Education & Skills Funding Agency

Guidance

Apprenticeships: initial assessment to recognise prior learning

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

1. What is an initial assessment?

Before an apprenticeship begins, the main training provider must conduct an initial assessment. They will assess the individual's prior learning to establish the 'starting point', or baseline, for the apprentice. This informs how much of the apprenticeship training content the individual requires. It checks that the apprenticeship is an appropriate training programme for the individual and is about the whole standard, not just English and maths.

The assessment should also establish the eligibility of the remaining content in the context of the minimum requirements for off-the-job training and duration. It may identify that an apprenticeship may not be suitable for an individual because their level of prior learning and experience may be too high; therefore a higher level apprenticeship or another type of training could be a suitable alternative and is more appropriate for the individual.

The provider guide to delivering high-quality apprenticeships offers more detail about how initial assessments fit in to the rest of the apprenticeship.

2. Why is it important to conduct an initial assessment which correctly recognises prior learning and experience?

A robust initial assessment forms a foundation for ahigh-qualityapprenticeship programmeby:

- establishing the starting point for the apprentice,which demonstrates the value of the programme to the individual and the employer. Ofsted inspectorswill use this to judge the distance travelledby the apprentice.
- identifyingonly thetraining the apprentice still needs to undertaketo become occupationally competent, as set out in the standard, avoiding duplication.
- identifying where apprenticeships could be shortened or have a different delivery model which is valued by employers; this includes shortening the duration by over three months tobecomean apprenticeship that is accelerated, whilst still meeting the minimum requirements of 12 month duration and 20% off the job training. It could also inform other flexible models, including where training is front-loaded.
- reducing the negotiatedprice paid by the employerfortraining,as set out inthe apprenticeship funding rules; ESFA willuse this to ensure funding is not being claimed fortraining the apprentice does not need.
- identifyingwhere apprenticeships are not suitable, for example where the individual's existing knowledge, skills and behavioursmeans there is not substantial new learningto achieve the minimum 12-month duration and 20% off-the-job training requirements.

3. How doesthe recognition of prior learning link to statutory 12-month minimumduration andthe20%minimum off-the-job training requirement?

The apprenticeship funding rulesset out howthe duration,content and priceof the programme must be reducedwhenadjusting the programme which recogniseprior learning.

Where providers adjust the amount of training to be delivered so that it falls below the minimum 20% off-the-job training requirement and/or does not meetthestatutory 12-monthminimum duration, the apprenticeship is no longer eligible for funding.

4. What are the benefits ofrecognising prior learning?

Beyond needing to comply with the apprenticeshipfunding rules, correctly recognising prior learning means providers can:

- deliver appropriate tailored content which is likely to be more engaging for apprentices,and therefore lead to higher retention and achievement rates, and onward progression – including into another apprenticeship
- establish the right starting point,which will be recognised by Ofsted inspectors,and supports a high-quality programme. This allows providers to evidence the added value of the programme to both employers and apprentices
- deliver apprenticeships that are accelerated, which are reliant onfully recognising prior learningto enable a proportionate reduction in the content and time taken to deliver it, which is valued by employers who gain a fully competent and productive employee more quickly.

5. How to conduct an initial assessment

Providers can design their initial assessment process to meet the needs of their programmes. Their process for recognising prior learning and experience must be submitted when applying to join the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers.

We are not prescriptive abouthow it must be conducted, provided it compares the individual's existing knowledge, skills, and behaviours with those required in the standard to achieve occupational competence. It should produce an individual training plan (the commitment statement) that accounts for relevant prior learning and experience.

The initial assessmentcouldbecomposed of the following stages:

Aself-assessment for the apprentice to assess themselves against the knowledge, skills, and behaviour requirements of thestandard.

Aprofessionaldiscussion with the individual about their previous learning, work experience,andcurrent competence in relation to the knowledge, skills, and behavioursin the standard.This will also identify their career aspirations and explore the compatibility ofapprenticeship with their job role.Occupational maps and T Level progression profiles could support this discussion.

Mapping of knowledge, skills, and behaviourswhere the providerassessesthe evidence, they have gathered about apprentice's prior learning and experienceagainst the level required to achieve occupational competence.

A separate diagnostic assessment (where applicable) for English and maths, which is funded separately. This shouldidentify relevant prior qualifications or equivalents, and any Functional Skills Qualificationsor exemptions required.

For higher and degree apprenticeships, accreditation of prior experiential learning could also lead to credits being awarded for modules.

The process should conclude with ameetingbetween the provider, apprentice, andtheir employerto agreetheir individual training plan, produced after the initial assessment,which recognises their currentcompetenceandplans for further progress reviews throughout the programme. This may naturally form part of the apprenticeship induction process and inform the commitment statement, showing the planned end date based on the remaining content.

It may also be necessary to revisit the Initial Assessment after the apprenticeship starts if the apprentice is working at a level above or below expectations. Employer and apprentice feedback is vital as it may be necessary to further adapt the training plan based on new evidence or consider an alternative standard.

6. How isprior learning and experience assessed?

Assessing prior learning and experience compares the apprentice's existing knowledge, skills, and behaviours with those required to achieve the occupational standard.

Providersshould use their knowledgeand expertiseof the level of competence needed to meet the gateway requirementsfor each element of the standard they are delivering.They can also seek the employer's views, both about the expected level required to achieve occupational competence, and for their opinion on the level the apprentice is currently working at.

Knowledge

The apprentice'sknowledgeis their current knowledge of technical detail and know-howrequired to do their job. This may be specific to the standard required to achieve occupational competence, or it could be more general, and acquired from previoustrainingand work experience.The apprentice'sself-assessmentand the professional discussion may show evidencethat an apprentice has knowledge of a required part of the standard and is already occupationally competent in that area. Where an apprentice has some, or 'emerging' knowledge of a statement, recognition of prior learning should still apply. It should not be necessary to start learning from the beginning.

Skills

The apprentice'scurrentskillsrefer to how competent they are atpracticallyapplyingtheir knowledge to their role.While anapprentice may have experience of developing and using a skill from prior work experience or training,the discussion should not just focus on their duties. The professional discussion could test the level of competence with which an apprentice uses their skills, referringto the assessment plan where necessary.

Behaviours

The apprentice's currentbehavioursare their current mindset, attitude, and approach.The discussion with apprentice will indicatetheir current competence and this could be drawn particularly from their work experience.

Evidence providers look for will vary depending on the standard. A technical qualification like a T Level, which is based on an occupational standard, or completion of a Skills Bootcamp (especially those aligned to a standard), or an industry recognised qualification will provide strong evidence of relevant prior learning and experience.

Recent work experience in a related role is also likely to demonstrate some of the required knowledge, skills, and behaviours. These should generally lead to a proportionate reduction in the training content delivered and the negotiated price.

Evidence of more general prior learning and experience, or qualifications with weaker link to the occupational standard – for example unaccredited training courses delivered in the workplace – will also be relevant. Providers should carefully consider how much this prior learning and experience meets the standard required for occupational competence. This may or may not lead to a reduction in the content they deliver.

7. How shouldproviders record evidencethat they have recognised the apprentice'sprior learning and experience?

The apprenticeship funding rules set out the evidence requirements for recognisingprior learning in the commitment statementand documenting the initial assessment.It is vital that providers can demonstratethat they have conducted a robust assessment and howthey have used that information to develop a personalised training plan. Where they have recognised prior learning and experience, providers must evidence that they have reduced the content, duration, and price proportionately.

8. What prior learning and experience should not be included?

Providers may decide, after a thorough initial assessment,that someprior learning and experience is not relevant and does not need to be recognised when deciding how to deliver training. This could be wherean apprentice's skills have eroded through lack of practice, or where the apprentice's knowledge has been superseded– for example by technological advancements.

Where this happens, providers can use theassessment plan, their expertise, and consult the employer when deciding what prior learning and experience should be excluded and document this in the evidence pack as detailed in the apprenticeship funding rules.

9. How do other technical education programmes use occupational standards?

Apprenticeships lead to full occupational competence, through the combination of on and off the job training and experience. The number of people building on previous programmes and progressing into apprenticeships is increasing. Effective recognition of prior learning and experience supports this progression and plays an important role in. Many of these programmes are aligned to occupational standards,justlike apprenticeships, but not all will lead to full occupational competence.

Individuals could begin an apprenticeship aftercompleting programmes such as:

- T Levels
- Traineeships
- SkillsBootcamps
- Further Education or A Levels
- In future, Higher Technical Qualifications and Level 3 Technical Qualifications

Where theprevious programme has a high level of alignment with the proposed apprenticeship, providers will need to carefully assessthe apprentice's competence. Where both competence and alignment are high and the apprentice is unlikely to require substantial new learning, the provider will need to make a judgement about whether the apprenticeship will be eligible for funding based on the minimum off-the-job training time and duration requirements. Another progression route may be more appropriate.

Alternatively,an individual may havereceived training on many of the knowledge, skills, and behavioursfroma previous programme but not to the level required to achieve occupational competence. This may bebecause the individual hasnot had the opportunity to learn them in depth or develop and embed their skills in the workplace. In these cases, the provider should carefully consider the training required to achieve occupational competence as they could still be eligible for an apprenticeship.

As part of the reforms to technical education are realised, more programmes which align to occupational standards will become available. We will keep this guidance and our funding approach under review during this time. The ESFA will closely monitor changes to the duration and total negotiated price of apprenticeships for learners who have completed other programmes aligned to standards. This is to ensure reductions to the duration and cost are accurately recorded in the ILR.

10. Who is responsible for the recognition of prior learning?

All three partiesto the commitment statementhave a part to play in ensuring an apprentice's prior learning is recognised and the initial assessment is an effective one.

Provider

The providerconducts the initial assessment, documents the findings in the evidence packand uses the assessment to develop the apprentice's training plan.

Employer

The employershouldensure that theyfactor any reduction in the cost of the apprenticeship due to recognition of prior learningwhen negotiating the price of their programmes with the provider. They may also ask to know more about the provider's policy on prior learning and assessment.

Apprentice

The apprenticeshould be supported by the provider and employer toprepare for and engage with the initial assessment by reflecting on their education and career to date and gathering evidence in advance if required. The apprentice should also be made aware of the benefits of being supported to achieve their apprenticeship sooner.

11. How doesrecognising prior learningaffect thetotal negotiated price of an apprenticeship?

The price of the apprenticeship negotiated between providers and employers should be reduced in proportion with the training which is notdelivered. This does not mean that omitting a module will lead to aprecise,like-for-like reductionas there are likely to be fixed costs which apply toan entire programme, regardless of the content delivered. However, there should be a proportionate discount,reflecting the lower cost of delivery to the provider, which is documented in the evidence pack, and agreed with the employer.

12. Illustrative example – a current employee

Sarah has worked for a large, public-sector employer for a few years and has been covering a management role for several months. She has recently been successful in applying for a permanent role on promotion as a departmental manager. Her employer is keen to support Sarah with an apprenticeship. After a discussion with their main provider, who runs most of their apprenticeship programmes, they decide that the Level 5 Operations or Departmental Manager standard would be a good fit. The provider asks Sarah to complete a self-assessment form where Sarah matches herself to the broad areas of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of the standard.

Sarah returns her completed self-assessment to her training provider in advance of a professional discussion as part of her initial assessment.

Over the course of their discussion, Sarah's provider is confident that in most of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours she is a long way from being occupationally competent and that the apprenticeship is a good fit for her. However, her recent, strong performance from her last role has produced some good evidence of the Operational Management knowledge and skills. They discuss these to informally test Sarah's knowledge, and understand her experience of applying her knowledge in the workplace to assess her level of skill. Over the course of the discussion Sarah also appears to have demonstrated some of the required behaviours around taking responsibility and being inclusive.

After the discussion, Sarah's provider re-visits the assessment plan and judges that Sarah will be able to pass the Operational Management element of the professional discussion at EPA. The provider checks this with Sarah's employer, who endorses their approach by agreeing that Sarah's previous performance meets the pass criteria for the knowledge and skills. They agree that Sarah can omit the module of her programme on operations management.

For the behaviours, Sarah's employer and provider agree that although Sarah displays some of the behaviours required to be occupationally competent, these are not as strong. The provider and employer agree that these will continue to develop through both Sarah's off-the-job training, and on-the-job support from the employer. Sarah's employer is happy that they can negotiate the price of the programme from a lower starting point, and that the overall time on-programme will be reduced.

14. T-Level Progression Profiles

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has worked with employers on a pilot project to look at potential progression routes from T Levels into apprenticeships and employment. When developing the profiles, The Institute also looked at where T Level students may be able to complete an apprenticeship in a reduced timeframe (an accelerated apprenticeship), due to recognition of prior learning.

The profiles were developed in conjunction with employers, providers, and other industry experts, mapping where there is content that is common to T Levels and apprenticeships which will provide a foundation for the next step into work.

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