Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1

POLICY No.4: Access, transfer, and progression policy

4. Purpose of policy

Policy No.4 provides a source of accurate and reliable information regarding access, transfer, and progression. It also details the arrangements for those who wish to transfer or progress from the programmes into employment or further education opportunities.

4.1 Policy scope

Programme candidates should access this policy, along with apprentices, tutors, FIT staff, Approved Delivery Partners[1], and broader regulatory and accreditor stakeholders. Promoting broad accessibility to Tech Apprenticeships for FIT candidates is a key element of FIT's organisational mission. This document reflects sectoral best practices and QQI guidance on access, transfer, and progression provided in "QQI Policy Restatement Policy And Criteria For Access, Transfer And Progression In Relation To Learners For Providers Of Further And Higher Education And Training [NQAI 2003, Restated 2015]".

[1] Typically an Education and Training Board.

4.2 Overarching considerations

Tech apprentices come from a wide range of backgrounds. FIT recognises that individual candidates accessing Tech Apprenticeships are likely to have distinct requirements, including the need to access supports relating to neurodiversity or disability. FIT also aims to ensure that mechanisms are in place to facilitate applicants who do not meet traditional entry criteria, such as those who submit educational qualifications from other across European Union Member States and beyond.

Considering the diversity of the candidate population and FIT's use of both in-person and blended modes of delivery, ease of access for candidates to the required technologies while navigating learning resources and attending virtual classrooms is paramount. Therefore, this policy focuses on ensuring that candidates who come through the admissions process and who may have specific needs are supported and facilitated in a timely manner, enabling them to have ready access to their chosen Tech Apprenticeship programme and all required technologies, hardware and software.

4.3 Policy statement

FIT is committed to providing an environment of quality-assured education and training, with the ultimate goal of enhancing career opportunities for graduating apprentices of Tech Apprenticeship programmes. FIT will instigate a learning environment that stimulates and supports life-long learners. FIT ensure the integrity of entry/access arrangements are clearly stated, and decisions regarding the allocation of apprentice placements on programmes are transparent. All programme candidates and those who are subsequently enrolled are treated fairly, equally, and consistently. The FIT candidate recruitment process provides a supported and responsive recruitment process for both candidates and participating Approved Employers.

Recognition of Prior Learning mechanisms are in place to facilitate candidates to furnish their prior qualifications for FIT's review and assessment. In addition, on a limited, case-by-

case basis, the Registrar may exempt an apprentice from the requirement to complete some early-stage module assessments due to previous, verifiable completion by an apprentice of a separate programme.

Advanced entry to programmes is not permitted since, for statutory purposes, all apprentices must be registered with Solas on the National Register of Apprentices for a period of no less than two years. Although embedded programme transfer arrangements do not apply, FIT has formalised several progression routes and is keen to continue identifying more in the years ahead. FIT aims to facilitate graduates as far as possible and, ensure that graduated apprentices can to continue employment with their apprenticeship employer while undertaking further study. In addition, FIT is committed to continuing to foster industry-supported skills development initiatives for apprenticeship gradates career progression.

4.3.1 Programme access

FIT defines access to programmes as a process by which applicants conclude the required steps for candidate applications. These steps will include aptitude testing and a FIT mock employer interview, culminating in their subsequent placement in employment with an approved participating employer, as well as the satisfactory completion by the applicant of statutory registration processes.

4.3.2 Entry criteria

Candidates must be 18 years or older and have achieved a passing grade (O6/H7) in at least five subjects (to include Maths and English) at Ordinary Level in the Irish Leaving Certificate. Candidates must complete a comprehensive online application form, an initial online aptitude test, a mock interview, an employer interview, onboarding, and any required registration processes. For those who have not completed the Leaving Certificate, equivalence may be decided through the Recognition of Prior Learning procedure.

Candidates applying to the Data Analytics Associate Apprenticeship must have previously completed a Mathematics component equivalent to an O6/H7 outcome in the subject of Mathematics in the Irish Leaving Certificate.

4.3.3 Skills and attributes required upon entry

Candidates must be numerate and literate, have good communication and learning skills, and be interested in technology and customer service. In addition, candidates should be able to absorb product knowledge and demonstrate a strong motivation to start an apprenticeship programme, while also being motivated and analytically minded. Ideally, candidates should be determined to succeed, have an even temperament and excellent interpersonal skills, along with adaptability and the capacity to work in a team.

4.3.4 Reasonable accommodations (to support programme access/entry)

During the application process, all candidates who require any reasonable accommodations must inform FIT at the earliest juncture possible. These accommodations may include provisions to accommodate arrangements for a physical or hidden disability, neurodiversity, or in cases where a candidate seeks extra support in making their application. The FIT Registrar will take all practicable steps to ensure that such accommodations are processed, and that the applicant is supported to the greatest extent reasonably possible.

4.4 Transfer

Providing an internal transfer mechanism is a process by which an apprentice is enabled to transfer from one programme to another by being awarded a general credit that recognises learning outcomes (s)he has already achieved in a previous programme. FIT appreciates the need to support apprentices who may wish to exit mid-programme to seek a different learning opportunity. Apprentices who have completed modular components of Tech

Apprenticeships may be eligible to apply them towards the achievement of alternative/additional City and Guilds or industry certifications, or to gain access to other programmes being offered by other providers. FIT will collaborate with any relevant awarding bodies to identify other options for exiting apprentices on programmes leading to awards in the NFQ.

4.5 Progression

Progression routes/destinations signify how apprentices, on successful completion of their Tech Apprenticeship programmes, can progress to another programme of education and training, generally one of a higher NFQ level standing. FIT, in the spirit of cultivating future possibilities for graduated apprentices, has established progression pathways that FIT staff communicate to all graduating cohorts. These pathways in the information, communications and technology sectors are relevant to graduates' respective acquisition of skills in the information, communications, and technology sectors. These routes provide efficient enrolment of graduate apprentices on a part-time basis, allowing them to continue their full-time employment, where applicable, and their pursuit of long-term careers.

In addition any graduate apprentice who furnishes their award certificate to another Institute following completion of a Tech Apprenticeship may seek advanced entry to a programme of education and training of higher NFQ level standing.

4.6 English language proficiency (for non-native English speakers)

Non-native English-speaking candidates must demonstrate English language proficiency if they have not studied English, in the Irish Leaving Certificate (as evidenced by a 06/H7 outcome) or an equivalent UK A-level examination standard. For English language proficiency, FIT utilises the common reference levels as detailed in the Common European Framework Reference for Languages, with reference to the B2 benchmark standard that states an individual:

"can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans."

Candidates who meet the B2 benchmark or higher will be requested to provide evidence of it as part of their application to FIT. Such evidence may include confirmation of an English language school test showing a B2 level or comparable IELTS score between 5.5 and 6.5. Several Irish providers, and others further afield, offer these tests online. Prospective candidates are advised to have their English language proficiency test evidence available at the point of application to the Data Analytics Associate Apprenticeship programme.

4.7 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

This is a mechanism that candidates may use to gain access to a programme, receive credit towards an award, or receive a full award. Details noted in this policy describe how RPL is applied in the context of Tech Apprenticeships.

4.7.1 Recognition of prior learning for access

Candidates who may not be able to demonstrate compliance with the specified entry criteria may request to have their prior learning assessed for the purpose of being granted entry. The candidate should submit the request in writing to the Tech Apprenticeship Registrar, who will consider the evidence of prior learning that the candidate has presented, and may request additional evidence of such learning. The apprentice will receive written confirmation of the decision from the Registrar (or delegate) within two months of receipt of the formal request.

4.7.2 Recognition of prior learning for credit or advanced entry

Apprentices cannot use RPL to achieve credit towards their outcome award, such as the QQI L6 Advanced Certificate Apprenticeship Award.

4.7.3 Recognition of prior learning for a full Award

RPL cannot be provided to achieve an Tech Apprenticeship Award, such as the QQI L6 Advanced Certificate Apprenticeship Award.

4.8 Information provision

The following programme information will be made known to apprentices after onboarding by an employer and before the apprentice's active enrolment in the relevant intake cohort:

I. The name of the awarding body (or bodies) making the award for the programme;

II. The title of the programme and the award to which it leads;

III. Access arrangements and selection criteria;

IV. Course structure to include synchronous delivery or face-to-face elements;

V. Assessment methods, module summaries, tuition methods and training locations;

VI. The award level and type (a Major, Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ);

VII. Admission requirements, including a statement of the knowledge, skill, and competence needed by the apprentice for successful participation in the programme; and

VIII. Details of learning support available for specific learners, such as those with disabilities or whose mother tongue is not English.

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