

Apprenticeship Working Group - Review of Apprenticeship Action Plan 2021 – 2025

2.0 Response to Questions under Section 4 of Action Plan for Apprenticeship:

Response for CIF: In the first instance, the CIF and its members would like to recognise and lend its support for the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025; the consultation document is a comprehensive and well-drafted document, which accurately defines the contribution of apprenticeships to the economy of Ireland.

Definition of Apprenticeship

Q1) The core features of what constitutes an apprenticeship in Ireland are set out in Figure 1 on page 8. What, if any, changes should be made to these features?

Response for CIF: In general terms, the CIF is satisfied with the apprenticeship system and the features that constitute an apprenticeship, however, there is a need to promote and encourage apprentice sharing and to reduce the burden on smaller employers and devise a system that encourages this group to get involved. All new apprenticeship programmes must be developed by industry-led consortium; is this reasonable for smaller companies?

Legislation

Q2) The legislation relevant to apprenticeship in Ireland is set out in Figure 2 on page 10. What, if any, changes should be made to the provisions relevant to apprenticeship?

Response for CIF: No comments.

Governance Structures

Q3) What are your views on the operation of the current governance and management structures for apprenticeship described in Figure 3 on page 11?

Response for CIF: There is a need to continue to separate construction (craft) apprenticeships from post-2016 apprenticeships to maintain their viability for employers- i.e. payment of trainees while off the job. It is suggested to align construction apprenticeships in development (i.e. scaffolding and roofing) with pre-2016 craft apprenticeships; these should be equal in terms of allowances and employer input. Should this facility be in place for all apprenticeships?

Q4) How has the Apprenticeship Council functioned as a structure and what, if any, changes should be made to its operation or terms of reference?

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION

Response for CIF: As demonstrated by the addition of 58 new apprenticeship types, the Apprenticeship Council is functioning well and operating as intended. The only recommendation we would suggest is to have a broader industry representation on the Council.

Q5) Reflecting the partnership between multiple stakeholders in delivering apprenticeship, what governance and management structures are appropriate for a single governance model?

Response for CIF: A single, focussed structure is preferred. In the general promotion of Apprenticeship, there is some concern that the Craft Apprenticeship does not receive enough focus in the effort to increase post 2016 apprenticeships

Q6) How should the current roles of the Apprenticeship Council, SOLAS and the HEA be performed under this model?

Response for CIF: It is suggested to defragment the various stakeholder roles/inputs by re-assigning responsibilities to the Apprenticeship Council.

Q7) What role can be played by sectoral or regional structures and bodies in the governance and management of apprenticeships?

Response for CIF: In general, we agree that apprenticeships should be industry-led, to ensure content and graduates are fit for purpose. There are instances where other approaches may be required e.g. current situation regarding some of “wet trades” – e.g. tiling – no registrations since 2012 – there is an issue here that this apprenticeship is not supported by industry most likely in that it is not what industry require – time to take action . Others relevant here – painting & decorating / plastering –(exception : blocklaying) . Where such programmes are not delivering numbers to make viable and indeed preventing alternative training being offered because of the apprenticeship existence, then action needs to be taken – e.g. traineeship.

Development and Delivery of Apprenticeships

Q8) What are your views on the opportunities for structured and transparent dialogue among stakeholders in the development and implementation of apprenticeships? Are there any ways in which engagement between stakeholders can be further enhanced?

Response for CIF: As above, regarding more industry representation on Apprenticeship Council would be beneficial.

Q9) What are your views on the operation of the 10-step process to develop new apprenticeship described in Figure 5 on page 15. What works well and what, if any, changes do you think should be made to this process?

Response for CIF: Feedback from members is that the 10-step process works well. In particular, the secretariat for the Apprenticeship Council is to be commended for their efficient functioning.

Q10) A number of initiatives have been taken to streamline the processes associated with apprenticeship e.g. online registration of employers and apprentices. What has been the impact of these changes for stakeholders? Can other improvements be made?

Response for CIF: A few improvements are suggested:

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION

- Online facility for applications (to include upload facility for photographs), as an alternative to postage.
- Online Chat or Helpdesk function, as it is often difficult to contact individuals, even more so during the pandemic;
- An online alternative to SOLAS' Safe Pass would be a welcome addition.

Members report varying levels of success when communicating with Senior Training Advisors and requirements form such advisors.

Q11) How do the processes for the development/review of craft and consortia-led apprenticeship curricula and learner assessment align with education provider institutional practices?

Response for CIF: Feedback from members is that course content during Phase 4 and 6 has become progressively less technical for the craft apprenticeships and this is evident in the current, Version 4 curriculum. Review of curricula can be slow and laborious.

Q12) How can apprenticeship provision be integrated into the quality assurance, administrative and academic leadership arrangements of Further and Higher Education Institutions?

Response for CIF: no comment

Q13) What, if any, changes to the structure or delivery of the craft and consortia-led programmes do you consider necessary?

Response for CIF: The duration of Phase 2 (22 weeks) is deemed too long, and Phases 4 and 6 are too short; this could be simply resolved by lessening Phase 2 and extending the duration of Phases 4 and 6.

On the basis of low uptake of apprenticeships in the wet-trades, it is suggested to adopt a different approach, where theory training would be undertaken first (similar to a pre-apprenticeship course), allowing for participants to enter the workforce with a basic knowledge and skills. Additionally, the findings of the CIF Trades and Apprenticeship Survey 2020 should be considered; these are listed in Table 1 for quick reference and reflect findings for wet trades such as bricklaying, floor and wall tiling, painting and decorating, and plastering.

Table 1: Recommendations from CIF Trades and Apprenticeship Survey 2020

Issue to Address	Recommended Action
Apprenticeship Model Review	1.1 Ongoing monitoring of market trends and projected future demand to provide evidence-based analysis and timely modification of curriculum content to meet industry requirements.
	1.2 An independent review of the current apprenticeship model for wet trades should be undertaken on an individual trade basis to include (but not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration of each wet trade apprenticeship • Block release versus alternative models of apprenticeship • Review of the minimum age entry requirement • Review of remuneration • Use of technology to enable blended learning, in particular, at early phases for orientation in advance of commencing with employer.

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION

Issue to Address	Recommended Action	
	1.3	Structure and communicate the progression route from apprenticeship to craftsperson and upward through the NFQ to clearly exhibit career pathways for qualified tradespeople.
	1.4	Incorporate business skills development during the apprenticeship as many qualified personnel become business owners. This should be coupled with continuous professional development programmes.
Education and Training	2.1	Traineeships should be further developed, supported, and marketed as a mechanism by which to commence or continue within wet trades. In this context an assessment of employer requirements should be undertaken.
	2.2	Undertake a review of wet trade apprenticeship on a trade by trade basis (see 1.1) incorporating pre-phase one orientation (see 4.4) and ongoing evidence-based curriculum review (see 1.1).
	2.3	Develop a series of continuous professional development programmes for qualified tradespeople to maintain competence and enable compliance with CIRI.
	2.4	Promote in-company training centres around the country to support (not replace) existing training and education provision. The initiative could be administered and monitored by relevant trade associations.
	2.5	Investigate the feasibility of listing construction apprenticeship programmes on the Central Applications Office (CAO) to mitigate against the comparatively negative perception of apprenticeship programmes vis-à-vis other level 6 programmes currently on the CAO.
Government	3.1	Government departments continue to support and engage in the national campaign to attract suitable people into the construction sector.
	3.2	Following the outcome of the review of the current apprenticeship model (see 1.2) ring-fenced funding should be allocated to an appropriate skills programme for construction trades to ensure a sustainable labour market throughout economic cycles.
	3.3	Intervention where minimum threshold levels are not achieved to meet demand should lead to the direct engagement of apprentices by government departments at least for the duration of the NDP 2018-2027. In this instance apprentices would gain experience on a wide variety of public sector projects and continuity of engagement is assured.
	3.4	To put CIRI on statutory footing for the monitoring of qualifications, quality, and standards across the industry.
Encourage Construction Companies to Engage Apprentices	4.1	Incentivise construction companies to engage with apprentices. This could be achieved through the National Training Fund (NTF), tax credits or subsidies. Redundancy rebate should also be reconsidered in conjunction with other financial measures by government (see 3.2).
	4.2	Promote and expand alternative modes of education and training, including the shared apprenticeship scheme nationwide by communicating the benefit to all stakeholders in training apprentices in a variety of companies across construction sectors.
	4.3	Reduce the administrative burden on companies participating in the shared apprenticeship scheme. A central agency should be tasked with, and adequately resourced to undertake this process.
	4.4	Develop a pre-site training programme for early stage apprentices to ensure they have received essential training and orientation, including

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION

Issue to Address	Recommended Action
	health and safety, manual handling, and basic regulations (see 4.2). This will ensure that the apprentice is ready to commence work on site and adds value from the start.
	4.5 In conjunction with the apprenticeship model review (see 1.2) consideration should be given as to the feasibility of altering the current block release structure to align with newer apprenticeships (such as auctioneering and property services) whereby the apprentice is in a training centre one day a week and with an employer for four days.
Marketing and Awareness Campaign	5.1 Establish an industry oversight group to support careers promotion in the construction sector.
	5.2 Continue to engage in an awareness campaign to promote construction as a viable career choice and encourage school leavers to consider apprenticeship.
	5.3 Industry representatives to engage with Career Guidance Counsellors to communicate the opportunities for building a career in construction. This may involve industry and education providers engaging directly with career guidance counsellors (and relevant associations) in this regard. This initiative could be coordinated with a schools programme or competition to generate awareness.
	5.4 Continued efforts to dispel the misconceptions surrounding construction apprenticeship to reinforce the importance of apprenticeship as a mode of learning.
Registration and Recognition of Skills	6.1 It is recommended that a range of CPD programmes be developed which will serve to provide confidence in the competence of personnel being engaged.
	6.2 Promote the recognition of qualified personnel through the CIRI register and align with registration (see 6.1)
	6.3 Consider undertaking a feasibility study in relation to the introduction of a registration system for qualified wet trade personnel.

Funding of Apprenticeship

Q14) How should the apprenticeship system be funded?

Response for CIF: Direct funding from the National Training Fund. Off the job elements should also be funded. All parties involved in an apprenticeship gain from the involvement, therefore all should contribute – employer by paying wages and provide training while learning “on the job”, State, while apprentice is in formal education .

Q15) What, if any, role should financial incentives play in encouraging participation in apprenticeship?

Response for CIF: It is suggested to incentivise employers to engage apprentices, perhaps using a subsidy, bursary or reduced levy funded from the National Training Fund. This would act as a reward scheme for employers and would recognise their input and commitment to the training and mentoring of workers. It must be acknowledged that qualified apprentices often leave the training employer to pursue further study or employment in other work areas (e.g. craft apprentices often work in facility management, public service, Prison Service, HSE , Local Authorities and OPW) – i.e. sectors that are not known for supporting the training of apprentices but do avail of the skills of

trained apprentices / graduates to the detriment of the employers who provided the training platform.

Q16) What, if any, changes are required to the funding allocation mechanisms for apprenticeship?

Response for CIF: In general, employers and apprentices of craft apprenticeships (pre-2016) are satisfied with the funding allocation mechanisms. Of benefit would be an incentive for apprentices to pass their exams at first attempt (e.g. a refund of exam fees).

Q17) How should the impact and cost effectiveness of apprenticeship be evaluated?

Response for CIF: In terms of benefit to the economy. Employed apprentices contribute to society and are essential to support the construction and other sectors. It would be useful to undertake a cost benefit analysis for the apprenticeship system; it is assumed that the costs associated with apprentices are nullified by year two and contribute to the economy thereafter. By comparison, graduates from third level courses facilitated through CAO are often not 'work-ready' and take some time to contribute.

Supports for Employers

Q18) Which cost elements of apprenticeship impact most on employers?

Response for CIF: Phase 1 can be costly for employers in construction sector as there are many mandatory training programmes required for new starts. The continued third level charge at Phase 4 and 6 are also a burden that in many cases is paid for by the employer. Employers also advise that the duration of Phase 2 is an issue.

Q19) How can the cost/benefit balance of participation in apprenticeship be improved for employers?

Response for CIF: Provision of administrative support for smaller entities employing apprentices would be of benefit. Additionally, financial, and other support for promotion of apprenticeships would be invaluable, as the time and resources incurred in identifying talent is extensive.

Q20) How can small enterprises be supported to participate in apprenticeship?

Response for CIF: Administrative support during registration and assessment steps. Support for pre-apprenticeship courses. Any support for small enterprises in facilitating essential industry training would be appreciated (e.g. SOLAS' Safe Pass, Manual Handling, Mobile Elevated Work Platforms (MEWP) for those working in construction).

Q21) What steps could be taken in relation to the structure or delivery of apprenticeships to reduce costs for small enterprises, for example, assistance with recruitment or administrative tasks or in company training?

Response for CIF: As for Q20.

Increasing Participation

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION

Q22) How well are the benefits of, and opportunities to apply for, an apprenticeship currently promoted to young people and adults?

Response for CIF: The CIF strongly advocates the 'Generation Apprenticeship' and 'Ireland Skills' and 'World Skills' as being paramount in attracting talent into apprenticeships. Each of the campaigns listed serve as a platform to demonstrate skills gained in fulfilment of an apprenticeship and afford such individuals due recognition for their talent/achievements. However, there exists a lack of understanding amongst school children and their parents of the forms of apprenticeships on offer and the means to pursue a career through an apprenticeship. The CIF's Careers in Construction campaign is scheduled to commence in October 2020 and will operate for a 3-year period to highlight the routes of entry into the construction sector. Nonetheless, more needs to be done to persuade children, their parents, and teachers of the benefits of apprenticeships as an alternate means for career development.

Q23) Are there any steps that could be taken in relation to programme design, delivery, progression pathways or other key features to improve the attractiveness of apprenticeships to young people and adults?

Response for CIF: As for Q22.

Q24) What, are your views on the provision of specific financial and non-financial incentives to increase participation by under-represented groups?

Response for CIF: This is welcomed by the construction sector.

Q25) How can the range of further and higher education programmes which can help people prepare for an apprenticeship be expanded and/or made more visible?

Response for CIF: More assistance is required within schools, particularly from Career Guidance Counsellors, to promote apprenticeships on an equal standing as full-time education at third level. There is an opportunity to engage with students during transition year to offer exposure to a range of industries and career opportunities, including apprenticeships.

Q26) What approach to target setting should be taken in the new Action Plan, in relation to participation generally and for under-represented groups?

Response for CIF: No comments.

Q27) Which, if any, of the Generation Apprenticeship initiatives are you familiar with and how effective do you consider them to be?

Response for CIF: CIF have been a supporter, including financially, of the generation Apprenticeship initiative from the start so we are aware of all the initiatives taken to date and believe that these actions are beginning to bear fruit – we recommend the initiative is continued

Q28) How should the promotion of apprenticeship be further developed under the new Action Plan?

Response for CIF: Continue the Generation Apprenticeship initiative as mentioned above. Continue the drive to create more new apprenticeships. We need to celebrate the success of those who undertake an apprenticeship and to address the focus on league tables of CAO places for schools. WorldSkills Ireland Live National Apprentice Competitions in the RDS Dublin (as run in 2019) should

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY FEDERATION

be on the yearly calendar of all 700 + secondary schools as these competitions showcase the skillset of all individual trades and will be a game changer to career decisions & progression. This initiative should receive funding to ensure that it runs every year.

Q29) What role can the public sector play to expand the availability of apprenticeship, through its roles as employer and substantial purchaser?

Response for CIF: The involvement and support from the public sector is vital in encouraging contractors to employ and mentor apprentices. This could be further promoted through inclusion of clauses in public tendering contracts, supporting the employment of apprentices. Details of how this would work and be feasible to be agreed. Another option would be for the State to act as an employer for apprentices, where registrations fall below a certain threshold but SLMRU forecast indicate rising demand, for example, in the wet trades of bricklaying, floor and wall tiling, painting and decorating, and plastering.

For further information relating to this submission , contact:

Dermot Carey

Director

Construction Industry Federation

E:dcarey@cif.ie / 086-8320648