

Junior apprenticeships

Guidance for Local Authorities and further education institutions

This version of the guidance is valid until
the sector is informed otherwise.

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Purpose of the Programme	3
3. Service Level Agreement.....	4
4. Payment and Finance	4
5. Suggested Responsibilities	5
i. FE College.....	5
ii. School	6
iii. Local Authority	7
6. Learner Eligibility and Entry Requirements	7
7. Programme Specifications.....	8
i. Programme Overview	8
ii. Programme Content	8
iii. Data Submission Requirements.....	10
8. Monitoring and Audit.....	10
i. Monitoring Approach.....	10
ii. Audit Testing	11
9. Further Information and Contact Details	11

1. Introduction

This Programme Guidance sets out the requirements for delivery of the Junior Apprenticeship (JA) Programme. It provides an overview of the programme requirements, including learner eligibility and entry conditions; and details the data submission and monitoring requirements in order that Medr can monitor programme delivery and learning outcomes for the JA Programme.

This Guidance also forms part of the agreement between Further Education (FE) institutions and the Welsh Ministers for the delivery and funding of the JA Programme. You must ensure that your JA provision adheres to this Programme Specification.

This document may be amended or revised to complement the release of any updated guidance relating to learners in education other than at school (EOTAS).

2. Purpose of the Programme

Junior Apprenticeships offer year 10 and 11 pupils of all abilities, with the right aptitude for vocational study, the opportunity to study full-time quality vocational provision for a future career, in a college setting. The programme offers a two-year programme of work-related education with work experience built in, alongside a Level 1 or Level 2 course in a range of different vocational pathways, that can be equivalent to up to four or five GCSEs, . Subject to local arrangements, a one-year option may be made available. (This would only apply to year 11 learners, as it would provide an opportunity for colleges to backfill places left by learners that had dropped out of the programme.)

Each junior apprentice should also study a 'challenging, ambitious and stretching' qualification in Mathematics and English.

In addition to the provision above, each Junior Apprentice should also have access to support with learning, help with behaviour management, and a designated Welfare Officer to support day to day issues and provide pastoral care.

The main aim of the JA Programme is to:

- provide learners who would otherwise be at risk of disengaging from education, with a meaningful pathway to further education, apprenticeship and employment.

The programme requires year 10 and 11 learners to:

- attend college on a full-time basis (with the exception of learners undertaking GCSEs at their 'home' school), and undertake a two-year programme of work-related education with in-built work experience;
- have the opportunity to undertake a full-time vocational Level 1 or Level 2 programme (equivalent of up to four or five GCSEs) in a range of vocational pathways through enriching and exciting learning environments and experiences; as well as study GCSEs (or other appropriate 'challenging, ambitious and stretching' qualifications (as described above) in Mathematics and English/ Welsh.

Successful delivery of the JA programme will:

- rely on close collaboration between schools, local authorities and FEIs
- develop relationships with businesses and training providers with sufficient flexibility to accommodate local context.
- have a positive impact on learner attendance, attainment and post-16 participation, resulting in:
 - a reduction in the number of learners not in employment, education or training (NEET)
 - learners developing wider personal and social skills and becoming more independent.

3. Service Level Agreement

The Junior Apprenticeship Programme is primarily funded by the Local Authority and therefore it is essential that agreement is reached between the LA and the FE College before this provision is agreed.

A service level agreement (SLA) should be set up between the local authority, the school that a learner would usually attend and the FE college where the learner will participate in the JA programme. The SLA formalises relationships between **all** parties, by setting out the respective obligations and responsibilities in relation to performance, service standards and management.

The SLA should run from 1 September to 30 June in each academic year at which point and following consultation with relevant parties, a revised SLA will be available for consideration. In January of each academic year all parties will meet to review the programme and discuss any potential changes.

Termination of the SLA prior to 30 June in each academic year will require 6 months' notice on either side.

4. Payment and Finance

Schools, through the local authority, will contribute funding for each learner attending the Junior Apprenticeship Programme. The level of funding and payment arrangements should be a local arrangement between each college and LA/ school.

Funding for Free School Meals, Pupil Development Grant and ALN is provided to Local Authorities through the RSG and other WG grants. Colleges are responsible for negotiating the funding provided by the Local Authority for Junior Apprenticeships.

Each College will draw down additional funding from Medr as indicated in Medr's Post-16 Programmes Directory for 2026/27.

The full cost of home-to-college transport for learners from schools engaged in the Junior Apprenticeship Programme will be covered by the LA, where learners meet the eligibility criteria.

5. Suggested Responsibilities

i. FE College

The FE college should:

- Provide a designated representative to liaise with school Headteacher / Head of Year.
- Work collaboratively with the school and LA to ensure a robust selection process that includes determining a learner's aptitude for vocational learning.
- Share information with learners, parents, schools to ensure they are fully informed of the suitability of individual courses, taking care to avoid and overcome traditional gender stereotypes. Share and agree curriculum content and timetable arrangements with partner schools and local authorities for all learners and keep them updated of any changes affecting individual learners, such as pastoral support programme arrangements, which should be reviewed regularly.
- Ensure learner sessions are timetabled on a full-time basis (recommended minimum 25 hours).
- Ensure all learners take part in a full induction and are initially assessed (LAs should ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place).
- Agree learner travel arrangements with partner schools and LAs. For example, travel to and from college by dedicated school or college transport, or a travel pass for free travel on public transport.
- Complete arrangements for examination registrations and host examinations.
- Perform robust individual risk assessments and clarify responsibility for safeguarding arrangements for all learners including operational risk assessments. This includes any work experience placements arranged by the college.
- Follow the 'All Wales Child and Adult Protection Procedures 2008' and the 'Prevent Duty Guidance 2015' when dealing with disclosures, concerns or allegations relating to safety, welfare and wellbeing.
- Share performance data and learner reports with schools and organise parent's evenings.
- Maintain accurate attendance records; shared with schools at regular intervals e.g., weekly.
- Provide dedicated facilities for learners, where possible, to foster a supportive learning environment and encourage constructive behaviour.
- Provide, where feasible, dedicated programme staff to deliver GCSE lessons and act as learning coaches.
- Ensure behaviour standards and expectations are met in line with the College's behaviour policy and liaises with schools to address any issues. If, following liaison with the school, behaviour issues are still unresolved the College should follow their

own disciplinary procedures, ensuring that a parent/ carer and school/ LA representative is present.

- Arrange invoicing of LAs and record appropriate data to ensure accurate and timely programme funding from Medr.
- Submit timely data to LLWR in line with the Post-16 Data Management Principles 2022.

ii. School

The school should:

- Assign a designated representative to liaise with the FE College.
- Work collaboratively with the College and LA to ensure a robust selection process that includes determining a learner's aptitude for vocational learning
- Work collaboratively with the College to ensure that prospective learners and parents/carers receive comprehensive impartial advice and guidance about all curriculum options, as well as JAs where these are available, and would be appropriate for the individual learner.
- Support learners with the online application process and gains parental consent for learners applying for the programme.
- Complete the referral form fully with all relevant information.
- Continue to deliver Maths, English/Welsh, where this has been agreed as part of local arrangements.
- Provide the College with appropriate learner information i.e., literacy and numeracy levels, additional learning needs including individual development plans, pastoral and behaviour history.
- Provide information for the annual reviews of learners with IDPs.
- Nominate an administrative contact i.e., Education Welfare Officer for issues relating to attendance.
- Liaise with the College to address any behaviour issues and represent learners on disciplinary hearings where required.
- Determine with the LA how learners will be registered, noting the benefits of dual registration, that would enable learners to return to their 'home' school if necessary, and prevent learners from being removed from the school roll.
- Provide funding to the LA for each Junior Apprenticeship Programme learner for the College placement, subject to funding arrangements agreed by all parties.
- Take responsibility for operational risk assessments for learners where they are dually registered. Where they have been removed from the school roll, colleges should take responsibility for operational risk assessments during the school day, when learners are not on the College's premises.
- Join multi-agency meetings as appropriate.
- Reintegrate into school any Junior Apprenticeship Programme learner on the first year of the programme (year 10 or year 11) who leaves the programme during the first half term of the academic year.

- Refer any JA leavers that the school considers inappropriate to return to the school, to the Access to Education Panel.

iii. **Local Authority**

The local authority should:

- Agree, clarify and communicate future funding arrangements for junior apprenticeships with schools and colleges.
- Make and implement on-entry and on-going assessment arrangements to support learner progression.
- Work collaboratively with the College and School to ensure a robust selection process that includes determining a learner's aptitude for vocational learning.
- Take responsibility for maintaining the learners IDP (where applicable).
- Work collaboratively with all local schools and colleges to evaluate the potential for extending junior apprenticeship provision for year 10 and year 11 pupils struggling to engage with existing mainstream provision in schools.
- Assign a designated representative to liaise with college and school staff regarding referrals, enrolments and promotion of the programme.
- Meet with College/School representatives at least once per term to monitor the operational running of the programme and/or discuss any concerns. Convene multi-agency meetings as required.
- Provide consent for care-experienced children (CEC) applying for the programme.
- Support the college and school to find suitable alternative arrangements for the learner if a placement is no longer viable.
- Provide support and guidance in relation to any safeguarding issue that cannot be resolved between the school and the college.
- Represent learners at disciplinary hearings where the school is unable to attend.
- Track the destinations of learners once they have left the College to ensure they are not NEET.
- Ensure travel arrangements for learners engaged in the Junior Apprenticeship Programme are in line with latest WG guidance.

There are clear benefits in ensuring that JA learners are dually registered at both the school and college. These include alleviating school admission challenges should a learner drop out of the Programme and need to return to their 'home' school. It also reduces the risk of schools off-rolling learners.

6. Learner Eligibility and Entry Requirements

To be eligible for entry onto the programme a learner must be aged 14 to 16 and in Year 10 or Year 11. The robust selection process must consider whether the learner is at risk of becoming NEET, demonstrates an aptitude for vocational learning and is most likely to benefit from this provision. The learner should also be legally eligible to have access to education in the UK.

The programme should not, under any circumstances, be viewed as an alternative to a PRU (a type of school established and maintained by a local authority to provide suitable education for children and young people who, by reason of illness, exclusion or otherwise, may not receive such education).

7. Programme Specifications

i. Programme Overview

Junior Apprenticeships are currently available at Level 1 and Level 2. There are currently 10 programme codes to reflect different Junior Apprenticeship pathways. Junior Apprenticeship programmes should be delivered on a full-time basis (recommended minimum 25 hours) for the duration of the academic year. The Programme must also include work experience opportunities to support JA learners to develop future career aspirations. These may take many forms depending on the local labour market, including classroom-based activities, such as digital delivery, workplace visits or interactions with individual or mentors and employers.

It is recommended that group size does not exceed 15 learners.

Each Junior Apprentice should have access to support with learning, help with behaviour management, and a designated Welfare Officer to support day to day issues and provide pastoral care. The aim of the Junior Apprenticeship is to make the learner employable or ready to progress onto a higher-level vocational course or apprenticeship at the age of 16.

In accordance with CfW requirements for EOTAS learners not in a Pupil Referral Unit, arrangements must ensure that provision:

- enables learners to develop in the ways described in the [four purposes](#).
- is suitable for the learners' ages, abilities and aptitudes.
- is broad and balanced (as appropriate to each learner) and offer appropriate progression.
- secures, as far as is appropriate for the individual learner, learning which
 - develops the [cross-curricular skills](#).
 - encompass the [Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience](#).
 - encompass [RSE](#) that is appropriate for each learner's stage of development.
- where reasonably possible and appropriate to do so, include learning on the other curriculum components, which include the areas of learning and experience and the mandatory elements.

ii. Programme Content

1. Curriculum for Wales requirements

In line with the [14 to-16 Learning Guidance](#) under the Curriculum for Wales, each junior apprentice should also study a 'challenging, ambitious and stretching' qualification in

Mathematics and English. For some JA learners, this might be the made-for-Wales GCSEs - this includes a single integrated English language and Literature award for learners who might benefit from undertaking a smaller qualification. For other JA learners, the Level 1 and Level 2 Essential Skills Wales qualifications (which are still currently designated and available for pre-16 learners), may be more suitable.

The learning and experiences that JA learners receive, should as far as is appropriate for individual learners, include all 4 components of the 14 to 16 learner entitlement:

- Reflections on learning and progress and post-16 planning.
- Qualifications in literacy and numeracy (as described above).
- Qualifications to encourage breadth (the chosen Level 2 pathway).
- Wider learning and experiences across the curriculum (mandatory elements encompassing Health and Wellbeing, Religious and Sexual Education and Cross-curricular skills).

Advanced notice of new qualifications for 2027

- From September 2027, new [Foundation qualifications](#) will be available to 14 to 16-year-olds in Wales in a range of general and work-related subjects. They are for learners who may not feel ready for [GCSE](#) and/or [VCSE](#) study. They will span Entry Level and Level 1 (with the exception of the Cymraeg qualifications).
- From September 2027, new [Skills Suite](#) qualifications will be available to 14 to 16-year-olds in Wales. They will span Entry Level to Level 2 and include a range of inclusive topics to develop effective and relevant work and life skills.
- The new qualifications are designed primarily for 14–16-year-olds, providing a broad basis for progression post 16, irrespective of the setting in which they are taken. There is clear alignment with the range of pathways currently offered under the JA programme and Qualifications Wales has confirmed that they are suitable for delivery by FEIs to JA learners.
- It should be noted that the new GCSE English Language qualification for post-16 learners (first teaching September 2027), will not be available to pre-16 learners, irrespective of the learning setting. This is because the qualification builds on learners' prior experiences of the new integrated English Language and Literature GCSE and is primarily aimed at learners resitting the GCSE.

2. Level 2 Learner Pathway

Main qualifications within learning programmes must be selected from those listed on the [QiW database](#) as eligible for funding and approved for delivery.

3. Careers and Work Related Experience

As above, FE institutions are encouraged to work with employers to provide meaningful and hands-on work experience for learners.

iii. Data Submission Requirements

Medr will use data from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) to monitor how FE institutions are performing against their targets and to monitor programme delivery and learning outcomes for the Junior Apprenticeship Programme.

In line with the conditions set out in the annual 'Terms and Conditions of Funding: local authority sixth forms and further education institutions for 2026/27', (which can be found on Medr's website at [Funding for providers](#)) institutions must ensure that data is submitted in the correct format and in a timely manner.

The [LLWR User Support Manual](#) sets out the guidelines that institutions should follow when sending LLWR data for the current academic year.

0104AJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Public Services
0301AJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Landscaping
0401CJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Fabrication and Welding
0401HJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Automotive Engineering
0502AJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Construction
0703AJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Hair and Beauty
0704BJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Hospitality and Catering
0903AJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Media
1401AJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Personal Growth
1402AJAB	Junior Apprenticeships – Work Related Education

Where provision being offered sits outside of the pathways identified within the programmes above, the FE College should complete and return a 'New Programme Request' form to Medr at InvestmentandMonitoring@medr.cymru. Learners should not be enrolled on a new pathway prior to approval by Medr.

8. Monitoring and Audit

i. Monitoring Approach

The approach to monitoring will focus on the following areas:

- Compliance with the Programme Specification - Medr will use LLWR data to monitor compliance with the programme specification. This will include monitoring of the data from the programme and activity datasets to check that programme delivery requirements are being met.

and

- Learning outcomes for the Junior Apprenticeship Programme - learner destination is a key performance measure for the programme, and crucial in evaluating programme delivery. It is anticipated that the majority of learners who successfully

complete the JA Programme will progress on to further learning, apprenticeship or employment at the age of 16.

This will be achieved through a combination of in-year and end-of year monitoring and a data matching exercise.

ii. Audit Testing

In addition to the approach to monitoring set out above, data returned by FE institutions will be subject to existing end of year audit requirements. Within this, particular emphasis will be placed in the *Auditors' Notes for Guidance* to ensure that external auditors appropriately sample learners undertaking the Junior Apprenticeships.

The audit requirements for the current academic year will be published at the end of the academic year.

9. Further Information and Contact Details

For any queries relating to the content of this Guidance document, please contact Medr at InvestmentandMonitoring@medr.cymru.

Medr

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