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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for apprentices, employers, training providers, end-point assessment organisations and external quality assurance providers

Updated 6 April 2020

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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 (<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 (<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/response-to-covid-19/>).

This document includes information on:

- delivering apprenticeships flexibly to those working at home
- continuing training and end-point assessment for furloughed apprentices
- applying the policy on breaks in learning
- delays to end-point assessment ([EPA](#))
- alternative arrangements for [EPA](#) and external quality assurance

Specifically, we are:

- introducing flexibilities to allow furloughed apprentices to continue their training, as long as it does not provide services to, or generate revenue for, their employer
- 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 in order to maintain progress and achievement for apprentices
- 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 4 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 08000 150 600 or email at 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. Find details of this support (<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. Find additional advice and guidance from ACAS (<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. High-quality apprenticeships will be a vital contributor to the economic recovery that will follow the pandemic. 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, even if they are put on furlough by their employer. 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.

This may be necessary:

- for an individual, due to illness or self-isolation, or challenges getting to their place of employment or location for training provision
- for an employer, due to a temporary need to redeploy apprentices to different roles

- for a training provider, 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 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

Where breaks in learning are required, it is our goal that apprentices are able promptly to 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 4 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. Find full details of this substantial package of support (<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 4 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 (the date should be 1 April or later so as not to affect the March payment)
- 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 4 weeks that begins on or after 1 April:

- the training provider should report this in their April ILR submission using the last day in learning, or in the month in which the break of learning commenced
- the apprenticeship should be 'paused' by the employer through the apprenticeship service at the point the break in learning begins. The employer should not 'stop' the apprenticeship through the apprenticeship service as this will prevent it resuming subsequently

When the apprentice, training provider and employer are all ready for the apprenticeship to resume (after the 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 Ofgqual, 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.

Find more details of the above direction on the delivery of assessment in the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's guidance for COVID-19 (<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) they are permitted to continue with their training where their provider can continue to deliver this remotely.

Where apprentices are placed on unpaid leave (not furloughed), 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 (for example, 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.

Furloughed apprentices

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme allows employers to claim for 80% of furloughed employees' (employees on a leave of absence) usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions, and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions on that wage.

A furloughed employee can take part in volunteer work or training, as long as it does not provide services to or generate revenue for, or on behalf of the employer. Training in this context includes apprenticeship off-the-job training.

Where their provider can continue to deliver training remotely, a furloughed apprentice can therefore continue their apprenticeship whilst furloughed.

Where training is undertaken by furloughed workers, at the request of their employer, workers are entitled to be paid at least the NLW/NMW 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.

For additional information on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme please consult HMRC's guidance.

Audit

Prior to the Prime Minister's announcement of the new COVID-19 lockdown measures on Monday 23 March 2020, we made the decision to pause the start of any new routine funding audits for all post-16 providers for the short-term, as result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have now extended this pause to cover the period for, at least, the duration of the lockdown.

Where funding audits and investigations were already in progress, we have sought to complete the work, taking into account providers' capacity to resolve any issues. We understand the challenges providers face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and have been sensitive to these challenges when contacting providers.

It may be necessary for the ESFA to contact providers during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to continue to maintain effective oversight and protection of public funds. Where such contact is necessary, we will continue to be sensitive to the challenges providers face as a result of COVID-19.

We will continue to monitor and review the situation in the light of the circumstances. When the COVID-19 lockdown measures are reduced and there is a return to office-based working across the country, we will assess when it is appropriate to restart routine funding audits.

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.

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. 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 4 weeks. This guidance document sets out what employers and training providers need to do when breaks in learning are more or less than 4 weeks, and if that break commences during or after March.

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 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 your and your employer/ training provider's situation.

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. Please check their website or contact them to discuss your options.

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

7. If 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?

We 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.

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.

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.

Employers may set employees training tasks when they're working from home, but where these are not directly linked to the apprenticeship, it cannot be classed as off-the-job training.

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.

We accept that this might be challenging in the current environment and so, while we would encourage material changes to be recorded, we understand it may not be possible to do it immediately.

Employer-providers will need to ensure they are only claiming for the actual costs incurred throughout the apprenticeship and these might now have changed.

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.

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 you 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 at Find Apprenticeship Training and liaise with your training provider in the usual way.

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. 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.

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

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