



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

WHITE PAPER

Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Apprenticeship

FOR CONSULTATION

This White Paper contains proposed topic-specific statutory quality assurance guidelines for use in the development, quality assurance and enhancement of programmes where provision is intended to be available to learners through apprenticeship formation.

QQI is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the proposed policy contained in this White Paper.

Submissions may be emailed to
consultation@QQI.ie

The closing date for submissions
is **Monday 15 February 2016**.

In your submission please clearly indicate:

1. *Your contact details.*
 2. *Whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.*
 3. *If you do not wish your submission to be published.*
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

This document is issued under Section 27(1a) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (the 2012 Act)¹.

These statutory topic-specific guidelines need to be read in conjunction with the Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. While the Core QA guidelines provide the majority of the quality assurance guidance required, these topic-specific guidelines add to the core by addressing the more specific requirements for Apprenticeship Programmes.

1.2 PURPOSE

This document offers specialised guidance to providers on good practice in the quality assurance of programmes for apprentice education and training and related services. The guidance concentrates on broad principles of effective practice.

Providers will have regard to the guidelines in this document to inform the establishment or renewal of their quality assurance procedures for apprenticeship programmes and related services.

This document is intended for use by all providers required to have regard to QQI statutory Guidelines who wish to offer Apprenticeship Programmes. It will be of interest to the wider group of apprenticeship stakeholders including all those directly involved in the education or training of apprentices, employers of apprentices, employers' associations, professional bodies, regulatory bodies, trade unions, communities of practice, apprentices, teachers and other interested parties.

¹ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/print>

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 CONTEXT

The Irish Government has formally reviewed training and education through apprenticeship in the State and decided to expand the apprenticeship mode of training to all NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications) levels above Level 4 and to widen the range of **occupations** (characterised by an **Occupational Profile** to be defined later) where training is by apprenticeship. New apprenticeships would be for occupations identified by employers as being necessary for workforce development and for a stable and effective labour market. In the broad national education landscape, this aims to create an accessible additional pathway to excellence in education and training achievement, and generate an additional competent skilled mobile cohort in the workforce, and help raise Ireland's competitiveness internationally.

2.2 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMMES

The national Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland, established by the Minister for Education and Skills, published its report in January 2014 and made recommendations for apprenticeship as follows:²

“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*

² 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>

- » *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 up skilling. Apprenticeships must prepare the participant for a new job role.”

The key defining characteristic of apprenticeship is the contractual relationship between an employer and an apprentice employee committing both to a period of training of the apprentice leading to a professional award (i.e. a profession-oriented award) recognised within the NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications).

2.3 APPRENTICE FORMATION PARTNERSHIPS

2.3.1 Reference Stakeholders

In general there are several stakeholders who form reference groups relevant to the development of an apprenticeship programme. Examples of these groups are:

- a) Prospective employers of apprentices
- b) Practitioners in the occupation/profession concerned
- c) Providers of education and training services
- d) Occupational/professional associations
- e) Occupational/professional regulators
- f) State organisations responsible for funding and regulating apprenticeships
- g) And not least, the apprentices themselves

It is possible that a group of such stakeholders could form a legal entity which could also fulfil the role of **Coordinating Provider** identified in the following section and described further on in the document.

2.3.2 Primary Provision Stakeholder Roles

Within the broader stakeholder groups, some stakeholders will hold primary roles in provision of education and training (there may be secondary roles). These form the primary partners in apprentice provision.

1. The 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 an established **relevant provider** (as defined in section 2 of the 2012 Act) or by a composite organisation established for the purpose which becomes a relevant provider.

The Coordinating Provider will be an entity with education and training as a primary function though not necessarily their only function.

External to, and supportive of, these primary partners are a variety of State and private sector organisations, each with its distinctive role and with which the primary partners will interact.

This guideline will seek to lay out in clear terms the fundamental relationships between these four primary partner groups. 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. The guideline will include an outline of structures considered necessary for the stable implementation of both new and existing programmes.

2.4 SCOPE OF GUIDELINES

The guidelines focus on the quality assurance of apprenticeship programmes and related services through the lens of relevant providers as it were.

The guidelines contained in this document apply directly to **relevant providers** involved (or prospective relevant 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 (existing apprentice occupations in 2015), while recognising their different stages of development.

2.4.1 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 level³ and consistent with the approved **Occupational Profile**. QQI will separately issue a set of guidelines which 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 will have a duration of no less than two years.
- f) The structure of the programme will provide for more than 50% workplace based learning.

2.4.2 Regulation of Apprenticeship

Established apprenticeships are regulated by statute. These guidelines **assume** that new apprenticeships will also be subject to statutory regulation. Such regulation would be outside the scope of these guidelines and not a function of QQI.

It is assumed 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.

2.4.3 Range of Guidelines

There are stages in the development, delivery, review and cessation of all programmes of education and training. The stages applicable to apprenticeship programmes are:

³ 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

- a) **Stage 1:** Initiation of concept and proposal of an occupation, up to receipt of State approval to develop the occupation. It is assumed that an **Occupational Profile** will be approved at this stage.
- 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 on the NFQ.
- c) **Stage 3:** Validation approval of the Programme for an award on the NFQ. The awarding body adjudicates on the fitness of the proposed programme in light of the award sought.
- d) **Stage 4:** Provision of the 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 3 stages (the programme must be validated) before it can be offered to employers and prospective apprentices. Established apprenticeship programmes are already at Stages 4 and 5.

This guidance document gives advice 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 a matter for the State authorities, who would approve inclusion of a new occupation in the list of apprentice occupations, to give guidance on Stage 1 requirements.

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.

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, in the National Framework of Qualifications, at the system, provider and employer levels.

The QA guidelines are addressed, under the 2012 Act, to **relevant providers** (and prospective relevant providers) of apprenticeship programmes, specifically to the Coordinating Provider and any relevant provider who is a collaborating provider in an apprenticeship.

QQI does not have a direct quality assurance relationship with other kinds of providers who may be involved, or with employers of apprentices unless the employer is also a relevant provider in the 2012 Act context. However, these other roles are subject to QA through the Coordinating Provider and relevant providers and are addressed in these guidelines, especially through the guidance for Coordinating Providers.

These apprenticeship guidelines recognise that the apprenticeship learning mode is characterised by more complex relationships than traditional college/training centre systems because of the distinctive roles of the multiple partners who contribute to the overall formation of the apprentices.

It might be useful for those less familiar with the concepts of awards, qualifications and education and training programmes to note that QQI has developed a very substantial range of policies and guidelines in relation to implementation of the 2012 Act. In addition, QQI endeavours to ensure that Irish practice is consistent with and learns from international practice in quality assurance and qualifications, for example, from the European Qualifications Framework community.

The quality assurance of programmes and making of awards for Irish apprenticeships are not isolated activities. Each award is a tile in the mosaic of all Irish awards in the NFQ which in turn is part of a greater international structure for recognition of qualifications. In this context, it is necessary for QQI to be prescriptive in its quality guidance and procedures, while giving flexibility to the way in which providers and employers of apprentices match those quality guidelines and procedures to their own particular circumstances.

3.2 PARTNERS FOR APPRENTICE FORMATION

As stated earlier, there are four primary partners involved in any apprentice occupation. These are:

- » Employers
- » 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 this guideline in the context of QQI validation of programmes, so as to ensure all stakeholders understand them with the same meaning.

- » **An Employer of Apprentices:** should be taken to mean any actual contractual employer of apprentices. Where the term “employer” or “enterprise” is used, it should be taken to have the same meaning for the purpose of the guidelines.
- » **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 provider who is ultimately responsible for 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 apprentice programme, the entity must be a Relevant Provider under the 2012 Act. This means, among other things that it must be a legal entity and must have the provision of education and training as one of its principal functions. If an entity is not already

a Relevant Provider it may become one through a QQI process. A Coordinating Provider could, for example, be a consortium of different kinds of organisations, if approved by QQI.

- » **A collaborating provider** is a provider who may be a relevant 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, then it is 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 of the 2012 Act.

3.3 AWARDS, PROGRAMMES AND CURRICULA

- » **A relevant awarding body⁴** is a legal entity which has the power to make awards. The professional award made upon completion of an apprenticeship must be recognised within the NFQ. The awarding body may or may not be a provider (for example QQI is an awarding body, but is not a provider, while Universities and IoTs are providers and awarding bodies (within certain limits). More than one awarding body may be involved in making an award.
- » **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 and includes— (a) a certificate, (b) a diploma, (c) a degree. The 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 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 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

⁴ This is not the same as a relevant designated awarding body defined in the 2012 Act. It is a term of art for these guidelines.

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.

- » **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 through a Coordinating Provider for provision by an expandable group of providers meeting criteria approved at the point of validation and accountable to the Coordinating Provider. There must be explicit procedures for adding collaborating providers.
- » **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 either by the Coordinating Provider (possibly jointly with other awarding bodies) or by QQI (possibly jointly) on application by the Coordinating Provider. A joint award may be established where multiple awarding bodies wish to be involved in making the award and the programme approved by a single validation process jointly meeting the requirements of the awarding bodies.
- » **Differential Validation:** Differential validation applies when a change in a validated programme that is substantial enough to warrant revalidation would justify the findings of the original validation process being reused. A specific example of this is where a programme designed to be provided at one location is modified to enable it to be provided at another. The modifications might, in this case, be the changed teaching staff; the changed facilities and resources; and perhaps the changed quality assurance environment.
- » **A Shared Curriculum:** A shared curriculum is one that is developed for use by two or more providers. It is that part of a provider's programme of education and training that does not depend on the specific characteristics of the provider; for example, the provider's governance, quality assurance arrangements, geographical location, staff, premises, and equipment. A shared curriculum may be used by another provider (with its owner's permission) when developing a programme of education and training. When QQI validates one provider's programme using a shared curriculum, any other provider (with permission to use that shared curriculum) need only apply for differential validation of its corresponding programme. QQI will support and encourage the practice of sharing curricula.

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 that a team of like-minded representatives coalesce to direct and make an application. To date, such teams have been known as **Consortium Steering Groups or CSGs**. Although these teams and their operations are not subject to these guidelines because they operate in the Stage 1 (initiation of concept and proposal stage), it will be useful to refer to them from time to time in this document.

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. 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*”⁵ and further details are available from QQI’s website. The establishment of QA procedures is one of the requirements for access and the applicable guidelines would include the Quality Assurance Guidelines for Apprenticeship.

3.6 THE ORGANISATION OF THE GUIDELINE SECTIONS

The guidelines below are organised in broad sections as follows:

- 3.7 Guidelines to the Pre-validation Programme Development Stage
 - 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

⁵ http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf

- 3.7.5 The Occupation 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 Matching Training Capacity to National Demand
- 3.7.12 Progression Pathways
- 3.7.13 Brand Image, Occupation and Award Naming

SECTION 4 GUIDELINES TO THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME STAGE

- 4.1 Occupational Memoranda of Agreement and Memoranda of Understanding
- 4.2 Programme Provision
 - 4.2.1 Programme development and approval
 - 4.2.2 Apprentice recruitment, progression and recognition
 - 4.2.3 Programme Monitoring and Review
 - 4.2.4 Staffing
 - 4.2.5 Teaching and Learning
- 4.3 Assessment of apprentice achievement
 - 4.3.1 General comments
 - 4.3.2 Assessing on the job
 - 4.3.3 Assessment off the job
 - 4.3.4 Final assessment of competency
 - 4.3.5 Assessing the assessment
- 4.4 Managing and maintaining quality in apprentice programmes
 - 4.4.1 Producing a quality environment
 - 4.4.2 Strategic management of quality- ensuring continued relevance and increased quality
 - 4.4.3 Programme operation - implementing quality in a dynamic environment
 - 4.4.4 Day to Day management of the programme
- 4.5 Periodic Reviews of Occupation, the Consortium and the Programme
 - 4.5.1 Purposes of periodic reviews
 - 4.5.2 Reviewing the Occupational Profile
 - 4.5.3 Reviewing the Partnerships
 - 4.5.4 Reviewing the programme
 - 4.5.5 Other reviews

SECTION 5 SUPPORTS FOR APPRENTICES

- 5.1 General issues
- 5.1 Duty of care to young apprentices
- 5.1 Integration into Off-the-Job Institutions
- 5.1 Dealing with competing responsibilities
- 5.1 Special educational and training needs or disabilities

SECTION 6 INFORMATION PROVISION

- 6.1 Management information and data
- 6.2 Public Information

3.7 GUIDELINES TO THE PRE-VALIDATION PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT STAGE

The focus in this section is on managing quality in the programme development process, which includes the responsibilities of the various partners, developing the structure of the proposed programme, the assessment process, the appeal process and rules and criteria for access, transfer, progression and for expulsion of the apprentice throughout the apprenticeship. It includes developing a continued holistic administrative and managerial relationships between the stakeholders during the programme life.

This section will provide guidance on the critical roles of the Coordinating Provider, the employers and other providers.

3.7.1 The Organisational Structure necessary to make a Proposal for Validation

The nature and complexity of relationships between the primary partners in apprenticeship formation makes it necessary that a single provider will act as a Coordinating Provider for the proposed programme. The Coordinating Provider will coordinate the activities of employers and collaborating providers among other things.

Prior to, or following, the issue of approval for a new occupation by the State authorities, the **Consortium Steering Group** (CSG) should identify the entity which is to be the Coordinating Provider.

There are two options available:

1. The Consortium Steering Group identifies, or establishes a legal entity as the Coordinating Provider that will apply to QQI for access to initial validation of programmes leading to QQI awards. This option allows for a completely new provider to be established.
2. The Consortium Steering Group identifies an existing **relevant provider** and agrees that provider as the Coordinating Provider.

3.7.2 Prior to Appointment of the Coordinating Provider

Consideration should be given to the role of the Coordinating Provider and its relationships with the partner parties.

- a) The CSG should ensure that the selection of the Coordinating Provider has the broad support of employers whom they represent.
- b) The CSG should ensure that the programme development role, and the programme validation role, of the Coordinating Provider is understood by engaged employers.
- c) The CSG should ensure that the role of management of programme delivery by the Coordinating Provider is understood by engaged employers.

3.7.3 The Operational Role of the Coordinating Provider

Following appointment, the Coordinating Provider will:

- a) Take responsibility for development of a programme proposal to go forward for validation.
- b) Establish a **Programme Board** that reports to the coordinating provider and is representative of employers and education and training advisors to advise on the programme proposal and operation.
- c) Ensure that the Programme Board consults with stakeholders in the development of the programme (see below).

- d) Require the Programme Board to develop systems that ensure that employers and labour market trends influence and lead curriculum development, while providing for learners' personal development and their preparation for progression.
- e) Ensure that the Programme Board develops in consultation and agreement with employers and other relevant stakeholders such as professional bodies, binding memoranda of understanding or memoranda of agreement which commit all parties to a process of implementation of the agreements.
- f) Develop assessment instruments that adequately support certification of achievement of learning outcomes, employ appropriate grading systems, and all necessary appeal mechanisms. The assessment systems should embrace both on- and off-the-job phases.
- g) Apply to the awarding body for validation (or validate the programme if it has the required awarding authority).
- h) Develop such administrative systems as are necessary to ensure efficient and effective management of programme provision, including tracking and managing apprentices' progress.
- i) Manage the programme during operational delivery.
- j) Develop and maintain systems for access (in collaboration with employers of apprentices), transfer, progression, and expulsion of participants, including all necessary appeal processes.
- k) Coordinate the actions of other providers of education and training, involved in curriculum development and in programme provision.
- l) Coordinate with employers to ensure (i) that recruitment of apprentices takes into account the knowledge, skill and competence requirements to have a reasonable chance to complete the programme (ii) the effective and efficient training of apprentices within the work place to reach programme learning outcomes.
- m) When the relevant occupation is regulated (whether by law or in fact) the coordinating provider consults with regulators to ensure that the criteria for access to the apprenticeship and the apprenticeship programme remain consistent with applicable regulation.
- n) Agree and implement a system with employers for evaluation and review of employer training capacity and for addressing any gaps in that capacity.
- o) Establish a system to allow orderly expansion of provision adding employers and collaborating providers of education and training.
- p) Develop a quality system to manage curriculum and assessment updates and improvements where multiple providers are involved so as to ensure that the national character of the curriculum is maintained and that the approved curriculum is implemented by all collaborating providers in accordance with the unique validated programme for the apprenticeship.

- q) Agree a system with employers for smoothing demand surges and collapses in the light of labour market forecasts

3.7.4 Technical and Market Assessment

It is essential that the apprenticeship programme be led by the current and future requirements of enterprises. To this end, the identification of employers' needs must be established through consistent thorough analysis of the market if this has not already been established adequately in Stage 1.

There should be a focus on identification of the broad enterprise sectors relevant to the new occupation through:

- a) A systematic and rigorous process for identifying the enterprise sectors, as clearly as possible, that may need, or may be supportive of, a new apprenticeship training pathway and if applicable a new occupation. This should identify the national distribution of potential employers. This will ensure that the developing programme truly represents the needs of employers nationally.
- b) A similar process should take place to identify off-the-job providers who will be partners in the development.

3.7.5 The Occupation Profile and its application

The Occupational Profile is part of the foundation on which the programme is built. It should be approved at **Stage 1**.

The Occupational Profile is expected to describe the skills, knowledge and competences that a person should have to practice autonomously in the occupation.

An informed lay reader of the Occupational Profile, for example a human resource manager, should understand the depth and range of skill, knowledge and competence specified.

The programme development should start by establishing detailed intended learning outcomes that are consistent with the Occupational Profile, these should be further refined in light of the QQI Professional Award-Type Descriptors at which point the most appropriate NFQ level should be identified. It is good practice to consult stakeholders at this stage on the intended programme learning outcomes before developing the programme.

Once the intended programme learning outcomes are established the programme can be developed.

3.7.6 Establishment of a Programme Board

The coordinating provider should establish a Programme Board.

- a) When the market segment is understood, a systematic process should be used to ensure that a representative Programme Board is formed which will represent both a technical understanding of the needs of the occupation, the employment potential and the education and training dimensions. The Programme Board should have the skills necessary to steer the apprenticeship programme development. For example, members might be prospective employers of apprentices, or practitioners in the occupation/profession concerned, providers of education and training services, occupational/ professional associations, trade unions, occupational/professional regulators and labour market analysts and such like.
- b) The Programme Board should always include persons who are representative of employers and off-the-job providers and its governance, constitution and operation should ensure an employer led development approach.
- c) There should be a system for recording discussions, decisions and outcomes of the Programme Board deliberations and a system for their timely dissemination to stakeholders where necessary.

3.7.7 A Systematic Consultation Process

The Coordinating Provider should establish a quality process to ensure that the Programme Board consults with and advises representative stakeholders, as the intended apprenticeship programme learning outcomes and programme structure are refined in light of the Occupation Profile approved at Stage 1.

The Programme Board should:

- a) Establish a system for market research and analysis including analysis of publications of manpower forecasting bodies.
- b) Establish a process which ensures that cognate programmes, either existing or capable of development, alternative to the proposed apprenticeship are considered, so that the apprenticeship programme can be situated in context. Of particular interest should be the identification of other apprenticeship programmes which may act as feeder or transfer qualifications for the programme, or which could benefit from entry to the new programme with advanced standing, learning additional skill, knowledge or competence.
- c) Establish a system to develop binding memoranda of understanding or agreement, which shall apply to all current employers and education/training agencies involved in the programme, and which shall extend, as a pre-requisite to any additional employers or education/training providers who wish to join the programme.
- d) Establish a system to ensure that the funding agencies and other appropriate state bodies are informed and consulted as required through the Coordinating Provider.

Once the programme is validated the functions of the programme board will change (see section 4) and its membership may need to be adjusted accordingly.

3.7.8 A Systematic Programme Development Approach

The Programme Board should adopt a systematic approach to developing their programme proposal, which includes:

- a) Specifying the **intended apprenticeship programme learning outcomes** and the proposed NFQ Level of the terminal award in light of the Occupational Profile.
- b) Estimating demand including regional analysis.
- c) Clear identification of the roles and responsibilities and the relationships between partners involved in the programme.
- d) Designing the most efficient structure and organisation of the programme. This includes entry standards, **block and/or day release arrangements for off-the-job training**, assessment arrangements, the use of FDL and all operational and management issues.

- e) Developing an excellent communication system with employers and collaborating providers, including processes for real-time updating of each other with the apprentice's progress.
- f) Giving consideration to efficiency in projected operational costs. For example design of release phasing could fit employer business cycles, optimising of employer provided skill training, and reduction of education/training providers skill training may reduce off-the-job capital and operational costs, and optimising group sizes may impact greatly on operational costs. Efficiency considerations, at the design stage have a very large impact on provision costs.

3.7.9 Programme Design for Quality of On-the-job training

During programme development, particular attention should be given to development of quality assurance procedures for the training within employment. The greater part of the apprentices' formation will take place with the employer and the role of the employer as trainer is crucial to the excellence of the graduate of an apprenticeship programme.

Therefore the Coordinating Provider should develop quality systems that:

- a) Establish a systematic approach to the approval of employers for inclusion in a register of approved employers of apprentices.
- b) Establish (before approval of an employer), that the range of business activity of the employer is such that the apprentice will receive instruction in a sufficient range of skills, knowledge and competences, to satisfy the learning outcomes of the curriculum (see h).
- c) Establish that the employer employs staff who are capable of imparting the training necessary to enable or help learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.
- d) Establish that the employer has a designated mentoring and supportive structure in place with trained staff capable of providing guidance and support to the apprentice throughout his/her training.
- e) Establish that the employer has an apprenticeship management and administrative structure in place capable of linking with and promptly exchanging two-way data with off-the-job providers as necessary for the holistic formation of the apprentice.
- f) This systematic approach should include review, at appropriate intervals, of the employer's capacity to continue as a trainer either at the employer's own request or based statistical evidence, or reports from apprentices, or reports from off-the-job providers on performance of apprentices from that employer.

- g) The systematic approach should establish an independent appeal procedure where employers who are refused permission to recruit, or to continue training, an apprentice may appeal such judgement.
- h) Where necessary procedures and criteria should be developed for establishment of some system of cooperative training where the training of an apprentice is shared between several employers, so that employers, with limited technical range, could employ apprentices, and ensure their holistic training by placing them for periods with other employers.
- i) Consideration might be given to criteria which would apply, where part of an apprentice's on-the-job training takes place abroad, and how this might be quality assured. This might be of particular interest to multinational employers. The Coordinating Provider and Programme Board may gain some insight from QQI guidance document Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards⁶, although not written specifically for apprentice Programmes. The European ECTS and ECVET policies may also assist.
- j) Consideration should be given to processes for dealing with disruption to an apprentices training, owing to business reduction or failure of the employer's business.

3.7.10 Education and Training Quality within Off-the-Job phases

The periods the apprentice spends with the off-the-job provider is likely to provide much of the essential theoretical and situational context for the apprentice's learning. This must be integrated with the on-the-job learning in a symbiotic virtuous relationship of reinforcing and expanding learning. Those off-the-job periods should be designed to allow the apprentice a period of peer reflection and learning within the community of their peers, comparing and learning different approaches to practice within different employers. This is particularly important for those from employers with small numbers of apprentices. Regular communication and information exchange between different off-the-job providers and between collaborating providers and employers is an important indicator of quality.

Therefore, off-the-job providers involved in the programme should develop quality systems that:

- a) Establish the differences between existing approved quality systems and those appropriate to apprenticeship and address the gaps by establishing additional QA procedures, with approval of QQI where required.

⁶ <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Policy-for-Collaborative-Programmes,-Transnational-Programmes-and-Joint-Awards.aspx>

- b) Ensure that staff are (and will continue to be) fully capable of imparting the education and training necessary to satisfy the intended programme learning outcomes. The programme itself should explicitly identify the qualifications and experience required of staff who will be responsible for the education and training in the apprenticeship programme.
- c) Ensure that there are quality systems to maintain an effective relationship between participating employers and the collaborating off-the-job providers in the matter of curriculum relevance, assessment integration, data communication and apprentice mentoring and support.
- d) Ensure that management and administrative systems can deal effectively with the organisational and communication needs of the apprenticeship programme.

3.7.11 Matching Training Capacity to National Demand

Surges and collapses in the numbers of apprentices trained have been characteristic, for many years, but became extreme during the first decade of the millennium.

It is essential that the Coordinating Provider, in consultation with all other stakeholders gives substantial consideration to the development of mechanisms to smooth recruitment to levels consistent with strategic long term labour market demand. In so doing it would be most effective if all providers of apprentice programmes, jointly considered this issue with employers and stakeholders, so that, as far as possible, the arrangements for individual programmes would form part of a national approach across all occupations, while still allowing variation for the particular circumstances of individual programmes.

- a) Consideration should be given to determining how recruitment surges and collapses might be smoothed. This might involve controlling approval to recruit an apprentice in the specialisation. It might also involve consideration of incentives to recruit apprentices in times of slack demand. Such systems should be based on best economic and manpower forecasting data for the occupation.
- b) In the event of employers not being approved to employ an apprentice, in order to smooth surges in demand, an appeal system should also be designed to allow an independent consideration of the refusal.
- c) Individual employers will inevitably experience business closure or retrenchment, which may make it impossible to retain apprentices in employment. Consideration should be given to systems which would support out-placing such redundant apprentices, or allowing them to transfer to other programmes. In any event consideration must be given to an orderly ending of the apprenticeship if all fails.

3.7.12 Progression Pathways

In developing the Programme, specific attention should be given to progression and transfer pathways. It is an essential characteristic of the programme, that it be situated within the hierarchy of NFQ programmes with arrangements for transfer both into and out of the programme. The following are among the matters to be considered:

- a) Transfer into the programme from cognate programmes, leading to awards at similar or higher NFQ levels, and the extent to which the possibility of transfer with advanced standing might apply.
- b) Progression into the programme from cognate programmes leading to awards at lower NFQ levels.
- c) Transfer or progression from the programme into cognate programmes leading to awards at similar or higher NFQ levels.

3.7.13 Brand Image, Occupation and Award Naming

The Review Report recommended that apprentice occupations should be stable long-term training programmes leading to stable occupations for the future. This was considered to be a characteristic which differentiated apprentice occupations from in-company training and from generalised education programmes.

The end result of an apprentice training should be a professional ability to work in the relevant field with autonomy.

One corollary of this approach is that the occupation, in its general sense, should have a stable long-term brand image in the public mind and the minds of employers. Examples of existing professions (apprenticeships and non-apprenticeships) which fit this concept are Electrician, Doctor, Accountant, Engineer etc. While each of these occupations has specialised employment options, the public understanding is of a generalised brand image occupation.

Keys to establishing such public understanding and stability for apprentice professions are the use of occupation titles, (which are themselves both explanatory and stable and which describe the general profession) and secondly stability of recruitment, and employment in the chosen field. This does not limit flexibility and evolution of the profession as the external environment changes with time.

In this respect the Coordinating Provider, in making a validation application (or validating) should ensure that the programme name and its associated award:

- a) Promote a stable long term occupation brand image
- b) QQI and DA award titles should conform to published QQI title criteria (see QQI Policy and Criteria for Making Awards⁷)

7 <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Policy%20and%20Criteria%20for%20Making%20Awards.pdf>

4 GUIDELINES TO THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME STAGE

4.1 OCCUPATIONAL MEMORANDA OF AGREEMENT AND MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING

Any successful collaboration of a consortium of employers and providers will require a binding agreement between the **consortium** partners. The consortium will be the sole group recognised for the training of apprentices within the occupation.

The responsibilities of the Coordinating Provider are broader than programme management and delivery as it also must arrange the monitoring of the occupation and the employers within it to ensure continued relevance and national coverage.

A sample Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is included in Appendix 1. It is possible that funding and regulatory authorities might suggest a template for a Memorandum of Agreement but if not the responsibility will devolve on the Coordinating Provider. The purpose of a Memorandum of Agreement is to enable the consortium partners to manage, deliver and develop the apprentice programme. To achieve this the Memorandum of Agreement should

- » Establish the separate responsibilities of partners and the authority to carry out these responsibilities.
- » Designate the membership of the managing **Programme Board**, its terms of reference, structure and reporting arrangements.
- » List the rights of on-going review of training and work experience and access to relevant apprentice records.
- » Describe processes by which new members of the consortium can be agreed.
- » Outline the periodic review processes and the access necessary to carry out such processes.

Besides the formal agreement it will be necessary to have memoranda of understanding between the co-ordinating provider and individual collaborating providers. These memoranda should include

- » Establish normal lines of communication between co-ordinating provider, training provider and employer, including contact details.
- » Establish protocols for the exchange of information and reports.
- » Establish protocols for the external oversight of the providers' operations.
- » Provide a mechanism for the resolution of difficulties with the programme or between providers.

4.2 PROGRAMME PROVISION

Provider procedures/guidelines for programme delivery should be compliant with QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines and also, where appropriate, the Flexible Delivery Learning and Research Degree Guidelines.

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 this 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 co-ordinating provider and employers as a partnership;
- » are designed to allow for national recruitment and for 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 enthusiastic and able existing employees, whose prior learning is significantly less than the peer group, are being proposed for registration, these learning gaps should be identified and appropriate support offered.

In addition to the QQI Core Quality Assurance Guideline (CQAG) procedures for admission, progression and recognition additional procedures should 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 professional or occupational certification to facilitate employment and career mobility.

4.2.3 Programme Monitoring and Review

An apprentice programme is delivered both within the enterprises and occupations, for which they are a preparation, and within off-the-job training/educational providers. Apprentice programme monitoring must ensure that the learning opportunities allows 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 apprentice programmes is that multiple providers and possibly multiple sites are involved. This requires that each element (e.g. stage or phase) dovetails with or into 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.

Monitoring should also utilise the rich connections between practices and programme 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;
- » provide secure and timely feedback processes for apprentices, employers and providers.

The provider of 'on the job' periods is responsible for apprentice direction, observation and supervision. The off the job provider is responsible for the training elements of the programme. The co-ordinating provider is responsible for oversight of both these periods. This should be specified formally in the programme management proposals and overseen by the co-ordinating provider and evaluated by the programme committee.

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 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

Where there is a breakdown in the relationship between apprentice and employer or when the apprentice has a justifiable complaint that they are not receiving adequate training or where for

personal reasons an apprentice must leave an employer or where an apprentice becomes redundant the Programme Board

- » will endeavour to place the apprentice with another suitable employer
- » will provide the apprentice with a complete record of his/her learning to date
- » will facilitate and support the transfer of apprentices between employers where this is necessary

Where general conditions within the industry are poor and no substitute position can be found for redundant apprentices the Coordinating Provider will seek to provide additional substitute experiences to allow the apprentice to complete the training. In the event of substitute experience not being available, then arrangements for the termination of the apprenticeship and transfer of the apprentice to other cognate non-apprentice programmes should be developed.

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 then some consideration on appropriate staffing is necessary. In particular enterprises should 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;
- » who 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 section 2.4 pages 23-25. 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 be 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 section 2.5 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 relevant 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 extends 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 at a minimum two locations, an enterprise and a relevant provider (normally an educational/training institution). In most cases it will have many enterprises and possible 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 also can 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 must establish procedures to

- » check on 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 work place 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 work place 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

Apprentice 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 might also arise due 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 agile enough to allow for changes in the Occupational Profile to be included, where appropriate, in the curriculum. 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;

- » mechanisms are put in place to disseminate innovations in the curriculum;
- » there are regular meeting of the Programme Board to prevent too wide a disparity in experience arising.

4.3 ASSESSMENT OF APPRENTICE ACHIEVEMENT

4.3.1 *General comments*

Assessment is one of the most important elements of apprentice training. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on an apprentice's employment opportunities and career options. The right of an institution or an individual to assess an apprentice carries with it very serious responsibilities. This responsibility extends to preserving the value of previous assessments for previous cohorts of apprentices. Poor or inconsistent assessment damages the quality of all awards made by the provider. Mentors and teachers cannot function purely as trainers and advocates for their apprentices they must also make judgements. Any assessor making a judgement on an apprentice must be competent to do so. This may involve assessment training and independent oversight of assessments. All of the guidelines in section 2.6 of CQAG apply fully to apprentice programmes; QQI's guidelines on assessment also apply.

4.3.2 *Assessing on the job*

Assessment on the job faces particular challenges. These include some or all of the following: long periods of individual learning outside the formal learning environment, the individual work experiences of particular apprentices, the measurement of real outcomes in the workplace rather than simulated ones in the academy, periodic and brief observation sessions of the apprentice, disjunction between elements and sites and the level of expertise available in the workplace. Employers and the community of practice have a key strategic interest in the effectiveness of on the job assessment.

Assessment of 'on the job' should have the following characteristics

- » A continuous record of experience and assessment is maintained for each apprentice. This record should also contain the apprentice's reflections on their experience. It should be confirmed by the workplace mentor and accessible by the other examiners.
- » Provision should be made for the external observation of the apprentice.
- » The apprentice has access to timely sources of feedback on assessment and support for dealing with deficiencies.
- » Assessment schedule and regime should be flexible enough to deal with differing workplace situations and adaptive to changing circumstances.
- » Periodic face-to-face observation of the experience and achievements of the apprentice.

4.3.3 Assessment off the job

Assessment of 'off the job' may be happening in different sites, where the programme has been delivered with some variations. Assessment 'off the job' should have the following characteristics

- » Identical assessment regime at each site overseen by the coordinating provider. (Format of examination, length etc.)
- » Consistent range and level of assessment across each site.
- » Sufficient flexibility in topics to allow for delivery differences at each site and for local examiner input, where appropriate
- » Where deficiencies in the 'on the job' experience have been remedied by an 'off the job' input, this input should be assessed.

4.3.4 Final assessment of competency

The final assessment of apprentices must ensure that they are immediately capable of performing the activities and carrying out the responsibilities normal to the occupation. This assessment should

- » Be holistic in that it measures the general competency of the candidate.

- » Be final in that success should mean the entitlement to an award and to registration in the occupation where this is an intended outcome of the programme.

4.3.5 Assessing the assessment

Assessing the assessment is an important element of any QA system. In a distributed apprenticeship training system it presents particular issues of relevance, equivalence and quality of judgement. These can be dealt with by peer review of assessment and by second reading of some examination material. Periodic reviews by outside independent assessors are also necessary to ensure that

- » Overall standard is maintained.
- » No systematic differences are arising between locations.
- » Assessment material remains relevant.
- » Evaluating the impact of apprenticeship disruption on assessment.

4.4 MANAGING AND MAINTAINING QUALITY IN APPRENTICE PROGRAMMES

Apprentice programmes pose particular challenges in maintaining quality. They have a strong occupational focus which may require recalibration of outcomes and processes from time to time. This may require occupational scans, strong feedback and input from employers and those involved in the occupation.

They are employer led which can lead to changing demand patterns. This might require continual input to ensure that new providers can maintain the quality of the programme. Any management system must take into account the position of the various providers and awarding agencies or institutions. There may be one employer or many. There may be one 'off the job' provider or many. The 'off the job' provider may be an awarding body. In all these cases it is necessary that the management of the programme is not compromised by the complexity of the structure.

The Coordinating Provider may be an employer or group of employers, who may not be providing any other programmes (but the entity must conform to the QQI Relevant Provider criteria). This may require that quality responsibilities, normally carried out by extensive institutions with experienced staff, are carried out by a smaller group with less experience or resources. For this situation in particular, the Coordinating Provider takes on the responsibilities outlined in *Quality Assurance Guidelines and Criteria for Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes leading to QQI Awards 2013*. The responsibilities of the management and promotion of quality can be considered at three levels.

These are the broad context within which the programme is delivered, the strategic management of quality and finally the operational level that ensures that quality is delivered on a day-to-day basis. The management structure must be able to address all of these levels.

4.4.1 Producing a quality environment

Producing a quality environment will ensure that the standards of the programme and the interests of the stakeholders, the employers, the apprentices and the broader occupational group are maintained. This can be achieved by having an efficient and effective organisational structure that can implement quality systems, react to external inputs and is transparent in its operations. It should also be a reflective structure capable of internal reform. Such an organisation would have the following characteristics.

- » Clear assignment of roles and responsibilities, lines of communication and reporting supported by agreed memoranda of understanding where necessary.
- » Induction processes for new providers and support for new mentors, lecturers and managers.
- » Promotion of a collegiate approach that recognises equality of esteem between different providers.

4.4.2 Strategic management of quality - ensuring continued relevance and increased quality

The strategic management of the quality assurance system involves the maintenance of that system. This in turn requires an ongoing evaluation as to whether the system is being implemented as agreed at validation, and whether the elements need to be updated. The scope of possible changes should also be specified with clear boundaries agreed at validation. This should achieve the requisite level of subsidiarity without breaching the requirements of the awarding body.

It requires active benchmarking of the programme against best practice elsewhere. It should have the ability to get timely reports on implementation and the ability to react to those reports.

Strategic management also requires continual assessment and re-assessment of the needs of the stakeholders and the evolution of the skills, knowledge and competences required within the occupation. This requires strong and rich connections with the community of practice and an awareness of changes elsewhere in the world. The structures necessary to carry out strategic management would have the following characteristics:

- » Involvement of major stakeholders and providers meeting regularly with agreed terms of reference, agenda and minutes.
- » Sufficient authority agreed by all providers to ensure compliance with QA systems.
- » Sufficient internal competence and expertise to propose and if necessary implement changes to quality system.
- » Clear communication and reporting links with operational management.
- » Be sufficiently embedded in the provision of the programme to act as an energising force rather than a purely controlling one.
- » Should include members who have rich connections to or involvement with the occupation.
- » Has processes to admit new providers to the organisation.
- » Maintains open feedback processes from learners independently of the local employer.

4.4.3 Programme operation - implementing quality in a dynamic environment

The fragmented nature of the delivery process within apprenticeship programmes produces issues that must be dealt with by those involved with the direct delivery or management of the programme. Those involved with 'on the job' elements must handle the individual recruitment and orientation of apprentices, ensure that the apprentice is functioning as a learner and as a valued member of the workforce, deal with external observations of the workplace experience, maintain records and liaise with 'off the job' management. They should also actively promote up-to-date techniques for inclusion in the programme.

The off-the-job provider must ensure that material delivered meets the needs of apprentices coming from work experiences which may be divergent. They may work in isolation requiring formal communication with peers. They may have to liaise with other off-the-job providers to ensure that elements delivered in different sites remain aligned.

Quality implementation will require

- » Providers who have clear instructions as to their responsibilities and competence and authority to carry them out.
- » Providers must have an awareness of the whole programme and their position within it.
- » They should have sufficient expertise to direct apprentices and to propose variations in the delivery process.
- » They should have access to their peers and the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation and development of the programme.

4.4.4 Day to Day management of the programme

4.4.4.1 Programme Director/Administrator

A programme director/ administrator should be appointed by each relevant collaborating provider to manage the programme, to administer or oversee the administration of the programme and ensure

communications with partners. The programme director is the point of contact of all providers for the programme. They organise the programme and examination boards. They report to the awarding body and to the Programme Board. They deal with individual apprentice issues. They assist employers in the registration of apprentices. They organise the registration of the apprentices with the awarding body. They assist in the admission of new members into the consortium. They are the contact point for apprentices with individual for group concerns.

4.4.4.2 The Programme Board Functions

The Programme Board is the entity responsible for the ongoing oversight of the programme. It should have access to data on the delivery of the programmes the current assessment results and the flow of apprentices between elements of the programme. It should receive any process reports from providers and from independent examiners. It should also be aware of changes in the circumstances of the providers and in the occupation. Its functions include

- » The general oversight of the delivery of the programme and of the assessments.
- » Responding to inputs from external examiners.
- » Responding to inputs from the providers and from the occupation.
- » Sanctioning changes to delivery and minor changes to the programme within the bounds set by the validation.
- » Organise surveys of apprentices and respond to these.
- » Providing secure feedback mechanisms for apprentices.
- » Reporting to the coordinating provider's academic council or equivalent on its activities as required by the awarding body.
- » Reporting on its activities to the partners as required.
- » Taking the lead in the programmatic review.
- » In an expanded form it functions as an examination board.

4.4.4.3 Membership of the Programme Board

The size of Programme Boards may vary depending on the range of providers involved in the consortium and the distribution of sites at which the programme is delivered. It should consist of a minimum of four elements, the course director, and representatives of employers, of the educational /training providers and of apprentices. Representatives of other stakeholders such as professional associations could be included where appropriate. The chair could be one of the employers and the organisation of the board should be the responsibility of the programme director.

- » The programme director, besides organising the board should act as a contact point for the board and the providers and should report to the awarding body and the consortium
- » The members from the training / educational providers and should function as experts rather than as representative of their providers. At the same time they should inform themselves of issues arising in their areas and be capable of arguing for changes in the programme.
- » The members from the employers should be occupational experts and/or active mentors. They should be capable of representing the broad interests of the occupation. They should also have the capacity to bring provider concerns to the board.

4.4.4.4 The examination board

The size and membership of the examination board depends on the range of providers involved in the consortium and the distribution of sites at which the programme is delivered. It must be capable of dealing authoritatively with the assessment results presented to it. It should operate according to the rules of the awarding body. It should have available to it sufficient expertise to allow it to operate within those rules.

- » It should have members drawn from the examiners, at least one from each educational/training provider and sufficient to deal with all modules and sites
- » Employers could be represented by their Programme Board members, with additional persons representing significant examining expertise if necessary.
- » External examiners, where they confirm results should be members
- » The chairman of the Programme Board and the programme director should be members, ex-officio.

4.5 PERIODIC REVIEWS OF OCCUPATION, THE CONSORTIUM AND THE PROGRAMME

4.5.1 Purposes of periodic reviews

Periodic reviews are a standard form of long term quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. Periodic reviews are general reviews of the whole project and can be the precursor for major changes in the programme.

Apprenticeship programmes have three elements which require this thorough overhaul. These are the agreed occupational profile, the functioning of the consortium, and the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme itself.

The timing of the reviews can depend on a number of factors. Awarding bodies normally require five year reviews of programmes. Funding bodies may require reviews at the end of funding periods. The pace of changes in the occupation may also determine the need for changes. The maximum review period should be set when the programme is initially validated.

Characteristics of periodic reviews are

- » They are thorough reviews that can justify major changes in the programme
- » They consist of a self-evaluation process and an external independent review.
- » All three elements can effect each other and the reviews are best carried out at the same time.

The three reviews can be carried out separately but it should be recognised that each report can influence the outcomes of the others. The programme report for revalidation should incorporate the relevant outcomes of the other reports. To avoid unnecessary duplication the three reports could be presented as one report with three distinct elements.

4.5.2 Reviewing the Occupational Profile

The purpose of any apprenticeship is to prepare apprentices for the occupation. Ultimately the quality of the apprenticeship depends on how the qualified apprentice performs in the occupation. As occupations change the know-how, skills and competences required change. A thorough review of the requirements of the occupation profile is necessary before any review of the programme is carried out. A review of an occupation would have the following characteristics

- » Involvement of employers' associations or of significant employers;
- » Engagement with human resource personnel from across the industry to assess functioning of qualified apprentices;
- » Survey of any literature, conference proceedings, or regulatory material pertaining to the occupation, including economic and labour market forecasts and analyses;
- » Involvement of significant occupational professionals;
- » Review of technological changes that might impact on the occupation;
- » Survey of past graduates to identify strengths and weakness of the programme and level of preparation for career advancement.

The report should indicate necessary and desirable changes to the programme. It is the process where employers and occupational members can have influential input to the apprenticeship. It is a vital input to the review of the programme. It should be circulated to stakeholders and form the context for a programmatic review.

4.5.3 Reviewing the Partnerships

The collaborating Providers and Programme Board are the mechanisms by which the employers and the Coordinating Provider ensure the delivery of the programmes. The Coordinating Provider may also be the mechanism by which the funds are dispersed. The review of the consortium should deal with the following issues

- » The responsibilities of individual providers including the Coordinating Provider

- » The relationships between the providers and between providers and employers
- » The effectiveness of the reporting procedures
- » The communication links between the partners
- » Corporate governance arrangements
- » Operation of safeguards against academic/financial impropriety, recklessness or negligence
- » Any necessary changes to the consortium agreement

4.5.4 Reviewing the programme

Programmatic reviews are a normal part of academic quality assurance. The format of programmatic reviews are part of the agreed QA procedures of recognised providers. An outline of these is available from QQI. Reviews of apprentice programmes will have the necessary input from review of the Occupational Profile and partnership reviews. In reviewing the effectiveness of the programme the review should

- » take into account the input from the Occupational Profile review to ensure continued relevance of all aspects of the programme;
- » use input from mentors, trainers, graduates and current apprentices to modify the curriculum, modules and assessment processes;
- » review reports from external assessors to ensure suggested changes are implemented;
- » establish the levels of mentoring, training and assessment skills available to the programme and also the currency of physical facilities;
- » assessing whether the entry requirements remain appropriate.

The efficiency of the programme can be assessed by

- » taking into account the input from the partnership review to modify delivery arrangements;
- » looking at retention, withdrawal and graduation rates and causes across the full period of the review;

- » ensuring that there are no persistent anomalies at particular sites or with particular modules or other elements of the programme;
- » using input from mentors, trainers, graduates and current apprentices modify the delivery process and the operational management procedures.

The output from this review should be a programme proposal with updated intended programme learning outcomes suitable for the changing occupational profile, changed partnerships, changed module outcomes and changed content to reflect updated occupational concerns and a more efficient delivery of the programme. The review should be carried out in a way that affirms the positive roles of participants and re-energises the consortium

4.5.5 Other reviews

A Coordination Provider, delivering apprentice programmes, may be required to report periodically to funding or regulatory agencies or to professional bodies. The partnership agreements should facilitate any such reports.

5 SUPPORTS FOR APPRENTICES

5.1 GENERAL ISSUES

Apprentice learners may require particular types of support. Support is required at induction, to ease the change in life status of the new apprentice, as is indicated in the section above on recruitment.

As an employee the apprentice may find that continuity of the employment or the suitability of the employment may be at risk. Systems need to reduce the impact of these risks as indicated earlier. It should be noted that the Coordinating Provider and its partners cannot and should not guarantee that it would find suitable employment for redundant apprentices in all cases.

The learning supports required for the apprentice are outlined in earlier sections and should include personal and career support. It is particularly important for young apprentices to be integrated into their community of practice as early as possible.

Membership of a stable community is a significant part of the personal socialisation process all persons. To that end, where there are multiple off-the-job providers, as far as possible apprentices should attend one such provider for all releases, thus maintaining continuity of community, easing integration and improving learning efficiency by familiarity with library, IT and other institutional systems.

5.2 DUTY OF CARE TO YOUNG APPRENTICES

Some apprentices may be under eighteen years of age. In these cases the provider should exercise the appropriate duty of care. This is particularly important when young apprentices are away from home at 'off the job' phases.

5.3 INTEGRATION INTO OFF-THE-JOB INSTITUTIONS

Where the off-the-job provider is a large educational/training institution it is important that apprentice learners be fully integrated into the social, sporting and support systems of the institution particularly rapidly, because of the concentrated nature of off-the-job phases and these institutions should ensure that that support and integration is maintained during the on-the-job phases (for example library access, IT system access, sport facilities access etc.

Off the job phases may commence at varying times during the academic year and this presents a particular challenge as many activities of institutions are founded on full time attendance. Institutions should take particular cognisance of this and develop mitigating policies, such as the maintenance of access and communication during the on-the-job phases mentioned above.

5.4 DEALING WITH COMPETING RESPONSIBILITIES

Older apprentices may have more family commitments than full time students. Their employments may require them to move temporarily around the country. These potential disruptions should be allowed for and support provided where possible.

5.5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING NEEDS OR DISABILITIES

Apprentices may also present with special educational or training needs or disabilities this information should be shared at the outset by the employer with the coordinating provider.

6 INFORMATION PROVISION

6.1 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION AND DATA

Awarding bodies, funding authorities and quality assurance agencies all require that accurate data is kept on the operation of the programme and on the progress of the apprentices. These responsibilities are described in CQAG section 2.8.

In the case of apprentice programmes the following circumstances must be accounted for

- » Particular attention is required to ensure real-time data transfer between SOLAS, HEA, ETBs, IoTs, Universities and involved private colleges and systems should be developed or modified to achieve this. Where the Coordinating Provider is a new entity, approved by QQI, immediate attention should be given to establishing such a communication system, ensuring continuity and coherence of multi-channel information transfer.
- » Attention needs to be given to the implications of data protection law, and apprentices, employers, relevant providers and involved State agencies should sign appropriate data transfer agreements at the outset and from the commencement of individual apprenticeships, which allow and facilitate appropriate data transfer.
- » As advised earlier, attending a single off-the-job provider is an important element of support to an apprentice. However if it is necessary that an apprentice moves providers, there may be no informal 'institutional memory' available to the new providers. Relevant information that normally would be held by a teacher or mentor should be recorded and passed on in advance of the transfer to the next provider. This might include, achievements and performance on the programme, particular difficulties or strengths, minor infractions, additional external responsibilities where appropriate, disabilities supports offered etc. Compliance with data protection law is of particular significance in relation to personal information.
- » Apprentices may have unique learning pathways and experiences. This may require an individualised learning record for each apprentice. The requirements of the labour market may also require a detailed record of experiences.
- » Systems should facilitate integration into international credit accumulation systems, such as Europass, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

6.2 PUBLIC INFORMATION

It is a normal requirement that certain information on any programme leading to an NFQ award is publically available. Partnership agreements must ensure that providers are aware of this and cooperate with it.

It is particularly important that the “brand image” of apprenticeship as a mode of learning, appropriate to all higher NFQ levels above Level 4, be developed and encouraged and that the public understand the progression opportunities and nature of work based learning. Therefore public information should support the positioning of apprenticeship in this context.

The Coordinating Provider is responsible for ensuring that new apprentices are fully aware of the programme. As apprentices may enter singly into apprenticeship without the support of a cohort or contact with more advanced peers it is particularly important that the information delivered to the new apprentice is complete and is supported by briefing by the workplace mentor, while covering the full programme on which he/she has engaged.

The Coordinating Provider and the programme partnership may be the body, within the occupation, most directly responsible for programme quality. It should seek to promote quality in the occupation among apprentices and also amongst those qualified.

7 APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

7.1 GUIDELINES ON THE DRAFTING OF MEMORANDA OF AGREEMENT

7.1.1 Memoranda of Agreement (MOA)

The Memorandum of Agreement should assure that 'on the job' and 'off the job' training provision and associated services are provided in a streamlined manner and in compliance with QQI policy and the policies of other relevant statutory agencies in accordance with its guidelines and with any other legitimate requirements.

7.1.2 General arrangements

- a) establish and specify the partnership (indicating the partners including identifying the Coordinating Provider and the designated address for communication);
- b) agree processes by which partners might leave the partnership and new partners might be admitted;
- c) establish the rights and obligations of all partners and partner providers;
- d) agree terms of MOA and MOU between Coordinating Provider and other partners;
- e) establish the nature of the services to be performed by each partner; specify the scope of the agreement and the relevant programme and the award and the awarding body that it will lead to;
- f) establish the period of the agreement;
- g) establish the conditions under which the agreement will be reviewed and under which it will be renewed;

- h) provide for the amendment of the agreement;
- i) establish the entities (normally the Coordinating Provider and employer) that learners can hold legally liable for any deficiencies in the provision of education and training;
- j) specify any limitations on liability and provide for mutual indemnification;
- k) provide for the resolution of disputes arising in respect of the agreement;
- l) provide for the termination or suspension of the agreement (setting out the conditions under which this can be done) having regard for learners concerned;
- m) make appropriate arrangements for the protection of apprentices and in all cases for residual obligations to learners on termination of the agreement;
- n) make appropriate arrangements for the protection of apprentices in cases where an individual partner cannot fulfil their obligations;
- o) name the jurisdiction within which the agreement is enacted and should be interpreted;
- p) establish a process for addressing disputes in respect of the agreement including any perceived breaches of the agreement and grievances by learners and involved employees;
- q) oblige partner providers to participate in the programme; review/accreditation/validation process required by the relevant awarding body and also any agreed by the consortium and to comply with any conditions that are attached to review/accreditation/validation;
- r) establish quality assurance procedures for the programme and require partner providers to cooperate and participate in the quality assurance procedures and in related quality evaluations whether internal or externally organized, while ensuring that quality assurance procedures applying to the collaborative programme should be recognized as meeting the requirements of the awarding body;
- s) provide for the relevant awarding bodies to monitor the quality and standards of the programme and associated services;
- t) collect and maintain the information required by external quality assurance agencies or for National or European agencies such as the Europass Diploma Supplement;
- u) require that partner providers will encourage and make provision for cooperation between their staff in respect of the programme.

7.1.3 *Financial arrangements*

- v) specify the provider, normally the Coordinating Provider, that is accountable for the funds disbursed to the consortium;
- w) state financial arrangements
 - i. that address the distribution of any funds allocated to the programme
 - ii. that assure each partner provider's capacity to account for income and expenditure involving the consortium;
 - iii. that meet all legal requirements in all of the involved jurisdictions;
 - iv. that make adequate provision for protection for learners as described under paragraph m) and n)