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Apprenticeships 101

The really simple guide to the
20% off-the-job training rule

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Who is this guide for?

Employers, especially HR Managers and Apprenticeship Managers

MYTH BUSTER

Myth: Releasing apprentices for 20% off the job time is going to be an impossible logistical challenge.

Myth: Releasing apprentices one day a week is going to cost me money and productivity.



Fact: Not necessarily! Employers should consider all the different ways their apprentices are getting off the job training (such as shadowing, mentoring, industry visits etc) by using software or other tracking methods. Apprenticeships that are blended, flexible and applied tend to make meeting the 20% off the job training requirement easier.

Fact: Employers might need to take a longer term view. Releasing apprentices for a day a week to learn means they get both work experience and practical training. They will be completely up to date on quality assured theory and knowledge which in turn will make them a much better employee in the long run. Making this rule mandatory and outsourcing it to an organisation specialised in the delivery of training ensures not only that it happens, but that it happens to a required and common standard and ensures a quality apprenticeship.

THE REALLY SIMPLE GUIDE TO THE 20% OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING RULE

What is off-the-job training?

According to the definition provided in the Funding Rules 2020/21, Off-the-job training is defined as learning done outside of an apprentice's normal working duties, but within their working hours. It can include training that is delivered at the apprentice's normal place of work. It can also include regular day release, block release and special training days/workshops.

Why is there a 20% off-the-job training rule?

The government believes that ensuring a substantial component of the apprenticeship is given over to off-the-job training is the best way to safeguard the quality of the apprenticeship. While learning skills on the job is no doubt essential in any profession, combining this with broader learning about the occupation offers deeper understanding and knowledge, skills and behaviours that are transferable to other businesses, while allowing the apprentice to bring that knowledge back into your organisation during their period of employment.

There is good precedence for this. Other countries with high-performing and well-established apprenticeship systems also split the apprentices time between work and vocational school - often to a much greater degree than in England. In France for example, 50% off-the-job learning is required. In the Netherlands between 20 to 40% of time is spent off-the job.

Why has the government brought this in?

It's actually not new. Off-the-job learning was part of each of the old SASE Frameworks guidance. However this is the first time a specific proportion of off-the-job learning has been mandated.

What is it 20% of?

Apprentices must spend 20% of their contracted hours in off-the-job training, not including holidays. So on a standard 35 hours a week contract, the off-the-job portion of training equates to 300 hours a year. This is based on a minimum 30 hr/week contract, so for part-time roles the duration of the apprenticeship must be extended pro rata to ensure your apprentice receives sufficient off-the-job training to maintain quality.

Does off-the-job training mean classroom based training?

Not at all. The funding rules are broad enough to cover a blended learning approach for off-the-job training. While the teaching of theory may well include lectures, it can also include online courses, simulation exercises, or third-party training. In addition, practical training might involve shadowing colleagues, being mentored, doing industry visits or attending competitions. Finally, off-the-job training can also include learning support and time spent writing assessments/assignments.

Does the 20% have to be delivered in a particular way - e.g., day release?

There are no regulations over how you (and your training partner) decide how to parcel up the delivery of off-the-job training. It could be one day a week, a week at a time, or perhaps in a longer block preceding a more intensive on-the-job rotation.

Do I have to use an external training provider for off-the-job training?

You must use a training provider who has been accepted onto the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers. However if you meet the criteria, it is possible to apply to become an Employer-Provider, establishing your own training arm to deliver apprenticeships.

If my apprentice needs additional training on functional skills does this count towards the 20%?

Unfortunately not, apprenticeship funding including the levy is only eligible for training that is directly related to accomplishment of the standard.

What else doesn't count towards off-the-job training?

To state perhaps the obvious programme reviews or on-programme assessment (apart from the end-point assessment). And, crucially, training that takes place outside an apprentice's normal working hours.



Why are many organisations calling for more flexibility with this rule?

One of the main arguments against the 20% off-the-job rule is that it makes life difficult for smaller businesses who cannot financially support the loss of productivity. However this must be weighed against the fact that the government will fully finance apprenticeship training for companies with under 50 employees, as well as the fact that the minimum apprentice wage is lower than the normal apprentice wage. Where possible it is also important for employers to take the longer term view, with eight in every 10 employers believing that apprentices help to generate higher productivity, according to the Education, Learning & Skills Council.

Where can I go for more information?

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