

JBM Guidance for Higher Level Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland

Introduction

This document provides guidance for education institutions/providers which are developing programmes as part of their Higher Level Apprenticeship and seeking the Joint Board of Moderators (JBM) accreditation.

A Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) is designed to provide the underpinning knowledge (K) for an apprenticeship standard which can be at Level 6 or 7. The degree structure must meet the requirements set out in the Department for the Economy (DfE), Higher Level Apprenticeships Higher Education Institutions Operational Requirements. The content must map to the JBM and the Engineering Council (EngC) degree guidelines.

As a Higher Education Institution (HEI) offering places in conjunction with the DfE, you must work in parallel with your apprentices and their employers to ensure that by the end of their academic programme of study the apprentice has:

- met the requirements as set out by DfE in the Operational Requirements,
- met or exceeded the academic requirements as specified by the University offering the JBM accredited degree,
- and is normally able to demonstrate the professional competencies / attributes required by JBM member institutions for IEng or CEng status.

The ethos of the HLA programme is to utilise the working environment to embed and deepen learning. HLA programmes may contain a proportion of Work Based Learning (WBL) in order to demonstrate the integration of knowledge within contextualised learning opportunities. WBL activities may be developed and assessed by the University or by the employer working in close collaboration with the University. As the degree awarding body, it is the responsibility of the University to ensure that all WBL learning activities are undertaken at the required FHEQ level and are assessed in accordance with appropriate Quality Assurance processes. It is also the University's responsibility to monitor the overall progress of the student to ensure that the programme delivers the required subjects at the required level over its duration – be this through content delivered at the University or in the WBL context.

The following are the most common questions Universities are asking the JBM about an apprenticeship degree.

1. We run accredited bachelor degree programmes; can I advise employers that this existing degree is also accredited for the purposes of registering apprenticeship students?

No, an individual Higher Education Institution (HEI) needs to seek a separate accreditation for the HLA programme through submission of a HLA documentation pack, demonstrating that you have reviewed the programme content and its delivery against DfE's "*Operational Requirements*." JBM needs to see evidence of close academic/industry liaison for the successful delivery and that you have done this to allow them to approve changes you make to your programme as a result.

Providers should also refer to the [QAA characteristics statement](#), and the Engineering Council sets the overall requirements for the Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP) in engineering, in line with the UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC).

2. We wish to develop an apprenticeship degree, where do I start?

You start with the DfE's "*Operational Requirements*" which stipulates the requirements of the programme which the Apprentice must consistently achieve. Further guidance on the principles of Higher Level Apprenticeships may be derived by viewing the framework document in conjunction with the overall requirements set within the DfE HLA framework.

2.1 Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes MUST ensure that: -

- a) In line with DfE stipulations all learning activities are undertaken through close collaboration between the University and employers in order to ensure relevancy and validity
- b) The employer and/or university is responsible for ensuring that any Work Based Learning and assessment is undertaken in line with the associated FHEQ level of study
- c) The development, delivery and assessment of WBL is undertaken by a suitably competent person – in the case of WBL undertaken by the University this may be a suitably qualified academic, in the case of WBL led by the employer this would have to be someone who holds an appropriate level of professional recognition i.e., recognised as a Supervising Civil Engineer, Delegated Engineer or Mentor with associated IEng or CEng accreditation
- d) Any WBL and/or associated assessment undertaken by the employer is validated by the University in line with its approved Quality Assurance processes. It is the Universities' responsibility to ensure that the nature of the WBL, its assessment and any mark awarded is fit for purpose and can be justified relative to FHEQ level of study

3. What does the JBM mean by WBL?

Following the recommendation of the JBM Sub-committee (JBMSC), it was agreed to use the definition of WBL set out in the JBM's [Glossary of Further Learning Terms](#): 'a structured way of using learning acquired through work experience'.

4. Is WBL a requirement for an apprenticeship degree?

Yes, an apprenticeship is a work-based training programme for which apprentices MUST be employed.

If WBL is awarded academic credit, it must be assessed and delivered at the required level by an appropriately qualified and recognised party. To ensure parity across, the JBM consider that it is appropriate to cap the maximum number of credits that can be achieved in this way. The suggested cap is a maximum of 90 credits and ideally spread equally across all FHEQ Levels. If a University wishes to include more than this, it has to be justified in the HLA submission.

In line with the requirements set out in the [JBM Guidelines for Developing Degree Programmes](#) subject areas covered must comprise of the three core subjects contained within List A (Structures, Materials, Geotechnics) and a minimum of two core subjects chosen from List B. For quality and consistency purposes, the University should assess all subject areas.

Students may use in-house training courses, for example in surveying, to complete the practical element of a surveying module with the underpinning theory and assessment of related coursework being delivered/validated by the University.

5. Does the title of the degree programme need to be different from our existing degree titles, we will be using our existing part-time degree programme to provide the underpinning knowledge for the degree?

The title of the HLA programme does not need to include the term 'Higher Level Apprenticeship', but it should have a different award title to that of an existing degree if the academic content is different in any way to the current provision. The apprentices receive a separate certificate from DfE to confirm they have completed the apprenticeship.

6. Local employers are asking us to offer a Higher Level Apprenticeship pathway for both IEng and CEng (partial) students, does it have to be one or the other or can it be both?

The primary focus of the Civil Engineering HLA is on developing the knowledge, understanding and skills outcomes sought by employers. This HLA framework can provide a route to Chartered Engineer status and is intended to satisfy the academic base for an Incorporated Engineer (IEng) or a Chartered Engineer (CEng) under the provisions of UK-SPEC. The framework is not prescriptive about the awards to be made available by learning providers; however, these should be national qualifications at appropriate FHEQ level and required number of credits e.g., level 6 360 credits and level 7 180 credits.

NB the framework should only be delivered by providers capable of bestowing the correct awards at the appropriate FHEQ level (or working in a partnership to be able to do so). To ensure recognition by the following professional bodies all HE qualifications should be accredited by the Joint Board of Moderators (JBM):

- Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)
- Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE)
- Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT)
- Institute of Highways Engineers (IHE)
- The Permanent Way Institution (PWI)

7. Does the Higher Level Apprenticeship programme need to be a structured learning experience?

Yes, the whole Higher Level Apprenticeship is a structured learning programme containing the degree with a negotiated technical and professional programme. Any WBL content is assessed and audited by the provider (in conjunction with the apprentice and the employer) through a minimum of 3 scheduled meetings per academic year. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure a Personal Training Plan (PTP) requirements are being monitored and met in line with DfE requirements on successful completion of the programme.

These visits will also be used to reflect on learning at the university and in the workplace as well as any other relevant Initial Professional Development, e.g., attendance at professional body meeting, webinars, training courses, reading journals etc.

8. Does the University need to monitor the gathering of apprentices' evidence to demonstrate that it meets the standard required for professional accreditation?

The level of monitoring will depend on the method of delivery and the arrangements adopted for the development and assessment of any WBL i.e., if it is undertaken by the University or by an appropriately qualified person within the organisation. In all cases, the University should undertake monitoring to ensure that all work associated with the degree is undertaken in line with its Quality Assurance processes and as per the requirements of the DfE Operational Requirements.

The University is responsible for the monitoring of the students' academic progress and should ensure that the required subject areas (as specified by the JBM Core Subject Lists A and B) are delivered at the required level over the programme's duration.

Successful completion of an accredited HLA programme will result in the award of the degree title. It is not a requirement that the Apprentice apply for membership following graduation, however, it is good practice to ensure that the apprentices gathering of evidence for their portfolio runs concurrently with the degree programme and the gathering of evidence is supported by their employer. If the Apprentice is not afforded the opportunity to gather evidence in support of application for IEng registration, this should be discussed with their employer.

9. Does the University need to provide training for those designated industrial mentors from those organisations their apprentices will work for? Is this something the professional bodies can help with?

Learning providers (universities) should liaise with existing employer training and development and quality assurance systems to minimise any double assessment (if WBL forms part of the programme). They will need to ensure that mentors are recognised as such or have been trained appropriately - the professional bodies may be able to help with this.

10. Is an End Point Assessment (EPA) required as part of the Higher Level Apprenticeship process in Northern Ireland?

No – Higher Level Apprenticeships are delivered by Universities and are subject to the same Quality Assurance mechanisms as conventional full-time degree programmes. In Northern Ireland, a different QA scheme is applied and therefore an EPA is not required. Successful attainment of the 360 credits at level 6 or 180 credits at level 7 required will result in the completion of the programme and award of the degree.

11. Can I use the [Risk Based Approach \(RBA\)](#) to make an application for approval of our apprenticeship degree, is there any extra information I will need to provide?

You may use the RBA to make your submission **if you are** already offering JBM accredited degree programmes. If you are, you will need to include the following information.

The HEI must submit a report to the JBM (jbm@ice.org.uk) containing the following information for each programme under review:

- A rationale for the new programme which includes:
 - Mapping to [AHEP Learning outcomes](#) and JBM mapping to core subject matrix and threads.
 - Projected recruitment statistics.
 - Internal validation report.
 - Details of changes to related accredited programmes since the last JBM visit
- Programme specifications providing details of the structure of the programme.
- Commonality with other accredited programmes.
- Resource implications (including staffing and equipment).

Extra information for all Higher Level Apprenticeship Degree submissions:

- A statement confirming which framework the award provides the underpinning knowledge, skills and behaviours for.
- A mapping table to demonstrate how DfE HLA frameworks' learning and skills outcomes requirement are met in the HLA programme.
- The academic and industrial support provided to apprentices.
- Proposals for monitoring apprentices' academic competence as well as development needs, such as arrangements for on-going progress monitoring and reviews.
- In the case of academic credit given for WBL, state the number of credits and how the WBL is to be assessed.
- Any contractual agreement exists between employer and the DfE (funder) and with the HEI for delivering HLA programme.
- The tri-partite commitment statement between the apprentice, the employer and the HEI.
- Active engagement with the relevant professional institution(s) to support employers and prepare the apprentices for successful timely completion of the HLA.

If you **do not** run JBM accredited degree programmes then you will need to complete the full [JBM accreditation submission report](#), as soon as your programme has been internally validated. Please contact the JBM secretariat as soon as the programme has been validated to allow them to arrange a pre-accreditation visit.

12. We have our accreditation visit in the next few months; what evidence will the JBM expect to see that relates to our apprenticeship programme?

- 1) The academic degree must meet the requirements set out in the [Guidelines for Developing Degree programmes](#) and has been mapped to [AHEP learning outcomes](#). This mapping must be evidenced in student work.
- 2) Where WBL is developed and assessed by the employer, clear evidence must be shown that activities map to the related FHEQ level associated with study and that the employer is appropriately qualified to deliver and assess such content
- 3) Where applicable written agreement between University, employer and Apprentice developed prior to the commencement of WBL which clearly lays out the roles and responsibilities of each party
- 4) Evidence of Employer input to the development and ongoing delivery of the Higher Level Apprenticeship programme at a strategic level. This may be demonstrated via the establishment and input of an Industry Advisory Panel
- 5) Evidence of close collaboration between the HEI and the employer(s) during the delivery and assessment of any WBL components
- 6) Evidence will be required that the HEI has comprehensive quality assurance processes and procedures in relation to any WBL elements undertaken with an employer.
- 7) The apprenticeship course handbook should outline the full process i.e., the need to gain appropriate experience in addition to their academic studies
- 8) Minutes of Student Staff committee meetings or any other such activities that relate to apprenticeship students and their experience of the programme.

13. What types of questions could a JBM visiting team ask us?

- 1) What is the ethos of your apprenticeship degree, what is different from the other degrees you offer and your engagement with industry?
- 2) What is the mode of delivery and if there are likely to be any issues faced by apprenticeship students when compared with other students?
- 3) Is there any linkage between the University and company support/mentoring of the apprenticeship? As part of the accreditation process, the JBM will seek evidence that strong and visible links are in place between provider and employers, and that employers contribute to delivering HLA framework learning & skills outcome, holding regular review meetings, supporting apprentice etc.
- 4) The JBM actively expects providers (universities) to consider apprenticeship related matters within an established Industry Advisory Board (IAB) or in a standalone IAB equivalent for the HLA programme.
- 5) On an accreditation visit, the JBM must meet apprenticeship students, some of their employers and mentors
- 6) How are you going to monitor/manage the WBL element of the course?
- 7) Have there been any students admitted to later years of the programme to ensure that the accreditation intake period aligns with the graduating cohort?

14. Can the HLA programme be entirely delivered and assessed through WBL by the employer with the University providing validation?

No – in order to ensure that the required subject areas are covered, and a sufficient understanding of underlying theory associated with study at a degree level is attained, the University must deliver a proportion of the programme.

Whilst the use of the workplace as a learning environment is to be encouraged, it is unlikely that any one employer will be able to offer the opportunity to cover the entirety of the programme at the required level of study in the workplace. The HLA programme should look to use the strength of the respective learning environments to ensure that the apprentice is provided with a comprehensive programme which includes academic study as well as its practical application for the purpose of learning.

In practical terms, this will mean a blend of classroom-based learning offered in combination with WBL. This may be achieved through day release/block release offered in combination with WBL activities if the University can show clear evidence that the required subjects have been covered and to the required academic level. For example, subjects which are predominantly theory based (e.g., Mathematics) may be exclusively taught in the classroom whilst more practical subjects

(such as Surveying) may be taught through a combination of classroom and WBL activities. The University should work with employers and Apprentices on an individual basis to identify opportunities for learning to be undertaken in the workplace and work to ensure this is supported through classroom-based learning. WBL may also be included in the form of a dedicated module(s) within the programme structure where it can be utilised to evidence the achievement of Programme Learning Outcomes as stipulated by the JBM.

