



Department  
for Education



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

# The Apprenticeship Programme response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

## Version 23 March 2020

### **Guidance for apprentices, employers, training providers, end-point assessment organisations and external quality assurance providers**

This document sets out guidance for apprentices, employers, training providers and assessment organisations in response to the impact of COVID-19. It outlines the changes that the Education and Skills Funding Agency is making to the apprenticeship programme during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the introduction of urgent government measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and a rapidly developing situation, these guidelines reflect arrangements applied at the current time. This guidance will be kept under active review and updated regularly with further developments.

Last updated: 24 March 2020

## General information

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

This document sets out guidance and some temporary flexibilities that we are introducing to the programme during the pandemic and provides answers to questions related to these changes and other common questions. Our information should be read alongside Government's COVID-19 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 Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) has also published new guidance on the delivery of assessment at <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/response-to-covid-19/>

This document includes information on:

- applying the policy on breaks in learning;
- delays to end-point assessment (EPA); and
- alternative arrangements for EPA and external quality assurance.

Specifically, we are:

- Encouraging training providers to deliver training to apprentices remotely and via e-learning as far as is practicable.
- Allowing the modification of end-point assessment arrangements, including remote assessments wherever practicable and possible.
- Clarifying that apprentices ready for assessment but who cannot be assessed due to COVID-19 issues can have their end-point assessment rescheduled. Apprentices whose gateway is delayed can have an extension to the assessment timeframe.
- Enabling employers and training providers to report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning due to COVID-19 is greater than four weeks.
- Clarification on how to record breaks in learning so that funding is not unnecessarily disrupted.
- Confirming that where apprentices are made redundant, it is our ambition to find them alternative employment and continue their apprenticeship as quickly as possible and within 12 weeks.

Our objective for these measures is to support all employers and apprenticeship training and assessment providers to retain their apprentices and to help them plan with more certainty through this difficult period of disruption.

These guidance and measures start immediately and apply until further notice.

As users of this document will understand, this information and any changes we are making are being developed during a time of rapid social and economic developments. We are keeping the developing situation and our guidance under review and will continue updating this guidance as new information is available and/ or the situation evolves. This will include information on support where an apprentice may face redundancy as a result of COVID-19.

Unfortunately, we cannot address individual scenarios or circumstances. For queries not covered by this guidance, please contact the apprenticeship service helpline by telephone on **0800 150 600** or email at [helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk](mailto:helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk)

## Overview

### Government measures to support businesses and employees

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

We are working closely with HM Treasury to monitor how the support packages are benefitting organisations and to consider any further action which may be required.

Additional advice and guidance from ACAS can also be found at: <https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>

### Apprenticeship programme response

In this difficult time, employers and training providers are doing their best for their workforce. We want to support that by ensuring that wherever possible apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeship, despite any break they have to take as a result of COVID-19. Investing in the support of high quality apprenticeships is a vital part of supporting the economic recovery that will follow. We are committed to working with training providers, end-point assessment organisations and external quality assurance organisations to mitigate the impacts of this disruption and maintain the integrity of apprenticeships.

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

## Detailed guidance for training providers and employers

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

### Disruption to training

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

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

### Changing apprenticeship learning arrangements

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

### Breaks in learning

Apprenticeship funding rules already make provision for disruption in learning:

- **Less than 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 continue to successful completion of end-point assessment.

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

### Payments to training providers

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

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

Where the 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>.

### Arrangements for disrupted training delivery in March

As a result of COVID-19, there will be cases where training providers have delivered training during March but had to suspend this training before the end of the month. It is likely that this training will have been suspended knowing that the interruption will last longer than four weeks and will constitute a break in learning.

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

- include these learners in their March ILR submission as on programme;
- record, retain and submit evidence in the usual way;
- record a break in learning in their April ILR submission; and
- ensure that these learners are not recorded as permanently withdrawn from their apprenticeship, by entering the 'Completion status' field of the ILR as '6', denoting that the learner has temporarily withdrawn from learning due to an agreed break in learning.

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

During March levy-paying employers should not use the apprenticeship service to 'pause' or 'stop' payments to the training provider where some training has been delivered in March. Doing so will result in the training provider not receiving any payment for these apprentices.

### Arrangements for April and beyond

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

- the training provider should report this in their April ILR submission, or in the month in which the break of learning commenced; and
- 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 COVID 19 pause) training providers should update their ILR data in line

with section 5.4 in the training provider support manual to ensure accurate recording and earnings calculations. Training providers will not receive funding payments for apprentices during a break in learning.

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

### **Disruption to assessment**

With IFATE and Ofqual, we are introducing flexibilities to enable apprentices to complete their apprenticeship in the event of disruption to assessment either separately to, or as well as, disruption to training and employment.

External Quality Assurance Providers (EQAPs) remain responsible for assuring consistency and quality of assessment. End-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) should engage with EQAPs 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 COVID-19 related issues, will be able to have their EPA rescheduled. Where there is a specified time limit for EPA post gateway, a further pause of 12 weeks is allowable.

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

EPAOs may also propose to EQAPs 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.

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

### **Disruption to employment**

Where apprentices are furloughed (granted a leave of absence) or placed on unpaid leave, or where the nature of their employment changes and no longer supports their apprenticeship, the apprentice, employer and training provider should consider whether a break in learning would be appropriate. (See section above on breaks in learning.)

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

Apprenticeship funding rules already make provision for apprentices who are made redundant so that wherever possible they can continue their apprenticeship and proceed to end-point assessment. (See P271-P273 in the [funding rules for main providers 2019-20](#) for further details).

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

## Frequently Asked Questions and further information

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

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

### Changes to learning and employment

This section covers anything that affects how learning will be conducted and breaks in learning activity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**4. My employer is asking me to take a period of unpaid leave, what happens to my apprenticeship during that time?**

Where you are no longer able to work, but have not been made redundant, you can take a break from your apprenticeship and resume when you return to work. Please get in touch with your training provider who will inform us of a break in learning.

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

The ACAS website may also be a good source of information.

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

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 a lesser number of 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)

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

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

You will already be recording your off-the-job training activity using an approach agreed with your training provider. Please continue to use this in the coming weeks. If your work circumstances change because of COVID-19 so that the minimum 20% off the job cannot be met, you will need to liaise with your employer or training provider to agree a break in learning.

#### **7. My employer is laying me off/making me redundant. What happens to my apprenticeship?**

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

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

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

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

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

#### **9. Due to business continuity measures all staff are required to be available at their usual place of work. How can my apprentices continue their learning?**

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

- a. apprentices could engage in digital or distance learning at a convenient time within their agreed working hours;
- b. they could be offered additional on-site mentor support;
- c. they could take a short pause in their learning of less than four weeks while still completing by their planned end-date; or
- d. 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.

**10. I am having to move staff into different and/or business critical roles that aren't related to their apprenticeship. What happens to their apprenticeship?**

It is our goal that apprentices can promptly resume their apprenticeship and continue to successful completion of end-point assessment. Funding rules currently state that a break in learning must be initiated by the apprentice. Employers and training providers can now temporarily also report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning is greater than 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, and if that break commences during or after March.

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

**11. What do I do if I 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>

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

Employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy are able to reserve apprenticeship funding through the apprenticeship service in line with the published [guidance](#).

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

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

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

Government policy does not allow payment for services in advance of delivery. The government has set out a substantial package of support to businesses to mitigate the impact of the 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.

**15. Should employers use the ‘Stop’ or ‘Pause’ apprentice facility in the apprenticeship service?**

In circumstances related to 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.

**Changes to assessment**

This section covers all questions related to completion of the apprenticeship.

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

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

**17. What will happen if I am not well enough to take my end-point assessment?**

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

**18. Gateways are being delayed and we cannot complete the end-point assessment in the required time frame. Can we extend the EPA timeframe due to the current disruption?**

Apprentices who are deemed ready for assessment and cannot be assessed due to assessor illness or Covid-19 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 EQAPs to ensure 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.

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

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

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

**20. 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 all testing meets security requirements and that the details of invigilators are recorded and available for confirmation by EQAPs.

**21. If the current situation continues for a long period of time would you consider awarding the apprenticeship without the end-point assessment?**

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.

End-point assessment organisations are encouraged to advise the ESFA if they are cancelling or postponing EPAs in order for us to monitor the impact. We will be contacting EPAOs directly and updating the guidance with further information mechanisms for informing us shortly.

**22. Can the timeframe for completion be extended if the completion of EQA activity cannot take place?**

EQA activity should be delivered remotely and continue within current guidelines. EQAPs should reschedule audits where this is appropriate.

**23. We can deliver part of the end-point assessment, 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 EQAP. 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 EQAP, 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 EQAP, assessments may be conducted in an appropriate simulated environment, such as a training facility.