

NATIONAL
APPRENTICESHIP
WEEK 2022

BUILD THE FUTURE

#NAW2022



I  APPRENTICESHIPS

I ♥ APPRENTICESHIPS CONTENTS

PAGE 3:

Introduction

PAGE 4:

SUZANNE SLATER

Apprenticeships are the answer to the skills shortage and 'The Great Resignation'

PAGE 5:

MICHELLE DONELAN

Minister Q&A

PAGE 6:

TOBY PERKINS

We are failing a generation on skills education

PAGES 7-8:

Highlights from the week

PAGE 9-10:

What the data shows...

PAGE 12:

JANE HICKIE

Apprenticeships are a proven success- but why are so many SMEs still struggling to engage?

PAGE 13:

Apprentice feedback tool set for launch 'later this year'

PAGE 14:

ANNABEL MAY

Apprenticeships are in the spotlight. But you know what isn't? Apprentice pensions.

PAGE 15:

HOLLY GOODING

A degree apprenticeship was the best possible option for me

PAGE 16:

JASMINE KING

Finding a community of apprentices helped me through the hardship of the pandemic

PAGE 17:

A way into work for young people with learning disabilities

PAGE 19:

PAUL KESSELL-HOLLAND

Three cheers for apprenticeships trainers

PAGE 20:

JENNIFER COUPLAND

The Institute is ready to make apprenticeships even greater

PAGE 21:

Degree apprenticeships:
Demand vs supply

PAGE 22:

DAVID SIMS

It's time to address the apprenticeships mismatch for young people

PAGE 23:

DAVID MARSH

Strengthening apprenticeships to help 'build the future'

PAGE 24:

PETER COX

Unlocking the potential of prisoner apprenticeships: The 3 key challenges

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK
FEBRUARY 7-13, 2022

FE WEEK

EDITOR:

Shane Chowen

DEPUTY EDITOR:

Billy Camden

COMMISSIONING EDITORS:

Jess Staufenberg

JL Dutaut

SENIOR REPORTER:

Will Nott

HEAD DESIGNER:

Nicky Phillips

SENIOR DESIGNER:

Simon Kay

OPERATIONS AND FINANCE MANAGER:

Victoria Boyle

SALES MANAGER:

Bridget Stockdale

SENIOR SALES EXECUTIVE:

Clare Halliday

EVENT MANAGER:

Frances Ogefere Dell

SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR:

Evie Hayes

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR – APPRENTICE:

Zoe Tuffin

PHOTOGRAPHY:

Ellis O'Brien

iStock

MANAGING DIRECTOR:

Shane Mann

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert contact:

E: advertising@feweek.co.uk

T: 020 81234 778

In-depth, investigative journalism, determined to get past the bluster & explain the facts for the FE & skills sector

**Subscribe to
FE Week today**

[Feweek.co.uk/subscribe](https://feweek.co.uk/subscribe)



Apprenticeships are back with a bang

SHANE CHOWEN
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Welcome to FE Week's special supplement marking 2022's National Apprenticeship Week. We're proud to be able to bring together voices from the range of players working together to make apprenticeships a success; from the politicians and policymakers to the apprentices themselves.

This year's focus is unsurprisingly on emerging from the pandemic and understanding the new world of work, but you'll see too that some familiar challenges have resurfaced as we adjust to life after the Covid crisis.

Pleasingly, there are some strong signs of recovery in apprenticeships starts based on the most recent government data. This is of course good news, but it would be easy for policymakers to get carried away here. The number of starts is, after all, just one measure and apprenticeships find themselves in a fairly unique place in the

education system where the number of people starting a programme is given much higher prominence relative to the number of people completing successfully. Why is that?

Measuring apprenticeship completions and outcomes correctly comes up throughout this supplement and is clearly an issue the sector is keen to see addressed this year. Funding too is never far from the discussion. FE Week's deputy editor Billy Camden challenges the further education minister on both of these issues in an exclusive interview on page 5.

How much do you know about apprentices' pensions? In an illuminating piece on page 14, Annabel May from the National Society of Apprentices uncovers an area rarely discussed. We also feature Holly and Jasmine, both from the Association of Apprentices, who write powerfully about their experience as degree apprentices and the difference that finding a community of apprentices has made to them.

Growth in higher level and degree apprenticeships is perhaps one of the most

stand-out developments in apprenticeship policy in recent years. FE Week's senior reporter, Will Nott, talks to the UCAS chief executive about how to meet ever-rising demand for degree apprenticeship places on page 21.

Meeting demand, growing starts, improving outcomes – none of that can happen without the people teaching, training and assessing apprentices day in day out. The Education and Training Foundation's Paul Kessell-Holland gets underneath the changing roles of the front-line assessors and trainers on page 19.

Looking ahead, what do we want to be able to say about apprenticeships for next year's National Apprenticeships Week? This year we'll see the first flexi-job apprenticeships where apprentices will work with multiple employers over the course of their programme. Will we see even more flexibilities funding policy to remove barriers for small businesses? One thing is for sure – as this supplement proves – the sector isn't short on ideas and innovations to keep making apprenticeships even greater.



THE FE WEEK PODCAST IS BACK! ...||| EPISODE 1: |||... THE GREAT PAY DIVIDE

Are FE staff struggling to make ends meet?

How can staff push for pay parity?

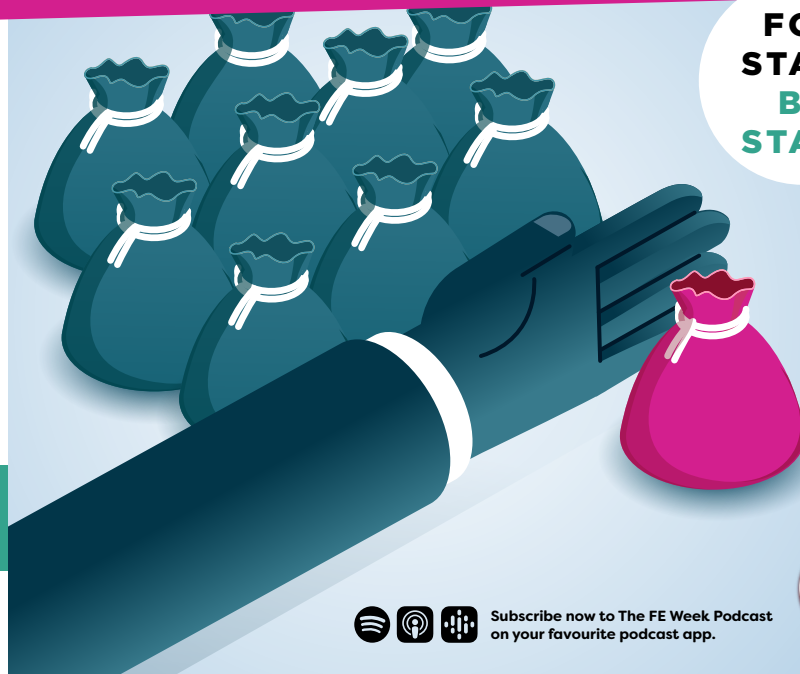
Tune in to the first episode of our brand new 6-part podcast series, with investigative journalist Jess Staufenberg. Join Jess as she chats to classroom lecturers and practitioners on the front line as they spill the beans and shine a light on the big FE issues that affect them...



On all platforms
February 21, 2022

feweek.co.uk/podcast

**FOR
STAFF
BY
STAFF**



Provided by



Subscribe now to The FE Week Podcast
on your favourite podcast app.

Apprenticeships are the answer to the skills shortage and 'The Great Resignation'

SUZANNE SLATER,
NCFE'S DIRECTOR
OF OPERATIONS FOR
APPRENTICESHIPS



There's lots to shout about during National Apprenticeship Week. The latest government figures show apprenticeships are standing strong as the economy continues to recover post-Covid.

Apprenticeship starts are up over 40%, incentive payments for employers hiring apprentices rose to around 40,000 – over four times more than the year before – and apprenticeship redundancies have dropped from 220 to 10 for January this year.

Even with success rates dropping by nearly 13%, overall the picture for apprenticeships is a bright one for the year ahead – despite a gloomy economic forecast elsewhere.

We're living through a time of unprecedented change in our labour market. A four-day working week is currently being trialled, while working from home and hybrid working have all been positive by-products of the pandemic. But our economy post-Covid has been hit hard by skills shortages and the so-called Great Resignation. Apprenticeships could be the answer to both of these critical predicaments, in fact, there may never have been a better time to be an apprentice or take one on.

Skills shortage

The national skills shortage has made



headline news. From the HGV driver crisis to recent DCMS figures showing that the UK is grappling with a gaping digital skills hole, there has never been a better time to become an apprentice. At NCFE, we develop smarter solutions through education that respond to skills shortages and empower our learners. Work is currently underway to develop a digitally focused apprenticeship offering, and we already specialise in Business, Care and Education, and Health apprenticeships – all key areas crying out for a skills injection.

The Great Resignation

As if a pandemic and a skills shortage weren't enough, we're also in the midst of a Great Resignation. Coined in the US after record numbers of people began leaving their jobs, the trend has been felt across the globe and most recently in the UK. Businesses across the country have been hit by rising numbers of staff leaving their jobs. As the new year tends to bring about a renewed purpose and job-focus for many, employers are bracing themselves for staff shortages in 2022. Apprenticeships could prove to be the answer for both employers and for those looking for a career change.

Apprenticeships help employers develop skilled employees where they need them most in their workforce, adding value, productivity and output. Whether it is to

address a skills gap or a labour shortage, apprenticeships are a tried and tested solution.

For those with itchy feet looking for a new challenge, whatever their age or starting point; an apprenticeship could be the perfect fit. Our apprenticeships provide access to some careers that many would only think accessible via a degree, in areas where there is a growing workforce need and exciting opportunities for career progression. They range from Accountancy and Finance, Health and Social Care, Teaching, Leadership and Management to Digital. Not to mention our new Teaching apprenticeships we've recently launched with Tes that provide an innovative route into teaching and upskill Teaching Assistants.

At NCFE, we're proud to provide end-to-end apprenticeships so we'll be with our learners and providers from the beginning to the end of their journey. We develop apprenticeships in areas where there is a growing workforce need and exciting opportunities for career progression. Long-term investment in skills is the only way to get our workforce back on track and apprenticeships will play a key role in levelling up and reskilling our economy. For more information on our world-class apprenticeship offer, visit <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/apprenticeships/>

Minister Q&A with **Michelle Donelan**

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

FE Week sat down with joint HE and FE minister Michelle Donelan to discuss apprenticeship starts, spending transparency, drop out rates and future reform.

Q: How are you celebrating National Apprenticeship Week this week?

A: We're all as ministerial teams doing lots of different visits. I'm out and about in the country on Thursday and Friday. I'm also speaking to different media outlets to really promote National Apprenticeship Week and shine a spotlight on it. But of course, here at the Department of Education, we try to do that week in week out, given the importance that we as a government place on apprenticeships and the real value they can have in terms of catapulting somebody's career and opportunities. They're central to our levelling up agenda.

Q: Apprenticeship starts appear to be recovering to pre-pandemic levels. How much do you put this down to the £3,000 employer cash incentives that ended in January?

A: So first of all, I completely agree with you in terms of the promising stats – up 43 per cent this first quarter based on where they were this time last year, which is amazing, especially given the challenges that everybody's faced with the pandemic. I think the incentives definitely helped, absolutely, given what employers were facing with the pandemic, the uncertainty. But that was a pandemic measure. And so that wasn't ever pegged as a long-term initiative. And there were other reasons why apprenticeships are going up, I would argue as well, that we're continuing to sell the brand of apprenticeships and then the value of them both to employers, but also to young people and people that want to rescale or upskill.

Q: Sector leaders and commentators often say that apprenticeship spending is shrouded in secrecy. Are there any plans to publish more transparent spending data?

A: I think that the key stats that really matter are how many apprentices we have and how many employers



Michelle Donelan

we have got engaged. They are the key stats that really matter because this is about ensuring that apprenticeships can open up those opportunities for so many people. If we look at degree apprenticeships, for instance, we've now got over 90 universities providing degree apprenticeships and we're altering the access and participation plans to make sure that we're pushing and promoting the use of degree apprenticeships in universities and there's much more that we can do in so many of these different areas.

Q: So to confirm, there are no plans to publish more transparent data on apprenticeship spending?

A: No.

Q: There have been previous warnings from the National Audit Office and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education that the apprenticeship budget could go bust. Is there still a danger of the budget being overspent in future years?

A: This notion that the apprenticeship budget is going to go bust is not true at all. What we are doing as a government is focusing on driving up the number of apprenticeships, because we believe in them and that that them as a vehicle. So I wouldn't want anybody to be put off taking an apprenticeship because of this notion.

Q: The DfE's then permanent secretary, Jonathan Slater, told the Public Accounts Committee in 2019 that the budget could soon be overspent. You say the budget is now not at risk of going bust, what has happened since then?

A: He didn't explicitly say go bust. The word bust implies the whole thing is going to collapse, which it is certainly not in danger of doing so. What I'm saying is that we're a government that primary focus is on driving up apprenticeships at all levels, including degree apprenticeships, and I'm working with universities to ensure that becomes a reality year on year. We've seen that in the last two years. And that we continue to focus on working with employers, because at the end of the day, these are apprenticeship standards, co-written by employers fit for purpose of a real high quality, and that is our primary mission here.

Q: The former minister skills minister, Gillian Keegan, launched an investigation last year into the "astonishingly" high apprenticeship drop out rate. Is this still a concern in the DfE?

A: It's something that we are actively tackling. IfATE, for instance, are working on how we how they can align end-point assessments with professional qualifications, so that there isn't that incentive to leave before you've formally finished your apprenticeship. Also, the other work that we're doing is around supporting apprentices to make sure that they've got all the information so they pick the right apprenticeship for them in the first place. So really, wraparound support for apprentices, also supporting employers.

There are a variety of reasons as to why somebody will drop out, it could be because they already have their professional qualification, but they haven't yet completed their end-point assessment, it could be that they were offered employment. We did obviously see an impact with the pandemic as well. So there's no one reason we have found that that individuals would choose to drop out.

Q: What are the government's next steps for reform?

A: We have introduced a number of flexibilities, such as the front loaded apprenticeships, flexi-job apprenticeships, which work for certain sectors, especially digital and creative. And we do want our apprenticeship system to be fit for purpose to work with employers and their needs. And we'll continue to listen to employees but there are no current plans for reform.

Toby Perkins

Shadow skills minister



We are failing a generation on skills education

As someone who worked in the recruitment industry for 8 years prior to entering Parliament, I am acutely aware that there has never been a time when employers felt that their appetite for skilled, work-ready applicants was being satisfied.

As we celebrate National Apprenticeship Week, it is clear that these pressures are growing, stunting our economy's growth, affecting our international competitiveness and failing a generation of young learners and workers.

The government consistently speak of the importance of a skilled workforce, but they are operating in ways that undermine that aim. New initiatives often contradict existing ones, don't deliver what's promised and create confusion among learners and providers.

Nothing illustrates these failings more than the Apprenticeship Levy, introduced in 2017. This levy on larger employers accompanied the scrapping of central government funding for apprenticeships. The levy has led to a massive reduction in the number of entry-level apprenticeship opportunities for young people and a reduction in the number of SMEs employing apprentices.

Government data shows the total number of apprenticeships fell by almost a quarter from 2011 – 2019, with nearly 130,000 opportunities lost even before COVID hit. Since then, this has only worsened with opportunities for

16-18 year olds falling by a third.

The government's re-introduction of the so-called 'lifetime skills guarantee', which they abolished in 2013, shuts out the vast majority of adults who need to re-train, and excludes 9 million jobs in sectors not covered by the 'guarantee'.

Facing widespread criticism, the government has now sought to outsource responsibility for the strategic direction of local skills policy to chambers of commerce with FE colleges and metro mayors relegated to an advisory role.

We have also seen damaging developments like the move to clawback adult education funding from colleges that

delivered fewer courses during COVID. Colleges like Derby College saw £1.8 million clawed back, leading to dozens of redundancies.

At Labour Conference last autumn, Keir Starmer set out Labour's commitment to tackle these failures, ensuring that every young person leaves education ready for work and ready for life, equipped with the skills they and our economy need to prosper.

By removing tax breaks from private schools, Labour would fund access to a specialist careers advisor for every school alongside reintroducing two-weeks compulsory work experience, supporting young people to make informed decisions about future study and career options.

Labour is also calling for unspent Apprenticeship levy funds to be used to create a wage subsidy, delivering 100,000 new apprenticeship opportunities for 16 – 24 year olds this year, supporting our ambition to deliver more level two and three apprenticeships giving young people a foot on the ladder.

This comes alongside Labour's commitment to focus on re-engaging young people who are NEET. Working with local authorities and Metro Mayors across the country, Labour would provide targeted funding for local programmes such as Talent Match, that deliver tailored support young people not in education or employment, recapturing and igniting their interest in learning.

Contrary to their rhetoric, the Conservatives have failed to make skills or FE a priority. Core FE funding has faced bigger cuts than almost any arm of government. Successive Conservative-led governments have slashed FE budgets by a third and adult education by 50% in real-terms.

As a result, Britain now has the lowest levels of participation in adult and workplace education in 30 years, with employers unable to get the skilled workforce they need to secure our economy post-pandemic.

Labour's plans would deliver the skills that businesses across England need to prosper as we look to the challenges of the future. Instead, the Tories are wasting individual talents and failing to deliver a secure economy. Working with businesses, Labour would see our economy firing on all cylinders, in every part of the country and every sector of the economy.



Angela Rayner, Toby Perkins and Keir Starmer during NAW2022

Highlights from **the week**

Ministers hit the road for NAW 2022

Ministers travelled across the country to show their support for national apprenticeship week, visiting a film studio, a university and apprenticeship firms.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi met with apprentices at Pinewood Studios and commended the studios for how they have been bringing young people into work.

"It's national apprenticeship week. I'm at Pinewood Studios. They are making sure that they participate in what is truly transformational and this is building the human capacity, the people, the apprentices,

the kick-starters that I've met today," Zahawi said.

"Truly inspirational. Why? Because they know the value of bringing young people into the industry and growing it to where it is today."

Skills minister Alex Burghart visited apprentice engineers at training provider South West Durham Training and apprentices at Learning Curve Group.

He also visited apprentices at Multiverse, the London-based apprenticeship firm started by Euan Blair.



Alex Burghart with apprentices at Multiverse



Nadhim Zahawi at Pinewood studios

"Thank you Multiverse for introducing me to some [of] the fantastic apprentices you are working with - great energy, a lot of ambition and slick thinking," he said.

Michelle Donelan, joint FE and HE minister, travelled to Nottingham Trent University to speak to a group of degree apprentices.

"I've had some amazing conversations with students, including degree apprenticeships, for national apprenticeship week next week," she said.

She added in a tweet that "high-quality skills are critical to levelling up every part of our country".

Principal takes on MP in tyre changing challenge

The principal of Furness College went head-to-head with local MP in a tyre changing competition to mark National Apprenticeship Week.

Professor Andrew Wren took on Simon Fell MP for Barrow and Furness in the against the clock challenge at the college's motor vehicle workshop.

The professor came out on top, with a time of 1 minute 53 seconds, while the MP managed a time of 2 minutes 11 seconds. Neither came close to the time achieved by specialist motor vehicle lecturer Darren Fine (52 seconds).

"It was great to do this as it highlights how different and complex apprenticeships are," said Fell.

"Apprenticeships offer an alternate route



In blue are... Professor Andrew Wren (left) and Simon Fell MP for Barrow and Furness (right)

into employment because you are able to earn while you learn.

"Apprentices are for people of all ages and I would encourage anyone who is interested in a new career to explore apprenticeships and pop to Furness College and see what they can offer you."

Wren said the college wanted to do something to mark National Apprenticeship Week to show the range of apprenticeships offered by the college, which trains 700 apprentices each year across more than 20 industry sectors.

Highlights from the week

Apprenticeship staff tour the Midlands in yellow bus

A big yellow bus filled with a college's apprenticeship team visited five counties across the Midlands to help young people find a programme to springboard their future career.

Students from schools in the West Midlands, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Worcestershire and Northamptonshire were visited by the apprenticeships team at WCG (formerly Warwickshire College Group) in an American-style yellow school bus.

Three schools were visited each day.

The bus featured a range of activities for pupils at the schools to interact with apprenticeships being showcased ranging from construction and engineering to arboriculture and motor vehicles.

Students got the chance to create their own catapult from lollypop sticks and spoons under the watchful eye of engineering tutors from the college.

There was also a collection of engines from motor vehicles for prospective apprentices to inspect and power tools on show for construction use.

Staff also put on an arboriculture taster session, using chainsaws with chains removed.

Mark Whittaker, from WCG, said:

"For the last two years we haven't been able to get out to schools during National Apprenticeship Week, and it's important that young people are aware of the opportunities available to them through apprenticeships.

"We hope the WCG yellow bus turned some heads."

He added: "The last year has seen government

place a major emphasis on skills and in particular how post-16 education can help to ease pressures on the labour market. Apprenticeships are a vital component in doing that and we hope our apprenticeships roadshow will open more eyes to the benefits of taking the apprenticeship route."



Awarding body chief swaps jobs with apprentice

The chief executive of NCFE swapped jobs with one of his apprentices for a week.

David Gallagher made the swap with John-Joe Tams, an accreditation apprentice at the education charity and leader in vocational qualifications.

The week started at NCFE's head office, where the job-swappers met and discussed the reality behind their roles and career journeys.

The NCFE leader spent his week answering customer service calls, dealing with queries and taking minutes in team meetings.

Meanwhile, Tams took control of the charity – albeit with the close support of Gallagher and his top team.

The apprentice worked with NCFE's executive team and co-chaired a meeting on the Future of Work with one of the organisation's operation's directors.

"I have been really looking forward to this



David Gallagher & John-Joe Tams

year's National Apprenticeship Week. It's been great to get to know our fantastic apprentices and the important work they do," said Gallagher.

"It [has] felt like a reverse mentoring experience and I think I actually learnt more from John-Joe than the other way round!"

Gallagher added that National Apprenticeship week is an excellent way

to shine a spotlight on the vital role apprentices play in businesses and the economy.

"This week has been a great experience! I feel as though I've learned so much and I've already grown in confidence. I'm also getting a really interesting insight into what a CEO actually does," Tams said.

What the **data** shows...

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Apprenticeship starts are recovering to pre-Covid levels, according to Department for Education data for quarter one of the 2021/22 academic year. Here's what the latest data tells us...

1 3% UP OVERALL

Figures show there were 130,200 starts recorded from August to October 2021, compared to 91,100 reported for the same period in 2020 – a 43 per cent jump.

The starts recorded for the first quarter of 2021/22 are also 3 per cent up on the 125,800 reported for same period in 2019 before the pandemic struck.

Q1 APPRENTICESHIPS STARTS, REPORTED TO DATE

2021/22	130,200
2020/21	91,100
2019/20	125,800
2018/19	132,000

2 UNDER 19 STARTS ALSO RECOVER

The proportion of apprenticeship starts in the under 19 age group have recovered following the drop seen in the first quarter of last year. The percentage now stands at 31 per cent, compared to 26 per cent in 2020 and 32

per cent in 2019.

The number of starts from learners aged 25 and over has increased again – from 41,500 to 49,800, but the proportion for this age group has dropped from 46 per cent in 2020 to 38 per cent in 2021.



3 BAME PROPORTION RISING

The proportion of starts by black, Asian and minority ethnic people has risen again.

This group accounts for 10.5 per cent in 2018/19 quarter one, but now account for 13.5 per cent.

Q1 BAME APPRENTICESHIPS STARTS (% DOES NOT INCLUDE UNKNOWN), REPORTED TO DATE

2021/22	17,200	13.5%
2020/21	11,700	13.4%
2019/20	14,200	11.6%
2018/19	13,400	10.5%



4 ITPS STILL DOMINATE THE MARKET

Out of 130,200 apprenticeship starts in the first quarter of the 2021/22 academic year, independent training providers were responsible for 57 per cent (74,300).

General FE colleges meanwhile accounted for 26 per cent (33,700).

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi issued a call to arms to college leaders

to deliver more apprenticeships during an address to the Association of Colleges conference in November. He said: "Currently around 30 per cent of apprenticeships are carried out in colleges, but if we really want to transform supply we will have to grow that number."

5 POSITIVE PREDICTION FOR FULL 2021/22 YEAR

Year-end starts for 2018/19 sat at 393,000, and dropped to 323,000 the following year and then to 321,000 in 2020/21.

But the DfE forecasts there will be 374,000 starts by the end of 2021/22. This would be a 17 per cent jump in the previous year, and just 5 per cent off the year the before the pandemic.

TOTAL APPRENTICESHIPS STARTS (ACADEMIC YEAR)

2021/22 forecast	374,000
2020/21 reported	321,000
2019/20 reported	323,000
2018/19 reported	393,000



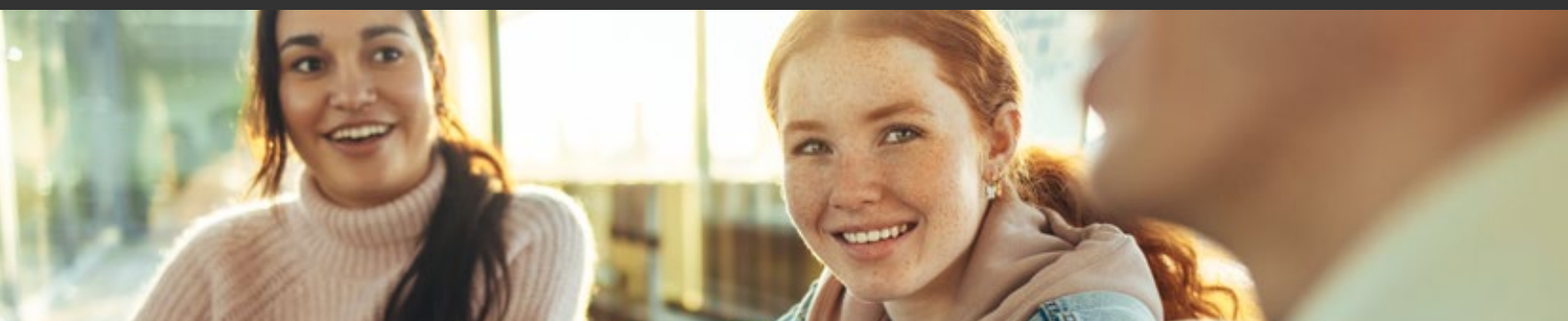
APPRENTICESHIPS THAT BUILD FUTURES

Supporting your delivery from start to finish

Future-focused and fully flexible, NCFE's end-to-end apprenticeship solution allows you to develop diverse delivery programmes that meet the needs of apprentices and employers. Our comprehensive offer features:

- Individual skills plan allowing learners to work through resources online to plug skills gaps at a time that suits them
- Skills assessment and diagnostic tools to evaluate apprentices' starting points, with a single initial assessment for English & maths in just 30 minutes
- Mandatory and complementary qualifications
- Paper-based, online and remotely invigilated assessments on demand, all with 6 working day results turnaround
- Market-leading end-point assessment function
- Exceptional service and support from our specialist team

Discover how we can help you transform your apprenticeship delivery at ncfe.org.uk/apprenticeships.



Jane Hickie

Chief executive, AELP



Apprenticeships are a proven success- but why are so many SMEs still struggling to engage?

National Apprenticeship Week is always a real highlight in the sector's calendar. It's a great opportunity for all of us to celebrate the fantastic role that apprenticeships play in supporting individuals to achieve their ambitions, to deliver the skills our businesses need, ultimately contributing to the creation of a world class skilled workforce

With opportunities in virtually every sector, from entry-level to masters' degree equivalent, what better way to start a career or even to upskill in an existing one? Apprenticeships are great value for employers too, whether hiring someone new or upskilling existing staff. 7 in 10 apprenticeships are delivered by independent training providers, who have a solid track record of working with employers of all sizes.

In the UK 5.6m businesses- 99% of all business- are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with up to 249

employees. Despite this, too many SMEs are still struggling to engage effectively with apprenticeships. Less than 29% of apprenticeship starts last year were with SMEs- and non-levy starts overall are still around 38%- despite these businesses making up the vast majority of employers. This means that 98% of all employers are not required to pay the apprenticeship levy. It can be difficult for some SMEs to commit to the longer-term investment that training an apprentice requires, but there are other factors at hand, which require urgent attention by policymakers.

Funding, incentives, and costs

As part of the Plan for Jobs, the government introduced an enhanced employer incentive of £3k per new apprenticeship to support growth. It was a great move on their part, but, unfortunately, they took the decision to end enhanced apprenticeship incentives on 31 January.

The most recent apprenticeships data shows the programme is making a strong recovery after the pandemic, with starts up 43% from the previous year. We know incentives had a positive impact, supporting the creation of over 162,000 new jobs, around 78% of which were for younger people.

To address the issue, AELP believes the government should reinstate the incentives as a matter of urgency. Moving forwards, incentives could be targeted for those hiring apprentices under 25 and funded through recycling unspent apprenticeship funding, that would otherwise be returned to the

Treasury.

Furthermore, the true cost of delivery needs addressing. There is still a real lack of parity in funding for functional skills in apprenticeships. The rates haven't changed since 2013, and at £471 per apprentice, are discounted to around just half of the classroom-based rate. This means most providers are delivering functional skills at a loss, which also impedes their ability to support the most disadvantaged learners. An update from the ESFA's ongoing review of wider eligible apprenticeship costs is expected soon, and we certainly hope this will address some longstanding issues around the true cost of delivering apprenticeships, with around 22% of provider delivery costs identified as currently 'ineligible' in the 2019 IFF research commissioned by the IfATE.

Accessibility- growth capping, levy transfer and appropriate standards

The fact that the numbers of non-levy paying employers with an apprenticeship service account is still proportionally low highlights the ongoing struggle for smaller employers to engage due to the bureaucracy, cost, time, and administrative constraints. The introduction of intermediaries or funding to providers to undertake this activity on their behalf would help facilitate increased participation.

Beyond funding, there are serious issues in how accessible apprenticeships are to SMEs. Levy transfer was a positive development to give levy payers greater choice, but it cannot be the route for any non-levy payers who want additional growth. At present, non-levy-paying employers are capped at 10 apprenticeship starts. At AELP's Spring Conference last year, the ESFA announced that they would be resetting the cap, meaning that from 1st April 2021 until March 2022, non-levy paying employers would now be able to access a further ten commitments/starts, regardless of how many they have used previously. This was welcome news, but further flexibility would certainly be welcome to allow even more apprenticeship starts in SMEs.

Ultimately, as with most issues, the funding is the sticking point. That's why AELP are calling for a standalone annual budget for SME apprenticeships, to ensure businesses of all sizes are able to maximise the benefit of apprenticeships. Without appropriate support for SMEs- the backbone of our business community- the government's ambitions of maximising apprenticeships simply cannot be realised.



Apprentice feedback tool set for launch 'later this year'

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A tool that allows apprentices to give feedback on their training provider is set to finally be launched later this year.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency's digital service has been developing the feature for a number of years. Its launch was originally set for September 2018, with then-skills minister Anne Milton (pictured) speaking strongly in favour of its value over Ofsted inspections.

Around the same time a similar feedback tool for employers – similar to TripAdvisor – got underway and the reviews now feature prominently on the government's Find Apprenticeship Training site.

But "low engagement" in a number of trials for the tool for apprentices forced the ESFA to go back to the drawing board

last year.

However, in a new apprenticeship funding agreement for training providers, published last month, the ESFA said one "quality indicator" for 2021/22 will be "apprentice ratings of the training provider".

A spokesperson for the agency has now told FE Week: "We're continuing to work to develop this tool and expect the feature will be available and feedback will start to be displayed later this year."

The agency was unable to explain exactly how the tool will work or how it has managed to increase engagement.

The delays come amid concern that apprentices have been struggling to raise issues about poor training.

The National Society of Apprentices previously said an apprenticeship system that "values the views of employers over the views of apprentices" is "inherently

unbalanced".

"It comes as no surprise that employers are able to provide feedback on their perception of the quality of education and training that their apprentices receive, but that the views and experiences of apprentices can wait," a spokesperson added.



Anne Milton

DON'T MISS YOUR CHANCE TO ATTEND THIS YEAR'S AAC!

A not to be missed two day apprenticeship event!

21 - 22 MARCH 2022 **ICC, BIRMINGHAM**

FEWEEKAAC.COM

HEADLINE PARTNER

City & Guilds
A City & Guilds Group Business



PLUS KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



AMANDA SPIELMAN
HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted



JENNIFER COUPLAND
CEO, Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education



DR JO SAXTON
Chief regulator, Ofqual



PETER MUCKLOW
Apprenticeships Director, Department for education

AAC CONFERENCE
CHAIR AMOL RAJAN
CONFIRMED!



CONFERENCE SPONSORS



STRATEGIC PARTNER



REGISTRATION SPONSOR



EXHIBITION SPONSOR



MEDIA PARTNER





**ANNABEL
MAY**

Leadership Team,
National Society
of Apprentices

Apprenticeships are in the spotlight. But you know what isn't? Apprentice pensions.

At last, its time to look back at the pandemic and hope the worst is over. As we stop for a breath its time to think about what we need to change to make sure apprenticeships are amazing, not just during NAW but all year round. I for one love doing my apprenticeship but it is important to recognise that there are a few faults within the system, one of which is surrounding pensions.

“It seems ludicrous that apprentices are missing out on this saving”

Apprentice pensions - not a topic of conversation that would usually crop up over the dinner table. I'm probably the first person to write about pensions for apprentices in the pages of an FE Week publication.

But they have a massive impact on hundreds and thousands of apprentices. So it's time we talked about it.

Only workers earning over £10,000 – and aged between 22 and state pension age – must be automatically enrolled into a workplace pension by their employer. Also, interestingly 3 out of 4 of those people earning lower than the £10,000 threshold are women.

Therefore, thousands of apprentices aged under 22 are missing out on saving this extra bit of money, unless they opt in. It seems ludicrous that apprentices are missing out on this saving which could be the difference between them eating or going hungry upon



retiring.

You may be reading this article thinking, what about the state pension? The state pension is £175.20 per week, yet this is not a great amount of money to live off weekly especially if there was a home emergency. Putting into perspective the cost of a new boiler can be £500 upwards - this would take months of saving if someone was just living off the state pension.

From personal experiences and listening to other apprentice stories it quite often isn't as simple as simply asking an employer to be entered into a pension scheme. It can take months to finally be entered into one as an employer is not always willing but with lowering the pension auto enrolment age this will help to combat this issue.

The fact that women earn 80% less than men over their lifetimes has great consequences on their pension contribution and retirement according to the Chartered Insurance Institute (Insuring Women's Futures, 2021).

This is for a multitude of reasons and one way that we can help to ensure financial

“It isn't as simple as simply asking an employer”

security upon retirement is to lower the pension auto enrolment age from 22 to 18 for apprentices.

It is also important to note that if I or any other worker were to be out of work for any reason later on in life the pension contributions that I would have saved from when I was 18 would help to offer security for later on in life.

As seen over the past year, from job losses to redundancies the income to the pension pot would have stopped for many. That earlier saving could be a lifeline.



**HOLLY
GOODING**

Digital marketing degree
apprentice, Delego

A degree apprenticeship was the best possible option for me

My journey began in the education sector. After leaving sixth form, I was unsure on which career pathway I wanted to go down. All of my A-Levels had been science-based but at the end of year 13, I decided that I no longer wanted a career in science.

Whilst deciding what I wanted to do, I took on a role as an administrative assistant within the educational sector whilst completing an A Level in business. During this time, I found it so much easier to learn whilst working because I was able to apply my learning and subsequent knowledge to my job.

Fast forward a year and the country is mid-pandemic. It was at this stage that I decided to investigate the apprenticeship route. I wanted to complete a degree. But I was now certain that university was not the correct pathway for me as I enjoyed working full-time. After many Google searches, I discovered degree apprenticeships – something which was never discussed as an option during my time at sixth form.

After applying and interviewing for multiple apprenticeship programmes, my current employer saw how serious I was about completing a degree whilst working full time. They contacted my local university and within a few months, I was starting a degree apprenticeship in digital marketing.

During the first year of my degree apprenticeship, my role was based in-house, undertaking the majority of the marketing at a company within the education sector. I enjoyed my day-to-day role and it presented so many opportunities such as building a website from scratch for a new branch of the company and designing a company logo for another branch of the company. In addition, I was performing well in my university course because I could clearly see how each module linked to my day-to-day work.

The pandemic affected many individuals, including apprentices and working from home felt quite isolating at times. Because my course (like many others) was delivered online, I only met my cohort in the last few months of my apprenticeship.

During the pandemic, I became a council member of the Association of Apprentices (AoA), where I met many other apprentices in similar situations to myself. The AoA is 'an apprentice-led community' which encourages apprentices to connect with each other and provides a lot of courses and guidance to aid personal development. The launch of 'AoA Connect' provided the opportunity for a lot of us to network and provide support for each other. If you are an apprentice and have not heard of the AoA, I highly recommend looking at their website and signing up to the AoA Connect platform. The community is highly supportive and there are so many resources on offer such as personal development courses and live events.

I am now in my second year of my degree

apprenticeship and now work at a marketing agency in the construction industry. I strongly believe that the apprenticeship route was the best possible option for me, and it has provided me with years of experience alongside a fully funded degree!

**“It has provided me
with years of
experience
alongside a fully
funded degree!”**

If you are considering the apprenticeship route, my advice would be to go for it. Applying for your first apprenticeship is the first step on a ladder of endless opportunities and is a valuable experience.



**JASMINE KING**

Housing policy and
practice degree apprentice,
Flagship Group & vice chair,
Association of Apprentices

Finding a community of apprentices helped me through the hardship of the pandemic

I'm Jasmine and I'm vice chair of the Apprentice Council at the Association of Apprentices. I'm a housing policy and practice apprentice at Flagship Group, a housing association working to solve the housing crisis in the East of England. I'm currently studying level 6 chartered management degree apprenticeship whilst working in the housing team, Victory Homes. I previously completed Level 4 senior housing manager in November 2021.

This apprenticeship programme has truly enhanced my skills and provided new opportunities to learn, develop and grow. My apprenticeship success has been recognised as I was awarded Higher/Degree Apprentice of the Year 2021 by Apprenticeships Norfolk.

The pandemic brought uncertainty to many apprenticeships, and I was grateful for my employers communication and support. Whilst I continued working, some colleagues were furloughed and so my support network was reduced. I also changed teams to support customer need and provide a front-line service to tenants experiencing financial hardship as a direct result of the pandemic. This was a lot of change and resulted in feelings of anxiety.

During this time I researched more into the apprenticeship communities and looked for platforms to meet other apprentices in similar circumstances to me. I wanted to share my experience and build my confidence in the virtual world. I found opportunities through the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network which supported me during this time. I then discovered the Association of Apprentices on LinkedIn through the promotion of their

Apprentice Council. I'm honoured to have been elected as vice chair of their apprentice council and see the association grow to an apprentice-led community.

"Other apprentices were using their time to support me"

It's amazing to see the association's offer develop and apprentices supporting one another. The Association of Apprentices takes an inclusive approach to apprenticeships and considers all aspects, including wellbeing, life skills, and career progression. AoA Learn provides additional knowledge and AoA Connect enables learning through shared experiences and advice. These platforms have enabled me to ask questions and advice on apprenticeships.

When preparing for my end point assessment (EPA) I explored the support on

AoA Learn and asked for advice from other apprentices on AoA Connect. The level and detail of responses was impressive, other apprentices were truly helping me and using their time to support me. I was so grateful for this, and even received 'good luck' messages on the day of my EPA!

This personal side to the association makes it even more special and know that people genuinely care about helping others succeed. It truly reflects apprentices connecting together, engaging with each other, and inspiring each other.

It's an honour to celebrate apprentices' successes through the association. The community also recognises the success comes in many forms, however big or small it may seem, we share the passion for apprenticeships and love to see each other develop and succeed. There's a mentoring feel to the association and being able to connect in a safe, comfortable environment. There is a lot of momentum on the next steps after an apprenticeship, members are sharing their experience into a graded position, interview process, etc. Irrespective of an apprentice's progress and journey, there is true value in them joining the association.

There's a magical feeling of being part of an association that shares the passion for apprenticeship and are dedicated to helping apprentices reach their full potential.

As we approach two years since the pandemic started, I am so proud of everything I've achieved. The Association of Apprentices has been a big part of this journey and I will continually promote the association, because together as a community we can connect, engage and inspire apprentices to reach their full potential!



A way into work for young people with learning disabilities

WILL NOTT
WILLIAM.NOTT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Wayne Gorman is a hard-working grounds maintenance operative, who is in charge of a six acre site.

He is highly valued by his employer, Ground Control, one of the country's leading providers of landscaping and maintenance services.

The work Wayne does is difficult and full-on. He cuts grass, does weed control, works on trees, prunes shrubs and much more. He is good at his job and is well known throughout the company as being a loyal employee.

However, there is something unique about how Wayne got his current role.

Wayne has learning difficulties and came to Ground Control through a unique partnership with The Westminster Specialist College.

The college has been working with Ground Control over the last five years to develop an industry-first scheme to help support young people like Wayne.

The program identifies, supports and mentors students through an internship scheme before they transition to a grounds maintenance apprenticeship.

For Wayne, the scheme provided a perfect opportunity to move into the world of work.

"The way education and the curriculum is set up, it didn't suit Wayne with his learning abilities," Roy Candlin, area manager at Ground Control, told FE Week.

"He was a very disruptive child, throwing chairs and tables around within a classroom, disturbing other students... taking up a lot of staff time and energy."

However, an internship with Ground Control saw Wayne come into his own and develop a passion for machinery.

"One of his sensory passions, if you like, was the smell of petrol and so he liked engines," Candlin said.

"When he worked with us, he obviously came across lots of different types of machinery when

we did a project, and he did a couple of trial days where he came across all the different machinery and equipment that we use within our company and to service our clients.

"It really clicked with him, and he showed a great passion for working. He didn't want to be shut up inside the classroom, and he liked being outside."

Following Wayne's internship, he progressed to a full apprenticeship program and has since moved on into full time employment with Ground Control.

"He really has turned out to be an outstanding employee for Ground Control. He's very highly thought of. Everybody in the company knows about him. He's highly regarded, and he does a cracking job," Candlin added.

Oliver Flowers, head teacher at The Westminster Specialist College, has been inspired by Wayne's success and is trying to expand this training pathway to help other young people with learning difficulties.

He told FE Week, that back before Wayne started his apprenticeship, the prospects for these students entering the world of work did not look good.

"The employment figure for young people with a learning disability at that time was

hovering between five and six per cent... And really that as an employment outcome makes you question your whole reason for being as a school."

But Wayne's success has opened up the doors for the next generation of apprentices.

The Westminster Specialist College will now be offering more internships to selected students, all of whom will have access to the help and advice of a full-time staff member, working as mentor.

They will also be offered workplace experiences on projects selected and overseen by Ground Control. Once successfully completed, these students will be able to progress onto an apprenticeship program.

"The next young person – Kenny Hanney – has begun his journey and will soon begin his grounds maintenance apprenticeship," said Flowers.

"Our goal is to grow the numbers progressing through the pipeline and allow us to soon set up something truly innovative – our own field team of workers."

With a way into work that might not have otherwise been possible, the benefit for young people with learning difficulties is clear to see. But what of Ground Control, who takes on these students and puts time and effort into their development?

"We're coming out with very dedicated, very loyal, passionate workers. And at the end of the day, that's for any business wants isn't it," said Candlin.

"They're not looking at working with us for two years or moving on to somebody else... having a job, somebody wanting them, having a purpose in life to get up in the morning... That's what Ground Control has gained out of it."



Roy Candlin, Laura Adamson, Kenny Hanney, Jordan Brown, Wayne Gorman

APPRENTICESHIPS THAT BUILD FUTURES

An EPA offer that delivers on service

Let our experienced end-point assessment specialists guide you through a seamless EPA journey, that focuses on provider and apprentice success from start to finish.

Why choose NCFE for EPA?



Flexible EPA solutions that come with sector expertise, guidance materials and proactive support



Service level agreements for every stage, to give you transparency and confidence in the process

- Direct booking for assessments offered within 4 working days
- Gateway validation within 4 working days
- Complete EPAs within 8 weeks of your Gateway acceptance date*



Provision of a named contact within our EPA Relationship team



An online platform available 24/7 for registrations, Gateway requests and progress updates



Remote assessment tools that are delivered through the use of remote invigilation, video conferencing and more



A directly employed team of Independent End-Point Assessors (IEPAs), which ensures we have complete control over the quality and service of your EPA.

Find out more about how we can support you with EPA at ncfe.org.uk/epa

Proud to support National Apprenticeship Week 2022



PAUL KESSELL-HOLLAND

National head of curriculum design projects, ETF

Three cheers for apprenticeships trainers

I am very lucky to work with technical and vocational educators and leaders across a vast range of settings. As a result, I work with many staff who have different job titles to each other, but actually do very similar roles.

One area of difference that is often lost on people who are not close to apprenticeship education is the distinction made between teachers and trainers. While there should be no distinction in many areas of their practice, and both should be equally well qualified in their educational skillset, there are many differences. On National Apprenticeships Week, we should take the time to recognise and indeed celebrate these differences and the vital contributions which trainers make.

“Our expectations of trainers has changed considerably”

Trainers are of course the ‘teachers’ of apprentices. They need to manage a complex web of interactions between employers and apprentices. Notably, the fact that the employer is both a place of work and a place of learning, and that the apprentice is an employee as well as a learner. The requirements of the programmes will also often need to be mapped against other learners in other employers who are at different stages of learning and development. They do this out of sight, not usually recognised for the difficult balance they strike, nor for the significant impact they have on the apprentices they teach.

Without meaningful education, an apprenticeship means simply ‘going to work’.



While it falls to many partners to create the conditions for learning, the trainer is there at the heart of this, and we should support these essential staff to be the very best they can be. In the past few years, our expectations of trainers has changed considerably. Helping them to develop as the landscape around them evolves is a crucial part of giving every apprentice the very best experience and future career possibilities. Before the pandemic there was a strong case for increasing workforce development and training opportunities, and now this is even more pressing.

The Education and Training Foundation was commissioned by the ESFA to deliver the first phase of the Apprenticeship Workforce Development Programme in Autumn 2020, and the first courses went live in January 2021. An online programme of core support, targeting areas that our evidence showed would be of greatest help, this AWD offer has proven extremely popular and helpful for training staff and managers. It is therefore really positive news that a tender has recently been released for further support in the coming years. Regardless of who is selected to become the provider, the programme will doubtless be welcomed by the sector in the same way that the first

phase was received.

What matters the most in terms of supporting trainers as they teach and develop apprentices recognising what they know and do, and listening to what they need. For example, while there was an enormous shift to online teaching during the pandemic, it is worth remembering that this was less of an impact to many apprenticeship trainers than it is to their classroom-based counterparts. With a long history of blended and online teaching, there was a rich seam on which to draw. Training staff know what they need to learn and understand to develop their practice further. The evidence from our long history of support for apprenticeships shows that trainers are keen to obtain new educational skills, just as much as they are hungry to remain up to date with developments in their own industries and professions.

If we want apprenticeships to be continue to be a compelling option for young people, we need to keep in mind – and celebrate – their trainers. Ultimately the trainers drive apprentices to be the very best they can be, boosting our economy and our businesses. Without trainers and their considerable expertise, none of this would be possible. Three cheers for the trainers!



**JENNIFER
COUPLAND**

Chief executive,
Institute for
Apprenticeships and
Technical Education

The Institute is ready to make apprenticeships even greater

I love National Apprenticeship Week – it's my favourite time of the working year.

I always enjoy getting out and about and highlights for me in the past few days have included visiting construction apprentices working for Mace, Armed Forces apprentices at Wellington Barracks, and tech apprentices at Google and Multiverse.

Apprentices and those who work with them know that apprenticeships have improved immeasurably over the past 10 years, but it's still so important to raise awareness with employers, parents, teachers and potential apprentices of the quality and variety of opportunities available.

It's been great teaming-up this year with the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) on that front. Our chair Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith, who started with the Institute last summer and is president of the BCC, inspired this and her credentials in the political and business worlds will be of huge service to the apprenticeship community looking ahead.

National Apprenticeship Week 2022 comes at the perfect moment as the nation starts emerging from the challenges of Covid-19 with the programme still in a position of strength.

It is clear from the 43% year-on-year increase in starts for the first quarter of this year that employers still want to invest in apprenticeships and the added major increase in vacancies compared to the same period last year shows that employers are confident apprentices can help their organisations recover and grow again.

But we also know that some sectors will have further to travel to get back to normal as the pandemic has had really different impacts on different sectors - numbers starting in the catering and hospitality sector dropped by 24% last year, but there was a

45% increase for the health and science sector, where we have seen apprentices supporting with hospital care, testing and vaccine development.

Looking ahead our plan at the Institute is to remain responsive and ready to help large and small employers, along with our partners in the FE sector who've worked so tirelessly to protect their students and apprentices.

We also want to keep learning about what's working well and where things need to improve for apprentices.

“I have never seen more goodwill and support from government and the public for apprenticeships”

Our Panel of Apprentices launched a major survey with apprentices across the country this week. It is asking about their experiences of training, levels of personal support, and preparation for end point assessment. The responses are really important as they will guide what issues panel members pursue with employers and government over the next 12 months – so please share the link with your apprentices and encourage them to fill it in.

There is also lots more for the Institute to get to grips with over the coming year.

Apprenticeships are an all-age programme and while it's a good thing that they support training and retraining throughout people's working lives, we know that young people have been really hard hit by the pandemic, so we want to do everything possible to support more onto apprenticeships.

And once young people are on an apprenticeship, too many of them are failing to complete them, so we want to see consistently high-quality delivery and better pastoral support to keep apprentices engaged in their training and completing their end point assessments.

Another challenge is improving diversity. The proportion of people on apprenticeships who are black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic (BAME) broadly reflects the national demographic, but it masks quite sharp disparities in representation between sectors and levels.

Apprenticeships are also a brilliant tool for levelling up.

I've seen good evidence from some universities that degree apprenticeships are starting to open out traditional white-collar professions, such like law and accounting, to a broader variety of people, but we want all apprenticeships to reflect our diverse country.

The Institute will focus much of our efforts in this area into a project we recently launched to embed equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) across all our products and areas of work.

A further challenge will be keeping pace with future skills requirements, particularly for the emerging green economy. This is something successive governments have struggled with, but I think we've made a great start through harnessing the expertise of employers on our Green Apprenticeships Advisory Panel.

As National Apprenticeship Week draws to a close, I would like to reflect that these are incredibly exciting times.

I have never seen more goodwill and support from government and the public for apprenticeships. The challenge is now to fully capitalise on that to help deliver a better future for everyone.

Degree apprenticeships: Demand vs supply

WILL NOTT

WILLIAM.NOTT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

UCAS data shows there is an increasing demand for higher and degree apprenticeships from school and college leavers. FE Week spoke with Clare Marchant, UCAS's chief executive, to find out whether such increased demand is likely to outstrip supply and what the government should do next.

Demand for higher and degree apprenticeships is growing. Around 50,000 students applied to both university undergraduate degrees as well as degree apprenticeships in England in 2021, according to UCAS' latest applicant data.

Around half of all the 750,000 students who registered with UCAS in 2021 told the organisation they were interested in considering an apprenticeship as well as a university undergraduate degree.

Business, engineering and medicine represent the largest subject areas flagged to be of interest.

“There is a need for a degree apprenticeship supply strategy from government”

“I think there are a few things that lie behind increases in demand. There are the underlying demographic increases, so you have got more UK 18-year-olds and that is contributing to this increase we are seeing,” Clare Marchant, UCAS's chief executive, told FE Week.

“[There are] three per cent more this



year than last year, and that continues all the way to 2025 and beyond.”

Marchant explained that another factor is that young people are looking for diversity when they make choices and want more technical and vocational courses.

“The third thing is that we are seeing more students look at degrees which have a definite career and vocation after them...”

“Employability is always a big factor in what applicants are looking for. So, when you put that in the context of apprenticeships... you have got a job.”

But with all this demand, will there be enough higher and degree apprenticeships opportunities to go around?

Figures from the DfE for the number of under 19s actually starting higher or degree apprenticeships in 2021 was just 3,600 – not even close to the number of those who applied for academic degrees.

UCAS told FE Week that it forecasts the number of 18-year-olds applying to university or college will increase by 30 per cent between 2021 and 2026. This will result in over 350,000 English domiciled 18-year-old applicants, up from 270,000 in 2021.

If the proportional demand for apprenticeships remains at the same level, this would result in 15,000 additional students applying for Degree Apprenticeships, leading to a total of 65,000 (as a minimum).

UCAS believes there is a need for a degree apprenticeship supply strategy across government and employers to meet this increased demand and ensure that these students have suitable, high-quality opportunities available to them.

“The demand vs supply point is really important, and I don't think it is well understood. We are waiting for a lot of things in the higher education space in terms of announcements,” Marchant said.

“What I would say is that we have to take employers with us. Because whatever government does, it has to benefit those 99 per cent of businesses that are SMEs.

“Unless the government makes it attractive for SMEs we will continue with this massive chasm between the number of young people wanting a degree apprenticeship and the number of starts we see. So that is the gap that we need to bridge... more needs to be done,” she added.

**DAVID SIMS**

Research director,
National Foundation for
Educational Research

It's time to address the apprenticeships mismatch for young people

There is a growing mismatch between the Government's policy commitment for apprenticeships to be a key route for post-16 study and actually delivering the numbers of apprenticeships needed to achieve this. The Government urgently needs to review the design of the current apprenticeship system to ensure that reality matches the rhetoric.

Following the recent reforms to the apprenticeship system, there has been a sharp decline in the number of apprenticeships for young people. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a further drop in apprenticeship starts, with the largest fall among smaller employers. As noted in NFER's recent apprenticeship report, between 2015/16 and 2018/19 apprenticeship starts at level 2 and 3 declined by 23 per cent for those under the age of 19, with starts falling by another two-thirds between 2018/19 and 2020/21. Overall, apprenticeship starts for this important age group, who are beginning their careers, have halved since 2015/16. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been particularly affected.

While apprenticeship starts for under-19s picked up in the autumn, it is not clear that any increase will be sustained as current incentives for employers to take on new apprentices will expire on January 31. The key question here is how likely is it that an increase in starts sufficiently redresses the decline that has happened to date?

There are several actions that should be taken to boost apprenticeships so they drive skills development and open up vital training opportunities for young people. In addition to the existing £1,000 incentive for taking on an under-19 apprentice, the Government should give immediate consideration to continuing to offer the apprenticeship employer incentive currently set at £3,000

for each new under-19 apprenticeship start. This would be a divergence from the current incentive (which is available to all age groups) but would go some way towards ensuring a sustained growth in apprenticeships. This would benefit not only the prospects of young people, but in helping to provide a more secure apprenticeship pipeline, would support the ambitions of the Government's Skills for Jobs white paper.

The House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee report Skills for every young person pointed out that the Government's public sector target requiring all public sector bodies with 250 or more staff in England to employ at least 2.3 per cent of their staff as new apprentice starts is not being met. This is another area in which the Government should take action by exploring how the public sector could make a greater contribution to apprenticeship growth, especially for under 19s.

NFER's apprenticeship report recommends that all employers should be required to advertise apprenticeship vacancies on the Find An Apprenticeship (FAA) website. Employers may currently choose whether or not to post their apprenticeship vacancies on this website. The Government should further improve access to apprenticeship opportunities by

providing targeted application support to young people applying to apprenticeships from disadvantaged areas as recent apprenticeship reforms have had a disproportionate impact on apprenticeship starts from this group.

"The government should provide targeted application support to disadvantaged young people"

Also, the Government should re-assess how minimum English and maths requirements can be incorporated into apprenticeship training to address the issue of these requirements acting as a disincentive for some employers hiring apprentices. Recent research by NFER found a majority of apprenticeship vacancies mentioned English and maths requirements.

It should also review the misalignment of incentives within the current apprenticeship funding system, particularly supporting smaller employers. Separating and

protecting the funding for under 19 apprenticeships from the main apprenticeships budget would also be beneficial. This would help to mitigate negative effects of the apprenticeship funding system which trades off apprenticeships for young people against higher apprenticeships which are typically taken by older employees. Taking this action would also help Government to see more clearly the apprenticeship investment for the under 19s, compared to older age groups, and assess the economic and social returns.





**DAVID
MARSH**

Co-chair,
The St Martin's Group

Strengthening apprenticeships to help 'build the future'

National Apprenticeship Week (NAW) is a key moment in the diary; it's an opportunity to showcase the outstanding innovations taking place across learning providers and employers. Our members alone - who collectively represent roughly 15 per cent of the UK apprenticeship market - have hosted more than 30 events, published new research finding and insights, and shared content to help reinforce the value of apprenticeships.

There are many reasons to celebrate apprenticeships, including higher employment rates for apprentices; the ability to provide greater financial security and long, meaningful careers; equipping individuals with in-demand skillsets; and creating more opportunities for learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds thereby supporting the wider 'levelling up' agenda.

The positive impact of apprenticeships for both individuals and employers alike is well-documented, with apprentices delivering an average return on investment of at least £2,500. The unique combination of on-the-job experience with traditional learning demonstrates the ability to help learners develop the skills and knowledge required for a rewarding career, all while supporting businesses in developing a workforce equipped with future-proof skills.

However, while the signs of post-pandemic recovery are promising, with an increased number of learners embarking on courses, there is always more that can be done to galvanise this trajectory. While NAW is key to raising awareness and encouraging participation, we must also be outcomes-focussed and assess the barriers to ensure the system is robust, agile, and able to withstand any challenges.

Addressing lower completion rates

With over a third of apprentices failing to successfully complete their qualification, it's clear that a full analysis of the underlying factors behind this drop off is needed. These statistics on the surface can appear poor -



but underneath, the fact that the majority of the leavers are due to employment related reasons rather than learning is often missed. If allowed to take root and dominate the national narrative, they could erode both young people's and employers' faith in the wider apprenticeship system as a viable and compelling post-16 route.

The St Martin's Group will commission a research project this year to explore the outcomes for those who have started an apprenticeship, identifying trends for those who complete and those who do not, with a view to recommending alternative measures of success for the programme.

Re-examining mandatory Level 2 qualifications

In addition to tackling pervasive stereotypes around apprenticeships, with polling by UCAS revealing only eight per cent of students surveyed associated apprenticeships leading to a 'good job'; it's critical to remove barriers to access to further drive uptake. This goal is even more pressing given the pandemic has exacerbated existing educational trends, as apprenticeship starts amongst deprived and younger learners have declined disproportionately.

Relieving this burden on the country's most disadvantaged learners can be achieved by examining the impact of the mandatory requirement for all apprentices to continue studying towards a Level 2 qualification in

maths and English, to achieve a minimum GCSE grade of 4. Although originally introduced to help drive up standards (something we wholeheartedly support) and make apprentices more employable, an unintended consequence is that it may have contributed to the drop off in apprenticeship starts amongst disadvantaged young people - with the NFER observing only half of learners eligible for Free School Meals achieved a grade 4-9 in English and maths during the last academic year. An analysis of the effectiveness of this recent policy amendment may help promote increased access for those from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

Often stepping into frontline roles including nursing or HGV driving, this year's cohort has demonstrated the huge potential of apprentices in helping to 'Build the Future' so it's vital we do all we can to ensure these opportunities remain as accessible and impactful as possible.

As an opportunity to raise the profile of pathways available and promote the significant value of responding to critical employer needs and driving economic growth, NAW is vital for organisations and bodies across a wide range of industries. But it's now time for leaders to follow suit and build the future of the apprenticeship system as a whole by examining what can be done to solve some of the more challenging problems currently at risk of damaging the brand; only then will we truly set young people up for success.

Peter Cox

Managing director,
Novus, LTE Group



Unlocking the potential of prisoner apprenticeships: The 3 key challenges

One huge benefit that apprenticeships would provide is hope, and sometimes hope is all you need to influence change."

This moving statement by former prisoner David Breakspear was submitted to the House of Commons Education Select Committee's inquiry into prison education. Following National Apprenticeship Week, it seems that there are, finally, genuine grounds for optimism.

The Ministry of Justice announced that it will change the law to allow prisoners at open prisons across England to access apprenticeship opportunities while they are still serving time but are out on day release, or nearing the end of their sentence.

Opening up apprenticeships to more prisoners is a positive step in reducing reoffending. Using education and training to support offenders from prison into employment is a crucial step in giving them the tools they need to transform their lives.

Novus stands ready to play its part.

As part of LTE Group, a leading further education college group, it has more than 30 years of experience of delivering education and training in prisons. In partnership with training provider Total People, also part of LTE, it has launched an innovative "foundation apprenticeships" pilot programme at HMP Hindley in Greater Manchester, mapping level 2 vocational provision to existing apprenticeship standards.

Learners who progress to an apprenticeship after their release will be able to demonstrate some of the knowledge, skills and behaviour required, which could lead to a two-year apprenticeship being completed in as little as 12 months - fast-tracking the journey from prison to sustainable employment.

We are keen to explore how we can use our strong employer links to make use of the new flexibilities announced by the MoJ. But if we are to ensure that apprenticeships achieve their full potential, there are three key issues which must be considered.

1 Employment, contracts and ROTL

An apprenticeship must be a real job – but exactly what is and isn't possible for prisoners is not entirely clear. Governors can already allow prisoners to be paid by an outside employer – and impose a levy on their earnings, with proceeds going to Victim Support. In 2019 the government announced that more prisoners could be eligible for release on temporary licence (ROTL) earlier on in their sentence.

Little progress has been made since then, however, and practical issues remain to be worked through. ROTL may not be appropriate for some prisoners or in some types of establishments, while learners switching prisons mid-apprenticeship would cause disruption to all parties. Excluding these groups limits the number of prisoners who could benefit.

Another option would be to open up apprenticeships to prisoners carrying out work within prisons. At HMP Hindley, for instance, Novus runs a general maintenance programme under which prisoners refurbish cells, classrooms and toilets. This isn't a simulated environment. If activity could be carried out by a contractor, it could equally be done by an apprentice, provided that contractual requirements are met.

2 Attracting providers and employers

Even outside prison, training providers are understandably cautious in who they enrol. If an apprentice doesn't progress to completion, the consequences are serious, both in terms of potential funding clawback and achievement rates.

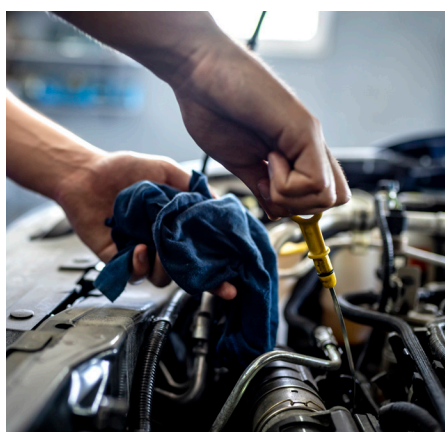
Providers and employers need reassurance that they would not be penalised for situations out of their control, such as a prisoner not being released from their cell due to operational challenges. And while some employers already recruit offenders, including Novus' partners such as Greene King, Kier and Willmott Dixon, further incentives could encourage more companies to engage with prison education.

3 Ensuring "through the gate" support

If an apprentice is released part way through an apprenticeship programme, will they be able to complete it? Will they still receive support from the tutors they have come to trust? And who will ensure they are given safe accommodation during their apprenticeship?

All parties must work together to ensure apprentices receive the wraparound support they need. And we must not forget about pay. A 21-year-old in the first year of an apprenticeship is entitled to a minimum hourly rate of just £4.30. Is this really enough to steer a vulnerable young person away from reoffending?

If prisoner apprenticeships are to be a success, they must be rigorous, respected and sustainable. If this can be achieved, then they could offer the hope that so many prisoners badly need.



APPRENTICESHIPS THAT BUILD FUTURES

Functional Skills that fit flexibly with your delivery

Choose NCFE Functional Skills to complement your apprenticeship delivery, giving apprentices the English and maths qualifications they need to progress to their end-point assessment.

When you work with us for Functional Skills, you'll get the complete package for English and maths that ensures apprentice engagement and achievement, including:

- High-quality teaching and learning resources for classroom, online and self-learning delivery
- Free support for Tutors and Assessors, including 3 free consultations, from our Provider Development team.
- A range of sample assessments
- Online learner feedback reports
- Flexible and on-demand paper, online, and remotely invigilated assessments
- Sector-leading service times, including a 6-day results turnaround

Discover our full Functional Skills offer at ncfe.org.uk/functional-skills