

Guidance for Initial Assessment to Recognise Prior Learning for Apprenticeships in the Health Sector

The purpose of this guidance is to inform training providers, employers and apprentices about the need for, and importance of, **initial assessment** and **recognition of prior learning** when commencing an apprenticeship in the health sector. The guidance has been adapted for the health sector from guidance provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

This guidance should be considered alongside the apprenticeship funding rules.

Checklists are provided for employers and training providers.

Key points:

- 1** Recognition of prior learning extends beyond English, maths and existing qualifications;
- 2** All the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the standard should be considered in reviewing the prior learning of the apprentice;
- 3** Recognition of prior learning is part of the learner eligibility assessment;
- 4** Apprenticeships could be poor value for money and unnecessarily long if training covers areas that the apprentice already knows, and public funding, which includes the apprenticeship levy, should not be used for learning which is not new;
- 5** Initial assessment is vital to ensure high-quality apprenticeships and Ofsted inspections look for evidence of a robust initial assessment.

What is an initial assessment?

Before an apprenticeship begins, the main training provider must assess the individual's prior learning to establish the 'starting point', or baseline, of the apprentice. This informs how much of the apprenticeship training content the individual requires. Good practice would suggest that the employer might undertake the initial assessment alongside the training provider and prior to making the individual an apprenticeship offer. The initial assessment checks that the apprenticeship is an appropriate training programme for the individual.

For example

Maria is hoping to become a Healthcare Support Worker and her employer has apprenticeship opportunities available. She has been working as an appointments/booking clerk for the last two years. The employer and the training provider consider what knowledge, skills and behaviours from the Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship standard Maria may already have from her current job. Evidence can be found in her previous job description, appraisal documents, qualification certificates and by having an open discussion with Maria.

Why is initial assessment important?

Initial assessment checks that the apprenticeship (both the job role and the training) is an appropriate programme for the individual. Apprentices should not be spending paid time doing training they do not need, and the apprentice will not have a good experience if they are repeating training. Apprenticeship funding should not be used to pay for, or accredit, existing knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Ofsted inspectors consider the 'distance travelled' by the apprentice in determining the value added by the training programme. Without knowing the starting point of an apprentice, inspectors cannot correctly assess the distance travelled and the quality of the apprenticeship training that has been delivered. Training providers must evidence a robust initial assessment, clear milestones and progress against these.

THINK

What is the goal and what is the apprentice trying to achieve?

- ◆ Where are they currently against this goal?
- ◆ How much of the content is new to them?
- ◆ Do they require significant and sustained new learning?

How does initial assessment check the eligibility of the individual for an apprenticeship?

The initial assessment checks how much of the apprenticeship programme the individual requires to become occupationally competent. Assuming there is some relevant prior learning, the training provider must assess whether the individual still needs an apprenticeship with a minimum duration of 12 months with at least 20% off-the-job training. In some circumstances, this amount of training will not be necessary for the individual so the learner is ineligible for the apprenticeship programme and an alternative should be considered.

For example

David has been working as a Senior Healthcare Support Worker in a medical ward in a small general hospital but secures a new job working in a specialist renal unit. He will need to undertake some further development and his manager is considering how he might benefit from an apprenticeship. Initial assessment shows that David can evidence most of the high-level knowledge, skills and behaviours in the Senior Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship standard, but he does need to develop some knowledge and skills which are specific to his work in the renal unit. These can be developed through on-the-job mentoring,

a short course and some specialist equipment supplier training. The employer and the training provider will need to consider if this meets the 12 month and 20% off the job requirements to ensure that they are meeting the rules.

What counts as prior learning?

In recognising prior learning, the following should be considered against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the standard or framework:

◆ Work experience

This is particularly important if the apprentice is an existing employee, but also consider where knowledge, skills and behaviours may be transferable from experience gained outside of the health sector

◆ Prior education, training or associated qualification(s) in a related sector subject area (this goes beyond just English and maths)

For example:

Hal is a Registered Nurse and has completed the Non-Medical Prescribing course a year ago at his local university. An apprenticeship opportunity has arisen in the local GP Practice for a Nurse Practitioner role. Credit from the prescribing course will be counted by the university towards the MSc in Advanced Clinical Practice that he will need to complete for the Advanced Clinical Practitioner apprenticeship, reducing the cost and time it will take to complete the apprenticeship.

◆ Any previous apprenticeship undertaken

For example:

Mo has completed the Nursing Associate apprenticeship but has ambitions to become a Registered Nurse. The employer and Mo should consider what arrangements are in place with their chosen university to offer a shortened Registered Nurse degree apprenticeship.

Who is responsible for doing the initial assessment?

The ESFA states that the main training provider is responsible for:

- ◆ Assessing the prior learning of the individual before the apprenticeship can begin;
- ◆ Agreeing with the employer how the programme will be delivered to reflect any relevant existing knowledge, skills and behaviours; and
- ◆ Recording prior learning in the evidence pack and commitment statement

However, in practice it is reasonable to expect that the employer will be actively involved in this process prior to offering an apprenticeship employment opportunity. This is particularly true if the individual is an existing employee where the employer will have much to contribute.

How is prior learning assessed?

ESFA does not mandate how a provider assesses or determines prior learning, just that it must be done, and the findings taken account of.

The knowledge, skills and behaviours defined in the apprenticeship should normally be used as the basis for initial assessment.

Models for assessing prior learning vary, but some good examples include:

- ◆ A professional discussion with the individual to discuss knowledge, skills and behaviours gained in previous roles against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the apprenticeship
- ◆ Evidence of competence from current or previous roles, including things like job descriptions, appraisal documents and qualifications certificates, indicating the individual is ready for progression

Checklists are provided at the end of this guidance as an aide for employers and training providers.

How should prior learning be recorded?

The ESFA does not mandate how prior learning should be recorded, only that the initial assessment must be documented in the evidence pack and summarised on the commitment statement. Initial assessment is subject to audit checks and funds may be recovered where initial assessment has not taken place, has not been evidenced or a price reduction has not been made to reflect the prior learning.

How does recognition of prior learning feed into funding negotiations?

The funding band of the apprenticeship is based on an apprentice requiring development to meet all the knowledge, skills and behaviours defined by the apprenticeship.

ESFA funding rules state that the apprenticeship content, duration and price must be reduced where the individual has relevant prior learning. Prior learning must be factored into the price that is negotiated between the provider and the employer: apprenticeship funding must not be used to pay for, or certify, the delivery of existing knowledge, skills and behaviours as this represents poor value for money. There are audit checks to ensure a price reduction has been made to account for prior learning and the reduced training content required. To meet the ESFA funding rules, the training element within the apprenticeship must have a minimum duration of 12 months with at least 20% off-the-job training.

How does this all link to a 12-month minimum duration and off-the-job training?

Where there is prior learning, the content and duration of the apprenticeship must be reduced to reflect this. The new (reduced) duration must still meet the minimum threshold of 12 months. At least 20% of the paid hours for the new (reduced) duration must be spent on off-the-job training.

How is recognition of prior learning taken into account when applying to be on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers?

ESFA apprenticeship funding rules require main training providers and employer providers to take account of prior learning. As part of the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP) application processes, main providers and employer providers must submit their policy on how they will perform initial assessments of apprentices' prior learning.

Apprenticeship Initial Assessment Checklist for Employers

Preparation for Initial Assessment:

- Have you selected an apprenticeship standard?

A full range of apprenticeship standards can be found at [Healthcare Apprenticeship Standards Online](#).

You may also wish to consider career progression opportunities using the [Apprenticeship Pathways Tool](#).

- Have you made the individual aware that relevant prior learning can count towards the apprenticeship?
- Have you asked the individual to consider what knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) set out in the apprenticeship they may already be able to evidence?

Initial Assessment:

- Have you assessed the individual's work experience, prior education, training or associated qualifications against the KSBs set out in the apprenticeship?
- Have you worked with the main training provider set out the individual's baseline level of competency against the KSBs to determine the remaining content required?

Eligibility decision point:

- Assuming there is some prior learning, has the training provider assessed whether the individual still meets the eligibility criteria of requiring significant and sustained new training (a minimum duration of 12 months with at least 20% off-the-job training)?

If not, the individual is not eligible for an apprenticeship and an alternative programme should be considered.

Apprenticeship Initial Assessment Checklist for Main Training Providers Working with Health Sector Employers

Preparation for Initial Assessment:

- Has the employer selected the apprenticeship standard?
- Is the individual aware that relevant prior learning can count towards the apprenticeship?
- Has the individual considered what knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) set out in the apprenticeship they may already be able to evidence? set out in the apprenticeship they may already be able to evidence?

Initial Assessment:

- Have you and the employer assessed the individual's work experience, prior education, training or associated qualifications against the KSBs set out in the apprenticeship?
- Have you worked with the employer to set out the individual's baseline level of competency against the KSBs to determine the remaining content required?

Eligibility decision point:

- Assuming there is some prior learning, have you assessed whether the individual still meets the eligibility criteria of requiring significant and sustained new training (a minimum duration of 12 months with at least 20% off-the-job training)?

If not, the individual is not eligible for an apprenticeship and an alternative programme should be considered.

Following Initial Assessment and Confirmation of Eligibility:

- Have you documented prior learning in the evidence pack and summarised this in the commitment statement?
- Have you and the employer agreed how the programme will be delivered (including the cost) to reflect the apprentice's existing KSBs?
- Have you set out key milestones for the apprentice so their progress can be reviewed against this?
- Have you assessed the apprenticeship training material against the job role to ensure sufficient opportunities for the apprentice to consolidate their learning in the workplace?