



EAfA

Attracting and nurturing trainers



Launched in 2013, the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships \(EAfA\)](#) is a multi-stakeholder platform aiming to strengthen the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships, as well as the mobility of apprentices in Europe and beyond. EAfA aims to do so through national commitments by public authorities and voluntary pledges from stakeholders, and by providing practical information and increasing knowledge exchange on apprenticeships.

Why attracting and nurturing in-company trainers is important

Trainers based in companies play a crucial role in the effectiveness of an apprenticeship by bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical workplace application. Similar to how the quality of teaching significantly impacts educational outcomes, the **quality of in-company training is essential for quality and effective apprenticeships**¹. Research indicates that better-prepared apprentice supervisors are fundamental to delivering high-quality training and improving apprenticeships' completion rates. This is evidenced by the case of Germany, which reinstated mandatory training for apprentice supervisors after its suspension in the early 2000s led to increased apprentice dropout rates and company complaints about apprentice performance².

Enhanced training capacity within workplaces ensures that apprentices receive a high-quality learning experience, increasing the likelihood of developing the technical and soft skills intended during their apprenticeship, thus preparing them for successful careers, and also improving the speed at which they develop and refine these skills in practical settings³. In addition to imparting **specific skills**, trainers have a crucial role in providing apprentices with tailored learning experiences and regular feedback by acting as **mentors**, helping them integrate into the company culture and guiding them in their **professional behaviour** and **teamwork**. Experienced trainers provide **inspiration to apprentices**, encouraging critical thinking and innovative problem-solving, and ensure adherence to safety protocols and industry regulations, thereby mitigating workplace risks.

Overall, trainers play an essential role in balancing the support of apprentices' learning with the need for consistency in performance and work quality, enabling apprentices to make a meaningful and effective contribution to the workplace. In turn, a well-supported training environment is more conducive to **better retention and completion rates**, and **job readiness**, which is also beneficial for companies training apprentices.

Finally, at a time of rapid skills evolution driven by the green and digital transitions, apprenticeships are increasingly important for learners to access the most up-to-date production and service delivery processes. Consequently, the role of skilled in-company trainers is also more critical for the success and effectiveness of apprenticeships.

1. OECD (2018) [Seven Questions about Apprenticeships](#), p. 94

2. *Ibid.*, p. 95

3. *Ibid.*, p. 94

What is the role of apprenticeship trainers?

The definition and specific functions of apprenticeship trainers (also known as, for example, trainers, tutors and mentors) differ based on national or regional contexts. Generally, these are individuals employed by companies who support apprentices in their learning while managing their work responsibilities.

Although there is no standardised definition for in-company trainers in Europe, the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) differentiates between teachers, and trainers. The combination of the complementary expertise of trainers and teachers is a primary factor in the success of apprenticeships. The complementary roles of teachers and trainers are outlined below:

Trainers	Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the workplace-based component and provide coaching to apprentices based on workplace requirements • Facilitate apprentices' integration into the company and support them in acquiring practical and transversal skills • Expertise is based on their occupation and sector, while their qualifications depend on national or regional requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogical professional responsible for implementing school-based learning • Focus on the concepts and theories behind practical work⁴ and general education • Possess professional teaching credentials

The specific competences required by in-company trainers are listed below. Effective trainers should possess all these competences to excel in their role.



Specific competences needed by effective trainers

- **Extensive occupational expertise** that is current, especially concerning the green and digital transitions. This expertise allows trainers to assist apprentices in acquiring the technical skills required.
- **Pedagogical skills** necessary to impart practical knowledge and skills related to production and service delivery. This includes the ability to teach soft/transversal skills such as teamwork, lifelong learning competences, and communication skills, which are essential for effective workplace operation.
- Broader competences in areas such as **communication and motivation**, enabling trainers to guide and inspire apprentices while supporting their personal development.
- Comprehensive understanding and communication of the **legal aspects of apprenticeships**, such as apprentices' social and labour rights, information on workers' representatives, apprentices' duties and responsibilities, and mechanisms for reporting and addressing violations of apprentices' rights.

4. Although practical work may also take place in schools, especially where workplace simulations take place.

Key challenges

Companies encounter various challenges in nurturing and preparing their trainers to be effective in their roles. These challenges differ depending on specific factors such as the nature of apprenticeships in a given country or region, the availability of human resource capacity within companies, and the relationships between companies and vocational education and training (VET) schools at local levels. These challenges are particularly pronounced in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often lack the time and resources to have comprehensive training functions.

Key challenges include:

Lack of professional status and recognition of trainers' role

In certain countries, the role of the trainer is not fully professionalised, and trainers are not legally required to have specific qualifications⁵. The absence of professional status diminishes the attractiveness of the trainer's role, resulting in limited incentives to pursue this career path and scarce training opportunities, making it difficult to fund training initiatives. This is especially the case for SMEs.

Embracing the needs of new groups of apprentices

Apprenticeships are increasingly accessible to diverse groups, including adults, individuals with low basic skills, and those with special requirements, such as language skills for migrant and refugee communities⁶. Apprentices from more diverse backgrounds may require additional support in the workplace to successfully complete their training programmes. Trainers need adequate training to understand these groups' unique circumstances and effectively address their training needs. Equally, companies should take steps to recruit and train trainers from a variety of backgrounds to better represent the diversity of the learner population.

Keeping up to date with the latest developments in teaching and learning

While trainers stay informed about workplace changes due to their professional roles (e.g. green and digital transitions), they may not be as aware of educational advancements. Emerging trends include the development of approaches to VET that use learning outcome descriptors in qualifications⁷, potentially detaching teaching and learning from traditional content-based methods and altering assessment practices for apprentices.

Ensuring sound linkages between workplace-based and school-based learning

The environments in which trainers and teachers operate can differ significantly (e.g. varying calendars and priorities). Developing and maintaining strong mutual trust between the realms of work and education is crucial as it directly impacts the integration and sequencing of learning, affecting apprentices' learning experiences and outcomes.

Scarcity of data to act as reference points/benchmarks for performance improvement

There is a notable lack of data at national, European, and international levels regarding in-company training and trainers. In many countries, it is often not clear how many individuals serve as in-company trainers, what qualifications they hold, or what professional development they have undertaken.

5. In the most well-developed apprenticeship systems, e.g. in dual-system countries like Austria, Germany, Denmark and Switzerland, trainers have high status and are often required to have professional qualifications.

6. Cedefop (2022) [Teachers and trainers in a changing world](#)

7. Evidence suggests that the move to VET based on learning outcomes is seldom accompanied by training programmes for trainers who instead tend to learn informally 'on-the-job' from the teachers they liaise with. For more information, see Cedefop's report (forthcoming) related to the project '[The shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality?](#)'.

What key actions are needed?

Considering these challenges, a range of actions are required to attract and nurture trainers.

Enhancing the professional status of in-company trainers

In many EU countries there is a lack of clarity around the role and professional status of in-company trainers. To address this issue, **policy and legislative frameworks** can be developed that specify, for example, the minimum number of years of work experience in a profession required before someone can become a trainer or attain the necessary qualifications. Having a sound evidence base for such frameworks is important, and **research into trainer needs** and challenges at national, European and international levels is needed to fill gaps in knowledge and provide reference points and benchmarks. Such measures should also be accompanied by **publicity and awareness-raising campaigns** (see, for example, the VET Excellence Awards in Greece, which recognises outstanding businesses and trainers involved in apprenticeship programmes⁹), as well as conferences to attract workers to become trainers and inform companies of the benefits of having skilled trainers. Placing the role of trainers on a more professional footing will involve costs for companies, so it is important that companies understand how the benefits can outweigh the costs.

'Qualit' project in Italy – German-Italian bilateral cooperation initiative

The 'Qualit' [project](#) was initiated by the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK) in Italy, in collaboration with the National Agency for Active Labour Policies, the training organisation of the Union of German Chambers of Commerce (DIHK), and the German Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (GOVET). This project received co-financing from the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

The project aimed to establish a nationwide system for qualifying and training in-company trainers and VET teachers involved in dual education pathways. It focused on defining a structured training programme and methodology for 'dual trainers'. As part of the initiative, nearly 300 training staff involved in dual pathways received training based on an agreed-upon curriculum, which was complemented by formal assessments of skills and competences. Upon completion of the training, participants were awarded certification for their competences.

The courses targeted both teachers and trainers, highlighting a cohesive approach to both roles and the development of a national professional profile to prevent fragmentation. Additionally, the project contributed to developing a model for training dual trainers and helped establish a network of experts at national, regional, and sectoral levels. This network will ensure the sustainability of the project results and support its impacts at the national level⁹.

Strengthening the professional development of in-company trainers

In-company trainers require both initial training before becoming trainers and opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD). When new regulatory frameworks are introduced, measures to initiate or strengthen initial training and CPD programmes may be necessary. Since many trainers in various countries may not have received prior training, CPD is particularly important for skills enhancement. Initiatives can include funding and developing relevant programmes as well as providing **financial incentives** to encourage companies to invest in their trainers. Additional measures include creating and distributing relevant **training materials** and resources to companies; organising conferences, seminars, and workshops to share best practices and training methods; and **launching networks** for trainers to exchange experiences and practices with each other and teachers, who can offer valuable knowledge. Companies should aim to create environments that motivate individuals to become trainers, such as by linking the training role to career progression and publicly recognising the importance of training positions¹⁰.

8. The [VET Excellence Awards Greece 2024](#) is a newly introduced competition, organised for the first time in Greece by the Hellenic-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in collaboration with the Federation of Industries of Greece (SBE), and under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports. The Awards have contributed to building a more resilient apprenticeship system, reinforcing the connection between education and the labour market. Given its positive impact, it is planned to take place annually moving forward.

9. Cedefop (2021) [Apprenticeship governance and in-company training: where labour market and education meet – Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts: short papers](#)

10. For example, some companies (e.g. Bosch) appoint senior profiles as legacy trainers/mentors, emphasising the importance of the trainer role.

Support of Dual Learning System – ESF, Bulgaria

The [project](#) is part of Bulgaria's Operational Programme 'Science and Education for Smart Growth' (OPSESG), co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) (2020-2023) and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science.

One of the project's activities ([Activity 4](#)) aimed to improve vocational training competences of teachers and trainers, and facilitate the acquisition of pedagogical and methodological skills for mentors in partner enterprises (in-company trainers). The project also included initiatives to enhance the attractiveness of the dual learning system among students and parents, and to increase enterprise awareness regarding the importance of training quality and well-qualified, motivated mentors.

The total budget for the project, encompassing all five activities, was approximately EUR 12.5 million. The project aligned with Bulgaria's efforts to establish specific requirements for company mentors in dual training, as reflected in the amendments to Art. 17a1 of the VET Act (VETA) of 2018.

Centre of Excellence in Vocational Education and Training – ESF+, Slovakia

In 2024, the Ministry of Education of Slovakia launched a national [project](#) called 'Centre of Excellence in Vocational Education and Training' (CEOVP), funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

A key activity of the project is to develop a methodology for the professional development of pedagogic employees and integrate their education with that of instructors and career counsellors (including in-company trainers) within the newly established CEOVP framework. The broader goal of the project is to create at least eight CEOVPs in key sectors and establish a comprehensive CEOVP system in the country.

The estimated funds allocated for non-refundable financial contributions are approximately EUR 13 million.

Enhancing the teacher-trainer relationship and collaboration within VET systems

As previously mentioned, trainers have complementary roles to teachers. Consequently, it is essential to establish effective relationships between individual trainers and teachers, as well as between their respective training companies and VET schools, to ensure both parties can fulfil their roles effectively. For example, a regional ESF+ project in Valencia, Spain, offers grants for teachers for placements in certain sectors for up to two weeks, complementing Erasmus+ placements for a maximum of two months. The activities include teachers visiting companies to acquire specific skills in their sector, which they can share with their students, thus, establishing stronger links between the theoretical and practical parts of apprenticeships.

Moreover, VET schools and teachers can play a crucial role in nurturing trainers in their role. For example, with appropriate support and incentives, trainers can engage with VET schools to acquire pedagogical skills and align the theoretical knowledge gained by apprentices with practical applications. Additionally, teachers and trainers can participate in joint training sessions, referred to as '**tandem training**'. Shared learning through professional networks can also be beneficial to trainers. Although often informal and voluntary, such networks can greatly benefit from public sector support. At a different level, trainers' professional bodies can contribute to designing support mechanisms, although they may require assistance to enhance their capacity to perform this role more effectively.

Testing New Approaches to Training VET and Workplace Tutors for Work-Based Learning – Erasmus+

The Testing New Approaches to Training VET and Workplace Tutors for Work-Based Learning project implemented an innovative approach – tandem training – for the professional development of over 800 VET teachers and in-company trainers in the Baltic countries, namely Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, from 2017 to 2020.

The project devised and piloted a prototype training programme, which was subsequently tailored to align with each country's national priorities, legal framework, and apprenticeship training needs. The content of training programmes and pedagogical approaches were adjusted based on research evidence, the lead trainers' self-reflection, and a peer learning process. The research findings were converted into recommendations for VET policymakers in the Baltic region. Consequently, the project produced a Baltic WBL Tutors Competence profile and methodological material for a Joint Training Approach.

Equipping trainers for new challenges

In addition to their traditional role in training apprentices to acquire work-related skills, trainers must be prepared to address new challenges, such as targeting new groups for apprenticeships, including adults or migrant learners¹¹, developments in VET practices and new priorities based on key labour market transitions (e.g. green or digital skills). Tailored CPD **courses, resources, and networks for sharing best practices** can equip trainers with the skills they require. For instance, the shift to curricula based on learning outcomes for adults may impact in-company trainers. Trainers play a critical role in ensuring the authenticity of assessments – accurately reflecting realistic working practices. Therefore, it is essential that they are supported with appropriate tools and resources to understand how to effectively participate in new assessment practices related to learning outcomes through CPD, conferences, workshops, and other resources.

DIGICULT – Erasmus+

The DIGICULT Strategic Partnership [project](#) (2022-2024), with a budget of nearly EUR 300 thousand, aimed to equip trainers with skills and methodologies to address new challenges in the cultural and vocational education sectors.

By incorporating digital tools, cultural heritage, and environmental awareness, the project provided trainers with innovative learning approaches to support learners in a rapidly evolving landscape. DIGICULT focused on professional development, digital literacy enhancement, and fostering resilience among trainers, enabling them to assist VET learners in adapting to new labour market demands. Through international collaboration and the promotion of best practices, the project helped trainers embrace digital transformation and sustainability while maintaining cultural heritage.

The project produced several outcomes, including a [strategy paper](#) for planning education activities, a [DIGICULT Course](#) available on Moodle, and an [educational game](#).

Providing targeted support for SMEs¹²

As noted above, SMEs often encounter specific challenges regarding apprentice trainers. SMEs may lack the resources to support their own trainers, and employees who perform training functions often do so on an informal or part-time basis in addition to their primary responsibilities. To address these issues, interventions can include offering **financial incentives** to SMEs, thereby encouraging investment in trainer development. Additionally, the creation of **mentorship programmes** that link experienced trainers with those in SMEs can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise. Collective initiatives, such as establishing **inter-company training centres** – as seen in Austria and Germany – can also be effective. These centres facilitate work-based apprentice training while distributing costs among companies, ensuring the quality of instruction in smaller firms that may not have the capability to develop their own in-house trainers.

11. See, for example, initiatives for [intercultural competence development for trainers](#) in Germany and the [University of Bonn's recent training course](#) offer (2025), which provides further qualifications to VET trainers and practical instructors in dealing with language support in the training of immigrants.

12. A key source for this section is: European Commission (2016) [High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning](#)

'Years of apprenticeship are years of exploration' – Erasmus+

The project titled 'Years of apprenticeship are years of exploration' (*Lehrjahre sind Wanderjahre*) was led by the Chamber of Crafts in Potsdam (Germany) from 2023 to 2024. The Chamber's role involved supporting its member companies (SMEs) in addressing personnel and economic challenges, such as the recruitment and retention of skilled labour, as well as sustainable management practices.

The primary objective of this project was to offer apprentices and staff members of SMEs an opportunity to obtain a recognised additional qualification through training activities conducted in various European countries. These international mobility initiatives enabled apprentices and craft sector employees to enhance their professional, linguistic, and personal skills. Consequently, SMEs benefited directly from a workforce equipped with new competences and insights, thereby promoting innovation and sustainability within their operations.

Additionally, the project facilitated the Chamber of Crafts Potsdam in strengthening its collaboration with SMEs and partner organisations. This collaboration optimised knowledge transfer and expanded mobility opportunities, providing better support for businesses in navigating both economic and personnel-related challenges.



Who should do what?¹³

All the stakeholders involved in apprenticeships – including governments, chambers of commerce, individual companies, and VET schools – have essential roles in attracting and nurturing trainers. By working collaboratively, these stakeholders can engage in various activities that bring together diverse perspectives, skills, and expertise. Such cooperation helps ensure a shared ownership of the devised interventions. Below are several actions that can be undertaken by different types of stakeholders.

Governments	Social partners, employer organisations, and chambers of commerce	National VET agencies	Individual VET schools and companies
Design regulations setting qualification and/or experience requirements	Work with the government and national VET agencies on the development of regulatory frameworks	Conduct research into the needs of trainers	Develop processes and cultures that encourage people to become trainers (e.g. by linking training roles to career progression, through trainer awards)
Develop and monitor quality frameworks	Develop and run CPD programmes and accompanying training materials	Facilitate in-company trainer training (e.g. conferences, online courses, network development)	Foster cooperation between VET schools and companies to develop mutual learning activities
Provide incentives for companies to invest in trainers' development	Promote the benefits of having highly skilled trainers (e.g. campaigns)	Develop and distribute training materials and resources	Develop joint training programmes that integrate up-to-date industry content and practices
Offer funding for professional development programmes	Establish networks for trainers' mutual learning	Share best practices and innovative training methods	Establish communication channels for regular updates on apprentices' progress and feedback

Additionally, as demonstrated by examples in this factsheet, stakeholders can collaborate through **EU-funded actions**, such as Erasmus+, ESF (2014-2020), and ESF+ (2021-2027). European projects allow trainers to learn from counterparts in other countries via transnational mobility. They also facilitate the development of teacher training courses, curricula, learning tools, and resources addressing common industry challenges. These projects help create professional networks and guidelines to support trainers in their roles. Specific areas of focus may include digital skills, green skills, and inclusive training practices, providing opportunities for sharing information, insights, and analysis. Furthermore, they assist in developing reference points and benchmarks through research and surveys¹⁴.

13. A key source for this section is: Cedefop (2022) [Teachers and trainers in a changing world](#)

14. For example, Cedefop is planning to launch a survey of VET teachers in 2025, see: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/vocational-teacher-survey>.

Key sources for further reading

- European Alliance for Apprenticeships (2020) [Pedagogical support for apprenticeships: teachers and trainers](#)
- European Alliance for Apprenticeships (2020) [EAFA Module 4: Supporting in-company trainers in SMEs](#)
- Cedefop (2019) [Second policy learning forum: Unlocking the potential of learning at the workplace by, and for, teachers and trainers in VET](#)
- Cedefop (2021) [Apprenticeship governance and in-company training: where labour market and education meet - Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts: short papers](#)
- Cedefop (2022) [Empowering teachers and trainers to manage change](#)
- Cedefop (2022) [PLF: Assessing the feasibility of a pan-European survey of VET teachers and trainers](#)
- Cedefop (2022) [Teachers and trainers in a changing world](#)
- European Commission (2016) [High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning](#)
- European Commission (2017) [Teachers and trainers in work-based learning/apprenticeships](#)
- European Commission (2018) [Teachers and trainers matter: How to support them in high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning: 12 policy pointers](#)
- European Commission (2023) [Education and training monitor 2023 – Comparative report](#)
- European Commission (2023) [Vocational education and training and the green transition – A compendium of inspiring practices](#)
- European Commission (2024) [ERASMUS+ projects focusing on digital skills and engaging young people in vocational education and training](#)
- European Commission (2024) [Vocational education and training and the green transition – A compendium of inspiring practices: 2024 edition](#)
- OECD (2018) [Seven Questions about Apprenticeships](#)

