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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for apprentices, employers, training providers, end-point assessment organisations and external quality assurance providers

Updated 19 May 2020

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General information

These are difficult times for employers, apprentices and providers of apprenticeship training and assessment. As part of the cross-government efforts to respond to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is implementing new measures, until further notice, to make it easier for apprenticeships to continue and complete in a different way if they need to, or to break and resume an apprenticeship later when that becomes possible.

This document sets out guidance and some temporary flexibilities that we are introducing to the programme during the outbreak, and provides answers to questions related to these changes and other common questions. It also gives information on apprenticeship training and assessment following the Prime Minister's announcement setting out the steps to restart the economy, and the safer working guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) published on 11 May 2020. Our information should be read alongside the government's COVID-19 guidance and support for businesses (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>).

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) has also published new guidance on the delivery of assessment (<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/response-to-covid-19/>).

This document includes information on:

- how apprenticeship training and assessment can continue in line with the new safer working guidance
- delivering apprenticeships flexibly to those working at home
- furloughed employees continuing apprenticeship training and end-point assessment (EPA), or starting an apprenticeship
- applying the policy on breaks in learning
- delays to EPA
- alternative arrangements and flexibilities for EPA, external quality assurance, and certification
- extensions to contracts for training providers with existing procured contracts
- funding audits and evidence

Specifically, we are:

- supporting employers, providers and apprentices to work together to mutually agree where and how this training takes place. This includes in the workplace where a provider is able to do so safely and where that workplace meets new 'coronavirus secure' guidelines on ensuring the workplace is safe
- confirming flexibilities to allow furloughed apprentices to continue their training, and to take their EPA, and to all existing furloughed employees to start a new apprenticeship, as long as it does not provide services to, or generate revenue for, their employer
- encouraging training providers to deliver training to apprentices remotely and via e-learning as far as is practicable. Allowing the modification of EPA arrangements, including remote assessments wherever practicable and possible. This is in order to support employers, providers and end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) to maintain progress and achievement for apprentices

- clarifying that apprentices ready for assessment, but who cannot be assessed due to coronavirus issues, can have their EPA rescheduled. Apprentices whose gateway is delayed can have an extension to the assessment timeframe
- enabling employers and training providers to report and initiate a break in learning, where the interruption to learning due to coronavirus is greater than 4 weeks
- confirming that, where apprentices are made redundant, it is our ambition to find them alternative employment and continue their apprenticeship as quickly as possible and within 12 weeks
- confirming that, where apprentices are made redundant and are ready to go through gateway, providers and EPAOs are able to make the necessary assessment arrangements to support these apprentices
- confirming that we are extending the transition period onto the apprenticeship service. Funds available for new starts on non-levy procured contracts can now be used until 31 March 2021. All starts will be through the apprenticeship service from 1 April 2021

Our objective for these measures is to support all employers to retain their apprentices and to support apprenticeship training and assessment providers to continue to deliver services to apprentices where possible, so that they may progress and complete their apprenticeships as planned. This guidance will help all parties to plan with more certainty through this difficult period of disruption.

This guidance and these measures start immediately and apply until further notice, unless otherwise stated.

As users of this document will understand, this information, and any changes we are making, are being developed during a time of rapid social and economic developments. We are keeping the developing situation, and our guidance, under review, and will continue updating this guidance as new information is available and/or the situation evolves.

We have also broken down some of this guidance into articles for employers, training providers and EPAOs (<https://help.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/hc/en-gb>), as well as articles for apprentices (<https://help.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/hc/en-gb/sections/360003798540-Apprentice>). These can be found on our Apprenticeship Service Help page.

Unfortunately, we cannot address individual scenarios or circumstances. For queries not covered by this guidance, please contact the apprenticeship service helpline by telephone on 08000 150 600 or email at helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk.

Overview

Government measures to support businesses and employees

Apprentices and their employers, and training and assessment organisations as businesses, are able to access the government's package of measures to support businesses to withstand the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Find details of this support (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>).

We have recently published guidance on how the government's package of financial support can be accessed by further education and apprenticeship providers. This can be found at Coronavirus (COVID-19): financial support for education, early years and children's social care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care/>).

We are continuing to working closely with HM Treasury to monitor how the support packages are benefiting training and assessment organisations and to consider any further action which may be required, and in line with Cabinet Office guidance we are introducing targeted financial support measures in the form of a provider relief scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to retain capacity within the apprenticeships and adult learning sector to deliver the skills we will need to support economic recovery post-outbreak. As part of that, we also want to support providers to maintain delivery to and support for existing learners and employers and, where possible, enable new learners to enrol. Details of the provider relief scheme are available at ESFA post-16 provider relief scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-post-16-provider-relief-scheme>).

Find additional advice and guidance from ACAS (<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>).

Apprenticeship programme response

In this difficult time, employers, training providers and EPAOs are doing their best for their workforce. We want to support that by ensuring that, wherever possible, apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeship, despite any break they have to take as a result of coronavirus. High-quality apprenticeships will be a vital contributor to the economic recovery that will follow the outbreak. We are committed to working with training providers, EPAOs, and external quality assurance (EQA) providers, to mitigate the impacts of this disruption and maintain the integrity of apprenticeships.

Our flexibilities will make it easier for apprentices to continue as an apprentice, by enabling them to take a break from their learning, or do their learning or assessment in a different way to that originally planned, even if they are put on furlough by their employer. As well as ensuring that employers will still have the skills they need for the future, it means that they can temporarily redeploy apprentices without ending their apprenticeship.

Recently, new 'COVID-19 secure' guidelines have been made available to UK employers to help them get their businesses back up and running and workplaces operating as safely as possible. The new guidance, published on 11 May (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>), covers 8 workplace settings which are allowed to be open.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement setting out the steps to restart the economy, we understand that some apprentices may be returning to work and able to continue or restart their training in the workplace.

To ensure that we are supporting as many apprentices to continue their apprenticeship as possible, new arrangements will be supported alongside the existing flexibilities about where apprenticeship training is delivered. Where a provider is able to do so safely, apprenticeships can be delivered:

- remotely where an apprentice is working from home, or is furloughed

- in the workplace where the apprentice is a critical worker or is returning to work, where that workplace meets new 'COVID-19 secure' guidelines on ensuring the workplace is safe

We support employers, providers and apprentices working together to mutually agree where and how this training takes place.

To ensure that apprentices can work to complete their apprenticeship, new assessment arrangements will be supported alongside the existing flexibilities about how apprenticeship assessments are delivered. Where remote assessments can take place, meaning apprentices can stay home, these are preferable. If there is no option to take the assessment remotely, and an assessment centre meets the safer working guidance, then apprentices can travel to them to undertake their EPA.

From 1 June 2020, apprenticeships may start to be delivered in an educational setting again, in line with the guidance on wider opening from 1 June 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/actions-for-education-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>) and guidance for further education providers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/maintaining-education-and-skills-training-provision-further-education-providers>). This includes apprenticeship training taking place in training centres. Educational settings must adhere to the principles set out in the guidance on protective measures in educational settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>).

Detailed guidance for training providers and employers

So that we can support users of this information to be clear on what is changing, and the steps that can be taken, the information in this document is necessarily technical in places.

Disruption to training

Because of illness, caring responsibilities, and operational disruption, apprentices may be unable to attend training, and training providers may be unable to deliver training, over the coming weeks or months. This will create significant implications for apprentices and employers, as well as for training providers and EPAOs whose income may be disrupted.

This may be necessary:

- for an individual, due to illness or self-isolation, or challenges in getting to their place of employment or location for training provision
- for an employer, due to a temporary need to redeploy apprentices to different roles
- for a training provider, due to challenges in providing training or assessment due to staff absences or closure of facilities

Changing apprenticeship learning arrangements

We are encouraging and supporting employers, and training and assessment providers, to make use of distance-learning tools wherever possible and practicable to do so.

Breaks in learning

Apprenticeship funding rules already make provision for disruption in learning:

- less than 4 weeks – in these circumstances neither the employer, nor the training provider, needs to report the interruption, the end-date for the apprenticeship remains the same and there is no change to the payment of funding
- more than 4 weeks – in these circumstances, employers and/or training providers must report a formal break in learning. Where a break in learning is reported, the payment of funding to the training provider will be suspended for the duration of the break in learning

Where breaks in learning are required, it is our goal that apprentices are able promptly to resume their apprenticeship and continue to successful completion of EPA.

Funding rules currently state that a break in learning must be initiated by the apprentice. Employers and training providers can now, temporarily, also report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning is greater than 4 weeks.

Payments to training providers

Apprenticeship training providers will continue to be paid retrospectively for the training they have delivered and can evidence. Data should continue to be submitted via monthly individualised learner record (ILR) submissions and records retained for compliance and audit checks. The ESFA reserves the right to recover funding which was claimed for and paid to the training provider but for which the training provider was found not to be eligible.

Where learners take breaks in learning, training providers must report this in line with the guidance below. Training providers will not receive payments for learners who are on breaks in learning.

Where the coronavirus outbreak results in loss of income due to ceased or reduced delivery of training, training providers should consider their eligibility and apply for the wide range of financial support that HM Treasury has already announced for businesses. Read about the substantial package of support for businesses (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>).

Arrangements for disrupted training delivery in March

As a result of coronavirus, there will have been cases where training providers have delivered training during March, but had to suspend this training before the end of the month. It is likely that this training will have been suspended knowing that the interruption will last longer than 4 weeks, and will constitute a break in learning.

Where training has been delivered in March but a break in learning has begun or is expected to start before the end of March, to ensure payment for these apprentices, training providers should:

- include these learners in their March ILR submission as on programme
- record, retain and submit evidence in the usual way
- record a break in learning in their April ILR submission (the date should be 1 April or later so as not to affect the March payment)

- ensure that these learners are not recorded as permanently withdrawn from their apprenticeship by entering the 'Completion status' field of the ILR as '6', denoting that the learner has temporarily withdrawn from learning due to an agreed break in learning

Training which cannot be delivered in March but for which the training provider receives payment should be delivered within the remainder of the apprenticeship and the previously agreed total cost of the apprenticeship before the planned end-date. Where the apprenticeship does not resume, and the training provider has received payment for training in March, which was not delivered and cannot be delivered in the future, ESFA reserves the right to recover payment.

Arrangements for April and beyond

For a break in learning greater than 4 weeks that begins on or after 1 April:

- the training provider should report this in their April ILR submission using the last day in learning or in the month in which the break of learning commenced
- the apprenticeship should be 'paused' by the employer through the apprenticeship service at the point the break in learning begins. The employer should not 'stop' the apprenticeship through the apprenticeship service as this will prevent it resuming subsequently

When the apprentice, training provider and employer are all ready for the apprenticeship to resume (after the coronavirus pause), training providers should update their ILR data in line with section 5.4 in the training provider support manual, to ensure accurate recording and earnings calculations. Training providers will not receive funding payments for apprentices during a break in learning.

For the avoidance of doubt, during breaks in learning it is not necessary for apprentices to comply with the minimum of 20% off-the-job training requirement. When the break in learning ends, and training resumes, the 20% off-the-job training requirement will apply over the remaining amended duration of the apprenticeship.

Disruption to assessment

In order to maintain progress, achievement and delivery of EPA, we are working with IFATE and Ofqual to introduce some flexibilities. This will enable apprentices to complete their apprenticeship in the event of disruption to assessment.

EQA providers remain responsible for assuring consistency and quality of assessment. EPAOs should engage with EQA providers throughout and agree arrangements in advance where remote assessment replaces face-to-face assessment, or where a simulated environment is to be used.

Apprentices who are deemed ready for assessment and cannot be assessed due to coronavirus related issues will be able to have their EPA rescheduled. Where there is a specified time limit for EPA after gateway, a further pause of 12 weeks is allowable.

Apprentices whose gateway is being delayed are allowed a break in learning, with an extension to the assessment timeframe. The training provider is required to record this in the ILR.

EPAOs may also propose to EQA providers modifications (rather than substitutions) to specified assessment methods provided that they do not compromise quality or the intention of the assessment. The authority for any flexibilities remains with IFATE, to whom any modification proposals should be referred.

Payments to EPAOs

Apprenticeship training providers will continue to be paid retrospectively for the training and assessment that has been delivered and can be evidenced, and they should continue to pay EPAOs (in line with their contractual arrangements) for assessment activity that has been delivered. Data should continue to be submitted via monthly ILR submissions and records retained for compliance and audit checks. This submission should include an accurate record of the cost of EPA. The ESFA reserves the right to recover funding which was claimed for and paid to the training provider, but for which the training provider was found not to be eligible such as where an EPA has not taken place.

Where learners take breaks in learning, training providers must report this in line with the guidance below. Training providers and EPAOs will not receive payments for learners who are on breaks in learning.

Where the coronavirus outbreak results in loss of income due to ceased or reduced delivery of training, EPAOs should consider their eligibility and apply for the wide range of financial support that HM Treasury has already announced for businesses. Full details of this substantial package of support can be found at Financial support for businesses during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>).

New EPA flexibilities

In addition to the general flexibilities allowed by the IFATE, EQA providers have to date agreed additional flexibilities to the delivery of EPA which apply to more than 100 apprenticeship standards. These flexibilities have the potential to allow thousands of apprentices to undertake EPA, despite the current operating constraints.

The list of standards with temporary discretions or flexibilities can be found at List of standards with temporary discretions or flexibilities (<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/covid-19/recent-announcements/list-of-standards-with-temporary-discretions-or-flexibilities/>).

The IFATE continues to work with EQA providers to understand where other standards require such measures to be put in place and regularly update the list of standards to reflect the latest position.

More details of the above direction on the delivery of assessment can be found in the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's guidance for COVID-19 (<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/response-to-covid-19/>) and its FAQs (<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/covid-19-information-regarding-apprenticeships/covid-19-faq/>).

If the information you want is not included in IFATE's guidance, or the FAQs, please send a question to Enquiries.IFA@education.gov.uk and IFATE will come back to you as quickly as possible.

IFATE will continue to update all coronavirus related guidance to reflect the evolving situation and advice. We recommend that you refer back to the guidance regularly, as it may include updated information.

Ofqual's coronavirus guidance

Read Ofqual's guidance for EPAOs where they are the EQA provider

(https://mcusercontent.com/aec166ae519e80e34c196ff99/files/43b706d5-6228-4090-8f92-6c0b32a06d9f/Ofqual_EPAO_guidance.v1.0.pdf).

Qualification certificates

We are aware that awarding organisations are currently unable to issue certificates confirming that apprentices have completed the necessary qualifications to go through gateway.

Therefore, as a temporary arrangement, we support providers and employers in accepting a confirmation email from the awarding organisation as evidence of achievement. To ensure authentication emails must contain the following information:

- learner details
- certification run date
- unique number

In due course the awarding organisation will issue the formal certification.

Disruption to employment

Where apprentices are furloughed (granted a leave of absence), they are permitted to continue with their training where their provider can continue to deliver this remotely.

Where apprentices are placed on unpaid leave (not furloughed), or where the nature of their employment changes and no longer supports their apprenticeship, the apprentice, employer and training provider should consider whether a break in learning would be appropriate. (See section above on breaks in learning.)

Where apprentices are made redundant, it is our ambition that they will be supported to find alternative employment and continue their apprenticeship as quickly as possible and within 12 weeks. We will keep under review whether this 12-week period should be extended.

Apprenticeship funding rules already make provision for apprentices who are made redundant, so that wherever possible, they can continue their apprenticeship and proceed to EPA. (See P271-P273 in the funding rules for main providers 2019 to 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules>) for further details).

Where an apprentice is made redundant, the training provider must support the apprentice to find another employer. In instances where a significant number of apprentices are made redundant (for example, because a large employer faces difficulties), the ESFA will attempt to provide exceptional practical support to the apprentices and training providers to secure alternative employers for the individuals. It is hoped that the government's substantial package of financial support for business will prevent such significant redundancies, but we will keep arrangements under review and consider whether there are circumstances in which the ESFA may need to provide additional support to apprentices and training providers.

Furloughed apprentices

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) allows employers to claim for 80% of furloughed employees' (employees on a leave of absence) usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions, and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions on that wage.

A furloughed employee can take part in volunteer work or training, as long as it does not provide services to or generate revenue for or on behalf of the employer. Training in this context includes apprenticeship off-the-job training.

Where their provider can continue to deliver training remotely, a furloughed apprentice can therefore continue their apprenticeship whilst furloughed.

Where training is undertaken by furloughed workers, at the request of their employer, workers are entitled to be paid at least the appropriate minimum wage for this time. In most cases, the furlough payment of 80% of a worker's wage, up to the value of £2,500, will provide sufficient monies to cover these training hours. However, where the furlough payment does not meet the appropriate minimum wage for the time spent training, employers will need to pay the additional wages.

The CJRS will continue in its current form until the end of July (i.e. the government paying the 80% subsidy). The Chancellor has been clear that getting people back to work will be introduced in a measured way, avoiding a cliff edge. As the Chancellor announced (on 12 May) from August, employers currently using the scheme will have more flexibility to bring their furloughed employees back to work part time whilst still receiving support from the scheme.

This will run for three months from August through to the end of October. Employers will be asked to pay a percentage towards the salaries of their furloughed staff. The employer payments will substitute the contribution the government is currently making, ensuring that staff continue to receive 80% of their salary, up to £2,500 a month. More specific details and information around implementation will be made available by the end of May.

For additional information read HMRC's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>).

Functional skills requirements

For level 2 (intermediate) apprenticeships, apprentices must achieve a level 1 in both English and maths functional skills qualifications to complete their apprenticeship. Intermediate apprentices were also required to study towards, and attempt, the functional skills assessments at level 2.

Ofqual have published their approach to assessment for vocational and technical skills (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/direction-issued-to-the-chief-regulator-of-ofqual>) in light of coronavirus. This includes confirmation that students due to take functional skills assessments this summer will receive a calculated grade. In light of this guidance, and the fact that scheduled functional skills assessments are not taking place, the rule requiring level 2 apprentices to study towards, and attempt, the functional skills assessments at level 2 is suspended temporarily. This will allow apprentices, employers, providers, and EPA organisations, to focus on other key requirements for completion of a level 2 apprenticeship.

Therefore, apprentices who are due to take their EPA up until 31 July 2020 should be passed through gateway to sit their EPA without the need to attempt the level 2 functional skills English and maths assessment. Providers should retain evidence if an apprentice did not take the level 2 assessments due to coronavirus. A level 2 apprentice will still require a level 1 functional skills in English and/or maths in order to complete apprenticeship. We will review the position in July 2020 to determine whether the suspension should continue.

The temporary suspension applies to both apprenticeship standards and frameworks.

Apprentices undertaking a level 3 or higher apprenticeship are still required to hold or achieve an approved level 2 functional skills English and maths qualification, before they can successfully complete their apprenticeship.

Ofqual has also confirmed that it will extend the regulation end date for legacy functional skills (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/maintaining-education-and-skills-training-provision-further-education-providers>) qualifications in English and maths to 31 December 2020.

Non levy procured apprenticeships contracts

Contract extensions were issued to training providers at the beginning of March via the Manage your education and skills funding service (<https://skillsfunding.service.gov.uk/>), with a start date of 1 April 2020.

Training providers with existing procured contracts received extensions to these same contracts, which cover the existing financial year (2020-21). These extensions are to fund carry-over costs for existing apprentices as well as new apprenticeship starts, with start dates up to and including 31 October 2020. This aligned with our intention for all starts to be funded through the apprenticeship service from 1 November 2020.

In light of the challenges being faced by providers and employers as a result of the current coronavirus outbreak, we are extending the procured contracts to extend the transition period onto the service. Funds available for new starts on non-levy procured contracts can now be used until 31 March 2021.

Following this extended transition all starts will be funded through the apprenticeship service from 1 April 2021. Contract variations will be issued in the summer to support the changes and performance management rules will be confirmed shortly through the usual routes.

We remain committed to giving smaller employers greater control over their apprenticeship choices by moving towards a system in which employers select an apprenticeship standard, choose their training provider and secure access to funding for all new apprenticeships through the apprenticeship service. As originally planned, this means, over time, more employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy will begin to access apprenticeship training via the apprenticeship service, as well as through a provider with an existing Government contract (now extended until 31 March 2021).

Audit

Prior to the Prime Minister's announcement of the new coronavirus lockdown measures on Monday 23 March 2020, we made the decision to pause the start of any new routine funding audits for all post-16 providers for the short-term, as result of the coronavirus outbreak. We have now extended this pause to

cover the period for, at least, the duration of the lockdown.

Where funding audits and investigations were already in progress, we have sought to complete the work, taking into account providers' capacity to resolve any issues. We understand the challenges providers face as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and have been sensitive to these challenges when contacting providers.

It may be necessary for the ESFA to contact providers during the coronavirus outbreak in order to continue to maintain effective oversight and protection of public funds. Where such contact is necessary, we will continue to be sensitive to the challenges providers face as a result of coronavirus.

We will continue to monitor and review the situation in the light of the circumstances. When the coronavirus lockdown measures are reduced and there is a return to office-based working across the country, we will assess when it is appropriate to restart routine funding audits.

Frequently Asked Questions and further information

These questions and answers will be updated regularly in line with advice from central government, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE).

For queries not covered by this guidance, please contact the apprenticeship service helpline. They can be contacted by telephone on 0800 150 600 or email at helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk.

Apprenticeship training frequently asked questions

Apprentices who are still working

1. Due to business continuity measures, all staff are required to be available at their usual place of work in their usual job role. How can my apprentices continue their learning?

If your apprentices are required to attend their usual place of work in their usual job role (critical workers), there are several options available:

- apprentices could engage in digital or distance learning at a convenient time within their agreed working hours
- they could be offered additional on-site mentor support
- they could take a short pause in their learning of less than 4 weeks while still completing by their planned end-date
- they could take a formal break in learning of 4 weeks or more and re-calculate the planned end-date upon their return to learning

2. I am having to move critical worker staff into different and/or business critical roles that aren't related to their apprenticeship. What happens to their apprenticeship if they can't continue training?

Apprenticeship training must be linked to the job role that the individual is undertaking. Where this link is broken temporarily, it is our goal that apprentices can promptly resume their apprenticeship and continue to successful completion of EPA at a future date. Funding rules currently state that a break in learning must be initiated by the apprentice. Employers and training providers can now temporarily also report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning is greater than 4 weeks. This guidance document sets out what employers and training providers need to do when breaks in learning are more or less than 4 weeks, and if that break commences during or after March.

3. I am having to move critical worker staff into different and/or business critical roles that are connected to their apprenticeship. Can they continue training?

Where apprentices can remain on their programme, they should continue to fulfil the minimum 20% off-the-job training entitlement. Off-the-job training can already be delivered flexibly at a time and way to suit the employer and apprentice (remote observations, distance learning, etc.) and many providers have developed additional training material in response to coronavirus. If a critical worker apprentice has been redeployed into another role, then some of this activity may still count towards off-the-job training but this should be discussed and agreed between the employer and provider. All off-the-job training must be relevant new training that develops the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the apprenticeship and, where funding is being accessed, it must be delivered by an organisation on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers. Evidence of delivery must be kept.

Apprentices who are self-isolating, caring for family members, or sick

4. If I need to self-isolate, what will happen to my apprenticeship?

Apprenticeships have been designed to be responsive to changes in apprentices' circumstances, for example during a period of illness. If you need to self-isolate, please talk to your employer and training provider about the best way to continue with your apprenticeship or report a break in learning.

Options include:

- an increase in e-learning
- a short pause of less than 4 weeks in your apprenticeship while you are in self-isolation. This will not affect the planned end-date of your apprenticeship
- a formal break in learning of 4 weeks or more that your training provider should report to the ESFA. This will result in the planned end-date for your apprenticeship being re-planned upon returning to learning to take into consideration the duration in line with the length of your break
- re-scheduling planned assessment activity for a later date

The appropriate steps will be agreed based on your and your employer/ training provider's situation.

5. I need to take care of myself/a family member. Can I continue my apprenticeship learning at home?

Yes, this may be possible, depending on your apprenticeship and whether e-learning is available from your training provider. Please check their website or contact them to discuss your options.

6. What do I do if I think an apprentice is not well enough to work (especially in a health setting)?

Employers should follow the government's guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>).

7. If I can't work/attend training, will I still be paid?

An apprenticeship is a job with training, so even when you are not able to do your training, you are still employed, unless you have been notified otherwise by your employer. You will be paid in line with the details in your employment contract.

Where you are unable to work, we suggest speaking to your employer about their policies on pay. The government is providing a range of support to employers to help them retain and pay the wages of employees (including apprentices) during the coming months.

8. My provider has put my apprentice on a break in learning because they can't deliver training. As the apprentice is working as normal and I want their apprenticeship to continue, can I override this break in learning?

We have committed to apprenticeship training providers continuing to be paid retrospectively for the training that they have delivered and can evidence. Where training cannot take place for any reason, and this may include the ability of the provider to continue delivery, an apprentice must be put on a break in learning to pause payments. Providers are working hard to develop flexible learning packages to ensure continuity of training where possible and for some, this may take some time. If you have concerns, we encourage you to discuss these with the provider.

Apprentices who are working at home

9. My employer is enforcing a work from home policy and my classroom provision has been withdrawn. What are my options?

If you are unable to attend scheduled learning events, there are several options available to you:

- your training provider may provide digital or distance learning
- you can take a short pause if it is likely your apprenticeship can resume in less than 4 weeks and you will still be able to complete your apprenticeship by the planned end-date
- you can take a formal break in learning of 4 weeks or more which your training provider should report to the ESFA and will result in the planned end-date of your apprenticeship being re-planned upon returning to learning, to take into consideration the duration of your break

Please talk to your employer and training provider to agree the appropriate steps for your circumstances.

10. How do I record progress towards my apprenticeship while I am subject to different working conditions like working from home?

You should already be recording your off-the-job training activity using an approach agreed with your training provider. Please continue to use this in the coming weeks.

11. When an apprentice is working from home, can we count anything they do as off-the-job training?

Off-the-job training is a statutory requirement for an English apprenticeship. It is training which is received by the apprentice during the apprentice's normal working hours, for the purpose of achieving the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the approved apprenticeship referenced in the apprenticeship agreement.

All off-the-job training must be directly relevant to the apprenticeship, but this can now be delivered more flexibly, including remote working.

Employers may set employees training tasks when they're working from home, but where these are not directly linked to the apprenticeship, it cannot be classed as off-the-job training.

12. Can I change training provider if they are offering more on-line/digital delivery?

A change in training provider can occur at any time, although it is likely to be more difficult in the current climate.

When an apprentice and employer start working with a new training provider, activity must take place to ensure that the apprenticeship programme and apprentice are eligible for funding. Examples of necessary activity include:

- initial assessment of the apprentice
- completion and signing of agreements

Evidence must be collected and retained to support this activity but can be held in a digital or electronic format.

13. Will training providers be paid more for rescheduling off-the-job training and bringing it forward?

No, the normal monthly payment profile will apply over the length of the apprenticeship, as it currently does whether providers deliver blocks of training or more evenly spaced training. Providers should factor this in if they are considering a change to the delivery methodology and timetable.

14. Will employers and training providers need to revise the price of the apprenticeship if the delivery method is changing?

The price of an apprenticeship is negotiated and agreed upon by an employer and provider. If any material changes occur to the agreed delivery method that may result in a change in price, then this should be discussed and amended.

We accept that this might be challenging in the current environment and so, while we would encourage material changes to be recorded, we understand it may not be possible to do it immediately.

Employer-providers will need to ensure that they are only claiming for the actual costs incurred throughout the apprenticeship and that these might now have changed.

Apprentices who are furloughed

15. Can training continue for furloughed apprentices?

Yes, where apprentices are furloughed, they can continue to train for their apprenticeships, as long as it does not provide services to or generate revenue for their employer.

16. If my apprentice continues to do off-the-job training, can this be more than one day a week?

Yes. The normal off-the-job training rules will apply, so training can be done as a block where this is agreed between the provider and the employer. The 20% minimum off-the-job training over the length of the apprenticeship will still need to be satisfied.

17. Why should I continue my learning if I can't attend my place of work?

We do not want the disruption caused by the coronavirus outbreak to prevent apprentices continuing to learn where this is still possible. Not being able to apply the learning straight away might present some challenges, but there are benefits from carrying on with the apprenticeship during this time, including continued engagement and progression that can all be applied to the job once it is safe and practical to do so.

18. Will I be paid for continuing my learning if I have been furloughed?

Yes. While furloughed you will still be paid by your employer and pay taxes from your income. While you cannot undertake work for your employer while on furlough you can undertake training. Where training has been required by your employer you should be paid the appropriate minimum wage for the time spent training. This will be covered as part of your furlough payment in the first instance.

Your time spent training must be paid at the appropriate minimum wage. Where the total furlough payment amount equates to less than the appropriate minimum wage for the total amount of your time spent training, during the furlough period, your employer should top up your furlough payment.

19. As an employer how will I know if I need to top up an employee's wages if they are furloughed but continuing with their apprenticeship?

Where training is undertaken by furloughed employees, at the request of the employer, they are entitled to be paid at least their appropriate national minimum wage for this time. In most cases, the furlough payment of 80% of an employee's regular wage, up to the value of £2,500, will provide sufficient monies to cover these training hours. However, where the overall time spent training during the furlough period, attracts a minimum wage entitlement in excess of the furlough payment, employers will need to pay the additional wages. This is because time spent training is treated as working time for the purposes of the minimum wage calculations, and therefore must be paid at the appropriate rate, taking into account the increase in minimum wage rates from 1 April 2020.

Employers should consider the hours that an employee is expected to train during the period of the furlough (which must be a 3-week minimum). Employers will need to ensure that the furlough payment provides sufficient monies to cover these training hours. Where the entire furlough payment equates to less than the appropriate minimum wage entitlement for the training hours during the furlough period, the employer will need to pay the additional wages to ensure at least the appropriate minimum wage is paid for the time spent training.

Our worked examples show how to calculate whether the furlough payment equates to less than the appropriate minimum wage entitlement for time spent training.

Example 1:

18 year old first year apprentice is on a 37 hours per week contract and has been furloughed. They are continuing to train for 1 day per week (7.5 hours per week).

In terms of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) regulations they are entitled to £4.15 for every hour they train. (Note that the NMW legislation does not apply to time not in work or training.)

Over the 3 week furlough period (the pay reference period) this amounts to an NMW entitlement of £93.38 ($£4.15 \times 7.5 \text{ hours} \times 3 \text{ weeks}$).

The 80% furlough payment that they have received from their employer is £368. This furlough payment provides sufficient money to cover these training hours.

Example 2:

22 year old second year apprentice is on a 37 hours per week contract and has been furloughed. They have agreed, with their employer and provider, to train for 4 days per week (7.5 hours per day) (to cover as much off-the-job training as possible during this period).

In terms of the National Minimum Wage regulations they are entitled to £8.20 for every hour they train. (Note that the NMW legislation does not apply to time not in work or training.)

Over the 3 week furlough period (the pay reference period) this amounts to a NMW entitlement of £738 ($£8.20 \times 7.5 \text{ hours} \times 4 \text{ days} \times 3 \text{ weeks}$).

The 80% furlough payment that they have received from their employer is £728.16. This furlough payment does not provide sufficient money to cover these training hours and the employer would need to top up the difference (£9.84).

*Note in both cases above the apprentice, prior to furlough, was paid at/close to the National Minimum Wage.

20. Where an apprentice is furloughed can they and their employer still take part in a progress review?

Yes, where apprentices are furloughed, they can continue to train for their apprenticeships as long as it does not provide services to or generate revenue for their employer. This includes progress reviews.

If the employer (line manager) is also furloughed, then we appreciate that arranging a progress review may be more difficult at this current time. But, provided the discussion is about the progress of the apprenticeship, they are able to take part in the discussion.

21. Can a furloughed apprentice use work technology (laptop etc) to access apprenticeship off-the-job training?

Yes, a work laptop can be used to access apprenticeship training if this is the only option, but the apprentice must be mindful of the fact that whilst they are furloughed they must not carry out their normal work.

22. Can a furloughed apprentice listen in to (without taking part in) a work-related meeting / discussion to aid off-the-job training?

Apprentices who are continuing to train for their apprenticeships must not provide services to or generate revenue for their employer. If an employer wants to query an example of what an apprentice can do whilst on furlough they should speak to the HMRC helpline (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/contact/get-help-with-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>).

Apprentices who are made redundant

23. My employer is making me redundant. What happens to my apprenticeship?

Please speak to your training provider if you are made redundant as your apprenticeship training may be able to continue.

Your training provider may still be able to offer training, based on your circumstances, in the short term. They may even be able to support you in finding a new employer.

If that move becomes permanent, you should look to see which alternative apprenticeship your apprentice can transfer to at Find Apprenticeship Training (<https://findapprenticeshiptraining.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/>) and liaise with your training provider in the usual way.

24. What funding support is currently available to support redundant apprentices?

The existing funding support relating to redundancy is outlined in the table below. In addition to this funding support, a package of pastoral support is currently being put together and information will follow on this shortly.

Apprentice circumstances	Funding support
Apprentice is within 6 months of the final day of training	<p>We will fund 100% of the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the provider and the previous employer, up to the funding band maximum.</p> <p>Within this 6 month period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- If the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point.- If the apprentice takes a job with an employer which is not related to their apprenticeship, we will continue to fund the remaining costs.
	We will fund the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the provider and the previous employer, for a maximum of 12 weeks.

Apprentice is between 6 months and 12 months of the final day of training	<p>Within this 12 week period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point. - If the apprentice takes a job with an employer which is not related to their apprenticeship, we will continue to fund the remaining costs for up to 12 weeks. - If a new employer is not found within 12 weeks, the apprentice is withdrawn from the programme but can return to the same apprenticeship at a later date, without the need to satisfy the 12 month minimum duration rule.
Apprentice is more than 12 months away from the final day of training	<p>We will fund the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the provider and the previous employer for a maximum of 12 weeks.</p> <p>Within this 12 week period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point. - If the apprentice takes a job with an employer which is not related to their apprenticeship, we will continue to fund the remaining costs for up to 12 weeks. - If a new employer is not found within 12 weeks, the apprentice is withdrawn from the programme. If they return at a later date to the same apprenticeship, they would need to satisfy the 12 month minimum duration rule.

Apprentices who are on unpaid leave

25. My employer is asking me to take a period of unpaid leave. What happens to my apprenticeship during that time?

Many employers who had planned to ask employees to take unpaid leave during this period will now be able to access the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and receive financial support to keep you employed. You should speak to your employer about this to understand whether you are still being asked to take unpaid leave or if your status is now considered to be furloughed. There is a section on furloughed apprentices in this document.

If you are still being asked to take unpaid leave, then you can take a break from your apprenticeship and resume when you return to work. Please get in touch with your training provider, who will inform us of a break in learning.

Once you are back at work you can resume your apprenticeship, which your training provider can help with too. You should refer any queries around terms and conditions, including wages, to your employer in the first instance.

ACAS (<https://www.acas.org.uk/>) may also be a good source of information.

26. What happens to the apprentice during a period of unpaid leave in terms of monies, do they have access to universal credit?

Through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, all UK employers will be able to access support to continue paying part of their employees' salary for those employees that would otherwise have been laid off during this crisis. HMRC will reimburse 80% of furloughed workers wage costs, up to a cap of £2,500 per month.

Alternatively, Universal Credit may be available for both workers and the unemployed alike, as long as they meet the other conditions of entitlement (including that the applicant and their partner have savings of under £16,000 between them). Apprentices may be entitled to access Universal Credit during a period of unpaid leave. They may also have access to Universal Credit even if they were working and being paid. Being laid off or on fewer hours could increase the rate of Universal Credit entitlement.

Apprentices on unpaid leave may also be eligible for other benefits (<https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits>).

Recruiting new apprentices

27. Can an employer recruit a new member of staff into the business as an apprentice?

Yes, an employer can recruit and start apprenticeships as they would have done prior to coronavirus, if all personal and programme eligibility funding rules can be met and the provider is still able to support this activity.

It is important to note that an employer can only claim for furloughed employees that were on the PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020. Therefore, it would not be possible for an employer to recruit an apprentice after this date where the intention is to furlough this person immediately and claim wage support from the CJRS.

28. Can an existing member of staff start an apprenticeship whilst they are furloughed?

Yes, a furloughed member of staff can start an apprenticeship, but they must still meet the learner eligibility and programme eligibility criteria of the apprenticeship funding rules. For example, the apprenticeship must be a real job, the candidate must require a programme that has a minimum training duration of 12 months, with a minimum of 20% off the job training over this duration to become occupationally competent. With regards to learner eligibility the provider should consider how they would assure the ESFA of the identity and eligibility of the individual and how they would carry out the initial assessment.

29. Are the evidence arrangements around obtaining learner signatures being relaxed during coronavirus?

When starting a new apprenticeship, and throughout training, signatures are required to form part of the evidence pack. Examples of where the funding rules ask for evidence of signatures to be retained are:

- the apprenticeship agreement
- the commitment statement
- external audit reports for subcontractors
- evidence linking to additional payments such as additional learning support and the care leavers bursary
- contracts for services
- agreements that an apprentice has passed all gateway requirements

It is expected that where providers already have a digital/electronic signature process, they must continue to utilise their existing processes in accordance with the respective funding rules.

Where a provider has no digital or electronic systems and processes in place to capture a learner or employer signature then, under normal circumstances, a wet signature is required for recruitment and evidence of continuing learning. A wet signature is created when a person physically 'marks' a document.

It is recognised that providers delivering training and/or recruiting learners during the coronavirus outbreak will experience difficulty in obtaining learner and employer wet signatures. Therefore, where providers do not have systems and processes in place for electronic/digital signatures, during the coronavirus restrictions we will allow confirmation/evidence to be obtained through email.

For the purpose of audit evidence, we expect a record of acknowledgement or adoption of a genuine electronic message or document.

Acceptable alternative evidence includes:

- an email from the learner and/or employer's email address with details of the confirmation and their typed name at the end of the message
- a typed name on an electronic form or document emailed from the learner and/or employer
- a signed scanned document attached to an email from the learner and/or employer
- photo taken on a camera/digital medium of the signed document attached to an email from the learner and/or employer

We are allowing providers to use this type of electronic confirmation during the period of restrictions due to coronavirus, only where no other usable digital or electronic processes exist. This is not to be used as alternative evidence as part of the provider's business as usual process once the coronavirus restrictions are lifted.

Following the period of coronavirus restrictions, providers using the above alternative evidence must resume their usual process for obtaining wet signatures on relevant documentation. Providers must ensure that all alternative evidence replacing wet signatures received during the coronavirus restrictions is genuine and irrefutable, and the evidence is retained for audit purposes.

Apprenticeship levy and service frequently asked questions

The apprenticeship levy

30. Will levy payments be paused for employers?

The apprenticeship levy is an important part of our aim to raise apprenticeship quality which supports employers to make a long-term, sustainable investment in training. Due to this, HM Treasury have no current plans to pause the collection of the apprenticeship levy because of the coronavirus disruption.

The Chancellor has set out an unprecedented package of support for businesses and employers and stands ready to announce further action wherever necessary.

31. Will you increase the time available to employers to spend their levy funds?

Employers already have 24 months in which to spend their levy funds before these expire. For now, we do not intend to make any changes to current arrangements.

32. I am a levy-payer with funds in my account. Why can't my funds be used to continue to pay the provider even though they can't deliver training? This will help them cope with the financial impacts of coronavirus.

Where training cannot take place for any reason, an apprentice must be put on a break in learning. When on a break in learning the individual will still be employed and classed as an apprentice, and they can continue working, but we cannot pay for training delivery that isn't taking place.

Where the coronavirus outbreak results in loss of income due to ceased or reduced delivery of training, training providers should consider their eligibility and apply for the wide range of financial support that HM Treasury has already announced for businesses. Read the support for businesses guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>).

33. I am a non-levy paying employer recruiting for/with apprentices due to start. Can I still go ahead and reserve funds on the system?

Employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy are able to reserve apprenticeship funding through the apprenticeship service in line with the Apprenticeship funding for employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding>) guidance.

34. What happens to my funding reservation as a non-levy employer if my apprentice can't start?

Reservations will expire if they are not turned into a commitment within 3 months of the apprenticeship start date, detailed in the reservation. Where a commitment is needed and a previous reservation has expired, a new reservation must first be made.

35. Can you release early the 20% completion payment that would normally be withheld until the end of apprenticeship training to manage cash flow challenges faced by training providers?

Government policy does not allow payment for services in advance of delivery. The government has set out a substantial package of support to businesses (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>) to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

36. Should employers use the 'Stop' or 'Pause' apprentice facility in the apprenticeship service?

In circumstances related to coronavirus, employers should use the 'Pause' function in the service.

Employers must ONLY use the 'Stop' function when they are certain that training will not resume at any point. Using 'Pause' will stop payments temporarily, and allow the employer and apprentice to resume the apprenticeship at a later date.

We are reviewing options to simplify the process of re-starting apprentices on the service, including to facilitate a transfer to a different apprenticeship or employer in due course.

Apprenticeship assessment frequently asked questions

End point assessment (EPA)

37. I am on a fixed-term contract which would ordinarily have given enough time to complete the training and the EPA. If the training is delayed, and I have not completed my EPA before I leave employment, can I do the EPA afterwards?

You must be employed when you are taking your EPA, so where a break in learning has been necessary, and the planned end-date for your apprenticeship has had to move back, please speak to your employer and training provider. We would expect them to work with you to reschedule your training which may also include reviewing your apprenticeship agreement and commitment statement. We will keep this under review as the situation evolves.

38. What will happen if I am not well enough to take my EPA?

If you are unwell, or in a period of self-isolation, and unable to attend your EPA, please contact your training provider as soon as you are able, to allow them maximum time to re-schedule your assessment.

39. I have been furloughed, can I still take my end-point assessment?

Yes, where apprentices are furloughed, they can sit their EPA providing that they meet the conditions for furloughed apprentices.

40. Gateways are being delayed and we cannot complete the EPA in the required timeframe. Can we extend the EPA timeframe due to the current disruption?

Apprentices who are deemed ready for assessment, and cannot be assessed due to assessor illness, or coronavirus related measures, are allowed to take a break before taking their EPA and for the EPA to be rescheduled.

If the EPA timeframe needs to be extended beyond what is allowed in the assessment plan (where specified), EPAOs are responsible for agreeing extensions to EPA timeframes during the current disruption. EPAOs should work closely with EQA providers to ensure that quality of EPA is maintained. For apprentices whose gateway is being delayed, the training provider must report this as a break in learning in the ILR.

41. Where the EPA plan states that assessment must be conducted face-to-face, but cannot be under the current circumstances, can we conduct these remotely?

Where an assessment method requires face to face engagement, this can be conducted remotely, subject to the following conditions:

- arrangements are cleared in advance by the EQA provider
- the apprentice's identity is verified
- remote tests are supervised by an appropriately trained invigilator or assessor who:
 - has the necessary qualifications, training or experience
 - and who has not been involved in the training, preparation or line management of the apprentice
 - appropriate technology and systems are in place
- the impact that remote assessment may have on apprentices is to be taken into consideration to ensure a fair and reliable assessment of occupational competence
- here alternatives are not appropriate, a pause and rescheduling might be the only action. An extension of 12 weeks is allowable for those EPA plans where a time limit is specified from gateway to EPA. It is to be logged on and shared with EQA providers on a timely basis

42. How will invigilation of assessments be conducted remotely?

Remote tests should be supervised by an appropriately trained invigilator or assessor who has the necessary qualifications, training or experience and who has not been involved in the training, preparation or line management of the apprentice.

Tests must only be carried out within a supervised and controlled environment and EPAOs must ensure that all testing meets security requirements and that the details of invigilators are recorded and available for confirmation by EQA providers.

43. What will happen if an apprentice's line manager has been furloughed and their employer is unable to confirm their readiness to take EPA with their training provider and EPAO?

If the person who would normally sign an apprentice off as ready to take their EPA has been furloughed, and there is no suitable alternative, we support providers to make the gateway decision. This temporary arrangement can only be relied upon where the provider can provide evidence to the EPAO that the apprentice has met the relevant gateway requirements and is ready to sit their EPA. Where this is not the case then the EPA should be rescheduled.

Apprentices whose gateway is delayed can have an extension to the assessment timeframe.

44. If the current situation continues for a long period of time, would you consider awarding the apprenticeship without the EPA?

We would not consider this to be appropriate at the current time. Our intention is to safeguard the quality of apprenticeships, and at this time we believe that the EPA is an important part of that.

EQA providers have agreed flexibilities which apply to over 60 standards from Actuarial Technician to Senior Equine Groom to Adult Care Worker. These flexibilities have the potential to allow thousands of apprentices to undertake EPA, despite the current operating constraints.

45. How are the ESFA monitoring the number of cancelled and postponed EPAs?

EPAOs are an important element to delivering quality apprenticeships. In order to support them, and the wider market, to meet the future demand, we have asked end-point organisations to complete a weekly return to the ESFA recording all coronavirus related EPA cancellations.

We sent each organisation on the register of end-point assessment organisations a copy of the template return, which should be sent back to the apprenticeship assessment mailbox.

This information will help us to understand and manage the post coronavirus pipeline of apprenticeship assessment.

46. We can deliver part of the EPA, but some sections require direct observation. How do we deal with these components?

These elements of the EPA will need to be rescheduled if they cannot be undertaken remotely. If the EPA timeframe needs to be extended beyond what is allowed in the assessment plan, the EPAO should seek agreement from the EQA provider. Where a specified assessment method for a specific standard might be adjusted without threatening safety and in a manner in which it meets the original intent, EPAOs should discuss this option with their EQA provider, who may refer it to IFATE for authority. The substitution of assessment methods is not considered appropriate at this time.

With the prior authority of their EQA provider, assessments may be conducted in an appropriate simulated environment, such as a training facility.

47. Can EPAs be staggered to ease pressure on EPAOs?

It is the responsibility of the end-point assessment organisation to agree the schedule of EPA. You should refer to the assessment plan for the apprenticeship standard to check if there is a time limit for the assessment taking place following gateway.

Where an EPA cannot be undertaken immediately, a pause and rescheduling might be the only action. An extension of 12 weeks is allowable for those EPA plans where a time limit is specified from gateway to EPA. It is to be logged on and shared with EQA providers on a timely basis.

48. Apprentices are ready for EPA but can't take it. Should they be paid more than the apprenticeship minimum wage now?

An apprentice is classed as an apprentice until they have taken their EPA. Apprentices must be paid at least the apprentice minimum wage, but an employer can choose to pay an apprentice more than this, all employers must comply with national minimum wage legislation.

Functional skills requirements

49. What evidence do I need to provide to show the apprentice did not take the level 2 English and/or maths functional skills test before entering them for EPA?

You should add a dated note to the evidence pack for the apprentice explaining that the test was not taken due to revised guidance during coronavirus.

50. Will there be a requirement to go back and take the level 2 functional skills test after the apprenticeship has been achieved?

Studying and taking the test for intermediate apprentices is suspended until July 2020, upon which time we will review this position. There will be no requirement for those apprentices who are passed through gateway to go back and take the level 2 functional skills test.

51. What does this mean for the arrangement for gateway prior to EPA?

We want to make it as straightforward as possible to continue EPA. Lifting the rule to take the test for intermediate (level 2) apprentices should help them to progress to EPA during the coronavirus disruption.

52. What about the level 2 English and maths exit requirements for level 3 and higher apprenticeships?

This requirement applies to intermediate (level 2) apprentices only. Apprentices undertaking a level 3 or higher apprenticeship are still required to hold or achieve an approved level 2 English and maths qualification before they can successfully complete their apprenticeship.