



Department
for Education

Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider Pilot

**Expression of Interest: Guidance and
Application Process**

September 2023

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). It has been produced to help apprenticeship training providers (providers) to complete an Expression of Interest to take part in a pilot to test an Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider status.

Expiry or review date of this guidance

This guidance will be reviewed before August 2024.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for **main** apprenticeship training providers who are:

- already registered with the Apprenticeship Service
- on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR), and
- hold an existing Department for Education (DfE) Apprenticeships Provider Agreement to deliver apprenticeships

Supporting providers, employer-providers, and end point assessment organisations are not eligible to participate.

Main points

Interested providers should read this guidance document before completing the Expression of Interest [Selection Questionnaire](#). To participate in the pilot, providers must be able to meet the minimum requirements set out in this guidance and the [Selection Questionnaire](#).

- Expressions of Interest to take part in the Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider pilot (pilot) will be accepted from **Wednesday 13 September 2023**.
- The closing date for Expressions of Interest to be received is **23:59 on Wednesday 27 September 2023**.

SECTION ONE

Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider Pilot

Welcome to this Expression of Interest process for taking part in the Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider Pilot (pilot). This is designed to be a light-touch process for training providers with minimal time required to complete the Expression of Interest.

This is not a procurement exercise. The Department for Education (DfE) is not procuring any services and there is no additional funding to be awarded.

Overview

The DfE is looking to develop and pilot an Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider status. We are inviting expressions of interest from **main** training providers who are already registered with the Apprenticeship Service, are on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR), hold an existing DfE Apprenticeships Provider Agreement to deliver apprenticeships and meet the criteria for participating in the pilot.

Interested training providers should complete a light-touch Expression of Interest to participate in the pilot if they are able to meet the minimum requirements set out in the [selection questionnaire template section](#) in this document.

What expert providers will get through the pilot

We have listened to feedback from the sector about the challenges you face when supporting non-levy paying employers (SMEs) to engage with the apprenticeship system.

Through this pilot we will make it easier for you to work with SMEs by giving expert providers more access to our systems, reducing the time and resource you need to commit to coaching non-levy paying employers through their digital journey.

We will use this new expert status to give you the opportunity to identify and realise operational cost and resource savings.

Training providers can use their Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider status as a mark of excellence and a marketing tool and we will also explore how we can promote a provider's expert status as part of the pilot, for example through [Find Apprenticeship Training](#) (FAT).

We will give selected providers flexibilities and permissions in the Apprenticeship Service, including the opportunity to access the system and carry out tasks on behalf of SMEs.

Expert Providers will also enjoy a range of non-system based benefits, including scheduled access to senior DfE officials and the ability to shape and influence the simplification agenda as a consultative group for improvements to the wider programme.

We want to work in partnership with established training providers to assess the benefits of the Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider status and associated flexibilities and their potential impact on, for example, quality of delivery, apprenticeship starts (particularly for young people and with SMEs), employer feedback, efficiency of delivery and savings for providers.

Background to the pilot

The DfE remains committed to supporting the growth and quality of apprenticeships and we want to recognise and reward excellence.

As part of the simplification programme, we have listened to stakeholder feedback about the administrative burden involved in the end-to-end delivery of the programme for employers and providers.

We have already made several changes and improvements to streamline the delivery of apprenticeships and make them easier for providers and employers to deliver.

We are continuing to engage with training providers, employers, and assessment organisations to work through the apprenticeship journey from start to finish and identify and address barriers to delivery.

Informed by this feedback we want to work in partnership with a small group of training providers to identify, test, and pilot potential additional flexibilities and simplification measures which could be awarded to those providers deemed 'expert' in the long term. The work may also identify simplification options that would benefit the whole of the apprenticeship programme.

Aims of the pilot

The aim of this pilot is to test and refine a range of additional flexibilities and permissions that could be awarded to Expert Apprenticeship Training Providers. Through the pilot, DfE will work in partnership with selected providers to evaluate their impact on SME employers and the providers who deliver their apprenticeship training.

The pilot will test what impact, if any, expert status has on non-levy starts, starts for young people, and programme delivery cost and resource efficiencies for training providers.

Timetable

Date	Milestone
Wednesday 13 September 2023	Expressions of Interest to take part in the pilot will be accepted
Wednesday 27 September 2023	Expression of Interest window will close at 23:59
Monday 16 October 2023	Providers will be informed of the outcome of their Expression of Interest
Tuesday 31 October 2023	The pilot will launch
April 2024	We will begin to evaluate the impact on SMEs and providers
Autumn 2024	If the pilot is successful, we will commence wider roll-out of the Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider status

SECTION TWO

Specification

Providers will need to meet a number of requirements to be eligible to take part in the pilot.

Service Requirements

Providers already commit to, and will be expected to continue to operate in accordance with the documents below:

- [The Provider Agreement](#)
- Apprenticeship [Funding Rules](#)
- Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register [\(APAR\) Conditions of Acceptance](#)

To support the development of the Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider status, providers will engage in a pilot programme to test and evaluate different aspects of the policy and its supporting systems.

Expert Apprenticeship Training Providers will have a good track record of delivering high quality apprenticeship training programmes. This amounts to 5 years delivery for Further Education Colleges and Independent Training Providers and 2 years delivery for Higher Education Providers.

Expert Apprenticeship Training Providers that meet our criteria on financial health, quality measures, and engagement with SMEs and young people, will act as ambassadors for the programme and will be able to use their 'expert' status as a marketing tool and mark of excellence.

Participating providers need to be main providers. Supporting providers, employer-providers, and end point assessment organisations **are not** eligible to participate.

To be eligible to participate in the pilot, potential providers will need to hold an existing Department for Education Apprenticeships Provider Agreement to deliver apprenticeships.

To be considered for the pilot, providers must submit a light-touch **Expression of Interest** which fully complies with the instructions set out in the [selection questionnaire template section](#) in this document.

Providers must be able to meet the selection criteria and continue to meet the Expression of Interest selection criteria throughout the duration of the pilot. Where this is not the case the DfE may consider revoking their participation in the pilot.

Pilot Requirements

To enable DfE to fully test the impact of the expert status (including to understand the impact of Apprenticeship Service permissions and the quality mark on business growth and cost savings for providers), 'Expert Providers' will be required to test and evaluate a number of benefits, including but not limited to:

- employer level access to the Apprenticeship Service, for non-levy employers;
- a 'quality mark' conferring their expert status and preferential 'sorting' on Find Apprenticeship Training (FAT)
- priority engagement opportunities with DfE officials through workshops and roundtables

This may take the form of working groups, surveys, or submitting short reports.

Funding

There will be no additional funding available for Expert Apprenticeship Training Providers, though we anticipate that training providers will see growth in starts and realise savings through delivery efficiencies.

Revocation of Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider Status

Expert Provider status may be revoked in the following circumstances:

- if a safeguarding issue has been identified
- if a training provider receives an Ofsted rating lower than 'good' during the duration of the pilot
- if a training provider's contract to deliver apprenticeships is terminated
- if the training provider is the subject of a DfE or ESFA investigation, or if they receive an unsatisfactory opinion from an assurance review.

Decisions to revoke participation in the pilot and Expert Apprenticeship Training Provider status will be made on a case-by-case basis.

There will be no avenue for appeal against the DfE's decision.

Record Keeping

Participating training providers will be expected to:

- keep accurate records and maintain and share evidence to support an effective impact evaluation of the pilot, and
- participate fully in pilot activities, including regular workshops and meetings with the DfE.

SECTION THREE

Application Process

The Expression of Interest Process

The DfE will use a one-stage process for selecting training providers that have expressed an interest to participate in the pilot.

Applicants will complete a [Selection Questionnaire](#) consisting of tick-box questions (Y/N) and a single free text question (500 words).

The closing date for responses will be **23:59 on Wednesday 27 September 2023**.

Applications will be assessed, and applicants will be notified of the outcome **from Monday 16 October 2023**.

Limited feedback will be available for unsuccessful applicants. All decisions are final and there will be no right of appeal.

Selection Questionnaire and Scoring

The [selection questionnaire template](#) includes two parts.

Part 1 has questions that require 'yes' or 'no' responses.

Providers must be able to answer 'yes' to all questions to pass Part 1. Submissions with missing or 'no' responses will not be marked further and will be excluded from further consideration by the DfE in this selection process.

Part 2 of the application form is comprised of one question requiring a free-text response (up to 500 words). Answers to this question should demonstrate how the training provider intends to use their participation in the pilot to maximise the potential benefits to SME employers and their own organisation. A minimum score of good in Part 2 must be achieved, for a provider to pass ([see scoring matrix](#)).

We are looking for a **maximum of 15 providers** to join the pilot. Selected providers will be representative of the main provider types currently delivering the programme, including Independent Training Providers (ITPs), Further Education Colleges (FECs) and Higher Education Providers (HEPs). The proportion of providers from each provider type will be reflective of current market share (e.g., 7 ITPs, 5 FECs, 3 HEPs).

All providers must pass Part 1 and Part 2 of the selection questionnaire to be invited to participate in the pilot. In the case of oversubscription for each provider type the DfE will rank providers by their published All Age Qualification Achievement Rate, and levels of SME (non-levy recruitment), selecting providers with the highest levels to participate in

the pilot. The DfE may also make decisions based on the range of geographies and standards represented in the cohort of providers, to ensure the pilot tests effectiveness across a wide range of provision.

If more than 15 applications pass all Part 1 questions and score good or above in Part 2, DfE reserves the right to award further places on the pilot based on ensuring there is a good range of feedback available to help us successfully test the 'expert provider' model and prepare for wider implementation.

Completing the Expression of Interest

To participate, applicants are required to submit an Expression of Interest [Selection Questionnaire](#) which fully complies with the instructions provided and are advised of the following:

- it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that they have submitted a fully compliant response, and
- incomplete responses received will be deemed non-compliant, and the applicants Expression of Interest will be rejected.

Applicants must participate in and submit their Expression of Interest in the knowledge and on the understanding and acceptance that these conditions apply to the process and agree these terms in all respects. It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure that they have all the information they need to prepare their response.

The DfE reserves the right to issue further instructions during the period the Expression of Interest is live, including revisions to the documents required to submit a compliant response. Any changes to the instructions will be issued via the [ESFA update](#) and to sector membership bodies.

Applicants must satisfy themselves that they have submitted all documentation that has been requested by the DfE.

All interaction between the DfE and applicants must be conducted through the dedicated mailbox: ExpertProvider.PILOT@education.gov.uk

Clarification questions can be submitted to the dedicated [mailbox](#) for a response within 2 working days. We cannot guarantee a response for any questions submitted on the closing date, **Wednesday 27 September 2023**.

All responses from applicants must be submitted through the [Selection Questionnaire](#).

Providers are solely responsible for costs and expenses incurred in connection with the preparation and submission of their expression of interest.

The issue of the Expression of Interest in no way commits the DfE to award a place on the pilot to any provider.

The DfE reserves the right to alter the pilot requirements and related expression of interest at any time.

Data Entry

Expressions of Interest must adhere to the following requirements:

- all answers must be inserted into the relevant response field, no further attachments are permitted and only information entered into the relevant response field in accordance with the DfE's instructions will be taken into consideration for the purposes of evaluating the application
- the Expression of Interest must be submitted in the English (UK) language
- applicants must answer all requirements accurately and as fully as possible within the specified character limits
- each question answered must be complete in its own right which may mean having to repeat some information
- applicants must not answer questions by cross referring to other answers or to other materials (e.g., annual company reports located on a web site).

Deadline for the submission of Expression of Interest (Selection Questionnaire)

All responses must be received by the DfE before the submission deadline, as set out in [the timetable](#).

Responses received after the submission deadline will be considered non-compliant and will be excluded from evaluation.

Submitting the Expression of Interest (Selection Questionnaire)

Providers are responsible for ensuring that their response has been successfully completed prior to the submission deadline.

All Expressions of Interest must be submitted to the DfE through the [Selection Questionnaire](#). Responses submitted by any other means will not be accepted.

Providers may modify and resubmit their Expression of Interest at any time prior to the submission deadline. Responses cannot be modified after the submission deadline.

SECTION FOUR

How to submit an Expression of Interest

You **should read this guidance** before completing an Expression of Interest. All expressions of interest must be submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) online through the [Selection Questionnaire](#).

Selection Questionnaire Template

Training provider contact details

Providers will be asked to provide the following details about their organisation:

- Name of training provider
- Address of training provider
- UKPRN
- Senior Responsible Officer for the Application (e.g., CEO, College Principal)
- Application contact details (Name, telephone number and e-mail address)

Part 1 Questions

Providers must be able to respond positively to each of the questions in Part 1.

Theme	No.	Question	Resp.
Ofsted Rating	1.	Has your organisation been judged 'good' or 'outstanding' overall and in leadership and management by Ofsted in the most recent inspection	Yes/No
Length of delivery	2.	Has your organisation been delivering apprenticeships over a period of either 5 years (if you are an Independent Training Provider or FE college) or 2 years (if you are a HEI)?	Yes/No
Financial health	3.	Can you confirm that your organisation's financial health is 'good' and that your organisation has no current short- or medium-term financial health concerns? (Please Note: DfE may request a copy of your latest audited accounts or management accounts to review if you are successful).	Yes/No
Audit and compliance	4.a	Can you confirm that your organisation (and the people who are in control of your organisation), is not currently, or has not within the last 5 years, been subject to ESFA and/or DfE led contract management action or sanctions relating to how you operate?	Yes/No
	4.b	Can you confirm that your organisation is not currently, or has not within the last 5 years, been subject to an investigation by DfE or other public body or regulator?	Yes/No
	4.c	Can you confirm that your organisation has not, within the last 5 years, either been required to pay back funding in excess of £5000 and/or received an unsatisfactory opinion from either a DfE/ESFA or an internal audit/external audit that identified concerns/irregularity with governance, management controls and/or use of funds?	Yes/No
	4.d	Can you confirm that your organisation doesn't have any significant recurring issues from Funding Monitoring Reports ? (You do not need to declare any issues caused by DFE systems).	Yes/No
Apprentice achievement rate	5.	Does your organisation have an all age apprenticeship achievement rate of 51% or above as published in the 2021/22 national achievement rates ?	Yes/No
SME engagement	6.	Does your organisation deliver at least 30% (and a minimum of 50 annual starts) of its overall apprenticeships provision to non-levy paying employers (SMEs)?	Yes/No
Employer feedback	7.	Does your organisation have a 4-star rating for employer feedback as displayed on find apprenticeship training ?	Yes/No
Pilot participation	8.	Are you willing to commit to working with the DfE for the duration of the pilot to identify benefits for your organisation, other providers and employers via regular feedback, evaluation, and engagement in testing the Expert Training Provider status as described in the Specification?	Yes/No
	9.	Are you willing to participate in the pilot for the full duration? (at least 12 months)	Yes/No

Part 2 Question

Applicants must explain how their organisation will use the pilot to maximise the potential benefits to the organisation. This could include but is not limited to:

- growing SME participation and bringing new quality SMEs to market
- growing apprenticeship starts, especially for young people
- improving employer engagement and feedback
- improving quality of delivery
- identifying benefits to the delivery of apprenticeships, including cost and resource savings for your organisation.

The response is limited to 500 words.

Part 2 Scoring Matrix for Selection Criteria

Score	Rating	Basis for Awarding Score
0	Unacceptable	The response is absent or incomplete and/or the applicant fails to fundamentally answer the question. The response provides no evidence of and gives little to no confidence in the provider's ability, expertise and/or experience to meet the requirements of the pilot.
1	Very Poor	The response fails to answer very significant aspects of the question and/or the response contains no detail. The response shows very little evidence of the provider's ability, expertise and/or experience required to meet the requirements of the pilot.
2	Poor – Not Confident	The response fails to answer significant aspects of the questions and/or answers all aspects of the question but with a poor level of detail. The response shows poor or limited evidence and gives limited confidence in the provider's ability, expertise and/or experience to meet the requirements of the pilot.
3	Satisfactory - Minor concerns	The response addresses all aspects of the question in satisfactory detail and shows relevant evidence and gives reasonable confidence of the provider's ability, skills resources, expertise and/or experience to meet the requirements of the pilot.
4	Good - Confident	The response addresses all aspects of the question well and shows considerable relevant evidence and gives good confidence in the providers ability, skills, resources, expertise and/or experience to meet the requirements of the pilot.
5	Excellent – Very confident	The response addresses all aspects of the question extremely well and in detail and shows excellent and compelling relevant evidence and gives a high level of confidence in the provider's ability, skills, resources, expertise, and experience to meet the requirements of the pilot.



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