



**GENERATION
APPRENTICESHIP**
www.apprenticeship.ie

Quality assurance of national craft apprenticeships



Quality Assurance Manual

2023

SOLAS
learning works



DUBLIN
TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY



QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Diarthú Calloichte agus Calloichte Éireann



Riailas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Quality Assurance Governance and Structures	6
3.	Documented Approach to Quality Assurance.....	19
4.	Programme Development, Approval and Validation.....	24
5.	Assessment and Assessment of Apprentices.....	31
6.	Access, Transfer and Progression	39
7.	Supports for Apprentices	41
8.	Monitoring	47
9.	Public Information and Communication	51
Appendix 1	National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee - Terms of Reference.....	55
Appendix 2	Programme Advisory Board Terms of Reference.....	58
Appendix 3	Terms of Reference for the sub-committee to the NAAC.....	59
Appendix 4	Role and Responsibilities of SOLAS Authorised Officers.....	62
Appendix 5	Assessment Sampling Methodology	63
Appendix 6	SOLAS Service Level Agreement	64
Appendix 7	External Authenticator Code of Practice	67
Appendix 8	External Authentication Report (Sample only)	68
Appendix 9	SOLAS Memorandum of Understanding (Sample only).....	71

1. Introduction

This manual outlines SOLAS Quality Assurance as Co-ordinating Provider, for the provision, maintenance and review of the validated National Craft Apprenticeship Programmes, in compliance with QQI Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. Statutory apprenticeship programmes are governed by the Industrial Training Act 1967. Under this Act SOLAS has a range of statutory responsibilities.

SOLAS is the state organisation with responsibility for funding, planning, and coordinating Further Education and Training (henceforth FET) in Ireland. Established in 2013 under the Further Education and Training Act, it is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills, governed by a Board. SOLAS is tasked with building identity and values of a world-class, integrated FET sector that is responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changed and changing economy.

Quality Assurance is coordinated by SOLAS as the designated “co-ordinating provider”, working closely with off-the-job collaborating training providers across further and higher education and with apprenticeship employers who are responsible for on-the-job training of apprentices.

This manual is used in conjunction with a series of companion documents which are referenced throughout this document. They are as follows:

- National Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices
- Memoranda of Understanding/SLA documents, agreed with each of the further and higher education providers of off-the-job craft apprenticeship training
- Apprenticeship Guideline documents underpinning core apprenticeship processes, including statutory approval of employers to employ apprentices; registration of apprentices; processes for recognition of prior learning; supports for apprentices
- SOLAS Craft Assessment Rules

1.1 National Craft Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship is a statutory based programme of structured education and training which formally combines learning in the workplace with learning in an education and training centre. The completion of an apprenticeship prepares the apprentice for a specific occupation and leads to a qualification under the National Framework of Qualifications.

An apprenticeship begins when a SOLAS approved employer takes on an apprentice and agrees a contract of employment. Apprentices are paid for the duration of their apprenticeship.

National craft apprenticeship programmes span four main industry areas, construction; electrical; engineering and motor.

Construction	Engineering
Brick & Stonelaying	Mechanical Automation & Maintenance Fitting
Stonecutting & Stonemasonry	Industrial Insulation
Floor & Wall Tiling	Metal Fabrication
Painting & Decorating	Pipefitting
Plastering	Sheet Metalworking
Plumbing	Toolmaking
Carpentry & Joinery	Farriery
Wood Manufacturing & Finishing	

Electrical	Motor
Electrical	Agricultural Mechanics
Electrical Instrumentation	Construction Plant Fitting
Electronic Security Systems	Heavy Vehicle Mechanics
Instrumentation	Motor Mechanics
Refrigeration & Air Conditioning	Vehicle Body Repairs
Aircraft Mechanics	

Craft apprenticeships have the following key features:

- They lead to a major award at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications
- On successful completion of their training, apprentices receive a QQI Advanced Certificate – Craft award
- Programmes are, in general, 4 years in duration with 7 alternating phases of on- and off-the-job training, and the time-served by the apprentice forms part of the award
- Apprentices are employed under a formal contract of employment
- Apprentice employers have formal approval to train apprentices
- There is a minimum of 50% on-the job training
- Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 take place on-the-job (with an employer)
- Phases 2, 4 and 6 take place off-the-job (with an education and training provider)
- The employer pays apprentices’ salary during their on-the-job phases
- The State pays the apprentice a training allowance during their off-the-job phases
- Apprentices and employers commit to adhering to an Apprenticeship Code of Practice as part of apprenticeship training.

Figure 1 below presents the duration and timing of each of the seven phases of craft apprenticeships.

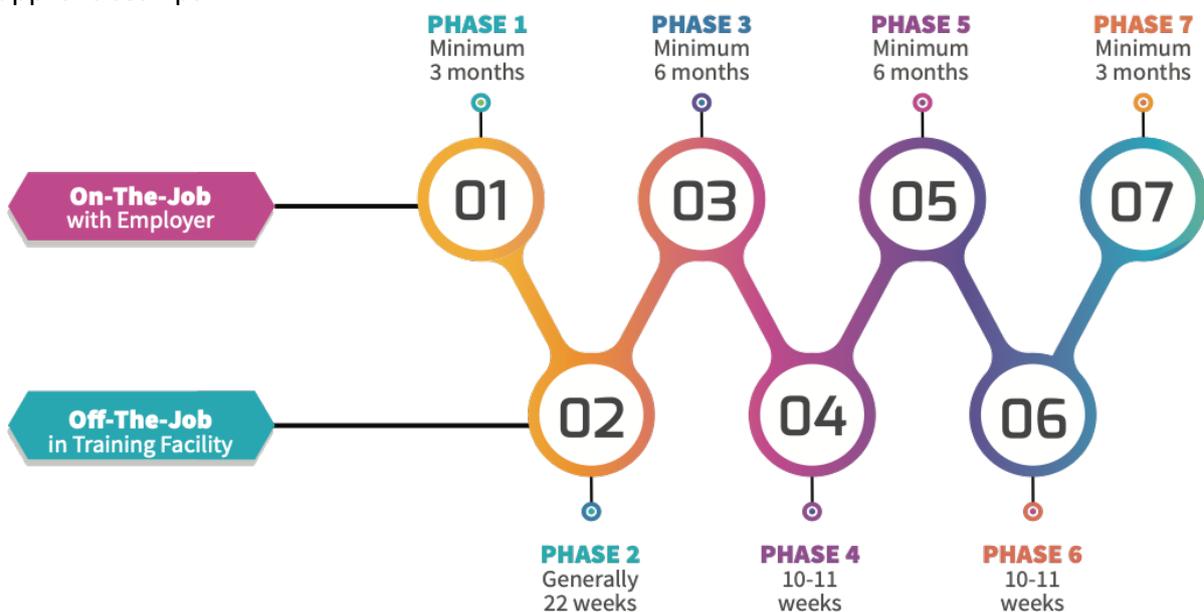


Figure 1

SOLAS funds the development of all national apprenticeship programmes and funds the collaborating providers for apprenticeship in the further education and training sector (i.e. Education and Training Boards). The Higher Education Authority funds collaborating providers within higher education and training (i.e. Institutes of Technology, Technological Universities). Although SOLAS is the statutory authority for national apprenticeship, it is only the coordinating provider for those apprenticeships developed before 2016, craft apprenticeships. Therefore, this manual refers only to the craft apprenticeship programmes.

2. Quality Assurance Governance and Structures

This chapter outlines the structures in SOLAS governance and management of quality assurance as a provider of further education and training.

2.1 Governance

SOLAS is mandated under The Further Education and Training Act 2013 to “prepare, and submit, every five years, a strategy in relation to the provision of further education and training”. This strategy must reflect Government policy in relevant areas, the evolving environment and the future world of education and work. It will steer the FET system to respond to this context over the next five years.

Two major developments in recent years have supported the move to a more strategic, integrated, quality and outcomes-focused approach in FET. The first of these developments was the establishment of strategic performance agreements in 2018 between SOLAS and the ETBs providing a key link between national strategy and FET provision over a multi-annual planning period.

Alongside this, the ongoing work between QQI, ETBs, TUs, HEIs and other providers around quality assurance and quality enhancement is critically important in facilitating a more agile, responsive, and integrated quality system. This process has supported the development of holistic QA structures, systems and processes within each provider, driving continuous improvement and reform, and it provides a platform for more effective programme development by providers in the future.

The development path which has been followed in establishing an integrated and devolved FET system in recent years has delivered significant achievements. The natural and diverse learning pathways which have been created as a result offer real potential for a strategic and agile FET system - a system which can respond to the future world of work, the emerging societal and economic challenges, and evolving expectations and needs in terms of its future role and contribution. There is now a really strong foundation for realising this potential over the next five years, with six core attributes underpinning the future FET strategy. These attributes are set out in *Figure 2*

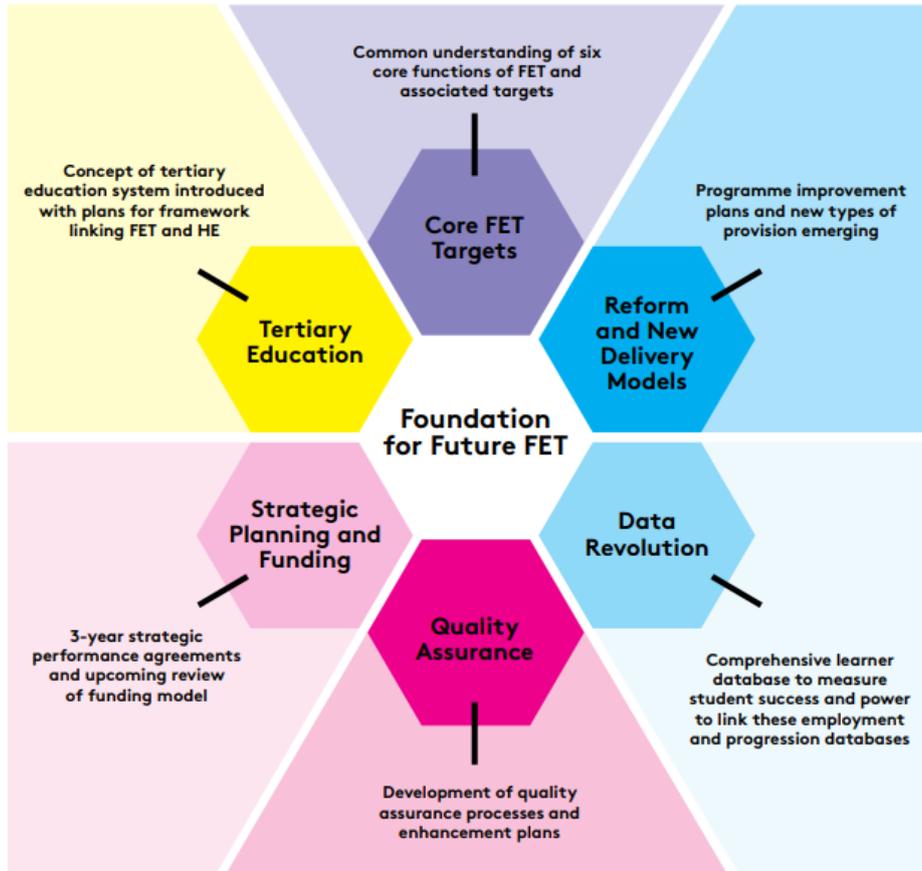


Figure 2

The new strategy “Future FET: Transforming Learning” is an ambitious strategy based around three core pillars of building skills, fostering inclusion, and facilitating pathways.

SOLAS mission is to “drive continuing transformation and success of the FET and apprenticeship systems by setting strategy, channelling investments, leading implementation and ensuring accountability across providers”



SOLAS set out a clear strategy on the role of the organisation through the Corporate Plan (2021-2024) [SOLAS Corporate Plan 2021 - 2024](#) on how it will ensure FET continues its transformation and responds to the needs of the communities, enterprises, and learners.

This corporate plan will mirror the role of its predecessor which informed SOLAS Craft Apprenticeship Quality Assurance priority, to ensure that the proper framework and services are in place to support the delivery of the Annual Business plan, by effectively equipping the organisation to carry out its mandate as follows:

Complete the Quality Assurance requirements necessary for apprenticeship

- Develop a new quality manual for the craft apprenticeship team.
- Develop and embed all policies and procedures for assessment and curriculum for craft apprenticeship as part of the overall system.
- Ensure there is an overall quality system operationally across the unit.

This framework is focused on delivering the current Corporate Plan where it is a consistent ethos of putting the learner at the heart of what SOLAS do. SOLAS 3-year vision is to ensure that FET is focused on the needs of the learner and that all are offered a quality and consistent experience, empowering learners to participate in society and support diverse communities.

The SOLAS corporate plan has always focused on the specific actions and deliverables being progressed by individual teams within each of SOLAS's three divisions. Under the new ways of working, a shared sense of purpose and ownership is enhanced across all of SOLAS. The objectives are structured that resonate with all employees across the organisation. Specific to Apprenticeship Services, the following objectives are applicable:

Working Smarter

Support a Quality Approach: Ensure a quality approach across all direct SOLAS service delivery and support ETBs in developing the curriculum development capability and quality infrastructure which can drive agile responses to regional skills needs. Work with QQI to develop a strategy and future approach for FET qualifications.

Reforming Craft Apprenticeship Provision: Tackle Apprenticeship waiting lists via investment in capacity and adopting innovative models of provision. Develop and implement migration plan to move to devolved model of craft apprenticeship provision across FET and HE. Revise curricula around evolving industry and occupational needs.

Engaging Stakeholders

Learner Engagement: Continue to build learner engagement and influence throughout FET via the Learner Forum and the development of a cross-FET learner engagement survey. Progress with development of qualitative measures of learner progress and outcomes by working with the sector on implementation of a distance travelled tool.

A system of annual Business Plans turns each of the objectives and associated priorities of the SOLAS Corporate Plan into an ongoing programme of actions. The corporate plan is also underpinned by a balanced scorecard designed to define the internal and external indicators that reflect the changing operating environment and help to benchmark success for SOLAS each year. This scorecard will serve as a useful monitoring mechanism for the SOLAS Board, the Senior Leadership Team, SOLAS staff and other relevant stakeholders.

The business plan focuses on key priorities for the organisation as it seeks to deliver the overall SOLAS Corporate Plan 2021-2023 and the wider strategy for further education and training system, ***Transforming Learning***.

In effect we can think of it as a windmill, with SOLAS performing effectively across a range of objectives that will in turn generate the “power” to support delivery of enabling themes and FET strategic priorities, as demonstrated in *Figure 3* below.

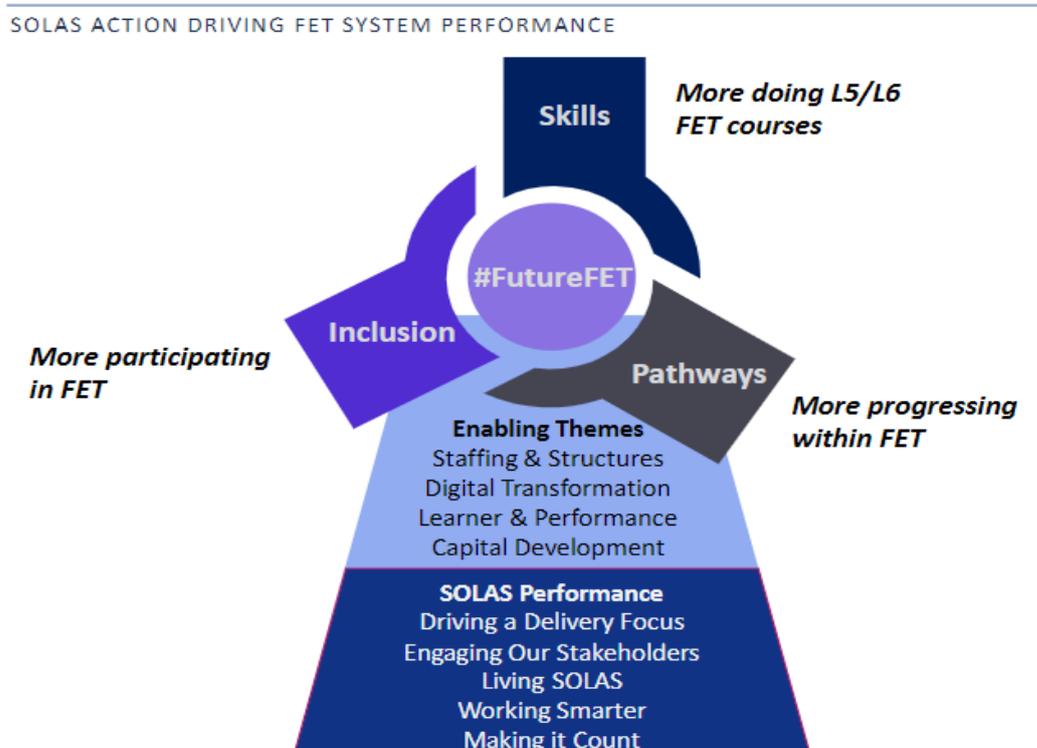


Figure 3

The development of a new model for Craft Apprenticeship has been identified in the SOLAS Business Plan 2022 which will be completed in partnership with apprenticeship providers, employers and other stakeholders. This is informed/managed through the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 and focuses on the migrating Craft Apprenticeship provision to a devolved consortia-led approach in line with the Action Plan. The purpose of this Quality Manual is to focus on the current craft apprenticeship model.

SOLAS also publish an Annual Report which provides information on the achievements, activities and accounts of the organisation.¹

¹ [SOLAS Annual Report](#)

2.2 SOLAS Roles and Responsibilities

SOLAS is the statutory authority for Further Education and Training (FET), including apprenticeships and construction schemes, in Ireland. This means we have responsibility for steering, funding and coordinating FET activity through a network of 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other FET providers. We have statutory responsibility for approving new areas of industrial activity for apprenticeship, approving employers of apprentices, maintaining a register of apprentices, and making statutory rules for the conduct of apprentices, in addition to currently serving as the coordinating provider for craft apprenticeships.

While retaining the statutory authority and responsibility for apprenticeship as laid out in the Industrial Training Act (1967) and Labour Services Act Apprenticeship Rules (1997), SOLAS also bears the additional responsibilities of subsequent legislation:

- Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act (2005)
- Labour Services (Amendments) Act (2009)
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012)

SOLAS has the responsibility for funding, planning, and coordinating FET. Therefore, the responsibilities include:

- Statutory Authority
- Funding Provider
- Coordinating Provider for Craft Apprenticeship Programmes

2.2.1 SOLAS as a Statutory Authority

SOLAS has the statutory authority to make a set of rules regarding apprenticeship training and also requires the organisation to comply with a number of statutory requirements. The 1967 Industrial Training Act assigns statutory responsibility to SOLAS for creating national apprenticeships via Industrial Training Orders; for approving employers to hire apprentices, and for registering apprentices on the national Apprenticeship Register.

2.2.2 SOLAS as a Funder

SOLAS funds the development of all national apprenticeships and funds the Collaborating Providers of apprenticeship in the Further Education and Training sector. The Higher Education Authority funds collaborating providers within higher education (Institutions and Technological Universities)

2.2.3 SOLAS as a Coordinating Provider

Although SOLAS is the statutory authority for national apprenticeships, it is only the coordinating provider for those apprenticeships developed before 2016, namely, craft apprenticeships.

This is a role which will be phased out over the coming years as the new Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 is implemented.

2.3 SOLAS and Craft Apprenticeship

To fulfil its current role as the designated coordinating provider for craft apprenticeships, SOLAS carries out the following responsibilities and functions, in close partnership with employers and with further and higher education providers of craft apprenticeship training:

- a) Coordinates establishment of Programme Advisory Boards that are representative of employers and education and training providers, to advise on craft apprenticeship programme reviews and operation
- b) Ensures that craft apprenticeship programmes conform to, and evolve with, the requirements of the occupation; are enterprise-led; and meet labour market needs
- c) Coordinates development of assessment instruments that adequately support certification of achievement of learning outcomes, ensures appropriate grading systems are in place, and all necessary appeal mechanisms. The assessment system embraces both on-the-job and off-the-job phases
- d) Applies to the awarding body for validation
- e) Develops such administrative systems as are necessary to ensure efficient and effective management of programme provision, including tracking and managing apprentices' progress
- f) Manages the programmes during operational delivery
- g) Develops and maintain systems for access (in collaboration with employers of apprentices), transfer, progression, and expulsion of participants, including all necessary appeals processes
- h) Coordinates the actions of other providers of education and training, (e.g. Irish Farriery School) who are involved in curriculum and assessment development and in programme provision
- i) Coordinates with employers to ensure (i) that recruitment of apprentices considers the knowledge, skill and competence required for apprentices to have a reasonable chance of completing the programme and (ii) the effective and efficient training of apprentices within the workplace to reach programme learning outcomes
- j) Where the relevant occupation is regulated (whether by law or in fact), coordinates consultation with regulators to ensure that the criteria for access to the apprenticeship and the apprenticeship programme remain consistent with applicable regulation
- k) Agrees and implements a system with employers for evaluation and review of employer training capacity and for addressing any gaps in that capacity
- l) Coordinates a quality system to manage curriculum and assessment updates and improvements with partner providers, ensuring that the national character of the curriculum is maintained and that the approved curriculum is implemented by all collaborating providers, in accordance with the unique validated programme for the apprenticeship.

2.4 Principles of Quality Assurance

Systems and processes for quality assurance of craft apprenticeships are based on the guidance provided in three core QQI documents:

- *QQI Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016a)*
- *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016b)*
- *QQI Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Apprenticeship Programmes (2016c).*

Seven principles underpin quality assurance of craft apprenticeships.

Principle 1 Comprehensive, system-wide Quality Assurance

System-wide quality assurance of craft apprenticeship is currently coordinated by SOLAS in close partnership with further and higher education providers and with apprenticeship employers. There is a collective commitment to continuous enhancement of quality, via robust systems and processes, systematic review and evaluation, and regular internal and external feedback.

Principle 2 Focus on Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are at the heart of the design, implementation, and evaluation of craft apprenticeships.

Principle 3 Governance and Evaluation

SOLAS and all partners are committed to effective and efficient implementation of a system of quality assurance for craft apprenticeships, with robust internal and external governance and oversight. There are regular audits/reviews of craft apprenticeship as part of the overarching quality systems.

Principle 4 Use of external expertise

Independent persons with relevant expertise advise on national and international research and evaluation to inform the operation and ongoing development of craft apprenticeships.

Principle 5 Continuous Improvement

Apprenticeship providers are committed to continuously develop and improve the quality of craft apprenticeship programmes for apprentices, employers, and other stakeholders.

Principle 6 Transparency

Procedures and processes underpinning craft apprenticeships are fair, transparent and conform to the highest standards of integrity, as is appropriate for national programmes funded by the State and Irish industry.

Principle 7 Public confidence

Partners involved in delivering craft apprenticeship training are committed to maintaining the highest level of public confidence in the programmes, through efficient and effective systems and processes, and through a robust and comprehensive system of quality assurance.

High quality apprenticeship provision is delivered by a large community of collaborating providers and employers. Each partner plays a distinct but essential role in training apprentices and supporting them to achieve the best possible outcomes in their learning and skills development.

Functions and partners involved in the above responsibilities include:

- SOLAS Board
- SOLAS Executive
- National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee
- Programme Advisory Boards
- NAAC Sub-Group
- SOLAS Craft Apprenticeship Unit
- Collaborating Providers

2.5 SOLAS Organisational Structure and Governance

Within SOLAS, governance and administration of craft apprenticeships is structured with reference to the underpinning legislation and the role and responsibilities of the organisation. The SOLAS board is accountable to the Minister of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and is responsible for ensuring good governance in SOLAS.

2.6 SOLAS Board

The Board consist of 12 members, appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The Board includes an independent Chairperson and the Chief Executive of SOLAS, ex-officio. The CEO and the senior management team follow the broad strategic direction set by the Board and ensure all Board members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to SOLAS. It provides strategic guidance to the executive, and monitors activities and effectiveness as well as internal financial control systems. The SOLAS CEO, acts as a direct liaison between the Board and management of SOLAS.

2.7 SOLAS Executive

SOLAS is structured into three directorates (Support, Delivery and Transformation) reporting to the CEO, who in turns reports to the SOLAS Board.

The executive of SOLAS has responsibility for coordination of:

- (i) day-to-day operations.
- (ii) ongoing review and development.
- (iii) the national system of quality assurance for craft apprenticeships.

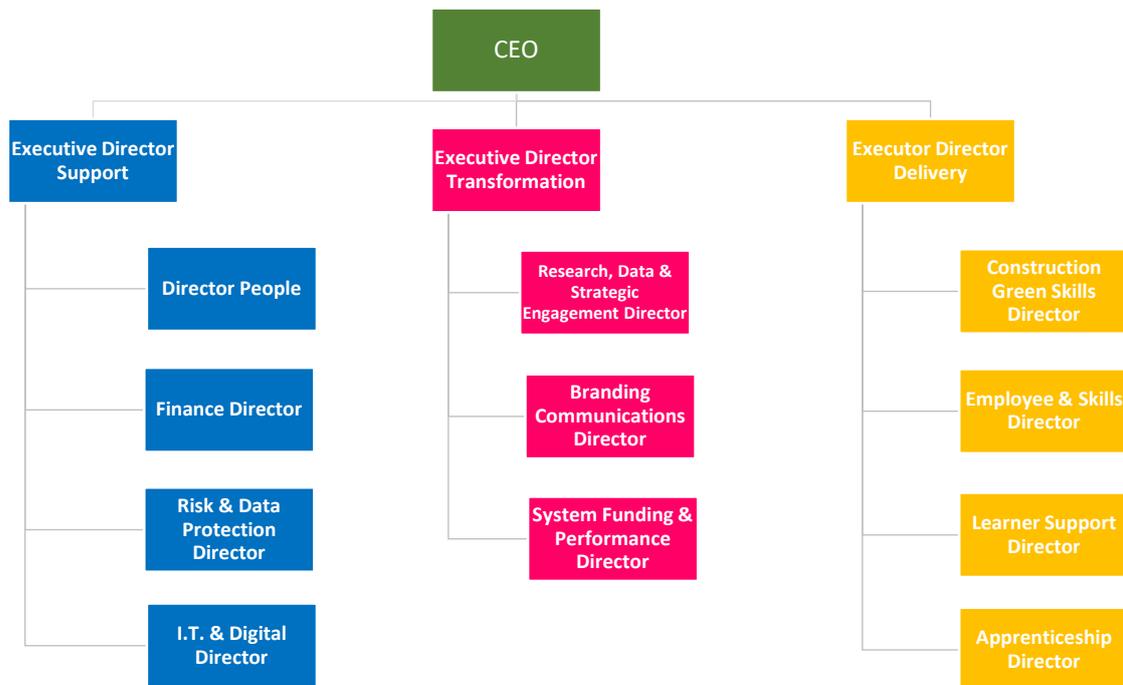


Figure 4

The executive is structured to fulfil these three main responsibilities, with a dedicated Apprenticeship unit leading on these; a Skills and Labour Market Research Unit which provides ongoing information and analysis of skills needs, trends in occupations, and horizon-scanning; an ICT unit which develops and supports the ICT platform underpinning the national apprenticeship system; and a Legal and Audit Services unit which supports aspects of operations and quality assurance, including management of relevant legal matters; service agreements with collaborating providers and other service providers; handling of any complaints, compliance with GDPR legislation, and organisation of internal audits which are overseen by an independent external consultancy body.

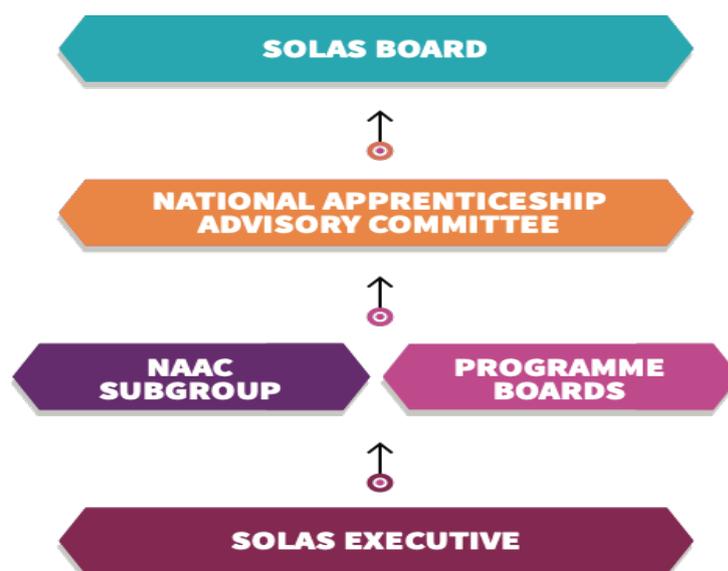


Figure 5

2.8 National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee

A sub-committee of the Board, the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC), which is chaired by a member of the SOLAS Board, provides advice to SOLAS on the ongoing operation, development and quality assurance of craft apprenticeships. The NAAC meets between 5-6 times per year. Its members include a representative of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; the Higher Education Authority; industry representatives; education providers and social partners. The NAAC fulfils the role of Consortium Steering Group for craft apprenticeships. As part of its functions, the NAAC establishes Programme Advisory Boards for craft apprenticeships which are due for review and update. Through the NAAC, additional persons are co-opted onto Programme Advisory Boards.

The Terms of Reference of this committee are available on Appendix 2 of this manual.

2.9 Programme Advisory Boards

As per QQI guidelines (Topic Specific, Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines) Programme Advisory Boards “represent both a technical understanding of the needs of the occupation, the employment potential and the education and training dimensions” (2016, p.16), and steer the development of an apprenticeship programme.

The key function of the Programme Advisory Board is to provide assistance and advice with programme development activities to reflect current legislative frameworks and industry requirements.

Programme Advisory Board objectives are as follows:

1. To provide support to SOLAS in the development, review, and continual enhancement of the Apprenticeship Programme/s from a technical, regulatory, future employment, environmental, education and training and ethical perspectives.
2. To ensure that the apprenticeship Programme maintains an industry-led approach to its continuous development.
3. To assist SOLAS in the successful development, review, and implementation of Apprenticeship Programmes.

The Terms of Reference of this Board are available on Appendix 2 of this manual.

2.10 NAAC Sub-Group – The Appeals and Recognition of Prior Learning Committee

The function of the Appeals and Recognition of Prior Learning (henceforth RPL) Committee is to adjudicate on both appeal and RPL applications. It is the final adjudication body in relation to appeal applications and may consider any appeal which it considers reasonable, with the exception of issues related to the marking of assessments. The Appeal and Recognition of Prior Learning Committee also adjudicates on RPL applications submitted to SOLAS in relation to aspects of craft apprenticeship and may consider any RPL application request which it considers reasonable, with the exception of applications for exemptions from off-the-job training phases and assessments.

The Terms of Reference of this Committee is available on Appendix 3

2.11 SOLAS Apprenticeship Services

SOLAS Apprenticeship Services has statutory responsibility for the administration and management of the apprenticeship programme at national level.

SOLAS Apprenticeship Services roles with regard the management of apprenticeship, include:

- Development and Management of Craft Apprenticeship Curriculum
- Development and Management of Craft Apprenticeship Assessment
- Submission to QQI for Validation
- Scheduling and Capacity Planning
- Maintenance of registers for employers and apprentices
- Monitoring and review responsibilities (review the QQI Monitoring Policy)
- Authorised Officer Network Authorisation
- Data Reporting

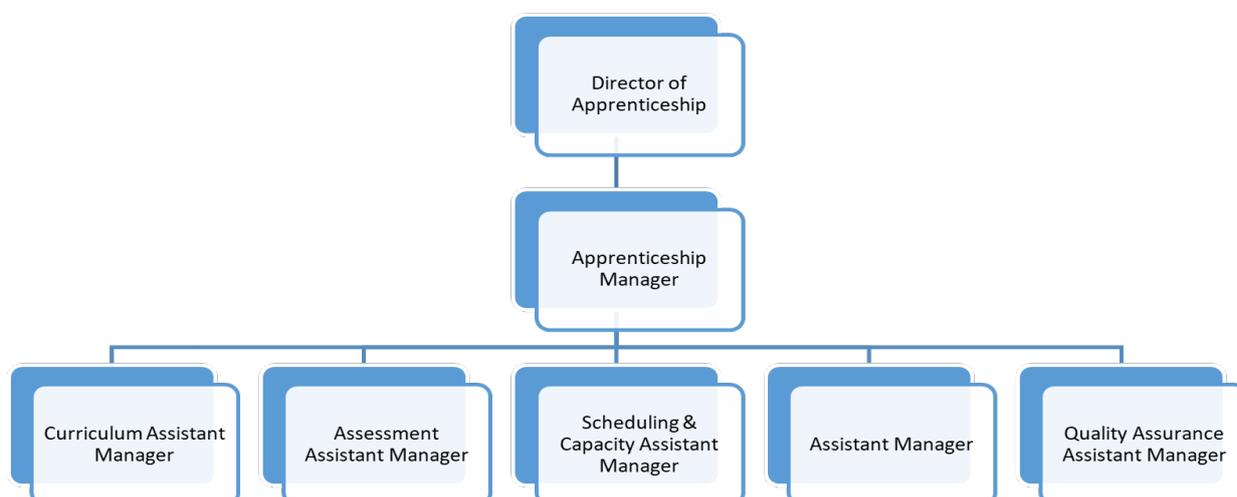


Figure 6

2.12 SOLAS Authorised Officers

A network of SOLAS Authorised Officers based in ETBs manage, support, and administer a portfolio of apprentice approved companies and apprentices within their region on behalf of SOLAS. They operate under a certificate of appointment as SOLAS Authorised Officers by the Chief Executive Officer of SOLAS under section 43 of the Industrial Training Act 1967, as amended.

The SOLAS Authorised Officers provide an independent brokerage through which the integrity of the overall Apprenticeship programme is maintained and are a critical link between the Coordinating and Collaborating Providers, the apprentice, and the employer. They currently carry out a range of functions on behalf of SOLAS including, but not limited to those outlined in Appendix 4.

SOLAS Authorised Officers are employed across the 16 ETBs to fulfil their duties as per the Industrial Training Act 1967. This statutory function operates within the role of an ETB Senior Training Advisor. SOLAS Authorised Officers must receive a formal letter of designation from the Chief Executive of SOLAS authorising them to carry out statutory functions. On an annual basis, the ETB Management Team submits details of suitably qualified individuals for authorisation to perform the agreed apprenticeship administrative functions of a SOLAS Authorised Officer to the Apprenticeship Unit

The role and responsibilities of SOLAS Authorised Officers is available on Appendix 4

2.13 Collaborating Providers Governance Arrangements

SOLAS as the co-ordinating provider, must be satisfied and verify that quality assurance of off-the-job craft apprenticeship provision forms an integral part of the organisation-wide quality assurance systems and processes of collaborating providers. These systems and processes span teaching and learning, assessment, engagement with learners/apprentices and associated protections and supports. To support ongoing provision of craft apprenticeship training and to ensure shared clarity on roles and responsibilities, each collaborating provider periodically agrees a Memorandum of Understanding and/or Service Level Agreement with SOLAS. (see section 3.4 for more details or appendix 6 & 9)

2.14 Employers' governance arrangements

The process for approval of an employer to employ apprentices requires employers to formally commit to a *National Apprenticeship Code of Practice* for Employers and Apprentices. Employers agree to internal governance arrangements that include appointment of a mentor for apprentices, an assessor and an internal verifier, the latter who signs off on apprentices' on-the-job training and assessment. To help assure the ongoing quality of governance and responsibility, employers are also required to facilitate regular, structured monitoring contacts and visits by a representative of SOLAS via the national Authorised Officer network. In addition to fulfilling a monitoring role, the Authorised Officer is available to answer employers' queries and to help resolve any issues arising.

2.15 SOLAS Internal Departments

2.15.1 Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU)

The Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) produce analysis of key skills gaps and labour market trends which is already influencing ETB and other FET providers' strategy and provision. The use of this data has been formally embedded within SOLAS/ETB strategic performance agreements and underpins the identification of the critical skills areas on which SOLAS requires ETBs to focus. The SLMRU will work on making this information more accessible to a wider audience, so that it can have a greater influence on potential learners, parents, guidance professionals and employers in influencing smarter choices around education and skills development.

2.15.2 Legal and Audit Services Unit

The Legal and Audit Services Unit ensures that SOLAS complies with the corporate governance specified in the Conduct for State Bodies (2016). They manage the delivery of the annual internal audit plan as agreed by the SOLAS Audit and Risk Management review committee and ensure SOLAS Compliance with GDPR. They also support the provision of professional legal advice and manage the complaints services for SOLAS clients. The unit reviews and challenges the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation risk management process while reviewing the corporate risk register in accordance with review timelines.

3. Documented Approach to Quality Assurance

This chapter describes SOLAS approach to quality assurance documentation as statutory authority, funder, and coordinating provider of craft apprenticeship programmes in Ireland.

Craft Apprenticeship Quality Management System Hierarchy

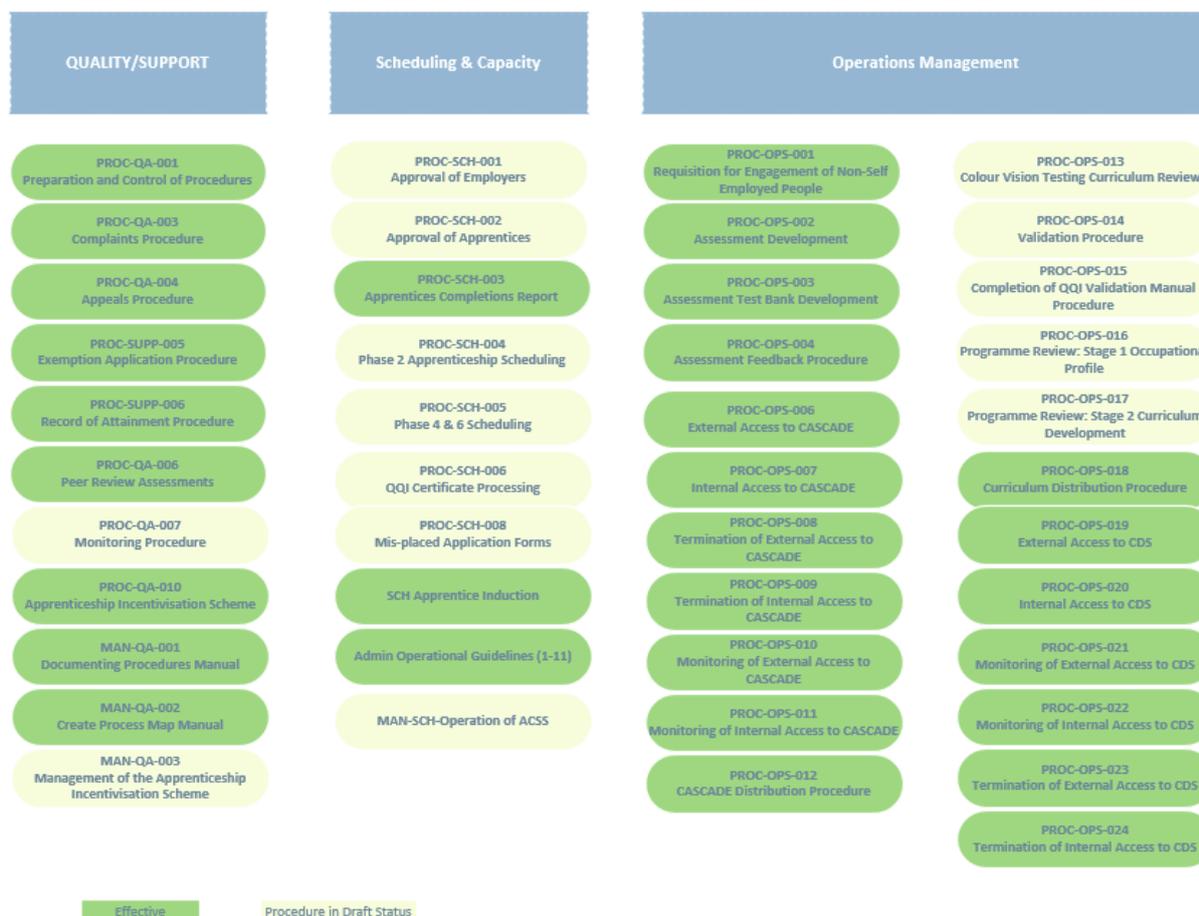


Figure 7

3.1 Documented Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures

SOLAS Craft Apprenticeship services are committed to implementing, maintaining, and continually reviewing operational systems and processes.

The purpose of governance structures is to ensure that policies and procedures are implemented as intended, and to identify themes and future areas for policy and procedure development. As such, SOLAS are committed to operating their responsibilities under the disciplines and control of a Quality Management System (henceforth QMS) See *Figure 7* above.

The QMS framework is a live document, which is regularly maintained and updated during the development and implementation of all elements within the Quality Management System. The documentation within the QMS are applicable to Apprenticeship Services daily operations.

Each operation within Craft Apprenticeship is governed by a policy. The policy reflects the 'rules' of the processes. The policy owner is responsible for their operation and will ensure all processes and procedures are identified. Procedures represent the implementation of policy and should evolve overtime as new tools emerge, new processes are designed, and the risks associated with an area change in response to internal or external environmental changes.

Embedding a Quality Management System within Craft Apprenticeship shall ensure roles and responsibilities are clearly identified to deliver the Business Unit's goals and objectives and staff empowered to take ownership.

3.1.1 Craft Apprenticeship Quality Assurance Policy

The Quality Assurance policy confirms Craft Apprenticeship commitment to quality and describes the Craft Apprenticeship's approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement through procedures and processes.

This policy is available on the SOLAS intranet POL-QA-001 "Quality Policy". This policy informs our documented approach to the development, review, approval, and control of procedures ensuring consistency and transparency.

3.1.2 Craft Apprenticeship Schedule and Capacity Policy

The Schedule and Capacity Policy defines the process for the management of national registrations and scheduling of apprentices, maintenance of results and certification and generation and maintenance of reports.

3.1.3 Craft Apprenticeship Operations Policy

The Operations Policy defines the lifecycle of all programmes from implementation through to the review stage and the development of curriculum, development of assessment rules, preparation and distribution of assessment assigned to each programme. It will include the systems used in each phase of the process.

Effective procedures applicable to Craft Apprenticeship staff and are available on a Quality Document Library on the SOLAS intranet.

3.2 Quality Document Library

The Quality Document Library is available on the SOLAS intranet whereby it is accessible to all staff within Craft Apprenticeship. Awareness training is provided to new or transferred staff on the Quality Management System.

Once procedures become effective, they are published to the Quality Document Library. The Quality Document Library contains additional documentation such as Training Manuals on internal processes, templates and forms and a documentation master file which manages the status and review of each document.

3.3 Providers delivering on quality assurance of craft apprenticeships

As set out in *Figure 8*, high-quality apprenticeship provision is delivered by a large community of collaborating providers and employers. Each partner plays distinct but essential roles in training apprentices and supporting them to achieve the best possible outcomes in their learning and skills development.

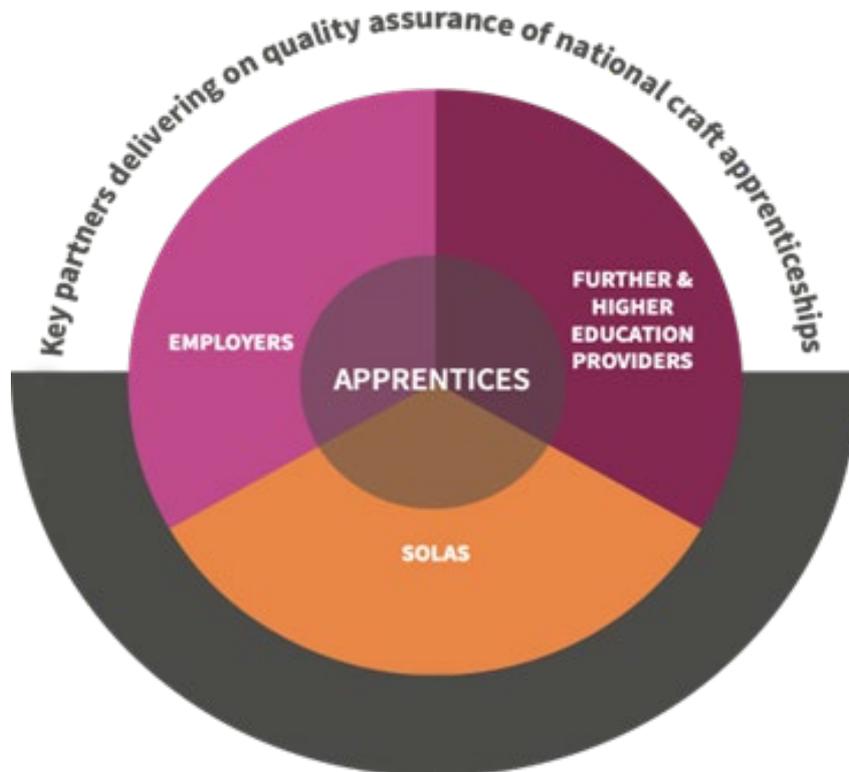


Figure 8

Further and higher education providers in Ireland provide off-the-job training for craft apprentices, at Phases 2, 4, and 6 as set out in Figure 8. The providers include 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), 1 Institute of Technology (IoT), and 5 Technological Universities.. Each of these bodies is a statutory organisation in its own right and has formally agreed systems and processes for quality assurance of their education and training provision.

SOLAS and collaborating providers work in close partnership to deliver a robust system of quality assurance of craft apprenticeship. Providers' quality systems:

- a) Are a fundamental component of the overall quality assurance systems and processes that underpin craft apprenticeship and include quality assurance procedures that are specific and tailored to national apprenticeship provision.
- b) Ensure staff have the capacity to deliver the education and training elements to fulfil the learning outcomes within relevant craft apprenticeship programmes.
- c) Oversee quality systems which maintain an effective relationship between participating employers and the off-the-job provider regarding curriculum relevance, assessment integration, data communication and apprentice mentoring and support.
- d) Ensure management and administrative systems can deal effectively with the organisational and communication needs of the apprenticeship programme.

3.4 Collaborative Arrangements

SOLAS Apprenticeship Services believes in the concept of working together with our stakeholders in pursuing quality assurance and in striving for continuous improvement.

3.4.1 Education Training Boards

There are 16 Education and Training Boards that deliver phase 2 of the craft apprenticeship programme. As such, they are responsible for the operational delivery of the validated programme supported by SOLAS Craft Apprenticeship Services Quality Assurance. Additionally, collaborating providers must implement their own QQI approved QA system for those aspects of apprenticeship delivery that are not covered by SOLAS (i.e., assessment events etc.)

ETB also employ a network of SOLAS Authorised Officers who register employers/apprentices on SOLAS behalf in addition to carrying out the monitoring of registered employers (see 2.11 and also appendix 4 on their role and responsibilities)

ETB's may also carry out other administrative functions regarding apprenticeship. These duties are detailed in the Apprenticeship Guidelines which have been developed in collaboration with the ETBs. The Apprenticeship Guidelines are reviewed every three years and updated in collaboration with the Authorised Officers at each Authorised Officer Advisory Network meeting. The approved Apprenticeship Guidelines documentation is published and uploaded to the Apprenticeship Services intranet portal.

SOLAS and ETBs enter into a Service Level Agreement (henceforth SLA) for the provision of accountable governance and management of quality assured apprenticeship support activities performed by the SOLAS Authorised Officers and administrative backup services performed by the ETB apprenticeship administrative team. See appendix 6.

The emphasis of the agreement is a partnership which enables a collaborative approach to the quality assured service delivery and continuous quality improvement activities.

An example of an SLA can be viewed at Appendix 6 while the agreed Apprenticeship Guidelines defines the parameters of the support activities.

3.4.2 Institute of Technology/Technological University

There are 5 Technological Universities (henceforth TU) and 1 Institute of Technology (henceforth IoT) that deliver phase 4 and 6 of the craft apprenticeship. Similar to the ETB's they are responsible for the operational delivery of validated programmes supported by SOLAS Craft Apprentices Services Quality Assurance . Additionally, TUs and the IoT must implement their own QQI approved QA system for those aspects of apprenticeship delivery that are not covered by SOLAS.

SOLAS enters into a memorandum of understanding (henceforth MOU) with TU and IoT which provides an agreed framework for cooperation and communication between the two organisations for the delivery of off-the-job training, the content of which are:

- Purpose and Scope
- Duration of Agreement
- Partner Profiles
- Legislative Content
- Collaborations and Communications
- Dispute Resolutions
- Coordinating Provider and Collaborative Provider MOU

See appendix 9

3.5 Apprentice Documentation

Documentation available to apprentices include:

- Induction booklet
- Apprentice guide to assessment
- Log book (assessment, training and employment record)
- Health and safety guidelines for learners
- [The Code of Practice](#)

These documents are reviewed annually within SOLAS Craft Apprenticeship Unit and in collaboration with the AO Advisory Network.

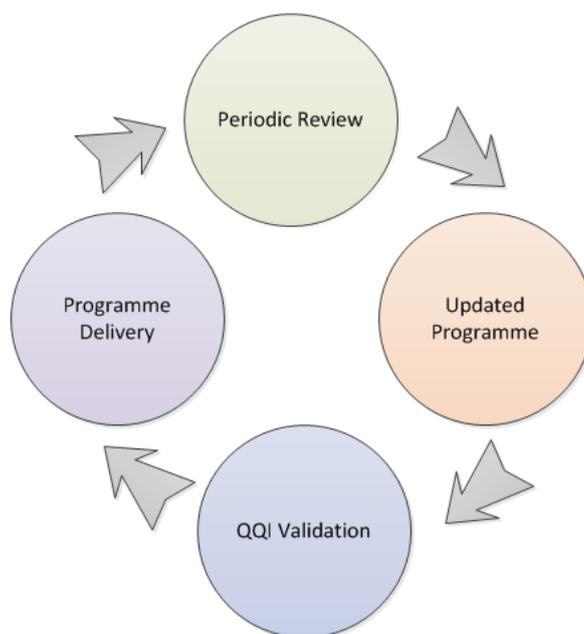
4. Programme Development, Approval and Validation

This chapter describes how SOLAS undertakes craft apprenticeship programmes, outlining programme development and approval and validation and re-validation of craft apprenticeship programmes.

4.1 Programme Update Lifecycle

Currently, no new craft programmes are being developed within the craft apprenticeship system, however since 2016, existing craft apprenticeship programmes must comply with QQI's statutory requirements (*Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2016b*) Programmes are periodically reviewed and subsequently redeveloped to ensure they meet current industry needs.

Craft apprenticeships programmes undergo continual reviews, updates and enhancement and updates. Full programmatic periodic reviews are scheduled every 5 years by SOLAS in collaboration with industry experts, social partners and training providers, before submission to QQI for validation.



4.2 Periodic Review

In line with the statutory requirements as set out in the *Topic Specific Apprenticeship Programmes Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (QQI, 2016b)*, craft apprenticeship programmes are subject to annual review and are formally reviewed and updated at a minimum every 5 years. This aims to ensure that programmes prepare apprentices effectively for their chosen occupation and that they continue to meet industry skills needs. Apprenticeship programme reviews (annual and periodic) are coordinated by SOLAS and delivered through the structure of Programme Advisory Boards representing industry representatives, social partners and training providers for each of four families of craft apprenticeships: Construction, Electrical, Engineering and Motor.

An apprenticeship programme may undergo a periodic review in a shorter timeframe than five years where there is clear evidence of legislative and/or industry requirements. In addition, each Programme Advisory Board aims to take ideally no longer than six months to complete a periodic review of an apprenticeship.

The process for review and update of craft apprenticeship programmes is intended to be robust and agile, keeping pace with new technologies, knowledge and ways of working within modern industry. The frequency and timing of review and update of apprenticeship programmes therefore have an intrinsic bearing on their quality. The general time period is, however, actively reviewed as part of ongoing quality improvement, and with reference to feedback on programme content and delivery from employers, apprentices, collaborating providers, the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and other key partners/stakeholders.

4.3 Annual review of Craft Apprenticeship Programmes

Each Programme Advisory Board oversees annual reviews of apprenticeship programmes, drawing on feedback from apprentices, employers and training providers. This feedback is used to continuously improve service delivery, and if necessary, make minor changes to the programme. The information also informs periodic reviews where there is an opportunity for more thorough-going programme changes.

4.3.1 Apprentice Feedback

Apprentice feedback is gathered by collaborating providers at the end of each off-the-job training phase. The synthesised feedback is submitted to SOLAS and onwards to the relevant Programme Advisory Board. Concerns within the collaborating provider's remit are addressed at local level; other concerns that are deemed to be of a wider or national importance are considered by the Programme Board. Surveys of apprentices are also completed on behalf of the Programme Board. Apprentice feedback is analysed and followed up with employers and/or collaborating providers as appropriate.

As part of initial induction and at each survey engagement apprentices are requested to provide feedback to their employer, their relevant SOLAS Authorised Officer or the relevant off-the-job collaborating provider at any time during their apprenticeship.

4.3.2 Employer Feedback

Apprenticeship employers are encouraged to provide feedback on any aspect of the apprenticeship programme to their appointed SOLAS Authorised Officer. The Authorised Officer documents feedback via on-the-job feedback sheets during periodic employer site visits. This feedback is collated and considered by the Programme Advisory Board within the annual and periodic review cycles. Any concerns arising are addressed at local level or considered by the Programme Advisory Board.

4.3.3 Feedback gathered by Collaborating Providers

The memoranda of understanding agreed by collaborating providers include arrangements for gathering feedback on programme delivery and on matters arising, including curriculum and assessment. Any matters arising that cannot be dealt with locally are considered by the relevant Programme Advisory Board or if necessary by the dedicated NAAC sub-committee.

4.4 Process and Governance – Review and Update

At a minimum, six months in advance of the end of a five-year apprenticeship programme cycle, a periodic review and update process is commenced. The process is steered through the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee in its role as the Consortium Steering Group for the craft apprenticeships.

The periodic review of the craft apprenticeship(s) is informed by the relevant Programme Advisory Board. In preparation for the periodic review, the Programme Advisory Board may co-opt additional representatives with relevant knowledge and expertise from industry, the social partner community, and education and training community. A schedule, timeline (generally six months) and working arrangements for the review are set by SOLAS. The work of the Board is facilitated by SOLAS which provides Secretariat support as required. Regular updates are provided to the NAAC on behalf of the Programme Advisory Board.

4.5 Review and Update - Two-stage process

There are two main stages in the process which the Programme Advisory Board follows for the periodic review of craft apprenticeship. Stage 1, includes an overall review of the programme, including a self-evaluation exercise; and updating of the Occupational Profile for an apprenticeship. In Stage 2, the content of the apprenticeship programme (MIPLOs, MIMLOs, curriculum and assessment) is updated, along with the partnership arrangements used to deliver the programme.

Stages 1 and 2 are documented by the SOLAS into a formal periodic review report to support revalidation of the programme.

4.5.1 Stage 1 Programmatic Review and Updating of Occupational Profile

Review of the apprenticeship programme(s) and update of the Occupational Profiles which underpin craft apprenticeships centre on the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme over the previous cycle, and the most up-to-date knowledge, skills and competencies now required for a particular occupation within an industry. In addition to advice from expert stakeholders, the Programme Advisory Board draws on relevant economic/labour forecasts and analyses, regulatory updates/material, surveys and other feedback from apprentices, employers, and education and training providers on the existing apprenticeship programme(s), and any other relevant research or evaluation material.

In completing the first stage of its work, the Programme Advisory Board produces two main documents. The first provides an overview of the programme review process, including an evaluation by the Programme Advisory Board; and the second is a draft updated Occupational Profile for public consultation. Both these documents are published on www.apprenticeship.ie and feedback is proactively sought from a wider group of stakeholders who include:

- Relevant industry representatives, including HR personnel, training and development personnel
- Social partners, employer and employee representatives
- Partner collaborating providers

Feedback from the consultation is incorporated into an updated occupational profile and forms part of the periodic review report.

4.5.3 Stage 2 Update of the Apprenticeship Programme and Partnership Arrangements

Following updates of the Occupational Profile and completion of the overall review of the programme, the apprenticeship programme itself is updated. A structured outline of the work required is agreed by the Programme Advisory Board which includes the following:

- Proposed NFQ level of the programme
- Entry and progression routes
- Changes within the Occupational Profile
- Updated programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs)
- Updated module learning outcomes (MIMLOs)
- Updated delivery mechanisms
- Updated assessment requirements
- Updated capital requirements for collaborating providers

Stage 2 also includes review of the partnership arrangements used to deliver the apprenticeship(s), with feedback gathered from members of the Programme Advisory Board, collaborating providers and other key stakeholders. Updates to and improvements in, the partnership arrangements may be incorporated into the periodic review.

The periodic review report which is submitted to support revalidation of the apprenticeship programme provides a detailed overview of the two-stage process followed, and proposed updates to the occupational profile, programme and partnerships.

The report aligns with the report guidelines provided by QQI and follows the structure below. It may make use of additional headings where required.

- Introduction
- Methodology and Methods
- Occupational Profile Update
- Partnerships Update
- Programme Update
- Summary
- Programme Proposal

SOLAS Apprenticeship Services captures this process on internal procedure PROC-OPS-016 “Development of Occupational Profile Procedure “

4.6 Updating Programmes

As noted previously, the project proposal (as part of the Periodic Review Report) initiates the programme update process. In accordance with QQI (see 4.7 for more detail) requirements and with additional information prescribed by SOLAS this project proposal details the following updates:

- Proposed NFQ level of the programme
- Entry and progression routes
- Changes required to Occupational Profile
- Updated programming learning outcomes (MIPLOs)
- Updated module learning outcomes (MIMLOs)
- Updated delivery mechanisms
- Updated assessment requirements
- Updated capital requirements for collaborating providers

A summary of stakeholders involved in the programme development lifecycle and their reporting relationships, purpose and key functions are outlined in the diagram below. Please note that the functions described may not be exhaustive of all stakeholders’ responsibilities. The Terms of Reference for the NAAC and the Programme Advisory Board in Appendices 1 and 2 should be consulted for a comprehensive understanding of all functions.

Programme Update Stakeholders, Purpose and Key Functions

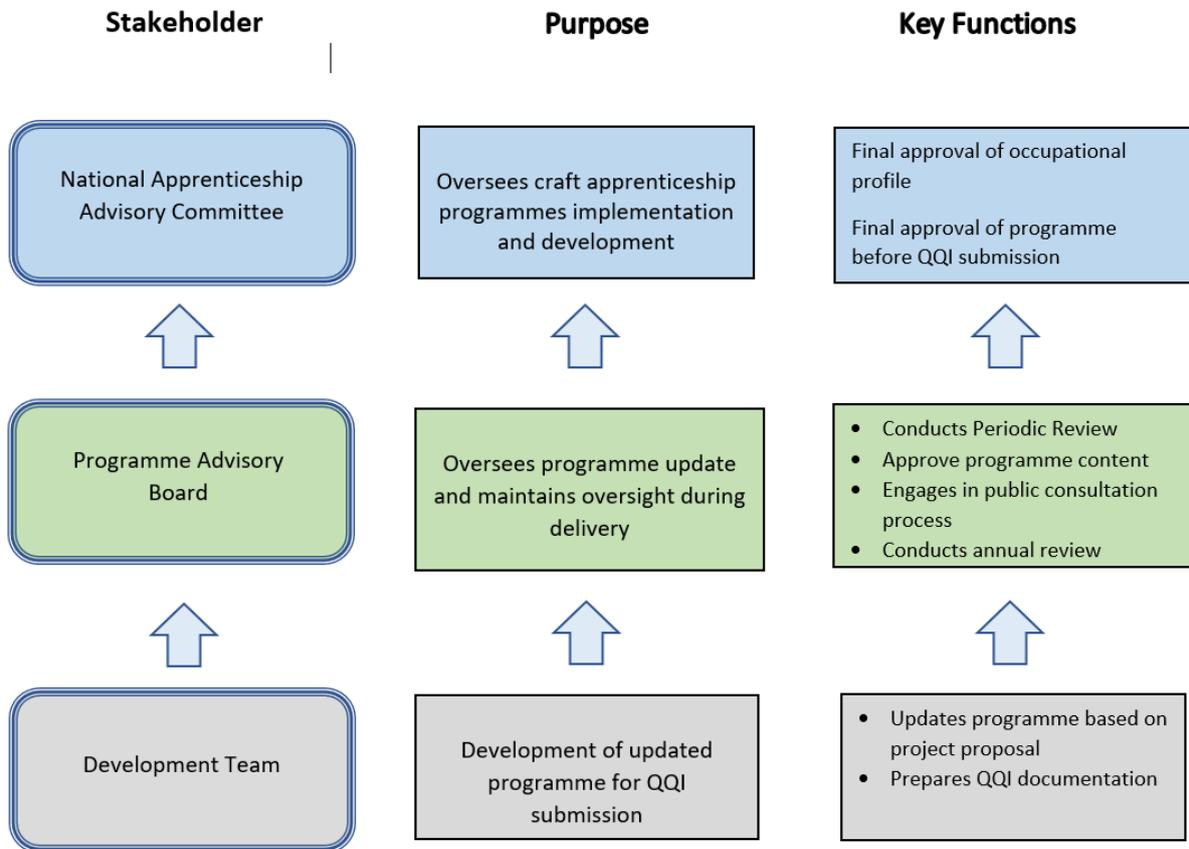


Figure 9

4.6.1 Programme Update Process

- The Director submits the Periodic Review Report, complete with Project Proposal to the NAAC which initiates the programme update process.
- The Apprenticeship Services Operations Assistant Manager calls a meeting of the Programme Advisory Board to agree a schedule of completion.
- The Development Team, overseen by the Operations Assistant Manager, develops the programme in accordance with the findings of the project proposal and the requirements of the Programme Advisory Board.
- Each programme is submitted to the Apprenticeship Services Assistant Manager for approval to move to the next stage.
- Each programme is then submitted to the NAAC for approval.
- Upon completion, the draft programme is submitted to the Apprenticeship Services Assistant Manager for approval to move to the next stage.
- The draft programme is submitted for public consultation. It is sent to industry representatives, collaborating providers and social partners.

The consultation period is 3 weeks, after which feedback is received through cadu@solas.ie and submitted to the Programme Advisory Board for evaluation.

Upon evaluation of the feedback received, the Programme Advisory Board makes any necessary changes to the programme.

- a) Each draft programme is then submitted to the NAAC for approval.
- b) The programme is submitted to QQI.

4.7 Validation and Re-Validation

Validation and Re-validation is the process through which QQI evaluates a programme of education and training, to ensure that the proposed programme provides the learner with the opportunity to reach the standards of the award to which the programme is intended to lead.

4.7.1 Submission Process for Applications to QQI Validation

SOLAS prepares applications for validation and re-validation in conjunction with QQI suite of documentation as follows:

- Validation Application Manual (2019)
- Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for programmes (2016)
- Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training (2017)

It is SOLAS's responsibility to manage the process for the submission of Craft Apprenticeship validations applications to QQI.

Upon receipt of QQI Validation panel assessment reports, documentation is updated where required.

This is captured in procedure PROC-OPS-014 "Submission of Validation Applications to QQI", is available on the Apprenticeship Services Intranet.

The validation manual is completed with the craft specific information along with supporting documentation. SOLAS are responsible for completing a final review of the completed documents along with the letter of authority.

This is captured in procedure PROC-OPS-015 "Completion of Validation Manuals to QQI", is available on the Apprenticeship Services Intranet.

5. Assessment and Assessment of Apprentices

This chapters outlines how SOLAS operates a fair, consistent and professional approach to apprenticeship assessment development and administration for its further education provision.

5.1 Assessment Development

Assessments are developed in line with the programme curricula. Assessment development is underpinned by an assessment strategy.

Assessments will require apprentices to demonstrate knowledge, skills and competence gained across the entire programme. Assessment tasks must comply with the assessment strategies and minimum intended programme learning outcomes (henceforth MIPLOs).

An Assessment Plan will be devised for each programme, to include key information including:

- The learning outcomes being assessed
- The techniques and instruments used
- The time allocated for completion
- Deadlines and due dates
- The allocation of marks and assessment criteria

Assessment Development is underpinned by the following:

- Assessment Strategy
- Assessment Rules

5.2 Assessment Strategy

Each craft apprenticeship will include an assessment strategy within the validated programme, which will provide instructors, apprentices, and employers with guidance on the learning process. It will also include the following:

- Learners will be kept informed of what assessments they are required to complete and where applicable, their progress in achieving same.
- The Development Team, Programme Advisory Board and NAAC will ensure that there is no over assessment of learners of apprentices.
- Assessments will enable apprentices to demonstrate their achievements of MIPLOs through a variety of approaches including but not limited to formative and summative assessments.
- The Development Team, Programme Advisory Board and NAAC will ensure that assessments are fair and consistent.
- Periodic reviews will be utilised to evaluate the effectiveness of assessment methods and to identify and action any areas for improvement.
- SOLAS and collaborating providers will ensure compliance with the Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules.

5.3 Assessment Rules

All craft apprenticeship programmes are governed by a set of apprenticeship rules which maintain the integrity of the assessment process and the standards upon which the programme is based. These assessment rules apply to both SOLAS and collaborating providers. They are published to the Craft Apprenticeship Quality Library on SharePoint .

5.4 Roles within Assessment

Quality Assurance of assessments reflect the shared coordination and delivery responsibilities between SOLAS, collaborating providers and employers. They incorporate on-the-job and off-the-job assessments across the training programme and include arrangements for monitoring and verification of processes and results.

5.4.1 SOLAS Role

In consultation with collaborating providers and employers, SOLAS provides the following supports for craft apprenticeship assessment:

- Coordinating ongoing development of assessment instruments for on-the-job and off-the-job training phases
- Guidance on appropriate grading systems
- Secure distribution of assessments via the CASCADE technology platform
- Receiving and recording assessment results for each apprentice on the National Apprenticeship Database
- Coordinating national appeals process for apprentices where local appeals processes have been exhausted.

5.4.2 Collaborating Providers Role

Quality assurance of assessment within craft apprenticeship is an integral part of the quality assurance activities and infrastructure within each Education and Training Board, Institute of Technology and Technological Universities. Providers work closely with SOLAS in the ongoing development and review of assessment instruments, arrangements for secure and efficient delivery of assessments at Phases 2, 4 and 6 of craft apprenticeships, (whether online or in-person), and for the secure return of assessment results to SOLAS for recording on the National Apprenticeship Database.

Collaborating Providers' systems and processes for quality assurance of all education and training are used for craft apprenticeship. These include a commitment to provide comprehensive information for apprentices on the assessment process, the assessment instruments which will be used, regulations supporting the assessment process, marking criteria, relevant dates, supports available, results, opportunities to repeat assessments, and appeals mechanisms. Assessors are encouraged to provide assessment feedback on potential corrections or improvements on the assessment feedback sheet.

Feedback on the quality of information provided and on the assessment experience itself is gathered from apprentices through periodic surveys by collaborating providers.

5.4.3 Employers Role

Apprenticeship employers ensure access is provided for the apprentice to the appropriate equipment, tools and resources to facilitate the required assessments for the on-the-job elements of the Apprenticeship programme. Each apprenticeship programme includes assessment guidelines which set out the required learning outcomes for each module of learning, along with an assessment brief which includes the techniques to be used, logistical guidance on the time to be allocated for the assessment, deadlines and due dates, scoring templates and guidance on the allocation of marks and assessment criteria. Outcomes of on-the-job assessment for each apprentice are formally recorded by employers and submitted to a designated SOLAS Authorised Officer. Assessment outcomes are then recorded on the National Apprenticeship Database (the Apprenticeship Client Services System).

5.5 Assessment Delivery

Collaborating Providers' have systems and processes in place to document key information at assessment events, including:

- Attendance at assessment event
- the format of assessment (online and/or in-person) arrangements for reasonable accommodations, any issues arising with the assessment instruments or an assessment event itself,
- arrangements in the event of non-attendance of apprentices, deferrals, and recording of results.

Any personal circumstances arising for apprentices are also documented, for consideration by the relevant examination board/results approval panel.

5.5 Security and integrity of assessment

The security and integrity of assessment is safeguarded through robust processes which providers have in place, in line with SOLAS MOU agreements. Collaborating providers are provided with assessment papers via the online platform CASCADE. Designated personnel within each collaborating provider institution have access to and manage the assessment processes. Collaborating providers have robust processes in place to deal with any anomalies or other issues before, during or after delivery of assessment events.

Collaborating providers administer the processes and associated quality assurance of assessment results. In line with institutional systems and processes, each provider arranges periodic meetings of examination boards/results approval panels to review and confirm assessment results.

Providers also have systems, processes and guidelines in place for apprentices to repeat or re-sit assessments, and for review and/or re-check of assessment results. Apprentices may attempt each off-the-job assessment three times. The apprentice can request that the result be rechecked, reviewed and appealed to the relevant collaborating providers on each occasion. Thereafter, if the failure of the assessment has been confirmed by the relevant training provider on the third and final occasion, the apprenticeship shall be terminated ([Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices, p.9](#)). Apprentices may appeal such termination and request a fourth and final assessment attempt to the Apprenticeship Appeals Committee.

Definitions of repeats, re-sits, re-check/review, and referral within craft apprenticeship have been agreed collectively with collaborating providers. These are defined in more detail within the Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules document.

5.6 Assessment Records

All assessment records, including results, minutes of examination boards, appeals processes are managed by providers through their overarching systems and processes. These include the period for retention and subsequent disposal of assessment records which are in line with national GDPR requirements.

5.7 Assessment Appeals Mechanisms

Providers have systems and processes in place for apprentices to appeal assessment results, and for documentation of same. Further details are referred to in the Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules document.

5.8 Assessment Malpractice

Collaborating Providers have processes in place to investigate and deal with any form of assessment malpractice which could impact on the validity of craft apprenticeship assessment, including security measures to safeguard the integrity of assessment.

Further details on Assessment Malpractice available on Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules document

5.9 On-the-job Assessment Appeals

Apprentices wishing to appeal an on-the-job assessment result may initially raise their concerns with their employer assessor and/or verifier. They may also raise their concerns with the SOLAS Authorised Officer and request an appeal of the recorded assessment result.

Appeals of on-the-job assessment results are considered by the Craft Apprenticeship Sub-Committee hosted by SOLAS.

Investigations of assessment malpractice on-the-job are supported by SOLAS, working with the Authorised Officer and their designated collaborating provider.

5.10 Authentication Process

In line with QQI's (2018) Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers, SOLAS must engage with an authentication process for assessments. This process, is to ensure "fairness, consistency and validity of assessment and the outcome of assessment" (p.24)

The authentication process must include:

- Internal Verification
- External Verification

5.10.1 Internal Verification

Designated staff within the collaborating providers are independent of and separate from the course design, development, delivery and assessment, affording them objectivity and freedom to express opinion, approve provisional results and report anomalies.

Internal verification is a monitoring process by which the collaborating provider verifies that the SOLAS assessment rules have been adhered to. It is undertaken by one or more verifiers within an ETB/IOE/TU and conducted on a sampling basis.

As provision differs across provider, each collaborating provider has their own policies/procedures pertaining to internal verification. Sampling is thus conducted at an institutional level, however collaborating providers are asked to use the below sampling strategy as a general rule:

The sampling strategy is as follows:

A minimum of 12 assessments will be included in the sample. If there are more than 12 assessments, the sample will be selected using the following formula:

$$\sqrt{N}+1 \quad \text{Where } N \text{ is the total number of learners.}$$

A minimum of six assessments should be selected above and below the grading thresholds of Pass, Merit and Distinction. See Appendix 5 for further details regarding sampling.

ROLE OF INTERNAL VERIFIER

The collaborating provider appoints one or more internal verifiers who check that SOLAS procedures have been adhered to within their own training centre/IOE, and are applied consistently across all assessment activities, thus verifying the accuracy of assessment results. They are required, by QQI to:

- Monitor assessment results on a sample basis
- Produce an internal verification report

INTERNAL VERIFICATION RULES

- Internal verification must take place on both on-the-job and off-the-job assessments
- Internal verifiers must be briefed by the relevant manager within the collaborating provider on their responsibilities
- Internal verifiers are prohibited from verifying assessments on which they instructed, supervised, conducted or marked
- All documentation completed by the internal verifier must be made available to external authenticators and the appropriate Results Approval Panel
- Internal verifiers must communicate any non-conformances to the Results Approval Panel

VERIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

The internal verifier will ensure that the correct assessment procedures have been applied across all assessment activities sampled for this award, these assessment procedures are documented in the *Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules*, however collaborating providers have their own policies/procedures which also undergo the authentication process. Collaborating providers each have their own internal verification documentation, however the **Verification of SOLAS Assessment Procedures** form at Appendix 8 may be used as a guide, laying out the minimum requirements. Documentation must be submitted to the nominated personnel within the collaborating provider.

VERIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Through a systemic check of sample assessment evidence, the internal verifier will verify that

- All assessment documentation is available and completed correctly
- Sufficient and reliable assessment evidence is available for all learners
- The evidence was generated in accordance with the techniques and instruments indicated in the validated programme
- Marks been correctly totalled and grades awarded in line with QQI requirements

5.10.2 External Authentication

SOLAS appoints a panel of external authenticators to provide “independent authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in accordance with national standards” (QQI, 2018, p.26). External authenticators must abide by the External Authenticator Code of Practice (Appendix 8).

External authenticators must demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria of the role they are applying for and therefore must:

- Agree to take part in the SOLAS External Assessor mandatory training
- Agree to operate within QQI’s External Authenticator Code of Practice (see Appendix 8)
- Be available to SOLAS at the appropriate times
- Be independent of the centre to which they are assigned

ROLE OF EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATOR

The external authenticator will provide independent confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in line with QQI requirements and will ensure consistency of assessment results with national standards.

EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATION RULES

- The external authenticator must attend a SOLAS briefing session in advance of commencement
- The external authenticator must follow up on the implementation of continuous improvement plans from previous external authentication reports
- The external authenticator must meet with the nominated person in the collaborating providers to discuss findings at a closing meeting
- The written report may not contain any findings that were not discussed at the closing meeting
- The external authenticator must record the collaborating provider's comments from the closing meeting
- Confidentiality must be maintained by the external authenticator throughout the process

MODERATION OF RESULTS

External authenticators will moderate results by judging the marked evidence presented according to the standards outlined in the award specification by examining samples of evidence within each grade.

They will review and check the standard of evidence against each grade band:

- A Pass is a grade awarded to a learner who has attained the minimum standard. To be awarded a pass grade a learner must have achieved a mark of between 50-64%
- A Merit is a grade awarded to a learner who has exceeded the minimum requirements. To be awarded a merit grade a learner must have achieved a mark of between 65-79%
- A Distinction is a grade awarded to a learner who has substantially exceeded the minimum requirements. For a learner to be awarded a distinction he/she is must have achieved a mark of 80% or over
- When a learner has not achieved the minimum standards for an award the grade is recorded as Referred

They will pay particular attention where learners are close to a grade boundary i.e. Referred/Pass, Pass/Merit, Merit/Distinction.

FREQUENCY AND COORDINATION OF EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATION

External authentication will take place prior to the Results Approval Process and/or Exam Board.

SOLAS will agree with collaborating providers the upcoming authentication schedule and notify them of same. It is the responsibility of the collaborating provider to schedule external authentication visits.

EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATION FEEDBACK

The external authenticator issues a written report of findings to both the collaborating provider and SOLAS Apprenticeship Services Unit within two working days hours following authentication visit. (See appendix 8)

This report (and supporting evidence) is also presenting for review at the collaborating providers Results Approval Panel.

NON-CONFORMANCES

- Any non-conformances or matters of concern are communicated to the collaborating provider from SOLAS QA, with a view to creating a collaborative approach to solving issues
- SOLAS QA will request the collaborating provider submits a **Continuous Improvement Plan** to address issues identified during the EA visits

The Collaborating Provider Responsibilities and all details associated to the External Authentication process are available on the External Authentication Guide.

The External Authentication Guide is available on SOLAS QA SharePoint Library and on ETB Portal (when approved)

6. Access, Transfer and Progression

This chapter focuses on provision made by SOLAS in relation to access, progression, and transfer pathways for apprentices to and from apprenticeship programmes.

6.1 Access

In accordance with the Labour Services Act 1987 - Apprenticeship Rules 1987, a person entering employment as an apprentice shall have the following, as a minimum:

- a) The grade of “Achieved” attained in five subjects in the Department of Education Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) or approved equivalent, or
- b) Completed to the satisfaction of SOLAS an approved pre-apprenticeship course, or
- c) Completed to the satisfaction of SOLAS a course for persons with disabilities at a Centre approved by SOLAS, or
- d) In the case of persons being over 25 years of age who do not meet the requirements under (a) not less than three years work experience acceptable to SOLAS in a relevant designated industrial activity.

In respect of (b), (c) and (d) above applicants must undergo a structured assessment interview approved by SOLAS and achieve a minimum standard to be specified by SOLAS from time to time.

While the above are the statutory minimum entry requirements, this does not preclude employers from creating additional entry criteria.

For some trades, a person entering employment as an apprentice must pass the Ishihara Colour Vision Test 24 Plate Edition.

6.2 Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning is a process that allows apprentices to gain admission to a programme to study or gain exemptions from some parts of the apprenticeship programme. SOLAS recognises that knowledge and skills can be acquired from a range of learning experiences.

6.2.1 Prospective Apprentices

If prospective apprentices do not meet the statutory requirements of a), b) or c) as detailed in section 3.1 they may apply for a Recognition of Prior Learning (henceforth RPL) to gain entry into an apprenticeship via the route d) in section 3.1

Applicants undergo a structured interview by a SOLAS Authorised Officer/Senior Training Advisor and where appropriate, a subject matter expert.

For further information on RPL for prospective apprentices please see *Apprenticeship Guidelines (105)*.

6.2.2 Existing Apprentices

Existing apprentices, who have yet to complete their apprenticeship can make an application for RPL through their local ETB. To make an RPL application, an apprentice must be:

- Registered as an apprentice for at least 4 years
- Have successfully completed all off-the-job phases of their apprenticeship (phases 2, 4 and 6)
- Are recorded with the status of 'redundant' or 'dead-filed' on the Apprenticeship Client Services System

Redundant apprentices who have attained the required standard but do not meet the duration of 4 years in employment in the specified trade or have an outstanding phase 5 or phase 7 may apply to SOLAS for accreditation for periods of trade related employment or training/education to enable them to qualify for an Advanced Certificate - Craft.

For further details on RPL for existing apprentices please see *Apprenticeship Guidelines (108-2)*.

6.2.3 Record of Attainment

Individuals who completed an apprenticeship, before the introduction of the craft apprenticeship system and who therefore do not have an Advanced Certificate - Craft, can apply for a Record of Attainment as proof of their skills.

For further information please see *Apprenticeship Guidelines (108-1)*.

6.3 Programme Transfer

A registered apprentice who wishes to transfer from one craft apprenticeship to another should contact his/her SOLAS Authorised Officer/Senior Training Advisor for advice about the preparation of a Portfolio of Evidence, an application for RPL and potential time or phase exemptions.

For further information please see *Apprenticeship Guidelines (108-2)*.

6.4 Progression Routes

Holders of the Advanced Certificate - Craft can progress to courses at levels 6, 7 and 8 in some higher education institutions via specifically named awards. This is detailed in *QQI's Progression Routes into Higher Education (2014a)*.

Detailed information on progression routes, advanced entry and entry requirements for specific programmes are included in programme documentation presented for validation by QQI. QQI facilitates the development of a national approach to credit accumulation and transfer, based on units of learning. These progression routes are identified during the programme development process and are agreed by QQI at validation.

The details of progression routes can be found within the programme documentation of each craft apprenticeship.

Progression routes for apprentices made redundant after phase 4 of the apprenticeship programme are available from individual higher education institutions.

7. Supports for Apprentices

This chapter describes the learner support and outlines pastoral care and access to services for apprentices on SOLAS Apprenticeship programmes.

7.1 Supports for Apprentices

In their role as coordinating provider, SOLAS ensures that the collaborating provider provide a positive learning experience which enables the apprentice to successfully complete their apprenticeship programme. In their role as coordinating provider, and in partnership with our collaborating providers, SOLAS ensure apprentices are provided with:

- Support for all Learners
- Courses of the highest quality delivered with the apprentice in mind
- An environment that supports and stimulates learning
- Dedicated learning materials
- Skilled, qualified and support staff
- A healthy and safe learning environment
- Fair and consistent enforcement of rules and regulations
- Information on access, transfer and progression which provides equal access opportunities to all potential apprentices
- Reasonable accommodation and dedicated staff for learners with recognised disabilities

7.2 Collaborating Provider Support Services

Collaborating providers have a range of learner support services which integrate apprentices across the social and support systems of the institution they are attending. The range of supports varies across collaborating providers, but may include such things as:

- Career Guidance Service
- Chaplaincy
- Accommodation Service
- Medical Service
- Counselling Service
- Literacy Service

In addition to outlining these support services at induction, collaborating providers publish the details of their support services online.

7.3 Supports for Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties

SOLAS is an equal opportunities organisation and welcomes applications from apprentices with specific learning difficulties. Specific learning difficulties refer to a difference, challenge or difficulty people have with aspects of learning. Specific learning difficulties is an umbrella term and encompasses but is not necessarily limited to:

- Physical disability
- Learning difficulty
- Mental Health
- Disorders
- On-going illness
- Neurological conditions

Apprentices are informed of the range of resources and services available to them through the following means:

- Upon Registration
- Induction

7.3 Upon Registration

Special educational or training needs or disabilities are self-declared to employers during the apprentice registration process. Apprentices are required to complete the section on disability and where additional learning and/or training supports are required. SOLAS Authorised Officers contact the apprentice following receipt of their registration documentation and seeks to create a supportive environment which encourage disclosure with supportive response.

Disclosure is defined as an apprentice informing relevant SOLAS Authorised Officer about a disability or specific learning difficulty. There is no legal obligation on apprentices to disclose that they have a disability or learning difficulty, and some may choose not to do so. Disclosure is not a barrier to entry.

Disclosure is welcomed so that the appropriate supports may be provided to create and/or improve learning environment for apprentices.

Their needs are discussed however no formal assessment takes place. Learning and/or other supports are put in place where required. SOLAS Authorised Officers may also liaise with the employer to ensure that the apprentice has any necessary supports. Reasonable accommodations regarding assessments are detailed in the *Craft Apprenticeship Assessment Rules*.

7.4 Induction

All apprentices undergo an induction day at the beginning of their apprenticeship where they are met by a SOLAS Authorised Officer and a Head of Trade/Instructor within the collaborating provider.

SOLAS Authorised Officers (see section 6.5) act in an advisory capacity throughout the learner's apprenticeship. At induction they provide apprentices with the following information:

- Induction booklet
- Apprentice guide to assessment
- Access to the apprentice portal
- Log book (assessment, training and employment record)
- Health and safety guidelines for learners
- The Code of Practice

Apprentices are informed during their initial induction that disclosure of any disability or specific learning difficulty and/or training supports is welcomed and discussed in confidence with the SOLAS Authorised Officer.

The collaborating provider is required to give apprentices the following information:

- An outline of the curriculum, and how it is delivered
- The duration of the course
- The format that assessments will take (i.e. practical , theory etc.)
- Health and safety precautions
- What, if any, allowances are paid
- The supports and facilities available within the institution (i.e. guidance counsellors, printing services)

7.5 SOLAS Authorised Officer

It is the function of SOLAS Authorised Officers to facilitate the effective and efficient delivery of all services and procedures associated with apprenticeship training. It is also the role of the SOLAS Authorised Officer to:

- Provide the necessary support and advice to apprentices as they progress through their apprenticeship.
- Advise apprentices of their responsibilities and obligations in accordance with the *Code of Practice*
- Advocate on the behalf of the apprentice with the employer, training provider and SOLAS as necessary
- Provide an independent liaison between the employer and apprentice if, and when necessary

A more detailed description of SOLAS Authorised Officers role is available at Appendix 4

7.6 Unemployed and Redundant Apprentices

In line with QQI (2016b) guidelines, SOLAS and its collaborating providers, does not guarantee that it can find suitable employment for redundant apprentices.

Should an employer be unable to maintain the employment of an apprentice, the employer should

- Immediately inform the relevant SOLAS Authorised Officer

The apprentice should

- Immediately inform the relevant SOLAS Authorised Officer
- Seek alternative employment
- Register with the local INTREO Office

Redundant apprentices can also

- Enrol in other training courses to improve their skills
- Enrol in a range of night courses run in ETB training centres
- Apply for Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) if meeting the criteria (see section 6.2)

This process is detailed in the *Apprenticeship Guidelines (110)*.

7.7 Apprentice Feedback

Feedback is gathered by the SOLAS Authorised Officer network and by training providers on completion of phases of training. Phase based feedback is systematically reviewed and concerns discussed with the relevant group, provider or Authorised Officer. Apprentices are surveyed during the re-validation of a programme and relevant learner resources and supports are reviewed and updated in advance of commencement of an apprenticeship programme. During the programme review, meetings with mentors/employers allow the opportunity for apprentices to give feedback and voice their opinions with regards to delivery, assessments, resources and supports.

The apprentice representative on the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee provide an ongoing channel of engagement of apprentices needs.

7.8 Complaints

Apprentices should contact their SOLAS Authorised Officer/Senior Training Advisor if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of their apprenticeship. Apprentices also have the below options available to them.

7.8.1 Off-the-Job

Apprentices who are dissatisfied with any aspect of their off-the-job phases should make a complaint to the collaborating provider delivering that phase, following the collaborating provider's complaints procedure.

7.8.2 On-the-Job

Currently the policy/procedure pertaining to on-the-job complaints, is that apprentices may contact their SOLAS Authorised Officer/Senior Training Advisor for advice.

7.8.3 Escalation to SOLAS

As noted in the *Code of Practice* if an apprentice is unsatisfied with the outcomes of the above policies, they may escalate a complaint to SOLAS through the SOLAS complaints process. The SOLAS Complaints Liaison Officer handles all complaints for SOLAS at corporate level and distributes them to the relevant business unit.

The complaint will be sent to the Apprenticeship Assistant Manager in the Apprenticeship Unit where it will be dealt with in accordance with the complaints procedure.

Refer to SOLAS Apprenticeship Services procedure PROC-QA-003 Complaints Procedure.

The Apprenticeship Unit will communicate a decision to the SOLAS Complaints Liaison Officer who will then issue this decision to the complainant within 28 working days. This decision will also be communicated to the provider of the service against whom the complaint has been made.

If the complaint has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, it may be referred for internal review by SOLAS. Requests for review should be sent, in writing, within 28 days of the date of the initial decision to the SOLAS Complaints Liaison Officer.

It is the policy of SOLAS that such internal reviews will be carried out by a more senior staff member than the person who investigated and responded to the initial complaint.

If, following the review, the complaint is still unresolved to the satisfaction of the complainant it may be referred in writing to the Office of the Ombudsman.

7.9 Appeals

Apprentices may submit an appeal to the Appeal and Recognition of Prior Learning Committee (see section 2.9). The committee does not adjudicate on the marking of assessment, but may consider an application from an apprentice or an employer wishing to appeal:

- a) The termination of his / her apprenticeship having failed to reach the minimum qualifying standard, after three (3) attempts, in any of the off-the-job training modular assessments.
- b) The decision by SOLAS to reject an application for the legacy award of a Record of Attainment.
- c) The decision by SOLAS to reject their application for exemptions from the pre 2016 Standards Based Apprenticeship Programme.
- d) The decision by SOLAS to refuse to approve their company to train apprentices.
- e) The decision by SOLAS to suspend their company from registering apprentices for six months or, to remove their company from the approved employer register.

For further information see the terms of reference for the Appeal and Recognition of Prior Learning Committee at Appendix 3 and the *Apprenticeship Guidelines (106)*.

For any appeals pertaining to the marking of assessment, apprentices must follow the collaborating provider's own procedures.

7.10 Apprenticeship Website

SOLAS provides regular communication for apprentices on www.apprenticeship.ie It includes regular publication of updates accompanied by global text messages to apprentices and their employers. The communication is shared with further and higher education providers of craft apprenticeship training and the providers are asked to also engage with their classes of apprentices with reference to communication updates.

7.11 SOLAS Contact

The email address appship@solas.ie is a dedicated email address which receives queries from apprentices and members of the public on any aspect of craft apprenticeship. It is managed by members of the craft apprenticeship team who either respond directly, or re-direct to the appropriate person for action. Contact is made with SOLAS by employers on behalf of apprentices and by training providers. In line with customer service commitments, all such queries are dealt with in line with SOLAS customer service policy.

8. Monitoring

The quality of information on craft apprenticeship is monitored and enhanced on a continuous basis through regular engagement with key partners.

8.1 Coordinating Provider Responsibilities

As the co-ordinating provider of craft apprenticeships, SOLAS is required by its governance obligations to undertake comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of programme delivery, including assessment processes, and associated services relating to the delivery of apprenticeship programmes.

SOLAS have in place a monitoring strategy for collaborating providers delivering SOLAS apprenticeship programmes leading to QQI certification. The monitoring is designed to establish ongoing compliance with SOLAS Quality Assurance Guidelines for apprenticeship training and assessments. The monitoring activities include areas, such as:

- Administration and service processes
- Adherence to programme structure, format, and delivery
- Verification and accreditation processes
- Implementation of agreed procedures
- Implementation of assessment requirements and marking schemes
- Implementation of prescribed health and safety requirements

8.2 SOLAS Apprenticeship Services Monitoring

QQI's *Policy on Monitoring* (2014b) sets out "parameters for detailed guidelines and procedures for monitoring of education and training providers". These parameters, and the responsibilities of SOLAS as a coordinating provider to exist within those parameters, are detailed below.

SOLAS Quality Assurance Unit monitors the operational processes of apprenticeship collaborating providers. The current scope includes the monitoring of QA procedures, assessment authentication, accreditation processes and the work undertaken by a Results Approval Panel. This remit may be expanded depending on the needs of the apprenticeship Unit.

It is the responsibility of the SOLAS Apprenticeship Unit to:

- Inform SOLAS Monitors of their obligation to comply with the SOLAS Monitors requirements.
- Identify quality assurance areas which require monitoring
- Identify the scope of the monitoring visits
- Identify the apprenticeship providers for monitoring
- Notify Apprenticeship providers of monitoring schedules
- Request the relevant documentation to be made available to Authorised Monitors
- Arrange for verbal feedback, evaluation, and reporting of findings

SOLAS Monitors complete a monitoring report which details findings. They may also suggest recommendations for corrective action before being sent to Apprenticeship Quality Assurance Assistant Manager for finalisation.

A synopsis of the finalised report is sent to the collaborating provider, who has 10 working days to notify SOLAS of its intended actions, as applicable. The apprenticeship unit monitors the implementation of actions and may engage in follow-up visits with collaborating providers.

Areas of risk are communicated to QQI through scheduled meetings.

8.2.1 Overview of Craft Apprenticeship Monitoring

SOLAS Quality Assurance monitors ensure that Collaborating Providers comply with the following:

- Observing statutory compliance of procedures and documentation in line with SOLAS QA e.g., registration of employers, registration of apprentices
- SOLAS Monitors record their observations using SOLAS monitoring instruments and reporting formats, based on the written and verbal evidence provided by the monitored apprenticeship provider
- Complete Monitoring instruments and produce a report to SOLAS specification and standards.
- Develop Monitoring Schedules for apprenticeship providers
- Monitor for compliance with signed SOLAS/ETB/IOT/TU (inc. Irish Farriery School) Service Level Agreements [SLAs] and Memoranda of Understanding [MOUs] using SOLAS Monitoring Instruments
- Check compliance of agreed Apprenticeship Guidelines using SOLAS approved Monitoring Instruments
- Conduct Monitoring of the collaborating providers' self-assessment reports on training and delivery of pre-2016 Apprenticeship programmes.
- Completing Monitoring instruments and produce a report to SOLAS specification and standards.
- Further to approval of the Monitoring Schedule, SOLAS will engage directly with ETBs/IOTs/TUs (inc. Irish Farriery School) to confirm and advise on monitoring events
- SOLAS will provide a record detailing the status of monitoring: to include Monitoring Event Number, Scheduled, Confirmed, Completed, Cancelled, Rescheduled, Report Issued.

8.3 Monitoring of Craft Apprenticeship Employers

Registered employers with active apprentices are monitored through a series of visits by SOLAS' Authorised Officers. The purpose of these monitoring visits is to verify that the training and assessment practices in the workplace meet the specifications required for the on-the-job phases of a craft apprenticeship.

The SOLAS Authorised Officer operates within the role of an ETB Senior Training Advisor. The primary objective of the post is to facilitate the effective and efficient delivery of all services and procedures associated with Apprenticeship Training and Assessments.

8.4 External Authentication Monitoring

Authentication monitoring provides independent confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners and course participants in accordance with QQI requirements and standards. External authentication is the critical element of the assessment process. It provides the necessary safeguards and reassurance that the veracity of the assessment processes operated by apprenticeship collaborating providers are reflected in the certification awarded to successful candidates following the completion of the apprenticeship programme.

SOLAS maintains a panel of External Authenticators which have been selected for their subject matter expertise and capacity to make recommendations for improvement to assessment practice and to confirm consistency with national standards. SOLAS does not contract the services of the same External Authenticator for more than three successive certification periods, in the same centre.

Collaborating providers will cooperate fully with the appointed external authenticators and provide all information requested.

8.5 Provider Self-Monitoring

In line with the QQI Core QA Guidelines, all collaborating training providers have implemented the requisite quality policies and procedures to facilitate the delivery of quality-assured *off-the-job* apprenticeship training and assessment programmes. In addition, these policies and procedures also take into account the requirements of the QQI Apprenticeship QA Guidelines. To establish the effectiveness of their QA systems, the collaborating training provider conducts self-evaluation monitoring processes and records the outcomes of these monitoring exercises.

Craft Apprenticeship Providers self-monitoring guides the providers in demonstrating the effective implementation and enhancement of their Quality Assurance (QA) procedures. It is a shared responsibility between the relevant Collaborating Provider, SOLAS and QQI, as provider self-monitoring highlights issues of risk for follow-up and for reporting to QQI.

8.6 Annual Review

It is proposed that on an annual basis, the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee considers a comprehensive synthesis report on the system and processes in place. This report addresses all core elements of quality assurance. It draws on feedback from all apprenticeship partners, including apprentices, employers, education and training providers, and the network of Authorised Officers. The report synthesises the feedback from ongoing internal and external monitoring reports, including from monitoring and any audits which have been completed in the period.

Documented outcomes of annual and periodic reviews of programmes are reviewed, along with the outcomes of any assessment and certification, appeals, complaints and RPL matters.

Actions on foot of the annual review by the NAAC are documented and followed up by SOLAS in liaison with relevant partners.

8.7 Proactive Monitoring and Evaluation

Pro-active monitoring and evaluation of apprenticeship training and assessment activities provides robust data, which informs the design and implementation of incremental continuous quality improvement activities which supports examples of good practice and eliminates potential weaknesses rather than the necessity for a reactive fix for underperforming processes.

9. Public Information and Communication

This chapter outlines SOLAS's approach to public information and communication for apprentices, collaborating providers and the general public.

SOLAS is the state agency tasked with building a world class Further and Education sector to fuel Ireland's future. Working closely with regional skills managers and our partners in Education and Training Boards nationally, SOLAS manages a range of Further Education and Training programmes which enables learners to succeed in the labour market and thrive in society.

SOLAS aims to publish clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and easily accessible information.

By working closely with Further Education Partners and employers nationally, SOLAS two dedicated research teams, Data Analytics and Skills & Labour Market Research, seek, not just to respond to, but to anticipate the future needs of business and industries across Ireland.

The Skills & Labour Market Research Unit in SOLAS publishes research and reports on the further and higher education sector as well as other related sectors.

The Data Analytics Unit support SOLAS and Education and Training Boards nationally to make evidence-based decisions which can inform change and ensure that planning and provision of Further Education and Training is economic, efficient and effective.

The Strategy & Evaluation Unit provides the internal SOLAS hub for coordinating the implementation of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024 and conducts systematic reviews of full time Further Education Training provision as well as a programme of research into the FET related activity. This unit also manages the ReferNet project which is a European wide network of expertise on vocational education and training overseen by CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocation Training).

SOLAS's website (www.solas.ie) and SOLAS's social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, anymore?) are key tools in SOLAS information distribution.

SOLAS national publications are overseen and managed by the SOLAS communication team (correct title) which also issues press releases, and manages public website content on SOLAS social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn)

SOLAS publishes a monthly Spotlight on SOLAS (is this just internal)

9.1 Public Information

The information channels listed above are directed at the broader spectrum of stakeholders. SOLAS information and communication channels in relation to apprenticeship programmes include:

- SOLAS Apprenticeship Website
- Collaborating Providers Prospectus?
- Career Booklets
- Press release events
- Generation Apprenticeship

9.1.1 Apprenticeship website

The primary source of information, for apprenticeship is the website www.apprenticeship.ie which includes:

- Apprenticeship Overview
- Apprenticeship programmes
- Frequently asked questions for apprentices,
- Apprentice success stories and videos
- Apprenticeship Jobs
- Information for Potential and Current Employers

It is proposed that the website includes monthly statistical reports on apprentices registrations by apprenticeship programme, registration forecasts and other relevant national and international research

9.1.2 Collaborating Providers Prospectus

Individual collaboration providers may prepare local course brochures. These brochures provide additional detail on facilities and course details. These brochures are distributed at further education training//SOLAS/training provider events. Course brochures are approved by collaborating provider Manager/FET Director? Or by SOLAS

9.1.3 Craft Apprenticeship Information Booklet

Further Education Providers regularly provide career days for second level students, teachers, parents and other interested parties. These events are provided with the Craft Apprenticeship Information Booklet for distribution. The content is managed and controlled by SOLAS Apprenticeship unit and reviewed on a regular basis.

9.1.4 Press Release Events

Press release and press articles regarding SOLAS Apprenticeship programmes information and activities on an occasional basis. These are managed by SOLAS and also through the SOLAS Apprenticeship Unit Generation Apprenticeship campaign (see 7.1.5.)

9.1.5 Generation Apprenticeship

The term Generation Apprenticeship has been chosen to mark and communicate all developments associated to the Irish Apprenticeship system as a whole. Guidelines have been developed to support key stakeholders in working together to strategically promote apprenticeship in Ireland.

9.1.6 Apprentice Information

SOLAS hosts the platform for collection and analysis of key data on national apprenticeships. It is an in-house database built around the business rules governing apprenticeship and contains the following information:

- The register of all certified and in-training apprentices in Ireland including their complete learner history
- The register of all employers in Ireland who are approved as suitable to train apprentices
- The complete learner lifecycle, including scheduling of training, assessments and certification
- Statistical reporting data

9.1.7 Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices

Apprentices must comply with the statutory obligations on them under the Industrial Training Act, 1967 and any Apprenticeship Rules, which apply in respect of the relevant Apprenticeship Programme. The Code of Practice is intended to assist apprentices to understand their duties and responsibilities to the Apprenticeship Programme.

Apprentices must accept the Code of Practice as part of the apprentice registration process.

9.2 Communication

The Generation Apprenticeship national campaign has been running since 2017 to disseminate information and promote awareness about the apprenticeship route to skills development. The campaign includes digital advertising and editorials, annual national and international competitions which involve employers, apprentices and second-level students, presence at education and training fairs such as Higher Options, National and regional jobs fairs, Apprentice and Employer of the Year awards and the annual World Skills week. The impact of Generation Apprenticeship campaign is reviewed as a standing item at meetings of the National Apprenticeship Council and also the National Apprenticeship Alliance

Large scale stakeholder meetings on the campaign are also held three times yearly. At these meetings feedback is gathered on the initiative's underway which shapes forward planning.

9.2.1 Employers and Apprentices Communication

In addition to the Code of Practice for employers and for apprentices, there is ongoing structured communication and sharing of information with employers and apprentices via SOLAS, the Education and Training providers and the Authorised Officer network. The quality and effectiveness of this communication and information-sharing is assessed via the annual surveys of employers and apprentice and through feedback from the Authorised Officer network.

9.2.2 Collaborating Providers Communication

There is regular ongoing engagement between collaborating providers through correspondence, meetings and via more informal mechanisms of surveys and monitoring exercises. Email is used extensively to engage with partners on a day to day basis. There is also a dedicated IT Helpdesk via an intranet function which enables the Authorised Officer network and other education and training colleagues to log queries. The quality of communication and information-sharing with education and training partners is reviewed periodically.

Appendix 1 National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee - Terms of Reference

1.0 Background

The Apprenticeship Programme came into force in 1994 after intensive negotiations involving FÁS, the Department of Education and Science, trade unions, employers and the Institutes of Technology. The traditional time-served approach to apprenticeship was replaced by a standards-based one, and possession of a National Craft Certificate became a compulsory requirement for recognition as a craftsperson. The necessary standards were to be achieved through study of curricula which had been developed by Subject Matter Experts drawn from employers, trade unions, FÁS and the Institutes of Technology. The programme was delivered in most cases, in 7 phases of alternating off-the-job and on-the-job components. FÁS established the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) to oversee the programme's implementation and development.

2.0 NAAC Terms of Reference

- a) To advise the SOLAS Board on international best practice in the areas of apprenticeship training methodology, pedagogical practice, apprenticeship structures and trends.
- b) Advise the SOLAS Board on technological developments that may impact on apprenticeship delivery, assessment methodology and practices, curricula and associated services.
- c) Advise the SOLAS Board on current and expected best practices within the workplace and the latest technologies that could impact across apprenticeship related sectors
- d) Facilitate relationship building between SOLAS and the principle apprenticeship stakeholders.
- e) Advise the SOLAS Board on the continuous improvement in the delivery of the apprenticeship system and services.
- f) Advise the SOLAS Board on approaches needed to promote apprenticeship and to encourage equity and equality of access to and participation in apprenticeship.
- g) Advise the SOLAS Board on approaches to encourage and facilitate employers to actively engage in the apprenticeship system.
- h) Advise the SOLAS Board on the maintenance and expansion of apprenticeship provision and capacity.
- i) Advise the SOLAS Board on apprenticeship completion rates, attrition rates and progression rates within apprenticeships.
- j) To review apprentice registration trends, apprentice profile developments and educational attainment prior to apprenticeship and advise the SOLAS Board on the implications for the apprenticeship system.

- k) To analyse labour market trends and possible consequential influences for apprenticeships and the apprenticeship system and to advise the SOLAS Board
- l) Advise the SOLAS Board on the expansion factors impacting on providers' capacity to expand apprenticeship provision and associated resources
- m) Advise the SOLAS Board on the best approach to manage the apprenticeship system in times of economic growth and downturns
- n) Consider the outcomes of apprenticeship programme and curricula reviews and to advise the SOLAS Board of developments within those programmes
- o) Review the statutory rules of apprenticeship and to advise the SOLAS Board accordingly

3.0 Quorum

The quorum for a meeting of the NAAC is for seven (7) members to be in attendance including the Chairman. Secretarial support for the Committee shall be provided by SOLAS.

4.0 Membership

The membership of the NAAC comprises of two SOLAS Board Members and a representative from the Department of Education and Skills, the Institutes of Technology, Education and Training Boards Ireland, the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS, two Employer Body representatives, SME Representative, Learner representative and two ICTU representatives.

5.0 Frequency of Meetings

The NAAC will meet every quarter within a calendar. The NAAC may establish a sub-committee for the purposes of examining, investigating, considering or expediting issues referred to them by the NAAC. The NAAC may also organise Workshops from time to time to examine and consider specific apprenticeship related topics.

6.0 Attendance

The following attendance rules will apply:

- a) All NAAC members will be required to sign the NAAC meeting, sub-committee meeting or NAAC Workshop attendance sheet for record purposes.
- b) Draft NAAC minutes, draft sub-committee minutes, NAAC Workshop notes will be circulated after each NAAC meeting, sub-committee meeting or Workshop
- c) The draft NAAC minutes will be reviewed and agreed by the NAAC members at the subsequent meeting, which the Chairperson will ratify by signature as the final agreed minutes.
- d) The draft Workshop notes will be reviewed and agreed by the NAAC members at the subsequent meeting, which the Chairperson will ratify by signature as the final agreed minutes.

- e) The final sub-committee minutes will be reviewed and agreed by the sub-committee members at the subsequent meeting, which the sub-committee Chairperson will ratify by signature as the final agreed minutes.
- f) Where an NAAC member is unable to attend a meeting/workshop, an agreed informed substitute nominee would attend with prior notice to the Chairperson
- g) In the absence of the Chairperson the second SOLAS Board representative will chair the meeting. Where the second SOLAS Board representative is also unable to attend the meeting, the Chairperson will nominate an acting Chair in their absence as long as the quorum for the meeting is maintained. The Chairperson will notify the Secretariat of the nominee in advance of the meeting.

7.0 Meeting Location

NAAC meetings and associated meetings will generally be held in Castleforbes House, Castleforbes Road, Dublin 1.

8.0 Meeting Expenses

Representative expenses will be paid by their respective organisations.

9.0 Reporting

The NAAC through the SOLAS Executive and the NAAC Board Members will formally advise the SOLAS Board on matters pertaining to apprenticeship.

10.0 Review of Terms of Reference

The NAAC Terms of Reference shall be reviewed every three calendar years.

Appendix 2 Programme Advisory Board Terms of Reference

Purpose:

The key function of the Programme Advisory Board is to provide assistance and advice with programme development activities to reflect current legislative frameworks and industry requirements.

Programme Advisory Board objectives are as follows:

1. To provide support to SOLAS in the development, review, and continual enhancement of the Apprenticeship Programme/s from a technical, regulatory, future employment, environmental, education and training and ethical perspectives.
2. To ensure that the apprenticeship Programme maintains an industry-led approach to its continuous development.
3. To assist SOLAS in the successful development, review, and implementation of Apprenticeship Programmes.

Function & Scope:

The Programme Advisory Board will fulfil its purposes by:

1. Supporting SOLAS to conduct periodic review of the Apprenticeship Programme/s
2. Conducting an annual review of the relevant Apprenticeship Programme and implementing agreed minor changes (programme content, delivery, assessment etc.) within the guidelines of relevant QQI policies and criteria
3. Recommending any changes that may be required to the Occupational Profile for the relevant Apprenticeship Programme
4. Informing SOLAS of any emerging domestic and international trends and forthcoming legislative and technical changes to the trade area that will potentially impact on the apprenticeship programme demand, content, or delivery.
5. Sharing feedback on the structural and organisational efficiency of the programme (i.e., release arrangements, assessment arrangements, flexible learning techniques, operational issues etc.)
6. Reviewing relevant internal and external reports to inform the future direction of the Apprenticeship Programme
7. Facilitating a feedback and consultation process with relevant stakeholder groups relating to specific aspects of programme development as directed by SOLAS

Appendix 3 Terms of Reference for the sub-committee to the NAAC

1.0 Function / Purpose

The function of this sub-committee to the NAAC is to adjudicate on both appeal and RPL applications.

1.1 Appeal Applications

The Committee will adjudicate on appeal applications submitted to SOLAS in relation to aspects of the pre and post 2016 apprenticeship schemes and programmes.

The Committee is the final adjudication body in relation to appeal applications and may consider any appeal which it considers reasonable, with the exception of issues related to the marking of assessments. The Committee may, for example, consider an application from an apprentice or an employer wishing to appeal:

- a) The termination of his / her apprenticeship having failed to reach the minimum qualifying standard, after three (3) attempts, in any of the off-the-job training modular assessments.
- b) The decision by SOLAS to reject an application for the legacy award of a Record of Attainment.
- c) The decision by SOLAS to reject their application for exemptions from the pre 2016 Standards Based Apprenticeship Programme.
- d) The decision by SOLAS to refuse to approve their company to train apprentices.
- e) The decision by SOLAS to suspend their company from registering apprentices for six months or, to remove their company from the approved employer register.

The marking of assessments is outside the remit of the Committee. All enquiries relating to the marking of assessments should be submitted to the ETB or the Institutes of Technology where the examination took place.

1.2 RPL Applications

The Committee will adjudicate on RPL applications submitted to SOLAS in relation to aspects of the pre 2016 standards based apprenticeship scheme.

The Committee may consider any RPL application request which it considers reasonable, with the exception of applications for exemptions from Off-the-Job training phases and assessments. The Committee may, for example, consider an application from apprentices:

- a) Seeking recognition of On-the-Job assessments, at Phases 5 and/or 7, completed with an unapproved employer, and to have these formally recorded on their apprenticeship record.
- b) Seeking a review of their employment record and to have periods of trade related employment with unapproved employers formally recorded on their apprenticeship record.
- c) Seeking a review of their training / education records and to have the time periods in trade related training or education formally recorded on their apprenticeship record.

Applications for RPL will only be considered from apprentices:

1. Where 4 years has elapsed since their registration as an apprentice
2. Who have successfully completed all off-the-job phases (2,4 & 6)
3. Who can provide evidence that they were unable to secure employment with a SOLAS approved employer for the relevant period

The Committee will be the final SOLAS adjudication body in relation to all applications.

2.0 Committee Membership

The Committee will have a minimum of 5 voting members with the option of an independent Chairperson and a minimum of 2 non-voting members in advisory roles. The Committee may co-opt additional members in advisory roles where required. *(see Appendix 1)*

- 1) A Chairperson approved by the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee
- 2) An Employer Body Representative
- 3) A Trade Union Representative
- 4) An Institute of Technology Apprenticeship Committee Representative (ITAC)
- 5) SOLAS Apprenticeship & Construction Services Manager
- 6) Apprenticeship Unit Manager, Education & Training Board Ire. (ETBI) Representative,
- 7) Education & Training Board Ire. , Authorised Officer, - advisory role only
- 8) SOLAS Legal Services Manager – advisory role only
- 9) SOLAS Apprenticeship & Construction Services Asst. Manager, Secretary

SOLAS Committee members will be appointed by the SOLAS Executive. All other members will be nominated by the NAAC, ETBI and ITAC. The term of office for the Committees will be set for a period to coincide with the period of the term of office of the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee. At least four voting members will be required for a quorum.

3.0 Committee Operational Overview

The Committee will meet at least once a quarter with secretarial support provided by SOLAS Apprenticeship & Construction Services. All members in attendance will be required to sign the attendance sheet.

The Committee Secretary will arrange for all information relating to each application to be distributed to committee members in advance of the meeting to enable member to review the applications prior to the meeting. At the meeting, the Secretary will present all applications to the Committee for consideration. The Committee may seek further information or advice from such persons as it deems necessary and may invite such persons to attend and address the Committee.

Committee decisions will be made by consensus based on all the evidence available following full and frank discussion. Where the Committee is divided, the outcome will be decided by a majority vote of the members present with the Chairperson holding the casting vote. The decisions are ratified by the signatures of the Chairperson and the Secretary and at least one other representative in attendance. The decisions of the Committee will be formally presented to SOLAS by the Secretary for ratification.

The proceedings and deliberations of the Committee will be strictly confidential. Under no circumstances should any person (Committee Member or invited attendee) disclose any deliberations, document, information or opinions conveyed or expressed at the meeting. All documentation circulated at Committee meetings should be returned to the Secretary at the conclusion of the meeting. Only recorded decisions made by the Committee will be disclosed or made public in accordance with SOLAS policy.

The applicant should be informed, in writing, of the outcome of their application within 10 working days by the Committee Secretary. Any amendment to the Applicant's apprenticeship classification as a consequence of the process should be arranged by the Committee Secretary. SOLAS will retain all application documentation securely for a period of six years and maintain a register of decisions indefinitely.

SOLAS will present an annual report to the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee.

Appendix 4 Role and Responsibilities of SOLAS Authorised Officers

The SOLAS Authorised Officer operates within the role of an ETB Senior Training Advisor. The primary objective of the post is to facilitate the effective and efficient delivery of all services and procedures associated with Apprenticeship Training	
Duties and Responsibilities:	
Governance and Administration	
1.	Implement all agreed SOLAS Guidelines and through the use of the Apprenticeship Client Services System record all specified data in an accurate and timely manner
2.	Promote an apprenticeship as a career path of choice, engage and provide relevant information to all stakeholders as required
3.	Provide an independent governance layer through which the integrity of the overall apprenticeship programme is maintained
Employer Services	
4.	Assess and establish that prospective employers meet the specified criteria to train apprentices
5.	Advise employers of their responsibilities and obligations when employing an apprentice in accordance with the Apprenticeship Code of Practice.
6.	Confirm that employers have fulfilled all of their obligations through regular communications and monitoring visits
7.	Facilitate employer feedback regarding curricula, governance, apprentice progress and advocate on behalf of the employer where necessary
Apprentice Services	
8.	Provide the necessary support and advice to apprentices as they progress through their apprenticeship.
9.	Advise apprentices of their responsibilities and obligations in accordance with the Apprenticeship Code of Practice
10.	Advocate on the behalf of the apprentice with the employer, training provider and SOLAS as necessary
11.	Provide an independent liaison between the employer and apprentice if, and when necessary

Appendix 5 Assessment Sampling Methodology

Sampling Methodology

The sampling strategy is determined by SOLAS and takes account of all pre-2016 Craft apprenticeship programmes and apprenticeship off-the-job training phases. This follows QQI External Authentication Q.A. Guide (Revised 2015), see *Figure 10* below

Sampling: Values for \sqrt{N}

Number of learners (ranges)	Sample size/sample evidence
0→12	All learners (all scripts)
12→144	12
144→168	13
169→195	14
196→224	15
225→256	16
257→289	17
290→324	18
325→361	19
361→400	20

Figure 10

The criteria are as follows:

Be sufficient in size (with a minimum cohort of six or 50% of class) to enable sound judgement about the fairness and consistency of assessment documentation.

If there are twelve or less assessment, a minimum of six assessments will be external authenticated, to allow for the cut-off points between the grades to be established

- If there are more than twelve assessments in a class, the sample will normally be 50%
- Where grade changes are identified in the E.A process, all the grades within the class must be reviewed and adjust marks accordingly.
- Sampling of all Classes Delivered
 - Ensure that every instructor that delivers a class will have at least one class authenticated each year.

Appendix 6 SOLAS Service Level Agreement

Service Level Agreement between SOLAS and the [Institution Name] for the delivery of Craft Apprenticeship Off-the-Job Training Phases

2.1 Purpose

In a spirit of partnership, the parties to this memorandum will co-operate in the effective and efficient delivery of scheduled apprenticeship ‘off-the-job’ training and assessment activities. To this end; in accordance with the Collaborating Provider’s own QA arrangements, combined with the SOLAS apprenticeship rules and regulations; the scope of this agreement includes managing the delivery of ‘off-the-job’ apprenticeship training and assessment activities in a manner that maintains the overall integrity of apprenticeship training in a safe and healthy working environment.

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The primary responsibilities of SOLAS as the Co-ordinating Provider for apprenticeship (see Table 1) training programme delivery have been:

- Programme management: curriculum and assessment development, programme review and validation, apprentice *off-the-job* training phase scheduling, and programme delivery process monitoring
- Implementing the Co-ordinating Provider’s quality assurance system
- Overall management of the electronic Apprenticeship Client Services System

As part of this revised MoU SOLAS will adopt a joint approach with HEI providers in relation to curriculum development, assessment and monitoring of programme delivery. SOLAS will uniquely retain responsibility for apprentice *off-the-job* training phase scheduling and overall management of the electronic Apprenticeship Client Services System.

To facilitate a “*fair and consistent treatment of learners*”; the Collaborating Provider, is responsible for providing the appropriate resources² necessary to deliver the entirety of the scheduled quality assured *off-the-job* apprenticeship training and assessment programmes in a safe healthy working environment.

- Monitoring the apprentice’s learning progression and the provision of any additional learning supports identified for individual learners
- Data management and data transfer to SOLAS in accordance with agreed procedures and time-frames

⁵ As per Section 2 <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Core%20Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines.pdf> issued April 2016

- Facilitating the SOLAS apprenticeship programme training delivery process monitoring activities (including results analysis)
- Conduct and mark apprenticeship assessments in accordance with the SOLAS requirements

2.3 Quality Assurance Systems

In relation to quality assurance of the apprenticeship programmes, the primary objective is to provide high quality training programmes that meet the appropriate national and international quality standards as applicable. To this end, the Co-ordinating Provider's QA system focuses particular attention on programme design, the effective and efficient training delivery, assessment methodology, and the analytical programme review and monitoring activities of *on-the-job* and *off-the-job* apprenticeship training.

The Collaborating Provider has approved and implemented its own internal Quality Assurance system, in line with its statutory obligations and internal governance procedures, which aligns with the QQI requirements³ for the delivery of *off-the-job* apprenticeship training. Ultimately, apprenticeship *off-the-job* training programmes are delivered in accordance with the SOLAS requirements and the Collaborating Provider's approved QA system. However, in the event that a conflict arises between Collaborating Provider's QA system and the SOLAS apprenticeship rules and regulations the SOLAS regulations take precedent.

2.4 Protection of Learners

In the event of a Collaborating Provider prompted training programme cancellation, the Collaborating Provider issues the Co-ordinating Provider with at least eight weeks' notice of the proposed cancellation. To maintain a continuity of training delivery the Collaborating Provider will co-operate with the Co-ordinating Provider to make alternative arrangements for the training and assessment of the affected apprentices.

In the event that an apprenticeship instructor, teacher or course tutor is unavailable to deliver a scheduled lesson, the Collaborating Provider will make the necessary arrangements to provide a suitably qualified substitute.

If, for any reason the Co-ordinating Provider cancels or relocates a scheduled apprenticeship *off-the-job* training programme from one Collaborating Provider to an alternative Collaborating Provider, the transfer will be completed in accordance with the agreed Standard Operating Procedure.⁴

³ Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines –developed by QQI April 2016

⁴ SOP 107 (V2) Re-assigning an Apprenticeship Programme to an Alternative Training Provider.

2.5 SOLAS Apprenticeship Monitoring Processes

SOLAS has a statutory responsibility for the governance, co-ordination, administration, and control of apprenticeship training in Republic of Ireland and, in line with this, is required to implement a series of monitoring and reporting processes which establish the effectiveness of the apprenticeship training programme delivery. In accordance with the legislative requirements, SOLAS recognises the continuous improvement process as a priority component of its apprenticeship quality⁵ and governance responsibilities.

Consequently, to protect the integrity of apprenticeship awards, SOLAS employs a partnership approach with its training partners to continuously improve the quality of training delivery and assessment practices.

The purpose of SOLAS Training Provider monitoring activities are to:

- Endeavour to have apprenticeship programmes remain current and continue to meet the needs of relevant stakeholders.
- Verify that the curriculum and assessment regulations are being adhered to, and deliver a fair and consistent treatment of learners both within and across training providers.
- Identify areas of the training delivery and assessment process which have potential for continuous improvement action
- Contribute to the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement in which all stakeholders are aware of their respective duties and responsibilities and the collective need to pro-actively address areas for improvement identified in programme delivery and assessment practices.
- Enhance the learning and development experience of the apprentice in attaining the standards at the appropriate level of his or her apprenticeship
- Establish the degree to which learners achieve specific programme learning outcomes (SOLAS Authorised Officers observe at the Results Approval or Examination Board Meetings as appropriate and issue written report of the outcomes to SOLAS).

To this end, SOLAS will develop a series of monitoring instruments designed to establish that all apprenticeship training providers adhere to the SOLAS apprenticeship training regulations and that they are regularly monitored to confirm that they continue to provide an effective and efficient apprentice training and assessment process.

⁵ See Sections 28, 30, 32, and 33 of the 2012 Act.

Appendix 7 External Authenticator Code of Practice

External authenticator/code of practice

The role of the external authenticator is to provide independent authentication of fair and consistent assessment of learners in line with QQI requirements and national standards. This code of practice identifies the key areas of the role and the standards or professionalism which External authenticators are expected to maintain. External authenticators must undertake to work within this code of practice. The external authenticator will undertake to:

- exercise their role with utmost integrity and professionalism when undertaking external authentication for a provider
- comply with QQI policies and procedures specifically in relation to awards and assessment fully comply with the provider's policies and procedures
- inform the provider of any potential conflict of interest which may compromise their role inform the provider of availability
- communicate appropriately with the provider and inform them of planned visits and information required
- provide constructive feedback to the centre management and staff
- Compile an external authentication report on time and based on an independent evaluation of the process and procedures.

Name of external authenticator

Signed Date

QQI, 2013. *Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers*, p.51

Appendix 8 External Authentication Report (Sample only)

External Authentication Report Phase # Craft Apprenticeship

1. Data Protection regulations

Data Protection regulations must always be adhered to.

2. Timeline for completion of External Authentication

External Authentications must be conducted following the training providers internal verification process and prior to the providers Results Approval Panel meeting. Sufficient time must be given to the provider to prepare for an External Authentication. Please ensure that all blank fields are crossed out and marked N/A (Not applicable)

3. Selection of Classes for external Authentication

A schedule of apprenticeship classes is selected for external authentication by the relevant ETB.

4. Sampling Strategy

1. The Authenticator Selects the sample of assessment evidence, applying the SOLAS sampling strategy, they must ensure a spread across the different grade bands and at the borderline between grades.
2. The grade cut-off points (see below) should be establish.
3. Review the standard of the evidence at each grade band. Select the learner evidence which have the lowest mark and the highest mark on the border lines between the grades i.e.
 - Lowest Pass/Highest unsuccessful
 - Lowest Merit/Highest Pass
 - Lowest Distinction/Highest Merit
4. Examine the evidence within the sample with reference to the learning outcomes in the award specification and the provider's assessment criteria and marking sheets.

5. Closing Meeting

On completion of the Authentication, a closing meeting must be conducted by the authenticator. [During the meeting feedback should be given to the relevant training personnel.](#) Provider feedback should be recorded, as appropriate. A summary of the EA's findings must be recorded in the report. Corrective actions identified in the Authentication event should be addressed and a timeline assigned for follow-up where required

Apprenticeship Programme Details			
Apprenticeship Provider			
Centre Location			
Location where EA took place			
EA Co-Ordinator (TSO)			
External Authenticator			
Class Number			
Programme Version, Date & Code	Version: Date: Code:		
Class Instructor			
Apprenticeship Craft			
Number of Apprentices in class			
EA conducted on provider site	Yes	EA conducted Remotely	Yes
EA Opening Meeting Date			
Details/Comments on opening Meeting			
No. of Sample Assessments Authenticated	Distinction:	Merit:	Pass: Referrals:

Class Assessment Results						
Full Class Assessment Results:	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>P1</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>P3</i>	<i>SD1</i>
<i>No. of Distinctions Recorded:</i>						
<i>No. of Merits Recorded:</i>						
<i>No. of Passes Recorded:</i>						
<i>No. of Referrals Recorded:</i>						
<i>Overall Results:</i>	<i>Distinctions</i>	<i>Merits</i>	<i>Passes</i>	<i>Referrals</i>		

Apprentices Assessment Sampled T1 Rev.		
Apprentice Registration Number Sampled	Grade	Comments / Actions / Observations
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
Number of Recommended Grade Change & %		
Additional comment		

Apprentices Assessment Sampled P1 Rev.				
Apprentice Registration Number Sampled		Grade	Comments / Actions / Observations	
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
Number of Recommended Grade Change & %				
Additional comment				
Please confirm evidence viewed by inserting appropriate symbol in the box provided				
		T1	P1	P2
Assessment Sign in /Attendance Sheets Complete				
Internal Verification Report complete and signed				
Were assessment marking sheets viewed				
Were assessment answer sheets provided				
Was the evidence assessed in accordance with the module and assessment instrument				
Are results consistent with national standards for the Award				
Invigilators Reports checked?				
Assessment Feedback Sheets available for review				
Assessment Seating Plans available and complete				
Phase Summary Assessment Sheet complete				
EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATOR DECLARATION				
I declare that I am not aware of any potential or known conflict of interest that might compromise my professional judgement while carrying out this authentication of apprenticeship assessment results.				
I have applied the SOLAS agreed Sampling Strategy and will abide by the requirements.				
External Authenticator name (print)				
External Authenticator Signature:				Date:
Collaborating Provider:	Training Standards Officer Signature:		Date:	

Appendix 9 SOLAS Memorandum of Understanding (Sample only)

Memorandum of Understanding between SOLAS and the [Institution Name] for the delivery of Craft Apprenticeship Off-the-Job Training Phases

Revision No.	Details of Revisions	Approved Signed	Issue Date
1.	New Document	November 2017	November 2017
2.	Revised Document	December 2022	
	<i>Next planned review: December 2025</i>		

Notes:

1. This is not a legally binding agreement or contract, and it is not exhaustive in its identification of the two organisations' responsibilities
2. The term 'partnership' is used in this document, as in the general contemporary parlance; as it refers to a relationship based on consultation and co-operation. The word 'partnership' is not employed here in any legal or corporate sense and should not be construed as placing any legal or formal responsibility on either party.
3. SOLAS and its various training partners recognise their special relationship in the provision and delivery of '*off-the-job*' apprenticeship training and assessment programmes. This relationship is underpinned by the relevant legislation and is based on a partnership approach to apprenticeship training delivery.
4. Any change to the main body of this agreement requires the approval signature of the Principals from each of the participating organisations.

**Memorandum of Understanding between An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus
Scileanana (SOLAS), the Co-ordinating Provider,
and [Institution Name], the Collaborating Provider,
for the delivery of
Craft Apprenticeship *Off-the-Job* Training Phases**

1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1. This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna, the Further Education and Training Authority (hereafter referred to as the Co-ordinating Provider) and [Institution Name](hereafter referred to as the Collaborative Provider) provides an agreed framework for co-operation and communications between the two organisations for the delivery of apprenticeship training and assessment activities.
- 1.2. The Memorandum has been developed in accordance with the relevant statutory provision, national strategies, and government policies. Although it is not a legally binding agreement or contract, and is not exhaustive in its identification of the coordinating provider and collaborating provider responsibilities, it does not preclude the identification and implementation by the organisations of additional objectives and activities. Furthermore, in the spirit of the MOU it is anticipated that further areas of collaboration will be identified subsequent to its agreement.
- 1.3. Under this Memorandum, SOLAS will act as the Co-ordinating Provider in accordance with the QQI guidelines on Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines, Statutory QA Guidelines developed by QQI for providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes⁶ and the Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines: Statutory QA Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers⁷.

⁶ Available at http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Apprenticeship_Programmes_QAG_Topic-Specific.pdf issued April 2016

⁵ Available at <http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Core%20Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines.pdf> issued April 2016

- 1.4. Under this Memorandum, the [Institution Name] will act as the Collaborating Provider in accordance with the:
- ✓ The QQI validated programme curriculum, associated assessment instruments, and marking scheme
 - ✓ Higher Education Institution QA Framework, Assessment Regulations
 - ✓ QQI QA guidance document *Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines: Statutory QA Guidelines developed by QQI for providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes*, and the,
 - ✓ QQI QA guidance document *Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines: Statutory QA Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers - April 2016*.
- 1.5. The Co-ordinating Provider and the Collaborating Provider have separately agreed terms and conditions for advancing moneys for scheduled training delivery; therefore, apprenticeship funding arrangements are outside the scope of this agreement.
- 1.6. The Co-ordinating Provider and the Collaborating Provider will facilitate arrangements whereby all relevant personnel will be familiar with the content of the MOU and that all dealings between the partner organisations and with other named parties are conducted in the manner that is consistent with its objectives.

2. Duration of this Agreement

- 2.1 The duration of this MOU is for three (3) calendar years from the date of signing.
- 2.2 This MOU may be modified with the mutual consent of the authorised signatories.,

Partner Profiles

3.1 The Co-ordinating Provider: SOLAS

Established in 2013 under the Further Education and Training Act, SOLAS is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills and is governed by the SOLAS Board. SOLAS is responsible for building the identity and values of a world-class, integrated Further Education and Training (FET) Sector that is responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changing economy. Its role is to fund, co-ordinate and monitor a range of FET provision to deliver economic and social wellbeing and to progress, influence and support the development of a FET sector including craft apprenticeships.

SOLAS has statutory responsibility for the administration and management of the apprenticeship programme at national level. In order to fulfil this role SOLAS will engage collaborating providers to deliver scheduled⁸ apprenticeship training and administrative services on its behalf (see *Appendix 1*). In line with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) requirements, as the Co-ordinating Provider of designated craft apprenticeships (*listed in Table 1 below*), SOLAS has overall responsibility for curriculum, assessment design, marking scheme, programme development, review, and the quality assurance policies and procedures for designated craft apprenticeship training and assessment provision. SOLAS operates in a collaborative approach/model recognising that the HEI provider Quality Assurance Framework complements these processes.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Agricultural Mechanics | 2. Aircraft Mechanics |
| 3. Brick and Stonelaying | 4. Carpentry and Joinery |
| 5. Construction Plant Fitting | 6. Electrical |
| 7. Electrical Instrumentation | 8. Electronic Security Systems |
| 9. Farriery | 10. Heavy Vehicle Mechanics |
| 11. Instrumentation | 12. Metal Fabrication |
| 13. Mechanical Automation and Maintenance Fitting (MAMF) | |
| 14. Motor Mechanics | 15. Pipefitting |
| 16. Plumbing | 17. Plastering |
| 18. Print Media | 19. Painting and Decorating |
| 20. Refrigeration and Air-conditioning | |
| 21. Stonecutting and Stonemasonry | |
| 22. Sheet Metalworking | 23. Toolmaking |
| 24. Vehicle Body Repair | 25. Wood Manufacturing and Finishing |
| 26. Industrial Insulation | 27. Floor and Wall Tiling |

Table 1 Designated Craft Apprenticeships

⁸ Each October the apprenticeship *off-the-job* training capacity is agreed between SOLAS and relevant Training Partners for the forthcoming academic year.

The SOLAS apprenticeship programmes (pre-2016) are managed by the SOLAS Executive, in consultation with the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, comprising of the consortium of industry practitioners; including employer representative groups, trades unions, and training providers from across the various *off-the-job* training phases

The programme design takes cognisance of the experience of those involved in apprenticeship training provision to facilitate apprentices to effectively and efficiently achieve the minimum intended programme learning outcomes whilst remaining a functional part of their employer's team.

In addition, SOLAS is responsible for the planning, scheduling and monitoring of all apprenticeship training programmes nationally. The capacity planning process for '*off-the-job*' training is outlined in Appendix 2. When required, SOLAS will liaise with individual training providers to arrange additional training delivery.

3.2 The Collaborating Provider: Higher Education Institutions

(Named HEI) is an institution of higher education, established under the Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006 and/or Technological University Act 2018 which provides higher education programmes leading to awards across Levels 6-10 of the National Framework of Qualifications. It is governed by a statutory Governing body, which is also responsible for appointing an Academic Council to assist in the planning, coordination, development and oversight of the educational work of the Institution, and to protect, maintain and develop the standards of the programmes which it offers.

In addition, the Institution also participates as a Collaborating Provider in the delivery of '*off-the-job*' phases of specified designated craft apprenticeships. In this role, the Institution is responsible for the operational delivery and the implementation of its own Quality Assurance Framework in relation to all craft apprenticeship training and assessment⁹ delivered within its training location(s). In addition to agreed training delivery, the Collaborating Provider is responsible for the provision of specified apprenticeship administration functions on behalf of SOLAS. (refer to Appendix # for these functions)

⁹ In accordance with the QQI validated apprenticeship programme curriculum, associates assessment instruments and marking scheme, and the Apprenticeship Services Assessment Regulations

3. Legislative Context

In Ireland the administration, regulation and organisation of apprenticeship programmes is governed by the Industrial Training Act 1967. The primary legislation outlining statutory duties and responsibilities of the Co-ordinating Provider, Collaborating Provider and QQI in relation to Apprenticeship are included in the following:

- Industrial Training Act, 1967 (No. 5/1967)
- Labour Services Act 1987 - Apprenticeship Rules 1997 (S.I. No. 168/1997) and the Labour Services (Amendment) Act 2009 (No. 38/2009)
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (No. 28/2012)
- Further Education and Training Act 2013 (No. 25/2013)
- Data Protection Act 1988 (No. 25/1988) and the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003 (No. 6/2003)
- Institutes of Technology Act 1992- 2006
- Technological University Act 2018

Pursuant to Section 32 of the Industrial Training Act 1967, and the conferring of statutory powers by the Further Education and Training Act 2013, and as the Co-ordinating Provider, SOLAS has responsibility for governance, co-ordination, administration, and control of craft apprenticeship training in Ireland. This responsibility encompasses maintaining the integrity and the efficient design and delivery of apprenticeship programme curriculum and assessment activities delivered in a safe and healthy working environment in accordance with SOLAS rules and regulations. Furthermore, the Co-ordinating Provider has agreed with the Collaborating Training Provider for service provision in relation to the organisation and delivery of various '*off-the-job*' phases of apprenticeship training programmes. Under this arrangement and subject to the provisions of the legislation and specific requirements of apprenticeship training delivery, the principal function of the Collaborating Provider is to;

- Deliver industry specific '*off-the-job*' phases of training and assessment to registered apprentices in accordance with the SOLAS apprenticeship curriculum and assessment regulations.
- Co-operate with the Co-ordinating Provider for service provision in relation to training delivery.

4. Collaboration and Communications

The Co-ordinating Provider and the Collaborating Provider will work together in a spirit of partnership and continuous quality improvement in relation to the apprenticeship programme design, delivery and monitoring.

Should it emerge that a review is required, the coordinating provider will initiate a review.

It is recognised by both partners in this agreement that to remain *'fit-for-purpose'* apprenticeship training programmes must be continuously modernised and updated. In this context, the Co-ordinating Provider, the Collaborating Providers and other partners are committed to reviewing policies, procedures and programme provision to demonstrate that they satisfy the needs of the learner, the industry and the training partners.

Subsequently, to facilitate effective programme delivery processes, in relation to reviewing specified components of apprenticeship training and assessment activities; both partners to this agreement will nominate representatives to participate on strategic and operational working groups as necessary.

The existing arrangements do not limit the innovation of either the Co-ordinating Provider or the Collaborating Provider; but rather, commits them to bring about the necessary changes in an open, productive and collaborative manner.

5. Dispute Resolution

Any dispute between the partners in this agreement as to the interpretation of any of the terms of operations shall, in the first instance, be discussed and agreed in good faith between the relevant personnel of each partner organisation. In the event of a failure to reach agreement, the issue in dispute shall be referred to an agreed third party mediator for discussion and resolution.

6. Co-ordinating Provider and Collaborating Provider MOU

The Collaborating Training Provider's authorised signatories (detailed below) accept the contents of this document as the basis of a 'Memorandum of Understanding' for the delivery of the specified apprenticeship programme curriculum content and assessment activities.

This Memorandum of Understanding is valid for a period of three years or until such time that An tSeirbhis Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scieanna (SOLAS) is no longer the Coordinating Provider, the duly authorised representative for and on behalf of the An tSeirbhis Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scieanna (SOLAS), the Co-ordinating Provider: Castleforbes House, 1, Castleforbes Road, Dublin 1

-and-

[Institution Name] (The Collaborating Training Provider)

The duly authorised representative for and on behalf of the above Institution
(Collaborating Training Provider)

Name (printed): _____

Title: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

The duly authorised representative for and on behalf of SOLAS, the Coordinating Provider:

Name (printed): _____

Title: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____