



A MODERN APPRENTICESHIP

A quiet revolution is underway in IT apprenticeships, one in which government, employers, professional bodies and awarding bodies are aligned. Paul Jagger FBCC, reports.

The creation of the new Trailblazer Apprenticeships and the association of them with the Register of IT Technicians presents an integrated masterpiece of workplace learning and development that any medieval craft guild would be proud of.

The new apprenticeships form an outstanding package that benefits employers and apprentices alike. The fundamental characteristics of the integrated programme are:

- employment in a technical occupation;
- work based learning linked to external certification;
- assessment based upon evidence of full competence in a defined occupation;
- eligibility for entry to a register of competence;
- membership of a recognised professional body such as BCS, the IET, and others.

Trailblazer Apprenticeships

Trailblazer Apprenticeships are the gold standard of modern apprenticeship and are one of the outcomes of the Richard Review of Apprenticeships (2012). They:

- are employer-led apprenticeships with a strict minimum duration of 12 months;
- lead to what employers have defined as full competence in specific occupation;
- place a greater emphasis on English and mathematics,
- are linked to professional registration (where available);
- will be graded pass, merit or distinction.

Trailblazer Apprenticeships for IT

The Trailblazer Apprenticeships for the IT sector are being developed by The Tech Partnership, which is a network of employers across the IT sector and beyond.

The Trailblazer Apprenticeship enables the integration of third party vendor certification and focuses on assessment toward the end of the apprenticeship based upon solid evidence of knowledge, skills and behaviour. The foundation of the Trailblazer Apprenticeship is a job in a skilled occupation - these apprenticeships combine genuine employment with continuous learning.

So far, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) has approved Trailblazer Apprenticeships in the

following occupations:

- cyber intrusion analyst;
- digital marketer;
- digital media technology practitioner;
- network engineer;
- software developer;
- software tester.

Note: Other IT or digital occupations may be added in the future.

Register of competence for IT apprentices

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT has led the development of a new Register of IT Technicians that is ideally suited to the needs of employers, recruiters and apprentices.

Much like the existing Chartered IT Professional status, the Registered IT Technician is a professional who has demonstrated their competence based upon evidence and assessed against the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA).

A Registered IT Technician can take pride in being independently recognised for doing a technical job well and in joining the IT profession.

Who can join the Register of IT Technicians?

Any IT practitioner who is operating at SFIA level 3 or higher will be able to apply to become a 'Registered IT Technician' (RITTech), whether they be an apprentice or not.

However, the register is particularly relevant to apprentices on completion of their apprenticeship, and the intention is that assessment for Registered Technician status will be integrated into the apprenticeship in a seamless fashion.

Note: The fundamental prerequisite is to be, or have recently been, employed in a technical role in which IT knowledge and skills are competently and confidently applied at level 3 of SFIA.

How will candidates for Registered IT Technician be assessed?

The application to become an RITTech will be conducted online, providing a simple, quick and thorough process that can be integrated into an apprenticeship.

Assessment will be split into two areas: generic assessments that apply to everyone, and an individual's choice of criteria depending upon their particular area of technical experience (i.e., their occupational specialism).

The assessment will be conducted by a professional body against the SFIA standard – a model that applies to the entire breadth of the IT industry, in the UK and globally.

Apprentices will choose where their skills best fit into the SFIA model. They will provide evidence of their achievements during their apprenticeship (i.e., their 'masterpiece') and write a statement that maps their skills to SFIA level 3 or higher.

The apprentice's evidence must be supported by an attestation from their employer, mentor or apprenticeship supervisor. The apprentice's application will be reviewed by the professional body who may require additional evidence,

perhaps in the form of a telephone interview.

Where technical competence meets the independent SFIA level 3 criteria of the RITTech standard, a place on the register will be offered upon successful completion of the apprenticeship (subject to joining a recognised professional body and signing up to a professional code of conduct).

Benefits of a register of competence

A place on the Register of IT Technicians offers benefits to the apprentice, to employers and to the wider IT profession, including:

- commitment to a code of conduct;
- membership of a recognised professional body (e.g. BCS or the IET);
- post-nominal letters (RITTech);
- access to continuous professional development;
- independent assessment of competence conducted by a chartered professional body;
- three-year validity for currency;
- an assessment model based upon global standards (SFIA);
- assessment through evidence of achievement in employment;
- confirmation by employer/mentor;
- independent acknowledgement of proficiency in performing a technical skilled job.

Ultimately the Register provides employers and recruiters with a simple means to confirm that an apprentice is 'a safe pair of hands' and one whose competence is current in a fast-changing area of professionalism, regardless of the individual's technical specialism.

Registered IT Technician and CITP

Chartered IT Professional (CITP) status is the benchmark of competence for senior IT professionals, and like RITTech it is assessed against SFIA. Candidates for

CITP will have a minimum of 10 years experience in the IT profession, of which a minimum of three of the past five years will show clear evidence of working at SFIA level 5 or higher.

Successful apprentices who have achieved RITTech status may progress on to CITP status later in their career if they develop to a level of influence, autonomy, complexity and business skills commensurate with SFIA level 5 or higher.

Other professional bodies and the RITTech

Other recognised professional bodies will be able to adopt the Register of IT Technicians for operations in the UK or elsewhere in future.

First Registered IT Technicians awards

It is expected that the first apprentices who complete under the Trailblazer programme will be awarded RITTech status in 2017. Existing higher apprenticeship programmes will also be recognised as developing knowledge, skills and experience that maps to the SFIA standard required of the register.

Recently qualified apprentices in IT / digital occupations will also be able to join the register, subject to independent verification of their competence.

Details of the Trailblazer apprenticeship can be found at:

www.apprenticeships.org.uk/standards

Details of the Register of Competence can be found at:

www.bcs.org/it-technician-register

Details of the Skills Framework for the Information Age can be found at:

www.sfia-online.org