

Developing and Delivering

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIPS IN IRELAND

The Handbook
2026



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About this Handbook

This Handbook is designed to support all stakeholders involved in preparing a proposal for the current call and to clarify the process requirements.

It will guide the development and delivery of national apprenticeships, benefitting apprentices, employers, as well as Ireland's economy and society.

The Handbook provides comprehensive guidance for industry-led consortia, education and training providers, and the network of SOLAS Authorised Officers in fulfilling key legislative aspects of the system.

The handbook is in three parts

- Part 1 offers an overview of the national apprenticeship system in Ireland and outlines the proposal call process.
- Part 2 details the key steps required to develop and initiate a new apprenticeship programme.
- Part 3 presents guidance and resources to assist all stakeholders in delivering a high-quality apprenticeship experience for both apprentices and employers.

We welcome feedback

Feedback on the Handbook is welcomed – please contact apprenticeship@solas.ie.

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Part 1

Overview of the National Apprenticeship System

Key Features of Apprenticeships in Ireland

Ireland is actively investing in its apprenticeship system as part of its national education and training policy. An apprenticeship in Ireland involves a structured education and training programme that integrates employer-based on-the-job experience with classroom or training centre instruction, culminating in a qualification recognised by the National Framework of Qualifications.

The legislative framework for the national apprenticeship system is primarily established by the 1967 Industrial Training Act, which outlines the structure, protections, and responsibilities of apprentices, employers, and education and training providers. The 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act further support apprenticeships, particularly regarding programme validation and quality assurance mechanisms.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is responsible for setting overarching policy for the Further Education and Training (FET) and Higher Education (HE) sectors. SOLAS (The Further Education and Training Authority) manages and regulates the statutory apprenticeship system; its duties include approving employers, overseeing the national system, coordinating programmes, and managing the central Apprenticeship.ie portal for both applicants and employers. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) serves as the statutory body for governance, funding, and oversight of the HE sector. Among its responsibilities, it provides funding for the delivery of both craft and consortia-led apprenticeship programmes in the HE sector. The HEA works closely with SOLAS and QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) to support the delivery of the national apprenticeship system.

Consortia-led apprenticeships 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
- Between 2–4 years in duration
- Minimum 50% on-the-job learning
- Flexible delivery – online, blended, off-the-job learning in increments/blocks
- Apprentices are employed under a formal contract of apprenticeship
- The employer pays the apprentice for the duration of the apprenticeship

National Apprenticeship Alliance

The National Apprenticeship Alliance (NAA) plays an important role in delivering on the Government's commitments to fully embed apprenticeship in the tertiary education and training system. The NAA has an advisory role in relation to the development of the apprenticeship system.

For more information on the NAA, including its terms of reference, membership and notes of meetings visit apprenticeship.ie.

The Consortium Steering Group

The composition of the Consortium Steering Group (CSG) depends on the scope of the occupation and the level of enterprise participation. The Chairperson should be an authoritative figure from an enterprise or relevant community. Majority of members must represent enterprises, employers' associations, professional organisations, or communities of practice. Enterprise representatives should include both large and small-to-medium (SME) employers. The Coordinating Provider and other off-the-job providers are also members of the CSG, with the Coordinating Provider generally responsible for secretariat duties.

Consortium Steering Group Role

The Consortium Steering Group engages stakeholders in programme development, delivery, and evaluation. It ensures curriculum alignment with employer requirements and labour market dynamics, thereby fostering learner advancement. The group addresses regional and national demands by assessing funding and supply and delivers clear, accurate information to apprentices, the public, and employers. Additionally, it enhances occupational visibility and reinforces the apprenticeship brand, supports career guidance initiatives, and contributes to marketing activities.

Establishing binding agreements with stakeholders in accordance with national standards is another key responsibility, alongside coordinating recruitment and training activities with statutory regulators and employers. The group promotes equity and inclusion within programmes, providing comprehensive learning support as needed, and assesses employer training capacity, proactively addressing identified gaps. It determines and updates employer eligibility for apprentice training as appropriate, manages recruitment fluctuations, and responds effectively to redundancy concerns.

The Consortium Steering Group encourages growth and collaboration among employers and providers, conducts regular reviews of the occupation, programme, and its own operations, upholds compliance with established governance principles and regulatory mandates, and delegates specific responsibilities to the Coordinating Provider when resources permit.

The Consortium Steering Group and apprenticeship coordinator are crucial to the effective operation of consortia-led apprenticeships in Ireland. The CSG, guided by QQI statutory guidelines, includes key stakeholders such as employers, occupational regulators, and the coordinating provider. Its key role is to ensure that the apprenticeship programme is enterprise-led, meets the requirements of an occupation, and continues to evolve with the occupation over time, thereby fulfilling labour market needs. It meets regularly to review and plan programme delivery, supporting the apprenticeship coordinator in daily operations. The consortium typically comprises 7–12 members.

Should your application be approved for development, before you receive any funding you will need to confirm establishment of a fully operational consortium in line with QQI quality assurance guidelines for apprenticeship. Further information on the make up of a fully operational consortium as it relates to employee representation will be made available where an application is approved for development.

Coordinating Provider

A Coordinating Provider will be an entity for whom education and training is a primary function though not necessarily its only function.

Operational role of the Coordinating Provider

The Coordinating Provider develops programme proposals for validation and forms a Programme Board representing employers and training providers for advice. They ensure the apprenticeship meets occupational requirements, is enterprise-led, and responds to labour market needs often involving a consortium steering group. Consultation with stakeholders occurs during programme development, and systems are established to allow employer and labour market input into curriculum design while supporting learner growth.

The Coordinating Provider creates memoranda of understanding with employers and stakeholders to commit to implementation processes. They design assessment tools that certify learning outcomes, include appropriate grading, and offer appeals; these tools cover both on-the-job and off-the-job phases.

The Coordinating Provider applies to the relevant awarding body for validation of the programme.

Administrative systems are implemented for effective programme management and apprentice tracking, and the provider oversees programme delivery. Systems for access, transfer, progression, expulsion, and appeals are maintained with employer collaboration. The Coordinating Provider coordinates other education and training providers in curriculum and programme delivery and works with employers to recruit apprentices with suitable skills, ensuring workplace training aligns with learning outcomes.

Where occupations are regulated, regulators are consulted to keep access criteria compliant. Evaluation and review are set up with employers for training capacity and to address gaps, often through a consortium steering group. The provider also considers quality assurance in consortium expansion and develops a quality system for curriculum and assessment updates to maintain national standards across all collaborating providers.

To act as a Coordinating Provider for an apprenticeship programme, the entity must be a relevant or linked provider under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. This means, among other things, that it must be a legal entity, and the provision of education and training must be one of its principal functions. If an entity is not already a relevant provider, it may become one through a QQI process.

Collaborating provider

A provider who is formally involved in the provision of an apprenticeship programme and accountable in this respect to the Coordinating Provider.

Employer of Apprentices

Any contractual employer of apprentices approved by the statutory regulator. The terms “employer” or “enterprise” should be understood as having the same meaning when relevant to these guidelines.

Statutory Regulator

Responsible for fulfilling those functions assigned to it under the 1967 Industrial Training Act or its successors. This role is statutorily assigned to SOLAS. This role is distinct from SOLAS’ role as a provider of apprenticeships or as funder of apprenticeships. The statutory regulator appoints SOLAS Authorised Officers who carry out activities on its behalf.

Professional Regulation and Accreditation

In Ireland, professional regulation and accreditation are overseen by national agencies such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), alongside specific statutory bodies that license professions such as medicine, law and teaching. Certain occupations require legally mandated registration, while others rely on voluntary professional body memberships and course approvals.

Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices

The [Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices](#) serves as an essential reference document. It clearly outlines the duties and responsibilities of both participating employers and apprentices and requires their commitment to compliance as part of the statutory apprenticeship process.

The Role of the SOLAS Authorised Officer

The network of SOLAS Authorised Officers provides essential support for industry and education partners in the apprenticeship system. They handle employer approvals, apprentice registration, maintenance of the National Register of Apprentices, key apprenticeship data management, and monitor apprentice welfare and the quality of on-the-job training.

A strong working relationship between SOLAS Authorised Officers and consortia has been identified as an important feature of the expanding national apprenticeship system, strengthening and enhancing the quality of the apprenticeship for both apprentices and employers.

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Part 2

Developing and Initiating a New Apprenticeship Programme

The Call for Proposals

Initial Briefing and Selection Process

An online briefing session will be held on 30 September 2026 to introduce the process and requirements for developing a new apprenticeship programme.

Following this session, the Call for Proposals will launch and remain open for a six-week period, allowing interested consortia and stakeholders to submit proposals. Once the submission window has closed, the review process will commence in November/December 2026.

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), the Boards of the HEA and SOLAS and National Apprenticeship Alliance (NAA) will be informed of the panel's funding decisions.

Applications will also be assessed against national workforce and skills data, including data from the National Skills Observatory as it becomes available.

Where the occupation is subject to professional regulation or accreditation, the consortium should outline how it will engage with the relevant regulator(s) or professional body(ies) to ensure the programme meets regulatory requirements and remains sustainable within the labour market.

Notifications will be issued to consortia in Q1 2027.

Selected consortia will receive notifications confirming their approval to enter Step 1 of the apprenticeship development process. Further instructions will be provided, including a request to confirm their commitment to proceed with programme development and an invitation to attend a workshop covering the five-step development process.

Unsuccessful consortia will receive feedback on their proposals.

Should a successfully proposal move to step 1 of development, the HEA will be the main point of contact for all Higher Education CLA proposals and SOLAS will be the main point of contact for all Further Education and Training CLA proposals.

The Five Step Development Process



Step 1: Approval for Development

Project Plan Approved and Development Funding Allocated

The government provides a contribution of up to €80,000 to consortia for developing approved national apprenticeships. Consortia must submit a development funding proposal detailing expenditures. Groups proposing multiple apprenticeships are expected to achieve cost efficiencies.

A project plan for development of the apprenticeship is prepared by the consortium steering group using the template provided. The completed project plan is submitted to SOLAS.

Development funding for national apprenticeships is allocated to consortia in three stages. After the consortium's project plan is approved and a Memorandum of Funding is submitted, the first tranche of funding (34%) is released. The second payment (33%) follows a mid-term progress and expenditure review and completion of the validation step. The final 33% is payable following registration of the first group of apprentices on the programme, along with confirmation that funding to date has been spent in accordance with agreed terms.

As part of the Memorandum of Funding, a consortium agrees that all expenditure can be vouched, and receipts provided if requested. Expenditure may also be audited. Any unspent development funding must be returned by the consortium to SOLAS.

Step 2: Occupational Profile

Occupational Profile Development and Approval

During this step, consultation will be conducted with consortia to develop and agree upon a final occupational profile for the apprenticeship.

The agreed occupational profile will be presented to the National Apprenticeship Alliance.

One Apprenticeship per Occupation

Each apprenticeship must provide training for one specific occupation. The occupational profile shapes the learning outcomes and module content for apprenticeship training both on and off the job. SOLAS supplies a template for this profile.

The occupational profile includes details of knowledge, skills and competencies for the occupation as well as the proposed NFQ level, duration, and minimum entry requirements for the programme. SOLAS engages with the consortium on the occupational profile in advance of presenting it to the National Apprenticeship Alliance.

Finalised apprenticeship occupational profiles are subsequently published on www.apprenticeship.ie.

Step 3: ITO (Industrial Training Order) Creation

Industrial Training Order Assessment

The occupational profile established for each apprenticeship is used to assess whether a new Industrial Training Order must be created to designate the relevant industrial activity, or whether an existing Order is sufficient.

If a new Industrial Training Order is required, the process is set out by legislation and includes formal consultation with industry sector representatives of both employers and employees. All feedback from the consultation is considered before proceeding.

Provided the outcome of the consultation is satisfactory, the final version of the Industrial Training Order is presented to the SOLAS Board for approval. Once approved, the completed Order is laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and is subsequently published in the Irish Statute Book and the official Irish State Gazette, *Iris Oifigiúil*.

Each national apprenticeship in Ireland is a statutorily designated industry activity. This provision is set out in the Industrial Training Act 1967. An Industrial Training Order, 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 Act and the 2013 Further Education and Training Act.

Creation of an Industrial Training Order is set out as Step 3 in the critical path to developing a new apprenticeship, however the process of review and development of a new Order, if required, gets underway once an occupational profile (Step 2) has been approved.

Step 4: Programme Development and Validation

Validation and Quality Assurance

The awarding body for the apprenticeship programme may be an organisation authorised to confer National Framework of Qualifications awards, such as technological universities, universities, or institutes of technology.

Arrangements for quality assurance are incorporated into the validation process for the apprenticeship. Statutory guidelines developed by QQI on the quality assurance of apprenticeships support both the on-the-job and off-the-job elements as well as the ongoing roles and responsibilities of industry-led consortia in the development, delivery, and monitoring of programmes.

QQI levies a fee for programme validation, and other awarding bodies may also charge. Consortia may apply for funding support to cover these validation fees as part of their overall development funding.

Validation Process

For validation of a programme, a consortium prepares a programme submission that sets out the detailed content and structure of the programme and the quality assurance arrangements that will underpin it.

In addition, the submission documents how the programme meets the requirements of the Professional Award Type Descriptor.

Following submission of a programme for validation, an independent panel with industry and apprenticeship expertise is established. The panel assesses the programme submission and makes a recommendation to the awarding body.

During the programme development phase, the detailed design and content of the apprenticeship programme is completed by the consortium. A programme development team with an overall coordinator is generally formed within the consortium to lead this work.

Following a successful validation process the apprenticeship programme is approved for launch as part of the national apprenticeship system.

QQI documents supporting programme development

- [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes](#)
- [Professional Award-type Descriptors for the National Framework of Qualifications](#)
- [Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training](#)
- [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#)
- [QQI Review of Consortia-led Apprenticeships in Ireland 2022](#)

Step 5: Go Live

Implementation and Promotion

 Programme implementation and promotion can go ahead once funding arrangements have been agreed with the appropriate funding body.

Funding bodies for apprenticeship are SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). One or both bodies will fund each apprenticeship programme in accordance with terms and conditions that they determine.

Website and Promotional Material

The consortium is responsible for designing promotional materials in consultation with SOLAS and the HEA to inform and attract potential apprentices and employers.

Online Briefing session with the SOLAS Authorised Officer Network

Information material is prepared by the consortium covering programme details, industry area, management of the first apprentice intake, and identifying target employers and apprentice groups. **The Authorised officer online launch briefing session must be completed prior to any public launch or advertising of the apprenticeship.**

 **Approval of employers to employ apprentices and registration of apprentices can begin once steps 1 –5 are completed and approved by SOLAS.**

Employer Approval

Employers are approved through an online process supported by the SOLAS Authorised Officer network. Typically, an Authorised Officer will visit employer premises and subsequently make a recommendation to SOLAS regarding the employer's suitability to train apprentices.

Registration of Apprentices

The Register of Apprentices is maintained by SOLAS, with support from the SOLAS Authorised Officer network.

Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices

In advance of an apprenticeship getting underway, employers and apprentices are required to commit to a formal [Code of Practice](#). This is to help clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure the best possible training experience for all.

Regional and National Promotion of the Programme

Initial promotion of the new apprenticeship is essential in order to build awareness among employers and potential apprentices. Support on promotion is available via SOLAS and the HEA marketing campaign across all media and digital channels.

Promotional Launch of the Programme

Once an Authorised officer online launch briefing session has taken place, a national promotional launch of the new programme provides a further important opportunity to raise awareness of the programme. In general, the consortium will aim to have a large group of stakeholders, including key industry and apprenticeship representatives in attendance to support the event and to spread the word among their own networks.

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Part 3

Guidance and Resources for Delivering Quality Apprenticeships

This third part of the Handbook includes information and guidance for consortia as they oversee apprenticeship delivery, programme coordination and ongoing expansion of the programme nationally.

Part 3 is structured into four sections

- National Liaison and Supports
- Employer and Education Provider Collaboration
- Funding
- Maintaining and Building Key Apprenticeship Relationships

National Liaison and Supports

Apprenticeship consortia receive a comprehensive range of supports from SOLAS and the HEA. Key contacts within each consortium are added to the SOLAS and HEA mailing lists, enabling them to receive regular updates, share information, and engage on various apprenticeship-related topics. These communications cover areas such as the national marketing campaign, ongoing work led by the National Apprenticeship Alliance, and progress regarding the implementation of the successor to the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025.

The HEA will be the main point of contact for all Higher Education (HE) CLA proposals, and SOLAS will be the main point of contact for all Further Education and Training (FET) CLA proposals.

Apprenticeship.ie Website

The [Apprenticeship.ie](https://www.apprenticeship.ie) website serves as a central hub for information and resources related to all aspects of apprenticeship delivery, providing up-to-date details for stakeholders nationwide.

National Strategic Marketing Campaign

This campaign will promote all national apprenticeships and acts as a coordinating brand and tagline for apprenticeship nationally.

All consortia will receive branding guidelines and will be required to incorporate this branding in their promotional materials. Additionally, consortia participate actively in both national and regional campaign activities to ensure cohesive messaging and broad outreach.

Employer and Education Provider Collaboration

The quality of the relationship between employers and education providers is a key factor in the success of any apprenticeship programme. This relationship operates at strategic, tactical, and operational levels, and its strength greatly influences the overall effectiveness of apprenticeship delivery.

Collaborative Approach and Key Practices

A partnership-based approach between enterprises, education providers and other stakeholders has proven most effective in supporting apprentices throughout their training. High levels of trust among all parties are fundamental. To facilitate this, each partner typically appoints a key point of contact, establishes regular scheduled check-ins and meetings, and adopts an agreed approach to apprentice welfare and support.

Role of SOLAS Authorised Officers

SOLAS Authorised Officers play an essential bridging role between enterprise and education partners. Their responsibilities include implementing statutory elements of the apprenticeship system, such as approving employers to take on apprentices, managing apprentice registrations, maintaining the National Register of Apprentices, supporting apprentice welfare during training, and monitoring on-the-job training quality.

Apprenticeship Funding

Apprenticeship funding can be categorised into four main areas: national apprenticeship infrastructure; the off-the-job training costs incurred by training providers across FET and HE; training allowances for craft apprentices; and grants to employers whose apprentices are not in receipt of a training allowance plus a gender bursary for employers who take on apprentices from a minority gender on a programme.

Funding for apprenticeship employers

Employers of apprentices on programmes launched after 2016 (excluding those with a training allowance) receive €2,000 annually per apprentice.

Gender bursary for employers

The gender bursary, launched in 2022 as an expansion of the previous female craft apprenticeship bursary, offers employers €2,666 for hiring apprentices on national programmes with over 80% representation of one gender. It applies to eligible apprentice registrations and is paid in two instalments: €1,333 after six months of training and €1,333 after 18 months. Administered by Education and Training Boards, further details and application guidelines are available at apprenticeship.ie.

Funding for off-the-job apprenticeship training

Providers of off-the-job training for all apprenticeships receive formula-based funding support based on annual apprentice numbers, either through SOLAS or HEA. Funding for apprenticeships leading to an FET award is allocated via SOLAS, and funding for apprenticeships leading to a HE award is allocated via HEA.

Apprenticeship Online

[Apprenticeship Online](#) is a free online platform providing access to information and services for consortia, employers, training providers and Authorised Officers. Employers can complete the approval process, obtain the employer grant (€2,000 per apprentice per year), advertise job vacancies and view essential apprenticeship information. Employers who have not registered on the portal and want access can [email](#) to get set up for services and information.

SOLAS Funding Allocation Model

SOLAS funds Education and Training Boards, CLAs, Co-ordinating providers and Further Education and Training non-statutory agencies.

ETBs are issued with a funding allocation under five funding pot categories, one of which is Apprenticeship (Craft and CLAs). Each ETB determines how best to utilise the funding allocation in keeping with delivery targets, the funding requirements, SPAs, FET Strategy, etc.

For non-statutory agencies there is a funding formula for the co-ordinating provider role which determines the maximum grant payable. For non-statutory agencies, that are also collaborating providers, funding is allocated based on a funding application and reviewed by an Evaluation Panel, who recommend the final amount.

HEA Funding Allocation Model

Funding Allocation Model for Consortia Led Apprenticeships

A unit cost model-based approach is used for all HE CLA Apprenticeships. This unit cost model-based approach is comprised of the following three components.

Recurrent/Operational Costs

A contribution provided to the HE provider towards the cost of delivering the programme. In advance of agreeing the recurrent/operational amount, Consortia are required to submit detailed total costings associated with the delivery of the 'off the job training' portion within the programme.

Following discussions with the Consortia, a recurrent allocation (reflecting unit costs like those applied to existing HE programmes in the relevant discipline) will be agreed. In funding discussions, consideration will be given to the NFQ Level, duration and structure of each proposed apprenticeship within the parameters as set out.

Consortia Management Costs

A contribution is provided to the industry consortia towards costs associated with the running of the consortia. An amount of €1,500 per apprentice registered is provided in this regard and the annual total amount as allocated to the Consortia will be capped at an agreed level.

Apprentice Contribution

An apprentice contribution will be charged to individual apprentices. The employer they are registered with may pay this fee on the apprentice's behalf. This is applied in line with current practice for existing apprentice programmes in higher education. The apprentice contribution must be agreed by the consortia and should reflect the extent of contact between the apprentice and the education provider during an academic year across both the off-the-job and on-the-job training phases.

Development Allocations

In some cases, a once off allocation for development funding may be provided to assist Consortia with the roll out of programmes in the initial year.

All funded proposals will be subject to a performance and funding agreement and be subject to regular monitoring and review arrangements.

New programme development will be subject to available resources. HEA and SOLAS reserve the right to negotiate the scope and budgets of all proposals prior to approval for development.

Maintaining and Building Key Apprenticeship Relationships

The National Apprenticeship Alliance acts as an advisory body for the apprenticeship system. It includes three apprentice representatives, ensuring that apprentices have a stronger presence and voice within the system. The annual Apprentice of the Year Awards also helps to strengthen visibility and recognition for apprentices.

Consortia play a significant role in supporting apprentices' visibility and input. Strong procedures for gathering apprentice feedback and representation are essential. In 2025, meetings and workshops showcased good practices, such as conducting impact studies through focus groups and surveys, awarding outstanding apprentices on individual programmes, and running other recognition initiatives.

Employee representatives play a vital role in supporting apprentice welfare and maintaining the quality of apprenticeships from the employee perspective. Successful consortia incorporate both employee representatives and apprentices into their steering groups.

Consortia with a strong employer base emphasise the need for tailored strategies and resources to sustain and increase apprenticeship employer numbers. Some have developed customer resource management tools to facilitate this work, and examples of successful practices are being shared through the wider community of consortia.

As part of their annual funding, consortia are required to ensure their activities support and amplify national campaign efforts, thereby maximising the collective benefit and impact for the overall apprenticeship system. Branding guidelines and guidance on increasing employer numbers will be included in the consortia support materials.

Community of Practice

A strong community of practice has developed among industry-led consortia for national apprenticeships. Further growth is planned through the implementation of the successor to the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025. Ongoing evaluation, data collection, and feedback from apprentices, employers, training providers, tutors, and mentors will help keep apprenticeship programmes relevant and responsive to demand.

SOLAS and the HEA will continue to promote the sharing of good practice among apprenticeship consortia in 2026 and beyond.

Representatives from consortia underscore the importance of systematically collecting and using feedback within apprenticeship programmes. This approach results in more apprentices being employed and increased application numbers due to positive experiences. Evaluations led by consortia help validate the findings of national and larger-scale initiatives.

