



# Supporting Apprentices

## Guidance for Employers

Safeguarding, Wellbeing, Inclusion and Early Intervention

*University of Wolverhampton Degree Apprenticeships*

### Introduction: Working in Partnership to Support Apprentices

Employing a degree apprentice is a significant investment and a clear commitment to developing skills, talent and professional capability. Apprentices balance **academic study, professional practice and personal responsibilities**, often across different environments and expectations.

This guide has been developed to support employers in working **in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton** to support apprentices holistically. It goes beyond safeguarding alone to include **mental health and wellbeing, accessibility and disability, and early intervention** where concerns arise.

### Employer duty and shared responsibility

Employers have a duty to comply with all relevant **UK legislation and statutory responsibilities**, including those relating to health and safety, safeguarding, equality and employee wellbeing. Within apprenticeship provision, this includes a responsibility to take reasonable steps to support an apprentice's **welfare, safety and wellbeing in the workplace**, and to seek appropriate advice where concerns arise.

While the University of Wolverhampton holds overall responsibility for safeguarding within apprenticeship provision, employers play a **critical frontline role**. Apprentices spend a significant proportion of their time in the workplace, and employers are often best placed to notice **early changes in behaviour, engagement or wellbeing**.

We recognise that safeguarding and learner welfare can feel complex, particularly where concerns relate not only to the workplace but also to an apprentice's **personal circumstances, health or wider wellbeing**. Employers are **not expected to be experts** in safeguarding, mental health or educational support, nor to manage risk alone.

This guidance has therefore been developed to:



- clarify the employer's role and responsibilities
- explain how safeguarding and support operate in partnership with the University
- outline when and how to seek advice or raise concerns
- support employers to integrate this information into existing internal procedures

Early communication and proportionate action are central to this approach. Many concerns can be addressed effectively when raised early, reducing risk for apprentices, employers and the University alike.

## Employer Summary: What You Need to Know

### Your role as an employer

You are expected to:

- provide a safe and supportive working environment
- notice changes in behaviour, engagement or wellbeing
- raise concerns early rather than manage them alone
- work collaboratively with the University

You are **not** expected to investigate concerns or determine which support pathway applies.

### When to contact the University

You should contact the University if you are concerned about:

- an apprentice's safety or wellbeing
- mental health or emotional distress
- disability, health or pregnancy-related impact on work
- repeated absence or disengagement
- professional conduct or suitability
- anything that "doesn't feel right", even if you're unsure why

Professional concern is sufficient — certainty is not required.

### What not to do

- Do not investigate safeguarding concerns yourself
- Do not delay because you are unsure which pathway applies
- Do not assume the University already knows
- Do not manage risk alone

### Early conversations prevent escalation.

You are not expected to solve the problem — only to raise it.



# Section 1: Safeguarding and PREVENT

## Safeguarding: Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding within apprenticeship provision is a **shared responsibility** between the University and employers. Each has distinct but complementary roles in ensuring apprentices are safe, supported and able to thrive in both academic and workplace environments.

### The University's role

The University of Wolverhampton is responsible for providing a **robust safeguarding framework** across apprenticeship provision. This includes:

- ensuring employers are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities through clear guidance and ongoing communication
- ensuring apprentices understand what safeguarding is, why it matters, and how to access University support services
- providing safeguarding training for all University staff who work with apprentices
- ensuring that staff in roles which meet legislative or statutory definitions are subject to appropriate **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks**, including:
  - roles involving apprentices aged 16–18
  - roles where professional or regulatory requirements apply
- maintaining open and effective communication with employers, recognising that apprentices may disclose concerns differently depending on context and relationship

The University holds overall responsibility for safeguarding oversight and escalation and will coordinate responses where concerns are raised.

### The employer's role

Employers play a critical frontline role in safeguarding, as apprentices spend a significant proportion of their time in the workplace.

Employers are expected to:

- familiarise themselves with relevant safeguarding and employment-related legislation
- understand what safeguarding means **in practice** within their organisation and employment context
- take reasonable steps to ensure apprentices' welfare, safety and wellbeing in the workplace
- ensure that staff working with apprentices in positions of trust are suitable for their role and do not pose a risk
- ensure that any staff working with young people or vulnerable individuals have the **appropriate DBS checks**, where required
- identify (where possible) a named safeguarding contact within the organisation
- ensure the named safeguarding contact:
  - is identified during apprenticeship onboarding and pre-eligibility checks
  - has read and understands the University Safeguarding Policy and expectations



Employers are **not expected to investigate safeguarding concerns** or manage risk alone. Where concerns arise, they should be shared promptly with the University

## Prevent Duty

Under the **Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015**, universities are required to have *due regard* to the need to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism.

There is no single profile or pathway into extremism. Vulnerability can arise from a **combination of factors**, including personal circumstances, identity, relationships, online influence and wider social pressures. Extremism can include **non-violent activity** as well as violent ideologies.

All apprentices studying at the University are expected to engage with Prevent-related learning as part of their programme.

## The University's role

The University fulfils its Prevent responsibilities by:

- providing training for university staff so they understand the Prevent Duty and how to recognise and respond to concerns
- maintaining clear procedures so concerns can be escalated promptly to specialist teams
- providing opportunities for apprentices to explore complex issues in a safe, structured and educational way
- ensuring apprentices can express views in **non-extremist, respectful and lawful ways**
- creating an environment that supports **free speech, critical thinking and professional values**

## The employer's role

Employers are expected to support the principles that underpin the Prevent Duty by:

- demonstrating a commitment to professional values, respect and inclusion in the workplace
- remaining alert to concerning changes in behaviour or expression
- seeking specialist advice if concerns arise, rather than attempting to assess risk independently
- identifying how Prevent-related concerns would be raised within their organisation
- sharing this information with apprentices during onboarding and with their University account manager

Employers are **not expected to determine whether concerns meet a Prevent threshold**. Any concern should be shared so it can be assessed appropriately by trained professional

## What employers need to know



## What safeguarding means

Safeguarding is about **protecting apprentices from harm and promoting wellbeing**. It applies to all apprentices, including adults, and includes concerns arising in:

- the workplace
- placements or professional settings
- online environments
- home or personal circumstances

Safeguarding is not limited to abuse or criminal behaviour. It includes **wider vulnerabilities and contextual risk**.

## Signs that may raise safeguarding concern

Concerns may arise where there are:

- significant changes in behaviour or mood
- distress, anxiety or withdrawal
- unexplained absence or disengagement
- inappropriate behaviour from others
- disclosures about harm, safety or exploitation
- concerns about online behaviour or misuse of power

This list is not exhaustive. If you are unsure, **raise the concern**.

## What employers should do

If you have a safeguarding concern:

1. Act promptly
2. Do not investigate
3. Contact the University using agreed routes
4. Record concerns factually
5. Continue to support the apprentice appropriately

If there is immediate danger, emergency services should always be contacted first.

## What safeguarding is (and isn't)

Safeguarding **is**:

- supportive
- confidential
- proportionate
- led by trained professionals

Safeguarding **is not**:



- disciplinary
- automatically shared with employers
- about blame or fault

## British Values

An important element of the **Prevent Duty** is the promotion of **British values**. These values underpin our democratic society and are embedded in UK law, including legislation such as the **Equality Act 2010**.

Within apprenticeship provision, British values are not taught in isolation. They are reflected in **everyday professional behaviour**, workplace expectations and how individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

British values are described as:

- **Democracy**
- **The rule of law**
- **Individual liberty and mutual respect**
- **Tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs**

Apprentices are encouraged to explore ideas, challenge viewpoints and develop professional judgement in contexts where these values are **recognised, upheld and respected**.

### The University's role

The University of Wolverhampton promotes British values across apprenticeship provision by:

- embedding British values throughout apprenticeship programmes and learning activity
- providing structured opportunities for apprentices to explore how British values shape society, workplaces and professional practice
- supporting apprentices to apply these values to real-world and professional contexts
- encouraging respectful dialogue, critical thinking and lawful expression of views
- promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, including respect for **protected characteristics** outlined in the Equality Act 2010

This approach ensures that British values are experienced as **living principles**, not abstract concepts.

### The employer's role

Employers play a key role in reinforcing British values through workplace culture and professional practice. Employers are expected to:

- demonstrate a clear commitment to British values within their organisation
- ensure apprentices are treated fairly, lawfully and with respect
- provide opportunities for apprentices to experience British values in action, for example through:



- inclusive decision-making
- clear policies and procedures
- respect for diversity and difference
- appropriate challenge and accountability
- adhere to the requirements of the **Equality Act 2010** and relevant employment legislation

Workplace behaviours, expectations and standards all contribute to how apprentices understand and apply British values in practice.

### Why this matters

Promoting British values:

- supports safeguarding and Prevent responsibilities
- reinforces inclusive, respectful workplaces
- helps apprentices develop ethical and professional judgement
- supports confidence, belonging and engagement
- aligns academic learning with professional conduct

British values are fundamental to preparing apprentices to operate confidently, lawfully and responsibly within modern workplaces and wider society.

## Section 2: Cause for Concern & Support to Study

### When issues don't fit neatly elsewhere

#### What is a Cause for Concern?

A Cause for Concern is used where there are **emerging, complex or overlapping issues** that may not meet safeguarding thresholds but still require coordinated support.

It exists to **prevent escalation** and support apprentices to remain engaged.

#### What might trigger a Cause for Concern?

A Cause for Concern may be appropriate where there are concerns about:

- declining engagement or performance
- ongoing stress or wellbeing difficulties
- workplace or placement challenges
- professional conduct or suitability
- repeated absence or extenuating circumstances
- pregnancy or pregnancy-related health or caring needs
- cumulative pressures affecting ability to cope

Often, it is **patterns**, not single incidents, that matter.



## What is Support to Study?

Support to Study is used when there are **more significant concerns** about an apprentice's ability to engage safely and effectively at that point in time.

It focuses on:

- wellbeing and safety
- readiness to continue
- what support or adjustments may help
- whether a temporary change may be beneficial

Support to Study is **supportive, not punitive**.

## Why early engagement matters

Early engagement:

- protects apprentices
- supports retention and progression
- reduces workplace disruption
- enables proportionate responses

Raising a Cause for Concern is not escalation to sanction — it enables support.

# Section 3: Mental Health and Wellbeing

## Mental health in apprenticeship contexts

Degree apprenticeships are demanding. Periods of stress or low mood are common, but **unaddressed difficulties can escalate**.

Employers play an important role in **noticing early signs and encouraging support**, without attempting to diagnose or manage mental health concerns themselves.

## Signs employers may notice

- changes in behaviour or mood
- increased absence or lateness
- reduced confidence or engagement
- difficulty coping with feedback or pressure
- emotional distress or withdrawal

## What employers should do

- have a supportive, professional conversation where appropriate
- encourage access to university support



- raise concerns if difficulties persist or escalate
- use the Cause for Concern pathway if wellbeing affects engagement or safety

### University mental health support

The University provides:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing support through [Student Life](#)
- clinically informed triage and proportionate intervention
- a **24-hour dedicated helplines** for all learners
- digital wellbeing tools

Employers do not need to decide which service is appropriate.

## Section 4: Accessibility, Disability and Inclusion

### Equality Act responsibilities

Under the **Equality Act 2010**, employers and education providers must ensure disabled individuals are not placed at a substantial disadvantage.

Disability includes:

- physical and mental health conditions
- neurodivergence
- Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) such as dyslexia

### Disclosure and confidentiality

- Disclosure is personal and voluntary
- Information should be shared sensitively and, on a need,-to-know basis
- The University works with apprentices on a **consent-led basis** when liaising with employers

### Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- changes to working practices
- flexibility around tasks or deadlines
- adjustments to communication or supervision
- assistive tools or technology

The [University's Disability and Inclusion](#) team can support employers with advice and coordination.

### Dyslexia, SpLD and neurodiversity



The University **funds diagnostic assessments** for apprentices where appropriate. These assessments:

- support lifelong understanding
- carry forward beyond the apprenticeship

Many apprentices bring significant strengths alongside specific challenges.

Supporting accessibility is about removing barriers — not lowering expectations.

## Section 5: Sexual Harassment, Online Safety and Professional Conduct

### Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment and Misconduct

#### Legal duties and shared responsibility

Creating safe, respectful and inclusive environments is a shared responsibility. Sexual harassment and sexual misconduct can occur in **any setting**, including workplaces, placements, online spaces and social environments connected to work or study.

#### Employer legal duty

Under the **Equality Act 2010**, as strengthened by the **Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023**, employers have a **legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment** of workers in the course of their employment.

This duty is **anticipatory and preventative**. It requires employers to:

- actively consider the risk of sexual harassment
- take reasonable steps to prevent it from occurring
- respond appropriately where concerns are raised

For employers of apprentices, this duty applies fully within the workplace and extends to interactions with colleagues, managers, clients, service users and others connected to work.

#### What do we mean by sexual harassment and misconduct?

Sexual harassment and misconduct can include (but are not limited to):

- unwanted sexual comments, jokes or gestures
- inappropriate messages, images or online behaviour
- unwelcome physical contact
- coercion, pressure or abuse of power
- sexual assault or violence



Harassment may occur **once or repeatedly** and may be perpetrated by colleagues, supervisors, clients, service users or others connected to the workplace.

### The employer's role

In line with legal duties, employers are expected to:

- take **reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment** in the workplace
- promote a culture of dignity, respect and professional boundaries
- ensure clear workplace policies and reporting routes are in place
- ensure apprentices know who to speak to if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable
- respond promptly and appropriately to concerns raised
- **seek advice from the University where concerns involve an apprentice**

Employers are **not expected to investigate safeguarding matters independently** where an apprentice is involved. Concerns should be shared so they can be assessed and managed appropriately.

### The University's role

The University of Wolverhampton takes a **zero-tolerance approach** to sexual harassment and misconduct and is responsible for:

- providing clear policies and guidance for apprentices
- offering accessible reporting routes,
- coordinating safeguarding responses and specialist support
- working in partnership with employers where concerns span workplace and academic contexts
- ensuring responses are lawful, proportionate and trauma-informed

Further information about the University's approach is available via [Staying Safe:](#)

### Why early reporting matters

Early reporting:

- helps employers meet their **legal duty to prevent harassment**
- reduces risk to apprentices and others
- supports fair, timely and proportionate responses
- protects organisations and individuals
- reinforces a culture of respect and accountability

**If something doesn't feel right, it is always appropriate to raise it.**

Please email: [safeguarding@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:safeguarding@wlv.ac.uk)



## Online safety and professional boundaries

Employers should remain alert to:

- online harassment or bullying
- inappropriate digital behaviour
- blurred professional boundaries

These issues may intersect with safeguarding or wellbeing concerns.

## Professional conduct and suitability

Concerns about professional behaviour or suitability should be raised early, particularly in regulated or public-facing roles.

Early discussion allows proportionate, supportive responses.

# Section 6: How to Raise Concerns and What Happens Next

## When to contact the University

Contact the University if you are concerned about:

- [safety or safeguarding](#)
- [wellbeing or mental health](#)
- [disability or accessibility](#)
- [pregnancy-related support](#)
- [professional conduct](#)
- [engagement or attendance](#)

You do not need to determine the correct pathway. Webpages are hyperlinked in the list above

To raise a safeguarding, welfare, professional conduct, sexual harassment or misconduct, support to study concern please email [safeguarding@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:safeguarding@wlv.ac.uk)

For Prevent related concerns please email: [prevent@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:prevent@wlv.ac.uk)

To seek support for disability or accessibility for an apprentice please email: [ALNapprentices@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:ALNapprentices@wlv.ac.uk)



### How concerns are handled

- Concerns are reviewed by trained professionals
- Responses are proportionate and supportive
- Apprentices are involved wherever possible
- Employers are engaged where appropriate

If there is immediate risk, emergency services should always be contacted first.

You are not expected to manage risk alone.

Early communication supports apprentices, employers and the University alike.

Thank you for your role in supporting apprentices to remain **safe, well, engaged and successful.**

Dr Clare Dickens MBE – Director of Student Life and University Principal Safeguarding Lead

