



Department  
for Education



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

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

**February 2021**

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## Details

This document is for apprenticeship training providers (providers), employers, end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) 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

This document should be read alongside:

- the [safer working guidance](#)
- the [Further Education \(FE\) operational guidance](#)
- the government's [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance and support for businesses](#)
- the [apprenticeship funding rules](#)
- The Institute for [Apprenticeships and Technical Education guidance](#)

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

We have broken down some of this guidance into [articles](#) for employers, providers and assessment organisations, as well as [articles for apprentices](#). These can be found on our [Apprenticeship Service Help page](#).

## Updates

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 22 February, from 8 March all apprentices will be able to attend on-site training and assessment. The only exception is apprentices in Higher Education (HE). Apprentices can only return to HE settings if they need practical training and access to specialist equipment and facilities.

## Training and assessment in the workplace and educational settings

Training and assessment can usually take place in education settings, assessment centres (including community settings), and the workplace. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak we have had to restrict where training and assessment takes place.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 4 January 2021 all training and assessment should be undertaken remotely until 8 March, except 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

- apprentices who are working and face-to-face training in the workplace can take place safely
- vulnerable young apprentices and the children of key workers who need it
- apprentices who are undertaking EPA and FSQ assessment

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 22 February, from 8 March, apprentices may attend on-site training and assessment in educational settings, in addition to the on-site training and assessment that is currently permitted in workplaces.

Apprentices can return to HE settings if they need practical training and access to specialist equipment and facilities. Apprentices should not return to HE settings if they can continue to train remotely.

As was the case prior to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, providers, employers and EPAOs should continue to judge the appropriate balance of on-site and remote training and assessment to provide high quality training.

The government is further strengthening the measures to control the virus, to provide more reassurance and to help decrease the disruption the virus causes to education and training.

Providers, employers and EPAOs should operate in line with the relevant guidance.

We will keep this guidance under review and update as necessary.

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

Before 8 March, apprenticeship providers should remain open to:

- vulnerable apprentices
- apprentices with at least one parent or carer who is [listed as a critical worker](#)
- apprentices who were planning to undertake end-point assessment in January, February or March. These apprentices can attend educational settings for face-to-face training where it is not possible for their training to be completed remotely

From 8 March, all apprentices will be able to return to all educational settings. The only exception is apprentices in HE settings who can continue to train remotely. These apprentices should continue to train remotely and not return to face-to-face teaching. Apprentices in HE settings who need practical training can return to HE settings to access specialist equipment and facilities.

As was the case prior to coronavirus (COVID-19), apprenticeship delivery can be extremely flexible, and it is up to training providers, employers and EPAOs to agree how apprenticeship training is delivered, and how assessments are undertaken. They should consider whether they want to take advantage of more than one delivery method and should continue to determine the appropriate balance of on-site and remote training based on the apprenticeship and the apprentice's ability to train remotely.

Where apprentices are in training settings, providers should follow the [Further Education \(FE\) operational guidance](#), including updated guidance on testing and face coverings.

Where apprentices are in HE settings, providers should follow the [add link to HE guidance].

The Government will review, by the end of the Easter holidays, the options for the return of remaining apprentices to HE settings.

## Apprentices undertaking EPA and FSQ assessment

Until 8 March, 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.

From 8 March all apprentices will be able to undertake EPA and FSQ in all settings.

EPAOs should continue to determine the appropriate balance of on-site and remote assessment based on the apprenticeship and the apprentice's ability to take their assessment remotely.

The guidance on delivering exams within the [Further Education \(FE\) national restriction guidance](#) must be followed where the EPA takes place onsite.

Where face-to-face assessment is undertaken remotely it must be in line with The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education '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

### Breaks in learning

Apprentices may be unable to attend training because of illness, caring responsibilities and operational disruption, and training providers may be unable to deliver training.

Apprenticeship funding rules already make provision 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 remains the same and there is no change to the payment of funding
- **more than 4 weeks** – in these circumstances, employers and/or training providers must report a formal break in learning. Where a break in learning is reported, the payment of funding to the training provider will be suspended for the duration of the break in learning

As well as apprentices, employers and training providers can now, temporarily, report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning is greater than 4 weeks.

Apprentices, employers and providers should initiate a break in learning where:

- restrictions prevent apprenticeship training continuing for a period of more than 4 weeks
- 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
- the apprentice is unwell, in self-isolation, or facing challenges getting to their place of employment or location for training provision
- there is a temporary need to redeploy apprentices to different roles
- access to the workplace or practical equipment is required to undertake training but is not possible
- there are challenges in providing training or assessment due to staff absences or closure of facilities

For a break in learning greater than 4 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 in 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
- inform EPAO and FSQ assessment providers

If a break in learning has been necessary, and the planned end-date for their apprenticeship has moved back, employers and providers are expected to work with apprentices to reschedule training, which may include reviewing apprenticeship agreements and commitment statements.

When the apprentice, training provider and employer are 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 ILR support manual](#) to ensure accurate recording and earnings calculations.

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.

Training providers will not receive payments for apprentices who are on a break in learning.

## Provider payments

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 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) reserves the right to recover funding which was claimed for and paid to the provider but for which the provider was found not to be eligible.

Providers:

- will not be paid more for rescheduling off-the-job training and bringing it forward. The normal monthly payment profile will apply over the length of the apprenticeship. Training providers should factor this in if they are considering a change to the delivery methodology and timetable
- may need to revise the price of their 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
- are encouraged to record any material changes, but it may not be possible to do it immediately

## Disruption to assessment

Until 8 March, EPA and FSQ assessments can continue in colleges, training providers' premises and assessment venues where it cannot be conducted remotely and where providers and EPAOs judge it right to do so.

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.

From 8 March all apprentices will be able to undertake EPA and FSQ in all settings.

EPAOs should continue to determine the appropriate balance of on-site and remote assessment based on the apprenticeship and the apprentice's ability to take their assessment remotely.

## Remote tests

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 and shared with EQA providers on a timely basis

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.

## **Rescheduling EPA**

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. 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.

The direct observation sections 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 way 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.

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.

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.

## **EPA flexibilities**

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) have been extended until at least 31 August 2021. The Institute will give 12 weeks' notice from when any changes are announced to existing flexibilities before EPAOs will have to deliver them.

In addition to the flexibilities set out by the I, EQA providers have agreed additional discretions to the delivery of EPA which apply to more than 100 apprenticeship standards.

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.

EPAOs may propose to EQA providers modifications (rather than substitutions) to specified assessment methods if 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.

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. The Institute will continue to update all coronavirus (COVID-19) related guidance. If the information isn't in the Institute's guidance or further guidance, please contact [Enquiries.IFA@education.gov.uk](mailto:Enquiries.IFA@education.gov.uk).

### **EPA for apprentices on furlough**

If an apprentice is on furlough, they can sit their EPA providing that they meet the conditions for apprentices on furlough. 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.

### **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.

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.

### **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. For authentication, emails must contain the following information:

- apprentice details
- certification run date
- unique number

The awarding organisation will issue the formal certification when they are able to do so.

## Apprenticeship certificates

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

## Disruption to employment

If apprentices are required to attend their usual place of work in their usual job role, they could:

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

Where apprentices cannot attend their usual place of work, they could,

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

## Apprentices on furlough

Apprentices on furlough can take part in volunteer work or training for their apprenticeship if it does not provide services to or generate revenue for their employer. Training in this

context includes apprenticeship off-the-job training. Therefore, a furloughed apprentice can continue their apprenticeship where a training provider can continue to deliver training remotely. The off-the-job training rules continue to apply. 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.

If an employer wants to query an example of what an apprentice can do whilst on furlough they should speak to the [HMRC helpline](#).

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) allows employers to claim for 80% of furloughed employees' 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. This includes apprentices.

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

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. 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, considering the increase in minimum wage rates from 1 April 2020. 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.

When calculating whether they need to top up an apprentice's 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.

Examples of furlough payment can be found in [Annex A](#)

### **Apprentices on unpaid leave**

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 4 weeks or longer. (See section on [breaks in learning](#)). Where this is a permanent change the apprentice should be withdrawn.

## Redundant apprentices

Following redundancy, providers may still be able to offer apprentices training, based on their circumstances.

Where an apprentice is made redundant, the main provider must support the apprentice to find another employer and continue their apprenticeship as quickly as possible. In instances where a significant number of apprentices are made redundant (for example, because a large employer faces difficulties), ESFA will attempt to provide exceptional practical support to the apprentices and training providers to secure alternative employers for the individuals.

Policy on enabling redundant apprentices to complete their apprenticeship has been extended to 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 redundant 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 can access funding to continue training the redundant apprentice, in line with the eligibility criteria set out in the funding rules for main providers.

### **1. Apprentice was made redundant on or after 1 August 2020 but before 15 October 2020 who, on the day of dismissal, was within 6 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 if the apprentice:

- finds a new employer where they can complete their apprenticeship, the new employer assumes outstanding liabilities and benefits from that point
- takes a job with an employer which is not related to their apprenticeship, we will continue to fund the remaining costs

### **2. Apprentice was made redundant on or after 15 October 2020 and was within 6 months of the final day of training OR they have completed at least 75%**

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
- takes a job with an employer which is not related to their apprenticeship, we will continue to fund the remaining costs

### **3. Apprentice does not fit into any category above but has less than 12 months until the final day of training**

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 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
- 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
- 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

### **4. Apprentice does not fit into any category above and is more than 12 months away from the final day of training**

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 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
- 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
- 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 need to satisfy the 12-month minimum duration rule

## **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 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 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.

## Changing employers

Funding rules only allow an apprentice to have a 30-day break between employers but, 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.

## Universal Credit for 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) if they satisfy all eligibility criteria. In most cases this will include being 18 or over and undertaking work related activity – for example, 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 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. If they:

- live with their partner and they're eligible for UC
- are responsible for a child, either as a single person or as a couple
- 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, 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 is available on [Universal Credit: Eligibility](#). If there is any discrepancy between that webpage and this document, the Universal Credit: Eligibility webpage takes precedence.

### **Apprentices unable to return to work in England**

Apprentices who have been unable to return to England, due to the outbreak, but have been able to train and work remotely will still be eligible for funding. 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.

## **Functional skills requirements**

### **Temporary flexibility suspending the requirement for Level 2 to attempt FSQs at L2 (where they have already achieved a Level 1 FSQ)**

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



functional skills assessments at level 2. However, apprentices who are due to take their EPA on or before 31 March 2021 **do not have to attempt the level 2 functional skills English and maths assessment** and can move through to gateway to sit their EPA. 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.

## Calculated Assessment Grades 2020

Ofqual 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 EPAOs 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 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)

A level 2 apprentice will still require a level 1 functional skills in English and/or maths to complete their apprenticeship. 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. 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 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**

Due to these ongoing disruptions to FSQ assessments the Department for Education (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.

## **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 carrying out a risk assessment on restarting site visits for audits and investigations so that we can do so, should we need to.

Where funding audits and investigations were already in progress, we have sought to complete the work, considering 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.

## **Obtaining signatures**

It is expected that where training providers already have a digital or electronic signature process, they must continue to use 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 have trouble in obtaining apprentice and employer wet signatures. Therefore, where training providers do not have systems and

processes in place for electronic or digital signatures, during the coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, confirmation or evidence can be obtained through email.

For the purpose of audit evidence, a record of acknowledgement or adoption of a genuine electronic message or document is required. 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 or digital medium of the signed document attached to an email from the apprentice and/or employer

Training providers can 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.

## Contact us

We cannot address individual scenarios or circumstances. For queries not covered by this guidance, please contact the apprenticeship service helpline by:

Telephone: **08000 150 600**

Email: [helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk](mailto:helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk)

## Annex A

### Examples of Furlough payment

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 ( $£4.15 \times 7.5 \text{ hours} \times 3 \text{ weeks}$ ).

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

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 ( $£8.20 \times 7.5 \text{ hours} \times 4 \text{ days} \times 3 \text{ weeks}$ ).

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

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.

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write to Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London, TW9 4DU

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