



Department
for Education

Quality Framework

For Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies

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Summary

About this guidance

This is the framework the Department for Education (“DfE”, “our” or “we”) will use to review the quality of apprenticeships provision being facilitated by Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies (“FJAAs”, “organisations” or “you”).

The Quality Framework will inform our assessment of Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies. It can also help you to:

- review your own performance.
- identify potential quality issues.
- carry out improvements.

Who is this guidance for?

This document sets out the Quality Framework to be used by DfE for all FJAAs.

The DfE will use this framework to review the quality of apprenticeship provision. This guidance sets out DfE’s expectations, including:

- the policy framework’s key principles and objectives.
- the indicators and thresholds we’ll use to review quality.
- the support we’ll provide.
- the range of interventions we may take where quality issues are identified.

This is for all Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies on the published [GOV.UK register](#).

This sits alongside the [apprenticeship funding rules](#) and [Conditions of Registration for Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies](#).

Policy objectives and principles

We want to raise the quality of apprenticeships to ensure apprentices:

- have a high-quality experience
- can progress to higher-level skills
- are prepared for a successful career

The Quality Framework underpins this.

The Quality Framework is based on the principles set out below.

Data Driven

We'll use a wide range of quality indicators and measures to give us a more rounded overview of an FJAA's delivery.

Risk based

We'll take a risk-based approach, using a range of quality indicators and measures. These will focus on FJAAs where there may be quality issues so we can intervene to help you improve.

Encourage self-improvement

We aim to:

- identify risks to quality early
- support self-improvement
- minimise the impact on apprentices

Timeliness

We'll monitor your performance data throughout the academic year. This ensures that management conversations and interventions happen earlier, where necessary. However, DfE reserves the right to undertake a full review of your performance data at any point during the academic year where concerns / issues are being raised.

We expect you to monitor and review your performance data throughout the academic year.

Proportionality

We'll only take intervention actions as a result of a management conversation. Interventions are not automatic.

We'll take proportionate action to support FJAAs to address quality issues. We'll generally use interventions in a targeted way. For example, if poor quality is limited to a particular sector we will focus on that sector, etc.

Indicators we use to review Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies

We'll use the following indicators and thresholds for reviewing a Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency's performance. The following indicators will act as triggers for possible intervention where performance does not meet the thresholds.

The thresholds reflect our minimum expectations. Do not use them as targets.

Reviews will assess the latest available data for the current academic year and the previous academic year.

In these indicators and thresholds, 'total number of apprentices' means all your FJAA apprentices within the relevant academic year, regardless of their completion status. It includes:

- new starts
- existing apprentices

We'll keep the indicators, thresholds and intervention actions under review and the Quality Framework will be updated from time to time.

Quality indicators and thresholds

Withdrawals

This data will be taken from the Apprenticeship Service and the Individualised Learner Record.

This is where the learner has either withdrawn from:

- the Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency; or
- their apprenticeship.

We'll assess organisations as 'at risk' if their withdrawals are greater than 35% of the total number of apprentices.

We'll assess organisations as 'needs improvement' if their withdrawals are less than or equal to 35% and greater than 15% of the total number of apprentices.

We'll work with you to understand which areas of your FJAA offer may be affecting your overall withdrawal rate.

NB: Reasons for withdrawals will be considered when reviewing the above thresholds and determining what (if any) action is required.

Apprenticeship Achievement Rates

This data will be taken from the Individualised Learner Record.

We'll assess organisations who have an achievement rate of less than 50% as 'at risk'.

We'll assess organisations who have an achievement rate of greater than or equal to 50% and less than 60% as 'needs improvement'.

We'll work with you to understand which areas of your FJAA offer may be affecting your overall achievement rate.

We may compare your achievement rates with similar sectors in order to benchmark performance.

Delivery outside of approved areas

This data will be taken from the Apprenticeship Service and the Individualised Learner Record.

We'll monitor any organisations that are found to be routinely operating outside of their approved sectors and / or locations; where this is identified we'll request a discussion in the first instance – this will include whether the organisation is meeting the needs of the target group as defined in their application to join the Register of Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies.

Breaks in Learning

This data will be taken from the Individualised Learner Record.

We'll assess organisations with more than 15% of the total number of apprentices on a break in learning by 365 days or more as 'at risk'.

We'll assess organisations with more than 15% of the total number of apprentices on a break in learning by 180 days or more and less than 365 days as 'needs improvement'.

Where a break in learning has been initiated by the apprentice, then this will be considered when reviewing the above thresholds and determining what (if any) action is required.

Past Planned End Date

This data will be taken from the Individualised Learner Record.

We'll assess organisations with more than 15% of the total number of apprentices past their planned end date by 365 days or more as 'at risk'.

We'll assess organisations with more than 15% of the total number of apprentices past their planned end date by 180 days or more but less than 365 days as 'needs improvement'.

Review process

We'll continually monitor quality indicators and may contact FJAAs at any point in the academic year where more information or action is needed.

Before a review

DfE account managers will identify FJAAs that are 'at risk' or 'needs improvement' based upon available data.

They will set out where data indicates an FJAA has fallen below any thresholds.

The DfE account manager will invite you to have a management conversation. We expect you to respond proactively.

You should consider whether there are mitigating factors and share any supporting evidence with your DfE account manager ahead of the meeting.

During the management conversation

The DfE account manager will review your data against the Quality Framework's indicators.

The discussion will be focussed on where thresholds have not been met, as set out above. The discussion is an opportunity to discuss:

- evidence you've provided about mitigating factors such as:
 - host employer and / or training provider behaviour
 - concerns with a particular apprenticeship standard
 - reasons for sector behaviour
 - concerns with an end-point assessment organisation
- progress in relation to previously agreed Quality Improvement Plans or targets
- action you're taking to improve quality and when you expect to see the impact

The DfE account manager may ask for further information. You should provide this within the agreed timeframe.

After the review

Following the meeting, the DfE account manager will inform you in writing about any required follow-up action.

Types of interventions

If we still have concerns about the quality of delivery after the management conversation, we may intervene and take further action.

Our interventions will aim to support you to improve your provision in a timely manner and protect apprentices' interests.

The following section sets out the various intervention actions that we may opt to take. We can take one or more intervention actions, as we consider appropriate.

More detail on the operation of the interventions below can be found in Schedule 3 (Quality Framework for Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies) of the [DFE Apprenticeships – Employer Agreement](#).

The type of intervention will be based on:

- evidence and individual circumstances
- previous performance
- level of risk
- specific areas of concerns
- any mitigating factors

No intervention

If you're 'on track' against all indicators, we'll not contact you to arrange a review – however your normal scheduled check-ins with your DfE account manager will continue.

There may be instances where FJAAs do not meet one or more of the quality indicators, but we decide that an immediate management conversation is not needed.

As part of your scheduled check-ins, your DfE account manager will also discuss areas that will include, but are not limited to:

- your relationship management with training providers, including dealing with any issues
- your relationship management with host employers
- timeliness and quality of your data submissions
- whether you are meeting the needs of your target area(s) as defined in your FJAA application
- external factors that you are encountering

- your sustainability and growth

Depending on the concern / issue, we may require details of your stakeholder management / engagement process, etc.

Watching brief

Scheduled check-ins with your DfE account manager will continue but may have more focus on potential 'needs improvement' areas. Where appropriate, in-person visits will take place.

Enhanced monitoring and account management

This may be needed when the Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency:

- requires improvement against one or more indicators
- is at risk of delivering poor-quality against some or all of the indicators, indicated by their in-year data

You may be required to attend more regular meetings to discuss:

- planned improvements
- the impact and progress of any mitigating actions
- in-year reporting of progress

This could also include:

- in-person visits
- site visits to host employers
- additional data requests
- conversations with training providers and / or apprentices

Quality Improvement Plan

The requirement for a Quality Improvement Plan may be used where your data identifies indicators that are 'at risk' or where there has been no significant progress in areas assessed as 'needs improvement'.

Working with your DfE account manager, timeframes and proposals for improvement will be agreed with check points scheduled for further reviews.

At this stage, DfE may impose restrictions on recruitment – this could be stopping or limiting new apprenticeship starts (this may be limited to a certain sector or standard).

Restrictions will usually be time-based or linked to further reviews of performance against the indicators.

External Audit

An external audit may be used where improvements have not been seen, or for instances that raise significant concerns. We will look to initiate an external audit which would be undertaken by the Employment Agency Standards (“EAS”) Inspectorate, part of the Department for Business and Trade. This audit will cover a wide range of checks, this will not just be limited to the areas that DfE have identified as a concern.

At this stage, DfE may impose restrictions on recruitment – this could be stopping or limiting new apprenticeship starts (this may be limited to a certain sector or standard).

Restrictions will usually be time-based or linked to further reviews of performance against the indicators.

Removal from the Register for Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies

This intervention will be used when your data indicates that you’re at continued risk of delivering poor-quality against some or all of the indicators, following management conversations.

This may be needed when a Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency has:

- failed to meet their own improvement targets against the indicators
- demonstrated that they’re unable to improve performance within a reasonable timescale.

Where appropriate, all avenues will be exhausted before this intervention is implemented.

Other types of intervention

We may also:

- pause, temporarily suspend or fully suspend certain sectors that a Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency can facilitate
- cap reservations for apprenticeship funding for a fixed or indefinite period
- pause access to the Apprenticeship Service
- terminate your DfE Apprenticeships - Employer Agreement and remove access to the Apprenticeship Service

Contextual factors

We'll take relevant contextual factors into account when we review your performance and decide on what intervention action (if any) to take.

Apprentices with protected characteristics

Every apprentice deserves excellence in their training provision. We expect Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies to offer opportunities for training and progression that meet the needs of a range of apprentices and host businesses within their target group.

This is in line with your duties under the [Equality Act 2010](#) not to discriminate against apprentices with protected characteristics.

Some apprentices have a greater distance to travel to achieve full occupational competence on their chosen standard. See [apprenticeship funding rules](#) for details of available support, guidance, and funding.

We may consider the profile of a Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency's cohort when we review its performance.

Small or new Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies

When deciding on intervention action for underperforming FJAAs, we'll consider mitigating factors such as:

- small cohorts
- whether the organisation is new to facilitating these types of apprenticeships

We expect these FJAAs to set realistic improvement targets as a priority. We'll challenge them on reasonable progress and evidence of impact.

Data timeliness and accuracy

We'll use data from:

- your Apprenticeship Service account
- your training providers Individualised Learner Records
- apprentice feedback from the apprenticeship service
- your Data Collection Form

In line with contractual obligations, FJAAs should regularly and accurately maintain:

- Apprenticeship Service data, including:

- apprentice starts
- apprentice withdrawals
- apprenticeship delivery model

In line with contractual obligations, FJAAs must record accurate data on their Data Collection Form and submit this to DfE by the stated timescales (as detailed in the [Conditions of Registration](#)).

This will ensure that data accurately reflects your apprentice population at any point.

Complaints and feedback

You can complain about an intervention action through our [enquiry form](#) if you're unable to resolve this with your DfE account manager directly. Select the apprenticeships 'query type'.

We welcome [feedback](#) on the quality framework. We'll consider this as we make future updates.



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