

SOLAS

Opening statement to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships

15 November 2018

On behalf of SOLAS, I am very pleased to make this statement to the Joint Committee for Education and Skills on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships. SOLAS funds and oversees further education and training in Ireland, which includes traineeships, and has statutory responsibility for the national apprenticeship system. The organisation has been closely involved in the national policy to expand apprenticeship and traineeship, supporting the Department of Education and Skills and working with Education and Training Boards; higher education institutions, the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); the enterprise community, apprentices and trainees.

Work has been underway since late 2014 on the expansion of apprenticeship in Ireland, drawing on a strong track record, evidence that apprenticeship is an effective way to build the pipeline of talent within industry, and a vision of its potential to become a major route to skills development in this country. A national Apprenticeship Council, appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills, is steering the expansion of apprenticeships into new areas of industry and leading to awards from Levels 5 to Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. SOLAS is represented on the Council and acts as the Council Secretariat. As of this month (November 2018), the number of national apprenticeship programmes has increased to 42, up from 27 in 2016. A further 35 programmes are in-development. Apprentice registrations have more than doubled, going from 1,929 in 2013 to over 4,500 as of the end of October 2018. Registrations on craft apprenticeships are exceeding forecasts and while registrations on the 17 newer programmes have been lower than originally envisaged, registrations are rising as the programmes become more established.

The new apprenticeships are developed and overseen by industry-led consortia. During 2018 the Apprenticeship Council has begun engaging with these consortia to discuss progress, employer support for the new programmes; and the ambition regarding targets for each apprenticeship to 2020.

A review of pathways to participation in apprenticeship was completed this year. 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. The review sets out five steps to tackle under-representation and exclusion in the apprenticeship system.

A national promotional campaign, Generation Apprenticeship, has been underway since May 2017, designed to engage and influence employers, parents, teachers and potential apprentices on the opportunities arising from apprenticeship programmes.

The number of traineeships available via Education and Training Boards (ETBs) around the country has increased from 24 in 2016 to 51 as of November 2018. ETBs have been working with employer partners on expansion of traineeship offerings over the past 12 months in particular, since publication by SOLAS in partnership with ETBs of *The Five-Step Guide to Traineeship in Ireland*. The target enrolments for traineeship in 2016 and 2017 were not achieved; however enrolments have started to increase in 2018, and there are positive forecasts on traineeship enrolments 2018-2020. The introduction in 2018 of 'Skills to Advance', a new policy to support upskilling of lower-skilled employees is also enabling ETBs to adapt traineeship provision so that people at work can access this route to skills development.

In conclusion, we ask the Committee to note that overall, apprentice registrations are increasing year-on-year, as are the number of participating employers. There are 17 new apprenticeship programmes available with 35 more in the pipeline. Apprentice registrations on new programmes are, however, in effect one year behind target. Buy-in by employers to the new and expanded apprenticeship offerings will be a key success factor. Regarding traineeship, enrolment targets have so far not been fully met, however as of 2018 the trend in enrolments is upwards, there is a strong pipeline of 51 traineeship programmes now available, and positive forecasting on numbers for 2019 and 2020. Similar to apprenticeship, employer buy-in to traineeships will be a key success factor over the next two years.