

The Apprenticeship Approvals Group

Terms of
Reference
2021/2022

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1 Purpose and functions

1.1 Purpose of the Apprenticeship Approvals Group

The Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG) plays a key role in the effective governance of Scottish Apprenticeships (Scottish Apprenticeships includes Foundation, Modern, Technical, Higher, Professional and Graduate Apprenticeships). The AAG is an independent group that works closely with the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board Standards and Frameworks group (SAAB SFG) as part of the governance structure. The purpose of AAG is to ensure that Scottish Apprenticeships meet the needs of employers and provide high quality learning opportunities to individuals.

1.2 Key functions of AAG

AAG will carry out the following primary function and sub functions:

Primary function

1. Evaluate all submitted Scottish Apprenticeships for approval if they meet the approval criteria

Sub functions

- 1.1 Maintain and enhance the quality of all Scottish Apprenticeships
- 1.2 Ensure that all approved Scottish Apprenticeships align to and support the achievement of key Scottish Government Skills policies
- 1.3 Provide assurance and recommendations to SAAB SFG in relation to Scottish Apprenticeship development
- 1.4 Provide feedback and reports on AAG performance to SAAB SFG, SG officials and Ministers

1.3 Other functions within Scottish Apprenticeship Governance

Leadership – SAAB SFG

- Ensure that underpinning infrastructure can support policy objectives
- Provide recommendations to Scottish Government
- Strong and relevant employer leadership
- Act as custodians of Apprenticeships in the absence of a sector skills council

Development – Technical Expert Groups (TEGs) and Qualification Design Group (QDG)

- Development group for an occupational cluster/pathway
- Lead development across all Scottish Apprenticeships
- Consistent approach to development across all Scottish Apprenticeships
- Direct employer representation (SMEs and large employers)
- Development of qualification aligned to apprenticeship utilising QDG

The Scottish Apprenticeships governance structure in Scotland is outlined in Appendix 2.

2 Membership and key role

2.1 Membership representation

AAG membership consists of:

- The chair; and
- 13 other organisations who are listed below. Individuals are proposed by their organisation and appointed as members of AAG by SAAB SFG
- Substitutions will not be accepted.

Members are drawn from employers, the education and training sector, regulatory bodies and social partners:

- Employer (chair) (from SAAB SFG)
- Employer member (from SAAB EEG)
- Employer member (from SAAB EEQu)
- Apprenticeship member (from SAAB AEG)
- Scottish Government (SG)
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
- Education Scotland
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- SQA Accreditation
- The Scottish Training Federation (STF)
- Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards (FISSS)
- Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC)
- Colleges Scotland
- The SCQF Partnership

There is a distinction between acting as members of AAG and the responsibilities which members have in their day to day roles. Members of AAG must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias. Members are required to respect confidential and sensitive aspects of any development work.

2.2 The chair

The chair of AAG will be an employer.

The chair of AAG shall be appointed for a period of two years.

The SAAB SFG chair will propose the chair and vice chair of the AAG and the SAAB SFG will approve any appointment.

The AAG chair will propose new or replacement members to AAG; appointments will be confirmed by SAAB SFG.

The chair will check for any conflicts of interest at the beginning of each meeting.

A bi-annual report will be provided to the SAAB SFG by the AAG chair.

2.3 The Secretariat

SDS shall act as Secretary of the AAG and will be responsible for:

- issuing a schedule of meetings, venue, time, and agenda items with prior agreement from AAG chair
- collating and circulating all papers at least one week before meeting
- taking a minute of the proceedings, including the names of those in attendance
- ensuring approved minutes are posted to the SDS website
- maintaining a database of agendas; minutes of meetings; approved Scottish Apprenticeships; correspondence to SAAB SFG, AAG sub group and other stakeholders; other general documents
- hosting and updating all relevant documents on the SDS website
- dealing with stakeholder enquiries about changes to the content of Scottish Apprenticeships

The minutes will be ratified as an accurate reflection of the meeting at the subsequent AAG meeting. Minutes of meetings will be circulated promptly to all members of the AAG. All minutes will be published on the SDS website unless there is valid non-disclosure reason under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

2.4 Responsibilities of members

AAG will act on a collective basis, responsibilities of members are outlined below under the primary function and sub functions.

1. Evaluate all submitted Scottish Apprenticeships for approval if they meet the approval criteria primarily the Definition of Apprenticeships Principles.

1.1 Maintain and enhance the quality of all Scottish Apprenticeships

- identifying any improvements required to Scottish Apprenticeships including lessons learned and implications to the wider system
- work with the relevant approval organisations for Scottish Apprenticeships components to provide assurance that they continue to be fit for purpose

1.2 Ensure that all approved Scottish Apprenticeships align to and support the achievement of key Scottish Government Skills policies

- checking Scottish Apprenticeships fit with Scottish Government policy and priorities, and align with industry and economic need, Fair Work and job opportunities
- providing feedback on Scottish Apprenticeships submissions and approvals
- providing guidance to development partners when changes occur

1.3 Providing assurance and recommendations to SAAB SFG in relation to Scottish Apprenticeships development

- sharing information and intelligence with SAAB SFG, SG Policy officials and SDS and other parties for consideration in terms of a national joined up approach to policy development and delivery of Scottish Apprenticeships. This will include:
 - assisting in identifying overlaps and gaps in activity

- assessing evidence of demand for Scottish Apprenticeships
- seeking and acting on advice from SAAB, SAAB SFG and other relevant stakeholders

1.4 Provide feedback and reports on AAG performance

- providing a quarterly progress and highlight reporting to SAAB SFG
- provide a bi-annual report for Scottish Government Officials and Ministers, to be signed off by SAAB SFG chair

Additional responsibilities of AAG members

- ambassadors for the Scottish Apprenticeship Programme

Further details of AAG processes and responsibilities are included in appendix 1
See also Appendix 2 Code of Conduct.

2.5 Observers

- 2.5.1 At any time a maximum of 3 representatives from Member organisations (in total) may be invited to attend meetings of AAG as observers. Observers shall be entitled to receive the papers for such meetings at the same time as Members, or as soon as possible thereafter if this is not reasonably practicable.
- 2.5.2 In addition, there are a number of standing observers who provide AAG with specialist advice and information.
- 2.5.3 Observers invited to attend meetings of AAG shall have regard to the organisational values of AAG (as listed under paragraph 5) as if they were Members.
- 2.5.4 Although an observer shall be entitled to attend and contribute to any meetings of AAG, he or she shall not be entitled to vote on any matter put by the Chair to a vote of the Members.
- 2.5.5 The basis upon which observers are invited to join the meetings of AAG shall be made on such terms and conditions as the Members see fit, including (without limitation to the generality of the foregoing) frequency of attendance, duration and cessation as an observer. For the avoidance of doubt, an observer may be excluded from any meeting of AAG, or any part of a meeting, if AAG considers it appropriate.
- 2.5.6 **Additional Inputs to AAG Meetings**
AAG may on occasion invite submitting organisations to attend and provide additional information to AAG in support of their submission this invite will be at the discretion of the AAG Chair.

2.6 Technical Assurance of Scottish Apprenticeships submissions (AAG sub group)

Technical Assurance will be carried out by the AAG sub group, which is formed of a representative from SQA Accreditation, and Skills Development Scotland.

Technical assurance checks will be carried out to scrutinise the final drafts of all Scottish Apprenticeships and, where required, feedback will be provided on any changes to submitting organisation prior to AAG submission for approval.

This will provide the AAG with the technical assurance that the Scottish Apprenticeships are ready to be evaluated by AAG with a view to approval if they meet the approval criteria. The responsibility for quality assurance lies firmly with the submitting organisation who must submit final draft Apprenticeships to AAG sub group which meet relevant guidance, quality requirements and are in a publish ready state.

3 Skills and experience of members

3.1 The AAG membership will bring relevant and up-to-date experience in a range of sectoral interests, including:

- knowledge and experience of developments in the vocational education and training landscape
- knowledge of Government policies and priorities
- experience of working on Apprenticeship, qualifications or standards development and implementation
- knowledge of emerging developments, technologies and models of Apprenticeships, standards, frameworks and work-based learning

4 Meetings

- 4.1 The AAG shall normally meet monthly, where required. The chair of the AAG may call additional meetings as deemed necessary.
- 4.2 An annual schedule of meetings will be set to provide members with the greatest opportunity to attend in person. In the event of a matter of urgency, a meeting may be convened by the chair on less than seven days' notice.
- 4.3 Matters arising at a meeting which require a decision must be decided by at least two thirds of votes of the members present.
- 4.4 Notice of every meeting confirming the venue, time and date together with an agenda of items and associated papers to be discussed shall be sent by email to each member of AAG and any other person expected to attend.
- 4.5 AAG may form and convene sub-groups as required to support the work of the group.

Quorum

- 4.6 The quorum necessary to transact business will be a minimum of 2/3rds, whom must be members (and not observers)
- 4.7 Meetings may be held without members being physically present in the same place, for example, by telephone or video-conference. When a member attends by telephone or video-conference they are counted as being in attendance for the purpose of a quorum

- 4.8 If a quorum is not present, the Chair may adjourn the meeting to another time or agree to proceed if agenda items are not deemed contentious and seek homologation of the decision from Members following the meeting.

5 Review

5.1 Membership Review

Membership will be considered as part of the annual review and evaluation process to ensure the effective role and function of the AAG are maintained. AAG Chair will review membership as part of this annual review.

5.2 Termination of membership

Termination of membership would be considered if a member organisation:

- ceases to exist
- resigns by written notice
- is not represented by the named individual at AAG meetings for a period of three consecutive meetings. The chair of AAG will write to the member organisation to ensure it can consider how best to be represented
- is removed from membership by SAAB SFG. A resolution to remove a member organisation from AAG membership may only be passed if: The member organisation has been given at least twenty-one days' notice in writing of the meeting of AAG at which the resolution shall be proposed and the reasons why it is to be proposed.

5.3 Declaration of Interest

Members must declare and resolve any conflict of interest and relationships.

Members must ensure that they have no conflict of interest with any TEGs whose work they consider. Where a conflict of interest is identified, members will excuse themselves from the section of the meeting within which the conflict exists.

5.4 Review of Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually and will be made publicly available on the SDS website at the following address:

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

Date Approved: 1st July 2021

Review Date: 7th July 2022

6 Appendices

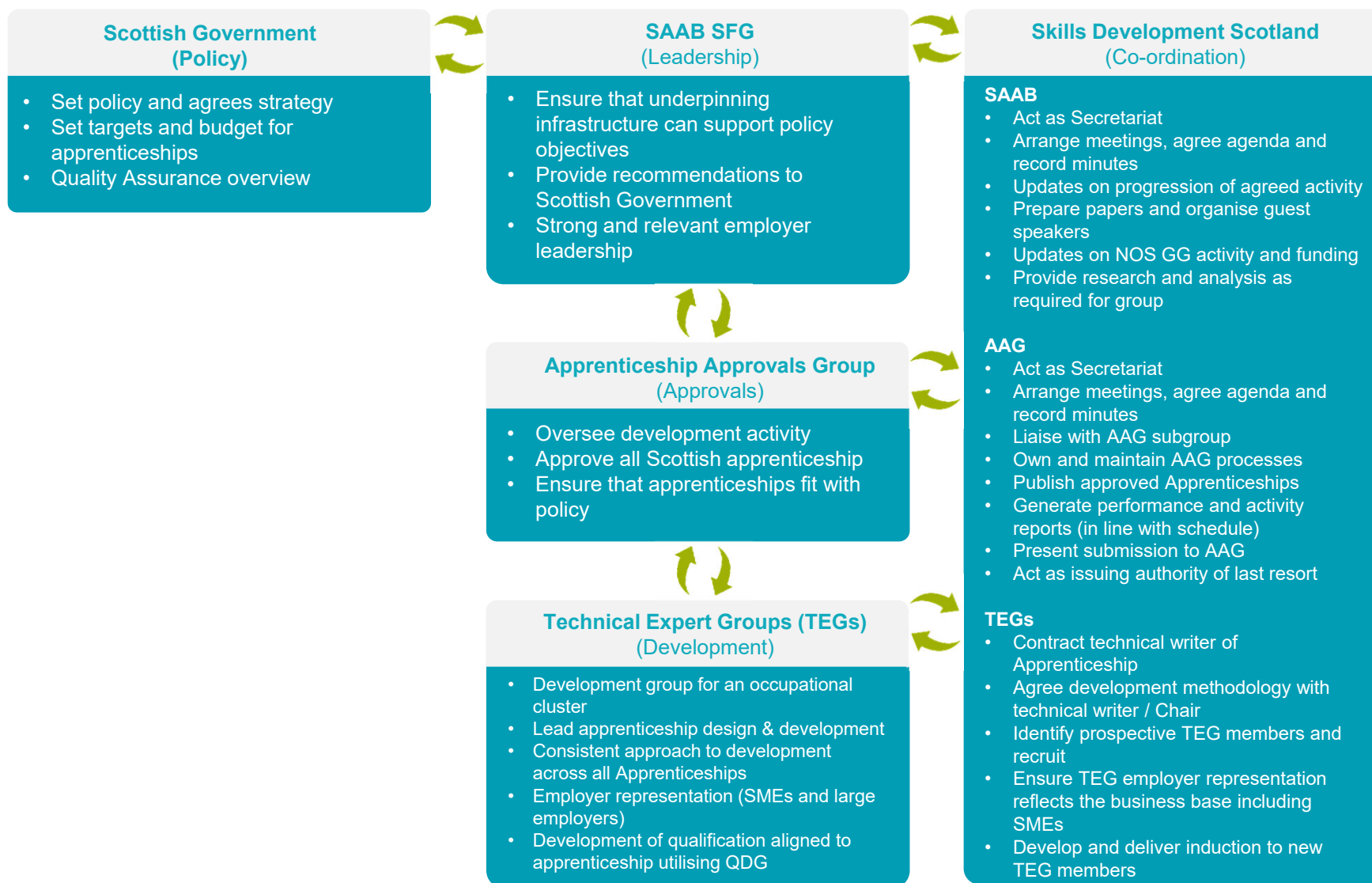
Appendix 1: AAG Processes and Responsibilities

AAG minute and actions process		
Stage	Timescale	Responsibility
AAG Meeting	1st Thursday of every month	All members to attend
Draft AAG minute written up and circulated to members	Within 5 working days of AAG meeting taking place	Secretariat to draft and circulate
List of actions included within minutes	Within 5 working days of AAG meeting taking place	Secretariat to draft and circulate
Comments on draft AAG minutes to be sent to SDS (via "track changes")	Within 5 working days of receiving draft minutes	All members
Comments to be collated by SDS. Final version of the AAG minute circulated to all members	Within 2 working days of receiving all comments	Secretariat
Actions to be completed where possible	Within 3 weeks of AAG meeting taking place	All members
Informing TEGs about Standard and Framework decisions		
Stage	Timescale	Responsibility
AAG secretariat notifies TEG of AAG decision by email, copying in FISSS	Within 5 working days of the AAG meeting	AAG Secretariat
Summary of AAG decisions and changes published on SDS website	Within 5 working days of AAG meeting	SDS
Updated standards and frameworks published on SDS website	Within 2 working days of receipt	SDS
AAG Submission Process		
Stage	Timescale	Responsibility
TEG submits Framework for technical quality assurance check	10 working days prior to AAG Sub Group Meeting	SDS
Technical quality assurance check carried out	10 working days prior to AAG Meeting	AAG Sub Group
Technical quality assurance issues communicated to TEG via email	Within 2 working days of Technical quality assurance check	AAG Sub Group
TEG submits final draft Scottish Apprenticeships for approval to AAG secretariat	5 working days prior to AAG Meeting	TEG
AAG papers distributed	5 working days prior to AAG Meeting	Secretariat
AAG meeting	1st Thursday of month	All members

*full list of dates to be published on SDS website

Appendix 2

The Apprenticeship governance structure in Scotland is outlined in the diagram below.



Appendix 3: AAG Code of Conduct

Apprenticeship Approvals Group Code of Conduct

1. **Decisions must not be restricted by pre-determined views and submissions should not be judged before they have considered the proposals and supporting information :** Members may hold tentative views on the merits of individual submissions to AAG but they should be open to persuasion and alternative points of view. They should only reach their final conclusions once they have considered all the evidence and representations.
2. **Irrelevant considerations and outside influences must not influence decisions and recommendations:** Decisions and recommendations should be based on the relevance and substance of the evidence and arguments put by the parties and not by the identity, status or personality of those providing that evidence or argument.
3. **All offers of gifts, hospitality and other benefits must be declared to the AAG Chair:** No-one should act in a way that could give the impression that they may or have in fact been influenced by gifts, hospitality or other benefits to show favour or disfavour to a particular party.
4. **Everyone must be treated equally, and with dignity and respect:** We must not discriminate against people because of their race, sex, sexuality, marital status, religion, disability or age and must behave at all times with courtesy, patience and understanding.
5. **AAG members must avoid unnecessary delay in reaching decisions and recommendations:** AAG members should not be dilatory in completing work assigned to them and should make every reasonable effort to ensure that decisions and recommendations are made as soon as possible after the relevant evidence has been considered.
6. **AAG Members must be responsible for their own decisions and recommendations:** Except where specific provision has been made in agreement with the AAG Chair, decision-makers should not delegate their responsibilities to anyone else. Nor should they allow anyone to usurp their responsibilities.
7. **Treatment of information submitted to AAG:** Suppliers and contractors submitting information to AAG have the right to expect that the information they provide will be treated as confidential.

May 2021