

2 **CONTEXT, SCOPE, ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES**

2.1 **Context**

These guidelines apply to all statutory apprenticeship programmes governed by the Industrial Training Act 1967. Under this Act, the further education and training authority, SOLAS, has a range of statutory responsibilities; including the designation of statutory apprenticeships via Industrial Training Orders.

The Department of Education and Skills commissioned a review of apprenticeship in 2013. A report, *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland*, was subsequently published in December of that year. Following this, an Apprenticeship Council was launched on

18 November 2014 on an interim basis. The Apprenticeship Council³ is tasked with the expansion of apprenticeship across a range of qualification levels into new sectors of the economy, leading to the ‘new’ apprenticeships referred to in the preceding paragraph.

The *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland* report made recommendations for apprenticeship as follows:⁴

“Apprenticeship is a programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the work place with learning in an education or training centre, (a dual system, i.e. a blended combination of on-the-job employer-based training and off-the-job training) whose completion:

- *prepares the participant for a specific occupation, and*
- *leads to a qualification nationally recognised under the National Framework of Qualifications at any level from Level 5 upwards.*

Every apprentice should be employed under an approved Contract of Apprenticeship for the duration of training.

Apprenticeship training should be substantial in depth and duration, and the apprentice should be employed in a real job. For a programme to be classified as an apprenticeship at entry level, it should have a duration of no less than two years. The structure of the programme should provide for more than 50% workplace-based learning.

Graduates of apprenticeship programmes should be qualified to work autonomously in a competent, professional and independent capacity in their selected field.

Apprenticeships should be open to persons of all age groups above the statutory school leaving age. They are a valued mode of learning both for initial entrants to the labour market and for those who wish to continue upskilling. Apprenticeships must prepare the participant for a new job role.

2.2 Apprenticeship stakeholders and partnerships

The reference to stakeholders relevant to the development of an apprenticeship programme include:

- a) Prospective employers of apprentices
- b) Practitioners in the occupation concerned
- c) Providers of education and training services
- d) Occupational associations
- e) Occupational regulators
- f) State organisations responsible for funding and regulating apprenticeships

³ <http://www.apprenticeshipcouncil.ie/faq.aspx>

⁴ Department of Education and Skills (2013) *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland, Dublin Executive Summary, Section 1 p7*, <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Review-of-Apprenticeship-Training-in-Ireland.pdf>

- g) Consortia established to develop apprenticeships
- h) And, not least, the prospective apprentices themselves

2.2.1 Primary stakeholder roles in the provision of apprenticeship programmes

Within the broader stakeholder groups, some stakeholders will hold primary roles in the provision of **apprenticeship programmes**.

- 1) Employers of apprentices
- 2) The Coordinating Provider
- 3) Collaborating providers including off-the-job providers
- 4) Apprentices

The Coordinating Provider role can be fulfilled by a **relevant or linked provider** (as defined in section 2 of the 2012 Act).

A Coordinating Provider will be an entity for whom education and training is a primary function though not necessarily its only function.

External to, and supportive of, these primary partners are a variety of other entities, with distinctive roles and with which the primary partners will interact.

These guidelines seek to lay out, in clear terms, the fundamental relationships between these four primary roles. These relationships are necessary to form the foundation for development, maintenance and provision of stable apprenticeship programmes leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. These guidelines will include an outline of structures considered necessary for the stable implementation of both new and existing apprenticeship programmes.

2.2.2 Stakeholders involved in ensuring the apprenticeship programme meets the requirements of the occupation

It is essential that the apprenticeship programme is led by, conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation. The provider of the apprenticeship programme has a responsibility to ensure this but those requirements are determined by entities such as: employers, occupational associations, and any occupational regulators that may not be directly involved in the provision.

In principle, it is possible for the key stakeholders in a particular occupation to form an entity that could become a Coordinating Provider. This arrangement is likely to be atypical. Where the provider of an apprenticeship programme does not comprise all the key stakeholders, the Coordinating Provider will need to find other ways to maintain close links with those key stakeholders (2.3) to ensure that the apprenticeship programme meets the requirements of the occupation.

There are different ways in which this might be accomplished. One tenable

approach is outlined within this guideline as an indicative example (Appendix 2). This involves the establishment of a **Consortium Steering Group** (CSG) whose membership and functions are set out in Appendix 2.

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.