



Department  
for Education



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

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# **Providing apprenticeships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak**

**January 2021**

# Table of Contents

Details .....	4
Updates.....	4
General information.....	4
Training and assessment in the workplace and educational settings.....	5
Training and assessment in the workplace and educational settings for vulnerable young apprentices and the children of key workers.....	6
Apprentices due to undertake EPA and FSQ assessment .....	6
Apprentices in the workplace.....	7
Disruption to training .....	7
Changing apprenticeship learning arrangements .....	7
Payments to training providers .....	7
Breaks in learning.....	8
Disruption to assessment.....	9
Payments to EPAOs.....	9
EPA flexibilities.....	10
OFQUAL - Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance.....	10
Qualification certificates.....	10
Temporary flexibility for apprenticeship certificate address .....	10
Disruption to employment .....	11
Apprentices on furlough.....	11
Redundant apprentices .....	12
Functional skills requirements.....	15
Exam Support Service – Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) Apprenticeships.....	16
Non-levy procured apprenticeships contracts .....	17
Audit.....	17
Frequently asked questions and further information .....	17
Apprenticeship training frequently asked questions .....	18
Apprentices who are still working .....	18
Apprentices who are self-isolating, caring for family members, or sick.....	19
Apprentices who are working at home.....	20
Apprentices who are on furlough.....	21
Apprentices who are made redundant.....	25

Apprentices who are on unpaid leave.....	25
Recruiting new apprentices .....	26
Apprenticeship levy and service frequently asked questions .....	27
The apprenticeship levy.....	27
Apprenticeship assessment frequently asked questions.....	29
End point assessment (EPA).....	29
Functional skills requirements .....	32

## Details

This document is for training providers (providers), employers, assessment organisations and apprentices.

It describes:

- how and when apprentices can safely train and undertake assessment in the workplace and educational and assessment settings.
- the temporary flexibilities which apply during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

## Updates

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 4 January 2021 confirming a new national lockdown, training providers, employers and EPAOs must ensure that training and assessment takes place remotely wherever possible.

Face-to-face training and assessment can continue in colleges and training providers' premises for vulnerable young apprentices and the children of key workers who need it, and for a small number of apprentices for whom some face-to-face training is essential to enable them to prepare for and undertake their end-point-assessment which was due in January or is planned for February or March.

Face-to-face training and assessment can also continue in employers' covid-secure settings where it is essential for workers to attend their workplace, and where it is safe and practical to do so.

End-point assessment (EPA) and Functional Skills (FSQ) assessments can continue in colleges, training providers' premises, assessment venues and workplaces where it cannot be conducted remotely and where providers and end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) judge it right to do so.

Visit the [training and assessment in the workplace and educational settings](#) sections for more information.

## General information

As part of the cross-government efforts to respond to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has implemented measures to make it easier for apprenticeships to continue and complete in a different way, or to take a break in learning and resume an apprenticeship later when that becomes possible.

This document also provides guidance on how and when apprentices can safely train and undertake assessment in the workplace and educational and assessment settings.

It should be read alongside the [safer working guidance](#), the [Further Education \(FE\) operational guidance](#), the [Further Education \(FE\) national restriction guidance](#), and the

government's coronavirus guidance and support for businesses at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>.

The usual apprenticeship funding rules apply to main providers, employer providers, and employers delivering apprenticeship training and on-programme assessment under the apprenticeship programme. The rules form part of the terms and conditions for the use of funds in an employer's [apprenticeship service](#) account or for government-employer co-investment.

This document sets out guidance and some temporary flexibilities to the apprenticeship funding rules that apply during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and provides answers to questions related to these changes and other common questions. This guidance should be read alongside the apprenticeship funding rules, which can be found on the [apprenticeship funding rules](#) page on GOV.UK.

Our objective for these measures is to support employers and apprentices to start, continue and complete their apprenticeships wherever possible.

We have also broken down some of this guidance into [articles](#) for employers, training providers and assessment organisations, as well as [articles for apprentices](#). 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](mailto:helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk)

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

## **Training and assessment in the workplace and educational settings**

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 4 January 2021 confirming a new national lockdown, training providers, employers and EPAOs must ensure that training and assessment takes place remotely.

As set out below, there are exceptional arrangements for training and assessment for vulnerable young apprentices and the children of key workers who need it, for a small number of apprentices for whom some face-to-face training is essential to enable them to prepare for and undertake their end-point-assessment which was due in January or is planned for February or March, and for apprentices who are undertaking EPA and FSQ assessment.

We recognise that for some apprenticeship programmes which normally involve substantial use of practical equipment and demonstration of applied knowledge this new guidance will be particularly challenging. We have seen strong examples of how providers have adapted training and assessment using virtual scenarios, and live lessons. We have also seen providers adjust the sequencing of apprenticeships to concentrate practical learning when on-site training is possible. This approach should be taken as far as possible to ensure that training can continue.

We know that receiving face-to-face training is best for apprentices' mental health and for their educational achievement. The earliest that apprentices will return to face-to-face education is 8 March. We will set out more detail and ensure we give at least 2 weeks' notice to allow apprentices, training providers, employers, and assessment organisations to prepare.

In the meantime, where restrictions prevent apprenticeship training continuing for a period of more than four weeks the apprentice, employer and provider should agree to institute a [break in learning](#) and resume training when this is possible.

Where the apprentice, employer or provider believe that remote delivery of off-the-job training or a lack of access to the workplace is compromising the quality of the apprenticeship training and there is a risk that the apprentice will not be ready for end-point assessment at the planned end-date of training, then a break in should be initiated.

### **Training and assessment in the workplace and educational settings**

Face-to-face training and assessment (including FSQ assessment) can continue in colleges, training providers' premises and assessment venues for vulnerable young apprentices and the children of key workers who need it (as defined within the [critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings guidance](#)).

The definition of vulnerable young apprentices includes those 16 to 18 year-olds who may have difficulty engaging with remote training and assessment at home (for example due to a lack of devices, connectivity or quiet space to study).

Apprentices who were planning to undertake end-point-assessment in January or are planning to do so in February or March are also able to attend educational settings for face-to-face training where it is not possible for their training to be completed remotely.

Where face-to-face training and assessment continues onsite it must be done in small groups, following a risk assessment, and with social distancing in place. The guidance on how to minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible within the [Further Education \(FE\) national restriction guidance](#) must be followed where training and assessment continues onsite.

### **Apprentices undertaking EPA and FSQ assessment**

Wherever possible EPA and FSQ assessment must be conducted remotely.

Where this is not possible face-to-face EPA and FSQ assessments can continue in colleges, training providers' premises, assessment venues and workplaces, where providers and EPAOs judge it right to do so. The guidance on delivering exams within the [Further Education \(FE\) national restriction guidance](#) must be followed where EPA continues onsite.

Where face-to-face assessment is undertaken remotely it must be in line with the Institute's guidance on the delivery of assessment.

### **Apprentices in the workplace**

Apprentices should only attend workplaces where they cannot work from home and it is essential for them to do so. Where it is essential for workers to attend their workplace, apprenticeship training and assessment can be delivered in the workplace where that workplace meets 'COVID-19 secure' guidelines on ensuring the workplace is safe.

### **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.

- For an individual, a break in learning may be necessary due to illness or self-isolation, or challenges in getting to their place of employment or location for training provision.
- For an employer, a break in learning may be necessary where there is a temporary need to redeploy apprentices to different roles or where access to the workplace or practical equipment is required to undertake training but is not possible.
- For a training provider, a break in learning may be necessary if there are challenges in providing training or assessment due to staff absences or closure of facilities.

### **Changing apprenticeship learning arrangements**

As far as it is possible and practicable to do so, employers and training and assessment providers must make use of distance-learning and assessment tools and techniques. This will enable apprentices to continue learning and assessment and complete their apprenticeships. Where it is not possible to continue training, the apprentice, employer and provider should agree to institute a break in learning and resume training when it is possible to do so. Providers and employers should remain in contact with their contracted EPAO to ensure clarity on any changes to expected gateway and assessment dates.

### **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 apprentices take breaks in learning, training providers must report this in line with the guidance below and inform EPAO and FSQ assessment 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 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. Full details of this substantial package of support can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>.

## Breaks in learning

Where it is not possible for an apprenticeship to continue, a break in learning may be initiated. A break should be initiated where remote delivery of off-the-job training or a lack of access to the workplace is compromising the quality of the apprenticeship training and there is a risk that the apprentice will not be ready for end-point assessment at the planned end date.

Apprenticeship funding rules already make provision for disruption in learning:

- **Less than and up to four 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 four 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 to promptly resume their apprenticeship and, where relevant, continue to successful completion of EPA.

As well as apprentices, employers and training providers can now, temporarily, also report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning is greater than four weeks.

For a break in learning greater than four weeks:

- the training provider should report this in their 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 (COVID-19) pause), training providers should update their ILR data in line with section the [training provider support manual](#) to ensure accurate recording and earnings calculations.

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 minimum of 20% off-the-job training requirement will apply over the remaining amended duration of the apprenticeship.

## **Disruption to assessment**

To maintain progress, achievement and delivery of EPA, the Institute have introduced flexibilities and discretions to assessment plans. These have and will continue to enable apprentices to complete their apprenticeship in the event of disruption to assessment.

All EPA flexibilities and discretions put in place due to coronavirus (COVID-19) will be extended until at least 31 August 2021. The Institute have also confirmed that they will give 12 weeks' notice from when any changes are announced to existing flexibilities before EPAOs will have to deliver them.

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 (COVID-19) 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 in addition to this time limit.

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 and keep EPAOs up to date.

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 the Institute, to whom any modification proposals should be referred, and who will approve or deny any applications made via EQA providers.

## **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 apprentices take breaks in learning, training providers must report this in line with the guidance above. Training providers and EPAOs will not receive payments for apprentices who are on breaks in learning.

### **EPA flexibilities**

In addition to the general flexibilities allowed by the institute set out in their [guidance](#) and supporting [FAQ document](#), EQA providers have agreed additional discretions to the delivery of EPA which apply to more than 100 apprenticeship standards. These discretions have the potential to allow thousands of apprentices to undertake EPA, despite the current operating constraints.

The Institute 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.

The Institute will continue to update all coronavirus (COVID-19) related guidance to reflect the evolving situation and advice. We recommend that the guidance is referred back to regularly, as it may include updated information. If the information isn't in the institute's guidance or the FAQ, a question can be sent to [Enquiries.IFA@education.gov.uk](mailto:Enquiries.IFA@education.gov.uk)

### **OFQUAL - Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance**

Ofqual have published [guidance for EPAOs](#) where they are the EQA provider.

### **Qualification certificates**

Where awarding organisations are unable to issue certificates confirming that apprentices have completed the necessary qualifications to go through gateway, as a temporary arrangement we support training 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:

- apprentice details
- certification run date
- unique number

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

### **Temporary flexibility for apprenticeship certificate address**

Apprenticeship 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 training provider address or to the apprentice themselves if the employer's office is closed. This will ensure that apprentices are not disadvantaged and held up as they plan the next steps in their post apprenticeship journey.

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

## **Disruption to employment**

Where apprentices are on furlough, they are permitted to continue with their training remotely where their training provider can continue to deliver this.

Where apprentices are placed on unpaid leave (not on furlough), or where the nature of their employment changes and no longer supports their apprenticeship, the apprentice, employer and training provider should agree a break in learning where this disruption will last four weeks or longer. (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.

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 2019-20](#) and P290 – P291 in the [funding rules for main providers 2020-21](#) for further details).

Where an apprentice is made redundant, the main provider must support the apprentice to find another employer. In instances where a significant number of apprentices are made redundant (e.g. 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.

## **Apprentices on furlough**

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.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been extended until 30 April 2021. Information about the extension can be found in the [extension to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) guidance.

When an employee is on furlough they 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 a training provider can continue to deliver training remotely, a furloughed apprentice can continue their apprenticeship whilst furloughed.

Where training is undertaken by workers on furlough, 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. Employers will have to top-up employees' wages to ensure they receive 80% of their wages up to a cap of £2,500 for the time they are furloughed.

For additional information on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme please consult [HMRC's guidance](#)

### **Redundant apprentices**

The existing policy on enabling redundant apprentices to complete their apprenticeship has been extended to also fund all apprentices to completion who are at least 75% of their way through their apprenticeship at the point of redundancy on or after 15 October 2020. More information can be found in [ESFA Update](#).

We've updated our [apprenticeship funding rules](#) to require providers to create a 'record of apprenticeship part-completion' to support an individual to find new employment where an apprentice is withdrawn because they have been unable to find a new employer.

### **Support for apprentices**

Where an apprentice is made redundant but wishes to continue with their apprenticeship and subsequently undertake EPA or other mandatory qualifications including FSQs, providers are able to access funding to continue training the redundant apprentice, in line with the eligibility criteria set out in the funding rules for main providers.

<b>Apprentice circumstances</b>	<b>Funding support</b>
Apprentice was made redundant on or after 1 August 2020 but before 15 October 2020 who, on the day of dismissal, was within six months of the final day of training	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 6-month period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point.</li><li>• If the apprentice takes a job with an employer which is not related to their apprenticeship, we will continue to fund the remaining costs.</li></ul>

<p>Apprentice was made redundant on or after 15 October 2020 and was within six months of the final day of training OR they have completed at least 75%</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Within this period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point.</li> <li>• If the apprentice takes a job with an employer which is not related to their apprenticeship, we will continue to fund the remaining costs.</li> </ul>
<p>Apprentice does not fit into any category above but has less than 12 months until the final day of training</p>	<p>We will fund the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main 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"> <li>• If the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>
<p>Apprentice does not fit into any category above and is more than 12 months away from the final day of training</p>	<p>We will fund the remaining costs of the price negotiated between the main 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"> <li>• If the apprentice finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

Employer-providers can only usually train their own staff but if they make an apprentice redundant, that apprentice can continue to be trained by them, even if they do not find a new employer.

### **Universal Credit for apprentices**

To further support redundant apprentices, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has advised that where an apprentice has been made redundant but is continuing their apprenticeship study, they can claim Universal Credit (UC) as long as they satisfy all eligibility criteria. In most cases this will include being 18 or over and undertaking work related activity – i.e. being available and looking for work and doing this alongside their study.

Where study is work related this may be accepted as work preparation activity and other expectations reduced accordingly. This is normally not expected to be more than 16 hours a week, although more than 16 hours may be possible if they are still able to satisfy all their requirements to be available to look for work. In each case, claimants will need to discuss their particular circumstances with their coach.

### **Claiming as an 18-year-old**

Where an 18-year-old redundant apprentice, who is training at level 3 or below, plans to claim prior to the 1 September following their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, their eligibility will be based on how long they train for and whether they meet the appropriate eligibility criteria.

If an apprentice is 18 or over and training full-time (more than 12 hours a week) they can make a claim if any of the following apply:

- they live with their partner and they're eligible for UC.
- they are responsible for a child, either as a single person or as a couple.
- they are disabled and entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and have limited capability for work.
- they are [in further education](#), are 21 or under and do not have parental support, for example they're estranged from their parents and they're not under local authority care.

If a redundant apprentice does not meet the criteria above but is studying more than 12 hours a week, then they would not claim UC in their own right, but their parents would be able to claim the child element of UC (if eligible) and Child Benefit instead, up until (but not including) the 1<sup>st</sup> September following their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.

If a redundant apprentice does not meet the criteria above and is studying 12 hours a week or less, then they would be able to claim UC in their own right if 18 or over. If they are under the age of 18 they would have no entitlement and their parents would not be able to claim the child element of UC or Child Benefit.

### **Exceptions for 16 and 17-year-olds**

In most cases an individual must be 18 or over to claim UC, however there are some exceptions which allow a 16 or 17-year-old to apply. If a redundant apprentice is under the age of 18 they still may be eligible to claim UC in their own right if they are training at level 3 or below and they:

- have limited capability for work or have medical evidence and are waiting for a Work Capability Assessment.
- are caring for a severely disabled person.
- 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 it's 11 weeks or less before their expected week of childbirth.
- have had a child in the last 15 weeks.
- do not have parental support, for example they're estranged from their parents and they're not under local authority care.

More information on eligibility criteria can be found on the [Universal Credit](#) page on GOV.uk. If there is any discrepancy between that page and this document, the UC page on GOV.uk takes precedence.

### **Redundancy Support Service for Apprentices**

Apprentices who have been 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 on the impact of redundancy, their options and next steps. It also helps apprentices to identify new apprenticeship and employment opportunities, and, where they are eligible, complete their current apprenticeship.

Apprentices that have been made redundant, or think they might be made redundant in the future, can visit [Facing redundancy during your apprenticeship](#) for more information. This includes the option of registering for our new vacancy sharing service which will alert redundant apprentices to employers offering new apprenticeship opportunities in their area.

Employers who would like to recruit a redundant apprentice or offer new apprenticeship opportunities, should visit [Hiring an apprentice who has been made redundant](#). Those apprentices that have been made redundant may already have the valuable skills and experience that organisations need.

## **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 are 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 considering coronavirus (COVID-19), which includes confirmation that students who were due to take functional skills assessments until 31 July 2020 will receive a calculated grade. Considering this guidance, and the fact that scheduled functional skills assessments are not taking place as planned, the rule requiring level 2 apprentices to study towards, and attempt, level 2 functional skills assessments is suspended temporarily. This will allow apprentices, employers, training providers and EPA providers to focus on other key requirements for completion of a level 2 apprenticeship.

Therefore, apprentices who are due to take their EPA on or before 31 March 2021 should be passed through gateway to sit their EPA without the need to attempt the level 2 functional skills English and maths assessment. Main providers should retain evidence if an apprentice did not take the level 2 assessments due to coronavirus (COVID-19). A level 2 apprentice will still require a level 1 functional skills in English and/or maths to complete their apprenticeship.

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

We have also extended the end dates for legacy Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQ) to ensure apprentices have enough time to complete their outstanding assessments. Where there are ongoing difficulties, employers should work with providers to make sure apprentices can complete their FSQ assessments. The end date for legacy functional skills qualifications in English and maths has been extended to 31 July 2021.

### **Exam Support Service – Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) Apprenticeships**

We recognise that these challenging times, in some cases, make it difficult for apprentices to access an FSQ test. Due to these ongoing disruptions to FSQ assessments the DfE Exam Support Service has been extended to include FSQs in apprenticeships, where assessments were planned to be delivered in the workplace.

Apprenticeship training providers will be able to access the service to book sites and invigilators for FSQ assessments and claim eligible costs.

To be eligible, the apprentice must:

- Have been expecting to take their FSQ assessment in the workplace
- Have a planned end date between 1 August – 31 March 2021
- Not be otherwise able to access an FSQ assessment



The [Exam Support Service guidance](#) has been updated to include FSQ and includes full eligibility details and the process for making a claim.

## **Non-levy procured apprenticeships contracts**

Contract extensions were issued to training providers at the beginning of March 2020 via the [Manage your education and skills funding service](#), 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 March 2021.

Following this transition all starts will be funded through the apprenticeship service from 1 April 2021.

## **Audit**

Prior to the Prime Minister's announcement of the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown measures on 23 March 2020, we made the decision to pause the start of any new routine funding audits for all post-16 providers, as result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

We restarted routine funding audits on a remote basis for independent training providers from September 2020 and for colleges from November 2020.

We are also carrying out a risk assessment on restarting site visits for audits and investigations so that we have the ability to do so, should we need to. We recognise the challenges providers face as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) and will be sensitive to these in agreeing arrangements for both remote funding audits and site visits with providers.

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

It may be necessary for ESFA to contact providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic 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 (COVID-19).

## **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 **08000 150 600** or email at [helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk](mailto: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 critical worker job role. How can apprentices continue their learning?**

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

- apprentices could engage in off-the-job training within the workplace at a convenient time within their agreed working hours
- 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 four weeks while still completing by their planned end-date
- they could take a formal break in learning of four weeks or more and re-calculate the planned end-date upon their return to learning

**2. Critical worker staff are having to be moved 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. As well as apprentices, employers and training providers can now, temporarily, also report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning is greater than four weeks. This guidance document sets out what employers and training providers need to do when [breaks in learning](#) are more or less than four weeks.

**3. Critical worker staff are having to be moved 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 their off-the-job training, ensuring that a minimum of 20% is completed over the duration of their apprenticeship. 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 training providers have developed additional training material in response to

coronavirus (COVID-19). 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, with the aim of ensuring that the apprentice gets the right training and support to be ready to complete their apprenticeship. 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.

#### **4. What should happen if an apprentice is falling behind due to training remotely?**

Where the apprentice, employer or provider believe that remote delivery of off-the-job training or a lack of access to the workplace is compromising the quality of the apprenticeship training and there is a risk that the apprentice will not be ready for end-point assessment at the planned end-date of training, then a break in learning should be initiated.

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

#### **5. If an apprentice needs to self-isolate, what will happen to their apprenticeship?**

Apprenticeships have been designed to be responsive to changes in apprentices' circumstances, for example during a period of illness. If an apprentice needs to self-isolate they should talk to their employer and training provider about the best way to continue with their apprenticeship or report a break in learning. Options include:

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

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

#### **6. What should employers do if they think an apprentice is not well enough to work (especially in a health setting)?**

Employers should follow government's guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19) at: <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 an apprentice can't work/attend training, will they still be paid?**

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

Where they are unable to work, we suggest that apprentices speak to their employer about their policies on pay.

## **8. A provider has put an apprentice on a break in learning because they can't deliver training. As the apprentice is working as normal their employer wants their apprenticeship to continue, can the employer override this break in learning?**

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. Training 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 employers have concerns, we encourage they discuss these with the provider.

### **Apprentices who are working at home**

## **9. How does an apprentice record progress towards their apprenticeship while they are subject to different working conditions like working from home?**

Apprentices should already be recording their off-the-job training activity using an approach agreed with their training provider. They should continue to use this.

## **10. When an apprentice is working from home, can a provider 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 employee's 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.

## **11. Can apprentices change training provider if they are offering more online / digital delivery?**

A change in training provider can occur at any time

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.

### **12. 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 training providers deliver blocks of training or more evenly spaced training. Training providers should factor this in if they are considering a change to the delivery methodology and timetable.

### **13. 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.

### **14. Will apprentices who have been unable to return to England, due to the outbreak, but have been able to train and work remotely still be eligible for funding?**

Yes. Although the funding rules require an apprentice to spend at least 50% of their working time in England we understand that, due to the outbreak, some apprentices will have no option but to work and train remotely from a location outside of England.

Where an existing apprentice is spending more than 50% of their working time, over the duration of their apprenticeship, outside of England due to coronavirus (COVID-19) they will remain eligible for support.

## **Apprentices who are on furlough**

### **15. Can training continue for apprentices on furlough?**

Yes, where apprentices are on furlough, 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 apprentices continue training if they can't attend their place of work?**

We do not want the disruption caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) 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 apprentices be paid for continuing training if they have been on furlough?**

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

Apprentices 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 their time spent training during the furlough period, their employer should top up their furlough payment.

**19. How will employers know if they need to top up an employee's wages if they are on furlough 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.

From 1 August 2020, the level of grant will be reduced each month, along with who has responsibility for National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions. The timetable for changes to the scheme is set out in the [changes to the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme guidance](#). 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.

When calculating whether they need to top up an apprentices wage, employers should consider the hours that an employee is expected to train during the period of the furlough (which must be a three-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 a NMW entitlement of £93.38 (£4.15 x 7.5 hours x 3 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.

From September 2020, where the level of grant from the government has been reduced to below 80%, the employer must substitute the contribution the government is currently making, ensuring that staff continue to receive at least 80% of their salary, up to £2,500 a month.

#### **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 NMW 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 x 7.5 hours x 4 days x 3 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).

From September 2020, where the level of grant from the government has been reduced to below 80%, the employer must substitute the contribution the government is currently making, ensuring that staff continue to receive at least 80% of their salary, up to £2,500 a month. This is in addition to the £9.84 calculated above.\*Note in both cases above the apprentice, prior to furlough, was paid at/close to the NMW.

## **20. Where an apprentice is on furlough they and their employer still take part in a progress review?**

Yes, where apprentices are on furlough, 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 on furlough, 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 an apprentice on furlough 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 on furlough they must not carry out their normal work.

## **22. Can an apprentice on furlough 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](#).

## **23. Can an employer still receive an incentive payment if an apprentice is put on furlough?**



If an employer recruits a new apprentice who is eligible for the incentive payment and this apprentice is subsequently furloughed through the CJRS, the employer can still receive the payment as long as the apprentice remains in training. However, if the furloughed apprentice does not continue in training and is put on a break in learning, the incentive will not be paid (as set out in the conditions signed by the employer).

## Apprentices who are made redundant

### **24. What happens to an apprenticeship when an apprentice is made redundant?**

Apprentices should speak to their training provider if they are made redundant as their apprenticeship training and assessment may be able to continue.

Training providers may still be able to offer training, based on an apprentice's circumstances, in the short term. They may even be able to support them in finding a new employer.

If that move becomes permanent, apprentices should look to see which alternative apprenticeship they can transfer to at [Find Apprenticeship Training](#) and liaise with their training provider in the usual way.

### **25. Will apprentices who would, if not for the outbreak, have started with their new employer within 30 days of leaving their last still be eligible for funding when they start working for their new employer?**

Yes. Although the funding rules only allow an apprentice to have a 30-day break between employers we understand that, due to the outbreak, some apprentices will have not been permitted to start working for and training with their new employer. Where an apprentice had planned to start with their new employer within 30 days of leaving their last but has had a break of over 30 days between employers due to coronavirus (COVID-19) they will remain eligible for support on their return.

## Apprentices who are on unpaid leave

### **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. HMRC will reimburse up to 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. Information is available at [www.gov.uk/browse/benefits](http://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 (COVID-19), if all personal and programme eligibility funding rules can be met and the provider is still able to support this activity.

From 1 November onwards, employers can only claim for furloughed employees that were on the PAYE payroll on or before 30 October 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 apprentice signatures being relaxed during coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

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 training 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 an apprentice 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 training providers delivering training and/or recruiting apprentices during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will experience difficulty in obtaining apprentice and employer wet signatures. Therefore, where training providers do not have systems and processes in place for electronic/digital signatures, during the coronavirus (COVID-19) 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 apprentice 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 apprentice and/or employer.
- A signed scanned document attached to an email from the apprentice and/or employer.
- A photo taken on a camera/digital medium of the signed document attached to an email from the apprentice and/or employer.

We are allowing training providers to use this type of electronic confirmation during the period of restrictions due to coronavirus (COVID-19) only where no other useable 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 (COVID-19) restrictions are lifted.

Following the period of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, training providers using the above alternative evidence must resume their usual process for obtaining wet signatures on relevant documentation. Training providers must ensure that all alternative evidence replacing wet signatures received during the coronavirus (COVID-19) 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 (COVID-19) 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. Why can't levy 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 (COVID-19).**

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 (COVID-19) 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. Full details of this substantial package of support can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>.

### **33. Can non-levy employers still 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 published [guidance](#).

### **34. What happens to funding reservations if an 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 the 20% completion payment that would normally be withheld until the end of apprenticeship training be released early 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 to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses->

[about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses](#) for more information on support available.

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

In circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID-19), 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. Can end-point-assessment still go ahead in this lockdown?**

Yes, EPA and even FSQ assessments can continue in colleges, training providers' premises, assessment venues and workplaces where it cannot be conducted remotely and where providers and EPAOs judge it right to do so.

Face-to-face training can also take place in educational settings where it is essential to enable them to prepare for and undertake their end-point-assessment which was due in January or is planned for February or March.

#### **38. An apprentice is on a fixed-term contract which would ordinarily have given them enough time to complete the training and the EPA. If the training is delayed and they have not completed their EPA before they leave employment, can they do the EPA afterwards?**

Apprentices must be employed when they are taking their EPA, so where a break in learning has been necessary, and the planned end-date for their apprenticeship has had to move back, they should speak to their employer and training provider. We would expect employers and training providers to work with apprentices to reschedule training, which may also include reviewing apprenticeship agreements and commitment statements. We will keep this under review as the situation evolves.

#### **39. What will happen if an apprentice is not well enough to take their EPA?**

If an apprentice is unwell, or in a period of self-isolation, and unable to attend their EPA, they should contact their training provider as soon as they are able, to allow them maximum time to re-schedule the assessment.

#### **40. Can apprentices on furlough still take their EPA?**

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

Where it is essential for workers to attend their workplace, EPA and FSQ assessment can be delivered in the workplace where that workplace meets 'COVID-19 secure' guidelines on ensuring the workplace is safe.

**41. Gateways are being delayed and the EPA cannot be completed in the required time frame. Can the EPA timeframe be extended 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.

**42. Where the EPA plan states that assessment must be conducted face-to-face but cannot be under the current circumstances, can they be conducted 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.
- Where 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.

**43. 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.

**44. 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 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 over 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.

#### **48. 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.