1. Objectives and description

Against the background of high youth unemployment and skills mismatch, high-quality apprenticeships are needed to ensure that knowledge, skills and competences acquired during the period of training are relevant to labour market needs. The success of policy initiatives for apprenticeships also depends largely on more small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) including micro-companies being involved in providing placements. Evidence suggests that large enterprises are more likely to offer apprenticeships than their smaller counterparts (1). SMEs play a key role in job creation and therefore could also play a stronger role in the provision of apprenticeships, thus enhancing the employability of young people.

The objective of the Call is to invite the submission of proposals providing support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) offering apprenticeships, either newly engaging or substantially increasing their current supply of apprenticeships. It should be noted that this call does not provide financial support to SMEs directly.

This Call intends to increase the supply of apprenticeships which is one of the five European priorities on VET for 2015-2020 and one of the main objectives under the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

2. Eligible applicants

Lot 1:
The applicant (coordinator) must be one of the following organisations or group of organisations:

— chambers of industry, trade and crafts, or similarly relevant sectoral/professional organisations,
— public or private enterprises,
— VET providers,
— other organisations with a role in supporting SMEs in increasing their offer on apprenticeships.

The partnership must be composed of at least two eligible countries (one of which must be an Erasmus+ programme country).

Lot 2:
The applicant (project coordinator) must be a network or organisation having members or affiliates in at least 12 Erasmus+ programme countries, of which at least six take part in the project as partners.

Eligible participating organisations (Lot 1 and Lot 2) include:

— ministries,
— social partners (employers’ and workers’ organisations),

— public or private companies,
— chambers of industry, trade and crafts, or similarly relevant sectoral/professional organisations (e.g. crafts organisations),
— public employment services,
— public regional and local authorities,
— VET providers,
— VET agencies/centres,
— schools or other educational institutions,
— higher education institutions,
— research centres,
— international organisations,
— non-profit organisations (NGOs),
— youth organisations,
— parents associations,
— other relevant bodies.

Natural persons and sole traders are not eligible.

**Eligible countries are:**

For Lot 1 and Lot 2:

The Erasmus+ programme countries:

— the 28 Member States of the European Union,
— the EFTA/EEA countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway,
— EU candidate countries: Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

Proposals from applicants in EFTA/EEA countries or from candidate or associated countries may be selected provided that, on the date of the award, agreements have been signed setting out the arrangements for the participation of those countries in the programme.

The following Erasmus+ partner countries:

— EU potential candidate countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.

3. **Eligible activities**

The aim of this call is to support projects at European level helping SMEs to engage in apprenticeships. Proposals should be submitted under one of the following two Lots:

(a) **Partnerships on building capacities for intermediary bodies or partnerships established by large companies to support SMEs (Lot 1)**

Projects supported under this Lot should build partnerships between businesses, VET providers and intermediary organisations together, as appropriate, with public authorities and social partners, with the aim of getting more SMEs involved in apprenticeships. They should therefore aim at:

— either building capacities of intermediary bodies (such as chambers of commerce, industry and crafts, other professional organisations) supporting apprenticeships in SMEs,

— or establishing partnerships by bigger companies using their supply chain to assist SMEs in increasing the supply of apprenticeships.
(b) European level networks and organisations supporting SMEs through their national members or affiliates (Lot 2)

The call also supports a limited number of projects presented by existing European networks and organisations in order to support strategic activities between their umbrella organisation at European level and their national members or affiliates on strengthening the supply of apprenticeships in SMEs.

These partnerships should include cooperation at national, regional (cross-border and inter-regional) and/or cooperation at sectoral level.

The beneficiaries should undertake the following activity:

**Lot 1:**

— Building up capacities for intermediary bodies (such as chambers of commerce, industry and crafts, other professional organisations) or using the supply chain of bigger companies to develop and set-up support structures for SMEs, particularly for those with no previous experience of apprenticeships.

**Lot 2:**

— Targeted cooperation between the umbrella organisation of existing European networks and organisations and their national members or affiliates for developing and setting up support structures for SMEs, particularly for those with no previous experience with apprentices.

In addition, beneficiaries should undertake one of the following activities (identical for Lot 1 and Lot 2):

— identifying solutions to specific SMEs’ policy challenges for setting up or strengthening apprenticeships, for example examining and developing governance, curricula, or quality assurance of apprenticeships systems,

— developing financial and non-financial support (for example supporting accreditation as a training company, training and instruction of in-company trainers, administrative procedures, assessment and certification of apprentices) structures for SMEs and cost-sharing models that motivate SMEs, VET providers as well as learners,

— supporting measures to help SMEs to raise the quality of in-company trainers and to improve the cooperation with VET providers,

— promoting excellence in apprenticeships and/or integrating disadvantaged learners into apprenticeship,

— developing strategies for setting up joint training centres or collaborative training that could be used by a pool of SMEs that would work together to host apprentices,

— production and dissemination of teaching and information material or other practical tools focusing on SMEs,

— undertaking apprenticeship attractiveness campaigns to secure the engagement of SMEs,

— identifying and developing strategies and structures to promote cross-border mobility of apprentices in SMEs (but not covering the mobility of apprentices themselves),

— other relevant activities to support SMEs in increasing apprenticeships offer.

4. **Award criteria**

Eligible applications will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

(a) relevance of the project (maximum 40 points — threshold minimum 20 points);

(b) quality of the project design and implementation (maximum 20 points — threshold minimum 10 points);

(c) quality of the project consortium and the cooperation arrangements (maximum 20 points — threshold minimum 10 points);

(d) impact and dissemination (maximum 20 points — threshold minimum 10 points).

The threshold for proposals to be put forward to the evaluation committee shall be minimum 60 points (out of 100 points in total).
5. **Budget**

The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects is estimated at maximum EUR 8.7 million (EUR 5.2 million for Lot 1 and EUR 3.5 million for Lot 2).

Each grant will amount to between 300,000 and 600,000 euros for Lot 1 and between 600,000 and 800,000 euros for Lot 2. The Agency expects to fund around 15 proposals (up to 10 projects under Lot 1 and up to five projects under Lot 2).

The Agency reserves the right not to distribute all the funds available.

6. **Deadline for submission of applications**

Applications must be submitted no later than **15 January 2016** 12.00 noon (Brussels time).

Applications shall comply with the following requirements:

— they must be submitted exclusively online using the correct official application form,

— they must be drafted in any official EU language.

Failure to comply with those requirements will lead to the rejection of the application.

7. **Full details**

The guidelines together with the application form can be found at the following internet address:


Applications must comply with all the terms of the guidelines.