



Healthcare
Apprenticeships

Trailblazer Guide for Employers

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Introduction

Apprenticeships are developed by trailblazer groups (employer-led steering groups) in line with guidance provided by the Institute for Apprenticeships ([IfA](#)) who decide what can and cannot be developed. An apprenticeship is a job with training, it enables someone to develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to perform effectively in a particular occupation. Each occupation must be unique and clearly explained. The group needs to show how it is different from other occupations at the same level or within the same field.

Skills for Health has designed this document for healthcare employers to share some of our experience working with trailblazers for the health sector. Checklists are included to help you keep your trailblazer on track and make sense of the Institute for Apprenticeships guidance.

Apprenticeship trailblazer groups develop standards in line with the process outlined in this document.

The Process



Setting up your group

I'm interested in developing a standard – what do I need to do?

- First, you need to define the occupation – this must be a recognised stand-alone occupation, for which there is a genuine demand in the job market. In the health sector this can present particular issues as many occupations overlap and whilst they may work in a particular professional context or setting it can be very challenging to demonstrate that the skills, knowledge and behaviours that describe the occupation are unique.
- Check on [Healthcare Apprenticeship Standards Online](#) whether there is a standard, or a similar standard, already. On the website, you will find standards specific to healthcare as well as more generic ones which are widely used in the health sector.
- Think about the level of the apprenticeship standard. Be aware that the level of the standard is an academic level and not Agenda for Change pay band or Career Framework level. It is also important to note that current apprenticeship policy is that any mandatory qualifications included in a standard has to be at the level of the standard. This means that if different level qualifications can lead to registration only one level can be mandated in the standard. It is possible not to include a mandatory qualification to get around this but for some occupations this may not be viewed as acceptable by employers or professional bodies.
- If no other standard is already available or in development, gather as much information about the occupation from your own organisation's resources, i.e job descriptions, career frameworks and professional standards. [NHS careers](#) and [NHS jobs](#) may also be helpful.
- Your organisation must commit to employing apprentices once the standard is approved for delivery. Find out how many they will employ in the first year. You may need to speak to your finance, HR, workforce or education departments to find out more background information on your organisation's position in relation to apprenticeships.
- Decide whether or not you want to volunteer as Chair on the trailblazer group.

- Talk to people within your network and from other organisations to see if they are interested in developing the same occupation and whether you can get a group together with geographical spread.
- Skills for Health can help by putting you in touch with other people who have enquired about the same occupation. Use the Healthcare Apprenticeship Standards Online [enquiry form](#). This can be really helpful if you need to find people from outside your geographic region too.

Who should be in the group?

- You need to have at least 10 employers as members of the stakeholder group (pre-trailblazer group), including at least two employers with fewer than 50 employees. We recommend that you aim for 15 – 20 employers on the group. This allows for movement in membership and for you to still meet the minimum requirements set by the Institute for Apprenticeships at submission points. Please note that it is possible to bring in new members, at the discretion of the Chair, but it can be a steep learning curve. New members can sometimes mean re-treading old ground which can hinder progress.
- If the stakeholder group is interested in developing a degree apprenticeship, the proposal should have the active support of at least two Higher Education Institutions. Often there will be more than two who want to be involved.
- You need to consider having a project manager to coordinate meetings and communications. Their role is to ensure that the project stays on track and to check that the group is meeting all the Institute for Apprenticeships requirements at each stage. If Skills for Health is commissioned to work with your group, we can do this for you.
- The appointment of the Chair is really important. It must be someone committed to the journey and who has credibility within the occupation. They have to ensure that there is always strong leadership throughout the process. Being a chair can be time consuming and there are times when you'll personally have to make decisions on behalf of your group. If you are working with Skills for Health and Health Education England, your project manager will be in regular communication with you and will expect you to be contactable and responsive.
- Wider stakeholders are commonly included, offering advice and guidance i.e Skills for Health, Health Education England, professional and regulatory bodies, awarding organisations or education providers. However, this is an employer led process so it is the employers in the group who make all the final decisions. If for any reason the group can't reach a consensus the Chair has the deciding say.
- The Institute for Apprenticeships relationship manager must be invited to join the group. They will give advice and guidance, ensuring that you are fully prepared at each submission point.
- As the group can't accommodate everybody who is interested in developing the standard, a period of consultation on the standard is always built into the process, often as an online survey. Skills for Health publishes consultation links on Healthcare Apprenticeship Standards Online whenever they are available.

What is the commitment required?

- Initial development of the standard and end-point assessment is likely to require regular meetings. This can be over a period of about 12-months.

Releasing people from work, travel time and expenses when attending meetings can be costly. Therefore, offering remote communication through dial-in facilities can be a way to facilitate debates and to put forward ideas. This works best when the focus of the meeting is feeding back how you have taken forward actions and discussions from the last meeting. Groups are often large and it can be hard to run a participative webinar or teleconference with so many people wanting to have their say. For meetings where there is likely to be a need for discussion and debate we would recommend that you hold them face to face. There is a [small business travel fund](#) to support small employers in engaging with standards development.

- It takes a significant amount of work to define the detailed knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) within the standard. As employers, you are the experts on the requirements of the occupation. You need to be able to

explain them in a way that an apprentice and their family can understand. This means using plain English, avoiding healthcare jargon and abbreviations.

- It can be time consuming to draft and re-draft the text, sending it back and forth between the steering group and sub-groups for comment. If you have a project manager, they will coordinate a lot of this activity. However, each member of the group should be made aware that they have an individual responsibility to feedback into the drafting in a timely manner.

Submitting a proposal

To write a new proposal to develop an apprenticeship, the stakeholder group must review the standards that have already been approved and explain the relationship between their proposed standard and those that already exist. This is to avoid crossover as the Institute for Apprenticeships guidance is quite clear that the occupation must be defined, unique with sufficient breadth and depth. If you are unable to demonstrate this sufficiently you may be asked to work with another trailblazer or your proposal may be rejected. So, in order to have the best chance of success, you must outline the occupation in detail including day to day activities, on-programme learning and links to professional registration (see Appendix A for a Proposal checklist).

Most healthcare occupations have similarities in relation to things like safeguarding, duty of care or manual handling. However, it is really important to explain the differences between occupations in a way that someone who is not familiar with the health sector will be able to understand. The Institute for Apprenticeships panels (who make the decisions about whether or not your standard is approved for development) may not come from or be familiar with the health sector. This means that you must be as explicit as you can be about the breadth and scope of the occupation within the proposal.

Your relationship manager must see and comment on the proposal before you submit it. The submission deadline for all stages is the last Wednesday of the month. You can access the on-line submission form at the bottom of [this page](#).

Developing a standard

Once the proposal is submitted and approved, the group officially becomes a 'Trailblazer' and starts developing the standard. The standard is a short document that describes what the apprentice will know, understand and be able to do at the end of their apprenticeship. The standard also describes the values and behaviours employers are looking for in the workplace. In the health sector, we all work to similar values and behaviours, and so this is one area of the standard where you may see duplication or overlap between standards.

The trailblazer group will write the standard together (see Appendix B for a standard checklist). This can take some time and generate a lot of discussion and even differences of opinion. The Chair will help the group negotiate through this stage and reach consensus about what should appear in the standard. It is important to remember that everyone who is going to take the apprenticeship must be able to do everything that is listed in the document. This means that some things which are common to many but not done by all will not appear in the standard document itself but may still be taught during on-programme training.

Although there is no set template for writing a standard, we would encourage employers to use a template which displays skills and knowledge side by side, similar to the one used by Skills for Health.

When you submit your standard, you need to gather letters of support including two from employers with less than 50 employees. In the health sector this can be quite a challenge as most health employers, especially the NHS, are well in excess of this.

The costing form that you submit at this stage, will be used to define the final funding band for the standard. Therefore, even if you haven't started developing your assessment plan your group needs to consider what it is likely to include before submitting the standard. When the standard is approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships they will also provide an indicative funding band.

Developing an assessment plan

Once the standard is approved, the trailblazer group will move on to develop an assessment plan focussed on end-point assessment (EPA). The end-point assessment is a new process, entirely separate from on-programme assessment (which may include a formal qualification). It aims to holistically assess that the apprentice is work-ready at the end of their apprenticeship (see Appendix C for an assessment plan checklist). Often healthcare trailblazer groups begin to work on their assessment plan whilst their standard is out for consultation. You need to make sure that the assessment plan is affordable and achievable.

Take into account how important it is to employers that end-point assessment is carried out close to where the apprentice works. Be careful not to create a plan that over-assesses individuals, especially if they have already undertaken a rigorous on-programme qualification. It is still key that end-point assessment measures their overall competence though so you will need to find a comfortable balance between the two.

When developing a standard that leads to professional registration, the trailblazer group will need to be mindful of the potential for apprentices to register as a professional prior to completing their apprenticeship. In other words, they may complete the qualification that leads to registration and be assessed as 'professionally competent' before they go through the apprenticeship end-point assessment. In fact, often the on-programme qualification will be one of the gateway markers that an apprentice must achieve before they can be put forward for end-point assessment. For degree standards, this issue may be mitigated by opting for integrated end-point assessment. However, this in turn may require revalidation of programmes and delay the proposed start date of the apprenticeship.

When you submit your assessment plan you will need to gather letters of support from: the organisation that is providing external quality assurance; if a degree standard from the universities involved; and if a regulated profession, from the regulator or professional body. It may take additional time to get support from each of these bodies and you will need to factor in their individual processes and requirements to your own project timeline.

Implementation

Once all three stages (Proposal, Standard and Assessment Plan) are complete, the Institute for Apprenticeships assigns the standard and assessment plan as 'approved for delivery'. This is when the Institute for Apprenticeships allocates a final funding band for apprenticeship standards. You can read more about funding [here](#).

Employers need to select an organisation from the [Register of Approved End Point Assessment Organisations](#) and [Register of Approved Training Providers](#) to work with their apprentices. As an employer you may want to deliver some or all of the training yourself. In those instances, there are three types of provider status to choose from 'main providers' 'employer providers' and 'supporting providers'. You can read an explanation of what each of these types of provider can and cannot do [here](#). Once End Point Assessment Organisation and Training Providers are in place, employers can recruit apprentices and training can begin.

After the trailblazer group's work is finished, sometimes employers continue to work together and develop communication materials or additional guidance on how to use the new standards. This may help contextualise the new standards for colleagues who have not been able to be round the table with you through the development process. It is also an opportunity for you to explain what your decisions have been and what aspects of the new standards are outside of your control i.e. including end-point assessment or grading.

Healthcare Apprenticeships Standards Online (HASO)

HASO is Skills for Health's online portal which gives access for health employers in England to:

- Search for and download standards that are approved for delivery and ready to use
- Keep up to date with which standards and assessment plans are still in development
- See what is being considered for development or where expressions of interest have been submitted
- Read about standards which have not progressed
- Respond to consultations
- Check the status and last start dates of healthcare frameworks
- Discover additional resources and blog posts

If you are the chair of a healthcare trailblazer group that Skills for Health is not commissioned to work with directly, we will forward enquiries that we receive about your trailblazer on to you. In turn, you are invited to keep us up to date with your progress by emailing healthcare.trailblazer@skillsforhealth.org.uk. We can also publish your consultation links in our news feed if you would like us to.

Skills for Health and Health Education England's Role

Many of the standards that are being developed for use in the health sector are being facilitated by Skills for Health (SfH), who are supporting Health Education England to ensure that the NHS in particular, has the apprenticeship standards it needs.

Additional useful Links:

- [Healthcare Apprenticeship Standards Online](#)
- [Institute for Apprenticeships How to Guide for Trailblazers](#)
- [Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers](#)
- [Register of Apprenticeship Assessment Organisations](#)
- [The levy](#)

Appendix A

Proposal Checklist

Before submitting, have you...?

- Have you read the Trailblazer Guide on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)?
- Have you defined the occupation to include main duties, responsibilities and skills?
- Have you checked on HASO for any similar existing standards or any crossover?
- Have you discussed your submission with your relationship manager?
- Have you decided what level the proposed standard will be?
- Have you worked out the annual start data?
- Have you gathered at least 10 employers to join the stakeholder group of which 2 are small employers (less than 50 employees)?
- Have you included 2 HEIs in the group? (if proposed standard is a Degree Apprenticeship)
- Have you appointed a chair?
- Have you named a project manager to coordinate meetings and communications?
- Have you committed to employing apprentices once the proposed standard is available and decided on how many?
- Have you outlined the key knowledge, skills and behaviours that apply to this standard?
- Have you estimated when the proposed standard will be ready to deliver starts?
- If you want Skills for Health support, have you requested it via Health Education England?

Can you answer yes to the following and provide evidence?

- Does the standard include a qualification?
 - If a degree apprenticeship, does it include a full bachelors or masters degree?
 - If not a degree apprenticeship, can you meet one of the 3 criteria for including a qualification ie it's required as a license to practice; for professional registration; or the apprentices will be disadvantaged in the job market without a qualification because it is used as a hard sift at interview (evidenced via job descriptions and adverts)
- Is the proposed standard at least 12 months long with 20% off the job learning?
- Is the proposed standard unique and does not overlap with any existing standards?
- Is there a genuine demand in the job market for this occupation?
- Are there transferable skills in this occupation which will enable successful apprentices to work in any size businesses?

REMEMBER TO CHECK THE [HOW TO GUIDE](#) FOR FULL DETAILS.

<https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/>

Appendix B

Standard Checklist

Before submitting, have you...?

- Have you read the Trailblazer Guide on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)?
- Have you included the standard title? i.e Apprenticeship Standard for **X**, Degree Apprenticeship Standard for **X**, Integrated Degree Apprenticeship Standard for **X**.
- Have you listed the typical job titles?
- Have you described the occupational profile and knowledge, skills and behaviours?
- Have you listed the responsibilities and duties of the role?
- Have you included the qualification requirements?
- Have you included the level of the standard?
- Have you included the duration of the standard?
- Have you included the review date of the standard?
- Have you listed the values and behaviours?
- Have you included on programme qualifications (if any)?
 - Qualifications cannot be in development
- If the standard is a core and options model, have you listed the option titles?
- Have you written the standard in a size 12 font and fitted all information in three pages?
 - If it is a core and options model it can be longer
- Have you discussed your submission with your relationship manager?

Can you answer yes to the following and provide evidence?

- Do you have 10 letters of support including 2 small employers?
- Can you provide evidence to support the inclusion of a qualification (if any)?
- Did you open a consultation on the standard? i.e online survey
 - Who did you consult with?
 - How did the survey responses affect the final draft of the standard?
- Is the duration of the standard at least 12 months?
- Do you have a projected annual apprenticeship start date once the standard is approved?
- Have you included your outline costing proposal?
- Have you included a word version of the standard?

REMEMBER TO CHECK THE [HOW TO GUIDE](#) FOR FULL DETAILS.

Appendix C

Assessment Plan Checklist

Before submitting...?

- Have you read the Trailblazer Guide on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)?
- Have you included a range of assessment methods?
 - Each method linked to specific knowledge, skills and behaviours
 - One of which is holistic
- Are the assessment methods appropriate to the occupation? i.e an assessment plan based mainly in theory tests is unlikely to be appropriate for someone who works directly with people
- Does it include grading and detail of how judgments will be made?
- Does it detail internal and external quality assurance arrangements?
- Does it include how the standard relates to professional body recognition?
- Does the assessment plan confirm that an apprentice is fully competent in the occupation?
- Is it affordable? Costing no more than 20% of the overall fundable cost of the apprenticeship
- Is it manageable and feasible by all size employers?
- Is it appropriate to the level and proportionate to the planned length of the apprenticeship?
- Is it independent? Assessment needs to be carried out by organisations who have not been involved in the on-programme training of the apprentice, unless it is an integrated end-point assessment.
- Does it outline the roles and responsibilities of the apprentice, employer, training provider, assessment organisation and assessor?

Can you answer yes to the following and provide evidence?

- Are you challenging the funding cap assigned?
 - Have you prepared and updated the costing proposal?
- Are you applying for grading exception?
- If the standard is for a regulated occupation, do you have a letter of support from the regulator?
- Have you included a word version of the assessment plan?
- Have you included a letter of support from the organisation that is providing external quality assurance?

REMEMBER TO CHECK THE [HOW TO GUIDE](#) FOR FULL DETAILS.