

Technical and Professional Apprenticeships in Construction and the Built Environment: Enabling Successful Apprenticeships (England)

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A rising number of C&BE (technical and professional) apprenticeships, starts and achievements

- There are now **117 occupational standards** in the C&BE route, with **66 of these are approved at technical, higher technical and professional levels (England)**
 - Of these, **33 link to the professional registers &/or accreditation options** in C&BE
 - Recent revisions across the sector have realised a **reduction in the overall number of individual occupations**
- The transition to technical and professional apprenticeships has meant a **significant increase in the typical duration** of many apprenticeships, with completions taking time to come through
- **Starts have now reached over 95,000** since September 2017 across the professionally linked apprenticeships, with these levelling out at circa. 17k starts per annum for last 3 years
- **Achievements have now reached nearly 16,000** across the professionally linked apprenticeships, with these roughly doubling year on year since 2017/18
 - Of those apprentices that sat & completed their EPA, 93% of apprentices passed their apprenticeship

Level 6 and 7 Apprenticeships (English)

- **Level 6 and 7 Apprenticeships in England**
 - 17 occupations currently available, from architecture, civil engineering, construction management and surveying through to transport planning, building control, fire safety engineering, facilities management, landscaping and geospatial mapping and science
 - Some include a degree, others a Master's degree, and some with no formal qualification at all
 - Outcomes and assessment directly link to professional registers (outcomes are professional registration as well as degree qualification)
- **Degree Apprenticeships starts (since 2017) have reached over 17,000**
 - Starts at Level 6 have reached 15,850, and at level 7, 1,870
- **'Professional' Degree Apprenticeships in two forms: integrated and non-integrated EPA**
 - 5 are currently integrated, and 11 non-integrated
 - 1 further apprenticeship with no mandated degree or other qualification listed
 - Some major changes to some occupations and assessment methods from March 2025 (civil and building services engineering)

Level 6 and 7 Apprenticeships (English)

- **Achievements on level 6 and 7 apprenticeships have reached 1070**
 - These apprenticeships are 4 to 6 years in duration and do take time to complete (we expect lower numbers at present)
 - Completions rapidly growing, as are achievements
 - Pass rate average is 90% (for those with data available)
- **But:**
 - Only 2 level 6/7 occupations exceeded the current 62% ESFA Qualification & Achievement Rate (QAR) target in 2022/23; Government ambition for QAR is to reach 67% in 2025
 - Qualification achievement rates vary hugely by individual occupational standards – some are very low
 - Retention rates are slowly improving, but remain around 52%
 - Some non-integrated apprenticeships have now been reviewed and will now integrate EPA (but these have retained direct professional registration links)
 - Uncertainty of level 7 apprenticeships under new Labour Government & Skills England

What is happening around non-completions?

- From **ESFA's last full annual data set** (2022/23), we can also see that there were around half (the annual intake expected to complete that year) are leaving without completing across these occupations
 - Wide variety of reasons for apprentices leaving during their apprenticeship
 - Covid 19 effects, which delayed training, both 'on' and 'off the job' delaying completions & achievement
- **C&BE Apprentices have been leaving:**
 - At the very start of their apprenticeship (wrong career choice / didn't know what to expect)
 - When an interim award can be made (such as HNC / HND)
 - After failing modules, most commonly mathematics-oriented modules (first and resit attempts)
 - After they have completed their underpinning academic qualifications or on completion of their training period, and have not sat their EPA (non-completions)
- **But the impact is significant**
 - *Major funding issues passed onto training providers for non-completion of EPA (20% of funding is withheld / already been paid for by employers)*
 - No independent assessment of an apprentices' occupational competence
 - Reduction in number of apprentices that come through to professional review – an increasing issue as the Building Safety Act will require employers to demonstrate their workforce is competent

What have we done?

- **Desktop research**
 - Range of reports from DfE, IfATE, St Martins Group in association with L&W Institute, AELP
 - Triangulate findings
- **National Apprenticeship Week**
 - Captured materials for inclusion in toolkit
- **1-2-1 (or very small group) discussions with a range of stakeholders:**
 - Employers
 - Training Providers
 - Apprentices
 - Professional institutions (including those who are also registered EPA organisations)
- **Events and Workshops with:**
 - Employers
 - Training Providers
 - Apprentices
 - Professional bodies
 - Broader stakeholders, including IfATE
- **Identified key issues and challenges: six priority areas**
- Final stages of curating report and good practice case studies aimed at **improving completions** in the C&BE sector for technical and professional apprenticeships

The key areas for collective action

What is different about an apprenticeship?

Setting out expectations, roles and responsibilities

Checking and measuring progress: tripartite action planning

Preparing for, and undertaking, the EPA

Defining and celebrating success

What is different about an apprenticeship?

Communication

- Most websites only mention the qualification and not the occupational or professional outcomes
- Are we devaluing the apprenticeship brand?
 - Language: 'Free' *versus* 'employer investment'
 - 'No cost to apprentice', but major costs to both employer and training provider – it's not just money, its time and commitment

Are we supporting the 'competence' message?

- We're still selling qualifications and not competence outcomes from the outset
- We need to shift the messaging around competence to collectively support the implementation of the Building Safety Act 2024 requirements
- Should we be more vocal about addressing poor employer & provider practice?

Setting out expectations, roles and responsibilities

Have we really set out the expectations to the right people?

- We often have HR personnel leading initial contracting and training plan checks, and not the line managers / technical leads, which can lead to gaps in understanding and implementation
- We also have gaps in understanding from teaching teams with the 'apprentice team' the focus of initial and ongoing engagement activity
- We also have gaps in professional accreditation practice

Can we better support our academic and industry counterparts ?

- How might we better inform and support our line managers?
- How can we encourage, support and reward our academic teams?

Do we revisit expectations often enough?

- Are we using what we find to improve practice, inform delivery and challenge outcomes?

Progress Reviews / Tripartite Discussions

Do we truly value the progress review?

- For too long, progress reviews were simply not undertaken
- Many were undertaken by the 'teaching team' and focused around the 'qualification' progress and not the suite of KSBs
- Too many line managers have not attended

Progress reviews make the biggest difference to success

- They need structure and focus, to support KSB development in small but steady steps
- They must challenge the employer to provide apprentices with the opportunities to develop and contextualise their KSBs
- They should be an open forum to discuss challenges and seek to resolve these quickly

Capture feedback to make improvements

- Progress reviews should also be used to capture feedback on the programme and implement improvements for all learners

Preparing for the EPA

Practice driven by funding

- A focus on achieving the underpinning qualification whilst leaving the EPA for the *'we'll deal with it later'* box
- Apprenticeship completion became more about *'20% final payments'* and not about *'completion and achievement'* outcomes

Preparing for EPA Gateway

- Practice is improving, with programmes supporting KSB development and assessment each year
- Some employers and providers also embed professional development frameworks *and* also offer registration at lower levels, e.g. EngTech in year 3 of 5-year programme as a practice run for EPA
- Many providers now ensure there is a supporting module aimed at supporting apprentices to complete all the documentation for EPA

What can we improve?

- Many apprentices are voicing concern over pressure-points during the final year: completion of individual projects, exams, additional responsibilities at work, and EPA documentation – these often overlap, so we need to ensure we carefully review our programmes and allow time to complete EPA gateway preparations
- Are we engaging employers early enough to identify and address gaps or simply sign off paperwork?

Undertaking the EPA

We need to improve the processes in place

- We need a better grasp on how many apprentices will come forward and when – and for this information to be presented in a timely manner – at least 6 months in advance – to plan resources
- To enable smooth gateway review, we need the right documentation, and signatures, in place
- We need to ensure that training providers are retaining contact with the apprentice and employer - to remind them this is a mandatory and time constrained element of the apprenticeship
- We also need contact details for apprentices and their line manager to ensure they are contactable during the EPA period

We appreciate there are issues with current EPA practice

- Limited application dates and EPAO resources
- There are limited slots to support level 3 and 4 progression (over summer periods)
- Accessing and finding guidance can be difficult – but it is improving
- But, the EPAOs do support apprentices, employers and training providers – just ask!

Bigger challenges

- Apprentices aren't always given the time to carry out EPA work
- Apprentices' partially completing EPA
- Apprentices (and employers) not responding to EPAO or training provider
- Backdoor to professional registers

Defining and celebrating success



We currently have a very limited set of 'success' criteria defined in the accountability framework which is aimed at training providers alone



Employers feel this is far too limited as we are retaining talent in the sector



We typically celebrate 'graduation' or champion progression to another apprenticeship training scheme (often as quickly as possible)



We need to do more to recognise EPA completion



Employers also need to revisit their 'reward' systems and financial incentives to support EPA completion and professional registration more

Our Next Steps

- Currently finalising the report which will include examples of good practice
- Aim is to promote and publish this by end of 2024
- We are feeding this into the work of the Construction Leadership Council where withdrawals and non-completions are currently being discussed
- Utilise this work with the establishment of (shadow) Skills England (new organisation expected to form Spring 2025)

Thank You

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