

Review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales

Handbook

October 2020



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Introduction

1 This handbook explains the QAA review process for the review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales in 2020-21. The review is concerned with Degree Apprenticeships funded through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) by the Welsh Government. Funding for Degree Apprenticeships has been made available in three priority areas: Digital, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing. This funding was made available on a pilot basis from 2018-19. Further details about these Degree Apprenticeships can be found on the [HEFCW website](#).¹

2 The Degree Apprenticeship review is designed to be a developmental review focused on higher education providers' delivery of the programme including work-based learning. The outcome of this review is intended to inform future policy and priorities, and will complement the Welsh Government's evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeships pilot scheme that will assess the intended benefits and outcomes of these programmes for employers and individuals.

3 The QAA review is aimed at providing information about how Degree Apprenticeships are being developed. While there are three priority areas for funding, the review is concerned with the development of Degree Apprenticeship provision in Wales and is not a subject-based review. As this is a relatively new qualification, the review will use the [QAA Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships](#) as its primary reference point to inform sector practice.² It aims to offer providers information about the effectiveness of the arrangements to design, deliver and enhance their provision, and will identify good practice and areas for development to improve and enhance the delivery of Degree Apprenticeship provision. A sector-wide report will share learning and development across all providers in Wales.

4 As a developmental review, review teams are not making an overall judgement on the standards and/or quality of the provider's provision. However, should the review team find matters of concern which have potential to present serious risk(s) to the provider's management of standards or quality, then the review team will refer the matter to HEFCW who could then decide whether to investigate the matter through their own procedures.

5 The review of Degree Apprenticeships is not part of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales and, as such, sits outside the Quality Enhancement Review for regulated institutions in Wales. The provider's report is not published and therefore can be considered confidential to the provider and its partners, however, the provider is welcome to share the report and learning from the review as part of any future external quality assurance engagement.

6 This review handbook covers the context and aims of the review, the key areas under review, detail of the review process and timelines. The review has been designed as a developmental review with outcomes that will assist various stakeholders in taking forward the provision. For the purposes of this handbook, the term 'review' is used as shorthand for 'developmental review'. The process will result in a review report for each funded provider which will be shared with HEFCW. As these are reviews of the pilot programme, it is not intended to publish provider reports, but to use them as valuable tools to inform internal development of Degree Apprenticeship provision. The published sector-wide report will provide an anonymised summary of the provision and findings of the reviews and make recommendations for the future delivery of the programmes.

¹ www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy_areas/skills_and_employability/apprenticeships.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/characteristics-statement-apprenticeships.pdf

7 For the purposes of this review, the handbook references learners on Degree Apprenticeship programmes as apprentices rather than students in recognition of the fact that the workplace is their primary source of learning.

8 The reviews will take place during the spring/early summer terms in 2020-21. A timeline for the review programme can be found at Annex A.

Reviews during COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

9 At the time of finalising this handbook, restrictions remain in place throughout the UK to control the spread of Coronavirus, including local lockdown measures for many county councils in Wales. While providers have plans in place for the new academic year, QAA recognises that there is considerable uncertainty over when and how these measures will be eased and whether new restrictions may need to be imposed. QAA recognises that restrictions will vary within and between nations, and the method of delivery of the review will need to be flexible. QAA will work with providers, partners and employers to ensure review teams operate according to the procedures implemented by them and closely monitor official public health advice.³ QAA recognises that there is the potential in the Spring Term for undertaking some, and possibly all, review activity virtually. If this is the case, QAA will work with those involved to ensure the procedures for engagement are clear by providing further guidance on the delivery of online reviews so that all parties can be confident that the review process delivers robust results.

Aims of the review process

10 The Degree Apprenticeship review is a developmental process designed to assist stakeholders in the development of Degree Apprenticeship provision in Wales. In particular, the review aims to:

- inform the development of Degree Apprenticeship provision through a review report of the provider's provision
- share practice with partners and employers, and inform future apprenticeship provision
- promote sharing of sector good practice, learning and areas for development through an overview report
- enhance the value of the apprentice learning experience and the value of apprenticeships for employers
- inform the future development of Degree Apprenticeship provision in Wales.

Scope of the review

11 The review will:

- be undertaken for each lead Degree Apprenticeship provider in Wales in receipt of funding from HEFCW for the priority subject areas
- for each lead provider, include further education colleges where they work as delivery partners and consider the effectiveness of the collaboration and scope for development of pathways

³ For latest information on COVID-19 see Public Health Wales:
<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

- use programme trails to sample provision and confirm the effectiveness of the provider's approach, and to identify practice that makes a particularly valuable contribution to the character of the qualification; one programme trail will be selected from each Degree Apprenticeship framework, as relevant, for each provider review
- include visits to employers providing apprenticeships; where possible, visits will be made to employers in selected programme trails and these will be used to assess how well institutional processes work and how effective they are in practice at a local level and across the institution as a whole
- take account of the apprentice voice and experience through engagement with apprentices individually and collectively where possible
- consider how Welsh language has been considered in the delivery of apprenticeship programmes
- comment on the contribution of Degree Apprenticeships to supporting access, equality and equity of opportunity.

Overview of the review process

12 The review method has been designed in accordance with the principles common to other QAA review methods in Wales as appropriate to a review of this type. It is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. Apprentices are central to the purpose and process of review and are involved in several ways (paragraphs 34-42). Additionally, owing to the particular characteristics of Degree Apprenticeships, visits will be made to the workplace to meet with employers and apprentices.

13 The key elements of the review process are as follows:

- A Facilitator appointed by the lead provider who will have day-to-day responsibility for the arrangements for the review and ensuring that the evidence is made available to the team.
- A Lead Apprentice Representative (LAR), appointed where appropriate by apprentices or the student body, who helps to encourage the involvement of apprentices in the review and keep them informed of progress, and acts as the contact between the review team and apprentices.
- The preparation of a reflective analysis (RA) by the lead provider, in collaboration with partners as appropriate (paragraphs 28-32). It forms the provider's assessment of its own performance and the starting point for the review and the review teams' analysis and preparation for the review.
- The opportunity for an apprentice submission by apprentices or, if this is not practicable, the student representative body on behalf of apprentices, to report on the apprentice experience of those studying Degree Apprenticeship programmes. This is used alongside the RA by the review team and helps to inform the focus of the review from the perspective of the apprentice experience.
- A programme trail for the lead provider's provision in each Degree Apprenticeship framework. These form the basis of engagements with apprentices and employers in the workplace. This may be a single programme trail for those providers with provision in one apprenticeship framework.
- A sector briefing from QAA for staff from lead providers and colleges, employers and LARs, to explain the nature and practicalities of the review process.

- A review team of two reviewers supported by a QAA Officer for each provider. Reviewers will be recruited on the basis of their knowledge and experience of higher apprenticeships and work-based learning. Reviewers will be recruited from across the nations of the UK to bring a wider perspective to the review as a developmental exercise.
- Review visits with the lead provider, partner colleges, and, owing to the particular characteristics of Degree Apprenticeships, apprentices and employers in the workplace. Review visits may be physical visits, online meetings, teleconferencing or mixture of these depending on practicalities of arranging visits and meetings, and guidance and legislation in place for keeping safe from COVID-19 at the time of the engagement. QAA appreciates that the method and timing for conducting visits, as well as individual meetings, needs to be flexible in order to accommodate the availability of participants.
- The length and mode of interaction of the review visit will be proportionate to the size and complexity of the provision, and length of time the provision has been delivered. It will be determined by the number and size of programmes, the employer profile and numbers of apprentices employed. To inform this selection, lead providers will be asked to submit data on their provision as part of their submission. Dependent on data submitted, the total length of the review will vary from one to two days, taking into account the proportion of programmes funded in the years 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- A draft report will be sent to the lead provider for comments on factual accuracy. It will contain areas for development for the lead provider about how they may improve the management and delivery of their Degree Apprenticeship provision to support the characteristics of the qualification, and identify good practice where aspects of the management of the provision make a particularly positive contribution to the apprentice experience.
- The final report will not be published but it will be shared with HEFCW and the lead provider. There is an expectation that lead providers will share the report with their partners.
- An overview report drawing upon the reports of the individual reviews will be published by HEFCW and used to inform the Welsh Government evaluation.

External reference points

14 The primary reference point to be used in this review is the [QAA Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships](#). The Characteristics Statement describes the distinctive features of the qualifications in terms of their purpose, general characteristics and generic outcomes. Furthermore, the Characteristics Statement complements and contextualises the information within *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (FHEQ), providing more detail about the distinctive features of these qualifications at particular levels and, as such, should be read in conjunction with these Frameworks.

15 This review in Wales is concerned with Degree Apprenticeships located at Level 6 of the FHEQ, the equivalent of bachelor's degrees.

Welsh medium provision

16 The review will consider how Welsh language has been considered in the delivery of Degree Apprenticeship programmes and how it meets the needs of apprentices and employers where it is appropriate and possible to do so for their specialism.

17 Degree Apprenticeships provide opportunities to use the Welsh language and, in line with the Welsh Language Standards, the Welsh language must be treated no less favourably than the English. The review will consider the arrangements in place for delivery and support of apprentices through the medium of Welsh, and the ability of the lead provider and partners to meet the Welsh language needs of employers and apprentices. The reviews will also consider how Welsh language apprentices can maintain and develop their Welsh language in the workplace.

Overview of the key areas under review

18 The review will focus on the key areas in the design, structure and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships set out in the Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships.⁴ It will consider how the characteristics and distinctive features of Degree Apprenticeships are supported through these five key areas. Considerations for each key area are summarised below for the benefit of providers and reviewers, and include the particular characteristics of delivering Degree Apprenticeships in Wales. These are provided as guidance and are not intended to be a prescriptive or definitive summary of the considerations under review for each key area.

Key area one: Design and development of programmes

19 The review team will evaluate whether, and to what extent, programmes are designed to deliver the defining characteristics and distinctive features of a higher education apprenticeship. Considerations for the evaluation of this key area will include:

- how the design of programmes has met the requirements of the relevant Apprenticeship Standard or Apprenticeship Framework and other requirements where necessary, for instance, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
- how the design of programmes has been informed by reference points for the quality assessment of programmes, including the requirements of the Quality Code and Qualifications Frameworks as well as other guidance including Subject Benchmark Statements and the Characteristics Statements
- alignment with reference points specific to providers in Wales such as the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales and Welsh language requirements
- the design and content of curricula, including the integration of on-the-job and off-the-job learning, subject knowledge and professional/occupational knowledge, skills and behaviours
- the involvement of employers and professional and sector bodies so programmes meet their specific workforce development needs, working arrangements and practices
- how the design of programmes enables apprentices to develop their role and progress in their work, including progression routes and continuing professional development opportunities

⁴ Further guidance in relation to the standards and quality of apprenticeships that involve higher education has been published by QAA. The guidance document Quality Assuring Higher Education Apprenticeships - Current Approaches (2nd edition, 2018) can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/supporting-resources

- the use of formal agreements or commitment statements between employers, providers and apprentices to ensure the high-quality delivery of the programme and distinctive features of the qualification
- how recruitment and admission arrangements enable the process to be employer driven while satisfying the provider's entry requirements.

Key area two: Modes of delivery

20 Degree Apprenticeships can involve a diverse range of modes of delivery. This will depend on a wide range of factors such as the pedagogic approach, employer and apprentice requirements, the individual apprenticeship, PSRB and fitness to practise requirements. Considerations for the evaluation of this key area will include:

- how the delivery of the programme aligns the off-the-job learning with the day-to-day work activities in order to maximise apprentices' learning opportunities
- how employers are involved in decisions about the mode of delivery and how and where the apprentice will undertake their learning, including formal agreements between employers and the provider and respective responsibilities for standards
- the effectiveness of the arrangements between employers and the providers to plan and coordinate work-integrated learning
- how delivery practices support inclusion and diversity in the workplace
- arrangements for delivery in Welsh language as far as specialism/skills permit
- the arrangements and responsibilities for the assurance of the quality and standards of all aspects of learning, whatever the mode and location of that learning.

Key area three: Learning and teaching

21 A range of diverse and innovative methods of learning and teaching will be delivered in order to support the diverse needs of apprentices and their individual workplace situations. Considerations for the evaluation of this key area will include:

- how the range of learning and teaching methods for the programme are appropriate to the diversity of apprentices' needs and individual workplace situations
- where appropriate, the involvement of the employer in designing and/or agreeing details on assessment
- whether there is clear agreement of responsibilities of all parties involved in learning, teaching and enabling apprentice achievement
- whether appropriate time is set aside to enable quality work-based learning
- how arrangements for self-directed learning and reflection are supported through mechanisms such as learning agreements and personal learning and development plans
- how learning contracts or equivalent are used to support the integration of on and off-the-job learning, as well as the delivery of work-based learning and assessment
- apprentices' ability to access Welsh medium provision
- how providers manage, record and monitor apprentices' progress and achievement across all forms and locations of delivery, including any adjustments to delivery.

Key area four: Supporting apprentice achievement

22 Apprentices will need a range of support mechanisms throughout their journey - from admissions and transition into the workplace and programme to completion of the

award. Consideration therefore will need to be given to the support needs of apprentices from both their employers and higher education providers. A particular characteristic of the Degree Apprenticeship is the coaching and mentoring role(s) in the workplace which enables the apprentice to gain insight into the workplace, encourages learning and identifies opportunities for professional and career development. Considerations for the evaluation of this key area will include:

- induction arrangements for all aspects of the apprenticeship so that apprentices are appropriately prepared
- how access to student support services is achieved to meet the needs of apprentices, including support through the medium of Welsh where appropriate
- arrangements to support inclusion and diversity in the workplace and ensure no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment
- support and guidance provided to facilitate opportunities for flexible career progression and further employment
- how providers and employers support staff who teach and enable learning to be appropriately qualified, supported and developed
- support and development processes in place for staff involved in apprentice training, such as mentors and coaches, so they are appropriately experienced to undertake their responsibilities
- how the effectiveness of the support processes is monitored and assessed to ensure apprentices achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.

Key area five: Assessment

23 Assessment strategies will reflect the type of learning and apprentices, and the nature of each element of the apprenticeship learning programme. A variety of methods of assessment will be required and this may include a variety of formal and informal, and formative and summative techniques. An employer might be involved in the design and/or in agreeing details on assessment and confirming achievement of professional competence by the apprentice. Considerations for the evaluation of this key area will include:

- arrangements for the assessment of recognition of prior experiential and/or certificated learning to establish relevant entry points and/or exemption
- how the design of the assessment strategy enables the apprentice to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by the relevant degree specification
- arrangements to ensure Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language in relation to assessment procedures⁵
- how methods of assessment incorporate opportunities for the apprentice to use their workplace and authentic work experiences to meet the assessment requirements
- how assessment practices support inclusion and diversity in the workplace
- the effectiveness of the arrangements in place to support assessment in the workplace, including development and training for employers involved in the assessment process
- how progress and achievement is regularly recorded and monitored for reporting purposes.

⁵ The Guidelines on Effective Practice in Examining and Assessing in Welsh within Wales: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/guidelines-for-higher-education-providers-on-effective-practice-in-examining-and-assessing-in-welsh-within-wales.pdf

Review outcomes

24 The review team will use programme trails to evaluate the lead provider's delivery of Degree Apprenticeship programmes against the Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships. The review team will comment on the extent to which the lead provider assures the design and delivery of its Degree Apprenticeships to reflect the characteristics of the award, identifying areas of good practice and areas for development.

25 For this developmental review, **good practice** is defined as a practice which, in the context of the provider, makes a particularly positive or innovative contribution to supporting the characteristics/distinctive features of the Degree Apprenticeship provision. As a result, it is worthy of wider dissemination. The identification of good practice is intended to enable the lead provider to build upon its strengths and enhance delivery of its provision, as well as contributing to the further development of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales.

26 An **area for development** is an area in the design, structure and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships that can be improved or modified in order to strengthen and enhance the delivery of the characteristics/distinctive features of the provider's Degree Apprenticeship provision. Areas for development relate to the five key areas and the considerations taken from the Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships (see paragraphs 18 to 23).

27 The review team's findings will be summarised in an unpublished written report for the lead provider and a published overview report will contain any learning from the review programme as a whole. Specific good practice and areas for development will not be attributed to individual providers.

Features of the review process

Reflective analysis (RA)

28 *Please note, the reflective analysis (RA) should be no more than 8,000 words and, as an indication, include no more than 40 supporting pieces of evidence.* The RA and evidence base may be shorter where the number of programmes is relatively small with relatively few delivery sites, and/or the provision is funded under one Apprenticeship Framework.

29 The reflective analysis (RA) is the lead provider's assessment of its Degree Apprenticeship provision. Data supplied with the RA, such as contextual information about the provider, informs the decision about the selection of programme trails and informs the plans and arrangements for the review visit. The RA is the starting point for the reviewers' understanding of how the lead provider manages its provision. It should consist, as far as possible, of a portfolio of existing documents accompanied by an evaluative commentary against the key areas of focus. It should provide a reflective evaluation of the provider's approach to managing Degree Apprenticeships as a portfolio of provision, and provide specific and contextual examples of its approach (while this will include examples for the proposed programme trails, this should not be to the exclusion of examples from other programmes).

30 The RA should signpost and contextualise the evidence contained in the documents for the reviewers. The principal requirements for an RA are that it is evaluative, not just descriptive, and it provides sufficient documentary evidence to support its assessment. It should act as a guide for the reviewers to the relevant sections in the existing evidence. The

task of the reviewers is to evaluate the effectiveness of the provider's approach against key areas under review.

31 Each review will focus on the lead provider's management of its Degree Apprenticeship programmes and the role of further education colleges, training providers and other partners if relevant, and employers. The RA should cover the entirety of the provision at all sites of delivery, including varying modes of delivery and the contributions of different employers. The RA should be submitted to QAA no later than **six weeks** before the review visit.

32 The RA should comprise the following:

- An introductory short statement on the lead provider's provision, its partnership arrangements and responsibilities.
- The context in which the Degree Apprenticeship programmes have been developed, including reasons for developing the particular provision and the involvement of employers and employer-related organisations.
- Data and commentary on recruitment, retention and progression rates, Welsh language medium apprentices, equality, diversity and inclusion, employee status of apprentices, employer profile, numbers of apprentices per employer. The purpose of the data will be to help understand the characteristics of the apprentices and support needs, and to contextualise the programme trails and selection of employer visits.
- An overview of the management structures and personnel involved, including the organisational and quality frameworks within which the Degree Apprenticeship provision operates.
- A description of quality assurance and enhancement procedures applicable to Degree Apprenticeships.
- Copies of agreements and contracts such as partnership agreements, agreements between the employer, apprentice and the higher education provider, and learning contracts.
- Information about the programme trail(s) proposed including a rationale for the selection of the programmes (paragraph 54).
- A concise evaluation of all the Degree Apprenticeship provision under each key area, cross-referenced to the documentary evidence and with a particular focus on the programme trails. It should evaluate and reflect on how far the design and delivery of its programmes of study match the defining characteristics of higher education apprenticeships. It may be helpful to structure the evaluation according to the Degree Apprenticeship frameworks and then specifically reference the programme trail. Where the provider has a programme trail for each apprenticeship framework, please reference both programme trails.
- Definitive programme documents for the proposed programme trails such as the validation report, programme specifications, module descriptors/guides and the programme handbook.

- While it will be helpful to draw on material from the proposed programme trails for the evaluation of the provision, the evidence base should aim to be balanced in terms of the provider's provision as a whole.

Apprentice involvement

33 In the same way that students are central to QAA's review processes, for this developmental review, the collective and individual apprentice voice is a key principal of the review method. There is opportunity for apprentices to make a collective submission and to meet the review team. An individual apprentice is also able to take on the role of Lead Apprentice Representative. In addition, there will be opportunities for apprentices to respond to a questionnaire and to meet reviewers both at their institution and in their workplace. QAA will send the questionnaire to lead providers to distribute to apprentices three weeks before the upload of the reflective analysis and apprentice submission. QAA will ask for these to be returned directly to QAA by the submission date for the reflective analysis.

The apprentice submission

34 Apprentices have the opportunity to make a collective submission to the review team in advance of the review visit. If this is not possible, then the students' representative body - normally the Students' Union (or equivalent) of the lead provider - can take the lead on behalf of apprentices. This should always be done in consultation with apprentices on Degree Apprenticeship programmes and include apprentices at partner institutions as relevant. While the apprentice submission is usually a written document, other formats are welcome and further guidance is available from QAA.⁶ The apprentice submission is a valuable document for the review team as it provides insight into the nature of the apprentice experience and the effectiveness of how the lead provider and its partners manage the quality of the apprentice experience.

35 The apprentice submission, if provided, should be submitted at the same time as the provider's reflective analysis, where possible. The date for the submission will be confirmed as part of the review schedule with both the Facilitator and Lead Apprentice Representative. For further details and guidance about the apprentice submission, see Annex C.

36 QAA appreciates that it may not always be possible for an apprentice submission to be made. If this is the case, providers need to be mindful when putting together their reflective analysis of other possible sources of evidence that would document the collective apprentice voice, for instance, minutes of staff-student liaison forums and apprentice surveys.

Lead Apprentice Representative

37 The lead provider and apprentices may agree to appoint a **Lead Apprentice Representative** (LAR). Where possible, the LAR should be appointed by the apprentices themselves. If this is not possible, a student representative may assume the role, either from the student representative body itself or as an elected student representative. (The LAR, whether an apprentice or student, should not hold a staff position.) QAA asks the Facilitator to work with apprentices and/or student representatives to decide who should take on the role. It will be important that whoever assumes the LAR role acts on behalf of the interests of

⁶ Guidance on Alternative Student Submissions in QAA Reviews:
www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/guidance-on-alternative-student-submissions-in-qaa-reviews.pdf

apprentices and has appropriate mechanisms in place to communicate and consult with individual apprentices.

38 The role of the LAR is to encourage the involvement of apprentices in the review and keep them informed of progress. The LAR may be involved in the preparation of the apprentice submission. The LAR works closely with the Facilitator to ensure smooth communication between the apprentices and the provider. The LAR may be able to work closely with apprentices in the workplace.

39 The provider should offer as much operational and logistical support to the LAR as is feasible. In particular, providers should share relevant information or data so that the apprentice submission is well-informed and evidence-based.

40 QAA envisages that normally the LAR will:

- receive copies of key correspondence from QAA
- disseminate information about the review to apprentices and give feedback on the review and its progress to them as well as the student body
- organise or oversee the apprentice submission
- liaise internally with the Facilitator to ensure smooth communications between the apprentices and the lead provider during the process
- help the review team to select apprentices to meet
- attend the reviewers' meetings with apprentices during the review
- attend the final meeting at the lead provider
- facilitate comments from apprentices/the student body on the draft report.

41 QAA appreciates that not all lead providers, colleges, apprentice/student representatives and students' unions may feel it appropriate or sustainable to provide the level of engagement envisaged for the LAR. Consequently, QAA will be flexible about the amount of time that the LAR can provide and can consider other arrangements for ensuring appropriate apprentice involvement.

Engagement with apprentices

42 Reviewers hope to meet with a group of apprentices as part of the engagement with the provider and partner colleges. Reviewers will meet with apprentices in the workplace in order to understand their experience in the workplace as their primary source of learning. As reviewers are only able to visit a sample of workplaces, apprentices will be invited to complete a survey which will help to inform the reviewers' preparation for the review engagements.

The review team

Reviewers

43 QAA will appoint a team of two **reviewers** with expertise relevant to Degree Apprenticeships to undertake the review of each lead provider. The review team will be supported by a **QAA Officer**. The main responsibilities of the reviewers are to read, analyse and verify the information submitted by the lead provider and apprentices, and to gather whatever further evidence they consider necessary through engagements with the lead provider, partners, employers and apprentices and use this evidence and engagement to conclude the review outcomes.

44 Reviewers are generally appointed by QAA from nominations made by institutions that provide higher education programmes. Before undertaking reviews, QAA provides all reviewers and QAA Officers with training, which includes both the method and the particular context of the review. Lead providers will be advised of the membership of the review team approximately no less than nine weeks before the review and will be asked to confirm whether there are any conflicts of interest with proposed team members before the team is confirmed.

45 The review team will conduct their business as a team for their engagements through the lead provider. However, engagements with employers and apprentices in their place of work-based learning may be conducted on an individual basis in order to allow the reviewers to sample a larger number of workplace settings.

The QAA Officer

46 QAA appoints an Officer to coordinate and manage each review. The Officer is a named member of QAA staff who will normally support the full review for its full duration. The Officer is responsible for establishing close and constructive working relationship with providers.

47 The QAA Officer will be present with the review team throughout the review engagements but will not direct the team's deliberations or influence its conclusions and findings. The QAA Officer's overarching role is to ensure that the review process is conducted according to the method handbook and that the conclusions of the review team are appropriate, well-evidenced and robust.

48 The specific duties of the QAA Officer are to:

- liaise with the lead provider on the planning for the review
- facilitate communication between the Facilitator, Lead Apprentice Representative and the review team
- manage logistics
- chair review team meetings
- edit the review report and coordinate its production.

Facilitator

49 Providers are invited to nominate a member of staff to facilitate the review by liaising closely with the QAA Officer to ensure the organisation and smooth running of the review process. The Facilitator works closely and supportively with the LAR to ensure the apprentices, and where appropriate, the student body is informed of and understands the progress of the review. The Facilitator also works closely with employers to ensure they understand the purpose of and arrangements for the visits to the workplace. The Facilitator will have day-to-day responsibility for the arrangements for the review and for ensuring that the evidence is made available to the team. The Facilitator may lead on the preparation of the RA.

50 The Facilitator is permitted to observe any of the meetings between the team and the provider and the team and employers, apart from those with apprentices. Where the Facilitator is observing, they should not participate in discussion unless invited to do so by the review team.

51 During review engagements, the Facilitator is expected to:

- provide the review team with advice and guidance on the provider's structures, policies, priorities and procedures, and links with employers
- meet the QAA Officer and the LAR, and possibly members of the review team, outside the formal meetings to provide or seek further clarification about particular questions or issues
- help to direct reviewers to information or locate the information they are seeking to help make the process as time efficient as possible.

52 The Facilitator helps to provide a constructive interaction between all participants in the review process. This promotes effective working relationships by directing reviewers to information or sourcing it as efficiently as possible to ensure clarity and efficiency in the review process. Where appropriate, and in agreement with the LAR, the Facilitator might also provide guidance and support to student representatives when preparing the apprentice submission and for meetings with the review team.

Provider briefing

53 The purpose of the provider briefing is to describe the review in more detail, to allow lead providers and partners to ask any questions about the method, and to give further advice and guidance on preparations for the review, preparing a reflective analysis, and on helping apprentices to prepare a submission. The briefing also offers an opportunity for lead providers and partners to talk to each other about their preparations for the review. The provider briefing will take place by a webinar.

Programme trails

54 A programme trail is a Degree Apprenticeship programme selected from the provider's provision for each Degree Apprenticeship framework. It will be used to trail how the provider's processes and practices operate at a local level. Depending on the scope of the provider's provision developed in relation to Degree Apprenticeship frameworks, there may be one or two programme trails for each provider review.

55 Programme trails will be used to evaluate how effective provider's processes are in the development and delivery of the characteristics of higher education apprenticeships for their Degree Apprenticeship provision. Programme trails enable the review team to evaluate the effectiveness of the provider's management of their provision in this respect for both programme level and the provider's Degree Apprenticeship provision. Programme trails contribute to the overview of the development of programmes for both Degree Apprenticeship frameworks as well as Degree Apprenticeship provision as a whole.

56 As part of their submission, the lead provider should propose one programme to be used as a trail per Degree Apprenticeship framework. In order for the review team to decide whether the proposed programme trail(s) will provide sufficient opportunity to evaluate the key areas under review, the RA should provide the following information:

- the representativeness of the proposed programme trail in terms of providers' overall provision within the Degree Apprenticeship framework, types of arrangement and types of employers
- whether there are sufficient opportunities for employer visits to enable a representative sample of employers and apprentices to be engaged
- whether there are opportunities to sample employers/apprentices at different stages in the development of the provider's provision

- whether there are opportunities to meet apprentices who are both, new and existing employees, and at different levels of study.

The lead provider should use the data return to support its proposals and provide sufficient context for the selection of alternative trails should the review team decide this was necessary.

57 On the basis of their analysis and the review team meeting, the team will decide whether the proposed trails will provide sufficient opportunity to evaluate the key areas under review. This decision will be confirmed at four weeks before the review visit. In the circumstances that the review team decides that an alternative programme trail(s) would be better suited to provide the information needed for the key areas under review, this will be communicated to the lead provider at this point.

58 Once the programme trails are confirmed, the QAA Officer will discuss with the lead provider factors in the selection of employers to be visited, such as accessibility of sites and the availability of staff and apprentices, technical requirements for online meetings if required, and the scheduling and arrangements for site visits/meetings.

59 As part of the evidence base accompanying the RA, the provider is asked to provide definitive programme documents for the proposed programme trail(s), such as the validation report, programme specifications, module descriptors/guides and the programme handbook.

Activities during the review

60 The pattern of the review will be sufficiently flexible to respond to the nature of the programmes under review. Although most activities will be common to all reviews, the timetable of events will reflect the particular arrangements of each lead provider and its partners and employers. In some cases, it may be necessary for the review team to separate to conduct different activities.

61 All review visits will include:

- an initial meeting between the reviewers and staff responsible for the management of Degree Apprenticeship programmes and their quality assurance
- a meeting with teaching and support staff for Degree Apprentices programmes
- a meeting with a representative group of apprentices at the provider
- a meeting with staff at partner colleges to explore their involvement in the development and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships
- visits to the workplace to meet individual employers and their apprentices (see paragraphs 64-68)
- a final team meeting with the lead provider.

Employer involvement

62 The role of employers in these awards is important and employers play a significant part in the review process. Employers will be invited to contribute to the review through a questionnaire and by hosting a visit from the review team. Reviewers will wish to learn about the benefits and challenges of work-based and work-related learning and will conduct visits to a number of workplaces within the programme trail(s). The number and nature of the visits will be determined by the characteristics of the programme.

Employer survey

63 In order to ensure wider employer input into the review, QAA will send a questionnaire for lead providers to distribute to employers three weeks before the upload of the reflective analysis. QAA will ask for these to be returned directly to QAA by the submission date for the reflective analysis.

Employer visits

64 Reviewers will visit a sample of employers to meet staff who are directly involved in the apprenticeship programme and meet apprentices separately to find out about their experience. The reviewers will make every effort to minimise the disruption to apprentices and employers.

65 Employers visits will be selected on the basis of the programme trail(s). The reviewers will aim to visit a representative sample of employers, both in terms of the type and size of company, and the relative distribution of apprentices across employers. Accessibility of sites and types of employers, as well as COVID-19 guidance and public health advice, will determine whether visits can be conducted in person or virtually. For instance, where companies are predominantly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the review team may opt to conduct a mixture of physical and virtual visits. The number and characteristics of employers will be a key factor in determining the overall length of the review.

66 Where the review team need to conduct visits to a number of SMEs, reviewers may conduct visits individually in order to maximise the coverage of the review.

67 Employer visits will involve a meeting with staff supporting apprentices in the workplace (for instance, mentors, trainers and line managers) and managing the apprenticeship scheme, and a meeting with the apprentice(s). The review team can be flexible in terms of timings and appreciate that not all staff may be available at the same time, and therefore may need to set up alternative arrangements/additional meetings. Meetings may be held individually or as a group.

68 Employers attending meetings are likely to be asked questions about their involvement in the following areas of Degree Apprenticeship provision:

- their involvement in the design and development of programmes
- their involvement in the delivery of the programme and the integration of learning and work
- their involvement in learning and teaching
- how apprentices are supported in the workplace and the support offered by the lead provider
- opportunities for assessment and their involvement in the assessment process
- opportunities for Welsh language provision
- what arrangements work particularly well and areas that would benefit from further development.

The schedule for reviews

69 Reviews will take place in the Spring/early Summer Terms of 2020-21. QAA will consult the lead provider to ensure appropriate timing for the review. A timeline outlining the key events for the review programme as a whole is provided in Annex A.

70 A timeline for the individual reviews is provided in Annex B and this sets out the programme of activities undertaken by the lead provider and QAA. The process starts with the distribution of questionnaires to employers and apprentices by the lead provider nine weeks before the review visit. After the submission of the reflective analysis, supporting evidence and apprentice submission (if prepared), the period prior to the visit takes six weeks. The period for the preparation of the report will take four weeks from the last day of the visit.

71 The deadlines in this timeline will be adjusted to accommodate the Easter period, and any UK public holidays/QAA closure days.

The review report

72 The process will result in a review report for each lead provider which will be shared with HEFCW. As this is a developmental review, the report is not published.

73 The review report will:

- provide a background to the review, including a summary of the provision, partner involvement, programme trail(s) and employer visits
- record features identified by reviewers as representing good practice and areas for development as appropriate
- provide a commentary on Welsh Language provision, and equality and diversity
- detail the team's findings for the five key areas and the contribution of these areas to the characteristics and distinctive features of the Degree Apprenticeship for the provider's programmes, including a commentary of the effectiveness of college partnerships and scope for development.

74 Two weeks after the review engagement, QAA will share the draft report with the lead provider and the LAR, inviting comments on factual accuracy. The provider will have one week to respond. QAA will then finalise the report and send it back to the provider. At this point, QAA will also send the report to HEFCW.

QAA Welsh Language Scheme

75 In planning, conducting and reporting on reviews in Wales, QAA is committed to treating the Welsh and English languages as equal, and considers the requirements and expectations of Welsh language standards. The lead provider can request that the whole review or specific parts of the review - for example, meetings - are conducted bilingually. Similarly, visits to employers can be conducted in part or in whole bilingually. For further information, see Annex D.

Evaluation

76 QAA will encourage lead providers, LARs, employers, reviewers and QAA Officers to contribute to the evaluation of the review process by inviting comment on the reviews in which they have participated.

Annex A: Review programme timeline

Month	Activity
August 2020	Consultation period
September	Consultation closes on Monday 14 September
October	Finalised handbook published w/c 12 October QAA holds a provider briefing by webinar Preparation of reflective analysis and apprentice submission starts
November	Preparation of reflective analysis and apprentice submission continues Lead providers receive scheduling details and notice of review teams Scheduling details finalised
December	Preparation of reflective analysis and apprentice submission continues Review teams confirmed
January 2021	Preparation of reflective analysis and apprentice submission continues Lead providers asked to distribute questionnaires to employers and apprentices across their provision
February	Upload of submissions and supporting evidence
March	Review visits scheduled in March and April
April	Review visits and reporting on outcomes continues
May	Reporting on outcomes continues QAA prepares overview report
June 2021	Overview report finalised and submitted to HEFCW

Annex B: Provider review timeline

Working week	Provider	QAA
9 weeks before the visit	<p>Provider distributes questionnaires to employers and apprentices</p> <p>Provider confirms whether there will be an apprentice submission and whether a Lead Apprentice Representative has been appointed</p>	Contacts the Lead Apprentice Representative as appropriate
6 weeks before the visit	<p>Provider uploads provider and apprentice submissions and supporting evidence</p> <p>Deadline for submission of questionnaires</p>	Reviewers undertake desk-based analysis
4 weeks before the visit	<p>Provider informed of outcomes of virtual team meeting including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - confirmation of the programme trail(s) - confirmation of the employers to be visited as part of the programme trail(s) - a draft schedule - any additional evidence requests 	<p>Virtual team meeting where the Review team discusses their analysis and confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - programme trail(s) - employers to be visited as part of the programme trail(s) - the schedule for the review including - any additional evidence requests
1 week before the visit	<p>Provider uploads additional evidence</p> <p>Confirms the programme for the visit and people attending meetings</p>	Review team analyses additional evidence
Review visit	Provider facilitates the visit	Review team spends up to a total of two days for engagements with the provider, apprentices and employers
1 week after the visit		Moderation of findings
2 weeks after the visit	Provider considers report for factual accuracy and liaises with partners/employers as required	Draft report sent to lead provider and Lead Apprentice Representative, as appropriate
3 weeks after the visit	Provider submits factual corrections	
4 weeks after the visit		Report finalised and sent to provider and HEFCW

Annex C: The apprentice submission

The apprentice submission provides a means by which apprentices can inform the review team ahead of the review visit of matters they consider relevant to the purpose of review. Due to the dispersed nature of apprentices on Degree Apprenticeship programmes, the submission may be prepared through their student representative body (see paragraph 35). It is an opportunity to provide the review team with an impression of what it is like to be a degree apprentice on a programme from both their academic and workplace perspectives. QAA encourages apprentices and/or the student representative bodies to use this opportunity to inform review teams of their views and evidence, and to work closely with the lead provider.

The apprentice submission where possible should contain a response from apprentices to the lead provider's reflective analysis. This should be brief and can be narrative text or bullet points. Should apprentices and/or the student representative body and lead provider wish to present a joint reflective analysis, this is acceptable so long as the document demonstrates that it is a genuine reflection of apprentice views and makes clear the process by which they were involved.

Format, length and content

The submission should be no more than 4,000 words and should provide an explanation of the sources of evidence that informed its comments and conclusions. Alternative formats to a written submission or as material to supplement the main submission are both possible. QAA has a separate guidance document to help if this approach is preferred.⁷

The submission must include a statement of how it has been compiled, its authorship and the extent to which its contents have been shared with, and endorsed by, apprentices on Degree Apprentice programmes as a whole. If, for example, there are limitations with the submission in terms of gathering the perspectives of particular groups of apprentices, then this should be made clear.

The review team will welcome a submission that endeavours to represent the views of as wide an apprentice constituency within Degree Apprenticeship programmes as possible. Apprentices are encouraged to make use of existing information in the form of internal student surveys and committee papers. In QAA's experience, a critical analysis of existing data will be more useful to the review team than a collection of new data. If questionnaires are used specifically for this submission, we recommend that they are targeted at areas where there are gaps in existing knowledge.

When gathering evidence for and structuring the submission, it would be helpful if account is taken of the effectiveness of the following:

- how the design of the programmes enables apprentices to develop their roles and careers
- experience of the admission and recruitment process, including the recognition of prior learning
- how well the design and delivery of the programmes integrates on-the-job and off-the-job learning

⁷ Guidance on alternative Student Submissions in QAA Reviews:
www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/guidance-on-alternative-student-submissions-in-qaa-reviews.pdf

- how the different learning and teaching methods contribute to the apprentices' needs and workplace situations
- the quality and accessibility for supporting apprentices throughout their apprenticeship
- apprentices' experience of being assessed, including the use of workplace and authentic work experience.

The submission should not:

- name, or discuss the competence of, individual members of staff and employers
- discuss personal grievances
- include comments from individual apprentices who may not be well placed to represent a wider group.

Submission delivery date

The submission should be sent to QAA six weeks before the review visit, at the same time as the lead provider's reflective analysis. Details of how to submit the submission electronically will be communicated to the LAR. If the submission is confidential, then the LAR should contact QAA to make separate arrangements for its submission.

Confidentiality

QAA expects the submission to be shared with the lead provider, and the lead provider to share its reflective analysis with the apprentices. This openness is desirable because it enables the review team to discuss both documents freely with the lead provider and apprentices during the review, to check the accuracy of their content, and it encourages an open and transparent approach to the review. Apprentices/the student body may, if they wish, request that their submission be kept confidential to QAA and the team rather than being shared with the lead provider. QAA will respect this wish, but apprentices are asked to be aware that the team's use of a confidential submission will inevitably be restricted by the fact that its contents are unknown to the lead provider's staff.

If the contents of the submission are not to be shared with the lead provider, this must be stated clearly on the front of the document.

Annex D: Welsh language

QAA is committed to treating the Welsh and English languages equally in our work in Wales. All documentation relating to the Degree Apprenticeship Review is produced in both languages, as are all published review reports.

For reviews of providers in Wales, we seek to recruit bilingual reviewers and review managers. Our advertising and recruitment process actively supports this objective.

In any review of higher education providers in Wales, we acknowledge the right of any person to use the medium of Welsh and the right of any bilingual reviewer to speak in Welsh. We will normally seek to agree the use of the translation facilities existing within a provider and will provide our own interpretation or translation facilities where that is not possible.

We ensure that in the initial review planning meetings, the QAA Officer identifies the language preferences expressed by the provider and individual participants for the conduct of the review, determining what elements of the review process are to be conducted in Welsh, and making arrangements for translation where all participants are not bilingual.

Providers and apprentices may submit their documentation in either language at their discretion.

Following agreement about which elements of the review will be conducted bilingually, we will make arrangements for, and meet the costs of, providing simultaneous translation of those review proceedings that we have agreed to conduct bilingually.

We acknowledge that the extent to which Welsh and English are routinely used varies between providers and workplaces. We respect these differences and seek to appoint bilingual review managers to facilitate the smooth operation of the review process in providers where Welsh is extensively used.

This publication is also available in Welsh

Published - October 2020

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2020
Cambrian Building, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557000

Web: www.qaa.ac.uk