POWERING POTENTIAL

September 2019

THE SOCIAL MOBILITY IMPACT OF APPRENTICESHIPS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Apprenticeships provide a means for individuals – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – to ascend the layers of society. They provide low-barrier access to high-quality training and stable employment, circumventing major costs and entry barriers in accessing higher education. However, the picture is far from simple.

This report finds there is significant nuance and variation in social mobility performance within the apprenticeships landscape, on three crucial topics.

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Access to apprenticeships amongst learners from deprived backgrounds

Apprenticeships are unique in that they have no access gap. Pupils from deprived backgrounds are just as likely to join an apprenticeship as their less deprived peers, whereas for the most selective universities, deprived pupils are 43% less likely to attend.

It is concerning to see that higher-level (levels 4 and 5) apprenticeships have a lower representation of learners from deprived backgrounds. But crucially, there are meaningful variations between different providers and different apprenticeships. For example, some technical apprenticeships have 18% more learners from deprived backgrounds than the national average.

RECOMMENDATION

01

Create greater transparency on the social mobility performance of apprenticeship providers, through centralised collection and publication of intake data.

Much of the difference in access may be due to awareness.

A majority of apprentices said their teachers had not discussed apprenticeship options with them, and similarly a majority of teachers said they would rarely or never advise their high-performing students to choose an apprenticeship over university.

A more innovative and proactive approach is needed to raise awareness and break down awareness barriers amongst both staff and pupils in schools.

RECOMMENDATION

02

Increase publicity and targeted outreach to schools, teachers and career counsellors to increase recognition and awareness of apprenticeships as a valid route into employment.

Pay whilst on an apprenticeship

Pay is a critical element of social mobility.

Whilst those actively completing an apprenticeship are guaranteed a stable income, there are stark differences in pay whilst on programme.

Nationally, approximately 20% of level 2/3 apprentices are paid the apprenticeship minimum wage (£3.90 per hour). In comparison, QA finds its technology-focussed higher level apprenticeships pay significantly more, with almost a third paying between £17,500 and £25,000 per year, and 15% paying over £25,000.

Similarly, on average 43% of apprentices receive a pay rise whilst on programme, but QA finds for higher level technology-focussed apprenticeships this reaches 78%.

The current apprenticeship minimum wage is too low for independent living, and in many cases those apprentices depend on familial subsidy.

Employers, apprenticeship providers and government need to recognise that very low wage apprenticeships are not conducive to social mobility.

RECOMMENDATION

03

Abolish the lower apprenticeship minimum wage, and classify apprenticeships as 'in employment' and qualifying for national minimum and living wages for the commensurate age group.

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Employment outcomes after completing an apprenticeship

Nearly all apprentices report that they had seen beneficial impacts on their career. The majority felt they were better at doing their job, and felt satisfied in their job since starting an apprenticeship.

However, this report finds there is (yet again) significant variation between programmes and providers in how that translates into pay. Nationally, approximately half of apprentices at level 2/3 received a pay rise on completing their apprenticeship. For QA's (majority technical and higher level) programmes, 92% of apprentices saw a pay rise.

Higher pay is of course a positive outcome in and of itself, but it also recognises that an employee's productivity, skill set and economic value to the employer and the economy has grown – and that the employer is happy to pay more for their work as a result.

It is clear that some apprenticeships offer a much better economic return on investment for the employer and the economy. Funding should be directed towards these programmes.

RECOMMENDATION

04

Actively skew apprenticeships funding towards programmes with the highest return on investment, in high value-add sectors or in skill-shortage areas; supporting employers to take on more apprentices to close the skills gap.

However, it is difficult to track post-programme outcomes for apprentices.

The current government survey dataset is published every two years, and the granularity available between different levels, programmes and providers is insufficient to inform individual, provider or employer choices.

Tracking is particularly important now there are progression routes allowing an apprentice to complete successive programmes from GCSE through to degree level. To make informed assessments of the economic and social impact of different programmes and the policy as a whole, there needs to be step-change in the way data is collected and published.

RECOMMENDATION

05

Implement a standardised on- and post-programme census for all providers (collecting programme, economic, and social data), and publish in data dashboards in a model similar to that used for schools.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The government's apprenticeship reform programme, English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 Vision announced in 2015, set the target for three million apprenticeship starts by 2020, and articulated a vision for a broad, high-quality apprenticeships ecosystem open to all – driving excellence in skills and powerful employment outcomes.

Apprenticeships were envisioned as an engine of social mobility.

Apprenticeships support social mobility by creating new routes into stable, highly-skilled and well-paid jobs.

The reform programme report foreword stated: "Our goal is for young people to see apprenticeships as a high quality and prestigious path to successful careers, and for these opportunities to be available across all sectors of the economy, in all parts of the country and at all levels.

This will support our aim for young people to get the best start in life, through the opportunity that high-quality education and training provides."

We are now over half way along the journey since the vision was published. Hence it is an opportune time to consider how much of this vision has been achieved, and what more remains to be done. This report explores the drivers of social mobility, particularly in the context of apprenticeships and employer-driven training.

The Sutton Trust, a foundation which aims to improve the UK's social mobility using evidence-based research, recommends in their 2017 report, entitled "The state of social mobility in the UK", more must be done to promote apprenticeships and vocational education, as apprenticeship schemes are "aimed at increasing participation of disadvantaged students".

Whilst the drivers of social mobility are more complex and nuanced, this report considers the contributing factors to improving social mobility in an apprenticeships context.

Aiming to improve access to valuable education, and subsequently, rewarding career for those most in need of it, this report delivers a new outlook on apprenticeships – by dispelling common misconceptions about their perceived value.

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CHAPTER 1

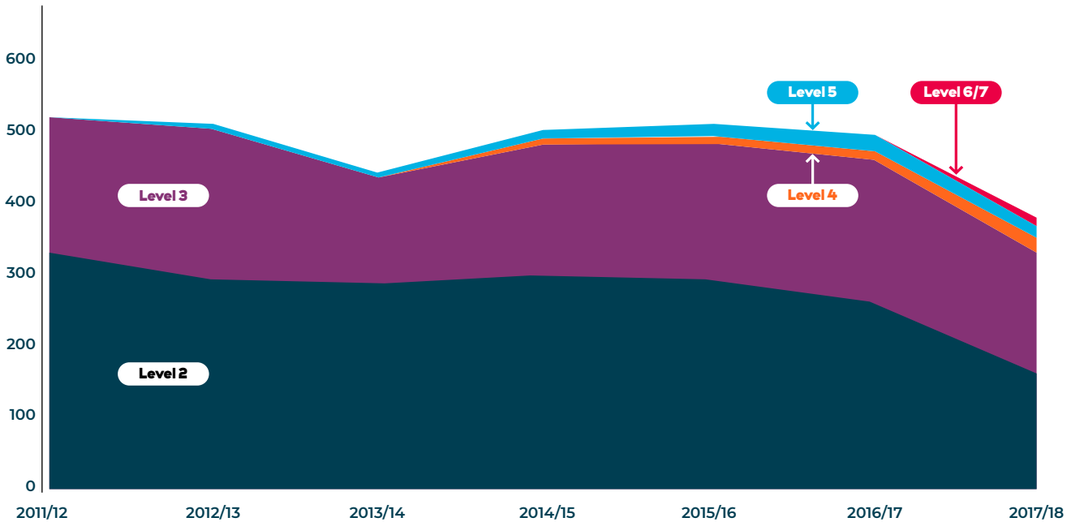
WHO ARE ON APPRENTICESHIPS?

The growth of apprenticeships

Between May 2015 and January 2019, there have been a total of 1,546,442 apprenticeship starts[1]. This is just over half of the 2020 target reached so far, but with only one year to go.

Despite this, overall apprenticeship starts have declined since 2011/12. Since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in May 2017, there has been a further reduction. In addition to this, the total number is vastly dominated by lower apprenticeship levels (levels 2 and 3), accounting for on average 95.1% of all apprenticeship starts (exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: Apprenticeship starts in England by level, since 2011/12[2]
Starts, thousands



It is clear, this high proportion of lower skill levels, and a lack of growth in higher-level apprenticeships (level 4 and above), is far from the vision set out in 2015 for apprenticeships to become a more "high quality and prestigious path to successful careers".

There is a risk the perception of apprenticeships is defined by lower level qualifications, which leaves them perpetually classified in public opinion as the 'poorer cousin' in skills development.

[1] Monthly apprenticeship starts by sector subject area or standard, age, level, funding type and degree apprenticeship: January 2019

[2] House of Commons Library Briefing Paper – Apprenticeship Statistics: England, 6 Nov 2018

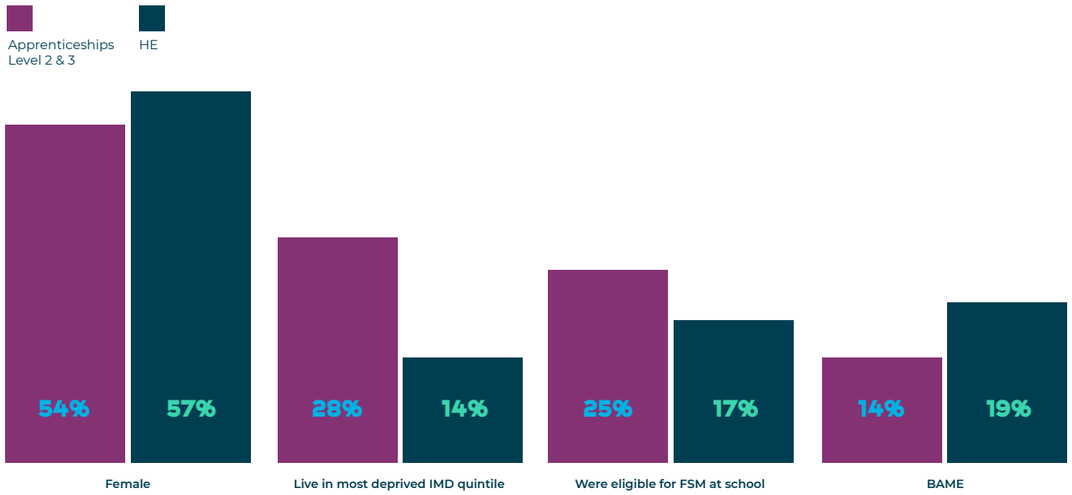
Apprentices from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds

Meaningful proportions of apprentices come from diverse and disadvantaged groups (exhibit 2). More than half of those choosing to embark on an apprenticeship are women, and more women have started apprenticeships than men every year since 2010/11.

Apprentices reflect the ethnic profile within England and Wales: 14% of apprentices are of a BAME[3] background, the same as the general population. In a number of instances, apprenticeships outperform the higher education sector on these metrics.

Exhibit 2: Representation of different demographic groups in apprentice and higher education (HE) population

% of apprentice and HE population



Crucially, apprenticeships have also shown to be effective at accepting an intake of individuals from deprived and low-income backgrounds.

Compared to higher education students, apprentices tend to live in deprived areas as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[5]. Compared to higher education students, they are twice as likely to live in an area in the most deprived IMD quintile. They are also almost 50% more likely to have been eligible for free school meals (FSM).[6]

[3] BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

[4] House of Commons Library Briefing Paper – Apprenticeship Statistics: England, 6 Nov 2018; Department for Education Learners and Apprentices Survey 2018

[5] Covers deprivation across seven domains: income; employment; education, skills and training; health deprivation and disability; crime; barriers to housing and services; and living environment

[6] Department for Education: Learners and Apprentices Survey 2018

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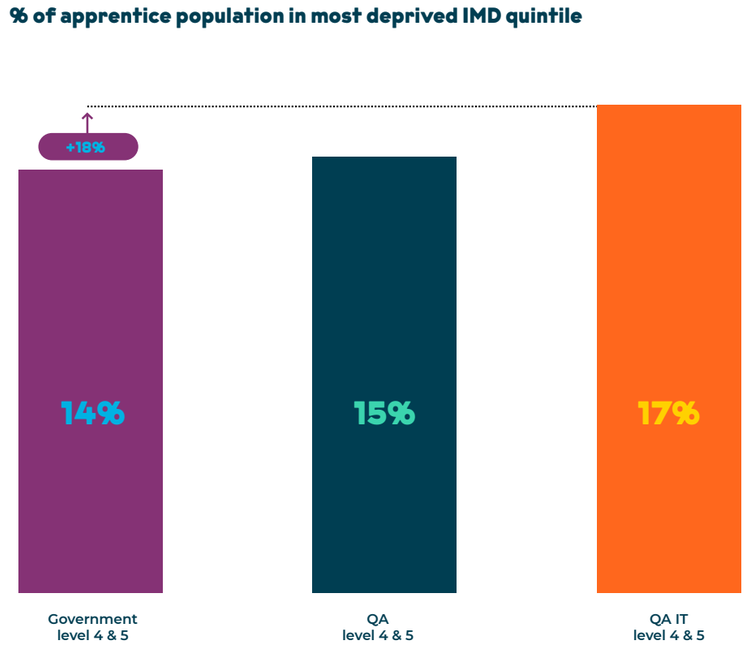
However access is not the same for all apprenticeships. The Social Mobility Commission[7] highlighted the difference in access to higher vs. lower-level apprenticeships.

The proportion of disadvantaged students on apprenticeships decreases significantly by level, with disadvantaged students representing 23% of all Level 2, 21% of Level 3, 17% of Levels 4-5 and only 13% of Level 6 apprentices in 2017/18.

QA research suggests there is further discrepancy between providers and courses (exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3: Representation of deprived students in apprenticeships



At a provider level, QA out-performs the national average for apprenticeships at a similar level, with IT programmes having 18% more learners from the most deprived IMD quintile than the national average. However we recognise more needs to be done.

Providers are at the front line of attracting students to apprenticeships – and therefore there should be onus on them to be proactively reaching out to diverse groups, by building partnerships with schools and others, in order to increase awareness and participation.

Whilst the IT apprenticeship performance is promising, the performance is still below the proportion of the level 2/3 apprentice population figures (see page 19 for more details).

On an individual level, these statistics create great potential for social mobility, but only if apprenticeships lead to better employment and earning outcomes.

[7]"State of the Nation", 2018-19, Social Mobility Commission, 30th April 2019

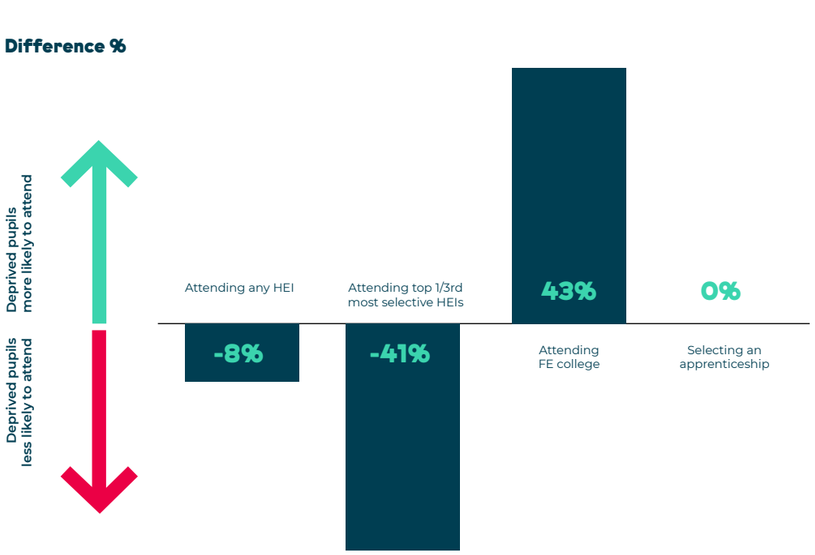
Academic barriers to access

The gap in educational attainment between deprived pupils and their less deprived peers is well documented.

Whilst universities are investing much in attempting to widen the social diversity of their intakes, the high academic requirements of some universities still remain a barrier to those who have had less privilege in their educational experience. By age 16 many pupils simply do not have the grades for university to be an immediate option, and sadly this is disproportionately true for poorer students.

Disadvantaged pupils[8] are 8% less likely to attend any university at all than the average pupil and 41% less likely to attend the most academically selective third of universities (exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4: Difference between average attendance rate and attendance rate for deprived pupils, by KS5 destination type



Source: Department for Education KS5 Destination data, 2015/16 cohort

The lack of access gap makes apprenticeships a potentially very powerful instrument of social mobility, often having less stringent academic entry requirements than universities, whilst also facilitating apprentices to earn whilst working towards an accreditation.

[8] Defined by whether the pupil was eligible for Pupil Premium Grant funding at KS4 level

Financial barriers to pursuing education

For many learners from deprived backgrounds, there may be a need to stay working whilst learning – in addition to potential geographical restrictions, such as caring responsibilities.

Apprenticeships provide significant opportunity for students to earn while they learn, with training subsidised by employers and the government. With a regular wage, often higher than the national minimum wage, apprenticeships provide apprentices with valuable, sector-specific skills, whilst earning to pay their living expenses.

Furthermore, apprenticeships across the UK increase local options, allowing apprentices to continue living at home, in addition to making an education accessible to those responsible for the care of dependents.

Conversely with higher education courses, it is often not possible for students to earn whilst learning due to unfavourable university timetables that have classes spread throughout the week and days that prevent working to earn. To combat this and become more inclusive some universities are arranging timetables to allow students to work full-time – this is a welcome development.

Whilst apprenticeships in general offer the opportunity to earn and learn, many apprentices are not earning that much. Many earn the apprentice minimum wage of £3.90 per hour, an amount almost 40% less than the National Living Wage for 18-20 year olds, and that is insufficient for independent living.

Wages are typically higher for higher-level apprenticeships and for more technical subjects. Given the majority of UK apprenticeships are level 2/3, a significant proportion of apprentices are paid minimum apprenticeship wage, earning a weekly wage of only £136.

On the other hand, research conducted by QA indicates higher-level tech-based apprentices earn a much higher wage that materially improves their economic position. 29% of QA apprentices earn between £17,500 and £25,000 per annum, and a further 15% earn over £25,000 annually (exhibit 5).

Pay during an apprenticeship is important – because those from a disadvantaged background are less likely to have the benefit of (financial or in-kind) family support whilst they complete their programme. Low wages can therefore be exclusionary to more disadvantaged learners. To be inclusive, wages should be sufficient for independent living.

QA APPRENTICES PAY

Apprentices on programmes with QA are mostly higher level and in technology or leadership programmes. Research conducted by QA finds these apprentices typically earn a lot more than national average. QA estimates the national median apprentice wage at approximately £237 per week.

The median wage for QA apprentices aged under 25 is £345 per week, which is 45% higher, and equates to approximately £9.20 per hour – 12% higher than the full National Living Wage (for over 25s).

Moreover, very few higher-level and technology-focussed apprenticeships pay the very low Apprenticeship Minimum Wage – just 3% compared to almost 20% nationally.

QA also finds that apprentices on technology and higher-level programmes are disproportionately likely to get a pay rise whilst on programme. 78% of QA apprentices received such a rise, vs. 43% nationally.

Exhibit 5: Mean annual salary for apprentices, national average (level 2/3)[9] vs. QA apprenticeships (all levels, aged under 25)[10]

[9] Apprenticeship Pay Survey England 2016
[10] QA Research
[11] Social Mobility Commission: Social Mobility Barometer 2018

Perception and awareness barriers facing apprenticeships

Perceptions are important.

They drive individuals' choices on education and training options, and employers' choices on where and how to recruit. In the Social Mobility Commission's December 2018 Social Mobility Barometer, over half of respondents felt that people from poorer backgrounds have the same opportunity to access an apprenticeship as people from more privileged backgrounds (while only 13% felt this was the case for attending a top university).

Some 30% of overall respondents felt that an apprenticeship offers the best route for a young person to progress their life or career – more than for any other option, including university (exhibit 6).

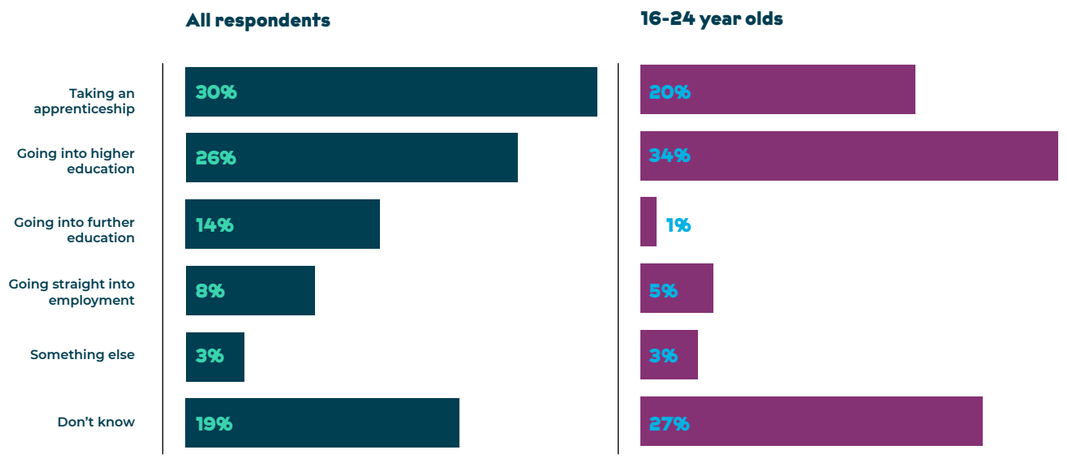
Unfortunately, perceptions among the respondents who matter most – the 16-24-year-olds currently facing decisions around which route to choose – are still very much aligned towards higher education.

By providing a clear-cut option to learn industry-specific skills, apprenticeships are a potential step towards bridging the skills gap the UK faces. In the ever-expanding digital and technology sectors, there is a much-needed influx of talented young people with novel skills. Nevertheless apprentices may be inhibited by a lack of awareness; there is a need for a paradigm shift away from negative preconception.

A plethora of potential apprentices may be prevented from embarking on the right educational path towards a rewarding career, due to incorrect, or even a total absence of information.

Exhibit 6: Attitudes to routes offering progression in life or career[11]

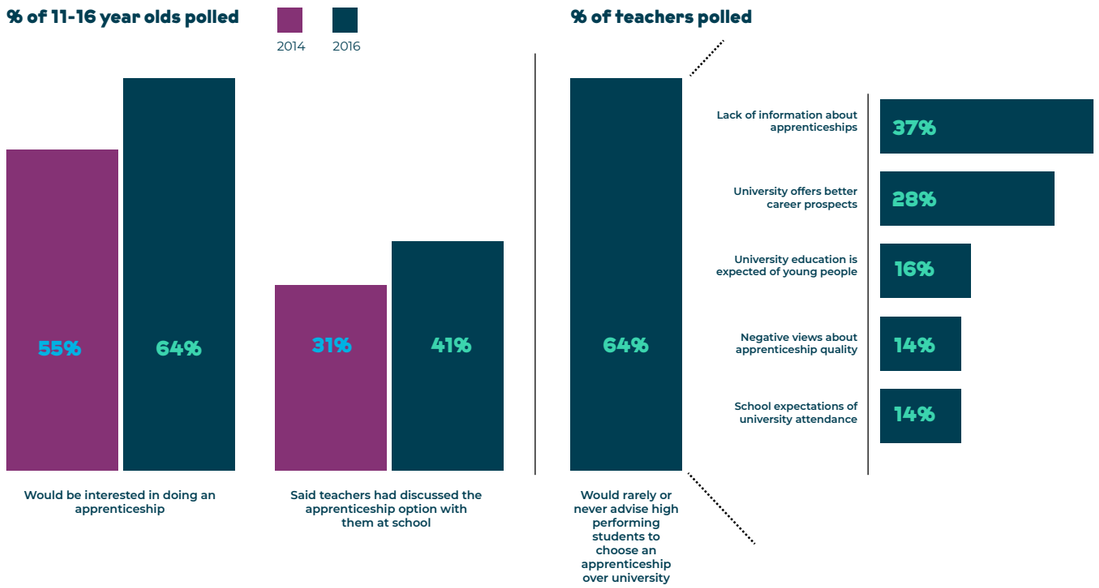
Thinking about the period after a young person leaves school, which of these routes do you think offers the best opportunity to progress their life or career?



However, compared to past figures the popularity of apprenticeships has grown in recent years as persistent attitudes are starting to shift.
A growing number of younger teens now prefer apprenticeships to university, according to a July 2018 poll by social mobility charity The Sutton Trust (exhibit 7).

64% of young people aged 11-16 said they would be interested in doing an apprenticeship after leaving school – a promising increase of 9% over the last four years.

Exhibit 7: Awareness and perceptions of apprenticeships among young people and teachers[12]



Despite teens' growing interest in apprenticeships, just 41% polled said that their teachers had discussed the apprenticeship option with them at school.

Almost two-thirds of teachers (64%) said they would rarely or never advise their high-performing students to choose an apprenticeship over university, citing a lack of information about apprenticeships, the perceived superiority of university and negative views about apprenticeship quality.

Clearly, there is still some way to bridge this gap – and a major priority is to get schools, teachers and career advisors on board to present apprenticeships as a valid and respectable alternative to university for all students.

However, awareness barriers clearly still exist for young people at school seeking advice. In recent evidence given to the House of Commons Education Committee, Christine Hodgson, Chair of the Careers and Enterprise Company, said that she "still believe[s] that apprentices are, in a way, the best-kept secret in Britain."[13]

There is a need for a more innovative and proactive approach to raising awareness and breaking down diversity barriers, using specific recruitment drives for employers that strive for fair representation of all socio-economic groups in their company.

[12] Sutton Trust Apprenticeship Polling 2018

[13] House of Commons Education Committee: Oral Evidence: Accountability Hearings (21 Nov 2018)

HOW QA ENGAGES WITH SCHOOLS TO RAISE APPRENTICESHIP AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION

As part of their commitment to social mobility, QA works hard to raise awareness of apprenticeships and support participation from diverse groups.

These efforts encompass a range of activities:

- Employing a dedicated team of schools liaison ambassadors, with contextual understanding of schools and learners. They maintain networks of schools and teachers in the most deprived areas of the country, raising awareness, and working alongside teachers and parents ensuring every individual is offered tailored information and advice.
- Providing information and resources on apprenticeships direct to teachers ('Teacher's Toolkits'), alongside hosting regular events for and at schools to raise awareness about the nature and benefits of different apprenticeships.
- Providing free CV writing and interview skills workshops for school pupils.
- Running a 'Future Proof Careers' podcast (free to download), discussing apprenticeship options and considerations.

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CHAPTER 2

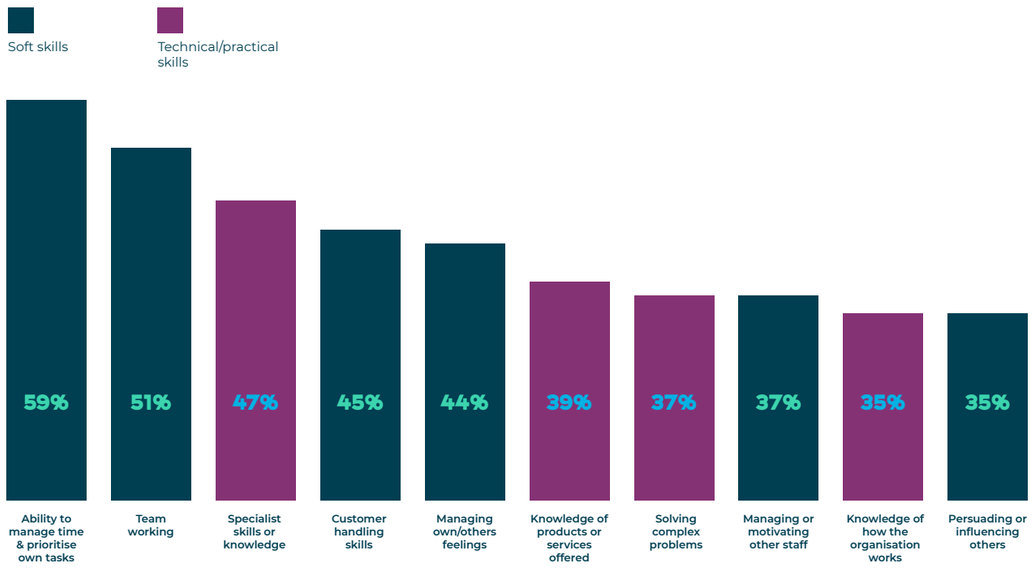
APPRENTICESHIPS BUILDING SKILLS

Employer gaps in hard and soft skills

In the Department for Education's Employer Skills Survey 2017, employers report that their most acute skills gap is in soft skills. Four out of the top five skills lacking amongst their staff are soft skills, and six out of the top 10 (exhibit 8).

The soft skills cited as most lacking are: the ability to manage time and prioritise tasks; teamwork; customer handling skills; and managing their own and others' feelings. Often the 'hard' skills reported missing are transient or employer-specific, for example: specialist skills or knowledge; knowledge of products; and knowledge of how the organisation works.

Exhibit 8: Skills lacking amongst staff (as reported by employers with skills gaps), 2017[14]



Two-thirds of employers with skills gaps (66%) reported these gaps as having an impact on their organisation's performance, with 17% reporting a major impact.

Larger establishments were more likely to say their skills gaps had an impact on their performance, but small businesses were more likely to report major impacts.

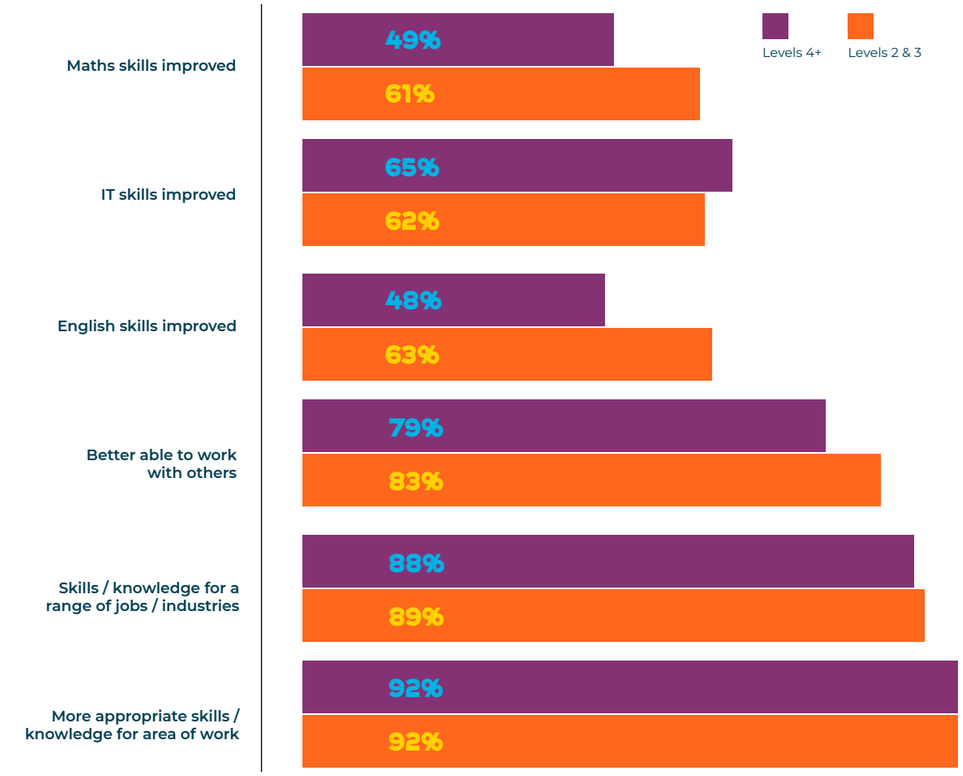
In an attempt to tackle these detrimental skills gaps, two-thirds of employers had increased either training activity or spending on training programmes, including apprenticeships.[15]

Since implementing the apprenticeship levy, more organisations see apprenticeships as an increasingly important component of training strategy, symbiotically driving innovation and improving social mobility – a promising step and positive result for all parties.

[14] Department for Education: Employer Skills Survey 2017

[15] Ibid

Exhibit 9: Skills and confidence gained as a result of apprenticeships, levels 2 and 3, and higher levels[16]



Nearly all (92%) of 4,990 level 2 and 3 apprentices interviewed in the Department for Education's Apprenticeships Evaluation 2017: Learners report, felt that their apprenticeship had helped them gain more appropriate skills and knowledge related to their current or desired area of work (this was also the same for higher-level apprentices).

Most (83%) rated themselves as now being better able to work with others – and for those who had been specifically recruited with the intention of doing an apprenticeship, this figure was even higher.

The majority of level 2 and 3 apprentices also reported improved English, Maths and IT skills. A higher proportion of level 4+ apprentices report improved IT skills, however a smaller number report English and Maths skills improving.

[16] Department for Education: Apprenticeships Evaluation 2017: Learners

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Case study:

Developing soft skills with the Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) has worked with employers and providers to develop a suite of management apprenticeships.

This includes the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) and the Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship which combine the best of academic, vocational and professional educational pathways. Management apprenticeships have proved to be hugely popular, with the CMDA now the most popular degree apprenticeship.

These management apprenticeships provide learners with a unique opportunity to learn the 'hard' and 'soft' skills demanded by today's employers.

Apprentices learn key business and management skills like operational strategy, leading a team, project management and business finance. They also develop the confidence and cultural skills need to succeed in the modern workplace.

CMI research shows that employers hugely value 'soft' skills, which are not always well developed through more traditional education routes, in particular taking responsibility, managing other people and collaborating well with a team.

Additionally, being able to work ethically, problem solve and use analytical skills are highly desirable 'soft' skills.

To ensure that management apprenticeships develop these behaviours – as well as deliver the wider technical skills, knowledge and experience required – CMI worked with a trailblazer group of over 40 employers to strike the right balance between management theory and the desired 'soft' skills.

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CHAPTER 3

APPRENTICESHIPS DRIVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

A route to immediate employment

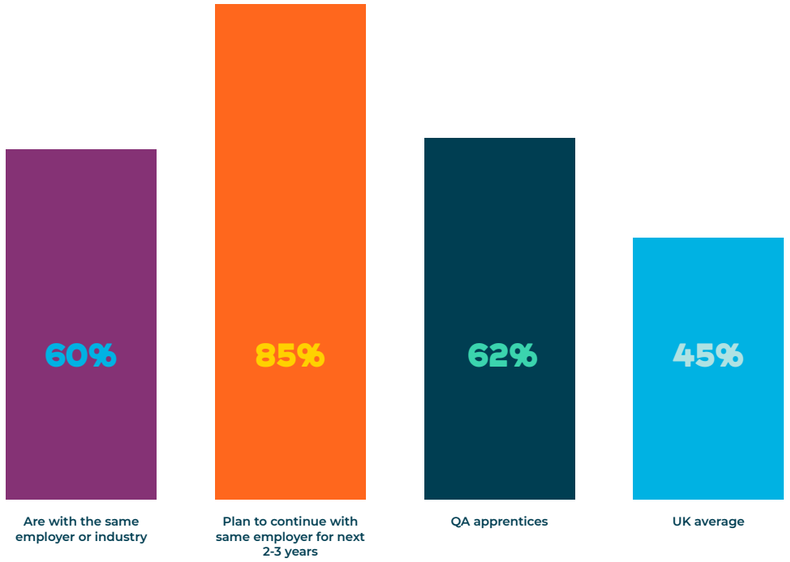
Apprentices gain on-the-job experience as well as forging direct connections in their industry, with many choosing to stay on with their apprenticeship employer for the short term (two to three years following completion). According to the Department for Education's Apprenticeships Evaluation 2017: Learners report, 60% of level 2 and 3 apprenticeship completers remained employed with the same employer, with 85% planning to continue working for the same employer for the next two to three years.

However there is variation across different apprenticeship programmes. QA research shows 60% of QA apprentices (predominantly on technology and leadership programmes) report doing a better job as a result of their apprenticeship, in comparison to 45.4% of all UK apprentices (exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10: Apprentice attitudes to continuing employment[17]

End of apprentice participants
% of survey respondents

% of survey respondents reporting 'doing a better job as a result of their apprenticeship'



Among current level 2 and 3 apprentices still on programme, immediate employment prospects were also positive. 86% considered that they would stay with their current employer for at least two to three years after they had finished their apprenticeship; the proportion of level 4+ apprentices was even higher at 89%.

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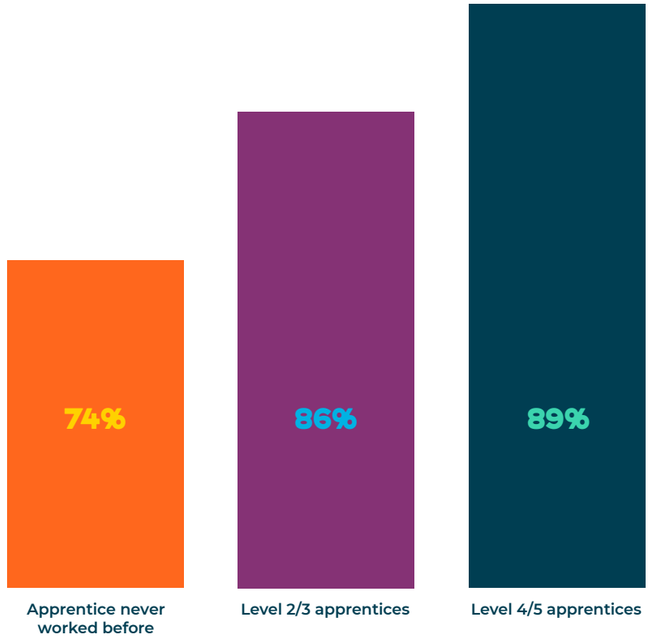
For individuals completely new to the workforce, apprenticeships can also provide an effective springboard into that crucial first job. 74% of apprentices who had never worked before completing their apprenticeship had moved into and remained in paid work at the time of interview (exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11: Immediate employment prospects for apprentices by level of apprenticeships[18]



[17] Department for Education: Apprenticeships Evaluation 2017: Learners
[18] Ibid

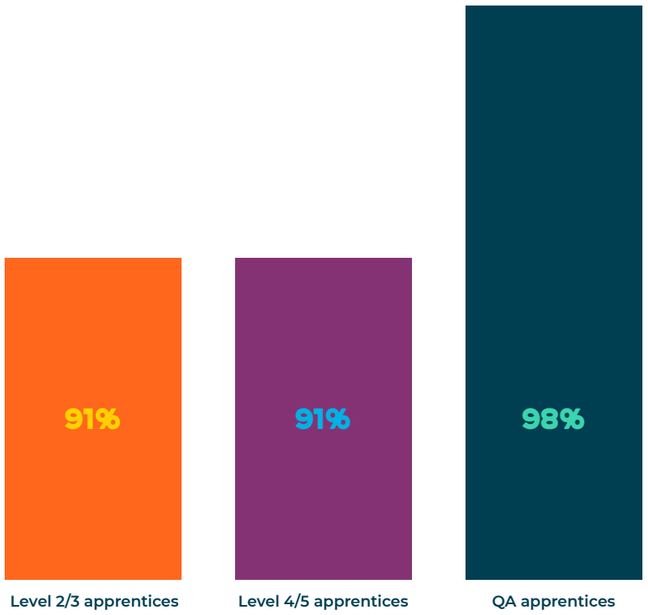
Long-term career prospects

Apprenticeships have been shown to provide strong employment outcomes over the long term. Those completing apprenticeships have a high overall employment rate that exceeds the national average.

Of level 2 and 3 and completers, 91% were in work when surveyed 12-20 months after finishing their apprenticeship (exhibit 12) – which is 17.5% higher than the national employment rate for the general population aged 16-64.

More than two-thirds had stayed with the same employer. Higher-level apprenticeship completers also reported the same proportion of employment.

Exhibit 12: Proportion of completed apprentices in full-time or part-time employment, by level (ages 16-64)[20 21]



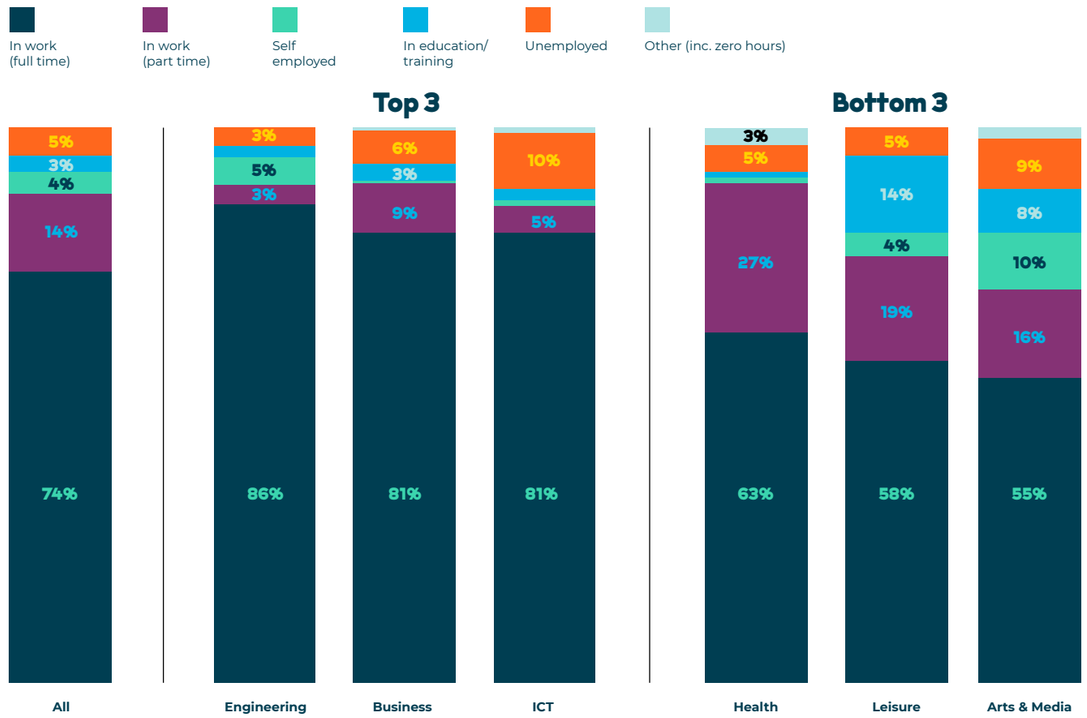
Research conducted by QA indicates the outcomes for higher-level apprenticeships are even stronger (level 4 and up), and also lead to a significantly higher percentage of completers in full-time work compared to level 2 and 3 apprenticeships.

More than nine in ten (91%) of those who had completed higher apprenticeships were in full-time jobs or further study at the point of survey[22], but this is up to 98% for some providers.

This is almost a fifth higher than the overall average for level 2 and 3 completers (all programmes), and 5% higher than even the best-performing level 2 or 3 programme (engineering).

[20] Department for Education: Apprenticeships Evaluation 2017: Learners
[21] QA Research
[22] Department for Education: Apprenticeships Evaluation 2017: Learners

Exhibit 13: Employment status of completed apprentices, by subject area levels 2 and 3



Certain programmes show greater effectiveness than others in launching former apprentices into full-time work; the outcome is strongest in sectors where there is an acute skills gap. Level 2 and 3 apprentices who had completed engineering, business and information and communications technology (ICT) apprenticeships were the most likely to be in full-time employment 12-20 months later (7-12 percentage points more completers in full-time jobs compared to average).

At the lowest end, arts and media, leisure and health apprenticeship completers were the least likely to be in full-time work (exhibit 13).

This aligns with QA's own experience. For a range of higher level technical and business programmes, 98% of QA's apprentices are in full-time employment or further training 6-12 months after completion.

It is unsurprising that tech has strong employment outcomes – as a sector, it is both productive and fast-growing.

According to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Sector Economic Estimates, the digital sector contributed £130.5bn to the UK economy in 2017, accounting for 7.1% of UK Gross Value Added (GVA). The contribution from this sector has increased by a third since 2010, which is the greatest percentage increase of all DCMS sectors.

The linkage between apprenticeship employment outcomes and sector economic performance indicates there is clear sense in steering policy and funding for apprenticeships towards high-output sectors.

Overall, apprenticeships show good long-term employment prospects. They are more than a route to a job – they are a path to a lasting career.

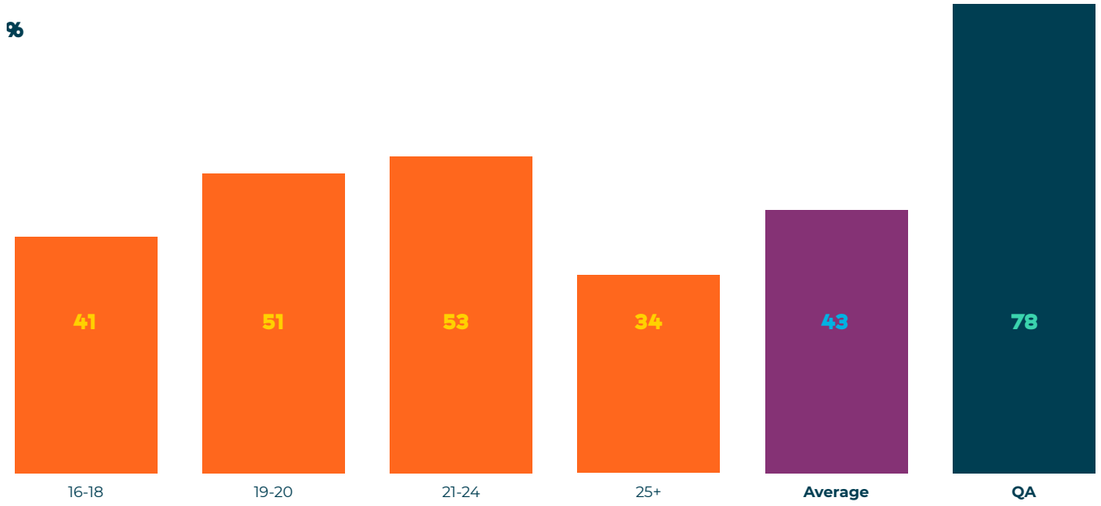
Pay

The real 'acid test' to determine good-quality training is whether the trainee receives a pay rise as a result. More than two-fifths of apprentices (43%) surveyed in the Department for Business, Industry and Industrial Strategy's Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2016 reported that their hourly pay rate had increased during their apprenticeship.

Young people aged 19-24 were the most likely to have received a pay rise.

According to QA research, the on-programme pay outcomes for technical and higher-level apprentices are much higher, with 78% of respondents reporting a pay rise and 46% of respondents a promotion since starting their apprenticeship[23] (exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14: Proportion of apprentices receiving a pay rise whilst on programme, by age group [24]



[23] QA research

[24] Department for Business, Industry and Industrial Strategy: Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2016

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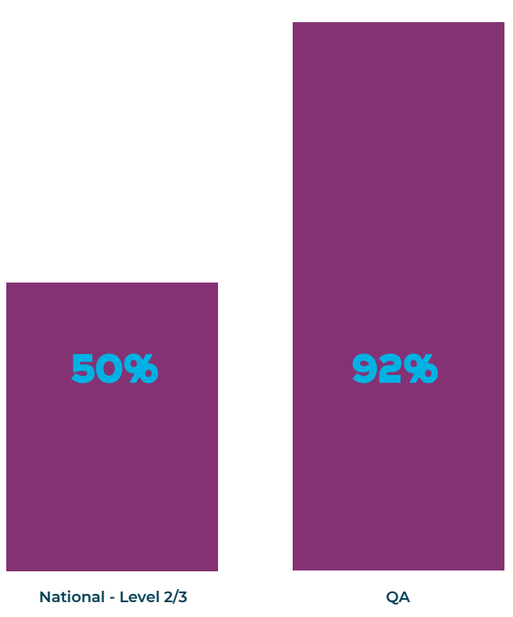
Exhibit 15: Proportion of apprentices receiving a pay rise 6-12 months after completion[25]



However it is the pay progression for apprentices after their apprenticeship that many are most interested in. Of the level 2 and 3 apprentices surveyed by the DfE[26], half had received a pay rise and a third had been promoted after their apprenticeships, with the majority crediting their apprenticeship wholly or in part.

This is a positive trend since 2015, but in some ways still surprising – it means half of apprentices on level 2/3 programmes did not receive a pay rise after completion. Apprenticeship success is clearly about more than pay, but if there is no pay rise then it does beg the question whether that programme was contributing to social mobility.

For higher-level and technical programmes it's a very different story. For apprentices on QA programmes, 92% reported a pay rise after completing their programme. It's clear that these higher-level, technical programmes are providing the pay uplift consistent with the government's vision for apprenticeships.

Higher pay is of course a positive outcome in and of itself, but it also recognises that an employee's productivity, skill set and economic value to the employer has grown and that the employer is happy to pay more for their work as a result.

[25] Apprenticeships Evaluation Survey 2017: Learners report, QA Research

[26] Department for Education: Apprenticeships Evaluation 2017: Learners

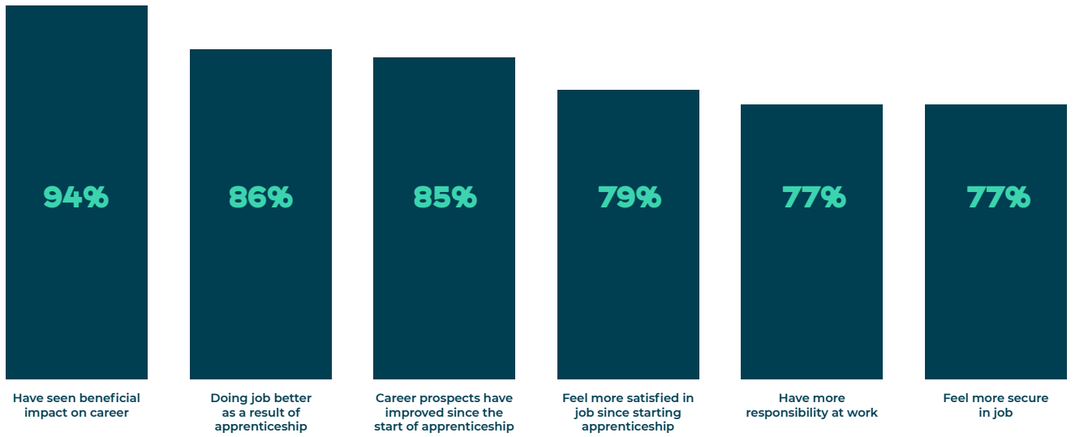
Job and programme satisfaction

Almost all (94%) of level 2 and 3 apprentices surveyed by the DfE[27] report that they had seen beneficial impacts on their career, and the majority felt they were better at doing their job and felt more satisfied in their job since starting an apprenticeship.

Apprentices also reported high levels of confidence in their career prospects, with 85% agreeing that these had improved (exhibit 16).

Exhibit 16: Job satisfaction of level 2 and 3 apprentices[28]

% of survey respondents



Apprentices also express high levels of satisfaction with their programmes.

Nearly nine in ten level 2 and 3 apprentices (89%) were satisfied with their apprenticeship overall (with only 5% dissatisfied). Higher-level apprentices similarly report 87% satisfaction. Looking at the top three individual programme elements, apprentices most often expressed satisfaction with the relevance of their training, the quality of training and assessment on the job.

Over four in five (81%) would speak highly of their apprenticeship, and advocate the benefits of apprenticeships to others.

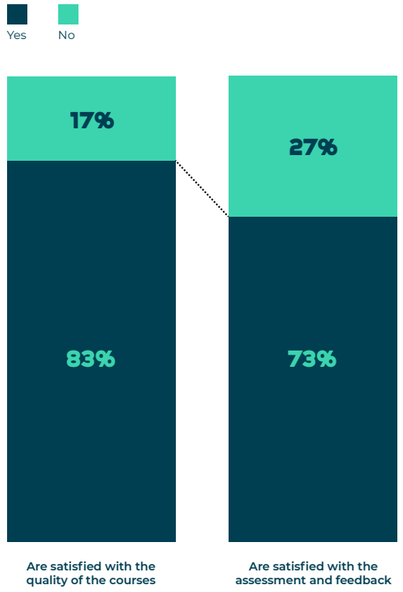
Overall apprentices are more satisfied with their programmes than students at universities and further education colleges are. The Office for Students' 2018 National Student Survey found that only 83% of students attending universities, colleges and other providers were satisfied with the quality of their courses (exhibit 17).

This figure dropped to 73% of these students rating themselves as satisfied with the assessment and feedback provided on programme – it is imperative to listen to learner preference.

[28] Department for Education: Apprenticeships Evaluation Survey 2017: Learners

Exhibit 17: End of course satisfaction for universities and further education (FE) colleges[29]

% of respondents, universities & FE colleges



Faced with an ongoing issue of a lack of awareness of apprenticeships, this is untapped potential – there are a large group of evangelists willing to 'shout from the rooftops' and spread the word about their positive apprenticeship experiences.

We urge the government and other providers to tap into these advocates, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to share their stories more prominently as a powerful force for awareness.

[27] Apprenticeships Evaluation Survey 2017: Learners report

Apprenticeship completion rates

While satisfaction levels are high, a known issue facing apprenticeships is completion rates. The overall completion rate for apprenticeships across all levels is 67.7%[30]. While this is up a percentage point from the previous year, this figure shows there is more to be done.

However, not every learner who withdraws from their programme should be viewed as a failure. 51.4% of those leaving their QA apprenticeships early was because they had a new full-time job.

Nonetheless, there is more to be done to improve withdrawal rates.

One option is to improve support for learners to stay on programme, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who might require extra support to complete their apprenticeship successfully.

Additionally, there is a need to encourage new apprenticeship starters into high-value programmes with higher completion rates.

Education and training and ICT apprenticeships, for example, have the highest completion rates of all level 2 or 3 programmes overall, with 76.5% and 75% of learners completing respectively. The completion rates for ICT in particular may reflect the growing demand for tech skills and trained digital workers.

[29] Office of National Statistics; 2018 National Student Survey

[30] Department for Education: National Achievement Rate Tables 2016/17 (March 2018)

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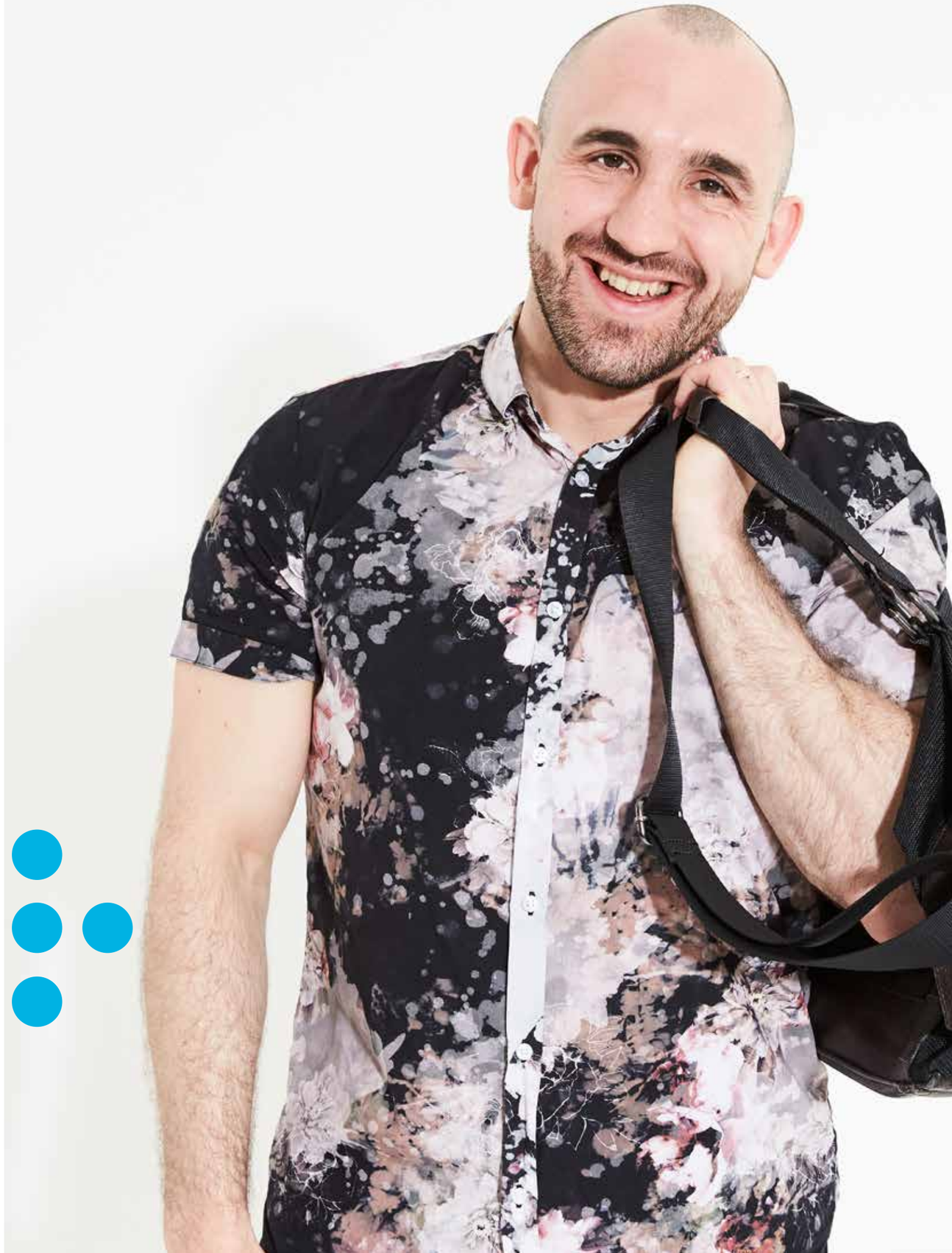

Case study:

Joshua Uwadiae – former IT systems and networking apprentice, Microsoft

For Joshua Uwadiae, a tech apprenticeship turned his life around. Joshua grew up in Hackney, East London and was expelled from school at 15 after falling in with the wrong crowd. “Hackney was a rough and gritty place back then—I grew up around gangs and chaos,” he says. “Then I decided I wanted to better myself around the age of 15.”

Joshua found a mentor and went to college, but he felt his course was just priming him for university. “The concept of university, all the studying, wasn’t appealing,” he says. “I just wanted to get out there and work and do something. I started looking around at jobs, but I didn’t have the right skills.”

The turning point for Joshua was seeing an apprenticeships poster for Microsoft in his company’s breakout area. Highly motivated in his hands-on, technical role, he successfully completed an IT apprenticeship and came runner-up in the prestigious Microsoft Apprentice of the Year Awards, accepting his award in the House of Commons.

Joshua then went on to build a successful fitness startup, WeGym, matching personal trainers with clients looking to work out in London. His inspiration for the company was an idea to solve his own problem – the frustration of not being able to find a personal trainer but not wanting to work out on his own.

“The concept of WeGym is to make personal training more accessible and fun,” he says. “We connect two to three friends or colleagues with the same goals and get them to share the costs of the personal trainer.”

Looking back, Joshua is grateful for how his apprenticeship changed his perspective. “Doing my IT apprenticeship was like being given the tools but having an open path – my future was what I chose to make of it,” he says. “I was a kid from Hackney and in the blink of an eye I was in the House of Commons picking up my apprenticeship award. The recognition gave me a real sense that good things will happen if you work for them.”

QA, delighted with Joshua as a true ambassador for apprenticeships, recently awarded him with QA’s first ‘National Apprenticeship Week Apprenticeship Inspiration Award’ at the Houses of Parliament in March this year.

Upon collection the reward Joshua further inspired the audience, stating “life is what you make of it, it doesn’t matter how far or fast you go – just go”.

QA is confident Joshua’s example will pave the way for a new outlook on apprenticeships to others.

> “I was a kid from Hackney and in the blink of an eye I was in the House of Commons picking up my apprenticeship award.
>
> The recognition gave me a real sense that good things will happen if you work for them.”

Acknowledgements

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ABOUT QA

QA is a UK-based learning partner, offering a full range of solutions to support organisations to meet their talent challenges – spanning corporate learning, academies, consulting, apprenticeship, and higher education offerings. It delivers learning both digitally and in-person – with 20 training centres as well as online academies, mobile learning, 3D simulations and gamification.

QA's apprenticeship portfolio focuses on IT, technology and business apprenticeships – blending training with real-world experience in the workplace, designed to upskill local talent with training relevant to their job roles. Its wide range of programmes include industry-recognised qualifications and accreditations from City & Guilds, Microsoft, CompTIA, ACA and APM.

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