

Apprenticeship units: What providers need to know

A guide for training providers



Apprenticeship units are the most significant change to the apprenticeship funding system since the levy was introduced. For training providers, they open up a learner cohort that full apprenticeships have never reached, on a delivery model that is faster, more employer-led, and funded within weeks rather than years. This guide covers what units are, what providers need to have in place to deliver them, and how Aptem Apprentice supports compliant, efficient delivery from day one.

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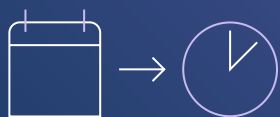


What are apprenticeship units?

Apprenticeship units are a new type of publicly funded training, introduced by the government as part of the Industrial Strategy. They became available from April 2026 and are designed to give employers a faster, more targeted way to invest in workforce skills through the apprenticeship funding system.

Unlike a full apprenticeship, which follows a structured programme journey over a minimum of eight months, apprenticeship units are short and self-contained. They typically run for between one and 16 weeks and deliver between 30 and 140 hours of training. The content draws on existing employer-designed apprenticeship occupational standards, focusing on the specific knowledge and skills needed to address a defined gap rather than achieving full occupational competence.

Seven units were announced for the initial rollout, with an eighth announced within days, covering AI leadership, electric vehicle charging point installation and maintenance, electrical fitting and assembly, mechanical fitting and assembly, permanent modular building assembly, solar PV installation and maintenance, welding, and battery manufacturing. Further units are expected to follow as the model develops.



1–16 wks

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Who apprenticeship units are for

Apprenticeship units are exclusively for employed adults aged 19 and over. They are designed for people who are already established in a role and need to develop specific skills quickly, whether because their job is changing, their employer is adopting new technology, or a skills gap has been identified. They are not intended for career changers or those seeking to enter a new occupation. If an employer needs to train someone for an entirely new role, a full apprenticeship remains the appropriate route.

Funding is available through the Growth and Skills Levy. Non-levy-paying employers receive full government funding for units; levy-paying employers can draw on their account, with government co-investment where funds are insufficient.



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How apprenticeship units differ from full apprenticeships

The table below sets out the key differences. Understanding them clearly matters: the compliance requirements, documentation, assessment approach, and funding model for units are all distinct from those that apply to standard apprenticeship delivery.

Delivery details	Full apprenticeship	Apprenticeship unit
Duration	Minimum eight months	✓ One to 16 weeks
Training model	Off-the-job training (flexible delivery methods)	✓ Delivery hours: tutor-led, synchronous, within working hours
Assessment	End-point assessment by an independent organisation	✓ Provider-designed skills test
Programme documents	Apprenticeship agreement, commitment statement, training plan	✓ Training plan only (two-stage sign-off)
Funding model	Monthly payments plus a completion element	✓ Two milestone payments (30% / 70%)
Progress reviews	Mandatory	✓ Not required
English and maths	Required (with some exceptions)	✓ Not required
Prior learning	Full RPL assessment, may reduce programme and price	✓ Simplified check: learner ineligible if 50% or more prior overlap
Ofsted inspection	In scope	✓ Not in scope until April 2027 at the earliest



The differences are significant enough that providers should treat unit delivery as a distinct operational model, not an extension of their existing apprenticeship processes.



The provider opportunity

Apprenticeship units represent a genuine new market. The learner group they are designed for, employed adults who need targeted upskilling rather than a full programme, has historically sat outside the apprenticeship funding system. Units bring them into scope.

For providers with the right delivery history and the appetite to move quickly, there are several reasons to take this seriously now.





A new learner cohort

The employed adult upskilling market is large and largely untapped within the apprenticeship system. Employers have long needed a way to fund short, focused training for existing staff without committing to a 12-month-plus programme. Units address that directly. For providers, this means access to a cohort of learners and employers that a full apprenticeship offer does not reach.

The profile of these learners is also different. They are already employed, often experienced in their field, and motivated by a specific skills need identified by their employer. Delivery is intensive and time-bounded, which suits providers who can offer structured, employer-facing programmes rather than long-form developmental delivery.



Shorter delivery cycles

A unit runs for a maximum of 16 weeks. For providers accustomed to managing learners over 18 months or more, this is a different commercial model: faster throughput, quicker completion, and funding recovered within weeks rather than years. The two-milestone payment structure reinforces this, with 30% of the agreed price payable once delivery is underway and 70% on completion.



For providers managing cash flow carefully, the speed of the funding cycle is a meaningful operational advantage compared to a standard apprenticeship model.



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Early mover advantage

The initial rollout is deliberately limited. Only providers already on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR) who have delivered the relevant standards or sector subject areas in the prior year are eligible, and only those without at risk indicators on the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework can participate. The effect is a relatively small pool of eligible providers, at least in the short term.

Providers who build delivery capability and employer relationships in this phase will be better placed as the model expands. More units are expected to be added over time. Providers who are already delivering, already learning, and already building employer pipelines will have a structural advantage over those who wait.



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A model that suits employer relationships

Apprenticeship units are employer-led by design. The employer identifies the skills need, confirms the learner's eligibility, co-signs the training plan, and signs off completion. This model strengthens the provider-employer relationship in a way that a long-form apprenticeship does not always do. For providers looking to deepen commercial relationships with employers, units offer a lower-friction entry point than a full apprenticeship commitment.



Honest framing

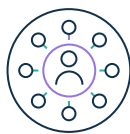
Apprenticeship units are new, and the model is still developing. Funding rates, ILR requirements, and the list of available units are all subject to change as the government refines the offer. Providers entering the market now should expect some degree of ambiguity and should be comfortable operating in a test-and-learn environment.

That said, the regulatory intent is clear, the funding rules are in place, and delivery is live. The providers building experience now will be the ones best positioned when the model matures.



Key requirements for providers

Delivering apprenticeship units is not open to all providers. The funding rules set clear eligibility criteria, and the operational requirements for compliant delivery differ in important ways from a standard apprenticeship. This section covers what providers need to have in place before they start, and what they need to do throughout delivery.



Provider eligibility

To deliver apprenticeship units, providers must meet three conditions:

- ✓ **Be registered on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR) as a main provider or employer-provider.**
- ✓ **Have delivered the apprenticeship standards or sector subject areas from which the units are drawn during the prior funding year (2024-25 for the current cohort of units).**
- ✓ **Have no indicators rated as at risk on the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework (AAF).**

Subcontracting is not permitted under any circumstances. Providers hold full responsibility for all training and assessment. This is a hard rule in the funding regulations, not a preference, and there is no exception for any part of the delivery chain.



Learner eligibility

Before enrolling any learner, providers must confirm they meet all of the following:

- ✓ **Aged 19 or over at the start of training.**
- ✓ **Employed, with at least 50% of their working hours in England.**
- ✓ **Not currently enrolled on another apprenticeship or apprenticeship unit.**
- ✓ **Not self-employed, a sole trader, on IR35 arrangements, or a company director without a separate line manager.**
- ✓ **In employment that covers the full duration of the unit (contracts or visas must not expire mid-programme).**



Providers must see and record evidence of each eligibility condition before accessing funding. Where evidence must come from the employer, the employer is responsible for providing it.



The prior learning check

Apprenticeship units use a simplified approach to prior learning. Rather than a full recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessment with price reduction, providers must confirm that the learner does not already have 50% or more knowledge overlap with the planned unit content. If they do, they are not eligible for funding.



The training plan

The training plan is the primary compliance document for apprenticeship units. It replaces the apprenticeship agreement and several other documents used in standard delivery. Providers should note that familiar documents such as the commitment statement and apprenticeship agreement do not apply to units.

The training plan has two distinct parts, each requiring sign-off from the provider, learner, and employer:



There is no apprenticeship agreement, no requirement for progress reviews, and no English and maths requirement.



The outcome of this check, and the evidence or rationale supporting it, must be recorded and summarised in the training plan before delivery begins.

Part 1

must be signed before training begins. It sets out the planned delivery hours and schedule, the outcome of the initial assessment and prior learning check, and the assessment method (the skills test). All three parties must sign before any funded delivery takes place.

Part 2

is signed at completion. It confirms that all planned delivery hours have been delivered and that the required skills have been achieved. Sign-off by all three parties is required before the final milestone payment can be claimed.



Delivery hours

The funding rules define delivery hours precisely, and the definition matters for compliance. Delivery hours must be:

- ✓ **Tutor-led.**
- ✓ **Synchronous, meaning live and real-time, whether in person or via virtual classroom, with the small allowance for recorded sessions kept to a minimum.**
- ✓ **Delivered during the learner's normal working hours.**

Independent study, self-directed learning, revision, exam preparation, onboarding activities, and similar do not count as delivery hours. Providers must be able to demonstrate that the hours recorded meet this definition. The primary mechanism for doing so is a declaration from the learner confirming that the hours were tutor-led and delivered within working hours.



Each unit has a fixed planned delivery hours figure set at programme level. The total must be delivered in full before completion can be confirmed.



Assessment: the skills test

Apprenticeship units do not use end-point assessment. Providers are responsible for administering a skills test that confirms the learner has achieved the knowledge and skills set out in the unit. This can be designed and delivered by the provider, or commissioned from an external awarding organisation. The test must:

- ✓ **Be valid and appropriate for the skills being assessed.**
- ✓ **Provide a clear basis for judging competence.**
- ✓ **Where possible, be designed by someone independent from the delivery of training.**

The outcome of the skills test must be recorded and retained as evidence. Some units may also include a non-mandatory qualification or a statutory or regulatory certification alongside the skills test. Where this applies, providers must plan, deliver, and evidence these components separately and distinguish them clearly from the skills test itself.

Confirmation that the skills test has been passed is captured through the training plan Part 2 sign-off. The provider, learner, and employer all attest to skills achievement at that point.



Funding and milestone payments

Units are funded through two milestones:

Milestone 1

(30% of the agreed price, up to the published funding band) is payable once the learner has completed 30% of their planned delivery hours.

Milestone 2

(the remaining 70%) is payable once all planned training has been delivered, the skills test has been passed, and the training plan Part 2 is signed by all parties.

The agreed price is negotiated between the provider and the employer. The published funding band for each unit is the maximum government contribution; the actual agreed price may be at or below this figure. Providers claim milestone payments through the DWP apprenticeship service. Non-levy-paying employers currently receive full government funding for units; levy-paying employers draw from their account, with government co-investment where funds are insufficient.





ILR requirements

Apprenticeship units are a distinct ILR programme type (programme type 34, Growth and Skills Offer: Apprenticeship Units). Providers must ensure their ILR records correctly identify unit learners under this programme type. Standard apprenticeship ILR data fields do not all apply to units and using the wrong programme type risks compliance failures and incorrect funding claims.

The same change-of-circumstance obligations that apply to standard apprenticeships apply to units. Breaks in learning are not permitted for apprenticeship units. There is an eight-week tolerance past the planned end date and after this, the learner must be withdrawn. The sole exception is for maternity/paternity or adoption leave; these returns to learning and withdrawals must all be recorded correctly in the ILR.



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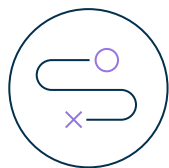


Ofsted and quality oversight

Apprenticeship units will not be brought into scope for Ofsted inspection until April 2027 at the earliest. During the current period, they are monitored on a light-touch basis by DWP and DfE and kept separate from qualification achievement rates. This reflects the pilot nature of the rollout and gives providers space to establish delivery without the full weight of the inspection framework applying from day one.



Providers should not treat this as a reason to approach unit delivery with less rigour. The evidence requirements in the funding rules are clear, and the expectation is that providers are building compliant processes now that will stand up to scrutiny when the accountability framework is extended to units.



Managing delivery in practice

Understanding the compliance requirements for apprenticeship units is one thing. Translating them into a repeatable delivery process is another. This section sets out what the end-to-end journey looks like in practice, from the point a learner is confirmed as eligible through to completion and funding claim.





Before delivery begins

The training plan Part 1 must be signed by the provider, learner, and employer before any funded delivery takes place. This is not a formality to complete alongside the first session — it is a prerequisite. Providers should build their onboarding process so that eligibility checks, prior learning confirmation, and training plan sign-off are all complete before the first delivery hour is recorded.

The initial assessment, confirming that the learner does not have 50% or more prior knowledge overlap with the unit content, should be documented at this stage. The outcome and supporting rationale must be recorded and summarised in the training plan.



Providers should also confirm the agreed price with the employer at this point and ensure it is recorded correctly, as it determines the milestone payment values for the duration of the programme.



Running delivery

Apprenticeship unit delivery is tutor-led and synchronous. Whether sessions are delivered in person or via virtual classroom, they must take place during the learner's normal working hours and be led by a tutor in real time. Providers should schedule sessions in advance with clear dates, times, and capacity, and ensure learners and employers are aware of the attendance expectations from the outset.

Attendance and delivery hours must be recorded as delivery progresses. Learners confirm through a declaration that each set of hours recorded was tutor-led and within normal working hours. Providers should not leave hours recording to the end of the programme; recording as delivery happens creates a cleaner audit trail and reduces the risk of errors or omissions when it matters most.

Where sessions are delivered virtually, using a platform with automated attendance tracking and session recording significantly reduces the manual effort of maintaining evidence. Transcripts, attendance registers, and session recordings all contribute to the audit trail for delivery compliance.



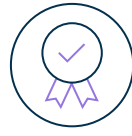
Tracking progress

Because units run for a short, fixed period, the margin for a learner falling behind is small. Providers should monitor learner progress and delivery hours actively throughout the programme, not just at the milestone points. If a learner misses sessions or is struggling with the content, identifying this early gives the provider and employer the best chance of addressing it before it affects completion.



Reaching milestone 1

The first funding milestone is reached when the learner has completed 30% of their planned delivery hours. Providers should monitor delivery hours against this threshold and be ready to initiate the milestone claim through the DWP apprenticeship service promptly once it is reached.



Completing the programme

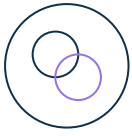
Completion requires three things to be in place: all planned delivery hours delivered, the skills test passed, and the training plan Part 2 signed by the provider, learner, and employer. Providers should plan the skills test well in advance of the programme end date, leaving sufficient time for the outcome to be confirmed and the training plan Part 2 to be signed before the final milestone claim is made.

The skills test must be designed and administered by the provider. Where possible, the person designing the test should be independent from the delivery of training. The outcome must be recorded and retained as evidence.

Once all three completion conditions are met, providers can claim Milestone 2 through the DWP apprenticeship service. The ILR record should be QA-verified and confirmed as accurate before submission.



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Building a repeatable model

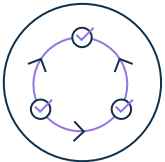
The first cohort through any new delivery model will surface operational questions that cannot all be anticipated in advance. Providers who document their process as they go – what worked, what caused friction, where the compliance risks emerged – will be in a much stronger position for subsequent cohorts. As the list of available units expands and delivery volumes grow, having a well-documented, repeatable process will be the foundation for scaling without proportionally scaling the administrative overhead.



Aptem customers have access to a feature feedback portal to keep up to date with the latest platform developments and suggest features and functionality to support apprenticeship units based on their experience.



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How Aptem Apprentice supports apprenticeship unit delivery

Aptem Apprentice is built for the full complexity of apprenticeship delivery in England. When apprenticeship units were introduced, the compliance requirements, funding model, and programme structure were different enough from a standard apprenticeship to require dedicated platform support. Aptem supports the full lifecycle of unit delivery, from programme setup through to completion and ILR submission, combining new purpose-built functionality with existing platform features, such as using a review to capture completion sign-off.



Setting up unit programmes

Aptem Apprentice includes a dedicated 'Training: Apprenticeship Units' programme type, built specifically for the unit model. It operates within the same programme builder environment providers already use for standard apprenticeships but is isolated from apprenticeship-specific logic. Gateway stages, end-point assessment, and off-the-job training references do not appear. ILR data defaults to programme type 34 (Growth and Skills Offer: Apprenticeship Units) from the point of programme creation.

Each unit is configured as a separate programme. Providers set the planned delivery hours, agreed price, and ILR settings at programme level. The agreed price field pre-populates when the programme is applied to a learner but can be adjusted to reflect the individual negotiated price where this differs from the programme default, supporting the funding rules requirement that the agreed price is confirmed per learner.



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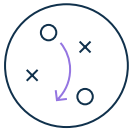
Enrolling learners

Aptem provides the flexibility to create a unit-specific enrolment flow. Fields and steps that apply to standard apprenticeships but not to units can be suppressed, and unit-appropriate eligibility prompts can guide administrators through the required checks: age, employment status, working hours location, and the prior learning check confirming that the learner does not have 50% or more knowledge overlap with the unit content.

For individual enrolments, the onboarding wizard collects all required learner and employer data in a configurable step-by-step workflow, generating the training plan ready for signature once onboarding is complete. For cohort delivery, CSV batch import allows providers to create multiple learner records simultaneously, reducing manual data entry when onboarding large groups from a single employer.



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The training plan

Aptem generates the training plan as a compliance document within the platform. It is a dedicated template, separate from the standard apprenticeship training plan, containing the correct content and structure for units. References to apprenticeship agreements, off-the-job training, gateway, and end-point assessment do not appear.

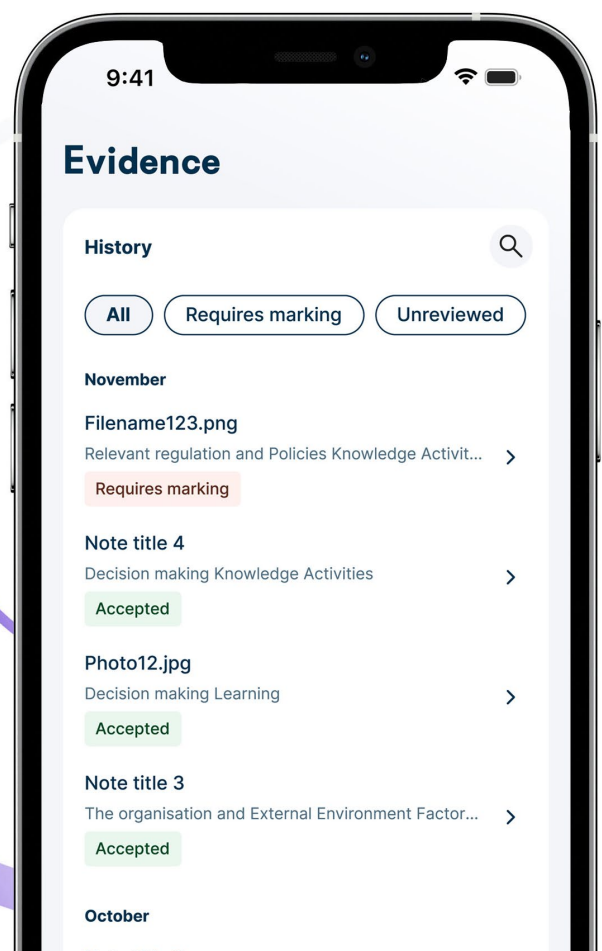
The training plan captures Part 1 sign-off, required before training begins. Part 1 requires electronic signature from the provider, learner, and employer before any funded delivery takes place, using Aptem's existing electronic signature infrastructure, accepted by DWP and the vast majority of funding bodies. Providers can view and manage Part 1 signature status across their entire unit caseload from the central signatures grid. Part 2 completion sign-off, confirming that all planned delivery hours have been delivered and the skills test passed, is captured using a review.



Recording delivery hours

Because delivery hours for units must be tutor-led, synchronous, and within normal working hours, the platform includes a mandatory learner declaration at the point of recording. Learners confirm that hours being recorded meet these conditions. This declaration is the provider's primary audit evidence for delivery method compliance.

Delivery hours are recorded through the activity log. The activity log form for unit programmes uses unit-appropriate language throughout, with no references to off-the-job training.





ILR generation and data management

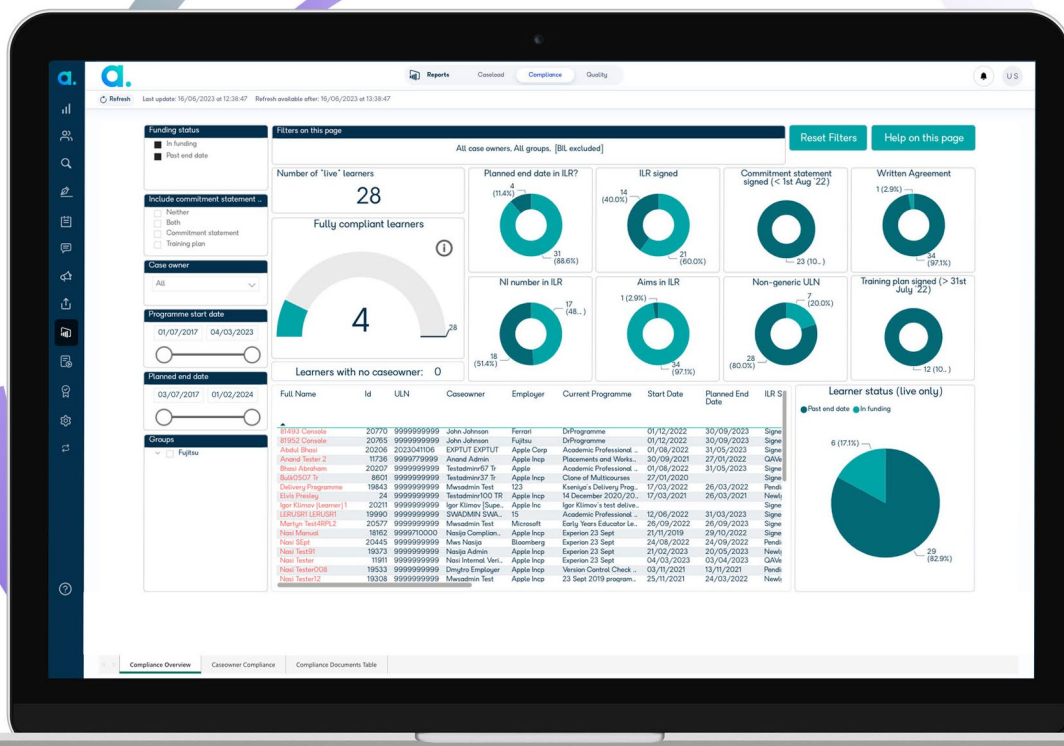
Aptem generates the ILR record for each unit learner using the programme type 34 template, pre-populated with the data collected during onboarding. Providers review and manage this data directly within the ILR, which is fully functional for unit programmes.

The same change-of-circumstance processes used for standard apprenticeships, including returns to learning and withdrawals, are supported for unit programmes. Breaks in learning are not permitted for apprenticeship units.



Reporting

Aptem's reporting tools give providers access to unit programme data across their caseload. Delivery hours data is available through user generic reports and OData feeds for use in external reporting and Power BI dashboards, supporting providers in monitoring compliance and preparing funding claims.





Reducing administrative load with AI-powered features

Apprenticeship units are short and intensive. A programme that runs for eight weeks leaves little room for administrative delays, late evidence submissions, or learners falling behind without anyone noticing. For providers managing unit delivery alongside an existing apprenticeship caseload, the operational pressure of a new programme type compounds this.

Aptem Enhance is a suite of AI-powered features built into Aptem Apprentice. While these features were developed in the context of standard apprenticeship delivery, several of them are directly applicable to the unit model, helping providers and tutors work more efficiently without adding complexity.





Keeping learners on track with checkpoint

Checkpoint generates AI-powered multiple-choice assessments mapped to the knowledge and skills elements of apprenticeship occupational standards. Tutors can use checkpoint to test learner understanding at any point during delivery, with questions generated automatically from the relevant standard rather than created manually.

In a unit programme, where the content is focused and the timeframe is short, checkpoint gives tutors an early, impartial view of where each learner stands against the specific knowledge and skills the unit covers. If a learner is struggling with a particular area, that becomes visible while there is still time to address it within the programme, rather than at the point of the skills test. Results are visible on learner profiles and in the checkpoint assessments and results report.

Learners who need support between tutor sessions can access the virtual assistant directly from a checkpoint question, getting an explanation of the relevant concept without having to wait for their next contact.



Supporting learners between sessions with the virtual assistant

The virtual assistant is a 24/7 in-platform conversational AI assistant for learners, contextualised to their specific programme and the apprenticeship standard the unit draws from. It can explain knowledge and skills components, answer questions about the content, and support learners in applying what they have covered during tutor-led sessions.

For unit delivery, where the tutor-led hours are fixed and tightly scheduled, learners do not always have the option of waiting until the next session to resolve a question. The virtual assistant gives them a route to support that does not depend on tutor availability, reducing the volume of routine queries that would otherwise fall to tutors and freeing tutor time for the delivery itself.

The virtual assistant becomes available once onboarding and compliance paperwork is complete, which in a unit context means it is ready from the start of training.



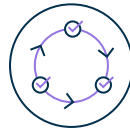
Reducing marking time with marking aid

Marking aid provides AI-assisted support for tutors marking written learning plan exercises. Where unit delivery includes written tasks or structured exercises, tutors receive AI-generated feedback suggestions based on a rubric, which they can review, edit, and apply rather than drafting from scratch. The result is a clean submission PDF for the learner and a marked version for compliance and portfolio purposes.

In a short-duration programme, the time between a learner submitting work and receiving feedback matters.



Marking aid reduces the turnaround time for written exercise feedback, helping providers maintain momentum through delivery and supporting the evidence trail needed for completion.



Cutting documentation time with enhanced reviews

Although progress reviews are not a mandatory requirement for apprenticeship units, many providers will choose to hold check-in meetings with learners and employers during delivery. Where these meetings take place, enhanced reviews allows tutors to upload a transcript and receive an AI-generated structured summary, rather than writing up notes manually.

The auto actions component extends this further: it generates and populates trackable goals and actions for learners based on the discussion, giving both learner and tutor a clear record of what was agreed without the tutor spending time on post-meeting administration.

For providers running multiple unit cohorts alongside a standard apprenticeship caseload, the cumulative time saved across marking, meeting notes, and learner queries is meaningful. These features do not change the delivery model for units, but they reduce the administrative overhead of running it well.



Getting started

Apprenticeship units are live, the funding rules are in place, and the pool of eligible providers is deliberately small. The providers who move now will have a structural advantage as the model expands.

Start with a conversation with employers you already have a relationship with. Identify whether they have staff who meet the learner eligibility criteria and a skills need that maps to one of the available units. Employers already familiar with the apprenticeship system will find the unit model straightforward; for those new to levy-funded training, units are a lower-commitment entry point than a full apprenticeship.

If you are an existing Aptem customer and want to understand how the platform supports unit delivery, speak to your Customer Success Manager.

If you are not yet an
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