**PART 7: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT POLICY: APPRENTICESHIPS**

**Introduction**

Our mission: The University is committed to providing high quality apprenticeships that draw on our strengths as a higher education provider in the provision of flexible work-based learning and is focused on ensuring an excellent experience for apprentices that achieves the highest levels of student satisfaction in keeping with those achieved on our other undergraduate programmes.

St Mary’s University is dedicated to ensuring that its practices in relation to employer engagement are informed by best practice in the HE sector and maximise the effectiveness of our relationships with employers as key stakeholders. Our work with employers embraces and encompasses many different types of educational provision, from partnerships in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision with over 650 primary and secondary schools, to work with employers who provide short and long-term placements and internships across many of our UG and PG programmes, but the development of apprenticeships requires a dedicated Policy that ensures that employer engagement informs all aspects of our work in relation to apprenticeships.

**Governance and oversight – employer involvement**

* St Mary’s University’s apprenticeship activity is overseen by the **Apprenticeship Steering Group (ASG)**, which is chaired by the University’s Dean of Learning & Teaching, who is also Head of our Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (CTESS).
* Key employer partners will be invited to attend ASG meetings where this supports ongoing developments and improvements.
* The ASG will report into our Collaborative Partnerships Sub-Committee ([CPSC](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/ctess/academic-development-committee/collaborative-provision-committee.aspx)), which in turn reports to the Academic Development Committee (ADC) which is chaired by the University’s Provost.
* ASG will bring key employer contacts together for an annual apprenticeship progress review meeting to ensure that their insights inform our approach to apprenticeship design, delivery and future enhancements.

**Marketing**

* We will promote our apprenticeship provision through targeted marketing activities and bespoke business development approaches that are informed by discussions with and input from key employer partners involved in apprenticeship delivery. We believe that working in partnership with key employer contacts and engaging them in our approach to marketing apprenticeships will ensure that the information, approach and materials employed are aligned with employer priorities and perspectives.
* The University will put in place a dedicated **Apprenticeship Website** that lists all programmes available to employers and provides detailed information on the services we offer as well as the ESFA guidance on apprenticeship funding.
* Our apprenticeship website will link to the **Find Apprenticeships Training (FAT)** pages to allow prospective apprentices to view current vacancies related to the programmes we offer. This also enables employers to reach a wider range of applicants to their vacancies.
* To ensure our programmes reach wider range of employers and prospective apprentices we will develop and regularly update our Search Engine optimisation and Social Media Campaign strategies with a view to attracting a wide range of enquiries to our website.
* We will adjust our communication and promotion methods to ensure they are relevant and sector specific, and will consult key employers in this process.
* The University will also develop and produce apprenticeship-focused marketing materials to support our business development activities, including stands for events, information leaflets and brochures to aid initial, face-to-face discussions with the employers. Input from our employer partners will be sought in order to refine materials and ensure they are employer-friendly.
* We will take a consultative approach to business development and we will adjust our method according to the requirements of the sector and individual employer partners. We engage with employers to identify their apprenticeship needs and aim to find suitable solutions. This includes managing the client’s journey through the development of new programmes or contextualisation of our existing programmes where appropriate.
* Our employer-focused Business Development activities will be managed by a dedicated team of staff in CTESS which will proactively reach out to employers, promote apprenticeship opportunities and build relationships with employers who wish to explore the benefits of providing apprenticeships within their organisation.
* We work with each employer to develop a bespoke strategy to promote their apprenticeships according to their needs. This might involve:
* Promoting and running open days and recruitment events on the employer’s site, both to provide information (to internal staff and/or potential recruits) and to present specific guidance on entry requirements, preparation, application processes and references.
* Creation of bespoke landing pages on our Apprenticeship website and marketing materials to promote the Apprenticeship opportunities as a partnership between the employer and the University.
* Advertisements on the Government’s Digital Recruitment service: ‘Find Apprenticeship Training’ and links from our Apprenticeships web pages to those recruitment pages, supported by social media promotion.
* Development of job descriptions with our academics, and in line with the Apprenticeship Standard.
* Support with assessment centres and screening activities, for example guidance in designing activities to ensure that recruitment to the employer is aligned to the requirements of the apprenticeship.
* Management of inbound inquiries to CTESS from interested applicants seeking employer support directly to employer colleagues.
* Providing a dedicated e mail address/account to all apprenticeship enquiries: [Apprenticeships@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:Apprenticeships@stmarys.ac.uk)
* In order to maximise the recruitment opportunities for our employers, our Outreach and Recruitment team focus on engaging with schools, pupils and their parents and promoting Apprenticeship opportunities to school leavers.
* All inbound communications (including e mails) will be responded to within 48 hours; typically phone calls are picked up immediately. CTESS has a generic apprenticeship email address and phone number for employers or apprentices that are not yet engaging with us: [Apprenticeships@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:Apprenticeships@stmarys.ac.uk)
* The central St Mary’s switchboard will forward all calls about apprenticeships to the CTESS Apprenticeships Team. All CTESS apprenticeship staff will have access to current information relating to apprenticeships, funding rules and St Mary’s portfolio of programmes.

**Training design and approval**

* The University will consult employer partners in the design of all aspects of our apprenticeship training programmes, including content (practice, theory, skills, behaviours etc), assessment and access to learning resources.
* We will also ensure that employer partners are involved in the training programme approval process, with employers represented on approval Panels.
* We produce a guide (Handbook) for each apprenticeship training programme, offering crucial information to help the Apprentice and their line manager understand what they will be learning, how the Apprenticeship works, what is expected from them and how they will be supported.
* For public sector engagements, we will respond to procurement and tendering opportunities, drawing on our extensive experience of working with many public sector employers.
* Co-creation will be at the heart of our programme approval process and will involve capturing and responding to the views of employer partners and apprentices.

**Tendering processes**

* ASG willlead/coordinate the bid writing process and establish a methodology for working with colleagues in teaching teams and support services to ensure the information provided through tendering processes is accurate and compelling.
* ASG will invite participation of potential employer partners in the bid-writing process, in order to ensure an alignment with their needs and training priorities for apprentices.

**Sector engagement**

* Key staff involved in apprenticeships will attend sector and industry-based events and engage in networking to strengthen our understanding of sectors and organisations’ needs; this provides us the opportunity to talk constructively with potential clients and employers and engage them in discussions about potential new apprenticeship programmes.
* On a more individual level, our website, social media and other marketing activities generate inbound enquiries from employers, which we respond to via the appropriate medium – typically phone or email in the first instance. We have a customer relationship management (CRM) system which enables us to keep records of queries, spot trends, and understand our customers ensuring we provide a joined up and customer focused service.

**Support for employers**

* Each employer will be allocated an Apprenticeship Partnership Account Manager (APAM) to manage a consistent customer journey. The employer will have an individual phone number and email address for their APAM.
* Employers will also be assigned a Partnership Co-ordinator (PC) at the start of their relationship with us. The Partnership Co-ordinator (normally a member of our academic staff) will guide them through the onboarding process including contracting and the apprentice’s admission to the programme.
* The APAM and Partnership Co-ordinator can answer all questions regarding apprenticeships through their own knowledge or through consultation with colleagues within the team or elsewhere in the University. They guide employers through the formal engagement process, negotiating and creating the contractual agreements Written Agreement and Commitment Statement required by the Apprenticeship Funding Rules.
* The Apprenticeships Partnerships Account Manager (APAM) ensures any issues are responded to efficiently and appropriately. They will have working relationships with key post holders within the university, including Admissions, Faculties/Institutes and other central support services. If needed, they can escalate to their line manager or to the Head of CTESS, who will address issues at a higher level and escalate to Faculty/Institute heads/ faculty leadership as necessary for swift resolution.
* The APAM will develop an account management plan dependent upon the needs of each employer. For example, for larger employers who wish to increase their engagement with apprenticeships, the APAM may attend group meetings involving apprenticeship and training leads to get an in-depth knowledge of the employer’s needs and plans, assess opportunities for apprenticeships across the organisation, respond to questions and address any issues that arise.
* CTESS’s dedicated Apprenticeship Team will manage and coordinate the contracting, administration and reporting to ESFA and ensures compliance with the Funding Rules
* In leading employer relationships, APAMs and Partnership Coordinators in the Faculties/Institutes will ensure there is a seamless approach to meeting the needs of employers across all aspects of their journey; business, operational, compliance issues and the apprentice experience.
* If required, we support employer-based mentors and coaches e.g. we offer a dedicated training session for mentors of apprentices and provide ongoing guidance on their roles.

**Programme development and apprentice journey**

St Mary’s Apprenticeships Steering Group will identify the ‘Standards’ we intend to offer through a rigorous proposal and approval process, within our usual University programme approval and quality assurance processes. These processes require us to consider key factors including:

* Resources and expertise we have available,
* How employers and professional bodies have been consulted,
* Delivery strategies and their match with employer demand,
* Financial viability and sustainability,
* Risk,
* Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) approval/recognition; and
* Start up plans.

**A flexible delivery approach to delivery to meet Employer needs and those of apprentices**

* Our programmes are employer demand-led; where there is a demand for a wide geographical coverage we can meet this through a blended delivery approach with a mix of face-to-face (on or off campus) and online learning.
* In the development of our Apprenticeships, we will align the learning outcomes of our HE qualification to the Apprenticeship’s knowledge, skills and behaviours to ensure the learner can achieve the Standard and prepare for the End Point Assessment.
* This flexible approach to creation of our apprenticeship programmes; they can be co-created with sectors, groups of employers, individual employers, or designed for flexible and contextualised delivery.

**Admissions**

* Entry requirements for our apprenticeships are formalised through the approval process both internally and with the relevant PSRB, if appropriate. They are also reflective of the criteria outlined in the relevant Apprenticeship Standard. We share them with employers to ensure consistency and transparency in their own recruitment processes for Apprenticeship engagement.
* Apprentices will apply through our online application process and complete an **Initial Needs Assessment (INA)** as part of this process. The Apprenticeship Coordinator in the relevant Faculty/Institute who leads delivery will assess the application to check it meets both the course entry requirements and the Apprenticeship eligibility rules as set out by the ESFA.
* The **Initial Needs Assessment (INA) form** will constitute a mandatory part of the University’s admissions process. Our approach begins with the apprentice's self-assessment which also enables the employer to contribute to it. This allows us to capture their skills, knowledge and behaviours from the outset and therefore help determine whether the apprenticeship is right for them. The initial needs assessment (INA) process also aligns with our processes for accrediting prior learning to ensure that prior learning is considered when designing the apprentice’s learning plan.

**Progress monitoring**

* Each apprentice has an ePortfolio Form to record their training and track progress towards the Knowledge Skills and Behaviours. The ePortfolios are developed by each programme team, and are used to inform discussion and the review of progress in three-yearly Three-way progress reviews (See below).
* Partner meetings - The APAM and Partnership Coordinator (leading the apprenticeship delivery) will meet with the Partner employer three times in each academic/calendar year (whichever is most appropriate) to review the operational aspects of the partnership and the progress of the apprentices (as a cohort) to ensure that any issues arising from delivery of training and the apprentices work in the work setting are identified and addressed through a process of ongoing quality improvement.
* Three-way progress reviews – The PAM and the Partnerships Coordinator in the Faculty/Institute concerned will convene three-way meetings with the partner and each apprentice. These will be scheduled to occur within the first 4 weeks of the apprentice starting their training, in weeks 10-14, and in the final 3 weeks of the scheduled programme of training. The final three-way meeting will be a ‘Gateway’ meeting where the progress of the apprentice is reviewed for a final time prior to them being put forwards to undertake their End Point Assessment(EPA). The purpose of the Gateway meeting is to ensure that the apprentice has demonstrated all the required skills, knowledge and behaviour as set out in the apprenticeship ‘standard’ and is thoroughly prepared to undertake the EPA.

**Contextualisation**

* We will adapt our existing programmes to meet the needs of individual employers, either for delivery through closed cohorts or open cohorts. Closed cohorts relate to an apprenticeship with a single employer partner. Our open programmes are designed for contextualised learning – the learning can be applied in the apprentice’s own work environment rather than more prescriptive approaches to teaching, and enable apprentices from different employers to work together as part of a single cohort.

**Quality assurance**

* Our Quality Evaluation processes ensure the voice of employers and apprentices continues to shape the programmes beyond the initial engagement – for example through our employer engagement, module evaluation, learner representatives, twice-yearly staff-student liaison forum meetings, apprentice surveys, employer surveys and other forms of feedback.
* The Partner meetings referred to above, along with the Three-way, three-yearly meetings with employers and apprentices will ensure that multiple opportunities are embedded in our processes for employer and apprentices to provide regular feedback to the University to inform ongoing improvements to the apprenticeship experience and to maximise alignment with employer priorities.

**Account management**

* The CTESS APAM will be responsible for maintaining a close direct relationship with

a key apprenticeship lead in each employer. An account management plan will be agreed at the outset of the engagement, including a schedule for reviews focusing on the needs of the employer.

* The APAM will ensure review outcomes and actions are shared within St Mary’s (e.g. via the Apprenticeships Steering Group), and where required agree timelines and reports to the employer.
* We will analyse feedback on our employer engagements through an annual employer survey, our employer complaints process, informal feedback and feedback gathered through teaching engagements (e.g. via the tripartite reviews or staff-student liaison meetings).

**Complaints**

* Our Student Complaints Policy will enable apprentices to submit a complaint via the Student Complaints Policy, whilst our dedicated Employer Complaints Procedure will enable employers to raise concerns and submit complaints where necessary. Both provide points of reference to the ESFA.
* Employer feedback and complaints data from apprentices and employers will be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Apprenticeship Steering Group with action plans developed to address any issues. Actions are agreed at the appropriate level, e.g. by the Account Manager, Head of CTESS, or the Apprenticeship Steering Group