



How to get involved
in the Trailblazer
reforms if you're an
employer

From 2017, Trailblazers will replace existing apprenticeship frameworks, with the aim of making it easier and more practical for employers to take on apprentices.

Having set an ambitious target of 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020, the government is understandably keen to ignite interest in the initiative, which looks to train and upskill candidates for a minimum of one year.

So, what is a Trailblazer?

Launched in October 2013 as part of reforms to apprenticeships, a Trailblazer comprises a group of employers, training providers and sector-specific awarding organisations, all working together in a single group to develop best-practice content and approaches for their industry.

They aim to help employers:

- develop standards for job roles that are more relevant to their respective industries
- increase the quality of apprenticeships – putting the focus on end-point assessments that confirm a learner’s competence in a particular role
- simplify the system – putting the focus on KSBS (knowledge, skills and behaviours)
- assume purchasing power – increasing the quality of training by putting employers in charge of government funding for training.

Having started with 8 Trailblazers, the latest figures from the Skills Funding Agency show there are now more than 1,200 employers involved with Trailblazer groups in the UK, with 375 apprenticeship standards currently in development,





approved as standards or approved as standards for delivery.

Becoming a Trailblazer

In order to set up a Trailblazer group, employers must be prepared to work together to design standards and assessment plans for a particular apprenticeship role. This includes sourcing the types of training providers needed to deliver these standards.

There's no funding available for this – employers tend to be driven by a passion to improve learning, development and employment opportunities in their industry.

In the first instance, any employer interested in creating an apprenticeship role should check whether a Trailblazer group already exists. They can do this by visiting the Skills Funding Agency website (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/skills-funding-agency), which publishes the status of all Trailblazer applications.



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8 'must-haves' for Trailblazers

Trailblazer groups must fulfil the following criteria:

1. Consist of at least 10 employers (in addition to any participating professional bodies or trade associations).
2. Be representative of those who employ people in this occupation.
3. Include at least two employers with fewer than 50 employees.
4. Have one employer member as chair.
5. Ensure that any other organisations, such as sector or trade bodies, professional bodies, training providers or industry training boards are invited to support the process – but don't lead the process.
6. Constitute members willing to work inclusively and collaboratively with

other employers or groups who come forward with an interest.

7. Comprise of employers prepared to work with other organisations to promote and market the standard.
8. Have employers looking to make use of the standard once it's ready for delivery (these businesses must also be ready to commit individually to a specific number of starts).



Kickstarting the process

Groups of Trailblazers then join forces to submit a bid to develop one or more apprenticeship standards – known as an Expression of Interest (EOI).

This document, which is accepted on a monthly basis, must meet the set criteria. If approved, a Trailblazer will be assigned a Relationship Manager to help the group widen its scope to include the providers and professional bodies that can help it develop an official standard.



Include at least two employers with fewer than 50 employees

EOI submissions

Once received, an EOI will go online for a two-week period to give other people an opportunity to comment on it. This may lead to any interested employers making contact with the group. You'll also receive a link to the survey so that you can publicise it.

The government estimates that Trailblazers should be able to get an approved EOI through to an approved assessment plan within a year. However, it's important to note that if a Trailblazer shows no real progress, permission to develop the standard may be withdrawn.

Getting the numbers right

All standards are subject to a funding cap that's assigned once an EOI has been accepted and later confirmed at approval stage. There are 15 funding caps available to Trailblazers.

It's essential that Trailblazer groups get to grips with costings for training, so they're able to get the best value from their allocated cap.

Support for Trailblazers is structured so that for every £1 the employer contributes to the external training and assessment costs of an apprenticeship, the government will pay £2. In 2017, a UK-wide levy is also being introduced to help boost the number of apprenticeships and improve the quality of apprenticeship training.

Additional incentives are also paid to:

- Employers with less than 50 employees
- Those employing apprentices aged 16-18
- Employers on completion of the standard.

£1

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Developing standards

A template is available for Trailblazer groups to use, but the rules state that a standard should:

- be short, concise and clear (no more than two pages long)
- set out the full competence needed in an occupation
- have the support of employers including smaller businesses
- require at least a year of training (before the end-point assessment) with off-the-job training accounting for at least 20% of the apprenticeship
- align with professional registration where it exists
- contain minimum English and maths requirements and any digital skills needed
- only include mandatory qualifications under certain circumstances.

End-point assessments

One major change in the way Trailblazer apprenticeships operate is the introduction of end-point assessments, or EPAs. In the majority of cases these will be graded and aim to evaluate an individual's KSB – or Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours. The idea is to apply a robust and controlled test once they have the depth and breadth of training required to perform the intended role.

This assessment must also be independent, and conducted by an expert who is listed on the Skills Funding Agency's Register for Apprentice Assessment Organisations (RoAAO).

An EPA constitutes a major part of any Trailblazer standard, so it's vital that groups understand the appropriate range of tests needed for their standard.



Expert input

Training providers and awarding organisations will be integral to planning a Trailblazer standard – assisting employers in not only understanding how training should be structured throughout the apprenticeship, but at EPA stage too.

NCFE has worked with the Supply Chain and Logistics Trailblazer group to develop three apprenticeship standards and assessment plans. As the group's chosen Awarding Organisation Partner, it lends its experience and expertise in developing high quality standards and approaches to assessment for apprenticeships in the sector.

CACHE is due to start working on the development of new Playwork apprenticeship standards, as well as new Trailblazer standards for support staff in schools. An employer-led Trailblazer group is also finalising the development of new Health and Social Care Apprenticeship standards for levels 2 to 5.

The Institute for Apprenticeships

Plans are underway for a new employer-led Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) to be fully operational by April 2017. In the interim, the Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards (FISSS) will develop and deliver the certification service for standards until December 2016.

For more details about Trailblazer apprenticeships, visit: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/skills-funding-agency



2016

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