



**Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee
on Education and Skills**

Uptake on Apprenticeships and Traineeships

2 November 2018

1 Introduction

The Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) is the representative body for the technological higher education sector in Ireland, which comprises fourteen institutes of technology, geographically dispersed across the country. THEA welcomes the invitation by the Joint Committee on Education and Skills to make a written submission on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships.

It is of note that ‘traineeships’, as defined in current policy documents, are further education programmes, and are offered primarily through the education and training boards, in partnership with employers.¹ The institutes of technology do not provide traineeships in this strict sense, although there are analogous examples of third level programmes, based on the ‘learn and work’ model, offered within the technological higher education sector, including bespoke programmes developed for individual companies.² In addition, work placement is a key component of many higher education programmes offered by the institutes.³ Ideally, discussions on the uptake of traineeships and apprenticeships should be viewed in the broader context of developing work-based learning as a core element of education and training across the ten levels of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity, THEA will concentrate in this submission on the uptake of apprenticeships, but will allude to the broader issue of work-based learning in section 4 below.

2 The institutes of technology and apprenticeship

Craft Apprenticeships

The institutes of technology have a long tradition of providing two of the three off-the-job phases (phases 4 and 6) of the craft apprenticeships. Currently, twelve THEA members are engaged in this provision. DIT is the largest craft apprenticeship provider in the sector, providing off-the-job training across fifteen of the twenty-seven designated craft apprenticeships, including seven crafts where it is the sole provider. The remaining participating institutes generally provide phases 4 and 6 in two to four of the craft areas.

¹ See especially *Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020*, pp 5-6; and the Department of Education and Skills/SOLAS/ETBI sponsored traineeship website at <http://www.traineeship.ie/employer.aspx>

² For examples from IT Blanchardstown see <http://www.itb.ie/IndustryInnovation/learnwork.html>; from IT Sligo see www.itsligo.ie/employers/wbl

³³ For examples, at CIT <http://extendedcampus.cit.ie/studentworkplacement>; at Dundalk IT <https://www.dkit.ie/about-dkit/dkit-careers-service/placement-office.html>; at IT Sligo see <https://www.itsligo.ie/employers/student-placements/>; and at WIT www.wit.ie/about_wit/industry_links/work_placement2.

Under the current quality assurance arrangements for apprenticeships, introduced by QQI in 2016,⁴ the institutes of technology act as collaborating providers in the delivery of craft apprenticeships. As such, they operate under the quality assurance procedures of SOLAS, the coordinating provider, and QQI, the designated awarding body, makes the awards. THEA's members also support the operation and development of the craft apprenticeships through their own Institutes of Technology Apprenticeship Committee (ITAC), and through participation on the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC).

It is of note that none of the institutes recruit apprentices directly. The Apprentice starts his or her journey by identifying an area in which they would like to work, and by securing employment with an appropriate employer.

New Apprenticeships

Following a review initiated by the Minister for Education and Skills in 2012, which was overseen by a review group chaired by the Chairman of the Labour Court, Kevin Duffy, and published in January 2014, a number of innovations have been introduced to the apprenticeship system. Led by a new Apprenticeship Council, which issued two national calls for proposals in 2015 and 2017, the system has been expanded into new industry sectors, leading to awards from Levels 5-10 on the NFQ. At the time of writing, sixteen new apprenticeship programmes are currently running, and a further thirty six programmes are expected to commence over the next fourteen months.

The institutes of technology have been active in the arena of the new apprenticeships, and played a pioneering role, in collaboration with their industry partners, in developing and launching the first two new apprenticeships in 2016: the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, a Level 8 degree programme coordinated by IT Sligo; and the Industrial Electrical Engineering apprenticeship, a Level 7 degree programme coordinated by Limerick IT. In total, the institutes are acting as coordinating providers for nine new apprenticeships that are currently running, and are the proposed coordinating providers for a further ten programmes that are under development.⁵ As coordinating providers, the institutes operate their own quality assurance procedures in line with QQI's guidelines, and will make the awards when the apprentices complete their programmes. The sector also supports the development of new apprenticeships through participation on the Apprenticeship Council.

3 Apprenticeship Registrations

The targets for apprenticeship registrations are set jointly by the Department of Education and Skills and SOLAS, and have been published in the *Action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020*, p. 11 (see Table 1 below).

⁴ Available at <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Apprenticeship%20Programmes%20QAG%20Topic-Specific.pdf>

⁵ The full list of new and craft apprenticeships (as at August 2018) is available at: <http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/news/Pages/List%20of%20Apprenticeships%20in%20Ireland%20-%20Generation%20Apprenticeship%20Aug%202018.pdf>

Table 1 Apprenticeship Registrations: Forecast 2016-2020

Craft-based apprenticeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of programmes	27	27	27	27	27
Forecast new registrations per annum	3,390	4,147	4,697	5,087	5,587
New apprenticeships	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Planned no. of programmes (cumulative)	2	15	25	35	40
Planned new registrations per annum	82	800	1,500	2,297	3,413
Total target apprentice registrations per annum	3,472	4,947	6,197	7,384	9,000

A number of observations can be made about the 2016 forecasts. It is not unfair to say that those for the craft apprenticeships were likely to be more accurate than those for the new apprenticeships. The craft apprenticeship registration forecasts were provided in 2016 by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) and the Apprenticeship Services Unit in SOLAS, and were grounded upon solid research, and the significant experience of the two SOLAS units in making such predictions. The planned registrations for the new apprenticeships, in contrast, were based on the proposals submitted by the various consortia in the first call for new apprenticeships in 2015, and would not perhaps — given their new, innovative nature and the tight deadlines associated with the call — have had the same level of rigour in predicting future registrations, certainly not across all of the consortia. In addition, it may also have been assumed that the developmental process for establishing the new apprenticeships would run smoothly, and deliver all of the projected registrations by particular deadlines. The reality, in fact, is that the developmental process was, and remains, exceedingly complex, as it requires new and deeper levels of engagement between employers and education providers — and the associated cultural adjustment — than has previously been the case. The process has also had to operate within a sometimes bewilderingly complex legal and regulatory environment, that encompasses and requires the operational integration of legislation written in very different eras, including especially the Industrial Training Act, 1967 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. THEA holds the view that the new apprenticeship system is fresh and innovative, and has the potential to bring about very significant enhancements to apprenticeship in time. However, THEA also holds the view that these developmental challenges were generally under-estimated and that, as a result, the speed of the throughput of programmes and the associated registrations may have been overly optimistic.

The above observations are reflected, in part, in registration data from the end of September 2018 for both craft apprenticeships and new apprenticeships (see Table 2 below). While it would be inadvisable to set too much store on a single year's data, it does illustrate that the variance between the 2016 forecasts for 2018 registrations and the actual registrations is greater in relation to the new apprenticeships than in relation to craft apprenticeships. Actual registrations in 2018 for the new apprenticeships, 410, are at 27%

of the 2016 forecast for this year. Actual registrations for the craft apprenticeships in 2018, 3,504, are more creditable, having reached 75% of the 2016 forecast. Since the 2016 forecasts were made, the key stakeholders have learned much more about the process of rolling out new apprenticeships, particularly in relation to how quickly individual programmes can be brought to the market and what the start-up enrolment patterns are likely to be. Given this, there may be an argument for revisiting the 2016 forecasts to evaluate whether they are still valid.

Table 2 Apprentice Registrations September 2018⁶

Craft Apprenticeships		New Apprenticeships	
Sector	Registrations 2018	Sector	Registrations 2018
Construction	1,036	Property Services	44
Electrical	1,528	Biopharma	2
Engineering	417	Engineering	46
Motor	528	Financial	148
		Hospitality and Food	114
		ICT	32
		Logistics	24
Total	3,504	Total	410

That said, there is undoubted disappointment in some quarters that the projected registrations have not been met. Overall, the combined 2018 registrations for craft and new apprenticeships, 3,914, have reached just 56% of the 2016 forecast for the same year. There is no doubt that all stakeholders who are interested in advancing the apprenticeship agenda face significant challenges in endeavouring to increase the level of recruitment to apprenticeship programmes. The remainder of this submission will set out some of the key issues that THEA believes are militating against a better uptake of apprenticeships.

4 Key challenges facing apprenticeship recruitment

Culture

In the past decade or so, apprenticeship has featured prominently in the policy discourse on education and skills development, both at a European and national level. The general recognition that education and training systems should deliver work ready graduates has caused policy makers and some educationalists to look again at the apprenticeship model, and to single it out as a suitable vehicle for producing graduates that meet the employability attributes required in the modern workplace. Such thinking, which underpinned the 2014 Apprenticeship Review, and the subsequent drive to develop new, modern apprenticeships, is generally accepted among policy makers and in political circles. However, while the image of apprenticeship has improved to some degree on foot of this official discourse, it is arguable that this improvement has not generally made an impact among the population at

⁶ Dáil Eireann debate, 25 October 2018: answer of the Minister of State at the Department of Education Skills to questions 155-157, at https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2018-10-25/155/?highlight%5B0%5D=apprenticeships#pq-answers-155_156_157

large. The traditional learner transition model, involving progression from general education into higher education degree level study, is still the best known and favoured route for most school leavers, and for the parents and guidance councillors that advise them. In this context, much work still needs to be done to enhance the awareness of apprenticeship as a valid and valued option for school leavers. Moreover, such work will also have to be undertaken over the long term if it is to compete with a tradition that is so embedded in the Irish psyche. And it will also have to address a particularly complex communications and branding/marketing challenge, given that the notion of work-based learning is not exclusive to the apprenticeship model. On the contrary, work-based learning is now a very visible part of non-apprenticeship education and training programmes across both further and higher education, so apprenticeship is not just competing with traditional academic education, but with new forms of tertiary education that have embraced the concept of work-based learning, if not the full earn and learn model.

The new apprenticeship programmes, in particular, can play a big part in changing perceptions and in enhancing the image of apprenticeship, as they hold out the prospect of embedding the apprenticeship model within the very system that it has generally had to compete with, and from which it has had to stand apart. These programmes are still at a relatively early stage of their development, and will need to be supported in a range of different ways over the long term if they are to make the desired inroads in wider societal awareness, against some of the more traditional education and training options.

Regulatory environment

In the view of THEA, one support that apprenticeship badly needs is an improved regulatory space within which to operate. Both the craft and the new apprenticeships are subject to the requirements of the Industrial Training Act, 1967, for it is from this legislation that they derive their status as statutory apprenticeships. This legislation is now over fifty years old and while to some degree it has stood the test of time, it is increasingly difficult to integrate with the legislation underpinning the work of many of the other stakeholders participating in the apprenticeship space. The institutes of technology are a case of point. Since 1967, THEA's members have been the subject of several iterations of reforming legislation, including the Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992, the Institutes of Technology Act 2006, and, most recently, the Technological Universities Act 2018. This legislation has changed many aspects of the way the institutes do their business, especially in relation to their academic autonomy and their assumption of responsibility for the quality assurance of the education and training programmes they provide. It is fair to say that the efforts to square legislative arrangements under the Industrial Training Act, 1967, with modern quality assurance legislation in education and training, including two iterations of national quality assurance legislation — the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 — has led to a very complex, overly bureaucratic system within which to develop the new apprenticeship model. While all of the stakeholders involved have worked hard and collaboratively to make the system work, it has no doubt hindered the responsiveness and agility of the

system, and arguably contributed to a delay in the throughput of new apprenticeship programmes and in meeting the projected registration targets. It has also complicated the discussions between education providers and employers, as some of the matters that need to be accommodated across the different pieces of legislation can be somewhat arcane, and difficult for the uninitiated to reconcile with the progressive intentions underpinning the development of new apprenticeships.

Employment sectors

THEA does not have enough detailed knowledge of the different employment sectors to comment in an informed way on why certain sectors, that are known to favour apprenticeship, are unable to recruit apprentices in sufficient numbers. As indicated previously, particularly in relation to the craft apprenticeships, the institutes are not directly involved in recruiting apprentices, and do not have the on-the-ground knowledge that they have in relation to the recruitment of their students that come through the CAO, or through direct entry mechanisms. The employment sectors themselves, through their representative bodies and associations, would be much better informed to elucidate where the uptake problems reside.

In relation to the new apprenticeships, where the institutions work more closely with the employers in the different consortia, THEA's members are somewhat closer to the recruitment process. One observation that might be made in this regard, is that recruitment tends to be more successful when an employment sector is well organised and has a strong professional association to mobilise the individual companies, or one which can take on some of the administrative burden in recruiting apprentices, on behalf of its members. THEA has seen at first hand the important contribution that the Insurance Institute has made in relation to the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship, which has had a number of successful recruitment cycles since its launch in 2016. It may be possible to address some of these issues through existing structures like the Regional Skills fora. Or the State may wish to consider other ways, in consultation with the employer representative bodies, how sectors might organise themselves in a manner suited to supporting the development and implementation of apprenticeships. If this is not possible, then consideration should be given to the question of whether apprenticeship is the most appropriate model of work-based learning for all sectors, or whether other forms of work-based learning might be considered as more feasible alternatives.

5 Conclusion

THEA and its members are strong supporters of the apprenticeship system, and consider that it will remain a key element of the technological higher education sector's education and training provision, even as the sector itself undergoes major transformation with the advent of technological universities. THEA believes that the new apprenticeships represent an important innovation, which have the capacity over time to change certain perceptions about the nature of learning and the pedagogical process across tertiary education. In this

context, it is important that a long term view is taken, and that they should be nurtured carefully in this early phase of their development. The institutes of technology are committed to playing an active and constructive part in their continued development, and will work in partnership with all the key stakeholders — employers, other education and training providers, and Government Departments and agencies — to enhance awareness of their existence and value.