



Association of
Apprentices

The BIG Apprentice Survey 2024

FINDINGS & INSIGHTS FROM APPRENTICES

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www.associationofapprentices.org.uk

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01 about us



Association of
Apprentices

The Association of Apprentices (AoA) was launched three years ago with the mission to connect apprentices across the UK for peer support. No one understands what it's like to be an apprentice better than another apprentice and by helping them to connect, we aim to eradicate feelings of isolation and loneliness that often lead to poor experiences and non-completion.

We have a significant presence in the apprenticeship community, with almost 30,000 apprentice members, a broader community of over 140,000 apprentices through our partners, and more than 100 partner organisations. Our members are from diverse backgrounds, with 25% from SMEs and half from more deprived areas of the country.

In addition to our community platform, AoA offers resources to support personal development, mental health, wellbeing and off-the-job training. These resources are available through our learning platform or at events, both virtual and in-person. In collaboration with the Chartered Institution for Further Education, we created the Post-Apprenticeship Recognition Scheme (PARS) to recognise the unique skills gained through apprenticeships.

Working with thousands of apprentices gives us valuable insights into their priorities, challenges, and support needs. We regularly poll our members for feedback, and in 2024, we conducted our first large-scale survey to better understand the value of apprenticeships, identify what works and what doesn't, and determine what is needed to improve the apprentice experience.

We are excited to share the insights from our inaugural annual survey with you!



02 introduction

Over 2,000 apprentices took part in the Association of Apprentices' Big Apprentice Survey 2024. This report examines the findings, providing valuable insights into the experiences of apprentices.

Key areas highlighted in this report include:

- 01 Impact and value of apprenticeships
- 02 Challenges encountered by apprentices
- 03 Apprentices' perspectives on improvements needed

This survey is important. AoA members often report feeling insufficiently involved in the creation of policies and working practices, despite being most affected by these decisions. Gathering direct feedback from apprentices offers us a unique and essential perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of apprenticeships. It helps us to understand and address the factors that contribute to a positive apprentice experience.

This insight is essential for developing policies, practices and support systems that drive apprentice success. The report emphasises the importance of going beyond simply hiring apprentices and focusing on creating a supportive and enriching experience for apprentices that leads to better outcomes and maximises the return on investment in apprenticeships.

03 methodology

This report is based on the analysis of AoA's Big Apprentice Survey undertaken in November 2024. It was administered online, with a link distributed to AoA apprentice members and to AoA's partner network. The survey gathered 2,096 responses. The report utilises both quantitative and qualitative data from the survey. Data has been analysed to identify recurring themes, sentiments, and key issues raised by apprentices in their own words.

The survey provides a valuable and robust dataset for understanding the apprentice experience and informing policy and working practices. While there is wide representation from the apprentice community, as outlined in the Annex, it should be noted that this sample is not representative of the entire apprentice population, nor have the responses been weighted. Additionally, the data is reliant on self-reported information. Please note when talking about the survey findings, the terms 'apprentice' and 'respondent' have been used interchangeably throughout. Where relevant, differences in responses among groups of apprentices have been highlighted throughout the report.



04 impact and value of apprenticeships

In this section, we look at the impact of apprenticeships on apprentices; what they value most about their apprenticeship experience, what it has given them and whether they would be working in their current industry without it.

What are the most valuable parts of your apprenticeship experience?



This question allowed respondents to select up to three answers

It is noteworthy that the top responses emphasise the practical and career-focused benefits of apprenticeships. This could suggest that apprentices view their programmes as not just a means of acquiring a qualification, but as an investment in their future careers. A recurring theme among respondents who selected 'other' was financial stability. Frequently mentioned aspects included 'earning while learning,' being 'debt-free,' and receiving a 'paid salary', all of which were valued highly.

For most respondents, these top aspects remained consistent regardless of age, level, or stage of apprenticeship. However, there was a notable difference among those aged 25 and

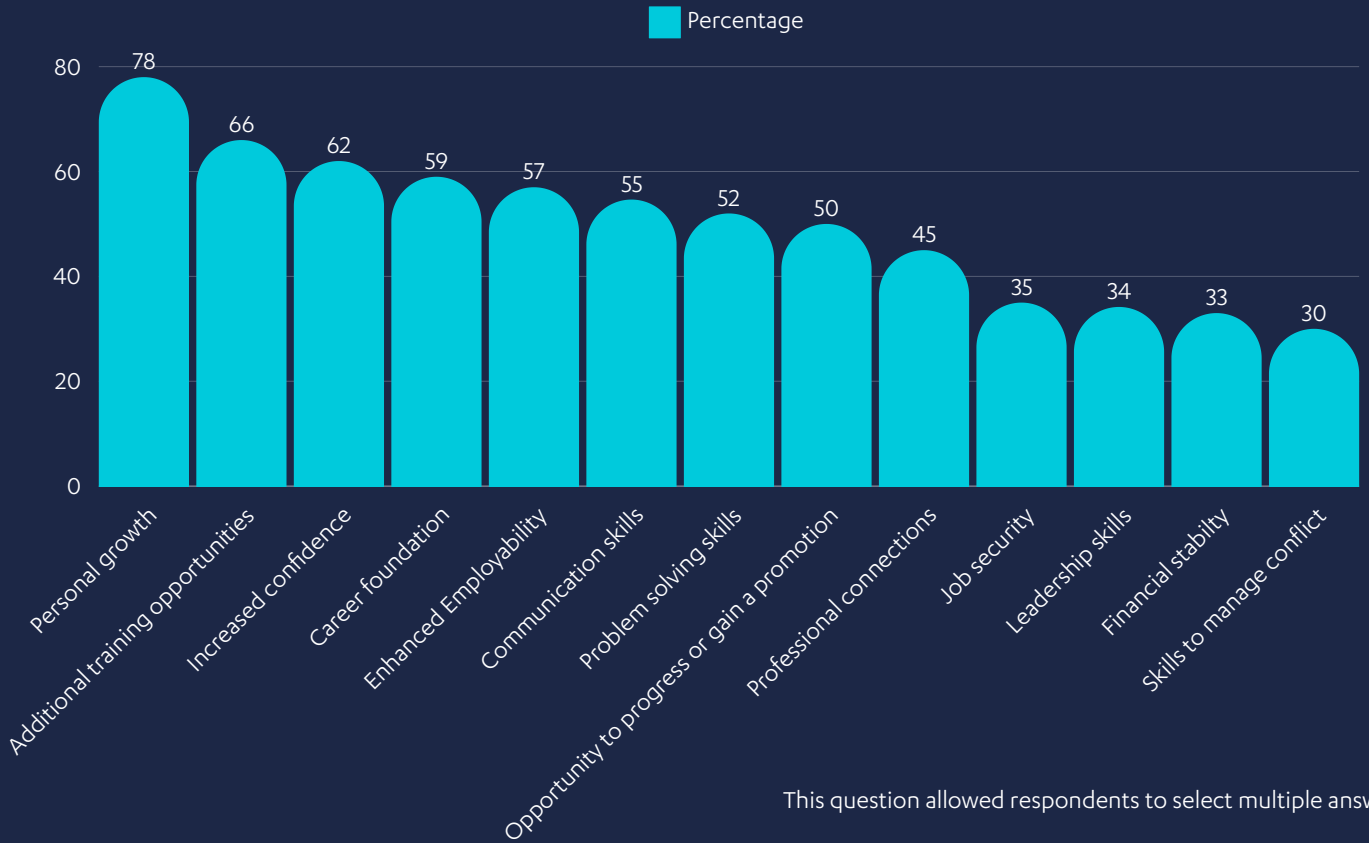
Top 5 most valued aspects of the apprenticeship experience, according to respondents:

1. Ability to gain work experience at the same time as a qualification (74%)
2. Career progression (51%)
3. Getting hands-on experience (46%)
4. Access to opportunities (28%)
5. Working for an established business (20%)

older, who placed a higher value on career progression compared to those aged 16-17 and 18-24.



What has the apprenticeship given you?



There is close alignment between what apprentices report as valuable and what they report they have gained; for instance, career progression is the second most valued aspect, and nearly 60% of respondents state that their apprenticeship provided a solid career foundation. This highlights the recurring theme of apprenticeships as a pathway to career advancement.

High ratings for personal growth, enhanced employability, and practical skills suggest that apprenticeships offer a comprehensive approach to development, reinforcing them as structured learning pathways that promote growth beyond technical skills, effectively developing well-rounded individuals.

Top 5 things that respondents selected:

1. Personal Growth (78%)
2. Additional training opportunities (66%)
3. Increased confidence (62%)
4. Career Foundation (59%)
5. Enhanced employability (57%)

The benefits cited by respondents are consistent across different ages, levels, and stages of apprenticeship, indicating their universal appeal. Although there were minor variations in the top five gains selected by different age groups and levels, these differences were minimal.



A significant percentage of apprentices (36%) believe they would not be working in their current industry without an apprenticeship, while 22% are unsure. Although 42% think they would likely be in their current industry regardless, the results indicate that a considerable number of apprentices view apprenticeships as essential for their entry into the field. This highlights the importance of apprenticeships in widening access to specific industries and providing opportunities that might not have been available otherwise.

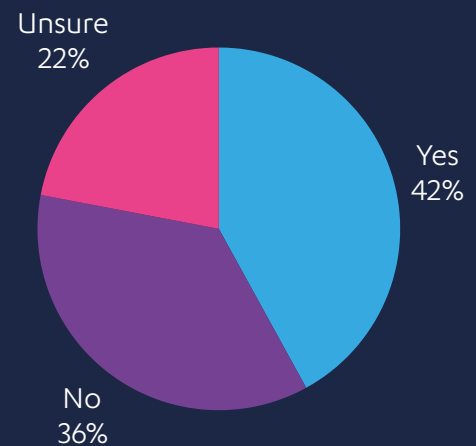
There are some notable differences in responses:

- Not believing they would be working in their current industry without an apprenticeship is especially true for younger apprentices. Only 28% of apprentices aged 16-17 and 21% of those aged 18-24 believe they would be working in their current industry without their apprenticeship. In contrast, over 61% of apprentices aged 25 and older think they would be in their industry regardless.
- About 42% of Level 2, Level 3, and Level 6 apprentices believe they would not be in their current industry without their apprenticeship. However, only 16% of Level 5 and 23% of Level 7 apprentices share this belief. Level 4 apprentices are in the middle, with 33% believing they would not be in their current industry without their apprenticeship.
- Among those who received free school meals (used as a measure of deprivation), 40% do not think they would be in their current industry without their apprenticeship, while 38% believe they would be. For those who did not receive free school meals, 34% do not think they would be in their industry, compared to 45% who believe they would be. The percentage point differences between the two groups, could suggest a meaningful trend, emphasising the role of apprenticeships in promoting social mobility and providing access to certain industries for those from lower-income backgrounds.

Some themes arising from this question's free-text responses include:

- Apprenticeships are crucial for individuals without prior connections or privileged backgrounds.
- There are concerns that changes to funding and the apprenticeship levy may hinder access to higher-level apprenticeships for people from various socio-economic backgrounds.
- While the increase in the apprentice minimum wage to £7.55 could make apprenticeships more appealing, there are concerns that it might negatively impact employers' willingness to hire apprentices.

Do you think you would be working in your current industry without access to an apprenticeship?

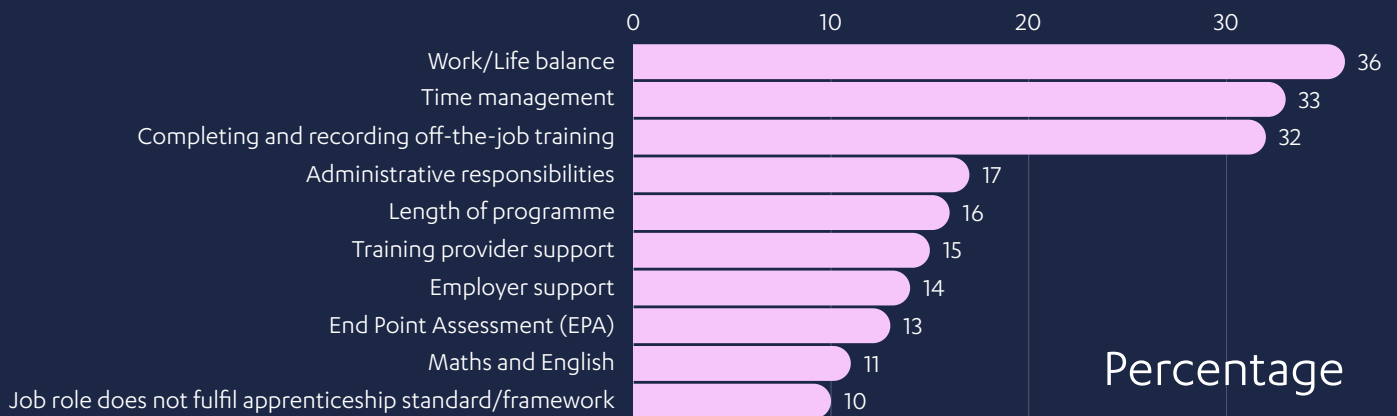




05 challenges encountered by apprentices

In this section, we look at the challenges and issues apprentices face during their apprenticeship, with specific focus on their mental health and wellbeing.

If you have faced any challenges in your apprenticeship, what are the top three issues you have encountered?



This question allowed respondents to select three answers

These findings highlight a common theme of balancing responsibilities and the importance of support systems and resources to help apprentices manage this.

The top five challenges identified by respondents are largely consistent across various ages, levels, and stages of apprenticeship, indicating these issues are common among apprentices overall. However, there are some minor variations worth noting.

Analysis of the three challenges most cited, reveals the top 5 are:

1. Work/Life balance (36%)
2. Time Management (33%)
3. Completing and recording off-the-job training (32%)
4. Administrative Responsibilities (17%)
5. Length of Programme (16%)

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If you have faced any challenges in your apprenticeship, what are the top three issues you have encountered?



The data reveals that respondents aged 16-17, those in a level 2 or 3 apprenticeship, or those 6-12 months into their apprenticeship are more likely to identify Maths and English as a challenge.



Training provider support is more frequently cited by apprentices aged 18-24, those who have been in their programme for a year or more, and those with a disability or learning difficulty.



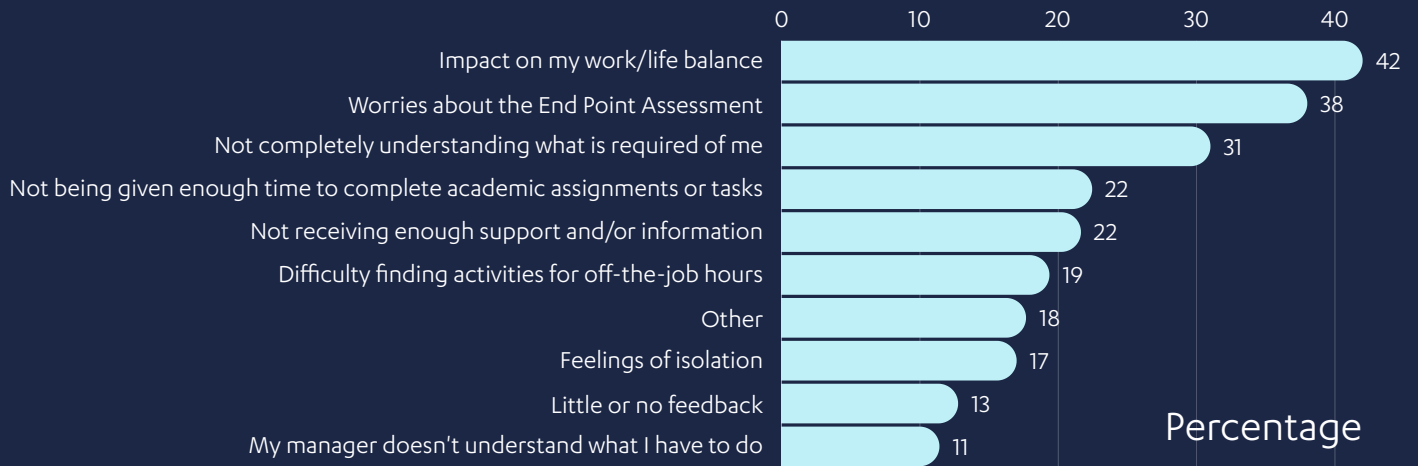
Employer support is more commonly mentioned as a challenge by apprentices over 25 years old, those at lower levels and those who have received free school meals. Completed apprentices are also more likely to identify employer support and the End-Point Assessment (EPA) as a challenge.



While these differences are minimal, they are highlighted here to help those working with apprentices understand where variations may inform better working practices.



Has your apprenticeship ever made you feel stressed or anxious in the last 12 months? Why did you feel stressed or anxious?



The survey allowed apprentices to select multiple options.

Again, there are some variations worth noting:

Apprentices aged 25+ report higher stress and anxiety compared with those aged 16-17 and 18-24. Apprentices taking higher-level (L5-7) apprenticeships report higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to those at L2-4.

Those 2+ years into their apprenticeship and approaching EPA report much higher levels of stress and anxiety compared with those in earlier stages of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices with learning difficulties report higher levels of stress and anxiety than those without.

For those who responded that it had caused stress and anxiety, the main reasons cited were:

1. Impact on my work/life balance (42%)
2. Worries about the end point assessment (38%)
3. Not completely understanding what is required of me (31%)
4. Not being given time to complete academic assignments or tasks (22%)
5. Not receiving enough support and/or information (22%)

62% of respondents said that their apprenticeship has made them feel stressed or anxious in the last 12 months. **Only 15% said that it had not.**

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Has your apprenticeship ever made you feel stressed or anxious in the last 12 months? Why did you feel stressed or anxious?

Responses from apprentices who selected 'other' or added commentary in the free-text option (over 10% of respondents) were analysed to identify key themes and attitudes regarding the reasons for feeling stressed or anxious. A summary is as follows:

- Apprentices face several challenges, primarily revolving around workload and time management, support and communication, personal circumstances, and assessment and progression.
- Balancing work and study, tight deadlines, and managing off-the-job training hours are common stressors.
- Inadequate support from training providers and employers, frequent changes in tutors, and a lack of understanding from employers exacerbate these issues.
- Concerns about administrative challenges, personal health and wellbeing, and feelings of isolation further add to the stress.
- Anxiety about the End-Point Assessment (EPA) and career uncertainty post-apprenticeship are also significant concerns.

Specifically with regard to EPA, analysis of the commentary provides further insight, including:

- Unclear expectations
- Inconsistent/insufficient information
- Seen as a 'high stakes' assessment
- Administrative and logistical challenges
- Misalignment with their job roles

Despite the frustration conveyed, comments from respondents suggest determination to succeed and complete, with some expressing gratitude for the opportunity to learn and develop new skills, even if the process is stressful. Overall, there is a strong emphasis on the need for better support and communication to help apprentices manage their workload.

06 apprentices' perspectives on improvements needed

In this final section, we asked apprentices how their experience could be improved and their thoughts on future apprenticeship policy.



What additional measures could be put in place to improve support for apprentices like you?

Respondents were asked for their thoughts on improvements to support for apprentices. Improvements could be from the Government, their employer or training provider. This was a free-text answer, and responses have been analysed to highlight key themes.

Respondents suggested several improvements to enhance their experience. Financial support is a key area, with calls for wages to match the national minimum wage, travel and accommodation subsidies, and extending student discounts to apprentices. Employer and training provider support is also crucial, including structured mentorship programmes, clear career progression paths, flexible working arrangements, additional training opportunities, better communication, and reduced administrative burdens. Mental health and wellbeing were highlighted, with a need for access to mental health resources, support for work/life balance, and post-apprenticeship support such as job security and networking opportunities.



The support measures suggested are fairly balanced among employers, training providers, and the Government. Themes are as follows:

Employers

- **Clear Career Progression Paths:** Providing clear pathways for career advancement to motivate apprentices and show long-term opportunities and job security within the organisation.
- **Flexible Working Arrangements:** Allowing flexible hours, dedicated study time or remote work options to help apprentices balance work and study commitments. Ensuring the organisation fully understands the commitment required before allowing apprentices to participate.
- **Financial Support:** Covering training-related expenses, assistance for commuting and accommodation and offering higher wages.
- **Better Communication:** Ensuring clear and consistent communication about expectations and progress from on-boarding, throughout the apprenticeship with regular feedback.
- **Mentorship Programmes:** Pairing apprentices with experienced professionals for guidance and support.

Training Providers

- **Enhanced Learning Support:** Providing additional training opportunities including workshops and online interactive sessions, and regular check-ins.
- **Tailored Study Support:** Offering one-on-one sessions and more flexible training schedules depending on work circumstances.
- **Improved Communication:** Ensuring clear and consistent communication between the training provider, the employer and the apprentice about expectations, requirements, and progress.
- **Reduced Administrative Burden:** Simplifying the administrative processes and reducing the amount of paperwork required from apprentices.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Creating opportunities for apprentices to connect with peers in person. The ability to connect online to share ideas for apprentices on the same course.

Government

- **Increased Wages:** Raising the apprentice minimum wage to be in line with the national minimum wage.
- **Increased Funding:** Providing more financial support for apprenticeships.
- **Financial Incentives:** Offering incentives for small businesses to hire and manage apprentices.
- **Travel and Accommodation Subsidies:** Easing the financial burden on apprentices including housing support, bursaries and assistance, especially for underrepresented groups.
- **Mental Health Support:** Providing access to mental health resources and counselling and support groups to help apprentices manage stress and maintain a healthy work/life balance.



How do you feel the changes announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 will impact the future of apprenticeships?



We asked apprentices for their thoughts on the apprenticeship policy changes announced in the Autumn Budget 2024. Key initiatives include the launch of Skills England, £40m to help implement new foundation and shorter apprenticeships, a reformed apprenticeship levy, and an increase in the apprentice minimum wage from £6.40 to £7.55.

Just over half of respondents (51%) think the changes will significantly enhance the apprenticeship system. 32% believe there will be some benefit but have concerns, with the remainder either unsure or think they will have a negative impact.

Respondents were invited to provide additional commentary which has been analysed to highlight key themes and attitudes. Over 10% of respondents contributed:

- **Impact of Minimum Wage Increase:**
 - Positive: Some believe that increasing the apprentice minimum wage will make apprenticeships more attractive and financially viable, especially given the current cost of living crisis.
 - Negative: Others worry that higher wages might discourage small businesses from hiring apprentices, potentially reducing opportunities.
- **Funding and Investment:**
 - Support for Increased Investment: Many respondents welcome the £40m to support the implementation of new foundation and shorter apprenticeships, seeing it as a way to address skill shortages and make apprenticeships more accessible.
 - Concerns About Allocation: There are concerns that the reformed apprenticeship levy might complicate matters for smaller businesses and that funds might not be used effectively.
- **Shorter Apprenticeships:**
 - Efficiency and Accessibility: Some see shorter apprenticeships as a positive change, making it easier for people to complete their training and enter the workforce quickly.
 - Quality and Depth of Training: Others worry that shorter apprenticeships might not provide enough time for apprentices to develop their skills fully, potentially leading to a less skilled workforce.
- **Level 7 Apprenticeships:**
 - Concerns About Defunding: The potential removal of funding for Level 7 apprenticeships is a significant concern, with many believing it will negatively impact career progression, access to advanced qualifications for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and the availability of highly skilled professionals.
- **Awareness and Marketing:**
 - Need for Better Promotion: There is a strong sentiment that more needs to be done to raise awareness about apprenticeships, particularly in schools, to ensure young people see them as a viable alternative to university.

Overall, responses reflect a mix of optimism and concern, with a strong emphasis on the need for careful implementation and support to ensure the changes benefit both apprentices and employers.

07 conclusions

The Big Apprentice Survey 2024 provides valuable insights into the experiences of apprentices, revealing strong correlations between different aspects of their journeys. For example, the survey highlights that apprentices highly value the practical elements of their programmes, such as gaining work experience and hands-on training, which they link to personal growth, career advancement, and enhanced employability. This might suggest that apprentices view their programmes not just as a means to a qualification, but as an investment in their future.

A significant proportion of respondents, especially younger individuals and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, believe they would not be working in their current industry without the apprenticeship. This underscores the critical role of apprenticeships in promoting social mobility and widening access to various industries.

However, while apprenticeships are highly valued, the survey also reveals significant challenges, with worklife balance, time management, and administrative responsibilities being frequently cited concerns. These challenges are strongly correlated with causes of stress and anxiety, with many apprentices reporting workload, unclear expectations, and worries about the End-Point Assessment as stressors. Furthermore, the survey identifies that respondents with learning difficulties, those at higher apprenticeship levels, and those who are approaching their End-Point Assessment tend to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety.

To improve the apprentice experience, respondents suggested several measures including clear career progression paths, flexible working arrangements, and better communication. The survey also sought feedback on the Autumn Budget 2024 apprenticeship policy changes, revealing a mix of optimism and concern, particularly regarding the potential impact of increased minimum wage on small business hiring practices and the reduction in funding for Level 7 apprenticeships.

Overall, the findings highlight the critical importance of apprentice wellbeing and the necessity for comprehensive support systems that address the practical aspects of apprenticeships, helping to manage workload and reduce stress. Incorporating these elements into working practices and policy design is vital to ensure a positive experience that leads to successful outcomes.



08 next steps

This survey offers insights directly from apprentices. The findings themselves provide clear guidance for those working with apprentices on what works and what could be improved to create a supportive and enriching experience that leads to better outcomes.

As a next step, we recommend using the BIG Apprentice Survey as a benchmark or a basis for discussion with your apprentices. The key areas highlighted in the report are:

Work/Life Balance: Providing flexible working arrangements and dedicated study time.

End-Point Assessment (EPA): Offering clear guidance, additional practise, and support for the EPA process.

Communication: Improving communication between employers, training providers, and apprentices regarding expectations and progress.

Mental Health: Increasing access to mental health resources, support groups, and counselling services.

Career Progression: Helping apprentices identify their next steps, career opportunities and pathways post completion

Financial Support: Helping apprentices to access support to ease the burden

At the Association of Apprentices, we understand the importance of the apprentice voice in designing and developing the best apprenticeship programmes. This insight is essential for building policies, practices and support systems that drive apprentice success.

If you would like to discuss these findings or find out how you can work with us, please get in touch.



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**If you are interested in finding out more
about what we do, please get in touch:**



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email hello@associationofapprentices.org.uk



annex

Survey Respondent Profile

Apprenticeship Level	Response percentage
Level 2 (Eng/Wales/NI) or Level 5 (Scot)	8%
Level 3 (Eng/Wales/NI) or Level 6 (Scot)	34%
Level 4 (Eng/Wales/NI) or Level 7 (Scot)	21%
Level 5 (Eng/Wales/NI) or Level 8 (Scot)	9%
Level 6 (Eng/Wales/NI) or Level 9/10 (Scot)	19%
Level 7 (Eng/Wales/NI) or Level 11 (Scot)	9%

Apprenticeship status	Response percentage	Age Group	Response percentage
Current apprentice	91%	16-17	2%
		18-24	44%
Completed apprentice	9%	25+	52%
		Prefer not to say	2%



Region	Response percentage	Gender	Response percentage
North East England	4%	Male	38%
North West England	15%	Female	58%
Yorkshire and the Humber	9%	Non-binary	1%
East Midlands	7%	Non-conforming	<1%
West Midlands	8%	Prefer not to say	2%
East of England	5%	Other	<1%
London	19%	Free School Meals	Response percentage
South East	16%	Yes	17%
South West	11%	No	75%
Scotland	3%	I don't know	8%
Wales	2%	Learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem	Response Percentage
Northern Ireland	<1%	Yes	21%
Other	<1%	No	74%
		Prefer not to say	5%



Ethnicity	Response percent	Ethnicity	Response percent
Arab	<1%	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - White and Black African	<1%
Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi	1%	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - White and Black Caribbean	1%
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	<1%	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - Any other mixed background	<1%
Asian/Asian British - Indian	4%	White - English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh / British	67%
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	2%	White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	<1%
Asian/Asian British - Any other Asian background	1%	White - Irish	1%
Black or Black British - African	3%	White - Any other White background	9%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	1%	Any other ethnic group	1%
Black or Black British - Any other Black background	<1%	Prefer not to say	4%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - White and Asian	1%		