APPRENTICESHIP ALLIANCES.EU
Engaging SMEs in apprenticeships

Toolkit to guide the establishment of Regional Apprenticeship Alliances for SMEs
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of a Regional Alliance at a Glance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Planning the Process</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Defining the Region</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Identifying Key Stakeholders</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Establishment of a Regional Alliance</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Identifying current Programmes/Strategies</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6: Action Planning</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources to help you set up and run a Regional Alliance</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Secondary Sources table</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Regional Apprenticeships Sector Directory of Support template</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3: Key Stakeholders relevant to Regional Alliance template</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4: Action Steps Template</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5: Regional Alliance Contact Details (RAISE)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 6: Further Resources</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

Support for small and medium sized enterprises engaging in apprenticeships: Regional Apprenticeship Alliances for SME’s (RAISE) is an Erasmus + Partnerships project which enables partnerships to be formed which build capacity for intermediary bodies to develop and operate support structures which will facilitate SMEs especially small and micro enterprises, to become apprentice employers.

The Regional Apprenticeships Alliance for SME’s (RAISE) project is delivered by 9 organisations from Poland, Spain, Netherlands, France, Northern Ireland (UK), Belgium and Ireland (RoI). They include Poland’s largest Chamber of Commerce, a regional development agency, a non-profit VET (vocational education and training) specialist and two Chambers of Industry, trade and crafts from Spain and France. The partners all share a commitment to building the capacity of SMEs to become apprentice employers and thus increasing the availability of apprenticeships.

This Toolkit is designed to support effective stakeholder engagement through the medium of Regional Apprenticeship Alliances for SMEs (RAISE). Our mission is the development of support structures for SME owners, for apprenticeship opportunities for young people and for the creation of innovative Regional Alliances which will realise a positive and long-lasting effect on the enterprise support system and VET system in each region. To facilitate the process of establishing these Alliances, a set of document templates are provided and can be used as helpful resources.
INTRODUCTION
Introduction

Persistently high youth unemployment and the education-employment skills mismatch have spurred governments to undertake VET reform to increase the quantity and quality of dual system apprenticeships. In many countries, particularly Poland, Netherlands, France and Ireland (RoI) this has generated an excess supply of apprenticeship seekers over employer demand. Only 4-10% of European employers are actively involved falling to only 1.4% in Poland.

There are multiple reasons for this poor demand among employers including a lack of information regarding the incentives and benefits of apprenticeships; a lack of awareness of the apprenticeship training in the locality and a perception that the provision would not meet their needs.

These issues are compounded by the fact that Apprenticeship support is often entirely missing from Enterprise Intermediary services provision. In a recent Enterprise NI survey less than 5% of enterprise agencies provided apprenticeship information and RAISE partners confirm this is consistent with their own countries.

RAISE aims to enable integrated action among VET providers, enterprise support agencies and wider stakeholders to produce and disseminate information resources, a teaching course and practical tools for SMEs.
RAISE will be delivered by partners from 7 countries in which dual system apprenticeships are new or have been subject to recent reform. The project will address four specific objectives. The primary objective is the creation of 6 Regional Alliances. These Alliances will involve 80+ intermediaries, VET providers and wider stakeholders. Their tasks will be to:

- map current apprenticeship programmes, incentives, support structures, actors, and levels of SME participation in their region
- identify opportunities and needs particular to the skills (mis)match and supply-demand of apprenticeships in their region
- share best practice locally and internationally about the role of intermediary organisations
- develop the ‘business case’ to encourage SMEs to become apprentice employers
- build sustainable face-to-face relationships between intermediaries, VET providers and SMEs
- develop a concrete Action Plan with individual and collective commitments in a defined time frame

A key element of this project is to establish sustainable, cross-sector collaborative relationships between Enterprise Support providers, VET providers, HEIs and wider stakeholders via 6 Regional Alliances.

In order to do so, we will engage with 4 target groups:

1. SMEs
   Including small and micro businesses
2. Enterprise/Business Centres
   Providing support for entrepreneurs
3. HEIs & VET
   Providers that deliver vocational and craft courses of all types
4. Wider Stakeholders
   Economic Development agencies, Local Governments, Chamber of Commerce’s & Industry representative bodies.
Apprenticeship Alliances - Key Indicators

The four main objectives of the project are:

1. To establish 6 Regional Apprenticeship Alliances
2. Create a Regional Alliance Toolkit
3. Produce and disseminate information resources, a teaching course, and practical tools
4. Ensuring long term exploitation

Main indicators are as follows:

- 6 Alliances with 80+ members, 3-5 meetings within the first year and signed Action Plan
  - At least 12 SMEs to be members of each Alliance
  - 150 SMEs to take part in regional needs analysis
  - 120 SME managers to take part in pilot test
  - 10,000 informed about the project via social media
  - 300 SMEs benefit from ‘One Stop Shops’
  - 370 SMEs will play an active role in the project and gain greater knowledge of the value of apprenticeship schemes
  - 90% participants register improved understanding of the needs and opportunities for SME apprenticeships
  - 80% stakeholders consider RAISE as making a significant contribution to overcoming barriers to SME apprenticeships
  - Dissemination to 10,000 SMEs to promote value of the project
DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL ALLIANCE AT A GLANCE
Regional Alliance development is an ongoing process from formation to implementation, maintenance and achievement of goals. The process is not linear and rigid but flexible and repetitive, thus it requires monitoring of the latest developments on policy at industry level in order to secure Alliance effectiveness and value. We now take you through the key considerations that should guide the establishment of a RAISE Regional Alliance.

What is currently available?
Set the scene - what are the current programmes related to the support of SMEs in terms of business development and expansion. Any specific programmes or initiatives relating to job creation should be fully researched and documented. Each country (and sometimes regions) has specific strategies and/or programmes encouraging or hampering business expansion and growth. A robust and documented knowledge of current and future strategies/programmes will contribute to the Alliance achieving its purpose and it enables the Alliance to define its region for intervention more effectively.

Why is this analysis useful?
Knowing who the key actors are, their knowledge, interests, positions, alliances, and importance related to the project allows the project to interact more effectively with key stakeholders and increase their support for a given programme. By carrying out this analysis before implementing a programme, project champions can detect and act to prevent potential misunderstandings and/or opposition to the implementation of the programme. A programme will more likely succeed if a stakeholder analysis, along with other key tools. A template of key stakeholders relevant to a Regional Alliance is developed and presented for use in Appendix 3.

Who is a stakeholder?
Stakeholders are defined as those groups that have a stake/interest in the apprenticeship, education, SME and business support sectors and those that will be affected positively by RAISE activities. These stakeholders or “interested parties” can usually be grouped into owners and executive staff from the following sectors: Government agencies related to enterprise, education and employment, private sector entities, educational institutions, funding institutions, trade and business associations, recruitment agencies and others.

What are the steps in the Regional Alliance Development?
The following are the key steps in the process:
- Planning the process
- Defining the regions
- Identifying key stakeholders
- Establishment of Regional Alliances
- Identifying current strategies, opportunities and needs
- Developing a business case and Action Plan

The subsequent sections of this document describe each of these steps in terms of suggested actions and tools to be used to develop Regional Alliances.
STEP 1: PLANNING THE PROCESS
This is the analysis stage. It is characterized by the development and gathering of collective insights that are relevant to new online business models for creative SMEs.

### An Alliance needs to ground itself in the following considerations: -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutual Need</td>
<td>Interdependence. We need each other to accomplish a task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Shared Vision</td>
<td>What does the CEO Regional Alliance wish to accomplish? Vision guides the Alliance mission, protocols, and constitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>How and in what ways is the Alliance going to accomplish its task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Systems</td>
<td>Do the stakeholders value similar things in the same way and to the same extent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>What kind of stakeholders do we require as future partners of the Alliance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wavelength</td>
<td>Are we all on the same “wavelength”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple language</td>
<td>Are we all “speaking the same language”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultures</td>
<td>Are there differences in the working cultures of our potential partners within the Alliance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Vision</td>
<td>SME appreciation value of taking on and nurturing Apprentices across the board.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Useful hint/tip – Best Practice example:

In Friesland, Business Development Freisland (BDF) found that a successful way of enriching the partnership and keep stakeholders engaged in the work of the partnership was through bi-lateral meetings, which meant that not all partners had to be present at every meeting. This facilitates those with busy schedules and ensures maximum value can be derived from partners in contributing to the partnership and delivering actions, making best use of partner resources.

### Step 1:
Should take the Regional Alliances through the following steps:

- Identify the stakeholders
- Communicate with them
- Set meetings
- Identify if all potential stakeholders are represented?
- Do any of the potential stakeholders have any previous experience of working together?
- Are there any historical or traditional barriers between the potential stakeholders?
- Is any jargon or technical language used that could be a barrier?
- How do stakeholders feel about establishing an Alliance?
- Are there any barriers to developing a common vision?
- Develop a plan and timeline
- Identify the specific steps to be taken
- Establish timeframes for each step
The RAISE Regional Alliance may be established as a regional or national initiative depending on the Alliance’s preferences for how they wish to define their region and their reach within same. While it can be easier to gain a creative entrepreneur’s attention by promoting in a regional area and establishing a new apprenticeship support structure with regional confines has advantages, in a globalising economy businesses will rarely restrict themselves to city or county boundaries.

The Spanish Partner, Barcelona Chamber of Commerce (BCC), defined their region in order to promote information campaigns with strong protagonism within the educational centres in 7 localities of Catalonia that have a Local Council of Vocational Training (which brings together the different agents linked to learning processes in companies). The locations were:

a. Within Barcelona Chamber: Barcelona, Granollers, Mataró, Rubí

b. Within the Council of Chambers of Commerce of Catalonia: Terrassa, Lleida, Tarragona.
A few words from the Regional Alliances on the importance and benefits of the Regional Alliance (RA) and apprenticeship schemes across the regions

**CCIN, France**

Apprenticeships are managed by The Region which defines the types of offers and training it will develop in the area. It also provides financial help to VET centres, apprentices and employers. The Region plans and organises training adapted to different apprenticeships. It decides on the opening and closing of sections and classes based studying the needs of employers, companies and the evolution of the employment market. It also works with the Board of Education to guarantee a good balance between education and vocational training. VET Centres are financed by The Region, the Apprenticeship Tax, the different professional branches and financing intermediary bodies. One of the benefits of the French RA has been to help disseminate the role of the Region, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Chamber of crafts and Agriculture and reinforce the link between all.

The RA has had a positive impact on the stakeholders involved as it permitted them to list and link all the tools that were already implemented and available for apprenticeship. By discussing and sharing view points and experience the RA was also able to pinpoint areas in which progress was necessary to develop the notoriety of apprenticeship for example.

Since 2018 an “Apprentibus” circulates in the different areas of the region. This bus is specifically dedicated to apprenticeship, to inform families, schools and potential apprentices.

**BDF, Netherlands**

Just as internship education is important, apprenticeship education is very important also. For example, more than 100,000 people were involved in internship education during 2017-2018. Each year around 450,000 practical agreements exist between companies and students (which includes apprenticeships as well as internships). Job opportunity is very high: no less than 82% of apprentices end up in their apprenticeship company. This shows that graduate apprentices are a very important inflow for the workforce.

However, for apprentices it’s quite difficult to find suitable apprenticeship companies. Many SMEs are not involved as apprenticeship companies yet, because they see just downsides of apprentices. That’s why the RA is so important: To spread the word about apprentices, facilitate communication between SMEs, public institutes and education to overcome these prejudice and promote apprenticeships as opportunities. One of the biggest impacts has been the RA has facilitated communication between parties which would not have been in contact without RAISE/the RA. This results in more understanding, reduction of prejudice and increased cooperation.
**BCC, Spain**

In Catalonia, apprenticeships are nowadays being prioritised. VET Dual System was regulated on May 2012, it offers a consensual model of training, developed, mainly, from the contributions of the educational centres and the companies that are on the way. In this sense, the RA adds to the complicity and co-responsibility of both parties and the support of the entities and administrations.

Outcomes have been tangible for the RA as Action Plan objectives were reached;
- Individualised advice to a sample of 100 companies on the same topic.
- Validation of at least 30 companies (SMEs) for engaging apprentices.
- Implementation of 12 information points and processing of applications from SMEs to involve in apprenticeship plans.

These actions will tend to encourage and promote direct cooperative work between SMEs and educational centres that are relevant in their territory and / or sector.

**LYIT, Ireland (RoI)**

In Ireland the national apprenticeship system is governed by legislation, the 1967 Industrial Training Act and overseen by a national Apprenticeship Council. The further education and training authority SOLAS is the lead agency responsible for apprenticeship on behalf of Government and is represented on Ireland’s Apprenticeship Alliance in Europe. Apprenticeships in Ireland is a relationship between SOLAS (Further Education and Training Authority), Local ETB (Education and Training Boards), the Apprentice, the employer, Organisations representing employees, Higher Education Authority, Department of Education and Skills, Consortium (Industry, Training Provider – for example IT Sligo).

Generation Apprenticeship is a major expansion project to more than double the number of learners taking the apprenticeship route in Ireland and brand awareness has been growing around Generation Apprenticeship through a concerted, sustained and creative promotional campaign through the use of events, competitions and social media in particular. Helping more people discover and develop their talents through training, is at the heart of Ireland’s national apprenticeship system. There are currently over 5,000 companies involved in the provision of apprenticeships in Ireland and the government’s Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeships and Traineeships in Ireland 2016-2020 aims to more than double the number of apprentices in Ireland during this period.

One of the benefits of the RA to date includes a number of policy considerations that have emerged through the RA meetings which will be fed through the appropriate channels to the national apprenticeship authority. Specifically, feedback from the RA has been used to input into local development strategic policy and plans, enterprise networks have improved through face to face networking, for example one of the SMEs joined the local Chamber of Commerce after meeting the CEO at our RA meeting. There was knowledge transfer and lessons learned particularly around the development of new apprenticeships whereby those who have completed the process were able to provide information and tips to those who are at earlier stages of the process. This was a very productive group of organisations who are both directly and indirectly involved in apprenticeship provision and delivery.
Skills are the key driver of positive economic change, and are also a powerful tool to promote individual opportunity and to achieve greater social inclusion. Apprenticeships provide an excellent means by which employers can obtain the skills they require as well as being assured that across the economy are people with strong technical and good employability skills. There are also real benefits for companies including having an active role to play in the skills and learning of their apprentices and, giving their experienced staff the opportunity to develop their own skills through e.g. mentoring and sharing their expertise. The Apprentices themselves benefit from an apprenticeship as they will earn whilst they learn, have the opportunity to work alongside experienced staff, receive off-the-job training specific to the job and ultimately gain a qualification.” Department for the Economy (DfE, 2018)

In NI apprenticeship schemes are governed by the Department for the Economy (DfE). The DfE have a Skills Strategy for NI which apprenticeships fall under. To achieve the objectives for the strategy, Higher Education Institutes (HEI’s) deliver apprenticeship schemes to increase the skills of NI’s workforce (which the Skills Strategy aims to achieve) therefore contributing to the economic growth of NI boosting jobs, enterprise and the local economy. By participating in the NI (UK) RA, L&CCC (as a Government body) have been able to engage with key stakeholders (as per the quadruple helix) and strengthen relationships with local SMEs, HEI’s and citizens/society through direct engagement. This has led to the creation of new apprenticeship schemes (Fabrication/Welding) in the locality which are appropriate, up to date and meet current industry standards, thus contributing to the overall strategy for apprenticeships in NI.

One barrier for SMEs in participating in the apprenticeship programmes is the need of having a mentor (apprentice supervisor). It has to be either a person with vocational title/specific training. Understanding this need, the ‘Voivodeship Vocational Training Institution’ in Szczecin, the member of the RA in Szczecin, prepared a dedicated course for apprentice’s mentors that is a part of the Database of Development Services (Polish: Baza Usług Rozwojowych), which means there is a possibility of refunding up to 80% of the cost of such training.

All Alliance members appreciate the fact of personal contacts that were possible due to the meetings. For example there is already an ongoing cooperation between Chamber of Crafts and Enterprises from the region of looking for apprentices which is a result of the Alliance’s meeting. It seems that face to face meetings are important for SMEs to start the cooperation.

An analysis of vocational education potential and enterprises’ needs was also conducted. The analysis showed that there are many convergent points that can be explored. The SMEs that are members of the Alliance have started preparation for taking their first apprentices as a result of this analysis.
In December 2016, the Minister of National Education in Poland introduced a reform that would change the structure of upper secondary VET. From the school year 2017/18 it established two-stage sectoral VET schools (Polish: dwustopniowa szkoła branżowa) replacing the so-called basic vocational schools. Stage one comprises of a three-year programme leading to a vocational qualification. Stage two comprises of a two-year programmes leading to a vocational qualification. This allows graduates to enter higher education after passing matura examinations in three compulsory subjects and a qualification examination. By participating in the RAs, the SMEs (members of the Northern Chamber of Commerce) received up to date information and guidance on participation in the apprenticeships programmes.

On May 2017 Polish Prime Minister stated that in a dynamically changing labour market, “(...) there is no more important matter than matching the learning structure and the needs of our vocational schools, industry schools, and technical schools for particular industries. We put great emphasis on this”. The labour market in Poland is undergoing some unexpected changes. The unemployment rate in May 2018 was 6.1%. When it comes to vocational occupation, the rate is even smaller. In fact, the demand for vocational employees often exceeds the workforce supply. The SMEs are interested in collaboration with VET providers and need guidance and support in these activities. By participating in the RA, The Northern Chamber of Commerce can be a hub for such collaboration, therefore contributing to the growth of the regional economy.

Stichting Business Development Friesland (BDF, Netherlands)
STEP 3:
IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS
The starting point for the creation of Alliances is to think about who should be involved and why. An effective Regional Alliance should be able to change and influence strategy in their region. Ideally the individuals being sought will have a variety of different skill sets and backgrounds. Apart from the compelling strategic rationale for becoming involved in a RAISE Alliance (in terms of benefits for businesses and young apprentices) forming an Alliance can be a powerful way to provide advocacy and support to apprentices and their employers. Individuals in position of influence in the region involved in Alliance actions can open doors, raise the Alliances profile and encourage buy in from others.

**Important questions to be answered for key stakeholder identification:**

1. Who can influence and make decisions about the development of an apprenticeship programme?
2. Who is involved in training potential apprentices?
3. Who is involved in funding business growth / job creation for SME’s?
4. Who is involved in providing the necessary structures for apprenticeships to take place?
5. Who provides business support and training for SMEs in your area?
6. Who are the key business networks, associations or industry bodies providing advocacy to the SME sector in your area?
7. Who is involved in regulating apprenticeship schemes?
8. What are the strategy gaps in relation to apprenticeship creation?
9. What are the programme gaps in relation to apprenticeship creation?
10. Are there any duplication in the key stakeholders’ roles, strategies and programmes?

Step 3: Key Organisations Checklist:

To ensure that your effort is valued in the community, consider inviting key representatives from those organisations that serve and represent SMEs most closely at local and regional level:

- Regional development agencies
- Small business associations
- Government organisations/ local authorities
- Chambers of Commerce
- Enterprise centres
- Industry bodies
- Higher Education Institutes
- VET bodies
- SME’s and micro businesses
- People you know who are interested in the problem or issue

Typically each Alliance will be made up of 12-14 cross-sectoral representatives
In this project, Partners adopted a Quadruple Helix approach to identify and collaborate with stakeholders. In addition to identifying stakeholders from Academia/University/Education, Government, Industry/Business, a new sector was explored, namely Citizens/Society:

“In the Open Innovation era, where social innovation and ecological innovation entail behavioural change at the individual and societal levels... the regional governance system should be opened to new stakeholder groups coming from the civil society that can foster a culture of constructive challenge to regional status quo. Innovation users, representing the demand-side perspective, are included as a fourth group of actors”


The Quadruple Helix contextualizes the Triple Helix by adding a fourth helix “civil society” which covers the “media and culture-based” public. It is widely understood that additional perspectives must be added to comprehend innovation to allow for twenty-first century nuances. It is suggested that the Triple Helix is not sensitive enough to allow for democratic additionality, whereas the Quadruple Helix reflects on this. Yawson, 2009 (cited by Cavallini, S. et al. 2016) formalised the ‘user’ i.e. citizens/society as a fourth sphere supported by the idea that innovation is driven by the needs of the citizens of society.

The Netherlands Partner, Stichting Business Development Friesland (BDF), Netherlands, are one example (shown below) who have identified stakeholders within each element of the Quadruple Helix for their region;

1. **Citizens/Society:** Kanselarij, Stichting Verbind Mij,
2. **University/Education:** Friesland College, Friese Poort, Stenden NHL, Mentorprogramma Friesland, O3 Leeuwarden
3. **Government:** IPF, SBB, EMS
4. **Industry/Business:** Uwerk, Grandcafé Z, BDF, Inquabator Leeuwarden

**Source:** [http://www.dandelion-europe.eu/](http://www.dandelion-europe.eu/)
STEP 4:

ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGIONAL ALLIANCE
This stage of the process involves the mechanics of setting up the Alliance. Due to regional variations a variety of approaches can be used to get stakeholders involved. The monitoring of the steering group and the delivery of planned activities should also be addressed at this establishment stage.

**Important when establishing the Regional Alliance:**

Set out the scope of the Alliance – Consider what the benefits for the intermediaries will be? How will they benefit from their commitment to the RAISE Alliance?

Representation – Contact as many stakeholders as is necessary to overcome the barriers for apprenticeships?

Priorities – What are the priority issues and concerns that are common to all participants in the Alliance relative to apprenticeships?

Accountability – To whom are you accountable?

Rules, roles, responsibilities, and duties – All require clarity, buy in and should to be written down. Revisit representation & structure on a regular basis. Be very clear about what you expect from Alliance members e.g. Number of meeting over a specific time period.

Communication – What tools will ensure we are going to benefit from timely, consistent and useful communication that meets our needs? E.g. group email, a text group etc.

- Maintain linkages – Preserve, nurture, and expand the relationships that have been forged.

Once established the Regional Alliance should have a system for monitoring of planned activities including:

**Routine of Alliance** – Is the Alliance process embedded in the routines of the participating agencies?

- Interim reports – What “proof” and indicators of Alliance success are required? How often is feedback provided and what is its quality?

- Sustainability – Plan early for sustainability and anticipate the unexpected or worst-case scenarios.

**Top Tips:**

1. Start with one to one meetings - use your personal contacts
2. If you do not know your stakeholder - do your research first
3. Host an exceptional Launch event to raise Alliance profile
4. Be patient you may not get all your key targets involved from the very start. Continue to engage with and invite your key targets, share progress being made and ask again for their support at a later date
Alliance Partner LYIT used their Alliance membership feedback to guide the Alliance throughout the process and to keep momentum going.

“Regular contact with our members has been a key element to our success. Best practice examples from LYIT would include bringing in Keynote speakers particularly those who are currently employing apprentices. We also engaged with a young apprentice to get her perspective. The National Agency were also invited to our meetings to give an overview of the reform currently underway in Ireland (RoI). This was very valuable. Allowing the Regional Alliance to guide the direction of the next meetings (with the goals/targets in mind) kept everyone included in the process. New members were invited onto the alliance based on knowledge gaps identified from existing alliance members such as SME sector and social welfare sector”

Karen McCormick, Project Coordinator LYIT, Ireland (RoI)
STEP 5:
IDENTIFY CURRENT INITIATIVES, PROGRAMMES & STRATEGIES AND POSSIBLE GAPS & NEEDS
At this stage of the process a mapping exercise should be conducted to identify current apprentice programmes, incentives, support structures, actors and levels of SME Participation in the region. The main aim of this exercise is to identify the key gaps in support for apprentice employers. Consultations and desk research will be required to complete this phase.

**Step 5: Developing a Common Vision**

It is important to identify the gaps, needs and demand for apprenticeship initiatives in the region in order to develop a vision for the RAISE Alliance and what it can achieve.

Identify opportunities and needs particular to the skills (mis)match and supply-demand of apprenticeships in their region.

For some regions it is beneficial to actually map the main players involved in providing supports to the sector. This can be done in real time at the consultation workshop using a platform such as Google Maps.

Once the research phase is complete and a common vision has been devised, the findings can be made available in an accessible format. Findings can be shared in blog posts, newsletters and online employment, apprenticeship or training forums. You can also publish your information in the form of ‘Did You Know’ infographics which encourage debate and raise awareness of the project.

Share best practice information, locally and internationally about the role of intermediary organisations and the Alliance. Crucially, the findings of your research will feed into the production of a ‘business case’ to encourage SMEs to become apprentice employers which is one of the key tasks for the alliance once it is up and running.

**Consultations**

It will be important that consultations in each region are held with a range of stakeholders, including policy makers from Government agencies, local Councils, local business development organisations, educational institutions, policy influencers, training providers, industry bodies and support providers. This can be done individually or by holding a facilitated workshop or informal forum event.

**Desk Research**

Government research and higher education reports have been produced about apprenticeships. These include reports regarding the benefits of apprenticeships to businesses, the benefits to young people and outcomes at regional, national and European levels. A template of secondary sources is developed and presented for use in Appendix 1.

Online reports, information available through local authorities and business networks are important inclusions in the scope of the desk research.

The purpose of the research phase is to identify sources of information which are useful and also to highlight support gaps. For instance, what information and support is currently not available? The focus should be on information which highlights the key issues for apprenticeship schemes over the next 5 – 10 years. A template of Regional Apprenticeships sector directory of support is developed and presented for use in Appendix 2.
STEP 6:
ACTION PLANNING
An Action Plan is a very tangible way to make sure your organisation’s vision is realized and is focused on strategies to meet its objectives. Specific objectives suggested at the preliminary stage which may be used as a starting point included:

- Develop content for a series of quick-access information resources – ‘bite size learning’ to engage and entice SMEs.
- Develop a complete online course presenting the ‘business case’ for apprenticeships in SMEs and practical information with a regional focus.
- Create interactive tools such as ‘Your roadmap to employing your first apprentice’
- Transfer all content onto a user-friendly, multimedia online training platform with easy online and mobile access. Intermediary organisations can use this to train their own staff but SMEs will also be able to access it directly.

What are the elements of a strong Action Plan?

The Action Plan for your RAISE Alliance should meet several criteria:

- Does it list all the action steps or changes to be sought in all relevant parts of the creative entrepreneur community?
- Is it clear who will do what by when?
- Does the Action Plan reflect the current priorities and fill gaps? Does it anticipate newly emerging opportunities and barriers?

When should you create an Action Plan?

Ideally, the RAISE Alliance Action Plan should be developed within the first six months of the start of the Alliance after you have explored and agreed the vision, mission, objectives, and strategies of your Alliance. It is vital to remember that an Action Plan is always a work in progress. It is not something you can write and forget about. It must be kept visible. Display it prominently online. As your Alliance changes and grows, you will want to continually revise your Action Plan to fit the changing needs of your region.

How to write an Action Plan

Over a series of meetings, with all your stakeholder’s present, review your Alliance’s:

- Vision
- Mission
- Objectives
- Strategies
- Targets and agents of change (e.g. trainers, business advisors)
- Proposed changes that are required in your region

Bring these components together to develop an Action Plan composed of action steps that address all proposed changes. The plan should be complete, clear and current. Identify the steps you must take to carry out your objectives while still fulfilling your vision and mission. Please use our Action Steps Template (Appendix 4) to assist.
The Action Plan brings together the sequence of action steps or changes to be brought about in your Alliance. Each action step or change to be sought should include the following information:

- What actions or changes will occur
- Who will carry out these changes
- By when they will take place, and for how long
- What resources (i.e. money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes
- Communication (who should know what?)

Review your completed action plan carefully to check for completeness

- Are we doing what we said we’d do?
- Are we doing it well?

Keep everyone informed about progress

Distribute the Action Plan to all members with names attached to specific tasks.

Communicate and Celebrate

Communicate to everyone involved how his or her input has been incorporated. Celebrate your accomplishments. Celebration helps keep everyone excited and interested in the work they are doing.

Follow through

Now take your plan and run with it! In the event that stakeholders are slow or distracted from completing their actions, there are several things you can try.

- Regular phone calls from the Alliance lead asking others how they are doing with their tasks. This should be a supportive call, offer assistance if it is needed.
- Making sure timelines are clear and are achievable, review regularly.

Regional Alliance Action Plan example:

The Action Plan developed by the NI (UK) Alliance partner Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (L&CCC) quickly allowed the Alliance to identify a disconnect between the employer and training provider approach in relation to current apprenticeship provision. The shortage of engineering skills in the Council area, in particular specialist welding skills, led to discussions between the Council, local educational provider South East Regional College, (SERC) and local industry providers (welding and fabrication) to develop a labour pool equipped to support local industry. This initiative not only boosts job creation in the local area, it also demonstrates successful partnership working which will benefit the local economy.
SYNOPSIS OF PROGRESS TO DATE / KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Key observations to date are as follows:

a Planning the Process
All partners have developed a shared vision and buy in with Regional Alliance partners and there is a clear understanding of project objectives. There is a general consensus that a ‘shared vision’ and ‘buy in’ will be improved once the learning course materials and website has been completed and ready for dissemination to SMEs.

b Defining the Region – Stakeholders
All partners have taken a Regional Alliance approach rather than a National approach due to the greater regional strength of relationships. Many partners have adopted the Quadruple Helix model of representation with members comprising from education sectors, public bodies, Councils, Chambers of Commerce, SMEs and former apprentices who have progressed to become apprentice employers (e.g. Letterkenny Institute of Technology).

c Development of Alliances
All partners have spent significant time investing in one to one meetings with stakeholders to explain the concept and Alliance responsibilities. All members have also had at least 2/3 collective Alliance meetings. One key barrier for all partners has been to persuade Alliance members that the project will complement current work regionally to improve Apprentice uptake and will not be in competition with other schemes.

d Synergies/Key Challenges
Key synergies/challenges that have been identified by Regional Alliances are as follows:

- Further need to promote and acknowledge the value of Apprenticeships to the wider economy as a clear alternative to mainstream education which is evidence by examples that are being derived from companies such as Kainos in Northern Ireland
- To improve the relationship disconnect between VET Institutions and SMEs and to ensure Apprenticeship courses are meeting the labour demand of SMEs
- Further need to persuade SMEs that investing in apprentices can be a worthwhile investment against the SME perception that taking on an apprentice will drain resources and will not be a long term investment
- Management of Apprenticeship schemes (Government led) are bureaucratic and over legislative in most partnership areas
- Lack of a coordinated approach to promote the value of Apprenticeship schemes
- The project is being delivered during a period when significant changes in Apprenticeship delivery are to occur in Poland, Northern Ireland (UK) and Ireland (RoI)
Action Plan Suggestions

Common identified actions as detailed in Partner Action Plans are as follows:

- To develop a regional specific needs analysis to further inform the online training module
- To ensure ‘One Stop Shop’ model implementation
- To explore greater cooperation and innovation between Regional Alliance stakeholders
- To develop localised dissemination strategies by using all social media resources
- To develop a network of ex-apprentices (Alumni) that will inform process and ensure sustainability
- To disseminate best practice examples from other countries e.g. Germany
- Develop innovative approaches to reduce bureaucracy
- Completion of Action Plan pledges - Each partner to bring to the table individually and collectively agreed objectives and key activities and targets/indicators for success and impact

KEY ACTION

As outlined in the following graphic, the development of high impact modules and in addition other practical tools to equip SME employers to hire their first apprentice.
RESOURCES TO HELP YOU SET UP AND RUN A REGIONAL ALLIANCE

Appendix 1: Secondary Sources table .............................................. 33
Appendix 2: Regional Apprenticeships Sector ............................ 34
  Directory of Support template
Appendix 3: Key Stakeholders relevant to Regional Alliance template 35
Appendix 4: Action Steps Template .............................................. 36
Appendix 5: Regional Alliance .................................................... 37
  Contact Details (RAISE)
Appendix 6: Further Resources .................................................. 38
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SOURCE</th>
<th>NAME OF REPORTS/PUBLICATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner resources</td>
<td>Case studies of best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reports relating to Apprenticeships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other key stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local directory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic resources</td>
<td>Practitioner reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research reports</td>
<td>Academic papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX 2: REGIONAL APPRENTICESHIPS SECTOR

## DIRECTORY OF SUPPORT TEMPLATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SUPPORT</th>
<th>NAME OF SUPPORT</th>
<th>SERVICE PROVIDER</th>
<th>WEBSITE ADDRESS</th>
<th>DETAILS OF SUPPORT PROVIDED</th>
<th>DATES SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE</th>
<th>SUGGESTED BY</th>
<th>CONTACT EMAIL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Impact on Regional Alliance (High, Medium, Low)</td>
<td>Reach (International, National, Regional, Sub Regional)</td>
<td>Alliance Action Plan Implementation Role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX 3: KEY STAKEHOLDERS RELEVANT TO REGIONAL ALLIANCE TEMPLATE
## APPENDIX 4: ACTION STEPS TEMPLATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION STEPS</th>
<th>BY WHOM</th>
<th>BY WHEN</th>
<th>RESOURCES &amp; SUPPORT</th>
<th>POTENTIAL BARRIERS OR RESISTANCE</th>
<th>COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What needs to be done?</td>
<td>Who will take action?</td>
<td>By what date will the action be done?</td>
<td>Resources Available/Needed</td>
<td>What individuals and organizations might resist?</td>
<td>Who should be informed about/involved with these actions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1:</td>
<td>By</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resources Available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2:</td>
<td>By</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resources Needed (financial, human, political, and other)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3:</td>
<td>By</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Toolkit to guide the establishment of Regional Apprenticeship Alliances for SMEs*
# APPENDIX 5:
## REGIONAL ALLIANCE CONTACT DETAILS (RAISE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGIONAL ALLIANCE PARTNER</th>
<th>CONTACT DETAILS</th>
<th>ALLIANCE ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Polnocna Izba Gospodarcza, Poland                       | jw@izba.info                   | Lead on Work Package 1 - Preparation and Planning  
Lead on Work Package 2 - Management                     |
| Cambra Oficial De Comerc Industria, I Navegacio De Barcelona | projectesqp@cambrabcn.org      | Lead on Work Package 7 - Quality Assurance                                                              |
| Stichting Business Development Friesland, Netherlands  | n.dejager@bdfriesland.nl       | Lead on Work Package 10 - Exploitation and European Platform                                             |
| Chambre Commerce Industrie Nantes Saint Nazaire         | Frederique.ORPEN@nantesstnazaire.cci.fr | Lead on Work Package 6 - Pilot Test of SME Teaching Materials and Tools                                    |
| Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council                     | padraic.murphy@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk | Lead on Work Package 3 – Implantation of Regional Apprenticeship Alliances                               |
| Canice Consulting                                       | canice@caniceconsulting.com    | Lead on Work Package 5 - Technical Transfer of SME information, teaching materials and tools            |
| Letterkenny Institute of Technology                     | Karen.McCormick@Lyit.ie        | Lead on Work Package 8 - Evaluation                                                                    |
APPENDIX 6: FURTHER RESOURCES

Handbook for VET providers:

This resource focuses on the importance of internal quality management specifically for VET institutions.

Briefing note - World class competition in training: advanced economies

This resource discusses some of Europe’s vocational education and training policy priorities which are shared by Australia, Canada, Japan and the United States and explores how they are responding.

Macroeconomic benefits of vocational education and training

Improvements in workforce skills are essential for European countries to attain higher economic growth and to compete effectively on product markets. This resource explores the analysis undertaken in six EU Member States – Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK which suggests that general and vocational skills complement each other and that the effect of (certified) skills on productivity is stronger when certified skills are reinforced by training.

European Business Forum on Vocational Training

This resource looks at the main results of discussions, exchanges and presentations made at the First European Business Forum on Vocation Training.

Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-17: United Kingdom

This resource gives an overview of VET policy in relation to Northern Ireland.

The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe

This resource discusses the responsiveness of national VET systems in relation to the economy, technology and demography. It looks at how the European education and training landscape has changed over time through relevant case studies.