Good afternoon. My name is Fergal McCarthy, Chairperson of the Education Committee of the Teaching Council in Ireland and I have been invited to this meting of EUNEC to provide you with a presentation of the review of apprenticeship education in Ireland and to set out for you the implementation plan that has developed following this review.

At the outset, I wish to advise that the Teaching Council is the professional standards body for teachers at primary, second level, and further education. The Teaching Council operates with legislative authority as the regulatory body for teachers and all teachers working in recognised schools must be registered with the Teaching Council. As most aprenticeship education has in the past been provided outside of these settings, the Teaching Council has had a limited influence on the standards involved in apprenticeship education with the exception of two further education settings, Mallow in Cork and Dun Laoighre near Dublin. It should be noted within the structural changes in Further Education that the Teaching Council’s remit in this sector may in time be expanded in the area of apprenticeship education. The Council is currently engaged in a strategic conversation with many of the stakeholders in this sector so as to inform its thinking about these developments. The Council’s remit focuses on the quality of teaching and learning in all sectors. There is much therefore to recommend an expansion of its remit. But the sector, like all others, has its own dynamic and particular challenges and issues. The last thing the Council wants to do is to rush into this space, however well intentioned such a move might be.In this context, the Teaching Council very much welcomes the opportunity to be part of this discusion in relation to VET initiatives.

In May 2013, The Minister for Education and Skills announced a review of apprenticeship education in Ireland to determine whether or not the current model should be ‘retained, adapted, or replaced by an alternative model of vocational education and training’.

This review has been part of a wide ranging reform programme in the Further Education and Training sector, which has included major structural changes and the establishment of a new body to oversee the VET sector in Ireland now known as SOLAS.

The review characterised apprenticeship as being substantial in depth and duration so as to allow the qualified apprentice to work autonomously and competently in a specific area of work. The review envisaged apprenticeship education as being employer led, of at least 2 years in duration and should have a minimum of 50% on the job training. The review identified the need for a more flexible model of apprenticeship, potentially leading to qualifications at any level from level 5 upwards on the National Framework of Qualifications.

A key recommendation of the review, with the aim of underpinning and establishing a new apprenticeship system is the establishment of an Apprenticeship Council. There are two principal areas to be addressed by the Apprenticeship Council. Firstly, it must review existing apprenticeship curricula as a matter of urgency with a move away from generic placement at level 6 and to programme durations based on the time needed to achieve the learning outcomes necessary for the occupation and secondly, it is to scope the development of new apprenticeships. Prior to the Apprenticeship Council being established, FAS, the previous Apprenticeship authority had already commenced a review of five trades Electrical, Plumbing, Carpentry and Joinery, Metal Fabrication, and Heavy Vehicle Mechanics. New standards have been developed and new draft curricula have been drawn up and they are currently being considered by the Apprenticeship Council prior to their submission to the QQI for public consultation and validation. This process will ultimately allow the QQI to place these qualifications on the appropriate level of the Qualification Framework. This process has been thorough but it has also been extremely time consuming and slow. The process involved:

* Establishment of individual standards development groups
* Drafting of standards
* Establishment of project steering groups
* Development of curricula by the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC)
* Review of standards by an external review group
* Submission of standards to QQI for public consultation and adoption
* Submission of draft programmes (including curricula) to QQI for validation

All of this material and work will be completed and submitted to QQI by the end of 2014.

The remaining trades will also be reviewed. Currently however discussions are underway to ascertain if the system described above could be streamlined and accelerated based on the experience garnered over the review of the initial 5 trades.

In the context of the second objective the Department of Education and Skills is currently engaged in discussions with representatives of enterprise sectors in Ireland to promote the development of apprenticeships in new occupational areas and to seek their support. While countries like Germany have a strong culture of this type of work place supported education with over 300 apprenticeship awards, Ireland is starting from a low base. While Ireland places a high value on apprenticeship education, and has a very strong track record at World Skills Olympic level, there are merely 22 areas of validated apprenticeship courses. Outside of the traditional apprenticeship sectors very few companies are formally engaged in work based learning. There are however examples of some innovative practices such as the Retail Management Degree offered through a collaboration between retail companies and third level providers such as lidl and the Dublin Business School.

It is envisaged that the Apprenticeship Council will identify new areas where apprenticeships will provide a valuable route for skills development and skills acquisition. In terms of context however it should be noted that Irish society places a very high value on third level education. In fact Ireland has the highest level of third level attainment among 30 to 34 year olds in the EU – 53% compared to the EU average of 37%. Many companies and indeed many professions provide additional on the job training to university graduates. This of itself is helping to create a culture of indusrty and education providers collaborating with the education and training of the future employee.

Given then that Ireland does not have the culture or tradition in the provision of apprenticeship education beyond the existing settings the Department of Education and Skills has developed a collaboration with the German Irish Chamber of Commerce. It is envisaged that international companies from countries with a strong apprenticeship tradition sited in Ireland would promote apprenticeship education within their Irish operations.

It is the stated objective of the DES to seek the support of representatives of the enterprise sectors in Ireland to develop proposals for new apprenticeships. The DES is committed to provide dedicated funding to develop this initiative.

The Apprenticeship Council will invite proposals for new areas for apprenticeship education from enterprise and providers of education and training. The proposals received will require these proposers to set out the labour market needs justifying the establishment of the apprenticeship scheme, as well as the willingness of employers to recruit and meet the relevant costs associated with the employment of apprentices. These proposals will also have to comprehend the format and structure of the programme being proposed as well as an outline of the main occupational needs to be addressed. The proposal will have to indicate the entry level of the learner as well as the transferability of the skills and avenues for the progression of the learner to the next level of learning. It is anticipated that this invitation will issue towards the end of 2014 with submissions to be received in the first quarter of 2015.

The Apprenticeship Council will examine the viability of the proposals. If it determines a proposal to be viable it will issue an interim report to the Minister in the second quarter of 2015.

Within this report to the Minister the Apprenticeship Council will identify the measures that may be necessary from the DES to facilitate the development of the proposal.

This will involve the identification of the resource implications of the proposal

Provide an assessment of the overall interest in apprenticeship or other forms of work- based learning in this particular area of enterprise.

It is envisaged that this work will be completed in the second quarter of 2015.

If the Minister accepts the benefits of this identified area of education and training as being best served by apprenticeship education then the standards and validation will be of particular concern.

The awards development process normally involves the universities, institutes of technology and large further education providers. For occupationally focused awards this normally entails the awarding body and the education provider with a representative group of employers and experts to develop the detailed award standard.

A detailed curriculum will need to be developed to achieve the learning outcomes detailed in the standards specification. This curriculum will set out the content, resources, duration, the on and off the job elements, entry requirements, assessment procedures and the position of the award on the framework.

There will also have to be clarity in relation to recruitment processes and of allocation of places to registered employers. This will include the provision of an apprenticeship contract to avoid the exploitation of apprentices or the apprenticeship scheme.

When the Apprenticeship Council is satisfied that a new apprenticeship is ready to commence it shall seek the Ministers approval for its commencement. The target date for the completion of this work is the end of 2015 into the second quarter of 2016.

The overall intention is for the outcome of this process to be underpinned by legislation. The overall governance arrangements for existing apprenticeship scheme will be harmonized to manage the expanded and diversified apprenticeship sector. This new structure will have the capacity to develop and research occupational forecasting capability. It will also develop arrangements to secure alternative provision for apprentice training in cases of redundancy. Other areas of competence that this process should provide would be the strengthening of arrangements to recognize prior learning,, create pathways towards Master craftsman programmes and the consideration of pre apprenticeship programmes. Actions in this regard will commence in the first quarter of 2016.

There are models of work experience as part of the delivery of a number of existing programmes most notably in the further education sector. These courses will continue to ensure that the qualifications are relevant to the industry.

In conclusion, the Irish government has identified that there is a mismatch between the skills required by employers and the skills of potential employees. The CEDFOP research demonstrates that those that are educated through apprenticeship education spend a shorter term unemployed and that there is a mismatch between the skills that are currently being taught and the skills demanded by industry. In the context of the crisis around youth unemployment it behoves us to develop and widen our apprenticeship schemes.

Thank you