

Apprenticeship Implementation Plan

Introduction

In May 2013, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn T.D., announced a review of apprenticeship in Ireland to determine whether the model should be “retained, adapted or replaced by an alternative model of vocational education and training”. The Review has been part of a wide ranging reform programme in the Further Education and Training sector, including major structural change and the development by SOLAS and approval by the Minister of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019.

The review was undertaken in two stages. The first stage involved a background issues paper which was published in May 2013 and the second stage involved the establishment of an independent review group which was set up in May 2013 and reported in December 2013. The Review Group was chaired by Mr Kevin Duffy (Chair of the Labour Court) and included employer and union representatives and academic experts. The group was asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the existing model; to examine alternative methods of work-based learning in Ireland and to consider mechanisms for collaborating with employers in the future. A Technical Group consisting of FÁS, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) representatives was also established “to provide evaluative data, to undertake a work programme determined by the Review Group and to develop and comment on options for the future”.

The review stated that apprenticeships should be employer led, of a least 2 years duration, have a minimum of 50% on the job training and should be governed by a contract of apprenticeship. It characterised apprenticeship as being substantial in depth and duration in order to prepare apprentices to work autonomously and competently in a specific occupation. The review envisaged a more flexible model of apprenticeship potentially leading to qualifications at any level from level 5 upwards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

It made a comprehensive set of recommendations across a range of areas underpinning the apprenticeship system. Key recommendations included

- legislative change to enable a more flexible model of delivery while protecting apprentices and setting out employers' obligations
- new governance arrangements including the appointment of an enterprise led Apprenticeship Council hosted by SOLAS with close cooperation from the Higher Education Authority
- a review of existing apprenticeship curricula as a matter of urgency with a move away from a generic placement at level 6 and to programme durations based on the time needed to achieve the learning outcomes necessary for the occupation
- the expansion of the apprenticeship model into a range of new enterprise sectors
- a call by the Apprenticeship Council for proposals from consortia of employers and education and training providers to develop new apprenticeships, supported by a ring-fenced fund
- the assessment of proposals against a sustainability test
- a requirement that employers would continue to be approved for the purposes of engaging in apprenticeship training
- that recruitment to apprenticeship would continue to be the responsibility of approved employers but with greater planning and control of numbers in apprenticeship
- a requirement that apprentices should continue to be paid both on and off the job with no reduction in earnings during periods spent in education and training institutions
- the development of clear occupational and academic progression routes
- the development of pre-apprenticeship programmes
- a branding and promotion initiative illustrating the benefits of apprenticeship as a way of learning and the career opportunities arising

Context for Implementation

The Minister for Education and Skills has accepted the thrust of the Review Group's recommendations and has asked the Department to develop an Implementation Plan. As recommended by the Review Group, the Department has consulted with key stakeholders in examining how best to progress the implementation of the Review Group's recommendations. Groups consulted included SOLAS, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the German Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI), Institutes of Technology Apprenticeship Committee (ITAC), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC) and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). A range of views emerged during these consultations including a general concern that new apprenticeships should be tested before any definitive legislative changes were advanced. A number of stakeholders who will have key roles in developing new apprenticeships also emphasised that the process of curriculum development including new awarding arrangements will take some time.

As outlined above, the recommendations of the Review Group identify core principles/characteristics of apprenticeships in terms of duration, qualification level and minimum on the job training. They also identify core legislative provisions that should apply to the employment of apprentices. In other recommendations, in particular in relation to the development of new apprenticeships, the Review Group was less prescriptive. This is a reflection of the need to be flexible as the possibility of new apprenticeships is explored. Apprenticeships are to be enterprise led and the views of enterprise will have to inform the nature of the process as it is developed. In addition, the capacity of relevant organisations to assume the roles envisaged needs to be tested. Accordingly, this Implementation Plan sets out a series of actions in three Phases during which the potential for new apprenticeships will be explored by a new Apprenticeship Council through a call for proposals.

The processes involved will, as far as possible, use the model suggested by the Review Group in terms of processing the proposals.

Establishment of the Apprenticeship Council

A key recommendation of the review, with the aim of underpinning a new apprenticeship system, is the establishment of an Apprenticeship Council. As part of the implementation process, the Council will be established in July. It will be hosted by SOLAS but will involve an equal partnership and close co-operation between SOLAS and the HEA in supporting the work of the Council. It will be enterprise led and the chairperson will be appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The principal area to be addressed by the council initially is the development of new apprenticeships.

The Apprenticeship Council will have representation drawn from the following:

- Business and Trade Unions (sufficient to ensure an enterprise led approach)
- SOLAS
- Higher Education Authority
- Department of Education and Skills
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland
- Further Education Sector
- Higher Education Sector

Phase 1 - Renewing Apprenticeships and Identifying New Opportunities

The focus of Phase 1 will be to identify the level of interest from industry sectors in developing new apprenticeships. In addition, during this phase, work already underway in line with the recommendations of the review on the revision of curricula for existing apprenticeships will be accelerated. This process will address the appropriate placement of

apprenticeship awards on the National Framework of Qualifications, programme duration, structure and entry criteria.

SOLAS has already made significant progress in the review of current apprenticeships. Prior to the publication of the review, the former FÁS had already commenced a review of five trades (Electrical, Plumbing, Carpentry and Joinery, Metal Fabrication and Heavy Vehicle Mechanics). Standards have been developed and new draft curricula drawn up in these areas and will be considered by the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, prior to being submitted to QQI for public consultation and validation. This process, which will ultimately lead to new apprenticeship awards at appropriate levels of the NFQ, has been thorough but has also taken a long time. The process involves:

- Establishment of individual standards development groups,
- Drafting of standards,
- Establishment of project steering groups,
- Development of curricula to meet the required standards,
- Approval of standards and curricula by the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC),
- Review of draft standards by an external review group,
- Submission of standards to QQI for public consultation and adoption and
- Submission of draft programmes (including curricula) to QQI for validation.

All material will be submitted to QQI by end 2014.

The remaining trades will also be reviewed. The Department has commenced discussions with SOLAS and QQI on how the process can be streamlined and accelerated, taking into account the learning gained from the review of the initial 5 trades. SOLAS and QQI will now consider, prior to the completion of the review of the initial 5 trades, how to best expedite the review of the remaining trades, examining the processes used and resources required.

A core principle that applies to existing apprenticeships as well as to the recommendations of the Review Group and this Implementation Plan is that apprenticeships are enterprise led. Wide reference has been made in public discourse to apprenticeship systems in countries such as Germany and Austria. These systems have developed over time and have long standing institutional and legislative underpinning. In Germany, for example, there are over 300 training occupations. The system is supported by a range of national and federal institutions, most notable the Chambers infrastructure in which German companies by law must participate.

The situation in Ireland is quite different. Outside of the existing apprenticeship sectors many companies have limited involvement in forms of work based learning. Indeed over time FÁS developed 35 traineeships of which only 8 are currently active. Sustaining work based learning models requires continued commitment from employers over time. This poses a huge challenge particularly in the case of apprenticeships which are the most intensive form of work based learning. Companies have also found other solutions to meeting their skills needs. The high societal value placed on third level education is a further factor. Ireland has the highest rate of tertiary attainment among 30-34 year olds in the EU – nearly 53% compared to an EU average of 37%. Many companies recruit from a pool of university graduates and then provide additional within company training. There are also examples of some innovative practices such as the Retail Management Degree run by Dublin Business School and Lidl which contains work based elements. Working collaboratively with companies, it is hoped that new areas can be identified where apprenticeships provide a valuable route for skills development.

In developing the Implementation Plan the DES has had discussions with the German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce and is grateful to the Chamber for its offer of continuing collaboration. It may be that companies located in Ireland that come from countries with a strong apprenticeship tradition might be able to draw on their experience to promote apprenticeships within their Irish operations or to assist other companies in Ireland in the development of apprenticeships.

The DES will commence a series of early meetings with representatives of enterprise sectors in Ireland to outline the plans to promote the development of proposals for new apprenticeships and to seek their support.

The Review Group proposed that dedicated funding should be established to promote the development and establishment of apprenticeships in new occupational areas. The Department will provide funding as recommended by the Review Group - the level of funding to be determined through the budgetary process. Proposals for new apprenticeships will be invited by the Council from consortia of enterprise and education and training providers. Proposals received will be evaluated against criteria that will include the sustainability test recommended by the Review Group. This will require proposers to set out:

- The numbers to be trained
- The extent to which proposers are representative of the industry
- The continuing demand for apprenticeships into the future
- Evidence of labour market need and future strategic economic priorities, supported by evidence based studies
- The capacity to support quality training (facilities, participation in training of trainers, capacity to provide required range of experience, co-ordination with other employers, etc)
- The willingness of employers to recruit and meet the relevant costs associated with apprenticeships
- A willingness of employers and education and training providers to engage collaboratively in development and delivery of apprenticeships
- A marketing plan to promote apprenticeships

In addition, proposers will have to set out the format and structure of the programme proposed, an outline of the main occupational needs to be addressed, demonstrate the depth and transferability of the skills to be acquired, the entry levels proposed, and how learners will be equipped for progression to the next level of learning.

The Apprenticeship Council will identify if the proposals received have the potential to be developed into viable and sustainable apprenticeships. At this stage the Council will provide an interim report to the Minister. The purpose of this report will be to:

- Inform the Minister of the nature of the viable proposals identified
- Identify what additional measures might be taken to facilitate the development of the identified proposals
- Identify the resource implications of the proposals
- Provide an assessment of the overall interest in apprenticeship or other forms of work based learning

The following is the timeline for the key actions in Phase 1:

- Complete review of 5 initial trades – Q4 2014
- Determine process and resources for review of remaining trades – Q4 2014
- Develop content of call for proposals and issue call – Q4 2014
- Submission of proposals – Q1 2015
- Evaluate proposals – Q2 2015
- Report to Minister – Q2 2015

Phase 2 - Developing the proposals

Phase 2 will focus on the detailed development of the successful proposals into new apprenticeships. The engagement with stakeholders and experience in the development of work based programmes to date would indicate that this process could be complex and time consuming. However, given the priority being assigned to the development of new apprenticeship, those involved will be requested to reduce timeframes as much as possible while ensuring that the quality of the programmes is protected. It may be that some proposals will build on existing provision and awards which may assist in shortening the timeframe. However, the level of detail required in these processes should not be underestimated.

A particularly important issue to be addressed for new apprenticeship programmes will be how the overall occupational profile developed by employers can be served through existing awards or translated into a set of standards to underpin a new award. The standards and awards development process varies across awarding bodies (QQI, Universities, Institutes of Technology and other awarding bodies whose awards are recognised through the NFQ). The nature and level of successful proposals and the partnering education and training providers will determine the awarding body concerned. Typically for occupationally-focused awards, the awarding body or a state agency or education and training provider will convene a group of employers and experts to develop the detailed award standard. The output of this process may also be reviewed by international experts and the awarding body will need to adopt the standard through its formal structures.

A detailed curriculum will need to be developed to achieve the learning outcomes detailed in the standard. This will elaborate programme content, resources, duration, on and off the job elements, entry requirements and assessment arrangements.

As the timeframe for development may vary across proposed apprenticeships a range of completion dates from 6 months to a year could be involved. The essential processes in Phase 2 will be:

- Establishment of development groups for each apprenticeship
- Determination of awarding arrangements potentially including the development of new awards
- Development of curricula
- Identification of clear progression pathways
- Clarification of recruitment processes and of allocation of places to registered employers
- Determination of the apprenticeship contract

Pending the establishment of the Council on a statutory basis when, in the opinion of the Council a new apprenticeship is ready to commence, it shall seek the Minister's approval for its commencement – target completion

date Q4 2015 – Q2 2016. It is intended to ensure that the necessary legislative protections for apprentices referred to in the Review Group’s recommendations will be provided for through the use of existing legislation or through the introduction of new legislation. The Department of Education and Skills will consider the most appropriate approach during Phase 2.

Phase 3 - Embedding the structures

The final phase of the implementation process will place the Apprenticeship Council on a statutory basis and address the other legislative amendments recommended by the Review Group. The overall governance arrangements for existing and new apprenticeships will be brought together to manage the expanded and diversified apprenticeship sector. This will provide a stable basis for progressing the outstanding recommendations of the Review Group in areas such as:

- further developing research and occupational forecasting capability
- developing arrangements to secure alternative provision for apprentices in cases of redundancy
- developing a branding and promotional strategy
- strengthening arrangements for the recognition of prior learning
- exploring the potential for master craftsman programmes, and
- examining the scope for Irish apprentices to train abroad
- considering the establishment of pre-apprenticeship programmes

Phase 3 actions will be ongoing from Quarter 1 2016.

Traineeships and other work-based learning

The Review Group noted that various other forms of work based learning exist at present. These include traineeships which are a partnership between business and enterprise and a local Training Centre and internships. Employers are involved in the development of traineeship curricula; there is on the job and off the job training; trainees receive a

training allowance and are assessed and receive certification. Other programmes such as PLC courses involve one or two year courses and a shorter work placement. In the context of the implementation of the Further Education and Training Strategy, opportunities to promote work based learning programmes that respond to the needs of employers and the labour market will be progressed. In addition, if in the submissions from enterprise and education and training providers, proposals for programmes other than apprenticeships emerge, it may be possible to develop them through traineeship type programmes or by extending and developing the work-based components of other programmes such as PLC courses. Opportunities may also exist at higher levels where a strong work-based component could be placed alongside an academic programme to ensure that qualifications received are relevant to industry.

Summary of Key Implementation Actions

1. Appointment of National Apprenticeship Council – Q3 2014
2. DES, SOLAS and HEA to engage with enterprise sectors to outline plans for promotion of new apprenticeships and seek support – Q3 2014
3. Complete the review of the 5 initial trades – Q4 2014
4. SOLAS/QQI to review system for revision of existing apprenticeships with a view to acceleration of process – Q4 2014
5. Call for proposals for new apprenticeships
 - Development and issue of call for proposals – Q4 2014
 - Submission of proposals – Q1 2015
 - Evaluation of proposals under specified criteria – Q2 2015
6. Report to Minister – Q2 2015
 - Identifying viable proposals
 - Identifying measures to facilitate further progressing of proposals
 - Identifying resource implications
7. Ministerial approval of allocation of resources for new apprenticeships – Q2 2015
8. Development of new apprenticeship(s) – by Q4 2015 to Q2 2016 – involving:
 - Establishment of development groups for each apprenticeship
 - Determination of awarding arrangements potentially including the development of new awards
 - Development of curricula
 - Identification of clear progression pathways
 - Clarification of recruitment processes and of allocation of places to registered employers
 - Determination of the apprenticeship contract
9. Drafting and enactment of legislation to establish Apprenticeship Council on a statutory basis and underpin new apprenticeship system – Q1 2016
10. Ongoing further development of new apprenticeship system.