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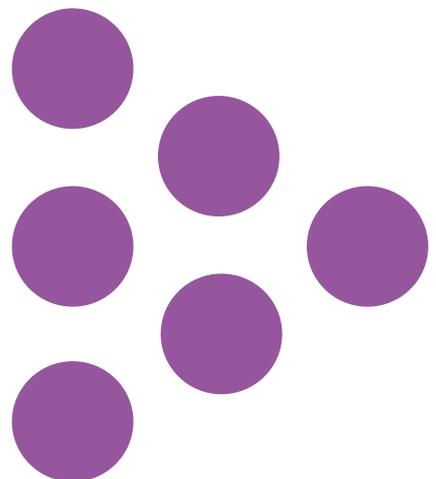
## Report

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# Equalising access to apprenticeships

Investigating the barriers to young people accessing  
apprenticeship opportunities

**National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)**



# Equalising access to apprenticeships

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## Executive summary

Apprenticeships are a key training route to help young people enter the labour market and for upskilling existing workers. Apprenticeships also have the potential to act as a vehicle for social mobility for young people (SMC, 2020).

Significant reforms have been introduced to the apprenticeship system over the last decade which have led to a substantial decline in the number of apprenticeships started. The impact of this decline has been felt unevenly, with young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds of all ages particularly affected. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who play a particularly important role in supporting young people to access apprenticeship opportunities have also been disproportionately impacted by these reforms. These trends were only exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Julius *et al.*, 2021). While there has been some recovery in the number of apprenticeship starts during the current academic year, it is not clear to what extent this recovery will be sustained.

The degree to which the fall in the number of apprenticeships started by young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is driven by a falling supply of apprenticeships or a lack of demand from young people looking for an apprenticeship is not well understood.

This report investigates the availability of intermediate (Level 2, equivalent to GCSEs) and advanced (Level 3, equivalent to A-levels) apprenticeship opportunities, and the barriers to young people accessing apprenticeships at these levels. It draws on Department for Education (DfE) statistics of the number of apprenticeships started by young people, 20 virtual and telephone interviews with SMEs and information from the ‘find an apprenticeship’ (FAA) service – the DfE’s online apprenticeship vacancy search website. The findings from the 20 interviews with SMEs are intended to highlight potential issues and areas of focus rather than to make generalisable statistical inferences.

## Key findings

### How are employers advertising their apprenticeship opportunities?

#### **The FAA service is an important way for young people to find apprenticeship opportunities.**

While not all vacancies posted will translate into an apprenticeship start, a substantial proportion of apprenticeship vacancies are advertised via the FAA service. For every ten intermediate apprenticeship starts in 2020-21, seven vacancies were posted on the FAA service. Further, one in three apprentices surveyed via the 2021 Youth Voice Census reported locating their apprenticeship via the service (Youth Employment UK, 2021).

While the small sample of SMEs who were interviewed reported using a number of other routes to recruit apprentices (Indeed, LinkedIn, social media, word of mouth, etc.), there was no consensus about what routes were the most successful.

**Most of the SMEs interviewed are not directly using the FAA service. It is mostly colleges and training providers who are engaging with the service on behalf of employers.**

Only around a third of the 20 employers who were interviewed reported that they engaged directly with the FAA service. This demonstrates the key role which colleges and training providers play in supporting SMEs to recruit apprentices.

### **What skills, qualifications and experiences are needed to start an apprenticeship?**

**Most apprenticeship opportunities advertised via the FAA have some formal qualification requirements, particularly English and maths requirements, which candidates need in order to apply.**

Three-quarters of intermediate (Level 2) and almost all (95 per cent) of advanced (Level 3) apprenticeship vacancies stated some kind of qualification requirement (e.g. at GCSE or A-level). Further, the vast majority (69 per cent of intermediate and 86 per cent of advanced apprenticeships) of vacancies listed both English and maths requirements in their FAA adverts<sup>1</sup>. This demonstrates that apprenticeships will often not be an obtainable route for lower attaining young people.

These requirements are a particular barrier to disadvantaged young people in accessing apprenticeship opportunities. Whilst 72 per cent of Key Stage 4 pupils in England achieved grade 4 in GCSE English and maths in 2020-21, just over half (53 per cent) of disadvantaged pupils in England achieved grade 4 or above in both GCSE English and maths (DfE, 2022d).

Several of the 20 SMEs interviewed reported that minimum English and maths GCSE requirements at grade 4+ (or equivalent) indicated that the young person would be able to cope with the job role, particularly for advanced apprenticeships. Employers appear to be specifying minimum requirements as it is costly for them and providers to take on young people who have not achieved this level due to the additional support and training required. Making it more financially attractive for employers, colleges and training providers to take on apprentices without English and maths GCSE requirements could be a key way of overcoming this barrier.

The Government has outlined plans to change the English and maths training requirements from August 2022 for apprentices who have not already achieved a Level 1 (e.g. a GCSE grade 1-3) in these subjects before starting their apprenticeship (ESFA, 2022). While these apprentices currently have to work towards a Level 2 in English and maths during their apprenticeship (e.g. a GCSE grade 4+), they will now be able to start working towards Level 1 before progressing onto a Level 2 if there is sufficient time left in the apprenticeship. However, this is unlikely to substantially impact the amount of time which apprentices spend on English and maths training.

**Qualification requirements differ substantially across sectors.**

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<sup>1</sup> A large proportion of vacancies specified that a Level 2 or GCSE grade 4+ was required (47 per cent for intermediate vacancies and 75 per cent for advanced vacancies). However, not all adverts stated a minimum qualification level.

For example, while 46 per cent of apprenticeship vacancies in ‘Retail, Commercial Enterprise and Hospitality’ had no qualification requirements, only nine per cent had no requirements in ‘Business, Administration and Law’. This demonstrates that, while the majority of apprenticeships across all sectors have some form of qualification requirement, the extent to which they may prevent a young person from starting an apprenticeship varies across sectors. It also shows the importance of tailoring careers advice and guidance across different apprenticeship sectors.

**Communication skills (including both verbal and written skills) are the most common skills required by employers.**

Indeed, 62 per cent of intermediate and 68 per cent of advanced apprenticeships listed communication skills as a requirement in their vacancies. Digital or ICT skills were also commonly listed by employers as prerequisites, with roughly half of advanced level apprenticeships mentioning these skills. Other key attributes such as teamwork, fitting into the company, organisation, interpersonal skills, good time keeping, flexibility, working accurately and being trustworthy were also identified from both our employer interviews and analysis of apprenticeship vacancies. This shows that employers are looking to hire young people with a broader set of skills, over and above formal qualifications.

**Work experience is viewed as important but it does not need to be sector specific.**

While only a relatively small proportion of apprenticeship vacancies listed any work experience requirements, the SMEs interviewed placed a strong value on recruiting apprentices with work experience, as they felt apprentices with this experience were more likely to come to the role with good work ethics and time management skills. However, work experience did not need to be sector specific. This demonstrates that lack of work experience may be another barrier to young people progressing onto apprenticeships, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are less likely to be able to access work experience via their personal networks (Youth Employment UK, 2018).

Further, although the SMEs taking part in interviews valued work experience, this did not mean they were looking to hire an older apprentice. A third preferred to employ an apprentice over 18, with the remainder either looking for someone under 18 years or not specifying the required age of the apprentice.

**What do we know about the current availability of apprenticeship opportunities?**

**There are substantial differences in the availability and accessibility of apprenticeship opportunities across the country.**

These differences are even starker for certain sectors. For example, while it is possible to undertake a ‘Health and Social Care’ apprenticeship in most parts of England, apprenticeship opportunities in ‘Manufacturing Technologies’ are much more localised meaning that young people seeking work in this sector would have to reconsider their options or move to a part of the country where opportunities are available. This is likely to prevent young people, particularly those from disadvantaged groups who cannot afford to relocate or cover their travel costs, from accessing these opportunities.

Apprenticeship standards set out what an apprentice will be doing and the skills required of them, by job role. While we would not expect all apprenticeship standards to be offered in all parts of the country and we recognise the Government’s aspiration for skills provision to match local skill need (as outlined by the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (2022)), the fact that most parliamentary constituencies only have starts in about a fifth of all standards confirms that geography is likely to be a significant barrier to young people with an interest in more specialised opportunities.

Offering subsidised travel or accommodation would help to improve young people’s access to more specialised opportunities. In addition, supporting SMEs to hire more apprentices would go some way to increasing the volume of more specialised opportunities. Alongside addressing the range of barriers which SMEs currently face in hiring apprentices, this would require the Government to revisit the design of the apprenticeship levy, whose current design cannot accommodate a large increase in apprenticeship starts among SMEs.

Indeed, whenever there is a risk that the apprenticeship budget will be overspent, the Government is likely to restrict the supply of apprenticeship funding for SMEs. This is because there is a fixed budget for the apprenticeship programme and, due to the current design of the levy (where apprenticeships in SMEs are resourced using the funding which has not already been spent by large employers), the main mechanism for the Government to ensure that the apprenticeship budget is not overspent is by capping the number of apprenticeship starts in SMEs.

### **What are SMEs’ experiences of recruiting an apprentice?**

#### **Most of the SMEs interviewed are positive about the design of the current apprenticeship system.**

Most of the 20 SMEs interviewed viewed young apprentices as valuable to their workforce<sup>2</sup>. A majority (two-thirds) also agreed that the current apprenticeships system helped organisations to recruit young people aged 16-19 years. The remaining third of interviewees who felt that the system was not working effectively highlighted a range of issues. These included: a lack of awareness among employers of where to go for support; a lack of proactivity from local colleges or providers, especially during the pandemic; bureaucracy with the qualification element; and time-consuming administration.

#### **Despite most interviewed SMEs being positive about the current system, many reported that they find it difficult to recruit suitable young people to apprenticeship vacancies.**

Most of the SMEs interviewed had received only a small number of applications for their roles, albeit there were suggestions that training providers may have been pre-screening applicants in some cases. Even where employers had successfully appointed an applicant to their role, most employers did not perceive that there were suitable alternatives to the

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<sup>2</sup> Among the interviewed employers, four employers had been recruiting apprentices for between four and ten years, three for between 13 and 20 years and two for over 30 years. Eleven had been recruiting apprentices for up to three years, with four beginning in the last year and seven in the last two to three years.

successful candidates that they could have employed instead. This was partly related to receiving a low number of applications in the first place.

### **What are the barriers young people face in accessing apprenticeships?**

The SMEs who were interviewed reported four main barriers to young people starting apprenticeships, which are detailed below.

#### **1. Low awareness and poor image of apprenticeships**

SMEs reported that low awareness of apprenticeships among young people was a significant barrier to recruiting young people. Many of the employers interviewed perceived schools' focus on academic routes as being a key contributor to young people's lack of awareness. Some employers also felt that schools had a negative perception of apprenticeships which was being passed onto young people.

However, it is important to note that this contradicts other evidence which suggests that awareness of apprenticeships is high among young people, and that many young people are seeking to apply to apprenticeship opportunities (Youth Employment UK, 2021). One way to reconcile this seemingly contradictory evidence is that Level 2 and 3 apprenticeship opportunities, particularly in SMEs, may be less visible or attractive to young people compared to opportunities in large employers, or at higher levels.

In terms of overcoming this barrier, employers suggested that schools should be supported to promote apprenticeships to young people by being made aware of the range of opportunities that they provide and by changing any outdated perceptions that still exist. In recognition of this challenge, the Skills and Post-16 Education Act (UK Parliament, 2022) has recently introduced a requirement for schools to allow technical education and training providers to access their institutions on six occasions to speak with pupils between the ages of 13 and 18. However, it will be important to monitor the impact of this new requirement to assess if it gets to the root of the issue.

#### **2. Low wages**

A third of the 20 SMEs interviewed perceived money to be another significant barrier to apprenticeship uptake. Although many paid more than the minimum apprenticeship wage, they felt that the wage was insufficient for young people to survive on, which could lead to a lack of applicants. Several employers gave examples of past apprentices who had struggled financially, undertaking additional jobs in the evening and at weekends to keep their finances in check. Some employers felt that they could not compete with more highly-paid low-skilled jobs which can be more attractive to young people in the short-term, as mentioned below.

Although they raised low wages as a barrier, many of the SMEs interviewed felt that they would not be able to pay a higher wage due to the stage of development of young apprentices and their ability to contribute to the business. However, some did offer possible solutions including offering young apprentices support with transport costs, and instituting more regular salary increments throughout their apprenticeship to reflect their increasing contribution to the organisation.

### 3. Lack of life and work experience

Young people’s lack of life and work experience contributes to the need for employers to invest substantial resource in their development which can particularly impact on the day-to-day running of SMEs. Several SMEs participating in interviews reported that some young people who they had previously recruited found the transition from school/college to work challenging and did not have the pre-requisite work ethic.

SMEs proposed that schools should be encouraged to do more to develop young people’s work ethic as well as their transferable skills, such as team working, adaptability and critical thinking. It is, however, important to recognise that schools already undertake work in this area and many feel over-stretched with competing priorities, so careful consideration would need to be given as to how this might be achieved. Employers also felt strongly that work experience opportunities should be more widely offered by schools and that young people should be provided with opportunities to undertake taster sessions with employers prior to committing to an apprenticeship.

### 4. Lack of career direction and long-term commitment

Several of the SMEs interviewed reported that young people’s lack of career direction and long-term commitment to a career could impact their take-up of apprenticeships. Indeed, concerns about an applicant’s commitment to the advertised role was one of the most commonly cited reasons as to why they were not suitable. The perception of some SMEs was that young people’s lack of career direction and long-term vision could lead them into more highly paid low-skilled jobs rather than considering the longer-term financial and progression benefits of an initially lower-paid apprenticeship. This relates closely to the point made above regarding low wages being a barrier to apprenticeship access.

SMEs suggested that providing positive apprentice role models, as well as work experience, would go some way towards encouraging young people to think more long-term with regards to their career decisions and the related training they needed to undertake to achieve their goals.

It is important to emphasise that these findings reflect the views of the SMEs we interviewed and that other employers, young people, their parents or carers, and those working with them in schools, colleges and training providers, may have different perspectives on these issues.

**Awareness of, and engagement in, traineeships<sup>3</sup> is low among the SMEs who participated in interviews, and this programme does not seem to be effectively supporting young people to progress onto apprenticeships.**

Traineeships were originally introduced to overcome several of the barriers to apprenticeship access outlined above. However, the traineeship programme has remained small and only around a quarter of learners who undertake a traineeship progress onto an apprenticeship (DfE, 2022b). SMEs interviewed who were aware of traineeships considered the unpaid nature of traineeships to be a key barrier.

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<sup>3</sup> Traineeships are programmes of education and training that help young people acquire the skills, experience and behaviours they need to secure an apprenticeship or a job (see Section 6.3 for further details).

## Recommendations

	Issue to address	Recommendation
<i>Recommendation 1</i>	Employers, colleges and training providers appear to be using minimum English and maths requirements as part of their selection process. However, almost half (47 per cent) of disadvantaged pupils in England fail to achieve grade 4 or above in both GCSE English and maths at Key Stage 4.	For apprenticeships to be an accessible route for those young people who do not meet these requirements, the Government should provide financial incentives to training providers, colleges and employers to hire these young people and support them to achieve their Level 2 in English and maths, in order to reflect the higher costs and potential risks associated with taking on these young people.
<i>Recommendation 2</i>	Some employers perceive money to be a key barrier to attracting, and retaining, young people on apprenticeships. In particular, high travel costs are identified as a significant barrier to young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, taking up more specialised opportunities not available in their local area.  This barrier will only be exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis.	The Government should extend the 16-19 bursary fund so that it can be used to fund travel costs for apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds. This will help reduce the geographic barriers to apprenticeship access, particularly among disadvantaged young people.  While the national minimum wage for apprenticeships was increased from £4.30 to £4.81 in April 2022, it remains very low. In light of current cost of living increases, the Government should review the appropriate level of the minimum apprenticeship wage.

**Issue to address**

**Recommendation**

*Recommendation 3*

<p>Some SMEs view low awareness of apprenticeship opportunities and recruitment processes, as well as lack of understanding of the potential longer-term financial and progression benefits, to be a significant barrier to recruiting young people.</p> <p>While the Skills and Post-16 Education Act (UK Parliament, 2022) requires schools and colleges to provide students aged 13-18 with six encounters with providers of technical education and apprenticeships, this may not go far enough and it will be important to monitor schools' adherence to it and other barriers to implementation.</p>	<p>There are a number of initiatives and organisations which already promote awareness of apprenticeships and positive role models (such as DfE's Get the Jump campaign, Amazing Apprenticeships, National Apprenticeship Week and the Careers and Enterprise Company). However, based on the views of interviewed SMEs, there still appears to be a need to improve both understanding and awareness of intermediate (Level 2) and advanced (Level 3) apprenticeship opportunities among young people.</p> <p>The Government should review the impact of existing campaigns to promote intermediate and advanced apprenticeship opportunities. Drawing on learning and effective practice, it should then re-focus its efforts to improve awareness and promote positive role models and messages to young people, parents, carers and teaching staff.</p>
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**Issue to address**

**Recommendation**

*Recommendation 4*

Some SMEs suggested that young people applying for intermediate and advanced apprenticeship opportunities often do not have the skills and experience which employers are looking for.

Work experience and employer engagement is vital to informing and preparing young people for their post-16 options, particularly vocational routes. It is also an integral part of many post-16 vocational and technical programmes.

To ensure that all young people are able to progress to the most appropriate post-16 route, the Government should consider how work experience and employer engagement can be better resourced and coordinated in schools, particularly to ensure the most disadvantaged young people are appropriately supported in their decision-making. This should build on existing initiatives and effective practice, including the work of the Careers and Enterprise Company and local collaborations of schools and colleges, which in many cases enable schools to benefit from colleges' strong employer networks and expertise in engaging employers.

*Recommendation 5*

Traineeships were introduced to support young people to overcome the barriers they face in accessing apprenticeships, with a particular focus on young people who are furthest from the labour market. However, the evidence suggests that, in many cases, they are not supporting young people to develop the skills and competencies to progress onto apprenticeships.

The Government should urgently review the traineeships offer to support more young people to successfully progress from traineeships to apprenticeships. This should include reviewing: the development of English and maths and other essential transferable skills; the delivery of work tasters; payment; and incentives for employers to offer apprenticeship opportunities following traineeships.



# 1 Introduction

Apprenticeships are paid jobs which incorporate on- and off-the-job training. They are a key training route to help young people enter the labour market and for upskilling existing workers. Apprenticeships also have the potential to act as a vehicle for social mobility for young people (SMC, 2020).

Despite this, as evidenced by our earlier report (Julius *et al.*, 2021), the number of apprenticeships started by young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds of all ages declined significantly following recent reforms to the apprenticeship system. The extent to which this fall in the number of apprenticeships started by young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, is driven by falling supply for apprenticeships or lack of demand from young people looking for an apprenticeship is not well understood.

This research seeks to fill this gap by investigating the availability of intermediate (Level 2, equivalent to GCSEs) and advanced (Level 3, equivalent to A-levels) apprenticeships, and associated age, qualification, skill and experience requirements.

Our research also explores small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) views on the value of recruiting young people aged 16-19 years to apprenticeships, as well as the barriers that prevent employers recruiting this age group. SMEs have a particularly important role to play in supporting young people to access apprenticeship opportunities as they hire a disproportionate proportion of young people onto apprenticeships (DfE, 2022c), and they are key to ensuring that a range of apprenticeship opportunities are available across the country.

Our research used a mixed-methods approach, as detailed below.

- **Quantitative investigation of the supply of apprenticeships**

Our quantitative analysis drew on apprenticeship vacancies posted on the Department for Education's (DfE) 'find an apprenticeship' (FAA) service between August 2018 and January 2022. The FAA service is an online job posting website where employers and providers are able to advertise apprenticeship vacancies in England. This was complemented by analysis of the number of apprenticeships started between 2015-16 and 2021-22, drawing on data collected by the DfE.

- **Qualitative interviews with SMEs**

Our qualitative analysis was based on virtual interviews with 20 SMEs recruiting for intermediate and advanced apprenticeships. Employers were sampled from the group of employers who posted a job vacancy on the FAA service between September 2019 and December 2021<sup>4</sup>. The sampling approach targeted employers across a range of sectors, levels

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<sup>4</sup> Four employers had been recruiting apprentices for between four and ten years, three for between 13 and 20 years and two for over 30 years. Eleven had been recruiting apprentices for up to three years, with four beginning in the last year and seven in the last two to three years.

and areas of England. Interviews took place between February and April 2022, either by telephone or virtually, and each lasted around 30 minutes.

It is important to note that the 20 interviews with SME employers were intended to highlight potential issues and areas of focus. This sample was not sufficiently large to make any generalisable statistical inferences.

Further details of the methodology can be found in Appendix A and details of the characteristics of the employers interviewed are provided in Appendix B.

## 2 The current apprenticeship landscape

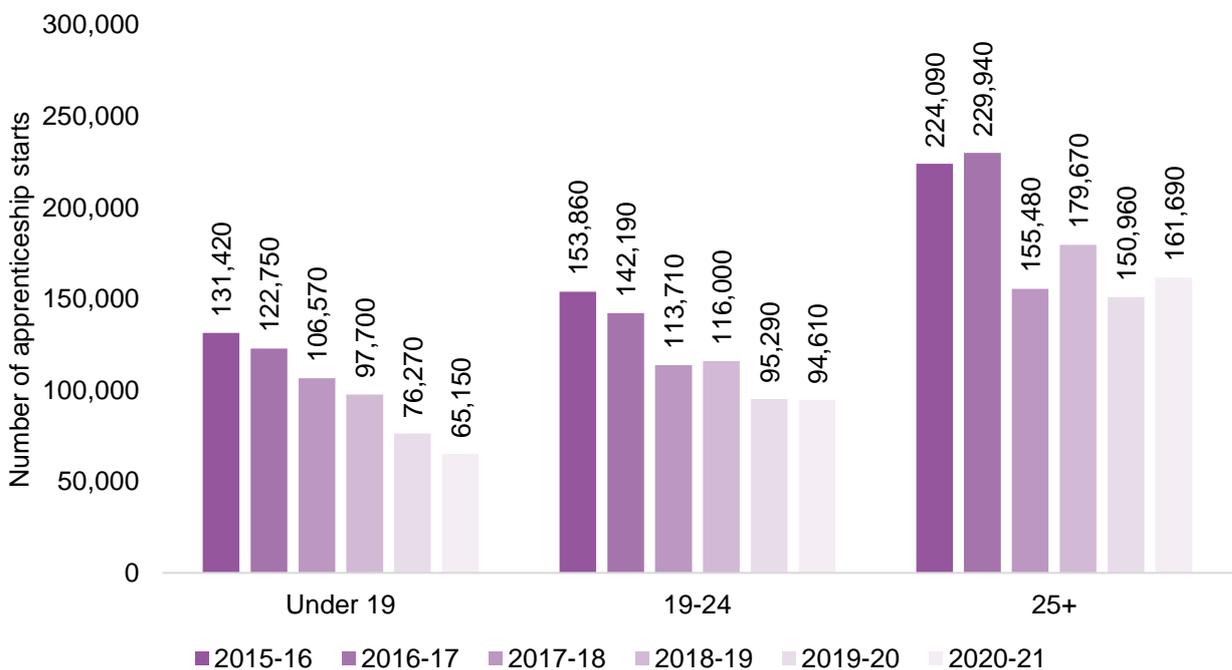
The Government’s ‘2020 Vision’ for apprenticeships (HM Government, 2015) set out the aspiration for apprenticeships to be an attractive offer that young people and adults aspire to go into, as a high-quality and prestigious path to a successful career. It also set the ambition that apprenticeships should provide high-quality opportunities that deliver the skills, knowledge and behaviours that employers are looking for. Unfortunately, the statistics demonstrate that this vision has not been realised.

### The number of apprenticeships started among young people has seen a substantial decline.

Apprenticeships currently only account for a relatively small share of the qualifications undertaken by young people. Among 16 to 18 year olds in 2020, only four per cent were studying an apprenticeship<sup>5</sup>, and this share was low even before the pandemic (DfE, 2021).

This reflects the fact that the number of apprenticeships started among under 19s halved between 2015-16 and 2020-21, as shown by Figure 1. This decline in starts among young people was largely driven by a drop in the number of apprenticeships started in SMEs, halving from 246,830 in 2015-16 to 123,780 apprenticeship starts in 2020-21.

**Figure 1: Number of apprenticeships started by age, 2015-16 to 2021-22**



Source: DfE analysis of Individualised Learner Record (ILR)

<sup>5</sup> Based on highest qualification aim.

**While the reasons for the decline are complex and multi-faceted, significant reforms introduced to the apprenticeship system over the last decade have been contributory factors.**

As outlined by Table 1 below, these reforms include the requirements for: apprenticeships to last at least 12 months and include 20 per cent off-the job training; all apprentices to work towards a Level 2 maths or English qualification (e.g. Functional Skills<sup>6</sup> or GCSE to achieve grade 4+) if the apprentice does not already have these; all apprenticeships to include an end-point assessment which apprentices must pass to gain the qualification; and all new starts since August 2020 to work towards employer-led standards which have replaced the old system of frameworks.

The other major development has been the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017. The levy is a 0.5 per cent tax on employers with an annual pay bill over £3 million, which was intended to fund the costs of the system. The levy has particularly impacted SMEs which largely do not pay the levy, as the policy focus on levy-paying employers has limited funding for non-levy payers.

**Despite this, the majority (two-thirds) of the 20 SMEs interviewed agree that the apprenticeships system helps to support organisations to recruit young people aged 16-19 years.**

These SMEs were particularly positive about the support available from their local college or provider in terms of the recruitment of apprentices and ongoing contact during the apprenticeship, as this quote exemplifies: *'I don't feel unsupported or left alone'* (employer 6).

The third of interviewees who felt that the current system was not working effectively provided a range of reasons to justify their response. This included: a lack of awareness of where to go for support; a lack of proactivity from their local college or training provider, especially during the pandemic; bureaucracy with the qualification element; time-consuming administration; and low awareness and negativity towards apprenticeships among employers. Only one employer was very unhappy with the current system, commenting that the system was *'significantly flawed'*.

Almost three-quarters of the SMEs interviewed felt that young apprentices were very valuable or exceptionally valuable to their current and future workforce. Many viewed young people as a *'blank canvas'* that could be *'moulded'*.

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<sup>6</sup> Functional Skills qualifications teach applied maths and English skills to support post-16 and adult learners to progress to employment and/or technical qualifications and to develop skills for everyday life. Level 2 is equivalent to GCSE grade 4+.

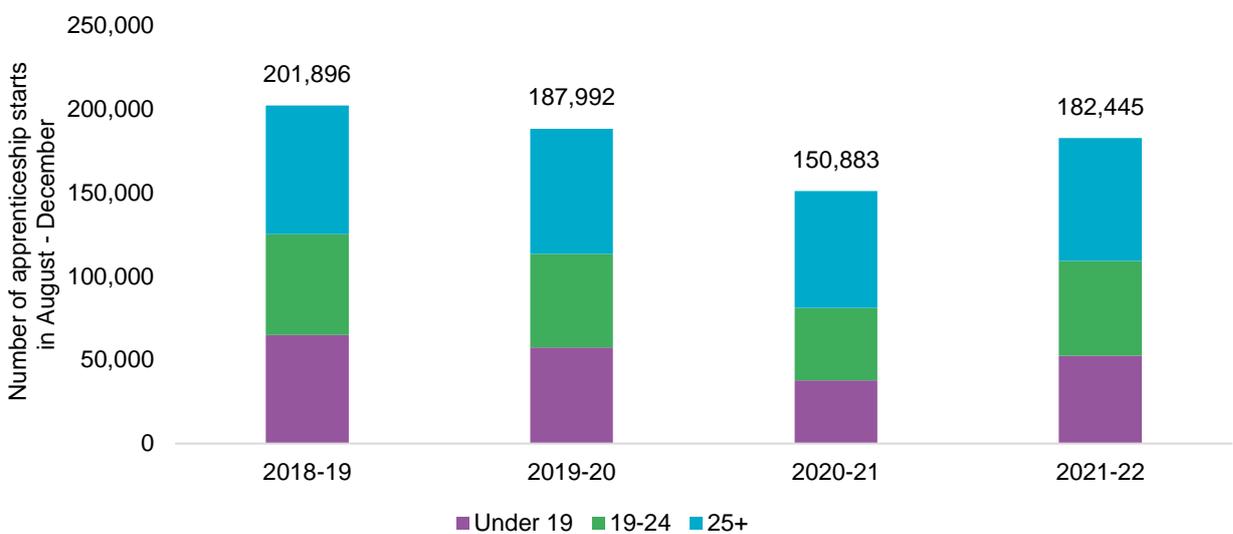
**Table 1: Key apprenticeship policies in the last decade, before and after reform**

Change	Date	Rationale for change	Before	After
<i>Shift from frameworks to standards</i>	Launched in 2013. All frameworks phased out by August 2020	Improve quality Qualifications to meet the needs of employers	Frameworks were designed by sector bodies, considered to be 'qualification-led' No formal assessment Not aligned with professional qualifications	Standards were designed by groups of employers ('trailblazers'), considered to be 'occupation-led' End-point assessment at the end of qualification Aligned with professional qualifications
<i>Apprenticeship levy</i>	Introduced in April 2017	Introduce employer-led demand Engage employers in the apprenticeship system	Funding was provided to training providers to deliver apprenticeships  Although employers were expected to make a contribution to the costs of apprenticeship training, this often did not result in a cash transfer	Levy paying employers (who are mostly large employers) access apprenticeship funding through the levy with a top-up from the Government and are able to transfer their levy funds to other employers. Non-levy paying employers (mainly SMEs) can either receive a transfer from a large employer to fund their apprenticeships, or fund their apprenticeships jointly with the Government
<i>Minimum apprenticeship length</i>	Introduced in 2012	Improve quality by introducing a minimum standard	No minimum	12 month minimum. Initially, apprenticeships could be shortened if the learner had already covered some of the course content but exemptions were removed in 2017
<i>Minimum requirements for English and maths</i>	Introduced in 2015	Ensure apprenticeships are preparing individuals with minimum skills to succeed in the labour market	No minimum	Apprenticeships must offer training up to Level 2 in English and maths if the apprentice does not already have these. This is in addition to the 'off-the-job' training requirement. From August 2022, apprentices without a Level 1 can first study for a Level 1, before progressing to a Level 2
<i>Off-the-job training</i>	Requirement from May 2017	Improve quality	Some apprentices were only receiving a small amount of training	All employers required to offer and evidence that they are providing apprentices with 20 per cent off-the-job training. From August 2022, the minimum requirement will be six hours per week (which is less than 20 per cent for those working over 30 hours per week)

**The number of apprenticeship starts has been recovering during the current academic year.**

The recent re-opening of the economy has been accompanied by a recovery in the number of apprenticeship starts, particularly among under 19s who were particularly impacted by the pandemic. However, recovery has varied substantially between sectors, and it is not obvious that the recovery will be sustained and reach pre-pandemic levels. For example, the Government has now withdrawn the additional financial incentive of £3,000 for employers to take on new apprentice hires which was in place between 1 October 2021 to 31 January 2022 (DfE, 2022b).

**Figure 2: Number of apprenticeship starts, August-December 2018-19 to 2021-22**



Source: DfE analysis of ILR

**The extent to which the fall in the number of apprenticeships started by young people is driven by falling supply of apprenticeships or lack of demand from young people is not well understood.**

However, there is evidence that interest in apprenticeship opportunities has been increasing. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has recorded a significant increase in interest in applying for apprenticeships among university applicants (Cope, 2022). This is also reflected in the substantive increase in google searches relating to applying for an apprenticeship in England over the last year<sup>7</sup>. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that this recent increase has focused on degree apprenticeships, and it is unclear whether this increase in demand has also been seen among intermediate and advanced apprenticeships.

<sup>7</sup> Based on NFER analysis of the number of google trends searches for 'Apply for an apprenticeship'.

### 3 Finding an apprenticeship opportunity

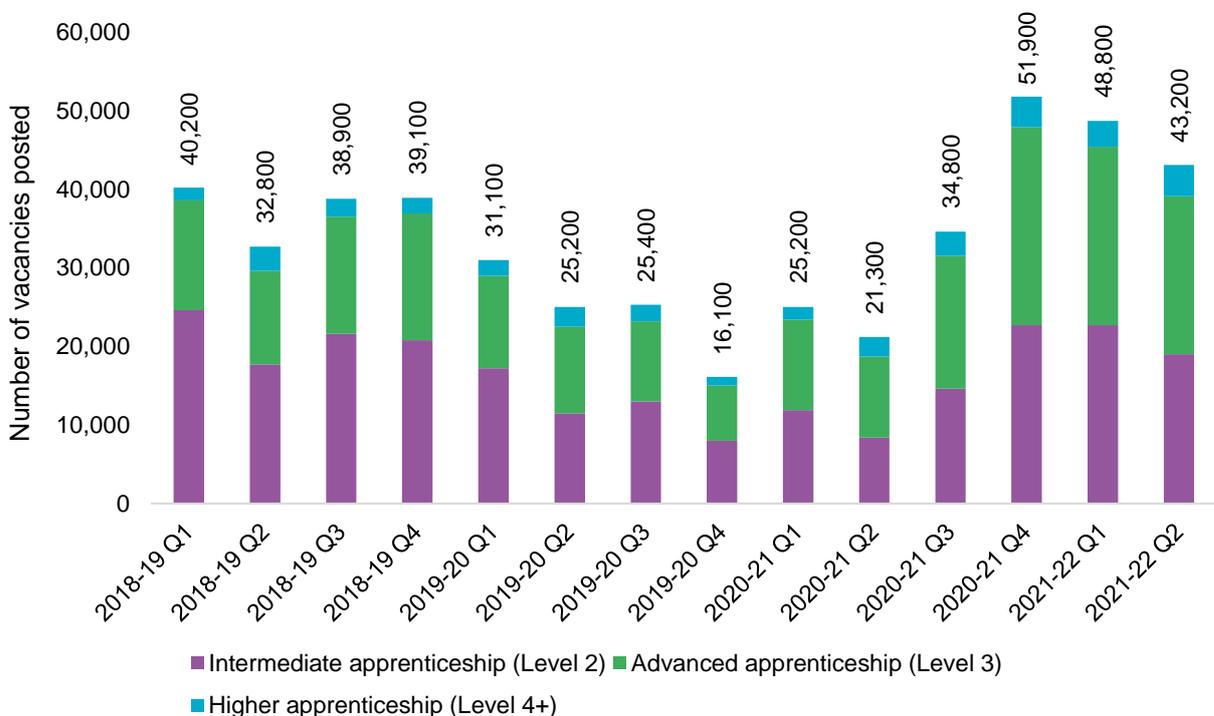
The FAA service was launched to streamline the process of advertising and applying for apprenticeships. This section explores the availability of apprenticeship opportunities for young people via FAA apprenticeship vacancy information. It also explores SMEs’ experiences of recruitment via the service in order to better understand to what extent the supply of opportunities is a barrier to young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, looking to start an apprenticeship.

#### 3.1 What apprenticeships are being advertised?

**While not all vacancies posted will translate into an apprenticeship start, a substantial proportion of apprenticeship vacancies are advertised via the FAA service.**

Since August 2018<sup>8</sup>, the FAA has become an increasingly important service for young people to find apprenticeship opportunities, as demonstrated by Figure 3. Indeed, in the 2021 Youth Voice Census, roughly one in three apprentices surveyed found their apprenticeship via the FAA service (Youth Employment UK, 2021).

**Figure 3: Number of apprenticeship vacancies posted, 2018-19 Q1 (August-October) to 2021-22 Q2 (November-January)**

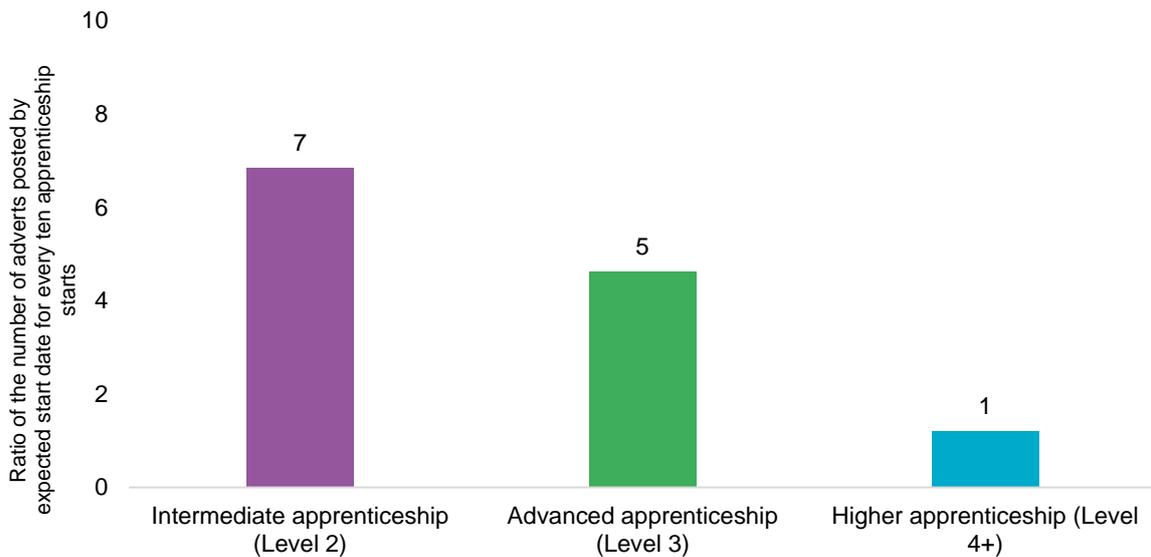


Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

<sup>8</sup> This is the oldest available data on the number of vacancies launched via the service.

The number of vacancies posted on the FAA service is substantial relative to the size of the apprenticeship market. Between January and December 2021, Figure 4 shows that seven intermediate apprenticeship vacancies were posted on the FAA service to start in this period for every ten intermediate apprenticeship starts. While not all vacancies posted will translate into an apprenticeship start, this suggests that a large proportion of apprenticeships are advertised via the FAA service.

**Figure 4: Ratio of vacancies posted by expected start date for every ten apprenticeship starts, January - December 2021**



Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

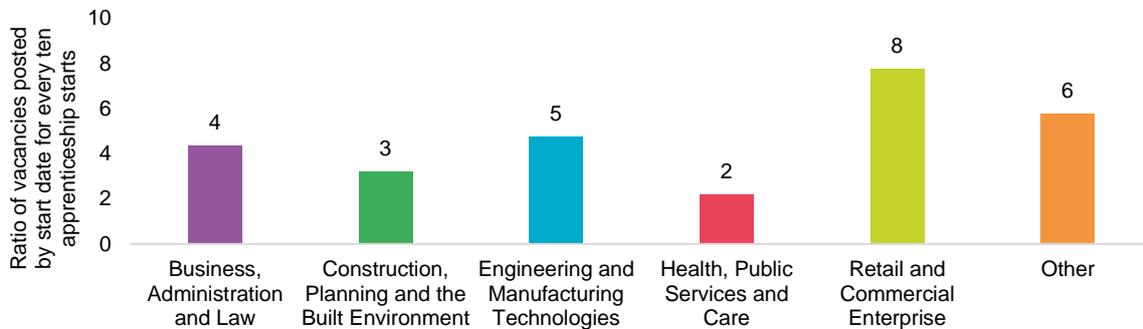
**However, use of the service differs across different types of apprenticeships.**

The FAA service is not used as much for higher apprenticeships (Level 4 and above, equivalent to degree-level qualifications) with only around one vacancy posted for every ten higher-level starts. This may be partly explained by the fact that a more significant proportion of higher-level apprenticeships are started by current employees, as compared to intermediate and advanced apprenticeships (Julius *et al.*, 2021)<sup>9</sup>. In turn, it follows that these vacancies are less likely to be advertised via the FAA.

The FAA service is also used differently by employers across different sectors, as shown by Figure 5. For adverts posted with an expected start date between January 2021 to December 2021, only two intermediate vacancies were posted on the FAA service for every ten apprenticeship starts in the 'Health, Public Services and Care' sector. This compares to eight vacancies posted for every ten in the 'Retail and Commercial Enterprise' sector.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that this does not appear to be explained by a larger proportion of higher apprenticeships being advertised via the UCAS apprenticeship service.

**Figure 5: Ratio of intermediate vacancies posted by expected start date for every ten apprenticeship starts by sector, January - December 2021**



Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

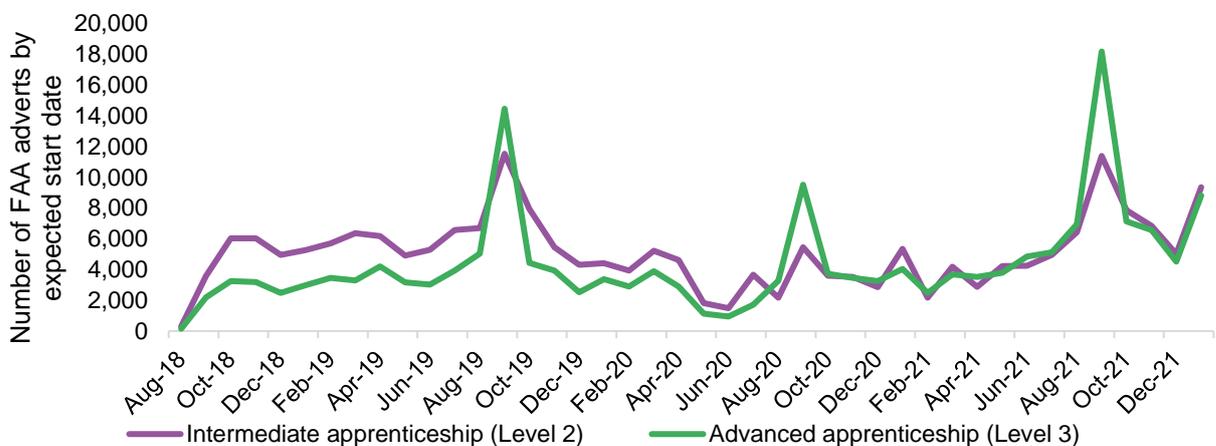
### 3.2 What can the FAA service tell us about the availability of apprenticeship opportunities for young people?

The FAA service provides key insights into the nature of apprenticeship opportunities available to young people, as well as on the seasonality of apprenticeship applications.

#### Intermediate and advanced apprenticeship vacancies follow a strong cyclical pattern.

Intermediate and advanced vacancies are most commonly expected to start in September of the academic year, with roughly one in five vacancies expecting to start in September. Unsurprisingly, under 19s are also more likely to start their apprenticeship in the autumn, compared to older apprentices – even when undertaking an apprenticeship at the same level as older apprentices. This demonstrates that encouraging more employers to advertise in advance for a September start may support more under 19s to access apprenticeships.

**Figure 6: Apprenticeship adverts by expected start date by level, August 2018 to January 2022**



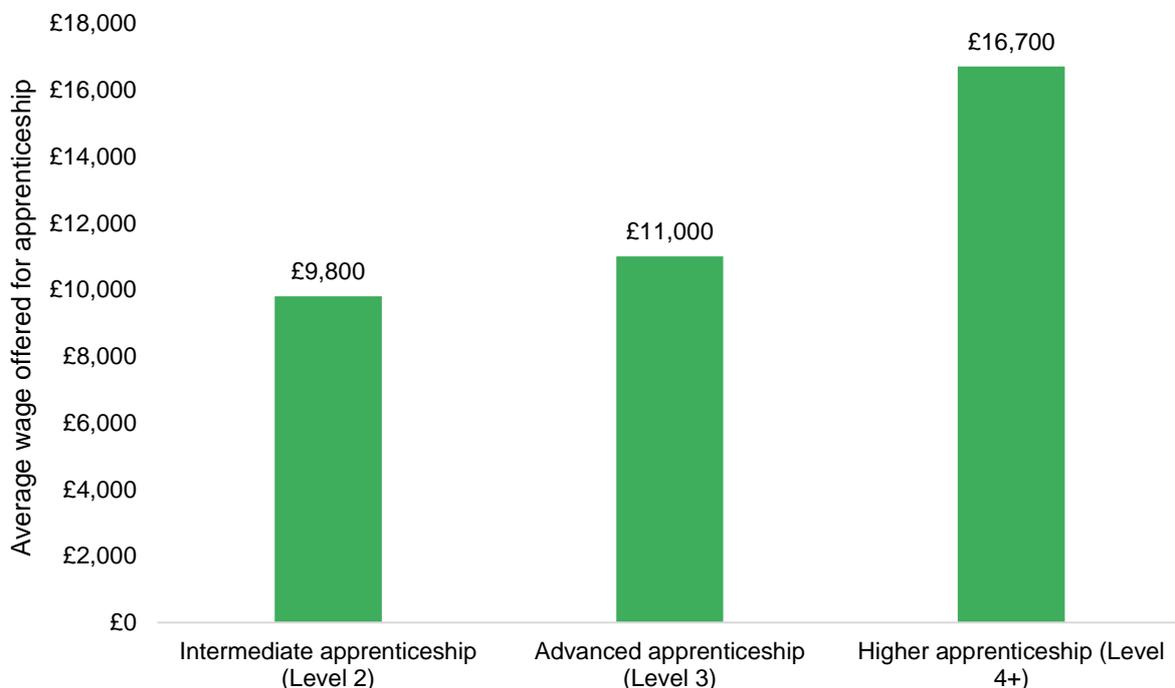
Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

**Apprentices are often paid above the statutory minimum apprenticeship wage.**

Figure 7 presents the average apprenticeship wage offered by apprenticeship employers at all apprenticeship levels between August 2018 and January 2022. It shows that, at least on average, employers offered wages which were above the statutory minimum apprenticeship wage. For example, between August 2018 and January 2022, the mean annual apprentice wage for an intermediate apprentice was £9,800, compared to the current statutory minimum for the first year of an apprenticeship of £8,800. Similarly, employers interviewed also reported offering their apprentices more than statutory minimums, while acknowledging that these wages were still relatively low.

However, it is important to note that apprentice wages tend to be significantly lower than those young people might be able to earn elsewhere. Indeed, the average full-time annual wage for 18-21 year olds in the United Kingdom in 2021 was £19,200 (ONS, 2021a). This demonstrates that, while employers may pay apprentices more than statutory minimums, apprenticeship wages are not competitive. This, in turn, may be affecting the attractiveness of apprenticeships among younger people. Indeed, as discussed in Section 6, the SMEs interviewed suggested that the relatively low apprentice wage is a significant barrier to young people both undertaking an apprenticeship and completing it.

**Figure 7: Average (mean) annual wage offered in FAA adverts to apprentices by apprenticeship level, August 2018 to January 2022**



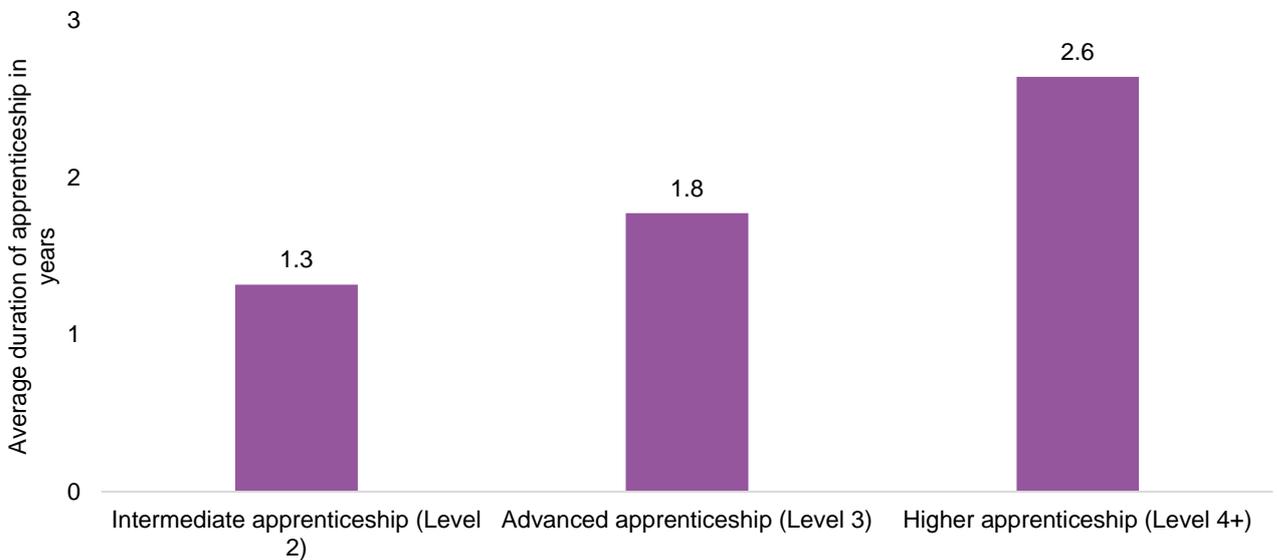
Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

Note: All wages converted into prices as of August 2021 using the consumer price index (ONS, 2022)

**Apprenticeships are a substantial commitment to a specific career for a young person.**

Whilst intermediate apprenticeships have the shortest average expected length at around 1.3 years (16 months, compared to 1.8 years for advanced apprenticeships and 2.6 years for higher apprenticeships), this is greater than the minimum requirement of 12 months. This shows that apprenticeships require young people to commit to a specific career over a significant period, which demonstrates the importance of encouraging young people to think long-term and understand the benefits of a sustained commitment to an apprenticeship.

**Figure 8: Average duration of apprenticeships by apprenticeship level, August 2018 to January 2022**



Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

**3.3 What were SMEs’ experiences of recruiting via the FAA service?**

**A minority of the SMEs interviewed directly use the FAA service. Almost half use providers (e.g. colleges or other training providers) to advertise for, and organise the recruitment of, their apprenticeship vacancies.**

Just over one-third of the SMEs interviewed (seven out of 20) reported that they directly used the FAA service, with some reporting a negative experience of it. They commonly referred to using a third party route instead as it reduced the burden on their business. In addition, of the employers who undertook the bulk of the recruitment themselves, some still used their local college or training provider to advertise their roles. There was some indication that providers and colleges short-listed candidates for employers, such as identifying those who were already studying a relevant course or who lived in close proximity to the employer.

*'I have tried setting it up through the government website, but I find that is a bit confusing to set up' (employer 18).*

*'No, we've not been very successful with FAA... We probably only ran maybe two campaigns on there [the FAA website] but the quality of the applicants that we got wasn't anywhere near as good as what we're finding through other channels' (employer 19).*

Aside from the FAA service, the SMEs interviewed were using Indeed, LinkedIn jobs and social media (e.g. Facebook) to recruit. A large number also mentioned links with their local college department or training provider and word of mouth as important recruitment channels. There was little consensus about which recruitment routes were most effective, suggesting that more could be done to encourage young people and employers to use the FAA. This could also improve parity of access given that young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds may not have the same access to personal networks (Youth Employment UK, 2018).

While the Government has outlined plans for training providers to record the reasons why employers did not wish to use the service in order to improve its effectiveness (ESFA, 2022), it is important the Government also gathers the views of colleges and training providers on their own use of the FAA service given the key role they also play in the apprentice application process.

## 4 What skills and qualifications are needed to start an apprenticeship?

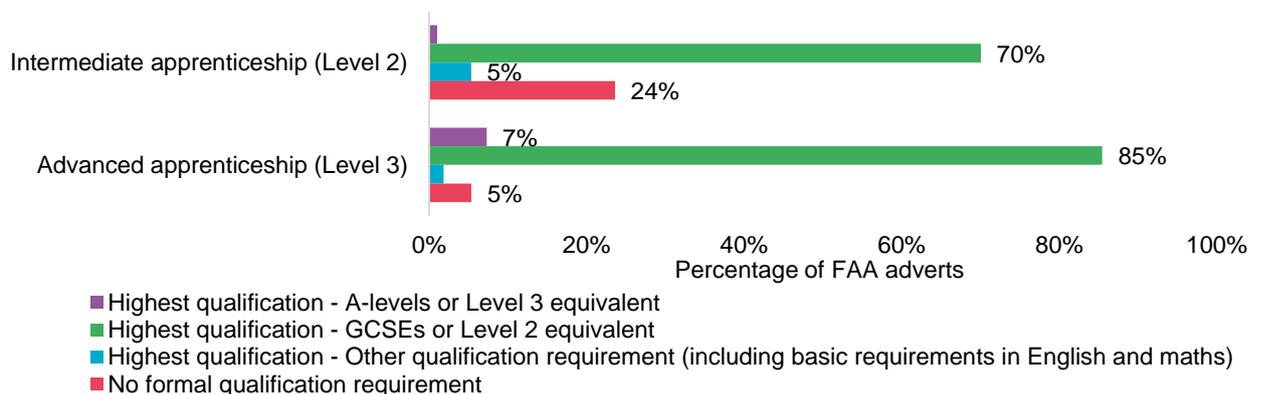
This section explores what qualifications and skills are required to start intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, drawing on apprenticeship adverts posted on the FAA website and on interviews with SME employers. It also investigates the extent to which these requirements may be barriers to young people, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, looking to start apprenticeships.

### 4.1 What qualifications are required to undertake an apprenticeship?

**Most apprenticeships have some form of qualification requirement.**

Figure 9 presents the highest-level qualification requirement listed in each advert posted on the FAA website. It shows that three-quarters of intermediate and almost all (95 per cent) of advanced apprenticeship adverts listed some qualification requirement. These requirements were often at least at GCSE or equivalent (at 85 per cent of advanced and 70 per cent of intermediate apprenticeship adverts) and sometimes at A-level or equivalent (at seven per cent of advanced apprenticeships and one per cent of intermediate apprenticeships)<sup>10</sup>. This demonstrates that apprenticeships will often not be an appropriate route for lower attaining young people. It also shows that it is not uncommon for young people to be expected to apply for an apprenticeship at the same level as their current highest qualification. This may make apprenticeships less appealing for some young people aiming to progress upwards from their current level.

**Figure 9: Highest qualification listed in FAA advert by apprenticeship level, August 2018 to February 2022**



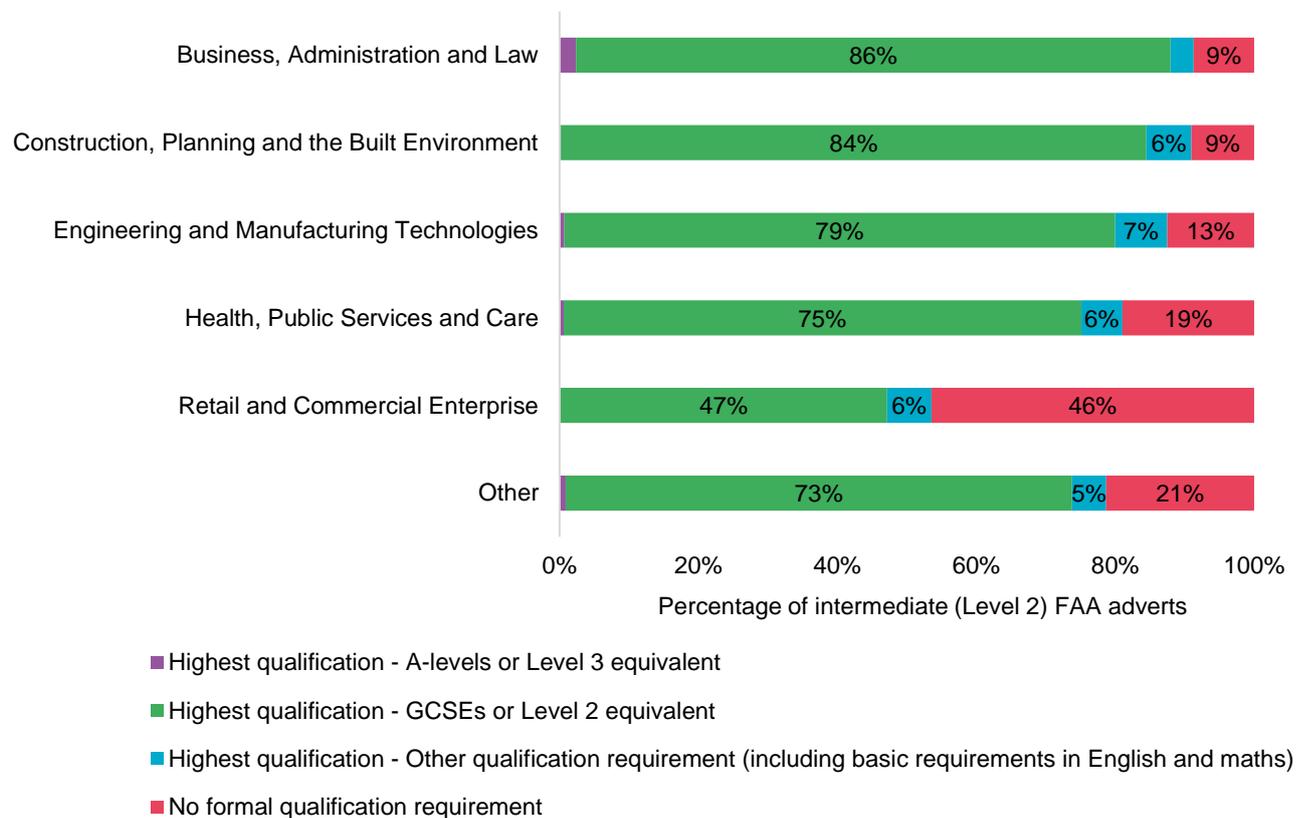
Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

<sup>10</sup> This is based on the highest level of qualification mentioned in that vacancy. For example, a qualification listing 'English and maths at GCSE or A-level' is categorised under 'A-levels or Level 3 equivalent'. There was a very small number of vacancies listing GCSE requirements where grade requirements are lower than a Level 2 (almost all at grade 3+, rather than 4+). These have still been classified as 'GCSE or Level 2 equivalent', and only have a minimal impact on the data.

**Qualification requirements differ substantially across sectors.**

As shown by Figure 10, while the vast majority of intermediate apprenticeship adverts in ‘Business, Administration and Law’ and ‘Construction, Planning and the Built Environment’ required some form of qualification (91 per cent), only 54 per cent of the intermediate apprenticeships in the ‘Retail and Commercial Enterprise’ sector had qualification requirements. A similar pattern can be shown for advanced apprenticeships, albeit requirements across all sectors are higher. This demonstrates that, while the majority of apprenticeships across all sectors have some form of qualification requirement, the extent to which they may prevent a young person from starting an apprenticeship varies across sectors.

**Figure 10: Highest qualification listed in intermediate FAA apprenticeship adverts by sector, August 2018 to February 2022**



Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

**A relatively small proportion of adverts list specific subject qualification requirements.**

In general, subject-specific qualifications were not required to start an apprenticeship. Where subject-specific qualifications were listed, it tended to be for advanced vacancies in specific sectors. Indeed, the most common qualifications required were in the sciences (three per cent of intermediate and nine per cent of advanced vacancies). Science requirements were strongly sector-specific, with roughly one in three advanced vacancies in the ‘Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies’ and ‘Construction and the Built Environment’ sectors listing

qualifications in the sciences. Less commonly listed qualifications were in engineering and early years qualifications (for both, less than one per cent of intermediate and two per cent of advanced vacancies). This demonstrates that lack of prior subject-specific knowledge would not typically be a barrier to a young person starting an apprenticeship.

**Table 2: Subject-specific qualification requirements listed in FAA adverts by apprenticeship level and sector, August 2018 to February 2022**

Subject-specific qualification requirements	Business, Administration and Law	Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	Health, Public Services and Care	Retail and Commercial Enterprise	Other
<b>Intermediate apprenticeships (Level 2)</b>						
Sciences	1%	1%	11%	4%	1%	3%
Construction	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Engineering	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Hair	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Beauty	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Early Years	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%
<b>Advanced apprenticeships (Level 3)</b>						
Sciences	1%	39%	36%	3%	1%	4%
Construction	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Engineering	0%	6%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Hair	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%
Beauty	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%
Early Years	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%	1%

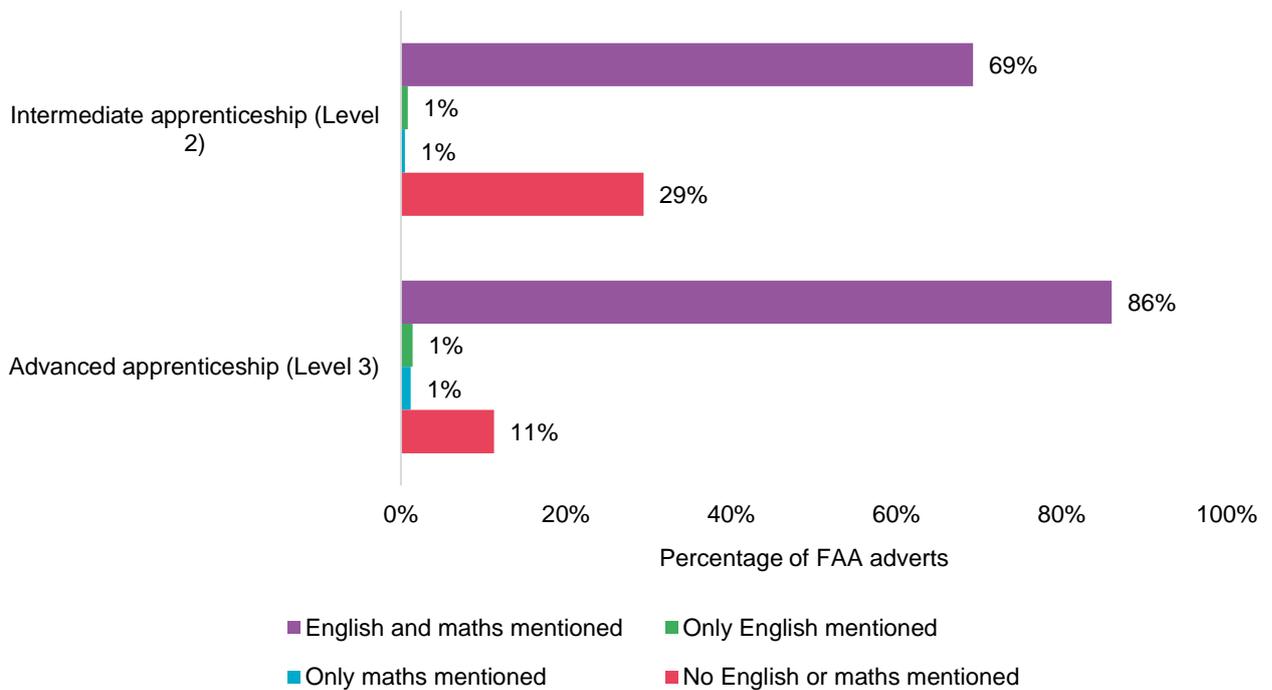
Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

**Most apprenticeships have minimum qualification requirements in English and maths.**

Figure 11 presents the number of adverts posted on the FAA service which listed some form of minimum English and maths requirement (including GCSEs, Functional Skills and numeracy or literacy requirements<sup>11</sup>). This shows that the vast majority of apprenticeship adverts (roughly seven out of ten intermediate and almost nine out of ten advanced) listed both these requirements.

These requirements are a particular barrier to disadvantaged young people in accessing apprenticeship opportunities. Whilst 72 per cent of Key Stage 4 pupils in England achieved grade 4 in GCSE English and maths in 2020-21, just over half (53 per cent) of disadvantaged pupils in England achieved grade 4 or above in both GCSE English and maths (DfE, 2022d)<sup>12</sup>. Further, retake pass rates are relatively low: only two in every five young people who either re-took their English or maths GCSE in 2021 achieved a grade 4 or above (JCQ, 2021)<sup>13</sup>.

**Figure 11: Minimum English and maths requirements listed in FAA apprenticeship adverts by apprenticeship level, August 2018 to February 2022**



Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

<sup>11</sup> While not all adverts stated the minimum level of English and maths required, most vacancies specified that a Level 2 or GCSE grade 4+ was required (47 per cent for intermediate vacancies and 75 per cent for advanced vacancies).

<sup>12</sup> This rate was higher in 2019-20 and 2020-21 compared to previous years due to the use of centre assessed grades.

<sup>13</sup> Disadvantaged pupils are also significantly less likely to go on to achieve a Level 2 in English and maths after age 16 compared to their more advantaged peers. While 38 per cent of non-disadvantaged pupils who have not achieved a Level 2 in English and maths by age 16 go on to achieve it by age 19, this proportion is only 24 per cent for disadvantaged pupils (DfE, 2022e).

A fifth of the 20 SMEs interviewed who were seeking an intermediate or advanced apprentice said they were not willing to employ young people without GCSE English and maths at grade 4+ (or the equivalent). They gave two key reasons for this. The first was young people not being able to cope with the job role. An interviewee from one SME said: *'If they are not bright enough to get the minimum levels, they are not bright enough to learn the technicalities of our job'* (employer 5). The second reason was their concern that apprentices without these qualifications would require more training and supervision. A minority of employers gave examples of employing apprentices without these qualifications in the past who had found the role too challenging and left.

*'They had to be able to meet a certain standard or they wouldn't have lasted long in the job'* (employer 3).

*'I'm not saying they wouldn't be able to perform and do the job well but, as an employer, you know that you don't have to sit with them for too long [if they have the requisite GCSE grades]. You know that they will understand what is being asked of them'* (employer 1).

Furthermore, several of the SMEs interviewed seeking advanced apprentices felt that taking English and maths GCSEs alongside the apprenticeship would be a distraction or too difficult.

*'I would prefer them to have appropriate English and maths skills rather than them having to learn that because if they haven't achieved appropriate English and maths skills by the time they get to 16 at school, it's a big struggle for them to learn out of school'* (employer 11).

In 2014-15, the Government made it mandatory for all apprentices who do not already have a grade 4+ GCSE qualification in English and maths to continue studying towards achieving them or an equivalent Functional Skills qualification during their apprenticeship. This was intended to ensure apprenticeships prepare individuals to succeed in the labour market. However, as employers must provide apprentices with time off for this training on top of the off-the-job training which all apprentices must receive, this has created a disincentive for employers to take on apprentices who have not already achieved these minimum requirements.

This is evidenced by the fact that minimum English and maths requirements are listed in FAA adverts across all sectors and in both intermediate and advanced opportunities which suggests that, at least to some extent, these requirements are used to filter applicants regardless of the extent to which they are required for the role.

In some cases, SMEs recruiting for apprenticeships (mostly at advanced level) listed that their apprenticeship training provider or college required apprentices to have grade 4+ passes in GCSE English and maths (or the equivalent). This may partly reflect the fact that the funding available to

colleges and training providers to provide English and maths training to apprentices is lower than for non-apprentice learners taking the same courses (Staufenberg, 2021). Research has also found some training providers and colleges require apprentices to have minimum English and maths requirements as they are viewed as being more likely to finish their apprenticeship, which affects the amount of funding which apprentices attract (DfE, 2020).

From August 2022, the Government has outlined plans to change the English and maths training requirements for apprentices who not already achieved a Level 1 (e.g. a GCSE grade 1-3) in these subjects before starting their apprenticeship (ESFA, 2022). These apprentices will now be able to start working towards Level 1 before progressing onto a Level 2 if there is sufficient time left in the apprenticeship. This is alongside plans to cap the off-the-job training requirement at six hours for employers who hire apprentices for at least 30 hours per week. Together, these plans could make it more attractive to hire apprentices without minimum English and maths requirements. However, their overall impact is likely to be minimal given that they will only impact a sub-set of apprenticeship learners, and it is unlikely to substantially change the amount of time which apprentices spend on English and maths training.

**Some SMEs will still consider employing apprentices with fewer formal qualifications.**

Where SMEs taking part in interviews were seeking an intermediate apprentice and had not specified GCSE passes in English and maths at grade 4+ (or the equivalent), a number explained that they or colleagues had been successful without attaining these qualifications themselves or that willingness to learn was more important.

*‘Part of the reason I’m not minding is that some of our staff have not got those anyway, some of the very experienced staff and it doesn’t necessarily impact on the ability to be extremely good at this job’ (employer 20).*

Some SMEs seeking an apprentice were pragmatic; a candidate who met all other criteria would not necessarily be rejected outright purely because they did not have the required level in English and maths. In particular, some of these employers said they could be convinced to appoint someone for the advertised role if they showed initiative, for example through undertaking a Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, volunteering and working part-time during their schooling. Likewise, in their vacancies, a number of employers, colleges and providers stated that applicants without minimum requirements could apply, even if these requirements were preferred. However, many of these applicants may be put off from applying in the first place due to the minimum stated requirements.

In addition, some SMEs reported that they might look to find an alternative role in other areas of the business for a young person without the required qualifications who had impressed them, as this employer explains: *‘I wouldn’t rule it out, it’s more about the appropriate role’ (employer 8).*

*'When we are looking through CVs...if they have looked to really step outside their comfort zone. Anyone can do GCSEs or equivalent. A CV always stands out if a learner has done something they didn't need to do, Duke of Edinburgh, volunteering' (employer 10).*

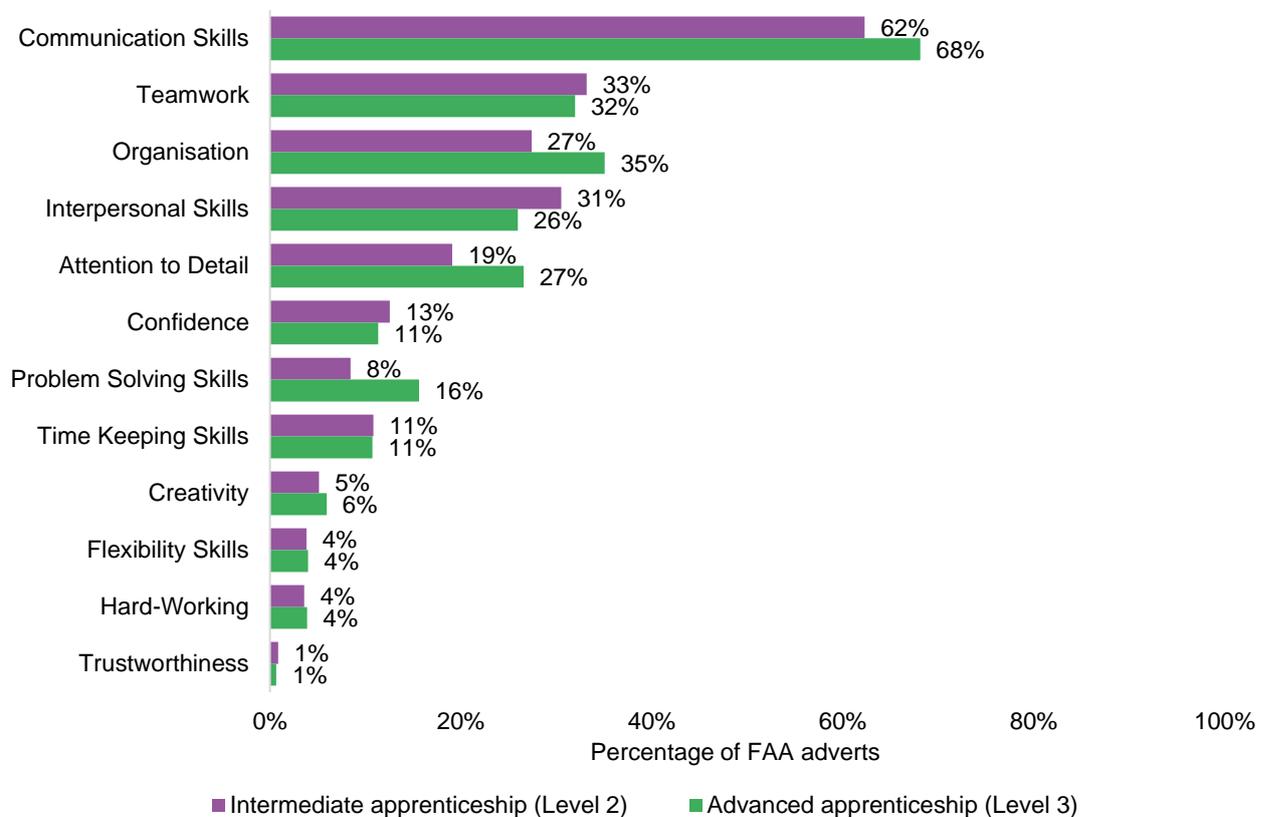
*'Maybe somebody who didn't have the required minimum, we might not consider them for an office role but if we had something in our production that might be something that we would consider.' (employer 1).*

## 4.2 What skills are required to undertake an apprenticeship?

**Employers most commonly require communication skills when recruiting apprentices.**

Figure 12 presents the most commonly-listed skills requirements in apprenticeship adverts. It shows that the vast majority of adverts across both intermediate and advanced apprenticeships require communication skills (at 62 per cent of intermediate apprenticeship adverts and 68 per cent of advanced apprenticeship adverts).

**Figure 12: Most commonly occurring skills listed in FAA adverts by apprenticeship level, August 2018 to January 2022**



Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

Communication skills – both verbal and written – were also the most commonly-mentioned skills in the SME interviews, with over half reporting that these skills were essential for new apprentice recruits. These employers required young people to have these skills for tasks such as speaking confidently to customers, keeping accurate records, and writing clear emails and reports. As this SME in the business sector explained: *‘They need to be confident enough to express themselves clearly’* (employer 4).

Other skills and attributes which were commonly listed in apprenticeship adverts and/or referred to in SME employer interviews were teamwork, organisation, attention to detail, interpersonal skills, timekeeping, flexibility, confidence and being respectful and trustworthy. A willingness to learn, commitment to the role and being able to fit into the company were also valued by employers. SMEs taking part in interviews emphasised that a young person’s personality could give them the advantage over other applicants. This shows that employers are looking to hire young people with a broad set of skills, on top of having formal qualifications. Recent research has also shown that many of these skills are likely to become increasingly important in future (Taylor *et al.*, 2022).

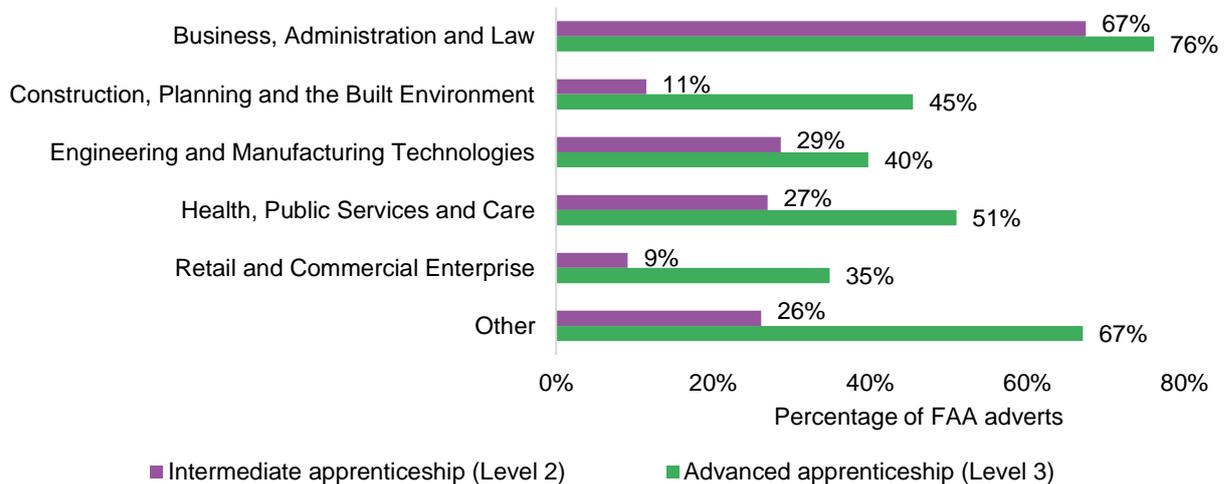
*“What stands out is when people have a little bit of charisma, they’ve got some confidence, not exactly extrovert, I’m just meaning that they can look you in the eye when they’re talking to you... They’ve got a presence, they can think on their feet. They’re the sort of things that we try and look for when we’re interviewing and the ones that are successful all tend to have those characteristics’* (employer 19).

*‘It’s about willingness to learn, being interested in it, turning up and doing their best’* (employer 5).

### **Digital skills are also pre-requisites for many apprenticeships.**

Digital (or ICT) skills (including experience of specific programmes, such as Microsoft Office) were listed in just under half of all intermediate and advanced apprenticeship adverts. However, the extent to which digital skills are a requirement for undertaking an apprenticeship varies substantially between sectors. Figure 13 shows that, while roughly seven out of ten intermediate adverts in the ‘Business, Administration and Law’ sector listed digital skills, this was the case for less than two in ten intermediate adverts in the ‘Construction, Planning and the Built Environment’ and ‘Retail and Commercial Enterprise’ sectors.

**Figure 13: Percentage of FAA adverts mentioning digital skills by sector, August 2018 to January 2022**



Source: NFER analysis of FAA data

### 4.3 What other experience and attributes do employers value when hiring an apprentice?

**Work experience is viewed as important by employers but it does not need to be sector specific.**

While only one in six adverts posted on the FAA service listed prior work experience (at 20 per cent of advanced and 13 per cent of intermediate apprenticeships), the majority of SMEs who were interviewed viewed work experience as important. This is because they believed young people with experience of part-time work were more likely to come to the role with a good work ethic, organisation skills and time keeping. Some provided examples of young people finding adapting to work challenging and tiring, so having some experience of work prior to beginning an apprenticeship was perceived to be beneficial. Others highlighted that the experience and life skills that young people gained through voluntary work could support their transition into the workplace.

However, the SMEs interviewed did not generally require applicants to have undertaken work experience related to their specific role. This is consistent with the fact that that subject-specific knowledge is not often required for apprenticeships, as discussed in Section 4.1.

*‘Even if it’s a year in McDonalds or Costa or the local pub. It just shows they’ve got time keeping. They’ve obviously got a degree of self-organisation’ (employer 6).*

**Despite preferring apprentices with work experience, many of the SMEs interviewed do not specify the required age of potential recruits. However, a third would prefer an apprentice over 18.**

A third of SMEs interviewed (seven out of 20) preferred to employ an apprentice over 18, with the remainder either looking for someone under 18 years or not specifying the required age of the apprentice.

Where SMEs looked to recruit older apprentices, this was due to health and safety requirements in the engineering and construction sectors, and perceptions that older apprentices were more suited to work with service users or children. Conversely, as outlined in Section 2, the SMEs seeking a young person aged 16 to 18 were attracted to the fact that young apprentices could be ‘moulded’ into their working practices and because they had altruistic motives to provide young people with opportunities.

*‘The younger ones, 16-19s, tend to fit better because most of them haven’t worked in a childcare setting before. They are easier to mould into someone that you can put the training into and time, and they tend to stay longer’ (employer 18).*

*‘I want to give people coming out of school that opportunity to get experience, to get a leg up’ (employer 3).*

#### **4.4 To what extent are SMEs able to appoint apprentices with the required qualifications, skills and attributes?**

**Most of the SMEs interviewed only receive a small number of applications for their apprenticeship vacancies.**

Most commonly, the SMEs taking part in interviews had received around two or three applications for their advertised apprenticeship roles, with some receiving up to five. However, there were suggestions that training providers and colleges had screened applicants in some cases. Only two out of the 20 employers interviewed reported receiving a noticeably larger number of applications (in sport and childcare). The majority reported that the number of applications for apprenticeship posts made recruitment challenging and they did not know how to go about increasing applications. As outlined in Section 3.3, the number of applications was not generally related to the recruitment mechanism used (e.g. FAA, Indeed, etc.).

*‘It’s not like you’re inundated with people who want to do it, it’s really hard to get an apprentice’ (employer 7).*

*‘It’s obscure to me actually, how to get more applicants’ (employer 17).*

Most SMEs commented that their recent experience of low applicant numbers was common, although they tended to be thinking post-pandemic. It is worth noting here that half of the organisations involved in the interviews had only been recruiting to apprenticeships in the last three years. A small number of employers reported having more applicants pre-Covid-19, *'I would have expected to see an awful lot more...usually I'm wading through them a bit'* (employer 8).

**Most of the SMEs taking part in interviews were able to recruit to their advertised roles but a significant minority faced challenges.**

Among the 15 SMEs who had completed their recruitment at the time of the interviews, two-thirds (11 out of 15) had appointed a suitable candidate. The majority of successful candidates had the qualifications and skills that were required. Where this was not the case, demonstration of *'a good work ethic and motivation'* (employer 9) was key. Of the four employers who were unable to appoint to the role, half had ended up appointing someone at a different level (e.g. a graduate).

**Overall, the SMEs interviewed do not feel there were other suitable candidates that they could have employed instead.**

More than three-quarters of the SMEs who had successfully filled the apprenticeship position (nine out of 11 employers) did not think there was another applicant they could have appointed who possessed the skills and attributes they required. Concerns about an applicant's commitment to the advertised role was cited more than other reasons as to why they were not suitable, as one employer commented: *'They were borderline in terms of qualifications but it was more about the interest, they were parking themselves here, rather than wanting to do it'* (employer 3). Factors that SMEs felt highlighted an applicant's lack of commitment included them being over-qualified for the role, the role appearing to be a *'stepping stone'* to another job or career, or the applicant being unclear of their career direction.

A small number of SMEs said that they would have extended the application period if they had not found the successful applicant, despite having other candidates.

## 5 What are the geographic barriers to starting an apprenticeship?

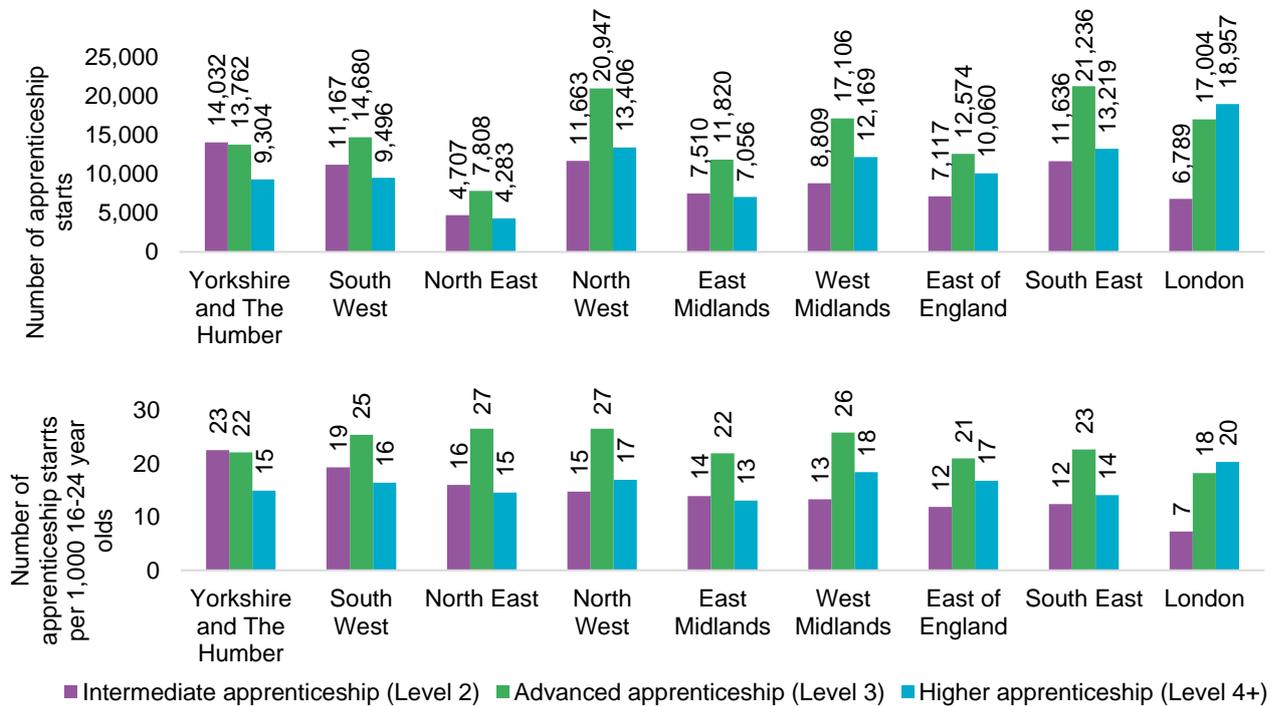
This section explores the geographic availability of apprenticeships across England, using data on the number of apprenticeships started in 2020-21<sup>14</sup>. The extent to which apprenticeship opportunities are available across the country is an important consideration for ensuring that all young people are able to access a suitable apprenticeship opportunity.

### 5.1 Where are apprenticeship opportunities located?

**There are substantial differences in the number of apprenticeships started in different parts of England.**

These differences remain even once differences in population are accounted for, as shown by Figure 14 below. In 2020-21, the numbers of intermediate apprenticeships starts per 1,000 16-24 year olds were highest in Yorkshire and the Humber and the South West, while the lowest levels were in the South East and London.

**Figure 14: Number of apprenticeship starts among under 24s and per 1,000 16-24 year olds by level, 2020-21**



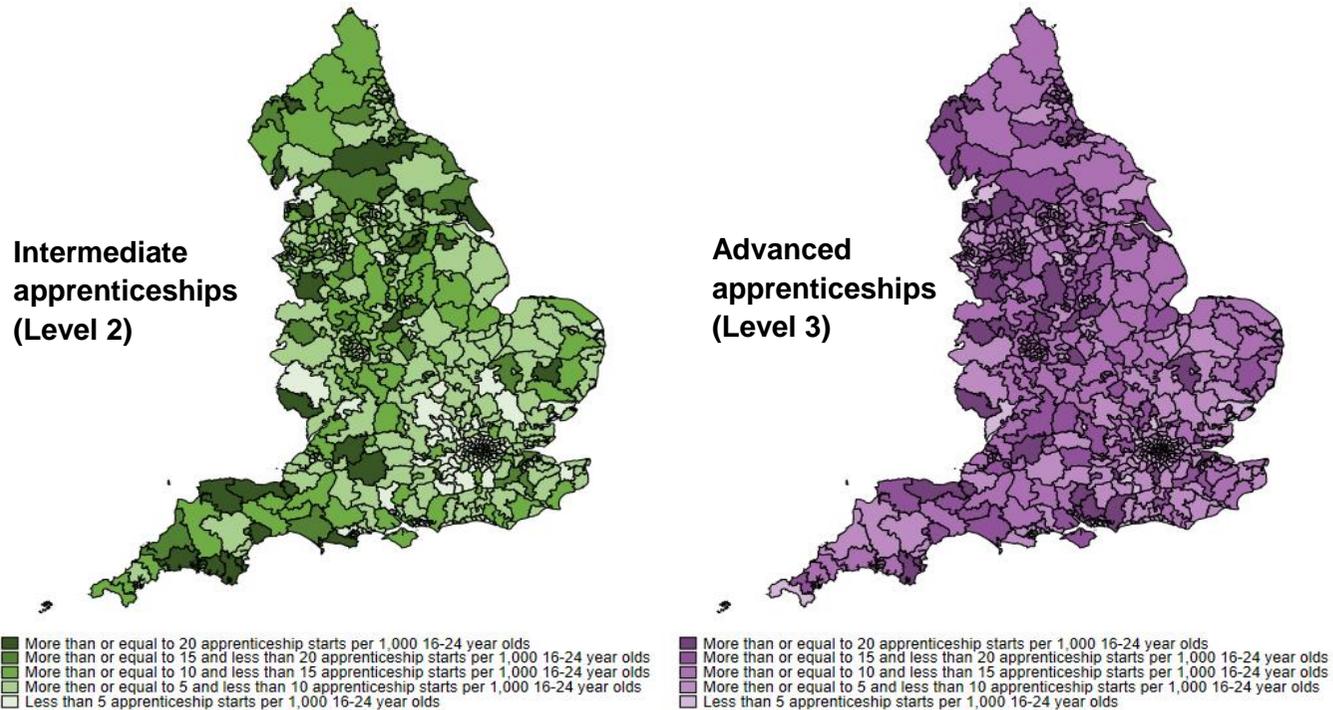
Source: DfE analysis of ILR

<sup>14</sup> While apprenticeship starts in 2020-21 were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, geographical differences in the availability of opportunities existed prior to the pandemic.

**These differences are even greater at a local area-level**

Figure 15 below presents the number of apprenticeship starts per 1,000 16-24 year olds in 2022-21 by parliamentary constituency (ONS, 2021b). It shows that, even within regions, there are substantial differences in the number of apprenticeships started. For example, in the South East region while the number of apprenticeship starts in the constituency of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton was six per 1,000 16-24 year olds, the number of apprenticeship starts in the constituency of Gosport was 179 per 1,000 16-24 year olds.

**Figure 15: Number of apprenticeship starts per 1,000 16-24 year olds by parliamentary constituency and level, 2020-21**

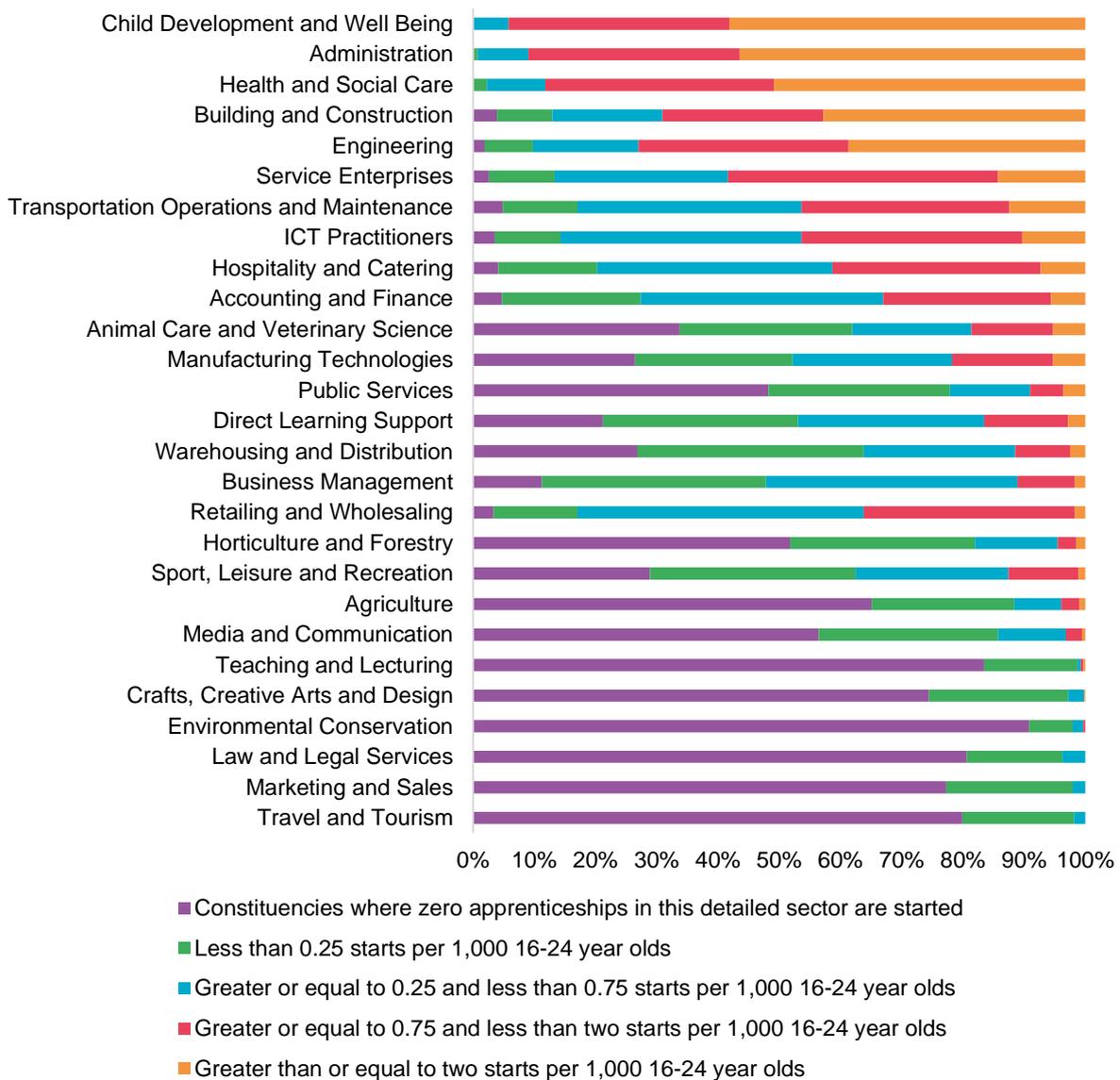


Source: DfE analysis of ILR

**These differences are even starker for certain sectors**

It is also the norm for apprenticeship opportunities for under 25s in a given area to be few and far between in most sectors. As illustrated by Figure 16, most areas of the country only had a small number of apprenticeships started in most sub-sectors. This demonstrates that an apprenticeship will not always be an accessible route for a young person with a specialised interest who is unable to afford to travel or move for an apprenticeship opportunity.

**Figure 16: Density of intermediate and advanced apprenticeship starts per 1,000 16-24 year olds by parliamentary constituency and detailed sector, 2020-21**



Source: DfE analysis of ILR

Figure 16 also highlights how opportunities in some sectors are much more localised than others. While it is possible to do a ‘Health and Social Care’ apprenticeship in most parts of England, apprenticeship opportunities in ‘Manufacturing Technologies’ are much more localised. This is hardly surprising given that, while ‘Health and Social Care’ workers are likely to be needed in all parts of the country, more specialised apprenticeships will be concentrated in the areas where employers are offering these opportunities.

**Most apprenticeship standards can only be started in around a fifth of parliamentary constituencies**

There are currently almost 140 intermediate and over 200 advanced apprenticeship standards which are approved for delivery in England (IFATE, 2022). While we would not expect all standards to be offered in all parts of the country and we recognise the Government’s aspiration for skills provision to match local skill need (as outlined by the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (2022)), the distribution of starts across different standards in different parts of the country is still informative about young people’s access to more specialised apprenticeship opportunities. The fact that most parliamentary constituencies only have starts in about a fifth of all standards confirms that geography is likely to be a significant barrier to young people with an interest in more specialised opportunities. For example, whereas an intermediate ‘Steel Fixer’ apprenticeship can only be started in a handful of areas, an ‘Adult social care apprenticeship’ can be started in almost every area in England.

**Table 3: Percentage of all apprenticeship standards offered in each parliamentary constituency by apprenticeship level, 2020-21**

	<b>Intermediate apprenticeships (Level 2)</b>	<b>Advanced apprenticeships (Level 3)</b>
<b>Mean percentage of all apprenticeship standards offered in each parliamentary constituency</b>	35%	34%
<b>Median percentage of all apprenticeship standards offered in each parliamentary constituency</b>	23%	19%

Source: DfE analysis of ILR

Note: Based on apprenticeship standards with a minimum of 50 starts in 2020-21

**Supporting SMEs to hire more apprentices may be a key way to increase access to local apprenticeship opportunities.**

Improving young people’s access to more specialised opportunities (i.e. via subsidised travel or accommodation) is crucial to ensuring that young people are able to access a suitable apprenticeship opportunity. Further, increasing the volume of apprenticeship opportunities is also key to improving young people’s access to apprenticeship opportunities more generally.

Supporting SMEs to overcome barriers to hiring more apprentices would go some way to reversing the recent decline in numbers and increasing the volume of more specialised opportunities. This might include barriers such as the bureaucracy, time consuming administration and complexity of the current system, as well as the 20 per cent off-the-job training requirement. In terms of the latter, the recent Government announcement for the 20 per cent off-the-job training requirement to be replaced by a minimum of six hours per week from August 2022 may go some way to reducing the training burden on employers who employ their apprentices for more than 30 hours a week (ESFA, 2022)<sup>15</sup>. However, this is likely to have relatively little impact given that many apprentices will be on a one-day a week release which may continue in the same way even if the minimum hours are slightly reduced.

Revisiting the design of the apprenticeship levy, whose current design cannot accommodate a large increase in apprenticeship starts among SMEs, would also support SMEs to increase apprenticeship recruitment. This is because there is a fixed budget for the apprenticeship programme and, due to the current design of the levy, the main mechanism for the Government to ensure that the apprenticeship budget is not overspent is by capping the number of apprenticeship starts in SMEs. As a consequence, whenever there is a risk that the apprenticeship budget will be overspent, the supply of apprenticeship funding in SMEs is likely to be limited (see Julius *et al.*, 2021 for further details). Indeed, the Government is currently preventing some SMEs from taking on apprentices as, since April 2021, there has been a cap on employers starting more than ten apprenticeships through the digital apprenticeship service. While the cap has recently been reset and SMEs are able to hire apprentices via other routes, this is off-putting for employers and may be preventing some employers from hiring apprentices (Camden, 2022a and 2022b).

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<sup>15</sup> The median hours worked for an intermediate or advanced apprenticeship is 37.5 hours per week based on vacancy information, such that the median employer will see their minimum training requirements drop by 1.5 hours per week.

## 6 Overcoming the barriers to apprenticeship access

This section explores SMEs' views on the barriers that young people face in accessing apprenticeships and their suggestions for solutions. It also discusses the extent to which pre-apprenticeship programmes might support more young people to access apprenticeships.

### 6.1 What are the main barriers which young people face in accessing apprenticeships?

Alongside the qualification barriers - specifically English and maths requirements - outlined in Section 4, the 20 SMEs we interviewed identified four main barriers to young people starting apprenticeships: low awareness and poor image of apprenticeships, low wages, lack of life and work experience, and lack of career direction and long-term commitment. Further details are provided below.

It is important to emphasise that these findings above reflect the views of the SMEs we interviewed and that other employers, young people, their parents or carers, and those working with them in schools, colleges and training providers, may have different perspectives on these issues.

#### Low awareness and poor image of apprenticeships

Half of the 20 SMEs interviewed regarded young people's low awareness of existing apprenticeship opportunities and where to look for them as a significant barrier to recruiting apprentices. As one employer reflected: *'I'll tell you barrier number one – they don't know it exists!'* (employer 17). This implies that, contrary to the evidence presented in Section 2, there is still a large amount of progress to be made in improving young people's awareness and interest in intermediate and advanced apprenticeship opportunities.

Many SMEs perceived schools' focus on academic routes as being a key contributor to young people's lack of awareness of apprenticeships. Several also felt that schools have an outdated and negative perception of apprenticeships which is passed onto young people.

However, it is important to note that this contradicts other evidence which suggests that awareness of apprenticeships is high among young people, and that many young people are seeking to apply to apprenticeship opportunities (Youth Employment UK, 2021). One way to reconcile this seemingly contradictory evidence is that Level 2 and 3 apprenticeship opportunities, particularly in SMEs, may be less visible or attractive to young people compared to opportunities in large employers, or at higher levels.

*'They don't even get told about apprenticeships at school...that is why the system is failing...they are not shown enough about what you can do because everyone is all about going to university and college'* (employer 16).

In terms of overcoming this barrier, SME interviewees suggested that schools should be supported to promote apprenticeships to young people by being made aware of the range of opportunities that they provide and by challenging outdated perceptions that still exist. Around a third of SMEs (seven out of 20) proposed that employers should be invited into schools to raise awareness of apprenticeships through open days, careers fairs, talks and mock interview workshops. These should be timed before young people make choices about their next steps (particularly when making GCSE and post-16 decisions) and could include talks from apprentice role models who have successfully progressed through the apprenticeship route. Employers subsequently offering work experience would provide another opportunity to raise awareness of the apprenticeship route. Some SME interviewees also suggested changing the name of apprenticeships to help overcome the low status and stigma attached to the current name.

To support awareness raising and understanding of post-16 technical routes, the Skills and Post-16 Education Act (UK Parliament, 2022) has recently introduced a requirement for schools to allow technical education and training providers to access their institutions on six occasions to speak with students between the ages of 13 and 18 (an average of one encounter per year). This includes students being given information about the provision available and the careers it might lead to. However, it is unclear whether this requirement will go far enough in addressing the entrenched issues within the current system. Further, it will be important to monitor adherence to this given that the Baker Clause – a legal requirement on schools introduced in 2018 which stipulates that schools must ensure that a ‘range of education and training providers’ have access to students from year 8 to year 13 (UK Parliament, 2017) – has proved difficult to enforce (as evidenced by the Careers and Enterprise Company, 2021; and Wilson *et al.*, 2021).

*‘You need people from apprenticeships asking for time with, well 15 year olds or even younger when they’re making choices...thinking that they don’t need to go off and do a degree in anything when you end up in debt. But you have to go in and recruit, really sell it and get successful apprentices to sell it...Get people who are 26 running their own business...I know someone who is doing really well. He’s just buying his own house and he is about 24 or 25. If he went into school and said, you know what, you don’t need to go to university, I’ve done this’ (employer 11).*

### **Low wages**

Around a third of SMEs interviewed (seven out of 20) perceived money to be a significant barrier to young people starting apprenticeships. Although many paid more than the minimum apprenticeship wage (as outlined in Section 3), they felt that the wage was insufficient for young people to survive on, which could lead to a lack of applicants. A number gave examples of past apprentices who had really struggled financially, undertaking additional jobs in the evening and at weekends to keep their finances in check. These challenges are only likely to be exacerbated by the current ‘cost of living crisis’ (GB Parliament, 2022). In addition, this barrier will disproportionately impact those from

disadvantaged backgrounds, who are unlikely to benefit from parental support to pursue these options.

*‘Back at my old workplace, we were paying £10,000 a year and they were doing other jobs in the evening...One got an £8,000 increase [at the end]...he had been doing two jobs to run his car’ (employer 8).*

*‘The pay is what puts most people off doing an apprenticeship...They are in training which they don’t necessarily understand. They are doing the same job but they get paid half what everyone else is getting paid’ (employer 18).*

Several SMEs also suggested that low wages could negatively impact apprentice retention, which may be contributing to the fact that completion rates for apprenticeships are low. Two in every five apprentices did not complete their intermediate or advanced apprenticeship in 2020-21 (DfE, 2022b). Indeed, one in every four non-completers sampled in a recent DfE survey cited financial reasons as a reason contributing to why they did not complete their apprenticeship (DfE, 2022a).

Although they raised low wages as a barrier, many SMEs felt that they would not be able to pay a higher wage due to the stage of development of young apprentices. They felt that the wage reflected the significant time and resource employers needed to spend on training and supervision with little ‘pay-back’ from young apprentices initially. However, a number did suggest some solutions. This included providing young apprentices with support for transport costs and offering regular salary increments throughout apprenticeships to reflect the increased level of contribution which young people make. Some SMEs also suggested that the government could subsidise the wage for apprentices under 19 years.

### **Lack of life and work experience**

Interviewed SMEs also felt that lack of relevant work and life experience can also be a barrier to young people securing apprenticeships. This contributes to the need for employers to invest substantial resource in developing young people which can particularly impact on the day-to-day running of SMEs. Several SMEs reported that some young people who they had previously recruited found the transition from school or college to work challenging and did not have the pre-requisite work ethic and transferable skills. This challenge is also likely to have been exacerbated by the general decline over the last two decades in 16 and 17 year olds having part-time jobs (Gardiner, 2020).

*‘It depends how much you as a business are prepared to invest in time and training someone up from scratch’ (employer 1).*

In terms of overcoming this barrier, SME interviewees suggested that schools could do more to support young people to develop the skills and attitudes required in the work place. They proposed that schools should be encouraged to do more to develop young people’s work ethic as well as their transferable skills, such as team working, adaptability and ability to make quick but sensible decisions. It is, however, important to recognise that some schools already undertake work in this area and many feel over-stretched with competing priorities, so careful consideration would need to be given as to how this might be achieved.

SMEs also felt strongly that work experience should be more widely organised by schools and young people should be offered opportunities to undertake taster sessions prior to committing to an apprenticeship. Without being prompted, several SME interviewees commented that they actively took young people on work experience, although previous research has highlighted that there are a number of barriers to employers offering work experience opportunities (Youth Futures Foundation, 2021).

*‘They should be given the opportunity to do work to see if they like it or not...do two weeks in the post office, two weeks with us, with a joiner, two weeks cutting lawns or do voluntary work first to see if it is for them...’ (employer 5).*

### **Lack of career direction and long-term commitment**

Several of the 20 SMEs interviewed felt that young people can sometimes lack career direction and long-term commitment to a career which can impact their decision-making around longer apprenticeships in particular. Some commented that young people’s lack of career direction and long-term vision could lead them into more highly-paid low-skilled jobs rather than considering the longer-term financial and progression benefits of an initially lower paid apprenticeship. SMEs linked this decision making to their perception of young people’s lack of understanding about the longer-term career and financial benefits associated with undertaking an apprenticeship.

*I pay them £5 an hour which is a bit more than I am obliged to but if you’re 17 you can get £10 an hour in McDonalds...some people tend not to look at the bigger picture and they’re just interested in the pay cheque at the end of the week’ (employer 4).*

SMEs taking part in interviews suggested that work experience and providing positive apprentice role models would go some way towards encouraging young people to think more long-term in terms of their career decisions and the related training they need to undertake to achieve their goals.

A smaller number of SMEs mentioned a range of other barriers that young people face in accessing apprenticeships. These included GCSE requirements and a narrow range of

apprenticeship sectors offered, both of which have been mentioned previously. A minority also mentioned the challenges of young people fitting into an older team which may have an outdated view of the role of an apprentice.

## 6.2 The role of financial incentives

**Most of the SMEs who took part in interviews are not particularly driven by financial incentives although, for some, they make the recruitment of young people viable.**

Two-thirds of the SME employers interviewed (14 out of 20) were not particularly driven by financial incentives and would employ apprentices regardless of these. While some noted that the additional incentive to employ 16-18 year olds is a relatively low amount which would not influence their recruitment decisions, others were not even aware of this additional £1,000 incentive.

The third of SMEs who felt financial incentives were important reported that it made it viable for them to recruit an apprentice as the funding contributed to the cost of the time to train and support young apprentices. Some of these employers reported that increased and sustained funding would encourage them to recruit more apprentices. Several also valued the financial incentives introduced during the pandemic (albeit these have now largely been withdrawn, as discussed in Section 2).

*'Yes, you get a lot of incentives, £1000 grant and £3000 grant since Covid, that's a massive incentive because you can put your apprentice through other bits of training that they want to do' (employer 7).*

*'If there were more incentives or sustainable incentives, not just initiatives that get pulled, that may be beneficial' (employer 10).*

*'We only tend to do apprenticeships when we need staff. Whereas, if we had more funding, we would happily have more apprentices to get trained up and then find their own job afterwards' (employer 18).*

## 6.3 The role of traineeships

**The SMEs taking part in interviews have a low level of understanding of traineeships, with several reluctant to engage with the scheme due to the lack of a wage.**

Traineeships were introduced in 2013 to support young people to overcome the barriers in accessing an apprenticeship or progressing to employment. This sub-section discusses the role that traineeships are playing in supporting young people to access apprenticeship opportunities.

Introduced in 2013, traineeships are programmes of education and training that help young people acquire the skills, experience and behaviours they need to secure an apprenticeship or a job. Each

traineeship includes four core elements: a period of work preparation with a training provider (covering areas like CV writing, interview preparation, job search and inter-personal skills); a work experience placement of a minimum of 70 hours; support with English, maths and digital skills, as needed; and flexible vocational learning, with a focus on preparing the trainee for occupational standards within apprenticeships or occupation-specific employment.

Traineeships are available for young people aged 16-24 (or aged 25 with an Education and Health Care Plan). They can last from six weeks up to one year, though most last for less than six months. There is no requirement for trainees on work placement to be paid. However, employers may decide to pay a wage and/or contribute towards the trainee's travel and subsistence costs<sup>16</sup>.

Just less than half of the SMEs interviewed (nine out of 20) were aware of traineeships and they generally had a low level of understanding about the programme. Some of these employers were reluctant to engage with the scheme as they felt strongly that trainees should be paid, with one reporting that they paid their current trainees on the scheme.

*'I just don't agree with having someone for 45 days for absolutely nothing. I think it's a bad idea and I think it shouldn't be offered because it's just free labour and people are just going to take advantage of that' (employer 7).*

**The traineeship scheme has remained small, and does not appear to be supporting many young people to progress to apprenticeships.**

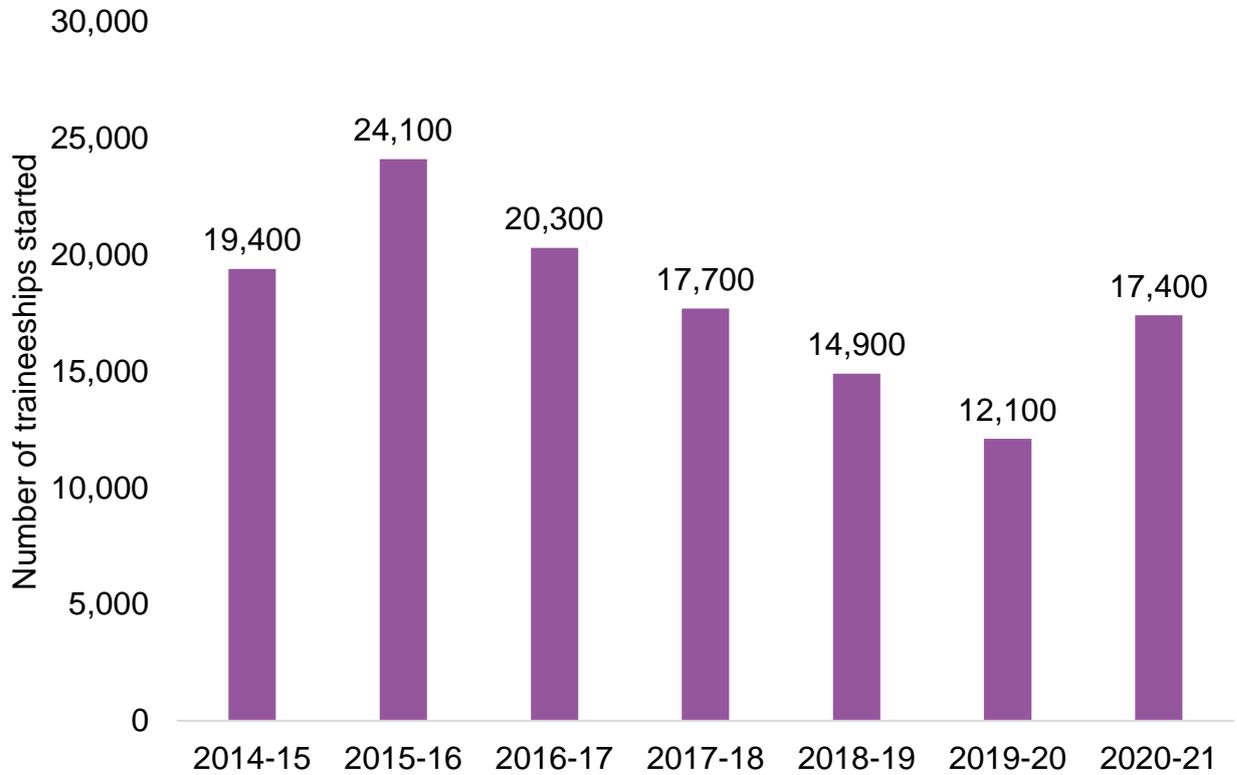
The number of traineeships starts peaked in 2015-16 at 24,100 starts, and is at just 17,400 in 2020-21. This is despite the fact that, since September 2020, an incentive payment of £1,000 per learner has been available to employers offering new work placement opportunities via a traineeship. While this may be partly due to issues and delays with the DfE's procurement processes (Camden, 2022c), it also reflects our findings that apprenticeship employers do not appear to be engaging with traineeships.

Further, only roughly a quarter of the traineeships undertaken between 2016-17 and 2019-20 converted into an apprenticeship. This shows that, even where young people are undertaking traineeships, they are not necessarily supporting young people to progress onto apprenticeship opportunities. Further, previous research has not been able to provide conclusive evidence that traineeships improve young people's destination outcomes (Dorsett *et al.*, 2019).

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<sup>16</sup> Disadvantaged young people aged 16-19 taking part in traineeships may also benefit from programmes of financial support such as the 16 to 19 bursary fund (DfE, 2022f), which can help with clothing, books, equipment and transport costs. Other learning support may be accessed by those over 19 years.

**Figure 17: Number of traineeships started, 2014-15 to 2020-21**



Source: DfE analysis of ILR

## 7 Conclusions

There is a myriad of barriers that young people – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with lower levels of formal qualifications – face in accessing apprenticeships. In order to improve access to apprenticeship opportunities, serious consideration needs to be given to how these barriers might be tackled.

A key barrier is the requirement of many employers for applicants to have GCSE passes in English and maths (or the equivalent), whilst one in every two disadvantaged young people do not achieve these qualifications at Key Stage 4. Additional financial incentives might encourage employers to recruit young people without these qualifications and to support them to achieve them.

Although many employers pay above the minimum apprenticeship wage, the wages young people receive are often insufficient for them to survive on. Offering young people support with transport costs, and further reviewing the apprenticeship national minimum wage in the light of cost of living increases, would go some way to tackling this issue, and improving apprenticeship completion rates.

As would be expected given their age, young people often lack relevant work and life experience which requires employers to invest substantial resource in developing them. To ensure that all young people are able to progress to the most appropriate post-16 options, the Government should consider how work experience and employer engagement can be better resourced and coordinated in schools, particularly to ensure the most disadvantaged young people are appropriately supported in their decision-making.

Young people can sometimes lack career direction and long-term commitment to a career which can impact their decision-making around longer apprenticeships and lead them into more highly-paid low-skilled jobs. Strong apprentice role models, alongside work experience, could positively influence young people's longer-term career decision making.

Traineeships should provide a vehicle for young people who are further from the labour market to overcome some of these barriers before they embark on an apprenticeship. However, the evidence suggests progression rates to apprenticeships are low and the lack of a wage is a key barrier to employers' and young people's engagement.

The availability of apprenticeship opportunities across the country may also be a barrier to young people accessing apprenticeships. Supporting young people with transport costs and SMEs to hire more apprentices are likely to be key ways to increase access to local opportunities.

There is also an issue in terms of the number of young people applying for apprenticeships, with most SMEs interviewed finding it difficult to recruit young people with the prerequisite skills and capabilities to their vacancies. Low awareness and the poor image of apprenticeships are likely to be contributing factors here. While the recent surge in interest in higher-level apprenticeship opportunities is welcome (as outlined in Section 2), it is crucial that awareness and attractiveness of intermediate and advanced apprenticeships are also improved.

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## Appendix A: Methodology

### Quantitative analysis

Our quantitative analysis draws on apprenticeship vacancies posted on the DfE's FAA service between August 2018 and January 2022 (DfE, 2022b). Apprenticeship vacancy data was first cleaned to remove duplicate records, and remove inconsistencies within the data.

For the purposes of our analysis, we use two different terms to describe the FAA data. While an 'advert' refers to a posted opportunity, vacancies take into account the number of positions the advert is advertising for, as there are a number of adverts that are offering multiple apprenticeships. Given that some adverts offer a large number of vacancies, we present outputs at the advert-level where appropriate to avoid a small number of adverts skewing our findings.

The sector of each apprenticeship was then first identified using the standard or framework name. For adverts that were not able to be assigned sector based on the standard or framework name, the sector name recorded within the advert was used. For the purposes of this report, we present sector breakdowns using the following sector breakdowns: 'Business, Administration, and Law', 'Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies', 'Construction and the Built Environment', 'Health, Public Services and Care', 'Retail and Commercial Enterprise' and 'Other'.

Wages were annualised and deflated to August 2021 prices using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Average wages were constructed as a weighted average of all apprenticeship adverts. Wages were also cleaned to remove extreme or inconsistent values. Where the wage was listed as a range between two values, the midpoint of these values was used.

The FAA includes a number of fields where employers and providers can outline the qualifications and skills required for an apprenticeship vacancy to prospective candidates. These fields were cleaned extensively and standardised (including the removal of HTML tags and hyperlinks). Frequency analysis was conducted to identify the most frequently appearing words. The qualifications requirement section field was then split into the separate qualifications that were being asked for, by using commonly used delimiters. This was done to support the identification of individual qualifications and the specific requirements associated with them. Further, rules were set up as to identify where a required qualification was mentioned to be undertaken during the apprenticeship, or whether a qualification was specified as not being requested. For the skills section, the frequency analysis was used to identify all the similar words and phrases used to ask for a certain skill and indicators were set up to include all these variants.

Indicators were then constructed by identifying the extent to which different qualification and skill requirements were listed within vacancies. It is important to recognize that, whilst a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the qualification and skills variables was undertaken, due to the sheer size and irregularity of the text data, a different approach is likely to have resulted in slightly different percentages to those presented in the report.

## Qualitative interviews

Our qualitative analysis is based on virtual interviews with 20 SMEs recruiting intermediate and advanced apprenticeships. Employers were sampled based on the set of employers who posted a job vacancy on the FAA service between September 2019 and December 2021<sup>17</sup>.

To construct a sampling frame of employers, further cleaning was conducted to identify unique employers within the FAA data. Drawing on this, in order to restrict the sample of employers to SMEs, the sampling frame of employers was then restricted to employers who had posted fewer than five adverts on the FAA service over this period. The sampling frame was also inspected manually to remove any well-known employers that were known to not be SMEs.

The sample was then restricted such that only the most recent advert on the FAA service for every employer was kept in the sample. In order to ensure a broad spectrum of employers were interviewed, this sample was then stratified across two broad categories; the sector the firm operates in and geographically where the employer is located.

This produced 20 sector and region pairwise combinations or stratas. A randomised list of FAA adverts was produced for each pairwise combination and then employers in each list were contacted based on their list order, with the contact details for each organisation having been identified via an internet search.

These organisations were phoned, systematically across the stratified sample to ensure a range of interviews were conducted. The caller asked to speak with the person in charge of apprenticeship recruitment. This person was invited to take part in a virtual interview between February and April 2022 which lasted for around 30 minutes. While interviews were not secured in all stratas, a sample of employers was secured from a range of sectors, levels and areas of England.

It is worth noting that, while employers were sampled using a stratified random sampling approach, there will be a non-random element, or participation bias, associated with the fact some employers agreed to participate in an interview.

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<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that, due to challenges in recruiting employers to interviews, a number of different approaches were explored for securing interviews with employers. In the end, all interviews were secured via a random stratified sampling approach. This was the preferred approach, as it was not contingent on employers approaching NFER to be involved.

## Appendix B: Characteristics of the 20 SMEs interviewed

Characteristics of participating organisations	
<b>Size of organisation</b>	12 organisations with 0-10 employees 5 organisations with 11-20 employees 2 organisations with 50- 60 employees 1 organisation: size unknown
<b>Geographic location</b>	6 North 5 South 9 Midlands
<b>Urban or rural</b>	15 Urban 4 Rural 1 Hamlets and Isolated Dwelling in a Sparse Setting
Characteristics of interviewees	
<b>Role at organisation</b>	7 Managers 6 Directors 3 Owners 2 CEOs 1 Head of Education 1 Personal assistant
Types of apprenticeships advertised	
<b>Level of apprenticeship</b>	8 Intermediate 12 Advanced
<b>Sector definition of apprenticeship</b>	3 Business 3 Health And Science 2 Construction 2 Customer Service

	2 Dental Health
	1 Business, Administration and Law
	1 Butchery
	1 Digital Industries
	1 Engineering
	1 Health, Public Services and Care
	1 Housing
	1 Property Services
	1 Public Service

## Appendix C: Apprenticeship starts by parliamentary constituency

**Table 4: Apprenticeship starts by parliamentary constituency in 2020-21**

Parliamentary constituency	Total number of intermediate and advanced apprenticeship starts	Number of intermediate and advanced apprenticeship started among 16-24 year olds per 1,000 16-24 year olds, 2020-21						
		Total	Business, Administration and Law	Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	Health, Public Services and Care	Retail and Commercial Enterprise	Other
Aldershot	474	49	17	6	9	3	5	8
Aldridge-Brownhills	182	27	4	4	5	5	4	3
Altrincham and Sale West	188	22	4	2	2	9	2	3
Amber Valley	223	27	6	4	5	4	4	3
Arundel and South Downs	112	15	1	1	2	6	3	3
Ashfield	288	29	6	5	8	6	3	1
Ashford	264	23	3	3	6	4	4	3
Ashton-under-Lyne	316	34	4	8	6	9	3	4
Aylesbury	182	16	3	1	3	5	2	2
Banbury	180	16	2	1	4	5	2	1
Barking	140	9	2	3	1	2	1	1

Barnsley Central	255	30	6	5	7	4	5	2
Barnsley East	145	16	3	3	2	4	3	2
Barrow and Furness	503	64	8	11	27	12	2	3
Basildon and Billericay	356	39	8	6	9	6	5	4
Basingstoke	333	31	6	6	5	5	5	3
Bassetlaw	275	29	6	5	7	6	3	3
Bath	204	9	1	0	1	3	2	1
Batley and Spen	180	16	2	0	4	5	2	2
Battersea	76	7	1	0	1	3	0	0
Beaconsfield	180	22	4	4	1	4	3	6
Beckenham	86	11	1	1	1	5	1	1
Bedford	180	16	3	1	2	5	3	2
Bermondsey and Old Southwark	315	16	4	2	2	3	1	5
Berwick-upon-Tweed	126	22	3	6	2	3	3	6
Bethnal Green and Bow	190	8	3	0	0	2	1	2
Beverley and Holderness	1029	128	5	8	75	6	31	3
Bexhill and Battle	171	21	2	3	2	5	4	3

Bexleyheath and Crayford	162	18	3	1	3	7	4	1
Birkenhead	406	44	10	8	11	8	5	2
Birmingham, Edgbaston	292	16	4	0	3	5	2	1
Birmingham, Erdington	175	15	2	1	2	4	3	2
Birmingham, Hall Green	151	9	2	0	0	4	1	2
Birmingham, Hodge Hill	169	9	1	2	2	4	0	1
Birmingham, Ladywood	929	30	10	1	5	4	4	6
Birmingham, Northfield	117	11	1	0	2	5	2	1
Birmingham, Perry Barr	155	11	1	1	2	5	1	1
Birmingham, Selly Oak	127	5	0	0	2	1	1	0
Birmingham, Yardley	154	11	2	1	2	4	1	2
Bishop Auckland	195	24	7	2	3	2	4	5
Blackburn	377	28	8	2	8	6	2	3
Blackley and Broughton	168	13	3	0	1	5	1	2

Blackpool North and Cleveleys	194	27	4	4	4	9	5	1
Blackpool South	194	25	4	3	2	10	4	2
Blaydon	255	34	6	7	7	5	7	3
Blyth Valley	238	31	4	7	8	5	4	3
Bognor Regis and Littlehampton	55	6	1	0	1	3	1	1
Bolsover	222	24	5	2	5	3	3	6
Bolton North East	124	12	3	0	2	3	2	2
Bolton South East	455	38	7	10	9	6	4	3
Bolton West	177	21	4	2	4	5	3	3
Bootle	376	39	6	10	8	8	4	2
Boston and Skegness	195	21	4	2	4	5	3	4
Bosworth	233	26	4	2	7	8	3	2
Bournemouth East	97	8	1	0	1	4	1	1
Bournemouth West	175	10	3	0	1	2	2	1
Bracknell	221	20	5	1	3	4	4	3
Bradford East	207	14	3	0	3	5	1	2
Bradford South	134	12	2	0	2	5	2	1
Bradford West	602	33	6	3	4	15	3	2

Braintree	100	11	2	1	1	3	3	1
Brent Central	163	9	1	4	3	1	0	0
Brent North	83	6	2	0	1	2	0	1
Brentford and Isleworth	169	14	3	0	2	4	3	2
Brentwood and Ongar	171	20	6	1	2	6	3	3
Bridgwater and West Somerset	568	58	5	15	16	5	4	12
Brigg and Goole	159	22	3	4	4	6	3	2
Brighton, Kemptown	115	7	1	1	0	4	1	1
Brighton, Pavilion	224	9	2	1	0	2	1	3
Bristol East	164	15	1	1	7	3	1	1
Bristol North West	262	19	2	0	3	10	2	2
Bristol South	194	17	4	2	2	3	2	4
Bristol West	521	14	4	1	1	3	3	2
Broadland	139	17	4	2	3	3	2	2
Bromley and Chislehurst	101	12	3	0	1	5	2	2
Bromsgrove	197	24	4	1	4	9	4	3
Broxbourne	174	18	5	3	4	4	2	1

Broxtowe	253	24	2	1	11	5	2	3
Buckingham	115	12	2	1	1	4	1	2
Burnley	504	59	11	19	14	5	2	8
Burton	296	28	5	2	10	5	3	2
Bury North	204	23	6	1	4	8	3	2
Bury South	140	15	3	1	2	6	2	1
Bury St Edmunds	396	38	5	3	3	20	5	2
Calder Valley	128	14	2	1	3	5	2	1
Camberwell and Peckham	183	16	2		10	3	1	0
Camborne and Redruth	312	31	2	8	11	4	2	4
Cambridge	115	4	1	0	0	2	1	0
Cannock Chase	292	31	5	4	5	6	6	4
Canterbury	236	9	2	0	1	3	2	1
Carlisle	431	53	10	16	9	9	3	5
Carshalton and Wallington	78	8	1	0	1	3	1	1
Castle Point	126	15	4	1	1	4	4	2
Central Devon	121	17	1	3	3	5	2	2

Central Suffolk and North Ipswich	276	31	5	9	6	3	1	8
Charnwood	161	17	2	1	2	6	3	3
Chatham and Aylesford	159	16	2	1	2	7	1	3
Cheadle	191	24	6	2	2	8	4	2
Chelmsford	419	40	12	3	6	8	5	5
Chelsea and Fulham	94	8	1	0	0	2	1	3
Cheltenham	291	24	5		1	11	4	2
Chesham and Amersham	152	19	2	1	2	6	2	8
Chesterfield	310	37	11	3	7	7	6	2
Chichester	361	35	6	4	7	8	7	3
Chingford and Woodford Green	66	8	1	0	0	4	1	1
Chippenham	195	24	5	2	3	5	2	6
Chipping Barnet	186	18	1	0	1	3	1	11
Chorley	251	27	4	4	3	9	3	4
Christchurch	129	20	3	1	6	7	2	2
Cities of London and Westminster	1209	66	33	1	3	4	7	19
City of Chester	200	17	4	1	1	6	3	2

City of Durham	436	19	5	5	3	2	2	2
Clacton	123	17	4		1	8	3	1
Cleethorpes	238	31	5	5	11	5	2	4
Colchester	559	35	7	7	5	6	6	2
Colne Valley	176	18	2	0	2	11	1	1
Congleton	209	27	3	3	3	10	5	4
Copeland	200	30	7	5	3	7	2	6
Corby	238	21	4	2	5	6	3	2
Coventry North East	228	16	5	0	1	7	1	2
Coventry North West	178	14	5	0	1	3	2	2
Coventry South	576	17	3	2	8	1	1	3
Crawley	233	23	3	4	7	4	3	1
Crewe and Nantwich	252	24	3	2	3	8	3	4
Croydon Central	171	15	5	1	1	6	1	1
Croydon North	236	16	1	0	3	4	7	2
Croydon South	99	9	1	1	1	5	1	1
Dagenham and Rainham	101	8	2	1	2	2	1	1
Darlington	504	59	13	14	11	8	7	6

Dartford	231	22	5	1	5	6	4	2
Daventry	188	22	5	1	3	7	3	3
Denton and Reddish	133	17	4	1	1	5	3	1
Derby North	445	32	5	1	13	8	2	2
Derby South	765	55	14	3	20	4	4	9
Derbyshire Dales	209	33	3	4	10	5	6	5
Devizes	479	42	1	2	2	3	30	4
Dewsbury	161	14	3	0	2	5	2	2
Don Valley	330	37	4	17	4	7	2	2
Doncaster Central	512	49	11	6	13	8	6	4
Doncaster North	202	22	3	11	3	1	2	2
Dover	124	14	2	3	2	3	3	1
Dudley North	254	29	10	3	3	8	3	3
Dudley South	315	40	7	4	14	10	5	1
Dulwich and West Norwood	87	10	2		1	5	1	1
Ealing Central and Acton	115	9	2	0	2	2	2	1
Ealing North	69	6	1	0	2	2	0	1
Ealing, Southall	51	6	1	2	1	2	0	0

Easington	188	24	9	1	4	4	2	5
East Devon	836	96	8	5	3	66	4	9
East Ham	111	6	1	0	1	2	0	2
East Hampshire	131	14	2	0	2	4	3	4
East Surrey	102	11	1	1	1	5	2	2
East Worthing and Shoreham	123	15	1	1	3	5	3	2
East Yorkshire	196	25	4	7	3	4	4	3
Eastbourne	165	16	3	2	1	5	4	1
Eastleigh	353	35	5	7	10	9	3	1
Eddisbury	383	49	2	4	7	5	5	25
Edmonton	96	7	2	0	2	2	1	1
Ellesmere Port and Neston	189	24	4	6	3	4	4	3
Elmet and Rothwell	173	20	5	3	2	7	1	1
Eltham	92	10	1	1	0	5	2	1
Enfield North	124	11	2	1	3	2	1	3
Enfield, Southgate	56	6	1		0	2	1	1
Epping Forest	172	19	4	1	1	4	8	1
Epsom and Ewell	220	21	2	7	7	4	2	0

Erewash	274	31	5	2	6	12	3	2
Erith and Thamesmead	87	7	1	1	1	2	1	1
Esher and Walton	110	12	2	0	1	6	3	1
Exeter	796	32	6	6	7	7	4	3
Fareham	335	37	6	6	9	8	5	4
Faversham and Mid Kent	177	20	2	2	3	4	2	7
Feltham and Heston	90	7	1	0	0	3	1	1
Filton and Bradley Stoke	526	37	7	4	13	6	2	4
Finchley and Golders Green	82	7	1		0	3	0	2
Folkestone and Hythe	252	25	3	4	3	10	4	1
Forest of Dean	108	12	1	0	1	4	2	4
Fylde	232	35	7	7	4	10	3	4
Gainsborough	182	23	3	3	6	4	2	4
Garston and Halewood	143	17	4	1	2	5	3	3
Gateshead	494	42	16	3	5	6	5	7
Gedling	136	16	3	1	2	7	2	2

Gillingham and Rainham	116	11	2	0	2	3	2	1
Gloucester	637	49	7	13	11	9	5	4
Gosport	1720	179	1	4	124	5	3	42
Grantham and Stamford	245	27	4	7	2	5	4	5
Gravesham	175	17	2	2	5	4	2	2
Great Grimsby	364	42	12	10	9	4	3	4
Great Yarmouth	102	11	3	0	1	2	2	2
Greenwich and Woolwich	321	23	4	0	3	7	2	7
Guildford	129	6	1	0	1	2	1	1
Hackney North and Stoke Newington	48	4	0		0	3	0	0
Hackney South and Shoreditch	215	15	3	1	1	4	1	5
Halesowen and Rowley Regis	245	28	6	1	5	10	3	3
Halifax	329	31	7	6	3	6	8	2
Haltemprice and Howden	174	23	6	4	3	5	2	3
Halton	241	26	6	6	7	2	3	2
Hammersmith	252	18	4	0	1	3	2	8

Hampstead and Kilburn	62	5	1		1	2	1	0
Harborough	210	19	3	0	1	9	3	2
Harlow	204	23	4	2	10	3	2	2
Harrogate and Knaresborough	1032	127	7	3	3	102	8	4
Harrow East	45	4	0	1	0	2	0	1
Harrow West	78	7	2		1	2	1	0
Hartlepool	398	43	8	13	11	3	5	3
Harwich and North Essex	70	6	1	0	0	3	1	0
Hastings and Rye	147	15	2	2	3	4	3	1
Havant	146	16	2	0	2	6	2	4
Hayes and Harlington	197	15	3	0	2	5	3	2
Hazel Grove	132	20	2	2	3	8	2	3
Hemel Hempstead	255	27	6	5	6	5	4	2
Hemsworth	102	11	2	2	2	2	2	1
Hendon	78	5	1		1	2	1	2
Henley	178	21	2	1	9	5	2	2
Hereford and South Herefordshire	460	52	16	5	9	8	9	6

Hertford and Stortford	153	15	2	0	1	6	3	2
Hertsmere	140	14	2	1	1	5	4	2
Hexham	162	26	1	4	4	5	6	6
Heywood and Middleton	331	32	5	9	9	6	3	2
High Peak	163	20	3	2	3	5	5	2
Hitchin and Harpenden	201	24	2	3	9	5	2	3
Holborn and St Pancras	451	16	5	0	0	2	4	5
Hornchurch and Upminster	113	11	2	1	1	3	2	1
Hornsey and Wood Green	52	5	1	0	0	3	0	1
Horsham	141	14	2	3	1	4	2	2
Houghton and Sunderland South	120	15	4	3	2	1	2	1
Hove	184	18	2	0	0	9	5	1
Huddersfield	715	49	8	10	18	3	6	2
Huntingdon	198	19	2	1	2	7	2	6
Hyndburn	187	20	4	1	5	3	4	2
Ilford North	98	8	3	0	1	3	1	1

Ilford South	152	9	2		1	4	1	1
Ipswich	330	29	10	2	5	6	4	2
Isle of Wight	338	29	4	2	2	10	6	4
Islington North	44	3	1		0	1	1	0
Islington South and Finsbury	173	8	3	0	0	2	1	3
Jarrow	132	17	3	2	5	2	3	2
Keighley	270	30	2	6	7	8	3	3
Kenilworth and Southam	233	24	2	3	2	3	4	11
Kensington	74	6	2	0	1	2	1	1
Kettering	246	27	5	2	3	12	4	2
Kingston and Surbiton	116	8	2	1	1	3	1	1
Kingston upon Hull East	367	41	7	13	14	4	2	2
Kingston upon Hull North	169	11	2	1	4	2	2	1
Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle	553	62	19	11	11	5	6	10
Kingswood	106	13	1	2	2	4	2	1
Knowsley	261	24	5	1	3	10	2	3

Lancaster and Fleetwood	144	7	2	0	1	1	2	1
Leeds Central	1387	34	7	8	6	4	5	4
Leeds East	211	18	3	0	0	11	2	1
Leeds North East	91	10	1		1	6	2	1
Leeds North West	145	7	1		0	2	3	1
Leeds West	118	9	4	0	0	3	1	2
Leicester East	148	11	2	0	0	6	1	2
Leicester South	517	17	4	2	3	4	3	1
Leicester West	150	9	2	0	1	3	2	1
Leigh	185	19	3	3	3	6	2	1
Lewes	176	23	2	1	2	6	2	10
Lewisham East	102	10	2	0	0	4	3	1
Lewisham West and Penge	83	9	2	0	1	5	0	0
Lewisham, Deptford	94	7	1	0	1	3	0	0
Leyton and Wanstead	180	17	1	5	1	7	0	2
Lichfield	507	62	5	5	3	42	4	3
Lincoln	374	16	4	1	4	3	3	2
Liverpool, Riverside	592	14	3	2	4	2	1	1

Liverpool, Walton	222	24	3	0	2	13	2	4
Liverpool, Wavertree	129	10	2	0	1	4	2	1
Liverpool, West Derby	109	13	1	0	0	7	3	2
Loughborough	224	10	2	1	1	3	2	1
Louth and Horncastle	141	19	4	1	3	4	3	3
Ludlow	116	19	4	1	4	5	2	2
Luton North	73	8	1	1	1	3	1	1
Luton South	148	11	4	0	2	3	1	1
Macclesfield	289	41	6	9	7	8	8	4
Maidenhead	218	24	7	1	2	5	2	8
Maidstone and The Weald	378	36	13	6	3	9	3	2
Makerfield	210	22	5	5	4	4	2	2
Maldon	111	14	4	0	1	4	3	2
Manchester Central	1068	25	8	0	2	4	6	4
Manchester, Gorton	95	4	0	0	1	1	0	1
Manchester, Withington	87	6	1	0	0	2	1	0
Mansfield	301	32	8	4	6	7	4	3

Meon Valley	261	31	5	1	2	15	3	4
Meriden	233	21	7	1	1	5	5	2
Mid Bedfordshire	205	19	2	2	5	4	3	3
Mid Derbyshire	144	21	2	2	3	6	3	4
Mid Dorset and North Poole	77	11	1	0	1	5	2	1
Mid Norfolk	187	20	4	2	3	6	1	4
Mid Sussex	226	25	3		10	7	3	2
Mid Worcestershire	219	25	4	1	4	6	2	9
Middlesbrough	389	29	10	3	4	6	3	4
Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland	134	16	2	3	1	5	3	1
Milton Keynes North	276	24	9	1	3	5	2	4
Milton Keynes South	225	18	3	2	3	5	3	2
Mitcham and Morden	35	3	0	0	0	2	1	0
Mole Valley	97	11	3	1	1	2	1	3
Morecambe and Lunesdale	226	29	3	5	11	4	5	1
Morley and Outwood	268	30	5	1	2	11	4	6

New Forest East	203	26	4	1	5	7	7	3
New Forest West	94	15	2	1	2	6	2	3
Newark	220	24	5	1	5	6	4	3
Newbury	290	28	4	3	7	6	2	6
Newcastle upon Tyne Central	388	19	7	1	2	4	3	2
Newcastle upon Tyne East	372	13	2	2	1	4	2	1
Newcastle upon Tyne North	175	20	5	3	3	2	5	2
Newcastle-under-Lyme	274	20	4	4	4	5	2	2
Newton Abbot	121	17	2	1	2	6	3	1
Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford	248	24	4	4	7	4	3	2
North Cornwall	190	24	1	3	1	7	5	7
North Devon	312	39	6	10	8	9	5	2
North Dorset	189	24	2	1	5	4	6	6
North Durham	115	15	2	2	3	3	2	2
North East Bedfordshire	151	15	1	2	3	3	2	3
North East Cambridgeshire	145	14	1	3	3	3	2	2

North East Derbyshire	154	19	3	2	4	5	3	3
North East Hampshire	101	12	2	1	0	4	2	3
North East Hertfordshire	120	14	2	1	2	4	2	2
North East Somerset	220	24	3	4	5	5	4	4
North Herefordshire	97	14	2	0	2	4	1	4
North Norfolk	132	21	6	2	2	4	3	3
North Shropshire	231	24	3	1	9	6	4	1
North Somerset	140	18	3	2	3	4	3	2
North Swindon	287	28	3	8	5	4	4	3
North Thanet	159	18	2	3	3	7	2	2
North Tyneside	337	35	9	7	7	5	4	3
North Warwickshire	220	26	4	4	4	6	4	3
North West Cambridgeshire	227	20	5	2	4	3	4	1
North West Durham	183	23	3	4	5	3	5	4
North West Hampshire	125	14	1	0	2	6	2	3
North West Leicestershire	527	54	11	17	16	3	4	4

North West Norfolk	172	22	2	3	6	5	4	3
North Wiltshire	843	110	2	2	90	2	9	4
Northampton North	176	19	4	3	5	4	2	1
Northampton South	375	32	5	3	4	7	10	3
Norwich North	169	20	4	2	5	3	2	3
Norwich South	532	24	10	0	1	5	7	1
Nottingham East	235	9	2	0	1	3	1	1
Nottingham North	272	25	3	8	6	3	2	2
Nottingham South	348	9	3	0	1	3	2	1
Nuneaton	201	22	5	1	3	6	4	3
Old Bexley and Sidcup	101	11	1	1	2	4	2	2
Oldham East and Saddleworth	132	12	2	1	3	3	1	1
Oldham West and Royton	493	39	6	5	7	7	4	10
Orpington	158	20	3	1	6	7	3	1
Oxford East	237	8	1	0	2	2	1	1
Oxford West and Abingdon	284	22	3	6	3	4	5	2
Pendle	295	35	4	6	4	9	5	6

Penistone and Stocksbridge	155	22	5	4	3	3	3	4
Penrith and The Border	152	23	2	3	5	4	4	4
Peterborough	214	18	5	1	3	4	3	2
Plymouth, Moor View	341	37	10	12	2	8	3	3
Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport	605	29	5	5	7	5	4	2
Poole	628	75	6	13	28	12	14	3
Poplar and Limehouse	215	11	5	1	1	2	1	1
Portsmouth North	563	58	9	8	8	13	16	4
Portsmouth South	163	6	2		1	2	1	0
Preston	763	47	2	1	2	2	1	38
Pudsey	190	23	4	0	2	11	4	2
Putney	29	3	1	0	0	1	0	0
Rayleigh and Wickford	166	18	4	1	0	4	5	3
Reading East	434	26	2	3	2	16	1	1
Reading West	130	14	3	1	2	3	1	4
Redcar	321	39	9	13	5	6	3	2
Redditch	239	29	4	5	5	9	4	2

Reigate	295	32	6	10	7	5	3	2
Ribble Valley	300	32	7	2	14	4	2	4
Richmond (Yorks)	2340	248	4	2	1	231	4	5
Richmond Park	149	13	2	0	0	3	6	2
Rochdale	208	17	5	0	3	5	2	2
Rochester and Strood	737	63	7	3	33	6	5	9
Rochford and Southend East	149	14	5	0	0	3	4	1
Romford	196	19	6	1	2	6	3	2
Romsey and Southampton North	234	17	1	1	7	2	2	5
Rossendale and Darwen	216	24	2	1	5	6	5	5
Rother Valley	159	18	3	3	4	3	2	4
Rotherham	216	22	6	1	6	3	3	3
Rugby	357	38	6	1	9	16	2	3
Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner	48	6	0	1	1	2	1	0
Runnymede and Weybridge	180	12	1	2	3	4	2	1
Rushcliffe	386	37	7	2	15	8	2	3
Rutland and Melton	184	21	3	1	4	5	3	4

Saffron Walden	124	12	2		1	4	2	2
Salford and Eccles	610	34	8	7	5	9	2	3
Salisbury	155	20	2	3	2	7	2	4
Scarborough and Whitby	231	29	5	5	5	7	5	2
Scunthorpe	356	40	8	9	10	4	9	1
Sedgefield	216	29	7	1	5	2	4	10
Sefton Central	88	13	1	1	1	6	3	2
Selby and Ainsty	216	23	3	2	5	6	5	3
Sevenoaks	109	13	2	1	2	5	2	1
Sheffield Central	353	8	2	0	1	2	2	1
Sheffield South East	283	31	6	4	9	6	5	2
Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough	242	21	3	5	3	6	1	3
Sheffield, Hallam	74	6	1	0	1	2	1	0
Sheffield, Heeley	331	38	10	9	4	11	3	2
Sherwood	246	28	4	3	5	8	4	4
Shipley	210	27	5	0	2	11	2	7
Shrewsbury and Atcham	395	41	6	9	9	9	5	4

Sittingbourne and Sheppey	200	16	3	3	3	4	2	2
Skipton and Ripon	270	35	5	6	6	6	6	6
Sleaford and North Hykeham	237	25	4	5	5	6	3	4
Slough	190	14	3	2	4	3	2	1
Solihull	209	22	6	1	3	4	5	4
Somerton and Frome	190	22	3	3	3	7	3	3
South Basildon and East Thurrock	145	15	4	1	0	5	4	1
South Cambridgeshire	126	12	2	0	1	5	0	2
South Derbyshire	177	18	2	2	4	5	1	3
South Dorset	460	57	4	5	7	35	4	3
South East Cambridgeshire	459	45	8	10	9	7	4	7
South East Cornwall	332	46	2	7	3	4	18	10
South Holland and The Deepings	271	30	5	2	6	9	3	4
South Leicestershire	264	27	4	1	9	6	4	3
South Norfolk	202	22	7	1	2	7	2	3
South Northamptonshire	208	20	5	1	3	7	2	2

South Ribble	135	15	3	2	2	4	2	3
South Shields	127	16	2	4	3	3	3	2
South Staffordshire	184	21	3	3	4	7	2	2
South Suffolk	174	22	4	2	3	7	3	3
South Swindon	204	20	8		2	5	2	3
South Thanet	148	16	2	3	3	3	3	1
South West Bedfordshire	215	22	5	0	4	5	4	3
South West Devon	291	39	4	14	6	8	4	3
South West Hertfordshire	108	11	1	1	2	4	2	1
South West Norfolk	150	16	3	1	3	5	3	2
South West Surrey	115	12	1	0	2	5	2	2
South West Wiltshire	167	19	3	3	3	6	2	2
Southampton, Itchen	171	10	3	1	1	3	2	1
Southampton, Test	224	12	2	1	2	4	1	1
Southend West	201	26	7	2	3	4	6	3
Southport	153	20	4	1	4	5	5	1
Spelthorne	53	6	1	1	1	3	1	0

St Albans	143	16	3	1	3	5	1	3
St Austell and Newquay	234	26	2	8	3	8	3	1
St Helens North	166	18	4	2	2	5	2	3
St Helens South and Whiston	251	25	6	5	6	4	2	2
St Ives	137	19	1	2	10	4	2	1
Stafford	344	38	5	2	4	10	9	8
Staffordshire Moorlands	126	19	1	4	5	5	1	2
Stalybridge and Hyde	130	15	1	1	3	5	2	2
Stevenage	273	30	4	2	6	11	2	5
Stockport	254	31	8	3	5	7	4	5
Stockton North	309	38	13	3	6	5	8	3
Stockton South	289	31	8	3	6	4	4	4
Stoke-on-Trent Central	310	25	7	3	5	6	3	2
Stoke-on-Trent North	207	21	4	3	7	4	2	1
Stoke-on-Trent South	258	30	5	3	10	7	3	2
Stone	162	24	2	4	3	10	4	1

Stourbridge	135	16	4	2	3	5	2	1
Stratford-on-Avon	213	27	4	3	3	8	5	5
Streattham	115	11	2	0	3	4	1	1
Stretford and Urmston	385	39	7	5	11	8	4	4
Stroud	217	24	4	1	5	8	2	3
Suffolk Coastal	172	22	5	1	2	6	6	2
Sunderland Central	372	31	7	4	6	7	4	3
Surrey Heath	117	12	2	0	2	3	2	4
Sutton Coldfield	281	33	5	1	7	11	6	4
Sutton and Cheam	81	10	2	0	1	4	1	1
Tamworth	216	23	4	2	5	5	5	3
Tatton	241	36	8	1	2	8	10	7
Taunton Deane	350	34	5	4	3	11	5	5
Telford	256	27	10	1	4	5	4	3
Tewkesbury	172	19	3	1	5	5	3	2
The Cotswolds	215	25	5	0	2	9	4	5
The Wrekin	898	81	4	1	52	5	2	16
Thirsk and Malton	180	22	1	3	4	6	3	4
Thornbury and Yate	175	24	4	3	3	6	6	3

Thurrock	203	16	5	1	3	5	2	1
Tiverton and Honiton	192	23	3	5	3	6	4	3
Tonbridge and Malling	318	32	5	2	3	7	4	12
Tooting	67	7	1		2	2	1	1
Torbay	122	15	2	0	1	6	5	0
Torridge and West Devon	130	17	2	2	2	7	4	1
Totnes	361	56	6	11	21	4	7	6
Tottenham	233	14	4	2	2	4	1	2
Truro and Falmouth	306	25	7	4	3	4	6	1
Tunbridge Wells	159	18	5	0	2	6	2	2
Twickenham	132	13	3	0	1	5	1	2
Tynemouth	290	34	10	5	5	9	3	3
Uxbridge and South Ruislip	196	13	2	1	5	3	1	1
Vauxhall	224	14	4	1	2	3	1	3
Wakefield	285	31	8	1	6	8	4	4
Wallasey	114	13	2	0	1	4	2	4
Walsall North	274	26	8	2	4	5	5	2

Walsall South	189	15	4	1	2	5	2	2
Walthamstow	187	17	5	4	1	4	1	3
Wansbeck	179	25	5	5	3	5	2	5
Wantage	160	15	2	0	2	5	2	3
Warley	194	17	5	1	2	5	2	2
Warrington North	373	42	10	14	8	4	2	4
Warrington South	320	31	5	1	2	14	7	2
Warwick and Leamington	334	24	3	1	9	5	3	2
Washington and Sunderland West	350	43	6	4	25	3	3	1
Watford	194	17	5	0	3	4	2	3
Waveney	255	28	5	3	7	5	3	5
Wealden	137	14	2	1	2	4	3	1
Weaver Vale	150	18	2	0	3	4	5	4
Wellingborough	198	19	5	2	2	5	3	1
Wells	145	15	2	0	2	4	5	2
Welwyn Hatfield	142	8	2	1	1	3	1	1
Wentworth and Dearne	225	25	4	3	4	4	8	3

West Bromwich East	242	25	6	2	3	10	2	2
West Bromwich West	287	29	6	2	10	7	3	2
West Dorset	239	35	3	2	4	8	7	11
West Ham	225	10	2	1	1	3	1	1
West Lancashire	243	18	3	5	4	2	3	2
West Suffolk	183	17	2	2	3	5	2	4
West Worcestershire	167	22	3	3	2	8	2	4
Westminster North	102	8	2		1	1	2	2
Westmorland and Lonsdale	181	25	3	5	5	4	4	4
Weston-Super-Mare	175	17	3	2	3	5	3	1
Wigan	269	27	7	6	4	4	3	3
Wimbledon	84	11	1	1	1	6	2	1
Winchester	544	41	18	1	1	6	13	2
Windsor	108	11	2		1	4	3	1
Wirral South	97	16	1	0	0	6	6	2
Wirral West	72	13	1	0	1	6	2	2
Witham	119	15	2	1	2	5	4	2

Witney	279	30	2	8	10	6	3	2
Woking	82	9	2	0	1	3	2	1
Wokingham	147	14	2	0	1	3	1	6
Wolverhampton North East	236	26	9	1	3	4	8	1
Wolverhampton South East	181	19	3	1	5	4	1	5
Wolverhampton South West	229	25	7	1	2	6	6	4
Worcester	288	23	10	0	4	4	2	2
Workington	303	45	7	15	10	6	2	4
Worsley and Eccles South	93	9	2	1	2	1	1	1
Worthing West	201	28	4	1	4	11	6	1
Wycombe	122	11	2	0	1	3	2	1
Wyre Forest	157	18	3	2	2	5	2	3
Wyre and Preston North	714	94	13	26	14	17	9	14
Wythenshawe and Sale East	311	35	8	2	2	7	5	11
Yeovil	265	28	5	2	8	7	3	3
York Central	152	6	1	0	1	3	1	0
York Outer	522	42	4	10	7	4	4	13

Source: NFER analysis of ILR

Note: Number of apprenticeship starts per 1,000 16-24 year olds is rounded to the closest integer. When no apprenticeships were started in a given sector in a given parliamentary constituency the cell has been left blank. Totals may not sum to breakdowns due to rounding

# Evidence for excellence in education

## **Public**

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