



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

# A REVIEW OF CONSORTIA-LED APPRENTICESHIPS IN IRELAND



QQI  
Insights

Report on a QQI Commissioned Review Conducted by:  
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# Executive Summary

This report sets out the findings of a review, commissioned by QQI, of the quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes developed for the 39 consortium-led apprenticeships that were established by mid-2022<sup>1</sup>. In doing so, the report offers a snapshot of the diversity of industries, occupations, delivery models and qualification levels that the consortium-led model of apprenticeship has been able to accommodate since the model was rolled out in 2016.

The findings of this review reflect that while there are some commonalities across the spectrum of established consortium-led apprenticeship programmes there is no standardised approach to their establishment. The ways in which consortia have assembled to initiate a new apprenticeship and configure their governance, management and operating structures with education and training providers vary. This is unsurprising, given the diverse industry and occupational profiles represented. Importantly, the review findings do not indicate that there is a singular approach that represents a 'preferred' or 'best practice' model for consortia-led apprenticeships. This is seen by the review team as a strength, reflecting that the model is adaptive and can facilitate a diversity of occupations and industries.

Similarly, the findings of this review suggest that the guidance, support and facilitation needs of different consortia vary substantively. This suggests that flexible and bespoke supports from central agencies will be best placed to foster development and growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Appendix I for the full text of the research questions guiding the review.

The government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 sets out to deliver a single, cohesive apprenticeship system that is flexible, responsive and easy to engage with<sup>2</sup>. Key Deliverable 1 of the Action Plan is to ensure that occurs within a strong framework of quality assurance. Achieving this will require the careful navigation of three tensions that can be viewed as inherent to the landscape of consortium-led apprenticeships.

### **1: Apprenticeships that are planned yet responsive**

The findings set out in this report validate the capacity of the consortia-led apprenticeship model to respond to emerging skills shortages and cater for the emergence of new occupational profiles. This is achieved through both the development of new programmes and ongoing industry leadership of those that have been established. Inputs to the review reflect that developing programmes that align to current industry needs has been a catalyst for collaboration between employers and has deepened existing links with providers of off-the-job training. However, the initiation, development and approval of a consortium-led apprenticeship is a significant undertaking. The viability of a potential apprenticeship needs to be carefully considered and a finding of this review is that additional guidance and support from central agencies throughout the planning and development phase will be welcome. However, to preserve the strengths of the industry-led model, it is crucial that planning support does not become directive. A directive approach would significantly diminish the capacity of consortia to respond to the changing needs of their industries and potentially undermine the strengths of the industry-led model.

### **2: Apprenticeships that have appropriate oversight, yet maintain their agility**

A striking finding of this review is that over 75% of consortium members predict there will be major changes in the next five years to the core skills needed for the occupations that consortium-led apprenticeships serve. To maintain their value in meeting industry needs, it is crucial that consortia remain active and provide input that ensures the new apprenticeship programmes are able to respond to industry dynamics. However, consortia do not operate the apprenticeship programmes in an unfettered manner. They are not able, for example, to make major changes to the curriculum, alter entrance requirements or switch from one mode of delivery to another without triggering a quality assurance process. Those checks and balances are necessary to safeguard the credibility of the Irish qualification system. Moving forward, it will be important that the complexity of managing a dynamic, yet quality assured programme is recognised by all stakeholders and that apprenticeship management is appropriately resourced to facilitate this.

### **3: Industry Collaboration with the Education and Training Sector**

Inputs to this review emphasised the positive collaboration between industry and the education and training providers that the development and operation of consortium-led apprenticeship programmes has prompted. Nonetheless, ways of working in industry and ways of working in education are acknowledged to differ. The quality assurance processes that underpin the work of education providers may be somewhat opaque to industry partners. Moreover, the pace at which decisions can be made and implemented in industry differs markedly to education and training contexts. For all stakeholders involved, it is noted that working and achieving together as a consortium potentially entails an ongoing '*learning curve*'.

The breadth of industries engaging with the new apprenticeship model indicates that there is a growing awareness of the value of work-based learning in sectors where this may not have previously been normative. Within the broader landscape of lifelong learning, it reflects an appetite for alternative, flexible pathways to qualification that are industry-led.

Despite the diversity of consortium-led apprenticeships, shared challenges are discernible. Within this report, these are approached thematically. Those themes encompass aspects of quality assurance, governance and processes, for example, ownership, communication, social perception, geography and resources. Divergences in experience and practice across the spectrum of consortium-led apprenticeships are acknowledged in relation to each theme.

Although Ireland's consortia-led apprenticeships are young, there is a collective wealth of experience and practical insight among the stakeholder groups into the effectiveness of the processes and systems that underlie their implementation. That experience is leveraged in this review, which will inform the ongoing enhancement of systems, policies and practices for consortium-led apprenticeships.



# Review Context

This review is focused on the quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes that have been developed to support the consortium-led apprenticeships.

In Ireland, statutory apprenticeship programmes are governed by the Industrial Training Act 1967.

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) has developed and published topic specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship programmes, published in 2016.
- SOLAS has a range of statutory responsibilities pertaining to apprenticeship, including the designation of statutory apprenticeships via Industrial Training Orders, approval of employers and registration of apprentices.
- Funding for consortium-led apprenticeship programmes is currently made available through SOLAS or the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

To assist in the implementation of the government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 - 2025 a National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) has been established to further enhance cooperation between SOLAS and the HEA to manage apprenticeship delivery across the further and higher education sector.

# Review Steering Committee



Figure 1 Review Steering Committee

The Steering Committee for this review included representation from the following organisations: SOLAS; Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS); Higher Education Authority (HEA); National Apprenticeship Office (NAO)<sup>3</sup>; Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC); Construction Industry Federation (CIF); Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU); Restaurants Association of Ireland; Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI); Union of Students in Ireland (USI); Technological Higher Education Association (THEA); Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA); Irish Universities Association (IUA); Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) (two nominees).

N.B. *This report represents the independent findings and views of the consultants who were commissioned by QQI to undertake this review. Statements made in the report do not necessarily represent the views of the Stakeholder Steering Group in relation to this project or the views of its individual members.*

3 NAO reports directly into HEA and SOLAS.

# 1. Introduction

A significant amount of change has occurred in the national apprenticeship system over a short period of time. Commencing in 2016, new consortia-led apprenticeships have been rolled out. The interrelationship of the consortia-led apprenticeships with the expertise and infrastructure that supports apprenticeship in Ireland is being continually refined. This review of the quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes established to facilitate consortia-led apprenticeships makes a contribution to ongoing work in this area. The review supports efforts to further define, enhance and inform related policy and practice. In the process, it also highlights the dynamic and innovative work that is being undertaken to open up the apprenticeship pathway for increasingly diverse candidates and industries across Ireland.

Consortia-led apprenticeships are already providing employment, career development and a pathway to a recognised qualification for apprentices across 40+ occupations in Ireland. The model has made additional opportunities to earn while you learn available to apprentices in areas including (but not limited to) Healthcare, Biopharma, Information Technology, Insurance, Recruitment, Accounting, Logistics, Supply Chain, Sales, Hairdressing, Hospitality and Food, Data and Telecommunications Networks, Engineering and Finance. During the period of this review, new apprenticeships were approved, reflecting the dynamic nature of this area. The rapid growth of these opportunities, which are steered by employers and industry stakeholders using a consortia model, reflects progress toward the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025's objective of apprenticeship being employer-driven.

There has been an overall positive upward trend of new registrations on consortia-led programmes since 2016. In 2016 only two programmes were running with a total of 79 apprentices registered. By 2021 there were 1,692 new registrations on 36 programmes (see Appendix VII). In June 2022, 2,974 apprentices were registered on consortium-led apprenticeship programmes.

Female apprentices make up 39% of the total number of registered apprentices on consortia-led programmes (with significant variation by programme). Currently, 65% of apprentices undertaking a consortia-led apprenticeship are 30 years of age or under, with the remaining 35% aged 31 - 60. These figures reflect that many of the new programmes are appropriate for mature learners. Although geographic disparities in provision can be observed, a number of consortia-led apprenticeships are already available nationally. There is more to be done. However, these outcomes reflect steady progress toward Objective 3 of the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025: 'Apprenticeship for all', which intends that participation in apprenticeship will evolve so that the "profile of the apprenticeship population will more closely reflect the profile of the general population" (Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025, p. 29). See Appendix VI for further detail.

Clearly, these early achievements are encouraging. But the consortia-led apprenticeship system is a complex one. To succeed, consortia-led apprenticeships require a high level of collaboration and commitment from their key stakeholders. Employers must work cooperatively to form consortia and toward outcomes that will benefit their industry as a whole - sometimes without the mediating presence of a representative body for the sector. Established consortia must collaborate closely with education and training providers as well as government bodies throughout the multi-step process entailed in the development and validation<sup>4</sup> of a consortia-led apprenticeship. Operationalising the apprenticeship post validation involves SOLAS Authorised Officers in the registration process and

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<sup>4</sup> Within this report, the term validation is used to refer to the formal approval process for a new programme by an awarding body, whatever form this takes.

requires ongoing engagement with employers, apprentices, workplace mentors and provider staff. In addition, consortia-led apprenticeships require a sustained commitment from the consortia members to ensure they remain aligned with and responsive to industry needs. Providers must ensure that the intended programme learning outcomes remain consistent with the standards of the awarding body and aligned to the National Framework of Qualifications.

This review therefore represents a timely opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes that have been established to facilitate consortia-led apprenticeship programmes. The review team has engaged directly with stakeholders involved in their initiation, development, approval and delivery, and has considered substantial volumes of supporting documentation. It has also gathered significant input from apprentices registered on a diversity of consortium-led programmes.

The government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 intends to deliver a single, cohesive apprenticeship system that is flexible, responsive and easy to engage with. Key deliverable 1 of the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 is to ensure that occurs within a strong framework of quality assurance. The findings of this review contribute to achieving this. They also represent an opportunity to learn from and leverage the experience and expertise of key stakeholders from across the spectrum of one of Ireland's newest and most innovative education and training pathways.

## 1.1 Inputs to Review



Figure 2 Inputs to Review

N.B. Please refer to Appendices I & II for further detail on the review methodology and sources of information.

## 1.2 Scope of Review and Access to Data

At the outset of the review in May 2022, 37 consortia-led apprenticeships were in scope for the review activity. That scope was expanded to include two new programmes during the review period, bringing the total to 39 (see Appendix III). By the time the review concluded in September 2022, two further programmes had been approved. However, the additional two programmes have not been included in the scope of this review. The review team notes that the dynamic nature of approvals and registrations for consortium-led apprenticeships means that data provided to the review team was often mismatched, as it captures and references different periods and dates.

Some challenges were encountered in progressing the work of the review, largely due to concerns within various agencies and institutions pertaining to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) obligations. As these issues will be relevant to the work of future review activities, they are noted here for future consideration. GDPR constraints meant, for example, that the review team was not provided with the contact details for consortia and provider representatives at the outset of the review period, despite the relatively short timeline in which data was to be collected from these stakeholders (May – July 2022). Concerns pertaining to GDPR created lags in access to data, made communications cumbersome and significantly increased the administrative burden for government agencies, consortia/provider representatives as well as the review team (see Appendix IV). Contributors to the review reported similar restrictions on access to necessary data, for example, contact details for key personnel. This suggests that arrangements could usefully be put in place to ensure that future reviews of quality assurance and effectiveness are clearly designated as a legitimate purpose for processing the restricted range of personal data (i.e., names and email addresses) of nominated consortia and provider representatives as well as other key stakeholders, where required. Similarly, a review of legitimate purposes for stakeholder access to data may be advised.

Despite these challenges, the review team collected a high volume of data and inputs to the review from a breadth of stakeholders in consortium-led apprenticeships. The mixed methodology employed by the review team facilitated triangulation of rich qualitative data, and involved document reviews, surveys, focus groups and interviews as well as the analysis of relevant quantitative data provided by key agencies. The findings of the review put forward in this report are therefore well-substantiated and demonstrably reliable.

With regard to one specific aspect of the review, mechanisms to facilitate formal industry-led governance, the review team notes that deficiencies in data and inputs are observable. The review had a lower-than-expected participation rate of consortium steering group Chairs in focus groups and interviews. This was due in part to lack of availability during the short timeline in which the review was conducted. This has resulted in the omission from this report of detailed discussion specifically oriented to this aspect of governance. However, in some instances, survey inputs from Chairs and other consortium steering group members as well as broader stakeholder contributions and documentation have been sufficient to inform findings.

It is noted that in many instances the review team was substantially assisted in their work by those tasked with steering and directly managing consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. The review team also received substantial support from the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO), SOLAS, QQI and the HEA.

## 2 How are Consortia-led Apprenticeships Created?

One objective of this review is to characterise the main variants of consortia-led-apprenticeship models that have been established in Ireland for the purpose of developing and delivering apprenticeships via the new consortia-led model. As consortia-led apprenticeship programmes can lead to awards at any level between 5 and 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), they have been adapted for use across diverse occupations and sectors. There are significant differences in how consortia configure themselves across different industries and in partnership with different education and training providers. This means there are also significant differences in how responsibility for the promotion and day-to-day management of an apprenticeship programme is distributed across roles and stakeholders within consortia.

The government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 sets out that a coherent, representative governance framework and structure for apprenticeships is a key deliverable. However, there is room within this for substantial variation between consortia. In this section of the report, the review team provides an overview of how the existing consortia-led apprenticeships have been initiated and how they operate. This includes a sketch of the main variants in governance and management structures for the 39 programmes in scope for this review. Where particular practices, features or roles are positively implicated in the success or growth of an apprenticeship these are highlighted here. However, it should be stressed from the outset that there is no singular approach that represents a 'preferred' or 'best practice' model for consortia-led apprenticeships. This is an important strength, as it demonstrates the diversity of occupations and industries that the model can adapt to and facilitate.

QQI's Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (2016) set out detail on the assumed characteristics of apprenticeship programmes, inclusive of consortia-led apprenticeships. How the existing consortia-led programmes align to these is summarised in tabular format in Appendix V.

## 2.1 Who initiates consortia-led apprenticeships?

Consortia-led apprenticeship programmes are industry led and created by groups composed of employers, employer representative groups, education and training providers and other key stakeholders concerned with a specific occupation or industry, working together voluntarily. These form a consortium, within which a consortium steering group collaborates to develop and deliver an apprenticeship programme. The programme is developed with the aim of meeting a training, development, or upskilling need for a particular occupation.

On an ongoing basis, the consortium steering group is expected to maintain oversight of the continued relevance of the apprenticeship curriculum and programme delivery. QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Apprenticeship Programmes (2016) outline that a consortium steering group is usefully established as a governing entity and ensures that:

*'the programme conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation. Its purpose would be to ensure that the apprenticeship programme is enterprise-led and meets labour market needs'*

QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Apprenticeship Programmes (2016) p.9

The envisaged roles and functions of the consortium steering group are further outlined in extracts from QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Apprenticeship Programmes (2016), provided in Appendix XI. The coordinating provider is a member of the consortium steering group and has responsibility for managing quality assurance processes, programme validation and delivery.

The consortia-led apprenticeships established since 2016 have been initiated by a broad range of stakeholders. They are industry led through a consortium steering group, consisting of employers and other stakeholders. It should be noted that the genesis of each programme is not always entirely clear, even to those who have been involved from the outset. This is because in some instances a number of stakeholders were involved and/or because the apprenticeship was one of several occupation-specific or industry-wide collaborations being concurrently progressed.

Nonetheless, consortia members, employers and providers surveyed for the review consistently responded that the new apprenticeships had, in the majority of instances, been initiated by a sectoral body<sup>5</sup>. Interviews, focus group discussions and document reviews confirmed this. An overview is presented in the table below:

*Table 1 Groups Initiating Apprenticeship*

Groups Initiating Apprenticeship	Number of programmes
Sectoral Body	23
Employer(s)	4
Provider(s)	9
Employer & Provider	2
Sectoral Bodies & Provider	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>

Further information is provided in Appendix VIII.

<sup>5</sup> Sectoral body is used to describe representative groups e.g., Irish business representative group Ibec, Nursing Homes Ireland the national body for the private and voluntary nursing home sector. A list of sectoral bodies involved in apprenticeship programmes is provided in Appendix XV.



Although in 23 cases consortia-led apprenticeships were initiated by sectoral representative bodies, in nine they were initiated by providers with established expertise and strong industry networks in a particular discipline area<sup>6</sup>. The development of an apprenticeship programme has also acted as a catalyst for employers in some industries to work collaboratively and to engage directly with providers. There is no observable correlation between the locus of initiation for a consortia-led apprenticeship programme and its success.

The diverse motivations for consortia to develop and deliver apprenticeships across different occupations and industries are discussed further in Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

## 2.2 How are consortia-led apprenticeships managed?

The development of an apprenticeship requires a sustained partnership between the consortium steering group and the coordinating provider. These partners may have a differing ethos and distinct ways of working. Successful apprenticeship programmes recognise these differences and seek to align their management to ensure that each partner's requirements are met in full.

The differing roles of the consortium steering group and coordinating provider can be conceptualised within the functions of apprenticeship management and programme lead, respectively. The apprenticeship management function must ensure that the aims of the consortium steering group are met, that the programme is enterprise focused and that it serves the needs of the industry. This encompasses assembly of the consortium steering group, development of the apprenticeship proposal for the National Apprenticeship Office, negotiating with potential providers and establishing Memoranda of Agreement between coordinating providers and the consortium steering group. It also encompasses recruiting new employers and new apprentices, supporting the consortium steering group to research possible changes to the curriculum, planning for future intakes and maintaining relations with the provider. Many consortia directly appoint an 'Apprenticeship Manager' to oversee and drive this. However, the management function is also sometimes distributed across other roles, characterised variously as business development, project management, administration, recruitment, etc.

The coordinating provider establishes a Programme Board with responsibility for the ongoing academic oversight of the programme and appoints a programme lead or equivalent. The programme lead function ensures that the delivery of the programme is as agreed and that the standards of the awarding body are maintained. The function also involves developing the curriculum and guiding the programme through the validation procedures of the awarding body. Programme leads manage the day-to-day delivery and assessment of the programme and the academic management of the apprentices. It must be emphasised that the programme lead and apprenticeship management functions are not mutually exclusive. In practice the roles overlap in many areas, such as recruitment and communications to the consortium steering group, employers, mentors and apprentices. However, what is consistently emphasised by stakeholders is the importance of these functions, i.e., apprenticeship manager and programme lead, to the overall success of the apprenticeship. Stakeholders identify that *'the role of the Apprenticeship Manager is key'* and that *'this role is the main driver in bringing all of the parties together to maintain a quality programme'*. Comments highlight that *'having a dedicated project manager for the apprenticeship is essential for its success'* as is *'having a champion within the provider team'*.

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<sup>6</sup> In all cases, the approval of an apprenticeship requires that it is developed to be employer led through a consortium steering group.

Although there are substantial variations in the way consortium-led apprenticeships are managed, the location of the Apprenticeship Manager role (or equivalent functions) can be viewed as significant as it has implications for proximity to employers and industry. Further, when the apprenticeship management function is located outside the provider the resources are typically not diverted to other institutional or academic matters (see appendix VIII).

Table 2 below illustrates some of the typical features of the apprenticeship management function that can be associated with the location of the role. Together with the programme lead, the Apprenticeship Manager (or management function, where distributed over several persons) oversees the development of the curriculum and supports the provider in the validation process. Both contribute to the joint management of the apprenticeship programme, and, in conjunction with the employer, supervise the learning of the apprentice both on and off-the-job. They communicate with apprentices ensuring that the terms of the apprenticeship are observed for both on and off-the-job elements of the programme. Notably, the development, delivery and maintenance of the apprenticeships require different tasks and skills during different periods. These can be broadly divided into three phases, development, followed by management and delivery, leading to review and renewal.

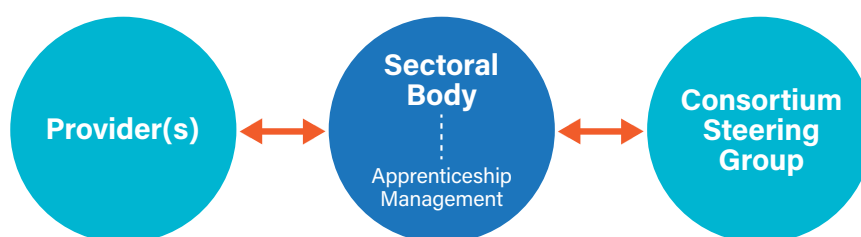
*Table 2 Development, Delivery and Maintenance of an Apprenticeship: Tasks and Functions*

Phase of provision of apprenticeship	Management tasks	Main functions involved in tasks	Requires
Development of apprenticeship	Assembling the consortium steering group	Apprenticeship management	Knowledge of industry
	Developing the occupational profile	Apprenticeship management with consortium steering group	Knowledge of occupational profiles and requirements of National Apprenticeship Office
	Getting permission from government agencies		
	Liaising with provider over structure and curriculum, access transfer and progression	Apprenticeship management, consortium steering group and coordinating provider lead	Knowledge of awarding body requirements and industry needs
Delivery of apprenticeship	Day to day delivery of off-the-job modules	Programme lead	Academic management experience, and good communication skills Management, communication skills and knowledge of technical aspects of apprenticeship
	Supervision of on-the-job assessments and experience	Apprenticeship management, employer/mentor, coordinating provider lead	
	Liaising with employers and apprenticeships	Apprenticeship management, coordinating provider lead	
	Organising consortium steering group and provider relations	Apprenticeship manager and coordinating provider lead	
	Selection and management of mentors	Employer	
Planning, review and renewal	Recruitment of new employers, promoting the apprenticeship	Apprenticeship management with consortium steering group and provider	Knowledge of industry, marketing experience
	Occupational review to update apprenticeship	consortium steering group and apprenticeship manager	Industry contacts and knowledge of occupation
	Curriculum redesign to match new requirement	Apprenticeship management and programme lead	Knowledge of awarding body requirements and industry needs

## 2.3 Variants - Operating Structures

Given the diversity of industries and groups now engaged in consortia-led apprenticeship, there are almost as many variants of governance and management structures as there are programmes. The quality assurance procedures and validation process for the apprenticeship may be overseen by QQI or by the provider institution if that institution is a designated awarding body. However, at a high level, the following patterns are observable from focus groups and surveys.

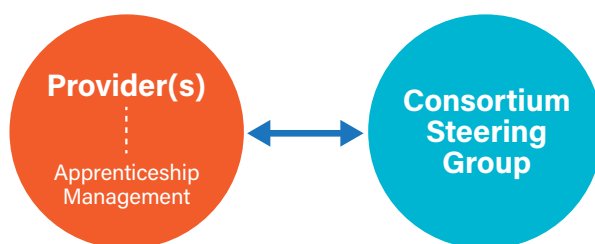
### Type A



*Figure 3 Type A Variant Operating Structure*

In this variant, the apprenticeship management is located within a sectoral body or representative organisation. That organisation convenes and is a member of the consortium steering group and liaises with the provider institution. Typically, within this variant the apprenticeship management will take responsibility for the recruitment of employers and apprentices. The apprenticeship management may also deal directly with collaborating providers. In larger sectoral bodies, a number of apprenticeships may be managed by a unit with specialist staff. This unit may also have the task of encouraging the development of apprenticeships in other areas. Such units are experienced in the complex process of managing apprenticeships through the process of approval and delivery.

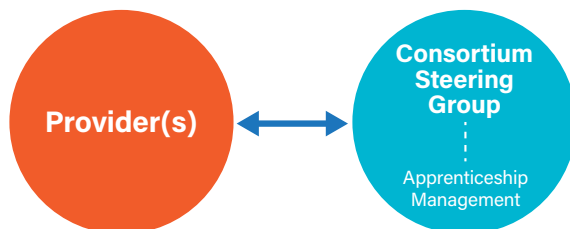
### Type B



*Figure 4 Type B Variant Operating Structure*

In this variant, the apprenticeship management is located within the provider institution. Notably, a further distinction can be made between those where apprenticeship management is embedded in an academic department and those that are part of an industry facing group or unit within the institution. The provider typically convenes the consortium steering group, which may or may not include membership from a sectoral body or representative organisation. Typically, the provider will seek active support from the consortium steering group in promoting the apprenticeship within industry for the purpose of recruiting employers.

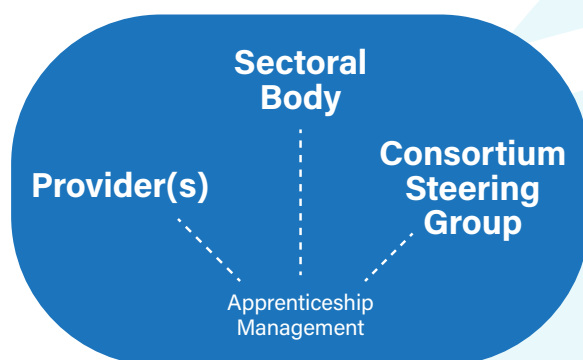
## Type C



*Figure 5 Type C Variant Operating Structure*

In this variant, the Apprenticeship Manager position is funded by and reports to the consortium steering group. The Apprenticeship Manager typically convenes the consortium steering group.

## Type D



*Figure 6 Type D Variant Operating Structure*

In this variant, all functions are housed in the same organisation. A sectoral body or representative organisation therefore acts as the provider, convenes the consortium steering group and employs an Apprenticeship Manager (or equivalent functions). In such instances, QQI or a designated awarding body, is responsible for approving the governance arrangements and quality assurance procedures of the organisation in its capacity as a provider.

## 3 What has been learned so far about the operation of Consortia-led Apprenticeships in Ireland?

An important function of this review is to bring to the fore aspects of the consortia-led model of apprenticeship that are thus far working well. An equally important function of the review is to interrogate what is *not* working well and where more work is needed to overcome challenges and make improvements.

In this section of the report, benefits and drawbacks associated with the consortia-led model, as so far implemented, are therefore explored. The issues raised are intended to stimulate reflection and, in some instances, prompt calls to action among current stakeholders. They may also offer new consortia an opportunity to learn from the experiences of those that have broken the same ground before them.

### 3.1 By Industry. For industry.

The positive impact that direct involvement of industry and employers has on consortium-led apprenticeship programmes was strongly emphasised by all of the stakeholders that made input to this review.

Among members of consortia and employers who have direct experience of this new model for apprenticeship, there is a clear view that the involvement of industry in the design of the programme ensures its relevance to the employers and apprentices it serves. These stakeholders report that consortium-led apprenticeships are *'industry specific'*, *'employer-led'* and *'meeting the requirements of employers'*. This is typically attributed by consortia and employers to the heavy involvement of industry in determining the learning outcomes, delivery models, curriculum/module content and assessment strategies, representing *'the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process from day one'*. Notably, a majority of contributors to the review considered the consortium steering group for the apprenticeship programme they were involved with to be well representative of their industry. Although in two instances<sup>7</sup> survey responses indicated this was not the case, overall inputs to the review suggest that the majority of programmes have oversight from consortium steering groups that are well placed to inform initial and ongoing development. This is due to the broad collective perspective they have across an industry or occupation. A strong theme in input to the review from both employers and members of the consortia pertained to the benefits the programmes bring not only to an individual employer, but to a sector as a whole: *'the standard and status of our industry will improve'*; the programme *'will be a big help for future practitioners'* and will help to *'drive the sector on'*, *'the programme is extremely good for our industry'*.

Consortia members and employers also report positively on the overall impact of consortium-led apprenticeships in relation to recruitment, retention and upskilling of staff. However, it is important to highlight that the specific benefits employers are able to leverage from a consortium-led apprenticeship are reported to differ widely across the diverse industries involved. For example, in sectors experiencing

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<sup>7</sup> One Chair of a consortium steering group commented in the survey that it was difficult to get employers from outside the Dublin region to engage with the programme

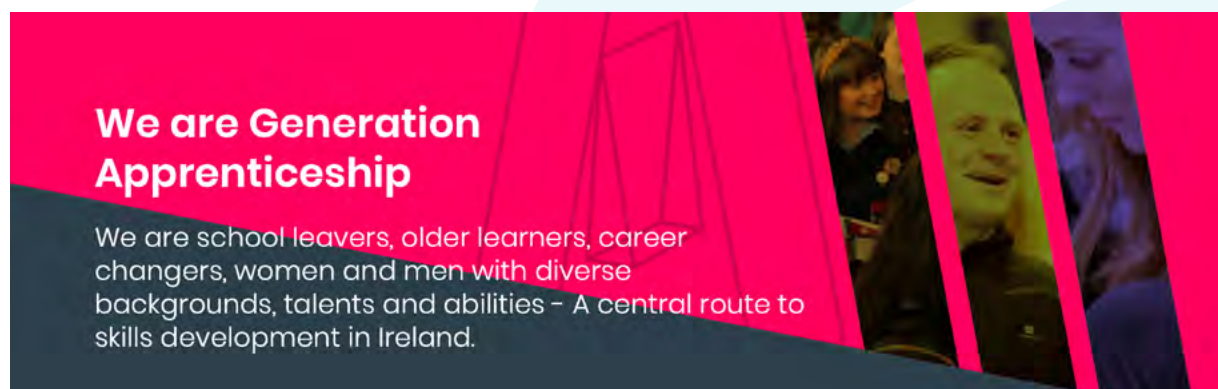
high staff attrition and turnover rates, the consortium-led apprenticeship is typically viewed as a means to encourage staff retention. In other occupations, the programme is viewed as a mechanism to aid recruitment or help create a skilled entry-level labour pool. Smaller companies may engage with apprenticeship to add value to their activities in the short term. Many of the consortia-led apprenticeship programmes have also been adopted by large companies as part of a wider internal learning and development strategy and to build capacity in the workforce for the medium term. In such instances, the programme is typically one of a suite of activities used to upskill existing employees in areas where there are current or future skills needs.

### 3.2 Multi Stakeholder Collaboration

As outlined in Section 2, an extensive process of collaboration underpins the development of all consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. In some instances, and within sectors that lack representative bodies, this means that the development of a programme has been a catalyst for collaboration between employers and other stakeholders. In other instances, the development process has deepened existing links between the consortia, employers of apprentices and providers of off-the-job training. Contributors reported *'positive and regular working relationships between stakeholders.'* Common sentiments are *'we work very well together,' 'everyone's voice is heard,' 'so little ego is involved'.* Emphasis is placed on collaboration and a *'collective will to make change happen.'*

Providers of off-the-job training for consortium-led apprenticeships highlight the many benefits that close links with consortia and employers bring to the programmes. These include the alignment of such linkages to the provider's strategic plan, access to industry-experienced guest lecturers and access to equipment or facilities for apprentice use. Providers also report less directly measurable but equally important gains, such as the opportunities for lecturing staff to ensure they are aligning their teaching to current industry trends and the potential to leverage relationships for other projects and partnerships.

### 3.3 Adaptability to Industry Needs



The many different ways in which the consortium-led apprenticeship model is being used to attract new talent or retain and develop existing staff undoubtedly reflects well on the adaptability of the model. Moreover, that adaptability aligns closely to objective 2 of the government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025, which aims for apprenticeship to be recognised and valued by employers as a key mechanism for building a highly skilled workforce. The plan explicitly acknowledges the full range of motivations employers may have for engaging with apprenticeship.

However, the review team observed differences in emphasis among some stakeholders in relation to the overall role and purpose of apprenticeships. In some discussions, the review team heard that the role of apprenticeships is to create *new jobs*. In other interviews, the review team heard that a perceived emphasis on new employment was a potential deterrent to employers, who were more likely to invest in existing employees. Concerns were also expressed to the review team that using apprenticeship to upskill and retain existing staff at higher levels on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was diluting the traditional apprentice brand.

This suggests that despite the emphasis placed on the flexibility of apprenticeship as a mode of learning within the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 and within the Generation Apprenticeship campaign, ongoing communication is needed in this area. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) endorses the varied opportunities that the apprenticeship pathway can offer within a larger lifelong learning infrastructure. This means that while they may be used to support recruitment into an industry, they may also be legitimately used as a mechanism to aid staff retention, upskilling and career development in that same industry or across other sectors. Stakeholders directly involved in consortium-led apprenticeship programmes as well as the wider community may benefit from further reinforcement of this message. A consistent emphasis needs to be placed on how 'Generation Apprenticeship' greatly expands traditional or fixed concepts not only of what apprenticeship is, but who it is for.

### 3.4 Dynamic skills and the changing world of work

Both consortia members and employers on the one hand, and provider institution representatives on the other, positively associate the ongoing involvement of industry with opportunities to continually enhance and update consortium-led programmes.

The close proximity of consortium steering groups to real-time industry needs can help an apprenticeship programme to keep pace with social or technological developments in an occupation or sector. Numerous inputs to the review reflected a perception that at this early stage, consortium-led apprenticeship programmes are not static. Rather, there is '*a practice of continuous improvement and listening*' as well as '*informed conversation around improvements*'. Consortia members frequently state that the provider institutions they work with '*value industry feedback*'. Such statements reflect that consortium-led apprenticeship programmes are well-positioned to evolve alongside dynamic labour-market needs.

This is particularly important when considering the views of consortia members, employers and provider representatives on future skills needs. Over 75% of representatives of these groups predicted at least some major changes in the next five years to the core skills needed for the occupations that the consortium-led apprenticeships they were involved in served. All respondents predicted some degree of change, with consortia and employers more likely than provider representatives to predict major changes would be needed.

In this context, processes that facilitate the ongoing and active involvement of employers via consortium steering groups after a programme is established are crucial. The review team notes that some variability in this regard was reported across existing programmes. In many instances, consortium steering groups remain active in promoting the programme within the sector and suggesting enhancements to the apprenticeship after it becomes operational. In other instances, provider institutions were reported to largely '*take over*'. Survey responses also indicated there is a wide disparity in the frequency of meetings between the consortium steering groups and members of the

provider institutions once an apprenticeship is established. Ten percent of respondents indicated that meetings of the consortium steering group occurred less than twice per year. This is concerning, as the consortium steering group should ensure, in partnership with the coordinating provider, adequate consultation throughout the delivery and review of the programme, as per QQI's guidelines.

Apprenticeship management and coordinating provider representatives consistently emphasise the positive impact that committed members of a consortium can make in maintaining the alignment of the programme to industry needs and promoting the programme to employers. However, some also report a substantially lessened contribution from consortia members once the early work of developing and validating the programme has concluded. The review team notes that members of consortia steering groups typically hold senior roles in industry and may be juggling heavy schedules. Further, it is standard that a coordinating provider will manage the day-to-day quality assurance aspects of delivery and assessment for a programme. Nonetheless, the review team cautions that a drop-off in interest from consortia members over time may negatively impact the apprenticeship programme's ongoing relevance and profile in the industry over time. This situation can prove particularly challenging when the responsibility for managing and promoting an apprenticeship is also dispersed across multiple personnel or otherwise under-resourced (see also discussion of apprenticeship management in Section 2 of this report and discussion of apprenticeship management resources in Section 4.5). The review team also noted that although the majority of apprentices responding to a survey that formed part of the review reported that the off-the-job learning was very relevant to their careers (>88%), the relevance and currency of the curriculum was also an area where they expressed dissatisfaction or identified that improvements were needed (see Appendix XI).

These findings suggest that the ongoing expectations of consortium steering group members could in some instances be made clearer and may also need to be considered in relation to the resources dedicated to a programme's ongoing management and promotion. The rotation of Chairs and members of a consortium steering group over time, already a practice for some of the programmes, may also be an effective way to share the workload and maintain a healthy dynamism within the consortium steering group.

### 3.5 A responsive model

Survey responses and focus group inputs to the review indicated that not only consortium steering groups, but coordinating and collaborating provider institutions, employers and apprentices were typically contributing to the ongoing development of consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. Inputs to the review also identified that mentors, tutors/instructors, Authorised Officers, regional skills managers, learning support staff, external authenticators and quality assurance experts were at times influential in enhancing the programme. The overall picture represented to the review team is suggestive of a healthy ecosystem, in which a breadth of stakeholders is able to make input. A common sentiment was that *'the consortium steering group is a very open platform'* and that stakeholders engaged in *'debating and working through the issues ... finding consensus among the participants'*

However, a number of contributors indicated that improvements were needed to the effectiveness of processes for facilitating feedback from employers that were not represented on the consortium steering group and the apprentices themselves. Approximately 20% of apprentices responding to a survey issued as part of the review stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on their experiences on the apprenticeship programme. This issue was also raised by a number of apprentices during focus groups facilitated by the review team.



Given the public investment in consortia-led apprenticeship programmes, it is reasonable to assume that in addition to qualitative and ongoing feedback mechanisms that may be implemented at programme level, an annual survey could be conducted centrally by an appropriate agency to measure the overall satisfaction of apprentices and facilitate a high level of transparency for the apprentice voice. A similar measure of employer satisfaction would provide a broad picture to inform the work of key agencies and policymakers.<sup>8</sup> The view of the review team is that the results of such surveys should be routinely published (as per studentsurvey.ie).

However, given the diversity of contexts, industries, provider institutions and delivery models that characterise consortium-led apprenticeships, the review team caution that the high-level view provided by such measures will not offer sufficient insight to individual consortia on programme specific needs or how to address the gaps identified in some areas. It is also noted that a number of consortium-led apprenticeship management teams have established robust and successful practices to facilitate and respond to feedback. The sharing of good practice at events such as the National Apprenticeship Office sponsored Action Learning days in 2022 may offer valuable support to programme teams seeking to enhance practice in these areas as well as those commencing development of new programmes.

### 3.6 Development and Validation Processes

The development of an apprenticeship involves making submissions to various funding and regulatory agencies. The requirements of these agencies are designed to ensure high quality outcomes. They also can be opaque and overly prescriptive. Many consortia steering groups develop only one apprenticeship, and therefore these processes represent new territory.

In addition to navigating these processes, a significant workload is involved in the development and validation of a programme for a major award. This can be especially challenging when a consortium has limited resources or prior experience in programme development. The requirements of the regulatory environment are stringent, and without experience, dealing with these can be daunting. In many instances, stakeholder inputs reflected that support would be welcomed from QQI. The review team note that being the regulatory body responsible for validating many of the programmes precludes QQI from offering detailed guidance or support on any individual submissions. However, such support could valuably be located with another agency. In particular, enhanced support for consortium steering groups developing an apprenticeship for the first time would greatly facilitate the prompt development of new apprenticeships. The review team notes that stakeholders who had applied to QQI for validation of an apprenticeship programme frequently indicated that the validation templates were overly complex and repetitive. This is noted as an area where enhancements could reasonably be made.

A common issue raised was that the process of developing and subsequently securing the validation of the apprenticeship programme took far longer than anticipated (or was considered reasonable) by industry stakeholders. Both providers and consortia reported delays in the development of apprenticeships. Provider representatives responding to a review survey reported that the full process had in most cases taken 1 - 2 years (38%), in some cases taking 2 - 3 years (22%) and in a few cases more than 3 years (22%). In a small number of cases, the time period reported was less than 1 year (11%). A further 7% were unsure (see appendix XII).

The granular data provided by QQI to the review team on QQI validation timelines reflects that the bulk of delays appear to be in the development phase prior to submission of the programme for

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<sup>8</sup> The current NAO business plan includes the undertaking of surveys as an action item

validation. Although there have been some instances where the validation period following acceptance of submissions has been lengthy, this is not typically the case. Forty-six percent (18 out of 39) of the consortium-led apprenticeship programmes that were in scope for this review were validated by QQI. The length of time to complete the validation process from submitting completed documentation to obtaining QQI validation has varied between 6 to 26 weeks, with a mean value of 15 weeks (see Appendix XII). In some instances, delays have occurred between the submission of documents and their acceptance by QQI, typically because the documentation was in some way incomplete. Some providers may see that pre-submission process as part of validation rather than of development. In other instances, independent validation panels have required the consortia and provider to implement special conditions of validation in areas where they perceive there to be deficiencies in the submission. In such cases, evidence will need to be submitted by the provider that this has occurred prior to a validation panel recommending approval. Despite this, the overall duration of validation periods for QQI programmes has not exceeded the norm.

Some providers, particularly higher education institutions, have significant experience and well tested procedures for the development of academic programmes, with the programme lead being a standard function within academic departments. This may facilitate the more rapid completion of the development phase of the apprenticeship once the occupational profile has been agreed in those contexts. It was reported to the review team that under normal conditions a programme should proceed through an internal approval process in an institution that was a designated awarding body in approximately 10 weeks (see Appendix XII).

Overall analysis of the inputs from stakeholders across the 39 apprenticeships and of the available data from government agencies does not bring one specific factor impacting on the time it takes to develop a consortium-led apprenticeship to the fore. Rather, there are a number of potential areas where progress can be delayed or slowed. These include, but are not limited to:

- The establishment of the consortium steering group;
- The consultation period with employers and other stakeholders;
- The approval of the Occupational Profile;
- The allocation of resources to develop the submission for validation;
- The experience of staff in developing submissions, in particular for QQI validation;
- The establishment of independent expert validation panels;
- The scheduling of validation events to suit the calendars of all panel members and consortia/provider representatives;
- The completion of the validation report and sign-off by panel members;
- The implementation of any special conditions of validation, where relevant;
- The acceptance of the recommendation in the report by the Programme Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) in the case of QQI or Academic Council in the case of designated awarding bodies.

Throughout the development and approval process, provider representatives reported that the provider institutions were typically more involved in moving things forward than the consortium steering group. This was not the view of consortium steering group members and employers, who typically perceived sectoral representative groups as being the most active partners during this phase, with employers equally if not more likely to be moving things forward than the provider. The review team suggests

that the disparity in perspectives on this item may be attributable to the degree to which the work of particular stakeholder groups is visible or understood by others. For example, provider staff may be required to undertake work associated with internal or external quality assurance obligations and prepare significant documentation that the consortium steering group and employers are not required to review. On the other hand, provider staff may not be aware of work associated with the establishment of the consortium and the submission for approval of the occupational profile.

Although inputs to the review reflect differing perceptions regarding where the bulk of the workload lies, all stakeholders are perceived to be contributing in appropriate ways that reflect their strengths and expertise. For example, both consortia and provider representatives indicated making significant input to the development of the occupational profile, learning outcomes and entry requirements for the apprenticeship programmes. Consortium steering groups were reported to make significant input into specifying the learning tasks and assessments undertaken on-the-job and planning the delivery model in relation to release time. Similarly, providers were reported to make significant input to planning assessments for off-the-job achievement and determining what part (if any) of the programme would be online. In this respect, the roles of the consortium steering group, coordinating and collaborating providers, programme boards and awarding bodies were reported by contributors to the review to be reasonably or extremely clear during the development of the programme.

QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (2016) have been used as guidelines by institutions developing consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. The guidelines were written to ensure that apprenticeships were situated within a firm quality framework, distinguished from, but equal to, those for traditional non-work-based programmes. The types of learning outcomes of knowledge, skill and competency for professional programmes are described differently than those for Awards Standards for specific fields of learning e.g., Awards Standards for Science (see Appendix V). The Professional Award-Type Descriptors provide general standards for the development of professional awards within the National Framework of Qualification. It was a requirement of the guidelines that they would be used in apprenticeship programmes. They also assist in underpinning the quality of work-based learning systems and are seen as an aid to the specification and measurement of work-based learning outcomes.

The broad structures suggested by the guidelines have been implemented on all programmes. They are industry led, with oversight from consortia of employers, industry stakeholders and providers. Moreover, they are occupation focused, designed to meet the needs of defined occupational profiles (see Appendix V). The quality assurance policies and procedures of ETBs, independent providers and the University of Limerick all state that they have adopted the PADT in developing apprenticeship programmes. Many of the Technological Universities, while adopting the broad structures of the guidelines, have used their own indicators to establish the level of the awards e.g., the Engineering Award Standards.

### 3.7 Operational Systems and Processes

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the capacity of key agencies to function as normal has understandably led to difficulties. During this period, consortia and provider representatives report lags in response times from various government bodies. This has led to significant frustration. The inherent challenges for agencies pivoting to remote operation during the pandemic appear to have been compounded in some instances by changes to/movement of key personnel. In this context, the establishment of a new National Apprenticeship Office is broadly welcomed. Multiple stakeholders identified that further definition of the responsibilities, personnel and key contacts in that office was

desirable. To facilitate this, it will be important to ensure that the National Apprenticeship Office is adequately resourced.

Another area of frustration for contributors to the review was the apparent duplication of tasks and responsibilities surrounding the recruitment and registration of employers and apprentices. This can lead to employers being required to deal with multiple processes and personnel to register, a lack of clarity over registration and enrolment processes and, in some instances, reported delays in registration. Apprenticeship management teams located outside Education and Training Boards (where Authorised Officers are located) report frustration at being unable to access contact details for Authorised Officers due to GDPR considerations. A significant variance in practice across different regions is also noted. Inputs to the review from Authorised Officers reinforce the complexity, highlighting that there is confusion surrounding operational processes and expressing concern that *'there is no rule book'* to follow for consortia-led apprenticeship programmes.

These issues are acknowledged in the government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025, which identifies that the complexity of operating two models has led in some instances to *'multiple and overlapping relationships and roles between individual stakeholders, education and training providers and regulatory bodies, whose roles and responsibilities have also evolved over this time'*. The government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 indicates that a review of the role of Authorised Officers and an examination of how the network can further evolve to support the delivery of apprenticeship in Ireland is a planned action. Inputs to this review indicate that this is much needed and that the opportunity to enhance clarity, communication and efficiency in this area will be welcomed by all stakeholders.

During the review period, an area of concern has been the lack of easy access to/availability of data and documentation that would inform the work of the review team. This can be attributed in part to GDPR constraints (see discussion in Section 1.3). However, gaps are also evident in relation to the consistency and accuracy of basic demographic and registration related data. A key deliverable within the government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 is that a robust data collection and performance framework will be established to provide an evidence base for continuous improvement. Under the auspices of the National Apprenticeship Office, this will facilitate the monitoring of apprentice retention rates and graduate tracking. It will also provide visibility of demographic information pertaining to apprentices (for example, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic background) and employer profiles, which is key to understanding the impact and reach of the system. This will also be a welcome development, as this information will be crucial to future reviews and to inform enhancements to policy and practice.

### 3.8 Communication

As previously discussed, the high level of collaboration between multiple stakeholders within consortia and the positive impact of this across different sectors was repeatedly emphasised in contributions to this review. However, consortium-led apprenticeships remain inherently complex to manage. That complexity has only been amplified by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and is further compounded by the ongoing development of operational systems discussed in the previous section. In this context, effective and clear communication must be a priority.

During the review, inputs from employers reflected that communication in some areas is considered a strength and apprenticeship management teams are frequently commended on this. However, a number of employers also made inputs suggesting more frequent or better communication was

needed. An area of particular concern for multiple stakeholders pertained to the crucial role of workplace mentors. Although mentor orientation and training events are facilitated by multiple consortia, attendance and participation in these is reported to be inconsistent. Moreover, employers and mentors report that greater communication is needed from consortia in advance regarding the expectations and workload associated with this role.

Input from apprentices also reflects that while, in the main, communication is considered clear and effective, gaps are evident. This is particularly evident in inputs pertaining to the off-the-job time. A small, but nonetheless concerning, percentage of apprentices (11%) indicated that they were unclear who to contact in their college or training centre if having difficulties, that they did not feel well supported while undertaking off-the-job learning and that the processes in place for them to report any difficulties were not adequate. Some apprentices also reported feeling like '*second class citizens*' within the colleges where off-the-job learning was facilitated. A compounding issue was that not all apprentices appeared to be provided with regular opportunities to engage with peers or felt that they were part of a community of learners. This was in some instances attributable to the pivot to online learning made by many programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this was also stated in connection to models of delivery that are standard practice and both pre and postdate emergency measures. Although these issues do not appear to be widespread, they do suggest that in some instances provider institutions need to give greater consideration to the implications of engaging in apprenticeship and ensuring that the needs of apprentices, which may differ substantially in profile from 'traditional' learners, are adequately supported.

### 3.9 Innovation and Knowledge Sharing

The scope of this review is high level and therefore does not examine the detailed teaching, learning or assessment arrangements for individual consortia-led programmes. However, as a dynamic area of our education and training sector, consortia-led apprenticeships are fertile soil for innovation. This is particularly evident in relation to the potential of work-based learning to facilitate access to education and training and promote social inclusion. It is also evident in relation to approaches to upskilling, learning and development and the promotion of lifelong learning in rapidly changing workplaces.

During the review period, the National Apprenticeship Office held a series of action learning events that the review team was able to participate in. Brief review focused discussions were facilitated, with the bulk of the time being devoted to interactive workshops led by an experienced apprenticeship manager. The review team heard repeatedly from participants at those events how valuable the opportunity was to network across consortia, discuss challenges and share examples of good practice with other apprenticeship management and delivery teams. Despite the diversity of the apprenticeship occupations involved in consortia-led programmes, there are multiple examples of apprenticeship practices that transcend specific occupations or industries. For example, a common concern was that employers that are smaller and more specialised in focus may not be able to facilitate apprenticeship as effectively as larger companies that are more comprehensive in their function. A specialised focus may be thought to preclude an apprentice from being exposed to particular aspects of the occupation that are necessary to achieve particular learning outcomes. However, participants in the action learning events heard examples of participation by such employers, with support from programme teams to develop appropriate workarounds such as field trips, observational case studies of other contexts and peer to peer learning during the off-the-job time. The positive feedback on these events reflected that activities of this nature are indeed timely and welcome.

### 3.10 Social Perceptions of Apprenticeship as a Mode of Learning

Consortium-led apprenticeships span a diversity of industries and occupations, including professional, managerial or those performed in an office or other settings. In many cases, pursuing a career in the industry has previously required progression through a conventional third level education route. An issue raised by a number of contributors to the review was that parents and prospective apprentices may be hesitant to accept apprenticeship as a viable pathway to a career in these domains. This is due to an enduring association among parents and prospective apprentices between apprenticeship and traditional craft-based occupations. For these programmes, focus group participants suggested that centralised support is sought after to better integrate apprenticeship options to the Central Applications Office (CAO) portal, raise awareness among second level teaching staff and careers advisers, and increase promotions for school leavers.

However, it is important to note that for many of the consortium-led apprenticeships, particularly those serving mature learners already in employment and career changers, social perceptions of apprenticeship as a mode of learning are reported to be positive. In many cases, apprenticeship is perceived as a logical way to progress beyond an initial traineeship and develop a career within an occupation. A number of apprentices noted that they previously had limited awareness of the opportunity to pursue an apprenticeship and felt it should be promoted more. Notably, in the context of the high-tech industries, apprenticeship is also well-recognised and a highly respected pathway to qualification. As is the case with many of the themes and issues discussed in this review, the picture is not uniform.

The National Apprenticeship Office and the Generation Apprenticeship campaign are actively working to enhance communications in this area and broaden the image of apprenticeship in Ireland. However, it must be acknowledged that changing social perceptions takes time. Given that consortium-led apprenticeship programmes now lead not only to Level 5 Certificate and Level 6 Advanced/Higher Certificate qualifications, but to Level 7 Ordinary, Level 8 Honours, and Level 9 Master's degrees as well as Level 10 Doctoral qualifications in well-paid industries, it can be assumed that current apprentices will also be powerful ambassadors for the opportunities that apprenticeship as a mode of learning can provide.

## 4 What helps (or hinders) the national roll out of a Consortium-led Apprenticeship Programme?

Consortium-led Apprenticeships are intended to be national in reach and impact. For this reason, new consortia are prevented from bringing forward apprenticeships that replicate existing offerings. It is envisaged that each consortium will seek opportunities to expand a new apprenticeship once it has been established, supporting the recruitment of regional employers and, where necessary, identifying collaborating providers that can cater for regional cohorts.

One of the objectives of the government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 is encapsulated as 'Apprenticeship for All'. The objective focuses on shifting the profile of apprentices to more closely reflect the profile of the general population.<sup>9</sup> 'Apprenticeship for all' entails the creation of more inclusive access and delivery structures to better facilitate diversity among apprentices. Among a number of actions that may help achieve this, an important consideration is whether opportunities to participate in apprenticeship are readily available across the entirety of Ireland.

In the following sections, achievements to date in rolling out consortium-led apprenticeships nationally are considered, and the complex features of apprenticeships that may influence a consortium's capacity to offer truly national access are examined.

### 4.1 Current status of national roll out

The data made available to the review team in August 2022 reflects that the spread of apprentices registered on consortium-led apprenticeships by location remains uneven. Donegal has the lowest registration at 1.6 per 10,000 population, contrasting with Dublin, which has over five times as many per 10,000 at 8.6. To control for the uneven distribution of industry across the regions in Ireland, the numbers for more population sensitive apprenticeships were also calculated. Population sensitive apprenticeships are those which are less dependent on the presence or clustering of a particular industry in a region to succeed. Therefore, they could be more reasonably expected to reflect residential population data. For example, apprenticeships for occupations within hospitality, insurance, healthcare, auctioneering, hairdressing, butchery and retail sectors can all be considered population sensitive. When this is accounted for, the disparity between the lowest and highest registration rates is reduced but remains striking (4.1 apprentices per 10,000 population in Dublin compared with 1.0 per 10,000 in Donegal).

It is reasonable to assume that local registration rates will be somewhat impacted by regional disparities in the availability of consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. Appendix X provides an overview of the number of locations where the off-the-job elements of the programmes were being provided during the review period.

A number of contextual features impact the expansion of individual consortium-led apprenticeships. These include industry size, local availability of laboratories or specialised equipment for some

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<sup>9</sup> See p.29 of the government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 for further detail.

apprenticeships, the geographic distribution of particular industries and the feasibility of online learning in the context of the apprenticeship occupation. These variables and other issues that may impact the national roll out of a programme are discussed in greater depth in the following section.

It is also important to consider the relative maturity of many consortium-led apprenticeships. At the time of this review, a number of the programmes in scope were focused on their first or second intake of apprentices and had not yet arrived at a graduation. Inputs to the review via surveys, interviews and focus groups indicate that expansion of the existing consortium-led apprenticeships via the engagement of new collaborating providers is being approached carefully. A number of consortia and coordinating provider representatives stated to the review team that it was considered preferable to establish the apprenticeship programmes fully, reviewing and refining where required, prior to engaging with potential collaborative providers.

## 4.2 What is Meant by a 'National' Programme?

Throughout a four-month period of engagement with key stakeholders, the review team observed a notable degree of ambiguity as to what constitutes a national consortium-led apprenticeship programme. In some instances, consortium steering groups and providers are working on the assumption that, once approved, the programme must run without variation across multiple locations, offering apprentices a near identical experience regardless of which provider is facilitating their off-the-job learning. This approach assumes that the following would be common across locations, and fall under the aegis of the same quality assurance system:

- a) Governance
- b) Title of apprenticeship
- c) Awarding Body
- d) Occupational profile
- e) Programme learning outcomes
- f) Programme Board
- g) Entry Requirements
- h) Curriculum structure- on the job / off the job
- i) Content and delivery model of off-the-job modules
- j) Assessment/Marks and Standards
- k) Academic Calendar

Defined in this way, the coordinating provider will be required to oversee consistent implementation of quality assurance procedures by collaborating providers. However, this may impose difficulties in areas such as the administration of student records and the processing of decisions relating to apprentices. In general, the administrative burden and reporting requirements associated with collaborative provision were observed to be a clear deterrent to some (though not all) coordinating providers. However, the review team notes that this was variable, with providers operating similar quality assurance systems, for example, Education and Training Boards, experiencing fewer problems. As a model for the roll out



of programmes, the review team notes that this approach to quality assurance is somewhat rigid, e.g., providers operating multiple marks and standards, and creates a significant workload for both the coordinating and collaborating providers.

### 4.3 Ownership

Interrelated with how quality assurance is managed in the context of a national programme are broader questions of ownership. These are reflected in the concerns that some coordinating providers, particularly those involved in consortium-led apprenticeship programmes above NFQ Level 6, express regarding loss of control over award standards for their students. Throughout the review, representatives of coordinating providers articulated concerns and apprehensions pertaining to this across interviews and focus groups, as well as within open-ended responses to a survey. Typical challenges identified include:

*'standardisation of teaching and learning'*

*'marks and standards for assessment differ'*

*'implementation and quality across multiple partners'*

*'consistency of delivery approach'*

Although consortia-led apprenticeship programmes are conceived of as industry-led and are overseen by a consortium steering group, it is clear that a strong sense of ownership and responsibility rests with the coordinating provider institutions. Section 2 of this report outlines the substantive investment of time and resources made by coordinating providers as they work with consortia to develop and validate the apprenticeship programmes. That commitment is crucial to the overall quality of the apprenticeship and the effective management of time spent on off-the-job learning.

However, the review team heard from numerous stakeholders, including coordinating provider representatives, that this can lead to a provider institution taking a proprietary view of a programme. A consequence of this is that the coordinating provider may in some instances be reluctant to share the programme with a competing provider institution.

### 4.4 Programme Viability for Provider Institutions

In addition to a sense of ownership, the perceived viability of consortia-led apprenticeship programmes, particularly in the early years of their delivery, can act as an additional barrier to national roll out. For coordinating providers, where there is a perception of a limited pool of apprentices in a particular region or industry, offering the programme in conjunction with a collaborating provider may lead to a decrease in registrations at the coordinating provider's own institution.

The review team also heard from representatives of several consortia that reluctance from potential providers (both coordinating and collaborating) was often due to the investment required. Experience to date reflects that in the majority of apprenticeships the numbers of apprentices registering will typically be low on initial intakes and build over time (see Appendix XVI). In the absence of a funding model that compensates for potential shortfalls during those initial intakes, not all provider institutions are willing or able to commit. This suggests that in areas where there are skills shortages and there is a national interest in addressing those, targeted interventions to support provider institutions may need to be considered.

For some occupations, the role that government funding mechanisms play was perceived to be a complicating factor. In these cases, the apprenticeship offers an earn and learn pathway to qualification. However, Springboard funded options that lead to an equivalent qualification via full-time study are also available. Some providers reported that these options are competing with one another for a relatively small candidate pool, compounding previously stated concerns about programme viability. Although the intention may be to provide options and alternatives to prospective learners and facilitate wider participation, the impact of this may need to be more closely examined in some areas.

## 4.5 Apprenticeship Management Resources

The provision of adequate and sustained resourcing for programme management and delivery was stated to be crucial to the growth of a consortium-led apprenticeship programme. An observable feature of several of the larger programmes that have achieved or are approaching national coverage is that significant staffing and administrative resources have been devoted to them.

### Employer survey responses

*'Having a dedicated project manager for the apprenticeship is essential for its success, especially in the early start up. Admin help is also needed in the early stages to support the manager while they build the consortium membership'*

*'The Apprenticeship Manager role is key in providing support and the ultimate sustainability of this programme as this role is main driver in bringing all of the parties together to maintain a quality programme'*

However, inputs to the review frequently reflected that a lack of understanding of the workload and complexity associated with developing, validating, establishing and maintaining an apprenticeship programme persists in some areas. For example, within provider institutions, the resource implications of intensive industry and employer relationship management as well as apprenticeship-specific processes are not always fully comprehended. It is also observed that the initial demands of programme development and validation as well as the ongoing quality assurance requirements of awarding bodies may be somewhat opaque to consortia and employers. The resources necessary for the deployment of effective mentorship within enterprises are also often underestimated.

A common input to the review from those charged with the day-to-day management and operation of a programme was an emphasis on the *'many moving parts'* of an apprenticeship, and the need for adequate *'dedicated (human) resources'*.

## 4.6 Economic Supports for Employers

A characteristic of the consortium-led apprenticeship model is that the employer is considered responsible for funding apprentice salaries during time spent on off-the-job learning. Nonetheless, grants and bursaries have been made available to consortium-led apprenticeships targeted at incentivising growth, retention and gender balance in consortia-led apprenticeships. At the time of writing, consortium-led apprenticeship employers are able to access a grant of €2000 annually per registered apprentice.

The government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 identifies that funding models will provide time limited and targeted interventions to support specific areas of national strategic importance or identified skills shortages. Such supports can be characterised as responsive, taking into account a rapidly evolving economic context. For example, employers of consortium-led apprenticeships could access an incentivisation scheme during the COVID-19 pandemic (closed for new registrations on 31st of December 2021). Notably, as consortium-led apprenticeships are initiated on a voluntary basis by industry, state agencies have limited capacity to discern in advance or plan for economic support that may be needed to promote employer participation within an industry.

Six years on, a clearer, though by no means simpler, picture of the role that economic supports play in enabling a consortium-led apprenticeship programme to grow and roll out nationally is emerging. The impact of economic supports varies depending on the consortium. One way of representing the landscape is by two variables of need and affordability. Figure 7 below represents this rather complex landscape across four distinct quadrants. The vertical axis represents the extent to which the industry in which the occupation is situated can realistically fund apprenticeship. The horizontal axis represents the degree to which the training or upskilling provided by the apprenticeship programme meets an immediate versus a longer-term or strategic need for the relevant industry. Notably, different employers engaging with the same apprenticeship may fall into different quadrants.

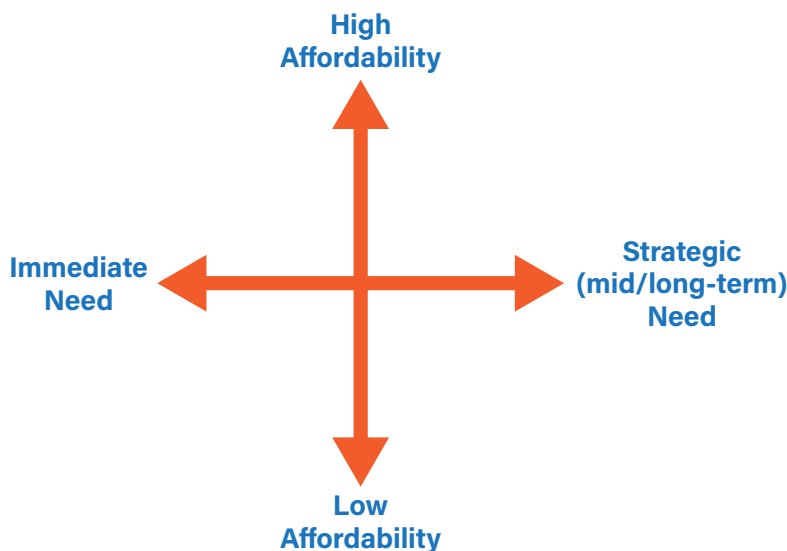


Figure 7 Economic Support Factors - Affordability and Need

**Vertical Axis (affordability)**

The degree to which engaging in apprenticeship is considered to be affordable for employers is a prominent theme associated with growth and national roll out of apprenticeship programmes in the data collected throughout the review period. Employers from diverse consortium-led apprenticeship programmes identified that the cost to employers of paying salaries for off-the-job learning time was a major blocker to their capacity to engage with apprenticeships, as *'It was tough paying wages and having no help to hire extra staff'*. This was a recurrent theme across survey responses, focus groups and interviews. Travel and accommodation costs are also an issue.

This suggests that the support model for apprentices can act both as an enabler in some circumstance,

but also as a barrier, depending on the industry. In such instances, the existing grants were noted to be very welcome, but insufficient. However, this is not uniformly the case. In other instances, consortia representatives noted that employers for the occupation were absorbing the cost of the apprenticeship within existing budgets allocated to training, learning and development.

A multitude of variables influence affordability in a sector. There are economic disparities between different industries engaged in consortium-led apprenticeships. The number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) versus large or multinational corporations in a particular industry (or as an employer of a particular occupation) is also highly variable. It is noted that a common statement made in stakeholder input to the review was that some SMEs are deterred from participating in apprenticeship by the cost of back-filling an employee while they are off-the-job.

Another consideration is the amount of time off-the-job, which differs substantially across programmes. In some programmes, off-the-job time has been kept to as little as two days per month. In others, the nature of the occupation requires a substantial block release period of multiple weeks, during which an apprentice's wages must be paid. This can occur in advance of the apprentice commencing work on the job. In such instances, differentiated funding models may need to be considered as a mechanism to alleviate the financial pressures associated with extended block release requirements for occupations that are of strategic importance nationally.

#### **Horizontal Axis (immediacy of need)**

The degree to which the training, upskilling or formal qualification obtained by the apprentice fulfils an immediate need in industry is also a prominent theme that has implications for employer participation and rolling out programmes on a national scale. In some instances, regulatory requirements, a lack of alternative training opportunities and a shortage of skilled labour for the occupation in industry has created a natural demand. Consortium-led apprenticeship programmes falling into this category are typically over-subscribed and have waiting lists.

However, as per affordability, this is not a uniform experience across all consortia. In some instances, consortium-led apprenticeship programmes provide alternative pathways to particular occupations or career paths that can also be accessed via traditional third level programmes. In other instances, the programmes may facilitate staff retention and meet medium-term or strategic needs without being considered essential to facilitate operations or business continuity.

## **4.7 Physical Requirements**

The government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025 acknowledges the impact of economic activity on apprenticeship, with recruitment and retention rates for apprenticeship suffering where there is a decline in activity in a particular sector.

Unsurprisingly, the system shock of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted some of the consortium-led apprenticeship programmes in scope for this review negatively. This was particularly the case for apprenticeship programmes that depended heavily on the use of specific facilities and equipment, required in-person attendance on location for off-the-job learning and were situated in industries that struggled to pivot online. However, as per the other features of the apprenticeship programmes that impact national roll out and are identified in this section of the report, this was not a uniform experience. In many instances, industries were able to adapt. Although challenges were experienced, coordinating providers were also typically able to facilitate an online pivot for off-the-job learning, enabling apprentices to progress in their learning and achievement.

The country is beginning, with cautious optimism, to move past the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced in 2020 - 2021. However, as this occurs, those apprenticeship programmes that require access to specific equipment and facilities to facilitate achievement of learning outcomes will continue to experience challenges distinct from those programmes more suited to use of standard classroom facilities or online learning. In some instances, it may not be practicable or viable to use more than one facility nation-wide for a single and highly specialised apprenticeship programme or to serve a niche industry. In such cases, the release time for off-the-job learning needs to be managed carefully, optimising the opportunities offered by blended learning formats where these are appropriate. Consideration also needs to be given to the burden of expenses incurred by employers who may be funding not only wages, but travel and accommodation costs.

## 4.8 Geographic Distribution of Industry

Notably, throughout the review period in 2022, the need for regionally based apprentices to be able to participate in both on-the-job and off-the-job elements of apprenticeship locally has been further highlighted. Rising costs of living, the fuel crisis and a nationwide accommodation shortage have placed an increasing strain on apprentices who are required to travel to access classes during day or block release periods.

However, there is a trade-off to be considered between creating opportunities for apprentices regionally and the practicalities of doing so in the absence of funding or grants that enable this to occur. Currently, consortia must weigh up the viability of offering the programme regionally against the implications of the geographic distribution of the industry. In some instances, consortium-led apprenticeships are serving industries that are heavily clustered in particular regions. Participants in the review stated that concentrating efforts in these regions makes it easier to establish class sizes that are suitably diverse and viable for coordinating or collaborating providers. It may also make it easier to leverage existing networks and relationships between providers and the industry.

## 4.9 Industry Representation

The review team notes that the existence and active involvement (often as a driving force) of a strong sectoral body has been a clear enabling factor for a number of successful consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. In addition, apprenticeship managers across a broad spectrum of industries consistently emphasise the degree to which the consortium steering group represents the entire industry is an important factor. A highly representative steering group offers a reasonably high level of confidence that inputs to the programme will ensure the relevance and currency of the programme for the full breadth of the industry/sector. Consortia with strong nationally organised representative bodies typically locate dedicated resources focused on promotion and recruitment within these. This is substantially more challenging where there is a single coordinating provider with responsibility for recruitment.

## 4.10 Suitability and Use of Blended/Online Learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many consortium-led apprenticeship programmes that were not validated for online or blended delivery made an emergency pivot to online learning. Notably, this was more easily facilitated in some programmes than others, and individual programme reviews will offer more nuanced accounts of how this impacted apprentices and the programmes overall. In many

instances, programmes benefited from the established expertise of collaborating and coordinating provider institutions and the existence of well-developed virtual learning environments. The shift to online learning was also noted to offer some advantages, for example, reducing commuting times and travel expenses as well as making remote participation feasible to apprentices located at a significant distance from the off-the-job provider. In some instances, the review team heard that there was an intent to continue with either fully online or increasingly blended delivery models in a post-pandemic future.

Nonetheless, online learning was a significant adjustment for many apprentices as well as teaching and training staff. The now well-documented challenges experienced by students and education and training providers across the nation were also experienced by apprentices. These included (but were not limited to) lack of access to devices, poor internet connections, increased family caring obligations and home environments that may be unsuited to online learning. The review team notes that face-to-face experience and opportunities to interact and connect with peers are highly valued by apprentices. This was evident in both responses to an apprentice survey as well as in contributions by apprentices to focus group discussions.

Moving forward, it will be important to consider and preserve opportunities for apprentices to engage with a community of learners and develop peer-to-peer relationships. This will need to be carefully considered and planned for by programmes seeking to leverage the many benefits that online learning also brings.

## 4.11 Barriers to Apprentice Participation

The review team engaged directly and indirectly with apprentices across a breadth of programmes during the review period. Apprentices responded to surveys, which elicited apprentices' views on what was working well, what needed to be improved, and any factors they perceived could act as a barrier or an enabler to others interested in engaging with apprenticeship as a mode of learning. The survey included space for open-text responses, which provided the review team with a wealth of qualitative as well as quantitative input. A number of focus groups for apprentices were also facilitated (see Appendix II) at which they were invited to discuss these issues in more depth (see Appendix XI).

These inputs reflected that overall, apprentices appreciated the opportunity that the apprenticeship gave them to earn while learning. Moreover, apprentices generally expressed that they enjoyed the opportunity to learn and were able to see the relevance of the programme to their career and the role their learning would play in terms of opportunities to progress. Nonetheless, certain issues were also highlighted, many of which are summarised in Appendix II. Of these, those that were perceived to be potential barriers to participation are identified below:

- Apprentices commented on curriculum and delivery issues that could deter individuals with family or other commitments from participating. In the main, these related to heavy workloads and challenging scheduling of modules and assessment tasks.
- Apprentices commented unfavourably on low salaries for apprentices in some industries. As the review period has coincided with rapidly rising costs of living nationwide, this concern has been understandably heightened. Inadequate salaries may also be viewed as a potential retention issue, particularly for mature learners.
- Apprentices expressed frustration at inconsistent salaries across their industry for apprentices. As per low salaries, this issue may also lead to potential retention challenges.

- Apprentices commented on entry requirements. The mathematics entry requirement of a minimum pass at Leaving Certificate level was stated to be a barrier for NFQ Level 6 Advanced Certificate programmes. This suggests further emphasis could be placed on bridging and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) in some instances.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

At this juncture, the stakeholders in consortium-led apprenticeships are well-positioned to reflect on the learning that has occurred across the last six years. As stakeholders move toward the next phase of the government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025, there are three tensions that are useful to reflect upon.

The first of these is the extent to which consortium-led apprenticeships are developed and operated in a planned versus a rapidly responsive manner. A strength of the consortia-led model is its capacity to respond to emerging skills shortages, including catering to occupational profiles in emerging industries and evolving needs in established industries. Nonetheless, the creation of a consortium-led apprenticeship is a significant undertaking and requires not only a substantial initial investment, but ongoing resources to deliver and maintain the programme. For this reason, the viability of consortium-led apprenticeships needs to be carefully considered at the outset. Consortia may benefit from expanded planning support in the development phase from government agencies. A differentiated and planned approach to economic support measures could, depending on the approach taken, also offer greater certainty to providers in relation to programme viability as well as provide greater confidence to employers interested in engaging with apprenticeship. There is now a sufficiently well-developed landscape of existing apprenticeships to inform a more nuanced approach in this area, including in relation to the retirement of programmes when and where appropriate. However, it is important that planning support does not become a mechanism for centralised control or diminish the capacity of consortia to respond to evolving needs and a changing economic climate.

The second tension pertains to the extent to which consortium-led apprenticeships are subject to oversight and control for the purposes of quality assurance as opposed to enjoying flexibility in their modes of operating. Undoubtedly, the credibility of the qualifications apprentices on consortium-led programmes work to attain depends on the implementation and maintenance of a quality assurance system that satisfies the requirements of the awarding body. Governance of quality imposes checks and balance that mean changes, especially significant changes, will require examination and approval by various committees and governing authorities. However, overly rigid interpretations of quality assurance, particularly in the area of collaborative provision, may not serve the system or its users well, potentially creating an undue administrative burden. In some areas of the system, for example the ETBI network, this might be more easily overcome via cooperative endeavour. Certainly, a shared common framework will facilitate a more fluid and manageable system for the longer term.

Finally, although contributors to this review have emphasized the positive collaboration between industry and the education and training sector that has been prompted by consortium-led apprenticeship programmes, there is nonetheless an acknowledged tension between ways of working in industry and ways of working in education. Much of this pertains to the capacity of industry to deal with challenges, make decisions and take corrective action quickly. Within the education and training sector, consultation processes and oversight mechanisms mean that both decision-making and the implementation of decisions tend to occur at a slower pace. For all stakeholders involved, working and achieving together as a consortium potentially entails '*a learning curve*'.

Notably, the three tensions outlined in these concluding remarks do not require resolution. Instead, they require an ongoing and dynamic navigation by key stakeholders. Ideally, a course will be steered that balances the demands of quality with the advantages of agility. Ongoing monitoring and future reviews should seek to ensure that the ship does not veer too far to either side of the course. In closing,



the review team reflect that the outcomes of this review are perhaps best summarised by a phrase used at a National Apprenticeship Office hosted event during the review. This was that there is '*...much achieved... more to be done.*'

## 6. Acknowledgements

The work of the review team has been informed throughout the period May - September 2022 by generous input from those with direct operational, managerial or governance experience of consortia-led apprenticeships.

Consortia members, industry representatives, employers of apprentices, workplace mentors, apprenticeship managers, providers of off-the-job training and SOLAS Authorised Officers, as well as the representatives of key government agencies engaged directly in discussions on these themes with the review team. The review team has also benefited from input from members of the Steering Committee. All contributors were invited to share their perspectives on existing strengths as well as opportunities to further develop the model. Importantly, the work of the review team has also been informed by the voices of apprentices registered on established consortium-led programmes.

The review team also takes this opportunity to applaud the resilience and achievement of the stakeholders who, despite the most adverse conditions, have brought a new model of apprenticeship to life over the past six years. Developing and obtaining approval for new apprenticeship programmes, navigating rapidly evolving systems and processes, recruiting employers, piloting programmes and supporting the initial cohorts of apprentices through graduation would be an achievement at the best of times. It is doubly so when managed amidst the economic turbulence and extreme social and personal disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although Ireland's consortia-led apprenticeships are young, there is a collective wealth of experience and practical insight among the stakeholder groups into the effectiveness of the processes and systems that underlie their implementation. That experience can now be leveraged to enhance and inform the ongoing enhancement of systems, policies and practices for consortia-led apprenticeships. There is no doubt that work to date has smoothed the way for increasingly diverse industries to engage with apprenticeship as a mode of learning. This in turn will create valued opportunities and pathways for diverse individuals across Ireland to benefit from what apprenticeship can offer.

# Appendices

# Appendix I – Review Methodology

The review methodology was developed to address four research questions set out in a Request for Tenders, as follows:

- 1) Characterise the main variants of consortium-led apprenticeship models (in terms of quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes) that are currently in operation having regard to [Section 3](#) and the following indicative but non-exhaustive list:
  - the genesis of the consortium;
  - the consortium’s motivations, strategies and objectives;
  - the consortium make-up and key support bases (constituencies);
  - the formal establishment and governance of the consortium;
  - the roles and divisions of responsibilities between the following actors in the various stages of the apprenticeship lifecycle as set out in Section 3:
    - » the consortium,
    - » the coordinating provider,
    - » the collaborating providers,
    - » the employers of apprentices,
    - » othe professionals/practitioners that the apprentices aspire to become<sup>1</sup> and
    - » any other key actors (e.g., but not limited to, SOLAS, HEA, QQI).
  - the expansion of the programme to involve additional collaborating providers and employers.
- 2) Identify practices, arrangements, processes or infrastructure (in terms of quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes), whether intrinsic or extrinsic to the apprenticeship, that have had a substantial positive impact on the quality of the apprenticeship, the roll-out of the apprenticeship programme across the country, or the credibility of the qualification, i.e., that worked well, and explain why they have worked well and determine whether they might be translatable.
- 3) Identify practices, arrangements, processes, or infrastructure (in terms of quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes) that did not work well or as intended and explain what can be learned from these to help enhance the quality of apprenticeships or the credibility of their qualifications.
- 4) What enablers and obstacles impact on how different consortia have managed to roll out a full national apprenticeship programme across all the regions (including meeting targets for intended registrations).

The scope of the review is also set out in the Request for Tender, with the explicit statement that:

*‘The review is high level and is not expected to examine the detailed teaching, learning or assessment arrangements for the 37 individual consortia-led programmes’*

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<sup>1</sup> Where the occupations are completely new then consider the role of the kinds of practitioners who are involved in providing on-the-job training.

## Document Review

The primary purpose of the document review was to inform RQ 1: *Characterise the main variants of consortium-led models*. The term 'model' was operationalised in the context of this project as referring to the governance and management arrangements and associated processes established across the 39 CLAs. The review team used a combination of pre-defined and emergent criteria for the document review process. Emergent criteria were discussed within the project team and then tracked and addressed iteratively throughout this phase of the review.

The project team anticipated that there would be considerable variability in the formatting, detail and completeness of the documentation that would be obtained for review. Accordingly, the project team requested in some instances that an appropriate individual (for example, the secretary to the consortium steering group or the Programme Lead) make themselves available for a brief follow up consultation to address any specific lacunae relevant to the pre-defined criteria. A number of individual consultations were held to clarify details and provide further information relevant to the available documentation.

## Document Sampling

The project team undertook an initial broad-brush review of (available) documentation. This did not involve a sampling strategy. However, it was contingent on the availability of documents and information. This enabled the team to produce an early 'sketch' of the consortium make up and governance arrangements for a number of the apprenticeship programmes.

After the initial broad-brush review was completed, purposive sampling was used to review the documentation. This enabled the project team to address emergent criteria and also facilitated triangulation in relation to specific themes that were emerging from survey, focus group and interview-based data gathering activities as the review progressed. Second-tier documentation included:

Appendix II provides detail regarding the volume of documents (categorised by type) accessed by the project team in the course of this review for the purposes outlined in this section.

## Surveys

Survey instruments were used to address Research Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 with consortia members, employers and provider representatives. A survey was also used to address Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 with apprentices. Surveys provided a useful mechanism to engage with a wider participant group than would be feasible via focus groups and interviews. They offered a means to triangulate data on specific themes.

Appendix II includes details of survey response rates, by respondent type. A copy of the survey items used in the review is available within a separate file from QQI upon request. It is noted that all surveys included open-text response items in which respondents were able to include remarks in response to specific prompts about what was working well, not working well and inhibiting or facilitating expansion of the apprenticeship. An additional open-text response item invited respondents to offer any other comments or remarks they wished to share with the review team. This meant that surveys offered a form of qualitative as well as quantitative data for analysis.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups were an important mechanism for gathering data to inform the findings of this review. They were selected as an effective method for enabling participants to engage in facilitated discussions on topics of shared relevance. They encourage participants to explore themes or issues and reach shared understandings, but do not require them to reach consensus. Focus groups were used to address Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 in particular.

The composition of the focus groups typically ensured that individuals holding similar role profiles in relation to an apprenticeship programme were grouped together. For example, consortium steering group Members from different apprenticeship programmes participated in the same focus group. Although participants were drawn from very distinct disciplines or industries, the commonalities in their roles facilitated discussion of shared experiences, as well as areas of divergence (Williamson and Miller, 2020).

The common profile of focus group members was also intended to minimise the inhibiting impact of power dynamics on the discussions. Participants were not placed in mixed groups where they would interact with colleagues holding roles very distinct from their own. For example, linked or collaborating provider representatives were not mixed with coordinating provider representatives.

It is acknowledged that participants attending focus groups may be somewhat more self-selecting than those who elect to limit their participation to a survey response or elect not to contribute to a review. A strong or specific interest in the governance and quality assurance arrangements surrounding apprenticeship programmes may motivate their choice to participate.

The majority of focus groups were conducted virtually, excepting four in-person discussions facilitated with the support of the National Apprenticeship Office at events scheduled in Dublin (2), Cork (1) and Galway (1). Appendix II contains summary information of focus groups facilitated for the review.

Although attendee numbers were often low at the virtual focus groups (typically 2 - 6 participants) uptake was generally representative across the consortium-led apprenticeship programmes overall. This facilitated a high degree of confidence that the focus group data reflected an appropriate breadth of perspectives gleaned from the full spectrum of consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. Although focus groups have traditionally been facilitated in-person, the exponential increase in virtual communication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has created new norms and expectations in this area. Research indicates that virtual focus groups can be conducted successfully and with comparable outcomes to in-person interactions (Menary et al., 2022, Greenspan et al., 2021); they can facilitate easier attendance from geographically dispersed and diverse participants and may also lead to lower dropout rates (Halliday et al., 2021).

## Interviews

Interviews were used to augment data gathered from document reviews, surveys and focus groups. Over 17 interviews were conducted with representatives of government agencies and members of the review steering committee. Interviews were typically used to address Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 and to explore emergent themes in the review data with key stakeholders. However, the review team also facilitated individual interviews with selected representatives of some consortium-led apprenticeships who were unable to attend focus groups due to scheduling conflicts or to address questions arising from documentation reviews for a particular programme. In such instances, Research Question 1 was also addressed via the interview format.

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# Appendix II – Sources of Information

## Documentation

As anticipated, the review team found considerable variability in the formatting, detail and completeness of the documentation obtained.

Table 3 below indicates the documentation received and reviewed to date by document type.

*Table 3 Types of Documentation Received*

Document Type	Number of Documents	Total Apprenticeships for each Document Type
Documentation pertaining to the approval of the CLA by the Apprenticeship Council and the occupational profile	21	11
Approved Programme Documents/Validation submissions	38	22
Information about Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures for CLA programmes	11	11
Any modifications or updates to Quality Assurance Procedures for CLAs post approval	1	1
Validation reports	24	25
Memorandums of Agreement/Memorandums of Understanding/ Terms of reference or equivalent for any groups established by the consortium	1	1
Memorandums of Agreement/Memorandums of Understanding with employers	5	5
Memorandums of Agreement/Memorandums of Understanding with collaborating providers	8	10
Terms of reference for committees and boards	7	5
Role descriptions for Programme Lead or Secretary of consortia/Role descriptions of all key roles involved in the governance of QA	3	3
Other	51	
<b>Total</b>	<b>170</b>	



## Survey Responses

Table 4 below indicates the responses to the surveys and the number of apprenticeships represented by those responses.

*Table 4 Summary of Survey Responses and Apprenticeships Represented*

Respondent Type	Responses received by 24/08/2022	Apprenticeships
consortium steering group Representatives	53	33
Employers of Apprentices	121	
Apprentices	274	24
Provider Representatives	52	29

## Focus Groups

Table 5 below summarises the number of focus groups facilitated by participant type.

*Table 5 Stakeholder Focus Groups Facilitated*

Focus Group	Completed
consortium steering group	6
Coordinating Provider Leads/Staff	6
Collaborating Providers	2
Employers	3
Workplace Mentors	3
Apprentices	6
SOLAS Authorised Officers	1
In-person NAO Event Provider and CSG representatives	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

## Interviews

Table 6 below shows individual stakeholder interviews by affiliation and representative name (where agreed for publication)

*Table 6 Stakeholder Interviews Conducted*

Affiliation	Representative
DFHERIS	Sarah Miley
ETBI	Ken Farragher
FIT	Andrew Finn
HEA	Ruaidhri Neavyn
HEA	Ruaidhri Neavyn & Louise Sherry
Ibec	Ann O Connell & Colleagues
IUA	Ann Ledwith
MSLETB	Siobhan Magner
NAO	Mary-Liz Trant
QQI	Bryan Maguire & Barbara Kelly
QQI	Jim Murray
RIA	Conor O'Sullivan
RIS	Oran Doherty
SOLAS	Philip Sheridan & Alan McGrath
THEA	Michael Hannon
THEA	Joe Ryan
TUI	Aidan Kenny
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

A total of 17 interviews were conducted. Most interviews were with representatives of key agencies and members of the review steering committee. However, the review team has also facilitated individual interviews with selected representatives of some consortium-led apprenticeships.

An additional brief meeting was facilitated with the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) education committee. They expressed their concerns over the possible migration of the craft apprenticeships to the consortium-led apprenticeship model. As this was outside the scope of the review their comments were not included. CIF did participate in a focus group concerning consortium-led apprenticeship programmes they are associated with.

# Appendix III - Apprenticeships Awards, Duration, Coordinating Provider & Industry Lead

Table 7 Overview Information on Apprenticeship Programmes

Apprenticeship	NFQ Level and Award	Duration	Coordinating Provider	Industry Lead
<b>ARBORICULTURE</b>				
Arboriculture	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	Galway & Roscommon ETB	Kilcoyne Tree care
<b>BIOPHARMA</b>				
Laboratory Analyst	Level 7. Ordinary Degree	3 years	TU Dublin	Ibec Biopharma cluster
Laboratory Technician	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	TU Dublin	Ibec Biopharma cluster
<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>				
Geo-Driller	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	SETU	Geological Survey Ireland
Scaffolding	Level 5 Certificate	2 years	Laois & Offaly ETB	Construction Industry Federation
<b>ELECTRICAL</b>				
Industrial Electrical Engineer	Level 7. Ordinary Degree	2 years	TUS	Stryker
<b>ENGINEERING</b>				
Engineering Services Manager	Level 7. Ordinary Degree	2 years	MTU	Construction Industry Federation
Equipment Systems Engineer	Level 9 Master Engineering	2 years	Univ. Limerick	SL Controls
Manufacturing Engineering	Level 7. Ordinary Degree	3 years	ATU	Irish Medical Devices Assoc., Ibec
Manufacturing Technology	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	ATU	Irish Medical Devices Assoc., Ibec
OEM Engineer	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	3 years	Cavan & Monaghan ETB	Combilift
Polymer Processing Technology	Level 7. Ordinary Degree	3 years	TUS	Plastics Ireland, Ibec
Principal Engineer	Level 10	4 years	Univ. Limerick	Lero

Apprenticeship	NFQ Level and Award	Duration	Coordinating Provider	Industry Lead
<b>FINANCE</b>				
Accounting Technician	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	Accounting Technician Ireland	Accounting technician Ireland
International Financial Services Associate	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	National College of Ireland	Financial Services Ireland
International Financial Services Specialist	Level 8. Honours Degree	2 years	National College of Ireland	Financial Services Ireland
<b>HAIR</b>				
Hairdressing	Level 6 Advanced Certificate	3 years	Limerick & Clare ETB	Hairdressing Council of Ireland
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>				
Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	Griffith College	Kiltipper Woods Care Centre
<b>HOSPITALITY &amp; FOOD</b>				
Bar Manager*	Level 7. Ordinary Degree	3 years	Griffith College	Vintners' Federation Ireland
Butcher	Level 5. Certificate	2 years	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB	Associated Craft Butchers of Ireland
Chef de Partie	Level 7. Ordinary Degree	4 years	MTU	Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI)
Commis Chef	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	Kerry ETB	Irish Hotels Federation
Sous Chef	Level 8. Honours Degree	2 years	MTU	Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI)
<b>ICT</b>				
CGI Technical Artist (Animation, Games, VFX)**	Level 8. Honours Degree	2 years	TU Dublin	Screen Skills Ireland
Cybersecurity	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	FIT	FIT
Network Engineer Associate	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	FIT	FIT
Software Developer Associate	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	FIT	FIT
Telecommunications and Data Network Technician	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	TU Dublin	KN Networks

Apprenticeship	NFQ Level and Award		Coordinating Provider	Industry Lead
<b>INSURANCE</b>				
Insurance Practitioner	Level 8. Honours Degree	3 years	ATU	Insurance Institute of Ireland
<b>LOGISTICS</b>				
Lean Sigma Manager	Level 9. Master's in Strategic Quality Management	2 years	Univ. Limerick	ICBE
Logistics Associate	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	TU Dublin	Freight Transport Association of Ireland (FTAI)
Supply Chain Associate	Level 7. Diploma in Supply Chain	2 years	Univ. Limerick	IPICS The Supply Chain Management Institute
Supply Chain Manager	Level 9. Master of Science in Supply Chain Operations	2 years	Univ. Limerick	IPICS The Supply Chain Management Institute
Supply Chain Specialist	Level 8. Bachelor of Science in Supply Chain Management	2 years	Univ. Limerick	IPICS The Supply Chain Management Institute
Transport Operations and Commercial Driver*	Level 6. Higher Certificate	2 years	ATU	Freight Transport Association of Ireland (FTAI)
<b>PROPERTY SERVICES</b>				
Auctioneering and Property Services	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	City of Dublin ETB	Sherry FitzGerald
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>				
Recruitment Executive	Level 8. Honours Degree	3 years	National College of Ireland	National Recruitment Federation
<b>SALES</b>				
Retail Supervision	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	Retail Ireland Skillnet (RIS)	Retail Ireland
Sales	Level 6. Advanced Certificate	2 years	Mayo, Sligo % Leitrim ETB	Sales Sense

**Notes:**

\* Indicates a new programme validated in 2022.

\*\* No apprentices registered since 2019.

## Findings:

- All programmes are placed on the NFQ from Level 5 to 10
- Two programmes were at NFQ Level 5, nineteen were at NFQ level 6 (11 Advanced Certificates and 8 Higher Certificates), eight at NFQ Level 7, six at NFQ Level 8, three at NFQ Level 9 and one programme at NFQ Level 10.
- Programme duration was from 2 years (minimum requirement for an apprenticeship) to 4 years. Twenty-eight programmes were of two year's duration, nine were of three year's duration and two of four years' duration.
- TUs were the coordinating provider for 15 programmes, independent providers for 10 programmes, ETBs for 8 programmes and UL for 6 programmes.
- The industry leads were mainly sectoral bodies (30 out of 39 (77%)). The remainder (9 out of 39 (23%)) were individual organisations mainly where the chairperson of the CSG was located.
- The industry lead and the provider were the same for five programmes.

## Appendix IV – Access to Stakeholder Details and Programme Data

As stated, GDPR constraints meant that the review team was not provided with the contact details for consortia and provider representatives at the outset of the review period, despite the relatively short timeline in which data was to be collected from these stakeholders (May – July 2022).

In practice, the contact details of some consortia and provider representatives were passed to the review team after QQI arranged for them to self-nominate as participants. Additional contacts were provided to the review team by the HEA or established via the direct networking activities of the review team, including at National Apprenticeship Office events. These primary consortia and provider contacts were then asked to provide documentation to the review team as well as to forward invitations to participate in review activities to the representatives of any collaborating provider institutions, employers, mentors, or apprentices involved with their programme. However, it should be noted that this activity was entirely voluntary, and the review team has no oversight of such communications.

Concerns pertaining to GDPR created lags in access to documentation and other data, made communications cumbersome and significantly increased the administrative burden for government agencies, consortia/provider representatives as well as the review team.

It should be noted that in some instances, staff turnover, the summer holiday period and other factors also led to substantial delays in the provision of documentation and data or the engagement of consortia and provider representatives in review activities such as surveys, focus groups and interviews.

It is also noted that following approval by legal advisors, invitations to participate in focus groups and surveys that formed part of the review activity were sent directly by SOLAS to registered employers and apprentices. This support facilitated significantly greater representation and participation than would otherwise have been possible.

# Appendix V – Characteristics of Apprenticeship Programmes

QQI’s Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (2016) in section 2.3.1 sets out the assumed characteristics of apprenticeship programmes in the left-hand column within Table 8 below. Findings of the review team in relation to how established consortia-led apprenticeship programmes reflect these characteristics are provided in the right-hand column.

*Table 8 Characteristics of Apprenticeship Programmes*

Assumed Characteristics	Apprenticeship Programmes
<p>Programmes prepare participants for a specific occupation for which an Occupational Profile has been established.</p>	<p>All consortia-led apprenticeship programmes have an Occupational Profile. Currently, occupational profiles are approved by SOLAS.</p> <p>Validation reports make reference in many cases (but not all) to the alignment of the consortia-led programme content with the Occupational Profile.</p>
<p>Access to the programme is via a contract of apprenticeship between an approved employer of apprentices and the apprentice.</p>	<p>SOLAS Authorised Officers approve employers and apprentices for all consortium-led apprenticeship programmes. However, as consortium-led apprenticeships are promoted directly by consortia and apprenticeship managers and both apprentices and employers also have to register with providers, this is currently a process fraught with duplication and inefficiency. This is discussed further in Section 3 of this report.</p>
<p>Programmes 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 level and consistent with the approved Occupational Profile. QQI may issue a separate set of guidelines that will cover apprenticeship programmes developed at NFQ Level 10.</p>	<p>All consortia-led programmes lead to awards that are placed on the NFQ. The number of programmes by level is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L5-(Certificate)-2</li> <li>L6 (Advanced Cert) -11</li> <li>L6 (Higher Cert) -8</li> <li>L7 (Ordinary Degree) -8</li> <li>L8 (Honours Degree) -6</li> <li>L9 (Master’s Degree)-3</li> <li>L10 (Doctoral)-1</li> </ul> <p>See Appendix III and VIII</p> <p>Not all programmes use the QQI Professional Award Type Descriptors (PADT). Those that do not align the programme with the QQI PADT took cognisance of the QQI Awards Standards for relevant fields of learning e.g., Engineering. Some programmes also align to professional body requirements.</p> <p>QQI did confirm that the existing guidelines do cover NFQ Level 10 and that separate guidelines may be issued for Level 10.</p>



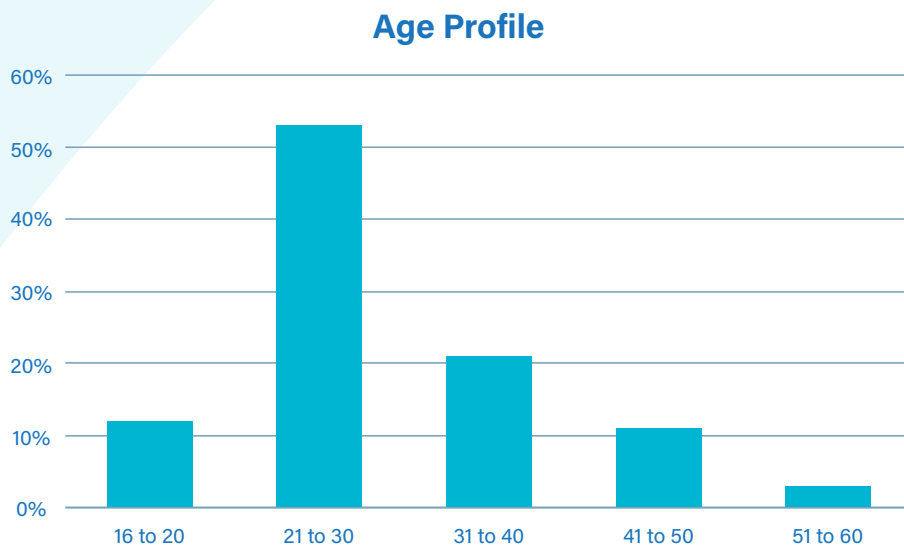
Assumed Characteristics	Apprenticeship Programmes
<p>Programmes are a blended combination of on-the-job (employer based) training and off-the-job training with an education/training provider.</p>	<p>This characteristic is reflected in the structure of consortia-led apprenticeship programmes. A minimum of 50% on-the-job learning is specified for each programme.</p> <p>A diversity of models is used for the off-the-job training ranging from one day or two days per week to block release periods of up to 15 weeks.</p>
<p>Programmes that are classified as an apprenticeship at entry level must have a duration of no less than two years.</p>	<p>All consortium-led apprenticeship programmes are two years or more in duration.</p> <p>2 years -28 CLA programmes</p> <p>3 years-9 CLA programmes</p> <p>4 years -2 CLA programmes. (See Appendices III and VIII)</p>
<p>The structure of the programme provides for more than 50% workplace learning.</p>	<p>A positive indicator that workplace learning is occurring are responses from apprentices to survey items pertaining to their on-the-job learning. Over 85% of apprentices responding to the survey indicated they agree or strongly agree that they can apply their off-the-job learning to their on-the-job work and that they are learning a lot from their on-the-job experience.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>This is reflected in the currently available consortium-led apprenticeship programmes, which do not duplicate one another.</p> <p>The review team acknowledge that some participants in focus groups/interviews expressed concern in relation to current programmes under development that had similarities to consortium-led programmes in operation. Step 5 Occupational Profile Approved in the handbook for Developing a National Apprenticeship does state that in order to have the occupational profile approved there can be no excessive overlap (in general no more than 50%) with and existing apprenticeship.</p>

*Table 9 National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Structure*

Major Strand	NFQ General	NFQ Professional
Knowledge	Knowledge Breadth	Knowledge Scope and Coherence
	Knowledge Kind	Knowledge Structure
		Knowledge of Issues
Know – how and Skill	Know –how and Skill: Range	Cognitive and practical skills to solve problems.
	Know-how and Skill: Selectivity	Draw insightful conclusions
		Communication and influence
Competence	Competence-Context	Exercise autonomy and judgement
	Competence-Role	Exercise responsibility
	Competence-Learning to learnt	Working with others
	Competence-insight	Learning and Teaching
		Attitudes

# Appendix VI – Registration of Apprentices by Gender and Age

Figure 8 Age Profile of Apprentices



## Findings

- Fifty-three percent of apprentices are in the 21 to 30 age group.

Figure 9 Percentage of Females and Males on Apprenticeship Programmes

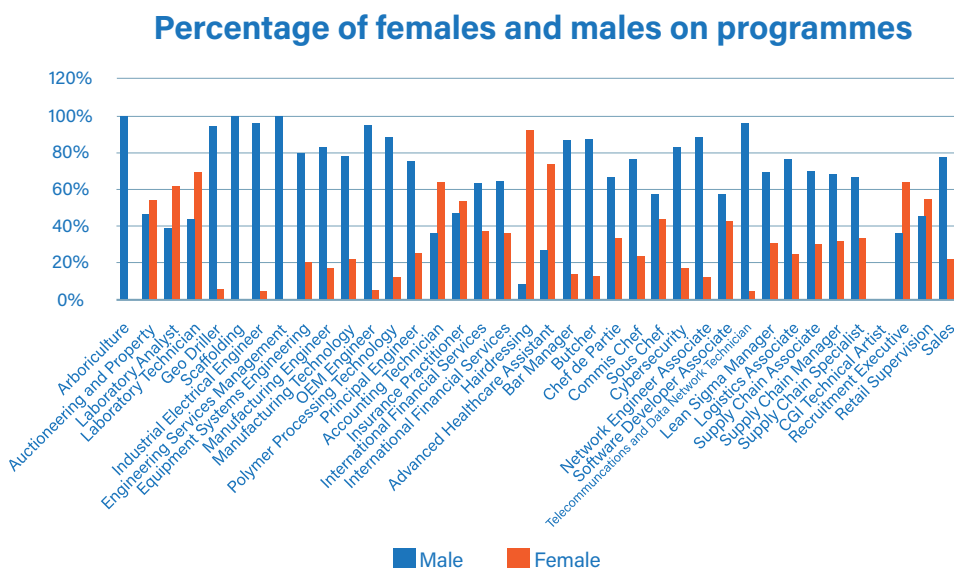
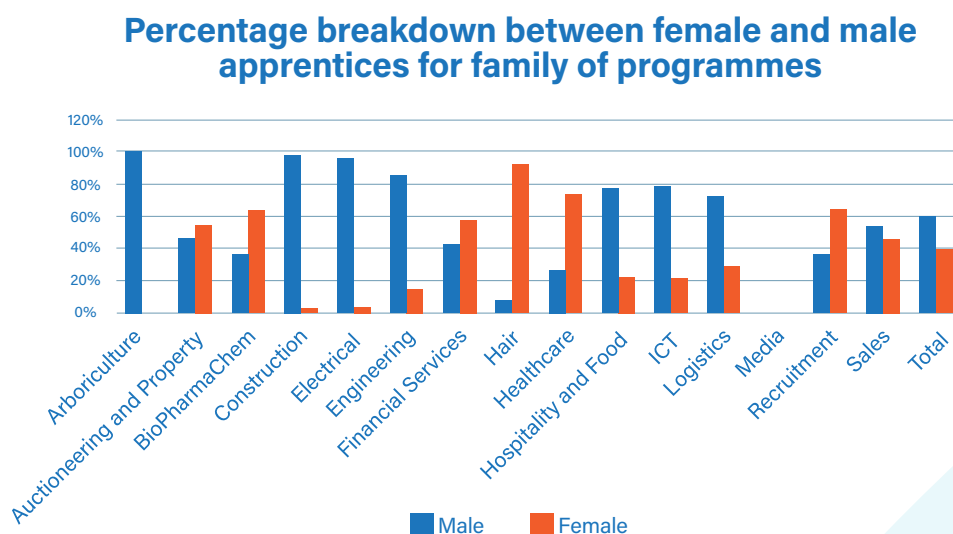


Figure 10 Percentage of Females and Males by Family of Programme



## Findings

- The percentage breakdown between females and males was 39% females and 61% males.
- The breakdown for individual programmes varied considerable as indicated in Graph V1-2. There were significant differences on the breakdown of females and males depending on the programme e.g., Auctioneering and Property Services breakdown was 54% female and 46% male, Engineering Services Management was 100% male, Hairdressing was 92% female and 8% male.
- The breakdown for the family of programmes does indicate that the distribution is related to the sector (family) of apprenticeships. Graph V1-3 e.g., Biopharma 64% female and 36% male, Construction 1% female and 99% male, Engineering 15% female and 85% male, financial Services 57% female and 43% male, logistics 28% female and 72% male and Sales 46% female and 54% male.

# Appendix VII – New registration of Apprentices 2016 – 2021

Table 10 New Registrations of Apprentices by Programme and by Family to December 2021 (Source: SOLAS)\*

Apprenticeship	Registrations December 2016	Registrations December 2017	Registrations December 2018	Registrations December 2019	Registrations December 2020	Registrations December 2021
<b>ARBORICULTURE</b>						
Arboriculture					3	31
<b>BIOPHARMA</b>						
Laboratory Analyst			2	21	18	18
Laboratory Technician			14	10	12	10
<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>						
Geo-Driller				2	18	7
Scaffolding						37
<b>ELECTRICAL</b>						
Industrial Electrical Engineer	12	19	25	28	30	20
<b>ENGINEERING</b>						
Engineering Services Manager				10	17	34
Equipment Systems Engineer				0	0	6
Manufacturing Engineering		36	20	27	20	53
Manufacturing Technology		40	34	29	30	42
OEM Engineer				11	16	14
Polymer Processing Technology		25	15	13	11	14
Principal Engineer		0	0	0	5	8
<b>FINANCE</b>						
Accounting Technician		71	88	124	96	163
International Financial Services Associate		15	11	9	17	16
International Financial Services Specialist		18	10	12	18	23

Apprenticeship	Registrations December 2016	Registrations December 2017	Registrations December 2018	Registrations December 2019	Registrations December 2020	Registrations December 2021
<b>HAIR</b>						
Hairdressing				14	84	182
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>						
Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner						68
<b>HOSPITALITY &amp; FOOD</b>						
Bar Manager				Programme validated in October 2021		
Butcher			7	37	10	51
Chef de Partie			31	40	5	35
Commis Chef		25	112	62	16	75
Sous Chef			0	5	3	11
<b>ICT</b>						
CGI Technical Artist (Animation, Games, VFX)				7	0	0
Cybersecurity				13	30	6
Network Engineer Associate			22	44	22	11
Software Developer Associate			39	66	42	53
Telecommunications and Data Network Technician				50	31	37
<b>INSURANCE</b>						
Insurance Practitioner	67	86	80	70	49	75
<b>LOGISTICS</b>						
Lean Sigma Manager				0	39	52
Logistics Associate			27	34	53	74
Supply Chain Associate						13
Supply Chain Manager					11	36
Supply Chain Specialist				0	10	22
Transport Operations and Commercial Driver				Programme validated in December 2021		
<b>PROPERTY SERVICES</b>						
Auctioneering and Property Services			53	92	75	138
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>						
Recruitment Executive					27	24
<b>SALES</b>						
Retail Supervision				76	101	142
Sales				0	30	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>949</b>	<b>1692</b>

\*These are new registrations of apprentices with SOLAS. The numbers may not correspond with registrations with providers as apprentices are employed prior to the off-the-job element of the programme.

## Findings

- There has been an overall positive upward trend of new registrations on programmes since 2016. In 2016 there were only two programmes running with a total of 79 apprentices registered whereas in 2021 there were 1,692 new registrations on 36 programmes.
- Scaffolding and Supply Chain Associate only commenced in 2022. Bar Manager and Transport Operations and Commercial Driver were only validated in late 2021. CGI Technical Artist has no registrations since 2019 and appears to be in difficulty.
- The impact of COVID-19 is evident in registrations in 2020 where there were 949 registrations compared to 906 in 2019.
- Twenty programmes had an increase in numbers, ten remained more or less the same, four were down on registrations and there were four new programmes.
- Two further programmes were approved recently but did not form part of the review.
- Four programmes, Accounting Technician, Hairdressing, Auctioneering and Property Services and Retail Supervision had over 100 apprentices registered. All four programmes are Advanced Certificates at NFQ Level 6.
- One programme has not recruited apprentices since 2019

# Appendix VIII – Information Pertaining to Variants

Table 11 Variants

Apprenticeship	Genesis of the apprenticeship	Apprenticeship Manager based	Quality Assurance	Delivery model	NFQ Level and award
<b>ARBORICULTURE</b>					
Arboriculture	Employers	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. Blocks. Year 1. Two weeks off the job, 4 weeks on the job. Stage 2. Two weeks off the job, 3 weeks on the job. Note: Two-weeks induction prior to commencing.	L6 Advanced Certificate
<b>BIOPHARMA</b>					
Laboratory Analyst	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body	Provider QA	3 years. 2 days off the job per week.	L7 Ordinary Degree
Laboratory Technician	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body	Provider QA	2 years 2 days of the job per week.	L6 Higher Certificate
<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>					
Geo-Driller	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	2 years. Attend off the job for 4 days per week for 11 weeks each year.	L6 Higher Certificate
Scaffolding	Sectoral Body	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years Year 1 three of the job phases. Phase 1 3 weeks, phase 2- 4 weeks, phase 3 three weeks. Total 10 weeks. Year 2 three of the job phases. Phase 4-4 weeks, phase 5- 3 weeks and phase 6 -4 weeks	L5 Certificate
<b>ELECTRICAL</b>					
Industrial Electrical Engineer	Employers and provider.	Provider	Provider QA	2 years. Two 15-week block release in TUS, One full day at TU Dublin and one evening online each week.	L7 Ordinary Degree
<b>ENGINEERING</b>					
Engineering Services Management	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	2 years. 1 day every week on-line remote delivery.	L7 Ordinary Degree
Equipment Systems Engineer	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	2 years. F2F and on-line. Semester 1-three days' induction. Semester 2 Technology provider sprints delivered remotely, Equipment Systems Research Plan, Thesis in 3. Semester 3 Project review. Year 2 Expo-on campus innovative solution to Peers. Semesters 2 and 3 write up masters. Community of Practice.	L9 Master's Degree



Apprenticeship	Genesis of the apprenticeship	Apprenticeship Manager based	Quality Assurance	Delivery model	NFQ Level and award
Manufacturing Engineering	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body	Provider QA	3 years. Block 15 weeks per year.	L7 Ordinary Degree
Manufacturing Technology	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body	Provider QA	2 years. Block 15 weeks per year.	L6 Higher Certificate
OEM Engineer	Employers	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	3 years. Stage 1 year 11 16 weeks off the job with remainder on the job. Year 2 same format year 3 14 weeks off the job.	L6 Advanced Certificate
Polymer Processing Technology	Sectoral body	Sectoral Body	Provider QA with mapping to PADT	3 years. Each year one 15 week block off the job.	L7 Ordinary Degree
Principal Engineer	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	4 years. 12-week stand-alone module to determine suitability. Blended and F2F. 12 modules over 4 years. F2F two to four days per semester. Community of practice and master classes. Focus is on applying research to practical problems	L10 Professional Doctorate
<b>FINANCE</b>					
Accounting Technician	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. 1 day off the job,	L6 Advanced Cert
International Financial Services Associate	Sectoral Body	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years 1 day off-job	L6 Higher Certificate
International Financial Services Specialist	Sectoral Body	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years 1 day off-job	L8 Higher Diploma
<b>HAIRDRESSING</b>					
Hairdressing	Sectoral Body and provider.	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	3 years. 1. day off the job with ETB	L6 Advanced Certificate

Apprenticeship	Genesis of the apprenticeship	Apprenticeship Manager based	Quality Assurance	Delivery model	NFQ Level and award
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>					
Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner	Employer and provider	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. Three 14-week semester. 1 days off the job for 10 of the 14 weeks.	L6 Higher Cert
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>					
Bar Manager	Sectoral Body	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	3 years. Three semesters per year with attendance on day off the job for 10 weeks per semester.	L7 Ordinary Degree
Butcher	Sectoral Body.	Provider -located in ACBI Office in Teagasc.	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. Not specified.	L5 Certificate in Craft Butchery
Chef de Partie	Sectoral Body	Shared between Sectoral Body and Provider	Provider QA	4 years. Level 7-4 years. Year 1 semesters 1, 2 and 3. Block release one week full-time. Two days per week for 11 weeks. Year 2 semester 4. 1 week full-time plus 2.5 days per week for 11 weeks. Year 3 semester. One-week full-time. 1 day a week for 11 weeks. Year 3 semester 6. One-week full-time. Two days per week for 4 weeks and one day per week for 7 weeks. Year 4 semester 7 and 8: One week FT each semester and 1 day per week for 11 weeks in each semester.	L7 Ordinary Degree
Commis Chef	Sectoral Body	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. Initial 3-week block release of intensive, structured learning in an ETB training centre (15 days). Two days per week in ETB training kitchen, three days with employer (2 years) -July and August: one day with ETB, 4 days with Employer (2 years)	L6 Advanced Certificate
Sous Chef	Sectoral Body	Shared between Sectoral Body and Provider	Provider QA	2 years. Stage 1. 1-week FT. Four days on the job. College 1-day Sept to Dec. Same for Jan to May. Year 2 Four days a week on the job. One-day college. Sept to Dec and Jan to May.	L8 Honours Degree

Apprenticeship	Genesis of the apprenticeship	Apprenticeship Manager based	Quality Assurance	Delivery model	NFQ Level and award
<b>ICT</b>					
CGI Technical Artist (Animation, Games, VFX).	Sectoral Body	Provider but was originally Sectoral Body.	Provider QA	2 years. One day off the job per week.	L 8 Honours Degree
Cybersecurity	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body and organises the provision.	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. First six months off the job, 12 months' employer with two days off the job. Last 6 months 1 day off site.	L6 Advanced Certificate
Network Engineer Associate	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body and organises the provision.	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. First six months in ETB. Next 12 months will involve 2 days per week off the job, the final six months will involve 1 day off the job per week.	L6 Advanced Certificate
Software Developer Associate	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body and organises the provision.	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. First six months off the job, 12 months' employer with two days off the job. Last 6 months 1 day off site.	L6 Advanced Certificate
Telecommunications and Data Network Technician	Employer	Employer	Provider QA	2 years. Eight blocks of two weeks over two years off the job	L6 Higher Certificate
<b>INSURANCE</b>					
Insurance Practitioner	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body	Provider QA.	3 years One day of the job. Two hours per week protected time per week for case studies and attending mentor meeting.	L8 Honours Degree

Apprenticeship	Genesis of the apprenticeship	Apprenticeship Manager based	Quality Assurance	Delivery model	NFQ Level and award
<b>LOGISTICS</b>					
Lean Sigma Manager	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	2-year Level 9. Delivery online with some site visits and master classes. On-line one Saturday per month. Six Saturdays per year. Min 4 workplace mentor meetings per year.	L9 Master Black Belt in Lean & Six Sigma
Logistics Associate	Providers (Two)	Sectoral Body	Provider QAs. Cork separate QA shared external examiner	2 years. One-day college, 4 days on the job.	L6 Higher Certificate
Supply Chain Associate	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	2 years. Delivery online with additional site visits and master classes. Min 4 workplace mentor meetings per year. Summer School year 1	L7 Diploma
Supply Chain Manager	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	2 years plus 5 months write up. One module every 5 weeks blended. Delivery online with additional site visits and master classes. Min 4 workplace mentor meetings per year. Summer School year 1	L9 Master of Science
Supply Chain Specialist	Provider	Provider	Provider QA	2 years. 1 day every 3 weeks during the Autumn and Spring semesters, i.e., 6 days a semester. Delivery online with additional site visits and master classes. Min 4 workplace mentor meetings per year. Summer School year	L8 Bachelor of Science
Transport Operations and Commercial Driver	Sectoral Body	Provider	Provider QA	2 years. One day per week attending on-line classes.	L6 Higher Certificate
<b>PROPERTY SERVICES</b>					
Auctioneering and Property Services	Sectoral Body.	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. 1 day off the job per week.	L6 Advanced Certificate
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>					
Recruitment Executive	Sectoral Body	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	3 years. 1 day off-site mainly on-line. Blended Learning delivery with 7 days online, and 3 days in college each semester (2 semesters per year)	L8 Bachelor of Arts

Apprenticeship	Genesis of the apprenticeship	Apprenticeship Manager based	Quality Assurance	Delivery model	NFQ Level and award
<b>SALES</b>					
Retail Ireland	Sectoral Body	Sectoral Body and provider the same	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. 24 days per year off the job. (14 days are delivered in the classroom and 10 days are delivered online from 10am-5pm each day. One module at a time. 2 days per month F2F and 1 day on-line.	L6 Advanced Certificate
Sales	Employers	Provider	Statutory Specific Guidelines for Apprenticeship	2 years. Stage 1. 10 credit module runs for 6 weeks. Three days F2F and 10 hours on-line. 15 credit module runs for 8 weeks. Five days F2F plus 12 hours on-line. Stage 2. 10 credit runs for 7 weeks with 3 days F2F 10 hours on-line. 15 credit module runs for 10 weeks with five days F2F and 14 dates on-line. 30 credit capstone runs for 12 weeks with six days f2F and 20 hours on-line.	L6 Advanced Certificate

## Findings:

Sectoral bodies and employers are the main groups involved in initiating apprenticeships.

Groups Initiating Apprenticeship	Number of programmes
Sectoral Body	23
Employer(s)	4
Provider(s)	9
Employer & Provider	2
Sectoral Bodies & Provider	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>

ETBs and independent providers developed the programmes aligning with the QQI Professional Award-Type Descriptors (PADT) of the National Framework of Qualifications. TUs and UL used their existing quality assurance policies and procedures and aligned with Award Standards. In one case both PADTs and Award Standards were used.

Further information is provided in Appendix XIII on the location of the apprenticeship Manager.

The variety of the delivery models is shown in column 5 of Table 11. It includes block release, one to two days of the job and so forth. Table 14 presents the information under the main delivery model for off-the-job element of the programme.

As can be seen in Table 12 the number of programmes by NFQ level and award type was:

*Table 12 Programmes by NFQ Level and Award*

NFQ Level	Award	Number
5	Certificate	2
6	Advanced Certificate	11
6	Higher Certificate	8
7	Ordinary Degree/Diploma	8
8	Honours Degree	6
9	Master's Degree	3
10	Doctorate	1

# Appendix IX – Extracts from the Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (2016)

## A The composition of the consortium steering group

The composition of the consortium steering group will depend on the range of the occupation and the nature of the enterprises that are involved in the occupation. The composition should have the following characteristics:

- a. It will be chaired by a person of authority from an enterprise or the community of practice involved in the occupation.
- b. It will have a majority of persons from enterprises, or employers' associations, or the community of practice, or relevant professional bodies.
- c. The enterprise members will be representative of the range of enterprises involved. Where enterprises employing apprentices include large and small employers there should be appropriate representational balance between the SME sector and the larger enterprises.
- d. The Coordinating Provider and other off-the-job providers will be members of the CSG.
- e. The Coordinating Provider should normally provide the secretariat for the CSG although this arrangement could be varied if necessary.

## B The role of the consortium steering group

The consortium steering group (CSG) will:

- f. Ensure, with the Coordinating Provider, adequate consultation with stakeholders in the development, delivery and review of the programme.
- g. 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.
- h. Respond to regional and national actual and forecast demand for the programme to ensure that it is demand driven rather than supply driven, taking into account funding and supply constraints.
- i. Ensure that potential apprentices, the public and employers have accurate information on the programmes and on the occupation.
- j. Support and develop the marketing of the occupational profile.
- k. Support career guidance initiatives and the development of the apprenticeship "brand".

- l. Develop, in consultation and agreement with providers, employers and other relevant stakeholders such as occupational bodies, and in accordance with national norms, binding memoranda of understanding or memoranda of agreement which commit all parties to a process of implementation of the agreements.
- m. Coordinate with the statutory regulator and employers to ensure (i) that recruitment of apprentices takes into account the knowledge, skill and competence necessary to complete the programme (ii) the effective and efficient training of apprentices within the workplace.
- n. Seek to ensure that recruitment and delivery arrangements adequately support equity and inclusion of underrepresented societal groups on programmes and provide appropriate learning support for these groups.
- o. Ensure there is a system in place to evaluate and review employer training capacity and to liaise with the Coordinating Provider in order to address any gaps in that capacity.
- p. Liaise, as requested, with the statutory regulator and its authorised officers in exercising its statutory authority to approve new employers who wish to recruit and train apprentices, and to remove employers who are deemed no longer to have the capacity to provide sufficient training to enable achievement of the programme learning outcomes.
- q. Ensure that there are systems in place for smoothing surges and collapses in occupational recruitment and for responding to redundancy of individual apprentices.
- r. m) Ensure that there is a system in place to allow orderly expansion of provision which can add employers and collaborating providers of education and training.
- s. n) Organise periodic occupational reviews and ensure that the findings are taken into account in subsequent reviews of the programme.
- t. o) Organise periodic reviews of the operation of the CSG itself and its membership and ensure that the findings are taken into account in the development of the CSG and the governance of the programme.
- u. p) Ensure that the development and operation of apprenticeship provision for the occupation conforms to principles of good governance and to the processes, systems and requirements of the statutory regulator, the funding bodies, the education and training institutions, the occupational body, QQI and any other relevant parties.

Depending on the resources available to it, the CSG may arrange for some of the roles above be carried out by the Coordinating Provider.

## C Definition of some terms

An **Employer of Apprentices** should be taken to mean any contractual employer of apprentices that has been approved by the statutory regulator for apprenticeship. Where the term “employer” or “enterprise” is used, it should be taken (where the context requires) to have the same meaning for the purpose of the guidelines.

The **Statutory Regulator** is responsible for fulfilling those functions assigned to it under the 1967 Industrial Training Act or its successors. This role is statutorily assigned to SOLAS. This role is distinct from SOLAS’s role as a provider of apprenticeships or as funder of apprenticeships. The statutory



regulator appoints authorised officers who carry out activities on its behalf.

A **Consortium** is a group, normally led by employers and including providers, involved in the development and provision of an apprenticeship programme.

A **Provider** is a person (an entity with legal personality) who provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.

A **Coordinating Provider** is a relevant or linked provider who is ultimately responsible for providing (as defined by the 2012 Act) an apprenticeship programme. Among its responsibilities are the development and maintenance of the curriculum and assessment procedures for the programme and leading the collaborating providers involved. To act as a Coordinating Provider for an apprenticeship programme, the entity must be a relevant or linked provider under the 2012 Act. This means, among other things, that it must be a legal entity and the provision of education and training must be one of its principal functions. If an entity is not already a relevant provider, it may become one through a QQI process.

A **collaborating provider** is a provider who is formally involved in the provision of an apprenticeship programme and accountable in this respect to the Coordinating Provider.

An **“off-the-job-provider”** is a collaborating provider involved in an apprenticeship programme with a responsibility for off-the-job education or training. It may be the Coordinating Provider, but if it is not, it is expected to be accountable to the Coordinating Provider for delivery of those elements of the programme within its control.

A **Programme Board** is as defined in section 3.7.6 (during development) and in section 4 (following development).

A **consortium steering group** is a governing entity that might be usefully constructed and established (as envisaged in Appendix 2) and whose role would be to ensure that the apprenticeship programme conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation. Its purpose would be to ensure that the apprenticeship programme is enterprise-led and meets labour market needs.

**Funding Bodies** for apprenticeship are SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). One or both of these bodies will fund each apprenticeship programme in accordance with terms and conditions that they determine.

## D 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 is representative of employers and education and training providers, to advise on the programme proposal and operation.
- c. Ensure that the apprenticeship programme conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation; is enterprise-led; and meets labour market needs. This and the following might, for example, be accomplished through the formal involvement of a consortium steering group with the functions set out in Appendix 2.
- d. Ensure that there is adequate consultation with stakeholders in the development of the programme (see below).
- e. Make sure there are systems that ensure employers and labour market trends influence and lead

curriculum development, while providing for learners' personal development and their preparation for progression.

- f. Ensure the development, in consultation and agreement with employers and other relevant stakeholders such as occupational bodies, of binding memoranda of understanding or memoranda of agreement which commit all parties to a process of implementation of the agreements.
- g. 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-the-job and off-the-job phases.
- h. Apply to the awarding body for validation (or validate the programme if it has the required awarding authority).
- i. Develop such administrative systems as are necessary to ensure efficient and effective management of programme provision, including tracking and managing apprentices' progress.
- j. Manage the programme during operational delivery.
- k. Develop and maintain systems for access (in collaboration with employers of apprentices), transfer, progression, and expulsion of participants, including all necessary appeal processes.
- l. Coordinate the actions of other providers of education and training, who are involved in curriculum development and in programme provision.
- m. Coordinate with employers to ensure (i) that recruitment of apprentices takes into account the knowledge, skill and competence required for apprentices to have a reasonable chance of completing the programme and (ii) the effective and efficient training of apprentices within the workplace to reach programme learning outcomes.
- n. Where 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.
- o. Agree and implement a system with employers for evaluation and review of employer training capacity and for addressing any gaps in that capacity. This might, for example, be accomplished through the formal involvement of a consortium steering group with the functions set out in Appendix 2.
- p. Ensure that any expansion of the consortium, through additional providers or employers, has due regard to any relevant quality assurance matters.
- q. 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.

## E 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 Programme Director, and representatives of employers of the educational/training providers and of apprentices. Representatives of other stakeholders such as occupational associations could be included where appropriate. The chair could be one of the employers and the organisation of the Programme Board should be the responsibility of the Programme Director.

- a. The Programme Director, besides organising the board, should act as a contact point for the Programme Board and the providers and should report to the consortium and the awarding body, if not a member.
- b. The members from the training/educational providers should function as experts rather than as representatives 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.
- c. 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
- d. The Programme Board functions
- e. 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 all process reports from collaborating providers and from independent examiners. It should also be aware of changes in the circumstances of the collaborating providers and in the occupation. Its functions include:

## F The programme board functions

- a. The general oversight of the delivery of the programme and of the assessments.
- b. Responding to inputs from external examiners.
- c. Responding to inputs from the providers and from the occupation.
- d. Sanctioning changes to delivery and minor changes to the programme within the bounds set by the validation.
- e. Organising surveys of apprentices and responding to these.
- f. Providing secure feedback mechanisms for apprentices.
- g. Reporting to the Coordinating Provider's academic council or equivalent on its activities, as required by the awarding body.
- h. Reporting on its activities to the partners as required.
- i. Taking the lead in the programmatic review in preparation for revalidation.
- j. In an expanded form it functions as an examination board.

## G Programme development and approval

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

- k. are designed with overall programme objectives and outcomes that are aligned with industry requirements and encompass the range of skills, competencies and knowledge;
- l. are aligned with the QQI Professional Award-Type Descriptors of the National Framework of Qualifications;
- m. are designed jointly by the Coordinating Provider and employers as a partnership;
- n. are designed to allow for national recruitment and for the smooth flow of apprentices between enterprises and educational institutions;
- o. are designed to facilitate professional and regulatory licensing, where applicable;
- p. are designed to facilitate transnational movement within an occupation, where feasible;
- q. are designed recognising the duality of the apprentice as employee and trainee;
- r. include well structured 'off-the-job' periods that integrate and strengthen the 'on-the-job' experience; and
- t. have a range of learning experiences to facilitate the further occupational development of the qualified apprentice.

# Appendix X – National Roll Out by Region

Table 13 Roll Out by Region\*

Column 1 Education and Training Board area	Column 2 Population 2022 preliminary census figures CSO	Column 3 Number of Apprentices	Column 4 Apprentices per 10000 population	Column 5 Apprentices in non- industrial*** Employment	Column 6 Apprentices in non-industrial employment per 10000 population
Cavan-Monaghan	146,033	86	5.9	41	2.8
City of Dublin + Dublin Dun Laoghaire**	1,450,701	1,235	8.5	594	4.1
Cork	581,231	347	6.0	220	3.8
Donegal	166,321	27	1.6	17	1.0
Galway- Roscommon	346,446	209	6.0	94	2.7
Kerry	155,258	48	3.1	38	2.4
Kildare- Wicklow	402,462	182	4.5	115	2.9
Kilkenny- Carlow	165,616	72	4.3	38	2.3
Laois-Offaly	174,325	50	2.9	31	1.8
Limerick- Clare	332,863	266	8.0	110	3.3
Longford- Westmeath	142,474	65	4.6	18	1.3
Louth- Meath	359,396	133	3.7	72	2.0
Mayo-Sligo-Leitrim	242,137	124	5.1	91	3.8
Tipperary	167,661	85	5.1	49	2.9
Waterford-Wexford	290,612	145	5.0	81	2.8
Country	5123536	3074	6.0	1609	3.1

\* Registration data is based on SOLAS data which is codified by ETB area. This includes all registrations up to June 2022

\*\* Combination of CDET and DDLET as population data is based on counties.

\*\*\* Non- industrial apprenticeships are those employments that directly service the residential population: Accounting Technician, Hairdressing, Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner, Chef de Partie, Sous Chef, Commis Chef, Insurance Practitioner, Auctioneering and Property Services, Retail Supervisor and Sales.

## Findings

- Table 13 shows in column 4 the number of apprentices per 10,000 population on programmes varies from 8.5 for the City of Dublin & Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB region to 1.6 for Donegal ETB region.

- Column 6 shows the number of apprentices in non-industrial employment per 10,000 population for each of the regions served by the ETBs. The spread is from 1 for Donegal to 4.1 for Dublin.
- The three regions as shown in column 4 covered by the ETBs for Dublin, Cork, Limerick & Clare have above the national average of 6.0 apprentices for CLA programmes per 10,000 population
- Donegal has only one apprentice for every five in Dublin. Laois Offaly has only three apprentices for every eight in Dublin. See column 4.
- Excluding the industrial apprenticeships Donegal (1.0) still has the lowest registrations with only one third of the national average (3.1). Longford – Westmeath registering 40% (1.3) of national average.

Table 14 Apprentices registered by ETB Region

Apprenticeship	Number of ETB areas with registered Apprentices	Number of Provider Locations* approved at validation/certification	Main delivery model of off-the-job elements**
<b>ARBORICULTURE</b>			
Arboriculture	13	1	2-week blocks
<b>BIOPHARMA</b>			
Laboratory Analyst	4	1	Day release
Laboratory Technician	6	1	Day release
<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>			
Geo-Driller	5	1	11 week block
Scaffolding	10	1	3/4 week blocks
<b>ELECTRICAL</b>			
Industrial Electrical Engineer	12	2	15 week blocks
<b>ENGINEERING</b>			
Engineering Services Management	5	1	Day release online
Equipment Systems Engineer	3	1	Day release
Manufacturing Engineer	15	5	15 week blocks
Manufacturing Technology	10	5	15 week blocks
OEM Engineer	9	2	16 weeks block front loaded
Polymer Processing Technology	8	1	15 week block front loaded
Principal Engineer	6	1	12 week initial module, blended

Apprenticeship	Number of ETB areas with registered Apprentices	Number of Provider Locations* approved at validation/certification	Main delivery model of off-the-job elements**
<b>FINANCE</b>			
Accounting Technician	16	11	Day release
International Financial Services Associate	2	1	Day release
International Financial Services Specialist	2	1	Day release
<b>HAIR</b>			
Hairdressing	15	16	Day release
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>			
Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner	8	3	Day release
<b>HOSPITALITY &amp; FOOD</b>			
Bar Manager	11	3	Day release
Butcher	14	1	not specified
Chef de Partie	8	9	one week block + weekly
Commis Chef	13	6	three weeks block + weekly
Sous Chef	2	6	6 months block front loaded
<b>ICT</b>			
Cybersecurity	9	6	6 months block
Network Engineer Associate	6	12	6 months block front loaded
Software Developer Associate	12	12	6 months block front loaded
Telecommunications and Data Network Technician	6	1	8 two week blocks

Apprenticeship	Number of ETB areas with registered Apprentices	Number of Provider Locations* approved at validation/certification	Main delivery model of off-the-job elements**
<b>INSURANCE</b>			
Insurance Practitioner	15	1	Day release
<b>LOGISTICS</b>			
Lean Sigma Manager	15	1	online with some visits to campus
Logistics Associate	11	1	Day release
Supply Chain Associate	6	1	Blended
Supply Chain Manager	11	1	Blended
Supply Chain Specialist	9	1	Blended
<b>PROPERTY SERVICES</b>			
Auctioneering and Property Services	15	1	Day release
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>			
Recruitment Executive	8	1	Day release blended
<b>SALES</b>			
Retail Supervision	16	4	2 days per month Face to Face
Sales	12	1	3 days Face to face/ 5days Face to Face

\*Locations in many cases involve collaborating providers. The number of locations is based on validation information. Some may not have recruited sufficient apprentices to run and some may have been added.

\*\* Some, day-release may be delivered remotely with apprentices not required to travel.

## Findings

- There is no clear pattern between the number of delivery locations and distribution of ETB areas with registered apprentices.
- Some apprenticeships based in one location recruit from all ETB areas. Others recruit from only two areas.
- Some apprenticeships initially approved to run in many areas only succeeded in recruiting in a smaller number of areas.



# Appendix XI – Open-Text Responses from Apprentices on CLA programmes to the Survey

Apprentices were asked open questions about their attitudes to the apprenticeship and its operation. These questions were answered by 205 of the respondents.

In answer to the question:

*4.1 What are the positive aspects of your experience of the apprenticeship.?*

The replies were categorised into 16 different areas the most popular aspects mentioned were as in Table 14

*Table 15 Positive Aspects of Apprenticeship*

Positive aspects	Number of respondents
Learning	40
Money	38
Peers	34
Curriculum	30
Support	20
Confidence	16

Four respondents out of the 205 indicated that there were no positive aspects to the experience. Other aspects mentioned included: experience, careers, qualifications, and the structure of the programme.

In answer to the question

*4.2. What (if any) aspects of your experience on the apprenticeship could be improved?*

The answers were dispersed over thirty-three categories. The ten most frequent of these are listed in Table 16.

*Table 16 Aspects of Apprenticeship for Improvement*

Aspects to be improved	Number of respondents
None	50
Curriculum	33
Communication	19
Money	12
Employer support	10
More face-to-face teaching	7
Time pressure	7
Disorganisation of providers and managers	6
Travel	6
Workload	6

Fifty respondents said there were no aspects of the programme that could be improved. Forty-nine responses were distributed over twenty-three different categories.

## Appendix XII – Analysis of Development Periods

The survey of employers and CSG indicated that the following periods were spent from initiation, formation of the consortium steering group, development of the occupational profile, development of the programme documentation and process for gaining approval of programmes.

*Table 17 Reported Time from Initiation to Approval*

Reported time from initiation to approval *	% of programmes
1 year or less	11%
1 year - 2 years	38%
2 years - 3 years	22%
More than 3 years	22%
Unsure	7%

\*These estimates were taken from the surveys of providers and employers. Responses for the same apprenticeship differed and there were differences between providers and consortium steering group members. The periods were based on recollection rather than recorded data.

There were differences in the time taken by providers who were also awarding bodies (University sector) and those seeking awards from QQI. On average this difference was approximately 5 months.

Data provided by QQI indicates the processing times for apprenticeship programmes. The review has no equivalent data for the university sectors.

*Table 18 QQI Validation Period Summaries*

	Acceptance to validation period in weeks	Submission to acceptance period in weeks	Submission to validation period in week
Average	15	7	22
Maximum	26	40	52*
Minimum	6	<1	<7

\*In this case there was 12 weeks validation period following the 40-week period to acceptance.

In the experience of the consultants, the average period to validation for QQI probably exceeds that in the Universities by about 5 weeks and the minimum would match the QQI time. It is unlikely that the Universities would have the outliers that occur with QQI. The major cause of different development times would appear to be in the time taken to get the proposal to an acceptable state for approval. This may have occurred where the consortium steering group and/or the provider were inexperienced in programme development. In some cases, providers that experienced considerable delays with their first apprenticeship, completed the process in a considerably less period in subsequent apprenticeship.

The delay from submission to acceptance does not occur in the universities as staff involved in development activities work to familiar requirements of the university. QQI will not accept a submission that will fail because the submission does not meet requirements.

# Appendix XIII - Apprenticeship Management and Programme Leadership

Table 19 Apprenticeship Management and Programme Leadership

Location of Apprenticeship manager	Number of occurrences	Implications for apprenticeship management	Location of programme lead	Features for programme lead
Sectoral representative body	8	May be supported by additional staff; primary function is promotion of apprenticeship and recruitment of employers and apprentices	Providing department or college/ training centre	Mainly focused on academic/ training matters
Provider delivering department or college/ training centre	19	May have other duties in the institution that are unrelated to the apprenticeship; may be subject to more frequent personnel changes	Providing department or college/ training centre	Mainly focused on academic/ training but may be involved in other apprenticeship activities
Department or section within the provider institution with responsibility for engagement with industry/ enterprises.	6	May be supported by additional staff, may have other duties that are industry facing; typically separate from delivering department/ college	Providing department or college	Focused on academic/ training matters
Sectoral body and provider are within same organisation	4	Programme lead and apprenticeship management are not separate functions; may be supported by additional staff with specific functions	As apprentice manager	Programme lead and apprenticeship management not separate functions, additional staff with specific functions

## Appendix XIV – List of Abbreviations Used

CAO	Central Applications Office
CIF	Construction Industry Federation
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HEA	Higher Education Authority (HEA)
HECA	Higher Education Colleges Association
Ibec	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IUA	Irish Universities Association
NAO	National Apprenticeship Office
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RAI	Restaurants Association of Ireland
SOLAS	State Agency
THEA	Technological Higher Education Association
TU	Technological University
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
USI	Union of Students in Ireland

# Appendix XV – List of Sectoral Bodies involved in programmes

*Table 20 List of sectoral bodies*

Accounting Technician Ireland
Alliance of Health Care Assistants Ireland
Arborist Association of Ireland
Associated Craft Butchers of Ireland
Biopharmachem Ireland Board
Construction Industry Federation (CIF)
Euro-Toques Ireland
Failte Ireland
Fast Track into Information Technology (FIT)
Financial Services Ireland
FIT (Fastrack into Information Technology)
Freight Transport Association Ireland
Geological Survey Ireland
Hairdressing Council of Ireland
Home and Community Care Ireland (HCCI)
Institute of professional Auctioneers and Valuers (IPAV).
Institute of Shipbrokers
Insurance Institute
Irish Business and Employer Confederation (Ibec)
Irish Centre for Business Excellence (ICBE)
Irish Hotels Federation
Irish Medtech Association-Ibec
Limerick for Engineering Consortium
National Recruitment Federation
Nursing Homes Ireland
Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM)
Polymer Technology Ireland-Ibec
Private Hospitals Association
Restaurant Association of Ireland
Retail Ireland Skillnet-Ibec
Society of Chartered Surveyors (SCSI)
The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in Ireland
The Supply Chain Management Institute (IPICS)
Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI)

## Appendix XVI – New registration of apprentices by successive yearly intakes

Table 21 New registrations by successive yearly intakes (SOLAS)\*

Current Apprenticeships	Intake year 1	Intake year 2	Intake year 3	Intake year 4	Intake year 5
<b>ARBORICULTURE</b>					
Arboriculture	3	31			
<b>BIOPHARMA</b>					
Laboratory Analyst	2	21	18	18	
Laboratory Technician	71	88	124	96	163
<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>					
Geo-Driller	23				
Scaffolding	37				
<b>ELECTRICAL</b>					
Industrial Electrical Engineer	27	28	30		
<b>ENGINEERING</b>					
Engineering Services Management	8	18	31		
Equipment Systems Engineer	13				
Manufacturing Engineer	36	20	27	20	53
Manufacturing Technology	40	34	29	30	42
OEM Engineer	11	16	14		
Polymer Processing Technology	12	11	10	13	
Principal Engineer	5	8			
<b>FINANCE</b>					
Accounting Technician	71	88	124	96	163
International Financial Services Associate	15	11	9	17	16
International Financial Services Specialist	18	10	12	18	23
<b>HAIR</b>					
Hairdressing	14	84	182		
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>					
Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner	25				



Current Apprenticeships	Intake year 1	Intake year 2	Intake year 3	Intake year 4	Intake year 5
<b>HOSPITALITY &amp; FOOD</b>					
Bar Manager**		Programme validated in October 2021			
Butcher	7	37	10	51	
Chef de Partie	14	33	31		
Commis Chef	25	112	62	16	75
Sous Chef	4	7	7		
<b>ICT</b>					
CGI Technical Artist (Animation, Games, VFX) **	7	0	0	0	0
Cybersecurity	13	30	6		
Cybersecurity Practitioner					
Network Engineer Associate	22	44	22	11	
Software Developer Associate	39	66	42	53	
Telecommunications and Data Network Technician	66	30			
<b>INSURANCE</b>					
Insurance Practitioner	53	45	37	75	
<b>LOGISTICS</b>					
Lean Sigma Manager	43	33			
Logistics Associate	51	52	69		
Supply Chain Associate	12				
Supply Chain Manager	21	11			
Supply Chain Specialist	17	16			
Transport Operations and Commercial Driver**		Programme validated in October 2021			
<b>PROPERTY SERVICES</b>					
Auctioneering and Property Services	53	92	75	138	
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>					
Recruitment Executive	21	23			
<b>SALES</b>					
Retail Supervision	76	101	142		
Sales	30	51			

\* These are new registrations of apprentices with SOLAS. The numbers may not correspond with registrations with providers as apprentices are employed prior to the off-the-job element of the programme.

\*\* Bar Manager and Transport Operations and Commercial Driver are new apprentices which only commenced registering apprentices in 2022. CGI Technical Artist (Animation, Games, VFX) registered apprentices in 2019. It has not registered any new apprentices since then.

## Findings:

- Thirty-one apprenticeships have had more than one intake.
- Twenty apprenticeships increased their registrations at the second intake. Overall, this group increased their intake by 90%. Typically, this group maintained the increase over subsequent intakes.
- Eleven Apprenticeships decreased their registrations at the second intake. Overall, this group registered 69% of the first registration at the second intake. Typically, this group maintained an intake of 75% of the first intake over subsequent intakes.



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