

# Set standards

**Hannah Crown** and **Katy Morton** speak to the chair of the education and childcare route panel, Mary Isherwood, about the progress of apprenticeship standards currently being developed at Levels 2, 5 and 6

## Talk us through the process of approving an apprenticeship standard.

The trailblazers work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to develop a standard. It is then reviewed by institute officials who will either approve the standard to continue to the next stage or may send it back for changes.

Then the childcare and education route panel, a group of employers and industry experts which I chair, review the standard. Finally, it is reviewed by the institute's board. Once approved, it can be published for delivery.

## What factors do you take into consideration when you are approving standards and assessment plans?

The institute considers the following:

- If a standard is required by the sector and if the skills that apprentices will learn would be transferable to more than one employer.
- If the scope of what apprentices will be required to learn is sufficiently broad, deep and skilled.
- Whether apprentices who pass the end-point assessment (EPA) will be fully competent at doing their job.
- If it will be recognised by a range of employers and stand alone with no training overlap from other standards.

For EPA, the priority is to ensure that plans measure occupational competence in a valid, consistent and reliable way.

All of the necessary information for delivery is included in the EPA plan to ensure that it is rigorous, robust and can be delivered comparably across multiple EPA organisations.



Mary Isherwood

## You are overseeing five early years and seven education standards, yet you only have one childcare specialist at a time (out of a panel of six). Why are the early years so under-represented?

We aim to ensure that each route panel, supported by the institute, has the necessary skills and expertise to cover all of the required occupations. Dr Eunice Lumsden was recently appointed to the education and childcare route panel. She is head of early years at the University of Northampton and has a wealth of experience in this area.

It is also important to note that the views of route panel members are not the only expert views that are heard when making recommendations. The views of the trailblazer employers are an important part of the considerations, and all draft apprenticeship standards and T-Levels are put out to public consultation. The institute also engages a wide range of peer reviewers to comment on the proposals.

Additionally, ex-panel members are invited to become members of our alumni community. Emma

Harwood, from Dandelion Nursery in Norfolk, is one such member of this community. Sometimes it is the case that we have expertise in one part of an occupational route sitting within a different route panel. Where this is the case, we use all the cross-panel expertise available to us.

We continually keep membership of route panels under review and recruit additional expertise where it is needed.

## Would you consider adding other early years representatives to the panel, given that the number of panel members seems to vary?

Panel members are generally recruited on a two-year contract. We seek to refresh panel membership on a regular basis to continue to hear a wide range of expert views and manage any changes in membership.

## The chair of the Level 2 trailblazer group has said the aim is to get the Level 2 standard ready for September. Is this likely to happen, and if not when do you expect to be able to have the standard ready for delivery?

This is unlikely given that the proposal to develop the standard was submitted for approval in August 2019, and this is only the first stage in the process.

## Why did the panel see fit to try to impose a GCSE-only requirement on the Level 3 standard, given this had already been tried by the Department for Education and had to be revoked in 2017, when functional skills were then allowed?

The Government has a minimum English and maths qualification ➤

### ➔ FURTHER INFORMATION

- Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org>
- Apprenticeship funding, [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work)

# apprenticeships

requirement for Level 3 to Level 8 apprenticeships. Therefore apprentices are required to gain a Level 2 English and maths qualification before taking the end-point assessment.

## What caused the 12-month delay to the Level 3 assessment plan being approved?

The institute had to work in collaboration with Ofqual, the Department for Education and the employers to ensure all parties were satisfied the EPA would meet all the necessary criteria without contradictions.

The Level 3 is approved for delivery and we have received positive feedback from the EPA organisations and the sector.

## Why has the proposed Level 6 standard been withdrawn?

Approval to develop the Level 6 Early Years Practitioner has been withdrawn on the basis that the Level 6 is not a distinct occupation. However, the route panel would still like to see a proposal developed for Level 6 which could stand alone as a high-quality apprenticeship.

## A proposal for a playworker standard is currently in development. If you approve this, will you recruit a playwork specialist onto the panel?

The playworker standard proposal will be considered by the care services route panel.



## Your work now also includes deciding on the content of T-Level qualifications. What will you look for in CACHE's new Level 3 Childcare and Education Technical Qualification?

The purpose of the Education and Childcare T-Level is to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills needed to progress into skilled employment or higher-level technical training. T-Level panels of employers, professional bodies and providers have produced outline content based on the same standards as those used for apprenticeships. This outline content will be used by NCFE to design the Technical Qualification (TQ).

The institute will ensure the TQ aligns with the outline content; provides reliable evidence of students' attainment of core and occupational knowledge and skills; and ensures maths, English and digital skills are developed and applied.

If students do not have Level 2 English and maths when they start the T-Level programme, they will be required to complete these requirements by the time they exit the programme. The minimum maths and English T-Level exit requirement will be a GCSE grade 9-4 or a functional skills Level 2 pass. This aligns with existing policy on maths and English requirements for Level 3 apprenticeships. Minimum T-Level exit requirements are set by the DfE. ■

## APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS FOCUS

### Level 2 apprenticeship

The Level 2 standard and end-point assessment plan is currently with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) and is ready to be put before the route panel who are due to meet this month.

The trailblazer group, which develops apprenticeship standards and assessment plans, had been given special dispensation by officials at the IfATE to submit both the standard and assessment plan at the same time. The group's chair Michael Freeston told *Nursery World* in July that he had agreed to 'fast track' the standard ready for delivery from this month when new Level 2 criteria come in and

old Level 2 qualifications are no longer full and relevant. However the IfATE now says it is 'unlikely' to be ready for September (see above). Apprentices will be able to take the new Level 2 Early Years Practitioner qualifications but only on the old apprenticeship framework – which attracts less than half the funding of an apprenticeship standard – CACHE has confirmed.

### Level 5 apprenticeship

The Level 5 Early Years Lead Practitioner standard has been approved with conditions. The standard is back with the trailblazer group, who are working through the conditions with the institute.

### Level 6 apprenticeship

The Level 6 Lead Early Years Practitioner (degree) standard was withdrawn by the IfATE last month on the basis that it is 'not a distinct occupation' (the IfATE looks for occupations that are 'distinct in terms of title and content from occupations at all levels and across all routes'), according to its website. The body has said it does want to see a Level 6 apprenticeship (see above). Chair of the trailblazers, Laura Upton, told *Nursery World* the Level 6 is not being abandoned. She said, 'The trailblazer group is continuing to develop the standards for Levels 5 and 6 in agreement with the IFA.'