

Healthcare Science Assistant (HCS Assistant) Apprenticeship: An Employer's Brief on the new Standard at Level 2

Introduction

New Apprenticeship Standards are being developed in England which will, ultimately, replace the apprenticeship frameworks. An independent review of Apprenticeships by Doug Richard in 2012 sought to develop a world class Apprenticeship system in England, offering young people a real alternative to University, and employers a 'job ready' pipeline of workers. The final report resulted in a series of recommendations designed to make Apprenticeships more rigorous and more responsive; notably putting you, the employers, in control.

A series of groups, known as 'Trailblazers,' were set up to develop the new Apprenticeship Standards. A Standard is a short document describing the knowledge, skills and behaviours that an apprentice should achieve by the end of their apprenticeship. The government requires that all apprenticeships contain an independent end-point assessment. Each Standard is accompanied by an assessment plan which sets out the requirements for this holistic assessment of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that have been learnt throughout the apprenticeship. Read more in the [guidance for trailblazers](#).

The Healthcare Science Trailblazer Group developed the Apprenticeship for HCS Assistants as part of a two-year project, also developing Apprenticeships for Healthcare Science Associates (Level 4) and a degree apprenticeship for HCS Practitioners (including Biomedical Scientists) at Level 6.

The occupational profile for HCS Assistants is outlined in the Standard as follows:

Occupational profile: The Healthcare Science Assistant (HCSA) support workforce contributes to safe patient care across all care pathways from conception to end of life in job roles within hospitals, general practice and other settings in the healthcare sector and across all areas of healthcare science. HCSAs perform a range of low risk, routine technical and scientific procedures usually within one broad area of HCS, following specific protocols and in accordance with health, safety, governance and ethical requirements. HCSAs work using standard operating procedures, initially under direct supervision but increasingly with experience, under indirect supervision.

The Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) with a range of healthcare employers and in partnership with Health Education England, HCS professional bodies and senior scientists, has led the HCS Trailblazer Apprenticeship and have designed the Apprenticeship Standard. The HCS Assistant Apprenticeship Standard is therefore applicable to a wide range of contexts.

The HCS Assistant Apprenticeship Standard is a short document that provides a high-level description of the skills, knowledge, values and behaviours required of the HCS Assistant. The assessment plan describes how the apprentice is assessed at the end of their Apprenticeship and by whom.

The HCS Assistant Apprenticeship Standard and Assessment Plan can be downloaded at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470806/HEALTHCARE_Healthcare_Science_Assistant.pdf

The HCS Assistant Apprenticeship has been approved for delivery by the Government. This means that the employers can work with training providers who provide learning for the Level 2 HCS Diploma and organisations which provide apprentice end point assessment to prepare for delivery. The Skills Funding Agency hold registers for approved training providers and approved end point assessment organisations.

On completion of this Level 2 Apprenticeship the apprentice will be a job-ready HCS Assistant.

How does it work?

During the Apprenticeship, the employer must ensure that the apprentice is given education and training opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours described in the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship Standard. The time taken to complete the Apprenticeship will vary but it must last for a minimum of 12 months and will typically take about 24 months to complete. The government requires that a minimum of 20% of the apprentice's time must be protected and away from the immediate demands of the job in order to develop the required knowledge and skills but it is for employers to design how this is delivered.

HCS Assistant Apprentices must achieve the mandatory Level 2 HCS Diploma. Employers should ensure that any Awarding Body providing the Level 2 Diploma qualification bases the qualification on the underpinning curriculum which provides the focussed skills and knowledge within a given HCS specialism and which has been developed by senior healthcare scientists. Awarding Bodies wishing to develop a Level 2 HCS Diploma qualification should approach The National School of Healthcare Science which has the intellectual property rights to the curriculum content.

When the employer, the training provider and the apprentice are confident that the apprentice is competent the apprentice reaches the gateway to the end-point assessment. An assessor from the end point assessment organisation who has not been involved in the delivery of the Apprenticeship will then independently assess the apprentice. The end-point assessment conducted by the end-point organisation assessor is made up of three parts:

1. Vocational Competence Observation (VCO) which observes and assesses the apprentices underpinning knowledge and understanding in performing work-based tasks.
2. Professional Practice Test (PPT) which assesses the apprentice's professional competency through responses to work-place based scenarios.
3. Professional discussion (PD) which includes evidence and reflection from their work as an apprentice, allowing the apprentice to showcase their knowledge, skills, behaviours and values from across the Standard.

Funding

Below is a very brief overview of funding arrangements. Individual enquiries should be addressed to

nationalhelpdesk@apprenticeships.gov.uk

Employers and the government will co-invest in apprenticeships. The employer contribution will become available through the Apprenticeship levy. All employers with a payroll over £3million will be subject to the levy from April 2017. They will pay a 0.5% tax on payroll which they will only be able to claim back as digital 'vouchers' for Apprenticeships.

Levy funding can only be used to pay for recognised training providers to deliver training, education and assessment required to deliver the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship. Funding pays for training and assessment only, not salary costs. The employer is able to negotiate with the training provider to determine the exact cost of training and assessment, however if the cost exceeds the funding band allocated by the Skills Funding Agency, the employer will be required to pay the additional amount. Employers may also need to carry out a tendering process in relation to this.

The funding band allocation for the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship is band 6 (max £5,000).

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/apprenticeship-changes> for more details about the levy and funding arrangements.

Getting started

As the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship Standard and the Assessment Plan have been approved for delivery by the government, employers, training providers and end point assessment organisations can begin to work together to prepare for implementation. There will not be a national launch and there will be no 'go live' date. The pace and time taken to get ready for delivery of the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship will vary according to local conditions. You can be preparing to use the new Apprenticeship now and can start HCS Assistant apprentices whenever you, your training provider and your end point assessment organisation are ready

Top tips for employers in getting started:

- Get familiar with the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship Standard and Assessment Plan.
- Start talking in your organisation about how the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship fits with your workforce plans
- Talk with training providers – remember you are the customer and you should be negotiating with providers on what you want delivered and how much you will pay.
- Think about how you will provide pastoral support and confidence building to prepare the candidate.
- Think about end point assessment. You will be able to choose (from an approved Skills Funding Agency list) which organisation you want do your apprentice end point assessment
- Set a realistic start date for your organisation to start apprentices on the HCS Assistant Apprenticeship. You might decide to start with a small pilot cohort. If you are used to using Apprenticeship Frameworks this should mark your transition date from 'Frameworks' to 'Apprenticeship Standards'.
- Recognise that current frameworks are being switched off. For the latest status/final start dates see here: <http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/standards/item/211-apprenticeship-frameworks-england>

End-to-end journey of the HCS Assistant apprentice

- The apprentice registers for the apprenticeship programme with their employer
- Achieves the Level 2 HCS Diploma qualification
- Achieves Level 2 English and Maths
- Compiles a professional portfolio based on their apprenticeship
- The employer assesses that apprentice is ready for the end point assessment and the end point Assessor is notified
- The apprentice completes the 3 elements of the end-point assessment (Vocational Competence Observation; Professional Practice Test; Professional Discussion)
- The assessor grades the apprentice based on the end-point assessments
- The apprenticeship is complete.
- Successful apprentices claim their apprenticeship certificate.