



Apprenticeships:  
information for  
education providers

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## Information for education providers planning new programmes where learners are also employees

Across the four UK nations, there is a diverse range of programmes leading to registration for the [15 professions we regulate](#). This includes the established higher and degree apprenticeship route in England, and potential future apprenticeship / 'earn and learn' routes within Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years, about a third of new programmes approved were degree apprenticeships in England<sup>1</sup>.

This information is for education providers who are considering running a new programme where learners are also employees of partner organisations.

Our aim is to help programmes align with our regulatory requirements. We have been approving apprenticeship programmes in England since 2017, and are well positioned to share insight with common approaches and challenges for education providers when developing these programmes.

1. [Education annual report, 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years](#) (pages 44-45)

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# Key considerations for education providers

When developing new education routes, we recognise that education providers will need to consider:

- financial incentives for increasing learner numbers, via a route that may have funding attached, and national government support;
- demands and availability of practice-based learning within specific professions, nations and English regions, to support the development of a sustainable workforce;
- whether proposed cohort numbers would make programmes viable; and
- providing a route to registration for potential learners in different circumstances to widen participation in professional training.

## Our key advice is:

- > Engage with us early
- > Education quality must remain central to programme development
- > Define the detail of your partnership arrangements
- > Ensure your resources will work for all types of learners
- > Ensure your pedagogical approach works with your method of delivery
- > Consider the requirements of other regulators and relevant bodies

# How we assess new programmes

We need to approve any new programme leading to HCPC registration before learners start the programme. This includes if you already deliver another programme in the same professional area. We found that programmes where learners are also employees of partner organisations need different underpinning arrangements to ensure a good quality of education, which we assess against our standards. We do apply our approval process flexibly depending on the situation, taking into account our knowledge of existing approved programmes.

It normally takes around nine months for us to approve new programmes for education providers new to the HCPC, and six months for existing HCPC-approved education providers, however, assessments can take longer if proposals are complex. We encourage education providers to [contact us](#) as soon as possible to begin discussions of any new programmes, and you will need to supply an [approval request form](#) to formally start the process.

Our [standards of education and training \(SETs\)](#) are designed to be flexible, which means they can be applied to a variety of training models. Education providers will need to demonstrate how proposed programmes meets our standards.

## Find out more:

We have a [guidance document](#) and [e-learning module](#) with an overview of the approval process, and how this looks and feels for education providers.

# Challenges when developing new routes

We found the following challenges through our assessments of apprenticeship programmes in England:

- ensuring sufficient practice-based learning capacity for apprenticeship learners;
- securing internal resources required to develop apprenticeship programmes;
- the need engage with additional bodies and regulators, including the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) and Ofsted, along with existing regulatory requirements (HCPC, Office for Students (OfS), and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)), and other quality standards (internal, and professional body);
- managing an increase in overall learner numbers; and
- developing resources required to support a different set of learners, with different needs and expectations.

We consider that many of these challenges will also apply to similar routes in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Addressing these challenges required education providers to work collaboratively with practice education providers and employers right from the beginning and on an ongoing basis.

# Our advice on aligning to regulatory requirements

There are six key areas for education providers to consider when developing programmes where learners are also employees of partner organisations.

1

Engage with us early

2

Education quality must remain central to programme development

3

Define the detail of your partnership arrangements

4

Ensure your resources will work for all types of learners

5

Ensure your pedagogical approach works with your method of delivery

6

Consider the requirements of other regulators and relevant bodies

# 1

## Engage with us early

- More complexity in programme proposals, and less experience with our regulatory requirements, often leads to longer assessments.
- Although we aim to conclude approval assessments within a six-nine month timeframe (depending on whether the education provider is already HCPC-approved), more complex programme models will often lead to longer assessments.
- Programmes where learners are also employees, are by nature more complex than more traditional programmes because of the arrangements which need to be in place to manage the programme and learner experience.
- Education providers and others should be aware that good forward-planning is required to ensure intended programme start dates can be met.



## 2

# Education quality must remain central to programme development

- You should be aware that learners who complete programmes will need to meet all of our requirements for registration, namely all of the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for the relevant profession, and the standards of conduct, performance and ethics.
- There can be tensions in developing these routes, with employers sometimes focusing on delivering employees who meet specific workforce needs/roles within the employer's organisation.
- This can lead to employers defining a narrow expectation of the skills, knowledge and experience required by those completing programmes to fill specific employer needs, rather than to develop fully rounded professionals who can enter practice in any setting.

*You should consider the following standards linked to this area:*

- > The programme must be sustainable and fit for purpose (SET 3.1)
- > The learning outcomes must ensure that learners meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register (SET 4.1)
- > The learning outcomes must ensure that learners understand and are able to meet the expectations of professional behaviour, including the standards of conduct, performance and ethics (SET 4.2)
- > The assessment strategy and design must ensure that those who successfully complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register (SET 6.1)
- > Assessment throughout the programme must ensure that learners demonstrate they are able to meet the expectations of professional behaviour, including the standards of conduct, performance and ethics (SET 6.2)

# 3

## Define the detail of your partnership arrangements

Relationships between the education provider and employer will often work in a different way to more traditional programmes. This is due to the shifting influence of the employer such as supplying learners, linked to funding arrangements for apprenticeship programmes (in England).

When developing your partnership arrangements, you should:

- define and agree responsibilities, including who is formally accountable for the education and training;
- secure formal commitment from employers about the supply of learners to the programme;
- agree how operational responsibilities for elements of the programme work (for example admissions decisions, allocation of practice experience, and what happens when things go wrong);
- make clear how you effectively quality assure practice-based learning at the employer, including how learners are supported by practice educators. This may be different to any existing arrangements due to the different model of learning; and
- consider the impact on any existing arrangements, such as supply of practice-based learning for other routes.

# 3

## Define the detail of your partnership arrangements

*You should consider the following standards linked to this area:*

- > The admissions process must give both the applicant and the education provider the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up or make an offer of a place on a programme (SET 2.1)
- > The programme must be effectively managed (SET 3.2)
- > The programme must have regular and effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place (SET 3.4)
- > There must be regular and effective collaboration between the education provider and practice education providers (SET 3.5)
- > There must be an effective process in place to ensure the availability and capacity of practice-based learning for all learners (SET 3.6)
- > There must be thorough and effective processes in place for ensuring the ongoing suitability of learners' conduct, character and health (SET 3.16)
- > The education provider must maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and ensuring the quality of practice-based learning (SET 5.3)
- > There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff involved in practice-based learning (SET 5.5)
- > Practice educators must have relevant knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning and, unless other arrangements are appropriate, must be on the relevant part of the Register (SET 5.6)
- > Practice educators must undertake regular training which is appropriate to their role, learners' needs and the delivery of the learning outcomes of the programme (SET 5.7)

## 4

## Ensure your resources will work for all types of learners

- When learners are in the workplace for the majority of their training, they may consider their employer their 'home' institution.
- As learners are also employees, they may need to be more independent in their learning and may need support with this.
- It may be more difficult for these learners to access support from you, as they will be doing so remotely, or they might be unclear about where to access support.
- Some learners might also have individual support needs – such as returning to education after many years. Others may have recently achieved Further Education qualifications and decided to take an employment route into the profession.
- The resources you have in place for existing provision may be a good starting point to support learners through these routes, but you will need to ensure these resources are being used effectively to support all groups of learners.

*You should consider the following standards linked to this area:*

- > There must be regular and effective collaboration between the education provider and practice education providers (SET 3.5)
- > The resources to support learning in all settings must be effective and appropriate to the delivery of the programme, and must be accessible to all learners and educators (SET 3.12)
- > There must be effective and accessible arrangements in place to support the wellbeing and learning needs of learners in all settings (SET 3.13)
- > There must be a thorough and effective process in place for receiving and responding to learner complaints (SET 3.15)
- > There must be an effective process in place to support and enable learners to raise concerns about the safety and wellbeing of service users (SET 3.17)

## 5

## Ensure your pedagogical approach works with your method of delivery

- Learners who are employees will spend time in the academic setting and in formal 'practice placements,' but they also spend time undertaking paid duties at their employer.
- To meet our requirements for registration, learners will need support to contextualise their duties within their training. Therefore, you need to ensure experience in a learner's place of work and in any formal 'placements' helps them to achieve the programme's learning outcomes.
- Ensure learners can gain the required range of practice-based learning to support delivery of the learning outcomes and our standards of proficiency (SOPs) – this might mean practice-based learning in settings outside of the learner's employer.
- For apprenticeship programmes in England, education providers with existing programmes usually use all or some of the same modules for apprenticeship programmes, or amend their existing modules in small ways.
- However, you will need to think differently about how you deliver academic components of the programme. You should consider practicalities, such as how to timetable any sessions that will be shared with more traditional learners, and the appropriate method of delivery for academic components.

*You should consider the following standards linked to this area:*

- > The learning outcomes must ensure that learners meet the standards of proficiency for the relevant part of the Register (SET 4.1)
- > Integration of theory and practice must be central to the programme (SET 4.5)
- > The learning and teaching methods used must be appropriate to the effective delivery of the learning outcomes (SET 4.6)
- > The delivery of the programme must support and develop autonomous and reflective thinking (SET 4.7)
- > The delivery of the programme must support and develop evidence-based practice (SET 4.8)
- > The education provider must identify and communicate to learners the parts of the programme where attendance is mandatory, and must have associated monitoring processes in place (SET 4.11)
- > The structure, duration and range of practice-based learning must support the achievement of the learning outcomes and the standards of proficiency (SET 5.2)

## 6

## Consider the requirements of other regulators and relevant bodies

We take an interest in the reviews of other bodies when considering if programmes align with their requirements. This helps us to understand if programmes are fit for purpose.

For apprenticeships in England, there are other statutory bodies besides HCPC that you will need to consider when developing programmes. Particularly:

- The Institute for Apprentices and Technical Education (IfATE) – sets a professional standard for apprenticeship programmes, and defines the funding band for apprenticeship programmes.
- The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) will inspect education providers delivering apprenticeship programmes.

In Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, these structures are yet to be defined. We will work with relevant groups in these nations to understand requirements of other organisations, and align with our own requirements where possible.

We recommend engaging with professional bodies when developing programmes, as they may have professional expectations, and / or provide advice and guidance useful for education providers developing programmes.

*You should consider the following standards linked to this area:*

- > The programme must be sustainable and fit for purpose (SET 3.1)
- > The programme must have regular and effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place (SET 3.4)
- > The programme must reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance (SET 4.3)

# Further sources of information

- [Responding to NHSE Long Term Workforce Plan: A guide for education providers](#)
- The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) [website](#) has information about their requirements for apprenticeship in England, along with the [approved standards](#) for HCPC professions
- [Professional bodies](#) may have advice, guidance and expectations for the delivery of apprenticeship routes
- [List of standards in development being facilitated by Skills for Health](#) (March 2024)

