Department
for Education

Guidance

Apprenticeship training provider accountability framework and specification

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Applies to England

Contents

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The framework and its specification informs our assessment of apprenticeship providers. It can also help you to:

- review your own performance
- identify potential quality issues
- carry out improvements

Accountability policy for apprenticeship training providers

As set out in the [Skills for Jobs white paper](#), we've introduced a more rounded, timely approach to accountability. This is based on a wider range of quality indicators, which we'll continually review throughout the academic year.

Indicators we use to review providers

We'll use the following indicators as triggers for reviewing provider performance where they do not meet thresholds.

The thresholds reflect our minimum expectations. Do not use them as targets.

We'll keep the thresholds and intervention actions under review.

Reviews will assess the latest available data for the current academic year and the previous academic year.

Quality indicators and thresholds

Outcomes from Ofsted inspection

This is the outcome from your most recent [Ofsted inspection](#). The outcomes are based on our [existing intervention policy](#).

We'll assess organisations as 'at risk' if Ofsted grades them:

- inadequate for 'apprenticeships'
- inadequate for 'overall effectiveness' under its further education (FE) and skills remit, where there is no separate apprenticeship grade

The contractual action we may take in these circumstances is set out in your funding agreement.

We'll prioritise providers for further review under the accountability framework if they've not yet been inspected by Ofsted or if they've been inspected by Ofsted and received:

- a 'requires improvement' grade at full inspection
- an 'insufficient progress' at a new provider monitoring visit

Apprenticeship achievement rates

Apprenticeship achievement rates are calculated as part of qualification achievement rates. The guidance sets out the methodology used.

We'll assess organisations with an all-age apprenticeship achievement rate:

- of less than 50% as 'at risk'
- greater than or equal to 50% and less than 60% as 'needs improvement'

We'll work with you to understand which areas of your provision may be affecting your overall achievement rate.

We may compare your achievement rates with other providers' in order to benchmark. This could include comparisons with providers delivering similar apprenticeships or in similar sectors.

Apprenticeship retention rate

Apprenticeship retention rates are calculated as part of qualification achievement rates, as above.

We'll assess organisations with an all-age apprenticeship achievement rate:

- of less than 52% as 'at risk'
- greater than or equal to 52% and less than 62% as 'needs improvement'

Employer feedback

This is collected through the [find apprenticeship training service](#).

Organisations with average employer feedback of less than 2.5 will be assessed as 'needs improvement'.

The average feedback rating shown on the find apprenticeship training platform is cumulative. To ensure we only review recent performance, we'll use the academic year average rating to determine whether a provider triggers the employer feedback threshold.

The academic year rating is currently not yet available to view in the quality dashboard of analyse FE data. We'll be updating the dashboard to show this information shortly.

Apprentice feedback

This is collected through the apprentice feedback tool.

We have not yet set a threshold for this indicator. We'll set this in due course.

You can review apprentice feedback in [find apprenticeship training](#), once 10 apprentices have responded. It is important that you monitor apprentice feedback data to support self-improvement.

Supplementary indicators and thresholds

'Total number of apprentices' means all your apprentices within the academic year, regardless of their completion status. It includes:

- new starts
- existing apprentices
- apprentices on both apprenticeship standards and frameworks recorded in the individualised learner records (ILR) through funding models:
  - 35 ('adult skills')
  - 36 ('apprenticeships')
  - 81 ('other adult')

Apprentices who do not meet the qualifying period of a minimum 42 days are excluded. This is set out in the apprenticeship funding rules.

We may consider monitoring the volume of leavers in the first 42 days of apprenticeships in future updates.

Off-the-job training

This is collected through the FRM37 report of financial assurance: monitoring post-16 funding for 2021 to 2022.

We'll assess organisations as 'at risk' if they have any of the following:

- more than 20 records
- one or more apprentices reported with zero planned hours
- one or more apprentices with zero actual hours on apprenticeship completion

We'll assess organisations as 'needs improvement' if they have either:

- more than 15 records for planned hours
- one or more records for actual hours

Withdrawals

This is where the ILR 'completion status' field is '3, the learner has withdrawn from the learning activities leading to the learning aim'.

We'll assess organisations as 'at risk' if their withdrawals are greater than 35% of the total number of apprentices.

We'll assess organisations as 'needs improvement' if either:

- their withdrawals are less than or equal to 35% and greater than 15% of the total number of apprentices
- more than 250 apprentices have withdrawn

Apprentices past planned end date

This refers to apprentices who are past their planned end date, or were past it when they completed their apprenticeship.

This includes apprentices where the ILR 'completion status' field is recorded as either:

- code 1 – the learner is continuing or intending to continue the learning activities leading to the learning aim
- code 2 – the learner has completed the learning activities leading to the learning aim

We'll assess organisations with more than 15% of the total number of apprentices past their planned end date by 365 days or more as 'at risk'.

We'll assess organisations as 'needs improvement' if they have either:

- more than 15% of the total number of apprentices past their planned end date by 180 days or more but less than 365 days
- more than 250 apprentices past their planned end date, regardless of the length of time

Break in learning

This is where the ILR 'completion status' field is '6, learner has temporarily withdrawn from the aim due to an agreed break in learning'.

We'll assess organisations with more than 15% of the total number of apprentices on a break in learning by 365 days or more as 'at risk'.

We'll assess organisations as 'needs improvement' if they have either:

- more than 15% of the total number of apprentices on a break in learning by 180 days or more and less than 365 days
- more than 250 apprentices on a break in learning, regardless of length

End-point assessment organisation data

This relates to apprentices:

- on apprenticeship standards only
- with no end-point assessment organisation in the ILR

It includes apprentices past their planned end date.

We'll assess organisations with apprentices identified as having no end-point assessment organisation in the ILR:

- within 3 months of the planned end date as 'at risk'
- within 3 to 6 months of the planned end date as 'needs improvement'

The end-point assessment organisation in the ILR must be valid for the standard being delivered. This is in compliance with ILR validation rules.

Review process

We'll continually monitor quality indicators and may contact providers at any point in the academic year.

Before a review

Case managers will identify providers that are 'at risk' or 'need improvement'.

They will set out where data indicates a provider has fallen below any thresholds.

The case manager will invite you to have a management conversation. We expect you to respond proactively.

Consider whether there are mitigating factors. Share any supporting evidence with your case manager ahead of the meeting.

During the management conversation

The case manager will review your data against the framework's quality and supplementary indicators.

The discussion is focused on where you have performed poorly under the framework. It's an opportunity to discuss:

- evidence you've provided about mitigating factors such as:
  - employer behaviour
  - issues with a particular apprenticeship standard
  - issues with an end-point assessment organisation
- progress in relation to previously agreed improvement plans or targets
- action you're taking to improve and when you expect to see the impact

The case manager may ask for further information. You should provide this within the agreed timeframe.

After the review

Following the meeting, the case manager will inform you in writing about whether any follow-up action is required.

Types of interventions

If we still have concerns about the quality of delivery after the management conversation, we may intervene and take further action.

Our interventions will aim to support you to improve your provision in a timely manner and protect apprentices' interests.

The type of intervention will be based on:

- evidence and individual circumstances
- previous performance
- level of risk
- specific areas of concern
- any mitigating factors that are outside your control

No intervention

If you're 'on track' against all indicators, we will not contact you to arrange a review.

There may be instances where providers do not meet one or more of the quality indicators but we decide that an immediate management conversation is not needed.

For example, a provider may have an 'outstanding' Ofsted grade and we expect them to have the capacity to improve.

Enhanced monitoring

This may be needed when the provider:

- requires improvement against one or more indicators
- is at risk of delivering poor-quality provision against some or all of the quality indicators, indicated by their in-year data

You may need to produce a quality improvement plan. We'll challenge this on reasonable progress and evidence of impact.

You may be required to attend more regular meetings to discuss:

- planned improvements
- the impact and progress of any mitigating actions
- in-year reporting of progress

In some circumstances, we may refer you to Ofsted or the apprenticeship workforce development programme.

Conditions of funding and additional contractual obligations

Used where your data indicates you're at risk of delivering poor-quality provision, when assessed against some or all of the quality indicators.

Conditions are likely to include improvement targets linked to your improvement plan.

Your recruitment of new apprentices may be restricted or removed on one, multiple or all apprenticeship standards.

Your sub-contracting ability may also be restricted or removed, if there is evidence that your management of sub-contracting is poor.

Restrictions will usually be time-based or linked to further reviews of quality indicators.

Contract termination

Used when your data indicates you're at continued risk of delivering poor-quality provision against some or all quality and supplementary indicators, following management conversations.

This may be needed when a provider has:

- failed to meet their own improvement targets against the quality indicators
- demonstrated that they're unable to improve within a reasonable timescale

Other types of intervention

We may also:

- agree with you objectives to achieve within a fixed period
- require you to complete modules of the apprenticeship workforce development programme
- withhold or suspend funding payments
- suspend funding payments for all new apprentices on particular standards for a fixed or indefinite period
- cap funding for delivery of new standards, for a fixed or indefinite period

Contextual factors

We'll take relevant contextual factors into account when we review your performance.

Apprentices with protected characteristics

Every apprentice deserves excellence in their training provision. We expect providers to offer opportunities for training and progression that meet the needs of a range of apprentices and businesses.

This is in line with your duties under the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate against apprentices with protected characteristics.

Some apprentices have a greater distance to travel to achieve full occupational competence on their chosen standard. See apprenticeship funding rules for details of support, guidance and funding.

We may consider the profile of a provider's cohort when we review their performance.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and cost of living pressures

We recognise that COVID-19 and cost-of-living pressures continue to affect employers and providers in different ways. We'll take this into consideration. However, we expect you to manage the circumstances efficiently to support apprentices.

We'll take a holistic view when deciding on any intervention action.

Small or new apprenticeship provision

When deciding on intervention action for underperforming providers, we'll consider whether they:

- have small cohorts
- offer new or immature provision

We expect these providers to set realistic improvement targets as a priority. We'll challenge them on reasonable progress and evidence of impact.

Data timeliness and accuracy

We use data from:

- your ILR returns
- employer and apprentice feedback from the apprenticeship service

In line with contractual obligations, providers should regularly and accurately maintain:

- ILR data, including:
  - apprentice withdrawals
  - breaks in learning
- other apprentice documents and evidence

This will ensure that data accurately reflects your apprentice population at any point.

You can use the following tools to test its credibility:

- funding information service
- provider data self-assessment toolkit (PDSAT)
- post-16 monitoring reports dashboard in view your education data
- analyse FE data tool (AFED) – this includes an overarching dashboard for the quality view

Complaints and feedback

You can complain about an intervention through our enquiry form if you're unable to resolve this with your case manager directly. Select the apprenticeships 'query type'.

We welcome feedback on the accountability framework. We'll consider this as we make future updates.

Policy objective and principles

We want to raise the quality of apprenticeships to ensure apprentices:

- have a high-quality experience
- can progress to higher-level skills
- are prepared for a successful career

The accountability framework underpins this.

We've published a provider guide and checklist on delivering high-quality apprenticeship training. We recognise that improvements will happen gradually over time. We'll work with providers to improve quality.

The framework is based on the principles set out below.

Data driven

We'll use a wider range of quality indicators to give us a more rounded overview of a provider's delivery.

Risk based

We'll take a risk-based approach, using a range of quality indicators. These will focus on providers where there may be quality issues so we can intervene to help you improve.

Encourage self-improvement

We aim to:

- identify risks to quality early
- support self-improvement
- minimise the impact on apprentices

Timeliness

We'll monitor your performance data throughout the academic year. This ensures that management conversations and intervention happen earlier, where necessary.

We expect you to monitor and review your performance data throughout the academic year.

Proportionality

We'll only take interventions as a result of a management conversation. Interventions are not automatic.

We'll take proportionate action to support providers to address quality issues. We'll generally use interventions in a targeted way. For example, if poor quality is limited to a particular aspect of provision.

Topics

Benefits

Births, death, marriages and care

Business and self-employed

Childcare and parenting

Citizenship and living in the UK

Crime, justice and the law

Disabled people

Driving and transport

Education and learning

Employing people

Environment and countryside

Housing and local services

Money and tax

Passports, travel and living abroad

Visas and immigration

Working, jobs and pensions

Government activity

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