

# APPRENTICESHIPS AND GENDER: JUST THE STATISTICS

## Gender patterns of participation in Apprenticeships in England

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*The gender pay gap, though it has declined since the 1990s, is persistent. Differences between men and women in their labour market outcomes, including pay, can reflect a number of factors. We consider gender differences in participation in Apprenticeships in England to aid in understanding the potential effect that this type of educational investment can have on observed differences in labour market outcomes between women and men.*

### INTRODUCTION

The overall gender pay gap in the UK was around 19 per cent in 2014.<sup>i</sup> There are many reasons for the gender pay gap's existence, and its persistence, including, potential discrimination and individual choices about labour market participation and patterns of work. One contributing factor is the relatively high concentration of women in occupations that pay relatively less than those in which men are more commonly represented. Why this should be the case is the subject of much analysis<sup>ii</sup> but is outside the scope of this briefing note. It is, however, worth noting that the reasons some occupations are considered to be of high status, attracting high rewards, and others not, may well result from factors other than the intrinsic skill levels - and relative scarcity of those skills - required of their incumbents.

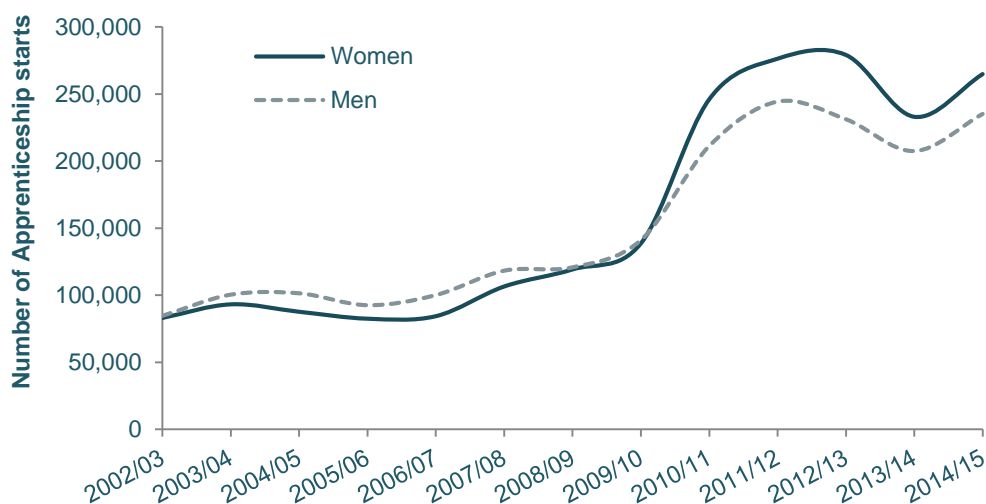
In looking at the factors that lead men and women into different jobs, it is important to consider the role played by initial vocational education and training. Indubitably, the choices made in the education system about which subjects to study

play an important role in determining at least the early labour market experiences of young women and men. Important here is the role of Apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are associated with relatively good labour market outcomes with respect to employment and earnings.<sup>iii</sup> Considering how participation in Apprenticeships varies between men and women can potentially further our understanding of gender differences in labour market outcomes more widely.

### PARTICIPATION IN APPRENTICESHIPS BY GENDER

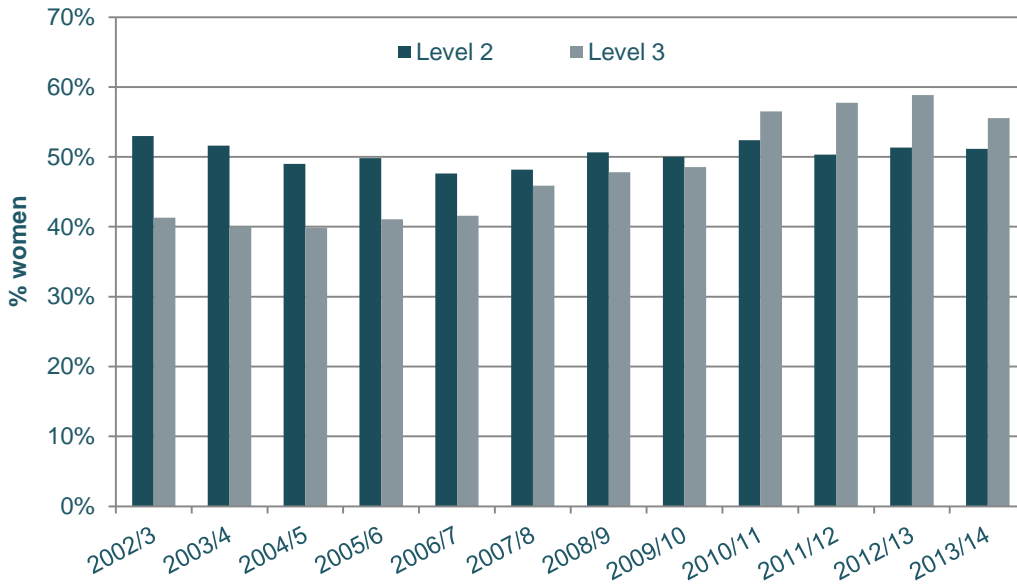
[Figure 1](#) shows that overall, participation levels in Apprenticeships differ little between men and women. Moreover, if one looks at participation by level of Apprenticeship there is not a great difference between men and women. As [Figure 2](#) shows, over time, women have increasingly accounted for the number of starts in Advanced Apprenticeships (i.e. at Level 3). In 2013/14 over 50 per cent of starts at Level 3 were by women. Apprenticeships, it would seem, are slightly more likely to be taken up by women, more so at Level 3 where the economic returns are relatively high.

**Figure 1: Trend in Apprenticeship starts by gender**



Source: FE Data Library Starts by Gender

**Figure 2: Percentage of Apprenticeship starts at Levels 2 and 3 accounted for by women**

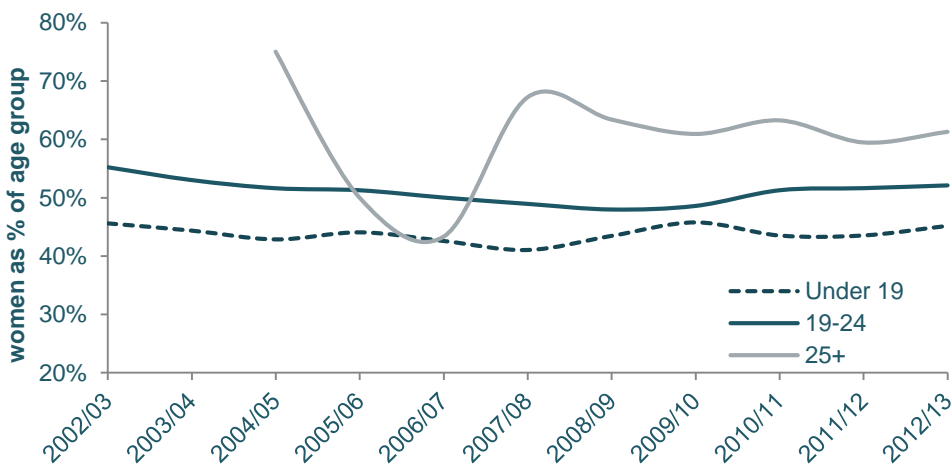


Source: FE Data Library Starts by Gender and Level

In policy terms, a distinction is made between those aged 16-18 years, those aged 19-24 years, and those aged 25 years and over. Increasingly, the 16-18 groups is seen as part of the compulsory education and training system. The 19-24 group is also seen as an essential part of the initial vocational education and training system that without Government support may be subject to market failures of one kind or another. For those

aged 25 years and over the role of the State in funding this type of training is much less evident. [Figure 3](#) demonstrates that whilst the composition of the respective 16-18 and 19-24 year old cohorts comprise more or less equal shares of men and women, this is not the case in relation to the over 24 year old group that is more likely to comprise women (in 2012/13, women accounted for 61 per cent of starts by over 24 year old group).

**Figure 3: Age profile of women’s participation in Apprenticeships**



Source: FE Data Library Starts by Gender and Age

[Table 1](#) shows the age distribution of Apprenticeship starts separately for men and women in 2002/03 and 2012/13. As the number of Apprenticeship starts amongst the over 24s increased, this has accounted for a relatively high share of all Apprenticeship starts. But it is notable that this age group is particularly important for women, accounting for just over half (51 per cent)

of starts amongst women in 2012/13 compared with 39 per cent amongst men. This suggests, other things being equal, policies that affect the participation of older age groups in Apprenticeships will have an impact on gender balance. It has been evident that the direction of policy over recent years has been to concentrate State funding on those aged under 25 years.

**Table 1: Distribution of apprenticeship starts by age group and gender**

Age Group	2002/3		2012/13	
	women	men	women	men
Under 19 years	53%	63%	19%	27%
19-24 years	47%	37%	31%	34%
25 years +	0%	0%	51%	39%

Source: FE Data Library Starts by Gender and Age

## PARTICIPATION BY SUBJECT AREA

It is misleading to think of Apprenticeships as a homogeneous programme of training. In a 2011 study<sup>iv</sup> considering the options for evaluating Apprenticeships, we pointed out that the differences in the content and structure of training varied so much by subject of study that like was only being compared with like. A Level 3 Apprenticeship in construction, for example, was

very different from even the same level within, say, retail / commercial enterprise. Certainly, the returns to the learner would be very different depending on the area studied.<sup>v</sup>

[Table 2](#) shows the top 10 frameworks (by starts) for women and men respectively in 2013/14. There are some commonalities between the lists for women and men. But it is the differences that are perhaps most striking.

**Table 2: Top 10 Apprenticeship subject starts by gender in 2013/14**

Women		Estimated full-time annual salary	Men		Estimated full-time annual salary
1	Health and Social Care	£18,000	1	Construction Skills	£26,000
2	Business Administration	£21,000	2	Engineering	£30,000
3	Children's Care Learning and Development	£17,000	3	Hospitality and Catering	£19,000
4	Management		4	Customer Service	£15,000
5	Customer Service	£15,000	5	Management	
6	Hospitality and Catering	£19,000	6	Business Administration	£21,000
7	Hairdressing	£14,000	7	Industrial Applications	£25,000
8	Retail	£15,000	8	Health and Social Care	£18,000
9	Accountancy	£28,000	9	IT and Telecoms Professionals	£28,000
10	Supporting teaching and learning in schools	£16,000	10	Vehicle Maintenance and Repair	£26,000

Source: FE Data Library Starts by Gender and Subject Area; ASHE occupational wage data – SOC 4-digit

In order to demonstrate the importance of looking at the subject in which an Apprenticeship is undertaken a value is also provided for the full-time annual wage for an occupation to which the Apprenticeship might grant entry which can reflect - admittedly in a rough and ready way - the likely returns associated with those subjects. In practice, completion of an Apprenticeship could lead to employment in a wide variety of occupations because of the generic skills it confers upon apprentices. But, if one is willing to accept

that completion of an Apprenticeship in, say construction, is more likely to lead to employment in an occupation that is not, in this case, a million miles away from something to do with the built environment, then [Table 2](#) provides some thought-provoking results. In short, the results suggest that women are more likely to be working towards completion of an Apprenticeship associated with occupations with relatively low wage rates.

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## CONCLUSION

Overall, the statistics provided above reveal that participation by women and men in Apprenticeships is more or less evenly balanced. But, if you look under the surface, there are substantial differences, including: (a) participation by women is more dependent upon older age groups where existing skills are more likely to be accredited than leading to the acquisition of new skills; and (b) women are more likely to participate in Apprenticeships associated with relatively low wage rate occupations. These patterns are not necessarily the fault of an Apprenticeship system where policy makers have worked hard to ensure that it is an equal opportunities one. One needs to look at what goes on prior to an individual's entry to an Apprenticeship. This is hardly a problem unique to Apprenticeships. There has, for instance, been a long running campaign to persuade more young women to study science, engineering and technology (SET) subjects at all levels given the relatively high wage returns

associated with working in traditionally male dominated SET occupations. But there is a need to keep highlighting the unequal outcomes that arise, otherwise there is little prospect of progress.

Ensuring more equal representation of women in those Apprenticeships likely to lead to better paid jobs requires making certain sectors, and job roles within them, attractive to both men and women. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that labour market information is available to would-be apprentices, both men and women, about the relative wage returns associated with not just completing an Apprenticeship, but the particular Apprenticeships that yield the better returns. There needs to be a mix of pull factors (ensuring that jobs are equally attractive to men and women) and push factors (ensuring that men and women are fully aware of the returns available), in place if there is to be more equality of outcomes associated with Apprenticeships.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

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Research on Apprenticeships, training and skills:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/apprenticeships-training>

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<sup>i</sup> See a recent study from [UKCES](#) outlining gender patterns in pay and other labour market outcomes.

<sup>ii</sup> For a discussion of the gender pay gap and occupational segregation see, for example, [Altonji and Blank, 1999](#).

<sup>iii</sup> See latest estimates provided [BIS \(2015\)](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Gambin et al, 2011](#)

<sup>v</sup> [BIS \(2014\)](#) provides post-study earnings returns by level and subject