

Apprenticeships Subcontracting Policy - update Oct 2025 version

1. Introduction

For Sheffield Hallam University (the "University"), higher and degree apprenticeships continue to represent a natural extension of our work in supporting employers to develop the skills of their workforce based on business need. The provision of higher and degree apprenticeships is a significant strand of the University's "Transforming Lives" strategy and a key initiative in the University's engagement with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority's skills agenda and its strategic aspiration to promote widening participation in higher education. To meet these aspirations, the University is now delivering many higher and degree apprenticeships supported by funding administered by the Department of Education (DfE).

In accordance with the DfE subcontracting Funding Rules this policy defines the arrangements under which the University will subcontract DfE funded higher and degree apprentice provision. It identifies key factors that the University will take into consideration prior to entering and overseeing a legally binding contract with an apprenticeship delivery subcontractor.

2. DfE Subcontracting Standard¹

The University continues to monitor and where necessary will develop/enhance its existing processes to ensure compliance with the DfE subcontracting standard.

The ESFA² in March 2024, confirmed that the university had achieved the required standard for the 2022 to 2023 funding year and can continue to subcontract, ensuring we follow the subcontracting rules³.

3. Rationale for subcontracting

The University has developed the following rationale to guide policy and practice with respect to the subcontracting of apprenticeship provision:

Sheffield Hallam University is a large modern University committed to applied education and the development of high-level skills. The University's aim is to work with learners, employers, and other stakeholders to design and deliver innovative and high-quality apprenticeship programmes.

¹ [Subcontracting funding rules for post-16 education and training 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

² Prior to the DfE taking over all functions from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) from April 2025.

³ the next submission of the university assurance review of the subcontracting standard will be 31st July 2026

Apprenticeships are integral to the delivery of the University's Transforming Lives strategy⁴. They facilitate the development of innovative and coherent curriculum and enable the University to work with a range of stakeholders to enhance economic growth, educational health, and quality of life.

In most cases the University will deliver all aspects of the apprenticeship training and/ or on-programme assessment. However, in certain circumstances the University may consider subcontracting some elements of the provision to other suitable approved organisations.

The University will carefully assess any proposal for subcontracting and will require the educational and other advantages to learners, employers, and other stakeholders to be clearly articulated.

The University has developed a set of principles for subcontracting, and these are used (as part of the University's normal governance/decision making processes) to inform the consideration of any proposal for subcontracting any elements of apprenticeship provision - where the University is the main provider⁵.

Sheffield Hallam University's principles for subcontracting

Sheffield Hallam University's default position is to meet learner and employer need using institutional resource, through direct delivery. Where that is not possible, or there is a compelling case to enhance the quality of the University's learning offer, a partnership and/or subcontracting approach may be considered.

In all cases any subcontracting arrangements will aim to enhance the opportunities available to learners by one or more of the following:

- widening access, participation, and progression for groups (including those with shared protected characteristics) that are hard to engage or geographically removed from the University
- enabling access to specialist staff or other resources that would otherwise not be available
- bringing benefits to the region in terms of business innovation and knowledge transfer with the University and its stakeholders
- accessing funding as a result of a joint bid or similar for higher and degree apprenticeship funding in which the University is the main provider (for example to meet the needs of particular learners/employers/ sectors)
- satisfying particular needs (of learners/employers/main provider) including the consideration of impact on individuals with shared protected characteristics
- fill gaps in niche or expert provision or provide better access to facilities

To ensure the quality of apprenticeship delivery, and compliance with DfE requirements, the University will ensure that:

⁴ Higher Degree Apprenticeships are identified in the University's strategic growth plan for its taught portfolio.

⁵ The principles do not relate to circumstances where the University might be a subcontractor for another main provider.

- subcontractors are on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (APAR)
- subcontractors not on the published APAR must deliver less than £100,000 of apprenticeship training and on-programme assessment under contract across all their main providers and/or can act as a 'supporting provider' following DfE approval
- as a main provider the University maintains a direct relationship with employers
- the University delivers a substantial element of an employer's apprenticeship provision
- any arrangements using subcontractors comply with all appropriate professional and regulatory frameworks, including DfE funding guidance.
- provision delivered via subcontracting is approved/monitored via the University's processes and procedures (including internal arrangements for academic standards and quality/ partner approval/ due diligence (initial and annual) and external arrangements such as compliance audit.
- subcontractors are appointed in line with current and relevant procurement regulations⁶
- second tier/ serial subcontracting is not used
- any proposal for subcontracting receives agreement in principle through the appropriate University governance (for example: the University's Apprenticeship Quality Committee).
- any proposal for subcontracting demonstrates alignment with the University's published principles and rationale
- we will not enter into any agreement for brokerage - nor use subcontracting to meet short term funding objectives.
- monitors and complies with the subcontracting 25% threshold of learners
- no member of University staff, with direct or indirect financial interest in a subcontractor, undertakes any management control activities of that subcontractor

4. Selecting and approving subcontractors

The University applies its existing processes for approving, managing and quality assuring collaborative partnerships and provision when selecting and managing subcontractors for apprenticeship provision - supplemented, as appropriate, where regulatory requirements (i.e., related to DfE rules / Ofsted) necessitate alternative or additional approaches.

Where delivery subcontractors are existing collaborative partners of the University, they will have already successfully completed the University's processes for partner planning and institutional approval. Through this process (supplemented by any additional processes required by regulatory requirements applicable at the time) the University collects, and risk assesses, information about a proposed partner or subcontractor to ensure: (i) the overall rationale for a proposed subcontract fits with relevant University policies and strategy (including the published rationale provided in section 2 above. (ii) the subcontractor's capacity and track record in providing high quality provision including that it is able to quality assure and improve relevant provision. (iii) appropriate legal, financial, quality and data protection due diligence checks are satisfied (including that the organisation is a legal person, it is not subject to legal proceedings to dissolve or wind up the company, it is up to date with submission of its statutory accounts and these have been subject to external audit by an independent and qualified auditor) and measures are taken to identify any conflicts of interest (iv) there are effective monitoring and

⁶ Including Public Contracts Regulations 2015: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/102/contents/made>

performance review procedures to oversee the subcontract and relevant University quality assurance processes - in line with regulatory requirements (v) there are monitoring triggers and processes to intervene and terminate subcontracts as necessary, including continuity arrangements to transfer or support current apprentices⁷.

Existing approved University partner organisations would normally be eligible to be considered for subcontracting arrangements, subject to confirmation that they can meet the specific requirements of the subcontract and can satisfy any additional regulatory requirements related to apprenticeships. Partners are required to supply information for approval, via University quality assurance processes, setting out key information relating to the proposed delivery and management of the apprenticeship. The roles and responsibilities of both partners are agreed through the approval process; these are then formally recorded within the contract for the partner.

Proposed subcontractors that are not already approved partners of the University may be considered for approval as a subcontractor via the University's partnership planning and approval process (supplemented by any additional processes to ensure compliance with any regulatory requirements applicable at the time). All new partnerships are subject to the University's quality processes for approval of new collaborative provision through the Institutional Approval process.

The University is responsible for ensuring that apprenticeship provision satisfies the regulatory requirements for subcontracting applicable at the time. As a main training provider, the University will:

- Agree the use of subcontractors with employers at the start of an apprenticeship
- Carry out due diligence checks on potential delivery subcontractors
- Enter into a written agreement with subcontractors prior to the start of apprenticeship delivery
- Ensure that second-level subcontracting does not take place
- Obtain an annual report from an external auditor⁸ if the total apprenticeship contract value exceeds £100,000 in any one financial year
- Take responsibility for the quality of all aspects and carry out regular assurance checks of their subcontractor's provision
- Provide delivery sub-contractor declarations in line with DfE dates and manage any updates if arrangements or circumstances change during the year

The Directorate of Skills & Partnerships at the University will be the single, central point of contact with the DfE.

Staff involved in selecting and managing subcontractors will normally be those in the Directorate of Skills & Partnerships with experience in developing and managing academic collaborative partnerships.

⁷ This includes making alternative arrangements for the delivery of education and training, protecting the audit trail, and/ or repaying the ESFA.

⁸ In line with the DfE Subcontracting Standard

5. Managing subcontracting arrangements

The University will hold regular subcontracting management meetings with all subcontractors to ensure that high quality delivery is taking place, in line with the requirements of funding and regulatory bodies. Management meetings with subcontractors will include consideration and monitoring of learner progress, safeguarding, “Prevent” duty and other matters contributing to the successful delivery of the apprenticeships.

The University shall also review the subcontractor KPIs on a regular basis via the subcontractor management meetings and is entitled to raise any additional questions and/or request any further information from the subcontractor to aid the University’s assessment of the KPI and/or subcontractor’s performance.

6. Fees and charges

The University will normally apply fees for the management of the apprenticeship and for supporting any academic provision. Further additional charges may be negotiated between the subcontractor and the University to reflect additional services or support the University is providing to apprentices and their employers. These fees will reflect the University's costs in procuring and managing subcontracts and the associated apprenticeship provision and in normal circumstances will not exceed 20% of the overall contract.

a. funding retained for quality assurance and oversight

In consideration of the fee the University will normally provide the following support to the subcontractor:

- Subcontract management oversight
- Monitoring of quality, standards and compliance related to the subcontract
- Review and enhancement for the apprenticeship
- Collating learner and employer feedback

b. funding retained for administrative functions such as data returns

In consideration of the fee the University will also be responsible for:

- Learner administration – Apprenticeship eligibility requirements, enrolment and ILR data, funding draw-down, assessment and progression of validated provision
- Audit Compliance – Contractual paperwork and apprenticeship evidence pack

c. charges negotiated between the subcontractor and the University

The fee may also reflect additional services or support the University is providing to apprentices and their employers such as:

- Support in recruiting learners where appropriate to the needs of the provision
- Support with learning, teaching and assessment (for example guidance and developing a community of practice)

- Employer support ongoing throughout the apprenticeship programme including End Point Assessment
- Sharing of good practice
- Providing advice and guidance to employers and apprentices on End Point Assessment Organisations

The University will provide potential subcontractors with full contractual terms to apply to all sub-contractor payments. Fees and charges will be in line with DfE apprenticeship rules and standard University payment terms.

7. Publication of information and communications

Any substantial changes to this policy are subject to review and sign off by the Apprenticeship Quality Committee on behalf of the University and are published on the University website. Minor changes and updates to ensure the currency and accuracy of the policy may be made by the policy owner and published on the website.

(<https://www.shu.ac.uk/business/training-and-development/degree-apprenticeships/useful-resources>)

This Policy and an outline subcontract are available to current and potential subcontractors at the point that discussions are opened for new or reviewed sub-contractor arrangements.

8. Review

This Policy is subject to annual review by relevant University Boards to ensure it continues to meet the University's needs and the requirements of the University's contract with the DfE and all relevant regulatory bodies.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Definitions

The University notes the definitions of subcontracting in the latest version of the DfE Apprenticeship Funding Rules (25/26)⁹

Subcontracting

Any delivery to a learner's programme of learning by a separate legal entity. It does not matter if this is by a third party recruited to deliver on site (travel to teach), online learning or whether it is described as a service.

Subcontractor

A separate legal entity or an individual (not an employee) that has an agreement (called a subcontract) with you to deliver any element of the education and training we fund.

⁹ [Subcontracting funding rules for post-16 education and training 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674442/subcontracting_funding_rules_for_post-16_education_and_training_2025_to_2026.pdf)

A separate legal entity includes but is not limited to companies in your group, other associated companies and sole traders. An individual could include a person who is a sole trader, self-employed, a freelancer or someone who is employed by an agency, unless those individuals are working under your direct management and control in the same way as your own employees.

This does not include relationships between the provider and the end-point assessment organisation or the provider and other third parties providing services such as marketing.