

Transport Operations and Commercial Driving Apprenticeship

There has been an increase in apprenticeship programmes across every sector in recent years, and with the launch of the Transport Operations & Commercial Driving apprenticeship, the transport sector is no different.

Industry heads hope that this training programme will change the perception of commercial driving as a profession, through creating awareness in schools by informing parents and career guidance counsellors of the varied driving roles within the freight distribution sector which offer rewarding and challenging career opportunities.

The programme started in September 2022 with 21 apprentices and Aidan Flynn, Chairperson of the Transport Operations & Commercial Driving Apprenticeship, says it will make a 'huge difference to the industry'. "This new apprenticeship will serve to be the catalyst to attract young people and vitally more women into our industry to support business growth. The academic qualification offers validity and value to the profession of driving and it will support career progression opportunities within the workforce. In addition, while the average size haulage business has just over five trucks, this programme can support succession planning, with sons or daughters gaining a business qualification whilst attaining their driving licence and supporting the legacy of their family business. Also, having more education and training options in our sector, supported by the collaborative focus of the logistics and supply chain skills forum, will support Ireland's ambitions to be leaders in supply chain and logistics."

Along with benefitting the industry as a whole, this new apprenticeship, which is delivered by ATU Sligo, is also a great opportunity for both participants and employers and since its launch, has attracted a great deal of interest.

"An apprenticeship is a way for both young people and adult learners to earn while they learn," said Flynn. "The Transport Operations & Commercial Driving Apprenticeship is designed to deliver upon the industry need to attract more entrants to the profession of commercial driving, sow the seed for lifelong learning and support career progression opportunities for the apprentice through the attainment of a Level 6 Higher Certificate in Transport Services and Commercial Driving. For an employer, hiring apprentices helps businesses to grow their own talent by developing a motivated, skilled and qualified workforce – and we have been inundated with enquiries from employers and potential apprentices so we hope that we will see increased numbers starting the apprenticeship year on year. To avail of this 'earn as you learn' apprenticeship the apprentice must be in full time employment and the employer must be approved by 'SOLAS' as fit to train apprentices. There are many employers looking to recruit apprentices which is supported by an apprenticeship employer grant of €2,000 per apprentice per year."

With over 40,000 Irish registered Heavy Goods Vehicles, greater than 3.5 tonnes, on the roads in Ireland, Flynn hopes that this new programme will also raise awareness of the important role commercial drivers play in today's society as they keep supply chains, across all sectors, open and flowing smoothly.

To this end, the new apprenticeship programme, which covers both practical work experience and online learning, is open to both the haulage and own account sector and covers a 'significant variety of roles'



including working as a tipper driver for a construction company, delivering fuel to homes, national and international haulage, retail distribution, working in the waste management sector or even the entertainment industry.

"One of the main objectives of any apprenticeship programme is to support a sustainable and skilled workforce for employers and to support career progression opportunities for the apprentices," he said. "In addition, apprenticeships sow the seed for lifelong learning which further supports and enhances the employer's workspace and the employees' ambitions."

According to Flynn, the transport and logistics sector has been less successful than others in recruiting younger workers over the years due to many factors 'including a perception that it is made up of predominantly low skilled jobs required to work long hours'.

This, along with a lack of diversity within the profession, is another reason why this new programme is essential.

"According to Road Safety Authority data, there are over 200,000 Heavy Goods Vehicle licences issued in Ireland and only 2% are issued to women in both C & CE category - this must change," he said. "Another concern is that over 60% of HGV full licences holders are over the age of 50 – so the importance of training and education in shaping the image of driving as a profession and attracting younger people into the profession cannot be understated. The Earn as you Learn apprenticeship offers great benefits to apprentices and employers alike. College isn't for everyone, and these new apprenticeships offer young people the opportunities to get employment with the added benefit of earning a qualification on the national framework of qualifications at the same time. The Transport Operations and Commercial Driving apprenticeship is unique in that it is a fully funded academic qualification as well as covering the costs of HGV driving lessons and driving tests. So, the apprentices will qualify with a higher certificate in Transport Operations and Commercial Driving as well as a Full C & CE Category Driving licence and DRIVER CPC qualifications. The freight distribution and logistics sector is a vibrant exciting and hugely important sector to the Irish economy and there are many different and diverse driving jobs within national and international haulage distribution, retail and food services distribution, waste management as well as driving for local authorities and or semi state organisations. Drivers are an essential ingredient of the Irish economy, and this apprenticeship will attract young people into an ageing workforce as well as prove attractive to women who are tragically underrepresented in this role."



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The Transport Operations & Commercial Driving Apprenticeship provides the academic qualification and practical training and work experience that supports a vibrant and exciting career in the freight distribution and logistics sector. Apprentices will also receive expert driving lessons and training in advance of completing their C/CE driving test and attaining the Driver CPC qualification.

The academic award for this apprenticeship is a Higher Certificate (NFQ level 6) in Business in Transport Services and is the first qualification on the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) linked to the profession of commercial driving!

Benefits for Apprentices

- ✓ QQI Level 6 Award 'Higher Certificate in Transport Operations & Commercial Driving'.
- ✓ Internationally recognised qualification.
- ✓ Earn as you Learn.
- ✓ Two year employment contract leading to permanent position.
- ✓ Gaining valuable on the job experience and workplace skills.
- ✓ Excellent Career Opportunities in the vibrant sector.

Benefits of recruiting apprentices for Employers

- ✓ Attracts new entrants into the business.
- ✓ Increases pool of qualified people within the business.
- ✓ Help with succession planning.
- ✓ The programme is built around work related experience and work specific projects.
- ✓ Apprenticeship State Grant for employers of apprentices €4,000 funding.

Minimum Entry Requirements

- Hold a Full 'B' Driver Licence.
- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Meet medical requirements for driving.
- Minimum entry requirements are a grade H7/O6 or above in five Leaving Certificate (or equivalent) subjects.
 - A minimum of grade O6 must be obtained in English.
 - A minimum of grade O6 or a B2 or above in Foundation level must be obtained in Mathematics.
- Holders of a QQI Level 5 or Level 6 (or equivalent) in cognate areas (eg business, logistics and distribution, supply chain management, etc.) can apply for entry onto year 1 of the programme.
- A mature candidate, over the age of 23, who does not hold qualifications as set out above, but who:
 - Has a minimum of two years' experience working as a commercial driver.
 - Is recommended by their employer.
 - Demonstrates the correct attitudes, behaviours and literacy skills.

The Coordinating training and education provider for this apprenticeship programme is Atlantic Technological University Sligo (ATU Sligo)
The lead proposer is the Freight Transport Association Ireland (FTAI)

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