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SUPPORTING

Apprentices in the workplace

A guide for union learning reps

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Cover photo, top: Johnny Greig

1 Overview

Apprentices help deliver measurable financial benefits to employers

An apprenticeship is a paid job that includes a skills development programme with a formal assessment, leading to a nationally recognised qualification.

It mixes paid work with on-the-job training in the workplace and classroom-based learning through a college, university or other training provider.

Apprenticeships are open to both new and existing employees over the age of 16 and are available from Level 2 (equivalent to five good GCSEs) all the way up to Levels 6 and 7 (degree apprenticeships).

While apprenticeships were once exclusively targeted at young people, nowadays they are much more evenly split between younger and older workers. Currently, around 47 per cent of apprenticeship starts are made by workers aged 25 and over.

What people learn on an individual apprenticeship is set out in a standard that has been approved for delivery by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE).

There are now more than 650 approved standards, which have almost completely replaced the old system of frameworks.

How apprenticeships pay off for employers

Organisations that train apprentices gain a wide range of benefits for their businesses, according to the government's research report *Apprenticeships Evaluation 2021 – Employers* (Government Social Research, March 2022).

The top four positives are:

- developing skills relevant to their organisation (85 per cent of employers who took part in the survey)
- increasing productivity (78 per cent)
- bringing in new ideas (67 per cent)
- improving their image as an employer (65 per cent).

Of those recruiting apprentices externally, 66 per cent said apprenticeships improved their ability to attract good staff. Of those using apprenticeships to train existing staff, 76 per cent said they helped improve staff retention.

Read the full report at: *bit.ly/3s3dCRI*

Photo: Wavebreak Media LTD

Apprentices help deliver measurable financial benefits to employers, according to recent analysis by The St Martin's Group, which comprises some of the UK's leading employers, training providers and awarding organisations.

The Real Costs and Benefits of Apprenticeships (September 2021) estimates that employers gain between £2,496 and £18,237 over the course of an apprenticeship.

And employers gain even bigger benefits once the programme is complete and they no longer have to set productivity gains against training costs.

Read the full report at: ***bit.ly/458ueGk***

How apprenticeships pay off for unions

Apprenticeships represent a major recruitment and organising opportunity for unions, especially since more than 50 per cent of apprenticeship starts are made by younger workers.

Even with the recent decline in apprenticeship starts, more than 150,000 16- to 24-year-olds enrolled on apprenticeships in 2022/23.

A positive experience with their local union branch (eg, mentoring from a union member, union learning rep (ULR) or other union rep) will help convince young apprentices of the benefits of collective action in the workplace at the beginning of their working lives.

To help deliver a high-quality experience for apprentices, all union reps can play their part:

- stewards can look after apprentices' contractual issues
- health and safety reps can help support apprentices' physical and mental wellbeing
- ULRs can help ensure on- and off-the-job training is of high quality
- all reps can undertake training to mentor apprentices.

Union branches that support apprentices will help sustain their membership numbers by recruiting new starters. They will also have the chance to identify and support potential future activists, and thereby help increase representation of young workers at all levels in the union movement.

2 TUC Apprenticeships Charter

The TUC developed its Apprenticeships Charter to help unions work with employers, providers and other organisations to deliver high-quality apprenticeships.

It sets out the seven key principles that ensure apprenticeships benefit apprentices, their employers and the wider UK economy.

The charter is a template to help union branches open negotiations with employers on apprenticeships and can be adapted as needed to local conditions. It's not intended to replace pre-existing union agreements that may have been locally or nationally negotiated.

When an employer signs the charter, unions can organise a celebration event to help raise awareness of the new opportunities on offer.

Apprenticeships Charter template text

We are committed to the vision of high-quality apprenticeships as a skills development programme for the current and future workforce as we build a new, fair and prosperous economy. There are a number of principles that must be met in order to ensure that this vision is realised in a way that is beneficial to the apprentices and the employer.

We agree that an apprenticeship will:

1. Be a job with a productive purpose

- Apprentices have parity of terms and conditions with all other employees.
- All quality apprenticeships will have progression opportunities to genuine employment.

2. Be paid a fair rate

- Apprentice rates reflect the job done.

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Union reps play an integral role in supporting, developing and advocating for apprentices

3. Ensure high-quality training and clear individual development

- Apprenticeship programmes identify a clear programme of training that is relevant to the job and recognisable in the sector.
- Apprentices are given paid time off the job for study and training to achieve their apprenticeship. Additional paid time off must be provided for achieving minimum standards in English and maths.
- On-the-job training is fundamental to the apprenticeship. There is a clear system for supervision, support and mentoring, by appropriately trained work colleagues.

4. Involve the trade union at every level of the programme

- Trade unions have a constructive role in the development and delivery of the apprenticeship programme. Unions negotiate around aspects of the apprenticeship, support apprentices and work with the employer to ensure the quality and success of the programmes.
- The union reps play an integral role in supporting, developing and advocating for apprentices. Union representatives, especially ULRs, are ideally placed to act as mentors to apprentices.

5. Be accessible to, and achievable by all

- A good apprenticeship programme will include strategies to ensure that apprenticeships are accessible to the widest possible demographic and a diverse spread of people.
- Particular attention is to be given to individuals from disadvantaged groups to take up all apprenticeship opportunities, with ongoing support to complete the apprenticeship successfully.

6. Be part of, and contribute to, a healthy and safe environment

- Employers and unions work together to ensure a safe environment for all apprentices. Particular attention is given to the unique needs of young workers.
- Health and safety training covers statutory workplace and job-specific requirements.
- The health and safety programme is reviewed regularly.

7. Involve a commitment from the employer to complement the workforce, not supplement it

- Apprentices are not recruited for job substitution.
- Apprentices are employed by the employer, not used as temporary or indirect labour.
- The employer and unions jointly plan to fill genuine skills shortages and future skills gaps.
- Apprentices are a key part of the workforce.

Resources

- Download the Charter as a Word document from: *bit.ly/47H56bE*

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3 Recruitment

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Apprenticeships offer new starters a firm foundation for their working lives and can open doors to potentially life-changing professional development opportunities for existing staff.

But these opportunities are not always fairly distributed to women, Black and minority ethnic (BME), disabled or LGBT+ people.

Union branches can help ensure employers develop rigorous recruitment processes that effectively widen participation in apprenticeships by people with protected characteristics.

Organisations looking to improve the accessibility of apprenticeships should:

- only include essential requirements in the job description
- spell out that the organisation welcomes applications from a diverse range of candidates
- advertise vacancies through partners eg, Jobcentre Plus, local FE colleges, community organisations
- provide recruitment materials in alternative formats
- organise outreach activities with schools and parents
- provide work experience or shadowing opportunities
- hold open days for specific under-represented groups
- use role models in recruitment materials, outreach and promotion.

Opening up more apprenticeships to women

Significantly fewer women under the age of 25 start apprenticeships than young men. In 2021/22, 44 per cent of starters aged under 25 were women (80,350), and 56 per cent were men (103,500).

Since apprenticeships can provide such an excellent first step on a career pathway, this means that young women's career options are being limited from the start of their working lives.

In addition, enduring patterns of occupational segregation also mean that young women are massively under-represented on the highest-paid apprenticeships (eg, engineering and electro-technical).

For example, in 2021/22, of the 33,610 16- to 24-year-olds starting engineering apprenticeships, where the average weekly basic pay was £320 in 2018, just 7 per cent were young women.

The other side of the coin is that young women remain hugely over-represented on the lowest-paid apprenticeships (eg, hairdressing and childcare). For example, in 2021/22, young women made up 87 per cent of apprentices in hairdressing, where the average weekly rate of basic pay was £173 in 2018 – almost half of what it was in engineering.

Opening up more apprenticeships to BME people

According to data from the 2021 Census, 18 per cent of people in England and Wales belong to Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BME) groups.

But while the proportion of apprenticeship starts by people from BME communities has been rising in the last decade, the figure had still only reached 14.4 per cent by 2021/22.

That gap looks even bigger when compared with the ethnicity of the school-age population, since 31.3 per cent of secondary school pupils came from BME backgrounds in January 2019. ***bit.ly/3KHpZcT***

Research by the Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) in 2018 highlighted some of the structural problems for young people from BME backgrounds who try to secure places on apprenticeships.

BTEG reported that roughly a quarter of applications via the government's Find an Apprenticeship website were from BME individuals, but the start rate for BME individuals was half that of white applicants.

They also found that BME people remain particularly under-represented on apprenticeships in sectors such as engineering and manufacturing, where average earnings tend to be higher, and over-represented in lower earning sectors such as retail.

Jeremy Crook (2018), 'Eradicating the opportunity deficit for black, Asian and minority ethnic young people', in *All Change: where next for apprenticeships?* Learning & Work Institute: ***bit.ly/3DZH3qs***

> The start rate for BME individuals was half that of white applicants

Opening up more apprenticeships to disabled people

Widening access for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (LLDD) remains a major issue.

In 2021, across both England and Wales, the proportion of disabled people was 17.8 per cent (10.4 million), according to the 2021 Census.

So although total LLDD apprenticeship starts rose from 11 per cent of all apprenticeship starts to 14 per cent between 2017/18 and 2021/22, disabled people remain significantly under-represented in apprenticeship recruitment.

Read the full statistical bulletin at: ***bit.ly/3EeeBSd***

Many LGBT+ young people didn't start apprenticeships because they expected to experience discrimination

Opening up more apprenticeships to LGBT+ people

Around 1.5 million people aged 16 and over in England and Wales (3.2 per cent) identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual and 262,000 (0.5 per cent) identify as trans or non-binary, according to the 2021 Census.

However, those aged between 16 and 24 are more than twice as likely to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, at 6.9 per cent (436,000 young people) and twice as likely (1 per cent) as trans or non-binary.

Read the Census 2021 sexual orientation statistical bulletin at: *bit.ly/448Sx5T*

Read the Census 2021 gender identity bulletin at: *bit.ly/3QDvkW7*

The government doesn't currently collect data on apprenticeship participation by LGBT+ people. But research by Stonewall in 2020 revealed little awareness of apprenticeships among LGBT+ young people and limited experience of participation: many LGBT+ young people didn't start apprenticeships because they expected to experience discrimination in workplaces offering apprenticeships.

Shut Out: the experiences of LGBT young people not in education, training or work (2020). Stonewall: *bit.ly/453Uf9O*

Once apprenticeships are on the collective bargaining agenda, union branches can specifically promote equality and diversity by:

- explaining the business benefits of improving workforce diversity to employers
- ensuring employers adopt inclusive recruitment practices
- encouraging employers to organise outreach activities and open days to specifically attract applications from under-represented groups and communities
- negotiating for apprenticeships to be offered in part-time and flexible-working roles as well as full-time
- establishing a working environment with zero tolerance for sexual harassment, sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia.

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Photo: Peter Cade

Union branches should use their expertise, understanding and collective strength to tackle all forms of bullying in the workplace, including of apprentices with protected characteristics. 19 per cent of people who left Level 2 apprenticeships (and 6 per cent of all non-completers) withdrew from their apprenticeship because of prejudice and/or bullying, according to *Apprenticeship Outcomes and Destination*s (St Martin's Group, October 2022): *bit.ly/45iyQcO*

Resources

Unionlearn has published four booklets to help union branches support apprentices with protected characteristics throughout their journeys from recruitment to completion.

- Tackling apprenticeship gender inequality: *bit.ly/3Ot8D4q*
- Supporting Black and minority ethnic apprentices: *bit.ly/3OxR7fs*
- Accessible apprenticeships: *bit.ly/449M36P*
- LGBT+ inclusive apprenticeships: *bit.ly/3OTkSrp*

4 Induction

Union reps should make sure that their branch has the chance to speak to new apprentices as part of their induction.

They should use inductions to explain:

- how the union specifically works to support apprentices (eg, through mentoring)
- how the branch supports apprentices in practical and concrete ways (eg, pay/training/workplace learning/disciplinaries)
- how the health and safety rep works to support the mental and physical wellbeing of apprentices and workers in general
- how the union branch discounts or subsidises membership fees for apprentices (if applicable)
- how the branch works to ensure fairness and equality in the workplace in general
- what unions are and how they work.

Union branches should also ensure apprentice inductions include health and safety training that is appropriate to the kind of work apprentices will be doing.

This should include a contribution from the union health and safety rep that explains their independent role in promoting health and safety in the workplace.

Young workers in particular need their induction training to cover the precautions they will need to take to deal with the specific hazards of the job they will be doing.

On its website, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) offers a detailed overview of what employers should include in an induction. It suggests:

- a clear timeline of the apprenticeship training
- an explanation of on- and off-the-job training that includes when and where the off-the-job component will take place
- an explanation of how the organisation will help apprentices prepare for the end-point assessment (EPA)
- an overview of the apprenticeship standard
- the promotion of an environment where apprentices feel confident to ask questions and ask for help
- an explanation of the internal systems that the organisation uses that apprentices will need to become familiar with
- supporting internal networking among apprentices
- signposting apprentices to support from buddies/mentors/union reps.

Read the full IfATE overview at: *bit.ly/3si5Xis*

5 Fair pay

Photo: Johnny Greig

Union reps, including ULRs, should carefully monitor apprentice pay in their workplaces, since government surveys of apprentice pay persistently reveal significant numbers of employers are not paying apprentices what they should by law.

There are national minimum wage (NMW) rates for:

- apprentices aged 16 to 18
- apprentices aged 19 or over in the first year of their apprenticeship
- apprentices aged 18 to 20
- apprentices aged 21 to 24.

The most recent government survey of apprentice pay (2018/19) reveals a substantial minority of employers continue to break the law by not paying Level 2 and 3 apprentices what they're legally entitled to.

Across England, Scotland and Wales:

- 19 per cent of employers are not paying their apprentices the correct rate – up from 13 per cent in 2016.
- More women (21 per cent) receive non-compliant pay than men (17 per cent).
- 48 per cent of employers are not providing the amount of formal training they should.

Read the pay survey at: *bit.ly/45soirK*

CHECKLIST

- ✔ Apprentice pay rates should reflect the job being done and should be negotiated in line with other pay rates in the workplace.
- ✔ If percentage rates are negotiated, they should start as high as possible and progress by time served or milestones reached, rather than by age.
- ✔ In industries with nationally agreed apprentice pay, such as construction, ensure the local employer is complying with that agreement.
- ✔ Pay rates for existing staff who enrol on apprenticeship programmes should remain unaltered.

6 Health and safety

New starters and existing staff on apprenticeships are all protected under the 1974 Health and Safety and Work Act.

Young people in particular need the support of union health and safety representatives, since they are more vulnerable to accident and injury because they are:

- new to a workplace
- new to the systems, processes and machinery involved
- new to the world of work in general.

Apprentices under the age of 18 are specifically entitled to:

- two days off per week
- a daily rest break of 12 consecutive hours
- a break of at least 30 minutes if the working day lasts more than 4.5 hours
- a working day no longer than eight hours (or 40 hours a week)
- daytime working only (with some exceptions).

> Union branches should ensure they support apprentices' mental health as well as their physical wellbeing at work

Union branches should ensure they support apprentices' mental health as well as their physical wellbeing at work. 9 per cent of apprentices who dropped out in 2020/21 did so for mental health issues (*Apprenticeships Evaluation 2021 – Learners*, Government Social Research, March 2022): ***bit.ly/3sentEE***

Unions can help look after all apprentices' physical and mental health and safety by:

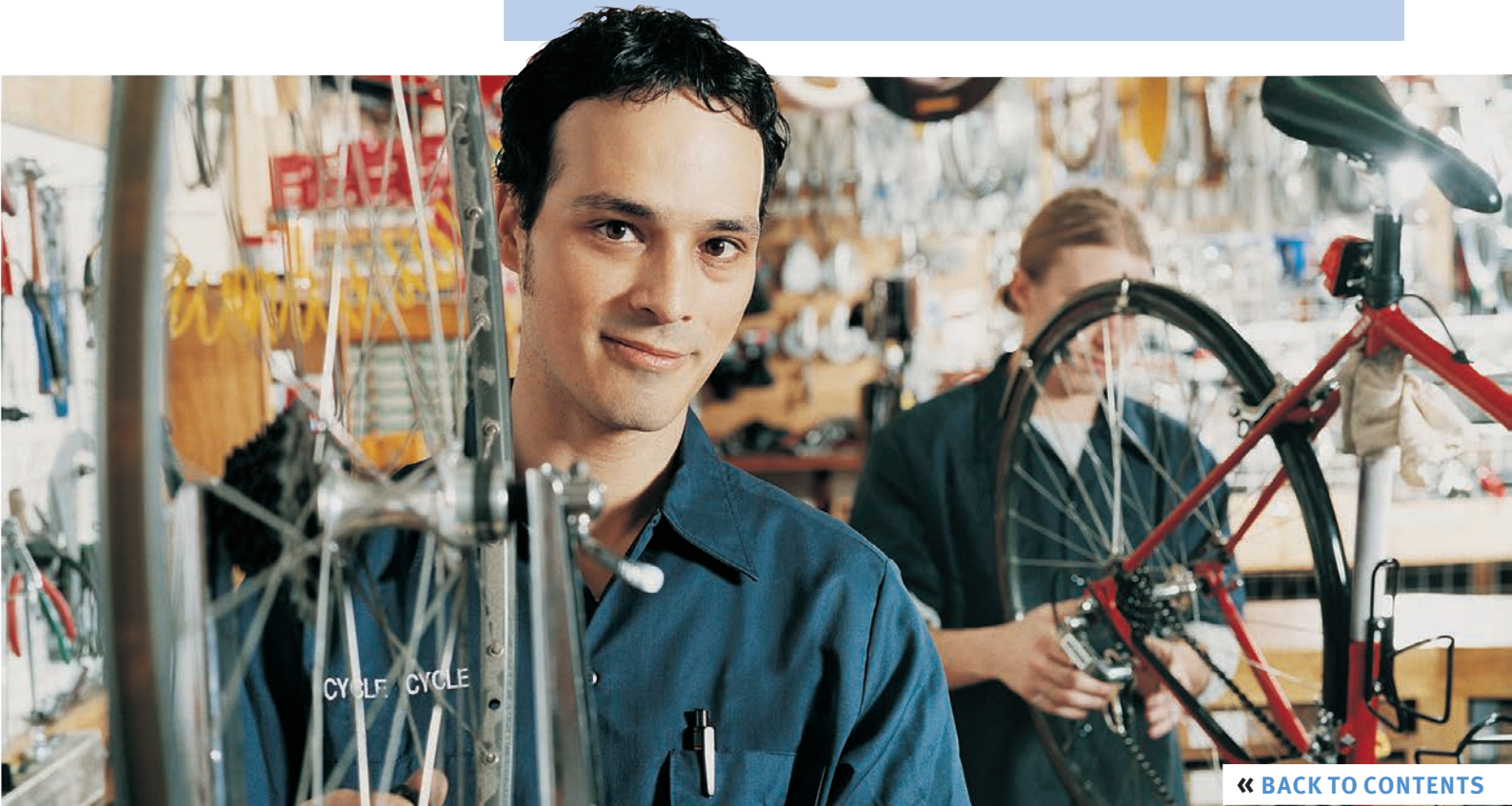
- working with employers and providers to create a high-quality apprenticeship experience
- making sure the employer has completed a suitable and sufficient risk assessment on all aspects of an apprentice's work before they start
- encouraging apprentices to join the union.

CHECKLIST

- ✔ **Risk assessment**. Make sure the employer completes a full risk assessment covering all aspects of an apprentice's job before they start that takes their lack of experience into account.
- ✔ **Induction training**. Make sure health and safety training that's appropriate to the apprenticeship is included in inductions.
- ✔ **Supervision**. Make sure supervisors are trained, competent and have enough time to supervise their apprentices.
- ✔ **Training**. Make sure health and safety is an integral part of an apprentice's overall training programme.
- ✔ **Protective equipment**. Make sure every apprentice is issued with appropriate protective clothing and equipment that is paid for by the employer.
- ✔ **Monitoring**. Make sure the employer monitors any injuries relating to apprentices as part of their monitoring of the apprenticeship.

Resources

- The Health and Safety Executive guidance on young workers. *bit.ly/45dwc8I*
- *Apprenticeships: a short guide for union safety representatives*, co-authored by the TUC. *bit.ly/30V5hsk*



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7 High-quality training

On- and off-the-job training are statutory requirements for apprenticeships. Off-the-job training is undertaken during the apprentice's normal working hours, to help them achieve the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the relevant apprenticeship standard.

Under the current rules drawn up in 2022 by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), employers must schedule six hours' off-the-job training for apprentices every week, regardless of the number of hours they work.

The six hours' rule replaced the previous requirement that 20 per cent of an apprentice's hours should be spent in off-the-job training.

Training providers drive the creation of an apprentice's training plan, which is the three-way agreement between the provider, the employer and the apprentice (previously called a 'commitment statement').

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The provider is responsible for driving the training plan since it's best placed to articulate the content of the programme to be delivered. But both the apprentice and the employer should play an active role in agreeing the content of the training plan.

The training plan is separate from the apprenticeship agreement, which is drawn up between the employer and apprentice, although the provider can help the employer with some of the required information (eg, off-the-job training hours; practical period start and end dates).

High-quality training helps ensure more apprentices complete their apprenticeships. 70 per cent of people who did not complete their apprenticeship in 2021 listed quality of training as a reason and 21 per cent selected it as their main reason (*Apprenticeships Evaluation 2021 – Learners*, March 2022): ***bit.ly/3sentEE***

CHECKLIST

- ✔ Employers should consult providers about the amount of time that the apprentice needs to spend out of work, as well as the amount of time they recommend for study in the workplace.
- ✔ Employers should detail the training that will be delivered and how the off-the-job element will be delivered in the apprenticeship agreement they draw up with each individual apprentice.
- ✔ Actual training received should be recorded to ensure it at least meets the specifications in the training plan.
- ✔ Where off-the-job learning takes place at the workstation, steps should be taken to ensure that distractions and demands of the job are minimised.
- ✔ The employer should also consider allowing time off for both the apprentice and their mentor to meet for mentoring sessions and informal discussions.
- ✔ Where existing staff take up an apprenticeship, they should be made fully aware of the commitment required to complete the apprenticeship and their rights to paid time off for training, and not subjected to any pressure to sign up to apprenticeships against their wishes.

8 Functional skills

Functional skills are the fundamental English, maths and digital skills that people need for their working and personal lives. Apprentices are funded to achieve functional skills English and/or maths qualifications, if they don't already meet the minimum requirements for the programmes they're on.

Union reps promoting learning can help apprentices by ensuring that they can access high-quality functional skills English and maths training as part of their apprenticeship, if necessary.

Under the 2022 funding rules:

- Apprentices on Level 2 apprenticeships who don't have Level 1 English and/or maths must prioritise achieving Level 1 qualifications in these subjects.
- Once they've achieved Level 1 English and maths, they're required to work towards Level 2 only if they have enough time remaining to make meaningful progress.
- Apprentices on Level 3 apprenticeships must achieve a pass in functional skills English and maths if they haven't already achieved a GCSE C or 4** in English and maths.

As the detail of the funding rules are subject to regular revision, ULRs should check for the latest revisions with their HR departments or on the gov.uk website.

Union reps should work with employers to help ensure they:

- arrange the relevant English and maths learning opportunities for all apprentices
- work with providers to ensure provision is high quality
- organise any additional support that apprentices may need to achieve the required functional skills qualifications
- swiftly and effectively address any issues around time off to study.

CHECKLIST

- ✔ Effective initial assessment of an apprentice's English, maths and digital skills should be used to develop personalised, structured and motivating learning plans for them.
- ✔ Initial assessments that identify an apprentice has a learning difficulty and/or disability (LLDD) should lead to securing the additional resources they need to achieve functional skills qualifications.
- ✔ Embedding English and maths, instead of treating them as add-ons, is integral to effective practice.
- ✔ Functional skills English and maths should be made relevant to apprentices by linking them to their interests, intentions and aspirations.
- ✔ Digital skills should be creatively embedded in apprenticeships (eg, by using online portfolio systems for completing and monitoring work and assessments).
- ✔ Ongoing, regular assessment of an apprentice's progress helps employers and providers offer responsive and flexible support throughout their apprenticeship.
- ✔ Feedback from apprentices should be collected through online surveys, learner forums, informal feedback at drop-in sessions, and written feedback in work placement booklets.
- ✔ Collecting feedback from apprentices should inform the delivery and future planning of functional skills English, maths and digital learning.

Adapted from *English, Maths and Digital Delivery in Traineeships and Apprenticeships: Case studies*, Learning & Work Institute, 2017. *bit.ly/45a8Rom*

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9 Mentoring

> Mentors help smooth the transition between school and work for young apprentices

Pairing an apprentice with a workplace mentor pays off for the apprentice, the mentor, their employer and their union.

A mentor is a more experienced colleague (sometimes a former apprentice themselves) who supports the development of an apprentice in the workplace.

ULRs and other workplace reps often make suitable mentors, especially when they're outside the apprentice's reporting hierarchy at work.

Mentors can:

- share their knowledge and experiences
- provide advice, guidance and feedback
- act as a sounding board
- offer encouragement and support
- celebrate the apprentice's success
- identify development opportunities
- build an apprentice's confidence, independence and self-belief
- set goals
- support an apprentice's personal development and wellbeing.

How mentoring benefits apprentices

- Having a mentor in the workplace helps apprentices find their voice in the workplace: "If you're between the ages of 16 and 21, speaking up about certain issues to management can be a daunting task," says a manufacturing apprentice in *The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Apprenticeships* (unionlearn, 2014). "If you have a mentor you feel comfortable with, you could express your worries with them and in turn they could discuss it with management on your behalf."
- Mentors help smooth the transition between school and work for young apprentices, who are often learning all the different elements that paid work involves for the first time on top of learning the knowledge and skills to be able to do their job.
- Mentoring helps builds an apprentice's confidence: "I've seen the increase in confidence and motivation of the third-year mentees," says an apprenticeship coordinator in *The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Apprenticeships*. "For the mentees it is clear they benefit from having someone 'who has been there' providing advice and support."
- Mentors help motivate apprentices to persevere with their training through to achievement of their qualification.

> Mentors improve communication between the apprentice and employer

How mentoring benefits employers

- Mentors help embed an employer's organisational culture, encourage positive behaviour and support soft employment skills (eg, time keeping and prioritisation): "The role of the mentor is to hold the apprentice's hand through every aspect of working life, to ensure the apprentices understand work ethics, appropriate behaviour and so on," says a line manager in *The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Apprenticeships*. "This means that mentees feel more valued and that they are seen as the future workforce."
- Mentors improve communication between the apprentice and employer by creating a channel through which apprentices can contribute their ideas and raise employment issues, which boosts completion rates – with strong evidence of improved retention for organisations recruiting from more disadvantaged or non-traditional groups.
- Mentors enable skills and knowledge transfer by experienced colleagues passing on skills, knowledge and understanding, which supports broader issues of succession planning.
- Mentors help improve quality of service, product quality and/or productivity as a direct result of helping to embed their organisational culture, according to more than 85 per cent of employers surveyed in *The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Apprenticeships*.
- Mentors help secure new insights into work processes by taking on apprentices who may be able to challenge 'the way things are done', says a food manufacturing employer in *The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Apprenticeships*: "We have found that it is often the apprentices that come up with new ideas to reduce waste and increase the efficiency of what we do."
- Mentoring boosts completion rates by creating a channel through which apprentices can contribute their ideas and raise employment issues.

How mentoring benefits the union

Playing an active part in mentoring programmes for apprentices helps union branches:

- engage and recruit the next generation of union members and activists
- demonstrate the power of collective approaches to workplace issues to young people often at the beginning of their careers
- revive and refresh branch organisation by encouraging apprentices to contribute their ideas about employment, workplace and social issues to the branch.

How mentoring benefits union members

Union members involved in mentoring apprentices benefit by:

- getting the chance to develop themselves both through the mentor training they undertake and through the day-to-day exchanges with their mentee
- gaining skills from their mentoring that help them to develop their careers (eg, through moving into supervisory roles)

- having the chance to offer input into the organisation of the learning process to better suit the needs of apprentices and their employers – experience that offers them a greater stake in the enterprise and helps them develop skills they can use to progress their careers.

Resources

- *The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Apprenticeships*, unionlearn Research Paper 20, April 2014: *bit.ly/47yZbW3*
- The power of mentoring apprentices: a 60-minute unionlearn webinar featuring Damian Holohan, Unite senior shop steward at Springfield Fuels, where he has developed a mentoring support network for apprentices, and Dr Gail Hebson, who teaches on the undergraduate and postgraduate Human Resources Management courses at the University of Manchester. The webinar is on the unionlearn YouTube channel: *youtu.be/OMt8LBZSAeA*

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10 Completion

Tackling apprenticeship completion rates has become a matter of urgency in the past couple of years, as numbers have rapidly declined.

The overall dropout rate was 41.3 per cent in 2019/20 and 41.2 per cent in 2020/21. This is a serious and stark decline from 2011/12, when the overall dropout rate was 26.2 per cent.

The latest figures also compare very badly with A levels, where the 2019 dropout rate was just 8.7 per cent, and even worse with university (5.3 per cent).

All the evidence suggests that there is a range of factors behind apprentices' decisions not to complete their training.

While the Covid-19 pandemic created enormous problems for in-person apprenticeship delivery models and its economic impact forced some individuals to look for higher-paid employment, it's important not to overstate its impact on the recent decline in completions.

Only 17 per cent of people who didn't complete in 2020/21 cited the pandemic as a reason and less than 1 per cent because they contracted Covid-19 (*Apprenticeships Evaluation 2021 – Learners*, March 2022): ***bit.ly/3sentEE***

The St Martin's Group commissioned the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) in 2022 to research the difference in outcomes for apprentices who did and didn't complete their programmes.

The research included the largest-ever sample of apprentices who didn't complete, providing a uniquely detailed exploration of their characteristics and destinations.

The most common reasons apprentices gave for withdrawing were:

- lack of support from their employer (37 per cent) or tutor (26 per cent)
- poor programme organisation (32 per cent) or teaching quality (24 per cent)
- high workload (29 per cent)
- loss of interest or motivation (27 per cent).

People on Level 2 apprenticeship were more likely to withdraw because of:

- lack of support from their employer (46 per cent, compared to 33 per cent at other levels)
- prejudice and workplace bullying (19 per cent, compared to 6 per cent at other levels)
- personal finances/low pay (17 per cent, compared to 10 per cent at other levels).

Women were more likely than men to withdraw because of negative workplace issues, including:

- prejudice and workplace bullying (13 per cent of women, compared to 7 per cent of men)
- lack of support for a mental health condition (12 per cent, compared to 6 per cent of men)
- lack of support for a physical health condition (5 per cent, compared to 2 per cent of men)
- the impact of Covid-19 (15 per cent, compared to 9 per cent of men), which is consistent with wider research into the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women's employment.

Older (50-plus) apprentices were more likely to withdraw because of:

- the impact of Covid-19 (23 per cent of over-50s, compared to 11 per cent of under-50s)
- struggling with maths and English (9 per cent, compared to 4 per cent of under-50s).

Disabled apprentices were more likely to withdraw than non-disabled apprentices and those without long-term health conditions because of:

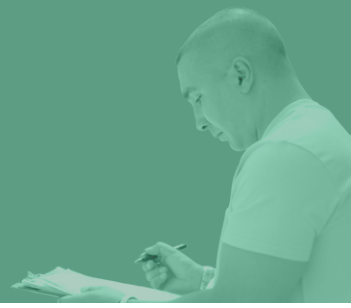
- lack of support from their tutor (36 per cent, compared to 24 per cent of non-disabled apprentices)
- lack of support for their mental health condition (22 per cent, compared to 7 per cent of non-disabled apprentices)
- lack of support for their physical health condition (9 per cent, compared to 2 per cent of non-disabled apprentices).

Apprenticeship Outcomes and Destinations (The St Martin's Group, October 2022) *bit.ly/45iyQcO*

CHECKLIST

- ✔ Employers and mentors should ensure apprentices are given time for off-the-job training and to complete assignments.
- ✔ Employers and mentors should effectively prepare apprentices to complete their end-point assessment (EPA).
- ✔ Employers and mentors should proactively discuss progression with apprentices.
- ✔ Training providers should offer more pastoral care and wrap-around support, particularly for groups likelier to identify support needs, including younger apprentices, disabled apprentices, new starters and BME apprentices.
- ✔ Training providers and employers should provide detailed information about the apprenticeship as early as possible to help avoid disparities between expectations and experience that contribute to withdrawal.

11 Professional registration



Apprentices on engineering, science-based and technical apprenticeships can improve their career opportunities and earnings potential by becoming professionally registered.

Professional registration provides a benchmark through which the public, employers and their clients can have confidence and trust that engineers, scientists and technicians have met professional standards that are recognised worldwide.

Many professional bodies welcome apprentices as members before they apply to become professionally registered.

And many professional bodies offer a streamlined professional registration process for people who have completed specific apprenticeships, since they recognise that the qualifications, skills and behaviours gained on those programmes align with the requirements for registration.

For example, the Science Council requires registrants to evidence competency in five main areas: application of knowledge; professionalism; personal responsibility; interpersonal skills; and professional practice.

But apprentices who have completed apprenticeships at Level 3, 4, 5 or 6 need only provide fresh evidence of the first two – application of knowledge and professionalism.

Applying to become professionally registered usually involves:

- joining the relevant professional institution (if not already a member) – institutions help apprentices (and all other applicants) apply to become professionally registered
- recording your professional development, collating evidence of your qualifications, activities and experience
- completing a written application for a professional review, which usually includes a personal statement and career profile as well as a CV and evidence of qualifications
- having your application assessed by members of the professional institution.

The benefits of professional registration

- Higher earnings potential: professionally registered engineers earn over £10,000 a year more than their non-registered counterparts, according to the last pre-pandemic salary survey by *The Engineer*: *bit.ly/3qA6yvt*

- Enhanced employability: by demonstrating attributes such as a commitment to professional standards and the drive to succeed, registration demonstrates key attributes that are highly valued by employers.
- Expanded opportunities for development: registration connects people to professional networks and a wider range of continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities.
- Improved self-esteem: registration creates a sense of achievement, enhances credibility with colleagues and boosts self-esteem and confidence since it's achieved through peer recognition.

Resources

- The Engineering Council produces a pocket guide to professional registration with the various different institutions, which is updated annually: *bit.ly/3P4Xdpf*
- The Science Council sets out the details of its shortened professional registration application route for apprentices on its website: *bit.ly/3DUvvF7*
- Apprentices who are preparing to work in occupations, trades or professions that are regulated by law will have to join the relevant regulatory body when they complete their training.

  Professions that are regulated by law include:

  - teaching
  - youth work
  - midwifery
  - nursing
  - physiotherapy
  - care work
  - social work.

  Find out more on the gov.uk website: *bit.ly/3Yw4GAE*

12 Get in touch

- You can get in touch with unionlearn through the contact form on the website: *www.unionlearn.org.uk/contact*
- You can email us directly at: *unionlearn@tuc.org.uk*
- You can phone us on: 020 7467 1212

Unionlearn also supports a network of project workers in the regions. For an up-to-date list of contacts, visit:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/regional-projects

This title may also be made available, on request, in accessible electronic formats or in Braille, audiotape and large print, at no extra cost.

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