

Expanding apprenticeship and traineeship

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 IRELAND

Timeline

2016 Approved/Agreed 2017 Implementation 2018 Implementation
2019 Implementation 2020 Implementation 2021 Completed

ID number 28293

Background

Apprenticeship forms a key element in the Irish government's policy to establish and significantly grow work-based learning as a core contributor to Ireland's growth as a society and economy, as outlined, for example, in the Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-20.

The national apprenticeship system in Ireland is governed by legislation, principally the 1967 Industrial Training Act, which sets out the overall structure of the national system and the protections for, as well as the responsibilities of, apprentices, employers, and education and training providers. The 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act also underpins apprenticeship, supporting validation and quality assurance arrangements for programmes nationally.

While apprenticeships have been offered for decades, a particular model of craft apprenticeship has been in operation in Ireland since the 1990s; apprenticeship programmes in this model are focused mainly on construction-related occupations, lead to an award at level 6 on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) and are of four years' duration.

Following a period of review and reform that started in 2013, a new model of apprenticeship was announced in June 2014. This new model brought greater flexibility in terms of the sectors involved as well as the content, duration, award levels, models of delivery, target groups, providers, and associated governance arrangements. The first new apprenticeships were approved for further development in July 2015 following a public call for proposals, and new apprenticeships in insurance practice and industrial electrical engineering were the first to be implemented in 2016. A second call for proposals was issued in 2017. New apprenticeships have been and are being developed in a wide range of sectors other than primarily construction-related areas. They are steered by industry-led consortia, and they are targeted at a wider range of participants including existing workers, not just school-leavers. For the first time, statutory apprenticeships are available at graduate level in Ireland.

Both the craft and new models are operating concurrently at present. The new model is in the relatively early stages of implementation, and the craft model, which has been in operation for decades, accounts for most of the current and expected numbers of new apprentices. All apprenticeship programmes in Ireland are now between two and four years in duration, involve a minimum of 50% on-the-job learning, and lead to an award at levels 5

to 10 on the NFQ.

The Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship was published in January 2017. A handbook for developing a national apprenticeship was published in May 2017, along with guidance relating to a second (2017) public call for proposals for new apprenticeships.

Objectives

To increase the number of apprenticeship and traineeship programmes and learners as a core contributor to Ireland's growth as a society and economy.

Description

The Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship 2016-20 in Ireland focuses on the actions required to achieve some of the goals set out in the National skills strategy 2025, the current programme for government in which Ireland aims to significantly grow work-based learning using the apprenticeship and traineeship modes of learning and skills development, and the education action plan. The actions outlined in these plans are funded through a variety of sources, depending on the programme; these include the national training fund, the Exchequer, and employee and employer contributions. Each new apprenticeship programme is underpinned by a statutory industrial training order. The Further Education and Training Authority of Ireland (SOLAS), the statutory authority for apprenticeship in Ireland, in cooperation with several stakeholders, is responsible for preparing those orders.

Since 2016, apprenticeships have been developed for sectors that previously did not have statutory apprenticeship activities including accountancy, biopharma, ICT, culinary, financial services, and insurance.

There are now 665 women in apprenticeships in Ireland, which is a significant increase on previous years: 60 in 2016, 151 in 2017 and 341 in 2018.

The traineeship model has also been modified and expanded to new sectors and occupations. In the past, traineeships were primarily available only to unemployed people. However, they are now open to a wider range of participants, including school leavers and people in employment. New traineeships must include at least 30% on-the-job training, lead to awards at levels 4-6 on the NFQ (EQF 3-5), and range in duration between six and 20 months.

2016 Approved/Agreed
2017 Implementation
2018 Implementation
2019 Implementation <p>In 2019, for example, new apprenticeships were developed for occupations such as geo driller, engineering services management, OEM engineer, hairdressing, CGI technical artist, cybersecurity, telecommunications and data network technician, lean sigma manager, supply chain manager, supply chain specialist and retail supervision. A list of apprenticeships provides an up-to-date summary of all current and in-development apprenticeships.</p> <p>By the end of 2019, a total of 54 national apprenticeships were operational, including 25 craft and 29 new. The total number of learners continued to grow: In 2019 there were 6 177 new apprentice registrations, up from 5 648 in 2018. This included 5 271 in craft, and 906 in new, up from 590 in 2018. The total apprenticeship population at the end of 2019 was 17 829.</p> <p>2019 also saw the rollout of the apprenticeship jobs market where 501 employers</p>

registered their apprenticeship jobs through this online facility. There are now 665 women in apprenticeships in Ireland, which is a significant increase on previous years: 60 in 2016, 151 in 2017 and 341 in 2018. The generation apprenticeship competition 2019 saw its second successful year of competitions, which celebrates the best teamwork, leadership, creativity and problem-solving skills of Ireland's apprentices. The competition aims to highlight the importance and value of apprenticeships as a route to skills development.

By the end of 2019, there were over 70 traineeship programmes available across 16 industry sectors, up from the initial 27 programmes that existed prior to expansion of the system. These include traineeships in areas such as architectural technology and computer-aided design, broadcast production skills, computer-aided design (Revit, Inventor, etc.), engineering technology, greenkeeping, HGV driving, manufacturing supply chain and customer service logistics, radio production and digital journalism, supervisory management and leadership, surf instructor and beach lifeguard, and youth work. New traineeships continue to be developed, based on the needs identified in collaboration with industry representatives and on local requirements. Similarly, there has been a year-on-year increase in traineeship enrolments with a total of 3 543 trainees enrolled on traineeship programmes in 2019.

2020 Implementation

Priority work was carried out to minimise the waiting and completion times for craft apprenticeship training. Public health restrictions remain in place, however SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) are working closely with further and higher education providers around the country to add the maximum amount of training capacity possible via remote online learning and assessment and additional space for practical training and assessment. In 2020, there has been good progress in plans to significantly increase workshop and training capacity around the country, with all training providers asked to identify opportunities for additional numbers of apprentices in training.

2021 Completed

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD, and Minister of State for Skills and Further Education, Niall Collins TD, have recently announced the roll-out of EUR 20 million in capital funding to respond to the growing demand for apprenticeships.

The funding will allow for a significant expansion in electrical, plumbing and carpentry places, and additional COVID-19-related capacity in electrical, plumbing, hairdressing and pipefitting places.

A new Action plan for apprenticeships 2021 - 25 was launched in April 2021.

Bodies responsible

- Department of Education and Skills (until 2020)
- Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS)
- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
- Department of Education

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
Unemployed and jobseekers
Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Optimising VET funding

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Apprenticeship information site](#)

[Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-20](#)

[Traineeship information site](#)

[Cedefop- ReferNet news - Ireland: expanding apprenticeships: a new handbook](#)

[2021 capital funding](#)

Related policy developments

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.

 IRELAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Completed

Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025

The 2025 National skills strategy is targeted at ensuring relevance of education and training to the needs of learners, society and the economy. It is based on active involvement of employers and quality teaching and learning, with a perspective of lifelong learning and inclusion.

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“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). Expanding apprenticeship and traineeship: Ireland. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28293>