

Written evidence submitted by GTA England Ltd

GTA England research into the impact of Covid-19 on the Apprenticeship programme – November 2020

Introduction

We are a national high-quality network of not-for-profit training organisations. Founded, led and governed by employers we deliver predominantly STEM related and technical training “for industry by industry”. The majority of members being created by the Industrial Training Act in which also saw the creation of the training levy for the first time.

The following table describes our characteristics, reach and quality:

We have trained over 300,000 apprentices since the inception of GTAs in the 1960s	One third of the country’s STEM apprenticeships starts on ‘Standards’ are with our members
We have increased the number of starts by 52% to 9,000 in 2019 from 6,000 in 2014	81% of our apprentices are between the ages of 16 and 24 years of age
Through our 30 members we have a reach of over 24,500 employers who engage us to train their workforce and apprentices, the majority of which are SMEs	We work hard to ensure that our apprentices succeed and our success rate of 79% is 12% above the national average
The GTA network has over 22,000 Apprentices currently employed and undertaking training, the vast majority are at level 3 and above	GTA staff are well qualified with relevant industrial experience and quality delivery is our top priority
Levy employers account for 51% of apprentice recruitment and non-levy employers 49%	96% of GTAs inspected by Ofsted are rated good or better, 18% above the national average

Impact of Covid19 on performance in the Apprenticeship programme

We conducted several surveys over summer in order to monitor the situation with members and their employers. The last survey concluded mid-October and in summary, occupancy with existing Apprentices, albeit challenging with moving to on-line delivery, is being impacted more. Furthermore, the key message around recruitment, although better than feared, continues to be an area for concern. The measures and timescales brought in response, welcome though they are, are not necessarily strong enough to encourage employers focussed on survival, to consider recruitment.

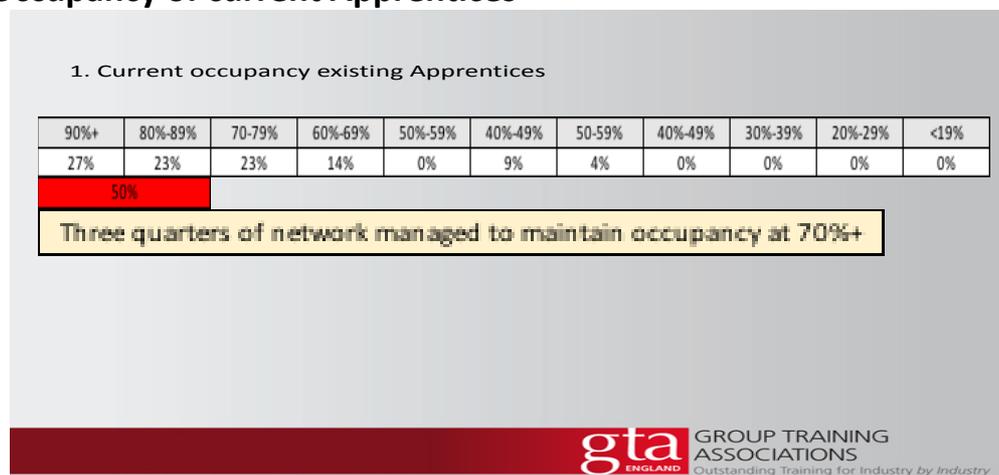
This report aims to address four key themes of the impact of covid-19 and suggests solutions in the following key areas:

- **Impact on occupancy of existing Apprentices** – a declining trend and a need to fund “additional catch up training”
- **The switch to on-line learning** – a great start but requires concerted effort and support to develop appropriate resources
- **Impact on recruitment and effectiveness of government measures** – not as bad as feared but a worrying number of reduced starts compared to last year. Cash incentives need to be a higher value and available beyond summer 2021.

- **Impact on effectiveness of delivery including EPA flexibilities** – large volumes for EPA anticipated next year swelled by those scheduled but not ready in 2020; flexible assessment methods including remote technologies, is required.

Some key messages from our survey include:

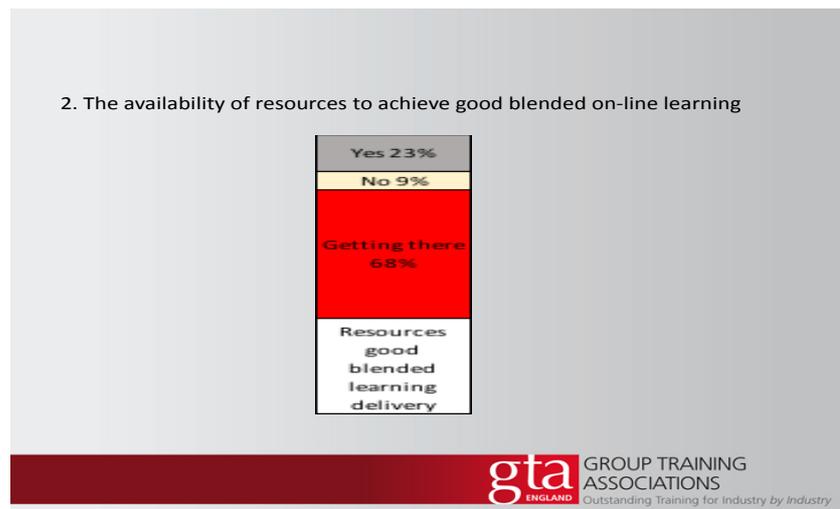
1. Occupancy of current Apprentices



- There is evidence of attrition as although, 27% of members have occupancy at 90%+ this compares to 55% in the last report. We have 50% of members with occupancy at 80%+
- Similarly, three quarters of members have occupancy at 70%+ in October which compares much less favourably to 98% in summer.
- Members increasingly are recording that redundancies are increasing and that:
 - It is difficult to track apprentices on furlough
 - volumes are not as high as expected and the end of the furlough support impact is not yet clear. Clearly the local Tier 3 lockdown situation is also likely to impact
 - One reporting that 30 apprentices who are at risk of redundancy with a further 20 that have already been made redundant. Some of those have taken the posts of potential new apprentices. Over 20 of our companies have put their recruitment of apprentices on hold.

2. On-line learning delivery

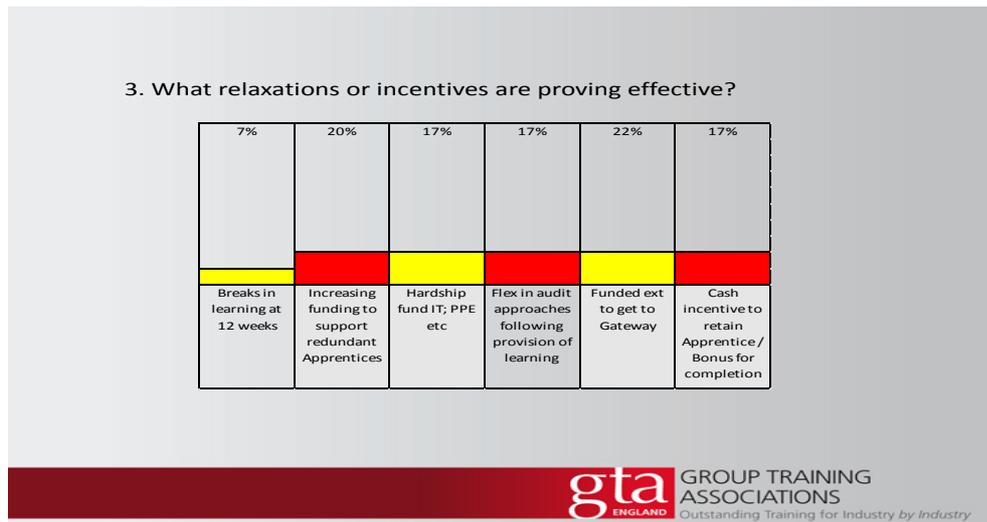
- When asked about the re-opening of centres EPA and the level of resources available to achieve good blended learning we found that although achieving a very credible start to the delivery of on-line learning has been made, it is not a panacea.
- There is a need to continue and create the right high-quality resources that engage and enable the progress of all our Apprentices. However, many are reinforcing that practical training is of paramount importance to employers which is difficult to offer a blended learning approach.



- c. Many are finding:
- All staff have the access to facilitate blended learning; however, it is the learners that sometimes do not have access to these. There is little support or funding out there for these apprentices as “they earn a wage”
 - We are finding more and more are self-isolating now than ever before. We are continuing to use zoom, teams etc. This is now proving more and more difficult as learners need "practical" training
 - We need to be able to do a complete switch of non-practical training online for future lockdown possibilities

3. What relaxations or incentives are proving useful for existing Apprentices?

- Quite well distributed as compared to the last surveys however, Funded extensions to get to Gateway (pre-EPA) and Increasing the Funding to support redundant Apprentices remain the most sought measures.
- The request for Hardship funds for IT kit and deep cleaning requirements remains popular as in the last surveys
- Interestingly, breaks in learning are being less requested as either redundancies, non-completions or achievements increase. Increasingly worrying is the effect of the cessation of furlough.
- A new category of cash incentives to retain Apprentices is seen as a very useful suggestion aimed at increasing completions



- e. A common element of feedback references that a range of measures would have to be available to be effective including the flexibility for apprentices to complete their training plans after redundancy which must have Real Work Environment; considerations to allow industrial training companies (GTAs) to use their industry standard facilities and experienced instructor/teachers to deliver the remainder such RWE until a new employer is found. Such measures need to be planned and mobilised in advance of furloughs cessation.
- f. Other include provision of a Training allowance, part time work, apprentice pooling for SME networks, all need to be on the table.

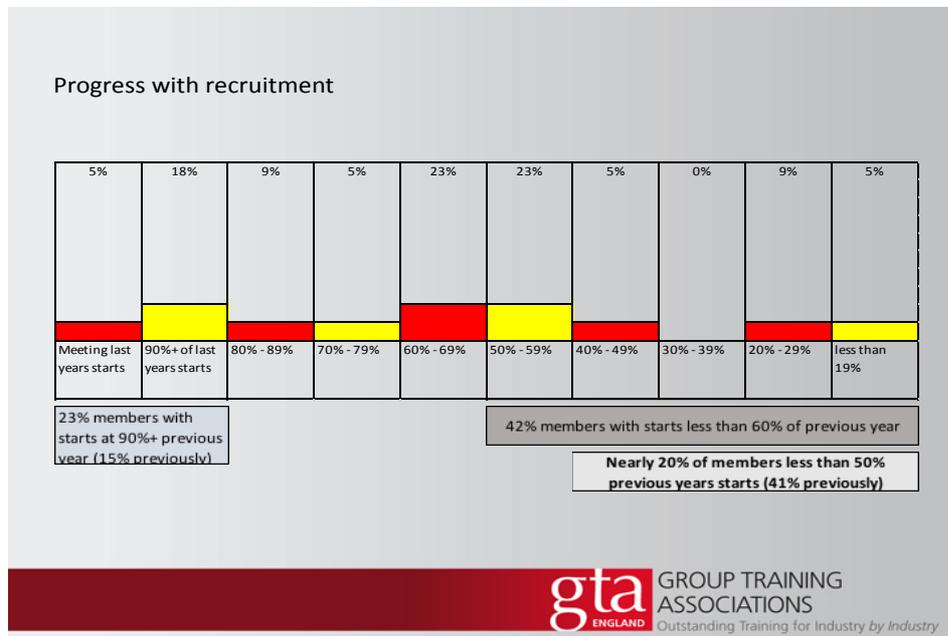
4. Impact on recruitment

- a. Better than feared, performance shows the dedication and hard work of staff operating different processes including on-line on boarding and assessment, to maximise recruitment
- b. Feedback ranged from the below comments



- c. Although still a deficit against past performance, the following table shows how performance has improved over the estimates in summer with:

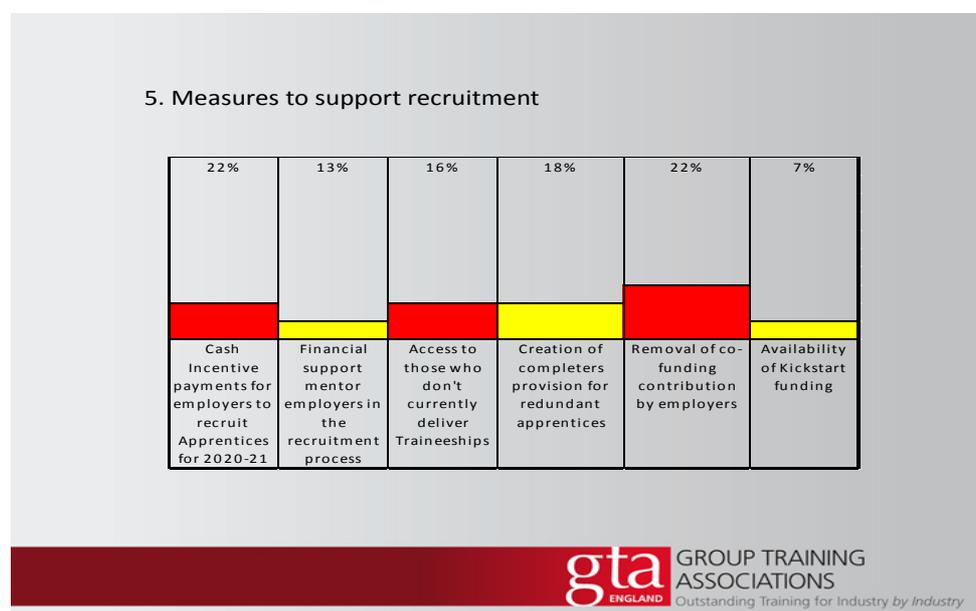
- 23% of members showing starts at 90%+ from the previous year (as compared to estimates of 15%)
- Still worryingly, 42% of members are showing starts at less than 60% the previous year's number
- Also, although an improvement from forecasts, still some 20% of members are showing starts at 50% or less on the previous year.



- d. **The “so what” impact on the level of starts** can be seen in the following table showing there is still no room for complacency:
- In 2019-20 members responding to the survey generated over 7,200 starts, predominantly, long duration, high quality STEM related occupations.
 - The equivalent figure to-date is 5,449 which is a 24% reduction. Forecasts over summer were as low as a 46% reduction but clearly current environment in which employers and GTAs are operating remains challenging.
 - Although not a like-for-like comparison, the last official national starts figures for June and July shows a national deficit of 35% as compared to our networks 24% figure – further evidence of the resilience of the GTA model and members.
- e. In the light of this it is no surprise that some 86% of respondents plan further intake dates however, market conditions indicate this will stretch until after January 2021 when the cash incentives are planned to cease.



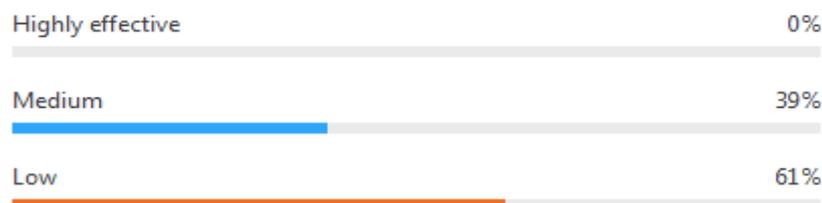
5. What measures are or would be effective to support recruitment?



- a. Although all measures, particularly the cash incentives, are welcomed, as one member reported, "however the administration of some of these options may be complex and employers are so focused on survival very few can afford the time or are not inclined to do so."
- b. Further contributions included:
- As contained in the table with member comments, the procurement of Traineeships, particularly for 16-18-year olds, for those new to its delivery was seen as an essential contribution to response to Covid-19, but increasingly this is seen as a missed opportunity as the process is yet to be issued.
 - Cash incentives are not seen as high enough to convert employer interest to recruit and are now confusing due to the number and variation.
 - Cash incentives need to be available beyond January 2021 as the effects of Covid-19 will still be being felt long after
 - Existing schemes with incentives to entice recruiting apprentices whilst existing staff are still furloughed, are ineffective and little can be achieved through packages of funding to help employers trying to survive.

- c. A poll conducted at the GTA England annual conference on the effectiveness of the cash incentives for Apprentice recruitment showed the following:

2. To what extent are the government measures effective in stimulating recruitment



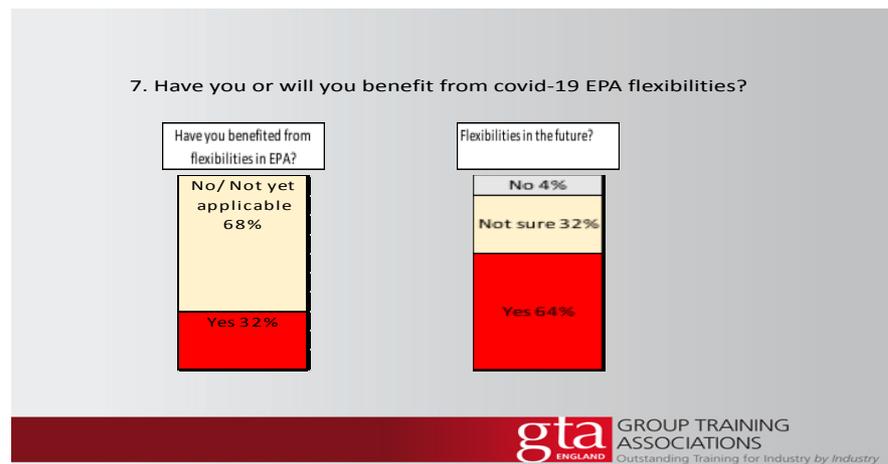
Contributions included:

- I do not believe that £1000 will encourage an employer to take on an apprentice.
- The incentives need to be in the order of £4.5k to £5k. This is based on making a 50% contribution to the minimum Apprentice wage of £4.55 per hour (£8,754 pa).
- The rationale being that for the first 6 months in STEM Apprentices are in-centre and not productive.
- It's also worth bearing in mind that many Apprentices will be on salaries much higher than the minimum requirement making the incentive less attractive.

6. How have you changed delivery in response to Covid-19?

- All members have altered delivery mechanisms in the light of government guidance, working hard to keep up to pace with requirements as they change in response to the changing R rate and subsequent variations of local and regional lockdown arrangements.
- The most used innovation is the use of shifts and the creation of bubbles to maximise the utilisation of centres whilst still achieving social distancing and guidance on the provision of face coverings
- As previously reported, largely on-line learning is used to deliver technical provision which also creates room for much needed practical delivery
- Members have been keen to record impact:
 - Shifts have been in place to ensure access to in centre training, however, can only be done in smaller volumes and has impact on progress
 - Exploring the long-term recovery programmes for learners missing out on essential workshop skills programmes. This may be at odds with EPA Gateway timescales
 - Moved new cohorts to November to allow existing population to catch up as we have implemented a rota attendance timetable with learner and staff bubbles to ensure continuity and a limited level of Covid security
 - We use on-line where possible and where it works, but increasingly find that engineering practical and FE need face-to-face delivery too.

7. Covid EPA flexibilities



- a. The majority of responses at 68% largely represent that EPA is not yet applicable with the majority being timed for 2021. However, in the majority of cases where EPA flexibilities have been used, they have been very well received.
- b. Certainly, flexibilities are requested to be the "new normal" with 64% recognising their value in remote delivery and reduced costs. Those responding as "unsure" are largely due to not having learners at the point of EPA being applicable.
- c. Members commented:
 - Our Apprentices not yet scheduled for EPA
 - We have continued to see all Business, Management and Customer Service Apprentices complete with distinctions by switching to online assessment of presentation of projects, interviews etc
 - The remote assessment has worked well. Spanish flu in 1918 was around for 2 years so we should plan for a long period of disruption.
 - Online vivas went well and should become the norm to reduce EPA cost
 - No EPA undertaken as yet but will benefit going forward from remote observation on MOET by C&G
- d. Equally some concern was expressed as follows:
 - The whole EPA system is clunky and disparate and needs to be much more flexible and responsive in its approach.
 - We need to see how effective the flexibility is by seeking the feedback from those currently going through EPA

8. Concluding remark

Taken in isolation, dealing with the pandemic in professional, family and social settings has been one of the biggest challenges we have experienced in generations. The impact of the virus and society's responses will be with us for some years to come.

However, challenging though it remains, the impact and response to the pandemic cannot be seen in isolation, all-encompassing though that appears most of the time. There are also other characteristics at play concurrently: Brexit and its impact on skills and education; potential Apprenticeship funding band changes particularly to mention but a couple.

In conclusion, one member seemed to catch the feeling just right:

- It remains a challenging landscape. On the one hand we are coping and still delivering a high quality service, thanks to the diligence and professionalism of our staff. On the other hand, costs have increased significantly due to reduced numbers; of both apprentices and commercial delegates; increased cleaning and equipment costs (none of which is funded like our colleagues in colleges); and now a huge carry over of staff holiday entitlement. The thought that apprenticeship funding could be reduced (following review) at all is a serious cause for concern.

Mark Maudsley
CEO GTA England
20th November 2020

December 2020