

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: THREE STEPS TO A WORLD CLASS APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

A REPORT TO THE GATSBY FOUNDATION

SIMON FIELD

November 2023



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DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Apprenticeship is an outstanding learning programme

Apprenticeship has had a major place in English life since the Middle Ages and is recognised globally as one of the best forms of occupational training. Today it plays a vital role in the skills system. At any given time, several hundred thousand people are on apprenticeship programmes; for comparison, around 1.2 million UK-domiciled people are in undergraduate higher education. Wage returns can be substantial, especially for younger apprentices, with those who started a Level 3 apprenticeship earning one-third as much again by their late 20s as those with just A-levels.

There has been a shift towards higher level apprenticeships. So while the number of those starting apprenticeships at Level 2 has declined rapidly, the number starting Level 4 and above programmes has increased quickly (see [Figure a](#)). Many apprentices are now adults who are already in work.

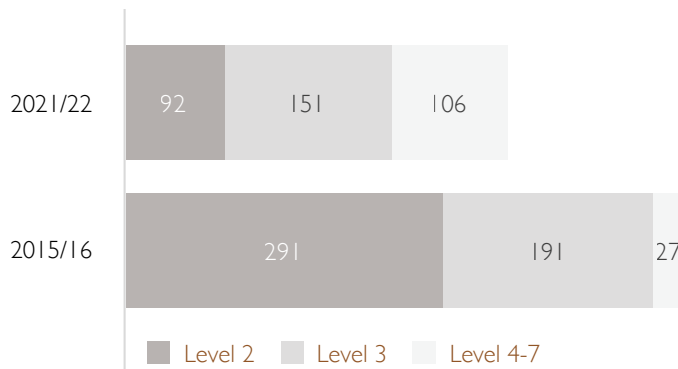


Figure a. The shift towards higher level apprenticeships (starts in thousands)

(See [Figure 2](#) in the main report for details)

Reform has improved the quality of apprenticeships

Over the last decade the English apprenticeship system has undergone a dramatic transformation. There are new apprenticeship standards¹ developed by employers and new minimum standards for programme length and off-the-job training. Competence is tested through an end-point assessment. Apprenticeships now cover almost every sector of the economy and extend to both low- and high-skilled occupations. These are real achievements.

These are great achievements, but deep challenges remain

But pride in achievements must be balanced by a recognition of how much is still to be done. The vision for apprenticeships set out in the Richard (2012)² and Sainsbury (2016)³ reviews is admirable: in that vision apprenticeship takes its rightful place as the work-based route, alongside the more school-based T-levels, for young people to gain technical qualifications. Technical education and training

¹ The new apprenticeship standards correspond to occupational standards, and the occupational standards also provide the basis for T-levels. These occupational standards are different from 'national occupational standards', which now have a limited role in England.

² Richard, D. (2012) *Richard review of apprenticeships*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf

³ Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016) *Report of the independent panel on technical education (Sainsbury Review)*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf

would thereby establish itself as a valued, quality alternative for the half of young people who do not enter higher education. But despite progress being made on many fronts, realisation of this vision for apprenticeship remains elusive.

The vision of the Richard and Sainsbury reviews has yet to be fully realised

While there are some very high-quality apprenticeships and rapid growth in degree apprenticeships, which are part of higher education, the apprenticeship system continues to play a relatively minor role in the area where it was traditionally strongest and where it has most to offer – the transition from school to work for young people who do not enter higher education. This is a major problem for two reasons. School-leavers with weak GCSE attainment are the group most at risk in the labour market and have a fundamental need for supportive training programmes. And there is evidence that youth apprenticeships, rather than apprenticeships for adults, offer the greatest returns to individuals and to the national economy.

To realise this vision three challenges must be addressed

Three factors obstruct the realisation of this vision for apprenticeship. First, not enough apprenticeships provide the breadth of education and training needed to provide a suitable career foundation for young people. Second, it is often unclear what apprentices can expect – not least because they often do not receive the minimum level of training required for their course – and there are high levels of dropout. Third, youth apprenticeship is a relatively small and declining part of the apprenticeship system. These are large obstacles, but they can be overcome.

In response to these challenges, this report draws on international experience to propose three steps that, if taken together, would help establish a world class apprenticeship system. Our 'great expectations' reflect our belief that the steps are realistic and our hope that they will be acted on.

STEP I. ENSURING A CAREER FOUNDATION

ENSURING A CAREER FOUNDATION: KEY FACTS

- There are 472 approved apprenticeship standards at levels 2-4, more than in most comparable systems. Switzerland, where more than half the youth cohort start apprenticeships, has around half that number.
- One in 10 apprenticeship standards are unused.
- Transferable skills are vital. England has particular challenges with the literacy and numeracy skills of younger adults. And interpersonal skills are increasingly important to the labour market.
- In most countries, but not in England, apprenticeship leads to a named qualification.

Apprenticeship must lead to a career, not just immediate job skills

Apprenticeship needs to provide immediate job skills, but for there to be lasting value, trainees must be able to adapt to changing job roles and technologies. This requires breadth of training in the target occupation, setting it above temporary job roles, alongside training in the wider and transferable skills that provide career competence. So the first step towards a world class apprenticeship system is the introduction of measures that provide a stronger career foundation for apprentices and yield a more adaptable workforce for employers and the economy.

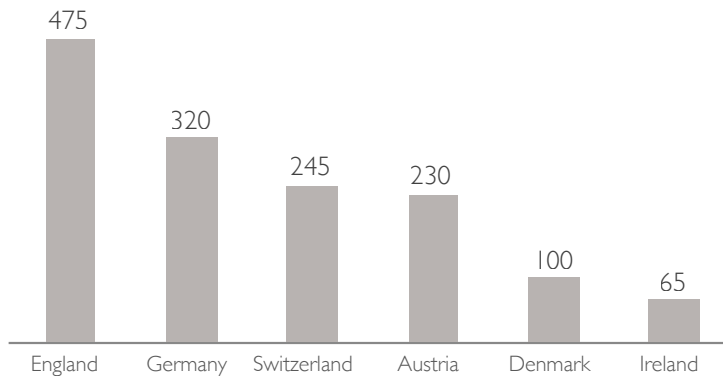


Figure b. More apprentice occupations imply narrower occupations

Numbers of apprentice occupations in different countries

(See [Figure 3](#) in the main report for details)

Recommendation 1.1: ensure broader apprenticeship standards

Some English apprenticeship standards are narrower in occupational coverage than those in other countries and are therefore less suitable as career foundations (see [Figure b](#)). In response:

- Through engagement with trailblazer groups, and through revised regulatory criteria, the Institute for Apprenticeship and Technical Education (IfATE) should ensure all apprenticeship standards have sufficient breadth to be suitable for career starters.
- IfATE should make better use of the ‘core and options’ framework to incorporate new specialisms into existing apprenticeship standards, without increasing the overall number of apprenticeships.

Recommendation 1.2: strengthen the inclusion of transferable competences in standards

In England, there are greater challenges in the literacy and especially numeracy skills of young adults than in many other countries. At the same time, interpersonal skills are becoming more important to the labour market because they are difficult skills to automate. Despite this, apprenticeships in England give less attention to transferable competences than many countries. In response:

- For numeracy, literacy and digital literacy, establish a common framework of requirements for apprenticeships by drawing on the frameworks already used for the first T-levels.
- In keeping with recent recommendations of the government’s Skills and Productivity Board, IfATE should make sure transferable competences are

adequately included in all apprenticeship standards. This should build on the guidance already given by IfATE for occupational/apprenticeship standards and its use of the Skills Builder Partnership approach.⁴

- Review the criteria for end-point assessments to ensure that synoptic assessment (a comprehensive assessment including a broad range of skills) is carried out.

Recommendation 1.3: establish a formal name for the apprenticeship qualification

Unlike most other apprenticeship countries, there is no recognised name for apprenticeship qualifications. This makes no sense and devalues apprentices. A formal name should include the route, individual standard and level. The name could have the route as the main title, for example, Work-based Learning Diploma in Health and Science, with the individual standard and level as the subtitle, Optical Assistant, Level 3. Such a name would enable graduates of the English apprenticeship system to point with pride to their qualifications and bring them in line both with their counterparts in other countries and those in England with other qualifications.

STEP 2. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TRAINING AND CLARIFYING THE OFFER

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TRAINING AND CLARIFYING THE OFFER: KEY FACTS

- More than half of the apprentices surveyed said they had not received the minimum required off-the-job training.
- Only about half (52%) of those on apprentice standards in 2020/21 successfully completed their programmes.
- Of those who dropped out of apprenticeships in England, 44% reported they had not been given enough time for training.
- Around one in five Level 2 and 3 apprentices do not receive the legal minimum wage.

Despite improvements, there is still little clarity about what apprentices can expect

The quality of apprenticeship training depends on the coordination of on- and off-the-job training. New minimum standards for the training of apprentices in England are a real advance. However those starting an apprenticeship have little idea what to expect. There are persistent challenges with some apprenticeships not complying with minimum requirements, and far too many apprentices drop out. The second step towards a world class apprenticeship system is to improve the quality of the training and to clarify, for prospective and established apprentices and for employers, what an apprenticeship will involve.

⁴ Skills Builder Partnership. <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/>

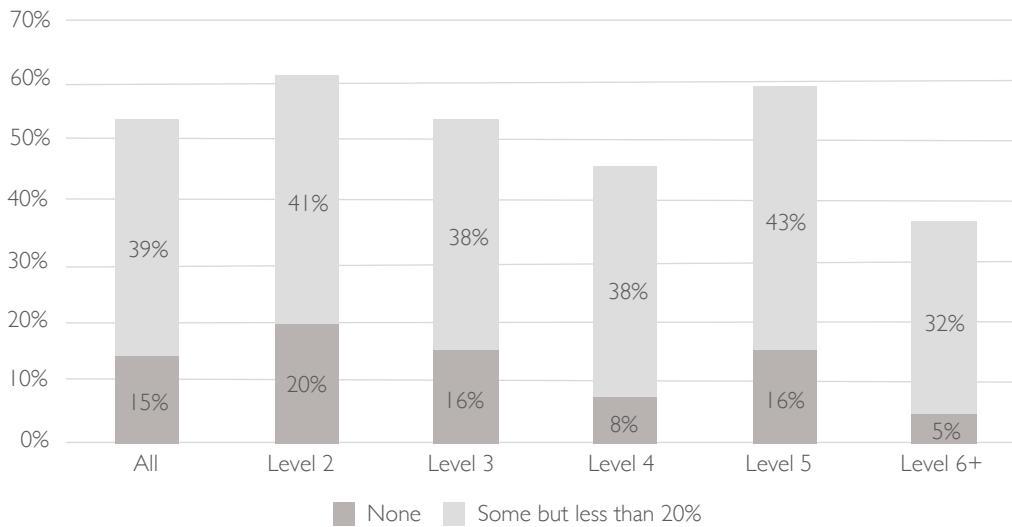


Figure c. Half of apprentices did not receive the required training

Percentage of apprentices reporting that they received less than the required minimum of 20% paid working time as off-the-job training in 2021

(See [Figure 5](#) in the main report for details)

Recommendation 2.1: simplify and enforce the off-the-job training requirement

England's minimum requirement for off-the-job training includes homework, online study and some workplace training in the official count of off-the-job training. This is confusing and encourages training providers to deliver less real training. Even using this permissive definition, many apprentices do not receive the required training (see [Figure c](#)). In response:

- Off-the-job training should be genuinely off-the-job. It should exclude mentoring and shadowing delivered by the employer. It should be genuine training delivered by a trainer/lecturer. It should not include homework and self-study. This is a simpler definition, similar to the definition of guided learning hours already in regulatory use. It would remove the incentives for providers to minimise the engagement of their trainers/lecturers in favour of documenting self-study and training provided by employers. It would also be much easier to enforce.

Recommendation 2.2: support and develop on-the-job training

On-the-job training, delivered by a practitioner to their apprentice, has been the defining feature of apprenticeships for more than two thousand years. However the on-the-job training currently delivered by employers is unregulated and therefore variable in both quantity and quality. In response:

- If ATE guidance should be explicit that employers are expected to provide on-the-job training for their apprentices delivered by designated mentors. Good practice could be shared and promoted.
- National curricula would highlight the occupational competences which should be developed, fully or partially, on the job. These would include not only technical competences but also soft skills, such as working with others, where workplace learning is vital.

- Training for those who train and mentor apprentices in the workplace should be supported and encouraged by government in the same way it is in many other countries.

Recommendation 2.3: clarify the apprenticeship offer

Several factors obscure what apprentices and employers should expect of an apprenticeship programme. Those considering an apprenticeship do not know how their training will be delivered in terms of the respective contributions of the employer and the training provider; they do not know how much of the training that is classed as 'off-the-job' will be self-study, online or delivered by the employer; they do not know how much training time will be given to different topics, including those in which they have a particular interest. The stated rules for apprenticeship programmes are widely ignored: only half of apprentices receive the required minimum amount of training and apprentices are 10 times more likely than other workers to receive wages that are below the legal minimum. Around half of apprentices drop out, often because they are disappointed with their experience. No other English education and training programme and few comparable international apprenticeship programmes operate with this level of uncertainty. In response:

- National curricula for apprenticeships should be introduced in line with practice in other countries. This will build on a promising IfATE initiative. The curricula should be developed by trailblazer groups in consultation with training providers and IfATE, alongside apprenticeship standards and assessment plans. This would have several advantages:
 - those starting an apprenticeship would know what to expect, reducing the risk of apprentices being disappointed with their training and dropping out
 - sufficient training time allocated to key job competences would be ensured
 - expectations on employers would be made clear and the coordination between employers and training providers would be improved
 - minimum standards would be robustly enforced, and the rules would be understood as binding by all parties.

STEP 3. REVIVING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

REVIVING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP: KEY FACTS

- Apprenticeships for those aged under 25 have double the wage returns of those for older people.
- 80% of apprentices under 25 are in Level 2 and 3 programmes.
- Participation by those under 19 has fallen by 32% over the last five years.
- Of levy paying employers, 15% said they were using the levy to accredit existing skills.
- 21% of the Department for Education's (DfE's) budget for apprenticeships was devoted to degree apprenticeships in 2021/22 – this has doubled in two years.
- In the five years to 2022/23, apprenticeship participation among those living in the most disadvantaged quintile of postcodes fell by 30%. During the same period it rose slightly for the most advantaged quintile.

Youth apprenticeship is currently small in scale and represents unrealised potential. The wage and productivity returns gained through youth apprenticeships are greater than for older workers. There is also a lack of alternative post-16 opportunities for those with weak prior attainment.

Many European countries successfully use apprenticeships to integrate young people into the labour market. But in England many employers prefer to use their levy funds to upskill their existing workforce, and/or to support degree apprenticeships and management training instead of funding the training of new recruits with limited prior attainment. The fast-increasing number of these higher level and degree apprenticeships benefit few young people (see [Figure d](#)). Step 3 towards a world class apprenticeship would be to revive youth apprenticeship.

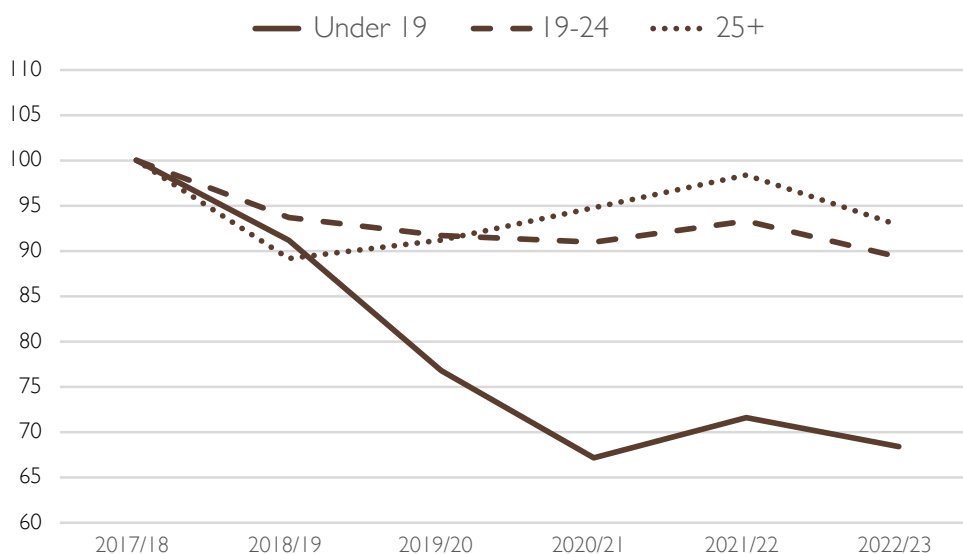


Figure d. Declining youth apprenticeship

Apprenticeship participation rates by age group (2017/18=100)

Note: Figures for 2022/23 are provisional

(See [Figure 8](#) in the main report for details)

Recommendation 3.1: improve the incentives for youth apprenticeship

In common with many other countries with apprenticeship systems, and consistent with A-level and T-level funding, off-the-job training and assessments for youth apprentices should be fully funded. This funding could come from general taxation or through the levy, by top-slicing the funds collected. Automatic full funding should be limited to apprenticeships where the starting apprentice is under 25, has not been employed in the current job for more than three months and the apprenticeship is at Level 2 or 3. This applies to around one-quarter of current apprenticeship starts.

In addition, and in line with practice in several other countries, employers should receive a payment each year for youth apprentices, plus a modest completion bonus. This would be an adaptation of the existing £1,000 incentive payment available to employers taking on an apprentice aged 16 to 18. The completion bonus should be modest so that it encourages completion but limits the risk that employers might only take apprentices that they see as certain to complete, thus excluding some of the most disadvantaged. These payments might be set experimentally and reviewed in the light of their impact.

Recommendation 3.2: with full funding of youth apprenticeships, the remaining levy funds should be used flexibly

All remaining levy funds should be used flexibly to fund different forms of training, including apprenticeship. The principle would be for the funds to be used for qualifications that are of general benefit to workforce skills and the economy, but not used for training which is employer specific. This would include apprenticeships and other approved qualifications based on IfATE occupational standards. It would enable levy paying employers to use their levy pots, and non-levy paying employers to draw on levy funding (while contributing 5%) to pay for apprenticeships and other technical qualifications at levels 4-7 and apprenticeships at levels 2-3 for existing workers.

Levy funding should also be extended to cover the recognition of prior learning. A serious gap in the English apprenticeship system is that, unlike many other apprenticeship systems, it fails to allow experienced workers access to an assessment giving them the same qualification as graduate apprentices. This presupposes a name for the apprenticeship qualification which does not mention apprenticeship, as proposed in recommendation 1.3.

Recommendation 3.3: broaden the T-level transition programme to prepare young people for both apprenticeships and T-levels

With the abandonment of the traineeships programme, England no longer has an access route into apprenticeships for those, often with weak prior attainment, who would be interested in a youth apprenticeship but who cannot immediately find one. Among the most disadvantaged, participation has declined (see [Figure e](#)). Many other countries maintain substantial pre-apprenticeship systems that support access to regular or modified forms of apprenticeship.

There are compelling arguments to fill the gap with a modified T-level transition programme. This would make a virtue of necessity because it would do no more than formalise the way the existing T-level transition programme already leads to apprenticeships alongside other outcomes. It would involve a change to the name and the stated objective of the programme, but relatively little change to its content.

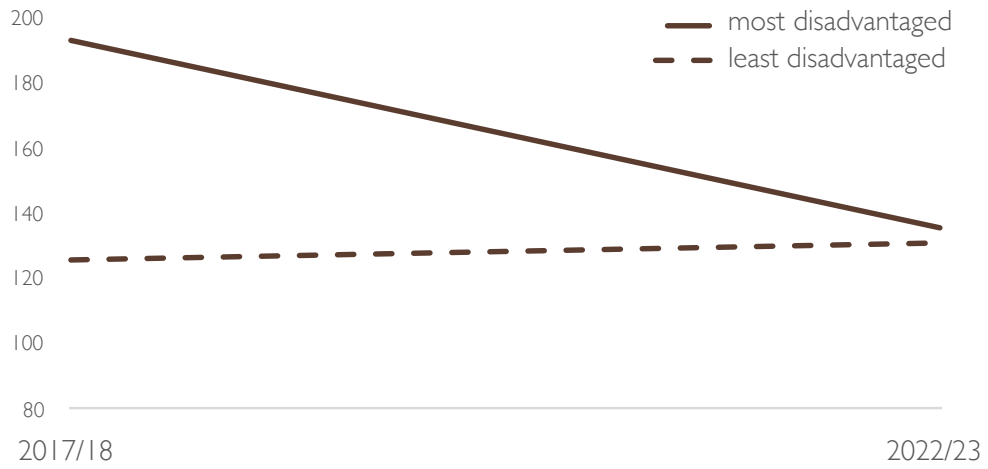


Figure e. Declining apprenticeship participation by the most disadvantaged

Thousands of participants from the most and the least disadvantaged quintiles, change between 2017/18 and 2022/23

(See [Figure 10](#) in the main report for details)

INTRODUCTION: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

THE CHANGING PICTURE OF APPRENTICESHIP IN ENGLAND

Apprenticeship is an outstanding learning programme

Apprenticeship has had a major place in English life since the Middle Ages and is recognised globally as one of the best forms of occupational training. Today it plays a major role in the skills system.

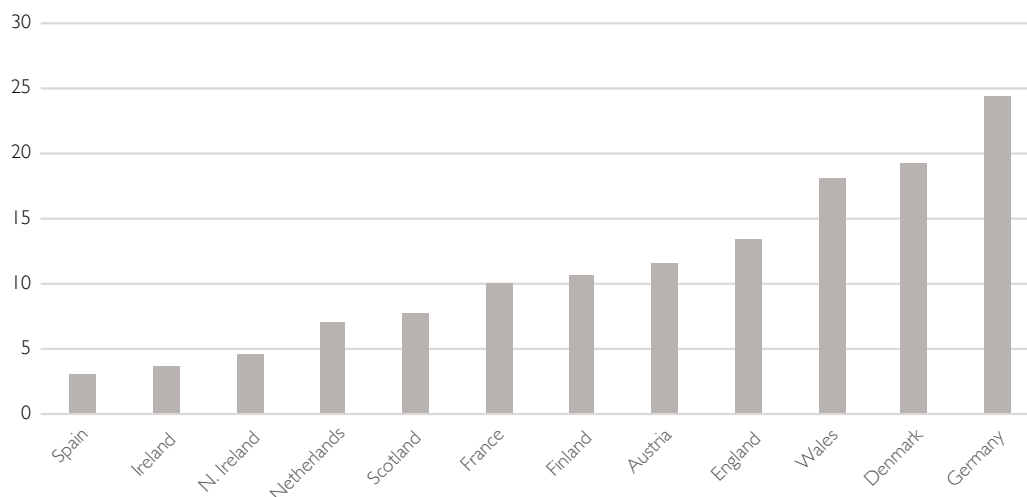


Figure 1. England's large apprenticeship system

Apprentices per thousand people in national populations: 2017-2019⁵

- *Big numbers.* Just over 700,000 people participated in apprenticeship training in 2022/23.⁶ For comparison, almost 1.2 million UK-domiciled people were enrolled in full-time undergraduate higher education programmes in England 2021/22.⁷ England's apprenticeship system is large in comparison with many other countries (see Figure 1).
- *Large impact on skills and productivity.* Returns vary hugely by sector and gender, but for example, by age 28, men who started a Level 3 apprenticeship earn 37% more than men who left education with A-levels (and did not progress further) and 35% more than men who left education with a Level 3 vocational qualification.⁸

⁵ Figures for the number of apprentices come from estimates in Cedefop (2021) *How many apprentices are there in the EU?* <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/4196>. Population estimates come from Eurostat figures at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/table?lang=en>, and for the UK nations at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2020#population-change-for-uk-countries>. Population figures are matched to apprenticeship numbers for the same year, as the year of the apprenticeship data varies between countries across 2017-2019 (so it is unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic). Multiple challenges in the apprenticeship enrolment data for Europe, explained in Cedefop (2021) *How many apprentices are there in the EU?* <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/4196>, mean that these figures for EU countries should be treated cautiously.

⁶ DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bfb8edaf5-tables>

⁷ HESA (2023) *Higher education student statistics UK, 2021/22 – student numbers and characteristics*. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2023/sb265-higher-education-student-statistics/numbers>

⁸ Viera, H (2018) *Do apprenticeships increase earnings?* LSE blog, 20 March 2018. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2018/03/20/do-apprenticeships-increase-earnings/> This blog is based on Cavaglia, C., McNally, S., & Ventura, G. (2018). *Do apprenticeships pay? Evidence for England*. Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp015.pdf>

- *Substantial expenditure.* In 2021/22, government expenditure on apprenticeship included around £1.6 billion for apprenticeships with levy paying employers and £0.8 billion for apprenticeships with non-levy paying employers.⁹
- *A big profile in the service sector.* Just two sectors of the economy – health, public services and care (29%); and business administration and law (27%) – accounted for more than half of apprenticeship starts in 2021/22. Engineering and manufacturing accounted for just 14%.¹⁰
- *Many apprentices are older existing workers.* In 2021/22, nearly half (46%) of starting apprentices were over 24,¹¹ and in 2021 just over half of apprentices were existing workers as opposed to new recruits.¹²

The mix of apprenticeships has changed rapidly

Apprenticeships at higher levels have grown rapidly in recent years, while Level 2 apprenticeships have declined (see Figure 2). In 2022/23 apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7 represented 15% of all starts.¹³ In 2021/22 they accounted for 21% of the Department for Education's (DfE's) budget for apprenticeships – this has doubled in two years.¹⁴ Younger people benefited less from these changes. Figure 2 shows that starts at levels 4-7 quadrupled over the six years to 2021/22, but in that year only one-third (33%) of the starts were under 25.¹⁵

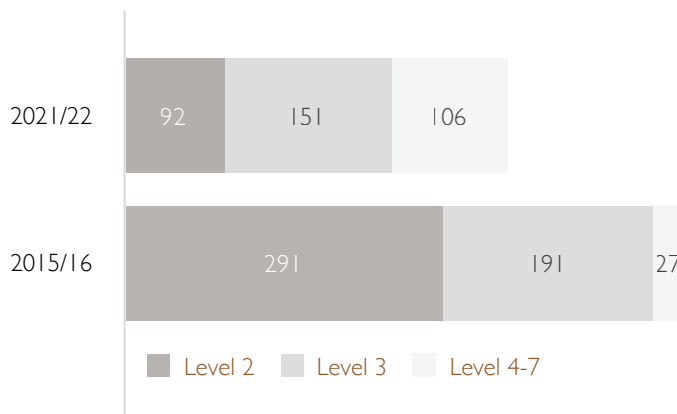


Figure 2. The shift towards higher level apprenticeships (starts in thousands)

Source: DfE (2023)¹⁶

9 UK Parliament (2023) *Apprentices: taxation. Question for the Department for Education. Answered on 5 June 2023.* <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-22/hl8010>

10 DfE (2023) *Academic Year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships.* <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bfb8edaf5-tables>

11 Ibid.

12 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

13 DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships.* <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bfb8edaf5-tables>

14 Camden, B (5 May 2023) Degree-level apprenticeship spending hit half a billion last year. *FE Week*, 5 May 2023. <https://feweek.co.uk/degree-level-apprenticeship-spending-hit-half-a-billion-last-year/#:~:text=FE%20Week%20analysis%20of%20the,since%20their%20introduction%20in%202015>

15 Ibid.

16 DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships.* <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bfb8edaf5-tables>

ACHIEVEMENTS

Reform has improved the quality of apprenticeship

Reform over the last decade has been rapid following the Wolf, Sainsbury and, most of all, the Richard reviews. The key reforms have been:

- *Apprenticeship standards have replaced frameworks.* In most apprenticeship systems, apprenticeship programmes correspond to occupations, with each programme preparing apprentices for a single target occupation. In England, the apprenticeship frameworks worked differently, in that they involved an à la carte mix of vocational qualifications. This caused multiple problems, partly of confusion and overlap, but most seriously because competence in the target occupation was not an essential feature of any framework. One of the major achievements of reform has been the introduction of apprenticeship standards which have established (or more accurately, re-established) the foundation principle of apprenticeship – that each apprenticeship is defined by its capacity to prepare people for a target occupation.
- *Employers now have a lead role in defining standards.* One element of the new standards is that, as in most other leading apprenticeship systems, employers have a key role in defining the occupational competence they expect in a target occupation, so the apprenticeship is driven by labour market needs.
- *Apprenticeship standards are now part of a broader system of occupational standards.* IfATE is now developing this broader system (to be distinguished from the previous national occupational standards) to underpin not only apprenticeships but also other technical qualifications. This will ensure coherence between apprenticeship and other qualifications.
- *Competence is now tested through an end-point assessment.* In most apprenticeship systems occupational competence is tested primarily through an assessment at the end of the programme. English apprenticeships have now adopted this principle, allowing, in theory, full competence in an occupation to be assessed in the round. (Under frameworks, assessments were fragmented throughout the programme, so there was no real test of the overall ability to do the job).
- *Minimum programme length and training requirements have been introduced.* In most countries, the length of apprenticeship programmes is around 2-4 years, meaning that apprenticeship is, and is perceived to be, a very substantive programme of career preparation similar in weight to higher education programmes. In contrast, apprenticeship programmes of just a few months in length were common in England in the first decade of the 21st century. The introduction of a 12 month minimum for programmes, alongside a requirement for at least six hours per week of off-the-job training during paid working time, means that apprenticeships are much more substantive programmes than previously, and are more comparable to international apprenticeship programmes.
- *Apprenticeship training has been extended to a wider range of occupations, including higher level professions.* The powerful apprenticeship principle of work-based learning combined with off-the-job training and education is applicable to a wide range of jobs. In England this has been realised through apprenticeship standards at up to Level 7. Alongside the incentives established by the apprenticeship levy, this has encouraged the development of degree-level apprenticeships to cover fields such as teaching and nursing. While degree-level apprenticeships in different

forms are also found in other countries, including France, Germany and Scotland, this development has helped to realise the full potential of apprenticeship.

CHALLENGES AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS

These are great achievements, but big challenges remain

These reforms have led to a clear and welcome break from a chequered past and have in many ways brought the English apprenticeship system closer to the expectations and standards of the strongest apprenticeship systems in the world. Pride in these achievements is justified but it needs to be balanced by a recognition of how much is still to be done. The vision for apprenticeship set out in the Richard and Sainsbury reviews is admirable: in that vision apprenticeship should take its rightful place as the work-based route, alongside the more school-based T-levels, for young people to gain vocational qualifications. Apprenticeship would provide an effective career foundation for young people, with programmes providing a solid range of transferable and basic skills alongside immediate occupational competence. This would both benefit the individuals concerned and support the whole economy by producing a skilled and adaptable workforce.

The vision of the Richard and Sainsbury reviews has yet to be fully realised

But despite the progress made on many fronts, full realisation of this vision remains elusive. While there are some very high-quality apprenticeships and rapid growth of degree apprenticeships, which are part of higher education, the apprenticeship system continues to play a relatively minor role in the area where it was traditionally strongest and where it has most to offer – the transition from school to work for young people who do not enter higher education. This is a major problem. School-leavers with weak GCSE attainment are the group most at risk in the labour market and have a compelling need for supportive training programmes. And there is evidence that youth apprenticeships, rather than apprenticeships for adults, offer the greatest returns to individuals and to the national economy.¹⁷

Realising the vision means addressing three challenges

Three obstacles stand in the way. First, too few apprenticeship programmes include the breadth of occupation, and the wider education and training needed to provide a suitable career foundation for young people. Second, there are weaknesses in the apprenticeship offer: the quality of the training is not always adequate, there is widespread non-compliance with training standards, and there are high levels of dropout. Third, youth apprenticeship, particularly for the most disadvantaged, plays only a modest role, while the massive incentives offered for higher level apprenticeships are creating distortions. These problems are substantial but solvable.

In response to these challenges this report draws on international experience to propose three steps that, if taken together, would help establish a world class apprenticeship system. Such a system would both improve fairness, creating opportunities for those who do not enter higher education, and provide a major boost to the national economy.

Our ‘great expectations’ are for a world class apprenticeship system

In Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, the hero, Pip, starts out as an apprentice blacksmith. The use of its title in this report marks the ambitions of youth, and the profound relationship between apprentice and mentor on which the plot of the

¹⁷ McIntosh, S. and Morris, D. (2018) *Labour market outcomes of older versus younger apprentices: a comparison of earnings differentials*. Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp016.pdf>

novel pivots. It is also a reminder of the long history of apprenticeship, appearing as it does in a novel written nearly two centuries ago. Today we should have great expectations for apprentices themselves, as well as for the contributions of employers and training providers. But, above all, our great expectations are for the vast potential of apprenticeship, and the aspiration to develop a world class apprenticeship system.

STEP 1. ENSURING A CAREER FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

Technical qualifications for young people must lead to a career

Occupational training should provide skills for a job, but for there to be lasting value, it must also enable trainees to adapt to changing job roles and technologies. This means breadth in the target occupation is needed, setting it above temporary job roles, alongside training in wider transferable skills that will support career development. This approach offers a career foundation for entrants to the labour market, while building flexibility in the labour force for employers and the economy. While training for narrower skill sets has value, it does not provide the foundation for careers.

Apprenticeship must also offer this prospect

For apprenticeship this approach is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to ensure that programmes go beyond the job-readiness that is the immediate concern of the employers of apprentices. The opportunity is to use the power of work-based learning to develop the crucial interpersonal and problem-solving skills that are more naturally fostered in a workplace than a classroom – a point emphasised, for example, by Skills Development Scotland and the Centre for Work-based Learning in Scotland (2018)¹⁸ and by Lerman (2013).¹⁹

This chapter explores apprenticeship as a career foundation

This chapter explores the extent to which apprenticeship systems offer a career foundation for those entering the world of work and compares England to other countries. The chapter covers:

- *Institutions, occupational breadth and specialisms*, which looks at the institutions that define apprenticeship occupations and qualifications. It explores how they ensure that target occupations are sufficiently broad to offer a career foundation, and how specialisms within occupations are handled.
- *Including transferable competences*, which examines how transferable competences as well as occupation-specific competences are included in apprenticeships, looking at literacy, numeracy and softer transferable competences.
- *Apprenticeship as a qualification*, explores the curious lack of a name for the apprenticeship qualification in England, in contrast with other countries.
- *Step 1: Ensuring a career foundation*, summarises the challenges and sets out recommendations designed to ensure apprenticeship provides the foundation for careers.

¹⁸ Skills Development Scotland and Centre for Work-based Learning (2018) *Skills 4.0 a skills model to drive Scotland's future*. https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44684/skills-40_a-skills-model.pdf

¹⁹ Lerman, R. I. (2013) Are employability skills learned in U.S. youth education and training programs? *IZA Journal of Labor Policy*, 2(6). <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-9004-2-6>

INSTITUTIONS, OCCUPATIONAL BREADTH AND SPECIALISMS INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEFINING APPRENTICESHIPS

Specialised bodies, including employers, are needed to define apprenticeships

The work of establishing individual apprenticeship qualifications requires specialised bodies. Such bodies must decide on a target occupation, identify the competences required for that occupation, decide on the learning programme and define the assessment regime. This requires the expertise of those who understand individual occupations and industry sectors, which usually means a significant role is played by employers. In Austria, France, Germany and Switzerland, employers work with both trade unions and government to define apprenticeship occupations (see [Box 1](#)). This is usually undertaken at national level but, for example, in the United States and South Korea most apprenticeship programmes are tailored and developed by local actors.²⁰

BOX 1. HOW SOCIAL PARTNERS TAKE PART IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF APPRENTICESHIP OCCUPATIONS

The expression 'social partners' is widely used in Europe but is less common in England. It refers to arrangements in which employer and worker organisations, often alongside government, collaborate to manage different aspects of employment and social policy.

- **In Austria** social partners make decisions about the curriculum and competence profile for each apprenticeship occupation.
- **In Denmark** social partners in 'trade committees', at both national and local level, define learning objectives, programme length, the division of training responsibility between the vocational school and the employer, and they assess the need for new competences.
- **In Germany** the social partners, organised through statutory 'chambers', supervise the apprenticeship system, and manage employers' responsibilities to train apprentices and carry out final assessments. Curricula are developed and revised in consultation with the social partners.
- **In Ireland**, since 2016, apprenticeships have become industry led. Consortia of labour market actors propose new apprenticeship programmes for which they then propose occupational profiles, curricula and learning outcomes.

Source: Cedefop (accessed 2023) European database on apprenticeship schemes. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes>

²⁰ International Labour Organisation (2020) *ILO toolkit for quality apprenticeships volume 2: guide for practitioners*. Module 6: innovations and strategies in apprenticeships, pp.25-26. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_751118.pdf

Trailblazer groups are dominated by occupation-specific employers

In England trailblazer groups, made up of employers associated with a single occupation, take the initiative in defining apprenticeship occupations under the aegis of the Institute for Apprenticeship and Technical Education (IfATE). A broader perspective is offered by the 15 'route panels' who carry out 'route reviews' of standards in their sector, but these come after the initial creation of the standard.²¹ Recent research has shown that some trailblazer groups do not adequately represent employers from different sectors who also recruit to these occupations, in particular the under-represented small and medium-sized enterprises that are more likely to recruit youth apprentices.²²

Other countries often provide counterbalancing elements

The English approach differs from that of other countries in two respects. First, in dual-system countries²³ individual apprenticeships normally emerge from broader rather than occupation-specific bodies, for example from the Chambers of Crafts in Germany. Second, in some other countries the employer viewpoint is balanced by a trade union voice. Steedman (2001)²⁴ described how in other European countries, either trade unions or government play an active role in looking after apprentices' interests and this is reflected in the institutional arrangements described in [Box I](#).

Employers and apprentices have different interests

Smits (2001)²⁵ showed that employers taking on apprentices in a specific occupational niche will tend to define apprenticeship occupations narrowly. This limits the ability of their graduate apprentices to leave for a better job or use the possibility of them leaving for better pay to drive up wages. Broader occupational qualifications tend to be in the interest of apprentices, increasing their potential labour market mobility. Employers in general (as opposed to those concerned with an occupational niche) also tend to prefer the broader qualifications that promote overall labour force flexibility. Similar considerations arise about how apprenticeship programmes balance occupation-specific and transferable competences, a point explored in a later section. These different interests are summarised in [Table I](#).

21 The role of route panels is described by IfATE, see <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/6284/route-panel-role-description-july-2022.pdf>

22 Dickinson, P. and E. Erikson (2022) *Profiling employers involved in apprenticeship trailblazer groups*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/trailblazer-employers-final-report-ier-041022.pdf>

23 In this report the term 'dual-system countries' primarily refers to Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, but recognises that some other countries, including Flemish Belgium and Luxembourg, also have similar apprenticeship systems.

24 Steedman, H. (2001) Five years of the modern apprenticeship initiative: an assessment against continental European models. *National Institute Economic Review*, (178), pp.75-87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002795010117800112>

25 Smits, W. (2001) *Occupation specific or generic skills? Conflicting interests of firms and apprentices*. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6909317.pdf>

Table I. Achieving balance in apprenticeship qualifications: the varying interests of stakeholders

	Employers taking on apprentices in the target occupation	Employers in general	Apprentices
Breadth of apprenticeship qualification	Prefer narrower standards to ensure qualified apprentices remain with the employer or, at least, in the sector	Prefer broader standards to allow those qualified to move to jobs and sectors in demand	Prefer broader standards to support career development and mobility
Balance between occupation-specific and transferable competences	Greater support for the occupation-specific competences that deliver immediate value to the employer	Greater support for the transferable competences to support a flexible workforce	Greater support for the transferable competences of value throughout a varied career

THE BREADTH OF APPRENTICESHIP

The choice of target apprenticeship occupations is not simple

The selection of an occupation for an apprenticeship programme sounds deceptively simple, but the choices involved are far from it. When does a package of tasks deserve to be treated as an occupation? When does a set of competences coalesce into full occupational competence? Does the skill required to handle new technology justify a new apprenticeship or just a new specialism? How we answer these questions has major implications.

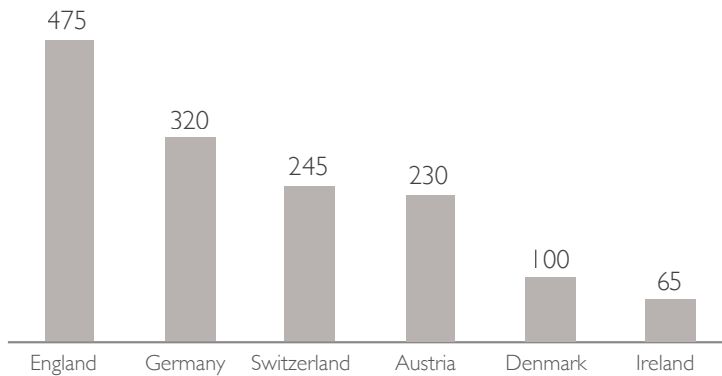


Figure 3. More apprentice occupations imply narrower occupations

Numbers of apprentice occupations in different countries

Sources: for England, figures are for levels 2-4 approved standards from 2 September 2023 <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/?levels=2,3,4&includeApprovedForDelivery=true>; For Ireland, see Irish government website <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b9760-how-to-become-an-apprentice/> For other countries, see Apprenticeship Toolbox website <https://www.bibb.de/en/146656.php>.

Some English apprenticeships are relatively narrow

If apprentice occupations are narrowly defined, more are needed. Figure 3 shows that in England, there are more approved apprenticeship standards at levels 2-4 than in many comparator countries (where apprenticeships are usually at Level 3). While many English standards are broad, others are strikingly narrow. For example, the dual fuel smart meter installer,²⁶ the powered pedestrian door installer and service engineer,²⁷ and the anti-social behaviour and community safety officer²⁸ correspond to specific technologies or job roles that are certain to change rapidly. While regulation specifies that standards must have sufficient breadth and depth to justify minimum training requirements (six hours per week for 12 months)²⁹ this requirement could be met through intensive training for a highly specialised job role.

The objective of limiting the overall number of apprenticeships, found for example in Austria (see Box 2), is notably absent. Recent analysis has shown that around one in 10 approved apprenticeship standards have attracted no apprentices, and that eight of the unused standards have been approved for five years.³⁰ This suggests that the approval requirements for new standards have not always been sufficiently demanding.

Many have argued for broader standards

In addition to the present author (Kuczera and Field,³¹ and Field³²), those arguing for broader standards include Richmond³³ and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).³⁴ The Edge Foundation states:

Some of the new standards risk training individuals for a very specific role with very few broader transferable skills, at the very time when the Fourth Industrial Revolution is beginning to create rapid change in the labour market that will require individuals to change occupations or even industries several times during their career.³⁵

Narrow standards obstruct broader standards in the same domain

For England it could be argued that some of the narrower standards are primarily designed to provide additional skill sets for existing workers instead of being a career foundation. However, since (for good reasons) competing and overlapping

26 IfATE (2018) *Dual fuel smart meter installer*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/dual-fuel-smart-meter-installer-v1-1>

27 IfATE (2018) *Powered pedestrian door installer and service engineer*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/search/?query=powered+pedestrian+door+installer+and+service+engineer>

28 IfATE (2022) *Anti-social behaviour and community safety officer*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/anti-social-behaviour-and-community-safety-officer-v1-0>

29 IfATE (2023) *Developing an occupation proposal*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-an-apprenticeship-occupation-proposal/>

30 Chowen, S. (2023) 1 in 10 established apprenticeships fail to recruit a single apprentice. *FE Week*, May 12, 2023, issue 425. https://feweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Edition-425-digi.pdf?mc_cid=ff3c26326b&mc_eid=9181985aef

31 Kuczera, M. and Field, S. (2018) *Apprenticeship in England, United Kingdom*. OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264298507-en>

32 Field, S. (2018) *Taking training seriously: lessons from an international comparison of off-the-job training for apprenticeships in England*. A report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/final-apprenticeships-and-off-the-job-training-may-2018.pdf>

33 Richmond, T. (2018) *The great training robbery: assessing the first year of the apprenticeship levy*. Reform Research Trust. <https://reform.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-great-training-robbery-assessing-the-first-year-of-the-apprenticeship-levy-final.pdf>

34 CIPD (2020) *Making apprenticeships future-fit*. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/apprenticeships-future-fit_tcm18-82228.pdf

35 Edge Foundation (2019) *Our plan for apprenticeships: broader, higher quality, better prepared*. https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/87/edge20e2809320apprenticeships20report2028final20-20web29_41nXjVp.pdf

apprenticeship standards are not permitted,³⁶ a narrow standard obstructs the creation of a broader standard in the same occupational group. A broader standard would only be allowed if it included the narrower one as a speciality.

Regular review helps to avoid proliferation

Periodic review of established apprenticeship occupations allows for responses to be made to changing labour market needs. In Switzerland, for example, all apprentice occupations must be reviewed every five years – the process involves the collection of information from training providers, employers and apprentices, leading to a report making recommendations for any necessary changes.³⁷ In England, most apprenticeship standards appear to require review every three years, but it is not clear if this policy is followed given the evidence that many standards have no apprentices. Chowen (2023)³⁸ suggests that the proliferation of standards has made it harder to ensure the regular review of standards which may no longer be relevant.

USING SPECIALISMS TO MAINTAIN QUALIFICATION BREADTH

Specialisms in apprenticeships reconcile breadth with depth

One way of ensuring breadth in apprenticeship occupations is by treating new skill sets, such as those linked to a new technology, as specialisms within an existing apprenticeship. In England, the ‘core and options’ model allows for this. For example, the ‘water network operative’ apprenticeship standard defines a core set of compulsory competences, while ‘clean water network operative’ represents an optional specialism.³⁹ Similarly, in Australia the hairdressing qualification requires 28 units of learning, of which 21 are core requirements, while seven are electives chosen from a list. The elective units include items associated either with men’s or women’s hairdressing, and individual skills such as applying hair extensions.⁴⁰ In Austria and Germany the use of specialisms has helped to limit the number of apprenticeship occupations (see [Box 2](#)).

Specialisms which come to define a job role may be distinguished from narrower skill sets

Some distinction can be drawn between specialisms which might become a separate job role, such as where a plumber specialises in underfloor heating, and the narrower skill sets associated with a specific tool or technology, such as the use of closed-circuit television to investigate blocked drains. In the latter case it is less likely that the skill set will define a job role, although this may vary depending on the organisation.

36 See IfATE guidance, “If an existing occupational standard covers an occupation, we will not permit the development of another one”. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-an-apprenticeship-occupation-proposal/>

37 SEFRI (2017) *Processus du développement des professions dans la formation professionnelle initiale*. https://www.sbf.admin.ch/dam/sbf/fr/dokumente/2017/03/HB_BE.pdf.download.pdf/Handbuch_Prozess_der_Berufsentwicklung-20170328f.pdf

38 Chowen, S. (2023) 1 in 10 established apprenticeships fail to recruit a single apprentice. *FE Week*. May 12, 2023, issue 425. https://feweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Edition-425-digi.pdf?mc_cid=ff3c26326b&mc_eid=9181985aef

39 IfATE (2022) *Water network operative*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/water-network-operative-v1-0>

40 See Australian government website (accessed 2023) *Certificate III in hairdressing*. <https://training.gov.au/training/details/SHB30416>

BOX 2. IN AUSTRIA AND GERMANY NEW SPECIALISMS WITHIN EXISTING APPRENTICESHIPS ACCOMMODATE NEW SKILLS DEMANDS

- **In Germany** the number of apprentice occupations has fallen from around 430 in 1969 to around 320 today. Allowing for specialisms enabled the merging of previously separate occupations. For example, pig breeder and shepherd became specialisms in the animal care apprenticeship. In the 1980s, a rule established that specialisms should not take up more than one-third of training time, with at least two-thirds spent on the common core training. However, since 1998, elective qualification units allow up to one-half of apprenticeship programme time to be devoted to 'non-core' training. Decisions on apprentice occupations and specialisms are intended to reflect both the diversity of job roles and the need to offer apprentices the opportunity for job mobility (Bretschneider and Schwarz, 2015).⁴¹
- **In Austria** specialisms are developed within a modular apprenticeship structure. During the four-year apprenticeship, at least two years must be devoted to a common core of training. One or two years may then be used to pursue a specialism, with the possibility of additional speciality training lasting for between six months and one year. The explicit objective is to respond quickly to changing skills demands through new specialist modules, while constraining the total number of apprentice occupations (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Digital and Economic Affairs, 2020).⁴²

New requirements, as for electric vehicle skills, can be met through specialisms

The approach of different countries to a new technology is informative. In many countries, a burgeoning stock of electric and hybrid vehicles is increasing demand for associated maintenance skills. In response, Austria introduced a high voltage technology module to its automotive engineering apprenticeship in 2015.⁴³ Similarly, in Germany, an option in the fourth year of a vehicle mechanic apprenticeship now offers 80 hours of training on "checking and repairing components on hybrid and electric vehicles".⁴⁴ Australia took a different approach, establishing a completely new apprenticeship dedicated to electric vehicles in 2022.⁴⁵

In England, apprenticeship standards have not yet responded

In England, the current (June 2023) apprenticeship standard for motor vehicle maintenance, which is under review, addresses electric vehicle skills only marginally, in that knowledge of hybrid and electrical systems is part of the standard, but maintenance skills for electric vehicles are not addressed.⁴⁶ The demand has, so far, largely been met through short courses provided by bodies such as the Institute of

41 Bretschneider, M. and Schwarz, H. (2015) *Bringing order to the regulations: a heuristic for the structuring of training occupations*. Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). <https://www.bibb.de/en/32647.php>

42 Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Digital and Economic Affairs (2020) *Apprenticeship system: the dual system of vocational education and training in Austria*. https://www.bmaw.gv.at/dam/jcr:8dbc03d8-45b2-4fc8-b087-95725065f27e/Die%20Lehre_Englisch_Barrierefrei

43 Federal Ministry Republic of Austria Digital and Economic Affairs (2014) *Apprenticeship: dual vocational education and training in Austria – modern training with a future*. <https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/Austria%20-%20Apprenticeship.%20Dual%20Vocational%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20Austria.pdf>

44 See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) website page on vehicle mechanics (accessed 2023) https://www.bibb.de/dienst/berufesuche/de/index_berufesuche.php/profile/apprenticeship/nh324578

45 MTA Institute (2022) *Electric vehicle apprenticeship now available in Australia*. <https://mtai.edu.au/electric-vehicle-apprenticeship-now-available-in-australia/>

46 IfATE (2023) *Motor vehicle service and maintenance technician – light vehicles*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/motor-vehicle-service-and-maintenance-technician-light-vehicle-v1-4>

the Motor Industry (IMI) and City and Guilds. However according to the IMI, there is “a lack of consistent EV [electric vehicle] training and assessment across existing programmes”,⁴⁷ and there have been complaints that short courses on electric vehicle skills are much less effective than apprenticeship training.⁴⁸ So Austria and Germany have been able to introduce relevant training within existing modularised automotive apprenticeships – a development not yet matched in England despite clear skills shortages. The new IfATE innovation strategy, launched in May 2023, sets the objective of having an enhanced and rapid response to emerging skills needs in apprenticeships and technical qualifications.⁴⁹

INSTITUTIONS, OCCUPATIONAL BREADTH AND SPECIALISMS: CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the evidence shows that some English apprenticeship standards are narrower in occupational coverage than those of other countries and are therefore less suitable as career foundations for young people. This reflects three factors:

- Trailblazer groups are dominated by occupation-specific employers instead of other stakeholders, including apprentices and wider employer groups.
- Regulatory criteria allow for standards that are highly specialised, and there is no explicit aim to limit the number of apprenticeship standards.
- Specialisms within apprenticeships can be addressed in England through the core and options model, which facilitates broader apprenticeships, but this model has not yet been fully exploited.

INCLUDING TRANSFERABLE COMPETENCES

THE CONTENT OF APPRENTICESHIP QUALIFICATIONS

Occupational competence demands both job-specific and wider competences

The capacity to do a job depends both on job-specific skills and on wider competences that are important in many jobs. These wider competences include cognitive skills such as numeracy and literacy, but also less-cognitive⁵⁰ competences, including interpersonal skills such as teamwork and leadership, traits such as honesty and determination, and high-level capacities such as creativity and adaptability.

Employers in occupational niches have less interest in wider competences

Research has confirmed (Schweri, 2021⁵¹ and Curtis and Mackenzie, 2002⁵²) that employers will (unsurprisingly) be reluctant to support training in the transferable competences that would help their employees move to jobs in other sectors (see Table 1). Because employers will not always support sufficient training in these competences, the Skills and Productivity Board⁵³ argue that government support

47 Murray, S. (2021) How apprenticeships will adapt to meet the EV era. *IMI MotorPro*. <https://tide.theimi.org.uk/industry-latest/motorpro/how-apprenticeships-will-adapt-meet-ev-era>

48 Pittock, S. (2022) The government must act quickly if targets for electrical vehicles are to be met. *FE Week*, 6 March 2022. <https://feweek.co.uk/the-government-must-act-quickly-if-targets-for-electrical-vehicles-are-to-be-met/>

49 IfATE (2023) *Innovation strategy*. May 2023. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/about/operational-plans/innovation-strategy/>

50 These are sometimes called ‘non-cognitive competences’, but this is misleading as they nearly always involve the use of some types of knowledge, so here they are referred to as ‘less-cognitive’.

51 Schweri, J. (2021) The costs of standardized apprenticeship curricula for training firms. *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 13(16). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40461-021-00120-4>

52 Curtis, D. and Mackenzie, P. (2002) *Employability skills for Australian industry: literature review and framework development*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254581576_Employability_Skills_for_Australian_Industry_Literature_Review_and_Framework_Development

53 Skills and Productivity Board (2022) *Understanding current and future skills needs*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1078091/Understanding_current_and_future_skills_needs_-_Policy_Report.pdf

is needed. As with the challenge of occupational breadth, a balance is necessary in apprenticeship programmes: sufficient training in transferable competences to make apprenticeships attractive to individuals and to support workforce flexibility, alongside sufficient emphasis on occupation-specific competence to retain the support of the employers of the apprentices.

LITERACY AND NUMERACY

England has challenges with numeracy and literacy skills

Good 'basic' literacy and numeracy skills are linked to higher rates of economic activity, better wages and a reduced risk of unemployment, and this link is particularly strong in England.⁵⁴ Employers often fail to recognise when weak basic skills are causing performance failures,⁵⁵ probably because literacy and numeracy are abstract notions. Despite the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showing the average reading and mathematics scores of English 15-year-olds as slightly above the OECD average,⁵⁶ there is worrying evidence of weaknesses in literacy and numeracy emerging in 16 to 19 education.⁵⁷ Evidence from the 2012 Adult Skills Survey suggested that, as shown in Figure 4, England's much expanded education and training system has, unlike other countries, failed to improve the basic skills of young adults. While these data are now 10 years old (updated results are due in 2024), change of generational differences in basic skills tends to be slow.⁵⁸

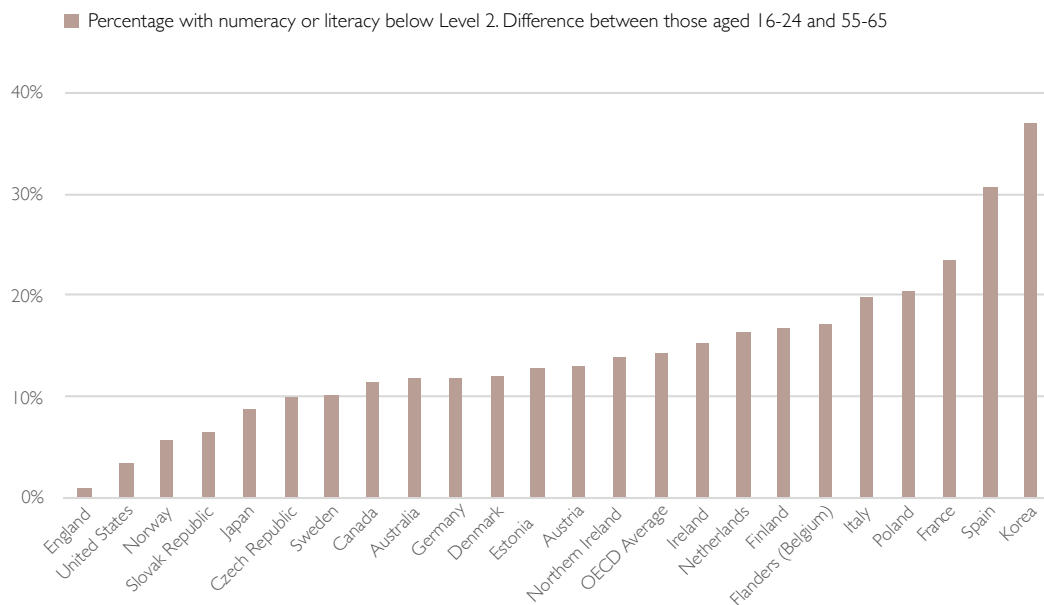


Figure 4. England as a basic skills outlier

Nearly everywhere, except England, low levels of literacy or numeracy are less common among adults than among older adults

Source: Kuczera, Field and Windisch (2016)⁵⁹

54 Kuczera, M., Field, S. and H. Windisch (2016) *Building skills for all: a review of England*. OECD Skills Studies <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf>

55 Ipsos Mori and Institute for Education (2016) *Impact of poor basic literacy and numeracy on employers*. Department for Business Innovation & Skills. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/497544/BIS-16-36-impact-of-poor-basic-literacy-and-numeracy-on-employers.pdf

56 OECD (2019) *Country note: results from PISA 2018 – United Kingdom*. https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_GBR.pdf

57 Green, A., Kaye, N., Pensiero, N. and Phan, H. (2021) *The effects of system type and system characteristics on skills acquisition in upper secondary education and training*. Vol. LLAKES Research Paper no. 69. <https://www.llakes.ac.uk/research-papers>

58 Kuczera, M., Field, S. and H. Windisch (2016) *Building skills for all: a review of England*. OECD Skills Studies <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf>

59 Ibid.

This needs to be addressed in apprenticeship

One explanation for weaknesses in post-16 numeracy and literacy, identified in the Wolf review a decade ago, is that England is unusual in not requiring 16- to 19-year-olds to continue mathematics and own-language education.⁶⁰ In response, a requirement was introduced for apprentices at levels 3-7 to attain at least a Level 2 English and maths qualification before completing their apprenticeship. Those starting a Level 2 apprenticeship were expected to attempt Level 2 maths and English qualifications.⁶¹ As recently as August 2022, these requirements were relaxed, so those starting a Level 2 apprenticeship without prior maths or English qualifications need only attempt Level 1 (rather than Level 2) maths and English assessments.⁶² More recently Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said that numeracy should be central to the education system, with all children continuing to study some type of mathematics up to the age of 18.⁶³

Upper secondary apprenticeship programmes tend to involve more general education

In the many countries where apprenticeship is integrated into upper secondary education, general education, including mathematics and own-language education, is routinely offered to apprentices. So even relatively low-level apprenticeships include general education that supports numeracy and literacy. For example, as detailed in Kuczera and Field (2018):⁶⁴

- *In Germany*, apprentices receive 160 hours of general education each year. It includes subjects such as German, English, economics or social science, and sports.
- *In Switzerland*, all apprentices receive 2.5 hours per week of teaching in the official language, communication, civic education (including some applied mathematics) and 45 minutes of physical education. This adds up to 120 hours of basic skills education and sport per year – so approaching 400 hours over a three-year apprenticeship.

Literacy and numeracy can be taught in context

For those who have chosen the apprenticeship pathway partly because they are disenchanted with academic instruction, they may find being taught literacy and numeracy in the classroom challenging. One option is to teach maths and literacy in the context of practical and vocational teaching. The relevance of mathematics, in particular, may be highlighted by understanding its practical application. Evidence shows that this approach can be effective, but it tends to be costly. An example is the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) programme in the US. It delivers a combination of vocational and basic skills to young people with low prior attainment with an occupational instructor and a basic skills instructor working alongside each other for at least 50% of class time. Evaluation has shown positive outcomes.⁶⁵

60 Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of vocational education – the Wolf report*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180504/DFE-00031-2011.pdf

61 Powell, A. (2023) *Apprenticeships policy in England*. House of Commons Library, January 2023. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN03052/SN03052.pdf>

62 DfE (2022) *Simplifying and improving apprenticeships – what this means for you*. The Education Hub. <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/05/27/simplifying-and-improving-apprenticeships-what-this-means-for-you/>

63 GOV.UK (2023) PM speech on building a better future: 4 January 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-making-2023-the-first-year-of-a-new-and-better-future-4-january-2023>

64 Kuczera, M. and Field, S. (2018) *Apprenticeship in England, United Kingdom*. OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264298507-en>

65 Glosser, A., Martinson, K., Cho, S. and Gard, K. (2018) *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program in three colleges: implementation and early impact report*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/washington-states-integrated-basic-education-and-skills-training-i-best-program-three>

A common framework for basic skills in T-levels and apprenticeships would be desirable

A framework for teaching numeracy, literacy and digital literacy has been developed for the first T-levels. So, for example, the framework sets out the competences needed in the Education and Childcare route. For digital literacy, programme participants should learn how to “support students to use digital devices and online media safely and responsibly”.⁶⁶ It would make sense to use a version of this framework to establish the numeracy, literacy and digital literacy requirements of apprenticeships in the same field.

WIDER TRANSFERABLE COMPETENCES***Some confusing terminology is applied to wider competences***

Transferable competences, and subsets of them, have been described as ‘21st century’, ‘soft’, ‘social and emotional’, ‘transversal’, ‘cross-curricular’, ‘metaskills’, ‘employability’, ‘essential’ and ‘key’ competences and skills.⁶⁷ Some of these categories, such as social and emotional skills, exclude cognitive skills such as literacy and numeracy.⁶⁸ Others, as in the five core skills used in Scotland (see **Box 3**) are related to what employers want, while the eight key competences identified by the European Union cover skills for life as well as for work and include civic capacity and cultural expression.⁶⁹ In England, as long ago as the early 1990s, six core skills of numeracy, communication, information technology, personal skills, problem-solving and competence in a modern foreign language had been identified and were being introduced into General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), although only the first (cognitive) three of these skills were compulsory.^{70 71}

66 DfE (2018) *Education and childcare: T Level outline content*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/2943/education-outline-content-final.pdf>

67 Field, S. (2023) *Transferable competences and Personal Social and Employability (PSE) Qualifications: some international evidence*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/international-comparisons-transferable-and-pse-skills.pdf>

68 OECD (2021) *Beyond academic learning: first results from the survey of social and emotional skills*. OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/92a11084-en.pdf?expires=1665481913&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=466AE2112546F54C44944A22F66096BC>

69 Official Journal of the European Union (2018) *Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning*. May 2018. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01))

70 Glover, L. (2000) *The revised GNVQ: key skills*. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/9897/1/The_revised_GNVQ_-_key_skills.pdf

71 Richard (2011) *General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) 1992-2007*. <https://technicaleducationmatters.org/2011/11/12/general-national-vocational-qualifications-gnvqs-1992-2007/>

BOX 3. IN SCOTLAND FIVE TRANSFERABLE COMPETENCES MUST BE EMBEDDED IN APPRENTICESHIPS

In Scotland, the education and training system includes five core skills which employers identify as important in most jobs. They are:

- communication
- numeracy
- information and communication technology (ICT)
- problem-solving
- working with others

These five competences are embedded in apprenticeship qualifications, either through a mapping exercise which demonstrates their inclusion within specific elements of occupational competence, or through separate certification, and are at a level consistent with the level of the apprenticeship. So, for example, in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Level 3 apprenticeship in agriculture, the module on implementing environmental good practice at work is mapped to communication, working with others and problem-solving.

Source: Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (accessed 2023) Core skills units: modern apprenticeships core skills and core skills profile. <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/75022.html>

Many less-cognitive competences are becoming more important

Evidence suggests that computerisation has increased the relative labour market importance of those skills that are difficult to computerise, especially interpersonal skills, such as communication skills, teamworking and leadership:

- *Internationally*, Deming (2015)⁷² showed that in the US since 1980, jobs that needed a high level of social skills experienced greater relative growth throughout the wage distribution. In Sweden, the wage returns for non-cognitive skills doubled between 1992 and 2013.⁷³
- *In the UK*, when prompted, one-half or more of employers surveyed in the Employers Skill Survey (2020) complained that both applicants for jobs and current staff lacked the ability to manage time and priorities, and to work in teams.⁷⁴ The Skills and Productivity Board concluded that the transferable skills for which demand is likely to grow most quickly include STEM knowledge, the ability to teach others and be a good learner, people skills, creative thinking and problem-solving.⁷⁵

72 Deming, D. (2015) *The growing importance of social skills in the labor market*. Working Paper 21473. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w21473/revisions/w21473.rev1.pdf

73 Edin, P., Fredriksson, P., Nybom, M. and Ockert, B. (2017) *The rising return to non-cognitive skill*. Institute of Labor Economics (IZA). <https://docs.iza.org/dp10914.pdf>

74 DfE (2020) *Employer skills survey 2019: skills needs*. p.127. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936489/ESS_2019_Skills_Needs_Report_Nov20.pdf

75 Skills and Productivity Board (2022) *Understanding current and future skills needs*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1078091/Understanding_current_and_future_skills_needs_-_Policy_Report.pdf

Some countries integrate transferable competences into apprenticeships

Some countries, including Scotland (see [Box 3](#)) address transferable competences by having a standardised list of key competences that are linked to all vocational qualifications, including apprenticeship.⁷⁶ In countries where apprenticeship is part of upper secondary education, requirements for transferable competences are sometimes built into curricula. For example, in Finland upper secondary vocational qualifications (including apprenticeships) must include social competences, labour market competences and entrepreneurship, alongside other soft skills. However, it is acknowledged that integrating these objectives into apprenticeship programmes is challenging in practice.⁷⁷ One promising development is that IfATE now make use of the Skills Builder framework of transferable competences in their guidance on how to develop an occupational/apprenticeship standard.⁷⁸ The Skills Builder competences include teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, creativity, speaking, listening, aiming high and staying positive. However this is guidance and is not mandatory.

But less-cognitive competences are hard to teach and assess in classroom settings

Despite their growing importance, many less-cognitive transferable competences (such as creativity) are hard to teach in a classroom setting and are hard to assess and measure using standardised tests. As a result, they can be neglected (see [Box 4](#)).

Metaskills involve the ability to use different competences to solve problems

Solving a work problem typically requires several competences – for example, creativity and teamworking alongside technical skills and knowledge. So the capacity to solve the problem comes not just from individual competences, but also from the higher-level ability to use those competences together to solve the problem. Such higher-level abilities have been described as metaskills.⁷⁹

England's approach to assessment limits the attention given to metaskills

Clearly metaskills are only testable through synoptic (meaning holistic) assessments that look at the capacity to solve real-world challenges. But a theoretical commitment to synoptic assessment in apprenticeship, following the recommendations of the Richard Review, has weakened in practice.⁸⁰ The government's stated plan following the Richard Review, was that "synoptic, end-point assessment means that an apprentice will need to be able to demonstrate the full range of skills, competency and knowledge required to meet the standard, putting different strands of learning together and applying these in different contexts".⁸¹ However, in practice, end-point assessments just need to use at least one synoptic assessment method, such as work observation, to test some of the required skills, behaviours and knowledge.⁸² This method of assessment can be applied separately, for example, to observe a technical skill and communication skills

76 Field, S. (2023) *Transferable competences and Personal Social and Employability (PSE) Qualifications: some international evidence*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/international-comparisons-transferable-and-pse-skills.pdf>

77 Finnish National Board of Education (2016) *Key competences in vocational education and training: Finland*. https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/ReferNet_FL_KC.pdf

78 IfATE (2023) *Developing an occupational standard*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-occupational-standards/>

79 Skills Development Scotland and Centre for Work-based Learning (2018) *Skills 4.0 a skills model to drive Scotland's future*. https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44684/skills-40_a-skills-model.pdf

80 Field, S. (2021) *A world without maps: assessment in technical education*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/assessment-in-technical-education-simon-field.pdf>

81 DfE and BIS (2013) *The future of apprenticeships in England: next steps from the Richard review*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190632/bis-13-577-the-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-next-steps-from-the-richard-review.pdf

82 IfATE (2020) *Developing an end-point assessment plan*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-an-end-point-assessment-plan/>

on two separate occasions. This is not synoptic assessment, which would involve, for example, an overall assessment of how someone handles a complaint from a customer about a technical malfunction of a product – a demanding task requiring the right blend of technical knowledge, tact and communication skills. Ofqual's review of the quality of end-point assessment materials for apprenticeships makes no mention of synoptic assessment.⁸³

BOX 4. TRANSLATING RHETORIC INTO REALITY: IMPLEMENTING LESS-COGNITIVE COMPETENCES IN TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

Teaching and assessing less-cognitive transferable competences (like teamwork) is hard but not impossible, especially if preconceptions about classroom teaching and paper and pencil examinations are set aside. The following example of plumbing gives the flavour of the challenges involved.

In England, the plumbing apprenticeship standard⁸⁴ includes a list of behaviours expected of the apprentice. These include “honesty and integrity ... dependable and responsible ... enthusiasm and positive attitude ... quality focus ... willingness to learn ... work with others ... sustainable working”. However these behaviours are not prominent in the assessment. They are assessed during the “professional discussion” with the apprentice, and while technical matters are explicitly included in the pass criteria for this discussion, behaviours are mentioned only in general terms, such that the candidate must be able to give examples of when they have demonstrated these behaviours.

In Switzerland, the plumbing apprenticeship⁸⁵ emphasises the integration of transferable competences with technical skills to realise “operational competence”. Professional and technical knowledge and skills are linked to methodological, personal and social skills to perform the job. This is operationalised in the training plan (effectively the curriculum) in which the components of learning are allocated to the different learning contexts. So for interpersonal and communication skills, for example, the company evaluator should ensure that the apprentice learns how to explain necessary plumbing installations in an understandable way to works management and to other trades on the site. At the same time, in the vocational school, the apprentice will be expected to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the interface between plumbing work and the work of other trades.

INCLUDING TRANSFERABLE COMPETENCES: CONCLUSIONS

English apprenticeship has a weaker approach to the inclusion of transferable competences in apprenticeship standards than other countries in two ways:

- There is less general education in English apprenticeships than in countries where apprenticeship is part of upper secondary education. Some numeracy

83 Ofqual (2020) *Findings from Ofqual's technical evaluation of apprenticeship end-point assessment materials*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895234/Technical_Evaluation_findings_-_EPA_Materials_25.06.2020.pdf

84 IfATE (2022) *Plumbing and domestic heating technician*. [https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/plumbing-and-domestic-heating-technician-v1-0; Plumbing and domestic heating technician apprenticeship \(level 3\) assessment plan](https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/plumbing-and-domestic-heating-technician-v1-0; Plumbing and domestic heating technician apprenticeship (level 3) assessment plan). https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/1476/st0303_plumbing-and-domestic-heating_l3_ap-for-publication_november-2017.pdf

85 Plan de Formation (2019) *Installatrice/installateur sanitaire avec certificat fédéral de capacité (CFC)*. <https://suissetec.ch/files/PDFs/Bildung/Grundbildung/Sanitaerinstallateur/Franz/Lehrordner%202020/Bildungsplan%20Sanitaerinstallateurin%20EFZ%20web%20fr.pdf>

and literacy requirements are included in English apprenticeships, but they were relaxed in 2022. Although the numeracy requirements may now be strengthened following statements made by Rishi Sunak.

- Some key transferable metaskills, that show the ability to use a wide range of knowledge and skills to address practical work problems, are not sufficiently recognised in the assessment framework because synoptic assessment has not been fully implemented.

APPRENTICESHIP AS A QUALIFICATION

In many countries apprentices take pride in their qualification

People take pride in qualifications that they have worked long and hard to obtain – whether they are a university graduate, have good GCSEs or a Higher National Diploma (HND) in engineering. In universities, formal graduation ceremonies mark the acquisition of qualifications, signifying the shared cultural value of learning. In many countries, the graduate apprentice can also proudly point to their qualification: in Austria, to their *Lehrabschluss*; in Germany, in the skilled crafts, to their *Gesellenbrief*; in Norway to their *Svennebrev* for skilled craft occupations; and in the Netherlands to a diploma in their occupational field.⁸⁶ (These qualifications do not directly mention apprenticeship because sometimes they can be attained through college-based programmes or through recognition of prior learning). The International Labour Organisation's definition of apprenticeship, agreed across member countries, including the UK, includes the expectation that it "leads to a recognized qualification".⁸⁷

But the English apprenticeship qualification has no recognised name

In England, common sense and the dictionary suggest that someone who attains an apprenticeship certificate has a qualification. But no name for this qualification exists. The qualifications page of the IfATE website refers to other qualifications, but not apprenticeships.⁸⁸ The occupational standards that are now the foundation of apprenticeship standards are also the foundation for other technical qualifications, including T-levels and Higher Technical Qualifications. So apprenticeships are part of the framework of technical qualifications but are not recognised as a technical qualification.

There are explanations, but they are no justification

One reason for this anomaly may be that apprenticeship frameworks included a package of regulated qualifications. And some apprenticeship standards continue to do this, despite current attempts to move away from this approach. This may make it seem odd to refer to the overall package, instead of to the elements, as a qualification. Also, unlike many other qualifications, apprenticeship qualifications are not regulated by Ofqual. Ofqual, for their part, describes some apprenticeship qualifications primarily in relation to the part of the programme that they do regulate, which is the end-point assessment. But qualifications are qualifications even if they are not regulated by Ofqual. The argument made here that apprenticeship should be treated as a qualification has no implication for Ofqual regulation.

86 Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes*. See relevant country fiches. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches>

87 International Labour Organisation (2023) *Standard-setting committee on apprenticeships: final text of the recommendation concerning quality apprenticeships*. 12 June 2023. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_885099.pdf

88 See IfATE web page of qualifications: <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/qualifications/>

STEP 1. ENSURING A CAREER FOUNDATION: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ENSURING A CAREER FOUNDATION: KEY FACTS

- There are 472 approved apprenticeship standards at levels 2-4, more than in most comparable systems. Switzerland, where more than half the youth cohort start apprenticeships, has around half that number.
- One in 10 apprenticeship standards are unused.
- Transferable skills are vital. England has particular challenges with the literacy and numeracy skills of younger adults. And interpersonal skills are increasingly important to the labour market.
- In most countries, but not in England, apprenticeship leads to a named qualification.

This chapter has identified several ways in which the English apprenticeship system does not always provide an adequate career foundation for young people. The challenges identified are summarised below, alongside a set of recommendations that address those challenges. These recommendations are the first step towards a world class apprenticeship system.

1.1 BROADENING APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS

Challenge: apprenticeship standards are too narrow. To serve as a career foundation, apprenticeship programmes need to have the breadth that enables qualified apprentices to have multiple job roles in the course of an evolving career. However some English apprenticeship standards are narrower in occupational coverage than those of other countries and are therefore less suitable as career foundations. This reflects three factors: first, trailblazer groups that are dominated by occupation-specific employers instead of other stakeholders; second, regulatory criteria that allow highly specialised standards; and third, insufficient use of specialisms within broader standards.

Recommendation 1.1: ensure broader apprenticeship standards.

- Through its role working with trailblazer groups, and/or through co-opted members of the group representing wider employer and apprentice interests, and through route reviews, IfATE should ensure all apprenticeship standards are broad enough to be suitable for career starters.
- IfATE should review the criteria used to justify the creation of a standard so that it recognises the need for occupational breadth regardless of depth. Numerical targets for the number of apprenticeship occupations could be helpful.
- As part of that exercise, IfATE should make fuller use of the core and options framework to recognise and incorporate apprenticeship training for new technology, without expanding the overall number of apprenticeships.

1.2 INCLUDING TRANSFERABLE COMPETENCES

Challenge: insufficient support for transferable competences. Career development requires general skills, such as numeracy and literacy, and some other key transferable competences, such as problem-solving, teamwork and adaptability. Interpersonal skills are becoming more important in the labour market. In England, apprenticeship gives less attention to transferable competences than is the case in many countries. This is partly because there is limited general education in apprenticeship programmes, despite evidence of serious challenges with literacy and especially numeracy among 16- to 19-year-olds. Metaskills, which involve the ability to use knowledge and skills to solve work problems, receive inadequate recognition in the assessment system.

Recommendation 1.2: strengthen the inclusion of transferable competences in standards. This will involve three steps:

- For numeracy, literacy and digital literacy, establish a common framework for apprenticeship requirements by drawing on the frameworks already established for the first T-levels.
- In keeping with recent recommendations of the government's Skills and Productivity Board, IfATE should make sure transferable competences are adequately included in all apprenticeship standards. This would build on the guidance already given by IfATE on occupational/apprenticeship standards and its use of the Skills Builder Partnership approach.⁸⁹
- Review the criteria for end-point assessments to ensure that genuine synoptic assessment is undertaken.

1.3 NAMING THE APPRENTICESHIP QUALIFICATION

Challenge: apprenticeship is a qualification without a name. Those entering a training programme need to be clear about what qualification they will obtain, while employers need to be able to identify these qualifications. However, unlike almost all other apprenticeship countries, there is no recognised name for English apprenticeship qualifications. This makes no sense and devalues apprentices.

Recommendation 1.3: establish a formal name for the apprenticeship qualification. The name should include the route, individual standard and level. It could have the route as the main title, for example, Work-based Learning Diploma in Health and Science, with the individual standard and level as the subtitle, Optical Assistant, Level 3. Naming in this way would enable graduates of the English apprenticeship system to point with pride to their qualification and bring them in line both with their counterparts in other countries, and those in England with other qualifications. The designation should allow for alternative non-apprenticeship routes to that same qualification, a point explored further in recommendation 3.2.

⁸⁹ Skills Builder Partnership. <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/>

STEP 2. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TRAINING AND CLARIFYING THE OFFER

INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at how apprenticeship training is delivered

The defining feature of apprenticeship is work-based training. Historically, apprenticeship is rooted in the contract between an employer and an apprentice,⁹⁰ and for many centuries all training was on the job and delivered by the employer. The development of education and training institutions led to the emergence of apprenticeship in its modern form, by adding a dimension of off-the-job training. This combines the comparative advantages of the two learning venues: often knowledge is more easily conveyed in a classroom setting and practical skills and behaviours develop more naturally in the workplace.

Despite advances, challenges persist

New minimum standards for the training of apprentices in England are a real advance. But many apprentices do not receive their entitlements, and an exceptionally wide definition of off-the-job undermines the minimum training requirement. Workplace training delivered by employers, central to apprenticeship systems in some countries, does not receive adequate recognition. Around half of apprentices drop out, sometimes because they do not receive adequate training, and often because their apprenticeship training is not what they expected. This chapter looks at these challenges and proposes steps to address them.

This chapter looks at training, dropout and curricula

The remaining sections of the chapter are as follows:

- *Off-the-job training*, which describes the very broad definition of off-the-job used in England, looks at the evidence of non-compliance with training requirements and explores the implications.
- *On-the-job training*, which describes how some other countries have higher expectations than England for this central element of apprenticeship.
- *Curricula for apprenticeships*, which looks at the role played by national curricula in other countries, and their potential for England.
- *Dropout and its causes*, which describes how high levels of dropout in England often indicate disappointment with the apprenticeship experience.
- *Step 2: improving the quality of training and clarifying the offer*, which summarises the challenges identified in this chapter and makes recommendations in response. These are the second step towards a world class apprenticeship system.

⁹⁰ As long ago as the Babylonian period, there were apprenticeship contracts that set out the pay that would be received by the apprentice to the king's mouse-catcher in return for an entitlement to training in the art of mouse-catching. Kedar, S. (2009) *Apprenticeship in the Neo-Babylonian period: a study of bargaining power. La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien: réalités, symbolismes, et images, Proceedings of the 55th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Paris 6–9 July 2009*, pp.537-546. https://www.academia.edu/8016105/Apprenticeship_in_the_Neo-Babylonian_Period_A_Study_of_Bargaining_Power

OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING

MINIMUM STANDARDS AND TRAINING ON- AND OFF-THE-JOB

Most countries regulate the balance of on- and off-the-job training

Most countries regulate the balance between on- and off-the-job training to safeguard the identity of apprenticeship. Too little off-the-job training would be closer to ordinary employment with employer-based training. Too much off-the-job training (say more than half of the programme), suggests a training programme with a work placement instead of a full apprenticeship. Some of the requirements in different countries are set out in [Box 5](#).

BOX 5. PATTERNS OF OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING

In Austria off-the-job training is delivered at part-time vocational schools in a pattern of either one full school day or two half school days a week, or on a block basis, for at least eight weeks continuously, sometimes linked to the season.

In Denmark the balance of on- and off-the-job training is decided separately for each apprentice occupation. Usually school time is about 20% of the programme. Following an initial school-based foundation period, which may last up to 40 weeks, apprentices spend up to one year in enterprises, alternating with attending school for up to three months.

In Germany apprentices must spend a minimum of 12 hours a week in the vocational school, with eight hours a week devoted to the vocational discipline and four hours to general education.

In Ireland four-year trade apprenticeships usually involve off-the-job training of around 40 weeks full-time. There are seven phases over four years that alternate off- and on-the-job training. The off-the-job training includes phase 2, which is delivered through an education and training board (for example, in a further education college), and phases 4 and 6 at institutes of technology (higher education institutions). Since 2016 the trade apprenticeships have been augmented by new programmes in new sectors, which are two to four years long. In most cases they continue the pattern of block release for off-the-job training in phases 2, 4 and 6.

Curricular expectations may also be set for off-the-job training in individual occupations. **In Canada** training requirements are set by provincial authorities. In British Columbia a plumbing apprentice has to complete 6,300 hours of on-the-job training, and 900 hours (or 30 weeks) of off-the-job technical training. **In Switzerland**, an apprentice plumber must spend 49 days in inter-company training centres (supported by employers) during a four-year apprenticeship, and in vocational school spend 800 periods (a period is 45 minutes) in training for the profession and 640 periods in general education.

Sources: for most countries see Cedefop (accessed 2023) European database on apprenticeship schemes. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes>.

For Ireland see Cedefop (2019) Vocational education and training in Europe: Ireland April 2019. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/ireland-2019>

For Canada see Ellis chart: comparative chart of apprentice training programs – plumber. <https://www.ellischart.ca/eng/trades/plumber/211.3s-ch.1rt.shtml>.

For Switzerland see the curricular requirements for a plumber. <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2019/434/fr>

ENGLAND'S UNUSUAL DEFINITION OF OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING***In the 1970s apprentices completed much off-the-job training***

In England in the 1970s, apprentices had to attend further education classes part-time. These were funded by local education authorities and took place in working hours without loss of pay. Craft apprentices would complete around 300 hours of education during each year of their apprenticeship, and it would cover craft theory, practical activities in the workshop or laboratory, associated subjects, including applied science and mathematics, industrial studies, and general studies. These studies typically led to examinations and a City and Guilds qualification, which was separate from their certification as a skilled craftsman.⁹¹

England now maintains an unusual definition of off-the-job training

The term 'off-the-job training' is used widely in the UK and some other apprenticeship countries. 'Off-the-job' could refer to three different ways in which training is separate from the job. It could be located away from the workplace, delivered by an external provider, or distinct from ordinary productive work. All three dimensions were referenced by the Richard Review (2012) "evidence tells us clearly that off-the-job, and off-site learning, typically delivered by a third-party organisation rather than the employer, adds value – it gives the apprentice safeguarded time away from their job to ensure they can do substantial training".⁹² However the current operational definition of off-the-job training is "training which is received by the apprentice within their practical period, during the apprentice's normal working hours, for the purpose of achieving the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the approved apprenticeship that is referenced in the apprenticeship agreement".⁹³ The odd thing about this definition is that it does not mention how the defined training is 'off' the job.⁹⁴

This allows two additional elements to be included

This definition allows two elements, if documented by the training provider, to be counted as off-the-job training:

- Homework ("time spent writing assignments") and "online learning" associated with the apprenticeship can be counted.
- Training delivered by the employer, such as shadowing an experienced worker, or mentoring by that worker, counts as off-the-job training if it helps develop the apprenticeship competences. Most countries would count these activities as on-the-job training.⁹⁵

91 Wheatley, D. E. (1976) *Apprenticeships in the United Kingdom*. Commission of the European Communities. <https://aei.pitt.edu/37008/1/A3053.pdf>

92 Richard, D. (2012) *Richard review of apprenticeships*. p.89 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf

93 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeship off-the-job training: policy background and examples*. Version 4, October 2022. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1110377/20221011_OTJ_Guide_v4_-_For_22_23_Rules_Final.pdf

94 It reflects the language of a now outdated section of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 paragraph 27, in which off-the-job training is defined simply as training which is received for the purposes of the skill, trade or occupation to which the (apprenticeship) framework relates.

95 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeship off-the-job training: policy background and examples*. Version 4, October 2022. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1110377/20221011_OTJ_Guide_v4_-_For_22_23_Rules_Final.pdf

In certain sectors, these two elements make a large contribution

While no regular data are available, some evidence suggests that these two additional elements make a large contribution, especially in certain sectors. Fipp and May (2022)⁹⁶ suggest that in some areas of recent apprenticeship growth – such as health and social care, early years, and business administration – the two elements are so substantial that day release for off-the-job training is unusual. Similarly, Richmond and Regan (2022)⁹⁷ report many advertisements for apprenticeships that suggest there will be little face-to-face training. Using case studies, Brockmann et al. (2020)⁹⁸ found that in the social care and retail sectors very little face-to-face instruction takes place:

Off-the-job training was delivered through a set of modules, as part of which apprentices were required to complete a series of tasks or workbooks, supported largely by e-learning. The training provider ensured that the apprenticeship criteria were met. A designated person (variously referred to as ‘tutor’, ‘trainer’ or ‘coach’) visited the apprentices at monthly or two-monthly intervals to review their progress through observations and reviews ...

In many countries, off-the-job training must be classroom or workshop-based

In many other apprenticeship countries off-the-job training is delivered, and in many cases it must be delivered, face-to-face by a trainer from a learning provider. For example, in Ontario in Canada the requirements are for classroom and in-school instruction.⁹⁹ In countries where apprenticeship is part of the upper secondary system, day release for one or one and a half days a week is routine – for example, the German requirement is for 12 hours a week to be spent in vocational schools. In England, the National Society of Apprentices have argued, against the current arrangements, saying that day or block release should become the norm.¹⁰⁰

The definition is not consistent with other government regulations

In England, the definition of off-the-job training is not the same as ‘guided learning hours’, that are used to set out the regulatory and funding criteria for other government programmes, such as, for example, Skills Bootcamps. Guided learning hours “... are the time a learner spends being taught or instructed by, or otherwise participating in education or training under the immediate, real-time guidance of a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate supplier of education or training, whether online or in person”.¹⁰¹ Guided learning hours can therefore potentially include online learning with the active engagement of a trainer but exclude homework and self-study. Similarly, the government provides guidance on when students are expected to be present in school, therefore excluding homework.¹⁰² The Richard Review expected that off-the-job training should be delivered off-site while the Sainsbury Review argued that apprenticeships for young people should

96 Fipp, S. and May, A. (2022) Apprenticeships: the new report that leaves Sunak exposed. *FE Week*, December 2, 2022, p.30. <https://feweek.co.uk/apprenticeships-the-new-report-that-leaves-sunak-exposed/>

97 Richmond, T. and Regan, E. (2022) *No train, no gain: an investigation into the quality of apprenticeships in England*. EDSK. <https://www.edsk.org/publications/no-train-no-gain/>

98 Brockmann, M., Laurie, I., Smith, R. and Cui, V. (2020) *On- and off-the-job training in apprenticeships in England*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/onandoffthejobtrainingv5.pdf>

99 See, for example, the curricular requirements for a plumber: https://www.skilledtradesontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/plumber_306a_11_12_13_en.final-draft.dec-6th-2017.pdf

100 Fipp, S. and May, A. (2022) Apprenticeships: the new report that leaves Sunak exposed. *FE Week*, December 2, 2022, p.30. <https://feweek.co.uk/apprenticeships-the-new-report-that-leaves-sunak-exposed/>

101 See regulatory requirements for Skills Bootcamps at: DfE (2022) *Skills Bootcamps: funding and performance management guidance 2022 to 2023*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1173153/Skills_Bootcamps_-_funding_and_performance_management_guidance_2022_to_2023.pdf

102 DfE (2023) *Length of the school week: non-statutory guidance*. July 2023. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1167516/Minimum_School_Week_Non-Statutory_Guidance.pdf

involve “at least 20% off-the-job learning of knowledge (in a college or private training provider)”.¹⁰³

The wide definition damages quality

Undesirable incentives emerge when providers are able to substitute the more expensive option of actually delivering training with cost-free self-study and/or the employers training activities. Brockmann et al. (2020)¹⁰⁴ describe how some training providers ‘inventively’ identify different chunks of time, with the aid of both the employer and the apprentice, as counting as off-the-job training under the rules. Richmond and Regan (2022)¹⁰⁵ explore similar issues. There are corresponding undesirable incentives for employers. By identifying mentoring in the workplace as off-the-job training for the purposes of regulation, they reduce the time they have to release the apprentice for genuine off-the-job training.

BOX 6. THE IMPACT OF SELF-STUDY AND ONLINE LEARNING ON MORE DISADVANTAGED APPRENTICES

Most of the evidence on the impact of home study on quality and equity comes from research on schooling and general education. Technical training has some special features, but the issues are similar. Disadvantaged apprentices, like disadvantaged school pupils, may have no quiet place to study, may lack digital resources and be less able to call on help from knowledgeable family members.¹⁰⁶

Evidence of the implications for equity of relying on online learning and self-study in academic education is extensive. Much evidence came from the pandemic when school closures forced teaching online. McKinsey & Company (2021)¹⁰⁷ discuss US evidence that during the pandemic, children fell behind at school by several months, but the effect was greater for children from low-income households. In a sophisticated empirical study designed to compare the impact of online learning to face-to-face learning, Xu and Smith Jaggars (2013)¹⁰⁸ showed that online learning increases dropout and damages grades overall. The OECD point to the risk that homework may increase inequalities and argue that schools need to provide support to parents to ensure that all students can do their homework.¹⁰⁹ Goudeau et al. make the same argument.¹¹⁰

103 Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016) *Report of the independent panel on technical education (Sainsbury Review)*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf

104 Brockmann, M., Laurie, I., Smith, R. and Cui, V. (2020) *On- and off-the-job training in apprenticeships in England*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/onandoffthejobtrainingv5.pdf>

105 Richmond, T. and Regan, E. (2022) *No train, no gain: an investigation into the quality of apprenticeships in England*. EDSK. <https://www.edsk.org/publications/no-train-no-gain/>

106 Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy (2021) *Impact of learning from home on educational outcomes for disadvantaged children*. <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/impact-of-learning-from-home-federal-government-brief-mitchell-institute.pdf>

107 McKinsey & Company (2021) *Covid-19 and education: the lingering effects of unfinished learning*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning>

108 Xu, D. and Smith Jaggars, S. (2013) The impact of online learning on students' course outcomes: evidence from a large community and technical college system. *Economics of Education Review*, (37) pp.46-57. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775713001039>

109 OECD (2014) Does homework perpetuate inequities in education? *PISA in Focus*, no. 46. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxrhqhtx2xt-en>

110 Goudeau, S., Sanrey, C., Stanczak, A., Manstead, A. D. and Darnon, C. (2021) Why lockdown and distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic are likely to increase the social class achievement gap. *Nature Human Behaviour*, (5) pp.1273-1281. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-021-01212-7>

The use of technology in apprenticeship training should take account of the equity implications

Modern technology has created many opportunities for e-learning in technical training – as it has for academic education – and distance learning options were vital during the pandemic. But the continued use of these opportunities must address the effects of shifting learning from classrooms and workshops into the home, especially when some are disadvantaged homes. The risks to equity have been widely recognised for general education (see [Box 6](#)) but have received less attention in apprenticeship.

OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING: CONCLUSIONS***International comparison supports minimum requirements for off-the-job training***

Field (2018)¹¹¹ argued that the then requirement for 20% of apprentices' working time to be off-the-job training should be a bare minimum. This was based on benchmarking against other countries and was combined with the knowledge that other countries often also had more demanding on-the-job training. Moreover, English apprenticeship programmes are relatively short on average and have a particularly short minimum length of 12 months. This makes an adequate weekly training requirement essential to ensure that all apprenticeships include rigorous training. In 2022, the off-the-job training requirement was reduced to six hours a week.¹¹²

More than half of apprentices do not receive their entitlement

Despite the broad definition of off-the-job training, many apprentices do not receive the minimum required. More than half of apprentices surveyed had not received the minimum required off-the-job training (20% of paid working time at the time of the survey). Extraordinarily, 15% reported receiving no off-the-job training at all (see [Figure 5](#)). Possible explanations include that apprentices were not being offered sufficient off-the-job training by the training provider, and this was evidenced in some recent Ofsted reports.¹¹³ Another explanation is employers not releasing apprentices for training, and this is backed up by the fact that 44% of non-completers said one reason for them not finishing their apprenticeship was not being given enough time for training.¹¹⁴ A final reason is apprentices, understandably, not recognising some activities, such as homework, as counting as off-the-job training.

111 Field, S. (2018) *Taking training seriously: lessons from an international comparison of off-the-job training for apprenticeships in England*. A report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/final-apprenticeships-and-off-the-job-training-may-2018.pdf>

112 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeship off-the-job training: policy background and examples*. Version 4, October 2022. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1110377/20221011_OTJ_Guide_v4_-_For_22_23_Rules_Final.pdf

113 Camden, B. (2022) Three training providers slammed for off-the-job shortcomings. *FE Week*, July 8 2022, issue 396, p.23. https://feweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Edition-396-2.pdf?mc_cid=d176a643b1&mc_eid=9181985aef.

114 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

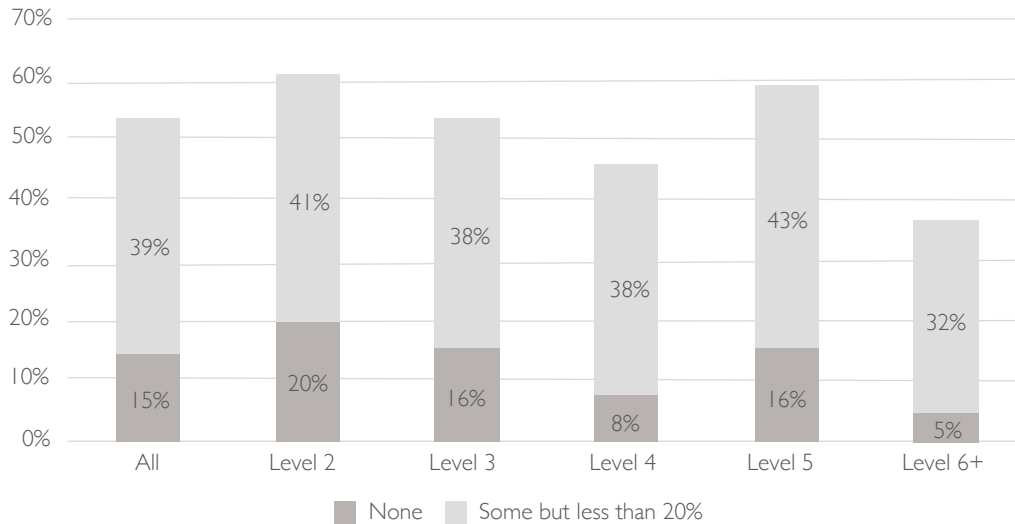


Figure 5. Half of apprentices did not receive the required training

Percentage of apprentices reporting that they received less than the required minimum of 20% of paid working time as off-the-job training (2021)

Source: DfE (2022)¹¹⁵

Enforcing compliance has not been possible

In the face of widespread non-compliance, the Education and Skills Funding Agency has, according to the National Audit Office, no effective way of determining whether providers are under-providing training, and they note this as an “important gap in oversight”.¹¹⁶ The enforcement challenges are not surprising, because there are a wide range of activities that can take place in a wide variety of places – at home, in the workplace, in colleges – that might be counted as off-the-job training under current rules.

Apprentices in England receive less off-the-job training than in other countries

Given that in England homework, online study and some types of workplace training can be categorised as off-the-job training, the English requirement corresponds to less than six hours per week on a more internationally comparable definition. Moreover, the widespread non-compliance, despite the broad definition of off-the-job training, means a worryingly large proportion of apprentices are not receiving anything like the same amount of off-the-job training as their counterparts in other countries.

¹¹⁵ DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. Table 6-2, p.96. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

¹¹⁶ National Audit Office (2019) *The apprenticeships programme*. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-apprenticeships-programme.pdf>

There are risks to both quality and equity

The broad regulatory definition also means there are serious risks for quality. It encourages training providers to substitute expensive face-to-face training with cheap online learning and self-study, and for employers to classify some workplace training as off-the-job training to reduce the amount of time apprentices need to be released for off-site training. Reliance on home study has particular risks for the most disadvantaged apprentices who have less support at home (see [Box 6](#)). The impact of self-study and online learning on more disadvantaged apprentices). Former Ofsted chief, Amanda Spielman, argues that online learning and self-study can be a “toxic combination when overused or used too soon” and “If an apprentice spends most of their first three months studying at home on their own, we can hardly be surprised if they drop out”.¹¹⁷ In response to the situation Richmond and Regan (2022)¹¹⁸ proposed that all apprentices should receive an annual total of at least 200 hours of face-to-face training delivered by the training provider.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING***HOW OTHER COUNTRIES ADDRESS ON-THE-JOB TRAINING******Learning through working defines apprenticeship***

Historically, the defining feature of apprenticeship has been that it is training delivered through ordinary work by an expert practitioner who guides the apprentice. It is through work-based learning that the apprentice learns both hard skills, such as how to use the most relevant equipment, and critical soft skills, such as teamwork and problem-solving, with expert practitioners who are best placed to demonstrate and teach these competences. The emergence of off-the-job education and training has only partially changed this picture.

Some countries give more emphasis to on-the-job training

In England and many other English-speaking countries, the policy focus has often been on the off-the-job part of apprenticeship because it is this part that is funded. In contrast, the dual-system countries tend to describe their apprenticeships as delivering occupational competence primarily through on-the-job training delivered by the employer, with off-the-job training playing a secondary role. Linked to this different emphasis are greater regulatory expectations for employer-delivered on-the-job training. For example, in Germany employers taking apprentices must develop certain competences and deliver training according to a syllabus and a timetable.¹¹⁹ This is in addition to the off-the-job training and education delivered by the vocational school. In the Netherlands employers must be accredited before they can take apprentices (see [Box 7](#)).

In England, on-the-job training is ‘officially’ irrelevant to apprenticeship

In England, government guidance defines on-the-job training as providing employer-specific skills that enable the apprentice to carry out the duties they are being paid to perform, but that are not included in the apprenticeship standard. This would include things such as training for in-company procedures.¹²⁰ A viable apprenticeship

¹¹⁷ Camden, B (2023) Ofsted chief on provider complaints: ‘We can’t soft-pedal on inspections’. *FE week*, 14 March 2023. <https://feweek.co.uk/ofsted-chief-on-provider-complaints-we-cant-soft-pedal-on-inspections/>

¹¹⁸ Richmond, T. and Regan, E. (2022) *No train, no gain: an investigation into the quality of apprenticeships in England*. EDSK. <https://www.edsk.org/publications/no-train-no-gain/>

¹¹⁹ Le Mouillour, I. (2021) Dual VET, Germany. In, Cedefop *Apprenticeship governance and in-company training. Where labour market and education meet*. pp.131-138. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6203_en_0.pdf

¹²⁰ IfATE (2023) *Raising the standards: training*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/raising-the-standard-best-practice-guidance/training-raising-the-standards/#:~:text=On%2Dthe%2Djob%20training&text=This%20training%20allows%20the%20apprentice,taught%20by%20the%20training%20provider>

may therefore include no on-the-job training whatsoever. This definition is not supported by common usage (see below), but it is the logical counterpart to the very broad definition of off-the-job training already discussed, which treats workplace training relevant to apprenticeship as potentially being off-the-job training.¹²¹

But ordinary usage treats on-the-job training as essential

Despite the official definition, ordinary usage in England recognises that on-the-job training is a key part of apprenticeship. For example, the providers and employers interviewed in a 2020 study also saw on-the-job training as essential to apprenticeships.¹²² Other English-speaking countries also use a more conventional definition of on-the-job training. Knight (2012)¹²³ defines apprenticeship in Australia as a “combination of paid employment and on-the-job training, and formal (usually off-the-job) training that leads to a recognised qualification”. In Canada, an element of on-the-job training is seen as essential to the apprenticeship,¹²⁴ as it is in Ireland.¹²⁵ In this report, this standard understanding of on-the-job training as a key element of the training that delivers apprenticeship skills will be used.

BOX 7. HOW DUTCH EMPLOYERS ARE ACCREDITED TO OFFER WORK PLACEMENTS

The Dutch Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labor Market (SBB) – a collaboration of technical education providers and the private sector – accredits and supports companies offering work placements both for apprenticeship and other types of technical programmes. Accreditation requires employers to demonstrate that they have suitable trainers, will cooperate with the training provider, have suitable infrastructure and offer relevant training opportunities. After accreditation, SBB facilitates training for workplace trainers, encourages communication between employers and training providers, and helps to share good practice. The quality of work placements is monitored by education advisers, who regularly visit workplaces, providing advice on all aspects of work-based learning.¹²⁶

Workplace mentoring of apprentices is a skilled task requiring training

Workplace mentors of an apprentice must not only have good job skills they must also be able to develop those skills in apprentices. While this is demanding, it is a competence that all line managers need, independently of apprenticeship. This is because managers need to help their staff not only to do their work, but also to acquire the additional skills that will enhance future productivity. Many countries have developed training courses (sometimes mandatory) for those who undertake this task (see Box 8).

121 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeship off-the-job training: policy background and examples*. Version 4, October 2022. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1110377/20221011_OTJ_Guide_v4_-_For_22_23_Rules_Final.pdf

122 Brockmann, M., Laurie, I., Smith, R. and Cui, V. (2020) *On- and off-the-job training in apprenticeships in England*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/onandoffthejobtrainingv5.pdf>

123 Knight, B. (2012) *Evolution of apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia: an unfinished history*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research. p.7. https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/file/0010/4132/2444.pdf

124 Government of Canada website (accessed 2023) *How to become an apprentice*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/support-skilled-trades-apprentices/become-apprentice.html>

125 Citizens Information Board (accessed 2023) *Apprenticeships*. https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/vocational_education_and_training/apprenticeships.html#:~:text=An%20apprenticeship%20programme%20provides%20on,off%2Dthe%2Djob%20training

126 Hoftijzer, M., Stronkowski, P. and Rozenbaum, J. (2018) *Getting out of school and into the workplace: strengthening work-based learning in upper secondary technical education in Poland's Świętokrzyskie region*. World Bank eLibrary. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/epdf/10.1596/978-1-4648-1322-1>

BOX 8. TRAINING THE APPRENTICE TRAINERS

In Austria, companies taking apprentices must have one qualified trainer for every five apprentices. The qualification can be obtained either by completing a 40-hour course, or as one module of the master craftsperson examination.

In Denmark, there are short voluntary courses for workplace trainers.

In Germany, a requirement for apprenticeship supervisors to hold a trainer qualification was reintroduced in 2009 after a six-year suspension, because evidence emerged of issues with the quality of training during the suspension. In the trainer aptitude exam, candidates demonstrate their ability to assess educational needs, plan and prepare training, assist in the recruitment of apprentices, deliver training, and help the apprentice complete their training. The exam, organised by the chambers of industry and commerce and the chambers of crafts, consists of a three-hour written component and a 45-minute practical exam, during which the candidate presents a typical training situation and is interviewed by a group of experts. To prepare for the exam, candidates typically attend a course for a total of 115 hours.

In Norway, optional training is offered to employees who supervise apprentices. Some counties provide the training themselves, others ask schools or training offices (which are owned by companies collectively) to provide it. The courses are free to participants. Typically the training takes two days a year. Supervisors learn how to cover the curriculum and prepare and deliver a training plan.

In Switzerland, apprentice supervisors must complete a training programme, in addition to having a vocational qualification and at least two years of relevant work experience. Cantons (districts) deliver and subsidise the courses. A 40-hour course covers the Swiss vocational education and training (VET) system, pedagogy and potential problems with young people, such as drugs and alcohol. A 100-hour course, leading to a federal diploma, develops the supervisors' knowledge of pedagogy, VET legislation and handling of young people. For the assessment, candidates submit a dossier and give a presentation.

Sources: For Austria see Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: scheme fiche Austria* <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/dual-apprenticeship>

For Denmark see Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: scheme fiche Denmark* <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/apprenticeship>

For Germany, Norway and Switzerland see Kis, V. (2016) *Work, train, win: work-based learning design and management for productivity gains*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 135. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/oec/eduab/135-en.html>

Curricula may require employers to deliver certain competences

Requirements for on-the-job training may be established both in national curricula and in local training plans. For example, in Austria, for every apprenticeship occupation there is a training regulation, which sets out a curriculum for the knowledge and skills to be taught to apprentices in the employer-based part of their training.¹²⁷ In Norway, the training provider must develop an internal training

¹²⁷ Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: dual apprenticeship – Austria*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/dual-apprenticeship>

plan that makes sure the apprentice is being trained in line with the curriculum associated with that apprenticeship occupation – either through training with the host employer or in some cases with other collaborating employers.¹²⁸ Box 9 describes how good practice in on-the-job training is promoted in Switzerland and in New South Wales.

BOX 9. PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE IN ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

In Switzerland, the *Qualicarte* is a self-assessment tool for employers taking apprentices. It is designed to promote good training practice. The tool was developed by the Swiss Conference of Vocational Education and Training offices, the Swiss Employers Association and the Swiss Industry and Trade Association. The tool can be used by employers to improve their own performance, and by local government cantons as part of their role in monitoring the training performance of employers. The *Qualicarte* has a list of 28 statements, with which the employer is invited to partially or fully agree or disagree. The statements provide prompts to the employer to take responsibility for the learning of the apprentice. They include statements such as:

- “The apprenticeship trainer sets clear and measurable learning objectives. He/she checks progress to determine whether these objectives have been attained”.
- “The apprenticeship trainer gives the learner the opportunity to make critical remarks regarding apprenticeship training and takes these remarks into account where possible”.
- “Work processes and methods are planned, demonstrated and explained”.

In New South Wales in Australia, the state government supports workplace trainers of apprentices both through a guidance document and videos available online. They cover issues such as how to manage the induction of new apprentices, how to handle challenges, (for example when an apprentice is not performing well), mental health issues, and coaching and learning styles.

Sources: for Switzerland. For the English translation of *Qualicarte* and associated information, see https://vp.et.ch/dyn/bin/21423-23923-1-qualicarte_eg_2016i.pdf

For New South Wales see New South Wales Department of Education (2021) *Supervising your apprentice or trainee*. https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2022-01/supervising_your_apprentice_trainee.pdf and New South Wales Department of Education (accessed 2023) *Supervising your apprentice or trainee videos*. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/resources/supervisor-videos>

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING: CONCLUSIONS

In leading apprenticeship countries, expectations can be high

On-the-job training is, and always has been, a central and essential part of apprenticeship. In other countries in continental Europe, notably the dual-system countries, employers play a major role in delivering this training. Employers may have to prove their suitability to deliver apprenticeships, the trainers of apprentices may themselves have to be trained, and national curricula may set out the training that must be delivered on the job.

¹²⁸ Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: upper-secondary vocational programmes – Norway*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/upper-secondary-vocational-programmes>

England has few requirements for training delivered by employers

In England, regulation does not cover the training responsibilities of the employers of apprentices, beyond the expectation that the job role should allow for the development of occupational competence and that apprentices should be released for off-the-job training.¹²⁹ IfATE guidance makes the statement that “best practice” would mean “the apprentice will be undertaking appropriate, meaningful work, supported by competent colleagues and with access to a named workplace mentor”.¹³⁰ This is not elaborated on, so while it is positive it is also very limited.

The quality (and even existence) of on-the-job training is variable

Quality varies in the absence of regulation. In recent research for the Gatsby Foundation, Brockmann et al.¹³¹ (2020) describe good practice in the construction, IT, and engineering sectors. But they found little on-the-job training in the retail and social care sectors, where apprenticeship training was seen as completely off-the-job. This led the authors to query whether some of the apprenticeships they saw in these sectors were worthy of the name.

CURRICULA FOR APPRENTICESHIP**England does not use national apprenticeship curricula**

Unlike in many other countries, in England there are no national curricula for apprenticeship, and individual training providers develop and use their own curricula. The logic for this approach was spelled out in the Richard Review: “... testing is particularly important in the model of apprenticeships that I am proposing, where we are flexible about the content and curricula but rigorous on the outcome ...”¹³²

But the logic of this approach is open to question

The approach recommended by the Richard Review rests on the assumption that final assessments will be sufficiently rigorous to ensure that inadequate curricula will be challenged when they lead to high failure rates in end-point assessments. Field (2021)¹³³ explains two reasons why this assumption is questionable:

- Occupational competence involves a blend of knowledge, skills and behaviours, which is much harder to test than academic skills in knowledge-based examinations. Unfortunately there is little solid evidence for the validity, and often even the reliability of the technical assessments used to test for such competence. Convincing tests of occupational competence require real-world assessments of the ability to do a specific job and are therefore difficult to standardise.
- The failure rate in end-point assessments for English apprenticeship is only around 2.5%, significantly lower than in the assessments of comparable countries (for example, in Germany it is around 10%, in Norway around 7%). This suggests that end-point assessments are primarily being used as near-automatic confirmation of the individual employer’s decision that an individual is ready to complete their apprenticeship.

129 Education and Skills Funding Agency (2017, updated 2021) *Apprenticeship accountability statement: the roles and responsibilities of all organisations involved in regulating apprenticeships*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-accountability-statement>

130 IfATE (2019) *Quality strategy*. March 2019. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/the-quality-strategy/>

131 Brockmann, M., Laurie, I., Smith, R. and Cui, V. (2020) *On- and off-the-job training in apprenticeships in England*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/onandoffthejobtrainingv5.pdf>

132 Richard, D. (2012) *Richard review of apprenticeships*. p.54. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf

133 Field, S. (2021) *A world without maps: assessment in technical education*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/assessment-in-technical-education-simon-field.pdf>

It is time to explore the potential of curricula

The implication is that it may be time to look again at the option of using national curricula in England for apprenticeship standards. As explained below, IfATE has already been giving thought to this option.

HOW OTHER COUNTRIES MAKE USE OF NATIONAL CURRICULA***Curricula are designed to reflect elements of occupational competence***

Apprenticeship curricula typically specify the topics to be covered through training and education; the time to be devoted to these topics; different training venues, including workplace and classroom; and the overall timetable. Programme curricula are normally mapped onto the competences identified as necessary for a target occupation. Two examples of the plumbing profession are given in [Box 10](#).

National curricula help to clarify expectations

National curricula serve several functions:

- *Providing potential apprentices with advance information about their training.* The curriculum tells them how much training of different types they will receive, where they will receive it and the topics it will cover.
- *Clarifying the relative importance of different competences* by showing the time devoted in the curriculum for developing those competences (see the plumbing examples in [Box 10](#)). So the shape and emphasis of the qualification is fleshed out in the curriculum.
- *Explaining what is expected of the training provider and the employer* in terms of their delivery of off- and on-the-job training.
- *Sequencing skills acquisition.* Acquiring skills in the right sequence supports complementarity – for example, classroom learning about health and safety requirements should ideally take place just before workplace exercises implementing these requirements. The sequence also makes it clear what skills should be acquired by what stage in the apprenticeship. For example, a Swiss plumber can be expected to install drinking water systems early in their apprenticeship, but not natural gas systems, which is only taught in the third year.¹³⁴ This helps employers by clarifying not only what the apprentice still has to learn but also the productive tasks the apprentice can undertake in their third year. Sequencing also supports having assessments part-way through apprenticeship programmes, to serve a formative function, and also to feed into the final assessment as, for example, in the half-time assessments used in Germany for many occupations.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (2023) *SERI professional directory: vocational training – sanitary installer EFZ*. <https://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/show/47706>

¹³⁵ BIBB (2021) *Informationen zu Aus- und Fortbildungsberufen: Klempner*. https://www.bibb.de/dienst/berufesuche/de/index_berufesuche.php/profile/apprenticeship/110512

National curricula may be contrasted with locally determined training plans

Usually local curricular arrangements are referred to as training plans instead of national curricula – this convention is followed here. However usage is variable. For example, Swiss national curricula are referred to as training plans (see [Box 10](#)). Some more examples are given in [Box 11](#).

BOX 10. CURRICULA FOR PLUMBING APPRENTICESHIPS

In Switzerland, the curriculum for each apprenticeship occupation is set out in two documents, the 'ordinance' which defines the apprenticeship occupation, and the 'training plan' (*plan de formation*).

- The ordinance describes in one and a half pages the competences of a plumber, and the amount of time that should be spent in the different training venues on different competences. So, 800, 45 minute periods of professional knowledge will be pursued in vocational school, divided between 'work planning' and 'installation'. In the inter-company training centres there will be 49 days of lessons, with, for example, eight days in the third year devoted to natural gas installations.
- The training plan (effectively the national curriculum) gives more detail on the competences that should be acquired in the workplace, in vocational schools and in inter-company training centres. For example, for the competence of installing drinking water supplies, the apprentice should a) demonstrate in the work setting how to install taps following the requirements of the manufacturer; b) in the inter-company training centre learn the installation of different types of water supply using different techniques; and c) in the vocational school display knowledge of the rules governing the allowable noise levels in water supply systems. A timetable for the eight semesters of the four-year programme, sets out when these competences are to be taught in the three different venues, to ensure coordination.¹³⁶

In Canada in Ontario, a plumbing apprentice follows a four-year programme involving 8,280 hours of on-the-job training, and 720 hours (or 24 weeks) of off-the-job training – 9,000 hours in total. A detailed curriculum, running to 219 pages, sets out the tasks which a qualified plumber is expected to undertake, and precisely how the off-the-job training hours are to be divided between 476 hours of theory and 244 hours of practical application. There are three progressive levels of training. At the first level, two hours should be devoted to "copper pipes and fittings", leading to 19 separate competences, including, for example, being able to "Identify the four standard wall thicknesses for copper pipe", and being able to "State the common joining methods for copper pipe and tubing" etc. At the third level, six hours will be devoted to "water supplies in high rise buildings", leading to competences such as the ability to explain five different types of domestic pressure pump installations. A separate 59 page document details hundreds of practical skills needed by a qualified plumber, each explained in a short paragraph. The designated employer-based trainer has to declare that the apprentice has demonstrated each of these skills.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (2023) *SERI professional directory: vocational training - sanitary installer EFZ*. <https://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/show/47706>

¹³⁷ Ontario government guidance on plumbing apprenticeship. <https://www.skilledtradesontario.ca/trade-information/plumber/>

Locally determined training plans have limitations when compared to national curricula

In the absence of national curricula, as in England, local training plans cover some of the same ground, for example, by setting out the sequence of training, the different roles of employers and training providers, and the time to be spent on different areas of competence. But they cannot serve all the functions of national curricula, for the following reasons:

- *Advance expectations.* Training plans are only created when an apprenticeship starts, and so they cannot guide the advance expectations of potential apprentices or employers.
- *Coordination.* While a training provider may establish its own training plan for the teaching it provides, it cannot impose any curricular requirements on other actors, including employers offering on-the-job training.
- *Quality assurance.* For example, the 2022 Optical Assistant apprenticeship standard¹³⁸ requires the apprentice to be able to “report and record ocular emergencies following correct employer procedures”, and this is to be assessed through professional discussion. But the skill level needed is not defined. In the absence of a national curriculum, it is unclear whether one hour devoted to this skill in a local training plan is sufficient. Ofsted, with limited specialist knowledge, cannot reasonably adjudicate this question. However, the trailblazer group would have the in-depth subject expertise to make this clear by developing a curriculum which gives a time allocation. Richmond and Regan (2022)¹³⁹ also argue for national curricula, partly because, in the absence of such curricula, it is very difficult to hold providers and employers to account for the training they offer.

¹³⁸ IfATE website (accessed 2023) *Optical Assistant 2022*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/optical-assistant-2022-v1-0>

¹³⁹ Richmond, T. and Regan, E. (2022) *No train, no gain: an investigation into the quality of apprenticeships in England*. EDSK. <https://www.edsk.org/publications/no-train-no-gain/>

BOX 11. LOCALLY DETERMINED CURRICULA: TRAINING PLANS

In New South Wales in Australia, an individualised training plan is developed by the training provider in consultation with the employer and the apprentice. It describes the units of competency and the mode of delivery (such as day release, online etc).¹⁴⁰

In England, the training plan (previously called a commitment statement) is a contract, developed by the training provider and agreed with the apprentice and employer. IfATE guidance suggests that the plan should establish the contributions of each of the different parties involved in the training, the anticipated off-the-job training hours, and when different elements of training content will be delivered, at least for the first year of the apprenticeship.¹⁴¹ However it has been suggested by Richmond and Regan (2022)¹⁴² that this training plan only involves a relatively brief summary of the training that can be expected.

In Germany, for each starting apprentice, the employer is required to develop an in-company training plan based on the national curriculum for the target occupation. This plan describes how the different elements of competence will be acquired during the apprentice's time with the employer, with an indicative timeframe.¹⁴³

Coordination can be demanding

National curricula have a coordination function, notably between off- and on-the-job training so that knowledge taught in the classroom is put to use in the workplace. In England, coordination is encouraged but not regulated.¹⁴⁴ Coordination can be challenging. For example, in Germany the 'training regulation' for each occupation sets out a national curricular framework. Within that framework, the different German regions establish curricula for the part-time vocational schools attended by apprentices for each regulation. In addition, each employer taking apprentices also develops a training plan setting out how the competences of the apprentice are to be developed through on-the-job training. All of these strands need to be coordinated.¹⁴⁵ In Switzerland, by contrast, on- and off-the-job training is coordinated through a combined curriculum (see **Box 10**).¹⁴⁶

140 Government of New South Wales website (accessed 2023) *Training plan for apprenticeships or traineeships*. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/apprentices-and-trainees/employers/training-plan>

141 Education and Skills Funding Agency (2019, updated 2022) *Apprenticeship funding rules for main providers: the training plan between the apprentice, employer and main provider*. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules-for-training-providers/the-training-plan-between-the-apprentice-employer-and-main-provider>

142 Richmond, T. and Regan, E. (2022) *No train, no gain: an investigation into the quality of apprenticeships in England*. EDSK. <https://www.edsk.org/publications/no-train-no-gain/>

143 Le Mouillour, I. (2021) Dual VET, Germany. In, Cedefop (2021) *Apprenticeship governance and in-company training. Where labour market and education meet*. pp.131-138. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6203_en_0.pdf

144 IfATE website (accessed 2023) *Three-way partnership*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/raising-the-standard-best-practice-guidance/the-three-way-partnership-between-employer-provider-and-apprentice-raising-the-standards/>

145 Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) (2014) *Training regulations and how they come about*. <https://www.bibb.de/dienst/veroeffentlichungen/de/publication/show/7324>

146 Bliem, W., Petanovitsch, A. and Schmid, K. (2016) *Dual VET in Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland: comparative expert study*. https://www.dcdualvet.org/wp-content/uploads/DC-dVET_Dual_VET_in-AT_GE_FL_CH_Comparative_Study_ENGL_FINAL.pdf

BOX 12 COMPARING THE LENGTH OF APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMMES

In England, the average length of an apprenticeship programme is now just over 20 months, with Level 2 apprenticeships averaging 16 months, while some traditional trades like plumbing and electricians take three or four years. The average length has been increasing in recent years, driven by a rise in the proportion of higher level apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships.¹⁴⁷ Half a century ago in England, most apprenticeships were in skilled manual trades and were typically three to four years in length,¹⁴⁸ so the shorter apprenticeship programmes found in England are a recent phenomenon.

The 'standard' length of apprenticeships in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Norway is around twice as long as in England. However the English average of 20 months is more comparable with many of the non-trade traineeship apprenticeships in Australia, some of the newly introduced apprenticeship programmes in Ireland in service sectors, and some of the short form apprenticeships in some countries – such as the two-year apprenticeship programmes in Switzerland. Many of the traditional trade apprenticeships in England – such as plumbers, electricians and motor vehicle mechanics involve three- to four-year apprenticeships in England as in other countries. Also, in England the hairdressing apprenticeship is 24 months, similar to other countries.

However even within the same occupation, some apprenticeship programmes are longer in some other countries. The waiter role involves a 12-month apprenticeship in England, but three years in Germany, Austria and Switzerland; the florist role is 24 months in England but three years in Germany and Austria. The landscape gardener is 24 months in England, and again three years in Germany and Austria. To give an extreme polar example, in Germany, a three-year apprenticeship leads to the occupation of an HGV driver. (This apprenticeship develops driving skills and a range of competences in looking after the vehicle, basic logistics, proper invoicing, dealing with accidents and emergencies etc.)¹⁴⁹ The comparable English apprenticeship standard takes 13 months.¹⁵⁰

One pillar of apprenticeship curricula – programme length – is defined centrally in England

Apprenticeship systems usually set programme lengths according to occupation, with some system-wide limits. Apprenticeships can be completed quicker when prior learning is recognised, while later completions reflect a delay in the apprentice reaching the expected standard. **Box 12** Comparing the length of apprenticeship programmes shows that programme lengths in England are sometimes, although not always, shorter than in other countries.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ See data at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2021-22>

¹⁴⁸ Wheatley, D. E. (1976) *Apprenticeships in the United Kingdom*. Commission of the European Communities. <https://aei.pitt.edu/37008/1/A3053.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ See Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) website (accessed 2023) for an HGV driver apprenticeship https://www.bibb.de/dienst/berufesuche/de/index_berufesuche.php/profile/apprenticeship/67589062

¹⁵⁰ IfATE website (accessed 2023) *Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) Driver C + E*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/large-goods-vehicle-lgv-driver-c-plus-e-v-l-3>

¹⁵¹ The 'official' programme lengths reported in apprenticeship standards may not always apply. Some training providers are apparently offering to deliver the Level 7 senior people professional standard in 18 months rather than the 36 months set out in the standard, and it has been claimed that there are scores of operational/departmental managers apprenticeships at 12 to 14 months, rather than the 30 months recommended. Bremner, M. (2023) The minimum apprenticeship duration requires reform. *FE week*, 29 April 2023. <https://feweek.co.uk/the-minimum-apprenticeship-duration-requires-reform/>

Standard university degree lengths contrast with the variable lengths of apprenticeship programmes

In England, few question the standard three years it takes to complete an undergraduate university degree, even when it means that undergraduate degrees in hairdressing (which, perhaps surprisingly, exist) and astrophysics take exactly the same amount of time. Standardised university degree lengths are accepted in England as widely as the standardised apprenticeship lengths are in the dual-system countries, possibly because in both cases the substantial time investment is seen as a necessary educational foundation for a career, independent of the varying skill requirements of different occupations. Similarly T-levels will take two years, regardless of the complexity of the target occupational field. This raises the question of whether, if apprenticeships are to provide a career foundation, greater standardisation of programme lengths is desirable.

CURRICULA FOR APPRENTICESHIP: CONCLUSIONS***National curricula serve functions that cannot be replaced by local training plans***

In other countries, national curricula detail what is meant by an apprenticeship qualification, clarifying for potential apprentices the training they will receive, and where and how it will be delivered. As will be seen in the following section, this may help to prevent the dropout that in England often comes from disappointment with the apprenticeship. For employers, a national curriculum helps clarify their role in delivering training, which is critical when, as in England, employer-delivered training is central to apprenticeship but unregulated. From the perspective of quality assurance, it is not enough to know that a topic must be covered, the level of that coverage can only meaningfully be reflected in a time commitment set out in a curriculum.

IfATE have published guidance for the development of non-mandatory national curricula

In recognition of the value of centrally determined curricula, IfATE have published guidance on the preparation, by trailblazer groups, of "specimen training plans".¹⁵² Despite the name, these would be non-mandatory national curriculum for the apprenticeship occupation, quite different from the training plans that are developed by individual training providers (see **Box 11**). The guidance explains that the plan should provide an 'example' of how the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for occupational competence could be delivered as a set of learning modules. For each module, the plan should cover:

- How the learning module is mapped to competences in the apprenticeship standard.
- The delivery period – for example between month four and month six of the apprenticeship.
- Learning objectives and outcomes.
- Off-the-job training delivery methods.
- On-the-job training that may take place in relation to the module.
- Interim assessments designed to check that the learner has the required competences.

¹⁵² IfATE (accessed February 2023) *Developing a specimen training plan*. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-a-specimen-training-plan/>

If implemented in mandatory form, these ‘training plans’ would provide sorely needed transparency

It is not clear if any trailblazer group has used, or is using, this plan for an apprenticeship standard. However it provides a framework for national curricula that could become mandatory. If made mandatory, it would provide more clarity and transparency than currently exists about what apprentices can expect when they enter an apprenticeship, what training providers will deliver for the funding they receive (therefore facilitating quality assurance), and what can be expected from employers as on-the-job training.

DROPOUT AND ITS CAUSES

COMPARING DROPOUT AND COMPLETION RATES

Dropout is wasteful, and often indicates quality problems

Dropout wastes the time and efforts of both trainee and trainer. It sometimes reflects outside factors, such as a personal challenge facing the apprentice. But it may also result from poor quality training or from an apprenticeship experience that disappoints because it is not what was expected. This section looks at dropout and its potential causes.

Comparison of dropout rates across countries requires caution

In England, only about half (51%) of those on apprentice standards in 2021/22 successfully completed their programmes.¹⁵³ Achievement rates do not appear to depend heavily on the age of the apprentice or even the individual standard, but they vary substantially by individual provider, with quite a number of training providers (including some larger ones) reporting less than one in four of their apprentices successfully completing.¹⁵⁴ High dropout rates are a long standing problem; even under less demanding apprenticeship frameworks, completion rates were only 60-70% in 2007/8.¹⁵⁵ Dropout figures are not straightforward because they depend on how we account for apprentices who move employers, interrupt their programmes, or just take a long time to complete. However three patterns are evident:

- *In some, but not all English-speaking countries, dropout rates are comparable to those of England. In Canada, after twice the designated programme time, only 36% of apprentices had successfully completed their apprenticeship programme.¹⁵⁶ In Australia, only 56% of apprentices starting in 2016 had successfully completed their programmes by 2020.¹⁵⁷ Other countries report a better performance: in Scotland the achievement rate (successful apprenticeship completions as a proportion of all those leaving apprenticeship programmes) is around 72%;¹⁵⁸ in Ireland the completion rate for apprentices registered from 2000 to 2013 was 70%.¹⁵⁹*

153 DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bf8bedaf5-tables>

154 Ibid.

155 Hogarth, T. G. (2010) Maximising apprenticeship completion rates. *Warwick IER Bulletin Number 96*. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/bulletins/ier96.pdf>

156 Jin, H. and Langevin, M. L. (2020) *Factors associated with the completion of apprenticeship training in Canada*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00008-eng.pdf?st=SgswVJUF>

157 NCVET (2021) *Completion and attrition rates for apprentices and trainees 2020*. <https://www.ncvet.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/completion-and-attrition-rates-for-apprentices-and-trainees-2020>

158 Skills Development Scotland (2022) *Modern apprenticeship statistics: quarter 2, 2022/23*. <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/cnkcfaoon/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-2-2022-23.pdf>

159 Houses of the Oireachtas (2019) *Apprenticeship data: Dáil Éireann debate, Wednesday, 8 May 2019*. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-05-08/373/>

- *In the dual-system countries, dropout rates tend to be lower.* In Germany, apprentice dropout rates are around 20 to 25%.¹⁶⁰ In Austria around 15% of apprentices drop out.¹⁶¹ In Switzerland a 2010 study reports that between 20% and 40% of apprentices did not complete their apprenticeship programmes in the standard period, but only 7% fully dropped out, the rest either repeated a year, or changed jobs or employers.¹⁶²
- *In some countries failing the end-point assessment is a significant reason for non-completion.* In England a low failure rate (around 2.5%) in end-point assessments means it has little impact on non-completion rates. But in Germany, for example, around 10% of apprentices fail the assessment on their first attempt.¹⁶³

WHY ARE APPRENTICESHIP DROPOUT RATES SO HIGH IN ENGLAND?

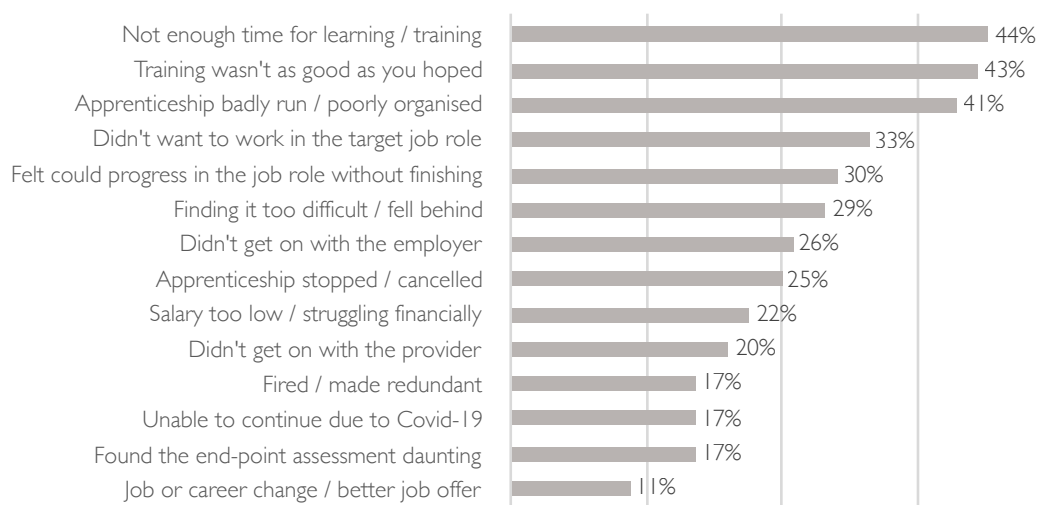


Figure 6. Apprentice dropouts in England 2021

Reason given for dropping out

Source: DfE (2022)¹⁶⁴

Advance information about apprenticeship is weak

In England, a recent survey found that most starting apprentices have little understanding of what their programmes will entail.¹⁶⁵ While 43% of dropouts said the training was not as good as they hoped (see Figure 6).

Inadequate training and wages are too common

Forty-four per cent of dropouts in England reported that they had not been given enough time for training, and 22% said wages were too low (see Figure 6). The evidence backs up both complaints:

¹⁶⁰ Fries, J., Göbel, C. and Maier, M. F. (2013) Do employment subsidies reduce early apprenticeship dropout? *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 66(4), pp.433-461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2014.948905>

¹⁶¹ Cedefop (2016) *Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training in centre stage*. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/austria_-_leaving_education_early.pdf

¹⁶² Filliettaz, L. (2014) Dropping out of apprenticeship programs: evidence from the Swiss vocational education system and methodological perspectives for research. *International Journal of Training Research*, 8(2), pp.141-153. <https://doi.org/10.5172/ijtr.8.2.141>

¹⁶³ Field, S. (2021) *A world without maps: assessment in technical education*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/assessment-in-technical-education-simon-field.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

¹⁶⁵ St Martins Group and the Learning and Work Institute (2022) *Apprenticeship outcomes and destinations*. <https://smartinsgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Apprenticeship-outcomes-and-destinations-Oct2022-Report-v7-RS.pdf>

- *Inadequate training.* As described in the previous section, more than half of apprentices surveyed said they did not receive the minimum amount of off-the-job training.¹⁶⁶ And in some sectors there is an over-reliance on self-study and workplace training instead of substantial off-the-job training.
- *Inadequate (unlawful) wages.* There is a long-standing problem of apprentices being paid less than the legal minimum (see [Figure 7](#)). The Low Pay Commission estimate that not being paid the legal minimum wage is about 10 times more likely for an apprentice than for an average worker. The Commission have asked the government to tackle this situation as a priority.¹⁶⁷ The new funding rules now make training providers responsible for checking that employers are paying minimum wages to apprentices.¹⁶⁸

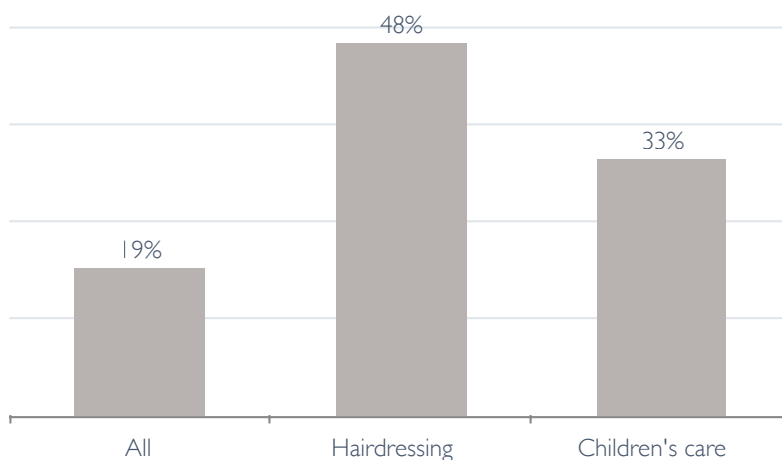


Figure 7. One in five apprentices receive wages below the legal minimum

Percentage of apprentices at levels 2 and 3 receiving wages below the legal minimum wage (national minimum or national living wage) 2018/19

Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) (2020)¹⁶⁹

Incentives that would reduce dropout are weaker than in the dual-system countries

The special apprenticeship contracts used in the dual systems give both employers and apprentices greater incentives to avoid dropout:

- *Apprentices* in England, as in many English-speaking countries, are regular employees who have an employment contract and alongside this they have an apprenticeship agreement. This means they can drop out of their apprenticeship without losing their job (see [Box 13](#)): 83% of apprentices in England who dropped out continued in employment while only 12% became unemployed.¹⁷⁰ In dual-system countries, a special apprenticeship contract replaces a standard

¹⁶⁶ DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

¹⁶⁷ Low Pay Commission (2020) *Non-compliance and enforcement of the National Minimum Wage*. A report by the Low Pay Commission. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/885382/Non-compliance_and_enforcement_report_-_2020_-_amended.pdf

¹⁶⁸ DfE (2023) *Apprenticeship funding rules August 2023 to July 2024*. Version 1. May 2023. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/39806/1/Apprenticeship_funding_rules_2324_Version_1.pdf

¹⁶⁹ BEIS (2020) *Apprenticeship pay survey 2018/19 - England*. Table 3.12, p.44. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/857210/aps-2018-19-england-report.pdf

¹⁷⁰ DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

employment contract,¹⁷¹ so dropping out of an apprenticeship usually involves breaking the apprentice's relationship with the employer. So for example, in Germany almost half apprentice dropouts were unemployed 12 months after the start of their apprenticeship.¹⁷² This means that apprentices have stronger incentives to complete their apprenticeship than in English-speaking countries.

- *For employers* in dual-system countries, heavy investment in on-the-job training is typical in the first year or two of the apprenticeship. This investment pays off later when the apprentice becomes almost as productive as a skilled worker.¹⁷³ So dropout, which is most common in the initial phase of apprenticeship, is costly for employers. The cost-benefit pattern of apprenticeship is different in England because the expectation that employers will devote extensive resources to on-the-job training is much lower and because many apprenticeships are shorter.¹⁷⁴

BOX 13. THE LEGAL STATUS OF APPRENTICES: REGULAR EMPLOYEES OR A SPECIAL STATUS?

In England, as in many English-speaking countries, apprentices are employees and the apprenticeship agreement is in addition to their regular employment contract. However in some countries in Europe, apprentices are not regular employees but instead have a special legal status and contract with their employer (although this status is usually aligned with general employment law). For example:

- **In Austria** apprentices are not regular employees. The apprenticeship contract commits the employer to provide training, to identify the trainer allocated, and to set out periods of training that will take place in collaboration with other employers.
- **In Denmark** apprentices are employees but they have special rights as learners.
- **In Germany** apprentices have a contract with the employer that is consistent with regular employment, but which also assigns some special rights and duties to the apprentice and the employer. The employer is obliged to provide training to the apprentice to ensure full occupational competence.
- **In the Netherlands** apprentices are regular employees with a temporary employment contract that lasts until the end of their apprenticeship period. They also have an apprenticeship contract agreed by the training provider, the apprentice and the employer.

Source: Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes*. See specific fiches for the countries mentioned. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches>

171 See Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes*. Questions 27-30 in the individual country scheme fiches <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches>

172 Fries, J., Göbel, C. and Maier, M. F. (2013) Do Employment Subsidies Reduce Early Apprenticeship Dropout? *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 66:4, pp.13-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2014.948905>

173 Kuczera, M. (2017) *Striking the right balance: costs and benefits of apprenticeship*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 153. <https://doi.org/10.1787/995fff01-en>

174 Wolter, S. C. and Joho, E. (2018) *Apprenticeship training in England – a cost-effective model for firms?* <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/apprenticeship-training-in-england/>

Relations with the employer are often a causal factor

Apprenticeship systems in countries like Australia and the UK, that do not regulate the employer side of apprenticeship, often have dropouts for employment-related reasons.¹⁷⁵ A meta-analysis of the reasons for dropout in apprenticeship in many countries suggests that problems in the relationship with the employer is one of the main causes.¹⁷⁶ A study in Germany also underlines the importance of the training employer environment in preventing dropout.¹⁷⁷

DROPOUT AND ITS CAUSES: CONCLUSIONS***Several factors cause high dropout rates in England***

In summary, dropout rates are higher in England (and some other English-speaking countries) than in the dual-system countries for at least four reasons. A lack of information about what can be expected from the apprenticeship; inadequate training and wages; fewer incentives to complete the apprenticeship than in the dual-system countries; and a lack of attention to the relationship between the employer and the apprentice. Steps to provide would-be apprentices with more clarity about what training they can expect are feasible and, if backed up by enforcement of minimum apprenticeship requirements, would go a long way to preventing the disappointment that so often leads to drop out.

STEP 2. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TRAINING AND CLARIFYING THE OFFER: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TRAINING AND CLARIFYING THE OFFER: KEY FACTS**

- More than half of apprentices surveyed said they had not received the minimum required off-the-job training.
- Only about half (52%) of those on apprentice standards in 2020/21 successfully completed their programmes.
- Of those who dropped out of apprenticeships in England, 44% reported that they had not been given enough time for training.
- Around one in five Level 2 and 3 apprentices do not receive the legal minimum wage.

This chapter has identified a sequence of challenges to the quality of training in English apprenticeship. The challenges are summarised below, alongside recommendations that address each challenge. These recommendations form the second step towards a world class apprenticeship system.

175 Powers, T. E. and Watt, H. M. (2021) Understanding why apprentices consider dropping out: longitudinal prediction of apprentices' workplace interest and anxiety. *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 13(9). <https://ervet-journal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40461-020-00106-8>

176 Bohn, S. and Deutscher, V. (2022) Dropout from initial vocational training – a meta-synthesis of reasons from the apprentice's point of view. *Educational Research Review*, 35. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1747938X21000373?via%3Dihub>

177 Patzina, A. and Wydra-Somaggio, G. (2020) Early careers of dropouts from vocational training: signals, human capital formation, and training firms. *European Sociological Review*, 36(5), pp.741-759. <https://academic.oup.com/esr/article/36/5/741/5862579>

2.1 SIMPLIFYING AND CLARIFYING OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Challenge: a confusing and widely ignored requirement for off-the-job training. Like other countries, England has a minimum requirement for off-the-job training. However it includes homework, online study and some workplace training and, in some sectors, there is limited face-to-face training. Even using this wide definition, many apprentices do not receive the minimum training they are entitled to. The unusually broad definition of off-the-job training has encouraged training providers to reduce real training. This has damaged the quality of the training and the reliance on home study has risks for equity.

Recommendation 2.1: simplify and enforce the off-the-job training requirement. Off-the-job training should be genuinely off-the-job. It should exclude the on-the-job training delivered by the employer, such as mentoring and shadowing. It should be genuine training, meaning that it should involve the active engagement of a trainer, and should not include homework and self-study. This gives a simpler definition, in line with international norms, and similar to the definition of guided learning hours already in use. It would remove the incentives for providers to minimise the engagement of their trainers in favour of self-study and employer training to the detriment of quality, and it would be easier to enforce. As in other education programmes, homework and e-learning have a role to play, but the active engagement of a trainer in the core programme is indispensable.

2.2 IMPROVING ATTENTION TO ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Challenge: inadequate attention to on-the-job training. Work-based training – on-the-job training – delivered by a practitioner to their apprentice has defined apprenticeship for more than two thousand years. But in England, this feature of apprenticeship has been neglected, often because the focus of policy is on off-the-job training. The on-the-job training currently delivered by employers is unregulated and variable in both quantity and quality.

Recommendation 2.2: support and develop on-the-job training. While it would not be realistic to expect employers in England to accept the kind of on-the-job training responsibilities that their counterparts in the dual-system countries have, much more could and should be done to encourage and support employers in delivering training:

- If ATE guidance should be explicit that employers are expected to provide on-the-job training for their apprentices, delivered by designated mentors. Good practice could be identified through the use of practical tools, such as the self-assessment quality tool developed by Fuller and Unwin (2014).¹⁷⁸ This could then be shared and promoted alongside international experience from Switzerland and Australia (see [Box 9](#)). Promoting good practice in on-the-job training).
- National curricula, as in recommendation 2.3, would highlight the occupational competences which should be developed, fully or partially, on the job. These would include not only technical competences but also soft skills, such as working with others, where workplace learning is vital.
- Training for those who train and mentor apprentices in the workplace should be supported and encouraged by government, in the same way it is in many other countries (see [Box 8](#)). Training the apprentice trainers).

¹⁷⁸ Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2014) *Creating and supporting expansive apprenticeships: a guide for employers, training providers and colleges of further education*. <https://repository.excellencegateway.org.uk/Creating%20and%20Supporting%20Expansive%20Apprenticeships-290514-10.pdf>

2.3 CLARIFYING THE APPRENTICESHIP OFFER

Challenge: a lack of clarity about what apprenticeship will involve.

Several factors obscure what apprentices and employers should expect of an apprenticeship programme. At present, those considering starting an apprenticeship do not know how their training will be delivered in terms of the respective contributions made by the employer and training provider; they do not know how much of the training that is classed as off-the-job will be self-study, online or delivered by the employer (see recommendation 2.1); they do not know how much training time will be given to different topics, including those in which they have a particular interest. The stated rules for apprenticeship programmes are widely ignored: only half of apprentices receive the required minimum amount of training and apprentices are 10 times more likely than other workers to receive wages that are below the legal minimum. Around half of apprentices drop out, often because they are disappointed with their experience. No competing English education and training programme and few comparable international apprenticeship programmes operate with this level of uncertainty.

Recommendation 2.3: clarify the apprenticeship offer. National curricula for apprenticeships should be introduced in line with practice in other countries. This will build on a promising IfATE initiative. The curricula should be developed by trailblazer groups in consultation with training providers and IfATE and include apprenticeship standards and assessment plans. The level of detail would be open for discussion. This would have several advantages:

- *Those starting an apprenticeship would know what to expect*, reducing the risk that apprentices who are disappointed with their training will drop out.
- *It would give reassurance that sufficient training time has been allocated to key job competences.* End-point assessments, with a pass rate of around 97.5%, do not provide such reassurance.
- *Expectations on employers would be made clear.* A curriculum would set out the contribution expected from employers to the development of the knowledge, skills and behaviours in any apprenticeship standard.
- *Coordination between different actors would be improved.* A national curriculum would give the employer, the apprentice and the training provider a common understanding of the competences to be acquired in different phases of an apprenticeship programme.
- *Minimum standards should be robustly enforced* and the rules be understood as binding by all parties. As in recommendation 2.1, off-the-job training requirements must be both clarified and enforced. The 2023 funding rules making training providers responsible for ensuring that employers are paying minimum wages to apprentices are welcome but will need to be pursued vigorously to correct high levels of non-compliance.

STEP 3. REVIVING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

In the past, almost all apprenticeship was youth apprenticeship

For many centuries, almost all apprentices were young. In England, as recently as the 1970s, most entered apprenticeship at the age of 16 or 17, either directly from school or after a few months of trial employment. The recruitment of adults (those over the age of 21) to apprenticeships was sometimes prohibited and always rare.¹⁷⁹ And, at the time, most other apprentice countries had a similar profile.

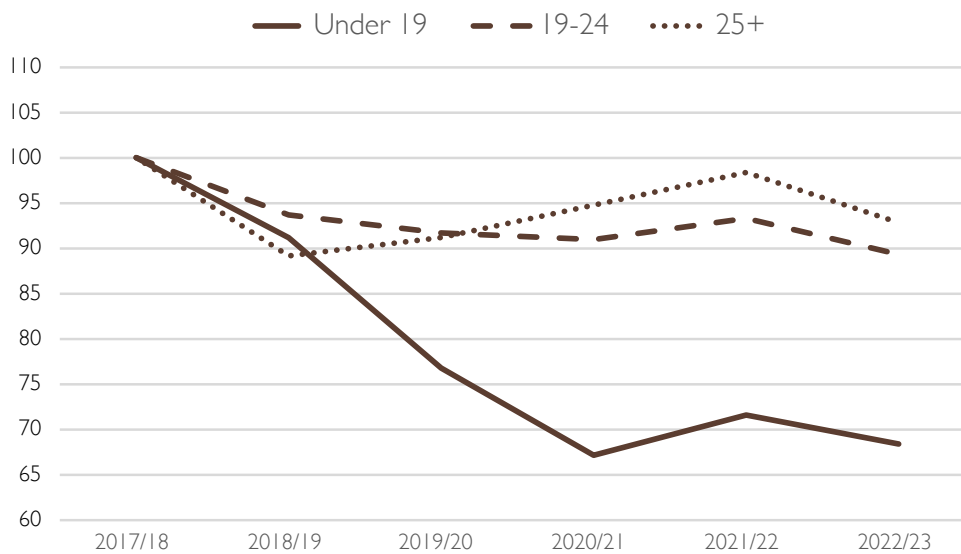


Figure 8. Declining youth apprenticeship

Apprenticeship participation rates by age group (2017/18=100)

Note: Figures for 2022/23 are provisional

Source: DfE (2023)¹⁸⁰

But this is no longer true in England and some other countries

By 2021/22 in England only 22% of starting apprentices were under 19 and 46% were 25 and over.¹⁸¹ Participation by those under 19 has fallen by 32% over the last five years (see Figure 8). This contrasts with the situation in some dual-system countries: in Germany 90% of apprentices are under 24;¹⁸² in Austria 60% of starting apprentices are 15 or 16.¹⁸³ However many countries also have lots of adult apprentices:

- In Australia in June 2022, 29% of apprentices were under 19, but 40% were over 24.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Wheatley, D. E. (1976) *Apprenticeships in the United Kingdom*. Commission of the European Communities. <https://aei.pitt.edu/37008/1/A3053.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bfb8edaf5-tables>

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: dual VET Germany scheme fiche*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/dual-vet>

¹⁸³ Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: dual apprenticeship Austria scheme fiche*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/dual-apprenticeship#group-target-2019>

¹⁸⁴ Australian government (2023) *Higher education, vocational education and training: apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/apprenticeships-and-traineeships>

- In Canada in 2015 the average age of starting apprentices was 27.¹⁸⁵
- In Finland, the age limit on apprentices was abolished in 1993, and in 2018 less than one-third of apprentices were under 30.¹⁸⁶
- In Ireland, the recent development of apprenticeships outside traditional trades has driven a growth in adult apprenticeships: in the 37 new apprenticeship occupations the average age of apprentices is 27.¹⁸⁷

Only some apprenticeship systems have a youth apprenticeship mission

Some country systems identify apprenticeship closely with youth apprenticeship. For others it is simply the work-based learning route to technical and vocational qualifications, which can therefore upskill existing workers (see [Box 14](#)). In England the system serves both purposes. Just over half of apprentices in England in 2021 were already working for their employer, but only one-quarter of apprentices under the age of 19 were already working when they started their apprenticeship.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Statistics Canada (2017) *National apprenticeship survey: Canada overview report 2015 – section 2 profile of apprentices*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/81-598-x/2017001/sect02-eng.htm>

¹⁸⁶ Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: apprenticeship training Finland scheme fiche* <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/apprenticeship-training>

¹⁸⁷ Houses of the Oireachtas (2022) *Apprenticeship programmes: Dáil Éireann debate, Tuesday, 8 March 2022*. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2022-03-08/83/>

¹⁸⁸ DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

BOX 14. THE ROLE OF APPRENTICESHIP IN THE SKILLS SYSTEM: YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP OR WORK-BASED LEARNING?

An apprenticeship system is normally part of a wider skills system. Drawing on recent work by Cedefop¹⁸⁹ and looking at other countries, there are two main ways in which apprenticeship can be incorporated into the wider skills system.

Youth apprenticeship, where apprenticeship is primarily seen as a way for young people to transition from school to work. Apprenticeships are usually a distinct subset of occupational/vocational qualifications, often at the upper secondary level (the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 3). Other vocational qualifications are not normally available as part of the apprenticeship system. This model applies in many European countries, including Denmark, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Norway.

Work-based learning, where apprenticeship is seen as providing a work-based learning route to vocational qualifications and is used alongside other routes. With this model, there is no distinct subset of occupational/vocational qualifications linked to apprenticeship even if, in practice, apprenticeships are clustered in certain sectors. Versions of this model are used in Australia and France. In Estonia, between 500 and 600 occupational qualifications/standards are the foundations for all forms of vocational training.¹⁹⁰ Apprenticeship is a possible route to any of these standards up to Level 5 and is mainly taken by adults.

England has elements of both models. Consistent with the work-based learning model, apprenticeship standards are part of an emerging new system of occupational standards developed by trailblazer groups and can be pursued at any level up to Level 7. But they are also in line with the youth apprenticeship model, because apprenticeship standards remain a distinct subset of technical qualifications.

In principle, youth apprenticeship provides the post-16 work-based route to technical qualifications

While post-16 education in England offered a clear route to tertiary education through A-levels, other post-16 routes, often involving technical education, were fragmented and poor quality.^{191 192} It was in response to this that the Sainsbury Review proposed two routes for post-16 technical education: a college-based route (T-levels), and apprenticeship.¹⁹³ The Sainsbury recommendations have been largely accepted and implemented – at least in principle.

189 Cedefop (2019) *Apprenticeship for adults: results of an explorative study*. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4179_en.pdf

190 Estonian Ministry of Education (2022) *Background report for OECD on vocational education and training (VET) in Estonia*. https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/oecd_vet_background.pdf

191 Green, A., Kaye, N., Pensiero, N. and Phan, H. (2021) *The effects of system type and system characteristics on skills acquisition in upper secondary education and training*. Vol. LLAKES Research Paper no. 69. <https://www.llakes.ac.uk/research-papers>

192 Field, S. (2022) *Inequality in English post-16 education: the IFS Deaton review of inequalities*. Institute of Fiscal Studies. <https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Inequality-in-English-post-16-education.pdf>

193 Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016) *Report of the independent panel on technical education (Sainsbury Review)*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf

But in practice, youth apprenticeship plays a limited and declining role

Recent studies by Julius, Faulkner-Ellis and O'Donnell (2020)¹⁹⁴ and Henahan (2019)¹⁹⁵ report a decline in youth apprenticeships, which has impacted heavily on the most disadvantaged. Dickinson and Hogarth (2021)¹⁹⁶ describe how the apprenticeship levy has meant provision is now skewed to higher level apprenticeships, existing workers and larger employers. Young people have been particularly affected by falling numbers of Level 2 apprenticeships, especially in small and medium-sized employers.¹⁹⁷ While there is some evidence that this is partly because some poorer quality apprenticeships have been eliminated by recent reforms, the result is that youth apprenticeship has become a relatively small part of post-16 education. These changes have happened at the same time as the diversification of occupations and levels included in the English apprenticeship system (see [Box 15](#)).

194 Julius, J., Faulkner-Ellis, H. and O'Donnell, S. (2020) *Putting apprenticeships to work for young people*. National Foundation for Educational Research. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4532/nfer_imap_apprenticeships_report.pdf

195 Henahan, K. (2019) *Trading up or trading off? Understanding recent changes to England's apprenticeships system*. Resolution Foundation. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/09/Trading-up-or-trading-off.pdf>

196 Dickinson, P. and Hogarth, T. (2021) *The benefits of hindsight: assessing the impact of apprenticeship reforms on employer behaviour*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation and the Edge Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/awboh-final-report-short-ier-final-v2.pdf>

197 Julius, J., Faulkner-Ellis, H. and O'Donnell, S. (2020) *Putting apprenticeships to work for young people*. National Foundation for Educational Research. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4532/nfer_imap_apprenticeships_report.pdf

BOX 15. DIVERSIFICATION IN THE ENGLISH APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

Norman (2022)¹⁹⁸ shows that, in comparison with England, apprenticeship in Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland remains more concentrated in traditional skilled trades, and there is less emphasis on professional and managerial roles. Historically in England, as in many countries, apprenticeships were used primarily as training for skilled trades and crafts. In the 1970s more than 40% of young male school-leavers entered apprenticeships, and two-thirds of them entered programmes in the engineering, construction, motor vehicle servicing and printing sectors.¹⁹⁹ However in 2021/22 only 14% of apprenticeship starts were in engineering and manufacturing.²⁰⁰

In part, these developments simply track the changing employment landscape. Manufacturing employment fell from over one-quarter of the UK labour force in the 1960-79 period to just over 9% in 2000-2016. Apprentice numbers in Britain in manufacturing and engineering fell from just under 400,000 in 1964 to less than 100,000 in 1989 (Broadberry, 2005).²⁰¹ More recently, as Norman (2022) points out, the extended occupational range has been driven by the creation and growth of higher level apprenticeships targeted at administrative and professional roles.

While this history is very different from that seen in continental Europe, there are some parallels. In Australia in the 1980s, the apprenticeship system of more traditional 3-4 year trade apprenticeships was augmented by 'traineeships'. These were also apprenticeships, but they covered personal service, retail and clerical roles. They were typically at lower qualification levels and involved often only one or two years of training. This non-trade sector grew rapidly and by 2012 it accounted for the majority of enrolments – although numbers in the non-trade areas have since fallen sharply. At the same time, over-24 enrolments (often existing workers) grew to represent nearly one-third of trade apprenticeships and nearly half of non-trade apprenticeships in 2016.²⁰² Similarly in Ireland, where until recently apprenticeship was nearly entirely concentrated in the construction industry,²⁰³ new apprenticeships in areas such as ICT, finance, hospitality and sales are now being developed.²⁰⁴

198 Norman, A. (2022) *What is an apprenticeship? Comparing occupational coverage of apprenticeship in England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark*. Report to the Gatsby Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/labour-market-coverage-v3.pdf>

199 Wheatley, D. E. (1976) *Apprenticeships in the United Kingdom*. Commission of the European Communities. <https://aei.pitt.edu/37008/1/A3053.pdf>

200 DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bfb8edaf5-tables>

201 Broadberry, S. N. (2005) *The productivity race: British manufacturing in international perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

202 Hargreaves, J. S., Stanwick, J. and Skujins, P. (2017) *The changing nature of apprenticeships: 1996-2016*. NCVER. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/the-changing-nature-of-apprenticeships-1996-2016>

203 Kis, V. (2010) *Learning for jobs: OECD reviews of vocational education and training - Ireland*. OECD. <https://web.archive.org/2012-06-14/109393-44592419.pdf>

204 Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: Apprenticeships in Ireland - reference year 2019*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/apprenticeships-ireland>

Youth apprenticeships contribute more to the national economy than apprenticeships for older workers

On average, youth apprentices get good wages.²⁰⁵ While wages vary a lot between sectors, those starting an apprenticeship between the ages of 19 to 24, typically get twice the percentage wage increase returns, relative to those who do not undertake apprenticeships or other further qualifications, of starters aged over 24.²⁰⁶ This is not surprising, given that a youth apprenticeship that launches a career will naturally have a larger impact than one that gives an existing worker additional skills. Since wages are a strong indicator of productivity, it also suggests that youth apprenticeship has a much larger impact – by implication double the impact – on productivity and national output than apprenticeship of older (often existing) workers.

Employers may prefer apprenticeships for existing workers even though they are less beneficial to UK plc

This raises the question of why employers continue to support so many apprenticeships for older workers, when there are better productivity returns from youth apprenticeship. One answer is that higher productivity from youth apprenticeship primarily benefits the apprentice, not the employer: the wage benefits the apprentice, and a skilled worker can always shop around for a higher wage. Conversely when a levy-funded apprenticeship for an existing worker can be used in place of previous employer-funded training, the benefit to the employer is direct.

There is a consensus on the need to support youth apprenticeship

The decline in youth apprenticeship is a double concern because the gap in the skills system is not being filled by other forms of training. Kathleen Henahan, in a recent Resolution Foundation report, summarises the evidence:

... the rate of educational attainment among young people has slowed and study options outside the traditional three-year degree route are both patchy and complex. Young people's transitions from school to work have become more difficult, and the share of young people working in lower-paid roles has risen. Younger people progress at a lower rate than their predecessors did when the same age – a pattern that is not helped by the fact that young people today receive lower rates of in-work training than young people in the past, even in the same roles. If any group would benefit from a system that offers a clear route to the skills required for a good career, it is them.²⁰⁷

Henahan's view has been widely echoed, and the government has asked IfATE to look at options for "increasing apprenticeship starts by young people" and to "consider whether the current offer meets the needs of career starters".²⁰⁸

Implementation of steps 1 and 2, proposed in earlier chapters, would strengthen youth apprenticeship

Earlier chapters have proposed steps to make apprenticeship more attractive to young career starters. Step 1 would broaden apprenticeship standards, strengthen

205 Cavaglia, C., McNally, S. and Ventura, G. (2018) *Do apprenticeships pay? Evidence for England*. Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp015.pdf>

206 McIntosh, S. and Morris, D. (2018) *Labour market outcomes of older versus younger apprentices: a comparison of earnings differentials*. Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp016.pdf>

207 Henahan, K. (2019) *Trading up or trading off? Understanding recent changes to England's apprenticeships system*. Resolution Foundation. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/09/Trading-up-or-trading-off.pdf>

208 DfE (2022) *Strategic guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1072633/Strategic_Guidance_to_the_Institute_for_Apprenticeships_and_Technical_Education_2022-2023_.pdf

the content of transferable competences, and offer a named diploma that graduates can be proud of. Step 2 would improve the quality of the training by strengthening training requirements and ensuring compliance with required minima for training and wages, while national curricula would clarify training expectations for both apprentices and employers. But these measures, while attractive to career starters, would not necessarily encourage employers to support youth apprenticeship. It is this issue which is central to step 3.

This chapter looks at how to revive youth apprenticeship

This chapter draws on international experience to look at what might be done to revive youth apprenticeship. The remaining sections of this chapter are as follows:

- *Adult and degree apprenticeships*, which examines two potential competitors to youth apprenticeship.
- *Funding*, which looks at how funding arrangements might be reformed to support youth apprenticeship and to increase flexibility in levy funding.
- *Access and inclusion*, which looks at how other countries provide access to apprenticeship for young, disadvantaged people and the scope for using the T-level transition year as a pre-apprenticeship programme.
- *Step 3: reviving youth apprenticeship*, which summarises the challenges identified and makes recommendations in response. These form the third and final step towards a world class apprenticeship system.

ADULT AND DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

The levy creates competition between youth and other forms of apprenticeship

A new challenge to youth apprenticeship is that levy paying employers have to choose between spending their limited pot of levy contributions on newly recruited youth apprentices or spending the same pot on adult apprenticeships, often for their existing workforce. Instead of spending their levy pots on apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 for less skilled recruits, they can also choose degree apprenticeships for more highly skilled staff or for management training. This means that youth apprenticeship has to appeal to employers as a better use of their levy funds than the other options. This type of competition is unique to England and makes the development of adult and degree apprenticeships relevant to youth apprenticeship.

APPRENTICESHIPS FOR EXISTING AND ADULT WORKERS

More than half of starting apprentices in England are existing workers

In England, more than half (56%) of starting apprentices in 2021 were existing workers, and most had been working for the same employer for more than 12 months. 82% of apprentices over 24 were existing workers, compared with only one-quarter (25%) of those under 19.²⁰⁹ Comparable figures for other countries are rare, but in those countries that have a lot of adult apprentices, such as Australia and Canada, existing workers are likely to have a substantial presence. Unusually for a dual-system country, many apprentices in the Netherlands are existing workers, and around 40% are over the age of 25.²¹⁰

209 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

210 European Union (2012) *Apprenticeship supply in the Member States of the European Union*. https://pmb.cereq.fr/doc_num.php?explnum_id=805

But apprenticeship is not always suitable for existing workers

There has been curiously little discussion about how suitable apprenticeship is for existing workers. The popular image of an apprentice as a school-leaver, rooted in centuries of history, combined with a policy concern about youth apprenticeship, has left little room for analysis of how and if apprenticeship should be used to upskill existing workers. However one of the main potential benefits of apprenticeship – work-based learning – can be accessed by an existing worker without an apprenticeship. An experienced worker can learn new skills in a classroom environment and then practice and develop those skills in their workplace without following an apprenticeship. In dual-system apprenticeships there are regulatory expectations for work-based learning for apprentices, but this is not the case in England.

In England, apprenticeship and other types of training can be used to upskill workers

In England, government advice to employers upskilling their workforce encourages employers to consider apprenticeship as a means of filling skills gaps, boosting employee motivation and improving retention.²¹¹ These are natural objectives for an employer, but, setting aside the availability of levy funding, there is no reason to suppose that apprenticeship is always the most effective means of achieving these objectives. The Richard Review argued for a clear separation of apprenticeship from upskilling and accreditation:

Improving the skills of someone already doing a job (or ‘upskilling’) is valuable and may well be something the Government wishes to support in other ways. Accreditation, for individuals who want their existing skills recognised, is also beneficial. But these activities are not apprenticeships and they should remain clearly distinct from the apprenticeship programme.²¹²

Many countries offer skilled workers a direct route to the apprenticeship qualification

Many apprenticeship countries offer experienced workers the option of going directly to a final assessment to attain the same qualification as that offered by apprenticeship. For experienced workers with, say, two-thirds or more of the competences needed for a target occupation, a full apprenticeship programme would be wasteful both for the apprentice and for their employer. Some tailored top-up training to ensure full occupational competence, followed by an assessment, as takes place in other countries, will normally be much more cost-effective both for the worker and their employer (see [Box 16](#)).

211 HM Government (accessed 2023) *Employers: upskilling your workforce*. <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/employers/upskilling-your-workforce#>

212 Richard, D. (2012) *Richard review of apprenticeships*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf

BOX 16. ALTERNATIVE ROUTES FOR UPSKILLING EXISTING WORKERS***A direct route for experienced workers to the apprenticeship qualification***

Many apprenticeship countries offer experienced workers the opportunity to have their skills recognised through an assessment leading to the same qualification as gained through apprenticeship. They can prepare for the assessment through tailored top-up training designed to fill any gaps in their knowledge and skills. Kis and Windisch (2018)²¹³ describe the access criteria required:

- **In Austria** experience amounting to at least half of the length of a regular apprenticeship. 15% of qualifications awarded in 2012 came through this direct route.
- **In Canada** experience amounting typically to at least one and a half times the apprenticeship period.
- **In Germany** experience of one and a half times the apprenticeship period. Some school qualifications may also be taken into account. In 2009, 6% of the successful final assessment candidates had followed this route.
- **In Norway** five years' work experience followed by a theoretical exam. One-third of the qualifications were awarded on this basis in 2015.
- **In Switzerland** five years' relevant work experience, including three years in the target occupation.

Professional examinations as a vehicle for management training

In Austria, Germany and Switzerland examinations to become a master craftsperson (*Meisterprüfung* in Austria and Germany, *Hoehere eidgenoessische Fachprüfung* in Switzerland) allow qualified apprentices to obtain higher-level qualifications that develop practitioner skills and allow individuals to run their own small businesses and train apprentices. The examinations are typically open to qualified apprentices working in the relevant field. Preparatory courses for the examination are usual but not mandatory. There are fees for the examinations and for the preparatory courses, but local support from employers or the state is sometimes available.²¹⁴

213 Kis, V. and Windisch, H. (2018) *Making skills transparent: recognising vocational skills acquired through workbased learning*. OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/making-skills-transparent_5830c400-en

214 Field, S. (2020) *Strengthening skills in Scotland: OECD review of the apprenticeship system in Scotland*. OECD. http://www.oecd.org/skills/centre-for-skills/Strengthening_Skills_in_Scotland.pdf

DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING

In England, degree apprenticeships use an increasing proportion of levy funds

Degree apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7, have grown rapidly, representing 15% of all starts in 2022/23.²¹⁵ As the funding bands for degree apprenticeship standards tend to be higher than for apprenticeships at lower levels, 21% of the DfE's budget for apprenticeships was devoted to degree apprenticeships in 2021/22, doubling from 10% in two years.²¹⁶ Further growth is certain: the government has introduced a £40 million fund through the Office for Students to encourage these apprenticeships.²¹⁷

Strong incentives made this growth predictable

An OECD report published in 2018²¹⁸ predicted this rapid growth based on the ability for the apprenticeship levy to be used to pay large fees that would otherwise be paid by students (usually backed by loans) or by employers. The report stated that at the time 200,000 students in UK universities were taking employer-sponsored degrees (funded by employers), and survey evidence indicated that one-third of employers intended to replace such sponsored degrees with degree apprenticeships.

The incentive structure is the driver of growth

There are some good arguments for using apprenticeships to deliver degree and higher technical level occupational training, because it allows academic education to be integrated with practical workplace skills. But there is no automatic benefit when an employer, who previously sponsored the degree of an employee, now pays into the levy and then uses levy funding to provide that same employee with a degree apprenticeship. The same funding is just flowing through an indirect route for the same purpose. Real benefits only emerge if the content of the degree changes, for example, because it involves greater employer engagement in the work-based learning that should complement the education received in the university. These benefits depend on how degree apprenticeships are developed and regulated. So the popularity of degree apprenticeships is not in itself an indicator of success.

Not all higher level apprenticeships are used appropriately

IfATE is currently reviewing degree apprenticeship policy, noting that when degree apprenticeships were first introduced in 2015, "there was no requirement on employers to show any labour market requirement in support of a degree and little guidance on what a good degree apprenticeship might look like".²¹⁹ There is evidence to suggest that degree apprenticeships are running into problems, perhaps partly because of their rapid expansion.

- Research on apprenticeships at Level 4 and above indicates that employers are primarily using apprenticeship to upskill existing workers, sometimes to prepare staff for management responsibilities.²²⁰ This is reflected in the age profile: in 2021/22, more than two-thirds (68%) of apprentices at Level 4 and above

215 DfE. (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8fb8eda5-tables>

216 Camden, B. (2023) Degree-level apprenticeship spending hit half a billion last year. *FE Week*, May 5 2023, issue 424, pp.5-6. https://feweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Edition-424-digi.pdf?mc_cid=df8fb46aa2&mc_eid=9181985aef

217 Noble, J. (2023) OFS to create £40m fund to boost degree apprenticeship take-up. *FE week*, 6 April 2023. <https://feweek.co.uk/of-s-to-create-40m-fund-to-boost-degree-apprenticeship-take-up/>

218 Kuczera, M. and Field, S. (2018) *Apprenticeship in England, United Kingdom*. OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264298507-en>

219 IfATE (2021) *Degree apprenticeships review 2021*. <https://apprenticeships.blog.gov.uk/2021/01/22/degree-apprenticeships-review-2021/>

220 Murphy, H. and Jones, E. (2021) *Apprenticeships at Level 4 and above*. National Learning and Work Institute. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Apprenticeships-at-Level-4-and-above-1.pdf>

were aged 25 and over (see Figure 9).²²¹ The same research showed that such apprenticeships are sometimes used (inappropriately) simply to accredit existing management and leadership skills.²²²

- Degree apprenticeships could have benefits for equity, if they attract less advantaged students into higher education. Unfortunately this is not currently the case. Those who have been eligible to receive free school meals are even less likely to enter degree apprenticeships than they are to enter conventional degree programmes.²²³
- Disproportionate resources are going into some individual programmes – FE Week estimates that £870 million from levy funds could be already committed to starts on the Level 7 Accountancy/Taxation Professional apprenticeship, and £420 million to the Level 7 Senior Leader standard.²²⁴
- Evidence from the National Student Survey shows that degree apprentices were more critical of the organisation and management of their courses than regular undergraduates.²²⁵

In other countries there are fewer incentives for degree apprenticeships

Some other countries maintain versions of degree apprenticeships. In Germany dual university programmes have a number of forms, but in all of them work and training with an employer is integrated with university studies.²²⁶ In France many forms of technical higher education, such as the Level 5 DUT qualification, can be completed with periods of employment alternating with periods of study.²²⁷ In Scotland graduate apprenticeships are now an established part of the apprenticeship system.²²⁸ But in these three countries, unlike in England, most of the costs of regular higher education are carried by the state. So the same financial incentives to package or repackage higher education as apprenticeship do not exist.

Similar arguments apply to some management training

Richmond and Regan (2022)²²⁹ point to several management apprenticeship standards that appear to be designed to upskill existing workers into management roles, rather than for new recruits. The Level 3 Team Leader/Supervisor standard, designed to develop management skills, is the most popular standard in England, with 87,000 starts since 2017/18. But Richmond and Regan argue that it is not cost-effective because it is eligible for £4,500 of apprenticeship funding, when a similar course provided by the Chartered Management Institute costs just £1,300

221 DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8fb8eda5-tables>

222 Murphy, H. and Jones, E. (2021) *Apprenticeships at Level 4 and above*. National Learning and Work Institute. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Apprenticeships-at-Level-4-and-above-1.pdf>

223 Cavaglia, C., McNally, S. and Ventura, G. (2022) *The recent evolution of apprenticeships: participation and pathways*. Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp039.pdf>

224 Camden, B. (2023) Degree-level apprenticeship spending hit half a billion last year. *FE Week*, May 5 2023, issue 424, pp.5-6. https://feweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Edition-424-digi.pdf?mc_cid=df8fb46aa2&mc_eid=9181985aef

225 Stein, J. (2023) Degree apprentices less satisfied than full-time uni students with their course. *FE Week*, 16 August 2023 https://feweek.co.uk/degree-apprentices-less-satisfied-than-full-time-uni-students-with-their-course/?mc_cid=b7c9c6abdf&mc_eid=9181985aef

226 Higher Education Compass offered by German Rector's Conference (accessed 2023) *Dual programmes – studying and work experience*. <https://www.hochschulkompass.de/en/degree-programmes/all-about-studying-in-germany/forms-of-study/dual-work-study-programmes.html>

227 Guidance on course options in France (accessed 2023) *BUT en alternance*. <https://diplomeo.com/dut-en-alternance>

228 Field, S. (2020) *Strengthening skills in Scotland: OECD review of the apprenticeship system in Scotland*. OECD. http://www.oecd.org/skills/centre-for-skills/Strengthening_Skills_in_Scotland.pdf

229 Richmond, T. and Regan, E. (2022) *No train, no gain: an investigation into the quality of apprenticeships in England*. EDSK. <https://www.edsk.org/publications/no-train-no-gain/>

for a part-time 12 month course. For existing workers who need an additional skill set to advance their career, a training course tailored to their individual experience and circumstances will often be more cost-effective than the more rigid structure of an apprenticeship programme, but such courses cannot be funded through the levy. In the dual-system countries, skilled workers (usually qualified apprentices) typically upskill to more senior positions in their occupational field through professional examinations. These more senior positions include the traditional master craftsperson roles (see [Box 16](#)).

ADULT AND DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS: CONCLUSIONS

Apprenticeship is a useful training model for higher-level occupational training and upskilling

The development of job competences often requires a mix of classroom education and training, alongside guided workplace learning. Apprenticeship offers a model for this blend and can be used to train for high-level jobs, such as teaching, nursing and management roles. It can also be used to upskill existing workers. The use of apprenticeship for these purposes is therefore to be welcomed, but not to the point of dismissing other models that offer this kind of blended training. More traditional teacher training, for example, also offers a mix of academic education and practical workplace training. And management training programmes can give novice managers some external training alongside their working experience.

In England, unlike many countries, there are ‘super-incentives’ to package such training as apprenticeship

However three factors mean that the choice of training model for these purposes is in many cases heavily biased towards apprenticeship:

- In England levy funds can only be used for apprenticeships, they cannot be used to pay the fees for other kinds of courses.
- Full fees for higher education (even if set against income-contingent loans) encourage students and employers to use apprenticeships, because they can use levy funds to avoid high, direct fees. The situation is different in other countries where higher education is more heavily funded by the government.
- Unlike in many other apprenticeship countries, England does not offer the option of direct access for experienced workers to an assessment and apprenticeship qualification. There are also fewer options for experienced workers to upskill by pursuing professional examinations in their chosen profession. The lack of alternative options increases the risk that apprenticeship may be used wastefully, simply to recognise existing skills.

This distorts education and training choices and may crowd out youth apprenticeship

The collective effect of these three factors is to create what may be called ‘super-incentives’ to use apprenticeships for this type of training, even when alternative training and assessment models might be more appropriate and cost-effective. This is not only wasteful but it could also crowd out youth apprenticeship, especially when larger levy paying employers use up their levy pots on upskilling and higher level apprenticeships for existing workers. The main response to these challenges must lie in funding arrangements, which are considered in the next section.

FUNDING

ESTABLISHING A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR PROGRAMME CHOICE

The choice between an apprenticeship and another technical qualification may depend on funding

Individuals seeking a technical qualification must choose between apprenticeship and other forms of occupational training. Employers also make the same choices when they support the training of their employees. Ideally, these choices should be determined by the merits and suitability of the specific form of training.

Table 2. How incentives vary depending on the level of study

The middle two columns show how apprenticeship and other technical programmes are funded. The final column summarises the funding incentives for apprenticeship and other technical programmes at the same level

	Other technical programmes	Apprenticeships	Comparative funding incentives for technical programmes and apprenticeship
Levels 2-3 (mostly younger apprentices) (61% under 25)*	Usually fully funded with no fees Example, T-levels		Small incentive to pursue regular technical programmes given some costs to employers of apprenticeships
Levels 4-7 (mostly older apprentices) (more than two-thirds of those studying at levels 4-7 are over 25)*	Substantial fee costs to students, but supported by lifelong learning entitlement Examples, higher technical and degree programmes	Common system of funding for levels 2-7	Super-incentives for students (and employers if involved) to avoid large fees by using levy-supported apprenticeships rather than regular programmes which cannot be supported by the levy

* DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*.

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bfb8edaf5-tables>

Approved technical qualifications are directly funded at Level 3, but are subject to loan arrangements at Level 4 and above

Outside apprenticeship, there is now a marked distinction between funding for levels 2 and 3 technical qualifications where the key programmes, such as T-levels, are fully funded by the government, and qualifications at higher levels where students usually have to pay fees supported by loans. Following transitional arrangements which have tried to consolidate funding arrangements, approved qualifications at levels 4 to 6 will be subject to a common funding regime, the 'lifelong loan entitlement', from the academic year 2025/26.²³⁰ This means that Higher Technical Qualifications at levels

²³⁰ DfE (2023) *Lifelong loan entitlement: government consultation response*. March 2023. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1140599/Lifelong_Loan_Entitlement_Consultation_Response.pdf

4 and 5 will in most cases be funded through the same income-contingent loan arrangements as degree education at Level 6. Given some recent tightening of the loan regime,²³¹ there will be substantial fee costs for students at levels 4-6, although government-backed loans will limit the upfront costs.

Apprenticeship funding has no parallel funding model

This binary approach to the funding for non-apprenticeship technical qualifications has implications for apprenticeship (see summary in Table 2. How incentives vary depending on the level of study), which does not have a similarly binary funding approach. As discussed in the previous section, it means that there are super-incentives for people to take apprenticeships at levels 4-6 instead of equivalent technical qualifications at that level, because apprenticeships allow levy funding to replace heavy costs for students or their employers. This is particularly compelling in domains where there is a technical qualification which is a close equivalent to apprenticeship. Conversely at levels 2-3 there is no incentive, in fact there is a disincentive, because small employers may have to pay 5% of the costs of apprentice off-the-job training. Most younger apprentices pursue apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3: over 60% of those studying at levels 2 and 3 are under 25 (see Figure 9). So the funding of apprenticeship at this level has large implications for youth apprenticeship.

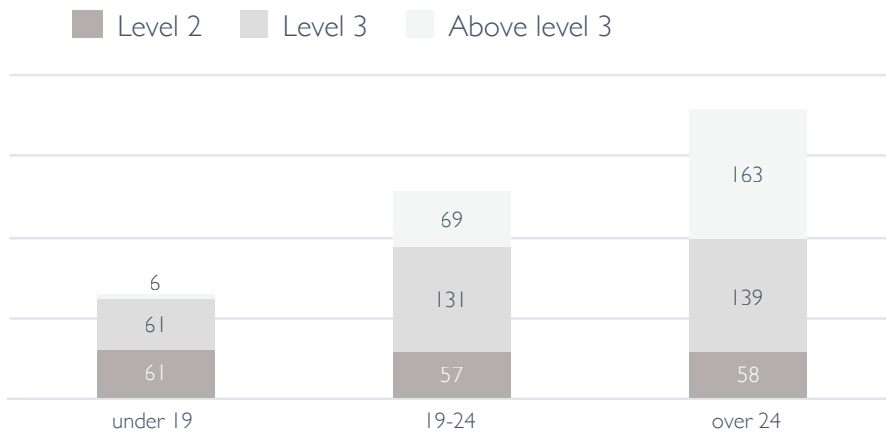


Figure 9. Most younger apprentices study at levels 2 and 3
 Apprenticeship participation by age group and level in thousands 2021/22
 Source: DfE (2023)²³²

231 Ogden, K. and Waltmann, B. (2023) *Student loans in England explained and options for reform*. Institute of Fiscal Studies. <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/student-loans-england-explained-and-options-reform>

232 DfE (2023) *Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8fb8bedaf5-tables>

CREATING THE RIGHT INCENTIVES

Action is needed on two fronts

To resolve the problems detailed in the two preceding sections requires action on two fronts and they will be considered in turn.

- To give additional support to youth apprenticeship at levels 2-3.
- To remove the super-incentives for apprenticeships at levels 4-6. Although apprenticeship has much to offer higher-level programmes, take-up of these apprenticeships should be based on the merits of the courses, rather than because of distortionary super-incentives.

Incentives for employers offering youth apprenticeship are essential

Training quality improvements, as proposed in steps 1 and 2, need to be reinforced by incentives for employers to offer youth apprenticeships. Such incentives are needed because youth apprenticeship has already, as discussed above, shown some decline. Henahan (2019)²³³ suggested that at least half of levy funding should be devoted to new starters, and a similar proportion to apprentices under the age of 30. The Edge Foundation (2019) proposed that “only apprenticeships for those who are aged 16 to 24 or whom the organisation can prove are new to the sector and occupation should be fully funded, with 50% funding available for older and existing workers”.²³⁴ More recently there has been support from different parts of the political spectrum. The Onward think tank (linked to the Conservative Party) has pointed out that the government fully funds A-levels for young people, and suggests that it do the same for the off-the-job training of 16- to 18-year-olds.²³⁵ Similarly, the Labour Party Council of Skills Advisors (2022)²³⁶ have concluded that “there is an overwhelming case for fully funding entry-level apprenticeships for this age group” (16- to 18-year-olds). Most recently, a Policy Exchange report argued that apprenticeships for 16- to 19-year-olds should be funded from general taxation through the 16-19 budget.²³⁷ It should be noted that such full funding would do no more than return the funding arrangements to those of 50 years ago, when off-the-job training of apprentices was fully funded by local education authorities through FE colleges.²³⁸

Many countries fully fund off-the-job training for youth apprentices

In many continental European countries where apprenticeship is part of the upper secondary education system, full government funding of all off-the-job education and training for youth apprenticeship is taken for granted. In Ireland also, government funds all off-the-job training for apprentices.²³⁹ In Australia employers normally pay for off-the-job training, but this is offset by funding from states and

233 Henahan, K. (2019) *Trading up or trading off? Understanding recent changes to England's apprenticeships system*. Resolution Foundation. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/09/Trading-up-or-trading-off.pdf>

234 Edge Foundation (2019) *Our plan for apprenticeships: broader, higher quality, better prepared*. https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/87/edge20e2809320apprenticeships20report2028final20-20web29_4InXjVp.pdf

235 Fraser, F. and Hawksbee, A. (2022) *Course correction: why apprenticeship reform is needed to level up opportunity*. Onward. <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Course-Correction-Onward-060422.pdf>

236 Labour Party Council of Skills Advisors (2022) *Learning and skills for economic recovery, social cohesion, and a more equal Britain*. https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/WVR-16813_22-Labour-Skills-Council-report-Edit-19-10-22.pdf

237 Mansfield, I. and Hirst, T. (2023) *Reforming the apprenticeship levy*. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Reforming-the-Apprenticeship-Levy.pdf>

238 Wheatley, D. E. (1976) *Apprenticeships in the United Kingdom*. Commission of the European Communities. <https://aei.pitt.edu/37008/1/A3053.pdf>

239 Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: apprenticeships in Ireland scheme fiche*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/apprenticeships-ireland>

territories and through a complex system of incentive payments.²⁴⁰ In Canada apprentices are responsible for tuition costs, but these are offset in various ways according to the province. For example, Nova Scotia has recently elected to make the province responsible for all the off-the-job training costs.²⁴¹

Some countries offer additional incentives to employers

In addition to full funding of off-the-job training, several countries offer employers financial incentives. In Norway employers taking apprentices receive around €500 a month from the state.²⁴² In Denmark the wage costs of apprentices during off-the-job training are paid from levy funds, not the individual employer. All employers contribute to the levy.²⁴³ Similarly in Ireland, employers do not have to pay wages to apprentices during their off-the-job training; instead apprentices receive an allowance from the state. In addition, a new employer incentive payment of €2,000 a year will shortly become available to employers offering apprenticeships.²⁴⁴ In the Netherlands and Austria, different tax and direct financial incentives are available to employers taking apprentices.²⁴⁵ These incentives are in most cases at least equal and sometimes more than the grant of the £1,000 offered in England to employers taking apprentices aged 16 to 18.²⁴⁶ So even if full funding of off-the-job training were implemented in England, this would be less generous to employers than is available in some other countries. However, most evidence suggests that these incentives have limited effect, and they can sometimes involve substantial dead weight, whereby funding is transferred to employers who would have offered youth apprenticeships even without the incentive.²⁴⁷

Currently, the system is not generous to employers, and expects little in return

The implication is that, by international standards, the English apprenticeship system is not currently financially generous to the employers of youth apprentices: unlike in many countries, employers may have to contribute to the cost of off-the-job training, and also unlike in many countries, they do not receive any incentives to take apprentices. At the same time, several other countries make greater in-kind demands on employers. As discussed in the previous chapter, in dual-system countries, employers are typically expected to deliver defined elements of the curriculum through on-the-job training and sometimes through inter-company training centres.

Other support measures for youth apprenticeship are attractive

Non-financial incentives for employers to offer youth apprenticeship are less straightforward, but have advantages given the dead weight associated with financial incentives. Several measures are used in different countries to encourage employers to take on youth apprentices and to help employers fully benefit from doing so. For example, in Norway, Apprenticeship Training Agencies are owned

240 Australian government (accessed 2023) *Australian apprenticeships incentive scheme summary*. <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/Aaip%20summary%20Final.pdf>

241 Province of Nova Scotia (2017) *News release: trades tuition fees covered for apprentices*. <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20170905001>

242 Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: apprenticeship Norway scheme fiche*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/upper-secondary-vocational-programmes>

243 Cedefop (accessed 2023) *European database on apprenticeship schemes: apprenticeship Denmark scheme fiche*. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes/scheme-fiches/apprenticeship>

244 Houses of the Oireachtas (2022) *Apprenticeship programmes: Dáil Éireann debate, Tuesday, 8 March 2022*. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2022-03-08/83/>

245 Kuczera, M. (2017) *Incentives for apprenticeship*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 152. <https://doi.org/10.1787/55bb556d-en>

246 Education and Skills Funding Agency (2020, updated 2022) *Guidance: payments for hiring a young apprentice*. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/incentive-payments-for-hiring-a-new-apprentice>

247 Kuczera, M. (2017) *Incentives for apprenticeship*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 152. <https://doi.org/10.1787/55bb556d-en>

by companies, and they work with companies who take apprentices to establish new apprenticeships, train staff to mentor apprentices and carry out some of the administration associated with apprenticeship on behalf of employers.²⁴⁸

The super-incentives distort training expenditure

Direct evidence supports the view that limiting the use of the levy to apprenticeships may distort training choices. A 2019 survey by the CIPD found that of levy paying employers, 15% said that they were using the levy to accredit existing skills, while 14% said that the levy was redirecting training away from more appropriate forms of training.²⁴⁹ Several stakeholders have therefore argued for a relaxation of the constraints that limit levy spending to apprenticeship,^{250 251 252} and the Labour Party have proposed a “Growth and Skills Levy”.²⁵³

FUNDING: CONCLUSIONS

Strengthening support for youth apprenticeship

Steps 1 and 2 in this report improve the value of youth apprenticeship to young people but need to be supported by measures that also make them attractive to employers. Four arguments support this view:

- Youth apprenticeships generate greater returns in terms of wages, productivity and, therefore, the national economy than apprenticeships for older people. But these returns mainly benefit the apprentices rather than their employers. Employers need additional incentives.
- Youth apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 could help support disadvantaged young people by providing a training route for many of those who do not currently enter higher education, in a similar way to other countries.
- Youth apprenticeship at levels 2 and 3 (unlike levels 4 and above) is currently restricted because alternative Level 2 and 3 technical qualifications are fully funded.
- Other countries typically fully fund the off-the-job education and training of youth apprentices, and some also offer employers incentives to offer these apprenticeships.

Establishing flexible levy funding

With alternative funding support for youth apprenticeship, as proposed above, the constraints on levy funding could be partially relaxed (as many have argued) to support other approved training and qualification programmes. The principle of levy funding would change to supporting training for qualifications that are of general benefit to workforce skills and the economy, but it would not be used for training which is employer specific. This principle would include apprenticeship but also other approved qualifications based on IfATE occupational standards.

248 Kuczera, M. (2017) *Incentives for apprenticeship*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 152. <https://doi.org/10.1787/55bb556d-en>

249 CIPD (2019) *Addressing employer underinvestment in training: the case for a broader training levy*. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/addressing-employer-underinvestment-in-training_tcm18-61265.pdf

250 City & Guilds and The 5% Club (2023) *Levying up: delivering sustainable skills*. <https://www.cityandguilds.com/-/media/cityandguilds-site/documents/news/2022/apprenticeship-research-report-pdf.ashx?la=en&hash=10866BF9B962D4CC63384B7CDC1D83D95E0D8559>

251 Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (2019) *Learning on the job: improving the apprenticeship levy*. <https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/3419/learning-on-the-job-improving-the-apprenticeship-levy.pdf>

252 Mansfield, I. and Hirst, T. (2023) *Reforming the apprenticeship levy*. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Reforming-the-Apprenticeship-Levy.pdf>

253 Labour Party (2022) *Press release: Labour announces landmark shift in skills to drive growth and equip our country for the future [27 September 2022]*. <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/press-release-labour-announces-landmark-shift-in-skills-to-drive-growth-and-equip-our-country-for-the-future-september-2022/>

Removing super-incentives

The effect of these reforms would be to remove what I have called the super-incentives, which have encouraged very rapid growth in higher level apprenticeships, while retaining the option for employers to use their levy pots to support such apprenticeships when that is the best option. For example, while at present, academy trusts use their levy pots to support teaching apprenticeships, under the proposals set out above, they could continue to do so, but they could also choose to support more conventional PGCE teacher training with their levy pots if that was the more cost-effective choice.

ACCESS AND INCLUSION

QUALITY AND INCLUSION IN YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

Youth apprenticeship needs to be inclusive

To serve a wider social purpose as well as the needs of the economy, youth apprenticeship needs to serve disadvantaged groups, including those with weak prior attainment. Unfortunately, recent changes in the apprenticeship system have been unhelpful to the most disadvantaged. For the period 2014-2020, Cavaglia, McNally and Ventura (2022)²⁵⁴ found that apprenticeships had been most popular in more disadvantaged areas, but now apprenticeships are equally likely to be chosen across areas with different levels of disadvantage. In the five years to 2022/23, apprenticeship participation among those living in the most disadvantaged quintile of postcodes fell by 30% and rose slightly for the most advantaged quintile (see Figure 10). This reflects a decline in the Level 2 apprenticeships, where participation by the disadvantaged had been concentrated.

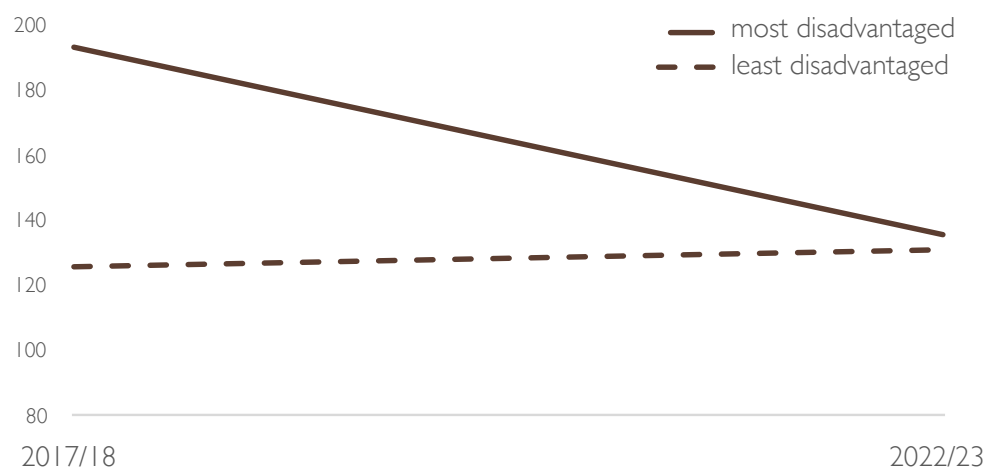


Figure 10. Declining apprenticeship participation by the most disadvantaged

Thousands of participants among the most and the least disadvantaged quintiles, change between 2017/18 and 2022/23

Note: The quintiles are identified from indicators of multiple deprivation in the postcodes of participants.
Source: DfE (2023)²⁵⁵

254 Cavaglia, C., McNally, S. and Ventura, G. (2022) *The recent evolution of apprenticeships: participation and pathways*. Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp039.pdf>

255 DfE (2023) Academic year 2022/23 apprenticeships and traineeships. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships#dataBlock-0eb10f9b-366f-432f-aaa4-2f8bf8bedaf5-tables>

Inclusion involves several policy considerations

The objective of inclusion in apprenticeship has to balance with competing policy aims and constraints:

- Work-based learning can provide a motivating option for young people who have become disenchanted with classroom education. However they cannot be directly offered an apprenticeship as a matter of policy. Independent employers make the decisions about which candidates to accept.
- A widely shared objective is that apprenticeship should be seen to be demanding and high level – having a status equivalent to an academic programme. But this objective can conflict with securing access for those with low attainment. This tension can be seen in England by the increase in the proportion of higher level apprenticeships, which has been welcomed as a signal of higher status, while the same trend has tended to limit access to apprenticeships by low-attainers, particularly for Level 2 apprenticeships.²⁵⁶

Many countries maintain special access routes into apprenticeship

Countries have sought to reconcile these competing policy demands, typically through programmes designed to ensure access by the most disadvantaged but separate from mainstream apprenticeship, so they do not dilute standards. These either take the form of a special apprenticeship to accommodate those who would find it difficult (at least in the first instance) to access a regular apprenticeship, or alternatively a training programme, often involving workplace experience, designed as an access route to apprenticeship (see [Box 17](#)). Large numbers are involved: in Germany there were 52 new pre-apprentices for every 100 starting apprentices in 2013, and in Switzerland, 22 new pre-apprentices for every 100 starting apprentices in 2012.²⁵⁷

256 Henahan, K. (2019) *Trading up or trading off? Understanding recent changes to England's apprenticeships system*. Resolution Foundation. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/09/Trading-up-or-trading-off.pdf>

257 Kis, V. (2016) *Work-based learning for youth at risk: getting employers on board*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 150. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5e122a91-en>

BOX 17. STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION: ALTERNATIVE APPRENTICESHIPS AND ACCESS ROUTES

Many apprenticeship systems include special programmes for those who, often because of weak school attainment, are not able to immediately start an apprenticeship:

- **In Austria** 'integrative apprenticeships' can be offered to young people with learning difficulties. Programmes can be extended from four to five or six years. A lower wage scale and subsidies encourage employers to offer these apprenticeships.²⁵⁸
- **In Germany** those with weak school qualifications who cannot find an apprenticeship at age 16 normally enter a range of locally organised programmes, collectively known as the 'transition system'. About 70% eventually complete an apprenticeship.²⁵⁹
- **In Switzerland** special two-year apprenticeships are designed for young people who cannot find a regular (three to four year) apprenticeship or who are at risk of dropping out. Evaluation shows that employers taking on apprentices through this scheme manage to break even by the end of the apprenticeships, while offering good learning opportunities to young people at risk. Nearly half of completers go on to regular apprenticeships, while three-quarters of the other half find a job.²⁶⁰

The English equivalent, traineeships, will now be dropped

The Richard Review argued that "We need pre-apprenticeship opportunities which offer a genuine, recognised ladder into high skilled apprenticeships".²⁶¹ This conclusion led to the development of traineeships; programmes that typically last a few months and include work experience, designed to transition those aged 16 to 24 into work or an apprenticeship.²⁶² Of those who completed a traineeship in 2017/18, two-thirds (66%) were in sustained learning or work six months after completion.²⁶³ However take-up of these programmes has been limited (around 15,000 annually), less than for comparable programmes in Germany and Switzerland. The standalone national traineeships programme came to an end in August 2023, although some elements might continue to be funded in other ways.²⁶⁴ The decision to end the programme has been criticised as damaging to entry-level learners.²⁶⁵

258 Kis, V. (2016) *Work-based learning for youth at risk: getting employers on board*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 150. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5e122a91-en>

259 Haasler, S. R. (2020) The German system of vocational education and training: challenges of gender, academisation and the integration of low-achieving youth. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 26(1), pp.57-71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258919898115>

260 Kis, V. (2016) *Work-based learning for youth at risk: getting employers on board*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 150. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5e122a91-en>

261 Richard, D. (2012) *Richard review of apprenticeships*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf

262 GOV.UK (accessed 2023) *Find a traineeship*. <https://www.gov.uk/find-traineeship>

263 GOV.UK (accessed 2023) *Explore education statistics: academic year 2017/18 further education: outcome based success measures*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-outcome-based-success-measures/2017-18>

264 UK Parliament (2022) *Skills update: statement made on 12 December 2022*. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-12-12/hcws434>

265 Hickie, J. (2022) Ending traineeships could be devastating for young learners. *FE Week*, 13 December 2022. <https://feweek.co.uk/ending-traineeships-could-be-devastating-for-young-learners/>

BOX 18. THE T-LEVEL TRANSITION PROGRAMME/YEAR AND ITS POTENTIAL AS A PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

The T-level transition programme, now renamed the transition year, is a one-year programme developed alongside T-levels for 16- to 19-year-olds post-GCSEs.²⁶⁶ It is designed for those who want to take a T-level but who need some additional preparation to be ready to do so successfully. Programmes are expected to include quality work experience and are designed to develop competences in five domains:

- Industry-relevant technical knowledge and skills (in relation to a chosen T-level route).
- Skills for successful study, including writing, researching and problem-solving.
- English, maths and digital skills, potentially including relevant GCSEs.
- Knowledge and skills for the workplace, including working with others and communication.
- Positive attitude and behaviours, including resilience and effectively handling feedback.

While the transition programme was designed to prepare young people for T-levels, the content, as described above, is in most part equally relevant as preparation for someone who wants to start an apprenticeship on the same route. Moreover, in its first year of operation, just 14% of participants moved on to T-levels, while one-third of participants (33%) progressed to BTECs and apprenticeships.²⁶⁷ Similarly, early research on the transition programme found that many participants moved on to Level 3 apprenticeships or other Level 3 programmes instead of T-levels. Many training providers, understandably, saw these as successful outcomes of the programme.²⁶⁸ Sometimes these outcomes also reflected a considered decision on the part of participants, made in light of their transition year, suggesting that one valuable function of the programme was to clarify pathway choices for those who were initially uncertain. These are early results, but they suggest that the programme has many benefits broader than its initial objective, and embracing those benefits in the programme rationale would make good sense.

The T-level transition year could be reconfigured to serve as a pre-apprenticeship programme

For several reasons, the T-level transition programme (now transition year), described in **Box 18**. The T-level transition programme/year and its potential as a pre-apprenticeship programme, might usefully be reconfigured as preparation for either T-levels or an apprenticeship at Level 3. The arguments are compelling:

- Evidence shows that the T-level transition programme is, despite its overt aim, already operating as a pre-apprenticeship programme by virtue both of its

266 DfE (2023) *T level transition programme: supporting young people to progress onto and succeed on a T level - framework for delivery from academic year 2022 to 23*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1169335/Transition_Programme_Framework_for_Delivery.pdf

267 Camden, B. (2022) Pre-T Level course flops in first year. *FE Week*, 27 May 2022. <https://feweek.co.uk/pre-t-level-course-flops-in-its-first-year/>

268 Straw, S. and Bradley, E. (2022) *Research on early delivery of the T level transition programme*. DfE. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1087315/T_Level_Transition_Programme_Research_Report_updated_June_2022.pdf

substance and the destinations of participants. Conversely, it has had limited success if judged solely in terms of T-level outcomes.

- The reorientation of the transition programme as dual-purpose would involve limited change to the substance.
- It would make little sense to develop a separate pre-apprenticeship programme that would be similar to the transition programme.
- It would be inequitable to maintain a transition programme dedicated to T-levels but to have no equivalent offer for those aiming at apprenticeship.
- There are advantages, already emerging from evaluation studies, in allowing students to postpone their choice of Level 3 programme until they can reflect on their experience of the transition year.

ACCESS AND INCLUSION: CONCLUSIONS

Many other countries maintain substantial pre-apprenticeship systems to provide an access route for those who would be interested in a youth apprenticeship but cannot immediately find one. With the cancellation of the traineeships programme from 2023, England will now lack a similar route. There are strong arguments for reconfiguring the new T-level transition programme to also provide the desired access route to apprenticeships.

STEP 3. REVIVING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REVIVING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP: KEY FACTS

- Apprenticeships for those aged under 25 have double the wage returns of those for older people.
- 80% of apprentices under 25 are in Level 2 and 3 programmes.
- Participation by those under 19 has fallen by 32% over the last five years.
- Of levy paying employers, 15% said they were using the levy to accredit existing skills.
- 21% of the DfE's budget for apprenticeships was devoted to degree apprenticeships in 2021/22 – this has doubled in two years.
- In the five years to 2022/23, apprenticeship participation among those living in the most disadvantaged quintile of postcodes fell by 30%. During the same period it rose slightly for the most advantaged quintile.

This chapter has described the worrying decline of youth apprenticeship, despite the evidence of its value. These challenges are summarised below, alongside recommendations that address those challenges. These form the third step towards a world class apprenticeship system.

The recommendations that form step 3 have major implications for funding and incentives in the apprenticeship system. Because of this, the potential impact of the proposed reforms has been modelled in the [annex](#) to this report. The [annex](#) explores how youth apprenticeship, which currently represents around one-quarter of all apprenticeship starts, might be expanded and how this might be funded.

3.1 FUNDING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

Challenge: despite compelling evidence of need, youth apprenticeship plays a limited role. Those who complete youth apprenticeships have greater wage returns than older apprentices, signalling the large potential contribution of youth apprenticeship both to individuals and to the national economy. Several other countries reap the full benefits of youth apprenticeship. But in England, youth apprenticeship plays only a modest role in the skills system, with growth in apprenticeship dominated by higher level apprenticeships, often for existing workers.

Recommendation 3.1: improve the incentives for youth apprenticeship.

In common with many other countries with apprenticeship systems, and consistent with A-level and T-level funding, off-the-job training and assessments for youth apprentices should be fully funded. This funding could come from general taxation or through the levy, by top-slicing the funds collected. Automatic full funding should be limited to apprenticeships where the starting apprentice is under 25, has not been employed in the current job for more than three months and the apprenticeship is at Level 2 or 3. This currently represents around one-quarter of all apprenticeship starts, and less than one-quarter of apprenticeship funding (see the [annex](#) to this report).

In addition, and in line with practice in several other countries, employers should receive a payment each year for youth apprentices, plus a modest completion bonus. This would be an adaptation of the existing £1,000 incentive payment available to employers taking on an apprentice aged 16 to 18.²⁶⁹ The completion bonus should be modest so that it encourages completion but limits the risk that employers might only take apprentices that they see as certain to complete, which may negatively affect the equity with which apprentices are taken on. These payments might be set experimentally in the first instance and reviewed in the light of their impact.

²⁶⁹ Education and Skills Funding Agency (2020, updated 2022) *Guidance: payments for hiring a young apprentice*. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/incentive-payments-for-hiring-a-new-apprentice>

3.2 REFORMING THE LEVY

Challenge: the apprenticeship levy is distorting training expenditure.

Currently, incentives encourage education and training at levels 4-7 to be packaged as apprenticeships so they can be funded through the levy rather than incurring direct costs to employers and students. Some levy paying employers are therefore using apprenticeships when other forms of training would be more cost-effective. While higher level apprenticeships have many merits, employers and individuals should only opt for these programmes because of these merits, not because of artificial funding incentives.

Recommendation 3.2: with full funding of youth apprenticeships, the remaining levy funds should be used flexibly. All remaining levy funds should be used flexibly to fund different forms of training, including apprenticeship. The principle would be for the funds to be used for qualifications that are of general benefit to workforce skills and the economy, but not used for training which is employer specific. This would include apprenticeships but also other approved qualifications based on IfATE occupational standards. It would enable levy paying employers to use their levy pots, and non-levy paying employers to draw on levy funding (while contributing 5%) to pay for apprenticeships and other technical qualifications at levels 4-7 and apprenticeships at levels 2-3 for existing workers. Potential implications are modelled in the [annex](#) to this report.

Levy funding should also be extended to recognise prior learning. A serious gap in the English apprenticeship system is that, unlike many other apprenticeship systems, it fails to allow experienced workers access to an assessment giving them the same qualification as graduate apprentices. This presupposes a name for the apprenticeship qualification which does not mention apprenticeship, as proposed in recommendation 1.3.

3.3 IMPROVING ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIP

Challenge: poor access to apprenticeship for the most disadvantaged young people. The options for 16-year-olds with weak GCSE performance are currently limited. T-levels are demanding and it is hard for those with weak GCSEs to directly enter apprenticeship. With the cancellation of the traineeships programme, England lacks an access route into apprenticeship for those interested in a youth apprenticeship but who cannot immediately find one. Many other countries maintain substantial pre-apprenticeship systems that support either access to regular apprenticeship or specially modified forms of apprenticeship. At the same time, early evidence from the new T-level transition programme has shown that while relatively few participants progressed to T-levels, significant numbers entered apprenticeships.

Recommendation 3.3: broaden the T-level transition programme to prepare young people for both apprenticeships and T-levels. This makes a virtue of necessity because it reflects the progression pathways already followed by participants. It would also allow participants to make more informed decisions about Level 3 programmes based on their experience during the transition year. The reform would involve a change to the name and stated objective of the programme, but relatively little change to its content and so would be easy to implement.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A little more than a decade ago, the apprenticeship label was often attached to short programmes which included no or little training.²⁷⁰ Resolving that problem has been one of many achievements in the intervening period. But more must be done to establish an apprenticeship system to rival the best in the world, and to realise the full promise of apprenticeship. This report has argued that three further steps are needed.

- First, apprenticeship standards need to be developed and managed to ensure they are suitable to launch the careers of young people. This means broad occupational targets and inclusion of the wider and transferable skills, including not only numeracy and literacy but also the problem-solving, interpersonal and other skills that support career development and foster an agile workforce. It also requires a little common sense: apprenticeship qualifications are qualifications and they sorely need a name.
- Second, the apprenticeship offer needs both clarity and quality. To attract students, and to retain them once they start, all education and training programmes need to explain in advance what the student experience will involve. Similarly, an apprenticeship programme needs to be able to say with certainty what kind of training will be given on different topics and how it will be delivered. That means a national curriculum and firm requirements, to replace the unenforced and therefore vague minimum expectations for training.
- Third, employers need encouragement and support to offer youth apprenticeships. That means, at a minimum, automatic full funding for youth apprenticeship at Level 2 and 3, plus other incentives. This is no more than many other countries already offer and it is what used to happen in England half a century ago. Remaining levy funds could then be used flexibly to support both apprenticeship and other approved qualifications. The existing T-level transition programme should be refocused to allow for transitions to apprenticeship as well as T-levels.

The recommendations contain a mix of quick wins and longer term reforms

The quick wins include, for example, giving a name to apprenticeship qualifications, rolling out the existing IfATE voluntary guidance for training plans (curricula) as mandatory for new apprenticeship standards, and reframing the T-level transition programme to work also as a route to apprenticeship. These steps could be taken quickly. Other reforms, many of which are interlinked, would need more time.

These reforms would lead to a world class apprenticeship system

If implemented, these three steps would help establish an apprenticeship system offering a broad career foundation for young people. This could dramatically improve the lives of many young people, especially those who will not enter higher education, and it would turbocharge the economy through the development of a much better trained and flexible workforce. All the evidence from other countries and from the many excellent apprenticeships already available in England suggests that this is a feasible objective. These are great expectations for a world class apprenticeship system.

²⁷⁰ See BBC press release linked to Panorama programme. BBC News (2012) *One in 10 apprentices in England works at Morrison*. 2 April 2012. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17564255>

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: THREE STEPS TO A WORLD CLASS APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

STEP 1. ENSURING A CAREER FOUNDATION

- 1.1: *Ensure broader apprenticeship standards.* IfATE should broaden standards through trailblazer groups, revised criteria and the more effective use of the core and options framework.
- 1.2: *Strengthen the inclusion of transferable competences in standards.* Establish a common framework for numeracy, literacy and digital literacy across apprenticeships and T-levels. Ensure softer transferable competences are adequately represented in all standards, building on the Skills Builder Partnership approach. Review the criteria for end-point assessments to ensure that synoptic assessment is carried out.
- 1.3: *Establish a formal name for the apprenticeship qualification.* It should include the route, individual standard and level. It could have the route as the main title, for example, Work-based Learning Diploma in Health and Science, with the individual standard and level as the subtitle, Optical Assistant, Level 3.

STEP 2. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TRAINING AND CLARIFYING THE OFFER

- 2.1: *Simplify and enforce the off-the-job training requirement.* Off-the-job training should be genuinely off-the-job. It should exclude on-the-job training delivered by the employer, such as mentoring and shadowing. It should be genuine training which requires the active engagement of a trainer, thereby excluding homework and self-study.
- 2.2: *Support and develop on-the-job training.* Employers should be encouraged to deliver on-the-job training. They should be offered support, guidance and training for workplace mentors.
- 2.3: *Clarify the apprenticeship offer.* National curricula for apprenticeship should be established to clarify the expectations of potential apprentices and employers, explain competence requirements and improve coordination between employers and training providers. Minimum requirements for wages and training should be enforced.

STEP 3. REVIVING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

- 3.1: *Improve the incentives for youth apprenticeship.* Off-the-job training of youth apprentices should automatically be fully funded, either from public or levy funds. Such apprenticeships would be for those under 25, with less than three months in their current employment and in a Level 2 or 3 apprenticeship. Employers should receive an additional payment for such apprentices.
- 3.2: *With full funding of youth apprenticeship, the remaining levy funds should be used flexibly.* Remaining levy funds might be used to pay for training leading to qualifications of different types, including apprenticeship and other programmes. Direct access to an assessment leading to the same qualification as graduate apprentices should be offered to experienced workers.
- 3.3: *Broaden the T-level transition programme to prepare young people for both apprenticeships and T-levels.* Refocus the existing T-level transition programme to prepare for both apprenticeships and T-levels. This would fill the gap left by the cancellation of the traineeships programme.

ANNEX. IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED FUNDING REFORMS FOR COSTS AND APPRENTICESHIP NUMBERS

INTRODUCTION

This annex sets out a model and gives examples of possible impacts

This annex describes some scenarios showing how the reforms proposed in this report could potentially impact on the numbers of apprenticeships and the costs involved. A description of how the model was developed is given, then two possible scenarios are introduced, which include assumptions about the potential effects of these scenarios and the different outcomes that would result based on these assumptions. While these figures are approximations that gloss over the many factors that would cause variations in the costs of different types of apprenticeships, they give an indication of the orders of magnitude of the costs and numbers. The results should be treated with caution.

BASELINE MODEL

The baseline model includes data on apprenticeship starts and estimates of associated costs

The baseline model involves two elements: first, a description of baseline numbers of apprenticeship starts linked to estimates of the numbers of youth apprenticeships; second, estimates of the associated expenditures. The figures are closely based on actual data, but some elements have been estimated.

NUMBERS OF APPRENTICESHIP STARTS

DfE statistics on apprenticeship starts provide the starting point for the model

The model uses available data²⁷¹ on apprenticeship starts in 2022/23 disaggregated by level, age group, and whether or not the employer is a levy payer. The main figures are set out in [Table 3](#). Because a slightly different data set is involved, the total number of starts reported is about 10% higher than those in the main headline statistics.

Estimates are included for the proportion of starting apprentices that are existing workers

Since the proposals for reform outlined in this report suggest that fully funded youth apprenticeships should not be extended to existing workers, estimates have been made of the proportion of existing worker apprentices at different levels. These estimates are based on the figures reported by DfE (2022),²⁷² which show that 25% of starting apprentices under 19, and 45% of those aged 19 to 24 are existing workers. The estimates shown in [Table 3](#) are italicised.

271 Extracted from a data set "Monthly Apprenticeship Starts by Start month, Age, Level, Fwk-std flag, Levy". GOV.UK (accessed 2023) *Explore education statistics. Table tool: create your own tables.* <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2022-23?subjectId=91881fa4-f6a9-404a-12bf-08dba4ae74ef>

272 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

Table 3. Apprenticeship starts 2022/23 by age group, level and funding type

		Levy payers	Non-levy payers (SMEs)	All funding types
Under 19	Total under 19	33,450	40,020	73,470
	Level 2	10,900	19,960	30,860
	Of which existing workers	2,725	4,990	7,715
	Of which new recruits	8,175	14,970	23,145
	Level 3	17,000	19,060	36,060
	Of which existing workers	4,250	4,765	9,015
	Of which new recruits	12,750	14,295	27,045
	Levels 4-7	5,550	1,000	6,550
19-24	Total 19-24	62,210	30,940	93,150
	Level 2	12,440	7,670	20,110
	Of which existing workers	5,598	3,452	9,050
	Of which new recruits	6,842	4,219	11,061
	Level 3	26,420	17,860	44,280
	Of which existing workers	11,889	8,037	19,926
	Of which new recruits	14,531	9,823	24,354
	Levels 4-7	23,350	5,410	28,760
25+	Total 25+	117,970	31,790	149,760
	Level 2	15,400	5,040	20,440
	Level 3	43,650	13,710	57,360
	Levels 4-7	58,920	13,040	71,960
All youth apprenticeships (sum of the four shaded rows above)		42,300	43,300	85,600

Note: figures from the published data on apprenticeships and traineeships 2022/23. GOV.UK (September 2023 update) *Explore education statistics table tool: create your own tables*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2022-23?subjectId=91881fa4-f6a9-404a-12bf-08dba4ae74ef>. Figures extracted from a data set "Monthly Apprenticeship Starts by Start month, Age, Level, Fwk-std flag, Levy". The figures in italics are estimates of the starts of existing workers as opposed to new recruits, based on evidence that 25% of starts by those under 19, and 45% by those aged 19-24, are by existing workers.²⁷³ The figures in the shaded rows are estimates of youth apprenticeships, using the definition in the policy proposals in this report – under 25, levels 2 and 3, and new recruits. These estimates are expressed to the nearest full digit, unlike the raw available data that are rounded to the nearest full 10.

273 DfE (2022) *Apprenticeships evaluation 2021 – learners*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1080690/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2021_-_learners_research_report.pdf

Just over one-quarter of apprenticeship starts are youth apprenticeships

Table 3 provides an estimate, based on the figures for existing workers explained in the previous paragraph, of the number of youth apprenticeship starts that would be affected by the reform proposals in this report. This suggests there were around 85,000 youth apprenticeship starts in 2022/23 – just over one-quarter of all starts. More than half of these were under 19, and youth apprenticeship starts are roughly equally divided between levy and non-levy payers (here abbreviated to SMEs) (see also Figure 11).

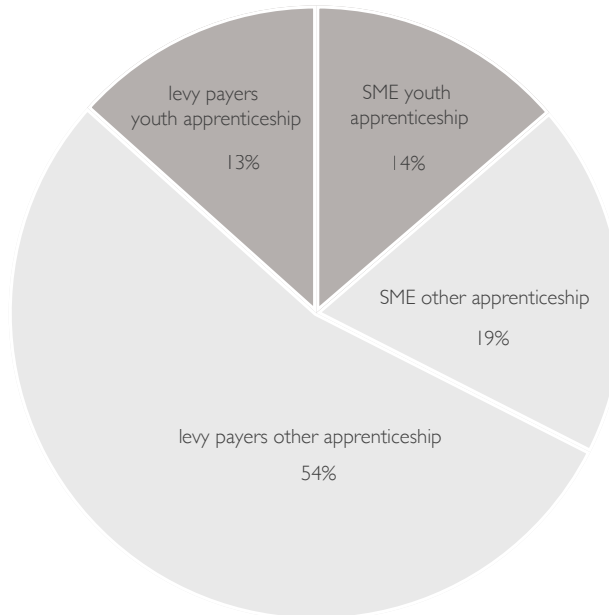


Figure 11. Percentage distribution of apprenticeship starts in 2022/23

This chart shows the percentage distribution of all apprenticeship starts in 2022/23 according to whether the employer is a levy payer or not (an SME), and whether or not the apprenticeships are youth apprenticeships. It is derived from the data in Table 3.

EXPENDITURES

Published figures for maximum costs of standards guide the cost estimates

There are no available published data on the unit cost to the apprenticeship budget of apprenticeship starts at different levels. However the maximum costs of individual apprenticeship standards are published²⁷⁴ and may be used as a guide. Analysis of these figures shows that the average maximum cost was £7,849 at Level 2, £12,292 at Level 3, and £16,241 at levels 4-7. While these figures are obviously very different from actual costs, it is plausible to assume that the average costs per start at different levels will have similar ratios, so that, for example, since £16,241 is just over twice as much as £7,849, we can assume that the average unit cost of a start at levels 4-7, will be just over twice as large as one at Level 2.

Expenditure is assumed to be linked to the academic year in which the starts take place

An additional simplifying assumption is that the sum of the unit costs of starts in any academic year corresponds to the expenditure out-turn in that same academic year. (In practice the costs associated with any start may spill over into other academic years, but the approach should provide a reasonable approximation).

²⁷⁴ Education and Skills Funding Agency (accessed September 2023) *Apprenticeship standard class codes – apprenticeship frameworks: funding bands*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-standard-class-codes>

These two assumptions provide an estimate of unit costs of starts by level

These two assumptions together allow an estimation of the average unit costs of apprenticeship starts at different levels. This calculation was performed using 2021/22 data, where out-turn figures are available,²⁷⁵ showing that expenditure on apprenticeships in that year was £2.42 billion. On this basis the unit costs of apprenticeship starts can be approximated at £4,800 at Level 2, £7,500 at Level 3, and £9,950 at levels 4-7. (Using these unit cost assumptions, and the number of starts at different levels in 2021/22, expenditure in 2021/22 would sum to the actual figure of £2.42 billion).

On this basis, the figures for starts in 2022/23 can be associated with expenditures

These cost estimates mean the data on starts in Table 3 can be associated with expenditure implications. This implies the total spend on apprenticeships in academic year 2022/23 may be estimated at just over £2.4 billion (similar to 2021/22). Spending on youth apprenticeships was just under one-quarter of all spending in that year. The model estimate, that slightly more than £1 billion was devoted to apprenticeships at levels 4-7, is consistent with an extrapolation of the observed trend in growth in expenditure at this level.

The outcome is a model that can be used to assess the impact of policy changes

The outcome of this exercise is a spreadsheet model of the numbers of apprenticeship starts and the associated costs, disaggregated by age group, level, and by whether or not levy funding is involved. This model then provides the basis for estimating the impact on numbers and costs of a policy change.

ESTIMATES OF NUMERICAL IMPACTS***Two linked reform proposals need to be quantified***

The two main reform proposals in this report are:

- Encouraging youth apprenticeship through automatic full funding and an additional financial incentive; this should increase the number of youth apprenticeships taken on by both non-levy smaller employers and by levy payers.
- This protection of youth apprenticeship means levy payers can use their levy pots to pay for other forms of qualification in addition to apprenticeship, leading to training funds being used in more cost-effective ways, even if it reduces the number of apprenticeships because they are less desirable to employers.

The full effects are not easy to predict, but the model allows the development of scenarios to illustrate the potential effects on apprenticeship numbers and costs. Two scenarios are set out below. In both scenarios it is also assumed that there would be an incentive for employers of £1,000 per youth apprenticeship start. (For simplicity the proposed completion bonus has not been factored into the estimation.)

In both scenarios the impacts of reform are highly uncertain

Before implementation, the impact of reform is highly uncertain. In the following two scenarios, a set of assumptions is made about the impacts. These assumptions are then used with the costing model to assess the potential impact of reforms. It should be emphasised that these assumptions are not based on direct evidence, but instead represent the possible impacts of reform designed to flesh out the two scenarios, and to illustrate some possible numerical impacts.

²⁷⁵ UK Parliament (2023) *Apprentices: finance. Question for the Department for Education. Tabled on 10 July 2023.* <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-07-10/193104>

SCENARIO 1. TOP-SLICING THE APPRENTICESHIP BUDGET TO SUPPORT YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

In this scenario youth apprenticeship, and the additional £1,000 incentive, are fully funded from the levy. Because levy funds would be top-sliced, levy payers would need to have their usable levy pot set at less than 100% of their contributions. In addition, as proposed in this report, levy paying employers would be free to use their levy pots to fund other forms of approved training, as well as apprenticeships.

The assumptions are that, as a result:

- Non-levy paying smaller employers would be encouraged to offer more youth apprenticeships because there would be a) full funding (rather than 95%) of the cost of the apprenticeship, and b) an added financial incentive of £1,000 per start. **As a result we assume SME youth apprenticeship starts rise by 40%.**
- Levy paying employers would be encouraged to offer more youth apprenticeships to benefit from the financial incentive and (unlike for other apprenticeships) they do not need to use their levy pots to fund these apprenticeships. **We assume such starts rise by 20%.**
- Levy paying employers would reduce the number of other (non-youth) apprenticeships that they offer; partly because they see opportunities to spend their levy pots more cost-effectively on other forms of training, and partly because their levy pots have been top-sliced. **We assume such starts fall by 15%.**
- Currently, according to the costing model, non-levy paying smaller employers support around 60,000 non-youth apprenticeship starts at a cost of around £450 million. About three-quarters of these starts are for those over the age of 25. For the purposes of this scenario **we assume these starts are not affected.**

Outcomes of scenario 1 in summary

The model provides a way to identify the implications for numbers and costs of the assumptions. The overall outcome would be a rebalancing of apprenticeships towards younger apprentices, for there to be more apprenticeships in SMEs and more lower level apprenticeships. Thus:

- Overall numbers of apprenticeship starts and expenditure against the levy would be little changed.
- There would be a shift towards apprenticeship for younger people. Apprenticeship starts for those under 19 would increase by nearly 20%, while falling by just over 10% for those over 24.
- Apprenticeship starts in (non-levy paying) SMEs would increase by over 15%, while falling by around 8% in levy payers.
- Starts at Level 2 would increase by around 10%, while falling by just over 10% for apprenticeships at levels 4-7.

SCENARIO 2. SUPPORTING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP THROUGH A SEPARATE BUDGET OUTSIDE THE LEVY

Youth apprenticeship would be supported from a separate budget supported through general taxation. As in scenario 1, levy paying employers would be free to use their levy pots to fund other forms of approved training, as well as apprenticeships.

The assumptions are that, as a result:

- As in scenario 1, non-levy paying smaller employers would be incentivised to offer youth apprenticeships. **We assume such starts rise by 40%.**
- As in scenario 1, levy paying employers would also be incentivised to offer more youth apprenticeships. **We assume such starts rise by 20%.**
- Unlike scenario 1, levy paying employers would no longer have to fund youth apprenticeships from their levy pots, freeing up just over £250 million to spend on other forms of training. **We assume that starts of other forms of apprenticeship remain constant.**
- As in scenario 1, the assumption is that starts of non-youth apprenticeships in non-levy payers are not affected.

Outcomes of scenario 2 in summary

As in scenario 1, the overall outcome would be a rebalancing of apprenticeship towards younger apprentices and lower level apprenticeships. However, because of the additional funding, this would happen primarily through additional youth apprenticeships, but with no reduction in other forms of apprenticeship.

- Total apprenticeship starts overall would rise by around 8%.
- Total expenditure on apprenticeships would increase by just under 10%, but expenditure set against the levy (excluding youth apprenticeship) would fall by around £500 million, freeing up this amount to be spent on alternative forms of training.
- Apprenticeship starts for those under 19 would increase by nearly 30%, and by nearly 20% for those aged 19-24.
- Apprenticeship starts in SMEs would increase by over 15%, and by around 4% in levy payers.
- Starts at Level 2 would increase by around 15% while remaining stable for apprenticeships at levels 4-7.

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