

Online learning for young people

Learning and Work Institute is delighted to be working in partnership with J.P. Morgan to support organisations to design and deliver inclusive and high-quality pre-apprenticeship programmes that provide a pathway to apprenticeships for young people.

Given the unprecedented social restrictions in place across the world, many providers are faced with the challenge of how to keep young people engaged and motivated to focus on their goals. Delivering their programmes remotely, or predominantly online, is the only realistic option for most providers. For some organisations, this will be a new challenge, and will require creativity and innovation.

Online learning, when delivered well, can present a variety of benefits for young people. It gives young people the option to learn at anytime and anywhere. It can enable them to juggle family life, work and learning. This is particularly important in the current crisis, given that many young people may now have additional responsibilities or distractions at home. Other benefits of online provision include young people:

- Having greater autonomy and ownership over their learning
- Being able to repeat lessons and learn at their own pace
- Being able to track and record progress online
- Improving their digital and IT skills whilst engaging with the programme

However, a word of caution - organisations need to ensure that young people are equipped and empowered to fully benefit from online learning. Their provision must be fully accessible and engaging for all young people. This is particularly important for young people who face additional barriers to online learning, such as having low levels of digital skills, or a lack of confidence to use technology. If online learning is available, but not accessible to individual young people, providers risk pushing them away from learning and reinforcing the disadvantage that many face.

Now is an incredibly challenging time for young people and the organisations that support them. But it also presents an opportunity to develop creative and flexible ways to keep young people engaged and positive about their pre-apprenticeship journey. This short article explores some key features of online provision which could help to support engagement and motivation on pre-apprenticeship programmes.

Effective support for young people

Support from both tutors and peers typically takes place through face to face interaction in classroom-based environments. This means it is important that organisations who are now delivering online, create ways to support young people through their learning.

Young people who are continuing to learn remotely, should still have the same access to dedicated, regular tutor support and peer support. Young people should have a range of ways in which they can contact their tutors including through online, live chat or social media, in addition to phone or text messaging. Having access to additional support and ensuring that young people are aware of this support, is essential to fostering engagement whilst delivering online learning.

For example, you could consider setting up regular sessions with young people as they adjust to remote learning, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. You could also set up a "buddy" system, whereby young people are matched with a peer who they can approach to have study sessions with, to ask questions, or general peer support.

L&W's [pre-apprenticeship resource](#) for providers offers some additional ways in which providers can support young people on pages 54-56.

Use a range of methods to deliver content online

There are many ways of delivering learning using online methods. Providers can use online learning platforms such as Google Classrooms, deliver webinars, share recorded PowerPoint presentations, or host an online discussion forum, to name a few. Young people will benefit most from learning which is delivered using a range of such methods to foster engagement and motivation.

One key benefit of online learning platforms is that they can make learning fun and more interactive. You should consider new ways to communicate with young people via online methods, for example, using existing smartphone applications, interactive online games and social media platforms to facilitate interactive learning. These tools can work well to engage and motivate young people.

JOBLINGE, in Germany, have developed a mobile phone app, "Maths as a Mission", to support participants to improve their maths skills 'in a playful manner'. The app is comprised of a comic story and a game, with difficulty levels linked to playable characters. The app is introduced during the orientation phase of the programme, and effectiveness is measured with pre- and follow-up tests. Alongside this, the Mathe4Joblinge project, supported by J.P. Morgan, aims to improve the digital and maths skills of participants on the pre-apprenticeship programme through the use of e-learning modules (bettermarks) and is again tested at the start, middle and end of the JOBLINGE programme.

Facilitate peer-to-peer interaction

Opportunities to collaborate and interact socially play an important role in young people's learning and in their personal and social development. In classroom-based settings, this would normally be achieved through face-to-face tutor and peer interaction.

Facilitating and encouraging communication between young people using online methods will help them to stay connected with their programme and fellow peers. Encourage young people to keep in touch outside of "teaching times", for example through peer-to-peer online study sessions, or even using video conferencing for refreshment breaks. This will also encourage young people to share their experiences with the rest of the group, which will be an important form of support during the next few months.

Online learning needs to be accessible

Today more than ever, people have access to the internet at home and are using devices such as smart phones. Despite this, having access to and being able to afford up-to-date technology, may be a key challenge for some young people. Some young people may not be able to access online material if they are unable to access the internet due to a lack of broadband connection, or they are unable to afford sufficient mobile phone data. Organisations should be aware of this, and strive to provide options that are less data intensive.

For young people who don't have access to technology or are unable to afford a sufficient internet connection, organisations may be able to approach local charities or businesses to loan equipment to their learners.

Organisations who are continuing to deliver their programme remotely, will need to ensure they are also providing resources for young people in a range of offline formats. This is likely to involve printing and posting materials as well as keeping in touch with young people via phone calls and text messaging.

It is also important that online learning platforms aimed at young people are easy to navigate and use accessible language to ensure the programme is inclusive for all. The use of videos, clear graphics and images, and interactive games are all effective ways of making learning platforms accessible to young people. Throughout this process, it is good idea to involve young people by asking them for feedback as well as ideas about what they think will be useful to them over the next few months, and how.

Keep in touch

L&W are working with providers in different countries to identify and promote best practice in the design and delivery of pre-apprenticeship programmes. We are working to gain up to date insight into how pre-apprenticeship programmes are being delivered and to understand how and why particular types of delivery make a difference in helping young people on their journey to an apprenticeship.

Over the next two years, we will build our knowledge of, and share best practice through a range of accessible outputs, resources and events; supporting innovation and learning between providers and wider stakeholders across Europe and beyond. If you are interested in this opportunity and would like updates on the project, please contact [Seana Friel](mailto:seana.friel@learningandwork.org.uk). (seana.friel@learningandwork.org.uk)

Useful websites and resources for providers

The European Commission have published a selection of [online resources and tools](#) for learners, teachers and educators during the outbreak of COVID-19.

The Education and Training Foundation in the UK is running a [series of webinars](#) to support training providers to respond to the challenge of delivering online.

Skills for Employment are hosting an online discussion forum whereby employers, training providers, and other individuals are invited to share and discuss ideas to maintain continued learning during COVID-19. The discussion, [found here](#), aims to explore innovative practices in online education and training.

Learning and Work Institute have produced a [range of resources](#) to support pre-apprenticeship providers in the design and delivery of pre-apprenticeship programmes, including an interactive resource, short films, and case studies.

