

COVID 19 – Guidance for Apprentices & Employers – update 6th April 2020

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has updated their guidance to further clarify some of the temporary flexibilities, introduced to the programme during the pandemic, and provides answers to questions related to these changes and other common questions.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-apprentices-employers-training-providers-end-point-assessment-organisations-and-external-quality-assurance-pro>

Below details some of the frequently asked questions, however, if you have any questions or queries please contact Karly Lattimore, MD of Training at Karly.lattimore@bpif.org.uk

Apprenticeship Training Frequently Asked Questions

Apprentices who are still working

1. Due to business continuity measures all staff are required to be available at their usual place of work in their usual job role. How can my apprentices continue their learning?

If your apprentices are required to attend their usual place of work in their usual job role (critical workers) there are several options available:

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

2. I am having to move critical worker staff into different and/or business critical roles that aren't related to their apprenticeship. What happens to their apprenticeship if they can't continue training?

Apprenticeship training must be linked to the job role that the individual is undertaking. Where this link is broken temporarily, it is our goal that apprentices can promptly resume their apprenticeship and continue to successful completion of end-point assessment at a future date.

BPIF feel that it is likely that where an apprentice is working in a different role, the apprenticeship can continue to progress as usual as the behaviors required for similar roles will be similar if not the same

3. I am having to move critical worker staff into different and/or business critical roles that are connected to their apprenticeship. Can they continue training?

Where apprentices can remain on their programme, they should continue to fulfil the minimum 20% off-the-job training entitlement. Off-the-job training can already be delivered flexibly at a time and way to suit the employer and apprentice (remote observations, distance learning etc.) and many providers, including the BPIF have developed additional training material in response to Covid-19. If a critical worker apprentice has

been redeployed into another role, then some of this activity may still count towards off-the-job training but this should be discussed and agreed between the employer and provider. All off-the-job training must be relevant new training that develops the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the apprenticeship and, where funding is being accessed, it must be delivered by an organisation on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers. Evidence of delivery must be kept.

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

4. 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:

- an increase in e-learning
- a short pause of less than 4 weeks in your apprenticeship while you are in self- isolation. This will not affect the planned end-date of your apprenticeship
- a formal break in learning of 4 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
- re-scheduling planned assessment activity for a later date

The appropriate steps will be agreed based on you and your employer/ training provider's situation and BPIF feel that it is likely that the apprenticeship can continue using remote methods

5. 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. At the BPIF we can continue all learning remotely.

6. What do I do if I think an apprentice is not well enough to work (especially in a health setting)?

Employers should follow the government's [guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

7. 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, unless you have been notified otherwise by your employer. 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.

8. My provider has put my apprentice on a break in learning because they can't deliver training. As the apprentice is working as normal and I want their apprenticeship to continue, can I override this break in learning?

The ESFA have committed that apprenticeship training providers will continue to be paid retrospectively for the training they have delivered and can evidence. Where training cannot take place for any reason, and this may include the ability of the provider to continue delivery, an apprentice must be put on a break in learning to pause payments. Providers are working hard to develop flexible learning packages to ensure continuity of training where possible and for some, this may take some time. If you have concerns, we encourage you to discuss these with the provider.

At the BPIF we will not be instigating any breaks in learning where this is not necessary for the apprentice and the employer.

Apprentices who are working at home

9. 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:

- your training provider may provide digital or distance learning
- you can take a short pause if it is likely your apprenticeship can resume in less than 4 weeks and you will still be able to complete your apprenticeship by the planned end-date
- you can take a formal break in learning of 4 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.

At the BPIF all scheduled classroom learning can now take place remotely so we feel breaks in learning are not necessary

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

You should 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.

11. When an apprentice is working from home, can we count anything they do as off-the-job training?

Off-the-job training is a statutory requirement for an English apprenticeship. It is training which is received by the apprentice during the apprentice's normal working hours, for the purpose of achieving the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the approved apprenticeship referenced in the apprenticeship agreement.

All off-the-job training must be directly relevant to the apprenticeship, but this can now be delivered more flexibly, including remote working.

At the BPIF all training whilst working from home will be recorded as off the job training, however, the training coordinator will regularly review the appropriateness of this

12. Can I change training provider if they are offering more on-line/digital delivery?

A change in training provider can occur at any time, although it is likely to be more difficult in the current climate.

When an apprentice and employer start working with a new training provider, certain activity must take place to ensure the apprenticeship programme and apprentice are eligible for funding. Examples of necessary activity include:

- initial assessment of the apprentice
- completion and signing of agreements

Evidence must be collected and retained to support this activity but can be held in a digital or electronic format.

13. Will training providers be paid more for rescheduling off-the-job training and bringing it forward?

No, the normal monthly payment profile will apply over the length of the apprenticeship, as it currently does whether providers deliver blocks of training or more evenly spaced training. Providers should factor this in if they are considering a change to the delivery methodology and timetable.

14. Will employers and training providers need to revise the price of the apprenticeship if the delivery method is changing?

The price of an apprenticeship is negotiated and agreed upon by an employer and provider. If any material changes occur to the agreed delivery method, which may result in a change in price, then this should be discussed and amended.

Apprentices who are furloughed

15. Can training continue for furloughed apprentices?

Yes, where apprentices are furloughed, they can continue to train for their apprenticeships, as long as it does not provide services to or generate revenue for their employer.

16. If my apprentice continues to do off-the-job training, can this be more than one day a week?

Yes. The normal off-the-job training rules will apply, so training can be done as a block where this is agreed between the provider and the employer. The 20% minimum off-the-job training over the length of the apprenticeship will still need to be satisfied. When furloughed apprentices return to work we will review the

total off the job training completed whilst in furlough against the 20% minimum requirement and revise the plans accordingly.

17. Why should I continue my learning if I can't attend my place of work?

We do not want the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent apprentices continuing to learn where this is still possible. Not being able to apply the learning straight away might present some challenges, but there are benefits from carrying on with the apprenticeship during this time, including continued engagement and progression that can all be applied to the job once it is safe and practical to do so.

18. Will I be paid for continuing my learning if I have been furloughed?

Yes. While furloughed you will still be paid by your employer and pay taxes from your income. While you cannot undertake work for your employer while on furlough you can undertake training. Where training has been required by your employer you should be paid the appropriate minimum wage for the time spent training. This will be covered as part of your furlough payment in the first instance. However, where the time spent training attracts an appropriate minimum wage in excess of the furlough payment your employer should top up your furlough payment.

Apprentices who are made redundant

19. My employer is 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.

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

The BPIF strive to support all apprentices who are made redundant to continue to successful completion of their apprenticeship

Apprentices who are on unpaid leave

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

Many employers who had planned to ask employees to take unpaid leave during this period will now be able to access the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and receive financial support to keep you employed. You should speak to your employer about this to understand whether you are still being asked to take unpaid leave or if your status is now considered to be furloughed. There is a section on furloughed apprentices in this document.

If you are still being asked to take unpaid leave, then you can take a break from your apprenticeship and resume when you return to work.

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.

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

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

Alternatively, Universal Credit may be available for both workers and the unemployed alike, as long as they meet the other conditions of entitlement (including that the applicant and their partner have savings of under £16,000 between them). Apprentices may be entitled to access Universal Credit during a period of unpaid leave. They may also have access to Universal Credit even if they were working and being paid. Being laid off or on a lesser number of hours could increase the rate of Universal Credit entitlement.

Apprentices on unpaid leave may also be [eligible for other benefits](#).

Apprenticeship levy and service frequently asked questions

The apprenticeship levy

22. Will levy payments be paused for employers?

The apprenticeship levy is an important part of our aim to raise apprenticeship quality which supports employers to make a long-term, sustainable investment in training. Due to this HMT have no current plans to pause the collection of the apprenticeship levy because of the Covid-19 disruption.

The Chancellor has set out an unprecedented package of support for businesses and employers and stands ready to announce further action wherever necessary.

23. Will you increase the time available to employers to spend their levy funds?

Employers already have 24 months in which to spend their levy funds before these expire. For now we do not intend to make any changes to current arrangements.

24. I am a levy-payer with funds in my account. Why can't my funds be used to continue to pay the provider even though they can't deliver training? This will help them cope with the financial impacts of COVID-19.

Where training cannot take place for any reason an apprentice must be put on a break in learning. When on a break in learning the individual will still be employed and classed as an apprentice, and they can continue working, but we cannot pay for training delivery that isn't taking place.

Where the 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. Find full details of this [substantial package of support](#).

25. I am a non-levy paying employer recruiting for/with 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.

26. 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.

27. 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. Find [more information on support available for businesses](#).

28. 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.

Apprenticeship assessment frequently asked questions

29. 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 must 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.

30. 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.

31. Gateways are being delayed and we cannot complete the end-point assessment in the required timeframe. 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.

32. 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
- here alternatives are not appropriate, a pause and rescheduling might be the only action. An extension of 12 weeks is allowable for those End-Point 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.

33. 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.

34. 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.

35. 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.

36. 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.

37. Can EPAs be staggered to ease pressure on EPAOs?

It is the responsibility of the provider and employer to agree the schedule of end-point assessment. You should refer to the assessment plan for the apprenticeship standard to check if there is a time limit for the assessment taking place following gateway.

Where an end-point assessment cannot be undertaken immediately, a pause and rescheduling might be the only action. An extension of 12 weeks is allowable for those End-Point 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.

38. Apprentices are ready for EPA but can't take it. Should they be paid more than the Apprenticeship Minimum Wage now?

An apprentice is classed as an apprentice until they have taken their end-point assessment. Apprentices must be paid at least the apprentice minimum wage, but an employer can choose to pay an apprentice more than this, all employers must comply with National Minimum Wage legislation.

DfE coronavirus helpline

Telephone 0800 046 8687

If you have a query about coronavirus (COVID-19), relating to schools and other educational establishments in England contact our helpline.

Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm and weekends 10am to 4pm.