

Office for
Students



Degree apprenticeships funding competition

Guidance for providers

Reference OfS 2023.51

Enquiries to degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk

Publication date 28 September 2023

Contents

Summary	2
Action required and timeframe	2
Introduction	4
Background	4
Purpose of this competition	5
Scope of this competition	8
Bidding competition	10
Timescales for bid submissions	10
Wave 1	10
Waves 2 and 3	12
Eligibility	13
Guidance on the bidding process	14
Wave 1: Bid requirements and assessment criteria	15
Considerations for submitting a Wave 1 bid	15
Eligibility criteria	16
Process	16
Assessment criteria	16
Proposed approach to scoring and prioritisation for Wave 1 funding distributed through this competition	20
Scoring criteria	21
Waves 2 and 3: Bid requirements and assessment criteria	23
Considerations for submitting bids in Waves 2 and 3	23
Eligibility criteria	24
Process	25
Assessment criteria	26
Proposed approach to scoring and prioritisation for Wave 2 and 3 funding distributed through this competition	32
Scoring criteria	32
Grant funding payments, conditions and monitoring	34
Further information and next steps	36

Summary

1. This document sets out how the Office for Students (OfS) will distribute funding for up to two academic years that is designed to grow and build capacity and increase equality of opportunity in Level 6 degree apprenticeships provision at higher education providers.
2. We have confirmed that up to £40 million is available to allocate through a competitive bidding exercise over the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25. Of the £40 million, up to £16 million will be allocated to projects that will complete before 31 July 2024 and up to £24 million is available for projects that will complete before 31 July 2025.
3. Funding will be allocated in three bidding waves. This will allow us to support providers that are at different stages in their plans to deliver Level 6 degree apprenticeships.
4. The competition is open to all higher education providers that are registered, or have applied to register, with us in the Approved (fee cap) category. It gives guidance on the requirements for submitting a bid or bids, and on our approach to prioritising those that meet the broader aims of the funding, as set out in paragraph 16.

Action required and timeframe

5. Eligible providers are invited to submit competitive bid(s) for funding following the guidance in this document. Specific assessment criteria and guidance for Wave 1 can be found in paragraphs 62 to 107 and Waves 2 and 3 in paragraphs 108 to 171. We have published the bidding templates that providers will need to complete alongside this guidance. Examples of the bidding templates are included for information in this document. The bidding template for Wave 1 is included as Annex A and the bidding template for Wave 2 included as Annex B. The bidding template for Wave 3 will be released in May 2024.
6. The timeframes for each wave of funding allocations are set out in Table A below. Bids from eligible providers for all waves should be submitted by emailing completed templates to degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk

Table A: Timeframe for funding submissions

Activity	2023-24 funding submission (Wave 1)	2023-24 <u>and</u> 2024-25 funding submission (Wave 2)	2024-25 funding submission (Wave 3)
Guidance published	28 September 2023	28 September 2023	May 2024 ¹
Provider webinar event ²	19 October 2023	19 October 2023	May 2024
Deadline for bids	1700 on 20 November 2023	1700 on 19 December 2023	June 2024

¹ We anticipate that the May 2024 guidance will be an addendum to this guidance document. The addendum will confirm the exact timelines for Wave 3 submissions.

² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/degree-apprenticeships-funding-competition/.

Activity	2023-24 funding submission (Wave 1)	2023-24 <u>and</u> 2024-25 funding submission (Wave 2)	2024-25 funding submission (Wave 3)
Assessment process	November and December 2023	January and February 2024	July/August 2024
Outcomes announced	December 2023	March 2024	September 2024
Funding commences	January 2024	April 2024	October 2024
Funding concludes	31 July 2024	31 July 2025	31 July 2025

Introduction

Background

7. In 2015, the UK government introduced the degree apprenticeship programme as part of the higher apprenticeship standard. Degree apprenticeships provide opportunities to combine paid work with higher-level learning that leads to an undergraduate or masters' degree.
8. The OfS wants all students to gain the skills they need to succeed in future employment or further study. We undertake a range of activity to support the supply of higher-level skills in England.³ Degree apprenticeships contribute to the diversity of provision in the English higher education sector. This enables students to have choice, contributes to local and regional prosperity and skills development, and equality of opportunity in higher education. The OfS has previously allocated £8 million to providers (in the academic year 2022-23)⁴ to support activities related to the growth and development of Level 6 degree apprenticeship training programmes.
9. The Department for Education (DfE) set out its priorities for the use of the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) that it allocates to the OfS in its most recent guidance letter.⁵ This included guidance that the OfS should provide up to £40 million to deliver a competitive Level 6 degree apprenticeship fund across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years.
10. We published our funding decisions for the academic year 2023-24⁶ on 22 June 2023. We confirmed that we intend to provide up to £40 million in funding for 2023-24 and 2024-25 combined to establish a fund for projects that will increase the number of degree apprenticeships offered in England and increase equality of opportunity. In the first two waves of this funding competition, we have decided to focus on Level 6 degree apprenticeship development activity. This means that funding to directly support apprenticeships at other levels is not within scope of this funding competition. We will review this position ahead of Wave 3.
11. During June and July 2023, we discussed a future degree apprenticeships fund with representative bodies of registered providers and with other stakeholders. We also held a public webinar on 20 July.⁷ The views expressed in these discussions have supported the development of this guidance. We are also working with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) to make sure there are appropriate connections between our related areas of work.
12. The OfS may provide funding to higher education providers that are registered with us in the Approved (fee cap) for the provision of education under sections 39-41 of the Higher Education

³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/skills-and-employment/supply-of-higher-level-skills/.

⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/mid-year-allocations-of-recurrent-funding-for-2022-23/.

⁵ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/9234cde5-5359-4538-92ac-1eab29f8596a/ofs-spg-guidance-2023-24.pdf.

⁶ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/funding-for-academic-year-2023-24/.

⁷ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/degree-apprenticeships-funding-webinar/.

and Research Act 2017 (HERA).⁸ This funding competition has been designed with due regard to the OfS's general duties under section 2 of HERA.

Our strategic aims

13. The OfS strategy for 2022 to 2025 outlines the OfS's core regulatory objectives⁹ as:

- a. Participation: All students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.
- b. Experience: All students, from all backgrounds, receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.
- c. Outcomes: All students, from all backgrounds, can progress into employment, further study, and lead fulfilling lives, in which their qualifications hold their value over time.
- d. Value for money: All students, from all backgrounds, receive value for money.

14. We outline below how this funding competition intends to support the delivery of these strategic aims.

Purpose of this competition

15. The purpose of this competition is to grow capacity and capability among English higher education providers to deliver high quality degree apprenticeships provision that meet skills needs now and in the future. We also aim to address equality of opportunity in relation to Level 6 degree apprenticeships.

16. The specific aims of the programme are therefore to:

- a. Expand provision among providers already offering Level 6 degree apprenticeships on apprenticeship standards with currently lower uptake (Strand 1) through:
 - i. delivery of new apprenticeship standards
 - ii. increasing the capacity and the number of new starts on current apprenticeship provision.
- b. Expand provision of apprenticeship standards with currently lower uptake among providers that are new to the Level 6 degree apprenticeships market (Strand 2).
- c. Increase equality of opportunity in Level 6 degree apprenticeships (cross-cutting theme).

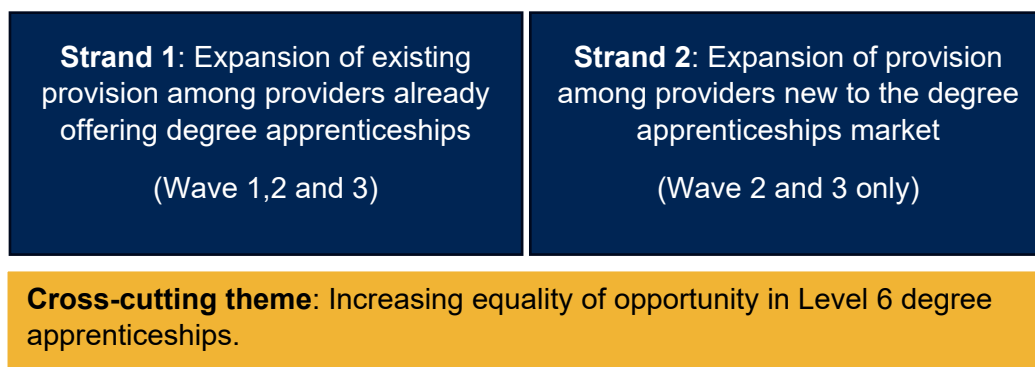
17. We have established the funding competition to attract bids that are most likely to achieve these aims. We have set out the structure of the competition in Figure 1. We will have two different strands focusing on existing providers and new providers respectively. We will also

⁸ See www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted.

⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/office-for-students-strategy-2022-to-2025/.

have a cross-cutting theme relating to equality of opportunity. We will invite bids for these strands through the different bidding waves.

Figure 1: Aims of the degree apprenticeship funded programme



Growing capacity and capability (Strands 1 and 2)

Increasing the number of providers offering degree apprenticeships

18. During the academic year 2021-22 there were 343 Approved (fee cap) providers on the OfS Register. Of these the analysis we have outlined in Annex C shows that only 240 were registered on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR)¹⁰ and only 99 had degree apprenticeship starts.
19. We want to use our funding to deliver projects that will increase the number of Approved (fee cap) providers that are offering degree apprenticeships. Our view is that this will contribute to our strategic goals to increase choice for students, improve graduate outcomes and increase equality of opportunity.
20. We consider that the relatively small proportion of registered providers currently delivering degree apprenticeship starts represents a market failure. We wish to address this by using our funding to incentivise providers to begin delivery of degree apprenticeships.

Increasing the number of students on degree apprenticeships

21. There has been a steady increase in the number of degree apprenticeships starts since 2015 but our analysis shows that this growth has been uneven across providers.
22. Overall, we have seen an increase in the number of Level 6 degree apprenticeship starts from 6,920 in 2019-20 to 13,510 in 2021-22 (see Annex C, Table 3). However, the majority of this increase is seen in 24 providers and our view is that growth across the sector has not been consistent. Some other providers have also seen significant growth, but their provision started small and has therefore contributed less.
23. We consider that this uneven and slow growth represents a market failure. We wish to address it by funding providers to increase their capacity across existing standards with low take up or

¹⁰ See <https://download.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/apar> on 14 August 2023. The APAR lists training provider organisations that are eligible for government funding to train apprentices and end-point assessment organisations.

by delivering new standards. Our view is that this will contribute to our strategic goals to increase choice for students, improve graduate outcomes and increase equality of opportunity.

Increasing the number of degree apprenticeship standards offered

24. Degree apprenticeship standards are approved where IfATE, working in conjunction with employers, has identified an occupation with a defined set of knowledge, skills and behaviours that would benefit from higher education delivered through an apprenticeship. There are currently 105 Level 6 degree apprenticeship standards approved by IfATE.¹¹
25. Analysis of available data published by DfE shows that, in 2021-22, apprentices started on 66 of these apprenticeship standards (Annex D). Of the 99 approved (fee cap) providers that have Level 6 degree apprenticeship starts in 2021-22, 41 providers have 100 or more starts in that year and 76 providers have 20 or more starts in that year (see paragraph 193, Annex C).
26. This low uptake of some degree apprenticeships standards means that our funding is therefore also designed to grow capacity and capability in Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision. This could be through:
 - a. Providers that currently offer degree apprenticeship provision delivering new degree apprenticeship standards that have been approved by IfATE and/or increasing numbers of students on current degree apprenticeship courses.
 - b. New providers to the apprenticeship market developing and delivering degree apprenticeship provision.

Increasing equality of opportunity

27. Many students do not experience equality of opportunity in higher education. This is true across the three main stages of a student's higher education journey: access, participation and progression. The OfS has developed the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (the EORR), which identifies 12 sector-wide risks that may affect a student's opportunity to access and succeed in higher education.¹²
28. Risk 5 of the EORR identifies that some students may not have equal opportunity to access a sufficiently wide variety of higher education course types, including degree apprenticeships.
29. We have analysed data on the shared characteristics of degree apprenticeship starts to understand which characteristics are more likely to be affected by this risk. We have made this data available in Annex C.
30. Our analysis shows that across degree apprenticeships, and within particular standards, there are disparities in the number of starts for different groups of students with shared characteristics. A purpose of the funding is therefore to address these disparities.

¹¹ This figure is based on the number of apprenticeship standards approved for delivery, filtered by Level 6, listed on the IfATE standards search as of 15 September 2023. See <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/?levels=6&includeApprovedForDelivery=true>.

¹² Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/.

31. We note that there is variation across degree apprenticeship standards, but at a national level we would expect to prioritise funding that targets increasing starts in the following groups:
- Students from ABCS quintiles 1 and 2¹³ (Figure 1 of Annex C).
 - Students under 21 years old (Figure 2 of Annex C).
 - Students with a disability (Figure 3 of Annex C).
 - Students from ethnic groups that are underrepresented on degree apprenticeships. For example, Black students, Asian students, and students from mixed and other ethnic backgrounds (Figure 4 of Annex C).
 - Students from IMD quintile 1 and 2 (Figure 6 of Annex C).
32. We want to use this funding stream to increase the diversity of students choosing and starting Level 6 degree apprenticeships. Our view is that this will contribute to our strategic goals to increase choice for students, improve graduate outcomes and equality of opportunity. We are looking to fund providers that can evidence an understanding of the ways in which equality of opportunity can be improved in their own degree apprenticeship provision or in degree apprenticeship provision in their local area, region or the nation as a whole.

Scope of this competition

33. The scope for the funding competition is set out in Table B below.

Table B: Scope for funding competition

In scope	Out of scope
Collaborative (Wave 2 and 3 only) and individual provider bids	Development of new standards through trail blazer groups
Activity to increase starts on degree apprenticeships at Level 6	Cost of direct delivery of apprenticeships that are funded through Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funding including end-point assessment associated costs. ¹⁴
Activity to widen participation on degree apprenticeships at Level 6	Bids targeted directly at increasing apprenticeship starts at Levels 4, 5 and 7
Development costs – including provider staffing costs and employer engagement activity	Capital expenditure
Non-capital expenditure	
Proposed apprenticeship standards must be listed as an ‘approved for delivery’ Level 6 standard on the IfATE website ¹⁵	

¹³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/associations-between-characteristics-of-students/.

¹⁴ See www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules.

¹⁵ See <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/?levels=6>.

34. Funding for collaborative bids is not included under Wave 1 due to the timeframe available for submitting bids.
35. Funding is only available to support Level 6 degree apprenticeships. Funding for other levels is not within scope. However, providers may seek funding for activity that directly increases starts on Level 6 apprenticeships and may also have an indirect positive effect on other levels. For example, this could include targeted marketing and outreach activity to support progression on to Level 6 provision from Level 4 and 5 pipelines.
36. Capital expenditure is not in in scope for this funding competition. Capital expenditure means money used to acquire or maintain fixed assets, such as land, buildings and equipment, which is normally capitalised in the provider's audited annual accounts.

Bidding competition

37. This section provides guidance on timescales for submitting bids to the competition, our approach to scoring bids, and the terms and conditions applying to funding awarded to successful bidders.

Timescales for bid submissions

38. We expect to distribute up to £40 million to be delivered between January 2023 and July 2025. We are making funding available through a competitive process through three bidding waves. The timescales for submitting bids are outlined in Table A, page 2. Providers can lead one bid for funding in each of the three waves.

39. Our view is that this will allow us to balance the time available for projects to deliver and provide assurance that our funding is achieving value for money. It will also offer clarity around how we expect to deliver funding across two financial years. In developing this approach, we have had regard to our general duties in Section 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, in particular to:

- a. The need to promote value for money in the provision of higher education by English higher education providers (2(1)(d)).
- b. The need to use the OfS's resources in an efficient, effective, and economic way (2(1)(f)).

40. All funding allocated through this competition must be spent in accordance with the relevant terms and conditions. This means that successful bids in Wave 1 will need to have spent all funds by 31 July 2024. Successful bids for Wave 2 will have set amounts of funding that will need to be spent by 31 July 2024 and 2025 respectively (based on breakdowns included in the bidding templates). Successful bids for Wave 3 will need to have spent all funds by 31 July 2025. A separate award letter and terms and conditions will be issued for each successful bid.

41. We will monitor spending during the period of funding and expect that any funding awarded by the OfS for a specific academic year to be spent during that year. This is to manage the risk of underspend towards the end of the funding period. In exceptional circumstances, if our monitoring does not give us confidence that a provider will be able to use the funding in the time available in line with the terms and conditions, we may withdraw the offer of funding in whole or part. Such exceptional circumstances may include:

- significant delays in delivery (for whatever reason) compared with the timetable set out in the provider's bid (or as may subsequently be agreed by us)
- failure of the provider to engage to our satisfaction in any reporting and monitoring requirements.

Wave 1

42. In Wave 1 we will distribute up to £16 million to individual providers that demonstrate that they can deliver rapid expansion of Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision from January 2024, and incur the associated costs before 31 July 2024.

43. In Wave 1 we are accepting bids from providers that are already offering degree apprenticeship provision or have joined the APAR but are not yet delivering degree apprenticeships that meet the following aspects of Strand 1:
- a. Delivery of new apprenticeship standards.
 - b. Increasing capacity and the number of starts on current apprenticeship provision.
44. Our assessment of bids submitted in this wave will consider the extent to which they demonstrate:
- a. Readiness of the proposal to receive and deliver funding sought by July 2024.
 - b. Credibility, in terms of the likelihood that a provider's plans will deliver rapid progress towards the aims of the funding competition and the outcomes set out in the bid. For bids that only propose to increase capacity and starts on **current** degree apprenticeship provision, this will include the extent to which the bid will contribute to the cross-cutting theme to address the risks to equality of opportunity identified for particular groups of students, as outlined in paragraphs 27 to 32.
 - c. That the project will provide value for money and the project, including any associated risks, will be well-managed.
45. Bids for Wave 1 can include proposals to support activity already started, provided we gain assurance that the funding awarded by the OfS will be spent in full within the stated period. We expect that any funding received through this competition will provide additional value to accelerate current development plans rather than duplicate or replace costs that have already been covered or committed to by other funding streams.
46. Given the short time frames to submit bids for Wave 1, collaborative bids will not be accepted as part of this wave. Collaborative partnerships should instead submit a bid as part of Wave 2 and/or Wave 3.
47. We have set a minimum funding threshold of £50,000 for Wave 1 bids. This will ensure that funding is prioritised towards more significant proposals that are likely to deliver progress against programme aims within the funding period. There is no maximum limit on the total amount of funding that can be requested for Wave 1. However, we will not provide more than £100,000 to activity related to any one degree apprenticeship standard (i.e. for a bid that proposes to deliver activity to expand two degree apprenticeship standards, we will not fund more than £200,000 in total for the bid). We have set the thresholds based on information we hold about the level of funding that is likely to effectively support development costs for higher education providers already offering degree apprenticeships.
48. The detailed criteria for Wave 1 bids are set out in paragraphs 62 to 107.

Summary of Wave 1

- Bids must be submitted by **1700 on 20 November 2023**.
- Funded activity starts from 1 January 2024 and concludes by 31 July 2024.
- Bids should be for a minimum total funding request of £50,000.
- We will fund a maximum of £100,000 per proposed standard.
- Individual provider bids only.

Waves 2 and 3

49. Waves 2 and 3 are open to all providers that meet the eligibility criteria outlined in paragraphs 53 to 57, including collaborative bids. Given the longer timeframe providers are being given, compared with Wave 1, we would expect projects funded under Waves 2 and 3 to demonstrate significant developments in degree apprenticeship provision and a higher level of evidence that the bid will result in increased equality of opportunity for students studying on degree apprenticeships.
50. We welcome bids from providers that are already offering degree apprenticeships and are looking to expand provision (Strand 1) and providers that are new to the degree apprenticeship market (Strand 2). Our assessment of bids submitted in these waves will consider the extent to which they demonstrate:
- a. Ambition, in terms of the proposed growth in the number of apprenticeship standards delivered and/or the likely number of apprenticeship starts in the short and medium term.
 - b. Credibility, in terms of the likelihood that a provider's plans will deliver the anticipated aims of the funding and the outcomes set out in the bid.
 - c. Contribution to the cross-cutting theme, in terms of the extent to which the bid will contribute to addressing the risks to equality of opportunity identified for particular groups of students as outlined in paragraph 31.
 - d. That the project will provide value for money and the project, and any associated risks, will be well managed.
51. We have set a minimum funding threshold of £50,000 for bids. This will ensure that funding is prioritised towards more significant proposals that are likely to deliver progress against programme aims within the funding period. There is no maximum limit on the total amount of funding that can be requested for Waves 2 and 3. However we will consider the total amount applied for when assessing the ambition and credibility of the bid.
52. For specific criteria for Wave 2 and 3 bids, please see paragraphs 108 to 171.

Summary of Waves 2 and 3

- Bids must be submitted by **1700 on 19 December 2023** for Wave 2. The submission date for Wave 3 is expected to be June 2024.
- Funded activity starts from 1 April 2024 for Wave 2 and October 2024 for Wave 3.
- Wave 2 activity will conclude by 31 July 2025 (with interim activity agreed with the OfS concluding by 31 July 2024).
- Wave 3 activity will conclude by 31 July 2025.
- Bids should be for a minimum total funding request of £50,000.

Eligibility

53. To be eligible to bid, a provider **must** be registered, or have applied to register, with the OfS in the Approved (fee cap) category. For a bid to be supported, a provider must be registered in the Approved (fee cap) category by the time OfS decisions on which bids to support are taken. This reflects the limit of our funding powers under section 39 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.
54. OfS-registered providers in the Approved (fee cap) category are eligible to lead and submit a maximum of one bid for funding for each wave of this competition and no more than three bids in total (i.e. one bid for Wave 1, one bid for Wave 2 and one bid for Wave 3). Providers may not act as the lead on more than one bid in each wave.
55. Wave 1 funding is only available for individual provider bids. However, under Waves 2 and 3 providers can be involved in additional bids through collaboration. Each collaborative bid requires an eligible lead provider for funding purposes. There is no limit to how many collaborative bids a provider is named as a partner on, provided that they are named as the lead on no more than one.
56. An overview of the eligibility criteria for each wave of the bidding process is outlined in Table C below.

Table C: Summary of eligibility criteria by wave

	Wave 1	Waves 2 and 3
OfS-registered providers in the Approved (fee cap) category	✓	✓
Providers already offering degree apprenticeship provision in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic year (Strand 1)	✓	✓
New providers to the degree apprenticeship market (Strand 2)	x	✓

	Wave 1	Waves 2 and 3
Providers submitting collaborative bids	x	✓
Providers registered on the apprenticeship provider and assessment register (APAR)	✓	✓ (Strand 1 only)

57. The lead provider for each bid must ensure that the bid meets the specified criteria for the relevant wave and strands they are bidding in.

Guidance on the bidding process

58. To submit a bid for funding, providers will need to complete the correct bidding template for the wave to which they are bidding.

- a. The bidding template for Wave 1 can be found in Annex A.
- b. The bidding template for Wave 2 can be found in Annex B.
- c. The bidding template for Wave 3 will be released in May 2024.

59. OfS will assess each bid against the specific criteria for each wave of the bidding process, as set out in paragraphs 62 to 107 (Wave 1) and 108 to 171 (Waves 2 and 3).

60. We will prioritise bids that we consider overall best meet the aims for this funding competition, as set out in paragraph 16. The detailed criteria and guidance for Wave 1 and Waves 2 and 3 are designed to achieve this. To be successful, a bid must explain how it meets these criteria through the appropriate use of evidence.

61. We aim to fund a portfolio of projects considering the programme's aims outlined in paragraph 16, ensuring a regional spread and diversity of providers, and a diversity of apprenticeship standards.

Wave 1: Bid requirements and assessment criteria

Considerations for submitting a Wave 1 bid

62. The Wave 1 submission period is aimed at providers that will be able to demonstrate that they can deliver rapid expansion of Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision and incur the associated costs before 31 July 2024. We therefore have limited the eligibility criteria to providers that are already delivering degree apprenticeships or have received approval from the APAR to deliver apprenticeships and are currently undertaking activity to deliver apprenticeships in the 2024-25 academic year (Strand 1). Other providers are able to submit in the Wave 2 and Wave 3 bidding exercises. Due to the available timeframe for the creation and assessment of bids, we are not accepting collaborative bids under the Wave 1 bidding exercise.
63. Proposals under Wave 1 should demonstrate that funding requested will accelerate plans to deliver new degree apprenticeship standards and/or increase capacity on current or new standards where there is currently lower uptake (see paragraphs 21 to 23).
64. We expect that bids for this wave may include the following activities. However, this is a non-exhaustive list and we will consider any activity that will contribute to the programme aims and which is not specified as out of scope for funding in Table B, page 8:
 - a. Upskilling and training for staff.
 - b. Recruitment of new staff.
 - c. Staff time to develop proposals.
 - d. Activity to increase starts on degree apprenticeships at Level 6, including employer engagement, targeted marketing and recruitment activity, delivery of outreach and information, advice and guidance.
65. Bids are likely to score higher if they demonstrate:
 - a. A clear and realistic project plan and that the provider is ready to deliver the activity for which funding is sought.
 - b. A proposal underpinned by a strategic approach and firm evidence base.
 - c. That their proposal is informed by the needs of apprentices and relevant employers.
66. Providers should note that we will not commit any OfS funding beyond 31 July 2024 through the Wave 1 bidding exercise. All funding allocated through this wave must be spent in full, and in accordance with the terms and conditions, by this date.
67. Providers may submit further bids for funding in Waves 2 and 3. There are similarities between the templates for bidding and we expect that providers may want to use the same evidence base across different waves. We would expect that providers ensure a bid for Waves 2 and 3 meets the relevant criteria outlined in paragraphs 108 to 171 rather than simply duplicating

information provided for Wave 1. A provider that receives funding in Wave 1 is not guaranteed funding in later waves.

Eligibility criteria

68. As outlined in paragraphs 53 to 57, to be eligible to bid for funding through Wave 1 providers must be:
- a. OfS-registered and in the Approved (fee cap) registration category.
 - b. Registered on the apprenticeship provider and assessment register (APAR).¹⁶
 - c. Offering IfATE-approved apprenticeship standards in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years.

Process

69. Providers wishing to bid must do so by downloading and completing the bidding template (example shown at Annex A).
70. Providers must complete all sections of the template, including numerical data collection and narrative information.
71. The bidding template for Wave 1 asks bidders to state whether they are applying for funding to deliver new apprenticeship standards, increase capacity and starts on current apprenticeship standards, or both. Providers should also state which apprenticeship standards their application relates to. This is collected in Table 4 of the bidding template.
72. Providers may provide information on which groups, identified in paragraph 31 or otherwise relevant to increasing equality of opportunity in relation to the degree apprenticeship standards included in their bid, they aim to target through the bid. This information is collected in Question 1 of Table 5 of the bidding template where applicable.
73. We require signed letters of support from the accountable officer of the higher education provider, and the director of finance at the higher education provider. These letters should be submitted in PDF format and submitted alongside the bidding template to degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk by the deadline for Wave 1 submissions of **1700 on 20 November 2023**.

Assessment criteria

74. The OfS will assess each bid against the following criteria:
- a. **Criterion 1** – the readiness of the project proposals to receive and deliver funding sought by July 2024.
 - b. **Criterion 2** – the credibility of project proposals to deliver rapid progress against achieving the programme aims and the outcomes set out in the bid. (For bids that only

¹⁶ Available at <https://download.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/apar>.

propose to increase capacity and starts on current degree apprenticeship provision this will include the extent to which the bid will contribute to the cross-cutting theme to increase equality of opportunity on Level 6 degree apprenticeships.)

c. **Criterion 3** – value for money and project management and risk.

Criterion 1: Readiness of the project proposals to receive and deliver funding sought by July 2024

75. This criterion assesses the current status of plans to expand degree apprenticeship provision, the readiness of the project to receive funding sought and the likelihood that funding will be delivered by July 2024.
76. Table 3 of the bidding template requests the amount of funding requested in the academic year 2023-24, details of the funding profile and a brief description as to how funding requested will be spent. The bid must confirm the provider's ability to use all the OfS funding sought with a clear spending profile for the academic year 2023-24. We are not permitted to provide grants in advance of need, (that is, in advance of the provider incurring the expense). Our funding specifically covers the period through to 31 July 2024.
77. For those bids that are funded, all monies must have been spent in full by 31 July 2024. We expect the spending profile in 2023-24 to reflect the amount requested in a provider's bid.
78. Table 4 of the bidding document asks providers to provide evidence of how funding will be used to support the development of new Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision and/or increase capacity and the number of starts on existing provision. Some of the following detail is collected as quantitative information, with space in the final column to provide any supporting commentary. Providers should:
- a. Detail the degree apprenticeship standards that the bid intends to fund. Proposed standards must be on the approved IfATE¹⁷ list.
 - b. Detail what stage of development the degree apprenticeship will be at by January 2024, and how the provider intends to make progress in the expansion of this provision by the end of July 2024.
 - c. Provide information on how they will increase the numbers of starts on existing and/or new degree apprenticeships provision, including details of plans for achieving that growth, and how they intend to deliver this activity before the end of July 2024.
 - d. Provide an estimate of the number of starts the bidder expects on the degree apprenticeship courses included in its bid in the academic years 2024-25 and 2025-26 and a commentary outlining the evidence that supports these estimates. The estimated numbers will indicate the growth the bid intends to deliver as a result of this funding. This will also contribute to the OfS assessment of Criterion 2 (credibility) and Criterion 3 (value for money). The OfS does not intend to link the release of funding to delivery of the specific student numbers included in these estimates.

¹⁷ See <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/?levels=6>.

79. Bids that can demonstrate that activity and funding can be realistically delivered within the funding timeframes through clear and evidence-informed plans will score higher.
80. Bids that can demonstrate that significant progress will be achieved before 31 July 2024 will score higher. This could include plans for recruitment to new standards in 2024-25 or ambitious estimates for 2024-25 starts for current provision that evidence growth. Bids that include credible estimates for starts underpinned by evidence will score higher.
81. Purely aspirational or unrealistic bids (for example, plans relying on future events or circumstances that cannot be predicted with certainty) are likely to score poorly.

Criterion 2: Credibility of project proposals to deliver rapid progress against achieving programme aims and the outcomes set out in the bid

82. This criterion assesses the credibility of the project proposals and the likelihood that they will contribute to achieving the aims of the programme and the delivery of the proposed activity set out in the bid within the funding timeframes.
83. Funding will be prioritised for programmes that deliver against standards with currently lower take-up at a national level (see Annex D). Bids that request funding to support standards that currently have the highest take-up at a national level will score poorly, unless they demonstrate strong evidence for funding i.e. evidence of a specific local or regional skills need or evidence that the proposal addresses gaps in provision.
84. Question 1 of Table 5 of the bidding document asks providers to provide a brief commentary on how the proposals intend to meet funding aims, as outlined in paragraph 16 and the evidence that has been used to inform proposals.
85. Bids that demonstrate a connection to the provider's wider strategic approach will likely score higher. This could include evidence of:
 - a. Alignment with institutional strategies for skills, learning and teaching, equality and diversity and access and participation plans (APPs).¹⁸
 - b. Alignment with other available funding streams, such as the £8 million SPG formulaic allocation for degree apprenticeships in 2022-23,¹⁹ OfS capital funding for 2022-23 until 2024-25²⁰ and the Skills Injection Fund (SIF) 1 and 2.²¹
 - c. Engagement with employers and Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).²²

¹⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/.

¹⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/mid-year-allocations-of-recurrent-funding-for-2022-23/.

²⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/capital-funding-for-financial-years-2022-23-to-2024-25/.

²¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-technical-education-skills-injection-fund-2/higher-technical-education-skills-injection-fund-2-guidance-for-applicants>.

²² See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-meeting-local-skills-needs-to-support-growth/local-skills-improvement-plans-lsips-and-strategic-development-funding-sdf>.

86. Bids that are informed by evaluation of current provision or evidence of effective practice are likely to score higher.
87. Bids must provide the estimated numbers of apprenticeship starts (against each proposed standard). This is collected in Table 4 and will also be used to assess Criterion 1 and Criterion 3, as outlined in paragraph 78(d). Bids that can evidence that the predicted numbers included in the bid are credible, realistic and will deliver sustained growth are likely to score higher.

Cross-cutting theme: Increasing equality of opportunity in Level 6 degree apprenticeships

88. Bids that only propose to deliver new apprenticeship standards may describe how they will contribute to increasing the equality of opportunity of apprenticeship starts (see the cross-cutting theme outlined in paragraphs 27 to 32). However, we will only score bids on the cross-cutting theme in Wave 1 if the proposal relates to increasing capacity on existing degree apprenticeships.
89. Bids that propose to increase capacity and starts on current provision must evidence how the proposal will address the cross-cutting theme. Bids that include activity to widen participation on degree apprenticeships at Level 6 for the groups identified in paragraph 31 are likely to score higher.
90. Bids that only propose to increase capacity and numbers of starts on current Level 6 apprenticeship provision must score at least a 2 (as detailed in Table D below) on criterion 2 to be considered fundable.

Criterion 3: Value for money and project and risk management

91. Bids should set out clearly how the project will provide value for money and how the project, and any associated risks, will be well managed.
92. Question 2 of Table 5 asks providers to provide a brief commentary in relation to this criterion. This could include:
- a. Any other funding streams that will be used to support the development of degree apprenticeships, including any co-investment from the provider, partners or employers. Please state whether the contribution is cash, in kind, capital, revenue or combinations of these, with estimated monetary values. Any contributions in kind must be given a monetary value.
 - b. Information regarding costs that have already been covered or committed to by other funding streams and how the funding sought from the OfS will provide additional value to accelerate current development plans, rather than duplicate or replace existing funding.
 - c. The roles and contributions of any employer or other partners involved in the project and the benefits of the project for those partners. Please note that we are not accepting collaborative bids in Wave 1 so funding should only be used to support the delivery of activity by the provider submitting the bid.
 - d. Project management. Bids should detail timelines and project milestones for the proposed activity and evidence how it will manage those activities to ensure successful delivery.

- e. Risk management. Bids should clearly identify any risk factors that are likely to impact on the success of the project, and how these risks will be managed.
- f. Governance and oversight. Bids should include detail on proposed project governance structures and oversight of financial management. This should be appropriate to the amount of funding requested and the complexity of the proposals.
- g. Contingency plans, and any dependences that would impact the project, for example internal and external approval processes.

93. As outlined in paragraph 47, the minimum amount of funding bid for is £50,000 with a maximum of £100,000 per proposed apprenticeship standard. Bids must explain how the amount of funding sought will deliver value for money in terms of the benefits that the project will bring for students and employers.
94. Bids that can provide evidence of other funding streams to support the delivery of the project and how the funding requested through this competition provides additionality and not duplication are likely to score higher.
95. We are inviting individual bids for Wave 1 funding. We consider it unlikely that sub-contracting activity to third party agencies will deliver value for money in this context. Bids that include sub-contracted activity are likely to score poorly unless there is strong evidence that the provider would not otherwise be able to deliver the project outcomes without this activity.
96. We are unlikely to consider that funding to deliver essential support services that providers should already be making available to students, such as teaching and learning support or welfare and student support services, will deliver value for money. Bids that include activity that we consider that providers should already be making available to students are likely to score poorly, unless there is strong evidence that the activity will accelerate plans to expand Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision and the provider would not otherwise be able to deliver the project outcomes without this activity. Providers should note that any activity fundable by ESFA for degree apprenticeships is out of scope for this funding competition.
97. Bids that lack clarity, or where the OfS considers that the sums requested appear disproportionate to the benefits of the project, are likely to score poorly. Bids that provide insufficient detail to assure the OfS that the project and associated risks will be effectively managed (including to minimise slippage and avoid underspending against the funding sought by the end 31 July 2024) will also likely score poorly.

Proposed approach to scoring and prioritisation for Wave 1 funding distributed through this competition

98. Bids will be assessed by OfS officers according to the scoring criteria outlined in paragraph 100. An internal OfS panel will then quality assure the assessment process and finalise recommendations for funding. The panel will consider our aim to fund a portfolio of projects (considering the programme's aims, including regional spread, diversity of providers and diversity of apprenticeship standards) in making its recommendations.

99. Final decisions will be made by the Director for Fair Access and Participation according to the OfS Scheme of Delegation (Part 8, row 11).²³

Scoring criteria

100. We will score each criterion on a scale from 0 to 4 according to the scale set out in Table D. The maximum score for a bid is therefore twelve.

Table D: Scoring criteria

Score		Description
4	Excellent	Clear, well-reasoned and evidenced explanation of how the bid meets the criteria. No material weaknesses in explanation or the evidence referred to or provided.
3	Very good	Clear, well-reasoned and evidenced explanation of how the bid meets the criteria. Some gaps in explanation or the evidence referred to or provided, but not material.
2	Satisfactory	Basic explanation and evidence provided for how the bid meets the criteria. Substantial gaps in evidence referred to or provided, but not material.
1	Poor	Minimal explanation of how the bid meets the criteria and/or minimal evidence to support the bid. Bid contains material inconsistencies or weaknesses in the explanation or evidence referred to.
0	No score	No explanation of how the bid meets the criteria and/or no evidence to support the bid. Bid contains significant material inconsistencies or weaknesses in the explanation or evidence referred to.

101. Providers should be aware that, in reaching final decisions, we will look to ensure we are able to offer an overall package of support across a broad group of providers that we consider best meets the programme aims set out in paragraph 16. Final scores will be reviewed and moderated by an internal OfS panel to inform recommendations to the Director for Fair Access and Participation.

102. Bids that score 0 on any of the criteria will not be considered for funding under Wave 1.

103. Bids that cannot demonstrate that the funding requested will be spent before 31 July 2024 or that score less than 2 on Criterion 1, will not be considered for funding under Wave 1.

104. Bids that only propose to increase capacity and numbers of starts on current Level 6 apprenticeship provision that cannot demonstrate that they will contribute towards the cross-cutting theme to increase equality of opportunity and score less than 2 on Criterion 2, will not be considered for funding under Wave 1.

²³ See 'Scheme of delegation', available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/who-we-are/our-board-and-committees/.

105. We anticipate supporting a wide range of projects, to deliver a diverse set of evidence-based bids, including ensuring we have a wide geographical spread of providers and apprenticeship standards. The final number of funded projects will depend on the quality of bids received, available funding, and the judgements and recommendations made through the assessment process. We may also consider advice from the Department for Education on the effect of the proposed growth on broader costs to government.
106. Where we are unable to afford to support all bids with a particular score using the process outlined in paragraph 98, the Director for Fair Access and Participation will particularly consider our aim to fund a portfolio of projects. This will take account of the programme's aims outlined in paragraph 16, the regional spread and diversity of providers, and the diversity of apprenticeship standards.
107. In reaching decisions on which bids to support, we may offer a successful bidder an allocation that is less than the sum it has bid for. Providers would be asked to consider whether they could progress their project under these circumstances. If a provider is unable to progress its project because reduced funding is offered, we will withdraw the offer and reallocate the funding to other providers. We may also withdraw the offer of funding if, in response, the provider proposes to significantly reduce the scope of the project it bid for, such that the reduced scope would not have scored sufficiently to be prioritised for funding. We will recover funding that is not used for the purposes intended within the funding period that spans academic year 2023-24.

Waves 2 and 3: Bid requirements and assessment criteria

Considerations for submitting bids in Waves 2 and 3

108. The Waves 2 and 3 submission periods of the funding competition are open to all providers that meet the eligibility criteria outlined in paragraphs 53 to 57. We are inviting bids from providers that already offer degree apprenticeships and are looking to expand provision (Strand 1) and those that are new to the degree apprenticeship market (Strand 2). In Waves 2 and 3 we are also inviting collaborative bids.
109. Providers that were successful for funding in Wave 1 may submit a further bid in each of Waves 2 and 3 if they can demonstrate a need that further funding will allow them to continue to deliver progress against the aims of the funding competition.
110. We will consider bids in Waves 2 and 3 from providers that were unsuccessful in their bid for funding in Wave 1.
111. Proposals under Wave 2 and 3 should demonstrate:
 - a. Ambition in terms of the proposed growth in the number of apprenticeship standards delivered and/or the likely number of apprenticeship starts in the short and medium term.
 - b. Credibility in terms of the likelihood that the plans will deliver the anticipated aims of the funding and the outcomes set out in the bid.
 - c. The extent to which the bid will contribute to addressing the risks to equality of opportunity identified for particular groups of students, as outlined in paragraphs 27 to 32.
112. We expect that bids for this wave may include the following activities. However, this is a non-exhaustive list and we will consider any activity that will contribute to the programme aims and which is not specified as out of scope for funding in Table B, page 8:
 - a. Upskilling and training for staff.
 - b. Recruitment of new staff.
 - c. Staff time to develop proposals.
 - d. Activity to increase starts on degree apprenticeships at level 6, including employer engagement, targeted marketing and recruitment activity, delivery of outreach and information, advice and guidance.
 - e. Engagement or collaborative activity with employers, higher education partners or other organisations.
113. Bids are likely to score higher if they demonstrate:

- a. A clear and realistic project plan and that the provider is ready for the funding sought.
- b. The proposal is underpinned by a strategic approach and firm evidence base. This could include:
 - i. alignment with institutional strategies for skills, learning and teaching, equality and diversity and access and participation plans (APPs)²⁴.
 - ii. work set out in the provider's access and participation plan or risks outlined in the OfS's Equality of Opportunity Risk Register
 - iii. links to Uni Connect partnerships
 - iv. alignment with other available funding streams, such as the £8 million SPG formulaic allocation for degree apprenticeships in 2022-23²⁵, OfS capital funding for 2022-23 until 2024-25²⁶ and the Skills Injection Fund (SIF) 1 and 2²⁷ and any other funding streams
 - v. engagement with Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs)²⁸
 - vi. other employer links and funding i.e. DfE degree apprenticeship workforce development (AWD) programme.
- c. That their proposal is informed by the needs of students and relevant employers.

114. Providers should note that we will not commit any OfS funding beyond 31 July 2025 through Waves 2 and 3. All funding allocated through these waves must be spent in full, and in accordance with the terms and conditions, by this date.

115. Providers that submit a bid in Waves 1 and/or 2 may also submit a further bid for funding in Wave 3, subject to amended guidance.

Eligibility criteria

116. As outlined in paragraphs 53 to 57, to be eligible to bid for funding through Waves 2 and 3, providers must be:

²⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/.

²⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/mid-year-allocations-of-recurrent-funding-for-2022-23/.

²⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/capital-funding-for-financial-years-2022-23-to-2024-25/.

²⁷ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-technical-education-skills-injection-fund-2/higher-technical-education-skills-injection-fund-2-guidance-for-applicants>.

²⁸ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-meeting-local-skills-needs-to-support-growth/local-skills-improvement-plans-lsips-and-strategic-development-funding-sdf>.

- a. OfS-registered (or have applied to register) in the Approved (fee cap) category of registration. (A provider must be registered in the Approved (fee cap) category by the time OfS funding starts.)²⁹
- b. Currently offering Level 6 degree apprenticeships (Strand 1) or planning to begin developing Level 6 degree apprenticeships (Strand 2). All providers, including those involved in collaborative bids, must meet the eligibility criteria for the relevant strand in which they are applying for funding, as outlined below.
 - i. **Strand 1** – Expansion of existing provision among providers already offering degree apprenticeships:
 1. Registered on the apprenticeship provider and assessment register (APAR)³⁰
 2. Offering apprenticeships programmes in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic year.
 - ii. **Strand 2** – Expansion of provision among providers new to the degree apprenticeships market:
 1. Either in the process of registering on the APAR **or** having sought approval from the appropriate decision makers at the provider to apply to the APAR. Evidence must be provided in support (i.e. confirmation of application process, confirmation in letter of support from accountable officer).

Process

117. Providers wishing to bid in Wave 2 must do so by downloading and completing the bidding template (example shown at Annex B). The Wave 3 template will be made available in May 2024.
118. Providers must complete all sections of the template, including numerical data collection and narrative information.
119. The bidding template for Waves 2 and 3 will ask bidders to provide detail of the proposed degree apprenticeship standards that the bid intends to expand or develop. This information is collected in Table 6.
120. Individual bids must state whether they are applying for funding under Strand 1 (expansion of current provision) or Strand 2 (new provider to the degree apprenticeship market).
121. Collaborative bids may apply under both strands. However, they must ensure that all collaborative partners meet the relevant eligibility criteria for the strand that applies to them, as outlined in paragraph 116(b)(i)(ii). This information is collected in the yellow section of Table 3 of the bidding template.

²⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/#/.

³⁰ See <https://download.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/apar>.

122. For bids applying under Strand 1, providers must state whether they are applying for funding to deliver new apprenticeship standards, increase capacity and starts on current apprenticeship standards, or both. This information is collected in the 'Current status' column of Table 6 of the bidding template, where providers can state for each apprenticeship standard whether it is a new or an existing apprenticeship.
123. Providers must select which target groups they aim to target through the bid. If the bid proposes to target groups not identified in paragraph 31, a rationale must be provided. This information is collected in Question 3a of Table 7 of the bidding template.
124. We require signed letters of support from the accountable officer of the lead higher education provider, and the director of finance at the lead higher education provider. These letters should be submitted in PDF format and submitted alongside the bidding template to degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk by the deadline for Wave 2 submissions of **1700 on 19 December 2023**. The deadline for Wave 3 submissions is expected in June 2024 and will be confirmed in May 2024.
125. For collaborative bids we require a signed letter of support from the accountable officer (or equivalent) at all named partners.
126. For providers (including partner providers) that are new to the degree apprenticeship market (Strand 2) the letter of support must provide evidence that the bid meets the eligibility criteria outlined in paragraph 116.

Assessment criteria

127. The OfS will assess each bid against the following criteria:
- **Criterion 1** – the ambition of the project proposals to expand provision of apprenticeship standards with currently lower uptake
 - **Criterion 2** – the credibility of project proposals to contribute to achieving the programme aims and the outcomes set out in the bid
 - **Criterion 3** – the extent to which the bid will contribute to addressing equality of opportunity on Level 6 degree apprenticeships
 - **Criterion 4** – the project and associated risks will be well-managed, and the project will provide value for money.
128. Our assessments of bids in Waves 2 and 3 will be proportionate, taking into account:
- provider context and the context of the bid as a whole, including consideration of the size of the bid
 - the current status of apprenticeship delivery and experience at the provider(s) involved in the bid
 - the strand(s) that the bid intends to deliver.

129. For example, we would expect project management arrangements in bids for large amounts of funding or with multiple partners to be more detailed and sophisticated than those for smaller or single provider bids.
130. We expect that, to make a credible bid, providers that are currently offering degree apprenticeship provision and applying under Strand 1 of the funding competition should demonstrate more fully developed plans and evidence than providers that are new to the degree apprenticeship market (Strand 2), where available evidence may be more limited.

Criterion 1: Ambition of the project proposals to expand provision of apprenticeship standards with currently lower uptake

131. This criterion assesses the ambition of the project proposals to deliver growth in the number of apprenticeship standards delivered and/or the likely number of apprenticeship starts in the short and medium term.
132. Bids must demonstrate how funding will be used to support the development of new Level 6 degree apprenticeship standards and/or increase capacity and the numbers of starts on existing provision and/or support new providers to enter the degree apprenticeship market.
133. Table 6 of the bidding template asks providers to:
- Detail the proposed apprenticeship standards the funding will be used for.
 - Detail what stage of delivery their degree apprenticeship provision is currently at.
 - Provide an estimate of the number of starts the bidder expects on the degree apprenticeship courses in each of the next three academic years. The estimated numbers will provide an indication of the growth the bid intends to deliver as a result of this funding. This will also contribute to the OfS assessment of Criterion 2 (credibility) and Criterion 4 (value for money). The OfS does not intend to link the release of funding to delivery of the specific student numbers included in these estimates.
134. Question 1 of Table 7 of the bidding document asks providers to provide further detailed commentary to evidence the ambition of the project proposals and the information provided in Table 6. In their response to Question 1 of Table 7, providers should:
- a. Provide a commentary regarding how the provider intends to make progress in the development or expansion of their apprenticeship provision by the end of July 2025.
 - b. Provide information on the activity that funding will be used for to increase the numbers of starts on existing and/or new degree apprenticeships provision, including details of plans for achieving that growth.
135. Funding will be prioritised for programmes that deliver against standards with currently lower take-up at a national level (see Annex D). Bids that request funding to support standards that currently have the highest take-up at a national level will score poorly unless they demonstrate strong evidence for funding i.e. evidence of a specific local or regional skills need or evidence that the proposal addresses gaps in provision.

136. Bids that can demonstrate that significant progress will be achieved, in terms of proposed growth, taking into account provider context, before 31 July 2025 will score higher. This could include:
- ambitious growth in starts in academic years 2024-25 and 2025-26 compared with current Level 6 apprenticeship provision
 - recruitment to new standards in the 2024-25 and/or 2025-26 academic years
 - new providers accelerating plans to deliver degree apprenticeship provision for 2025-26 starts.
137. Bids that include ambitious estimates for the number of starts expected in future years and which are underpinned by credible evidence will score higher. We will expect bids to describe their ambition in their context. This might mean that bids maintain or increase growth seen on existing degree apprenticeships between 2020-21 and 2021-22. However, in some contexts, for example new standards or projects that seek to address equality of opportunity, ambitious projects may offer slower, but harder to achieve growth.
138. Purely aspirational or unrealistic bids (for example, plans relying on future events or circumstances that cannot be predicted with certainty) are likely to score poorly.

Criterion 2: Credibility of project proposals to contribute to achieving the programme aims and the outcomes set out in the bid

139. This criterion assesses the credibility of the project proposals and the likelihood that they will contribute to achieving the aims of the programme to expand degree apprenticeship provision where there is currently lower uptake at a national level and local level.
140. Question 2 of Table 7 of the bidding document asks providers to provide information on the rationale for the bid and any evidence that has been used to inform the proposals. We will use this commentary along with the quantitative information collected in Table 6 to assess this criteria. Providers should:
- Provide detail and a rationale on the bid proposals, the proposed ambition of the bid and likelihood of the proposal to make progress in the expansion of this provision by the end of July 2025.
 - Provide information on the evidence that has been used to inform the proposed apprenticeship standards.
 - Provide information on how the proposal will increase the number of starts on existing and/or new degree apprenticeships standards. Bids that can demonstrate that proposed activities have been informed by prior learning or effective practice are likely to score higher.
 - Provide commentary outlining the evidence supporting the estimated number of starts included in Table 7.
141. Bids are likely to score higher where they:

- propose to fund standards where evidence suggests there has been a lower number of starts or growth, as outlined in Annex D
- address evidenced local and regional skills needs.

142. Bids that demonstrate a strategic approach and are underpinned by evidence as outlined in paragraph 113(b) are likely to score higher.

143. Bids must include credible estimates of starts over the next three years. Bids that provide detail of the evidence that has been used to inform these estimates are likely to score higher. This could include:

- national, regional or provider level data on recent starts on Level 6 provision and within related Level 4 and 5 apprenticeship standards
- evidence of local or regional population data
- engagement with employers to understand demand.

144. Bids that can evidence that the estimated number of starts included in the bid are credible, realistic and will deliver sustained growth are likely to score higher. Bids that are unable to provide evidence of how they have informed their estimates are likely to score more poorly.

Criterion 3: Extent to which the bid will contribute to increasing equality of opportunity on Level 6 degree apprenticeships

145. This criterion assesses the credibility of the project proposals and the likelihood that they will contribute to increasing equality of opportunity on Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision.

146. Question 3 of Table 7 of the bidding document asks providers to provide a narrative response regarding how they intend to increase the diversity of starts on the degree apprenticeship programmes named in Table 6. Providers should:

- a. Specify the target underrepresented groups that the proposals aim to support. This is collected in Question 3a.
- b. Provide detail of the evidence that has been used to inform the target groups. This could include:
 - i. analysis of national data outlined in Annex C and using the OfS access and participation data dashboard³¹
 - ii. analysis of internal provider data where available
 - iii. analysis of available local or national data

³¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/.

- iv. detail about how the target groups align with the provider's access and participation plan or risks outlined in the OfS's Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.³²
 - c. Provide detail of the activity that will be delivered to increase equality of opportunity on degree apprenticeships at Level 6.
147. If a bid proposes to target other groups other than those outlined in paragraph 31, clear evidence of underrepresentation in the local, provider or apprenticeship standard context must be provided. Bids that are unable to provide evidence of how they have informed their target groups are likely to score more poorly.
148. Bids that include innovative approaches to addressing equality of opportunity underpinned by plans to evaluate the outcomes of any new or innovative approaches are likely to score higher.
149. Bids must demonstrate how their proposed activity will help to increase diversity. Outreach and marketing activity designed to attract harder-to-reach groups and based on evidence of effective practice are likely to score higher.

Criterion 4: Value for money and project and risk management

150. Bids should set out clearly how the project will provide value for money and how the project, and any associated risks will be well managed.
151. Bids should demonstrate (by referring to evidence, such as written plans, strategic decisions or stakeholder views) that:
- there is a need for the proposal and that the provider has realistic plans in place to address this need
 - the provider is ready to deliver the activity for which funding is sought.
152. We will use the information collected in the following tables in the bidding template to assess this criterion:
- Table 4: Funding and finance – providers must provide detail of the total OfS funding requested in the academic year 2023-24 and 2024-25 along with information on any other co-investment and contributions in kind from the lead provider or other project partners.
 - Table 5: Profile of funding requested – providers must set out the proposed funding profile for the project. Providers should note we are unable to fund in advance of need (that is, in advance of the provider incurring the expense), therefore the funding profile requested must align with anticipated spend.
 - Table 8: Project inputs, outputs, and outcomes – bids must set out the key inputs, activities, outputs and outcome for the proposed project.

³² Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/.

- Table 9: Project risks – bids must clearly identify any risk factors that are likely to impact on the success of the project, and how these impacts will be managed.

153. Alongside the information collected above, Question 4 of Table 7 in the bidding template asks providers to give a brief commentary on how the project will provide value for money and how the project and any associated risks will be managed:

- a. How the amount of funding requested provides value for money in relation to the volume of proposed activities and the estimated growth in starts, and how it relates to meeting the programme aims described in paragraph 16.
- b. The benefits for those partners listed as contributing to the project in Table 3 of the bidding template. Bids that include letters of support from partners involved in the project are likely to score higher.
- c. Project management. Bids should detail management of the projects specified and provide timelines and project milestones for the programme.
- d. Governance and oversight. Bids should include detail on proposed project governance structures and oversight of financial management. This should be appropriate to the amount of funding requested and the complexity of the proposals.
- e. Contingency plans, and any dependences that would impact the project, for example internal and external validation processes.

154. We expect the funding requested to reflect proposed activities, ambition, and outcomes. Purely aspirational or unrealistic bids (for example, plans relying on future events or circumstances that cannot be predicted with certainty) are likely to score poorly.

155. Bids that can provide evidence of other funding streams to support the delivery of the project and how the funding requested through this competition provides additionality and not duplication are likely to score higher.

156. While we are accepting collaborative bids in Waves 2 and 3 and funding may be devolved to partners included in the bid, we are unlikely to consider that simply sub-contracting activity to third party agencies will deliver value for money. Bids that include such activity are likely to score poorly unless there is strong evidence that the provider would not otherwise be able to deliver the project outcomes without this activity.

157. We are unlikely to consider that funding to deliver essential support services that providers should already be making available to students, such as teaching and learning support or welfare and student support services, will deliver value for money. Bids that include activity that we consider that providers should already be making available to students are likely to score poorly unless there is strong evidence that the activity will accelerate plans to expand Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision and the provider would not otherwise be able to deliver the project outcomes without this activity. Providers should note that any activity fundable by ESFA for degree apprenticeships is out of scope for this funding competition.

158. The bid must confirm the provider's ability to use all the OfS funding sought with a clear spending profile for the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25. We are not permitted to provide grants in advance of need, and our funding specifically covers the period through to 31 July 2025.

159. For those bids that are funded, all monies must be spent in full by 31 July 2025. We expect the spending profile for the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25, provided in Table 5, to equal the total amount requested in Table 4.
160. Bids should explain how the provider will review progress of the project, and how it will identify and address emerging risks to the success of the project. This could include, for example, a description of how issues such as risk and reporting will be managed.
161. Bids should explain how the amount of funding sought is justified in the context of the benefits that the project will bring, demonstrating value for money for students and employers.
162. Bids that lack clarity, or in which the OfS considers that the sums requested appear disproportionate to the benefits of the project, are likely to score poorly. Bids that provide insufficient detail to assure the OfS that the project and associated risks will be effectively managed (including to minimise slippage and avoid underspending against the funding sought by the end 31 July 2025) will likely score poorly.
163. Providers should note that where a collaborative bid covers multiple projects, our assessment will be for the bid as a whole, not for individual projects within it. To meet Criterion 4, bids must demonstrate that any funding requested will be well-managed, provide value for money and ultimately minimise risks to public funds.
164. We anticipate supporting a wide range of projects, to deliver a diverse set of evidence-based bids, including ensuring we have a wide geographical spread of providers and apprenticeship standards. The final number of funded projects will depend on the quality of bids received, available funding, and the judgements and recommendations made through the assessment process.

Proposed approach to scoring and prioritisation for Wave 2 and 3 funding distributed through this competition

165. Bids will be assessed by OfS officers according to the scoring criteria outlined in paragraph 167. An internal OfS panel will then quality assure the assessment process and finalise recommendations for funding. The panel will consider our aim to fund a portfolio of projects (considering the programme's aims, including the regional spread, diversity of providers and diversity of apprenticeship standards) in making its recommendations.
166. Final decisions will be made by the Director for Fair Access and Participation according to the OfS Scheme of Delegation (Part 8, row 11).³³

Scoring criteria

167. We will score each Criterion on a scale from 0 to 4 according to the scale set out in Table E. The maximum score for a bid is therefore sixteen.

³³ See 'Scheme of delegation', available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/who-we-are/our-board-and-committees/.

Table E: Scoring criteria

Score		Description
4	Excellent	Clear, well-reasoned and evidenced explanation of how the bid meets the criteria. No material weaknesses in explanation or the evidence referred to or provided.
3	Very good	Clear, well-reasoned and evidenced explanation of how the bid meets the criteria. Some gaps in explanation or the evidence referred to or provided, but not material.
2	Satisfactory	Basic explanation and evidence provided for how the bid meets the criteria. Substantial gaps in evidence referred to or provided, but not material.
1	Poor	Minimal explanation of how the bid meets the criteria and/or minimal evidence to support the bid. Bid contains material inconsistencies or weaknesses in the explanation or evidence referred to.
0	No score	No explanation of how the bid meets the criteria and/or no evidence to support the bid. Bid contains significant material inconsistencies or weaknesses in the explanation or evidence referred to.

168. Providers should be aware that, in reaching final decisions, we will look to ensure we are able to offer an overall package of support across a broad group of providers that we consider best meets the programme aims set out in paragraph 16. Final scores will be reviewed and moderated by an internal OfS panel to inform recommendations to the Director for Fair Access and Participation.
169. Bids that score 0 on any of the criteria will not be considered for funding under Waves 2 and 3.
170. Where we are unable to afford to support all bids with a particular score using the process outlined in paragraph 165, the Director for Fair Access and Participation will particularly consider our aim to fund a portfolio of projects. This will take into account the programme's aims outlined in paragraph 16, regional spread and diversity of providers, and diversity of apprenticeship standards. We may also consider advice from the Department for Education on the effect of the proposed growth on broader costs to government.
171. In reaching decisions on which bids to support, we may offer a successful bidder an allocation that is less than the sum it has bid for. Providers would be asked to consider whether they could progress their project under these circumstances. If a provider is unable to progress its project because reduced funding is offered, we will withdraw the offer and reallocate the funding to other providers. We may also withdraw the offer of funding if, in response, the provider proposes to significantly reduce the scope of the project it bid for, such that the reduced scope would not have scored sufficiently to be prioritised for funding. We will recover funding that is not used for the purposes intended within the two-year funding period that spans the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Grant funding payments, conditions and monitoring

172. The terms and conditions that apply to OfS grant funding for the 2023-24 academic year, including the arrangements for payment, how it may be used and monitoring arrangements, are included in 'Terms and conditions of funding for 2023-24'³⁴. Terms and conditions of funding for subsequent years will be issued separately. We will issue separate grant award letters to all successful funded projects in each wave setting out the terms and conditions of the funding for the relevant wave of the programme. Funding award letters must be formally agreed before grant payments will begin.
173. We expect to announce the outcomes of the bidding competition to providers as set out in Table A on page 2.
174. Funding is provided on an academic year basis and must be used for the purposes intended, in accordance with the terms and conditions that apply. The OfS will not make payments to providers before they need it. So, providers must use grant funding in full within the relevant funding period for which they are provided.
175. In addition, any funding awarded through this bidding competition must be used:
- a. On activity and expenditure items included in the provider's successful bid. We will expect to monitor exactly what the monies were spent on.
 - b. In accordance with any other terms and conditions that we may specify when we award the grant.
176. If our monitoring of a provider's delivery of its project does not give us confidence that it will be able to use all the funding awarded through this competition within the relevant funding period, and in line with the terms and conditions that apply, we may withdraw the offer of funding in whole or part. The circumstances in which we might do this may include significant delays in delivery (for whatever reason) compared with the timetable set out in the provider's bid (or as may subsequently be agreed by us) or failure of the provider to engage to our satisfaction in any reporting and monitoring requirements.
177. If we are not satisfied that a provider has used the funds in accordance with the requirements in paragraph 172, or as notified separately, we will reclaim some or all of the funding provided. If providers are unsure whether the use they propose of funding is in line with requirements, they should contact degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk for advice in advance of committing to the expenditure.
178. Funded providers will be subject to individual monitoring arrangements depending on the wave in which they have secured funding, the level of funding awarded and risk assessment. Providers will be expected to report on the delivery against their successful funding proposal according to the following proposed timescales outlined in Table F.

³⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/terms-and-conditions-of-funding-for-2023-24/.

Table F: Proposed monitoring timescales by wave

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3³⁵
Interim reporting	March 2024	September 2024 and March 2025	March 2025
Final reporting	September 2024	September 2025	September 2025

179. We will take a risk-based, proportionate approach to monitoring, to ensure value for money and the delivery of targets, objectives, outputs and outcomes. We may undertake visits to and meetings with projects to better understand delivery, impacts and outcomes, and to support analysis and dissemination.
180. We may commission an independent evaluation of the overall scheme and will notify the funded projects of this work accordingly. We expect all funded providers to work with the OfS and the evaluators in an open and transparent way, to share learning and best practice for the benefit of students and the wider higher education sector, and to provide detailed analysis of successful and unsuccessful activities to understand lessons learnt. To support this, we will hold workshops and other engagements to facilitate the forming of a programme network. We expect all funded providers to engage in such activity.
181. We will consider what other monitoring or evaluation data may be collected to understand impact and programme outcomes. This may include collection of this data via regular project monitoring reporting or where data is available to us from the designated data body (DDB) or ESFA. Details of any further monitoring, evaluation or data collection requirements will be outlined in the terms and conditions of funding.
182. At the end of each academic year, the OfS will request monitoring information from providers to satisfy us that spending is aligned with our terms and conditions of funding, and that the outlined scope and scale of the project is being delivered. We will actively monitor spending on a yearly basis, to ensure that the total funding is spent across all providers collectively to meet the budget. Providers must notify the OfS immediately of any changes in the circumstances or delivery plans of individual projects, to ensure that government funding is being used appropriately. We reserve the right to review the offer of funding if there are significant changes to project plans or delays to its delivery. Providers must send details of any proposed change or expected delay degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk as soon as possible, so that these can be reviewed and assessed without delay.

³⁵ We anticipate that the timetable for Wave 3 will be an addendum to the September 2023 guidance. Exact timelines for Wave 3 monitoring will be confirmed at this point.

Further information and next steps

183. Eligible higher education providers are invited to download and complete the relevant bidding templates (see Annex A for Wave 1 and Annex B for Wave 2) and email it to [degree apprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk) by the timescales outlined in Table A.
184. Guidance and bidding templates for Wave 3 will be published in May 2024.
185. We will be hosting a webinar³⁶ on 19 October 2023 to provide an overview of the funding competition and guidance and answer questions from providers and employers.
186. If you have any questions about this competition, please email degreeapprenticeships@officeforstudents.org.uk.

³⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/degree-apprenticeships-funding-competition/.



© The Office for Students copyright 2023

This publication is available under the Open Government Licence 3.0 except where it indicates that the copyright for images or text is owned elsewhere.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/