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[Department
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Guidance

Providing apprenticeships during the COVID-19 pandemic

Updated 19 October 2021

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Details

This guidance 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, education and assessment settings
- the temporary flexibilities which apply during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

This document should be read alongside:

- the [working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance](#)
- [Further Education \(FE\) operational guidance](#)
- the government's [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance and support for businesses](#)
- the [apprenticeship funding rules](#)
- [Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education guidance](#)
- [the public health guidance to support exams for 2021 to 2022](#)

Our aim is to help employers and apprentices start, continue and complete their apprenticeships wherever possible.

Some of this guidance can be found on the [Apprenticeship Service Help page](#) for employers, providers and assessment organisations, as well as in [articles for apprentices](#).

Updates

We have removed the apprentices on furlough section as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has ended.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has extended end-point assessment discretions and flexibilities.

The following temporary flexibilities have ended and we have removed these sections:

- permitting email confirmation as evidence of achievement of qualifications where awarding organisations were unable to issue certificates
- enabling apprentices to spend more than 50% of their working hours outside England where they were unable to return to England to work
- permitting end-point assessment prior to FSQ achievement

We have removed the Ofqual guidance for EPAOs section as this is covered by guidance from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Apprenticeship training and assessment

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

All apprentices can attend on-site training and assessment in educational settings as well as workplaces.

Providers, employers and EPAOs should operate in line with the relevant guidance and continue to judge the appropriate balance of on-site and remote training and assessment.

Training and assessment in educational settings

Apprenticeship delivery can be very flexible, and it is up to training providers, employers and EPAOs to agree:

- how apprenticeship training is delivered
- how assessments are undertaken
- whether to use more than one training delivery method
- 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](#). HE providers should follow the [HE guidance](#).

Apprentices undertaking EPA and FSQ assessment

All apprentices can undertake end-point assessment (EPA) and functional skills qualification (FSQ) assessments 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.

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

Where face to face assessment is undertaken remotely, [guidance from The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#) (the Institute) must be followed.

Apprentices in the workplace

Social distancing measures ended in the workplace on 19 July and it is no longer necessary for the government to advise people to work from home. All

apprentices can attend the workplace.

Employers should continue to follow the working safely guidance. When considering a return to the workplace, employers should:

- reflect this in their workplace risk assessment
- take action to manage the risk of COVID-19 spreading, in line with the guidance

Disruption to training

Breaks in learning

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

Apprenticeship funding rules state that for disruption in learning of:

- less than and up to 4 weeks – 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 – 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

As well as apprentices, employers and training providers can now, temporarily, initiate and report a break in learning if:

- restrictions prevent apprenticeship training 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 by the planned end-date
- 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 individualised learner record (ILR) submission using the last date in learning
- 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
- the employer should inform the EPAO and the provider should inform the FSQ assessment providers

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

When the apprenticeship resumes, training providers should update their ILR data in line with the [training provider ILR support manual](#) to ensure accurate recording and earnings calculations.

During breaks in learning apprentices do not need to comply with the minimum of 20% off-the-job training requirement. When training resumes, the minimum of 20% off-the-job training requirement will apply over the remaining 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 changes occur to the agreed delivery method that result in a change in price, then this should be discussed and amended
- are encouraged to record any material changes in costs, but it may not be

possible to do so immediately

Disruption to assessment

All apprentices can 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

If an assessment 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 taken into consideration to ensure a fair and reliable assessment of occupational competence

Where alternatives are not appropriate, pausing and rescheduling might be necessary. An extension of 12 weeks is allowable for EPA plans where a time limit is specified from gateway to EPA. But it must be logged and shared with EQA providers on a timely basis.

Tests must only be carried out in a supervised, controlled environment. 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 but cannot be assessed due to issues relating to COVID-19 can 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 timeframes. EPAOs should work with EQA providers to ensure that quality is maintained.

Direct observation should be rescheduled if they cannot be done remotely. Where a specified assessment method for a standard might need to be adjusted to meet the original intent without threatening safety, EPAOs should discuss this 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.

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 informed.

EPA flexibilities

To maintain progress, achievement and delivery of EPA, the Institute have introduced [flexibilities and discretions to assessment plans](#). These allow apprentices to complete their apprenticeship in the event of disruption.

The Institute has extended all EPA flexibilities and discretions put in place due to COVID-19 until 31 December 2021. Some flexibilities will be retained permanently and will apply to all apprenticeships. The Institute will clarify how the retained flexibilities will be applied.

Temporary discretions, which apply only to specific apprenticeships, began their notice period on 5 August and will end on 31 December 2021. Some discretions will remain for occupations which are still experiencing disruption due to COVID-19. The Institute will clarify which apprenticeships will retain their discretions in December 2021.

EQA providers remain responsible for assuring consistency and quality of assessment. While the flexibilities are in place, EPAOs should engage with EQA providers and agree arrangements in advance if remote assessment replaces face-to-face assessment or if a simulated environment is to be used. EPAOs may propose modifications (rather than substitutions) to assessment methods providing 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 will continue to update COVID-19 related guidance. If the information isn't in the Institute's guidance, contact Enquiries.IFA@education.gov.uk.

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.

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

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 requesting a replacement certificate.

Disruption to employment

If apprentices are required to work in their usual job at their usual place of work, 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 their planned end-date upon their return to learning

If 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 their planned end-date upon their return to learning

Apprentices on unpaid leave

If apprentices are placed on unpaid leave, or the nature of their employment changes and no longer supports their apprenticeship, the apprentice, employer and training provider should agree a break in learning if the disruption will last 4 weeks or longer. (See section on [breaks in learning](#)). If 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.

If an apprentice is made redundant, the main provider must help the apprentice find another employer to continue their apprenticeship as quickly as possible. 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.

Funds are available to help all redundant apprentices complete their apprenticeship if they are at least 75% of their way through their apprenticeship at the point of redundancy and were made redundant after 15 October 2020. More information can be found in the [ESFA update](#).

We've updated our [apprenticeship funding rules](#) to require providers to create a 'record of apprenticeship part-completion' to help apprentices find employment when they are withdrawn because they have been unable to find a new employer.

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

Situation 1: 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.

If the apprentice, within this period:

- 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

Situation 2: apprentice does not fit into the 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.

If, within this 12-week period:

- 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 will be 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

Situation 3: 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.

If, within this 12-week period:

- 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 will be 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 for apprentices

Apprentices that have been made redundant, or think they might be made redundant, can find information about their options and next steps at [redundancy support for apprentices](#).

They can also register with [Find an apprenticeship](#). Once registered, they can search and apply for new opportunities using selected criteria such as location,

occupation, job role and keywords. They can also set up alerts to be notified when new opportunities become available.

Employers who would like to recruit a redundant apprentice or offer new apprenticeship opportunities, should [create an apprenticeship service account](#), or [sign in](#) if they already have one. Once they create an apprenticeship opportunity, it will be advertised on [Find an apprenticeship](#). Apprentices that have been made redundant may already have 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 pandemic, 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 COVID-19, they will remain eligible for support on their return.

Universal Credit for apprentices

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) advises 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 includes being 18 or over and undertaking work related activity – for example, being available and looking for work alongside their study.

If study is work-related, this may be accepted as work preparation activity. This is normally expected to be less than 16 hours a week, although more than 16 hours may be possible if the individual is still able to satisfy all the requirements of being available and looking for work. In each case, claimants will need to discuss their circumstances with their coach.

More information is available on [Universal Credit: Eligibility](#). If there is any discrepancy between that webpage and this, the Universal Credit: Eligibility webpage takes precedence.

Functional skills requirements

Temporarily suspending the requirement for Level 2 apprentices to attempt Level 2 FSQs

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 have a planned end date of on or before 31 December 2021 do not have to work towards and attempt the level 2 functional skills English and maths assessment and can move through to gateway to sit their EPA. For apprentices with a planned end date after 31 December 2021, the normal (pre-COVID) rules and requirements for level 2 apprentices apply. Main providers should retain evidence if an apprentice did not take the level 2 assessments and add a dated note to the evidence pack for the apprentice explaining that the test was not taken due to revised guidance during COVID-19.

This temporary suspension will allow apprentices, employers, training providers and EPAOs to focus on other key requirements for completion of a level 2 apprenticeship.

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.

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 should not be a barrier to them progressing to EPA, as the (optional) level 2 FSQ assessment can be taken before, alongside or after EPA.

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.

Audit

Obtaining signatures

If 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.

If a provider has no system or process in place to capture a digital or electronic signature, then a wet signature is normally required for recruitment and evidence of continuing learning. A wet signature is created when a person physically 'marks' a document.

If training providers cannot obtain wet signatures due to the COVID-19 restrictions, confirmation or evidence can be obtained through email.

For 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 only use this type of electronic confirmation during the period of restrictions due to COVID-19 if no other useable digital or electronic processes exist. This is not to be used as alternative evidence as part of a provider's business as usual process once the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

Training providers using alternative evidence must resume their usual process for obtaining wet signatures when restrictions are removed. Training providers must ensure that all alternative evidence replacing wet signatures received during the 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

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