

Briefing on the revised process to approve and develop new consortia-led apprenticeships

30 September 2026



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Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
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Agenda

1. Purpose of this briefing
2. Context for the review and update of the process to approve and develop new consortia-led apprenticeships
3. Key changes to the process to propose and develop new consortia-led apprenticeships
4. Overview of the call for proposals process and timelines
5. Supporting documentation
6. Next steps and contact information
7. Q&A (via chat function)



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Purpose

The purpose of this briefing is to communicate the new process for proposing, approving and developing new consortia-led apprenticeships.

- **Explain the rationale for change**, outlining how stakeholder feedback, review findings and lessons learned have informed the design of the new process.
- **Present the new process** for developing and approving consortia-led apprenticeships, including the key stages, decision points, timelines and supporting documentation.
- **Clarify roles and responsibilities** for stakeholders involved in the process, including consortia, coordinating providers, approval bodies and supporting agencies.
- **Build shared understanding and confidence** in how the new process will operate in practice, including expectations, supports available and points of contact.
- **Provide an opportunity for questions and feedback** (through the chat) to identify any areas requiring further clarification, guidance or communication before implementation.
- **Support consistent implementation** by ensuring all stakeholders receive the same messages and have a common understanding of the process, requirements and next steps.



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Background to the Call

In March 2026, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), SOLAS and the HEA commenced a review of the processes to develop and approve new consortia-led apprenticeships (CLAs).

After the completion of the review, DFHERIS together with SOLAS and the HEA have agreed to implement a formal call process for submitting new CLA proposals. The first Call will be launched in October 2026 with successful applicants being notified in Q1 2027.



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Context for the Review and Update of the Process to Approve and Develop New Consortia-led Apprenticeships

- Celebrating ten years of consortia-led apprenticeships. 62 new national consortia-led apprenticeship programmes NFQ L5 – L10
- Review of the Action Plan for Apprenticeship (2021-25) by the OECD
- Development of the follow up to the Action Plan led by DFHERIS
- Review of processes to develop and approve new consortia-led apprenticeships is timely in the context of the above developments
- A new call process allows for better management of available budgets



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Key Changes to the Process to Propose and Develop New Consortia-led Apprenticeships

Informed by insights gathered from extensive stakeholder engagement, the revised approach is characterised by **three key developments**:

1. A structured, time-bound, competitive call for proposals and submissions process to run annually beginning Q4 2026
2. A more comprehensive proposal phase to identify apprenticeships for development
3. A streamlined, five-step approach to developing selected apprenticeships approved through the new call for proposals process with guideline timings for each new step



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Key Objectives of the Apprenticeship System

Main objective of an apprenticeship

The main objective of an apprenticeship is the provision of an employment opportunity which is accompanied by on and off the job training for the employee in an occupation which addresses current and future national skills needs.

Key objectives from the current Action Plan for Apprentice System

1. High Quality and Innovative Approach
2. Employer- Driven
3. Apprenticeship for All
4. A valued Option



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Apprenticeships Have the Following Features:

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



Key Information for Applicants

- Applicants are advised to read the **Call for Proposals Document & the Handbook** before commencing the application process. These documents outline the requirements and provides guidance on preparing an application for a Consortia-Led Apprenticeship.
- All sections of the application form must be completed. Incomplete proposals which do not address all questions as set out in in the online proposal form will be deemed ineligible.
- The application must be signed and dated by an authorised representative of the Consortia.
- Proposals which do not score the maximum points in the first section of the application will be ineligible for assessment.
- All applications must be submitted via the online proposal form.
- Late submissions will **not** be accepted.
- Panel may request further information from applicants if needed
- Decisions notified to **DFHERIS Minister, SOLAS Board and HEA Board**



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Supporting Documentation

These documents will be attached to the email launching the Call

- Call for Proposals
- Handbook on the development of a new CLA

**Applicants are advised to read the both documents before starting the application process.*

In addition to the above:

- FAQ document will be available after 13 October 2026
- Video guide to the online proposal form on Wizehive platform



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The Handbook - What the Document Covers

- Part 1 Overview of the National Apprenticeship System
- Part 2 Developing and Initiating a New Apprenticeship Programme
- Part 3: Guidance and Resources for Delivering Quality Apprenticeships

The Handbook will assist stakeholders in proposing new apprenticeships. It clarifies key processes, requirements, and responsibilities.



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Call for Proposals Document

Call for Proposals document sets out the following:

- Background to the Call
- Structure of Proposals
- Funding
- Eligible Costs
- Submission of Proposals
- Evaluation Criteria
- Evaluation Process
- Monitoring of Funded Proposals



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Call for Proposals - Guiding Principles

- Demonstrated labour market need (current and future)
- Strategic alignment with national priorities
- Employer commitment and capacity
- National/regional accessibility and balanced delivery
- Quality assurance, standards, and portability
- Be a fit-for-purpose pathway choice
- Clear progression pathways and flexible design
- Promote inclusion and equity of access
- System governance



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Call for Proposals - Eligibility to Apply

The following providers are eligible to apply for the Call:

- Eligible HEA designated institutions of higher education
- Eligible privately funded further and higher education providers whose quality assurance procedures have been approved under the 2012 Act¹ (re-engagement/QA approval processes). A letter from QQI confirming the above will be required prior to allocation of funding.
- SOLAS funded further education and training providers



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Call for Proposals - Indicative Proposal Areas

- Proposals should clearly evidence a skill need and be aligned to key national strategies and skills monitoring reports with reference to skill needs at a regional and national level ([Please refer to Appendix 4 of the Call for Proposals document](#))
- Proposed new apprenticeships must come from at least one of the eligible discipline areas as listed in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) codes ([Please refer to Appendix 5 of the Call for Proposals document](#))



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Call for Proposals - Consortium and Employers

- Form an industry-led consortium of **7–12 members**.
- Include employers, education and training providers, other relevant partners.
- Consortium to oversee development and rollout of new apprenticeship.
- Ensure the apprenticeship is:
 - Industry-led
 - Aligned with the requirements of the occupation
 - Responsive to changing occupational needs
 - Supports the development of skills that meet labour market needs.



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Call for Proposals - Funding to be Provided for CLAs

- Development funding
- Coordinating Provider funding
- Consortia funding
- Budgets subject to available resources and negotiation

The funding guidelines are outlined in *The Handbook 2026* and should be consulted prior to making an application.



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Call for Proposals - Eligible Costs for Coordinating Provider and Consortia Funding

Eligible cost categories can include:

- Staff cost (direct and indirect)
- Materials
- Travel & Subsistence
- Marketing/Promotion
- Overheads (Overheads in excess of 25% will not be considered)
- Supervision
- Work based learning
- Other costs (provide detail)

Ineligible costs include:

- Third Party examination and certification requirements
- Professional Membership fees



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Evaluation

Proposals will be assessed under the following criteria and must score the minimum mark in each category to be considered for funding. Proposals which do not score the maximum points in the first section of the application will be ineligible for assessment.

Criteria No.	Evaluation Criteria	Marks Available	Minimum Mark to be considered for funding
1.	Supporting information	20	20
2.	Industry-based rationale	50	35
3.	Education and training approach	50	35
4	Funding	30	20
	Total	150	110

The Evaluation panel will make all final decisions on proposals approved to advance to the development stage. If necessary, the panel may request further information from applicants to clarify aspects of their proposals. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), SOLAS Board, HEA Board and National Apprenticeship Alliance will be notified of the evaluation panel decisions.



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	1. Supporting Information
1.1	Name of lead proposer (official point of contact) Name of coordinating education and training provider
1.2	Proposed collaborating providers
1.3	Is the proposed apprenticeship expected to lead to a Further Education and Training (FET) or a Higher Education (HE) award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
1.4	Working title of the proposed apprenticeship
1.5	The occupation that successful completion of the apprenticeship will facilitate entry to and employment in
1.6	Duration of apprenticeship
1.7	Proportion of on-the-job learning (%)
1.8	NFQ level of proposed apprenticeship
1.9	Proposed awarding body for apprenticeship
1.10	ISCED code



	2. Industry-Based Rationale
2.1	Rationale for and evidence of the skills need
2.2	Employer support
2.3	Apprentice registration forecasts
2.4	Approved employer forecasts
2.5	How will this apprenticeship programme meet national priorities.
2.6	Occupational profile
2.7	Is the occupation subject to professional regulation or accreditation



	3. Education and Training Approach
3.1	Case for an apprenticeship in this occupational area
3.2	How will the apprenticeship complement not compete with existing provision?
3.3	Provide summary evidence that there is no duplication in provision with existing apprenticeships (generally ≤50% overlap) and attach the detailed mapping exercise document.
3.4	Core teaching and learning methodologies to be used
3.5	How the apprenticeship will be quality assured both on and off the job
3.6	Proposed access, transfer and progression arrangements underpinning the apprenticeship
3.7	Describe how the programme will be made available nationally
3.8	Proposed programme launch date



	4. Funding
4.1	Estimated operational, consortia and capital funding
4.2	Total funding sought
4.3	Estimated cost per apprentice per annum
4.4	Estimated additional staff required for this proposed apprenticeship



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Evaluation Process

- Eligibility and completeness check
- Panel scoring
- Review of overlap/duplication
- Possible interview
- Final decision by panel

Submitted proposals will be assessed by an evaluation panel convened by the HEA and SOLAS and overseen by a process auditor



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Next Steps and Contact Information

- A recording of this briefing will be made available alongside the call documentation
- Call opens and documentation available from 12.30pm on 06 October
- FAQs on the process are open from 12.30pm on 06 October to 5pm on 13 October
- Call for proposals closes on 24 November

Call for proposals 2026 Queries and Clarifications - [FAQs – Fill in form](#)

For programmes that are approved for development, the HEA will be the main point of contact for all Higher Education programmes and SOLAS will be the main point of contact for all Further Education and Training CLA programmes



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Important Dates for Applicants

Call Launch	12.30 pm Tuesday 06 th October 2026
FAQs Closed	5.00 pm Tuesday 13 th October 2026
Call Closed	12.30 pm Tuesday 24 th November 2026
Notification of Outcomes	Q1 2027



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Q&A

- Please place questions in the Q and A chat
- These questions will be reviewed and responded to by COB on Friday 2nd October.



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Thank you.



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