

DEFINITION OF APPRENTICESHIPS IN SCOTLAND 2025

14 Principles and Guidance



Introduction to the Principles and Guidance for Scottish Apprenticeships

Purpose, Scope, and Annual Review of the Scottish Apprenticeship Principles

Context

The Scottish Government with employer support from the Scottish Apprenticeships Advisory Board (SAAB) established a comprehensive set of principles and supporting guidance to define what an apprenticeship is in Scotland. The principles and guidance ensure continued recognition of robust, industry-led, and quality-assured apprenticeships. These 14 principles set out what apprenticeships are, what differentiates them from other training programmes, work-based learning or vocational qualifications and training methods, and the processes by which they are developed and assured across Scotland.

Purpose

The purpose of these principles is to provide clarity and consistency for stakeholders involved in the creation, approval, and delivery of apprenticeships. They serve as a foundation for the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) and its associated groups, including the Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG), to guide approvals and maintain high standards.

By clearly defining apprenticeships, these principles help ensure skills are transferable across the UK, support national priorities like Fair Work, sustainability, and inclusion, and reduce the risk of misclassification for funding.

Apprenticeships covered by the Principles and Guidance

SAAB is responsible for stewardship, whilst AAG provides approval, for all Scottish Apprenticeships: Foundation, Modern, and Graduate Apprenticeships. The principles and guidance outlined in this document apply to Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships. They are relevant to both publicly funded and self-funded developments, ensuring that every programme aligns with the defined standards, established governance, and proposed legislative requirements through the Tertiary Education and Training Bill and its legal definition of apprenticeship.

Foundation Apprenticeships

Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) are an inherent part of the Scottish Apprenticeship Family and a recognised offer within the senior phase (S4-S6 in school years). However, FAs are distinct from Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships, particularly in that participants are not employed in a paid role for the duration of their programme. In order to ensure alignment and cohesion across the apprenticeship family, the SAAB will work with the Scottish

Government's Foundation Apprenticeship Enhancement Group to create and publish a subset of principles and associated guidance for FAs. These will reflect the educational context of Foundation Apprenticeships and their role in preparing young people for future employment and learning.

Guidance Supporting Each Principle

Each principle is accompanied by detailed guidance that translates the high-level values into practical expectations for stakeholders. This guidance covers critical aspects such as:

- employment status
- occupational competence
- availability and investment
- equality and inclusion
- frameworks
- design methodology
- qualifications and certification
- assessment of competence
- workforce agility
- workplace support
- learning types and duration
- roles and responsibilities
- quality assurance
- accessible documentation.

The guidance is designed to ensure apprenticeships are responsive to industry needs, deliver meaningful employment opportunities, and uphold national standards of quality and portability.

Annual Maintenance

To ensure continued relevance and effectiveness, the principles and guidance are actively maintained and updated by the SAAB Standards and Frameworks Group (SFG). Annual checks will be undertaken enabling the principles and guidance to respond to ongoing education and skills requirements including Scottish Government reforms. This approach ensures that apprenticeships remain aligned with emerging workforce requirements, legislative changes, and stakeholder feedback, safeguarding the integrity and impact on the Scottish Apprenticeship brand.



14 Principles

- 1 Apprenticeships and Employment** – All Modern and Graduate Apprentices are Employed.
- 2 Apprenticeships and Occupational Competence** – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships are designed to develop skills and competence in an occupation required by their employer.
- 3 Availability and Investment** – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships are available across a wide range of occupations and sectors through demand assessment processes.
- 4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships support equality, diversity and inclusion and are designed to ensure there are no barriers to learning or assessment.
- 5 Apprenticeships Frameworks** – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship Frameworks are based on recognised standards that are aligned to occupational activity and skills requirements.
- 6 Apprenticeship Design** – The requirements of a Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships align to occupational requirements are set out in a Standard Apprenticeship Framework document defined by industry which adapts to emerging and future needs.
- 7 Qualifications & Certification** – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships offer internationally recognised, accredited or externally quality assured qualifications at SCQF Levels 5 to 12.
- 8 Assessing Competence** – Each Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship Framework describes the required learning content and method of learning and assessment.
- 9 Enabling Workforce Agility** – The occupational standards and qualifications included in apprenticeships are designed to develop transferable skills across occupations and sectors.
- 10 Supporting the Apprentice in the Workplace** – Apprentices are employees. Employers are required to ensure appropriate support for their employees within the duration of the apprenticeship.
- 11 Types of Learning and Duration** – Apprenticeship learning is delivered to fit the requirements of the Apprenticeship Framework, the needs of the industry and the individual's pace of learning.
- 12 Apprenticeship Roles and Responsibilities** – Employers, Learning Providers and Apprentices/Employees have specific roles and responsibilities to maximise opportunities for success.
- 13 Delivering Quality** – Apprenticeships deliver high quality learning experiences.
- 14 Documentation, Guidance & Support** – Apprenticeship documentation is clear, accessible and easy-to-understand.

Principle 1:

Apprenticeships and Employment – All Modern and Graduate Apprentices are Employed

Guidance:

Employment status is fundamental to the success of an apprenticeship and is what differentiates it from other 'training programmes', 'Work-based Learning' or 'Vocational' qualifications.

The apprentice must be employed in a job with a contract of employment aligned to a Scottish Apprenticeship Framework.

Apprentices are employees first and must have this status from the first day of their apprenticeship.

- The job role must provide the opportunity for the apprentice to gain and develop competence through their knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to achieve the apprenticeship.
- Apprenticeships must align with the Scottish Government's 'Fair Work First' policy.

Principle 2:

Apprenticeships and Occupational Competence – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships are designed to develop skills and competence in an occupation required by their employer.

Guidance:

- Apprentices develop occupational competence primarily through the execution of their duties at work. It is therefore critical that apprenticeship development aligns with the occupation and can be supported within the workplace.
- Apprenticeships are intended to build skills relevant to an occupation rather than training for a specific employer.
- Occupational competence is further supported through the provision of underpinning knowledge. This can be in the form of formal or informal learning and can take place either 'on' or 'off-the-job'.
- Occupational competence is achieved when the employee can execute their duties in a manner consistent with the skills level and the behaviours required of the role.
- Apprenticeships place the learner at the centre, offering a holistic approach to skills development that prepares individuals for the workplace. Apprentices gain technical skills, underpinning knowledge, and develop essential behaviours, aptitudes and Meta-skills that support both immediate job performance and long-term adaptability.

Principle 3:

Availability and Investment – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships are available across a wide range of occupations and sectors through demand assessment processes.

Guidance:

- Apprenticeship availability and investment are aligned to the needs of the Scottish economy and informed by Scottish Government priorities and employer demand, identified through robust sectoral and regional demand assessment processes.
- Apprenticeship investment must demonstrate effective use of public funding whilst delivering economic, societal, environmental and cultural benefits.
- Apprenticeships support the development of skills and competence across a wide range of sectors, including niche industries and are essential to retaining specialist and/or traditional skills.

Principle 4:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships support equality, diversity and inclusion and are designed to ensure there are no barriers to learning or assessment.

Guidance:

- Apprenticeships must be designed and delivered to ensure there are no barriers to access learning or assessment.
- Apprenticeships must align with the Scottish Government's 'Fair Work First' policy. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fair-work-first-guidance-2/pages/9/>
- Apprenticeships must align with the Equality Act 2010

Principle 5:

Apprenticeships Frameworks – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship Frameworks are based on recognised standards that are aligned to occupational activity and skills requirements.

Guidance:

- All Modern and Graduate apprenticeships are designed to align with the needs of occupations and the required competence.
- In the UK the recognised occupational standards of competence are defined as National Occupational Standards (NOS), developed on behalf of respective Devolved Governments.
- Modern Apprenticeships use qualifications based on National Occupational Standards (NOS). These can include Scottish Vocational Qualifications or other relevant qualifications.

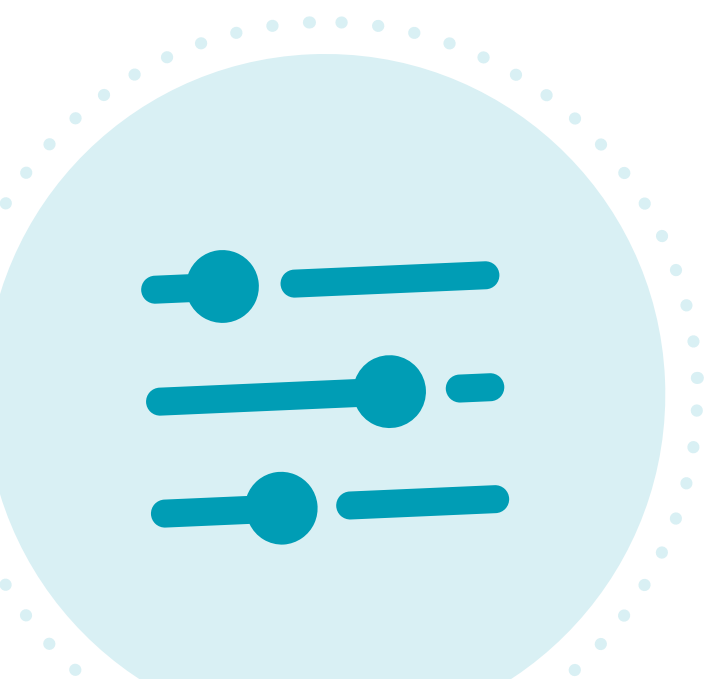
- Graduate Apprenticeships, typically use subject benchmark statements defined to the degree-level qualifications within the apprenticeship.
- Apprenticeships may also directly align with identified Professional Standards subject to the requirements of employers and industry bodies.

Principle 6:

Apprenticeship Design – The requirements of a Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships align to occupational requirements are set out in a Standard Apprenticeship Framework document defined by industry which adapts to emerging and future needs.

Guidance:

- The world of work is evolving, and occupations are constantly changing, therefore apprenticeship design methodology must be able to respond, offering and enabling a rapid and agile response to skills needs.
- Industry must be involved in the design methodology to assist in the design and development of frameworks that are agile and responsive to industry need – ensuring they are fit for purpose.
- To be fit for purpose nationally funded apprenticeships must:
 - Adhere to the apprenticeship principles.
 - Be designed with the input and involvement of the relevant stakeholders but not limited to:
 - ▶ Employers of all sizes: large, medium and small, whose occupations directly align.
 - ▶ Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Skills Development Scotland (SDS) learning providers and qualification bodies, trade federations and unions.
 - ▶ Respective apprenticeship learning providers, awarding bodies and regulators.



Principle 7:

Qualifications & Certification – Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships offer internationally recognised, accredited or externally quality assured qualifications at SCQF Levels 5 to 12.

Guidance:

- Apprenticeships must certify employees with qualifications that illustrate achievement of the required occupational competence and where required achievement is aligned to Professional Qualifications and Standards.
- The qualifications within the apprenticeship must be included on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) illustrating pathways and progression to apprentices and employers.

Modern Apprenticeship Qualifications:	Graduate Apprenticeship Qualifications:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Contain a qualification that is directly aligned where possible to the National Occupational Standards required to become competent and accredited by the appropriate national awarding body.■ Where required by employers, supplemented by underpinning knowledge-based qualification to enable theoretical understanding of the role.■ Learning providers and employers seeking to deliver qualifications in Scotland must be approved to do so by the relevant awarding body, which is approved by Qualifications Scotland Accreditation.■ Certified by the approved awarding body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Graduate Apprenticeships contain a relevant degree-level qualification aligned with the occupational requirement.■ Upon completing all Graduate Apprenticeship assessments, the HEI/ University as the learning provider will validate and certify accordingly.

As employees, it is important that apprentices develop the necessary behaviours and aptitudes required within the workplace. There are two types of skills that support these behaviours and aptitudes, namely:

Core Skills Core Skills are contained in Modern Apprenticeship frameworks:

These are the fundamental, transferable skills required for everyday work and learning. They underpin the development of technical and professional skillsets within an apprenticeship.

Meta-skills apply to both Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship frameworks:


These are described as higher-order skills that help individuals manage change, learn continuously, and thrive in the workplace.

Principle 8:

Assessing Competence - Each Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship Framework describes the required learning content and method of learning and assessment.

Guidance:

- Employers and learning providers must discuss and agree on a continuous assessment programme for the apprentice, identifying and planning relevant occupational activities that allow the apprentice to develop competence and improve continuously.
- The assessment programme must be agreed for each activity with the individual apprentice, employer and learning provider and set out in the Apprenticeship Agreement.
- There are two recognised methods of learning within an apprenticeship:
 - Learning through workplace activities is referred to as 'on-the-job' and
 - Learning away from day-to-day workplace activities is 'off-the-job'.
 - ▶ Monitoring and recording employee competence requires ongoing communication and collaboration between the manager, employing organisation & learning provider(s).
 - ▶ Approaches to assessing competence should reflect the type of skills. For example, assessing technical or practical competence will differ from the assessment of core skills development.

Modern Apprenticeship assessment	Graduate Apprenticeship assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Primarily assessed within the workplace (on-the-job)■ On-the-job assessment takes place through the output or observation of naturally occurring tasks in the workplace.■ Where an employer requires the apprentice to develop technical or underpinning knowledge as part of the apprenticeship, formal summative assessment can take place at an external provision, in most cases at a learning provider site. (off-the-job)■ Learning providers will undertake formal summative assessment visits at the employer site to meet with the apprentice to review evidence of competence – including core skills competence, discuss actions, provide feedback and forward plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Assessment of competence must align to the occupational activity within the workplace and to the theoretical and practical requirements of the degree qualification. 

Modern Apprenticeship assessment	Graduate Apprenticeship assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Learning providers may also conduct some summative assessments out with the normal working environment of the apprentice in accordance with the Apprenticeship Framework's assessment strategy as part of the continuous assessment programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assessment of competence must align to the occupational activity within the workplace and to the theoretical and practical requirements of the degree qualification.

Core Skills are embedded in Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. Assessment in relation to Core Skills relates to the framework requirements.

Meta-skills are transferable skills and attributes that apprentices are required to reflect upon. Assessment in relation to meta-skills development relates to the apprentice's ability to reflect upon their own development and demonstrate an appropriate level of awareness for the level of the apprenticeship.

Principle 9:

Enabling Workforce Agility – The occupational standards and qualifications included in apprenticeships are designed to develop transferable skills across occupations and sectors.

Guidance:

- Apprenticeships are constructed to include skills that are transferrable across multiple occupations, coupled with occupationally specific skills and aptitudes.



Principle 10:

Supporting the Apprentice in the Workplace - Apprentices are employees. Employers are required to ensure appropriate support for their employees within the duration of the apprenticeship.

Guidance:

- All apprentices, as employees, are required to have an assigned line manager or supervisor.
- The line manager or supervisor is responsible for ensuring a safe working environment for the apprentice to undertake the duties of the role as set out in the Apprenticeship Agreement.
- The line manager or supervisor must ensure the apprentice understands the requirements of the job and how the apprentice can gain the relevant level of competence for the role. This includes:
 - ensuring the workplace offers adequate opportunities for apprentices to generate evidence required.
 - defining tasks, how progress will be monitored and two-way feedback.
 - appropriate opportunities for improvement.

Employers are responsible for assisting apprentices with adjusting to the workplace environment, as well as supporting their well-being, networking, and teamworking.



Principle 11:

Types of Learning and Duration - Apprenticeship learning is delivered to fit the requirements of the Apprenticeship Framework, the needs of the industry and the individual's pace of learning.

Guidance:

Types of learning:

- The choice of Apprenticeship Framework is critical to ensuring that the learning required matches the needs of the employer. This should be discussed and agreed between the employer and learning provider at the outset and included in the Apprenticeship Agreement.
- The primary method of learning is through the daily execution of occupational activity by the apprentice.
- This may be further supplemented by learning that takes place at a provider location typically designed to support the development of underpinning knowledge and theory and/or practical skills development.
- Where deemed necessary by employers or for regulatory and compliance purposes, other learning is identified to supplement the apprentices' occupational competence which may take place either on or off the job.

Duration of learning:

- Each Apprenticeship Framework contains guidance on what is the recommended or expected duration of time needed to achieve the required level of competence.
 - The amount of time it takes to achieve competence may differ from apprentice to apprentice.
- Qualifications have notional learning durations indicated by the volume of SCQF credit points to achieve.
 - The time it takes an apprentice to achieve the required qualification(s) will differ from apprentice to apprentice.
- Completion of a Modern Apprenticeship typically ranges between 1 and 4 years. Completion of a Graduate Apprenticeship typically ranges in duration between 2 and 4 years.
- Achieving apprentice competence over time is paramount, therefore employers and learning provider(s) are expected to make adjustments, as necessary.
- The attendance pattern for off-the-job learning (where delivered) is variable and dependent upon the apprenticeship and learning provider.

Principle 12:

Apprenticeship Roles and Responsibilities – Employers, Learning Providers and Apprentices/Employees have specific roles and responsibilities to maximise opportunities for success.

Guidance:

- All Apprenticeships must have an 'Apprenticeship Agreement', setting out the required roles and responsibilities of employers, learning providers and the apprentice.
- The 'Apprenticeship Agreement' recognises that employers, learning providers and apprentices/employees all have fundamental roles to play in the learning process and the overall quality of the apprenticeship experience.
- The 'Apprenticeship Agreement' represents a shared commitment between the parties to deliver successful outcomes.

Principle 13:

Delivering Quality - Apprenticeships deliver high quality learning experiences.

Guidance:

- The learning environment contributes to achieving occupational competence.
- Within the delivery of apprenticeships quality assurance is governed by two primary approaches:
- Aligned to the role of employers and the learning environment established within the workplace.
- Aligned to the role of learning providers in the execution of duties around learning, teaching and assessment.

Employer role in delivering Quality:

- It is the employer's responsibility to ensure the provision of a quality learning environment for the apprentice.
- This includes appointing supervisor functions, appropriate performance management and review and guidance structures.
- Ensuring the apprentice is encouraged to offer their insights and suggestions for improvement.

Learning Provider role in delivering Quality:

- The qualification(s) within apprenticeship all have respective quality assurance principles that learning providers are obligated to abide by.
- The principles set out the expected quality standards required by learning providers when conducting teaching, learning and assessment activities aligned to the apprenticeship assessment strategy.

Governance of Apprenticeship Quality:

- In addition to the above quality requirements of parties directly attached to delivering apprenticeships, the quality of apprenticeship provision is also governed at a national level. These include:

Skills Development Scotland (SDS):	Monitoring the overall delivery of apprenticeships with a focus on learner experience and outcomes
Scottish Funding Council (SFC):	Under legislation, SFC must secure coherent, high quality further and higher fundable education activity and ensure quality assurance mechanisms are in place for assessing the quality of the provision. This is achieved using the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF). The national framework provides assurance on the academic standards and quality of the student experience and includes Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs) and college-delivered Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs)
Quality Assurance Agency (QAA):	Acts on behalf of SFC to discharge its statutory duties for high quality further and higher provision. Oversees the implementation and monitoring of a shared set of principles, delivery pillars, and outputs, aligned to academic standards and quality of the student experience across college and university sectors.
Qualifications Scotland Accreditation:	Approves awarding bodies and accredits qualifications submitted by these awarding bodies. Performs a regulatory role in making sure that all approved awarding bodies and accredited qualifications maintain standards over time.
Awarding Bodies:	Ensure assessment is delivered in accordance with the apprenticeship assessment strategy.
Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) & its associated groups	Provides employer leadership and strategic oversight of the end-to-end apprenticeship delivery in Scotland ensuring programmes meet employer and learner needs, supporting fair work and economic objectives. SAAB oversees AAG, independently approving all new and revised apprenticeships.

Principle 14:

Documentation, Guidance & Support – Apprenticeship documentation is clear, accessible and easy-to-understand.

Guidance:

An explanation of all apprenticeship frameworks, their purpose, content and indicative requirements are outlined in a series of easy-to-understand guides, including the following:

Apprenticeship Framework:

- An outline of the overall apprenticeship containing an overview of the required occupational skills, knowledge and behaviours.
- Roles and responsibilities of each party in relation to activity before and during the apprenticeship
- Indicative approaches to learning and assessment.
- Indicative timelines and information on associated apprenticeship qualifications

Occupational Profile:

- A detailed breakdown of the occupational functions and requirements
- Indicative performance, knowledge and understanding requirements.

