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Guidelines for Apprenticeships in the Food Industry

Workpackage 3 Work-based Learning Guidelines and Promotion
Task 3.1 Guidelines for Apprenticeships in the Food Industry
Lead Beneficiary Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)

Prepared by Joshua Bugeja, Doreen Micallef and Kenny Muscat (MCAST)

Contributors Gemma Cornau (ACTIA), Rui Costa (IPC), Sara Escudeiro (IPC), Joshua Bugeja (MCAST), Doreen Micallef (MCAST), Kenny Muscat (MCAST), Gun Wirtanen (SEAMK), Karri Kallio (SEAMK), Jarmo Alarinta (SEAMK), Anet Rezek Jambrak (FFTb), Ferruh Erdogan (AU), Fotini Salta (SEVT)

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Foreword

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Project Coordinator:

Rui Costa | Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra (IPC), College of Agriculture (ESAC) | ruicosta@esac.pt

WP 3 Leader:

Gemma Cornau | French Technical Coordination Association for the Food Industry (ACTIA) | G.Cornau@actia-asso.eu

Lead Beneficiary:

Kenny Muscat | Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology | Kenny.Muscat@mcast.edu.mt

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Summary

The aim of this document, which is part of Work Package 3 of the Erasmus+ EQVEGAN project, is to provide guidelines for apprenticeships in the food industry. The document is based on the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, which was issued by the Council of the European Union in 2018.

Education institutions and food associations that contributed towards the compilation of the document are:

- Ankara University, Turkey
- Faculty of Food Technology and Biotechnology, University of Zagreb, Croatia
- Federation of Food and Drink Industry Associations of Turkey, Turkey
- Federation of Hellenic Food Industries, Greece
- Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, Malta
- Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra, Portugal
- Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Finland

The document is structured around the seven criteria for learning and working conditions and seven criteria for framework conditions as established in the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. Following each criteria, a discussion on the situation among countries who have contributed to draft this document, together with best-practices, is provided.



Foreword	I
Summary	II
1. Introduction	1
2. The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships	2
3. Guidelines for Apprenticeships	2
3.1 Written agreement	2
3.2 Learning Outcomes	3
3.3 Pedagogical support	4
3.4 Workplace component	5
3.5 Pay and/or Compensation	6
3.6 Social protection	7
3.7 Work, health, and safety conditions	8
3.8 Regulatory framework	8
3.9 Involvement of Social Partners	9
3.10 Support for Companies	10
3.11 Flexible Pathways and Mobility	10
3.12 Career Guidance and Awareness Raising	11
3.13 Transparency	12
3.14 Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices	12
4. Summative Representation	13
Bibliography	14



1. Introduction

The document is based on a number of terms which are defined as follows:

Apprentice – student / learner involved in work-based learning in the form of apprenticeship;

Intern - student / learner involved in work-based learning in the form of internship;

Work-based learning scheme – a scheme which offers the opportunity to students / learners to carry out part of their learning at the place of work (work placement, apprenticeship, internship, other);

Employer – company / business offering the work-based learning opportunity to students / learners;

Training Institution – Vocational Education and Training institution and/or Higher Education Institution (e.g. university) offering courses / qualifications with an element of work-based learning;

Social partners – unions and employers’ organizations;

Teacher – general subject teacher;

Trainer - VET subject teacher;

Mentor – employer’s staff member who supports students in their acquisition of vocational skills at the work-place.

The following definitions, taken from the Malta Work-based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (Cap. 576) ([Link to Act](#)), may also be useful for your interpretation of the survey:

Work-placement – offered to EQF Levels 1 to 4 students and they may or may not receive remuneration. However, training at this level “may also take the form of Apprenticeships as described in this Act”;

Apprenticeships – offered to EQF Levels 3 to 4 students and they receive remuneration;

Internships – offered to EQF Levels 5 and above students and they may or may not receive remuneration. However, training at this level “may also take the form of Apprenticeships as described in this Act”.



2. The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, which is the basis for this document, was issued by the Council of the European Union in 2018. It consists of seven criteria for learning and working conditions, and seven criteria for framework conditions. These criteria are introduced in Figure 1.

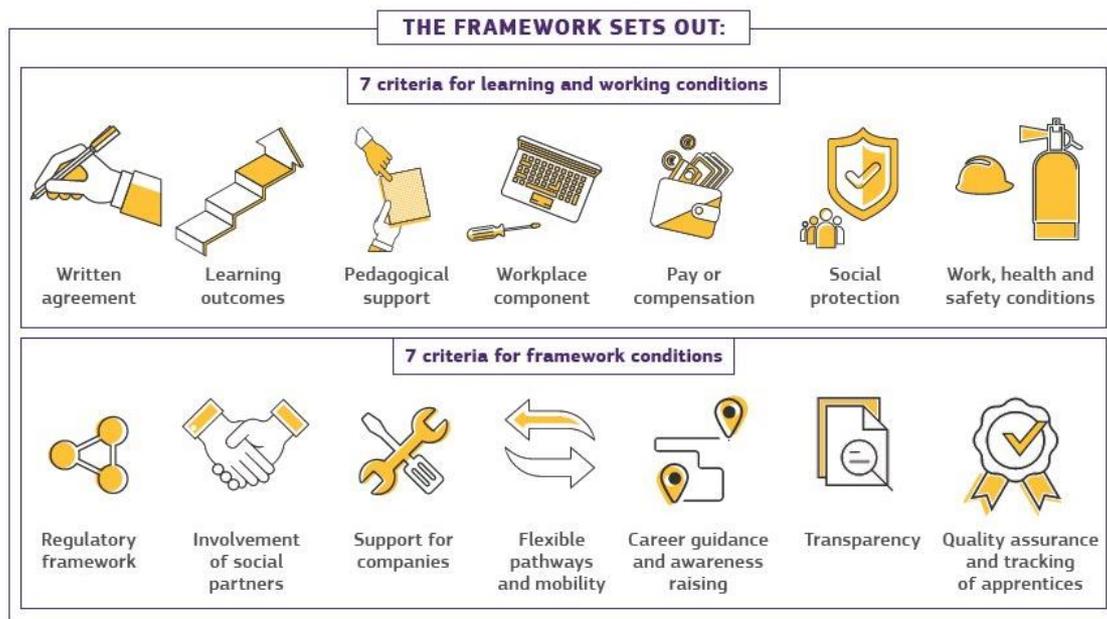


Figure 1. Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (Council of the European Union, 2018)

3. Guidelines for Apprenticeships

In this section, 14 criteria forming part of the Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships are first introduced. Following the introduction of each criterion, a discussion follows. These discussions are based on findings of what project partners of the Erasmus+ EQVEGAN project are doing in their respective countries together with a number of best-practices which are worth sharing.

3.1 Written agreement

“Before the start of the apprenticeship a written agreement should be concluded to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer, and where appropriate the vocational education and training institution, related to learning and working conditions” (Council of the European Union, 2018).



The written agreement, sometimes referred to as a formal contract, is an essential part of apprenticeship schemes as it clarifies rights and obligations of the student, the training institution and the employer. Typically, written agreements include: (a) duration of apprenticeship; (b) obligations of employer; (c) obligations of student; (d) learning outcomes to be addressed; (e) remuneration for work done; (f) hours of work; (g) entitlement for time off; and (h) termination procedures.

A significant difference, arising from contributions provided by partners across Europe in this report, is related to the inclusion of learning outcomes in the written agreement. Learning outcomes are omitted in written agreements in Malta, Croatia, Portugal and Turkey. However, in Portugal, the written agreement includes a workplan which is approved by the Scientific Council of the training institution. In Turkey, learning outcomes are mostly based on proficiency exams.

Another difference is related to the minimum duration of the apprenticeship. While in Malta, the duration is specified in the apprenticeship unit specification (syllabus), the duration is that of one month in Croatia, two months in Greece, and six months in Portugal (for MSc students). In Finland the duration is expressed in terms of credits – which are specified in the Universities of Applied Sciences Act. In Turkey, the minimum duration is determined by the Ministry of National Education and the Higher Education Board, which varies according to the type of vocational field.

Entitlement for time off is not included in written agreements in Croatia and Greece, while remuneration is also omitted in Croatia. In Finland, the hours of work, entitlement for time off and termination depends on the situation. In Portugal, the written agreement is signed with private companies and state entities but not with the education institutions. In Malta, the written agreement also refers to the probationary period (similar to formal written agreements of general employment).

3.2 Learning Outcomes

“ The delivery of a set of comprehensive learning outcomes defined in accordance with national legislation should be agreed by the employers and vocational education and training institutions and, where appropriate, trade unions. This should ensure a balance between job-specific skills, knowledge and key competences for lifelong learning supporting both the personal development and lifelong career opportunities of the apprentices with a view to adapt to changing career patterns” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

As discussed in the previous section, there are variations in the way learning outcomes are addressed in apprenticeship schemes. Apprenticeship schemes provide opportunities for students to improve both technical skills and transversal skills at the place of work. This enables students to become more employable in their respective vocational field, and also in other fields if they wish to make a change at a later stage.



While in large countries, it is normal to have defined learning outcomes in accordance with national legislation, this is not the case of smaller countries like Malta. In the case of Malta, learning outcomes are defined by the training institutions, where employers also have the opportunity to provide feedback considering their expertise in the real place of work. The National Skills Council, is working at a national level to improve this current practice and provide more transparency in the development of learning outcomes related to the apprenticeship schemes. In Croatia, in general, students get ECTS for student practice.

3.3 Pedagogical support

“In-company trainers should be designated and tasked to cooperate closely with vocational education and training institutions and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feed-back. Teachers, trainers and mentors, specially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, should be supported to update their skills, knowledge and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market needs” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Collaboration between education institutions and companies is very important to provide effective and meaningful work-based learning experiences for students. A culture of feedback (to and from: students, training institutions and companies) should be fostered as this ensures that any issues that arise are dealt with immediately. Furthermore, continuous feedback ensures that the content delivered by the education institution is relevant and current. Finally, continuous feedback also enables companies to understand student needs and support them in their journey that leads them to employment.

All the countries participating in this report do address current industry needs through the apprenticeship schemes. Addressing future needs, is a more challenging task and is currently the practice in Croatia; Turkey, where social partners are involved and schemes are designed considering global competences and future needs; and to a certain extent in Greece where recent efforts to strengthen links between education institutions and industry have been observed. National priorities are a reality in Malta, Finland and Turkey.

In recent years, the importance of key competences and transversal skills has been highlighted regularly. While key competences are the very basic competences to enable students to progress to higher levels, and eventually become employable (e.g. mother language, foreign language, information technology, etc. (European Commission, 2018)), transversal skills are the skills required to lead a fruitful personal and professional life, irrespective of the vocational field chosen (e.g. intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, etc. (UNESCO, 2016)). While key competences and transversal skills are primarily taught (or experienced) in training institutions, these can be further



developed at the place of work as part of the apprenticeship scheme. The importance of key competences and transversal skills seems to be given priority by companies as the development of these is happening in Turkey, Croatia, Portugal, Malta, Finland and Greece. However, in some instances the development of key competences and transversal skills is indirect as this depends on the vocational field, workplace, tasks performed and supervisors' competence. A good practice is observed in Finland where transversal skills are developed in the personal curriculum and where students have more autonomy and can choose elective subjects. Autonomy in the choice of apprenticeship has also been noted in Malta, Portugal and Finland.

Formal qualifications, and continuous professional development of teachers, together with training of mentors is necessary if students are to be provided with the relevant support in their educational journey. Teachers in countries that have contributed to the compilation of this report are formally qualified and are mostly offered continuous professional development opportunities, even though in some instances not directly related to support students during their apprenticeship. However, while industry mentors may be formally qualified (depending on the vocational field), they are rarely provided with continuous professional development opportunities, except for Turkey and Finland. Interestingly, in Finland there is a system with professors in practice.

3.4 Workplace component

“A substantial part of the apprenticeship, meaning at least half of it, should be carried out in the workplace with, where possible, the opportunity to undertake a part of the workplace experience abroad. Taking into account the diversity of national schemes, the aim is to progress gradually towards that share of the apprenticeship being workplace learning” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

While guidelines suggest that at least half of the apprenticeship should be carried out at the place of work, there are variations in this aspect across Europe. In Malta and Turkey, the learning at the place of work depends on the vocational field and industry requirements. In Croatia, students spend between one month and 6 months at the place of work, in Portugal students on internship work full-time at the place of work, while in Greece the duration is from two to six months. In Finland, students spend 30 credits out of 240 credits at the place of work.

In several countries, there are established guidelines on the coordination of work-based learning. In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education and the Higher Education Board are also involved. In Greece, Malta and Portugal the apprenticeship is coordinated by the training institutions.



The European Union promotes mobility of students and workers, and countries participating in the compilation of this report highlighted the practice of mobility even for apprenticeships. This practice is also available in Turkey where the local qualification framework is pegged to the European Qualification Framework, enabling students to also benefit from opportunities of mobility.

3.5 Pay and/or Compensation

“Apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist, and taking into account arrangements on cost-sharing between employers and public authorities” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Compensation can be seen as a form of motivation for students to complete their apprenticeship as part of their studies. It is also a form of support, especially in instances where students cannot be financially supported by their families.

Students in Malta and Turkey, receive a minimum wage while on apprenticeship. In Greece, in some instances students receive remuneration and are eligible for 75% of the minimum wage. In Croatia and Finland, some students receive remuneration. While in the former this is based on the minimum wage, in the latter this depends on the industry and the labour union, as well as whether the student is employed or just performing the studies.

Most of the students in this report’s participating countries are covered by social protection regulations and in various countries they receive additional financial support. In Finland and Portugal, students on apprenticeship have an insurance that is paid by the training institution. In Turkey, students on apprenticeship might be supported further through public financing schemes or institution grants, while in Malta students also receive a monthly stipend from public finances – which is given to all students following post-compulsory education, up to EQF Level 6. In Finland, students get credit according to schemes offered by education institutions and based on credits they get grants or payment provided by the government.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), which is an agency of the European Union and works to improve vocational education and training, has developed a database on financing apprenticeships in the European Union. The database, which can be accessed here [CEDEFOP - Database on financing apprenticeships in the EU](#), includes 29 apprenticeship schemes financing arrangements, 54 financing instruments and 5 cross-country overview tables.



3.6 Social protection

“Apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance in line with national legislation” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

The metrics for the quality of apprenticeship provided do not rest solely on a sustainable result with full integration into the labour market. The macro, micro, objective and subjective indicators all form a key aspect for the quality of apprenticeship provided. Social protection entitlement during the apprenticeship period provide access to health, sickness and accident insurance as well as protection through the occupational health and safety afforded by the national legislations or collective agreements.

In Turkey we see that the Vocational Education Law (Law #3308) defines the sphere of influence for the apprenticeship schemes. The Vocational Educational Law clarifies the minimum remuneration that an apprentice should receive and provides a framework which allows the apprentice to be covered by social protection. Students following apprenticeship schemes in Turkey can also benefit from financial schemes and institution grants where applicable.

In sharp contrast, apprentices in Croatia are not covered by social protection and have no means of other financial support whilst following the apprenticeship. Also, remuneration is not always provided, however when it is, it is based on the minimum legal wage.

In Portugal apprentices do not receive any remuneration and have no means for financial support. Social protection is provided by the education institution through an insurance.

The situation in Malta is like the one in Turkey. Students on apprenticeship schemes receive remuneration whilst students on work placements and internships may or may not receive remuneration. When paid, students are entitled for the national minimum wage. As a measure of further financial aid, students following full-time courses in Malta – at post-compulsory education and from MQF Levels 1 to 6 – receive a stipend from the state. Social protection is offered through the sponsor, who is responsible for the payment of National Insurance for the purposes of Social Security in terms of the Social Security Act (Chapter 318 of the Laws of Malta). Furthermore, the apprentice is entitled to paid leave on a pro-rata basis, which leave shall include but is not limited to normal vacation leave and sick leave.

Greece and Finland both offer their apprentices with social protection. In Greece, for the case of the apprenticeship for the Vocational Training School students the remuneration when provided is set at 75% of the minimum legal wage. As a measure of further financial support, apprentices in Finland are provided with credits which are then redeemed by the government as study grants.



3.7 Work, health, and safety conditions

“The host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

A strong commitment to safeguarding the apprentice health and wellbeing is of paramount importance for a safe learning environment. All parties involved in an apprenticeship must take reasonable action to minimise risks to apprentices. This includes all aspects of the apprentices’ experience. It is expected that staff working with apprentices are trained in safeguarding and can access additional information, advice, and training when appropriate.

All countries forming part of this partnership report that indeed all apprentices are covered by health and safety regulations. In the case of Turkey this is through the Vocational Education Law. In the case of Portugal, the apprentice has the same cover afforded by the company providing the apprentice opportunity.

With regards to personal and protective equipment all countries, apart from Malta, report that apprentices are provided with the necessary equipment. In the case of Malta, this is not specifically mentioned in the contract signed between the employer and the apprentice.

3.8 Regulatory framework

“A clear and consistent regulatory framework should be in place based on a fair and equitable partnership approach, including a structured and transparent dialogue among all relevant stakeholders. This may include accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces that offer apprenticeships and/or other quality assurance measures” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Providing a standardised apprenticeship experience across a vast range of companies and different workplace portfolio is one of the most challenging aspects of apprenticeship. Some form of variation between companies and workplaces is inevitable. Rules and regulations can offer a structured approach which can be followed more easily by the companies and can be more readily evaluated; on the other hand, such structures might impede the apprentice from taking full advantage of the experience being offered by the workplace.

Greece, Malta, and Turkey all report that their framework makes specific reference to the rights and obligations of the apprentices, employers, and training institutions. Portugal follows a different ideology where the rights and obligations of employers, apprentices and training institutions are laid out in the laws for Level 4; but at higher



education the institutions themselves state the rights and obligations. When involved with ERASMUS+, IAESTE, and local work-based learning; the rights and obligations for apprentices are listed in Croatia’s framework. However, Croatia’s framework does not list the rights and obligations of the employers and training institutions.

3.9 Involvement of Social Partners

“Social partners, including, where relevant, at sectoral level and/or intermediary bodies, should be involved in the design, governance, and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

The inclusion of all stakeholders in the design, governance and implementation of the apprenticeship scheme is a desirable attribute as it is thought to lead to higher quality programme for the apprentices to follow.

Greece reports that there is currently limited involvement of the social partners in the design and implementation of apprenticeship training. However, big strides have been made recently for more active participation of the social partners which has led to the improvement of the system.

Turkey already has a system in place whereby all policies are developed by collecting input from social partners. The policy is subsequently implemented by the government bodies, training institutions and employers. Furthermore, work-based learning is accredited in line with Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF). TQF was prepared by the Vocational Qualifications Authority which also includes representatives from social partners. The policy is determined by government bodies and autonomous entities which mainly consist of public authorities with the involvement of social partners and other stakeholders. Nevertheless, the social partners generally remain as minority, and their effect on critical decisions is limited.

Finland has a scenario where the social partners are partly involved in the design of work-based learning policy. Implementation wise, the social partners are responsible for providing the content of the work-based training course; with accreditation being carried out by the specific university. Like other countries, the involvement of the social partners has, in the long run, lead to changes in the policy.

On the other hand, the social partners are not involved in the design, implementation, and accreditation of work-based learning, in Croatia, Malta and Portugal. Malta’s Work-based Learning and Apprenticeship Act refers to examination bodies, even though these have not been set up yet.



3.10 Support for Companies

“Financial and/or non-financial support should be envisaged, particularly for micro-, small and medium-sized companies, enabling cost-effective apprenticeships for companies, taking into account, when appropriate, cost-sharing arrangements between employers and public authorities” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Countries have a multitude of options when considering subsidising the costs involved in running apprenticeships. The three mostly employed methodologies are for work-based learning schemes supported financially by employers or by public authorities, or else for apprentices exempted to be exempt from paying tuition fees.

Croatia and Portugal have no cost-sharing frameworks in place. This means that the internships are unpaid and the fees paid by the students to the academic institution also cover the apprenticeship scheme.

Finland employs a system where some students at Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences are paid by the employer and then the insurances are covered by the employer, whilst in other cases the university is paying the insurances needed. In the first case the apprentice is employed and remunerated and in the latter case the apprentice does not get salary. Also, Finland’s public authorities support the student by providing grants based on credits achieved. Moreover, students arriving in Finland from EU and ETA are exempted from tuition during the whole study period.

Greece also employs a hybrid system where in some cases the employer will undertake the cost. Public authorities also support the system through specific funds. In Turkey cost sharing is implemented through the VEL, whereby the employers are obliged to pay wages to apprentices.

Malta’s approach is based on the implementation of all three main methodologies. Work based learning is supported by both the employers and the state. Moreover, higher education in Malta is free of charge; hence students are exempt from paying fees.

3.11 Flexible Pathways and Mobility

“To facilitate access, entry requirements for apprenticeships should take into account relevant informal and non-formal learning and/or, if relevant, the accomplishment of preparatory programs. Qualifications acquired through apprenticeships should be included in nationally recognised qualification frameworks referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (1). Apprenticeships should allow access to other learning opportunities, including at higher education and training levels, career pathways and/or, where relevant, the accumulation of units of learning outcomes. Transnational mobility of apprentices, either at the workplace or education and training institutions, should be



progressively promoted as a component of apprenticeship qualifications” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Most of the partners in the project have commented that they do have specific entry requirements which depend on the type of work-based learning scheme.

In Malta, the entry requirements are established by the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act which states that ‘Persons who have attained school-leaving age as provided for by the Education Act shall be eligible to enrol for work placements, apprenticeships and internships in accordance with this Act. It shall be the responsibility for the VET providers to set the entry requirements for respective training programmes’.

However, Portugal does not impose any entry requirements for enrolment into apprenticeship programmes except that, in some cases, a medical check of the applicant is requested.

If these entry requirements are not met, then different countries offer different options to engage and integrate the relevant persons into the labour market.

In Turkey, the relevant bodies offer different schemes, certification programmes and opportunities to people of all ages to engage them in labour market. In Malta, Jobsplus, which is the national public employment agency, offers work-based learning opportunities, some of which are under the guidance of trained mentors who provide additional support.

3.12 Career Guidance and Awareness Raising

“Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided before and during the apprenticeship to ensure successful outcomes, to prevent and reduce drop-outs as well as support those learners to reengage into relevant education and training pathways. Apprenticeships should be promoted as an attractive learning pathway through widely targeted awareness-raising activities” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

Amongst the partner countries, there seems to be a varying degree of career guidance in the various training institutions. In Croatia, this form of support is not available whilst in Turkey, this depends on the training institution as there is no legal obligation to offer this service. Where guidance is provided, it is mostly done by academics and qualified professionals.

In the Portuguese partner institution, career guidance is not offered by a department dedicated to this service. However, in one section of the institution where work placement is a part of the programmes offered, the students are supported in the preparation of a portfolio of professional development. This guidance is provided by the degree programme coordinator who is an expert in Food Engineering.



In Malta, the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology employs two full-time career advisors; students have access to these advisors prior to enrolling in a course and even while studying at the College. These career advisors are qualified professionals and hold a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree in career guidance.

3.13 Transparency

“The transparency of, and access to apprenticeship offers within and between Member States should be ensured, including with the support of public and private employment services as well as other relevant bodies, and, when appropriate, by using Union tools such as EURES as provided for in the EURES regulation” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

In all of the partner countries, the work-based learning schemes offer a variety of training (work placements, internships or apprenticeships) linked to different occupations at different levels of study. The work-based learning schemes offer opportunities for all including those individuals in under-represented groups. In Turkey, for example, everyone can attend the desired work-based learning scheme if they satisfy the educational background requirements where applicable. In Portugal, the training institution asks the companies to accept the student for an internship and if the company refuses, then a valid justification must be given. In Malta, there are specific programmes for the under-represented groups, e.g. students with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.

3.14 Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices

“Quality assurance approaches should be in place taking into account the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) (2), including a process allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes. The tracking of employment and career progression of the apprentices should be pursued, in accordance with national and European legislation on data protection” (Council of the European Union, 2018).

In all the partner countries, there is a National Quality Assurance system in place. In Turkey, the quality assurance of qualifications is based on the relevant European quality documents, namely ‘Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area’ and ‘European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training’.

In Portugal, this is different for higher education and non-higher education whilst in Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture grants core funding to the Universities of Applied Sciences, taking into account the extent, quality and effectiveness of the operations and other education, research and science policy objectives.



In Malta, this is regulated by the MFHEA (the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority – <https://mfhea.mt>).

All educational institutions are subject to quality assurance inspection however, the companies offering the work-based training are subject to quality assurance inspection in most of the partner countries except in Finland and Greece. In all of the partner countries except in Turkey, the social partners are not involved in the evaluation of the work-based learning schemes. In Malta, however, the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act states that examining bodies are to be set up to monitor the VET programmes and suggest changes to ensure that these remain relevant to industry needs.

The apprentices themselves are not involved in the evaluation of the work-based learning schemes in most countries however in Portugal, they may give feedback on the work-based learning experience and in Finland, this can be done during the internal evaluations. In Malta, students always have the opportunity to provide feedback to their employer, lecturers/trainers, Institute Director or student organisation.

4. Summative Representation

The following table provides a summative representation of the current implementation of the guidelines criteria in the six countries represented by the partners of this project. Green representation a situation where the criteria is implemented, red indicates that the criteria is not being implemented, whilst orange represents a criterion which is partially implemented.

Criteria	Turkey	Finland	Malta	Portugal	Croatia	Greece
Written Agreement	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Learning Outcomes	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Pedagogical Support	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Green
Workplace Component	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Pay and/or Compensation	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange
Social Protection	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Red	Orange
Work, health and safety conditions	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green
Regulatory framework	Green	Orange	Green	Orange	Red	Green
Involvement of social partners	Green	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Orange
Support for companies	Orange	Orange	Green	Red	Red	Orange
Flexible pathways and mobility	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Green	Green
Career Guidance and Awareness Rising	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Red	Orange
Transparency	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green



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