Apprenticeships and Covid-19

The current Covid-19 pandemic means big changes for the way we work and apprentices are feeling the impact of these changes too. For some apprentices this means a break in access to training, moving to a full-time job or even redundancy in some extreme cases. Many will also be asked to work from home and will be doing their learning from home.

This guidance will help branches address some of the issues that are likely to come up over the coming months regarding apprenticeships. It is important that UNISON reps are aware of any issues so that they can support apprentices and raise any concerns with the employer.

As a starting point it is useful to remember that apprentices have a contract of employment so most of the guidance directed to all staff in your workplace applies.

Apprenticeship starts dropped significantly in the first weeks of lockdown, new data from the Department for Education (DfE) has shown. According to the figures published:

* There were 13,020 apprenticeship starts reported between 23 March and 30 April 2020 – almost exactly half the 26,330 reported for this period at this point last year and latest reported to date starts for 2019-20 were down on the same point in the previous year The DfE stressed final data would not become available until later in the year.
* Learners aged 25 and over make up nearly two-thirds (66 per cent) of starts, compared to 55.8 per cent in the previous year, while intermediate apprenticeships accounted for 22.7 per cent of starts, compared to this was 36.8 per cent in 2018-19.
* Higher apprenticeships accounted for 33.8 per cent, nearly double the proportion reported in 2018-19.

Apprenticeship policy is subject to national variations and as such there may be some variations to response

Guidance for Wales

<https://gov.wales/work-based-learning-and-apprenticeships-coronavirus>

Guidance for Scotland

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Guidance for Northern Ireland

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-apprentices>

There are resources available from unionlearn, the TUC’s learning and skills organisation, that deal specifically with issues around apprenticeships arising from the response to Covid-19

Most relevant to the current situation is the document ‘supporting apprenticeships during coronavirus pandemic available via unionlearn’s website here

[Supporting apprenticeships during coronavirus pandemic – briefing for union reps](https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-04/Apprenticeships%20during%20coronavirus%20pandemic%20briefing%20for%20reps%20Updated.pdf)

The briefing covers:

* breaks in apprenticeships
* end point assessments
* English and Maths
* employment issues including pay, furlough and redundancy
* working and learning from home

It contains a list of handy action points plus a guidance table.

For apprentices themselves there is a separate guidance page, How will Covid-19 affect my apprenticeship? <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/how-will-covid-19-affect-my-apprenticeship>

Other Resources

Covid-19 Pandemic Return to Work Legal Advice for Branches

UNISON has produced general legal guidance for branches on issues relating to members’ return to work. Members will face different situations so it is not possible to provide a one-size-fits-all or conclusive legal guidance or advice.  But this guidance should be of assistance to you representing members, and it points the way for further investigations of any concerns in order to get appropriate legal advice on individual circumstances where required.  This guidance is applicable to a variety of situations where members have concerns about their safety at work. It covers relevant legislation, whistle blowing, collective action and government advice.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/06/Covd-19-Pandemic-Generic-Legal-advice-to-branches-re-return-to-work-Health-and-Safety-concerns.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Local%20Government%20Updates%20-%209%20June%202020&utm_source=Local%20Government&utm_content=Read%20the%20guidance%20here>

Covid-19 related equality resources

UNISON’s online bargaining page has a special section on C19 guidance.  The guides all include equality issues.  The section can be found here - <https://www.unison.org.uk/get-involved/in-your-workplace/key-documents-tools-activists/bargaining-guides/>

UNISON offers regions and branches a range of online materials to help to engage around apprenticeships, including:

* Apprenticeship toolkit
* An Introduction to Apprenticeships e-note

Apprenticeship toolkit

This comprehensive guide is available on the UNISON website at <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2018/08/TUC-Apprenticeships-pack-sheets-2018-Low_res-Unison-version.pdf>

An introduction to apprenticeships enote

This e-note explores the obligations on the employer, the rights of the apprentice, and the opportunities for UNISON. It takes about 20 minutes to complete. Access via the learning pages on the Organising Space as follows:

1. Login – Firstly you’ll need to have registered with My UNISON <https://my.unison.org.uk>

2. You will then need to log in to the Organising Space <https://organisingspace.unison.org.uk/OS/>

3. Resources – This section of the Organising Space is where you can view different types of resources

a. Scroll down to the Learning and Development tile. Once you have clicked on this you will be taken to a menu with three options and a ‘plus’ sign next to each

b. Click on the plus sign next to ‘training’. You will see a tile with the title ‘e-learning.UNISON online modules’. Click on this. You will find the enote in this section

Apprenticeship Essentials App

Unionlearn has created an ‘Apprenticeship Essentials’ app which includes key information about apprenticeships, details about choosing the right apprenticeship and information about joining a trade union.   
Apprenticeship Essentials is unionlearn’s all-in-one resource, featuring guidance, interactive tools, bite-sized learning, a pay checker, job search and more. If you are an apprentice, or considering an apprenticeship, Apprenticeship Essentials is made for you.  
  
For more information and to download the app visit: [www.unionlearn.org.uk](https://unionlearn.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=ebd004a8047907dc47d269fd1&id=efc92eed6d&e=02e0e9f1da)

UNISON apprenticeship Charter

UNISON’s apprenticeship charter provides a tool to ensure apprenticeships deliver positive outcomes for both apprentices and employers. You can view and download a copy from the UNISON website here

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/05/25596.pdf>

We need your help

We are keen to hear from you about what’s happening with apprentices within your branch/region. If you have any views you want to share with us, things that are happening locally you think we should know about, or issues you think we should be dealing with nationally – please let us know.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/about/contact/>

For apprentices in health you can also contact:

[health@unison.co.uk](mailto:health@unison.co.uk)

For apprentices in local government contact:

[localgovernment@unison.co.uk](mailto:localgovernment@unison.co.uk)

For apprentices in education contact:

[education@unison.co.uk](mailto:education@unison.co.uk)