

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH EMPLOYERS

**A CHECKLIST AND GUIDE FOR
APPRENTICESHIP PROVIDERS**

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide

Apprenticeships are an established and well-regarded part of the UK's economy and education system. They will also play a crucial role in the future by:

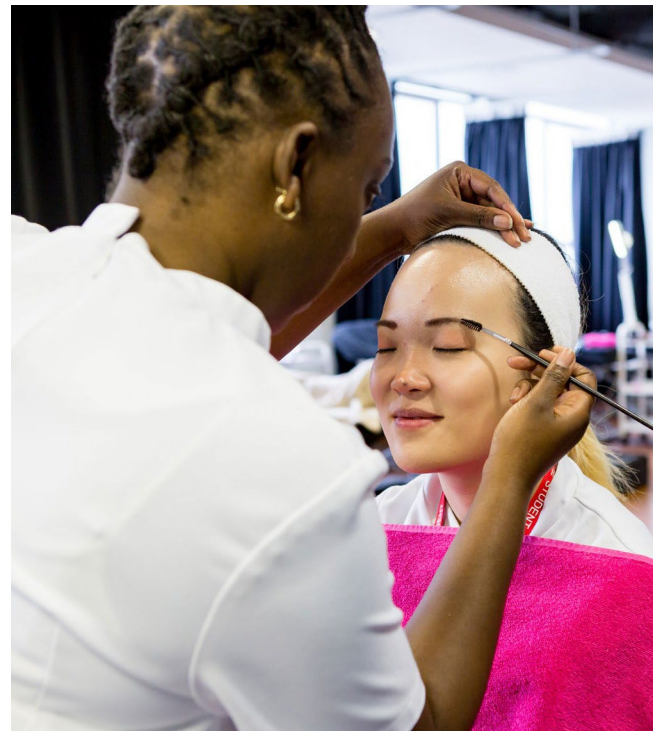
- helping employers to tackle the economic challenges ahead
- continuing to open up opportunities for people at all stages of their careers.

Working effectively with employers is designed to help providers work effectively with employers throughout the apprenticeship journey, so that apprentices gain the opportunities and support they need to:

- develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours in the workplace
- achieve their learning and career goals.

Many providers are ambitious to extend their capability by supporting more apprenticeships — including specialist standards — and by improving outcomes and quality. An effective two-way relationship between providers and employers is fundamental in meeting these aims.

The guide should help providers to make the most of collaboration by identifying and building on the benefits. However, it also recognises that creating and sustaining effective working relationships can be difficult. There is no silver bullet — but working through the checklists, self-assessments and action plans should provide ideas and, hopefully, inspiration to tackle the challenges.



How to use this guide

You can use this guide to:

- review the state of relationships with employers currently involved in apprenticeships
- create and sustain effective relationships with new employers
- build the knowledge and skills of staff involved with employers
- identify the priorities for action at each stage, using the tick boxes in the checklists.

The content of this guide

After this introduction, the guide contains a graphic which shows key stages in the provider–employer relationship and outlines the roles of the provider and the employer.



This is followed by six sections, each of which covers a stage in the relationship. These sections contain checklists, short examples of good practice, quotes from employers, a self-assessment tool based on Ofsted’s ‘intent, implementation and impact’ model and a list of documents that providers may find useful at each stage.

The next section is an action plan template which providers can use to make improvements in the priority areas they have identified on the checklists.

The last section of the guide lists further resources including links to support and relevant courses in the [Apprenticeship Workforce Development \(AWD\)](#) offer.

Sources

The checklists and good practice examples come from various sources, including recent Ofsted inspection reports, a guide produced by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, sector publications and contributions from employers and apprenticeship providers. The criteria used in the self-assessments come from the grade descriptors contained in Ofsted’s *Further education and skills handbook* (updated in July 2022).

The guide draws on the experiences of employers, apprentices and apprenticeship providers since the introduction of apprenticeship standards and the apprenticeship levy, both of which have given employers more influence and more of a stake in success. It uses the lessons already learned about effective employer partnerships and should help providers to recalibrate their relationships so they become even better.

It is by no means the last word, however: lessons will continue to be learned and the checklists are only a snapshot. Providers will continue to strengthen relationships and find new, better ways of working with employers. This incremental development of experience and expertise should help providers to set an ever-higher level as a benchmark for their continuing interactions with employers.

Defining key terms

For the purposes of this guide, ‘employers’ are the organisations that employ apprentices and commit to supporting them throughout apprenticeships. They range widely in size from small businesses through to large corporations, in both private and public sectors and in virtually all sectors of the economy. As a result, arrangements for working with employers may vary considerably — so you should use this guide with your context in mind and adapt any suggestions to match your portfolio of employers.

The guide refers at various points to specific groups of people within employers including senior leaders, line managers, supervisors, mentors and apprentices’ work colleagues. All have an important part to play, although

their roles also differ according to their organisation’s size, type and sector. For example, larger employers may have dedicated apprenticeship teams while in smaller employers, the roles could be filled by one or two individuals. Where there are several or many employer staff involved, it is important for providers to have a single point of contact who can coordinate the network of relationships and channel communications.

‘Apprentices’ — the learners who embark on apprenticeships — also range widely in age, background and experience. They may be new to the organisation or already employed. One thing they share is an ambition to learn new knowledge and skills to build their careers. This provides a common rationale for the guide.

About the authors

This guide was created by Simon Shaw and Alison Sumpter — Senior Associates at the [Strategic Development Network](#) (SDN) — for the [Education and Training Foundation](#) (ETF), the expert body for professional development and standards in the Further Education and Training sector in England.

The ETF’s [AWD offer](#), of which this guide is a part, supports staff delivering apprenticeships with the teaching skills, subject knowledge and confidence they need for the benefit of their learners.



If you don't do anything else...

...ask yourself these questions about each stage of the apprenticeship — and go to the checklists to check your answers.

Engagement

Have you and the employer done everything you can to ensure that the apprenticeships offered:

- are the ones which best meet business needs?
- are actively supported by line managers, supervisors and mentors?
- give apprentices the best opportunity to succeed in their careers?

Enrolment and commitment

Have you both done all you can to select and enrol apprentices in a way that gives them the best chance to thrive and complete their apprenticeships successfully?

Design

Have you created a positive and supportive environment for learning which makes good use of staff and resources and merges them into high-quality and efficient training programmes?

Delivery

Are you doing all you can to help apprentices:

- learn the right things?
- make good progress?
- develop personal (as well as professional and technical) skills?
- enjoy the training they receive?
- benefit from it immediately?
- complete their apprenticeship successfully?

Preparing for successful outcomes

Are you providing the best possible support to apprentices throughout the apprenticeship in preparation for end-point assessment (EPA)?

Does everyone else involved know what's required for apprentices to well in their EPA?

Progression

Are you helping apprentices to see the direction in which they are travelling – from the start of their apprenticeship and throughout it — so they focus on the goals and are motivated to work towards the opportunities?

THE PROVIDER–EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIP

The graphic below shows six stages in the relationship between providers and employers. It describes:

- key aims of the relationship at each stage
- the significance of each stage in underpinning the quality of the apprenticeship
- the role of the employer in each stage.

Stage	Engagement	Enrolment and commitment	Design	Delivery	Preparing for successful outcomes	Progression
Key aims	Build collaborative relationships Understand employers' needs	Carry out enrolment, selection and induction	Co-design the apprenticeships Co-create learning plans	Develop knowledge, skills and behaviours at work Link off-the-job training to apprentices' work	Monitor and review progress Prepare for end-point assessment	Monitor and review progress Prepare for end-point assessment
Significance	Develops productive relationships in which the full value of apprenticeships can be understood and realised Formulates a collaborative partnership focused on quality Enables effective and efficient joint working	Selects applicants who are eligible and committed to the apprenticeship Enables an efficient enrolment process Assesses apprentices' starting points and support needs Delivers effective induction	Produces apprenticeships in which relevant personnel at key levels work closely and effectively together Creates learning plans for apprentices which structure and sequence learning logically and efficiently and can be flexed to match each apprentice's workplace	Plans how apprentices develop knowledge, skills and behaviours Integrates theory and practice by sequencing and combining on-the-job and off-the-job learning Provides opportunities for apprentices to broaden their knowledge and skills, behave positively in the workplace and develop themselves	Maintains a good pace of progress and attainment throughout the whole of the training Identifies and solves practical and personal issues which affect progress Prepares apprentices well for end-point assessment	Creates an ambitious approach to apprentices' futures and an assumption that all can succeed Uses a wide range of sources of information about jobs and careers Makes creative use of networks to motivate apprentices and raise their expectations
Employer role	Enter the relationship with strong ambitions for it to succeed Link apprenticeships to strategy and workforce plans Gain senior leader commitment to high-quality apprenticeships Identify the managers and staff involved and allocate time needed to make the apprenticeships a success	Identify areas of the business where apprenticeships will be most beneficial Provide information on apprentices' roles and job specifications Run a fair and efficient enrolment and selection process Take an active part in planning and delivering apprenticeship induction	Create opportunities for apprentices to learn and develop through work Provide high-quality facilities and resources for apprentices Develop learning plans that are flexible enough to match individual apprentices' work and learning Identify ways in which apprentices can expand and stretch their learning	Develop the skills for staff to coach and mentor apprentices in the workplace Provide stimulating and challenging work for apprentices Set high standards for apprentices' work and performance Support them as they develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours	Monitor the standard of apprentices' work Give constructive feedback on their performance Take an active part in regular reviews of progress Provide information required for end-point assessment Help apprentices to prepare for end-point assessment	Identify opportunities for apprentices to extend their responsibilities Provide information about employment in the organisation, the sector and regionally Support apprentices as they apply for jobs and/or promotions Help apprentices to identify career prospects in the industry

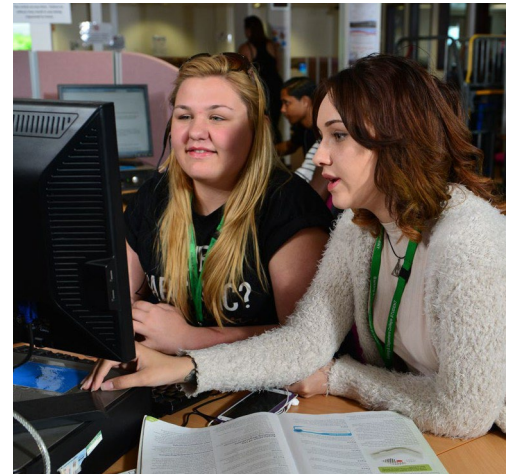
STAGE 1: ENGAGEMENT

A deep engagement with apprenticeships will enable providers and employers to work through the opportunities and challenges together, especially in the early stages of their partnerships.




The following two checklists will help providers and employers to:

- develop productive relationships in which the full value of apprenticeships can be understood and realised
- collaborate to ensure high quality across the apprenticeship programme
- maximise opportunities through working together in partnership.



Checklist 1a: Build collaborative relationships

No	Action	Priority
1	Analyse skills needs to create a pipeline of employers who are, or may be, interested in apprenticeships, using social media to show what success looks like and to contact specific individuals likely to be supportive.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Use initial contacts with employers to make a good first impression and establish a single point of contact, keeping bureaucracy, forms and paperwork in proportion to avoid discouraging potential partners while raising awareness of the commitment involved in supporting a high-quality apprenticeship programme.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Explore the rationale for apprenticeships to employers — encompassing recruitment, skills gaps, workforce development, learning and development plans and business growth, and identifying other reasons why employers are considering them.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Assess where the most suitable opportunities are for apprenticeships in terms of roles, departments, geographical location, support systems, vacancies and career opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No	Action	Priority
5	Demonstrate expertise and understanding of the sector so that employers see the benefits of apprenticeships and feel confident to engage with them.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 <p>A provider delivering apprenticeships in engineering uses experienced consultants with a track record in the industry to show senior leaders how apprenticeships contribute to their strategic business plans and fit in with their recruitment and training policies.</p>		
6	Provide enough information about apprenticeships in general and specific standards for employers to make informed decisions about which apprenticeships to offer, where and when.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Agree – in principle – the roles of employer and provider in planning, designing and delivering high-quality apprenticeships.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Tell employers about the legal requirements for apprenticeships such as 20% off-the-job training time, explain the key performance indicators used to assess providers' performance, and agree how both parties – employer and provider – will hold each other to account.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Explain that the most common reason for apprentices leaving before completing their apprenticeship is lack of support from their employer, and outline how employers can provide a good level of support using resources they already have.	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Tell employers about the legal requirements for apprenticeships such as 20% off-the-job training time, explain the key performance indicators used to assess providers' performance, and agree how both parties – employer and provider – will hold each other to account.	<input type="checkbox"/>



Discussions between a provider and an environmental science employer about the feasibility of apprenticeships took place over 12 months to coincide with the employer's strategic workforce review. During this time, a new capability assessment system was developed by the human resources (HR) team, including relevant apprenticeship standards identified by the provider. This enabled apprenticeships to be integrated into the employer's plans from the start.



“Our provider spent time really getting to know our business, our values and our priorities. We felt that they understood us and were able to develop the apprenticeship which fully met the business needs whilst supporting our apprentices to thrive and succeed in their qualifications.”





Checklist 1b: Understand employers' needs

No	Action	Priority
11	Explain that the most common reason for apprentices leaving before completing their apprenticeship is lack of support from their employer, and outline how employers can provide a good level of support using resources they already have.	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Use local knowledge to show employers how businesses, industry sectors and community groups in the area are already using apprenticeships to meet their needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Identify the people within employers who are likely to know most about specific skills needs. Work with them in the early stages of planning apprenticeships to match specific knowledge, skills and behaviours in the apprenticeship standards to the employer's priorities.	<input type="checkbox"/>



A consortium of providers hosts regular employer forums which use action-focused case studies to showcase how apprenticeships are helping businesses in their area or industry sector. These events work best when they concentrate on wider skills issues rather than selling single-option solutions.

No	Action	Priority
14	Identify opportunities for employers to use apprenticeships to recruit into roles where their needs are traditionally met by other routes – e.g. establishing talent pipelines for T Level students, school and college leavers and using higher and degree apprenticeships as well as, or in place of, graduate recruitment.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	An employer in the construction industry has developed close links with schools and colleges in one of the English regions where it operates. These links are designed to give young people information about the industry and create a 'chain of opportunity', leading to employment and apprenticeships.	
	A provider specialising in financial services apprenticeships has responded to changes in the sector – where recruitment was primarily a graduate-entry career – by showing employers how to meet their needs more effectively through apprenticeships to attract school leavers. This has led to several employers introducing apprenticeships at Levels 3 and 4 and developing progression routes to higher level qualifications including apprenticeships at Level 5 and above.	
15	Explore how apprenticeships support employers' ambitions for a more diverse workforce and more inclusive workplaces by offering opportunities to a wider group of people.	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Produce visual aids such as route maps and career escalators to show how apprenticeships meet an employers' skills and recruitment needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Challenge employers to be clear about what they are trying to achieve with apprenticeships, what success looks like and how they will measure achievements in one year, three years and five years.	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Increase the ability of staff to understand the challenges and opportunities employers face for which apprenticeships may be part of the solution – e.g. through 'Insight' activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>



“As a business, we have developed links with several schools and colleges in the region to provide a ‘chain of opportunity’ for young people to join the company. They come on site visits, shadow our staff and do short periods of work experience. This means that when it comes to apprenticeships, we attract young people from a wide range of backgrounds. The business no longer has to run campaigns targeted at under-represented groups to meet its inclusivity target.”



A large national employer uses T Level industry placements as a steppingstone for young people into apprenticeships. Their target is that fifty percent of placement students will join as apprentices after finishing their T Level. Experience so far suggests that they make better progress and are more likely to complete their apprenticeship successfully than apprentices recruited in other ways.

Self-assessment: Engagement

Category	Criteria	Rating
Intent	Apprenticeships are built on sound analysis of employers' skills needs. They are ambitious and relevant to employers' recruitment and skills priorities. They give apprentices the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their careers.	
	Clear criteria are used to identify employers most likely to commit to developing a strong partnership that can deliver high-quality apprenticeships.	
	Apprenticeship standards are selected to meet the needs of individual employers.	
Implementation	Providers and employers are clear about what they are aiming to achieve together in the apprenticeship programme before going into the details of how it will work.	
	The tasks apprentices carry out at work are demanding and ensure that they build knowledge and acquire skills, improving on what they already know and can do.	
	Line managers, supervisors and mentors work with trainers and support staff to ensure that all apprentices achieve as they should.	
	Principles of equality and diversity are nurtured.	
Impact	Employers and providers develop committed, trusting partnerships based on a clear understanding of each other's needs and priorities.	
	Apprentices acquire and develop high-quality skills and produce work of a consistently high standard.	
	Apprentices from all backgrounds achieve the best possible outcomes.	



Relevant documents

- apprenticeship standards
- employer's and provider's value statements
- contracts, service-level agreements and terms of business
- financial forms and templates
- job roles and specifications for apprentices
- case studies of success stories
- social media policies and plans
- training needs analyses (TNAs) for each employer.

STAGE 2: ENROLMENT AND COMMITMENT

Efficient enrolment, fair selection and a seamless onboarding process all help to set a professional tone and standard for apprenticeships from the start.

Everyone who applies, including those who are not selected as apprentices, should feel that the process is positive and supportive. Successful applicants should feel confident that they understand how the apprenticeship works and are inspired to succeed.



The following checklist will help providers and employers to:

- identify and select applicants who are eligible and committed to the apprenticeship
- carry out an efficient enrolment process
- assess apprentices' starting points and support needs
- communicate the outcomes of initial assessment to apprentices' line managers, supervisors and mentors
- design and deliver an effective induction in which apprentices get to know the people who will be supporting them and vice versa.

Checklist 2: Carry out enrolment, selection and induction to a high standard

No	Action	Priority
1	Design the application process to be fully inclusive, providing opportunities for a wide and diverse range of applicants from across the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Give applicants enough information to make it a positive choice to apply for an apprenticeship which matches their job role and career aspirations.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No	Action	Priority
3	Use a fair and proportionate selection process based on best HR principles and practice, opening access to the widest range of applicants possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Assess applicants' commitment to apprenticeships by checking that they value the opportunity, have a positive attitude to the job role and want to learn, in the full knowledge of what is required of them.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Provide a starting point by assessing each applicant's level of knowledge and skills and relevant prior achievements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Identify applicants who can benefit from additional learning support to perform as well as, or better than, their peers.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Communicate the outcomes of initial assessment to line managers, supervisors and mentors so they can help each individual apprentice make good progress in reaching their learning goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<p>Design and deliver an induction that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inspires apprentices to succeed• gives an in-depth preview of how the apprenticeship works and who does what• effectively introduces safeguarding and the Prevent duty• covers all the employer's usual requirements for new staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>



During induction, one employer uses a range of activities – including a talk and a 'question and answer' session with the managing director – to help apprentices understand the organisation's values, goals and culture. Apprentices also meet other key people in the business and get to know those they will work with, which helps them to settle in. Another employer has worked with their provider to identify where safeguarding and the Prevent duty link to the company's policies and procedures for health and wellbeing, bullying and harassment, privacy and data security and social/community affairs. Apprentices carry out exercises during induction to become familiar with these policies and understand the employers' commitment to upholding them.

No	Action	Priority
9	<p>Use the induction process to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get to know the apprentice and their line manager, supervisor and mentor • find out what motivates them about the apprenticeship • hear any concerns they might have • show line managers, supervisors and mentors how the apprenticeship standard links to the apprentice's job role. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	<p>Support employer staff who are responsible for managing, supervising and mentoring apprentices so they feel confident and well-equipped for their roles, e.g. by training to develop their coaching and mentoring skills. Ensure staff know how to raise concerns so they can be discussed and resolved swiftly and well.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Apprentices are assigned a mentor at the end of induction. Information obtained about individual apprentices is used to match them with a suitable mentor. New mentors take part in a half-day workshop run by the provider which covers their mentoring role, the skills a mentor uses, 'ground rules' for the mentoring relationship and who to talk to if they have questions or concerns.



A large national employer with its own in-house apprenticeship programme gives all its apprenticeship coordinators and skills coaches a one-day training course in coaching and mentoring skills. This is followed by shorter sessions focusing on specific aspects of coaching apprenticeships, such as having difficult conversations and giving constructive feedback.



"When apprentices first join us, we give them the golden treatment, so we have senior leaders talking to them and a series of micro-exercises where they can hear about the direction of the Group and the values and behaviours of the organisation. It's all topped off with a grand induction event where all our apprentices come together for the start of their careers and hear from different parts of the business."

Self-assessment: Enrolment and commitment

Category	Criteria	Rating
Intent	Enrolling on apprenticeships is a gateway to a wide and rich set of experiences that develops people's talents and interests and contributes to business goals.	
	Enough information is gained about applicants to enrol them on suitable apprenticeships, plan learning and support them throughout.	
	The enrolment and selection process is fully inclusive, enabling a wide and diverse range of potential apprentices to apply, learn from and succeed in the application process.	
Implementation	Taking part in the enrolment and selection process helps to develop applicants' resilience, confidence and independence.	
	Accurate and unbiased information is given about how apprenticeships help towards future success.	
	Enrolment, selection and induction take place in an environment that values and nurtures difference.	
Impact	Apprentices develop consistently high positive attitudes and commitment to their apprenticeship through induction.	
	Participation in apprenticeships is very high among those from groups under-represented in development opportunities.	

Relevant documents

- social mobility demographics
- inclusivity and diversity policies and plans
- apprenticeship agreement
- training plan (formerly called commitment statement)
- health and safety checks
- safeguarding and Prevent policies
- appropriate insurances
- initial assessment results
- analysis of prior learning and impact on learning plans and funding
- information for the individualised learner record (ILR).

STAGE 3: DESIGN

Successful apprenticeships can only occur when providers and employers work together with a shared intent to design an engaging, meaningful and enriching experience for apprentices that contributes to the employer's goals.



The following three checklists will help providers and employers to:

- understand the core principles used to co-design high-quality apprenticeships with employers
- co-design apprenticeships with relevant personnel at key levels working closely and effectively together
- create learning plans for apprentices which structure and sequence learning logically and efficiently and can be flexed to match each workplace.



Checklist 3a: Co-design the apprenticeships

No	Action	Priority
1	Design apprenticeships in close collaboration with employers, who play an active role in shaping how the knowledge, skills and behaviours defined in the standards can be developed through on-the-job experience and mentoring as well as formal training.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Align the learning outcomes defined by apprenticeship standards and assessment plans with the priorities of individual employers so that they reflect the requirements of specific job roles or occupations.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No	Action	Priority
3	Combine on-the-job learning with off-the-job training and sequence the learning to build progressively on apprentices' skills and knowledge, allowing them to develop throughout the apprenticeship.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Incorporate teaching and assessment methods that promote active learning, critical thinking and skill development, integrate a range of workplace learning methods, and enable apprentices to develop professional behaviours.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Provide guidance, support and feedback to apprentices throughout to nurture their development, address challenges, and create a positive, dynamic learning environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Use evaluation and quality improvement processes including feedback, reviews and assessments to deliver positive outcomes for apprentices and employers and revisit the design of apprenticeships to increase their impact.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Checklist 3b: Co-design the apprenticeships

No	Action	Priority
7	Agree strong and clear shared principles for the design of apprenticeships which underpin effective and challenging training, to which senior leaders commit, and in which line managers, supervisors and mentors are fully involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Agree that all apprentices will receive a well-balanced and coordinated programme of on-the-job and off-the-job training and will be given enough time to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the apprenticeship standard to a high level.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Shape the apprenticeship with relevant department heads and line managers so that apprentices are placed in an environment where they can learn and are given opportunity and scope to develop the exact skills needed for their individual job roles	<input type="checkbox"/>

No	Action	Priority
10	Select and combine methods of delivery to suit both apprentices and the employer – including hybrid models such as blended learning – and be ready to modify the methods used as circumstances change.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 <p>Close collaboration between an employer's apprenticeship team and the provider's solutions team has made it possible for them to co-design a range of apprenticeships at Levels 2, 3 and 4 to a consistently high standard. All the apprenticeships include internal training, co-facilitated training sessions and assessment activities in which apprentices apply knowledge and skills gained off the job to real problems and opportunities in the workplace.</p>		
11	Make the design of the apprenticeship sufficiently flexible so that training can be adapted to reflect each apprentice's working environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Identify situations when apprentices are particularly busy and can develop resilience and the ability to work under pressure – and times when it may be more feasible for them to focus on gaining, applying and consolidating the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the apprenticeship standard.	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Make good use of state-of-the-art facilities, equipment and resources – including expert staff in specialist areas – which employers can provide	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Adapt the language, imagery and graphics used in apprenticeship literature and collaterals to reflect the culture, values and brand of the employer.	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Be creative in how to communicate the key messages about apprenticeships to line managers, supervisors and mentors without going into too much detail.	<input type="checkbox"/>



Even something as simple as changing single words like 'customer' to 'guest' allows the apprenticeship to feel more in tune with the employer's normal business processes.



“We spent five months designing the apprenticeships with our provider before the launch. We produced a detailed delivery specification for both Level 3 and Level 5 which is an overview of the apprenticeship and shows things like the order the modules are in, what’s in each module, the timetable, etc. There’s a list of resources for each module and we show how it links to our new values. We also put in special events where our senior managers are involved such as talks, presentations and panels. Once the specifications were agreed, we used the information to produce a handbook for apprentices and a manual for their supervisors and mentors.”




Good links between providers and employers in an area can help to shape the curriculum by providing access to facilities and equipment. For example, in one provider, modern facilities for engineering, composites and aerospace engineering are provided by local employers and industry organisations. Another provider uses its partnerships in the animal care sector to give apprentices access to specialist facilities such as aqua treadmills, veterinary centres and physiotherapists. These help apprentices to gain skills in specialisms that they do not always encounter at work.



“It was a difficult process at first working with the university because we didn’t understand what they were asking us to do with apprentices or why it was so important. We had our own training and our tradition of training developed over many years, and that was our benchmark. We thought it would be simple to graft the apprenticeship on to it. We’ve moved a long way to understand the apprenticeship context, especially how to capture the learning that happens in the workplace as well as formal training.”

Checklist 3c: Co-create learning plans

No	Action	Priority
16	Obtain information from department heads, line managers and supervisors to help with assessing apprentices' starting points, in addition to the information obtained directly from apprentices (e.g. through skill scans and assessment of prior learning and achievement).	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Specify the goal of the apprenticeship for the apprentice, the impact desired by the employer, how the apprentice's work and progress will be assessed, and when and how feedback will be given to the apprentice.	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Work closely with department heads, line managers and supervisors to set learning objectives that are stretching and balanced with high levels of support.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 After agreeing learning objectives and planning a delivery timetable with the provider, the employer's apprenticeship manager identified members of staff to lead short masterclasses, adding depth and breadth to specific aspects of learning. As well as demonstrating expert know-how, the classes also showed how the objectives of the apprenticeship link to the employer's business.		
19	Plan and sequence learning so that apprentices develop substantial new knowledge and skills throughout the apprenticeship.	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Adjust planned sequences of modules, topics, etc. to match the timeframes and priorities of the department, team or project the apprentice is working in.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No	Action	Priority
21	Agree adjustments to learning plans with apprentices' line managers and supervisors to meet apprentices' individual needs and preferred ways of learning as they go through the apprenticeship.	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Plan opportunities for apprentices to participate in additional employer-led activities to develop wider skills and attitudes.	<input type="checkbox"/>



Apprentices in one employer participate in entrepreneurial competitions and community-based 'give-back' events, e.g. in local schools and social events. These improve their understanding of business and wider society and help them to become positive and responsible members of their communities.

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Plan additional activities with employers that allow apprentices to learn about how to keep physically and mentally healthy.

☐

Apprentices benefit from being included in health and wellbeing sessions run for staff, covering topics such as emotional wellbeing, cancer awareness and healthy relationships.



"In the past, we didn't find learning plans very useful once apprentices had started their programme. They helped to set it up for the apprentices – but after that, they were only looked at during reviews which was a bit of a formality, to be honest. We're trying a different approach this time. There's an overall template for the apprenticeship with the broad timetable and content so everyone can see where they're going, but each individual apprentice has their own learning plan which they update on a rolling three-month basis with their line manager and tutor. It's going quite well so far; most of the apprentices are on track and I think they're gaining more from it by being able to plan the learning themselves."

Self-assessment: Design

Category	Criteria	Rating
Intent	There is a firm common understanding of the core design principles when co-designing in apprenticeships with employers.	
	Leaders, managers and staff in the provider and employer know what these principles mean for their role in apprenticeships.	
	Apprenticeships are coherently planned and sequenced to cumulatively develop knowledge, skills and behaviours.	
Implementation	Apprenticeships are collaboratively designed following the agreed principles.	
	They are coherently planned and sequenced and are flexible enough to be adapted to different situations.	
Impact	Apprentices develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours cumulatively throughout the apprenticeship.	
	By the end of the apprenticeship, they work to a consistently high standard in all areas of the standards.	

Relevant documents

- design principles
- apprenticeship overview
- learning objectives
- learning plans
- handbooks and manuals for apprentices and staff
- language, imagery and brand guidelines.

STAGE 4: DELIVERY

Apprentices do best when on-the-job learning opportunities are judiciously combined with off-the-job training – especially when providers and employers work together as a single delivery system. A joined-up approach to delivery avoids the danger of employers seeing apprenticeships as the provider’s business, and of the provider seeing the apprentice as ‘theirs’ rather than the employer’s.



The following two checklists will help providers and employers to:

- plan and deliver apprenticeships that use opportunities for apprentices to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours at work and off the job
- integrate theory and practice by sequencing and combining on-the-job and off-the-job learning
- provide opportunities for apprentices to broaden knowledge and skills, behave positively in the workplace and develop themselves.

Checklist 4a: Develop knowledge, skills and behaviours at work

No	Action	Priority
1	Prioritise the knowledge, skills and behaviours which help to prepare apprentices swiftly for their roles when they start the apprenticeship.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Plan opportunities for apprentices to work and learn in different settings, including challenging environments (e.g. with customers and clients).	<input type="checkbox"/>



Apprentices in an NHS Trust spend the first year of the apprenticeship on rotation in a range of clinical and non- clinical settings which are carefully selected to match the apprenticeship. They support patients at different stages of the patient journey and are gradually given greater independence in and responsibility for their work.

No	Action	Priority
3	Give apprentices a level of responsibility in their teams and projects so that they develop their confidence and make significant contributions to the business.	<input type="checkbox"/>

4	Provide on-the-job training that is interesting, motivational and engaging to stimulate and stretch apprentices and provide more challenging activities for those who are progressing well and doing high-quality work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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An employer provides stretch and challenge to apprentices by getting them to work on different projects, giving them problems to solve, asking them to communicate with different teams and inviting them to participate in activities across the whole organisation.

5	Provide extensive opportunities for apprentices to apply theory and practice newly learned skills in real situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Trainers expertly link apprentices' research (on the impact of external factors) to the insurance models used by the employer. This allows apprentices to apply the knowledge they gain in their theory lessons to their roles at work.

6	Systematically revisit the knowledge, skills and behaviours apprentices learn at work to reinforce and deepen learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Coaches conduct monthly revision sessions with apprentices. They use quizzes, worksheets and oral questions to review learning and ask questions about the theoretical knowledge that underpins apprentices' daily routines. They make good use of these sessions to identify the specific things they need to work on with apprentices.

No	Action	Priority
7	Set clear expectations for apprentices' behaviour and use events that occur at work to develop apprentices' ability to behave appropriately for the situation and organisational culture.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Develop a culture of mutual respect that underpins strong working relationships in the workplace.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Develop a culture of mutual respect that underpins strong working relationships in the workplace.	<input type="checkbox"/>



Catering apprentices value being referred to as 'chefs', which helps develop a culture of mutual respect in the kitchen. They have high rates of attendance at practical training sessions, arrive on time and are ready to learn.



“Working together to develop our apprentices has benefitted the apprentices in terms of their understanding of the realities of business. Asking our managers and team leaders to get involved in running a few sessions has consolidated their understanding of the importance of the apprentice training processes and has enabled them to develop their own communication skills.”

Checklist 4b: Link off-the-job training to apprentices' work

No	Action	Priority
10	Match the content of off-the-job training to apprentices' projects and tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Give clear and precise explanations of concepts, models tasks and techniques and relate them to apprentices' day-to-day experiences.	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Create learning objectives that link the tasks apprentices carry out in the workplace to specific knowledge, skills and behaviours in the apprenticeship standard and show how apprentices can demonstrate achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Set exacting standards for apprentices' off-the-job work and give feedback that helps them to improve their level of knowledge and skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Use experienced staff to demonstrate to apprentices the expert use of knowledge, skills and behaviours.	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Use specialists and special events to give apprentices expert tuition and enrich their experience of the industry, including in specialist areas.	<input type="checkbox"/>



Apprentices on an animal trainer apprenticeship take part in masterclasses and seminars with top breeders and trainers. They also prepare for and participate in competitions and events. Apprentices on an accounting apprenticeship attend masterclasses with leading professionals and professional update seminars on specific subjects. All apprentices on a management apprenticeship do short courses that help them develop business skills including design thinking and becoming an 'Agile Explorer'. As a result of completing these courses, apprentices quickly develop skills to manage their own time efficiently and to make independent decisions.

No	Action	Priority
16	Use events from the workplace to provide relevant and interesting teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Give trainers continuous feedback about how to link off-the-job training to each apprentice's context and the specific circumstances of their workplace, using a range of learning methods that are proven to work well in the work environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Use feedback from apprentices to identify where off-the-job training does not link to apprentices' work and take steps to improve the links.	<input type="checkbox"/>



A provider identified that some trainers were not fully aware of what apprentices were doing at work. They supported the trainers to spend more time discussing the work profile with apprentices and line managers and agreed development actions to link training to current work tasks.



"The projects set for our apprentices have been invaluable. We have improved efficiency by implementing sets of recommendations. Another benefit has been the increased awareness of the value of apprentices to the organisation. New departments are now seeking to recruit through the apprenticeship model."



"We have learned what works in apprenticeships over and above the usual things like getting apprentices to watch, listen, ask questions and try out new things. We use the idea of 'deliberate practice' to break down more complex tasks that require multiple or high-level skills into manageable components. We then get the apprentice to practice them systematically and when they're feeling confident, we continuously push them out of their comfort zone to improve performance."

Self-assessment: Delivery

Category	Criteria	Rating
Intent	Trainers have a firm common understanding of the delivery process and methods used.	
	Apprenticeships contain a wide and rich set of experiences for apprentices to develop their talents and interests and contribute actively to the employer.	
Implementation	Learners work to consistently demanding goals throughout the apprenticeship.	
	Off-the-job and on-the-job training contribute well to delivering the agreed outcomes.	
	Trainers, coaches and support staff receive focused and highly effective professional development.	
	Work-based learning uses a range of proven techniques such as deliberate practice, collaborative enquiry and real-world problem-solving.	
	Apprentices show commitment by taking part in activities, projects and events such as masterclasses and competitions.	
Impact	Apprentices acquire and develop high-quality skills and produce work of a consistently high standard.	
	Apprentices show consistently high levels of respect for others and play a role in creating a positive workplace environment.	

Relevant documents

- progress reviews
- progress trackers
- issues and resolution logs
- examples of apprentices' work
- line managers' sign off on apprentices' work
- assessment records
- feedback reports
- testimonies by apprentices' mentors and colleagues
- observation records.

STAGE 5: PREPARING FOR SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

Apprentices' success is the product of every aspect of their experience from enrolment onwards. The quality of training and support — both on the job and off the job — plays a major part in helping apprentices to attain consistently high levels of performance. End-point assessment (EPA) is an opportunity for apprentices to demonstrate these achievements.




The following two checklists will help providers and employers to:



- maintain a good pace of progress and attainment throughout the entirety of the training
- identify and solve any practical and personal issues which affect progress
- prepare apprentices well so they give their best in their EPA.



Checklist 5a: Monitor and review progress

No	Action	Priority
1	Understand how well apprentices develop and apply their skills, knowledge and behaviours through frequent discussions involving apprentices, line managers, supervisors, mentors and trainers.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Give thorough, constructive and timely feedback to apprentices about the standard of their work.	<input type="checkbox"/>


No	Action	Priority
3	Check that apprentices use feedback to improve their performance at work and make rapid and sustained progress in proficiency and confidence.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Monitor progress against learning plans and outcomes using robust quality assurance and performance management systems, including those used by employers for their staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 All employees in one organisation receive regular operational reviews – including apprentices. Line managers record outcomes and take prompt and effective action when performance does not meet the employer's expectations (as set out in its operational procedures and competency standards).		
5	Involve line managers, supervisors and mentors in reviews of progress to identify opportunities for apprentices to further develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours at work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Joint reviews by the provider and employer are reflective and forward looking, with ambitious targets which enable apprentices to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours in a meaningful way. Apprentices' line managers like the feeling that they are contributing to apprentices' success.		
6	Prepare for reviews by setting targets that are broken down into achievable steps and recording apprentices' progress towards achieving these steps	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Take shared ownership with employers for identifying and quickly solving any practical issues which may affect apprentices' progress and achievements — e.g. workload pressures, not enough time for off-the-job training.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Identify any personal issues affecting progress — such as mental health or family concerns — and help apprentices to work through these issues sensitively, calling on specialist support where needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>

No	Action	Priority
9	Use observations of learning and training to examine apprentices' work and progress critically and to develop a deeper understanding of the purpose of the training – e.g. by posing questions such as “What’s the bigger picture?” or “Where does completing that task lead you to next?”	<input type="checkbox"/>
	A provider has shifted the focus of reviews from checking on progress to technical observation of apprentices' work and attitudes. The review form has reduced from a five-page document to a short online form which takes a fraction of the time to complete. The time spent on review is used more effectively with apprentices and their line manager or supervisor.	
10	Try out different ways of making reviews interesting and informative for the employer by replacing a tick-box approach by one that stimulates more revealing discussions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Getting the apprentice to lead tripartite reviews has worked well for one provider. They have noticed a different dynamic when the apprentice rather than the skills coach asks the line manager for feedback and takes a more proactive role in the review.	
11	Use the outcomes of reviews to revisit apprentices' learning goals, reset targets and replan training.	<input type="checkbox"/>




“Forensic analysis completed on all aspects of the apprentice journey has allowed us to develop an in-depth understanding of all our apprenticeship processes. In spending time with each of the staff members involved, we have been able to streamline our processes, reduce administration time and ultimately improve the feedback learners are receiving on their practical skills. Apprentices, staff and managers have all benefitted.”

Checklist 5b: Prepare for EPA

No	Action	Priority
12	Make sure employers know what's involved in end-point assessment, how long it takes and the challenges apprentices may feel including mental health, so that they provide enough space for apprentices to prepare properly.	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Give apprentices enough information about EPA at the start of their apprenticeship and at various points during it, so they understand what they are working towards by the end of their training.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 <p>Apprentices in one employer know in detail what they need to do for their final assessment. They understand the grading criteria and all apprentices aspire to get a grade above 'Pass'. As a result, the proportion who achieve high grades in their final assessments is very high.</p>		
14	Use EPA grading criteria and exemplars of work to show what apprentices need to do to achieve a high grade.	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Integrate grading criteria into learning plans and outcomes alongside the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the apprenticeship standard.	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Produce an EPA guide for apprentices, line managers, supervisors and mentors, so that everyone understands the EPA process and their role in it.	<input type="checkbox"/>



Line manager and mentor handbooks contain information about EPA, including the role of line managers and mentors in confirming apprentices' performance against apprenticeship standards. A separate briefing is prepared for each apprenticeship, showing how line managers and mentors can help apprentices to meet the grading criteria. Templates are provided for statements and testimonies by line managers, mentors and other staff who can provide evidence of the standard of apprentices' work.

No	Action	Priority
17	Give apprentices plenty of chances to practice elements of their EPA, such as interviews, professional discussions, projects and presentations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Management apprentices produce a project brief for their employer as part of their training. They present the brief to a panel of senior leaders at a Dragons' Den-style event. The panel gives feedback on the content of the brief and the style of presentation. The experience helps apprentices to prepare for the project presentation element of the EPA.		
18	Explain how employers can provide accurate and timely information about apprentices' work and achievements for the EPA gateway.	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Plan the gateway process so that apprentices understand what will happen and when once they have finished their practical training period. This includes specific pieces of work that may need developing during the gateway for the EPA — e.g. project reports, presentations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Prepare apprentices for all elements of EPA so they perform to the best of their abilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>



“End-point assessment was new to everyone. We made sure our apprentices were fully aware of what to expect, had chances to practice and could get answers to their questions. This has led to high levels of achievement and greater confidence in our managers to advise about future end-point assessments.”

Self-assessment: Preparing for successful outcomes

Category	Criteria	Rating
Intent	The employer and provider are ambitious for all apprentices to make progress on the apprenticeship to the very best of their ability.	
	They work together to plan the timetable, allowing enough time for apprentices to prepare properly for EPA.	
Implementation	Apprentices make swift and efficient progress in their learning at all stages of the apprenticeship.	
	Apprentices' work matches the learning plan and outcomes and develops cumulatively to a consistently high standard.	
	Apprentices are well prepared for final assessment and feel confident in all elements of the EPA.	
Impact	Most apprentices make good progress, complete their training on time and are ready for final assessment.	
	The pass rate at EPA is very high and a high proportion of apprentices achieve high grades.	

Relevant documents

- notes of apprentices' progress
- feedback notes
- review records
- reset targets and replanned training
- progress trackers
- issues log
- observation records
- EPA guide
- learning outcomes incorporating EPA grading criteria
- gateway guide and support.

STAGE 6: PROGRESSION

The aims of apprenticeships are to:

- improve apprentices' employment and career outcomes
- contribute to their employer's success.

Where apprentices can go to after the apprenticeship – and the support they receive during their journey – help to validate the investment made by them and their employers.



The following checklist will help providers and employers to:

- create and sustain an ambitious approach to apprentices' futures and an expectation that all can succeed in their lives
- use a wide range of sources of information about jobs and careers
- make creative use of contacts and networks, including current and recent apprentices, to motivate apprentices and raise their expectations.

Checklist 6: Identify next steps and support career progression

No	Action	Priority
1	Share a clear and inspiring vision for apprentices to aim high and have the best possible careers because of their apprenticeships.	<input type="checkbox"/>



Apprentices have a good understanding of career opportunities when they finish the apprenticeship. Employer staff advise and guide apprentices effectively through frequent and useful career conversations. Apprentices can make informed and well considered choices about further study or job opportunities.

No	Action	Priority
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2	Nurture and develop apprentices so that they feel confident about succeeding in their careers and know how to grasp opportunities through continuous learning and development.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Apprentices thrive in the high-performing culture and make rapid progress in their organisations as they go through training. The pace of their careers is sustained after they complete their apprenticeship. Many of them move onto further study at degree level to develop new knowledge and skills and gain promotion.

3	Understand that job and career outcomes are likely to be better when apprenticeships are fully embedded in recognised progression pathways and career routes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4	Develop ways of keeping in touch with apprentices which could be beneficial for them, employers and future apprentices.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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One provider keeps in touch with apprentice alumni through databases, LinkedIn communities and newsletters. They run an annual event to inspire future generations and celebrate success – with talks from successful apprentices – and are now creating an apprenticeship ambassador network.

5	Encourage new apprentices to talk about employment and career opportunities with apprentices who are further along or have completed their apprenticeships.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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6	Use wide-ranging sources of information to signpost diverse options, including links with networking groups, professional bodies, other employers and higher education.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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No	Action	Priority
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Many professional bodies such as chartered institutes and sector-based member organisations provide employers with long-term engagement strategies for career pathways. Some support employers through the whole recruitment and development journey.

7	Use local knowledge about employers and the labour market to identify suitable progression routes for apprentices.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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8	Use links with employers to provide additional work experience for apprentices who wish to explore alternative career paths.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9	Celebrate success to recognise the hard work and dedication that goes into a successful apprenticeship programme, create case studies, and engage with local or national award celebrations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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“We have exceptionally good links with a wide range of people in the industry and we’ve found them incredibly useful in giving apprentices a wealth of information about the profession. [Apprentices] get to broaden their knowledge of the opportunities available to them regionally, nationally and internationally. We put on masterclasses and seminars to give our apprentices exposure to different aspects of the profession. Ours is quite an entrepreneurial sector, so we’ve put a variety of videos on different careers on our online learning platform as well as a course on setting up your own business.”



“Apprenticeships are just the starting point for a career within our organisation and sometimes beyond it as well. We are genuinely ambitious for apprentices. Everyone feels that way from the top and all the way through the business. You see it in the high expectations that managers have for the apprentices in their teams and departments, and it’s reflected in the attitudes of apprentices themselves.”

Self-assessment: Progression

Category	Criteria	Rating
Intent	The employer and provider are ambitious for all apprentices to succeed in their apprenticeships.	
	There are high aspirations for apprentices' longer-term success in their jobs and careers.	
	Career progression is built into the apprenticeship from the start to motivate apprentices and inspire high performance.	
Implementation	All apprentices get accurate and unbiased information, advice, guidance and support to achieve their next steps and progress to positive destinations.	
	Providers and employers work with local and regional economic planners to identify a wide range of post-apprenticeship opportunities for apprentices.	
Impact	There is clear and direct evidence of the positive impact of apprenticeships on jobs and careers.	

Relevant documents

- progression data and reports
- labour market information and economic intelligence
- sources of information about job and career options
- progression pathways and career routes
- alumni contacts, e.g. LinkedIn pages.

ACTION PLAN

To create an action plan:

- look back at the items which you identified as a priority in each checklist
- decide on an appropriate action for each item
- decide a date when each action should be completed and identify the person responsible for it
- summarise how the action will be carried out
- describe the impact you anticipate when the action is completed successfully.

Theme	Action	When	Who	How	Anticipated impact
Stage 1: Engagement					
Stage 2: Enrolment and commitment					
Stage 3: Design					
Stage 4: Delivery					
Stage 5: Preparing for successful outcomes					
Stage 6: Progression					

FURTHER RESOURCES

In this section, you'll find a selection of further resources and continuing professional development (CPD) offers to support your work with employers.

The Gatsby Charitable Foundation: The Education Landscape: a guide for employers

Launched in 2022, this [guide](#) from the Gatsby Charitable Foundation is designed to help businesses navigate and make the most of the education and skills system in England.

Developed in partnership with the British Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors, the Careers & Enterprise Company and the DfE, the resource is an overview of the education system as a whole and explains how employers can work with schools, colleges, universities and the wider skills system to benefit their business.

You may find it useful to share the guide with your employer partners.

The Careers & Enterprise Company: Are you promoting all pathways?

Launched in 2022, this [short video](#) from the Careers & Enterprise Company is aimed at careers leaders and key staff in FE providers.

It focuses on ensuring that young people — and their parents and carers — are supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of all available routes at key transition points, so that they can make informed choices about their next steps.

The ETF: the AWD offer

Launched in January 2021, the ETF's [AWD offer](#) — of which this guide is a part — is funded by the DfE. It supports staff delivering apprenticeships with the teaching skills, subject knowledge and confidence they need for the benefit of their apprentices.

The AWD offer is free of charge and available online. Trainers and leaders can engage with the CPD when it is suitable for them.

To access this CPD, you need to create an account and a profile on the ETF's [Professional Development Platform \(PDP\)](#).

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