

The Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-25

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 IRELAND

Timeline

2022 Implementation

2023 Implementation

2024 Implementation

2025 Completed

ID number 45164

Background

Ireland's Action plan for apprenticeship 2021-25 sets out new ways of structuring, funding, and promoting apprenticeship to make it more accessible to employers and learners.

Objectives

The Action Plan aims to deliver an apprenticeship system that is flexible and responsive, providing a strong value proposition for employers and potential apprentices, attractive and easy to engage with, and delivers high standards and sought after qualifications.

The main objectives of the plan are:

- (a) a high quality and innovative approach - apprenticeship will deliver the highest quality of work-based learning (WBL), supporting and demonstrating innovation to empower apprentices and employers to meet current and emerging skills needs;
- (b) employer-driven responses - apprenticeship will be recognised and valued by employers across all sectors of the economy as a key mechanism for building a highly skilled workforce, contributing to productivity and sustainable growth;
- (c) apprenticeship for all - the profile of the apprenticeship population will more closely reflect the profile of the general population;
- (d) a valued option - apprenticeships will be available and recognised as a work based learning opportunity, providing sought after qualifications across the tertiary education and training sector;
- (e) a single, coherent system - there will be a single apprenticeship system underpinned by a clear governance framework with strong stakeholder input.

Description

Ireland's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-25 was launched in 2021 by the Ministers for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Minister of State for Skills and Further Education. The plan aims to expand the types of programmes available and increase the number of apprenticeships to 10 000 per year by 2025. The plan is to ensure equity of access by creating simplified routes to entry, and improved flexibility

within the system so that underrepresented groups are able to participate in apprenticeship.

The plan contains 13 key deliverables, among which creating a coherent and representative governance structure; removing barriers to employer participation through financial and non-financial incentives; increasing availability of apprenticeships in the public sector; creating inclusive and accessible structure. The plan foresees measures for setting up apprenticeship governance structures, promotional activities, providing incentives to employers to take apprentices and expanding apprenticeship to new occupations and programmes.

The plan brings all apprenticeships together under one roof in a new National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) with responsibility for management, oversight and development of the apprenticeship system and implementing the Action plan. The NAO is a single contact point for employers, apprentices, and FET providers for information and advice. The NAO is also to facilitate bringing together statutory functions of SOLAS (the national authority for FET) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in relationship to apprenticeship.

The plan also foresees a new National Apprenticeship Alliance (NAA), representative of apprenticeship stakeholders, to create a single coherent system.

2022 Implementation

The 2022 NAO's annual report noted upward trends in the number of active employers, apprenticeship registrations and population.

In 2022, a number of activities took place.

Setting up governance structures

In 2022, the NAO was established, following the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between SOLAS (the national further education and training authority) and the HEA. The NAO appointed its first Director and started its work plan.

The NAA was established and met five times in 2022, providing strong support to the NAO. In addition, the Access and Inclusion Subcommittee was established that is to ensure that links with second level schools, community education, youth justice programmes, FET provision and Higher Education are achieved as regards the needs of the national population.

Promoting apprenticeships

A promotional radio, digital and social media campaign to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities *#GenerationApprenticeship* was launched and achieved over five million impressions and more than 120 000 engagements via social media by end of November 2022.

The Apprentice of the Year awards were launched at the inaugural event attended by 500 participants in October 2022. Apprentices were nominated by their employer or training provider and judged on their outstanding skills and qualities in the transversal skills of leadership, teamwork, creativity and problem solving. Over 40 print articles related to the apprentice of the year awards have been published to-date.

Incentives/grants to employers

A new fast and convenient employer grant online application system was designed, tested, and launched; by end of 2022, 675 employers received a grant through it.

An updated gender bursary provides a financial incentive to employers to hire women apprentices. The updated bursary extends to all apprenticeships with a greater than 80% representation of a single gender in order to encourage gender balance across the apprenticeship system. As of December 2022, 1 946 female apprentices were in training, including 349 women in craft apprenticeships.

Creating new and increasing the number of apprenticeships

Four new apprenticeships were launched: bar manager; cybersecurity practitioner; transport operations and commercial driver; and wind turbine maintenance technician. The wind turbine technician apprenticeship was the first dedicated green skills/green energy programme in the national apprenticeship system.

Open competition via the public sector jobs portal was launched in October 2022 to recruit of over 100 ICT apprentices in 23 different public sector organisations. Successful applicants will undertake a two-year full-time ICT apprenticeship programme in software development, computer networking or cyber security. This contributes to strengthening digital and ICT skills in the civil and public service, in line with the Government strategy.

The Higher Education Authority Bill, signed into Irish law, in October 2022, removed barriers to developing apprenticeships in professions that were excluded previously, such as agriculture, horticulture or fishing.

Investment in apprenticeships

The Government allocated EUR 17.2 million for capital investment to respond to the growing demand for apprenticeships. In addition to the capital investment, there was an equivalent increase in staffing to build the training capacity for apprenticeships across FET.

2023 Implementation

There were 8 712 apprenticeship registrations and 9 200 employers in 2023, achieving significant progress to the targets set out in the Apprenticeship Action Plan.

The updated Handbook on Developing and Delivering an Apprenticeship Programme was published.

The National Apprenticeship Office provided tailored support and guidance to over 30 industry-led groups and consortia in 2023, on development of new apprenticeships to meet skills needs, and to assist in resolving a range of issues arising as programmes continued to evolve and expand.

A first national survey of apprentice employers was conducted, with responses received from 2 457 employers, a 31% response rate. The survey findings indicated good levels of satisfaction with the apprenticeship system, including high levels of satisfaction with the contribution of apprentices. 90% of respondents indicated that they were planning to either maintain the same number of apprentices or employ more apprentices over the next twelve-month period.

Seven new apprenticeship programmes were launched in 2023, bringing the total of national apprenticeship programmes to 73. This is a significant increase on the 27 apprenticeships that were available in 2014.

Over 2 000 applications for the Apprenticeship Employer Grant were received in 2023. EUR 5.351 million was paid out through this grant in 2023.

The One More Job initiative was developed and introduced in 2023 to support micro and small employers to get involved in the apprenticeship system and employ one or more apprentices. By the end of 2023, 887 new and micro and small micro employers had engaged, with 1 166 apprentices employed.

The Public Service Apprenticeship Plan was developed and published, and implementation began in 2023. The plan sets out actions and targets for employment of at least 750 apprentices annually by a wide range of public service employers. In addition, the plan sets out objectives for public service bodies to become more involved in new apprenticeship development.

An Access and Inclusion subcommittee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance was

established in January 2023. The subcommittee of 15 members representing all under-represented groups in apprenticeship met 5 times.

A new bursary for potential apprentices was introduced in September 2023 with 16 initial recipients, receiving financial supports up to EUR 3 000.

Employers of 230 apprentices were eligible for the gender bursary in 2023.

The Generation Apprenticeship Freephone Helpline was launched as a full service in January 2023.

Generation Apprenticeship assets and materials were circulated via the Institute of Guidance Counselors (IGC) for wider dissemination of apprenticeship opportunities in schools.

The second national Apprentice of the Year awards were held with 220 nominations of apprentices for an award and over 500 people in attendance.

A targeted campaign to promote apprenticeship opportunities among girls and women called Facts, Faces, Futures was launched in 2023. Over 100 of the all-girls schools around the country had received apprenticeship information and briefings as part of the Facts, Faces, Futures campaign.

The National Apprenticeship Alliance which is the national advisory body for the apprenticeship system in Ireland met 8 times, and agreed a project plan to create the single integrated model of apprenticeship programmes.

2024 Implementation

In 2024, there were 9 352 apprenticeship registrations, with 9 883 employers for 77 different apprenticeship programmes; four new national apprenticeship programmes were launched. Almost 3 000 more places were added in 2024, for craft apprenticeships to address delays in training caused by the impact of COVID-19 lockdown.

The NAO developed its statistics and data analysis capability in 2024, with a dedicated team now in place. A performance framework for apprenticeship was in development which would include collection and analysis of data on apprentice ethnicity, socioeconomic background, retention rates and routine graduate tracking.

The Apprenticeship Employer Grant of EUR 2 000 per apprentice per year was allocated to over 1 658 employers this year, EUR 6.1 million from the National Training Fund.

A national survey of apprentices was carried out during October-November 2024. Over 5 580 full and partial responses were received, corresponding to a 20% response rate.

A dedicated handbook was developed for public service employers and a national seminar was jointly hosted by the Departments of Further and Higher Education and Public Expenditure and Reform.

The access and inclusion subcommittee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance met four times in 2024 and provided expert advice on a workplan, including expansion of the bursary for learners completing access to apprenticeship courses, enhanced data collection on under-represented groups in higher education, and initiatives to promote access for learners of diverse backgrounds.

The sixth national Generation Apprenticeship Champions in the Workplace awards took place, with 80 company nominees demonstrating excellence in mentoring, advocacy, diversity and inclusion, and team-wide support for apprentices in the workplace.

2025 Completed

The Apprenticeship Action Plan is in its final year. One new apprenticeship Accounting

Technologist (NFQ Level 8/EQF Level 7) was announced in 2025 in a unique context as the first-ever all-island apprenticeship programme has been launched between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Delivery of this apprenticeship is a joint initiative of the Technological University of the Shannon and The Open University in Northern Ireland. There are now 78 different apprenticeships available in Ireland.

In June 2025, there was a parliamentary joint committee debate Review of Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 where the CE of SOLAS and the Director of the National Apprenticeship Office (NAO) were present. The following summary of the achievements of the Action Plan were given:

The (National Apprenticeship) Office was set up in 2022 to take responsibility for the management, oversight and development of the system, and drive the delivery of the plan. It is jointly managed by SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority to reflect the fact that apprenticeship training provision spans across both the further education and training, FET, and higher education, HE, sectors.

The apprenticeship system has continued to transform and grow significantly over the lifetime of the action plan. In 2020, there were just 5 236 new apprentice registrations, but by 2024 this had grown to 9 352. This leaves us on course to hit the 10 000 target for 2025, which is the final year of the plan. There is now an apprentice population of 29 279, having expanded by more than 50% since 2020. There are 77 diverse apprenticeship programmes to choose from, ranging from level 5 to level 10 on the national framework of qualifications, NFQ, serving industries as diverse as biopharma, ICT, recruitment, financial services, retail, hospitality, engineering and construction, with a further 25 in development. Funding for apprenticeships has increased from EUR 142 million in 2019 to EUR 339 million in 2025.

Other key achievements in the delivery of the apprenticeship action plan include the introduction of an employer grant scheme, incentivising employers to recruit across all types of apprenticeships; national surveys of employers and of apprentices, showing very positive feedback on the benefit of apprenticeship options for industry and those embarking on developing their careers; a large increase in options in professional areas of training and development via apprenticeship, including in social work, engineering, accounting and international financial services; the high-profile apprentice of the year awards are now an annual fixture, with the fourth year of these awards taking place in October; growth in participation by under-represented groups, including members of the Traveller community, those from ethnic minorities, women, and people with disabilities, with bursaries and access initiatives put in place; and a plan for the fully integrated apprenticeship system developed via extensive, broad-based consultation.

The next Apprenticeship Action Plan is due to be published in 2026.

Bodies responsible

- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
- Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)
- National Apprenticeship Office (NAO)
- National Apprenticeship Alliance (NAA)
- Education and training boards (ETBs)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Young people (15-29 years old)

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers
Learners with disabilities
Adult learners
Older workers and employees (55 - 64 years old)
Unemployed and jobseekers
Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment
Low-skilled/qualified persons
Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

Education professionals

Teachers
Trainers
School leaders
Adult educators

Entities providing VET

Companies
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
VET providers (all kinds)

Other stakeholders

National, regional and local authorities

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning
Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-25](#)

[FAQs about the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-25](#)

[Generation Apprenticeship - National Website for Apprenticeship](#)

[National Apprenticeship Alliance](#)

[Ministers announce record numbers take up apprenticeships in 2023 and detail expansion planned for 2024](#)

[Up to 10 new apprenticeship programmes in 2023 announced by Minister](#)

[3,000th female apprentice milestone reached as Minister Harris launches new campaign to encourage more to register this International Women's Day](#)

[Minister launches financial and training supports for employers taking on apprentices](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

New Prison Education Taskforce: Education, Training and Apprenticeship Opportunities to support Rehabilitation and Post-Release Access to Employment

The Prison Education Taskforce is co-chaired by the Minister for Law Reform and the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science.

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Type of development

Strategy/Action plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Further Education and Training (VET) Funding Model Review

The process of review started in 2019 with the agreement on the guiding principles and approach. An international expert panel was appointed, with an internal funding model review advisory group and data modelling working group established to support the panel's work.

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Type of development

Practical measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Tertiary Degrees in Further Education and Training, guaranteeing progression to Higher Education.

Creating a unified tertiary system is one of the strategic priorities of the National FET strategy 2020-24.

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Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Further Education and Training Colleges of the Future (CotF): Capital Call

The National FET Strategy defined that CotFs should have the following characteristics:

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Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Completed

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Strategy 2021-23

DFHERIS funds and creates policy for the higher and further education and research sectors. It also oversees the work of the State agencies and public institutions operating in these areas.

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Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2021 Approved/Agreed

Transforming Learning 2020-24: Ireland's National Further Education and Training Strategy

The FET strategy 2020–24 was developed in consultation with the FET sector and other key stakeholders. Consultation was wide-ranging and included bilateral meetings, regional

workshops and a public call for submissions.

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Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). The Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-25: Ireland. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/45164>