

THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM¹ – AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

“Apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training (OJT) and related classroom instruction under the supervision of a journey-level craft person or trade professional in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. After completing an apprenticeship programme, the worker's journey-level² status provides an additional benefit of nationwide mobility at journey level scale”³.

The aim of the present paper is to examine the apprenticeship system in France and other European countries and also in USA.

Key words: apprenticeship system, Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Ile-de-France, Paris, employer, employee, to employ

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1. Introduction. What is apprenticeship?

Apprenticeship⁴ is at the same time a job and also school. It is perceived as an opportunity since it represents a good way for youth to prepare for the future with on-the-job training in a career and thus become highly skilled professionals. Besides earning experience for their future jobs, the apprentice is paid for learning the skills necessary in his future career. The apprentices are trained by master craftsmen, experts in their fields who share their skills and knowledge with the apprentice in order for him / her to become an expert. Apprenticeship is also a schooling period with classes where he/ she is taught how to master all the aspects of the job.

2. The apprenticeship system in France

The apprenticeship contracts in France are intended for the **youth** between 16-25 years old, before and after the graduation/ an educational cycle. The French youth may cap their professional activity either by obtaining a diploma or through a vocational training according to RNCP⁵. The French apprenticeship system comprised approximately 400.000 youth in 2014 whereas the Ile-de-

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² experience applies to a person who has completed an apprenticeship program or is an experienced worker, not a trainee, and is fully qualified and able to perform a specific trade without supervision, www.cslb.ca.gov

³ Washington State Department of Labour and Industries

⁴ Source: <http://www.exploreapprenticeship.wa.gov>

⁵ RNCP= Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles

France region comprised 80.00 apprentices. The French Government aim at the number 500.000 of apprentices in 2015-2016 and in Ile-de-France, 118.000.

The apprenticeship contracts are based on two pillars:

- The activity carried out within a centre of vocational training (school or university);
- The activity carried out within a company, with a mentor.

The statute of apprentice of a French youth is that of an employee in a private company or public company and the contract may vary from 1 to 3 years. The statute of apprentice is protected through legislative framework which supports this activity.

Such a contract entitles the youth to certain advantages such as:

- Obtaining a diploma or a certificate;
- Free access to education;
- His/ her first work experience;
- It also facilitates him/ her employment.

The youth may be paid with 25% - 78% of the minimum wage per economy, depending on his/ her age and his/ her level of education. In addition, he/ she may benefit from regional subsidies coming to cover some basic expenses as transportation, utilities, food, books etc.

For the **companies** also, the apprenticeship contracts represent an easy and cheap access to skilled staff, financial incentives, efficient recruiting modalities as well as a cumulative system of regional incentives as it follows:

- The companies having at least 11 employees may receive 1000 euros/ per annum for each apprentice;
- The companies with less than 250 employees may receive 1000 euros/ per annum for each newly employed apprentice comparatively to the previous year.

Yet, for the companies there also constraints and disadvantages which are not easy to cope with:

- The companies having more than 250 employees must pay 5% of the total amount intended for wages to the apprentices; if they do not do it, they have to pay penalties to them;
- The companies must have trained mentors to train, guide and assess the apprentices;
- It is common for the companies to pay the tuition fees of their apprentices, who are also students⁶.

Nonetheless, the legislative provisions are subject to periodical changes, still being in the course of becoming perfect.

3. The apprenticeship system in Novancia Business School

Within Novancia Business School and not only the students have a double statute: that of a student (part-time student) and that of an employee (part-time employee). During the Bachelor degree, the students have the option to carry out a tutorial period in companies during II and III years on regular bases (one week as a student and one week as an employee).

Moreover, in 2012, Novancia made the I year students the proposal to finance their studies – may choose a certain type of agreement with a company under the guidance of a mentor, in this case, the courses being in the morning.

Going on with the master studies, during the two years, given the fact that the students in France are compelled to carry out nine months of apprenticeship at the minimum, either in France

⁶ ESCP Europe, the oldest Business School in the world (1819) with the headquarters in the centre of Paris, has a system similar to that of Novancia; during the apprenticeship contract, the tuition fees of the students and their wages are paid by the employer-company.

or abroad, they may choose an apprenticeship contract or internship contract; the former may be extended to two years (except for the Development of International Business specialization).

In other words, the students have to choose the kind of tutorial they want to carry out, either apprentices in a company and in this case they are financially supported by the company, or as an internship period and in this latter case they have to finance their studies by their own. The internship period is carried out in shorter periods, up to six months; during the internship period, the students do not have the statute of an employee and may be temporarily paid with 30% of the minimum wage.

All the more, in order to support the student of Novancia Business School, recruiting platforms have been framed and implemented, such as Job net, Job Teaser and I Questa, they constituting an important information and connecting source for apprenticeship and not only. There is also a forum of permanent dialogue between the apprentice-students and employers (“Le Forum Apprentissage-Emploi speciale).

4. The Apprenticeship system in the Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Ile-de-France, Paris

The apprenticeship system of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries in Ile-de-France, Paris has 23 apprenticeship schools, 14182 of apprentices were attending at the beginning of 2015; it also offers a wide range of trainings in a wide range of sectors: catering, mechanics, multimedia, video, fashion, power-industry, entrepreneurship, management or sales.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industries in Ile-de-France, Paris also offers training programmes oriented towards the needs of the labour market; it makes a permanent effort in adjusting to the technical evolution; it utilizes interactive pedagogical methods to integrate the information coming from companies.

There are also performance indicators that can be mentioned as for instance, a high rate of successful exams, 87.14% at the level of 2014; low rate of abandon, 6% for the period 2013-2014; high employment rate, 76% of the graduates may find jobs in less than 6 months. After evaluating the performance, the difference is given by the permanent effort to monitor the apprenticeship period in schools and companies and a permanent dialogue with the employer-companies. Interesting enough is the fact that the apprenticeship period may be carried out within international systems, like:

- Erasmus+
- Movil’ App⁷
- ECVET⁸

5. The Apprenticeship system in other countries

Speaking of **British** apprenticeship, in 1994, a public programme, Modern Apprenticeship was established with the aim to increase Britain’s supply of skills. It was meant to expand work-based learning among young people. Being oriented towards draft and technician skills, it also mixed on the job and off the job training. The provision was intended to improve the national shortfall in productivity and trade performance (as the authors⁹ of the article suggest). The authors, also imply the idea that the programme should be seen as a labour market programme. The

⁷ Mobile Application

⁸European Credit System for Vocational Education & Training

⁹ Paul Ryan, University of Cambridge [King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST, e-mail: pr23@econ.cam.ac.uk
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article comprises four ‘restrictions’ as the authors calls them: efficiency aspect, Advanced Modern Apprenticeship, a particular date for characterizing Modern Apprenticeship, the data limited to England and Wales, despite the ‘British’ description.

Using as a starting point the definition of apprenticeship, “a structured programme of vocational preparation sponsored by an employer, juxtaposing part-time education with on-the-job training and work experience, leading to recognized vocational qualification at craft or higher level and taking, at least, two years to complete” [4]. Nonetheless, the authors appreciate that it is difficult to measure apprenticeship according to any definition, since there is no statutory regulation. Modern Apprenticeship appears as a possibility for 16-24 year-old youth, with several apprenticeship attributes: orientation towards the acquisition of a work-based National Vocational Qualification attainments in two key-skills; compatibility with any other sectorial determined requirements; a training pledge signed by the parties including the employer and the apprentice. Yet, apprenticeship remained smaller in Britain comparatively to Britain [4].

With reference to the quality of work-based training, the authors demonstrate that it is deficient, despite the implementation of the programme Modern Apprenticeship, speaking of 1999 level. However, there are two gains for MA¹⁰ over Youth Training, the model qualification has raised and secondly MA has improved its performance over time. Nonetheless, the British apprenticeship is under the performances of the German apprenticeship. Though there are common attributes with the German counterparts in that they both involve a set of training occupations with vocational qualifications. On the other hand, MA encouraged acquisition of practical skills rather than technical understanding.

The authors conclude their article in saying that the contemporary British apprenticeship is weaker than their German counterpart. Despite MA’s increasing contribution, it appears apprenticeship activity has not increased and among causes, the authors find the over-commercialized training quasi-market. Indeed MA appears to have extended systematic youth training into sectors and occupations and also reduced gender and age unbalances in accessing apprenticeship. Yet the training MA has developed, it seems only in the name. On the other hand, there are reforms providing improvement, but they seem to be attractive only on paper [4] since training providers lack qualified staff. To say it in fewer words, the training quasi-market constitutes an obstacle rather than an asset.

German apprenticeship versus American counterpart

The author of the article, at the moment of publishing it¹¹ had just come back from Germany where he visited half a dozen apprenticeship programmes at brand-names companies, among which Daimler, Siemens and Bosch. At that time he came away with¹² a metaphor, “a native tree, flourishing, productive, and highly adapted” [5].

The article represents a comparison between Germany and USA, with high scores for Germany, in what apprenticeship is concerned. Whereas in USA, 5% of young people train as apprentice, in Germany there are 60% and in fields like advanced manufacturing, IT, banking and hospitality and the trainees split their day between classroom instruction and on-the-job time at a company. Thus the theory they learn in the classroom, is reinforced at work. Besides they learn work habits and responsibility. For their time spent in the classroom or in a company, the trainees are paid and the arrangement lasts from 2 to 4 years. This is an opportunity both for the trainees and employer as they hope it will finally lead to a permanent job – but for employer it represents much more – “a crucial talent pool” [5].

¹⁰ Modern Apprenticeship, the author’s note

¹¹ October 16 2014

¹² Say something suddenly that surprises or shock people, www.macmillandictionary.com

What is interesting enough, is that the employer and employee have respect for practical work “This has nothing to do with corporate social responsibility,” an HR manager at Deutsche Bank explained to the group I was with, organized by an offshoot of the Goethe Institute.

“I do this because I need talent.” And this happens at Bosch “Building world-class diesel parts is hard,” the executive in charge of the program explained. “We’re very careful about who we hire. We’re looking for quality.” As for trainees, they learn quickly enough: A mistake on the factory floor is a million-dollar mistake—and they grow up fast, learning not just skills but responsibility [5].

Nobody is amazed about the popularity of apprenticeship; in John Deere plant in Mannheim, 3600 young people apply each year for 60 slots; at Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt, 22,000 apply for 425 places. Another interesting thing is that both the employer and employee expect more from apprenticeship than just training. The reason is here:

In the future, there will be robots to turn the screws,” one educator told us. “We don’t need workers for that. What we need are people who can solve problems”—skilled, thoughtful, self-reliant employees who understand the company’s goals and methods and can improvise when things go wrong or when they see an opportunity to make something work better [5].

Flexibility is the third attribute of the German apprenticeship. Although children as early as in their tens, can choose an academic high-school, a vocational track or something in-between, still there are a lot of opportunities for trainees to switch tracks. They can choose between going back to school to specialize further or earn a master craftsman’s certificate or train as a trainee in the company’s apprenticeship programme. The German reality “lifelong training” is only a dream in USA.

Speaking of money, in Germany, a company receives from the state a sum varying between 25,000 and more than 80,000 euro per apprentice. In USA, the firms have to build programmes.

Another important issue is that the German state plays an important role in regulating what happens in private companies:

What makes dual training work, every manager told us, are the standardized occupational profiles, or curricula, developed by the federal government in collaboration with employers, educators, and union representatives. Every young machinist training anywhere in Germany learns the same skills in the same order on the same timetable as every other machinist. This is good for apprentices: It guarantees high-quality programs where trainees learn more than one company’s methods, making it possible for those who wish to switch jobs later on. [5]

Therefore, USA and Germany have different points of views on practical skills.

While Germany educates and train young people at the same time, as they agree what people have to be prepared for jobs, in USA, people are generally committed to the idea of education preparing people for life.

Switzerland implemented the apprenticeship system successfully. 2/3 youth choose an apprenticeship contract, this being an opportunity for them to acquire basic and solid professional knowledge. They may choose from among 230 of apprenticeship schemes offered by companies, the system being decentralized, the companies and the youth having the last say. Beginning with 15 of age, the youth may opt for alternating the theoretical study in school with training stages in companies. Moreover the apprentices’ productivity surpasses the gross costs afferent to their training. Therefore it is not surprizing the fact that Swiss companies are willing to train apprentices.

Romania has an apprenticeship system similar to that in France, the apprenticeship contracts being signed from 16 of age and encompass the professional training of the potential employee as well as payment of the monthly minimum wage per country. The apprentices have a programme of 8 hour per day, 40 hour per week, except for the 18-year old youth who have a 6-hour per day programme, 30 hours per week.

In our country the apprenticeship contract is established depending on the training level, as it follows:

- From 12 months for qualification level 1;
- From 24 months for qualification level 2;
- From 36 months for qualification level 3;

According to the decision of the European Council 85-368-EEC, the vocational and technical pre-university education has three qualification levels. There is also a National Record of Professional Qualifications in Romania, just like in France.

In Romania, the employer is compelled to organize the evaluation of the practical and theoretical of the apprentice's knowledge through a centre of evaluation and certification of the professional competences acquired during the apprenticeship period and at the same time to support financially the costs of assessment.

During the contract, the employer may request and benefit from 60% of the social indicator value of reference for unemployment insurance and stimulating the work force regulated by the Law no. 76. 2002 concerning the system of unemployment insurance and stimulating the work force.

6. Recent approaches to apprenticeship in UK

Sarah Gordon, Business Editor of Financial Times [6] published an article on 29 November 2015. The article *Employers brace themselves for apprenticeship levy* speaks about a tax “levy” which will be imposed to the employers beginning with April 2017. Thus the employers will pay 0.5 per cent contribution to the levy, but they will also receive an allowance in return of up to 15,000 pounds, depending on the number of apprentices they employ. Although this “levy” is generally perceived as “a sting in the tail”, the good news is that an independent body will be set up. This body will be called the Institute of Apprenticeship and will be operational by 2017. The Institute as an independent body of government will aim at advising at the level of levy funding each apprentice should get. This provision will help put the quality of apprenticeship to the forefront, the business department believes. The Institute will be led by board members, publicly appointed comprising business leaders and their representatives which again is a good thing, since so far there was a total lack of involvement.

7. Instead of Conclusions – Proposals

After we have seen what is apprenticeship and the way it is perceived in different countries, we think that it is high time that we, Romania should do more in this sense. It presents benefits for everybody: young people get paid and find a job easily; the employers get incentives from the state; the state itself has a means to control the private system. Whether we compare the data in this article, we notice that the German apprenticeship system is by far the best regulated, since the state holds the control. We thought that some proposals would be of help and therefore we would like to share.

To the extent enabled by the legal framework in Romania, it is worth that in our universities, the possibility should exist for the students attending II of Bachelor studies and I year of Master studies be encouraged to conclude apprenticeship contracts so they can benefit from all the advantages falling from such contracts: experience and professional insertion during the faculty (not to discourage the full-time students already employed; we would better find the proper conditions and partnerships with the societies that hire them), thus a more profound and real connection with the business environment should be achieved.

Therefore it is necessary for our courses and seminars to emphasize more the practical side of their training and less on the theoretical side. Moreover, in our universities the obligativity should exist within the internalization process for the students to carry out a practical stage abroad (at least 1-2 months). For the beginning, we can develop such programmes based on European Funds of training and professional insertion. Also an independent department should exist to deal exclusively with the practical activity of the students:

- Lobby activities in relation to the companies;
- Approaching the companies, carrying out activities with them and evaluating them;
- Creating a database with these companies;
- Guiding the students;
- Common projects carried out with these companies;
- Instituting partnerships with societies and companies abroad;
- Collecting funds;
- Creating an on-line platform with the business environment;
- Students' projects for these companies;
- Creating business incubators for the students proving entrepreneurship skills, wishing to start up a business of their own, etc.

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