

# DRAFT - APPRENTICESHIPS REQUIREMENTS

## Apprenticeships Specification Cymru (ASC)

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Status and legal basis

- 1.1.1. This document, the Apprenticeships Specification Cymru (“the Specification”), is made under section 115 of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 (“the Act”).
- 1.1.2. It specifies requirements that must be met in relation to an approved Welsh apprenticeship.
- 1.1.3. From **1 August 2027**, this Specification will set out the requirements to be met in relation to approved Welsh apprenticeships entered into on and after that date. It replaces the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW), which operated under section 28 of Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.
- 1.1.4. Where a provision is expressed as mandatory, compliance is required. Where flexibility or discretion is permitted, this is stated explicitly.

#### 1.2. Definitions

- 1.2.1. In this Specification:
  - i. “approved Welsh apprenticeship” has the meaning given in section 111 of the Act;
  - ii. “equivalent learning and assessment” means learning and assessment arrangements based on occupational standards, where achievement is demonstrated through the assessment arrangements specified under paragraph 2.2.7 rather than through a qualification;
  - iii. “Essential Skills” means Essential Skills (Wales) qualifications in Essential Communication Skills, Essential Application of Number Skills and Essential Digital Literacy Skills;
  - iv. “framework” means an apprenticeship framework as defined in section 114 of the Act;
  - v. “Guidance” means the document titled **Guidance on the Application of the Apprenticeships Specification Cymru**, published separately;
  - vi. “occupational standards” means National Occupational Standards (NOS), recognised occupational standards and recognised professional standards;
  - vii. “Proxy List” means the **List of Recognised Proxy Qualifications for Essential Skills (Wales)**, published by the Welsh Ministers for the purposes of this Specification; and
  - viii. “proxy qualifications” means qualifications recognised through the Proxy List as an alternative means of evidencing specified Essential Skills;
  - ix. “Requirements” means the requirements specified in this Specification under section 115 of the Act.

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## **1.3. Purpose of the Specification**

- 1.3.1. The purpose of this Specification is to ensure that approved Welsh apprenticeships are coherent, robust and of consistent quality.
- 1.3.2. The Specification provides a transparent, publishable and legally robust basis for the approval, review, revision and withdrawal of frameworks.
- 1.3.3. The Specification establishes a clear national baseline for apprenticeship frameworks in Wales, ensuring that apprenticeships:
  - i. support the achievement of occupational competence;
  - ii. respond to current and future labour market needs; and
  - iii. contribute to a coherent and high-quality tertiary education system.
- 1.3.4. The Specification is intended to provide a stable and enduring framework for apprenticeship provision, supported by Guidance and operational arrangements which may be updated more frequently to reflect system needs.

## **1.4. Scope of the Requirements**

- 1.4.1. These Requirements apply to approved Welsh apprenticeships. An apprenticeship framework must comply with the Requirements to be published by Medr under section 117 of the Act.
- 1.4.2. They relate to matters including (but not limited to):
  - i. framework content, structure and approval requirements;
  - ii. occupational competence, technical knowledge and qualifications;
  - iii. assessment, achievement and successful completion;
  - iv. Essential Skills and proxy qualifications;
  - v. training requirements, including on- and off-the-job training;
  - vi. matters to be taken into account when frameworks are prepared, reviewed or withdrawn.

## **1.5. Audience, application and relationship to guidance**

- 1.5.1. The Requirements are intended for:
  - i. Medr, as the body responsible for approving, publishing, maintaining, reviewing and, where necessary, withdrawing apprenticeship frameworks, maintaining the register of apprenticeship frameworks and for preparing apprenticeship frameworks where appropriate or securing their development by other bodies;
  - ii. framework developers, who must ensure that proposed frameworks meet the Requirements;
  - iii. apprenticeship providers, who must deliver approved Welsh apprenticeships in accordance with published frameworks and applicable Requirements;
  - iv. employers, who engage with approved Welsh apprenticeships developed and approved under the Requirements and may rely on published frameworks meeting the standards set out in this Specification;
  - v. awarding bodies, where relevant to the qualifications specified within apprenticeship frameworks.

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- 1.5.2. Welsh Ministers retain responsibility for the Specification and for setting the requirements for approved Welsh apprenticeships under section 115 of the Act.
- 1.5.3. In applying the Requirements:
- i. Medr must be satisfied that apprenticeship frameworks comply with the mandatory requirements set out in this Specification when approving, reviewing or maintaining them;
  - ii. framework developers must demonstrate clearly how each relevant Requirement is met when submitting frameworks for approval or revision;
  - iii. providers must deliver approved Welsh apprenticeships in a manner consistent with published frameworks and the intent of the Requirements.
- 1.5.4. This Specification distinguishes clearly between:
- i. mandatory Requirements, which must be complied with;
  - ii. permitted flexibilities, where frameworks or delivery models may vary within defined parameters; and
  - iii. matters for guidance, where additional detail is provided to support consistent interpretation and delivery.
- 1.5.5. Where matters are not specified in detail in this Specification, they may be addressed through published Guidance or operational arrangements. Guidance supports consistent interpretation and delivery but does not create additional requirements and does not override mandatory Requirements set out in this Specification.
- 1.5.6. Proxy qualifications are those included in the Proxy List, as in force on the date the relevant apprenticeship framework comes into force, unless otherwise stated.

### **1.6. Related documents**

- 1.6.1. This Specification should be read alongside the following related documents, which support its application and implementation:
- i. Guidance on the Application of the Apprenticeships Specification Cymru (Guidance), published separately;
  - ii. List of Recognised Proxy Qualifications for Essential Skills (Wales) (the Proxy List), published by the Welsh Ministers;
  - iii. In the event of any inconsistency between this Specification and a related document, this Specification prevails.

### **1.7. Commencement and transitional arrangements**

- 1.7.1. The Requirements in this Specification come into force on 1 August 2027.
- 1.7.2. From that date, the Requirements set out in this Specification must be used when (under the Act):
- i. developing new apprenticeship frameworks;
  - ii. revising or updating existing frameworks;
  - iii. considering the continued approval of existing frameworks.
- 1.7.3. Any revised version of this Specification should set out any transitional arrangements that apply to its implementation.
- 1.7.4. Unless otherwise specified in any transitional arrangements, apprentices who entered into an approved Welsh apprenticeship before a

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revised Specification comes into force may continue to completion under the requirements in force at the date the approved Welsh apprenticeship was entered into.

## **1.8. Review and change**

- 1.8.1. The Requirements in this Specification may be reviewed, revised or withdrawn in accordance with section 115 of the Act. Any revisions to the Requirements will be published and will include a clear commencement date.
- 1.8.2. The Specification will normally be reviewed periodically, taking account of legislative change, labour market developments, and system performance.
- 1.8.3. Changes to the Specification will be proportionate to their impact. Revisions to, or withdrawal of, requirements under this Specification will be undertaken in accordance with sections 115 and 116 of the Act.
- 1.8.4. Changes will be communicated with appropriate notice periods to support system readiness, including for providers, awarding bodies and employers.

## **1.9. Disclaimer**

- 1.9.1. All hyperlinks are correct at the time this Specification is issued. However, the Welsh Government cannot be responsible if any such links become obsolete due to documents being updated or the linked pages being taken down during the lifetime of this Specification.

## **2. Apprenticeship Frameworks**

### **2.1. All Apprenticeship Frameworks**

- 2.1.1. A framework must meet the Requirements set out in this Specification, including Requirements relating to:
  - i. occupational competence, technical knowledge and successful completion;
  - ii. qualifications or occupational standards, where applicable; and
  - iii. the type or amount of training undertaken.
- 2.1.2. Requirements in this Specification are structured according to qualifications, occupational competence, additional Requirements, Essential Skills and on- and off-the-job training.
- 2.1.3. A framework must not be so narrow that it is only relevant to a specific employer or workplace. It must support occupational competence that is transferable within the relevant sector.
- 2.1.4. A framework must specify its level using the national level descriptors described in the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).
- 2.1.5. A framework must be at:
  - i. Level 2 to qualify as a Foundation Apprenticeship;
  - ii. Level 3 to qualify as an Apprenticeship;
  - iii. Level 4 or 5 to qualify as a Higher Apprenticeship; and
  - iv. Level 6 or 7 to qualify as a Degree Apprenticeship.

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- 2.1.6. A framework must specify the minimum volume of learning in the form of CQFW credits. The number of credits must reflect the learning required to achieve full occupational competence in the skill, trade or occupation to which it relates.
- 2.1.7. Credit calculations must be derived from CQFW definitions and:
  - i. where qualifications are included, be consistent with the sum of published learning hours for each qualification included in the framework; or
  - ii. where qualifications are not included, be based on a robust and evidenced estimate of the total learning hours required to achieve full occupational competence, informed by occupational standards and assessment requirements.
- 2.1.8. Where credit values are derived without reference to qualifications, frameworks must clearly evidence:
  - i. how learning hours have been estimated;
  - ii. how these align with CQFW credit principles; and
  - iii. how the proposed volume of learning supports achievement of occupational competence.
- 2.1.9. A framework must include a minimum of 37 credits in total for occupational competence and technical knowledge components (not including Essential Skills), whether delivered through separate qualifications, a combined qualification, or equivalent learning and assessment. Credit values derived through equivalent learning and assessment must be determined in accordance with paragraph 2.1.7(ii). In many cases frameworks will significantly exceed this minimum.
- 2.1.10. The credit value attributed to occupational competence must represent at least 50% of the total credit value, unless the framework has a combined competence and knowledge qualification which must be at least 37 credits.
- 2.1.11. A framework must be reviewed periodically to ensure it is current and continues to meet the needs of the sector, in accordance with review arrangements determined by Medr.
- 2.1.12. In developing, approving, reviewing or revising apprenticeship frameworks, Medr must have regard to opportunities to increase access to Welsh-medium apprenticeship provision, taking account of learner demand, occupational competence requirements, and the availability of supporting standards, qualifications and assessment arrangements.
- 2.1.13. A framework must state both the date of its issue and the date by which it will be formally reviewed.

### **2.2. Qualifications and Occupational Competence**

- 2.2.1. A framework must identify either:
  - i. an occupational competence qualification and an occupational technical knowledge qualification; or
  - ii. an integrated (combined) qualification that includes both occupational competence and technical knowledge; or
  - iii. where qualifications are unavailable or require development, the framework must specify the relevant occupational standards (and, where applicable, draft qualifications may be referenced where regulatory approval is expected).

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- 2.2.2. Where draft qualifications are referenced on the basis that approval is expected by a UK qualifications regulator the framework must:
- specify any minimum credit value or other conditions in accordance with this Specification; and
  - make clear how the framework will remain operable if regulatory approval is not secured in time for implementation.
- 2.2.3. Where qualifications are included, competence and knowledge qualifications must be consistent with the framework level.
- 2.2.4. Where qualifications are included, the occupational competence and technical knowledge qualification(s) (or the integrated qualification) must be either:
- offered by an awarding body or organisation recognised by a UK qualifications regulator;
  - offered by a degree awarding body regulated by Medr; or
  - offered by a recognised industry body and meet occupational competence requirements.
- 2.2.5. Medr must be satisfied that any qualification specified within a framework complies with applicable legislative requirements, including section 34 of the Qualifications Wales Act 2015 where applicable.
- 2.2.6. Except where expressly permitted elsewhere in this Specification, all required components of the framework, including qualifications, or where applicable, components based on occupational standards, must be achieved by the apprentice in order to qualify for a Welsh apprenticeship certificate.
- 2.2.7. Where components are based on occupational standards, the framework must:
- specify the standards of attainment required for successful completion; and
  - specify the assessment arrangements through which achievement against those standards will be assessed and evidenced, including evidence of competence derived from workplace activity and aligned to the relevant occupational standards.
- 2.2.8. The majority of the occupational competence component, whether delivered through a qualification or equivalent learning and assessment, must be capable of being assessed from evidence gained through on-the-job training in a workplace.
- 2.2.9. Occupational competence must:
- be based on NOS, where they exist; or
  - where NOS do not exist, be based on recognised occupational or professional standards relevant to the occupation;
- 2.2.10. Where qualifications are included, they must be aligned to the relevant standards in accordance with sub-paragraphs 2.2.9(i) or 2.2.9(ii).
- 2.2.11. The technical knowledge component or element must provide the underpinning theoretical knowledge and understanding required to support occupational competence.
- 2.2.12. Where competence and knowledge are delivered through an integrated qualification, each element must be clearly identified within the framework.
- 2.2.13. The occupational competence and technical knowledge components, whether delivered through qualifications or equivalent learning and assessment, must be aligned to the level of the framework as determined in accordance with paragraph 2.1.5.

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## 2.3. Assessment and Assurance

- 2.3.1. Frameworks must specify how occupational competence and knowledge are assessed and evidenced.
- 2.3.2. Medr must be satisfied that arrangements for assessment and achievement ensure consistent and comparable outcomes across approved frameworks, including where frameworks do not rely on qualifications regulated by Qualifications Wales or another recognised UK qualifications regulator.

## 2.4. Additional Occupational Competence Requirements

- 2.4.1. Frameworks may specify additional short courses or programmes of learning required to meet occupational competence requirements.
- 2.4.2. Where additional occupational competence requirements are included:
  - i. the framework must specify the learning outcomes to be attained;
  - ii. outcomes may be assessed through qualifications or through other forms of independent and verifiable assessment.

## 2.5. On- and Off-the-Job Training

- 2.5.1. Frameworks must specify the minimum number of learning hours required to complete the framework.
- 2.5.2. Frameworks must specify the minimum number of on-the-job and off-the-job training hours required.
- 2.5.3. The balance between on-the-job and off-the-job training must reflect:
  - i. the nature of the occupation;
  - ii. the proportion of workplace-based assessment required.
- 2.5.4. All training must be undertaken whilst participating in an approved Welsh apprenticeship.

## 2.6. Essential Skills

- 2.6.1. **Level 2 (Foundation Apprenticeship)**
  - i. A foundation apprenticeship framework must specify the expected achievement levels of:
    - Essential Communication Skills; and
    - Essential Application of Number Skills;at a minimum of Level 1, or higher where determined by industry requirements.
  - ii. A framework may specify Essential Digital Literacy Skills at a minimum of Level 1 where relevant to effective performance in the occupation.
- 2.6.2. **Level 3 (Apprenticeship)**
  - i. An apprenticeship framework must specify the expected achievement levels of:
    - Essential Communication Skills; and
    - Essential Application of Number Skills;

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at a minimum of Level 2, or higher where determined by industry requirements.

- ii. A framework may specify Essential Digital Literacy Skills at a minimum of Level 2 where relevant to the occupation.

### **2.6.3. Levels 4 and 5 (Higher Apprenticeship)**

- i. Essential Skills are not mandatory for apprenticeship frameworks at Levels 4 and 5.
- ii. Frameworks must demonstrate how they have considered the relevance of Essential Skills based on:
  - occupational requirements;
  - the needs of learners.
- iii. Where Essential Skills are included, the requirements set out in paragraph 2.6.2 apply.
- iv. Where Essential Skills are not included, frameworks must ensure that learner needs are identified, including through initial assessment, and that appropriate support is provided where required.

### **2.6.4. Levels 6 and 7 (Degree Apprenticeship)**

- i. Essential Skills are not mandatory for degree apprenticeship frameworks.

## **2.7. Proxy Qualifications**

2.7.1. Where Essential Skills are specified in a framework, the framework must specify the proxy qualifications accepted for:

- i. Communication;
- ii. Application of Number;
- iii. Digital Literacy (where applicable).

2.7.2. Proxy qualifications are those included in the Proxy list, as in force on the date the relevant apprenticeship framework comes into force.

2.7.3. Any revision to the Proxy List will be published separately.

## **2.8. Completion of the Apprenticeship**

2.8.1. An apprentice is deemed to have completed the apprenticeship where all mandatory components of the framework have been successfully achieved. These components must be achieved in full, including occupational competence, technical knowledge, any additional requirements, and Essential Skills (where specified), in accordance with the assessment arrangements set out in the framework.