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# D/PENDR Analytical Note

## Apprenticeships – Trends and Profiles


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**This paper has been prepared by IGEES staff in the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery, and Reform. The views presented in this paper do not represent the official views of the Department or Minister.**



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# Apprenticeships – Trends and Profiles

## Executive Summary

This paper set out the recent trends in apprenticeship numbers and the profile of apprentices. Apprenticeships are essential to the economy and to support a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers for key sectors such as construction, supporting commitments under NDP Delivery, Housing for All and the Climate Action Plan.

Between 2018 and 2023, a total of over €1.05 billion in current expenditure has been invested in apprenticeships, increasing from a total of c. €118.7m in 2018 to a 2023 provisional outturn of €274.9m. Excluding Covid and Cost of Living provision for apprenticeships and re-allocation of expenditure from other areas to meet demand, overall current provision for apprenticeships has increased by 78% from 2018 to 2023.

This greater provision is reflective of the substantial increase in those choosing to undertake apprenticeships. As detailed in the paper, following the impact of the financial crisis in which the overall apprenticeship population and registrations fell significantly, the system has recovered substantially in recent years and is now approaching previous peak levels. As of end 2022, there was an overall apprentice population of 26,325, with 8,286 registrations in 2022. Of these registrations, the most popular apprentices continue to be in the traditional craft apprenticeship sectors, particularly Electrical, Construction and Engineering.

In addition to the overall trend in apprenticeship numbers, the paper also highlighted the following:

- **Construction Apprenticeships:** While overall apprenticeship numbers are approaching previous peak levels, despite strong recovery in the sector in recent years, construction and construction related apprenticeships lag behind the previous peak period in 2006. This be can be explained by a number of factors such as the overheated construction industry in 2006, the expansion of apprenticeship offerings since then and the shift towards Modern Methods of Construction. However, this must still be considered in the context of ongoing demands for skilled labour for NDP Delivery, Government priorities such as Housing for All and the Climate Action Plan as well as overarching demographics trends.

- **Consortia:** Growth in the new consortia apprenticeships has been slow, with the targets set under the previous Apprenticeship Action Plan still to be reached However, the strong growth in consortia registrations since Covid would suggest an increasing interest in these type of apprenticeships, with nearly 2,000 registrations on consortia apprenticeships in 2022.

- **Age Profile:** Reflecting its role as a significant option for school leavers, the age profile the craft apprenticeship population is relatively young with the majority (80%) under 24 years of age. However, the profile of the consortia apprentice population is more evenly distributed, with a significant proportion over 30 years of age (33%). This age profile could be considered in the context of the skills agenda and activation.

- **Gender/Inclusion:** There have been increased numbers of females undertaking apprenticeship, with the majority of these increases accounted for by the new consortia apprenticeships. Of the 1,950 female apprenticeships population in 2022, 1,596 are consortia-led apprenticeships, while 354 are on craft apprenticeships. While there have been increases in the number of females deciding to undertake craft apprenticeships, relative to the overall craft apprenticeship population, the number is still negligible and further progress is needed in this area.

- **Employers:** As of end 2022, there were just under 9,000 employers involved in apprenticeships. Year on year the annual number of employer registrations has continued to grow, particularly with the introduction of consortia-led apprenticeships and the recovery of the construction sector, which has grown from a 2013 low point of 83 employer registrations to 390 in 2022.

- **Apprenticeship Backlog:** In large part driven by closures of training centres due to Covid-19 as well as increasing demand for apprenticeships, there are existing backlogs in the system for apprentices to access off the job training, particularly Phase 2. However, following significant work led by the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) and SOLAS and overseen by D/FHERIS, numbers on the waiting list have improved, reducing from 5,252 in August 2023 to 3,460 at the end of March 2024.

## Introduction[1]

Apprenticeships are essential to the economy and to support a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers for key sectors such as construction, supporting commitments under NDP Delivery, Housing for All and the Climate Action Plan. Under the Programme for Government, there is a commitment to significantly increase the footprint of apprenticeship within the education landscape, across both traditional craft apprenticeships and post 2016 consortia apprenticeships, while ensuring that apprenticeships are open and accessible, seen as a viable and exciting career path, and delivering current and future skills need for an economy facing demographic change and the twin green and digital transitions.

The continued growth in apprenticeship programmes and registrations shows the popularity of this form of training and qualification through employment. Apprenticeship provides a rapid route to employment while gaining a qualification.

There has been a rapid expansion of the apprenticeship system since 2019, the last pre-pandemic year for apprenticeship before the publication of the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 and significant progress is being made to achieving the target of 10,000 registrations by 2025.

At the end of 2023, there were 27,000 apprentices, 73 apprenticeship programmes, 9,200 apprentice employers, and up to 16 additional programmes in development and due to become available over the next 12 months.

Importantly, there has been a continued increase in the number of people becoming craft apprentices. This is vital to ensuring we have the workforce necessary to meet our housing targets. The Report on the Analysis of Skills for Residential Construction & Retrofitting 2023–2030 outlined our labour market requirement at over 50,000 new entrants into the construction sector for that period to meet our housing and retrofitting targets.

[1] Note that while there is some use of more recent data, given the time at which this analysis was started and data collated (Mid/Late 2023), the majority of data will use end 2022 data as the final year

## Apprenticeship Policy

*Future FET Strategy*[2]

The key strategy underpinning the further education and training (FET) sector is Future FET: Transforming Learning – the National Further Education and Training Strategy. Published in mid-2020 by the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (D/FHERIS) in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, this strategy sets out an ambitious agenda for the FET sector out to 2024 as a driver of both economic development and cohesion. Under this strategy, three key priorities/pillars are set out for FET:

- **Skills:** FET will build skills to anticipate and respond to rapidly evolving regional and national needs, as well as facilitate pathways to particular careers. It will also provide a pipeline of talent for employers, as well as provide a resource to ensure that the skills of their workforce remain relevant.

- **Inclusion:** FET balances the needs of skills for work with supporting citizenship and prosperity across communities and developing social capital through its provision. It needs to be ensured that a strong inclusive ethos will continue to underpin all FET.

- **Pathways:** Sector should offer clear pathways into FET, within FET and from FET, encouraging and facilitating ongoing engagement at all stages of people's lives and careers.

Further detail regarding core areas under each of these priority areas is set out in the strategy itself.

*Apprenticeship Action Plan, 2021-2025*[3]

In addition to the Future FET strategy which drives the overall direction of the FET sector, apprenticeship policy in Ireland is driven by the Apprenticeship Action Plan, 2021-2025. This plan, building upon previous action plans for Apprenticeships, aims to increases the total

[2] https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf
[3] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0879f-action-plan-for-apprenticeship-2021-2025/

number of annual apprenticeship registrations to 10,000 per annum by 2025. In addition to this registration target, the Action Plan has the following high level objectives, with supporting deliverables to achieve these objectives:

- **A High Quality and Innovative Approach:** Apprenticeships will deliver the highest quality of work-based learning, supporting and demonstrating innovation to empower apprentices and employers to meet current and emerging skills needs;

- **Employer-driven Responses:** Apprenticeships will be recognised and valued by employers across all sectors of the economy as a key mechanism for building a highly skilled workforce, contributing to productivity and sustainable growth;

- **Apprenticeship for All:** The profile of the apprenticeship population will more closely reflect the profile of the general population;

- **A Valued Option:** Apprenticeships will be available and recognised as a work based learning opportunity, providing sought after qualifications across the tertiary education and training sector;

- **A Single Cohesive System:** There will be a single apprenticeship system underpinned by a clear governance framework with strong stakeholder input.

In working to achieve the above, the Apprenticeship Action Plan introduced two new structures/organisations into the apprenticeship ecosystem, the National Apprenticeship Alliance (NAA) and the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO).

The NAO has responsibility for all aspects of the management, oversight, and development of the apprenticeship system and for implementing the Action Plan. The NAO exercises the relevant legislative and funding functions of SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) related to apprenticeships.

The NAA acts in an advisory role, providing support and advice to the NAO on all aspects of apprenticeships as well as oversight of progress against Action Plan targets.

Appendix 1 demonstrates the key organisations and stakeholders involved in the delivery of apprenticeships.

## Types of Apprenticeships

There are two broad categories of apprenticeships available in Ireland. These are craft apprenticeships and consortia-led apprenticeships.

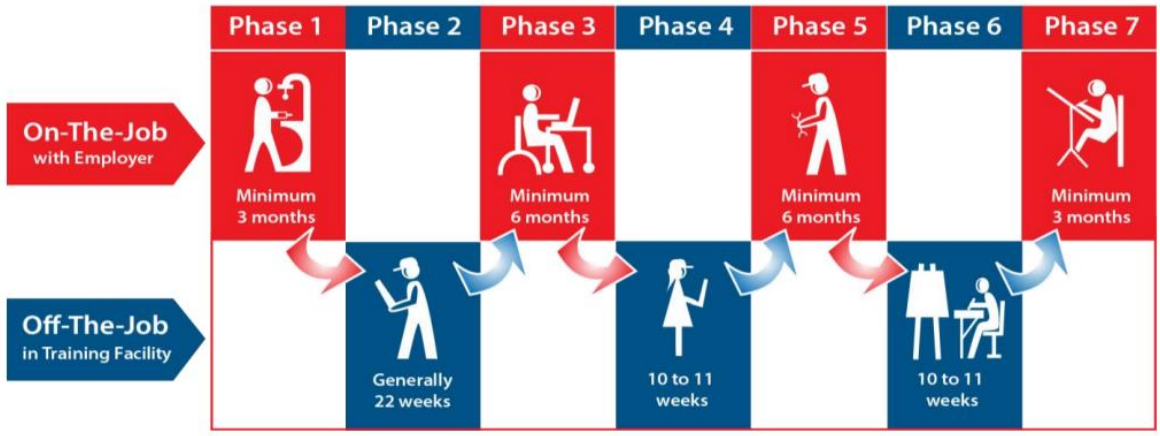
### Craft Apprenticeships

Craft apprenticeships are what would have traditionally been considered as a typical apprenticeship in Ireland and include apprenticeships in the areas of construction, engineering, motor and electrical. A craft apprenticeship will generally last for 4 years, during which time the apprentice will spend 3 different periods in off-the-job training (Phase 2, 4 and 6), with the remainder of time spent in on-the-job training with an employer.

Generally, the first off-the-job training phase takes place in an Education & Training Board (ETB), while the subsequent off-the-job training phases is in a Technological University (TU) or Institute of Technology (IoT).

The graphic (Figure 1) below sets out the process for craft apprenticeships. As can be seen from the graphic, the length of time spent in the various phases of the apprenticeship is not uniform, with Phase 2 typically being the longest phase of off-the-job training at approximately 22 weeks, while Phase 3 and 5 are the longest periods for on-the-job training at a minimum of 6 months each.

*Figure 1: Training Stages for Craft Apprenticeships*



While in on-the-job training, payment of the apprentice is the responsibility of their employer. However, while on the off-the-job training element of their apprenticeship, craft apprentices are paid a weekly training allowance based on what sector their apprenticeship is in and what phase they are currently in. The current effective rates are set out in the table below (Figure 2), with the rates of pay varying by sector. As can be seen from the below table, as an apprentice progresses through their training, their rate of pay increases.

*Figure 2: Effective Training Allowance Rates, as of Feb 2024*

| Sector | Phase 2 | Phase 4 | Phase 6 | Year 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Construction | € 279.34 | € 419.06 | € 628.58 | € 754.30 |
| Electrical | € 329.51 | € 423.66 | € 611.95 | € 753.17 |
| Engineering | € 202.71 | € 304.29 | € 451.26 | € 545.70 |
| Mechanical Engineering | € 295.19 | € 443.24 | € 664.85 | € 797.82 |
| Motor | € 212.29 | € 318.76 | € 478.13 | € 573.76 |

*Source: https://apprenticeship.ie/news-events/news/off-the-job-training-payments-allowances-for-craft-apprentices*

The skills the apprentice develops are assessed through on-the-job competence testing as well as off-the-job modular assessment and examinations and, if the apprentice completes these assessments successfully, they are awarded an Advanced Certificate – craft (Level 6 National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level).

### Consortia Apprenticeships

Consortia Apprenticeships were introduced in 2016 to expand into areas experiencing skills shortages within the economy, offering apprenticeships in new areas and to increase female participation

These new apprenticeships have a more flexible training structure, which does not use the phase structure of craft apprenticeships, but instead allows for more flexible options including online learning, blended learning and day releases from their employer to attend training, in addition to on-the-job training. Additionally, unlike craft apprenticeships, successfully

completed consortia-led apprenticeships can lead to awards from level 5-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Consortia-led apprenticeship programmes are industry led apprenticeships and created by consortia composed of key stakeholders (employers, education and training providers etc.) concerned with a specific occupation or industry, working together to develop the apprenticeship. The 2016 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) guidelines for the Provision of Apprenticeship Programmes sets out that the consortium will often provide governance over the apprenticeship, ensuring "*the programme conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation. Its purpose would be to ensure that the apprenticeship programme is enterprise-led and meets labour market needs".*

A recent review of consortia-led apprenticeships by QQI (2023) found that while there are some common features across the established consortia apprenticeships, these apprenticeships can vary significantly and there is no standardised approach/best practice with regards to their establishment. The QQI review noted this as a strength of the consortia model, highlighting that this allows adaption and flexibility in designing an apprenticeship across a wide range of different occupations and industries. However, given this adaptability and variety in consortia apprenticeships, it can be difficult to assess and examine consortia-led apprenticeships collectively.

While there are consortia apprenticeship offerings in the traditional apprenticeship sectors, consortia-led apprenticeships have also expanded into several other sectors not covered by craft apprenticeships including ICT, Hospitality, Logistics and Finance. As opposed to craft apprenticeships, the length of a consortia apprenticeship also varies depending on the specific apprenticeships with current consortia apprenticeships lasting between 2-4 years.

Unlike craft apprenticeships, consortia-led apprenticeships do not receive a training allowance from the State while on off-the-job training, and the payment of apprentices on these courses is the sole responsibility of the employer. However, since January 2022, consortia-led apprenticeships do attract an Apprenticeship Employer Grant. The Apprenticeship Employer Grant provides financial support from the State to employers who employ apprentices on one of the apprenticeships which have been established since 2016 and which do not attract payment of off-the-job training allowances.

Apprenticeship employers are eligible to receive a €2,000 grant annually for each registered apprentice, effective from 01 January 2022. This includes apprentices who were registered between 2019 and 2021 and who continue in employment as of 01 January 2022. The grant is paid in arrears in 2 payments annually, with €1,000 payable in May-June and a further €1,000 in November-December. Employers can receive this grant each year for individuals for the duration of their apprenticeship.

### Student Contribution

Both craft and consortia-led apprentices pay a pro-rata amount of the student contribution for the elements of their off-the-job training spent in a Higher Education Institute (HEI), similar to undergraduate Higher Education (HE) students. This is typically in the region of approximately €1,000. However, this costs can vary more substantially with consortia-led apprenticeships as the amount of time they spend in a HEI for training can vary significantly depending on the specific consortia apprenticeship.

As part of the Cost of Living packages in 2022 and 2023, in which a once-off reduction in the student contribution of €1000 was provided for to undergraduate HE students, apprenticeships would have received a similar pro-rated reduction.

### Expenditure on Apprenticeships

Between 2018 and 2023, a total of over €1.05 billion in current expenditure has been invested in apprenticeships, increasing from a total of c. €118.7m in 2018 to a 2023 provisional outturn of €274.9m. This represents an increase of 132% over the period, with an average increase of approximately 20% per annum over the period.

In Budget 2024, €67 million investment was secured in order to increase training capacity and to support the reduction in the backlog. This was supplemented by €30 million funding D/FHERIS re-allocated from wider further education and training budgets to bring total apprenticeship funding to €298 million, including c.€10m in non-core funding.

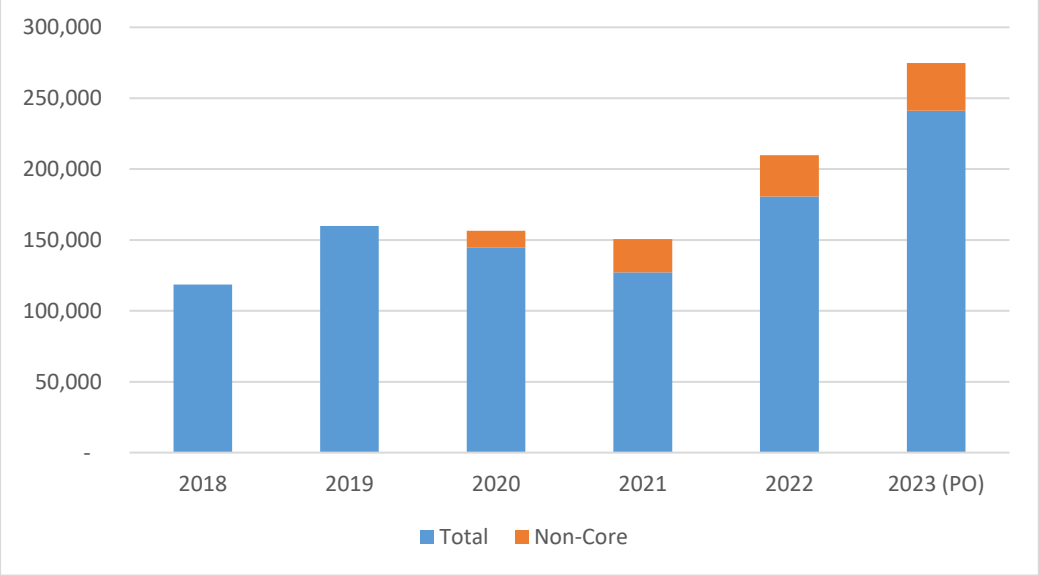
The growth in expenditure should be caveated by the presence of non-core expenditure from 2020 onwards with nearly €100m spent between 2020 and 2023. This funding was primarily

to address impacts of Covid-19 including the incentivisation of the registration of apprentices during the pandemic through the Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme (AIS), as well as to help address the apprentice backlogs which were driven in part by training centre closures during Covid 19. A relatively smaller portion of this non-core funding (c.€7.4m) was provided for the previously highlighted Cost of Living measures for apprentices in 2022 and 2023. In addition, as mentioned the 2023 allocation includes a temporary re-allocation of core expenditure by D/FHERIS from other areas to meet apprenticeship demand. If these factors are excluded, overall current provision for apprenticeships has increased by a still significant 78% from 2018 to 2023.

Capital investment has also been provided for apprenticeship through both Education and Training Boards and Higher Education Institutions (€20 million in 2021, €17.2 million in 2022, €17 million in 2023) to expand provision within existing facilities, expand provision by development of new facilities, and provide additional tools and equipment.

While necessary to deal with non-core pressures and increased demand, it is noted by D/FHERIS that the use of non-core and re-allocations of core expenditure has had impacts on apprenticeship delivery in areas such as hiring apprenticeship instructor posts. One of the issues affecting the ability of the apprenticeship system to grow is the lack of instructors, which has been strongly impacted by the buoyant labour market, and the NAO has implemented a recruitment drive over late 2023 and early 2024 to address this issue.

*Figure 3: Current Expenditure on Apprenticeships 2018-2023*



An updated analysis of the costs associated with apprenticeships is due to be published by the Department of Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (D/FHERIS).

## Available Apprenticeships

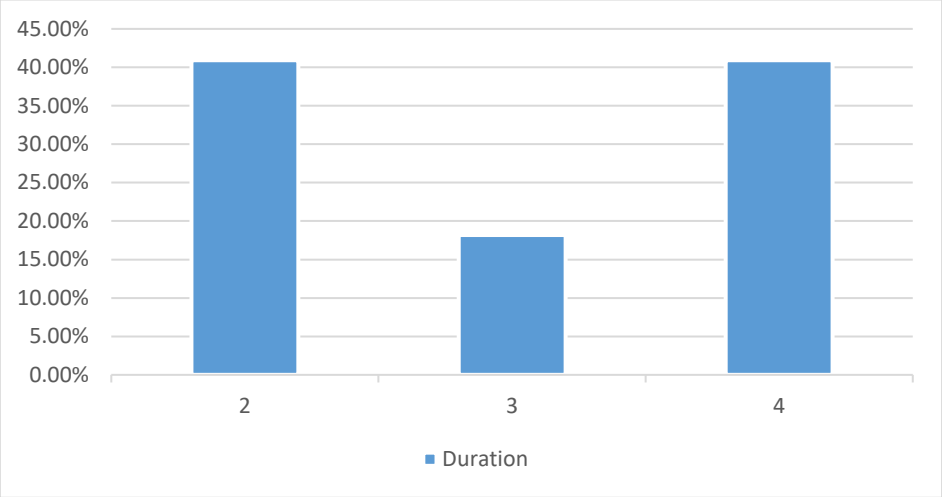
As of end 2022, there are currently 66 apprenticeships available across 16 different sectors in Ireland with active apprentices across craft (25) and consortia (41). See Appendix 2 below for a full list of current apprenticeships

*Table 1: Available Apprentices Programmes by Sector, as of end 2022*

| Sector | Craft | Consortia |
|---|---|---|
| **Arboriculture** | - | 1 |
| **BioPharma** | - | 2 |
| **Construction** | 7 | 2 |
| **Electrical** | 6 | 1 |
| **Engineering** | 7 | 9 |
| **Finance** | - | 3 |
| **Hair** | - | 1 |
| **Healthcare** | - | 1 |
| **Hospitality** | - | 5 |
| **ICT** | - | 6 |
| **Insurance** | - | 1 |
| **Logistics** | - | 5 |
| **Motor** | 5 | - |
| **Property Services** | - | 1 |
| **Recruitment** | - | 1 |
| **Sales** | - | 2 |
| **Total** | **25** | **41** |

Figure 4 sets out the distribution of apprenticeships based on duration. The majority of apprenticeships (approximately 82%) are either 2 or 4 years in duration. The entirety of 2 and 3 year courses represent consortia-led apprenticeships, while the majority of the 4 year apprenticeships are craft. Of the 4-year apprenticeship courses, only 2 are consortia-led apprenticeships – Chef de Partie and Principal Engineer.

*Figure 4: Breakdown of Apprenticeships by Duration*




## Employer Involvement in Apprenticeships

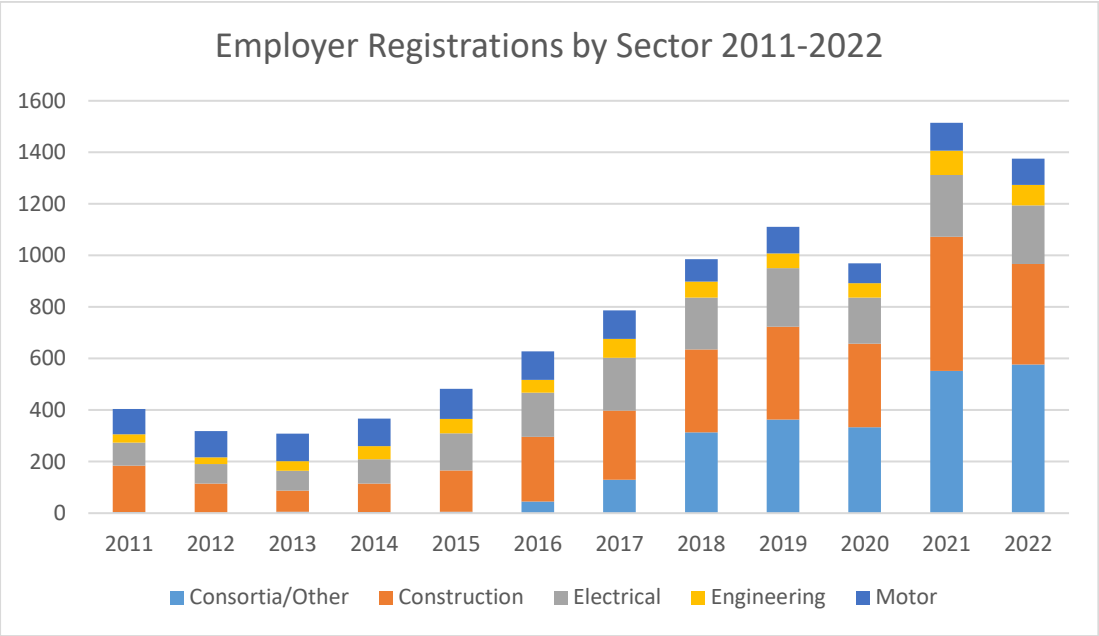
Employers are a key part of the apprenticeship system in Ireland, delivering on-the-job training to apprentices and in the case of consortia-led apprenticeships are often a key part of the development of the apprenticeship itself. As of end 2022, there were just under 9,000 employers involved in apprenticeships. The overall figure for active employers fluctuates over the course of the year as apprentices begin or finish their training.

To achieve the target of 10,000 annual registrations by 2025 set out in the Action Plan for Apprenticeships, the NAO had previously estimated that the number of active apprenticeship employers needs to increase to at least 12,000, however this could vary significantly depending on the employer size and the number of apprentices taken on by employers.

While employer numbers as of end 2022 may appear to be a relatively small number given the overall apprenticeship population, it is important to highlight there has been significant growth in the number of employers involved in apprenticeships in recent years. In 2014, there were only approximately 3,300 active employers following the impacts of the financial crisis, particularly on the construction sector. Figure 5 below sets out registration trends of employers in recent years, across the traditional craft sectors and the new consortia apprentices. Year on year the annual number of employer registrations has continued to grow, particularly in terms of the introduction of consortia-led apprenticeships and the recovery of the construction sector, which have grown from a 2013 low point of 83 employer registrations to 390 in 2022, a 370% increase. Overall, from a 2013 low point in annual

employer registrations of c.300 across all apprenticeships, employer registrations increased to over 1500 in 2022.

*Figure 5: Employer Registrations, 2011-2022*




## Trends in Apprenticeships – Registrations

### Annual Registrations

Overall registrations for apprenticeships have undergone a number of stages over the years.

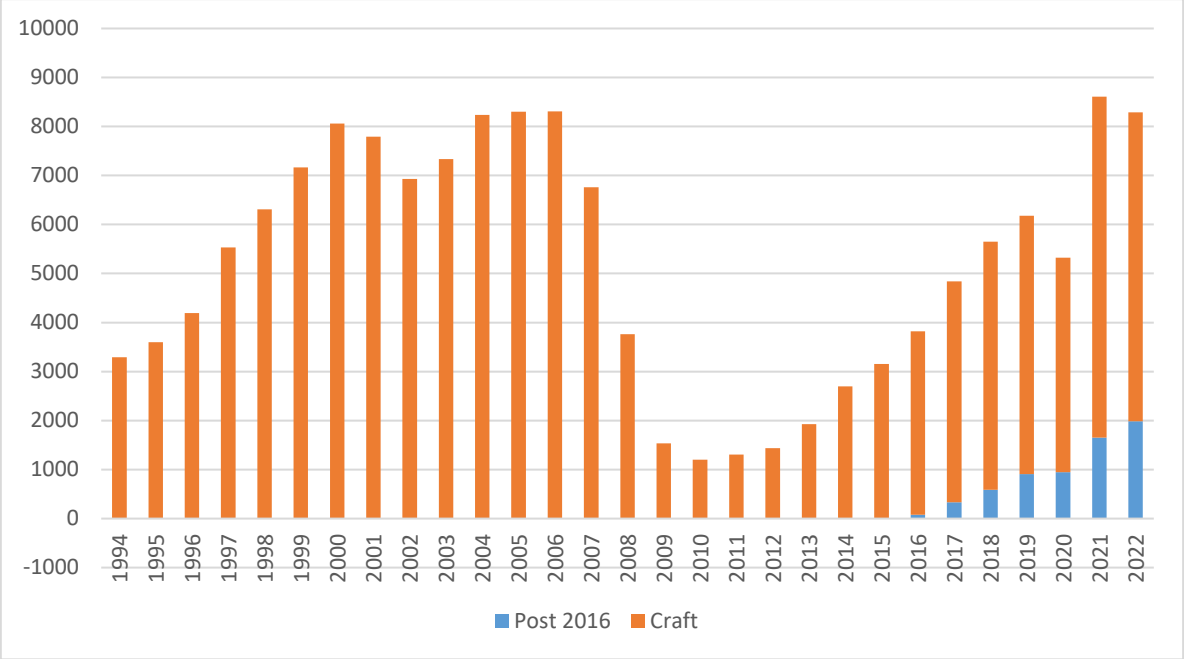
*1994-2006*

Between 1994 and 2000, apprenticeship registration numbers increased significantly from 3,290 to 8,058, an increase of approximately 145%. Average growth in registrations over the period was approximately 16% per annum, with a particular highpoint in terms of growth in 1997 where registrations grew by 32%, an increase of 1,338 from 4,193 in 1996 to 5,531 in 1997.

Following a reduction in registration numbers due to economic contraction, annual registrations fell over 2001 and 2002, reaching 6,932 in 2002 (a reduction of c.14% on 2000 levels). However, this trend reversed and by 2004, annual registrations had increased to 8239, 2.25% higher than peak 2000 levels. From 2004 to 2006, annual registrations largely stayed

at the same level with a slight increase of 77 between 2004 and 2006. Overall registrations peaked in 2006 at 8,306 registrations.

*Figure 6: Trend in Apprenticeship Registrations 1994-2022*




*2007-2010*

Following the financial crisis and its impacts, particularly in relation to the construction sector which was heavily represented in the apprenticeship population, apprenticeship registration numbers fell significantly year on year between 2007 and 2010 from 2006 levels. Registrations reached a low point of 1,204 registrations in 2010, an 85.5% decrease on 2006 levels. From 2007 to 2010, apprenticeship registrations fell by an average of 36% per annum.

*2011-Present*

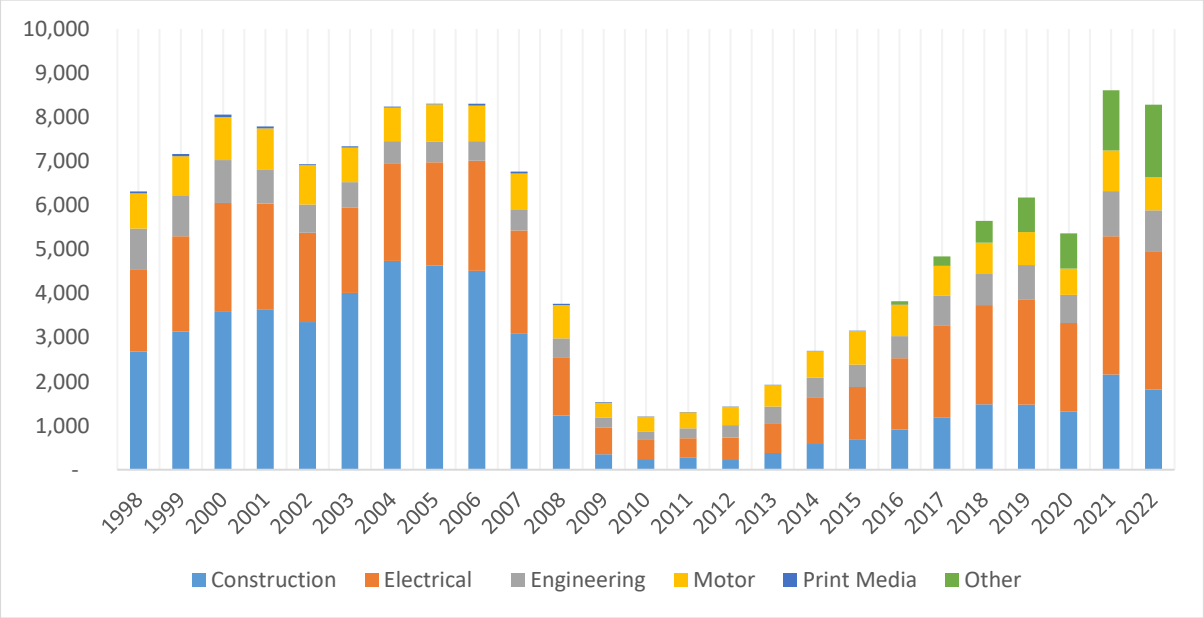
Following this low-point in 2010, registration figures have been recovering since 2011, and while growth in 2011 and 2012 was relatively low, figures have been steadily growing since approximately 2013 as craft apprenticeships recovered as well as the introduction of consortia apprenticeships in 2016. Between 2013 and 2019, registrations grew from 1,434 in 2012 to 6,177 in 2019, an increase of c.330% or an average annual growth of 24% per annum over the period. Following the brief dip in registrations in 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions,

annual registration figures have continued to grow and have now recovered to peak 2006 levels (8,306), and in 2021 this peak was actually surpassed with 8,607 registrations. The 2022 figure for overall registrations (8,286) represents a 34% increase on 2019 levels, a 117% increase on 2016 levels and a growth of 588% from the low point in 2010.

## Sectoral Breakdown of Registrations

A more detailed breakdown of annual registrations by sector is set out below (Figure 7). Note this breakdown groups the majority of consortia-led apprenticeships across the different sectors under the "Other category" for ease of presentation.

*Figure 7: Apprenticeship Registrations by sector, 1998-2022*




As can be seen above, the same broad trend seen in the overall registration numbers is observable in the sectoral breakdown, particularly with regard to construction and electrical apprenticeships, with a significant drop following 2006/2007 followed by subsequent recovery. Figure 8 below compares registrations for the main apprenticeship sectors in 2006/2007 to 2021/2022. As can be seen, most sectors have recovered following the financial crisis and are above previous peak levels in 2006, with the exception of construction sector apprenticeships. While there has been significant recovery following the impact of the financial crisis, registrations are still below the previous peak 2006 levels.

*Figure 8: Apprenticeship Registrations by Sector*

| Year | Construction | Electrical | Engineering | Motor | Print Media | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2006** | 4,514 | 2,495 | 448 | 808 | 41 | - |
| **2007** | 3,100 | 2,327 | 466 | 826 | 44 | - |
| **2021** | 2,159 | 3,141 | 1,025 | 917 | - | 1,365 |
| **2022** | 1,820 | 3,123 | 946 | 752 | - | 1,645 |

However, it is important to highlight that apprenticeship registrations in the construction sector are not considered in isolation when considering the skills supply for construction .If this trend in construction is examined in terms of the more broader and more applicable "construction and construction related" category, which is across several sectors, it can be seen that while construction related apprenticeship registrations are in line with 2007 levels, the numbers are still below 2006 peak levels, particularly areas such as Plumbing and Carpentry/Joinery.

*Figure 9: Comparison of Construction/Construction Related Apprenticeships*[4]

| Construction/ Construction Related Apprenticeships | 2006 | 2007 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Brick and Stonelaying** | 473 | 247 | 148 | 72 |
| **Cabinetmaking** | 207 | 154 | | |
| **Carpentry and Joinery** | 1907 | 1350 | 847 | 713 |
| **Floor & Wall Tiling** | 32 | 43 | | |
| **GEO Driller** | - | - | 7 | 8 |
| **Painting and Decorating** | 161 | 112 | 43 | 23 |
| **Plastering** | 220 | 143 | 38 | 31 |
| **Plumbing** | 1500 | 1038 | 875 | 792 |
| **Scaffolding** | - | - | 37 | 29 |
| **Stonecutting and Stonemasonry** | - | - | 9 | 8 |
| **Wood Machining** | 14 | 13 | | |
| **Wood Manufacturing and Finishing** | - | - | 155 | 144 |
| **Electrical** | 2269 | 2057 | 2748 | 2648 |
| **Construction Plant fitting** | - | - | 81 | 73 |
| **Refrigeration and Air Conditioning** | | | 142 | 152 |
| **Metal Fabrication** | 198 | 190 | 340 | 252 |
| **Sheet Metalworking** | 46 | 51 | 63 | 42 |
| **Engineering Services Management** | | | 34 | 22 |
| **Equipment Systems Engineer** | | | 6 | 5 |

[4] Note some of these construction apprenticeships have either been discontinued or merged with other apprenticeships since 2006/2007.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Auctioneering and Property Services** | | | **138** | **140** |
| **Electrical Instrumentation** | 46 | 56 | 103 | 120 |
| **Electronic Security Systems** | | 12 | 61 | 86 |
| **Industrial Electrical Engineer** | | | 20 | 42 |
| **Instrumentation** | | | 12 | 13 |
| **Industrial Insulation** | | 7 | 22 | 16 |
| **Pipefitting** | | | 98 | 114 |
| **Polymer Processing Technology** | | | 14 | 17 |
| **Principal Engineer** | | | 8 | 4 |
| **Toolmaking** | 33 | 15 | 52 | 48 |
| **Wind Turbine Maintenance Technician** | | | | 14 |
| **Total** | **7106** | **5488** | **6101** | **5628** |

*Context for 2006 Figures*

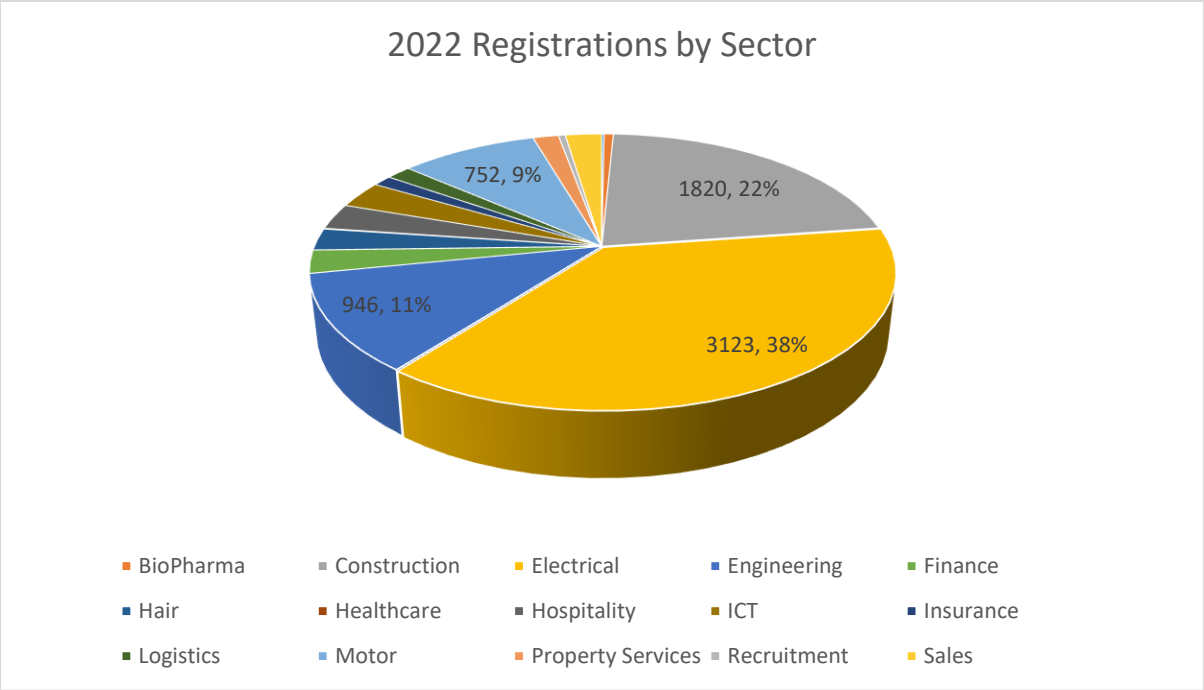
Potential explanations for this difference relative to other sectors include the heavy reliance of the Irish economy on the Irish construction sector and an unsustainable overheated property market in 2006, including the heavy impact of the financial crisis on the sector. For context, McQuinn and Smyth (2010) note an average of 75,000 houses per annum being built in Ireland between 2002 and 2007, two and a half times less than in the UK over the same period, which had 14 times the population of Ireland which was clearly unsustainable.

It is also important to highlight that changes in the nature of the construction sector including the shift towards modern methods of construction (MMC) and greater off-site manufacturing have also likely contributed to a lower demand for certain construction apprenticeships. In addition, the greater diversification of apprenticeship offerings since 2006/2007 means that a prospective apprentice has a greater choice in the apprenticeship they pursue. However, overall numbers must still be considered in the context and demands of Government priorities such as Housing for All and the Climate Action Plan.

## 2022 in Focus

The below pie chart (Figure 10) sets out a breakdown of the 2022 Apprenticeship Registrations (8,268) by sector, as the most recent full year available at the time of analysis.

*Figure 10: 2022 Registrations by Sector*




As can be seen in the above, the four largest apprenticeship groups (Engineering, Construction, Electrical and Motor), which are primarily craft apprenticeships account for approximately 80% of total registrations in 2022. The remainder of registrations are accounted for by new apprenticeships across a range of areas as detailed above, with the most substantive registrations on consortia-led apprenticeships being in the areas of Hospitality and Food, ICT and Finance. This breakdown is consistent with registration trends in recent years. As per Figure 11 below, over the last 4 years, the sectors of Engineering, Construction, Electrical and Motor have consistently accounted for the majority of apprenticeship, albeit that they have decreased slightly as consortia apprenticeships have grown and expanded into new sectors.

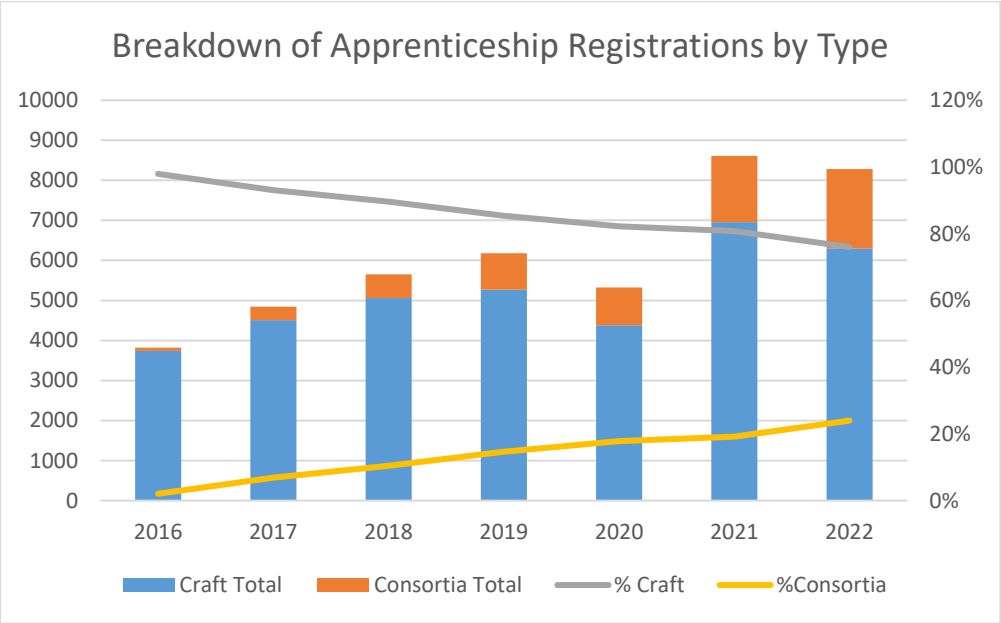
*Figure 11: Sectoral breakdown of Apprenticeships, 2019-2022*

| Year | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Construction | 23.94% | 24.77% | 25.08% | 21.96% |
| Electrical | 38.66% | 37.76% | 36.49% | 37.69% |
| Engineering | 12.53% | 12.05% | 11.91% | 11.42% |
| Motor | 12.14% | 11.10% | 10.65% | 9.08% |
| **% of total** | **87.28%** | **85.67%** | **84.14%** | **80.15%** |
| **Overall Total** | **6177** | **5326** | **8607** | **8286** |

## Registrations by Apprenticeship Type

The below graph (Figure 12) sets out annual registrations by Apprenticeship Type since the launch of consortia-led apprenticeships in 2016.

*Figure 12: Apprenticeship Registrations by type*




Over this period, craft apprenticeships have grown strongly and continue to account for the majority of apprenticeships, increasing by an average of 11.6% per annum with some dips in registrations in 2020 due to Covid-19 lockdowns and 2022 due to the high craft registrations the previous year. The 2022 figure of 6,299 craft registrations represents a 68% increase on 2016 levels (3,724) and approximately 76% of total registrations in 2022.

By comparison, consortia-led apprenticeships have been slow to grow, staying below 1,000 registrations until 2021, and it has only been since then that there has been a significant growth in consortia numbers. This growth coincides with Covid-19 measures introduced to incentivise individuals to take up apprenticeships as well as the introduction of the Employer Apprenticeship Grant in 2022. In 2022, there were 1,987 consortia-led apprenticeship registrations, an increase of 20.3% from the 2021 level (1,652), and more than doubling of 2020 levels (949), representing approximately 24% of total registrations in 2022.

While the current Action Plan does not set out targets for consortia-led apprenticeships, the previous action plan did include such targets/forecasts. As can be seen from the below table (Figure 13), these targets were missed by a substantive margin. While initially, registration figures were generally in line with targets, with there being only a 4% variance between

forecasts and outturn, year on year the gap between forecasts and outturn widened with 2020 forecasts being missed by 72%. While, as stated previously, numbers have grown significantly since 2021, total registrations on craft apprenticeships for 2022 are still below targets/forecasts set for 2019 in the previous Action Plan.

*Figure 13: Consortia Apprenticeship Targets vs Outturn*

| Year | Forecast/Target | Outturn | Difference | Variance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2016** | 82 | 79 | 3 | 4% |
| **2017** | 800 | 335 | 465 | 58% |
| **2018** | 1500 | 590 | 910 | 61% |
| **2019** | 2297 | 906 | 1391 | 61% |
| **2020** | 3413 | 949 | 2464 | 72% |

## Apprenticeship backlogs

However, while overall population figures are trending towards 2007 levels, it should be noted that there are existing backlogs within the apprenticeship system in relation to craft apprenticeships. This is in large part driven by closures of training centres due to Covid-19 as well as increasing demand. Craft apprenticeship programmes are demand-led – there are no restrictions on the number of apprentices that can be registered in any single year.

Continued demand and interest in apprenticeship and a strong construction sector has resulted in a backlog of craft apprentices waiting to access their phase 2 off-the-job training (out of a 7 phase craft apprenticeship programme) which is primarily delivered in ETB centres.

Following analysis in July 2023 which indicated that delays in training for craft apprentices were rising substantially, a plan was developed to eliminate craft training delays, led by National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) and SOLAS and overseen by D/FHERIS. The NAO, with SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority have worked with Education and Training Boards and Higher Education Institutions to increase capacity for phase 2 craft apprenticeship training significantly.

The rapid implementation of the response has resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of apprentices waiting 6 months or longer for their off-the-job training; reduced from 5,252 in August 2023 to 3,460 at the end of March 2024. Final year apprentices continue to

be fast tracked to complete their qualification and apprentices continue to be supported in order of those waiting longest.

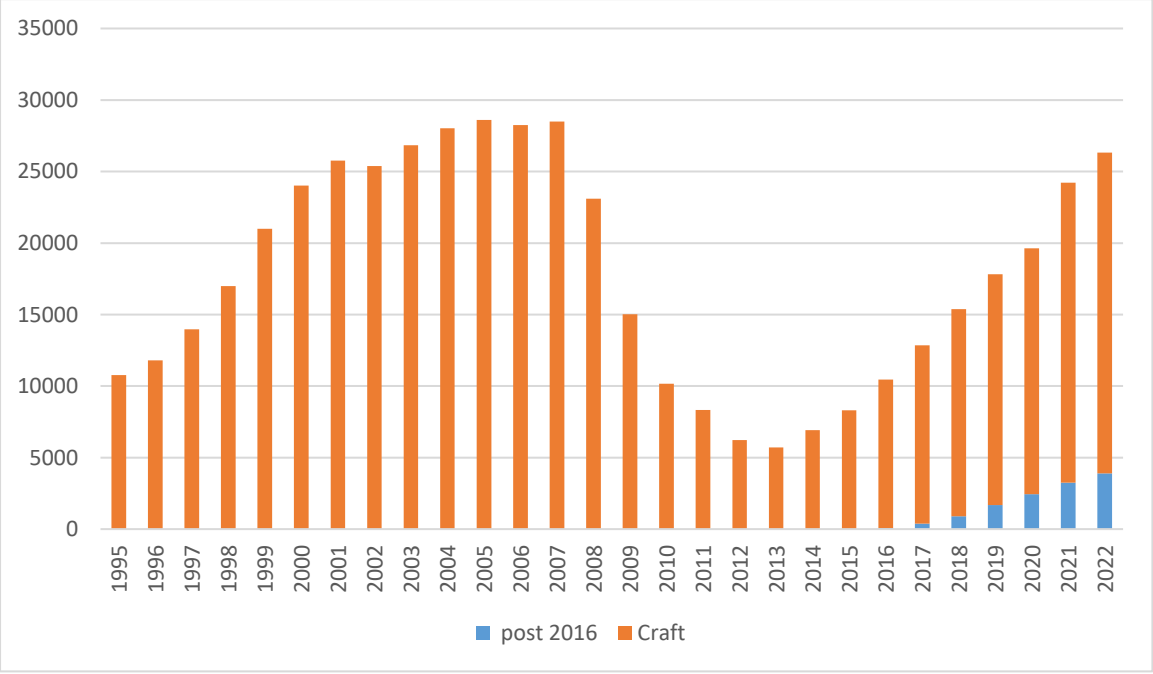
However, there are challenges remaining. As mentioned previously, the National Apprenticeship Office are leading a national recruitment campaign to address a lack of apprenticeship instructors in the Education and Training Boards in the context of buoyant labour market conditions.

## Trends in Apprenticeships – Population

### Overall Population

The overall apprenticeship population trend largely follows a similar trend as registrations, albeit with a slight lag following registrations. Following a period of sustained growth in the 90's/early 2000's in which a highpoint of 28,500 was reached in 2007, there was period of significant reduction following the financial crisis, particularly from 2008 to 2010. Between 2008 and 2013, the apprenticeship population reduced by an average of 24% per annum, reaching a low point of 5,711 in 2013, a reduction of 80% on 2007 levels.

Figure 14: Apprenticeship Population, 1995-2022

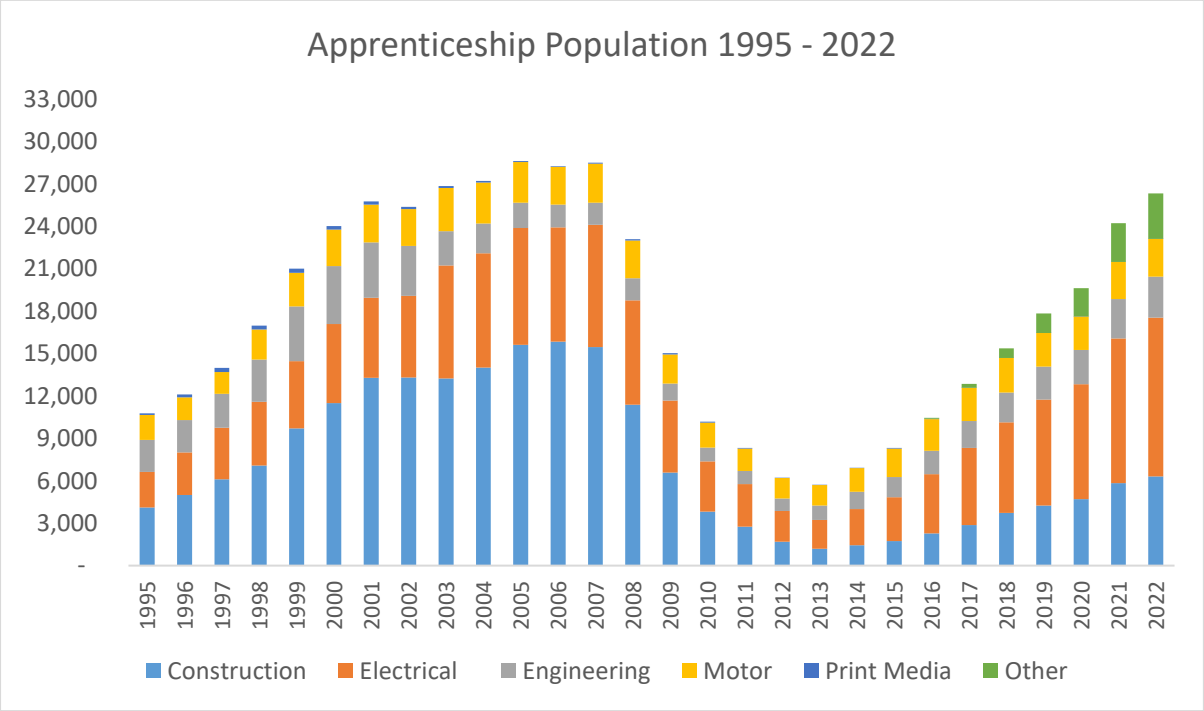



Since this low point, numbers have been steadily growing at an average rate of 18.6% per annum as the system has recovered, and in 2022 the total apprenticeship population totalled to 26,325, approximately 2,000 below peak 2007 levels. Of these apprentices, just under

3,900 (15%) in 2022 are consortia apprenticeships, a substantive increase from the 79 consortia apprentices when they were first launched in 2016.

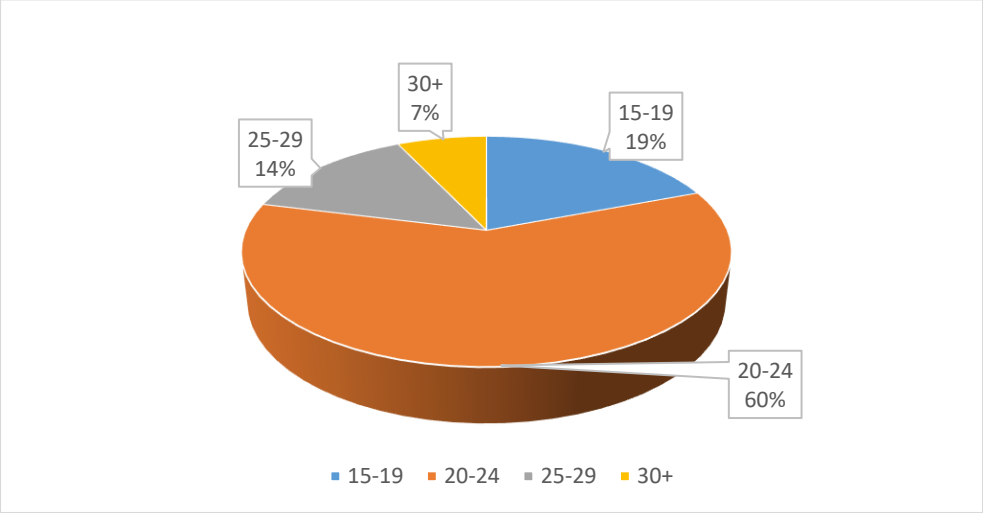
A more detailed sectoral breakdown of the apprenticeship population is set out below, which again largely mirrors the trend in apprenticeship registrations with a significant drop following 2006/2007, particularly in the Construction and Electrical sector, followed by subsequent recovery from approximately 2013 onwards. Similar to registrations, despite a strong recovery in recent years, the overall population for construction sector apprentices is still below previous peak levels in 2006.

*Figure 15: Sectoral Breakdown of Apprentice Population 1995-2022*



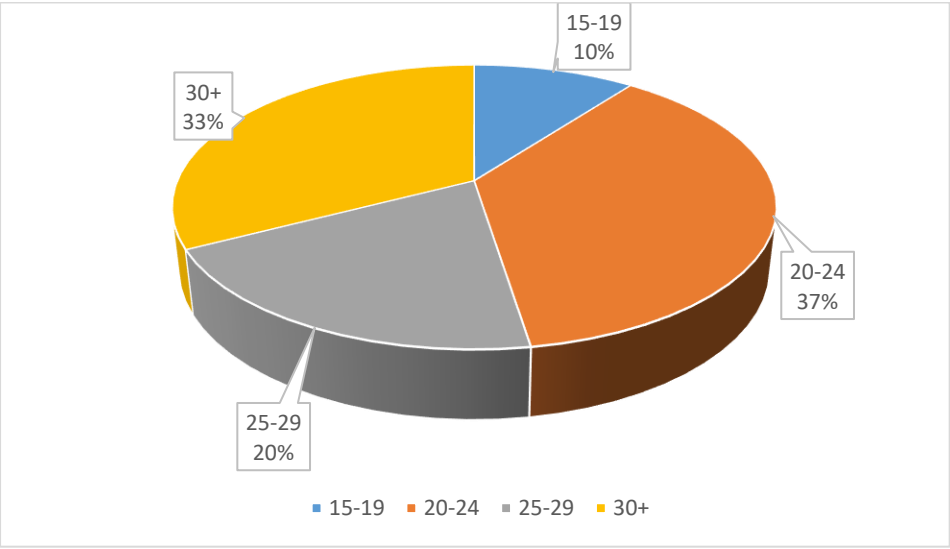
## Age Profile of Apprenticeships[5]

*Figure 16: Age Breakdown of Craft Apprentice Population*




Traditionally the apprentice population has had a relatively young demographic**,** reflecting that an apprenticeship is one of the primary choices for school leavers. Figure 16 above sets out the age breakdown of the current craft population, and as can be seen nearly 80% of the craft apprenticeship population is 24 years old or under. The share represented by those over 24 is relatively minor, particularly in the 30+ age bracket, which is 7%.

*Figure 17: Age Breakdown of Consortia Apprentice Population*

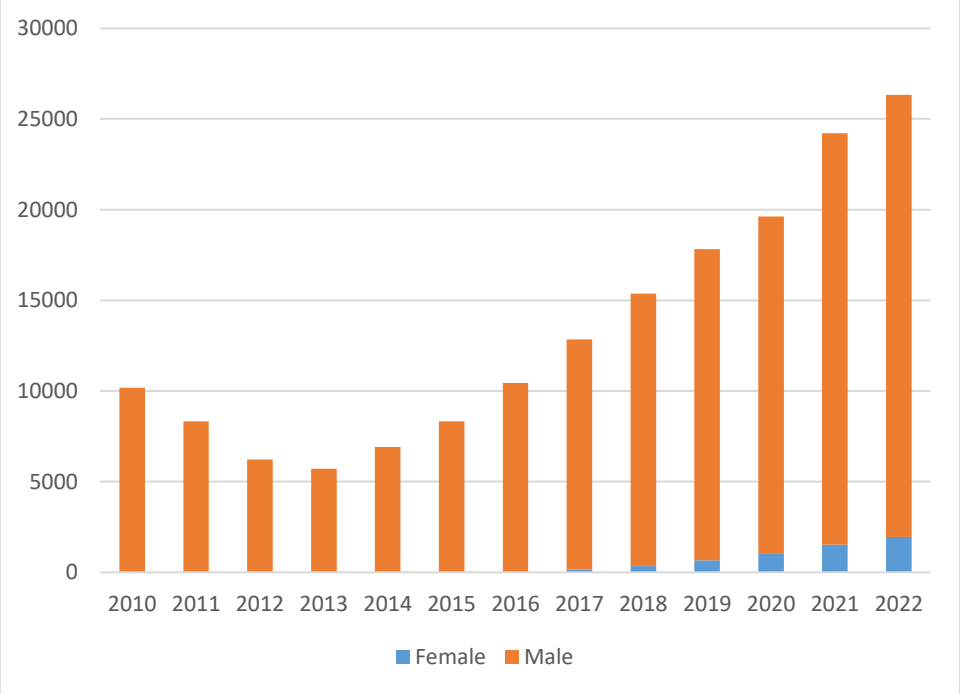



[5] Note January 2024 data is utilised here as opposed to 2022 data used in the majority of the paper. This is due to the design of the current apprenticeship data systems which can make the extraction of some historical, granular data relatively cumbersome.

Interestingly however, if the current consortia population is observed (Figure 17 above) it can be seen that there is a more even distribution across the age brackets. While those below 24 continue to account for a significant portion of the population, 53% of the consortia population are over 24, including approximately 33% of the population being over the age of 30. Perhaps reflective of the nature of these apprenticeships and the sectors in which they operate, the new consortia-led apprenticeships appear to be more attractive to older age cohorts relative to craft, which is relevant in the overall context of the skills agenda and activation for the labour market.

## Gender Balance

*Figure 18: Breakdown of Apprenticeships by Gender*

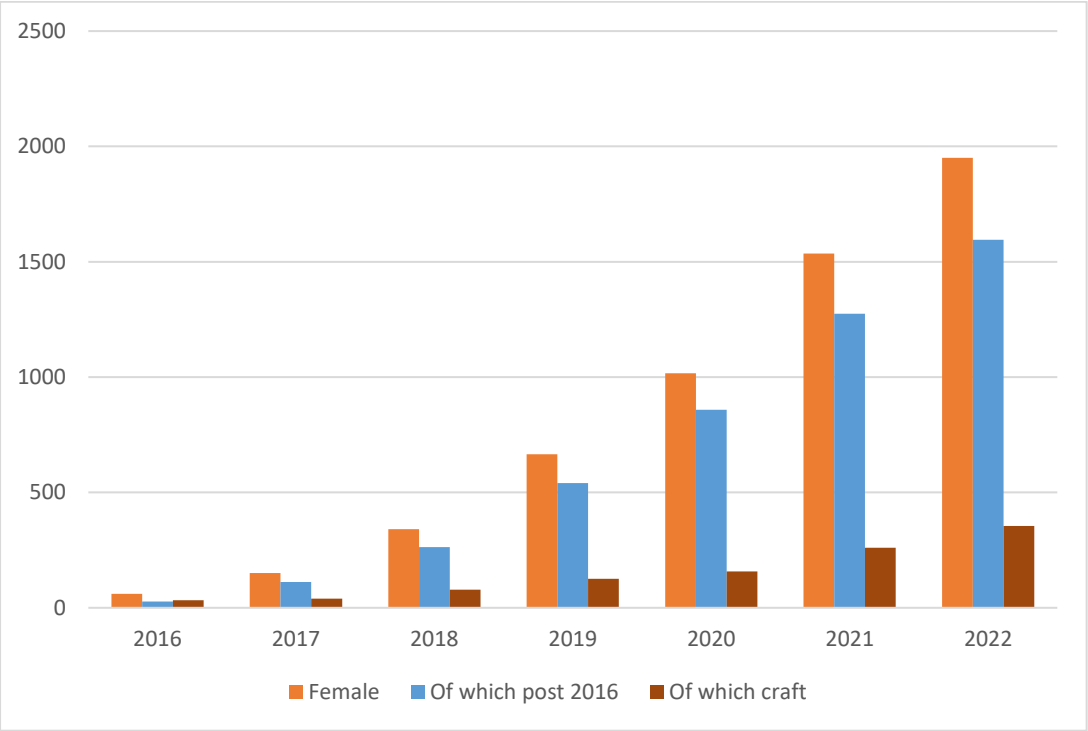



For many years, the number of females undertaking apprenticeships was negligible. In 2010, of the 10,171 apprentices in Ireland, there were only 44 female apprentices which represented 0.43% of the entire apprenticeship population. Prior to the introduction of consortia-led apprenticeships, there were 26 females participating in apprenticeships 2015, approximately 0.3% of the total population at the time (8317).

Female participation in apprenticeships has been growly steadily in recent years as demonstrated in Figure 18 above. From 2015-2018, female apprenticeship grew by an average of 136% per annum, from 26 to 341, while from 2019-2022, average growth of 56%

per annum has increased the female apprentice population to 1950. The 2022 figure of 1,950 female apprentices represents c. 7.4% of the entire apprenticeship population and a 7400% increase on 2015.

*Figure 19: Female Participation in Apprenticeships 2016-2022*



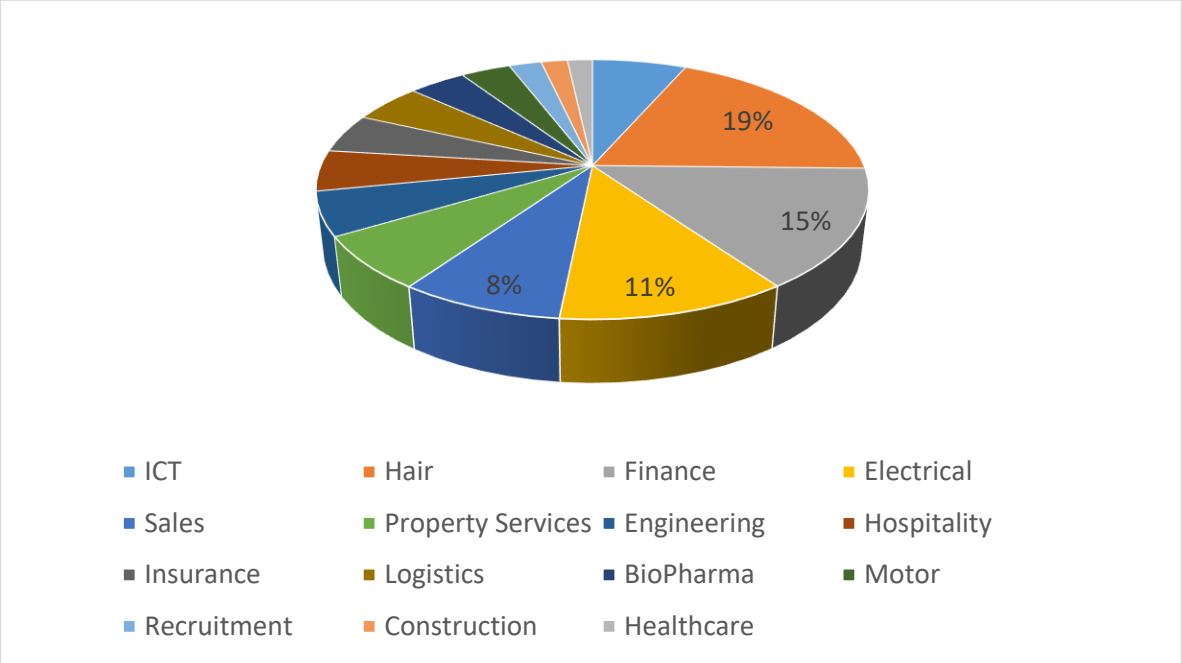

However, it should be noted that the majority of this growth is attributable to post-2016 consortia-led apprenticeships. Of the 1,950 female apprenticeships population in 2022, 1596 are consortia-led apprenticeships, while only 354 are on craft apprenticeships. (The majority of which are in Electrical Apprenticeships (219), followed by Motor (68), Construction (36) and Engineering (31).

While this 354 figure for females completing craft apprenticeships represents a significant increase from 2010 female craft apprenticeship levels, in the context of the overall craft population, this figure is still very low, representing only 1.6% of the total craft population in 2022 of 22,429. By comparison, the female consortia-led apprenticeship population (1,596) represents approximately 41% of the total consortia-led apprenticeship population in 2022 (3896).

Figure 20 below breaks down the female apprentice population in terms of the areas female apprentices are undertaking apprenticeships. As can be seen, the most popular apprenticeships appear to be Hairdressing (366), followed by Finance (290), Electrical (222)

and Sales (158), which together account for approximately 53% of the female apprenticeship population in 2022. Construction and Engineering, two of the biggest apprenticeship groups in terms of the overall population, only account for approximately 7% of the female apprenticeship population combined.

*Figure 20: Female Apprenticeship Population Breakdown by Sector*




There have been further efforts to improve gender representation within the apprenticeship population through financial support. The gender-based bursary is available to employers who employ apprentices on any national apprenticeship programme with greater than 80% representation of a single gender.

Apprenticeship employers are eligible to receive a €2,666 bursary for each registered apprentice from the minority gender, effective from 01 January 2022. The bursary to eligible employers will be paid in two instalments. €1,333 is payable following completion of 6 months training by the apprentice(s). The second payment of €1,333 is payable following completion of 18 months training by the apprentice(s).

Based upon end 2022 population statistics, this would cover female apprentices on 41 active apprenticeships (30 of which are in Construction/Engineering/Electrical) whilst also simultaneously being available to males on 1 apprenticeship (Hairdressing).

## Summary of Key Findings

- **Apprenticeship Numbers:** Following the impact of the financial crisis on the apprenticeship system, the system has recovered strongly in recent years, which is reflected in the overall number of apprentices and the increased level of funding to the system. While overall figures are approaching peak levels, construction/ construction related apprenticeships are still below previous peak levels in 2006 despite strong growth in recent years. This is a challenge in terms of the delivery of Government priorities such as Housing for All and the Climate Action Plan.

- **Consortia Apprenticeships:** Growth in the new consortia apprenticeships has been slow, with the targets set under the previous Apprenticeship Action Plan still to be exceeded. However, the strong growth in consortia registrations since Covid would suggest an increasing interest in these type of apprenticeships.

- **Age:** Reflecting its role as a significant option for school leavers, the age profile the craft apprenticeship population is relatively young with the majority (80%) under 24 years of age. However, the profile of the consortia apprentice is more evenly distributed, with a significant proportion over 30 years of age. This age profile should be considered in the context of the skills agenda and labour market activation.

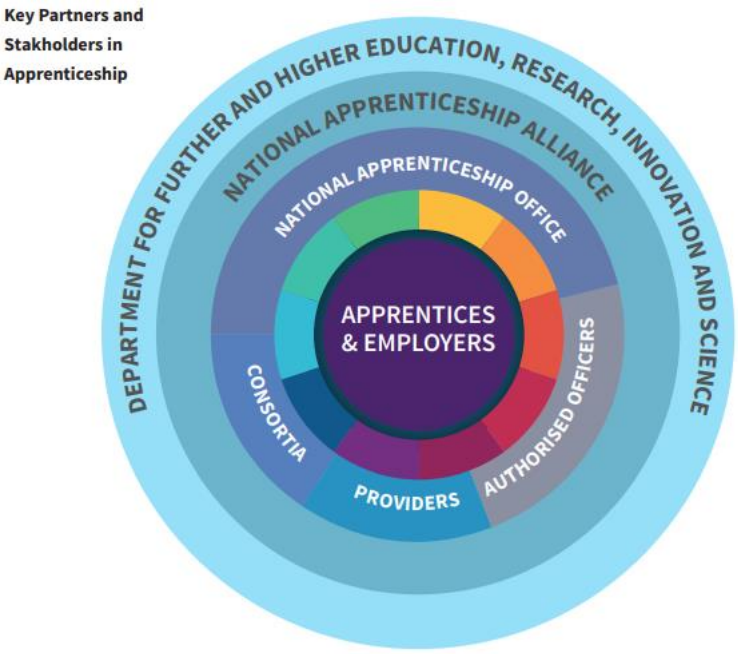
- **Gender:** There have been increased numbers of females undertaking apprenticeship, however the majority of these increases have been accounted for by the new consortia apprenticeships. While there have been increases in the number of females deciding to undertake craft apprenticeships, relative to the overall craft apprenticeship population, the number is still negligible and further progress is needed in this area.

- **Employers:** As of end 2022, there were just under 9,000 employers involved in apprenticeships. Year on year the annual number of employer registrations has continued to grow, particularly with the introduction of consortia-led apprenticeships and the recovery of the construction sector, which has grown from a 2013 low point of 83 employer registrations to 390 in 2022.

- **Apprenticeship Backlog:** In large part driven by closures of training centres due to Covid-19 as well as increasing demand for apprenticeships, there are existing backlogs in the system for apprentices to access off the job training, particularly Phase 2. However, following significant work led by the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) and SOLAS and overseen by D/FHERIS, numbers on the waiting list have improved, reducing from 5,252 in August 2023 to 3,460 at the end of March 2024.

# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Overview of the Apprenticeship Ecosystem




## Appendix 2: Available Apprenticeships by Registrations as of end 2022

| Apprenticeship | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | Duration (Years) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ARBORICULTURE** | | | | | |
| Arboriculture | 0 | 3 | 31 | 13 | 2 |
| **Total** | **0** | **3** | **31** | **13** | |
| **BIOPHARMA** | | | | | |
| Laboratory Analyst | 21 | 18 | 18 | 14 | 3 |
| Laboratory Technician | 10 | 12 | 10 | 37 | 2 |
| **Total** | **31** | **30** | **28** | **51** | |
| **CONSTRUCTION** | | | | | |
| Brick & Stonelaying | 80 | 56 | 148 | 72 | 4 |
| Carpentry & Joinery | 597 | 563 | 847 | 713 | 4 |
| Geo Driller | 2 | 18 | 7 | 8 | 3 |
| Painting & Decorating | 31 | 24 | 43 | 23 | 4 |
| Plastering | 36 | 20 | 38 | 31 | 4 |
| Plumbing | 628 | 560 | 875 | 792 | 4 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scaffolding | 0 | 0 | 37 | 29 | 2 |
| Stonecutting & Stonemasonry | 3 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 4 |
| Wood Manufacturing & Finishing | 102 | 75 | 155 | 144 | 4 |
| **Total** | **1479** | **1319** | **2159** | **1820** | |
| **ELECTRICAL** | | | | | |
| Aircraft Mechanics | 72 | 50 | 55 | 62 | 4 |
| Electrical | 1949 | 1740 | 2748 | 2648 | 4 |
| Electrical Instrumentation | 125 | 62 | 103 | 120 | 4 |
| Electronic Security Systems | 76 | 45 | 61 | 86 | 4 |
| Industrial Electrical Engineer | 28 | 30 | 20 | 42 | 2 |
| Instrumentation | 16 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 4 |
| Refrigeration & Air Conditioning | 122 | 73 | 142 | 152 | 4 |
| **Total** | **2388** | **2011** | **3141** | **3123** | |
| **ENGINEERING** | | | | | |
| Engineering Services Management | 10 | 17 | 34 | 22 | 2 |
| Equipment Systems Engineer | 0 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 2 |
| Farriery | 5 | 0 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| Industrial Insulation | 20 | 23 | 22 | 16 | 4 |
| Lean Sigma Manager | 0 | 39 | 52 | 43 | 2 |
| M.A.M.F | 199 | 142 | 221 | 203 | 4 |
| Manufacturing Engineer (Level 7) | 27 | 20 | 53 | 48 | 3 |
| Manufacturing Technology (Level 6) | 29 | 30 | 42 | 90 | 2 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Metal Fabrication | 266 | 198 | 340 | 252 | 4 |
| OEM Engineer | 11 | 16 | 14 | 20 | 3 |
| Pipefitting | 76 | 52 | 98 | 114 | 4 |
| Polymer Processing Technology | 13 | 11 | 14 | 17 | 3 |
| Principal Engineer | 0 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 4 |
| Sheet Metalworking | 57 | 41 | 63 | 42 | 4 |
| Toolmaking | 61 | 48 | 52 | 48 | 4 |
| Wind Turbine Maintenance Technician | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 3 |
| **Total** | **774** | **642** | **1025** | **946** | |
| **FINANCE** | | | | | |
| Accounting Technician | 124 | 96 | 163 | 170 | 2 |
| International Financial Services Associate | 9 | 17 | 16 | 34 | 2 |
| International Financial Services Specialist | 12 | 18 | 23 | 21 | 2 |
| **Total** | **145** | **131** | **202** | **225** | |
| **HAIR** | | | | | |
| Hairdressing | 14 | 84 | 182 | 213 | 3 |
| **Total** | **14** | **84** | **182** | **213** | |
| **HEALTHCARE** | | | | | |
| Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner | **0** | **0** | **68** | 7 | 2 |
| **Total** | **0** | **0** | **68** | **7** | |
| **HOSPITALITY & FOOD** | | | | | |
| Bar Manager | 0 | 0 | 0 | 115 | 3 |
| Butcher | 37 | 10 | 51 | 27 | 2 |
| Chef de Partie | 40 | 5 | 35 | 9 | 4 |
| Commis Chef | 62 | 16 | 75 | 102 | 2 |
| Sous Chef | 5 | 3 | 11 | 1 | 2 |
| **Total** | **144** | **34** | **172** | **254** | |

| ICT | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CGI Technical Artist | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Cybersecurity | 13 | 30 | 6 | 53 | 2 |
| Cybersecurity Practitioner | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| Network Engineer Associate | 44 | 22 | 11 | 33 | 2 |
| Software Developer Associate | 66 | 42 | 53 | 148 | 2 |
| Telecommunications & Data Network | 50 | 31 | 37 | 29 | 2 |
| **Total** | **180** | **125** | **107** | **265** | |
| **INSURANCE** | | | | | |
| Insurance Practitioner | 70 | 49 | 75 | 105 | 3 |
| **Total** | **70** | **49** | **75** | **105** | |
| **LOGISTICS** | | | | | |
| Logistics Associate | 34 | 53 | 74 | 79 | 2 |
| Supply Chain Associate | 0 | 0 | 13 | 15 | 3 |
| Supply Chain Manager | 0 | 11 | 36 | 6 | 2 |
| Supply Chain Specialist | 0 | 10 | 22 | 15 | 2 |
| Transport Operations and Commercial Driving | 0 | 0 | 0 | 21 | 2 |
| **Total** | **34** | **74** | **145** | **136** | |
| **MOTOR** | | | | | |
| Agricultural Mechanics | 44 | 52 | 90 | 58 | 4 |
| Construction Plant Fitting | 73 | 63 | 81 | 73 | 4 |
| Heavy Vehicle Mechanics | 174 | 135 | 194 | 162 | 4 |
| Motor Mechanics | 408 | 310 | 502 | 431 | 4 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vehicle Body Repairs | 51 | 31 | 50 | 28 | 4 |
| **Total** | **750** | **591** | **917** | **752** | |
| **PROPERTY SERVICES** | | | | | |
| Auctioneering & Property Services | 92 | 75 | 138 | 140 | 2 |
| **Total** | **92** | **75** | **138** | **140** | |
| **RECRUITMENT** | | | | | |
| Recruitment Executive | **0** | **27** | **24** | 37 | 3 |
| **Total** | **0** | **27** | **24** | **37** | |
| **SALES** | | | | | |
| Retail Supervision | 76 | 101 | 142 | 161 | 2 |
| Sales | 0 | 30 | 51 | 38 | 2 |
| **Total** | **76** | **131** | **193** | **199** | |
| **Overall Total** | **6177** | **5326** | **8607** | **8286** | |

*Source: National Apprenticeship Office, 2022*

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