UCEM Code of Practice

Quality Assuring Apprenticeship Provision

Version:	4.00
Status:	Final
Date:	02/11/2023

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1.   Introduction

This document outlines the policies in place to ensure the quality of UCEM's higher education apprenticeship programmes. It should be read alongside UCEM's other code of practice chapters and Academic and Programme Regulations which set out how UCEM ensures the quality of the academic awards that are included within the apprenticeship programmes it provides.

UCEM's approach is informed by the regulatory context set out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

All the apprenticeships delivered by UCEM are English apprenticeships which have been developed by a subject specific 'trailblazer' group made up of employers and subject specialists under the guidance of the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)[1]. These apprenticeship programmes are open to all individuals aged 18 years or over at the start of their programme, regardless of disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

An apprenticeship is a job with training. Through an apprenticeship, an apprentice will gain the technical knowledge, practical experience and wider skills and behaviours that they need to be competent in their current occupation. The apprentice will gain this through formal off-the-job training (which is the responsibility of UCEM) and an opportunity to apply these new skills in a real work environment, in a productive job.

The learning phase of the apprenticeship is known as the Practical Period and includes on and off-the-job learning. Some apprentices will also need to study maths and English to meet the requirements to access funding. At the end of the Practical Period, apprentices will pass through a Gateway meeting which is effectively confirmation that they are consistently meeting the requirements of their apprenticeship standard. Following this, they will undertake End-Point Assessment (EPA) which is the final step to completing the apprenticeship.

UCEM is responsible for the quality of all aspects of the apprenticeship provision, and this chapter sets out how UCEM assures the quality of its apprenticeship programmes.

2.   Programme Design and Approval

As outlined above UCEM delivers English apprenticeships which need to be delivered in line with the published standards which detail the:

- Entry requirements
- Core and option occupation duties
- Required outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and behaviours
- Qualifications required as part of the apprenticeship programme
- Assessment plan for the EPA
- Typical duration of the apprenticeship
- Maximum funding that can be drawn down from the tax levy

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[1] Standards can be found at https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/

UCEM has an apprenticeship approval process which includes checks to ensure that UCEM is designing the apprenticeship programme in line with the published standards. Before apprenticeship programmes can be delivered they must undergo both business case approval and apprenticeship approval as set out in the Code of Practice chapter on Programme Development and Validation and accompanying Programme Development and Validation Procedure. Where the programme also contains a new academic award the apprenticeship approval can be combined with the academic validation if the additional apprenticeship documentation is provided and there is appropriate expertise on the panel. Through the apprenticeship approval process UCEM can ensure that:

- consideration is given to the programme structure and coherence of the programme;

- compliance with the apprenticeship standard and the knowledge, skills and behaviours;

  confirm the arrangements for the EPA.

3. Initial assessment, admission and sign-up

UCEM has detailed procedures in place for initial assessment, admission and sign-up to ensure that the employer and apprentice understand the requirements of the apprenticeship programme and that appropriate checks are made to ensure that they can deliver on their commitments and meet the ESFA funding requirements.

3.1 Initial assessment

Before an employer can register with UCEM to deliver an apprenticeship they must complete a Pre-approval Form via the Employer Portal providing information about their business and which apprenticeship programmes they are looking to recruit to.

Following initial checks, the employer completes an Employer Advance Enquiry Form which details the workplace training and support opportunities required for the apprenticeship they are applying for and an apprentice information release form which provides all the required information regarding the potential apprentice. The form sets out the competencies that the apprentice will need exposure to, and the employer must state whether these workplace training opportunities can be provided. The Employer Advance Enquiry Form is reviewed by the UCEM Apprenticeship Admissions Team and where applicable, referred to a member of the Apprenticeships Team. If the employer meets the criteria, approval is granted for the apprenticeship pathways to which the employer can recruit apprentices. Following approval of apprenticeship pathways, the employer will then provide the details of the applicant that they would like to register on the apprenticeship programme. Employers are also sent a Health and Safety Questionnaire to complete (see section 5.5 below).

3.2 Application and sign-up

UCEM sends the applicant a direct link to the applicant portal containing the application form which they are asked to complete. Alongside this applicants are also asked to complete a Skills Self-assessment Form which allows UCEM to undertake an assessment of the applicants prior experience, knowledge and skills which is a requirement of the ESFA Apprenticeship Funding and Performance Management rules and allows UCEM to judge their prior skills and to check that they will benefit from completing the apprenticeship programme that they are applying for.

On receipt of the completed application form UCEM will assess the applicant against the entry requirements for the academic award in line with the Code of Practice chapter Admissions and Recognition of Prior Learning.

UCEM is committed to an inclusive admissions policy by providing transparent, fair and consistent practice for all individuals. No potential student will be excluded entry to any UCEM programme as a result of discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity. For more information, please see the Code of Practice chapter: Equality and Diversity.

Applicants who are not able to present evidence of achievement of maths and English at Level 2 or better complete an initial assessment, through the Skills Forward Platform which is arranged by UCEM's Functional Skills subcontractor, Runway Training and provides diagnostic assessments to determine their English and maths skills. Where an applicant does not meet the English and/or maths requirements for entry to the apprenticeship programme their Skills Forward assessments may be used to confirm that they are working at the appropriate level and they can be admitted to the apprenticeship programme but will be required to complete Functional Skills qualification as outlined in section 5.2 below.

Alongside the academic award entry requirements there are also a number of other criteria linked to ESFA funding requirements that UCEM will check against before the applicant is admitted to the programme. In the event of any query or if adjudication is required, the application is referred to the Apprenticeship Funding and Eligibility Panel (AFEP).

If the application is successful the applicant and employer will be asked to complete the signup documentation which includes the apprenticeship agreement, written agreement and Training Plan (see section 3 below). The applicant and employer are also provided with a sign-up video which provides further information on what they are committing to on sign-up to the apprenticeship programme.

4. Apprenticeship Training Plan

Before an apprentice can start on an apprenticeship programme with UCEM there must be a completed and signed Training Plan in place signed by all parties. The Training Plan is a three-way agreement between the apprentice, the employer and UCEM as the training provider that explicitly sets out each parties' responsibilities throughout the entire apprenticeship programme. This Training Plan is discussed and agreed with the apprentice and the employer as part of the sign-up process.

The Training Plan is uploaded into the e:Vision portal and the UCEM Apprenticeship Outcomes Officer (AOO) is responsible for monitoring compliance with this statement (see section 5.3 below).

5. Apprenticeship delivery

5.1 Apprenticeship induction

All apprentices are invited to attend an apprenticeship induction which provides specific information relevant to their apprenticeship.

5.2 English and maths

All apprenticeships offered by UCEM require apprentices to have an English and maths qualification at Level 2 before proceeding through the gateway to the End-Point Assessment. Where an apprentice does not have the accepted prior English and/or maths qualifications at the start of their apprenticeship they are required to achieve Functional Skills English and/or maths qualifications as part of their apprenticeship. Time undertaking English / maths qualifications must be additional to the minimum 20% off-the-job training requirement. Each Functional Skills qualification typically requires 55 hours of additional off-the-job training.

UCEM currently subcontracts the delivery and support for English and maths Functional Skills to Runway Training. The subcontracting arrangement sets out that Runway Training manages and delivers all aspects of Functional Skills learning including:

- Registering the apprentice with the external awarding body

- Monitor apprentices progress from start to completion of the Functional Skills qualification

- Provide monthly risk reports to UCEM

- Claim achievement for the Functional Skills qualification and provide UCEM with the award certificate from the external awarding body.

For further details of how UCEM ensures the quality of subcontracted provision please see section 5.11 below.

Where apprentices have the required English and maths qualifications UCEM supports students to further develop these skills to a higher level as part of the curriculum as well as developing the required English and maths skills they need to complete their workplace practice and to progress through the gateway to EPA.

5.3 Disability and additional needs

UCEM has a duty to anticipate reasonable adjustments in the design, assessment and support services delivered as part of its apprenticeship programmes to ensure that all students can achieve their full potential and not be disadvantaged because of disability or additional need. A reasonable adjustment is a reasonable variation or alteration made to UCEM processes so that a student with a disability can access the educational opportunities of the institution without compromising the expected academic or professional standards. There is no duty on UCEM to adjust genuine competency standards.

UCEM can also make adjustments for short-term health conditions and pregnancy, maternity and paternity. There may however be instances in these circumstances where reasonable adjustments cannot be made and at this point students can consider applying for mitigating circumstances in line with the Mitigating Circumstances Policy or a break in learning as detailed within the Academic and Programme Regulations.

UCEM can also access Additional Learning Support Funding via the ESFA in order to implement any reasonable adjustments for students with a confirmed support need.

Further information about UCEM's policy on disability and additional needs is set out in the [Code of Practice chapter on Neurodiversity Disability and Wellbeing (opens new window)](#).

5.4 Apprentice initial review and scheduled progress review process

UCEM is responsible for all aspects of its apprenticeship programmes including ensuring that students are being effectively supported in the workplace as well as receiving their allocation of a minimum of 20% of their working hours for off-the-job training. To monitor this, each apprentice is allocated an AOO, who undertakes an extensive and wide-ranging scheduled progress review with the apprentice and employer at twelve-week internals.

Prior to the commencement of the scheduled progress review process AOOs will schedule an initial review normally during weeks 3 – 6 of the programme. The purpose of the initial review is to get feedback from the apprentice on their first weeks as an apprentice, to provide initial information, advice and guidance and to deal with any queries.

These progress reviews examine the apprentice's progress towards the End-Point Assessment gateway incorporating: the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to complete the apprenticeship through their off and on the job training; how the apprentice is developing their wider knowledge and skills such as health and safety, safeguarding, employability and English and maths skills; and supporting their general welfare. As part of these Progress Reviews is may be identified that the apprentice needs additional support with their academic studies in which case the AOO can recommend that the apprentice has an academic tutorial with an Academic Support Tutor (see section 5.8 below).

Apprentices are required to complete an off-the-job diary using the UCEM template to detail their off-the-job training activity which is monitored by the AOO as part of the progress review process.

UCEM uses a centralised system to monitor and track apprentice progress. This system allows progress against each individual element of the apprenticeship to be tracked.

Observations of progress reviews are planned and undertaken in line with Observation and Quality Assurance of Apprenticeship Provision.

5.5 Health and safety

The health and safety of the apprentice is the primary responsibility of the employer, except when the apprentice is attending any face-to-face sessions delivered by UCEM. Information is provided to employers on their responsibilities within the Apprenticeship Employer Handbook.

Employers are also expected to complete an Employer Health and Safety Questionnaire as part of the sign-up process which collects information on the member of staff at the employer who is responsible for the day-to-day management of health and safety of the apprentices at work and requests for a copy of the employer's health and safety policy, employer's liability insurance and ensures that risk assessments are undertaken.

5.6 Professional Practice Workshop

The majority of UCEM's apprenticeship programmes include Professional Practice Workshop, Technical Advice which are delivered as part of the off-the job training and designed to support apprentices in developing the required knowledge, skills and behaviours and to support networking opportunities. These sessions are generally delivered by industry practitioners who are recruited in line with UCEM's standard recruitment practices and are expected to undertake all compulsory compliance training including safeguarding and prevent and data protection.

The quality of these sessions is monitored through observations undertaken in accordance with Observation and Quality Assurance of Apprenticeship Provision.

5.7 Monitoring attendance and engagement

To meet the requirements of the ESFA funding rules, UCEM must keep a record of students' attendance at all Professional Practice Workshop. A separate register is taken at the start of each session, and any explained absence or reasons for lateness noted, reported and followed up. Copies of these registers are retained by the Apprenticeship Team for audit purposes.

Alongside monitoring attendance at sessions UCEM also monitors apprentice's engagement with the VLE and where there are problems with attendance and engagement this is discussed as part of the scheduled progress review meetings. Any ongoing issues without valid reasons with an apprentice's attendance or engagement will be investigated in line with UCEM's Disciplinary Procedure (opens new window).

5.8 Apprenticeship Support Tutorials

Apprentices can access additional support with their academic studies by arranging an individual tutorial with an Academic Support Tutor. Academic Support Tutors can provide support with study skills such as referencing, time management and study techniques.

5.9 Technical support

UCEM has a number of different models for providing technical support for apprentices which are detailed within this section. When designing a new apprenticeship programme careful consideration is given to the appropriate model to use to best support the apprentice to meet the requirements of the apprenticeship standard.

5.9.1 Technical Coach / Reviewer

On apprenticeship programmes where the Technical Coach / Reviewer role is used the role is focused upon guiding and supporting the apprentice, and where needed the employer, to successfully meet the requirements of the apprenticeship standard and to support the apprentices progress to the EPA. This includes ensuring that the apprentice is inducted into the requirements of the apprenticeship, coaching and supporting the apprentice and undertaking scheduled coach / review sessions to support the apprentice's personal development, completion of the portfolio of evidence and preparation for EPA. In addition, the Technical Coach / Reviewer also liaises with other UCEM staff in relation to apprentice progression and health, safety and welfare.

Technical Coach / Reviewers are appointed based on their professional experience and knowledge of the EPA and are recruited in line with UCEM's standard recruitment practices and are expected to undertake all compulsory compliance training including safeguarding and prevent and data protection.

Quality assurance of the scheduled coach / review sessions is undertaken in line with the Observation and Quality Assurance of Apprenticeship Provision Procedure.

5.10 End-Point Assessment

The End-Point Assessment is the final assessment that is taken at the end of the apprenticeship programme to determine if each apprentice has met the requirements of their apprenticeship standard. Each English apprenticeship has an End-Point Assessment plan which sets out the requirements of the EPA and how it must be conducted. EPAs can only be undertaken by an organisation that is approved to conduct the EPA for the particular apprenticeship. To be approved an organisation must be included in the Apprenticeship, Provider and Assessment Register (APAR). For degree apprenticeships, the EPA can either be integrated or non-integrated with the degree element of the apprenticeship. Where the EPA is integrated, part or all of the assessment will contribute to the credit that makes up the degree award. Where the EPA is integrated UCEM will be the End-point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) and will need to be included in APAR. Where the EPA is non-integrated, UCEM will choose the EPAO from the list of approved EPAOs, however apprentice employers can assist with the selection for their apprentices. EPA activity is subject to external quality assurance which is regulated by the Office for Students for apprenticeships programmes with an integrated EPA.

Before any apprentice can progress through the gateway to undertake the EPA both UCEM and the employer must check that all gateway requirements as set out in the Apprenticeship Standard Assessment Plan have been met. As part of this process the employer and UCEM will sign a statement to confirm that all gateway requirements have been met and the apprentice is ready to take the EPA.

5.11 Subcontracted provision

To cover all aspects of the apprenticeship standards UCEM may need to subcontract some areas of delivery such as the delivery of functional skills.

Where areas of delivery are subcontracted UCEM will ensure that the subcontracting arrangement is put in place in line with the Subcontract Policy (opens new window) which sets out clear criteria in relation to subcontractor selection, due diligence, quality assurance, subcontractor support and performance management.

6. Engagement with industry and employers

6.1 Engagement with industry and employers in programme design and review

Due to the vocational nature of the programmes delivered by UCEM it is important that the institution maintains close links with industry representatives and employers.

UCEM invites practitioner and employer representatives as panellists as part of the apprenticeship approval process. These panellists play an important role in providing an autonomous and impartial view of the quality of the apprenticeship programme proposal by drawing on their experience of provision elsewhere and / or identifying its likely fit with sector and employer needs.

UCEM collects feedback from employers and industry representatives via a annual Professional Engagement and Advisory Forum (PEAF) and employer forums. Both inform the development of UCEM's curriculum to ensure that it remains in line with industry expectations.

6.2 Employer feedback

Employers can leave feedback on UCEMs apprenticeship programmes via the ESFA Employer Satisfaction survey.

Employers can also feedback directly to UCEM through a variety of mechanisms including, the Business Development team, the, Apprenticeship Outcomes Officers or as part of the exit review process when an apprentice completes or withdraws from programme.

6.3 Employer complaints

UCEM has a formal Complaints Policy and Procedure for Employers of Apprentices (opens new window) that may want to raise a complaint in relation to the delivery of services provided by UCEM. UCEM will investigate any complaints in line with this procedure. Any matters relating to fees and funding should be addressed to the main provider in the event that the main provider is not UCEM, i.e. where UCEM is delivering the apprenticeship under a subcontracting agreement.

7. Apprenticeship programme monitoring and review

7.1 Review of performance data

UCEM's Senior Leadership Team undertakes regular monitoring of apprenticeship data by monthly update of the Institutional Scorecard and through in-depth review as part of the Quarterly Business Review meetings.

At these meetings, the performance of the apprenticeship programmes are monitored against a set of agreed key performance indicators which are aligned with the ESFA Accountability Framework:

- The number of apprentices that undertake their EPA against target.

- The number of apprentices that undertake and pass their EPA against target.

- Percentage satisfaction of apprentice employers against target.

- Percentage apprentice satisfaction in UCEM's Student Experience Survey.

- Monitoring withdrawal rates per quarter.

- Overall qualification achievement rate against target and retention rates as part of this.

7.2   Apprenticeship programme review

UCEM also reviews each apprenticeship programme as part of its programme review process as set out in the Code of Practice chapter on Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and Programme Monitoring and Review Procedure. As part of this process there will be a scorecard report produced either on an annual or bi-annual basis reviewing the performance of the apprenticeship programme and identifying areas for enhancement which will be captured on the accompanying Quality Enhancement Plan.

7.3   Self-Assessment Review

UCEM undertakes a Self-Assessment Review (SAR) on an annual basis which reviews how UCEM's apprenticeship programmes meet the grade descriptors set out in the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework. The assessment focuses on the following key areas:

- Overall Effectiveness

- Quality of Education

- Behaviour and Attitudes

- Personal Development

- Leadership and Management (including safeguarding)

The exercise allows UCEM to use self-reflection to drive enhancement at both programme and institutional level. The enhancement actions that are identified as part of this review are added to the UCEM Enhancement Plan. UCEM also prepares quarterly position statement which provide an update on the enhancement activities identified.

7.4   External adviser role

In order to ensure effective external oversight of UCEM's higher education apprenticeship programmes UCEM appoints a Higher Education Apprenticeship External Adviser. This role works in parallel to the academic and practitioner external examiners that have oversight of the academic award contained within the apprenticeship.

The role of the Apprenticeship External Adviser is to ensure:

- that the apprenticeship management processes are rigorous and fair and conducted in line with UCEM policies, procedures and regulations;

- to comment on apprenticeship KPIs and data;

- monitor and advise on the effectiveness of the programme to prepare apprentices to progress to timely completion of the EPA; and

- to advise on the comparability of apprenticeship support and management with those at other institutions.

The Apprenticeship External Adviser must be impartial and wholly independent of UCEM and its staff (including the governing body) and have been so for the last five years; currently employed by an institution delivering degree apprenticeship provision; and have the necessary experience of managing the delivery of degree apprenticeship programmes. The period of appointment to this role is four years with annual renewal; however, the period of appointment can be extended by a year under certain circumstances.

The role requires attendance at UCEM once per semester to review documentation and to meet with members of staff, and at the end of each visit to provide informal verbal feedback and a written report annually on the designated proforma.

Appendix A   Related policies and procedures

UCEM Code of Practice chapter on Programme Development and Validation

UCEM Code of Practice chapter on Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

UCEM Complaints Policy and Procedure for Employers of Apprentices

UCEM Observation and Quality Assurance of Apprenticeship Provision

UCEM Programme Development and Validation Procedure

UCEM Subcontracting Policy

Appendix B   Benchmarked policies and guidance

IfA Quality Statement (opens new window)

QAA (July 2018) Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships: Current approaches (opens new window)

QAA (July 2019) Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement (opens new window)