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# Regulating Work Experience Programs in the Greek Post-Secondary Education: The Case of Traineeships

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## Abstract

The smooth transition of young people to the labor market and their competency in successfully planning and developing their careers constitute key aims of all modern education systems. The implementation of work placements plays an important role in the realization of these aims by enhancing the communication between the education providers and the world of work, and by contributing to the development of professionally oriented competences by young learners. The paper focuses on traineeships, a particular type of work placement, which is implemented by post-secondary education institutions in Greece. A traineeship includes a variety of training processes with clear objectives and predetermined assessment strategies, which help trainees to gain professional skills and experience through an experiential process. Its ability to exercise a strong influence on the professional prospects of young people led many education institutions to integrate traineeship opportunities in their study program either as a compulsory component or as a non-mandatory option. The paper analyses the traineeship component of the study programs of three post-secondary education institutions in Greece, i.e. Institutes of Vocational Training (IVTs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Technological Educational Institutes (TEIs). More analytically, the paper investigates the legislative provisions concerning the organization and implementation of student traineeships, and records the evolution of the particular learning option over the years. In addition, it attempts to identify indications of interaction between post-secondary education institutions as regards the organization and the particular features of student traineeship schemes, which may imply the development of mutual learning. The paper concludes by articulating some remarks regarding the implementation of traineeships in Greek post-secondary institutions and the improvement of their organizational and operational characteristics.

**Keywords:** Traineeship, Work Placement, Post-Secondary Education, Higher Education Institutions, Technological Educational Institutes, Institutes of Vocational Training

## 1. Introduction

Work placements constitute an important component of the education systems of modern countries due to their important role in the smooth transition of young people to the labor market and to their ability to support their successful career planning and development. Traineeships –either as a compulsory component of the curriculum

or as a non-mandatory option of the study program– are the most prominent type of work placement available to post-secondary education students. They allow them to test their knowledge, skills and competences acquired during their studies in the actual professional environment and to undertake certain work duties under the supervision of experienced professionals. At the same time, student trainees have the opportunity to take independent initiatives to some degree and thus gain better understanding of the particular dynamics of the workplace.

Traineeships are an indicative example of the benefits and of the opportunities for all parties involved that stem from the triangular interaction between the education institutions, student trainees and businesses. However, they are required to constantly evolve in order to confront the arising challenges and to maintain their high added value as an experiential learning process.

The paper aims at analyzing the regulatory framework of traineeships in Greece with special reference to the post-secondary education. Therefore, it focuses on the traineeships offered by three post-secondary education institutions in Greece, i.e., Institutes of Vocational Training (IVTs) [NQF level 5], Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) [NQF levels 6-7] and Technological Educational Institutes (TEIs) [NQF levels 6-7].

The paper investigates the institutional framework that governs the organization and the implementation of traineeships in the aforementioned post-secondary education providers and designates their individual characteristics and (dis-)similarities in relation to their particular educational goals. Moreover, it presents the reformative interventions that contributed to the evolution of traineeships as learning components of post-secondary institutions over the years, while it attempts to identify potential indications of interaction between post-secondary education institutions as regards the characteristics of the students' traineeship programs, which would imply the existence of mutual learning. The paper concludes with some conclusive remarks about the implementation of traineeships in the particular Greek post-secondary institutions and the improvement of their organizational and operational characteristics.

## **2. Post-Secondary Education in the Structure of the Greek Education System**

The education providers that comprise the Greek formal education system are allocated according to the seven ISCED 1997 levels set by UNESCO (2006).

The six-year primary education (ISCED 1997 level 1) and the six-year secondary education (ISCED 1997 levels 2-3) precede the post-secondary education, where various education institutions offer either general/academic or vocational education and training, and prepare their future graduates for professional duties or further academic and research pathways. As regards the Greek post-secondary education, it comprises the post-secondary (non-tertiary) education (ISCED 1997 levels 4-5) and the post-secondary (tertiary) education (ISCED 1997 levels 6-7) (Figure 1).

In post-secondary (non-tertiary) education, the Institutes of Vocational Training (IVTs) (Institouto Epangelmatikis Katartisis) offer initial and continuous vocational training to upper secondary education graduates and prepare them for their transition to the labor market as mid-level professionals. Students must fulfill certain admission criteria in order to be accepted in –public or private– IVTs, while after the completion of their studies they are awarded professional rights provided they successfully participate in the national certification examinations.

At the post-secondary (tertiary) education level, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Anotato Ekpaideftiko Idryma) welcome upper secondary education graduates who succeed in the national examinations for entrance in universities (Panelladikes). HEIs offer their students curricula that (aspire to) combine academic and practical knowledge and skills in order to prepare them either for academic or professional careers. For many years, the Greek post-secondary (tertiary) education was fragmented; Higher Education Institutions (universities) focused especially on academic learning, while the Technological Education Institutes (TEIs) focused on practical, professionally oriented competencies. Since the academic year 2019-2020, TEIs have merged with universities (Act 4610/2019). Thus, today the Greek tertiary education comprises one type of institution, i.e. Higher Education

Institutions (HEIs). However, the transformation of TEIs into universities (HEIs) is still ongoing. This is the reason why they implement both types of student traineeships, the non-mandatory traineeships of universities and the mandatory traineeships of TEIs as detailed below.

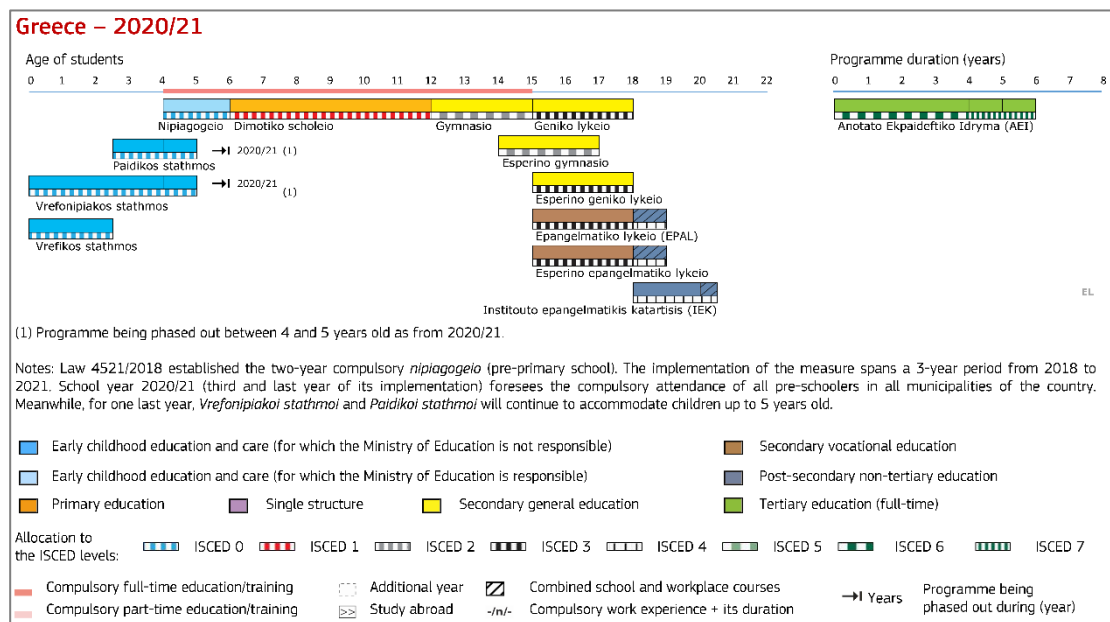


Figure 1: Greek formal education system

Source: *Eurydice 2020/21 (official website, Greece Overview)*

The ISCED 1997 is the main classification system that is used globally for the allocation of the various formal education institutions of the national education systems at different levels depending on the type of the awarded certificates and qualifications. Besides the implementation of the ISCED 1997, the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) constitutes an institutional obligation of all European Union member states. Every NQF must be founded on the basic principles and guidelines of the European Qualifications Framework that was introduced in 2008 (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008) and was revised in 2017 (Council of the European Union, 2017). A National Qualifications Framework introduces an 8-level classification of knowledge, skills and competencies that ensures the transparency, the comparability and the portability of people's qualifications, and facilitates their recognition in the European study or work environment. The European authorities approved the National Qualifications Framework of Greece in 2015, but its implementation has been reinforced with the latest reform of the Greek vocational education and training institutional and operational system in 2020 (Act 4763/2020), thus gaining in visibility and contributing to the rearrangement of the dynamics of the Greek education providers.

Table 1: National Qualifications Framework (NQF) – Greece

LEVELS	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING			GENERAL EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION
8					DOCTORATE
7					MASTER'S DEGREE [traineeship]
6					BACHELOR'S DEGREE (UNIVERSITY/T ECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE-TEI) [traineeship]
5	VOCATIONAL POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL APPRENTICESHIP YEAR (EPAL) [apprenticeship]	VOCATIONAL TRAINING DIPLOMA (IVT) [apprenticeship or traineeship]	POST-SECONDARY (NON-TERTIARY) HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA OR DEGREE		
4	VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOL CERTIFICATE (EPAS) [apprenticeship]	VOCATIONAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE (EPAL)		GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE (GEL)	
3	VOCATIONAL SCHOOL CERTIFICATE (SEK) [apprenticeship]	VOCATIONAL TRAINING CERTIFICATE (IVT) [apprenticeship or traineeship]			
2				LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE	
1				PRIMARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE	

Source: Information from EOPPEP (official website, NQF) elaborated by authors

Table 1 provides an overview of the structure of the Greek NQF and shows the education institutions that include a mandatory or non-mandatory work placement component. The students' participation in work placement programs (apprenticeships, traineeships) constitutes a valuable experience with strong influence on their future learning or professional choices and opportunities. The Greek NQF clearly shows that work placements (whether mandatory or not) are embedded in the study curricula of specific education institutions at NQF levels 3-7. The

studies in the particular institutions have a certain professional orientation and can lead graduates either directly to the labor market or to the next education level. Therefore, the better understanding of the work environment through such an experience can play a decisive role in their career planning and development.

### 3. Legislative Framework for Traineeships in Post-Secondary Education

The legislative provisions that regulate traineeships in the Greek post-secondary education have evolved over the years in order to ensure the effective communication between the education providers and the labor market, as well as to define clearly the terms and conditions of cooperation between all parties involved.

The paper presents the regulatory framework of traineeships in the Greek post-secondary education, which includes both tertiary and non-tertiary education institutions. The tertiary education institutions (ISCED 1997 levels 6-7) include Higher Education Institutions (universities), which have an academic orientation, and Higher Technological Education Institutes, which have a vocational orientation. The non-tertiary education institutions include the Institutes of Vocational Training, which have a vocational orientation and a more practical study program ((ISCED 1997 levels 4-5).

#### 3.1. Traineeships of the Institutes of Vocational Training (IVTs)

The Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK-Institutouta Epaggelmatikis Katartisis) are an ISCED 1997 level 4 education institution, which offer initial or continuous vocational training to high-school graduates. The study program has a clear professional orientation and aims at providing young especially people with the appropriate technical and practical skills that prepare them to work in mid-level job positions. The studies usually last 4 semesters and after their completion, the students receive a Certificate of Vocational Training. After the successful participation in the national certification exams graduates receive a Diploma of Vocational Specialization and gain access to upgraded professional rights.

Since their foundation in 1992 (Act 2009/1992) and until quite recently, the IVTs' operational framework did not include provisions for student traineeships. Although students could participate in a work experience program, traineeships were voluntary and such a decision relied exclusively on their free will to secure a trainee position. The IVTs had no obligation to offer guidance and support to aspiring or active trainees at any point of the process; however, scarce initiatives coming from private IVTs or trainers gave some of their students the opportunity to acquire work experience in parallel with their studies. As regards the terms and conditions of the traineeship, employers determined them on an individual basis and often exercised their power over trainees in an arbitrary way by using them as substitutes of permanent employees. For many years, the Greek state left these voluntary work experience programs unregulated, thus contributing to the further depreciation of the particular education institution. It was not until 2013 that traineeships became mandatory for IVT students (Act 4186/2013).

An interesting point of the new law has to do with the definition of a work experience program for IVT students. More explicitly, the law makes reference to the students' ability to participate in an apprenticeship or a traineeship. The criterion for the distinction between an apprenticeship and a traineeship is the timetable of the work experience program. An apprenticeship is organized in such a way so that it combines theoretical learning for one day per week at the IVT institution with practical training for four days at the workplace. A traineeship is done entirely at the workplace (Ministerial Decision K1/54877/2017, Articles 3a-3b). Apprenticeships have not been implemented in private IVTs yet; they have been introduced only in certain specializations of the public IVTs (Nursing, Nursing Assistant, Nursery Assistant, Administration and Economy Specialist, Network and Telecommunications Technician, Computer Technician).

An IVT apprenticeship has a total duration of 960 hours and consists of two parts, the "apprenticeship program at the IVT" and the "apprenticeship program at the workplace." The "apprenticeship program at the IVT" has a total duration of 192 hours; the training is arranged in one day with 8 teaching hours per week and is done by an IVT instructor. The "apprenticeship program at the workplace" has a total duration of 768 hours; the training takes place at the work environment and is arranged in 32 hours distributed in 4 days per week (public holidays excluded) (Ministerial Decision K1/54877/2017, Articles 3a-3b). An IVT apprenticeship position can be offered by all public

sector agencies (Note 1) or private sector businesses and the trainee position must be associated with the students' specializations.

The IVT traineeship has become mandatory under Act 4186/2013, while its completion is a prerequisite for students to obtain the Vocational Training Certificate (Act 4186/2013, Article 23; Act 4763/2020). Its duration is set at 960 hours or a period of 6 months, but it cannot exceed 12 months; the trainees work 8 hours/day for 5 days/week. The traineeship can be completed either during the 3rd and 4th semester or during an additional semester after the conclusion of the 4-semester studies (Act 4264/2014, Article 47, para 3). The trainees carry out their work placement under the supervision of an IVT instructor and work in trainee positions related to their specialization.

IVT students who have already completed at least 120 wages in the specialization they attend can ask to be exempted from the obligation to participate in a mandatory traineeship and to receive the Certificate of Vocational Training upon completion of the four semesters of theoretical and laboratory training. Similarly, IVT students who have completed at least 40 wages in the specialization they attend, can include them in the overall duration of their work placement (Act 4264/2014, Article 47, para 3).

The trainees' compensation is set at 75% of the legal, statutory, minimum wage of the unskilled worker. The Ministry of Education subsidizes part of the compensation, while the employer pays the remaining amount and the relevant social security contributions (Ministerial Decision K1/118932/2017).

During the traineeship/apprenticeship period both the education institution and the employer are required to keep attendance sheets in order to certify the implementation of the work placement. Moreover, employers must submit all the necessary information about the trainee to the online system of ERGANI (Ministerial Decision 40331/D1.13521/19.09.2019), which is run by the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Welfare, and must keep a file with all relevant documentation regarding the traineeship, so that it is available in case of an auditors' check. On the part of the trainees, each one of them must keep a traineeship notebook provided by the IVT, where their weekly activities, the timetable, the work duties, the days of absence (if any) and their performance are recorded. All weekly entries must be checked and signed by the manager or the trainee supervisor of the company. Upon completion of the work placement, the trainees submit their traineeship notebooks to their supervisor at the IVT. Upon completion of the traineeship program, the trainee receives a "Certificate of Attendance" and the completed "Traineeship Notebook" from the employer and submits them to the IVT, which issues the final "Certificate of Completion of the Traineeship."

On the part of the education provider the director of the IVT exercises his/her responsibility for the overall supervision, coordination, quality assurance and evaluation of the traineeship by appointing a member of the teaching personnel as coordinator and/or supervisor of the traineeship. The IVT instructor can make unannounced on-site inspections in order to check the traineeship environment and conditions, the relation of the work duties with the trainee's specialization and the availability of the necessary documentation. Moreover, the IVT supervisor monitors and assesses the performance of both the trainee and the company as regards their obligations, and addresses potential problems during the work placement (Act 4186/2013, Article 23; Ministerial Decision 26385/2017) (Note 2).

In an attempt to support the efforts of public IVTs to increase the trainees' protection during their placement, the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning undertakes the insurance cost for potential accidents at work of the IVTs that fall under its competence (Ministerial Decision 139931/08.09.2015).

The trainees are entitled to the same regular leave with remuneration as employees, as well as to absence due to illness with remuneration (Act 1346/1983; Civil Code, Articles 657-660). In case of a continuous absence of a trainee for more than 15 working days without notification the Director of the IVT may terminate the traineeship. Also, for serious reasons a trainee may terminate the traineeship or transfer to another company on condition that he/she notifies the supervising persons (director and instructor) at the IVT.

Although the completion of a traineeship has become mandatory in order for students to graduate, the IVTs – mainly the public ones – lack an organized system of making traineeship positions available to their students and matching them with businesses. For this reason, students have to secure on their own an employer's acceptance to offer them a traineeship position. Then, they submit their proposal and the details of the proposed traineeship to the IVT director in order to receive the necessary approval, which allows them to start their work placement.

### *3.2. Traineeships of the Technological Educational Institutes*

The Technological Education Institutes (TEIs) were established as successors of the preexisting Centers of Higher Technical and Vocational Education in 1983 and became one of the two sections of the Greek higher education in 2001 (Act 2916/2001). Although the TEIs were recognized as part of higher education of the Greek education system, the law made a clear distinction between them and the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)/universities in terms of their role, their aims and their mission. Therefore, in contrast to the academic orientation of HEIs, TEIs offered education that included academic and applied components, while they gave emphasis to the development of professionals combining the theoretical knowledge with the high quality laboratory learning and work experience. However, until quite recently not only were they differentiated from the HEIs, but they were also regarded as education providers of inferior quality as compared with HEIs. This attitude can be mainly attributed to the prevailing mindset of the Greek society that evaluates the tertiary education diplomas according to the professions they are related with; thus, the academic content of the HEI degrees has been placed at a higher level than the vocational content of the TEI degrees.

The studies offered by the Technological Education Institutes have a practical orientation and content, and aspire to equip their graduates with the necessary professional skills and competences in order that they enter the labor market easier. Evidently, the inclusion of work experience schemes in their study content was very important. For many years, the Technological Education Institutes were the only post-secondary education provider that had developed a complete student traineeship system. Gradually, traineeships became part of the curriculum and a mandatory requirement for students' graduation.

At the beginning, the opportunity for TEI students to do a traineeship at public and private sector organizations was non-mandatory in an attempt to establish the new institution in the collective mindset of the students and of the host organizations. Public sector agencies and organizations were obliged to offer traineeship positions to TEI students, thus preparing the labor market for the broader implementation of work placement schemes. Moreover, the new legislation introduced the trainee compensation for the first time. It was paid by the employment services or the students' institution and was supplemented with social insurance and basic health insurance for accidents and sickness, but did not secure any permanent employee rights for students (Act 1351/1983, Article 12). Soon the traineeship system of TEIs underwent a major reform. Traineeships became a mandatory component of the curriculum and were recognized as an integral part of the learning process (Act 1404/1983, Article 24).

The organization and the relevant processes of students' traineeships were defined in detail with a Presidential Decree (174/1985). The responsibility of interacting with the labor market and securing trainee positions for their students in public or private organizations lies entirely with the faculties and/or the departments. In addition, each department has to promote traineeships among its students and to provide them with all relevant information regarding their implementation, the terms and conditions, and the expected outcomes. Also, the TEIs have to improve the connection of the theoretical and the laboratory learning with the production process in order to improve the ability of trainees to respond to the work duties and, therefore, to increase the effectiveness of the traineeship.

According to the same Presidential Decree, the traineeship is divided in two periods with a total duration of eight months. Each department decides the implementation of the non-mandatory first period, which lasts two months (or eight calendar weeks of five working days); during the two-month period students receive information about the organization and the operation of the working environment. The second period of the traineeship is mandatory and lasts six months; this part of the traineeship is activated after the fourth and fifth semester of studies and is implemented outside the courses' timetable (Presidential Decree 174/1985, Article 2). These provisions were



reaffirmed with later explanatory documents (Circular E5/332/22.01.1986; Circular E5/3196/14.05.1987).

For many years, there was a lack of uniformity in the definition of the remuneration of student trainees. For those students who do a traineeship in the public sector the remuneration was determined with joint ministerial decisions issued by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry responsible for each public agency, but is exempt from any deductions (Act 1566/1985, Article 71, para 4b; Common Ministerial Decision E5/1258/25.02.1986; Ministerial Decision 2/50514/0022/17.09.2002). The issuance of supplementary circulars contributed to further clarifications on the matter (Circular E5/8711/10.12.1986; Circular E5/4967/30.06.1987). As regards the students who participate in a traineeship in the private sector, additional ministerial decisions determined the trainees' compensation, the subsidy paid to the participating businesses by the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED-Organismos Apascholis Ergatikou Dynamikou) (if they are entitled to receive such a subsidy), which is set to 50% of the compensation, and the individual arrangements for the implementation of the work placement (Ministerial Decision E5/1797/20.03.1986; Ministerial Decision E5/4825/16.06.1986; OAED Circular 94200/05.08.1986; OAED Circular 96478/01.10.1986). Employers, regardless of them belonging to the public or the private sector, are obliged to include in the trainees' compensation package health insurance securing medical and hospital care for them (Presidential Decree 185/1984) and insurance against accidents at work (Ministerial Decision E5/1303/03.03.1986).

Today, the Technological Education Institutes make use of different sources of funding for the implementation of their students' traineeships. Therefore, a traineeship can be funded by the following sources: the Manpower Employment Organization in the form of subsidy paid to the company after its completion; the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) in the form of compensation paid to trainees; a company that is willing to participate in the training of future professionals by hosting student trainees and undertaking the costs of their work-based learning.

The students' compensation has been set at 80% of the wage of the unskilled worker, which the National Collective Labor Agreement determines every time. Currently, the monthly compensation for TEI trainees is set at € 580.80. For traineeships subsidized by the Greek Manpower Organization, employers pay the monthly compensation to student trainees and receive a subsidy that is set to 50% of the total compensation after the completion of the placements. For traineeships funded by the Action "Higher Education Traineeship," the student receives a grant that amounts to € 269.89/month from NSRF funds, while the employer pays the remaining amount of € 310.91/month.

The introduction of a subsidy paid by the Manpower Employment Organization to the companies that offer trainee positions to TEI students was an important financial incentive aiming not only at the enhancement of traineeships, but also at the empowerment of the connection between the Technological Education Institutes and the labor market for the benefit of future graduates. Of course, in the case of traineeships funded by the NSRF this condition does not apply. However, the NSRF funding is very important too, because it constitutes a proactive recognition of the key role of work-based learning in the establishment of a close cooperation between higher education providers and the labor market, and contributes to the easier school-to-work transition of graduates.

An additional obligation of employers is to record the traineeships in the official employment registry in order to facilitate their monitoring and certification. According to a Decision of the Minister of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity, the start, the changes and the completion of student traineeships have to be announced to the ERGANI system, where employers enter all the necessary documents regarding their employees and their trainees. These documents must be available during potential checks by state inspectors (Ministerial Decision 29147/D1.10258/27.06.2019) (Note 3).

The supervision of each traineeship is done both by the employer at the workplace and the departmental supervisor, while the trainee keeps a traineeship notebook, where the developments of the work placement are registered on a weekly basis. During the traineeship, the student has to conform to the same work and safety regulations of the company that apply for all personnel. Moreover, the trainee is entitled to justified absences from work for up to 5 working days, which are recorded in the traineeship notebook together with other information concerning the work

placement. As regards the companies, besides adhering to the terms and conditions of traineeships, they must ensure the engagement of trainees in work duties relevant to their specialization, while they are encouraged to facilitate their participation in laboratory classes and in their examinations. If the traineeship terms and conditions are not met, the work placement can be terminated or be transferred to another employer. The traineeship is concluded with its evaluation, which is done through separate forms that are filled in by the trainee, the employer (or the workplace supervisor) and the departmental supervisor.

A traineeship in public or private sector organizations may receive national and European funding that is provided through the various Operational Programs of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF). The traineeships of the HEIs and the TEIs are funded through the Operational Program “Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship and Innovation,” Action “Higher Education Traineeship.” During the last years traineeships funded by the country’s NSRFs have become the prevailing type of work placement for students both in HEIs and in TEIs. The traineeship services of the institutions announce trainee positions every academic year and invite students to submit an online application expressing their interest in participating in a work placement. The traineeships last up to three months, but can be extended for up to six months. In this case the employer undertakes the student’s compensation for the additional traineeship period.

ATLAS (Note 4), an online system that supports the traineeships of higher education students funded by the NSRF, plays a key role in the process. All parties involved in student traineeships have to register to the online database. Employers use it in order to announce trainee positions offered by their businesses. The institutional traineeship services use it in order to reserve trainee positions for eligible applicants. Students use it in order to access information about the existing work placement offers and the companies’ profile, and to carry out the entire traineeship process including the application submission, the selection procedure and the certification of the traineeship completion (ATLAS official website). ATLAS is an innovative system that contributes to the easier and transparent connection between the higher education institutions (HEIs and TEIs) and the businesses that offer trainee positions, as well as to the comprehensive monitoring of the particular work experience programs.

After the final selection of the eligible trainees (Note 5) a contract is signed between the student-trainee, the employer, the institutional traineeship services and the competent department, where the placement’s terms and conditions, the rights and the obligations of each party involved in the traineeship are recorded.

According to a Decision of the Minister of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity, the start, the changes and the completion of a student’s traineeship have to be announced to the ERGANI system, where employers enter all the necessary documents regarding their employees and their trainees. These documents must be available during potential checks by state inspectors (Ministerial Decision 29147/D1.10258/27.06.2019). Currently, the student’s monthly compensation from NSRF funds amounts to € 269.89/month, which include health insurance against accidents; the employer pays the remaining amount of € 310.91/month. In the case of traineeships funded through the NSRF, the employer is not obliged to announce the trainee position to the Greek Manpower Employment Organization, because the participating businesses do not receive any subsidy from the state concerning the traineeship.

### *3.3. Traineeships of the Higher Education Institutions (Universities)*

The Technological Education Institutes were the first ones among the post-secondary (tertiary) education institutions for which the Greek state officially regulated the implementation of student traineeships. The Greek Higher Education Institutions -Universities followed ten years later.

The first official reference to traineeships for university students appeared in Act 2327/1995 (Article 11, para 1): “*The students of the departments of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) carry out a traineeship, on condition that it is included in the curriculum of the relevant department.*” The students’ remuneration would be determined with ministerial decisions, while it would be exempt from social security contributions and taxes (Act 2327/1995, Article 11, para 4b). The institutional framework was limited to simply identifying the ability –or determining the obligation– of university departments to include opportunities for traineeships in their study program. Provided

such an option had already been included in the curriculum of their university department, university students would be able to participate in a work experience program during their studies. Eventually, the university departments were actually left without any integrated governmental guidance; therefore, they proceeded to the regulation of their traineeships by taking advantage of the existing 10-year experience of the Technological Education Institutes.

The Act 2817/2000 presents a more complete approach of the organization and implementation of student traineeships in Universities (Act 2817/2000, Article 14, para 8). Students of Higher Education Institutions (Universities) can participate in traineeships offered by private sector companies provided that traineeships are embedded in the curriculum and that students' participation in such schemes is approved by the general assembly of each department of the university. The implementation of the traineeships should be in accordance with the provisions already in force in other types of education institutions. These provisions had retroactive effect as of the academic year 1996-1997, thus allowing the participation of older students who had not graduated yet.

Traineeships had already been incorporated in the curricula of several university departments with a more practical orientation and study content before the new law came into force. The departments of the Higher Agricultural School of Athens, the School of Geotechnical Sciences of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the departments of Biology of all Greek Universities are indicative examples (Act 1474/1984; Ministerial Decision 27786/305/1987).

The Act 4009/2011, which regulated issues regarding the structure, the operation and the quality assurance of studies together with the internationalization of higher education institutions (Act 4009/2011), included more concrete and detailed organizational provisions for student traineeships. Thus, it contributed to the faster development of traineeship schemes in the Greek higher education, while it initiated actions for their better organization and implementation, as well as for their inclusiveness: *"Students carry out a traineeship in the public or private sector in the country or abroad, on condition that it is included in the relevant curriculum. The terms and conditions of the traineeship are regulated by the relevant institution, including the special care for the facilitation of students with disabilities, in order to carry out their traineeship on an equal basis with any other student"* (Act 4009/2011, Article 36, para 1b).

Moreover, according to the particular Act every university is able to establish a legal entity under private law in the form of a public limited company, for the management and utilization of all or part of the resources coming from various funding sources, as described in the relevant provision. Among others, these resources can be used for the implementation of traineeship projects and the connection of universities with the labor market. Furthermore, the creation of an Innovation and Liaison Office was included in the provisions, whose objectives explicitly included the organization of work experience programs for students (Act 4009/2011, Articles 58, 60). Following the entry into force of the Act 4009/2011 a number of ministerial decisions were issued in order to put the new provisions into practice. The Act 4386/2016 (Article 59) recognized a retroactive effect to the particular ministerial decisions for the implementation of traineeships of –undergraduate or postgraduate– university students thus making the relevant arrangements permanent. In addition, it clearly enhanced the role of the competent university authorities to take decisions about the schemes.

The aforementioned ministerial decisions defined the purpose, the duration and the organization of the traineeships, and facilitated students' participation in the schemes. They also determined the details regarding the supervision, the compensation, the social security and health insurance, and the overall rights and obligations of the trainees. These legislative provisions enabled the universities to improve the organization of their students' traineeships by drafting their individual Traineeship Regulations.

Today, large part of the funding of the traineeships comes from public and European sources, while traineeships together with other forms of work experience programs are included in the National Strategic Reference Framework and the Operational Programs that refer to education and employment. These financial resources cover the remuneration and the social and health insurance costs of many of the schemes; as regards the organizational and the selection processes, they are the same that apply in the case of TEIs' traineeships funded by NSRF, while

they are also completed through ATLAS (Note 6).

The amount of money paid to trainees from NSRF funds is set to € 269.89; it is rather small and mainly has a symbolic character. Nevertheless, in some –rare– cases employers pay an additional amount of money to their trainees as an incentive for increased performance at the workplace. Besides the publicly funded traineeships, various businesses develop special cooperation with universities and offer their students work experience opportunities, which are funded entirely by employers, but maintain the organizational characteristics determined by the existing legislative framework.

A special type of work experience programs are the traineeships that allow university students to acquire professional experience at primary and secondary schools. In this case, future teachers or other school professionals receive special practical training –usually as a mandatory part of their curriculum– at primary and secondary schools, or in other entities of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion Affairs. The procedures, the criteria, the terms and conditions, and all other issues related to the particular traineeships are regulated by ministerial decisions (Act 4559/2018, Article 22).

The Traineeship Regulation of every university and/or department provides all the necessary information and relevant provisions for the implementation of its traineeships. The provided information includes the maximum duration of the internship; the selection process (with special provisions for the disabled, who do not have to participate in the general selection process); the social and health insurance coverage; the general terms and conditions concerning the students, as well as their rights and obligations. Moreover, the university services assign the supervision of each trainee to a professor, who also evaluates the traineeship after its completion. The process of each traineeship requires the close cooperation and constant communication between all parties involved, namely the university traineeship services and the supervising professor, the company and the student.

The evaluation of the traineeship after its completion is three-fold. On one hand, the student trainee and the supervising professor are required to fill in an online form with details concerning the organization, the content and the work duties of the traineeship, and an assessment of the company's performance as a host organization. On the other hand, the employer/trainee supervisor of the host organization fills in an evaluation form with regard to the trainee's performance and response to their responsibilities in the work environment (Note 7).

In general, Greek Universities have not developed their institutional framework for traineeships from scratch and according to their individual needs as regards their connection with the labor market. On the contrary, they based it on the regulatory framework governing other work placements implemented by different Greek education institutions, such as the Technological Education Institutes and the Vocational Schools of the Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED). Therefore, although traineeships are considered an important part of the learning process, the existing provisions on many occasions appear to be incomplete and fragmentary. However, in the course of time under the influence of the European recommendations about work placements for young people and the transformations in the school-to-work transition, the Greek Universities have made significant progress in the promotion of traineeships among their students and improved their organizational and funding conditions.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

This paper investigated the regulation of traineeships that are implemented by post-secondary education institutions in Greece. It focused especially on three post-secondary education institutions: the Institutes of Vocational Training (IVTs), which belong to the vocational –non-tertiary– education stream of post-secondary education; the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which belong to the tertiary education stream of the Greek post-secondary education, are often referred to as Universities and offer studies with an academic orientation; the Technological Educational Institutes (TEIs), which also belong to the tertiary education stream, but offer studies with a professional orientation. The merger of HEIs and TEIs in 2019 led to a unified post-secondary –tertiary– education that defines both institutions as Universities.

The investigation showed that the regulation of the traineeships remains fragmented, while the exchange of experiences and the mutual learning practices among the post-secondary education institutions are rather limited.

However, recent reforms in the Greek legislation concerning the education system show greater awareness than in the past of the ongoing organizational and technological transformations in the professional environment, and of the importance of this type of student work placement. Thus, they attempt to motivate the education institutions to redefine their relevant strategic approach and to enhance this understanding among their students.

The analysis of the legislative provisions showed that the regulatory framework considers traineeships essential for young people, because it regards them as an opportunity for better communication between the education providers and the world of work, and for the development of professionally oriented competences by young learners. By participating in a traineeship, students develop broad knowledge and skills that prepare them for a smooth transition to the labour market and successful career development.

Although the reformative trend has upgraded the case of traineeship schemes in the post-secondary education agenda, one cannot help but observe the persistence of certain deficiencies. The organizational framework of each institution's traineeship schemes remains different from the ones implemented by the others. This variation obliges employers to develop different implementation practices and burdens the necessary human and material resources that are required for the organization of traineeships. Furthermore, the regulatory framework lacks a set of incentives, which would encourage the proactive involvement of businesses in the improvement of the traineeship framework and in the efforts to increase of their effectiveness. Therefore, businesses are discouraged from the development of a strong and stable nexus with the education institutions aiming at more effective work placements, as well as from a broader involvement in their planning, organization, implementation and assessment in collaboration with the education providers.

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**Notes**

Note 1. The public sector agencies are defined in Act 1892/1990, Article 51.

Note 2. The Training Guides of Initial Vocational Training include a detailed description of the organization of the traineeship/apprenticeship schemes for each specialization for IVT students. They are published by the General Secretariat of VET and Lifelong Learning according to the Act 4763/2020, Article 41.

Note 3. The Ministerial Decision underwent several amendments, which did not change the provisions regarding student traineeships, but renewed them for the following academic years. Moreover, by issuing explanatory documents, such as the Circular 30294/D1.10558/03.07.2019, the Greek state gave supplementary information about the registration of student traineeships in the ERGANI system.

Note 4. ATLAS: System of Central Support of Student Traineeships of HEIs.

Note 5. Some institutions make the selection of eligible trainees according to their own criteria and announce the results to the businesses, while others let businesses select their trainees through a process they consider more suitable.

Note 6. For more details about ATLAS please see section 3.2.

Note 7. The institutional and/or the departmental Traineeship Regulations of the Greek Universities provide detailed information about the traineeships' organization and processes.