Tithe an Oireachtais

An Comhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna

Tuarascáil maidir le hÉisteachtaí i ndáil le Printíseachtaí agus Cúrsaí Oiliúna a Ghlacadh

Meán Fómhair 2019

Houses of the Oireachtas

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Report on Hearings Relating to the Uptake of Apprenticeships and Traineeships

September 2019

32/ES/28

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Contents

Chairman's Foreword

As part of its work programme, the Joint Committee on Education and Skills decided to examine the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships.

Apprenticeships and traineeships are a vital part of the education system in Ireland. They allow a student to learn a set of skills while working and earning.

In the aftermath of the recession, registrations for apprenticeships were hit and while this trend has improved with overall registrations increasing since 2013, they are still low compared to their levels a decade ago, with registrations now at 1998 levels.

Since the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeships and Traineeships 2016-2020 was launched in 2016, craft apprenticeships have experienced a strong growth in registrations. The breadth of apprenticeships now available include quantity surveyor, cybersecurity, biopharma laboratory analyst, insurance, accountancy and logistics supply chain specialist.

We heard that apprenticeships suffer from a lack of parity of esteem with other educational options, which is an issue that must be addressed for our young people who are preparing to leave school. Parents and School Guidance Counsellors have a large role to play in promoting the benefits of this path.

In November 2017, the Committee had the pleasure of meeting with a cohort of the apprentices who represented Ireland at WorldSkills. We met 16 competitors who participated in a range of categories including aircraft maintenance and restaurant service and we were very impressed how they clearly showcased the changing perception of apprenticeships in Ireland.

I would like to thank all the witnesses who appeared before the Committee to provide us with evidence. We had an interesting meeting and their input is very much appreciated.

Fiona O'Loughlin
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Fiona O'Loughlin T.D.

Chairman

September 2019

1.   Introduction

Apprenticeship is a statutory, national programme that enables an apprentice to earn and learn at the same time. It is traditionally associated with the construction, electrical, automotive and engineering industries. One of the principal advantages of this method is that it allows the apprentice to learn on the job and to participate fully as an employee in a real-world work environment. Recently there have been efforts made to extend this approach into sectors that have not been traditionally associated with apprenticeships.

There are a number of agencies such as Skillnet and FIT operating in conjunction with government departments, national education and training agencies, local development organisations and a variety of community-based organisations to promote and facilitate workforce learning in Ireland. These organisations work with enterprises to develop employability skills *via* the apprenticeship model.

2.   Engagement with Stakeholders

A series of public meetings of the Committee were held on 15st and 20th November 2018. At these meeting, the Committee heard from the following witnesses:

Session 1: 15th November 2018	
Dr Jim Murray	Technological Higher Education Association
Mr Bredan McGinty	Skillnet Ireland
Dr Mary-Liz Trant	SOLAS
Mr Phil O'Flaherty	Department of Education and Skills
Session 2: 20th November 2018	
Mr Peter Davitt	FIT Limited
Mr Tony Donohoe	IBEC
Dr Phillip Smyth	Shannon College of Hotel Management
Ms Nessa White	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)

3.   Recruitment

THEA views statutory national apprenticeships as one key element in a broad family of education and training programmes that are based on a learn-and-work model. This model also includes traineeships and non-apprenticeship programmes provided by the further education and higher education sectors that have varying levels of non-paid, work-based learning embedded within them. These include work placements integrated into regular degree programmes and bespoke programmes developed for individual companies. It is important to offer this opportunity of work-based learning to enhance the employability of all graduates and it is equally important that employment sectors consider which model is most suited to their recruitment needs.

In their evidence, THEA outlined how recruitment tends to be more successful when an employment sector is well organised and has a strong professional association behind it that can determine whether apprenticeship is an appropriate work-based learning model for that sector. A strong professional association also helps to mobilise individual companies in recruiting apprentices and can support that recruitment directly.

IBEC told the Committee that while there is still great respect for tradesmen, the expert or the artisan, it has been overwhelmed by the ever-present media, public and private discourse on points and college places. All witnesses noted that a significant barrier to recruitment is persuading public opinion that an apprenticeship is a credible and equal route to a professional career. In other countries, for example Switzerland, two-thirds of 15-year olds enter apprenticeships and these positions are highly valued in society.

There is also some confusion regarding the qualifications required for having a career in certain sectors, such as technology. There is a belief that a student must have a primary or master's degree in a science, technology, engineering or maths (STEM) subject to enter this sector. This can be a significant deterrent for many people.

FIT acknowledged that from 1999 to the early 2000s, many companies engaged with FIT more from the perspective of corporate social responsibility than from any real hope that they would get a suitable candidate through the process. However, since this time, FIT say that companies appreciate how valuable apprenticeship candidates are and they are now a regular part of company recruitment initiatives and

strategies. They stressed that most companies prefer competencies over credentials, and that candidates with the skills for the job are more valued whether they have achieved education or training to level 5 or 6, or to 8 or 9. They noted that level 6 is in most demand.

FIT advised that while there is currently nearly full employment in the State, it does not see this as a problem in their recruitment processes for a variety of reasons. In some third-level technology courses there is a drop-out rate of up to 70% and this cohort of people are looking for an alternative route through third-level education. There are also people who are reskilling or upskilling. Indeed, the cohort currently in apprenticeship programmes has an age range of between the early 20s to the middle 40s. Another cohort comprises foreign nationals who have particular skills but which are not recognised in this jurisdiction.

The introduction of the educational mark has been of major benefit to the Shannon College of Hotel Management in terms of their international recruitment, marketing and recognition. Several Swiss students attend every year and previously they had problems once they returned to Switzerland as their training was not fully recognised. Since the introduction of the education mark, the skills they learn are now recognised.

All witnesses stated that it is vital to increase the visibility of apprenticeship opportunities. The SOLAS, pathways to apprenticeship approach proposes a number of ways to deal with that, including having an apprenticeship marketplace that will advertise vacancies. A more prominent drive in Intreo offices and within the social welfare service of apprenticeship opportunities is proposed. It is envisaged that it will be available on www.apprenticeship.ie.

4.   Awareness

The traditional learner progression model, that is, progression from second-level, school-based education to third-level higher education degree level study is still the best known and most favoured route for the majority of school leavers, and for the parents and guidance counsellors who advise them. Work needs to be done to raise awareness of apprenticeship as a valid and valuable option for school leavers. THEA highlighted how this traditional learner progression model is deeply engrained in the Irish psyche and it will take substantial effort over a

sustained period of time to change the public perception of a earn-and-learn apprenticeship model. Additionally, they noted that work-based learning is not exclusive to the apprenticeship model. Work-based learning is now a visible part of non-apprenticeship education and training programmes within both further and higher education, so apprenticeship is not just competing with traditional academic education; but with new forms of tertiary education that has embraced the concept of work-based learning, if not the full earn-and-learn model.

THEA also states that there is a need to simplify the regulatory environment in which the apprenticeship system operates. The system operates in accordance with the provisions of the Industrial Training Act 1967 which is 50 years old. They note that while this legislation is sturdy and has stood the test of time, it is not easily reconciled with subsequent education and training legislation, particularly that relating to the national quality assurance system. It has led to a very complex, and at times overly bureaucratic system within which the new apprenticeship model must operate. While all the stakeholders have worked collaboratively to make the system work, it has undoubtedly hindered the agility and responsiveness of the system, delaying the throughput of programmes and making it very difficult to predict and deliver registration targets.

There are a new cohort of apprenticeships in finance and ICT where employers have not previously engaged with the apprenticeship model. SOLAS currently focus heavily on engaging with prospective employers and promoting these new apprenticeship opportunities.

FIT believes that there is a genuine desire in the tech sector to address the issue of diversity and to increase female participation. It is increasingly important to make choosing the apprenticeship route in this type of sector attractive. Whether male or female, if one goes the route of a FET qualification, they must be seen as equivalently qualified to those who take the route of a third-level qualification.

Regarding higher education qualifications, there are now a number of advanced apprenticeships that can lead to a primary degree, masters and there is even a PhD apprenticeship being developed. IBEC note that there will not be a huge number of this type of apprenticeship on offer, but that it is important that this type of educational progression is available. They suggest that this is one mechanism to address the issue of the status of apprenticeships in public opinion.

WorldSkills is a skills contest that originated for the youth of Spain and Portugal in 1950. It rapidly expanded to include Germany, Great Britain, France, Morocco and Switzerland and, by the 1960s, it had expanded globally. The Committee heard from Shannon College of Hotel Management that from an employment and apprenticeship point of view, having WorldSkills come to Ireland would be like hosting the World Cup. There would be a constant, protracted competition for eight or nine days, featuring approximately 60 different skills. This level of advertisement and excitement over skills-based jobs would have an impact on young people in deciding on their career paths and if used properly, could be projected through the media to raise awareness to the wider population.

5.   Female Uptake of Apprenticeships

The Pathways to Apprenticeship and Training review published by SOLAS shows that the current make-up of the available apprenticeships is 85% men under 25 years and only 2% are women.

There are two main issues that impact on the participation of females in apprenticeships. The first is occupational segregation, which is due to most apprenticeships being in the trades which are traditionally male dominated areas of work. The second is the issue of quality and affordable childcare. The criteria to take up certain courses include being unemployed for a certain period before commencing which may be difficult to comply with and incompatible with family commitments.

There are several initiatives aimed at encouraging women into apprenticeships in a variety of sectors. The broadening out of the range of apprenticeship opportunities is intended to give those who enter apprenticeship a better selection of opportunities to choose from but also to make apprenticeship attractive to a much broader range of people. However, this approach must not only deal with the issue of a lack of female participation by encouraging apprenticeships in areas that would traditionally have a high uptake of female employment, it is also about encouraging females to see themselves as having a place in traditionally male roles such as the construction industry, engineering and motor mechanics for example. The generation apprenticeship campaign is trying to push those female role models.

Technology Ireland is running a programme called ReBOOT which is designed to reconnect women who were working in the sector but took

time out to raise a family for example. Twenty of the largest technology companies in Ireland are participating in this programme which is actively getting women back into the sector and re-equipping, reskilling them and building their confidence.

In 2018, the ESB received an award from the European Vocational Skills Week Awards for vocational and education training (VET) Excellence. This award was given for its work on apprenticeships and in attracting women into electrical apprenticeships, which traditionally were predominantly filled by men. It has done a significant amount of work in promoting opportunities and now has approximately 16 female apprentices, whereas three years ago there were only two.

The most successful new apprenticeship for female participation so far is the insurance apprenticeship, in which 60% of the apprentices are female. The second most successful apprenticeship is run by Accounting Technicians Ireland, in which another 60% of the apprentices are female. IBEC's bio-pharma sector launched a laboratory technician apprenticeship in November 2018 where currently, females are outnumbering males on it.

6.   Social Inclusion in Apprenticeships

In many countries, apprenticeship is something that begins in schools at secondary level, around fourth or fifth year. After sitting the equivalent of the Junior Certificate, students choose to go either an academic or vocational route. In Ireland a different system operates whereby even in craft apprenticeships, over 70% of entrants have completed their leaving certificate. There is currently no data on the social background of students undertaking apprenticeships, but the DES has noted that this might be useful information to obtain in the future.

THEA noted in their evidence that the status of an education and training programme and how it is perceived socially is deeply embedded within the Irish psyche. They suggested that the term apprenticeship has a set of social values attached to it, notwithstanding whether these are right or wrong, positive or negative. In reality, it should only be perceived as a mode of educational and training attainment. Additionally, THEA maintains that apprenticeships should have much higher visibility within mainstream education system. THEA believes that this mind-set can be changed with new apprenticeships in sectors that would not have

previously been accessible *via* apprenticeships and new degree programmes that are available which are in the apprenticeship mode of provision have begun that task.

7.   Employer Incentives

One area of difficulty in apprenticeships arises from an insufficient supply of participating employers in certain sectors. Many people are interested in getting involved in some of the newer apprenticeships in particular, but there is difficulty getting enough places with employers. There are other apprenticeships where there is a lot of employer interest and less interest from potential apprentices and learners. Employer buy-in is critical, as the apprenticeship and traineeship models depend on employers taking on apprentices.

In 2013, the Government reviewed apprenticeship training in Ireland. At this time, IBEC noted that the apprenticeship system, which was limited to 26 craft-based occupations, did not reflect the broad skill needs of the Irish economy. The review suggested that a new model of business-led apprenticeships could boost skill levels across the economy and help to get people into quality, sustainable jobs.

The apprenticeship campaign run by SOLAS has made significant progress in raising the profile of apprenticeships with key stakeholders, such as guidance counsellors, learners, business and the media. However, a targeted campaign on the value proposition of apprenticeships for firms is needed. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and owner-managers are a particularly difficult business segment to address in terms of expanding take-up, but they are incredibly important. They tend to be time poor, have limited numbers of staff to support apprentices and may not even be aware of how the potential talent delivered through the apprenticeship system could improve their business.

A major obstacle to the expansion of new apprenticeships, especially among SMEs, is cost. There is strong evidence that the cost of paying a salary and subsistence while the apprentice is off-the-job becomes a major disincentive. IBEC highlighted a case study demonstrating that the total cost of a newly recruited apprentice manufacturing engineer is approximately €90,000. They suggest that the cost of funding new apprenticeship off-the-job wages, plus travel and subsistence costs where necessary should be supported through the National Training Fund. This

would also address the anomaly whereby similar costs for traditional craft apprenticeships are subvented.

Since 2016, the ETBI have developed a centralised unit that provides support for the assessment and development of curricula and they have introduced a mentored training initiative to liaise with employers. They noted that they have received some positive feedback that they have used to amend and adapt their approach.

8.   FIT

FIT is the co-ordinating provider of two ICT apprenticeships, for associate professionals in software development and network engineering, respectively.

FIT was established in 1999 to promote an inclusive smart economy. Its board members are senior executives in leading technology sector companies. Over the past 20 years, in collaboration with FÁS and VECs, and latterly SOLAS and education and training boards, they assisted 18,500 jobseekers in gaining access to quality ICT training, of whom over 14,000 have secured employment. The majority of these candidates have not been third-level students or graduates who studied STEM subjects. Prior to the first call for new apprenticeships, FIT had piloted a new dual-education, two-year training programme called ICT associate professional at NFQ level 6 in collaboration with DES, SOLAS and eight education and training boards. On this precursor to the technology apprenticeships, 259 candidates were sponsored by 143 companies, with 85% of those completing securing employment. In collaboration with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, (KWETB), and Intel, FIT designed and ran a new advanced manufacturing maintenance technician programme at NFQ Level 6. Over 80% of those who completed the programme to date secured employment in Intel and a further 10% elsewhere. The vast majority of these candidates had no previous knowledge or experience in the discipline, further demonstrating how FET can cater for highly technical roles. With the support of KWETB, the capacity of the programme has since been doubled.

In light of this background, FIT welcomed the development of a new national policy on apprenticeships and traineeships, the establishment of the Apprenticeship Council and the creation of QQI quality and programme-validation processes for apprenticeships.

In tandem with the first call, FIT developed two ICT apprenticeships to meet the skills needs of employers while making tech employment more inclusive. The positive response received from IT employers led them to a goal of achieving an annual intake of 1,000 ICT apprentices by 2021 through expanding the portfolio of tech apprenticeships into complementary areas, such as cybersecurity, FinTech, DevOps, virtualisation and digital forensics. There is strong employer demand in Ireland for ICT skills. There is demand not just for high skills but also for intermediate or associate professional skills that are well within the capability of appropriately designed FET programmes. In periodic ICT skills audits based on large numbers of face-to-face interviews with IT employers, FIT has consistently found the majority of posts they were seeking to fill required the exercise of skills at levels they described as entry or competent rather than expert. Employment of ICT practitioners is concentrated in Ireland's four largest cities but there are now growing pockets in every region, some of which have grown particularly rapidly.

9.   Recommendations

The Joint Committee recommends that:

1. a national and persistent promotional campaign needs to be implemented to ensure broad appreciation of the range of apprenticeships now available and in development, with emphasis to encourage more women to consider the opportunity;

2. Ireland should bid to host WorldSkills to boost the image of apprenticeships in the country generally;

3. consideration should be given to level 8 apprenticeships, to address the negative educational perceptions of the overall apprentice scheme;

4. use of school liaison officers to promote apprenticeships in schools;

5. transition year work experience programmes be developed to let students know what the day-to-day activities of an apprentice are;

6. leaving certificate subjects and curricula should be evaluated to see to what extent they can lead to apprenticeships, in terms of motivation and content;

7. consideration be given to introducing a separate subject in tourism and hospitality to the leaving certificate curriculum;

8. introduction of a comprehensive suite of apprenticeships in the hospitality sector be examined;

9. an online forum for advertising available apprenticeships be further developed;

10. apprentices' off-the-job wages, when they are training in a college, and any associated travel costs be covered by the State through the National Training Fund;

11. salary scales in ETBIs should be sufficient to attract and retain suitably qualified staff;

12. existing administration processes for new apprenticeships need to be reviewed to ensure fitness for purpose; and

13. the various bodies working in governing, developing and promoting apprenticeships are consolidated into one dedicated agency working with business consortia and education providers, to oversee the funding, development and promotion of apprenticeships.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Committee Membership

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Deputies:	Thomas Byrne (FF)
	Donnachadh Ó Laoghaire (SF)
	Catherine Martin (GP)
	Tony McLoughlin (FG)
	Hildegarde Naughton (FG)
	Fiona O'Loughlin (FF) [Chair]
	Jan O'Sullivan (Lab)
Senators:	Maria Byrne (FG)
	Robbie Gallagher (FF)
	Paul Gavan (SF)
	Lynn Ruane (Ind)

Notes:

1. Deputies nominated by the Dáil Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Dáil on 16 June 2016.
2. Senators nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 22 July 2016.
3. Deputies Carol Nolan, Ciaran Cannon, Joan Burton, and Jim Daly discharged and Deputies Kathleen Funchion, Tony McLoughlin, Jan O'Sullivan, and Josepha Madigan nominated to serve in their stead by the Twelfth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 3 October 2017.
4. Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh resigned with effect from 27 February 2018.
5. Senator Paul Gavan nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 8 March 2018.
6. Deputy Josepha Madigan discharged and Deputy Hildegarde Naughton nominated to serve in her stead by the Twentieth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 1 May 2018.
7. Deputy Kathleen Funchion discharged and Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire nominated to serve in her stead by the Twenty-Fifth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 11th July 2019.

Appendix 2

Committee on Education and Skills

Orders of Reference

a. Functions of the Committee – derived from Standing Orders [DSO 84A; SSO 71A]

(1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on—

> (*a*) such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and

> (*b*) European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.

(2) The Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such—

> (*a*) Bills,

> (*b*) proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,

> (*c*) Estimates for Public Services, and

> (*d*) other matters

> as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and

> (*e*) Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public monies, and

> (*f*) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.

(4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the

relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies:

(*a*) matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,

(*b*) public affairs administered by the Department,

(*c*) policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,

(*d*) Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,

(*e*) policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,

(*f*) the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill,

(*ag*)scrutiny of private members' Bills in accordance with Standing Order 148B, or detailed scrutiny of private members' Bills in accordance with Standing Order 141,

(*g*) any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,

(*h*) statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,

(*i*) strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,

(*j*) annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (*d*) and (*e*) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and

(*k*) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—

(*a*) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,

(*b*) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,

(*c*) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and

(*d*) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.

(6) The Chairman of the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be the Chairman of the Select Committee.

(7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:

(*a*) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,

(*b*) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and

(*c*) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.

(8) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may, in respect of any Ombudsman charged with oversight of public services within the policy remit of the relevant Department or Departments, consider—

(*a*) such motions relating to the appointment of an Ombudsman as may be referred to the Committee, and

(*b*) such Ombudsman reports laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas as the Committee may select: Provided that the provisions of Standing Order 111F apply where the Select Committee has not considered the Ombudsman report, or a portion or portions thereof, within two months (excluding Christmas, Easter or summer recess periods) of the report being laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas.

b. Powers of Committees [derived from Standing Orders – DSO 85, 114 and 116 and SSO 71, 107 and 109]

The Joint Committee has:-

(1) power to take oral and written evidence and to print and publish from time to time minutes of such evidence taken in public before the Committee together with such related documents as the Committee thinks fit;

(2) power to invite and accept oral presentations and written submissions from interested persons or bodies;

(3) power to appoint sub-Committees and to refer to such sub-Committees any matter comprehended by its orders of reference and to delegate any of its powers to such sub-Committees, including power to report directly to the Dáil and to the Seanad;

(4) power to draft recommendations for legislative change and for new legislation;

(4A) power to examine any statutory instrument, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009, and to recommend, where it considers that such action is warranted, whether the instrument should be annulled or amended;

(4B) for the purposes of paragraph (4A), power to require any Government Department or instrument-making authority concerned to submit a Memorandum to the Committee explaining any statutory instrument under consideration or to attend a meeting of the Committee for the purpose of explaining any such statutory instrument: Provided that such Department or authority may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil;

(5) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State shall attend before the Committee to discuss policy for which he or she is officially responsible: Provided that a member of the Government or Minister of State may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil and Seanad: and provided further that a member of the Government or Minister of State may request to attend a meeting of the Committee to enable him or her to discuss such policy;

(6) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State shall attend before the Committee to discuss proposed primary or secondary legislation (prior to such legislation being published) for which he or she is officially responsible: Provided that a member of the Government or Minister of State may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Committee, which may report thereon to the Dáil and Seanad: and provided further that a member of the Government or Minister of State may request to attend a meeting of the Committee to enable him or her to discuss such proposed legislation;

(6A) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State shall attend before the Committee and provide, in private session if so requested by the member of the Government or Minister of State, oral briefings in advance of meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers to enable the Committee to make known its views: Provided that the Committee may also require such attendance following such meetings;

(6B) power to require that the Chairperson designate of a body or agency under the aegis of a Department shall, prior to his or her appointment, attend before the Committee to discuss his or her strategic priorities for the role;

(6C) power to require that a member of the Government or Minister of State who is officially responsible for the implementation of an Act shall attend before a Committee in relation to the consideration of a report under DSO 164A and SSO 157A;

(7) subject to any constraints otherwise prescribed by law, power to require that principal office-holders in bodies in the State which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by members of the Government or by the Oireachtas shall attend meetings of the Committee, as appropriate, to discuss issues for which they are officially responsible: Provided that such an office-holder may decline to attend for stated reasons given in writing to the Committee, which may report thereon to the relevant House(s);

(8) power to engage, subject to the consent of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, the services of persons with specialist or technical knowledge, to assist it or any of its sub-Committees in considering particular matters; and

(9) power to undertake travel, subject to—

    (a) such recommendations as may be made by the Working Group of Committee Chairmen under DSO 108(4)(a) and SSO 104(2) (a); and

    (b) the consent of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, and normal accounting procedures.

In accordance with Articles 6 and 8 of Protocol No. 2 to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Protocol on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality) as applied by sections 7(3) and 7(4) of the European Union Act 2009, the Committee has the power-

    (a) to consider whether any act of an institution of the European Union infringes the principle of subsidiarity [DSO 116; SSO 109]; and

    (b) to form a reasoned opinion that a draft legislative act (within the meaning of Article 3 of the said Protocol) does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity [DSO 114 and SSO 107].

c. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders) [DSO 84; SSO 70]

In addition to the powers and functions that are given to Committees when they are established, all Oireachtas Committees must operate within the scope and context of activities in Dáil Standing Order 84 and Seanad Standing Order 70 as set out below.

- A Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders;

- Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the relevant House(s).

- A Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to DSO 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993;

- A Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Joint Committee on Public Petitions in the exercise of its functions under DSO 111A(1); and

- A Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—

(i) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or

(ii) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle, whose decision shall be final.

List of Stakeholders

Department of Education and Skills

Education and Training Boards Ireland

FIT Limited

IBEC

Shannon College of Hotel Management

Skillnet Ireland

SOLAS

Technological Higher Education Association

Appendix 4

Submissions by Stakeholders

Department of Education and Skills

Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on the Uptake of Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Overview

The expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship is a key priority for Government. The Programme for Government and the Action Plan for Education contain a commitment to having a cumulative 50,000 enrolments on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes between 2016 and 2020. This represents more than a doubling of activity over the period. Details of how this overall target would be reached through increased enrolments each year were set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016-2020, along with information on a range of supporting initiatives. Apprenticeship and traineeship are an important part of wider efforts to engage employers more closely in the education and training system and to ensure that education and training is meeting current and future skills needs.

The programme to expand apprenticeship and traineeship was starting from a difficult position. Apprenticeship suffered enormously during the recession with a fall in registrations of over 80%. This closed down an important avenue for young people. As well as giving access to valued careers for learners, apprenticeship and traineeship deliver talented and work-ready people for employers. Rebuilding these pathways to rewarding careers and increasing the pipeline of talent for employers has required significant work and new thinking. It was recognised that apprenticeship and traineeship needed to grow beyond the sectors of the economy that had traditionally engaged with the programmes and that this would need a new approach.

Informed by an independent review of the apprenticeship system, the then Minister appointed an Apprenticeship Council in late 2014. The remit of the Council was to oversee the development of a range of new apprenticeships, initially through a call for proposals, and to examine the issues associated with creating a more flexible and accessible model of apprenticeship that could meet the needs of a diverse range of employers. Alongside this work, the curricula of existing craft apprenticeships were remodelled to keep pace with new methods and technologies in the workplace and to ensure that apprentices has the broader range of literacy, numeracy, ICT and teamworking skills they needed to be successful. Work was also undertaken by SOLAS with the Education and Training Boards to engage with employers to develop a range of new traineeships in growing areas of employment.

Really good progress has been made. There has been strong growth in apprenticeship registrations over recent years. 17 new programmes have been developed through two open calls for proposals issued by the Apprenticeship Council and a strong pipeline of further programmes are in development. A completely new model of flexible industry-led apprenticeship has been created with a diverse range of programmes at levels 5-9 on the National Framework of Qualifications now in place. Craft apprenticeships are growing strongly, with industry re-engaging with apprenticeship recruitment.

Nonetheless there are challenges. Apprenticeship programmes have taken longer to get off the ground than originally envisaged and registrations on new apprenticeships are approximately a year behind the targets set in the Action Plan. Female participation in apprenticeship remains low. Traineeships, which in the past were primarily for unemployed people, saw some falls in enrolment as unemployment reduced significantly. However, there are plans in place to address these issues and the Department is confident about the future of these important programmes.

Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016-2020 Targets

The annual targets set out in the Action Plan are presented below.

Craft-based apprenticeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of apprenticeship programmes	27	27	27	27	27
Forecast new registrations per annum*	3,390	4,147	4,697	5,087	5,587

New apprenticeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Planned number of apprenticeship programmes (cumulative)	2	15	25	35	40
Planned new registrations per annum	82	800	1,500	2,297	3,413

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total target apprentice registrations p.a.	3,472	4,947	6,197	7,384	9,000

Existing traineeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of 'live' traineeship programmes*	24	24	24	24	24
Target new enrolments per annum	2,400**	2,400	3,000	3,500	3,500

New/relaunched traineeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of traineeship programmes (cumulative)	2	4	10	20	30
Planned new enrolments per annum	100	200	900	1,500	1,500
Total target trainee enrolments p.a.	2,500	2,600	3,900	5,000	5,000

Progress against the targets is set out below, along with figures for 2014 and 2015 for context. The SOLAS submission to the Joint Committee provides greater detail on the programmes developed and the registration data on individual programmes.

APPRENTICESHIPS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Number of new programmes (cumulative)	-	-	2	9	17
Craft registrations	2,698	3,153	3,742	4,508	4,021
New Consortia led registrations	-	-	79	335	509
Total registrations	2,698	3,153	3,821	4,843	4,530
TRAINEESHIPS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018

New programmes (cumulative)	-	-	4	10	24
Traineeship enrolments	2,708	2,350	2,321	1,770	2,597**

* To date

** as of May 2018

Programme Development

The Apprenticeship Council have issued two calls for proposals for the development of new apprenticeships, the first in 2015 and the second in 2017. The model used, where proposals are made by consortia of employers and education and training providers, is very different to the craft apprenticeship model. Based on the recommendations of the Apprenticeship Review Group, the Council worked with the Department and state agencies with input from employers and unions to put in place arrangements where these consortia could be funded and supported to develop high quality programmes that could be made available nationally. All programmes are quality assured by QQI or a statutory awarding body, lead to qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications and can be offered by a range of education and training providers and approved employers. However, programmes are very individual and designed to fit industry needs. They lead to qualifications at various levels of the NFQ, with durations of 2-4 years and with different patterns of time spent on and off the job. It is a very considerable achievement to build agreement and consensus around this more distributed and diverse model while also ensuring that the programmes continue to be developed.

To date 17 new apprenticeship programmes have been developed, in areas as diverse as butchery and financial services. The full list is contained in the SOLAS submission. A rich pipeline of further programmes is in place with 35 further programmes scheduled for delivery before the end of 2019, three of which will be in place before the end of this year. The development of new programmes has taken somewhat longer than anticipated due to the complexity of ensuring that programmes can be flexible but still operate to national standards and within the statutory framework for apprenticeship. However, all the key building blocks are now in place and the pace of development has picked up significantly in 2018. This is evidenced by the fact that a new programme in Logistics, a critical sector in the context of Brexit, launched this September, having been approved at the end of 2017 through the Apprenticeship Council's second call. The deficit of 5 programmes against the end 2018 target of 25 will be made up in 2019.

The existing craft trades have also been the subject of a considerable amount of programme development work. New curricula are now in place in all of the high volume trades and the necessary investment has been made in new equipment in training centres and Institutes of Technology to support their delivery. This ensures that the technical skills and knowledge stays up to date with industry needs and that apprentices are also well prepared for the other demands of the modern workplace, with a stronger focus on transversal skills such as ICT, communications and teamworking.

A range of new traineeships have also been developed. Traineeships are shorter than apprenticeships and trainees do not need a contract of employment. Programmes can be between 6-20 months, offering potential awards of NFQ Levels 4-6 or equivalent, with at least 30% on the job learning. SOLAS and Education and Training Boards developed Career Traineeships, which are sector specific programmes, in areas such as hospitality, engineering, visual effects for animation and post production and digital sales and marketing for small businesses. In addition, over twenty additional new traineeships have been developed in areas such as engineering, logistics and animation.

Trends in Registrations and Enrolments

There is a strong upward trend in apprenticeship registrations. Registrations in the craft trades have been in line with targets set in the Action Plan and the 2018 target is also on course to be achieved. However, it is acknowledged that not all craft trades have recovered at the same rate and there is ongoing engagement between SOLAS and the Construction Industry Federation on support for some of the lower volume trades, including on proposals to develop a model of shared apprenticeship so that small construction employers can get involved in apprenticeship training with a reduced level of time commitment and apprentices can experience a broader range of activities.

On registrations in new apprenticeships, we are currently approximately one year behind the targets set in the Action Plan. The pattern of recruitment by employers in new apprenticeships has been somewhat different than anticipated. Typically, programmes are starting with small numbers but as employer confidence grows, numbers are building well. The SOLAS submission gives some examples of this on programmes that have been in place since 2016 and 2017. The growing base of new programmes now in place and the pattern of numbers growth within apprenticeships enables the Department to be confident in the numbers of apprenticeship opportunities increasing strongly in future years. This will require work with employers through the overall promotion of the benefits of engagement with apprenticeship and with the consortia leading the apprenticeships that are currently on offer. The Apprenticeship Council are currently meeting all consortia to discuss their plans for growth through getting greater employer take up in their sectors and through expansion of their apprenticeships to other education and training providers. The Council are also engaging on the challenges faced by consortia and the support they will need to grow.

With the introduction of new apprenticeships we have seen strong growth in the number of females undertaking an apprenticeship programme. This is primarily due to these new apprenticeships being in sectors where there is greater gender balance in the workplace. For example, women are strongly represented in the financial and hospitality apprenticeships. Indeed, women outnumber men in the Accounting Technician Apprenticeship.   While this is welcome, it is also important to address issues influencing the low level of recruitment of women in the craft trades and this is being looked at in the overall context of the review of the pathways to apprenticeship.

The trend in traineeship enrolments has been slightly different however and this is mainly due to their eligibility criteria as they were previously aimed at unemployed people. As part of expansion of traineeship nationally, the eligibility requirements has now been expanded to include a broader group of potential participants, including those who are in employment. Trainees may include school leavers, older learners, those in employment and those who are unemployed. While we did not meet our target traineeship enrolments in 2016 and 2017 we have seen strong growth in enrolments to date in 2018. The SOLAS submission to the Joint Committee provides greater detail on traineeship enrolments.

Promotion of Apprenticeship

It is important that apprenticeship opportunities are more visible to all. A national promotional campaign, Generation Apprenticeship, has been underway since May 2017, led by the Apprenticeship Council and with co-ordination support from SOLAS. It has been designed to influence parents, teachers and potential apprentices on the career paths and further educational opportunities arising from apprenticeship programmes.

The second phase of the Generation Apprenticeship campaign is now underway and includes a stepped-up focus on employers. As part of this phase the Apprenticeship Council will actively engage with industry sectors to gather feedback on apprenticeship provision, to discuss practical challenges as well as opportunities emerging, and plans for the future.

Pathways to Apprenticeship

The Department is engaging with SOLAS on a review of pathways to apprenticeship. The purpose of the review is to ensure that our national apprenticeship system is more reflective of the range and diversity of our population, more inclusive of diverse backgrounds and abilities and that apprenticeship opportunities are more readily accessible to all. It is expected that actions in this area will be published in the coming weeks.

In addition, an independent review of career guidance which is being carried out by Indecon International Consultants will examine the quality and range of information and resources available to students in schools and other settings. This will include an examination of how apprenticeship opportunities are presented to students in our schools.

Funding

Apprenticeships and traineeships are funded from the National Training Fund (NTF) through the collection of the Training Levy (previously the Apprenticeship Levy). One of the key features of the NTF is its flexibility and the way it responds to changing economic/labour market conditions. This has allowed an increased investment in training those in employment such as apprenticeships and traineeships, which focus on close to labour market skill needs.

Following a consultation process, the Government, as part of Budget 2018, decided to raise the rate of the NTF levy by 0.1% in 2018 to 0.8% and in Budget 2019 by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020. The following table shows the increased expenditure in apprenticeships and traineeships since 2014 responding to calls from employers for greater support for the development of skills in the existing workforce. From 2018 all funding for craft based and consortia led apprenticeships are being provided from the National Training Fund.

Expenditure on Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2014 - 2018					
	2014	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018 (allocation)**
Apprenticeship (SOLAS & HEA)	52.7	55.1	69.7	89.0	122.0
Traineeship	20.4	28.4	26.6	23.8	39.2
Total	73.13	83.51	96.35	112.77	161.16

The 2019 budget allocation for apprenticeship training is €142m which represents an increase of over 16% on the 2018 allocation of €122m. The 2019 budget allocation for traineeships is €47.9m which represents an increase of almost 17% on the 2018 allocation of €41m.

Conclusion

We are now in a new phase of apprenticeship and traineeship growth. We have a high quality package of new programmes to complement our existing craft apprenticeships and traineeships. We will continue to drive greater employer engagement to ensure sustainability of these new programmes. The Department will continue to work closely with the Apprenticeship Council and all stakeholders to further progress on the expansion programme set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016 – 2020 to ensure that the Programme for Government commitments in the area are met.

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) submission to The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on the uptake of Apprenticeships and Traineeships

November 2018

1. Introduction

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) was established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013[1] and is defined as an association established to collectively represent the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and promote their interests, which is recognised by the Minister for the purposes of this Act. ETBs are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes.

ETBI welcomes the invitation by the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Education and Skills to make a submission on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships. Section 2 presents work to date by the ETBs and reflects the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships within the further education and training sector. Section 3 presents points for consideration by the committee.

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[1] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/11/enacted/en/print.html

2. Expansion and uptake of Apprenticeships and Traineeships

2.1 Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship system in Ireland is governed by legislation, the 1967 Industrial Training Act. Apprenticeship is defined as a programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education and training centre. An apprenticeship prepares participants for a specific occupation and leads to a qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Following the Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland[2] in 2013 a national Apprenticeship Council was established to implement the review findings, which recommended an expansion of the Irish apprenticeship system into new areas of industry and leading to awards from Levels 5 to Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Each apprenticeship programme can be between 2 and 4 years in duration. Diverse models of training on- and off-the-job may be used, as well as different models of delivery. Apprenticeship development and roll-out are overseen by industry-led groups (consortia steering groups) working with education and training providers and other partners. All new apprenticeships developed in Ireland after 2016 follows this new apprenticeship approach.

An apprenticeship is created when an employer takes on an apprentice and agrees on a contract of employment. Apprentices are paid for the duration of their apprenticeship. Since the 1970s, it is estimated that over 105,000 apprentices have been trained in Ireland. In 2017, there were 4,843 new registrations on the craft-based apprenticeships and 335 new registrations on the Industry-led apprenticeships. The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020[3] sets a target of 31,000 cumulative new apprenticeship registrations by 2020.

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[2] https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Review-of-Apprenticeship-Training-in-Ireland.pdf
[3] https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Action-Plan-Expand-Apprenticeship-Traineeship-in-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf

2.2 Employer Approval and Apprentice Registration

ETB's support the expansion of apprenticeships nationally through the Senior Training Advisor's in each ETB. Acting on behalf of SOLAS as SOLAS Authorised Officers, they carry out the employer approval and apprentice registration processes, a requirement under the Industrial Training Act, 1967. The SOLAS Authorised Officers engage directly with employers in their ETB regions for all statutory apprenticeships, supporting employers, apprentices, administering the approval and registration process. Ten years ago, the number of SOLAS Authorised Officers was nearly double its current size of 46[4]. In order to support employers and meet the expansion and uptake of apprenticeships, additional posts will be required as demand grows.

2.3 New Apprenticeships Coordinated by ETBs

Since the call for apprenticeship proposals by the Apprenticeship Council in 2015 and subsequently in 2017, ETBs have been actively engaged in expanding the range of apprenticeship offering within the FET sector as illustrated in Table 1.

The Commis Chef Apprenticeship was rolled out nationally in Q4 2017 with 25 apprentices registered in 2017 and has expanded with an addition 97 registrations in 2018. The Auctioneering and Property Services Apprenticeship was rolled out this year in Dublin and Cork with 52 registrations and 40 employers participating. The Butcher Apprenticeship was recently rolled out, and registrations are ongoing for the 2018 intake.

TABLE 1 Apprentice registrations and active employers in Apprenticeships coordinated by ETBs[5]

	2017	2018	
	Apprentice Registrations	Apprentice Registrations	Active Employers
Commis Chef, Kerry ETB	25	97	104
Auctioneering and Property Services, City of Dublin ETB	n/a	51	40
Butcher, Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB	n/a	3	3

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[4] Date source: SOLAS/ETB Apprenticeship Monthly Activity Report May 2018
[5] Data source: SOLAS National Register of apprentices (as of the 24th Oct 2018)

While uptake is increasing, there are challenges being experienced by Consortium Steering Groups (CSGs). The need to attract, incentivise and support employers who employ, and train apprenticeships was identified by ETBI in its submission to the Committee in 2017[6]. The Craft apprenticeships are based on a different payment model where employers pay the apprentice wages on-the-job and a training allowance[7] is paid to apprentices while they are in training. For new Industry-led apprenticeships, the employer pays the wages both on and off the job. This has proved challenging to some employers in hospitality and other sectors in being able to afford to take on an apprentice and is impacting the development timeline of programmes and employer participation once the programmes are rolled out.

An additional six new Industry-led apprenticeships and their planned rollouts are shown in Table 2. The OEM Engineering Apprenticeship was validated recently by QQI and is preparing for rollout in Cavan Monaghan and Limerick Clare ETB's. The remaining five new Industry-led apprenticeships are in development and preparing for submission to QQI for validation, early 2019.

TABLE 2 New Apprenticeship Programmes due to roll 2018-2019, coordinated by ETBs

New apprenticeship programmes planned	Planned rollout
OEM Engineering, Cavan Monaghan ETB	Q4 2018
Scaffolding, Laois Offaly ETB	Q1 2019
Associate Sales Professional, Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB	Q1/Q2 2019
Arboriculture, Galway Roscommon ETB	Q3 2019
Hairdressing, Limerick Clare ETB	Q3 2019
Wind Turbine Maintenance, Kerry ETB	Q3 2019

2.4 Traineeships

Traineeships have been part of the Irish education and training system for over twenty years. The national traineeship programme was introduced in 1995 to provide work-based learning in partnership with employers, to improve employment outcomes for participants and to facilitate recruitment, retention, and improved industrial productivity.

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[6] Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) Submission to The Joint Committee on Education and Skills on Apprenticeships and Skills Schemes as an Alternative to University Courses, April 2017
[7] http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/current/Pages/ApprenticeInfo.aspx?anchor=Allowance

The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016- 2020 included actions and annual targets to 2020 for traineeship. In October 2017, SOLAS published The Five-Step Guide to Traineeship in Ireland which clarified and presented the key features of traineeship. Education and Training Boards, in partnership with local and regional industry partners, are leading on updating existing provision and developing new traineeship programmes. SOLAS, through a series of national workshops has been engaging with ETBs, clarifying the development and reporting requirements.

Since 2016, ETB's have been actively engaged with Industry partners with 24 new traineeships introduced to date. In 2016, four new traineeships were rolled out in Hospitality NFQ Level 4, Hospitality NFQ Level 5, Engineering OEM and Interior Systems. In 2017, an additional six traineeships were introduced in Animation, Certified Accountancy Pathway, Digital Sales and Marketing, Engineering Operations, Hairdressing and Laboratory Assistant. 2018 has seen a significant increase with 14 new traineeships rolled out with another 10 traineeship programmes expected to roll out by the end of 2018.

Traineeships tend to have a number of advantages for ETBs over apprenticeships:

- more attractive for some employers as they don't pay the trainee
- less expensive to develop and deliver
- shorter development time, quicker response to employers' needs with more agility and flexibility, particularly when vendor certification is used
- of shorter duration, participants are able to join the workforce more quickly
- work placement of reasonable length which employers are demanding
- certification can be tailored to employers' and participants' needs
- delivered when there is a demand, e.g. every second year, in different locations

2.5 Other factors impacting on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships

While considerable work has been undertaken by the Industry-led consortium groups in promoting their respective apprenticeships, promotion at national level, of apprenticeship and traineeships would be welcomed. In Ireland, the CAO route to higher education is firmly

engrained in the minds of parents and potential candidates. The school league tables[8] reinforces this idea and while people are advised that no information is available about progression to further education programmes such as Post-Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) and apprenticeships, schools that send all their students to higher education are perceived as *'better'* schools, potentially undermining the efforts of schools that promote the apprenticeship and traineeship options to their students.

Career guidance to empower young people to make well-founded choices is one of the 20 guiding principles of high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning[9] and is an essential element in relation to improving the attractiveness of apprenticeships. Career guidance helps students make well-informed and sustainable educational choices that match their capabilities and career aspirations. The pace of change in apprenticeship and traineeship offerings since 2016 has been challenging for those providing up to date information. Work is ongoing to address this shortfall with relevant information such as labour market research, information on apprenticeship and traineeship offerings and employer perspectives being provided to career guidance counsellors.

Matching employers with people wishing to take the apprenticeship route has continued to be challenging. A recent initiative, an app launched in the Mid-West[10] to assist learners and students make informed decisions on their future career pathways by linking apprenticeship programmes with participating employers. The app provides those considering the work-based learning option with informative data on all participating apprenticeship employers in the Mid-West and their apprenticeship programmes across industry sectors. It can also assist guidance counsellors and parents with visibility and greater awareness of career options through the apprenticeship model of learning. The expansion of this initiative nationally with necessary supports to implement and manage on a national scale would be welcomed.

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[8] https://education.independent.ie/league

[9] European Commission and ET2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training, "High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning: 20 guiding principles," p. 80, 2015.

[10] https://www.limerick.ie/business/news-events/news/launch-mid-west-apprenticeship-app

3. Concluding Remarks for Consideration

This document focused on apprenticeships and traineeships within the ETBs. Both these programmes formally combine alternate employer-based training with education provider training and lead to nationally recognised qualifications upon successful completion. In line with the National Skills Strategy 2025, the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship and the current Programme for Government, Ireland aims to significantly grow work-based learning over the coming years using apprenticeship and traineeship modes of learning and skills development. ETBs have been delivering on the targets working collaboratively with Industry partners, SOLAS, QQI and other providers and if appropriately resourced, have a leading role in the provision of cost-effective off-the-job training to apprentices and trainees across a wide range of career areas in the communities where the apprentices/trainees reside. The following summary points are outlined for consideration by the Committee:

- The SOLAS Authorised Officers appointed in ETB's should reflect the expansion of the apprenticeship model in Ireland to ensure employers and apprentices are supported, and the quality of national statutory apprenticeships are maintained.

- Resourcing the FET sector in terms of recruitment/retention of suitably qualified staff, access to state-of-the-art training facilities and equipment, is critical if they are to support work-based learning in the 21st-century meeting the needs of the economy, industry and local communities.

- Employers are central to apprenticeship and traineeship. Ways of attracting, incentivising and supporting employers who employ, and train apprentices need to be considered to ensure the continued success of the apprenticeship model. Matching of employers to potential apprentices provides a route for those interested in the apprenticeship model of learning.

- Marketing and promotion of apprenticeship and traineeships at national level should be considered to endorse these options for rewarding careers meeting the skill needs of the economy and providing a highly skilled talent pool for employers.

- Career guidance to empower young people to make well-informed and sustainable educational choices that match their capabilities and career aspirations is an essential element in relation to improving the attractiveness of apprenticeships.

FIT Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills.

20th November 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

FIT welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Committee's review of how apprenticeships and traineeships are being developed at this period in Ireland's social and economic development. FIT is a not-for-profit, industry-led organisation whose mission is to promote the inclusiveness of Ireland's rapidly expanding high tech sectors by enabling resident unemployed jobseekers acquire IT skill sets for which there is a demonstrated demand.

2. BACKGROUND TO FIT

It was established in 1999 to test and prove the shared convictions of people in industry and of education and training providers that sectors and occupations intensive in their use of IT skills present more opportunities than threats to jobseekers in Ireland, that high tech enterprises are not and do not wish to exclude those without a higher education, and that appropriately designed FET has a significant contribution to make in supplying the skill needs of these enterprises and making IT employment more inclusive. The fact that, 20 years on, high tech employers' support for FIT's mission continues strongly and that policy makers and that public bodies have become immensely more supportive of it, show that its founding convictions have stood the test of time.

However, it is still not appreciated sufficiently, and certainly not communicated vigorously enough to jobseekers in Ireland, the extent to which high tech employers are keen to broaden their intake of employees and to help design and support FET programmes for doing so. They are keen for a number of reasons;

- the sheer speed of change in the technologies they must employ makes them value the ability of new recruits to 'hit the ground running' and whose training incorporated substantial elements of learning-by-doing;
- the huge diversity of their customers makes them, in turn, value diversity in their workforces, including in socio-economic background and gender;
- the large scale of their skill needs, intensification of the 'global war for talent' and difficulties in maintaining Ireland's strong performance in attracting talent from abroad have sharpened their interest in additional channels of domestic recruitment and up-skilling existing employees;
- the ambition has grown among high tech employers, globally and in Ireland, to become more proactive in reducing inequalities, especially those being accentuated by the socially and regional uneven uptake of ICT opportunities, and promoting equity and inclusiveness; and
- employers and organisations seeking to recruit IT workers can now be found in every sector of the economy - the public, not-for-profit and private sectors, indigenous companies and SMEs, regions without large cities, agri-food and tourism, etc., now

want their shares of learners leaving programmes with practical and up-to-date IT skill sets.

In short, it is FIT's experience that, where IT skills are in demand, employers value competencies more than credentials.

FIT is now the appointed Coordinating Provider for Ireland's first two ICT Apprenticeships to produce ICT Associate Professionals in Software Development and Network Engineering respectively. Our goal is to achieve an annual intake of 1,000 apprentices *per annum* by 2021. But this is a relatively recent development in FIT's history. In fact, over the last 20 years, FIT in collaboration with FÁS and VECs and, latterly ETBs, has facilitated 18,500 job seekers to access quality ICT training of which over 14,000 have secured employment. And, for the most part, the profile of these candidates does not mirror the stereo-typical depiction of those who are employed in high tech as being predominantly Third Level students who studied STEM subjects at a high level.

Some of the organisations major steps along the way help explain how the consortia of which it is a part has been accorded this responsibility and, indeed, honour.

3. SOME OF THE EXPERIENCE FIT BRINGS TO THE APPRENTICEHIP CHALLNGE

3.1 FIT has retained and strengthened its traction with tech sector employers by improving its understanding of their actual skills needs in a structured and on-going manner and then designing and arranging the delivery of tech courses in response. In 2012, it undertook its first independent, comprehensive and granular *FIT ICT Skills Audit* at a national level to get information from high tech employers that was more detailed, current and specific than it could source elsewhere and which it needed to inform its work. It has improved and repeated the process in 2014 and 2018. These Audits rely on face-to-face interviews with senior personnel in a position to confirm the actual disciplines in which they are seeking to recruit employees and whether the vacancies in question require skills to be exercised at entry-level, competent or expert levels. Feedback from tech sector companies and FET providers on the methodology and findings of these Audits has been overwhelmingly positive and spurred many companies to review the manner of their talent acquisition in a more holistic and inclusive manner and ETBs to increase the provision of FIT-supported IT courses.

3.2 In its ICT Skills Audit in 2014, at the end of each face-to-face interview, FIT asked respondent companies whether they would they be interested to support a dual-education 'apprenticeship style' FET training programme whose candidates on completion would hold a NFQ Level 6 Award in either Software Development or Network Engineering. An overwhelmingly 85% of the respondent companies said yes and welcomed the initiative. In response the following year, with the support of the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS and 8 participating ETBs (CDETB, CETB, CMETB, DDLETB, GRETB, LCETB, LMETB, LWETB), FIT rolled out a new dual education, two year training programme called *ICT Associate Professional* at NFQ Level 6 (FET). During this pilot, 143 tech companies ranging from prominent multinationals to SME's sponsored 259 candidates and in excess of 80% of participants securing quality employment. An independent evaluation of the programme

carried out by the CIRCA group found that the majority of company sponsors viewed their recruits from the programme as highly productive by their 12th month in the programme.

3.3 In 2016, FIT entered discussions with Intel regarding the potential of an NFQ Level 6 FET Award to augment their recruitment. The company responded enthusiastically and, over a six month period, the appropriate training content necessary to initiate a new Advanced Manufacturing Maintenance Technician programme was teased out. The process gave Intel the opportunity to better appreciate what FET provision could deliver and the first course commenced later that year with the collaboration and support of KWETB. 80% of the participants secured employment in Intel on completion and a further 10% secured employment elsewhere. Notably, the first candidate from the programme to secure employment in Intel was a lone-parent who had no previous knowledge or experience. In its recruitment messaging now, Intel clearly cites NFQ Level 6 Award as a desired level of certification for employment. With the support of KWETB, the capacity of the programme has since been doubled.

3.4 A final important piece of learning that convinced FIT to lead a consortium and apply to run IT apprenticeships was its realisation that appropriately designed high quality, employer-endorsed programmes require the investment of significant resources but yield their returns over years and constitute excellent value-for-money. This happens when trainees remain in sustained employment because they and their employers are satisfied. It is a hall mark of FIT programmes that the relevance of their content is endorsed and periodically reviewed by employers, the motivation of learners and their aptitudes assessed prior to beginning, the need for support monitored in-programme, pre-employment preparation provided, and in-work support maintained on beginning a job. In short, FIT has steadily sought to ensure the 'loop was closed' between beginning one of its programmes and maintaining good employment.

On the basis of its experience and the extent of the deep collaboration and strong relationships FIT had developed with ETBs, ETBI, SOLAS and the DES, the organisation responded to the apprenticeship call in 2016 and was appointed the Coordinating Provider for two ICT Apprenticeships. In time expanding this portfolio to include IT apprenticeships in complementary areas such as Cyber Security, Fin-Tech, DevOps, Virtualisation and Digital Forensics, FIT has set itself the goal of achieving an annual intake of 1,000 apprentices by 2021.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE WIDER CONTEXT TO IRELAND'S APPRENTICESHIP AMBITIONS

Some observations need to be made about the current international and wider national contexts to the decision to increase the number of apprenticeships and traineeships and extend them into sectors of that economy that have not traditionally had them.

4.1 An international re-evaluation of FET dual education[1]

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[1] Studies on which this sub-section and the following are based are referenced in FIT's submission to the DES on the preparation of the National Skills Strategy – available on request from FIT.

Ireland is far being alone in seeking to upgrade its appreciation of the strength of demand in advanced economies for workers with the skill sets that dual education programmes, including apprenticeships and traineeships can provide. In many OECD countries, perceptions of the proportions of jobs that need to be filled that require a four year degree or more have been or are being revised, even as living standards rise and economies become more knowledge-intensive. For example, in the US, it is estimated that one third of all vacancies by 2018 will call for some post-secondary qualification, but not necessarily the completion of a four-year degree, while two-thirds of overall employment growth in the European Union (EU25) is forecast to be in the "technicians and associate professionals" category, i.e., for professional and technical jobs requiring no more than one or two years of career preparation beyond upper secondary level category. (There is an extensive literature on this – a prominent source is the set of Skills Beyond School studies of the OECD and studies by the EU's Cedefop).

While some countries have thriving post-secondary vocational sectors (Germany and Switzerland being the oft-quoted European case studies), more have found it difficult to find a place for shorter (one-or two-year) programmes in competition with better known academic qualifications, and Ireland is a good example. While school and higher education, and the well-trod path between them, play a dominant role in how young people and parents target quality jobs as the Irish economy moves up the value chain, there is a corresponding under appreciation that, as an OECD report puts it, 'outside these two institutions there exists a less well understood world of colleges, diplomas, certificates and professional examinations – the world of post-secondary vocational education and training'. It has been, been pithily analysed in both the US and UK that they produce too many generalist bachelor's degrees, too many low-level vocational qualifications and too few higher technician or associate professional level qualifications. Even leading educational systems are being encouraged to critically review how they are ensuring that all their students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are equipped with the necessary cognitive and social-emotional skills to make them resilient to technological change (e.g., Finland in the 2018 World Bank Report on the EU, Growing United. Upgrading Europe's Convergence Machine).

4.2 A difficult national climate in which to improve the status of FET

There are many reasons why young people in Ireland, backed by their parents, have an exceptionally strong preference to transfer to higher education immediately after completing the Leaving Certificate. They include:

- The employment rate advantage, the 'graduate premium' in earnings and the private financial returns to a tertiary education in Ireland are among the highest in the OECD (OECD, 2015);
- Unchallenged assumptions that within a decade or more, all good jobs will be for graduates;
- The underdevelopment of quality FET programmes that are alternative routes to good employment; and

- the limited access to good, labour market-informed career guidance on the part of those who need it most.

At the same time there are indicators that a growing number of graduates are being disappointed by what their higher education achieves for them. For example:

- The numbers of graduates in non-graduate elementary jobs and on low pay are high by international standards;
- The inequality in earnings among those with a higher education in Ireland is high by OECD standards;
- The proportion of people at work over-qualified for their jobs is high;
- The quality of the undergraduate experience has come under enormous pressure as staff-student ratios and undergraduates' contact hours with teaching faculty have fallen;
- Non-completion rates are high in parts of the HE sector;
- The job-readiness of graduates is of significant concern to many employers who are having recourse to sometimes quite long in-house graduate placement programmes.

Young people can feel defined by their Leaving Cert results and relative success in the 'points race' can have inordinate influence on the decision to proceed immediately to higher education and on what is studied. In FIT's experience of promoting the capacity of FET programmes as a complement to HE provision for the tech and related sectors, it is often not employers who need persuading of the credentials and competencies attained on FET vocational programmes but potential participants themselves, along with their parents, who have to be convinced that there is nothing '*second-class*' in choosing FET.

At the same time, many of those who gain only low CAO points can enter adult life more conscious of what they do not have than of what they have. FIT is profoundly aware of a 'waste of talent' among all too many of the 30%-40% of young people currently not transferring from school to higher education. At a time of life when self-confidence should abound, some finish their schooling with little sense of achievement and low self-belief, which can lead to the dilution of their career aspirations and disregard of their potential. It is significant that some of the countries from which many EU workers come to Ireland have educational systems more equitable than Ireland's (Estonia, Poland, and Latvia).

Overall, FIT continues to contend with what it sees as still a general undervaluing in Ireland society of FET provision and an underestimate of its capacity to equip job seekers, young and old, with skills that will be sufficient to secure quality employment in Ireland's already advanced economy. In particular, I want to highlight the labour market currency of the NFQ Level 6 FE Award – which I call Ireland's '*forgotten certification*'. It is, it should be noted, higher than an Honours Leaving Cert., at the same level as an Advanced Certificate or Diploma and equates to many industry / vendor certifications that are sought after by high

tech companies. It is our experience that more and more of the tech companies who value competencies above credentials are becoming aware of the potential of a NFQ Level 6 FE Award holder to 'hit the ground running' and provide them with skills they need.

FIT wishes to state very clearly, therefore, that the belief that the lions' share of IT jobs to be filled require a higher education qualification is still too widely held and that it is simply wrong and misleading. FIT believes young people now are transferring directly to higher education from school whose aspirations, more beneficial patterns of learning and immediate employment prospects would be better served if they could enter quality, occupation-focussed FET programmes and defer their commencement of third level education in tandem with their career development. It is important that pressures on young people to seek entry to HE immediately are lessened by the greater provision of quality alternatives for gaining good employment at Levels 5-6 that include clear pathways HE at a later stage.

A more profound discussion than has yet been had, is still needed between educationalists and the corporate sector to ensure they understand together the full breadth of competencies and skills needed to underpin working lives in the future. It is then for early, primary and secondary education in Ireland to embrace and nurture all young people with their different talents, interests and intelligences by providing the learning styles that suit them and the requisite diversity of opportunities on leaving school to make promising starts to their working lives.

5. THERE IS STRONG DEMAND FOR IT SKILLS IN IRELAND

Many indicators point to a strong growth in demand for ICT practitioner skills in Ireland. For example:

- A study recently commissioned by DBEI as part of its preparation for Ireland's *Third ICT Skills Action Plan, 2018-2026* predicts that the demand for ICT skills in Ireland will continue to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.5%. This implies an additional 38,560 ICT practitioner jobs will be needed by 2022 alone;
- Employment survey results indicated that IDA Ireland ICT-related client firms' full-time employment grew by 8.4% in 2016, while employment in Enterprise Ireland ICT-related client firms grew by 9%;
- Demand for ICT practitioners is, in part, being met through attracting talent not just from across the EU but from beyond it. In 2017, 3,442 employment permits were issued —an increase of 8.2% on 2016 and of more than 35% on 2015;
- Demand for ICT practitioners on the part of indigenous firms and organisations (including public bodies) is likely to grow rapidly because of the major potential of the emerging new IT technologies to improve competitiveness and/or the quality of performance and services. Some of these companies and sectors play particularly important roles in the regions and are most vulnerable if they do not utilise ICTs to innovate, boost their productivity, and develop new market channels.

FIT's own Skills Audit 2018[2] painted a similar picture of a thriving tech sector requiring large numbers of additional ICT practitioners at entry, competent and expert levels. Its principal findings include:

- Its estimate that there are 12,000 *current* vacancies for ICT practitioners, the majority of which (58%) require the exercise of skills at the entry or competent level, and the remainder (42%) at the expert level;
- Striking evidence of how the pace of technological change is affecting IT vacancies - consultation with employers in preparing its questionnaire found it necessary to add two new disciplines and 70 new specific skills to the framework that had been developed for the 2014 Audit;
- Good news on apprenticeships - 91% of respondents expressed support for apprenticeships and were willing to hire an apprentice to address skills shortages in their organisation.
- A deep challenge to the design of programmes - ICT companies continue to demand deeper technical skills, coupled with an increasing requirement for broad transversal skills to enable wider applications of emerging technologies. This is consistent with the conclusion of industry analysts that the "4th Industrial Revolution" is upon us, and that successful economies going forward will be characterised by their willingness and ability to adapt rapidly to the challenges and opportunities that this presents;
- Findings from complementary research carried out by FIT into the regional spread of IT employment in Ireland finds that
  - ICT activity and urban scale are closely linked – 38,300 or 45% of all ICT practitioners in the State are in the greater Dublin region. In addition to Dublin and the Mid-East, the South West can be described as having a significant cluster of ICT practitioners (11,400 or 13.4% of all in the State)
  - Yet the tech sector still has a significant degree of regional spread. What are small numbers in the national context can be significant in a regional and local context.
  - The scale of the current imbalance between Dublin and the other regions can be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat to the effective development of ICT in the regions, and stakeholders in regional economic development should see how changes in ICT technologies are offering both opportunities as well as threats to their location's value proposition for hosting high-tech enterprises and attracting high skilled ICT practitioners to 'de-commute'. This is, in fact, already happening in several ways.

6. **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN THE ROLL-OUT OF THE NEW APPRENTICESHIPS TO DATE**

6.1 Strengths or indicators of what has gone well include:

- The strong articulation of the policy commitment by key institutions namely, SOLAS, the HEA, QQI and the Apprenticeship Council and the extent of support for more and

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[2] A copy will be forwarded to any committee member on request.

better dual-education to be found in our new 'generation' of national policies for enterprise, innovation, the regions, skills, HE and FET;

- The establishment of the Apprenticeship Council;
- The creation of QQI quality and programme validation processes for apprenticeships;
- The high level of response to calls and the formation of consortia targeting a wide range of economic;
- The high level of involvement of HEIs in particular;
- The extent of awareness of the need to include more women in apprenticeships;
- The extent of awareness of the need to make provision of apprenticeship places more feasible and attractive to SMEs;
- Evidence that the career guidance profession, commentators and the media are beginning to become more interested in apprenticeships and other alternatives to immediate entry to university when CAO points are published and being debated

6.2 Weaknesses or what should be going much better include:

- The level of ambition in the targets set, even allowing for the principle that the new arrangements 'should walk before they run', is questionable given the continuing growth of the economy and scale of demand for higher skills at all levels;
- The scale of ETB participation relative to HEIs so far is small and FET Level 6 still appears as 'the forgotten award';
- The pace or speed of the roll out is slow and there is a lack of clarity as to why and of urgency in finding out
  - There is funding confusion and shortfalls. Though we are now in the final quarter of 2018, funding for new FET apprenticeship programmes has still not been finalised or adopted.
  - What is being proposed appears insufficiently tailored to the circumstances of the different consortia.
  - It is difficult to believe that the levels of funding in the current funding template adequately acknowledge the scale of net public savings that will occur when, for example, non-completion within HE is reduced, graduate underemployment after HE is avoided, labour market entry directly after school is circumvented, and people already resident in the country rather than attracted from abroad supply IT skills that are needed.
  - Overall, the lack of adequate funding is impeding the effective roll-out of the new apprenticeship programme as originally envisaged, hampering company participation and candidate access, which if allowed to persist will ultimately erode employer confidence.
- The National Training Fund (NTF) is not being used sufficiently. Indecon has analysed the Fund's income and expenditure over the last seven years and estimates the 2018 outcome is an under-spend of €144 million. It projects a cumulative surplus being carried forward in 2018 of €460m. In this context, there is understandable frustration among consortia.

- The administration process appears to be inefficient. The current process for both Employer Apprenticeship Approval and Apprentice Registration is cumbersome, overly administrative, and appears to be significantly under resourced. This is impeding the timely registration of companies and candidates and, ultimately, the pace of incremental growth in new apprenticeships. In addition, several companies have expressed concern that the current registration process may be non-compliant with GDPR legislative requirements.
- The promotion and marketing of the new apprenticeships is low key. It is our view that a comprehensive national recruitment campaign directed at candidates, companies and the general public is essential, showcasing the variety of careers and opportunities the new apprenticeships have to offer.
- There has been little advance in understanding how to increase women's participation. While the need to have more women apprentices is widely accepted, insufficient progress is being made as to how to do it and in developing a discourse and messaging about apprenticeships that appeals to women.
- Action on behalf of SMEs has been slow. Awareness of the need that more SMEs should take on apprenticeships has not been matched with greater resources and improved know-how in how to do it. This is particularly the case where ICT apprenticeships are involved and where SMEs compete directly with leading multi-nationals in the recruitment of human resources to meet their talent and skills needs.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

FIT presents the following recommendations for consideration by the Committee with the ambition that they contribute to the future development of apprenticeships.

7.1   Carry out a review of existing administration processes for the new apprenticeships to improve their fitness for purpose, efficiency and effectiveness. The processes currently in   use with relation to employer approval and apprentice registration are largely legacy systems developed for traditional apprenticeships and before current requirements such as GDPR came into existence.

7.2   Organise a comprehensive and sustained National New Apprenticeship Recruitment Campaign directed at candidates, companies and the general public, showcasing the variety of careers and opportunities the new apprenticeships have to offer.

7.3   Develop a range of pre-apprenticeship programmes to support wider participation in the ICT apprenticeships and new apprenticeships generally. Vehicles such as Traineeships, VTOS, YouthReach, PLC, Specific Skills Training and other FET programmes could help to support wider participation in new apprenticeships.

7.4   Undertake a high impact school-based awareness campaign to inform parents, career guidance providers, teachers and potential participants that an FET route is a

valuable and viable pathway to a career in high skill sectors, including the tech sector.

7.5   Design and resource an SME Apprenticeship Support Scheme to address barriers which may be faced by smaller enterprises in availing of the skills development opportunity available via the new apprenticeships. Pilot this for ICT Apprenticeships with a view to expanding it across sectors.

7.6   Establish a national Apprenticeship Forum, to capture the learning and experience of consortia, coordinating providers and other key stakeholders, and inform the ongoing development of new apprenticeships.

7.7   Develop and implement a national 'Women in Apprenticeship' campaign, with a vibrant public discourse, to promote apprenticeship as a valued career path for women. Engage a wide range of advocacy groups, employers, thought leaders and influencers to create an enduring impact.

7.8   Set more ambitious targets for the expansion of new apprenticeships to match the strong growth in the economy and the need for additional skills and recruitment streams. We are in danger of aiming low because the adoption of new apprenticeships is a challenging transformation which requires change in mindsets and traditional approaches.

7.9   Develop funding models which more effectively support the early stage development and implementation cycle of new apprenticeships and take account of the diverse needs that pertain across sectors. A 'one size fits all' approach is in danger of slowing or impeding the necessary innovation.

7.10   Some of the NTF's accumulated surplus and a higher proportion of its annual income should be expressly allocated to accelerating the development and implementation of new apprenticeships, recognising the potential of apprenticeship to broaden talent acquisition and thereby further Ireland's future growth and prosperity.
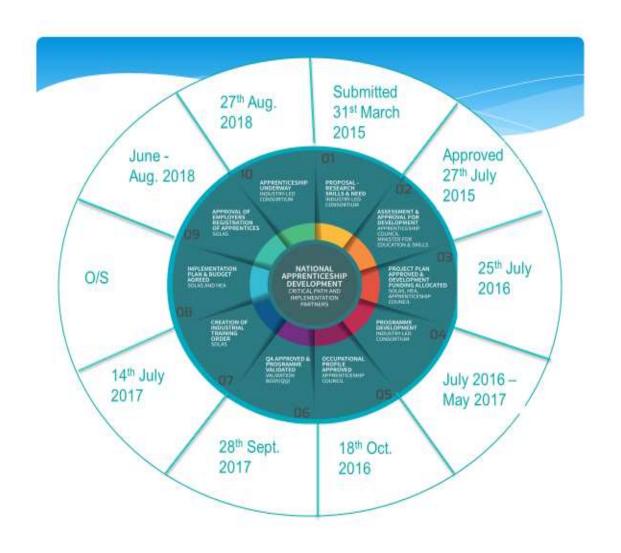
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APPENDIX 1

FIT Board of Directors:

1.	Liam Ryan	SAP, Chairperson FIT
2.	Hilary O'Meara	Accenture
3.	Gary O'Callaghan	Siemens
4.	Geraldine Gibson	AQMetrics
5.	Eimear Gunn	IBM Ireland
6.	Joanne Morrissey	Microsoft
7.	Aengus McClean	Oath:
8.	Ed Taylor	Ebay
9.	Adam Grennan	CISCO
10.	Daragh Mac Aoghain	PayPal
11.	Shane Kirwan	Skillsoft
12.	Jason Ward	DELLEMC
13.	John Walsh	Fujitsu
14.	Una Fitzpatrick	Technology Ireland, IBEC
15.	Allan Rochford	Eir
16.	Simon Murphy	Deloitte
17.	Andrew Lennon	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
18.	Richard Hanlon	Vesta
19.	Maria Campbell	Sisk Healthcare
20.	Joe Hogan	Openet
21.	Charlie Fitzgerald	LinkedIn
22.	Kieran Sweeney	eDot
23.	Annette Soraine	Innovate

APPENDIX 2

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT: - FIT's Journey, March 2015 to November 2018.

APPENDIX 3

Text of the Considerations and Recommendations in FIT ICT Skills Audit 2018.

In addition to providing analysis into the skills, knowledge and competencies currently in demand in Ireland's growing tech sector, this ICT skills audit proposes to inform skills policy development, provide substantive information to education providers to assist programme development and to give some insight to educationalists, career guidance professionals and those interested in pursuing a career in the sector. The following considerations and recommendations are presented with these objectives in mind:

1. **The pervasion of technologies across key sectors of the economy requires redefinition of the 'tech talent' pipeline and greater diversity in its composition.**

   An integral part of making the national economy and regional economies amenable to high-tech will be communicating clearly the enormous potential of the new ICT technologies, across all sectors, in achieving outcomes that are not just improving our lives as consumers but our well-being, societal priorities and environmental concerns.

   Accordingly, the requirement for a broader participation of the population in Ireland's ICT success story as increasingly local industries, enterprises and workplaces adopt new and emerging ICT technologies necessitates vigorous engagement of regional employers and other regional economic stakeholders with the continuum of FET and HE provision.

   The Regional Skills Fora on which the ETBs and third level institutions are represented have a major role in articulating the tech skill requirements of employers regionally (and collectively nationally) while facilitating the coordination of delivery of a comprehensive portfolio of tech programmes across the spectrum of tertiary education (FET + HE) through a jointly developed and comprehensive delivery plan.

2. **Successful economies going forward will be characterised by the ability to adapt rapidly to the challenges and opportunities of the "4th Industrial Revolution".**

   The convergence of technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, analytics, etc. are radically transforming how work gets done across global value chains, enabling organisations to be more intelligent, more agile, and better able to scale their operations, optimise supply chains and shift to new business models with unprecedented speed.

   Ireland has undergone a remarkable recovery from a deep recession with full employment now within sight. For the economy to remain resilient to unforeseen shocks, and for future employment to be of a high quality and inclusive of the workforce nationally (across the country's nine regions), foreign investment and, especially, indigenous enterprises must embrace new technologies fully to boost productivity, innovate, grow their markets and most importantly remain competitive.

   It is critical that government, the development agencies and the regions provide the right conditions, skills and capabilities that corporate strategies demand and that they are in a position to clearly articulate how an Irish location can be part of a dynamic company's ambitions for growth.

3. **Successfully orchestrating learning ecosystems will be the critical skills policy challenge in an era of unprecedented digital disruption.**

The pace of change and technological evolution makes it in increasingly difficult to categorise the digital careers that are flourishing today with yesterday's labels. Traditional ICT specialisations are now in danger of encouraging an absence of flexibility where the ability to appreciate developments in a range of ICT fields and to work across them are now particularly highly valued. Today's tech employers require a much broader array of tech skills combined with business development, entrepreneurial, creativity and interpersonal skills. The ability to communicate with others and an approachable demeanour now matter more than before for potential candidates seeking to pursue careers in the high-tech space.

As Ireland's economy, at national and regional levels, is increasingly transformed by digital technologies over the coming years, it is crucial that skills provisioning is aligned and effective in enabling job seekers meet the requirements of a rapidly changing labour market. In the light of emerging technologies anticipation is required on how the labour market will change, and the re-skilling and up-skilling programmes need to be prioritised by government. Ensuring that citizens have the skills to benefit from the opportunities offered by new technological developments is integral to ensuring ongoing prosperity as well as social cohesion.

This entails not just more education, but a transformation in the type of skills that are developed and how they are provided. Crucial in terms of the educational system, is not just what is taught but how it is taught and the achievements that are fostered at each level of the system, particularly during the senior cycle of secondary and upwards. This Audit's findings emphasise the importance of fostering cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities that will enable young people and job seekers pursue emerging and yet unforeseen tech impacted careers successfully. In this regard it is important to think not just in terms of formal education and training systems and their institutions, but to embrace the idea of a learning ecosystem that encompasses public, private and non-government actors who collaborate and share information to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for learners and themselves.

4. **Dual education initiatives such as the new tech apprenticeship merit the stature they are attaining in current policy and practice as key and essential contributors in addressing the strong demand forecast for ICT Skills.**

This requirement for proficiency across a range of technological competencies combined with a good knowledge of how business gets done necessitates effective application through hands-on learning and professional development to bring them to the levels now required in today's tech workplaces. Accordingly, the potential of dual education programmes (apprenticeships and traineeships), whether in FET or HE, that combine off-the-job training with work-based learning to develop and test these skills has become more appreciated, principally by employers and policy makers, and latterly by those seeking careers in tech related sectors.

5. **5. FET deserves appropriate recognition in policy and practice as a key and essential component in addressing the increasing demand forecast for ICT practitioner skills.**

Consistent with the findings in this report, it has been FIT's experience and conviction for some time, that ICT employers are increasingly convinced of the technical competencies and team working skills delivered through appropriately designed NFQ Level 5 and Level 6 programmes. It is no longer assumed that only people with a higher education are eligible to pursue careers in the technology sectors.

The findings of this skills dialogue reinforce the extent of demand in the ICT sector for people across levels of proficiency, indicating significant levels of demand for people at entry and competent as well as for expert levels. This repeated finding through the cycle of FIT ICT Skills Audits serves to correct with authority what FIT sees as a widespread and persistent misconception that the ICT skills gap is exclusively made up of roles at the apex of the skills triangle i.e. at the 'expert' level. Additionally, it has become clear from the Audits that 'the expertise' requirement articulated by tech employers' relates more to the fruit of experience rather than of the level of qualifications.

This reality requires greater resonance on the part of policy-makers particularly in the drafting of policy documents such as the ICT Action Plan. To date these would appear to undervalue the potential contribution of FET skills programmes in enhancing the tech talent pipeline which is so vital to the sustenance and future growth of related sectors within the Irish economy.

To illustrate the potential contribution of FET provision, the new ICT Associate Professional tech apprenticeship, recently approved by the national Apprenticeship Council, has the goal of delivering a minimum of 1,000 apprentices per annum into the tech sector by 2021 across a range of disciplines including Software Development, Network Engineering, Cyber Security, FinTech and Advanced Manufacturing. In this instance employers will sponsor tech apprenticeships on FET Level 6 programmes from day one.

6. **Remedial actions are needed to realise the significant employment opportunities that currently exist within Ireland's tech sector.**

The findings of the 2018 ICT Skills Audit suggest that there are approximately 12,000 ICT practitioner vacancies currently in the tech sector in Ireland, at entry/competent levels (58%) and expert level (42%). The overall picture that emerges, therefore, is of a thriving tech sector requiring large numbers of additional ICT practitioners. This opportunity if not addressed sufficiently may quickly become a challenge to the sectors global competitiveness as issues relating to resourcing and productivity emerge. Accordingly, it is incumbent on the key stakeholders namely government/ policy-makers, tech related industry/sectors, local development agencies and education and training providers to come together and to work cohesively to deliver a coordinated response in a timely manner. Better coordination in the development, range and delivery of relevant tech training programmes across the continuum of FET and HE (both with their substantive budgets) is a critical and urgent component for success. Regional Skills Fora could facilitate the necessary dialogue between the key stakeholders on an ongoing basis with the expected outcomes clearly articulated in regional training and development plans annually – which could then be collated into national tech skills development programmes to ensure that both regional and national existing and emerging priorities are met.

7. **7. Ensuring labour market inclusiveness in the tech sector is a shared objective.**

There are strong concerns that advanced countries are neglecting the extent to which groups and regions within their societies are being 'left behind' as technology, globalisation and migration reshape their labour markets. Consequently, the OECD is now committing to assess the labour market performance of its member states, on the basis of the quality and inclusiveness of the employment they provide, in addition to correlation in economic performance and employment statics.

The desire is to redress the cumulative evidence emerging that technologies (principally ICT) and globalisation can, combine to cause a polarisation in national labour markets, to the point of fuelling widespread popular and political opposition to further economic internationalisation. The intent is to ensure that access to decent employment by, for example, women, young people without higher education, older workers, people with a disability, and residents of regions distant from major urban centres is prioritised and actioned to ensure satisfactory labour market performance. Ireland should aim to become the exemplar of social and economic cohesion by incorporating these concerns and necessary responses as cornerstones in future skills development policies.

Recent strategies make clear how much of the 'heavy lifting' in bringing people from disadvantaged starting points to access decent employment must be done by the ETBs, and the Regional Skills Fora, in turn, must play a key role in helping them to do so.

8. **The reach and economic impact of the tech sector is significant and increasing beyond the pale.**

The types of employment of most relevance to this report are those that specifically require ICT skills and a demonstrated competence in using them. The spatial distribution of economic activity and employment in Ireland is one of the most concentrated in the EU/OECD due to the dominance of the Dublin City Region. However, the degree of concentration of ICT practitioners and growth in their numbers observed in large city regions should not be used as templates or benchmarks for assessing the performance across the regions.

The significant growth rates in the numbers of ICT practitioners observed in the smaller regions should be built upon. The evidence suggest that the tech sector already has a degree of regional spread, and what are small numbers in comparison with large concentrated regions are not immaterial within less populated regions and are most likely of greater significance. It follows that what each regional skills forum can ambition, the measures needed to achieve its regional economy's potential and the effectiveness of each forum's performance has to be hugely contextual.

The current imbalance between Dublin and the other regions has to be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat to the effective development of ICT in the other regions. The evidence that a number of the other regions have a substantive and burgeoning ICT practitioner base should be a significant determinant in adopting appropriate policies to build on these firm foundations, providing alternatives locations for those tech sector companies coping with the costs and constraints of urban congestion as depicted in the capital. The regional growth in tech skills as recorded over the inter-census is the more significant metric in determining regional policy development. Attracting large ICT operations to small regions is possible and there are successful examples.

9. **The level of tech employment provided by indigenous companies across key sectors of the economy needs to grow faster.**

It is important to appreciate both nationally and regionally that the full capacities of emerging technologies should be applied to improving the performance and prospects of existing industries and services. This will ensure that important industries and sectors of the economy (farming, wholesale and retail activities, accommodation and food, health services and education, etc.) are enabled and equipped to improve their quality, productivity and efficiency as key pillars of the Irish economy. Some of these companies and sectors play particularly

important roles in the regions, and are most vulnerable if they do not utilise ICTs to innovate, boost their productivity, and develop
new market channels.

In pursuit of the key objectives of maintaining and growing inward investment while fostering faster indigenous growth, it is crucial that, at national and regional levels, enterprises have access to workers with the skills, knowledge and competencies that enable them to exploit the newest ICT technologies.

10. **Informing career choices in a sector where change is a constant requires a continuous dialogue amongst stakeholders.**

The ICT sector in Ireland already has some of the elements of a multifaceted skills ecosystem in place. Yet its representative bodies need to be more proactive in supporting education and training institutions in attaining a full appreciation of the tech ecosystem and the jobs within. This should facilitate a forward-looking perspective on emerging techniques and resulting state-of-the-art technologies that will inform future roles and professions yet to be defined.

Similarly, students/job seekers must be assisted to understand the implications and career prospects emanating from new technologies and their application in an everchanging and dynamic workplace. The impact of digitisation is growing exponentially and employment in IT-related careers is projected to increase at a rate that outpaces most other professions.

While the lack of qualified talent can alter the expansion plans and locational choices of organisations with positions to fill, it simultaneously provides unprecedented career opportunities and prospects for indigenous job seekers willing to develop in-demand tech skills.

Ibec

Apprenticeships and traineeships

Submission to the

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skils

November 2018

Ibec's main business sectors are:

Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland

Audiovisual Federation

Financial Services Ireland

Food Drink Ireland

Property Industry Ireland

Building Materials Federation

Technology Ireland

Telecommunications and Internet Federation

Manufacturing Ireland

Medtech & Engineering

Biopharmachem Ireland

Retail Ireland

Small Firms Association

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Key recommendations

- The cost of funding new apprenticeship off-the-job wages, plus travel and subsistence costs where necessary, should be supported through the National Training Fund in order to expand take-up of apprenticeships amongst SMEs and address the anomaly whereby similar costs for traditional craft apprenticeships are subvented.

- The highly fragmented components of the apprenticeship 'landscape' should be consolidated in a dedicated agency, working with business consortia and education providers, to oversee the funding, development and promotion of apprenticeships.

- The Industrial Training Act 1967 should be amended to reflect changes in the business environment and facilitate the streamlining of the new apprenticeship development process.

- Assessment of the capacity of employers to be registered to offer apprenticeships should be undertaken by the consortia leading the occupational apprenticeships.

- A national online mechanism for employers to advertise apprenticeship opportunities and prospective apprentices to register interest and/or apply should be introduced, as a priority.

- A targeted campaign on the business 'value proposition' of apprenticeship for firms, and in particular, SMEs is required. 'Horizontal' cross sector occupational apprenticeships should be promoted.

- Regional Skills Fora managers should highlight apprenticeships as a core element of the 'Skills for Growth' package initiative

- The DIT pilot pre-apprenticeship programme should be mainstreamed and rolled out to other regions outside the capital. These programmes should be developed through a partnership with appropriate new apprenticeship providers at level 6 to broaden the range of apprenticeships beyond the traditional crafts. This should also include apprenticeships in occupations which young women regard as offering viable careers

- The pre-apprenticeship programme should ensure that students can maintain a social welfare payment or receive a training allowance while participating in the programme. Where necessary, other counselling supports should be provided to improve retention and outcomes

- Employers should be encouraged to engage with local providers on traineeship programme development through regional promotional campaigns. Employer support and understanding of such programmes will be key, and appropriate language and terminology must be deployed.

- To minimise duplication and encourage best practice sharing between education and training providers, a streamlined process for notification of planned provision of traineeships should be established. This should feed into a national database to simplify the reporting process.

- Career and opportunity pathways between traineeships and other programmes should be developed to highlight progression opportunities and encourage more lifelong learning.

- The social welfare system should support people returning to the workforce after a period of absence to reskill quickly through the traineeship programme

Introduction

Ibec welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the examination by the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships. The main focus of this submission is the requirement to encourage the take-up of 'new' apprenticeships and traineeships amongst employers. **Employer buy in is critical, as the apprenticeship and traineeship models depend on employers taking on apprentices.**

It is almost six years since Ibec was invited to participate on the then Government's Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland[1]. At the time, it was felt that the apprenticeship system, which was limited to 26 craft-based occupations, did not reflect the broad skill needs of the Irish economy. The Review suggested a new model of business-led apprenticeships that could boost skill levels across the economy and help to get people into quality, sustainable jobs.

Companies would be involved in both the design of curricula and in the delivery of the on-the-job element of programmes, some of which could extend up to higher degree level. This would ensure the continuing relevance of qualifications in a rapidly changing labour market. The new apprenticeships could offer a real alternative to ambitious and capable young people, who may be looking for alternatives to direct entry from school to higher education, and would be interested in an 'earn and learn' model.

A lot of effort has been put into the apprenticeships project to turn this aspiration into a reality. Ibec has, at times, been frustrated at the speed at which the new apprenticeships have come on the stream. But, in retrospect, this probably should not be a surprise.

The starting point for any consideration of new apprenticeship models usually includes a reference to the well-established dual systems of countries such as Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Much of the commentary, however, tends to ignore the fact that Ireland cannot simply adopt systems that have been built over generations, upon very different economies, labour markets and social partnership arrangements. We also have to acknowledge the reality that apprenticeships, traineeships and vocational education in general, tend not to enjoy parity of esteem in a society that still defines educational achievement in terms of CAO points and entry to higher education.

This is not to say that we do not have much to learn from other national systems. In fact, the apprenticeship review group report tried to distil some of the principles on which they are based to inform a model that could work in an Irish context. And we should remember apprenticeships are a distinct model of education. They are not internships or traineeships. They are a deep and academically accredited learning experience in preparation for a specific occupation.

The apprenticeship project is also gaining some momentum. The Action Plan to expand Apprenticeships and Traineeships 2016-2020[2] sets ambitious, but achievable, targets for the introduction of 40 new programmes and a cumulative total of 33,000 new apprenticeship registrations by 2020. Almost 20 new programmes, in areas such as accountancy, ICT, insurance, international financial services, manufacturing and biopharma, have come on stream.

There has been significant progress and useful learning over the past three years. Ibec believes that it is an opportune time to review this experience and start to plan for a more ambitious expansion of an apprenticeship system that is capable of delivering rewarding careers for learners and meeting the constantly changing upskilling demand of business.

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[1] https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Review-of-Apprenticeship-Training-in-Ireland.pdf
[2] https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Action-Plan-Expand-Apprenticeship-Traineeship-in-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf

Increasing the uptake of apprenticeships by SMEs

Recommendations

- **A national online mechanism for employers to advertise apprenticeship opportunities and prospective apprentices to register interest and/or apply should be introduced, as a priority. should**

- **The Apprenticeship Council should develop a targeted campaign which highlights the business 'value proposition' of apprenticeships.**

- **A targeted campaign on the business 'value proposition' of apprenticeship for firms, and in particular, SMEs is required. 'Horizontal' cross sector occupational apprenticeships should be promoted.**

- **Regional Skills Fora managers should highlight apprenticeships as a core element of the 'Skills for Growth' package initiative**

SMEs and owner managers are a particularly difficult business segment to address in terms of expanding take-up of apprenticeships. They tend to be time poor, have limited numbers of staff to support apprentices and may not even be aware of how the potential talent delivered by the apprenticeship system could improve their business. However, the table below demonstrates why this sector cannot be ignored, if the apprenticeship model is to be embedded in Irish business. Almost 20% of all private sector employees work for companies with less than 10 staff while companies with less than 50 staff account for 44% of total employment.

Company size (no of employees)	No of companies	% of total employment	No employees
<10	229,472	19.7	373
10 -19	10316	10.8	129
20 - 49	5686	13.4	160
50 - 249	2829	21.0	255
250+	540	35.0	414

Table 1. Source: CSO

The Generation Apprenticeship campaign has already made significant progress in raising the profile of apprenticeships with key stakeholders such as guidance counsellors, learners, business and the media. However a targeted campaign on the business 'value proposition' of apprenticeship for firms, and in particular, SMEs is required.

While many sectors of the economy are experiencing skills and labour shortages, it should not be assumed that all companies fully understand how apprenticeships, or upskilling more generally, can address their business need. The Government's "Skills for Growth" is a package of supports for employers to help them understand and plan for their skill needs. Each employer who participates in the programme is given access to a new skills audit tool to capture robust and consistent data on the skill needs of their business; one on one assistance from a Regional Skills Forum Manager to use this tool and plan for the future; and once skill needs have been identified, Regional Skills Fora link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to their skills needs. Where possible, apprenticeships should a central focus of this solution.

The recent SOLAS Review of pathways to participation in apprenticeship[3] has recommended that a national online mechanism for employers to advertise apprenticeship opportunities and prospective apprentices to register interest and/or apply. It is surprising that five years into this project that such a mechanism does not already exist. Therefore it should be implemented as a priority.

There have been two national Calls for apprenticeship proposals to date, in January 2015 and in May 2017. Arising from these Calls, there were 16 new apprenticeships operational (as of September 2018) with up to 36 more due to launch before the end of 2019. Since the 2017 call, the Irish labour force and economy has continued to expand, with analysis of skills shortages in a number of key areas. Businesses groups are usual organised along sectoral lines and, not surprisingly, the consortia that have responded to calls are organised along sector lines. There is a danger that the promotional opportunities for 'horizontal' cross-sector occupational apprenticeships such as ICT or sales will be missed. Therefore, these require specific marketing campaigns.

Support for employers hiring apprentices

Recommendation

- **The cost of funding new apprenticeship off-the-job wages, plus travel and subsistence costs where necessary, should be supported through the National Training Fund in order to expand take-up of apprenticeships amongst SMEs and address the anomaly whereby similar costs for traditional craft apprenticeships are subvented.**

A major obstacle to the expansion of new apprenticeships, particularly amongst SMEs, is cost. There is strong evidence that the cost of paying a salary and subsistence while the apprenticeship is off-the-job has become a major disincentive (see case study below). There is also a significant policy inconsistency where payment of off-the-job wages for traditional four-year craft apprenticeships is provided by the State

This was acknowledged by the Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland 2013 report:

The payment by an employer of an apprentice wage throughout the period of training, both in the on and off the job phases, for new apprenticeships, is a departure from the existing scheme. However, if the State were to assume the off the job wage cost in new programmes, the scope for expansion would be extremely limited. This issue should be discussed further with employer organisations.

Since the Review, was published five years ago, Government has been able to significantly increase apprenticeships funding to €122m in 2018, due to a significant increase in National Training Fund (NTF) levy receipts. The amount contributed by employers through the NTF levy will have doubled from €340m in 2014 to a budgeted €685m in 2019. However, only a very small fraction (€13m in 2018) has been allocated to new apprenticeships.

The NTF levy itself was raised by 0.1% in 2018 to 0.8% and will be increased by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020. The Minister for Finance stated that increases in the levy would be subject to the implementation of the necessary reforms to ensure that employers have a greater role in determining the priorities and the strategic direction of the Fund. The new apprenticeships have the potential to increase skill levels across the economy and should be regarded as a priority for NTF support. The cost of funding new apprentice off-the-job wages, plus travel and subsistence costs where necessary, should be supported through the National Training Fund.

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[3] http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/PathwaysApprenticeshipReviewNov18.pdf

Case study

In 2017 the Irish Medtech Association and Polymer Technology Ireland, the Ibec groups that represents the medtech and polymer sectors launched three new apprenticeships as part of the Department of Education and Skills wider national strategy. These include:
 - Manufacturing Technician level 6 – 2 years
- Manufacturing Engineer level 7 – 3 years
- Polymer Processing Technologist level 7 – 3 years

These three new industry led apprenticeships are the fundamental building blocks to future proof the medtech and polymer sectors in Ireland as well as meeting the skill needs of the broader manufacturing industry and creating world class talent.

The academic partners for the manufacturing programmes include the Institute of Technology in Sligo, Galway, Limerick, Cork to date and Athlone Institute of Technology & Institute of Technology Sligo for the polymer apprenticeship. They require the releasing of the apprentice for 15 weeks per year off the job to ensure standardised academic and technical workshops skills are acquired. The 15 weeks block release pattern is the preferred option by industry and academics partners. The apprentice salary is set by the individual company.

In year one, 2017, 106 apprentices were signed up from 56 companies, of which 45% are small and medium enterprises. The sector breakdown is 50% medtech, 4% pharma and 46% engineering. Although there were many achievements in the first year, sustainability of the apprenticeship programmes is a major cause of concern for Irish Medtech Association, Polymer Technology Ireland, partner Institute of Technologies and member companies. Based on feedback from companies, the costs incurred on the employer to take on apprentices are not sustainable. The Institutes of Technology require two intakes per year for long term viability. From a financial perspective the programmes need to be accessible to small and medium enterprises and continue to be an affordable option for larger organisations. Surveys, company consultations and consortium meetings throughout the development of the apprenticeship consistently showed a very positive response and strong demand from employers, due to the ongoing pronounced shortage of technicians, engineers, polymer technicians and technologists. However, the potential level of government support to employers was very unclear throughout. It was not apparent until the later stages of development that the employer themselves would have to cover the full cost of salary plus travel and subsistence for the off the job phases and that the government supports for the existing trades off the job phases would not apply. As a result, some plastics and smaller medtech companies, including some of those that had taken an active role in the design and development of the apprenticeships, cannot afford to avail of the programmes. Some of these companies are engaged with the pre-2016 apprenticeships and cannot justify the substantial employer costs of the new programmes.

The Polymer Apprenticeship requires significant machinery and polymer expertise to deliver the off the job phases, available only in Athlone IT, therefore employers from Cork, Waterford etc who wish to participate in the programme must factor in substantial travel additional costs. In summary, many smaller companies have not engaged with the new apprenticeship programmes in Manufacturing Engineering or Polymer Technology as the cost of paying a salary and subsistence while the apprentice is off the job for 15 weeks per year is prohibitive.

According to Irish Medtech Association and Polymer Technology Ireland, the total cost of a newly recruited apprentice manufacturing engineer is about €90k. This is major obstacle for the expansion of apprenticeships amongst SMEs.

Governance

Recommendation

- **The highly fragmented components of the apprenticeship 'landscape' should be consolidated in a dedicated agency, working with business consortia and education providers, to oversee the funding, development and promotion of apprenticeships.**

The landscape around the development and promotion of apprenticeships is extremely fragmented with multiple actors. These include the Department of Education and Skills, the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Quality Assurance Ireland, education and training Boards, higher education educations, industry groups and trade unions.

A **National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee** (NAAC) advises the Board of SOLAS on apprenticeships in place prior to 2016. The Committee includes representation of employers, trade unions, education and training providers in further and higher education via an Institutes of Technology Apprenticeship Committee (ITAC), the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS and the HEA. To support its work, the NAAC establishes working groups representative of the main stakeholders to develop guidelines on curricula, and a small group of experts, also representing the stakeholders reviews and develops apprenticeship curricula in accordance with the guidelines. The Committee also provides advice on the designation of new occupations in apprenticeship training, drawing on scoping studies.

The **Apprenticeship Council**, which was launched in 2016, is responsible for the expansion of apprenticeship into new sectors of the economy and identifying sectors where new apprenticeships can make a real difference to both employers and employees. It develops calls for proposals for apprenticeships in areas outside of the traditional apprenticeships and reports to the Department of Education and Skills on viable new apprenticeships. It also monitors the development by industry and education and training partners of the successful proposals into new apprenticeships, including curriculum development, awarding arrangements, duration and entry level.

This challenges posed by this fragmentation has been highlighted by two Government reports. The Apprenticeship Review Group warned:

There are currently major differences in legislative underpinning and culture between higher education institutions and those in the further education and training sector. For example, higher education institutes control quality through statutory academic councils, have delegated authority to make awards, develop curricula, are examining bodies and have nationally coordinated data base systems for records. Development of cost effective and efficient work based systems should recognise and capitalise on these differences and should endeavour to optimise utilisation of existing governance, resources and systems to the maximum. The principle of subsidiarity should apply to operations in so far as is feasible.

More recently the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020[4] stated:

A challenge for the expansion project will be to ensure that the various State partners are working in close collaboration to ensure smooth operational roll out and governance of the expanding system.

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[4] https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Action-Plan-Expand-Apprenticeship-Traineeship-in-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf

The Apprentice Review Group recommended a f*ramework for more plural governance arrangements in the future … which will facilitate apprenticeship at either further or higher education level*.' The experience of recent years would suggest that time has arrived for introduction of these new arrangements in the shape of a specific agency, working with business consortia and education providers to oversee the funding, development and promotion of apprenticeships.

Streamlining the new apprenticeship approval process

Recommendation

- **The Industrial Training Act 1967 should be amended to reflect changes in the business environment and facilitate the streamlining of the new apprenticeship development process.**

- **Assessment of the capacity of employers to be registered to offer apprenticeships should be undertaken by the consortia leading the occupational apprenticeships.**

The new apprenticeship project has been developed under the legal framework of the Industrial Training Act 1967. At one level, it is testimony to amount of the goodwill that exists towards the apprenticeship project in the system that any new apprenticeships have been delivered through a 40 year old legal framework that was designed for a different industrial era. It should also be pointed out that all the legal requirements around, protections, rights and responsibilities of apprentices and employers are still valid. However other requirements have made the development of new apprenticeships and registering of new companies a bureaucratic process, as evidenced by the critical path for apprenticeship development set out in Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship. It should be noted that this 'path' starts up to seven months after a call for a proposals

1. Proposal – Industry-led Consortium
2. Assessment and Approval for Development – Apprenticeship Council, Minister for Education and Skills
3. Project Plan Approved; Development Funding Allocated – SOLAS, HEA, Apprenticeship Council
4. Programme Develoment – Industry-led Consortium
5. Occupation Profile Approved – Apprenticeships Council
6. Validation and Q/A for Programme Approved – Validation Body/QQI
7. Creation of Industry Training Order – SOLAS
8. Implementation Plan and Budget Agreed – SOLAS and HEA
9. Approval of Employers Registration of Apprentices – SOLAS
10. Apprenticeships Underway – Industry-Led Consortium

In raising this issue, we are not suggesting any comprises around validation and quality assurance elements of this paths. The quality assurance guidelines for apprenticeship, which were published by the QQI in June 2016, require employers and education and training providers to have co-ordinated robust structures in place, ensuring high standards that meet employers' skills needs and apprentices' career ambitions while also being accessible and user-friendly. This is appropriate as employers and learners need to retain full confidence in the quality of apprenticeships.

However, other elements of the path are not adding value to the process. The Government's apprenticeship expansion plan included a commitment to an overall development to rollout of 12-15 months. This has not been achieved and there is a major challenge around keeping companies, who originally expressed interest in the apprenticeship project, engaged. Given the constantly changing business environment and skills requirement, the system needs to respond swifty.

Therefore legislation for apprenticeships should be designed as an enabling framework only, as originally recommended by the Apprenticeship Review Group. As a first step, the assessment of the capacity of employers to be registered to offer apprenticeships should be undertaken by the consortia themselves, as they have the appropriate expertise for the occupation concerned. This is possible under the existing legislation.

Pre-apprenticeship programmes

Recommendations

- **The DIT pilot pre-apprenticeship programme should be mainstreamed and rolled out to other regions outside the capital. These should be developed through a partnership with appropriate new apprenticeship providers at level 6 to broaden the range of apprenticeships beyond the traditional crafts. This should also include apprenticeships in occupations which young women regard as offering viable careers**

- **The pre-apprenticeship programme should ensure that students can maintain a social welfare payment or receive a training allowance while participating in the programme. Where necessary, other counselling supports should be provided to improve retention and outcomes**

Pre-apprenticeships are programmes targeted at young people aged 16-24, where the aim is progression to an apprenticeship. They are designed to give young people the skills, confidence, and connections they need to access and successfully complete an apprenticeship. Pre-apprenticeships prepare young people for apprenticeships by providing a combination of vocational training and hands-on experience, however, the components vary by individual programme. They enable young people who have not previously been successful in making positive and sustained transitions in vocational education and training, or into employment, the opportunity to develop specific skills, experience and attributes they need to gain an apprenticeship.

The European Commission has sought to improve the rigour of pre-apprenticeship programmes across Europe through the publication of its Recommendation for a Quality Framework for Traineeship in 2013. Ireland, to date, has placed significant and warranted focus on initiating Generation Apprenticeship and has been slow to embark on journey for pre-apprenticeship. It is now time to increase focus on this model of education and training and delivery. Ibec welcome and strongly the endorse the recommendations and actions of the recently published Review of Pathways to Participations in Apprenticeship (SOLAS, Nov. 2018)[5] that aims to create new pathways via pre-apprenticeship courses around the country. This includes the 500 places on pre-apprenticeships courses to be made available by Q3 2019. However, this ambition will not be realised without adequate policy supports and resources to enable education and training providers to develop, market and scale programmes.

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[5] http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/PathwaysApprenticeshipReviewNov18.pdf

Case Study

In 2017 Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), supported by the JP Morgan Foundation and ESB, launched a pilot programme aimed at supporting the transition of young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage to secure apprenticeships.

DIT has its roots in vocational education with a long history of supporting young people from disadvantaged areas to access education and training. The programme was developed to address the lack of knowledge about how to secure an apprenticeship as well as the low levels of social capital that exist for young people from marginalised communities. The target age group is 16 – 24 years.

Over the initial 18 month pilot period, 48 students were recruitment over three 12 week programmes. The targeted 12 week programmes aims to build confidence, offer a sample of the various skills and opportunities available via apprenticeships and to build links with employers.

Access to Apprenticeship worked in partnership with employers who provided work placement during the 12 week programme and also in over 50% of cases provided apprenticeship positions for the young people. The two-week work placement takes place at the end of the programme to ensure young people gain exposure to the workplace environment and experience the reality of apprentice training before completing the programme. DIT work with a selection of employers from across apprenticeship sectors to ensure young people have access to a work placement in a sector of their choice.

The programme was also supported by an advisory board with representative from key stakeholder groups including Ibec, HEA, THEA, Dublin Regional Skills Forum, CIF, ESB and the National Youth Council. In the initial pilot the programme recruited 48 young people with 26 moving into full apprenticeships in the traditional trade apprenticeships.

DIT is now working on a second stage of the pilot programme, funded in partnership with JP Morgan and the HEA to further develop the programme and implement the recommendations from the phase 1 evaluation.

The second generation of Access to Apprenticeship will run from October 2018 to March 2021.

Some challenges emerged during the pilot that will require attention to ensure that the pre-apprenticeship programme meets its stated intention and to develop best practice prior to a national roll-out.

The DIT programme, which is a level 6 Special Purpose CPD Award, is not formally recognised by the DSP as a qualifying programme for Back to Education Allowance. Participants risk losing their payments by taking up a place on the programme.

Traineeships

- **Employers should be encouraged to engage with local providers on traineeship programme development through regional promotional campaigns. Employer support and understanding of such programmes will be key and appropriate language and terminology must be deployed.**

- **To minimise duplication and encourage best practice sharing between education and training providers, a streamlined process for notification of planned provision of traineeships should be established. This should feed into a national database to simplify the reporting process.**

- **Career and opportunity pathways between traineeships and other programmes should be developed to highlight progression opportunities and encourage more lifelong learning.**

- **The social welfare system should support people returning to the workforce after a period of absence to reskill quickly through the traineeship prgromme**

Career Traineeship (CT) is a model of combined work-based and classroom-based learning aimed at providing a course of specific skills development for career progression in distinct economic sectors and occupations. It seeks to build on national and international best practice in work-based learning (WBL) initiatives for job seekers, with a model of training provision that is employer-led and directly responsive to skills demand in the local and national economy.

Career Traineeship have been in existence for over 20 years in Ireland and have successfully improved skills and job opportunities for participants.

The need to revise the traineeship model arose from the recommendations of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014 – 2019 and the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020. The new model was developed in recognition of the reformed FET sector in Ireland, the supporting policy, allocated funding, and the need for any new or pilot traineeship model to be capable of being adopted and followed in specific sectors and locations, with each application being a genuinely local and bottom-up structure involving real and thorough partnership and collaboration.

The target has been set for new traineeship enrolments of 5,000 per annum by 2020, from a baseline of 2,400 in 2016, and a sharp increase in the number of new or relaunched traineeships to enable this.

An important feature of the new traineeship model, that distinguishes it from other work-based learning approaches, is that programmes will have connection to nationally and locally identified needs, but require a response with core modules but with the flexibility to address local employer requirements. Traineeships are driven by collaborative programme development, based on identified industry/employer needs.

Following a SOLAS review of the of the initial pilot programme delivery has proven both effective and efficient in the design, development and delivery of training targeted at identified labour market skills needs. Key findings include:

- The 51 trainees who had completed the CTs highlighted in the evaluation had high completion and qualification rates (70%); and

- High levels of employment since completing the programme (98%), of which 72% were with employers that had hosted the trainees and 28% were with other employers;

- Employers remarked upon the commitment, skills and job-readiness of the trainees on completion and a number also commented on the cost savings this represented, the lack of

any learning curve, their immediate productivity and the fact that core competencies are in place prior to employment.

- Of the 164 trainees who had completed CTs overall, 94% were employed after the programme finished.

The projected number of new enrolments and recent strategic dialogue engagement indicates the target of 3,900 in 2018 is on track to be achieved and the number of new traineeship programmes to be introduced in 2018 to exceed the target of four.

In 2018, 11 new programmes have commenced across the following areas:
Automated Software Testing - CAD - CNC Operator - Engineering Precision
Manufacturing - HGV (pilot) - Manufacturing Supply Chain & Customer Service
Logistics - Life Sciences Manufacturing - Pharmaceutical
Manufacturing - Quality Management - Tech Support Engineer - Welding/Fabrication.

In order to maintain this positive momentum of traineeships, a promotional campaign to encourage employers to engages with local providers on programme development should be put in place. Employer support and understanding of such programmes will be key and as such appropriate language and terminology must be considered. The social welfare eligibility criteria should also be examined to ensure that it supports people returning to the workforce after a period of absence, who may not be currently in receipt of a social welfare payment, to reskill quickly. To minimise duplication and encourage best practice sharing between education and training providers, a streamlined process for notification of planned provision should be established. This should feed into a national database to simplify the reporting process.

Submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Education & Skills

October 30th 2018

Contents

Appendices

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

There are a range of complex challenges now confronting the Irish workforce. Up-skilling those in employment and creating a vigorous talent base enhances competitiveness at both a firm level and at national level. Upskilling provides career paths and new opportunities for workers, improving career mobility and living standards. In employment upskilling builds on the strategies that have led to such a successful record in attracting foreign investment. It is evident too that other jurisdictions are increasingly using financial incentives to stimulate enterprise-led skills development[1]. For these reasons there is a need for focused efforts, on the behalf of both employers and Government, on the continuous training of those in employment.

Through successive independent evaluations both domestic and international, the Skillnet model has been highlighted as an efficient and effective means of addressing workforce development challenges. An enterprise led approach, cost sharing, agility, and sound corporate governance are some of the inherent strengths of the Skillnet model. Skillnet Ireland is well placed to continue to make a substantial contribution to several workforce challenges highlighted in national policy. These include: lifelong learning, Regional development, supporting the lower skilled, workforce innovation, future skills supply, employment activation and building SME capability.

1.2 About Skillnet Ireland

Established in 1999, Skillnet Ireland works with businesses and workers in Ireland to address their current and future skills needs. Skillnet Ireland is funded from the National Training Fund and is a 'demand side' programme, facilitating enterprise led training through 65 learning networks across a range of sectors and regions. Skillnet Ireland operates under a joint investment model where State grants are combined with investments by participating businesses.

Skillnet Ireland has deep roots with enterprise in Ireland and is contracted with over 50 employer groups/ sectoral associations/ regional representative bodies and industry associations. In 2017, 15,000 private firms participated in Skillnet learning networks and over 50,000 workers were supported by Skillnet funded training. There is a highly diverse set of enterprise groups

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[1] OECD: Financial Incentives for Steering Education & Training (2017)

collaborating with Skillnet Ireland, giving the agency a solid footprint in each of the key industry sectors and in the regions across Ireland (see appendix 3).

Skillnet Ireland is actively supported and guided by national employer and employee bodies including Ibec, the Small Firms Association, the Construction Industry Federation, Chambers Ireland and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

1.3   Challenges for Irelands Workforce

Ireland draws a significant competitive strength from our workforce. A well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable workforce has been a pillar of Ireland's economic/ industrial policy since the 1960s. However, this is not a fixed state; skills are highly dynamic and vulnerable to change and obsolescence, meaning a persistent focus must be maintained on the development of the skills of the Irish workforce.

Skills supply is met, in various parts, through outputs from Ireland's higher and further education system, from employment activation and supports to jobseekers, and from immigration. However, for the greatest part, the skills that power Ireland's economy are derived from within employment. Advances in technology, shifting consumption patterns, changing demographics, and a multitude of competitive and geopolitical forces (including Brexit) are constantly driving new skills requirements for employers. These mega-trends are combined with a general convergence and acceleration of technology, characterised by new disruptors such as robotics, artificial intelligence, automation, IoT and Big Data. These trends have significant implications for skills over the next 5 years.

In addition, our remarkable achievements in winning foreign investment have been enabled to a significant extent by our ability to produce high caliber talent. In the context of ever increasing international competition for FDI, we must continue to strengthen all the pillars of our FDI proposition including in employment upskilling.

Over time, a widening productivity gap has formed between indigenous SMEs, and the multinationals and large corporations that operate here. Best practices are not diffusing to ingenious small firms to the extent that is possible, nor is the opportunity to create value from the prevalence of multinationals being fully grasped by our indigenous SMEs. The National Competitiveness Council [2] amongst others have identified the low uptake of lifelong learning and Management Development in indigenous SMEs as causal factors. To help alleviate these issues, it is vital that workers in small businesses are encouraged to undertake training and are supported

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[2] Competitiveness Council Scorecard (2017)

in doing so. Brexit too is likely to have a disruptive impact on small-and medium-sized businesses. Irish businesses in exposed sectors must equip themselves with the essential skills they need to meet the challenges (and opportunities) that will be presented by Brexit.

A major priority is the significant minority of Ireland's workforce that can be broadly categorised as 'lower skilled'. The OECD have observed that strategic support is needed for the professional development of Irish workers with vulnerable skills, to facilitate career ladders and enable movement into higher skilled positions[3].

Finally, in the context of ever increasing urbanisation, regional workforce development must remain a top priority. We should ensure that future investment by enterprise can be matched with suitable skills/ talent supply at regional levels, so that employment in the regions can grow and businesses can prosper.

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[3] OECD: Employment and Skill Strategies in Ireland (2014)

2.0 The Skillnet Model

2.1 Enterprise-Led Approach

Skillnet Ireland partners with the major enterprise, sectoral and trade associations in Ireland in its approach to in-employment upskilling. This approach puts companies and workers at the centre of the processes. Each group (Skillnet) is a network of firms drawn from the same industry sector or region. A Steering Group of voluntary industry representatives are responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Skillnet and for coordinating the delivery of training. In 2017, the OECD highlighted Skillnet as a best practice approach for Government sponsored enterprise-led workforce development. It found that "the Skillnet decentralised model generates highly specialised knowledge on employment and training related issues, resulting in better alignment between labour market needs and the supply of skills" [4].

2.2 Cost Sharing

Skillnet Ireland operates a cost sharing model, through which the cost of training is met via contributions from participating private firms, combined with the grants allocated by Skillnet Ireland. As well as offering a subsidy to encourage upskilling, this approach drives firm employer commitment to the training process. In 2017, employers made a total contribution towards training of €15.91 million through Skillnet. The Skillnet Ireland cost sharing model is also creating significant funding leverage, in that every €1 of State investment is matched with €1.14 from employer contributions[5]. This represents a highly efficient utilisation of public monies and an effective vehicle for State investment in the skills of workers.

2.3 Responsive and Agile

Through Skillnet, the process by which skill needs are identified and how the responses are determined is owned by the enterprise groups contracted with Skillnet Ireland. This decentralised approach enables fast and impactful responses to the needs of industry and workers.

Training facilitated by Skillnet networks is usually delivered part-time or on a modular basis, offered all year round, available both inside and outside normal working hours, or embedded in the workflow itself. The Skillnet model also promotes collaborative and informal approaches to learning, encouraging learning between firms, as well as producing a significant level of formal

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[4] OECD: Financial Incentives for Steering Education & Training (2017)
[5] Indecon: Evaluation of Skillnet funded programmes (2016)

and accredited learning. (In 2017, 57% of training days delivered via Skillnet were NFQ certified, with 18% industry certified [6]).

The Skillnet Ireland model is also highly flexible in the manner in which funding can be directed. Skillnet Ireland regularly issues competitive *Calls for Proposals* which are designed to attract applications from new enterprise groups. For established Skillnet networks there is an annual competitive *Call for Proposals* which allocates the substantial proportion of the available funding for the following year.

2.4   Corporate Governance

Skillnet Ireland is a Company Limited by Guarantee. The Board is tripartite, composed of Employer representatives (7), Employee representatives (3) and Ministerial nominees (3), bringing together the critical stakeholders. In the first instance, the Board is responsible for:

- Setting the strategic direction for Skillnet Ireland.
- Establishing formal procedures through various Board and Committee functions to allocate and monitor expenditure from the NTF.
- Establishing procedures for the monitoring / mitigation of risk and safeguarding the assets and reputation of the organisation.
- Adoption and adherence to the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies* (2016).

Skillnet Ireland subjects all funded programmes to annual independent evaluation. This practice extends back to the establishment of Skillnet Ireland, with the evaluation conducted by economic consultants. Principally, the independent annual evaluation is designed to assess the effectiveness/ impact of Skillnet Ireland funded programmes and their contribution to national workforce policy.

2.5   Capacity to Align Expenditure with Workforce and Sectoral Priorities

Skillnet Ireland is highly aligned with national workforce policy due to its closeness to both employers and Government. Skillnet Ireland is also heavily integrated within many Government sectoral strategies and has been assigned responsibility by Government for the implementation of multiple actions and initiatives. A comprehensive statement on Skillnet Irelands' contribution to national workforce and sectoral policy is contained in ***Appendix 1***

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[6] Skillnet Ireland Annual Report 2017

3.0 How Skillnet Ireland is Creating Value

The following are the set of workforce priorities that are supported by Skillnet Ireland.

3.1   Upskilling those in Employment

The need to increase in-employment engagement in lifelong learning is a national policy objective. For reasons already outlined, employed learners need to build up their skills portfolio and to continually upskill and reskill. The Government has targeted a lifelong learning participation rate of 15% by 2025. However, the actual participation rate in Ireland is closer to 7%, well below the EU average (11%) and significantly behind the top performers including: Denmark (31%), Sweden (29%) and Finland (25%) [7].

Skillnet Ireland is making a significant contribution to this challenge**.** Of the 50,000 learners supported by Skillnet Ireland in 2017, all met the definition of a lifelong learner.

3.2   Supporting Enterprise Clusters

Ireland's international standing in relation to national cluster development exceeds the EU average with well-established regional clusters in bio-pharma, medical devices, ICT and financial services. Skillnet Ireland supports a large number of enterprise groups within each of these clusters at both a national and regional levels. The National Competitiveness Council notes that regions successful in facilitating industry clusters "have been found to achieve higher levels of productivity, innovation, employment and prosperity"[8]. Skillnet Ireland helps enhance cooperation between industry, research institutions, education providers and other stakeholders creating opportunities for clusters to match skills provision with identified enterprise needs. In addition, new clustering initiatives can be greatly strengthened by their connection with Skillnet Irelands' cohesive learning networks.

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[7] Lifelong Learning Participation Among Adults, SOLAS, (2017)

[8] Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard (2016)

3.3   Regional Development

Skillnet Ireland plays a significant role in regional skills development through 20 regionally based, mixed-sector Skillnet learning networks, which are promoted by a variety of regional bodies and local Chambers. These groups provide highly valued training supports to workers and small business owners in towns and regions across Ireland. The Regional Skills Fora also facilitates dialogue between employers and education and training providers at local level. Since their inception, Skillnet Ireland has been an active stakeholder in the development of the Regional Skills Fora, with each Fora having a dedicated Skillnet representative.

3.4   Supporting Lower Skilled Workers

Lower-skilled workers remain "the most vulnerable to ongoing changes within the workplace" and they are also "less likely to be offered, to seek, or to avail of training."[9] Skillnet Ireland is serving an important role in supporting lower-skilled workers in vulnerable employment by enhancing their skill levels and enabling career paths. For example, 53% of all workers up-skilled through the Skillnet Ireland in 2017 had not attained a third level degree[10]. This equates to approximately 26,000 people per annum. On this basis Skillnet Ireland is well positioned to make a significant contribution to the recently published SOLAS policy framework for skills development of people in employment [11].

3.5   The Future Skills Programme

Anticipating future skills is a challenge given the complex and dynamic world we live in. Skillnet Ireland plays an important role in maintaining a supply of new and future skills by facilitating collaborations between Enterprise groups, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), Government agencies and industry training providers. The Skillnet Ireland Future Skills Programme (FSP) is the vehicle through which that collaboration is achieved. The strategic intent of the FSP is to develop new programmes that address emerging skill needs where there is a clearly identified gap in provision.

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[9] National Skills Strategy 2025 (2016)
[10] Evaluation of Skillnet Ireland Training Networks Programme Indecon (2017).
[11] Supporting Working Lives & Enterprise Growth 2018- 2021 SOLAS (2018)

FSP provides up to 80% in seed funding to encourage enterprise groups to develop new programmes. Through the FSP initiative, firms also make a significant non-financial investment by deploying their staff to work with relevant HEIs to define industry requirements and contribute to the overall design of new programmes and qualifications. For employers this approach provides a practical platform to collaborate with academic experts, so business requirements can be translated into effective and innovative programmes.

Programmes developed to date are varied and have included courses in animation, software product management, artificial intelligence, fintech, cyber security, medical technologies, aviation finance, management development and international financial services law.

3.6   Supporting Jobseekers and Re-Joiners

Since 2010 Skillnet Ireland has supported the needs of over 40,000 jobseekers by focusing on integrated training with employers, dedicated conversion courses, and through work placements in areas of high employment potential. The Skillnet Employment Activation Programme (EAP) has recorded exceptionally strong outcomes, with 52% of participants going on to secure employment[12]. The programme has also been cited internationally as a best practice example for an employment activation initiative[13].

Ireland ranks slightly below the EU average for labour market participation, which presents a barrier to an economy approaching full employment. Of concern however is the low level of female participation in our labour market relative to other developed economies. (For example, peak female participation occurs in Ireland between the ages of 25-34[14], but unlike certain jurisdictions, female participation levels in Ireland do not recover after this peak).

Skillnet Ireland has supported a number of initiatives that have been successful in this area. One such programme is the *Women ReBoot* initiative promoted by the Technology Ireland Software Skillnet. The initiative has bridged the gap between talented, professional women and tech employers. Supported by 20 leading technology companies, Women ReBoot has achieved an 82% conversion rate to fulltime employment, with over 200 women graduating from the programme over 2017 and 2018.

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[12] Evaluation of Skillnet Ireland Training Networks Programme Indecon (2017).
[13] Local Job Creation: How Employment & Training Agencies Can Help OECD (2013)
[14] Labour force participation rate by age group ILO (2016)

4.6   Building SME Capability

Enhancing SME capacity is a policy priority and a major focus of Skillnet Ireland. As already noted there are ever more significant productivity and competitiveness challenges confronting small Irish businesses. However encouraging SME owner- managers to engage in training and embedding a culture of lifelong learning in indigenous SMEs remains a considerable challenge. Skillnet Ireland supported over 15,000 firms in 2017, but to get a true sense of the challenge, there are an estimated 240,000 active small / micro enterprises in Ireland employing some 680,000[15] people.

85% of the firms supported by Skillnet Ireland are small firms, with 50% employing just 9 staff or less.

4.0 Recommendations

Recommendation 1

For the reasons outlined in this submission, Government should maintain a rigorous focus on the skills of those in employment. Government should direct support at close-to-labour market skill requirements, and in targeting interventions that support effective enterprise-led training and preparing individuals to take up employment opportunities.

Recommendation 2

To implement in full recommendations arsing from the independent evaluation of the National Training Fund undertaken by Indecon. The consultation and review examined the operation and expenditure of the NTF and contains14 specific recommendations across 4 key areas:

- Reform of the future direction of the NTF so that it aligns with the needs of the labour market and enterprise.
- Utilising the NTF to support investment in Higher Education.
- Enhancing enterprise engagement and input to NTF priorities.
- Improvements in monitoring/evaluation of the NTF.

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[15] EuroStat (2017)

Recommendation 3

Provide greater incentives to firms in order to increase investment at enterprise level in staff training. Such responses will serve to increase the productivity and competitiveness of firms, and boost the skills and career mobility of workers. Specific consideration should be given to small and micro firms operating off low turnover or tight margins. Typically, these employers are distracted by multiple priorities and tend not to give staff training the emphasis it needs.

Recommendation 4

To continue to expand demonstrably efficient and effective Government/ Enterprise upskilling mechanisms such as Skillnet Ireland.

Appendix 1: Skillnet Ireland in National Policy Framework

Department/ Agency	Report Name	Number of Actions	Year of Publication
D/ Finance	IFS2020 Action Plan for 2018	7	2018
DES	Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017 – 2026.	2	2017
DES	Action Plan For Education 2017	6	2017
DJEI	Action Plan for Jobs 2017	1	2017
D AG	Foodwise 2015	1	2017
DF	IFS 2020 – Action Plan 2017	5	2017
EGFSN	Update on Future Skills Needs in the Food and Drink Sector	3	2017
NCC/DJEI	Ireland's Competitive Challenge 2015	3	2017
DES	Action Plan for Education 2016-2019	1	2016
DJEI	Action Plan for Jobs 2016	4	2016
DJEI	APJ Dublin 2016-2018	0	2016
DJEI	APJ Mid-East Region 2016-2017	2	2016
DJEI	APJ North-East North-West 2016-2017	2	2016
EGFSN	Future Skills Needs of the Biopharma Industry in Ireland	3	2016
DES	Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025	2	2016
DSP	Pathways to Work 2016-2020	1	2016
DJEI	APJ Midland Region 2015-2017	1	2015
DJEI	APJ Mid-West Region 2015-2017	4	2015
DJEI	APJ South-East Region 2015-2017	1	2015
DJEI	APJ South-West Region 2015-2017	0	2015
DJEI	APJ West Region 2015-2017	3	2015
DJEI	Enterprise 2025 - Ireland's National Enterprise Policy 2015-2025	1	2015
EGFSN	Future skills needs in the Freight, Transport & Logistics Sector 2015-2020	3	2015
EGFSN	Future skills requirements in the Hospitality Sector 2015-2020	2	2015
D/T	IFS 2020 'A strategy for Ireland's International Financial Services sector 2015-2020	7	2015
DJEI	Innovation 2020	1	2015
NCC/DJEI	Ireland's Competitive Challenge 2015	3	2015
DHPLG	Construction 2020 - A strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector	3	2014
DES	ICT Skills Action Plan 2014-2016	2	2014
EGFSN	Assessing the Demand for Big Data and Analytics Skills, 2013 – 2020	1	2013
EGFSN	Future Skills Requirements of the Manufacturing Sector to 2020	9	2013

Appendix 2: Skillnet Networks

Skillnet	Promoting Body
Animation Skillnet	Dublin Business Innovation Centre (DBIC)
Aviation & Aerospace Skillnet	Irish Centre for Business Excellence (ICBE)
Aviation Finance Finuas Network	Irish Centre for Business Excellence
BioPharmaChem Skillnet	BioPharmaChem Ireland, IBEC
Carlow Kilkenny Skillnet	Carlow Kilkenny Training Network Ltd.
Chef Network Skillnet	Chef Network
CILT Skillnet	Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport
CITA Skillnet	Construction IT Alliance
Cobotics Skillnet	Robotics & Drives Services Ltd.
Connected Health Skillnet	Irish Medtech Association, IBEC
Cork Chamber Skillnet	Cork Chamber
County Tipperary Skillnet	Clonmel Chamber
CPA Ireland Skillnet	CPA Ireland
Design Enterprise Skillnet	Institute of Designers in Ireland (IDI)
Design, Print & Packaging Skillnet	Irish Printing Federation
Duhallow Skillnet	IRD Duhallow
Farm Business Skillnet	Irish Farmers Association (IFA)
First Polymer Training Skillnet	Polymer Technology Ireland, IBEC
Food Drink Ireland Skillnet	Food Drink Ireland, IBEC
Galway Executive Skillnet	KT Business Skills Ltd.
Gréasán na Meán Skillnet	Danú Media Teo
Green Tech Skillnet	Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA)
ICBE Advanced Productivity Skillnet	Irish Centre for Business Excellence (ICBE)
ICBE Business Excellence Skillnet	Irish Centre for Business Excellence
ICOS Skillnet	Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society (ICOS)
IMAGE Skillnet	Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op
Irish Franchising Skillnet	Irish Franchise Association
Irish Medtech Skillnet	Irish Medtech Association, IBEC
ISME Skillnet	ISME
IT@Cork Skillnet	It@Cork Association Ltd.
ITAG Skillnet	ITAG Ltd.
Law Society Finuas Network	Law Society of Ireland
Leading Health Providers Skillnet	Leading Healthcare Providers
Lean & Green Skillnet	Central Solutions Ltd.
Learning Waves Skillnet	LMFM
Limerick Chamber	Limerick Chamber
M1 - Drogheda Chamber Skillnet	Drogheda & District Chamber
Macra Agricultural Skillnet	Macra na Feirme

Skillnet	Promoting Body
Midland Border East Skillnet	Midland Border East Training Ltd.
National Organic Training Skillnet	National Organic Training Network Limited
National Recruitment Federation Skillnet	National Recruitment Federation (NRF)
Next Level Skillnet	Supply Network Shannon Ltd.
Positive2Work Skillnet	Positive2Work Ltd.
Restaurant & Hospitality Skillnet	Restaurants Association of Ireland
Retail Ireland Skillnet	Retail Ireland, IBEC
Role Skillnet	Boyle Chamber of Commerce
Rural Enterprise Skillnet	MED Rural Development Company Ltd.
Rural Food Skillnet	Rural Food Company Training Network
Shannon Chamber Skillnet	Shannon Chamber of Commerce
SIMI Skillnet	Society of the Irish Motor Industry (SIMI)
Sligo Chamber Skillnet	Sligo Chamber of Commerce
South Kerry Skillnet	South Kerry Development Partnership
South West Gnó Skillnet	Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne Teoranta
Space Industry Skillnet	G&L Technology Limited
Summit Finuas Network	Financial Services Ireland, IBEC
Sustainability Skillnet	Sustainability Matters
Taste4Success Skillnet	SLM Training Ltd.
Tech North West Skillnet	Letterkenny Institution of Technology
Technology Ireland ICT Skillnet	Technology Ireland, IBEC
Technology Ireland Software Skillnet	Technology Ireland, IBEC
Tourism & Food Skillnet	Ballyhoura Development CLG
Trainers' Learning Skillnet	Irish Institute of Training & Development (IITD)
Waterford Chamber Skillnet	Waterford Chamber
Wexford Chamber Skillnet	Wexford Chamber
XL Vets Skillnet	XLVets Ireland Ltd.

NOTES:

Submission by SOLAS to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships

02 November 2018

1   Introduction

An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS) is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills with responsibility for funding, planning and coordinating further education and training in Ireland. Among its functions, SOLAS oversees and supports education and training, including traineeships, provided by sixteen Education and Training Boards around the country. SOLAS also has statutory responsibility for the national apprenticeship system which spans further and higher education.

We welcome the focus of the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Education and Skills on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships and are pleased to make a submission to the Committee on the matter. SOLAS has been closely involved in implementation of the expansion policy since 2014, supporting the Department of Education and Skills and working closely with partners who include Education and Training Boards; higher education institutions, the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); the enterprise community, apprentices and trainees. Substantial public funding is allocated each year to support this provision; €120m has been allocated for apprenticeship in 2018. An amount of €34.6m has been allocated to support traineeship in 2018.

This submission is structured in four parts. Following the introduction, Section 2 presents key data and a summary of the work underway on expansion of apprenticeship in the five-year period since 2014. Section 3 provides similar information on traineeship over the five-year period. The final section summarises key points for consideration by the Committee in considering progress to-date and looking ahead to 2020.

2   Expansion and uptake of apprenticeship in Ireland

Work has been underway since 2014 on the expansion of apprenticeship in Ireland. This followed a comprehensive *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland* which was commissioned by Government and published at the end of 2013. The following year, the Minister for Education and

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Skills established a national Apprenticeship Council to implement the review findings, which principally recommended an expansion of the Irish apprenticeship system into new areas of industry and leading to awards from Levels 5 to Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. There were 1,929 apprentice registrations in 2013, the year the review was published, and c.3,300 employers taking on apprentices. The review set out the evidence for apprenticeship as an effective way to build the pipeline of talent within industry, its strong track record in Ireland, and the potential of apprenticeship to become a major route to skills development in Ireland.

As part of its initial implementation plan, one of the first actions taken by the Apprenticeship Council was to issue a national call for apprenticeship proposals, during the first half of 2015. Twenty-five proposals were initially approved for development by the Minister, through 'industry-led consortia' located around the country. Up to 30 other proposals were identified as having potential for development at a future stage.

In 2016 the first two new apprenticeships got underway, in Industrial Electrical Engineering, leading to an NFQ Level 7 award and in Insurance Practice, leading to an NFQ Level 8 award. There were 12 apprentices on the new engineering apprenticeship in the first year. The first year of the Insurance Practice apprenticeship had 67 apprentices. New Industrial Training Orders were created by the Board of SOLAS to support introduction of these two new apprenticeships and others due to launch in 2017.

The first two new apprenticeships are now in their third year of implementation. Apprentice registrations have grown each year as set out in Table 1 on page 4 of this document. Building on the Apprenticeship Council's first implementation plan, an *Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016- 2020* was also developed in 2016. This Plan includes detailed actions and targets to be achieved annually in the five-year period from 2016 to the end of 2020. It is intended that by 2020, there will be 9,000 registrations onto apprenticeship programmes annually, with a cumulative total of 31,000 apprentices having accessed this route in the five-year period from 2016-2020. In addition to increasing the numbers of apprentices, the Action Plan includes targets to have 67 apprenticeship programmes in place by the end of 2020, in new industry areas and leading

to awards from Levels 5 to Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. As set out in Table 1 below, 3,821 apprentices registered in 2016, up from 3,153 registrations the previous year.

In 2017, the trend in apprentice registrations and participating employers continued upwards. A further seven new apprenticeships were launched in the industry areas of finance, engineering/ manufacturing and hospitality. The Apprenticeship Council issued a second call for apprenticeship proposals in May 2017 and in December 2017 the Minister for Education and Skills announced a further 25 apprenticeships for development. Work also got underway on a number of proposals from the 2015 call which had not been in the initial group announced for development but for which there was continued industry demand. This created a pipeline of up to 50 new apprenticeship programmes to add to existing craft-based programmes.

Table 1 below shows apprentice registrations and employer participation continuing on an upward trend during 2017 and in 2018. Regarding new programmes and associated apprentice registrations, 335 apprentices registered on nine new programmes in 2017. The target for that year was 800 registrations on 15 new programmes. The Apprenticeship Council has identified two main reasons for this slower-than-planned roll out. The first is that it has taken the industry-led consortia longer than originally envisaged to develop apprenticeship programmes and get them to market. Secondly, apprentice registrations in Year 1 of a new programme have been lower than consortia forecast in their original proposals, with employers taking longer to come on board.

In 2018, the overall upward trend in apprentice registrations and employer numbers has continued, albeit with high numbers on some apprenticeships masking lower take-up on others. On craft-based apprenticeships for example, the Electrical apprenticeship had 1,705 apprentice registrations in 2017, up from 845 registrations in 2014. Carpentry and Joinery had 443 apprentice registrations in 2017, up from 185 in 2014. Numbers have, however, remained quite static on apprenticeships such as Mechanical Automation and Maintenance Fitting, and Toolmaking. These trends are being monitored by SOLAS in partnership with industry representatives. Notwithstanding the variation in demand, the overall target of 4,697 apprentice registrations on the 25 craft-based apprenticeships is forecast to be achieved by the end of 2018.

A further eight new apprenticeships have been rolled out to-date (end October) in 2018, in the industry areas of ICT, Property Services, Biopharma and Hospitality/Food. As of 24 October, there were 509 registrations on the 17 new programmes introduced since 2016. It is forecast that there will be 800 apprentice registrations on new programmes by the end of the year. This will mean in effect that target apprentice registrations are one year behind what is set out in the 2016-2020 Action Plan.

Table 1   Apprentice registrations 2014-2018* (programmes introduced since 2016 are in red)

	Apprentice Registrations				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 *Oct-24
AUCTIONEERING					
Auctioneering & Property Services	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	51
Total					**51**
BIOPHARMACHEM					
Laboratory Analyst	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2
Laboratory Technician	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10
Total					**12**
CONSTRUCTION					
Brick & Stonelaying	20	26	52	60	70
Carpentry & Joinery	185	291	399	443	474
Painting & Decorating	11	19	27	44	22
Plastering	9	7	18	34	25
Plumbing	318	289	345	532	515
Stonecutting & Stonemasonry	16	13	2	8	5
Wood Manufacturing & Finishing	23	48	71	59	76
Total	**582**	**693**	**914**	**1,180**	**1,187**
ELECTRICAL					
Aircraft Mechanics	33	34	39	53	72
Electrical	845	956	1,343	1,705	1,446
Electrical Instrumentation	85	83	106	120	81
Electronic Security Systems	16	28	28	72	53
Industrial Electrical Engineering	n/a	n/a	12	19	24
Instrumentation	10	8	10	20	8
Refrigeration & Air Conditioning	62	75	79	106	89
Total	**1,051**	**1,184**	**1,617**	**2,095**	**1,773**
ENGINEERING					
Mechanical Automation & Maintenance Fitting	174	153	163	183	143
Farriery	4	7	5	6	7
Industrial Insulation	10	13	10	21	12

Manufacturing Engineering (Level 6)	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	30
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)	n/a	n/a	n/a	36	16
Metal Fabrication	176	198	186	224	186
Pipefitting	0	37	33	25	42
Polymer Processing Technology	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	14
Sheet Metalworking	23	38	40	53	62
Toolmaking	66	62	66	65	56
Total	**453**	**508**	**503**	**678**	**568**
FINANCE					
Accounting Technician	n/a	n/a	n/a	86	78
Insurance Practice	n/a	n/a	67	71	79
International Financial Services Associate	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	5
International Financial Services Specialist	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	7
Total			**67**	**190**	**169**
HOSPITALITY					
Commis Chef	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	97
Chef de Partie	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	30
Total				**25**	**127**
ICT					
ICT Associate Professional Network Technician	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13
ICT Associate Professional Software Developer	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24
Total					**37**
LOGISTICS					
Logistics Associate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	26
Total					**24**
MOTOR					
Agricultural Mechanics	38	59	43	45	33
Construction Plant Fitting	56	77	59	86	61
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	145	154	136	143	151
Motor Mechanics	325	423	420	353	306
Vehicle Body Repairs	40	47	58	46	26
Total	**604**	**760**	**716**	**673**	**577**
PRINTING					
Print Media	8	8	4	2	0
Total	**8**	**8**	**4**	**2**	**0**
FOOD MANUFACTURING					
Butcher	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
Total					3
Total Craft Apprenticeships	**2,698**	**3,153**	**3,742**	**4,508**	**4,021**
Total New Consortia (in red)	**n/a**	**n/a**	**79**	**335**	**509**
Grand Total	**2,698**	**3,153**	**3,821**	**4,843**	**4,530**

Active employers	n/a	3,558	4,216	4,965	5,583

Data sources: SOLAS National Register of apprentices and National Register of employers approved to train apprentices

Table 2 below shows the number of employers who are taking on apprentices on the seventeen new apprenticeship programmes. Twelve industry-led consortia are involved in overseeing delivery of these apprenticeships.

Table 2   Number of participating employers on new apprenticeship programmes as of October 2018

	Apprenticeship	Number of participating employers
1	Accounting Technician L6 (2017)	101
2	Auctioneering and Property Services L6 (2018)	40
3	Butchery L5 (2018)	3
4	Chef de Partie L7 (2018)	22
5	Commis Chef L6 (2017)	104
6	ICT Network Engineering Associate L6 (2018)	10
7	Software Development Associate L6 (2018)	15
8	Industrial Electrical Engineering L7 (2016)	30
9	Insurance Practice L8 (2016)	103
10	International Financial Services Associate L6 (2017)	5
11	International Financial Services Specialist L8 (2017)	8
12	Laboratory Analyst L7 (2018)	1
13	Laboratory Technician L6 (2018)	7
14	Logistics Associate L6 (2018)	15
15	Manufacturing Technology L6 (2017)	25
16	Manufacturing Engineering L7 (2017)	28
17	Polymer Processing Technology L7 (2017)	23
	Total number of participating employers	**540**

Data source: SOLAS National Register of employers approved to train apprentices

During 2018 the Apprenticeship Council has begun engaging with apprenticeship consortia to discuss progress in the early years of the apprenticeships launched during 2016 and 2017, to discuss employer support for the new programmes, and the ambition regarding targets for each apprenticeship to 2020. A report on the findings from these meetings will be prepared by the end of the year.

A further 35 new apprenticeship programmes are due to roll out during the remainder of 2018 or in 2019 as set out in Table 3 below, with 28 industry-led consortia involved.

Table 3   New apprenticeship programmes due to roll out 2018-2019

Title and level of new programme	Roll out date planned by consortium
Advanced Quantity Surveyor L9	Q3/Q4 2019
Applied Horticulture L6	Q3 2019
Arboriculture L5	Q3 2019
Associate Sales Professional L6	Q1/ Q2 2019
Bakery L6	Q1 2019
Bar Manager L7	2019
CGI Technical Artist (Animation, Games, VFX) L9	2019
Engineering Services Management L7	2019
Equipment Systems Engineer L9	2019
Executive Chef L9	2019
Farm Manager L7	Q3 2019
Farm Technician L6	Q3 2019
Geo-Driller L6	Q1 2019
Hairdressing L6	Q3 2019
Healthcare Assistant L6	2019
HGV Driver L5	tbc
Cybersecurity Associate L6	Q1 2019
International Financial Services Advanced Specialist L9	2019
Lean Sigma Manager L9	2019
Manufacturing Data Integration Engineer L7	Q4 2018
OEM Engineering L6	Q4 2018
Precision Turned Parts Manufacturing L6	Q3 2019
Principal Engineer L10	2019
Recruitment Practitioner L6	2019
Retail Practice L6	Q1/2 2019
Scaffolding L6	Q1 2019
Science Aircraft Asset Management L7	Q2/3 2019
Software System Designer L9	2019
Sous Chef L8	Q4 2018
SportsTurf Management L6	Q3 2019
Stud Farm Management L7	Q3 2019
Supply Chain Associate L7	2019
Supply Chain Manager L9	Q3 2019
Supply Chain Specialist L8	Q2/3 2019
Wind Turbine Maintenance L6	Q3 2019

A review of pathways to participation in apprenticeship has been completed in 2018, and is due to be published shortly. As the apprenticeship system expands it is essential that skills development through apprenticeship becomes a realistic, valued option for the widest possible cohort of young

and older citizens in Ireland. There are challenges relating to gender, disability and socio-economic circumstances that are evident in the current apprentice population. Just 1% of apprentices are women. Just 2.75% of apprentices declare a disability. There are indicators that those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage are under-represented in the apprentice population. The review sets out five steps to tackle under-representation and exclusion in the apprenticeship system, and these will be implemented over the coming months.

3   Expansion and uptake of traineeship in Ireland

Traineeships have been part of the Irish education and training system since the mid-1990s, when the National Traineeship Programme was introduced by the training and employment agency FÁS, supported by the EU Operational Programme for Human Development. Since then there have been an estimated 30,000 trainee participants, and over 1,500 participating employers. Traineeship has a number of particular features. Its primary aim is to provide work-based learning in partnership with employers, improving employment outcomes for participants, and enhancing recruitment, retention and productivity within companies. Traineeship is often described as provision that is complementary to apprenticeship; an Appendix to this document on page 15 presents the key features of both apprenticeship and traineeship. Principal differences between apprenticeships and traineeships include duration: an apprenticeship is between 2-4 years in duration whereas a traineeship can be from 6 months to a maximum of 20 months. In addition apprenticeship is governed by specific legislation, the 1967 Industrial Training Act, whereas traineeship is not. Furthermore, an employer must provide a contract of employment to an apprentice for the apprenticeship to begin, whereas a traineeship begins with a trainee enrolling in an education and training environment, with a work placement fulfilling at least 30% of the programme learning content. Development of a traineeship programme is triggered by identification of a skills need within a particular industry. A traineeship leads to an award equivalent to Levels 4-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Employment outcomes from traineeship have been strong, with periodic surveys of graduates from traineeship programmes indicating that up to 60% obtained employment within 12 months (most recently, a 2013 Follow Up Survey and a 2017 Follow Up Survey). In 2014, as part of implementation of the 2014-2019 Strategy for Further Education and Training, a pilot initiative got

underway to further develop traineeship provision in Ireland, which at that point included approximately twenty-four programmes spanning business; sports and leisure; construction; engineering; retail; ICT; finance and logistics. Called 'the career traineeship initiative' to reflect its close links with employment and careers, the pilot initiative was coordinated by SOLAS in partnership with Education and Training Boards and regional and national employers. Work began on development of new programmes in the areas of hospitality, engineering and animation, and in 2016 four new traineeships were introduced with 108 trainee participants, leading to awards in hospitality, OEM engineering and Interior Systems (construction).

The *Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016- 2020* included actions and annual targets to 2020 for traineeship, building on the provision in place and the development work underway since 2014. It is intended that by 2020, there will be 5,000 annual enrolments on traineeship programmes and 54 programmes available across a range of industry areas and leading to awards equivalent to Levels 4-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. In the period 2016-2020 it is intended that a cumulative total of 19,000 trainees will have enrolled. The Action Plan includes targets for enrolments and new programmes for each year leading up to 2020. It also committed to developing a critical path and associated timeline to refresh and relaunch existing traineeship programmes, and to develop new programmes. This critical path was published in October 2017, in a document called *The Five-Step Guide to Traineeship in Ireland.* This document clarified and presented the key features of traineeship, listed 31 traineeship programmes in place at the date of publication, and explained how Education and Training Boards, in partnership with local and regional industry partners, could refresh existing provision and develop new programmes. The document also provided information on access to traineeship for interested learners; since the recession traineeship had been primarily associated with upskilling for unemployed people. The document stated that traineeship is open to all potential participants, of all ages and backgrounds, and are free-of-charge. People who are unemployed and wish to access a traineeship to upskill for employment may be eligible for a training allowance or income support.

During 2017-2018 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have been working to refresh and relaunch existing provision and to develop new traineeship programmes, supported by SOLAS. A review of the pilot career traineeship initiative was published, and a review of 'pre-2016' traineeship provision also undertaken, which is shortly to be published. In addition, a series of four national

workshops were held with ETBs in 2018. Table 4 below provides details of 51 traineeship programmes currently on offer in thirteen broad industry areas.

Table 4   Traineeship programmes on offer October 2018

BUSINESS	CARE	CONSTRUCTION
• Business Administration • Business Systems Service Technician • Legal Administration • Medical Administration • Office Administration	• Early Childhood Care and Education • Health Care Assistant	• Construction Skills for Employment • Interior Systems • Overhead Lines Operator
ENGINEERING	**FASHION AND BEAUTY**	**FINANCE**
• Aircraft Maintenance Technician • Aircraft Structures Technician • Architectural Technology and Computer-Aided Design • Computer-Aided Design (Revit, Inventor etc) • Engineering OEM • Engineering Operations • Engineering Precision Manufacturing • Laboratory Assistant • Welding/Fabrication • Wind Turbine Maintenance	• Beauty Therapist • Hairdressing	• Accounts Executive • Certified Accountancy Pathway • Financial Administration
HOSPITALITY	**ICT**	**LOGISTICS**
• Food and Beverage Service • Hospitality L4 • Hospitality L5	• Automated Software Testing • Digital Sales and Marketing • ICT Systems and Principles for IT Professionals • IT Network Security • IT Support Specialist • Software Developer • Tech Support Engineer	• HGV Driving (pilot) • Logistics and Distribution • Manufacturing Supply Chain and Customer Service Logistics • Supply Chain Logistics
MANUFACTURING	**MEDIA**	**RETAIL**
• CNC Operator • Life Sciences Manufacturing Operations • Manufacturing Technician – Maintenance Technology Skills • Pharmaceutical Manufacturing • Quality Management (Quality Assurance)	• Animation	• Pharmacy Sales Assistant • Retail Associate • Retail Skills Health and Beauty
SPORTS AND LEISURE		

- Equestrian International Instructor (BHSAI)
- Outdoor Activity Instructor
- Sports, Recreation and Exercise

End-of-year data in Table 5 below show that target enrolments for traineeship in 2016 and 2017 were not achieved, with 2,321 enrolments in 2016 rather than the planned 2,500 enrolments. In 2017, the number of enrolments in the year actually dropped to 1,770; the target enrolment was 2,600. Reasons for this drop have been discussed with ETBs, and it is believed that this is primarily due to the reduction in numbers of unemployed people in Ireland in 2017, and the strong association traineeship provision had as upskilling for unemployed people over the previous 5-7 years. It is of note that enrolments have increased in 2018, with 2,597 recorded as of May 2018 via the SOLAS FARR database of further education and training provision.

Table 5   Traineeship enrolments 2014 – 2018* (*as of May 2018)

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018* May 2018
Traineeship enrolments per annum	2,708	2,350	2,321	1,770	2,597

Data source: SOLAS FARR database – most recently available data is May 2018.

Forecasts of traineeship enrolments in 2019 and 2020 which have been provided by ETBs as part of the 2018 strategic dialogue and performance agreements process indicate that trainee enrolments will continue to rise, with the target of 5,000 enrolments in 2020 close to being achieved. The introduction in 2018 of 'Skills to Advance', a new policy to support upskilling of lower-skilled employees via further education and training is also enabling ETBs to adapt traineeship provision so that people at work can access this route of skills development. SOLAS will continue to monitor the traineeship targets and associated progress, working closely with ETBs and with employer representatives.

Notwithstanding the shortfalls in trainee enrolments to-date, new traineeship programme targets have actually been either achieved or exceeded, with four programmes introduced in 2016 (exceeding the target of two); six introduced in 2017 (target of six); and fourteen new traineeships introduced to date in 2018 (target of four). These are set out in Table 6 below. ETBs report strong

interest and positive feedback from local and regional employers; this is reflected in the number of programmes being developed in 2018 and 2019.

Table 6   New traineeship programmes introduced since 2016

Year	New traineeship programmes
2016	Hospitality L4 Hospitality L5 Engineering OEM Interior Systems
2017	Animation Certified Accountancy Pathway Digital Sales & Marketing Engineering Operations Hairdressing Laboratory Assistant
2018 (as at 26 October)	Architectural Technology and Computer-Aided Design Automated Software Testing Computer-Aided Design (Revit, Inventor, etc.) Construction Skills for Employment CNC Operator Engineering Precision Manufacturing HGV Driving (pilot) Manufacturing Supply Chain & Customer Service Logistics Manufacturing Technician - Maintenance Technology Skills Life Sciences Manufacturing Operations Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Quality Management (Quality Assurance) Tech Support Engineer Welding/Fabrication

Ten additional new programmes are due to commence before the end of 2018, these are:

Animal Care
Bio Pharma/MedTech
Builders' Merchant Retail
Broadcast/Radio/Digital Media Production
Customer Service & Barista Skills
Film (Prosthetics, Model-Making, Rigging)
Hairdressing & Barbering
Horticulture
Make-Up Artistry
Management Development

4   Conclusion – points of progress and looking ahead to 2020

This response document from SOLAS has aimed to provide to the Joint Committee for Education and Skills an overview of the uptake of apprenticeship and traineeship, including details of any increase/decrease in participation. The following summary points are proposed for consideration by the Committee:

Apprenticeship

- Overall apprentice registrations are increasing year-on-year. Targets for craft-based apprenticeships were exceeded in 2016 and 2017 and are on track for a similar outcome in 2018

- The number of participating employers is also increasing year-on-year, with over 5,500 participating employers to-date in 2018

- Targets for new apprenticeship registrations and programmes are behind each year to-date, with 17 new programmes introduced since 2016, 79 registrations in 2016; 335 registrations in 2017 and 510 registrations to-date in 2018

- During 2018 the Apprenticeship Council is actively engaging with the industry-led consortia overseeing new apprenticeships to review employer engagement and to discuss the ambition regarding targets to 2020

- There is a strong pipeline of new programmes on the way, with 35 more due to be launched during the remainder of 2018 and in 2019

- Large-scale employer buy-in to new apprenticeships is a key success factor and dependency over the next two years.

Traineeship

- Traineeship enrolment targets have so far not been met, with a drop in enrolments in 2017. This trend reversed in 2018, however it is unlikely that the 2018 target of 3,900 enrolments will be achieved.

- The strong association of traineeship with upskilling for unemployed people and the diminishing pool of people in this category is believed to be a reason for the lower numbers accessing traineeships during 2016 and 2017.

- The outlook for 2018, 2019 and 2020 is more positive however, with a strong pipeline of up to 24 additional new traineeships introduced in 2018 and rolling out in 2019, adding to the 31 already available. Forecasts from ETBs indicate that the 2020 target is achievable.
- Similar to apprenticeship, employer buy-in to traineeships is a key success factor over the next two years to 2020.

SOLAS, 02 November 2018

Appendix

Features of apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland

	Apprenticeship	Traineeship
Legislation	Governed directly by legislation – the 1967 Industrial Training Act	Not governed directly by legislation
Employment basis	Starts with a contract of employment	Starts with enrolment on an education and training course
Industry involvement	Industry-led- requires strong industry support and involvement from the outset	Led by education and training providers but based on identified industry skills need and requires industry support and involvement for design input and work placement
Time 'on-the-job'	Minimum of 50% on-the-job, and up to 80%	Minimum of 30% on-the-job
Qualification level(s)	Leads to an award between Level 5-Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications	Leads to an award equivalent to Level 4-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications
Duration	Between 2 and 4 years	Between 6 months and 20 months
Target cohorts	Open to all, including those already in employment	Open to all, may be accessed by those in employment as part of new 'Skills to Advance' policy
Payment (if any) to apprentice/trainee	Employers pay apprentice a salary	No payment by employer to trainee. Unemployed people may be eligible for income support/a training allowance

SOLAS
learning works

Ms Fiona O'Loughlin TD
Chair
Oireachtas Committee on Education & Skills
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

4th December 2018

Dear Chair

Thank you again for the opportunity for SOLAS to present to the Committee last week.   As my colleague, Mary-Liz Trant did not have some information to hand, she suggested that SOLAS would revert to the Committee on a number of issues, please see below.

Apprenticeship and support of sustainable construction practices

Many of the current live craft apprenticeships include content that is relevant to eco-friendly/sustainable training topics and curriculum areas. More than 8,289 apprentices or over 50% of the apprentice population are involved in such craft apprenticeships including: plumbing; electrical; carpentry and joinery; stonecutting and stonemasonry; and brick and stonelaying.

The significant contribution of apprenticeship to supporting sustainable construction practices and combating climate change is evident in light of the 2018 population numbers. State support for apprenticeship includes funding for capital and training allowances provision to apprentices in craft apprenticeships. In programmes such as plumbing and electrical, the requirement for capital is substantial. Other relevant supports consist of the provision of off-the-job equipment and resources such as solar panels.

New apprenticeship programmes are in development in Wind Turbine Maintenance and Scaffolding, which are expected to include best practice in climate change regulation.

Plumbing
The Plumbing Curriculum content has distinct modules in a range of renewable energy systems. Apprentices are trained in the knowledge and practical skills required to install a variety of renewable energy systems such as:

- Solar thermal systems
- Heat pumps
- Rainwater Harvesting systems
- Biomass boilers

There is also a focus in the curriculum content on the installation of sustainable heating systems that include time and temperature controls. Heating systems that utilise these controls systems limit the amount of fossil fuels used in the heating of domestic housing stock and as a result reduces the amount of fossil fuels required to heat a domestic property.

Electrical

The Electrical Apprenticeship curriculum content has a number of distinct training modules in renewable energy systems. Apprentices are trained in the operation, construction and maintenance of a variety of alternative energy modules such as the electrical energy in the apprenticeship programme. These topic areas include:

- Solar Technology
- Wind Turbine Technology
- Combined Heat and Power
- Rainwater Harvesting

The sustainable use of energy in the lighting and heating of domestic properties is included in the course content. The installation of heating control systems limits the use of energy required to heat a home is a distinct module in the programme. Training in the installation of home automation systems and the use of LED lighting systems also form an integral part of electrical apprenticeship training in the sustainable use of energy in buildings.

Carpentry & Joinery

The Carpentry and Joinery Apprenticeship has a number of learning outcomes which are relevant to environmental issues. These topic areas include:

- Timber Frame Construction
- Window Manufacturing
- Building Aesthetics and Sustainability
- Thermal Insulation and Heat Transfer
-

There is a focus in this programme on ensuring energy waste is kept minimal.

Traineeships

A small number of current traineeship programmes include components that are relative to eco-friendly/sustainable training topics:

- Wind Turbine Maintenance Traineeship (21 leaners to date in 2018)
- Interior Systems Traineeship (19 learners to date in 2018)

Future plans for the Qualibuild project at Waterford and Wexford ETB (first initiated by LIT, with European funding, H2020)

SOLAS' involvement with this project to-date has been to fund the pilot at WWETB. We are currently exploring how we might become further involved in the near future. In the meantime, and following our meeting with the Committee, we have sought an update on progress from WWETB.

As the Committee may know, the benefit of NZEB or nearly zero energy buildings means a building has a very high energy performance, determined in accordance with Annex 1 of the *European Performance of Buildings Directive* and in which the nearly zero or very low amount of energy required should be covered

to a very significant extent by energy from renewable sources, including energy from renewable sources produced on-site or nearby.

WWETB involved itself in the NZEB project for a number of reasons, including;

- Large involvement in training apprentices for the construction sector
- Many people from the Wexford and Waterford area are employed in the construction sector
- There was no training response planned for those involved in the trades
- Two major NZEB conferences have taken place in Enniscorthy, Co Wexford
- Local awareness of NZEB, particularly in the Enniscorthy area

As of November 2018, significant progress has been made. All of the National Skills Specifications for NZEB have been agreed. The National Skills Specifications have been converted by WWETB into curricula and training programmes and currently, training manuals are being developed in conjunction with Limerick Institute of Technology. The training programmes will be accredited by City & Guilds; a building has been sourced in Enniscorthy. Refurbishment and upgrade works have been completed. The NZEB Training rig has been built and installed and training programmes have begun to be delivered by WWETB on the week beginning the 26th of November 2018.

Should the Committee require any additional information at this time, or at any time in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Conor Dunne
Acting CEO

Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

Uptake on Apprenticeships and Traineeships

2 November 2018

1   Introduction

The Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) is the representative body for the technological higher education sector in Ireland, which comprises fourteen institutes of technology, geographically dispersed across the country. THEA welcomes the invitation by the Joint Committee on Education and Skills to make a written submission on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships.

It is of note that 'traineeships', as defined in current policy documents, are further education programmes, and are offered primarily through the education and training boards, in partnership with employers.[1] The institutes of technology do not provide traineeships in this strict sense, although there are analogous examples of third level programmes, based on the 'learn and work' model, offered within the technological higher education sector, including bespoke programmes developed for individual companies.[2] In addition, work placement is a key component of many higher education programmes offered by the institutes.[3] Ideally, discussions on the uptake of traineeships and apprenticeships should be viewed in the broader context of developing work-based learning as a core element of education and training across the ten levels of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity, THEA will concentrate in this submission on the uptake of apprenticeships, but will allude to the broader issue of work-based learning in section 4 below.

2   The institutes of technology and apprenticeship

Craft Apprenticeships

The institutes of technology have a long tradition of providing two of the three off-the-job phases (phases 4 and 6) of the craft apprenticeships. Currently, twelve THEA members are engaged in this provision. DIT is the largest craft apprenticeship provider in the sector, providing off-the-job training across fifteen of the twenty-seven designated craft apprenticeships, including seven crafts where it is the sole provider. The remaining participating institutes generally provide phases 4 and 6 in two to four of the craft areas.

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[1]   See especially *Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020*, pp 5-6; and the Department of Education and Skills/SOLAS/ETBI sponsored traineeship website at http://www.traineeship.ie/employer.aspx

[2]   For examples from IT Blanchardstown see http://www.itb.ie/IndustryInnovation/learnwork.html; from IT Sligo see www.itsligo.ie/employers/wbl

[33]   For examples, at CIT http://extendedcampus.cit.ie/studentworkplacement; at Dundalk IT https://www.dkit.ie/about-dkit/dkit-careers-service/placement-office.html; at IT Sligo see https://www.itsligo.ie/employers/student-placements/; and at WIT www.wit.ie/about_wit/industry_links/work_placement2 .

Under the current quality assurance arrangements for apprenticeships, introduced by QQI in 2016,[4] the institutes of technology act as collaborating providers in the delivery of craft apprenticeships. As such, they operate under the quality assurance procedures of SOLAS, the coordinating provider, and QQI, the designated awarding body, makes the awards. THEA's members also support the operation and development of the craft apprenticeships through their own Institutes of Technology Apprenticeship Committee (ITAC), and through participation on the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC).

It is of note that none of the institutes recruit apprentices directly. The Apprentice starts his or her journey by identifying an area in which they would like to work, and by securing employment with an appropriate employer.

New Apprenticeships

Following a review initiated by the Minister for Education and Skills in 2012, which was overseen by a review group chaired by the Chairman of the Labour Court, Kevin Duffy, and published in January 2014, a number of innovations have been introduced to the apprenticeship system. Led by a new Apprenticeship Council, which issued two national calls for proposals in 2015 and 2017, the system has been expanded into new industry sectors, leading to awards from Levels 5-10 on the NFQ. At the time of writing, sixteen new apprenticeship programmes are currently running, and a further thirty six programmes are expected to commence over the next fourteen months.

The institutes of technology have been active in the arena of the new apprenticeships, and played a pioneering role, in collaboration with their industry partners, in developing and launching the first two new apprenticeships in 2016: the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, a Level 8 degree programme coordinated by IT Sligo; and the Industrial Electrical Engineering apprenticeship, a Level 7 degree programme coordinated by Limerick IT. In total, the institutes are acting as coordinating providers for nine new apprenticeships that are currently running, and are the proposed coordinating providers for a further ten programmes that are under development.[5] As coordinating providers, the institutes operate their own quality assurance procedures in line with QQI's guidelines, and will make the awards when the apprentices complete their programmes. The sector also supports the development of new apprenticeships through participation on the Apprenticeship Council.

3   Apprenticeship Registrations

The targets for apprenticeship registrations are set jointly by the Department of Education and Skills and SOLAS, and have been published in the *Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020,* p. 11 (see Table 1 below).

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[4]   Available at https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Apprenticeship%20Programmes%20QAG%20Topic-Specific.pdf

[5]   The full list of new and craft apprenticeships (as at August 2018) is available at: http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/news/Pages/List%20of%20Apprenticeships%20in%20Ireland%20-%20Generation%20Apprenticeship%20Aug%2018.pdf

Table 1 Apprenticeship Registrations: Forecast 2016-2020

Craft-based apprenticeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of programmes	27	27	27	27	27
Forecast new registrations per annum	3,390	4,147	4,697	5,087	5,587
New apprenticeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Planned no. of programmes (cumulative)	2	15	25	35	40
Planned new registrations per annum	82	800	1,500	2,297	3,413
Total target apprentice registrations per annum	3,472	4,947	6,197	7,384	9,000

A number of observations can be made about the 2016 forecasts. It is not unfair to say that those for the craft apprenticeships were likely to be more accurate than those for the new apprenticeships. The craft apprenticeship registration forecasts were provided in 2016 by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) and the Apprenticeship Services Unit in SOLAS, and were grounded upon solid research, and the significant experience of the two SOLAS units in making such predictions. The planned registrations for the new apprenticeships, in contrast, were based on the proposals submitted by the various consortia in the first call for new apprenticeships in 2015, and would not perhaps — given their new, innovative nature and the tight deadlines associated with the call —have had the same level of rigour in predicting future registrations, certainly not across all of the consortia. In addition, it may also have been assumed that the developmental process for establishing the new apprenticeships would run smoothly, and deliver all of the projected registrations by particular deadlines. The reality, in fact, is that the developmental process was, and remains, exceedingly complex, as it requires new and deeper levels of engagement between employers and education providers — and the associated cultural adjustment — than has previously been the case. The process has also had to operate within a sometimes bewilderingly complex legal and regulatory environment, that encompasses and requires the operational integration of legislation written in very different eras, including especially the Industrial Training Act, 1967 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. THEA holds the view that the new apprenticeship system is fresh and innovative, and has the potential to bring about very significant enhancements to apprenticeship in time. However, THEA also holds the view that these developmental challenges were generally under-estimated and that, as a result, the speed of the throughput of programmes and the associated registrations may have been overly optimistic.

The above observations are reflected, in part, in registration data from the end of September 2018 for both craft apprenticeships and new apprenticeships (see Table 2 below). While it would be inadvisable to set too much store on a single year's data, it does illustrate that the variance between the 2016 forecasts for 2018 registrations and the actual registrations is greater in relation to the new apprenticeships than in relation to craft apprenticeships. Actual registrations in 2018 for the new apprenticeships, 410, are at 27%

of the 2016 forecast for this year. Actual registrations for the craft apprenticeships in 2018, 3,504, are more creditable, having reached 75% of the 2016 forecast. Since the 2016 forecasts were made, the key stakeholders have learned much more about the process of rolling out new apprenticeships, particularly in relation to how quickly individual programmes can be brought to the market and what the start-up enrolment patterns are likely to be. Given this, there may be an argument for revisiting the 2016 forecasts to evaluate whether they are still valid.

Table 2 Apprentice Registrations September 2018[6]

Craft Apprenticeships		New Apprenticeships	
Sector	**Registrations 2018**	**Sector**	**Registrations 2018**
Construction	1,036	Property Services	44
Electrical	1,528	Biopharma	2
Engineering	417	Engineering	46
Motor	528	Financial	148
		Hospitality and Food	114
		ICT	32
		Logistics	24
Total	**3,504**	**Total**	**410**

That said, there is undoubted disappointment in some quarters that the projected registrations have not been met. Overall, the combined 2018 registrations for craft and new apprenticeships, 3,914, have reached just 56% of the 2016 forecast for the same year. There is no doubt that all stakeholders who are interested in advancing the apprenticeship agenda face significant challenges in endeavouring to increase the level of recruitment to apprenticeship programmes. The remainder of this submission will set out some of the key issues that THEA believes are militating against a better uptake of apprenticeships.

4   Key challenges facing apprenticeship recruitment

Culture

In the past decade or so, apprenticeship has featured prominently in the policy discourse on education and skills development, both at a European and national level. The general recognition that education and training systems should deliver work ready graduates has caused policy makers and some educationalists to look again at the apprenticeship model, and to single it out as a suitable vehicle for producing graduates that meet the employability attributes required in the modern workplace. Such thinking, which underpinned the 2014 Apprenticeship Review, and the subsequent drive to develop new, modern apprenticeships, is generally accepted among policy makers and in political circles. However, while the image of apprenticeship has improved to some degree on foot of this official discourse, it is arguable that this improvement has not generally made an impact among the population at

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[6]   Dáil Eireann debate, 25 October 2018: answer of the Minister of State at the Department of Education Skills to questions 155-157, at https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2018-10-25/155/?highlight%5B0%5D=apprenticeships#pq-answers-155_156_157

large. The traditional learner transition model, involving progression from general education into higher education degree level study, is still the best known and favoured route for most school leavers, and for the parents and guidance councillors that advise them. In this context, much work still needs to be done to enhance the awareness of apprenticeship as a valid and valued option for school leavers. Moreover, such work will also have to be undertaken over the long term if it is to compete with a tradition that is so embedded in the Irish psyche. And it will also have to address a particularly complex communications and branding/marketing challenge, given that the notion of work-based learning is not exclusive to the apprenticeship model. On the contrary, work-based learning is now a very visible part of non-apprenticeship education and training programmes across both further and higher education, so apprenticeship is not just competing with traditional academic education, but with new forms of tertiary education that have embraced the concept of work-based learning, if not the full earn and learn model.

The new apprenticeship programmes, in particular, can play a big part in changing perceptions and in enhancing the image of apprenticeship, as they hold out the prospect of embedding the apprenticeship model within the very system that it has generally had to compete with, and from which it has had to stand apart. These programmes are still at a relatively early stage of their development, and will need to be supported in a range of different ways over the long term if they are to make the desired inroads in wider societal awareness, against some of the more traditional education and training options.

Regulatory environment

In the view of THEA, one support that apprenticeship badly needs is an improved regulatory space within which to operate. Both the craft and the new apprenticeships are subject to the requirements of the Industrial Training Act, 1967, for it is from this legislation that they derive their status as statutory apprenticeships. This legislation is now over fifty years old and while to some degree it has stood the test of time, it is increasingly difficult to integrate with the legislation underpinning the work of many of the other stakeholders participating in the apprenticeship space. The institutes of technology are a case of point. Since 1967, THEA's members have been the subject of several iterations of reforming legislation, including the Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992, the Institutes of Technology Act 2006, and, most recently, the Technological Universities Act 2018. This legislation has changed many aspects of the way the institutes do their business, especially in relation to their academic autonomy and their assumption of responsibility for the quality assurance of the education and training programmes they provide. It is fair to say that the efforts to square legislative arrangements under the Industrial Training Act, 1967, with modern quality assurance legislation in education and training, including two iterations of national quality assurance legislation — the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 — has led to a very complex, overly bureaucratic system within which to develop the new apprenticeship model. While all of the stakeholders involved have worked hard and collaboratively to make the system work, it has no doubt hindered the responsiveness and agility of the

system, and arguably contributed to a delay in the throughput of new apprenticeship programmes and in meeting the projected registration targets. It has also complicated the discussions between education providers and employers, as some of the matters that need to be accommodated across the different pieces of legislation can be somewhat arcane, and difficult for the uninitiated to reconcile with the progressive intentions underpinning the development of new apprenticeships.

Employment sectors

THEA does not have enough detailed knowledge of the different employment sectors to comment in an informed way on why certain sectors, that are known to favour apprenticeship, are unable to recruit apprentices in sufficient numbers. As indicated previously, particularly in relation to the craft apprenticeships, the institutes are not directly involved in recruiting apprentices, and do not have the on-the-ground knowledge that they have in relation to the recruitment of their students that come through the CAO, or through direct entry mechanisms. The employment sectors themselves, through their representative bodies and associations, would be much better informed to elucidate where the uptake problems reside.

In relation to the new apprenticeships, where the institutions work more closely with the employers in the different consortia, THEA's members are somewhat closer to the recruitment process. One observation that might be made in this regard, is that recruitment tends to be more successful when an employment sector is well organised and has a strong professional association to mobilise the individual companies, or one which can take on some of the administrative burden in recruiting apprentices, on behalf of its members. THEA has seen at first hand the important contribution that the Insurance Institute has made in relation to the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship, which has had a number of successful recruitment cycles since its launch in 2016. It may be possible to address some of these issues through existing structures like the Regional Skills fora. Or the State may wish to consider other ways, in consultation with the employer representative bodies, how sectors might organise themselves in a manner suited to supporting the development and implementation of apprenticeships. If this is not possible, then consideration should be given to the question of whether apprenticeship is the most appropriate model of work-based learning for all sectors, or whether other forms of work-based learning might be considered as more feasible alternatives.

5   Conclusion

THEA and its members are strong supporters of the apprenticeship system, and consider that it will remain a key element of the technological higher education sector's education and training provision, even as the sector itself undergoes major transformation with the advent of technological universities. THEA believes that the new apprenticeships represent an important innovation, which have the capacity over time to change certain perceptions about the nature of learning and the pedagogical process across tertiary education. In this

context, it is important that a long term view is taken, and that they should be nurtured carefully in this early phase of their development. The institutes of technology are committed to playing an active and constructive part in their continued development, and will work in partnership with all the key stakeholders — employers, other education and training providers, and Government Departments and agencies — to enhance awareness of their existence and value.