

Dear colleagues

Here is the Apprenticeship Hub Bulletin which provides advice about managing apprenticeships during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it will have on the delivery of apprenticeships. Please circulate this email to colleagues and add names to the mailing list, apologies if we have missed anybody off. We are hoping that the ESFA/ DFE will relax some of the funding rules during this difficult time. We understand that you may have other ideas and suggestions about things that either the Apprenticeship Hub, HEE or the ESFA/ DFE can do to help, please let us know what your suggestions are by emailing us, or if you would like to be taken off this circulation please contact Candice.walker@hee.nhs.uk.

Apprenticeship Hub COVID-19 Apprenticeship provision updates

Skills for Health COVID-19 Apprentice pay and breaks in learning guidance

Apprentices are likely to be asked to increase substantive clinical duties during Covid-19 operations, they will continue to be employed on an apprenticeship (albeit on a break), but there needs to be clear proceedings if employing them for 2-3 months without them completing much or any learning in that time.

Alert

In cases where they are on apprenticeship minimum wage, under NMW, their apprenticeship is suspended and they are being used as full time staff, then their pay rate is illegal. If the apprentice does not have a second assignment as for example an HCA, NA, or AP, and due to complexities of changing their contract short term to NMW, a bank contract supporting the extended clinical role is a good short term solution. This will allow the apprentice to be paid the correct wage for their age when they are not in an apprenticeship role.

Breaks in learning only need to be applied after 4 weeks of continuous break, either because the learner is off with illness or in special circumstances (I.e. Coronavirus). The guidance (see reference below) indicates that if the government advice causes apprenticeship learning to be suspended for more than 4 weeks, this can be recorded as a break in learning.

Advice: Breaks of less than 4 weeks do not officially need to be recorded, but if there is concern about the impact of numerous shorter breaks, or a short term change, please record these anyway just in case they are needed in future.

Action: On the Individual Learner Record (ILR) record very clearly any breaks in learning that take place due to illness or organisations complying with government advice, indicating the start and end dates of the breaks in learning. Employers must ensure this is done in partnership with the training providers and that all breaks are formally recorded on the ILR and any relevant paperwork/eportfolio.

Advice: If the apprentice is on apprenticeship NMW and on a full break in learning (not being utilised on bank or in other substantive roles) then you can continue to pay them apprenticeship NMW. If they are on a break and you are using them for other substantive duties they need to be paid correctly as they are no longer in learning.

COVID-19 Apprentice pay and breaks in learning guidance Apprentices and National Minimum Wage (NMW) legislation /funding rules

Below, for reference, is an excerpt from ESFA guidance released on 9th March 2020 – we expect further updates any day now but this is unlikely to change. In order to support the sector during any disruption which may be experienced due to Covid-19 these are the initial commendations from the Department for Education:

1. Apprentices who are ready for assessment – i.e. who reach gateway and cannot be assessed due to assessor illness or Covid-19 related measures, will be allowed to have a break in learning. This should protect funding and completion of apprenticeships and should be reflected in the July completion rules. The normal breaks in learning process should be followed and therefore we only need notifying once a break in learning has exceeded 4 weeks. A break in learning must occur before the learner is recorded as completed. Apprentices can go on a break in learning between completing the learning activity (learning

actual end date) and the assessment, but there would be no requirement to record in this in the ILR as it will not have an effect on funding.

2. Apprentices who experience gaps in training due to Covid-19 related illness in the workplace or off the job can classify this period as a break in learning. The normal breaks in learning process should be followed and therefore we only need notifying once a break in learning has exceeded 4 weeks.

3. Usually breaks in learning are only permitted where they are learner driven, however we are aware that there may be occasion where an employer who is following government advice may take action that results in an apprenticeship have to be paused. In these occasions a break in learning can be used where there will be a break of longer than 4 weeks. The normal breaks in learning process should be followed.

4. In order to maintain the integrity of high quality assessment of apprenticeships we are going to monitor the situation and will issue further advice and modifications relating to specific assessment methods if necessary.

5. We advise adhering to the current escalation process of raising EPA (end-point assessment) issues through EQAPs (external quality assurance providers) in the first instance.

There is a need for everyone (employer, provider, EPAO, Apprentice) to take a reasonable and balanced approach in these situations and to recognise that the health and wellbeing of individuals is a higher priority than performance measures. We know that good communications between each of these parties is important to the successful delivery of EPA anyway. So, in these circumstances communication becomes even more important. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) will shortly be publishing further guidance for this area in response to potential disruption from Covid-19.

Transfers

Transfers – Many Organisations are currently providing transfers to Primary and Social Care employers. Payments for current transfers will continue to run unless a learner goes on a Break in Learning, at which point payments will cease and then re-start when the learner re-joins their Apprenticeship programme.

We will continue to process upcoming transfers for March Primary and Social care TNA cohorts and will update individual organisations if and when there are any changes such as; learners withdrawing prior to starting their Apprenticeship or Universities postponing enrolments.

Maytas

The ILR upload schedule remains unaffected and we will be issuing ILRs as per the provider calendar. If your organisation requires support with Maytas input during the current pressures, please do let us know and we can make arrangements to support you.

The pending server migration that was planned will be postponed as trust IT teams will need to have their resources and time diverted to the priority areas.

Apprenticeship Provision in your organisation

The team are still working on obtaining official guidance from the ESFA. Can we ask you to let us know what actions you are currently taking with regards to your apprenticeship provision, particularly around the postponement of cohorts, withdrawal of learners or suspension of off the job training. Please let us know by emailing candice.walker@hee.nhs.uk. If you have already submitted this to the HEE Nursing Team you do not need to do so again because they have shared this information with us

Breaks in Learning

We are encouraging HEIs, Apprenticeship Providers and Employers not to put breaks of learning in place at this moment in time due to the Covid 19 outbreak. You have up to 4 weeks to put a break in learning in place and we are still awaiting guidance from HEE Nationally, the ESFA and DFE on how to handle this. You can still retain your learner in the workplace and in the clinical setting and not release them for 'Off the Job Learning' without a break in learning for up to 4 weeks and this is what we are encouraging you to do. We are expecting detailed guidance in the very near future and would ask that you do not act prematurely

Enrolment of New Apprentices

Where it is possible to do so we would encourage you to continue to enrol learners where you can, using email and other alternatives to 'Face to Face'. We recognise that due to the current situation this may very quickly lead to a break in learning, but after due consideration the advice from that it is better to enrol

where you can, until further advice is received.

End Point Assessment Organisations – Important to Record on the ILR

If you have not already done so and you are in a position to can you record the EPAO on your ILR. This is very important, particularly for TNAs and Pe Registration Nurses and other clinical Apprentices, because we are expecting to receive guidance in the very near future that will accelerate these learners registration, if the EPAO is not recorded that may not be able to fast track their Registration. You will be receiving a request directly from our Relationship Managers to share this information with them and this request will also be contained in tomorrows bulletin. Please respond to this request when you receive it.

Pre-Registration Nursing Apprentices

As you are aware Pre Registration Nursing Apprentices cannot administer medication, whilst Health Care Support Workers can. Urgent advice is being sort from the NMC about whether this rule can be suspended during the Corvid 19 outbreak. We are aware that some trusts are considering putting a break inf learning in place and giving these staff Health Care supporter worked roles to enable them to administer medication. Before doing this we would urge you to wait until a response from the NMC is received, it is expected very early next week.

Weekly Question and Answer Sessions

Weekly telephone call Q&A sessions are going to be established that will allow you to dial in and ask any questions that you may have and we will include an email in box in our next bulletin where you can ask any questions you may have. Frequently Asked Questions will also be included in this bulletin going forward. Details of these sessions will be included in our Bulletin that we will be sending out on Monday so please look out for these.

In the meantime if you have any questions please send these to Candice.Walker@hee.NHS.uk who will field them to the most appropriate member of the team or book a call for you.

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