



**An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,  
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta**  
Department of Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science

# Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025

## FAQs

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## 1. GENERAL

### 1.1. What difference will the Apprenticeship Action Plan (2021 – 2025) make?

The Plan sets out a 5 year strategy towards delivering an apprenticeship system which provides enhanced responsiveness to skills delivery and an improved experience for employers and learners.

- Apprenticeship jobs will not be available if employers do not participate in apprenticeship. We will provide financial and non-financial supports for employers make it easier to employ and support apprentices. These supports will roll out in 2022.
- It will be easier for prospective apprentices (students, jobseekers and career changers) to find information on available vacancies and apply for roles. This is starting now and be fully rolled out during 2022.
- The apprenticeship p
- A central office – the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) – will bring together the existing expertise from the Higher Education Authority and SOLAS into one place. This will support the close cooperation required to deliver apprenticeship – the only education and training programme that crosses further and higher education sectors.
- The NAO will be advised by a group of stakeholders called the National Apprenticeship Alliance (NAA). This group will make sure that stakeholders – employers, unions and education and training providers will have a voice in the delivery and oversight of the Action Plan.

### 1.2. What informed the actions in the Plan?

Apprenticeship in Ireland is currently managed in two different ways (Craft and Consortia-led apprenticeships). The Plan is based on learnings from operation of the two models of apprenticeship, best international practice and feedback from stakeholders, employers and apprentices.

60 stakeholders responded to a written consultation process; 3750 apprentices responded to a web-based survey and 350 SME employers provided feedback through the Regional Skills Fora network.

Details of the consultation process can be found [here](#).

### **1.3. This is a five year plan...what are the main deliverables?**

The Government has set a target of 10,000 new people registering as apprentices every year by 2025.

- In 2021 we will work in the background, setting out the structures for the national apprenticeship system of the future. This includes the establishment of the National Apprenticeship Office, the National Apprenticeship Alliance and starting the process for migrating all existing apprenticeships to the single model set out in the Plan. We will form a baseline for apprentice outcomes to demonstrate the value of apprenticeship to learners.
- In 2022 we will launch financial supports for employers and a bursary for apprentices in target groups. The Public Sector will set out a roadmap for recruitment of apprentices and the existing consortia-led programmes will migrate to the new apprenticeship system. The National Apprenticeship Alliance, through its Equity of Access committee will determine targets for inclusion of underrepresented groups in apprenticeship.
- The NAO will facilitate increased visibility of apprenticeship to employers and prospective apprentices. Over the period of the Plan registered apprentices will also be supported with greater visibility on their progress through their apprenticeship programme. Employer grants will be managed through the Office, with peer learning supports for apprenticeship consortia integrated into the system.
- Between 2022 and 2025 the existing centralised craft apprenticeship system will move to the single apprenticeship model. This will move the decision making for delivery of craft apprenticeship closer to the employers, employee representatives and the education and training providers. It will also fully integrate the provision of apprenticeship within the quality structures of the respective higher education providers.
- During this time the number of apprenticeship places across the public sector will also grow to reach 750 new apprentices every year by 2025. The content, level and duration of public sector apprenticeships will be determined by identified skills needs.
- Towards the end of every year a report will be brought to Government which sets out progress on the plan to date and defines clear actions for the

coming year. In this way, Government will have clear site of the impacts of the plan in delivering on its objectives.

Ireland's craft apprenticeships have a strong tradition and reputation of excellence. The migration of these 25 apprenticeships to a distributed model will maintain and enhance this reputation, providing flexibility in programme delivery at a national level while safeguarding quality, and the collaborative spirit of apprenticeship stakeholders (employers, unions and education and training providers).

By 2025 apprenticeship will be a clear choice for people looking for a new career, qualification or return to work option across all sectors of the economy. Apprenticeship will be available, accessible and seen as a real and substantive option for those who learn best by doing and/or who may wish to earn while they learn.

#### **1.4. What will the plan do to increase diversity in the apprentice population?**

The Plan promotes access, diversity and inclusion in apprenticeship by offering targeted supports to encourage participation from under-represented groups such as women, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Actions within the plan to increase participation by under-represented groups are based on stakeholder feedback and also the current position of the 2018 *Pathways to Participation in Apprenticeship Review*.

The National Apprenticeship Alliance will be supported by an equity of access subcommittee to ensure that the voice of under-represented groups is integral to the development of the apprenticeship system. The subcommittee will include representation which ensures that links with second level, community education, youth justice programmes, broader FET provision and higher education are represented. Targets will be set in conjunction with the Equity of Access Subcommittee and will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that interventions are effective in supporting increased diversity of the apprentice population.

- The current female craft apprenticeship bursary will be expanded to all programmes with greater than 80% representation of a single gender – this means, for instance, that employers of male hairdressing apprentices will be eligible for the scheme.
- An apprentice bursary/support scheme will be established to fund up to 100 apprentices per year who are experiencing severe socioeconomic disadvantage and who are from target groups, including lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers and Roma.

The 2018 Review of Pathways to Participation in Apprenticeship has already resulted in a significant widening of measures to support increased visibility of apprenticeships. Actions outlined within this Plan are designed to support and enhance progress towards the goals of the Pathways review. A full review will be conducted during the lifetime of this plan, informed by the Equity of Access subcommittee and employer and apprentice experience as determined within the annual survey.

### **1.5. How does this fit into work on single portal for all options for people accessing third level?**

Linkages to and from major career guidance and further and higher application resources will drive initial recognition of the range of offerings available to learners across the system, including an assessment of the ability to facilitate expressions of interest in apprenticeship through the CAO.

Apprenticeship is a contract of employment and needs to be reflected as such. We will enhance engagement with DSP and Enterprise agencies to highlight the need to balance access to apprenticeship opportunities for school leavers and career changers/unemployed/long term unemployed.

### **1.6. Why are you establishing a new National Apprenticeship Office?**

Apprenticeship programmes are delivered across the further and higher education sectors. SOLAS are responsible for apprenticeship under legislation dating back to 1967 and for education and training across the further education sector (ETBs). The Higher Education Authority is responsible for the governance and delivery of apprenticeship in higher education institutions (IoTs, TUs and University of Limerick).

Currently and historically the two organisations have a strong working relationship in the delivery of apprenticeship, with off-the-job training for craft apprenticeships in particular taking place across the ETBs and IoTs/TUs. The National Apprenticeship Office will provide the opportunity for SOLAS and the HEA to further enhance the existing close cooperation between the two organisations to manage apprenticeship delivery across the further and higher education sector. The office will be accountable to the Boards of both SOLAS and the HEA for the management of apprenticeship.

## **2. LEARNERS**

### **2.1. What does the plan mean for me?**

It will be easier for you to find out information about apprenticeship opportunities and you will receive more support and clearer communication throughout your learning journey.

By the end of 2021, all apprenticeship opportunities will be advertised on or linked from [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie) with clear guidance on expected recruitment dates for programmes with group intake.

## **2.2. How can I apply for an apprenticeship?**

Apprenticeship is a contract of employment. You can find details of available apprenticeship roles on [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie) or through the consortia responsible for running the programme you are interested in. You can also contact your local Education and Training Board who may hold information on local apprenticeship vacancies. A list of ETBs can be found [HERE](#)

## **2.3. Where can I find details on available apprenticeships?**

Details on the range of apprenticeship programmes and how to apply are available on [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie). You can also find information on available apprenticeships in your area from your local Education and Training Board (ETB). A list of ETBs can be found [HERE](#)

## **2.4. Where and when can I access bursaries?**

During 2022, an apprentice bursary/support scheme will be established to fund up to 100 apprentices per year who are experiencing severe socioeconomic disadvantage and/or who are from target groups, including lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers and Roma.

The mechanisms of the scheme are being developed and details of how to apply for a bursary will be available on [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie) during 2022.

## **2.5. I am a craft apprentice – what does this mean for me?**

There will be no immediate changes for craft apprentices. Feedback from apprentices indicates that the existing method of payment of off-the-job training allowances can cause difficulty for some apprentices. The method of payment of allowances apprentices will be examined before the end of 2022.

The plan also sets out actions to provide for craft apprentices to express preferences on the location of their off-the-job training. While the offer of an off-

the-job training place will be dependent on a number of factors such as demand for a specific location and available spaces. This will be delivered by Q1, 2022

### **3. EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS**

#### **3.1. What exactly is the new model of apprenticeship?**

By 2025 all national apprenticeship programmes will be managed by apprenticeship consortia. Consortia will comprise of employer, employee representatives, education and training providers and other key stakeholders and will be directly responsible for the development and delivery of apprenticeship programmes.

Programme validation, quality assurance and delivery will be managed through a coordinating provider (a further or higher education institution) who is a member of the consortium.

A new National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) is being established which will facilitate a coming together of the statutory functions of SOLAS and the HEA as they relate to apprenticeship. It will hold responsibility for all aspects of the management, oversight and development of the apprenticeship system and for implementing the Action Plan.

It will act as a single point of contact for employers, apprentices and providers in accessing information and guidance on apprenticeship. It will also manage the provision of supports to apprenticeship consortia in developing and implementing apprenticeships and in providing peer learning opportunities for consortia.

Stakeholder insight is critical to both the existing and continued success of apprenticeship. The National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee have an established place in craft apprenticeship and the Apprenticeship Council has successfully steered the first phase of the expansion of the Apprenticeship system.

A new National Apprenticeship Alliance (NAA) will provide advice and guidance to the NAO on all aspects of its work and to help it drive the implementation of the Action Plan. The NAA will discharge its role in respect of all apprenticeships and will be representative of apprenticeship stakeholders. It will help steer the next phase of apprentice to create a single coherent system and will review and approve formal occupational profiles in the development of new apprenticeships. This ensures the national character of apprenticeship programmes is maintained with nationally approved standards of knowledge, skill and competence and only a single apprenticeship in place for any one occupation.

### **3.2. What will happen with the migration of craft apprenticeship to the new model**

The migration of craft apprenticeship from SOLAS as a coordinating provider to the distributed system where craft apprenticeships will have a number of different coordinating providers will take place over the full lifetime of the plan.

A migration plan for the 25 craft apprenticeships will be developed by the NAAC and SOLAS in collaboration with the NAO and NAA.

## **4. EMPLOYERS**

Without engagement from employers there can simply be no apprenticeships or places on those programmes. Feedback from employers as part of the action plan focused on three main areas (1) the need for information on apprenticeship (2) practical supports to engage with apprenticeship, particularly for SMEs and (3) financial supports towards the cost of apprenticeship.

### **4.1. What supports are available to employers?**

The cost to employers of craft apprentices is reduced through payment of off-the-job training allowances for Phase 2, 4 and 6 of their courses. The Action Plan sets a target for a new base grant to be introduced for employers of apprentices other than craft apprentices from 2022.

This will be supplemented by practical measures to support the employment of apprentices in SMEs, and additional financial and other measures to support the employment of underrepresented groups in apprenticeship and the delivery of skills essential to the economy.

### **4.2. How do I access the apprenticeship system/hire an apprentice?**

Information on accessing the apprenticeship system and how to hire an apprentice is available on [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie) which includes access to the apprenticeship jobs portal (which is free to use). You can also find information on apprenticeship from your local Education and Training Board (ETB). A list of ETBs can be found [HERE](#)

### **4.3. Where can I find details on available apprenticeships?**

Information on available apprenticeships is available on [apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie) and from your local Education and Training Board (ETB). A list of ETBs can be found [HERE](#)

During the lifetime of the action plan we will move to increase linkages with national employer agencies.

#### **4.4. Where and when can I access bursaries/financial supports?**

- The Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme is a temporary Covid-19 related payment to employers of apprentices registered for the first time between 1 March 2020 and 30 Jun 2021. The payment of €3,000 is spread over two years, with the final instalment of €1,000 payable where the apprentice is retained for at least one year. Details of the scheme are available from SOLAS.
- An employer bursary of €2,667 is currently available to eligible employers who register female apprentices in a craft apprenticeship. The bursary is applied by the relevant Education and Training Board at a rate of €95.23 per week for 28 weeks as a contribution towards the apprentice's salary and other costs. It is paid in two instalments, the first on completion of phase 1 of an apprenticeship and the second during phase 3 when the apprentice completes the balance of the 28 applicable weeks with their employer. More information can be found on [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie).
- Under the Action Plan for apprenticeship the female craft apprentice bursary will be extended to all apprenticeship programmes with greater than 80% representation of a single gender during 2022.
- Additional targeted funding will become available during the lifetime of the plan in response to National Skills needs.

## **5. OTHER**

### **5.1. Public Sector Apprenticeship**

The Action Plan for Apprenticeship has set a target of 750 PS apprentice registrations per annum by 2025. This is roughly seven times greater than current annual intake. The diversity of the public sector in terms of service delivery provides a wide basis for involvement with the range of existing apprenticeships and those in development. Apprenticeship provides an opportunity to target and widen the recruitment pool for both generalist and specialist roles within the public sector.

Apprenticeship is a contract of employment and public sector employers must drive the availability of apprentice placements depending on the range of activity and the future skills mix required within that organisation.

2021 - An intensive informational campaign will be delivered to public sector employers to support engagement with existing programmes and identify

areas for development of specific programmes to meet the needs of PS employers. Public sector organisations are requested to complete an assessment of skills needs by end 2021.

2022 – The above analysis will inform a sector wide Apprenticeship Recruitment Plan to be delivered by mid-2022. The Apprenticeship Recruitment Plan will target a minimum of 750 apprentice registrations per annum across the public sector by 2025. This represents in excess of a seven-fold increase on 2020 registrations and will support a long-term goal of 7% of the apprentice population being employed by public sector employers.

In addition to leveraging the 60 existing programmes, it is open to employers to develop bespoke apprenticeships to address identified and sustainable skills needs. The potential for sector specific apprenticeships is being assessed in a number of areas, including in the Built Heritage/Traditional Skills area. The Health Service Executive will establish a new consortium to develop a NFQ level 5 apprenticeship for the occupation of Healthcare Assistant.

## **5.2. Craft apprenticeship backlogs**

A phased return to face to face training has commenced for those apprentices who were close to completion of phase 2, 4 or 6 when training was suspended in January 2021. SOLAS is providing weekly updates directly to apprentices, and employers of apprentices, who are currently assigned to these off-the-job training phases.

SOLAS and the HEA are working on the development of additional training capacity across education and training providers with the objective of tackling the waiting lists and ensuring that apprentices complete their training as quickly as possible once current COVID-19 restrictions allow. €20M in capital expenditure has been allocated to SOLAS and the HEA to facilitate an additional 4,000 places across the system in the coming period.

Ongoing updates are issued to craft apprentices assigned to off-the-job training. All other apprentices and the public can access information on <https://apprenticeship.ie/news-events/news>.

## 6. Available Apprenticeships Mar 21

Apprenticeship	NFQ Level	Duration (years)
<b>AGRICULTURE</b>		
Arboriculture	Level 6	2
<b>BIOPHARMA</b>		
Laboratory Analyst	Level 7	3
Laboratory Technician	Level 6	2
<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>		
Brick and Stonelaying (c)	Level 6	4
Carpentry and Joinery (c)	Level 6	4
Geo-Driller	Level 6	2
Painting and Decorating (c)	Level 6	4
Plastering (c)	Level 6	4
Plumbing (c)	Level 6	4
Stonecutting and Stonemasonry (c)	Level 6	4
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing (c)	Level 6	4
<b>ELECTRICAL</b>		
Aircraft Mechanics (c)	Level 6	4
Electrical (c)	Level 6	4
Electrical Instrumentation (c)	Level 6	4
Electronic Security Systems (c)	Level 6	4
Industrial Electrical Engineer	Level 7	2
Instrumentation (c)	Level 6	4
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (c)	Level 6	4
<b>ENGINEERING</b>		
Engineering Services Management	Level 7	2
Farriery (c)	Level 6	4
Industrial Insulation (c)	Level 6	4
Manufacturing Engineer	Level 7	3
Manufacturing Technology	Level 6	2
Mechanical Automation and Maintenance Fitting (c)	Level 6	4
Metal Fabrication (c)	Level 6	4
OEM Engineer	Level 6	3
Pipefitting (c)	Level 6	4
Polymer Processing Technology	Level 7	3
Principal Engineer – Professional Doctorate	Level 10	4
Sheet Metalworking (c)	Level 6	4

Toolmaking (c)	Level 6	4
<b>FINANCE</b>		
Accounting Technician	Level 6	2
Insurance Practitioner	Level 8	3
International Financial Services Associate	Level 6	2
International Financial Services Specialist	Level 8	2
<b>HAIR</b>		
Hairdressing	Level 6	3
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>		
Healthcare Assistant	Level 6	2
<b>HOSPITALITY &amp; FOOD</b>		
Commis Chef	Level 6	2
Chef de Partie	Level 7	4
Sous Chef	Level 8	2
Butcher	Level 5	2
<b>ICT</b>		
Network Engineer Associate	Level 6	2
Software Developer Associate	Level 6	2
CGI Technical Artist (Animation, Games, VFX)	Level 8	2
Cybersecurity	Level 6	2
Telecommunications and Data Network Engineering Technician	Level 6	2
<b>LOGISTICS</b>		
Lean Sigma Manager	Level 9	2
Logistics Associate	Level 6	2
Supply Chain Associate	Level 7	3
Supply Chain Manager	Level 9	2
Supply Chain Specialist	Level 8	2
<b>MOTOR</b>		
Agricultural Mechanics (c)	Level 6	4
Construction Plant Fitting (c)	Level 6	4
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics (c)	Level 6	4
Motor Mechanics (c)	Level 6	4
Vehicle Body Repairs (c)	Level 6	4
<b>PROPERTY SERVICES</b>		
Auctioneering and Property Services	Level 6	2
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>		
Recruitment Executive	Level 8	3
<b>SALES</b>		
Retail Supervision	Level 6	2
Sales	Level 6	2

(c) denotes a craft apprenticeship