

UoW Guidance on Degree Apprenticeship Delivery

during the Coronavirus pandemic

Background

The University's policy on the provision of face-to-face teaching is currently applied to all programmes, regardless of the mode of delivery. This is based on the Government advice for Universities which is to deliver teaching face-to-face where possible, based on a 4 Tier framework¹. The DfE has now published separate guidance for apprentices, adult learners, and residential providers which we believe should be applied to Apprenticeship programmes in place of the general advice for universities. The most recent guidance² for these settings states:

For adult apprentices, employers, providers, end point assessment organisations and FSQ assessment organisations should review how training and assessments are taking place and identify opportunities to increase the proportion of online training and assessment where that is appropriate. Where in-person delivery is essential this can continue providing all relevant coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance is complied with.

For adult education, we are asking providers to consider moving to online teaching where possible to do so while still achieving educational objectives, using existing flexibilities within the FE Operational guidance. Where education needs to continue on site, to enable access to equipment, or where students cannot access remote delivery, this can continue in a Covid-secure way.

Residential providers should support students to reduce travel between home and educational accommodation unless absolutely necessary, and in particular residential students on adult programmes should remain in their educational accommodation if possible and not move between home and educational accommodation during term time, in line with the approach for universities.

Rationale for differentiating the policy for apprenticeship programmes

The general guidance for universities is suited to a full-time mode of study where learners live on or close to the University campus. Many apprentices live and work at locations remote from the University and are required to travel considerable distances to attend blocks of teaching, often using public transport.

Once at University, many of the apprentices require campus accommodation for the duration of their stay, which under normal circumstances is provided in student halls of residence at a fixed price aligned with normal student accommodation rates. During the current pandemic Warwick Accommodation are unable to provide this accommodation as it would involve temporarily moving people into residential bubbles across multiple halls. Accommodation would therefore need to be provided by Warwick Conferences, with the added complication that the price is fixed and the conference centres do not have kitchen facilities accessible to the apprentices.

The University may need to require that all apprentices be tested for coronavirus at the employer's expense immediately prior to travelling to campus. Furthermore, if an apprentice is required to self-isolate whilst at University and is unable to safely travel home, then significant additional, unplanned costs could be incurred by their employer. Furthermore, many of our apprentices are adult learners with families, and a period of self-isolation on campus could separate them from their dependents for up to three weeks (including the teaching

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/updated-guidance-for-universities-ahead-of-reopening>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-and-childcare-settings-new-national-restrictions-from-5-november-2020#further-education-and-apprenticeships>

block) if their only mode of travel is by public transport. This may encourage apprentices experiencing symptoms to not be tested, and to travel long distances to avoid being 'locked down' on campus.

Employer and apprentice perspectives

The university has received mixed feedback from employers. Whilst some are willing to allow their apprentices to travel to campus for teaching blocks, they rightly require that we provide detailed risk assessments to demonstrate how we will keep apprentices safe whilst here. They are also seeking clarity over the procedure if an apprentice is required to self-isolate whilst at University. The view of apprentices is equally split, with some raising serious concerns about travelling to campus, whilst others are willing to attend. With these uncertainties in mind, if we continue with our current model departments may have to resort to mixed-mode teaching of face-to-face and distance learners concurrently, which the university has indicated is not recommended.

New Guidance

We recognise that Academic departments are trying to respond to the concerns of employers and apprentices whilst adhering to existing University guidance on face-to face teaching. To reduce the uncertainty for all stakeholders, we have taken to decision to align our guidance on Degree Apprenticeship teaching with the DfE guidance:

Where possible apprenticeship training and assessment should be moved online. Where face-to-face delivery is essential (e.g. to meet PSRB requirements which cannot be deferred to a later date), this can take place however departments should minimise the length of time that apprentices are required to stay on campus. Mixed-mode teaching with virtual and face-to-face attendance in the same session is not currently recommended.

We anticipate that this new guidance will remain in place for the duration of Term, however further updates may need to be made if the guidance from the DfE changes significantly.