National College of Ireland

Quality Assurance Handbook

Chapter 12: Apprenticeship Programmes

Approved: November 2018

Updated: March 2020

1 Overview

This section of the NCI Quality Assurance Handbook details the internal and external framework, policies and procedures for the development, delivery and quality management of apprenticeship programmes. This document highlights how internal procedures are aligned with key external reference points, including:

- QQI's Topic Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (June 2016)[1]
- Handbook for Developing a National Apprenticeship (May 2017)[2]
- Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices[3]
- Generation Apprenticeships Website[4]

Any staff member considering developing a national apprenticeship is advised to review these documents alongside the NCI's QA Handbook[5] and, at the earliest possible opportunity, speak to the relevant Dean of School and NCI Apprenticeship Manager.

The following 10-steps are involved in developing a national apprenticeship and it is estimated that development of an apprenticeship programme will usually take 12-15 months.

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT
CRITICAL PATH AND IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

01 PROPOSAL - RESEARCH SKILLS & NEED INDUSTRY-LED CONSORTIUM

02 ASSESSMENT & APPROVAL FOR DEVELOPMENT APPRENTICESHIP COUNCIL MINISTER FOR EDUCATION & SKILLS

03 PROJECT PLAN APPROVED & DEVELOPMENT FUNDING ALLOCATED SOLAS, HEA, APPRENTICESHIP COUNCIL

04 PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY-LED CONSORTIUM

05 OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE APPROVED APPRENTICESHIP COUNCIL

06 QA APPROVED & PROGRAMME VALIDATED VALIDATION BODY/QQI

08 CREATION OF INDUSTRIAL TRAINING ORDER SOLAS

09 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN & BUDGET AGREED SOLAS AND HEA

09 APPROVAL OF EMPLOYERS REGISTRATION OF APPRENTICES SOLAS

10 APPRENTICESHIP UNDERWAY INDUSTRY-LED CONSORTIUM

[1] https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Apprenticeship%20Programmes%20QAG%20Topic-Specific.pdf
[2] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/Developing-a-National-Apprenticeship-Handbook.pdf
[3] http://www.apprenticeship.ie/Documents/ApprenticeshipCodeOfPractice.pdf
[4] http://www.apprenticeship.ie/en/SitePages/Home.aspx
[5] https://www.ncirl.ie/About/Governance-Reports/Academic-Policies-Procedures

1.1 10-Steps for Developing a New National Apprenticeship Programme[6]

1.1.1 Industry-Led (Consortium Led) Need Identified (Step 1)
The first step in the development of an apprenticeship is to establish a substantial skill need within an industry sector(s) for the programme. Clusters of employers may come together to form an initial consortium to identify and agree on the need for an apprenticeship programme. A formal proposal is made to the Apprenticeship Council as part of its periodic Calls for Proposals. As an apprenticeship prepares someone to operate autonomously and competently in a particular occupation, an outline occupational profile is an important component of the initial work on an apprenticeship proposal. The occupational profile will propose the knowledge, skills and competencies which will be attained by an apprentice on completion of their apprenticeship. It will propose the duration of the apprenticeship and qualification level on the National Framework of Qualifications, typically between Level 5 and Level 8.

1.1.2 Assessment for Approval and Development (Step 2)
The Apprenticeship Council assesses apprenticeship proposals and makes recommendations to the Minister for Education and Skills on new apprenticeships for development. The Council will engage with proposers on development and indicative delivery funding in advance of formal approval of an apprenticeship programme for development.

1.1.3 Project Plan Approved and Development Funding Allocated (Step 3)
Following approval of an apprenticeship proposal for development, proposers are asked to formalise their consortium and to submit a detailed project plan for development of their apprenticeship. The consortium is industry-led, with a number of employer representatives, one or more employee representatives, education and training provider(s) and other key stakeholders in the region/nationally. A consortium generally has between 7-12 members. The consortium oversees the development of the apprenticeship programme according to the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship. On receipt and approval of the plan, the Apprenticeship Council recommends allocation of development funding and a Memorandum of Funding is agreed.

1.1.4 Programme Developed (Step 4)
During the programme development phase, all of the detailed design and content of the apprenticeship programme is completed by the consortium. The occupational profile for the apprenticeship forms the core of the programme, guiding the development of the programme learning outcomes and the learning outcomes of the programme's constituent modules that will be delivered both on-the-job and off-the-job. Please see Section 5 for a more detailed outline of the proposal, development and approval process for apprenticeship programmes.

1.1.5 Occupational Profile Approved (Step 5)
At a stage determined by the consortium, the occupational profile for the apprenticeship is submitted to the Apprenticeship Council for formal approval. Two principal objectives for the Council at this point are to be satisfied that there is adequate industry support for the apprenticeship and that there is no excessive overlap (in general, no more than 50%) with an

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[6] Extracted from the *Handbook for Developing a National Apprenticeship* (May 2017)

existing apprenticeship. Industry support comprises support from employee representatives as well as employers and employer groups. Upon review of the occupational profile, the Council may decide to approve it or defer approval pending amendment or clarifications from the consortium. In the case where approval is deferred pending additional information, guidance is provided to the consortium on what is required. Approved occupational profiles are subsequently published on the National Apprenticeship website and form part of the publicly-available information on national apprenticeships.

1.1.6 QA Approved and Programme Validated (Step 6)

Quality assurance arrangements for the apprenticeship programme form part of the validation process, and topic-specific guidelines on quality assurance of apprenticeship programmes have been developed by QQI to support both the on-the job and off-the-job components. These guidelines also outline the role of the consortium in developing the apprenticeship programme and monitoring its delivery throughout the period of validation. QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training also apply to apprenticeship programmes in this instance.

As QQI charges a fee for the validation of any programme of education and training and other professional bodies may also charge a fee for recognition and/or validation, the consortium is advised to seek funding for the programme validation process as part of the budget for programme development.

The consortium is responsible for preparing the submission for validation, which primarily includes a programme document that outlines in detail the programme learning outcomes, the content and structure of the programme, and the quality assurance arrangements that will underpin the delivery and monitoring of the programme. The submission also documents how the proposed programme meets the requirements of the Professional Award Type Descriptor and other validation criteria. Following submission of a programme for validation, an independent panel with external experts is convened by QQI. The panel is tasked with assessing the programme submission and conducting a site visit to meet the consortium before making a recommendation to either QQI or the governing body with delegated authority to make awards. If the panel believes that the programme is not sufficiently developed to warrant validation, it may recommend areas for improvement that will assist the consortium in modifying the proposed programme and preparing a resubmission. Following a successful validation process, the apprenticeship programme is approved for national delivery as part of the national apprenticeship system.

1.1.7 Industrial Training Order Created (Step 7)

An Industrial Training Order (ITO), which is a statutory instrument, designates an industrial activity as an apprenticeship. SOLAS is the body responsible for creating Industrial Training Orders, via the 1967 Industrial Training Act and the 2013 Further Education and Training Act. The occupational profile underpinning each apprenticeship is used to determine whether a new ITO is required to designate a new industrial activity or whether an existing Order is sufficient to cover that activity. While the creation of an ITO is included in the critical path to developing a new apprenticeship, SOLAS undertakes the process of review and development, if required, once an occupational profile has been approved (Step 5). The process for the creation of a new ITO is set out in legislation and includes formal consultation by SOLAS with representatives of employers and employees in an industry sector. Following the consultation period, all feedback received is considered. Subject to a satisfactory outcome, a final version

of the ITO is presented to the board of SOLAS for approval. A completed ITO is submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas and subsequently put on the Irish Statute Book.

1.1.8 Implementation plan and budget agreed (Step 8)

In advance of introducing a new apprenticeship programme, the consortium engages with either the HEA or SOLAS to agree an implementation plan and operational budget. Funding for the apprenticeship is provided by the Department of Education and Skills via the HEA for programmes provided in higher education and via SOLAS for programmes provided in further education and training. Apprenticeships are supported by the National Training Fund as well as through Exchequer funding.

1.1.8.1 *Apprenticeships supported via the Higher Education Authority (HEA)*

The HEA has developed a unit cost model for new apprenticeship programmes in-line with other funding arrangements currently in place across the higher education system. Unit costing proposals are requested from a consortium whose primary educational provider, i.e. the Coordinating Provider, is a higher education institution (HEI). Each consortium is required to provide details on the numbers of expected registrations on the course. The total unit cost will comprise the following:

- A contribution provided to the HEI by the HEA towards the cost of delivering the off-the-job component of the apprenticeship programme.
- An annual student contribution, which will be charged to individual apprentices (the employer may pay this fee on behalf of the apprentice). In line with existing practice, the amount of the student contribution must be agreed between the coordinating provider and the HEA, based on a pro-rata application of the annual student contribution for a full-time higher education student and reflecting the amount of direct contact between the apprentice and the institution in relation to teaching, learning and assessment and student support services.
- A contribution provided to the consortium by the HEA directly or by payment through the HEI to meet the essential running costs of the consortium associated with the administration of the apprenticeship programme. A unit cost similar to that for existing higher education programmes is applied to new apprenticeship programmes.

The HEA will also consider applications for the funding of equipment necessary to provide the programme. These applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and may be subject to the HEA visiting the particular HEI to assess the requirements.

HEA has implemented a monitoring process to support the allocation of funding and the delivery of new apprenticeship programmes. A number of monitoring templates have been developed and payments to a consortium are issued when the relevant templates are completed and analysed. Two reports are generally required per academic year, typically December and April. These reports include details of the numbers of apprentices registered on the courses along with details on the consortium's engagement and activities, details on marketing and promotion campaigns, and engagement with employers and employees. The HEA also requires that a Coordinating Provider is identified in the consortium. The Coordinating Provider will be the lead contact and will also be responsible for the submission of the required reports. It is expected that all payments will be made to the Coordinating Provider. The only exception is where it is agreed by the consortium to pay the contribution directly to the lead industry partner.

1.1.9 Approval of Employers and Registration of Apprentices (Step 9)

As part of the national apprenticeship system, there are formal requirements for approval of an employer's suitability to train apprentices and professionally register apprentices. These requirements are set out in the 1967 Industrial Training Act. SOLAS is responsible for delivering on these requirements. To fulfil these requirements, SOLAS has in place a supporting technology infrastructure and draws on a network of 40+ 'Authorised Officers' (AOs) located in the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) around the country. AOs are formally authorised by SOLAS to work on an ongoing basis with employers, apprentices, and the consortia engaged in rolling out apprenticeship programmes. In addition to assessing employers' suitability to train and professionally register apprentices, AOs have an ongoing role in assuring the quality of apprentice training on-the-job and in supporting apprentices during their training. Approval of employers' suitability to train and professionally register apprentices can begin once an Industrial Training Order for the apprenticeship is in place, the apprenticeship programme is validated, and funding for the implementation of the programme is agreed with the HEA or SOLAS.

Once approved as suitable to train, an employer requests registration of an apprentice, following which the employer and the apprentice receive notification of the apprentice's registration date and details of an apprenticeship induction process that all apprentices are required to complete. If there are any issues arising with registration of an apprentice, the AO will work with the apprentice and employer to reach a resolution. In advance of an apprenticeship commencing, employers and apprentices must agree to adhere to a formal code of practice, entitled The Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Apprentices and Employers.

1.1.10 Apprenticeship Underway (Step 10)

The National Apprenticeship website (www.apprenticeship.ie) has been developed as the primary source of information and for promotional material supporting the work of individual consortia. Successful collaboration between employers, educational providers and other partners involved in the provision of an apprenticeship programme is required for the exchange of data and information. This includes specific information on apprentices' training and progress provided by the employer to the Coordinating Provider. The Coordinating Provider in turn provides key reporting data to SOLAS and the HEA. All data and information shared between partners will be in accordance with Data Protection legislation and GDPR requirements.

Ongoing monitoring of apprenticeship training both on-the-job and off-the-job is required to ensure that apprentices are provided with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies training as set out in the apprenticeship programme. The Coordinating Provider and SOLAS through its Authorised Officer network, have responsibilities in this area, and they work collaboratively to ensure that the statutory QA processes and the Coordinating Provider's QA policies are mutually reinforcing while avoiding unnecessary duplication.

1.2 Apprenticeship Objectives and Characteristics

The National Apprenticeship System is governed by legislation, principally the 1967 Industrial Training Act, which sets out the overall structure of the national system and the protections for, as well as the responsibilities of, apprentices, employers, and education and training providers. All statutory apprenticeships are regulated by the Industrial Training Act 1967. The QA procedures must be consistent with these regulatory arrangements. Providers must also adhere to any conditions imposed by the Apprenticeship Council or by the relevant funding bodies. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act (2012) also underpins apprenticeship,

supporting validation and quality assurance arrangements for programmes if education and training nationally.

The objective of the statutory apprenticeship is to provide apprentices with the required knowledge, skills and competencies to work autonomously in their selected craft or occupation. The apprenticeship is a statutory validated training and educational programme for SOLAS-registered apprentices, which is enterprise-led in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders.

Apprenticeships in Ireland have the following key features:

- Industry-led – consortia of industry and education partners
- Lead to an award at Levels 5 to 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
- Between 2-4 years in duration
- Minimum 50% on-the-job learning
- Flexible delivery – online, blended, off-the-job learning in increments/blocks
- The State funds off-the-job learning
- Apprentices are employed under a formal contract of apprenticeship
- The employer pays the apprentice for the duration of the apprenticeship*

QQI guidelines explain that apprenticeship programmes share the following characteristics:

- the Programme will prepare the participant for a specific occupation for which an Occupational Profile (to be defined later) has been established;
- access to the programme is via a contract of apprenticeship between an approved employer of apprentices and the apprentice;
- the programme will lead to a professional award at an NFQ level between Level 5 and Level 9 inclusive, which is aligned with the QQI Professional Award-Type Descriptor for that level and consistent with the approved Occupational Profile;
- the programme is a blended combination of on-the-job (employer-based) training and off-the-job training delivered by an education and/or training provider;
- the programme will have a minimum duration of two years from commencement to completion;
- the structure of the programme will provide for a minimum of 50% workplace-based learning; and
- the programme will be restricted to occupations approved by the State for inclusion in the list of apprentice occupations and there will be one programme (nationally) per occupational profile.

1.3   National Stakeholders, Roles and Responsibilities

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

APPRENTICESHIP COUNCIL

SOLAS

INDUSTRY

PROVIDER

APPRENTICE

QQI

CONSORTIUM

HEA
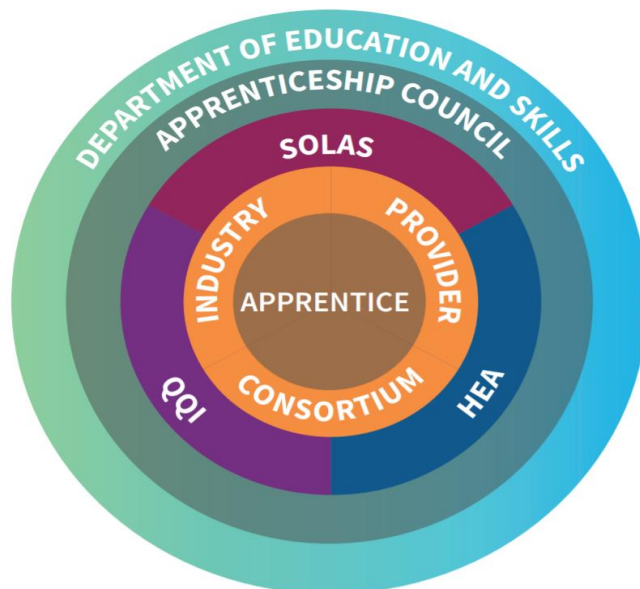
- **Department of Education and Skills** sets policy and allocates funding for apprenticeships via the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

- **Apprenticeship Council** steers the expansion of apprenticeship provision into new and existing sectors of the economy. Members of the Council are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills.

- **SOLAS** is the agency with primary responsibility for management of apprenticeship nationally. Key functions include designation of apprenticeship programmes on a statutory footing through Industrial Training Orders; maintaining the process for determining employers' suitability to train apprentices and a register of approved employers; and maintenance of a register of apprentices nationally. The statutory regulator appoints *Authorised Officers (AO)* that carry out activities on its behalf.

- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)** is the quality assurance agency for all further and higher education and training in Ireland, including apprenticeship. It is an awarding body and is responsible for maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and for developing and monitoring access, transfer and progression policies for learners.

- **The Higher Education Authority (HEA)** manages and funds off-the-job provision of apprenticeship training in higher education and works in close partnership with other State agencies on the expansion and development of the national apprenticeship system.

- **The Consortium** is the name given to the industry-led group which develops an apprenticeship programme and oversees its roll out and ongoing relevance to the needs of industry. The consortium includes education and training providers who have a lead role in co-ordinating delivery of the apprenticeship programme, and providing the off-the-job learning. Each apprenticeship will have a Coordinating Provider and may draw on collaborating providers for the delivery of the off-the-job parts of the programme:

- o **Consortium Steering Group** is a governing entity that is responsible for ensuring that the apprenticeship programme conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation. Its primary purpose is to ensure that the apprenticeship programme is enterprise-led and meets labour market needs.

- **The Provider(s)** is the name given to the education and/or training provider(s) directly involved in the delivery of the apprenticeship programme**:**

  - o **Coordinating Provider:** is ultimately responsible for providing (as defined by the 2012 Act) an apprenticeship programme. Among its responsibilities are the development and maintenance of the curriculum and assessment procedures for the programme and leading the collaborating providers involved. To act as a Coordinating Provider for an apprenticeship programme, the entity must be a **relevant or linked provider** under the 2012 Act. This means, among other things that it must be a legal entity and must have the provision of education and training as one of its principal functions. If an entity is not already a relevant provider it may become one through a QQI process;
  - o **Collaborating Provider:** is a provider who is formally involved in the provision of an apprenticeship programme and accountable in this respect to the Coordinating Provider;
  - o **Off-the-job-Provider:** is a collaborating provider involved in an apprenticeship programme with a responsibility for off-the-job education or training. It may be the Coordinating Provider, but if it is not, then it is expected to be accountable to the Coordinating Provider for delivery of those elements of the programme within its control.

- **Industry** refers to the approved employers that register an apprentice. Apprenticeship gets underway when an approved employer formally registers an apprentice with SOLAS. Employers of apprentices provide on-the-job training, pay the apprentice a salary throughout the apprenticeship covering both on-the-job and off-the-job components, and they sign-up to the formal code of practice.

- **Apprentice** refers to the individual who secures a contract with an employer to complete apprenticeship training. Each apprentice agrees to abide by a formal code of practice for the duration of the programme. The completion of an apprenticeship programme prepares the apprentice for a specific occupation, and Leads to a qualification nationally recognised under the National Framework of Qualifications.

1.4   College Commitments

Apprenticeship programmes enable NCI to deliver against an important aspect of NCI's core mission of 'changing lives though education'. As outlined in our Academic Strategy (2019-2024) our strategic themes include being Enterprise-Focused – *'To develop long-term productive partnerships and collaborations that augment the local and international standing of the college, employability of graduates and support for contemporary industry challenges'.*

NCI's commitments include:

- Continuing to ensure that all programmes are developed to meet current and workforce demands
- Play a pivotal role in helping industry to understand and address training and workforce educational requirements

- Developing an infrastructure to engage with and maintain relationships with key industry partners

The range of work-based learning opportunities offered by NCI includes:

- Existing collaborative arrangements to provide in-company training
- Accredited placements offered as part of undergraduate degrees
- Industry based projects/dissertations offered on postgraduate degrees

Underpinning the delivery of apprenticeship programmes is a set of key principles that form the College's policy on involvement with work-based learning, namely that all activities:

- Must be consistent with the College's strategic plans, (ideally) arise from School plans and be congruent with the School's existing academic provision, bringing clear benefits to all those involved.
- Should only be with other organisations:

  - which have the academic OR professional standing to successfully contribute to or deliver programmes of study to appropriate academic and professional standards
  - the financial standing to sustain them
  - adequate infrastructure facilities and resources (including appropriate staffing) to support them and
  - the legal standing to contract to their delivery.

- Should be equivalent in quality and standards to comparable programmes delivered solely by the College.
- In the case of 'off the job learning', should be comparable in student learning, support and experiences to those programmes based solely at NCI.
- Should give adequate opportunity for student representation and feedback.
- Should be financially viable and feasible, and be fully costed and priced accordingly.
- Should not be over-reliant on an individual member of staff, either within the National College of Ireland or within a partner organisation or representative body.
- Should be compliant with internal and national (Irish or EU) legislative requirements and adhere to the principles of the Charter on Inclusive Teaching (AHEAD 2010) and QQI's code of practice for the teaching of international students (QQI, 2015).

2 Quality Assurance Framework for Apprenticeships

2.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement System (QAES)

The QAES is an institution-wide system, which can only be effective if it is aligned to the current needs of learners and industry. It is therefore of the utmost importance that this system is continuously reviewed and updated to ensure fitness for purpose and currency.

Ensuring the relevance of the QAES and the quality and impact of the College's academic programmes involves the active participation of the key officers and governance structures as outlined in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below. Further details of roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships for institutional governance and quality assurance can be found in Chapter 2: Quality Assurance and Enhancement System.

Figure 1: Organisation of Apprenticeship Provision
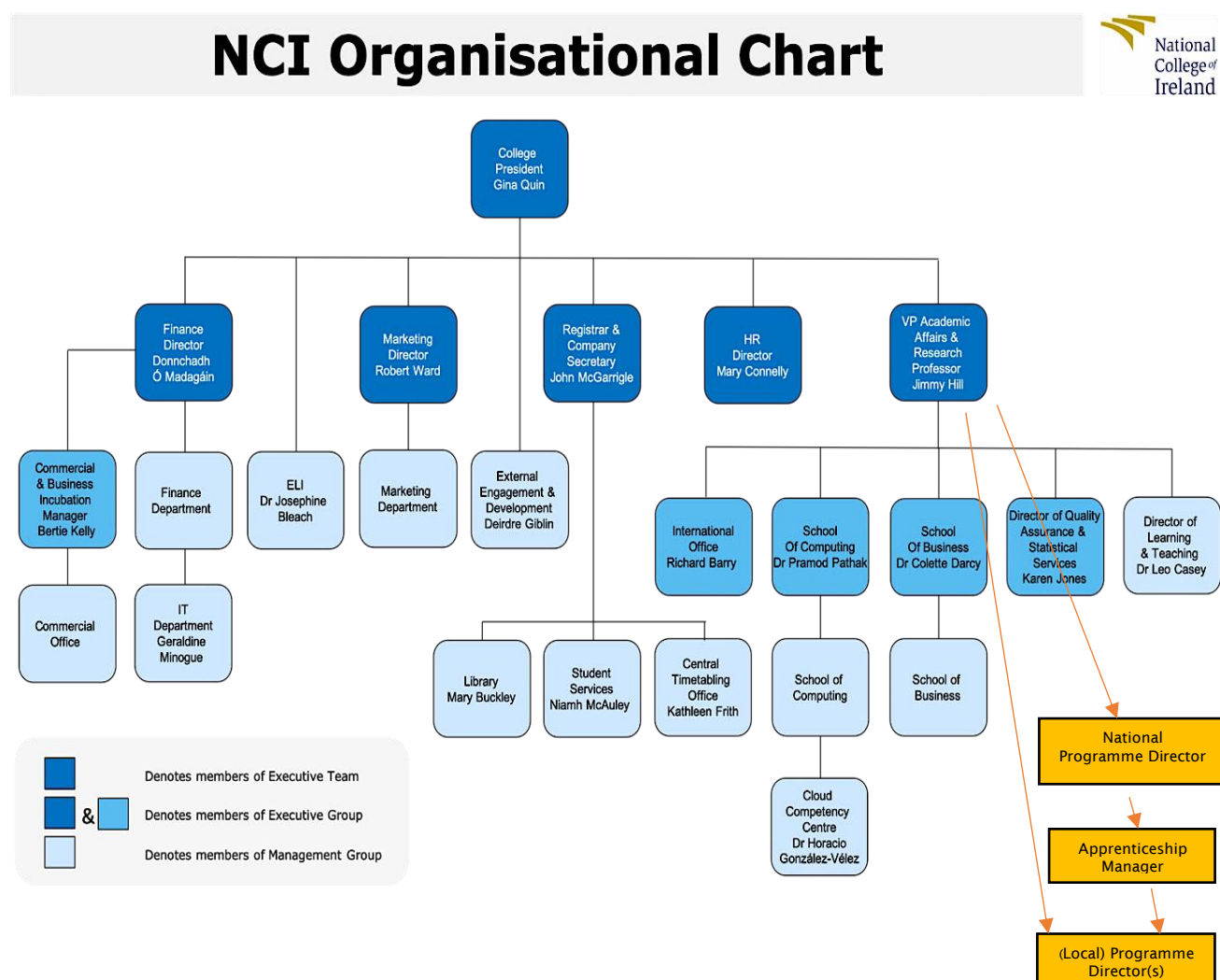
Figure 2: Academic Governance Structure
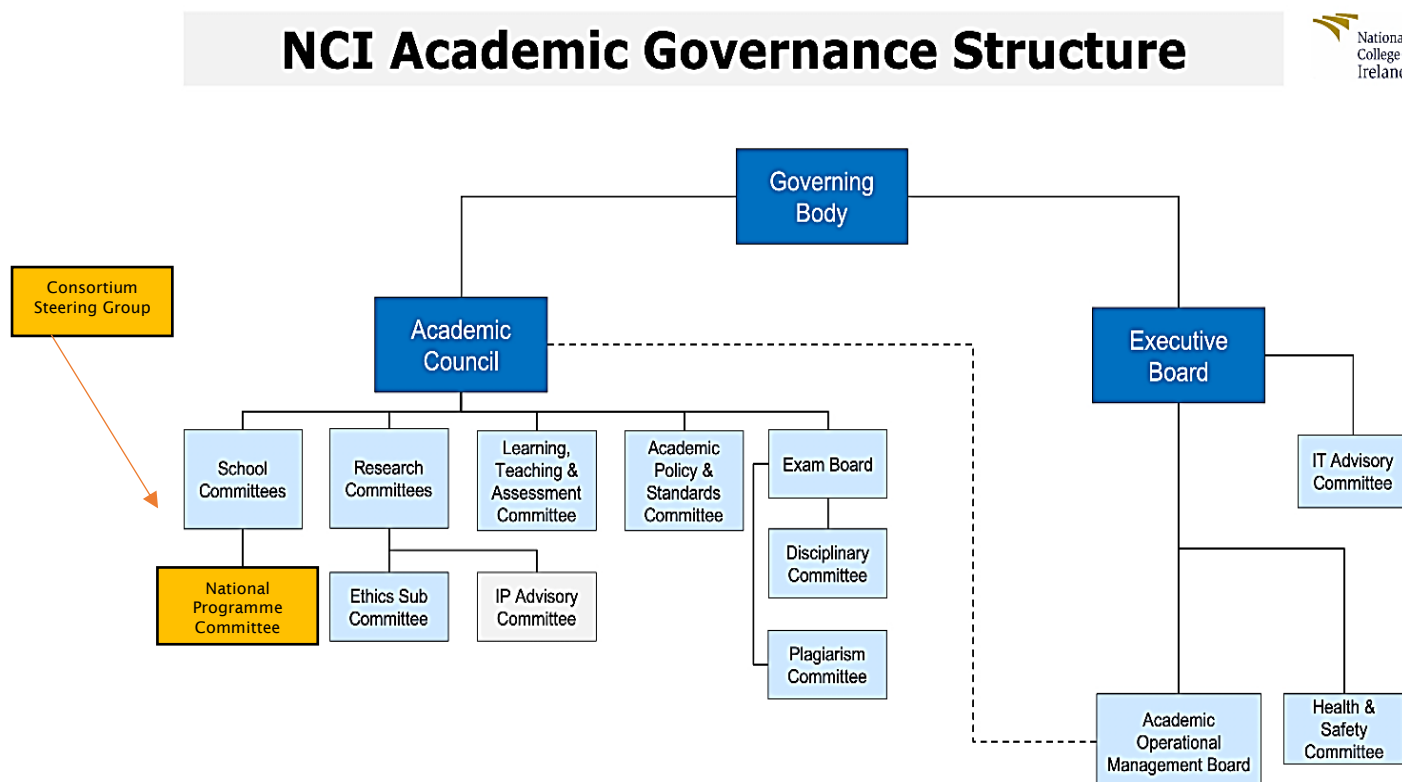
2.2 Quality and Standards

Ongoing monitoring of both the "on-the-job" and "off-the-job" components of an apprenticeship programme is required to ensure that apprentices are provided with the opportunity to acquire the skills, knowledge and competencies as set out in the validated programme document. The Coordinating Provider and SOLAS, its Authorised Officer network, - have responsibilities in this area, working collaboratively to ensure that the statutory (SOLAS) and quality assurance (Coordinating Provider) policies and procedures are mutually reinforcing while avoiding excessive duplication.

Successful collaboration between employers, providers and other partners involved in the provision of an apprenticeship programme is supported by a clear understanding of the responsibilities and agreements between the partners, including those relating to data and information exchange. This includes specific information on apprentices' training and progress provided by the employer to the Coordinating Provider. The Coordinating Provider in turn provides key reporting data to SOLAS and the HEA. All data and information shared between partners will be in accordance with Data Protection legislation and requirements.

As a Coordinating Provider of an apprenticeship programme, NCI will ensure the delivery of the programme as validated by QQI. All apprenticeship programmes developed or delivered by NCI are subject to the College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement System as laid out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. All aspects of programme development and management are overseen by the academic governance structure, the core responsibility for programme quality resting with the respective Programme Committee.

Award standards and programme quality will be maintained and monitored throughout the

programme lifecycle though the use of qualitative and quantitative data analysis within annual monitoring structures. Academic Council will receive an analysis of programme effectiveness and impact prepared by the Apprenticeship Manager. Additional external reviews may be undertaken by the Consortium, QQI and/or the Statutory Agency as appropriate. All internal and external reviews will be informed by the status and evolution of the Occupational Profile.

When NCI is approached to be a collaborating provider in an apprenticeship programme, the following processes should be carried out in consultation with the QASS Director, Registrar and Apprenticeship Manager:

1. Evaluation of strategic fit and resources to deliver the programme
2. Due diligence on the partners delivering the programme
3. Evaluation of quality assurance procedures required for the apprenticeship programme and confirmation that NCI is in a position to comply

Participation as a collaborating provider in an apprenticeship programme must be approved by the specific School, Executive Board and Academic Council. Where areas of quality management are delegated to a partner organisation, these arrangements will form part of the agreement reached between NCI, the partner organisation and QQI, as appropriate. NCI will always retain responsibility for quality assurance of assessment, appointment of external examiners and learner feedback.

2.3   Programme Management and Monitoring

The following roles are responsible for managing and monitoring the delivery of an apprenticeship programme:

- *Vice-Dean of School:* responsible for ensuring that the day to day management and monitoring of all elements of a specific apprenticeship programme is undertaken.
- *Local & National Programme Directors:* responsible for ensuring that programmes are delivered as approved and for ensuring that the curriculum is maintained. Programme performance data is analysed and prepared by each Programme Committee in advance of onward consideration at a School and institutional level at Academic Council.
- *Apprenticeship Manager:* will analyse and report internally and externally on the quality of the learner experience and attainment levels on apprenticeship programmes as appropriate.
- *Academic Supervisor:* responsible for monitoring the progress of the apprentice. This includes ensuring that data relevant to the progress of the apprentice is shared effectively between the employer and NCI, i.e. learner attendance and assessment data.

Please refer to Section 6 for more details on the above roles involved in the delivery and ongoing review of an apprenticeship programme.

2.4   Programme Evaluation

Each apprenticeship programme will undergo a range of internal and external evaluation processes, including

2.4.1 Apprentice/Learner Evaluation

It is expected that each cohort of apprentices will elect a Class Representative who will meet with the Programme Team in accordance with the College's existing quality assurance procedures. In accordance with existing policy, each module, including "on-the-job" modules, will be evaluated by an anonymous survey of learner. This process is managed centrally by the QASS Office and typically runs during Week 8 of standard semesters. The

evaluation of the "work-based learning" modules will be tailored to consider the specific requirements of "on-the-job"-training. Each Class Rep will be provided with training, guidance and support to ensure they are able to demonstrably ensure the learner voice informs annual programme review and ongoing programme improvements.

2.4.2 Programme Committee Meeting

The Programme Committee meets at least twice per semester in order to review the ongoing management of the programme and to address any specific issues arising from its operation, including matters raised via the Class Rep or matters raised via other mechanisms facilitated by the College. Qualitative and quantitative data will be analysed within the Programme Committee to monitor and measure programme health, relevance and impact.

2.4.3 Annual Programme Review

Each Programme Committee will complete an annual review process, coordinated by the QASS Director and overseen by Academic Council. Included in that report will be recommendations for curriculum modification as well as amendments to the teaching, learning and assessment strategies employed across the programme.

2.4.4 Annual Review of Apprentice Provision

The Apprenticeship Manager will undertake an annual review of all apprenticeship programmes to evaluate the operation of the apprenticeship provision as a whole within the institution. This will be submitted to Academic Council for consideration and will inform future College decisions on apprenticeship provision. This review, alongside any recommendations from Academic Council, will also be provided to the Consortium Steering Groups (CSG). This will inform the CSG's decisions around the expansion or contraction of the apprenticeship programme and its ongoing review of the approved Occupational Profile.

2.4.5 Programme Review & Revalidation

Each apprenticeship programme should be reviewed and submitted for revalidation at least every 3 years in accordance with QQI's *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*. The terms of reference for the review should be agreed with QQI and should explicitly reference matters specific to apprenticeship programmes, i.e. the operation of the CSG, relationships with employers and other providers, retention and withdrawal of employers and employment opportunities for apprentices following completion of the programme. Please refer to Chapter 3: Programme Development, Validation and Evaluation (Section 3.8) for further information on the programme review and revalidation process.

2.5   Information Accuracy and Accessibility

NCI's Student Recruitment & Marketing Department is responsible for maintaining oversight of the advertisement of apprenticeship programmes in consultation with the Apprenticeship Manager. Relevant websites and printed material will be checked regularly to ensure accuracy of programme information. This will extend to materials provided by all employers involved in an apprenticeship programme alongside materials published on www.apprenticeship.ie, which is the main source for promotional activities that supplement the work of individual consortia.

3 Consortium Formation, Development and Expansion

These guidelines apply in the situation where NCI has been selected as the Coordinating Provider for a national apprenticeship programme.

3.1 Consortium Steering Group

The Consortium Steering Group (CSG) is responsible for ensuring that the apprenticeship programme conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation. Its purpose is to ensure that the apprenticeship programme is enterprise-led and meets labour market needs. This requires that the programme graduates fit the autonomous occupational role assigned to them. The CSG acts as the 'guardian' of the occupation, performing the critical role, in conjunction with the statutory regulator, of coordinating employers involved in the programme. It should also act to bring together the employers, the Coordinating Provider and the other providers who are involved in the programme.

In conjunction with the statutory regulator, the CSG should ensure that the critical element of "on-the-job" training is maintained and delivered at the appropriate standard with the specified learning outcomes and that it is implemented effectively by employers and by the Coordinating Provider. The CSG will act as a liaison between employers and the Coordinating Provider at a broad level. Where necessary, it will deal with and report to the statutory regulator, the relevant funding body and QQI, and where appropriate with occupational bodies.

The CSG will act with the Coordinating Provider in a spirit of partnership. In its operation it will respect the statutory autonomy of the Coordinating Provider, its responsibilities to maintain academic standards and to deliver programmes as agreed with the validating authority. The CSG will interact closely with the programme committee and academic management of the Coordinating Provider and any Collaborating Provider to ensure a holistic administrative and educational structure and delivery, creating a unified "on-the-job" and "off-the-job" learning experience for the apprentice.

3.1.1 Role of the Consortium Steering Group

As part of the development, delivery and review of an apprenticeship programme, the Consortium Steering Group (CSG) will:

a) Ensure, with NCI, adequate consultation with stakeholders in the development, delivery and review of the programme through regular meetings and consideration of feedback from stakeholders through quality assurance processes such as annual and cyclical review.

b) Request an annual report from each consortium member which will inform:
   i. Plans for the recruitment of apprentices year on year
   ii. Plans for smoothing surges and collapses in occupational recruitment and for responding to planned redundancy of individual apprentices
   iii. Evaluation of individual employers' capacity to recruit apprentices
   iv. Enrolment projections in a given year. In these circumstances, consideration should be given to the impact that this decision may have on apprentices currently training, i.e. the number of repeat opportunities that can be offered to learners due to class capacity, and the recruitment plans as additional collaborating providers and employers may be required to accommodate increased number of learners.

c)   Agree with the NCI Apprenticeship Manager, the apprenticeship information to be published via NCI's website, the Consortiums' website and individual employers' sites. Information relating to apprenticeship programmes must comply with QQI guidelines for programme information.

d)   In supporting the marketing of apprenticeships, the CSG should provide representatives for events designed to promote the apprenticeship, support career guidance initiatives and the development of the apprenticeship "brand".

e)   Approve and maintain from time to time templates for the memoranda of agreement between employers, the Consortium and education providers.

f)   In proposing the entry requirements and processes for the programme, the CSG should ensure that:

   i.   recruitment of apprentices considers the knowledge, skill and competence necessary to complete the programme

   ii.   apprentices are effectively and efficiently trained within the work place

   iii.   recruitment and delivery arrangements adequately support equity and inclusion of underrepresented societal groups on programmes and provide appropriate learning support for these groups.

g)   Liaise, as requested, with the statutory regulator and its authorised officers in exercising its statutory authority to approve new employers who wish to recruit and train apprentices, and to remove employers who are deemed no longer to have the capacity to provide sufficient training to enable achievement of the programme learning outcomes.

h)   Organise a biennial review of the occupational profile and ensure that the findings are considered in subsequent reviews of the programme. This review may precipitate the requirement of a full programme review.

i)   After the first year of delivery, undertake a review as to the effectiveness of its operations, membership and governance. This review should be informed by feedback from all stakeholder groups.

j)   Ensure that the development and operation of apprenticeship provision for the occupation conforms to principles of good governance and conforms to processes, systems and requirements of the statutory regulator, the funding bodies, the education and training institutions, the occupational body, QQI and any other relevant parties.

Depending on the resources and expertise available to the CSG, it may decide to devolve responsibility for some of the duties to NCI as the Coordinating Provider. The detail of these arrangements will be outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement between the CSG and NCI.

3.1.2 Composition of the Consortium Steering Group

The composition of the consortium steering group will depend on the range of the occupation and the nature of the enterprises that are involved in the occupation. The composition should have the following characteristics:

- Chaired by a person of authority from an enterprise or the community of practice involved in the occupation.

- Consist of a majority of persons from enterprises, or employers' associations, or the

community of practice, or relevant professional bodies.

- The enterprise members will be representative of the range of enterprises involved. Where enterprises employing apprentices include large and small employers there should be appropriate representational balance between the SME sector and the larger enterprises.
- NCI will be represented on the CSG, normally by the Apprenticeship Director or Manager.

- The addition of a large number of additional employers to the programme at any one time, may require a review of the membership of the CSG. The membership of the CSG should be monitored to ensure that it is representative of the sector.

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3.1.3 Meeting Schedule

The CSG will meet at least three times per year to review the operation of the apprenticeship programme(s) and relationships. These will typically occur in September, February and June. The Apprenticeship Manager is responsible for ensuring that any items raised by the CSG in relation to NCI as co-ordinating provider or the delivery and management of the specific apprenticeship programme should be brought the attention of the appropriate NCI officer or committee after each meeting.

3.2 NCI's Responsibilities as a Co-ordinating Provider

Prior to accepting an invitation to or responding to a tender to become a Co-Ordinating Provider, the College must be satisfied that any partner involved in the apprenticeship programme is an appropriate partner. In order to proceed with the process of due diligence the School must apply to the Executive (via Academic Operations Committee) for initial approval to commence the process.

- **Registrar & Company Secretary**: is responsible for the preparation of the memorandum of understanding and/or agreement on behalf of the College following completion of due diligence checks. This is informed by the programme development team and the Director of Quality Assurance & Statistical Services. Agreements should be reviewed by the College's legal advisors.
- It is the Registrar's responsibility to ensure that all agreements are signed and countersigned prior to the registration of an apprentice or an employer, or commencement of delivery of a programme.
- All agreements should be brought to the attention of the Registrar. Agreements should be reviewed by the College's legal advisors.

As coordinating provider, NCI accepts responsibility for:

a) The development of a programme proposal to go forward for validation.

b) Establishing a Programme Committee that is representative of employers and education and training providers, to advise on the programme proposal and operation.

c) Ensuring that the apprenticeship programme conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupation; is enterprise-led; and meets labour market needs. This will, be accomplished through the following quality assurance procedures:

   i) Stakeholder engagement and evaluation at all stages in the programme development and design phases

ii) Membership of workplace mentors on the programme committee and incorporation of their feedback in ongoing delivery and annual review and evaluation of the programme

iii) Incorporation of apprentice feedback into programme development and operational delivery

iv) Ensure the development of templates of memoranda of agreements with Employers and/or Education Providers.

d) Developing assessment instruments that adequately support certification of achievement of learning outcomes, employ appropriate grading systems, and all necessary appeal mechanisms. The assessment systems should embrace both on-the-job and off-the-job phases.

e) Applying to the awarding body for validation.

f) Developing such administrative systems as are necessary to ensure efficient and effective management of programme provision, including tracking and managing apprentices' progress.

g) Managing the programme during operational delivery.

h) Developing and maintaining systems for access (in collaboration with employers of apprentices), transfer, progression, and expulsion of participants, including all necessary appeal processes.

i) Coordinate the actions of other providers of education and training, who are involved in curriculum development and in programme provision.

j) Coordinate with employers to ensure (i) that recruitment of apprentices considers the knowledge, skill and competence requirements to have a reasonable chance to complete the programme and (ii) the effective and efficient training of apprentices within the workplace to reach programme learning outcomes.

k) Where the relevant occupation is regulated (whether by law or in fact) the coordinating provider consults with regulators to ensure that the criteria for access to the apprenticeship and the apprenticeship programme remain consistent with applicable regulation.

l) Agree and implement a system with employers for evaluation and review of employer training capacity and for addressing any gaps in that capacity.

m) Ensure that any expansion of the consortium, through additional providers or employers, has due regard to any relevant quality assurance matters.

n) Develop *and integrate into its existing quality systems*, a quality system to manage curriculum and assessment updates and improvements where multiple providers are involved, so as to ensure 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. (See Section 3.4; Section 12).

3.3 Additional Employer or Academic Institution

The addition of an employer or academic institution to an apprenticeship programme should be considered carefully. Any institution being included in the programme will be subject to the following:

a) Due diligence process as outlined below.
b) The institution should complete a self-assessment as to how it can meet with the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. This self-assessment will be based on the requirements of the Statutory Authority as determined from time to time.
c) At minimum, the employer must demonstrate that it can:

- Satisfy quality assurance requirements to be a registered employer.
- Ensure the range of business activity is such that the apprentice will receive instruction in a sufficient range of skills, knowledge and competences, to satisfy the intended apprenticeship programme learning outcomes (see h). This will be identified through a review of the module learning outcomes and appropriate evidence deemed acceptable as validated by QQI.
- Employ staff who are capable of imparting the training necessary to enable or help learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.
- Have a designated mentoring and supportive structure in place with trained staff capable of providing guidance and support to the apprentice throughout his/her training.
- Have an apprenticeship management and administrative structure in place capable of linking with and promptly exchanging two-way data with off-the-job providers, as necessary for the holistic formation of the apprentice.
- Take part in reviews, at appropriate intervals, of the employer's capacity to continue as a trainer either at the employer's own request or based on statistical evidence, or reports from apprentices, or reports from off-the-job providers on performance of apprentices from that employer.
- Where appropriate take part in cooperative training where the training of an apprentice is shared between several employers, so that employers with limited technical range could employ apprentices, and ensure their holistic training by placing them for periods with other employers.
- Participate in processes for the transfer of apprentices should they require it due to business disruption or other reasons.

The addition of an employer or academic institution may be as a result of expanding numbers of apprenticeship places or the replacement of an existing provider.

The final decision to accept a new employer or academic institution lies with the Consortium Steering Group in association with the Authorised Officer of the Statutory Agency.

The template for the MOA between NCI and another education provider are available from the College Registrar or Apprenticeship Director.

4 Apprenticeship Partnerships

Partner institutions are defined as either

- Organisations forming an apprenticeship consortium
- Employers Participating in the apprenticeship programme
- Academic institutions who are a collaborating provider

4.1 Due Diligence Process

In carrying out the due diligence processes, NCI recognises the role of Authorised Officers in

- conducting an assessment site visit to assess the Employer's Suitability to Train Apprentices
- assessing and approving employers to register apprentices, through SOLAS Employer Approval and Code of Practice

In addition to consideration of the academic suitability and business viability of the proposed apprenticeship, the College will need to be assured that any proposed new partner institution is of an appropriate standing. This involves several integrated processes:

- a 'Due Diligence' investigation of a range of relevant information relating to the partner institution.
- a visit to the prospective partner institution by relevant staff;
- 'Internal due diligence' i.e. the strategic fit and benefit to the College of the apprenticeship programme.

This strategic fit of the partnership and programme is carried out by the School and programme team prior to submitting the initial programme proposal as outlined below.

As part of the process of considering whether to work with a partner institution, the College will carry out a 'Due Diligence' investigation in order to assure itself that the proposed partner is one with which it would be happy to collaborate. The purpose of this process is to satisfy the College that the partner has the requisite legal standing, financial and academic resources with which to engage in partnership with NCI. This investigation should include the legal status of the prospective partner or agent, and its capacity in law to contract with the College and the awarding body.

The Registrar's/Company Secretary's Office will ask prospective partners to supply the following documentation:
- An Annual Report (akin to the College's Annual Review).
- A set of Annual Accounts.
- Details of Professional Indemnity insurance cover, such as a letter from the partner Institution's brokers confirming this cover and its extent.
- Details of employer training and development structures which outline how the employer envisages that learners will be able to meet learning outcomes, be afforded appropriate support and mentoring and the administrative structures available to support communication between NCI and the employer.
- Details of any additional education provider structures which outline how the provider envisages that learners will be able to meet learning outcomes, be afforded appropriate support and mentoring and the administrative structures available to support communication between NCI, the CSG and the employer.

- CVs of staff who will be teaching on relevant programmes (where relevant).

To support and substantiate this information, other sources of information will be investigated as follows:
- The QASS Office will undertake due diligence of published quality assurance and improvement data relating to the proposed partner.
- Where applicable, the International Office will seek information from appropriate organisations in Ireland and abroad about the standing of the proposed partner and whether they have any existing collaborations with other Irish HEIs.
- A review of the information systems provided by the partner (where appropriate) to ensure that required data on learners can be held securely and exchanged with NCI.
- A review of data protection legislation and arrangements to ensure that learner data can be released to NCI for submission to required regulatory and awarding bodies.
- A review of requirements for intellectual property, non-disclosure agreements and any other security arrangements which may affect assessment and access to learners and records relating to the apprenticeship programme.

4.1.1 Approval Visits to prospective Employer Partner Institutions
An approval visit to the prospective employer partner institution will normally be undertaken by an appropriate member of staff from the School, Apprenticeship Manager, QASS Director and a representative from the Consortium Steering Group. Other staff, may from time to time, accompany them. Many of the items outlined below can be reviewed using documentary evidence. The visit should be used to explore in more depth and/or provide clarity if required.

The visit to the prospective partner institution will involve the following:
- Consideration of the quality of the training and learning facilities in relation to the proposed programme(s), including library and IT resources. The member of staff of the relevant School or Department will have a particular responsibility in this area
- meeting key teaching and other staff of the proposed partner, where relevant
- arrangements in place for the mentorship of the apprentice
- arrangements in place for ensuring that the proposed on the job curriculum can be delivered

Following the visit, the Apprenticeship Manager will produce an agreed report for consideration by Academic Council.

4.1.2 Approval Visits to prospective Collaborating Provider Partner Institutions
An approval visit to the prospective collaborating partner institution will normally be undertaken by an appropriate member of staff of the relevant School, Apprenticeship Manager and also by a member of the QASS office. Other staff, may from time to time, accompany them. Many of the items outlined below can be reviewed using documentary evidence. The visit should be used to explore in more depth and/or provide clarity if required.

The visit to the prospective partner institution will involve the following:
a. Consideration of the quality of the teaching and learning facilities in relation to the proposed programme(s), including library and IT resources. The member of staff of the relevant School will have a particular responsibility in this area
b. meeting key teaching and other staff of the proposed partner, where relevant
c. consideration and discussion of a range of academic issues relating to the partnership including:
   - the Partner Institution's existing quality assurance arrangements
   - arrangements for managing the partnership (including the committee structure)

- proposed quality assurance arrangements for the programme(s), including Annual Programme Reports and future Periodic Review and Revalidation
- arrangements for seeking the views of student (representation and evaluation)
- assessment arrangements, including External Examiners
- learner complaints and appeals procedures
- learner welfare support and facilities
- admissions arrangements, including admissions criteria, English language provision (where appropriate) and the minimum and maximum size of a cohort
- arrangements for marketing of and recruitment to the programme (including website and publicity material)
- staff training and development, and staff appraisal

d. discussion of a draft Memorandum of Agreement (based, particularly, on discussions related to issues set out in (c) above)
e. where appropriate, an observation of teaching
f. Where appropriate, meeting a group of existing students.

Following the visit, the Apprenticeship Manager will produce an agreed report for consideration by Academic Council.

4.2 Consideration and approval of Due Diligence information

On receipt of the relevant documentation and other pieces of evidence, these will be considered as follows:

- The Finance Office will consider the set of Annual Accounts and provide a brief report to the Registrar's Office indicating whether these are satisfactory
- The Registrar's Office will confirm whether the partner Institution's Professional Indemnity insurance cover is appropriate
- The Registrar's Office will produce a summary report on the complete Due Diligence process, including the Academic due diligence process for consideration by the Academic Council and also, in relation to the financial aspects of due diligence, for the Executive Team. This report will form part of the documentation required for the interim checkpoint of the Development phase as described above.

In the case of the expansion of the apprenticeship programme to additional employers or collaborating providers, the summary report of the Due Diligence process will also be provided to the Consortium Steering Group.

4.2.1 Timing of Due Diligence investigations

Whilst there is the potential for the Due Diligence process to take a little time, the College will seek to ensure that this does not stop innovation and proposals for partnership coming forward. The Due Diligence process is intended to run in parallel with the development of a Business Plan and with the programme approval process for an apprenticeship and can begin as soon as approval has been granted at the feasibility phase.

In the case where an apprenticeship programme is being expanded to add a new employer and/or collaborating provider, this process will commence when an application to join the apprenticeship scheme is made.

4.2.2 Reciprocal Due Diligence

The College is aware that the Due Diligence process is sensitive, both financially and culturally.

The investigation will therefore be conducted with appropriate tact and diplomacy, particularly as it is the expectation that any future partner will be a well-established institution with an excellent reputation. Nevertheless, a Due Diligence investigation is something which the College is obliged to carry out and this should be made clear to prospective partner institutions at the outset. However, in order to act in a transparent way and to encourage the development of a partnership, the College will provide the following documents to a proposed partner on a reciprocal basis:

- The Annual Report
- The Annual Accounts (Financial Statements)
- The College Prospectus
- A copy of the College's most recent Institutional Review report (or equivalent)
- Confirmation of the College's Professional Indemnity insurance
- A standard note setting out the legal standing of the College and its relationship with awarding bodies

4.3   Consortium Agreement

NCI and partner organisations should establish a formal Memorandum of Agreement to be known as the 'Consortium Agreement'. Academic Council will approve such agreements on advice from the Company Secretary/Executive Team.

The operation of these agreements will be monitored by the QASS office and reported to the Risk Committee of Governing Body, as appropriate.

The Consortium Agreement should assure that 'on the job' and 'off the job' training provision and associated services are provided in a streamlined manner and in compliance with QQI QA guidelines, awarding body requirements and the policies of the statutory regulator, funding bodies and with other parties with legitimate requirements.

4.3.1 General arrangements

A Consortium Agreement should be created between NCI and the Consortium Steering Group which will:

a. Establish and specify the partnership/consortium (indicating the partners, including identifying the Coordinating Provider and the designated address for communication).

b. Ensure that processes are in place by which partners might leave the partnership and new partners might be admitted.

c. Ensure that the rights and obligations of all partners are clear.

d. Agree terms of MOA and MOU between Coordinating Provider and other partners.

e. Ensure that the nature of the services to be performed by each partner is clear.

f. Specify the scope of the agreement and the relevant programme and the award that it will lead to and the awarding body.

g. Establish the period of the agreement.

h. Establish the conditions under which the agreement will be reviewed and under which it will be renewed.

i. provide for the amendment of the agreement.

j. Ensure that the entities (normally the Coordinating Provider and employers of apprentices) that learners can hold legally liable for any deficiencies in the provision of education and training is clear.

k. Specify any limitations on liability and provide for mutual indemnification.

l. Provide for the resolution of disputes arising in respect of the agreement.

m. Provide for the termination or suspension of the agreement (setting out the conditions under which this can be done) having regard for learners concerned.

n. Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the protection of apprentices and in all cases for residual obligations to learners on termination of the agreement.

o. Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the protection of apprentices in cases where an individual partner cannot fulfil its obligations.

p. Name the jurisdiction within which the agreement is enacted and should be interpreted.

q. Ensure that a process is in place for addressing disputes in respect of the agreement, including any perceived breaches of the agreement and grievances by learners and involved employees.

r. Oblige partners to participate in the programme review/accreditation/validation process required by the apprenticeship awarding body and to comply with any conditions that are attached to review/accreditation/validation.

s. Establish quality assurance procedures for the programme and require partners to cooperate and participate in the quality assurance procedures and in related quality evaluations whether internal or externally organized, while ensuring that quality assurance procedures applying to the collaborative programme should be recognized as meeting the requirements of the awarding body.

t. Provide for the apprenticeship awarding bodies to monitor the quality and standards of the programme and associated services.

u. Collect and maintain the information required by external quality assurance agencies or for National or European agencies such as the Europass Diploma Supplement.

v. Require that partners will encourage and make provision for cooperation between their staff in respect of the programme.

4.3.2 Financial arrangements
a. Normally NCI, as Coordinating Provider, is accountable for funds being disbursed to the consortium;

b. Financial arrangements will:

- address the distribution of any funds allocated to the programme

- Clarify each partner's capacity to account for income and expenditure involving the consortium

- meet all legal requirements in all of the involved jurisdictions

- make adequate provision for protection for learners as described under paragraph m) and n).

4.3.3 Specific Programme Requirements

Agreements between NCI as co-ordinating provider and individual education partners involved in the delivery of specific programmes will have additional specific arrangements in respect of each of the programmes covered by the Agreement. These will specify the programme's essential parameters including prior learning and other admission requirements, programme assessment strategy and intended learning outcomes; they will also:

- specify the awarding body or bodies and including the necessary awarding agreements.
- require, and provide for, the partner providers as appropriate to jointly contribute to the provision of the programme.
- specify the regulations (recruitment, access and admission, academic standard, transfer, progression, assessment, appeals, complaints etc.) that apply to learners or prospective learners concerned while ensuring that the procedures for access, transfer and progression determined by QQI are implemented.
- specify in detail the rights and entitlements of learners (including necessary learner support services) at each of the partner provider sites and how the relevant services will be delivered and how access to same by learners should be assured.
- deal explicitly with the provision of, and access by learners to, human and material resources.
- specify in detail (with explicit rationale based on the learning outcome standards required by the awarding body or bodies and any other requirements needed for approval) the programme assessment strategy and learner assessment procedures for the programme and the conditions under which an award will be recommended and provide for the appointment of external examiners.
- require that partner providers will encourage and make provision for cooperation between their staff in respect of the programme.
- deal with intellectual property rights relevant to the programme.

4.4   Memoranda of Agreement with Education Providers and/or Employers

NCI should also enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with other educational providers delivering the statutory apprenticeship programme. The agreement should provide for the following:

a) Ensure that the rights and obligations of all partners are clear and that the nature of the services to be performed by each partner is clear.

b) Specify the scope of the agreement and the relevant programme and the award that it will lead to and the awarding body.

c) Establish the period of the agreement.

d) Establish the conditions under which the agreement will be reviewed and under which it will be renewed.

e) provide for the amendment of the agreement.

f) Provide for the resolution of disputes arising in respect of the agreement.

g) Provide for the termination or suspension of the agreement (setting out the conditions under which this can be done) having regard for learners concerned.

h) Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the protection of apprentices and in all cases for residual obligations to learners on termination of the agreement:

a. Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the protection of apprentices in cases where an individual partner cannot fulfil its obligations

b. Name the jurisdiction within which the agreement is enacted and should be interpreted.

i) Ensure that a process is in place for addressing disputes in respect of the agreement, including any perceived breaches of the agreement and grievances by learners and involved employees.

j) Oblige partners to participate in the programme review/accreditation/validation process required by the apprenticeship awarding body and to comply with any conditions that are attached to review/accreditation/validation.

k) require partners to cooperate and participate in the quality assurance procedures and in related quality evaluations whether internal or externally organized, while ensuring that quality assurance procedures applying to the collaborative programme should be recognized as meeting the requirements of the awarding body.

l) Require that partners will encourage and make provision for cooperation between their staff in respect of the programme.

m) Set out expectations with respect to appointment and selection of staff.

n) Set out expectations with respect to attendance at meetings.

Employers are statutorily required to sign Code of Practice for Apprenticeship. NCI proposes that employers are also requested to enter into a MOA with NCI and its education providers so as to ensure that all aspects of the relationship are managed. It is accepted that this may be considered an additional overhead, however in the interests of good practice a MOA between NCI and the Employer is required.

4.5   Termination of Agreements

Each agreement shall have specific conditions regarding the termination of a programme or collaborative arrangement. Agreements should outline circumstances in which a programme may not run e.g. insufficient numbers, availability of resources. NCI's policy on the cessation of programmes states that once a programme has commenced, NCI will not terminate the programme until all learners currently enrolled have completed their programme. In order to assure the protection of learners, this agreement should outline how learners would be accommodated by NCI should the agreement be terminated. Agreements must contain a provision for *'Force Majeure'*.

4.6   Data Protection, Records Management and Confidentiality

All activities relating to apprenticeship delivery are subject to current data protection and GDPR (2018) legislation.

Recognising the sensitive and secure nature of the workplace, particular care should be taken when using workplace data in assessment. The memorandum of agreement with all parties should clearly indicate the permissions, processes and security clearances required to allow Academic Supervisors, External Examiners and any other staff members appropriate access to such data. A template non-disclosure agreement is included in the memorandum of agreement between NCI and the employer.

All evidence for consideration as assessment must be pre-approved by the workplace mentor in advance of it being submitted and considered for assessment. However, its detail must be sufficient to allow appropriate and due consideration of that assessment.

Students will be required to consent to data relating to their enrolment and progress on the programme to be shared by both the Employer, SOLAS and NCI for the purposes of registration, supervision and service provision.

Enrolment and progression data, including progression reports, will be stored and shared in accordance with current data protection legislation and NCI records management policies

Applicant and Student data will be shared with other third parties in accordance with NCI data and records management procedures and in compliance with GDPR (2018).

5   Programme Proposal, Development and Approval

The developmet of a national apprenticeship programme is required to follow the 10 step structure published in '*The Handbook for Developing a National Apprenticeship (May 2017)*[7]'. Developing a new apprenticeship programme can take between 12-18 months to complete.

Table 1 below outlines the four phases of programme development at NCI and the associated outputs associated with those phases for apprenticship provision activities as published in the NCI Quality Handbook 2018 edition within Section 3.[8] Where new programmes are being proposed or existing programmes are being put forward for differential validation, the programme team will comprise representatives from NCI and the Consortium Steering Group.

Table 1: Programme Development Process & Outputs

Initial	Interim	Internal Validation	QQI External Validation	
Programme Proposal Form	Interim Checkpoint form	Internal Review Report	Programme Submission Document	Awarding body report
Partner Profile	Due Diligence Report	Programme team response	Draft Agreement (As agreed by partners and NCI)	Signed Agreement between NCI & partners
Initial Risk Analysis		Final Submission Document	Self-Assessment	Certificate of Accreditation
	Final Occupation profile			

Programme development will be carried out in the context of QQI's policy and criteria for programme validation, 2016.[9]   In developing or amending programmes for apprenticeship provision, the programme development team must ensure that:

- The Programme is placed at the appropriate level of the National Framework of Qualifications and that the Professional Award Type Descriptors as published by QQI at the appropriate level of the National Framework of Qualifications.
- The Minimum Intended Programme Learning outcomes should have due regard to the Occupational Profile of the occupation being provided for.
- Arrangements for admission comply with the College's regulations for Access, Transfer & Progression.
- Arrangements for assessment comply with the College's assessment regulations which are subject to Assessment & Standards, 2013 and its sectoral conventions as published by QQI.
- Procedures for external examining align with the College's regulations on external examining.
- Schools will be required to prepare a Programme and Module Handbook, developed in line with the College's template.

Any derogation from regulations should be clearly outlined in the programme validation document.

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[7] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/Developing-a-National-Apprenticeship-Handbook.pdf
[8] https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/QA/Handbook/NCIQAH-3.%20Programme%20Development%20Valdiation%20and%20Evaluation.pdf?ver=2019-07-30-153744-887
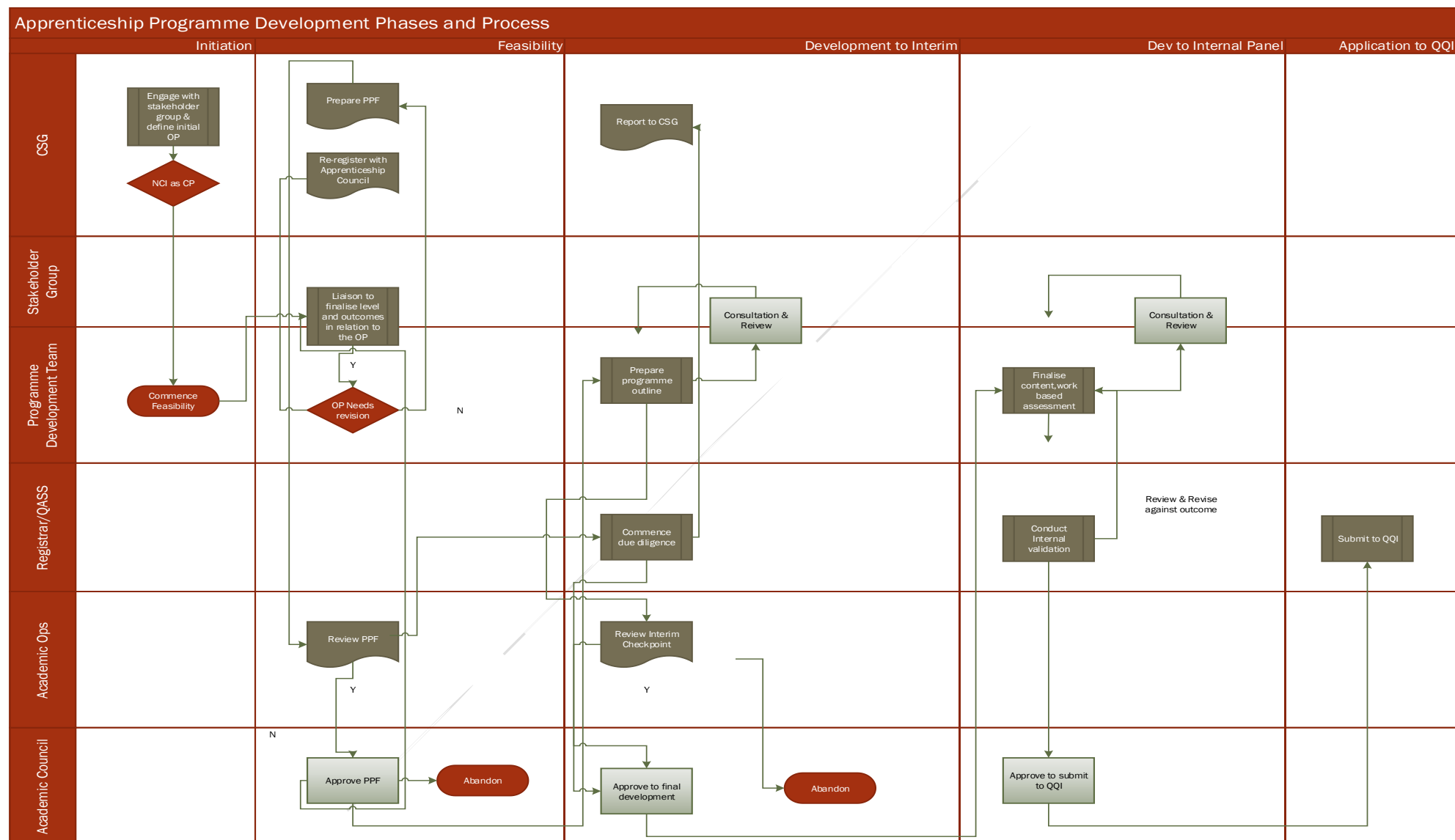[9] QQI, 2016: Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training

Figure 3: Overview of Apprenticeship Programme Development Process at NCI

5.1 Application of Occupational Profile to the Programme

The Occupational Profile is part of the foundation on which the apprenticeship programme is built. The Occupational Profile (Approved at Step 5 of the National Apprenticeship Approval Process) describes the skills, knowledge and competences that a person should have to practice autonomously in the occupation. It will propose the duration of the apprenticeship and qualification level on the National Framework of Qualifications (between Level 5-10). There can only be one apprenticeship programme per occupation. The occupational profile will confirm this.

The programme development should start by establishing detailed intended apprenticeship learning outcomes that are consistent with the Occupational Profile.

These should be further refined in light of the QQI Professional Award Type Descriptors at which point the most appropriate NFQ level should be identified.

Stakeholders should be consulted again at this stage on the intended programme learning outcomes before developing the programme.

Once the intended programme learning outcomes are established, the programme can be developed to enable learners to achieve those outcomes.

5.2 Award and Programme Title

The end result of an apprentice's training should be the ability to practise the occupation autonomously. The occupation, in its general sense, should have a stable long-term brand image in the public mind and the minds of employers.

In this respect, the programme team in making an application for validation, should ensure the programme name and its associated award promotes a stable long-term occupational brand image.

5.3 Feasibility Phase of Development

The feasibility phase examines the overall merits of the proposed programme and collaborations with proposed partners involved so that a decision can be taken whether NCI can commit to the further the development of the proposal and its role as co-ordinating provider.

The proposal as feasibility stage will be presented by the CSG and Apprenticeship Manager.

The information required at this stage is outlined in the programme proposal form. Mandatory information required at this point is:

- Confirmation that the occupational profile is sufficiently developed to enable them to enable the development of programme learning outcomes.
- An analysis of the market and demand for the programme as a whole using international, national and sectoral reports.
- A review of similar programmes offered within Ireland or other jurisdictions. Similar in this case may mean subject matter, programmes delivered into the specific industry, apprentice programmes at the same level.
- Identification of additional education providers that may be required to deliver the programme.

- Commitment from employer organisations to take part in the programme development phase.
- Identification of the Programme Director who will lead the development of the programme to submission for validation and co-ordinate all activities required to prepare the submission.

An output of this process is the completion of the initial risk analysis form and will contribute to the decision of Academic Council to proceed with programme development. A more comprehensive description of this process is contained in the College's programme development process (Chapter 3, QA Handbook 2018). In the case of apprenticeship programmes, once approved for development, the due diligence process described in Section 4 will be commenced by the College Registrar.

5.4   Programme Design & Development

5.4.1 Phase 1- Interim Checkpoint
The programme team should complete an interim checkpoint document. In the case of apprenticeship provision, a detailed risk analysis will be undertaken. This risk analysis will include the results of the completed due diligence process. The purpose of the interim checkpoint is to ensure that the assumptions made regarding the financial and academic viability of the partnership and/or programme in the feasibility phase hold true and that any issues raised in the development of the programme with regard to its viability can be addressed by the College and the relevant Consortium Steering Group.

Due to the number of individual partnerships that will be a feature of an apprenticeship programme, it may arise that after the checkpoint stage, individual employers may not be considered appropriate to the apprenticeship programme. This finding will be required to be shared with the Statutory Agency and with any representative body. The programme development or collaborative arrangement may be abandoned at this point.

5.4.2 Programme Information Requirements
In preparing the programme for validation, the programme team should take account of the information requirements required to meet QQI's validation criteria. In the case of work-based modules, particular care should be taken to ensure that sufficient detail is provided to ensure that the learning outcomes can be consistently met across a range of organisations and contexts without being so over-prescriptive that it is not transferable to these contexts. This should include:

- Identification of the structure of the programme
- Identification of Taught and Work based learning
- Identification of assessment strategies for modules
- Identification of any additional resources required to deliver the programme (physical, technological
- Identification of any gaps in the staffing of the programme
- consultation with regulators to ensure that the criteria for access to the apprenticeship and the apprenticeship programme remain consistent with applicable regulation
- 5-year business plan for the programme

5.4.3 Phase 2 - Consultation with Stakeholders

Phase 2 of development allows development of the programme to be completed and the detail of any agreements to be completed with CSG members, employers and if relevant, other education providers.

During this final phase of development, consultation should be undertaken to ensure that the design of the work-based modules in particular, meet the expectations of employers and line Managers on the ground and that the learning outcomes of the programme and modules are achievable.

Methods by which this can be done include:

- Workshops with existing employees in similar roles to map learning outcomes, learning opportunities and samples of evidence
- CSG focus groups/meetings
- Workshops with key stakeholders internally and externally

It will also allow the programme team, in collaboration with the QASS office, consider how quality assurance arrangements for the proposed programme are to be handled, paying particular attention to the monitoring of those quality management functions which have been delegated to the partner institution and which will be outlined in the memorandum of agreement.

This will include arrangements for:

- the operation of the Local Programme Committee and Examinations Board, and the provision of annual reports to the School on an equivalent basis to that for programmes delivered at NCI.
- regular monitoring of the programme and related learning facilities, including frequency and purpose of visits to the partner institutions by the School.
- mechanisms for students to provide feedback and to make complaints/appeals.
- creation of communications processes to facilitate on-going and regular contact between the College, the programme Committee, workplace mentors and the management of operational issues.
- periodic review and revalidation (in line with the policy for programmatic review and revalidation of programmes.
- Reporting to key internal and external stakeholders including the HEA, QQI and SOLAS.

The length of the development phase is dictated by the type of programme, the number of proposed employers, the views of CSG members and whether validation is for a new programme or is an existing programme which requires a differential validation due to the collaborative activity.

The Programme Development Committee should consult with and advise representative stakeholders, as the programme development evolves to ensure that at assumptions remain valid and that the programme as developed serves the needs of the occupational profile.

5.5 Validation Process

As part of NCI's Devolved Responsibilities for Arranging an Independent Evaluation Report (June 2018) an internal validation process is undertaken. Whilst an internal process, the evaluation panel has representation from external academic and industry providers. Normally,

these external members will have experience of apprenticeship provision in order to inform the process. The purpose of the internal validation process is to provide feedback and additional perspective to the application and to evaluate whether the submission *as presented*, is fit to be submitted to QQI for validation.

The programme team must submit the following for internal validation:
- the programme submission document using the template provided.
- the draft agreements related to the programme.
- its self-assessment of the programme against QQI's validation criteria and the collaborative arrangements.

Once completed, QQI screens applications in advance of establishing an independent evaluation panel This process, managed by QQI, results in the approval of the programme and the collaborative agreements made with each employer involved in the apprenticeship programme.

6   Responsibilities for Managing Apprenticeship Programmes

6.1   Authorised Officers (AO)

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

The AO provides an independent brokerage through which the integrity of Apprenticeship programmes is maintained. AOs 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:

- conducting an assessment site visit to assess the Employer's Suitability to Train Apprentices
- briefing employers on their roles and responsibilities in relation to the on-the-job elements of the apprenticeship
- assessing and approving employers to register apprentices, through SOLAS Employer Approval and Code of Practice
- approving and registering new apprentices and apprentices changing employers
- providing an objective information and guidance service to all registered apprentices
- monitoring employers during the on-the-job components of the programme
- maintaining apprentice and employer records

As Coordinating Provider, NCI will work in collaboration with the network of AOs to monitor and manage our apprenticeship programmes. NCI staff will fully brief the AOs on the programme-specific criteria for employer suitability to train apprenticeships as outlined in the validated programme documentation. On validation of the programme, a schedule of briefings will be conducted for AOs by the Programme Director.

6.2   National Programme Committee

As apprentice programmes have a national remit, the National Programme Committee as defined below has a related but distinctly separate role to NCI's other programme committees. The work of the National Programme Committee encompasses:

- Ensuring that the programme is well managed and that academic standards are maintained
- Periodic evaluation of the of the relevance and quality of the programme as it refers to the occupation
- Ensuring there is a reasonable balance of work for the learner and that assessments are appropriate, fair and varied to meet the learning outcomes
- Ensuring that the assessment and feedback timetable is scheduled and communicated to students at the beginning of the academic year and that the assessment structure is available to students
- The preparation, maintenance and publication of a programme handbook
- Review ing External Examiner Reports and implementing the recommended improvements
- Review of learner feedback and implementation of improvements

6.3   National Programme Director

The National Programme Director provides academic leadership for the apprenticeship programme through the planning and chairing of the National Programme Committee. The key responsibilities of this role include:

- Convening and chairing National Programme Committee meetings which take place at least once each semester and/or other times as needed.
- Ensuring that the minutes of National Programme Committee meetings are taken by a Programme Co-Ordinator or nominee and are recorded on the School portal site by the Programme Co-ordinator.
- Ensuring adherence to the Terms of Reference for National Programme Committee meetings.
- Reviewing exam broadsheets to identify and query any anomalies;
- Supporting the Vice-Dean with programmatic review.
- Escalating programme compliance issues e.g. exam deadlines not being met to the appropriate Vice-Dean.
- Composing the annual monitoring report with feedback and input from members of the National Programme Committee, local Programme Committees and other fora and follow through on the implementation of any recommendations.
- Coordinating with the Marketing Department and CSGin the preparation of programme marketing material and ensuring that marketing material provided for brochures, on the web-site and other communication channels is up to date.
- Dealing with academic concerns relating to the Programme and liaising with the Vice-Deans as appropriate.

6.3.1 Programme Quality Management

The National Programme Director is responsible for managing the quality of the apprenticeship programme as it is delivered throughout its period of validation. In particular:

- Advising the Consortium Steering Group (CSG) on issues arising with the delivery of the programme programme.
- Advising and assisting the CSG in the admissions process as appropriate.
- Advising the relevant Vice Deans at education providers regarding the recruitment requirements for the programme, i.e. Associate Faculty, Teaching Assistants, Lab Assistants, etc.
- Contributing to the review of the job description for apprentices as required.
- Participating on interview panels for Associate Faculty.
- Providing guidance to new (Associate) Faculty and Teaching Assistants and those from other education providers by giving them an overview of the programme, an outline of teaching content and assessment methods and the deadlines for giving student feedback, while also conveying the importance of attending Programme Committee meetings, providing the schedule for Programme Committee meetings, and clarifying any queries from Associate Faculty regarding their job description.
- Authorising time-sheets for Associate Faculty, Teaching Assistants and Lab Assistants;
- Chairing the standardisation meeting and ensuring that the associated report is provided to the External Examiner.

6.3.2 Student Relations & Pastoral Care

The National Programme Director is responsible for managing student relations and ensuring that pastoral care provisions and support services are available to enrolled learners. In particular:

- Presenting to students at orientation and introducing course content, assessments and dates, how student academic queries/problems are handled, student discipline, and plagiarism.
- Liaising with the appropriate Departments regarding student supports and pastoral care.
- Ensuring that Class Rep meetings are planned and attending them, that minutes are taken by a Programme Co-Ordinator and that a response is given and actions taken on issues that arise.

6.4 Apprenticeship Manager

The Apprenticeship Manager reports directly to the Vice-President and is responsible for the management of all apprenticeship provision within the institution. The Apprenticeship Manager has day-to-day responsibility for discharging NCI's role as Coordinating Provider. The postholder will:

- be a key contact point between each Programme Director, Consortium Steering Group and individual employers
- represent NCI on Consortium Steering Groups
- be the main point of contact for the funding and Statutory Agencies
- be a member of the National Programme Committee
- report to Academic Council at least annually, providing information on programme performance, relevance and impact

These responsibilities sit outside of the individual responsibilities that (local) Programme Directors have for each apprenticeship programme and its learners within NCI's academic governance and line-management structures.

6.5 Academic Supervisor

The Academic Supervisor will supervise learners as they complete the "on-the-job" components of the programme, i.e. the modules that are clearly designated as "work-based learning" modules. A Portfolio Building Tutorial will be rescheduled each week, during which the Academic Supervisor will meet with a small number of allocated apprentices to advise on how to structure, compose and review the electronic portfolio. As modules clearly designated as "work-based learning" run for the length of the academic year, it is important that the completion of these is monitored and the generation of evidence by the learner is evenly balanced throughout the year. In addition, the Portfolio Building Tutorial will present an opportunity to build a community of practice, sharing and discussing ideas for and approaches to generating evidence for the completion of their portfolio.

The Academic Supervisor will contact the Workplace Mentor at least twice during each academic year. The contact will be made by phone or conference call. These schedule contacts provide an opportunity for either party to raise issues that need to be addressed, to review the delivery of the programme, and to maintain oversight of the development of the apprentice. Work-based learning agreements will be also reviewed on these occasions, providing a basis for discussing how the learner is being supported to attain the minimum

intended programme learning outcomes and to resolve any issues relating to the assessment of "on-the-job" learning.

6.6 Faculty Members

Individual faculty members are responsible for the quality of the delivery of modules that are not clearly designated as "work-based learning" modules and for responding to and acting on feedback provided by learners. As such, each faculty member involved in the delivery of the apprenticeship programme must also attend Programme Committee meetings and participate in the annual and cyclical review programmatic reviews. A faculty member may also be appointed as module leader where a single module are delivered to multiple cohorts or at multiple locations. As a module leader, it is the faculty member's responsibility to review the module based on stakeholder feedback, in particular, learners, internal reviewers and external examiners. Faculty teaching involved in delivering modules that are clearly designated as "work-based learning" should either be current practitioners in the industry or have significant recent experience within the sector. Prior to commencing delivery on the programme, the faculty member must complete the Apprentice Programme induction programme. The general responsibilities of all faculty members are outlined in Chapter 2 of NCI's Quality Assurance Handbook (Section 2.7.12).

6.7 Workplace Mentors

Participating employers, once approved as suitable to train by SOLAS and having signed the Code of Practice for Apprenticeships and Employers, are required to designate a staff member(s) as a Workplace Mentor who will:

- manage the recruitment and initial orientation of apprentices

- have sufficient professional expertise and authority to allow for mentoring of apprentices

- have mentoring training

- act as liaison with the off-the-job providers in delivering the programme

- have an agreed set of responsibilities with respect to apprentices

- have, where appropriate, the skills necessary to assess apprentice progress and to confirm the achievement of learning outcomes

- will be the reporting contact to the coordinating provider.

A comprehensive induction and training programme will be delivered. Areas covered will include as appropriate:

- Organisation and management of the programme
- Technologies used in delivery and administration of the programme
- Learning outcomes and their assessment
- Work based learning and its assessment
- Services available to them and to apprentices that they are supporting

This will consist of a blended approach consisting of workshops and coaching. An indicative sample is laid out below:

Learning intervention	Format and interval	Outcomes
Mentor Induction and Programme Orientation	1 day training workshop Semester One	Clear understanding and/ or ability to apply: • Strategic nature of programme and how that translates in their organisation • Roles and responsibilities • Apprentice assessment process including role in validating portfolio • Difference between evidence portfolio and internal development plans and how to link the two • Support mechanisms available to mentors throughout the programme
Mid-programme Programme Committee Meeting	Half- day workshop / programme meeting Semester Two	Clear understanding of and/ or ability to apply: • Review of Semester 1 • Expectations of Semester 2 • Apprentice assessment process • Reviewing examples of evidence • NCI method of assessment and evaluation • Programme issues for discussion • Feedback from Workplace Mentors
Year End Review	Half- day workshop / programme meeting After semester two	Review of Academic Year Feedback from Workplace Mentors Review of Academic Performance

Records of participation at initial training and continuing professional development of Workplace mentors will be recorded on the College's CRM system in order to maintain records and to ensure that training is renewed as required.

6.7.1 Role of the Workplace Mentor
Each workplace mentor within the employing organisation who will be an experienced officer within the workplace, who will work closely together with an Academic Supervisor from college faculty to support the apprentice to succeed on the programme.

As the Mentor is integrated in to the overall apprenticeship programme, the Academic Supervisor will act as a point of contact for queries and will support both the mentor and apprentice. The Academic Supervisor maintains overall responsibility for each apprentice's progression during their time on the programme. The Academic Supervisor can help support mentoring arrangements, provide backup, briefing, training, and provide action plans for the apprentice. The work-based module learning agreement will be reviewed and discussed as part of the interaction between the Workplace Mentor and the Academic Supervisor.

The Mentor will use their specific organisational and industry knowledge to guide learners through their apprenticeship, helping them to navigate corporate culture and gain confidence in the application of their learning from all modules on the programme.

The apprentice's interests are paramount in the mentoring relationship. The role of the mentor is to:

- Build an open and honest relationship and create an atmosphere where the apprentice feels safe to try out different ways of doing things.

- Support and encourage the apprentice's personal development and learning by giving confidential feedback to reinforce what the apprentice does well, and help in areas where he/she wants to develop.

- Help the apprentice to take increasing initiative for his/her own learning and development and to take increasing responsibility for managing the mentoring relationship.

- Fully understand what subjects the apprentice is covering whilst at college and reinforcing this within the workplace.

- Challenge the apprentice to tell or demonstrate what he/she has learnt and correct any misunderstandings and reinforce the knowledge gained.

- Try to facilitate the apprentice in working on tasks that relate to the subject recently taught at the college.

- Discuss with the apprentice what assignments he/she needs to complete and ask them to tell you how they will go about it.

- Discuss with his/her Academic Supervisor what evidence is required and try to help them to gain it through task allocation.

- Share your experiences of interesting and challenging jobs with your apprentice to create enthusiasm in these areas.

- Progress monitoring and review.

6.7.2 Module Learning Agreement EXAMPLE:

Workplace Mentor Learning Agreement

Apprentice Name	
Organisation Name	
Workplace Mentor Name	
Academic Supervisor Name	
Date	

Workplace Mentors play an important part in the delivery of an apprenticeship and in the development of the apprentice. Acting in the role of Workplace Mentor you agree to:

- Attend Workplace Mentor Meetings on-site at NCI twice per academic year / once a semester;
- Meet with the apprentice on a regular weekly basis to discuss their development and progression as an apprentice;
- Participate in a review meeting with the assigned Academic Supervisor once per semester by phone, skype, or alternative;
- Review work-based assessment briefs with the apprentice providing support and facilitating access to learning opportunities as required;
- Fully understand what subjects the apprentice is covering whilst at college and reinforcing this within the workplace;
- Discuss with the apprentice what assignments he/she needs to complete and ask them to tell you how they will go about it;
- Discuss with his/her Academic Supervisor what evidence is required and try to help them to gain it through task allocation;
- Try to facilitate the apprentice in working on tasks that relate to the subject recently taught at the college;
- Use the portfolio and post feedback comments on apprentice work-based submissions;
- Build an open and honest relationship and create an atmosphere where the apprentice feels safe to try out different ways of doing things;
- Support and encourage the apprentice's personal development and learning by giving confidential feedback to reinforce what the apprentice does well, and help in areas of development;
- Help the apprentice to take increasing initiative for his/her own learning and to take increasing responsibility for managing the mentoring relationship;
- Challenge the apprentice to tell or demonstrate what he/she has learnt and correct any misunderstandings and reinforce the knowledge gained;
- Share your experiences of interesting and challenging jobs with your apprentice to create enthusiasm in these areas;
- Read and review the Workplace Mentor's Handbook for the Recruitment Executive Apprenticeship programme;
- Support and facilitate the apprentice in the achievement of module Learning Outcomes as set out in the Workplace Mentor's Handbook.

Workplace Mentor Signature & Date:

6.8 Apprentice Advocate

The apprentice advocate is employed by an apprenticeship employer. It is expected that this person is in a position which has oversight of the organisations apprenticeship provision and has sufficient influence to act as advocate on behalf of the apprentice should they find themselves in dispute with either their mentor, academic supervisor or programme director,

in relation to any aspect of the programme. Where it is found that the unit in which an apprentice is placed is unable to provide a particular learning opportunity, the Apprentice Advocate will facilitate transfer to another unit within the organisation.

If the learning opportunity is not available within the employer organisation, the Apprentice Advocate in association with the Academic Supervisor, will assist the apprentice in sourcing an appropriate alternative. The Apprentice Advocate acts a point of contact with the NCI Apprenticeship Manager and/or Programme Director.

6.9   Programme Coordinator

The Programme Co-Coordinator is responsible for providing Administrative Support to faculty members within the School and is a primary administrative point of contact with apprentices.

Key Responsibilities in relation to Apprenticeship provision:

- Provide high-quality co-ordination support for programmes in the School.
- Provide a high quality of service to students of the College.
- Respond professionally to enquiries from apprentices, class reps, academic supervisors, Workplace Mentors, off-campus contacts and faculty on a range of issues.
- Effective interaction with other units in the College such as the other Schools, Professional Education & Training, Student Services, Registrar's Office, Fees and Examinations.
- Ensure that College Policies, outlined in the QA Handbook, for programme management and delivery are adhered to.
- Provide Faculty with information regarding timetables, course notes, student numbers and location of lectures.
- Assist the Programme Directors in the production of examination results and broadsheets.
- Act as secretary to the Programme Committees.
- Introduce themselves to and regularly attend the class groups they support.
- Be alert to developing problems and raise to the appropriate level as soon as possible.
- Respond to and address student complaints.
- Check availability of resources e.g. Library, IT.
- Alert Faculty and Apprentices to planned assessment schedules and deadlines.
- Assist in orientation and registration.
- Record and follow up on exam/assessment absence, medical records and attendance.
- Compilation and maintenance of all Programme material, module descriptors and distribution to the student body.
- Assist in the timetabling process of relevant programmes assigned.
- Assist with programme co-ordination for other programmes for other areas as required.
- Assist with assessment processes
  - Provide administrative support for the College's formal student feedback mechanisms such as Class Rep meetings and student surveys.
  - Provide cover for Reception.
  - Any other duties as assigned by Senior Administrator or Dean.

6.10   Main Communication Touch Points between NCI and Employers

The employer representative roles may the same person depending on the size of the organisation and/or scale of apprenticeship provision within that organisation.

NCI representative	Employer Representative	Nature of Interaction
Apprenticeship Manager	Apprentice Advocate	• Business to business relationship with NCI • Information and issues arising to and from Consortium Steering Group • Issues arising with individual apprentices and with their progress on the programme • Issues arising from groups of apprentices at that site and their progress across the programme (s) • Matters escalated from Academic Supervisor • Matters escalated from Workplace Mentor
Programme Director	Workplace Mentor	• Feedback on programme related matters • Escalation point Issues arising with individual apprentices and their progress on the programme • Escalation point Issues arising with groups of apprentices and their progress on the programme
Academic Supervisor	Workplace Mentor	• Assessment of learners • Feedback on programme/module related matters • Issues arising with individual apprentices and their progress on the programme/module

7   Recruitment, Transfer & Progression

7.1   Recruitment and Admission

General procedures and principles of admission to NCI programmes are outlined in Chapter 6 of the Quality Assurance Handbook[10]. The process below has been developed specifically for apprenticeship programmes. To begin an apprenticeship, an applicant must be employed by a SOLAS approved employer. To be eligible, the applicant must be at least 16 years of age and have a minimum of grade D in any five subjects in the Junior Certificate or equivalent. However, higher educational qualifications and other requirements may be sought.

Recruitment processes put in place by the Consortium Steering Group must ensure that the apprentice is likely to remain with the employer for the duration of the training, to fit in with the organisation and to have the capacity and temperament required for the occupation. In order to optimise this requirement, the admissions process for apprenticeships is organised into distinct phases illustrated in figures 4 & 5. These phases also recognise that a candidate may elect to withdraw from the process and are illustrated in figure 5.

7.1.1 Application

Depending upon the model agreed with the Consortium, applications will be co-ordinated by NCI or the CSG directly. In either case, this will be clearly communicated to applicants. Criteria for application to the programme consist of both academic and personal criteria which must be agreed at the programme validation. Furthermore, all applicants will be required to adhere to the apprenticeship Code of Practice[11].

7.1.2 Selection

Shortlisted applicants are then referred to employer organisations who have vacancies for apprentices. An applicant may be shortlisted for more than 1 organisation. As part of this process, additional checks may be carried out depending on the nature of the apprenticeship. Applicants may appeal a decision at any stage of the selection process. Successful applicants will be advised and referred to SOLAS for registration.

7.1.3 Registration

Registration is a two-fold process

- Registration of the apprentice and employer with SOLAS
- Registration of the apprentice on NCI administrative systems for the purpose of managing the record of learning

7.2   Briefing of SOLAS Authorised Officer

The Apprenticeship Manager and representative from the Consortium should arrange a briefing with the appropriate Authorised Officer to inform them of

- The nature of the programme and curriculum
- Details of the proposed employers of apprentices
- The locations at which off-the-job training will take place
- Delivery arrangements e.g. timetables

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[10] https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/QA/Handbook/NCIQAH-6.%20Admissions%20Registration%20and%20Curriculum.pdf?ver=2019-07-30-153718-353
[11] http://www.apprenticeship.ie/Documents/ApprenticeshipCodeOfPractice.pdf

7.3   Bridging Mechanisms

Where existing employees, whose prior learning is significantly less than the peer group, are being proposed for registration, any learning gaps should be identified and appropriate support offered through mechanisms e.g.

- Mathematics support
- English Language support

7.4   Recognition of Prior Learning

In defining the entry requirements for a statutory apprenticeship, the programme development team in conjunction with the CSG should identify opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and clearly define these within the programme documentation and recruitment processes.

Mechanisms should be put in place

a. to ensure the continued suitability of the apprentice to the training programme and the employment regime.
b. to recognise particular aptitude for the occupation that may compensate for lack of formal prior qualifications.
c. to address specific skill or competency deficiencies where apprentices meet the eligibility requirement but lack qualifications which are normal for their group.
d. to establish the status of the apprentice within the enterprise and among their peers in the community of practice.

Admission of the learner to the programme is co-ordinated and managed by NCI using criteria set by Consortium Steering Group. The learner must meet the minimum entry requirements that have been agreed as part of the programme validation process.

As part of the recruitment process, the employer must have permission to share personal data with NCI.

7.5   Learner Agreement

It is a statutory requirement that the employer and apprentice sign the Apprentice Code of Practice which outlines the expectations of those participants in the process. This agreement will be supplemented by negotiated learning contracts for each work-based learning module which will develop the detail of the learning opportunities to be made available to the apprentice.

The learning agreement outlines dates by which activities must be identified and completed and allows monitoring of standards through the Academic Supervisor.

Progress against these activities will be recorded by the learner via the portfolio which is a key component of all work-based learning.

It is in formulating this agreement that any gaps in capacity that an employer may have should be identified and a clear alternative arranged for the apprentice. If the appropriate learning cannot be provided within the apprentice organisation, sourcing it in another organisation or via other means will be facilitated by the Academic Supervisor

Apprentice Recruitment, Admission and Registration

	CSG	Apprentice	NCI as Co-Ord	Employer	SOLAS	NCI as Provider

Application
- Accepts employer to process
- Expression of Interest lodged

Shortlisting
- Shortlist against criteria for apprenticeship (academic & personal) — Y / N
- Applicant advised
- Organise open day & meet & greet — N → Apprentice advised; Y
- Apprentice withdraws

Interview
- Advise applicant — N
- Interviews candidate — Y

Selection
- Candidate withdraws
- Issue precludes apprentice continuing — N
- Offer and complete any necessary clearances (credit, garda etc) — Y

Registration
- Apprentice Advised
- Appeal to SOLAS/Apprenticeship Council?
- Approves employer — N / Y
- Registers apprentice
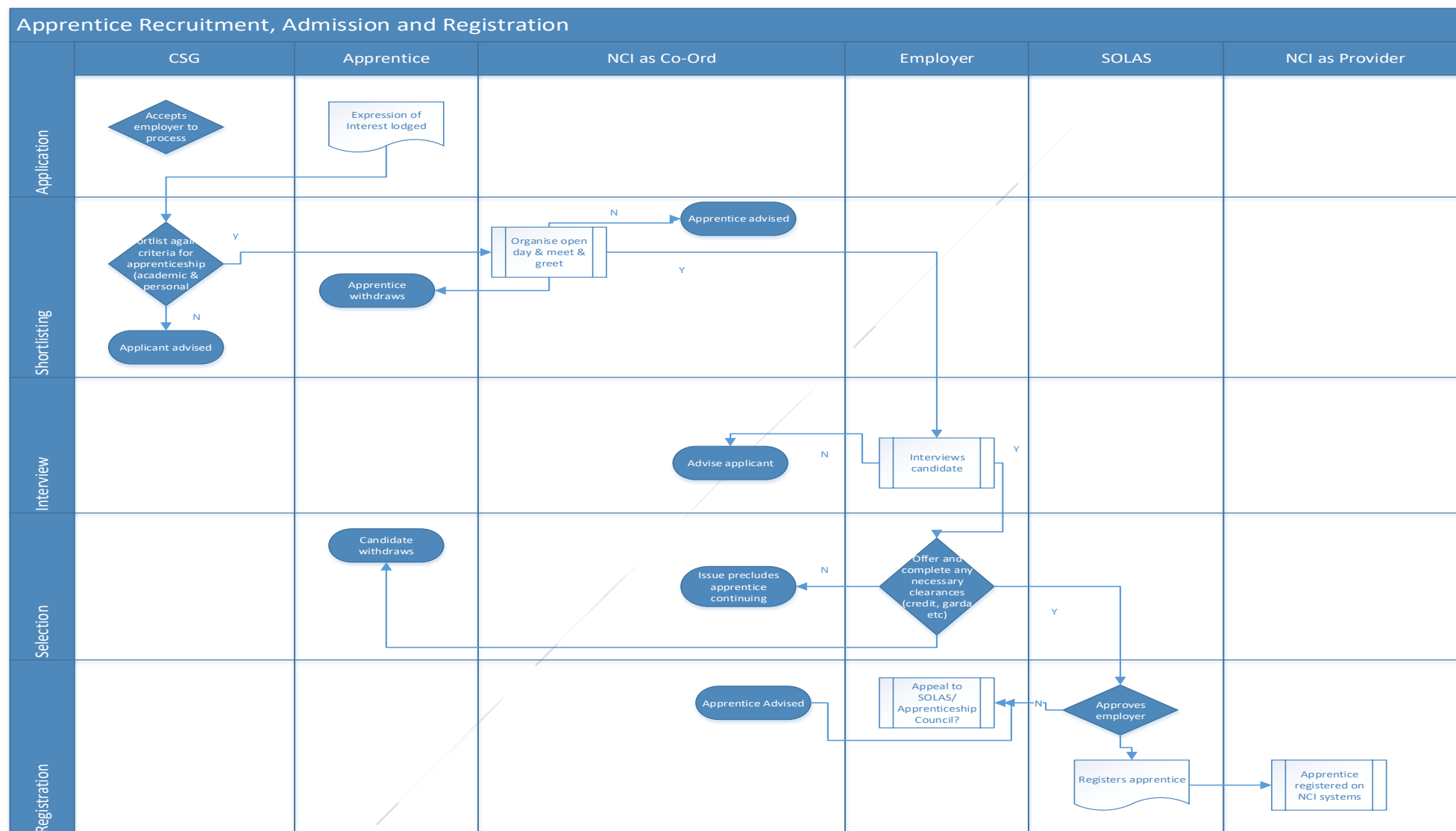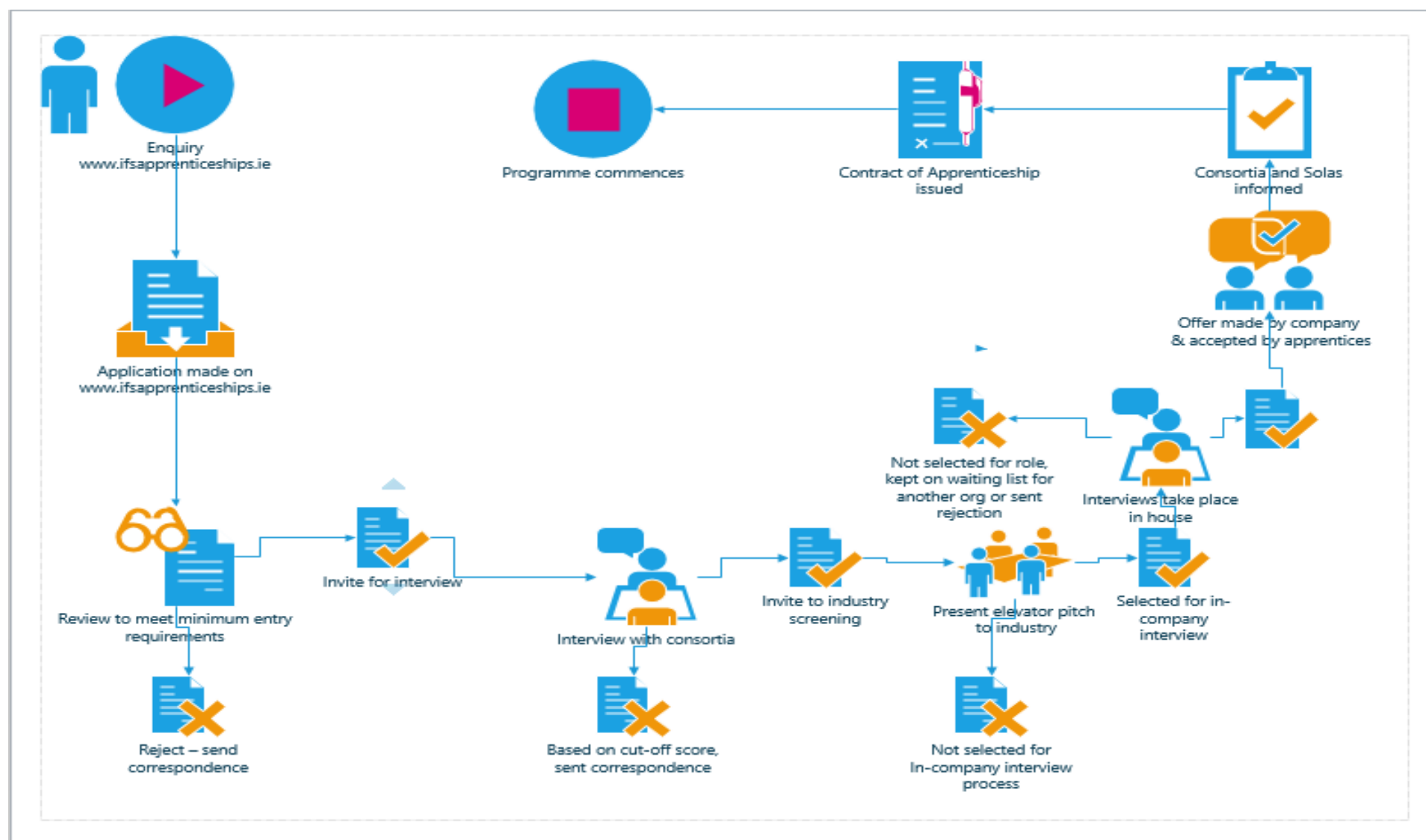- Apprentice registered on NCI systems

Figure 4: Overview of Apprenticeship Admissions Process (NCI Coordinated)

Figure 5: The Apprentice Journey to Commencement

7.6   Monitoring Apprenticeship Progression

The Apprenticeship Programme requires the apprentice to be responsible for their own learning. Apprentices are required to abide by this Code of Practice and NCI Policies and Procedures during the apprenticeship. The local SOLAS authorised officer will assist apprentices to comply with this Code of Practice by advising them where possible of potential or apparent breaches of the standards set out. However, SOLAS reserves the right to impose the appropriate sanctions up to and including the removal from the Apprenticeship Programme of an apprentice who in the reasonable opinion of SOLAS fails to meet the standards set out in this Code of Practice (which may be amended from time to time).

Overall responsibility for monitoring the progression of the apprentice is assigned to the Academic Supervisor. This will be done via interaction with key stakeholders involved in the delivery and management of an apprenticeship programme internally and nationally alongside an analysis of academic progress data.

The record of academic progress will be managed using NCI's existing administrative systems which will be accessible to lecturers, academic supervisors and workplace mentors who are situated both in on-the-job and off-the-job locations.

The following data will be considered as indicators by which progress will be monitored:

- Attendance, both at on and off-the-job activities.
- Participation in assessment activities, both formative and summative as outlined in the programme assessment strategy.
- Registration with the disability support service as appropriate.
- Engagement with college communication systems e.g. Requests for online services.
- Use of existing employer performance appraisal mechanisms to monitor continued suitability for the occupation.
- Outcomes of disciplinary processes.

Data collections, management and destruction will be subject to national and internal policies, procedures and guidelines on data protection, GDPR and privacy legislation.

7.7   Progression/Transfer

Section 5 of the QQI Topic-Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes notes that for apprentices *'continuity of the employment, or the suitability of the employment, may be at risk',* the College commits to facilitating transfer to another acceptable programme in the event that employment ceases, and agreements with partner companies specifies that they will cooperate in placing apprentice learners in the event of an employer withdrawing from the apprentice scheme. Should a learner be required to leave an apprenticeship programme prior to completion due to personal reasons, every effort will be made to accommodate or facilitate transfer to a relevant academic programme where the credit for any modules completed will be recognised as appropriate.

7.8 Attendance/Non-Attendance

The apprentice's record of attendance at off-the-job learning will be monitored and data shared between NCI and the apprentice's employer. Engagement with learning will also be monitored by the Academic Supervisor through the monitoring of evidence gathering.

7.9 Disruption of Apprenticeship

An apprenticeship programme may be disrupted for a variety of reasons including;

1. Redundancy
2. Irreconcilable differences with employer
3. Academic failure
4. Illness or other personal circumstance which may affect the learner's ability to participate in the programme

Any period of time spent on temporary lay-off (per the redundancy legislation), maternity, adoptive or parental leave, carer's leave or any other period of statutory protective leave, sick leave (in excess of 6 weeks in any 12month period) or any unauthorised absence will not count towards completion of the apprenticeship. During such absence the apprenticeship will be temporarily suspended. SOLAS retains the discretion to temporarily suspend an apprenticeship in instances of frequent intermittent absences and/or absences of less than 6 weeks' duration

In cases of redundancy of irreconcilable differences with an employer, efforts will be made to place the apprentice with an alternative employer in order to complete their apprenticeship. If this is not possible, learners will be offered an opportunity to transfer to a similar academic programme offered by NCI or another academic institution.

Apprentices may attempt each off-the-job assessment three times. The apprentice can request that the result be rechecked and reviewed by, and appealed to the relevant training provider 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 automatically terminated. Apprentices and their employers shall be notified by SOLAS of this termination in writing where applicable.

Apprentices may appeal such termination and request a fourth and final assessment attempt to the Apprenticeship Appeals Committee. The time limit for making an appeal is 3 months from the date of termination. SOLAS retains absolute discretion to extend this time limit.

8   Learning and Teaching Environment

8.1   The Workplace Learner Experience

It is the Programme Team's responsibility to ensure apprentices can see the value and distinctiveness of their programmes of study. Amazing Apprenticeships[19] cite the following benefits of the apprenticeship learner experience:

- You work in a real job for a real employer
- You gain valuable work place skills and experience
- You are paid a salary and have a contract of employment
- You get paid holiday
- You achieve qualifications
- You get support from colleagues and your training organisation
- You become more employable because you have experience of work
- You have better career prospects once you complete your apprenticeship[12]

Many prospective applicants will have reservations about *'not going to College'.* This model allows learners to experience being on-campus, albeit with limited duration. However, this allows an experience the college 'vibe', environment, to sit in lecture theatres and experience differing approaches to teaching and learning, as other learners at NCI would. Many prospective part-time learners display reservations at Open Evenings as they have never been in a third level educational environment, alternatively this will be familiar to learners on this programme.

The learners on apprenticeship programmes have access to supports, both academic and non-academic, as all other NCI students and this can assist these supports throughout their learning journey. All the learning support departments are available during their day of protected study, but also outside of traditional 9-5pm times. The College is aware that returning to college and/or balancing work, home and college can be a challenge and as such the Teaching and Learning team has as their core mission to coordinate, enhance and introduce support services to ensure that students have a rewarding and fulfilling experience, both personally and academically, while at college. Additional pastoral supports include:

- Medical Centre
- Student Counselling Service
- Pastoral & Welfare Support Services
- Careers Guidance

The proposed delivery and scheduling of Apprenticeship programmes will be outlined in the programme validation document. The design of the programme will take the expected primary location of the 'on the job' aspect of the programme into account and ensure that the delivery schedule is appropriate to the intended learner profile.

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[12] Amazing Apprenticeships (2015) *Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far.*, [Online] Available at: http://amazingapprenticeships.com/wp-content/uploads/Apprenticeship_Pack_for_16-19_year_olds-2.pdf [13th March 2017]

8.2 Campus Learning Environment

Off the job on-site training will usually be provided at the College's IFSC campus which is a purpose-built facility opened in 2002. As outlined in Sections 5[13] and 7[14] of the 2018 QA Handbook., apprentices will have full access to all of the support services available to NCI learners:

- Library & Information Services
- IT Services
- Learning Development
  - Maths Support
  - Academic Writing
  - Computing Support
  - Academic Integrity Support
- Careers & Employability Services
- Disability Support Services
- Medical & Counselling Services
- Students Union Representation, Clubs and Societies

Consideration will be given to the duty of care required for apprentices that are under 18, particularly if the design of the programme requires block delivery at a distance from the apprentice's primary employment location. Employers will be required to ensure garda vetting has been completed if it is anticipated that learners will be under 18 on admission. NCI garda vetting policy will apply to 'off the job' locations.

A schedule of events should be organised to bring cohorts of apprentices together. These can be organised as part of the delivery of the programme e.g. seminars, guest lectures as well as social events. In addition to the development of a representative forum, the development of alumni groups and clubs and/or societies should be encouraged.

The VLE should be used to encourage the creation of virtual communities where apprentices are not located in clusters.

8.3 On-Job/ Company Learning Environment

As part of the national apprenticeship scheme, there are formal requirements for approval of an employer's suitability to train apprentices. Once approved by SOLAS, the approved employer is required to sign the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between NCI and the employer for the on-job/off campus learning. The MoA provides specifics in relation to the commitments required by the employer in respect of work placement, including:

- release from work for study
- appropriate workspace at the place of employment
- facilities for apprentice meetings and other forms of training
- ICT access and provision
- Access and provision of a Workplace Mentor for each apprentice

The MoA will be signed by the employer prior to the apprentice commencing a programme of study.

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[13] https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/QA/Handbook/NCIQAH-5.%20Learning%20and%20Teaching%20Environment.pdf?ver=2019-07-30-153718-620
[14] https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/QA/Handbook/NCIQAH-7.%20Support%20Services%20for%20Learners.pdf?ver=2019-07-30-153718-417

A member of the Apprenticeship Programme Team will make an employer site visit on the first year of the programme to each new employer, or new employer site. This gives an additional opportunity to meet Workplace Mentors, apprentices, as well as Apprentice Advocates in the organisation. This gives the opportunity to discuss the programme content, practice and contextual issues. This will be fed back to the Programme Committee.

8.4   Codes of Practice

The apprentice is responsible for their own learning throughout their apprenticeship. Once registered with SOLAS, an apprentice is required to sign up to a formal Code of Practice[15] which outlines obligations on both employers and apprentices. Apprentices are required to abide by this Code of Practice and NCI's Code of Discipline during the apprenticeship.

8.4.1 SOLAS Code of Practice

Local SOLAS Authorised Officers will assist apprentices to comply with this Code of Practice by advising them where possible of potential or apparent breaches of the standards set out. However, SOLAS reserves the right to impose the appropriate sanctions up to and including the removal from the Apprenticeship Programme of an apprentice who in the reasonable opinion of SOLAS fails to meet the standards set out in this Code of Practice (which may be amended from time to time).

8.4.2 NCI Code of Discipline

As members of the College community, apprentices have an obligation to know and abide by, in addition to the laws of the state, all College policies and procedures, including the College Code of Discipline. In this regard, the College has developed relevant policies and regulations statements designed to offer all Learners a friendly and safe environment. In general, the College expects that the common sense of a mature and responsible individual will determine if the behaviour is one that should be avoided and may be adjudicated. The provisions of the Code of Discipline continue to apply when a Learner is outside the campus on an academic exercise or representing the College in any way. Learners should be aware that they are viewed by the public as representatives of the College and they are expected to behave in a manner that reflects positively on themselves and the College.

Apprentices are subject to the College's Code of Discipline. If a learner has been sanctioned as a result of this disciplinary process, this may have an impact on the employment of the learner depending on the severity of the offence. Offences under the NCI Code include:

- Plagiarism or the use of unauthorised material during an examination/assessment or other breaches of the examination regulations
- Failure to adhere to Invigilators instructions
- Misuse of College IT systems
- Furnishing false information to the College with intent to deceive
- Forgery, alteration or misuse of College documents, records or identity cards
- Verbal or Physical abuse of another person
- Malicious destruction, damage or misuse of College property or of private

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[15] http://www.apprenticeship.ie/Documents/ApprenticeshipCodeOfPractice.pdf

property on the campus
- Unauthorised retention of library materials
- Forcible occupation of College buildings and grounds
- Unwarranted interference with the College safety equipment, firefighting equipment and alarm systems

The outcomes of disciplinary processes will be made known to the employer.

8.4.3 Code of Practice for Academic Honesty & Integrity

Academic honesty and integrity are central to NCI's learning community and all students and staff are expected to uphold this principle. The purpose of this Code is to ensure that assessments are valid, reliable, have integrity and are fair to all. This policy is to ensure that student engagement in assessment is honest and reflects the work and abilities of the student and that it provides a response, feedback and consequence to issues concerning possible breaches in a timely and transparent manner. The Code also lays out the process for managing alleged breaches and stipulates penalties.

Academic dishonesty arises when someone misrepresents someone else's work as their own. This can take many forms which are outlined in the Code and alongside the penalties applied by NCI if a learner is found to have breached NCI policies and Codes intentionally or unintentionally. Further details can be located in the NCI Quality Handbook 2018 edition within Section 5.

8.5   NCI Disciplinary Committee

The NCI Disciplinary Committee shall investigate cases of alleged misconduct and recommend an appropriate penalty, if any, should be imposed in each case.   This recommendation from the Disciplinary Committee will then be presented by the Registrar at the Examinations Board for approval. The Disciplinary Committee alone shall adjudicate on the allegation(s) based on written and oral submissions and shall determine the penalty to be applied. Its decision must be a majority decision. Other than the Recording Secretary, no other person shall be present during the period of adjudication. The reports and/or written submissions shall be made available to the Learner in advance of the committee hearing. The Learner shall be notified in writing through the office of the Registrar of the outcome of the deliberations

Where the Disciplinary Committee has made a finding that there has been a breach of an examination regulation, for example plagiarism, it shall make such recommendations to the Examination Board as it considers appropriate to include but not limited to a recommendation.

- That a Learner's marks shall be reduced.
- That the Learner be deemed not to have passed their exam.
- That other examinations sat by the same Learner at the same examination sitting be declared void.
- That other forms of assessment undertaken in that academic year by the same Learner be declared void.
- That the Learner be suspended from College for a specified period.

Recommendations of a disciplinary meeting are to be made known to the Course Director and Dean of School immediately after the meeting and in advance of Assessment/examination boards, including progress boards. The decision of the

Examinations Board on major offences may be appealed to the Appeals Committee appointed by the Academic Council. Decisions of the Appeals Committee shall be final.

8.6   NCI Complaints Process

The following process is designed to resolve concerns as speedily and effectively as possible. NCI will endeavour to address most concerns successfully through informal mechanisms to secure an early and timely resolution where possible. However, if informal resolution is not appropriate or unsuccessful, the formal process is available. A student does not need to complete Step 1 before moving to Step 2.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the complaints process wherever possible/appropriate. There are four steps in a student expressing a concern:

Step 1: Informal Complaint 'Early Resolution'	The student should first seek to address concerns directly with the person or line manager to attempt to resolve the matter informally and swiftly. The Programme Director, Head of Department/School or Head of relevant support service may be able be required to intervene to secure a satisfactory outcome.
Step 2: Formal complaint	Made in writing and submitted to the relevance Dean of School and Registrar. Once lodged the Registrar will acknowledge the complaint (within 20 days) initiate an investigation as quickly as possible. A written response detailing what action was agreed, if any, will be shared with the complainant.
Step 3: Internal Appeal	If the student remains dissatisfied after the conclusion of the investigation they can write to the NCI President to investigate further. Please note that the President cannot be involved in complaints at an earlier stage. The President is the final point of appeal within the College.
Step 4: External Appeal	If the student remains dissatisfied, having exhausted the NCI complaints process, they are entitled to refer their complaint to the Officer of the Ombudsman, HEA, QQI or, SOLAS (as appropriate). The external body may investigate in line with their published guidelines for complaints/appeals available from the respective websites.

Regular reviews of student complaints, including recurrent themes, will be undertaken by the Registrar and reported to Academic Council for consideration and action.

9 Assessment

9.1 Assessment Strategy

Assessment supports an understanding of core theory and practice for an apprentice, enabling learners to address the tasks they face in their work-based learning environment. Apprenticeship programmes emphasise the development of skills of enquiry through problem-based teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Learners are exposed to real-world practical problems in scenarios that are dynamic in nature.

In the off-the-job components of the programme, a combination of continuous assessment, including projects, case studies, presentations and reports, and examinations are utilised to ensure that learners are exposed to different assessment strategies. This is to reflect the most effective ways of assessing the learning outcomes of the component modules.

Each Programme Committee, as part of its annual review of programme(s), will develop an assessment schedule for the forthcoming year such that learners are afforded an appropriate timeframe in which to undertake assessment within each semester.

Learners must submit and/or sit all assessment components, i.e. both continuous assessments and terminal examinations, within a module. Failure to submit and/or sit a component without appropriate extenuating circumstances will result in failure of the module. Examinations are held during an examination period determined by the college and guidelines around revision guidance will normally be built into the teaching schedule. Formative assessment plays a vital role in apprenticeship programmes and is, therefore, embedded in the teaching and learning strategy of each constituent module, with individual feedback provided on a one- to-one basis outside of lecture hours or through the use of NCI's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), i.e. Moodle.

Apprenticeship programmes are delivered to full-time students, with the majority of time spent in the workplace. Module leaders will be available throughout the semester to assist or deal with any issues relating to academic queries or issues, while Academic Supervisors will guide apprentices on work-based modules. Apprentices will also benefit from the support of an assigned Workplace Mentor. Please refer to Section 6 for the specific responsibilities attached to these individual roles.

9.2 Assessment Policy and Procedures

Assessment of apprenticeship programmes will be undertaken in accordance with the College's regulations and QA policies and procedures, which are compliant with QQI's Assessment and Standards (2013). The policies and procedures outlined in Chapter 4 of NCI's Quality Assurance Handbook[16], therefore, apply to assessments in apprenticeship programmes, with the following exception:

- Pass by Compensation is not permitted for modules clearly designated as "work-based learning", i.e. learners must obtain ≥ 40% to pass these modules.

In addition to the general policies and procedures relating to assessment as outlined in Chapter 4 of NCI's QA Handbook, the following policies and procedures will apply specifically to assessment in apprenticeship programmes.

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[16] https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/QA/Handbook/NCIQAH-4.%20Assessment.pdf?ver=2019-07-30-153718-433

9.2.1 Work-Based Assessment Ratio

A principle feature of an apprenticeship is that there must be a minimum of 50% on-the-job learning. Accordingly, the teaching, learning and assessment strategy for an apprenticeship programme must ensure that each of the programme's constituent modules includes a minimum of 50% assessment that is either directly related to work-based learning or directly applied to the workplace.

9.2.2 Assessment of 'Off the Job' Learning

The internal examiner is responsible for ensuring the preparation of all assessment materials. Where a module is being delivered in the same semester by more than one lecturer, the Module Coordinator is responsible for preparing all relevant course materials. All lecturers involved in the delivery of the module must be consulted in the preparation of assessment materials.

The Internal Examiner, a role fulfilled by the Module Coordinator, must submit to the NCI Examinations Office all examination papers or part examination papers, for which they are responsible, once they have been reviewed and agreed with the External Examiner and according accordance to the dates and conditions specified by the College. Each paper will be accompanied by a marking scheme and outline answers and/or model solutions as appropriate. The process for ensuring oversight and the external examination of assessment on apprenticeship programmes is outlined in Figure 6 below.

In order to assure the relevance and consistency of assessment, all summative assessment should be internally reviewed by the subject group or appropriate review group appointed by the School prior to being submitted to the External Examiner. This process should assist in ensuring that the assessment tests the appropriate programme learning outcomes as validated by QQI and that any anomalies or inaccuracies can be detected and remedied in advance of assessments being issued to learners.

Where a module is delivered to multiple cohorts during the same timeframe, the same assessment should be taken by all learners. In the case of unseen examinations, if it is not feasible to hold the examination at the same time for all cohorts, different examination papers must be provided.

9.2.3 Assessment of 'On-the-Job' Training

The assessment of 'on the job' training and education in apprenticeship programmes is currently informed by the following principles[17], which are compliant with QQI's *Assessment & Standards* (2013): Figure 7 outlines the process followed.

- Assessment methods correspond with the minimum intended programme learning outcomes (MIPLOs) and to the relevant level of the Award Standard as determined by the programme award's position on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ);
- An assessment strategy must be developed for the programme that is capable of accurately measuring and/or determining learners' attainment of the ILOs, with arrangements for the continuous review of this strategy as part of the delivery and management of the programme;

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[17] Woolf, H. and Yorke, M. (2010) *Guidance for the assessment of work-based learning in Foundation degrees*. Lichfield: Foundation Degree Forward

- Assessment arrangements are accurately documented, transparent in the expectations made of learners, and communicated to all relevant stakeholders in a timely manner;
- The assessment of students in the workplace will always involve the employer, as represented by the Workplace Mentor;
- Appropriate guidance and support will be given to employers to ensure they are confident and competent to be involved in the assessment of learners;
- There will be evidence of thorough marking and internal moderation, which will be used to ensure consistency of assessment and sharing of best practice within and between providers where the programme is delivered; and
- Learners will be encouraged to develop their own assessment tasks for modules clearly designated as "work-based learning", which are discussed with the Academic Supervisor and Workplace Mentor before being undertaken by the learner.

9.2.3.1 *Record of Learning Activity and Evidence*

Any assessment of learner's achievement of the MIPLOs in 'on-the-job' training will typically involve the monitoring and evaluation of a learning journal, i.e. an electronic portfolio. This will allow each learner to maintain a continuous record of their work experience and assessment and also enable them to capture critical self-reflections. The records will be substantiated by evidence that is confirmed by the Workplace Mentor and accessible to examiners.

Evidence for evaluation must be:

- Valid: relevant to the MIPLOs the assessment is intended to satisfy
- Sufficient: satisfies the MIPLOs the assessment is intended to address
- Authentic: provided directly by the learner
- Consistent: demonstrably achieved on more than one occasion
- Current: not more than two years old

The Academic Supervisor will monitor the apprentice's engagement with their learning and provision of evidence on a consistent basis, providing timely feedback on this assessment and consulting with key stakeholders, including the Authorised Officer, as required.

Provision will be made for the external observation of the apprentice by the Academic Supervisor, the Programme Director or another examiner as appropriate. This progress visit will allow for the face-to-face observation of the apprentice. However, if the assessment being observed is a high-stakes assessment, it might necessitate that the apprentice is recorded completing the assessment to allow for moderation and standardisation of marking of work-based learning.

9.2.3.2 *Assessment and Marking*

The primary source of evidence of attainment of the MIPLOs in modules clearly designated as "work-based learning" will be provided via the electronic portfolio, which will be assessed according to one of the following two models:

1. Assessment where the Workplace Mentor is the first marker and the Academic Supervisor is second marker
2. Assessment where the Academic Supervisor is the first marker and the Workplace Mentor provides feedback that contribute to the mark. This contribution will

normally take the form of confirmation that evidence provided by the learner is valid.

The decision to adopt Model 1 or Model 2 is decided by the programme team during the development of the programme and must be adhered to once the programme is validated by QQI. This decision may be influenced by the level of the programme, the stage of the programme that the module is delivered in and/or the maturity of the sector in assessing work-based learning.

9.2.4 Standardisation of Assessment

Where assessments are individualised e.g. dissertations, work-based learning, etc., standardisation meetings are held at the end of each semester, where a sample of such assessments are reviewed to ensure consistency of marking and the grades awarded to learners. The sample chosen for review will consist of three assessments from each award classification band and all fails. The standardisation meetings will be attended by the National Programme Director, Local Programme Directors and Academic Supervisors, with invitations extended to Workplace Mentors.

This process will involve a sample of apprentice evidence across all modules clearly designated as "work-based learning" being distributed to a group of assessors to discuss grading and any discrepancies in individual judgements. This allows for professional development as well as ensuring a shared understanding of assessment practices and the consistent application of grading schematics. In addition, standardisation should also involve a review of devised assessments and a review of assessment practice.[18] A total of three standardisation meetings will take place during the academic year:

Meeting 1:	A review of assessment practice and instruments before they are implemented
Meeting 2:	Address any concerns with managing assessments and identify training needs of assessors
Meeting 3	Follow-up on above and identity best-practices for subsequent iterations

In the process of standardisation, the review will consider grade banding decisions rather than a granular review of marks, i.e. determining if an assessment meets the criteria for being awarded a particular grade (a Pass, Merit or Distinction) rather than questioning if an assessment warrants a particular mark (54% or 57%). Should a sample from an individual assessor be deemed to be a grade too high, or alternatively too low, a recalibration of all assessments from that assessor will be made to the appropriate grade band. The findings from standardisation meetings will be discussed at Programme Committee Meetings and will be used to develop training workshops for Workplace Mentors. Any disputed marks between first and second markers will also be subject to review at standardisation meetings and highlighted to the External Examiner for consideration. The National Programme Director will prepare a report for the External Examiner, which will address assessment standards, the operation of assessment, and any notable variations between providers and/or employer locations.

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[18] Oxford Cambridge and RSA (2016) Internal Standardisation Generic Guidelines [Online] Available at: http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/286460-internal-standardisation-generic-guide.pdf [Accessed 18th April 2017]

9.2.5 Repeat Opportunities and Stage Progression

In the case of both "on-the-job" and "off-the-job" components of the programme, learners will have a maximum of three attempts to pass a module.[19] A learner will have a first attempt and a maximum of two repeat attempts. If a learner fails a module, they will be given a repeat exam opportunity and/or an opportunity to resubmit failed coursework according to the reassessment strategy outlined in the module descriptor.

NCI's policy on pass by compensation will apply to modules on an apprenticeship programme, except for those that clearly designated as "work-based learning" modules. The pass by compensation rule does not apply to modules that are clearly designated as "work-based learning" modules. A learner must achieve ≥40% to pass these modules. Please refer to Chapter 4 of NCI's Quality Assurance Handbook (Section 4.11.4) for further information on the pass by compensation policy.

Learners can progress to the subsequent stage of an apprenticeship programme while carrying a maximum of ten credits from the previous stage, i.e. progress into Stage 2 while carrying ten credits from Stage 1. This permission, however, is made at the discretion of the relevant Vice Dean and is subject to approval by the Exam Board. Please refer to Chapter 4 of NCI's Quality Assurance Handbook (Section 4.15) for further information on stage progression eligibility.

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[19] The number of attempts a learner has to pass a module on an apprenticeship programme is in accordance with SOLAS' regulations on apprenticeship provision as documented in *Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices*.
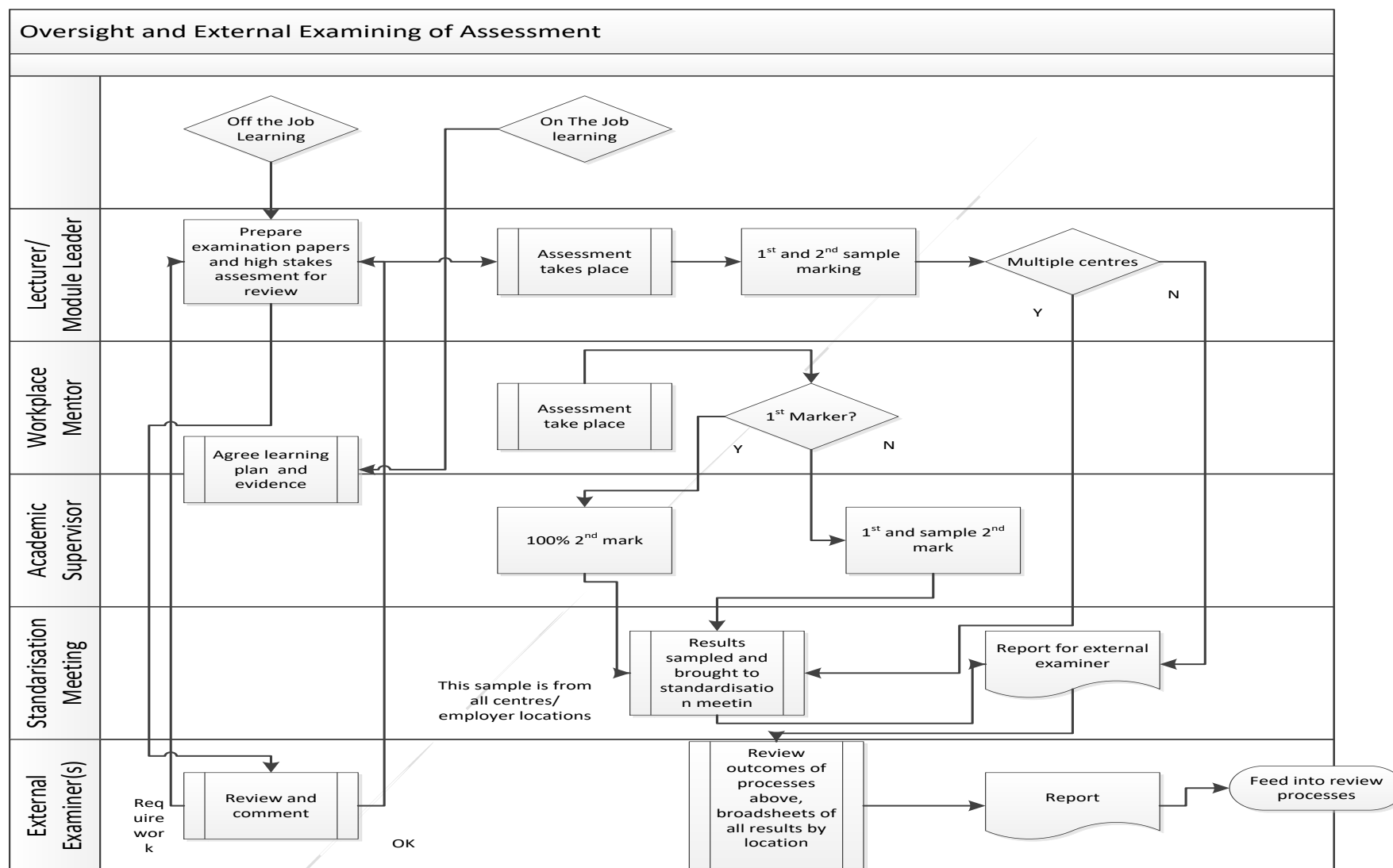
Oversight and External Examining of Assessment
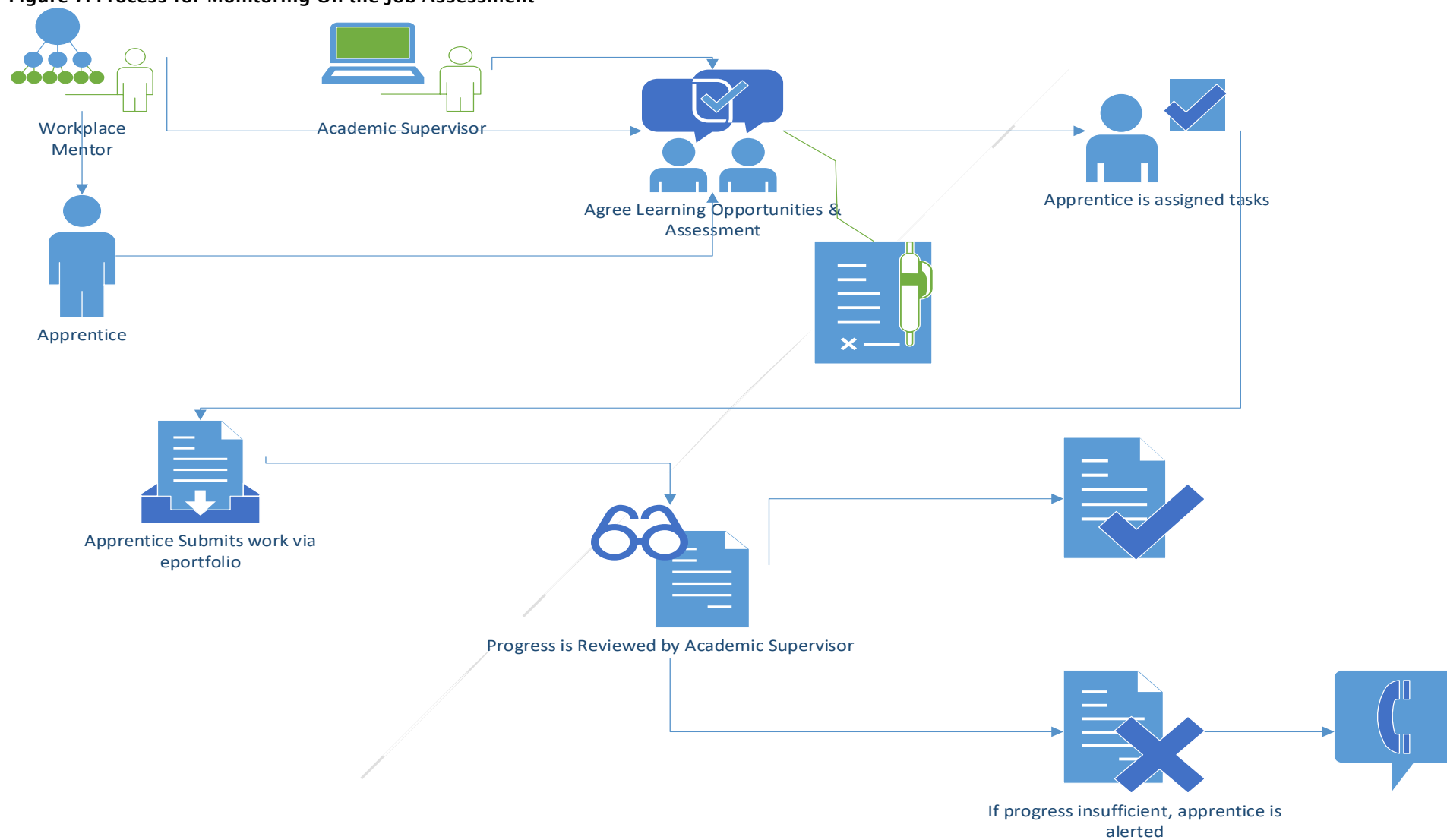

Figure 6: Oversight and External Examining of Assessment

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Figure 7: Process for Monitoring On the Job Assessment

Workplace Mentor

Academic Supervisor

Agree Learning Opportunities & Assessment

Apprentice is assigned tasks

Apprentice

Apprentice Submits work via eportfolio

Progress is Reviewed by Academic Supervisor

If progress insufficient, apprentice is alerted

9.3 Rubrics for Work-Based Learning

	FAIL	PASS	MERIT 2 / 2.2 Honours	MERIT 1 / 2.1 Honours	DISTINCTION / 1.1 Honours
Satisfaction of Learning Outcomes	The evidence presented for the module fails to meet **all** of the Learning Outcomes for the module.	The evidence presented is sufficient to satisfy the Learning Outcomes. However, the evidence presented only demonstrates a basic level of knowledge, skill and competence. A basic understanding and awareness of the relevant concepts and practice is shown. Some points of evidence, information and artefacts will benefit from being more direct and focused toward the satisfaction of Learning Outcomes.	The evidence presented clearly satisfies the Learning Outcomes. The evidence presented demonstrates a sound level of knowledge, skill and competence. A suitable understanding and awareness of the main issues is demonstrated, and relevant concepts and practice are shown. However, there are clear opportunities to develop evidence for the module further. Evidence may be limited in terms of its analysis, complexity, and range. The majority of evidence is direct and focused toward the satisfaction of Learning Outcomes.	The evidence presented clearly satisfies the Learning Outcomes. The evidence presented demonstrates a high level of knowledge, skill and competence. A depth of understanding and awareness of the main issues is demonstrated, and relevant concepts and practice are shown. There are some opportunities to develop evidence for the module further. Evidence shows greater analysis, complexity, and range. All of evidence is directed and focused toward the satisfaction of Learning Outcomes.	The evidence presented clearly satisfies the Learning Outcomes. The evidence presented demonstrates an exceptional level of knowledge, skill and competence. A secure understanding of the subject matter, concepts and practices is demonstrated. Evidence shows analysis, acknowledges complexity, and scope. A very high standard of comprehension is evident. All of evidence is directed and focused toward the satisfaction of Learning Outcomes.
Knowledge & Understanding	The evidence presented may not be appropriate to satisfy the Learning Outcomes. The evidence presented	Evidence is overall suitable, however exhibits some indiscriminate content around the subject	Evidence displays an understanding of the main concerns, but may lack a sustained focus, get side tracked and	Evidence displays an understanding of the main concerns, and an appreciation of the	Evidence displays an understanding of the main concerns, and is cognisant of the wider implications/context.

	FAIL	PASS	MERIT 2 / 2.2 Honours	MERIT 1 / 2.1 Honours	DISTINCTION / 1.1 Honours
	shows little relevance to the Learning Outcomes and assessment measures assigned.	without showing complete understanding.	veer away from the central issue or task set. Concern for the wider context may be missing.	wider implications/context.	
Consistency	Evidence may be incomplete, and there may be omissions, resulting in Learning Outcomes not being satisfied.	Whilst Learning Outcomes are satisfied, the Learner has not fully pursued the Consistency concept, i.e. the learner has not provided more than one piece of evidence for most of the Learning Outcomes.	The Learner has clearly attempted pursue the Consistency concept, i.e. the learner has provided more than one piece of evidence for some of the Learning Outcomes. However, further opportunities remain to show a varied range of evidence.	The Learner has clearly pursued the Consistency concept, i.e. the learner has provided more than one piece of evidence for many of the Learning Outcomes, where appropriate and opportunity allows.	The Learner has clearly pursued the Consistency concept, and provided multiple forms of varied evidence, for each Learning Outcome, where appropriate and opportunity has allowed.
Originality & Creativity	Little or no originality or creativity is demonstrated in the presentation or collection of evidence for the e-portfolio.	Little originality or creativity is demonstrated in the presentation or collection of evidence for the e-portfolio.	Some originality and creativity are demonstrated in the presentation or collection of evidence for the e-portfolio.	Originality and creativity are clearly demonstrated in the presentation or collection of evidence for the e-portfolio.	The evidence presented for the module / e-portfolio is highly creative, original and innovative.
Organisation	There is a lack of clarity in the evidence presented and the match to Learning Outcomes.	Not all of the evidence is accompanied by a caption that clearly explains the importance of the item.	Most of the evidence is accompanied by a caption that clearly explains the importance of the item to the Learning Outcomes.	All of the evidence is accompanied by a caption that clearly explains the importance of the item to the Learning Outcomes.	All of the evidence is directly focused on achieving the Learning Outcomes and its relevance and relationship to the

	FAIL	PASS	MERIT 2 / 2.2 Honours	MERIT 1 / 2.1 Honours	DISTINCTION / 1.1 Honours
	The organisation of evidence for the portfolio could be significantly improved. Examples of poor organisation are: confusing navigation links that make it difficult to locate artefacts; external links do not connect to the appropriate website or file.	The organisation of evidence for the portfolio is could be improved further. Examples of poor organisation are: confusing navigation links that make it difficult to locate artefacts; external links do not connect to the appropriate website or file.	The organisation of evidence for the portfolio is satisfactory, with some opportunities to further develop. Examples of poor organisation are: confusing navigation links that make it difficult to locate artefacts; external links do not connect to the appropriate website or file.	The portfolio is organised well, with limited opportunities to further develop. Examples of poor organisation are: confusing navigation links that make it difficult to locate artefacts; external links do not connect to the appropriate website or file.	Learning Outcome is explained with detail. The portfolio is highly organised, with minimal or no issues. Examples of poor organisation are: confusing navigation links that make it difficult to locate artefacts; external links do not connect to the appropriate website or file.
Presentation	The evidence is very poorly presented which significantly distracts or inhibits its impact and ability to be considered as a portfolio entry. Examples could include: written submissions to the e-portfolio that are difficult to read due to inappropriate use of fonts, type size for headings, sub-headings and text and font styles; Audio and/or video artefacts are not edited or exhibit	The evidence has numerous errors that should be have corrected prior to submission and these distract from the impact of the evidence. Examples could include: written submissions to the e-portfolio that use inappropriate fonts, type size for headings, sub-headings and text and font styles; A audio and/or video artefacts are edited with inconsistent clarity or	The evidence has some errors that should be have corrected prior to submission and but these do not distract from the impact of the evidence. Examples could include: written submissions to the e-portfolio that use inappropriate fonts, type size for headings, sub-headings and text and font styles; audio and/or video artefacts are edited to focus on the Learning Outcome, and there are few	Consideration to the design and display of evidence is demonstrated. The evidence has few obvious errors and these do not distract from the impact of the evidence. Examples could include: written submissions to the e-portfolio that use inappropriate fonts, type size for headings, sub-headings and text and font styles; audio and/or video artefacts are edited to focus on	A high level of attention is given to the design and display of the Evidence. The evidence has no, or very minor, errors and these do not distract from the impact of the evidence at all. The evidence (written, audio, and video, etc.) is of a high standard, and is targeted on the Learning Outcomes.

	FAIL	PASS	MERIT 2 / 2.2 Honours	MERIT 1 / 2.1 Honours	DISTINCTION / 1.1 Honours
	inconsistent clarity or sound (too loud/too soft/garbled).	sound (too loud/too soft/garbled).

Writing is generally grammatically correct but does not use extensive or sophisticated vocabulary, or language common in their role / industry. | issues with inconsistent clarity or sound (too loud/too soft/garbled).

Written evidence is generally grammatically correct and has some use of sophisticated vocabulary and language common in their role / industry. | the Learning Outcome, and there no issues with clarity or sound. | |
| **Academic Supervisor / Work Based Mentor Support** | Overly dependent on Mentor / Academic Supervisor support, guidance, or direction in the completion of evidence for the module.
Support, guidance, or direction may not have been taken, acted on and ignored. | Highly dependent on Mentor / Academic Supervisor support, guidance, or direction in the completion of evidence for the module. | Some direct Mentor / Academic Supervisor support, guidance, or direction has been in the completion of evidence for the module. | The learner has received limited Mentor / Academic Supervisor support, guidance, or direction in the completion of evidence for the module. The learner has acted independently for the most part. | The learner has received minimal Mentor / Academic Supervisor support, guidance, or direction in the completion of evidence for the module. The learner has demonstrated high levels of independence. |

10 Extending Operations to other Education Providers

The following sections outline the matters to be considered in the delivery, assessment and management of an apprenticeship programme when extended to another provider. These processes should be under continual monitoring to ensure that they remain fit for purpose as delivery of the programme scales upward or that they are not too onerous should the programme scale down.

10.1 Areas of Responsibility
The area of responsibility for an additional education provider should be agreed as part of the MOA signed between it and NCI. This area of responsibility will include the names of employer organisations for whom the provider will have responsibility.

10.2 Programme Management
As apprenticeships are national programmes, the practical operation of the National Programme Committee will require close monitoring. Should delivery of the programme extend to another provider, it is expected that each will have a Programme Committee as described above will operate at that location and be known as *Local Programme Committees* (LPC), and will be chaired by a *Local Programme Director* (LPD).

Each LPC is a sub-committee of the Programme Committee and is responsible for:

- advising the Programme Committee, on matters relating to proposed or existing programmes.
- monitoring the implementation of the programme and regularly reporting on matters to the Programme Committee.
- supporting the critical self-evaluation of the programme and the preparation of revised documentation and other tasks in relation to evaluation processes.
- ensuring the highest standards of academic excellence for the learner from all faculty.
- preparing an Annual Programme Monitoring report as directed by NCI.
- adapting the programme handbook for learners as needed.

10.3 Local Programme Director (LPD)
The LPD will have responsibility for the day to day running of the programme at the providers' location. They will:

- be responsible for ensuring that the programme as delivered at that location is delivered in accordance with the Certificate of Accreditation, NCI's quality assurance procedures and as agreed in the MOA between NCI and the provider.
- convene LPC meetings to address matters arising from the delivery of the programme at that location.

- attend National Programme Committee Meetings and bring any matters arising from the delivery of the programme to the National Programme Committee.
- be responsible for the monitoring of apprentice progression.
- be the local point of contact with the Apprentice Advocate for employers within the area of responsibility.
- compile an annual monitoring report to the National Programme Director for inclusion in the Programme Annual Monitoring Report.
- attend induction and training events scheduled by NCI from time to time.
- liaise with the Apprenticeship Manager on matters arising in relation to employers within his/her area of responsibility.

10.4 Module Coordinator

A module coordinator will be appointed to act as a point of contact for all lecturers delivering both off-the-job and on-the-job modules in all locations. The module leader will be responsible for:

- ensuring input from all module lecturers into the preparation of assessment briefs and terminal examinations for taught modules.
- compiling recommendations for module amendment via feedback from external examiners, module lecturers and from apprentice evaluations.

10.5 Procedure for the Appointment of the Local Programme Director

The Local Programme Director will be nominated by the education provider.

Nominees must hold the educational qualifications specified in the programme validation document and be experienced in programme management at the level of the programme involved. A member of NCI management will be a member of the selection panel. Lecturers and Academic Supervisors are subject to NCI's quality assurance processes for staff evaluation.

NCI may veto the continued appointment of a lecturer or academic supervisor based on the outcome of those quality assurance procedures.

10.6 Procedures for the Recruitment of Academic Supervisors/Lecturers

Academic Supervisors and Lecturers will be nominated by the education provider.

Nominees must hold the educational qualifications specified in the programme validation document. A member of NCI management will be a member of the selection panel. Lecturers and Academic Supervisors are subject to NCI's quality assurance processes for staff evaluation

NCI may veto the continued appointment of a lecturer or academic supervisor based on the outcome of those quality assurance procedures.

10.7 Sharing of Best Practices

Opportunities should be provided to allow meetings of mentors and module lecturers to share practices. This may be facilitated via webinars, seminars, development days or other appropriate fora.