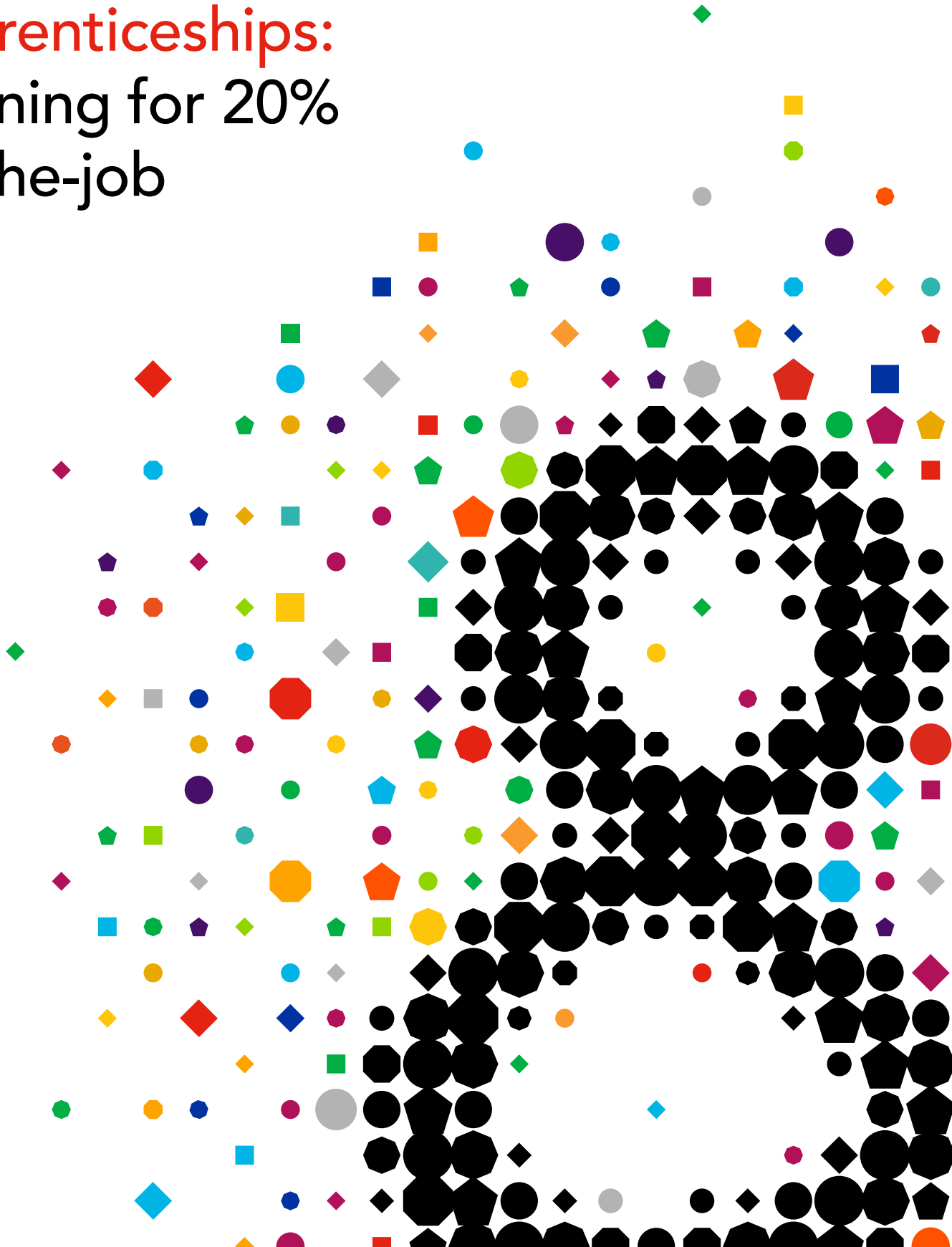


# Apprenticeships: Planning for 20% off-the-job



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# Introduction

Since the introduction of apprenticeship standards in May 2017, it's been a requirement that every apprentice spends at least 20% of their time on off-the-job training. City & Guilds and ILM recognise that there's some concern in the marketplace around these requirements. The rules state that 20% of an apprentice's time should be used for off-the-job training – applying to all apprenticeships, new and old alike. The fact that every apprentice, whether a new or existing employee, is required – and closely monitored by law – to spend 20% of their time not doing their job is seen as one of the key challenges in the successful delivery of apprenticeships.

One concern employers have is that for organisations that are already stretched, taking on an individual who will effectively be out of action for one day a week is costly, particularly for smaller businesses. However, when compared against employee skills deficits and the difficulties of recruiting in sectors where there are skills shortages, 20% off-the-job becomes less of a challenge and more a necessity to ensure knowledge and competence for future productivity. But employers fear they will inadvertently fail to meet the strict 20% off-the-job rules as guidance is open to interpretation. So, without clarity on what is required, the process is ripe for slip-ups.

But the requirement doesn't have to be a daunting prospect – and doesn't even mean the apprentice has to be away from their desk 20% of the time.

This guide aims to help employers understand what the requirement really means, the range of different ways it can be implemented, and how it can be used to make apprenticeships even better.



“If it works, it will mean a richer experience for everyone.”

Damon Saddler,  
Managing Director, Alert Training UK

## What is off-the-job training?

Apprenticeship standards must last a minimum of 12 months and involve at least 20% off-the-job training. “The challenge will be understanding what qualifies as off-the-job and making sure that activity is totally different from what the individual does in their normal job role,” says Damon Saddler, Managing Director at Alert Training UK. “This is especially important when off-the-job happens within the workplace.” Off-the-job training is defined as learning which is undertaken outside of the normal day-to-day working environment and leads towards the achievement of an apprenticeship – it simply means learning away from the apprentice’s normal day-to-day activities.



The flexibility implied by the term is deliberate; the Department for Education (DfE) rightly recognise that this is new territory for everyone and that it will mean different things for apprentices in every industry. That’s not to say they will be light-handed in monitoring the application of the regulation. More that, as an industry, we have a duty to interpret the guidance so that it rings true with the concept that an apprenticeship is fundamentally about training to gain new skills and knowledge, not only developing existing skills. As such, there is a level of learning that must take place to enable this to happen – it’s not just business as usual.

### Off-the-job training can include:

- the teaching of theory (for example: lectures, role playing, simulation exercises, or manufacturer training)
- workshops
- shadowing
- mentoring
- industry visits.

It can also cover learning support and part of the time spent writing assessments or doing assignments.

### Off-the-job training does not include:

- English and Maths (up to Level 2), which is funded separately
- progress reviews or on-programme assessment needed for an apprenticeship framework or standard
- training that takes place outside the apprentice’s paid working hours.

This type of training will not be unfamiliar to any organisation that has ever operated apprenticeships or formal training schemes. In reality, much of it will likely already be occurring in the typical apprenticeship experience. For example, mentoring is a key off-the-job component of leadership and management apprenticeships, teaching them core leadership skills such as communication and teamwork in a typical working environment.

Off-the-job can include training that is delivered at the apprentice’s normal place of work but must not be delivered as part of their normal working duties. However, it is possible to be undergoing training activities outside of normal working duties while physically at your normal workstation – for example, being taught how to operate a new machine or undertaking e-learning at your desk. To decide whether a training activity constitutes “off-the-job” training, it may be helpful to consider it in comparison to activities undertaken by other staff that are fully occupationally competent.



## The training provider view

**Damon Saddler, Managing Director, Alert Training UK**  
An independent training provider whose awarding bodies include City & Guilds and ILM and which runs Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeships

‘Off-the-job’ could include observing and tutoring from a colleague in a skill/ discipline that isn’t part of their day job. But this has to be far more than “come over and take a look”. It has to explore the principles behind it as well so knowledge development can take place. This means the person they are with being able to share knowledge and help them develop skills.

There could also be an academic element to it: a tutor could assign knowledge development work linked to an activity in the workplace or the individual could be given time out for some project work.

Whatever the activity, the apprentice will need to provide a diary/contact type log so they can evidence what they are doing is separate from their job activities and this could be problematic if it happens in the same environment. It’s very easy to say: “we’re going to send you off to do a one-day course” and evidence that, but it’s much harder when it happens in the workplace. For example, a receptionist could be taken to another department to be shown how a system links into others and that involves knowledge development. But how they log and diarise that will be where the skills come in.

As a training provider, we produce template contact logs and diary sheets to help apprentices and employers. As well as logging what was done, the individual needs to state what they gained from the activity. It needs to be a reflective account of what they’ve done. It might not filter directly into a specific unit but may have lots of added value and so feed into the standard.

There needs to be a clear understanding at the beginning of the programme of the job the apprentice is taking on and the job description must include the groups of activities that form part of the role. Then the employer needs to work out what will make up the 20% off-the-job. If it is going to be spent with an experienced member of staff for, say, one day a week, that person must build a programme of what is going to be done on those days. It must be knowledge development, not knowledge testing.

Part of our role is getting the employer on board and making sure they’ve got the apprentice for the right reason. Some employers will want a return from the apprentice quickly so it is important for the employer to create tasks that benefit the company now as well as in the long-term. If they feel they are losing a person for a day a week and will need to employ someone else for that day, it won’t work for the employer.

So we have to help them design programmes that fit the off-the-job profile but are of benefit to the organisation as well. As the trainer, we need to get a good understanding of what an employer wants from an apprentice and a good understanding of what they do as a business so we can guide them. And we have to ensure the employer is driving some of the off-the-job activity so they don’t feel they are losing a person.

If it works, it will mean a richer experience for everyone, but employers do need to invest the necessary time at the beginning.

“As the trainer, we need to get a good understanding of what an employer wants from an apprentice and a good understanding of what they do as a business so we can guide them.”



## When should you undertake off-the-job training?

To make sure the off-the-job training component of the apprenticeship doesn't pose a problem, we recommend that training providers agree in advance what the 20% will consist of. This will look different for every employer; small or large, retail or construction, manufacturing or financial, each will have a preferred way to structure an apprentice's time in a way that works for them. Writing a training programme into their contract for delivery makes it clear from the get-go how the off-the-job learning element of an apprenticeship will be organised, so that it doesn't become a point of contention down the line.

This 20% off-the-job training requirement is measured over the course of an apprenticeship (as opposed to over an academic year). The off-the-job training is an essential part of an apprenticeship and therefore must take place during employed time. If training must, by exception, take place outside of working hours, the rules state that this is acceptable but would need to be recognised by relevant time off in lieu.

Some apprentices may wish to undertake study or training outside of their working hours. Because this training is undertaken outside paid employment (and therefore outside the apprenticeship), it cannot be counted towards meeting the 20% requirement.

It is up to the employer and training provider to decide at what point during the apprenticeship the training is best delivered. 20% may sound like a big investment, but what this looks like within the apprentice's contract is flexible. Apprentices can dedicate a full day each week, a block release at the beginning or end of the year, or even a little bit of time every day to this training. It's down to employers to agree on the best structure both for the apprentice and the organisation.

However the training is delivered, it is important to remember that the apprentice must receive off-the-job training for a minimum of 20% of the time that they are paid to work.



## Where can it take place?

Although much of this off-the-job learning can actually be done in the existing workplace, there is also significant evidence that apprentices – and indeed employees on the whole – benefit hugely from getting away from their desks and learning elsewhere.

We'd always recommend that apprentices are encouraged to spend time off-site, at college or at a training centre, where they are surrounded by peers and can ask questions they may not feel comfortable broaching with their boss or colleagues. The more exposure to their wider industry and sector, the more rounded an apprentice will be. But we'd also suggest that developing the habit of learning in the workplace is equally important; online and distance learning can help apprentices familiarise themselves with the concept that work is a place to learn new skills and capabilities, and within the atmosphere of their workplace they may more readily see the relevance of theory to practical situations.

You don't have to stick with one method of delivery. Your apprentice could attend centres on a weekly basis on a 'day release' model, take a block of time to train at a dedicated training centre, allocate an hour a day to training activities, or a combination of the above.

Ultimately, the decision as to whether training should all be face-to-face, outside the office, online or blended is one for the employer, trainer, and apprentice to land on together.



## The further education college view

Julien Sample, Assistant Principal, Harlow College

**The college delivers a range of apprenticeship programmes**

One of the aspects we are considering is how the 20% off-the-job training will be audited. We currently use an e-portfolio system within the business-related apprenticeships. It has a diary function which the assessor and the apprentice use to log all of the off-the-job activities. The system seems to work well and diary entries can be specifically categorised as 'off-the-job'. This gives us the ability to easily create a report that will track the amount of off-the-job training over the length of the apprenticeship.

We anticipate that where an apprentice is new to the organisation and role they will undertake a greater percentage of off-the-job activities within the first 4–6 weeks, whilst they are learning to carry out their role. These activities may diminish over the length of the apprenticeship but we will have banked (so to say) a chunk of off-the-job activities.

I believe that how employers will react to the 20% off-the-job requirement very much depends on their knowledge of it and the messages and instruction providers give them about it. If 'off-the-job' is not sufficiently explained and examples of what constitutes 'off-the-job' not given, I would expect that some employers will be put off, believing that they could not afford to 'lose' an employee for that amount of time.

But if it is explained properly and examples of what type of activities it can include given, such as shadowing or mentoring, it will be more favourably received. This is all part of relationship management with the employer and managing their expectations. In the past, there has been more flexibility but in the future it is likely to become more important to fully understand off-the-job training and how to record it.

Off-the-job training cannot simply be logged and forgotten about. There has to be an element of reflection to ensure that it has been effective, relevant to the apprenticeship and that learning has taken place. There will need to be internal audit to ensure that what is logged as 'off-the-job' is actually 'off-the-job'. If assessors are new to this – and in the initial stages while their knowledge and understanding are being developed – there may be a more detailed audit required. As time goes on and understanding is improved, I would expect the instructions and advice given to apprentices to improve so the quality of logging and reflecting on 'off-the-job' activities will in turn improve.

I expect that where an apprentice is new to a role and an employer/organisation, there will be many more opportunities for off-the-job training than where an apprentice is not new. This will be a bigger challenge and will require more thought and role analysis to ensure all off-the-job activities are captured and reflected upon.

My three top tips for employers are:

- read the [Department for Education's 'off-the-job' training guidance](#) published in June 2017
- question providers on how they will manage the 20% as this could be a major differentiating factor between one and another
- make sure that you have a clear plan and agreement with the provider on who will deliver each part of the 20% prior to an apprentice starting.

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## Providing evidence of off-the-job training

As well as being a core principle of a quality apprenticeship, the requirement for all apprenticeships to include a minimum of 20% off-the-job training is included in the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funding rules. Compliance with this requirement will therefore be considered as part of normal audit arrangements. More information about the ESFA audit and financial assurance processes can be found [here](#).

In order to comply with the funding rules, each apprentice should have a commitment statement that, amongst other information, outlines the programme of training that the apprentice should receive. This statement should set out how the provider intends to fulfil the 20% off-the-job training requirement. As set out in the funding rules, the funding recipient (usually the main provider) is the custodian of the relevant evidence files.

Some training providers will use technology to help them record and evidence off the job training. "We currently use an e-portfolio system within the business-related apprenticeships," says Julien Sample, Assistant Principal at Harlow College. "It has a diary function which the assessor and the apprentice use to log all of the off-the-job activities. The system seems to work well and diary entries can be specifically categorised as 'off-the-job'. This gives us the ability to easily create a report that will track the amount of off-the-job training over the length of the apprenticeship."

The ESFA do not prescribe the type of evidence that should be retained as they prefer training providers and employers to use naturally occurring evidence where this is available.

"As a training provider, we produce template contact logs and diary sheets to help apprentices and employers," says Damon Saddler, Managing Director of Alert Training UK. "As well as logging what was done, the individual needs to state what they gained from the activity. It needs to be a reflective account of what they've done. It might not filter directly into a specific unit but may have lots of added value and so feed into the standard."

All training providers that deliver Levels 2–5 apprenticeships are subject to Ofsted inspection where they will judge the quality of training. All providers that deliver apprenticeships at Levels 6 and above are subject to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) quality assessment regime. HEFCE will work with Ofsted to reach a judgement for apprenticeship providers at Level 4 and/or 5 where the apprenticeship standard or framework contains a prescribed higher education qualification. These regimes are primarily focused on making judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. As part of this process they may also request evidence of how the upfront planned and agreed off-the-job training is being delivered, as well as observing the delivery of off-the-job to make judgements on the quality of it and the value to each apprentice's learning experience.



The evidence pack must, among other things listed in the funding rules, contain evidence to support the funding claimed, which must be available to the ESFA if they need it.

This must include:

- details of how the 20% 'off-the-job' training, excluding English and Maths, will be quantified and delivered
- details of employment: the name of the employer and the agreed contracted hours of employment, including paid training and 20% 'off-the-job' time as well as the total planned length of the apprenticeship.

Training providers and employers should work together to allocate and record all the off-the-job training the apprentice undertakes.

We've seen some great examples of providers and employers encouraging apprentices to take responsibility for logging their own off-the-job time, including use of online calendars such as Outlook, work diaries or journals, and portfolio management platforms such as City & Guilds' Learning Assistant.

Involving and supporting the apprentice in tracking and logging their off-the-job time results in far better understanding and appreciation of the programme and support they are receiving. This can really help when Ofsted interview the apprentices as part of their inspection.

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- [Management apprenticeships: Planning an apprenticeship](#)

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We believe in a world where people and organisations have the confidence and capabilities to prosper, today and in the future. So we work with like-minded partners to develop the skills that industries demand across the world.

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