

Apprentice Mobility in Europe: This is Just the Beginning!

Since 2015, a Europe-wide goal has been emerging, given impetus by Jean Arthuis, an MEP: to make Europe more open to apprentices.

The challenges are well known: **fighting youth unemployment by making apprenticeships first-rate training courses** and giving all youngsters—not just students—the chance to enjoy a life-changing experience that forges their European citizenship.

- **Apprenticeships have proved their worth in incorporating youngsters into the world of work.** Yet they are losing traction in Germany and struggling to expand in France, while the schemes are underdeveloped—even inexistent—in several European countries;
- **Internationally oriented apprenticeships** will help put behind us the notion of apprenticeships as second-rate courses by giving them the same strengths as programmes offered by universities and world-class teaching institutes, whose global dimension attracts top candidates both nationally and worldwide;
- **International mobility speeds up integration into the jobs market:** Youngsters who have completed a supervised period of mobility abroad find a job in the space of 2.9 months on average, as opposed to 4.6 months for others (source: note from L'Observatoire 'Erasmus+', no. 1, Enquête Génération study from the CEREQ centre for research in qualifications, 2014).

In line with **Jean Arthuis' initiative, vocational-training centres have been set up around Europe** to develop long-term mobility. Among them, 36 training centres in twelve European countries—brought together by the French craftsmanship association *Les Compagnons du Devoir et du Tour de France*—founded the consortium EuroApp'.

In 2019, more than 4,000 apprentices spent time abroad on the Erasmus programme, amounting to under 1 % of apprentices. Moreover, apprentice mobility consists of periods that are relatively short: 27 days on average, an experience that is incomparable with the whole semesters that university students spend abroad.

EuroApp' has opened the way to an Erasmus for apprentices

The pilot project—'A European Framework for Mobility of Apprentices'—led by Jean Arthuis and funded by the European Commission in 2016 and 2017 was a chance to turn words into actions. Through this project, training centres could receive funding to test long-term mobility among apprenticeships for periods of six to twelve consecutive months in other European countries. The European Commission chose the EuroApp' consortium's candidacy for these two trial years.

In concrete terms, 104 youngsters have pursued their work-study training courses in European countries other than their own for six-to-twelve month periods through EuroApp' and a wealth of feedback has been shared. So, what conclusions can be drawn from this pilot scheme when we review it?

1. **Apprentices are keen to discover the world as much as university students are.** This appetite for travel is not related to levels of study as EuroApp' apprentices mostly work towards vocational qualifications below Level 6 in the European Qualifications Framework;
2. **There are still more obstacles to long-term mobility among apprentices than the training centres imagined !** No fewer than sixty major hindrances were picked out. For example, some countries would not accept apprentices not following the entire training curriculum;
3. **Despite this somewhat unfavourable context, employers have cooperated,** whether in letting their apprentices pursue their course abroad or in hosting apprentices from other EU countries for a semester or an academic year.

Things are being shaken up

An 'Erasmus Pro' scheme incorporated into the 'Erasmus+' programme: the European Commission has decided to integrate the pilot project into its programme by earmarking a €400m budget for 'Erasmus Pro' grants reserved for 50,000 apprentices who wish to spend a mobility period lasting at least three months in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The French government is showing its determination: after Jean Arthuis' report was handed over to the French minister of labour, Muriel Pénicaud, in January 2018, the French government underlined its aim to push up to 15,000 the number of apprentices enjoying a semester of training in another European country each year. The French law of 5 September 2018 on the freedom to choose a professional future has included the necessary provisions for apprentices to leave their position for several months as part of their mobility: the French employer's responsibility is put on hold and social protection is maintained concomitantly. Conditions of reciprocity have been introduced with the apprenticeship contract under French law being adjusted for hosting apprentices from other European countries in France at any time of the year.

Despite this progress, much remains to be done.

It is vital for all European countries to remain active in removing the persistent hindrances that could hold back structures wishing to join this venture*:

- Recognition of the European Health Insurance Card;
- Visas for non-European apprentices;
- Recognition of attainment levels by ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training);
- Information and support for businesses;
- The status of apprentices in Europe.

* Extract from the manifesto: *Combining Apprenticeship and International Mobility: Proposals for a Europe of Apprenticeship.*

EUROAPP' European Apprenticeship Programme

Key figures concerning the project

- **12 countries committed:** Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia.
- **36 training centres,** including 16 in France, plus an intermediary body.
- **104 youngsters who left for periods abroad between August 2016 and September 2018:**
 - 58 French youngsters who went to another European country and 46 European youngsters hosted in France;
 - 9 youngsters receiving training through apprenticeships in their country of origin when they went abroad, including 2 French apprentices;
 - 8 minors.
- **Sectors represented** (from the most to the least represented): Hotels and restaurants; Bakeries and cake shops; Development and finishes; Metallurgy and industry; Construction; Agriculture, Hairdressing; Trade and Tourism.



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So, what next ? Jean Arthuis is pursuing his undertaking by creating a foundation

At the end of his tenure as an MEP, Jean Arthuis will be pursuing the project he has already begun, promoting equal access to European mobility among apprentices and students. His creation of a foundation will spearhead his initiative to make sure reforms are carried out and to go on shaking things up—both in France and Europe—as long as hindrances persist.

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Another major step: the next multiannual financial framework of the European Union, with priority measures to implement.

- Doubling of 'Erasmus+' credits (as put forward by the European Commission), even tripling of them (in line with the European Parliament's proposal);
- Simplification in granting and managing 'Erasmus+' programme funds for training institutes, especially CFA apprentice training centres;
- Creation of a special 'Vocational training and apprenticeship' programme financed by the cohesion funds ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and ESF (European Social Fund) to help countries that carry out structural reforms with the purpose of reaching the high standard needed to end youth unemployment.

In February 2018, Muriel Pénicaud, France's minister of labour, attended the EuroApp' consortium's Point d'étape meet-up. In the presence of over fifty youngsters taking part in the pilot project, she underlined the government's willingness to enable at least 15,000 apprentices to make the most of the Erasmus scheme to spend several months being trained in another European country.

The partner European training centres—members of the EuroApp' consortium—have always made great efforts to develop long-term mobility among apprentices. As part of Erasmus Pro, they will be pursuing their actions.

