



Guidance for employers and universities on the speech and language therapy degree apprenticeship in England

NOVEMBER 2021 | VERSION 2

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Originally published: January 2021

This version published: November 2021

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A degree apprenticeship is where an employee is studying towards an undergraduate or postgraduate degree as part of their apprenticeship. Tuition fees are paid by the employer using the apprenticeship levy, and apprentices are paid a salary.

1.2 The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) has actively supported the development of a speech and language therapy degree apprenticeship standard and the end-point assessment (EPA) that was led by employers, universities and the RCSLT and supported by Skills for Health. The approved standard and EPA can be found on the [Skills for Health website](#). All speech and language therapy pre-registration apprenticeships will need to adhere to this standard and EPA.

1.3 Pre-registration education of speech and language therapists should facilitate the development and attainment of a level of academic and clinical capability that, on completion of an approved qualification, is fit for professional practice. This applies to both apprenticeships and to traditional pre-registration routes.

1.4 The RCSLT Board of Trustees has agreed apprenticeships could offer important new opportunities for career progression to those already working in healthcare settings, to the existing SLT assistant workforce and to those who have financial or practical reservations about the traditional route. In addition, apprenticeship routes may appeal to a new cohort of learners who had not previously considered speech and language therapy as a career.

2.0 Purpose of this guidance

2.1 This guidance is for universities delivering speech and language therapy pre-registration training and for employers, or potential employers, of speech and language therapy apprentices.

2.2 This guidance aims to provide information about the new speech and language therapy apprenticeship and how it can contribute to your speech and language therapy service. It also sets out RCSLT expectations about delivery and the role of employers and universities. This guidance is in addition to that already provided by Government in terms of structureⁱ and fundingⁱⁱ and by the HCPCⁱⁱⁱ in terms of its regulation of the profession. It is also in addition to other relevant guidance from RCSLT, including mandatory accreditation of pre-registration courses, curriculum, supervision and placements^{iv}.

2.3 This guidance applies to universities and employers in England only.

2.4 If you are a potential apprentice please see our separate [RCSLT webpages on apprenticeships](#).

3.0 Overview of RCSLT expectations of an apprenticeship

3.1 RCSLT support in the development of this apprenticeship has been on the basis that the qualification will be as rigorous as the existing university-based route and that the curriculum is the same.

With that in mind, the RCSLT has the following expectations of the apprenticeship:

- Only bodies recognised by Government can award degrees^v in the UK – so all employers will need to work with a university to deliver the apprenticeship.
- The RCSLT will not accredit any apprenticeship programme for entry to the profession unless it provides at least a degree-level qualification that will capture graduate-level learning outcomes and demonstrates how it delivers the learning outcomes mapped to our curriculum guidance.
- The apprenticeship will need to reflect the breadth of UK speech and language therapy practice, ie with clients of all ages and a wide range of social, health, justice and education settings, and be explicit about the range of learning that needs to be demonstrated and assessed, including relating to practice-based learning.
- The apprenticeship will be of sufficient length to cover the expected learning outcomes.
- The apprenticeship will define a high-quality learning experience and support for apprentices.
- The apprenticeship will align with HCPC requirements for eligibility to register to practise as an SLT in the UK and to use the protected title.
- The apprentice will need protected learning time, formally agreed between the employer and the university, in which the apprentice will undertake learning to support academic study. This includes (but is not limited to) research, essay writing and specified learning that can take place on the job. In addition, employers will need to factor in that placements outside the normal workplace will also be required during the apprenticeship in order to ensure the breadth of experience required by the RCSLT curriculum guidance^{vi}. This does not include any “study leave” the employer wishes to offer to allow the apprentice preparation time for exams. In particular HCPC will consider the approach in relation to its Standards of Education and Training^{vii}, SET 5 on practice-based learning will be particularly relevant.
- The apprentice will also need to make a commitment to their education and training, and this will typically be signified by their contractual agreement with the employer – this is a Government requirement for all apprenticeships.^{viii}

4.0 Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

4.1 The HCPC has produced tips and guidance on their programme approval process in relation to degree apprenticeships. This information can be found [on the HCPC website](#).

5.0 RCSLT accreditation

5.1 The RCSLT would typically seek to follow the same timetable as HCPC in relation to accreditation of courses to minimise placing additional burden and administration on HEIs.

5.2 Contact with the RCSLT should be made in the early stages of planning, and in line with HCPC requirements, depending on whether universities are seeking accreditation through the major change route or whether it is a new course.

5.3 Given that apprenticeship delivery will involve new relationships with employers, the RCSLT will wish to see how those relationships will be supported to ensure that a quality apprenticeship is delivered. Universities will need to scope their offer with potential employers to support the case for running the apprenticeship within their organisations.

5.4 RCSLT accredited apprenticeships are required to meet the RCSLT curriculum guidance for the pre-registration education of speech and language therapists. The curriculum guidance provides a blueprint to support and guide educational leaders and partners in developing degree-level entry routes to the speech and language therapy profession using the five RCSLT core capabilities: communication, partnerships, leadership and lifelong learning, research and evidence-based practice, and professional autonomy and accountability. The apprenticeship standard was developed using the RCSLT curriculum guidance as the basis, so in practice it should be possible to ensure a programme meets both requirements simultaneously.

6.0 Employers: making the business case

6.1 You may be uncertain about taking on an apprentice as the processes involved are likely to be new to you. However, if you are in a large organisation or NHS Trust, it is quite likely there will already be apprentices in your organisation. Your organisation may also already have pre-registration apprentices (eg nursing, physiotherapy, paramedic and occupational therapy (OT)). If so, then there may already be support and processes in place. If it does not have pre-registration apprentices, it may have other types of apprentice. If existing apprenticeships in your organisation are not at degree level then the process of liaising with universities will be new, but

rest assured it is new to the universities too and therefore represents an opportunity to find your way together. If you are in a small organisation that does not pay into the Government apprenticeship levy, then your process and funding route will be different (see [the GOV.UK website](#) for advice on this), but you will still need to liaise with your chosen university.

6.2 Do not disregard apprenticeships if your nearest university that is considering apprenticeships is some distance away. There is potential for discussions around flexibility and innovation in provision. There are already other allied health professional (AHP) apprenticeships being delivered at distance from apprentices' workplaces.

6.3 Having commitment from your senior managers, in terms of funding and support in delivery will be essential in helping you to plan and deliver a speech and language therapy apprenticeship. If you are in an NHS trust it is likely they will already be paying the Government apprenticeship levy. This means that the trust will be keen to make the most of their "levy fund", which they can draw on to support apprentices across the organisation. The [NHS Employers website](#) offers some guidance on building apprenticeship into a workforce strategy.

6.4 The RCSLT has developed an apprenticeship business case template to help you with making the business case. [This is available on the RCSLT website.](#)

7.0 Employing an apprentice

7.1 All apprentices are employed by an employer; they are not students. Apprentices are recruited by employers in close consultation with universities. The RCSLT does not have a role in this. However, we expect that employers will need to discuss entry requirements with their partner university so as to ensure that apprentices are well placed to undertake the academic aspect of the degree. There are no barriers to existing employees being considered for apprentice SLT positions. See section 9.6 for more information on ensuring a joined-up recruitment process.

7.2 The Government publishes detailed guidance about the funding of apprentices using the apprenticeship levy. There are rules on who is eligible for funding, what the levy funding can pay for, contractual requirements and the payment of training providers. The guidance is available [on the GOV.UK website.](#)

7.3 Any employer hiring a degree apprentice must agree and sign an apprenticeship agreement and a commitment statement. The Office for Students [provides advice and guidance](#), including a template you may wish to use.

7.4 Skills for Health have developed an [apprenticeship implementation toolkit](#) to guide employers through the steps in developing an apprenticeship programme. They also provide an example commitment template you may wish to use or adapt.

7.5 It will be important to be clear with apprentices what the future job prospects might look like as they progress through the apprenticeship and on successful completion. The hope is that an accredited apprenticeship will lead to a Band 5 (or equivalent outside the NHS) job if the apprentice completes it successfully and also achieves registration with the HCPC. We recognise that this may not always be achievable in the light of changes to organisations' structures or policies. In any event an apprentice should have a contract of employment for at least the period of their training. If the apprenticeship is in the NHS then NHS employers and the NHS Staff Council^{ix} also provide guidance on employment, banding and pay.

Apprenticeship levy and the funding band

7.6 All employers with a pay bill of more than £3 million per year have to pay the apprenticeship levy to HMRC. In practice this includes many NHS Trusts. These employers will receive funds through the apprenticeship service to spend on training and assessing apprentices. The government will add 10% to these funds.

7.7 Employers with a pay bill of less than £3 million a year do not need to pay the levy. These employers will need to pay the training provider directly for training apprentices and will pay 5% towards the cost of training and assessing the apprentice. The government will pay the rest (95%) up to the funding band maximum. They will pay the funds directly to the training provider.

7.8 There are detailed rules about funding available [on the GOV.UK website](#).

The Government apprenticeship funding band for speech and language therapy

7.9 Each apprenticeship standard is allocated to one of 30 funding bands by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. These range from £1,500 to £27,000. For apprentice SLTs the maximum funding has been set at £25,000 (this covers off-the-job training over the whole period of training). This sets the maximum amount of digital funds an employer who pays the levy can use towards an individual apprenticeship. The upper limit of the funding band also sets the maximum price that government will 'co-invest' towards an individual apprenticeship, where an employer does not pay the levy.

7.10 The funding band maximum is not a funding rate. Employers should negotiate with training providers and end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) and agree a price. If the

costs of training and assessment go over the funding band maximum, employers can agree to pay the difference with other funds if they wish.

Apprentice pay band

7.11 An employer is responsible for paying the apprentice, at least at the relevant minimum wage rate, whether this is time spent training or studying, and whether at work, at university or on placement. They must be offered the same conditions as other employees in similar roles.^x The RCSLT expects that apprentice SLTs should be employed at broadly the same level as speech and language therapy assistants. It is for the employer to consider the appropriate pay, taking into account prior qualifications and experience. For existing assistants becoming an apprentice, we would not expect to see employment at a lower banding as an apprentice. Employers will wish to consider whether apprentices can move up the banding scale as they reach milestones in their experience during their apprenticeship. The NHS Staff Council also provide guidance about apprenticeship pay and conditions in the NHS. In November 2019 they released a [statement](#) that it had not been possible to reach a national agreement on apprentice pay. Some organisations are using [Agenda for change Annex 21](#) salary recommendations for trainees. Others are determining their own spot salaries.

Structure of role

7.12 The apprentice will need to be clear about their position within the team, especially if there are other assistants already in post, to avoid any potential tension that could develop. For example, there would need to be clarity about the hours they will be away to attend university and other agreed learning time. We would expect the use of an appropriate title, such as 'Speech and language therapy apprentice' and, if in the NHS, for the role to have been through a banding exercise.

7.13 If an apprentice is new to the employing organisation, they are also likely to be subject to organisation probation requirements.

Supervision

7.14 The RCSLT requires speech and language therapy assistants (SLTAs) and newly qualified professionals (NQPs) to receive professional supervision from an experienced, HCPC-registered SLT. All apprentice SLTs will need supervision appropriate to the role of an apprentice, in the same way that assistants and students currently do – guidance on supervision can be found on the [RCSLT website](#).

7.15 Specifically, the HCPC standards for education and training (SETs) require that: “Practice-based learning must take place in an environment that is safe and supportive for learners and service users” (HCPC SET 5.4, 2017). Education providers and employers must ensure that learners work within a scope of practice that is appropriate to their level of skills and experience. This is likely to develop for an individual learner as they progress during the course of the programme and the practice-based learning they take part in should reflect this. Education providers must also consider other factors in providing a safe environment for service users, such as the level of supervision and autonomy (independence) that learners have.

Travel and subsistence costs

7.16 It is up to the employer to make clear what travel (eg to placements) and other expenses (eg professional body membership, uniform) they will offer to apprentices.

7.17 The apprentice may also be eligible for discounts on public transport, with many schemes running on a local basis, like the Apprentice Oyster photocard in London – giving apprentices 30% off certain journeys.

7.18 The apprentice will be classed as an employee, rather than a student, so won't be entitled to student discounts. But the National Union of Students (NUS) offers an [NUS Apprentice Extra Card](#).

Support and wellbeing

7.19 A speech and language therapy degree is demanding in terms of academic stretch and volume of learning. Both employers and universities will need to work jointly to support and ensure the continued wellbeing of apprentices and that the balance of work and learning can be managed.

7.20 The Government recommends that all apprentices should have an apprentice mentor. This is usually not their line manager, although in small teams this is not always possible. The mentor could be another health professional, for example someone who is mentoring other AHP apprentices. This is separate from any supervision requirement.

7.21 The role of the mentor is to help the apprentice through workplace issues and decisions and a safe space in which to consider their progress, aspirations and concerns. This role can also help the apprentice to understand how to take responsibility for their own wellbeing and provide the tools and channels to help them to raise concerns in a safe space.

Procuring off-the-job training

7.22 Employers are responsible for the procurement of the off-the-job training. For the speech and language therapy pre-registration degree apprenticeship this will mean contracting with a university who can provide an apprenticeship programme approved by HCPC and accredited by the RCSLT.

7.23 The Government requires that all apprentices have a minimum of 20% of their working week in off-the job training. For speech and language therapy, we expect that the majority or all of the off- the-job training will be conducted by a university who will deliver the academic elements of the programme.

7.24 Length of programme – we expect that if the apprentice spends 20% of their working week in academic learning that it would take around four years for them to complete the undergraduate pre-registration curriculum. Please note that this assumes a normal working year, not a traditional university academic year. If the apprentice spends more of their working week on academic learning this time could potentially be shortened, for example some physiotherapy apprenticeships have a shorter model where more time is spent at university.

7.25 In the same way that the master's qualification, via the traditional route, is usually shorter than the undergraduate route, we also expect the master's apprenticeship to be shorter than an undergraduate route, assuming they are following the same model of delivery.

7.26 The off-the-job learning may be offered in the format of a regular day per week or it could be arranged differently, in blocks for example. It is also possible to consider the style of learning, such as face to face or blended. This is open to negotiation between universities and employers.

7.27 Health Education England (HEE) has been carrying out a pre-procurement exercise for NHS organisations who wish to employ apprentices in pre-registration programmes. The aim of this is to pre-qualify universities providing pre-registration programmes in relation to NHS procurement processes. This process is ongoing and at the time of writing has been completed in the London and the South East only. A national procurement across England is expected during 2021.

Models of procurement

7.28 All universities will require a minimum cohort of students to be able to run an apprenticeship programme and to be able to make a business case that the programme can be delivered within the potential funding envelope. The minimum cohort will vary for each university. Most employers will not be contracting in these numbers, so we think there will need

to be regional networks or other joint arrangements, for example within integrated care systems, to pool your requirements.

8.0 Role of universities

Which universities are involved in the apprenticeship?

8.1 At the time of writing the University of Essex has announced that it will deliver the apprenticeship programme from 2022, Birmingham City University from January 2023 and the University of Sheffield from 2023. There are a number of other universities are actively looking into potentially developing an apprenticeship programme, dependent on demand from employers becoming more concrete. However, universities will only be able to commit to course development if they are able to show to their own management that the course will be sustainable. We would therefore encourage employers, via their regional networks, AHP Councils, ICS and HEE to consider cohorts on a regional basis and make the most of potential opportunities for flexibility and innovation in provision.

Delivery of off-the-job learning

8.2 In an integrated degree apprenticeship (where the end-point assessment (EPA) is incorporated into the degree) the university provider will develop and deliver a programme to deliver the academic learning and practice required for the award of either an undergraduate or master's pre-registration degree, that encompasses the requirements of the apprenticeship standard, the RCSLT curriculum guidelines and the HCPC requirements. Universities will specify whether their apprenticeship course is at undergraduate or master's level.

8.3 The university will need to work with employers in terms of how this programme will be delivered – further details in section 9.0.

8.4 The university must also be registered on the register of apprenticeship providers or be a sub-contractor to a provider on the register. Visit the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website for guidance on applying to the register.

Academic support

8.5 The university will provide appropriate academic and pastoral student support and will discuss how this coordinates with employer support where necessary.

End-point assessment (EPA)

8.6 The EPA is an independent assessment of an apprentice's competence and is carried out by a registered end-point assessment organisation (EPAO). It is separate from any assessment by the university about whether the apprentice has passed their degree.

8.7 The university will be EPAO^{xi} and they must also be registered on the Government's register for [end-point assessment organisations](#). They are responsible for organising the assessment of apprentices, according to the requirements of the approved [end-point assessment plan](#). No party who was involved in the apprenticeship can make the sole decision on competence and passing the end-point assessment – the assessor must be independent and deliver an impartial result. [Details of how to become an EPAO can be found at GOV.UK](#).

Quality

8.8 The Office for Students regulates the quality of degree apprenticeships. They are responsible for regulating all provision delivered by registered providers, including apprenticeships. Their guidance is available on the [Office for Students website](#).

9.0 Joining up delivery

Employer university coordination

9.1 The degree apprenticeship route to qualification is new to employers and universities. The checklist below can be used as a starting point in any discussions about delivery and collaboration with each other:

- What model of learning is best suited to the employer, apprentices and the university.
- Develop a road map detailing the on and off the job learning – so each party knows the timing of the different academic and practical elements and what is required when by each.
- The employer and the university understand each other's business and regulatory need and processes, what is possible to adjust and what is not.
- A process for robust initial needs assessment for the apprentice.
- Arrangements for regular review of apprentices, flagging concerns and resolving problems, clarity about what happens if key milestones are not met or exams not passed.
- Responsibilities for placement arrangement and ensuring appropriate placement educators in place.

- Monitoring and record-keeping requirements including data protection.
- Clear roles for university/ line manager/ apprentice mentor/placement providers.
- The consideration of funding across organisational boundaries to promote larger cohort sizes and a broad range of settings for apprentices to experience.

Balance of academic and work-based learning – student and employee

9.2 Please see section 3.0 above for the RCSLT's expectations about the balance of academic and work-based learning. It will be counter-productive and detrimental to the health and wellbeing of the apprentice for them to have no free time during a week. Employers and universities will need to jointly find a balance between each of their expectations to the level of commitment required from the apprentice that takes these factors into account, agree this formally and to clearly communicate that to the apprentice before they start.

Placements

9.3 While apprentices will spend much more of their working week in the workplace than with a traditional degree, it will still be necessary to demonstrate that the apprentice has been given the opportunity for placements outside their usual setting. We would encourage employers of apprentices across a region or ICS area to consider options for the exchange of their apprentices to provide variety of experience for apprentices on a rotation approach for example.

9.4 The RCSLT guidance on [placement education](#) includes guidance about placement education as part of the apprenticeship model as well as for traditional models of qualification.

9.5 The [RCSLT curriculum guidance](#) (member login required) sets out mandatory placement hours required. Recent challenges to healthcare professions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the use of technology enhanced care services, also called telehealth, telepractice or digital. Practice education may involve 'in person' or telehealth placements or a hybrid. Until the new guidance is available (expected spring 2021) universities and employers should bear in mind the following:

- Requirements in RCSLT guidance relating to supervision, the role of practice educators and universities all apply in relation to an apprentice.
- The requirement to have placement hours in both adult and paediatric settings will apply to apprentices.

- The RCSLT will take a practical approach, ahead of the publication of any new guidance on practice education, in considering how the mandatory placement hours will be achieved in an apprenticeship.

Recruitment

9.6 A degree apprenticeship is just as academically challenging as a traditional degree, as it provides the same qualification. While employers are responsible for recruitment, they will need to work with the university to ensure that candidates will be able to undertake the academic learning required, as well as having the characteristics you are looking for in your workplace. Employers will need to provide a job description for the apprentice.

9.7 It is likely that a two-stage recruitment process will be required with the employer first assessing candidates and then the university doing so. This is because a university will be unlikely to be able to attend every interview across a region and potentially across many employers. Experience from other AHP programmes has highlighted the need for close and specific agreement between the university and employer on the criteria for selection of apprentices, to avoid a scenario where a university is unable to accept a candidate when an employer has already done so.

9.8 You will need to consider whether to recruit internally or whether to extend the recruitment to external candidates as well. The apprenticeship model allows either approach, the key criteria is that recruitment must be to a real job and the employment contract should cover the period of the apprenticeship at least.

9.9 Recruiting from all areas of your local community helps to build a diverse workforce which is more representative of the people your organisation serves. A report from [NHS Employers](#) makes suggestions about how to improve diversity in recruitment practices in the NHS. The RCSLT is keen to promote a more diverse workforce given that by gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic terms the profession is significantly lacking in diversity.

9.10 Note that HCPC will not give any guarantees about whether an individual will eventually be registered as a professional at the completion of the programme as this will depend on successful completion of other checks, eg criminal record checks. Successful completion of an approved apprenticeship programme confers a right to apply to HCPC for registration. Employers should refer to HCPC SET 2 relating to programme admissions and in particular HCPC standards of proficiency number 8.2 about English language requirements: “be able to communicate in English to the standard equivalent to level 8 of the International English Language Testing System, with no element below 7.5”. This requirement is stricter for speech and language therapists than for all other HCPC registered professions, as communication in English is a core professional skill (see standard 14.20).^{xii}

10.0 Useful links and resources

NHS Apprenticeships

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/plan/workforce-supply/apprenticeships/>

NHS employers Q&As

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/plan/workforce-supply/apprenticeships/apprenticeship-questions>

11.0 Glossary of organisations

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education – oversees the development, approval and publication of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans as well as the occupational maps for T Levels and apprenticeships. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/>

Office for Students – the independent regulator of higher education in England
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/our-strategy/>

UK Government – sets the policy on apprenticeships in England
<https://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships>

Health Education England – role is to support the delivery of healthcare and health improvement to the patients and public of England <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/>

Skills for Health – role is to inform policy and standards focusing on health, education and improving public health and provider of workforce and organisational development.
<https://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/>

12.0 References

Government employer guidance

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/employing-an-apprentice-technical-guide-for-employers>

Government apprenticeship funding rules

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules>

HCPC standards of proficiency for speech and language therapy

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/standards/standards-of-proficiency-speech-and-language-therapists/>

RCSLT guidance (please login to view this guidance)

^{iv} <https://www.rcslt.org/members/lifelong-learning/information-for-education-providers#section-2>

Recognition of universities

^v <https://www.gov.uk/check-a-university-is-officially-recognised>

RCSLT curriculum guidance (please login to view this guidance)

^{vi} <https://www.rcslt.org/members/lifelong-learning/information-for-education-providers#section-2>

HPCP Standards of Education and Training

^{vii} <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/globalassets/resources/guidance/standards-of-education-and-training-guidance.pdf>

Government advice on employing an apprentice

^{viii} <https://www.gov.uk/take-on-an-apprentice/apprenticeship-agreement>

NHS Staff Council guidance on apprenticeships in the NHS

^{ix} <https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Apprenticeships-in-the-NHS-NHS-Staff-Council-guidance.pdf>

Pay for apprentices

^x <https://www.gov.uk/take-on-an-apprentice/pay-and-conditions-for-apprentices>

End-point assessment

^{xi} <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-an-end-point-assessment-plan/>

HPCP standards of proficiency for speech and language therapy

^{xii} <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/globalassets/resources/standards/standards-of-proficiency---speech-and-language-therapists.pdf>

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. As well as providing leadership and setting professional standards, the RCSLT facilitates and promotes research into the field of speech and language therapy, promotes better education and training of speech and language therapists, and provides its members and the public with information about speech and language therapy.

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