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Guidance

# Apprenticeships: initial assessment to recognise prior learning

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The purpose of this guidance is to inform training providers, employers and apprentices about the need for, and importance of, initial assessment (IA) and recognition of prior learning (PL) - specifically:

### **Key points:**

1. Recognition of prior learning extends beyond English, maths and existing qualifications;
2. All the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the standard should be considered in reviewing the prior learning of the apprentice;
3. Recognition of prior learning is part of the learner eligibility assessment;
4. Apprenticeships could be poor value for money and unnecessarily long if training covers areas that the apprentice already knows, and public funding should not be used for learning which is not new;
5. Initial assessment is vital to ensure high-quality apprenticeships and Ofsted inspections look for evidence of a robust initial assessment.

This guidance provides additional information to support initial assessment of prior learning in accordance with the policy intent and the apprenticeship funding rules.

## **1. What is an initial assessment?**

Before an apprenticeship begins, the main training provider must assess the individual's prior learning to establish the 'starting point', or baseline, of the apprentice. This informs how much of the apprenticeship training content the individual requires. It checks that the apprenticeship is an appropriate training programme for the individual.

## **2. Why is initial assessment important?**

Initial assessment checks that the apprenticeship (both the job role and the training) is an appropriate programme for the individual. Apprentices should not be spending paid time doing training they do not need, and the apprentice will not have a good experience if they are repeating training. Apprenticeship funding should not be used to pay for, or accredit, existing knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Ofsted inspectors consider the 'distance travelled' by the apprentice in determining the value added by the training programme. Without knowing the starting point of an apprentice, inspectors cannot correctly assess the distance travelled and the quality of the apprenticeship training that has been delivered. Training providers must evidence a robust initial assessment, clear milestones and progress against these.

## **3. How does initial assessment check the eligibility of the individual for an apprenticeship?**

The initial assessment checks how much of the apprenticeship programme the individual requires to reach occupational competency. Assuming there is some relevant prior learning, the training provider must assess whether the individual still needs an apprenticeship with a minimum duration of 12 months with at least 20% off-the-job training. In some circumstances, this amount of training will not be necessary for the individual so the learner is ineligible for the apprenticeship programme and an alternative should be considered.

#### **4. What counts as prior learning?**

In recognising prior learning, the following should be considered against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the standard or framework:

- Work experience (this is particularly important if the apprentice is an existing employee);
- Prior education, training or associated qualification(s) in a related sector subject area (this goes beyond just English and maths); and
- Any previous apprenticeship undertaken

#### **5. Who is responsible for doing the initial assessment?**

The main training provider is responsible for:

- Assessing the prior learning of the individual before the apprenticeship can begin;
- Agreeing with the employer how the programme will be delivered to reflect any relevant existing knowledge, skills and behaviours; and
- Recording prior learning in the evidence pack and commitment statement

#### **6. How is prior learning assessed?**

ESFA does not mandate how a provider assesses or determines prior learning, just that it must be done and the findings taken account of. The relevant apprenticeship framework or standard should normally be used as the basis for initial assessment, i.e.:

- What is the goal and what is the apprentice trying to achieve?
- Where are they currently against this goal?
- How much of the content is new to them?
- Do they require significant and sustained new learning?

Models for assessing prior learning vary, but some good examples include:

- A professional discussion with the apprentice to discuss knowledge, skills and behaviours gained in previous roles against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the apprenticeship; and

- Evidence of competency at a lower level, indicating the individual is ready for progression

## **7. How should prior learning be recorded?**

The ESFA does not mandate how prior learning should be recorded, only that the initial assessment must be documented in the evidence pack and summarised on the commitment statement. Initial assessment is subject to audit checks and funds may be recovered where initial assessment has not taken place, has not been evidenced or a price reduction has not been made to reflect the prior learning.

## **8. How does recognition of prior learning feed into funding negotiations?**

The funding band of the apprenticeship is based on an apprentice requiring the full content of the apprenticeship, and in the case of standards this means all the listed knowledge, skills and behaviours.

ESFA funding rules state that the apprenticeship content, duration and price must be reduced where the individual has relevant prior learning. Prior learning must be factored into the price that is negotiated between the provider and the employer: apprenticeship funding must not be used to pay for, or certify, the delivery of existing knowledge, skills and behaviours as this represents poor value for money. There are audit checks to ensure a price reduction has been made to account for prior learning and the reduced training content required. To meet the ESFA funding rules, the training element within the apprenticeship must have a minimum duration of 12 months with at least 20% off-the-job training.

## **9. How does this all link to a 12 month minimum duration and off-the-job training?**

Where there is prior learning, the content and duration of the apprenticeship must be reduced to reflect this. The new (reduced) duration must still meet the minimum threshold of 12 months. At least 20% of the paid hours for the new (reduced) duration must be spent on off-the-job training.

## **10. How is recognition of prior learning taken into account when applying to be on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers?**

ESFA apprenticeship funding rules require main training providers and employer providers to take account of prior learning. As part of the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP) application processes, main providers and employer providers must submit their policy on how they will perform initial assessments of apprentices' prior learning.

## **11. Summary**

**Preparation for Initial Assessment:**

1. Has the employer specified an apprenticeship standard or framework for the individual?
2. Has the training provider made the learner aware that relevant prior learning can count towards the apprenticeship and asked the learner to consider relevant information against the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) set out in the apprenticeship?

**Initial Assessment:**

1. Has the training provider assessed the individual's work experience, prior education, training or associated qualifications in a related sector subject area against the KSBs set out in the apprenticeship?
2. Has the training provider set out the individual's baseline level of competency against the KSBs to determine the remaining content required?

**Decision required at Initial Assessment:**

1. Assuming some existing prior learning, has the training provider assessed whether the individual still meets the eligibility criteria of requiring significant and sustained new training (a minimum duration of 12 months with at least 20% off-the-job training)?

If not, the individual is not eligible for an apprenticeship and an alternative programme should be found.

**Following Initial Assessment and a decision that the learner is eligible for apprenticeship:**

1. Has the training provider documented prior learning in the evidence pack and summarised this in the commitment statement?
2. Have the training provider and employer agreed how the programme will be delivered (including the cost) to reflect the learner's existing KSBs?
3. Has the training provider set out key milestones for the apprentice so their progress can be reviewed against this?
4. Has the training provider assessed the apprenticeship training material against the job role to ensure sufficient opportunities for the apprentice to consolidate their learning in the workplace?