

# Long-term cross-country mobility in apprenticeships

## Case Study Report

Cedefop project on Long-term cross-country mobility in apprenticeships  
(service contract AO/DLE/RCDC\_LRUST/ Long-term cross-country mobility  
in apprenticeships/ no/2018)

## *Ireland*

By Ilona Murphy, February 2020



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# Introduction

This research on cross-border long-term mobility in apprenticeships (CB LTMA) comes at a time when apprenticeship policy in Ireland is high on the political agenda. With major reforms underway to establish apprenticeship as a major route to skills development in Ireland, the focus now is on improving the traditional craft apprenticeships, expanding apprenticeships into new areas of industry (known as Generation Apprenticeships), and responding to the current demand for skills on the labour market.

Based on the research and interviews undertaken for this research, it can be summarised that whilst there is overall support for the notion of CB LTMA, is not a policy priority at present. Nevertheless, information gathered through the research provides useful considerations on a range of relevant dimensions across the framework, system and implementation levels. These are discussed in turn below.

## CHAPTER 1. State of play

Long term mobility in apprenticeships is not seen as a priority in the Irish education and training policy agenda. Reasons for this can be partly explained by briefly reflecting on the recent history of apprenticeships in Ireland within an economic context.

Ireland's strongest period of economic growth, from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, was followed by an unprecedented economic crash sparked by the global financial crisis. The over-reliance on the construction industry is well reported as a contributing factor to the collapse of the Irish economy which entered severe recession in 2008, and then into an economic depression in 2009. Unemployment rates hit a rate of 16% recorded at the peak of the financial crisis in 2012 – a sharp increase from a rate of 4.5% in 2006. The scale of the Irish recession was described by the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland as amongst the worst in the EU (Honohan, 2009).

As discussed by Murchadha and Murphy (2016), the recession had obvious economic consequences for the country and severe consequences for apprenticeships. Construction employment fell to under 50% of its 2007 peak, with a reduction in excess of 90% of new registrations of construction apprentices at the lowest point. The decline in apprentices across all trades where they were traditionally<sup>1</sup> available (e.g. construction, electrical, engineering, motor and printing) was significant (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). By 2010, there were more unemployed than employed apprentices in Ireland (SOLAS, 2015a).

In 2013, the government launched a review of apprenticeship training in Ireland. At this time, apprenticeships were concentrated on 26 craft-based occupations, with overall concern that the traditional craft apprenticeship model (with an over-reliance on employer engagement stability) did not reflect the broad skills needs of the 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 (Department for Education and Skills, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to Standards Based Apprenticeship that were introduced following a major review of manpower in Ireland in 1991. For historical origins of apprenticeships, readers are directed to McCarthy (1976)

Following the Review 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 (NFQ).

Since then a major expansion project called 'Generation Apprenticeship' has been underway. The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016-2020<sup>2</sup> includes detailed actions and targets to be achieved annually in the five-year period from 2016 to the end of 2020. At the time the Apprenticeship review was undertaken, there were 1,929 apprentice registrations in 2013<sup>3</sup>. As set out in the Action Plan, 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. By 2020, the aim is to have over 70 apprenticeship programmes in place, spanning the full range of industry sectors and leading to awards from Level 5 to 10 on the Irish National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) (SOLAS, 2019). This includes the traditional craft-based apprenticeships covering 26 occupations and the newly developed 'generation apprenticeships'.

The Irish economy is now firmly in recovery and almost at full employment. As high levels of economic performance and growth are recorded, the labour market faces a knowledge and skills deficit. With reported skills gaps, labour shortages and changing demographics, there are concerns the industry is unable to respond to future growth. The need to improve and expand apprenticeships into new areas of industry is currently at the forefront of apprenticeship policy developments in Ireland. Whilst apprenticeships are considered to represent a huge opportunity to grow talent pipeline, a lag between the needs of the labour market and what apprenticeships can deliver in terms of qualified, skilled workers to meet the needs of labour market demands is of key concern.

The policy focus is therefore on addressing issues associated with the development, implementation and expansion of apprenticeship programmes in Ireland. At present, this leaves little scope to examine the potential of CB LTMA outside the current context of Erasmus +.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2017)

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Houses of the Oireachtas (2019a)

## 1.1. Framework level

### 1.1.1. Dimension 1.1. Overall size and training capacity of companies

The overall size and training capacity of companies in Ireland is a key consideration in the context of CB LTMA. SMEs account for 99.8% of total (active) enterprises in Ireland and 65% of total employees, which increases to 68.4% when proprietors and family members engaged in the SME are included<sup>4</sup>. This means that SMEs are the main source of jobs in the Irish economy and who employ most apprentices. Conversely large firms, while accounting for only 0.2% of total enterprises, employ 31.6% of all persons engaged.

Dealing with SMEs first, the sectors where traditional craft apprenticeships are offered are primarily occupied by SMEs, except for a small proportion of some large multi-national corporations. The seven phased structure of the traditional craft apprenticeship means that apprentices are released from employment for phased blocks of up to 22 weeks throughout the duration of the programme. As reported by all interviewees, SMEs already struggle with releasing apprentices for off-the-job training, especially towards the latter stage of the apprenticeship as the apprentice becomes valued and integral members of the workforce – also amidst concerns that apprentices participating in LTM will not return or will be poached by sister/competitive employer. For many SMES located in remote locations, they are likely to have limited access to a talent pool. There was common agreement across all interviewees that SMEs are unlikely to agree to apprentices participating in CB LTM unless the mobility period accounts for one of the mandatory off-the-job phases, and that the employer is reciprocated or incentivised in some way.

With regards to SMEs hosting incoming apprentices, a key concern is that SMEs would simply not have additional resources to provide support over and above what they current offer to existing apprentices in terms of training. It is likely SMEs would have limited capacity to train apprentices who may have additional training and support needs.

Turning to multi-national corporation, all interviewees identified potential for CB LTM in relation to new Generation Apprenticeships<sup>5</sup> in industries where large

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Houses of the Oireachtas (2019b)

<sup>5</sup> Generation Apprenticeship were developed since 2016 and are part of a major expansion project of apprenticeships. Prior to 2016, apprenticeships existed in traditional craft-based occupations. Traditional craft apprenticeships exist alongside the new Generation Apprenticeships.

multi-national corporations are present such as accounting technicians, international financial services, insurance practice<sup>6</sup> and so on. For large multi-national corporations, it is reported that mobility is an established characteristic of the organisational structure whereby employees participate in mobility placements in European/international branches of the same organisation. In terms of both outgoing and incoming apprentices, it is expected apprentices would be supported within the context of existing HR functions and dedicated staff responsible for training and development, thus offering a potentially favourable environment for CB LTMA. Expanding Generation Apprenticeships into areas of industry brings a new mode of learning to a range of industries who had no prior experience of apprenticeships. Generation Apprenticeships present important opportunities for employers to attract talent at an earlier stage than they have been able to do so in the past. New employers are at the early stage of their experience with understanding apprenticeships. Introducing CB LTMA may be considered too much, too soon.

**1.1.2. Dimensions 1.2.and 1.3. Sectoral employers' organisations (SEOs) in the national, international and European context**

In relation to sectoral employers' organisations (SEOs), there is strong cooperation between SEOs in Ireland and practice of stakeholder cooperation on matters relating to education, training and development of employability skills in Ireland.

Stakeholder collaboration has intensified more recently as key actors have formed industry-led consortiums to inform the design and development of Generation Apprenticeships and improvements to traditional craft apprenticeships. Consortiums typically include representatives from government, education and training providers, enterprises, SEOs and so on. Sectoral employers' organisations contribute to issues relating to working conditions for apprentices, how technology impacts on sectors and what this means for curricula etc. Overall there is a good social partnership approach in Ireland, referred to by one interviewee as a 'cooperative model'.

On a European and International level many SEOs have established collaborative partnerships with their counter SEOs. One example can be

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<sup>6</sup> A full list of traditional craft and generation apprentices is available at: <http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/news/Pages/List%20of%20Apprenticeships%20in%20Ireland%20-%20Generation%20Apprenticeship.pdf>



highlighted in the case of Connect Ireland<sup>7</sup> who is the largest Engineering Union in Ireland, representing up to up to 40,000 workers. Connect has associations with the Global Power Trade Unions (Electrical) and the United Association in the US, Canada, Australia. As a member of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)<sup>8</sup>, Connect has a key role to place in supporting the development of apprenticeship policy across Europe. This represents a favourable environment to facilitate CB LTMA.

**1.1.3. Dimensions 1.4. Intra-EU trade; 1.5. Enterprise foreign affiliates; 1.6. International sourcing**

The UK, US, Germany and the Netherlands remain Ireland's most significant trading partners<sup>9</sup>. In recent years, the Irish Government has focused its efforts on internationalisation, adopting measures to prepare Irish businesses for the consequences of Brexit. The aim is to prepare businesses to remain competitive, diversify and grow both in existing and new markets.

As presented in evidence submitted to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report<sup>10</sup>, the share of total Irish exports in 2016 among large firms was 67%, compared with the SME contribution of 31%. This points to a significant proportion of SMEs that are neither exporting nor importing and solely focused on the domestic market. Limited trade relations may restrict capacity of SMEs to support CB LTMA.

In terms of international sourcing, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) released findings of survey on International Sourcing in Ireland for the period 2009 - 2011<sup>11</sup>.

The purpose of the survey was to establish data on the movement of Irish business activity abroad during the reference period 2009-2011. The results showed that almost 12% of large Irish enterprises (100 or more employees) engaged in international sourcing during the period 2009-2011. Around three-quarters of these enterprises were part of multinational enterprise groups with the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.connectunion.ie/about-our-trade-union/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&intPageId=5234&langId=en>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/its/internationaltradeinservices2018/>

<sup>10</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas (2019a)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/intss/internationalsourcingsurvey2009-2011/>  
<https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2008pressreleases/international sourcing-movingirishbusinessactivityabroad/>

head of the group residing outside of Ireland. This represents a decline in international sourcing compared to the reference period 2001-2006, when 38% of large Irish enterprises engaged in international sourcing. The level of international sourcing of Irish business activity was reported to be highest in the manufacturing sector (57%) and transport, storage & communication sector (54%). According to the CSO data, the results show 30% of all large Irish enterprises sourced core business internationally. Furthermore, 29% of enterprises sourced non-core support business functions internationally. The support business functions most likely to be sourced internationally by Irish enterprises are distribution (16%), marketing and sales (13%) and engineering (13%).

More recent data suggests a decline in international sources as the economy has moved into full recovery. Data shows that between 10-16% of employers move business functions to other EU Member States to reduce labour (or other) costs (medium level of international sourcing)<sup>1213</sup>.

On a sector level, in electrical and mechanical engineering, there are large multi-national corporations in Ireland who already engage in foreign investment. These include Jones Engineering<sup>14</sup>, Designer Group<sup>15</sup> and Suir Engineering<sup>16</sup> for example. Cross country mobility of their workforce (including apprentices) to European/International counterparts is not unusual in order to gain wider experience whilst working for their principal employer. Whilst good trade relations exist, one interviewee emphasised the need to ensure industry standards are maintained to the highest level. Whilst not insurmountable, ensuring comparability between levels of training within a mobility context across different European/International models of apprenticeships was highlighted as a key concern for the future of CB LTMA. Connect Ireland described recent experience of labour mobility whereby different skill levels between qualified workers from the USA were observed. In response, Connect Ireland is working on a pilot

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<sup>12</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International\\_sourcing\\_and\\_relocation\\_of\\_business\\_functions#International\\_sourcing\\_by\\_broad\\_economic\\_activity](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_sourcing_and_relocation_of_business_functions#International_sourcing_by_broad_economic_activity)

<sup>13</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/structural-business-statistics/global-value-chains/international-sourcing>

<sup>14</sup> <https://joneseng.com/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.designergrp.com/apprenticeship-mentoring-programme-ice/>

<sup>16</sup> Suir Engineering: <http://suieng.ie/>

project with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) to develop a module to bridge the gap between skills levels and ensure individuals are at the Level 6 requirements (this relates mainly to individuals who have finished their apprenticeships).

**1.1.4. Dimensions 1.7. Intra-EU labour migration for skilled labour; 1.8. Skills shortages in medium-level occupations; 1.10. Immigration policy**

With regards to labour migration in Ireland, the general consensus from the interviewed stakeholders is that migration is understood by policy makers to have had a significant benefit to the Irish economy, with the majority of migrants being economically active and making a valuable contribution to the Irish economy and society.

There is an historical tradition of movement of Irish people, both in terms of outward movement from Ireland and return movement to Ireland. Ireland has historically been a net exporter of people, however more recent trends show that Ireland has become a net importer of people<sup>17</sup>. As explained by one interviewee, previous economic events and the result of policy reactions have had a significant impact on labour market flows. As summarised in the study on mobility of workers, these include:

- the strong economic growth of the 1990s to the mid-2000s saw Ireland attract significant inward investment;
- the decision in 2004 to open the Irish labour market to accession countries was crucial in increasing inward movers;
- the impact of the economic crisis and the great recession in Ireland was severe;
- the recovery in the Irish economy resulted in an increase in net migration.

As noted by one interviewee, labour shortages experienced during the mid-2000s were satisfied by EU enlargement and greater mobility from Eastern Europe to Ireland. With improvement in the economies of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Ireland is not attracting the same interest from those workers in Ireland anymore. With concerns that Ireland is now at a point of an acute labour shortage (and no comfort blanket in terms of a supply of skilled labour), the need to unlock

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<sup>17</sup> European Commission (2018)

opportunities for skills development is considered vital. Apprenticeships are considered part of this discourse. The immediate focus is on expanding apprenticeships, attracting higher numbers of apprentices to improve the supply of skilled labour across a wide range of industries. Taking the construction industry for example, the sector is not producing the required number of apprentices to contribute to infrastructure projects currently taking in place in Ireland over the coming years (Intel project in Kildare and new children's hospital in Dublin). It is estimated alone that the Intel project will require over 8,000 skilled workers during the lifetime of the project. To make up for the shortfall in supply of skilled workers in Ireland, the need to attract international skilled workers is recognised.

In response to current labour shortages, Irish economic migration policy accommodates the arrival of non-EEA (European Economic Area<sup>18</sup>) nationals to fill capacity gaps in the domestic economy<sup>19</sup>. Figures published by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation show 13,398 permits for workers from outside the EEA were approved in 2018 — an annual increase of over 2,000<sup>20</sup>. Jobs offered to migrants through the Critical Skills Employment Permit scheme must pay a minimum of either 60,000 EUR per year (in most cases), or 30,000 EUR per year (if the job is on Ireland's Highly Skilled Occupations List). Whilst the measure is deemed to be critically important to growing Ireland's economy, two interviewees expressed concerns that this approach should not replace opportunities for Irish and EEA nationals to gain employment. It was strongly emphasized that the priority focus should be on ensuring there is a supply of skilled workers to meet demand for skills and to respond quicker as sectoral skills shortages emerge.

During one interview, the issue of skills shortages in the meat industry was highlighted to illustrate concerns regarding shortfalls in EU labour mobility in general. In response to significant skills shortages in the industry, the Irish government has already issued 911 (of an allocated 1,500) employment permits to non-EEA citizens for meat processing operatives<sup>21</sup>. With a European

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<sup>18</sup> EU28 Member States + Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway

<sup>19</sup> <https://workpermit.com/immigration/ireland/ireland-critical-skills-employment-permit>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/rules-on-employment-permits-for-non-european-workers-to-be-relaxed-1.3847996>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/1500-non-eea-work-permits-available-for-meat-plants/>

population of over 500 million citizens<sup>22</sup>, one Social Partner interviewee commented that the issuing of over 900 work permits to non-EEA citizens indicates either a monumental shortage of meat processing operatives across Europe, and/or a serious failing of cross boarder labour mobility in Europe. Moreover, it assumes the notion of labour mobility is far removed from the current policy discourse.

The European Commission has predicted that Ireland's GDP will grow by 5.6% by the end of 2019, up from a predicted rise of 4% in its summer 2019 economic forecast, and the highest in the EU for 2019<sup>23</sup>. As the economy continues to grow, the labour market has seen a return to pre-recession levels of demand for talent across all sectors. However, with a seasonally adjusted unemployment rate stood at 4.8 % in November 2019<sup>24</sup>, there are growing concerns about high levels of labour shortages across many sectors. This includes manufacturing, ICT, construction<sup>25</sup>. There was consensus from all the stakeholders interviewed that the issue of labour shortage cannot be resolved by in-coming apprentices across a range of sectors due to concerns of maintaining standards and health and safety. Whilst there was a shared view amongst interviewees that skills shortages makes mobility possible, given the significant shortage of supply in the Irish labour market, there are serious concerns about the exploitation of apprentices. Whilst recognising the contribution of apprenticeships to meeting labour market needs, there was a shared view that the use of incoming apprentices to address skills shortages runs the risk of devaluing the notion of apprenticeships. In the longer term, interviewees referred to the need for a change in mindset where opportunities for CB LTM within the context of VET, apprenticeships and employment are sustainable and more common practice.

#### **1.1.5. *Dimension 1.9. Share of job-related non-formal education and training sponsored by employers***

Compared to the EU average, Ireland reports relatively lower levels of participation in adult learning. In the background paper prepared for the 2018-2020 Further Education and Training Policy Framework for skills development of

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<sup>22</sup> [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/living\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/living_en)

<sup>23</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/european-commission-ups%20Ireland-s-growth-forecast-for-2019\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/european-commission-ups%20Ireland-s-growth-forecast-for-2019_en)

<sup>24</sup> <https://statbank.cso.ie/multiquicktables/quickTables.aspx?id=mum01>

<sup>25</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2016a)

people in employment<sup>26</sup>, in 2017, it is reported that the level of adult participation in lifelong learning in Ireland was 8.9%: lower than the EU average of 10.9% and lower than rates reported by Eurostat in Denmark (27%), Sweden (30%) and Finland (27%). It was also reported, that the participation rate in lifelong learning for those in employment in Ireland in 2017 indicate a similar shortfall with 8.3% of those in employment in Ireland engaging, against a 12% EU average.

As the Irish economy continues to grow and the number of unemployed people decline, it is documented that the Further Education and Training Policy Framework was developed to deal specifically with the skills needs of those in employment<sup>27</sup>. The framework is presented as a means to deliver on the National Skills Strategy 2025 and envisages a world of work in Ireland where:

- upskilling during one's working life is considered normal practice and leads to increased job security, earnings and autonomy at work for employees
- indigenous and multinational firms invest in the development of their staff and benefit through improved productivity and competitiveness of their employees and business
- FET provision is flexible, high quality, accessible and relevant to the changing needs of employees, the economy and industry.

National data on continuing vocational training (CVT) collected by the CSO found that approximately 77% of all private sector enterprises provided some CVT in 2015, a proportion higher than the EU average (73%)<sup>28</sup>. However, overall it is reported that Irish owned companies in most sectors have reduced employee training in the period 2000 to 2015<sup>29</sup>.

The available data and policy focus on upskilling and reskilling people in the workplace suggest employers are increasingly embracing and supporting participation of employees in job-related education and training. However, despite positive attitudes, this does not imply a favourable environment for the intake of apprentices on CB LTM.

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<sup>26</sup> SOLAS (2018)

<sup>27</sup> SOLAS (2018)

<sup>28</sup> Cited in SOALS (2018)

<sup>29</sup> Cited in SOLAS (2018)

#### **1.1.6. *Dimension 1.11. International qualifications***

International qualifications are delivered in Ireland and could lay the groundwork for the implementation of CB LTM. Some but not all international qualifications are mapped to the National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland (NFQ). For example, AAT level 2 and 3 correspond to Levels 5 and 6 of the NQF in Ireland. In addition, NARIC Ireland which provides advice on the academic recognition of a foreign qualification by comparing it, where possible, to a major award type and level on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

#### **1.1.7. *Dimension 1.12. Tradition regarding cross-border VET and/or labour mobility***

There is no real tradition of cross-border mobility in relation to apprenticeships. However, at the peak of the recession, many apprentices in the construction industry were unable to complete their apprenticeship in Ireland as high numbers of firms folded. In response, apprentices were funded under the European Lifelong Learning Programme to fulfil the remaining phase of their apprenticeship in Germany. No information has been identified on the experience of such mobility experiences.

There is a tradition of cross-border VET in relation to Post Leaving Certificates<sup>30</sup> in Ireland whereby programmes based on a learn-and-work model across the further education and higher education sectors have work placements (including cross-border) components. This is considered as a valuable opportunity to enhance the employability of learners and employment sectors. There is also a tradition of labour mobility in certain sectors. As previously noted, large multi-national companies in the construction sector and electrical and mechanical engineering sector already engage in labour mobility. The experiences from this may inform or influence the implementation of CB LTMA policy in Ireland.

In addition, one interviewee reported that some Education and Training Boards<sup>31</sup> are experimenting with mobility in apprenticeships though no further information was available at the time of writing up the case study.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.plccourses.ie/>

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.etbi.ie/etbs/directory-of-etbs/>

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## Key enablers and disablers at framework level

### Key enablers:

- Expansion of apprenticeships into new industry areas
- Presence of large multi-national corporations in industries covered by Generation Apprenticeships offers potential for apprentices to engage in CB LTM
- Potential to capitalise on experience of mobility in VET programmes

### Key disablers:

- The overall size and training capacity of companies was highlighted by all interviewees as being the main disabler to CB LTM for SMEs.
  - Large number of SMEs with limited resource capacity to agree to existing apprentices participating in periods of LTM. Limited resources to support receiving apprentices
  - Fear that apprentices participating in LTM will not return or will be poached by sister/competitive employer
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## 1.2. System level

### 1.2.1. Dimension 2.1. Apprenticeship type and 2.3. Apprenticeship function

Following the 2013 national review of apprenticeship training (reporting in 2014), and as reinforced in the Action Plan to extend Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020<sup>32</sup>, work has continued to expand the national apprenticeship system into new industry sectors, leading to awards from Levels 5 to 10 on the NFQ. There are now 54 apprenticeship programmes available in Ireland (an increase from 27 in 2016) with a further 24 in the pipeline<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2016a)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/news/Pages/List%20of%20Apprenticeships%20in%20Ireland%20-%20Generation%20Apprenticeship.pdf>



Apprenticeship is defined as a programme of education and training which combines learning in the work place with learning in a training centre or educational college. Apprenticeship provides the opportunity for learning acquired off-the-job to be applied and further developed under supervision in the workplace. Apprenticeship in Ireland is classified as Type A according to the classification of Apprenticeship undertaken as part of the Cedefop Cross-Nation overview of Apprenticeships<sup>34</sup>. In summary, Type A is understood as 'apprenticeship as an education and training system' where the apprenticeship is aimed at providing people with full competence and capability in an 'apprenticeable' occupation or trade.

Cross-border LTM is not a formal component of the current apprenticeship model (referring both to traditional craft apprenticeships and Generation Apprenticeships). As previously noted, interviewees noted that within certain industries, there is some practice of cross-border mobility offered by employers with partner organisations overseas, but this would be on a company by company basis.

Traditional craft apprenticeships consist of seven phases: three off-the-job and four on-the-job. Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 take place with the employer. Phases 2, 4 and 6 take place off-the-job. Apprentices are employed by a SOLAS-approved employer for the duration of the programme which is generally between 2-4 years. This seven-phase model is considered a challenge for CB LTB as this could potentially require apprentices to be released from the workplace for block-periods of up to 40 weeks should the CB LTB component be undertaken as part of the off-the-job training component.

#### **1.2.2. Dimensions 2.2. Share of VET students in apprenticeship schemes**

According to SOLAS, the current share of VET students in apprenticeship schemes in Ireland is approximately 10%. There are currently 175,000 unique learners who enrol on FET programmes each calendar year. The population of apprentices at the end of 2019 was close to 18,000.

Regarding the extent to which the current share of VET students in apprenticeship schemes may influence positively or negatively the (future) implementation of the CBLTM policy, one interviewee noted that there is

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<sup>34</sup> Cedefop (2018)

currently insufficient evidence/research to answer definitively at present. There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that apprentices from Ireland work in many countries around the world after qualifying, which confirms the transferability of their skills (e.g. UK, Australia etc) but at present there is no firm research evidence or data to underpin this.

**1.2.3. Dimensions 2.4. Apprenticeship governance; 2.5. Funding of the in-company training; 2.6. Duration of the whole apprenticeship period; 2.7 Duration of in-company placements; 2.8. Alternance**

**Apprenticeship governance:** The structure of apprenticeship governance in Ireland has potential to facilitate the implementation of CB LTMA in the future this is because there is a strong culture of collaboration between key stakeholders involved in apprenticeship policy.

At present, SOLAS (agency of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) with responsibility for funding, planning and coordinating further education and training in Ireland) has statutory responsibility for the national apprenticeship system which spans further and higher education. SOLAS has been involved in the implementation of the apprenticeship expansion policy since 2014, supporting the DES and working closely with key stakeholders. This includes, the ETBs, education and training providers, the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); the enterprise community (employers and trade unions) etc. In addition, the Apprenticeship Council (established in 2014 following the independent review of apprenticeships) is occupied by representatives from all major stakeholders involved in education and skills – representing a social partnership between the Government and key partners to ensure apprenticeships are aimed at meeting the needs of the economy. Collectively, the Council oversee the development 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 traditional 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.

**Funding:** As reported in evidence by SOLAS to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report<sup>35</sup>, substantial public funding is allocated each year to apprenticeship provision. 120 million EUR was allocated for apprenticeships in 2018.

Although there are high hopes that the expansion of apprenticeships will attract talent to SMEs across a broader range of sectors and address the skills needs, a major obstacle to the expansion of new apprenticeships is cost. This is due to the fact employers are required to pay a salary and subsistence while the apprentice is participating in off-the-job phases of the apprenticeship (this is not the case in the traditional craft apprenticeship where the employer pays the apprentice both on-the-job and off-the-job for the duration of the apprenticeship - see also the discussion on remuneration below). This is considered a major disincentive and unlikely to facilitate opportunities for CB LTMA in the future. Employers are unlikely to allow for apprentices to participate in CB LTM if required to foot the bill for this. It would therefore be necessary to consider incentives to support SMEs, such as tax incentives or bursary. This does not negate the fact that employers are likely to perceive periods of CB LTMA as far too disruptive to the organisational structure and strategic direction of the company.

**Duration of the whole programme:** For the traditional craft apprenticeships, traditionally, apprentices trained under a 'time served' model, whereby apprentices were required to 'serve' as an apprentice for a pre-determined amount of time – this is typically over a duration of 4 years in total. Traditional craft-apprenticeships typically consist of seven phases: three off-the-job and four on-the-job. Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 take place with the employer. Phases 2, 4 and 6 take place off-the-job. The total duration of off-the-job phases is approximately 40 weeks, of which 26 are in the Training Centre (phase 2) and two seven-week periods (phases 4 and 6) in institutes of technology.

Generation Apprenticeships vary in their overall duration and can be between 2-4 years in total with different patterns of time spent on and off the job. For example, Accounting Technician Apprentices work four days a week with a registered employer and study one day a week with a local college on a two-year employment contract<sup>36</sup>. The Chef De Partie apprenticeship is a 4-year

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<sup>35</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas (2019a)

<sup>36</sup> See: <http://accountingtechnicianapprenticeship.ie/>

programme which involves 3 or 4 days per week on-the-job training, and 1 or 2 days per week off-the-job, depending on the time of year<sup>37</sup>.

Key questions from all interviewees in relation to the traditional craft apprenticeships, is at what stage and phase of the apprenticeship programme would a period of CB LTM take place – at the beginning or end of the apprenticeship? During one of the phases of off-the-job training or on-the-job training? Regarding at what stage a period of CB LTM could take place, several interviews expressed that if apprentices participate in CB LTM towards the latter stages of the programme, they are likely to be well-established employees making valued contributions to the organisation. With this in mind, employers may be reluctant to approve extensive periods of CB LTM, unless they are compensated in return. The same issue can also be applied to CB LTM within Generation Apprenticeships.

Regarding the issue of whether or not CB LTM should take place during a phase of on or off-the-job-training, mixed views were expressed in this respect. On the one hand, participating in CB LTM during an off-the-job phase would be less disruptive to the apprentices' employer. On the other hand, the real value in a mobility experience is seen in participating in on-the-job training within a receiving host company.

**Alternance:** Apprenticeship programmes provide at least a minimum of 50% (and up to 80%) workplace-based learning<sup>38</sup>.

The traditional craft apprenticeships have the seven phased approach and generation apprenticeships comprise of different patterns of time spent on and off the job depending on the individual apprenticeship programme.

In relation to the seven phased approach of the traditional craft apprenticeships, block release for off-the-job training is already identified as challenging for employers. To release apprentices for another period of on-the-job training is considered to be even more problematic. There are also issues around remuneration, health and safety and recognition of skills.

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<sup>37</sup> See: <http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/apprentice/Pages/ChefDePartie.aspx>

<sup>38</sup> For the hairdressing apprenticeship (generation apprenticeship model, the proposed ratio is 80% on-the-job training with the employer and 20% off-the-job training with an education provider.

**1.2.4. Dimensions 2.9. Type of contract; 2.10. Status of apprentices; 2.11. Remuneration; 2.12. Occupational health & safety standards and social insurance**

**Type of contract and status of the apprentice:** An apprenticeship is created when a SOLAS-approved employer takes on an apprentice and agrees on a contract of employment. The apprentice assumes the status of an employee bound by a contract of employment. As a contract is in place, this is considered to limit opportunities for CB LTMA.

**Remuneration:** Apprentices are paid for the duration of their apprenticeship. For apprenticeships developed before 2016 (i.e. traditional craft apprenticeships), the employer pays the apprentice a wage during this period. The Government covers the cost of the apprentice's wage during the off-the-job training periods. This is in the form of a training allowance (through the National Training Fund) paid by the local ETB while the apprentice is attending the off-the-job training.

For apprenticeships developed in 2016 and after (i.e. Generation Apprenticeships), the employer pays the apprentice a wage for the duration of the apprenticeship whereby the rate of pay is agreed between the employer and the apprentice. This is highlighted as a key challenge for SMEs, whereby paying a salary and subsistence whilst apprentices are not in the workplace is a major disincentive. This was highlighted by all interviewees as being a main obstacle to CB LTM for employers offering Generation Apprenticeships. A question raised by interviewees is: 'Who pays the apprentice during periods of CB LTM and will this vary between traditional craft apprenticeships and Generation Apprenticeships?'

**Occupational health and safety standards and social insurance:** The Apprenticeship Code of Practice<sup>39</sup> sets out participating employers' and apprentices' duties and responsibilities. Apprentices and employers sign up to the Code of Practice as part of the statutory apprenticeship process<sup>40</sup>. In the context of CB LTMA, the issue of health and safety and insurance of apprentices (both outgoing and incoming apprentices) was considered as the most significant barrier to participation. Whilst measures are in place to maintain health and safety standards (including routine health and safety checks, approved employers, and in the case

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<sup>39</sup> SOLAS (2016)

<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/employers/Pages/EmployerInfo.aspx> for further information.

of the construction sector – the Construction Skills Certification Scheme<sup>41</sup>, overall there are major concerns about the health and safety of both outgoing and incoming apprentices. Concerns were raised by interviewees about comparison of industry standards from one country to another and the implications this may present for health and safety in the context of CB LTM.

There is common view that opportunities for CB LTM would be more appropriate once the apprentice has completed their apprenticeship programme. Indeed, continued post-apprenticeship training was considered essential to ensure individuals in the workplace have the skills to meet the requirements of a rapidly changing labour market and to be able to benefit from opportunities offered by new technologies.

#### **1.2.5. Dimensions 2.13. Curriculum training standard; 2.14. Use of validation**

All Apprenticeships operate to national standards and within the statutory framework for apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are linked to the NFQ. A number of issues concerning curriculum training standards have been identified and are of key consideration in the context of CB LTMA:

- Some concern has been raised that the expansion of apprenticeship may allow for the development of alternative training standards and therefore a lack of conformation of the key common standards apprenticeships were built on.
- Interviewees raised concerns that curriculum training standards followed by incoming apprentices in the host country may not be of the same level as those used in Ireland. There are serious concerns that this may lead to a diminishment of standards which have upheld the core value of Irish apprenticeship.
- A further concern relates to the recognition of practices conducted abroad and the need to ensure learning gained during CB LTM is fully recognised and contributes to the apprenticeship curricula.

With regards to the validation of non-formal and informal learning (known as RPL in Ireland) to shorten the apprenticeship duration this has been in practice for some time – particularly following the economic crisis. During this time, RPL was used to support redundant apprentices who could submit an application to have trade related work experience or formal training recognised as part of their apprenticeship thus enabling them to complete the apprenticeship. At present, registered apprentices can submit an application for phase and/or time exemptions

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.solas.ie/Pages/CSCS.aspx>

in recognition of formal qualifications or trade related work experience. Time-served apprentices can be offered the opportunity to validate their competence leading to the Record of Attainment or the QQI Advanced Certificate – Craft.

In the context of Generation Apprenticeships, through existing arrangements for recognition, SOLAS envisage an increase in the demand for RPL from those individuals already working in these areas where new apprenticeships have been introduced and who now wish to obtain the new qualification. This could be considered as an enabler for CB LTM.

While there is no evidence whether incoming or outgoing apprentices can use VNFIL/RPL to shorten their apprenticeships, we can consider that RPL in the Irish context would hypothetically count towards the diplomas of mobile apprentices and would therefore act as an enabler of mobility.

#### **1.2.6. Dimension 2.15 Legal basis for apprenticeships and integration of mobility**

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. In evidence provided to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills<sup>42</sup>, the need to simplify the regulatory environment in which apprenticeships systems operate was highlighted. Updating the Industrial Training Act of 1967 is seen as necessary to better reflect changes in the business environment, facilitate the streamlining of the new apprenticeship development process, allow for greater agility and responsiveness of the system was highlighted.

At present the legal framework for apprenticeships does not favour the policy for CB LTM. This is because in Ireland an apprenticeship represents a legal contract between the employer and the apprentice – raising concerns about the legal protection of apprentices on periods of CB LTM.

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<sup>42</sup> Cited in Houses of the Oireachtas (2019a)

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### **Key enablers and disablers at system level**

Key enablers:

- None identified

Key disablers:

- Seven phase structure of the traditional craft apprenticeship model may limit opportunities for apprentices to be away from the workplace for additional periods than currently required
  - Concerns related to health and safety of apprentices and maintaining curriculum training standards
  - Funding regime for apprentices whereby employers cover the off-the-job phases of Generation Apprenticeships
  - Legal framework is complex and considered to limit the agility and responsiveness of apprenticeships to meet employers need – therefore unlikely to support CB LTM
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## **1.3. Implementation level**

### **1.3.1. Dimension 3.1. Governance of apprenticeship implementation**

As discussed under dimension 2.4, there is a strong culture of collaboration between stakeholders in the development and implementation of apprenticeships. Employer organisations and trade unions already contribute to policy development and could be expected to input into discussion and potential planning around CB LTMA.

### **1.3.2. Dimension 3.2. Age of apprentices at enrolment**

Apprenticeships are open to persons of all age groups above the statutory school leaving age. While it is possible to proceed to apprenticeship training following completion of lower secondary education (Junior Certificate), around 66%<sup>43</sup> of learners continue to complete upper secondary education (Leaving Certificate). This means that apprentices nowadays are slightly older than in the past when less young people completed upper secondary education.

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<sup>43</sup> SOLAS interviewee



The cohort currently in apprenticeship programmes has an age range of between the early 20s to the mid-40s. Being slightly older, this means that some apprentices may have family and other commitments and therefore may not be interested in CB LTM. For some apprentices, parents may be averse to their child engaging in CB LTM without being fully qualified in the trade for which they are preparing for.

Another issue related to the profile of apprentices is the cost of accommodation. In relation to incoming apprentices. Several interviewees (two social partner interviewees, two national expert interviewees) warned of limited and very high costs of rental accommodation in Dublin. It is expected that this would make the logistical costs of CB LTMA untenable.

One interviewee (national expert) also raised concerns about the 'readiness' of apprentices not only from a skills perspective but also in terms of the health and well-being of both outgoing and incoming apprentices. There is an increased focus on the mental health of young people in Ireland and there is a concern that young people sent abroad for a long period may not know where to go for help or whom to ask. These issues do not create a favourable environment for CB LTMA.

Lastly on the age of apprentice, there are expectations that parents will be concerned about apprentices being in a different country from long period of time.

#### **1.3.3. Dimension 3.3. Employers' attitude towards apprenticeship**

The number of employers participating in apprenticeships has increased in recent years. In 2019, over 6,000 employers used apprenticeships, with over 17,000 apprentices<sup>44</sup> currently completing their training. Despite growing number of employers in apprenticeships, a number of factors were highlighted as influencing employers' attitude towards apprenticeships. These are discussed below.

Culturally and socially, it is widely reported that apprenticeships have suffered from a lack of parity of esteem with other educational options. In evidence submitted to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills<sup>45</sup>, it is acknowledged 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 Central Application Office<sup>46</sup> (CAO) points and entry to higher education. Evidence submitted by the IBEC noted 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"*. Moreover, it is

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<sup>44</sup> SOLAS interview

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Houses of the Oireachtas (2019a)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.cao.ie/index.php?page=points>

reported that the school league tables reinforce the idea the schools who send all their students to higher education are perceived as 'better' schools. As argued by IBEC and reinforced by several interviewees, this undermines the efforts of schools that promote the apprenticeship and traineeship options to their students. All witnesses to the Committee and as echoed by the interviewees, a significant barrier to recruitment is persuading public opinion that an apprenticeship is a credible and equal route to a professional career.

#### **1.3.4. Dimensions 3.4 and 3.5 (Long-term) mobility national strategies or initiatives**

National strategies or initiatives for long-term mobility do not exist in Ireland for either apprenticeships or VET overall. Apprenticeship mobility is not seen as a priority in the Irish education policy agenda. For example, the Irish International Education Strategy 2016-2020 does not make any reference to apprenticeships.<sup>47</sup> The topic of cross-country mobility receives little attention in the country's Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019, where it is briefly mentioned in the context of the recognition of prior learning<sup>48</sup>. Here, VET mobility is seen as linked to the strategic objective 'Promote and provide high quality Further Education and Training (FET)'<sup>49</sup>.

Thus, Ireland's main scheme for international apprenticeship mobility is Erasmus+, managed at the national level by Léargas,<sup>50</sup> a not-for-profit organisation wholly owned by the Department of Education and Skills. Under Key Action 1 on mobility, the interviewee from Léargas confirmed that to date, no applications have been received in relation to apprentices participating in mobility placements abroad. At present most interest in Key Action 1 tends to be on the mobility of VET staff. As Léargas confirmed, whilst private or public organisation are eligible to apply; individuals cannot apply for funding directly. One of the issues is that Léargas deals primarily with education and training providers – some of which may not be providers of apprenticeships. Efforts are underway to promote Key Action 1 to private organisations, but interest thus far has been limited.

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<sup>47</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2016b)

<sup>48</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2014)

<sup>49</sup> European Commission, (2019)

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.leargas.ie/>

#### **1.3.5. Dimension 3.6. Flexibility of curriculum to include learning from mobility**

The need to introduce flexible learning opportunities across the further and higher education systems was highlighted by several interviewees. As previously reported, the Apprenticeship Council was tasked examining issues associated with creating a more flexible and accessible model of apprenticeship that could meet the needs of a diverse range of employers. To date, Generation Apprenticeships are positioned as a new flexible industry-led apprenticeship that has been created with a diverse range of programmes at levels 5-10 on the NFQ. Interviewees share the view that apprenticeships are incredibly important for talent, pipeline and opening up post level two opportunities that in the past have been mainly limited to higher education. To ensure greater flexibility in apprenticeships, some Generation Apprenticeships lend themselves to more flexible approaches to learning including blended and on-line learning to further facilitate participation in apprenticeships and to reflect the changing workplaces and industry areas where new apprenticeships exist. Moreover, Ó Murchadha and Murphy (2015) argue that ‘through collaboration, there is an opportunity to design a modern model of excellence for the delivery of apprenticeship training, flexible enough to minimise the risks of future cyclical shocks, thereby improving the labour market for the betterment of society and ensuring the ability to meet future skills needs’.

There has been some concern that 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 (see section above on limitations of the legal framework for apprenticeships).

#### **1.3.6. Dimension 3.7. Methodologies and guidelines**

There are no other methodologies or guidelines in place to support CB LTM in apprenticeships beyond the context of Erasmus +.

#### **1.3.7. Dimensions 3.8. Authorities promoting long-term mobility of apprentices; 3.9. Involvement of intermediary organisations and structures;**

At present, Léargas is the only known authority to promote CB LTMA – specifically promoted in the context of Erasmus+, though as stated no applications related to apprentices under Key Action 1 have been received. One issue is that employers are unlikely to be aware of funding possibilities for CB LTMA through the Erasmus + programme. Efforts to promote CB LTMA could made in this respect.

As previously note, a strong model of stakeholder collaboration is in place with consortiums established to support the ongoing development and implementation of apprenticeships. All key partners have a potential a role to play in promoting CB LTMA.

The difficulty of involving certain intermediary organisations in CB LTMA developments was highlighted by one interviewee. It was noted that in some service areas, trade agreements are in place whereby employers are required to comply with certain regulation requirements, including paying minimum rates of pay and training opportunities. Difficulty has been experienced in trying to establish agreements in certain service areas where there is no shortage of individuals prepared to work and thus no benefit in signing sector agreements that may place unwanted restrictions on hiring and training of staff. This attitude does not represent a favourable approach to CB LTMA.

#### **1.3.8. Dimension 3.10. Role and capacity of VET providers in implementing mobility**

Education and training providers currently organise mobility projects in the context of Post Leaving Certificate programmes<sup>51</sup>. According to Léargas the support systems currently in place seem to work well from the perspective of VET providers implementing mobility.

In the context of Key Action 1 (Learning mobility of Individuals) of the Erasmus + project, at present most interest has been on mobility opportunities to support the professional development of staff. Practitioners engage in mobility projects with the view to establishing European partners to participate in future mobility opportunities for both learners (including apprentices) and practitioners. This is expected to create favourable conditions for CB LTMA opportunities in the future.

Interviewees (national experts and ministry representatives) shared the view that education and training providers in Ireland are responsive and supportive of policy developments. Interviewees felt practitioners would be responsive to CB LTMA and could assist in supporting opportunities for learning, act in the capacity of validating learning outcomes and be involved in language support. Whilst VET providers could support a system of LTM, they would need clear guidance on how to support and implement CB LTMA in the context of both outgoing and incoming apprentices.

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<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.plccourses.ie/>

#### **1.3.9. Dimension 3.11. Funding of long-term mobility**

Opportunities for CB LTMA are available through the Erasmus +, managed by Léargas. There are no other funding opportunities at national level to support CB LTM in apprenticeships.

#### **1.3.10. Dimensions 3.12. Employers' interest in receiving apprentices from abroad on long-term mobility; 3.13. Employers' interest in letting apprentices go abroad on long-term mobility; 3.14. Apprentices and their families' interest in long-term mobility**

**Employers interest in receiving apprentices from abroad on LTM:** There is no evidence to suggest that employers are interested in CB LTMA. Indeed, one interviewee questioned if *'anyone has asked employers if they are interested in CB LTM in apprenticeships – nationally or on a European scale'*. Reasons why employers might not be interested are likely to be due to the costs associated with additional training to apprentices from abroad, additional time and resources to support logistical arrangements, potential language barriers and concerns about maintaining health and safety and curriculum training standards. There was also a view from one Social Partner interviewee and one national expert interviewee that employers may perceive the training of an apprentice who will return home after a mobility period as a 'waste of time' from their perspective.

**Employers interest in letting apprentices go abroad on abroad on LTM:** There is very little-known experience of CB LTMA in Ireland. The idea of allowing apprentices (as employees) to take between 3-6 months away from the workplace is not part of employers thinking. Timing is also a key issue. At a time when the economy is in full recovery, there are serious concerns about critical labour shortages in the very near future and therefore employers will not want to lose apprentices for long periods of mobility. In any case, there was clear consensus that employers would need to be compensated, perhaps through tax incentives or reciprocal arrangements.

**Apprentices and their families' interest in CB LTM:** There is no concrete evidence to suggest apprentices and their families' are interested in CB LTM in apprenticeships or not. An important consideration in this respect is the perception and interests of young people and their parents in apprenticeships more generally. As previously noted, the tradition of learner progression in Ireland is from second level school-based education, to third-level higher education degree level. This is the most route most school leavers take and is widely promoted by parents as

some have argued, by schools and guidance support. However, with high dropout rates in some third level courses, (up to 70% in third level technology courses), this cohort of people are looking for an alternative route through third-level education. As one interviewee noted, this group of individuals represent a lost cohort and failing of the system to provide alternative routes for a more diverse range of learners. With changing demographics, a surge in the number of young people leaving second-level education in 10 years' time is expected. One interviewee explained that the existing network of third level higher education institutions will not have the capacity to accommodate such large numbers. This calls for a more diverse range of options at third-level.

In response, there is a key challenge to promote the benefits of apprenticeships and raise awareness of apprenticeships as a valid and valuable option for school leavers. Guidance counsellors have a role play in this respect. Employer perspectives on apprenticeships could also raise the profile of apprenticeships.

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## **Key enablers and disablers at implementation level**

### **Key enablers:**

- Strength of stakeholder collaboration
- Greater flexibility in apprenticeship delivery with the introduction of Generation Apprenticeships
- Willingness of VET providers in general to support improvements to Apprenticeship delivery and their influential role in convincing employers to get involved

### **Key disablers:**

- Older apprentices may have family and other commitments that may limit their interest in participating in CB LTM in apprenticeships
  - No national strategies for CB LTM in apprenticeships and little interest in Key Area 1 of the Erasmus + programme – limits opportunities to gain experience of CB LTM in apprenticeships
  - High cost of rental accommodation in parts of Ireland might make the logistical costs for incoming apprentices impossible to meet
  - Apprenticeships have suffered from a lack of parity of esteem with other educational options – partly explained by over emphasis on transition to higher education (fuelled by strong focus on CAO points)
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## CHAPTER 2. Latest and future developments

This section provides a reflection on latest and future developments that are likely to influence potential for CB LTMA in Ireland in the future.

### 2.1. Framework level

In terms of latest and future developments at framework level, there is a growing emphasis on the need to support SMEs in their efforts to stay ahead competitively and continue to grow and future-proof their businesses. In response, efforts are underway to support SME enhance their talent pool whereby close collaboration between SMEs in a region and local education providers (ETBs, Institutes of Technology, Universities) is critical to providing the pipeline of skills needed for future jobs as well as facilitating accredited lifelong learning to upskill current staff<sup>52</sup>. Increasing the range of sectors covered by apprenticeships and making the apprenticeship path more attractive is expected to be significant to SMEs in the future. However, it is recognised that many SMEs do not have the resources or known-how in terms of engaging with apprenticeships and in some sectors, they are in direct competition leading multi-nationals in the recruitment of human resources to meet their talent and skills needs. In going forward the policy efforts must be on engaging more SMEs and increasing their participation in apprenticeships. As expressed by interviewees, the priority is on creating greater flexibility in apprenticeship delivery and identifying ways to support (possibly incentives) SMEs to take on apprentices. Efforts can then then to the notion of CB LTMA however future discussions are likely to centre around securing additional resources to facilitate CB LTMA as employers should not be expected to incur any additional expense in the context of both outgoing and incoming mobility.

To understand issues SMEs face in relation to apprenticeships at industry level, the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) is currently undertaking some research on trades that are not doing so well due to slow recovery from the economic crisis. The research is exploring how and why SMEs are struggling with allowing apprentices to attend off-the-job component. As noted above, the seven phased approach of the apprenticeship models requires apprentices to attend three phases of off-the-job training for up to periods of 22 weeks. For many employers, this is problematic. The outcomes of this research are likely to provide important insights into issues SMEs face in losing apprentices for periods of time mid-way

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.wdc.ie/smes-in-ireland-what-are-the-issues/>



through their apprenticeship programme which could inform thinking around CB LTMA.

Another key issue at framework level relates to the issues of labour shortages and extent to which Ireland can supply the level of skilled workers required to meet the demands of economic growth. As mentioned two large construction projects are underway. In response, the need to rely on EU and international labour mobility is expected to address the shortfall in the skilled workforce. Moreover, opportunities for validation of non-formal and informal learning can also be used to support individuals gain recognition of their learning gained outside formal education to meet industry qualification level requirements.

## 2.2. System level

As presented in section 1.2.1, recent policy efforts have focused on expanding the national apprenticeship system into new industry sectors and making improvements to traditional craft apprenticeships. There are now 54 apprenticeship programmes available in Ireland (an increase from 27 in 2016) with a further 24 in the pipeline<sup>53</sup>. Whilst apprentice registrations and employer engagement in apprenticeships continues to rise, there is a need to promote the potential of apprenticeships as a credible and valuable route. As part of this efforts are underway to address the gender balance<sup>54</sup> and attract higher numbers of participants to sectors that in the past may have been accessible to many young people. In the future, the need to expand options in level 3 provision has an equal and highly valued level 3 option will be essential to meet demographic changes and the needs of a wider cohort of young people. Interviewees shared the view that apprenticeship programmes that offer opportunities for CB LTM may be an attractive feature to prospective apprentices and their future career prospects.

The issue of funding in the context of Generation Apprenticeship is expected to generate ongoing discussions and will be a key consideration for the capacity of CB LTMA in the future.

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<sup>53</sup> See <http://www.apprenticeship.ie>

<sup>54</sup> As identified in a Review of pathways to participation in apprenticeship published by SOLAS (2018)

Work currently underway by Connect Ireland into matching curriculum training standards between skilled workers in Ireland and those coming from different countries is currently underway. As noted under section 1.1.3, Connect Ireland are currently participating in a pilot study with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) to develop a module to address the gap between skill levels. The outcomes of this research may also provide useful insights into issues related to recognition of skills within a CB LTMA context.

### 2.3. Implementation level

In terms of latest and future developments at implementation level, as noted in the previous section efforts are needed to increase the visibility of apprenticeship opportunities. In response SOLAS are also currently focusing efforts on the promotion and marketing of Generation Apprenticeships with the view to commissioning a comprehensive national recruitment campaign directed at candidates, companies and the general public. Building on Ireland's success in the World Skills Competition<sup>55</sup>, it is considered necessary to showcase the variety of careers and opportunities apprenticeships have to offer.

As reported in evidence to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills<sup>56</sup>, there is recent 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. These are critical factors influencing interest in apprenticeships – especially by young people and their parents. As identified by several interviewees, there is some work to do in the area of guidance to help reduce the high level of drop out for some people going into first year Level 3 provision. Improving the image of apprenticeship and information, advice and guidance in the future may mitigate against some of these factors.

As noted in section 1.2, a review of pathways to participation in apprenticeship published in 2018<sup>57</sup> identified key challenges relating to gender, disability and socio-economic circumstances, evident in the current apprentice population as reported by SOLAS (2018). The review sets out five steps to tackle under-

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<sup>55</sup> <https://worldskills.org/members/ireland/>

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Houses of the Oireachtas (2019a)

<sup>57</sup> SOLAS (2018B)

representation and exclusion in the apprenticeship system, and these are expected to help raise the profile and image of apprenticeships and in turn.

Lastly, one important development at implementation level relates to plans by SOLAS to monitor apprenticeship patterns. The aim is to track the apprentices in terms of their transition and where their apprenticeship journey takes them. The intention is to generate data on education and employment outcomes and provide insights into the social and economic dimensions of apprenticeships.

# Conclusions

Since 2014, Ireland has been in a phase of apprenticeship growth. A new generation of apprenticeships have been developed to complement existing traditional craft apprenticeships. The current policy focus is on driving greater employer engagement to ensure sustainability of the new apprenticeships programmes.

Now in full economic recovery with a huge demand on skills, the Irish labour market faces a knowledge and skills deficit. The need to ensure the apprenticeship system contributes to skills development is imperative and of immediate concern. By 2020, the aim is to have over 70 apprenticeship programmes in place, spanning the full range of industry sectors and leading to awards from Level 5 to 10 on the NFQ.

At present, national strategies or initiatives for long-term mobility in apprenticeships do not exist in Ireland. Given the focus on apprenticeship expansion and labour shortages, the notion of introducing CB LTMA does not feature in the current policy discourse.

Based on the information gathered through desk research and interviews, overall it can be concluded that CB LTMA is an area of key interest and has the potential to widen horizons for apprentices and their employers in the future. There are enablers currently in place to facilitate CB LTMA including close collaboration between key stakeholders, responsiveness of VET providers to facilitate the process and greater flexibility in the apprenticeship model. However, key factors limiting the capacity for CB LTMA were also identified. These mainly relate to the overall size and training capacity of SMEs in Ireland and concerns related to maintaining curriculum training and health and safety standards and social insurance. With the expectation apprentices would enter CB LTM placements mid-apprenticeship, this was mentioned as being at a critical time when the apprentice is growing into valuable employees making essential contributions to the growth and strategic direction of the company. In the current economic climate and imminent labour shortages, employers will not take favourably to losing apprentices to long periods of mobility.

In summary, developing an environment and the necessary conditions to facilitate CB LTMA is not insurmountable – it is just not a priority for apprenticeship policy at this moment in time.

## Annex 1. Interview partners

Representatives from:

- SOLAS
- Education and Training Boards Ireland
- Leargase
- Connection Trade Union Ireland
- Construction Industry Federation (CIF)
- Irish Business & Employers Confederation (IBEC)
- Teachers' Union of Ireland - TUI
- SIPTU (The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union)
- Higher Education Authority (HEA)

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