ITAC Response to Position Paper on Apprenticeship Review

ITAC response to Apprenticeship Review Group - Position Paper

1. Range of Occupations

The current range of apprenticeships should be broadened, with the proviso that the occupations are relevant in terms of employability for the apprentice and meet the needs of the labour market. There is a consensus that the present craftsperson Trades are too narrowly defined and allied to industry sectors that are also narrowly defined. New and emerging Trades need to be identified and given consideration in the context of changing technologies and roles of craftspersons.

The more technical Trades, which provide skill profiles to the craftsperson that can be applied across many industry and service sectors, should not be aligned exclusively to single industry sectors, e.g. Electrical Installation is aligned with the construction sector. In addition many Trades give technical competences and roles to craftspersons that overlap with those of technicians who possess level 6/7 technician qualifications.

SOLAS should have the role of determining the classification of vocational disciplines as Trades. It should conduct meta-level and sectoral level needs’ analyses continually to support such decisions.

The experience with ‘new’ trades such as Floor & Wall Tiling and Electrical Security has been that they have not been viable in the long-term and numbers registered have all but collapsed. These ‘new’ apprenticeships took a significant length of time to develop and implement from the initial decision to designate as trades (typically up to five years). In this time the market had changed fundamentally. A more streamlined system for designing and implementing changes will be needed in future to ensure ongoing relevance and viability.

Propose broadening apprenticeship to include:

- Outcomes for some trades at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 (common across Europe)
- Outcomes for ‘master’ tradespersons at NFQ Level 7 or above.

Broadening the range of apprenticeships probably wouldn’t be taken to the levels implemented in some European systems but there would be merit in the Irish context of focusing on specific areas. Industry buy-in is critical if broadening the range of apprenticeships. Certain traineeships could possibly be restructured as apprenticeships. All programmes should have progression opportunities.

2. Governance

There is uncertainty here given the potential roles of SOLAS nationally and the new Education & Training Boards locally/regionally. SOLAS should have the following roles:

1. Planning the provision of apprenticeship Trades in allocations that reflect as close a match as possible between supply and demand for each Trade (on a rolling 3 year basis). This will involve projections of supply and demand by Trade.
2. An important function of SOLAS also is the planning of skills profiles to ensure that the range of apprenticeship Trades continue to meet industry needs. This will involve wide stakeholder consultation and forecasting.
4. Funding of contracts to develop and deliver the Advanced Craft Certificate programme in each Trade (see 6. Funding).
5. Develop a national database of apprentice employers and allocation of apprentices to employers (see 9. Providers & Delivery Methods).

For these planning responsibilities SOLAS must develop relationships with a broad section of industrial and service sectors, e.g. the Education and Training Boards which can conduct needs’ surveys at a regional level, the sectoral committees within IBEC, the FDI manufacturing and services sectors, SMEs, and large public sector employers such as hospitals and educational institutions, and unions, who should be encouraged to continue to recruit apprentices under the new model.
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Governance must also involve decisions on provision by SOLAS, through tendering of long-term contracts (10-years) to consortium groups of IoTs/DIT. The IoT/DIT sector can uniquely offer the following advantages:

- the capacity to develop centres of excellence in specific technologies associated with certain Trades (which can also be aligned with technician curriculum requirements for efficiencies of resource deployment and for progression purposes).
- the provision of supply/demand flexibility through the use of base/core cohorts of Trades lecturers who teach the skills competences, and other lectures who can be deployed across the Trades and technician curricula.

The current legislative/statutory base lacks the flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of industry and enterprise. The current statutory role could be restructured into one of more developed authority/responsibility for the Dept. of Education & Skills.

QQI should be given a remit in term of regulation of apprenticeship – currently has remit ranging from English language schools/private providers through Furtet Eduction to Higher Education.

Linking to QQI offers opportunity to facilitate the delivery of a wider range of apprenticeship than through the current system of statutory instruments.

Propose move towards programmatic review approach of trade syllabi and standards and delivery of same (FE Colleges have adopted similar approach through Common Awards System).

Interaction with industry needs to be integral part of system. Examples exist already e.g. Engineers Ireland accreditation in HE sector, HSE recognition for Care of the Aged in FE sector.

QQI are considering how to incorporate industry accreditation (e.g. Engineers Ireland) into its overall programme validation process.

Proposing a more flexible, ‘lighter’ approach than the current NAAC/FÁS system.

Current system of apprenticeship is controlled by FAS (now SOLAS) as mandated by statute and implemented by statutory instruments.

All other programmes in HE sector are outcomes based.

Propose that apprenticeship should be outcomes based (meet outcomes in terms of education and skills). An RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) system will be needed to validate candidates who come with a range of experience/education.

6. Funding

It is widely recognised that the current model is too expensive in two particular facets: apprentices remuneration and administrative costs/overheads in the management of the apprentice system are too high.

Note that figures show that the administration/overheads cost is at least as significant as the direct payments to apprenticeships, although it is the latter that is given most attention.

Action on these two fronts would lead to a more sustainable model.

Reference is frequently made as to why apprentices should be funded differently from all other post-secondary students. The cost of the present system is one of its major detractions. Indeed, the weekly allowance paid to apprentices may have been a significant primary attraction for school leavers to enter apprenticeship.

Irrespective of the new model of apprenticeship, the apprentices should be paid a modest wage while on internship with industry, as is the practice for HE students, for example. SOLAS should set a minimum wage level for apprenticeships during the work-based modules. These should be set with reference to what HE students are paid for work-based learning. The employer should pay the minimum wage or greater, with a small percentage of the minimum wage paid by SOLAS as a grant to the employer. This minimum payment for internships/ work based placements is established by statute in many European countries.

During college placement apprentices should receive the same funding entitlements as HE students.

It is possible that some costs would be borne by the apprentice depending on the mode of entry to the system.

The IoTs/DIT colleges should be funded a unit rate by SOLAS for each apprentice which should reflect unit costs. These funds should be transferred directly, on contractual terms, to the IoTs/DIT and should not form any part of the colleges’ recurrent grants. The contracts should be tendered on a ten-year basis and reviewed every 5 years.
7. Recruitment
Propose multi-entry mechanisms which will promote access to education and training to a broadened range of apprenticeship opportunities.

This multi-entry pathways approach recognised that the system will cater for different standards of students (some more or less academically inclined).

Multi-entry system to incorporate use of CAO system, entry at NFQ Level 5.
It was noted that the CAO process will come under review and may move towards a dual entry system.

Currently candidate needs to be employed to be registered as an apprentice. This entry pathway can be maintained through the use of RPL.

Apprenticeship as a career needs to be adequately promoted.

The consortium of IoTs/DIT for each Trade would directly recruit school leavers and other entrants at each entry point. The consortium for each Trade would cap the recruitment numbers at the SOLAS contract level or overfill with no payment for overfilling.

8. Curriculum & Award

The programme structure should have the following features:
- A series of minor awards with exit options which are knowledge-skills-competences defined under the NFQ.
- The minor awards cumulate towards the major Level 6 Advanced Craft Certificate award which would be 4 years in total.
- Multiple entry points would exist for school leavers, for those with the appropriate minor awards or equivalent, and for those who present an appropriate skills/knowledge/competences profile on the basis of RPL processes.
- The Level 6 Advanced Craft Certificate award would enable progression onto a cognate Level 7 award.

The programme outcomes for the minor award for each Trade would be available in accessible language for all stakeholders. These would describe the specific skills possessed by the award holder and responsibilities that could be assigned to the award holder.

There are a number of possibilities as regards the structuring of the programme in relation to campus- and work-based learning structuring:
- 2 years of campus learning followed by 2 years of work-based learning,
  or,
- 4 years of alternate campus- and work-based learning in short blocks of 12/14 weeks. This approach has the advantage of using work-based learning to support and reinforce the campus-based learning, and to involve employer partners in the formation process at as early a stage as possible. It would also furnish apprentices with knowledge of the practice of the Trade at various exit points with minor awards.

A key outcome of the ITAC Conference on the Future of Apprenticeship (see Appendix C) was the need for and value of multiple pathways to apprenticeship. An outcomes based approach, via such multiple pathways, complements and reinforces the acknowledged success of the Standards Based Apprenticeship syllabus. Flexible entry modes relieves the pressure on the employer-led entry mode which has seen the virtual collapse of apprentice numbers registering in certain trades.

A further advantage of the outcomes based approach to programme design and delivery would mean different durations for different crafts.

The Quality Assurance of the programme is crucial to the success of the new model. Each Trade’s curriculum must be validated by QQI through either a consortium of IoTs/DIT or by SOLAS, with the former being the model favoured. In this scenario, there would be two levels of quality assurance:
1. SOLAS, following consultation with the providers and employers, would be responsible for the national apprentice framework that would provide specific structures for the Advanced Craft Certificate model. National craft standards would be established for credit-based curriculum, generic programme outcomes, and generic assessment strategies, including work- and campus-based credits.

2. A consortium of IoTs/DIT would be responsible for the design, validation and delivery of each Advanced Craft Certificate programme. This ensures that the curriculum is in effect a national curriculum corresponding to the national apprentice framework standards established by SOLAS, and allows particular IoTs/DIT (or FE Colleges, as appropriate) to specialise in certain trades. Employer and union groups, and other representatives, should be members of the consortium programme board for each Trade. Such programme consortia could respond flexibly to change through annual reviews of the curriculum, and could involve different sets of collaborations corresponding to different Trades.

The quality assurance processes for delivery and assessment of the work-based learning elements of the new model must be as robust as those for the campus-based learning elements. It must involve direct supervisors of the apprentices and may necessitate training provided by the IoT/DIT programme consortia, on an ongoing basis, which would have the effect of strengthening the employer’s stake in the programme.

It would be of great merit to have a Level 7 award available in the craft of each respective Trade (master craftsperson). This most likely would be a level 7 in technology cognate to the Level 6 Advanced Craft Certificate award, as there would have to be Level 8 progression opportunities in turn (these exist already). Transfer/Progression pathways should be in place to permit the Advanced Craft award holder to apply for advanced entry to existing and future Level 7 engineering and technology awards. Some IoTs/DIT have already pioneered this having mapped the programme outcomes of the Advanced Craft Certificate against appropriate Level 7 programmes. In such cases advanced entry is usually granted into Year 3 of the Level 7 programme after or accompanied by bridging modules.

9. Providers & Delivery Methods

It has been proposed that a consortium of IoTs/DIT would be responsible for the design, validation and delivery of the Advanced Craft Certificate programme for each Trade.

The curriculum would have conventional on-campus and work-based delivery. However it would also be designed to facilitate the use of modern learning technologies for both the campus- and work-based learning elements of the programme. On-line/distance learning technologies would be employed to support blended learning and self-directed learning associated with the campus- and work-based learning elements. The self-learning and work-based learning elements would be structured and contain materials to support the apprentice. They would also contain formative assignments, quizzes and tests, to give direct feedback to the apprentice.

SOLAS should establish a national database of apprentice employers, with either Solas or the ETBs responsible for the allocation of apprentices to employers after the apprentice has completed the campus-based modules. This proposal is in line with SOLAS’ proposed responsibility for grant-aiding employers for taking apprentices for work-based learning.

10. Duration

It has been mooted that not all Trades require 4 years in the context of acquiring the skills and competences of the Trade. However, the national 4-year model should remain in the context of the requirements for the application of the skills in a variety of sectoral settings, for the apprentices to have appropriate ICT, communications and other skills, and are prepared for progression to Level 7 programmes of learning.

It must be recognised that the proposal for a series of minor awards would enable apprentices to remain with their employers having completed their work-based learning modules or to move to other employers if they wish. These apprentices would have the choice of returning to college to complete further modules towards the next minor award at any stage or to complete the major award, the Advanced Craft Certificate.

This proposed ‘mobility’ of apprentices extends to them the facilities for Access, Transfer and Progression mandated to all other learners in the State under the various Education and Training Acts. It also mirrors the Bologna principles of mobility of learners and benefit to learners and the economy of a spectrum of exit points into employment and subsequent potential re-entry points into the education and training curriculum.

Dr Barry O’Connor, C.Eng.
Chair
Institutes of Technology Apprentice Committee

16/9/2013

ATTENDANCE AT SPECIAL MEETING OF ITAC
DEVELOPMENT OF SUBMISSION TO REVIEW OF APPRENTICESHIP
TUESDAY JUNE 25TH 2013, DIT BOLTON ST.

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Current Membership of ITAC

Dr. Barry O'Connor: CIT (Chairperson)
Mr. Albert Byrne: WIT
Mr. John Carolan: DKIT
Mr. Tom Corrigan: DIT
Mr. Matt Cotterell: CIT
Mr. Jim Coyle: HEA
Ms. Celia Munro: DCFE
Mr. Edwin Landzaad: IT Carlow
Mr. Joe Lawless: AIT
Mr. Denis Healy: MCFE
Mr. Cathal Naughton: IT Sligo
Mr. Timothy P. O'Leary: DIT
Mr. Liam Quirke: ITB
Mr. Keith Sunderland: DIT
Mr. John Twohig: CIT
Mr. Tony Wallace: LIT
Mr. Gerard MacMichael: GMIT
Mr. James Wright: ITT Dublin
Mr. Brendan O'Donnell: IT Tralee
Proposed Structure of ITAC Alternative Apprenticeship Model

Revised Model of Apprenticeship Education

Preamble:

The Institutes of Technology Apprenticeship Committee (ITAC) has been considering for some time now how best to respond to the serious issues regarding the training/education of apprentices. As you will be aware there has been a huge fall off in the numbers of apprentice registrations since the beginning of the period of economic recession. This has been very dramatic and on a large scale in all the construction-related trades but has impacted significantly also on most other trades. Craftspeople or relevant companies who would traditionally have taken on apprentices no longer have the business throughput to sustain apprentices. This has resulted in redundancies for partly trained apprentices and, in some trades, a complete embargo on recruiting ‘Phase 1’ or new apprentices. Apprentice recruitment has always been at the mercy of short to medium term variations in market demand as the current structure is designed to be strictly employer-led in. Nationally, this leads to periodic peaks and troughs in the supply of craftspeople, with the subsequent knock-on effects on the education and training provision both in the IOT sector, in FÁS and within the industry sectors which support apprenticeship. The Institutes (and FE Colleges) have been very responsive to increased demand, particularly during the recent unprecedented demand for apprentice training. The current economic downturn has brought into sharp focus the need for a national strategy in terms of apprentice provision.

ITAC believe that a revision of apprenticeship provision is overdue. The revision proposed by ITAC would incorporate an assurance of continuity of supply and an avoidance of oversupply of apprenticeship places and trained apprentices. Put simply the revised model would ensure a ‘floor and ceiling’ approach to apprentice numbers nationally.

As an agreed input into this strategy, ITAC has developed a revised model for Apprentice Education, details of which are attached. The essential features include ‘front-loading’ of the apprentice education component into two academic years in an IOT (or FE College) leading to a Higher Certificate on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), a level 6 award. The ITAC model provides a number of options for students at this point, varying from progression to National Craft Certificate, progression through the Higher Education sector or entering employment. This model would allow more universal access to a craft education, while at the same time facilitating a national strategy to control numbers accessing craft education. This would allow ‘floor and ceiling’ thresholds to be developed in specific trades or families of trades, effectively regulating the supply and demand patterns which are a key element in the current crisis in craft education.

This proposal will be subjected to full academic rigour in working through the detailed specification of the specific programmes to be developed. The combined and significant expertise in craft education as represented by ITAC is ready to show strategic and practical leadership in this matter and to strengthen and assure the delivery of a strong and flexible
academic foundation for apprenticeship training to the benefit of all stakeholders. Access to apprenticeship will be widened and enhanced through this proposal, whilst assuring that the ‘standards based model’ at the core of the current apprenticeship provision retains its integrity. Progression opportunities will be broadened for apprentices and craftspersons. There is also scope for significant financial savings as the ‘off-the-job’ phases can be mainstreamed within the Higher Education and Further Education sectors.

The new model proposed will be a national model i.e. proposed and approved nationally and hence capable of being delivered on a national basis through HE/FE Colleges.

Dr Barry O’Connor, C.Eng.
Chair, ITAC
16/9/2013
Continually Evolving Apprenticeship Programmes

Time Served

- Day Release
- Block Release
- One Year off the Job

Current Model is Standards Based Apprenticeship

Standards Based Apprenticeship

Phases 1, 3, 5 & 7: On the Job
Phases 2, 4 & 6: Off the Job

Phase 2 (FÁS), Phase 4 & 6 (IOT/FE)

ITAC Model: Design Criteria

- Benchmarked against best international practice
- Calibre of the student / apprentice recruit should be maintained
- Education / training needs of industry should be adequately met
- Access, Transfer and Progression opportunities
- The revised model should be cost effective
- Supply of trained craftspeople should be maintained during economic downturns
- Capacity of the education / training system should be maintained
- Ease of mobility from one trade to another

Structure of revised model:

- Stage 1: Education / and Training (pre-requisite for Stage 2)
Appendix B

Proposed Structure of ITAC Alternative Apprenticeship Model

- Years 1 & 2
  - Stage 2: Work based training
  - Years 3 & 4

Years 1 and 2:
- This apprenticeship model will deliver the current phases 2, 4 and 6 on a four semester bases and will include additional modules to allow students to adapt to changes in technology in the future and facilitate ease of progression.
- On successful completion of this programme, the student would receive an award of Certificate in Applied Technology Skills (NQAI level 6).

Years 3 and 4:
- The student seeks employment from an approved registered employer as an apprentice craftsperson.
- The apprentice then completes a two-year work-based period of training with defined learning outcomes.
- On successful completion of Stage 2, the apprentice will be awarded an Advanced Certificate (Craft) in their trade and where appropriate / required their Fitness to Practice licence.
- This could be a Special Purpose Award at level 6.

Application Procedures:

**Standard Entry:** Students apply for a Certificate in Applied Technology Skills (craft specific) through the CAO and / or FAS and enter an IT, VEC College or FÁS.

**Non-Standard Entry:** Students who do not meet the standard entry requirements would complete an approved pre-apprenticeship programme and enter as above.
**Detailed Structure of Craft Education Stages**

**Year 1 Structure:**

Year 1 would consist of two semesters delivering 60 ECTS credits.

The content would be similar to that covered in Phases 2/4 of the existing Standards Based system which would be trade specific.

To include generic modules that would be shared by all craft areas in:

1. Communications and Key Learning Skills
2. Craft Mathematics
3. Engineering / Construction Science
4. Computer Skills and Applications

**Year 2 Structure:**

Year 2 to consist of two semesters delivering 60 ECTS credits. The content would be similar to that covered in phases 4/6 of the existing programme and also include generic modules that would be shared by all craft areas in:

1. Entrepreneurship and running your own business
2. Craft Mathematics
3. Health and Safety
4. Engineering / Construction Science

**Programme Balance:**

In order to reflect the different requirements in craft areas Year 2 should contain a balance of Craft Skills and Craft Technology depending on the craft in question.

For example, certain craft areas would have more Craft Skills modules and other craft areas would have a greater number of Craft Technology modules.

**Year 3 and 4 Structure:**

The content would be similar to that covered in Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 of the existing Standards Based system which would be trade specific.
Special module certification would be required in areas where specific technical skills are required such as:

- Welding
- Gas Installations
- Aircraft Maintenance
- Electrical.

**Funding**

- Grant on completion of Year 1 and/or Year 2
- Eligible for VEC Grants etc.
- Paid by employer on Year 3 and 4
- Possible additional focussed Access Initiative supports

**Other matters for consideration**

- EU Apprenticeship Systems
- Single Qualification
- Skills for Specific Industries
- Social Implications