

Skills England: Apprenticeship Assessment Reform

July 2026



Apprenticeship Assessment Reform

- Apprenticeship assessment is being reformed following a DfE review in 2024, which found that while apprenticeships continue to deliver strong outcomes, the apprenticeship assessment process can be overly complex, burdensome, and time-consuming.
- In February 2025, the Government published a new set of assessment guiding principles outlining the changes required.
- These changes will apply to all apprenticeships, at all levels.

The Principles (DfE, February 2025)

Reforms will:

- simplify and shorten assessment plans
- remove unnecessary duplication
- improve the apprentice experience
- maintain high quality and meet employer needs
- enable timely and efficient assessment
- enable innovation and flexibility in assessment design

[Changes to apprenticeship assessment, 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

Proportionate	No unnecessary duplication	Allow on-programme assessment where appropriate
Allow centre-assessment where appropriate	Shorter plans with minimal level prescription	Employer verified behaviours
Minimum number of assessment methods	Make best use of technology	Assessment at the right time, in the right place

Assessment Reform: The Key Changes

- Occupational standards (which define competence through achievement of KSBs) remain
- End of 'EPA', but not end of apprenticeship assessment
- Proposals aim to remove duplication of assessment (e.g., use of mandatory qualifications)
- Knowledge and Skills statements will be grouped (and graded)
 - Only some K and S statements mandated
 - Methods
 - Sampling introduced
- Employer Verification of Behaviours
 - Part of apprenticeship certification process
 - Guidance expected
- Awarding Organisations design and deliver assessment
 - AOs responsible for designing and producing assessment materials
 - AOs can offer centre-based assessment (on programme assessment)
 - Sampling is being introduced, which may mean some apprentices are not directly assessed by AO
 - Potential for variation in conformity and consistency
- On programme assessment to be introduced
 - Providers to carry out on programme (formative) assessment
 - Assessment organisations to complete remaining 30% of (synoptic) assessment

Apprenticeship Assessment Reform

Benefits

- Simplification of assessment plans
- Removal of duplication, and good use of content in mandated qualifications
- Improved and more timely achievements
- Reduction in apprentice workload

Concerns and risks

- Variability and inconsistency in assessment outcomes
- Independence of assessment by competent professionals
- Recognition of, and routes to, professional qualification and appropriate skills cards
- Removal of behaviours from assessment in favour of 'employer verification'

The challenge: to ensure the outcomes of apprenticeships remain industry and professionally recognised

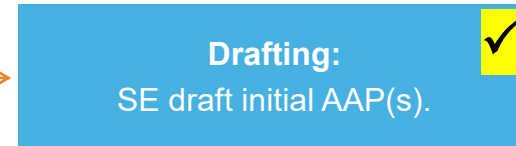
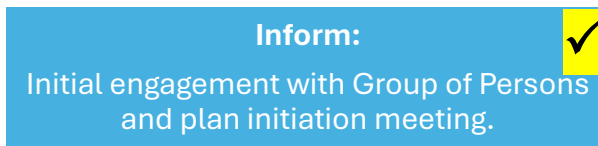
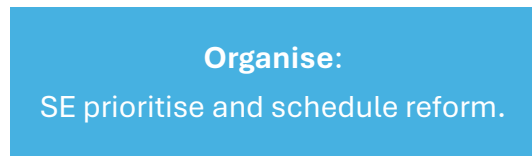
- Alignment with the Building Safety Act / Industry Competence Steering Group requirements
 - Consider future scope, implications and impact of the single Building Safety Regulator (on occupations and routes to competence)
 - Maintenance and improvement in the quality of competence outcomes
 - Public safety, regulatory compliance and professional judgement

The role and purpose of the ‘Groups of Persons’

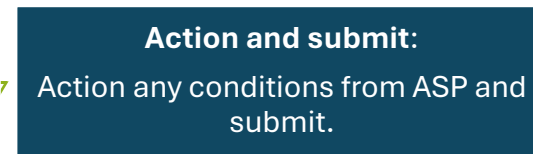
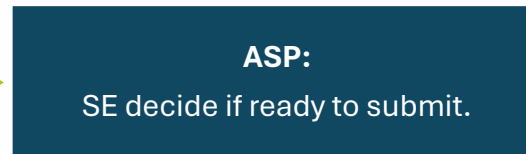
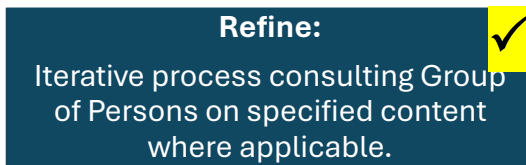
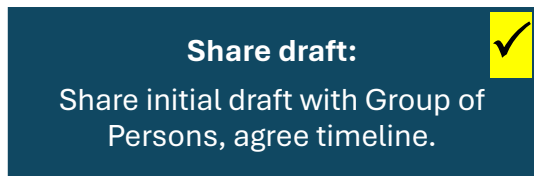
Who are the Groups of Persons?	The Group of Persons is the terminology used in legislation. To implement the assessment reforms, we will work with an expanded version of the Trailblazer Group. In the future, we will work with Occupational Groups drawn from Skills England’s Expert Network. As per the DfE’s apprenticeship assessment principles, as a minimum each Group of Persons must include representation from the following stakeholder groups: • Employers • Assessment organisations • Training providers • The organisation responsible for external quality assurance • Industry and PSRBs (professional, statutory and regulatory bodies) • Trade unions where applicable
What will the Group of Persons do?	Purpose: Support the preparation of the apprenticeship assessment plan to deliver the aims of the reforms and comply with the relevant policies. What can the Group of Persons influence? 1. Advise providers on occupationally relevant assessments 2. Any additional assessment requirements, in line with any relevant policy documents

Where does the Group of Persons fit in?

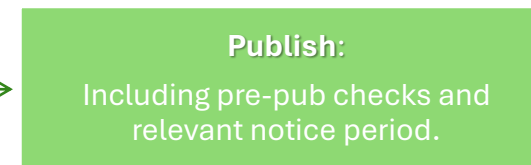
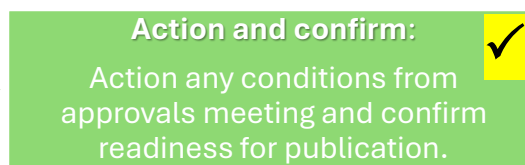
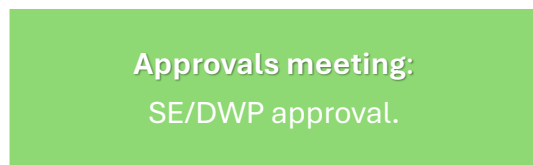
Skills England &
GoP development



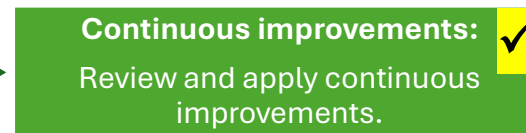
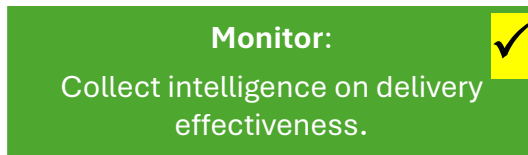
External
consultation



Finalisation



Live delivery



How do Employers and PSRBs support apprenticeship quality?

Employers	- Employers are the occupational experts. Their expertise is best utilised in developing the occupational standard to ensure apprentices can deliver for employers. The occupational standard continues to underpin the apprenticeship assessment. - Employers have three opportunities to ensure high quality is maintained: - in developing the occupational standard making sure it is fit for purpose - supporting assessment organisations in their employer engagement activity to support their design and delivery of apprenticeship assessments - sharing live intelligence with the assessment organisations they have contracted with and the Group of Persons, for the purposes of continuous improvements to ensure lessons are learned and acted upon.
PSRBs	- PSRBs are professional standards and competence experts. They must ensure the occupational standard aligns with the professional standards set, and that apprenticeship assessment aligns with their requirements. - PSRBs have several opportunities to ensure high quality is maintained: - in developing the occupational standard making sure it meets the professional standards set - supporting Groups of Persons and assessment organisations to align their assessment processes with the requirements set by the profession - supporting training providers in their design and delivery of the apprenticeship through accreditation / approval processes - supporting employers in their delivery of the apprenticeship through professional development and mentoring - sharing live intelligence with the Group of Persons, for the purposes of continuous improvements to ensure lessons are learned and acted upon.

How should Professional Bodies engage in the Apprenticeship Assessment Reform Process?

Skills England

Skills England contact the lead for the 'Group of Persons' to request an initial meeting to outline the steps of the assessment review process

Skills England independently review the current occupational standard and end point assessment plan (for currency and compliance)

Skills England will draft an initial Apprenticeship Assessment Plan for discussion with the Group of Persons

Where there is a mandatory qualification, Skills England will carry out initial mapping of the Knowledge and Skills statements to the published qualification specifications and state whether they believe coverage is: full, partial or not covered

Skills England may also suggest revisions to some K&S Statements

Group of Persons

The Group of Persons will be convened by Skills England, comprising representation from existing trailblazer group members, employers, assessment organisation(s), professional institution(s), trade organisation(s), training providers, and other appropriate stakeholders for example, unions

The Group of Persons should review the:

- Proposed K&S grouping into assessment outcomes: Agree or provide rationale for review
- Proposed set of mandatory K&S statements to be assessed in all cases: agree or provide rationale for review
- Mandatory Qualification mapping (where relevant): This is to ensure mapping is correct (agree), or make the case for revisions to be made to the mapping and the AAP (inclusion, grouping and statements)
- Assessment methods to ensure they are valid, credible and suitable for your sector
- Wording in the AAP to ensure coverage of 'relevant frameworks, standards, guidance or other documents that may be published by industry regulators, professional bodies, and other representative groups'

The Group of Persons, where necessary, revise the occupational standard and its KS&B statements for currency and link these back into the AAP

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies

The Group of Persons with Skills England should engage with the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to ensure the AAP can deliver the appropriate outcomes to assessment, using appropriate methods

This means working with the:

- Range of professional institutions to ensure professional outcomes can be achieved readily
- Skills card issuing bodies to ensure the appropriate skills cards are maintained as outcomes
- Appropriate Industry Competence Steering Group lead to ensure the requirements for the Building Safety Regulator can be achieved (noting that the consultation is live)

With this engagement in place, the AAP should reflect appropriate wording in the AAP to ensure coverage of relevant frameworks, standards, guidance or other documents that may be published by industry regulators, professional bodies, and other representative groups

Skills England will liaise with colleagues in OfQual, OfS, the Skills England Assessment team, and with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure there is alignment and agreement

Review, Consultation and Approval

Working collaboratively, revisions to the Occupational Standard and the Apprenticeship Assessment Plan can be proposed (this can be an iterative process)

Once an agreement is reached, a pathway to formal submission can be considered

Skills England will provide an outline and timescale for formal submission and public consultation

Skills England will then issue the agreed revisions to the AAP (and occupational standard, where required) for public consultation

Public consultation is a two-to-four-week process

Feedback will be gathered by Skills England and shared with the Group of Persons for final revisions to be considered and/or made.

The final revisions will then be processes by Skills England and an agreed timescale for implementation discussed and agreed.

Role and responsibilities of PSRBs

What do PSRBs currently do?	What will PSRBs do going forward?	How will PSRBs do this going forward?
During design, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs): • provide their expertise to ensure their requirements are met within the occupational standard and end point assessment plan During delivery, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs): • provide expertise to ensure training meets the requirements they set (accreditation/approval) • ensure apprenticeship assessment is robust and where possible, meets the requirements of the profession to minimise any potential duplication of apprenticeship assessment	During preparation of the AAP, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) provide insight and intelligence to: ▪ support Groups of Persons ▪ support DfE's reform principles ▪ inform decisions about the essential information required ▪ advise how they might endorse the apprenticeship During delivery, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs): • as per existing responsibilities • help stakeholders to understand the reforms within their sector	During preparation of the AAP, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) work closely with the Groups of Persons and SE to understand how • assessment reform can meet and secure the professional standards set • ensure DfE's principles are being operationalised During delivery, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs): • support delivery and assessment approaches to reduce, where feasible, duplication with registration/recognition requirements • advise on continuous improvement

Skills England: Apprenticeship Assessment Plans

Revised Apprenticeship Assessment Plans (AAPs)

- Original ambition was to have 2-page AAPs, but they are now likely to be either very short or 3 to 4 pages
- Details **minimum** assessment requirements
- Going from very prescriptive to something significantly less so
- Design of assessment will sit with awarding organisation
- Providers may deliver aspects of assessment, but with oversight from awarding organisation, where appropriate
- Providers may be able to ‘mark elements’ of apprentice assessment
- Employers to ‘verify’ behaviours (with assessment organisations having evidence of this to release completion certificates)

Section	Description
Assessment details	Explains a number of core principles that apply to the apprenticeship’s assessment, including the purpose of assessment outcomes and the expectation that all outcomes must be met. This section also sets out expectations relating to sampling, timing, and marking of assessments.
Assessment of behaviours	Clarifies that the employer is responsible for verifying that each behaviour statement has been sufficiently demonstrated.
Assessment outcomes	Summarises the content of the occupational standard into assessment outcomes and explains which knowledge and skills statements map to each outcome. Where there is a mandatory qualification, these outcomes describe the content that is not assessed by the qualification only.
Assessment requirements	Notes specific requirements in relation to individual assessment outcomes or groups of outcomes. This may include describing specific priorities that inform the approach to assessment.
Performance descriptor	Describes the characteristics of a ‘pass’ and any grades above a pass.

Assessment requirements in full can be found [here](#)

Assessment Plans: What has changed?

What does the current EPA plan do?	What does the reformed AAP do?	How will this stakeholder get the detailed information they need?
Provides apprentices with detailed information on how they will be assessed.	Provides information for apprentices on the minimum requirements for assessment to enable Assessment Organisations to develop detailed assessment strategies and specifications which support valid and reliable assessment.	Apprentices will use guidance issued by the assessment organisations to understand when/how they will be assessed and how to prepare.
Provides employers with detailed information to give them confidence in the assessment of occupational competence.	Requires assessment organisations to design assessments to ensure: - employers have confidence that the apprentice has reached the expected performance standard - apprentices are sufficiently secure in their knowledge and skills, so that they could demonstrate their competence in different contexts	Employers will select the assessment organisation. They can ask how the assessment confirms occupational competence and refer to published assessment materials to gain confidence. Employers may work with the assessment organisations to support the design of valid and reliable assessments. Employers can reference Ofqual's or OfS's conditions of registration to understand the requirements assessment organisations must comply with.
Provides assessment organisations with stringent detailed criteria to develop assessments.	Provides assessment organisations with minimum requirements to produce valid and reliable assessments.	Assessment organisation will use the existing EPA plan, their delivery experience, SE's general requirements, any regulatory requirements, training provider input and employer input to design and deliver the assessment.
Provides training providers with detailed information to prepare apprentices for their assessments.	Provides training providers with the minimum requirements for assessment.	Training providers will work closely with the assessment organisation to agree how to support readiness for assessment and how to prepare apprentices.
Provides professional bodies with reassurance that the apprenticeship satisfies their requirements.	Provides professional bodies with minimum requirements on how the apprentices will be assessed, any information on alignment and where to go for further information.	Professional bodies can ask how the assessment is designed and refer to published AO assessment materials to determine if the design fulfils the professional body requirements. They can work with assessment organisations to maintain alignment.

Content of Assessment Plans (1 of 2)

Introduction	Explains the assessment plan's purpose , status and relationship to other documents
Assessment Outcomes	Summarises the content of the occupational standard into assessment outcomes and explains which knowledge and skills statements map to each outcome. Where there is an additional qualification mandated, these outcomes describe the content (if any) that is not assessed in the qualification. This section also sets out the mandatory knowledge and skills statements that must be assessed in every version of the assessment that is made available. K&S statements in bold are mandatory. Knowledge and skills statements which offer opportunities to develop functional English and Maths are identified with an asterisk (*)

Content of Assessment Plans (2 of 2)

Assessment Requirements	Outlines the mandatory assessment method that must be used in every version of the assessment that is made available, together with optional, additional assessment methods as appropriate Outlines additional requirements regarding setting, marking or timing of assessment. This is where assessment organisations must have ‘due regard for relevant frameworks, standards, guidance or other documents that may be published by industry regulators, professional bodies, and other representative groups’
Performance Descriptors	Describes the characteristics of a ‘pass’ or ‘distinction’ in six specific areas: 1. Applied Knowledge 2. Applied Skills 3. Regulatory and Procedural Awareness 4. Communication and Collaboration 5. Information Use and Decision Making 6. Responsibility and Autonomy

Mandatory Qualifications (MQs) Policy

Additional qualifications mandated within occupational standards	Where necessary, one or more additional qualifications may be mandated as a completion requirement for an apprenticeship (sometimes referred to as ‘mandatory qualifications’ or MQs). These are determined on a case-by-case basis for individual standards for one of the following reasons: • the qualification is a regulatory or legal requirement to operate in that occupation • the qualification is required for professional body membership • the qualification has such currency in the labour market that an apprentice would be at a significant disadvantage without it MQs will be carefully mapped by Skills England against the knowledge and skills statements set out in the occupational standard and may be used in revised apprenticeship assessment in one of three ways, shown below.
A. An MQ(s) is comprehensive, and an apprenticeship assessment is not required	Skills England’s mapping activities demonstrate a comprehensive level of coverage, and the MQ(s) will provide the sole assessment for the apprenticeship. The qualification(s) provide the scope to assess all the knowledge and skills set out in the occupational standard and mapping identifies that a comprehensive proportion of the apprenticeship content is covered.
B. An MQ(s) is sufficient, and an apprenticeship assessment is not required.	In this case, a small number of knowledge and skills statements are not covered, but these are not sufficient to create a separate apprenticeship assessment. The qualification(s) assesses a sufficient proportion of the knowledge and skills set out in the occupational standard and a sufficient proportion of the apprenticeship content is covered to provide confidence of occupational competence. The qualification(s) serve as the sole means of assessment for the apprenticeship. However, there are a small number of knowledge and skills statements which are not covered by the qualification(s). These will be outlined in the AAP. These will not require assessment but do require training. This approach will be used when any remaining knowledge and skills statements are not sufficient to support the creation of further, valid and reliable assessment. This could include, for example, where there is insufficient content to develop meaningful assessment outcomes or differentiate levels of performance or enable AOs to develop valid assessments.
C. Apprenticeship assessment is required alongside the MQ(s)	In some instances, mapping will identify that the MQ assesses an insufficient proportion of the knowledge and skills set out in the occupational standard. In this case, there are a significant number of unmapped knowledge and skills statements that need to be assessed. This means that the MQ(s) will not provide the sole assessment for the apprenticeship. For example, a small health and safety qualification, usually taken at the start of an apprenticeship or in other cases where there are sufficient knowledge and skills statements remaining to support the creation of a valid and reliable apprenticeship assessment. In these cases, apprenticeship assessment will also be required alongside the MQ(s) and assessment outcomes will apply to describe the content that is not assessed by the qualification(s).

Degree Apprenticeship Policy (1 of 2)

Degree Apprenticeship	• A degree can be mandated as a completion requirement for an apprenticeship (referred to as a ‘degree-apprenticeship’). • The degree must be aligned with the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) in the occupational standard. • This means the degree can provide the sole assessment for the apprenticeship and achievement of the degree confirms completion of the apprenticeship. Criteria: A degree can be mandated in an apprenticeship on a case-by-case basis for one of the following reasons: • a Level 6 degree can be mandated in a Level 6 apprenticeship covering a ‘degree level entry’ occupation • a master’s degree can be mandated in a Level 7 apprenticeship covering a “master’s level entry” occupation
Development of bespoke degrees	The development of bespoke degrees is required to support a degree-apprenticeship. Learning outcomes of the degree must be aligned with the KSBs in the occupational standard and all KSBs must be taught. Degrees must be reviewed/developed after the degree apprenticeship is published, to ensure that the degree learning outcomes align with the KSBs. This means that the KSBs would constitute the degree learning outcomes, ensuring that the KSB outcomes determine professional competence and the award of the degree. Behaviours are verified by employers and do not contribute to the apprenticeship grade.

Degree Apprenticeship Policy (2 of 2)

Degree Apprenticeships: Assessment Outcomes	Assessment outcomes apply to all AAPs, except where a mandated qualification or a degree replaces the entire apprenticeship assessment. The degree's assessment outcome will confirm completion of the apprenticeship.
Degree Apprenticeships: Grading	- Where an apprenticeship is assessed solely through a degree, the apprenticeship will be graded on a pass or fail basis. A pass must represent full occupational competence in the relevant occupation, ensuring that the apprentice meets all required knowledge and skills as defined in the occupational standard. - Whilst the apprenticeship certificate will record a pass, the degree may operate with grading approaches that are different to the apprenticeship. This means that the degree could award grades above a pass and retain the degree classification system.
Degree Apprenticeships: Delivery Arrangements	Higher Education Providers (HEPs) operating under sub-contractual and validation arrangements may deliver degree-apprenticeships, including the apprenticeship assessment. Where a degree-apprenticeship is delivered through validation or sub-contracting, the HEP holding the degree-awarding power is responsible for awarding the degree-apprenticeship. The assessment of degree-apprenticeships must be delivered by a HEP acting in its role as an AO. AOs must comply with regulatory requirements and be registered with the OfS for each degree-apprenticeship they assess. There are broadly three arrangements recognised by the OfS through which registered HEPs may deliver higher education. HEPs must operate under at least one of the following: - the provider holds degree awarding powers and awards its own degrees - the provider doesn't hold degree awarding powers and delivers provision through a validation arrangement with a provider that does - the provider doesn't hold degree awarding powers and delivers provision through a sub-contractual arrangement with a provider that does

Standard degree apprenticeship assessment plan content

The purpose of the assessment plan is to set out the minimum requirements for the assessment of knowledge and skills so that assessment organisations can validly and reliably design and deliver the assessment of occupational competence in line with DfE's reform principles.

It should be used in conjunction with the [Requirements and guidance for apprenticeship assessment - GOV.UK](#)

Section	Description
Introduction	Explains the assessment plan's purpose, its relationship to other documents and explains what the degree assessment does.
Degree qualification	States the qualification must be achieved to be awarded the apprenticeship.
Assessment outcomes	- Explains that the knowledge, skills and behaviours within the occupational standard fully align with the learning outcomes listed in the degree. - States that the degree's assessment outcome confirms apprenticeship completion.
Grading	Lists the available grades.
Professional recognition	References any relevant alignment in the occupational standard and signposts where to get further information.