



# Supporting Learners on Degree Apprenticeship Programmes

## Employer Mentor and Line Manager Guide

### **Leadership and Management Apprenticeships at Manchester Met**

September 2019



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## 1 | Introduction to Degree Apprenticeships at Manchester Met

Manchester Metropolitan University is a leading, modern university and one of the largest in the UK, educating over 37,000 students each year. The University takes its responsibility for creating work-ready graduates very seriously and has a rich history of education and employer engagement since 1824.

This embedded philosophy has enabled the University to take an industry-leading role in Degree Apprenticeship creation and delivery. We are one of the largest national providers, working with over 200 employers and 1000 degree apprentices on a range of programmes across leadership and management, digital technology, health and social care and chemical science.

Our degree apprenticeship provision was Highly Commended at the 2016 Times Higher Education Awards for its pioneering work in the development and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships and in 2019 we were the highest placed University provider in the Rate My Apprenticeship awards.

Please email [apprenticeships@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:apprenticeships@mmu.ac.uk) if your organisation is interested in other apprenticeship programmes on offer at Manchester Metropolitan University.



## 2 | Apprenticeship Mentor Guidance and Support

Whether you are joining the process as a new mentor or your apprentice has rotated into your department from another, this guide is designed to give you an overview of the apprenticeship mentor role when supporting apprentices in the workplace.

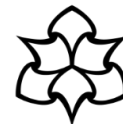
An apprenticeship is a tripartite relationship between the apprentice (as the learner), yourself (as the employer) and the University (as the apprenticeship provider). Apprenticeships are only successful if this relationship is strong and supported by strong communication and contact.

In addition to this guide, you will be assigned a dedicated skills coach who will conduct regular reviews with yourself and the apprentice to monitor progress and set targets. They are also an invaluable source of information and guidance about how to support and develop apprentices in the workplace, so please reach out to them and ask for advice.

Webinars and information sessions are also held throughout the year and there is a range of resources that can be found on our employer resources page:

[www.mmu.ac.uk/apprenticeships/resources/chartered-manager/](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/apprenticeships/resources/chartered-manager/)

The following pages aim to answer frequently asked questions and share best practice from our employer network. However, if you have a question that this guide does not answer, please contact with your skills coach or the central mailbox at [managementapprentice@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:managementapprentice@mmu.ac.uk).



### 3 | Role of an Apprenticeship Mentor

Every apprentice on programme should have a mentor in their organisation who is willing and able to engage in termly tripartite reviews with the University to monitor progress and identify suitable workplace development needs and opportunities. In addition, the mentor should provide ongoing informal support and guidance to the apprentice and help them to reflect on their learning and development whilst on programme.

In most cases, the apprentice's line manager will be their apprenticeship mentor, as they are best placed to understand the particular requirements of the role and proactively identify any challenges and support requirements. They are also best placed to understand and help manage the time-management challenges which arise from undertaking a degree whilst in employment.

However, it may be the case that someone else in the organisation is best placed to act as a mentor, and there have been many examples of this arrangement working successfully. Similarly, organisational requirements may require the apprentice to have several short-term mentors at different stages of their apprenticeship, eg as they rotate around in the organisation. In this situation, we would advise that the apprentice is also assigned an additional mentor who will take overall responsibility for their development. Both short- and long-term mentor could then attend and partake in the tripartite review process.

Every organisation is different, so we encourage you to have early and proactive conversations with your apprentice and skills coach in order to determine the most appropriate and successful arrangement for your apprentice.

#### Qualities of an effective apprenticeship mentor:

- Dedicated to the development of the apprentice and committed to degree apprenticeships
- Understanding of the independent learning approach required when studying for a degree
- Aware of the individual development needs of the apprentice and willing to explore these, challenging and coaching as required
- Senior enough and trusted within the organisation to 'open doors' and facilitate access to development opportunities
- Approachable and encouraging, helping the apprentice to reflect on their learning and how to apply it in the workplace
- Proactive and available to attend tripartite reviews to monitor progress and development



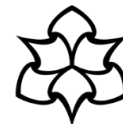
- Able to bring out the aspirational qualities in an apprentice and encourage them to think about their long-term development, within and outside the organisation.

### **Work-based projects**

Work-based projects are an essential component of degree apprenticeships at Manchester Met, and we have created a separate guide discussing the nature of these projects in more detail. Mentors have a crucial role to play in these projects, in terms of helping apprentices to identify a suitable project area, helping apprentices to manage the project whilst it is 'live' and helping them to reflect on the impact and future implications of the project. Finally, projects are a fantastic opportunity for apprentices to demonstrate a return on investment for their employer and mentors can help them align their project to broader organisational strategy and needs.

As our guide outlines in more detail, it is very important that these projects are 'live' workplace projects that deliver a real tangible result or outcome. As a mentor, you can help apprentices to understand the importance of developing a project which will yield something of value to their organisation, rather than an abstract or desk-based research project.

It is also inevitable that some projects will fail to meet their objectives, and the mentor can play an important role in helping to re-align projects and encourage reflection.



## 4 | Apprenticeship Review Process

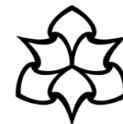
Throughout the academic year, termly reviews of progress will take place between the apprentice, skills coach and workplace mentor. These tripartite meetings will review academic and vocational progress and identify any areas for development against the apprenticeship standard. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that the apprentice is making good progress against the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) listed in the standard, where knowledge is delivered through formal learning and skills and behaviours are developed and evidenced in the workplace.

In these reviews, your skills coach will encourage you and the apprentice to identify opportunities for the application of skills and behaviours in the workplace, so that apprentices can develop occupational competency and apply their learning in practice. For example, an apprentice in an operational role might struggle to develop competency against the *finance* and *sales and marketing* areas of the CMDA standard (because these are role specific responsibilities that are handled by a different department or person in the organisation). In this situation, a mentor could help by arranging a shadowing or training opportunity so that the apprentice can gain exposure to this area. They may also encourage the apprentice to develop this skill in their workplace project, steering them towards a project that is outside of their immediate sphere of influence or comfort zone, and facilitating the necessary connections for them to do so.

Periodic skills scans will be used throughout the programme to help identify developmental needs, in apprentices will be asked to rate their competency against their apprenticeship standards. These skills scans will be shared and discussed in the tripartite reviews. SMART targets relating to any development needs will be set in each review and the apprentice will be encouraged to collect evidence of their development for inclusion in the apprentice development portfolio that forms a crucial component of the end-point assessment.

### Your role in these tripartite reviews:

- Helping to identify suitable developmental needs and opportunities
- Providing challenge and helping to stretch the apprentice
- Gaining a deeper understanding of the university programme to help apprentices apply their knowledge in the workplace
- Helping to monitor progress, including university grades, attendance and progress towards 20% off-the-job development time
- Helping to explore potential work-based project topics.



## 5 | Apprenticeship Standards and End-Point Assessments

The apprentice is working on a programme tailored to meet the criteria of an apprenticeship standard relevant to the industry in which they are working. Apprenticeship standards are developed by employers, providers and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education in trailblazer groups. Apprenticeship standards are supported by an assessment plan, which outlines any specific assessment requirements for the relevant apprenticeship. To get more information about the various apprenticeship standards, please visit [www.gov.uk/guidance/search-for-apprenticeship-standards](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/search-for-apprenticeship-standards).

All apprenticeship standards will contain an occupational profile (providing an overview of the role and any specific responsibilities), and will list the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) that are to be developed and evidenced as part of the apprenticeship programme:

- **Knowledge** (*knows and understands*): is delivered and assessed through the formal degree qualification
- **Skills and Behaviours** (*able to do and demonstrate*): are developed and acquired in the workplace, supported by relevant academic assignments

### End-Point Assessments

Although the degree component of the apprenticeship is assessed throughout the programme, the apprenticeship, as such, is not formally assessed until the end of the programme, during the End-Point Assessment (EPA) process. The EPA assesses occupational competency and ensures that all KSBs have been met by the apprentice.

Each assessment plan lists the specific assessment methods of the relevant apprenticeship standard, but they are likely to contain:

- **Synoptic project**: a final-year project that allows the apprentice to demonstrate their application of KSBs in a large-scale project
- **Project presentation (or showcase)**: a presentation on the outcomes of the project, followed by questioning
- **Competency-based interview**: a structured interview designed to test occupational competency ('tell me about a time you have...')
- **Apprentice Development Portfolio**: a record of workplace evidence and examples which demonstrate occupational competency against the standard
- **Professional discussion**: a more loosely-structured discussion exploring development across the apprenticeship





Extensive support and guidance is given in the run-up to end-point-assessment, and a range of resources can be found on our employer resources page and the apprentice's programme page on Moodle. We organise mock EPAs throughout the year, allowing apprentices to engage in competency-based questioning and presentation skills workshops.

### **End-Point-Assessment Organisation**

For the CMDA (Level 6) and MBA Degree Apprenticeship (Level 7) we have partnered with the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) to deliver our End-Point-Assessments. EPAs are held at the Business School at Manchester Met throughout the year to encourage swift completion of the apprenticeship after the achievement of the degree qualification.



## 6 | Apprenticeship Development Portfolio

Throughout the apprenticeship, and in preparation for the EPA, your apprentice will develop a portfolio of evidence demonstrating their development and application of skills and behaviours in the workplace. Your skills coach will provide guidance on this process throughout the reviews and regular communications. Further guidance is also available in a separate guide on our employer resources page.

Your key role in this process is to help the apprentice to access any development or training opportunities that are required to develop the skills and behaviours listed in the standard. You can do this by arranging training, shadowing or delegating higher-level tasks.

### Developing and evidencing behaviours

Although behaviours are an important part of apprenticeship standards, they can be difficult to define and evidence in the apprenticeship portfolio, as behaviours are demonstrated on an ongoing basis through a range of actions (rather than a skill-specific activity).

To encourage reflection on behaviours and the collection of suitable evidence for the end-point-assessment, we have developed a 360-degree feedback activity which we ask you to complete with your apprentice at least once per year. Along with colleagues, direct reports and other stakeholders, mentors are asked to complete a form commenting on the apprentice's behaviours in the workplace (example below). Your skills coach will explain this activity in more detail. You might want to include this activity as part of ongoing reviews and development planning.

**Skills and Behaviours Feedback Form:** to be completed by apprentice and line manager / mentor

Mentor/Manager Name: ..... Date: .....  
 Apprentice: ..... Year of study: 1 2 3 4



Comment on the apprentices general performance against the behaviours and include any relevant examples to contextualise the performance comments (MMU advises that you do not include any commercially or personally sensitive information). It may be appropriate to consider the behaviours in relation to the study unit or rotational area the apprentice is currently in.

Behaviour	Descriptor	Comments	Scale (see below)
<b>Takes Responsibility</b>	Drive to achieve in all aspects of work. Demonstrates resilience and determination when managing difficult situations. Seeks new opportunities underpinned by commercial acumen and sound judgement.		
<b>Inclusive</b>	Open, approachable, authentic, and able to build trust with others. Seeks the views of others and values diversity internally and externally.		
<b>Agile</b>	Flexible to the needs of the organisation. Is creative, innovative and enterprising when seeking solutions to business needs. Positive and adaptable, responding well to feedback and need for change. Open to new ways of working and new management theories.		
<b>Professional</b>	Sets an example, and is ethical, fair, consistent and impartial. Operates within organisational values and adheres to the CMI's Professional Code of Conduct and Practice. ( <a href="http://www.managers.org.uk/policies/code-of-conduct-and-practice">http://www.managers.org.uk/policies/code-of-conduct-and-practice</a> ).		

Mentor/mentor name and signature: .....

Apprentice name and signature: .....

### 360-degree behaviour feedback form



## 7 | Developing the Reflective Practitioner

In order to tackle the challenges of the twenty-first century, we need leaders and managers who can critically reflect on their actions. Across all our programmes, we are committed to developing reflective practitioners who actively think about the consequences and impact of their actions on themselves, others and the wider community.

As such, apprentices will be encouraged to reflect on their practice and development as a leader and manager at every stage of their apprenticeship. Indeed, a crucial component of the end-point assessment is an apprentice development portfolio containing examples of their occupation competency and a set of reflective statements (called Reflection on Evidence or RoE forms).

Apprentices may struggle to see the value of developing reflective practice, especially in the early stages of their learning journey. As an employer mentor, you can play a crucial role in this process, helping the apprentice to 'stand back' from their learning and immediate role job and explore the broader application or implications of their learning and development.

This starts by creating the space for reflection. If an apprentice is chairing a meeting for the first time, for example, plan ahead and ensure that you can both sit down after the meeting and reflect on the decisions that were taken and the approach taken. Some questions you could ask:

- *How do you think that went?*
- *How did you find the experience?*
- *What did you find challenging?*
- *What would you do differently next time?*
- *Is there anything you need clarifying?*
- *What do you need to do next?*

Remember that your skills coach is also available to help you during the apprenticeship, and you can contact them for advice about how to support and develop your apprentice.



## 8 | 20% Off-The-Job Development Time

An important part of any apprenticeship is being given sufficient time to learn new knowledge and skills, and develop new behaviours. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) decided that this should constitute no less than 20% of an apprentice's contractual hours over the duration of the apprenticeship programme. As an employer mentor, you need to support the apprentice to receive this development time and ensure that the apprentice is tracking it on the e-portfolio system.

Dedicated off-the-job development time includes University studies (including attendance at teaching sessions, workshops and tutorials, online learning) as well as activities undertaken in the workplace which contribute to the development of skills and behaviours outlined within the apprenticeship standard. Guidance on how to best utilise this during the programme will be given, but as a general guide we have calculated the 20% as follows:

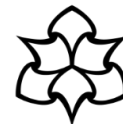
Based on apprentice working 7.5 hours/day over 5 days	Hours	Days
Average contracted weekly working hours (7.5 hours per day)	37.5	5
Average contracted annual hours (37.5 x 46.4 weeks)	1740	232
OTJ entitlement per year (20% of contracted hours)	348	46

Attendance at University will automatically be monitored and logged as part of the off-the-job time by the apprenticeship team. As such, it is important for the apprentice to notify the team of any absences in advance ([managementapprentice@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:managementapprentice@mmu.ac.uk)). You should negotiate and arrange with the apprentice how they will receive the remaining off-the-job entitlement and what this will consist of.

Training and support outside of contracted working hours cannot count towards the 20% off-the-job development time unless the out-of-hours work is supported through time off-in-lieu or similar arrangements. In addition, the 20% allocation does not include additional time which may be required for functional skills or on-programme resits.

A range of activities can be counted towards the off-the-job requirement provided that the activity is (1) directly relevant to the apprenticeship standard and (2) developing new knowledge, skills or behaviours. Examples include:

- Online training or learning related to University units
- Research, study and development of University assignments and projects
- Additional training or development based on identified needs
- IT or technology training
- Shadowing, mentoring or visiting other departments
- Attendance at competitions, conferences or industry visits



- Learning support provided by the employer or University
- Taking on additional responsibilities and tasks

### Study support days

In addition to the time spent at University, it is likely that your apprentice will need some additional time to research, develop and also write their assignments. However, we do not expect that this study time will make up the entirety of their 20% off-the-job development time. Indeed, the apprentice will also benefit from training and development opportunities that are based in the workplace and which are directly related to identified skills and development needs based on the standard. This will be explained to apprentices during induction, but it is important that you re-emphasise this message.

Once again, it is important to have early and open conversations with your apprentice about how this 20% off-the-job development and any dedicated study time will be managed. It might be useful to remind apprentices that whilst some additional study, research and development time will be needed, they should not expect unlimited additional time, but only enough time to pass the assignment or achieve the target on which you have both agreed. If the apprentice wishes to achieve a higher mark, and perfect their assignment further, then they can be encouraged to do this in their own time. Once again, every apprenticeship journey is unique and the amount of time required will vary by apprentice, based on confidence, experience and assignment/project difficulty and scope.

Some different examples of how to manage these expectations are given below:

- **Dedicated time each week:** you agree that a certain numbers of hours are kept clear as dedicated off-the-job development time each week (eg every Wednesday from 2-5pm). This might be filled with study time or additional development opportunities as required. Establishing this rhythm might help apprentices and your organisation manage the off-the-job development time.
- **Additional study time around assignment submission:** in order to maximise the impact of additional study time, you agree that the apprentice can take it when it can be best utilised, according to assignment submission dates. These are available on our employer resources page.
- **Agreed number of study afternoons:** you agree that the apprentice can request a certain number of afternoons per term or year for dedicated study time (eg 6 afternoons). The apprentice has to proactively request and 'book' these afternoons in advance.

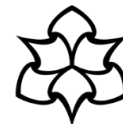


- **Location of dedicated study time:** it is also a good idea to discuss with the apprentice how they will use their study time, thinking about how they work best—do they need a quiet location to study? Can they work from home during these periods? Should they be contactable by telephone/email etc.

Apprentices must log their off-the-job development time on the e-portfolio system and the progression against their target will be monitored and reported on at each tripartite review. As a mentor, you will be able to see the off-the-job entries in the e-portfolio system.

Please encourage your apprentice to log their development time regularly and keep accurate records. Some examples of best practice in logging off-the-job development time:

- **Colour-coded calendar entries:** set aside a specific colour for OTJ development time in their work calendar, so that they can easily identify which activities contribute towards their off-the-job target
- **Monthly calendar reminders:** to log their off-the-job development time on the e-portfolio system. Doing this on a monthly basis means that their log is up-to-date and accurate
- **Easy-to-access log:** keep an easy-to-access log on which they can quickly add activities before inputting to the e-portfolio system each month (eg a word document on their desktop or a cloud-based to-do list).



## 9 | Supporting Apprentices

Workplace mentors also have an important role to play in helping apprentices to apply their newly acquired knowledge and manage the challenges of studying for a degree whilst also working in full-time employment. Each apprentice learning journey will be different, and we encourage you to check in regularly with the apprentice about how they are finding their apprenticeship experience and encourage them to share their concerns and challenges.

Please ensure that you understand the academic programme, so that you know what your apprentice is studying whilst at University and can encourage them to apply their knowledge in the workplace. Teaching schedules and assignment hand-in dates can be found on our employer resources page.

### Level of support

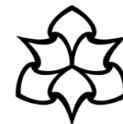
Just like inducting a new employee, you will find that you need to provide more support during the initial stages of an apprenticeship. Once they settle into a new rhythm and pattern of work and learning, support can often be scaled back, as the apprentice becomes a more independent learner and reflective practitioner. However, as a minimum, we suggest that you schedule regular monthly catch-up meetings with your apprentice, to establish a regular pattern of support. These meetings might be used for updates on their University or occupational progress, or could be used to explore a particular concern or development need that has been identified. Creating this dedicated space and time for discussion and reflection about the apprenticeship will help them and you to ensure issues are identified early.

Like any employee, there will be 'pinch points' in the year when even the most able apprentice has to juggle conflicting work and university demands. Again, these will be different according to sector and organisation, but we encourage you to be proactive and ask your apprentice to let you know when their assignments are due and when they are slipping behind with their commitments. You might ask your apprentice to put these assignment deadlines into your calendar for the year ahead.

### Opening doors

One of the key roles of the employer mentor is to help the apprentice to access information, people, resources and opportunities that they would not otherwise know existed or that were available to them. Whilst you should always encourage your apprentice to take the lead, and proactively reach out for support, your connections and organisation-specific knowledge can prove to be invaluable to their development.

If your apprentice is new to your organisation, they will need help to learn about all the different teams and functions in your organisation and how they all fit together. At first,



they will be unaware of these different components, and you may be able to help facilitate the initial connection that allows them to shadow someone in a different part of the organisation, for example.

Existing employees may also struggle to see the opportunities and resources that are available to them. In one example, an apprentice mentioned in a tripartite review that they were struggling with an assignment relating to strategy because they had 'searched the intranet high and low, but couldn't find anything.' Slightly surprised, the line manager turned to a filing cabinet and pulled out the strategy document. 'Why didn't you just ask?' The reality is that it is often difficult to ask, especially when an apprentice is so embedded in organisational structures and ways of working. Again, being proactive and open can help overcome these barriers.





## 10 | Examples of Support

Although every apprenticeship journey will be unique, here are some common scenarios that workplace mentors have encountered:

- **Transition to Higher Education:** The apprentice is making the transition from further to higher education whilst also transitioning into full-time employment. They may struggle to negotiate the requirements and pace of their new role and manage their time effectively. Making the shift to a more independent and self-directed mode of study may also be challenging. The apprentice may benefit from being put in touch with another apprentice or graduate who has been through the same experience. They may also benefit from regular discussions about their learning, to help them understand key topics and issues.
- **Overwhelmed by the opportunity:** especially if an apprentice is new to the organisation, they can find the process of 'learning whilst they earn' exhilarating and exciting. Indeed, degree apprenticeships are providing an opportunity that many people thought would never happen for them. That said, this process can also be overwhelming, especially around assignment deadlines. In these situations, the apprentice may benefit from dedicated study days or mornings, during which they can solely focus on their upcoming assignments. They may also benefit from a discussion about setting realistic expectations.
- **Unrealistic expectations:** The apprentice is extremely diligent about their 'academic' studies but find themselves unable to keep up with the high standards that they are setting themselves. They want to read every article and set out determined to achieve a first in every assignment. They may benefit from an honest conversation about priorities and unrealistic expectations (good is good enough). Remind them that it is not necessary or possible to read every article or book on a topic and that they should focus on understanding the key topics and models. They may also need help focussing on the bigger picture, and thinking about their broader development on the apprenticeship.
- **Returning to education:** The apprentice is returning to study after several years progressing through the organisation because of their natural skills and determination. However, despite this occupational competency, they are nervous about returning study. You may wish to remind these apprentices to draw on their experience in their studies, and not to get overwhelmed by the 'academic' component. Once again, connecting them with a current or recent degree apprentice can also help settle these fears.
- **Application of knowledge:** The apprentice is struggling to see the relevance of the apprenticeship to their own development; there is a disconnect between



the academic knowledge and the practical application in the workplace. Engaging in the tripartite reviews will help to explore the links between knowledge and skills, but you could also check-in with the apprentice regularly to ask them about their learning and assignments and encourage them to make their assignments tailored to the organisation as much as possible. This will help to develop a learning culture in the apprentice and organisation. In these situations, you may also want to consider encouraging challenge—experienced apprentices often have a lot to offer their organisation, but sometimes need encouragement to offer-up their ideas and suggestions.

- **Struggling academically:** The apprentice is struggling on the course and not receiving the grades that they would like. In this situation, it is also important to have an open conversation about what ‘good’ looks like. Apprentices new to higher education are often disappointed even though they are achieving 65% (an upper second and a ‘good’ honours degree). You may also want to sit down with the apprentice and review the feedback from their tutor. Talking through their feedback often helps learners to self-identify the barriers to further progression. Additional academic support can be provided by our academic skills tutors ([studyskills@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:studyskills@mmu.ac.uk)).
- **Mental health and emotional support:** If your apprentice approaches you with a concern about their mental health or emotional wellbeing, it is important to take the time to listen to them in a non-judgmental manner and help them to explore their options. In these situations, apprentices are often worried that they will be unable to complete their apprenticeship, something that is very important to them. Remind that there are many options in these circumstances, including extensions to assignment deadlines and a temporary break in learning to give them time to focus on their wellbeing. Your skills coach will be able to explore these options with you and your apprentice in more detail.

The University also has a confidential counselling service that the apprentice can access directly ([counselling@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@mmu.ac.uk) and 0161 247 3493). Your organisation may also have employee wellbeing support that they can access in addition to support from their GP.

Your skills coach is the first point of contact in situations like this. They will be able to advise you and your apprentice on possible options and explore additional support opportunities that are available at the University.