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SCIENCE
APPRENTICESHIP FORUM

SAF Newsletter

Letter from the Forum

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first Science Apprenticeship Forum (SAF) newsletter of 2026.

This year, we are introducing a new format, moving away from our previous monthly updates. This change allows us to bring you more focused, meaningful content, while still sharing all the exciting developments from across the apprenticeship landscape.

You can continue to expect the same great mix of updates, including:

- Key news from across the apprenticeship and technical education sector
 - Opportunities to get involved with SAF and the wider community
 - Events, resources, and initiatives relevant to apprentice technicians

For the second quarter, we will be shining a spotlight on our community. We'll be sharing shoutouts and success stories, celebrating individuals who have gone above and beyond, as well as those who would like to highlight their own achievements.

We hope you enjoy this refreshed format and, as always, welcome your contributions and feedback.

Thank you for being part of the SAF community.



Apprenticeship Reforms Update

Implications for current and recently completed apprentices

The apprenticeship system is undergoing a coordinated set of reforms across assessment, funding, and standard development. These changes are being implemented on a rolling basis through 2025 to 2026, meaning there will be a period of coexistence between old and new models. The detail below outlines what is changing and, critically, who is affected.

From EPA to 'Apprenticeship Assessment'

The most significant reform is the move away from the traditional End-Point Assessment (EPA) model.

- EPA is being replaced by a more integrated **apprenticeship assessment** approach
- Assessment is expected to be **distributed across the duration of the programme**, rather than concentrated at a single end-point
- Increased use of **on-programme assessment**, including portfolios, observed practice, and project-based evidence
- A shift toward **sampling of competence**, rather than re-testing all knowledge, skills, and behaviours at the end
- **Assessment Plans** are being rewritten to be shorter, less prescriptive, and more flexible in delivery

There is also a structural change:

- EPAOs are transitioning to **Assessment Organisations (AOs)**
- 'Gateway' becomes **Gateway to Completion**, reflecting a less binary transition into assessment

Who is affected:

- Apprentices currently on programme will **generally complete under the existing EPA model**, unless their standard is formally revised during their programme and they are transitioned (this is expected to be limited and controlled)
- New starters on revised standards will follow the **new apprenticeship assessment model**

In practice, most current apprentices will still undertake EPA, while future cohorts will increasingly experience integrated assessment.



Apprenticeship Reforms Update

Changes to Funding & Delivery Expectations

Funding reforms sit alongside assessment changes, with a clear policy direction toward **flexibility, efficiency, and stronger employer alignment.**

- At present, funding is primarily used for **apprenticeship training and assessment**, with policy moving toward more flexible models, including **shorter or modular training approaches in future**
- All employers with a pay bill of **£3 million or more** contribute to the **apprenticeship levy**, set at **0.5% of payroll**, minus a **£15,000 allowance**
- In England, levy-paying employers can use these funds to pay for **apprenticeship training and assessment**
- Employers who do not pay the levy can typically access **levy transfer funding** from larger organisations
- Additional government support remains in place for **younger apprentices (aged 16–18)**

There are also emerging policy considerations:

- Levy funds currently **expire after 24 months**, with proposals to reduce this to **12 months**, increasing pressure to utilise funds more quickly
- A broader shift toward **more responsive funding models**, better aligned to employer demand and workforce needs

Alongside this, delivery expectations are evolving:

- Greater emphasis on **value for money** and reducing unnecessary duplication in assessment
- Assessment must be **proportionate to occupational competence**
- Encouragement of **timely completion**, reducing delays at programme end
- Increased flexibility in how training and assessment are **structured, sequenced, and delivered**, including workplace and digital methods

Who is affected:

- Current apprentices are unlikely to see direct changes to how their programme is funded
- Employers and providers may begin adapting delivery in response to funding pressures, which could influence **training structure and pacing**
- Future apprentices are likely to experience a system that is more **flexible, potentially shorter in duration, and more closely aligned to employer workforce planning**



Apprenticeship Reforms Update

Evolution of Trailblazers into Employer-Led Networks

The governance of apprenticeship standards is also being restructured.

- Traditional **Trailblazer groups** are being replaced by broader, more flexible **employer-led networks**
- These networks include:
 - Employers, large organisations and SMEs
 - Training providers and assessment organisations
 - Professional bodies and regulators
 - Sector bodies, unions, and regional stakeholders

The intent is to:

- Improve **responsiveness to industry need**
- Enable **continuous updating of standards**, rather than periodic full revisions
- Reduce bottlenecks in standard development and approval

Who is affected:

- This change primarily affects **how standards are developed and updated**, rather than individual apprentices directly
- However, over time, apprentices will benefit from **more current, occupation-relevant standards** and faster updates to reflect industry change

Taken together, these reforms represent a shift from a discrete, end-tested model, to a more continuous, evidence-based approach to competence.



Call-To-Action

RSB's Apprentice of the Year Award 2026

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) Apprentice of the Year award is now open for applications.

The award celebrates apprentices and recognises their contribution to their teams and the wider bioscience community. Anyone currently on a Level 3+ (England, NI, Wales) or 5+ (Ireland, Scotland) bioscience-based apprenticeship, or who has completed a bioscience-based apprenticeship in the last year, may apply.

To find out more and apply, [please visit the RSB website](#). Applications close **17:00 (BST) Tuesday 7 July**.

National Apprenticeship and Skills Awards 2026

Nominations are now open for the National Apprenticeship and Skills Awards, celebrating the outstanding achievements of apprentices, employers and skills champions across England.

These prestigious awards recognise individuals and organisations who are making a real impact through apprenticeships and skills development, showcasing excellence, innovation and dedication across a wide range of sectors.

We strongly encourage apprentices and employers to take this opportunity to nominate deserving individuals or teams. Whether it's an inspiring apprentice, a supportive employer, or someone championing skills in their organisation, this is a chance to give them the recognition they deserve.

The awards are free to enter and open to apprentices, employers, T Level students and skills champions involved in programmes in England.

Further information, including nomination guidance, category details and downloadable entry packs can be found on the [official website](#). **Applications close on Friday 22 May.**



Call-To-Action

Science Apprenticeship Forum Conference Update & NCST 2026 Announcement

The Science Apprenticeship Forum will not be hosting its annual conference this year. However, we are pleased to be actively involved in the organisation of an exciting alternative event, the **National Conference for Science Technicians**, hosted by the **Royal Society of Chemistry**, to ensure that apprentice technicians continue to be represented.

This free hybrid conference celebrates technical staff and their vital contribution to the sciences, bringing together professionals across the chemical and wider scientific sectors.

This year's theme is career development, focusing on skills, frameworks, and opportunities for technicians, as well as strengthening the visibility of the technical community.

Highlights include:

- A career development training session from HEaTED
- Insights from the Royal Society of Chemistry on disability in the workplace
- One-to-one careers consultations for RSC members
- Opportunities to network and hear from inspiring technicians

The event is open to apprentices, technicians, and technical managers, with both in-person and online attendance available. Non-RSC members are also welcome.

To enable broad representation, organisations are encouraged to nominate one or two attendees. Travel bursaries of up to £200 will be available for UK-based delegates, with applications opening alongside registration in June. [Read more here.](#)

We encourage our community to take part in this valuable opportunity to connect, learn, and represent apprentice technicians nationally.



How can you help the Science Apprenticeship Forum?

Become an organised apprentice voice within the Forum

- Apprentices can join the Science Apprenticeship Forum to provide regular feedback on standards, training quality, and workplace experience.
- Apprentices can also highlight emerging skill needs they see first-hand in labs or production settings.

Act as skills ambassadors within their workplaces

- Apprentices can promote apprenticeships to new recruits, schools, and early-career talent.
- Share case studies with the SAF showing how their work supports innovation.
- Help SMEs understand what apprentices can contribute.

Provide insight to update and improve apprenticeship standards

- Apprentices can give feedback about which elements of their standard are outdated or missing
- Participate in SAF consultations that feed into trailblazer groups; take part in skill surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
- Share examples of new technologies already being used at work.

Support diversity and inclusion initiatives

- Apprentices can participate in outreach to schools and communities and shared lived experiences to help remove barriers for underrepresented groups.
- Champion inclusive practices across training providers and employers.

Champion quality and consistency in training and assessment

- Highlight where assessment doesn't reflect real job roles.
- Suggest changes that would make EPA preparation clearer or more accessible.
- Support peer-mentoring systems within the SAF community.



Any Other Business

Science Apprenticeship Forum Membership Form

As we continue to enhance the way we support and connect with our community, we kindly ask members, new and old, to complete the new SAF membership form. This will help us ensure we have the most accurate and up-to-date information about our members.

You can find the form [here!](#)

Contact Us

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