

White Paper No.1 from BestAssessor.Com



The New Apprenticeship Revolution –

15 Things You Need Know
and 5 Practical Things You Can Do

November 2015



BestAssessor

WWW.BESTASSESSOR.COM

@bestassessor

About BestAssessor.com

BestAssessor.com is committed to raising the quality of vocational assessment and training. Our contributors believe that the quality of training depends on the quality of assessment. That's why we are building a forum dedicated to researching best practice in vocational assessment and spreading this expertise to the people who care. We will also be providing updates on the latest and most important training and qualification initiatives in the UK and internationally.

BestAssessor.com was set up by the experts who researched and wrote the new qualifications for Assessment and the Quality Assurance of Assessment. Between us we have over a century of experience in Vocational Education and Training in the UK and abroad + many years training assessors and quality assurers. Our goal is to create a community of practice which reflects the highest standards of assessment.



About the Author

Starting out in FE in the 1980s, Geoff Carroll has been working in Vocational Education and Training for over thirty years and has been involved in most of the major developments. As a consultant operating at the national level, he researched and authored a wide range of occupational standards and qualifications for many industries. His national and international experience gives him an excellent working knowledge of Apprenticeships in the UK, Europe and beyond.

Geoff has worked extensively on issues to do with assessment, having researched and authored the current Assessment and Quality Assurance of Assessment qualifications (replacements for the old 'A' and 'V' awards) in 2011.

Having recently returned from three years in the Middle East where he was leading a major government VET transformation project, Geoff brings a fresh pair of eyes to the Apprenticeship reforms in England. He is passionate about the need for all the key stakeholders in the system to be fully informed and, where necessary, trained for what is to come.

Geoff is a founder and director of BestAssessor.com. He welcomes feedback and discussion. You can contact him via LinkedIn or via geoff.carroll@bestassessor.com

Contents

1. Summary	4
The Major Takeaways	4
2. Potted History: Where the Reforms Are Taking Us and Why	6
3. There Is a Coming Revolution in Assessment Practice – Staff Will Need Retraining	7
Major Changes	7
There will only be one Assessment Plan for each occupation, but each Assessment Plan could be different	7
Key decisions on apprentice competence will be made by independent assessors and employers	8
End-point assessment takes over from on-programme (continuous) assessment	9
The implications for providers are profound	10
There will be less demand for on-programme assessment and a greater need for high quality, tailored training	11
There Will (Usually) Be Grading	11
4. The Content Is Changing – The Curriculum Will Need to Change Too	12
Goodbye to PLTS and ERR	12
PLTS Out, Behaviours In	12
ERR Out and Nothing In	12
The Standard of competence may (or may not) be the same	12
There May (Or May Not) Be Qualifications	13
The new Apprenticeships cover single occupations, not sectors or ‘job families’	14
Content (and assessment) will vary from sector to sector: there will be a greater emphasis on sector-based CPD	14
5. The Funding Model Will Change the Way We Work	16
Apprenticeships will be funded by a levy imposed on big employers	16
Money for apprenticeship training will be controlled by the employer and they will choose how to spend it	17
6. Five Practical Things You Can Do	18
1. ‘Wake up and smell the coffee’?	18
2. Find and Study the New Standards and Assessment Plans	18
3. Make Your Voice Heard	18
4. Contact the Relevant Apprentice Assessment Organisations and Keep Track of their Preparations	18
5. Undertake CPD with BestAssessor.com	19

1. Summary

Many of the government's new Apprenticeship reforms are welcome, but the question is: can our colleges, training providers and employers fully implement them by 2017/18? And, if they do, can they deliver both the 3m new starts planned for 2020 and drive up quality as the government demands?

In this *White Paper No. 1*, we analyse some of the key changes and explore their implications for providers and employers, with particular reference to Assessment and Curriculum. We only touch lightly on Funding issues where they are likely to impact on training provision.

In the opinion of *BestAssessor.com*, this package of Apprenticeship 'reforms' is actually a revolution in the way we deliver training in England. While the changes are generally positive, they also pose the biggest challenges to the world of vocational education, training and assessment for over thirty years. Huge changes are about to happen, and if they go through, this world will be a very different place within five years.

BestAssessor.com is determined to use our expertise to help employers, providers, teachers and trainers adapt to the new apprenticeship Standards and Assessment Plans by providing information, analysis and an ongoing programme of **Continuing Professional Development**.

Our views are based on an analysis of the key government guidance documents, the new Apprenticeship Standards and Assessment Plans published so far and, of course, our 30 year experience of Vocational Training in the UK and internationally. In drafting this White Paper, we have shared these points with many employers, experts and other stakeholders involved in the developing the new Apprenticeship system.

The Major Takeaways

Here are the 15 major 'takeaways' for from this analysis:

There Is a Coming Revolution in Assessment Practice

- There will only be one overarching Assessment Plan for each Apprenticeship and this must be followed; assessors will have less freedom to design their own approach; however, there will be a greater variety of assessment methods and assessors will need to be more versatile.
- Independent Assessors employed by new Apprentice Assessment Organisations (AAOs) and employers will make the key decisions on apprentice competence – provider-based assessors will have less influence over the apprentice's outcome; they will need to redirect their energies to coaching and training; however, it's not yet clear where the independent assessors will come from or whether there will be enough. We also don't know how the AAOs will be quality assured.
- All apprentices will have to pass one or more independent end-point assessments before successful completion – if done properly, this raises the bar for training quality – but providers will need to make sure learners are properly prepared for assessments they cannot control.
- On-programme (continuous) assessment will still be needed but its purpose will be to measure progress and ensure the apprentice is ready for the end-point assessments

- If the provider's role is less focused on on-programme assessment, they will need to find other ways to add value to the Apprenticeship system; this will include high quality learning tailored to the employers' needs.
- In most occupations apprentices will be graded – grading is complex and potentially contentious; staff will need specific training.
- Overall, there is a huge need for training and Continuing Professional Development to bring staff up to speed and upskill them in a range of different approaches.

The Content of the Apprenticeships Is Changing – This Will Impact On The Curriculum

- Employment Rights and Responsibilities disappears – but apprentices will still need good careers advice, information and guidance.
- Personal Learning and Thinking Skills goes and is replaced by Behaviours – Behavioural Assessment needs specific training.
- The standard for technical competence is being redefined for each occupation; for some occupations it will reflect the learning outcomes you are used to; for others it may be quite different; each Standard is only two pages – providers will need more detail than is available at the moment.
- For some Apprenticeships, qualifications will no longer be used – this could make it more difficult for providers to design curricula and structure training to ensure the apprentice achieves the Standard; without the content provided by qualifications, different programmes may come up with quite different outcomes.
- The new Apprenticeships focus on single occupations, not sectors or job 'families' – this could make training narrower than it has been in the past and complicate delivery.
- The SASE Framework approach disappears – there will be much greater diversity in Apprenticeship Standards and Assessment Plans: generic CPD will more difficult.

The New Funding Model Will Change the Apprenticeship Market – Providers Will Need to Adapt Their Business Model

- The new Apprenticeships will be funded from an employer levy – this may increase the number of Apprenticeship places, but could have unintended consequences.
- Funds for Apprenticeship training will be under the control of the employer, not the provider; they will decide whether and how to spend it on external provision – providers will need to 'up the ante' on marketing, and design attractive quality training which complements what the employer can do.

5 Practical Things You Can Do

1. The changes are just around the corner: providers, employers and everyone else need to get up to speed with what's happening
2. Find and study the Apprenticeship Standards and Assessment Plans relevant to your work. See what will affect you and begin to plan your response
3. Make your voice heard: the government is constantly consulting on new Standards and Assessment Plans; you can influence the process and outcomes

4. Contact the relevant Apprentice Assessment Organisations and keep track of their preparations: this will help you to prepare for the detail of each sector you are involved in
5. Get involved with CPD: **BestAssessor.com** will be providing a series of workshops and conferences to inform and upskill. Come and join us!

2. Potted History: Where the Reforms Are Taking Us and Why

We know from the experience of other countries like Germany and Australia that apprenticeships are a great way of getting young people into the workforce and helping industry to become more competitive. The evidence is so compelling that England has had three previous attempts at setting up a world class Apprenticeship system over the last 50 years!

These efforts have not yet paid off. In many ways, we still face the same problems we had back in the 1960s and '70s. Few English apprenticeships can match the quality of their global counterparts. Apprenticeships lack the status they enjoy elsewhere in Europe: most young adults and their parents are reluctant to get involved. High achievers still prefer the expensive and uncertain university path to a career. Employers still do not believe that apprenticeships are delivering the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need. Productivity/competitiveness are still held back by low skills. The immigration debate rumbles on year after year.

Something had to be done (again), and the [Richard Review of Apprenticeships](#) in 2012 picked up on many of the reasons why English Apprenticeships were not meeting expectations: lack of strong employer leadership; too many short-term apprenticeships; little new learning taking place; funding being used to upskill existing workers; a confusing array of qualifications; fragmented and unreliable assessment. In fact many of these weaknesses were confirmed in the recent [Ofsted Report on Apprenticeships](#), published three years later.

In response the Government published [The Future of Apprenticeships in England](#): Implementation Plan. Its recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1. Apprenticeships must train those aged 16 and above to achieve the standard employers expect for any given occupation. What's more, an apprenticeship must involve substantial training.
2. Employers must take the lead in designing simple and straightforward standards.
3. Apprenticeship standards must be right for companies of all sizes, including Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs).
4. Government will set a small number of criteria that Apprenticeships must meet. Outside of these criteria, there will be freedom to bring in innovative approaches that meet the needs of their sector.
5. Assessment needs to be tightened up. There will be a strong element of independent assessment which will shift the focus from continuous, unit-based assessment to testing what the apprentice knows and can do at the end of the apprenticeship. This will strengthen quality and credibility.
6. All apprentices will be graded, for example, pass, merit and distinction.
7. All apprenticeships must last for at least 12 months. Off-the-job training will continue to be a requirement.

To take these changes forward, the government established '[Trailblazer Groups](#)' – mainly consisting of employers and professional bodies. There are now around 170 Trailblazers working on new Apprenticeship Standards and Assessment Plans. As of October 2015, [55 of these](#) are approved for delivery by employers and providers. Over [160 more](#) are in development.

The government has set a deadline so that by 2017/18, all Apprenticeships will follow the new format, and funding for the current Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) frameworks will cease.

The implications for providers and employers are radical, and time is pressing. If the new system is going to work to the quality standards the government expects, providers and employers will have to get up to speed very quickly with the new requirements.

3. There Is a Coming Revolution in Assessment Practice – Staff Will Need Retraining

Major Changes

The new approach to assessment is the biggest advance in the way we test vocational learners since the introduction of NVQs 30 years ago and should, if done properly, drive up the quality and credibility of Apprenticeships as the Government hopes.

There will be four main changes to the way we do things. Firstly, there will be only *one Assessment Plan* for each Apprenticeship. Secondly, judgments about whether or not the apprentice achieves the standard will be done by an *independent assessor* – i.e. someone not involved in the apprentice's training and with no vested interest in the outcome. Thirdly, every future Apprenticeship must contain *end-point assessment*, and an apprentice will only successfully complete if they pass this. Finally, most new Apprenticeships will require *grading*.

There will only be one Assessment Plan for each occupation, but each Assessment Plan could be different

The first thing to emphasise is that there will only be one Assessment Plan for each occupation and this Plan will have to be followed. The Assessment Plan stipulates which assessment methods will be used for each aspect of the Standard and who will be responsible for each assessment method (for example, employer, provider or assessment organisation).

Under the current SASE arrangements provider-based assessors have quite a lot of flexibility in choosing the right balance of assessment methods and types of evidence (provided these conform to their awarding organisation's quality assurance framework). Under the new Assessment Plans this flexibility will be reduced.

However, because each Trailblazer Group is operating autonomously, each Assessment Plan is likely to be more appropriate to the occupation the apprentice is training for. This should have the advantage of strengthening validity, i.e. assessment methods are appropriate to what is being tested, and improving reliability, i.e. every assessor is using the same method. It should also ensure that the assessment

methods are realistic, feasible and cost-effective for the type of industry and occupation which the Apprenticeship covers.

Key decisions on apprentice competence will be made by independent assessors and employers

Under the current SASE system, those who make the assessment judgments are also involved in the apprentice's training. Many argue this gives them a vested interest in the outcome of assessment. It's a bit like the driving school carrying out the driving test. Although provider-based assessors are working within an awarding organisation's quality assurance framework, the *Review of Apprenticeships* felt that oversight and quality assurance of assessment is often 'minimal'.

This criticism is not new. Since the 1980s, vocational assessment has been mainly internal (i.e. done by an assessor working for a provider) and quality assured by internal and external verification. Good in theory, but in practice some assessors are not always adequately trained, external verification can be inconsistent, standards may vary across centres and, since the assessor usually works with the learner over an extended period of time, there are doubts about objectivity.

Employers have also questioned how up-to-date provider-based assessors are with current industry practices and technologies.

Under new system, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) will approve one or more Apprentice Assessment Organisations (AAOs) for each Apprenticeship. In most cases, the AAOs are our existing awarding organisations (for example, City and Guilds, Pearson or OCR) although some sectors are setting up their own assessment services. The AAOs will appoint, train and quality assure their independent assessors. The independent assessor will assess all evidence of the apprentice's work as relevant to their final result.

In addition, many of the Trailblazer Groups are asking for the formal testing of knowledge and understanding via written or on-screen assessments which are centrally marked.

Even if the apprentice succeeds in all independent assessments, completion will have to be signed-off by the employer.

The bottom line is that, in future, provider-based assessors will have much less influence over the apprentice's final result.

Independent assessment will raise a number of challenges which are worth keeping an eye on.

- If each apprentice has to be assessed by an independent assessor, there will need to be a large pool of these people to draw from. If there is not, there may be significant delays in apprenticeship completions which are outside of the provider's control.
- To a certain extent this risk could be reduced by using newer techniques such as remote assessment which eliminates the need for the assessor to be physically present during the assessment. However, employers and providers will need to make sure they have the necessary technology to make this happen.
- Establishing a corps of independent assessors could present the same problems we have seen with external verification under SASE. The work of independent assessors will need to be carefully monitored and standardised by the AAOs. If different AAOs interpret the standards

differently or if different independent assessors make different judgments, the quality of independent assessment will be called into question and we will be back to 'square one'. The Trailblazer Groups and AAOs will have to look again at their QA frameworks to make sure these mistakes are not repeated.

- The quality of assessment may actually go into reverse. Currently, most provider-based assessors are trained and qualified in assessment. If the selection of independent assessors is going to be mainly based on their knowledge/experience of current industrial practice, they are likely to be working in industry at the moment and unlikely to have any training or accreditation in assessment. Unless they understand and apply the principles of assessment, how will they be able to make sound assessment decisions?

BestAssessor.com believes there is a very strong case for making sure that all independent assessors are appropriately trained and qualified in assessment. There are existing assessment qualifications in the form of the [Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement](#) which address all of the principles and practices relevant to Apprenticeship assessment and is available from around 50 awarding organisations in England. These should be a minimum baseline.

End-point assessment takes over from on-programme (continuous) assessment

The *Review of Apprenticeships* also argued that the traditional NVQ/QCF unit-by-unit assessment is fragmented and never gives a clear picture of what the Apprentice can do by the end of their training. They might be able to do all the individual 'bits', but can they combine them in a way that gives a positive outcome for the employer?

The *Review* also argued that the current use of on-programme (continuous) assessment is over-complicated and time-consuming. Time and money spent on cross-referencing and recording what has already been learned could more usefully be spent on teaching new skills and knowledge – and teaching new skills and knowledge seemed to be lacking under the SASE arrangements.

From now on every new Apprenticeship, therefore, must include one or more end-point assessments which pull together all the key learning outcomes the Apprentice should have covered in their period of training (also known as 'synoptic assessment'). The strength of this approach is that in the real world, companies need workers who can combine a variety of skills, knowledge and behaviours in every piece of work they do. In simple terms, they don't do teamwork, customer service and technical stuff separately. In a real workplace they have to integrate these every time they tackle a new task and this is fundamental to competence. End-point assessment should be the best way of testing this.

End-point assessments will be developed and implemented by the AAOs. However, there are issues to watch:

- Looking across all of the Assessment Plans published at the moment, there is a huge variety of end-point assessment techniques being proposed. These include: major (one or two-day) practical assignments based on real-life scenarios, 'viva-style' interviews, summative 'showcase' portfolios and behavioural assessments. Many of these are new and the training implications are significant: independent assessors will need to be trained in all of these methods or at least those that apply in their sector/occupation. To make it work effectively, the need for CPD is very great.
- Where there is more than one AAO involved, there will need to be consistency between their end-point assessments to maintain a clear standard. Currently we do not know how this will be done.

- There will need to be large pool of different end-point assessments, maintained and updated on a frequent basis; without this they will be known in advance and much easier to prepare for.
- However, employers and providers will need detailed information on the assessment specifications for the end-point assessments and samples to look at. Without this, it will be difficult to train and prepare apprentices for success.
- End-point assessments may prove complex and time-consuming to set up and mark. Although this approach is widely used in other countries, such as Germany, there is little experience of using them in the UK. There is likely to be a steep learning curve for all those involved, and professional development must be a high priority.
- It may prove difficult to develop and implement end-point assessments which cover all of the key learning outcomes of a 12-month (or longer) Apprenticeship.
- Quality assuring long and complex practical assignments (particularly ensuring there is no 'help' given) may prove challenging.
- For many industries, end-point assessments may prove difficult and expensive to set up and run in an off-job context because providers may not have all the equipment and materials needed.
- If end-point assessments have to be carried out in the workplace (because the provider does not have the resources to stage a realistic scenario) they may become an interruption to normal working which the employer will not welcome.

Whereas *BestAssessor.com* supports the shift of emphasis to end-point assessment, we also feel that there are a number of important issues to be addressed before the system works effectively for providers and apprentices: **initial training for new assessors and CPD for existing ones will be central to this.**

The implications for providers are profound.

Over and above the points covered above, providers will need to think through the implications for their own practice.

- For the last 30 years, we have got used to on-programme assessment. Learner achievement is judged and recorded on a unit-by-unit basis by someone who knows the learner and helps to deliver their training. Learners can be assessed many times against a unit and receive ongoing coaching until the assessor deems them competent. In that sense, the learner may get several (informal) attempts at showing they meet the standard.
- End-point assessment will change this. Under the new system, the apprentice will only be judged competent if they are successful in the final assessment which will be a formal event. There will be the opportunity for 'retakes' but probably not many. The logistics of choosing, setting up and marking new end-point assessments is likely to reduce the number of retakes available.
- Continuous assessment will carry on, but its purpose will now be different. Under the new system it will be used to measure the apprentice's progress, make sure they are ready to go through the 'Gateway' for the end-point assessment and to provide additional learning if they are not. In this sense it becomes true Formative Assessment.
- Providers will have to ensure that the quality of their training will be of the right standard to prepare the apprentice to pass an independent end-point assessment.

There will be less demand for on-programme assessment and a greater need for high quality, tailored training

If there is less emphasis on continuous assessment, this will impact on the role of the provider. In the current SASE Apprenticeship system, the provider makes an important contribution to gathering/reviewing evidence, organising it into portfolios, and making and recording assessment decisions. If the requirement for on-programme assessment diminishes, providers will need to reconsider how and at what points in the programme they can clearly add value to the apprentice's development.

One way in which they can do this is by providing stronger training inputs to address the skills, knowledge and behaviours the employer cannot cover. Providers will need to examine the new Standards and Assessment Plans carefully and have a clear idea about the scope of training and experience which the apprentice may receive in the workplace and what they can offer to complement on-job learning. Focused inputs of this kind, tailored to a company's needs, may prove very attractive to employers.

In general, there will be a higher demand for smart and innovative curriculum design and the capacity to provide high quality off-the-job learning that will support the apprentice in their journey to the end-point assessments.

Provider staff who until now have mainly been involved in on-programme assessment will now need to become effective teachers and trainers and undertake appropriate CPD.

There Will (Usually) Be Grading

This is another big change. Up to now we have assessed apprentices on the basis of pass/fail which mirrors the competent/not yet competent approach which has been used for many years. One of the recommendations of the *Review of Apprenticeships* was that apprentices should be graded. The argument was that employers are not just interested in whether the apprentice can do the job, but *how well* they can do the job. A grading system might also encourage harder work for higher grades. Most of the new Assessment Plans, therefore, contain two or three grades, usually 'Pass', 'Merit' and 'Distinction' or 'Pass' and 'Distinction'

However, grading has not been accepted by all Trailblazer Groups. Some employers feel it is not relevant to their sectors and exceptions are allowed. However, where grading does apply, it may add a further layer of complexity to reforms which are already quite challenging. In particular:

- For the majority of employers and providers, grading schemes are new and additional training will be needed.
- In most cases, grading will only apply to some assessments (for example, testing knowledge and understanding), but not others (usually the practical work). Careful thought will need to be given to how much weighting a graded score gives to the overall final result. We may find, for example, that an apprentice who gets a high mark for a knowledge and understanding test (graded) ends up with a better overall grade than another apprentice whose practical skills (ungraded) are actually superior.
- Grading schemes will differ for different Apprenticeships so generic training will be difficult.

4. The Content Is Changing – The Curriculum Will Need to Change Too

Goodbye to PLTS and ERR

The most obvious changes to content are the removal of Employment Rights and Responsibilities (ERR) and Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS). These have both been around for some time in different forms and were intended to give apprenticeships a greater breadth than just job specific technical skills and knowledge.

PLTS Out, Behaviours In

The disappearance of PLTS may appear at first sight to make life easier since most sectors require evidence for these through an often complex system of cross-referencing against technical tasks. However, the principal of broad transferable skills returns in the form of Behaviours.

Like PLTS, they must be evidenced and therefore some degree of cross-referencing may still be needed. Having said that, like many aspects of the new apprenticeships, these Behaviours (unlike the PLTS) are being written specifically for the occupation which the apprenticeship covers. Although they tend to include many of the same areas as the PLTS (for example, teamwork and self-management), the employer groups have chosen the ones which are most appropriate and written them in a way which is more relevant to the job. This will probably make assessment flow more easily since evidence for the Behaviours is more likely to occur naturally during the apprentice's day-to-day work.

There is a CPD implication:

- Assessment of Behaviours needs to be done well otherwise it is wide open to subjective judgments. There is a good precedent in the way behavioural assessment is used for in-company performance appraisal. Good Human Resource Management practice would always recommend that the managers who carry out the appraisals are appropriately trained. The same principle should apply to Behavioural assessment in the future Apprenticeships.
-

ERR Out and Nothing In

ERR has gone and, unlike PLTS, is not being replaced. Some may feel the removal of ERR is a step forward – taking out something that was never directly relevant to 'learning a trade'. However, the ERR did deliver some very useful knowledge, not just rights and responsibilities as an employee but also a broader understanding of the sector in which the apprentice works, key organisations within the sector and, perhaps most importantly, the typical career pathways available. The fact that even this rather narrow element of general education has been taken out looks like a retrograde step and compares badly with other European countries where apprenticeships are seen not just as training for work but also as contributing to the young person's sense of citizenship and social identity.

Without the ERR as a requirement, apprentices will definitely need alternative access to clear and reliable careers information, advice and guidance.

The Standard of competence may (or may not) be the same

Every Apprenticeship since the 1990s (including the current SASE) has used National Occupational Standards (NOS) and qualifications (Competence qualifications and Technical Certificates) based on NOS.

These were developed by Sector Skills Councils, usually after a long period of research and consultation with employers. The new Trailblazer Groups are asked to take a different approach. Every Group has to produce a *two-page only* Standard for each occupation describing the skills, knowledge and behaviours the apprentice should have acquired by the end of the programme.

In some cases, the Trailblazer Groups have relied on the 'old' NOS for their content and, in others they have done something different – possibly more up-to-date and 'world class'. In most cases – partly because the new Standard is so short – it is hard to tell how different the new ones are from the SASE content. We have not yet seen any comparison documents which show the similarities and differences.

The shortness of each Standard raises another problem. Two pages may be a good 'headline' summary but that summary lacks the detail needed to put together training programmes – all of which must be a minimum of one year and some may last up to four.

Both of these factors (the possible/unknown deviation from well-recognised and established standards and the lack of published detail) will make it difficult for different providers to design programmes that lead towards the same specific outcomes. Without providers having sufficient detail to put together a curriculum, will all apprentices in the same occupation acquire the same skills, knowledge and behaviours?

Some Trailblazer Groups are trying to address this gap by producing more detailed and much longer Employer Occupational Briefs (for example, Digital Industries). Some others are referencing existing training handbooks (for example, Golf Greenkeepers). However, this practice is not widespread and without this detail providers in some sectors may find it hard to put together training programmes which have the right scope and content and lead to the desired outcomes for the apprentice.

BestAssessor.com strongly believes that this information gap must be addressed: providers need more content detail – *without prescription about training methods* – to plan high quality programmes.

There will also be confusion about what is the standard for any given occupation – is it the established NOS or is it the new Apprenticeship Standard?

There May (Or May Not) Be Qualifications

This, like the non-use of national occupational standards, is a major departure from all previous Apprenticeship systems. It's an odd one since the *Review of Apprenticeships* did not ask for the removal of qualifications, simply that qualifications should be more 'robust'. However, government guidance strongly encourages the Trailblazer groups *not* to use qualifications unless they are a statutory requirement or a licence to practice.

Some Trailblazers, for example, Automotive, are keeping Technical Certificates and NVQs (or at least NVQ units). Other, for example, Financial Services, are not.

This will be a significant change for many providers:

- Providers are used to having a clear qualification structure (often provided in a standard format) on which they can base their training. Without the need to follow a qualification structure, providers will certainly have more freedom to be creative – something the government wants. However, a well-written qualification also provides the 'scaffolding' from which good programmes can be designed. Without this scaffolding – and given the lack of detail in the new two-page Standards –

providers may struggle. Where structure and scaffolding is provided, this is likely to take a variety of formats and provider resources are likely to be stretched in dealing with the sheer diversity involved.

- If there are no qualifications, what exactly does the apprentice get at the end? The simple answer is that the apprentice who ‘passes’ gets an apprenticeship (which will be a legally protected term). Under the current, SASE, system they could at least take away one or more of the qualifications that make up the Frameworks. To offset this, some new Standards offer the possibility of the successful apprentice gaining membership of a relevant professional body, where these exist.
- Of course, providers can choose to include vocational qualifications as part of their training offer, but this will add a further layer of cost in a market which is likely to become more and more competitive.

The new Apprenticeships cover single occupations, not sectors or ‘job families’

This is, perhaps, one of the more surprising changes. For many years UK vocational programmes have tried to cover transferable ‘core’ competences which run across a sector or area of work and provide ‘optional’ pathways for specific occupations. This seemed to align well with the pace of change in the workplace (where individual jobs may change quickly or disappear altogether) and gave learners a wider range of career opportunities. The new Standards are being developed for individual occupations, sometimes by different Trailblazer Groups and with no mechanism (as yet) to agree on a common core across related jobs.

This may give greater control for employers to ensure that there are no compromises in the training needed for their jobs. However,

- The number of individual Apprenticeships will increase dramatically. Currently there are around 250 SASE Frameworks. Under the new system we could have somewhere in the region of 700-800 individual Standards and Assessment Plans by the time the process is finished, and if there are commonalities or linkages, these may be accidental rather than planned.
- Apprentices may end up being trained narrowly for a specific occupation (for example, Financial Services Customer Adviser), rather than the broader sector (for example, Financial Services); this may not give the Apprentice broad enough preparation for later career progression.
- The concept of a progressive framework may disappear. It will be more difficult now for successful Apprentices to transfer credit for the competences they have demonstrated in one occupation to a different one, if they need to make a career move into a related, but not identical job; the promise of ‘credit transfer’ which was a cornerstone of the now defunct Qualifications and Credit Framework disappears into thin air.
Without the more complex and time-consuming Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), broader career opportunities for successful apprentices could be restricted.
- For providers it means that training cannot be rationalised so easily. With existing Frameworks, you could have reasonably good class sizes for the core learning outcomes and deal with the job specific units in smaller groups or through individual coaching.

Content (and assessment) will vary from sector to sector: there will be a greater emphasis on sector-based CPD

It should be clear from the above discussion that Apprenticeships will become more diverse across different sectors and, in turn, more specific to each sector. There will also be a greater expectation that provider staff will be *occupationally expert*. The likely outcome is that CPD initiatives will need to be more sector specific – i.e. CPD for trainers and assessors will need to focus tightly on the requirements

of each individual Apprenticeship (or groups of Apprenticeships where these are being developed by the same Trailblazer Group). New provider staff will probably be recruited on the basis of recent industrial experience. Existing staff will need to be upskilled on current industrial practice, for example, through work-shadowing.

5. The Funding Model Will Change the Way We Work

Apprenticeships will be funded by a levy imposed on big employers

The government has now confirmed an Apprenticeship levy of 0.5% of the wage bill for companies with wage bills of £3m per year or more, effective as of April 2016. This is predicted to raise around £3bn by 2019/20.

Therefore, a large proportion of the cost of Apprenticeship training will no longer be financed from general taxation. This is not simply a cost-cutting measure, but is intended to incentivise major employers to engage with Apprenticeships. The argument is that if major employers are forced to pay into a funding pool, they are much more likely to get that money back again by recruiting and training more apprentices.

In addition, since they are paying the money anyway, they may be more incentivised to take the lead in defining Apprenticeship standards and controlling quality.

The levy collected from major employers – who you might argue can better afford to contribute – will be used to fund Apprenticeship training for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), who may be less well off.

In theory it sounds good but there may be unintended consequences. Without yet knowing how the final system will work, it is hard to predict these, but, for example:

- Will employers pay the levy by diverting money away from their own in-house training programmes? The CEO of one major retailer has already said this is likely to happen in his company. If it does, it could have an overall negative impact on competitiveness and productivity.
- Will the incentive actually work? Whatever levy contribution the major employer can claw back will only cover the cost of apprentice *training*. The employer still has to pick up the apprentice *wage costs*, and this may be a deterrent. If so, major employers may not recruit more apprentices after all. If this happens, the apprentice levy may become a tax on the large employer which is mainly spent on training apprentices working for SMEs. It's worth bearing in mind that England set up a very similar Apprenticeship funding system in the 1960s, but this was mostly abandoned less than twenty years later, mainly because large employers were unhappy with the levy and the fact that they were subsidising training for smaller companies. Where the levy system survived – in Construction and Engineering – we still find employers complaining about skills shortages.
- In fact we know that the bulk of the workforce in England is employed by SMEs and they will have to do the heavy lifting if the Government is to achieve its target of 3m starts by 2020. Yet there are no similar incentives for them.
- There may be a tendency for the large employers (since they will be ones paying for it) to dominate the development of Standards and Assessment Plans, making them less appropriate for the SMEs.

Money for apprenticeship training will be controlled by the employer and they will choose how to spend it

This turns the current funding model on its head. The objective is to give each individual employer ownership of their apprentices' training who can then go to the provider market and purchase the best, best value, or perhaps cheapest, provision they can find. Potentially, this will completely change the way most providers operate.

- Under the present system, funding to providers is relatively simple and predictable (although there have been some hiccups). Providers pitch for business from a single body, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), then find employers to provide the Apprenticeship places.
- Under the new system, providers will have to pitch for business from multiple employers. Revenue streams become less predictable and additional investment in marketing and sales may erode profit margins, making the Apprenticeship market less attractive to providers than it is now.
- Employers, may want to gain as much of the funding as possible by providing more of the off-job training themselves. This may diminish the amount of business available for Apprenticeship-related training.
- Where employers do look for external training provision, it is more likely that they will want focused packages that cover the bits they cannot do themselves. We may find colleges and providers having to design more 'bespoke' programmes for individual companies. This will probably work well for occupations that need a lot of underpinning knowledge and understanding that is best delivered in classroom. Providers still have something to offer. For occupations where most of the off-the-job can be done in-house, there may be little or no need to work with a provider.
- The market may become more price sensitive with employers looking out for the best bargains from colleges and providers. This is likely to give a further boost to alternative forms of provision such as distance and blended learning.

Despite the fact that employers will control the training funds, it's the providers who are likely to be better informed about the changes taking place. If providers do get up to speed on what is happening, they will certainly be in a good position to help employers understand their new responsibilities and work with them to achieve quality results.

6. Five Practical Things You Can Do

1. 'Wake up and smell the coffee'?

It may sound brutal but if you don't already know what's going on, it's time to find out! And more than that, keep up-to-date. It's a fast moving area and there are new developments all the time.

For background reading, the two main documents ([Richard Review of Apprenticeships](#) and [The Future of Apprenticeships in England](#)) have already been referenced. Other valuable sources of updates can be gathered from regular online publications such as [FE Week](#).

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) maintains a very informative and well maintained [website](#) which covers many of the Trailblazer developments.

BestAssessor.com regularly provides news and insights via our [Twitter account](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

2. Find and Study the New Standards and Assessment Plans

The next thing is to identify which Standards and Assessment Plans are relevant to you, what changes are about to happen and work out what they will mean to you. Those that are already approved and those under development can be found at the [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills \(BIS\) website](#). The website is regularly updated when new documents come online so it's worth making a weekly visit to see what's happening.

3. Make Your Voice Heard

Trailblazer Groups are also consulting on their draft Standards and Assessment Plans and there are opportunities for you to make your own views known. BIS has now provided access to a [public online feedback survey](#) to support the evidence-gathering and decision-making process. Consultations are only live for two weeks so visit the survey often and see which consultations are relevant to you. If the Standards and Assessment Plans are going to be robust and sustainable, it's vital that the Trailblazer Groups get as much feedback as possible.

4. Contact the Relevant Apprentice Assessment Organisations and Keep Track of their Preparations

The AAOs will have responsibility for implementing the assessment arrangements for each new Apprenticeship. As their preparations continue, they should be able to provide more detailed information on what will be tested and how.

Currently only a small number of AAOs have been approved by the SFA for specific Apprenticeships, but this number will grow quickly. The [list of AAOs](#) is published and regularly updated by BIS.

5. Undertake CPD with BestAssessor.com

Continuing Professional Development must be very high on the agendas of all training providers and employers who will be involved in the new Apprenticeship system. We are the experts who can provide the learning you need.

BestAssessor.com will be making its contribution through a series of CPD workshops. These will be flexible and interactive and will carry CPD points. On completion, delegates will be able to:

- Understand the generic changes across all industries and why the government is bringing them in.
- Analyse a relevant sample some new 'Trailblazer' Standards and understand about how employers have produced them.
- Analyse the appropriate Assessment Plans and explore how the different elements fit together.
- Evaluate the implications for Assessor skills:
 - What will happen to portfolios and on-job assessment?
 - What will these new end-tests and assessment methods look like?
 - How can I measure Apprentice progress to ensure they are ready for end-point assessment?
 - Can I become an independent assessor? If so, how do I do it?
 - Am I ready to grade apprentice achievement?
 - Am I ready to assess apprentice Behaviours?
- Evaluate the implication for Curriculum Design
 - How do I design training programmes to meet the requirements of the new Standards and Assessment Plans?
 - How do I integrate on- and off-job training to create an effective learning package?
- Identify further CPD needs and develop a personal action plan to address these
- Take part in follow-up study and feedback

BestAssessor.com invites all Apprenticeship training providers and employers to join us in making this a success.



Together, we can make this work!