



Boost your business with a Cybersecurity Practitioner Apprenticeship

An Employers Guide





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Introduction

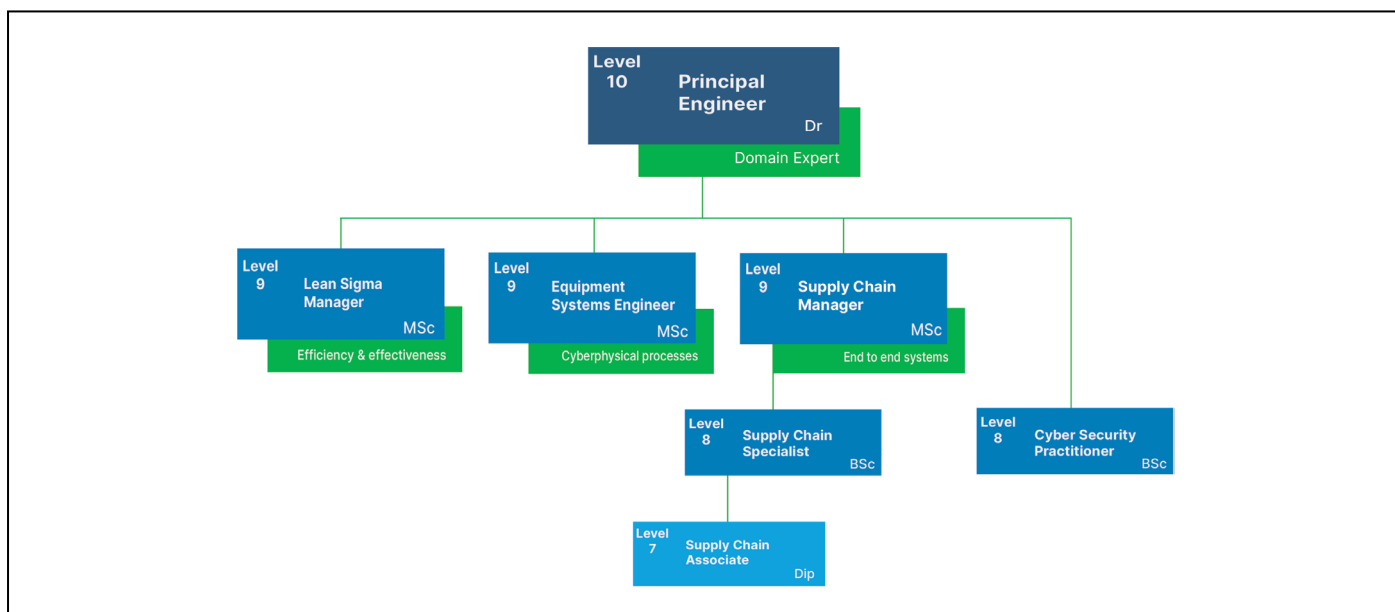
As part of the new National Apprenticeship Programme, the University of Limerick (UL) is Ireland's first University to offer apprenticeships at higher level. Included in the suite of executive programmes, UL offer a Cybersecurity Practitioner apprenticeship.

These qualifications have been created 'by industry for industry' and are aimed at building Ireland's capacity to be world industry leaders through enhancing the skills of its existing workforce.

The programmes at UL are designed for people who are already working and wish to gain additional knowledge and experience within their role. As such, all of our participants already have employment contracts that meet or exceed the duration of the apprenticeship. Extensive consultation with industry has taken place in regards to curriculum content and structure, with high emphasis on real-world skills and employability.

All of the programmes are designed to minimise the apprentice's time away from the workplace using a 70:30 'on-the-job' to 'off-the-job' ratio. This is achieved through the use of blended and online programme delivery for maximum benefit.

The suite of Executive Apprenticeship Programmes on offer at UL



Apprenticeships Consortia

For each apprenticeship programme a Consortium Steering Group (CSG) has been developed. Their role is to ensure that the Apprenticeship programme(s) conforms to, and evolves with, the requirements of the occupational profile and to ensure that it is enterprise-led and meets labour market needs.

Each Consortium Steering Group is composed of relevant stakeholders including employers, programme specific occupational associations, any occupational regulators or relevant professional bodies and the University of Limerick. The CSG acts as a liaison between employers and the University at a broad level. The CSG will undertake periodical reviews of the programme and in particular the learning outcomes so as to ensure relevancy of the programmes and aligning the needs of Industry with skills development. The consortia lead for the Cybersecurity Practitioner apprenticeship programmes is Limerick for IT.

Cybersecurity Overview

Security is paramount regardless of the sector and all industries need to ensure that their systems and processes are cybersecure from incursion. The main responsibility of a cybersecurity practitioner in a company is to protect the computer and network from cyber-attack. Typically they will be involved in activities such as the operation and maintenance of information security aspects (data integrity, availability, authentication, confidentiality and non-repudiation), monitoring of network and systems for detection of intrusions, identifying security flaws and vulnerabilities, risk analysis, analysis of security breaches, and the recommendation and installation of appropriate tools/countermeasures.

The Importance of Cybersecurity ?

As the world becomes increasingly technologically advanced, business and governments need to be able to rely on secure networks and systems to protect vital information. In the last number of years the rate of Cyber-attacks have escalated and these can be financially devastating, disrupting, and upsetting to people and businesses. The McAfee report titled "The Hidden Costs of Cybercrime," concludes that cybercrime costs the world economy more than \$1 trillion, or just more than one percent of global GDP, which is up more than 50 percent from a 2018 study that put global losses at close to \$600 billion. Michael Dell has estimated this will rise to \$10 trillion by 2025. Along with the increase in cyber-attacks business' are faced with increasing remote working challenges, regulation and the need for compliance with GDPR which has resulted in demand for not only cyber professionals but also IT Risk professionals.

Not only does cybercrime have a detrimental impact on profits, but also it can create long-term damage to a company's reputation and ability to grow. Nevertheless, many small business owners find themselves unable to protect their organisation, as they don't have the resources necessary to monitor their networks and systems.

In 2020, Cyber Ireland surveyed the current labour market for Cybersecurity skills in Ireland. The Cybersecurity Skills Survey results have highlighted strengths and identified challenges, including Cybersecurity skills gaps (people lacking appropriate skills) and skills shortages (a lack of people available to work in Cybersecurity job roles). These shortages are affecting organisations of all sizes (micro, small, medium and large), across a range of sectors, including indigenous and foreign owned companies.

This escalation of cyber-crime has created the requirement for the role of Cybersecurity Practitioner. A CS Practitioner will be responsible for protecting IT infrastructure, edge devices, networks, and data. along with preventing data breaches and monitoring and reacting to cyber attacks.

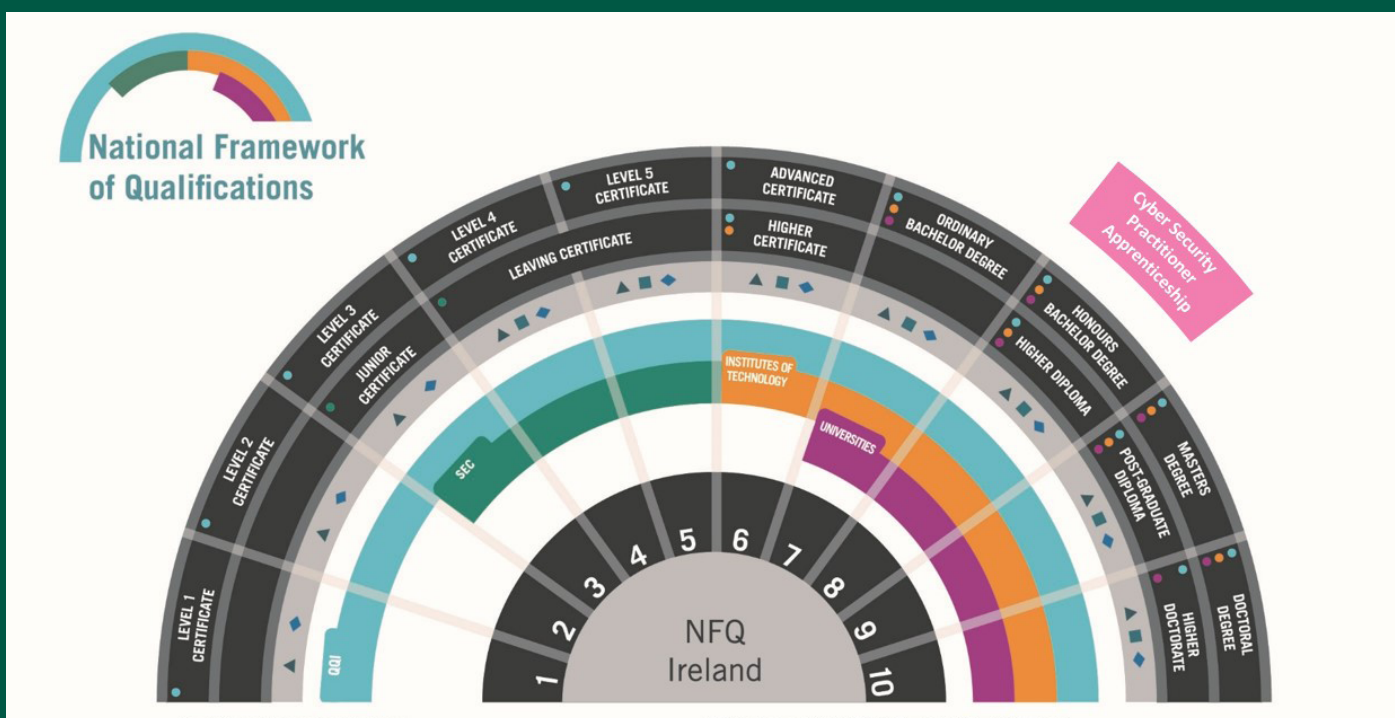
National Framework of Qualifications

National qualifications frameworks (NFQ) describe what learners should know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification. These frameworks also show how learners can move from one qualification, or qualification level, to another within a system. Over 150 countries are now developing, or have developed, a national qualifications framework.

The Irish NFQ, is a framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and competence. Because all NFQ qualifications are quality assured, learners can be confident that they will be recognised at home and abroad.

Upon successful completion of the programme, apprentices will graduate with the following:

NFQ Level 8 Degree in Cybersecurity (BSc)



Cybersecurity Practitioner Apprenticeship

Limerick for IT in partnership with the University of Limerick have developed a new Level 8 Honours Degree - Cybersecurity Practitioner Apprenticeship.

This apprenticeship programme aims to address this critical skills shortage of skilled professionals in Cybersecurity and provide a talent pipeline for industry.

Developed by industry for industry, this is a 3 year work based education programme which supports the development and knowledge base of Cybersecurity amongst practitioners in organisations. It offers a new and exciting pathway for those who are new or existing employees of the sector that combines practical implementation and learning in the workplace with blended learning through the University of Limerick.

Both on-the-job and off-the-job learning will take place in tandem. Apprentices are employed within their respective employers where during the academic year they work four days per week and undertake their studies on the fifth with the University of Limerick.

Outside of the academic year apprentices work full time. The combination of the off-the-job and on-the-job elements enable the apprentice to combine practical elements of their jobs and role with the relevant taught academic modules and theory. All apprentices are supported during the programme with an in-company mentor whose role it is to facilitate learning, provide direction and scope to engage in meaningful activities and be a sounding board for any challenges that may arise.



On successful completion of the Cybersecurity Practitioner Apprenticeship, apprentices will have attained the skills and knowledge to:

- Assist in the identification, evaluation and implementation of security solutions.
- Be able to design, work with and implement systems, components or processes in the field of cybersecurity and information and communications technologies.
- Apply cybersecurity and privacy principles to organisational requirements (relevant to confidentiality, integrity, availability, authentication, non-repudiation).
- Work with both technical and business functions to promote awareness and best practices across the organisation to meet the goals of the security program.
- Deploy their knowledge and skills across the range of technologies in the field of information and communications technology, enabling them to work with either hardware or software as appropriate.
- Apply their knowledge and skills in communications technologies, networks, IT Forensics, computers and computer-based applications, security in information technology, as required.
- Develop the ability for a critical and independent approach to problem-solving in their future careers.
- Use self-directed learning to improve their knowledge and skills in line with developments and innovation in the fields of cybersecurity and information and communications technology.

How is the Programme Delivered?

Apprenticeship is a dual system, a blended combination of on-the-job employer-based training and off-the-job training. The Cybersecurity Practitioner Apprenticeship programme has been designed to be flexible to allow the broadest range of employees to participate. This is to ensure that apprentices can minimise the amount of time they are away from work.

Our programmes are structured for blended delivery with learning material delivered by a combination of academic subject matter experts and industry professionals.

The programme is aligned with the academic calendar in the University of Limerick which is structured over 2 semesters Autumn (September-December) and Spring (January to May). The taught programme modules start in September and finish in May every year.

Programme content will be delivered both virtually and on campus. Due to the nature of the programme there is a requirement that apprentices be released from work to be on campus at the University of Limerick a minimum of 1 day per week during the semesters to engage in their studies- primarily in labs and tutorials. There may also be a combination of evening and day lectures and masterclasses scheduled for apprentices to engage in.

Engagement with programme content may be scheduled during normal working hours and employers will be required to facilitate the apprentice with time to access this. There is an emphasis on directed assignment work in each of the modules to allow participants to spend more time applying the concepts in the context of their own organisations.

Modules are assessed on a continuous basis and all modules will feature some element of an end-point assessment which will test an apprentice's academic competency and practical capabilities.

Prior to commencing on the programme all apprentices will be registered as students of the University of Limerick and on the Induction module. Apprentices will only need to participate in this once and it usually takes place over two weeks in August. The induction module provides the apprentice with an opportunity to become familiar with the University of Limerick Virtual Learning platform where they will be able to access programme content, examination and assessment requirements, electronic library, student email and on-line collaboration spaces. This immersed learning approach allows you to earn-as-you-learn whilst also developing highly-valued skills within the workplace.

As with all apprenticeships, company support and commitment to the programme and the on-the-job learning elements is crucial.

On-the-job learning is delivered by the employer throughout the duration of an apprentices employment and this provides the apprentice with the scope to engage in meaningful projects, to provide opportunities and access to relevant work experience to complement the chosen apprenticeship and to incorporate their learning in practical activities. There must be coherence between the on-the-job and off-the-job learning to reinforce and embed the learning gleaned from the programme.

At all times an apprentice is supported by an In-company mentor – someone who has the skills and knowledge within the company and that can facilitate the apprentices on-the-job learning.

How is the Programme Structured?

This programme is a 3 year 240 (180) credit Bachelor of Science Degree (hons) in Cybersecurity. Applicants are expected to hold a level 6 (60 ECTS) qualification in an ICT related discipline prior to entry.

In year 1, depending on prior academic qualifications successful applicants may be streamed into an appropriate programme of study and receive exempted credits for some of the current programme modules.

In years 2 & 3 all applicants will undertake the same modules – 2 per semester, each delivered over a period (semester) of 12 weeks.

In year 3 along with taught modules all apprentices will undertake a significant capstone project – split over two semesters and these will be based on their employer.

Along with their taught programme of study all apprentices will engage in a Community of Practice where they will have opportunities to interact and engage in peer-to-peer learning activities around the academic content and on-the-job learning. Key components of the programme are industry based seminars and master classes with sector experts. Apprentices will have different levels of experience and knowledge of their industry depending on their organisational role and will benefit from seminars to expand their knowledge and learning. In company mentor meetings will form an essential component of the Community of Practice.

Professional competencies and skills as well as linking on-the-job and off-the-job elements will all be captured through significant reflective learning modules that are built into the programme and narrated on an ongoing basis through the years of study. A total of 6 reflective learning modules will be undertaken with the majority in years 2 and 3.



Programme Overview

180 credits (European Credit Transfer System - ECTS)

Duration: 3 years

Delivery: Blended learning – with a combination of on-campus and virtual classrooms, tutorials, labs from subject matter experts.

Entry Requirements: NFQ level 6 qualification in an ICT discipline or equivalent with relevant work experience or completion of a Level 6 ICT Associate apprenticeship. Advanced entry into Year 2 will be possible for apprentices who hold a relevant Level 7 qualification in an ICT related discipline and have relevant work experience.
The University of Limerick's Recognition of Prior Learning may be applicable on a case by case basis.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Autumn	Autumn	Autumn
Operating Systems 1	Introduction to Security and Cryptography	Applied Cloud Computing
Computer Software 3	Computer Law, Investigations, and Ethics	Introduction to Data Engineering And Machine Learning
Modern Communications Fundamentals	Reflective Learning Journal 2	Project 1
Computer Network: Standards, Protocols and The Internet Of Things		Reflective Learning Journal 5
Spring	Spring	Spring
Operating Systems 2	Data Security	Host and Network Security
TCP/IP Networking	Introduction to Cloud Computing	Computer Forensics
Mobile & Wireless Communications	Reflective Learning Journal 3	Project 2
		Reflective Learning Journal 6
Summer	Summer	Summer
Reflective Learning Journal 1	Reflective Learning Journal 4	

Community of Practice

Alongside the modules apprentices will be participating in the Community of Practice (CoP). This an integral part of the programme and includes:

- Mentoring - recording meetings with an approved in-company mentor
- Forums
- Masterclasses
- Reflective Learning Journals (6 to be completed over the duration of study)

Employer Duties & Responsibilities

Embarking on the CS Practitioner Apprenticeship

Before undertaking an apprentice on the Cybersecurity Practitioner programme, an employer should first consider the following questions:

1. Who is this programme suitable for?

The programme is suitable for new and existing employees seeking to progress within their organisation and develop skills relevant to the workplace. For professionals who wish to:

- Enhance their career prospects as a Cybersecurity professional.
- Quickly gain the knowledge to assess cyber risk and implement effective technical and organisational controls. Create, maintain, audit and improve systems to meet particular needs, often as advised by a business analyst or systems architect.
- Develop test protocols for hardware systems, software systems and the integration of both.
- Diagnose and resolve system faults through developing a comprehensive plan and instructions, for follow through.
- Write diagnostic programs and design and write code for operating systems and software to ensure efficiency.
- Have responsibility for writing review protocols and test plans and co-ordination of user and system testers to ensure that the system is thoroughly tested.

2. Does the apprentice need to meet entry requirements:

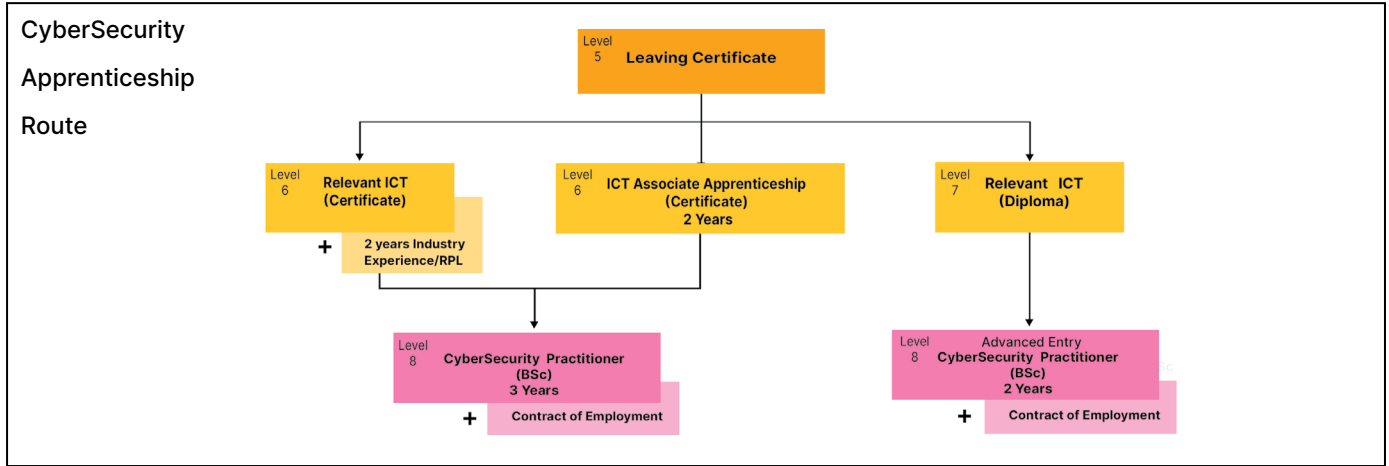
All potential apprentices must meet the minimum entry requirements as follows:

- Must have an Irish contract of employment, be Irish based and be employed by a SOLAS 'Approved Employer'.
- Must be aged 18 or over.
- Must have achieved the minimum academic requirements for the relevant programme.
- Certified and non-certified Recognition of Prior Learning may also be considered.
- Every apprentice must have opportunity and access to relevant inhouse work experience to complement the chosen apprenticeship.
- Apprentices for whom English is not a first language must demonstrate proficiency in English and meet the University of Limerick English Language requirements.
- Non-EU applicants are subject to work permit regulations.

3. What are the routes of entry?

The minimum academic entry requirements are:

- NFQ level 6 qualification in an ICT discipline or equivalent with relevant work experience.
- Completion of a Level 6 ICT Associate apprenticeship.
- Advanced entry into Year 2 will be possible for apprentices who hold a relevant Level 7 qualification in an ICT related discipline and have relevant work experience.



4. Can you provide the apprentice with continuity of employment (both On-the-Job and Off-the-Job over a 3-year period)?

This apprenticeship is 3 years in duration, however is dependant on prior experience and academic qualifications. The normal route for apprentices is to join the programme in Year 1 of a three year apprenticeship but advanced entry to Year 2 can be considered provided the apprentice has significant industrial experience and meets academic entry requirements.

All organisations who employ apprentices must adhere to the guidance provided in the SOLAS Apprenticeship Code of Practice. This Code of Practice is intended to assist both employers and apprentices to understand their duties and responsibilities relating to the apprenticeship programme. A copy of the code of practice can be found at:

[Apprenticeship Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices](#)

5. Can you provide access for the apprentices to the type of work that allows them gain the necessary experience and develop their skills across the full range of competencies included in the programme?

As apprenticeships are based on a work learn model it is important that you as the provider of the on-the-job learning elements can provide apprentices with a range of projects and work that will enable them to develop their skills and put their theory into practice. Apprentices will be expected to draw on their experiences as part of their assignments and continued assessments. Apprentices will be required to complete at least 1 significant project based on their employer. Confidentiality and non-disclosure of sensitive company information will be advised at all times.

The University of Limerick will provide guidance to apprentices on the suitability of projects but these must be facilitated within the apprentice work environment

In addition, apprentices are required to attend and participate in lectures and classes which are part of their off-the-job learning. Some of these may take place on campus in the University and are scheduled according to the relevant modules. Classes, webinars and masterclasses that are delivered online may take place during office hours and while all online classes are recorded and made available for offline viewing at a later stage many provide an opportunity for apprentices for Q&A and clarification from tutors and so it is important that they be provided with the flexibility to attend.

On-the-job learning resources will also include releasing the apprentice for masterclasses to enhance their learning. These will take place periodically throughout the year and apprentices can usually chose from a variety of masterclasses that best suit their individual interests.

6. Can you provide a qualified or experienced staff member who will act as the apprentice's In-Company Mentor?

Each apprentice must be allocated an In-Company Mentor (a maximum of 4 apprentices to 1 mentor) whose key role is to support and enable the apprentice to complete the programme and their on-the-job learning. The role of the in-company mentor is not to formally assess any part of the apprenticeship programme as all assessments are done by the University of Limerick.

Mentors instead fulfil a vital role as advocate/facilitator/enabler depending on their role in the company and specific experience. An apprentice may have more than one in-company-mentor if they wish, though this is not compulsory.

Mentors must agree to have regular documented meetings with the apprentice throughout the programme and these form part of the apprentices community of practice and reflective learning. The in-company mentor may have one or more of the following:

- Enabling capacity – to ensure the candidate dedicates enough 'on-the-job' time to the programme to ensure successful completion in the given timeframe.
- Subject matter knowledge in the area of study.
- Academic expertise through having completed a higher programme of study (at minimum a level 8) or have 5+ years of relevant sector experience.

Customised training for the mentor will be provided by the University. Continuous support throughout the duration of the programme is also provided. The In-Company Mentor will be required to provide a CV and proof of qualifications to determine their suitability to mentor.



Role of the In-Company Mentor

- Familiarise themselves with the Cybersecurity Practitioner apprenticeship programme.
- Facilitate the apprentice's learning in the workplace by conducting a minimum of 4 mentoring meetings per year.
- Promote independence and autonomy in learning and in the completion of tasks and assignments.
- Foster a supportive environment to complete on-the-job and off-the-job learning.
- Facilitate peer learning with other experienced members of staff.
- Attend a mandatory briefing day workshop at the beginning of the apprenticeship programme.

The workplace mentor may also:

- Participate in and/or contribute to the National Programme Board.
- Liaise with the course director, academic supervisor and the apprenticeship programme manager on apprentice progress.

Registering an Apprentice

The employer must be approved by UL and SOLAS in order to register an apprentice on this programme.

The Consortia and programme board will accept and review applications on an ongoing basis. The closing date is the end of June each year in advance of the programme start with Induction in August and teaching in September. If you are interested in coming on board as a host employer and in applying for this apprenticeship, please contact apprenticeships@ul.ie. Application and Company Registration is a 2 stage process. Further details will be provided to the apprentice and employer at the outset.

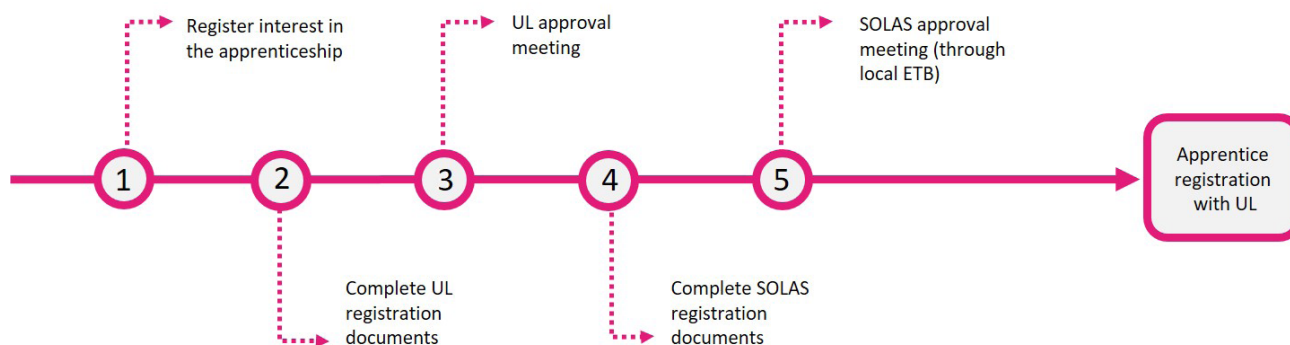
The Role of SOLAS



SOLAS, as the further education and training authority, is the lead agency responsible for apprenticeships on behalf of the Government. They work in close partnership with employers, the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, industry and education and training providers across further and higher education.

SOLAS' responsibility includes maintenance of a national register of employers approved to take on apprentices and a national register of apprentices. SOLAS have authorised the network of over forty uthorised Officers (AO) located within Education and Training Boards (ETB) around the country, to carry out key employer assessment and liaison activities for the apprenticeship system, along with apprentice registration and ongoing support and monitoring duties.

For an employer to gain approval to train apprentices in a particular occupation, s/he must demonstrate that they have the capacity and the ability to provide quality, relevant on-the-job training to apprentices as per the requirements of the national apprenticeship programme and the statutory apprenticeship system overall.



Stages to become an Approved Employer

Stage 1: UL application

1. Register interest by completing the [Expression of Interest form](#) or by emailing apprenticeships@ul.ie.
2. Complete and return the UL Cybersecurity Practitioner Apprenticeship Application form along with supporting documentation.
 - a. Proof of mentor qualifications (photo/scan of parchment)
 - b. Proof of apprentice qualifications
3. Attend an approval visit with UL programme manager, mentor, apprentice and person responsible for apprenticeships in the organisation.
4. Following UL approval, the UL programme manager will send all documentation to the local ETB.

Stage 2: Statutory registration

5. ETB arranges a statutory approval visit and will ask the employer to complete the following:
 - a. SOLAS Suitability to Train form
 - b. Apprentice registration form
 - c. Provide apprentice photo (signed)
6. Following Solas approval*, the UL programme manager will provide the apprentice with a link to apply to UL as a apprentice and register on the programme.

Apprentice/Apprentice Registration

7. Apprentices applies to UL by completing the online application form and uploading the following:
 - a. A copy of passport (in the event of not having a passport, a copy of birth cert will be accepted).
 - b. An official copy of qualifications, undergraduate and postgraduate (transcripts and parchments required).
 - c. English language certificate if English is not their first language.
 - d. Cybersecurity Practitioner Apprenticeship Application form.
 - e. Online registration fee of €35.
8. Apprentices will receive an official offer letter for the programme which they must accept by doing one of the following:
 - Pay €250 acceptance fee (which comes off your total fee payable)
 - Attach a letter of sponsorship on headed paper which must be signed and stamped by your company
3. On receipt of payment or sponsorship letter, the apprentice will be sent instructions on how to enrol onto their course and register for their modules to officially become registered apprentices of UL.

The company registration with UL and SOLAS is a one-off process and any additional apprentices who wish to register in subsequent years can express an interest by emailing: apprenticeships@ul.ie.

There is no limit on the number of apprentices that an organisation can have.



* If the employer is deemed unsuitable, the SOLAS Authorised Officer will identify what requirements remain to be met and subsequently, a re-visit can be scheduled to re-assess.

Frequently Asked Questions



What is the value proposition of the apprenticeships to employers?

This apprenticeship programme has been developed to meet current and future demand for suitably qualified Cybersecurity personnel employed across all industry sectors.

What are the benefits to your business?

- Boost your business productivity and competitiveness
- Create a talent pipeline by developing your inhouse talent and investing in existing staff
- Cost effective training with highly subsidised fees and flexible training
- Bring new thinking to your business through the combination of on-the-job and off-the-job learning
- Strengthen your employer brand and awareness

Is there a cost associated with taking on an apprentice?

As these programmes are suitable for existing employees, all apprentices need to have an Irish contract of employment in place.

What are the programme fees associated with the Cybersecurity Practitioner apprenticeship?

Fees attributed to the Cybersecurity Practitioner programme will be based on a pro rata basis and can either be paid by the apprentice or the employer. There is also a €35 application fee payable at the time of registration.

Once an apprentice receives their letter of offer for the programme, there is a requirement that an acceptance fee must be paid. This can be paid in one of two ways:

- Pay €250 acceptance fee (this will be deducted from the overall programme fee)
- Submit a letter of sponsorship on headed paper, signed and approved by the employer

Is there any funding available for apprenticeships?

Yes – there are various funds available for organisations who take on apprentices at all levels:

- Apprenticeship Employer Grant - €2000 per annum available to employers subject to terms and conditions.
- Gender Diversity Bursary - €2,666 payable in apprenticeship programmes with greater than 80% representation of a single gender.
- Údarás na Gaeltachta Apprentice Scholarship Scheme – for apprentices living in Gaeltacht areas.

For information on the above grants, please contact SOLAS directly

Does the apprentice have to leave work for long periods to attend college?

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As with all apprenticeships company support and commitment to the programme and the on-the-job learning elements is crucial.

On-the-job learning is delivered by the employer through providing the apprentice with the scope to engage in meaningful projects, to provide opportunities and access to relevant work experience to complement the chosen apprenticeship and to incorporate their learning in practical activities. There must be coherence between the on-the-job and off-the-job learning to reinforce and embed the learning gleaned from the programme.

What qualification does the apprentice get?

Upon successful completion of the programme, apprentices will graduate with a NFQ Level 8 Degree in Cybersecurity (BSc)

Progression opportunities are available for those who wish to continue their studies into the next levels and onwards to the Professional Doctorate Programme (Level 10). Indeed, apprenticeships are acknowledged as vital elements in the economic regeneration of countries across the globe.

What is the Community of Practice?

Professional competencies and skills as well as linking on-the-job and off-the-job elements will all be captured through significant reflective learning modules that are built into the programme and narrated on an ongoing basis through the semester. A total of 6 reflective learning modules will be undertaken.

Along with their taught programme of study all apprentices will engage in a Community of Practice where they will have opportunities to interact and engage in peer-to-peer learning activities around the academic content and on-the-job learning. Key components of the programme are industry based seminars and master classes with sector experts. Apprentices will have different levels of experience and knowledge of their industry depending on their organisational role and will benefit from seminars to expand their knowledge and learning. In company mentor meetings will form an essential component of the Community of Practice.

Contacts

If you would like to discuss apprenticeships with one of our programme managers, please contact us using one of the following methods:

Email: apprenticeships@ul.ie
Tel: Elaine Butler 061-237798

Further information on our apprenticeship programmes can also be found at:

Web: <https://www.ul.ie/ulearning/flexible-learning-courses/apprenticeships>

