

Assessment plan: Financial Services Administrator (Adviser firm or Network)

1. Introduction and Overview

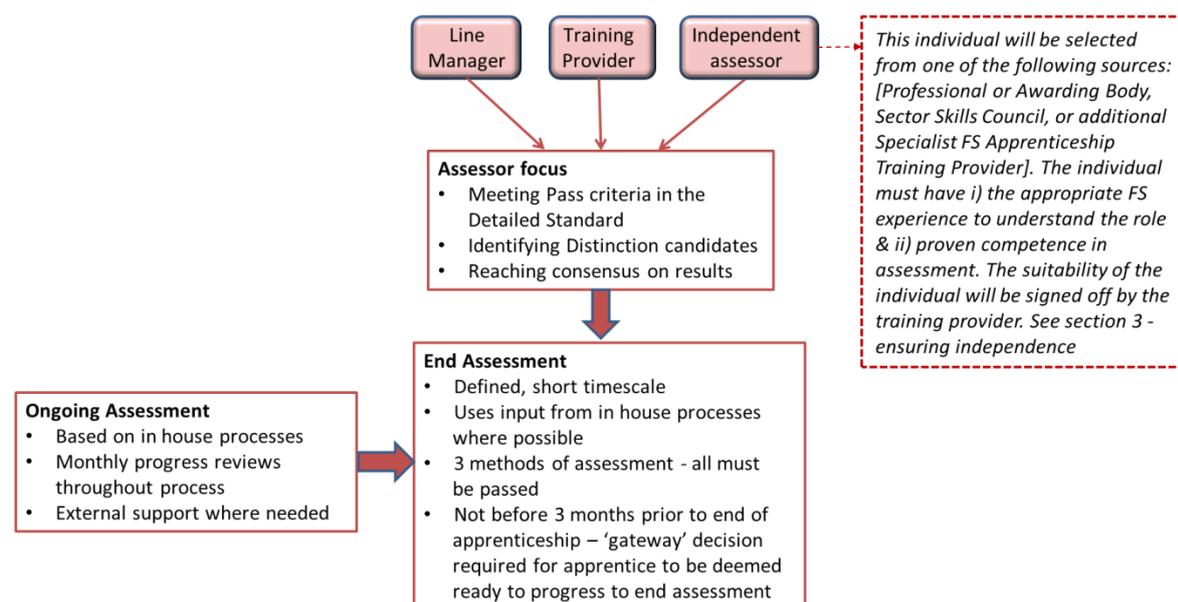
This is an apprenticeship, designed as an entry level role into the financial / mortgage advice sector. The role is applicable to both large firms (eg Network Service Providers) plus SME advice firms, and as such the assessment plan needs to cater for these 2 very different types of employer, with their different operating models, support structures and commercial requirements.

The model has been driven by an employer steering group, **and then challenged and refined through a development group consisting of training & assessment experts including specialist Financial Services (FS) apprenticeship training providers & professional bodies (The Chartered Insurance Institute & the IFS University College)**. The principles driving the design of the assessment plan are as follows:

1. Maximum relevance to the job wherever possible
2. Integration with Business As Usual (BAU) processes wherever possible
3. Add value to the apprentice's journey, both during and at the end of the apprenticeship

The high level model is as follows:

High Level Assessment model:



Tools for assessment:

This paper describes the assessment plan at the level requested for submission. Work is underway to design the tools for delivering the final assessment in the live environment. It is anticipated that the tools will be available by the end of 2014, well in advance of them being required for the first cohort of candidates to complete this apprenticeship.

2. Assessment Methods

The following methodology has been designed taking into account that this is an entry level, 12-18 month apprenticeship, that needs to be able to be consistently applied in both large and SME environments.

Formative Assessment

Our approach to ensuring that the apprentice is on track during the apprenticeship is based on the in house Performance Management (PM) process, which is a standard and recognised way of working within the FS sector.

- The Line Manager uses the PM process which includes monthly 1:1 meetings to discuss progress on the apprenticeship, provide feedback and guide development. **This process will also track the progress and completion of the qualifications within the timescales allowed.**
- Regular check points between the Line Manager and Training Provider (aligned with the PM process) will take place to ensure that the apprentice is on track and agree how any issues will be addressed.

The Training Provider will play an important part in supporting this by:

- i) Ensuring that (prior to starting the apprenticeship), both employer and apprentice understand the detail of the learning journey and their respective commitments to this
- ii) Ensuring that the requirements of the apprenticeship are fully reflected in the PM process, with any gaps being filled through their work with the apprentice
- iii) Supporting the apprentice throughout the learning journey, providing advice and guidance on learning strategies and tools that will support the apprentice's preferred learning style and improve their learning agility
- iv) Supporting the line manager in their commitments to the apprenticeship and providing any training if required.

We are confident that this is an effective process as this style of performance management is an accepted norm across the Financial Services sector, therefore providing a consistent and reliable approach to all apprentices.

Final Assessment

The Final Assessment forms 100% of the assessment of the apprenticeship.

The focus of the Final Assessment is on the apprentice being able to prove their competence in the role of Financial Services Administrator, through the work they have done. This entails demonstrating competence in 28 defined learning outcomes (defined as 'What Good Looks Like') derived from the competencies set out in the standard; see appendix 1.

The Final Assessment will contain 3 components, which offer multiple ways of demonstrating competence – **all components must be passed for the apprentice to be deemed competent**

1. A work based **project** that contains real activity done in the role. This will be reviewed and scored by the panel members ahead of the interview.
2. A **portfolio** of recent evidence that demonstrates competence in learning outcomes not covered by the project. This will be reviewed and scored by the panel members ahead of the interview.
3. A **panel interview / Viva** that allows the panel members to explore particular areas of the standard that have been highlighted during assessment of the project & portfolio – this may be areas of strength, inconsistencies, or where the apprentice does not appear to meet the standard.

Key requirements in the final assessment:

There is deliberately no stipulation as to the percentage of learning outcomes covered by each of the project and portfolio components, as both are equally valid methods of assessment. The balance will vary according to the size and style of business of the employer.

However, the requirements are that:

- a) **both components must be used, and**
- b) **between them they must cover 100% of the learning outcomes required in the final assessment.**

As the apprentice has to pass all 3 elements of the final assessment, the panel interview / Viva would only go ahead if both the project & portfolio were assessed as passes. Otherwise feedback would be given & remedial action would be required by the apprentice, before progressing to the interview / Viva

Unanimous assessment:

The views of the panel must be unanimous for either a pass or a distinction to be achieved.

Final Assessment timings & activities:

The process of setting up the Final Assessment will begin around 4 months before the completion of the apprenticeship as shown in the table below:

Timescale	Activity
4 months before completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress and ensure on track as part of regular PM process • Line Manager and Training Provider identify any gaps and create a plan for the final 3 months to complete the learning • Line Manager, Apprentice and Training Provider meet to review requirements for Final Assessment and start to shape content of project & portfolio • Develop proposal for the 2 components of the Final Assessment. Line Manager reviews for relevance to role; Training Provider reviews for fit and coverage of the standard
3 months before completion <i>(subject to 'gateway' decision by LM & TP)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line Manager and Training Provider sign off the agreed components and outline content of the project & portfolio • Apprentice completes the work on both components, with support from Line Manager and Training Provider.

<i>that apprentice is ready to progress to final assessment)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprentice submits project and portfolio 2 weeks before the date on which they attend the panel interview to make their presentation
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The Training Provider Role:

The training providers will again play a key part in overseeing the final assessment process by:

- i) Taking responsibility for organising and coordinating the process
- ii) Contacting professional bodies / awarding bodies / other training providers to secure the services of an appropriately qualified 3rd party ‘independent’ assessor
- iii) Providing training in the assessment process (including use of tools and application to ensure consistency) for assessors involved in end point assessment and interview

Training Providers have been involved in the development of this assessment plan and feel that this is an area where they can bring their experience to bear and really add value to the employer.

This activity would be included in the commercial terms agreed in contracting between the employer and training provider.

3. Ensuring Independence / Impartiality

The approach we are taking is one that demonstrates clear **impartiality**, whilst the inclusion of a third party assessor, adds an **independent** view. **Impartiality** is delivered through the requirement for **a unanimous decision** and the fact that no single party who has been involved in delivery can make the sole decision on competence.

As shown in the diagram on page 1, there are 3 parties involved in the final assessment process, whilst the Professional Body additionally provides external and independent assessment of knowledge competence through the examination requirement. Bringing these together provides a collective view of competence and gives us a genuinely impartial result.

The independent 3rd party assessor will be selected by the training provider in consultation with the employer, from one of the following sources: Professional or Awarding Body, Sector Skills Council, or Specialist FS Apprenticeship Training Provider. The individual must have:

- i) the appropriate FS experience to understand the role, and
- ii) proven competence in assessment.

The suitability of the individual will be signed off by the training provider.

*The sources from which the 3rd party assessor could be selected are deliberately wide at this stage and could be reduced after the experience of running the pilot. This is because the market is still responding to the Apprenticeship reforms and we cannot therefore say that all professional bodies will want to provide this service. **Moreover, by having this initial wide selection, costs of this additional resource will be driven down by competition**, particularly as it is likely that a similar approach will be taken with subsequent FS advice sector Apprenticeship standards that are under consideration, and any parties interested in providing this service will be made aware of the bigger picture / future potential.*

Assessor roles:

Assessor	Role
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1. Line Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings a view of the apprentice from the PM process and working with them in the workplace through the apprenticeship • Scores all components of the Final Assessment independently of the other assessors • Assesses against Pass and Distinction criteria • Participates in consensus decision
2. Training Provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings a view of the apprentice from supporting them through the apprenticeship • Scores all components of the Final Assessment independently of the other assessors • Assesses against Pass and Distinction criteria • Participates in consensus decision
3. Independent 3rd party assessor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent view as they will not have had any prior involvement in the apprenticeship or with the apprentice. • Brings added rigour & consistency to the assessment through their wider industry perspective, knowledge & experience • Scores all components of the Final Assessment independently of the other assessors • Assesses against Pass and Distinction criteria • Participates in consensus decision
4. Professional Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External & independent assessment of knowledge competence through the examination requirement, during formative assessment

4. Delivering Consistent (Reliable) Judgments

The workplace focus of the project and portfolio in this apprenticeship means that the evidence provided will vary depending on the role that each apprentice has within their employer. **At the core of ensuring that judgments on role competence are consistent, will be the Detailed Standard (see Appendix, columns 1&2) which defines what is required for each of the Knowledge and Skill areas to be assessed.**

A robust scoring matrix will be created that will be used by all assessors to evaluate each of the three assessment components cumulatively against the 28 learning outcomes derived from the Detailed Standard. Again this method has been chosen as employers are used to this approach which is accepted best practice for assessing performance in the FS sector. This process will contain detailed guidance on what is required to pass the apprenticeship for the defined learning outcome of both Skills and Behaviours (see Higher Order Skills below) using the Pass Assessment Criteria in the Detailed Standard and including examples of acceptable evidence for that employer. Each area will be scored to identify how well the apprentice has met the learning outcome.

An example scale is shown below - the apprentice will have to score 3 or above in each of the competencies to achieve a Pass.

1	2	3	4	5
Significant gaps in their ability to demonstrate the standard	Minor gaps in their ability to demonstrate the standard	Fully meets the Assessment Criteria	Some examples of exceeding the standard in some areas; meets in all other areas	Consistently exceeds the standard across most of the areas

Consistency of approach by assessors will be achieved through training of all assessors involved by the Training Provider. This will cover an understanding of the overall apprenticeship; knowledge of

the detailed standard; the scoring matrix; examples of evidence relevant to that particular employer and sample scoring exercises. The Training Provider will act as the assessment 'expert', whilst the Internal Verification processes within Training provider models add a further level of robustness to reliability and consistency.

5. Delivering Accurate (Valid) Judgments

The entire Final Assessment is focused on the competence of the apprentice in the role, as evidenced by their ability to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours as set out in the Detailed Standard. Each of the three components of the Final Assessment builds a cumulative picture of competence against the Detailed Standard. In addition, the use of the in house PM process during the apprenticeship will drive a focus on building competence throughout the 12-18 months of the apprenticeship.

Training Providers involved in the assessment of this role, **would have to be specialists in Financial Services**. This would be a key requirement for any employer in selecting a Training Provider partner.

6. Synoptic Assessment

The three components of the Final Assessment and the assessment tools being used in this apprenticeship all require the apprentice to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and behaviours in an integrated manner to deliver the learning outcomes required to meet the standard.

The assessors will build a cumulative and holistic picture, from all 3 components of the Final Assessment, of how well the apprentice meets or exceeds the standard.

The focus of the Final Assessment will be on the Higher Order Skills from the standard.

Higher Order Skills

We have determined that the Higher Order Skills within this apprenticeship are the 5 skills and 5 behaviours that make up the standard.

The knowledge competencies have been reviewed by the Professional Bodies (CII & IFS University College). **They have confirmed that knowledge areas fall into 2 categories; generic and company specific. Generic knowledge will be fully covered by the exams required in the standard, whilst company specific will be acquired by the apprentice within their role and their day to day work.**

The apprentice will therefore acquire the knowledge requirements of this standard during the formative stage of the learning journey (with satisfactory progress being assessed by the line manager as part of Performance Management), and by passing the required exam(s).

Gateway for progressing to final assessment

Ultimately, a sound understanding of the 4 knowledge competencies is a prerequisite for an apprentice to be able to demonstrate the skills & behaviours required for this standard. The Line Manager and Training Provider would use this as a gateway; **ie not allowing the apprentice to start on the end assessment stage of the apprenticeship until the knowledge competence has been agreed as completed.**

7. Graded Assessments

Our standard says that we will have 2 levels of achievement within this apprenticeship: Pass and Distinction.

Employers agreed that there were 3 specific performance areas that would demonstrate a higher level of performance in the role that would deserve a distinction award:

1. **Impact on the business** – measured by results delivered and viable improvement ideas put forward
2. **Impact on the customer** – measured by demonstrably higher levels of service delivered
3. **Impact on peers** – measured by evidence of teamwork and support for others

For assessment of a distinction grade, we will use the same robust scoring matrix described in section 4 above. However, in designing this assessment tool, key learning outcomes from the 28 listed in appendix 1 will be selected that most accurately reflect the 3 performance areas above. These selected key learning outcomes will be the **same for all apprentices as part of the approved assessment plan** and a score of 4 or 5 will be required in **all** those selected for an apprentice to be awarded a distinction.

8. Affordability & Flexibility

In developing this assessment approach employers have consistently sought to keep the approach simple but effective, to use existing work-based performance assessment wherever possible and to avoid duplication or the need for adding additional personnel into the assessment process.

This has led to a well-defined, cost-effective and deliverable process that employers will find easy to understand and apply to their business environment. Where additional support is required (for instance, in small businesses where Performance Management processes may not be as well defined, or line management skills may be less developed) the Training Provider can step in to offer their expertise.

The **flexibility** built into this assessment model is critical to its ability to cater for both large and SME businesses. The following key points deliver this flexibility:

- Use of both project and portfolio of evidence in the final assessment, and flexibility in percentage make up of each – will vary according to nature of business and its size
- Option to flex the amount of support required from the training provider – can be discussed and tailored (utilising the training provider's expertise) during contract discussions

This flexibility, plus the additional payment that Government is proposing to provide to small businesses offering apprenticeships, will make this an affordable apprenticeship model for small and large businesses alike. It may also be the case that large IFA networks familiar with this apprenticeship model will offer their services to help-businesses within their network as part of their business development support.

Furthermore it is anticipated that costs will be minimised by the use of remote learning and assessment where appropriate (both in training the assessors and working with apprentices). Again the FS sector is well used to utilising eLearning and video conferencing technology.

9. Manageability / Feasibility

This apprenticeship has been designed to be viable for both large network head office environments and SME advice businesses. This means that there could be large numbers and/or wide geographical take up. Existing FS apprenticeship training providers are well used to dealing with this and the assessment model is a relatively simple one to administer:

- Final Assessment interview will take place either face-to-face at business premises (or by video conferencing interview if deemed appropriate)
- Assessors will attend a training event shortly before they commence any engagement with the Final Assessment process. This will be face-to-face or virtual, depending on the location of individuals.
- Assessors will travel to the location of the Final Assessment on the day (wherever possible).
- Final agreement between the assessors will be decided at a discussion that takes place at the end of the day or at a subsequent conference call, with notes documented to provide an audit trail of the final decision.

The Training Provider will have a key role to play, working with the employer, providing training as required, and organising / administering the Final Assessment.

10. Professional Body Recognition

Both the Chartered Insurance Institute & the IFS University College have been involved & contributed to the design of this apprenticeship throughout the development process. Each has confirmed their support of this standard and assessment plan through letters of endorsement which have been submitted to BIS.

Appendix 1 – The 28 Learning Outcomes for final assessment

(all need to be competently demonstrated to pass the apprenticeship)

	Competence	Learning Outcome (What Good Looks Like)
Skills		
Quality service delivery	Consistently develops and delivers excellent service to customers, colleagues & advisers, supporting the products / services provided and adhering to 'Treating Customers Fairly' principles at all times	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responds to customers, colleagues & advisers in a timely, accurate fashion, within service standards. 2. Takes ownership of issues, escalating those which cannot be solved and follows through to ensure action has been taken 3. Is realistic when agreeing actions, explains what can be achieved and by when. Provides regular progress updates 4. Represents the values and ethics of the firm.
Customer communication & relationships	Develops effective relationships with customers & key contacts, handling & resolving issues through effective verbal/written/IT skills.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Builds rapport with customers and demonstrates empathy and understanding when dealing with them 6. Delivers effectively to customers' satisfaction 7. Demonstrates consistent accurate & appropriate communication through all relevant media
Team working & collaboration	Understands role within team & impact on others. Consistently endeavours to support colleagues & collaborate to achieve results	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Is an enthusiastic and positive team member 9. Shares knowledge, ideas and experiences with the wider team to assist in continuous improvement. 10. Demonstrates an open and honest communication style 11. Asks questions and challenges others positively
Planning & prioritising	Successfully analyses and plans in order to deliver good outcomes for the business	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Consistently prioritises time and activities accordingly, managing resources as appropriate 13. Takes ownership & commits to delivery 14. Flags concerns before crisis arises, when concerned about workloads or timescales
Using systems & Processes	Consistently adheres to systems & processes using proficient IT skills, including risk, regulatory and governance requirements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Consistently utilises systems accurately and appropriately 16. Demonstrates proficient use of IT systems and ensures that regulatory requirements are met
Behaviours		
Honesty & integrity	Truthful, sincere in their actions and doing the right thing (even when not the easiest)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Demonstrate integrity and ethical behaviour in the way they do their job 18. Act in an open and honest way
Adaptability	Willingness to accept changing priorities and work patterns when new jobs need to be done, or requirements change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Demonstrate a flexible approach 20. Respond positively to change & shows willingness to refocus priorities when required
Enthusiasm	Shows drive and energy in their work, when things are going well and when challenges arise	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Consistently demonstrates a positive approach to work 22. Do what needs to be done to get the job done 23. Suggest ways to improve how work is done
Dependability	Meets personal commitments and expectations, eg completing work, timekeeping	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 24. Be at work and engaged in work when required 25. Take ownership in their job
Personal commitment	Proactive in their own development; commitment to the job and the business	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Take ownership & seek ways in which to develop own knowledge and skills within the role 27. Share knowledge and experiences with others to assist in their learning journey 28. Progressively develop their own career as they learn more about the job and the business