



## Investigation Outcome Report

### Provider: Aston University

#### Background

The Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) commenced an investigation into Aston University (AU) on 1 October 2024 regarding concerns relating to apprenticeship funding claimed by and paid to AU. The concerns involved:

- The validity of some claims for apprenticeship funding
- The accuracy of data that had been submitted by AU in support of those funding claims.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency became part of the Department for Education in April 2025.

#### Outcomes of the investigation

The investigation found that:

- The examination of documents, for selected years, identified that the evidence to support funding claimed did not meet the required standard set out in the funding rules, or that inaccurate data had been submitted to the ESFA.

The following breaches of the funding rules were identified:

Framework	Breach	Issue
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P67 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P61 2022/23 and P17 2023/24)	Failure to check eligibility of all learners and to retain evidence of the individual's eligibility.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P27 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P29 2022/23 and P59 2023/24)	Failure to keep a completed/signed apprenticeship agreement in the evidence pack
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P64 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P56.7 2022/23 and P86 2023/24)	Failure to keep a current signed commitment statement (Training Plan) in the evidence pack.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P385 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P361 2022/23 and P271 2023/24)	Failure to submit accurate data in relation to start and end dates for some apprentices.

Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P31.1 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P35.2 2022/23 and 79 2023/24)	Failure to demonstrate apprentices are involved in active learning throughout the apprenticeship.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P52 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P53 2022/23 and P83 2023/24)	Failure to demonstrate evidence to support the delivery of the off-the-job training that is set out in the apprentice's commitment statement.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P57.4 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P55.4 2022/23 and P85.3 2023/24)	Failure to record, retain or produce accurate off-the-job training records.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P365 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P339 2022/23 and P83 2023/24)	Failure to produce evidence that delivery has taken place, that it is relevant, new knowledge, skills and behaviours.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2020-21</a> , <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P374 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P350 2022/23 and P45 2023/24)	Failure to retain evidence to show apprentices are exempt from functional skills or that they are undergoing training.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2020-21</a> , <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P375 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P353 2022/23 and P144 2023/24)	Failure to produce evidence that employer co-investment contributions have been collected.
Apprenticeship funding rules <a href="#">2020-21</a> , <a href="#">2021-22</a> , <a href="#">2022-23</a> and <a href="#">2023-24</a>	P59 Apprenticeship funding rules 2021/22 (P24 2022/23 and P27 2023/24)	Failure to evidence assessment of prior learning and experience before starting the apprenticeship.

## Action

The following action has been taken by the provider:

- Prior to the start of the investigation AU had commissioned an external audit firm and received a report and action plan. AU had commenced implementing changes, including improving the use of their digital apprenticeship management and delivery system, and centralising the service for compliance, service delivery and skills coaches.
- The ESFA identified an overpayment of funding of £1,385,504.81 which AU has already repaid.

## Prevention

Upon the conclusion of the investigation, the DfE undertook a prevention analysis exercise to establish what could have been done to prevent the breaches that were identified in the investigation.

Issue	Prevention
No evidence of assessment of prior learning, apprenticeship agreements or training plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Providers should complete an internal audit of the evidence of enrolment to ensure that it is complete before the learner commences an apprenticeship.</li></ul>
Failure to keep effective and reliable evidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Providers should conduct monthly internal audit / quality assurance reviews of their evidence to highlight any gaps in the apprentices' evidence pack.</li></ul>
Inaccurate data submission in relation to start and end dates of learning for some apprentices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Providers should have an internal audit / quality assurance function to identify data anomalies</li><li>Providers should also conduct detailed analysis of their ILR, PDSAT and Funding Rules Monitoring (FRM) reports on a monthly basis to identify and correct any incorrect data.</li></ul>
Off-the-Job hours evidence incomplete. Lack of evidence apprentice is in continuous learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Providers should have an internal audit / quality assurance function to identify any issues relating to Off-the-Job activities and ensure there is continuous learning.</li><li>Providers should also conduct monthly data checks to ensure that apprentices enrolled at their institution are on track to reach their Off-the-Job hours.</li></ul>
Functional Skills delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Providers should retain evidence of learner exemption from Functional skills, retain evidence where training is being delivered and conduct regular internal reviews to identify and correct any errors.</li></ul>
No evidence of employer contributions being collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Providers should conduct regular data checks to ensure that employer contributions are claimed accurately.</li><li>Providers should also check their monthly payment reports to ensure that the payments they have received are correct.</li></ul>