

**Submission to the Joint Committee on
Education and Skills regarding Culinary
Apprenticeships**

November 2019

Background to the Chef Shortage

Since 2012, the Restaurants Association of Ireland have been calling for policies to tackle the chronic chef shortage in Ireland. Currently, 1,800 chefs qualify each year from certified culinary training programmes. In 2015, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) report on the Hospitality sector identified a deficit of 5,000 chef trainees annually. We are now almost 4 years on from the publishing of that report and numbers are estimated at almost 7,500. The key findings of the EGFSN report were that the skills shortage is across all levels, most notably amongst Chefs. It is also worth noting that the report of 2015 makes recommendations to 2020. Given recent economic developments and the fact that full employment has now been reached there is most certainly a need for the Group to meet again to compile the next report for beyond 2020.

Policies implemented to tackle the Skills Shortage:

- Development of National Commis Chef Apprentice Programme (112 places were rolled out in October 2017) (2 days college, 3 days employment x 2 years).
- Development of National Chef de Partie Programme - of which RAI is the Chair – commenced September 2018 in two IOTs
- Development of National Sous Chef and Executive Head Chef apprenticeship programmes.
- Establishment of a Restaurant & Hospitality Skillnet in 2017 by the RAI - to provide upskilling courses to those currently working in industry.
- Establishment of a National Oversight and Advisory Group ‘Hospitality Skills Oversight Group’.
- Apprentice Chef Initiative – aims to create a positive and pro-active approach and introduction to culinary arts profession for second level students.
- Tourism Insights – online portal for transition year students to promote careers in tourism and hospitality. Over 240 schools have participated to date.
- Ireland Skills Live – showcasing in an exciting and dynamic way, apprenticeships or skills as a future career pathway.

Culinary Apprenticeships

The two active culinary apprenticeships which the Restaurants Association of Ireland co-developed; Chef de Partie and Commis Chef, do not operate the same as other apprenticeships – there is no bursary as with pre-2016 / trade apprenticeship and Industry, i.e. the employer foots quite a large cost.

Currently for apprenticeships developed before 2016, a training allowance is paid by the local ETB to apprentices while attending off-the-job training. In some cases, a contribution towards travel or accommodation costs may be paid if deemed eligible. The sector which the apprentice's employer is engaged in, will often determine the allowance payable. Current applicable apprenticeships are;

- Engineering
- Construction
- Motor
- Printing & Paper
- Electrical Industry

This means that within ETBs currently there are some students in the Culinary Sector and other post 2016 apprenticeships that are at a marked disadvantage compared to their counterparts training in other industries.

The Joint Committee on Business, Enterprise and Innovation Report on: “The Role of Apprenticeships and Work Permits in Addressing Ireland’s Skills Needs” published in May 2019 observed and recommended the following regarding apprenticeships: “The Committee notes that post-2016 apprenticeship programmes do not receive the same level of financial support from the State for off-site training as the pre-2016 apprenticeship programmes. The Committee notes that block release apprenticeships can be particularly problematic for SMEs. **The Committee recommends that the Government examine avenues to reduce the financial burden on employers taking on apprentices, particularly SMEs.**”

National Training Fund Levy

The Government, as part of Budget 2018, decided to raise the rate of the National Training Fund (NTF) levy by 0.1% in 2018 to 0.8% and by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020 on the basis of the implementation of planned reforms. Our members and sector as employers pay into this levy and continually ask what is it that they are getting out of it? Similarly, our members have queried why there is an NTF surplus?

Training Allowance

For apprenticeships developed before 2016, a training allowance is paid by the local ETB to apprentices while attending off-the-job training. In some cases, a contribution towards travel or accommodation costs may be paid if deemed eligible. The sector the apprentice's employer is engaged in will determine the allowance payable. These allowances are calculated on the gross wages paid by industry in each sector. The amount the apprentice gets will generally be less than that, as it is based on the net take-home pay of the relevant sector.

The difficulty our members and the wider tourism and hospitality sector, (which is one of the country's largest employers and also currently experiencing a skills shortage) have is that whilst our apprenticeships were in development the process changed. Industry, employers and educational providers engaged as did other consortia members, giving time, and expertise to develop a suite of culinary apprenticeships that, when the process began, were developed on the understanding that female bursaries and training allowances were available.

We acknowledge that the introduction of the Employment Miscellaneous Provisions Act earlier this year, there is no longer a training wage rate, we would however welcome a flat apprenticeship wage rate applicable for all apprentices and paid through the educational provider for days of off the job training. It is our opinion that in order to encourage greater engagement, employers must see the value and not be discouraged by the cost. There is practice in other EU member states of a wage rate for apprentices. There is currently an apprentice wage rate in the UK and in France for all hours worked by apprentices, for example.

We are also concerned that training allowances are not a flat rate for all apprentices and instead set by industry as below and detailed on the apprenticeship.ie website. We are asking for a training allowance on the days that employees are off site from the employer business and training in either ETBs or IOTs. Employers are happy to pay employees for the time they are on site working and learning in the kitchen but on days when they are offsite, to ask an employer to pay wages and also to back fill the position can be crippling for a small business and simply not feasible.

Mechanical Engineering Building Services Contracting Sector

Note: **Mechanical Engineering Building Services Contracting Sector rates** - Effective: 06 March 2018

This rate applies to all Pipefitters. It also applies to Plumbers whose companies are designated under Construction

Year	Gross wage norm
Phase 2	€295.14
Phase 4	€443.24
Phase 6	€664.85
4th Year	€797.82

Construction

Construction rates advised by C.I.F. – Effective: 19th October 2017

Year	Gross wage norm
Phase 2	€245.84
Phase 4	€369.14
Phase 6	€553.70
4th Year	€664.44

Motor

Motor rates advised by S.I.M.I. - Effective: 01 May 2008

Year	Gross Wage Norm
Phase 2	€195.25
Phase 4	€293.17
Phase 6	€439.75
4th Year	€527.70

Apprenticeship Partners meeting with SOLAS 7th November 2019

At this meeting with SOLAS this month the resounding and most common feedback on how to increase the number of employers and apprentices in the coming months and years was by re-instating the training allowance and the female bursary. This meeting included Authorising Officers, Employer representatives, and Industry representatives and there was consensus that without monetary support or an alleviation of the current cost on employers the apprenticeships will not grow, and some may even have to cease.

SOLAS's own Apprenticeship targets demonstrate that the current model for Apprenticeship is not working.

Employer Targets

- Target for employers for new apprenticeships (Pre-2016) was 1500
- Current figure is 947 (to Sept 2019 – as per SOLAS) **only at 63%**

Apprentice Targets

- 18,763 apprenticeship registrations since 2016
- 31,000 is the target for apprenticeship registrations to 2021

Industry Feedback

Feedback from our members (2,100+ potential apprentice employers) is that apprenticeships, as they are currently structured are simply too costly - €7,000 a year is the estimated cost to the employer.

Feedback from existing apprentice employers and both of our educational partners (ETB and IOT) is that any employer that has been able to engage and take on a culinary apprentice will not be able to take on anymore or engage again – the cost is simply too high.

We would like to thank the Joint Committee for the opportunity to provide this feedback through a submission and would welcome the opportunity to answer any further queries they may have.