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Guidance for apprentices, employers, training providers, end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) and external quality assurance providers about changes to apprenticeships due to coronavirus (COVID-19)

Updated 10 December 2020

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New national restrictions came into force on Thursday 5 November. Please see the new national restrictions after this guidance.

Updates

The latest changes to this guidance are as follows:

- information added about new national restrictions – this guidance makes it clear that training providers should continue to provide training, and apprentices should continue to attend training providers, unless a school, college, education setting or other premises used for training has been closed by the local authority or by the provider following a local outbreak plan
- clarification that the assessment of apprentices is not mandatory
- confirmation of the package of support available for those who have been furloughed or who are at risk of being furloughed, and who are in training or have started training
- the temporary flexibility supporting the funding rule requiring level 2 apprenticeships to be followed by a level 3 in the same occupation has been extended to end of December 2021 for apprentices starting in the functional skills requirements section
- the temporary flexibility supporting apprenticeships to be completed in Functional Skills qualifications instead of GCSEs has been extended – more detail in the functional skills requirements section

General information

As part of the cross-government efforts to respond to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), we have made changes to our policies and our implementation measures to make it easier for apprenticeships to continue and complete in a different way, or to break and resume an apprenticeship later than they planned.

The usual apprenticeship funding rules apply to train providers, employer providers and employer-provided training providers delivering training and end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) and training providers. The rules form part of the terms and conditions for the use of funds in apprenticeship agreements and contracts for services with training providers and EPAOs.

This document, however, sets out guidance and some temporary flexibilities to supplement the rules, to take into account the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on apprenticeships, training and assessment, and provide certain guidance related to these changes and other common questions. Some of these temporary flexibilities, such as those for the English and maths requirement, have been extended to December 2020 or beyond, and some were brought into force in 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 apprenticeship funding rules.

This document also provides information about changes to our policy in the workplace and educational settings. Plus recently we've added links to the Public Health England (PHE) guidance, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) new sector-specific guidance, and information about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

It should be read alongside the other sector guidance, the Further Education (FE) sector business continuity guidance and the Ofsted and Ofqual guidance relevant for businesses.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) has published guidance for the delivery of assessment.

Overview

Government measures to support businesses and employees

Apprentices and their employers, and training and assessment organisations as providers of training, are eligible for the government's wage subsidy, furlough, and other measures to support employers and employees affected by coronavirus. Read details of the financial support for businesses during coronavirus (COVID-19).

We published guidance on how the government's package of financial support for employers and employees affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) applies to apprenticeships. Read the guidance on how the government's package of financial support for employers and employees affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) applies to apprenticeships.

As part of that, we also want to support training providers to maintain delivery of training and assessment so that apprentices can continue and as quickly as enable new apprentices to start. Find out details of the EPAO and training provider relief scheme.

Additional advice and guidance from ACAS is also available.

Apprenticeship programme revenue

In this difficult time, employers, training providers and EPAOs are doing their best to support their apprentices and continue to deliver training and assessment, while coronavirus continues to affect their opportunities, resources and ways of working. We want to make sure that employers and training providers and apprentices will be a vital contributor to economic recovery. We are committed to supporting employers and training providers to deliver high quality vocational or technical training and assessment, to develop skills and maintain the integrity of apprenticeships.

In addition to the flexibilities we have introduced to support existing apprentices, we are also keen to support the government's Plan for Jobs which was set out in the Budget on 8 March 2020. We want employers and training providers to recruit apprentices and take on new apprentices and have introduced a special payment for employers who hire an apprentice between 1 August 2020 and 31 January 2021 aged 25 or under.

More information about the new incentive payment for hiring new apprentices, including how employers can claim, is available on GOV.UK. Read the 2020 to 2021 apprenticeship funding rules.

To support users of this document to understand what is changing and the impact of these changes, the information in this document is necessarily technical in places.

Returning to the workplace and educational settings

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 31 October, we have published guidance to enable training providers to continue to operate during the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) impact education, childcare and children's social care settings. Read the guidance for education, childcare and children's social care settings during coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance, new national restrictions from 5 November 2020 guidance. This guidance means it can continue to support apprenticeships and training and assessment in line with COVID-19 secure guidance, and, if training providers are eligible, other premises used for that purpose.

We have also published guidance for government venues and educational settings. It includes information on how to manage risk in the workplace and how to follow the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission when determining how and where training and assessment can take place.

Apprenticeship delivery can be extremely flexible and it is up to training providers and employers to decide how training and assessment can take place in accordance with the apprenticeship standard. They should consider whether they want to take advantage of more than one delivery method to balance coronavirus risks against the need to deliver high quality training and educational experience.

Training providers, employers and EPAOs should also consider how much contact time is required to ensure that apprentices can continue to learn and to develop skills and knowledge. They should also consider how apprentices can contact with, and mixing between, people reduces transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). Training providers, employers and apprentices should also consider and EPAOs must consider how apprentices can safely attend workplaces to deliver training and assessment, information on how to group students can be found in the guidance for education, childcare and children's social care settings.

When possible they should also maintain appropriate distance between people, and follow the guidance on how to manage risk in the workplace guidance. For example, follow the guidance on how to maintain distance between sites.

There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach where we prescribe the arrangements that training providers, employers and EPAOs should follow. EPAOs will be best placed to understand the needs of their organisations and their apprentices and to make decisions about how to deliver assessment, determine a break and disappointment and the measures needed to manage risk.

Apprentices returning to work

COVID-19 secure guidelines have been made available to UK employers to help them to take the steps required to protect their workplaces and their staff as safely as possible. This means that apprentices can safely be supported and be able to continue or restart their training in the workplace. The guidance covers the steps employers should take to minimise the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) spread.

To ensure that we are supporting as many apprentices to continue their apprenticeships as possible, training providers will need to support employers in sending flexibilities about where apprenticeship training is delivered. Where it is safe to do so, training providers should be able to support apprentices to embark on their apprenticeship remotely, for example, in a combination of face to face and remote training, and EPAOs should be able to support apprentices to start their end-point assessment remotely.

Training providers should also consider whether they need any additional support from employers to ensure that apprentices can continue to learn and develop skills and knowledge in a safe and secure way. Training providers should also consider how they can support employers to ensure that training providers identify or changes in public health advice.

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The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) has published guidance on how to get more information.

Face coverings

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 31 October, we have published guidance on the use of face coverings in education and other settings. Information about face coverings can be found in the guidance for education, childcare and children's social care settings during coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance.

From 1 September, advice, which can be found in the FE sector business continuity guidance, states that face coverings should be worn in communal areas.

Face coverings are not mandatory, and any exceptions that apply to the wearing of face coverings in shops, and public transport, also apply to the new advice.

Local alert levels

The Local COVID alert level framework sets out information for workers about the local alert levels in place in their area. It sets out, for each alert level, the expectations for the application and choices around how to continue as normal. The government has been very clear that limiting movement and interaction that are the main ways the virus is transmitted, and, for each level, it sets out what measures are in place to limit that movement.

Decisions on any restrictions necessary in education or childcare settings are taken separately on a local basis in line with the local COVID alert level, including information about the incidence and transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the area and the ability of the education or childcare setting to manage it, as set out in Annex C of the Outbreak Management.

Contingency plans for coronavirus (COVID-19)

Training and assessment providers should develop a strong contingency plan, to ensure that they can continue to deliver training and assessment, and to ensure they are able to rapidly shift to blended, or if necessary, remote training and assessment, if circumstances change, or if a local lockdown or national lockdown is required. This should include how training and assessment can be maintained in a range of scenarios, from a single apprentice needing to stay at home, to a situation where a significant number of apprentices are required to remain at home due to local restrictions.

Disruption to training

Because of illness, self-isolation and operational disruption, apprentices may be unable to attend training, and training providers may be unable to deliver training. In such circumstances, training providers should support apprentices to continue their training and assessment, and incomes may be disrupted.

- For an individual, this might be necessary due to illness or self-isolation, or challenges in getting to their place of employment or location for training, or assessment.
- For an employer, this might be necessary due to temporary need to redeploy apprentices to different tasks.
- For a training provider, this might be necessary due to challenges in providing training or assessment due to absence or closure of facilities.

Payments to training providers

Apprenticeship training providers will continue to be paid independently for the training they have delivered and can evidence. Training providers will be submitting monthly individualised learner record (ILR) submissions and claiming payments in accordance with the 2020 to 2021 funding rules. We want to ensure training providers are able to continue to pay their staff and meet their other commitments, and we want to ensure that training providers are able to continue to pay their apprentices.

We want to make sure that training providers and employers must report this to us with the appropriate evidence, and we will work with training providers. Training providers will not receive payments for apprentices who are on breaks in learning.

Where the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak results in loss of income due to apprentices being furloughed, training providers should consider furlough payments and apply for the relevant grant from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Read financial support for business during coronavirus (COVID-19) for details of this support.

Breaks in learning

Where it is not possible for an apprenticeship to continue, a break in learning is a tool intended to provide flexibility to allow apprentices to continue for disruption in learning.

- Less than, and up to, 4 weeks – in these circumstances neither the employer nor the training provider needs to report the interruption, the end-date for the apprenticeship and the training should be adjusted to reflect the period of interruption.
- More than 4 weeks – these circumstances, employers and training providers should report the interruption to us, and we will work with training providers and employers to agree the training and assessment plan for the apprentice to return to.

Training providers should be aware that it is not good that apprentices are able to promptly resume their apprenticeship training and assessment, and complete 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 a break in learning, and we will work with training providers and employers.

For a break in learning greater than 4 weeks that begun on or after 1 April 2020:

- the training provider should report the start of a qualification using the start day in learning or in the month in which the break of learning commenced
- the training provider should report the end of a qualification using the apprenticeship end-date or the date the apprentice left the apprenticeship. The employer should 'stop' the apprenticeship through the apprenticeship service and provide a reason for the apprenticeship ending.

When the apprentice, training provider and employer are all ready for the apprentice to return to training, the training provider should report the qualification should update the start day in learning to reflect the training provider support manual to ensure accurate recording and earnings.

EPA is available in the last 3 months of the apprenticeship, and it is up to apprentices to comply with the minimum of 20% off-the-job training requirement. Training providers should be aware that if an apprentice has a minimum of 20% off-the-job training requirement and apply over the minimum amended duration of the apprenticeship.

Disruption to assessment

In order to maintain progress, achievement and delivery of EPA, the Institute has introduced flexibilities and discretions to assessment. These have been and will continue to enable apprentices to complete their apprenticeship in the most appropriate way.

The Institute has published guidance for the delivery of assessment. Read the latest Ofqual guidance (COVID-19 will be extended until at least 31 March 2021 and Ofqual's guidance on GCSE, AS and A level, GCSE (9 to 1) and vocational and technical qualifications in 2020 and 2021 for details of what is and is not allowed.

EQA providers responsible for assuring sustainability and quality of assessment. EPAOs should engage with EQA providers throughout and agree a sustainable and quality assessment plan. Apprentices who have completed assessment in which assessment methods and assessment plans are deemed ready for assessment and cannot be assessed due to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, should be given a pass in the assessment.

Where there is a gap between the end of the apprenticeship and the end-point assessment, training providers should be able to support apprentices to continue learning.

Training providers should be able to support and utilised a break in learning with an extension to the assessment timeline. The training provider is required to report this to us.

EPAOs may also propose to EQA providers modifications (other than those specified in the Institute's guidance) to assessment methods, or to the assessment plan, to ensure the assessment is proportionate. The authority to do so is flexibility remains with the Institute, to ensure any modification proposals are in line with the Institute's guidance, and, where appropriate, agreed in advance by apprentices made via EQA providers.

Where apprentices have breaks in learning, training providers must report this to us and EPAOs must be able to support and utilised a break in learning in preparation for assessment and to complete.

Where coronavirus (COVID-19) results in loss of income due to viewed or furloughed staff, training providers should consider furlough payments and apply for the relevant grant from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for details of this support.

EPA flexibilities

In addition to the general flexibilities allowed by the Institute, set out in the discussion (COVID-19) guidance, EPA (COVID-19) guidance and EPA (COVID-19) discussion, EQA providers have to date agreed additional flexibilities to the assessment plan, to ensure that the assessment is proportionate, and that apprentices can complete their apprenticeship in a way that is consistent with EPA, despite the current operating constraints.

Read the list of assessment plan flexibilities agreed by flexibilities.

The Institute continues to work with EQA providers to understand where more flexibilities are required, and to agree and publish further guidance to support the delivery of EPA in the coronavirus.

The Institute will continue to update all coronavirus (COVID-19) related guidance to reflect the changes made to EPA and to ensure apprentices that the guidance is referred to be required, as it may include updated information. If you have questions about EPA, please contact the EQA or operation partner, sent to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and.

EPA flexibility for functional skills qualifications (FSQs)

The Institute had set out a temporary flexibility that enabled apprentices to complete functional skills qualifications (FSQs) instead of GCSEs, as a flexibility for awarding organisations to be able to deliver FSQs in place of GCSEs.

The flexibility enabled apprentices, who would otherwise fail to attain, gaining a qualification, to be able to complete functional skills qualifications (FSQs).

This flexibility applied to:

- apprentices who were given calculated FSQ result
- those apprentices that were deemed by their training provider to have the ability to pass the FSQ, based on their performance in the assessment process

- occupationally competent apprentices or gateway are were ready to progress to an EPA or not

This temporary measure supports qualifying apprentices to complete their EPA and achieve their apprenticeship qualifications. It applies to EPAs for apprentices who are scheduled to complete their EPA between 25 March 2020 and 25 June 2020.

Apprentices who qualify under this apprenticeship once they have passed EPA will receive their qualification. Employers will be able to use their judgement to provide prompt confirmation of the apprentice's FSQ calculated results to their training provider, and employers can be found at Apprenticeships guidance and support for employers.

Ofqual - coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance

Ofqual have published guidance for FSQs, where they are the EPA gateway.

Qualification certificates

Where awarding organisations have decided to issue certificates confirming that apprentices have completed the necessary qualifications to go through gateway, they will be able to issue certificates using the evidence they have used to determine an apprentice is competent. Awarding organisations are considering an evidence of achievement. To ensure authentication, emails must contain the following information:

- apprentice details
- qualification details
- unique number
- the course the awarding organisation will issue the formal certification.

Temporary flexibility for apprenticeship certificate address

Qualification certificates are usually sent to the apprentice's employer, but we have introduced a temporary flexibility to allow apprenticeship certificates to be sent to the apprentice's home address instead. We have made this temporary flexibility for apprentices who are furloughed or who are on leave and are not disadvantaged and feel an up-to-date certificate will be of benefit to their career.

The flexibility also applies to the current process to request a replacement certificate.

Disruption to employment

Where apprentices are on furlough or working under the Job Support Scheme (JSS), they are permitted to continue their training where their training is not affected by their employer's reduced hours.

Where apprentices are placed on unpaid leave (not on furlough), or where the nature of their employment has changed significantly, they can continue apprenticeship. The apprentice, employer and training provider should consider the impact on the apprenticeship and agree a plan that can deliver a meaningful apprenticeship.

Where apprentices are made redundant, it is our ambition that they will be supported to find another apprenticeship with a suitable employer as quickly as possible and within 12 weeks.

We have made it easier for training providers to provide apprenticeships with an apprentice who has been furloughed or who has been made redundant. Training providers can use the Apprenticeship Service (AS) to find apprentices who are looking for a new apprenticeship. Training providers can find apprentices who are looking for a new apprenticeship on the AS.

Where an apprentice is made redundant, the main provider must support the apprentice to find a suitable new employer and ensure a significant number of apprentices are made redundant (e.g. because a large employer faces insolvency), the main provider should work with other training providers to support the apprentices and training providers to secure alternative employers for the individuals.

Apprentices on furlough

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) allows employers to claim for furloughed employees who are furloughed for any reason, including for medically vulnerable, sick, and childcare reasons. It will also fund successful employee National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) was announced on 20 March 2020. Information about the extension can be found in the guidance for employers and furlough employees. The CJRS will initially last for a period of 3 months, but may be extended if required. Employers will be able to claim back 80 percent of wages, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. The £2,500 cap is proportionate for part-time hours.

When an employee is furloughed, they can continue training and apprenticeship training so long as it does not provide productivity, or generate revenue for an employer. Training should be given during furlough or when returning from furlough.

When their training provider can continue to deliver training, a furloughed apprentice can therefore continue their apprenticeship if it is not furloughed.

Where training is undertaken by apprentices on furlough, at the request of their employer, without benefit to their employer, the training provider should claim the training cost from the employer. Training providers should, at this stage, up to the value of £2,500, and provide sufficient evidence to cover their claim. Training providers should also provide evidence to their employer, to demonstrate that training has been undertaken and that employers need to pay the additional wages. It is important to note that the percentage of wages employers need to pay will be proportionate to the hours worked. Training providers should also provide evidence to their employer. Employers should not have to pay employees' wages to cover they receive 80% of their wages up to a maximum of £2,500 from the Government.

For additional information on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme please see the Gov.Uk Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme guidance.

Redundant apprentices

The existing policy on enabling redundant apprentices to complete their apprenticeship has been extended. Training providers can continue to provide apprentices with a suitable employer and ensure they receive 80% of their wages up to a maximum of £2,500 from the Government.

Support for apprentices

Where an apprentice is made redundant, but wishes to continue with their apprenticeship and training, the training provider should work with the apprentice to find a suitable employer. Training providers can find apprentices who are looking for a new apprenticeship on the AS.

Apprentice circumstances

Apprentices who were made redundant on or after 1 August 2020 but before 31 October 2020, can qualify for the 30 shortlist, even within 6 months of the first day of training.

Funding support

We will fund 100% of the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main provider and the previous employer, up to the funding band maximum.

Within this period:

- 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 training

Apprentice circumstances

Apprentices who were made redundant on or after 1 October 2020 and who within 6 months of the first day of training, no longer need to be in employment.

Funding support

We will fund 100% of the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main provider and the previous employer, up to the funding band maximum.

Within this period:

- 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 training

Apprentice circumstances

Apprentices does not fit into any category above but has less than 12 months until the first day of training.

Funding support

We will fund the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main provider and the previous employer, up to the funding band maximum.

Within this 12 week period:

- 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 training

Apprentice circumstances

Apprentices does not fit into any category above but has more than 12 months away from the first day of training.

Funding support

We will fund the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main provider and the previous employer for a maximum of 12 weeks.

Within this period:

- 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 training

- if the new employer is not found within 12 weeks, the apprentice is withdrawn from the programme. If the apprentice is able to take up the apprenticeship, they would need to satisfy the 12 month minimum duration

Training providers can continue to deliver training, if it does not affect productivity or generate revenue for an employer.

Apprentice circumstances

Apprentices who were made redundant on or after 1 October 2020 and who within 6 months of the first day of training, no longer need to be in employment.

Funding support

We will fund 100% of the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main provider and the previous employer, up to the funding band maximum.

Within this period:

- if the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point
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Apprentice circumstances

Apprentices does not fit into any category above but is more than 12 months away from the first day of training.

Funding support

We will fund the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main provider and the previous employer for a maximum of 12 weeks.

Within this period:

- if the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point
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Training providers can continue to deliver training, if it does not affect productivity or generate revenue for an employer.

Universal Credit for apprentices

Under Universal Credit regulations and guidance, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have advised that where an apprentice has been made redundant, they should be treated as being in work for the purpose of Universal Credit (UC) so long as they are earning the minimum wage. This is ensures they will receive benefits if they are unemployed, and will be able to continue to receive benefits if they are in work but earning less than the minimum wage.

Where study is work related this may be accepted as work preparation activity and other expectations will be set.

This is normally not expected to be more than 16 hours a week, although more hours may be set if the claimant is willing and able to do so. Work coach appointments are suitable for work related activity, and work coaches will seek to discuss their particular circumstances with their claim.

Claiming as an apprentice

Where an 18-year-old apprentice, who is training at level 2 or below, is made redundant, they may be eligible to claim Universal Credit (UC) and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Apprentices who are 19 or over will usually be more appropriate eligibility criteria.

If an apprentice is 18 or over and training full-time (more than 16 hours a week) they can make a claim if any of the following applies:

- they are 18 or over and have reached the age of 19 since the start of their apprenticeship
- they are pregnant and 19 or under
- they are responsible for a child
- are in a couple with responsibility for at least one child and their partner is eligible for Universal Credit
- are pregnant and 19 or under, or are disabled and have been in receipt of Universal Credit
- have had a child in the last 9 months
- do not have parental support, for example they're estranged from their parents and they are not looked after by local authority

Find more information on eligibility criteria can be found on the Universal Credit and Jobseeker's Allowance pages. Apprentices can also contact the UC page or JSA page for more information.

Redundancy Support Service for Apprentices

Apprentices who are made redundant, or who are at risk of redundancy, can access online and telephone support through the Redundancy Support Service for Apprentices.

The new service provides clear, accessible advice and guidance to individuals, including: how to find a new apprentice job, how to find a new training provider, how to find a new employer, how to find a new apprenticeship, how to find other work, how to find other training, and how to find other support.

Employers who would like to recruit a redundant apprentice or offer new apprenticeship opportunities, should use the Apprenticeship Service to post new trade redundant. These apprentices that have been made redundant may be eligible for additional support and assistance from the Government.

Functional skills requirements

For level 2 (intermediate) apprenticeships, apprentices must achieve a level in both English and Maths functional skills qualifications to complete their apprenticeship. Intermediate apprentices are also required to study towards a level 2 functional skills qualification in ICT.

Ofqual have published their temporary arrangements for the delivery of functional skills in light of coronavirus (COVID19), which includes confirmation that functional skills assessments will be available from June 2020. Ofqual have also confirmed that functional skills assessments will be available for the 16 scheduled functional skills assessments are not taking place as planned, the awarding organisations will be able to issue certificates to learners who have successfully completed their functional skills assessments. Apprentices, employers, training providers and EPA providers to focus on other learning and assessments in the last 3 months of apprenticeship.

Therefore, apprentices who are due to take their EPA on or before 31 March 2020 can continue with their assessment plan and complete their EPA, including attempt the end-to-end assessment, if their training provider is prepared. Plan providers should obtain evidence if an apprentice did not take level 2 functional skills assessments in English and Maths, or ICT, and should not hold back a learner's end-to-end EPA if it is ready to go and is a complete apprenticeship.

The temporary suspension applies to both apprenticeship standards and apprenticeship frameworks.

Apprentices undertaking a level 3 or higher apprenticeship are not required to achieve a level 2 in English and Maths functional skills qualifications and mathematics qualification before they can successfully complete their apprenticeship. If the apprentice has not achieved a level 2 in English and Maths functional skills assessment, they should be encouraged to continue to develop their skills and then progressing to EPA, as the (optional) L2 FSQ assessment can be better attempted after the EPA.

We have also extended the end dates for legacy Functional Skills Qualification (FSQ) assessments, to allow apprentices who are nearing completion of their apprenticeship, Where there are no longer any FSQ assessments available, apprentices who are nearing completion of their apprenticeship can continue. The end dates for legacy functional skills qualifications in English and maths has been extended to 31 March 2021.

Following the extended transition, all starts will be funded through the apprenticeship service from 1 April 2021. Contract activities will include a transition period, so that any apprentices who are mid-apprenticeship can be continued seamlessly through the usual routes.

We remain committed to giving smaller employers greater control over their apprenticeship training. We have made temporary changes to the apprenticeship levy to ensure that employers can continue to use their levy funds to fund training for all new apprenticeships through the apprenticeship service. As a temporary measure, we will also allow employers to transfer up to 25 percent of their levy funds to other employers, including those not paying the apprenticeship service, as well as through a provider with an existing government contract (one received until 31 March 2021).

Audit

Ofqual is the enhancement bulletin measures on Monday 23 March 2020, we have the because to pause the audit of any new accounts for providers to ensure they are able to focus on supporting apprentices and employers.

We are also suspending the requirement for independent training providers to independent training providers from September 2020 and for colleges from January 2021 to undertake a full audit. We will instead undertake a light touch audits for audits scheduled for the autumn term 2020 and spring term 2021, should we need to. We recognise the challenges training providers face as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19), and we want to ensure that we do not place further burdens on training providers at this time.

Where funding audits and investigations were already in progress prior to the lockdown, we have sought to complete the work, taking into account training providers' capacity to resume work.

We will not carry out any audits of training provider training providers during the pandemic (COVID-19) and will seek to restore confidence in the effectiveness of oversight and protection of public funds. Where such contact is necessary, we will take into account the challenges training providers face as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Frequently asked questions and further information

These questions and answers will be updated regularly in line with advice from Public Health England, 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 08450 150 600 or by email at apprenticeshipsupport@gov.uk.

Apprenticeship training frequently asked questions

Apprentices who are still working

Q Due to business continuity measures, all staff are required to be available at their usual place of work or their usual place of work. Do apprentices in apprentice centres have to attend?

A Apprentices should continue to attend their usual place of work in their usual job role, they are essential workers.

- apprentices could engage in off-the-job training within the workplace, or on educational visits or in a classroom if time allows and training is not affected
- apprentices could engage in digital or distance learning at a convenient time and place, if training is not affected

- they could be furloughed if training is affected
- they could take a short pause in their learning if less than 4 weeks while still being employed and continuing training
- they could take a pause in learning of more than 4 weeks if training is not affected and pause and date upon return to learning

Q Critical worker and essential worker apprentices are classified as critical jobs that we'll extend to their apprenticeship. What happens to the apprenticeship if they can't continue training?

Apprenticeship training must be linked to the job role that the individual is undertaking. Training providers should be able to show how the apprentice can principally carry out their apprenticeship and continue to successful completion of EPA at a future date. Funding rules currently state that training should be for a minimum of 12 months, and that at least 20 % of training provision is off-the-job training. Training providers can continue to learning where the interruption to learning is greater than 4 weeks. This should be agreed between the training provider, the employer and the apprentice, where breaks in learning are for more than 4 weeks.

Q Critical worker staff are having to be moved into different job roles/roles to support the NHS and other critical services. Can this be funded as Apprenticeship Training?

Where apprentices can remain on their programme, they should continue to fulfill the minimum 20% off-the-job training requirement. Off-the-job training is already delivered flexibly or in time and way to suit the employer and apprentice's circumstances. Training providers, employers and apprentices in gateway have delivered apprenticeship training and assessment in a variety of ways (remotely). Q Critical worker apprentice has been redeployed to support the NHS and other critical services. Can training continue?

Training, but they should be flexible in their approach to training and assessment. Training providers should be able to show how the apprentice can principally carry out their apprenticeship and continue to successful completion of EPA at a future date. Funding rules currently state that training should be for a minimum of 12 months, and that at least 20 % of training provision is off-the-job training. Training providers can continue to learning where the interruption to learning is greater than 4 weeks. This should be agreed between the training provider, the employer and the apprentice, where breaks in learning are for more than 4 weeks.

Q If an apprentice can't work/training, will they still be paid?

Q If apprenticeship is on furlough, or working, or unable to work, or not able to do their training, they are still employed, unless they have been notified otherwise by their employer. Employers will need to pay their apprentices in line with their contract of employment.

Where they are unable to work, we suggest that apprentices open to their employer a discussion about their training.

Q Apprentices who are furloughed, can they continue their apprenticeship learning?

Yes, this may be possible, depending on their apprenticeship and whether a learning is available from training provider. Apprentices should check their training providers and discuss their training with their employer.

Q What should employer's do if they think an apprentice is not welcomed to return to work because they have been furloughed, or have been furloughed and are now working?

Q If an apprentice can't work/training anymore, will they still be paid?

Q If apprenticeship is on furlough, or working, or unable to work, or not able to do their training, they are still employed, unless they have been notified otherwise by their employer. Employers will need to pay their apprentices in line with their contract of employment.

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Apprenticeships are working at home

Learn how apprenticeships are being delivered and how providers have been withdrawn. What the sectors for apprenticeships?

All apprentice is unable to perform their apprenticeship remotely, there are several options available to them:

- Start training and/or complete digital or distance learning
- Pause training and/or complete other training or other work-based learning (for example, a short course or other work-based learning opportunity that the apprentice can do)
- Pause training and/or complete other training or other work-based learning (for example, a short course or other work-based learning opportunity that the apprentice can do) and then return to training when it is safe to take into consideration the duration of their break

However since now, the government has made it clear that the furlough scheme for some apprentices as part of a coronavirus response to delivery, and from the end of March 2020 to the end of June 2020 furlough scheme for apprentices. Will the apprentices at all times be furloughed or furlough scheme for apprentices and will the support apprentices to be furlough apprentices and training providers to signal their support for furlough scheme for apprentices.

Will there also a provision for furlough scheme for apprentices in the coronavirus while they are subject to different working conditions (the working from home)?

Apprenticeship training providers are being asked to support furlough scheme, as an approach agreed with their training providers. They should continue to use their judgement.

Employers are approached to support furlough scheme for apprentices and training providers are being asked to support furlough scheme for apprentices.

Will there also a provision for furlough scheme for apprentices in the coronavirus while they are subject to different working conditions (the working from home)?

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 training 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.

45) 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 more than 100 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

46) 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 (COVID-19) related EPA cancellations.

We sent each organisation on the register of EPAOs 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 (COVID-19) pipeline of apprenticeship assessment.

47) 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 the institute 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.

1. 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. The training provider 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

49) 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 NMW legislation.

Functional skills requirements

50) What evidence do training providers 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?

Training providers 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 (COVID-19).

51) 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 31 March 2021, 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. However, If the apprentice would like to attempt the level 2 functional skills English and maths assessment, they should be allowed to do so. This shouldn't be a barrier to them progressing to EPA, as the (optional) L2 FSQ assessment can be before, alongside or after EPA.

52) What does this mean for the arrangement for gateway prior to EPA?

We want to make it as straightforward as possible to continue EPAs. Lifting the rule to take the test for intermediate (level 2) apprentices should help them to progress to EPA during the coronavirus (COVID-19) disruption.

53) 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.

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