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Guidance

# Apprenticeships: initial assessment to recognise prior learning

Updated 20 July 2022

**Applies to England**

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

Assessment of an apprentice's current competence, through recognition of prior learning and experience, forms part of the initial assessment process, which ensures that the apprentice is on the right programme and includes eligibility checks, English and Maths attainment and any additional learning support and or other needs. The training provider (the provider) must start the initial assessment before the apprenticeship begins.

Initial assessment costs are now classified as an eligible cost, within the funding band of the standard; this recognises the importance of initial assessment in leading to a tailored and high-quality training programme, that meets the needs of the apprentice and employer.

# 1. The importance of recognising prior learning and experience

Assessment of the individual's prior learning and experience (along with the other initial assessment activities) allows the provider to establish the 'starting point', or baseline, for the apprentice. Effective recognition of prior learning has benefits for apprentices, employers and providers. A robust initial assessment forms the foundation for a high-quality apprenticeship programme for:

- the **apprentice**, who will have a tailored training plan that identifies their specific training needs and gives them the most effective route to full occupational competence, without unnecessary duplication
- the **employer**, whose apprentice has a training programme that is tailored to the employer and the individual's needs and ensures that best use is made of the off-the-job time to train
- the **provider**, who can deliver a more tailored learning experience that will be valued by apprentices and their employers. This can lead to the apprentice completing the programme in a shorter time

[The provider guide to delivering high-quality apprenticeships](#) gives more detail about how [initial assessments](#) fit in to the rest of the apprenticeship.

# 2. The roles of providers, employers and apprentices in recognition of prior learning and experience

All three parties have a responsibility in ensuring an apprentice's prior learning is recognised and the assessment is effective.

## Provider

The provider conducts the assessment of prior learning and experience advising the apprentice and employer of the process and expectations. The provider identifies what prior learning and experience the individual has compared to the requirements of the occupational competence described in the standard, uses the outcome of the assessment to identify which elements of the full training programme do not need to

be delivered and tailors the apprentice's training plan to reflect this. The provider documents the findings in the evidence pack (as defined in the funding rules) and updates the Individualised Learning Record (ILR) and Apprenticeship Service (from 1 August 2022 onwards).

## **Employer**

The employer must support the apprentice to ensure that the assessment of prior learning and experience is accurate and agree a tailored training programme if needed, particularly where the apprenticeship could be accelerated. The employer must agree that the reduction in the cost of the apprenticeship reflects the correct level of recognition of prior learning and experience before negotiating the final price of their programmes with the provider. They should also ask the provider for details of their policy on prior learning and assessment.

## **Apprentice**

The apprentice should, with the support of the provider and employer, prepare for the assessment of prior learning and experience by reflecting on their education and career to date and gathering evidence in advance if required, which may be relevant to their apprenticeship. The apprentice should also be made aware of the benefits of being supported to achieve their apprenticeship and potentially become occupationally competent in a shorter time than the typical duration for the apprenticeship.

# **3. What's involved in the assessment of recognition of prior learning and experience**

Providers can design their prior learning assessment process to meet the needs of their programmes, but it must include the stages outlined in the initial assessment section of the funding rules, which are summarised below. However, the method in which these stages are conducted is not prescribed.

The assessment compares the individual's existing knowledge, skills and behaviours with those required in the standard to achieve occupational competence. It should result in an individual training plan that accounts for relevant prior learning and experience, reducing the content, duration and cost where training is not required.

The assessment should also establish that the individual is eligible for the apprenticeship by meeting the minimum requirements for off-the-job training and duration, which are defined in the funding rules. It may identify that an apprenticeship may not be appropriate for an individual because their level of prior learning and experience breaches the minimum requirements; therefore a higher level apprenticeship or another type of training could be more appropriate for the individual.

## **Skills scan**

The skills scan assesses the individual's competence against the knowledge, skills

and behaviour requirements of the standard. This may be a self-assessment, with a follow-up discussion, but it should be supported and or contextualised by the provider to ensure that the individual gives an accurate reflection of their current competence against the standard.

## **Accreditation of prior qualifications**

The provider must identify relevant prior qualifications or equivalents (particularly qualifications aligned to occupational standards) and unaccredited courses.

A discussion should be held (and documented) with the individual and their employer to validate the individual's previous learning, work experience, and current competence in relation to the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the standard. This will also identify their career aspirations and explore the compatibility of the apprenticeship with their job role. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) [Occupational maps](#) and [T Level progression profiles and mapping](#) (where appropriate) must inform this discussion.

## **Mapping the level of competence to the training programme**

Once the above steps have been completed the provider must map the knowledge, skills and behaviours that the individual already has (their current occupational competence) against the programme of training for the apprenticeship. Elements of the training programme that the individual does not need, due to them having the required level of competence, should be removed. The individual training plan, with reduced content and duration, should then be agreed between the provider, the individual and employer. The planned end date should be recorded in the training plan.

The provider should revisit the initial assessment after the apprenticeship starts if the apprentice is working at a level above or below expectations. The employer's and apprentice's feedback is vital as it may be necessary to further adapt the training plan based on new evidence or to consider an alternative standard.

# **4. Applying recognition of prior learning and experience**

Individuals could begin an apprenticeship from a variety of entry points and may have prior learning and or experience that requires consideration including:

- T Levels
- Traineeships
- Skills Bootcamps
- Further Education or A Levels
- Work experience in the same or related job role

Some of the above may be aligned to occupational standards, just like apprenticeships, so will have obvious overlap in knowledge, skills and behaviours. Effective recognition of prior learning and experience supports this progression and plays an important role in career development.

Where the previous programme has a high degree of alignment with the proposed apprenticeship standard, providers will need to carefully assess the 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.

Where the prior qualification is a T-level you must take account of the IfATE [progression profiles and mapping](#), which identify whether a subsequent apprenticeship in the same occupational area must be accelerated or if the apprenticeship cannot be funded due to insufficient remaining training. The profiles are supported by mapping documents which set out the additional learning required for certain standards when progressing from a T-level. These mapping documents should be used to inform the prior learning assessment and be reflected in the training plan (where the learner is eligible for an apprenticeship).

Alternatively, an individual may have received training on many of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours from a previous programme but not to the level required to achieve occupational competence, as described in the standard. This may be because the individual has not 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. The justification must be documented in the training plan for audit purposes.

In the future, Higher Technical Qualifications and Level 3 Technical Qualifications, based on occupational standards, will become available and have overlap with apprenticeships.

## **5. Assessing the individual's KSBs against the standard**

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

Providers should use their knowledge and expertise of the level of occupational competence needed to meet the gateway requirements for each element of the standard that they are delivering. They must 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, if they are an existing employee.

### **Knowledge**

The apprentice's knowledge is their current knowledge of technical detail and know-how required to do their job. The apprentice's self-assessment and the discussion may show evidence that an apprentice has knowledge of a required part of the occupational standard and is already occupationally competent in that area. Where an apprentice has some or 'emerging' knowledge, recognition of prior learning may still apply.

### **Skills**

The apprentice's current skills refer to how competent they are at practically applying their knowledge to their role. The discussion should not just focus on their duties but should identify how they have experience of developing and using a skill derived from prior work experience or training. The discussion could test the level of competence with which an apprentice uses their skills, referring to the assessment plan where necessary.

## **Behaviours**

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

## **6. Recording recognition of prior learning and experience in the training plan**

The [apprenticeship funding rules](#) set out the evidence requirements for recognising prior learning in the training plan and documenting the outcome of the initial assessment. It is vital that providers can demonstrate that they have conducted a robust assessment and how they have used that information to develop a personalised training programme, which is documented in the training plan. Where they have recognised prior learning and experience, providers must evidence that they have reduced the content, duration, and price using the formula below (section 7). If the provider has not made an adjustment for prior learning and or experience, the reasons for this must be recorded in the evidence pack, with reference to the outcomes of the skills scan, accreditation of prior qualifications and training, and the discussion.

There may be circumstances where content of the training programme is not needed, but it is impractical to reduce the overall duration of the apprenticeship, for example because the apprentice is learning alongside other apprentices who still need that off-the-job training content. If the overall duration is not reduced the programme must still meet the minimum requirements of the off-the-job-training policy (for the full apprenticeship programme's duration) and the minimum duration of the funded apprenticeship. If the employer and apprentice agree that they should not attend the unfunded elements of the programme, the apprentice must remain involved in active learning, as required by the funding rules.

## **7. Reducing the price of the apprenticeship where recognition of prior learning has been identified**

The price of the apprenticeship must be reduced in proportion to the training which is not delivered, reflecting the lower cost of delivery to the provider. This must be documented in the evidence pack and agreed with the employer.

The amount of the apprentice's prior learning, in terms of off-the-job training hours, must be calculated as a percentage of the hours required by an apprentice with no assessed prior learning and experience.

Having identified the number of hours that will not be delivered to the apprentice, the

provider must apply a reduction in cost to reflect the hours that have been removed from the training plan. To reflect the training delivery costs of the hours, you must reduce the price by a minimum of 50% of the prior learning percentage.

For example, if apprentice 'A' has prior learning and or experience equating to 300 off-the-job training hours, and a typical apprentice with no prior learning and or experience requires 1000 off-the-job training hours, apprentice 'A's' prior learning and or experience should be calculated as  $300/1000 = 30\%$ .

Applying a minimum reduction of 50% to this example means that the starting point for price negotiation should be at least 15% lower than the maximum of the funding band.

So, if apprentice 'A' is on a standard with a maximum funding band of £10,000 – then the price adjusted for their prior learning and or experience must be at least £8,500 (-15%).

This is the starting point for any further price negotiation between the provider and the employer; the price could be negotiated down further to reflect factors affecting price, such as discounts for large cohorts.

## 8. Recognition of prior learning requirements on the apprenticeship service

From 1 August 2022 a new field to capture recognised prior learning for apprenticeship starts on or after 1 August 2022 will be shown when you [add an apprentice](#) or [create a bulk upload file](#).

If there is any recognised prior learning for an apprenticeship from this date, we then capture:

- the reduction in weeks for training due to prior learning
- the reduction in price, in whole pounds, for training due to prior learning

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