

Appendix B: National Foundation for Educational Research Report

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National Apprenticeship Current Position

Significant reforms to the apprenticeship system in the last decade have contributed to a substantial decline in the number of intermediate and advanced apprenticeship starts in recent years, which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. While there has been some recovery during the latest academic year, it is not clear to what extent this recovery will be sustained.

Recent **research** notes the disproportionate impact these reforms had on disadvantaged young people as well as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), who play a crucial role in supporting young people to access apprenticeship opportunities). There are several barriers to attracting and retaining young people to intermediate and advanced apprenticeships.

- The minimum apprenticeship wage must be reviewed and the 16-19 bursary fund extended to cover travel costs for apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our interviews with SMEs highlighted that the minimum apprenticeship wage may be insufficient for some young people to survive on. High travel costs can exacerbate the impact of this low wage, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and for those who may not have more specialised opportunities available locally. This barrier will only be intensified by the current cost of living crisis.
- Timely and engaging information provision on intermediate and advanced apprenticeship opportunities to young people, parents, carers and teaching staff must be improved. Our interviews with SMEs highlighted that they are concerned that there is low awareness of apprenticeships among young people which may be a significant barrier to recruitment. Moreover, there are concerns that the longer-term financial and progression benefits of an initially lower-paid apprenticeship are not well understood by young people and so they may be more attracted to initially higher paid but low skilled jobs.
- The SMEs reported that young people applying for intermediate and advanced apprenticeship opportunities often do not have the skills (such as teamwork, good time keeping, flexibility, working accurately and being trustworthy) and work experience which they are looking for. This means that there is a need for employers to invest substantial resource in their development which can particularly impact on the day-to-day running of SMEs. More focus should be given to incentivising employers to offer work experience to young people to aid their transition into employment and ensure they are better able to meet employer requirements.

Employer Response to Apprenticeship Training

It is reported that many employers are disillusioned with Apprenticeships following the reforms, with many citing them as being too complex with levy and non-levy technicalities to understand, the gaps and delays in 'end point assessment' EPAs and that apprenticeships involve too much bureaucracy. Employers also sight the following as drawbacks of apprenticeships:

- **Time-consuming.** Apprentices will need an experienced mentor, which decreases the productivity of that individual. It will take time for the apprentice to master the skills, and this requires consistent feedback. This has been exacerbated following the pandemic, with so many organisations citing many vacancies and not enough staff.
- **Commitment.** Generally, apprentices last at least one year. However, some apprenticeships can last up to four years. Companies cannot always afford the time, personnel, and effort to see the commitment through.

At the recent LSIP round table working event on the 17th March 2023 for Coventry, Warwickshire and the Black Country, a number of employers stated that Apprenticeships were 'too big an ask' of employers and that they were deemed to be too long, too intense, and that employers haven't got the time to support an apprentice. Employers were asking for short sharp modular qualifications for their workforce.