

Guidance on the Application of the Apprenticeships Specification Cymru (ASC)

1. Introduction

1.1 Status of this Guidance

This Guidance is to support the interpretation and application of the Apprenticeships Specification Cymru (ASC).

The ASC is published under section 115 of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 (TERA) and sets out requirements in relation to approved Welsh apprenticeships as defined in section 111 TERA.

This Guidance:

- explains the requirements contained within the ASC;
- provides information on how those requirements should be interpreted; and
- supports consistency in the development, approval, maintenance and review of apprenticeship frameworks.

This Guidance does not create additional requirements and does not override the ASC. In the event of any inconsistency, the ASC prevails.

1.2 Audience

This Guidance is intended for:

- Medr;
- framework developers;
- apprenticeship providers;
- awarding bodies;
- professional bodies;
- employers and employer representative bodies; and
- other organisations involved in the design, approval or delivery of apprenticeship frameworks.

1.3 Relationship to the ASC

The ASC specifies requirements in relation to approved Welsh apprenticeships.

This Guidance should be read alongside:

- Apprenticeships Specification Cymru (ASC);
- List of Recognised Proxy Qualifications for Essential Skills (Wales) (the Proxy List); and
- any operational arrangements published by Medr relating to framework approval, review or maintenance.

1.4 Purpose of ASC

ASC is intended to provide a clear, consistent and durable national baseline for approved Welsh apprenticeships.

It replaces the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW) and supports implementation of apprenticeship reforms under the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022.

The intention is to maintain confidence in the quality and consistency of Welsh apprenticeships whilst providing sufficient flexibility to respond to changing occupational, employer and learner needs.

2. Framework Development and Structure

Related ASC provisions: 2.1.1-2.1.13

2.1 Occupational Focus

Apprenticeship frameworks should support transferable occupational competence and should not be developed solely around the needs of a single employer or workplace.

The intention is to ensure that apprentices develop skills, knowledge and behaviours that are recognised and valued across the relevant occupation or sector, rather than being limited to a particular organisation or role.

2.2 Framework Levels

Frameworks must specify a level using the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).

The framework level should reflect the level of occupational competence and technical knowledge that an apprentice is expected to demonstrate on successful completion of the apprenticeship.

2.3 Credit Values and Volume of Learning

ASC requires frameworks to specify a minimum volume of learning expressed through CQFW credits. This helps provide a consistent and transparent means of describing the amount of learning associated with an apprenticeship framework.

The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that apprenticeship frameworks contain sufficient learning to support attainment of occupational competence and technical knowledge.

Where qualifications are included within a framework, credit values will normally be derived from those qualifications.

Where qualifications are not included, ASC permits credit values to be derived through equivalent learning and assessment arrangements based on occupational standards.

2.4 Occupational Competence Credit Requirement

ASC requires occupational competence to represent at least 50% of the total credit value of a framework, unless the framework contains a combined competence and knowledge qualification, in which case that qualification must be at least 37 credits.

The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that achievement of occupational competence remains the principal outcome of an apprenticeship framework and that occupational competence forms the largest single component of apprenticeship learning.

Where occupational competence is delivered through equivalent learning and assessment rather than qualifications, any derived credit value should be used when considering compliance with this requirement.

3. Qualifications and Occupational Competence

Related ASC provisions: 2.2.1-2.2.12

3.1 Qualification-Based Frameworks

Where qualifications are included, they should support achievement of occupational competence and technical knowledge appropriate to the occupation and framework level.

Qualifications may comprise:

- separate occupational competence and technical knowledge qualifications; or
- an integrated qualification containing both elements.

ASC does not prescribe the detailed design of qualifications. Its purpose is to specify the requirements that apprenticeship frameworks must meet, rather than to define the detailed content, structure or regulation of individual qualifications, which remain the responsibility of awarding bodies and qualifications regulators.

3.2 Occupational Competence

For the purposes of ASC, occupational competence refers to the practical skills, knowledge and behaviours required for effective performance within the occupation covered by a framework.

Occupational competence will normally be demonstrated through an occupational competence qualification. However, ASC also permits competence requirements to be based directly on occupational standards where qualifications are unavailable or require development.

This flexibility is intended to support occupations where appropriate qualifications do not yet exist or where qualification development is still underway, whilst maintaining confidence in apprenticeship outcomes.

3.3 Technical Knowledge

Technical knowledge refers to the underpinning theory, principles and understanding required to support occupational competence.

ASC distinguishes between occupational competence and technical knowledge to ensure that apprentices develop both the practical ability to undertake an occupation and the knowledge that supports effective performance within that occupation.

3.4 Occupational Standards and Standards of Attainment

Where occupational standards are used in place of qualifications, frameworks should identify:

- the occupational standards being applied;
- the standards of attainment required for successful completion; and
- how achievement against those standards will be assessed and evidenced.

For the purposes of ASC, "standards of attainment" refers to the level of performance, competence or achievement that an apprentice must demonstrate in order to successfully complete the framework.

3.5 Occupational Standards

ASC requires occupational competence to be based on:

1. National Occupational Standards (NOS), where they exist; or
2. recognised occupational standards or recognised professional standards where NOS do not exist.

Where occupational standards are used directly within a framework, they should be relevant to the occupation and capable of supporting achievement of occupational competence. The intention is to maintain confidence in apprenticeship outcomes whilst allowing flexibility in sectors where qualifications are unavailable or still under development.

3.6 Draft Qualifications

ASC allows draft qualifications to be referenced within a framework where regulatory approval is expected.

This provision is intended to support framework development and implementation planning where replacement or new qualifications are still progressing through regulatory approval processes.

4. Additional Occupational Requirements

Related ASC provisions: 2.4.1-2.4.2

Frameworks may include additional occupational requirements where these are necessary to support achievement of occupational competence.

Examples may include:

- licence to practise requirements;
- professional registration requirements;
- industry-specific certifications; or
- other occupation-specific requirements.

Where additional requirements are included, frameworks should clearly identify the outcomes to be achieved and how achievement will be evidenced.

5. On- and Off-the-Job Training

Related ASC provisions: 2.5.1-2.5.4

Frameworks must specify:

- minimum learning hours;

- minimum on-the-job training hours; and
- minimum off-the-job training hours.

The balance between on-the-job and off-the-job training will vary according to the occupation and framework requirements.

The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that apprentices receive sufficient workplace and off-the-job learning opportunities to support achievement of occupational competence.

6. Welsh Language Considerations

Related ASC provision: 2.1.12

ASC requires consideration of opportunities to increase access to Welsh-medium apprenticeship provision.

This reflects the Welsh Government's commitment to increasing opportunities for learners to undertake apprenticeships through the medium of Welsh where practical and appropriate.

Relevant considerations may include:

- learner demand;
- opportunities to increase participation in Welsh-medium apprenticeship provision;
- employer demand;
- availability of Welsh-medium provision; and
- wider Welsh Government Welsh language priorities.

The intention is to encourage continued growth in Welsh-medium apprenticeship opportunities whilst recognising that availability of Welsh-medium qualifications, occupational standards and assessment arrangements may vary between sectors.

7. Essential Skills and Proxy Qualifications

Related ASC provisions: 2.6.1-2.7.3

7.1 Purpose

Essential Skills support apprentices to participate effectively in employment, learning and wider society.

7.2 Framework Requirements

For Foundation Apprenticeships and Apprenticeships, ASC specifies minimum Essential Skills requirements while allowing frameworks to require higher levels where appropriate for the occupation.

This reflects the principle that apprenticeship frameworks should provide a consistent baseline while retaining flexibility to respond to occupational need.

7.3 Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

ASC does not require Essential Skills to be included within Higher Apprenticeship or Degree Apprenticeship frameworks.

This reflects a policy intention to adopt a more proportionate approach at higher apprenticeship levels, recognising that learners may already possess relevant qualifications, skills or experience.

The intention is to reduce unnecessary barriers to participation and completion whilst retaining flexibility for framework developers to include Essential Skills where they remain relevant to occupational competence or industry need.

7.4 Proxy Qualifications

Where Essential Skills are specified within a framework, the framework should identify which proxy qualifications from the published Proxy List may be accepted as evidence of attainment of the relevant Essential Skills.

Unless otherwise specified, the version of the Proxy List in force when the relevant apprenticeship framework comes into force should apply.

Any revisions to the Proxy List will be published separately.

8. Framework Review

Related ASC provisions: 2.1.11 and 2.1.13

Frameworks should be reviewed periodically in accordance with arrangements determined by Medr.

The purpose of review is to ensure that frameworks remain current, relevant and responsive to changes in occupations, qualifications and labour market needs whilst continuing to support achievement of occupational competence and technical knowledge.

9. Commencement and Transitional Arrangements

Related ASC provisions: Commencement and Transitional Arrangements

ASC applies to apprenticeship frameworks from 1 August 2027.

Apprentices who commenced under arrangements approved pursuant to the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW) will continue to be subject to those arrangements unless alternative transitional arrangements are specified.

Future revisions to ASC may include specific transitional arrangements where appropriate.