

3 GUIDELINES: DEVELOPMENT STAGES

3.1 QQI QA guidelines

The focus of the apprenticeship guidelines is to provide a clear framework for quality assurance of apprenticeship programmes leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications, at system, provider and employer levels.

The QA guidelines are addressed, under the 2012 Act, to relevant and linked providers (and prospective relevant and linked providers) of apprenticeship programmes.

3.2 Partners for apprentice formation

As stated earlier, there are four primary partner roles involved in any apprenticeship programme, all of which are likely to be represented in any consortium established to propose and develop an apprenticeship. These are:

- Employers of apprentices
- The Coordinating Provider
- Collaborating providers who may or may not be relevant providers, including off-the-job education and training providers and other providers
- Apprentices

To avoid doubt and assist those most directly involved in programme development and provision, it is useful to explain some of the terms used in these guidelines to ensure that all stakeholders interpret them in the same way.

- **An Employer of Apprentices** should be taken to mean any contractual employer of apprentices that has been approved by the statutory regulator for apprenticeship. Where the term “employer” or “enterprise” is used, it should be taken (where the context requires) to have the same meaning for the purpose of the guidelines.
- **The Statutory Regulator** is responsible for fulfilling those functions assigned to it under the 1967 Industrial Training Act or its successors. This role is statutorily assigned to SOLAS. This role is distinct from SOLAS’s role as a provider of apprenticeships or as funder of apprenticeships. The statutory regulator appoints authorised officers who carry out activities on its behalf.
- **A Consortium** is a group, normally led by employers and including providers, involved in the development and provision of an apprenticeship programme.
- **A Provider** is a person (an entity with legal personality) who provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.
- **A Coordinating Provider** is a relevant or linked provider who is ultimately responsible for providing (as defined by the 2012 Act) an apprenticeship programme. Among its responsibilities are the development and maintenance of the curriculum and assessment procedures for the programme and leading the collaborating providers involved. To act as a Coordinating Provider for an

apprenticeship programme, the entity must be a **relevant or linked provider** under the 2012 Act. This means, among other things, that it must be a legal entity and the provision of education and training must be one of its principal functions. If an entity is not already a relevant provider, it may become one through a QQI process.

- A **collaborating provider** is a provider who is formally involved in the provision of an apprenticeship programme and accountable in this respect to the Coordinating Provider.
- An **“off-the-job-provider”** is a collaborating provider involved in an apprenticeship programme with a responsibility for off-the-job education or training. It may be the Coordinating Provider, but if it is not, it is expected to be accountable to the Coordinating Provider for delivery of those elements of the programme within its control.
- A **Relevant Provider** is as defined in section 2(1) of the 2012 Act.
- A **Linked Provider** is as defined in section 2(3) of the 2012 Act.
- A **Programme Board** is as defined in section 3.7.6 (during development) and in section 4 (following development).
- An **Initial Consortium Steering Group** is as defined in section 3.7.
- A **Consortium Steering Group** is a governing entity that might be usefully constructed and established (as envisaged in Appendix 2) and whose role would be to ensure that the apprenticeship 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.
- **Funding Bodies** for apprenticeship are SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). One or both of these bodies will fund each apprenticeship programme in accordance with terms and conditions that they determine.

3.3 Awards, programmes and curricula

- An **Apprenticeship Awarding Body** is a legal entity which has the power to make **apprenticeship awards** that are recognised within the NFQ or another kind of awarding body with a joint awarding arrangement to make apprenticeship awards with such an entity. The awarding body may or may not be a provider.
- An **Award** means an award, including a joint award, for education or training, or both, made by an awarding body or in the case of a joint award, by two or more awarding bodies, to a learner to record or certify that the learner has acquired a particular standard of knowledge, skill or competence; it includes (a) a certificate, (b) a diploma, (c) a degree. The **apprenticeship award** made, following successful completion of an apprenticeship programme, is expected to be placed on the NFQ and to be consistent with (i) the occupational profile, (ii) the applicable NFQ professional award-type descriptor in conjunction with (iii) any other applicable award-type descriptor (e.g. a descriptor for an honours bachelor degree).

- **A Programme of Education and Training** is a process by which a learner acquires knowledge, skill or competence and that includes a course of study, a course of instruction and an apprenticeship.
- **A Validated Programme:** A programme of education and training is validated where QQI confirms, under section 45 of the 2012 Act, that the provider of the programme has satisfied it that an enrolled learner of that provider who completes that programme will acquire, and where appropriate, be able to demonstrate, the necessary knowledge, skill or competence to justify an award being offered in respect of that programme. Other awarding bodies have similar procedures for the approval of programmes and so the term ‘validated programme’ is also used in these contexts.
- **A Provider’s Validated Programme:** validation as defined above applies to a provider’s programme rather than to a programme in isolation from a provider. A validated programme is not transferrable from one provider to another. However, a programme may be validated for provision by an expandable group of providers meeting criteria approved at the point of validation and accountable to the Coordinating Provider.
- **A Validated Apprenticeship Programme** means a validated programme based on a curriculum developed and maintained by a **Coordinating Provider**. There would be only one apprenticeship programme per apprenticeship occupation and only one validation process conducted either by the Coordinating Provider (possibly jointly with other awarding bodies) or by QQI (possibly jointly) on application from the Coordinating Provider or a Designated Awarding Body (possibly jointly) where the Coordinating Provider is a Linked Provider.

3.4 Occupation approval phase

The State has determined that proposed new occupations should seek formal State approval. Of necessity, progress towards such approval requires a team. These teams can be described as the **Initial Consortium Steering Groups or ICSGs**.

3.5 Access to QQI validation

A Coordinating Provider who cannot make awards that are recognised within the framework will need to apply to QQI to have the programme validated or, if a Linked Provider, to the relevant Designated Awarding Body.

Certain prerequisites must be in place before a provider may apply to QQI for validation. These are set out in “*Policy and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards*”⁶ and further details are available on QQI’s website. The establishment of QA procedures is one of the requirements for access and the applicable guidelines include the Core QA Guidelines and the QA Guidelines for Apprenticeship Programmes (as set out in this document).

⁶ http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf

3.6 The organisation of the guideline sections

The guidelines below are organised in broad sections as follows:

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| 3.7 | <u>Guidelines to the pre-validation programme development stage</u> |
| 3.7.1 | The organisational structure necessary to make a proposal for validation |
| 3.7.2 | Prior to appointment of the Coordinating Provider |
| 3.7.3 | The operational role of the Coordinating Provider |
| 3.7.4 | Technical and market assessment |
| 3.7.5 | The occupational profile and its application |
| 3.7.6 | Establishment of a programme board |
| 3.7.7 | A systematic consultation process |
| 3.7.8 | A systematic programme development approach |
| 3.7.9 | Programme design for quality of on-the-job training |
| 3.7.10 | Education and training quality within off-the-job phases |
| 3.7.11 | Progression pathways |
| 3.7.12 | Brand image, occupation and award naming |