

Frequently asked questions and further information – from Dept of Education

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 helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk.

Changes to learning and employment

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

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

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

Options include:

- 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.

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

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

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 My employer is enforcing a work from home policy and my classroom provision has been withdrawn.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

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

- 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.

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

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

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

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

5. What happens to the apprentice during a period of unpaid leave in terms of monies. Do they have access to Universal Credit?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please speak to your training provider, if you are made redundant as your apprenticeship training may be able to continue. Your training provider may still be able to offer training, based on your circumstances, in the short term. They may even be able to support you in finding a new employer.

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

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

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

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

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

- 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 four 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Government policy does not allow payment for services in advance of delivery. The government has set out [a substantial package of support to businesses](#) to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

15. Should employers use the 'Stop' or 'Pause' apprentice facility in the apprenticeship service?

In circumstances related to COVID-19, employers should use the 'Pause' function in the service. Employers must only use the 'Stop' function when they are certain that training will not resume at any point. Using 'Pause' will stop payments temporarily and allow the employer and apprentice to resume the apprenticeship at a later date. We are reviewing options to simplify the process of re-starting apprentices on the service, including to facilitate a transfer to a different apprenticeship or employer in due course.

Changes to assessment

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apprentices who are deemed ready for assessment, and cannot be assessed due to assessor illness, or Covid-19 related measures, are allowed to take a break before taking their EPA, and for the EPA to be rescheduled.

If the EPA timeframe needs to be extended beyond what is allowed in the assessment plan (where specified), EPAOs are responsible for agreeing extensions to EPA timeframes during the current disruption. EPAOs should work closely with EQAPs to ensure quality of EPA is maintained. For apprentices whose gateway is being delayed, the training provider must report this as a break in learning in the ILR.

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

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

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

20. How will invigilation of assessments be conducted remotely?

Remote tests should be supervised by an appropriately trained invigilator, or assessor who has the necessary qualifications, training or experience, and who has not been involved in the training, preparation or line management of the apprentice.

Tests must only be carried out within a supervised and controlled environment. EPAOs must ensure all testing meets security requirements, and that the details of invigilators are recorded and available for confirmation by EQAPs.

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

We would not consider this to be appropriate at the current time. Our intention is to safeguard the quality of apprenticeships, and at this time we believe that the EPA is an important part of that.

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

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

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

23. We can deliver part of the end-point assessment, but some sections require direct

observation. How do we deal with these components?

These elements of the EPA will need to be rescheduled if they cannot be undertaken remotely. If the EPA timeframe needs to be extended beyond what is allowed in the assessment plan, the EPAO should seek agreement from the EQAP. Where a specified assessment method for a specific standard might be adjusted, without threatening safety, and in a manner in which it meets the original intent, EPAOs should discuss this option with their EQAP, who may refer it to the Institute for authority.

The substitution of assessment methods is not considered appropriate at this time.

With the prior authority of their EQAP, assessments may be conducted in an appropriate simulated environment, such as a training facility.

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.