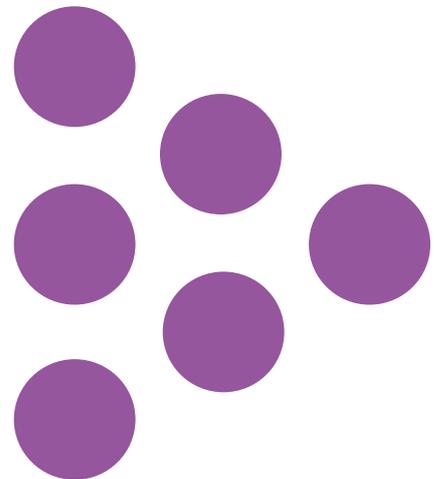

Report

Barriers to young people accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships: perspectives from apprenticeship providers

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



Barriers to young people accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships: perspectives from apprenticeship providers

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Executive summary

In March 2023, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), in collaboration with Amazing Apprenticeships and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), ran a roundtable for apprenticeship providers. The aim of the roundtable was to explore apprenticeship providers' views on the barriers young people aged 16-19 face in accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships and how they might be overcome. Prior to the roundtable, providers were asked to answer a small number of questions both to inform the roundtable discussions and provide additional beneficial data and insights. Twenty-seven providers answered the pre-event questions and seven attended the roundtable, including representatives from independent training organisations, employer providers, local authorities, and colleges. The roundtable followed a previous study in which NFER analysed Department for Education (DfE) and Find an Apprenticeship (FAA) service data on apprenticeship starts and undertook interviews with 20 small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to explore their perceptions of young people's barriers to accessing apprenticeships.

The roundtable, together with the pre-event questions, provided a valuable opportunity for reflection on our and others' previous findings on young people's barriers to accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, as well as to gain providers' perspectives on the barriers and how they might be addressed. The ongoing decline in apprenticeship starts at intermediate and advanced levels for 16-19-year-olds since 2015/16 continues to be a significant concern.

Providers reported that the most common barrier remains a lack of in-depth understanding of apprenticeships amongst young people, their parents/carers, and teachers, including the opportunities for career progression. This is preventing young people from even getting to the point of application.

At the point of application, providers perceived the most common barriers for young people to include not being 'work ready'; not having GCSE English and maths at Grade 4+ (or the equivalent); low levels of psychological health and wellbeing; apprenticeships not being affordable; and some apprenticeships not being widely available.

These insights highlight that it remains vital that action is taken to tackle these barriers that young people face, particularly those who are already disadvantaged.

The Government needs to closely monitor the implementation of the enhanced Baker Clause and ensure that young people are provided with detailed information on apprenticeships and the potential long-term benefits of completing one. Schools/colleges, employers and apprenticeship providers must work together to ensure that young people are provided with in-depth information and guidance on opportunities for progression through the apprenticeship levels, the associated wage increases and the resulting career gains. Moreover, employers should be proactively promoting the progression opportunities that apprenticeships bring, through the inclusion of the apprenticeship standards and levels that are desirable/meet entry requirements for *all* job roles, not just apprenticeships.

Young people's lack of readiness for work remains a key issue, which has been further exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, we found that young people require more support with their job applications to effectively compete with older, more mature applicants. To address these barriers, the Government should consider additional interventions to improve young people's work readiness

and job search skills and bolster their confidence and resilience. These could be delivered by schools, colleges, or apprenticeship providers.

Increasing the affordability of apprenticeships for young people is also essential. There are numerous ways this could be achieved, from addressing the level of the minimum apprenticeship wage, the more widespread introduction of discounted or free travel passes, incremental annual pay increases as an apprentice progresses, and reviewing a family's loss of Child Benefit when a young person aged 16 to 18 starts an apprenticeship. These could all be major game changers in increasing young people's engagement in apprenticeships.

Finally, consideration should be given to encouraging more employers, particularly SMEs, to take on young people who seem to be increasingly losing out to older, more mature applicants. This requires a review of existing incentives, with increased financial aid for employers supporting young people to achieve level 2 in English and maths, and who have other support needs. Government and industry leaders have a pivotal role to play as actioning this recommendation could make a significant difference to apprenticeship opportunities for young people.

NFER will continue to track apprenticeship starts over the coming months and pay particular attention to how young people are faring, especially as the cost-of-living crisis continues to bite.



1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

This report presents the perspectives from a roundtable on apprenticeships which the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) ran with apprenticeship providers in March 2023, in collaboration with Amazing Apprenticeships and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP). The roundtable perspectives are supplemented by the findings from a set of pre-roundtable questions.

1.2 About the apprenticeship roundtable

The aim of the roundtable was to explore the perspectives of apprenticeship providers on the barriers that young people aged 16-19 face in accessing intermediate (level 2) and advanced (level 3) apprenticeships and how they might be overcome. Their perspectives and recommendations were intended to provide additional insight to feed into the policy debate on equalising access to apprenticeships and improving apprenticeship opportunities for this age group.

Apprenticeships continue to be a declining option for 16-19-year-olds entering the labour market. More specifically, since 2015/16 there has been a well-documented sharp decline in apprenticeship starts at intermediate and advanced levels for 16-19-year-olds. This ongoing trend is troubling as NFER's recent research (see below) has shown that young people, particularly those who are already disadvantaged, face a multitude of barriers to accessing apprenticeships which are not being effectively tackled.

The roundtable was chaired by Anna Morrison from Amazing Apprenticeships and included both breakout sessions and whole-group discussion. The roundtable was attended by seven apprenticeship providers who deliver training across a range of sectors, in addition to two representatives from AELP. A list of the roundtable attendees is included in Appendix 1.

Prior to the roundtable, a wide range of apprenticeship providers were invited to respond to a set of questions which were used to inform the roundtable, but which also provided additional beneficial data and insights. The questions aimed to explore apprenticeship providers' perspectives on the barriers that young people face in accessing apprenticeships and possible solutions. These questions were answered by 27 providers, and further details on their characteristics are provided in Appendix 1. All of the data collected was analysed thematically, with key messages from the roundtable and pre-roundtable questions presented within this report. Further data from the pre-roundtable questions can also be found in the technical appendix [here](#).

The apprenticeship providers who participated in the study included representatives from independent training organisations, employer providers, local authorities and colleges. From here on we will refer to them as “providers”.



1.3 NFER apprenticeship research

NFER has been undertaking research on apprenticeships over the past three years. This has included:

- [Putting Apprenticeships to Work for Young People](#) (2021) which examined the impact of the apprenticeship reforms on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and on young people, against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. It involved analysing apprenticeship starts drawing on the Department for Education’s (DfE) Apprenticeships and Traineeships statistical release, the DfE’s Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics, and bespoke tables provided by the Department for Education.
- [Equalising Access to Apprenticeships](#) (2022) which investigated the availability of intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, and the barriers to young people accessing them. It drew on DfE statistics on the number of apprenticeships started by young people, together with 20 virtual and telephone interviews with SMEs and information on apprenticeships advertised on the ‘Find an Apprenticeship’ (FAA) service – the DfE’s online apprenticeship vacancy search website.



2 What are young people’s barriers to accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships?

This section presents the key messages from the provider roundtable discussions and the pre-event questions on the perceived range of barriers that young people aged 16-19 face in accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships. Where relevant, messages are placed within the context of other research which reflects the findings.

Young people face a range of barriers to accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships which are not being effectively tackled.

Providers reported several key barriers that young people face in accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, echoing the findings from our previous consultations with SMEs.

The perceived most common barrier is lack of awareness and understanding about apprenticeships being a beneficial post-16 option amongst students, their parents/carers, and teachers. This results in young people not even getting to the point of applying for an apprenticeship.

Following this, other common barriers at the point of application include:

- lack of job search skills and work readiness
- not having expected levels in GCSE English and maths
- poor wellbeing and mental health, including anxiety, lack of confidence and resilience
- lack of affordability
- lack of availability.

The following sections explore these barriers in more detail. Illustrative quotations from providers who attended the roundtable, or responded to the pre-roundtable questions, are included in the shaded boxes.

Although awareness has improved in recent years, young people often lack in-depth understanding of apprenticeships, including the different levels and progression opportunities, to make informed decisions.

The provider access legislation (often referred to as the Baker Clause)¹, which was introduced in 2018, requires all schools and colleges to provide opportunities for education and training providers to inform all year 8-13 students about approved technical qualifications and apprenticeships. However, over recent years, various sources have found that the Baker Clause has not been universally adhered to (Hochlaf and Dromey, 2019; CEC, 2021; UCAS, 2021; DfE, 2023) and some providers reported experiencing challenges in gaining opportunities to engage with students, particularly those in years 10 and 11. However, both the general perceptions of providers at the roundtable and evidence from the *Youth Voice Census*, suggest that young people’s awareness of apprenticeships is improving.

‘The Baker Clause has helped with this [awareness raising on apprenticeships] as schools are contacting us to give talks and showcase our services.’

¹ See DfE (2023) *Careers guidance and access for education and training providers*.

Through its *Youth Voice Census*, Youth Employment UK (2021; 2022) has found positive change in young people saying they have had apprenticeships discussed with them once or more in secondary school, with 85.6% reporting this in 2021 and 82.3% in 2022. However, in 2022, just over a quarter (25.6%) of students surveyed had been told about apprenticeships more than five times compared to 49% for A-levels, suggesting that further work is still needed. In addition, recent Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) survey data suggests that awareness of apprenticeships is improving as students move up the school: 39% of Year 7 students were aware of apprenticeships compared to 81% of Year 11 students (CEC, 2023).

Although awareness of apprenticeships has improved, providers reported that young people, their parents/carers and teachers often lack a *detailed* understanding of apprenticeships as a route to a successful career. In addition, teachers were perceived to be generally better placed to provide advice on A-levels. This is reflected by research from the CEC (2021) which stated: ‘There remains work to do to meet growing student demand for more detailed information about all non-academic pathways, including apprenticeships, and addressing the barriers to translating interest into uptake’. This lack of exposure to options for technical and vocational education can result in misperceptions and misunderstandings about what being an apprentice entails (Kobayashi and Warner, 2023) and can lead to young people not considering apprenticeships as an option.

‘Parents and schools still view apprenticeships as the poor relation, only for those who are less academically gifted and will usually guide [prospective] apprentices towards A-levels/T Levels.’

‘Parents are not educated enough on the options of apprenticeships and what they entail and can lead to. Too many parents do not see apprenticeships as a route to a successful career.’

Providers hoped that awareness of apprenticeships will continue to grow as a result of the strengthening of the provider access legislation in the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 (GB. Statutes, 2022). This further reinforces the Baker Clause with a requirement for schools to provide at least six encounters with a provider of approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships for all pupils during school years 8-13. However, there were some remaining concerns amongst providers regarding the limited time they might be given in some schools, restricting their ability to provide students with a detailed understanding of apprenticeships.

Providers also noted that employers could play a greater role in demonstrating the value and long-term gains of apprenticeships to support young people’s decision making. One way this could be achieved would be by employers’ job adverts including the apprenticeship standards and levels accepted as pre-cursor qualifications for their job roles.

‘...I wanted to bring up the perceived value of the apprenticeship in the labour market... It does not get mentioned in the wider labour market. So, when looking to see what doing an apprenticeship would do for them later, young people do not see it anywhere. There is a role for employers to play their part in advertising the suitability of applicants who have completed an apprenticeship.’

This point is echoed by Kobayashi and Warner (2023), namely that employers rarely include apprenticeships within specifications for job roles and that more could be done to increase

employers' understanding that the skills developed from the completion of an apprenticeship have significant labour market value and recruitment strategies should reflect this.

Young people often do not demonstrate to employers that they are 'work ready' and this barrier has been exacerbated by Covid-19.

Participating providers unanimously felt that many young people are not 'work ready', with this being even more evident since the pandemic. This can impact both their access to, and retention on, apprenticeships.

Providers viewed work readiness as incorporating two important elements:

- application and interview skills
- understanding and demonstration of the required workplace behaviours and skills such as timekeeping, structuring your time effectively, communication, reliability, and commitment.

The first hurdle some young people face is getting through the application stage.

Providers raised concerns regarding the standard of some young people's applications, as well as broader difficulties young people experience during the application process (such as meeting deadlines to provide information), and communicating clearly during a formal interview. Some providers put this down to young people not receiving job search support at school or during college courses. Although providers reported trying to support young people with applications and interviews, this can often be difficult due to time constraints. Where young people do not effectively demonstrate their abilities and potential, they can lose out to older, more experienced mature applicants. Providers reported a trend of older applicants applying for intermediate and advanced apprenticeships who young people found it hard to compete with. For intermediate starts in 2021/22, 32% of starts were aged over 25 years and 60% of starts were aged over 19 years. For advanced apprenticeship starts in the same year, over 25s accounted for 43% of starts and over 19s for 76%. This is indicative of the higher proportion of older applicants applying for apprenticeships at these levels (see [Apprenticeship data 2021/22](#)).

'Many applications we receive are of such poor quality the applicant does not even get shortlisted...It often appears many young people are receiving little advice and support [from school/college] about submitting a good application.'

'They've not even gone onto the link where they're meant to do a video interview and they've not gone on to this to do that or we've asked them to fill in a form by a certain date and they've not even completed a form or submitted something on a timescale that you'd expect them. Going back three years, we'd see so many get to the later stage and now we are not seeing as many.'

'...I think what you're seeing now is, because people want to get into work, we're seeing a higher age of people applying for those roles in the first place...So, when they're pitched against somebody who is slightly older, the older person is always going to come through whereas beforehand there was still more of a chance for the 16-18-year-olds.'

Providers reported that many young people do not have sufficient understanding of the workplace and appropriate behaviours and etiquette, which are evident at both the interview stage and when they start their apprenticeship.

Providers commented that some young people appear to see apprenticeships as an extension of school or college rather than a job, and do not display a knowledge and understanding of the different expectations of full-time employment. Examples were given of young people not meeting employers' requirements in a range of areas, including communication skills, timekeeping (arriving on time and adjusting to a 9am-5pm day Monday to Friday), discipline, and commitment. Some of this was put down to young people's level of social maturity², which may have been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 lockdowns. However, providers also felt there may be a link with schools' decreased focus on work experience and employability in recent years, which was also hindered by the pandemic. This aligns with the Social Market Foundation findings of the *Learning from Experience* report (Regan and Bhattacharya, 2023), which states that less than half of young people in England currently receive work experience, since the mandatory duty to offer work experience was removed in 2011.

'The big key thing is social maturity and that has been affected by Covid... the lack of social maturity...is definitely going to get worse. The way they speak to people, the way they conduct themselves...their behaviours...their etiquette... so I don't think that there's enough going on to get them work ready...'

'They don't have the motivation, not prompt in arriving at work, employers are being let down. Work ethic isn't built into them.'

'Feedback from learners is that they can't handle the work environment, they are not equipped for it. For example, when they are told what to do, they feel they are being told off.'

'They seem unable to commit fully to their apprenticeship and cannot structure their time very well.'

'They don't realise that, although they are training, they are working so calling in sick frequently isn't accepted, puts pressure on employers.'

'When they have their work readiness, we are virtually successful from day one...If you've got the right behaviours you can learn.'

Providers suggested that more could be done by employers, schools, and colleges to prepare young people for the workplace, for example through work experience, and support with developing job search skills and employability. Regan and Bhattacharya (2023) highlighted that work experience can bring a range of benefits in terms of future employability, insight into the world of work, self-confidence, and emotional development. Providers emphasised that, where young people are work ready and show commitment and a desire to learn, they are more than likely to stay the course. Moreover, some training providers reflected that building a strong relationship between the young person, the employer and themselves was also important to triangulate support and mutual understanding of each of their roles during the apprenticeship. An effective three-way collaboration was thought to help young people to integrate into the workplace and to successfully complete their apprenticeship.

² A level of behaviour in accordance with the social standards that are the norm for individuals of a particular age (APA Dictionary of Psychology).

‘... what the employer thinks that they are signing up to with an apprenticeship - there is not always a clear understanding [of the employer’s role in providing support]. Many employers seem to think the provider will do it [provide additional support where required], not fully understanding they have a big role in it [supporting the apprentice’s ongoing development] to facilitate it and make it happen, and the apprentice may feel like their employer is not engaged/invested in it.’

‘... [the apprenticeship] provider needs to make sure that the employer is properly engaged and on board to start with. So the role of the employer is important from the apprentice’s perspective.’

The requirement for GCSE English and maths grade 4 or above (or an equivalent level 2 qualification) can be a key barrier to young people accessing both intermediate and advanced apprenticeships.

Providers noted the extra workload involved in young people taking GCSE/Functional Skills English and maths alongside the apprenticeship which could lead some to withdraw. In addition, this additional workload was a reason why some employers were requiring young people to have already achieved level 2 in English and maths before starting intermediate apprenticeships.

From our previous [Equalising access to apprenticeships research](#), we found that English and maths at level 2 can often be required for intermediate as well as advanced apprenticeships. The requirement for level 2 in English and maths is a particular barrier for disadvantaged young people, many of whom may have the required technical skills. While 69 per cent of Key Stage 4 pupils achieved grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths in 2021/22, less than half (48 per cent) of disadvantaged pupils achieved this level (see [Key stage 4 performance data 2021/22](#)). A suggestion was made during the roundtable that employers should be encouraged to *not* specify English and maths at level 2 for intermediate apprenticeships, particularly since they are not part of the apprenticeship standard.

‘It is limiting access for disadvantaged and lower ability young people who would otherwise be absolutely capable of achieving occupational competence in their field and adding value to their employer.’

‘I think it’s wrong if they’re bringing them in on an intermediate apprenticeship to insist that they have English and maths. We definitely don’t insist that they do because it’s not part of the apprenticeship standard and you’ve got to give these people the opportunities. It’s a level 2, it’s not a level 3.’

‘Lack of maths and/or English is a common stumbling block. Taking on FS [Functional Skills] alongside an apprenticeship is hard work and many students withdraw because of FS.’

Providers reported that, since the Covid-19 lockdowns, increasing numbers of young people are presenting with poor levels of psychological wellbeing and mental health, which is affecting their post-16 transitions, including into apprenticeships.

Whilst young people’s wellbeing was already a concern in the UK prior to Covid-19, the pandemic has had a further detrimental impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. It has led to increased levels of distress, worry and anxiety, depression, uncertainty and anxiety about the future, loss of confidence and motivation, and inability to face and overcome

difficulties (UK Youth, 2021; Millar *et al.*, 2020; Leavey *et al.*, 2020; Mansfield *et al.*, 2022; Anders *et al.*, 2021). In addition, the effects seen are greater for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the pandemic exacerbating pre-existing inequalities (Mansfield *et al.*, 2022; Anders *et al.*, 2021).

Providers echoed these concerns, noting that more young people they were working with had low levels of confidence, commitment, and resilience and that they were seeing more incidences of anxiety and depression. These psychological challenges can both impact on young people accessing and completing apprenticeships and can be heightened by the workplace. Providers reported seeing more examples of young people feeling overwhelmed by the requirements and demands of the work environment, and finding it difficult to manage their anxieties. Some reported employing welfare officers and managing these barriers through effective three-way communication between the apprentice, employer, and provider. However, many providers reported insufficient capacity to deal with the increase in young people presenting with decreased levels of psychological wellbeing.

'[There has been a] significant increase in mental health issues in young people [which], coupled with lack of resilience, causes much higher drop-out rates in the early stages of the apprenticeship than previously and prevents some learners [from] ever accessing an apprenticeship.'

'Mental health has a huge impact on young learners, more and more often this is becoming an issue with learners' confidence and ability to commit to full-time employment.'

'People are still suffering from mental health, anxiety, depression and [lack of] motivation as a result of Covid lockdown.'

Lack of affordability – particularly the low minimum apprenticeship rate/national minimum wage for under 18s - prevents young people from starting apprenticeships and can lead to drop out.

The affordability barrier has several elements to it, with the low minimum apprenticeship wage being the most significant. Although increased to £5.28 an hour in April 2023, the minimum apprenticeship wage³ is still low, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living pressures. Findings from our previous research with SMEs and the apprenticeship provider roundtable suggest that this can be off-putting and lead to young people choosing higher paid alternatives to apprenticeships, or result in them leaving early as they cannot afford to live on the wage. Wright and Corney (2022) reflect these findings and suggest that apprentices in low-income households are likely to particularly struggle on the apprenticeship wage. However, the alternative employment young people opt for may pay more in the short-term but not offer the same level of training and longer-term career progression opportunities as apprenticeships. Where young people do choose apprenticeships, providers gave examples of some needing to take on additional part-time work to supplement their wage which, in turn, could be detrimental to their apprenticeship.

'It is much more attractive to young people to go into better paid roles in retail – especially up here in the North. Seasonable jobs offer twice the apprenticeship rate.'

³ The minimum apprenticeship rate is the same as the national minimum wage for those under 18.

‘Three apprentices have recently left because of low wages and crippling travel costs.’

‘Young people need to be able to see why they can’t afford to NOT do an apprenticeship because of the opportunities this will open up.’

‘Perceived value is really important. Going back to travel, energy price hikes, and wages – all are important considerations. However...going into HE [higher education] costs so much money...Apprenticeships are a great option despite low wages, as you can train up to level 7 without building up these debts.’

However, providers followed up their comments on the low minimum apprentice wage by noting that some employers - SMEs in particular - would struggle to pay higher wages: *‘I know in our sector, the employer could not be expected to fund more. They [young people] struggle as the majority of apprenticeships work in SMEs’.*

Providers reported that travel costs can also be a deterrent to young people engaging in apprenticeships as they need money for public transport or to buy a car up-front, with the wages being too low to accommodate running a car. Transport costs can be a particular barrier in rural areas where being able to travel is essential. Moreover, there is geographical inconsistency where some local/combined authorities provide travel support and others do not. For example, Transport for London offers free travel for under 18s and Greater Manchester provides free bus travel.

‘...to gain an apprenticeship, you need to have money up-front to pay for travel/a vehicle.’

‘Land-based industries are often in very rural locations leading to significant travel costs, or even inaccessibility if there is no public transport.’

In addition, providers reported cases of 16/17-year-olds not taking up, or dropping out of, apprenticeships due to their family’s loss of Child Benefit: *‘We have had instances where the apprenticeship couldn’t be taken up due to the impact on Child Benefit’.* Indeed, as an apprentice is not considered to be in full-time education and training and is classified as being “in work”, this results in ineligibility for Child Benefit. At a time where the rising cost of living is a pressing concern, for those young people still living at home with their parents/carers, the loss of benefits arising from starting an apprenticeship and the resulting pressures on family finances, are a significant consideration (Wright and Corney, 2022; Low Pay Commission, 2023).

Providers perceive that some employers, particularly SMEs, are hesitant to employ young apprentices due to lack of affordability.

Although the focus of the roundtable was on young people’s barriers, providers highlighted concerns regarding employers being able to afford to take on young apprentices. They commented that some employers – particularly SMEs - were unable to accommodate the cost and time required to support young people to retake English and maths and to deal with young apprentices’ other support needs. This reported issue with English and maths is consistent with our earlier research with SMEs, where employers appeared to be specifying minimum requirements for English and maths – for both intermediate and advanced apprenticeships - as it was costly for them to take on young people who have not achieved this level due to the additional support and training required. Providers also gave examples of cases where this barrier had led to employers either employing older apprentices or removing apprenticeship options altogether.

'There's no point in us taking [young people on at] level 3 anymore because of the work we've got to do with them to get them to the place they need to be. They've got to improve English and maths, they've got to improve behaviours, their own personal issues that need to be addressed on a daily basis is time consuming for the business. So we're looking for that more mature person.'

A final barrier relates to the absence of certain occupational standards at the apprenticeship levels appropriate for school/college leavers (i.e. levels 2 and 3) which limits progression.

Providers also noted the lack of certain occupational standards at intermediate and advanced level, which reduced young people's apprenticeship progression opportunities. They gave examples of the lack of a Level 2 in Business Administration and a Level 3 in Animal Care. Other important examples include the absence of a Level 2 in both plumbing and electrical engineering (to become an electrician) which mean that young people have to go straight in at level 3 or achieve their level 2 at college first.

'We also find that the lack of certain progression routes (No level 3 Animal Care, no level 2 BA [business administration]) means that many apprentices with RPL [recognition of prior learning] or previous experience have no opportunities available to them.'

3 Key recommendations

A number of changes are needed to support young people to overcome barriers to accessing intermediate and advanced apprenticeships and to compete with older applicants. Key recommendations arising from the roundtable and pre-event questions are set out below.

Despite improvements in recent years due to the requirements of the Baker Clause, it appears that young people are not always receiving sufficiently detailed information and advice on apprenticeships to effectively support their decision making.

Recommendation 1: To ensure that opportunities for increasing young people’s awareness and understanding of apprenticeships are capitalised upon, the Government should carefully monitor the implementation of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 to ensure that the enhanced Baker Clause is being actioned. As part of this monitoring, it would be useful to go beyond compliance to explore whether students’ understanding of the routes available to them, in this case apprenticeships, is improving, for example via an annual student survey (such as the Careers and Enterprise Company *Future Skills Questionnaire*).

Recommendation 2: Addressing misunderstandings and misperceptions of what being an apprentice entails and emphasising the long-term value of completing an apprenticeship must sit at the core of this increased exposure. We recommend that schools/colleges, employers and apprenticeship providers work together to ensure that young people are provided with in-depth information and guidance on opportunities for progression through the apprenticeship levels, the associated wage increases and the resulting career gains. The Government also has a core role to play in promoting this comprehensive understanding and supporting schools/colleges and providers in their awareness raising role.

Recommendation 3: To support young people’s understanding of the longer-term benefits of apprenticeships and to demonstrate their value in the labour market, industry leaders and representative bodies should encourage employers to include the apprenticeship levels (e.g. intermediate, advanced) and occupational standards that are desirable/meet entry requirements for *all* job roles, not just apprenticeships. In actioning this recommendation, it will be important to be clear and realistic about the investment and commitment required from all parties.

Young people need more support to apply for apprenticeships and to develop their readiness for the workplace.

Recommendation 4: Young people’s lack of readiness for the workplace – for example their understanding of the workplace and the behaviours expected of them - has been an ongoing issue, which has been further exacerbated by Covid-19. Insights from providers also suggest that often young people do not have the knowledge and skills to be successful with their apprenticeship applications. Alongside Covid-19 catch-up actions in schools, the Government should consider additional interventions with associated funding to prepare young people for the workplace. This should include a focus on job search, work experience, developing an understanding of the workplace and workplace behaviours, as well as developing confidence, motivation, resilience, and coping strategies. These activities might be delivered by schools, colleges, or apprenticeship providers. Where appropriate, provision should incorporate Personal, Social and Employability

(PSE) Qualifications which are to be developed⁴. In considering recruitment and retention, content and delivery mechanisms, learning should be drawn from previous initiatives with similar aims, including the national Traineeship programme, Kick Start and Young Apprenticeships. Moreover, a recent Edge report (Maguire, 2022), highlighted the need for lessons to be learned from previous youth employment interventions. Gathering insights from the assessment, initial support, and follow-up elements of the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) would also be beneficial. This programme drew on international evidence and demonstrated positive impacts.

Young People need more financial support to be able to afford to undertake apprenticeships.

Recommendation 5: Although the minimum apprentice rate/16-17-year-old rate increased by nearly 10% in April 2023, the wage is still very low. Over the coming years, the Government should seek to bring it closer to the 18-20-year-old rate.

Recommendation 6: Industry leaders and representative bodies should encourage employers who initially pay the minimum apprentice rate to implement pay increments at least annually, as apprentices' contribution to the business increases. This is likely to attract more young people to start, and be retained on, apprenticeships.

Recommendation 7: The Government should review the impact on Child Benefit payments to families of its classification of 16-18-year-old apprentices as being "in work" and ensure that disadvantaged households are not more disadvantaged as a result. This classification may be acting as a deterrent to young people entering apprenticeships and, if so, the Government should consider revising the criteria to allow 16-18-year-old apprentices to be exempt from the "in work" classification.

Recommendation 8: The Government should consider encouraging local/combined authorities to offer discounted travel passes to 16-18-year-olds in further education and on apprenticeships, as are already offered in some authorities. Apprentices are often ineligible for many travel schemes due to their classifications as being "in work", rather than in training.

Young people's (especially disadvantaged young people) access to apprenticeships needs to be supported through enhanced incentives for employers to make offering apprenticeships more affordable.

Recommendation 9: To improve availability and young people's access to apprenticeships, the Government should consider reinstating the additional £3,000 employer incentive introduced during the pandemic. However, this should be targeted at young people aged 16-24 on intermediate and advanced apprenticeships who meet certain criteria requiring additional support, for example young people who do not already hold Level 2 in English and/or maths or those who are disadvantaged (indicated by previous eligibility for Pupil Premium/Free School Meals). This incentive should be in addition to the current £1,000 available for taking on a young person aged 16-18.

⁴ See DfE (2022): *Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below in England. Government consultation response.*

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Appendix 1: About the apprenticeship providers participating in the study

List of roundtable attendees

Name		Organisation
Chair/Collaborator		
Anna	Morrison	Amazing Apprenticeships
Facilitators/organisers		
Eleanor	Bradley	National Foundation for Educational Research
Lisa	Morrison-Coulthard	National Foundation for Educational Research
Suzanne	Straw	National Foundation for Educational Research
Collaborators		
Malcolm	Williamson	AELP
Paul	Warner	AELP
Attendees		
David	Kreyling	Creative Sport and Leisure
Jacqui	Kawczak	United Utilities
Jennifer	Stone	Health Education England
June	Gray	Training Trust
Andrew	Williams	Cornwall Marine Network Ltd
Sharon	Bonell	Training Works (NW) Ltd
Pam	Wadcock	Training Works (NW) Ltd

Characteristics of apprenticeship providers answering the pre-roundtable questions

Table 1: Apprenticeship provider size

Provider size	N
Up to 25 employees	8
26 – 50 employees	8
51 – 75 employees	3
76 – 100 employees	2
151 – 200 employees	1
Over 200 employees	5
N=	27

Table 2: Location of apprenticeship providers

Location	N
National	7
North West	7
North East	1
Yorkshire and the Humber	2
East of England	4
East Midlands	2
West Midlands	2
London	3
South East	5
South West	2
N=	27⁵

⁵ The figures in this table do not sum to 27 due to 5 providers operating in multiple regions in England, but not nationally. They are therefore counted in each of the regions in which they operate.

Table 3: Sectors in which apprenticeship providers offer apprenticeships

Apprenticeship sectors	N
Business (Business Administration, Support, Skills and Services)	15
Health and Social Care	11
Leadership and Management	10
Engineering	9
Customer Services	8
Early Years/Childcare	7
Construction	6
Digital (general Digital and IT, Digital Marketing, Content Creator)	4
Education (Teaching and Learning, Teaching Assistant)	4
Warehousing/Logistics	3
Floristry, Horticulture, Land-based	3
Automotive/Mechanics	3
Manufacturing	3
Accountancy	2
Animal care/Equine	2
Sport and Physical Activity	2
Science	1
Hospitality	1
Retail	1
Hairdressing	1
Property Maintenance	1
Human Resources/Recruitment	1
N=	27⁶

⁶ The figures in this table do not sum to 27 as many providers operated in multiple sectors.

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