



Apprenticeships and the twin green and digital transition

*European Alliance for Apprenticeships online
event*

9-10 November 2020

Meeting report

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Social Europe

Apprenticeships and the twin green and digital transition: Challenges and opportunities ahead

European Alliance for Apprenticeships online event

On the first two days of the European Skills Week 2020 (EVSU), an online conference discussing green and digital skills in apprenticeships and vocational education and training (VET) took place, organised by the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA). Speakers at the live-streamed conference discussed how vocational education and training through apprenticeships can adapt to the digital and green transitions in Europe. The two days brought together a record number of over 800 participants from across Europe, including EAfA members, businesses, education providers, social partners, NGOs, apprentices and other relevant stakeholders of the European VET sector.

DAY 1 – Live Discussions

1.0 Live Discussion 1: Skills for the green economy

The first live discussion of the event explored the definition of green skills, the challenges of integrating them into apprenticeships and good practices that the VET sector can implement to promote green skills.

Norbert Schöbel, European Commission, welcomed all participants to the event with a brief introduction. He highlighted that while the topic of digital skills has been a recurrent one in EAfA, this conference was the first in EAfA's history to focus on green skills. This was inspired by the importance of the topic on the EU policy agenda and the EU flagship initiative the European Green Deal. Both the green and digital transitions are crucial as the EU implements its COVID-19 exit strategy and moves towards a 'new normal'. The Commission's initiatives, including the new Pact for Skills as part of the European Skills Agenda, contribute to socially inclusive and fair green and digital transitions. He invited EAfA members, who represent key VET actors to stand committed to contributing to a greener European economy and society.

The speakers of the live discussion were the following:

- **Barbara Archesso**, Project Manager of **LIFE FOSTER** – a project led by the Italian consortium for VET ENAIP NET, which is a best practice case on food waste reduction from the Italian platform for circular economy;
- **Chiara Palazzetti**, Project Manager at **FORMA.Azione** – an education and training provider operating in different economic sectors, including environmental protection and renewable energies, Italy;
- **Richard Pond**, Policy Officer at **European Federation of Public Services Unions (EPSU)** – a trade union representing workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local, regional and central government;
- **Stelina Chatzichristou**, Expert at **Cedefop** – an EU agency for the development of vocational training, and responsible for the Skills for Green Jobs Report.

Kicking off the live discussion, **Stelina Chatzichristou** outlined that green skills can be divided into two categories: job-specific skills linked to production and operations benefitting the green economy, and skills that raise environmental awareness and behaviour among citizens. Both may be developed in school- or work-based

apprenticeship training. Cooperation among all stakeholders involved, including social partners that play a key role, is essential to develop apprenticeship programmes and curricula that support a sustainable shift to the green economy.

Barbara Archesso stressed that green skills are acted rather than learnt and that cooperation between stakeholders, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro companies, is important to allow green skills to develop across sectors and in society. A concrete example from the restaurant sector was highlighted, showing how monitoring the environmental impact of people's actions can increase awareness of green issues, including waste of food, water and electricity.

Sharing her experience from the Italian regional SME sector, **Chiara Palazzetti** underlined that it is key to have all actors on board when fostering a new mindset on sustainability and environment in the VET sector. For green skills to be built into apprenticeships, VET providers play a role in promoting innovation, greening themselves, and empowering apprentices to become catalysts of ecological change.

Bringing in a trade union perspective, **Richard Pond** stressed the value of social dialogue and collective bargaining in ensuring the quality of training. A bottom-up approach that involves locally led practices, such as local green representatives, can help to raise awareness of green issues. While green skills vary hugely by sector, there are also many shared elements upon which common green skill frameworks can be developed. To find these and to involve companies across the economy, in particular SMEs, sectoral consultations and cross-sectorial coordination are key.

The **Q&A** session focused on how EU-level frameworks (e.g. DigComp, e-CF, EntreComp and LifeComp) can be used in the training design for apprenticeships. The speakers highlighted that while frameworks can play an important role in promoting green skills, they must be understandable to all stakeholders, which can be a challenge at local level. The question of how best to support companies whose business model is disrupted by the ecological transition was also discussed. Speakers here highlighted the importance of having a network of partners in place to identify challenges and to understand what needs to be done to adapt to the green transition.

To conclude the discussion, attendees were asked on **Slido** what they believed was the most important factor to ensure green skills in the apprenticeship sector. The most popular answers were *awareness*, *collaboration* and *innovation*.



2.0 Live Discussion 2: Digital skills in apprenticeships

The second live discussion addressed the importance of digital skills in apprenticeships and the impact of the digital transition on companies, education providers and apprentices in the VET sector.

Introducing the session, **Chiara Rioldino**, European Commission raised the issue of how to harness digitalisation and unlock the potential of technologies that enable

learning, teaching and the development of digital skills for all. The pandemic has accelerated the digital transition and given a strong impetus to make vocational training and education systems more agile and resilient. Due to differences in digital infrastructures and skill levels, digital skills are found at varying levels between, and within, countries. Raising the provision of digital skills and reducing skill gaps is crucial to ensure social cohesion and innovation, and critical to make Europe fairer and more sustainable. To achieve this and to support VET actors, participants are encouraged to take advantage of upcoming unprecedented levels of EU funding in the form of grants and loans for upskilling and reskilling programmes.

The following speakers participated in the panel discussion:

- **Cristina Romero**, Training Coordinator at **Inercia Digital** – a digital skills training provider, Spain;
- **Daniel Schrapp**, Project Manager of #HESSEnbildung.digital at **HessenChemie** – the Association of Chemical and Related Industry Employers for the State of Hesse, Germany;
- **Safet Getxhaliu**, President of the **Kosovo Chamber of Commerce**, representing Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum – a regional platform of Chambers of Commerce.

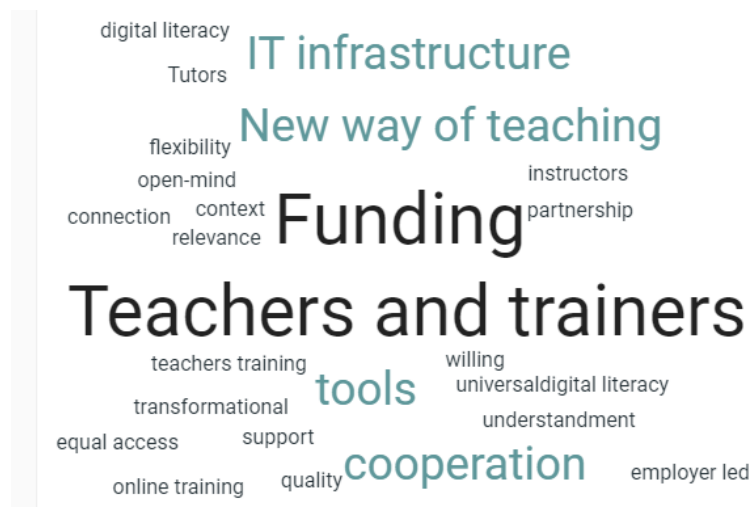
Cristina Romero stressed that digital competences can provide knowledge, skills and attitudes applicable across five different areas of professional performance: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving. Throughout the training process, it is important to go beyond curricular and academic criteria and focus on skills that can be implemented in pragmatic ways across these five areas.

Daniel Schrapp shared several regional digital initiatives, such as the two-year pilot project #HESSEnbildung.digital to strengthen the partnership between vocational schools and training companies in the chemical-pharmaceutical industry. He invited interested partners to reach out to his organisation for a possible EU-wide transfer project in other industries. Daniel further stressed that digitalisation is not an end but a means to improved learning efficiency. To enable success in digital learning, each company must define its goals and motivation. Local-level actors are often best suited to find digital solutions, as they know their needs and can best respond to emerging changes in the working environment.

Safet Getxhaliu stressed the value of cooperation and dialogue by bringing actors together around issues concerning digitalisation, including data and data protection. Today, it is difficult to envisage a future without digitalisation and it is therefore crucial that investments are made in education and digital skills now. As the importance of digital skills in the modern workplace grows, ICT and more innovation can offer solutions to tackling youth unemployment, which is increasing as a result of the pandemic.

During the **Q&A** session, speakers addressed how quickly the VET sector can respond to the digital transformation. Speakers agreed that there are limits to the extent that digital skills can, and should be, adopted in the learning environment, stressing that face-to-face learning remains essential. Participants were also interested in how to strengthen the role of social partners when reforming apprenticeship systems for the digital transition. Speakers agreed that social partners need to be involved from the start and be part of an inclusive process to digitalise the VET sector.

To conclude the discussion, attendees were asked on **Slido** what they believed was the most important factor to ensure digital skills in the apprenticeship sector. The most popular answers were *funding, teachers and trainers, and tools*.



DAY 2 – High-level event

1.0 Introduction and welcome

Setting the scene for the second day of the event, **Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit**, made a keynote video intervention in which he congratulated EAfA members and the involved social partners and organisations on achieving the milestone of 1 million pledged EAfA apprenticeships. The Commissioner reminded the audience that apprenticeships have shaped our common history, and that they will remain instrumental in the future. The green and digital transitions will have an impact on jobs and how we work, produce and consume. Apprentices on the front line will be affected. This is particularly the case today, as young people are significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Continuing to offer quality apprenticeships gives young people strong life prospects and equips the European workforce with the necessary skilled workers of tomorrow.

2.0 Panel discussion 1: Green transitions

The first panel discussion revolved around the opportunities and challenges for apprenticeships stemming from the green transition. The panellists discussed how green skills and the sustainability agenda could improve the attractiveness of apprenticeships, and how VET could help meet the skill needs of the green transition in the energy sector. The panellists were the following:

- **Alexandre Grillat**, National Secretary of **CFE-CGC ENERGIES** – a trade union representing employees in the energy sector and organisers of #Skills2Power, France;
- **Alfonso Balsamo**, Policy Officer at **Confindustria** – an employer’s federation representing manufacturing and service companies, Italy;
- **Michael Fitzgerald**, Technical Training and Development Manager at **Electricity Supply Board (ESB) Networks** – a large electricity company active in the apprenticeships field, Ireland.

Michael Fitzgerald stressed that there were major opportunities for apprentices in the green transition. To support the green transition, apprenticeships must enable a deepening of broad engineering skills through both the mainstreaming of environmental aspects and a focus on digital technologies. The ESB currently coordinates a four-year programme, whose syllabus has been revamped to respond to the challenges of the green and digital transitions, as well as a new two-year

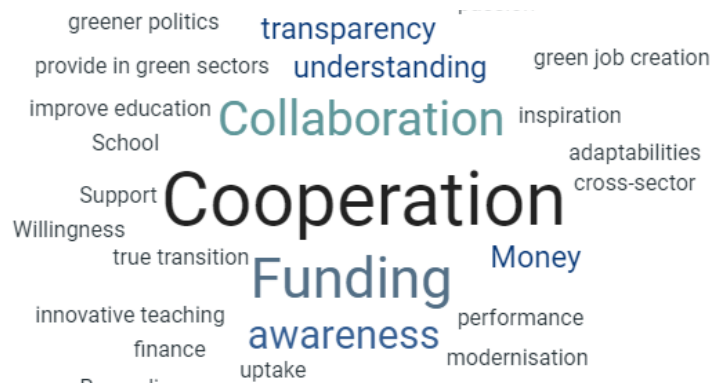
university-level apprenticeship programme for future graduate engineers. Michael also outlined the challenges of adapting training to the COVID-19 pandemic context, especially in the area of safety.

Alexandre Grillat presented an energy trade union perspective on the green transition. He stressed that while political discourse most often highlighted the promises of the green transition in terms of job creation in the energy sector, it was crucial to also recognise that some current job positions may become obsolete, with a clear need to anticipate the upskilling and reskilling needs that will result from this. VET is key to ensuring both a just transition and the adequate skills endowment of the workforce. Alexandre also expressed hope that the digital transition would make the energy sector more attractive to young people.

Alfonso Balsamo highlighted Italy's structural labour market mismatch, with a significant share of companies struggling to attract young people with the skills they need, despite high youth unemployment. The Italian industry, due to its leadership on raw materials and electricity sectors, has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the sustainability agenda. The link between sustainability and employability can attract young people to apprenticeships, and in Italy there is now a process of 'cultural sowing' regarding skills and the green transition. Nevertheless, work and education are still two very separate worlds, which is why Confindustria is working to bring secondary schools and the business world closer, while promoting a sustainability agenda through the dissemination of a circular economy kit for students and specific training programmes for teachers. Alfonso hopes that NextGenerationEU funding will be used to develop apprenticeships at both upper secondary and tertiary level and suggested the idea of a European network for green skills.

During the **Q&A session**, the audience asked the panellists if they believed green and digital skills could help increase the attractiveness of apprenticeships. **Michael Fitzgerald** answered that it was important to link sustainability to young peoples' goals and ambitions, and that this was done yearly by ESB Networks through a social media campaign. ESB Networks also try to increase diversity by reaching out to groups that might not consider apprenticeships a viable option. As a result, they have increased their numbers of female students. Michael also highlighted that school teachers are critically important in making apprenticeships a valid alternative to the traditional college/university route. Other key factors are parental attitudes towards apprenticeships and creating awareness through, for example, apprenticeship events where engagement with young people can take place more directly than on social media. **Alfonso Balsamo** answered that attractiveness was a cultural challenge, as most people in Italy were not aware of the existence of apprenticeships as a potential education path. **Alexandre Grillat** took a question from the audience on mid-career workers and elaborated upon his organisation's work with the French government to offer retraining to 800 coal fire power station workers to join the nuclear industry.

On **Slido**, attendees were asked what they believed was needed to ensure apprenticeships can support the green economy. The most frequent answers were *cooperation, funding and collaboration*.



3.0 Panel discussion 2: Digital transitions

The second panel discussion revolved around opportunities and challenges linked to digitisation and tackled the issues of changes to the learning model, inclusion of vulnerable groups and curriculum revamping. The panellists were the following:

- **Attila Szekely**, VP Enterprise Business at **OpenClassrooms** – an online education platform providing courses in digital skills and entrepreneurship, France;
- **Belén Sánchez-Rubio**, Head of the International Department at the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), representing **Empleando Digital** – the 2019 European Social Fund Award winner who focused on digitalisation and technological change in VET, Spain;
- **Markus Bell**, Head of Global Vocational and Training Department at **SAP** – a software company incorporating Industry 4.0 into apprentice training, Germany.

Matthäus Fandrejewski from the **European Apprentices Network (EAN)** kicked off the session with the thoughts of the EAN on the green and digital transitions:

1. The Just Transition Fund must be used to finance a socially fair green transition which leaves no one behind. VET is therefore crucial, not just for young people but also for adult reskilling and upskilling.
2. Green skills and behaviours must be mainstreamed across the curricula.
3. Increase youth ownership of the green transition by appointing youth ambassadors for sustainability in schools and companies.
4. VET schools and providers must be adequately equipped with digital devices.
5. Teachers and trainers must benefit from adequate training themselves to be able to pass on digital and green knowledge.

Matthäus further emphasised that the green transition needs to be socially fair, with everyone having access to work and social protection.

Kicking off the panel discussion on digital transitions, **Attila Szekely** highlighted the opportunities offered by digitisation for the development of the apprenticeship model. OpenClassrooms, offers an all-online training model which removes both geographical and time constraints. Apprentices and companies can start a training programme whenever they wish, as they are not subject to an annual school calendar. Likewise, the online educational centre removes the need to find an education provider and a company both located in the same geographical area. OpenClassrooms aims to create

1 600 new apprenticeships in 2021 and is currently expanding its offer outside France. The main barrier OpenClassrooms faces currently is a lack of concept awareness.

Belén Sánchez-Rubio was asked how digital training could be made available to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Fundación Secretariado Gitano has developed *Empleando digital*, a joint project with the Spanish Red Cross and the Accenture Foundation, co-financed by the European Social Fund. *Empleando digital* aims to mainstream digital skills in Fundación's existing employment programmes. Fundación started by going digital itself. It then trained the beneficiaries in basic digital skills and also used digital tools for specific courses in occupations (e.g. virtual reality for cleaning or waiting tables), which also helped improve soft skills. Belén highlighted, however, that digital skills alone were not sufficient to secure integration in the labour market. Soft skills such as communication and work habits also proved to be crucial. She stressed that EU funding has been crucial in developing the programme, especially in providing beneficiaries with adequate IT equipment.

Markus Bell presented SAP's revamped apprenticeship programme. To better reflect the needs of the labour market in its training programme, SAP did some surveying and market research across the IT sector. The company came up with an updated training offer, including new modules such as data science, the internet of things, additional programming languages and security training. SAP also addresses the development of social and personal skills through a focus on student self-organisation. For instance, students must plan the rotating phases of their training plan themselves. Innovation is also an important aspect of SAP's training programme, which includes a dedicated week during which students come together to work on innovation topics, create prototypes and then pitch their results.

During the **Q&A session**, the panellists were asked for their views on the ideal balance between the most advanced digital technologies, such as virtual reality or artificial intelligence, and more basic digital skills in the training offer. Panellists acknowledged that it was important to train individuals in advanced technologies, but that the provision of such trainings may raise budgetary concerns for training providers. Panellists also underlined that young people from vulnerable groups might not necessarily be literate in digital technologies. As such, basic digital skills and physical presence remain important in the learning process. Regarding national regulatory frameworks, panellists outlined that national skill frameworks should consider the increased need for digital skills if countries wished to retain a competitive edge.

On **Slido**, attendees were asked the following question: How can we ensure apprenticeships best equip people with digital skills? The most cited answers were *training, funding, train the trainers, equipment, online and motivation*.



Norbert Schöbel, European Commission, closed the panel discussion by stressing that companies had a responsibility to play in training the trainers and invited companies that had not yet done so to join the Alliance.

4.0 Closing session

Digital skills in apprenticeships: The international perspective

Ashwani Aggarwal from the **International Labour Organization** introduced an international perspective on apprenticeships. He focused on how the use of digital technology is transforming apprenticeships, and how apprenticeships are addressing the rising demand of digital skills. Global trends identified during the pandemic include digital degree apprenticeships, an increased reliance on e-learning, and a greater use of new technologies involving mobile apps, virtual reality and augmented reality. However, with only half of the world population connected to the internet, there is great variation in the extent to which countries outside Europe can embrace digital technologies in teaching and learning processes. One key challenge is to continuously adjust education curricula to meet rapidly changing digital developments. The low rate of apprenticeships in many countries represents an opportunity, given that apprenticeships have the potential to reduce the widening digital divide and provide a tool to keep pace with new digital demands.

Action Plan for the Alliance

Norbert Schöbel, European Commission presented the renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeships. On 1 July, the Commission has adopted a package of measures related to youth employment, driven in part by the concern around the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth employment as well as on up- and reskilling of workers. The package includes the European Skills Agenda, a Proposal for a Council Recommendation on VET, a Proposal for a Council Recommendation on reinforcing the Youth Guarantee, and a Communication on Youth Employment Support, which also presents the renewed EAfA with six future oriented priorities:

- encouraging commitment among Member States and companies to quality and effective apprenticeships, by fostering national apprenticeship coalitions;
- incentivising support to SMEs, providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships;
- mobilising local and regional authorities as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment;
- strengthening social dialogue through the more active involvement of national social partner organisations;
- proactively engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees on apprenticeships, with a view to obtaining agreement on joint sectoral pledges;
- supporting the representation of apprentices in the Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network.

Norbert Schöbel gave an overview of the 2020–2021 EAfA activities (11 events, 7 live discussion, 8 webinars and 5 online training modules) and briefly explained the benchlearning activities, the methodology for reforming EU national apprenticeship systems through a combination of benchmarking and peer learning.

Newcomer session

A total of 24 organisations have joined EAfA since 1 March 2020. These organisations come from 15 different countries and together aim to create a total of 4,078 apprenticeship places. The newcomers follow the objectives on supply, quality image

and mobility. They come from a variety of sectors (education providers, business world, public authorities, employer organisations, etc.). Norbert announced that thanks to these new members and a new pledge from Nestlé, EAfA members have pledged to create 1 million apprenticeship places. Representatives of three different newcomer organisations and Nestlé, a committed member of the alliance, were given the floor to present their pledges.

Giorgos Giorgakis, Managing Director at Eurosuccess consulting (Cyprus), a consultancy specialising in EU funds in the area of education and training. Eurosuccess consulting is committed to promoting European mobility of apprentices and quality apprenticeships in Cyprus through awareness campaigns and events and through open discussion with various key stakeholders at national level. The organisation is hopeful that EAfA membership will expand its network of organisations and give it access to best practice examples, so as to fulfil its twin goal of offering better apprenticeships and to foster apprentice mobility within its network of partners. Giorgos believes that quality standards and labour rights are a key issue in the field of apprenticeships in Cyprus, and that by fostering public dialogue at national level his organisation can help improve the quality of apprenticeships.

Orhan Yazkhan, Vocational Project Manager at TürkTraktör (Turkey), an automotive industry company involved in several EU vocational projects. The organisation provides diversified training through different 'laboratories' and a mentoring scheme. TürkTraktör is committed to sharing good practices with fellow EAfA members and increasing its knowledge and awareness of innovative learning approaches. The organisation sees EAfA as a source of opportunities for its apprentices.

Bernadette Greco, Programme Officer and EURES Adviser at the Department of Labour of Regione Puglia and ARPAL (Italy) shared that apprenticeship awareness among both young people and employers can be increased in the Puglia region. The Department of Labour of Puglia advised the local Higher Technical Institutes to shift from a traineeship to a transnational mobility apprenticeship model to increase awareness and enhance the image of apprenticeships. With the support of EURES and, in particular, the 'Your first EURES job' initiative, the region is trying to make this shift possible and thus increase the attractiveness of apprenticeships and raise awareness of the soft skills component that the mobile experience can bring in.

Finally, **Bart Vandewaetere, Head of Corporate Communications and Government Relations at Nestlé for Europe, Middle East and North Africa**, presented the company's renewed pledge to EAfA, of which it is a long-standing member. Bart stressed the responsibility of companies towards young people during this difficult period throughout which they face reduced learning and working opportunities. Nestlé and its 300 supply chain business partners of the Alliance for YOUTH have offered more than 450,000 first opportunities (jobs and apprenticeships) in the last six years and have pledged to offer 300,000 more by 2025. Nestlé itself will create 40,000 jobs and training opportunities. Bart stressed the benefits of this objective for both society and businesses, which young people must steer in the right direction in light of the challenges of the digital and the green transitions.

Closing remarks

Closing the event, **Manuela Geleng, European Commission**, thanked the participants and the speakers and reiterated the great importance of EAfA reaching the milestone of 1 million pledged apprenticeships. Today, both the green and the digital transitions are at the heart of the Youth Employment Support Initiative and the

European Skills Agenda, which aim to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. The recently announced Pact for Skills further calls for businesses, social partners, public authorities, and training providers to work on the upskilling and reskilling of the labour force, where also the VET sector can play an active role. In the coming years, funding is a crucial aspect considering the levels of investments needed in green and digital skills. The current EU budget for resilience and recovery is aiming to make serious investments in skills and apprentices. VET stakeholders, including event participants, are encouraged to apply for the unprecedented levels of funding that are available.

Finally, the participants were reminded of the **EaFA agenda** and were cordially invited to take part in the following events:

Events		Webinars		Online Trainings		Live discussions	
4 th benchlearning coordinators' meeting – 26 November	November	Role of employer organisations – 25 November	November	In-company trainers: roles and responsibilities, skills required and training needs	November		
European Network of Cities for Apprenticeships online workshop							
European Network of Cities for Apprenticeships online workshop – 21 January	January	Rights and protection of apprentices at work – 11 December	December			Pact for skills – 19 January	January
The role of regions and cities – Green and digital transition – 26 January						The role of regions and cities – green and digital transitions – 26 January	

