

Employer Guide to Apprenticeships in the UK Nations

April 2020



Introduction

An apprenticeship is a job, with structured training aimed at developing the person to competence in their role. The UK has a long history of using apprenticeships to develop a skilled workforce, and public funding for training to specified standards has long been a key component of the apprenticeship system.

This Guide has been produced at the request of the Nuclear Skills Strategy Group of key employers, who have recognised that while apprenticeships are important in the UK, differences in policy and approach in the four UK nations can sometimes cause confusion. It is intended to be an introductory guide only, setting out some of the key similarities and differences between the nations' systems, and will not cover all details.

For more details, please contact martin.mcmanus@cogentskills.com (Tel: 01925 515232) or see the "Further Information" section for each nation below.

UK systems

Since 1998, education and training policy has been devolved to the nations of the UK. This means that the apprenticeship systems in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are independent of each other, and the systems have diverged.

Until recently, the four nations collaborated to ensure consistency between their separate systems, with different Apprenticeship Frameworks all based on National Occupational Standards.

Apprenticeship Reform – England

A significant change was made following the Richard Review of Apprenticeships in 2012, starting a process of reform for England only.

In England, work is almost complete to replace the existing system of Frameworks for each occupational area with a system of Apprenticeship Standards. The government's current plan is that all English Frameworks are replaced by Standards by 2020.

Apprenticeship Levy

Introduced in 2017, The Apprenticeship Levy is charged to all organisations in the UK who have a payroll over £3m, in all four UK nations. However, only those in England are directly affected by the funding deriving from the Levy. (In the other nations, HM Treasury allocates funds in the usual way according to the Barnett Formula, and they are spent according to the policies of the devolved governments.)

England

Current system - Frameworks (being replaced by 2020)

Frameworks developed against the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) set out competence qualifications, knowledge qualifications, Employee Rights and Responsibilities, and Personal Learning & Thinking Skills.

Levels

English Apprenticeship Frameworks are available at Intermediate (Level 2), Advanced (Level 3) and Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4 and above).

The full list of Frameworks is on the Apprenticeship Certifications England Online database:

<https://acecerts.co.uk/web/frameworks-library>

The Framework system has been replaced in phases by the system of Apprenticeship Standards.

New system - Standards

The government's plan is to have one Apprenticeship Standard for each occupation, developed by groups of employers, setting out the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to be competent in the job. Standards are not designed to rely on qualifications, and indeed the inclusion of competence qualifications such as NVQs is discouraged unless necessary in the industry. Competence must be assessed primarily by an independent End Point Assessment towards the end of the apprenticeship.

Trailblazer Groups – These are groups of employers who develop and submit Standards for approval by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Assessment Plans – In addition to the Standard itself, the Trailblazer Group develops the End Point Assessment Plan that sets out the way the apprentice's knowledge, skills and behaviours will be assessed. Assessments are carried out by organisations independent of the employer and training provider, selected from the Register of Apprenticeship Assessment Organisations.

Funding Bands – Each Standard is allocated a Funding Band, being the maximum contribution the Government will make via the Education & Skills Funding Agency. The actual cost of providing training can be negotiated between the employer and the lead training provider. Public funding can only be used via training providers on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers, to cover training and the assessment described above.

All Standards that are either approved or officially in development are available on the website of the Institute for Apprenticeships:

<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/>

Funding

Levy Funding - Employers who pay the Levy have access to a digital Apprenticeship Service, which allows them to use the value of the Levy they have paid to pay approved providers for training and assessment of their apprentices based in England, up to the Funding Band limits.

Transfers – Levy payers have the option to transfer up to 25% of the value of their Levy to another employer to use for apprenticeship training. Employers might choose to use this option for an Apprenticeship Training Agency, or another company in their supply chain.

Non-Levy Funding – Employers who do not themselves pay the Levy are still entitled to funding of 95% towards the cost of approved apprenticeship provision. Similarly, employers who have used up their Levy credits can access funding for further apprentices at this same 95% level.

Age eligibility

There are no age restrictions to adults undertaking apprenticeships in England.

Further information

<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/>

Scotland

Scottish Apprenticeships are branded under the Modern Apprenticeships system. The Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG) is responsible for approving the publicly funded Frameworks in Scotland, which are developed by employers through their Standards Setting Bodies. Frameworks set out relevant competency and knowledge based qualifications, Core Skills and Industry specific training.

Levels

There are Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks at Scottish Curriculum and Qualification Levels 5-7 (equivalent to Registered Qualifications Framework Levels 2-4), Technical Apprenticeships at SCQF Levels 8 and 9 (equivalent to RQF Levels 5-6) and Professional Apprenticeships at SCQF Levels 10 to 12 (equivalent to RQF Levels 6-8).

Foundation Apprenticeships are aimed at young people in school, so that they can study for elements of a Modern apprenticeship alongside Highers or other qualifications.

Graduate Apprenticeships (Foundation Degree up to Master's Degree level) were introduced in 2017 in conjunction with Scottish Higher Education Institutions, and at time of writing are available in 11 occupational areas.

The list of available Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks is available on Skills Development Scotland's Apprenticeships.Scot website:

<https://www.apprenticeships.scot/take-on-an-apprentice/modern-apprenticeships/browse-frameworks/>

Funding

Modern Apprenticeship funding is routed directly to training providers and is part of their agreed funding contracts with Skills Development Scotland.

Age eligibility

Apprenticeships are open to all ages in Scotland, but SDS funding is concentrated mainly on 16-25 year olds.

Further information

<https://www.apprenticeships.scot/>

Wales

Welsh Apprenticeship Frameworks are developed by employers through their Standards Setting Bodies against the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW). They set out the required competence and knowledge qualifications, Essential Skills Wales qualifications, any Additional Occupational Requirements and (optionally) information on Employee Rights and Responsibilities.

Levels

Frameworks are available at Foundation Apprenticeships (Level 2), Apprenticeships (Level 3) and Higher Apprenticeships (Level 4 and above).

The full list of Frameworks can be found on the Apprenticeship Certifications Wales Online database:

<https://acwcerts.co.uk/web/frameworks-library>

Funding

Apprenticeship funding in Wales is routed directly to training providers and is part of their agreed Work Based Learning funding contracts with Welsh Government. The Welsh Government has stated that it currently has no plans to change the apprenticeship funding system in the light of the Levy.

Age eligibility

Apprenticeships in Wales are open to all ages, with extra support given to 16-19 year olds in transition from full time education.

Further information

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/apprenticeships>

Northern Ireland

Apprenticeship Frameworks in Northern Ireland are developed by employers through their Standards Setting Bodies and approved by the Department for the Economy. They are branded under the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. Frameworks consist of Competency Qualifications, Knowledge & Skills Based Qualifications, Essential Skills and Employee Rights & Responsibilities.

Levels

Frameworks in Northern Ireland are available at Levels 2 and 3, and Higher Apprenticeships at Levels 4-8.

The full list of Frameworks can be found on the Department for the Economy's website:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/types-apprenticeships>

Funding

Apprenticeship funding in Northern Ireland is routed directly to training providers, and is part of their agreed funding contracts with the Department for the Economy.

Age eligibility

Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland are mainly aimed at young people. Support for adult apprenticeships (over 25) is restricted to specified economically important sectors. The eligible Frameworks are listed separately at

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/apprenticeship-frameworks-people-aged-25-and-over>

Further information

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/apprenticeships>

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