

## Briefing: What Covid-19 means for young apprentices

June 2020

### Summary

Covid-19 has brought a unique set of difficulties for young apprentices. This group is suffering both from the employment crisis and from complications with the support that they need to learn and progress. 1 in 5 of all apprentices have been made redundant, are on a break in learning or have left their programmes<sup>1</sup>. Evidence suggests that the young are most likely to be left in these unfortunate positions. They are more likely to be in the sectors which are struggling due to the pandemic - over 55% of workers aged 16-19 years are in hospitality and retail compared to 18% of the wider workforce<sup>2</sup> - and they are over-represented in practical fields such as construction where working from home is a challenge. Young workers are also at greater risk of being furloughed than older ones (by 9 percentage points<sup>3</sup>).

Many providers are doing everything they can to continue training for their apprentices across this period, with one survey finding that 81% are still learning<sup>4</sup>. This includes furloughed apprentices who can continue their studies while not working. Young apprentices nevertheless face delays to assessments and difficulties with remote learning, preventing them from completing their apprenticeships. This in turn causes problems with opening up apprenticeship opportunities for the next cohort of young people.

Even prior to Covid-19, apprenticeships among young learners were in decline with starts for under-19s falling 23% between 2015/16 and 2018/19<sup>5</sup>. This is despite government targets made in 2015 to create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020, with a focus on young people in particular<sup>6</sup>. These targets were not achieved, and now apprentice starts are plummeting against a backdrop of rising youth unemployment. Figures released on 29<sup>th</sup> May show that only 1,040 apprenticeship starts took place among under 19 year olds between 23<sup>rd</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020 compared with 4,020 for the same period last year.<sup>7</sup> Research has also found that employers are hiring 32% fewer people onto apprentice or school leaver programmes this year<sup>8</sup>, and projections indicate that the lowest qualified school leavers will be 37% less likely to be in work in 3 years' time.<sup>9</sup>

This briefing gives an overview of the major challenges during the pandemic with insights from current apprentices, as well as mapping out some of the harmful domino effects facing future cohorts. The

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aelp.org.uk/news/news/press-releases/training-providers-working-miracles-to-preserve-apprenticeships-and-other-skills-programmes-but-living-on-borrowed-time-latest-aelp-covid-19-impact-survey-shows/> (survey does not provide breakdowns for young apprentices). A YouGov poll commissioned by the Sutton Trust found this was closer to 1 in 4 – 8% made redundant and 17% having their learning suspended: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-impacts-apprenticeships/>

<sup>2</sup> ONS Annual Population Survey – Workplace Analysis, England January-December 2019

<sup>3</sup> Based on analysis of ONS data on furloughing rates between 23 March and 5 April using concentration of 16-19 year old workers by sector

<sup>4</sup> As above

<sup>5</sup> Apprenticeship starts fell from 116,400 to 89,370: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/apprenticeships-in-england-by-industry-characteristics-2018-to-2019>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-kick-starts-plans-to-reach-3-million-apprenticeships>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships-may-2020> Caution is advised with interpretation of the data.

<sup>8</sup> The Institute of Student Employers: <https://www.tes.com/news/employers-reduce-entry-level-jobs-quarter>

<sup>9</sup> Projections for employment rate in 3 years time for low-skilled workers. Resolution Foundation, Class of 2020 briefing note: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/class-of-2020/>

complexity and diversity of their circumstances, as well as an absence of some key data, has meant that their experiences and prospects have been somewhat overlooked so far in discussions about vulnerable young people at a national level. Without more attention and action, there are multiple indicators that this vital alternative to formal education could become much less accessible, closing off opportunities for a group which the government has committed to invest in.

## Young apprentices hit hardest

Between August and October 2019 there were over 105,100 young apprentices (under 19 years)<sup>10</sup>. Given new research finding that a quarter of training providers have closed<sup>11</sup> and industry estimates that most expect to downsize at least<sup>12</sup>, we can expect that a sizeable majority of these young apprentices will be adversely impacted in some way, in addition to many more on traineeships. In fact, young apprentices are being hit significantly harder than older learners:

- > Figures released on 29<sup>th</sup> May for the Covid-19 lockdown period (23<sup>rd</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> April) show that apprenticeship starts for under 19s were a quarter of last year's numbers (1,040 down from 4,020). For 25+ years, apprenticeships only dropped by less than half from 14,700 last year to 8,590 this year.<sup>13</sup>
- > Young people are over-represented in industries which are struggling most – over 55% of workers aged 16-19 years are in hospitality and retail compared to 18% of the wider workforce<sup>14</sup>
- > They are much more likely than older apprentices to be learning in industries such as construction, retail or manufacturing, where working and learning from home is difficult<sup>15</sup>
- > Young workers are being furloughed at a rate of 36% compared to 27% for the workforce as a whole.<sup>16</sup>
- > According to the Resolution Foundation, one third of 18-24 year old employees have lost jobs or been furloughed, compared to one in six prime-age adults.<sup>17</sup>

It is been estimated that at least 1 in 5 of all apprentices are on a break in learning, have been made redundant or have left their programme. Although there are not yet national figures which fully break down apprentice circumstances under Covid-19 by age, the existing data suggests that young apprentices are more often the ones who have their apprenticeship disrupted.

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<sup>10</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/875232/Further-education-and-skills-March-2020-main-tables.xlsx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875232/Further-education-and-skills-March-2020-main-tables.xlsx)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-impacts-apprenticeships/>

<sup>12</sup> 18% of training providers are under threat of closure, 28% expect to mothball their operations, and 55% to downsize: <https://www.aelp.org.uk/media/3631/covid-19-impact-aelp-survey-intial-results-250320.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships-may-2020>

<sup>14</sup> ONS Annual Population Survey – Workplace Analysis, England January-December 2019

<sup>15</sup> Department for Education, Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics 2018 to 2019

<sup>16</sup> Based on analysis of ONS data on furloughing rates between 23 March and 5 April using concentration of 16-19 year old workers by sector

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis/>