

New and innovative developments aimed at increasing apprenticeships nationwide

Accounting

Accounting Technicians Ireland have taken the innovative step of offering students an alternative route to qualify as an Accountant through their new apprenticeship programme. On the subject of apprenticeships, Tony Donoghue, head of social and educational policy at the Irish Business and Employers Confederation cautions: “If we’re going to interest young people and their families in apprenticeships, we need to show them a clear progression route both academically and in terms of career progression.” ATI’s Accounting Technician Apprenticeship ticks both of these boxes by offering participants a fast-track route to an academic qualification whilst providing graduates with a pathway to potentially qualify as a Chartered Accountant.

Apprentices will earn while they learn. This programme involves four days a week in a work setting and one day in college. Participating colleges are: Rathmines CFE, Blackrock CFE, Bray CFE, Cork College of Commerce and Monaghan Institute. Participants get the opportunity to progress to Chartered Accountancy after just two years, meaning they could emerge with a level 9 qualification after just five years. For more details see: www.accountingtechniciansireland.ie

Construction:

“The construction sector has a dual role in Ireland’s economy - as a sector in its own right and one that provides and maintains the infrastructures and buildings on which every other industry and society depends. In Q3 2015, the sector employed over 127,400 persons, regionally distributed across a variety of occupations and skills level. Year-on-year, employment in the sector increased by 15,000, representing 26% of the net increase in employment nationally, albeit from a low base following the recession.” (Guidance for Higher Education providers on current and future skills needs of enterprise Springboard+ 2016 including ICT Skills Conversion, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs)

Clancy Construction, Cleary Doyle, Mythen Construction and Anthony Neville Homes are participating in a pilot programme where apprentices spend time with each company whilst learning a trade and other critical career skills. The four companies will share apprentices between them during the four-year term of their apprenticeships. The benefits of this are reduced costs for the participating companies and enhanced employability for the apprentices as a result of access to a broader range of skills and hands on experience for the apprentices.

The scheme is being run in conjunction with SOLAS, the expectation is that a national roll-out of the scheme could radically increase the quantity of quality apprenticeships in the industry. This is a timely development as indicators suggest that activity in the industry is rapidly increasing and the demand for skills is approaching peak levels. Dermot Carey, Head of the Education and Training Committee at the Construction Industry Federation elucidates the situation as follows:

“Currently, activity has picked up with the industry approaching the €15billion output mark this year and we’re hiring 1000 new people every month since late 2014. As ever, activity and demand move faster than the time it takes to produce graduates and apprentices so we may face a skills shortage in the near term. This shared apprentice scheme is just one initiative between industry, SOLAS and the network of Education and Training Boards around the country.”

The pilot scheme is focussed initially on increasing the uptake of apprenticeships in the wet trades such as plastering and concrete work. Under the scheme, apprentices can continue on-site learning with other companies at times if the original employer doesn’t have sufficient workload. In such cases, for example, apprentices can be trained by sub-contractors on site once these sub-contractors have qualified trades people with the correct craft certificate approved by SOLAS and the ETBs. The CIF has launched a new website: www.apprentices.ie which allows employers to advertise their vacancies.

“In the short term the occupational distribution of the construction sector is expected to shift slightly further towards Quantity Surveyors (particularly Mechanical & Electrical), wet trades (bricklayers, plasterers and decorators) and semi-skilled operatives (e.g. steel fixers, concrete workers, dry liners etc.).” (Guidance for Higher Education providers on current and future skills needs of enterprise Springboard+ 2016 including ICT Skills Conversion, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs)

At a wider level, the CIF is working with many of the Education and Training Boards across the country to provide short skills courses to bring those people on the live register with construction experience, estimated at around 60,000, back into the industry.” During an IGC Labour Market Subcommittee meeting with CIF last year, the CIF highlighted their wish to employ Irish nationals currently on the live register as one of their immediate priorities.

Skills courses on offer include Form working (shuttering, carpentry skills, putting together propriety systems for example DOKA) a 24 week course at Laois/Offaly ETB and steel fixing a 12 week course at Ballyfermot ETB. The requirements for these courses are that the applicant is physically able to complete the tasks involved, there are no points requirement and the applicant does not need to find a sponsor.

The beauty of these short courses is that not only do they serve as a possible route into an apprenticeship that is both practical and experiential; they can equip job seekers with the skills they need to become self-employed. A further exciting development is the introduction of apprenticeships to the gradireland handbook. See gradireland.com for details about graduate carers in property and construction.

Some of the advantages of embarking on an apprenticeship:

1. Apprentices learn from the bottom up
2. Apprenticeships offer hands on practical learning

3. Apprentices are trained in specific job requirements, on completion of the apprenticeship the young person is job ready, this is a huge advantage over college graduates who once employed will need to somehow make the transition from theory to practice and are expected to hit the ground running
4. Apprenticeships bring increased retention of employees – they have experienced the job first-hand, they know that they can do it and that they like it.

Skills required by 2020

Guidance Counsellors are all too cognisant of the lifeline offered by apprenticeships to our students. Working in schools, Youth and Adult Services we are strategically positioned to demonstrate to students of all abilities how choosing an apprenticeship is a valid option and to what level they can progress over their lifetime culminating with a level 9 or 10 qualification or at Master Craftsman level if they so wish.

We read with interest the forecasting of skill requirements in the “Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland 2013” (SOLAS). “CEDEFOP estimates that by 2020, while all jobs will require higher levels of skill, 50% of them will need medium level skills and 15% low level skills.” (SOLAS, 2013, p91). Students equipped to supply medium and low skills in the labour market need a higher level of support and direction from the guidance counsellor than their peers if they are to achieve their full potential. These students typically present with low levels of self-confidence and self-awareness, they need regular input from their guidance counsellor to work out what their unique skill set is and to nurture the fragile process of bolstering a new found self-esteem.

For students who are predominantly kinaesthetic learners, the traditional learning experience which still dominates second level education can be a soul destroying experience, this category of student typically excel in hands on, practical learning situations. We need timely access to our students to identify potential apprenticeships.

“Educational aspirations are formed as early as junior cycle, remaining relatively stable thereafter, and are highly predictive of the actual routes taken two or three years later.” (McCoy & Byrne, 2011, p61). It is not sufficient to merely identify these individuals; they also need regular encouragement and guidance which is vocational, educational, social and personal in nature to counteract their low self-esteem and lack of supports.

In 2013 SOLAS published the “Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland 2013”. The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) commends the main objectives outlined in this publication. We have some further recommendations:

- Extend the range of apprenticeship options to reflect labour market trends, nationally and internationally. SOLAS is studying best practice in Switzerland where currently 70% of

all 15 – 19 year olds participate in an apprenticeship and can chose from apprenticeships across a diverse range of professions.

- Develop a website to advertise openings in different apprenticeships by offering video footage of trained craftsmen describing their training and work duties. CIF have taken on board the IGC's suggestions on this and collaborated with Careersportal to make huge headway in this area.
- Create a database where employers and potential apprentices can advertise positions or availability in a transparent manner.
- A centralised application form similar to the CAO system, where students can clearly see what and where their options are would achieve a lot in terms of earning parity of esteem between apprenticeships and the higher education institutes.

References

Guidance for Higher Education providers on current and future skills needs of enterprise Springboard+ 2016 including ICT Skills Conversion, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

McCoy, et al. (2014) Leaving School in Ireland: A Longitudinal Study Post Leaving Certificate Transitions. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland 2013, SOLAS

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