

Designing and delivering pre-apprenticeships

Technological University Dublin -
Access to Apprenticeship

Ireland



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Case study summary

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) is the largest provider of apprenticeships and higher education in Ireland, currently providing 30% of apprenticeship education alongside wider vocational provision. In 2017, TU Dublin piloted the Access to Apprenticeship programme which aims to prepare young people from Dublin's inner-city communities to access apprenticeship positions.

The Access to Apprenticeship programme is 12-week programme which includes 10 weeks in the classroom followed by a 2-week work placement with a relevant employer. TU Dublin delivered three phases of the Access to Apprenticeship programme in 2017/18, with sixteen young people (total 48) on each phase in September 2017, January 2018 and April 2018.

This case study highlights key learning points arising from the unique opportunity to study this pilot programme in detail. It specifically highlights the key role that different partnerships play in the design and delivery of good quality pre-apprenticeship programmes. The case study provides examples of the role of partners at different stages, for example in setting up programmes, recruiting suitable young people, delivering programme, content and in providing work placements.

Key programme details

- Young people spend a total of 12 weeks on the programme, with 30 contact hours per week. The first 10 weeks are spent in the classroom, after which young people complete a two-week work placement.
- Young people engage in skills sampling, whereby they spend five days per week in the classroom, with each week focused on different apprenticeship sectors. This is a useful way of providing career orientation for young people who can then make informed decisions about the sector they are interested in.
- Employer engagement is an important element of this programme, helping provide meaningful opportunities for young people who might not traditionally access apprenticeships or normally have direct contact with hiring employers.
- Young people receive a certificate of participation at the end of their programme, recognising the skills developed during the programme and the completion of their work placement.
- The programme cost 3,700 per person in 2017/18

Country context

In Ireland, apprenticeships are an employer-led scheme, managed by the 'Further Education and Skills Service known as SOLAS. There are currently 29 disciplines offered on the apprenticeship scheme focusing on craft-based areas such as construction, manufacturing and transport with new additions in insurance, accountancy and financial services. The traditional apprenticeship scheme generally involves seven phases over four years with phases four and six taking place in an Institute of Technology.¹ Phases 1, 3, 5 and 7 involve on-the-job training and phases 2, 4 and 6 involve off-the-job training.

Given that traditional apprenticeships in Ireland are strongly focused on areas such as construction, levels of apprenticeship recruitment in these sectors are strongly linked with labour market and economic cycles. Apprenticeship starts in Ireland fell rapidly from 8,239 registrations in 2007 to just 1,500 in 2013. Levels of apprenticeship starts are now beginning to grow again, and there is significant scope to increase the numbers of young people choosing an apprenticeship as a route to employment and training.

With the aim of meeting skills shortages in key areas of the economy and improve youth unemployment rates, there has been recent investment in expanding the apprenticeship scheme, including promoting apprenticeships as a feasible alternative to higher education. It is the ambition of the Irish government to have 100 different apprenticeship frameworks in place by

2020 providing a total of 50,000 apprenticeship places. Along with several recommendations set out by a review of the apprenticeship system in 2013², the government identified the introduction of a national pre-apprenticeship course as being key to meeting these targets by increasing the number of opportunities for young people to gain access to the apprenticeship scheme.

The current provision of pre-apprenticeship programmes in Ireland is delivered outside of the main apprenticeship education providers. There are a small number of pre-apprenticeship programmes offered in colleges of further education around Ireland but there is no official, national pre-apprenticeship programme.

Some programmes help people who have already met the entry requirements for an apprenticeship to gain work experience in a particular sector to provide them with a foundation of knowledge and experience to pursue an apprenticeship in that trade. Other programmes are offered by Community Training Centres and are aimed at early school leavers, or young people who wish to complete an apprenticeship but for whom the minimum entry requirement has not been achieved. Such programmes offer young people the opportunity to gain the qualification needed to begin an apprenticeship.

Access to Apprenticeship

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) is the largest provider of apprenticeships and higher education in Ireland, currently providing 30% of apprenticeship education alongside wider

vocational provision. TU Dublin trains apprentices across 13 job roles including Aircraft Mechanics; Brick and Stone Laying; Construction Plant Fitting; Electrical; Heavy Vehicle Mechanics; Industrial Insulation; Mechanical Automation and Maintenance Fitting; Metal Fabrication; Painting & Decorating; Plumbing; Print Media; Refrigeration & Air Conditioning; Sheet Metal working; Vehicle Body Repairs; Wood Manufacturing and Finishing.

TU Dublin provide 10% of all higher education in Ireland through its four colleges; arts and tourism, business, engineering and the built environment, sciences and health. Due to this range of provision, TU Dublin have a diverse student population, with students undertaking apprenticeships, undergraduate degrees, master's and doctoral programmes. supporting their commitment to widening participation in higher education, TU Dublin offer a successful one-year access course which aims to support mature students and/or young adults who have experienced educational disadvantage. This strong and well-established access programme supports around 950 access students who are currently completing undergraduate courses. The access programme is targeted at students who come from backgrounds typically under-represented in higher education, and combines academic, financial, personal and social support and activity.

In Ireland, the proportion of young people who were not in education, training or employment in 2017 was 10.9%, which is lower than the EU average of 14.2%³. In 2017, TU Dublin was successful in securing a grant from J.P Morgan Chase Foundation and ESB to develop an

¹ An Institute of Technology is a type of higher education in Ireland, which usually specialises in engineering, technology, applied science, and sometimes natural sciences. There is a total of 14 colleges that use the title in Ireland. (Source: <http://www.dit.ie/about/>)

² <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Review-of-Apprenticeship-Training-in-Ireland.pdf>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tipslm90&plugin=1>

innovative project to support the transition of young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage on to an apprenticeship programme. The Access to Apprenticeship programme particularly aims to address the challenges faced by young people in Dublin aged 16-24 from areas of social disadvantage in accessing an apprenticeship.

The development of the Access to Apprenticeship programme was underpinned by TU Dublin's combined expertise in apprenticeships and access. The project was delivered on a pilot basis by TU Dublin's College of Engineering and Built Environment. The pilot project is working with key stakeholders in inner-city Dublin to address the challenges facing young people (16-24) from disadvantaged communities in accessing apprentice positions. The project was delivered from January 2017 to September 2018 with the development and design stage commencing in January 2017. The project mirrored the existing traditional apprentice intake recruiting 16 students for a 12-week block in 3 stages (Sept 17, Jan 18, April 18).

In designing their programme, TU Dublin set up an advisory board of key stakeholders in the apprenticeship sector including policy makers, employers, educators and youth workers. This advisory board is helping to provide strategic direction on progress in the development of the pilot implementation. The board also brings a national perspective to the programme, ensuring it's implemented in line with wider developments around apprenticeships and eventually, can be mainstreamed in to broader policy development. In the future, TU Dublin would like Access to Apprenticeship to develop into a programme that can be mainstreamed into wider apprenticeship provision in Ireland.

Recruitment of young people

To support the transition of young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage in Dublin on to an apprenticeship scheme, staff identified geographic areas in Dublin with some of the highest level of socio-economic disadvantage in the city. To meet the criteria of targeting young people who are socially and economically disadvantaged, the following indicators were used.

- Parent(s) or Guardian(s) Have Not Gone to College (Higher Education)
- Applicant has Attended a DEIS School for At Least 2 years
- Applicant Lives in an Area of Urban Disadvantage

The Access to Apprenticeship programme was promoted through various outreach activities in schools, youth employment schemes and local area partnerships, as well as using online and social media platforms. TU Dublin effectively use their existing partnerships with schools, community and statutory organisations to support the recruitment of young people who are within the 16-24 age group from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, TU Dublin's Access and Civic Engagement team have good relationships with DEIS schools in Dublin, designated as disadvantaged by the Department of Education and Skills. They used this partnership as an opportunity to promote engagement onto the programme.

"We have a range of partners in the community education sector, in youth groups or in youth training centres, and we also targeted them to see if they had students who they thought the programme might be suitable for." (TU Dublin Access Co-ordinator)

Women continue to be significantly under-represented in traditional apprenticeships in Ireland, and TU Dublin aim to use this programme as an opportunity to attract more women into apprenticeships. TU Dublin have run several initiatives to attract women to the programme, such as a targeted open day with the primary focus of engaging young unemployed women in the local area. Two young women joined Access to Apprenticeship having attended the targeted open day. Employers have recognised the value of the programme as diversifying the recruitment pool for apprenticeships and are keen to collaborate with the programme to engage and recruit more females.

"We are very interested in working with the Access programme to increase the number of female apprentices. The biggest challenge will be to get parents and career guidance professionals to recognise that it is a positive and rewarding career for females". (Employer)

Interview and initial assessment

Using their effective working relationships with the Access team, staff involved in the pilot have been able to share learning about targeting, recruiting and assessing young people on to the Access to Higher Education programme. The access team worked with the access to apprenticeship team to develop assessments as well as the benchmarks used to determine if someone is classed as disadvantaged.

Young people who apply for a place on the Access to Apprenticeship programme attend an interview with TU Dublin staff. To determine young people's levels of work readiness, the interview explores young people's motivations for applying, their personal and social circumstances

and educational background. It also set out the practicalities of the programme and what would be expected of them. Importantly, young people are made fully aware of the progression outcomes available to them upon completion, key success factor in recruiting young people onto the programme.

To ensure that all places on phase one of the programme were taken up, recruitment involved targeting schools, community and statutory organisations that work directly with the target group. Staff and tutors highlighted how it was much easier to recruit and engage young people in September, as this is when the academic year begins in Ireland. In addition, more young people were referred to the programme by schools for phase one starting in September, compared with later in the academic year.

The pilot phase of Access to Apprenticeship led to several key learning points relating to the recruitment of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Given that this was the first time TU Dublin had worked with this type of student in an apprenticeship setting, there were important lessons about the appropriate level of resource or experience to meet the needs of young people.

Going forward, the initial assessment will be an important part of the recruitment process for Access to Apprenticeships. Staff and tutors plan to reflect on the application process used during the pilot phase to introduce a careful assessment of young people's motivations, capabilities and skills before they are accepted on to the programme. This will help to ensure the right profile of young people enter the programme, and that they are likely to fully engage with it and progress onto an apprenticeship.

Staff will also work with partners to signpost young people where more intensive intervention and support is required for this type of student. The ATA Programme was not designed to provide intensive supports, rather support with access to apprenticeship and employers.

Model of delivery

The Access to Apprenticeship programme seeks to deliver the essential skills required for entry to apprenticeships including maths, science and digital skills, as well as career support, personal development and confidence building. Young people spend a total of 12 weeks on the programme, with 30 contact hours per week. This model was designed to reflect the amount of contact time individuals spend during one term as an apprentice. Personal and professional development focuses on skills such as self-assessment, self-evaluation, goal setting and resilience.

The first 10 weeks are spent in the classroom, after which young people complete a two-week work placement. Young people spend five days per week in the classroom, with each week focused on different apprenticeship sectors. For example, young people spend time learning about aircraft mechanics for one week, before focusing on painting and decorating the next. Tutors who usually deliver classroom-based training on the apprenticeship at TU Dublin are involved and provide young people with a basic knowledge about the sector, alongside an opportunity to work on a practical project in this area.

This gives young people the chance to experience a wide range of apprenticeships on offer at TU Dublin, enabling them to make an informed

decision about their future career choice. Young people value the opportunity to attend taster sessions in various apprenticeship sectors. They gain insight to sectors which they might not have considered before and importantly, can explore which sectors they might want to pursue through an apprenticeship.

Each Wednesday is known as 'personal development and employer engagement' day, where young people engage in activities related to improving their employability skills such as CV development, interview preparation or employer engagement. Each Friday is dedicated to reflecting upon what went well the week before and creating new goals for the week ahead.

Weekly reflections are an important part of the programme in enabling young people to review their experience of different apprenticeship sectors, look at the skills they have developed and to make plans for the subsequent week. This level of reflection also provides one way for young people to think about their preferred apprenticeship area. Each participant records their reflections in a portfolio which is assessed again at the end of the programme.

Weekly reflections are built in to the programme to give young people a sense of the assessment and feedback processes in an apprenticeship. In Ireland, apprentices are continuously assessed using online portfolios throughout the course of the apprenticeship, rather than through formal testing.

Table 1. Access to Apprenticeship programme

Week	Access to Apprenticeship – 12-week programme
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction and Health and Safety Training • Health and Safety Training, Manual Handling & Emergency Response • Safe Pass Training Course and Certification Provided
2-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday (9am – 5pm) • Mornings - Personal Development & Employer Engagement • Afternoons - Employers and Current Apprentice Presentations • Tuesday through Thursday (9am – 5pm) • Skills Sampling - Workshops and Lectures • Friday (9am-1pm) • E-Portfolio Development with Apprenticeship Lecturers from that Week
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Development & Employer Engagement • Aircraft Mechanics - Two Visits for Group of 8 Students • E-Portfolio Development with Apprenticeship Lecturers from that Week
11-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Experience with SOLAS Registered Employers • Last Friday - Awards Day – Certificate of Completion (CPD)

Employer engagement

Employer engagement plays a key role in ensuring young people have direct contact with employers who can offer work experience. This is an important element of this programme, helping provide meaningful opportunities for young people who might not traditionally access apprenticeships or normally have direct contact with hiring employers.

“The programme is a great initiative for young people to give them a potential start they otherwise would not have had, we hosted work placements for each of the phases and we have two apprentices from the programme now registered with us”. (Employer)

Employer engagement activities take place every Wednesday whereby employers give presentations about their organisation, apprenticeships and potential opportunities. TU Dublin also hold regular networking events where young people have the opportunity to meet a range of employers at one time. This provides young people with the chance to meet potential employers to host their work placement and potential apprenticeship, and in turn provides employers with the opportunity to meet potential apprentices.

The two-week work placement takes place at the end of the programme to ensure young people gain exposure to the workplace environment and experience the reality of apprentice training. TU Dublin work with a selection of employers from across apprenticeship sectors to ensure young people have access to a work placement in a sector of their choice.

Employers who were involved in the Access to Apprenticeship pilot provided positive feedback on the programme. They valued the opportunity to engage with the young people and to see their level of interest in pursuing an apprenticeship. Employers also thought it was good for young people to learn what would be expected of them as an apprentice. Young people who complete the programme especially value the work placement element, highlighting that gaining experience in the workplace with an employer helped to clarify which apprenticeship sector they are interested in pursuing.

“I’m happy with the programme and the 9-day work placement with employers give both the candidate and employer a good opportunity to assess each other to see if this will work both ways”. (Employer)

TU Dublin commissioned an external evaluation of the Access to Apprenticeships pilot programme after the first phase to learn more about the strengths, challenges and key learning points to take forward. TU Dublin have been able to use this evaluation to inform the future development of the programme. For example, in the next rollout of Access to Apprenticeship, TU Dublin are considering adapting the 'taster' modules to provide young people with a deeper level of insight and understanding into key sectors.

Outcomes for young people

The programme resulted in an overall completion rate of 75%, a pass rate of 62.5% with 50% of participants taking up an apprenticeship. Young people receive a certificate of participation at the end of their programme, recognising the skills developed during the programme and the completion of their work placement. This is an important component in the design of TU Dublin's pre-apprenticeship programme, providing a sense of achievement for young people and supporting their progression to an apprenticeship.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do with my future but since I started this course, I know that I want to do an apprenticeship in Plumbing. Everything is explained on the course about what you need to do to get the apprenticeship. After I left school, there was no guidance about next steps and getting a career, this course came at the right time for me as I was completely lost and getting into bad habits and falling out with everyone at home" (Young person on ATA).

Additionally, as part of the independent evaluation, a questionnaire was administered with 33 participants to measure changes as a result of participation in the programme. Students were asked to score themselves on a range of soft indicators before beginning the programme and then at ten weeks.

The external evaluation demonstrated positive changes in outcomes for young people who completed Access to Apprenticeship. These changes ranged from a 25% improvement in independence to a 33% improvement in ambition and included other outcomes such as improvements in health and well-being (30%), community participation (33%), and personal development (30%).

"Meeting new people has been great, I am now much more confident and comfortable talking and working with others. I am getting more out of myself and I have more skills than I thought I had. (Young person on ATA).

Best practice – key success factors

- Using existing partnerships such as with schools and youth organisations provides a useful way to generate targeted and appropriate referrals to pre-apprenticeship programme.
- Giving young people the chance to experience a range of apprenticeship sectors allows them to find out what interests them and to make informed career decisions.
- Employer engagement activities that introduce young people to employers demonstrates that there is a commitment to them to find work placements, and that there is a real opportunity to progress to an apprenticeship.