

Vision for Foundation Apprenticeships

Foundation Apprenticeships are high-quality, employer-led work-based learning programmes that support clear and viable pathways from education into the workplace. They equip learners with the skills, capabilities, competence, knowledge and confidence needed by industry and employers, while creating sustainable talent pipelines for Scotland's economy.

The Foundation Apprenticeship portfolio provides aligned pathways across SCQF levels 4–6. Each framework combines three core elements: work-based skills, meta-skills, and underpinning knowledge and understanding. Learning is practice-based, contextualised around real workplace activity, and supported by holistic delivery and assessment models that strengthen learner experience, progression and outcomes.

Learner journeys are flexible, accessible and driven by learner choice. Learners may progress through Foundation Apprenticeship levels over time, enter at the level most appropriate to their interests and capability, or use Foundation Apprenticeships to experience different workplace environments and activities. All journeys should be designed to remove barriers to participation, learning and assessment.

Foundation Apprenticeships are primarily intended to support progression into the workplace, including direct pathways to employment, Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships where appropriate. Progression will be supported through strong employer involvement, clear recognition of achievement, and alignment with occupational standards, labour-market need and national and regional economic priorities.

For learners seeking to progress to Further or Higher Education, Foundation Apprenticeship achievement at SCQF levels 4–6 should be recognised within relevant eligibility criteria, alongside other qualifications and admissions requirements. Where progression is aligned to the same subject or occupational area, achievement should support a smooth transition and avoid unnecessary duplication of learning.

Foundation Apprenticeships should be available as part of Scotland's education and skills system, with access shaped by learner demand, employer need and economic priorities. They should support young people in the Senior Phase

By embedding employer co-design, high-quality delivery, continuous assessment, appropriate support and supervision, recognised certification, inclusive access, learner choice and robust quality assurance, Foundation Apprenticeships will act as a trusted bridge between education and work, contributing to a resilient skills pipeline and positive outcomes for learners, employers, communities and Scotland's economy.

Purpose:

The purpose of these principles and guidance is to provide clarity on the key and unique characteristics of Foundation Apprenticeships and their intended benefit for learners, employers, education and the Scottish economy.

Collectively, they combine to form a robust understanding of what they are, who they are for and what they look like. They should be utilised as a guide by respective parties to inform expected standards in development, delivery and performance management.

For the avoidance of doubt, the principles outlined here aligned specifically to Foundation Apprenticeships alone and have no bearing on other 'work-based' learning provision or qualifications within the education and skills system.

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P1. Foundation Apprenticeships and Employment

Foundation Apprenticeships are pathways to work from Senior Phase. They develop skills for the workplace, in the workplace. Although not paid, Foundation Apprentices are affiliated to an Employer for their work-based activity including work placement.

Guidance:

Individuals undertaking a Foundation Apprenticeship are 'pre-apprentices', not employees. Employers are required to support the development of their skills during the programme. Depending upon the respective requirements of each Foundation Apprenticeship, this commitment will range from supporting required work-based activity through to the provision of work-placement over a sustained period.

Employer Role and Contribution:

Given the importance of employers to the successful delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships, their roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined and agreed through a tripartite agreement with the training provider(s) and the learner.

P2. Foundation Apprenticeships and Workplace Skills, Capabilities and Competence

Foundation Apprenticeships will develop skills, capabilities and competence aligned to occupations and the broader workplace environment.

Guidance:

Foundation Apprentices will develop the required skills, capabilities and competence to function effectively within the workplace. Informed by respective industry standards, Foundation Apprentices will develop skills aligned to occupational competence, complemented by the development of broad and transferable Meta- skills and under-pinning knowledge and understanding.

All skills development must be contextualised and centred around real-work-based activity and situations.

P3. Foundation Apprenticeship Framework Content & Design

Foundation Apprenticeships must be co-designed with employers and stakeholders. Content must be centred around developing skills, capabilities and competence aligned to occupational needs and respective industry standards. Underpinning Knowledge and Understanding should be contextualised and delivered alongside the development of practical skills and capabilities. All Foundation Apprenticeships must contain a blend of three fundamental elements, namely work based skills, meta-skills and under-pinning knowledge and understanding.

Upon completion, design and content should equip Foundation Apprentices with the necessary skills, capabilities and competence to progress into employment across a number of occupations and sectors.

Guidance:

Content:

As Foundation Apprenticeships are centred around developing skills, capabilities and competence needed for the workplace, the content must be informed and led by the views of employers and industry partners. This is to ensure that Foundation Apprentices are equipped with the capabilities that employers require and can be built upon within any future employment opportunity. The development of competence aligned to occupations should be informed and guided by respective industry standards.

Design:

Recognising commitments to the breadth of access and opportunity, the design of Foundation Apprenticeships should be flexible to accommodate multiple contexts and locations. To that end, it is critical that they are co-designed with key stakeholders across the education and skills system in order to mitigate any barriers to access whilst also maximising the opportunities for learner success.

P4. Foundation Apprenticeships and Approach to Delivery

Foundation Apprenticeship delivery should ensure all three elements work-based skills, meta-skills and under-pinning knowledge and understanding, are holistically delivered to maximise learner experience and outcomes.

Guidance:

Foundation Apprenticeships delivery must be practice-based and experiential end-2-end. Delivery should be led through the execution of practical work-related activity, designed to develop the required skills, capabilities and competences required for the workplace and occupations.

All underpinning knowledge and understanding should be contextualised and delivered alongside the executions of tasks and practical activities. Meta-skills development should wrap around both of these layers and develops as a consequence of completing tasks, doing the work and engaging with others.

As such, delivery should ensure that the work-based element is provided at the same time as respective under-pinning knowledge and understanding. Through reflective practice, pre-apprentices should develop a cognitive understanding of the role Meta-skills plays within the workplace.

P5. Foundation Apprenticeships and Approach to Assessment

Foundation Apprenticeship assessment approach should reflect the practice-based learning and delivery model and as such support a continuous assessment approach, centred around criteria and evidence in respect of the work-based element. Meta-skills development should be assessed via learner driven reflective practice. The approach to assessment will be outlined within each respective Foundation Apprenticeship Framework and Qualification.

Guidance:

Employers and providers/assessors must discuss and agree on a continuous assessment programme for Foundation Apprentices, aligned to the work-based learning element and guided by associated qualification assessment criteria.

Recognising the three core elements of each Foundation Apprenticeship, namely, 'work based', 'underpinning knowledge and understanding' and 'meta-skills', approaches to assessment should be holistic, further enhancing the opportunity to contextualise the connection between all three elements.

Meta-skills Assessment:

Aside from the assessment requirements of associated qualification products, to support Foundation Apprentices in taking their own agency with regards to their 'Meta-skills' development, they should be encouraged to maintain a 'Meta-skills Journal', logging their application of these skills in carrying out the work-based elements. At regular intervals, Foundation Apprentices should engage in reflective practice to enhance their cognitive understanding of their Meta-skills development to date and inform future goals for further development.

Employers and learning providers should contribute to the learner's reflection and support their cognitive awareness and understanding through identifying opportunities for Meta-skills development and application contextualised within the work-based activity.

P6. Foundation Apprenticeships Support and Supervision

Foundation Apprenticeship Frameworks outline the obligations of all parties in relation to supporting Foundation Apprentices throughout their programme. These are captured within a 'tripartite agreement' defining respective roles and responsibilities of Employers, Learning Providers and the Foundation Apprentice. Recognising the age of the Foundation Apprentices, in addition to the requirements for delivery, further obligations will be required as defined by legislation.

Guidance:

All Foundation Apprentices must be supported and supervised across the entirety of their participation on the programme.

Any party involved in the servicing, delivery and execution of the Foundation Apprenticeship is required as a condition of funding, to ensure appropriate measures are in place that will protect Foundation Apprentices and support their chances of success.

The tripartite agreement should form a robust outline of the respective roles and responsibilities, required of all associated parties in supporting and supervising the learner across their end-2-end journey.

For Foundation Apprentices from school, employers will be required to align to the [Education Scotland Work Placements Standard](#).

Recognising the potential for multiple sites of learning, all Foundation Apprentices should also have an additional singular point of contact that can support general enquiries about their programme.

P7. Foundation Apprenticeships Duration and Certification

Foundation Apprenticeships duration should enable completion in no more than one academic year. Upon completion, Foundation Apprentices will be certified within an industry recognised qualification. All Foundation Apprenticeships will have standardised hours of learning and duration across each framework for respective SCQF levels

Guidance:

Duration:

As Senior Phase programmes, all Foundation Apprenticeships will enable completion within one academic year. Whether embarking on a Foundation Apprenticeship at SCQF L4, L5 or L6, each level will share standardised hours of learning.

Whilst flexible delivery models may apply resulting in variable 'start' to 'finish' timelines, this does not impact the size of the framework, nor the time required by Foundation Apprentices to achieve.

As a guide, the hours of learning required to complete a Foundation Apprenticeship should be within reasonable tolerances to achieve across one academic year.

Certification:

Achievement of Foundation Apprenticeship at SCQF L4, L5, and L6 will result in Certification from the respective Awarding Body. This will be in the form of an overall 'Group Award' Certificate, supplemented with details confirming the qualification and individual units achieved.

Foundation Apprentices who do not complete the full programme will receive certification of their completed elements from the respective Awarding Body.

P8. Foundation Apprenticeships Progression and Recognition

Foundation Apprenticeships although primarily intended to support progression to the workplace, resultant qualification and certification will be accepted and recognised within eligibility requirements for progression to Further or Higher Education.

Guidance:

Fundamental to Foundation Apprenticeships, is the value achievement offers Foundation Apprentices for onward progression into the Workplace or Further and Higher Education.

Subject to the SCQF level, Foundation Apprenticeship achievement should be listed as a recognised programme/qualification within respective eligibility criteria, examples below:

- Apprenticeships: Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship*
- College: National and Higher National Provision*
- University: Undergraduate Degrees*

Where the work-based learning element within the Foundation Apprenticeship develops occupational competence by virtue of select competency units, respective Foundation Apprentices should not be required to repeat this learning if progressing onto an apprenticeship sharing the same units.

Note:

** Where progression is aligned within the same subject area, Foundation Apprenticeship achievement in that area should be elevated to 'Preferred' Status over generic qualifications at the same SCQF level.*

P9. Foundation Apprenticeships Availability

Foundation Apprenticeships exist to develop talent pipelines from school to the workplace. Availability should reflect the needs of national and regional economies. Access should be an entitlement within the Senior Phase of school, bringing parity alongside other school subjects.

Guidance:

Maximising the opportunity for employer led career pathways, Foundation Apprenticeships should be a national entitlement in schools alongside existing national qualifications and provision mapped to the requirements of the economy.

Notwithstanding the primary intent in creating pathways to work, Foundation Apprenticeship content and learning can be utilised to complement and contextualise other Senior Phase subjects, driving broader education policy objectives and positive outcomes for all.

Fundamental to driving parity of esteem with other school subjects, access to Foundation Apprenticeships should be made available where there is demonstrable economic demand and priority.

P10. Foundation Apprenticeships and Learner Choice

Foundation Apprenticeships are accessible, aligned and driven by learner choice. Journeys are flexible, offering the choice of SCQF progression across academic years, or to pick up in any given academic year.

Guidance:

Foundation Apprenticeships should offer the learner flexibility of choice dependent upon their preference and perceived benefits/interests.

Foundation Apprentices may elect to embark on their FA journey each academic year with scaling levels and depth of work-based/ employer led activity each year.

Alternatively, Foundation Apprentices may choose the same level and depth of work-based activity each year however offering exposure to different types of work environments and activity.

Foundation Apprentices may also elect not to do the FA each year of senior phase and may opt instead to only embark on their FA in select years.

P11. Foundation Apprenticeships Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Foundation Apprenticeships support equality, diversity and inclusion and are designed to ensure there are no barriers to learning or assessment.

Guidance:

Foundation Apprenticeships must be designed and delivered to remove barriers to participation, learning and assessment, and should align with the National Framework for Inclusion and relevant equality, children's rights, safeguarding and education legislation.

Framework and delivery guidance should set out how learners with different needs, backgrounds and circumstances will be supported to access, participate in and achieve through Foundation Apprenticeships, including through reasonable adjustments, accessible materials and flexible delivery where required.

Providers, employers and schools should work together to identify barriers early and agree proportionate support through the tripartite agreement and wider learner support planning.

Employers should be supported to provide inclusive workplace learning environments where all learners can take part safely, meaningfully and with appropriate supervision.

Foundation Apprenticeships should support widening participation in occupational areas and sectors where some groups are under-represented, with recruitment, guidance and progression routes designed to promote equitable access.

Inclusion should be reviewed regularly through quality assurance, learner feedback and performance monitoring, with improvement actions taken where barriers or inequalities are identified.

Resources:

[National Framework for Inclusion 3rd Edition 2022](#)

Additional relevant resources may include equality, inclusion, children's rights, additional support for learning, safeguarding and work placement guidance, alongside sector-specific materials that support inclusive access, participation, assessment and progression.

P12. Foundation Apprenticeships Quality & Experience

Foundation Apprenticeships quality assurance requirements are clearly defined within the Apprenticeship Framework and regularly monitored and evaluated to maintain high performance and successful outcomes.

Guidance:

Foundation Apprenticeships are intended to offer rich work-based learning and development experiences, centred around building work-based skills through the blend of underpinning knowledge with practical activity.

A central function of the Framework for Foundation Apprenticeships is to provide guidance on the expected Learner, Provider and Employer experience, including respective roles, responsibilities and approach to managing service delivery and outcomes. This should be further supported by the respective tripartite agreement between each party.

Together these should be defined in a series of qualitative indicators ideally enabling effective monitoring and assessment against measures and performance expectations.