# Apprenticeship Coaching Custom and Practice

The role of the coach is critical in ensuring a meaningful experience and the successful and timely completion of the apprenticeship. Coaching runs alongside work on the job and study of the academic award to enable clear and precise identification of work-based opportunities for apprentices. These opportunities are used to embed practice and theory and demonstrate capability against the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSB) of the Apprenticeship Standard. Programme teams in the Colleges follow core principles of practice in coaching on apprenticeships in common:

* Support the completion of off the job learning activity and accurate recording of activity logs
* Facilitate the production of evidence for the portfolio to meet the Apprenticeship Standard
* Encourage reflective practice throughout the apprenticeship, helping the apprentice to ground their learning in real-world work experience
* Undertake tripartite reviews with the apprentice and their line manager/mentor and ensure such reviews are documented with responsibilities actioned
* Guide the apprentice on the relevant University process and regulations as appropriate, including Safeguarding, Prevent Duty etc
* Assist apprentices in preparation for the End Point Assessment (EPA) gateway, working from the initial meetings and referring to this regularly to ensure all checks are understood and ready for completion.

The approaches indicated here have been developed to assist coaches and Colleges to bring further consistency to these activities. The purpose of this document is to define some consistent standards and expectations about approach, interpretation and completion of these activities. The document is intended for coaches, apprenticeship programme teams and College management teams to use.

### **Off the Job Learning**

Recording their off the job learning is a core statutory requirement for all apprentices, with a requirement that this meets a 20% expectation of learning for all English apprenticeships. Further features of ‘Off the job Learning’ (OTJL) required are:

* The defined number of hours to be logged is included in the commitment statement. This is calculated from the apprentice’s working hours, holiday entitlement, and programme requirement /duration.
* Learner journeys in Aptem reflect these hours. The Learner journeys are continually reviewed with programme teams to reflect the focus and scheduling of OJTL activity expected over the duration of the apprenticeship.
* Care is taken by coaches to interpret the off the job learning requirement so that this is consistently defined between coaches, to avoid confusion, and any dispute within employer organisations. For example, employers should not have the impression that there is a specific expectation for scheduled dedicated study time for their apprentices. Apprentices should not be left with the impression they are justified in going back to their employer to negotiate for more study leave because other employers offer more.
* Allocation of study leave to apprentices on programme is entirely an internal matter for individual employers and subject to their policy framework. Since the OTJL target can be met in a variety of ways, there is no regulatory requirement for formal study leave beyond releasing apprentices for scheduled class delivery and assessments.
* The University requires apprentices to declare whether their OTJL is undertaken during working hours or rewarded via overtime or Time off in lieu (TOIL).
* In-role professional development, supported by reflective practice, is the most valuable and most relevant learning undertaken within the apprenticeship. This is often demonstrated in roles with in-built professional development for workers studying at level 6 and 7. The undertaking of a variety of activities within the apprentice’s job role often readily contributes to the development of the knowledge, skills and behaviours defined in the apprenticeship standard. Hence, coaches should encourage apprentices to identify and track all forms of development inherent in their role and within the wider support framework their employer provides. While we may expect study leave to be part of the development picture, there is no target or minimum level we require employers to support.

### **Off the Job reporting**

As the supporting systems for managing apprenticeships develop, reporting of OJTL varies presently depending on whether apprentices are being tracked within Aptem, Skills Forward or via a manual system.

* Within Aptem, all apprentices have a monthly task in their learning journey to complete a web form summarising OJT activity: this is marked as complete in the system after it is reviewed and approved by the coach.
* Apprentices on Skills Forward maintain a running learning log in the system and complete a web form for each entry.
* Apprentices in EPS (pre Aptem) maintain a time logging spreadsheet stored on Box by the coach.

These different systems present different activities for the coaching role. The following table outlines the proposed tracking of off the job hours and activity across the various platforms used currently (April 2022). Expectations for activity are provided alongside the activities indicated.

These approaches will be maintained during the migration of all Apprentices to Aptem.

### **Proposed OJTL tracking standards/KPIs**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Aptem | Skills Forward | Spreadsheet/Box |
| Dashboard to be monitored by coach and checked during coaching meetings.  Target each apprentice to be no more than 2 months behind in OJTL logging over the duration of the apprenticeship.  Coach to review and approve/refer OJTL log within one month of submission into the system.  Any significant shortfalls or issues to be flagged to the relevant Service Delivery Managers (SDM) prior to tripartite review meeting, and actions agreed as a result to be reported back to SDM to enable communications with employer to be managed. | Learning log to be monitored by coach on an ongoing basis.  Target each apprentice to be no more than 2 months behind in OJTL logging over the duration of the apprenticeship.  Any significant shortfalls or issues to be flagged to the relevant SDM prior to tripartite review meeting, and actions agreed as a result to be reported back to SDM to enable communications with employer to be managed.  Tracker spreadsheets which summarise apprentice progress stored by BSS on Box to be maintained and updated monthly for level 6 and 7 programmes. These provide essential summary information to the central apprenticeships team and facilitate employer management and engagement. | Time logging spreadsheets to be monitored and reviewed by coach on an ongoing basis.  Target each apprentice to be no more than 2 months behind in OJTL logging over the duration of the apprenticeship.  Any significant shortfalls or issues to be flagged to the relevant SDM prior to tripartite review meeting, and actions agreed as a result to be reported back to SDM to enable communications with employer to be managed.  Tracker spreadsheets which summarise apprentice progress to be developed and maintained along similar lines to the BSS spreadsheets. These will provide essential summary information to the central apprenticeships team and facilitate employer management and engagement. |

### **Portfolio Evidence and Reflective Practice**

The mandated requirements for an evidence Portfolio vary by standard and are not explicitly part of the End Point Assessment (EPA) in all cases.

* The University recommends that coaches and professional supervisors work with apprentices to encourage them to develop good Continuous Professional Development practices for career development. This includes development and gathering of appropriate evidence of CPD activity throughout the apprenticeship.
* Where portfolios are required for EPA, this is critical activity and a key part of the coach / professional supervisor role. Experience to date shows that failure to press this point with apprentices and ensure progress is being made on portfolios, represents a significant risk to successful completion. The aim should be for portfolios to be essentially complete at the point of reaching the EPA gateway.
* While it might be unrealistic to expect much progress on portfolios at the beginning of an apprenticeship, coaches and professional supervisors should encourage apprentices to reflect on their learning and its application in the workplace from the outset. This is particularly linked to the sequencing of modules and accompanied work activity. Opportunities can be taken at tripartite reviews to discuss and plan ahead, so that specific elements of learning may be underpinned and supported by workplace activity.
* Progress towards portfolio completion should be steady and accelerate as the apprenticeship continues to progress.

### **Portfolio Reporting**

Collection and reporting of portfolio evidence will vary depending on systems in use.

* Using Aptem, apprentices log an activity within their learning journey, to which they can upload multiple artefacts which together constitute one portfolio entry. Entries are categorised by the apprentice, identifying (and the coach signing off) the specific KSBs the evidence entry refers to, and this data feeds into the apprentice dashboard data for KSB completion.
* Entries are stored in the learning journey in the month the apprentice first logs the activity. These activities can be reviewed and approved/referred by the coach or supervisor in the same way as with monthly OJTL logs. In this way a portfolio entry can be started, developed and refined, and worked on over an extended period. Feedback from the coach and line manager where relevant, is provided on the evidence as it is developed. As portfolio activities are added, portfolio items can be selected for specific review using the learner journey filter.
* Skills Forward logs portfolio items in similar fashion, enabling apprentices to log a piece of evidence with multiple artefacts, with mapping against the KSB. Approval processes are similar to those used in Aptem, with a dashboard to display progress.
* For EPS apprentices (pre-Aptem), portfolio items are generated and stored independently by the apprentice. Activity is currently underway to implement central storage for this evidence across all programmes.

These different systems present different activities for the coaching role. The following table outlines the proposed tracking of portfolio evidence and activity across the various platforms used currently (April 2022). Expectations for activity are provided alongside the activities indicated.

Approaches will be maintained during the migration of all Apprentices to Aptem.

### **Proposed Portfolio Tracking Standards/KPIs**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Aptem | Skills Forward | Spreadsheet/Box |
| Portfolio development tracked and encouraged by coach over the life of the apprenticeship.  Target each apprentice to complete portfolio by the time of EPA gateway. Interim targets for portfolio completion at the discretion of the coach.  Coach to review and feedback on portfolio submissions within one month of upload by apprentice.  Any significant shortfalls or issues to be flagged to the relevant Service Delivery Managers (SDM) prior to the tripartite review meeting, and actions agreed as a result to be reported back to SDM to enable employer communications to be managed. | Portfolio development tracked and encouraged by coach over the life of the apprenticeship.  Target each apprentice to complete portfolio by the time of EPA gateway. Interim targets for portfolio completion at the discretion of the coach.  Coach to review and feedback on portfolio submissions within one month of upload by apprentice.  Any significant shortfalls or issues to be flagged to the relevant SDM prior to tripartite review meeting, and actions agreed as a result to be reported back to SDM to enable employer communications to be managed.  Tracker spreadsheets which summarise apprentice progress stored by BSS on Box to be maintained for level 6 and 7 programmes. These provide essential summary information to the central apprenticeships team and facilitate employer management and engagement. | Portfolio development tracked and encouraged by coach over the life of the apprenticeship.  Target each apprentice to complete portfolio by the time of EPA gateway. Interim targets for portfolio completion at the discretion of the coach.  Coach to review and feedback on portfolio submissions within one month of upload by apprentice.  Any significant shortfalls or issues to be flagged to the relevant SDM prior to tripartite review meeting, and actions agreed as a result to be reported back to SDM to enable employer communications to be managed.  Tracker spreadsheets which summarise apprentice progress to be developed and maintained along similar lines to the BSS spreadsheets. These will provide essential summary information to the central apprenticeships team and facilitate employer management and engagement. |

### **Tripartite Reviews**

Regular review meetings (tripartite reviews) between apprentice, employer and provider are a core expectation of apprenticeship delivery.

* The tripartite review process enables the progress of a specific apprentice to be captured, any requirements for additional support identified, and problems/feedback raised and addressed. The coach (or professional supervisor in some cases) is responsible for conducting and documenting the tripartite reviews.
* These tripartite reviews feed into a separate employer review process managed by the SDMs and key account team which will vary in frequency depending on the volume and scope of the apprenticeship activity undertaken. The employer review is an opportunity to discuss wider issues of employer expectations, feedback and infrastructure to support the apprenticeship. The frequency of Employer review meetings varies from twice monthly, to an annual check-in. Expectation as to scope and frequency of these meetings is established with the employer client at the outset.
* These Employer reviews are led either by an appointed Account Manager or one of the dedicated Service Delivery Managers. They provide a wider review opportunity across multiple programmes and/or Colleges/ Schools. Critically, should significant issues be identified through the tripartite process, these should be escalated to an Employer review, scheduling an additional meeting if necessary to escalate and/or resolve these issues.
* The importance of consistent practices in conducting and documenting the tripartite reviews is recognised. This includes frequency of the review undertaking. Standardising approaches enables consistent levels of service and formats of reporting to be provided. Further, the University has contractual requirement to meet the planned review structure documented within the commitment statement with the employer. This provides a minimum benchmark as a contractual obligation between all parties, including the funding agency ESFA.

The reporting activity with the employer is supported in Aptem. Programme mapping documentation is used to reflect this reporting plan and automatically populate the commitment statement with a proposed schedule of meetings. Outside Aptem, the University’s default schedule was for quarterly meetings, however implementation and frequency has varied thus far.

## **Review Reporting**

Aptem supports review reporting for tripartite reviews (initial, quarterly and annual) as defined and scheduled tasks within the learner journey.

* The review structure and questions are coded into the system and can be customised at programme level to reflect the specific requirements of the apprenticeship.
* Apprentice and line manager engagement in these reviews is also built into the system, with the facility to set the review up to automatically prompt the apprentice and line manager to add comments to the review document fields in advance of the review taking place.
* Reviews are scheduled at set monthly anniversaries in the system based on the programme start date. The coach can use the system and when a meeting date has been agreed, they can edit the “Coaching and Progress Review Meeting” component in the learner journey to update the planned date of the meeting. Once the review is completed, line manager and apprentice signatures are captured to signify agreement and provide evidence of the process through document automation.
* Within Skills Forward, reviews are usually uploaded as a Word document or pdf into the “tracking” component of the system. The challenge of chasing participants for signatures makes it understandably difficult to capture the signatures necessary for each review. In some cases, review notes are added via web forms within the “Visit Details” drop down. Hence, while there is much good intention and significant effort on the part of coaches, consistency of reporting is a challenge and confirmation of evidence requires effort to overcome the lack of system automation support.
* Reviews within EPS are generally paper based and stored at programme level. Similar challenges for evidencing and consistency exist as for Skills Forward records. The difficulties of searching and locating files in the Box-based filing systems increase difficulties experienced.

The following table shows KPIs against the typical processes to achieve and record these reporting activities.

### **Proposed review tracking standards and KPIs**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Aptem | Skills Forward | Spreadsheet/Box |
| Programmes to review and confirm review frequency for each programme.  Target each review to be completed within 6 weeks of the “scheduled” date within the learner journey. Coaches to amend review date to reflect planned appointments when they are confirmed.  Aptem system set up to prompt line manager and apprentice input to review pro-forma seven days in advance of review date.  Reviews to be documented and signed off within two weeks of review taking place. Delays in sign-off by line manager or apprentice to be investigated and escalated to SDM if necessary.  Non-attendance at reviews, or cancellation without legitimate reason, to be flagged to SDM for potential escalation at employer level. | Review process to be focused on use of standard formatted Word documents or pdf copies for all review meetings.  Reviews to be completed in a timely manner, programmes/ coaching team to advise SDM of planned schedule  Reviews to be completed and uploaded to Skills Forward within 1 month of review taking place.  Where signatures are hard to secure, an email to be sent to apprentice and line manager confirming review completion and providing a copy of the review documentation: copy of email stored with quarterly review archives in Skills Forward.  Non-attendance at reviews, or cancellation without legitimate reason, to be flagged to SDM for potential escalation at employer level. Any non-attendance to be added to notes in tracking spreadsheet stored on Box. | Reviews to be stored in preferred format on Box. Shared access to the folder provided to the SDM responsible for programme  Reviews to be completed in a timely manner: programmes/ coaching team to advise SDM of planned schedule.  Review documentation to be completed and uploaded to Box within 1 month of review taking place.  Where signatures are hard to secure, email to be sent to apprentice and line manager confirming review completion and providing a copy of the review documentation: copy of email stored with the review documentation on Box.  Non-attendance at reviews, or cancellation without legitimate reason, to be flagged to SDM for potential escalation at employer level. Any non-attendance to be added to notes in tracking spreadsheet stored on Box. |

### **Overall Progress reporting across the University’s Apprenticeship provision**

The steps and standard processes outlined here provide shared expectations and engagement of the coaching teams in the Colleges in interaction with apprentices, working with employers and the Service Delivery Managers who act at the employer account level. The impact and effectiveness of these processes form part of the regular reporting activity for Aston University’s apprenticeship provision to the relevant Sub-committees of the University’s Learning and Teaching Committee.