

EXPLORING MODELS FOR PART-TIME AND FLEXIBLE APPRENTICESHIPS

Final report

Learning and Work Institute
and Timewise Foundation in Partnership with
Young Women's Trust and Trust for London

February 2018



Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality



Published by Learning and Work Institute and Timewise Foundation

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

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The Timewise Foundation is a Community Interest Company which achieves practical outcomes for people seeking flexible work, by running Timewise Jobs, Timewise and Women Like Us. We also relentlessly promote the societal benefits of flexible hiring through research, public affairs and media.

Across our services over the last 10 years, more than 90,000 people, predominantly mothers, have registered with us for advice or to find part-time jobs. More than 15,000 have directly accessed our careers advice and employability programmes, and we have helped over 5,300 into quality part-time work they can fit with family life.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Apprenticeships are a key government policy to support transition to the labour market, social mobility, economic growth and improved productivity. While evidence shows that the benefits to apprentices, to businesses and to our wider economy and society are considerable, too many people are missing out. Those needing to work part-time or flexibly – including parents, people with caring responsibilities or those with disabilities – are effectively excluded, not by a lack of ambition, but by a lack of opportunity.

Timewise, Learning and Work Institute, Young Women's Trust and Trust for London were delighted to work together to understand the challenges in developing part time and flexible apprenticeships, and to explore models that will tackle current inequalities and support greater access for people who are currently missing out.

Learning and Work Institute and Timewise would particularly like to thank Young Women's Trust and Trust for London for their funding, time, insights, and support with this research.

We would also like to thank the stakeholders, providers, employers, learners, and part-time workers who to part in interviews and discussion groups.

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Apprenticeships are seen by the Government as a key vehicle to support transition to the labour market, social mobility, economic growth and improved productivity. An ambitious reform programme is underway to raise the quality and quantity of apprenticeships, funded in part by the new Apprenticeship Levy which has also catapulted apprenticeships to the top of the agenda for many businesses.

This agenda offers an opportunity to reverse the long-term decline in employer investment in training and open up new opportunities for employees to access and progress in skilled jobs.¹ While evidence shows that the benefits to apprentices, to businesses and to our wider economy and society are considerable, too many people are missing out and access to high quality apprenticeships is uneven. Gender segregation is entrenched, mirroring the inequalities in the labour market that see women over-represented in low paid, low skilled jobs.² For those needing to work and train part-time or flexibly – such as parents with young children, single parents, carers, care leavers, and those with disabilities – the options can be limited when the majority of apprenticeship opportunities are offered on a full-time basis.³

This paper investigates the feasibility and scalability of part-time and flexible models of apprenticeships. It is based on research conducted by Learning and Work Institute and Timewise with learners and employees with commitments that make the traditional full-time model untenable, and with employers, training providers, and other key stakeholders. The research has been supported by the Young Women's Trust and Trust for London.

Our findings suggest that part-time and flexible apprenticeship opportunities can be effective ways of both increasing access for new starters to apprenticeships and enabling existing staff to upskill. This will widen the talent pool for employers and has the potential to increase productivity. An effective flexible and part-time apprenticeship programme would include the following critical success factors:

- Working with employers to understand their workforce needs and where part-time and flexible apprenticeships may be beneficial.
- Communicating the opportunities and demand for part-time and flexible apprenticeships. There is a mismatch between employer, provider, and potential apprentices' understanding of opportunities and respective demand for part-time and flexible apprenticeships. Providers do not perceive a demand from employers, and employers do not think providers offer them and often rely on staff to communicate part-time or flexible needs either at interview or subsequently (rather than building this into job adverts).

¹ Green F, Felstead A, Gallie D, Inanc H and Jewson N (2013). *What has been happening to the training of workers in Britain?* LLAKES Research Paper 42, London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, Institute of Education.

² Fuller A and Unwin L (2013). *Gender segregation, apprenticeship, and the raising of the participation age in England: are young women at a disadvantage?* LLAKES Research Paper 44. London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, Institute of Education.

³ IFF Research (2017). *Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2016: Great Britain*. London: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

- Focusing initially on sectors and occupations where some degree of part-time or flexible working is already established. In addition, a focus on areas that have skills gaps and recruitment difficulties could ensure that there is a business case for employers to adopt strategies to attract a wider pool of talent, as well as benefiting learners with flexible work and training needs.
- Managers overseeing the apprentices should be engaged in decisions about how work and study will be organised, with the terms of hours and flexibility agreed upfront
- Ensuring the level of apprenticeships offered are appropriate for the individual, of a high quality, and offer real progression opportunities and wage returns. Concerns exist about the viability of part-time Higher and Degree Level Apprenticeships, which could take up to 8 years when completed part-time. At the same time, concerns also exist about the quality of Intermediate (Level 2) Apprenticeships in some sectors. As such, for those already in work we suggest that Advanced (Level 3) Apprenticeships offer an appropriate balance between concerns about quality and duration. For those entering the workforce we recommend exploring Intermediate Apprenticeship opportunities in sectors and occupations offering better wage returns and how subsequent progression opportunities to Level 3 (and beyond) can be built into the model.
- Ensuring that apprentices taking up part time and flexible opportunities are paid at least the Living Wage or London Living Wage. Whilst this is important for all apprentices, and we do not advocate rates of pay for part-time apprenticeships over and above other apprenticeships, it is particularly important to ensure that part-time apprentices, or apprentices employed on a flexible basis, do not face a 'participation penalty'. Evidence shows that low-pay in apprenticeships acts as a critical barrier and this is likely to be of even greater concern for part-time workers. Since financial viability of an apprenticeship will be a key consideration (particularly those with dependents and caring commitments); being paid at least the Living Wage or London Living Wage will be a crucial enabling factor for participation. In addition, ongoing financial capability support and training throughout may be a key factor in supporting retention on part-time and flexible apprenticeships.
- Exploring flexible timetabling and blended learning programmes that make better use of online and distance learning approaches to facilitate part-time and flexible apprenticeship models, while retaining the benefits of face-to-face and peer group learning valued by learners.
- Involving employer and employee representatives in the design of the pilot to ensure part-time models of delivery meet the needs of both.

We now intend to seek partners and funding to use these insights, and the more detailed findings set out in this report, to develop and pilot part-time and flexible apprenticeship models in London. The pilots will be evaluated and a final report will be published with the findings and practical guidance for those interested in implementing similar models. The report will also consider any wider implications for policy and practice. Our goal is to build an evidence base to support a scalable part-time and flexible apprenticeship offer and influence how the Government is sharing information and guidance about apprentices.

Method

The following research activities were conducted as part of the scoping and consultation phase:

- A review of apprenticeship policy and wider policy relating to key groups who are currently under-represented and could benefit from access to part-time and flexible apprenticeships.
- In-depth interviews with:
 - 6 stakeholder organisations, including the Institute for Apprenticeships, Association of Colleges (AoC), Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), Federation of Small Businesses, CITB, and the Institute of Directors.
 - 11 learners with experiences that have meant they could benefit from part-time or flexible options, including: being excluded from school; being a young and/or single parent; being a looked after child and leaving care; and being a young adult carer. The learners included a combination of apprentices and non-apprentices.
 - 10 part-time workers who were interested in or had applied for an apprenticeship.
 - 13 employers, including 3 local authorities, 2 hospitals and employers in the private sector offering apprenticeships from Level 2 to degree level in retail, customer service, business administration, care, finance, engineering, procurement and telecommunications, among others.
 - 8 apprenticeship providers, including 4 further education colleges, three independent training providers, and 1 higher education provider.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT PICTURE FOR PART-TIME AND FLEXIBLE APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeship reform has led to a period of widespread change in how employers and providers think about the employment-related training they offer. Driven by the Government's target of 3 million apprenticeship starts by May 2020, changes have aimed to make the system employer-led so that linkages can be created between apprenticeships and the skills required by the labour market. Key changes have included the development of occupational apprenticeship standards to replace apprenticeship frameworks; introducing degree level apprenticeships; establishing an apprenticeship target for public sector employers; and the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, a levy on UK employers introduced in April 2017 (based on wage-bill) to fund new apprenticeships.

In the changing system, quality and access considerations are crucial when trying to meet challenging targets and the needs of employers and apprentices. The role of high quality part-time and flexible apprenticeships is one issue, in a complex and evolving system, which may be limiting the growth of apprenticeships and preventing a diverse range of people from participating.

This section uses existing literature and data, as well as findings from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the sector, to explore the current picture for part-time and flexible apprenticeships in terms of policy, prevalence, and potential.

What do the policy and rules say about part-time and flexible apprenticeships?

The changes to the apprenticeship system have been underpinned by a Government commitment to the quality of apprenticeships and clarification of minimum standards. This has included the introduction of end-point assessments for apprentices, a register of approved providers, minimum requirements for the hours worked by apprentices during their programme and off-the-job training, and guidance for what off-the-job training comprises. However, there have been criticisms that the introduction of the target encourages a focus on quantity rather than quality, and that the Levy creates a perverse incentive for employers to recoup their contribution by using it for CPD for existing staff, creating a risk that they are accrediting existing skills rather than adding value.

Government criteria states that an apprenticeship must last at least 12 months, and can last up to five years depending on the level of study. The policy emphasis is on apprentices being employed for a minimum of 30 hours per week, including off-the-job training.

Off-the-job training

Off-the-job training is defined as learning which is undertaken outside of the normal day-to-day working environment and leads towards the achievement of an apprenticeship. This can include training that is delivered at the apprentice's normal place of work but must not be delivered as part of their normal working duties. Current models of delivery by providers are:

- **Day release:** for example one day a week at the training provider's location.
- **Block release:** for example 3-4 weeks at the training provider's location.
- **At your location:** the training provider comes to your workplace.

It is important to note that where an apprentice requires additional training to reach minimum standards for English and maths this is not included in the off-the-job training time, and as such if a part-time learner was also to require such training this may be a potential deterrent for an employer.

Until recently part-time and flexible apprenticeships were considered to be something that could take place in 'exceptional' circumstances; however, there was no shared understanding of what such circumstances might include. When asked the steps he was taking to promote the option of part-time apprenticeships, the then Minister for Skills Nick Boles stated that:

*"In exceptional circumstances, such as where the apprentice has caring responsibilities, a minimum of 16 hours per week may be agreed between the apprentice and the employer. In circumstances where the apprentice works fewer than 30 hours per week, the duration of the apprenticeship must be extended in proportion so that the minimum requirements on duration are still met."*⁴

As such there was not an explicit policy focus on part-time and flexible apprenticeships, and they continued to be the 'exception'. Funding guidance for employers released in May 2017 re-addresses this perception by stating that:

*"Working fewer than 30 hours a week or being on a zero-hours contract must not be a barrier to successfully completing an apprenticeship. We will monitor working hours data and patterns of behaviour to ensure that sufficient regular training and on-the-job activity is done to ensure successful completion of the apprenticeship, regardless of the number of hours worked."*⁵

As such, it is clear that if an apprentice's personal circumstances or if the nature of employment in a given sector make it impossible to work these hours, then a part-time or flexible apprenticeship is acceptable as the apprentice is employed for a minimum of 16 hours a week. Where this is the case the provider must extend the minimum duration of the apprenticeship (pro rata) to take account of this. Specifically, the rules state the following:

⁴ Parliament.uk (2016) Apprentices: Written Question 39187 www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-06-03/39187/

⁵ Education and Skills Funding Agency (May 2017). Apprenticeship funding: rules and guidance for employers May 2017 to March 2018 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/605004/EMPLOYER_RULES_V2_FINAL.pdf

Rules for part-time learning adjustments

Where part-time working is agreed, the provider must:

- record the agreed average number of hours each week
- evidence why this working pattern is needed
- extend the minimum duration using the following formula:

$$12 \times 30 / \text{average weekly hours} = \text{new minimum duration in months}^6$$

Interviews with stakeholder were also clear: no policy or rule-specific barrier currently exists which would stop an apprenticeship from taking place on a part-time or flexible basis so long as it met the minimum standards. The likely barriers were therefore seen to be related to demand, feasibility and practicality of the model, employer and provider ability to deliver a model, and/or concerns about meeting the quality criteria whilst delivering an apprenticeship in this way.

Support for the availability of more flexible models continues to grow, with the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices noting that:

“As the new apprenticeship system beds in, Government should examine how it could be made to work better for those working atypically, including through agencies. The Government should ask the Institute for Apprenticeships to work with sectors using high levels of lower paying and atypical work to ensure that they are making best use of the current apprenticeship framework.”⁷

How common are part-time and flexible apprenticeships?

The Apprentice Pay Survey 2016 found that full-time hours continue to be the norm for apprentices, and working and training for longer hours than they were contracted was a regular occurrence. Apprentices at Levels 2/3 were contracted for a mean of 36 hours per week, and reported working and training for a mean of 40.5 hours per week.⁸ At Levels 4/5 apprentices were contracted for a mean of 36.9 hours per week, and reported working and training for a mean of 44.7 hours per week.

The survey found that only 11% of apprentices at Levels 2/3 were contracted to work less than 30 hours per week, and 6% of apprentices at Levels 4/5.

Amongst apprentices at Levels 2/3 those contracted fewer hours per week were more likely to work over their contracted hours. The majority (79%) of those contracted for less than 20 hours a week worked longer actual hours than specified in their contracts. This suggests that being contracted for part-time hours is not a guarantee of actually working part-time hours. Pay may also be a consideration for apprentices, with retention being cited by some

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Taylor, M. (2017). *Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*. London: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

⁸ IFF Research (2017). *Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2016: Great Britain*. London: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

stakeholders as a potential concern for providers if an apprentice was on the National Minimum Wage for apprentices.

National Minimum Wage for apprentices

Apprentices are entitled to the apprentice rate if they're either: aged under 19; or aged 19 or over and in the first year of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices are entitled to the minimum wage for their age if they are both:

- aged 19 or over
- have completed the first year of their apprenticeship

Interviews with stakeholders indicated that in some cases providers and employers may be making exceptions for individual learners and 'getting on' with part-time and flexible delivery. However, there was a paucity of examples where providers and employers were making a concerted effort to develop high quality part-time options and appropriate adjustments to delivery models. The model developed by Camden Council remains the most visible and detailed example available of a specific apprenticeship programme designed and delivered for part-time apprentices.

Camden Council⁹

Camden became a Timewise Council in 2014, and recognises "the value of output over hours and supports arrangements that match the flexible needs of the individual, as well as the organisation". They perceive the value of flexible working to recruiting and retaining parents and other people with caring responsibilities. They worked with local businesses to pilot a project providing ten flexible adult apprenticeships for parents. These included a range of sectors and all paid at least the London Living Wage. The project was very successful. Nine of the apprentices were on course to complete qualifications and six were offered permanent jobs. Apprentices spoke highly of the programme, which improved their confidence, skills and experience, and economic situation. Employers spoke highly of the programme because it enabled them to access high quality adult apprentices.

Key learning from the independent evaluation carried out by NEF included:

- Part-time, flexible apprenticeships are a way of bringing parents into the workforce.
- Flexible apprenticeships offer not just a solution to parents, but also to other vulnerable groups who are under-represented in the workforce.
- Adult apprenticeships provide excellent value for money.
- Flexible, adult apprentices are an untapped workforce and there is a strong business case for employers to create opportunities to access them.

⁹ Camden Council, Flexible Working: <https://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/business/jobs-and-skills/flexible-working/?page=4>

Who can benefit from part-time and flexible apprenticeships?

Current data tracking suggests that the government is likely to achieve 2.8 million apprenticeship starts within the stated timescale. However, there are a number of potential barriers to this target being reached. One is that access to apprenticeships is uneven. The Government has made commitments to widening access to apprenticeships so that all those who can benefit from an apprenticeship are able to. This includes setting targets to increase by 20% the proportion of apprentices from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and with learning difficulties or disabilities, and to increase the proportion of those from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher level apprenticeships (such as looked after young people and care leavers).

Research by the Centre for Social Justice found that care leavers are significantly under-represented on apprenticeships; in some areas as few as 1% were employed as apprentices.¹⁰ For care leavers who have had poor experiences of education, apprenticeships potentially offer a valuable pathway to employment, but often require flexibility and support to make the transition.

However, targets are not in place to address wider disparities in the system, in part, this is because gendered segregation continues in apprenticeships. Although women make up 52 per cent of all apprenticeships, they are much more likely to be in low paid sectors, which contributes to ongoing pay inequalities. Young women apprentices are likely to be paid less than men. A recent poll by Young Women's Trust found that female apprentices reported earning an average of £6.67 an hour compared with £7.25 for male apprentices.¹¹

Whilst the Government recognises that there are disparities in gender representation in some sectors, including high value sectors, this has not been identified as a programme-wide success measure for apprenticeships as women overall account for the majority of apprenticeship starts. However, women's participation across all sectors will be monitored by Government to understand the impact that reforms are having on gender disparity.¹²

There was consensus amongst the stakeholders interviewed that increasing the part-time and flexible options available to apprentices would enable a more diverse range of individuals to be able to access and successfully complete apprenticeships, in particular those with caring responsibilities and those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

¹⁰ Centre for Social Justice (2016). We need to help young people out of care and into work www.capx.co/we-need-to-help-young-people-out-of-care-and-into-work/

¹¹ Young Women's Trust (2017). *Young Women & Apprenticeships: Still not working?* London: Young Women's Trust

¹² Department for Education (March 2017). Apprenticeship Reform Programme: Benefits Realisation www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/604401/Apprenticeship_Reform_Programme_-_Benefits_Realisation_Strategy.pdf

LEARNER AND PART-TIME WORKER VIEWS

An apprenticeship can be an important platform for social mobility and progression in the labour market. Younger people in particular benefit from apprenticeships that offer a broad curriculum including both academic and vocational content, and high levels of work and classroom-based training that enable reflective learning and practice.¹³ Many of the best apprenticeships are still the preserve of the male-dominated industries characterised by traditional full-time models of employment, and quality concerns about lower level apprenticeships in some sectors underpin the emphasis on off-the-job training requirements.

The challenge for this project is to explore part-time and flexible models of apprenticeships that enable access to and progression within a skilled occupational pathway, and do not come at the expense of wider quality. This section sets out the findings from interviews with learners and workers with part-time and flexible training needs about how to meet this challenge.

Potential benefits of part-time and flexible apprenticeships

We interviewed 21 workers and learners who wanted or needed to train and work part-time or flexibly. All interviewees said that more part-time or flexible apprenticeships would be a valuable addition to the apprenticeship system, and believed these would help to expand access to apprenticeships and better enable them to meet both the in-work and off-the-job training requirements.

Widening access to apprenticeships

More than half of the learners we spoke with had taken part in an apprenticeship, and perceived apprenticeships to be a beneficial, cost-effective route to further training that would enable them to gain the necessary skills to progress in work. Most of the part-time workers interviewed already had significant work experience and qualifications, including at degree level, but had taken low skilled part-time jobs to fit with family commitments. This group viewed apprenticeships as a route into a sector or occupation with better employment prospects than those offered by their existing job roles.

Interviewees noted that part-time and flexible apprenticeships could help to open up new training opportunities to parents, particularly single parents or parents with young children; people with learning difficulties and disabilities; people with mental health difficulties; people who may find full-time work or training overwhelming; and carers of all ages. They noted that part-time hours that fit around the school day would be particularly beneficial to apprentices with children.

Ensuring a positive learning experience

Interviewees noted the importance of part-time options and flexibility both from employers and training providers to ensuring a positive experience and enabling them to fulfil the demands of the apprenticeship programme.

¹³ Bynner J (2011). 'Youth transitions and apprenticeships: a broader view of skill', In: Dolphin T and Lanning T (eds) *Rethinking apprenticeships*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Some learners highlighted that they found it useful when providers made recordings of sessions available to students. This meant that if they had to miss a session, they could still access the work that was covered and would not fall behind. This was perceived to be a particularly useful learning aid for apprentices with additional responsibilities or health difficulties, who may have to miss sessions unexpectedly.

One participant said that her experience of undertaking an apprenticeship was very positive because her employer – a small charity – was able and willing to provide the flexibility she needed in order to carry out her caring responsibilities. The employer allowed this learner to work part-time, take time off to attend appointments necessitated by her caring responsibilities, and complete 10 hours of coursework per week from home, rather than having to stay on site to do this.

“I was really lucky. It was a small charity so the staff could take me under their wing a bit more and they were flexible with me. If I was working 37.5 hours I probably wouldn't be where I am now.” Learner

Potential barriers to part-time and flexible apprenticeships

The learners and part-time workers we spoke with suggested a number of barriers that may face individuals, providers, and employers who wish to provide or engage in part-time or flexible apprenticeships, and some of the difficulties that might stem from this form of apprenticeship.

Lack of awareness and availability

The Government's 'Find An Apprenticeship' service has no search function for those seeking to train part-time, meaning applicants have to trawl through the descriptions of each relevant apprenticeship to see if any flexibility is possible.¹⁴ Interviewees told us that they had rarely seen part-time or flexible apprenticeships advertised. As a result, some perceived apprenticeships as something that needed to be undertaken full-time, and noted that many people may be put off as a result, reducing the diversity of applicants overall. Many were wary of asking for flexibility at the application stage and felt that it was more viable to start an apprenticeship and then negotiate the flexibility they required after they had proven themselves or once they felt comfortable enough to disclose their circumstances. This mirrors research conducted by Timewise on the experiences of candidates seeking flexible jobs.¹⁵

Lack of financial support

Employers can choose to pay the National Minimum Wage for apprentices (in the first year of the apprenticeship for those 19+, after which it would be replaced by the age appropriate National Minimum Wage) to reflect the extent to which the apprentice is in training rather than productive work, helping to alleviate the financial concerns of some employers about taking on apprentices. Many interviewees recognised this as a 'trade off', particularly those learners undertaking an apprenticeship leading to a professional qualification (such as a chartered accountant), and felt that the fact that they received training and a wage was a huge benefit when compared to pursuing a university degree.

¹⁴ See: <https://www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch>

¹⁵ https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Flexibility_Train_Research.pdf

However, learners and part-time workers interviewed for this project suggested that money may be a barrier for some individuals, who may not be able to live on the wages earned from a part-time apprenticeship. This was particularly a concern for learners in London who were living independently. Learners and part-time workers told us that flexibility only works if apprentices have sufficient financial support, particularly given that the duration of a part-time apprenticeship is likely to be longer than a full-time apprenticeship.

This point is supported by polling of 4,000 young men and women, aged 18-30, carried out by Populus Data Solutions for Young Women's Trust in July 2017. The results showed that 3 in 5 young people (62%) who left school to go to university or to other work or training said that the extremely low levels of pay was one of the key reasons for them not following an apprenticeship route¹⁶.

Learners also highlighted the necessity of part-time apprentices being supported to navigate the benefits system, and receiving clear information about what they are entitled too. Some were concerned that participation in a part-time or flexible apprenticeship might impact on the receipt of benefits, including carer's allowance.

In contrast one learner based in London thought a part-time apprenticeship could be easier financially than a full-time training programme, by giving them the opportunity to 'top-up' their wage through doing a second better paying part-time job.

Lack of clarity between learning and work hours

Learners who had completed apprenticeships highlighted that lines can often become blurred between hours needed for working and learning on a full-time apprenticeship, and can be more than 37 hours. For example, we spoke with accountancy apprentices who spent between 45-50 hours per week including on the job training, college attendance, and independent study. Exceeding the contracted hours of an apprenticeship, to the point that their hours are full-time, might therefore be a very real possibility for part-time apprentices and would undermine the purpose and need for a part-time and flexible model. Learners highlighted the importance of all the components of an apprenticeship being included in the part-time hours, and that all hours are paid hours.

Employer and provider ability to meet requirements

Learners suggested that there may be a number of potential barriers for employers and providers to overcome before being able to provide part-time or flexible apprenticeships. They thought that having employees with more complex lives and more barriers to employment may deter some employers, and that the working patterns required by the employer were likely to take priority over their own needs for flexibility. Learners believed that larger organisations may be able to facilitate greater flexibility, whilst small, local organisations might want to do so in order to give something back to local employees. One

¹⁶ *Young Women's Trust, 2017, Young Women and Apprenticeships: Still not Working*

learner also suggested that colleges may be reluctant to alter their teaching timetables in order to accommodate part-time/flexible apprentices.

How to overcome these barriers

The interviewees noted that better use of online learning could facilitate part-time or flexible apprenticeship models. This would enable learners to access training at convenient times, and to plan around classroom-based training sessions well in advance. Online portals might also provide an easy way for employers and providers to track the learning apprentices had completed to ensure they are up-to-date. One learner suggested that it would be useful to have an online apprentice forum as part of this so that apprentices could discuss ideas and issues with one another.

However, blended learning programmes, which comprise both face-to-face and online elements, were perceived to be more beneficial than a purely online mode of learning. Learners told us that there were great benefits to face-to-face learning. For instance, tutors can emphasise the key aspects of the course, and provide structure and pace to the learning. Classroom-based learning creates learner cohorts, and therefore opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, which was viewed as invaluable to the learning process. Interviewees also noted that some learners may require face-to-face tutoring in order to stay motivated and receive sufficient support. As a result, training with a provider that is able to offer flexible delivery modes – including face-to-face learning, distance learning and live online learning – was perceived to be necessary for a part-time programme to work effectively and cater for a diverse range of needs.

The individuals consulted felt that if a part-time or flexible apprenticeship were to be successful, it would require the learner to be upfront about their circumstances, requirements and difficulties. They recognised that it might sometimes be necessary to provide proof of commitments, such as appointment letters, in order to develop trust with the employer. Flexibility would have to be agreed in advance, and regularly and openly discussed so that all parties were aware of the needs and expectations of one another. The training contract, agreed between an apprentice and their employer at the start of an apprenticeship, may be a useful tool for establishing this shared understanding.

Finally, a shared-apprenticeship, using a job share model over a suitably adjusted period of time, was suggested as a potentially useful model to overcome some of the barriers faced by employers. This would offer two apprentices the opportunity to work half of the week each, including their coursework, and therefore provide an employer with the equivalent of a full-time apprentice, where this was their preference.

EMPLOYER VIEWS

For employers, the main concern is often whether an apprenticeship meets their immediate skills needs, and whether they are able to recoup the cost of their investment as the trainee becomes more productive. For the training to be transferable, it should also meet the broader and longer term needs of the industry as a whole. Previously only a small proportion of employers have offered apprenticeships in the UK, particularly at higher levels, and employer investment in training overall has fallen significantly over time.¹⁷ However, the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy has opened up an opportunity to engage more employers in apprenticeship delivery and for them to consider where best to focus this investment, be it existing staff or new starters.

This section sets out the findings from the interviews with employers about their current approaches to apprenticeships, the scope for more high quality part-time and flexible models of delivery, and how these can meet their needs as well as those of learners.

Potential benefits of part-time and flexible apprenticeships

All of the employers interviewed were in the process of either initiating or growing an apprenticeship programme. Most were planning to recoup the costs of the Apprenticeship Levy by upskilling and progressing existing staff, including in cases where an existing apprenticeship programme was aimed at new entrants, although some were planning to extend schemes to new entrants in the future.

Some employers had not previously considered a part-time apprenticeship as an option and few advertised part-time or flexible options, preferring instead to consider individual requests from candidates.

“I have never heard anyone at [company name] have a conversation about PT apprentices – not on our radar.” Employer

However, most were open to considering part-time or flexible apprenticeship models and some had already offered apprenticeship roles at between 16 and 30 hours a week. Employers noted that the main benefit of offering part-time apprenticeships was the ability to attract and progress a more diverse workforce and target specific groups such as disabled people, lone parents, and those returning to work after a period of absence.

In a separate survey of HR decision makers carried out for Young Women’s Trust by YouGov in 2017, 54% of employers (including 65% in the public sector) would be willing to offer apprenticeships on a part-time basis but many wrongly believe there is little demand from potential apprentices for working arrangements along these lines.¹⁸

¹⁷ Green F, Felstead A, Gallie D, Inanc H and Jewson N (2013). *What has been happening to the training of workers in Britain?* LLAKES Research Paper 42, London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, Institute of Education.

¹⁸ *Young Women’s Trust, 2017, Young Women and Apprenticeships: Still not Working*

Potential barriers to part-time and flexible apprenticeships

Some employers noted that part-time working could exacerbate general barriers they face when trying to introduce new apprenticeships. For example, several employers said that their managers were resistant due to the resource required to train and coach apprentices, and the need to grant them time off to study. These employers noted that more part-time staff would be likely to increase the management resource required and reduce the time the apprentice spends being productive in the role, and therefore meet even more resistance from managers. There was a general sense across different employers that two days a week may be too short to accommodate work tasks and on and off-the-job training, but that three or four days a week may be more tenable.

“Sorry I’m sounding really negative but there is some resistance from managers because of additional management time needed for training and coaching.” Employer

Employers suggested that these operational barriers could be even more difficult to overcome in cases where there were general cultural barriers to part-time and flexible working. They suggested that sectors with predominantly full-time employment models were likely to be resistant to the need to redesign jobs and change the organisation of work at the same time as expanding or introducing a new apprenticeship programme. Examples included the shift work associated with some hospital roles, full-time engineering, distribution centre and kitchen roles, and sectors with peaks and troughs in demand that do not necessarily match employees’ needs for flexibility.

The Government requirements for apprenticeships to last at least a year and to employ apprentices for at least 30 hours a week must be extended pro rata for part-time apprenticeships (as set out previously). Many of the employers interviewed were worried that the longer duration of apprenticeships when undertaken part-time could affect retention, particularly at Higher and Degree levels, where the duration is already much longer than a year. A three-year Degree Apprenticeship could for example take up to six years to complete on a part-time basis. Some retailers focusing on meeting their immediate skills needs through apprenticeships were also concerned that the training could become outdated over longer periods of time.

Finally, several employers noted that few providers were open to the flexibility that may be required to facilitate a part-time model. They said that the providers they had worked with preferred larger cohorts, and would therefore be unlikely to accommodate requests from individual workers or small numbers of people. One employer noted that many providers offer courses that are delivered in a standardised way and at set times, including September start dates and term time only classes, and were unlikely to facilitate variations.

How to overcome these barriers

Employers argued that it would be easier to create part-time models in roles that are already offered part-time, at least initially, with a focus on three- or ideally four-day a week roles, or five-day roles but within school hours. Due to the extended duration of part-time apprenticeships, they also suggested an initial focus on Intermediate or Advanced

apprenticeships. Intermediate (Level 2) apprenticeships are equivalent to five GCSE passes and usually associated with entry-level roles, while Advanced (Level 3) apprenticeships are equivalent to two A' level passes and seek to address skills gaps in mid-skill and technician-level occupations.

One large retailer was offering purely digital/online off the job learning, and therefore saw no issue in allowing staff to complete training at their own pace. However other employers suggested that it would be helpful to identify and engage specialist providers with experience of offering flexible study and blended learning programmes, such as those offered by the Open University for degree-level apprenticeships.

Finally, several employers identified steps they could take to meet the general challenges associated with establishing an effective apprenticeship programme, part-time or otherwise. In particular, several employers felt they needed to do more to support and encourage their managers to create a learning environment that nurtures new talent. Some noted that, for this reason, the initial investment required to set up an apprenticeship programme is often more than the ongoing costs once a scheme is established.

"I very much enjoyed our discussion on part-time apprenticeships it's got me thinking about widening participation overall." Employer

One employer argued that it would be helpful if the Government enabled employers to invest more flexibly when establishing apprenticeships, for example in training staff mentors and supervisors, and designing the course content and structure in a way that works with their organisational needs.

PROVIDER VIEWS

Providers play a crucial role in supporting employers to design and deliver effective apprenticeship programmes, and can offer insights into alternative models of delivery. However, pressure to deliver on numbers has led to criticism that some providers focus on apprenticeships that are cheaper and easier to deliver, and do not do enough to ensure that apprenticeships meet the needs of employers and employees.¹⁹

This section sets out the findings from interviews with providers about how to increase part-time and flexible apprenticeships without compromising on quality.

Potential benefits of part-time and flexible apprenticeships

All the providers spoken with noted the potential benefits of part-time or flexible apprenticeships for people who may be unable to complete a full-time role, such as those with caring responsibilities, learning difficulties, physical disabilities, and those returning to work after a career break, including women returning to work after having children and those returning from long-term leave due to ill health.

Many providers thought part-time apprenticeships could also benefit employers by enabling them to fulfil their corporate social responsibilities, diversify their workforce and tackle skills gaps and recruitment difficulties in particular roles. Larger employers were perceived to be more in tune with the first two benefits, while smaller employers were thought to be motivated by the need to recruit for hard-to-fill roles. Some providers said they actively try to engage employers in considering the benefits of widening their talent pool, and promoting part-time and flexible apprenticeship options was perceived to be part of this.

“Smaller employers, we do suggest [being open to part-time working] to them, particularly if they are finding it hard to fill entry-level roles because it does widen the pool of who will apply. We will suggest it if we think it’s suitable and it’s going to help to fill a vacancy.” Apprenticeship provider

Overall providers said that they would be happy to accommodate the needs of employers and learners for flexibility, as long as the demand was sufficient for a model to be run, stating that they did not want to put barriers in the way of any potential learner accessing a course.

“If the demand was great, I’m sure that we could accommodate. It wouldn’t take much to accommodate a group of part-time learners, we never would put a barrier up for learning. We would just have to try and work a way of enabling that person to get a good apprenticeship experience, and let the employer get a good experience, too.” Apprenticeship provider

Potential barriers to part-time and flexible apprenticeships

Providers raised a number of potential barriers and concerns surrounding part-time/flexible apprenticeships. Some of these were from their own perspective, and some were barriers that they thought employers and learners would face.

¹⁹ Ofsted (2015). See also Keep E and James Relly S (2016) ‘Employers and meeting the Government’s target: What could possibly go wrong?’ in Lanning T (ed.) *Where Next for Apprenticeships?* London: CIPD

Perceived emphasis on full-time models

Some of the providers noted that part-time apprenticeships are rarely spoken about in the sector and some described them as very uncommon, in part because until recently the policy drivers and messages have been geared towards full-time apprenticeships. Some connected this with the traditional perceptions of apprenticeships held by many employers that an apprenticeship is a full-time structured employment and training pathway to support young people to make the transition from school to work, despite the fact that they are now used as a training mechanism for a much broader group of workers.

Employer resistance

Providers suggested that where part-time apprenticeships happen, they are largely learner led rather than employer led. Mirroring some of the concerns voiced by employers, some providers thought that employers would be resistant to adopt a part-time model due to a lack of understanding of how this would affect off-the-job training rules. In addition, the potential increased management resource of adopting part-time or job-share apprenticeships was seen as a deterrent, particularly in sectors where full-time employment was the norm such as construction and engineering, and for smaller employers.

“It’s probably easier to train someone up for 30 hours a week than it is for them to do part-time because they can do more things...especially if they are a small or medium size employer they want that person to take on a substantial role.” Apprenticeship provider

Learner experience and retention

Providers also echoed the concerns voiced by employers and learners about the salary available to part-time apprentices, particularly for longer apprenticeships. There was a question over whether or not apprentice’s pay would still increase after their first year, or whether this would be delayed due to the part-time nature of their programme. The former might act as a disincentive to employers whilst the latter might be problematic for apprentices.

“In this day and age, staying in an entry-level job at potentially apprenticeship salary for three years is pretty much unsustainable.” Apprenticeship provider

Connected to this, providers also believed that those choosing to complete an apprenticeship part-time or flexibly would need to understand the potential impacts this might have on any benefits received.

Some providers also questioned whether part-time apprenticeships are able to provide as high-quality an experience as full-time programmes. They questioned whether part-time training was as rigorous, especially where this is being done alongside another part-time job. The quality and intensiveness of the training was felt to be particularly important for young apprentices with little previous work experience.

Finally, there was concern that part-time apprentices may not benefit from the full potential value of the programme. For example, they may be isolated and do a lot of study on their own, with less time to practice their skills and learning, and there was also some concern that the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy may mean that employers are simply looking to

recoup their funds rather than the apprenticeship being in the best interests of part-time workers.

The providers interviewed were particularly concerned that these financial and quality issues could affect rates of retention, which in their experience was more of an issue the longer an apprentice is enrolled for. For providers for whom retention rates are one of their accountability measures, these considerations are crucial for the viability of apprenticeship models. As such, providers echoed the thoughts of employers that part-time apprenticeships at Higher and Degree levels were a particular risk.

Timetabling

Finally, several providers noted that it was more difficult for them to timetable part-time apprenticeships. Some providers use forms of block delivery, for instance where the apprentice attends for one or two weeks at a time, and felt that this would be difficult to replicate with part-time apprentices. However, overall the response of providers was that this was not impossible to work around and that they would do so if the employer requested this and demand was sufficient to generate a cohort for a part-time study programme.

How to overcome these barriers

Despite these potential barriers to offering part-time apprenticeships, many of the providers we spoke with remained positive about the possibilities for increasing the number of part-time apprenticeships. Some participants noted that the introduction of the Levy may be a good opportunity to trial part-time or flexible apprenticeships as Levy-paying employers try to make the most of their payments and seek to up-skill existing staff.

Providers thought that sectors where there is either a precedent for flexible working or where the nature of the job makes part-time working more straightforward to facilitate may be more amenable to flexible apprenticeship models. The sectors mentioned in this context were: childcare, teaching assistants, and related educational roles where hours could fit around the school day, and professional services such as IT and accountancy where part-time work is already well-established. Larger employers were also considered to be better placed to provide these than smaller employers, for reasons of cost and flexibility. Providers, like employers, suggested that part-time apprenticeships may be more appropriate at Levels 2 and 3, rather than at degree level where it could take too long to complete.

Some providers also suggested that sectors that use a flexible workforce to manage peaks and troughs in demand could be interested in flexible training models, such as hospitality and retail. Part-time and flexible working is common in these sectors, and seasonality and variability in demand could potentially be used to facilitate periods of block study.

“I think the flexible piece comes in industries where there is quite strong seasonality and variability of demand. You might have periods of time where there is not so much activity and then periods of time where it's full on, and it's being then able to have a more flexible apprenticeship that can accommodate those situations. You think maybe some of the hospitality or leisure industries, which can be seasonal, where people at certain times are going to have to work a lot more hours. Particularly if they're on an annual-hours contract.” Apprenticeship provider

In relation to the potential isolation of part-time learners, one provider noted that it would be possible to have cohorts of part-time learners. Again, this was felt to be appropriate to sectors where there a pre-existing culture of part-time/flexible working, where there may be sufficient demand to create a cohort of part-time learners. Furthermore, if online training methods were used, there may also be opportunities to create online networks and communities of part-time apprentices, as suggested in the learner interviews. The use of online and blended packages were raised as a key way to provide the flexibility for apprentices to be able to fit learning around their other commitments.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The findings set out in this report suggest that there is a consensus between individuals, employers and providers that more part-time or flexible apprenticeships could help to support underrepresented groups into apprenticeships, help individuals to upskill and progress in their roles, and help employers to increase the diversity and productivity of their workforce.

Most of the employers and providers interviewed were open to trialling flexible training models if the demand was there; however, there appears to be a mismatch in their respective understanding of the existing demand and who drives this.

Many of the barriers to implementing part-time apprenticeships mirror the cultural and operational barriers associated with creating more quality part-time work in a labour market where higher skilled, higher paid jobs are predominantly offered on a full-time basis. Cultural and operational resistance to part-time working are heightened in this context due to the fact that apprentices spend a fifth of their time in off-the-job training and less time being productive than other employees. There are challenges for employers wanting to see the shorter-term benefits of their investment, and for providers concerned about retaining apprentices over longer periods of time. Finally, a lack of visible policy guidance and standardised models of delivery among many providers also present challenges to those seeking to implement part-time or flexible apprenticeship models.

Interviewees offered a range of insights into how these barriers could be overcome. Based on our findings and the wider literature, we argue that the critical success factors include:

- 1. Working with employers to understand their workforce needs and where part-time and flexible apprenticeships may be beneficial.** Evidence suggests that both new entrants and existing members of the workforce could benefit from part-time or flexible apprenticeships. To ensure a model is effective it needs to understand and respond to the employer and apprentices' needs in this respect.
- 2. Communicating the opportunities and demand for part-time and flexible apprenticeships.** There is a mismatch between employer, provider, and potential apprentices' understanding of opportunities and respective demand for part-time and flexible apprenticeships. Providers do not perceive a demand from employers, and employers do not think providers offer them and often rely on staff to communicate part-time or flexible needs either on interview or subsequently (rather than building this into job adverts). The pilots should consider and test the most effective way of overcoming these barriers by identifying what information is most important for providers and employer to know and when.
- 3. Focusing initially on sectors and occupations where some degree of part-time or flexible working is already established.** In addition, a focus on areas that have skills gaps and recruitment difficulties could ensure that there is a business case for employers to adopt strategies to attract a wider pool of talent, as well as benefiting learners with flexible work and training needs.
- 4. Ensuring the level of apprenticeships offered are appropriate for the individual, of a high quality, and offer real progression opportunities and wage returns.** The

employers and providers we spoke with were concerned about problems retaining staff on Higher and Degree Level Apprenticeships, which could take up to 8 years when completed part-time. At the same time concerns also exist about the quality of Intermediate (Level 2) Apprenticeships in some sectors, including narrow content, low levels of training and poor wage returns. As such, for those already in work we suggest that Advanced (Level 3) Apprenticeships offer an appropriate balance between concerns about quality and duration. However, it is important that bridging opportunities are available for part-time workers entering the workforce who are not yet ready to take up Advanced Apprenticeship. For this group we recommend exploring Intermediate Apprenticeship opportunities in sectors and occupations offering better wage returns and how subsequent progression opportunities to Level 3 (and beyond) can be built into the model.

- 5. Ensuring that the apprentices taking up part time and flexible opportunities are paid at least the Living Wage or London Living Wage so that part-time apprentices do not face a ‘participation penalty’.** Learners and workers were concerned about the potential to be paid less on an apprenticeship than in other types of employment, they also raised concerns about impacts on wider benefits and support received. Whilst fair pay is important for all apprentices, and we do not advocate rates of pay for part-time apprenticeships over and above other apprenticeships, for part-time workers the financial viability of an apprenticeship will be a key consideration (particularly those with dependents and caring commitments); therefore, being paid at least the Living Wage or London Living Wage will be a crucial enabling factor for their participation. In addition, ongoing financial capability support and training throughout may be a key factor in supporting retention on part-time apprenticeships.
- 6. Exploring blended learning programmes that make better use of online and distance learning approaches to facilitate part-time and flexible apprenticeship models, while retaining the benefits of face-to-face and peer group learning valued by learners.** Identifying providers with prior experience of delivering blended learning approaches would be beneficial, but most importantly providers should be open to developing tailored learning programmes that meet the needs of both employers and employees, not simply offering off-the-shelf apprenticeship programmes and set models of delivery. For example, providers and employers should be open to exploring a range of models of delivery for the off-the-job training component, depending on the nature of the industry. While some employers prefer to create weekly opportunities for reflection and learning, others may prefer block release models that enable them to make use of peaks and troughs in workload over a year. It may also be appropriate for providers to explore shorter, more focused vocational pathways for part-time staff with significant prior qualifications and work experience who are seeking to retrain, while retaining broader apprenticeship models for younger apprentices and new entrants without significant prior work experience or education.
- 7. Involving employer and employee representatives in the design of the pilot to ensure part-time models of delivery meet the needs of both.** At individual business level, it is crucial to ensure shared understanding between the employer and employee of how flexibility will work from the start by agreeing the terms in the training contract, and to

engage the managers overseeing the part-time apprentices in the pilot, particularly where there is any organisational resistance to apprenticeships. Ideally the pilot should also engage and consult sector-level employer and employee representatives with knowledge and understanding of the skills needs of the broader industry. This can avoid the apprenticeship being too narrowly designed around the needs of one or a small group of employers, and ensure the content is broad enough to underpin mobility, progression and long-term relevance in the labour market.

In addition to these points, we believe there is a need for policymakers to demystify part-time apprenticeships by raising their profile as an option for employers, providing guidance about different models of delivery, and ensuring candidates that need to train flexibly are able to search easily for these opportunities where they exist. Learners may also need guidance from the Government about any implications for those in receipt of benefits if they decide to undertake a part-time apprenticeship.

Next steps

Timewise and Learning and Work Institute will seek partners and funding to use these insights to develop and pilot part-time and flexible apprenticeship models.

If funding is secured for the pilots, Timewise will identify and engage employers and providers to tailor and implement these models to the needs of different working realities over an 18-month to 2-year timeframe. The pilot will include a review and ongoing monitoring of existing best practice and an independent evaluation conducted by Learning and Work Institute, and will be supported by an advisory panel of experts and industry representatives. A final report will set out the findings and any wider implications for policy and practice. We will also produce guidance in consultation with candidates who need to work and train flexibly to support them to understand how to prepare for, find, and request part-time and flexible apprenticeship options.

This mirrors the proven approach Timewise takes with part-time workers more broadly – by seeking to grow the number of quality part-time training opportunities available, and offering candidates support to enable them to access these opportunities.