

Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG) Extended Terms of Reference (2026-2027)

Purpose

The Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG) is an independent industry-led group with delegated authority from Scottish Ministers through the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) Standards and Frameworks Group (SFG) to review, evaluate and approve all new and revised apprenticeships including Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships.

The AAG is an integral component of the broader Scottish Apprenticeship Governance structure (Appendix 1.1) and has an operational role in ensuring that all approved Scottish Apprenticeships are aligned with and assessed according to the Definition of Apprenticeship Principles.

It also supports the achievement of key Scottish Government Apprenticeship ambitions, ensures that programmes meet the needs of employers and the economy, and provides high quality learning opportunities to individuals.

AAG benefits from having Scottish Government and its agencies, qualification bodies, trade unions, training and learning providers, membership and industry groups as stakeholders within its membership, and aligns with the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB).

The roles and responsibilities of AAG are to:

- Evaluate all submitted Scottish Apprenticeships and approve against the set criteria of the Definition of Apprenticeships and its 'guidance':
 - provide feedback on Scottish Apprenticeships submissions and approvals
- Ensure that all approved Scottish Apprenticeships align to and support the achievement of key Scottish Government apprenticeship ambitions.
- Uphold and enhance the quality of all Scottish Apprenticeships:
 - identify and escalate any improvements required to Scottish Apprenticeships including lessons learned and implications to the wider system to the SAAB SFG.
 - work with the relevant approval organisations for Scottish Apprenticeships components to provide assurance that they continue to align with the ambitions and policy of Scottish Apprenticeships.
 - provide two-way advice and guidance to development partners to assist in effectively managing ongoing changes
- Provide assurance and recommendations to SAAB SFG in relation to Scottish Apprenticeships development and associated processes:
 - identify any challenges/issues and escalate any improvements required to Scottish Apprenticeships including lessons learned and implications
 - share information and intelligence – which could include, as examples, challenges around developments or impact considerations from learning providers
 - seek and act on advice from SAAB, SAAB SFG and other relevant stakeholders
- Act as ambassadors for the Scottish Apprenticeships by sharing outputs and decisions at AAG with stakeholders and member organisations, including the other SAAB groups (appendix 1.2).
- Provide feedback and reports on AAG performance:
 - provide a quarterly progress and highlights update to SAAB groups
 - provide an annual report, signed off by SAAB SFG Chair to the Minister for Higher and Further Education and communicate the report publicly, as agreed by SFG.

Membership/ composition

The AAG Chair:

- The Chair or co-chairs of the AAG should be a senior industry leader.
- Take responsibility for conducting an annual review of AAG membership to evaluate the group's

composition and skill sets, identify any gaps, and make necessary adjustments. Regularly update and modify the group's membership as needed to maintain relevance and ensure added value.

The AAG membership:

- will comprise a minimum of 50% employers, reflecting a mix of sectors, sizes and workforce diversity, and. will include relevant education and training sector, regulatory bodies, trade unions and social partners.
- members will act with integrity, impartiality, and in the best interests of the group as a whole. members are expected to set aside the interests of their home organisations when participating in discussions and decision-making processes. They must avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest and ensure that their contributions support the collective goals and objectives of the group.
- members are required to respect confidential and sensitive aspects of any development work.
- members are expected to support AAG engagement by communicating insights, knowledge, and activities to and from AAG and the organisations, networks, and groups they are associated with.
- members are expected to support continuity of knowledge and technical expertise through membership succession planning while encouraging skills development, knowledge sharing, and opportunities to enhance the overall effectiveness and resilience of the AAG.

Meetings

Meetings will take place monthly. The chair / co-chairs of the AAG may call additional meetings as deemed necessary.

Notice of every meeting confirming the venue, time and date will be sent by email to each member of AAG and any other person expected to attend. The agenda and associated papers will be shared via the SAAB extranet portal.

AAG may form and convene sub-groups as required to support the work of the group.

Quorum

Meetings require a quorum of at least two-thirds of the members present. Decisions on matters arising at a meeting must be approved by at least two-thirds of the votes from the members present. AAG Chairs may allow voting by correspondence to ensure that challenges with AAG attendance does not delay apprenticeship approval of availability.

AAG resource

- Secretariat support will be provided by the Skills Development Scotland Standards and Frameworks team.
- Marketing of new frameworks and production of the AAG annual Chairs report will be developed by Skills Development Scotland Corporate Affairs team and supported by the SAAB Communications and Engagement Manager.
- Recruitment of new AAG members will be led by the SAAB Communications and Engagement Manager and approved by the SFG and AAG Chairs.
- AAG communications with Ministers or external stakeholders will be handled by the SAAB Communications and Engagement Manager and approved by the SFG and AAG Chairs as needed.

Review

On an annual basis the AAG will review the groups terms of reference to affirm fit for purpose. The terms of reference will be made publicly available on the SDS website at the following address: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

Apprenticeship Approvals Group ToR Review - *This Terms of Reference represents a continuation of the 2025 Terms of Reference and has been extended to support the transition to new governance arrangements. It is intended to remain in force until the functions of both groups are transferred and operational within future governance arrangements.*

Appendix 1.1 - Scottish Apprenticeship Governance

The governance of Scottish Apprenticeships requires a partnership between industry and public sector bodies. AAG recognises the important roles of, and works closely with, the following key stakeholders:

- **Scottish Government (SG)** - sets out the key priority areas for the agencies in their annual Letters of Guidance which includes policy, targets and funding for skills and education including apprenticeships.
- **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)** - funds higher and further education through Scotland's colleges and universities. SFC part funds Foundation Apprenticeships and fully funds Graduate Apprenticeships.
- **Skills Development Scotland (SDS)** - is responsible for the
 - development and developmental approach of Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships.
 - operational delivery, management, including contracting and commissioning, and funding of Modern Apprenticeships
- **Qualifications Scotland (QS)** - retains an interest in apprenticeships through its awarding and accreditation functions for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) which underpin Modern Apprenticeships (MAs), and National Certificates (NCs) and National Progression Awards which underpin Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs)
- **Education Scotland's HMI - continues** to have a scrutiny and inspection function which encompasses work-based learning qualifications and pathways including MAs and FAs. It will periodically review and evaluate the success and quality of delivery of apprenticeship programmes.
- **The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)** will periodically review and evaluate the success and quality of GAs programmes

Appendix 1.2 - Employer Leadership through SAAB Groups:

- The Group Board (GB) oversees the end-to end delivery of apprenticeships on behalf of employers, ensuring apprenticeships are fit for purpose and reflect the needs of employers, learners and the Scottish economy.
- The Standards and Frameworks Group (SFG) oversee standards and framework design and development for apprenticeships. Offering strategic direction to the shape of frameworks and standards and positive challenge to the processes, approaches and underpinning infrastructure supporting an effective and efficient apprenticeship system in Scotland.
- The Employer Engagement Group (EEG) ensures employer involvement and influence in the strategic direction and prioritisation of apprenticeship delivery and work-based learning pathways aligned to employer demand.
- The Employer Equalities Group (EEQ) takes an evidence-based approach to addresses under-representation in apprenticeships and develops solutions to supports better access and participation.
- The Apprentice Engagement Group (AEG) promotes the value of apprenticeships with the aim of inspiring career influencers and the next generation of young people and employers to get involved in apprenticeships.