

THE IMPACT OF POLICY CHANGES ON APPRENTICESHIP STARTS SINCE 2006

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	IV
Overview and hypothesis	1
Data analysis – methodology	2
Apprenticeship data	5
Headline apprenticeship starts and key policy changes	5
Top 12 apprenticeship groupings – apprenticeship starts	6
Top 5 apprenticeships – SSA classification	10
Top 12 – employment trends	10
Top 12 – apprenticeship starts by training provider type, resource intensiveness and typical duration	12
Age – all apprenticeships	15
Apprenticeship vacancies	15
The Interviews	18
The end of Train to Gain and the restructuring of government bodies	18
Spikes predominantly in shorter duration apprenticeships that require less resource and are delivered by independent training providers	19
Impact of Advanced Learner Loans	20
Whether apprenticeship start numbers should currently be higher	21
The impact of apprenticeship standards	21
The impact of the levy	22
Barriers that could be removed	23
The funding or policy levers that could be used to encourage growth in those apprenticeships that have the most economic value	24
Conclusion	26
Recommendations	27
Appendix 1: Glossary	30
Appendix 2: The top 10 apprenticeship frameworks and top 12 apprenticeship standards	31
Appendix 3: Example of a grouping – accountancy	32
Appendix 4: Data sources	33
Appendix 5: Interview questions	34

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DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

Over the past 20 years, apprenticeships have undergone significant reform, beginning with the [Leitch Review of Skills](#) in 2006, followed by the introduction of the [Specification of Apprenticeship Standards](#) in 2011, [The Richard Review of Apprenticeships](#) in 2012, which led to the replacement of [apprenticeship frameworks](#) with [apprenticeship standards](#), and to the 2017 introduction of the [apprenticeship levy](#). The various policy and funding changes have undoubtedly affected the number of apprenticeship starts. In 2006/07, when the [Leitch Review](#) was published, there were 184,000 starts and they peaked at 521,000 in 2011/12, the first full academic year after the introduction of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards. The latest data available when the research was carried out showed that in 2022/23 there were 337,000 apprenticeship starts.

Comparison suggests that there is no correlation between the number of apprenticeship starts and the numbers employed in similar employment (occupational) classifications over the last 20 years. The following hypothesis was developed to explore this further:

Changes in the labour market have had little impact on apprenticeship numbers; instead, changes in government policy have driven fluctuations in the number of apprenticeship starts.

This is an important concept to consider because apprenticeship programmes are, at their heart, employment-based training and development programmes. It therefore seems counterintuitive that changes in apprenticeship participation have not been driven by changes in the labour market. This also raises an interesting question about what has been driving the number of apprenticeship starts if not employment.

This research explored the hypothesis by:

- analysing publicly available apprenticeship and employment data
- interviewing individuals who have been involved with apprenticeships in various roles over the past 20 years about the findings from the data analysis

The evidence identifies specific policy and funding changes that significantly impacted apprenticeship starts, revealing potential levers that could influence the number of apprenticeship starts in the future.

DATA ANALYSIS – METHODOLOGY

Apprenticeship starts data was taken from education statistics housed on the [Department for Education \(DfE\) website](#). It was necessary to combine several datasets because a comprehensive dataset with the required information for the years 2005/06 to 2022/23 was not available from government statistics. However, the datasets used were not consistent in a number of ways. Naming conventions changed over time, so, for example, business administration became business administrator; apprenticeship frameworks became apprenticeship standards and early level 3+ apprenticeships were described as 'level 3 and higher'. The lack of consistency in the data is important and is addressed in the [Recommendations](#) section.

Apprenticeship frameworks consisted of a suite of qualifications, and the main learning aims were often a national vocational qualification (NVQ) and a technical certificate. In contrast, an apprenticeship standard, in its simplest form, lists the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to be competent in an occupation. Frameworks regularly used pathways, so although the apprenticeship framework may have been called construction, it would contain several pathways, such as bricklayer or carpenter; but it was the top level construction framework that figures were reported for. In contrast, each standard is reported on, meaning there are separate figures for bricklayer and carpenter.

Once the datasets had been combined, 12 apprenticeships were selected for detailed analysis. This process involved identifying the 10 apprenticeship frameworks and the 12 apprenticeship standards with the highest number of starts since 2006 to examine the impact of policy over the past 20 years (see [Appendix 2](#)).

The decision was made not to simply choose the top 12 since 2006 because the frameworks had been in place longer than the standards, so the results would have been weighted towards the frameworks. Selecting 12 standards rather than 10 also allowed for the inclusion of the engineering standard in the data analysis. Engineering is a traditional and well-respected apprenticeship that is aligned to a priority area for the economy, so it was included for its relevance.

The two lists were merged, because some apprenticeships appeared on both the standards list and the frameworks list. To enable consistent like-for-like analysis over time and reduce the challenges caused by pathways and changes in naming conventions, a harmonisation exercise was used to group similar apprenticeships together. A generic term was created for each apprenticeship grouping, for example, the business administration grouping includes all apprenticeships of all levels from 2006 that can be described as resembling business administration. A more detailed example is included in [Appendix 3](#).

The generic groupings after the merging and harmonisation exercise were:

- accountancy
- business administration
- construction
- customer service
- early years
- electrics (typically electrotechnical)
- engineering
- hairdressing/barbering
- health/care
- hospitality
- management
- retail

Although the merging and harmonisation process introduced a degree of subjectivity, the groupings were based on details in the frameworks and standards. The pathways in the frameworks were used as a guide for which apprenticeship standards should be included in each grouping. The groupings could also include more than one apprenticeship framework, which allowed for frameworks having changed over time and for the analysis and interpretation of broad trends.

The apprenticeships selected and the groupings that were constructed enabled a range of apprenticeships to be studied, including shorter duration to long, a mix of sectors, a mix of traditional versus modern apprenticeships, a mix of FE college and independent training provider delivery and a mix of resource intensive delivery.

The approach also provides greater insight than provided by the sector subject area (SSA) system. The SSA is a classification system currently used to group apprenticeships together for official statistics reporting purposes. The SSA is based on education classifications, which makes it difficult to compare against the standard occupational classification (SOC) used to describe the labour market. For example, the SSA for health, public services and care includes both nursing and childcare, but in labour market classifications nurses are included in the health professionals category and childminders are in caring personal services.

To assess how closely apprenticeship numbers aligned with employment data, [Lightcast](#), a company specialising in scraping job post data to provide labour market information, gathered information on demand in the labour market.

Determining the length (or duration) of the apprenticeship was largely based on the expected duration listed in the apprenticeship standards (and assumed that the duration had not changed significantly from framework to standard). A judgement-based average was calculated for the standards that had the majority of starts in any particular grouping.

The training provider type was taken from official [DfE statistics](#), selecting the standards and frameworks for a particular grouping. Some provider types were excluded because the numbers were too small to be significant. These were 'other public funded' (which included local authority and higher education), sixth form colleges, special colleges and those listed as unknown.

Apprenticeship vacancy data and the length of employment before the start of the apprenticeship came from [DfE statistics](#). However, it was difficult to analyse for trends because publicly available vacancy data only goes back to 2018. Also the pandemic severely impacted apprenticeship vacancies in 2020.

Past experience was used to judge how resource intensive the delivery of an apprenticeship would be. For example, engineering was quantified as being highly resource intensive because of the materials, the intensity of the training and facility requirements. In contrast, business administration was classified as being low resource intensive, because large amounts of the programme can be delivered online to large cohorts. These groupings were sense checked against the funding bands allocated to apprenticeships. Broadly speaking, the funding for high resource intensive delivery apprenticeships tended to be in excess of £20,000, medium resource intensive was £8,000 to £15,000 and low was less than £8,000.

While the research involved the assumptions and elements of subjectivity that have been discussed, the methodology and findings are sufficiently robust to support informed judgements and conclusions.

The sources of data, with hyperlinks, are included in [Appendix 4](#).

APPRENTICESHIP DATA

HEADLINE APPRENTICESHIP STARTS AND KEY POLICY CHANGES

Figure 1 and the supporting table (Table 1) show the total number of apprenticeship starts across all sectors from the 2005/06 academic year to 2022/23 and the key policy and funding changes that occurred.

Figure 1. Total number of apprenticeship starts in all sectors from 2005/06 to 2022/23 and the points of key policy and funding changes

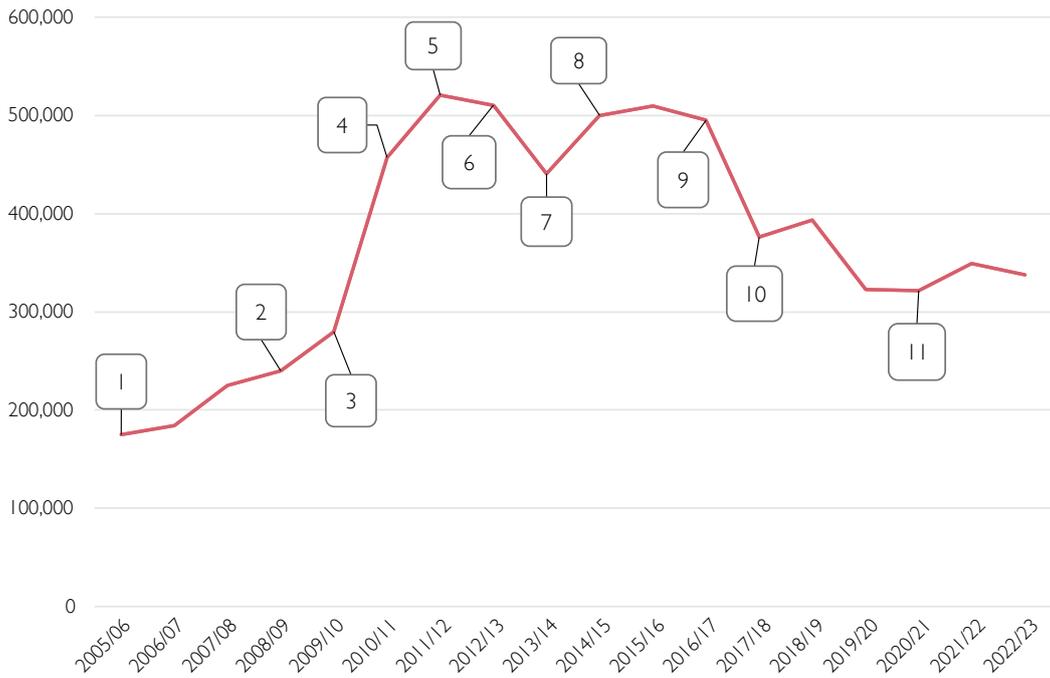


Table I. Key policy and funding changes in Figure I

Academic year	Apprenticeship starts	Key policy and funding change	Corresponding point on graph
2005/06	174,990	Train to Gain funding introduced.	1
2008/09	240,020	National Apprenticeship Service launched.	2
2009/10	279,750	Train to Gain ends at the end of the academic year. The Learning and Skills Council disbands and the Skills Funding Agency launches.	3
2010/11	457,280	First full year since Train to Gain ended. Specification of Apprenticeship Standards introduced in March 2011.	4
2011/12	520,620	Programme-led apprenticeships end (end of academic year).	5
2012/13	510,280	12-month minimum duration introduced (start of academic year).	6
2013/14	440,550	Advanced Learner Loans introduced for 24+ apprentices studying at level 3 and above (start of academic year).	7
2014/15	499,930	Advanced Learner Loans no longer apply to 24+ apprentices (start of academic year). Apprenticeship standards begin to be introduced.	8
2016/17	495,020	Apprenticeship levy introduced (from April 2017).	9
2017/18	375,910	First full year of levy. Frameworks begin to be phased out.	10
2020/21	321,600	Frameworks no longer available.	11

As shown, certain policy and funding changes seem to have impacted on overall apprenticeship start numbers. However, headline apprenticeship data does not tell the whole story, so further analysis is needed to identify trends.

TOP 12 APPRENTICESHIP GROUPINGS – APPRENTICESHIP STARTS

Please note that in the remainder of this paper, whenever the term 'top 12' is used, it specifically refers to the top 12 apprenticeship groupings identified as described in the [Data Analysis – Methodology](#) section.

The top 12 apprenticeship groupings by number of starts have been analysed further. [Figure 2](#) shows the 12 apprenticeships with the highest number of starts from 2005/06 to 2022/23.

Figure 2. Top 12 apprenticeships based on highest number of starts from 2005/06 to 2022/23

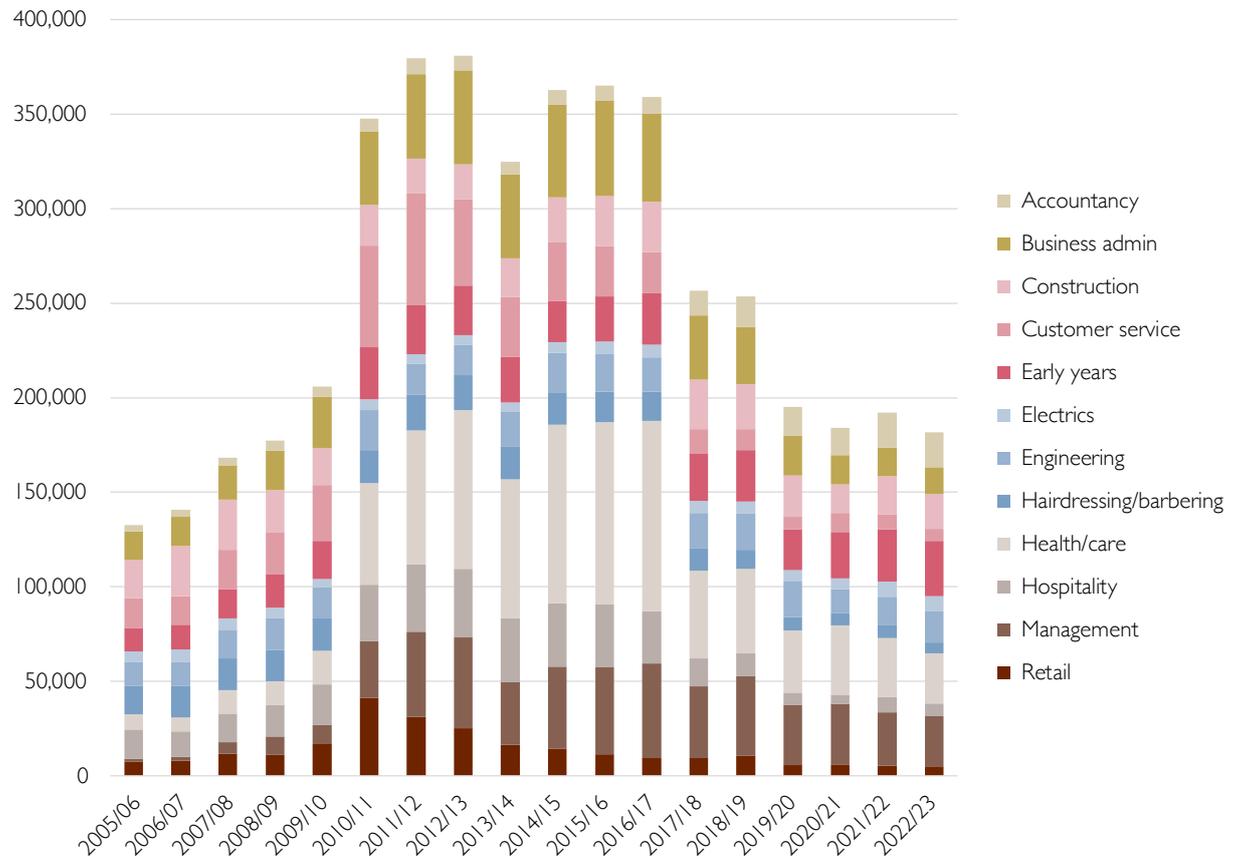
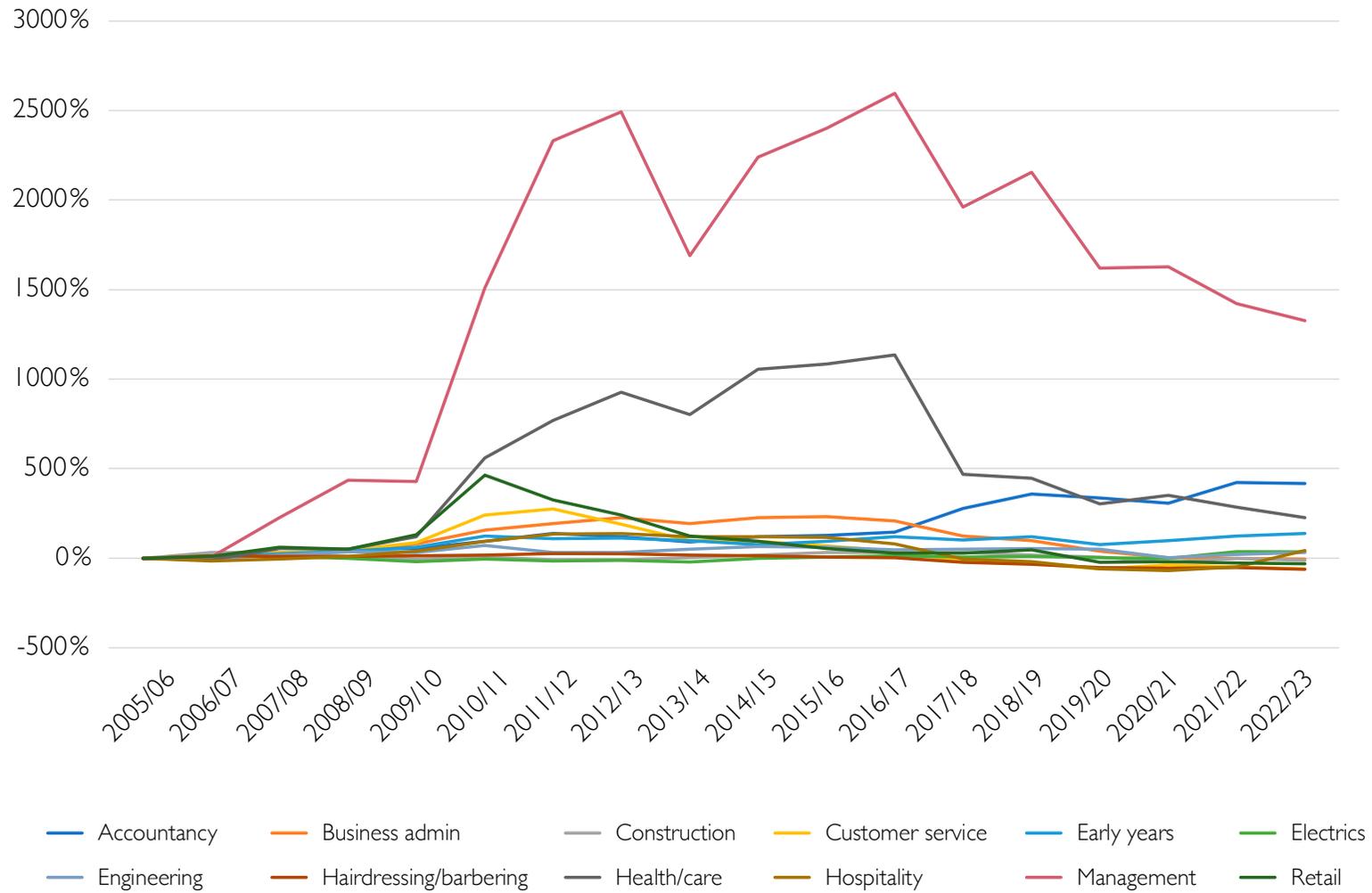


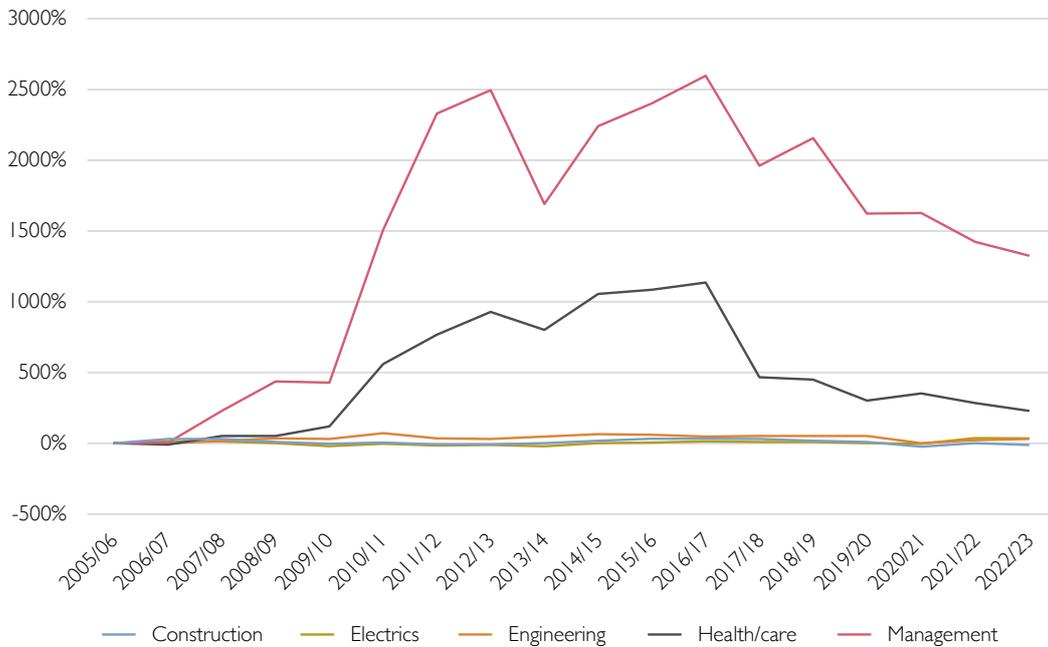
Figure 3 shows the percentage change in apprenticeship starts for the top 12, using 2005/06 as the baseline.

Figure 3. Percentage change using 2005/06 as a baseline



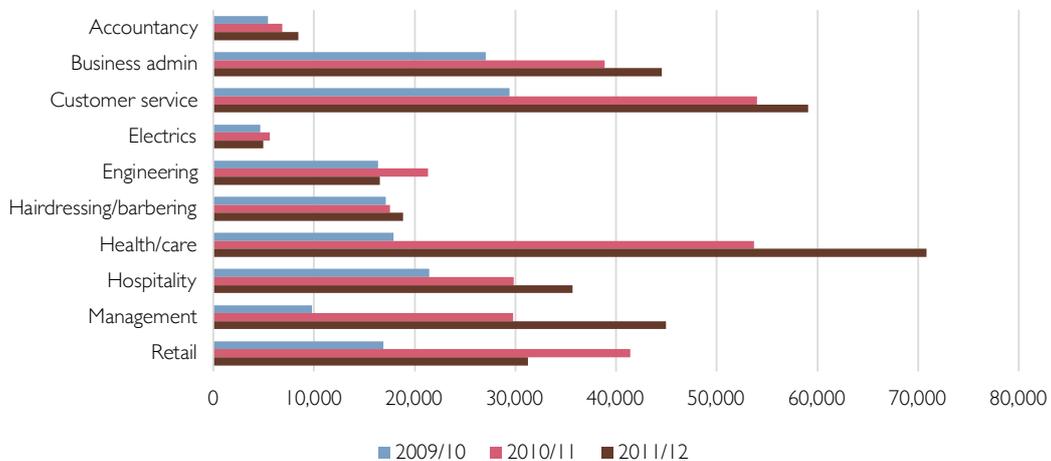
Some apprenticeships, such as health and care, and management, have experienced large growth but also contractions. While construction, electrics and engineering have remained relatively stable (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentage change for apprenticeships with large growth and contraction compared to apprenticeships with stable start numbers



In 2010/11 some apprenticeships – business administration, customer service, hospitality, health and care, management and retail – saw significant increases in the number of starts. However, this was not the case for all apprenticeships. Accountancy, electrics, engineering, and hairdressing and barbering stayed relatively stable and did not experience the same increases as others. Figure 5 shows the difference in increase in starts for these 10 apprenticeships.

Figure 5. Apprenticeship starts for 2009/10 to 2011/12

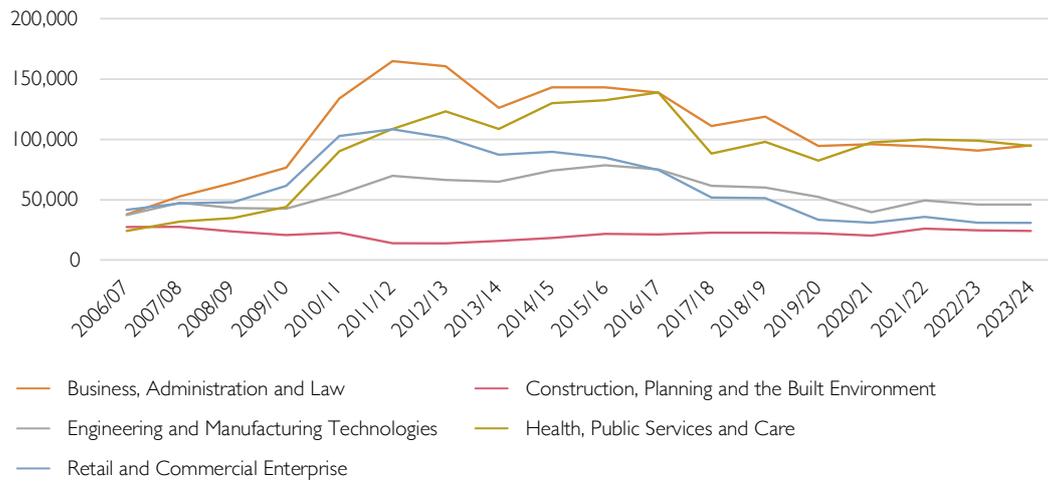


Even when Advanced Learner Loans were introduced for level 3 apprenticeships during the 2013/14 academic year, the number of apprenticeship starts in construction, electrics and engineering did not appear to change. However, the introduction did have a significant impact on apprenticeships in business administration, customer service, and health and care.

TOP 5 APPRENTICESHIPS – SSA CLASSIFICATION

In comparison to the top 12 apprenticeships identified in this research, Figure 6 shows the top 5 apprenticeships using the SSA classification.

Figure 6. Apprenticeship starts of top 5 apprenticeships using SSA classification



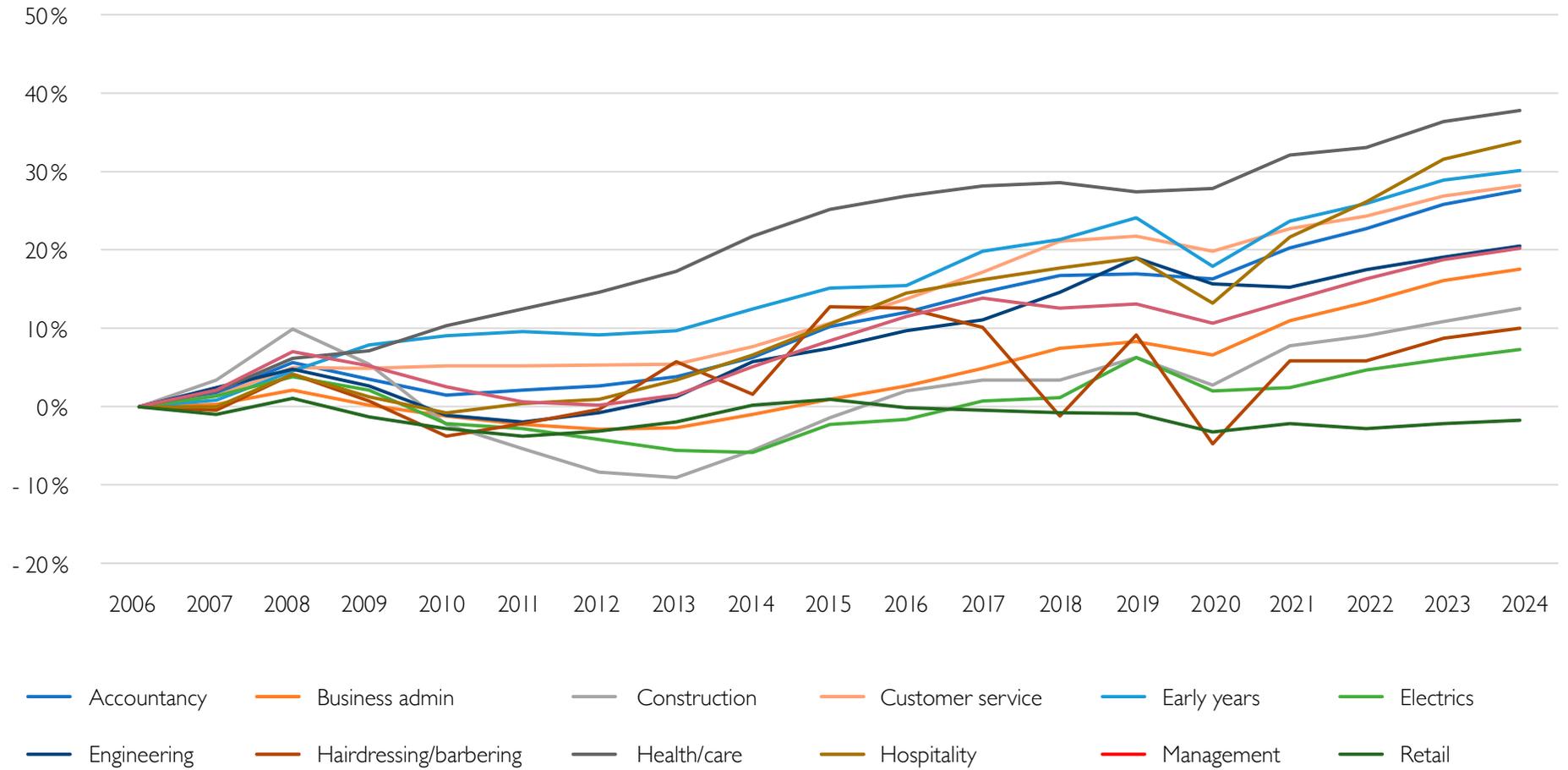
While apprenticeship data and labour market classifications are somewhat aligned, the SSA framework does not have the detail needed for a meaningful comparison with the labour market. It is not clear how apprenticeships are categorised in SSA to enable them to be analysed against labour market trends. The SSA does not align well with occupational or industry classifications, such as SOC or standard industrial classification (SIC), limiting its usefulness for identifying specific skills gaps or workforce needs. Therefore, for analysis purposes, labour market information is more useful for making comparisons between apprenticeships and employment trends.

TOP 12 – EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

It is a reasonable expectation that the number of people starting employment-based development programmes, such as apprenticeships, would fluctuate depending on changing employment trends. To test whether employment trends have impacted apprenticeship starts, it is important to analyse the employment trends for the corresponding grouped apprenticeships.

Figure 7 presents employment change (percentage change from 2006), using the SOC for the corresponding apprenticeship areas.

Figure 7. Employment (SOC) percentage change using 2006 as a baseline



As shown, employment trends have grown steadily, but with noticeable dips in response to the economic crisis in 2008 and the pandemic in 2020. In comparison, apprenticeship trends are erratic and do not follow the same trajectories as employment (see Figure 3 for comparison). However, apprenticeship starts have fluctuated significantly when specific apprenticeship policy/funding changes have been introduced.

TOP 12 – APPRENTICESHIP STARTS BY TRAINING PROVIDER TYPE, RESOURCE INTENSIVENESS AND TYPICAL DURATION

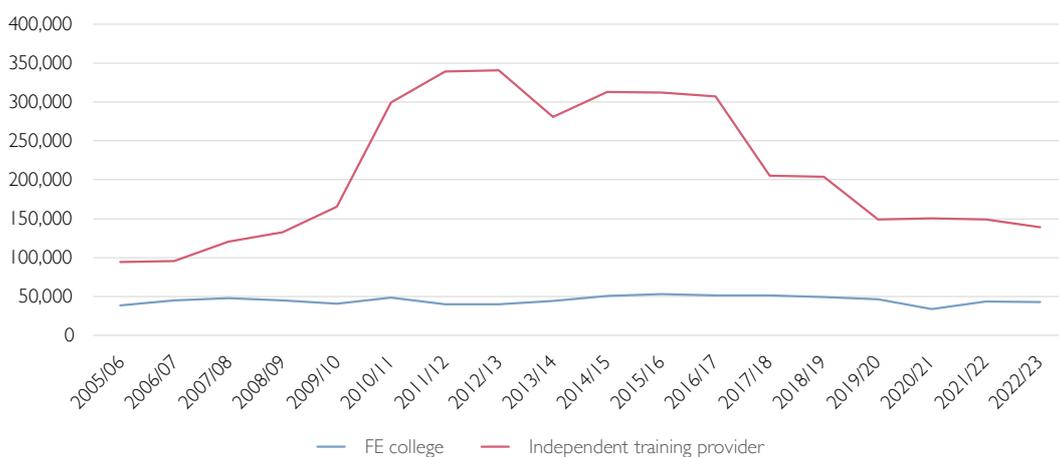
The apprenticeship levy is a tax on large employers designed to fund apprenticeship training that was introduced in 2017. In 2022/23 there were 337,490 apprenticeship starts and this number has not returned to pre-levy numbers; in fact apprenticeship starts decreased by 32% from 2016/17 when there were 495,020 starts, dropped by 18% between 2018/19 and 2019/20, and appear to have plateaued since then. While the pandemic contributed to this drop, it does not fully explain it, because apprenticeship starts have not recovered. This suggests the pandemic did not impact apprenticeship starts as much as the introduction of the levy and standards.

Some apprenticeships have been impacted by policy and funding changes more than others. Before 2017, the drive for higher start numbers along with the introduction of a minimum duration for apprenticeships had a large impact. Since 2017, the introduction of the levy and standards replacing frameworks, have had the greatest impact on apprenticeship starts.

The following figures explore whether there is commonality between the types of apprenticeships most impacted by the key policy changes and how those apprenticeships have performed.

Figure 8 shows the training provider type – FE college or independent training provider – for the top 12 apprenticeship groupings.

Figure 8. Apprenticeship starts for different provider types for the top 12



As can be seen, apprenticeship starts in FE colleges have remained relatively stable over the past 20 years, while independent training providers have experienced the biggest increases and decreases in the number of apprenticeship starts. This shows they have been more impacted by policy changes.

Figure 9 shows how resource intensive the delivery of the top 12 apprenticeships has been since 2005/06. For instance, engineering was classed as high because of the materials and facilities needed for the programme, while business administration was classed as low because it takes significantly fewer resources to deliver. The categorisation broadly aligns with the funding bands allocated to different apprenticeships. The high resource delivery apprenticeships tended to have funding of more than £20,000, medium resource intensive was in the region of £8,000 to £15,000 and low was less than £8,000.

Figure 9. Apprenticeship starts by how resource intensive the delivery is for the top 12 apprenticeships



As can be seen, the number of starts fluctuated most for the apprenticeships that needed fewer resources to deliver, while the apprenticeships that needed more resources had a remarkably steady number of starts.

Figure 10 shows the typical duration of the top 12 identified apprenticeship programmes. Low duration was classed as 12 to 17 months for typical delivery of the programme, medium was 18 to 24 months and high was 25 months or more.

Figure 10. Apprenticeship starts since 2005/06 by duration for top 12 apprenticeships



As shown, the shorter apprenticeships experienced the biggest fluctuations, while the apprenticeships that took longer to deliver remained relatively steady, although the number of starts for longer apprenticeships increased after 2017 with the introduction of the levy and then apprenticeship standards.

Headline figures indicate there has been a significant drop in apprenticeship starts since the introduction of the levy and apprenticeship standards. However, as shown in the preceding figures, it is largely the programmes delivered by independent training providers, those that need less resource and the shorter apprenticeships that have been impacted the most. Conversely, apprenticeships delivered in FE colleges, those that take longer to deliver and those that take more resources to deliver have not been as impacted by the introduction of the levy and standards. In fact, apprenticeships that take longer to deliver have fared fairly well.

AGE – ALL APPRENTICESHIPS

Figure 11. Apprenticeship starts by the age of those starting apprenticeships from 2005/06 to 2023/24



As shown in [Figure 11](#), fewer 16-18 year olds are starting apprenticeships, but apprenticeship starts among people in the other age brackets have increased.

The number of apprenticeship starts among the over 25s seems to have reacted closely to policy and funding changes. The beginning of the significant increase in those over the age of 25 starting an apprenticeship happened in 2009/10, which is when the Train to Gain programme ended. As Train to Gain was tailored to people in work and they tend to be older, it is not surprising that the first full year after the end of the programme had such a large impact on the age demographic of those starting apprenticeships. This was also coupled with the [removal of restrictions to apprenticeships for those aged 25+](#), which was introduced in September 2004 but was lifted gradually through contract allocations to providers.

In 2013/14, the introduction of Advanced Learner Loans for 24+ apprentices significantly negatively impacted the number of over 25s starting an apprenticeship. [Figure 11](#) shows the numbers recovered in 2014/15, when the loans no longer applied to apprenticeships and public funding was reinstated.

APPRENTICESHIP VACANCIES

Apprenticeship vacancies advertised through the official vacancy system were compared with apprenticeship starts to see whether there were any trends or correlations. It was difficult to analyse for trends because publicly available data only goes back to 2018, and the pandemic impacted apprenticeship vacancies in 2020. However, apprenticeship starts were not significantly impacted by the pandemic, which suggests that a large proportion of apprenticeship starts were existing staff members.

Figure 12. Apprenticeship starts and vacancies for the top 12 apprenticeships from 2018/19 to 2022/23

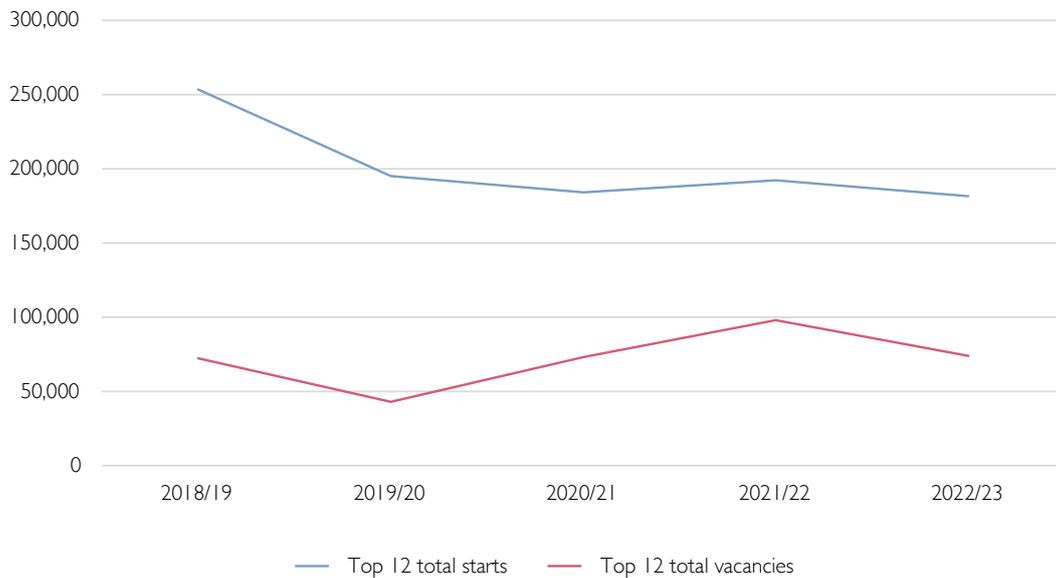


Figure 12 shows the starts and corresponding vacancy rates for the top 12 apprenticeships. It suggests that around 50% to 60% of apprenticeship starts are existing staff members because there are more than twice the number of starts as there are vacancies. This could mean that approximately 135,000 apprenticeship starts in 2022/23 were new recruits.

Official government statistics present this data in a different way but give the same result (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Starts by length of employment before starting an apprenticeship

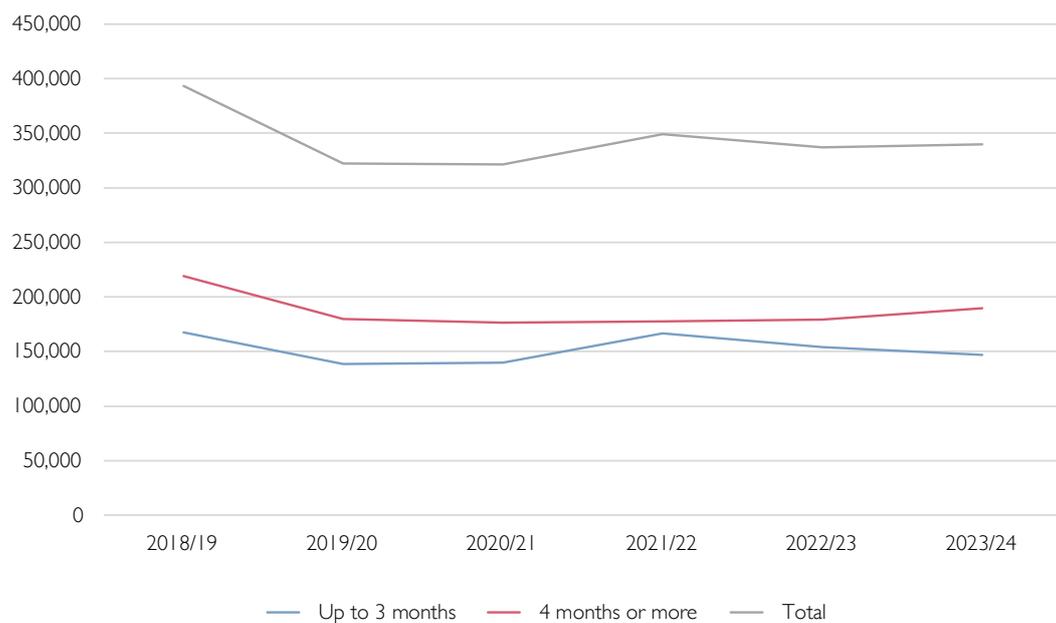
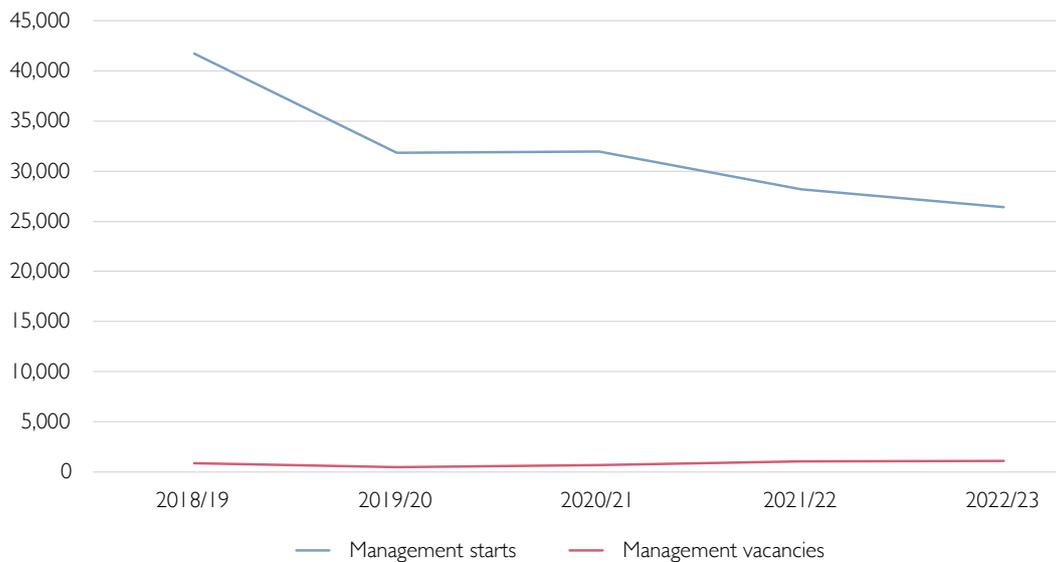


Figure 13 shows the length of time a person has been in employment before they start an apprenticeship (this data is for all apprenticeships, not just the top 12). The assumption has been made that anything less than three months is new employment because the person is taking up an apprenticeship, whereas anything over four months is an existing staff member (please note these are the parameters used in the official government statistics and they do not account for employees who have been working for between three and four months). In 2022/23, 189,800 of the apprenticeship starts were existing staff. This is 56% of the total number of starts, so it is in line with the 50% to 60% estimation made using the apprenticeship vacancy method, giving reasonable confidence in its accuracy.

An apprenticeship that appears to have more existing staff starting apprenticeships than the general estimation of 50% to 60% is management. Figure 14 shows that existing staff accounted for 94% of management apprenticeship starts in 2022/23. The caveat that not all the vacancies may have been advertised through the official system applies, but the figure is large enough to suggest something unique is happening with this specific apprenticeship.

Figure 14. Management apprenticeship starts and apprenticeship vacancies



THE INTERVIEWS

A total of 17 interviews were conducted with people who are now or who have in the past been involved with apprenticeships in different ways since 2006. Between them, the interviewees had experience of working for employers, FE colleges, independent training providers, employer bodies, professional bodies and government bodies. All interviews were anonymous so that participants could speak openly and honestly. A question script was used for consistency, but at times the scripted questions were set aside to allow conversations to flow and new ground to be covered when it felt appropriate. The question script can be seen in [Appendix 5](#).

Background information on some of the topics discussed during the interviews has been included to add context to the interviewee responses.

THE END OF TRAIN TO GAIN AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF GOVERNMENT BODIES

BACKGROUND

Train to Gain was a government-funded programme aimed at increasing the skill levels of employees by providing funding for level 2 and level 3 qualifications. Train to Gain funding was available from 2005/06 to 2009/10 and was managed by the Learning and Skills Council. The Learning and Skills Council funded all post-16 education and training in England up to higher education and operated on a regional and local basis. Government departments were restructured soon after Train to Gain ended and in 2010 the Learning and Skills Council was abolished and replaced by the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency. The National Apprenticeship Service was part of the Skills Funding Agency and they funded post-19 skills and training up to higher education and all apprenticeships from 16 upwards. Originally the Skills Funding Agency and the National Apprenticeship Service were operated regionally, but they became more national in their approach, introducing initiatives such as national contracting that enabled training providers to have a single contract with the Skills Funding Agency rather than needing a delivery contract for each location of operation. The Young People's Learning Agency became responsible for education funding for 16-18 year olds.

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

The consensus among interviewees was that the spike in apprenticeship starts in 2010/11 was a direct result of Train to Gain funding being removed.

Although interviewees cited several factors for the spike in apprenticeship starts, one of the main reasons they gave was that, when they realised Train to Gain funding was ending, many independent training providers shifted delivery into other funding streams, including apprenticeships. Interviewees said that apprenticeships were also beginning to be promoted quite heavily politically, and so this growth was actively encouraged by government bodies.

Interviewees said that independent training providers could respond and adapt much faster than FE colleges, so the change in their delivery offer was swift. They said there was also similarity between Train to Gain programmes and apprenticeship frameworks in that the NVQ was the centrepiece of both. This made it easier for independent training providers to adapt their delivery and, in many respects, rebrand their existing programmes as apprenticeships.

Interviewees said that the types of apprenticeships that saw a significant increase in starts would have been unlikely to fit most people's idea of what an apprenticeship should be, and in many cases would not meet the rules for what an apprenticeship should be at the time of writing this research.

The four interviewees who had been involved with apprenticeships during the restructuring believed it had contributed to the spike in numbers. Several interviewees identified interconnected factors:

- Apprenticeships had become topical and a political issue. This led to a push for growth, because growth is always the driving factor for government bodies.
- Government bodies were judged on the number of apprenticeship starts. This became the defining key performance indicator and as such it did not matter what the start was, so long as there was a start. This culture was prominent in the Train to Gain programme and did not change when the funding stream switched to apprenticeships.
- Government bodies were able to reallocate funding to different training providers to facilitate the creation of more apprenticeship starts.
- Considerable marketing and employer support was available at this time, meaning that employers did not need to understand funding or programme construction because training providers took responsibility for them.

An interviewee from an independent training provider described how government staff would actively encourage them to increase the size of their existing contracts to make sure the money was spent. Spending the money to hit targets was seen as the most important thing.

One interviewee said that the government departments responsible for overseeing apprenticeships adopted a transactional approach when they became part of the civil service, whereas previously, as arm's-length bodies (non-departmental public bodies), they had provided much more support to learners and employers. They felt that the supportive and advisory role had been lost, making it especially difficult for employers given the significant changes in the apprenticeship system.

SPIKES PREDOMINANTLY IN SHORTER DURATION APPRENTICESHIPS THAT REQUIRE LESS RESOURCE AND ARE DELIVERED BY INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

Interviewees said the drive by government bodies to increase the number of apprenticeship starts had resulted in the increase of shorter duration apprenticeships that also needed fewer resources. They explained that because they were shorter programmes, training providers could deliver more of them. For example, they could deliver four six-month apprenticeships in the time it took to deliver one two-year apprenticeship, resulting in more apprenticeship starts.

They were quick wins the market could deliver. Interviewees said that training providers concentrated on these quick wins and they were helped by government bodies because that was the way to meet the key performance indicators.

Interviewees explained that it was more economically viable to deliver these types of programmes: it was easier to enter the market because set-up costs were lower;

cohorts could be larger and, in many instances, they could be delivered remotely or in a room on the employers' premises.

Some interviewees said the growth of certain apprenticeships was driven by this type of pure economics. Several interviewees commented that independent training providers became focused on sales and that these types of programmes were easier to 'sell' to employers because the providers emphasised how quickly they could get the staff qualified at no cost and with minimal impact on business operations.

When asked why FE colleges did not follow suit, interviewees suggested it was because FE colleges were less agile and needed more development time to create or revise programmes. For FE colleges to go from idea to delivery can sometimes take years because they need to consider factors such as buildings and estates. They also often have robust governance protocols, and work has to be completed by the curriculum and planning teams, all of which takes time.

It is important to mention that the majority of interviewees stressed that many independent training providers were delivering excellent programmes that were highly valued by employers and learners. Unfortunately some providers appeared to want to game the system, and this had led to a negative perception of all independent training providers and of the wider training provider community.

There were mixed reactions to the question of whether there was anything wrong with the large growth spikes. Some interviewees believed it was wrong because quality had suffered (quite severely at times) and the programmes became more about numbers, where they 'met the target but missed the point'. Others believed that it had helped promote the apprenticeship brand and provided opportunities and experiences for some learners who may never have otherwise benefited.

IMPACT OF ADVANCED LEARNER LOANS

BACKGROUND

Advanced Learner Loans are government-funded loans that help adults in England who are 19 and over pay for tuition fees for level 3+ courses, such as A-levels, the Access to Higher Education Diploma, diplomas/certificates and vocational qualifications. Advanced Learner Loans cannot be used for degrees because there is already an established loan system for degree provision. For one year, Advanced Learner Loans were also used for level 3+ apprenticeships for those over 24.

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

The majority of interviewees felt that the apprenticeships that had not been impacted by the introduction of Advanced Learner Loans were career programmes. For instance, learners know that if they complete an electricians or engineering apprenticeship, the result is that they become an electrician or engineer. The programmes that seemed to suffer had less defined career routes, where it was not immediately obvious where the programme would take the learner, such as business administration, customer service, and health and care. By extension, this resulted in these programmes being seen as comparatively lower in value. Interviewees suggested that learners had been less inclined to contribute to the costs of a level 3 apprenticeship in these subjects, meaning that starts in these subjects decreased and then increased again when the loan requirement was withdrawn in 2014.

Three interviewees said the programmes least impacted were those that paid higher wages. Five interviewees said that FE colleges were less affected because they typically focused on delivering the career-type programmes.

WHETHER APPRENTICESHIP START NUMBERS SHOULD CURRENTLY BE HIGHER

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

All the interviewees felt that the number of apprenticeship starts should be higher than it currently is, although none of them could pinpoint which type they wanted to see more of. While interviewees were unsure about the sort of apprenticeships there should be more of, a significant number wanted greater focus on the 16-18 age group and on new entrants to the workforce instead of on existing staff.

Several interviewees said that the actual number of starts is immaterial as long as they are linked to business and sector need. So if growth is needed, the focus should be on sectoral/UK economic need.

Interviewees felt there was unmet demand, and two training providers said they were oversubscribed with learner applications for their vacancies. They felt that the level of demand meant there could be significantly more apprenticeships. However, interviewees from FE colleges felt they were operating at capacity, especially where facilities were needed, meaning they may not be able to accommodate more employers and learners. In fact, one interviewee from an FE college said there had been no spare capacity on their engineering programme for five years. This also links to the question of whether more apprenticeships are being provided to existing staff members, and whether this, combined with an overall reduction in starts, has resulted in fewer vacancies.

One interviewee mentioned that the numbers may reduce further still with increases to the minimum wage and National Insurance contributions. However, one person was keen to stress that there is a lack of awareness among employers that many apprentices are exempt from National Insurance.

A significant number of interviewees said that apprenticeships had been seen as the answer to all training needs and that it is important to acknowledge that other programmes may be more suitable for some of those needs.

THE IMPACT OF APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

The majority of interviewees stated that quality had improved since the introduction of standards, and that it was positive that lower quality apprenticeships had been taken out of circulation. However, eight interviewees commented that level 2 provision has decreased because the standards focus on level 3 and above. The removal of the level 2 business administration programme was used as an example several times. Interviewees, particularly those from the training providers (both colleges and independent training providers), stated that level 2 programmes play an important role as the first rung on the ladder for many people to progress from. So while a level 2 business administration qualification may seem less career focused, it provides a foundation for learners – especially young learners – to progress to other things.

Interviewees said that employers are more involved in the delivery of standards than they ever were with frameworks, and this shift is slowly beginning to change the culture for the better. However, this requirement for more employer involvement is discouraging some employers from becoming involved.

Three interviewees said that apprenticeship standards could be too rigid. While they agreed that apprenticeships should be based on occupations, they felt the approach did not work for every job role. For example, apprenticeship standards specify the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are needed to be competent in an occupation but there may be one or two of these that an apprentice would not get the opportunity to perform in a specific job role, and equally, there may be one or two that the apprentice would benefit from having for their job role that are not in the standard.

The rules that were introduced alongside the standards were also discussed by the interviewees. The requirement for 20% of normal working hours to be spent on off-the-job training was mentioned a number of times. Overall, interviewees felt it was important because it helped protect the apprentice and safeguard their learning. However, two interviewees wondered if there could be more flexibility to avoid a one-rule-fits-all situation. The example they gave was whether an existing staff member would need the same amount of off-the-job training as a new recruit.

Interviewees saw having the minimum 12-month duration rule for apprenticeships as important because, again, it helps protect apprentices and the apprenticeship brand, but they felt that the rule was a blunt instrument. However, when asked, they found it difficult to suggest an alternative that would achieve the same result. Five interviewees suggested more flexibility for existing staff was needed, but when questioned further, the majority wondered whether anything that took less than 12 months should be an apprenticeship or if a different type of training programme might be better suited.

The training provider interviewees mentioned that the recent changes making the requirement for functional skills more flexible was positive and was something that seemed to be welcomed by the sector as a whole.

THE IMPACT OF THE LEVY

BACKGROUND

Before the introduction of the levy, training providers could draw down 100% of the funding rate for recruiting apprentices aged 16-18. That rate reduced to 50% if they were over 19 and dropped further still if the apprentice was over 25. Many training providers did not pass this cost on to employers, even though there was an expectation that employers should contribute to apprenticeships for those over 19. Instead, training providers accepted they would receive less funding for apprentices who were 19 and over. This created an incentive for training providers to recruit 16-18 year olds, so they could offset the gain for that age group against their 'free' offering for 19+ apprenticeships. The introduction of the levy meant the funding was standardised across all age groups, meaning there was no longer more of an incentive to recruit 16-18-year-old apprentices.

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

Interviewees believed the introduction of the levy had led to a decrease in starts. The primary reason given was simply that change takes time for providers and

employers to adjust to. Some more nuanced thoughts included that the levy increased bureaucracy for small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and made it less advantageous to recruit 16-18 year olds. This links with the decrease in level 2 apprenticeships and with the number of younger apprentices, because many 16-18-year-old apprentices had previously typically begun their apprenticeship journey on level 2 programmes with SMEs.

Three interviewees felt strongly that SMEs had been more impacted by the introduction of the levy. However, one interviewee from an FE college said it had not experienced much of a drop in the number of SMEs engaging. When asked why they felt this was, they said it was the 'handholding' and full wraparound service they provided. For example, they would handle any bureaucracy or tasks for the employer wherever possible, without receiving any funding for it.

The majority of interviewees said that the levy seems to have shifted the focus to training existing staff, because many levy payers want to spend their levy pot. Three interviewees suggested that this was likely to change once existing staff had benefited (the pool is only so big) and the balance would then naturally become more even between existing staff and new recruits. However, the risk is that apprenticeship starts will reduce further if the number of new recruits does not increase.

The introduction of the levy did not impact FE colleges as much as it did independent training providers. The main reason interviewees gave was that FE colleges plan further in advance because they need various management sign offs and go through different planning stages and governance protocols. Interviewees from FE colleges also stated that FE colleges offered more wraparound services to employers and so they had provided more support and guidance during the changes.

Interviewees also said that the longer duration and more resource intensive programmes were less impacted because of the value that learners and employers placed on those programmes. These are the types of programmes that are mostly delivered by FE colleges.

BARRIERS THAT COULD BE REMOVED

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

Interviewees identified a range of barriers that could be removed; however, it should be noted that their suggestions were about generic barriers rather than being specific to certain apprenticeships. It should also be noted that these suggestions were made during the interviews, and they are not the recommendations of this research.

Interviewees suggested:

- Enabling one or two of the knowledge, skills or behaviours specified in standards to be modified, so employers can tailor the offer. This would also make incorporating emerging skills easier. In practice, this may mean one or two of the knowledge, skills and/or behaviours being left blank, allowing the employer, in consultation with the training provider, to fill in the gaps according to their own specification. There are obvious implications for the **end-point assessment** that would need to be considered. However, the bespoke knowledge, skills and behaviours could be excluded from the end-point assessment, allowing the employer to simply confirm the apprentice has met the standard when they reach the gateway, as is currently the case.

More challenging would be if an employer wished to remove any specified knowledge, skill or behaviour from the standard. Protocols and rules would be needed for this, and the appropriateness of the change would need to be carefully considered because the full occupation must be covered for the apprentice to progress after they have completed their programme.

- More flexibility with the off-the-job training rule. Two interviewees suggested that the 20% requirement could be reduced if the learner had prior knowledge and skills. Apprentices are currently required to have a pre-start assessment of their existing knowledge and skills. The result of this assessment could be used to reduce the 20% (along with funding). Strong justification would have to be provided by the training provider if proposing less than 20% off-the-job training for a new recruit, and it should be the exception rather than the norm.
- Reducing bureaucracy. Giving employers more control is positive because it allows them to be the decision-makers, but it has also increased their burden. A proposal made was for there to be an option for training providers, in consultation with the employer, to take full control of the [Digital Apprenticeship Service](#) for the employer. The Digital Apprenticeship Service, which is now called the Apprenticeship Service, is the online system used by employers to manage their apprenticeship programmes.
- Reviewing funding bands to make sure the cost of delivery is covered. The majority of interviewees believed that funding bands had not kept pace with inflation over recent years.

THE FUNDING OR POLICY LEVERS THAT COULD BE USED TO ENCOURAGE GROWTH IN THOSE APPRENTICESHIPS THAT HAVE THE MOST ECONOMIC VALUE

INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

Three interviewees said this was one of the most challenging questions to answer and was something they had grappled with many times over the years. Again, the responses were not specific to individual standards, but the suggestions made by the interviewees can be grouped into themes. Interviewee suggestions included:

Funding

- Funding incentives for priority sectors, such as an uplift on apprenticeships identified as requiring growth.
- Additional funding when new apprentices are recruited into the workforce. These apprenticeships need wraparound support but currently there is no extra funding for this.
- Incentivising the recruitment of 16-18 year olds. Although not sector specific, it will help increase the workforce and provide entry routes for young people.
- Ensuring funding bands keep track with inflation. Some interviewees said that certain funding bands had not been increased in several years, making some unviable and some even more dependent on having larger minimum cohorts.

- Considering completion grants for the employer. Introducing an incentive that is only paid at the end of the programme, reducing the risk of increasing starts but the number of completions staying the same.
- For resource intensive programmes that typically benefit from the apprentice being away from the workplace and at the training provider for the first 6 to 12 months of the programme, consideration should be given to funding subsidised wages.
- Enable levy funding to be used for the short course provision being developed by Skills England, to avoid the temptation of having to rebrand everything as an apprenticeship to access levy funding

Capacity building

- Providing financial support to enable providers to begin new programmes in priority sectors. Some interviewees said that for some apprenticeships a minimum cohort size is required for it to be financially viable. This makes it difficult to begin new programmes that may need a period of growth to reach the required cohort size.
- Financial support being made available to providers to enhance facilities and resources for priority sectors. Three interviewees mentioned that FE colleges seem to do well at delivering resource intensive programmes and a large reason for this is that the set-up costs are prohibitive to new entrants to the market.

Promoting and supporting

- Additional marketing of apprenticeships in general and more hands-on support for employers from government bodies.

Reduce bureaucracy

- Review the paperwork that employers, especially SMEs, are required to complete, because it can seem overly complex and off-putting.
- In response to [The Richard Review](#), the new system has been designed to give employers control of their apprenticeship spending. However not all employers, particularly SMEs, want this; therefore giving training providers the ability to fully control the online Apprenticeship Service for employers should be explored.

The provision

- Increase the recognition of prior learning and experience.
- Avoid making more policy changes to give current systems and processes time to stabilise. Where changes are needed, announce them in good time to enable appropriate planning by all stakeholders. Evolution should take precedence over revolution.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 20 years, apprenticeships have undergone significant reform, and numerous policy and funding changes have impacted the number of apprenticeship starts. The data suggest that policy changes have had much more of an impact on apprenticeship start numbers than employment trends, which is unfortunate for an employment-based programme.

Interviewees were clear that the quality of apprenticeships was suffering until apprenticeship standards replaced frameworks. The historical spikes in the number of apprenticeship starts were largely due to the introduction of rules that drove specific approaches to training and which did not necessarily result in improved skills or an increase in productivity in the workplace.

Apprenticeship frameworks had tended to be built around NVQs, as had the Train to Gain programme. The culture that developed in the Train to Gain programme carried over into apprenticeships after Train to Gain ended, with many apprenticeships becoming tick-box exercises, more focused on accrediting existing skills than on skills development. It is likely not a coincidence that the apprenticeships with the greatest fluctuations in number of starts were those delivered over a short timeframe and requiring minimal resources. While it is tempting to conclude that these were the lowest quality apprenticeships it is not possible to state definitively that shorter programmes that are less career focused do not play an important role by providing entry points into the workforce for many young people and for those returning to work.

Independent training providers seemed largely responsible for the spike in the number of shorter duration and less resource intensive apprenticeships. Some interviewees described this as independent training providers being nimble and able to capitalise on opportunities as and when they arose, but they questioned the quality of those programmes and the motivations of some providers. Training providers were supported by government bodies to create growth and to help meet targets. So training providers were being actively encouraged and facilitated by government bodies to increase the number of apprenticeship starts regardless of what the programme was or its features, including its duration.

It must also be stressed that all the interviewees stated that there were excellent independent training providers who worked in the interest of learners and employers. They felt it was unfortunate that some providers had gamed the system, which had led to the reputation of all independent training providers being tarnished. It should also be pointed out that, only a small number of all training providers had not been operating within the rules.

The overall management of the apprenticeship programme has changed significantly since 2006, including the historical cultures that had persisted. The introduction of standards, along with fairly stringent rules, has largely eradicated the bad practice – although the levy is evidently still the cause of some unwanted behaviour in the system. The apprenticeship programme, brand and ethos have changed for the better, but there are still areas that could be improved, which should support the needs of the economy and therefore productivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has proven the original hypothesis that changes in employment patterns have had little impact on apprenticeship numbers; instead, changes in government policy have driven fluctuations in the number of apprenticeship starts.

Apprenticeship programmes are, at their heart, employment-based training and development programmes, so it is counterproductive for them not to support employment needs. The following recommendations are based on the analysis of the available data and the responses of the interviewees presented in this report.

- Skills England and/or DfE should publish data that enables apprenticeship start data to be compared with corresponding employment data on a like-for-like basis over time. This is an important measure for determining if apprenticeships are supporting employment patterns, which is crucial for an employment-based training and development programme.
- Apprenticeship starts should be differentiated by employment status. A clear distinction should be made between apprenticeship starts that involve the creation of new job roles and apprenticeships for existing staff. This differentiation will help address three interlinked issues identified in this research:
 - Declining apprenticeship starts for 16-18 year olds. Evidence suggests there is unmet demand from this group, but financial incentives that would encourage employers to recruit and train younger learners compared to existing staff are lacking. Greater financial support, including removing all or some associated employer costs for recruiting 16-18 year olds, is needed to reverse this trend so more young people can begin their careers through an apprenticeship.
 - Apprenticeships being used for broader training needs. In recent years, many in-work training and professional development needs have been met through the apprenticeship system, primarily driven by the availability of levy funding for large employers. This has led to apprenticeships being used as a catch-all solution, often for upskilling existing staff. To address this, the short course/modular provision that is being developed by Skills England should be accelerated. Such provision would better serve the upskilling needs of the workforce, would protect the apprenticeship brand and reduce the need for short duration apprenticeships.
 - Lack of funding incentives for apprenticeships used to recruit new employees. Currently, there is no difference in funding for apprenticeships used to upskill existing staff and apprenticeships used to recruit new employees. This limits the potential for apprenticeships to drive workforce growth, job creation and productivity. Introducing enhanced funding for apprenticeships for new employees would better align the system with the labour market and with economic growth objectives and would better serve 16-18 year olds trying to begin their careers.

These issues were raised independently during the research, but they are interconnected. Collectively, they point to an apprenticeship system that is trying to address too many issues: catering to in-work development while also providing an entry to the workforce through a development programme.

The introduction of a separate short course or modular training offer would give employers a more suitable route for upskilling existing staff, particularly those aged 25 and over. It would help refocus apprenticeships as a structured route for younger new entrants to the labour market. Skills England should therefore expedite the development of the short course/modular provision in the newly named Growth and Skills Levy offering. This could enable:

- employers to have a dedicated and fit-for-purpose upskilling and skills development tool that does not dilute the purpose of apprenticeships
 - the apprenticeship brand to be re-established as a job creation tool
 - policy and funding mechanisms to be better aligned with economic and social priorities, such as reducing youth unemployment and improving workforce participation
 - apprenticeships to be more focused on covering the entirety or the majority of an occupation, while other training provision could offer modular training covering part of the occupation – apprenticeships and other training provision should be based on the same occupational standards
 - an end of the need to reduce the duration of apprenticeships, because another form or more suitable delivery will be available
 - apprenticeships to be open to all ages and to existing staff, but the need will not be so great if other provision that is more suitable for older and existing employees is available and if new role creation and 16-18 provision is incentivised
- Do not reinstate target numbers. Target numbers have a history of influencing behaviours in ways that create poor practice. If the programme delivers what employers and learners truly need and want, targets become irrelevant because market forces will dictate the numbers. An important addendum to this is that it is essential to fully understand if the programme is genuinely delivering what employers, learners and the economy need.
 - Consider providing a support service for SMEs to help with the administration and to understand their issues. Training providers could receive funding in addition to the funding band because SMEs are likely to need a more comprehensive wraparound service than larger levy payers. The possibility of training providers being able to handle apprenticeship administration for SMEs on the online management system, now called the Apprenticeship Service, should be considered.
 - Consider allowing flexibility in what knowledge, skills and behaviours are required for an apprenticeship standard. Having a small number that can be flexible would enable nuances between differing employers operating within the same occupation to be accounted for and could provide the opportunity for some standards to merge.

- Consider piloting a programme for increasing the number of longer duration and more resource intensive apprenticeships. Although these apprenticeships have not been significantly impacted by changes in policy and funding, they have remained static, and training providers believe there is unmet demand. The longer duration and more resource intensive apprenticeships are likely to be career-focused apprenticeships that contribute most to the economy. The set-up and running costs for this type of programme are higher, so it is not surprising that fewer of these programmes have been developed and that FE colleges have unmet demand. Investment should be made to explore potential pilot models with FE colleges and independent training providers to help enhance capacity for this type of programme.

APPENDIX I: GLOSSARY

Term	Description
12-month minimum duration	Until 2012 apprenticeships did not have a minimum duration. This led to the introduction of some apprenticeships that lasted three months (or even less). The 12-month minimum duration was introduced to improve the quality of apprenticeships being offered.
25+ restrictions	Previously, apprenticeships were only available to 16-24-year-old learners. This restriction was removed and apprenticeships are now open to all ages.
Advanced Learner Loans	A loan available to individuals for level 3 or above training of a vocational nature. Initially the loans could be used for apprenticeships by those aged 24 or above.
Apprenticeship frameworks	The old type of apprenticeships that were replaced by apprenticeship standards. Frameworks were made up of a suite of qualifications.
Apprenticeship levy	Used to fund all apprenticeships in the UK. Employers pay a 0.5% levy on wage bills over £3m.
Apprenticeship standards	Apprenticeship standards replaced apprenticeship frameworks. They describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to be competent in an occupation.
Digital Apprenticeship Service now known as the Apprenticeship Service	The online system employers use to find, fund and manage their apprenticeship programmes.
End-point assessment	The final test at the end of the apprenticeship. It checks whether the apprentice has the knowledge, skills and behaviours to perform the job competently.
Learning and Skills Council	Former non-departmental public body responsible for skills funding in England and implementing skills policy across England (regionally based).
Leitch Review	The Leitch Review of Skills (2006) examined the country's long-term skills needs and recommended major reforms to improve adult skills training, including apprenticeships.
National Apprenticeship Service	Launched by the Labour government in 2008 to have end-to-end responsibility for apprenticeships and to drive growth.
Programme-led apprenticeships	Programme-led apprenticeships were apprenticeships delivered without the involvement of an employer.
Richard Review	The Richard Review (2012) recommended significant reforms to apprenticeships that made them more employer-driven, gave control of funding to employers and incorporated independent end-point assessments.
Skills Funding Agency	Replaced the Learning and Skills Council. Was responsible for skills funding across England, initially 19+ provision and apprenticeships.
Specification of Apprenticeship Standards	The Specification of Apprenticeship Standards set the minimum requirements for all apprenticeships in England.
Train to Gain	A government-funded programme launched in response to the Leitch Review. It primarily aimed to increase the qualification level of the workforce to a level 2 or 3 or apprenticeship.

APPENDIX 2: THE TOP 10 APPRENTICESHIP FRAMEWORKS AND TOP 12 APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS

Top 10 apprenticeship frameworks by starts from 2005/06 to 2022/23	Sum of starts
Health and Social Care Level 2	342,700
Business Administration Level 2	306,050
Customer Service Level 2	287,490
Hospitality and Catering Level 2	240,220
Health and Social Care Level 3	228,430
Construction Skills Level 2	186,830
Management Level 2	172,050
Retail Level 2	164,780
Children's Care, Learning and Development Level 2	136,180
Hairdressing Level 2	136,120

Top 12 apprenticeship standards by starts from 2005/06 to 2022/23*	Sum of starts
Team Leader or Supervisor (ST0384) Level 3	104,740
Lead Adult Care Worker (ST0006) Level 3	70,560
Business Administrator (ST0070) Level 3	67,730
Adult Care Worker (ST0005) Level 2	65,990
Operations or Departmental Manager (ST0385) Level 5	59,250
Early Years Educator (ST0135) Level 3	47,680
Accountancy or Taxation Professional (ST0001) Level 7	44,650
Customer Service Practitioner (ST0072) Level 2	37,450
Installation and Maintenance Electrician (ST0152) Level 3	37,190
Hairdressing Professional (ST0213) Level 2	34,300
Engineering Technician (ST0457) Level 3	28,890
Senior Leader (ST0480) Level 7	28,100

* Apprenticeship standards gradually replaced the older frameworks, which started to be phased out from 2017/18.

APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLE OF A GROUPING – ACCOUNTANCY

Generic name	Apprenticeship name
Accountancy	Professional Accounting Taxation Technician Level Higher (standard)
Accountancy	Professional Accounting Taxation Technician Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Professional Accounting Taxation Technician Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Professional Accounting or Taxation Technician ST0003 Level 4 (standard)
Accountancy	Professional Accounting/Taxation Technician Level Higher (standard)
Accountancy	Professional Accounting/Taxation Technician Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Professional Accounting/Taxation Technician Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Payroll Level Higher (framework)
Accountancy	Payroll Level 3 (framework)
Accountancy	Payroll Level 3 and higher (framework)
Accountancy	Payroll Level 2 (framework)
Accountancy	Payroll Assistant Manager ST0869 Level 5 (standard)
Accountancy	Payroll Administrator ST0073 Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Payroll Administrator Level Higher (standard)
Accountancy	Payroll Administrator Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Payroll Administrator Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Credit Controller/Collector Level Higher (standard)
Accountancy	Credit Controller/Collector Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Credit Controller/Collector Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Credit Controller and Collector ST0176 Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Credit Controller/Collector Level Higher (standard)
Accountancy	Credit Controller/Collector Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Credit Controller/Collector Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Assistant Accountant ST0002 Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Assistant Accountant Level Higher (standard)
Accountancy	Assistant Accountant Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Assistant Accountant Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Accounts or Finance Assistant ST0608 Level 2 (standard)
Accountancy	Accountancy or Taxation Professional ST0001 Level 7 (standard)
Accountancy	Accountancy Level Higher (framework)
Accountancy	Accountancy Level 4 (framework)
Accountancy	Accountancy Level 3 (framework)
Accountancy	Accountancy Level 3 and Higher (framework)
Accountancy	Accountancy Level 2 (framework)
Accountancy	Accountancy/Taxation Professional Level Higher (standard)
Accountancy	Accountancy/Taxation Professional Level 3 (standard)
Accountancy	Accountancy/Taxation Professional Level 2 (standard)

APPENDIX 4: DATA SOURCES

Apprenticeship starts

DfE (2017) [Apprenticeships: Starts by framework, level and age \[2002 to 2016/17\]](#).

GOV.UK (accessed 2025) [Explore education statistics: Apprenticeship start data for 2017/18 to 2022/23](#).

Data for 2016/17 appeared incorrect and so was obtained from:

DfE (2019) [Apprenticeship data pack – user guide 2014/15 to 2018/19 \(reported to date – August 2018 to April 2019\)](#).

Historical age and level of apprenticeship starts for 2006 to 2022/23

GOV.UK (updated July 2025) [Data set from apprenticeships: Historical series – starts, participation by age, level, SSA](#).

Apprenticeship vacancies

GOV.UK (updated November 2025) [Explore education statistics: Academic year 2024/25 – apprenticeships](#). Located in underlying tables.

Length of employment before starting the apprenticeship

GOV.UK (updated November 2024) [Explore education statistics: Data set from apprenticeships – duration, starts by level, age, length of employment](#).

Training provider type

GOV.UK (updated November 2025) [Explore education statistics: Academic year 2024/25 – apprenticeships](#). Located in Underlying data – apprenticeship starts, and Underlying data – apprenticeship achievements.

Employment data

Lightcast (accessed 2025) [It starts with Lightcast](#).

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. The end of Train to Gain appeared to cause a spike in certain apprenticeship numbers. Do you believe that the end of Train to Gain was the cause and if so, why did it apply to only certain apprenticeships (typically short duration, low resource)?
2. To what extent did the restructuring of governmental bodies contribute to the large growth in 2010/11 and if so, how? Or did this have no real bearing on the growth in numbers?
3. Why do you believe the larger spikes in apprenticeship numbers were for those that are delivered over a shorter time frame, require less resource and are delivered by private training providers?
 - a. Is there anything particularly wrong with this and if so, why?
 - b. When policy changes have caused the number of these types of apprenticeships to reduce, is that concerning?
4. Only some apprenticeships (at level 3) seemed to have been impacted by the introduction of Advanced Learner Loans and these tended to be shorter duration, required less resource and were delivered by independent training providers.
 - a. Does this suggest less value is placed on these types of apprenticeships by employers and learners or is there another reason that led to this?
 - b. Those apprenticeships that were not significantly impacted by the introduction of Advanced Learner Loans appear to be delivered by FE colleges in the main, were of longer duration and required more resource. Does this suggest FE colleges are delivering programmes of greater value to employers and learners or is there something else at play?
5. Should apprenticeship start numbers currently be higher than they are? If so, should they be higher in any particular sort of apprenticeship?
6. Is the reduction in starts since 2017 as a result of the levy being introduced, standards being replaced by frameworks, a combination of both or some other reason?
 - a. Is there now unmet demand due to standards/the levy being implemented?
7. It appears that FE colleges delivering longer duration and more resource intensive apprenticeships were not impacted to a great extent by the introduction of standards and the levy. Does this suggest that the levy and standards have increased the quality of apprenticeships or are there other reasons for this?
8. What barriers could be removed to encourage growth in only those apprenticeships that have the most economic value?
 - a. What funding or policy levers could be used to encourage growth in those apprenticeships that have the most economic value?

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