

Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board's Definition of an Apprenticeship

Recommendations to the Minister for
Business, Fair Work and Skills

September 2019

Introduction

The Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) recommends that the Scottish Government determines and publishes a set of underpinning principles which defines apprenticeships in Scotland. We believe this is necessary to:

- Provide clarity on what apprenticeships are and what differentiates them from qualifications and other methods of training and learning
- To ensure that Scottish apprenticeships are recognised as robust, industry-led and quality assured work-based learning programmes which provide transferable skills across the UK and internationally.

Background

At the outset of SAAB, the members firmly determined the need for an updated definition of apprenticeships in Scotland. This was viewed as especially important in the context of the introduction of the UK levy - and the risk of the “re-badging” of existing courses as apprenticeships to recoup levy funds – and recent changes such as the extension of apprenticeships to school and undergraduate provision.

SAAB members feel that apprenticeships – in providing industry-wide transferable skills - are vital components of the Scottish economic and skills landscape. Given this, it is important for all involved to be clear that the apprenticeship brand comes with a set of expectations from design through to delivery. SAAB members also feel that anticipated changes to occupations and the structure of industry in the future means that any definition must seek to be futureproofed.

SAAB's Frameworks and Standards Group has undertaken an extensive exercise, supported by Skills Development Scotland (SDS), to develop a set of principles. These have been based on a review of the existing elements; consideration of other countries' models; and a wider consultation exercise¹ which elicited over 260 responses from a wide range of interested stakeholders including employers and their representative organisations, individuals, Trade Unions, training providers, and universities and colleges.

Recommendations

SAAB recommends that Scottish Government determine a set of underpinning principles for Apprenticeships - to meet the objectives outlined earlier. The following principles are proposed by SAAB and are based on the objective of building on and strengthening the existing system.

¹ Disseminated in November 2017 to over 2000 organisations and closed on 12th January 2018

Proposed Apprenticeship Principles

Principle 1. Apprenticeships and Employment

All post-school apprentices are employed.

Principle 2. Apprenticeships and Occupational Pathways

Each apprenticeship is a programme of work-based learning designed to develop competence in a defined occupation and apprenticeship pathway.

Principle 3. Availability and Investment

Apprenticeships are available across a wide range of sectors where there is demonstrable industry demand.

Principle 4: Diversity and Inclusion

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

Principle 5: Relationship to Occupational and Professional Standards

Apprenticeship frameworks are based on occupational standards and integrate professional standards where necessary.

Principle 6: Framework Design Process

The requirements of an Apprenticeship are set out in a framework document defined by industry which adapts to emerging and future needs.

Principle 7: Qualifications and Pathways

Apprenticeships offer internationally recognised, accredited or externally quality assured vocational, technical and professional qualifications at SCQF Levels 5 to 12 with clear pathways for progression.

Principle 8: Framework Content and Assessment

Each apprenticeship framework describes the required learning content and method of learning and assessment

Principle 9: Ensuring Transferability: Common and Specific Elements

The qualifications included in apprenticeship frameworks are designed to develop transferable skills across the sector.

Principle 10: Supporting the Apprentice in the Workplace

Each Apprentice is supported in the workplace by a competent mentor and in their learning and assessment by a qualified trainer/ educator/ assessor.

Principle 11: Types of Learning and Duration

Apprenticeship learning is delivered to fit the requirements of the apprenticeship framework, the needs of the business and the individual's pace of learning.

Principle 12: Apprenticeship Agreement

Employers and apprentice roles and responsibilities are clearly set out in an apprenticeship agreement.

Principle 13: Quality Assurance

Apprenticeships are underpinned by robust quality assurance processes from design to delivery.

Principle 14. Documentation

Apprenticeship Framework documentation is clear, accessible and in an easy to understand format.

Next Steps

Respondents to the consultation highlighted strong support for the apprenticeship family and the principles, with a proviso that any new measures are not unduly bureaucratic. SAAB will continue to work on key aspects of the principles to provide guidance and support materials where necessary with regard to the following:

1. Core/ generic/ meta skills
2. Off the job learning and guidance on minimum duration
3. Apprenticeship Agreement
4. Mentoring
5. Fast track approvals
6. Embedding equality

SAAB FSG (supported by Skills Development Scotland) will develop a strategy and workplan for apprenticeship standards and frameworks in Scotland built on the foundation of these principles; setting out clearly how we will work with partners and stakeholders. Regular updates on progress and the forward work plan will be provided to Ministers, subject to approval of these principles.

Principles: Further Details

Principle 1. Apprenticeships and Employment

All post-school apprentices are employed.

Employer demand and employment status are fundamental to the success of an apprenticeship and are what clearly differentiates it from a 'training programme'. The apprentice must be employed in a genuine job and not solely to undertake an apprenticeship per se.

- An apprentice must be an employee from the first day of their apprenticeship
- An apprentice must be paid at least a wage consistent with the law for the time they are in work and in off-the-job training
- The job role must provide the opportunity for the apprentice to gain and develop the competence, knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to achieve their apprenticeship

Principle 2. Apprenticeships and Occupational Pathways

Each apprenticeship is a programme of work-based learning designed to develop competence in a defined occupation and apprenticeship pathway.

To develop competence, an apprentice must be employed in a clearly defined occupation or job. Whilst generic or cross-sectoral skills – such as entrepreneurialism and business improvement – can enhance an apprenticeship and support development of a wider skill set, they do not develop occupation-specific competence.

Looking to the future, we are aware that technological advances will have an impact on occupations and that SDS and the Scottish Qualification Authority's feasibility work for Graduate Apprenticeships is considering how standards development can respond to a potential clustering of skills needs for occupations. We look forward to being informed of the outcomes of this work which may inform future thinking on the content of apprenticeships and transferability of skills across occupations.

Principle 3. Availability and Investment

Apprenticeships are available across a wide range of sectors where there is demonstrable industry demand.

Apprenticeships can support the development of skills and competency across a wide range of sectors, including niche industries where employee numbers may be low, but are essential to retain specialist or traditional skills. SAAB is mindful of the cost to the public purse of developing and maintaining occupational standards, frameworks and qualifications and thus recommends that there needs to be a strong business case for public funding investment for development of frameworks.

Principle 4: Diversity and Inclusion

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

We firmly support the values of inclusion and diversity within the context of the individual meeting the core criteria to undertake the job role. The SAAB's Employer Equality Group has committed within its forward work-plan to make recommendations to you on how this principle can be strengthened within the apprenticeship process from design through to delivery. Initial ideas include an early gate review within the framework design process.

Principle 5: Relationship to Occupational and Professional Standards

Apprenticeship frameworks are based on occupational standards and integrate professional standards where necessary.

Apprenticeship Frameworks are designed to develop the apprentice's technical and metaskills. Occupational and Professional Standards are critical because they define the skills, knowledge and understanding needed by an individual within a given industry to perform competently at a specified level. They allow recognition and transfer of skills and competence across sectors and borders. Apprenticeships and their associated qualifications must reflect occupational, and where relevant, professional standards to maximise the value of the apprenticeship to employers and individuals.

Principle 6: Framework Design Process

The requirements of an Apprenticeship are set out in a framework document defined by industry which adapts to emerging and future needs.

Apprenticeships are designed for industry, by industry. To be fit for purpose, the process for designing the apprenticeship framework's requirements must ensure that industry input represents the needs of the whole sector: from large multi-national companies to SMEs and micro businesses. SMEs form a large part of the business base in Scotland, and it is important that they are involved in the development and design process, however, we recognise the challenges due to time and resource pressures for SMEs. The SAAB Employer Engagement Group – which includes the Federation of Small Businesses and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce – will give further consideration to this and make recommendations to increase SME involvement and communication.

Framework design must also be informed by an understanding of the practicalities of delivery, therefore input is needed from other stakeholders such as Awarding Bodies, Trade Unions and Training Providers/ Colleges/ Universities/ Schools as necessary.

The processes that support the development of frameworks need to be sufficiently flexible to respond to changing industry needs. Rapid and agile development of standards, frameworks and qualifications – for example in the IT industry - is needed to ensure that the skills system is responsive to skills needs and changes in the labour market. The SAAB Frameworks and Standards Group will consider how the processes could be made more rapid to respond to this need.

Principle 7: Qualifications and Pathways

Apprenticeships offer internationally recognised, accredited or externally quality assured vocational, technical and professional qualifications at SCQF Levels 5 to 12 with clear pathways for progression.

Qualifications are an essential part of apprenticeships but must be industry designed and recognised across a sector and sufficiently flexible to provide apprentices with transferable skills which address employers' skills needs. Industry is best placed to make a well-informed decision on what qualifications are necessary for an apprenticeship.

The SAAB Frameworks and Standards Group will undertake work to review the description and promotion of qualifications to ensure that current information and sources enable industry groups, employers and stakeholders to be well informed. The group will also propose options for a fast track approach and more agile model for sectors undergoing rapid change, like IT.

SAAB also recommends that qualifications which are mandatory to operate in a sector are included in an apprenticeship, based on clear justification from the sector. Drop-out rates should be monitored to ensure that this neither affects uptake nor encourages sharp practice.

The continuing inclusion of additional units to develop generic or cross sectoral skills is also advocated. The SAAB Frameworks and Standards Group will be take forward further work on core and meta skills requirements, taking account of ongoing GA developments.

Principle 8: Framework Content and Assessment

Each apprenticeship framework describes the required learning content and method of learning and assessment

In Scotland, competence is assessed throughout the apprenticeship and although some sectors consolidate learning through an end or skills test, there is no requirement for this across all apprenticeships. Consolidation of learning can be applied through a wide range of approaches, such as appraisal, reflective accounts and 360-degree feedback and can help ensure that the apprentice has gained the necessary skills, competences and behaviours.

SAAB recommends that each sector should define and set out the method of consolidation and monitoring of the requirement. However, we are mindful that these requirements are not set out in Graduate Apprenticeship degrees and therefore further consideration will be required to identify how this might be best achieved across the apprenticeship family.

Principle 9: Ensuring Transferability: Common and Specific Elements

The qualifications included in apprenticeship frameworks are designed to develop transferable skills across the sector.

Apprenticeship frameworks in Scotland are designed to be transferable across a sector rather than company specific. A core and options model provides a common core across all apprenticeships within a sector, with additional options which enable the apprentice to specialise in an individual occupation. It is noted that this is the current approach for apprenticeships and SAAB recommends that this is continued.

Principle 10: Supporting the Apprentice in the Workplace

Each Apprentice is supported in the workplace by a competent mentor and in their learning and assessment by a qualified trainer/ educator/ assessor.

Mentoring is an important part of high quality apprenticeships and can ease the transition into the workplace by helping young people to understand their role in that environment, how to contribute to the success of the business and how to develop their own career pathways.

SAAB recognises the valuable role of mentors, but notes that it represents a challenge for some, especially smaller, employers. We recommend this as a principle but suggest that guidance and support would be required for some companies. This is an area which the Frameworks and Standards Group will give further consideration to.

Principle 11: Types of Learning and Duration

Apprenticeship learning is delivered to fit the requirements of the apprenticeship framework, the needs of the business and the individual's pace of learning.

The key focus of apprenticeships is on work-based learning to develop competency, skills and knowledge, with the content of learning defined by employers to meet the skills needs of the sector. Off the job learning which is completed outside the normal working environment and contributes towards the achievement of the apprenticeship, can include a range of activity – simulation, shadowing, industry visits, as well as more formal learning in colleges, universities or training centres.

SAAB recommends that it is up to the sector to determine whether there should be a mandatory off-the job learning element, and that industry should set out the duration of the apprenticeship, as is currently the case for some Modern Apprenticeships as well as Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships. The Frameworks and Standards Group will give further consideration to how to define off-the-job learning in order to create guidance for employers and sector groups.

Apprenticeship policy in Scotland does not require a minimum duration for Modern, Technical and Professional apprenticeships, although some sectors do mandate this. A minimum duration could have benefits for the apprentice and the employer, by giving wider experience in the business and support to embed new skills. This would provide consistency across the apprenticeship family.

We recommend that the sector should set a minimum duration for their apprenticeships and will develop guidance for sector groups and employers on how to set a minimum duration.

Principle 12: Apprenticeship Agreement

Employers and apprentice roles and responsibilities are clearly set out in an apprenticeship agreement.

An apprenticeship agreement (which is additional to the contract of employment) sets out the roles and responsibilities of employers and employees. It recognises that employers have a fundamental role in supporting apprentices' learning and the quality of the apprenticeship. An apprenticeship agreement also recognises that apprentices have roles and responsibilities too, which go beyond their requirements as an employee.

SAAB recognises that Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships already require this and recommend that this is extended to Modern Apprenticeships too. The SAAB Frameworks and Standards Group will develop a recommendations paper on proposed content and methods of monitoring this requirement.

Principle 13: Quality Assurance

Apprenticeships are underpinned by robust quality assurance processes from design to delivery.

A range of organisations are involved in the quality assurance of apprenticeships, from the development of underpinning standards, to the approval of apprenticeship framework, to the delivery of training. Each organisation has -a and will continue to have – a distinct role, but there may be opportunities to share best practice and collaborate.

SAAB endorses this as a principle and will develop a detailed work plan to enhance quality assurance process at all stages and identify opportunities for improvement and cohesion. The SAAB Employer Equalities Group will undertake further work to consider how equality and diversity can be embedded in quality assurance.

Principle 14. Documentation

Apprenticeship Framework documentation is clear, accessible and in an easy to understand format.

Apprenticeship frameworks in Scotland are currently set out in long documents and include information such as registration, recruitment and selection, and health and safety requirements. The SAAB Frameworks and Standards Group can offer advice on the simplification of framework documentation to better inform employers and stakeholders. We are also mindful of the potential for greater use of digital formats whilst ensuring accessibility.