



Department
for Education

Flexible Apprenticeships in the Life Sciences sector

May 2023



Office for
Life Sciences





Introduction

Introduction: purpose of this manual

This manual is for Life Science employers to explore how apprenticeships can be flexed to meet individual needs. It outlines **different ways that apprenticeships can be used flexibly**:

Pages 6-10: flexible models for training where off-the-job training is delivered to best suit the needs of apprentices and employers, whether through weekly delivery, front-loading, or block training.

Pages 11-13: accelerated apprenticeships which significantly reduce the duration by reflecting prior learning.

Pages 14-16: Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies and Portable Flexi-Job Apprenticeships (pilot) which support learners to move between shorter-term work with different employers including in life sciences.

Employers making use of these flexibilities are seeing the benefits in workforce satisfaction and productivity. We want all employers to consider how they can tailor apprenticeships to employees and their needs.

Introduction: what is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a **paid job** where employees can **learn and gain valuable experience**

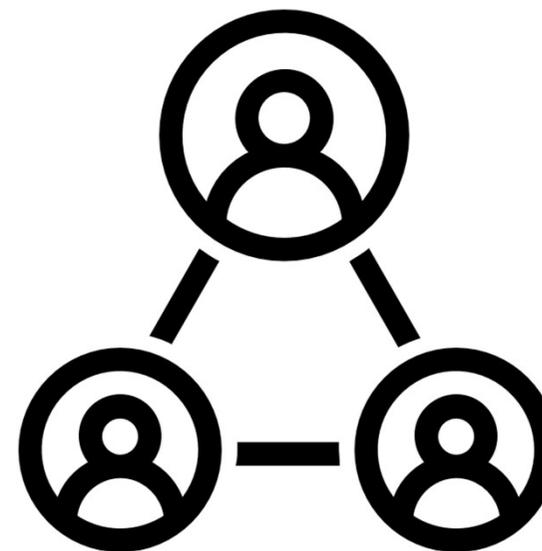
Apprenticeships last for a **minimum duration of 12 months** after any relevant prior learning has been recognised

Apprenticeships are **flexible** to meet the needs of the apprentice as well as their employers

Apprenticeships support progression, whether supporting entry into new occupations or upskilling existing employees

Alongside on-the-job training, apprentices spend **at least 20%** of working hours **completing off-the-job training** with a training provider

Apprentice
Commits to training programme and end-point assessment



Provider(s)
Responsible for off-the-job training and end-point assessment

Employer
Supports apprentice through training to end-point assessment.

Introduction: how do I employ an apprentice?

Our [step-by-step guide](#) outlines how to employ apprentices for the first time.

In doing so, apprentices can choose from over 660 apprenticeship standards which have been designed by employers alongside the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Getting started involves 6 simple steps:





Flexible models for training

Overview: delivering off-the-job training flexibly

The following pages in this section explore three example models for flexing how off-the-job training is delivered. In summary:

- Many apprenticeships are delivered so that regular weekly off-the-job training takes place throughout the apprenticeship. However, training delivery can be flexed to best suit employers and learners:
 - Employers and providers can **deliver training in blocks** instead of evenly over the duration of the apprenticeship, or use **frontloading** where apprentices undertake a significant portion of training at the start.
 - Employers and providers can use **block training or front-loading as long as some off-the-job or English & Maths training takes place every 4 weeks***. If the gap is longer, a break in learning is used to pause funding.

Making use of these training models can bring a range of benefits

- ✓ **Flexibility:** allows off-the-job training to be delivered in patterns which best meet the needs of apprentices and employers.
- ✓ **Higher productivity:** Front-loaded training means apprentices develop core knowledge, skills, and behaviours before applying them in the workplace.
- ✓ **Wider geographic reach:** Block training makes it easier to train a cohort of apprentices based across different locations.
- ✓ **Foundational skills:** Where an occupation or project requires working with specialist equipment or safeguarding of vulnerable individuals, for example, early or block training ensures basic standards of safety are met from the start.

* Updating to 'every month' in the 2023-24 funding rules, live from August 2023; please refer to latest rules

Three example models for flexible training delivery:

1 - Weekly off-the-job training



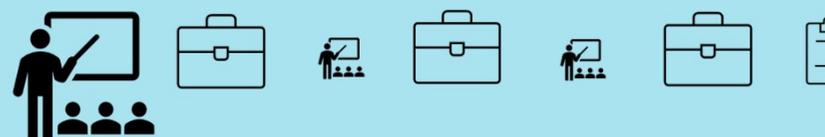
Off-the-job training delivered evenly across apprenticeship: e.g. 1 day/week

2 - Block training



Off-the-job training delivered in blocks: e.g. grouped into 3-4 days/month

3 - Frontloading



Most off-the-job training occurs at the start: e.g. the first months of multi-year apprenticeship mostly take place in a workshop or classroom setting



1. Weekly training: how this could work for you

Benefits of a 'traditional' apprenticeship delivery model for off-the-job training, such as one day per week

- ✓ Employers, apprentices and providers can agree regular training days which align with the apprentice's shift patterns.
- ✓ Can support apprentices to effectively manage academic and work commitments.
- ✓ Accommodates workplace demands and backfill challenges.
- ✓ Rapid application of taught concepts into work practice to reinforce and embed theoretical learning between teaching sessions.
- ✓ Accommodates learners not able to spend blocks of time away from work and/or for personal reasons (caring responsibilities/children).

Things to consider

- Shorter periods of off-the-job training may be aligned with use of blended learning which can support more regional provision.
- To maximise impact, the provider will need to be adaptable to employer needs.
- The size of the employer affects the suitability of the training model. Larger organisations are likely to have more resource to manage workforce pipelines and release cohorts for off-the-job training strategically.
- However, smaller organisations may benefit from a more adaptable training model.

Weekly off-the-job training



Training delivered evenly over the duration of the apprenticeship
e.g. 1 day/week of off-the-job training

Key:



Off-the-job
training



On the job



End-point
assessment

2. Block training: how this could work for you

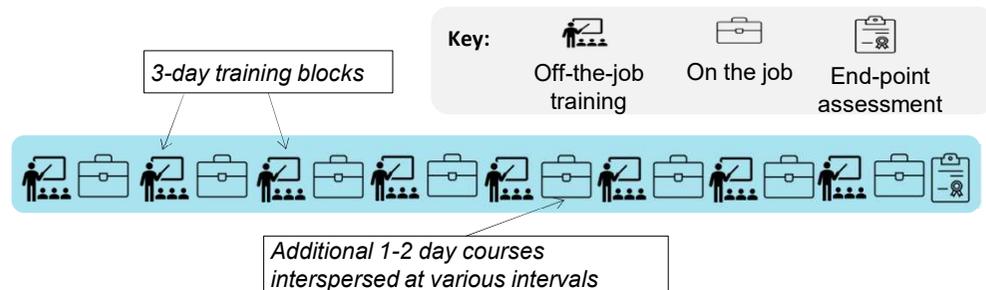
Case study - block training

Organisation: Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult (apprenticeship employer)

Apprenticeship: [Regulatory Affairs Specialist](#) (Level 7)

Delivery Method:

- Blended delivery model, including 8 x 3-day blocks of off-the-job training, followed by time to complete the module, spread over the 30-month duration of the apprenticeship.
- Other 1-2 day courses interspersed throughout the apprenticeship duration.



*“Block delivery has allowed our apprentices to **balance** their off-the-job training with their on-the-job experience and responsibilities. As this is a Level 7 apprenticeship, delegates are often working at a high level in a pressurised environment and allowing a **deep focus** on each module enables them to balance work, home life and study. The modular approach also facilitated an **intense & condensed learning period** on a given topic.”*

CATAPULT
Cell and Gene Therapy

Benefits of block training

- ✓ Concentrated periods of study help apprentices to focus on academic learning.
- ✓ Extended periods in the workplace allow apprentices to put new knowledge and skills into practice & develop behaviours working towards professional competence.
- ✓ Block training may supplement the apprenticeship experience by allowing apprentices to immerse themselves into field work.
- ✓ Option for block training to be residential and located across the country which opens up the training providers able to deliver this training.
- ✓ Can be used depending on the exact needs of the employee. For example, Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult employs apprentices on 8 apprenticeship standards relating to different occupations and levels, with the most appropriate training model being used in each case.

Things to consider

- The modular approach to off-the-job training can mean it is more intense at certain times of the year.
- Workforce planning may be needed to accommodate longer periods of time out of the workplace, with the risk some blocks coincide with periods of high demand.
- Employers should consider the support and mentoring needed to help apprentices embed and develop learning during block training when back in the workplace.

3. Front-loading: how this could work for you

Case study - front-loading

Organisation: Cogent Skills, who facilitate the Science Industry Apprenticeship Consortium (SIAC) North East, a group of employers in sectors including life sciences

Apprenticeship: [Science Manufacturing Technician](#) (Level 3) and [Science Industry Maintenance Technician](#) (Level 3)

Delivery Method:

- Cogent works with employers to agree foundational training content. This focuses heavily on safety, along with an introduction to technical engineering skills.
- Apprentices spend most of their first year at college, with some employer placements. Each week involves study for the knowledge qualification and hands-on workshops honing skills in a safe environment.
- The apprentices then transfer to the employer's site at the end of the first year, and continue to study in year 2 of the apprenticeship through day release.

Front-loading of off-the-job training



Most of the training occurs at the start

Key:



Off-the-job
training



On the job



End-point
assessment



“Employers are seeing a very high success rate with the collaborative approach they have to the apprenticeship programme, working with the training provider and with the support given to the apprentices throughout. We believe the approach to delivery is a big contributory factor.”

Benefits of front-loading

- ✓ Front-loading can provide benefits where foundational knowledge and skills are needed. For example, apprentices on these programmes complete core safety and technical training in a safe and controlled environment before starting live projects.
- ✓ Front-loading also allows early exposure across areas. For example, maintenance apprentices benefit from gaining mechanical, electrical and instrumentation skills and knowledge in the first year before specialising when they get to employer sites.

Things to consider

- Employers will need to accommodate more frequent/longer periods of off-the-job training at the beginning of the apprenticeship in their workforce planning.
- Front-loading can support development of strong peer networks through the period of training together at the start of the apprenticeship.
- Regular contact is important during the extended period of off-the-job training. For example, Cogent Skills and the employers meet with apprentices and providers every 8 weeks during the first year in college to discuss progress.

Accelerated apprenticeships

How does it work?

- **When the apprentice has significant prior learning or experience, the duration of the apprenticeship can be shortened**, so the apprentice reaches occupational competence sooner. The provider and employer agree and determine how much the duration and price is reduced by following an initial assessment with the apprentice.
- An **accelerated apprenticeship** is when the apprenticeship is shortened by 3 months or more. It must still be for a minimum 12-month duration, with at least 20% of the apprentice's working hours (based on 30 hrs per week) spent on off-the-job training.

Benefits

- ✓ **Higher-quality experience:** The apprentice avoids repeating unnecessary learning.
- ✓ **Accelerated skills pipeline:** Employees complete their learning sooner, becoming occupationally competent in the latest skills, knowledge and behaviours.
- ✓ **Clearer progression through skills system:** Employers and apprentices understand how different offers build upon each other and are reassured learning is not duplicated.
- ✓ **Improved value for money:** The apprentice becomes occupationally competent faster with lower investment of employer funds as the duration of the apprenticeship is shorter.

How are we delivering this?

- **We have strengthened our policy on recognising prior learning** to support providers and employers with this process and enable stronger outcomes.
- **We are raising awareness of accelerated apprenticeships** via sector engagement and strengthening links with offers such as T Levels, Skills Bootcamps and Traineeships.

Off-the-job training delivered using most appropriate model



Key:



Prior learning
e.g. T Level



Off-the-job
training



On the job



End-point assessment

Case study – accelerated apprenticeships

Organisation: Sterling Pharma Solutions

Apprenticeship: [Manufacturing Engineer](#) (Level 6) and [Science Industry Maintenance Technician](#) (Level 3) among other standards

Delivery Method:

- Supporting learners with existing prior learning, to complete apprenticeships sooner, which enabled faster progression and upskilling across the organisation.
- Sterling is delivering 15 apprenticeships standards, with progression links between them; accelerated apprenticeships help the organisation to ensure employees do not need to repeat learning already demonstrated via prior courses or work experience.

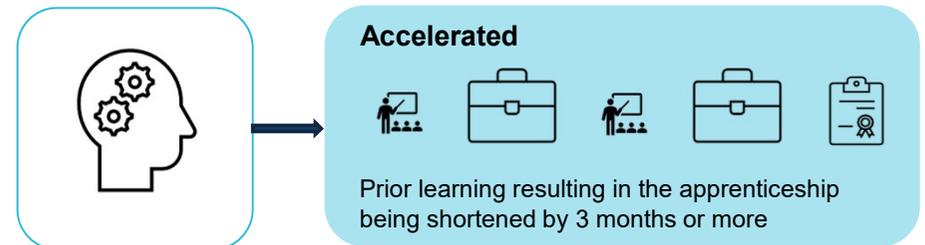


Supported by accelerated delivery, apprenticeships are helping us develop our internal capability and expertise. Our apprentices bring fresh thinking, role-modelling, and knowledge-sharing. They also support our learning culture and wider benefits such as improved staff retention.

A recent success story involves a Level 6 accelerated apprentice who recently applied their new learning to manage a significant project. This reduced energy usage of two cooling towers by 37%, supporting our goal to become net-zero, and yielded a direct saving of £64,169 per annum.

Benefits of accelerated

- ✓ Accelerated apprenticeships can provide fast upskilling and reskilling, but also support an effective overall progression framework for staff:
 - For Sterling, accelerated apprenticeships are supporting experienced employees to take a degree-level programme more quickly, such as the L6 Manufacturing Engineer standard. One mechanical engineer had already completed a L4 apprenticeship and a relevant certification, and had several years of experience in the business. A provider assessment of prior knowledge and skills led to a one year reduction in their L6 apprenticeship.
 - Sterling is seeing similar benefits at other levels. It supports employees with relatively less experience in engineering, such as newer employees or those moving from other departments, to take certifications. By capturing the learning from these certifications, and other relevant industry experience, employees have gone on to complete the Level 3 Science Industry Maintenance Technician standard sooner. Again, this is supporting faster progression to more complex work and degree study.



Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies and Portable Flexi-Job Apprenticeships

How does it work?

- The apprentice is employed by an agency and completes placements with host employers.
- Agencies help apprentices find suitable placements and charge the host businesses to cover their operating costs and apprentice wages. In coordinating placements, **these agencies have knowledge and experience** of their sectors and regions to support the best possible outcomes.

Benefits

- ✓ Opens up apprenticeships to specialised employers and SMEs that may not be able to offer coverage of all knowledge, skills and behaviours in a particular apprenticeship standard.
- ✓ Opens up apprenticeships to more occupations, such as where shorter-term work is the norm.
- ✓ Provides benefits where a **coordinating agency** is helpful to employers, learners and providers.
- ✓ *This Flexi-Job Apprenticeship model offers apprentices ongoing employment through an Agency during their apprenticeship. It can also offer wide exposure across a range of businesses and practices in a sector. This could, for example, benefit those starting their careers.*

✓ How are we delivering this?

- At the launch of FJAAs, we awarded £5m to support set-up costs for 11 flexi-job agencies in a range of sectors. Another five agencies, who didn't require funding, also joined the register.
- We re-opened the register in September 2022, to allow new organisations to apply, and gave existing FJAAs the opportunity to expand their offering. **A total of 30 FJAAs are now approved** and a range of sectors are now represented by Agencies, including the life sciences sector.
- We reopened the Register again between April and May 2023, with details on GOV.UK.

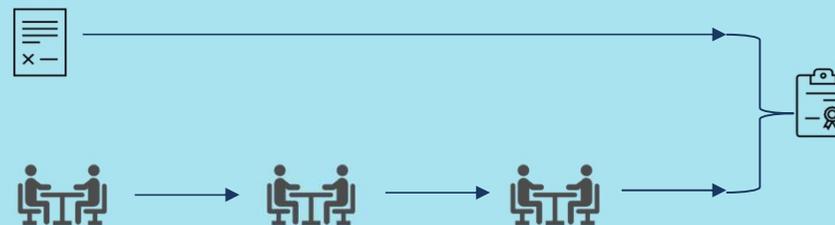
Cogent Skills is a registered Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency supporting employers and apprentices in the life sciences sector.

Regular apprenticeship



Employed by one employer for the duration of the apprenticeship

Agency-led: Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency



Employed by agency, completing placements (co-ordinated by the agency) with host employers during the apprenticeship

Key:



Employment
contract



Placement with
employer



End-point
assessment

New flexible models: Portable Flexi-Job Apprenticeships

How does it work?

- This in-pilot model supports employees who, due to the nature of their work, will move between different employment contracts over the course of an apprenticeship
- Employers commit to a minimum employment period of three months
- The apprentice can start, stop and resume their apprenticeship as they move between employers. If breaks between employment contracts are longer than 30 days, the apprentice is put on a break in learning, and funding is stopped until they resume their apprenticeship.

Benefits

- ✓ Opens up apprenticeships to specialised and small employers who may not be able to offer exposure to all knowledge, skills and behaviours in a particular apprenticeship standard.
- ✓ Opens up apprenticeships to more occupations, such as where freelancing, short-term and project-based work are used, with several healthcare standards part of the pilot.
- ✓ Supports social mobility in occupations traditionally dominated by university graduates.
- ✓ *This Flexi-Job Apprenticeship model can benefit apprentices who will need to flex their apprenticeship around less predictable employment patterns, pausing as needed. This could, for example, support established professionals looking to upskill in a sector.*

How are we delivering this?

- **We are running a pilot to test this model.** The pilot started in 2022 in the creative, digital, and construction sectors, and we added healthcare standards in January 2023 so there are now 38 standards eligible to pilot. As of May 2023, 16 providers are now involved in the pilot.
- **Providers and employers interested in finding out more about this model can contact:** helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk

Traditional apprenticeship



One employment contract for the duration of the apprenticeship

Portable Flexi-job Apprenticeship (in-pilot)



Planned moves to different employers with employment periods of at least 3 months each





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For more information

To find out more about hiring an apprentice, please visit [Apprenticeships](#).

To learn more about using apprenticeships and other training models in the life sciences sector, please contact officeforlifesciences@beis.gov.uk



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