4.2 Programme provision

QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines apply to providers' procedures for the provision of apprenticeship programmes.

4.2.1 Programme development and approval

Programmes have two broad purposes. They should ensure that at the conclusion of the programme, the qualified apprentice is fully qualified to perform the full range of activities and responsibilities outlined in the Occupational Profile. Those qualified should also have the skills to continue their learning as the occupation changes throughout their career. This requires the achievement of the **intended programme learning outcomes** and includes the ability to learn effectively. Policies and procedures for programme design and approval should ensure that programmes:

- are designed with overall programme objectives and outcomes that are aligned with industry requirements and encompass the range of skills, competencies and knowledge;

- are aligned with the QQI **Professional Award-Type Descriptors** of the National Framework of Qualifications;

- are designed jointly by the Coordinating Provider and employers as a partnership;

- are designed to allow for national recruitment and for the smooth flow of apprentices between enterprises and educational institutions;

- are designed to facilitate professional and regulatory licensing, where applicable;

- are designed to facilitate transnational movement within an occupation, where feasible;

- are designed recognising the duality of the apprentice as employee and trainee;

- include well structured 'off-the-job' periods that integrate and strengthen the 'on-the-job' experience; and

- have a range of learning experiences to facilitate the further occupational development of the qualified apprentice.

4.2.2 Apprentice recruitment, progression and recognition

Apprentice recruitment has a double purpose. The apprentice is employed to work for the enterprise. They are also being selected for a programme of training which may define their occupational status and career paths. Recruitment processes must ensure that the apprentice is likely to remain with the employer for the duration of the training, to fit in with the organisation and to have the capacity and temperament required for the occupation.

Where existing employees, whose prior learning is significantly less than the peer group, are being proposed for registration, any learning gaps should be identified and appropriate support offered.

In addition to the guidance provided by QQI Core Quality Assurance Guidelines (CQAG), procedures for apprenticeship admission, progression and recognition, should also include:

- mechanisms to ensure the continued suitability of the apprentice to the training programme and the employment regime;

- mechanisms to recognise particular aptitude for the occupation that may compensate for lack of formal prior qualifications;

- provision of supportive access programmes to address specific skill or competency deficiencies where apprentices meet the eligibility requirement but lack qualifications which are normal for their group;

- socialisation procedures to establish the status of the apprentice within the enterprise and among their peers in the community of practice;

- tools to track apprentices as they progress through the programme;

- appropriate recognition procedures including any occupational certification to facilitate employment and career mobility.

4.2.3 Programme monitoring and review

An apprenticeship programme is delivered within both the enterprises and occupations for which they are in preparation, and by the off-the-job training/ educational providers. Apprenticeship programme monitoring must ensure that the learning opportunities allow the apprentice to reach the objectives of the programme in both arenas.

4.2.3.1 Ongoing monitoring and reviewing of delivery

One particular aspect of apprenticeship programmes is that multiple providers and possibly multiple sites are involved. This requires that each element (e.g. stage or phase) dovetails with the following element (stage or phase). This will require processes to ensure that each provider has full information on the ongoing learning achievements of the apprentices. The contribution of authorised officers acting on behalf of the statutory regulator is another important component in this regard.

Monitoring should also utilise the rich connections between practices and programmes to ensure continuing fitness for purpose. In addition to the general requirements of CQAG, monitoring should:

- ensure that the experience of each individual apprentice fulfils the requirements of the programme by monitoring and recording work-based activity and the corresponding achievement towards programme goals and that these are available to subsequent providers;

- ensure that the delivery of on-the-job and off-the-job elements at multiple sites are, as far as possible, equivalent—this would prevent excessive spread of activities with a consequent loss of focus and quality;

- ensure that there are no excessive delays in progression by apprentices to off-the-job elements;

- allow for changing techniques and technologies as they come into practice;

- establish clear lines of responsibility for apprentice (learner) observation and supervision; and

- provide secure and timely feedback processes for apprentices, employers and providers.

The provider of 'on-the-job' elements (the employer) is responsible for apprentice direction, observation and supervision. The off-the-job provider is responsible for the off-the-job educational and training elements of the programme. The Coordinating Provider is responsible for oversight of both of these. This should be specified formally in the programme management proposals and overseen by the Coordinating Provider and evaluated by the Programme Board.

4.2.3.2 Addressing deficiencies in delivery

Deficiencies in delivery of on-the-job experiences occur when employers have different sets of regular activities that may not always cover all of the learning experiences required by a programme. This can be avoided or minimised by rigorous vetting procedures applied by the statutory regulator, in consultation with the Coordinating Provider, when employers are admitted to the programme. Where an employer's business does not provide some elements of training:

- A formal arrangement with another employer should be made to address this deficiency in advance of the commencement of the apprenticeship.

It is also the case that some experiences may not be available at the appropriate time for individual apprentices due to changing business circumstances. In this case, employers or/and co-ordinating providers should:

- replace the experience with one that achieves the same outcome; or

- arrange for the apprentice to gain the experience with another suitable employer; or

- allow for sufficient flexibility in the taught elements to compensate for some deficiencies in the 'on-the-job' experience of particular apprentices.

4.2.3.3 Addressing disruption in apprenticeship

Disruptions to an apprentice's engagement in an apprenticeship programme can take place for a variety of reasons. These include a possible breakdown, where there is a breakdown in the relationship between the apprentice and the employer; where the apprentice has a justifiable complaint that he or she is not receiving adequate training; where, for personal reasons, an apprentice must leave an employer; or where an apprentice becomes redundant. In these circumstances, the statutory regulator, in conjunction with the Coordinating Provider, will endeavour to provide alternative accommodation for the apprentice. Solutions in this regard may include:

- placing the apprentice with another suitable employer;

- providing the apprentice with a complete record of his/her learning to date;

- facilitating and supporting the transfer of apprentices between employers where this is necessary.

4.2.4 Staffing

4.2.4.1 Staffing in the employer's enterprise

While it is recognised that apprentice training is not the primary purpose of an enterprise, it may form a key component of strategic manpower planning for the employer. However, if an enterprise wishes to train apprentices, some consideration of appropriate staffing is necessary. In particular, participating enterprises, in complying with the statutory regulator and in accordance with effective quality assurance measures, should be required to designate staff who:

- manage the recruitment and initial orientation of apprentices;

- have sufficient professional expertise and authority to allow for mentoring of apprentices;

- have mentoring training;

- act as liaison with the off-the-job providers in delivering the programme;

- have an agreed set of responsibilities with respect to apprentices;

- have, where appropriate, the skills necessary to assess apprentice progress and to confirm the achievement of learning outcomes;

- are the designated reporting contact to the Coordinating Provider;

- consider establishing benchmark trainer/apprentice ratios.

4.2.4.2 *Staffing in the educational/training institution*

Within the educational institutions, the staffing arrangements should conform to the requirements of CQAG. In addition to their normal institutional activities, staff allocated to apprentice training duties should:

- have opportunities to relate to professional practice and, where appropriate, remain registered practitioners;

- be conversant with the 'on-the-job' experience of the apprentices and capable of actively integrating that experience into their teaching;

- liaise with employers and apprentices.

4.2.5 Teaching and learning

4.2.5.1 *Teaching and learning – supporting the individual learner*

In addition to the requirements of CQAG, it should be recognised that for much of the time, many apprentices progress through an individual sequence of learning experiences without the company of a cohort of peers. Where necessary, employers should ensure that the deficiency in peer support is made up by mentoring. The Coordinating Provider and the employer should ensure that:

- detailed information is provided to the apprentice on the sequence of learning actions;

- individualised support is provided to the apprentice especially in the early stages of the programme;

- detailed instruction is given to the apprentice on how they can demonstrate learning achievement;

- systems should also be evolved to allow and require apprentice feedback on the progress of their training to the appropriate provider.

4.2.5.2 Teaching and learning - maintaining the community of practice

The **community of practice** is an element of apprentice training that is critical to the successful formation of a professional in any arena. The generally accepted behaviour of peers will strongly influence the performance of apprentices. Besides technical know-how, the community of practice passes on the values and culture associated with an occupation. They can also act as unofficial or designated mentors for the apprentice. The community of practice not only extends within the enterprise, but also beyond it, as a recognised occupational community. Providers should be mindful that the quality of the community of practice must be maintained by:

- ensuring that the apprentice is recognised as a member of the community of practice;

- giving the apprentice access to his/her peers and other members of the community of practice in the enterprise;

- facilitating informal learning and socialisation between community members;

- ensuring access to broader community and occupational learning resources;

- providing mentoring to the apprentice by an experienced practitioner;

- valuing, in the workplace, the experience of learning.

4.2.5.3 Teaching and learning - ensuring equivalence of provision

Apprentice programmes will have a minimum of two locations, an enterprise and a provider of off-the-job education or training (normally an educational/training institution). In most cases, it will involve many enterprises and possibly multiple educational/training institutions. Where the structures of programme provision are complex, problems of equivalence and maintenance of quality can arise. These problems can be inherent, depending on the variable capabilities of providers. They can also arise on account of changing resources or opportunities available to the apprentice. Varying levels of competence or commitment within the peer group may also affect the 'on-the-job' experience.

To counteract this, the Coordinating Provider, in conjunction with the statutory regulator, must ensure that there are procedures in place to:

- check the facilities in enterprises and educational institutions;

- monitor the progress of the apprentices;

- facilitate the transfer of apprentices for particular experiences;

- support the training of workplace mentors;

- ensure that diagnostic assessment is available before the end of a particular phase of training—where the apprentice has failed to achieve the outcomes within the workplace, they should be apprised of the fact and, as far as possible, given the opportunity to achieve the specified outcome;

- provide mechanisms by which trainers and mentors in different organisations can exchange experiences and develop and recognise best practice;

- establish MOAs or MOUs with each collaborating provider to facilitate the above.

4.2.5.4 *Teaching and learning - maintaining the curriculum*

Apprenticeship programmes, by their nature, are delivered within the context of the **target occupation**. Changes within enterprises occur more rapidly and out of phase with changes within academic institutions. These changes may be driven by large-scale market changes. They may also arise owing to technological advances, changing techniques and best practices. Organisational changes can affect the envelope of occupational responsibilities and finally regulatory changes may require the acquisition of new knowledge, skill or competency. Some of these factors may be local to a particular enterprise.

The nature of an apprenticeship is that the qualified apprentice, on graduating, is immediately capable of performing all of the activities required by the occupation. This should happen without the necessity of further learning. Programme design and management must be responsive enough to allow for changes in the Occupational Profile to be included in the curriculum, where appropriate. This should be achieved without the necessity of rewriting full documentation or requiring a new validation. To achieve this, it will be necessary that:

- programme documentation (i.e. what is approved at validation) is not overly detailed and unduly prescriptive, with an emphasis on outcomes and educational and assessment strategy rather than detailed elaboration of learning materials;

- staff are empowered to consider the most appropriate way of achieving outcomes and varying content accordingly;

- assessment and examinations may change between curriculum reviews to reflect updated work practices and content;

- the Coordinating Provider or the Programme Board has the competence or the facility to monitor changes in the occupation; this might, for example, be facilitated through the formal involvement of a Consortium Steering Group with the functions set out in Appendix 2;

- mechanisms are put in place to disseminate innovations in the curriculum;

- there are regular meetings of the Programme Board to prevent too wide a disparity in experience arising.