

2.3 Scope and range of these guidelines - to whom do they apply

These guidelines focus on the quality assurance of apprenticeship programmes and related services through the lens of providers (relevant or linked).

The guidelines contained in this document apply directly to relevant or linked **providers** involved (or prospective relevant or linked providers to be involved) with any apprenticeship programme. Through these, the guidelines apply indirectly to others involved in the provision of apprenticeship programmes.

The concepts in the guidelines apply equally to 'new' apprenticeships and to established apprenticeships, while recognising their different stages of development.

2.3.1 Assumed characteristics of apprenticeship programmes

Apprenticeship programmes, within the scope of these guidelines, will share the following characteristics:

- a) The Programme will prepare the participant for a specific occupation for which an **Occupational Profile** (to be defined later) has been established.
- b) Access to the programme is via a contract of apprenticeship between an **approved employer of apprentices** and the apprentice.
- c) The programme will lead to a professional award at an NFQ level, between Level 5 and Level 9 inclusive, that is aligned with the **QQI Professional Award-Type Descriptor** for that level⁵ and consistent with the approved **Occupational Profile**. QQI may issue a separate set of guidelines that will cover apprenticeship programmes developed at NFQ Level 10.
- d) The programme is a blended combination of on-the-job (employer-based) training and off-the-job training with an education/training provider.
- e) For a programme to be classified as an apprenticeship at entry level, it must have a duration of no less than two years.
- f) The structure of the programme will provide for more than 50% workplace-based learning.
- g) It is assumed here that apprenticeship programmes will be restricted to occupations approved by the State for inclusion in the list of apprentice occupations and there will be **one programme** (nationally) per occupational profile.

⁵ QQI Professional award-type descriptors (award class: Professional) for the Alignment of Professional Awards http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Professional_Award-types_PS3_2014.pdf.

2.3.2 Regulation of apprenticeship

All statutory apprenticeships are regulated by the Industrial Training Act 1967. The QA procedures established by providers must be consistent with these regulatory arrangements. Providers must also adhere to any conditions imposed by the Apprenticeship Council or the relevant funding bodies.

2.3.3 Range of guidelines

There are stages in the development, delivery, review and cessation of all programmes of education and training. The apprenticeship stages of particular relevance to programme validation and quality assurance are:

- a) **Stage 1:** Approval of an occupational profile. For additional apprenticeships this role will be fulfilled by the Apprenticeship Council.
- b) **Stage 2:** Development of a detailed apprenticeship programme for the purpose of seeking validation of the programme leading to an award at a specified level in the NFQ.
- c) **Stage 3:** Validation of the apprenticeship programme for an award in the NFQ. The awarding body satisfies itself as to the fitness of the proposed programme in light of the award sought.
- d) **Stage 4:** Provision of the apprenticeship programme and assessment of learners' achievements.
- e) **Stage 5:** Continual reviews and periodic revalidation of the programme.

A new apprenticeship will have to go through the first three stages before it can be offered to prospective apprentices. Established apprenticeship programmes are already at Stages 4 and 5.

This document provides guidelines to providers on those stages concerning the development, validation, provision, periodic review, revalidation and continual quality assurance of apprenticeship programmes i.e. Stages 2 to 5 inclusive only. It is for the Apprenticeship Council to give guidance on Stage 1.

These quality assurance guidelines are intended to help providers ensure that the establishment, provision, maintenance and review of apprenticeships all contribute to the formation of excellent apprentices whose competence is attuned to the needs of employers in Ireland and to their own further personal, educational and continued professional development.

QQI requires that the established apprenticeship programmes and providers transit to quality assurance procedures consistent with those outlined in these guidelines, as soon as practicable.