



Characteristics Statement

Higher Education in Apprenticeships

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About this Statement

This document is a Characteristics Statement about the characteristics and distinctive features of apprenticeships in the UK where they include a higher education award, where they are a higher education programme and where they include higher level learning delivered through a higher education provider.

This Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement was written by the Higher Education in Apprenticeships Advisory Group and was published by the QAA in 2019. It is a reference point for all those involved in the design, delivery and review of UK higher education where it is included within, or as part of, an apprenticeship; for individuals considering undertaking apprenticeships; and for employers who are considering using apprenticeships to meet their workforce development objectives.

Characteristics Statements support [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (the Frameworks). They normally complement and contextualise the information within the Frameworks, providing more detail about the distinctive features of qualifications at particular levels such as master's or doctoral degrees or for qualifications and learning at any level, such as qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body. This Statement should be read in conjunction with these Frameworks.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, an apprenticeship will always include a qualification. In England, an apprenticeship might include higher education qualifications delivered by a [Registered Provider](#); the Apprenticeship Standard will specify if a qualification is included. For example, a higher education provider may deliver an apprenticeship that includes professional recognition, but not a qualification. Degree Apprenticeships in England and Wales must include a degree award (see Appendix 4.1). In order to aid comparability and equivalence of all higher education in apprenticeships, the level descriptors in the country-specific frameworks will apply.

This Characteristics Statement must be read in the context of [The UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code), which is the key reference point for all UK higher education. The Quality Code is underpinned by twelve advice and guidance themes which cover the learner journey, for example: Course Design and Development, Learning and Teaching, Assessment, Partnerships and Monitoring and Evaluation. QAA has also published detailed advice and guidance on [quality assuring higher education in apprenticeships](#). QAA advice and guidance on work-based learning, which includes higher education in apprenticeships, is also particularly relevant.

Higher education in apprenticeships may be at any level in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) or *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS); the characteristics of graduates who successfully complete higher education awards are described in the relevant qualification descriptors and other Characteristics Statements. Reference should also be made to guidance such as that given in Subject Benchmark Statements.

This Characteristics Statement also complements and contextualises the information provided by other national organisations overseeing apprenticeships in the UK to whom reference should also be made.

Who may find this document useful?

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of higher education in apprenticeship programmes
- a prospective apprentice/learner/student thinking about undertaking an apprenticeship
- an employer wishing to find out about how higher education in apprenticeships can help deliver workforce development objectives.

Relationship to the regulatory landscape

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding and/or regulatory bodies. These requirements have been considered in the development of this statement, but this Characteristics Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within this Statement where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources. QAA takes no responsibility for the content of external websites.

Terminology: Higher education provider

Higher education provider is used throughout the document for ease of reference. All higher education in apprenticeship provision is underpinned by tri-partite agreements between the Employer, Apprentice and the higher education provider.

In England, the provision of higher education in apprenticeships can be subcontracted to another provider organisation, for instance an employer, training provider or further education college. In Wales, the provision of higher education in apprenticeships can be delivered by a further education college where a higher education institution has a franchise agreement to deliver a particular course, or courses, at the college.

However, throughout the UK, the higher education provider responsible for the quality and standards of its awards will need to assure itself that any contract between other parties, that impacts on the awards, will not prevent the higher education provider from assuring the quality and standards of that award.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Statement can be found in the [QAA glossary](#).

1 Context and purposes of higher education in apprenticeships

1.1 Apprenticeships

An Apprenticeship is 'a job with training to industry standards'¹ and, like 'degree' and 'university' is a protected title.² Apprenticeships integrate work and learning and may lead to a qualification; some will also lead to recognition by one or more professional bodies. There may be a requirement for the apprenticeship to have a sustainable job outcome at the end of the programme.

Apprenticeships are a key vehicle by which the UK is seeking to ensure that public and private sector employers are able to recruit and develop the workforce they need.

Requirements and specifications for Apprenticeships are developed in different ways across the UK; in England they will be either an Apprenticeship Standard or an Apprenticeship Framework;³ Apprenticeship Frameworks are used in Wales, Northern Ireland and in Scotland. Different organisations have responsibility for their development: in England it is the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), in Scotland it is Skills Development Scotland (SDS), in Wales it will become Welsh Government and in Northern Ireland it is the Department for the Economy (DEFNI).

1.2 Context

The twin aims of the apprenticeship policy agenda across all countries of the UK are to increase productivity and social mobility. They are intended to raise productivity by driving up skills levels in the UK to maximise national competitiveness. Programmes of higher education in apprenticeships should demonstrate how they respond to this context.

Employers, employer representative bodies, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and higher education providers are involved in the development of apprenticeships across the UK; the ways in which they are involved, and the process, vary across the UK nations. Fundamental to their involvement is the need to ensure that the knowledge, skills and behaviours developed through an apprenticeship are relevant to the needs of the economy, employers and individuals, including the transferability of learning for the changing requirements of work.

Higher education in apprenticeships also has a role in contributing to social mobility by providing an alternative route into higher education for non-traditional learner, for improving future earning potential and accessing a professional career that might not otherwise have been available. Apprenticeships should develop transferable and lifelong learning skills that will enable the graduate apprentice to maintain employment throughout their working life.

1.3 Purposes of higher education in apprenticeships

Apprenticeships that include a higher education qualification, or higher levels of learning, have been developed to meet the need for higher-level skills, technical, graduate and professional occupations across the UK.

¹ www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship

² www.qaa.ac.uk/en/reviewing-higher-education/degree-awarding-powers-and-university-title

³ Apprenticeship Frameworks in England are being phased out and should cease to exist by 2021.

In order to ensure that increases in skill levels can be measured consistently, apprenticeships across the UK are aligned to established qualification levels and credit level descriptors. It is essential that levels of professions/occupations are aligned with levels of apprenticeships and levels of qualifications to promote and build clear pathways for professional careers. Where credits are used this should align with recognised credit frameworks, for example, the [Higher Education Credit Framework for England](#), [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#), and [Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales \(CQFW\)](#). The greater the alignment between apprenticeships, qualifications and professional status, the more transferable the outcome for the apprentice and the employer.

An apprenticeship should also provide progression opportunities for further (lifelong) study which could include, for example, another apprenticeship at a higher level, professional qualifications, and non-apprenticeship higher education study.

In order to meet the needs of employers and provide opportunities for access to professional careers, higher education in apprenticeships requires, and should promote, dynamic and sustainable collaboration between employers, higher education providers and professional bodies.

1.4 Characteristics of higher education in apprenticeships

Apprenticeships incorporating higher education:

- are constituted as first and foremost a job which requires work-integrated learning (see paragraph 2.1). The workplace becomes a site for the development and generation of knowledge, understanding, skills and professional behaviours rather than just a site for their application.
- are designed to enable apprentices to develop professional/occupational competence within a defined occupation and apprenticeship pathway
- are based on occupational standards
- support inclusion and diversity in the workplace and should ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment
- require the integration of on and off-the-job learning
- may require at least 20 per cent off-the-job learning and/or meet notional guided hours
- require the development of professional and/or occupational competence that is concerned with the ability to continually enhance professional practice to drive innovation, informed by codes of ethical practice and values. This should be distinguished from a 'closed' model of competence, which is only concerned with the ability to perform a set task to an established standard
- seek to maximise the transferability and recognition of apprenticeship outcomes to enhance career development opportunities for apprentices and deliver workforce development objectives for employers
- require comprehensive collaboration with employers at all stages
- position the employer as the primary gatekeeper for admissions working closely with the higher education provider
- involve tripartite agreements between employers, apprentices and higher education providers
- include support for apprentices in the workplace by a competent mentor and in their learning and assessment by a qualified trainer/educator/assessor who have sector experience and knowledge
- are not necessarily aligned with traditional academic years and may reflect varied patterns of employment

- may include a higher education qualification; where it does not it will be ascribed at a higher education level
- may include professional recognition.

Apprenticeship Frameworks describe the required learning content and forms of learning and assessment while Apprenticeship Standards (in England) set requirements for occupational competence and End Point Assessment.

Graduates from apprenticeships incorporating higher education have had the benefit of sustained employment as apprentices and will be able to demonstrate the qualities necessary for continued employment, including exercising personal responsibility and decision making. They are able to undertake further training, develop existing knowledge, skills and behaviours and acquire new competencies. The competencies achieved will align to the level of the apprenticeship with reference to the Frameworks.

2 Distinctive features of higher education in apprenticeships

2.1 Integration of on and off-the-job learning

The UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: Work-based learning describes higher education in apprenticeships as the being at the most work-integrated end of the work-based learning continuum.

Higher education in apprenticeships positions the workplace as the primary source of learning; the learning that emerges in the context of undertaking day-to-day work activities is on-the-job learning. This learning is facilitated, supported and enhanced through structured learning inputs by higher education providers and employers; this combination is often referred to as work-integrated learning.

In order to ensure that apprentices have sufficient time to focus on learning, apprenticeships require that employers provide a minimum⁴ of their employed time, or guided hours, to be allocated for this specific purpose, as off-the-job learning. Programmes that deliver higher education in apprenticeships need to be designed to include, and in some cases record, this requirement. However, it is important to note that higher education in apprenticeships cannot be delivered solely through off-the-job learning. Off-the-job can be through one or more of a range of modes of delivery such as, day release, block study, online study, self-directed study or job shadowing. It can take place in a variety of locations but must not be part of an apprentice's normal work duties, with the exception of Scotland. Programmes that deliver higher education in apprenticeships should be designed to, as far as possible, align the off-the-job learning with the day-to-day work activities to maximise the apprentices' opportunities to develop and apply the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to achieve full professional and/or occupational competence. For longer apprenticeships, the requirement to match on and off-the-job learning to developing apprentice roles and the apprentice's job progression can be particularly important.

Employers and higher education providers should ensure that apprentices are given the support necessary to achieve professional and/or occupational competence. This may include: formative feedback and assessment of developing areas of competence; the identification of work activities or projects that provide learning opportunities; work-based assessments (both formative and summative); formal progress reviews; and support to develop work and learning study skills. Clear arrangements for both employers and higher education providers to coordinate this support for apprentice learning is a key requirement for effective higher education in apprenticeship delivery.

The distinctiveness of higher education in apprenticeships is significantly defined by the integration of on and off-the-job learning, as well as work-based learning and assessments that reflect authentic work practices and expectations. This requires considerable flexibility in delivery approaches, together with clearly planned support for tri-partite relationships underpinned by formal agreements between employers, higher education providers and apprentices.

⁴ In England, ESFA funding rules require a minimum of 20 per cent off-the-job learning. ESFA publishes guidance on the types of activity that can, and cannot, count as off-the-job.

2.2 Comprehensive collaboration with employers

Employers are central to the development of Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks to ensure that the required knowledge, skills and behaviours, along with any mandatory qualifications, are specified for the relevant professional and/or occupational roles. Apprenticeship programmes should also align with employers' strategic objectives and goals. To ensure that the standards specified align with both higher education and professional expectations, comprehensive collaboration between employers, higher education providers and professional bodies is required. Irrespective of the need to meet an employer's specific requirements, the apprenticeship is a broader (and, therefore, portable) programme which enables mobility of the apprentices once they have completed the apprenticeship.

In many instances, employers may require specific arrangements in terms of the design and delivery of higher education in apprenticeships to meet their workforce development needs or to reflect established working arrangements and practices. For example, this could include flexible modes of delivery, multiple delivery sites, online and blended delivery, alignment of assessed work projects with identified employer priorities, integrating required in-company training. This can require considerable structured and planned collaborative development activity and formal agreements prior to delivery.

The involvement of employers in the design, delivery, progression, quality monitoring and review of higher education in apprenticeships is an essential feature of high-quality higher education in apprenticeship delivery. Where appropriate, the employer might also be involved in designing and/or agreeing details on assessment and confirming achievement of professional competence by the apprentice. The sustained collaboration between employers and higher education providers requires structured partnership arrangements often at both strategic and operational levels to underpin effective working relationships.

2.3 Accessibility

Apprenticeships can increase social mobility and access into further and higher education; the introduction of higher education in apprenticeships allows learners to 'learn and earn', avoid student debt (where student tuition fee loans and maintenance loans apply), gain access to employment (as apprentices), provide an alternative route into higher education, allow access into higher education for those for whom academic study is not the preferred route, improve the apprentices' employability in addition to making higher education more accessible to those already in employment.

Access to apprenticeships should not create barriers to potential learners: recruitment to employment as an apprentice and onto the associated course must comply with relevant legislative requirements including protected characteristics.

All apprentices should have their existing knowledge, skills and behaviours assessed; where appropriate there should be recognition of prior experiential and/or certificated learning (RPL) with a relevant entry point and/or exemption established. Maximum/minimum RPL for apprentices will be subject to the degree-awarding body's regulations and may also be subject to external requirements, for instance, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Funding Rules in England.

Apprenticeships are occupation specific, rather than company specific, and they are intended to be transferable across a sector and to develop skills for lifelong learning.

2.4 Progression

At whichever level the higher education in apprenticeship sits, there should be flexible and transparent ongoing career progression by facilitating opportunities for progression, for instance into an apprenticeship at a higher level, into an alternative career path at the same or another level (recognising prior learning), into studies at a higher level that are not part of an apprenticeship, into professional status or potential career development. The potential progression routes should be established, between provider and employers, when a higher education in apprenticeship programme is approved including progression opportunities provided by professional, or other, providers. Potential and guaranteed progression routes can be established at course approval stage and may include requirements for bridging programmes or continuing professional development opportunities.

In Scotland, there will be appropriate exit points within each Apprenticeship Framework to allow for part achievement and the opportunity to return in the future. Elsewhere in the UK, where this is not a requirement, providers might include interim awards, but these would be outside of the apprenticeship structure and may impact on key performance data such as 'timely completion'.

Where apprentices can gain professional accreditation and/or additional qualifications, either as part of the Apprenticeship Standard/Apprenticeship Framework, or in addition to this, the requirements can be included as part of the approval process and notified to the apprentice through the course documentation, course handbook and so on.

Apprentices must be employed but there is no guarantee of permanent employment after completion of the apprenticeship. As students of a higher education provider they can access the provider's Careers advice and guidance services. In the unfortunate circumstances that an apprentice becomes unemployed during the apprenticeship the higher education provider may need to support the individual in seeking further employment to be able to complete their apprenticeship. The higher education provider can also provide opportunities to transfer into a cognate, non-apprenticeship programme, possibly self-funded.

2.5 Flexibility and adaptability

Apprenticeships are an integration of work and learning, are intended to encourage social mobility and to be suitable for a range of employers who will have a variety of needs, constraints and restraints. In order to meet these diverse and changing situations the employer, the apprentice and the higher education provider will need to be flexible and adaptable, without negatively impacting on the standards and quality of the higher education in apprenticeships provided.⁵

There may need to be:

- Flexible delivery modes and study patterns
- Delivery in and support for apprentices in their workplace
- Multiple start dates, with delivery and assessment throughout a calendar year and out of synchronisation with the academic year and calendar
- Flexible approaches to assessment tasks to enable apprentices to include their work-based learning and experiences

⁵ See www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/work-based-learning and Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships: Current Approaches: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/supporting-resources.

- Flexible approaches to recruitment processes and admissions criteria that may be driven by employers, but always require provider input and involvement
- Flexible approaches to entry points to account for recognition of prior learning and/or entry with advanced standing
- Sufficiently flexible processes to develop and review Apprenticeship Standards and Apprenticeship Frameworks to be able to respond to changing industry needs.

2.6 Partnership

Apprenticeship requirements are specified through an Apprenticeship Standard or an Apprenticeship Framework: these are developed through partnerships between employers and relevant stakeholders including higher education providers and professional and sector bodies, where the apprenticeship is at a higher education level. Degree-awarding bodies need to work in partnership with employers, and other relevant stakeholders, when designing programmes that deliver higher education in apprenticeships.

The [Quality Code](#) includes Core practices that apply to working in partnership:

A Core practice for standards:

- ‘Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.’

A Core practice for quality:

- ‘Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.’

Partnership agreements for higher education in apprenticeships will clearly identify the needs and expectations of all parties and they will contain appropriate clauses to ensure that these practices can be achieved.

A range of partnerships will be required for successful delivery of higher education in apprenticeships; these may include higher education providers, degree awarding bodies, employers and employer bodies, further education colleges, other providers, PSRBs, funding agencies, and others.

All those involved in higher education in apprenticeships should recognise the primary responsibilities of the degree-awarding body for the standards and quality of the higher education and any higher education awards that it offers under its powers. It is also the case that higher education providers will need to recognise that the standards for apprenticeships are also set by other national bodies (such as IfATE in England, SDS in Scotland, DfENI in Northern Ireland and the Welsh Government in Wales). There should be a formal agreement between employers and higher education providers underpinning the delivery of higher education in apprenticeships. This agreement may need to reflect dual, or multiple responsibilities, for standards.

A fundamental partnership required for higher education in apprenticeships is that between the apprentice, the employer and the higher education provider. The approach must, therefore, set out the respective roles, responsibilities and entitlements of the apprentice, the employer and the higher education provider. Sometimes referred to as a tri-partite approach, this arrangement is considered by many to be central to successful delivery of an

apprenticeship. It will be set-out within a commitment statement, or an alternative agreement.

Apprentices, with support from their employers and higher education providers, can be involved in negotiating some, or all, of their courses to meet the work-integrated learning requirements. This negotiation may include live projects for assessment and work-based learning activities through which learning outcomes can be demonstrated.

Learning agreements, signed by the apprentice, the employer and the higher education provider, can be used to articulate what has been agreed with regards to the work-integrated and work-based learning aspects.

2.7 Recruitment and selection

A fundamental requirement of an apprenticeship is that it is a job which incorporates training to industry standards. The apprenticeship must provide employment that must include appropriate learning opportunities to enable the apprentice to develop the occupational and/or professional competence required. Apprentices may be existing employees or new recruits. Any recruitment processes will normally involve a collaboration between the employer and the higher education provider. This might be a joint recruitment process where the employer and higher education provider have equal involvement in developing a job and person specification, designing adverts and marketing campaigns, recruitment and selection. The relationships between employers and higher education providers for recruitment will vary, however, standard applications to higher education courses, for example through UCAS, will not normally apply.

Opportunities for RPL can be identified during the recruitment and selection process and/or the induction and initial assessment. Where RPL is identified it may need to lead to a reduction in the course length and content and a consequential reduction in the price charged. Different country-specific funding rules apply for RPL, these should be checked to ensure compliance.

Successful apprenticeship recruitment and selection will involve both the employer and the higher education provider reaching a common understanding with regards to the required entry criteria for the apprenticeship. Additional requirements may also be set by professional and other bodies for example English and maths requirements for Apprenticeships in England.

2.8 Induction and initial assessment

Apprentices will undertake an induction into the workplace, as a place to work and to learn,⁶ to the higher education provider, to the learning programme and to the education environment for instance virtual learning environments, online enrolment and registration, student support services, learning resources, for example. There can be benefits in providing a joint induction, or a co-ordinated induction, to ensure that the apprentice is appropriately prepared for all aspects of the apprenticeship.

Prior to commencing their apprenticeship, an apprentice should undergo an initial assessment to establish any existing knowledge, skills and behaviours in relation to those required for the apprenticeship being undertaken. Different country-specific funding rules apply to how and whether this 'prior learning' can, or must, be recognised. The prior learning can be experiential or certificated learning. In an effective partnership arrangement,

⁶ The induction will need to be tailored to the individual apprentice, for example those who are progressing from a previous apprenticeship will have different requirements to a new employee.

the employer will be involved in the initial assessment, the decision to recognise prior learning and in determining the impact on an individual apprentice's learning programme and any funding implications.

The Academic Regulations of the higher education provider for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), will state how such assessment is made and when, and how, RPL is awarded. Where RPL is given, or where there is entry with advanced standing, the funding provided for the apprenticeship programme and the length of time to complete the apprenticeships will be adjusted proportionately.

2.9 Monitoring and review

Apprentices and employers are involved in the evaluation of all aspects of higher education in apprenticeships; this is a requirement for the higher education provider and may also be a requirement for the funding body and other organisations. For example, in England there is a requirement for regular tripartite progress reviews; in Wales, apprentices must have their progress reviewed at least every two months; in Scotland, there is a requirement for an annual review process that details progress made towards the achievement of the apprenticeship qualification; these are additional to the usual arrangements for higher education monitoring and review. Evaluative comments from these progress reviews will be considered in the higher education provider's regular monitoring and review processes which must include both on and off-the-job elements of the apprenticeship. There are opportunities for apprentices and employers to actively participate in the monitoring and review of higher education in apprenticeships.

Other stakeholders will also undertake monitoring and review, for instance: funding bodies checking compliance with funding and management rules; progression from year to year to continue funding payments; the completion of the required reviews, rates for progression and completion, timely completion, and so on.

All evaluative and compliance data can provide useful information for quality assurance; higher education providers will actively engage with relevant stakeholders and data in the monitoring and review of higher education in apprenticeships.

3 Design, structure and delivery of higher education in apprenticeships

3.1 Design

The design of all higher education in apprenticeships must begin with the relevant Apprenticeship Standard or Apprenticeship Framework. Higher education providers must design the programme of learning to meet the requirements set out in these documents as well as the requirements set out in the Quality Code and Qualifications Frameworks, PSRB requirements and any other relevant information, for instance, Subject Benchmark Statements, Characteristics Statements, Funding Body requirements, and so on. If there are conflicts between these documents, the higher education provider will notify the relevant stakeholders to agree an acceptable resolution, unless there is a specified hierarchy between different requirements.

The Quality Code applies to all higher education in apprenticeships and the degree-awarding body has primary responsibility for the standards and quality of the higher education and any higher education awards that it offers under its powers. Providers of programmes that deliver higher education in apprenticeships also need to ensure that the process for the approval of programmes demonstrates that they are an appropriate preparation for apprentices to develop the associated knowledge, skills and behaviours specified in Apprenticeship Standards or Frameworks. The design and content may also need to comply with other stakeholder requirements.

The [QAA guiding principles on work-based learning](#) state that:

- 'Work-based learning courses and opportunities are designed and developed in partnership with employers, students and other stakeholders (where appropriate) and contain learning outcomes that are relevant to work objectives.'
- 'Work-based learning consists of structured opportunities for learning and is achieved through authentic activity and is supervised in the workplace.'
- 'Work-based learning opportunities enable students to apply and integrate areas of subject and professional knowledge, skills and behaviours to enable them to meet course learning outcomes.'

Higher education providers and awarding bodies can make use of these guiding principles in the design of higher education in apprenticeship learning programmes. Reference can also be made to other relevant Advice and Guidance themes including [Course Design and Development](#), [Assessment](#) and [Learning and Teaching](#).

When resolving any conflicts in stakeholder requirements, the degree-awarding body must take into account the mandatory requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and other regulatory or statutory body requirements.

3.2 Modes of delivery

Higher education in apprenticeships will involve a diverse range of modes of delivery which will depend on factors such as the pedagogic approach, employer and apprentice requirements, the individual apprenticeship, PSRB and fitness to practise requirements (for instance needing to achieve a minimum level of competence before starting on the job). Delivery modes can include a range of approaches such as blended, supported online, work-integrated and face-to-face learning, workshops and masterclasses, block or day

release but employers should, wherever possible, be actively involved in decisions and how and where the apprentice will undertake their learning. Apprenticeships require at least 20 per cent off-the-job learning and/or guided notional hours, which may need to be recorded for audit and compliance purposes, but this does not necessarily imply a day-release mode of delivery. Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for the assurance of the quality and standards of all aspects of the learning, whatever the mode and location of that learning.⁷

3.3 Learning and teaching

The knowledge, skills and behaviours required by apprentices may be delivered through a diverse and innovative range of methods that will reflect the diversity of the learners' needs and of individual workplace situations. The learning and teaching approaches for the programme will identify appropriate teaching styles and learning opportunities for apprentices, as well as elements that may require additional resources, for example the identification of learning opportunities and experiences within the workplace and those which are suitable for assessment.

Higher education in apprenticeships encourages lifelong learning by providing opportunities for self-directed learning and reflection, particularly from within the workplace. This may be achieved by supporting apprentices to develop action plans to assist the learning process and demonstrate that learning outcomes have been achieved. It can be helpful to encourage apprentices to use tools, such as personal learning and development plans, in conjunction with learning agreements, where relevant, as a reflective learning tool throughout the apprenticeship. These can also help document a record of achievement. Learning plans will be individualised to each apprentice to suit the specific role, learner, employer and sector requirements, and could be used by the higher education provider as a tool to monitor progress with the apprentice during regular reviews.

Learning contracts, which may be in the form of a commitment statement or other suitable document, are agreed between the apprentice, employer and learning provider, they will include all relevant elements of the course, criteria for knowledge, skills and behaviour, and how the learning will be assessed. They can also be used to evidence that appropriate time is set aside to enable quality work-based learning.

3.4 Coaching and mentoring

As learning in the workplace is fundamental to the learning in an apprenticeship, apprentices need to be able to identify opportunities within the workplace through which they develop the knowledge and skills and behaviours to enable them to achieve the Apprenticeship Standard or Apprenticeship Framework. In order to do this, apprentices must feel that the organisation supports the learning process by having supportive and encouraging learning structures in place. It is good practice⁸ to appoint a workplace mentor, who can provide an insight into the workplace, help to signpost learning opportunities and open doors for the apprentice, going on to support the apprentice to learn how to do this for themselves. This support process for learning in the workplace should be designed during the development phase and should be documented. The employer, the apprentice, the higher education provider and the workplace mentor will benefit from being involved in the design of this process.

⁷ See Core practices for where a provider works in partnership: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

⁸ The appointment of a workplace mentor is a requirement in Scotland.

Higher education providers should work with employers to ensure that workplace mentors have appropriate training, drawing on a variety of skills in order to effectively support the apprentices' learning. They should have a good understanding of the apprenticeship programme and how the knowledge, skills and behaviours are integrated within the programme structure, together with an understanding of the expectations of a higher education programme. The workplace mentors should have a clear understanding of the fundamentals of mentoring and coaching, supporting the transfer of tacit knowledge and understanding how to facilitate the learning process within the employer organisation.

The higher education provider should ensure that staff development is available for staff new to apprenticeships to ensure that the approaches to tutoring, coaching, mentoring and pastoral support are appropriate for the delivery of higher education in apprenticeships.

The process for monitoring coaching mentoring arrangements should be clearly articulated.

3.5 Assessment

The way that the required knowledge, skills and behaviours are assessed is specified at the time the higher education in apprenticeship learning programme is approved. The assessment strategy should reflect the type of learning and learners, and the nature of each element of the higher education in apprenticeship learning programme. Assessment may include a variety of formal and informal, and formative and summative, techniques, provided the outcomes are capable of rigorous testing and independent verification. A variety of methods of assessment will be required. These will need to be appropriate in enabling the apprentice to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by the relevant apprenticeship standard/framework. Methods of assessment should also reflect the context of authentic working practice that apprentices are engaged with and incorporate sufficient opportunities for the apprentice to use their workplace and work experiences to meet the assessment requirements. Higher education providers, and where relevant employers, will provide training and support to enable an apprentice to develop the skills necessary to identify these opportunities and to negotiate the use within the assessment regime.

Employers will normally be involved in formative assessment to provide apprentices with feedback regarding their progress towards achieving occupational and/or professional competence. Employers may also be involved in some aspects of summative assessment. Arrangements between higher education providers and employers should include appropriate induction, development and training for employers involved in assessment, for example with regards to higher education provider assessment procedures.⁹

In England, on Apprenticeship Standards, an independent End Point Assessment (EPA) must be completed once the apprentice has completed all relevant elements of the apprenticeship programme and has been confirmed, by the higher education provider and the employer, to have met the 'Gateway' requirements. At FHEQ levels 6, 7 and 8 the EPA may be integrated in, or separate from, the degree course. Successful completion of the higher education course and the apprenticeship entitles the apprentice to the award of a certificate for the higher education award (made by the degree-awarding body) and the issue of an Apprenticeship Certificate (by ESFA).

⁹ See Advice and Guidance Theme: Assessment: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance

Appendix 1: Scope of higher education in apprenticeships across the UK

Qualifications Framework Level		Terminology for Higher Education in Apprenticeship			
FHEQ	SCQF	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
8	12	<i>Degree Apprenticeship</i> <i>Higher Apprenticeship</i>	<i>Higher Level Apprenticeship</i>	<i>Professional Apprenticeship</i> <i>Graduate Apprenticeship</i>	
<i>Planned only</i>					
7	11	Degree Apprenticeship Higher Apprenticeship	Higher Level Apprenticeship	Professional Apprenticeship Graduate Apprenticeship	Degree Apprenticeship Higher Apprenticeship ¹⁰
6	10	Degree Apprenticeship Higher Apprenticeship	Higher Level Apprenticeship	Graduate Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship	Degree Apprenticeship
	9				Higher Apprenticeship ¹⁰
5	8	Higher Apprenticeship	Higher Level Apprenticeship	Technical Apprenticeship Higher Apprenticeship	Higher Apprenticeship
4	7	Higher Apprenticeship	Higher Level Apprenticeship	Modern Apprenticeship	Higher Apprenticeship
Notes		Degree Apprenticeship: Must include a Degree, or, exceptionally, another approved higher education qualification	Must include a higher education qualification	Must include a higher education qualification	Degree Apprenticeship: Must include a Degree
		Higher Apprenticeship: May include a higher education qualification			Must include a higher education qualification
					Degree Apprenticeship is a pilot only.

¹⁰ Current policy is for higher apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5. Apprenticeships can, technically, be up to level 7 but might not attract funding at this level.

Appendix 2: Further guidance, references and resources

Association of Colleges (AoC) 360 Guidance: Subcontracting in Apprenticeships
www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20360%20Subcontracting%20Guide%202018_0.pdf

Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Apprenticeships off-the-job training: Policy background and examples
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/792228/OTJ_training_guidancev2_reissued.pdf

ESFA Apprenticeships: initial assessment to recognise prior learning
www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-recognition-of-prior-learning/apprenticeships-initial-assessment-to-recognise-prior-learning

ESFA website
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
www.hefcw.ac.uk

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)
www.instituteforapprenticeships.org

Northern Ireland Higher Level Apprenticeship
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/higher-level-apprenticeships

Office for Students (OfS)
www.officeforstudents.org.uk

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

QAA Frameworks for HE Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks

QAA Higher Education Credit Framework for England
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks

QAA Quality Code, Advice and Guidance
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance

QAA Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships: Current Approaches
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/supporting-resources

QAA The Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Work-based Learning
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/work-based-learning

QAA Work-integrated degree: Context, engagement, practice and quality
<http://devmts.org.uk/wid.pdf>

SEEC Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education
www.seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SEEC-descriptors-2016.pdf

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

<https://scqf.org.uk>

Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales (CQFW)

<https://gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw>

Universities Vocational Awards Council (UVAC)

<https://uvac.ac.uk>

Appendix 3: Members of the advisory group for the Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement

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Mark Stone	Plymouth University/ACP
Greg Wade	Universities UK (UUK)
Angela West	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
Kate Wicklow	GuildHE
Jessica Wood	Office for Students

Employer representatives

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