



# Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships

Current Approaches

Second Edition

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>About this document</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1	The purpose of this document .....	1
1.2	Who is this document for? .....	2
1.3	How often will this document be updated?.....	2
1.4	Terminology .....	2
1.5	The structure of this document .....	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Context</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1	What is an apprenticeship? .....	4
2.2	About apprenticeships involving UK higher education .....	7
<b>3</b>	<b>Quality assuring higher education in apprenticeships</b> .....	<b>13</b>
3.1	Responsibilities of higher education providers, employers, apprentices and others .....	13
3.2	Learning and teaching .....	25
3.3	Assessing apprenticeships .....	30
3.4	The apprentice experience .....	35
3.5	Managing provision with others .....	38
3.6	Complaints and appeals .....	42
3.7	Monitoring and review .....	46
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusions and next steps</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Annexes</b> .....	<b>49</b>
5.1	Membership of the working group for higher education in apprenticeships (First edition) .....	49
5.2	Membership of the working group for higher education in apprenticeships (Second edition) .....	50
5.3	Key organisations.....	51
5.4	Key documents and other resources .....	51
<b>6</b>	<b>Features of Apprenticeship Programmes - Four nations comparison</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>57</b>

# 1 About this document

This document describes how expectations relating to the quality assurance of higher education, as set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, accommodate and apply to existing and emerging UK models of apprenticeships involving higher education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Such models include Higher and Degree Apprenticeships in England, Higher Level Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland, Degree Apprenticeships in Wales, and Graduate Apprenticeships in Scotland. It covers apprenticeships that involve higher education on levels 4 to 7 of the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and on levels 6 to 11 of the *Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland*.<sup>1</sup>

This document does not seek to interpret or explain other regulatory and funding requirements that relate to apprenticeships involving higher education; however, some information about these is provided for context, as it relates to the expectation of the Quality Code. For definitive information about additional regulatory and funding requirements, readers should refer to the relevant bodies responsible for setting those requirements.

## Note:

**The UK Quality Code is being revised during 2018. The new Quality Code<sup>2</sup> was published on 27 March 2018; advice and guidance will be published in November 2018. The operational date for the new Code is November 2018.**

**This document is based on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2015<sup>3</sup> and will be reviewed to align with the operational date for the new Quality Code.**

**Some content will change but the principles will remain largely the same.**

## 1.1 The purpose of this document

The purposes of this document are:

- to highlight key considerations for higher education providers in relation to the standards and quality of apprenticeships that involve higher education
- to draw out guidance from the UK Quality Code that is particularly pertinent to the delivery of apprenticeships that involve higher education qualifications<sup>4</sup>
- to provide a reference point for quality assurance of higher education provision in apprenticeships that do not include a higher education qualification or that sit outside the qualification
- to highlight characteristics of the various UK apprenticeship models that may require special consideration in relation to higher education quality assurance approaches.

---

<sup>1</sup> See [www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-a-setting-and-maintaining-academic-standards](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-a-setting-and-maintaining-academic-standards)

<sup>2</sup> See [www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-revised-uk-quality-code](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-revised-uk-quality-code)

<sup>3</sup> See [www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code)

<sup>4</sup> *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* will be a key reference document for higher education providers involved with apprenticeships. However, the UK Quality Code applies in its entirety to higher education provision within apprenticeships. See [www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-b-assuring-and-enhancing-academic-quality](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-b-assuring-and-enhancing-academic-quality)

The document aims to set out for the higher education sector, employers, apprentices and other stakeholders the ways in which apprenticeship models are accommodated by current quality assurance approaches, as well as to identify areas where apprenticeship models may require existing principles to be interpreted and applied in new ways. It is intended to reflect and support the work of higher education providers who are already delivering components of apprenticeships, and to provide information to others who are considering delivering apprenticeships in the future.

This document is provided for information only. It is not formal QAA guidance, and does not form part of the Quality Code. QAA has agreed with representatives from the sector and other key stakeholders that, in the longer term, it will be appropriate to develop a Characteristics Statement, which sets out a comprehensive UK-wide picture of apprenticeships involving higher education. The statement will explore the key features of the various models in operation, especially as these relate to academic standards.

However, as the nature and position of apprenticeships across the UK is still evolving we have agreed that the development of such a statement should commence only once practice across the UK is more fully established and embedded. We currently anticipate that this will be in 2018-19. The development process for the statement will involve extensive and detailed consultation with stakeholders from across UK higher education, as well as employers, apprentices, and policy-makers.

## **1.2 Who is this document for?**

You may want to read this document if you are:

- designing, delivering and/or assessing apprenticeships involving higher education, or considering doing so
- an employer, seeking to find out more about how apprenticeships involving higher education are quality assured
- an organisation involved with apprenticeships containing higher education within the UK for instance regulatory and sector bodies.

## **1.3 How often will this document be updated?**

Our intention is to update this document regularly to reflect developments in the apprenticeship landscape across the UK and changes to regulatory frameworks.

If you are aware of changes or developments that you would like the document to reflect, please contact [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk).

## **1.4 Terminology**

Higher education apprenticeships operate under devolved systems and use different terminology in the four countries. To capture all these levels and terms, this document will refer to the totality of these as 'higher education apprenticeships' or 'apprenticeships involving higher education'.

An apprenticeship is a job that involves work, education and training as part of a recognised standard or framework; an apprentice is any individual undertaking that role. However, as a participant in a higher education programme they will also be considered to be a student by the higher education provider. The Quality Code was written with students in mind, and any references to students in this document in the context of the Quality Code should be read to refer to apprentices.

## **1.5 The structure of this document**

We have structured this document to reflect both the commonality across, and the differences between, quality assurance approaches across each of the four nations of the UK. Each section opens with a description of the UK-wide picture, followed by colour-coded boxes containing descriptions of features unique to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where these are available.

Not all sections contain sub-sections for each nation and this reflects the fact that apprenticeship agendas across the four nations are at different stages of development. As these agendas progress, we will update the document to ensure that it adequately reflects the UK-wide picture.

## 2 Context

### 2.1 What is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a job with training to recognised industry standards. It should be about entry or progression to a recognised occupation, involve a substantial programme of on-the-job and off-the-job training and learning and the apprentice's occupational competence should be tested through formative and summative assessment, which might be continuous or end point assessment (EPA).

Not all training is an apprenticeship. Work experience alone, shorter duration training for a job, attending a course, or assessing and certificating an employee who is already working in the occupation, are all positive forms of learning and accreditation at work but they are not apprenticeships.

An apprenticeship programme should be designed to meet all the needs of a new entrant to the occupation rather than only the continuing professional development needs of existing employees. Where existing employees in the apprenticeship occupation join an apprenticeship, they should only do so if they need substantial training to achieve occupational competence. Their prior learning can then be recognised and the duration of their apprenticeship shortened accordingly.

Different policies apply in each nation on the levels of apprenticeship which can be funded and how the apprenticeships are developed with different stakeholder groups.

#### England

Apprenticeship standards are employer-led: employers set the apprenticeship standards; create the demand for apprentices to meet their skills needs; contribute towards the costs or fund the apprenticeship through the levy; and are responsible for employing and training the apprentice. But the needs of the apprentice are equally important: to achieve competence in a skilled occupation, which is transferable and aims to improve long term earnings potential, greater security and the capability to progress in the workplace.

In England apprenticeship standards are no longer based on qualifications and only a minority of apprenticeship standards overall contain mandatory qualifications (although a large majority at levels 6 and 7 contain a mandatory degree and will continue to do so). The level of the apprenticeship is therefore judged against the level of the occupation expressed in the standard, on the basis of one occupation to one apprenticeship standard at one level.

This is different from the position with apprenticeship frameworks<sup>5</sup> that were based on qualifications and hence qualification levels. In most cases, frameworks were based on successive levels for the same (or a very similar) occupation and hence taken one level at a time. However, standards are based on training from scratch with the aim of achieving a given level.

The origin of the levels framework used today is levels 1 to 5 of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) developed in the late 1980s. This was based originally on the level of the occupation. Changes over time have seen a greater emphasis on the level of

---

<sup>5</sup> The focus for the England-specific guidance is on Apprenticeship Standards. It should be noted that the UK Quality Code will apply to apprenticeships in England containing higher education and delivered through an Apprenticeship Framework. Where additional guidance is needed for such an apprenticeship, please contact [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)

qualifications based on the degree of difficulty or challenge as opposed to the level of occupational competence in the workplace; HE levels were incorporated into the overall framework in the early 2000s. However, successive regulators have maintained the equivalence of qualification levels to NVQ levels and hence to the level of occupational competence. Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications are also relevant to the measures of occupation competence for levels 4 to 8.

The Institute for Apprenticeships has produced a table of levels descriptors<sup>6</sup> which are designed to make it easier to determine an accurate level for each apprenticeship standard and to align it with the overall framework of qualification levels.

The UK Quality Code applies in its entirety to higher education provision within apprenticeships, where appropriate. The academic standards and frameworks set out within the Quality Code will also apply. These include: The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, Qualification Characteristics Statements, the national Credit Frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements.

## **Wales**

In June 2017, Wales set out proposals to reform post-compulsory education and training, which includes proposals for schools' sixth-form provision to be brought within the ambit of the new Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales (TERCW). The technical consultation is expected to delay longer term developments in Wales.

The Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW) sets out the minimum requirements to be included in a recognised Welsh apprenticeship framework.

An apprenticeship framework must specify its level using the national level descriptors described in the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). A framework must be at level 2 to qualify as a Foundation Apprenticeship, be at level 3 to qualify as an Apprenticeship and be at a level between 4 and 7 to qualify as a Higher Apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship frameworks up to and including level 5 are awarded through a tender process for work-based learning contracts. This process requires that companies pass the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) stage in order to achieve eligibility to proceed to the Invitation to Tender (ITT) stage. A work-based learning (WBL) contract is a legally binding contract that is agreed between the Welsh Ministers and the contracted WBL provider. Contracts are issued annually on an academic year basis and delivered subject to terms and conditions set out in the contract.

Welsh Government funding for Degree Apprenticeships level 6 will be allocated via HEFCW. Funding for level 7 is not currently planned for Wales. Funding for all other apprenticeships up to and including apprenticeships at level 5 will continue to be allocated through the current work-based learning network.

Apprenticeship learning in Wales is defined through frameworks that specify the qualifications and training that must be achieved to earn an Apprenticeship certificate. Degree Apprenticeships in Wales are delivered by HEFCW-funded institutions. All other apprenticeships in Wales are delivered through the Welsh Government Apprenticeship

---

<sup>6</sup> See [www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/1538/occupational-levels-guidance.pdf](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/1538/occupational-levels-guidance.pdf) (PDF, 71KB)

provider network. The Welsh Government is committed to supporting the development of Higher Apprenticeships in areas of economic growth and skill shortages.

Degree apprenticeships are work-based learning programmes that provide opportunities for individuals working in Wales to develop relevant industry knowledge and job competencies while in paid employment, gaining the experience of doing a particular job(s).<sup>7</sup> Requirements for completing a degree apprenticeship will be set out in apprenticeship frameworks, commissioned by the Welsh Government, and will include a level 6 degree qualification that is recognised by employers across an industry or range of industries. HEFCW-funded institutions will be required to ensure that Degree Apprenticeships meet all the requirements of the relevant apprenticeship framework. HEFCW-funded institutions are also encouraged to offer delivery through other providers, where it best meets the needs of the employer and the apprentice. Flexible delivery methods are welcome and will not be limited to just the lead degree apprenticeship provider. While the funding mechanism for Degree Apprenticeships will differ from other apprenticeships in Wales, they will form part of the Welsh apprenticeship system.

There are no restrictions to the type and/or size of employer that can recruit an apprentice, provided that the apprenticeship is within one of the priority areas identified by Welsh Government. The employer and provider must be clear that the individual apprentice will have the opportunity, in the workplace, to meet the competency requirements of the apprenticeship framework. Providers will need to be clear and transparent with the employer and the learner about the commitments they are signing up to, including commitment to release the employee for any off-the-job training.

A full degree apprenticeship will be a minimum of three years in duration. However, they may need to be longer to ensure that the apprentice has sufficient time to meet the apprenticeship framework requirements while working.

Where relevant, providers are expected to recognise prior learning, particularly where individuals have undertaken apprenticeships at lower levels. Where individuals' prior learning has been recognised, Degree Apprenticeships are expected to be shorter in duration.

---

<sup>7</sup> [HEFCW Statement: Degree Apprenticeships in Wales \(March 2018\)](#) (PDF, 71KB)

## 2.2 About apprenticeships involving UK higher education

Work-integrated higher education learning programmes have been a longstanding feature of UK higher education. Examples include medical degrees with clinical attachments, teaching, nursing, and social work degrees, which all require varying periods of practice, work-based learning degrees specifically designed to recognise learning from work, and higher education workforce development programmes designed to meet the needs of employers. New models of apprenticeships that involve higher education represent the latest iteration of work-integrated higher education provision.

Apprenticeship models across the four nations of the UK are at different stages of policy development and implementation and these are described in more detail below.

All apprenticeships that involve higher education (at level 4 or above on *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and at level 7 and above in Scotland) are covered by the expectations of the Quality Code. Providers also need to comply with wider regulatory frameworks that relate to apprenticeships, as well as those covering funding and professional qualifications.

### England

A key characteristic of apprenticeships involving higher education training and learning provision in England, as in the other UK nations, is that an apprenticeship is a job and the employer, not the individual apprentice, is the customer and purchaser of the apprenticeship. Employers, starting with levy-paying employers, are purchasing apprenticeship training provision and the services of an end-point assessment organisation to deliver the End Point Assessment (EPA) (through the Apprenticeship Service).

Individuals can only be employed as apprentices if they are working towards the achievement of an approved Apprenticeship Standard,<sup>8</sup> which defines the occupation and sets out the duties and knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) required to perform an identified job role. Every Apprenticeship Standard is devised by a consortium of employers that meet the requirements of the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) - Trailblazers - who employ people and operate in the relevant industry sector. Trailblazer groups for Degree Apprenticeships will include representatives from higher education providers. Trailblazers also devise the way in which the required duties and KSBs are assessed - this is outlined in the End-Point Assessment Plan (EPA Plan).

Only one Apprenticeship Standard can be developed for an occupation. In 2017/18, approximately 40 per cent of Apprenticeship Standards approved for delivery were at higher education level.

Assessment of duties and KSBs is conducted through a holistic EPA. For Degree Apprenticeships, if the degree is mandatory, it can be either an 'integrated' or 'non-integrated' Degree Apprenticeship. There are advantages and disadvantages to each delivery route for both employers, apprentices and higher education institutions (HEIs). The IfA's Trailblazer guidance<sup>9</sup> provides a definition of the two types and of the criteria and process for mandating of qualifications. The outcome of EPA, whether integrated or non-integrated, determines whether the apprentice is competent to undertake the identified occupation.

---

<sup>8</sup> Apprentices can also be working to achieve an approved Apprenticeship Framework; Apprenticeship Frameworks will be deleted as they are replaced by Apprenticeship Standards.

<sup>9</sup> See [www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships)

## Key players

The Department for Education Accountability Statement makes clear the roles and responsibilities of key players within the approval, delivery and regulation of higher education in apprenticeships (due to be revised autumn 2018).<sup>10</sup>

## The regulatory context

To deliver apprenticeships involving higher education providers must:

- be registered by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP)
- where providing EPA or delivering an integrated degree apprenticeship be registered on the Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations (RoEPAO) for each standard
- where delivering to non-levy paying employers, have secured funding from ESFA to do so, or be sub-contracted (ESFA rules apply) by a training provider who has secured ESFA funding to deliver provision to non-levy-paying employers; the levy transfer system can also be used<sup>11</sup>
- comply with the ESFA Funding Rules for Training Providers, Apprenticeship Service requirements and guidance issued by the ESFA, and contracts between the ESFA and provider, and employer and provider, and employer, provider and EPA organisation (where appropriate).

All providers of higher education in England are subject to the conditions of registration, which include the expectations of the Quality Code.

Where higher education providers are the main provider they will have responsibility for the entirety of the apprenticeship training provision, including subcontractors. Where the higher education provider is a subcontracted provider they will have responsibility for delivery of a specified element of higher education.

All providers of higher education apprenticeships in England are also subject to initial and ongoing RoATP registration requirements for quality assurance.<sup>12</sup> The Office for Students (OfS)/QAA is responsible for providing ongoing assurance to ESFA on the quality of providers delivering level 6+ apprenticeship training and for working with Ofsted to reach a judgement for providers of level 4/5 apprenticeship training containing a higher education qualification. Ofsted is responsible for providing ongoing quality assurance of providers of all other level 4/5 apprenticeship training.

In England, apprenticeships have legal protection equal to that of degrees, and approaches to marketing, information provision, development and delivery have to be undertaken in this context.

Specific rules and registration requirements apply to employers, including higher education providers who solely want to deliver apprenticeships to their own staff.

## Additional funding requirements

The ESFA's funding rules govern the use of levy payments by levy-paying employers and Government payment top-ups, and cover transfer of unspent levy payments to non-levy

---

<sup>10</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-accountability-statement](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-accountability-statement)

<sup>11</sup> See [www.gov.uk/guidance/transferring-apprenticeship-service-funds](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/transferring-apprenticeship-service-funds)

<sup>12</sup> See [www.gov.uk/guidance/register-of-apprenticeship-training-providers](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-of-apprenticeship-training-providers)

paying employers, among other things. Levy payers can transfer up to 10 per cent of their levy for apprentices to other organisations. Higher education providers need to be fully aware of the funding rules if they are drawing funds to train and, where appropriate, assess apprentices. Higher education providers delivering apprenticeships are subject to ESFA audit.

## Scotland

The Scottish Government is committed to the expansion of work-based learning opportunities through Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships and are committed to increasing the number of Apprentices to 30,000 by 2020.<sup>10</sup>

Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs) are developed by Skills Development Scotland through consultation with employers, universities, professional bodies and qualifications authorities in the form of technical expert groups (TEGs). The TEG acts as an advisory group on behalf of an industry sector with the premise that industry provides the expertise to identify the skills and knowledge they need for a competent graduate workforce. The academic representatives develop the programme, quality standards and alignment to professional accreditation required for delivery of the award.

GAs are currently available from SCQF level 8 (Dip HE) through to SCQF level 11 (master's degree level). The qualification an apprentice receives at the end is the same as the one they would get upon completion of a conventional learning programme with a further or higher education institute.

All Graduate Apprentices must be employed and resident in Scotland at the start of their Apprenticeship.

There is no maximum age limit, but employees must be at least 16 years old (or 18 depending on any health and safety requirements in the workplace). Graduate Apprenticeships are available to support existing employees gain a relevant work-based qualification, or to recruit and train new starts in the company.

Any employer in Scotland can access Graduate Apprenticeships support.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has a responsibility to ensure the quality of all Apprenticeship programmes in Scotland; this means that they will work with QAA and other regulatory bodies to align SDS Quality Management processes with existing structures where possible to ensure a streamlined approach and to reduce duplication of effort.

## Key players

**Skills Development Scotland (SDS)** leads on the development of Graduate Apprenticeships and administers the funding support to learning partners on behalf of the Scottish Government.

The **Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)** will quality assure SCQF level 8 to SCQF level 11 Higher Apprenticeships as part of the revised operating model for quality assessment in Scotland.

The **Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)** has a range of awarding body functions including the development, validation and review of qualifications, the awarding of certificates, and quality assurance of educational establishments offering SQA qualifications. SQA Accreditation authorises all vocational qualifications (other than degrees) delivered in Scotland.

**Universities Scotland** is the representative body of Scotland's 19 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

### **Additional funding requirements**

Until spring 2018, SDS, through a procurement exercise, secured funded GAs.

For cohorts starting up to autumn 2018, Apprentices' learning costs will be funded by SDS for the full duration of the course.

## **Wales**

From 2016-17 HEFCW-funded institutions have been supported to develop degree-level qualifications that could be included on an apprenticeship framework in Wales.

The Welsh Government Apprenticeship skills policy plan, *Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy*<sup>13</sup> set out its commitment to developing Degree Apprenticeships in Wales. The Apprenticeship Policy and five-year action plan commits to delivering 100,000 all-age Apprenticeships developed through a network of employer-led Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) to meet skills shortages. RSPs are tasked with analysing economic challenges and likely growth areas to identify the skills needed in the workforce. They produce Regional Employment and Skills Plans to analyse and influence the provision of skills and support growth in each region. These plans provide recommendations to Welsh Government to influence the prioritisation and deployment of skills funding.

Initial priority areas for Degree Apprenticeships (level 6) have been identified as ICT/computing, engineering and advanced manufacturing. Welsh Government expects delivery of Degree Apprenticeships to commence in these priority areas in 2018-19.

A Digital Framework has been issued and it is expected that Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Framework will be issued later in 2018.

HEFCW-funded institutions in Wales that wish to be funded for the delivery of Degree Apprenticeships will be required to submit proposals to HEFCW. Proposals will require HEFCW-funded institutions to set out how they will meet HEFCW priorities for Degree Apprenticeships.

HEFCW and Welsh Government will ensure that arrangements are monitored and reviewed.

Welsh Government has developed three RSPs to identify and respond to the skills needs of Wales. Higher Education representation comprises regional groups developed within HEFCW's integrated approach to regional planning.

### **Regional Skills Partnerships**

- **The North Wales Economic Ambition Board:** Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Glyndŵr University and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
- **The South East Wales Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership (LSkIP):** Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales and Bridgend College

---

<sup>13</sup> See [Welsh Government: Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy \(2017\)](#).

- **South West and Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLP):** University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea University, Gower College, Neath Port Talbot College, and Pembrokeshire College.

The Open University in Wales is represented on each partnership.

Welsh Government also formed the **Cardiff Capital Region** and the **Swansea Bay City Region**.

## Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the 2014 Apprenticeship Strategy 'Securing our Success' committed to making apprenticeships available between level 3 and level 8 (PhD equivalent). This extension of the apprenticeship offer has been termed 'Higher Level Apprenticeships', a descriptor covering apprenticeships with a targeted qualification between level 4 (Cert HE/HNC equivalent) and level 8 (PhD equivalent).

Under the reformed system of apprenticeships, employers have the key role in apprenticeship provision. An interim Strategic Advisory Forum, based on a partnership comprising employers, government, trade unions and training providers, has been established to advise government on the provision of Apprenticeships.

A series of Sectoral Partnerships have also been established to advise government on the provision of Apprenticeships. It is intended that Sectoral Partnerships will support the development of Higher Level Apprenticeship provision, with secretariat support from the Department for the Economy.

Following a successful evaluation, Higher Level Apprenticeship provision in Northern Ireland became part of the mainstream delivery at further education colleges and higher education institutions. There is no numerical target for apprenticeship starts in Northern Ireland, rather the focus is on delivery of a quality apprenticeship.

### Key players

The **Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland)** has overall accountability for the system of apprenticeships, including policy and governance. At present, the Department also performs a quality assurance function for Higher Level Apprenticeships.

The **further education colleges** in Northern Ireland are responsible for delivery of the off-the-job training component of apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5.

The **higher education institutions** in Northern Ireland are responsible for delivery of the off-the-job training component of apprenticeships at levels 6 to 8.

### The regulatory context

In Northern Ireland, an apprenticeship is recognised through a series of core components.

- An apprenticeship will be for a new employee, or in the case of an existing employee, a new job role that requires a substantial amount of learning and skills development.
- An apprenticeship will be available in professional and technical occupations commencing from level 3 up to level 8.
- The completion of an apprenticeship will take at least two years.

- Apprenticeships will enable mobility within a sector and across the wider economy by including a breadth of training beyond the specific needs of a job through both on and off-the-job training.
- An apprenticeship will be designed to facilitate the progression of participants to higher professional or technical training or on to a higher academic pathway.

## **3 Quality assuring higher education in apprenticeships**

### **3.1 Responsibilities of higher education providers, employers, apprentices and others**

#### **Setting academic standards and devising apprenticeships**

Higher education providers involved in delivering apprenticeships have dual responsibilities for quality assurance: apprenticeship training providers are responsible for the quality of the apprenticeship training that they deliver and higher education providers that have the legal powers to award UK degrees are responsible for the academic standards and quality of the higher education and qualifications that they award. This applies irrespective of the location/s in which programmes leading to those awards are delivered, who is involved in delivery, or whether they are delivered in conjunction with professional or other qualifications. Accordingly, degree-awarding bodies, such as universities, have sole responsibility for the academic standards and quality of any higher education and qualifications that they offer as part of apprenticeships.

When designing, developing and approving apprenticeships involving higher education, higher education providers must ensure that the higher education meets the expectations set out by the Quality Code, as appropriate. They must, for example, position each higher education programme at the appropriate level of the relevant qualifications framework, and ensure that learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in that framework; they must operate formal and effective processes for approval; and they must ensure that qualifications are only awarded where standards have been satisfied and the relevant learning outcomes achieved.

Although responsibility for academic standards can never be delegated, it is very common in higher education for degree-awarding bodies and other higher education providers to work with other organisations, including colleges and employers, to design and deliver higher education programmes. Similarly, it is common for degree-awarding bodies to offer programmes that fulfil the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB), or programmes that are delivered in conjunction with professional qualifications. In these circumstances, as for all higher education programmes, the programme design, and, in some cases approval, monitoring and review processes, will take into account input from a range of sources including staff, apprentices, employers and PSRBs. The Quality Code encourages use of external reference points and expertise and recommends that providers support both staff and other participants to contribute effectively to programme design, development and approval.

Apprenticeship models are developed in consultation with, or the development is led by, employers and sector bodies and will reflect employer need as well as national and regional skills needs. Therefore, higher education providers need to be sufficiently flexible to ensure that they respond to diverse and emerging employer and economic sector priorities when designing and developing learning programmes, while also ensuring that they are able to satisfy requirements for assuring academic standards. The independence of higher education providers and the autonomy that they have to decide what programmes to offer, within the wider framework governing academic standards and quality, means that they can ensure standards and quality are not compromised.

In this context, the employer-led characteristics of apprenticeships that involve higher education mean that higher education providers will have to meet the overarching requirement for assuring academic standards and quality, and the need for a more work-integrated programme designed along with employers, as well as the legal requirements of

national apprenticeship policies and associated PSRB accreditation standards. This may involve a cultural shift for some higher education providers, in that it positions employers, either directly or through representation on Technical Expert Groups, along with sector bodies, as the main drivers in the development process for apprenticeships that involve higher education qualifications. A traditional approach, where a higher education provider would invite an employer to endorse a programme after it has been designed, will not suffice.

## England

In the new English system, as outlined in the previous section, Apprenticeship Standards documents specify the duties and KSBs required to demonstrate full occupational competence in the relevant job role. These Standards are developed by Trailblazer groups made up of employers in a particular industry sector.

The Trailblazer approach is designed primarily to put employers' needs at the heart of the apprenticeship development process. However, Trailblazer groups for Degree Apprenticeships should also include higher education providers as full members to ensure that the development of Apprenticeship Standards is appropriately informed by and reflects required standards for the award of a UK degree.<sup>14</sup> Higher education providers and PSRBs (where appropriate) will also collaborate in the design of the Apprenticeship Standard and the EPA plan for Degree Apprenticeships.

Other Trailblazer groups developing apprenticeships that include higher education normally liaise with, and refer to, groups of potential providers in the process of devising Apprenticeship Standards and associated EPA plans.

It is a condition of ESFA funding that higher education providers must ensure that the programmes they offer are designed to enable an apprentice to develop the duties and KSBs specified in the relevant Apprenticeship Standard. When designing and developing apprenticeships that involve higher education, higher education providers must ensure that their programmes constitute an appropriate preparation for the achievement of part or all of the duties and KSBs as specified by the Apprenticeship Standard, and that they meet national requirements for the academic standards and quality of higher education qualifications.

Higher education providers with degree awarding powers retain full responsibility for the qualifications awarded in their name including for apprenticeships that incorporate higher education. However, as required for membership of the RoATP, higher education providers should also be able to demonstrate that they have quality assured processes for ensuring that higher education programmes are 'fit for purpose' in delivering identified apprenticeships to the approved national Apprenticeship Standard. Whether a higher education programme has been specifically designed to deliver an apprenticeship, or existing programmes have been specifically adapted for this purpose, validation and approval processes should ensure that programmes, including the training provision, constitute an appropriate preparation to enable apprentices to meet the nationally approved Apprenticeship Standard of occupational competence. This is particularly important for integrated Degree Apprenticeships where the EPA is conducted as part of the degree. Where apprenticeships include PSRB recognition as an outcome of successful completion, PSRBs should also normally be appropriately involved in validation and approval processes.

---

<sup>14</sup> Trailblazers wishing to seek support from Universities/HEIs can contact the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC): [uvac@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:uvac@bolton.ac.uk) and QAA: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk).

There is a range of possible contractual relationships between employers, providers and sub-contractors that can also affect the roles and responsibilities for quality assuring standards. In some cases a higher education provider may not be the 'main provider' of an apprenticeship that includes higher education. For example, a larger employer may be listed on the RoATP, as an employer-provider, and wish to be the main provider for a degree apprenticeship even though they do not have degree awarding powers. For this purpose, the employer would need to have a sub-contractor agreement in place with a higher education provider with degree awarding powers. The responsibility for the standard of the degree award would remain with the higher education provider but the responsibility for the degree apprenticeship would be shared between the employer-provider and the higher education provider as sub-contractor. Higher education providers should ensure that provision for a full range of employer/provider/sub-contractor relationships is built into arrangements for quality assuring apprenticeships that include higher education.

All apprenticeships require the successful completion of EPA as the means to establish that apprentices have demonstrated the required standard of occupational competence in the respective job role. The approved EPA Plan will determine how occupational competence is required to be assessed for each apprenticeship and what kind of body will undertake the EPA. For Degree Apprenticeships, EPA will either be part of the degree programme for integrated Degree Apprenticeships or external to the degree programme for non-integrated Degree Apprenticeships. In either case, only organisations listed on the Register of End-point Assessment Organisations (RoEPAO) can conduct EPA for specific apprenticeships. This means that higher education providers delivering integrated Degree Apprenticeships must be listed on the RoEPAO to be able to conduct EPA for their own degree awards. For non-integrated Degree Apprenticeships and all other apprenticeships that include higher education, EPA must be conducted by a separate organisation from the higher education provider that delivered the apprenticeship programme. It is the responsibility of the relevant End-point Assessment Organisation,<sup>15</sup> which conducts EPA, to claim Apprenticeship Completion Certificates from ESFA.

When looking at design, development and approval of apprenticeships there are a number of areas worth further consideration.

- Apprenticeships involving higher education are designed to provide appropriate opportunities for apprentices to achieve all the duties and KSBs required for occupational competence as set out in the relevant Apprenticeship Standard and the requirements of the associated EPA Plan. The clarity of the relationship between the duties and KSBs specified in the Apprenticeship Standard and programme and module learning outcomes is a key consideration for higher education providers of apprenticeships involving higher education. For higher education programmes that have been specifically designed to deliver a specified Apprenticeship Standard, the duties and KSBs identified, which are the outcomes of the apprenticeship, can also constitute the programme learning outcomes. This approach will be particularly but not exclusively relevant for the design of integrated Degree Apprenticeships. While 'knowledge' and 'skills' outcomes are common to higher education programmes, particular attention should also be given to how the 'behaviours' required as an outcome of an apprenticeship are reflected in the programme and module learning outcomes. The design of outcomes for apprenticeship programmes that include higher education should also demonstrate alignment with the FHEQ and reference to level descriptors such as the SEEC

---

<sup>15</sup> Only organisations who are listed on the Register of End-point Assessment Organisations (RoEPAO - held by ESFA) are eligible to conduct EPA for each specified apprenticeship.

Credit Level Descriptors (2016),<sup>16</sup> which are specifically designed to encompass learning from work settings.

- As Apprenticeship Standards are developed by consortia of employers (Trailblazers), early engagement with these groups can be a valuable means to contribute to the design and development stages to promote alignment with required higher education standards and quality expectations. All Apprenticeship Standards are set at a level that should correspond to recognised academic qualification - levels 4 to 7 for higher education. Higher education providers can contribute to the development of Apprenticeship Standards by seeking to ensure that the language used to describe duties and KSBs appropriately reflects the expectations of higher education levels as described by the FHEQ. In addition, reference to level descriptors such as the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors (2016) will help ensure consistency of expectations with regards to the levels of apprenticeship and higher education qualifications. Trailblazer groups are required to provide evidence of the support of at least two higher education providers when submitting a proposal for apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7.
- Through design, development and approval processes, higher education providers should consider how an apprenticeship that includes higher education provides apprentices who are undertaking it with equal opportunities for a high-quality learning and training experience; for example, by considering the range of working contexts and the variety of employment settings within which the apprenticeship will be undertaken. This should include the relationship between the structure of programmes, approaches to learning, teaching and assessment in relation to work patterns, geographical location(s) and the specific requirements of work required.
- When evaluating their design, development and approval processes, higher education providers review where changes are required to accommodate the delivery of apprenticeships, and where additional guidance would be useful (for example, concerning how higher education providers build in approved Apprenticeship Standards and EPA plans as reference points for the development of their apprenticeships).
- In consideration of the arrangements for validation and approval events and as part of the internal quality assurance arrangements, higher education providers should seek to ensure that appropriate practice expertise is represented on validation and approval panels. The requirement that apprenticeships that include higher education represent an appropriate preparation to enable apprentices to demonstrate duties and KSBs as evidence of the required level of occupational competence means that academic subject expertise may not be sufficient. Approaches will vary depending on the expectations of the relevant industry sector but perhaps, in particular for Degree Apprenticeships, validation and approval panels may include independent external members who bring both practice expertise and subject expertise. This may also include PSRB representation where an apprenticeship leads to formal recognition by a named PSRB.
- Both employer and higher education provider have shared responsibilities for ensuring the quality of the apprentice learning and training experience for apprenticeships that include higher education. This includes both on-the-job and off-the-job learning and training; effective collaboration between employer and provider across all aspects of the apprenticeship is required to provide high quality apprentice learning and training opportunities. In particular, there should be clear

---

<sup>16</sup> See [www.seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SEEC-descriptors-2016.pdf](http://www.seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SEEC-descriptors-2016.pdf) (PDF, 491KB)

arrangements for how the apprentice will be supported in the workplace to develop the duties and KSBs specified within the apprenticeship standard. When validating or approving higher education programmes for the purpose of delivering apprenticeships, higher education providers should consider the effectiveness of proposed workplace mentoring arrangements, how workplace mentors are inducted and supported in undertaking the role by both employers and providers and how the interaction between workplace mentor, apprentice and higher education provider tutor is structured. Validation and approval panels should also consider how a higher education provider will work with employers to ensure that the working environment within which apprentices are operating is appropriate to enable them to develop the required duties and KSBs for the relevant Apprenticeship Standard. This should also include matters of pastoral support, safeguarding, prevent duty, equality and diversity and health and safety.

### **The Quality Alliance**

The Quality Alliance is made up of agencies involved in ensuring quality of apprenticeships. It includes: the Department for Education, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Institute for Apprenticeships, the Office for Students, the Quality Assurance Agency, Ofqual and Ofsted. Universities UK (UUK), the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) act as advisers to the Quality Alliance.

The Quality Alliance, has developed, consulted on and published a Quality Statement,<sup>17</sup> which was led by the IfA and was the subject of widespread consultation and the detailed contents received strong support from both employers and other stakeholders. The IfA's Apprentices Panel was also consulted.

The Quality Statement defines a set of statements of quality in apprenticeships covering:

- 1 What an apprenticeship is and is not
- 2 The agreed partnership between the employer, apprentice and provider as set out in the Commitment Statement
- 3 The occupation and the standard
- 4 The job as the basis for the apprenticeship
- 5 The training programme
- 6 The end-point assessment.

The IfA is directly responsible for the quality of the first, third and sixth statements; employers, employer-providers, main providers will have responsibility for the other statements, these responsibilities will vary, depending on the arrangements set out in the written agreements (contracts). However, the higher education provider will always have ultimate responsibility for the quality of its apprenticeships' training provision (as a member of RoATP and as a higher education provider) and the quality and standards of any award that it confers (as a degree-awarding body).

---

<sup>17</sup> See [www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship)

## Scotland

GAs are currently available from SCQF level 8 (Dip HE) through to SCQF level 11 (master's degree level). The qualification an apprentice receives at the end is the same as the one they would get upon completion of a conventional learning programme with a further or higher education institute.

A GA at SCQF level 10 (honours degree level) will take up to four years to complete and a GA at SCQF level 8 (Dip HE level) will take up to two years to complete. Some individuals may complete the GA in a shorter period because the working year is longer than the university year meaning the overall time may be reduced.

In most cases, the GA courses have been mapped to professional body standards so apprentices will be able to apply for membership to any professional body relevant to their industry at the conclusion of their programme.

GAs support the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills needed for graduates to work and progress in industry. They are procured and part-funded by Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

SDS develops national frameworks aligned to current demand and growth sectors across Scotland.

When designing, developing and delivering GAs, higher education providers are expected to work in partnership between employers and any other involved providers (such as colleges) to design a programme of study that:

- meets the GA criteria developed by SDS
- meets the aims of the GA framework as developed by the TEG
- meets the needs of employers; and the academic requirements of the awarding body
- sets out clear goals and aspirations in support of equality and diversity with appropriate monitoring and other processes in place
- ensures liaison with the employer on the content and practical activities in the apprentice's individual learning and training plan, including the technologies and/or software development environments used
- ensures robust evaluation and enhancement for the programmes offered
- develops learning through reflection and review of work processes and experience.

## Wales

Frameworks will have been developed with employers and qualifications included on those frameworks will have gone through a process to ensure that they meet the requirements of an apprenticeship framework and the needs of employers. Regional Skills Partnerships, labour market information and sector reviews by Qualifications Wales will inform Welsh Government where apprenticeship funding should be targeted. The Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB) informed by the Wales Apprenticeship Advisory Board (WAAB) will consider apprenticeship developments as part of its remit and will advise on framework development.

It is imperative that apprenticeships in Wales are of a high quality. Only institutions funded by HEFCW can deliver Degree Apprenticeships in Wales.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education expects that Degree Apprenticeships:

- comply with the provisions of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009
- comply with the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales
- are closely aligned to the broader apprenticeship programme, and
- provide an opportunity for collaboration between the higher education sector and the work-based learning network at all levels of Higher Apprenticeships.

## **Northern Ireland**

The Higher Level Apprenticeship programme in Northern Ireland provides an alternative professional and technical work-based route for participants and employers to achieve industry approved qualifications at levels 4 and above. The programme, which launched in September 2017 following a number of years piloting, provides opportunities at levels 4 and 5 through the six local further education colleges with opportunities at level 6 and above through the three local universities.

Each Higher Level Apprenticeship consists of both on-the-job and off-the-job training, with the participant working towards a qualification that is nationally recognised, accredited and certificated by a national awarding body or organisation. Each Higher Level Apprenticeship has been designed through a sector partnership, and the Department for the Economy provides full funding for the off-the-job training element with additional incentives for small to medium size enterprise (SME) employers.

Sector partnerships have been established in 18 different areas, bringing together employers, industry bodies and curriculum experts from the further and higher education sectors. These bodies work to create pathways that offer a single award across the sector at each level, and progression pathways that enable a participant to continue their learning.

## **Recruitment, selection and admission**

Higher education providers' obligations with respect to the recruitment, selection and admission of students, as set out in the Quality Code, are underpinned by the widely accepted 'Schwartz principles' of fair admission.

Those principles state that a fair admissions system should:

- be transparent, and provide consistent and efficient information
- select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and potential
- use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
- minimise barriers to applicants
- be professional in every respect and underpinned by institutional structures and processes.

These practices will enable the selection of students who are able to complete the chosen programme of study.

While providers would be expected to abide by these principles in all of their recruitment, selection and admission activities, the processes for recruitment and entry for apprenticeships are different from those used for student recruitment and admission. As employees, apprentices will normally be recruited by the employer; in Northern Ireland

some training providers invite applications to the programme, shortlist and present employers with a selection. This is at the request of the employer, and more prevalent with SMEs. Dual admission procedures may be needed to ensure that the employer's recruitment requirements are satisfied, as well as the higher education provider's minimum entry requirements. Alternatively, the employer may seek to work in partnership with a higher education provider to support selection and minimise the need for dual admission. In practice this may involve higher education provider staff taking part in the assessment and interview processes for applicants.

## **England**

Selection of apprentices is, in England, principally an employer-led activity. It therefore mirrors the recruitment processes operated by employers, which may involve some initial screening and selection process. It is important to note that apprentices can be either new or existing employees and that the required evidence of merit and potential to successfully complete may differ.

Higher education providers need to be mindful of the entry requirements set within the relevant approved Apprenticeship Standard. Careful consideration should be given to the expectations set for entry requirements in the Apprenticeship Standards when compared with those set by higher education providers for higher education programmes designed or used to deliver apprenticeships. This should include consideration of minimum entry qualifications and UCAS points, where they differ from the expectations set out in the approved Apprenticeship Standard. Consideration should also be given to how entry requirements can be met through other forms of evidence, such as prior experience of work quantified by years of experience and/or levels of responsibility.

All Apprenticeship Standards in England require that apprentices have demonstrated the achievement of level 2 English and Maths prior to progressing through the 'Gateway' to the EPA. This effectively sets the expectation that some apprentices may not have achieved these level 2 qualifications prior to being employed as an apprentice but that they must successfully complete them prior to EPA. For many higher education providers this expectation may run counter to the established practice of requiring level 2 English and/or maths (as a minimum) to have been achieved prior to being admitted to higher education programmes. Higher education providers should consider carefully if these level 2 qualifications should always be a prerequisite for entry and, if not, under which circumstances and how other means of establishing an apprentice's potential to succeed can be evidenced. Working with employers, who will recruit the apprentices, higher education providers need to establish transparent, reliable and valid means of making judgements about applicants' potential including with regards to level 2 English and maths. It should also be noted that it is the higher education provider's responsibility to make arrangements to support any apprentice without the required level 2 qualifications to achieve them prior to the EPA Gateway. There is separate funding available for such apprentices; employers must allow paid time off to attend learning and training required to achieve level 2 English and maths. This time must not be included within the minimum time required for off-the-job learning and training for the apprenticeship (currently 20 per cent).

Apprenticeship Standards will typically specify where opportunities for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) are available on entry and, again, higher education providers need to ensure that consideration is given to the requirements described in Apprenticeship Standard documents and their own policies and procedure for RPL.

Where non-standard entry is accepted on a programme the provider should be able to demonstrate how it is supporting the apprentice in developing any prerequisite KSBs that they should have had at entry.

The employer contracts primarily with the provider to deliver the apprenticeship, rather than the traditional approach where the provider contracts with the student. However, where an apprenticeship involves a higher education qualification, the higher education provider will also have a contractual relationship with the apprentice as a student. The provision of apprenticeships involves important contractual dimensions that both higher education providers and employers need to consider. The specific arrangement will be defined in the Written Agreement (contract) between the employer and the higher education provider, and in the three-way Commitment Statement between employer, provider and apprentice. In the case of non-integrated Degree Apprenticeships, the role of the end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) and the interactions it will have with the provider and apprentice respectively should also be considered.

In order to support the recruitment, selection and admission process, the higher education provider publishes information about its apprenticeship offer; how the provision is managed, organised and quality assured; and how apprenticeships fit within the provider's overall mission, values and strategy and the policies that underpin its work. For prospective apprentices and their employers, information may also include:

- the type and level of apprenticeships offered
- the different locations and modes of learning that are supported and how these are organised by both the provider and employer
- higher education providers may also be required to signpost services that provide information about apprenticeship vacancies such as the 'Find an Apprenticeship Service'.<sup>18</sup> They can signpost information on apprenticeships on the UCAS<sup>19</sup> website
- in some cases, higher education providers may work with employer partners and provide specific information directly about apprenticeship vacancies
- the central role of employers in recruitment and selection and how this fits with the admission requirements of the higher education provider including requirements for level 2 English and maths. Where appropriate, this would include details about RPL.

### **Training Needs Analysis and Recognised Prior Learning (RPL)**

The goal of the apprenticeship journey is articulated in each Standard and End Point Assessment. The training needs of each apprentice might be different and through early training needs analysis the starting point for each apprentice should be determined prior to the commencement date. This aligns with the principles of recognised prior learning. Prior learning can be credit bearing and it can be experiential in nature and so the initial advice and guidance should focus on what duties and KSBs the learner has already attained relative to the required levels in the apprenticeship.

A previous academic or training award might clearly demonstrate areas of knowledge, sometimes more so than professional skills and behaviours. However, at degree level the holistic nature of learning as a combination of applied theory and reflective practice must be recognised. When conducting training needs analysis and attributing prior learning, higher education providers should work with the employer and apprentice to consider:

- previous credit-bearing awards at the same or higher level that demonstrate the specific attainment of duties and KSBs. Some modules at the relevant level need not be studied and indeed cannot be funded

---

<sup>18</sup> See [www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch](http://www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch)

<sup>19</sup> See [www.ucas.com/apprenticeships-in-the-uk](http://www.ucas.com/apprenticeships-in-the-uk)

- where significant work-based experience demonstrates the achievement of duties and KSBs, then some relevant modules need not be studied and should not be funded
- sometimes the blend of credit-bearing training and experience might act together to constitute prior learning that negates certain modules of study and prevents funding of those modules as they will not constitute new learning.

Once the above considerations have been made it is important that the remaining time of the apprenticeship will offer the opportunity to achieve the full range of duties and KSBs through the on-programme element and any work-based activities. Consider if it is reasonable to adjust the end date of the apprenticeship to allow all gateway elements to be fulfilled, but if this is a disproportionate stretch from the end of a mandated formal qualification, then it might not be an appropriate use of the apprenticeship route. In such cases the elements of learning will be disjointed and the risk of non-completion too significant.

Other principles to consider include:

- only new learning can be funded. When considering what constitutes new learning it is appropriate to recognise the impact that higher level critical thinking can have on the advancement of skills and behaviours, even if the apprentice has significant experience
- there is nothing to stop the learner from repeating learning outside of the apprenticeship, but it will not be funded and will not count towards 20 per cent off-the-job learning
- if the learner already demonstrates most of the duties and KSBs and is about ready to sit the End Point Assessment, then it would not be appropriate, or possible, to use the apprenticeship funds to simply add the formal qualification
- in other cases, more experienced applicants might demonstrate a substantial amount of experience but still need to evidence their competencies at a degree level and the formal qualification would be a sensible and eligible device to support the holistic integration of duties and KSBs at degree level.

In some cases, RPL may be precluded by the apprenticeship EPA plan.

Where RPL is allowed, the apprenticeship baseline requirement of 12 months' minimum duration and 20 per cent off-the-job training must be met.<sup>20</sup> These requirements are for the training actually delivered after any reductions due to RPL.

## Scotland

Graduate Apprenticeships are offered to new starts and existing employees within companies in Scotland. Recruitment, selection and admission processes are contextualised to the higher education provider, the employer requirements and the higher education programme entry requirements.

Individuals recruited on to Graduate Apprenticeships must be assessed to have a reasonable chance of achieving the selected degree, both in terms of the course content and the acquisition of wider graduate attributes.

<sup>20</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018)

The higher education provider's admission process would therefore take account of the employer requirements and liaise with employers to provide appropriate access to its programmes.

Higher education providers may also set minimum requirements for applicants in line with their other degree programme entry requirements. With agreement, entry requirements can be waived in the selection stage with demonstration of equivalence. Prior learning can be formally accredited through RPL.

In order to support the recruitment, selection and admission process, the higher education provider will publish information about its apprenticeship offer including:

- the title, level and mode of delivery for apprenticeships offered
- minimum and typical admissions requirements and any contextual factors
- how the provision is managed, organised and quality assured
- how flexible approaches can be used in assessing the suitability of candidates, by taking achievement of other vocational qualifications, RPL and employer input into account.

## **Wales**

Selection of apprentices in Wales is principally an employer-led activity, as all apprentices will be recruited on an employed status. Their job role will need to fulfil the requirements of the level 6 framework identified for delivery and admission processes in Wales for Degree Apprenticeships and comprise the employer and awarding body entry requirements.

Apprenticeship contracts will include the additional arrangements:

- apprentices spend 51 per cent or more of their time working in Wales
- an apprenticeship agreement is in place
- apprentices receive on-the-job and off-the-job learning
- apprentices have their progress reviewed at least every two months. Reviews should involve the HEFCW-funded institution, the learner and the employer
- previous experience and learning is recognised where appropriate
- apprentices have access to the full range of student services offered by the HEFCW-funded institution
- apprentices can have equivalent level qualifications to those included on the apprenticeship framework but not in the same subject.

## **Northern Ireland**

Higher Level Apprenticeship recruitment, selection and admission processes are set out for local providers in an Operational Requirements document. To be eligible, a participant must, as a minimum, meet the following criteria:

- a) have attained the minimum school leaving age; (16 as at 1 July prior to the start date of the programme)
- b) be a new employee in, or about to take up a permanent remunerative employment offer, including a specific start date and documented evidence from the employer of the actual job offer, or an existing employee in a new job role that requires a substantial amount of learning and skills development commensurate to the apprenticeship pathway
- c) be employed by a Northern Ireland-based company and be contracted to work a minimum of 21 hours per week (which includes day release/off-the-job directed training)

with one employer. Directed training must be paid as part of the apprentice's contracted hours

- d) have the potential to successfully complete the requirements of the appropriate Higher Level Apprenticeship
- e) meet any health requirements, for example colour vision, specific to the occupation of their choice
- f) have achieved all necessary entry academic qualifications determined by the relevant sector for the Departmental approved apprenticeship
- g) pass any entry tests specified by the relevant sector for the Departmental approved apprenticeship.

Employers may apply their own criteria during recruitment. However, only those who are assessed as capable/committed to achieving the full requirements of an HLA should be enrolled on to the programme. Where appropriate, a Sectoral Partnership may agree a set of recruitment criteria, to provide a uniform approach and meet the needs of employers.

## 3.2 Learning and teaching

### Learning, teaching and apprentice development

A key feature of apprenticeships is that the majority of learning and training takes place 'on-the-job' while apprentices are engaged in work activity. It is therefore fundamental that an apprentice's work will provide a source for learning, an environment for learning and the key context for learning. Meanwhile 'off-the-job' learning and training can take the form of traditional face-to-face delivery by a higher education provider, or take place within the workplace, perhaps using workplace facilities and may be supported by a variety of online learning opportunities. The integration of on and off-the-job learning and training is fundamental for delivery of a high-quality apprenticeship. This integration, and the focus on delivering occupational competence, are what differentiate an apprenticeship from part-time learning while at work.

The Quality Code recognises that UK higher education embraces a wide variety of modes of both learning and teaching, which can be used in different combinations and include flexible and distributed learning, work-based or placement learning, and technology-enhanced learning. It is also acknowledged that some or all of the learning opportunities may be provided by an employer or organisation offering a work-based learning opportunity, or an employer supporting its employee(s) on a higher education programme where the workplace is used as a learning environment.

As such, the Quality Code presents ample opportunity for providers to accommodate a wide range of sites and situations of learning, in order to deliver apprenticeships that align with employers' and learners' needs. However, it places specific requirements on those who design and deliver apprenticeships to ensure that the quality of the learning opportunities is consistent with that of all other higher education programmes. This includes, for example, the need to have clear agreement of responsibilities of all parties involved in learning, teaching and enabling student achievement. A key part of the main provider's responsibility is to ensure that the apprentice's progression through their apprenticeship is tracked, across all forms and locations of delivery and that interventions and or adjustments to delivery by a range of stakeholders is managed and recorded. This is a challenge for which Apprenticeship Programme Leads or Apprenticeship Managers need support and clear structures to work within.

The Quality Code highlights the need for all staff who teach and manage/enable learning, including those staff who are not employees of the providers and/or are not based at the provider organisation, to be appropriately qualified, supported and developed. With regards to workplace mentors, higher education providers will normally have a variety of resources available to support and develop the range of staff involved in apprenticeship training and ensure that they are appropriately experienced to undertake their responsibilities. These might typically include ongoing liaison with tutors with responsibility for supporting the learning development of apprentices (which can involve induction sessions and regular, scheduled virtual or face-to-face meetings).

The Quality Code also encourages the creation of an environment in which students take responsibility for their own learning; where they are fully informed about the opportunities available to them, but also aware of their responsibility to engage with these. It requires consideration to be given to the boundaries of responsibility between staff and the individual and requires providers to make clear the roles and responsibilities of all people and organisations involved in supporting development and achievement. It places emphasis on the importance of reflective learning, and envisages students drawing on informal and formal feedback to engage in a dialogue with staff to help plan their future learning.

Apprentices, in negotiation with employers and higher education tutors, will need to develop the ability to identify additional learning opportunities within the context of their day-to-day work activity. These might, for example, take the form of negotiated work-based projects that build on work activities and integrate knowledge, skills, behaviours and values developed through higher education learning. The development of reflective practice as a means of supporting the development of professional competence is a common feature of apprenticeships. This includes the use of approaches such as learning logs and professional development portfolios as vehicles for formative and summative assessment for learning, supported by feedback from workplace mentors and tutors.

## England

In England the requirement is that at least 20 per cent of an apprenticeship must involve off-the-job learning, while the remaining proportion takes place on-the-job. The ESFA issues guidance on what constitutes off-the-job training.<sup>21</sup>

Every apprentice must hold a Commitment Statement, which sets out the detail for the delivery of their apprenticeship and must also set out what is expected and offered by the employer, higher education provider (and any subcontractors) and the apprentice in achieving the apprenticeship.

A key consideration for higher education providers delivering apprenticeships that involve higher education is the integration of on-the-job learning and training and off-the-job learning and training.

The EPA for the apprenticeship (whether integrated with a degree or not) will test the extent to which full occupational competence has been achieved through the apprenticeship. Higher education programmes that seek to prepare apprentices for EPA will be most effective where they seek to align or integrate on-the-job and off-the-job learning and training in doing this.

As Government policy is to give employers flexibility when determining how best to support their apprentices in developing the duties and KSBs needed to be occupationally competent, Trailblazers are advised to avoid stipulating prescriptive on-programme activity in EPA plans, with the exception of referring to any mandated qualifications. Some Trailblazers are developing model training programmes to give guidance on what types of activities could be included.

Although employers are not required to use them, the role of the workplace mentor can be important in terms of the provision of learning opportunities. Mentors can help apprentices to identify relevant work activity that can operate as a source for work-integrated learning, they can advise on the development of work-based projects, they can provide feedback on the development of professional competence, and they can formatively comment on progress in achieving negotiated work-integrated learning objectives. In some apprenticeships, formally recorded quarterly or yearly reviews between the higher education provider and the employer are gateway requirements.

The expertise of those supporting work-integrated learning in apprenticeships involving higher education is significantly constituted through their professional qualifications, continuing professional development and professional practice. Some higher education providers offer formal programmes and qualifications in mentoring and coaching for workplace and other mentors as part of agreed arrangements with employers.

---

<sup>21</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency)

Arrangements between providers and employers should cover the roles and responsibilities of workplace mentors where used, and the employer's obligation to formally review apprentice performance with the support of the higher education provider, which may include attending EPA preparatory events.

Apprentices have a responsibility to engage with the on-the-job and off-the-job learning and training and take responsibility for their own learning and development. Where apprenticeships also lead to PSRB recognition, the ability to identify, plan and take responsibility for continuing professional development may have to be integrated into the higher education learning.

## **Scotland**

Higher education providers will work closely with employers to develop the programme specification and content and the delivery and assessment of practical activities to meet the needs of employers and employer bodies. They will adopt a flexible curriculum approach that uses the apprentice's actual work environment and, where appropriate, the technologies and/or software development environments used in the apprentice's employment.

Apprentices must have individual learning and training plans. The higher education provider and employer Human Resources systems should be coordinated during the development of the individual training and learning plan to ensure that the required employer contextualisation is effective. Consequently, delivery may include a variety of modes of attendance and delivery locations.

GAs require higher education providers to ensure work-based learning remains a consistent feature of the programme with at least 80 per cent of learning and teaching conducted in the workplace.

When designing and delivering apprenticeship programmes, higher education providers will have taken account of the needs of employers including consideration of how:

- higher education providers liaise with the employer on the content and practical activities in the apprentice's individual learning and training plan
- programmes align with employer strategic objectives and goals, and with standards, for example national occupational and professional body standards
- Graduate Apprentices are supported by employers and the institution, for example by using mentoring
- programmes develop employability-related skills and graduate attributes
- programmes account for flexible delivery.

The higher education provider will use its approved year-by-year breakdown and indicative content for each GA to co-plan detailed curriculum content, delivery and assessment with the employer, to maintain employer and industry currency needs and support apprentice development and employability.

To support GA delivery, employers are therefore expected to:

- provide apprentices with suitable opportunities for study
- provide each apprentice with a nominated mentor who must be readily accessible by the apprentice
- liaise with the higher education provider on the content and practical activities in the apprentice's individual learning and training plan
- provide agreed information as part of the apprentice's assessment.

## **Wales**

Degree apprenticeship providers in Wales will be expected to work closely with employers to develop qualifications that meet the requirements of the apprenticeship frameworks developed by relevant issuing authorities in consultation with employers.

Degree apprenticeship frameworks will include qualifications that recognise the knowledge and job-related competencies required to achieve an apprenticeship certificate. The assessment of these qualifications will combine elements of on-the-job and off-the-job training where both the workplace and the classroom become places of learning.

Proposals seeking funding for the delivery of Degree Apprenticeships will need to evidence how employers' needs are being met.

A full Degree Apprenticeship will be a minimum of three years in duration. However, they may need to be longer to ensure that the apprentice has sufficient time to meet the apprenticeship framework requirements while working.

Where relevant, HEFCW-funded institutions are expected to recognise prior learning, particularly where individuals have undertaken apprenticeships at lower levels. Where individuals' prior learning has been recognised, Degree Apprenticeships are expected to be shorter in duration

HEFCW-funded institutions will be encouraged to offer delivery through other providers where it best meets the needs of the employer and apprentice. Flexible delivery methods are welcomed and will not be limited to just the lead degree apprenticeship provider.

HEFCW-funded institutions will be required to collaborate with other apprenticeship providers to meet employer needs at all apprenticeship levels and create clear apprenticeship progression pathways from lower level apprenticeships. It is also expected that all apprentices should have access to the full range of student services offered by the HEFCW-funded institution.

## **Northern Ireland**

Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes are developed by sector partnerships with a degree of flexibility to allow providers to individually tailor delivery to meet the needs of employers, using forms of blended learning and technological solutions to ensure the most appropriate methods are chosen.

Training providers must:

- ensure that only those who are committed to the completion of the full requirements of apprenticeship should participate in the provision, with the appropriate level to be pursued identified
- ensure that, on commencing an HLA they provide each apprentice with a formal induction, in order to brief them thoroughly about all elements of the programme
- provide apprentices with information on the Personal Training Plan (PTP) process, relevant legislation, premises, health and safety, terms and conditions of employment, support services, complaints and whistleblowing procedures, privacy notice, key contact information within the training provider's organisation and progression routes
- provide all apprentices with information on the terms and conditions of the programme and with information on best practice regarding safe working practices in the chosen occupational area

- conduct an initial assessment of each apprentice to determine the level of their existing skills and competences in general. The purpose of this initial assessment is to identify each apprentice's strengths and weaknesses, professional and technical training.

A Tripartite Agreement, which expresses the responsibilities of the parties and their commitment to the successful completion of the apprenticeship, must be completed by the Training Provider in respect of each apprentice.

During the course of the programme the training provider must:

- monitor the training of the HLA apprentice and confirm that the training provider's quality assurance requirements, including health and safety obligation, are being met
- use reasonable endeavours to arrange suitable alternative employment for the remainder of the apprenticeship, in the event the HLA apprentice's contract with the employer is terminated due to redundancy
- assist the HLA apprentice to identify and record their achievement throughout the apprenticeship period
- agree, sign, and date a Tripartite Agreement with the employer and participant. A copy of the completed Tripartite Agreement must be issued by the training provider to all signatories within 12 weeks of the commencement of training, and a copy retained for departmental inspection purposes.

The training provider, employer, and apprentice must agree, sign, and date a PTP in respect of the apprentice. The PTP must be signed off by a parent/guardian for disabled apprentices under 18, for whom support services are required.

### 3.3 Assessing apprenticeships

#### Assessment

Higher education providers are required by the Quality Code to operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. The Quality Code offers advice on practices that enable this requirement to be met. It highlights the importance of ensuring not only that academic standards are rigorously set and maintained, but also that student performance is equitably judged against these standards. Higher education providers delivering apprenticeships that involve higher education have the same responsibilities for the assessment of learning required for the achievement of the apprenticeship.

The Quality Code indicates that effective assessment requires higher education providers to ensure that all those who are involved in assessment have undertaken appropriate training and are competent to undertake their various roles and responsibilities. This training will need to encompass effective ways to evaluate the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved, and in the case of apprenticeships may involve staff at delivery partners, including employers, where they are involved in assessment processes. Where degree-awarding bodies work with others to deliver awards, delivery partners (that is, those without degree awarding powers) are expected to operate assessment processes within the academic framework and regulations of the degree-awarding body, in accordance with their delegated role.

The Quality Code allows for RPL within higher education programmes, provided that an appropriate process of assessment enables a decision to be made about whether the learning is suitable for recognition.

Apprenticeships that involve higher education may involve the assessment of occupational or professional competence, particularly where apprenticeships provide a vehicle for PSRB recognition, as well as the assessment of academic standards. Such assessment may occur simultaneously or may involve separate assessments. Degree-awarding bodies are primarily responsible for the assessment that pertains to the higher education award but may also be responsible for assessment that directly relates to other apprenticeship/professional standards. Higher education providers should consider how the various assessment requirements of the apprenticeship as a whole might be most effectively coordinated.

#### England

All apprenticeships in England require an independently assessed, synoptic EPA, arrangements for which are detailed in the relevant Apprenticeship Standard's EPA plan. This will normally be conducted by a separate independent Apprenticeship End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) selected by the employer. Where an Apprenticeship Standard is an Integrated Degree Apprenticeship, that is, the EPA is included within the degree award, as specified in the EPA plan, the higher education provider will conduct the EPA as an integrated aspect of the degree. Higher education providers delivering integrated Degree Apprenticeships will need to ensure that they meet the requirements of the relevant apprenticeship Assessment Plan in demonstrating the independence of the process for EPA. The higher education provider will need to be registered on both the Register for Apprenticeship Training Providers and the Register for EPAOs, the latter must cover the relevant apprenticeship standard.

The EPA is designed to test that apprentices can demonstrate the duties and KSBs specified in the relevant Apprenticeship Standard and that they are fully occupationally competent. It must be conducted at the final stage of the apprenticeship, after the apprentice has passed

the gateway requirements set out in the relevant EPA plan, and must include at least two assessment methods. Methods of assessment may include requirements such as a work or practice-based project and/or a performative assessment such as a presentation or professional discussion. It is important that providers ensure apprentices have had adequate access and practice to these forms of assessment throughout their programme and prior to the Gateway. Where an Apprenticeship Standard includes PSRB recognition, the EPA may stand as the requirement for establishing professional status and/or membership.

Apprentices must have achieved level 2 English and maths prior to undertaking EPA.

In the case of standalone, non-integrated EPAs, these need to take place in addition to any assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes that higher education providers undertake in order to secure the standards of the associated higher education qualification. A significant degree of alignment is therefore required, which may begin with the alignment of duties and KSB outcomes and specified programme/module learning outcomes. Successful completion of a qualification in itself will not constitute the completion of an apprenticeship with non-integrated EPA.

One of the key factors required for the RoEPAO is that EPA is carried out by assessors who have relevant practice-based experience and/or expertise. Academic 'subject' expertise may not be sufficient to demonstrate that assessors are equipped to assess the professional competence of apprentices to fully undertake the requirements of the associated job role; there may also be a requirement to have occupational / workplace experience. Where successful completion of an apprenticeship also confers PSRB recognition, the associated Assessment Plan may require that EPA is conducted by assessors who have a specified professional status, such as Chartered Member or Fellow.

The responsibility for the arrangements for EPA for apprenticeships (including contracting) lie with the higher education provider, but the selection of the organisation that will conduct EPA (from the RoEPAO) is a matter of employer choice. It is the responsibility of the end-point assessment organisation to ensure they have robust internal quality assurance arrangements to ensure that there will be no conflict of interest on the part of individual assessors and itself. This is because it is required to comply with the internal quality assurance arrangements set out in the relevant EPA plan, and it must also stipulate how it will manage any potential conflicts of interest when submitting an application to the ESFA's RoEPAO.

## **Scotland**

In Scotland, all GAs are, by definition, integrated. Therefore, there are no EPA requirements. GAs are principally designed to be delivered and assessed in the workplace and take account of a range of assessment methods to accommodate workplace learning. An example of this could be:

- delivery of generic and non-employer specific (for example, knowledge and understanding) content by the higher education provider and specific content from the employer and/or private providers
- assessments where the task specification has been designed by the higher education provider, the employer and apprentice, with progress monitoring and assessment by the higher education provider and the employer. The employer would provide mentoring to the apprentice to support progress and attainment
- development of personal and business skills specifications that have been designed by the employer and the higher education provider, with delivery by the employer (and/or third party) and higher education provider. Progress monitoring and

assessment would be by the employer (and where applicable the third party) and the higher education provider. As with assessment, the employer would provide ongoing mentoring support.

This example demonstrates how the higher education provider and employer will work together in order to support apprentice assessment. Higher education providers and employers will ensure that assessment activity is aligned to both the provider's academic standards and the workplace activity in order to reflect the needs of employers and the apprentice.

Where RPL has been credited, the higher education provider ensures that recognition of prior learning does not conflict with its minimum terms of assessment to maintain standards for its awards.

## **Wales**

The requirements for completing a degree apprenticeship are set out in the apprenticeship frameworks. These will include a level 6 degree qualification that is recognised by employers across an industry or range of industries. HEFCW-funded institutions will be required to ensure that all the requirements of the relevant apprenticeship framework are met.

The employer and HEFCW-funded institution must be clear that the individual apprentice will have the opportunity, in the workplace, to meet the competency requirements of the apprenticeship framework. HEFCW-funded institutions will need to be clear and transparent with the employer and the learner about the commitments they are signing up to including commitment to release the employee for any off-the-job training.

Where relevant, HEFCW-funded institutions are expected to recognise prior learning, particularly where individuals have undertaken apprenticeships at lower levels. HEFCW-funded institutions will have the opportunity to deliver level 6 top-ups that would be shorter in duration than full Degree Apprenticeships.

The Degree Apprenticeship framework in Wales has no separate EPA, with the achievement of the overall framework based on assessment of the qualification success and achievement of the relevant module learning outcomes in the credit and qualification.

Consistent with the QAA expectations for Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning in Wales, Degree Apprenticeships will be required to comply with QAA expectations for assessment of taught provision and for the recognition of prior learning.

## **Northern Ireland**

The Higher Level Apprenticeship programme in Northern Ireland has no separate EPA, with the achievement of the overall framework based on assessment of the qualification success, and assessment of the on-the-job learning through a work-based project and e-portfolio.

## External examining

External examining is an integral and essential part of quality assurance in higher education. It provides one of the principal means by which academic standards are maintained across the sector. External examiners are appointed to provide degree-awarding bodies with impartial and independent advice, and informative comment on the degree-awarding body's standards and on student achievement in relation to them.

The Quality Code expects higher education providers to appoint external examiners for all programmes leading to a higher education qualification. Such examiners are drawn from higher education, industry, and/or the professions. They must be suitably qualified and experienced in a relevant subject or specialism, and external to, and independent of, the appointing higher education provider/awarding body. They typically work as part of larger examining teams across a range of programmes.

The Quality Code is responsive to the need to adapt external examining approaches as necessary in order to accommodate work-integrated higher education, for example, which involve oversight or regulation by a PSRB.

When appointing external examiners for apprenticeships, higher education providers are therefore expected to ensure that all examiners are suitably qualified to undertake the role, which might mean, for example, having an appropriate level of practice-based expertise. The required balance of subject and practice expertise might be achieved through the appointment of two external examiners, one a subject expert and the other with practice expertise.

### England

External examining, a familiar feature of the higher education system, is distinct from External Quality Assurance (EQA) which is part of the apprenticeships regime (EQA is covered in section 3.7, Monitoring and Review.)

The requirements for EPA, as described in EPA plans, include assurance that the process is appropriately independent. EPA plans will specify EQA requirements. EPA plans for integrated Degree Apprenticeships will necessarily include reference to external examiners, as the EPA is conducted as an integrated aspect of the qualification and, as such, must be under the auspices of the higher education independent external examiner system. However, where EPA is conducted by a separate independent EPAO, higher education provider-appointed external examiners for the higher education award will not play a direct role in the EPA process.

Higher education providers ensure that external examiners are appropriately briefed as to the specific nature of their role for apprenticeships that involve higher education. This will need to include: specifying whether the apprenticeship involves integrated or separate EPA; the relationship between apprenticeship duties and KSBs and programme/modules learning outcomes; the way that EPA is conducted and any implications for their role; and how the learning opportunities provided by the higher education programme are delivered in the context of on-the-job and off-the-job learning.

All higher education apprenticeship programmes are subject to the external examiner process.

**Scotland**

A higher education provider's standard external examiner process applies for GAs. External examiners provide external and objective feedback on the fairness and appropriateness of a higher education provider's student assessment processes and therefore form an integral part of the provider's review and evaluation procedures to assure the security of the academic standards of its programmes and awards. The activity culminates in an annual report from each examiner to inform internal quality assurance arrangements and enhancement.

**Wales**

Processes in Wales are consistent with the QAA standards for external examination of degree awarding bodies. Degree apprenticeships will be required to comply with QAA standards for external examination to ensure transparency and public accountability.

**Northern Ireland**

All Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes are subject to the standard higher education external examiner process.

### 3.4 The apprentice experience

A fundamental purpose of the Quality Code is to assure the quality of the student experience. It is premised on the need to put students at the heart of the higher education system by, for example, treating every student fairly and with dignity, courtesy and respect, and giving every student, including apprenticeship students, the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience. However, as employers play an equally significant role in apprenticeships it is important that higher education providers manage and reconcile the requirements and demands of both apprentices and employers.

The Quality Code's Expectation in relation to student engagement makes clear the importance of engaging students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning.<sup>22</sup> It asserts that student involvement in quality has a positive influence on the delivery and development of any aspect of the student educational experience. The Quality Code also highlights how learning and teaching specifically are most effective when there is a partnership between the higher education provider, their staff and students, and any external stakeholder (including employers) that results in the co-production and enhancement of creative and transformational learning.

The Quality Code acknowledges that students may have their own responsibilities to the delivery organisation and others (such as employees at other organisations where they study), including the responsibility to meet the norms and expectations for professional conduct in the particular field of work or study that they are undertaking, which might be covered in an employment contract.

Apprentices within higher education will have rights and entitlements as students (fee paying or otherwise), and rights and obligations as employees. Those responsible for assuring the quality of the higher education will navigate these different rights and obligations and ensure that they can be appropriately aligned.

#### England

Higher education providers offer a range of information for apprentices, signposting support services and enhancing the overall experience and communication activity between the provider, the employer, the apprentice and any sub-contractor(s). Accurate and timely information will help to inform the interrelationship between on-the-job and off-the-job learning and training to ensure that supervision, monitoring and feedback supports the apprentice appropriately. This is particularly important where apprenticeships do not follow the standard academic year cycle, communications and information should be provided at a time appropriate to the point in the apprenticeship. In particular, establishing clear expectations regarding the arrangements (including training) for workplace mentoring will be key, together with the requirements related to the off-the-job learning and training.

Under the recent apprenticeship reforms, it is the employer, not the individual, who purchases training for the apprenticeship. This means that providers of apprenticeships have dual responsibilities towards both employers and apprentices. However, it does not override higher education providers' responsibilities for assuring the quality of the apprentices' experience as a student of higher education. Rather, the needs of students must be balanced with the needs of employers. In light of this, care must be taken when designing programmes and scheduling assessment activity to ensure that there is recognition of an appropriate work/study/life balance. Furthermore, consideration should be given not only to

---

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter B5: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-b-assuring-and-enhancing-academic-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-b-assuring-and-enhancing-academic-quality).

academic work cycles, but employer work cycles which may affect the ability of apprentices to study effectively.

The Commitment Statement signed by providers, employers and apprentices sets out what is expected and offered by the employer, higher education providers (and any subcontractors) and the apprentice in achieving the apprenticeship and may be used to provide some clarity on how the quality of the apprentice's experience can be assured, while employer needs are also met. The statement should also ensure effective information sharing in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The need to seek and respond to student/apprentice feedback remains important in the context of the delivery of apprenticeships. As apprenticeships are offered through a range and combination of delivery modes, higher education providers will consider where, within their deliberative and non-deliberative structures, opportunities are sufficiently agile to capture the apprentice voice to allow opportunities to facilitate feedback about the apprentice experience and enhance learning opportunities. Existing opportunities may not be easily accessible for apprentices due to workplace commitments. The use of technology to enable participation at committees and contribute to surveys can alleviate some of these problems, although careful planning and scheduling of surveys is required to avoid 'survey fatigue'.

Assuring the quality of the student experience also means seeking and responding to employer feedback. Higher education providers should provide opportunities to obtain employer feedback and to identify actions taken to respond to that feedback. Relevant information can be made available to help inform prospective apprentice and employer choice.

## **Scotland**

The design, delivery and assessment of apprenticeships is intended to reflect a collaborative arrangement between the higher education provider, employer and apprentice. While the employer does not formally contract with the higher education provider, its partnership working, best exemplified through the standard framework and work-based learning requirements, recognises the need to support the individual needs of the apprentice as well as the respective employer. This is articulated through the individual learning and training plans.

As a registered higher education student, the apprentice would have access to the same facilities as the higher education provider's other students, appreciating apprentices may interact differently with these services.

Higher education providers will work with the employer to determine how information about support services and its accessibility will be made available. Such consideration may be outlined through a Student Agreement.

Higher education providers work closely with the employer as part of the recruitment, selection and admission process to ensure apprentices have sufficient opportunity to progress and achieve. The roles and responsibilities for employers and the higher education provider are clearly set out in relevant apprenticeship frameworks and work-based learning requirements that help to ensure the apprentice experience.

## **Wales**

The student experience is at the heart of higher education provision in Wales, and Degree Apprenticeships are no exception. Student Unions will need to ensure that they are able to represent the voice of these students, as part of the diverse student body. Appropriate student representation will also need to be established.

Degree Apprentices will need to have access to the full range of student services and support offered by the HEFCW-funded institution. As these students are also employed, this may require the institution to consider how accessibility may be achieved. Institutions may also need to vary their delivery models in place (for example, distance learning, block release, day release) to meet the needs of employers and learners.

## **Northern Ireland**

All training providers in Northern Ireland work closely with employers and student bodies to ensure that the participant is fully supported during both the on-the-job and off-the-job elements of the Higher Level Apprenticeship programme.

An annual electronic survey is conducted with participants to get their views on what is working well, and what concerns they may have, and an action plan drawn up to address any issues.

### 3.5 Managing provision with others

As noted in section 3.1 (Responsibilities of higher education providers, employers, apprentices and others) the design and delivery of apprenticeships requires the involvement of a range of organisations, including employers, higher education providers, and in many cases, other delivery organisations and/or PSRBs. Within this context, degree-awarding bodies retain ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of provision leading to a higher education award. Meanwhile, degree-awarding bodies and other higher education providers may have contractual obligations to the employers with whom they work to deliver apprenticeships, as well as to the bodies that fund or otherwise support those apprenticeships and to the apprentices that undertake them.

The Quality Code is clear that the variety of arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others that exist within higher education, including apprenticeship models, present a range of benefits and opportunities. These include, but are not limited to, flexible entry routes which may widen access, additional expertise and facilities, and curricula that are related to contemporary working practices and the needs of employers and employees. It also acknowledges the risks relating to quality and standards that can come with delivering learning opportunities with others, noting that arrangements that break down can present difficulties for students, and damage the reputation of participant organisations and UK higher education in general.

Accordingly, the Quality Code recommends a risk-based approach to managing arrangements, an approach that ensures that the effort invested is commensurate with the complexity of the proposed collaboration, the status of the delivery organisation or support provider, the level of experience of the degree-awarding body, and the risks associated with each of these. It is accepted that a one size fits all approach is not sufficient here and that higher education providers will develop and approve a range of different practices and procedures that are tailored and proportionate to the risks of the collaboration they are planning.

In particular, it points out that the due diligence enquiries and the formal agreements adopted for any one arrangement should be proportionate to the volume, complexity and nature of the activity, to the type of delivery organisation or support provider involved, and to the associated risks.

The Quality Code is clear that higher education providers can be flexible in the design and application of internal quality assurance processes to ensure that these are appropriate to the different timescales and contexts within which they may need to operate, and which can support the central role that employers play in apprenticeships. This can be achieved without undermining the broad principles that underpin the assurance of academic standards and quality.

#### **England**

Arrangements for the delivery and assessment of apprenticeships are underpinned by written agreements (contracts) between the higher education provider and the employer. Such written agreements (contracts) establish clear expectations about the role(s) that employers will play in supporting apprentice learning and training and reflect the regulations and governance requirements of the IfA and ESFA. They must refer to: the exchange of information in relation to the apprentice, in accordance with GDPR; quality assurance and respective responsibilities of each party; together with dispute resolution procedures and reference to EPAO guidance. They can include aspects such as access to employer resources when engaging in off-the-job learning and arrangements for workplace mentoring, such as induction, training, employer-provider communication, involvement in EPA and protocols for addressing issues. In addition, it is desirable to set out arrangements for

integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training, such as identification of relevant work projects, and arrangements for involving employers in higher education programme evaluation, monitoring and enhancement to be formalised in written agreements. It is useful to have contract and subcontract templates available, so that they can be customised to meet the needs of each apprenticeship and employer. A useful written agreement (contract) template is available from UVAC<sup>23</sup>; a guide to subcontracting is being written by a group led by the Association of Colleges (AoC).<sup>24</sup>

It is recommended that there is early engagement and discussion in relation to the contents of the written agreement (contract) and the expectations of the employer, in order to avoid delay in the start of the apprenticeship, if the written agreement (contract) is not in place. During such discussions the higher education provider should ascertain whether the employer has sufficient capacity and opportunities to support the apprentice in the workplace to meet the needs of the standard and whether any additional support is required.

Higher education providers may also establish agreements with subcontractors<sup>25</sup> to deliver part or all of an apprenticeship. Where the scale of the delivery undertaken by subcontractors is over £100k, the subcontracted organisation will also need to be listed on the RoATP.<sup>26</sup> Higher education provider arrangements for assuring the quality of provision delivered in its name apply equally to apprenticeships that involve higher education.

Higher education providers should provide support to advise and guide employers on making effective use of the workplace as a learning environment. This will include providing staff development, training mentors and, where appropriate, workplace assessors as well as providing information and induction for line managers and other staff working with the apprentice. By working in close partnership with the employer it enables them to maximise the benefits of providing learning opportunities for apprentices to the organisation and thereby enables the apprentice to have a more holistic and meaningful work and study experience.

A key element of apprenticeship support in the workplace is the role of the workplace mentor. The criteria for the selection of mentors should be clearly articulated in order to ensure that they are able to fully support the apprentice in the workplace and facilitate their learning. The higher education provider is responsible for ensuring the mentors are appropriately inducted into their role by the higher education provider to undertake the role, providing training in coaching and mentoring, providing an insight into how people learn in the workplace and an overview of the programme structure and assessment methodologies. The workplace mentor role is one that should be supported at all times by a higher education tutor. While this programme need not lead to a qualification, it is essential that the mentoring relationship, if it is to be effective in promoting apprentice learning at work, is subject to quality assurance by the higher education provider.

The relationship between higher education providers and EPAOs concerning arrangements for EPA also requires formal agreements to be in place. Under current regulations the employer is responsible for choosing the EPAO, but once chosen it is imperative that a contract is in place between the EPAO and the higher education provider to undertake EPA (when the EPA is not integrated within the degree apprenticeship). The provider will need

---

<sup>23</sup> See [www.uvac.ac.uk](http://www.uvac.ac.uk)

<sup>24</sup> Details will be published on QAA website when this document is available

<sup>25</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018) and [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/698909/Subcontracting\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698909/Subcontracting_guidance.pdf) (PDF, 80KB)

<sup>26</sup> Note: £100k relates to the total commitment of the sub-contractor for apprenticeships delivery, to each individual component.

to liaise closely with the EPAO and the employer to ensure that the apprentices are fully prepared for the EPA.

It is possible that some elements of the delivery and assessment of the apprenticeship will be subcontracted to a third party. This could be, for example, a specialist provider or an employer-provider, who wishes to deliver a part of the programme. In such cases a subcontracting agreement is required, which clearly sets out the responsibilities of each party and outlines the quality assurance processes that must be followed. The higher education provider remains ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of delivery across the whole programme provision and robust mechanisms to monitor third party delivery must be in place.

Arrangements between employers, providers and subcontractors can be complex and care must be taken to safeguard the stability and security of these arrangements in the interests of the apprentices. For example, where an employer is also either an employer-provider or has an agreement with a second non-higher education provider to work across a range of its apprenticeship provision, the employer-provider or contracted main provider may wish to subcontract with a higher education provider. Where this is the case, it is essential that due diligence procedures are carried out to ensure that the contracting arrangements between the parties are compliant with the ESFA funding rules. This will mitigate the significant risk of a negative impact on the apprentices' learning experience if delivery arrangements are required to change.

Where a higher education award is included, the apprentices will engage in a range of higher education institution/further education college systems and structures. Consideration needs to be given as to how apprenticeship agreements interact with student contracts that may be in place or are required to ensure compliance and safeguarding the apprentice's interest as a higher education learner.

Where a higher or degree apprenticeship also leads to PSRB recognition, formal agreements may need to be in place between the higher education provider and the PSRB.

## **Scotland**

The work-based learning component of higher education apprenticeships is a significant and central part of the whole award. The apprentice's work setting is therefore central to the contextualisation of learning and to the assessment of the award. Skills, knowledge and competence are integrated throughout the programmes.

Graduate Apprenticeships (SCQF levels 8 to 11) are built on a partnership between employers, universities and colleges and include the ongoing engagement of employers in the delivery, support and formative assessment of the programme. Employers are also involved in the range of quality assurance systems and processes.

## **Wales**

Welsh Government has developed three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs), to identify and respond to the skills needs of Wales. Higher education representation on each of those regional groups was developed within HEFCW's integrated approach to regional planning. This offers the opportunity for collaboration across the higher education and work-based learning sectors to best meet the needs of employers and to avoid nugatory competition.

HEFCW-funded institutions have been involved in the development of higher level apprenticeships with a commitment to improving access, equality and equity of opportunity through flexible learning pathways. This would include top-up degrees, strengthening progression pathways into the Degree Apprenticeship being delivered. HEFCW-funded institutions are also encouraged to offer delivery through other providers where it best meets the needs of the employer and the apprentice.

### **Northern Ireland**

Delivery of the Higher Level Apprenticeship programme requires collaboration between the six further education colleges and three higher education institutions in Northern Ireland to provide a joined up approach that gives a consistent quality of learning and training, in work support structures and progression routes.

Training providers, employers and the apprentice will sign a Tripartite Agreement that clearly establishes the role each party is expected to play in delivery. There is no EPA, with continuous assessment part of the programme throughout.

### 3.6 Complaints and appeals

The Quality Code requires higher education providers to have fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and academic appeals, which are accessible to all students. Broadly, apprentices undertaking an apprenticeship delivered by a higher education provider are students of that higher education provider. Therefore, the apprentices should have recourse to the provider's student complaints and academic appeals processes just as other students do.

In addition, the Quality Code states that a higher education provider with UK degree awarding powers remains responsible for the academic standards and quality of the higher education qualifications that it awards, regardless of how or where the programme is delivered. The higher education provider that awards the higher education qualification in the apprenticeship arrangement should, therefore, always conduct the final stage of the academic appeals process about that qualification. It should also conduct the final stage of the complaints process if the complaint is about the academic quality or standards of the apprentice's learning experience as a student of that provider.

Where an apprentice has exhausted the higher education provider's, and, if relevant, the employer's, internal complaints and appeals process they might have access to an external process; this varies by country.

#### **England and Wales: Office of the Independent Adjudicator**

Higher education providers in England and Wales are normally members of the independent complaints scheme for higher education in England and Wales, which is operated by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). A higher or degree apprentice, as a higher education student, can complain to the OIA about the higher education provider that is delivering their apprenticeship in the same way as other higher education students.

The OIA can consider complaints about anything that a member higher education provider has done or not done, although the provider must usually have had an opportunity to consider the complaint first. The OIA cannot review complaints about student employment matters. In the case of complaints from apprentices, the OIA would consider which aspects of a complaint related to the apprentice's experience as a student and which related to their employment. More information about the role and remit of the OIA can be found on its website.<sup>27</sup>

The OIA has published the Good Practice Framework,<sup>28</sup> which provides guidance on the effective handling of complaints and academic appeals, including in the context of delivering learning opportunities with others.<sup>29</sup> The general principles in the guidance are relevant to handling complaints and appeals in the context of apprenticeships and in due course the guidance will be expanded to cover that area in more detail.

In England, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) publishes guidance about apprenticeships to the sector and apprentices may also be able to complain to the ESFA about apprenticeship training providers.

---

<sup>27</sup> See [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

<sup>28</sup> See [www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework.aspx](http://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework.aspx)

<sup>29</sup> See [www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework/delivering-learning-opportunities-with-others.aspx](http://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework/delivering-learning-opportunities-with-others.aspx)

## Scotland

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman<sup>30</sup> (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about colleges and universities in Scotland (see below for more information).

## Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman<sup>31</sup> (NIPSO) provides an independent review of complaints about public service providers, including further education colleges and universities (see below for more information).

## England

The provision of higher and degree apprenticeships may involve complicated contractual arrangements.

In England, the higher education provider may act as main provider in the arrangement, drawing down the ESFA or Levy funding. The main provider is responsible for managing the apprenticeship effectively and the three-way Commitment Statement between the employer, the provider and the apprentice will set out their respective rights and obligations. Under the ESFA funding rules, the Statement must include details of the provider's complaints process.

Alternatively, the higher education provider may be sub-contracted by the main provider to deliver aspects of the apprenticeship, such as the higher education qualification. The contract between the main provider and the higher education provider will set out the responsibilities of the higher education provider under the apprenticeship arrangement. In accordance with the Quality Code, a higher education provider with UK degree awarding powers will be responsible for the academic quality and standards of the qualification it awards, notwithstanding any contractual arrangement with the main provider.

In both scenarios, the apprentices are students of the higher education provider and should have recourse to the provider's student complaints and academic appeals procedures as other students do. The apprentice may complain to the higher education provider about anything which is the responsibility of that provider under the apprenticeship arrangement or under the requirements of the Quality Code (in addition to informing the main provider where there are known sub contractual arrangements in place).

All Apprenticeship Standards require an End-Point Assessment (EPA). Degree apprenticeships may include an 'integrated EPA' within the Standard, in which case the higher education provider will conduct the EPA as an integrated part of the degree. In all other cases, the main provider will contract with an independent assessment organisation (from the RoEPAO) to provide the EPA and the apprentice will not usually have a direct contractual relationship with the end-point assessment organisation.

If the apprentice wishes to complain about a non-integrated EPA or the independent assessment organisation, their complaint will usually be addressed to their employer or to the main provider in the apprenticeship arrangement, in the first instance. However, where the assessment organisation is a higher education provider and the EPA is an 'award' of that provider, the apprentice may have recourse to the provider's student complaints and appeals processes and thereafter to the OIA if the higher education provider is an OIA member. (The OIA can consider complaints from someone undertaking a course of study leading to the grant of one of its member's awards.) Much will depend upon the way in which the EPA is structured.

---

<sup>30</sup> See [www.spsso.org.uk/college-or-university-complaints](http://www.spsso.org.uk/college-or-university-complaints)

<sup>31</sup> See [www.nipso.org.uk/nipso](http://www.nipso.org.uk/nipso)

Apprenticeships are designed and led by employers and the needs of apprentices must, of course, be balanced with those of employers. The arrangements between the employer and main provider will set out how employer complaints will be dealt with.

The higher education provider's internal processes may allow an employer to submit a complaint or academic appeal on behalf of one or more of their apprentices, acting as their representative. However, this is appropriate only where the issue or concern is something that has affected the individual apprentice(s), and they support the complaint or appeal. Disputes that arise from the commercial arrangements between the employer and higher education provider, and that do not directly affect the apprentice(s), are better dealt with under those arrangements, for example by arbitration or through the courts.

It is important that the higher education provider's policies are consistently applied across its student body and that students who are apprentices do not receive different treatment.

### **Scotland: The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman**

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) considers complaints from those who remain dissatisfied with a HEI decision following investigation. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failure and maladministration (administrative fault) as well as the way the institution has handled the complaint.

The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. This includes complaints about Scottish universities. If individuals remain dissatisfied with the university after its complaints process, the SPSO can be asked to look at the complaint. The SPSO cannot normally look at complaints:

- 'where you have not gone all the way through the University's complaints handling procedure
- more than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about, or
- that have been or are being considered in court.'

Note: taken from the University of Dundee website.<sup>32</sup>

### **Wales**

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) fund and regulate degree-awarding institutions in Wales. These are independent, legally autonomous bodies that each have their own complaints and appeals procedures, including on matters of academic performance and staff grievances. Complainants should pursue their complaints directly with the institution concerned in accordance with the institution's own internal procedures.

A Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability governs the relationship between HEFCW and its funded institutions. This sets out the procedure for making complaints in respect of terms and conditions for the following requirements:

- suspected breaches of the Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability by a funded institution
- the failure, or likelihood of failure, to comply with the Financial Management Code by a regulated institution

---

<sup>32</sup> See [www.dundee.ac.uk/governance/dca/complaints/ombudsman](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/governance/dca/complaints/ombudsman)

- the failure, or likelihood of failure, to comply with a Fee and Access Plan (fee levels and the general requirements of the Plan) by a regulated institution
- inadequate quality, or quality that is likely to become inadequate, of education delivered by or on behalf of a regulated institution
- the failure by a Relevant Higher Education Body (RHEB) to fulfil its Prevent duty, are outlined below.

HEFCW officers may investigate and take appropriate action where complaints are received that the Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability requirements are not being met by an institution, HEFCW cannot become involved in complaints that do not relate directly to one or more of these areas.

### **Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman**

Higher level apprentices, as higher education students, may be able to complain to NIPSO about their higher education provider. Usually, the apprentice will be expected to have exhausted their provider's own internal processes, before taking a complaint to NIPSO.

## 3.7 Monitoring and review

The UK Quality Code states that monitoring and review of programmes are essential processes that form part of a higher education provider's internal quality assurance mechanism. Regular monitoring and review of programmes will ensure that the provider has made appropriate learning opportunities available to apprentices and that it continues to do so. Ultimate responsibility for monitoring and review of programmes rests with the higher education provider but where, as in the case of apprenticeships, the learning and training environment will be multi-location and other organisations will be involved in the design, delivery and assessment of a programme, that is, the employer, workplace mentors, subcontractors and so on, the higher education provider will need to ensure that their processes allow for the input of all relevant parties.

There may also be a requirement for external monitoring and review; providers should ensure that all those involved in the apprentices' learning and training experiences are included in those processes.

### England

Monitoring and review of apprenticeships in England falls to a number of parties, represented in the Quality Alliance (see section 3.1 Responsibilities of higher education providers, employers, apprentices and others).

As the higher education provider has ultimate responsibility for its apprenticeship training provision (as a member of RoATP), for the higher education included (as a higher education provider) and its awards (as a degree awarding body) it retains the responsibility for the internal quality assurance of training and awards that forms part of any higher or degree apprenticeship. The provider will need to ensure that its processes include input from all organisations involved in the delivery of the apprenticeship and, for integrated Degree Apprenticeships, this will include the EPA.

External quality assurance, monitoring and review involves a range of agencies and the higher education provider will need to ensure compliance with their quality assurance requirements.

#### External monitoring and review of Apprenticeship Training Provision

OfS/QAA provides assurance to ESFA on the quality of apprenticeship training provision of RoATP members, for all providers delivering at level 6 and above and jointly with Ofsted for providers delivering levels 4 to 5 that include a higher education qualification. Ofsted is responsible for providing ongoing quality assurance of providers of all other level 4/5 apprenticeship training.

All higher education programmes may be subject to external monitoring and review by QAA and by the OfS.

The joint approach by OfS and Ofsted is under development and involves QAA. Details of the approach will be published on the OfS and QAA websites when it is available.

#### External monitoring and review of Apprenticeship End-point Assessment (External Quality Assurance)

While others within the system have responsibility for quality assuring the provision in apprenticeships, the IfA has overall responsibility for the quality assurance of EPA. Under the Enterprise Act 2016, the IfA must 'secure that evaluations are carried out of the quality of apprenticeship assessments'. This evaluation, to ensure that assessment is fair, robust and comparable between different assessment organisations, is known as External Quality

Assurance (EQA). The IfA has two important roles in the provision of EQA for apprenticeships:

- firstly, the IfA has a role overseeing EQA across all EQA providers to ensure quality, consistency and credibility
- secondly, the IfA will act as a provider of EQA for standards where the Trailblazer deems this the most appropriate solution, or where no other option is suitable.

The Institute gives Trailblazer employers the opportunity to nominate a body to deliver EQA for the standards that they develop. Trailblazers may choose: an employer-led model, a professional body, Ofqual or the Institute for Apprenticeships; in the case of integrated Degree Apprenticeships there is the additional option of QAA.<sup>33</sup> Organisations that have been approved to deliver EQA can be found on the IfA's website.

### **Scotland**

Skills Development Scotland has a responsibility to ensure the quality of all apprenticeship programmes in Scotland; this means that for Graduate Apprenticeships, they will work with QAA and other regulatory bodies to align SDS quality management processes with existing structures where possible, to ensure a streamlined approach and to reduce duplication of effort.

### **Wales**

In Wales, Degree Apprenticeships will be monitored and reviewed as part of the provision of HEFCW-funded institutions. Consistent with the QAA standards for programme monitoring and review arrangements of higher education learning in Wales, Degree Apprenticeships will be required to comply with process arrangements to ensure QAA standards are addressed.

In addition, HEFCW and Welsh Government will consider how to achieve a formative review of Degree Apprenticeships starting from 2018-19 to 2020-21 in order to inform future developments in this area, and to enable dissemination of good practice.

Monitoring and review arrangements between the provider, employer and apprentice are currently under review but HEFCW-funded institutions are required to submit data as required by HEFCW. It will also be expected that the apprentice should have their progress reviewed every two months as part of the apprenticeship contract.

---

<sup>33</sup> Subject to approval by the IfA Quality Committee.

## 4 Conclusions and next steps

There is scope within UK higher education providers' existing quality systems, underpinned by the Quality Code, to accommodate new and emerging apprenticeship models across the UK. Such apprenticeship models may require higher education providers to think creatively about the delivery of apprenticeships, to adjust existing processes, and to consider variations or exceptions to their current regulations, policies and practices.

As apprenticeship models grow and develop, providers should continue to ensure that quality and standards are maintained so as to protect their awards, the apprentices and the reputation of UK higher education and, in turn, to meet the skills needs of employers and the economy.

QAA welcomes ongoing discussion and information sharing around new and developing quality assurance approaches. We will seek to support such discussions in the coming months and provide opportunities for the sharing and dissemination of new and innovative practice.

## 5 Annexes

### 5.1 Membership of the working group for higher education in apprenticeships (First edition)

Adrian	Anderson	UVAC
Cris	Arnold	Swansea University
Dr Darryll	Bravenboer	Middlesex University
Karen	Caine	Aston University
Peggy	Cooke	Manchester Metropolitan University
Scott	Court	HEFCE
Jackie	Cresswell-Griffith	HEFCW
Robbie	Davis	Department for the Economy (NI)
Joy	Elliot-Bowman	Independent HE
Dr Alison	Harold	Skills Development Scotland
Ailsa	Harris	Department for Education
Tina	Hawkins	Welsh Government
Els	Howard	Pearson
Darren	James	London South Bank
Nikki	Jones	AMRC (Sheffield)
Ben	Kinross	Society of Apprentices (NUS)
Dr Joe	Marshall	NCUB
Alison	May	London South Bank University
Conor	Moss	Sheffield Hallam
Dr Karen	Petrie	University of Dundee
Elly	Philpott	CMI
Chris	Scriven	City of Bristol College
Professor Mark	Stone	Plymouth University/ACP
Kirsty	Tallis	University of Derby
Greg	Wade	UUK
Robyn	Whitmore	Department for Education
Jess	Wood	HEFCE

#### QAA staff

Simon	Bullock	QAA
James	Harrison	QAA Scotland
Dr Cathy	Kerfoot (Chair)	QAA
Mahfia	Watkinson	QAA

## 5.2 Membership of the working group for higher education in apprenticeships (Second edition)

Adrian	Anderson	UVAC
Cris	Arnold	Swansea University
Yvonne	Beach	AMRC (Sheffield)
Dr Darryll	Bravenboer	Middlesex University
Karen	Caine	Aston University
Charlotte	Corrish	OIA
Emily	Corsellis	Department for Education
Richard	Guy	Institute for Apprenticeships
Tim	Harris	Independent HE
Tina	Hawkins	Welsh Government
Maighread	Hegarty	London South Bank
Brian	Hermiston	Skills Development Scotland
Els	Howard	Pearson
Darren	James	London South Bank
Hilary	Jones	OIA
Nikki	Jones	AMRC (Sheffield)
Raymond	Kelly	Department for the Economy (NI)
Ben	Kinross	Society of Apprentices (NUS)
Peter	Millington	Department for Education
Ann	Minton	University of Derby
Sam	Moorwood	Sheffield Hallam
Conor	Moss	Sheffield Hallam
Cliona	O'Neill	HEFCW
Ali	Orr	NCUB
Dr Karen	Petrie	University of Dundee
Arti	Saraswat	Association of Colleges
Chris	Scriven	N-Gaged Training and Recruitment
Jocelyn	Simmons	CMI
Professor Mark	Stone	Plymouth University/ACP
Greg	Wade	UUK
Kate	Wicklow	GuildHE
Steven	Williams	HEFCW
Jessica	Wood	Office for Students (OfS)
<b>QAA staff</b>		
Simon	Bullock	QAA
Ruth	Burchell	QAA
Dr Alison	Felce	QAA
James	Harrison	QAA Scotland
Dr Andy	Smith	(Chair) QAA

### 5.3 Key organisations

Organisation	Home page
Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland)	<a href="http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk">www.economy-ni.gov.uk</a>
Department for Education (DfE)	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships">www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships</a>
Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency">www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency</a>
GuildHE	<a href="http://www.guildhe.ac.uk">www.guildhe.ac.uk</a>
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)	<a href="http://www.hefcw.ac.uk">www.hefcw.ac.uk</a>
Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA)	<a href="http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org">www.instituteforapprenticeships.org</a>
National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB)	<a href="http://www.ncub.co.uk">www.ncub.co.uk</a>
Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)	<a href="http://nipso.org.uk/nipso">nipso.org.uk/nipso</a>
Office for Students (OfS)	<a href="http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk">www.officeforstudents.org.uk</a>
Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)	<a href="http://www.oiahe.org.uk">www.oiahe.org.uk</a>
Ofqual	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual">www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual</a>
Ofsted	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted">www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted</a>
Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)	<a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk">www.qaa.ac.uk</a>
Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS)	<a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland">www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland</a>
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)	<a href="http://www.spsso.org.uk">www.spsso.org.uk</a>
Skills Development Scotland (SDS)	<a href="http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk">www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk</a>
Universities UK (UUK)	<a href="http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk">www.universitiesuk.ac.uk</a>
Universities Vocational Award Council (UVAC)	<a href="http://www.uvac.ac.uk">www.uvac.ac.uk</a>

## 5.4 Key documents and other resources

Document/Resource	Location
Apprenticeship funding and performance-management rules for training providers	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018">www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018</a>
Apprenticeship funding: rules for employer-providers	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018">www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018</a>
Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA)	<a href="http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org">www.instituteforapprenticeships.org</a>
IfA Approved Apprenticeship Standards	<a href="http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards">www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards</a>
IfA External Quality Assurance	<a href="http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/external-quality-assurance">www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/external-quality-assurance</a>
IfA Quality Statement	<a href="http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship">www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship</a>
IfA Register of External Quality Assurance Providers (EQAP)	<a href="http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/resources/register-of-ega-providers">www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/resources/register-of-ega-providers</a>
IfA Trailblazer Guide	<a href="http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-apprenticeships/how-to-develop-an-apprenticeship-standard-guide-for-trailblazers">www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-apprenticeships/how-to-develop-an-apprenticeship-standard-guide-for-trailblazers</a>
OIA Good Practice Framework	<a href="http://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework.aspx">www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework.aspx</a>
OIA Good Practice Framework: Developing learning opportunities with others	<a href="http://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework/delivering-learning-opportunities-with-others.aspx">www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework/delivering-learning-opportunities-with-others.aspx</a>
Procedure for dealing with complaints about providers of education and training	<a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/641779/Procedure_for_dealing_with_complaints_about_providers_2017.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/641779/Procedure_for_dealing_with_complaints_about_providers_2017.pdf</a>
Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP)	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-of-apprenticeship-training-providers">www.gov.uk/guidance/register-of-apprenticeship-training-providers</a>
Register of End Point Assessment Organisations (RoEPAO)	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/using-the-register-of-apprentice-assessment-organisations">www.gov.uk/government/publications/using-the-register-of-apprentice-assessment-organisations</a>
UK Quality Code for Higher Education	<a href="http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code">www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code</a>
Using subcontractors in the delivery of apprenticeships Policy background and examples	<a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698909/Subcontracting_guidance.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698909/Subcontracting_guidance.pdf</a>

## 6 Features of Apprenticeship Programmes - Four nations comparison

Features of Apprenticeship Programme	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England
Is a job required from day one of the apprenticeship?	Yes	Must be employed.	Yes	Yes
New Job/New Role	Yes	Yes	New recruits or those that have been with the organisation and require upskilling.	Can be
Existing Job	No	Must have a demonstrable need to acquire significant new knowledge and skills.	See previous section.	Can be
Minimum Contracted hours/week	Minimum of 21 contracted hours per week.	No minimum hours within scheme rules but if working part-time, the duration of apprenticeship will be extended proportionately.	Work and training for at least 16 hours per week.	Normal minimum 30 hours per week, but if working part-time, the duration of apprenticeship will be extended proportionately.
Education Level (Minimum - Maximum)	Level 2/level 3 to level 8.	SCQF level 5 to SCQF 11.	Level 2 to level 7.	Level 2 (intermediate) to level 7 (master's).
Proportion of off-the-job training specified	80:20 (typically, day release)	Variable depending on framework.	Apprenticeship frameworks specify the total number of on-the-job learning hours that an apprentice should receive	80:20 (20 per cent is the minimum).

Features of Apprenticeship Programme	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England
			to complete the framework.	
Age Policy/Age Focus	All age, but at level 2/3 there is a focus on 16-24-year olds, with 25+ limitations on support in priority economic sectors. No restrictions at level 4+.	Focus on 16-24 and an increased number of frameworks open to 25+.	All age, but engaging 16-19 years is a priority.	All age, but there are funding incentives for employers to recruit 16-18 year olds.
Public Sector Eligibility	No support	From April 1 public sector will have same access to funding as private sector.	No differentiation between public and private sector eligibility.	Public sector is integral to apprenticeships in England with public sector target for bodies with headcount of 250.
Target Apprenticeship Numbers Specified	None. KPIs focus on retention and achievement of targeted qualifications.	30,000 starts annually by 2020.	Minimum 100,000 quality Apprenticeships during this administration.	3 million Apprenticeships starts by 2020.
Funding Level	For level 2/3, 16-24 year olds, 100 per cent off-the-job training funded by the Department. 25 years and over, 50 per cent off-the-job training funded by the Department in priority sectors. For level 4+; 100 per cent off-the-job training funded by the Department.	Contribution towards cost of training, funding levels dependent on age and framework.	Activity Based Funding model, which funds the cost of the activity with uplifts by sector, language etc. The regime is complex and we are looking at options to simplify the model.	Levy payers can use funds to pay 100 per cent of training costs (up to the funding band) until their funds are exhausted. Then they move to co-investment. For non-levy payers Government pays 90 per cent (up to the funding band) and employers pay 10 per cent co-investment

Features of Apprenticeship Programme	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England
Applicable Legislation	None	None	Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009	Enterprise Act 2016/ Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009
Additional observations	<p>Apprenticeship qualifications are underpinned by National Occupational Standards (NOS). NOS provide a detailed specification of the knowledge, skills and competencies required for a job role. They are a fundamental part of the quality of apprenticeships in NI and valued by employers and our training providers.</p>	<p>Apprenticeship qualifications are underpinned by National Occupational Standards (NOS). NOS provide a detailed specification of the knowledge, skills and competencies required for a job role. They are a fundamental part of the quality of apprenticeships in Scotland and valued by employers, our training providers and learners.</p>	<p>Apprenticeship qualifications are underpinned by National Occupational Standards (NOS), where suitable. NOS provide a detailed specification of the knowledge, skills and competencies required for a job role. They are a fundamental part of the quality of apprenticeships in Wales and valued by employers and our training providers.</p> <p>Wales remains committed to maintaining qualifications as key components of apprenticeship frameworks. Professional or regulated qualifications facilitate portability for learners within and across organisations, sectors,</p>	<p>English Apprenticeship Standards specify the duties, knowledge, skills and behaviours required for occupational competence. Apprenticeships are employer-led: employers set the standards and create the demand for apprentices to meet their skills needs.</p> <p>English apprenticeship standards are no longer based on qualifications. For apprentices, achievement of the End Point Assessment provides evidence of occupational competence.</p> <p>A minority of all apprenticeships contain mandatory qualifications (the majority of level 6+ standards contain a mandatory degree).</p>

Features of Apprenticeship Programme	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England
			<p>regions and nations and provide a quality benchmark for employers, determining whether an apprentice is competent. For apprentices they provide evidence of competence and knowledge which will support their career aspirations.</p>	<p>Mandatory qualifications are allowed by exception if there is evidence of a professional, regulatory or career progression requirement.<sup>34</sup></p>

---

<sup>34</sup> See [www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/resources/mandated-qualifications-information-and-evidence-requirements](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/resources/mandated-qualifications-information-and-evidence-requirements)

## 7 Glossary

The following is a list of terms used within this document; the terms and their associated definitions may not apply to all of the UK. The context where the terms are used in the document should show in which country/countries) they apply.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Academic Standard	The standards set by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards.
AELP	Association of Employment and Learning Providers
AMRC	Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre
AoC	Association of Colleges
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
Apprentice	All those who receive an apprenticeship training through an apprenticeship framework or standard.
Apprenticeship	An apprenticeship is a job with training to industry standards. It should be about entry to a recognised occupation, involve a substantial programme of on-the-job and off-the-job training and the apprentice's occupational competence should be tested by formative and summative assessment.
Apprenticeship Framework	A pathway that sets out different apprenticeship roles, primarily developed by sector bodies and is often qualification-focused. Assessment occurs throughout the apprenticeship.
Apprenticeship levy	A levy on UK employers to fund new apprenticeships.
Apprenticeship Standard	A statement of the duties and knowledge skills and behaviours required for a specified occupation and that an apprentice will need to demonstrate at the end of the apprenticeship through an end-point assessment.
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
Commitment Statement	A signed agreement between the Employer, the Apprentice and the main provider setting out how they will support the achievement of the apprenticeship.
Degree Apprenticeship	An apprenticeship where the main learning includes a mandatory higher education qualification at level 6 or level 7 (bachelor's or master's degree).
Delivery Subcontractor	Any organisation contracted through a main provider or employer-provider to deliver apprenticeship off-the-job training, English or maths or planned on-programme assessment.
DfE	Department for Education
DfE (NI)	Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland)
Employer-provider	Any organisation who delivers some, or all, of the off-the-job training element of an apprenticeship to their own staff and holds a contract with the ESFA. The employer-provider will have overall responsibility for the training and on-programme assessment conducted by themselves or their delivery

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
	subcontractors and to arrange end-point assessment conducted by end-point assessment organisations.
EPA	End Point Assessment. Holistic and independent assessment of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that have been learnt throughout an apprenticeship standard.
EPA Gateway	The point at which the employer is confident that the apprentice is occupationally competent and ready to undertake EPA.
EPAO	End Point Assessment Organisation
EQA	External Quality Assurance
EQAP	External Quality Assurance Provider
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
Framework	1 See Apprenticeship Framework 2 See Framework for higher education qualification
Framework for higher education qualification	A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards.
Gateway requirements	Any requirements that should be completed before an apprentice can undertake EPA. It might cover for example: English and maths requirements, mandatory qualifications approved and detailed in the standard, any requirements or outputs that underpin an EPA method, such as a portfolio demonstrating particular aspects of the standard, confirmation that the employer has decided that the apprentice is ready for EPA.
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GA	Graduate Apprenticeships
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HLA	Higher level Apprenticeship An apprenticeship where the main learning is at level 4 (level 6 in Scotland) or above.
HR	Human Resources
IfA	Institute for Apprenticeships
ILR	Individualised Learner Record
Integrated apprenticeship standard/integrated apprenticeship	Where the EPA is incorporated into the main learning aim (usually a degree or other full higher educational qualification). In these cases, there is no need for an additional independent assessment.
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
KSB	Knowledge, skills and behaviours
Main provider	Any organisation holding a contract with ESFA through which ESFA directly route funds from an employer's digital account or government-employer co-investment. The main provider will have the overall responsibility for the training and on-programme assessment conducted by themselves or their delivery subcontractors and have a contractual relationship on behalf of the employer for the EPA conducted by EPAOs.
NCUB	National Centre for Universities and Business
NIPSO	Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
Off-the-job training	Learning that is undertaken outside of the normal day-to-day work environment and leads towards the achievement of an apprenticeship
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
OfS	Office for Students
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
On-the-job training	Employee training at the place of work while he or she is doing the actual job
PSRB	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAAS	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Scotland)
Quality Code	The UK Quality Code for Higher Education gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide.
Resit	Where no additional learning is required; is not fundable
Retake	Where additional learning is required; is fundable
RHEB	Relevant Higher Education Body
RoATP	Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers
RoEPAO	Register of End Point Assessment Organisations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SKC	Skills, Knowledge and Competence
SLA	Service Level Agreement

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
SME	Small to Medium Size Enterprise
SPSO	The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
Standard	1 See Apprenticeship Standard 2 See Academic Standard
TEG	Technical Experts Group
TERCW	Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales
Trailblazer Group	A Trailblazer is made up of a group of employers who work together to design new apprenticeship standards for occupations within their sectors.
Training Provider	ESFA use the term 'provider' to include any organisation on the register of apprenticeship training providers and appointed by an employer and/or holding a current funding agreement with the ESFA or contracted through a main provider for the delivery of training and on-programme assessment, as part of the employer's agreed apprenticeship programme.
UUK	Universities UK
UVAC	University Vocational Awards Council

QAA2166 - July 2018

Second edition

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)