

COVID-19:

What does furlough mean for apprentices?

The Government has confirmed that furloughed apprentices can continue their apprenticeship training if they're paid at least the apprenticeship minimum wage.

What does furlough mean?

Furlough leave is a new form of absence introduced by the Government as part of its Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. It's available to all UK businesses for all staff – including apprentices.

Under the scheme, furloughed employees are still employed and are still on the employer's payroll, but the Government pays 80% of their wages. Furloughed employees can't perform work duties and are considered absent from work.

The scheme was introduced to help businesses maintain workforce continuity in these uncertain times, manage their cashflow and reduce redundancies.

What does furlough mean?

According to HMRC, 'Apprentices can be furloughed in the same way as other employees and they can continue to train whilst furloughed.' This means that although they can't perform work duties, apprentices can remain an employee and continue with their training.

Apprentices that are furloughed don't need to take a break in learning. This is great for learners as they can maintain their training momentum – and it's great for providers too. Training providers can still claim funding for furloughed apprentices – as long as they can prove they're continuing to support their progression with remote delivery.

Employers can only furlough apprentices if they're paid 'at least the apprenticeship minimum wage, national living wage or national minimum wage as appropriate for all the time they spend training.'

This means that if 80% of the apprentice's wage is less than their appropriate minimum wage, employers must cover the shortfall.

How can the College support my apprentice?

As long as the apprentice is being paid over the national apprenticeship wage, the employer can place them on furlough, keep them on the payroll and claim their wages. The College will still continue to support your apprentices to work together to mutually agree where and how this training takes place. This includes in the workplace where a provider is able to do so safely and where that workplace meets new 'coronavirus secure' guidelines on ensuring the workplace is safe, or continue to support training remotely.

What can apprentices do when they're furloughed?

Furloughed apprentices can't perform work duties, but they can continue with their training. They can access elearning content, test their knowledge and complete remote reviews to maintain momentum in their learning even while they're off work. It's also a great opportunity for apprentices to progress towards the 20% off-the-job minimum requirement as it's something many apprentices struggle to fit around their normal working life. It means that when apprentices get back to work, they'll be ahead of their off-the-job target and can spend more time working.

Furloughing apprentices is the best solution for many learners in this uncertain time. Apprentices can continue learning, are still paid at least the national minimum wage and have a job to return to after all this is over.

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