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This guidance is intended for all existing trailblazer groups who are developing standards, and all those who may put forward an expression of interest to develop further standards in the future.

The new approach to the approvals process for apprenticeship standards

1. As set out in the latest version of the Guidance for Trailblazers, from the end of August 2015 there will be 2 changes to the way the approvals process for apprenticeship standards work:
 - we are moving to a monthly deadline for submissions of expressions of interest (EOIs); draft standards and draft assessment plans
 - this will start from the submission deadline on Thursday 27 August at 12pm, and thereafter will be 12pm on the last Thursday of every month
 - we are introducing a public online feedback survey to support the evidence-gathering and decision-making process at Gateway 1 (EOIs) and Gateway 2 (draft Standards).

1. Introducing a monthly deadline is designed to reduce delays in the process when the relevant documents are ready for submission, ultimately helping to make sure that new Standards that are fit for purpose can be approved and prepared for delivery as soon as possible.
2. Introducing an online survey is designed to increase transparency and scrutiny; ensuring that all interested parties have a final chance to comment and that approval recommendations are supported by feedback and evidence from a wide range of organisations.

How will the new approach work?

1. Shortly after each submission deadline (usually the following day), all EOIs and draft standards submitted for approval will be placed online for feedback through the CitizenSpace survey tool.
2. Each month's survey will be open for two weeks. We will promote it through relevant BIS/SFA publications, social media, and seek regular feedback from cross-cutting employer, provider and assessment organisations. You may also want to promote it through your own channels if you think this would be helpful (e.g. at Gateway 1 to demonstrate the proposal is widely supported).
3. For Gateway 1, once the survey has closed we will consider any feedback received on the EOIs, particularly around the level of demand and support for the proposed standard and the extent to which respondents agree that it is likely to meet published criteria. We will then use this, alongside evidence submitted in the bid, to make a ministerial approval recommendation.
4. For Gateway 2, once the survey has closed we will share a summary of the feedback on the draft standards with the trailblazer groups concerned to give you a chance to respond to any substantive comments or questions raised. We will then use this information, along with the more detailed evidence included in the original submission and feedback from the Relationship Manager (RM), to make a ministerial approval recommendation.
5. Once the decision on each EOI or draft standard has been made we will inform you as soon as possible, along with clear feedback supporting the decision, and publish successful trailblazer groups/standards online as per usual processes. We aim to complete the whole process within 6 weeks, but in some cases (e.g. if the online survey raises a query that would benefit from further investigation), this could take longer.

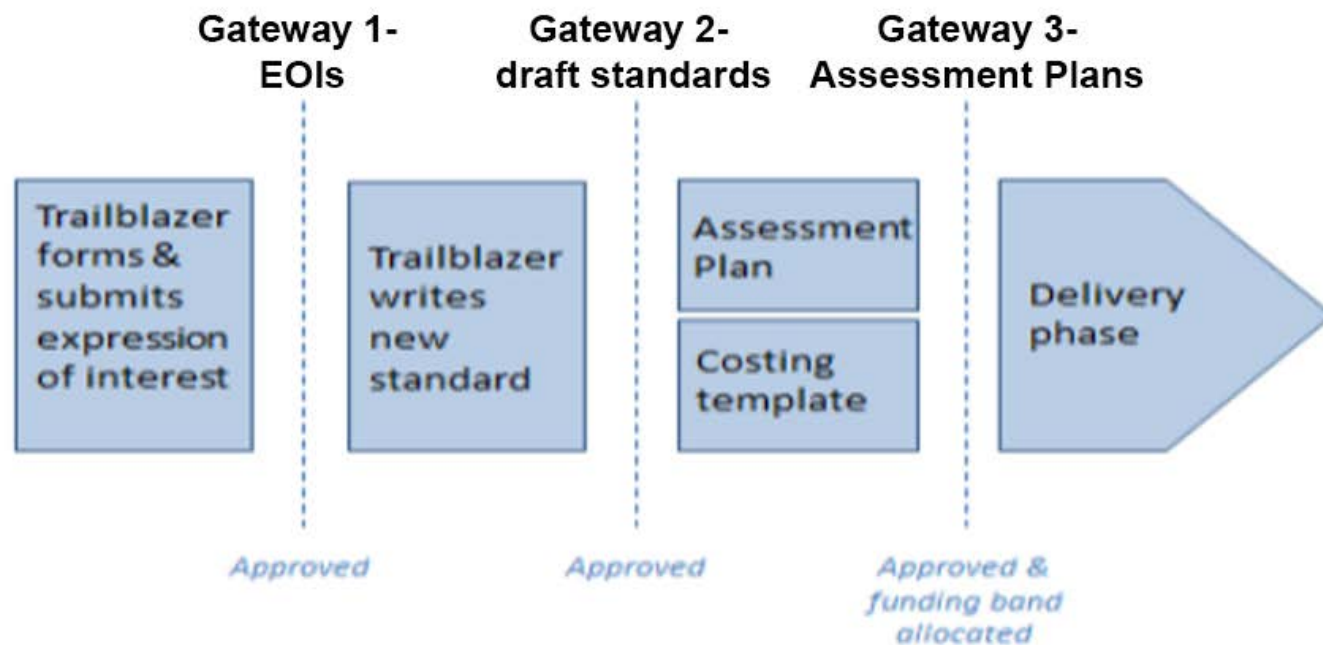
How will the new approach support existing trailblazer work to develop apprenticeship standards?

1. Introducing the online survey is aimed at ensuring we have the widest possible evidence base to provide assurance that a proposed EOI or draft apprenticeship standard is viable, well-supported, and of good quality. At Gateway 1 this is a chance to test whether the bid would have support in principle from other employers in the sector and to start to gauge the potential level of demand. At Gateway 2 it is

also an opportunity for the trailblazer group to consider any areas where improvements could be made to ensure the standard is as comprehensive and effective as it can be, whether or not it is approved. Your RM is on hand to support with this.

2. The survey is not designed to replace the full and comprehensive sector consultation that we ask trailblazers to carry out when developing their standards. This remains vital to ensure that the standard designed in a way that fully meets the needs of employers across the industry. As per page 18 to 19 of the Guidance for Trailblazers, it is important that you share details of your consultation with your RM before submitting your standard for approval at Gateway 2.
3. To ensure that we do not target the survey at groups that have already been consulted during the development phase, and to strengthen your evidence base as far as possible, we would also encourage all trailblazers to include evidence of who you have consulted and what you have done as a result as part of your formal approval submission. We will also however forward you the link to the survey so that, if helpful, you can use it to promote to any sector organisations/ employers etc. that have not yet had a chance to input.
4. For Gateway 2, trailblazer groups should continue to ensure that their draft standard is fully developed and that all the accompanying evidence and other documentation is ready before submitting for approval. To ensure the greatest chance of success, we may ask you to withdraw the submission and resubmit for a future deadline before putting a recommendation to the Minister if we feel further information or input is needed. We would therefore encourage you to check with your Relationship Manager before submitting draft standards for approval.

Your Relationship Manager will be able to give you more details on the new approach if required and answer any specific questions you may have. They can also help you if you would like more advice on how to carry out an effective and wide-ranging sector consultation. As we start embedding the changes we are keen to hear from you on how effective the new process is and how useful you find the feedback. Please do send in any views through your Relationship Manager, or email apprenticeship.trailblazers@bis.gsi.gov.uk.



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