



apprentline

*Capacity Building in the Organisation of Online
Apprenticeships*

**Guidelines for the organization of Online
Apprenticeships**

COMPANIES



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIPS

1.1. Benefits of virtual apprenticeships/ Companies

Virtual apprenticeships, also known as remote or online apprenticeships, have surged in popularity in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, revealing a significant gap in preparedness among all stakeholders for organizing and implementing online apprenticeships. Despite the challenges associated with virtual apprenticeships—such as the lack of background and resources experienced by many companies, VET (Vocational Education and Training) institutions, and intermediary organizations—there is a growing intent to explore and adopt the benefits these apprenticeships offer. Companies, in particular, stand to gain significantly from effectively implementing virtual apprenticeships.

One of the main advantages of virtual apprenticeships for companies is the wider range of opportunities they provide. Virtual apprenticeships significantly expand the pool of potential candidates, enabling companies to attract talent from remote areas, different cities, or even other countries. This geographical flexibility allows companies to tap into a broader talent pool, finding the best fit for their needs regardless of location. By coordinating with intermediary organizations, companies can ensure that both VET providers and the company itself are equipped to support remote apprentices, thereby widening the pool of available opportunities.

Accessibility and inclusivity are other significant benefits of virtual apprenticeships. These apprenticeships offer increased opportunities for students with disabilities, illnesses, or those unable to relocate. Companies can ensure that their digital tools and platforms are accessible to all students, providing support and resources to make virtual apprenticeships inclusive. This inclusivity not only benefits the apprentices but also enriches the company's workforce with diverse perspectives and talents.

Flexibility is another key advantage for companies. Virtual apprenticeships allow for flexible scheduling, eliminating the need for travel and dedicated office space. This flexibility benefits both apprentices and employers, making it easier to integrate apprentices into the company's workflow. Companies can establish flexible schedules that accommodate both apprentices and mentors, allowing the apprenticeship to better combine with school schedules or personal commitments, making it a more viable option for many students.

Virtual apprenticeships also provide a global perspective. They enable apprentices to collaborate with colleagues and mentors from diverse backgrounds, enhancing their global mindset. Companies benefit from multicultural teams with broader perspectives. By connecting with VET institutions globally, companies can foster these multicultural interactions and enhance the learning experience for apprentices.

Another advantage is the time and cost savings associated with virtual apprenticeships. Both apprentices and employers save time and money on commuting and office space. Companies can streamline the apprenticeship process, reducing logistical costs for both parties through efficient coordination and the use of digital tools. This cost-efficiency makes virtual apprenticeships an attractive option for many organizations.

Sustainability is a crucial aspect of virtual apprenticeships. They prepare VET actors for future extraordinary situations and promote long-term remote or hybrid apprenticeships. Companies play a vital role in developing and sharing best practices for sustaining virtual apprenticeship programs. By being prepared to continue offering these programs in the face of future disruptions, companies ensure a steady pipeline of skilled talent.

Virtual apprenticeships also contribute to reduced environmental impact by eliminating the need for commuting and physical office space. This reduction in carbon emissions aligns with the growing emphasis on sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Companies can advocate for and implement environmentally sustainable practices within apprenticeship programs, reinforcing their commitment to sustainability.

Digitalization is another benefit. Through virtual apprenticeships, both apprentices and mentors engage with a variety of digital tools and platforms on a daily basis, enhancing their digital skills. Companies provide training and resources to both apprentices and mentors to ensure effective use of digital tools. This training enhances the overall digital literacy of all participants, which is increasingly important in today's digital workforce.

With this guidebook, we aim to provide companies with recommendations, suggestions, and general guidance to address the lack of experience that many organizations might have regarding virtual apprenticeships. The guide will cover aspects such as organizing virtual apprenticeships, engaging organizations to implement them, digitalizing apprentices and mentors, developing strategy and action plans, and monitoring and evaluating the apprenticeships.

Companies play a pivotal role in the successful implementation and sustainability of virtual apprenticeships. By focusing on their unique role, this guidebook aims to maximize the benefits of virtual apprenticeships for all involved stakeholders, ensuring a robust and inclusive apprenticeship system for the future.

1.2. How to motivate companies to engage in the organization of virtual apprenticeships

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, the demand for skilled talent is essential. Companies across industries are constantly seeking innovative ways to attract, develop, and retain top talent to remain competitive and drive growth. Here, the organization and implementation of virtual

apprenticeships comes into the scene as a crucial opportunity to engage such talent, given the benefits mentioned above.

Encouraging companies to engage in the organization of virtual apprenticeships requires a combination of highlighting benefits, addressing concerns, and providing support. Here are some recommendations:

1. Highlight the Benefits

- ✓ Emphasize the value of virtual apprenticeships in providing companies with a pool of skilled and motivated talent, along with the new set of skills in terms of digitalization that both the apprentice and the company workforce may acquire after the implementation of the apprenticeship period.
- ✓ Point out the cost-effectiveness of virtual apprenticeships compared to traditional in-person programs, including reduced overhead costs and the ability to reach a wider pool of candidates, with a more global and multicultural perspective.
- ✓ Showcase success stories of companies that have implemented virtual apprenticeship programs and have seen positive outcomes, such as improved productivity, innovation, digitalization, higher satisfaction rates and employee retention.
- ✓ Spotlight the contribution of virtual apprenticeships in terms of sustainability and corporate social responsibility. When implementing online apprenticeships, the carbon footprint may be reduced, as candidates do not need to move by car or bus. On the other side, diversity and inclusion are guaranteed by reaching a wider pool of candidates regardless of geographic location, socioeconomic background, or physical abilities.
- ✓ Highlight the adaptability and resilience that virtual apprenticeships offer, especially in times of crisis or uncertainty. Virtual programs allow companies to continue talent development initiatives even during disruptions like natural disasters, pandemics, or economic downturns.
- ✓ Emphasize the role of virtual apprenticeships in leveraging technology and preparing apprentices for the digital skills required in today's workforce. Highlight how virtual platforms and tools can facilitate collaborative learning, remote work, and skill-building in many areas.

2. Address Concerns

- ✓ Acknowledge common concerns such as the perceived lack of supervision or hands-on training in virtual environments.
- ✓ Provide solutions and examples of how companies can effectively structure virtual apprenticeships to address these concerns, such as utilizing virtual collaboration tools, mentorship programs, and project-based learning experiences. Further recommendations on this matter will be given in the coming chapters.
- ✓ Highlight the flexibility and adaptability of virtual apprenticeships, which can accommodate various learning and working ways, and preferences.

3. Provide Support and Resources

- ✓ Offer guidance and resources for companies to design and implement virtual apprenticeship programs, including best practices, templates, and training materials.
- ✓ Facilitate connections between companies and educational institutions or training providers to streamline the process of recruiting and onboarding apprentices.
- ✓ Highlight the potential for companies to build relationships with educational institutions and access a pipeline of future talent through virtual apprenticeship programs.
- ✓ Establish a support network or community where companies can share experiences, ask questions, and learn from each other's successes and challenges.

4. Promote Visibility and Recognition

- ✓ Recognize companies that participate in virtual apprenticeship programs through awards, certifications, or public recognition initiatives.
- ✓ Showcase the impact and outcomes of virtual apprenticeships through marketing campaigns, case studies, and industry events to raise awareness and encourage more companies to get involved.

Following the previous recommendations, companies may be effectively and more easily motivated to engage in the organization of virtual apprenticeships.

1.3. How to attract and engage students for virtual apprenticeships

In the current landscape of education and professional development, virtual apprenticeships offer valuable experiences and skill acquisition opportunities. However, attracting and engaging students in these virtual apprenticeships requires a strategic approach that not only highlights the benefits but also elevates the overall perception of such opportunities. Companies need to build a positive image and raise the prestige of these apprenticeships.

By showcasing practical advantages, fostering a sense of community, and leveraging innovative outreach methods, companies can effectively capture the interest of students, paving the way for meaningful engagement and success in virtual apprenticeships. Here are some recommendations to guide the process and ensure that virtual apprenticeships become a valuable option for students:

Highlight Success Stories: Sharing success stories of students who have completed virtual apprenticeships can inspire confidence and interest among prospective students. Real-life examples of individuals who have benefited from these programs demonstrate their value and effectiveness.

Offer Valuable Skills Development: Emphasize the practical skills and knowledge students can gain through virtual apprenticeships, particularly those related to the use of digital tools and digitalization in general. Highlighting how these skills are relevant in today's job market and can help students stand out to potential employers makes the apprenticeship more appealing.

Provide Flexible Opportunities: Highlight the flexibility and convenience of virtual apprenticeships. Students often appreciate the ability to participate in these programs from anywhere with an internet connection, allowing them to balance their studies, work, personal, and family life.

Offer Mentorship and Support: Providing mentorship and support throughout the apprenticeship program enhances the learning experience. Personalized guidance and feedback help students feel supported as they develop their skills, increasing their engagement and success.

Promote Networking Opportunities: Highlight the networking opportunities available through virtual apprenticeships. Encourage students to connect with professionals in their field of interest, attend virtual events, and participate in online communities related to the apprenticeship program.

Engage with VET Centers, Business Schools, and Universities: Collaborate with educational institutions to promote virtual apprenticeships to students. Establishing relationships with VET providers can help increase awareness of the program and reach a larger audience of potential applicants.

To effectively implement these recommendations, companies can take the following actions to attract and engage students in virtual apprenticeships:

- **Organize and Host Virtual Information Sessions:** Prospective students can learn more about the apprenticeship program, ask questions, and interact with current participants during virtual

information sessions. This provides an opportunity to showcase the benefits of the program and address any concerns or misconceptions.

- **Create Engaging Multimedia Content:** Use videos, infographics, and interactive presentations to promote the virtual apprenticeship program on social media platforms, websites, and other online channels. Visual content captures students' attention and effectively communicates key information about the program.
- **Provide Virtual Tours or Demonstrations:** Give students a firsthand look at what to expect by providing virtual tours or demonstrations of the apprenticeship platform, tools, and resources. This helps students visualize themselves participating in the program and understand how it can benefit them.
- **Leverage Digital Marketing Strategies:** Utilize email campaigns, social media advertising, and SEO strategies to reach a wider audience of potential apprentices. Highlight the unique aspects and benefits of your virtual apprenticeship program in your marketing materials.
- **Engage Alumni as Ambassadors:** Involve past apprentices as ambassadors to share their experiences and successes with potential applicants. Alumni can provide authentic testimonials and answer questions, making the apprenticeship program more relatable and attractive.

By implementing these strategies, companies can effectively attract and engage students for virtual apprenticeships, ensuring a robust and dynamic apprenticeship program that meets the needs of today's digital economy.

1.4. Fields and sectors in which virtual apprenticeships could be more effective

Given the condition of remote work, virtual apprenticeships can be particularly applied in those fields and sectors where hands-on experience can be done remotely and do not need the presence of the apprentice at the workplace.

Based on the research conducted during the collection of best practices for WP2. "Handbook of best practices", we can identify certain fields and sectors in which virtual apprenticeships could be more effective and easier to be implemented.

IT and Digital Marketing are the main areas identified during the research conducted. Due to the digital profile of these sectors, they can easily tend to implement apprenticeships, fostered by the use and performance of digital tools.

Business and finance are also two sectors where remote work has become more and more popular, and where it is a common option for the staff of companies related to these sectors nowadays. The work developed for business and finance areas do not really need the physical presence of the workforce at the workplace, as it can be managed anywhere if the staff is well equipped (personal computer, internet connection and required digital tools that facilitate teamwork and communication among the team members and the employees and stakeholders). This option, as we already know, mainly leads into

flexibility, which is highly valued among employees in these times. As the remote work practice is common in these sectors, it is intended that the apprenticeships could be also implemented online.

Consulting sector, which can be considered similarly to the previous example related to Business and Finance, it is also a sector where digitalization and remote work are gaining popularity, so implementing virtual apprenticeships would not be an impediment and could lead into successful practices.

Finally, and instead of the face-to-face need of these sectors in most of the cases, we have identified Journalism and Tourism and Hospitality sectors as field where virtual apprenticeships can be effective, specially in those kind of backend tasks as publishing in the case of Journalism sector, and book management or customer support in the case of Hospitality and Tourism.

Apart from these sectors identified, where virtual apprenticeships are more common or can be straightforward implemented, we consider that with the appropriate digital means and determination, virtual apprenticeships could be implemented in most of the sectors. In conclusion, virtual apprenticeships offer a modern and adaptable approach to learning and skill development across various fields and sectors.

1.5. Statistics about virtual apprenticeships

Data related exclusively with the organisation of virtual apprenticeships is scarce over Europe while more data exists for the UK and USA where these programs are more common. From the data available we can mention that virtual apprenticeships, facilitated online, have seen a notable increase in adoption, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs are particularly valuable in industries such as IT, cybersecurity, healthcare, and financial services, among others. In 2023, the number of virtual apprenticeship programs grew substantially, with more than [1,000 programs available across over 25 industries, involving more than 400 companies](#).

The flexibility and accessibility of virtual apprenticeships have made them popular among a diverse range of participants, including students, job seekers, and professionals looking to reskill or upskill. [Data from the U.S. Department of Labor](#) indicates that these programs have been essential in maintaining apprenticeship opportunities during periods of economic uncertainty and social distancing measures

[In terms of demographics](#), the 2022/23 academic year saw significant participation in online apprenticeships, with many programs tailored to adults seeking career changes or enhancements. This period also highlighted an increase in apprenticeship starts and a broadening of the sectors involved in virtual apprenticeships.

CHAPTER 2

DIGITAL SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIPS

2.1. Digital skills required for the implementation of virtual apprenticeships and how to develop them

To conduct virtual apprenticeships, digital skills are a must both in mentors/providers of the apprenticeships and in apprentices. Apart from that, as industries are increasingly embracing digital transformation, the demand for individuals equipped with relevant digital skills has soared. Understanding and possessing these digital competencies are pivotal for both the success of virtual apprenticeships and the competitiveness of future professionals and companies.

Based on the research conducted for the collection of best practices, we can identify digital skills required for the implementation of virtual apprenticeships, from the perspective of the companies. The following digital skills are those that mentors or apprentices may have to better implement the virtual apprenticeships at companies.

1. Digital communication (*for mentors and apprentices*)

It encompasses the ability to convey, share, and understand information through digital platforms, ensuring that apprentices, mentors, and teams can collaborate effectively regardless of geographical barriers.

Digital communication involves using tools such as emails, instant messaging apps, video conferencing software, and collaboration platforms to exchange ideas, provide feedback, and maintain a continuous dialogue. It's not just about sending and receiving messages; it's about understanding and being understood accurately in a virtual environment. Its relevance to online apprenticeships is paramount, as it bridges the physical gap between apprentices and mentors, allowing for continuous support, guidance, and collaboration.

In online apprenticeships, where face-to-face interactions are limited or non-existent, effective communication is vital. It ensures that apprentices can receive timely guidance, clarify doubts, and collaborate with peers. It fosters a sense of community, enhances learning outcomes, and supports the development of professional relationships. Moreover, good digital communication skills prepare apprentices for the modern workplace, where remote work and digital collaboration are increasingly common.

❖ How to acquire and improve the skill?

The mentor and apprentice can acquire the skill by self-study resources such as online workshops or webinars (“MIT Principles of Digital Communication”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXFF8m4uGDc&list=PL2AD004D035C24F21>)

They can also set interactive exercises like role-play exercises that simulate challenging communication scenarios in online settings, where they can participate in peer review sessions where they give and receive feedback on communication materials like emails, proposals, or presentations.

To improve the skill, practice projects can be implemented such as regular communication with colleagues and feedback – clear communication rules and tools that could be used. It is also recommended making a practical journal and taking note of good and bad practices, things that have worked and didn't work with regards to digital communication for mentors/apprentices during the apprenticeship period.

The tools and technologies associated are email platforms, Slack, WhatsApp, MS Teams, Google Meets, Zoom, among others.

2. Basic knowledge of software/applications and devices *(for mentors and apprentices)*

This involves the ability to use software/applications for performing basic tasks: creating, editing, saving and printing documents (word processing); making calculations, creating tables, graphs and charts (spreadsheets); making presentations (slideshow maker); accessing, managing and sending emails (email client). The use of the devices (laptop, tablet, etc.) is also a must.

This is a basic skill required for the proper implementation of day-to-day work in a typical office. Specially in the case of virtual apprenticeships, it is important for apprentices to have this skill beforehand, so they can properly implement the tasks without having to first undergo some kind of training, which might not be as productive if organized in a remote setting. In the case of mentor, it is a skill assumed from their work at the company.

❖ How to acquire and improve the skill?

On open source are many courses available to acquire and develop MS Office skills. Some of them can be found here <https://www.coursera.org/courses?query=microsoft%20office>
YouTube also offers many video tutorials showing how to work with the different applications of MS Office https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmkaw6oRnRv8UYcRLpxon4rPQm_pud8nd

The tools and technologies associated are MS Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook); Google Workspace (Docs, Sheets, Slides, Gmail); WPS Office; Open Office; OfficeSuite.

3. Time management from a digital perspective *(for mentors and apprentices)*

Time management in a digital environment involves effectively organizing and planning how to allocate your time between specific activities online. This skill is particularly important in an online apprenticeship, where apprentices must navigate various digital platforms and tools for learning, communication, and project completion. It includes setting goals, prioritizing tasks, avoiding digital distractions, and using digital tools to schedule and track tasks and deadlines.

From the point of view of companies and mentors, this also involves the ability to use specialised tools for monitoring remote work as well as knowledge of additional features, such as tracking progress on activities, analysing productivity, etc.

Time management helps apprentices to balance learning with other responsibilities, meet deadlines, and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Effective time management leads to increased productivity, reduced stress, and better learning outcomes, as apprentices can dedicate appropriate time to study, practice, and rest.

❖ How to acquire and improve the skill?

Proposed resource for mentors and apprentices to acquire digital time management skills is “Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity” by David Allen.

They can also plan and execute small personal projects using a digital project management tool, setting deadlines and milestones and conduct a weekly review of tasks and accomplishments using a digital journal or note-taking app.

To improve the skill, they can join a study group or project team that uses digital tools to coordinate tasks and deadlines, participating in time management challenges or accountability groups online.

The tools and technologies associated are Trello or Asana for project and task management, Google Calendar or Microsoft Outlook for scheduling, and Tomato Timer for focused work sessions.

4. Online engagement and collaboration (*for mentors*)

Online engagement and collaboration skills encompass the ability to effectively facilitate interaction, discussion, and teamwork among learners in a virtual setting. These skills are essential for mentors to guide, support, and motivate apprentices, ensuring they remain active, connected, and collaborative throughout the online apprenticeship experience.

In the context of virtual apprenticeships, engagement and collaboration are key to creating a dynamic learning environment that mirrors the interactivity and community of in-person settings. These skills help prevent feelings of isolation, enhance learning through shared experiences, and build a supportive network among participants. Effective online engagement and collaboration ensure that learners are not just passive recipients of information but active contributors to their learning journey.

❖ How to acquire and improve the skill?

Training programs such as Digital mentorship certification programs focusing on online engagement strategies and tools can be taken, as well as workshops on facilitating online collaboration and building community in virtual classrooms.

To improve the skill, participating in online teaching communities or forums to exchange ideas and strategies for effective online engagement can be an option, as well as collaborate with other educators to co-host webinars or online workshops, gaining insights from shared experiences. Participating in role-playing scenarios that simulate online engagement challenges and solutions is also recommended.

The tools and technologies associated are Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom for interactive discussions and meetings.

5. Technical Troubleshooting *(for mentors)*

This skill may be considered important for mentors as they may be able to assist apprentices in resolving technical issues related to software, collaborative platforms used or connectivity. In this sense, it ensures smooth operation of the apprenticeship program, reducing downtime and frustration.

❖ How to acquire and improve the skill?

By developing and using manuals and guides on common IT issues, this skill can be acquired and improved

The tools and technologies associated are the helpdesk of the software used at the company for the implementation of the virtual apprenticeships.

6. Content creation *(for mentors)*

Digital content creation involves the skills required to design, develop, and deliver engaging and informative online materials such as videos, presentations, infographics, and interactive activities. For mentors in online apprenticeships, it encompasses understanding how to effectively use multimedia tools and digital platforms to create content that enhances learning and keeps apprentices engaged.

Digital content is crucial for successful mentorship in online apprenticeships as it directly impacts the quality and accessibility of learning materials. Well-crafted digital content can cater to diverse learning styles, making complex concepts easier to understand and more engaging. It also enables mentors to provide a more immersive and interactive learning experience, which is essential for maintaining learner motivation and engagement in a virtual environment.

❖ How to acquire and improve the skill?

Online articles and tutorials on effective educational video production, podcasting, and infographic design are recommended, as well as collaborating with other educators and mentors to create interdisciplinary content. Participate in online communities or groups focused on educational technology and digital content creation.

The tools and technologies associated are Canva, Piktochart for graphics and infographics, screen recording tools like Camtasia for creating tutorial videos.

2.2. Digital tools to support virtual apprenticeships

For the implementation of virtual apprenticeships, the use of several digital tools is crucial. In the virtual landscape, digital tools can help us to better manage, monitor and evaluate the virtual apprenticeship, from the perspectives of all the actors that can be involved: apprentices, VET entities, Intermediary organizations and companies.

Based on the digital skills required for the implementation of virtual apprenticeships, already identified, we can propose a bunch of digital tools that can facilitate the implementation of the apprenticeship period and the better onboarding of apprentices and mentors.

Google Meet



- *Tool type:* Communication tool
- *Website:* <https://meet.google.com/>
- *What is the purpose of the tool?*
Google Meet is a video conferencing tool, used for the organisation of video calls and meetings on different devices.
- *Are there options for both synchronous and asynchronous communication?*
Both types of communication are available. The features for making video calls, chat, creating polls and Q&A allow for synchronous communication, while the option to record a meeting allows for asynchronous communication.
- *Can users easily share documents, screens, or collaborate on a virtual whiteboard?*
Any user can easily share screens, presentations and other documents. Google Meet offers a feature for users to collaborate on a whiteboard.
- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*
Google Meet is useful for the organisation of virtual apprenticeships as it can be used for making video calls and meetings with apprentices on a regular basis in order to monitor their progress, provide support, guidance and feedback, etc.
- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*
Google Meet has a user-friendly interface and is easy to use even without any prior knowledge and experience with video conferencing tools.
- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

The tool is easy to implement and is accessible through the organisation's Google account, in case the company has software services from Google.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Google Meet has a support page with step-by-step guides, FAQs, section for troubleshooting and reporting problems.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

The tool is automatically integrated with other Google tools, such as Gmail (for starting or joining meetings), Google Drive (for accessing recordings of video meetings), Google Calendar (for scheduling meetings), etc.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

Data is encrypted by default and further safety features are available to users, such as advanced encryption, anti-abuse measures and privacy controls.

- *Is the tool open access?*

The tool is free to use. For creating a meeting, a basic Google account is required. Joining a meeting is possible even without a Google account.

Trello



- *Tool type:* Collaboration and teamwork

- *Website:* <https://trello.com>

- *What is the purpose of the tool?*

Trello is a tool for management of an organisation's tasks and workflow into boards, lists and cards in order to facilitate the processes related to keeping track and planning of work that has to be done, distributing tasks among co-workers, setting deadlines, following progress on the completion of different activities, so everyone within the team knows who is working on what and when it needs to be done.

- *What collaborative features does the tool offer?*

Trello's cards provide the options for users to leave comments, tag co-workers, attach documents, etc.

- *Can users easily share documents, screens, or collaborate on a virtual whiteboard?*

The boards, lists and cards represent a virtual whiteboard on which co-workers can collaborate. The cards have the option for sharing documents.

- *Are there features for brainstorming and capturing ideas collectively?*

Trello offers templates for brainstorming which are suitable for exchanging ideas with co-workers.

- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*

Trello is useful for the organisation of virtual apprenticeships as it can be used for assigning tasks to apprentices, monitoring the status of their work, keeping them informed about the overall workflow within the organisation, providing them with the opportunity to collaborate with other co-workers.

- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*

Trello is relatively easy to use and has intuitive features, which make it suitable even if users do not have any prior knowledge and experience in working with similar tools.

- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

Trello is easy to implement and users can sign up using their email or through their accounts in Google, Microsoft, Apple, Slack.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Trello has a support page with step-by-step guides, FAQs, discussion forum, form for reporting problems.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

Trello can be easily integrated with other tools which the organisation is already using for the following activities: Analytics and reporting; Automation; Board utilities; Communication and collaboration; Developer tools; File management; HR and operations; IT and project management; Marketing and social media; Product and design; Sales and support.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

Trello has a comprehensive privacy policy, which ensures the privacy of data.

- *Is the tool open access?*

Trello offers a free version for individuals or teams looking to keep their work organised.

Slack



- *Tool type:* Communication, Collaboration and teamwork, Task completion, Mentor interaction, Feedback receptiveness

- *Website:* <https://slack.com>

- *What is the purpose of the tool?*

Slack is a powerful communication and collaboration platform designed to simplify team interactions and enhance productivity within virtual environments. Its core functionalities include instant messaging, file sharing, video calls, and the integration of multiple third-party applications. The most useful features are channels for team communication, private messaging for direct conversations, and the ability to integrate with other productivity tools such as Trello, Asana, and Google Drive. However, if not used properly it can cause information overload and distraction due to constant notifications (which can be mitigated through customization of notification settings), as well as the limitations in the free/basic plan.

- *What collaborative features does the tool offer?*

Slack offers various collaborative features, including channels, shared documents, and most importantly third-party app integrations.

- *How does the tool enhance virtual communication?*

Slack enhances virtual communication through instant messaging, video calls, and the ability to create channels for specific topics or projects.

- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*

Slack contributes to the virtual apprenticeship by offering a centralized platform for all forms of communication and collaboration. It allows apprentices to stay connected with mentors and peers, facilitating seamless sharing of resources, real-time feedback, and group discussions. Its integration capabilities ensure that other tools used in the apprenticeship program can be easily accessed within Slack, streamlining workflows and enhancing learning experiences.

- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*

Slack has an intuitive interface and is easy navigation. New users can quickly become proficient in using its features, thanks to its straightforward design and the availability of comprehensive guides and tutorials.

- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

Implementing Slack within a company involves creating a workspace, inviting team members, and configuring channels for different topics or projects. The process is straightforward, with Slack providing extensive support and guidance. Companies can customize the tool to fit their specific needs, including setting up integrations with other applications.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Slack offers various support resources, including a helpdesk, an extensive knowledge base, FAQs, and training resources. Live support is also available for troubleshooting and assistance with more complex issues.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

Slack can be integrated with a wide array of tools and services, enhancing its functionality. These integrations allow for better project management, scheduling, and the automation of tasks which will improve virtual apprenticeship experience.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

Slack commits to data privacy and security, offering detailed information on data handling practices. Data generated within Slack is owned by the company using the platform, and Slack provides tools and settings to manage data privacy effectively. Slack is compliant with GDPR.

- *Is the tool open access?*

Slack offers a version at no cost that includes limited features. For additional functionalities, such as extended message history and advanced security features, paid plans are available.

Padlet



- *Tool type:* Communication, Collaboration and teamwork, Feedback receptiveness, Learning progress

- *Website:* <https://padlet.com>

- *What is the purpose of the tool?*

Padlet is a versatile digital canvas that enables users to collaborate and share content in a flexible and visually engaging way. It's used for brainstorming, project planning, resource sharing, and as a digital portfolio. Users can post text, links, images, and videos, which are then organized in a customizable layout. Its most useful features include real-time collaboration, a variety of templates (wall, grid, stream, etc.), and easy sharing options. However, the main inconvenience could be the limited functionality in the free version, pushing for a subscription to unlock full capabilities.

- *What collaborative features does the tool offer?*

Padlet's collaborative features allow multiple users to contribute to a single board in real-time, sharing ideas, resources, and feedback.

- *How does the tool enhance virtual communication?*

Padlet enhances virtual communication by providing a shared space for visual and textual information, fostering a sense of community.

- *Does the tool create or facilitate a roadmap to create feedback forms or surveys?*

Padlet can be used creatively to gather feedback through questions and prompts.

- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*

Padlet can be a dynamic space for learners to present their work, share resources, and engage in collaborative activities. It supports the visual and interactive sharing of learning materials and project

developments, fostering an environment of collective learning and feedback. Its flexibility allows it to be used for a wide range of activities, from group projects to individual portfolios, enhancing the overall learning experience.

- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*

Padlet is very user-friendly, with a simple interface that requires minimal guidance. Creating and contributing to a Padlet board is intuitive, making it accessible for users of all skill levels.

- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

Implementing Padlet within an organization or educational program involves signing up for an account, creating a Padlet wall, and inviting participants to contribute. Customization options allow for the adjustment of privacy settings and the look of the Padlet to suit the specific needs of the group or project.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Padlet provides support through a help center with articles, FAQs, and tutorials. Although direct support options may be more limited, the available resources are generally sufficient to solve common issues and questions.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

Padlet can be easily shared via links and embedded in websites and learning management systems, but direct integration with other tools is limited.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

Padlet has clear policies regarding data ownership and privacy, ensuring that the creator of a Padlet wall controls the data. It complies with international data protection regulations.

- *Is the tool open access?*

Padlet offers both free and paid plans. The free version has limitations on the number of Padlet walls one can create, while various subscription levels provide additional features and capacities suitable for different organizational needs.

Miro Boards



- *Tool type:* Communication, Collaboration and teamwork, Feedback receptiveness, Mentor interaction, Task completion

- *Website:* <https://miro.com/>

- *What is the purpose of the tool?*

Miro Boards is a collaborative online whiteboard platform designed to facilitate remote teamwork, brainstorming, planning, and visualization of ideas. It allows users to create and collaborate on digital whiteboards, incorporating various media types like images, documents, sticky notes, and drawings. Miro Boards is used for tasks ranging from project planning and management to creative brainstorming sessions.

- *What collaborative features does the tool offer?*

Miro Boards offers various collaborative features such as real-time editing, commenting, and @mentions, enabling team members to work together on projects and tasks.

- *How does the tool enhance virtual communication?*

Miro Boards enhances virtual communication by providing real-time collaboration tools like video conferencing, chat, and commenting features.

- *Does the tool create or facilitate a roadmap to create feedback forms or surveys?*

Users can create feedback forms or surveys using customizable templates or integrations with third-party survey tools, allowing for structured feedback collection and analysis.

- *How does the tool facilitate task assignment and tracking?*

Miro Boards facilitates task assignment and tracking through features like sticky notes, which can be used to assign tasks to team members and track their progress.

- *Are there features for setting deadlines and priorities?*

Users can set deadlines and priorities for tasks using due dates, labels, or color-coding to organize and prioritize tasks effectively.

- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*

Miro Boards contributes significantly to virtual apprenticeships by providing a platform for collaborative learning, teamwork, and project management. It enhances communication among apprentices and mentors, fosters creativity, and facilitates the organization and tracking of tasks and learning progress.

- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*

Miro Boards offers a user-friendly interface with intuitive tools and features, making it easy for users to navigate and collaborate effectively. It provides templates and tutorials to help users get started quickly.

- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

Implementing Miro Boards within a company typically involves creating user accounts for apprentices and mentors, providing training or resources to familiarize them with the platform, and integrating it into existing workflows or learning management systems if necessary.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Miro Boards offers comprehensive support for users, including a helpdesk, knowledge base, FAQs, and video tutorials. Users can also access live training sessions and webinars to learn more about the platform's features and best practices.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

Miro Boards can be easily integrated with other tools commonly used in virtual apprenticeships, such as project management software, communication tools like Slack or Microsoft Teams, and learning management systems.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

The data generated within Miro Boards is owned by the organization or individuals who create the content. Miro ensures data privacy and security through encryption, access controls, and compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

- *Is the tool open access?*

Miro Boards offers both free and paid plans, making it accessible to a wide range of users. The free plan provides basic features, while the paid plans offer additional functionality and support for larger teams.

Microsoft Teams



- *Tool type:* Communication, Collaboration and teamwork, Mentor interaction

- *Website:* <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>

- *What is the purpose of the tool?*

Microsoft Teams serves as a comprehensive collaboration platform, offering features like chat, video conferencing, file sharing, and integration with other Microsoft 365 apps. It is used to facilitate communication, project management, and collaboration among team members.

- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*

Teams facilitates virtual apprenticeships by providing a centralized platform for communication, collaboration, and learning. Apprentices can interact with mentors, access learning resources, collaborate on projects, and receive feedback—all within one tool.

- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*

Microsoft Teams offers a user-friendly interface with intuitive navigation. However, its extensive feature set may require some initial familiarization for new users.

- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

Implementing Teams within a company typically involves creating user accounts, setting up teams and channels, and providing training to employees. Companies may leverage Microsoft's support resources and documentation for implementation guidance.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Microsoft offers various support resources for Teams users, including helpdesk support, knowledge base articles, FAQs, and training resources such as tutorials and webinars.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

Teams integrates seamlessly with other Microsoft 365 apps, enhancing productivity and collaboration. It also offers integration with third-party apps through connectors and APIs, allowing users to complement Teams with additional tools as needed.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

Microsoft Teams is owned by Microsoft, and data generated within the platform is subject to Microsoft's privacy policies. Microsoft employs robust security measures to ensure data privacy and compliance with regulations like GDPR.

- *Is the tool open access?*

Microsoft Teams is available as part of Microsoft 365 subscriptions, with varying pricing tiers based on organizational needs. While some features are available for free, full functionality typically requires a subscription.

Asana



- *Tool type:* Communication, Time management, Task completion, Collaboration and teamwork, Feedback receptiveness, Learning progress

- *Website:* <https://asana.com/es>

- *What is the purpose of the tool?*

Asana is a project management and team collaboration tool designed to help teams organize, track, and manage their work. It's used for task management, project tracking, communication, and collaboration. Key features include task assignments, project timelines, workflow automation, and integration capabilities. Inconveniences might include a learning curve for new users unfamiliar with project management software and potentially overwhelming options for smaller teams.

- *How does the tool facilitate task assignment and tracking?*

Asana allows users to create tasks, assign them to team members, set deadlines, and monitor progress through various viewing options like lists, boards, and timelines.

- *How does the tool enhance virtual communication?*

Asana enhances communication by allowing comments and discussions directly on task or project pages, ensuring all communication is contextually relevant and easily accessible.

- *Are there options for both synchronous and asynchronous communication?*

Asana primarily supports asynchronous communication through task comments and updates. For synchronous options, integration with real-time communication tools like Slack is recommended.

- *Can users easily share documents, screens, or collaborate on a virtual whiteboard?*

Asana allows document sharing and integrates with file sharing tools. For screen sharing or virtual whiteboards, third-party integrations are necessary.

- *What collaborative features does the tool offer?*

Asana supports document sharing, task discussions, and project timelines that foster collaboration among team members.

- *Does the tool create or facilitate a roadmap to create feedback forms or surveys?*

Asana itself does not create surveys or feedback forms, but it can be used to manage the feedback collection process through tasks or integrated with tools that specialize in surveys.

- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*

Asana supports virtual apprenticeships by providing a structured environment for task management, progress tracking, and collaborative learning. It ensures that apprentices stay organized and mentors can monitor progress and deliver timely feedback.

- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*

Yes, Asana is known for its user-friendly interface and visual project management. It offers a clean, intuitive design that simplifies task tracking and team collaboration.

- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

Implementation involves setting up an account, creating projects, and inviting team members. Teams can then begin adding tasks, assigning roles, and utilizing various features to customize their workflow. Training sessions or tutorials can help accelerate adoption.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Asana offers extensive support options, including a helpdesk, an online knowledge base, FAQs, and training resources. They also provide community forums and webinars for user education.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

Yes, Asana integrates with a wide array of tools such as Slack, Google Calendar, Outlook, Dropbox, and more, allowing it to fit seamlessly into existing workflows and enhance productivity.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

Data generated in Asana is owned by the user or the organization. Asana provides robust security measures, including data encryption and compliance with privacy standards like GDPR, to protect user data.

- *Is the tool open access?*

Asana offers a free tier with basic features, which is sufficient for small teams or simple projects. Paid plans are available that offer additional features and capabilities for larger organizations or those needing advanced functionalities.

Zoom



- *Tool type:* Communication, Collaboration and teamwork, Feedback receptiveness

- *Website:* <https://zoom.us>

- *What is the purpose of the tool?*

Zoom is a video conferencing tool designed to facilitate virtual meetings, webinars, and collaborative communication online. It is widely used for educational, business, and personal communication. Its most useful features include high-quality video and audio calls, large meeting capacities, recording functionality, and strong security measures. Inconveniences may include dependence on internet quality and occasional security concerns, though regular updates address these issues.

- *How does the tool facilitate task assignment and tracking?*

Asana allows users to create tasks, assign them to team members, set deadlines, and monitor progress through various viewing options like lists, boards, and timelines.

- *How does the tool enhance virtual communication?*

Asana enhances communication by allowing comments and discussions directly on task or project pages, ensuring all communication is contextually relevant and easily accessible.

- *Are there options for both synchronous and asynchronous communication?*

Asana primarily supports asynchronous communication through task comments and updates. For synchronous options, integration with real-time communication tools like Slack is recommended.

- *Can users easily share documents, screens, or collaborate on a virtual whiteboard?*

Asana allows document sharing and integrates with file sharing tools. For screen sharing or virtual whiteboards, third-party integrations are necessary.

- *What collaborative features does the tool offer?*

Asana supports document sharing, task discussions, and project timelines that foster collaboration among team members.

- *How does it contribute to the virtual apprenticeship?*

Zoom is a video conferencing tool designed to facilitate virtual meetings, webinars, and collaborative communication online. It is widely used for educational, business, and personal communication. Its most useful features include high-quality video and audio calls, large meeting capacities, recording functionality, and strong security measures. Inconveniences may include dependence on internet quality and occasional security concerns, though regular updates address these issues..

- *Does the tool create or facilitate a roadmap to create feedback forms or surveys?*

Asana itself does not create surveys or feedback forms, but it can be used to manage the feedback collection process through tasks or integrated with tools that specialize in surveys.

- *Is the tool user-friendly and easy to navigate?*

Yes, Zoom is known for its ease of use. Its interface is intuitive, making it simple for users to start, join, and manage meeting

- *What is the process for implementing the tool within the company?*

Implementing Zoom involves creating an account, setting up meeting rooms, and distributing access to team members. Organizations can also customize settings for additional security and functionality as needed.

- *Is there any kind of support available for users?*

Zoom offers a comprehensive support system, including a help center, live support, training webinars, and detailed guides for troubleshooting and optimizing usage.

- *Can the tool be easily integrated with other tools or complement other tools used by the company?*

Zoom integrates with many scheduling, calendar, and project management tools, enhancing its utility in an organized workflow.

- *Who owns the data generated within the tool? How is data privacy ensured?*

Users own the data they generate within Zoom. The company ensures privacy through end-to-end encryption and adherence to international data protection regulations.

- *Is the tool open access?*

Zoom offers a basic free plan with limitations on meeting duration and participant capacity, with more extensive features available on paid plans.

We need to point out that these are only some examples of digital tools that can be used for the implementation of virtual apprenticeships, but not the only ones. We have presented the most popular ones and those that have been used in some of the best practices identified in WP2, meaning that the use of these digital tools has been already proven in virtual apprenticeships successfully implemented.

2.3. How to select the most appropriate tool

Once we have presented some different tools that can be used for the implementation of virtual apprenticeships, it is needed to set an approach in order to select the most appropriated tool, based on the virtual apprenticeship to be organized. With tens of options available, selecting the most appropriate tool can significantly impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the apprenticeship program.

The first step is to clearly define the needs of the company in terms of the work to be done during the apprenticeship period, outlining the objectives and requirements of the program. It is recommended to consider factors such as the nature of the work, communication preferences among mentors, apprentices, and VET providers or Intermediary organizations, the team size and specific functionalities needed if any.

Secondly, the company should evaluate the compatibility of each tool with the company's existing systems and workflows, and evaluate the possibility of integration of the digital tool with those already established in the company. Additionally, to evaluate the ease of use should be a priority, both for the mentor and the apprentice.

Depending on the features we are looking for, based on the work needs and what the company expects from the apprentice, key features and functionalities required to support the program must be identified. For example, Trello's Kanban boards facilitate project management, while Zoom's video conferencing capabilities enable real-time communication and mentoring sessions.

Moreover, the company might choose tools that can accommodate the evolving needs of the apprenticeship program as it grows and develops over time. Scalable solutions with customizable features offer the flexibility to adapt to changing requirements.

In the case that charged fee tools are taking into account, the total cost of ownership, including subscription fees, licensing costs, and potential additional expenses for training and support should be considered. Balance the benefits of each tool against its associated costs to determine the best value proposition for your organization.

Finally, the company (and the rest of actors involved, such as VET entities, Intermediary organizations and apprentices) should recognize that selecting digital tools is an iterative process that may require ongoing refinement and optimization. It should be a good option to ask for feedback from users and stakeholders regularly to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary adjustments.

By following these guidelines, you can strategically select the most appropriate digital tools to support and enhance the virtual apprenticeship program, fostering collaboration, learning, and professional growth.

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO SET A VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIP STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

3.1. How to apply the basic principles of EFQEA in the framework of a virtual apprenticeship

The European Framework of Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) sets out 14 criteria designed to ensure apprenticeships deliver both job-related skills and personal development. The proposal was adopted by the European Commission and is available here: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_17_3586

Applying the 14 principles of the European Framework of Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) from companies to virtual apprenticeships involves adapting traditional methods to digital tools and platforms.

N	Title	Description	Implementation
1	Written Agreement	Ensure that all apprenticeship agreements are created, signed, and stored digitally.	Companies can use digital signature platforms such as DocuSign or Adobe Sign to manage apprenticeship agreements. These tools ensure legal compliance and accessibility for both the company and the apprentices. This approach simplifies document management and provides a secure way to handle agreements electronically.

2	Learning Outcomes	Develop and communicate clear learning outcomes tailored to the virtual environment	Use Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle or Blackboard to outline, track, and assess learning outcomes. These systems help structure the apprenticeship program and allow for the awarding of digital badges and certificates upon completion of specific modules, making the learning process transparent and measurable
3	Pedagogical Support	Provide consistent and high-quality mentoring and tutoring through digital means	Implement virtual mentoring programs using video conferencing tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Regular virtual meetings, chat support, and resource sharing via cloud services ensure that apprentices receive continuous guidance and support from qualified professionals.
4	Workplace Component	Simulate real workplace scenarios and experiences in a virtual format	Utilize digital technologies to create immersive workplace simulations. Alternatively, assign remote projects that mirror real-world tasks, using collaboration tools like Slack or Google Workspace to facilitate teamwork and communication.
5	Pay and/or Compensation	Ensure transparent and timely electronic payments to apprentices	Adopt online payroll systems and use digital banking services or direct deposit methods to handle compensation. This ensures apprentices are paid on time and can access their payment details easily.
6	Social Protection	Inform apprentices about their social protection rights and ensure their health and safety digitally.	Use company intranets or platforms like SharePoint to host comprehensive information on social protection rights, health, and safety regulations. Provide digital access to these resources and ensure apprentices are aware of their rights and protections.

7	Conditions of Employment	Educate apprentices about their employment conditions through virtual onboarding sessions.	Conduct virtual onboarding using video conferencing tools and provide digital handbooks that outline employment conditions, rights, and responsibilities. This approach ensures that apprentices are well-informed and prepared for their roles.
8	Safety and Health	Offer comprehensive training on workplace health and safety in a virtual format	Deliver virtual training sessions on health and safety, using interactive modules and online assessments to ensure understanding and compliance. E-learning platforms can facilitate this training effectively.
9	Work-Life Balance	Promote flexible work schedules and use digital tools to help apprentices balance their responsibilities.	Encourage the use of digital calendars and productivity tools like Trello and Asana to manage schedules flexibly. This helps apprentices balance their work and personal life more effectively.
10	Continuous Support	Ensure ongoing support and feedback through regular virtual check-ins	Establish regular virtual check-ins and feedback sessions using communication tools like Microsoft Teams or Slack. These sessions provide a platform for continuous support and guidance from mentors and supervisors.
11	Learning and Working Time	Clearly delineate between learning and working hours using digital tools	Use project management and time-tracking tools such as Harvest or Asana to distinguish learning and working hours. This ensures a balanced and structured apprenticeship experience.

12	Quality Assurance	Implement virtual assessments and feedback mechanisms to monitor and improve apprenticeship quality.	Use digital feedback tools like SurveyMonkey or Google Forms to gather insights and monitor the quality of the apprenticeship program. Regular evaluations and performance metrics help ensure continuous improvement.
13	Transparency	Maintain open communication and provide regular updates through digital dashboards	Utilize tools like Power BI or Google Data Studio to create dashboards that visualize progress and outcomes. Regular updates keep all stakeholders informed and engaged
14	Inclusiveness	Ensure digital platforms are accessible to all apprentices, including those with disabilities.	Choose digital tools that comply with accessibility standards and provide necessary training. Tools like Zoom (with accessibility features), Google Workspace, VoiceOver, and JAWS can support inclusiveness and ensure all apprentices can fully participate in the program.

3.2. Strategy and action plan

In order to develop an action plan, companies need to go through a series of steps:

N	Step	Action	Regulations
1	Define Business-Aligned Objectives and Outcomes	Determine the specific skills, competencies, and knowledge that apprentices need to acquire to support the company's strategic goals and operational requirements. Develop a competency framework that integrates with industry	Align with national and EU vocational training regulations. Ensure the program meets criteria for recognized qualifications and industry certifications.

		standards and future job market needs	
2	Develop a Tailored Curriculum	Collaborate with internal experts and VET organizations to create a customized curriculum. Utilize digital tools to develop interactive modules, simulations, and e-learning content that reflect the company's real-world scenarios and practices	Comply with national education standards and industry-specific guidelines. Secure necessary accreditations for the curriculum if applicable
3	Select Robust Digital Platforms	Choose platforms that provide essential features like ease of use, accessibility, integration capabilities, and security. Ensure they support video conferencing, file sharing, and interactive learning tailored to the company's needs.	Ensure platforms meet data protection laws (e.g., GDPR) and cybersecurity standards. Verify accessibility features are compliant with legal requirements
4	Formalize Roles and Responsibilities	Draft and sign digital agreements using electronic signature services. Clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for both apprentices and the company, including job descriptions and performance metrics.	Ensure agreements are legally binding and comply with labor laws. Address intellectual property, confidentiality, and termination conditions in the contracts
5	Provide Continuous Support and Mentorship	Assign experienced employees as mentors and schedule regular virtual check-ins. Train mentors on effective virtual support techniques to ensure apprentices receive comprehensive guidance.	Follow workplace training and mentorship guidelines. Verify mentors' qualifications and experience meet legal and professional standards

6	Implement Virtual Workplace Simulations	Use advanced technologies to create virtual simulations that mirror the company's work environment. Assign meaningful tasks that can be performed remotely, providing apprentices with necessary digital tools	Adhere to industry training standards. Ensure virtual simulations are in line with educational and professional requirements
7	Manage Compensation and Benefits Efficiently	Set up an efficient electronic payroll system to ensure timely payments. Clearly communicate compensation packages, including benefits such as health insurance and opportunities for professional development	Ensure compliance with minimum wage laws and social protection regulations. Verify compensation packages adhere to legal and industry standards
8	Promote a Safe Virtual Work Environment	Develop and provide online health and safety training relevant to the company's industry. Incorporate interactive elements such as quizzes and simulations to reinforce learning	Comply with industry-specific health and safety regulations. Regularly update training materials to reflect current best practices and legal requirements
9	Encourage Work-Life Balance	Use digital tools to manage and schedule work and learning hours. Promote regular breaks and effective time management among apprentices to prevent burnout	Follow labor laws regarding working hours and rest periods. Ensure apprentices have adequate time for personal activities and are not overburdened
10	Ensure Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement	Implement surveys, performance metrics, and regular evaluations to monitor apprenticeship quality. Engage apprentices, mentors, and internal stakeholders in the feedback process to	Comply with quality assurance frameworks. Regularly review and update the program based on feedback and assessment results

		continuously improve the program	
11	Maintain Transparency and Communication	Provide regular updates on apprenticeship progress and outcomes. Use tools like Power BI or Google Data Studio to visualize data and share it with stakeholders	Ensure transparency in reporting and communication. Comply with regulations on data disclosure and privacy

3.3. Effective training delivery methods in virtual apprenticeships

To ensure effective training delivery methods, there are various steps that may be followed, as preparation part before starting the virtual apprenticeship. Collaboration between VET entities, intermediary organizations and companies is required.

Prior to start the virtual apprenticeship, VET providers and intermediary organizations should work closely with the company to tailor the virtual apprenticeship program to their specific needs, considering factors such as the sector or industry, the desired skills, tasks accomplishment and organizational culture. Begin by understanding the company's goals, the skills they are looking to develop, and the roles they are hoping to fill through apprenticeships

They should also assist the company in setting up the necessary technology infrastructure for virtual apprenticeships, including selecting appropriate communication tools, project management platforms, and learning management systems.

Once the needs of the company have been addressed, VET entities and intermediary organizations should assist the company in recruiting and selecting suitable candidates for the apprenticeship program. This may involve promoting the program through various channels, reviewing applications, and conducting interviews.

Once the candidate has been selected, and before to start the apprenticeship, training for mentors and supervisors is a must. VET entities and intermediary organizations should provide training and resources to mentors who will be overseeing apprentices remotely. This may include guidance on effective virtual communication, coaching techniques, and how to provide constructive feedback. The training could be provided by workshops, reuniting if needed similar companies based on the sector or their needs in the same workshop, or maybe personalizing the training if needed in some cases.

Specially the VET entities could provide access to a library of resources and support materials for the companies when monitoring and evaluating the apprenticeship, including online courses, tutorials, articles, and other relevant learning materials.

As soon as all these steps are accomplished, the company will be better prepared to implement the apprenticeship. As soon as it starts, VET entities, intermediary organizations and companies will continue keeping in touch during the apprenticeships period, ensuring necessary support between the actors in order to achieve the most successful program possible.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIPS

4.1. How to monitor virtual apprenticeships

Monitoring virtual apprenticeships involves more than just tracking attendance or completion rates of the tasks assigned. A multi-perspective approach is needed, including skill development, mentorship quality, engagement levels, and overall program impact. By implementing proactive monitoring strategies, organizations can identify challenges early, optimize learning experiences, and maximize the value derived from apprenticeship programs.

During the development of this guidebook, a list of recommendations in terms of monitoring strategies have been identified, as well as aspects to avoid. Recommendations can be listed as follows:

- **Establish clear communication channels and protocols.** For monitoring to be successful, it is important to establish good communication between the mentor and the apprentice. It is recommended to set standardized communication protocols, to ensure that both apprentices and mentors can easily reach out for support or information. This could include preferred methods of communication, expected response times, and guidelines for escalation of issues. At the same time, well established and reliable communication channels should be settled. Tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, or email should be used consistently to facilitate easy and open communication.
- **Regular check-ins and feedback sessions.** Implement structured weekly or bi-weekly video calls with mentors to discuss progress, challenges, and feedback. This maintains engagement and ensures issues are addressed promptly. Monitoring should be carried out on a regular basis in order to ensure that the assigned tasks are completed on time and to a high quality.
- **Progress tracking.** Implement progress tracking tools such as Trello, Asana, or a custom LMS (Learning Management System) to monitor the progress of projects, tasks, and learning objectives. These tools should be accessible to both apprentices and mentors. An apprentice logbook is also recommended, as they are a good tool to facilitate learning, tracking progress, providing feedback, and documenting achievements throughout the apprenticeship period. They serve as a comprehensive record of the apprentice's journey towards mastering their apprenticeship period, skills development and tasks performance.

- **Use of analytics and performance metrics.** Leverage tools that provide real-time analytics on apprentice engagement and progress. Metrics to monitor might include log-in frequency, completion rates of tasks or modules, and time spent on learning platforms.
- **Offline meetings.** If possible, from time to time, the mentor and the apprentice can meet in person in order for both sides to benefit from face-to-face communication and the apprentice to become more engaged in the company culture, getting in contact with peers and taking part in out-of-office activities if any.

Apart from these recommendations, some others have been identified as actions to avoid when monitoring apprenticeships:

- Monitoring should not be carried out too often as this might put more pressure on the apprentice, which can have a negative effect on his/her performance. Nevertheless, long gaps between communications should be avoided, as they can lead to apprentices feeling isolated or unsupported. Regular interaction is crucial, especially in a virtual setting.
- Monitoring should not be a one-way interaction. The apprentice should be involved as much as possible in the process. While self-reporting is valuable, it should not be the sole method of monitoring progress. Combine self-reporting with direct observations, and participation in discussions to get a comprehensive view of the apprentice's progress. It is important to have objective and reliable information about the progress and potential issues.
- Do not overwhelm apprentices with excessive information or assignments at once. Ensure the workload is manageable and allows time for understanding and application. In the same line, try to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to the apprenticeship schedule and materials. Recognize and accommodate different learning speeds and styles to keep all apprentices engaged and effective.
- When possible, monitoring should not be carried out entirely online without any face-to-face contact.

Based on these recommendations, we have developed examples that can be used as monitoring templates, as well as logbook templates for the apprentices to be completed, to contribute to the process of monitoring.

A monitoring template should contain information about the progress of completion of tasks assigned to apprentices, problems/issues faced during work, solutions/measures taken to address them, etc. It should be filled depending on the frequency agreed, on a daily, weekly or monthly basis for example, to ensure timely tracking of progress and resolution of issues.

The monitoring template should be filled by the mentor, based on her/his perception along with the feedback received from the apprentice or even from the apprentice's peers.

Example 1

Name of apprentice:
Name of mentor:
Date and hours worked:
Completed tasks:
Problems occurring during the completion of tasks:
Forthcoming tasks during the next days:
Need of support from other units or management:
Other topics/issues:
Approved by mentor:

Example 2

Apprentice's name and contact information:
Date and duration of the apprenticeship:
Section 1: weekly/daily goals and objectives:
Section 2: tasks assigned and completion status:

Section 3: mentor feedback:
Section 4: apprentices' self-assessment:
Section 5: challenges/issues and mitigation actions:
Next steps:
Date of report:

In the case of logbooks, they should contain information about the assigned tasks to the apprentice and the work done on the respective assignments. It should be filled by the apprentice and later supervised and approved by the mentor. It can be filled on a daily or weekly basis. A logbook encourages regular reflection and documentation of the learning journey, facilitating more meaningful discussions during check-ins with mentors.

Example 1

Name of apprentice:			
Name of mentor:			
Date:			
Day/Week of apprenticeship	Assigned tasks	Work done	Approved by mentor

Example 2

Name of apprentice:
Name of mentor:
Date:
Description of activities:
Skills and learning:
Challenges faced:
Questions for mentor:
Personal reflections:

Mentor's signature:	Apprentice's signature:
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Example 3

Name of apprentice:	
Name of mentor:	
Date and hours worked:	
Learning objectives:	
What new skills or knowledge were acquired?	
Are there any areas of improvement?	
Additional comments:	
Mentor's signature:	Apprentice's signature:

Note that these are only tentative templates and must be adapted to each case, and combining different sections if needed. You can check the possibility of automatizing these processes by integrating the templates in digital tools, as it can enhance and simplify the process making it faster and easier for all involved parties.

All the information collected through logbooks and monitoring templates shall be later shared with the VET entities or Intermediary organizations involved in the organization of the virtual apprenticeship, as they have to be also aware of the progress or the apprenticeship.

4.2. Supporting VET entities, intermediary organizations and companies when implementing virtual apprenticeships

When implementing virtual apprenticeships, the communication and collaboration among the parties involved (VET entities, intermediary organizations and companies) must be ensured. Support will be required during the implementation period, as each part separately might not have adequate or enough tools and procedures if challenges appear or queries arise. Synergies and collaboration among the parties will lead into better and more effective development of the apprenticeship, ensuring good quality, goals achievement and higher levels of satisfaction for the apprentice.

After setting all the previous steps prior to start the apprenticeship period, already commented under the section of effective training delivery methods, during the apprenticeship period regular check-ins between the parts should be taken, to address any challenges or concerns. As well as with the apprentice at internal level at the company, regular meetings between VET/intermediaries/companies can help to keep the parties engaged and motivated throughout the program, so the possibility to replicate the apprentice because of good practices and results will be higher.

Ongoing technical support should be provided to the company to troubleshoot any issues or challenges that apprentices or mentors encounter with the virtual apprenticeship platform or tools. This can help minimize disruptions and keep the program running smoothly. In this sense and along with other issues that may arise, resources such as articles, videos, and online courses that are relevant to the skills and knowledge being developed in the virtual apprenticeship program can be shared.

VET entities and intermediary organizations should encourage the company to adopt a mindset of continuous improvement and adaptation when it comes to virtual apprenticeships. Regularly review the program structure, processes, and outcomes to identify areas for enhancement and innovation.

Finally, after completion of the apprenticeship, VET providers, as official education and training entities, could recognize the company through badges or certificates as “good company for virtual apprenticeship”. This way, the company may be recognized forefront other intermediary organizations and potential apprentices as a good place to take apprenticeships, ensuring the replication and reiteration of new virtual apprenticeship periods at the company. This recognition could also attract new companies to engage into the organization of virtual apprenticeships.

4.3. Dos and Don'ts when implementing virtual apprenticeships

Based on the best practices already identified, and also following the basis of the recommendations given until the moment for the organization and implementation of virtual apprenticeships, we can

DOs

- ✓ Ensure that there is regular communication between apprentices and their mentors/supervisors (if possible, on a daily basis).
- ✓ Ensure that the mentors/supervisors closely monitor, provide the necessary support, feedback and follow up on the activities implemented by apprentices.
- ✓ Ensure that the apprenticeships are aligned with the applicable national legislation.

- ✓ If possible, provide some form of remuneration or other compensation (such as providing vouchers or covering bills related to electricity, Internet, software, etc.) to apprentices.
- ✓ Ensure that the participants successfully completing the apprenticeship are issued with a certificate.
- ✓ If possible, provide successful apprentices with opportunities for their future professional development (e.g. career consultation, advice on CV and interview preparation, job offer, etc.)
- ✓ If possible, organize periodic physical meetings with the apprentices, so they can get to know the company culture better.
- ✓ Ensure that all the necessary digital tools needed for the smooth implementation of the apprenticeship are provided and the users undergo the necessary training in working with them.
- ✓ Provide guidance and resources for effective time management and self-motivation as without the structure of a physical workspace or regular face-to-face interactions, apprentices may struggle with time management, staying focused, and meeting deadlines.
- ✓ If possible, implement a hybrid format of apprenticeship with an initial face-to-face period for adaptation and training, followed by remote work for the remainder of the apprenticeship.
- ✓ Develop a communication strategy with schedule of the daily/weekly meetings, commitment to regularly fill in logbook with the tasks done/skills acquired.
- ✓ If possible, develop an internship quality guide as a guideline to better implement the online internships.
- ✓ Define clear learning objectives by using competency standards and minimum requirements and clearly articulate the goals and expectations of the program. This includes defining the skills and knowledge that participants are expected to have prior to the program and after its participation.
- ✓ Review the performance of mentors and supervisors by conducting regular reviews to assess teaching effectiveness, support, and engagement. This includes feedback from participants, peer reviews, and self-assessment to evaluate teaching methods, communication, and motivational skills.
- ✓ Use a portfolio in order to gather evidences for the assessment.
- ✓ Invest effort and resources to achieve the successful integration of the apprentice in the work group of the company employees.
- ✓ Build human relationships that are very important to keep motivation especially in an online environment.
- ✓ Prepare (both the company and the apprentice) for the specificities that are involved in working as an apprentice remotely.

DON'Ts

- × Avoid organization of online apprenticeships in professions relying on manual labor and physical Interaction.
- × Avoid organization of online apprenticeships if the hosting organization is lacking the necessary expertise for its proper implementation.
- × Avoid organization of online apprenticeships if the hosting organization is lacking capacity and tools for holding regular communication with apprentices, monitoring the completion of their tasks, providing them with the necessary guidance and support.
- × Avoid organization of online apprenticeships in tasks which are not suitable for conducting in a remote setting.

- × Avoid replicating online apprenticeships which might not be suitable to a particular sector or are not in alignment with the relevant national setting, including the legislative framework.
- × Avoid organization of apprenticeships which are of very long duration.
- × Avoid skipping the introductory orientation/onboarding process which familiarizes participants with the tools, processes, and expectations of the program.
- × Do not underestimate the technological challenges that might occur, such as access to reliable Internet and suitable devices.
- × Do not underestimate the cultural differences that might impact communication and work styles in an international environment.
- × Do not stop improving and adapting the apprenticeship program to meet evolving needs and challenges.
- × Leave a lot of time without communication between the in-company mentor and the apprentice.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIPS AND SKILL ASSESSMENT

5.1. Common risks and challenges and how to mitigate them

Like any innovative approach, virtual apprenticeships come with their own set of risks and challenges that organizations must navigate effectively to ensure the success of the program. From technology barriers to communication obstacles and the complexities of mentorship in a virtual environment, implementing virtual apprenticeships requires careful consideration and strategic planning.

In this section we will explore some of the common risks and challenges associated with virtual apprenticeships and how to mitigate them. By understanding these challenges and implementing appropriate solutions, organizations can leverage the full potential of virtual apprenticeship programs to foster skill development, talent acquisition, and workforce diversity in the digital era.

1. **Technology barriers.** One of the most immediate challenges is ensuring that all participants have access to the necessary technology, devices and internet connection. Disparities in access can hinder the effectiveness of the apprenticeship and exclude certain individuals or demographics.
2. **Lack of hands-on experience.** Virtual apprenticeships may struggle to provide the same hands-on experience as traditional in-person apprenticeships. Certain industries, such as manufacturing or healthcare, heavily rely on physical interactions and equipment which can be challenging to replicate virtually. That is the reason why not all the sectors are prone to organize virtual apprenticeship, as we commented at the beginning of this guidebook.
3. **Communication and collaboration.** Effective communication and collaboration can be more difficult in a virtual setting. Without face-to-face interactions, apprentices may feel isolated or struggle to build strong relationships with mentors and peers. Additionally, miscommunication can occur more easily, leading to misunderstandings or delays in progress.
4. **Mentorship and supervision.** Providing adequate mentorship and supervision in a virtual apprenticeship program can be more complex. Mentors may find it challenging to observe and assess apprentices' progress, offer timely feedback, and provide the necessary support and guidance remotely.
5. **Engagement and motivation.** Maintaining high levels of engagement and motivation can be challenging in a virtual environment, especially for apprentices who may be combining multiple commitments. Without the structure of a physical workspace, apprentices may find it easier to become distracted or disengaged.
6. **Digital literacy and skills gaps.** Not all apprentices may possess the digital literacy skills required to fully participate in a virtual apprenticeship. This can create disparities in learning outcomes and hinder the effectiveness of the program, particularly for individuals from underserved communities or those with limited access to technology.

7. Cultural and time zone differences: In those virtual apprenticeship programs involving apprentices globally, participants may come from diverse cultural backgrounds and time zones. Managing these differences effectively requires careful planning and communication to ensure that everyone feels included and can participate fully.

Addressing these risks and challenges requires proactive planning, effective communication, ongoing support, and the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. By carefully considering these factors and implementing appropriate strategies, organizations can maximize the success of their virtual apprenticeship programs.

These are some recommendations on how to mitigate the possible challenges that may arise when organizing virtual apprenticeships:

- Provide access to necessary hardware and software. Ensure that all participants have access to the required technology, whether through loaner programs, subsidies, or partnerships with technology providers.
- Offer technical support. Establish a dedicated support system to assist apprentices with troubleshooting technical issues and provide guidance on using digital tools effectively.
- Foster a culture of open communication. Encourage regular communication through virtual meetings, messaging platforms, and collaborative tools to facilitate interaction among apprentices, mentors, and peers.
- Provide training on virtual communication. Offer training sessions or resources to help participants to develop effective virtual communication skills, including active listening, clear writing, etc.
- Establish communication protocols. Set clear expectations and guidelines for communication channels, response times, and meeting schedules to minimize misunderstandings and ensure accountability.
- Create a supportive learning environment. Foster a sense of belonging and community among participants through regular check-ins, team-building activities, and recognition of achievements. Foster the cooperative culture.
- Set clear goals and expectations. Define clear objectives, milestones, and timelines for apprenticeship to help participants to stay focused and motivated.
- Offer personalized support. Provide individualized feedback, coaching, and mentoring to address the unique needs and challenges of each apprentice, fostering a sense of progress and achievement.
- Implement structured mentorship protocols. Establish formal mentorship protocols with designated mentors who can provide guidance, feedback, and support to apprentices throughout their apprenticeship period.
- Offer digital literacy training. Provide training programs or resources to help participants develop essential digital skills, such as using productivity software, navigating online platforms, and face technical issues.
- Foster inclusivity and diversity. Create a welcoming and inclusive environment that respects and celebrates cultural differences, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation among participants from diverse backgrounds.
- Accommodate time zone differences. Schedule meetings, events, and deadlines in consideration of apprentices' time zones, and provide flexibility for asynchronous participation where possible.

- Facilitate cross-cultural communication: Provide training and resources to help participants navigate cross-cultural communication challenges, including language barriers, cultural norms, and communication styles.

By implementing these recommendations, organizations can effectively mitigate the risks and challenges associated with virtual apprenticeships, creating an inclusive, engaging, and impactful learning experience for participants.

5.2. Techniques and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of virtual apprenticeships

Like any other educational or training initiative, it is essential to assess the effectiveness of virtual apprenticeships to ensure that participants are gaining meaningful experiences and acquiring valuable skills.

Evaluating the effectiveness of virtual apprenticeships involves assessing various aspects to ensure that the program meets its objectives and provides value to both the apprentices and the company. Prior to the techniques and criteria, the main areas to be evaluated should be identified, and then to establish the techniques and criteria. The different areas, criteria and techniques that companies, VET entities and intermediary organizations can decide to assess are listed here:

AREA

CRITERIA

TECHNIC

Learning outcomes: Determine if the apprentices have achieved the intended learning outcomes. This could include assessing their knowledge, skills, and competences gained during the apprenticeship.

Knowledge acquisition: Assess the extent to which apprentices have gained new knowledge relevant to their field.

Skill proficiency: Evaluate the level of proficiency that apprentices have achieved in specific skills outlined in the program objectives.

Competency development: Determine whether apprentices have developed the competencies required for success in their chosen profession.

Provide self-assessment tools or surveys to the apprentices to evaluate their own progress and development throughout the program. Encourage apprentices to reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, learning experiences, and areas for growth. Logbooks can be useful here.

Skill development: Assess the specific skills that apprentices have acquired or improved during the apprenticeship period. This could include technical skills relevant to their field, as well as soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, etc.

Proficiency level: Assess the proficiency level of apprentices in specific skills relevant to their field.

Application in real-world scenarios: Evaluate the ability of apprentices to apply the skills learnt during the program to real-world projects or tasks

Facilitate peer review processes where apprentices provide feedback to each other on their work, projects, and contributions (in the case of several apprentices taking apprenticeships at the same time).

Ask the mentor and the apprentice to provide an evaluation survey with structured questions assessing mentorship effectiveness, communication and support. Regular feedback sessions can be scheduled, where mentors - apprentices can provide detailed evaluations from each other's performance and discuss their development.

Mentorship effectiveness: Evaluate the effectiveness of mentorship provided to the apprentices. This includes assessing the support and guidance given by mentors, as well as the apprentices' satisfaction with their mentors.

Mentor-mentee rapport: Evaluate the quality of the relationship between mentors and apprentices based on feedback from both parties.

Supportiveness: Evaluate the level of support and guidance provided by mentors to apprentices in achieving their goals

AREA

Progression and advancement:

Track the progress of apprentices over time and assess if they are advancing according to the program's expectations. This could include monitoring their performance on tasks and projects and evaluating their readiness for more advanced roles.

Engagement levels: Evaluate the level of engagement of the apprentices throughout the program. This can include attendance rates, participation in activities, and interaction with mentors and peers.

Technology utilization: Assess the effectiveness on the use of platforms and digital tools used to deliver the virtual apprenticeship program. Ensure that these tools are user-friendly, reliable, and conducive to learning and collaboration.

CRITERIA

Project completion: Track the successful completion of apprentices' tasks and assignments.

KPIs: Establish KPIs related to organizational goals and track the program's impact on these metrics.

Attendance rates: Track attendance rates for virtual sessions with mentors and peers.

Participation levels: Assess the level of active participation from apprentices in discussions, assignments, and collaborative projects.

Mastery of tools and technologies: Determine the extent to which apprentices have mastered the tools, software, and technologies commonly used during the apprenticeship.

Usability: Assess the usability of technology interfaces and features to determine whether they are intuitive and user-friendly for both apprentices and mentors.

Collaboration: Assess the collaboration features and functionalities of technology platforms, such as chat, video conferencing, document sharing.

TECHNIC

Commission external evaluations or audits of the virtual apprenticeship by independent experts or consulting firms. Utilize their expertise to assess the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement from an impartial perspective. Engaging industry experts to review the program annually can provide insights into its effectiveness and alignment with industry standards.

Conduct exit interviews with apprentices who have completed the apprenticeship period to gather feedback on their overall experience, lessons learnt, and suggestions for improvement. Use insights from exit interviews to inform program enhancements and address any issues raised by departing apprentices. Conducting exit interviews using structured questionnaires will help gather in-depth feedback from apprentices on their entire learning experience.



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Capacity Building in the Organisation of Online Apprenticeships



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