



Plan for the Transfer of Curriculum Development, Assessment and Awarding for Craft Apprenticeship to Providers

Project Initiation Document (PID)



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1 DOCUMENT CONTROL

1.1 Document History

Date	Version	Author	Comments
24/11/2025	1.0	SOLAS, HEA and QQI	

1.2 Approvals

Version	Approval Date	Approver Details
1.0	14.01.2026	DFHERIS

2 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document defines the scope, plans, structures and procedures for the delivery and management of the Transfer Plan for Craft Apprenticeship as requested by Minister Lawless' letter to SOLAS on the 3rd October 2025 (Appendix 1) in consultation with HEA and QQI.

The *Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 – 2025* details the large-scale project to develop a single apprenticeship system in Ireland; this change comprises two stages: Stage 1, the Craft Transfer Plan and Stage 2, the Plan to integrate craft and consortium-led apprenticeships into a National Apprenticeship System in Ireland.

This Project Initiation Document will focus solely on the Craft Transfer Plan as the immediate priority. The Minister requested a plan which requires a transfer of SOLAS' current role in craft curriculum development and assessment to education providers, and the transfer of the role of awarding body from QQI to Higher Education Institutions (which are designated awarding bodies¹). Together, these changes leverage the expertise available across the tertiary education system, ensuring that responsibility for the named functions rests with the most appropriate entity/entities.

It is recommended that this Project Initiation Document follows the approach set out in the *Government of Ireland Public Service Project Management Handbook*, and provides a governance framework for the Transfer plan. It will be updated as the project progresses and should be read in conjunction with the Project Change Log. Once this document has been accepted by DFHERIS and Minister Lawless, the next stage involves HEA engaging with the HE providers and SOLAS engaging with the FE providers to develop a more detailed Project Execution Plan.

3 PROJECT DEFINITION

Minister Lawless wrote to SOLAS on the 3rd of October 2025, requesting a plan to address the following points:

1. Governance and oversight arrangements, both during the transition period and following its completion.
2. The specific roles and responsibilities relating to craft curriculum and assessment that are to be transferred from SOLAS, along with details of what SOLAS will continue to be responsible for.
3. A process to assign, for each craft apprenticeship, the education provider(s) responsible for curriculum, assessment and the awarding of craft certificates. This process should be designed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the HEA and QQI.
4. Timelines and key milestones for the transfer's implementation, along with initial views on resource requirements.
5. Risk mitigation measures, identifying potential challenges and how they will be addressed.

This Project Initiation Document seeks to address each of the points above. Alongside this Craft Transfer Plan, SOLAS will continue to deliver the Quality Improvement Plan, as agreed with QQI, for the Electrical craft apprenticeship, developed in response to the outcomes of the recent focused review conducted by QQI in 2025, which includes collaboration with the education providers on the development of new assessment papers.

4 PROJECT APPROACH

4.1 GOVERNANCE APPROACH

The graphic below illustrates the governance and oversight arrangements for the transfer plan, both during the transfer of responsibilities from SOLAS and QQI to the providers and following the completion of the transfer. The

¹ The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended) defines a designated awarding body as, "a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, an educational institution established as a university under section 9 of the Act of 1997, a technological university, an Institute of Technology, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland".

blue boxes indicate project specific governance structures and the green boxes indicate governance structures that will live on beyond the lifetime of the project. During detailed project planning, the terms of reference for each of the governance structures will be proposed by the implementation bodies and agreed by each relevant entity.

High Level Project Reference Group

Members: Composition and format to be decided.

Purpose: Oversight of transfer plan implementation (with transfer of responsibilities from SOLAS and QQI to providers), to include consultation and engagement with all relevant stakeholders.

Including resolving emerging issues, e.g.: resourcing, timelines, etc.

This group will have final decision- making responsibility for the transfer implementation.

Approval of overall decisions and deliverables.



Implementation Bodies for the Transition Plan

Members: SOLAS, HEA, QQI, TUA, ETBI.

Purpose: Responsible for refinement and implementation of transfer plan which includes creation of National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF), formation of national provider alliances etc.



DAB Alliance

Members: Existing Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs, currently the 5 TUs and 1 IoT)

Purpose: Develop NQAF in consultation with all HE and FET providers involved with craft apprenticeship.

Charged with development of National QA Framework (NQAF) for Craft Apprenticeships.

The HE providers will ultimately assume the DAB awarding body role currently fulfilled by QQI.



National Provider Alliances

Members: All existing FET and HE providers for an individual or family of trades

Purpose: Implementation of national QA framework NQAF

The National Provider Alliances will also identify the resources necessary for the successful implementation of the transfer and implement appropriate systems to facilitate the transfer.

Work will be completed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including employers, social partners, and apprentice representatives.

4.2 SPECIFIC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO BE TRANSFERRED

For the purposes of clarity, under this plan, the traditional "Coordinating Provider" role of SOLAS for the craft apprenticeships will be replaced by the following terminology: "Legislative Coordinator" to describe SOLAS's future role in craft apprenticeship, and "Provider Coordinator" to describe the new role of the providers in the craft apprenticeships resulting from the transfer.

SOLAS' current responsibilities for curriculum and assessment development will be transferred to the Provider Coordinators, and this process will be implemented by the DAB Alliance and the National Provider Alliances. The awarding function will be transferred from QQI to the HE providers, and QQI will retain responsibilities for external quality assurance.

The graphic below illustrates the planned changes to apprenticeship roles and responsibilities.

RETAINED BY SOLAS AS LEGISLATIVE COORDINATOR

- Industrial Training Orders
- Maintenance of the national register of apprentices and national database of apprenticeship employers
- Forecasting data and statistics
- Capacity planning
- Apprentice registration
- Scheduling of off-the-job training
- Apprentice access and inclusion
- Apprenticeship promotion
- Employer registration
- Ongoing employer relations and support
- Management of participating employers
- Authorised Officer function

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN SOLAS AND PROVIDER COORDINATORS

- Apprentice progress and completion – links both on and off job phases
- National Apprenticeship Appeals and Review Committee (NAARC) appeals
- Minimum apprentice entry requirements

TRANSFERRED TO PROVIDER COORDINATORS

- Curriculum development review and update
- Assessment development review and update
- Learner support
- RPL
- NQAF for craft apprenticeship development and maintenance
- Awarding function (in their capacity as DABs)
- Results approval across all 7 phases
- Awarding/certification

RETAINED BY QQI AS EXTERNAL QA BODY

- Monitoring and review of the effectiveness and implementation of NQAF (through *inter alia* thematic reviews and provider-level review, and monitoring activity, as appropriate)
- Revision of statutory QA guidelines (as appropriate)
- Monitoring (primarily in the form of annual QA reports and quality dialogue meetings)
- External review of QA system at provider level (cyclical, and from time to time, as appropriate)
- Thematic review of QA of apprenticeship

4.3 THE TRANSFER PROCESS

As craft apprenticeship programmes lead to national awards, it is proposed that a national ‘DAB Alliance’ is required to have responsibility for awards for each craft apprenticeship programme to ensure consistency of award standards. In association with this, it will also be necessary to have national provider alliances to deliver individual or groups of national apprenticeship programmes. A brief description of both alliance functions is provided below.

- i. A **national DAB alliance** of current HE DAB providers to assume the current QQI awarding function for craft apprenticeships. This alliance will also be charged with the development of the NQAF for craft apprenticeships to underpin award standards, curriculum delivery, assessment, review and awarding arrangements for existing craft apprenticeship programmes. The NQAF for craft apprenticeships will need to be adopted by all existing HE DAB providers of craft apprenticeships and developed nationally in conjunction with all providers of craft apprenticeship, both FET and HE. This framework will be embedded in the existing quality assurance systems of education and training providers.
- ii. **National provider alliances** made up of existing FET and HE providers of existing craft apprenticeships, who would be responsible for apprenticeship delivery, curriculum and assessment updates. The Provider Alliance will recognise that Further Education and Higher Education providers have an equal part to play in the delivery of craft apprentices. When establishing these national provider alliances a process for the inclusion of additional new providers within the provider alliance for any given apprenticeship should be developed. National provider alliances for each craft apprenticeship will need to identify a lead HE provider to connect with the national DAB alliance. This lead provider will be selected by the members of the provider alliances, and consideration should be given to the rotation of this role over time (for e.g. a 5–7 year period). Similar national provider alliance models exist (or have previously existed) within the HE system e.g. Manufacturing Engineering Apprenticeship, Accelerated Technician programmes etc. To support the formation of multi provider alliances, it is essential to develop the NQAF for craft apprenticeships. This will underpin alliance operation, curriculum development, delivery, assessment and review processes, as well as awarding procedures. Taking such an approach will ensure the integrity and quality of the national craft apprenticeship system going forward and protect against inheriting any existing poor practices and procedures.

4.4 TIMELINES AND KEY MILESTONES

Please note that all milestone target dates are dependent on the approval of this Project Initiation Document and may need to shift forward in time to account for approval and consideration of resource implications from the Project Sponsor. Further details in the project milestones and schedule will be included in the Project Execution Plan.

Milestone Title	Milestone Description	Target Date
M1: Finalisation, submission and approval of Transfer Plan	Finalisation of requested plan, (this document), agreement from all colleague agencies, submission to DFHERIS and approval from the Minister.	Q4 2025
M2: Stakeholder engagement	Formal and informal engagement with providers on the development of the plan, dependencies and timelines	Q1 2026

M3: Finalisation and approval of detailed project execution plan	Finalisation of detailed Project Execution Plan developed in conjunction with SOLAS, HEA, QQI and the providers, and accepted by DFHERIS	Q1 2026
M4: Establishment of proposed governance structures	Establishment of proposed governance structures, including an oversight reference committee and implementation bodies structure	Q1 2026
M5: Establishment of the DAB Alliance	Membership consisting of Existing HE DABs, charged with development of National QA Framework for Craft Apprenticeships in consultation with all HE and FE providers involved with craft apprenticeship.	Q1 2026
M6: Establish national provider alliances for families of trades	This will include all existing FET and HE providers for the relevant trade(s) or families of trades. If agreed, proposed families of trades could include, for example Electrical, Construction, Engineering and Motor.	Q2 2026
M7: Establish the NQAF for Craft Apprenticeship	The development of the NQAF will be led by existing DABs in consultation with all providers involved in delivery of craft apprenticeships. The process will require engagement with national provider alliances, employers, social partners and apprentices in the development process	End Q4 2026
M8: Identify resource requirements to support DABs and national provider alliances	Identification of resource requirements to support DABs and national provider alliances in the implementation of the NQAF and delivery of functions transferred from SOLAS and QQI	Q4 2026
M9: Additional resources secured for education providers	Secure additional resources required for the DABs and national provider alliances for specific crafts to facilitate the transfer of SOLAS and QQI functions	Q2 2027
M10: Transfer of curriculum, assessment and awarding responsibilities to DABs and national provider alliances	Transfer of SOLAS and QQI curriculum, assessment and awarding responsibilities to DABs and national provider alliances	Q4 2027

4.4 RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

A detailed analysis will be required to identify the precise resources necessary to achieve the transfer. As part of this, an analysis of existing provider resources available to support the transfer will be undertaken. This will be part of the detailed project planning process.

However, it is anticipated that existing DABs such as TUs who will take on overall responsibility for awarding and QA arrangements from SOLAS and QQI will require:

- i. Additional staff to undertake and oversee curricula development, assessment and award functions associated with the 25,238 apprentices currently registered in the craft apprentice system, as well to manage and support the transitional period.
- ii. Additional IT resources and systems.

- iii. In addition, resource requirements and financial implications associated with the transfer of the awarding function, which will need to be considered in consultation with QQI.

FET providers will also require additional resources to support curriculum development and assessment processes and to ensure that the quality and integrity of both aspects are maintained.

QQI will need to consider the resourcing associated with the transfer – in particular, from the IT perspective.

4.5 RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

A standard risk management process will be applied to the Transfer Plan, including the development and maintenance of a risk register. Risk management will be a standing agenda item for the High Level Project Reference Group.

The following are high-level risks that apply to this plan and measures that will be taken to mitigate/manage those risks. Further risks and their appropriate mitigation strategies will be identified during the planning phase of this project and will be detailed in the Project Execution Plan.

Risk	Mitigation	Action Owner(s)
Lack of common shared understanding of the transfer of roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop shared understanding across all stakeholders through communication of and consultation on key terms, concepts, etc. • Develop a supporting communication plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Level Reference Group • Implementation Bodies
The quality and integrity of apprenticeship programmes is compromised due to a lack of clarity and ownership of responsibilities for core elements or curriculum, assessment and quality assurance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all parties understand the scope of roles and responsibilities to be transferred and the point in time at which they will be transferred • Engage and communicate with key stakeholders (i.e. the HEIs and ETBs) from the earliest stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Level Reference Group • Implementation Bodies
The timely transfer of roles is not fully implemented due to a lack of support from key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree a clear process and mechanisms to engage HEIs, ETBs, state agencies and social partners in the process • Agree on an approach to the timing of the transfer of the craft apprenticeship programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Level Reference Group • Implementation Bodies
The consistency of standards is not maintained due to delays in implementing the plan and potential confusion regarding responsibilities for individual programmes in the interim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a comprehensive QA framework to ensure consistency and currency of awards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAB Alliance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear timelines for transfers and ensure that these are communicated to all stakeholders • SOLAS continues to revalidate and implement curricula up to the time of their transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation Bodies

The currency of standards is not maintained due to a lack of resources, diversion of resources from curriculum updating and/or delays in the transfer of programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early transfer of programmes so providers can update curricula in a timely fashion, drawing on their disciplinary strengths and relationships with industry, employers and learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAB Alliance • Provider Alliances
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the QA and governance framework by the HEIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAB Alliance
The transfer is not sufficiently resourced, or resourcing is duplicated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate and timely funding and resourcing of the project • Map existing resources and responsibilities to identify gaps and overlaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Level Reference Group • Implementation Bodies • DAB Alliance • Provider Alliances
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a detailed resource allocation plan early in the transfer process, to be agreed by all relevant stakeholders (DFHERIS, SOLAS, HEA, providers, QQI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Level Reference Group • Implementation bodies

4.6 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

The delivery of this Craft Apprenticeship Transfer Plan will require extensive stakeholder engagement, in particular with the education providers in both the HE and FET sectors. As part of the detailed project plan development, a formal stakeholder engagement and communication strategy will be developed and included alongside the Project Execution Plan.

APPENDIX 1: Minister Lawless' letter to SOLAS 3rd October 2025

An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science



Ms Nessa White, CEO
SOLAS
Block 1
Castleforbes House
Castleforbes Road
Dublin 1
D01 A8N0

To issue via email: Nessa.white@solas.ie

3 October 2025,

Dear Ms White,

I'm writing to you regarding a matter of shared importance - the continued strength and integrity of our national apprenticeship system.

Ireland's apprenticeship tradition is a source of pride. It has served generations of learners and employers, remains a cornerstone of our skills ecosystem, and plays a vital role in supporting national infrastructure delivery. As we look to the future, it is essential that this legacy is safeguarded.

I welcome the ongoing work by SOLAS to address the recent concerns highlighted in QQI's focused review of Phase 4 and 6 assessments in craft electrical. However, those concerns have made it clear that the current structures for quality assurance in craft apprenticeships are not adequately addressing persistent challenges.

As discussed during the meeting with the previous SOLAS CEO in late August, it is now time for SOLAS to transfer its role in craft curriculum development and assessment to education providers. Additionally, the role of Designated Awarding Body should be transferred from QQI to Higher Education Institutions. Together these changes leverage the expertise across the tertiary education system.

I am requesting that SOLAS develop and submit a comprehensive transition plan to the Department by the mid-November. The plan should clearly outline:

Oifig an Aire Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

62 Falohe Sliabhna, Balle Átha Cilath 2, D02 DR87.
52 Saint Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, D02 DR67.
T +353 1 8892448/2449
minister_fheris@dfeiris.gov.ie



- A process to assign, for each craft apprenticeship, the education provider(s) responsible for curriculum updates, assessment updates, and awarding of craft certificates. This process should be designed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the HEA and QQI.
- The specific roles and responsibilities relating to craft curriculum and assessment that are to be transferred from SOLAS, along with details of what SOLAS will continue to be responsible for.
- Timelines and key milestones for the transition's implementation, along with initial views on resource requirements.
- Governance and oversight arrangements, both during the transition period and following its completion.
- Risk mitigation measures, identifying potential challenges and how they will be addressed.

Strong governance and oversight from SOLAS will be essential throughout this process. As responsibilities are devolved, we must ensure that the national character of craft apprenticeships is preserved, including the consistency of standards and the currency and recognition of qualifications across sectors and regions. The migration of quality assurance roles and responsibilities should be underpinned by a robust quality assurance framework that is fit for purpose for the apprenticeship system. The establishment of a dedicated team to develop this framework should now be accelerated, and engagement with QQI should commence immediately.

I look forward to receiving your plan by mid-November and to continuing our work together to ensure Ireland's craft apprenticeship system remains strong and future-ready.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Lawless', is written over a horizontal line.

James Lawless T.D.
Minister of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science.