



## PAL Spring Newsletter – March 2026



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## Welcome to PAL's Spring Newsletter

As we step into Spring 2026, the apprenticeship and Post-16 skills landscape continues to experience significant and, for many, challenging change. In recent weeks there has been an unprecedented volume of announcements, commentary and opinion across professional networks. While debate and scrutiny are healthy, they have also led to uncertainty and, in some cases, misinformation.

At Professional Assessment Ltd (PAL), we can offer reassurance. We are prepared for the changes ahead, we understand what they mean in practice, and we are here to work alongside you as the system evolves. Our approach has always been grounded in partnership, clarity and proportionality. This includes our longstanding commitment to **free Centre approvals**, an approach designed to remove unnecessary barriers and support stability during transition. We are therefore pleased to see other awarding organisations now adopting similar models — collaboration across the sector will be essential as reforms are implemented.

This Spring newsletter brings together a clear summary of government reforms, detailed updates on apprenticeship standards and delivery models, a comprehensive qualification update, a dedicated Youth Guarantee section, and a focused audit and compliance briefing. Our aim is to provide **practical, accurate information** and reaffirm PAL's commitment to working with you through change.

## Government Reforms Update: Post-16 Education and Skills

The first quarter of 2026 has seen a continued acceleration in reform activity across Post-16 education and skills, driven by the Department for Education (DfE), Skills England and Ofqual. Together, these changes represent the most significant reshaping of apprenticeships and technical education in over a decade.

Skills England has taken on a more visible leadership role, tightening its remit around occupational standards, assessment expectations and qualification approval. DfE continues to steer provider oversight and funding policy, while Ofqual's regulatory focus remains firmly on assessment validity, reliability and consistency.

## Apprenticeship Reforms and Delivery Updates

This section brings together the latest confirmed changes to apprenticeship standards, funding policy and new delivery models.

### Apprenticeship Standards Changes – Detailed Update

#### Tracking Standards Under Review

Skills England publishes a **monthly Apprenticeship Revisions and Adjustments Status Report**, providing the most up to date view of apprenticeship standards that are being revised, adjusted or retired.

 **Apprenticeship standards: revisions and adjustments – GOV.UK**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-standards-revisions-and-adjustments>

PAL strongly encourages all providers and employers to review the latest version regularly.



## Defunded Apprenticeship Standards

The Government has confirmed the withdrawal of funding for **16 apprenticeship standards**, described as part of the “streamlining” of apprenticeships.

### What providers need to know:

- New starts will be **restricted**.
- Providers with no delivery in 2024/25 or no starts in 2025/26 will not be permitted to begin delivery.
- For existing delivery, **funding ends on 17 December 2026**.
- **All learners already on programme remain funded through to completion.**

### Defunded standards include:

- Facilities Management Supervisor
- Improvement Practitioner
- Improvement Leader
- Custody and Detention Professional
- Security First Line Manager
- Public Sector Compliance Investigator and Officer
- **Cleaning Hygiene Operative\***
- Professional Security Operative
- Outdoor Learning Specialist
- **Coaching Professional\***
- Learning and Skills Assessor
- Learning and Skills Mentor
- **Lead Practitioner in Adult Care\***
- **Team Leader\***
- **Operations Manager\***
- Chartered Manager

\* Standards currently offered by PAL.

PAL is actively engaging with all affected clients to support transition planning and safeguard learner outcomes. In relation to **Cleaning Hygiene Operative**, PAL is working with sector employers, led by Lauren Kyle, to seek clarification on the removal of a Level 2 apprenticeship route for a sector with a significant levy contribution.

We do not expect the DWP to change their position regarding Team Leader and Operations Manager despite the significant level of feedback from employers and providers questioning the judgment of such a move.

If you are considering 'alternative standards' you will need to demonstrate capacity and capability to offer the standards. We are happy to discuss your plans regarding any adaptation of your provision.

## Looking Ahead

### Foundation Apprenticeships – Bridging into Employment and Apprenticeships

Foundation Apprenticeships sit between pre-employment provision and full apprenticeships and are designed to offer **shorter, accessible entry routes** into work and further training.



#### **PAL Foundation Apprenticeship Offer**

PAL currently offers the:

#### **Level 2 Health and Social Care Foundation Apprenticeship (FA0007)**

This Foundation Apprenticeship supports adult care and healthcare support roles and provides:

- Core knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Progression into employment or further apprenticeships, including:
  - Level 2 Adult Care Worker (ST0005).

#### **Assessment methods:**


- Knowledge Test.
- Practical Portfolio.

Assessments can be delivered by PAL or by **PAL approved Centres**, with **approval fees waived for existing PAL clients**.

Further Foundation Apprenticeships are expected in **hospitality and retail from April 2026**.

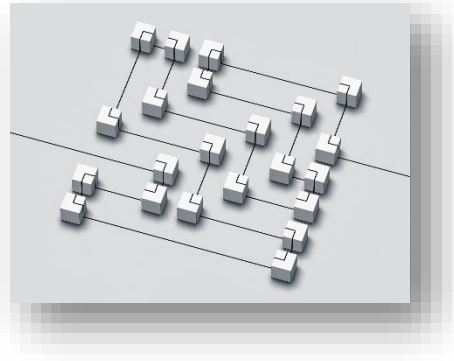
### Apprenticeship Units – Flexible Upskilling Opportunities

DfE has confirmed the introduction of **short course Apprenticeship Units**, allowing employers to upskill staff without committing to a full apprenticeship.

 **Official government press release – apprenticeship units and streamlining**  
<https://lnkd.in/e5FDaKJ6>

**First Wave units include:**

- AI leadership.
- EV charging installation and maintenance.
- Electrical and mechanical fitting.
- Modular building assembly.
- Solar PV installation.
- Welding (mechanical).
- Battery manufacturing.



PAL has reviewed the draft funding rules from a **DfE audit and compliance perspective** and will support providers in understanding delivery and funding risk.

### Qualifications Update – PAL’s Approach and Portfolio

In a system undergoing rapid reform, qualifications must do more than certify knowledge — they must prepare learners for current and future occupational realities.

PAL’s qualification design is underpinned by:

- **Occupational relevance.**
- **Validity and reliability.**
- **Clear, deliverable assessment models.**
- **Proportionate quality assurance.**

### Adult Care and Health and Social Care Qualifications

PAL is pleased to confirm approval from **Skills for Care and Ofqual** to offer:

- **Level 2 Adult Social Care Certificate.**
- **Level 3 Diploma in Adult Care.**
- **Level 5 Diploma in Leading and Managing an Adult Care Service.**

These qualifications support both reformed apprenticeship models and standalone delivery, giving Centres flexibility and continuity.

### Catering and Hospitality – Assessment Plan Reform

PAL is actively working with the **Group of Persons (formerly Trailblazer Group)** for the Catering and Hospitality reformed apprenticeships.

- Draft assessment plans are expected to go to public consultation in 2026.
- PAL is providing structured feedback on assessment validity and deliverability.
- Centres will be consulted on preferred assessment methods where choice is available.



PAL is actively seeking feedback from all our stakeholders on the most appropriate assessment methods contained in the forthcoming and revised **Level 2 Food & Beverage Team Member ST1488 (F&B TM)** and **Level 2 Hospitality Accommodation Team Member ST1420 (HATM)** standards. All feedback will be very welcome and extremely useful in ensuring these new versions meet the needs of the sectors. Replies to the surveys below by the end of April would be appreciated.

- Level 2 **F&B TM** survey link [here](#).
- Level 2 **HATM** survey link [here](#).

### Skills England Catering and Hospitality Standards Revision Timetable 2026

*Note these are estimated timelines provided by Skills England and dates are subject to change.*

Standard	Circulate Draft	Receive Feedback	Review Feedback	Meeting
Food and Beverage Team Member	27/02	06/03	By 11/03	12/03
Hospitality Accommodation Team Member	06/03	13/03	By 18/03	19/03
Hospitality Supervisor	13/03	20/03	By 25/03	26/03
Hospitality Manager	20/03	27/03	By 01/04	16/04
Commis Chef	10/04	17/04	By 22/04	23/04
Production chef	17/04	24/04	By 29/04	30/04
<b>Pastry Chef</b>	24/04	01/05	By 06/05	07/05
Senior Production Chef	01/05	08/05	By 13/05	14/05
Chef de Partie	08/05	15/05	By 20/05	21/05
<b>Baker</b>	15/05	22/05	By 27/05	28/05
<b>Lead Baker</b>	29/05	05/06	By 10/06	11/06
Senior Culinary Chef	05/06	12/06	By 17/06	18/06

Please note PAL does not currently offer the highlighted Catering and Hospitality Standards. If you wish to deliver the Baker Standards, we recommend you contact FDQ. PAL wishes to see the revised assessment plan for Pastry Chef before we commit to this standard.

### Safeguarding Qualifications – Levels 4 and 5

The updated statutory guidance **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)** places greater emphasis on impact, accountability and leadership in safeguarding practice.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

PAL is making strong progress with **Safeguarding qualifications at Levels 4 and 5**, developed by leading safeguarding experts for:

- Safeguarding and Vulnerable Groups (SVG) leads.
- Designated safeguarding professionals.
- Individuals responsible for managing disclosures.

These qualifications will be **sensibly priced** and designed to evidence **capability, capacity and leadership**.

## Have Your Say in Assessment Design

Developing assessment instruments for the reformed apprenticeship standards and designing future qualifications shouldn't happen in isolation. To ensure our assessment and qualification services remain relevant, robust and genuinely useful, we need your insight. Your experience of what content is needed, and what works in practice, is essential to shaping solutions that are fit for purpose.

We recognise that everyone is being asked for feedback from multiple directions, so we will gather your views through ongoing conversations and our regular account management activities. The scale of change across vocational learning is significant, and it is vital that any shifts in delivery feel realistic and workable for you, your employers and your learners. Your feedback will help ensure the system evolves in a way that supports – rather than disrupts – effective delivery.

## Centre Approval

Please contact us if you would like a copy of our straightforward Centre Requirements Guide or a no obligation chat about Centre approvals or the changes to the apprenticeship assessment plans and what that means for future delivery.

Centre assessment only applies to the new look apprenticeship plans, so there is no requirement for Centre approval for any current registered apprentices.

Ioana and her team will provide regular updates regarding assessment plan changes, new issues and releases.



## Youth Guarantee – Supporting Young People and Employers

The **Youth Guarantee** is the Government's commitment to ensure every young person aged **16–24** has access to work, education or training.

### What employers can access

- **£3,000 Youth Jobs Grant** for hiring eligible 18–24 year olds (from June 2026).
- **£2,000 Apprenticeship Incentive** for SMEs recruiting apprentices aged 16–24 (from October 2026).
- **Fully funded apprenticeships** for eligible under-25s at SMEs (from August 2026).
- **National Insurance contribution exemptions** for under-21s and apprentices under 25.

 [NIC exemptions for apprentices under 25 – GOV.UK](#)




**UK Government**

## YOUTH GUARANTEE

*Our offer* to employers

- NEW** **£1,000** for employers who hire apprentices aged 16-18.
- NEW** **£2,000** for SMEs who hire apprentices aged 16-24.
- £2,000** for employers who hire foundation apprentices aged 16-21.
- NEW** **£3,000** for employers who hire 18-24 year olds who have been on Universal Credit for over 6 months.
- No NICs** on employees under 21, or apprentices under 25.
- Jobs Guarantee** Fully subsidised work for long-term unemployed 18-24 year olds.

To get involved visit:  
[business.gov.uk/recruit](https://business.gov.uk/recruit)

## Audit and Compliance

### Practical Support Through Change: Funding Compliance: A Clear Action Plan

We recognise how difficult it is for employers and providers to keep pace with funding reform. PAL has developed a practical action plan to support decision making.

Rupert Crossland, as some of you may be aware, is active on the provider network circuit, so if you see him at a meeting you are attending, please say "Hi".

The recent issuing of the apprenticeship units draft funding rules has prompted lots of questions for our team. If you would like to discuss them with Rupert, please drop us a line.

 **Contact:** [rupert.crossland@professionalassessment.co.uk](mailto:rupert.crossland@professionalassessment.co.uk)

Rupert and his team are also available to offer highly bespoke and short intervention audit work to ensure you have access to affordable sensible audit and compliance consultancy that could save you thousands. If you have been put off from engaging with Rupert because of your perception of consultancy fees, please don't let that stop you enquiring about our services. When we say we are here to help, we mean that both in deeds and words. Thirty years in the sector is a testament to our commitment.





### 1. Understand the changes

- 10% levy top-up removed.
- Levy funds expire after 12 months.
- Co-investment rises to 25% once levy is exhausted.
- SMEs receive fully funded training for under-25s.
- New pathways include Foundation Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Units.

### 2. Conduct a levy risk assessment

- Forecast levy inflows and expiry.
- Prioritise programmes that use funds early.
- Reduce onboarding delays.

### 3. Rebalance programme mix

- Review high-cost standards.
- Use Foundation Apprenticeships for rapid skills deployment.
- Use Apprenticeship Units for targeted upskilling where applicable and possible.

### 4. Maximise SME opportunities

- Recruit apprentices aged 16–24.
- Build early careers pipelines.
- Convert young employees into apprenticeships.

### 5. Adapt to new assessment principles

- Engage with providers on new assessment models.
- Update EPA readiness processes.


## 2025/26 Funding Audits

DfE has issued its **2025/26 audit working papers**, signalling that audits are now underway. PAL's **mock DfE funding audit service** helps providers minimise the risk of errors in a DfE audit identify and correct issues early, protecting funding and reputation. A small investment today saves major expense in the future.

 **Contact:** [rupert.crossland@professionalassessment.co.uk](mailto:rupert.crossland@professionalassessment.co.uk)

## DfE Subcontracting Standard

Providers subcontracting **£100,000+** of DfE funding per year must undergo an external audit every three years. Most providers are now due for renewal, with submissions required by **31 August 2026**. Currently, we have capacity to accommodate your audit before the DfE deadline.

 **Contact:** [rupert.crossland@professionalassessment.co.uk](mailto:rupert.crossland@professionalassessment.co.uk)

## In Closing


Change brings challenge, but also opportunity. PAL remains committed to working collaboratively with providers, colleges and employers to ensure stability, quality and confidence.

We wish you a very **Happy Easter**, and we look forward to continuing our partnership.

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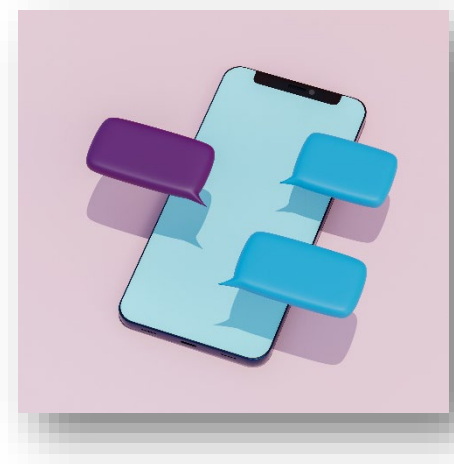
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 [www.professionalassessment.co.uk](http://www.professionalassessment.co.uk) on a final note we are giving our website a new makeover to make it easier for you to engage with us and ensure you have access to updated information.