



Department
for Education

Apprenticeship Evaluation 2023: Employer survey

Research report

September 2024

Authors: IFF Research



Government
Social Research

Contents

Contents	1
List of tables	5
List of figures	7
Executive Summary	10
Method and interpretation	10
Who employs apprentices?	11
What types of apprenticeships are on offer?	12
Why and how were apprenticeships recruited?	12
Retaining apprentices	13
Usage of higher and degree apprenticeships	13
Delivery, influence over, and understanding of apprenticeship training	14
Satisfaction and benefits	16
End Point assessments	16
Employers' awareness and understanding of apprenticeship funding	17
Future plans	18
1. Introduction	20
Survey background and policy context	20
Apprenticeship reforms	20
Increasing starts and widening participation	21
Improving quality and supporting achievements	22
Apprenticeship reforms	23
Wider context for the 2023 surveys	23
Research aims	23
Methodology	24
Structure of the report	28
Reporting conventions	29
A note on comparability	30
2. Who employs apprentices?	33
Introduction	33

Key findings	33
Sector and size profile	34
Length of time offering apprenticeships	39
Recent recruitment and comparisons to a 'usual' year	44
Growth outlook	48
3. What types of apprenticeships are on offer?	49
Key findings	49
Note on ILR data	49
Subject areas	50
Subject areas – all provided, and main subject areas	52
Levels of apprenticeship	54
Age groups of apprentices	59
4. Why and how were apprentices recruited?	62
Key findings	62
Reasons for providing apprenticeships	62
Sources of apprentices	65
Why apprenticeships were offered to existing staff	68
Delays to starting apprenticeships	70
Other types of qualification	73
Support available for employers	73
5. Retaining apprentices	77
Key findings	77
Retaining apprentices	77
Fixed-term contracts	79
6. Usage of higher and degree apprenticeships	83
Key findings	83
Awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships	83
Provision of higher and degree apprenticeships	87
Reasons for use of higher and degree apprenticeships	93
7. Delivery, influence over, and understanding of apprenticeship training	98
Key findings	98

Delivery of apprenticeship training	99
Initial assessment of apprentices' skills	99
English and maths	101
Employer influence on apprenticeship training	103
Understanding of the off-the-job training requirement, changes to calculations and views on amount of time spent off-the-job training	105
Understanding of flexi-job and accelerated apprenticeships	109
8. Satisfaction and benefits	114
Key findings	114
Overall satisfaction	115
Satisfaction with specific elements of apprenticeships	120
Advocacy	126
Benefits	129
What employers would like to change	134
9. End-point assessments	136
Key findings	136
Level of knowledge of end-point assessment (EPA)	137
Selection of end-point assessment organisation	139
Informing apprentices about EPA	141
Satisfaction with EPA	143
Importance of EPAs	143
Improving EPAs	144
10. Employers' awareness and understanding of apprenticeship funding	146
Key findings	146
Understanding of apprenticeship funding	146
Awareness of additional payments for employers to support young apprentices	148
Usage of the additional payment	149
11. Future plans	152
Key findings	152
Future provision of apprenticeships	152
Future of degree and Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships	158

12. Conclusions	160
Apprenticeship growth	160
Employer satisfaction and benefits	161
Impact and awareness of apprenticeship reforms	162
Differences in employer experience	164
13. Appendix A: Glossary	166
14. Appendix B: Detailed profile of employers	167
Completion status	167
Employer main subject area	169
Employer size	170
Employer main level	171
Employer region	172
Employer Levy payers	173

This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 5 July 2024. As a result, the content may not reflect current Government policy.

List of tables

Table 1-1. Abbreviations of Sector Subject Area (SSA Tier 1) titles used for analysis	26
Table 2-1. Percentages of apprentice employers in each SIC sector, since 2015	37
Table 2-2. Number of years apprentice employers have used apprenticeships for, change since 2015	41
Table 2-3. Number of people recruited by employers of completer apprentices to start an apprenticeship in the last 12 months by subject area	45
Table 3-1. Percentages of employers with apprentices in each Sector Subject Area covered, for apprenticeship evaluation research since 2015	51
Table 3-2. Percentages of employers with any completer apprentices at each level.....	56
Table 4-1. Why did you offer Apprenticeships rather than, or in addition to, other forms of training or qualification? By employers of completer or current apprentices	64
Table 4-2. Broad purpose behind existing staff starting their apprenticeship, 2015-2023	69
Table 4-3. Why the apprenticeship training did not start straight away – completer apprentices versus current apprentices, and changes since 2015	72
Table 4-4. Information/support/guidance employers felt was missing from what was available at the time of the survey	76
Table 5-1. Percentage of apprentices on fixed-term contracts.....	81
Table 6-1 Knowledge and awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships.....	85
Table 8-1. Overall satisfaction (score of 6 to 10 out of 10) by main subject area and level	119
Table 8-2. Percentage of employers satisfied (score of 6 to 10 out of 10) with specific elements of apprenticeships compared with previous years (those with completer apprentices only)	123
Table 8-3. Percentage of employers perceiving specific benefits of apprenticeships (prompted), by main subject area	132
Table 8-4. Benefits of apprenticeships compared with previous years, percent of employers with completer apprentices.....	133

Table 9-1. How EPAOs were chosen by employers with apprentices on standards who are aware of EPAs (completer and current).....140

Table 9-2. Timing of selecting an EPAO141

Table 11-1. Future intentions for apprenticeship numbers by all employers, completer and current.....153

Table 11-2. Reasons for employers expected to increase, decrease or stop offering apprenticeships over the next 2 to 3 years156

List of figures

Figure 2-1. SIC sector profile of employers with current apprentices (site level)	35
Figure 2-2. SIC sector profile of employers with completer apprentices (site level).....	36
Figure 2-3. Size profile of sites employing apprentices.....	39
Figure 2-4. Length of time offering apprenticeships, by SIC sector (SIC 2007)	43
Figure 3-1. Subject Area: Only, main or secondary subject area, employers with current apprentices	53
Figure 3-2. Only, main or secondary subject area, employers with completer apprentices	54
Figure 3-3. Employers' main (most important) level of apprenticeship, within their main (most important) subject area	58
Figure 3-4. What would persuade employers to offer apprenticeships to young people aged 16-18.....	61
Figure 4-1. Reasons for offering apprenticeships over other forms of training (spontaneous).....	63
Figure 4-2 Sources of apprentices in the 2023 survey - overlap.....	65
Figure 4-3. Sources of apprentices by main subject area	67
Figure 4-4. Broad purpose behind existing staff starting their apprenticeship.....	69
Figure 4-5. Why the apprenticeship training did not start straight away.....	70
Figure 4-6. Missing information, support and guidance about apprenticeships	75
Figure 5-1. Whether completer apprentices were still working for the organisation at the time of the survey by main level.....	78
Figure 5-2. Proportion of employers using fixed-term contracts with current and completer apprentices, by number of staff at organisation	82
Figure 6-1. Knowledge and awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships.....	84
Figure 6-2. Knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships, by main subject area	86
Figure 6-3. Correlation between use of Level 4-7 apprentices and knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships, by subject area	87

Figure 6-4. Employers using or planning to use higher and/or degree apprenticeships ..	89
Figure 6-5. Employers using or planning to use higher and/or degree apprenticeships in 2021 and 2023, by size of employer organisation.....	91
Figure 6-6. Reasons for offering higher or degree apprenticeships at Level 4 or above..	94
Figure 6-7. Reasons against offering higher or degree apprenticeships at Level 4 or above	96
Figure 7-1. Whether the training provider assessed apprentices' qualifications prior to starting, by number of staff at the organisation.	100
Figure 7-2. How important employers consider it is for their apprentices to have a Functional Skills Level 1 or Level 2 or GCSE standard pass in English and maths by the end of their apprenticeship by employers' main apprenticeship subject area offered	102
Figure 7-3. Whether the employer had an influence on the structure, content, delivery or duration of the apprenticeship, by main apprenticeship subject area	104
Figure 7-4. Employers' awareness of changes to the off-the-job training requirement changes brought in on the 1 st of August 2022, by size of site	106
Figure 7-5. Employers' opinions on the amount of time spent on off-the-job training by number of employees at organisation	108
Figure 7-6. Employers' opinions on the amount of time spent on off-the-job training, by main subject area	109
Figure 7-7. Whether employers had, or had not, heard of flexi-job apprenticeships by organisation size	110
Figure 7-8. Whether employers had, or had not, heard of accelerated apprenticeships by organisation size	112
Figure 8-1. Changes in overall satisfaction with apprenticeships over time (among employers with completer apprentices)	116
Figure 8-2. Overall satisfaction among all employers, those with completer apprentices, and those with current apprentices	116
Figure 8-3. Overall satisfaction among all employers, by main subject offered	118
Figure 8-4. Satisfaction with specific elements of apprenticeships (all employers).....	121

Figure 8-5. Whether employers of completer apprentices would recommend apprenticeships.....	127
Figure 8-6. Advocacy by main subject area	128
Figure 8-7. Perceived benefits of apprenticeships to employers (prompted), by level of main apprenticeship.....	130
Figure 9-1. Awareness of EPA among employers of current and completer apprentices	137
Figure 9-2. Whether employers are aware that their apprentices on standards have undergone or will undergo EPAs, by organisation size	138
Figure 9-3. Timing of informing apprentices about EPA	142
Figure 9-4. Employers' perception of the assessment apprentices completing as a good test of their occupational competence to do the job	143
Figure 9-5. How the EPA can be improved.....	145
Figure 10-1. Understanding of apprenticeship funding by whether have completer apprentices or current apprentices and whether likely to be required to pay Levy.....	148
Figure 10-2. What additional payment was used for	151
Figure 11-1. Future intentions for apprenticeship numbers by main subject area offered	154
Figure 11-2. Subject areas employers expect to introduce new Level 6 or Level 7 apprenticeship standards in	159
Figure 14-1. Proportion of employers interviewed as employers of completer apprentices or employers of current apprentices.	168
Figure 14-2. Proportion of employers by their main subject area.....	169
Figure 14-3. Proportion of employers by the size of their site	170
Figure 14-4. Proportion of employers by the level of their main apprenticeship.....	171
Figure 14-5. Proportion of employers by the region of their surveyed site.	172
Figure 14-6. Proportion of employers who were likely and unlikely to pay into the Apprenticeship Levy	173

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Apprenticeship Evaluation Employer Survey 2023. It is the eighth in the series, the first of which took place in 2011, with the previous survey taking place in 2021. It sits alongside the accompanying Learner survey report.

The research helps the Department for Education (DfE) to monitor apprenticeships from the employer perspective and to shape future development of the apprenticeship programme. Specifically, it examines the profile of employers with apprentices and the types of apprenticeship they offer, why and how apprentices are recruited, retention and progression of apprentices, higher and degree level apprenticeships, experiences and views on delivery, assessment and their ability to influence training, satisfaction with apprenticeships, the end-point assessment, funding, and future plans regarding offering apprenticeships.

Method and interpretation

The employer strand of the evaluation involved a telephone survey, taking place from July to October 2023, with 3,926 employers in England. The employers interviewed were split in two sample groups; firstly, those who had staff complete an apprenticeship between 1st July 2021 and 28th February 2022 (945 interviews), and secondly those who employed current apprentices as of 1st January 2023 (2,981). These two groups are referenced throughout the report as 'employers of completer apprentices' and 'employers of current apprentices'. When all employers are referenced in the report, this brings together data from employers of current apprentices, employers of completer apprentices and employers of both. All interviews were conducted at site level, rather than organisation. There was a timing gap between the fieldwork dates, and the completion of apprenticeship date for those in the employers of completer apprentices group, of 17 to 27 months. This allowed time for the impact of the apprenticeship on the employer to become apparent, and keeping the gap between the completion of the apprenticeship and survey broadly consistent with previous surveys.

There was a considerable overlap between the two groups. Around a fifth (18%) of employers of current apprentices also had completer apprentices, and around two-fifths (42%) of employers of completer apprentices also had current apprentices.

The inclusion of employers with current apprentices was introduced in the 2021 survey. Earlier surveys in the series only sampled employers with completer apprentices. As a result, comparisons for current apprentices can only be made to the 2021 survey, and where comparisons are made with 2018-19 and earlier surveys, this is only done among employers in the 'completer' group.

There were some changes to the sampling approach made in 2023, which are detailed further in the [Introduction](#) chapter and in the Technical Report.

There were differences in the sampling process in 2023 compared to 2021, due to the changes on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). This meant there were gaps in the employer details that were available, and subsequently IFF Research had to model the population using estimates of the population of employers for sampling and weighting purposes. More information about this process can be found in the Technical Report. Other differences in 2023 compared to 2021 included paused apprentices being removed from the current apprentices group in 2023,¹ and expected current apprentices were added to the sample.² Employers of expected completer apprentices were not included.³

Who employs apprentices?

The largest number of employers of current apprentices were found in Health and Social Work (18%), followed by Construction and Wholesale and Retail (both 15%), Manufacturing (14%) and Education (13%). For employers of completer apprentices, Health and Social Work was the largest sector (21%), followed by Education (16%), Manufacturing (14%) and Wholesale and Retail (11%).

In 2023, a fifth of all employers with current apprentices (20%) had offered apprenticeships for 3 years or fewer, while around a third (35%) had offered them for 10 or more years. Only one-in-ten (10%) employers of completer apprentices had been offering them for 3 years or fewer. This was a downward trend on the 18% who said this in 2021, 23% in 2018-19 and 29% in 2017.

The sectors where employers were most likely to be new to apprenticeships were Financial and Real Estate (30%) and Education (28%).

In 2023, around a fifth (18%) of employers with current apprentices had less than 10 staff in their organisation. Just less than half (47%) had between 10 to 99 staff, and 32% had 100 or more staff in their organisation. For employers of completer apprentices, 13% employed less than 10 staff in their organisation, 51% had between 10 and 99 staff, and 33% had 100 or more staff.

In 2023, fewer employers expected to grow compared with previous years. Just over half of private sector employers with either current or completer apprentices (53%) expected to grow in the next 12 months, this was down from 62% in 2021.

¹ Paused' apprentices were defined as those who had 'officially paused' their apprenticeship since March 2022 or who were 'officially current' but with an end date in the past (1st December 2021 – 30th November 2023) and who had still not finished as of 1st January 2023.

² The reason for this group's inclusion ensured that those on shorter apprenticeships would not be underrepresented in the final data, due to fieldwork taking place later in the calendar year compared with 2021 and there typically being a large intake of apprentices in August and September each year.

³ These were defined as employers of apprentices who expected to complete their apprenticeship between 1st January 2023 and 26th June 2023.

What types of apprenticeships are on offer?

Business remained the most common apprenticeship subject area offered (28% of employers of completer apprentices and 24% of employers of current apprentices), followed by Health (23% for both groups respectively) and Engineering (19% and 25% respectively).

Compared with 2021, there was an increase in employers providing apprenticeships in the Construction subject area, with 19% of employers with current apprentices having at least one (an increase from 14% in 2021). ICT apprenticeships among employers of completer apprentices doubled over the past 4 years, with 3% having one in 2018-19, to 6% in 2023. However, Retail apprenticeships have continued downwards, from 22% of employers with completer apprentices offering at least one in 2015, to 13% in 2023.

The proportion of employers offering Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships has continued to increase since their introduction. Among employers of current apprentices, 9% and 8% were offering Level 6 and Level 7 apprenticeships respectively, an increase from 7% and 6% respectively in 2021. However, the proportion of employers offering Level 2 apprenticeships continued to decrease. Just over a third (35%) of employers of completer apprentices offered a Level 2 apprenticeship in 2023, compared with 65% in 2017.

Finally, apprentice employers at an overall level were more likely to report that they would consider applications from people of all ages compared with 2021 (60% in 2023 vs. 56% in 2021). One-in-five (22%) employers reported that they would not consider an application for an apprenticeship from someone over the age of 25.

Why and how were apprenticeships recruited?

Key reasons for choosing to offer apprenticeships rather than (or as well as) other training were the benefit to the apprentice and/or community (20%), the inclusion of practical/vocational elements in the training (18%), and the content and the design of the training (13%).

The main way employers of apprentices recruited apprentices, was via specific recruitment of new staff to start an apprenticeship (whether to start immediately on recruitment or not). Overall, just under seven-in-ten (69%) of employers used this method, slightly lower than the 72% of employers doing so in 2021. A relatively low proportion of employers had recruited both people to specifically start an apprenticeship and provided apprenticeships to existing employees (11% of employers with current apprentices, and 5% of employers with completer apprentices). Among employers of current apprentices, the proportion providing apprenticeships only to existing staff increased (28%, an increase from 25% in 2021).

Among those employers who had provided apprenticeships to their existing employees, nine-in-ten (89%) were doing so to improve their skills for their existing job.

One-in-seven (14%) employers reported that at least some of their apprentices who had been recruited specifically for an apprenticeship, had a delayed start. The main reason that apprenticeships did not start straight away among these employers was that the timings were dictated by the college or training provider (47%).

Employers were asked if besides the training delivered through apprenticeships, they had funded or arranged any training for employees in the last 12 months which led to either a Level 2 or a Level 3 qualification. Two-thirds (65%) of employers said they had not.

In 2023, three-quarters (75%) of employers agreed that there was sufficient information, support and guidance available to employers interested in offering apprenticeships. This was a decrease from the 77% of employers who reported this in 2021.

Retaining apprentices

In line with 2021, among employers of completer apprentices, almost seven-in-ten (69%) had retained any of their apprentices, since the completion of their apprenticeship. Over six-in-ten (61%) had retained all of their completer apprentices.

Employers of completer apprentices who had provided mainly Level 4 to Level 7 apprenticeships were more likely to have retained any of their apprentices, since the completion of their apprenticeship, compared with those offering mainly Level 2 apprenticeships (77% compared with 63%).

In cases where apprentices had left the organisation since the completion of their apprenticeship, over four-fifths (83%) reported it was the apprentice's decision to leave. The main reasons for apprentices leaving despite being offered a role was that the apprentice wanted to go into another sector (21%), or that they wanted higher pay (21%).

Just over one-in-ten (12%) employers said that they, were the ones who made the decision to end the apprentice's employment after the apprenticeship was completed. The main reason suggested by these employers was that the apprentice was not working to the standard desired (46%).

The proportion of all employers who had all their apprentices on fixed-term contracts decreased compared with 2021 (54% in 2023 compared to 57% in 2021). The proportion of all employers with no apprentices on fixed-term contracts rose from 31% in 2021 to 35% in 2023.

Usage of higher and degree apprenticeships

All employers were asked how much they felt they knew about higher apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships. Overall awareness has remained unchanged. Six-in-

ten (60%) employers reported having any awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships, consistent with 2021 and 2018-19. Differences in awareness were found among employers depending on their main subject area. Awareness was highest among employers with the main subject areas of ICT (73%), Health (72%) and Business (71%).

Employers who had heard of higher apprenticeships were asked if they provided or had plans in place to provide) higher apprenticeships at Level 4 or 5, degree apprenticeships at Level 6 or 7 or any other Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships. Around a third (34%) of employers reported providing or having plans to provide a higher apprenticeship at Level 4 or 5, while around one-fifth (22%) reported providing or planning to provide a degree apprenticeship at Level 6 or 7. One-in-ten (10%) employers were planning to, or had provided, a Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeship. Among employers who did provide, or planned to provide higher or degree apprenticeships, the main reason was to help staff develop their skills (61%). The main reason among employers not offering higher or degree apprenticeships was that there was a lack of demand from employees (24%).

Delivery, influence over, and understanding of apprenticeship training

Most employers reported that their apprentices had received training from an external training provider, separate from their day-to-day work duties (95%). A high proportion of employers provided their own training to their apprentice in addition to the external training (77%). Employers who offered Hair and Beauty as their main apprenticeship type were by far the most likely to provide in-house training for their apprentices in addition to the external training, with almost all (98%) doing so.

More than eight-in-ten (83%) employers reported that a training provider assessed apprentices' existing qualifications and training prior to starting. This was consistent with 2021 and consistent between employers of completer and current apprentices.

Employers were asked how important it was for their apprentices to have or to achieve Functional Skills Level 1 or Level 2 or a GCSE standard pass in maths and English by the end of their apprenticeship. Around four-in-five (78%) employers considered it important for their apprentices to have or to achieve this level.

The proportion of employers who had an influence on the structure, content, delivery or duration of the apprenticeship had decreased. Two-in-five (40%) employers reported they had an influence compared with 43% in 2021. Among the 53% of employers who were not able to influence the apprenticeship, one quarter of them (25%) wanted to have an influence (13% among all employers). This was down slightly from 2021 where 28% of employers who were not able to influence, said they would have liked to have had an influence. Employers whose main apprenticeships were of a lower level, were more likely to have wanted to have an influence on the apprenticeship (27% of employers whose

main apprenticeship was either Level 2 or 3 compared with 17% of employers whose main apprenticeship was Level 4 to 7).

DfE guidance states that at least 20% of an apprentice's time must be spent on off-the-job training (OTJT) based on their normal working hours. However, DfE made changes to the way that this was calculated so that, from the 1st of August 2022, a maximum of 30 hours per week are used to calculate the time that should be spent on off-the-job training. This means that apprentices working more than 30 hours are required to undertake a minimum of 6 hours of OTJT, rather than 20% of the hours they work, as before. The purpose of this change was to widen participation to potential apprentices working in sectors with above average working hours. Seven-in-ten (70%) employers said that they understood very or fairly well what counted towards the OTJT requirement, a decrease compared with 76% in 2021. This decrease follows a period over which changes were made to OTJT requirements (changes were made in 2022). Just over a third (35%) said that they were aware of these changes to the requirements, while around two-thirds (65%) were not aware. This may have impacted on overall employer understanding of what activities counted towards the OTJT requirement. However, among those that were aware of changes to the OTJT requirements, most (84%) thought that the new guidance that had been introduced was clear.

In 2021 DfE introduced new flexibilities for the apprenticeship programme including 'Flexi-job' apprenticeships and accelerated apprenticeships. The former enable apprentices to move between employers more easily in sectors where short-term contracts are the norm.⁴⁵ Accelerated apprenticeships permit the duration of an apprenticeship to be reduced by 3 months or more if there the learner has sufficient prior learning or experience.⁶

While overall pre-survey awareness of the new flexibilities was low, after hearing a brief description about them, more employers were open to offering these apprenticeship types. Around one-in-five (21%) were aware of accelerated apprenticeships, and once employers heard a little about these flexibilities, 59% of employers felt they were likely to offer accelerated apprenticeships. Just over one-in-ten (13%) were aware of flexi-job apprenticeships, and once employers heard a little about these flexibilities, 29% said they were likely to offer flexi-job apprenticeships.

⁴ Flexible Apprenticeships Life Sciences – Manual Published (abhi.org.uk)

⁵ https://www.citb.co.uk/media/jqfbiesq/20210426_-csdg-cleared-flexible-apprenticeships-manual-construction-_final.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-can-apprenticeships-be-delivered-for-your-business#accelerated-apprenticeships>

Satisfaction and benefits

Levels of overall employer satisfaction with apprenticeships remained high, with 83% of employers satisfied with their main apprenticeship programme. Satisfaction levels for employers with completer apprentices stayed in line with the 2021 and 2018-19 surveys.

Satisfaction varied by the main subject area offered by an employer. Satisfaction was highest within Leisure and ICT (95% and 90%), and lowest in Arts and Media (80%) and Construction (76%). Smaller employers (less than 10 employees at their organisation) were most likely to be dissatisfied (13% with fewer than 10 employees at their organisation, compared with an average of 6%). Employers whose main programme was at a higher level (Level 4 or above) continued to be more likely to be satisfied than those whose main programme was at a lower level (Level 4 and above: 87%, vs. Level 2 or 3: 83%).⁷

Although satisfaction overall has stayed consistent over time, across all employers, they were less satisfied than in 2021 with five particular elements of apprenticeships. These elements were the ability to select apprenticeship relevant to needs (80% vs. 82% in 2021), the ability to influence training, structure, content, delivery, duration (53% vs. 56% in 2021), the quality of applicants (66% vs. 69% in 2021), how the provider offered learning flexibly to meet their needs (75% vs. 78% in 2021) and the amount, and complexity, of paperwork and administration involved with apprenticeships (74% vs. 76% in 2021).

However, among employers with completer apprentices, satisfaction with individual elements of apprenticeships remained mostly stable.

A high proportion of employers would recommend an apprenticeship to others (84%), and employers continued to experience a wide range of benefits as a result of training apprentices. The most common benefit was the development of skills relevant to the organisation (86%), and more than three-quarters (77%) of employers experienced increased productivity. Among employers who trained existing employees as apprentices, three-quarters (75%) reported improved staff retention. Employers whose main apprenticeship was at Level 4-7 were more likely to report at least one benefit (99% vs. 95% of employers whose main apprenticeship was at Level 2 or 3).

End Point assessments

Increasingly employers are aware that their apprentices need to undergo an end-point assessment (EPA). Seven-in-ten (72%) employers with current apprentices on standards were aware that their apprentices would be required to undergo an EPA, an increase

⁷ There was no significant difference in satisfaction between Levels 4 and 5, and Levels 6 and 7.

since 2021 (66%). This was higher among employers of completer apprentices who had completed standards (84%).

Most employers with apprentices on standards had not chosen their end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) themselves, as the choice was made by the training provider (72%). One-in-ten (9%) reported the EPAO selection was made jointly between themselves and the training provider. A further 9% reported there was no choice, as only 1 EPAO was available.

Employers reported that apprentices were most commonly informed of the EPA when they signed up for the apprenticeship (66% employers of completer apprentices, 45% employers of current apprentices).

Among employers of completer apprentices, eight-in-ten (83%) felt that the assessment apprentices completed was a good test of their occupational competence to do the job. A similar proportion (80%) thought the EPA was important for their organisation.

Overall, employers of completer apprentices were mostly satisfied with the EPA process. When asked what they would change about the EPA process, employers of completer apprentices most common response was that they did not know what could be improved (45%), or that the EPA did not need to improve (14%).

Employers' awareness and understanding of apprenticeship funding

In England, since 2017, there have been significant changes to the apprenticeship funding process, including the introduction of the apprenticeship levy for employers with a UK wage bill of more than £3 million, to create long term sustainable funding for apprenticeships.⁸ Employer understanding of the apprenticeship funding process has decreased since 2021. Half (50%) of employers thought their organisation understood the apprenticeship funding process well, compared with 67% in 2021.

One key funding change since 2017, is that the DfE has been making additional payments to both employers and training providers for apprentices aged 16 to 18 or for those aged 19 to 24 who are care leavers or who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). These additional payments of £500 are made 90 and 365 days after the start of the apprenticeship, totalling £1,000 if the apprentice reaches 365 days.⁹ Six-in-ten (60%) employers were not aware of either of the additional payments available to

⁸ [Pay Apprenticeship Levy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pay-apprenticeship-levy)

⁹ For more information about additional payments available to employers based on the age of an apprentice, see:

[Payments for hiring a young apprentice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/payments-for-hiring-a-young-apprentice);

[Apprenticeships care leavers' bursary guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeships-care-leavers-bursary-guidance);

[Resources to support care leavers into apprenticeships - Learning and Work Institute](https://www.learningandworkinstitute.org.uk/resources-to-support-care-leavers-into-apprenticeships);

[Apprenticeship funding rules - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules);

[Apprenticeship technical funding guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-technical-funding-guide).

them for eligible apprentices they employ. One-quarter (25%) of employers were aware of both.

Lack of awareness of either payment was highest among newer employers of apprentices (70% unaware for those offering apprenticeships for 3 years or less vs. 53% unaware for those offering for 10+ years). Among employers aware of the payment for 16- to 18-year-olds, 54% reported they had received the payment. Among employers aware of the payment for eligible 19- to 24-year-olds, 22% reported receiving the payment. Receiving the payment for eligible 19- to 24-year-olds was more common among employers with a main level of Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships (32% vs. 22% overall).¹⁰

The most common uses of these payments were to pay for training (53%), pay for equipment or to pay for other materials for apprentices (51%), and to pay for the apprentices' wages for the initial period (42%).

Future plans

Employers were asked whether they expected to continue to offer apprenticeships, and if so whether they planned to increase or decrease their apprentice numbers, over the next 2 to 3 years (and the reasoning behind these plans). Overall, the proportion of employers who were planning to increase the number of apprenticeships has decreased. Just over a quarter of employers (26%) were planning to increase the number of their apprenticeships in the next 2 to 3 years, compared with 36% of employers who reported this in 2021. Among employers of completer apprentices, the proportion of those who were planning to increase the number of apprenticeships over the next 2 to 3 years was similar to the 2018-19 figures (29% respectively). Employers of completer apprentices were more likely than employers of current apprentices to report that they planned to increase the number of apprenticeships offered (29% vs. 25%).

Employers whose main level of apprenticeship was Level 4 to 7 were more likely to report expecting to increase the number of apprentices than average (33%), as were large employers (with more than 100 in their organisation) (36%). Employers whose main subject area was Health were more likely than average to report they were planning to decrease their apprenticeship offer in the future (8% vs. 5% average). Employers whose main subject area was Hair and Beauty were 3 times more likely than average to report they were planning to stop offering apprenticeships (19% vs. 6%).

Among employers who were planning to increase their number of apprentices, the main reason for this was because the organisation was expanding (45%), or because it was a good way to meet their skill needs (33%). The main reasons for planning to decrease or

¹⁰ As the transfer of payments is organised by providers, some employers may have been unaware of receiving these payments.

stop offering apprenticeships were that they were not looking to recruit new staff (35%), and a lack of (good) candidates (11%).

One-in-five (24%) employers with existing apprenticeships at Levels 6 or 7 were expecting to introduce more subject areas at Levels 6 or 7. This is lower than the 32% who reported this in 2021. The most common subject area employers expected to introduce at this level was Business (37%).

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from the Employer strand of the 2023 Apprenticeships Evaluation Survey. Findings from the Learner survey can be found in the corresponding Learner report. The Employer survey comprised of 3,926 interviews, conducted between 27th July 2023 and 27th October 2023 with employers in England who had had employees complete an apprenticeship between 1st July 2021 and 28th February 2022 (945) or who employed current apprentices as of 1st January 2023 (2,981).

Survey background and policy context

The Apprenticeship Evaluation surveys, the first of which took place in 2011, have been an integral part of the evaluation strategy for the apprenticeships programme in England.¹¹ The surveys enable robust time series monitoring of the programme, in particular with regard to quality, satisfaction, motivation, benefits, progression and post-apprenticeship retention.

Apprenticeship reforms

Apprenticeships were fundamentally reformed from 2015 to improve quality and better meet the needs of employers and individuals, supported by sustainable funding. As a result of these reforms:

- Employers now design apprenticeship standards to meet their skills needs, and there are over 690 industry-designed occupational standards available from entry-level to degree-level. Apprenticeship standards were introduced in 2017, with the previous framework model being closed to new starters from August 2020. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) was established to work with employers to design and introduce apprenticeships and quality assure assessment plans, determine funding bands and approve apprenticeship standards and assessment plans. Training is delivered by registered providers that are regularly inspected by Ofsted.¹²
- Apprentices complete rigorous independent end-point assessment (EPA) to show they are fully competent in their role and there is now a mandated 12-month minimum apprenticeship duration. EPAs are an independent assessment of the knowledge, skills and behaviours which have been learnt throughout an apprenticeship standard and tests the apprentices' ability to apply them in the workplace. Every apprentice is required to undertake an assessment at the end of their training to confirm that they have achieved occupational competence and

¹¹ [Evaluation of Apprenticeships: Employers - BIS Research Paper 77 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/evaluation-of-apprenticeships-employers-2023.pdf)

¹² [Home / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/institute-for-apprenticeships-and-technical-education)

completed the apprenticeship. EPAs are delivered by end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs).

- The apprenticeship levy was introduced from May 2017, payable at 0.5% of the annual pay bill of UK employers where this exceeded £3m to address perceived employer under-investment in training, coupled with the need to fund increased apprenticeship volumes. Non-levy payers need to make a 5% contribution toward the cost of apprenticeship off-the-job-training (OTJT). From February 2022, changes were made to allow levy-paying employers to transfer some of their funds to other employers to support their supply chains and local areas.
- The Apprenticeship Service was introduced in England in 2017 as an online service for employers that pay the apprenticeship levy. It provides a full range of services to support employers to manage all aspects of apprenticeships from recruitment, through management of funding to final end-point-assessment and issuing of final apprenticeship certificates. The service also hosts apprentices, training providers and End-Point-Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) who together with employers, collaborate through the service. Since 2021 it was expanded to include all employers and there are currently over 260k employer accounts registered with the service. The Apprenticeship Service also hosts the campaign website for Apprenticeships which provides advice and guidance on all aspects of apprenticeships for employers, apprentices, and 'influencers'.

Increasing starts and widening participation

Alongside these fundamental reforms, the Government have worked to increase take-up of, and access to, apprenticeships. The Government has:

- Provided additional funding to employers and training providers who take on young apprentices, apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities, and care leavers.¹³
- Continued to promote apprenticeships in schools and colleges through the Apprenticeship Support & Knowledge programme (ASK). Over 2 million students have received support from ASK.¹⁴ In addition, the 'Get the Jump' campaign aims to raise awareness and understanding of all the different education and training pathways open at post-16 and post-18, including apprenticeships.¹⁵

¹³ The Government pays an additional payment of £1,000 to both employers and training providers when they take on any apprentice aged under 19, or apprentices aged 19-24 who have an EHCP or have been in care. The Government also funds all of the training costs for small employers (fewer than 50 staff) when they take on apprentices aged under 19. From August 2023, the Government increased the bursary that it pays to apprentices aged 16-24 who are care leavers, this additional payment increased from £1,000 to £3,000.

¹⁴ [The ASK programme \(apprenticeships.gov.uk\)](https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk)

¹⁵ [Get the Jump: explore your education and training choices | National Careers Service](#)

- Supported degree apprenticeship providers to expand and improve access to their offers, through a £40m Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund, delivered by the Office for Students.¹⁶

Introduced new flexibilities in 2021 for the apprenticeship programme including ‘Flexi-job’ apprenticeships and accelerated apprenticeships. The former enable apprentices to move between employers more easily in sectors where short-term contracts are the norm.^{17,18} Accelerated apprenticeships permit the duration of an apprenticeship to be reduced by 3 months or more if there the learner has sufficient prior learning or experience.¹⁹

Improving quality and supporting achievements

Achievement rates on apprenticeship standards (introduced 2017) have been lower than those recorded for frameworks.²⁰ To address this, in June 2022 the Government announced an ambition to reach a 67% achievement rate for apprenticeship standards by 2025. Building on the programme of continuous improvement, actions are in place to improve quality to ensure more apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeships:

- By taking swift action where training quality is poor, supported by Ofsted inspecting all apprenticeship providers by 2025.
- Improved practical guidance toolkits for employers, training providers and apprenticeship practitioners to spread effective practice.²¹
- For providers, initiatives include refreshing the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers with more stringent criteria and a £7.5 million investment in an Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) programme for teachers and trainers of apprentices.²²
- Through the introduction in 2017 of a minimum 20% OTJT requirement to ensure the development of new skills beyond their prior knowledge and current job

¹⁶ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8098/ofs-spg-guidance-2023-24.pdf>

¹⁷ Flexible Apprenticeships Life Sciences – Manual Published (abhi.org.uk)

¹⁸ https://www.citb.co.uk/media/jqfbiesq/20210426_-csdg-cleared-flexible-apprenticeships-manual-construction-_final.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-can-apprenticeships-be-delivered-for-your-business#accelerated-apprenticeships>

²⁰ The official achievement for the 2021-22 academic year was 51% for those undertaking apprenticeship standards, for those in apprenticeship frameworks it was 65%. More information can be found by looking at the ‘National achievement rate tables’ here: [Apprenticeships and traineeships, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeships-and-traineeships-academic-year-2022-23-explore-education-statistics)

²¹ [SMC-Apprenticeships-Toolkit.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108881/SMC-Apprenticeships-Toolkit.pdf)

²² [Apprenticeship Workforce Development - The ETF \(et-foundation.co.uk\)](https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/apprenticeship-workforce-development)

experience.²³ In August 2022, this was revised to 20% of a maximum 30 hour week (6 hours), regardless of the apprentice's actual full-time working hours.²⁴

The collective aim of these reforms and policy changes is to raise the quality of apprenticeships and ensure they meet employers' skills needs. This survey comes at a time when the apprenticeship reforms from 2017 are well embedded in the skills system. There is a strong focus on ensuring the changes are delivering the desired impact, providing value for money and meeting apprentice and employer needs.

Apprenticeship reforms

Wider context for the 2023 surveys

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated social distancing restrictions had a notable impact on employers and on apprenticeships, and temporary flexibilities to apprenticeships in certain cases were introduced in 2020. These allowed employers and training providers to initiate and report a break in learning. These flexibilities and pauses to apprenticeships ended in March 2022.

COVID-19 is recognised as having had a longer-term impact on how we live and work, and it is important to note that the 2023 Apprenticeship Evaluation took place in the context of a sustained period of change to working practices.

There has also been a period of economic turbulence and high inflation in recent years, known as the 'cost of living crisis', which may have impacted employers' decisions around recruiting apprentices and the wider apprenticeship market.

Research aims

This report forms part of a series going back to 2011, providing insight into how employer views of apprenticeships have evolved over time. The 2023 survey was the first survey since the end of all COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, with the previous survey having been carried out in 2021. The study provided an opportunity to continue to measure the longer-term impact of the 2017 reforms as well as an initial assessment of the recent policy changes introduced in 2022.

The research contacted two cohorts of employers, those who had apprentices completing a programme between 1st July 2021 and 28th February 2022 and those who, on 1st

²³ [Apprenticeship off-the-job training \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

²⁴ Prior to this change, off-the-job training used to have to account for at least 20% of an apprentice's employed time during their apprenticeship (regardless of hours worked). This training must be received as part of their employed hours, for the purpose of achieving their apprenticeship. It is not training delivered for the sole purpose of enabling the apprentice to perform the work for which they have been employed.

January 2023, were currently employing an apprentice.²⁵ The two audiences are referred to in this report as ‘employers of completer apprentices’ or ‘completers’ and ‘employers of current apprentices’ or ‘current’ respectively. The gap before interviewing employers of completer apprentices was there to measure the impact of apprenticeships on employers after completion.

The key aims of the survey were to understand why employers engage with apprenticeships, how they access the apprenticeship system, the impact apprenticeships have on their organisation, the progression and outcomes for apprentices when they finish their apprenticeship, and awareness of new policy areas (for example new apprenticeship flexibilities, and new payments available for employers).

The survey also explored satisfaction with apprenticeships, in how they are delivered, and views around the level of influence employers have and would like to have over training. The survey also looks towards the future, asking about future plans for apprenticeships, and the reasons for those plans.

Methodology

Survey scope

The employer survey involved a telephone survey with 3,926 employers in England who had had individual staff complete an apprenticeship between 1st July 2021 and 28th February 2022 or who currently employed apprentices.

This was the second iteration of the survey where the employers of current apprentices were included, as they were first introduced in the 2021 survey. Including this cohort allowed for up-to-date analysis of how employers are reacting to recent apprenticeship policy changes. The survey in 2023 took place later in the year than in 2021. To maintain comparability for employers with current apprentices, employers were asked to answer based on what the situation was on 30th June 2023.

The data for employers of completer apprentices’ is broadly comparable with the survey data in the 2018-19 survey and prior.

There was a considerable overlap in eligibility for the two employer groups: on the sample from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), around a fifth (18%) of employers of current apprentices also had completer apprentices, and around two-fifths (42%) of employers of completer apprentices also had current apprentices. Employers in the overlap between sample windows had a double chance of selection, but were only

²⁵ This was the most recent complete data available at the time of sample design (ILR extract R06 for 2022/23).

selected to be interviewed regarding apprentices in one sample window, to avoid overburdening the respondent.²⁶

Sampling and associated challenges

The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) is held by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), part of the DfE. The ILR contains records of all apprenticeships in England, and was used to identify the population of employers in scope for the survey. The extracts used included all apprenticeships started up to 1st January 2023.

Up to April 2022, the ILR included a unique employer ID (EmpID) which was used to obtain details of the employers at site-level. These included the name, postcode and telephone number of the site at which every apprentice was employed. For a limited number of records, an email address was also included. This information was used to produce the sample for the research. The survey therefore took place at a site level, and the results provided in this report are based on sites, not organisations.^{27 28} The following site details from the ILR were used to stratify the sample:

- The size of apprenticeship scheme at the site of employment, in terms of number of apprentices.
- The most commonly used level of apprenticeship at the site.²⁹
- The most commonly used subject area of apprenticeship at the site.

As in previous Apprenticeships Evaluation surveys, these subject areas are defined using the Ofqual Sector Subject Area (SSA Tier 1) classification, with abbreviated titles, as shown in Table 1-1.³⁰ Further information on stratification is provided in the accompanying Technical Report.

Since April 2022, providers have not been required to provide an EmpID on the ILR. As such, there was a proportion of records in scope for the survey on the ILR that had no EmpID. This meant that IFF Research were not able to identify whether these were unique employers, and therefore not able to get to a true picture of the population of employers for weighting purposes. It also meant that IFF Research were not able to

²⁶ Further detail on how the sample was drawn can be found in the Technical Report.

²⁷ The ILR database does not contain any information that enables the linking of sites of employment with other sites of the same business or enterprise.

²⁸ Analysis is provided in the report by both size of organisation and size of site. Where size of organisation is used for analysis, this is the size of the wider organisation the site was part of.

²⁹ Apprenticeship levels range from Level 2 (lowest) up to Level 7 (highest). Level 2 (Intermediate) apprenticeships are equivalent to a GCSE level qualification; Level 3 (Advanced) are equivalent to an A-level qualification; Level 4 and above apprenticeships (Higher) are equivalent to a Foundation degree or above. Note that some Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships are undertaken as 'Degree apprenticeships', i.e. equivalent to a Bachelor's or Master's degree.

³⁰ The report uses 'Sector subject areas' (SSA). These are described more fully here: [Qualification descriptions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualification-descriptions)

match on the contact details of these employers for the survey in the same way as previous years.

A number of steps were taken to overcome the challenges related to not being able to identify the site that apprentices were based at. This included incorporating Apprenticeship Service data. The steps taken are described in the accompanying Technical Report. After IFF Research conducted the above exercise, they proceeded to aggregate the records based on EmpID to create a 'modelled' population file. However, as this was a 'modelled' population, any comparisons of the population against previous waves using ILR data should be treated with caution.

Table 1-1. Abbreviations of Sector Subject Area (SSA Tier 1) titles used for analysis

Sector Subject Area (SSA Tier 1) title	SSA code	Abbreviation
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	03	Agriculture
Arts, Media, and Publishing	09	Arts & Media
Business, Administration and Law	15	Business
Construction, Planning, and the Built Environment	05	Construction
Education and Training	13	Education
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	04	Engineering
Health, Public Services and Care	01	Health
Information and Communication Technology	06	ICT
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	08	Leisure
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	07	Retail
Science and Mathematics ³¹	02	Science

Source: Ofqual / IFF Research

The final profile of the sample, and more detail on the process of sampling, is provided in Chapter 2 of the Technical Report.

³¹ Due to the small base size with this group, data for this audience was merged with Engineering for analysis purposes.

Weighting

Although the sampling and fieldwork approach was designed to achieve a spread of interviews close to the 'modelled' employer population derived from the ILR, some groups of employers were oversampled in order to allow separate analysis. The survey dataset was then weighted to produce reported results in line with the population.

Two weights were produced, both of which were used to generate figures in this report:

- **Current / completer employers** – a weight which provides separate results for employers of current apprentices and employers of completer apprentices. This was used for figures which relate only to one of these groups. If used to combine these groups, this weight would produce data which included the group of employers with both current and completer apprentices twice. These two groups are referenced throughout the report as 'employers of completer apprentices' and 'employers of current apprentices'.
- **All employers** – weighting employers of current apprentices, employers of completer apprentices and employers of both in line with their relative numbers in the population. This was used for figures representing all employers of apprentices, and sub-groups of employers not broken down by whether they have current or completer apprentices.

Further information is provided on weighting in Chapter 6 of the Technical Report.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork took place between 27th July and 27th October 2023.

Interviewers asked to speak to the person in charge of training taking place at that site in the subject areas listed on the ILR.

In line with the 2021 Apprenticeships Evaluation surveys, but in a change from surveys conducted prior to this, Random Probability Sampling (RPS) was used. This meant an employer, once selected, was called an agreed minimum of twelve times and sample was not withdrawn once various 'ideal' targets by level, sector subject area and apprenticeship status had been reached. The impact of this was that it helped to increase participation among busier or more difficult-to-reach employers, increasing the representativeness of the resulting dataset.

Employers were interviewed about either current or completer apprentices. Where they had both types of apprentice recorded on the ILR, a 50:50 random selection process was used during sampling to determine which survey they would be asked about.³² For employers interviewed regarding completer apprentices, there was a timing gap between

³² For more details, see Chapter 2 of the Technical Report.

the apprentices discussed completing their studies and fieldwork of approximately 17 to 27 months. This allowed time for the impact of the apprentice on the employer to become apparent.

In total, 3,926 interviews were completed, 2,981 regarding current apprentices, and 945 regarding completer apprentices. The overall response rate across all employers was 26%, an increase from 24% in the 2021 survey. More detail is provided in the Technical Report on fieldwork (in Chapter 4) and response rates (in Chapter 5).

Structure of the report

Each chapter begins with a summary of key findings and includes analysis of changes from 2021 to 2023 where available. Where comparisons are made with surveys in years including and further back than 2018-19, this is based on comparing the responses to employers of completer apprentices data in 2021 and 2023.

- [Chapter 2](#) looks at who employs apprentices, giving a summary of the profile of apprentices' employers, using secondary data and survey data.
- [Chapter 3](#) looks at what types of apprenticeships are on offer, giving an outline of the profile of employers in terms of the apprenticeships they provide, using secondary data and survey data.
- [Chapter 4](#) looks at why and how apprentices were recruited, giving an overview of employers' practices when it comes to new recruits. This section also includes data on why they use apprenticeships and what purposes they have used them for.
- [Chapter 5](#) looks at keeping apprentices through retention and progression as well as looking at the proportion on fixed-term contracts.
- [Chapter 6](#) examines awareness and use of higher and degree apprenticeships as well as the reasons why employers offer them.
- [Chapter 7](#) looks at delivery, assessment, and influence of apprenticeship training, including initial assessment of apprentices' skills prior to starting and employer influence on apprenticeships training. This section also looks at employer understanding of the new OTJT requirements as well as awareness and understanding of the new apprenticeship programmes.
- [Chapter 8](#) looks at satisfaction of employers with apprenticeships, including advocacy of apprenticeships, their benefits to employers, and what employers would like to change.
- [Chapter 9](#) looks at apprenticeship policy changes including understanding of and satisfaction with EPAs and apprenticeship standards, as well as how important these are for their organisation.

- [Chapter 10](#) looks at employers' awareness and understanding of apprenticeship funding and additional payments.
- [Chapter 11](#) examines the future provision of apprenticeships.
- [Chapter 12](#) outlines the conclusions to this report.
- [Appendix A](#) outlines the acronyms used in the report.
- [Appendix B](#) gives a detailed profile of the employers who took part on the survey.

Reporting conventions

This report leads with figures for all employers combining those with completer and current apprentices, followed by discussion of differences among subgroups. The key subgroups that are analysed include:

- **Main subject area**, as selected by the employer in the survey. This approach was also taken in 2021. The main subject area of apprenticeships should not be confused with the main sector of the employer's operations (i.e., Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) sector).
- **Main level**, as selected by the employer in the survey. Levels 4 and 5 are grouped together to represent higher apprenticeships, and separately, Levels 6 and 7 are grouped together to represent degree and Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships, in line with 2021.
- **Sector of the employer**, using the ONS SIC2007 classification, as given by employers in the survey.³³
- **Size of employer site**, by number of staff at the site, as given by employers in the survey, banded into groups for convenient analysis (less than 10 employees, 10 to 99 employees, and 100 or more employees).³⁴
- **Size of employer organisation**, the number of staff at the organisation level (that the site is part of), banded into the same groups as employer site.

Reflecting the DfE policy interest, analysis by employer size is presented at the organisation level in the first instance. Analysis by size of site is shown where there are particular findings of interest, for example where the difference between large (100+) and small (less than 10) employers by size of site is of far greater statistical significance than

³³ This information is not collected on the ILR.

³⁴ This classification uses employment at the site – i.e., including working proprietors – rather than employees. This information is not collected on the ILR.

the difference between the large (100+) and small (less than 10) employers, by the size of the organisation.

Where it is important to the narrative, differences are also commonly explored by other sub-groups, such as region, Levy eligibility, employers of completer apprentices versus employers of current apprentices, and number of apprentices as a proportion of their workforce.

Levy eligibility was based on a question in the survey which asked if the organisation had a wage bill of £3m or more in the UK at the time of the survey; if they stated that they did, it was assumed that they would be eligible for the Levy.

In some sections the Retail subject area has been further split out into Hair and Beauty and other Retail apprenticeships. The rationale here was that employers of Hair and Beauty apprentices often show markedly different opinions or behaviours to other employers of Retail subject area apprentices.

The survey was carried out at site level; that is, both branches/sites and head offices were interviewed. Where the report refers to the proportion of 'employers,' this refers to specific site not the whole organisation unless specifically referenced.

All findings are based on weighted data. Unweighted bases (the number of responses from which the findings are derived) are displayed on tables and charts as appropriate to give an indication of the robustness of results. Please note that, unless explicitly stated the minimum base size for reporting was 30 and base sizes lower than this have been suppressed in all charts. A dash (-) is used in tables in this report to flag where the base size is lower than 30. All data reported is from the Apprenticeship Evaluation Surveys series unless otherwise stated.

When percentages are provided in the text for sub-groups, such as by sector, this indicates that the proportion of this sub-group that gave an answer is statistically significantly different to the average of those not in that sub-group, at the 95% confidence level. The phrasing "most likely", "more likely than average" or "particularly likely", etc. is used as a shorthand for this. In tables and figures, significant figures are denoted with an asterisk (*) and bolding.

A note on comparability

Throughout the report, comparisons are made with the 2021 Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey (and earlier surveys where possible for employers with completer apprentices).³⁵

³⁵ There were also substantial changes in questionnaire design between the 2017 and 2018-19 surveys, making the scope for comparisons with data from prior to the 2018-19 survey limited.

There was no equivalent comparison group for 'all employers' or employers with current apprentices prior to 2021.

Due to sampling challenges as described above, direct comparisons of ILR data between 2023 and prior waves should be made with caution.

There are some other notable differences:

- **The first of these was the exclusion of 'paused apprentices' from the employers of current apprentices group, marking a return to the approach in 2018-19 and before.** The 2021 survey included apprentices who were marked as paused on the ILR, and also apprentices with a planned end date prior 1 January 2023 (the point at which current apprentices were sampled) but who had not been marked as having completed. In 2021 it was thought that this group (specifically those with a planned between 1 March 2020 and 1 December 2020) would likely be 'paused' apprentices due to the impact of COVID-19. Neither of these sample groups were included in the 2023 survey.
- **The change in fieldwork dates, which ran from July to October 2023 compared with May to August 2021 for the 2021 survey.** This meant the gap between the date of sampling (1 January 2023) and fieldwork was larger than it was in the previous survey. To counteract this, employers of current apprentices were asked about the situation on 30th June 2023, as opposed to the situation at the time of interview. This was to ensure that the data remained as comparable as possible to previous years. Moreover, it was also to ensure that employers did not get confused as to which 'current apprentice(s)' the survey referred to, in case they had taken on a newer intake of apprentices at the start of the new academic year.
- **Inclusion of 'expected current' apprentices.** To further counteract the above, employers of 'expected current' apprentices (namely those who were due to finish their apprenticeship during the fieldwork period) were included in the current apprentice group, with their sample prioritised in the early weeks of the fieldwork. The reason for this was to minimise the risk of those with shorter apprenticeships being underrepresented in the final data, due to fieldwork taking place later in the calendar year compared with 2021, and there typically being a large intake of apprentices in August and September each year.³⁶ Although not included in the 2021 sample (but were included in the final weighted population), this group were included in the fieldwork sample for the 2018-19 survey.
- **The adaptation to the population profile used for weighting employers of current apprentices.** In 2023, employers of current apprentices have been weighted to the population profile of apprentices that matched their sampling

³⁶ In 2021, fieldwork ran from May-August. In 2023, fieldwork ran from July-October.

criteria, namely employers who had active apprentices in the January 2023 ILR release and who had employees still undertaking their apprenticeship at the time of fieldwork. The population profile used for weighting therefore excludes employers of apprentices who had completed their apprenticeship in the gap between the sample selection in January 2023 and the fieldwork period beginning in July. In 2021, the population profile used for the weighting of current apprentices included this group of employers to adjust for this difference whereas in 2023 it did not. In neither 2021 nor 2023 were these apprentices included in the fieldwork sample.

2023 questionnaire compared with 2021

To ensure comparability, questions were kept as consistent as possible with the 2021 survey. All of the questions that focused on the impact of COVID-19 on employers were removed from the survey. There were, however, new areas of apprenticeship policy which the DfE wanted the survey to explore, such as how important employers thought the EPA was for their organisation, and awareness of OTJT requirements, new apprenticeship flexibilities (accelerated apprenticeships and flexi-job apprenticeships) and additional payments available to employers who employ apprentices of specific ages, are care leavers, or have an Education, Health or Care Plan (EHCP). Further information is provided on all changes to the questionnaire in Chapter 3 of the Technical Report, together with a copy of the final questionnaire.

2. Who employs apprentices?

Introduction

This chapter outlines the profile of employers of both completer and current apprentices and compares them to previous iterations of the survey. This is important to contextualise the other findings in the report.

The chapter uses survey data alongside data from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) to produce a projected profile of employers. While most sample data was drawn from the ILR, the survey data adds other layers, for example employer size, type and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) sector. The survey data allows a profile of employers of apprentices, something which would not be possible from the ILR alone. The employer profile is a combination of:

- Employers of current apprentices including those in the R06 ILR release who were still on an active apprenticeship as of 1st January 2023, where the apprenticeship was not due to end before fieldwork (27 June 2023 and 15 September 2023).
- Employers of completers who completed their apprenticeship between July 2021 and February 2022.³⁷
- It should be noted that figures shown in this chapter are not directly comparable to official statistics on apprentice employers since they refer to the sample windows defined for the survey. More information on the population groups and comparability to previous surveys can be found in the [Introduction](#) chapter.

Key findings

- **The largest number of employers of current apprentices were found in Health and Social Work (18%), followed by Construction and Wholesale and Retail (both 15%), Manufacturing (14%) and Education (13%).** For employers of completer apprentices, Health and Social Work was the largest sector (21%), followed by Education (16%), Manufacturing (14%) and Wholesale and Retail (11%).
- **In 2023, a fifth of all employers with current apprentices (20%) had offered apprenticeships for 3 years or fewer, while around a third (35%) had offered them for 10 or more years.**
- **Only 10% of employers of completer apprentices had been offering them for 3 years or fewer.** This was a downward trend on the 18% who said this in 2021, 23% in 2018-19 and 29% in 2017.

³⁷ A more detailed description of both sample groups is provided in the accompanying Technical Report.

- **The sectors where employers were most likely to be new to apprenticeships were Financial and Real Estate (30%) and Education (28%).**
- **In 2023, fewer employers expected to grow compared with previous years.** Just over half of private sector employers with either current or completer apprentices (53%) expected to grow in the next 12 months. This was down from 62% in 2021.

Sector and size profile

The SIC sector profile of employers with current apprentices is shown in Figure 2.1, which splits employers both by sector and organisation type (private sector, public sector and third sector).

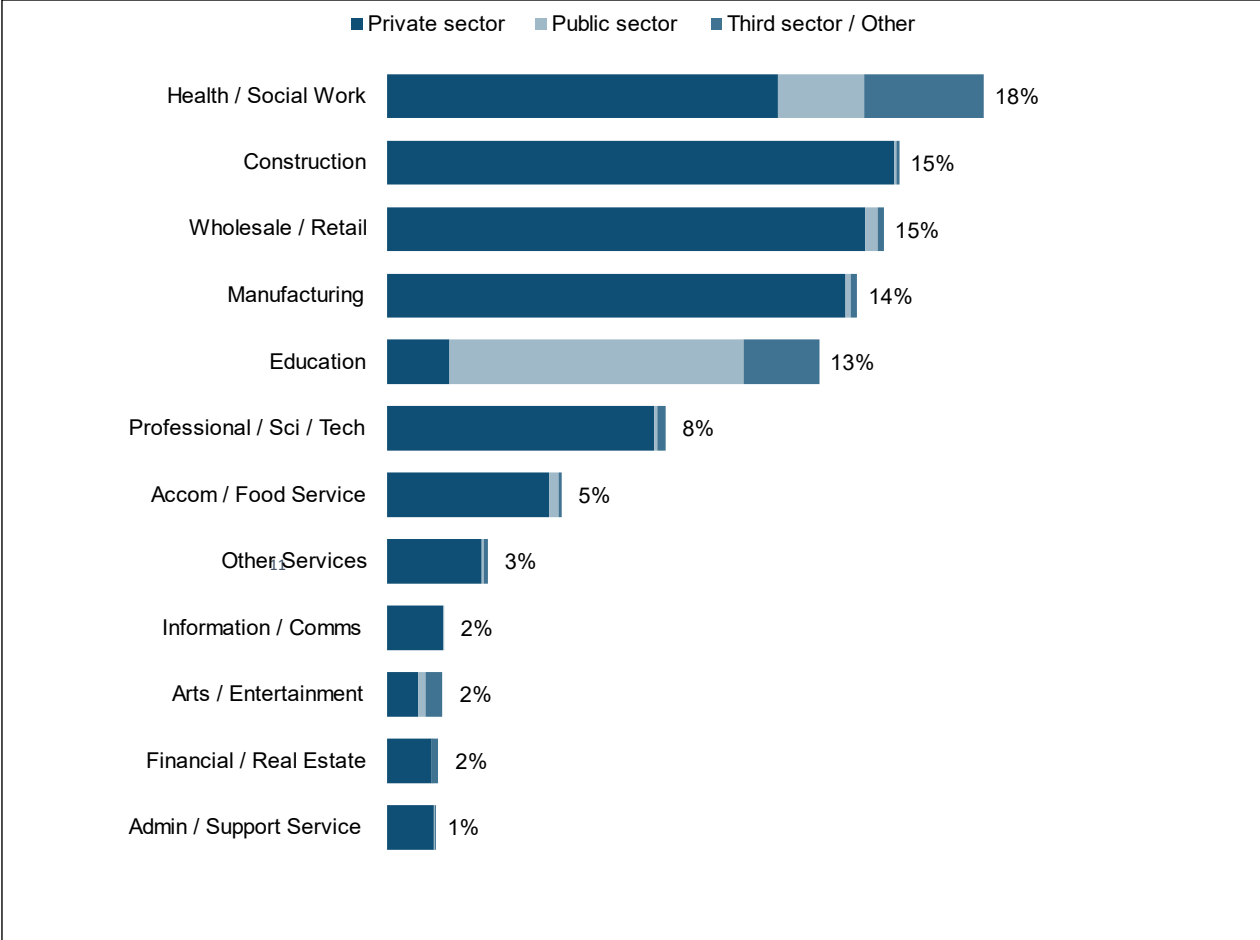
This chart is expressed in terms of the percentage of employers at a site level, not the percentage of apprentices. As some sites have more apprentices than others, this is not the same as the distribution of apprentices by sector.

The largest proportion of employers of current apprentices were found in Health and Social Work (18%), followed by Construction alongside Wholesale and Retail (both 15%), Manufacturing (14%) and Education (13%).

As shown in Figure 2-1, almost every sector, in terms of employers of current apprentices, was dominated by the private sector (who make up 79% of employers of current apprentices overall, down from 2021 when it was 81%). The only sector where there was an exception to this was Education, where the public sector dominates. Overall, the public sector accounts for 13% of employers of current apprentices, in line with the proportion seen in 2021. The third sector makes up 6%, the same figure as 2021.³⁸

³⁸ A more detailed description of both sample groups is provided in the accompanying Technical Report

Figure 2-1. SIC sector profile of employers with current apprentices (site level)



Base: Employers of current apprentices (2,981). Breakdown not shown for Agriculture or for Mining, Utilities due to low base sizes (<30). Classification used is the ONS SIC2007 classification, 1-digit level.³⁹

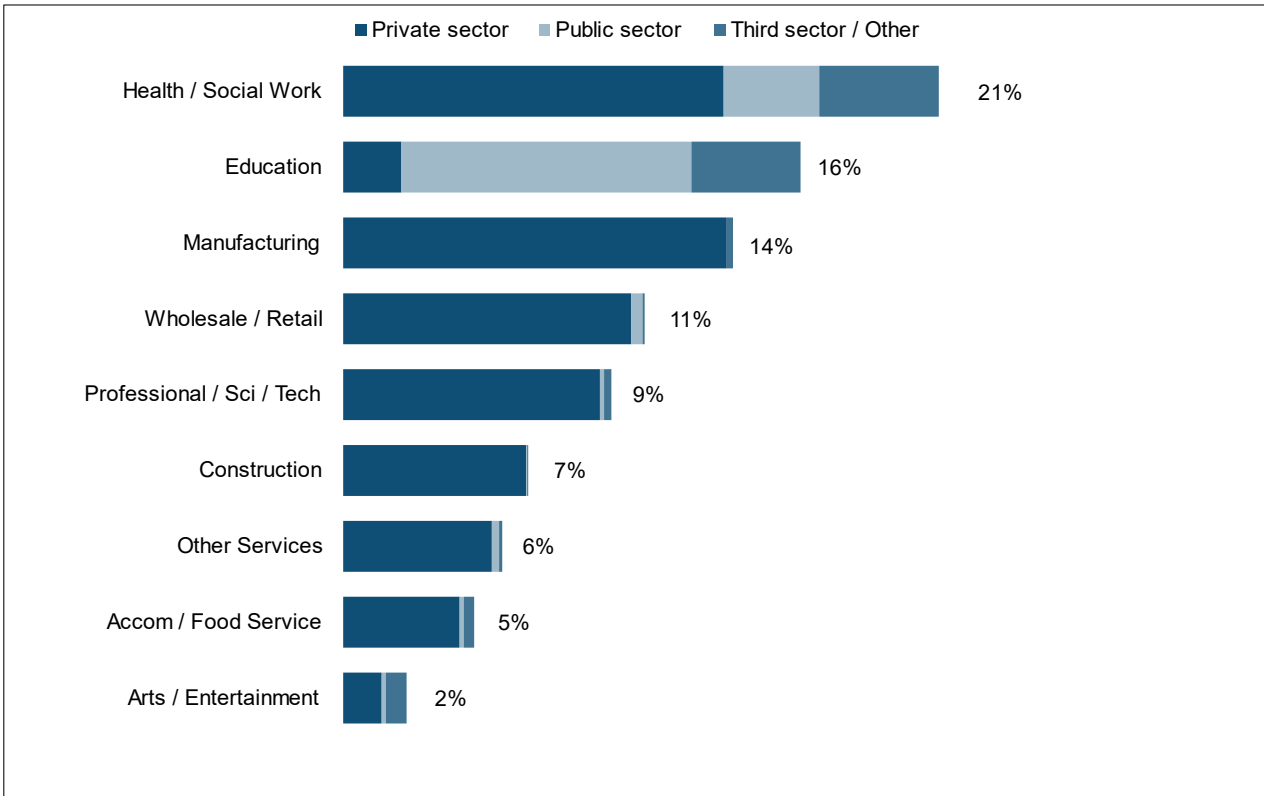
The sector profile of employers with completer apprentices is shown in Figure 2-2, showing all employers with apprentices completing between July 2021 to February 2022.

The profile here differs for employers with current apprentices not only due to possible changes since the end of the completer window in February 2022, but also because apprenticeships vary in length.

For employers of completer apprentices, Health and Social Work was the largest sector (21%), followed by Education (16%), Manufacturing (14%) and Wholesale and Retail (11%).

³⁹ <https://resources.companieshouse.gov.uk/sic/> Nature of business: Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes (companieshouse.gov.uk). Accessed 2nd January 2024.

Figure 2-2. SIC sector profile of employers with completer apprentices (site level)



Base: Employers of completer apprentices (945). Breakdown not shown for various sectors due to low base sizes (<30). Classification used is the ONS SIC2007 classification, 1-digit level.⁴⁰

In 2023, around a fifth (18%) of employers with current apprentices had less than 10 staff in their organisation. Just less than half (47%) had between 10 to 99 staff, and 32% had 100 or more staff in their organisation. For employers of completer apprentices, 13% employed less than 10 staff in their organisation, 51% had between 10 and 99 staff, and 33% had 100 or more staff.

Table 2-1 below compares the SIC sector data from the 2023 survey to the results from previous surveys back to 2015.

The proportion of current Construction (SIC sector) apprentice employers declined since the 2021 survey (from 18% to 15%), and similarly decreased for employers of completer apprentices in the sector (from 13% to 7%). Conversely, the proportion of Education and Manufacturing employers increased for both completers (from 11% to 16% for Education and 10% to 14% for Manufacturing respectively), and current (10% to 13% for Education and 11% to 14% for Manufacturing respectively).

⁴⁰ [Nature of business: Standard Industrial Classification \(SIC\) codes \(companieshouse.gov.uk\)](https://companieshouse.gov.uk/nature-of-business-standard-industrial-classification-sic-codes). Accessed 2nd January 2024.

Table 2-1. Percentages of apprentice employers in each SIC sector, since 2015

SIC Sector	2015 (completers)	2017 (completers)	2018-19 (completers)	2021 (completers)	2021 (current)	2023 (completers)	2023 (current)
Health / Social Work	24%	22%	25%	21%	16%	21%	18%*
Construction	7%	8%	9%	13%	18%	7%*	15%*
Education	11%	11%	10%	11%	10%	16%*	13%*
Manufacturing	9%	8%	8%	10%	11%	14%*	14%*
Wholesale / Retail	12%	12%	12%	9%	11%	11%	15%*
Other Services	10%	10%	9%	8%	5%	6%	3%*
Professional / Sci / Tech	5%	5%	6%	8%	10%	9%	8%*
Accommodation / Food Service	9%	7%	7%	6%	4%	1%	5%
Arts / Entertainment	4%	4%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Information / Communications	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Financial / Real Estate	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	2%*

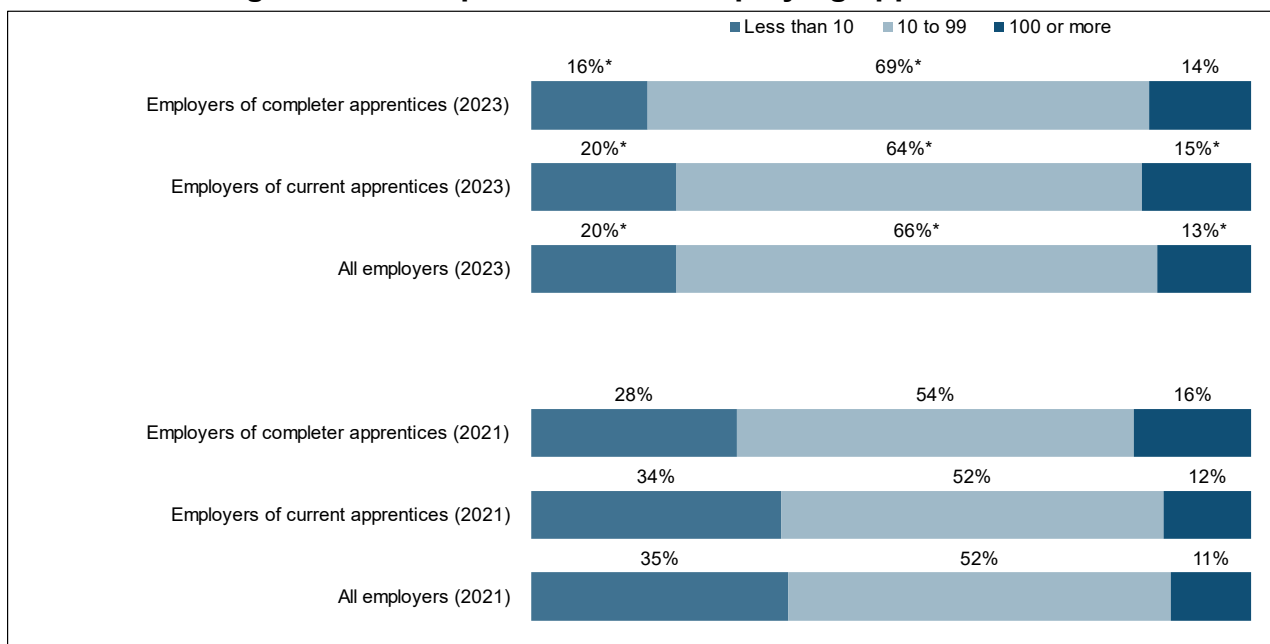
SIC Sector	2015 (completers)	2017 (completers)	2018-19 (completers)	2021 (completers)	2021 (current)	2023 (completers)	2023 (current)
Administrative / Support Services	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%*
Transport / Storage	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Public Admin / Defence	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Agriculture / Horticulture etc.	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Mining / Utilities	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<0.5%	<0.5%

Base: Employers of completer apprentices: 2015 (4,000); 2017 (4,004); 2018-19 (4,000); 2021 (977); 2023 (945). Employers of current apprentices: 2021 (3,108); 2023 (2,981). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

Around half (48%) of sites employing apprentices had less than 25 employees. The proportion of employers with less than 25 employees in the sites among employers of current apprentices was higher (48%) than among employers of completer apprentices (44%).

As shown in Figure 2-3, 13% of sites employing apprentices had 100 or more employees, up from 11% in 2021. For both employers of current and completer apprentices, the trend compared with 2021 was that there was a greater proportion of 10-99 employee size sites with apprentices.

Figure 2-3. Size profile of sites employing apprentices⁴¹



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). Employers of current apprentices: 2023 (2,981); 2021 (3,108). Employers of completer apprentices: 2023 (945); 2021 (977). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Length of time offering apprenticeships

In 2023, a fifth of all employers with current apprentices (20%) had offered apprenticeships for 3 years or fewer. A sixth (16%) had offered them for 4-5 years, 23% for 5-9 years while around a third (35%) had offered them for 10 or more years.⁴²

⁴¹ Note, this is a profile of employers, not a profile of apprentices.

⁴² As detailed in the Technical Report, there were sampling challenges in 2023 which resulted in difficulties in identifying employers of apprentices, particularly records after April 2022 when EmpID was removed from the ILR. This acutely affects employers of current apprentices. As a result, the proportion of employers employing current apprentices is likely to skew towards more established employers i.e. those that have been offering apprenticeships prior to the removal of EmpID. As such, we have not made any comparisons between the 2023 and 2021 data for this group.

Employers of completer apprentices had been offering apprenticeships for longer (as expected given that up to 27 months would have elapsed since the start of the apprenticeships discussed in the survey) – only 10% had been offering them for 3 years or fewer. This was a downward trend on the 18% who said this in 2021, 23% in 2018-19 and 29% in 2017. The longer-term trend is shown in Table 2-2.

Table 2-2. Number of years apprentice employers have used apprenticeships for, change since 2015

Years employers have offered apprenticeships	Up to 3 years	3 to 5 years	5 to 10 years	More than 10 years
2015 (completer) Employers with apprentices completing in the Mar-Oct 2014 period	25%	17%	21%	32%
2017 (completer) Employers with apprentices completing in the Jun 2015-Jan 2016 period	29%	23%	18%	27%
2018-19 (completer) Employers with apprentices completing in the Feb-Sep 2017 period	23%	25%	22%	26%
2021 (current) Employers with apprentices current as of 1 st January 2021	33%	22%	20%	23%
2021 (completers) Employers with apprentices completing in the July 2019-Feb 2020 period	18%	27%	25%	27%
2023 (current) Employers with apprentices current as of 1 st January 2023	20%*	16%*	23%*	35%*
2023 (completers) Employers with apprentices completing in the July 2021-Feb 2022 period	10%*	21%*	24%	40%*

Base: Employers with completer apprentices: 2015 (4,000); 2017 (4,004); 2018-19 (4,000); 2021 (977); 2023 (945). Employers with current apprentices: 2021 (3,081); 2023 (2,981). *indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

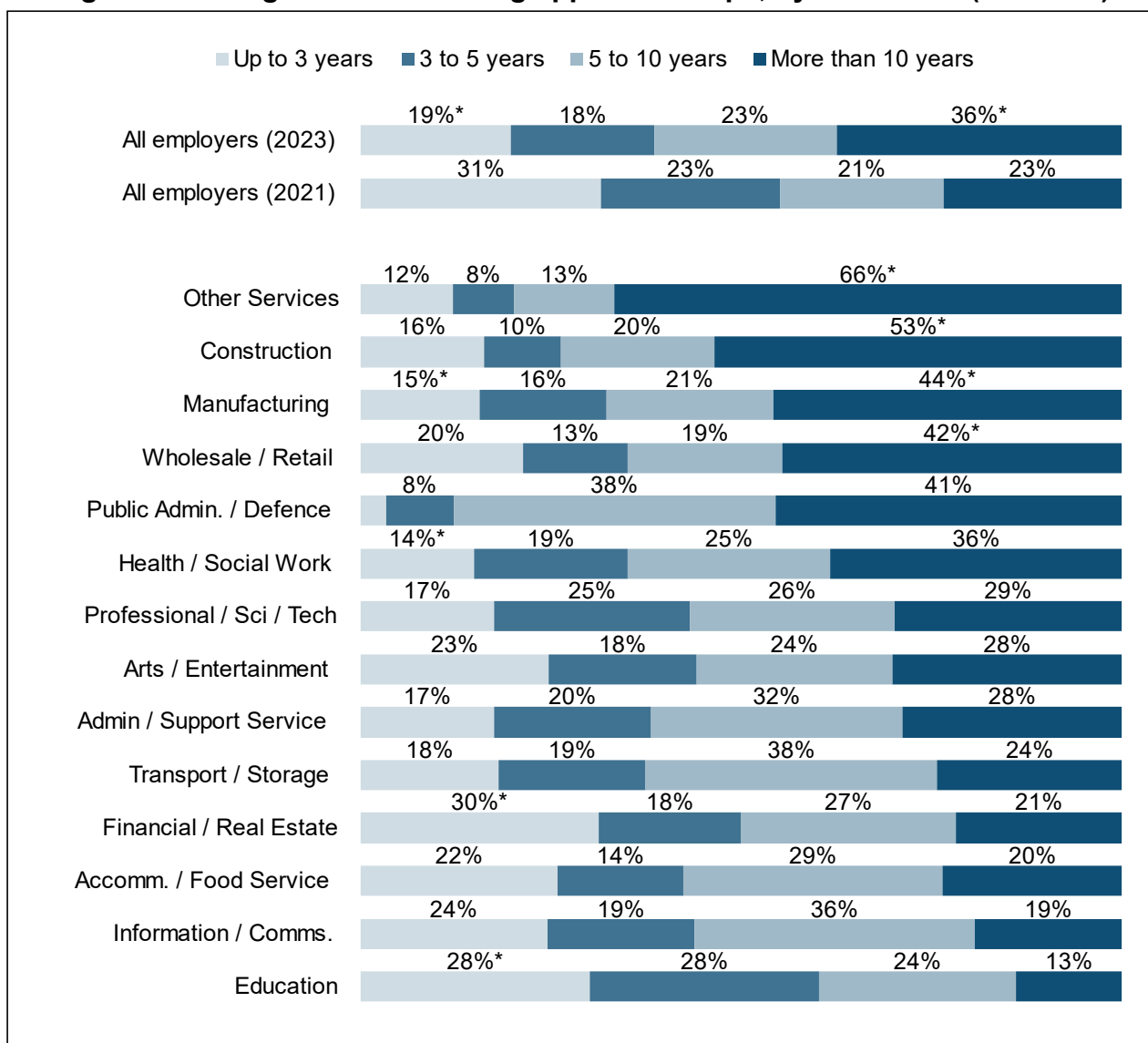
Looking across all employers in 2023, 19% had offered apprenticeships for 3 years or fewer, 18% for 3 to 5 years, 23% for 5 to 10 years, and 36% for more than 10 years.

The SIC sector with the longest connection with apprenticeships was 'Other Services', where 66% had offered apprenticeships for more than 10 years.⁴³ Other sectors which were more likely to have been offering apprenticeships for more than 10 years were Construction (53%), Manufacturing (44%) and Wholesale and Retail (42%).

The SIC sectors where employers were most likely to be new to apprenticeships i.e. have had them for 3 years or fewer, were Financial and Real Estate (30%) and Education (28%). Possibly related to this, these 2 sectors were also more likely to view the relatively newer higher and degree apprenticeships as their main level offered (24% for Financial and Real Estate, 18% for Education vs. 12% average for higher apprenticeships, 21% for Education vs. 9% average for degree apprenticeships).

⁴³ 'Other Services' includes Hairdressers, Barbers and Beauty Salons, alongside a range of other activities.

Figure 2-4. Length of time offering apprenticeships, by SIC sector (SIC 2007)



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). 2023 subgroups: Manufacturing (537); Construction (477); Wholesale/Retail (460); Transport/Storage (57); Accommodation/Food Service (176); Information/Comms (79); Financial/Real Estate (61); Professional/Sci/Tech (383); Admin/Support Service (81); Public Admin / Defence (57); Education (599); Health / Social Work (669); Arts / Entertainment (124); Other Services (122). Agriculture and Mining and Utilities not shown due to low base size (<30). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the 2023 average (for subgroups) and 2021 (for time series) for 'up to 3 years' and 'more than 10 years' time bands.

The following other groups of employers were more likely than average (19%) to have offered apprenticeships for 3 years or fewer, indicating that they had recently started adopting apprenticeships:

- Those whose main subject area was Arts and Media (40%), Education (34%), or Business and Administration (25%).
- Those whose main level of apprenticeship was 4 to 7 (23%).

- Those with a high proportion of apprentices (a quarter or more) in the workforce (23%).
- Those with only 1 apprentice (22%).
- Small organisations (i.e. less than 10 employees) (23%), or not paying the Levy (21%).
- Employers in London (27%).

Recent recruitment and comparisons to a ‘usual’ year

Among those employers interviewed regarding completer apprentices, more than half (53%) had recruited at least 1 apprentice in the last 12 months, while 45% had not recruited any apprentices over this period.⁴⁴ The proportion of employers that had hired at least 1 apprentice had increased since 2021, when, during the pandemic, 40% said they had recruited in the past 12 months prior to the survey. The average number of apprentices recruited in the last 12 months was 2.8, an increase from 2.4 in 2021. A full breakdown by employers’ main subject area can be found in Table 2-3 below.

Three subject areas saw an increase in at least 1 apprentice being recruited in the past 12 months, compared with 2021: Engineering (55% vs. 41% in 2021), Retail (54% vs. 32%) and Business (50% vs. 34%).

⁴⁴ This part of the analysis is presented only for employers with completer apprentices. This is because the answers to these questions would be skewed for those employers with current apprentices since they would by definition have had recently recruited apprentices.

Table 2-3. Number of people recruited by employers of completer apprentices to start an apprenticeship in the last 12 months by subject area

Main Subject Area	2021 (no apprentices recruited)	2021 (1 or more apprentices recruited)	2021 (average number of apprentices recruited in the last 12 months)	2021 (Average number of apprentices recruited in last 12 months, per 100 employees at time of survey)	2023 (no apprentices recruited)	2023 (1 or more apprentices recruited)	2023 (average number of apprentices recruited in the last 12 months)	2023 (Average number of apprentices recruited in last 12 months, per 100 employees at time of survey)
All completers	58%	40%	2.4	6.2	45%	53%*	2.8	5.8
Agriculture	67%	33%	0.8	9.5	53%	45%	1.5	4.6
Business	64%	34%	4.1	4.4	47%	50%*	4.6	5.8
Construction	49%	47%	1.8	7.5	45%	54%	1.6	6.0
Education	56%	43%	1.1	2.7	45%	52%	2.8	2.5
Engineering	59%	41%	2.2	3.3	44%	55%*	1.9	3.9
Health	45%	50%	2.9	9.1	42%	56%	3.6	7.3
ICT	45%	48%	1.7	7.2	48%	51%	1.1	3.4
Leisure	60%	40%	1.0	6.7	45%	55%	1.3	5.6

Main Subject Area	2021 (no apprentices recruited)	2021 (1 or more apprentices recruited)	2021 (average number of apprentices recruited in the last 12 months)	2021 (Average number of apprentices recruited in last 12 months, per 100 employees at time of survey)	2023 (no apprentices recruited)	2023 (1 or more apprentices recruited)	2023 (average number of apprentices recruited in the last 12 months)	2023 (Average number of apprentices recruited in last 12 months, per 100 employees at time of survey)
Retail	67%	32%	0.8	8.1	45%	54%*	1.1	8.1

Base: Employers interviewed regarding completer apprentices: 2023 (945); 2021 (977). Agriculture: 2023 (45), 2021 (49); Business: 2023 (183), 2021 (163); Construction: 2023 (86), 2021 (73); Education: 2023 (68), 2021 (63); Engineering: 2023 (150), 2021 (139); Health: 2023 (179), 2021 (225); ICT: 2023 (54), 2021 (51); Leisure: 2023 (44), 2021 (51); Retail: 2023 (115), 2021 (142). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

Employers were also asked if they had recruited more, less or about the same as a 'usual' year.⁴⁵ Among those employers interviewed regarding completer apprentices, 16% said they had recruited more in 2023, an increase on the 9% that said the same in 2021. Around one-fifth (22%) had recruited less (lower than the 41% which said this in 2021). Around a third (32%) said that the recruited number was about the same as a usual year (higher than the 22% in 2021).

Employers with medium size organisations (between 10-99 employees), were more likely to say that they recruited more than in a 'usual' year (18% vs. 16% average), and small employers (less than 10 employees) were more likely than average to report they recruited the same, or none (71% vs. 57%). Employers in the Professional / Science / Technology SIC sector were more likely to say that they recruited more than in a 'usual' year (26% vs. 16% average).

In contrast, those whose main subject area was Engineering were more likely to say that they were recruiting less than in a 'usual' year (29% vs. 22% average) as were those in the Manufacturing SIC sector (30%).

Employers offering mainly Level 2 apprenticeships were less likely than average to report that they recruited more than in a 'usual' year (12% vs. 16% average). Instead, employers offering mainly Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeships were more likely than average to report that they recruited about the same about as 'usual' (34% vs. 32% average), whereas employers who mainly offer Level 4 or Level 5 were less likely than average to report this (24% vs. 32%). Employers who offer apprenticeships at mainly Level 4 to 7 were more likely than average to report that they would have recruited none anyway (32% vs. 25% average).

Among employers who recruited less than in a 'usual' year, the most common reasons given were a lack of (suitable) candidates applying (32%), followed by a lack of need for new staff or not increasing the size of the workforce (30%). The pandemic was the third most common answer given in 2023 (12%). This was an expected divergence from 2021, when the vast majority of employers cited the pandemic as the reason for recruiting less (81%).

⁴⁵ There was a counterpart question asked in 2021 within the context of the pandemic which asked, 'Is the number of apprentices recruited in the last 12 months more, less or about the same number of apprentices if the last 12 months had been a 'usual' year?' The question was tweaked slightly in 2023 to just ask 'is this more, less or about the same as a 'usual' year?'.

Growth outlook

In 2023, just over half of private sector employers with either current or completer apprentices (53%) expected to grow in the next 12 months. This was down from 62% in 2021. This was possibly a result of sustained high levels of inflation in the months prior to fieldwork in 2023.⁴⁶ Among employers with completer apprentices, the proportion expecting growth was 53%, this was lower than the previous waves: 2021 (59%), 2018-19 (57%), 2017 (60%) and 2015 (59%).

However, there was variation between groups of employers in the extent to which growth was expected. The following groups were more likely than average to expect growth:

- Those whose main subject area was Arts and Media (76%), Leisure (72%), Business and ICT (both 64%), or Retail excluding those with Hair and Beauty apprentices (66%).
- Those whose main level of apprenticeship was Level 3 (55%) or Level 4 to 7 (58%).
- Employers with 100 or more (66%) employees at their organisation.
- Employers operating in the Professional, Science and Technology (62%), Accommodation and Food Service (76%), or in Information and Communications (69%) SIC sectors.
- Those likely to pay the Levy (69%).
- Employers based in the North East (63%).

The following groups were less likely than average to expect growth:

- Those whose main subject area was Health (41%) or Construction (40%).
- Those whose main level of apprenticeship was Level 2 (47%).
- Smaller organisations with fewer than 10 employees (40%).
- Employers operating in the Construction (44%), or in Health and Social Work (40%) SIC sectors.

⁴⁶ [Consumer price inflation, UK - Office for National Statistics](#). Accessed: 21st December 2023.

3. What types of apprenticeships are on offer?

This chapter explores the range of apprenticeships used by employers, as well as looking at levels and subject areas in use. In addition, the practice of offering apprenticeships to specific age groups of apprentices is covered. The chapter draws on data from both the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and the employer survey.

Key findings

- **In line with 2021, Business (28% of employers of completer apprentices and 24% of employers of current apprentices), Health (23% for both groups respectively) and Engineering (19% and 25% respectively) continued to be the three most common apprenticeships for employers.**
- **There have been some changes in the subject area distribution of apprenticeships over the past few years.** There was an increase in employers providing apprenticeships in Construction, with 19% of employers with current apprentices having at least one, an increase from 14% in 2021. ICT apprenticeships among employers of completer apprentices doubled over the past 4 years (with 3% having one in 2018-19, to 6% in 2023).
- **Retail apprenticeships have continued to trend downwards, from 22% of employers with completer apprentices offering at least one in 2015, to 17% in 2021 and 13% in 2023.**
- **The proportion of employers offering Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships continued to increase since their introduction.** Among employers of current apprentices, 9% and 8% were offering Level 6 and Level 7 apprenticeships respectively, an increase from 7% and 6% respectively in 2021.
- **The proportion of employers offering Level 2 apprenticeships continued to decrease wave-on-wave going back to 2018-19.** Just over a third (35%) of employers of completer apprentices offered a Level 2 apprenticeship in 2023, compared with 65% in 2017.
- **Compared with 2021, apprentice employers at an overall level were more likely to report that they would consider applications from people of all ages (60% in 2023 compared with 56% in 2021).**

Note on ILR data

Since April 2022, providers have not been required to provide a unique employer ID (EmpID) on the ILR. As such, there was a proportion of records in scope for the survey on the ILR that had no EmpID. This meant that we were not able to identify whether

these were unique employers, and therefore difficult to establish a true picture of the population of employers for weighting purposes. More detail on the steps taken to resolve this issue can be found in the accompanying Technical Report.

As a result of this, the employer population data was 'modelled', and thus employer data presented using ILR data, as well as any comparisons to 2021, should be treated with caution.

Subject areas

The 1,100+ apprenticeship types which exist in England are classed on the ILR into broad 'Sector Subject Areas' (SSAs).

In line with 2021, Business (28% of employers of completer apprentices and 24% of employers of current apprentices), Health (23% for both groups respectively) and Engineering (19% and 25% respectively) continued to be the three most common apprenticeships for employers. The percentages of employers with apprentices in each Sector Subject Area (since 2015) is shown in Table 3-1.

There have been some changes in the subject area distribution of apprenticeships over the past few years. There was an increase in employers providing apprenticeships in Construction (19% of employers with current apprentices having at least one, vs. 14% in 2021). ICT apprenticeships among employers of completer apprentices have doubled over the past 4 years (3% in 2018-19, 5% in 2021, to 6% in 2023). Retail apprenticeships continued to trend downwards, from 22% of employers with completer apprentices offering at least one in 2015 17% in 2021 and 13% in 2023.

Table 3-1. Percentages of employers with apprentices in each Sector Subject Area covered, for apprenticeship evaluation research since 2015

Sector Subject Area	2015 (completers)	2017 (completers)	2018-19 (completers)	2021 (completers)	2021 (current)	2023 (completers)	2023 (current)
Agriculture	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Arts / Media	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Business	34%	31%	31%	27%	26%	28%	24%
Construction	7%	6%	6%	8%	14%	9%	19%
Education	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%	3%
Engineering	13%	16%	16%	19%	26%	19%	25%
Health	23%	22%	24%	22%	21%	23%	23%
ICT	3%	4%	3%	5%	5%	6%	7%
Leisure	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Retail	22%	22%	20%	17%	12%	13%	11%
Science	0%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%

Percentages sum to greater than 100% since employers can have apprentices in multiple subject areas.

Subject areas – all provided, and main subject areas

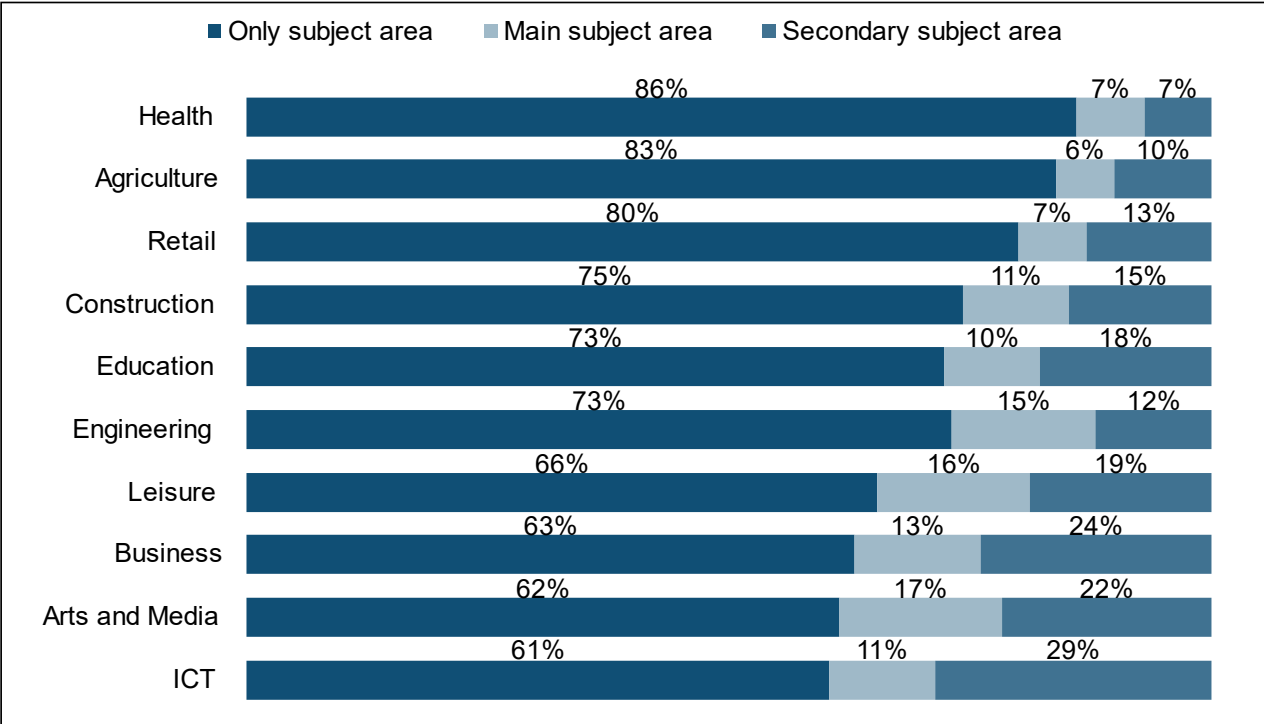
Employers of current apprentices showed a similar picture to 2021; most (76%) had only one current apprenticeship framework or standard, in line with 2021.⁴⁷

In the survey, the other 13% of employers of completer apprentices, and 24% of employers of current apprentices, were asked which individual apprenticeship they considered to be most important to their organisation.⁴⁸ This report will refer to the subject area of this apprenticeship framework or standard as the employer's 'main' subject area. As shown in Figure 3-1 and Figure 3-2, some subject areas were much more likely to be secondary to apprentice employers than others. ICT (29% and 20% for current and completer apprentices respectively) and Business (24% and 10% respectively) (and Arts and Media, among employers of current apprentices at 22%) were subject areas more likely than others to be a secondary area for employers. The pattern was broadly similar to 2021. Employers offering apprenticeships in Agriculture or Health were less likely to provide other forms of apprenticeship at the same time.

⁴⁷ Given how these figures are derived differently for employers of completer apprentices and employers of current apprentices (because the definitions of the survey windows are different, one based on completions between specific dates, and the other on a snapshot in time of active apprentices), no combined figure is given.

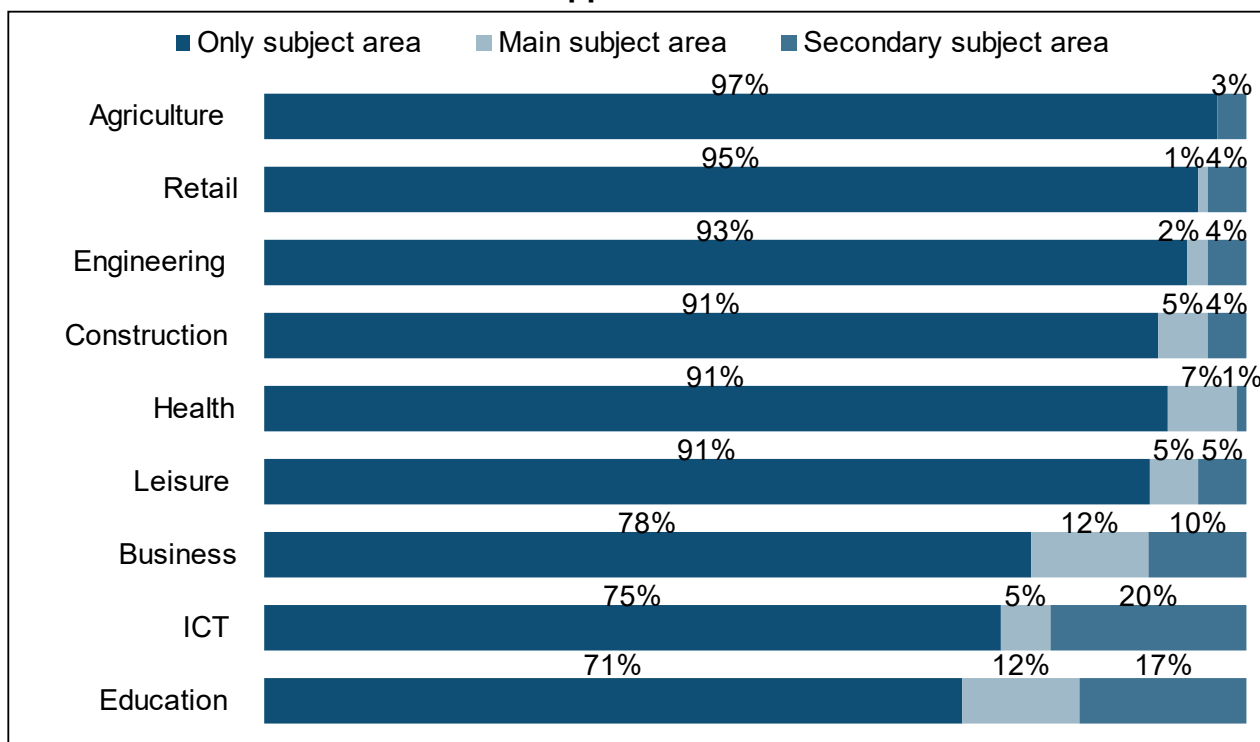
⁴⁸ This was from a list provided based on their records on the ILR, depending on which the survey was asking about.

Figure 3-1. Subject Area: Only, main or secondary subject area, employers with current apprentices



Base: Employers of current apprentices with any current apprentices in each subject area: Agriculture (172); Arts/Media (81); Business (931); Construction (546); Education (163); Engineering (793); Health (623); ICT (219); Leisure (115); Retail (309).

Figure 3-2. Only, main or secondary subject area, employers with completer apprentices



Base: Employers of completer apprentices with any completer apprentices in each subject area: Agriculture (45); Business (228); Construction (91); Education (74); Engineering (162); Health (183); ICT (75); Leisure (48); Retail (124). Arts and Media not shown due to small base size (<30)

For the remainder of this report, in line with from previous years, we will report on the basis of main subject area only.

Levels of apprenticeship

Apprenticeships are offered at a range of levels, from Level 2 to Level 7 (equivalent to a Masters' Degree). Historically, all apprenticeships were at Levels 2 and 3, but policy changes over the last decade have slowly introduced apprenticeships at Levels 4 and 5 ('higher apprenticeships'), and subsequently at Levels 6 and 7 ('degree apprenticeships' and 'Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships'). The distribution of apprenticeship levels among employers in 2023 compared with previous years is shown in Table 3-2.

The percentage of employers offering Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships continued to increase since their introduction. Among employers of current apprentices, 9% and 8% were offering Level 6 and Level 7 apprenticeships, an increase from 7% and 6% respectively in 2021. There was also a similar increase among employers of completer apprentices (less than 0.5% in 2021 for Level 6 and 7, to 3% and 4% respectively for 2023).

The proportion of employers offering Level 2 apprenticeships continued to decline wave-on-wave going back to 2018-19. Just over a third (35%) of employers of completed apprentices offered a Level 2 apprenticeship in 2023, compared with 65% in 2017.

Table 3-2. Percentages of employers with any completer apprentices at each level

Level	2015 (completers)	2017 (completers)	2018-19 (completers)	2021 (completers)	2021 (current)	2023 (completers)	2023 (current)
2	65%	65%	62%	49%	34%	35%	30%
3	49%	47%	49%	53%	57%	55%	58%
4	n/a	1%	2%	5%	9%	9%	11%
5	n/a	2%	4%	5%	10%	8%	9%
6	n/a	n/a	n/a	<0.5%	7%	3%	9%
7	n/a	n/a	n/a	<0.5%	6%	4%	8%

N/a indicates that these apprenticeship levels were not available at the time. Percentages sum to greater than 100% since employers can have apprentices at multiple levels. Source: Individualised Learner Record (2014 to 2023).

Employers were asked about the most important level of apprenticeship to their site, specifically within their main subject area, as shown in Figure 3-3.

At an overall level, the proportion of employers considering Level 4 or 5, and Level 6 or 7 qualifications as the most important increased compared with 2021 (12% in 2023 vs. 10% in 2021 for Level 4 or 5, and 9% in 2023 vs. 6% in 2021 for Level 6 or 7).

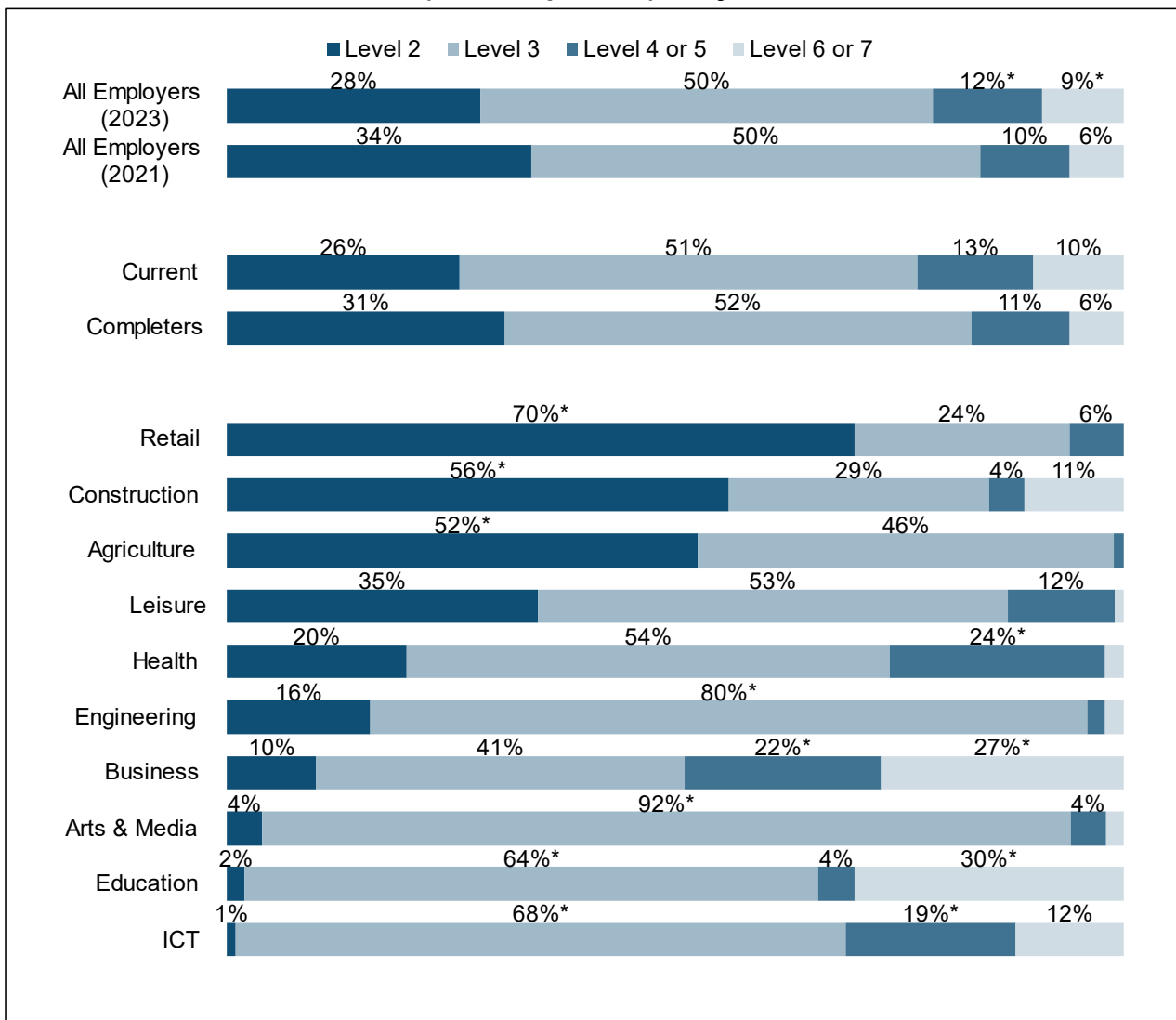
Conversely, the number of employers that reported Level 2 was their most important level of apprenticeship declined (from 34% in 2021 to 28% in 2023).

In line with 2021, employers whose most important apprenticeship subject area was Retail (70%), Construction (56%) or Agriculture (52%) were the most likely to report that Level 2 was most important to them.

Among employers where Business, Arts & Media, Education or ICT were the most important apprenticeship subject areas, they were more unlikely to consider Level 2 to be the most important to them (10% or less); instead, Level 3 apprenticeships were most important to them.

Health (24%), Business (22%) and ICT (19%) were the three subject areas where employers were more likely to say that a Level 4 or 5 apprenticeship was most important to them. Levels 6 or 7 were most likely to be reported by employers whose main subject area was in Education (30%) and Business (27%).

Figure 3-3. Employers' main (most important) level of apprenticeship, within their main (most important) subject area



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). 2023 subgroups: Current (2,981); Completer (945); Agriculture (189); Arts/Media (81); Business (793); Construction (483); Education (192); Engineering (792). Health (702); ICT (162); Leisure (140); Retail (350). Data labels now shown where 3% or less for Level 4 or 5, or Level 6 or 7. * indicates where a result is significantly higher from the 2023 average (for subgroups) and 2021 (for time series).

Similar to the pattern seen in 2021, employers with more than 25% of employees as apprentices were more likely to see Level 2 as the most important (41% compared with an average of 28%). This may indicate that apprenticeships were being used as a major recruitment route for new employees joining the organisation at lower levels.

Smaller employers (less than 10 employees at their organisation) were more likely than average to report seeing Level 2 apprenticeships as most important (41%). When looking at the size of a site, larger sites (those with 100 or more employees) were more likely to say that Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships were most important (16% vs. 5% among employers with less than 10 employees at their site).

Employers that started offering apprenticeships less than 4 years ago were more likely to consider Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships as most important (14%) compared with the average (9%). On the other hand, established employers that had been offering apprenticeships for a decade or more were more likely to see Levels 2 or 3 as more important (30% for Level 2 vs. 28% average, 55% for Level 3 vs. 50% average).

Perhaps as a result of the nature of employers in London offering high skill employment, London employers were twice as likely to see Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships as most important than the average (19% vs. 9% average), and less likely to see Level 2 as important (18% vs. 28% average).⁴⁹

Age groups of apprentices

At the time of the 2023 survey, three-in-five (60%) apprentice employers said that if they had a place available on their apprenticeship scheme, they would consider apprenticeship applications from people of all ages.⁵⁰ Compared with 2021, apprentice employers at an overall level were more likely to report that they would consider applications from people of all ages (60% in 2023 compared with 56% in 2021).

The group most commonly not considered for apprenticeships (if they had a place available) by employers remained the same as in 2021, those aged 25 or over. Overall, less than a quarter (22%) of employers (23% among employers of current apprentices, higher than the 19% among employers of completer apprentices) reported they would not consider applications from this age group. However, this happened less often than in 2021, when 25% of all employers were not considering the 25 or over age group.

Employers who reported they would not consider applications from the 25 and over age group included:

- Those whose main apprenticeship subject area was Construction and Engineering (both 39%). As also seen in 2021, for employers whose main subject area was Hair and Beauty, exclusion of this group was notably higher than average (63%).
- Those whose main level was Level 2 (29%).
- Employers who had a larger proportion of apprentices in terms of their workforce, such as those with 10% to 25% of their workforce being apprentices (32%) or more than 25% being apprentices (42%).
- Smaller employers (those with less than 10 employees at their organisation) (45%).

⁴⁹ [The changing geography of jobs | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](#) Accessed 2nd January 2024.

⁵⁰ Questions on this topic were amended from 2018-19, and therefore data can only be compared with 2021.

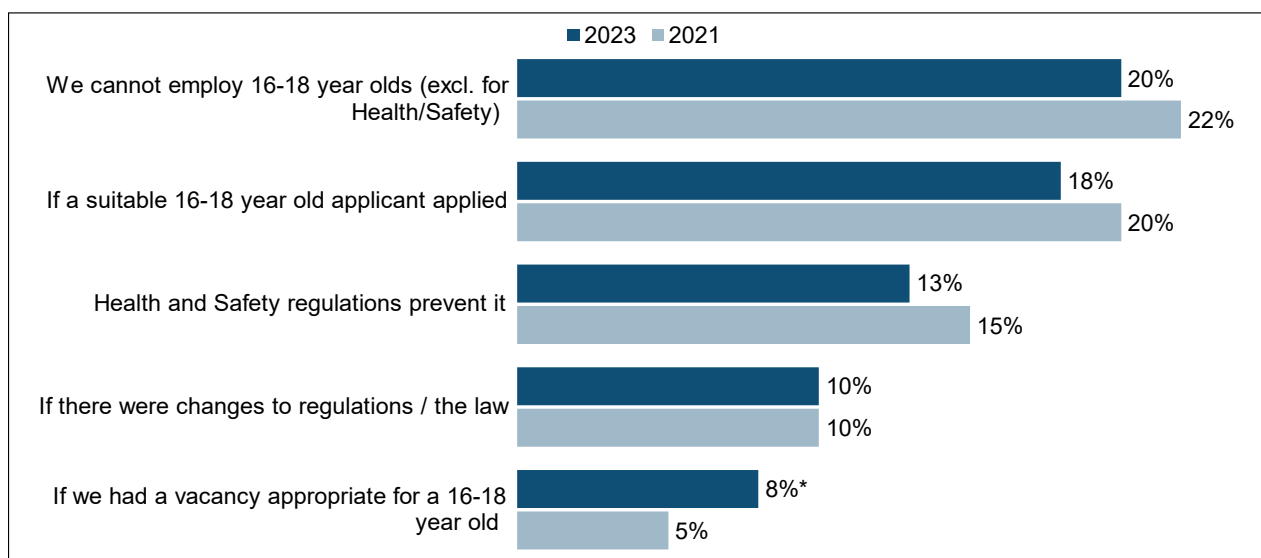
- Employers who had offered apprenticeships for 10 or more years (31%).
- Those based in the North East (28%) and Yorkshire and Humber (30%).

One-in-five employers reported they would not consider applications for those age 16 to 18 (19%). This was most common among:

- Employers whose main apprenticeship subject area was Education (28%), Business (26%) and Health (25%).
- Those who see Level 4 and above as their main level (33%).
- Employers with a small proportion of apprentices in terms of their workforce i.e. less than 5% of their workforce being apprentices (22%).
- Those with only 1 apprentice (20%).
- Employers with 100 or more employees at their organisation (22%)
- Those in the public (28%) and non-commercial sector (26%).
- Those who had offered apprenticeships for a shorter period of time (0-3 years 32%, 4-5 years 23%).
- Those based in London (25%).
- Those only aware of additional payments for 19- to 24-year-olds who met the specific criteria (39%). Employers that were aware of payments to both 16–18-year-olds and 19 to 24 year olds, were less likely to exclude 16-18 year olds (13% vs. 19% average).

Employers who only offer apprentices to those aged 19 and over were asked what could persuade them to offer apprenticeships to those aged 16-18 (Figure 3-4). The main response was that they cannot employ people aged under 19 (20%), or that they would, if a suitable 16–18-year-old person applied for the role (18%). Similar to 2021, a sizeable proportion reported that nothing would persuade them (19%, vs. 17% in 2021).

Figure 3-4. What would persuade employers to offer apprenticeships to young people aged 16-18



Base: Employers offering Apprenticeships to over 19s only: 2023(736); 2021 (913). Responses given by less than 5% or employers in 2023 not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Just over one-in-ten employers (13%) reported that Health and Safety regulations prevented them from offering apprenticeships to those aged 16-18. This was more likely than average among the following:

- Employers with a main subject area of Agriculture (31%) and Engineering (21%).
- Employers in the Manufacturing (39%) and Construction (24%) SIC sectors.
- Employers with 100 or more employees at the organisation (16%).
- Employers who had been offering apprenticeships for 10 years or more (20%).

4. Why and how were apprentices recruited?

This chapter looks at reasons for providing apprenticeships and if they are offered to new or existing staff. It also covers any other types of training provided by employers which leads to either a Level 2 or a Level 3 qualification, as well as views on the support available for employers interested in offering apprenticeships.

Key findings

- **The key reason for choosing to offer an apprenticeship rather than (or as well as) other training was the benefit to the apprentice and/or community (20%).** This was followed by the inclusion of practical/vocational elements in the training (18%), and the content and the design of the training (13%).
- **The main way (69%) in which all employers recruited apprentices was via specific recruitment to start an apprenticeship (whether to start immediately on recruitment or not), compared with 72% in 2021.** This was followed by recruiting via existing employees (36%).
- **Nine-in-ten (89%) employers who provided apprenticeships to existing employees were doing so to improve their skills for their existing job.**
- **One-in-seven (14%) employers reported that at least some of their apprentices who had been recruited specifically for an apprenticeship, had a delayed start.**
- **The main reason that apprenticeships did not start straight away among these employers was that the timings were dictated by the college or training provider (47%).**
- **Two-thirds (65%) of employers said they had not funded or arranged any training for employees in the last 12 months which led to either a Level 2 or a Level 3 qualification.**
- **Three-quarters (75%) of employers said that there was sufficient information, support and guidance available to employers interested in offering apprenticeships, a decrease since 2021 (77%).**

Reasons for providing apprenticeships

Employers were asked for the reasons why they offered apprenticeships rather than, or in addition to, other forms of training or qualification. The top 2 reasons given in 2023 were the same as in the 2021 survey, which were the benefit to the

apprentice/community (20%) and the inclusion of practical/vocational training (18%).⁵¹ However, as shown in Figure 4-1, the proportion of employers reporting they offered apprenticeships because of the benefit to the apprentice / community decreased from 22% in 2021 to 20% in 2023, as did the proportion reporting it was because apprenticeships were the industry standard/norm (15% to 11%). Among employers who were likely to be eligible for the Levy, one-in-five (21%) reported that they offer apprenticeships rather than, or in addition to, other forms of training or qualification, in order to use their Apprenticeship Levy (21% vs. 7% average).

Figure 4-1. Reasons for offering apprenticeships over other forms of training (spontaneous)



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). Responses given by less than 5% of employers in 2023 not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

As shown in Table 4-1, in 2023, employers of current apprentices were more likely than in 2021 to report they offered an apprenticeship because of the content / design of the training (13% vs. 11%). However, they were less likely than in 2021 to report they hired an apprentice because it was the industry norm or standard (11% vs. 15%). Among employers of completer apprentices, in 2023 they were more likely to offer an

⁵¹ This question was not asked prior to 2018-19. Responses for employers of completer apprentices can be seen in Table 4.1.

apprenticeship to recruit new staff (12% vs. 9% in 2021), however they were less likely to offer them because of the cost / affordability / subsidy element (11% vs. 14%), because it was a formal qualification (4% vs. 6%) or to use their Apprenticeship Levy / Apprenticeship Account (9% vs. 7%).

Employers of completer apprentices were more likely to offer apprenticeships because of the recruitment of new staff, compared with employers of current apprentices (12% vs. 9%), and to use their Levy (9% vs. 7%).

Table 4-1. Why did you offer Apprenticeships rather than, or in addition to, other forms of training or qualification? By employers of completer or current apprentices

	2018-19 (completer)	2021 (completer)	2021 (current)	2023 (completer)	2023 (current)
Benefit to the apprentice / community	13%	23%	21%	21%	20%
Inclusion of practical / vocational training	18%	15%	18%	18%	19%
Content / design of training	10%	12%	11%	13%	13%*
Industry standard / norm	17%	15%	15%	12%	11%*
Cost / affordability / subsidy (if apprenticeship levy not mentioned)	16%	14%	12%	11%*	11%
Recruitment of new staff	9%	9%	8%	12%*	9%
To use our Apprenticeship Levy / Apprenticeship Account	5%	7%	7%	9%	7%
Allows us to influence training	10%	7%	7%	8%	7%
Formal qualification	6%	6%	7%	4%*	6%
Retention of existing staff / staff morale	4%	6%	5%	5%	6%
General upskilling of employee / start a career	4%	6%	5%	6%	6%

Base: Employers with current apprentices: 2023 (2,981); 2021 (3,087). Employers with completer apprentices 2023 (945); 2021 (959). Employers who knew the training completed by their completer apprentices was an apprenticeship: 2018-19 (3,269). Responses given by less than 5% of employers in 2023 not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

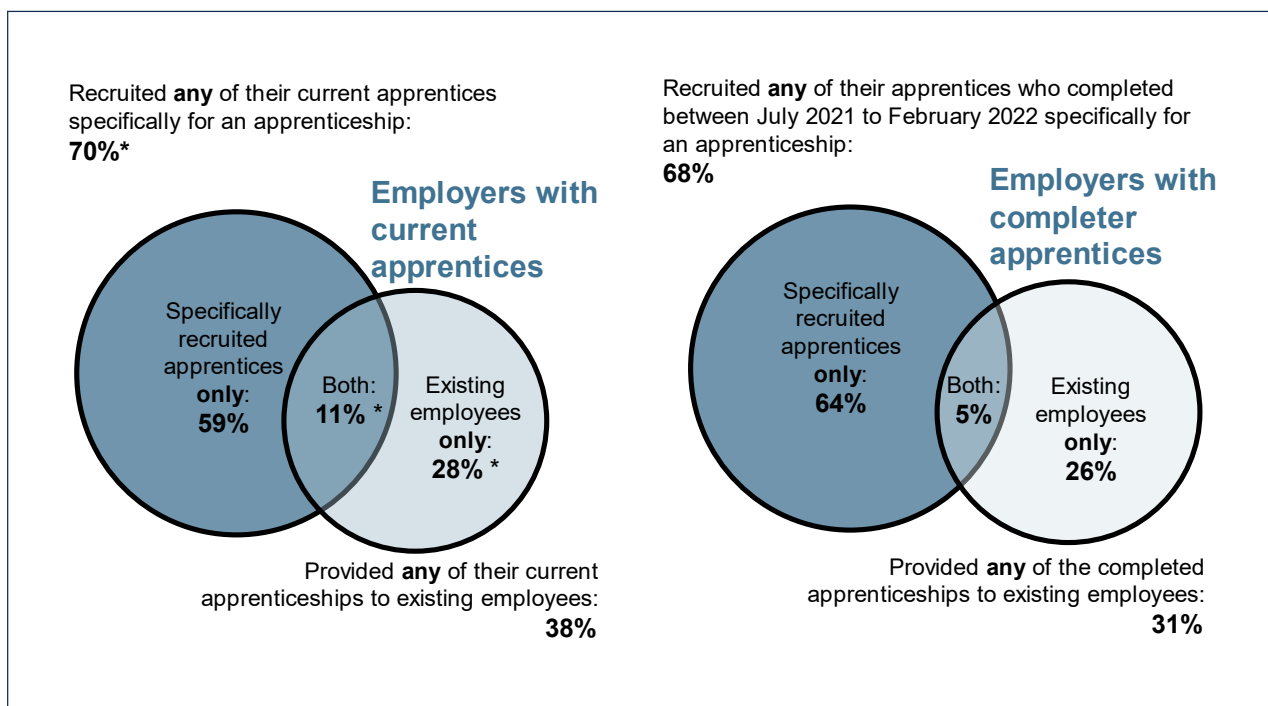
Sources of apprentices

All employers were asked whether their apprentices were recruited specifically to start an apprenticeship with the training starting straight away, recruited with the intention that they would start an apprenticeship but with the training not starting immediately, or whether they were existing employees that were already working for them.^{52 53}

The main way in which employers continued to recruit apprentices was via specific recruitment to start an apprenticeship (whether to start immediately on recruitment or not, these were new hires, rather than existing employees). This was 69% in 2023, lower than the 72% of employers doing so in 2021.

A relatively low proportion of employers had recruited both people to specifically start an apprenticeship (new hires) and provided apprenticeships to existing employees (11% of employers with current apprentices, and 5% of employers with completer apprentices). Figure 4-2 demonstrates the overlap between the 3 groups in 2023, showing separately for both employers of current and completer apprentices the proportion that recruited new apprentices only, existing employees only and from both sources.

Figure 4-2 Sources of apprentices in the 2023 survey - overlap



Base: Employers with current apprentices (2,981); employers with completer apprentices (945). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021. Due to rounding, the three circles do not add up to 100%.

⁵² Employers could answer across more than 1 of these categories.

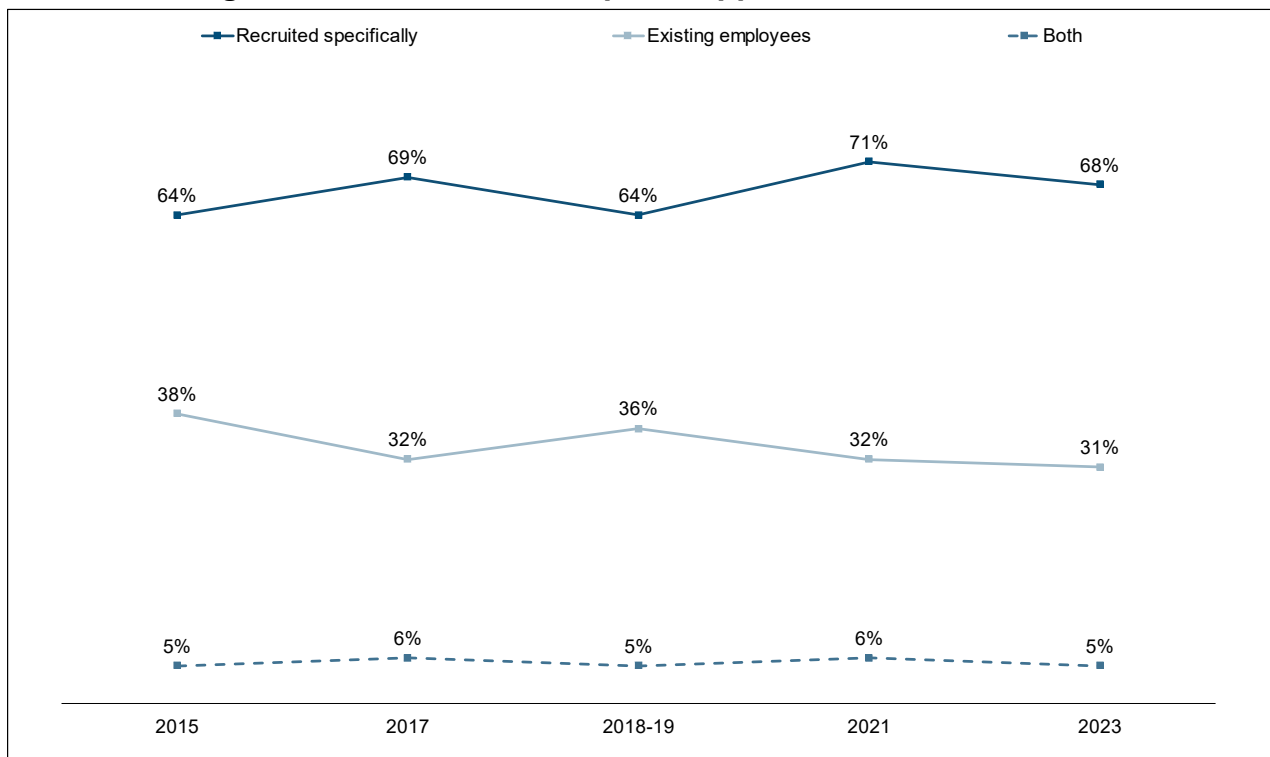
⁵³ For those surveyed about current apprentices, they were only asked about how their current apprentices at the time of the survey were recruited; for those surveyed about completer apprentices, they were only asked about how their completer apprentices in the window July 2019 to February 2020 were recruited.

Among employers with current apprentices (as shown in Figure 4-2), seven-in-ten (70%) recruited people specifically to start an apprenticeship. Over a third (38%) of employers provided them to existing staff, and 28% provided them only to existing staff (an increase from 25% in 2021).

The proportion of employers with completer apprentices that had recruited people specifically to start an apprenticeship (whether to start immediately on recruitment or not) was 68% (as shown in Figure 4-3) similar to 2021. This was higher than 64% in 2018-19 and returned to close to the level seen in 2017 (69%).

Among employers with completer apprentices, the proportion of employers that had provided apprenticeships to existing employees remained level with 2021. This was a decrease compared with 2018-19 (36%) and returned to the level seen in 2017 (32%). A quarter of employers in 2023 (26%) provided apprenticeships only to existing staff, the same as in 2021. This was down from 31% in 2018-19 and returned closer to the level seen in 2017 (27%). Figure 4-3 shows the sources of apprentices for employers of completer apprentices over time.

Figure 4-3. Sources of completer apprentices, 2015 to 2023

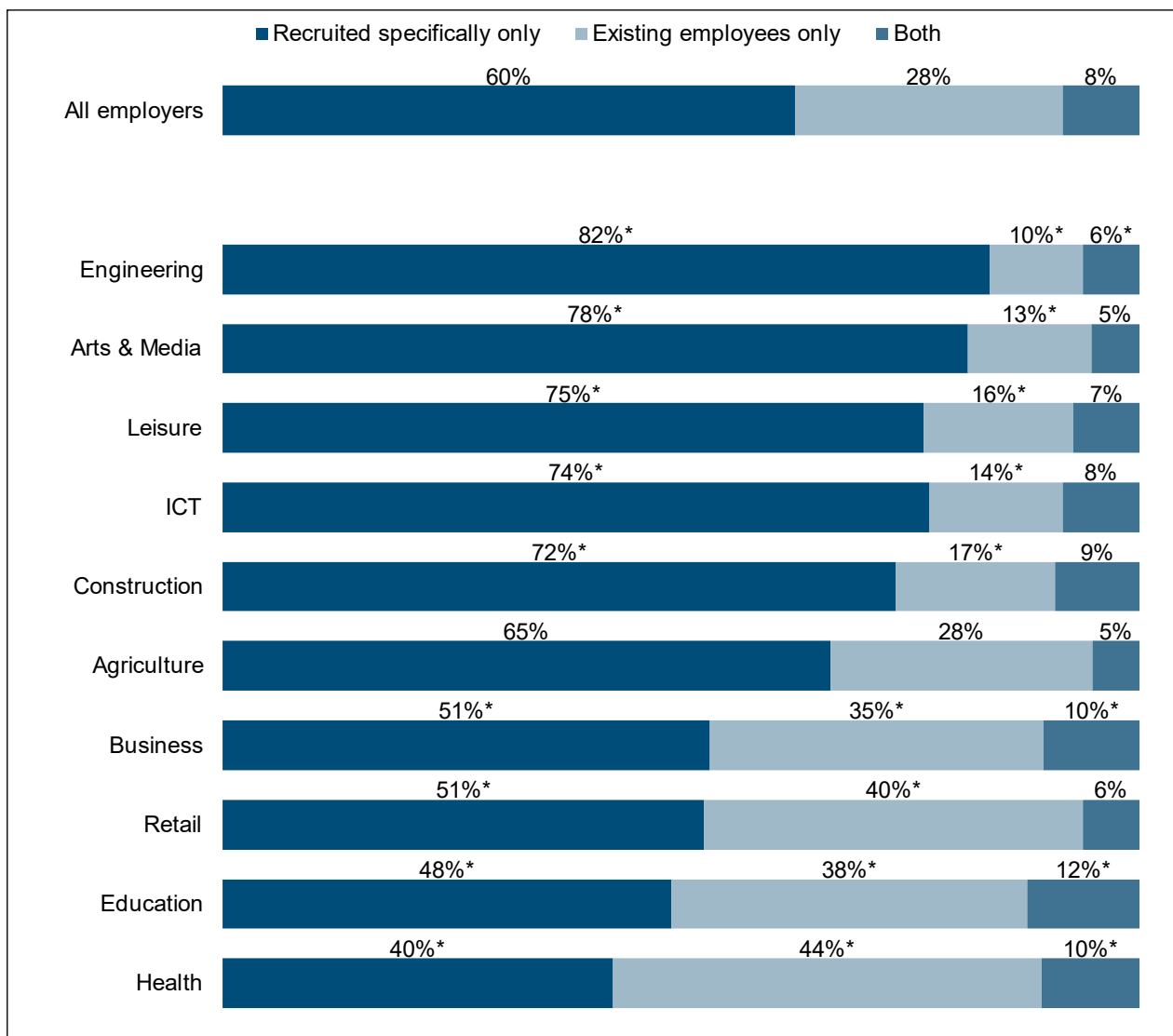


Base: All employers: 2015 (4,000); 2017 (4,004); 2018-19 (4,000). All employers with completer apprentices: 2021 (977); 2023 (945).

There were large variations in the sources of apprentices between employers providing apprenticeships in different subject areas, as shown in Figure 4-4. On average, three-fifths (60%) of employers hired apprentices via specific recruitment only in 2023. Employers were more likely than average to recruit only by specific recruitment, and not recruiting at all from their existing employee base if their main subject areas was Hair and

Beauty (84%), Engineering (82%), Arts and Media (78%), Leisure (75%), ICT (74%), Construction (72%). As shown in Figure 4.4, around three-in-ten (28%) of all employers hired apprentices only from their existing employees. This was more likely than average the case for employers whose main subject area was Health (44%), Retail (excluding Hair and Beauty) (40%), Education (38%) and Business (35%).

Figure 4-3. Sources of apprentices by main subject area



Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Engineering and Manufacturing (792); Construction (483); Arts and Media (81); ICT (162); Agriculture (189); Leisure (140); Retail (350); Business and Administration (793); Education (192); Health and Social Care (702). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the average.

Employers with apprentices at Level 4 and above were far more likely to recruit for apprenticeships from existing staff only (50%, compared with 22% among Level 2 or 3 employers). This pattern was also identified in 2021. However, employers hiring through specific recruitment only were more likely to be employers with apprentices at Level 2 or 3 (68%, compared with 33% among Level 4 and above employers). Employers in the

public sector were more likely to recruit via existing employees only (42% vs. 28% average), and less likely to recruit only via specific recruitment (47%, vs. 60% average).

Among all employers, those with less than 10 employees in the organisation were more likely than average to only recruit specifically for apprentices (80% vs. 60% average). Employers with 100 or more employees were more likely than those with less than 10 (at an organisation level) to report that they only recruited from existing employees (32% vs. 14%). Employers in London were more likely than average to recruit only from existing employees (38% vs. 28% average across all regions), as were employers in the South East (35%). Employers in the North East, the West Midlands and East Midlands were more likely to recruit via specific recruitment only (69%, 68% and 66% respectively, compared with a 60% average across all regions).

In terms of Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) sector, the following groups of employers were more likely to only recruit apprentices specifically for the apprenticeship compared with the average of 60%:

- Information and Communication (81%).
- Administration and Support Services (77%).
- Wholesale and Retail (77%).
- Construction (76%).
- Manufacturing (71%).
- Professional, Science and Technology (67%).

Meanwhile, employers in the following SIC sectors were more likely to provide apprenticeships only to existing employees, compared with the average of 28%:

- Accommodation and Food Services (57%).
- Health and Social Work (46%).
- Education (42%).

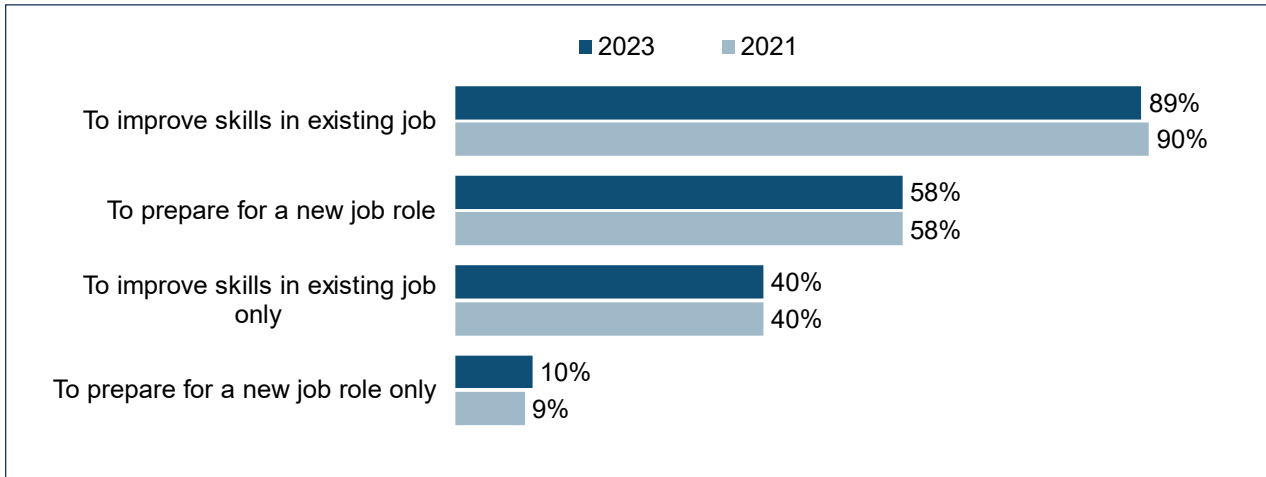
These 3 SIC sectors were also more likely to do this in 2021.

Why apprenticeships were offered to existing staff

Nine-in-ten (89%) employers who provided apprenticeships to existing employees were doing so to improve their skills for their existing job, as seen in 2021 (90%). A majority (58%) were also using the apprenticeship to prepare employees for a new job role, the same as in 2021.

As shown in Figure 4-5, two-fifths (40%) provided apprenticeship training to existing employees only to improve their skills for their existing job, one-in-ten (10%) provided it to prepare them for a new job only. There was no overall change since 2021.

Figure 4-4. Broad purpose behind existing staff starting their apprenticeship



Base: Employers with any apprentices drawn from existing staff: 2023(1,489); 2021 (1,698).

Table 4-2 shows the reasons employers provided existing staff with apprenticeships over time. This remained relatively consistent between 2015 and 2018-19, however there has been a shift in recent years, with more employers of completer apprentices in 2023 using apprenticeships to prepare for a job role (from 45% in 2018-19, to 55% in 2023) and less employers using them to improve skills in an existing job (from 94% in 2018-19, to 90% in 2023). As in 2021, there was no difference in 2023 between employers with completer apprentices and employers with current apprentices.

Table 4-2. Broad purpose behind existing staff starting their apprenticeship, 2015-2023

	2015 (completer)	2017 (complete r)	2018-19 (complete r)	2021 (complete r)	2021 (current)	2023 (complete r)	2023 (current)
To improve skills in existing job	92%	93%	94%	89%	91%	90%	88%*
To prepare for a new job role	42%	40%	45%	56%	60%	55%	60%
To improve skills in existing job only	57%	58%	55%	42%	39%	44%	39%
To prepare for a new job role only	6%	5%	5%	8%	9%	9%	11%

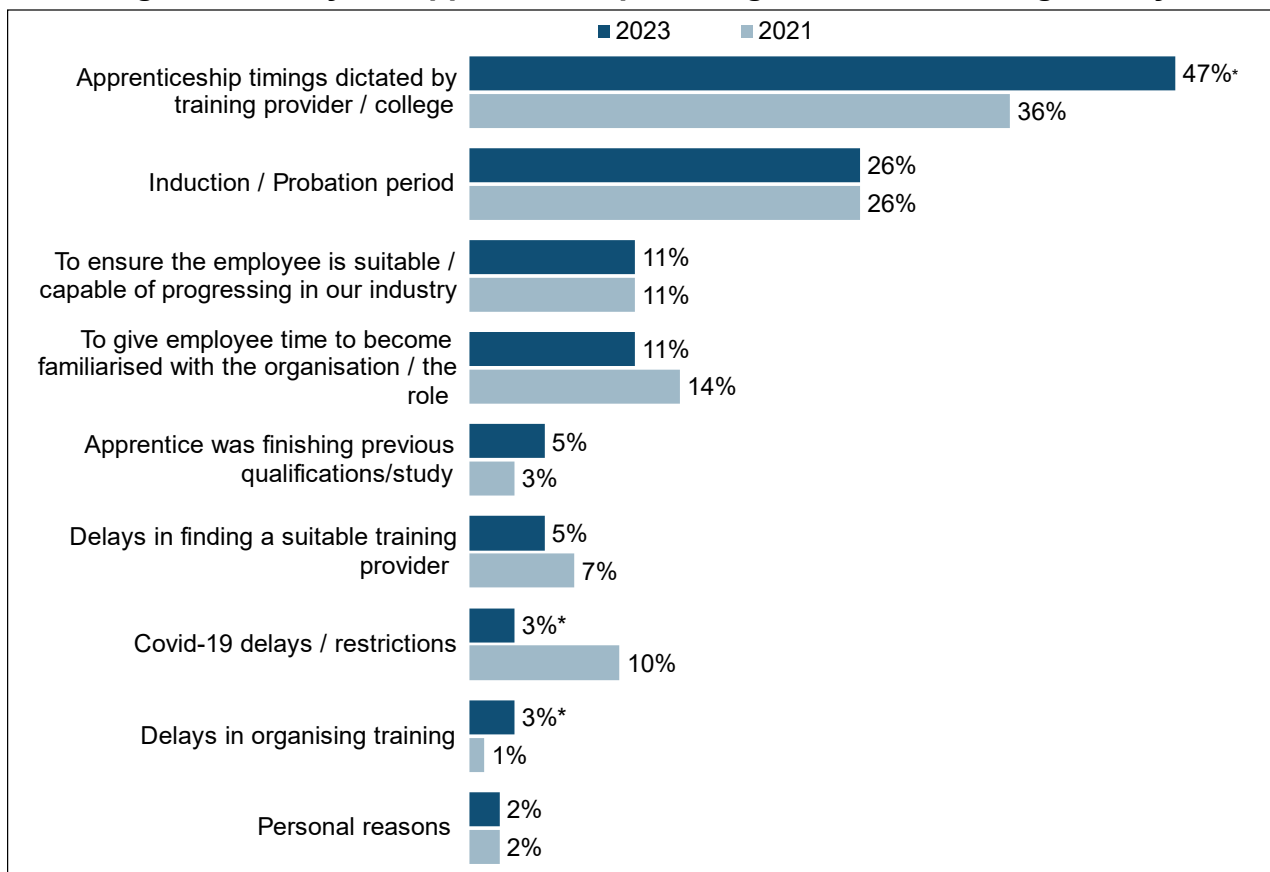
Base: Employers who draw apprentices from existing staff: 2015 (1,133); 2017 (1,241); 2018-19 (1,456).

Employers with completer apprentices: 2021 (326); 2023 (302). Employers with current apprentices: 2021 (1,372); 2023 (1,187). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Delays to starting apprenticeships

In 2023, around one-in-seven (14%) employers said that at least some of their apprentices who had been recruited specifically for an apprenticeship, had a delayed start – this was more common among employers of current apprentices compared with completer apprentices (16% vs. 11%). In 2023, this equated to around one-in-five of all employers recruiting specifically for apprentices (21%). The proportion of employers with at least some apprentices with a delayed start decreased from 16% in 2021, which could be due to the lessening impact of COVID-19 in the 2023 surveying window. As shown in Figure 4-6, the main reason that apprenticeships did not start straight away among these employers was that the timings were dictated by the college or training provider (47%, an increase from 36% in 2021), followed by the need to complete an induction and/or probation period beforehand (26%).

Figure 4-5. Why the apprenticeship training did not start straight away



Base: Employers who specifically recruited apprentices with a delayed start: 2023 (651); 2021 (741).

Responses given by less than 2% of employers in 2023 not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

The reasons for apprenticeship training not starting straight away varied between employers of completer apprentices and employers of current apprentices. Employers of current apprentices were more likely than employers of completer apprentices to cite the

timings being dictated by the college / training provider (50% vs. 34%). Employers of current apprentices were less likely than employers of completers apprentices to report delays in finding a training provider (3% vs. 10%) and that the employee was finishing a previous qualification (4% vs. 9%) as a reason for a delayed start.

Over time, employers of completer apprentices' reasons for delayed start of apprenticeships have remained broadly similar. As shown in Table 4-3, in 2018-19, employers were much less likely to say that timings had been dictated by the training provider or college; however, this may relate to changes in the months in which survey fieldwork took place. In 2023, employers of completer apprentices were less likely to report that the reason their apprenticeship did not start straight away was because of giving an employee time to become familiar with the organisation / role (18% in 2021 vs. 9% in 2023).

Table 4-3. Why the apprenticeship training did not start straight away – completer apprentices versus current apprentices, and changes since 2015

	2015 (completer)	2017 (completer)	2018-19 (completer)	2021 (completer)	2021 (current)	2023 (completer)	2023 (current)
Apprenticeship timings dictated by training provider / college	26%	31%	24%	31%	37%	34%	50%*
Induction / probation period	40%	34%	37%	34%	25%	27%	26%
To give employee time to become familiar with the organisation / role	16%	12%	12%	18%	13%	9%*	12%
To ensure the employee is suitable / capable of progressing	14%	16%	18%	11%	11%	11%	11%
COVID-19 delays / restrictions	n/a	n/a	n/a	2%	13%	4%	2%*
Finding suitable training provider	2%	7%	8%	12%	6%	10%	3%*
Apprentice finishing previous qualifications / study	3%	2%	5%	3%	3%	9%*	4%
Delays in organising training	4%	5%	4%	1%	1%	3%	3%*
Personal reasons	2%	1%	<0.5%	1%	2%	3%	2%

Base: Employers with completer apprentices who specifically recruited apprentices with a delayed start: 2015 (393); 2017 (421); 2018-19 (455); 2021 (126); 2023 (105). Employers with current apprentices who specifically recruited apprentices with a delayed start: 2021 (615); 2023 (546). Responses given by less than 2% of all employers of completer apprentices in 2023 not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

Other types of qualification

Employers were asked if besides the training delivered through apprenticeships, they had funded or arranged any training for employees in the last 12 months which led to either a Level 2 or a Level 3 qualification. This question was introduced in 2021. Two-thirds (65%) of employers said they had not, a decrease since 2021 (71%). Six-in-ten (61%) employers of completer apprentices had not done this, neither had 65% of employers of current apprentices. One-in-five (19%) employers had funded or arranged Level 2 training, and 22% Level 3 training (an increase from 18% in 2021). Less than one-in-ten (7%) had only arranged Level 2 training, and 9% had only arranged Level 3 training.

Employers providing apprenticeships mainly in the Agriculture subject area were more likely to only offer Level 2 qualifications (12%) meanwhile those mainly providing apprenticeships in Engineering and Healthcare subject areas were more likely to only offer Level 3 qualifications (11%). By apprenticeship level, those mainly providing Level 2 or 3 were more likely to say they do not offer other qualifications (67%).

Employers in the Public Administration and Defence SIC sector (33%), those in Health and Social Work (29%) and those in Arts and Entertainment (27%) were more likely than average to have conducted other training at Level 2. The same was true in 2021.

Employers in Public Administration and Defence (49%) and Health and Social Work (31%) SIC sectors were more likely to have conducted other training at Level 3. In terms of size of employer, those with fewer than 10 employees at their organisation were more likely to offer no other qualifications besides apprenticeships (78%).

Support available for employers

Three-quarters (75%) of employers said that there was sufficient information, support and guidance available to employers interested in offering apprenticeships. This was a decrease from 77% of employers who reported this in 2021. In 2023, there was no difference in response between employers with current apprentices (76%) and employers of completer apprentices (75%). Among the group of employers with completer apprentices, this was a decrease compared with 2021, where it was 79%. However, among this group of employers with completer apprentices, this is a return to levels as seen in 2018-19 (75%), but an increase overall from 2017 (68%) and 2015 (71%).

By main subject area, those providing apprenticeships mainly in Leisure (83%) and Retail (82%) were more likely to feel that there was sufficient information and guidance available. Those mainly providing apprenticeships in the Education (64%), Construction (72%) and Engineering and Manufacturing (72%) subject areas were less likely to report there was sufficient information and guidance available. Employers mainly providing apprenticeship Levels 6 or 7 were less likely to feel that the information available was sufficient (70% compared with 75% overall).

Employers with 100 or more employees (at an organisation level) were more likely to say the information and support was sufficient (83%), whereas those with fewer than 10 employees (at an organisation level) were less likely (68%). By SIC sector, employers in the Accommodation and Food Service (89%) and Professional, Science and Technology (81%) SIC sectors were more likely than average to state there was sufficient information, support and guidance available to employers interested in offering apprenticeships.

However, those in the Construction SIC sector were less likely than average to say this (71%). Despite the decrease in employers of completer apprentices reporting that there was sufficient information in 2023 compared with 2021 (75% vs. 79%), there was no significant changes by main subject provided between 2021 and 2023.

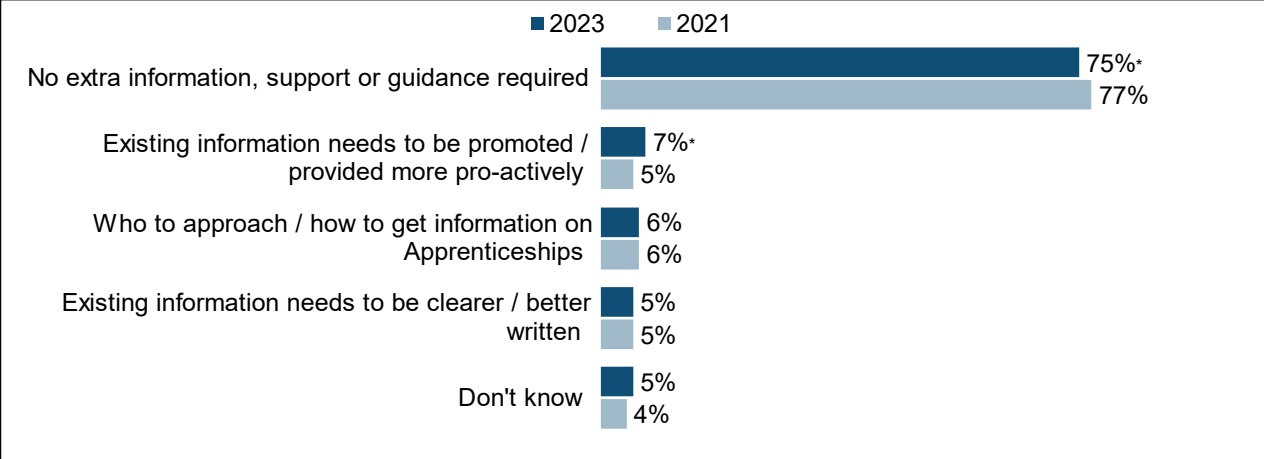
Employers in the third sector were more likely than average to report there was sufficient information (83% vs. 75% average), whereas public sector employers were less likely to report this (70%). Employers who were likely to be eligible for the Apprenticeship Levy were more likely to report there was sufficient information, compared with their counterparts unlikely to be eligible for the Levy (81% vs. 71%).⁵⁴

Employers who did not feel the information, support and guidance available was sufficient were asked what they felt was missing. Around a third (33%) felt that existing information needed to be promoted / provided more pro-actively (7% of all employers, higher than 5% in 2021).

Table 4-4 sets out the other responses given, across all employers (not just those who felt there was insufficient information, support or guidance available). The proportion of employers who felt that no extra information, support or guidance was required reduced between 2021 and 2023 (77% to 75%), meaning more employers thought extra support was required.

⁵⁴ This was based on a question in the survey which asked if the organisation had a wage bill of £3m or more in the UK at the time of the survey; if they stated that they did, it was assumed that they would be eligible for the Levy.

Figure 4-6. Missing information, support and guidance about apprenticeships



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Table 4-4. Information/support/guidance employers felt was missing from what was available at the time of the survey

	% of employers who felt currently available information was insufficient	% of all employers with completer apprentices	% of all employers with current apprentices	% of all employers
Base:	(709)	(945)	(2,981)	(3,926)
Existing information needs to be promoted / provided more pro-actively	33%	7%	6%	7%
Who to approach / how to get information on Apprenticeships	28%	5%	6%	6%
Existing information needs to be clearer / better written	24%	5%	5%	5%
What funding is available and how to get it	19%	4%	4%	4%
Information about the level of fees / payments for Apprenticeships	12%	3%	2%	3%
How to find suitable training providers	10%	2%	2%	2%
How to recruit apprentices	10%	2%	2%	2%
Understanding the requirements and benefits of an Apprenticeship	9%	2%	2%	2%
A specific person they could contact regarding Apprenticeships	9%	1%	2%	2%
More involvement, support and communication from the colleges	9%	1%	2%	2%
How to access Levy funds	7%	2%	1%	1%
How to set up training for Apprentices	6%	1%	1%	1%
How to deliver the qualifications	4%	1%	1%	1%
A central resource for information	4%	1%	1%	1%
Personal advice and support	4%	1%	1%	1%

Responses given by less than 4% of employers who felt currently available information was insufficient not shown.

5. Retaining apprentices

This chapter looks at issues of retention, the reasons behind why apprentices decided to leave their employers and why employers decided not to offer apprentices a role after the completion of their apprenticeship. The chapter also examines the relationship between fixed-term contracts and apprentice retention.

Key findings

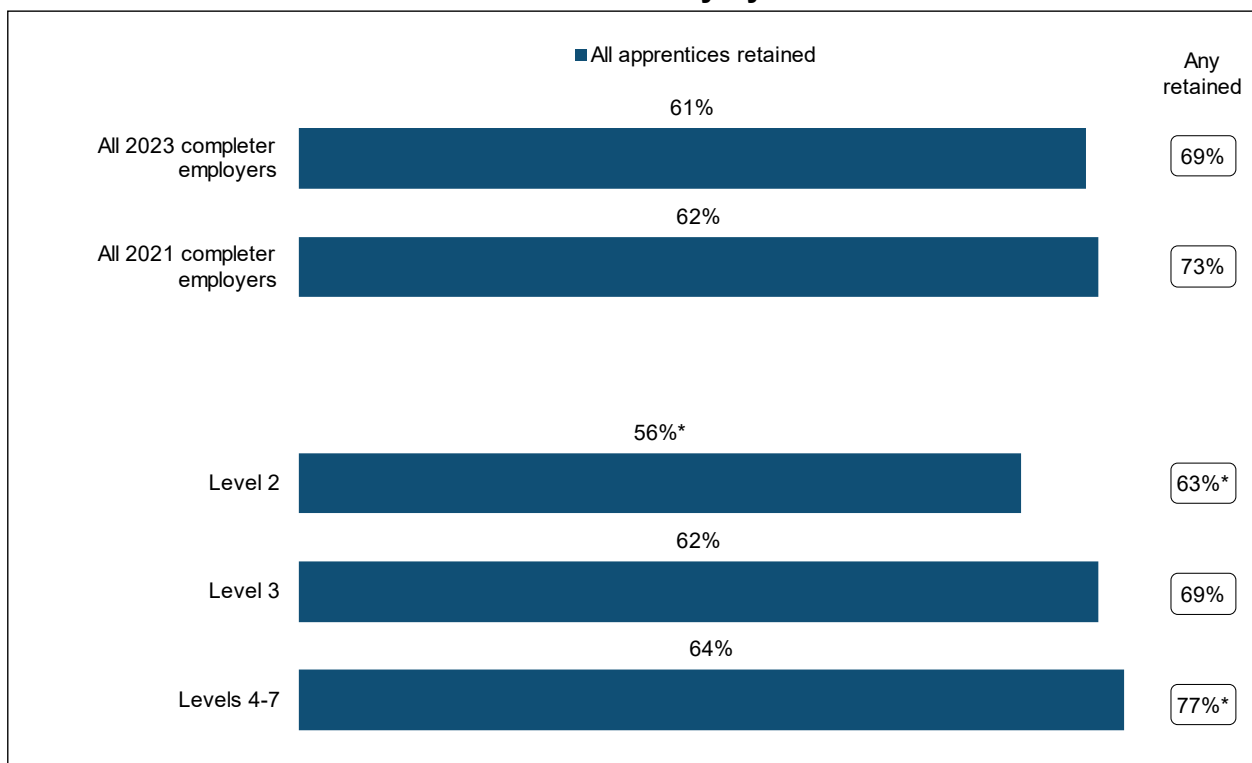
- **Among employers with completer apprentices, almost seven-in-ten (69%) reported that they had retained any of their apprentices since the completion of their apprenticeship.** Over three-fifths (61%) had retained all of their apprentices.
- **Employers of completer apprentices who had completed a Level 4 to a Level 7 apprenticeship were more likely to have retained any of their apprentices compared with those whose apprentices had completed a Level 2 apprenticeship (77% compared with 63%).**
- **Where apprentices had left their organisation since the completion of their apprenticeship, over four-fifths of employers (83%) said it was the apprentice's decision to leave.** One-in-ten (12%) employers said that they were the ones who made the decision to end the apprentice's employment.
- **Among all employers, the proportion of who had all their apprentices on fixed-term contracts decreased compared with 2021 (57% in 2021 to 54% in 2023).** The proportion of employers with no apprentices on fixed-term contracts rose from 31% in 2021 to 35% in 2023.

Retaining apprentices

Employers of completer apprentices were asked if they had retained their apprentices who finished their training between July 2021 and February 2022. Over three-fifths (61%) said that they had retained all their apprentices, which is in line with 2021, and almost seven-in-ten (69%) said that they retained any apprentices, which is a slight decrease from 2021 where 73% said they retained any.

Employers of completer apprentices whose main apprenticeship was a higher level apprenticeship (Levels 4 to 7) were more likely to retain any of their apprentices than those employing Level 2 apprentices (77% and 63% respectively). Employers of Level 4 to 7 completer apprentices were less likely to retain their apprentices in 2023 than they were in 2021 (89% in 2021 vs 77% in 2023). Similarly, employers retaining all of their Level 4 to 7 apprentices decreased from just over four-fifths (81%) in 2021 to just over three-fifths (64%) in 2023, as shown in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1. Whether completer apprentices were still working for the organisation at the time of the survey by main level



Base: Employers with completer apprentices: 2023; (945); 2021 (977). 2023 subgroups: Level 2 (325); Level 3 (461); Level 4 to 7 (159). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the average.

Employers with completer apprentices whose main subject area was Engineering were the most likely to retain their apprentices, with almost three-quarters (72%) retaining all and 78% retaining any.

Conversely, employers with completer apprentices whose main subject area was Leisure were the least likely to retain their apprentices. Only one-third (33%) retained all of their apprentices and less than half (46%) retained any of them.

Employers with completer apprentices with apprentices on fixed-term contracts were less likely to have retained all of their apprentices compared with employers not offering fixed-term contracts (57% compared with 66% respectively).

Employers with completer apprentices where 25% or more of the workforce was made up of apprentices were the most likely to have had any apprentices leave (45% of any apprentices left the organisation vs. an average of 34%).

Reasons for completer apprentices leaving their employer

Employers of apprentices (with completer apprentices) who had completed their apprenticeship but who had left the organisation before the survey took place were asked why their apprentice had left. Over four-fifths (83%) of employers reported that it had been the apprentice who had driven the decision to leave. One-in-ten (12%) said that the

employer had driven that decision. This was an increase in the proportion of employers reporting that the apprentice was the driver of the decision to leave since 2021 (83% vs. 67% in 2021).

The most common reason reported for apprentices to leave an employer despite being offered a role after the completion of their qualification, was that the apprentice wanted to go into another sector or that they wanted higher pay (both 21%). Wanting to move into another sector remained the most common reason compared in line with 2021. The third most popular reason for apprentices to leave in 2023 was that they were offered another or better job before completing their apprenticeship (19%). Other reasons suggested included wanting to move away or change location (15%), wanting a promotion or better career prospects (14%), and personal reasons – including family, health, and maternity/paternity (10%).

Reasons for employers not retaining completer apprentices

Employers (with completer apprentices) who did not offer a role to apprentices who had completed their apprenticeship were asked why they decided not to offer the apprentice a position.

The most common reason suggested by these employers was that the apprentice was not working to the standard desired. This was suggested by almost half of these employers (46%). This was also the most common reason in previous waves of the survey in 2021 and 2018/19. This equates to 2% of all employers of completer apprentices. Just over a quarter (27%) of employers said that they did not have any appropriate vacancies. Other reasons mentioned by employers who did not offer a role upon completion included not having enough work (17%), COVID-19 having an impact on the business (13%), and that they could not afford to take the apprentice on (12%). None of the responses had changed significantly since 2021.

Fixed-term contracts

During the recruitment stage of apprenticeships, some employers offer apprenticeships on a fixed-term contract only for the period of the apprenticeship training and not beyond this. As reported above, employers with completer apprentices who had offered fixed-term contracts to apprentices were less likely to retain all of their apprentices. Given the link between fixed-term contracts and retention, this section considers the trends in employers' use of fixed-term contracts, and the profile of employers offering these.

All employers were asked what proportion of their current and completer apprentices were recruited on a fixed-term contract for the duration of their apprenticeship. Overall, more than half of all employers reported that all of their apprentices were on fixed-term contracts (54%), while around three-fifths (59%) reported that at least half were on fixed-term contracts.

Over three-fifths (61%) of employers of completer apprentices reported that all their apprentices were employed on a fixed-term contract. Around two-thirds (63%) reported that at least half of their apprentices were employed on a fixed-term basis for the period of their apprenticeship.

Among employers of current apprentices, just over half (51%) reported that all of their apprentices were employed on a fixed-term contract. Around three-fifths (57%) said that at least half of their apprentices were employed on a fixed-term contract.

As shown in Table 5-1, the percentage of all employers offering all apprentices fixed-term contracts had decreased since 2021 (from 57% to 54%). When looking at employers of completer apprentices however (61%), this had decreased compared with 2017 when this figure was over seven-in-ten (67%). The percentage of all employers with at least half of their apprentices on fixed-term contracts (59%) has not changed since 2021.

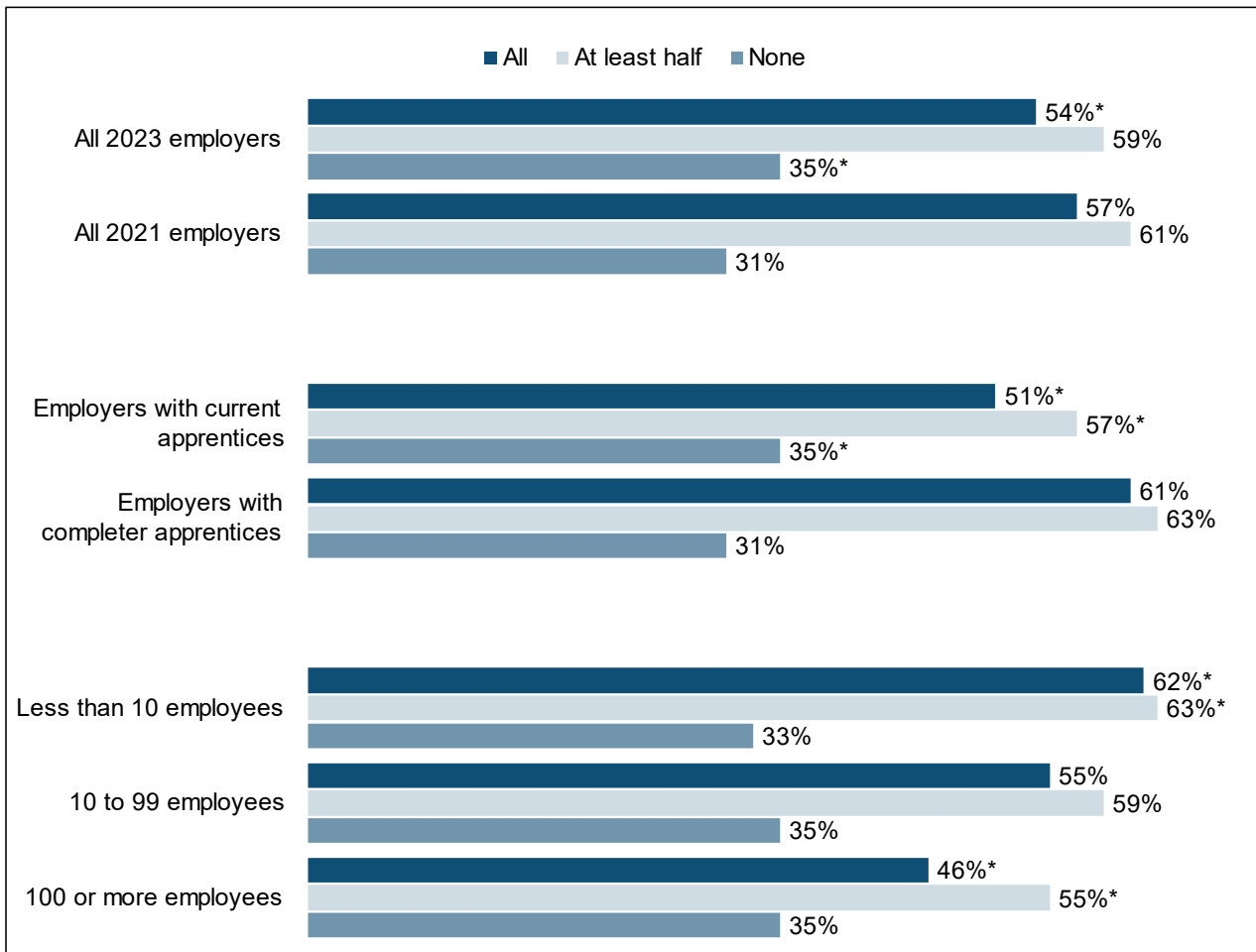
Table 5-1. Percentage of apprentices on fixed-term contracts

	2015 (Completer)	2017 (Completer)	2018/19 (Completer)	2021 (Completer)	2021 (Current)	2021 (All)	2023 (Completer)	2023 (Current)	2023 (All)
Base:	(2,636)	(2,883)	(2,639)	(681)	(2,277)	(2,958)	(669)	(2,216)	(2,885)
All on fixed-term contracts	65%	67%	63%	64%	52%	57%	61%	51%	54%*
At least half on fixed-term contracts	69%	71%	67%	67%	59%	61%	63%	57%	59%
None on fixed-term contracts	25%	23%	27%	28%	33%	31%	31%	35%	35%*

Base: Employers with any apprentices recruited specifically for an Apprenticeship. * indicates a figure is significantly different to 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

In 2023, over one-third of all employers (35%) were not employing any apprentices on a fixed-term contract (a rise from 31% in 2021). As shown Figure 5-2, there was a trend across the size of businesses by number of employees in the organisation, and the proportion of apprentices on a fixed-term contract. Smaller businesses with less than 10 employees in their organisation were more likely to have had all of their apprentices on a fixed-term contract compared with employers with 100 or more employees in their organisation (62% and 46% respectively).

Figure 5-2. Proportion of employers using fixed-term contracts with current and completer apprentices, by number of staff at organisation



Base: Employers with any apprentices recruited specifically for an Apprenticeship: 2023 (2,885); 2021 (2,958). 2023 subgroups: Current (2,216); Completer (669); Less than 10 employees; (437); 10 to 99 employees (1,279); 100 or more employees (1,081) (organisation level). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the 2023 average (for size of organisation), between each other (for completer / current), and 2021 (for time series).

Among all employers, those whose main level offered was Level 2 or 3 were also more likely to have all of their apprentices on a fixed-term contract compared with employers of Level 4 to 7 apprentices (57% compared with 36% respectively). Over two-fifths (43%) of Level 4 to 7 apprentices reported having no apprentices employed on a fixed-term basis. This was higher than the average of 35%.

6. Usage of higher and degree apprenticeships

This chapter explores employers' knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships, why they did or did not offer them and future plans to utilise them.⁵⁵

Key findings

- **Around three-fifths (60%) of employers reported having any awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships, consistent with 2021 and 2018-19.** .Awareness was highest among employers with the main subject areas of **ICT** (73%) (an increase from 2021, 60%), **Health** (72%) and **Business** (71%).
- **A third (34%) of employers reported providing or having plans to provide an apprenticeship at Level 4 or 5.** Over one-fifth (22%) reported providing or planning to provide a degree apprenticeship at Level 6 or 7, 10% provided or planned to provide a Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeship.
- **The main reason for not offering higher or degree apprenticeships, consistent with 2021 and 2018-19, was a lack of demand from employees (24%).**
- **The main reason for providing or planning to provide higher or degree apprenticeships among employers was to help staff develop their skills (61%), followed by creating progression for employees as part of their workforce development (39%).**

Awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships

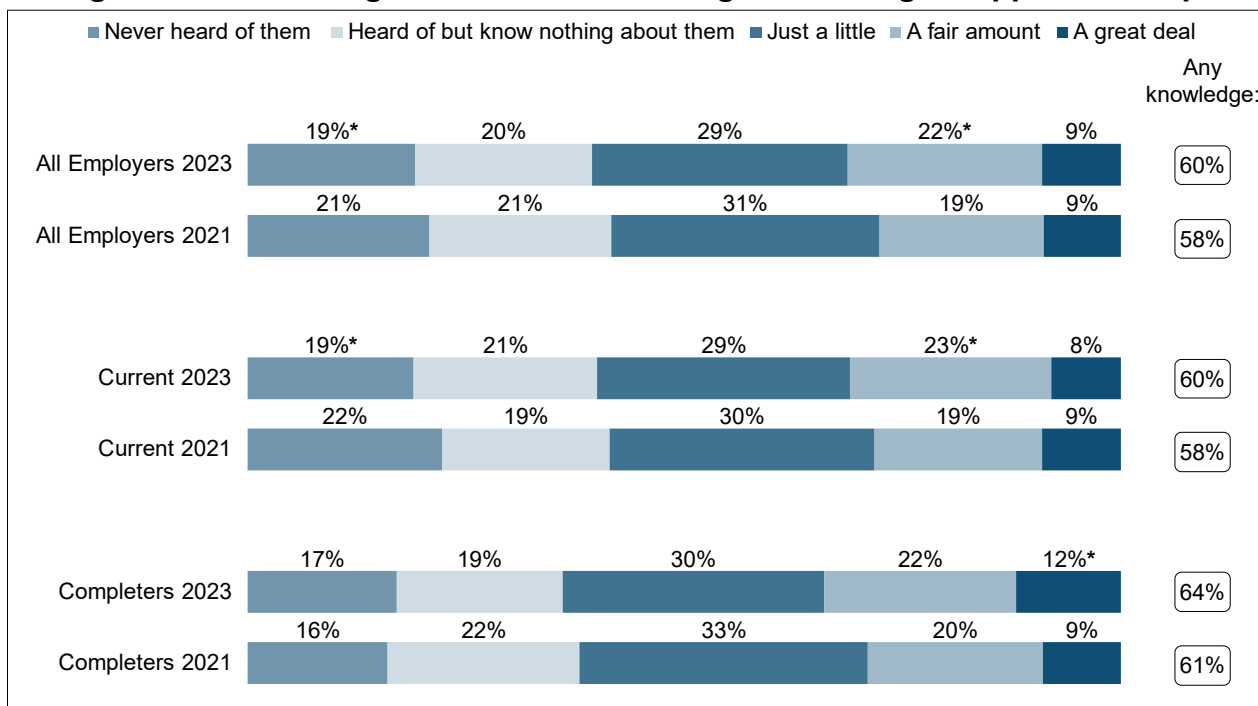
All employers were asked how much they felt they knew about higher apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships. Overall, three-fifths (60%) of employers reported having some knowledge of higher apprenticeships. A fifth (20%) reported they had heard of them but had no knowledge of them, while just under that proportion (19%) had never heard of them. Between 2021 and 2023, there was a change in awareness of higher apprenticeships, with an increase in the overall proportion of employers who said they had heard of them (81% in 2023 vs. 79% in 2021 and 2018-19) but employers reporting any knowledge overall (60%) remained consistent with 2021 and 2018-19. As shown in Figure 6-1 there was also an increase in 2023 of employers who reported knowing 'a fair amount' about higher and degree apprenticeships (22% in 2023 vs. 19% in 2021). As shown in Table 6.1, this was reflected in an increase in employers who had more than a little knowledge (31% in 2023 vs. 27% in 2021).

⁵⁵ By Higher apprenticeships, we mean apprenticeships offered at Levels 4 to 7, and Degree apprenticeships at Levels 6 or 7.

More than eight-in-ten (83%) employers with completer apprentices had heard of higher and degree apprenticeships. Employers with completer apprentices were more likely than employers with current apprentices to have had any knowledge of higher or degree apprenticeships (64% vs. 60%). This appears to have been driven by the higher likelihood of employers with completer apprentices to report having ‘a great deal’ of knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships compared with employers with current apprentices (12% vs. 8%).

Among employers with current apprentices, three-fifths (60%) reported having some knowledge of higher apprenticeships, just over eight-in-ten (81%) had heard of them (higher than 78% in 2021).

Figure 6-1. Knowledge and awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). Subgroups: Employers with current apprentices: 2023 (2,981); 2021 (3,108); Employers with completer apprentices: 2023 (945); 2021 (977). Don't know less than 1% not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Table 6-1 Knowledge and awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships

	2018-19 (Completer)	2021 (Completer)	2021 (Current)	2021 (All)	2023 (Completer)	2023 (Current)	2023 (All)
Base: All employers	(4,000)	(977)	(3,108)	(4,085)	(945)	(2,981)	(3,926)
More than a little knowledge⁵⁶	30%	29%	28%	27%	34%*	31%*	31%*
Any knowledge⁵⁷	59%	61%	58%	58%	64%*	60%*	60%
Heard of them⁵⁸	79%	83%	78%	79%	83%	81%*	81%*

Base: All apprentices. * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021. (Bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

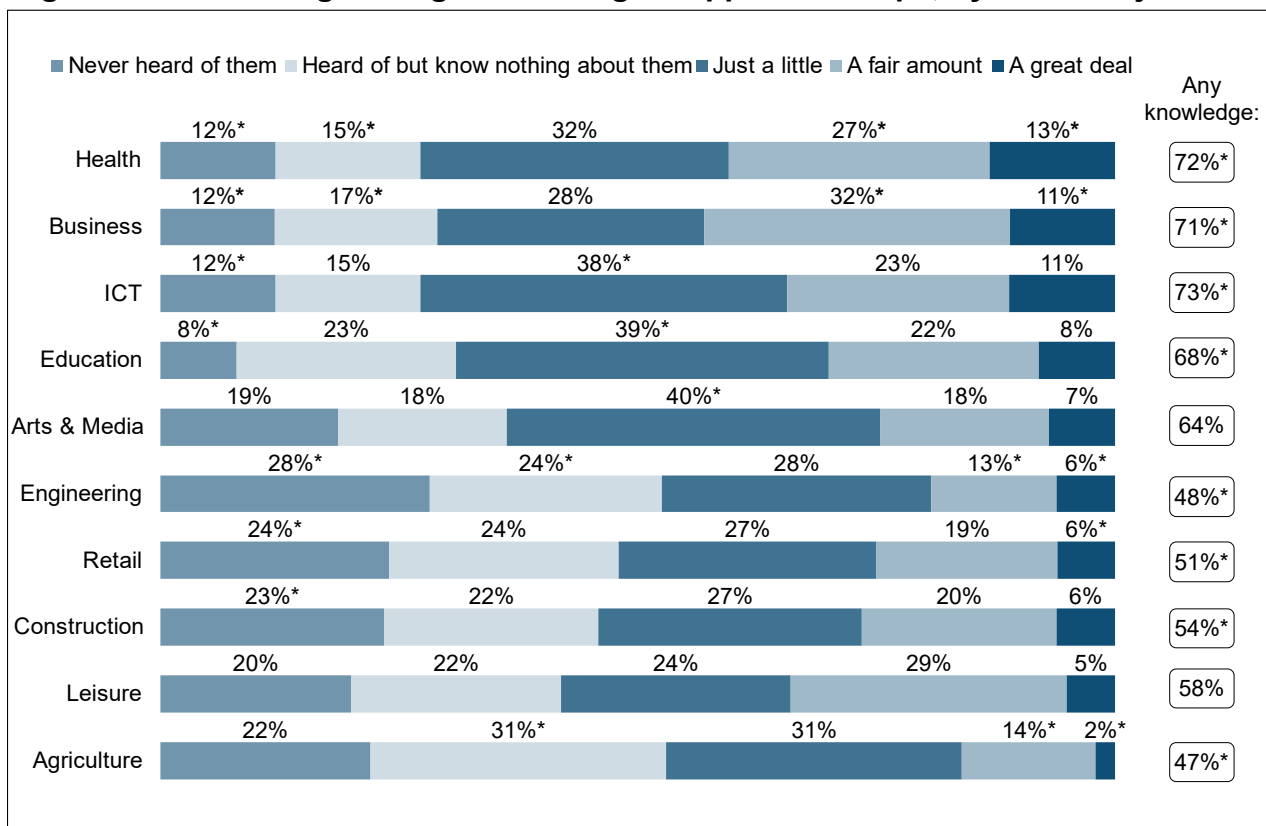
⁵⁶ Employers who reported having at least a fair amount of knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships.

⁵⁷ Employers who reported having at least a little knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships.

⁵⁸ Employers who had at least heard of higher and degree apprenticeships, including whether they had any knowledge or none.

As shown in Figure 6-2, by main subject area, employers whose main subject area was ICT (73%), were most likely to report having at least some knowledge of higher apprenticeships (an increase from 60% in 2021). Employers whose main subject area was Health (72%), Business (71%) or Education (68%), were similarly more likely than average to have had some knowledge of higher apprenticeships. Meanwhile, employers more likely to have never heard of higher apprenticeships were those with main subject areas of Engineering (28%), Retail (24%, rising to 42% among those with Hair/Beauty apprentices) and Construction (23%). There was a marked decrease in proportion of employers whose main subject area was Agriculture who reported never having heard of higher apprenticeships (22% in 2023 vs. 33% in 2021).

Figure 6-2. Knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships, by main subject area



Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Health (702); Business (793); ICT (162); Education (192); Arts & Media (81); Engineering (792); Retail (350); Construction (483); Leisure (140); Agriculture (189). Don't know less than 1% not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly higher than average.

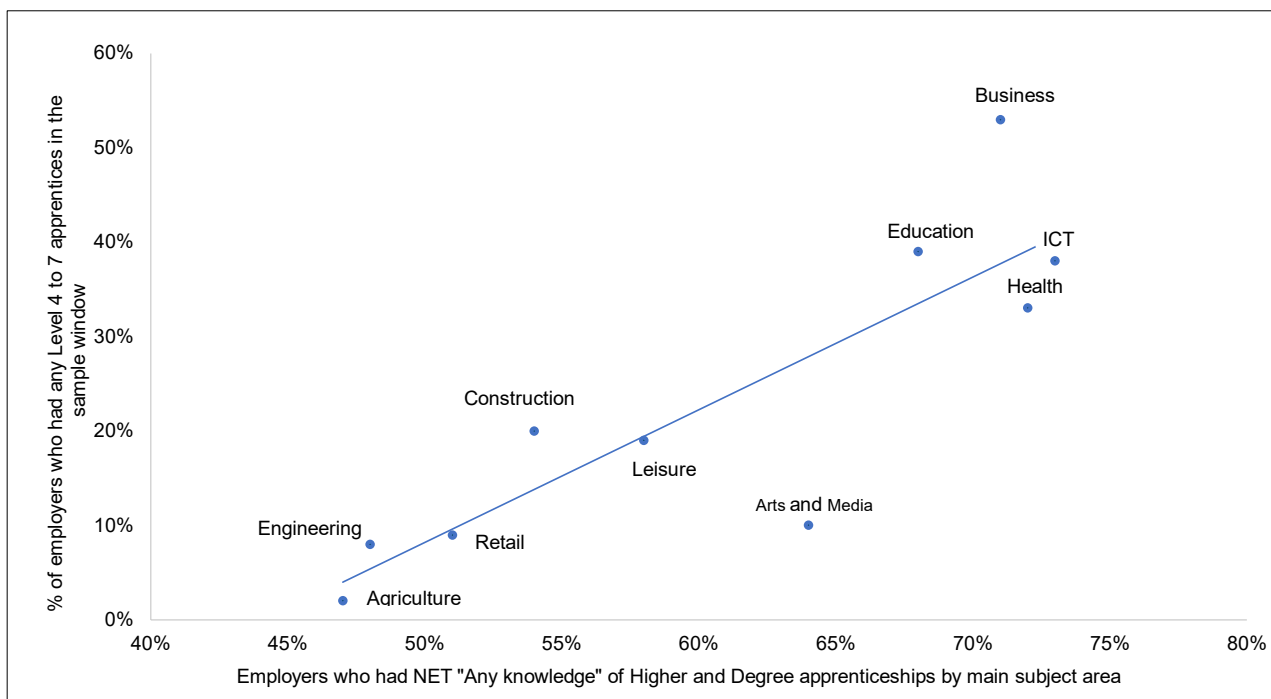
Awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships was higher among employers whose main level offered was between Level 4 and 7. More than eight-in-ten (83%) employers whose main level offered was between Level 4 and Level 7 reported having any knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships, compared with those whose main level offered was Level 2 or Level 3 (54%).

Awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships was higher among employers with a larger number of apprentices. Nearly nine-in-ten employers (89%) with more than 10

apprentices reported having any knowledge about higher apprenticeships compared with 56% of employers with only 1 apprentice. Similarly, awareness increased with employer size. Just under two-in-five employers (37%) with fewer than 10 employees in their organisation reported having any knowledge about higher apprenticeships, rising to six-in-ten of employers (61%) with 10-99 employees, and just under three-quarters (73%) of employers with 100 or more employees in their organisation.

As shown in Figure 6-3 there was some correlation by main subject area between employers who had a higher proportion of Level 4 to 7 apprentices in that subject area and knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships among employers who had apprentices in that subject area more generally. This was in line with the 2021 findings which also showed a correlation, with employers from the same main subject areas (Business, Health, ICT and Education) being both more likely to have Level 4-7 apprentices in the sample window and more likely to have ‘any knowledge’ of higher and degree apprenticeships.

Figure 6-3. Correlation between use of Level 4-7 apprentices and knowledge of higher and degree apprenticeships, by subject area



Base: Employers who had any Level 4-7 apprentices in the sample window (1,204).

Provision of higher and degree apprenticeships

Employers who had heard of higher apprenticeships were asked if they provided (at the time of the survey) or had plans in place to provide higher apprenticeships at Level 4 or 5, degree apprenticeships at Level 6 or 7 or any other Level 6+ non-degree

apprenticeships. Around a third (34%) of all employers reported providing or having plans to provide a higher apprenticeship at Level 4 or 5. This was the same proportion as in 2021.. Just over a fifth (22%) of employers reported they provided or planned to provide degree apprenticeships at Level 6 and 7. One-in-ten reported they provided or planned to provide any other Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships (10%). Around a quarter (24%) of employers were either providing or planning to provide either type of Level 6+ apprenticeships. In total, nearly two-fifths (39%) provided or planned to provide Level 4 to 7 apprenticeships.

As shown in Figure 6-4., there was a small increase in employers providing or planning to provide degree apprenticeships at Level 6 or 7 (22% in 2023 vs. 20% in 2021). There was also an increase in employers that were providing or planning to provide any other Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships. Although this was not significant at the 95% confidence level, when comparing among employers with completer apprentices, it represented an indicative year-on-year upward trend from 2017 (11% in 2023 vs. 10% in 2021 vs. 7% in 2017).⁵⁹

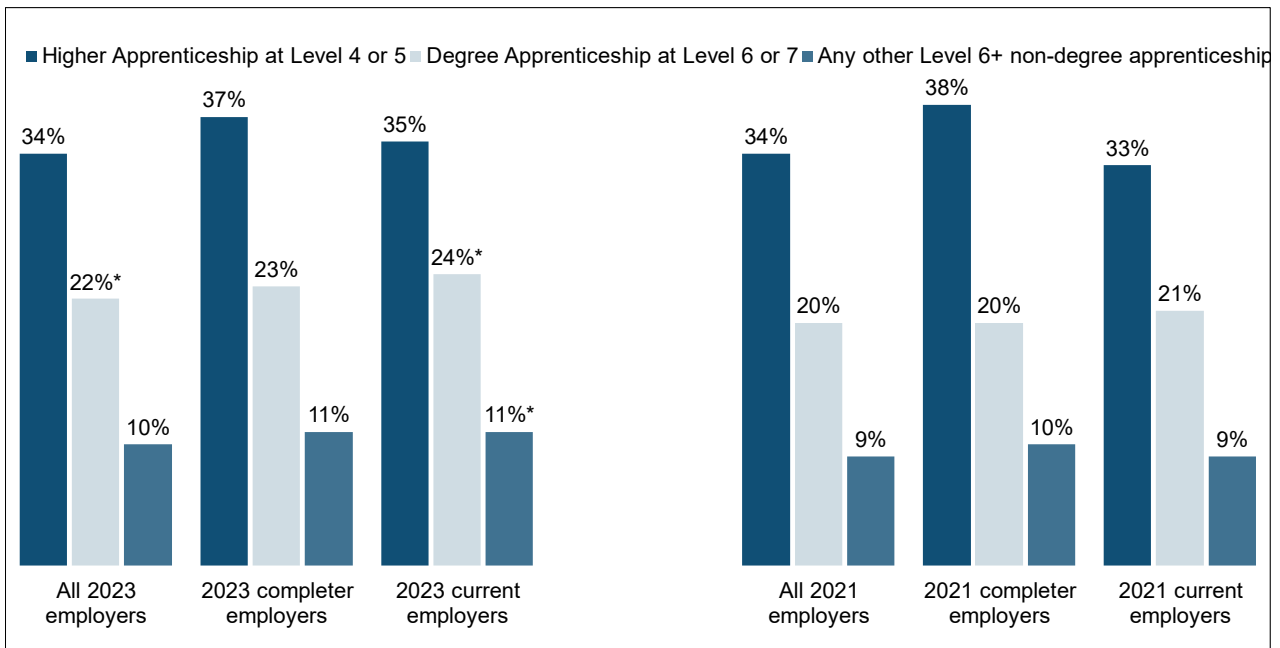
Findings were consistent between employers with completer apprentices and employers with current apprentices, with both types of employers being similarly likely to report providing or planning to provide each of the qualifications outlined:

- A higher apprenticeship at Level 4 or 5 (37% for employers with completer apprentices vs. 35% for employers with current apprentices).
- Degree apprenticeships at Levels 6 and 7, (23% for employers with completer apprentices vs. 24% for employers with current apprentices).
- Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships (11% for both employers with completer apprentices and employers with current apprentices).
- Apprenticeships at Levels 4 to 7 overall (42% for employers of completer apprentices vs. 40% for employers with current apprentices).

Compared with 2021, there was a slight increase in employers with current apprentices who reported providing or planning to provide degree apprenticeships at Levels 6 and 7 (24% in 2023 vs. 21% in 2021) and Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships (11% in 2023 vs. 9% in 2021).

⁵⁹ The 2017 survey was only of employers with completer apprentices so comparisons with this time period are made only with 2021 and 2023 employers with completer apprentices.

Figure 6-4. Employers using or planning to use higher and/or degree apprenticeships



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). Subgroups: Employers in completer apprentices: 2023 (945); 2021 (977). Employers with current apprentices: 2023 (2,981); 2021 (3,108). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Employers who offered Health (47%), and Business (43%) as their main subject areas were more likely than average (34%) to report providing or planning to provide higher apprenticeships at Level 4 or 5. Employers whose main subject area was Business also more commonly reported providing or planning to provide degree apprenticeships at Levels 6 and 7, as did those whose main subject area was ICT (33% and 30% respectively, compared with 22% average). Employers whose main subject area was Business (14%), or Health (13%) were more likely to provide or had plans to provide Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships (compared with 10% average).

There were also differences by Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) sector; employers in the Public Administration and Defence SIC were much more likely to provide or had plans to provide Level 4 or 5 apprenticeships (78%), as were those in Accommodation and Food Service (58%), Health and Social Work (53%), and those in the Professional, Science and Technology SIC sector (44%) compared with 34% average.

For degree apprenticeships, those in the Public Administration and Defence SIC sector were again far more likely to provide or had plans to provide these (82%), compared with an average of 22%. Employers in the Professional, Scientific and Technology sector (42%), Education (30%), and Health and Social Work (27%) were also more likely than average (22%) to report they provided or had plans to provide degree apprenticeships. Similar sectors were more likely to provide or had plans to provide Level 6+ non-degree

apprenticeships: Public Administration and Defence (51%), Professional, Scientific and Technology (16%), Health and Social Work (14%), and Education (13%).⁶⁰

The larger the number of apprentices employers had, the more likely they were to provide or had plans to provide each of the types of higher or degree apprenticeships:

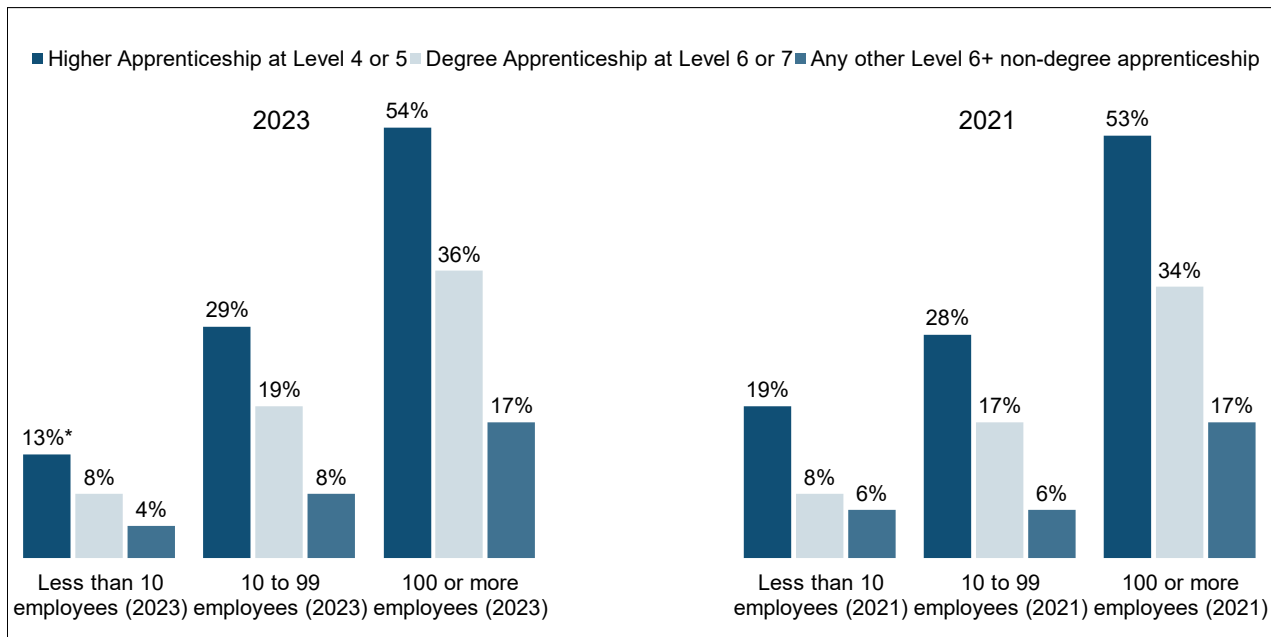
- Higher apprenticeship at Level 4 or 5 (80% for employers with 10+ apprentices vs. 29% for 1 apprentice).
- Degree apprenticeships at Levels 6 and 7 (64% for employers with 10+ apprentices vs. 19% for 1 apprentice).
- Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships (30% for employers with 10+ apprentices vs. 9% for 1 apprentice).

Similarly, likelihood to provide or plan to provide higher or degree apprenticeships increased with the size of employers' organisations. Sites with 100 or more employees were most likely to provide or had plans to provide apprenticeships at Level 4 or 5 (54%), degree apprenticeships at Level 6 or 7 (36%), or non-degree Level 6+ apprenticeships (17%). As shown in Figure 6-5, this finding matches the trend in 2021.

However, there was a decrease in the proportion of employers with less than 10 staff at the organisation who reported providing or planning to provide higher apprenticeships at Level 4 or 5 (13% in 2023 vs. 19% in 2021).

⁶⁰ Proportions of employers in Public Administration and Defence sector represent marked increases from 2021. However, caution should be made in interpreting these results because of a small base size (n=57).

Figure 6-5. Employers using or planning to use higher and/or degree apprenticeships in 2021 and 2023, by size of employer organisation



Base: Employers with less than 10 staff at organisation: 2023 (517); 2021 (845). Employers with 10 to 99 staff at organisation: 2023(1,734); 2021 (1,464). Employers with 100 or more staff at organisation: 2023 (1,524); 2021 (1,654). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Employers that recruited any apprentices outside of their organisation were less likely to provide (or had plans to provide) higher or degree apprenticeships, than employers providing apprenticeships to any of their existing staff (Level 4 or 5: 29% vs. 49%, Level 6 or 7: 20% vs. 33%).

Provision of, or plans to provide, a higher apprenticeship at Level 4 or 5, were less likely among employers who had been offering apprenticeships for 3 years or less, or 10 years or more (25% of those offering for 3 years or less vs. 38% 4 to 5 years; 42% 5 to 9 years and 32% 10+ years). Similarly, provision or plans to provide degree apprenticeships was least likely among both the newest employers offering apprenticeships, and those who had offered apprenticeships for over 10 years (16% 3 years or less vs. 28% 4 to 5 years; 27% 5 to 9 years and 20% 10+ years).

There were differences among employers in different regions, with employers in the North West (39%) being more likely to say they provided or had plans to provide Level 4 or 5 apprenticeships, compared with 34% average. Employers in London and Yorkshire and Humber were more likely to report they provided or had plans to provide any Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships (28% and 29% respectively).

Changes in provision of higher or degree apprenticeships

According to ILR data, over a quarter (28%) of employers potentially eligible to take part in the survey had higher or degree apprentices during their sample window period. This

was an increase compared with 2021, when just over a fifth (22%) of potentially eligible employers had higher or degree apprentices during their sample window period. The increase, alongside the higher proportion of employers that stated they provided or planned to provide these types of apprenticeships (39%) suggests an upward trend.

This upward trend appeared to be driven by the increase in employers with completer apprentices at Level 4 to 7. ILR data in 2021 showed that around one-in-ten (11%) had at least 1 completer apprentice at Level 4 to 7. In 2023, the proportion increased to one-in-five (21%). There was also an increase among employers of current apprentices; in 2021 just over one-in-four (26%) had at least 1 current apprentice at Level 4 to 7, while in 2023, this proportion had increased to one-in-three (30%).⁶¹

Funding additional degree qualification content

Employers who offer Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships were asked whether their organisation funded or would fund degree qualification content.⁶² Over half of employers (53%) reported that they already did or would fund additional content alongside degree qualifications in this way. Over one-quarter reported they do not or would not (28%). Findings between employers with completer apprentices and employers with current apprentices were consistent (53% did or would fund additional content in both groups; 27% vs. 28% did not or would not). These findings were in line with 2021.

Employers with a main subject area of Engineering and Construction were more likely than average to report funding or having plans to fund additional degree qualification content (67% for both), while those whose main subject area was Business (44%) were less likely than average (53%) to report this. Employers who recruited apprentices outside of their organisation (56%) were more likely than those providing apprenticeships to existing staff (49%) to report practice of, or willingness to, fund additional degree qualification content than employers. Employers whose organisation staff was made up of 25% or more apprentices were more likely than average to report they did not currently, and did not plan to fund additional degree qualification content (47% vs. 28% overall). Employers that offered fixed-term contracts were less likely than those that did not, to report they would (or already did) fund additional degree qualification content (51% vs. 62%).

There were also differences by SIC sector, employers in the Public Administration and Defence sector were more likely than average to report they were not, or did not plan to,

⁶¹ As noted in Chapter 3 and in the Technical Report, there were sampling challenges in 2023 which resulted in difficulties in identifying employers of apprentices, particularly records after April 2022 when EmpID was removed from the ILR. As a result of this, the employer population data for 2023 was 'modelled', and therefore comparisons to 2021, should be treated with caution.

⁶² In the question asked to employers, it was made clear that this was in addition to the apprenticeship where it was not included as a mandatory part of the training.

fund additional degree qualification content (58% vs. 28% average), as were employers in the Education sector (45% vs. 28% average). Employers in Manufacturing and Construction sectors were more likely than average to report they were, or planned, to fund additional degree qualification content (74% and 65% respectively, vs. 53% average).

Replacing graduate programmes or work-based learning

Employers with Level 6 or 7 apprentices were also asked whether the degree or Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships were replacements for a programme to recruit graduates. Nearly seven-in-ten reported that this was not the case (67%), with only 5% reporting that the apprenticeship training fully replaced a graduate programme. Around one-in-six (16%) reported that it partly replaced a graduate programme. There were no significant differences between employers with current and completer apprentices for these findings. There was no change between 2021 and 2023.

Employers with Level 6 or 7 apprentices were also asked whether these apprenticeships were a replacement for a programme to provide other work-based learning at these levels.⁶³ Just under half of these employers (47%) reported that this was not the case, 14% reported that the apprenticeship training fully replaced other existing work-based learning at these levels. Around one-quarter (27%) reported that it partly replaced this. There were no significant differences between employers with current and completer apprentices or between 2021 and 2023 for these findings.

Reasons for use of higher and degree apprenticeships

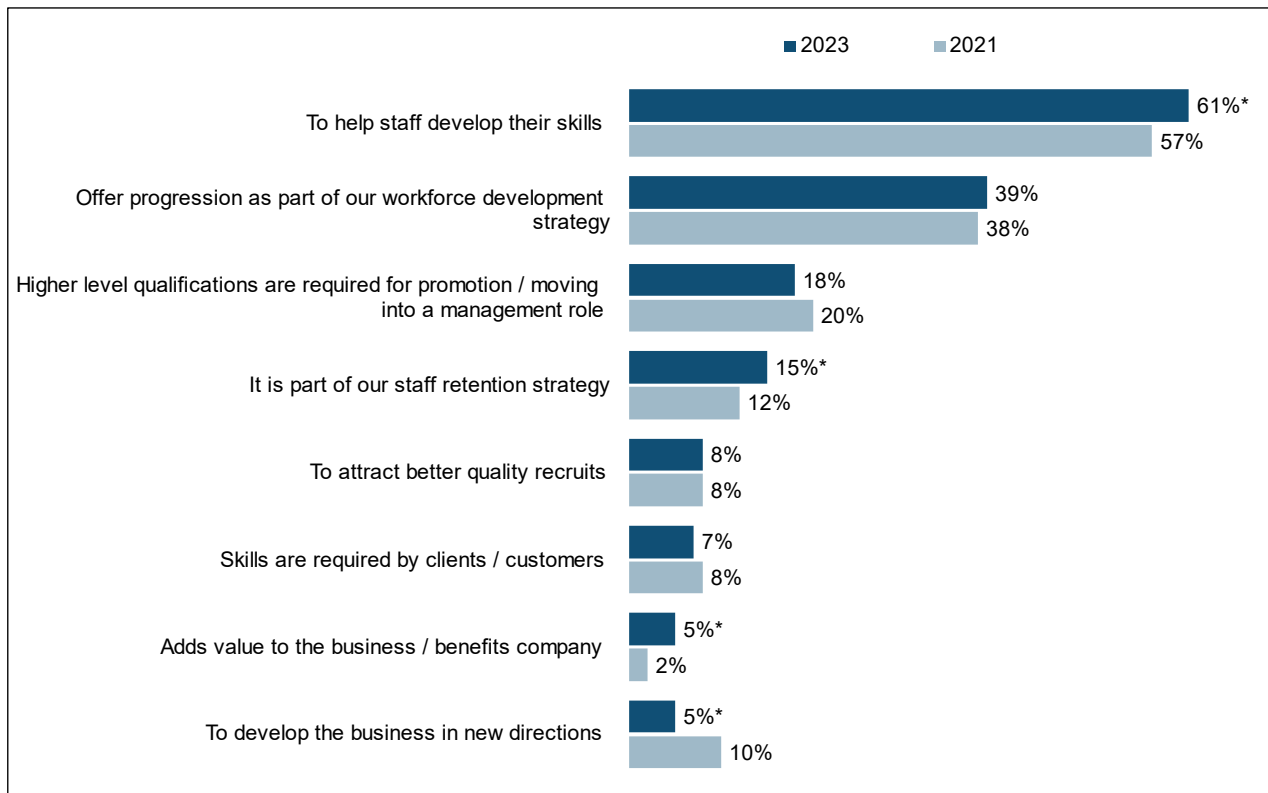
Employers who reported providing or having plans to provide higher or degree apprenticeships were also asked for reasons why. As shown in Figure 6-6, the most commonly reported reasons included to help staff develop their skills (61%), to create progression for employees as part of their workforce development strategy (39%), that higher level qualifications were required for promotion or for moving into a management role (18%), and as part of a staff retention strategy (15%).

These were also the most commonly reported reasons among employers in 2021 for offering higher and degree apprenticeships, however, there was an increase in the proportion of employers who mentioned the need to help staff develop their skills (61% in 2023 vs. 57% in 2021) and those that reported it as part of their retention strategy (15% in 2023 vs. 12% in 2021).

There were no significant differences between employers with current and completer apprentices for these findings.

⁶³ This included study towards a professional qualification.

Figure 6-6. Reasons for offering higher or degree apprenticeships at Level 4 or above.



Base: Employers who offer apprenticeships at Level 4+ 2023 (1,754); 2021 (1,858). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021. Responses given by less than 5% of employers in 2023 not shown.

Helping staff develop their skills was more likely to be reported as a reason for offering higher or degree level apprenticeships by employers whose main subject area was Health (66%) and those who offered apprenticeships to existing employees (64%). Offering progression for employees as part of a workforce development strategy was more likely to be mentioned by those likely to pay the Levy (42%) and those whose main level offered was 4 to 7.⁶⁴

Higher level qualifications being required for promotion or for moving into a management role was more likely than average to be mentioned by employers whose main subject area was Health (23%), employers with 10 or more apprentices (26%), employers with 100 or more employees in their organisation (20%), and employers who provided apprenticeships to existing staff (21%). Higher level qualifications being part of a staff retention strategy was more likely to be mentioned by employers whose main subject

⁶⁴ Levy eligibility was based on a question in the survey which asked if the organisation had a wage bill of £3m or more in the UK at the time of the survey; if they stated that they did, it was assumed that they would be eligible for the Levy.

area was Leisure (28%), and by employers with more than 100 employees at the site (20%).⁶⁵

Employers who reported that they neither provided nor had plans to provide higher or degree apprenticeships were also asked why not. As shown in Figure 6-7, the two most commonly reported reasons were there being a lack of demand from employees, (24%), followed by there being no need for higher level qualifications to do any jobs at the organisation (19%).⁶⁶

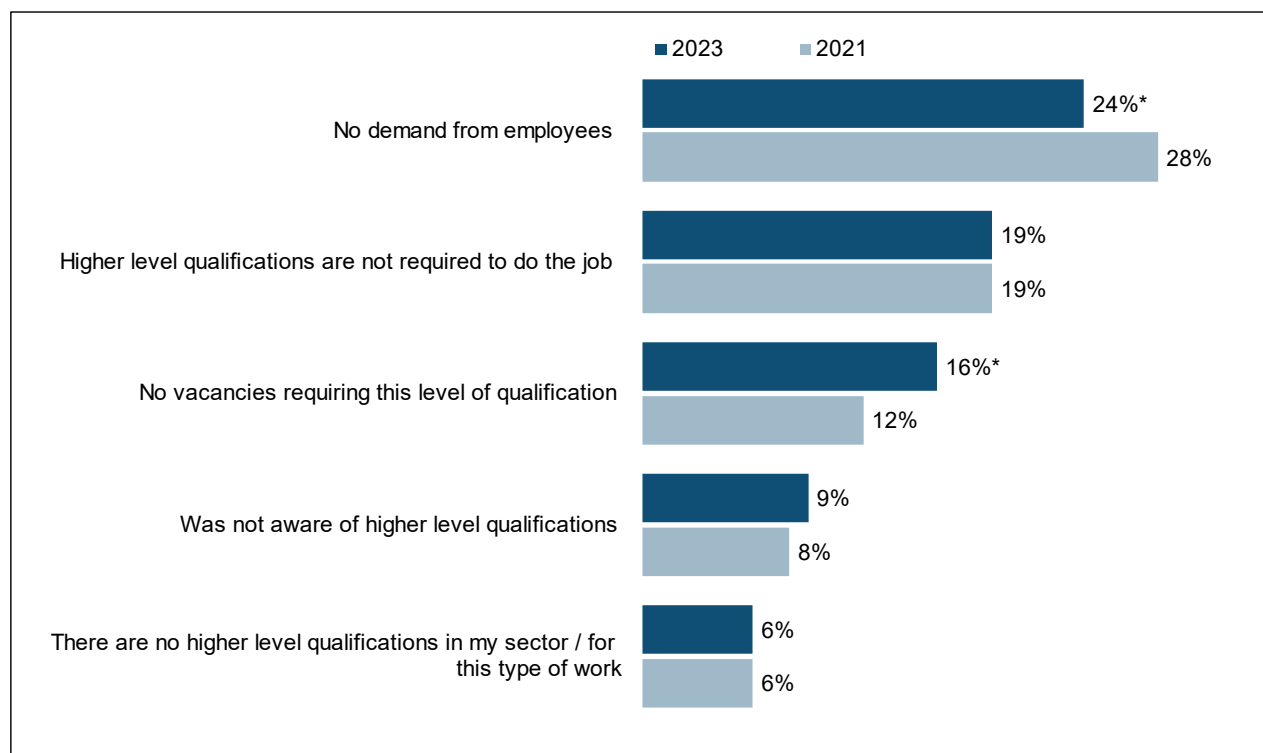
These were also the most common reasons in 2021 and 2018-19, although reporting a lack of demand from employees was less widespread in 2023. A quarter (24%) of employers in 2023 selected this reason as compared with 28% of employers in 2021 and 29% in 2018-19. There was no change in the proportion of employers who stated that their reason for not offering higher or degree level apprenticeships was the non-requirement of higher level qualifications to do the job, with 19% of employers selecting this reason in both 2023 and 2021, and 18% in 2018-19. There were no significant differences between employers with current and completer apprentices for these findings.

The third most common reason given by employers for not offering higher or degree apprenticeships was that there were no vacancies requiring this level of qualification (16%). This was also the third most common reason in 2021 but in 2023 this was more widespread (16% in 2023 vs. 12% in 2021). In 2018-19, this was less widespread, with only 5% of employers selecting this reason.

⁶⁵ In this instance, the figures from the size of employers site rather than the size of the employers organisation has been included in the report. This is because the difference between the large (100+) and small (less than 10) employers by size of site is of far greater statistical significance than the difference between the large (100+) and small (less than 10) employers, by the size of the organisation. Therefore, the decision has been made to report the size of site figures, rather than the size of organisation figures.

⁶⁶ Figures were calculated with a base of employers who did not offer apprenticeships at Level 4+ excluding those who had not heard of higher apprenticeships.

Figure 6-7. Reasons against offering higher or degree apprenticeships at Level 4 or above



Base: Employers in 2023 who did not offer apprenticeships at Level 4+, excluding those that had not heard of higher apprenticeships: 2023 (1,376); 2021 (1,331) * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021. Responses given by less than 5% of employers in 2023 not shown.

The following employers were more likely than the average (24%) to mention a lack of demand from employees:

- Employers with a main subject area of Health (39%) and Education (31%); this was more widespread among employers in 2021 with a main subject area of Education (48%).
- Employers with a main level of Level 4 -7 (32%).
- Employers with 10 to 99 employees within the organisation (27%); this was more widespread among employers in 2021 (37%).
- Employers providing apprenticeships to existing employees (30%).
- Employers in London (40%).
- Employers with a great deal or a fair amount of knowledge of Higher apprenticeships (32%).

Having no need for higher level qualifications to do the job was also reported more frequently than average (19%) by:

- Employers with a main subject area of Construction (28%).

- Employers in the Construction (29%) Manufacturing (24%) or Wholesale/Retail (24%) SIC sectors.
- Employers who had offered apprenticeships for more than 10 years (23%).
- Employers in Yorkshire and Humber (28%).

In terms of the third most commonly mentioned reason for not offering higher or degree apprenticeships, the following employers were more likely than average (16%) to point to having no vacancies requiring this level of qualifications:

- Employers whose main subject area was ICT (26%).
- Employers in the Professional, Science and Technology SIC sector (36%).
- Employers who had been offering apprenticeships for 3 years or less (23%).
- Employers in the East Midlands (23%).

7. Delivery, influence over, and understanding of apprenticeship training

This chapter explores the delivery of apprenticeship training, whether employers assessed apprentices prior to starting and whether employers had an influence over their apprenticeship training. This chapter also covers the new flexi-job and accelerated apprenticeships, employers' understanding of off-the-job training (OTJT) requirements, as well as employers' views on the English and maths requirement.

Key findings

- **Nearly all (95%) employers reported that their apprentices had received training separate from their day-to-day work duties.**
- **Over three-quarters (77%) of employers provided their own training in addition to the training already provided through the apprenticeship.**
- **Almost all (98%) employers offering Hair and Beauty apprenticeships provided their own internal training separate from the training provider's training.** This was the highest of any subject.
- **Over eight-in-ten (83%) employers reported that the training provider assessed their apprentices' prior qualifications before they began their apprenticeship.**
- **Just under four-fifths (78%) of employers considered it important for their apprentices to have or achieve Functional Skills Level 1 or Level 2 or a GCSE standard pass in English and maths by the end of their apprenticeship.**
- **Two-fifths (40%) of employers reported that they had an influence over the structure, content, delivery or duration of the apprenticeship.**
- **A quarter (25%) of employers who did not have an influence said that they would have liked to have done and just over seven-in-ten (72%) report that they would not have wanted an influence.**
- **Seven-in-ten (70%) employers said that they understood very or fairly well what counted towards the off-the-job training (OTJT) requirement, compared with 76% in 2021.**
- **Just over a third (35%) said that they were aware of the changes to the off-the-job training requirements.** Around two-thirds (65%) said they were not aware.
- **Among those that were aware of changes to the OTJT requirements, most (84%) thought that the new guidance that had been introduced was clear.**

- **Awareness of flexi-job and accelerated apprenticeships was low among employers (13% and 21% respectively).** Awareness for both was highest among employers from the Public Administration and Defence sector (62% for flexi-job and 52% for accelerated apprenticeships).
- **Just under a third (29%) of employers said that they would be likely to offer flexi-job apprenticeships.**
- **Almost three-fifths (59%) of employers said that they would be likely to offer accelerated apprenticeships.**

Delivery of apprenticeship training

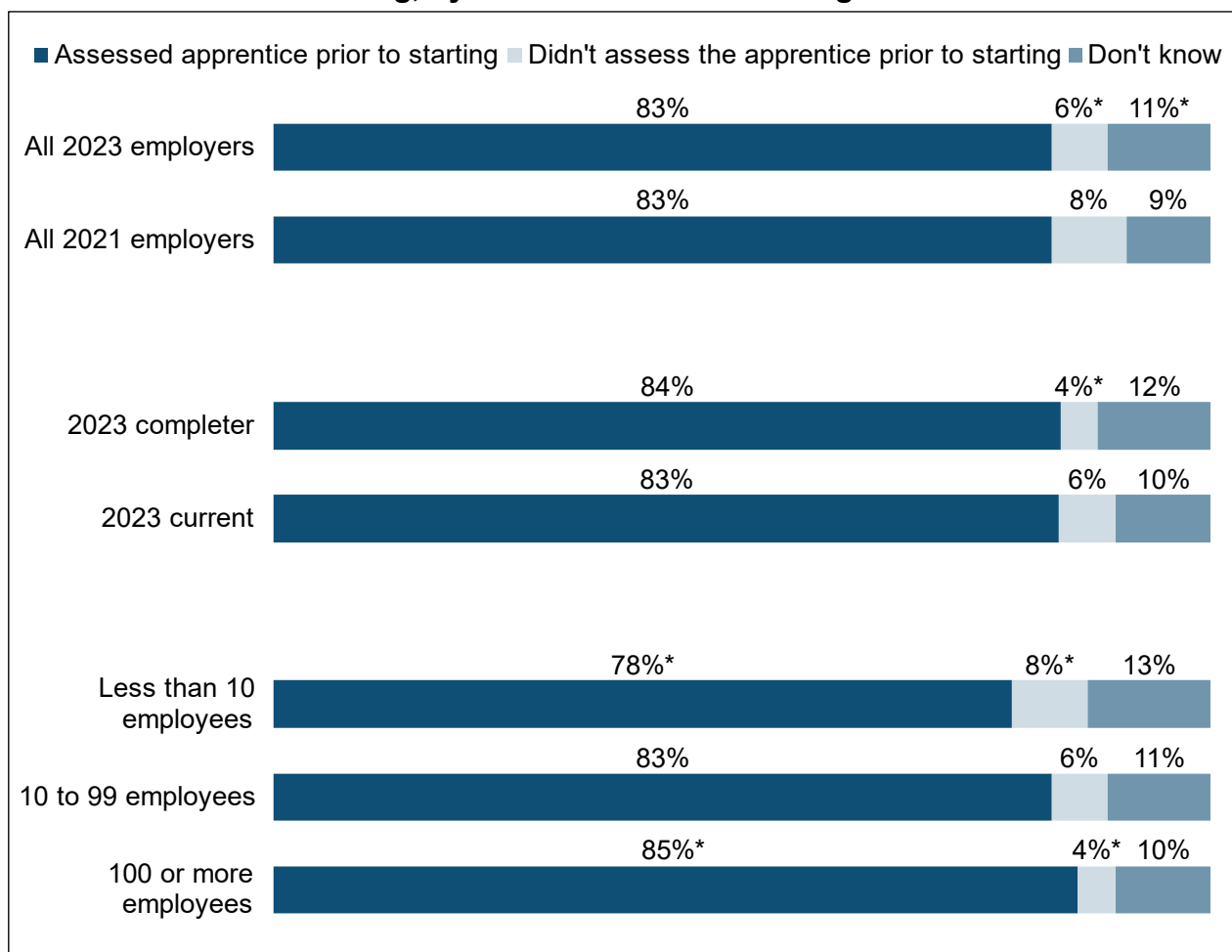
Overall, most employers (95%) reported that their apprentices had received training from a training provider, separate from their day-to-day work duties. Just 3% said that their apprentices had not received training separate from their regular duties. Employers whose most common apprenticeship subject was Leisure were more likely to than average to report that their apprentices had received training separate to the regular work duties (100%).

In over three-quarters of cases (77%), employers also provided their own training in addition to the training activities of the apprenticeship. Employers who offered Hair and Beauty as their main apprenticeship type were by far the most likely to provide in-house training for their apprentices. Almost all (98%) said that they had provided this. The subject where this was the least likely to occur was ICT, however, around seven-in-ten (71%) still provided in-house training despite this being lower than average.

Initial assessment of apprentices' skills

Just over eight-in-ten (83%) employers reported that the training provider had assessed their apprentices' qualifications prior to starting their apprenticeship. The overall figure remained the same as 2021.

Figure 7-1. Whether the training provider assessed apprentices' qualifications prior to starting, by number of staff at the organisation



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,758); 2021: (3,852). 2023 subgroups: Completer (912); Current (2,846); Less than 10 employees (514); 10 to 99 employees (1,692); 100 or more employees (1,411) (organisation size). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the 2023 average (for subgroups) and 2021 (for time series).

Eight-in-ten (80%) employers where there was 1 apprentice at the site reported that prior qualifications were assessed, whereas this figure was reported by 95% of employers at sites where there were 10 or more apprentices.

Similarly, as shown in Figure 7-1, smaller organisations were less likely to assess their apprentice's qualifications prior to them starting their apprenticeship. Just over three quarters (78%) of organisations with less than 10 employees said that they assessed their apprentice's qualifications. This was lower than the 83% of organisations of 10 to 99 employees and 85% of organisations with 100 or more employees who did the same.

Apprenticeship level also impacted on the proportion of employers reporting that their apprentices had their prior qualifications assessed by the training provider. Employers offering lower-level apprenticeships were less likely to say that their apprentices' prior qualifications were assessed. Eight-in-ten (80%) employers of Level 2 apprentices said

that the training provider assessed prior qualifications. This was lower than the average. This figure rose to 83% of employers who offered Level 3 apprenticeships as their main apprenticeship, and 87% of employers of Level 4 to 7 apprentices.

By SIC sector, the sector where employers were most likely to assess their apprentices' prior qualifications was Public Administration and Defence. Almost all (98%) of employers in this sector reported this to be the case. The SIC sectors where this was reported least by employers were Manufacturing, Wholesale and Retail, and Arts and Entertainment (all 78%).

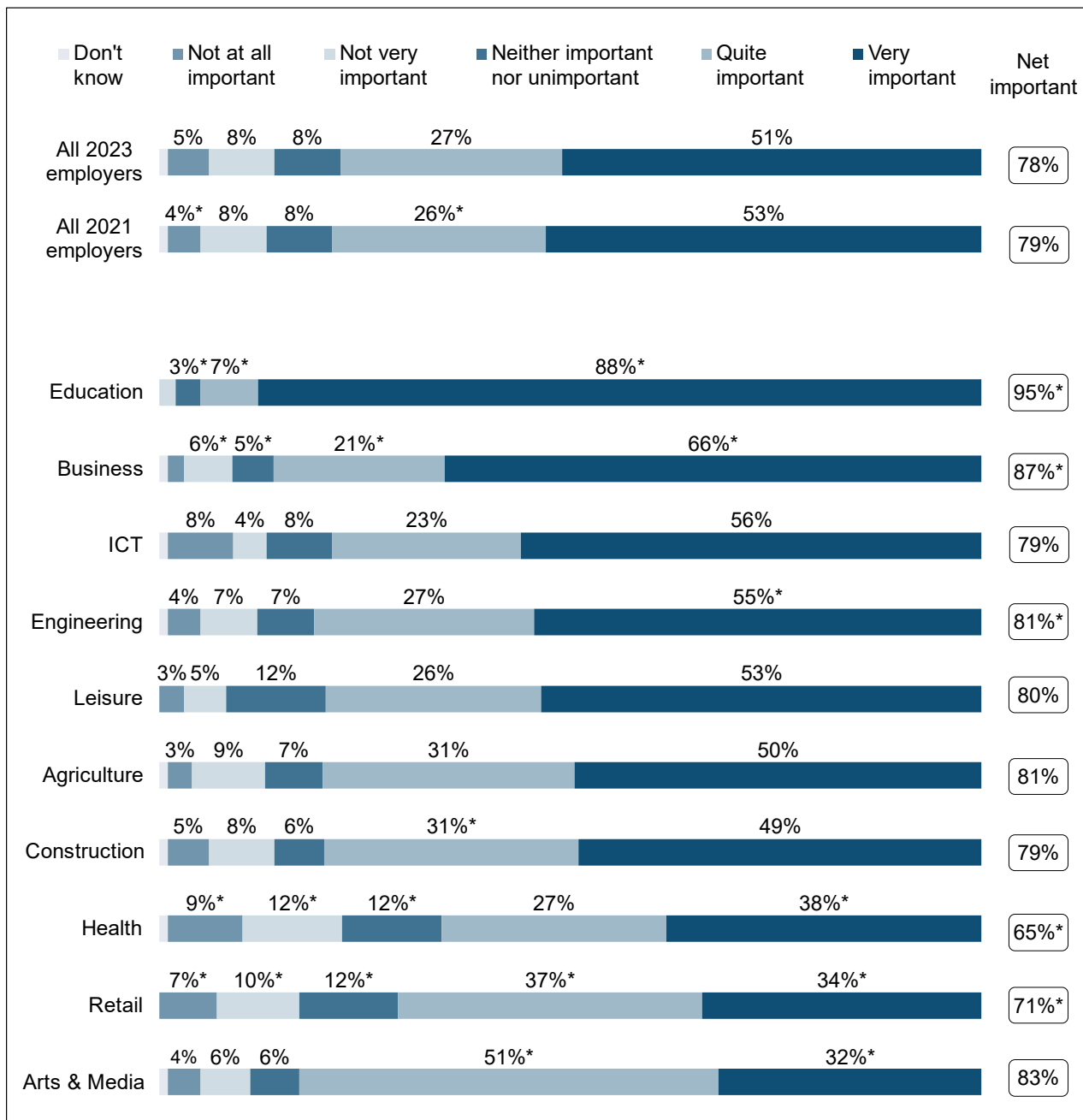
English and maths

Finally, employers were asked whether they consider it important for their apprentices to have or achieve Functional Skills Level 1 or Level 2 or a GCSE standard pass in English and maths by the end of their apprenticeship.⁶⁷ Over three-quarters (78%) of employers believed it was either quite important or very important. Just over one-in-ten (13%) said that these qualifications were either not very important or not at all important.

This remained similar to 2021 where 79% of employers considered the qualifications to be important.

⁶⁷ The wording for this question has changed slightly since 2021. In 2021, employers were only asked if they considered having Functional Skills Level 2 and a GCSE standard pass in English and maths important. In 2023, this was expanded to include Functional Skills Level 1 as well.

Figure 7-2. How important employers consider it is for their apprentices to have a Functional Skills Level 1 or Level 2 or GCSE standard pass in English and maths by the end of their apprenticeship by employers' main apprenticeship subject area offered



Base: All employers: 2023 (3, 926); 2021 (4,085). Subgroups: Agriculture (189); Arts & Media (81); Business (793); Construction (483); Education (192); Engineering (792); Health (702); ICT (162); Leisure (140); Retail (350). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the 2023 average (for subgroups) and 2021 (for time series). Data labels for values under 3% not shown.

As shown in Figure 7-2, employers whose main apprenticeship subject area offered was Education, were the most likely to consider their apprentice's achievement of Functional Skills Level 1 or Level 2 or a GCSE standard pass in maths or English to be important.

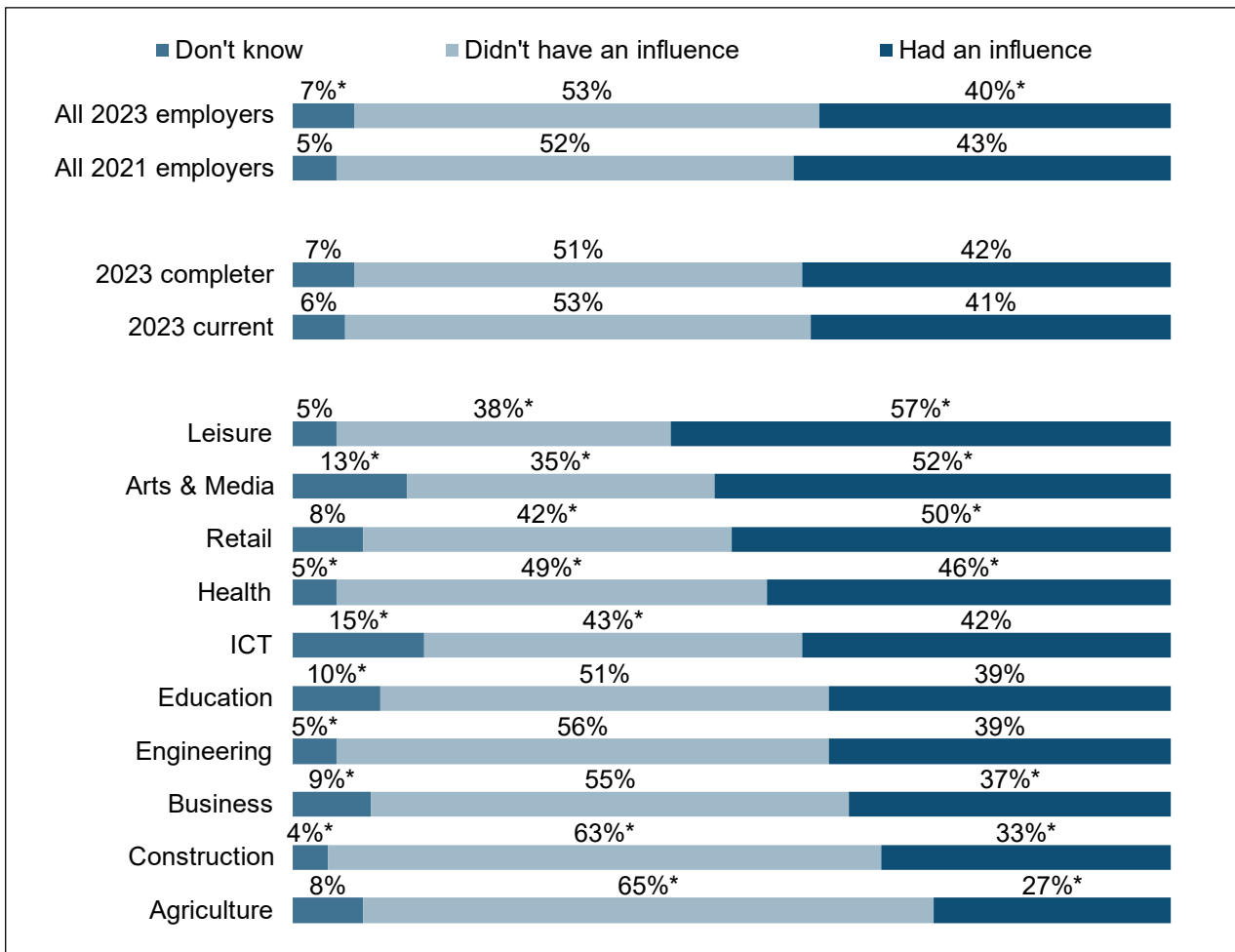
Almost all (95%) believed this to be either quite important or very important. Almost nine-in-ten (87%) employers whose main apprenticeship subject offered was in Business also considered apprentices gaining these qualifications to be important; higher than the overall figure (78%). Employers offering Retail and Health apprenticeships as their main subjects offered reported this to be less important than average (71% and 65% respectively vs. 78% overall).

Employer influence on apprenticeship training

Among all employers, two-in-five (40%) had an influence on the structure, content, delivery or duration of the apprenticeship. This was less than in 2021, where 43% of employers reported having an influence. Among employers of completer apprentices, the response to this question has fluctuated, however 42% responded that they had an influence in 2023, which is lower than in previous years (48% in 2017, 46% in 2018-2019, 49% in 2021).

The proportion of employers having an influence over the delivery of apprenticeships varied by subject area as shown in Figure 7-3. Employers whose main subject area was Leisure were the most likely to have impacted the delivery of the apprenticeship; almost three-fifths (57%) reported having influenced the apprenticeship's structure, content, delivery or duration. Those offering Arts and Media (52%), Retail (50%), and Health (46%) as their main subject areas were also more likely than average to have had an influence on training. Employers offering apprenticeships in Agriculture as their main subject area were the least likely to have had an influence on the apprenticeship training with just over a quarter (27%) saying they had done this. Employers offering apprenticeships in Construction as their main subject area (33%) were also less likely than average (40%) to have had an influence on the apprenticeship.

Figure 7-3. Whether the employer had an influence on the structure, content, delivery or duration of the apprenticeship, by main apprenticeship subject area



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,758); 2021 (3,852). 2023 subgroups: Completer (912); Current (2,846); Leisure (136); Arts & Media (76); Retail (334); Health (671); ICT (151); Education (183); Engineering (764); Business (765); Construction (457); Agriculture (184). Other not included due to low base size (<30). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the 2023 average (for subgroups) and 2021 (for time series).

Employers who had not had an influence on the structure, content, delivery or duration of the apprenticeship were asked if they would have wanted to have an influence. Of these, a quarter (25%) said that they would have liked to have had an influence and just over seven-in-ten (72%) reported that they would not have wanted an influence. This was down slightly from 2021 where 28% of employers said they would have liked to have had an influence.

Employers offering apprenticeships in ICT as their main subject area were the most likely to have wanted more influence over the apprenticeship with over a third (36%) reporting this compared with an average of 25%. Employers whose main subject area offered was Engineering were also more likely to have wanted to influence the apprenticeship (30% wanting this.)

The proportion of employers wanting to have an influence on the apprenticeship also varied by main apprenticeship level. Employers whose main apprenticeships were of a lower level, were more likely to have wanted to have an influence on the structure, content, delivery or duration of the apprenticeship. Over a quarter (27%) of employers whose main apprenticeship was either Level 2 or 3 wanted to have an influence on the apprenticeship, whereas less than a fifth (17%) of employers whose main apprenticeship was Level 4 to 7 said they wanted to have an influence.

Understanding of the off-the-job training requirement, changes to calculations and views on amount of time spent off-the-job training

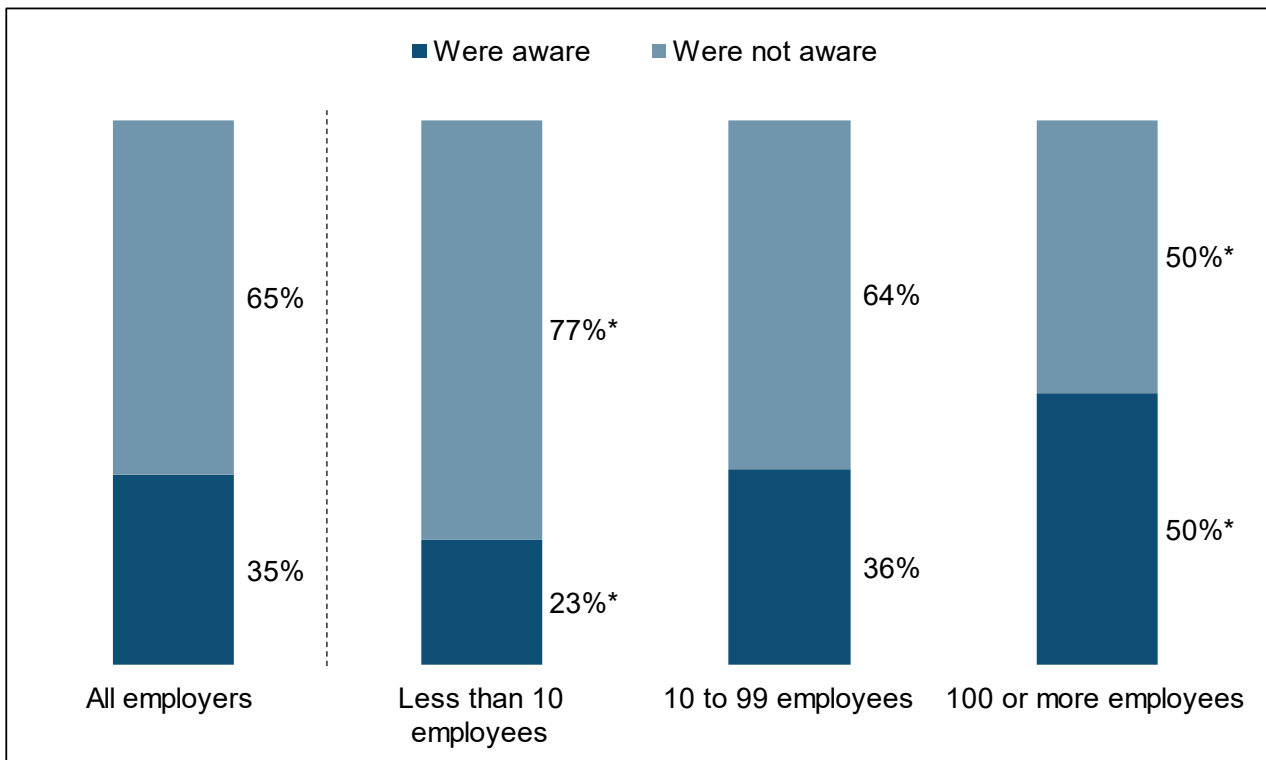
DfE guidance states that at least 20% of an apprentice's time must be spent on off-the-job training based on their normal working hours.⁶⁸ However, DfE made changes to the way that this was calculated so that, from the 1st of August 2022, a maximum of 30 hours per week are used to calculate the time that should be spent on off-the-job training. This means that apprentices working more than 30 hours are required to undertake a minimum of 6 hours of OTJT, rather than 20% of the hours they work, as before. The purpose of this change was to widen participation to potential apprentices working in sectors with above average working hours.

Employers were asked whether they were aware of these changes. Just over a third (35%) said that they were aware and around two-thirds (65%) said they were not aware.

As Figure 7-4. shows, employers with more staff at their site were more likely to have been aware of these changes. Half (50%) of employers of businesses with 100 or more employees at their site reported awareness of the changes, whereas less-than-a-quarter (23%) of businesses with less than 10 staff at their site said that they had been aware of the changes. When looking at size of organisation, larger employers (100 or more employees at organisation) were more likely than smaller employers (10 or less employees at the organisation) to report awareness of the changes (42% vs. 21%).

⁶⁸ [Apprenticeship off-the-job training \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Figure 7-4. Employers' awareness of changes to the off-the-job training requirement changes brought in on the 1st of August 2022, by size of site



Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Less than 10 employees (612); 10 to 99 employees (2,451); 100 or more employees (804) (site size). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the average

Employers who were likely to pay into the Apprenticeship Levy were more likely to be aware of the changes to the OTJT requirements. Of employers who were likely to pay, 45% reported awareness of the changes whereas among employers who did not pay into the Levy, just over three-in-ten (32%) reported being aware of the changes.

Employers were then asked to rate their understanding of what activities counted towards the off-the-job training requirement. Seven-in-ten (70%) employers said that they understood very or fairly well what counted and just under three-in-ten (29%) said that they did not understand very well or had no understanding. This was a decrease in understanding since 2021 where over three-quarters (76%) of employers said they had a very or fairly good understanding.

Employers with more staff at their organisation reported having a greater understanding of the activities that counted towards the OTJT requirement. Over three-quarters (77%) of employers with over 100 members of staff at their organisation said that they understood what activities counted very or fairly well. Just under three-fifths (59%) of employers with less than 10 staff members at their organisation said that they understood what activities counted towards the OTJT requirement either very or fairly well.

Employers who offered the following main subject areas were more likely to be aware of the activities counted towards the OTJT training requirement:

- Health (79%)
- Business (77%).

Employers whose main subject area offered was Engineering (61%) or Construction (63%) were less likely than average to report knowing what activities counted towards the OTJT requirements.

Those employers who were aware of the changes in the policy around the OTJT were asked how clear the guidance for the new requirements was. Overall, just over eight-in-ten (84%) employers said that the guidance was clear, 10% said it was not clear, 3% said that they were not aware of the guidance.

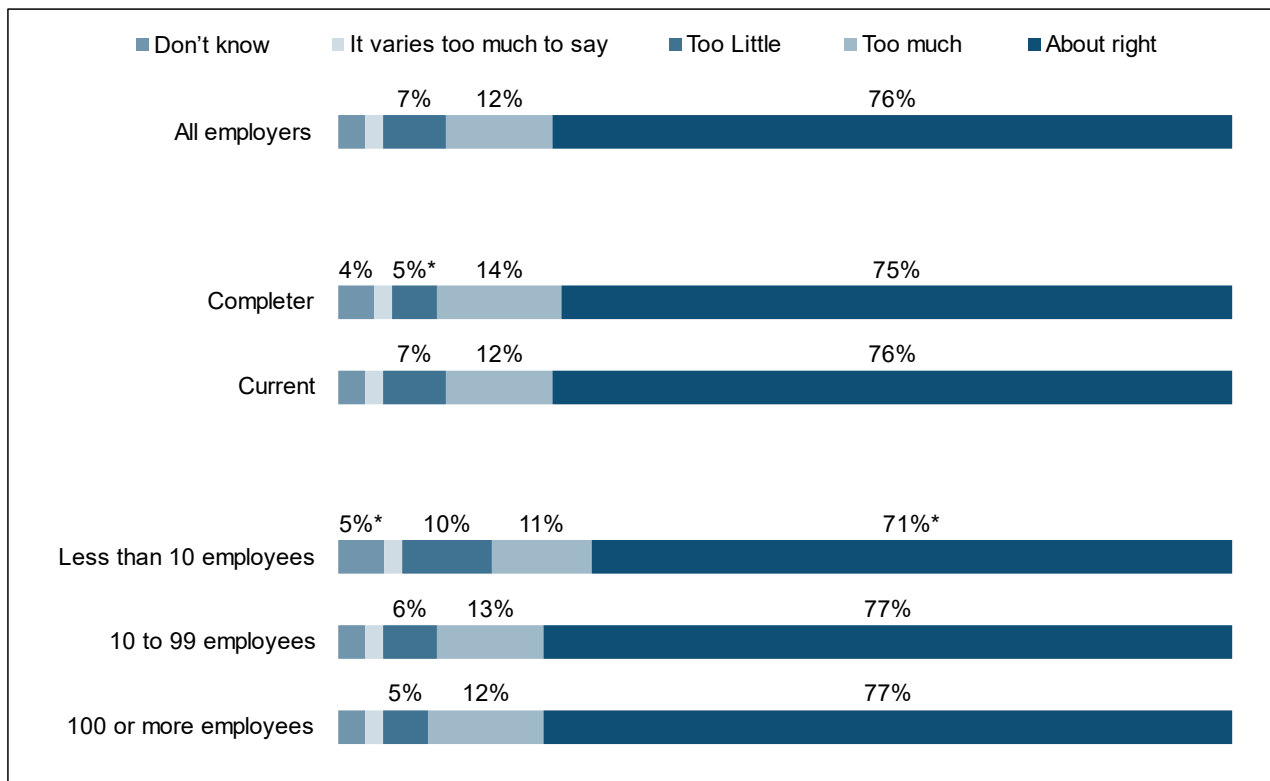
Employers offering apprenticeships in Agriculture as their main subject area were more likely than those offering apprenticeships in other subject areas to report that the guidance was not clear (22% compared with the 10% overall average).

All employers were asked whether they believed that the amount of time spent on OTJT was too much, too little or about right. Over three-quarters (76%) of employers reported that the amount of time spent on OTJT was about right. Just over one-in-ten (12%) said that it was too much, and 7% said that it was too little.

Employers on sites of less than 10 people were more likely to suggest that the amount of time spent on OTJT was too little. Just under one-in-ten (9%) of employers at these sites said they thought the amount of time spent on OTJT was too little compared to 6% of employers at sites of between 10 and 99 people and 5% of employers at sites of 100 or more people.

There was a similar trend by organisation size (as shown in Figure 7-5). Just over seven-in-ten (71%) employers of organisations with less than 10 members of staff said that the amount of time spent on OTJT was about right. This was lower than larger organisations of 10 to 99 staff or 100 or more staff (both 77%).

Figure 7-5. Employers' opinions on the amount of time spent on off-the-job training by number of employees at organisation



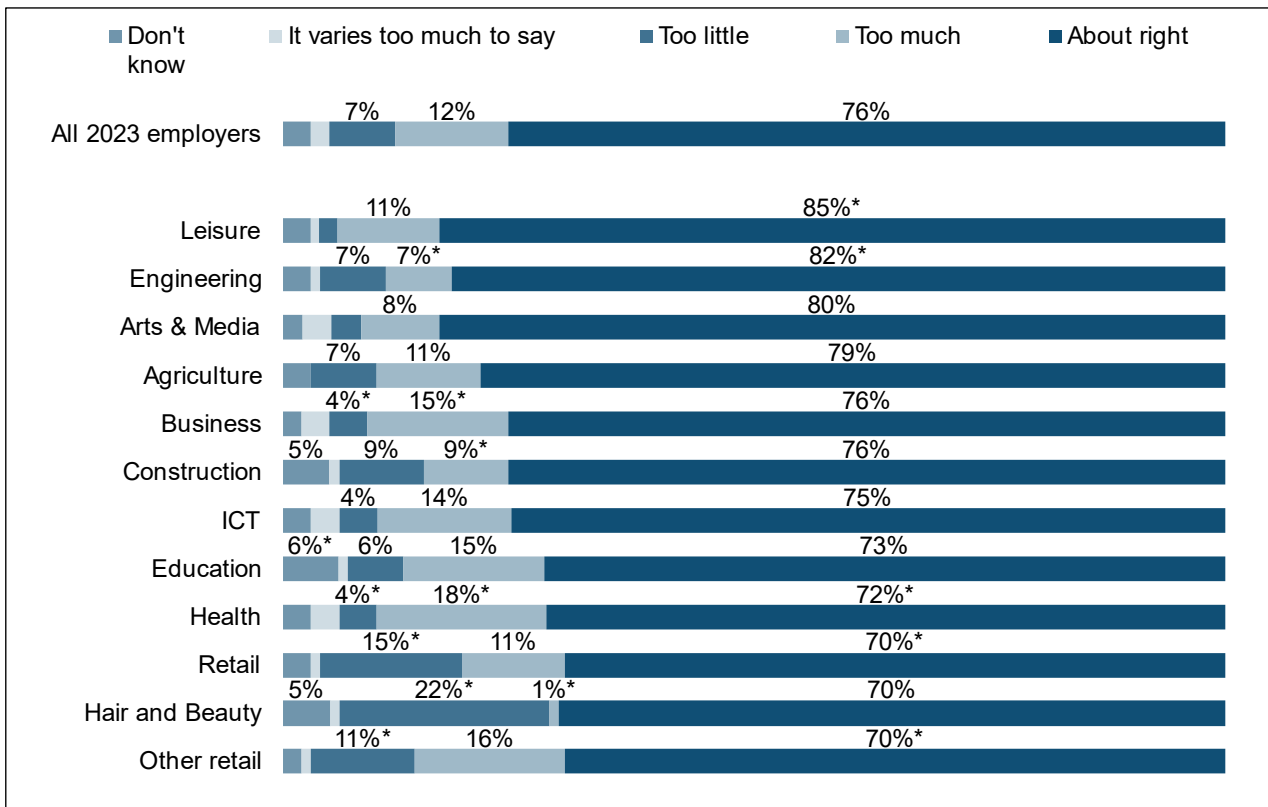
Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Current (2,981); Completer (945); Less than 10 employees (612); 10 to 99 employees (2,451); 100 or more employees (804) (organisation level). * on the current and completer data signifies a significant difference between these two subgroups. * on the site size data indicates where a result is significantly different from the average. Data labels below 4% not shown.

Among employers whose main subject area offered was Leisure, 85% said that the amount of time spent on OTJT was about right. This was the highest of any subject area. Other subject areas offered by employers as their main subject area where the amount of time spent on OTJT was more likely to be about right were Engineering (82%) and Agriculture (79%). Further detail is shown in Figure 7-6 below.

Employers whose main subject area offered was Hair and Beauty were the most likely to suggest that the amount of time spend on OTJT was too little (22%). Employers offering Retail apprenticeships as their main subject area as a whole were also more likely than average to suggest that the time spent on OTJT was too little (15% compared with an average of 7%).

Among employers offering Health apprenticeships as their main subject area, one-in-five (18%) suggested that the time spent on OTJT was too much, compared with an average of 12%. This was the highest of any apprenticeship subject. Employers offering apprenticeships in Business as their main subject area (15%) were also more likely than average to say that the amount of time spent on OTJT was too much.

Figure 7-6. Employers' opinions on the amount of time spent on off-the-job training, by main subject area



Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Leisure (140); Engineering (792); Arts & Media (81); Agriculture (189); Business (793); Construction (483); ICT (162); Education (192); Health (702); Retail ((350, of which Hair and Beauty (104) and Other retail (243)). * indicates a significant difference from the average. Data labels with figures below 4% not shown.

Understanding of flexi-job and accelerated apprenticeships

The DfE introduced new apprenticeship flexibilities in 2021 to encourage uptake of apprenticeships and make them easier for apprentices and employers. They included flexi-job apprenticeships designed to allow more flexibility around apprenticeships in sectors where there are more flexible working patterns such as Agriculture, Construction and the Creative sector.⁶⁹ There was also clarification that the duration of an apprenticeship could be reduced if there was sufficient prior learning or experience, with the apprenticeship being labelled an ‘accelerated apprenticeship’ if it was reduced in duration by 3 months or more.⁷⁰ Minimum standards must still be met, for example, the apprenticeship lasting more than 12 months, and the same requirements around OTJT

⁶⁹ <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2021/04/20/everything-you-need-to-know-about-flexi-job-apprenticeships/>

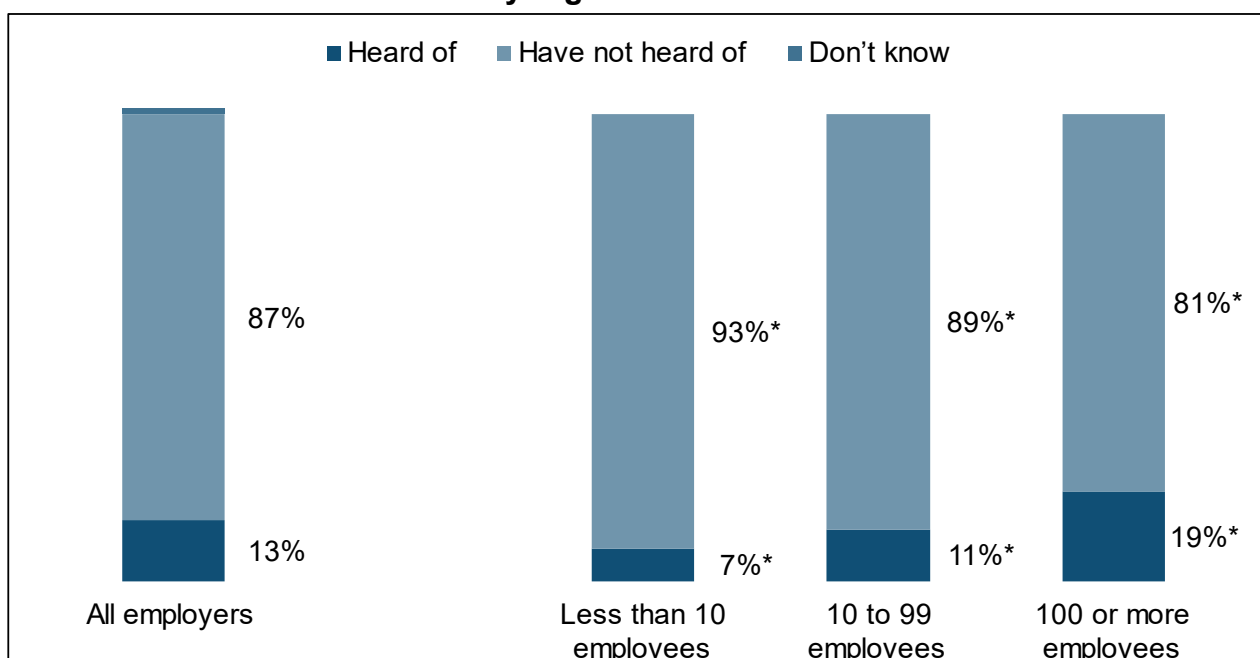
⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-can-apprenticeships-be-delivered-for-your-business#accelerated-apprenticeships>

still apply.⁷¹ This section looks at the awareness of these new flexibilities as well as employers' willingness to offer them.

Flexi-job apprenticeships

Overall, the majority of employers were not aware of flexi-job apprenticeships. Just over one-in-ten (13%) were aware of them, with almost nine-in-ten (87%) reporting that they had not heard of them. Employers with larger organisations were more likely to have heard of them. Amongst employers with organisations of 100 or more staff, almost a fifth (19%) said that they were aware of them. Conversely, only 7% of employers with organisations of less than 10 employees reported that they had heard of flexi-job apprenticeships.

Figure 7-7. Whether employers had, or had not, heard of flexi-job apprenticeships by organisation size



Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Less than 10 employees (517); 10 to 99 employees (1,734); 100 or more employees (1,524) (organisation size). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the average. Data labels for 'Don't know' not shown.

Some SIC sectors reported much higher knowledge than others. For example, over three-in-five (62%) employers in the Public Administration and Defence sector reported having awareness of flexi-job apprenticeships. Additionally, almost three-in-ten (29%) of employers in the Transportation and Storage sector reported awareness of them.

⁷¹ https://www.citb.co.uk/media/jqfbiesq/20210426_csdg-cleared-flexible-apprenticeships-manual-construction-final.pdf
[Flexible Apprenticeships Life Sciences – Manual Published \(abhi.org.uk\)](https://www.abhi.org.uk/)

Although lower, the Health and Social Care sector also reported a higher-than-average awareness of flexi-job apprenticeships (18%).

Employers in certain SIC sectors were more likely than average to report not having an awareness of flexi-job apprenticeships. Financial and Real Estate sector employers were the most likely to report that they were not aware of flexi-job apprenticeships. The majority of employers in this sector (94%) said that they had not heard of them. Employers in the Wholesale and Retail (93%), and Manufacturing (90%) sectors were also more likely than average to report a lack of awareness.

When asked if they, as an employer, would be likely to offer flexi-job apprenticeships in the future, just under three-in-ten (29%) employers said that they would be likely. Just under two-thirds (63%) said that they would not be likely to offer them.⁷²

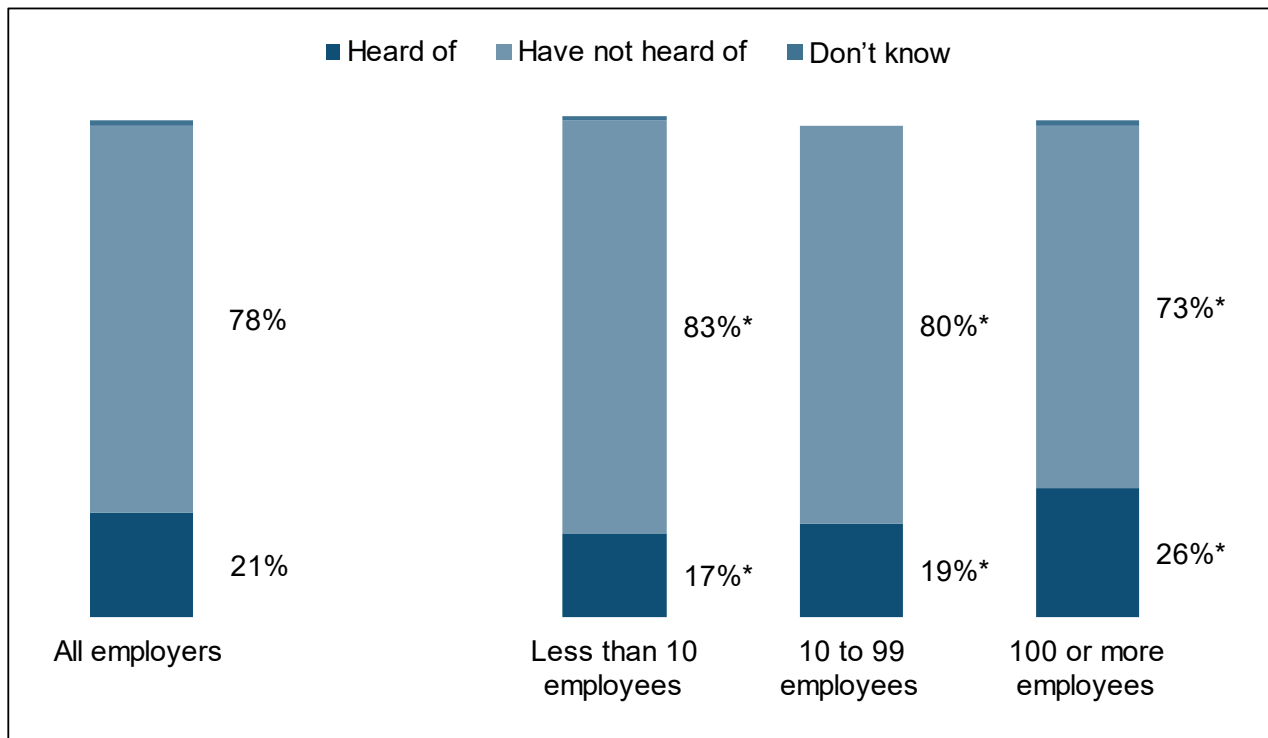
Larger employers were more likely to want to offer flexi-job apprenticeships in the future. Over a third (34%) of employers with over 100 staff at their organisation said that they would be likely to offer them in the future whereas this was just over two-in-ten (22%) for employers with less than 10 employees at their organisation.

Accelerated apprenticeships

Awareness of accelerated apprenticeships was higher than flexi-job apprenticeships. Just over two-in-ten (21%) employers had heard of accelerated apprenticeships. Almost eight-in-ten (78%) reported not having heard of accelerated apprenticeships. Similarly to flexi-job apprenticeships, employers of larger organisations were more likely to have heard of accelerated apprenticeships compared with employers of smaller organisations. Over a quarter (26%) employers of organisations with over 100 members of staff said that they had heard of accelerated apprenticeships whereas this was 17% for employers of organisations of less than 10 employees.

⁷² As part of the questionnaire, once employers had told the interviewer if they had heard of the flexi-job apprenticeship, the interviewer read out a brief description of what a flexi-job apprenticeship is: "This [flexi-job apprenticeship] allow apprentices to move between employers more easily in sectors where short-term, project-based employment is the norm?".

Figure 7-8. Whether employers had, or had not, heard of accelerated apprenticeships by organisation size



Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Less than 10 employees (517); 10 to 99 employees (1,734); 100 or more employees (1,524) (organisation size). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the average. Data labels for 'Don't know' not shown.

As with flexi-job apprenticeships, certain SIC sectors had greater awareness of accelerated apprenticeships compared with others. Employers in the Public Administration and Defence SIC sector reported the highest awareness of this apprenticeship type (52%). The other 2 sectors reporting a higher-than-average awareness of accelerated apprenticeships were Arts and Entertainment (29%) and Health and Social Work (25%). The SIC sector with the lowest awareness of accelerated apprenticeships was the Financial and Real Estate sector (12%) although this was not statistically different from the average.

Employers whose main apprenticeship was between Level 4 and 7 were slightly more likely than average to have an awareness of accelerated apprenticeships (24% for Level 4 to 7 employers compared with 21% overall).

Employers were also asked whether they would be likely to offer accelerated apprenticeships.⁷³ Almost three-fifths (59%) said that they would be fairly likely or very

⁷³ Similarly to with the flexi-job apprenticeship question, as part of the questionnaire, once employers had told the interviewer if they had heard of the accelerated apprenticeship, the interviewer read out a brief description of what an accelerated apprenticeship is: "These are where organisations recognise significant prior learning and are able to reduce the duration of the apprenticeship training plans by at least 12 weeks."

likely to offer them. A third (33%) said that they would either be not very likely or not at all likely offer them. Less than 1% said that they already offered them to their apprentices.

Employers whose main apprenticeship offered was between Level 4 and 7 reported that they would be more likely than those whose main apprenticeship offered was Level 2 or 3 to provide accelerated apprenticeships (64% compared with 58%).

By main subject area, employers who were mainly offering Health apprenticeships the most likely to want to offer accelerated apprenticeships, with 71% of these employers saying that they would be either fairly likely or very likely to want to offer them. Employers offering their main apprenticeship in the Construction subject area were the most likely to suggest that they were unlikely to offer accelerated apprenticeships. Just over two-fifths (44%) of these employers reported either being not very likely or not at all likely to offer them. Employers whose main subject areas offered were Engineering (43%) and Agriculture (42%) were also more likely than average to not want to offer accelerated apprenticeships.

8. Satisfaction and benefits

This chapter reports employers' overall satisfaction specifically with their 'main' apprenticeship programme (in terms of level and subject area). Those who had multiple programmes were asked to rate their satisfaction with the one they felt most important at their site. Satisfaction with a number of specific elements of the main apprenticeship is explored, to provide context for the overall ratings, including satisfaction with external providers, with quality of applicants and with meeting employer needs. How employers have benefitted from their involvement with apprenticeships is reported. This chapter also presents the extent to which employers would recommend apprenticeships in general to other employers and any changes they would like to see.

Key findings

- **Levels of overall satisfaction with their main apprenticeship programme was high among employers (83%).** Satisfaction levels among employers with completer apprentices (at 85%) had not changed from the 2021 and 2018-19 surveys.
- **Satisfaction varied widely by sector subject area, highest within Leisure and ICT (95% and 90%), lowest in Arts and Media (80%) and Construction (76%).**
- **Overall, 6% of employers were dissatisfied. Employers with smaller organisations (less than 10 employees) were more likely than average to be dissatisfied (13%).**
- **Employers were less satisfied than in 2021 with five elements of apprenticeships, for example the ability to influence the structure, content, delivery and duration of the apprenticeship (56% in 2021 to 53% in 2023) and how the provider offered learning flexibly to meet their needs (78% vs. 75%).**
- **Among those with completer apprentices, satisfaction with individual elements of apprenticeships remained mostly stable between years.**
- **Employers whose main subject area offered was Business, Health, Leisure or Retail were more likely than average to be satisfied with multiple elements of apprenticeships, compared with the average.**
- **Just over four-fifths of employers (84%) would recommend apprenticeships to others.**
- **Employers continued to experience a wide range of benefits as a result of training apprentices.** The most widespread was development of skills relevant to the organisation (86% of employers), followed by increased productivity (77% of employers).

- **Among those who trained existing employees as apprentices, improved staff retention was also commonly reported (75% of all who trained existing employees).**
- **Employers whose main apprenticeship programme was at Level 4 were more likely to select at least 1 benefit (99%), compared with employers who mainly provided Level 2 or 3 (95%).**
- **Just over a third (34%) of employers said that they would like to change something about the apprenticeship they were offering.**
- **The change most wanted by employers was to make the course more relevant to their needs (requested by 9% of all employers).**

Overall satisfaction

Throughout this chapter, employers' ratings of satisfaction are based on 1 specific apprenticeship – an individual framework or standard at a particular level considered to be the 'most important' to the organisation, as explored in [Chapter 3](#).

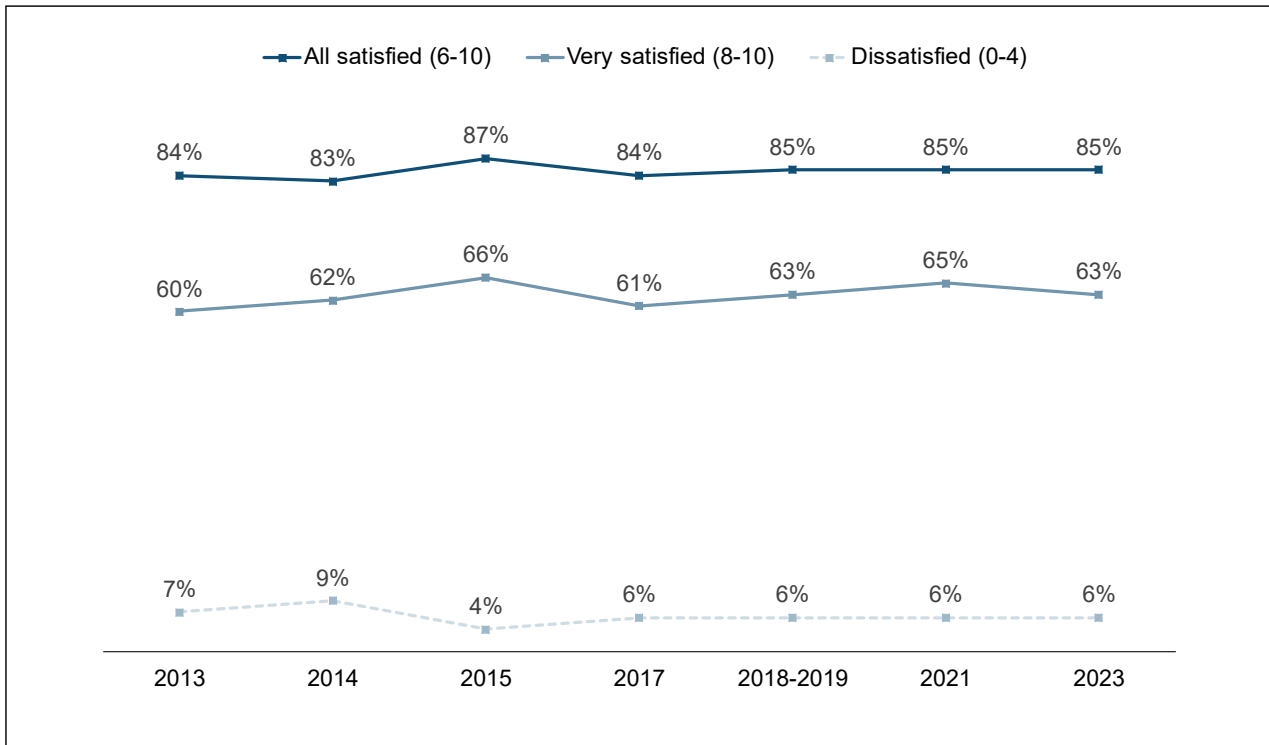
Employers were asked to rate their overall satisfaction on a scale where 0 was very dissatisfied, 5 neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 10 very satisfied. In this chapter, we refer to employers as dissatisfied (rating of 0 to 4), satisfied (rating of 6 to 10) or very satisfied (rating of 8 to 10).

When asked about their overall satisfaction with the programme (including both design and delivery), overall, 83% of employers were satisfied, the same proportion as in 2021. Among employers of completer apprentices, the majority (85%) were satisfied overall, as were employers of current apprentices (84%). Around two-thirds (63%) of all employers were very satisfied. Employers of both completer and current apprentices were very satisfied to the same extent (63% respectively). Around one-in-twenty (6%) were dissatisfied overall (6% of those with completer apprentices and 6% of those with current apprentices).

Among employers of current apprentices, overall satisfaction remained the same as in 2021 (84% in 2023). The full distribution of overall satisfaction scores from all employers and those with completer apprentices and current apprentices is shown in Figure 8.2.

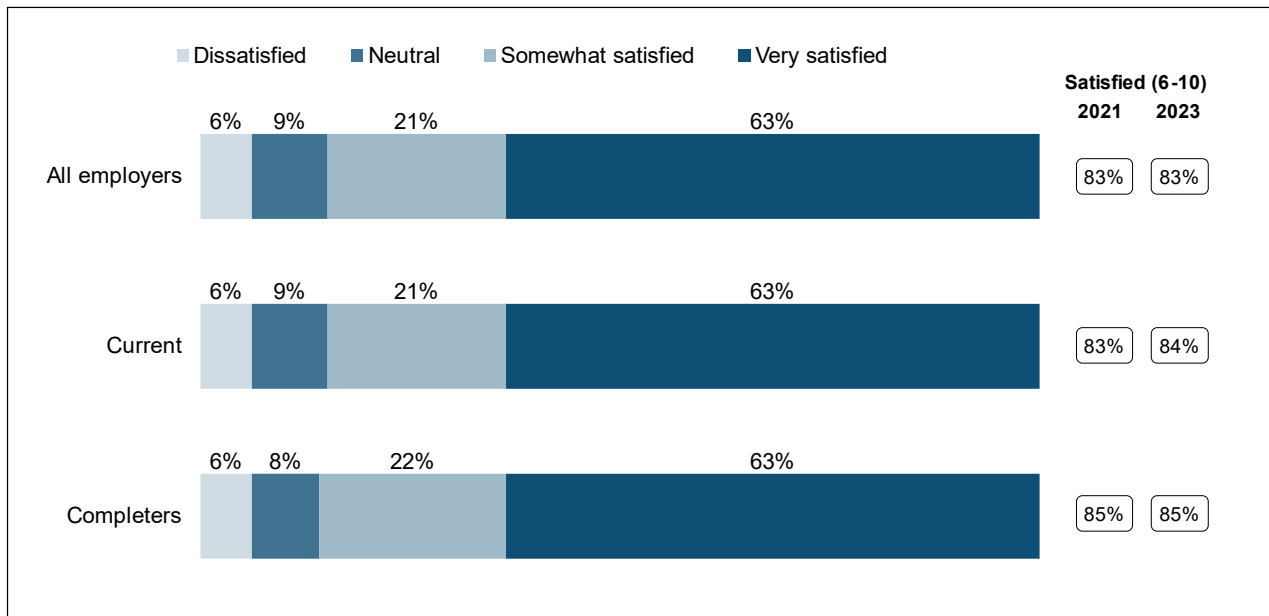
Among employers with completer apprentices, overall satisfaction ratings remained consistent compared with previous years (2021, 2018-19, 2017, 2015, 2014 and 2013), as shown in Figure 8-1, The proportion of employers of completer apprentices who were very satisfied returned to 2018-19 levels, after an increase to 65% in 2021 (which was higher than the 2017 levels).

Figure 8-1. Changes in overall satisfaction with apprenticeships over time (among employers with completer apprentices)



Base: Employers of completer apprentices: 2023 (912); 2021 (905); 2018-19 (4,000); 2017 (4,004); 2015 (4,000); 2014 (4,030); 2013 (4,009).

Figure 8-2. Overall satisfaction among all employers, those with completer apprentices, and those with current apprentices



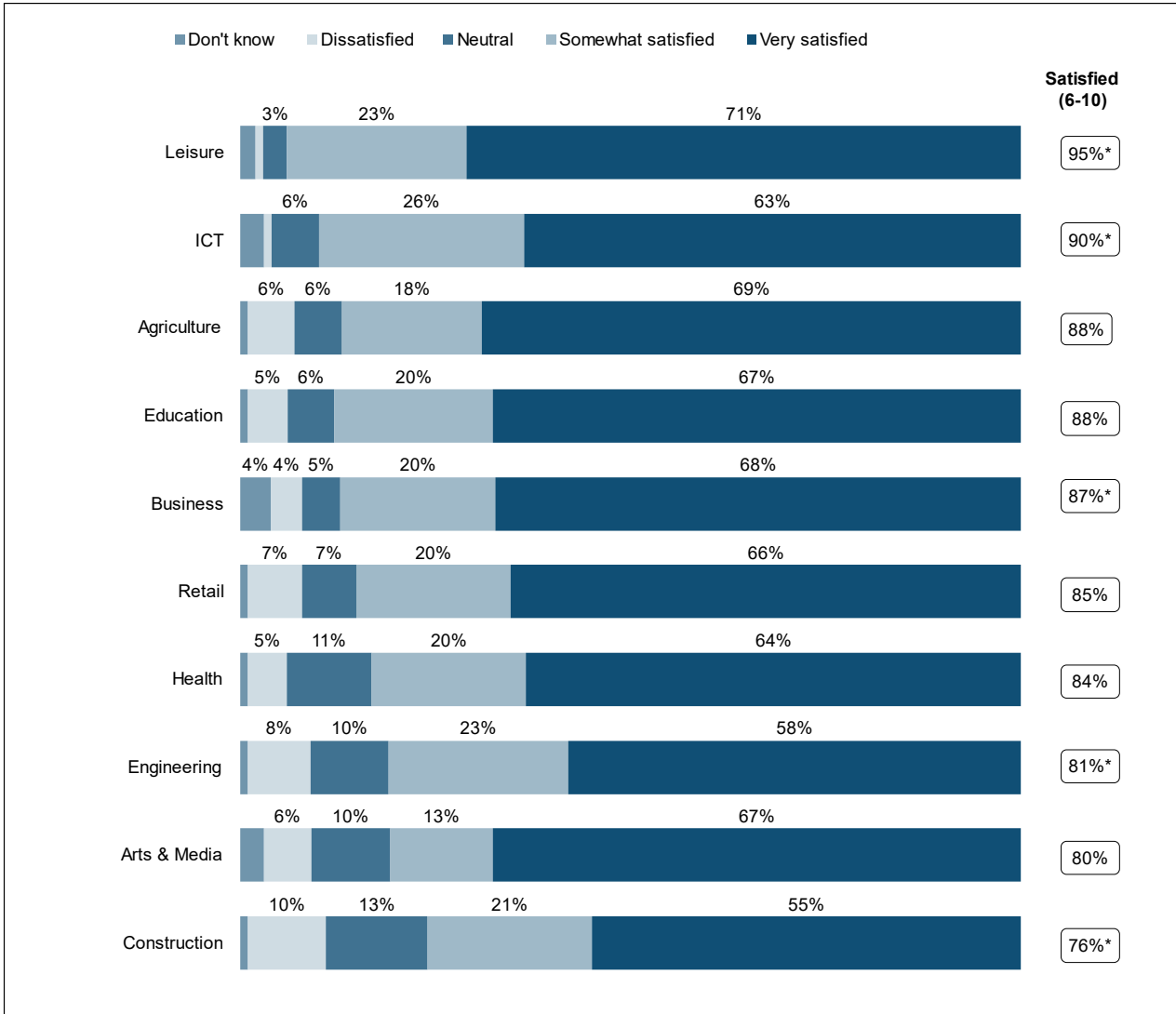
Base: All employers: 2023 (3,758); 2021 (3,852). Subgroups: Employers of current apprentices: 2023 (2,846); 2021 (2,947), Employers of completer apprentices: 2023 (912); 2021 (905). Don't know less than 3% not shown.

Almost nine-in-ten (87%) employers of organisations with 100 or more members of staff at their organisation said that they were satisfied. Organisations with fewer members of staff reported lower levels of satisfaction with 84% of organisations with between 10 and 99 employees and 76% of organisations with less than 10 employees reporting satisfaction.

Across all employers there were notable differences in satisfaction between those with main programmes in different subject areas. Satisfaction was highest where Leisure (95% satisfied, 71% very satisfied) or ICT (90% satisfied, 63% very satisfied) was the employer's main subject area, as shown in Figure 8.3. Satisfaction was lowest where Construction (76% satisfied, 55% very satisfied) or Arts and Media (80% satisfied, 67% very satisfied) was the employer's main subject area.

Satisfaction was also above average among those whose main subject area was Business (87% satisfied). This was similar to 2021, where Leisure was the main subject area where the highest proportion of employers were satisfied, and Business was also above average. In 2021, employers whose main subject area offered was Education were the joint most satisfied subject area, however in 2023, it was no longer higher than the average across all subjects.

Figure 8-3. Overall satisfaction among all employers, by main subject offered



Base: All employers able to identify a main apprenticeship: (3,758). Subgroups: Agriculture (184); Arts and Media (76); Business (765); Construction (457); Education (183); Engineering (764); Health (671); ICT (151); Leisure (136); Retail (334). Don't know less than 4% not shown. * indicates where a result is significantly different from the average.

Employers whose main programme was at a higher level (Level 4 or above) continued to be more likely to be satisfied than those whose main programme was at a lower level.⁷⁴ In total, nearly nine-in-ten (87%) employers whose main level was Level 4 or above were satisfied, compared with 83% among those whose main level was Level 2 or 3. This was the same as in 2021, however it was a shift from 2018-19 when satisfaction did not vary by level.

⁷⁴ There was no significant difference in satisfaction between Levels 4 and 5, and Levels 6 and 7.

These differences in satisfaction by level and subject area were driven by high levels of dissatisfaction or satisfaction with specific combinations of levels and subject areas, as shown in Table 8-1.

For example, although employer satisfaction at Level 2 and 3 was lower than average overall, the single level / subject area combination with the highest employer satisfaction was Leisure at Level 3 at 99%.

Table 8-1. Overall satisfaction (score of 6 to 10 out of 10) by main subject area and level

	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4+
Agriculture (Base: 83; 89; 12)	86%	89%	-
Arts & Media (Base: 10; 64; 2)	-	79%	-
Business (Base: 138; 328; 299)	84%	90%	86%
Construction (Base: 262; 119; 76)	73%	78%	84%
Education (Base: 9; 120; 54)	-	88%	87%
Engineering (Base: 140; 577; 38)	81%	80%	92%
Health (Base: 184; 301; 186)	88%	82%	83%
ICT (Base: 3; 109; 39)	-	87%	98%
Leisure (Base: 57; 62; 17)	91%	99%	-
Retail (Base: 215; 90; 29)	82%	94%	-
of which Hair and Beauty (91; 13; 0)	76%	-	-
others within Retail (124; 77; 29)	87%	96%	-

Base size varies by cell, shown in brackets after subject area name. Figures not shown if base size below 30.

Satisfaction was higher than average among employers of completer apprentices when any of their apprentices had stayed at the company after completing the apprenticeship (87% vs. 85% overall). For employers of completer apprentices who experienced at least one apprentice leaving after completing their apprenticeship, satisfaction was lower than average (80% vs. 85% overall).

Satisfaction was the highest among employers in the North East (89%), significantly higher than employers in the South West (80%).

Groups less likely to be satisfied

Other pockets of dissatisfaction, higher than the 6% dissatisfied average for all employers, were identified among the following groups:

- Employers whose main subject area offered was in Hair and Beauty (14%) or Construction (10%), and those in the Construction Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) sector (10%).
- Employers whose main programmes were Level 2 (8%).
- Employers where 25% or more of their organisation was made up of apprentices (10%).
- Smaller organisations with fewer than 10 employees across the organisation (13%).
- Employers based in Yorkshire and Humber (10%).
- Those in commercial sectors (7%).
- Those unlikely to be required to pay the Levy (8%) and thus needing to pay a contribution toward costs.
- Employers who have offered apprenticeships for more than 10 years (8%).
- Those who planned to stop offering apprenticeships in the future (21%).

Satisfaction with specific elements of apprenticeships

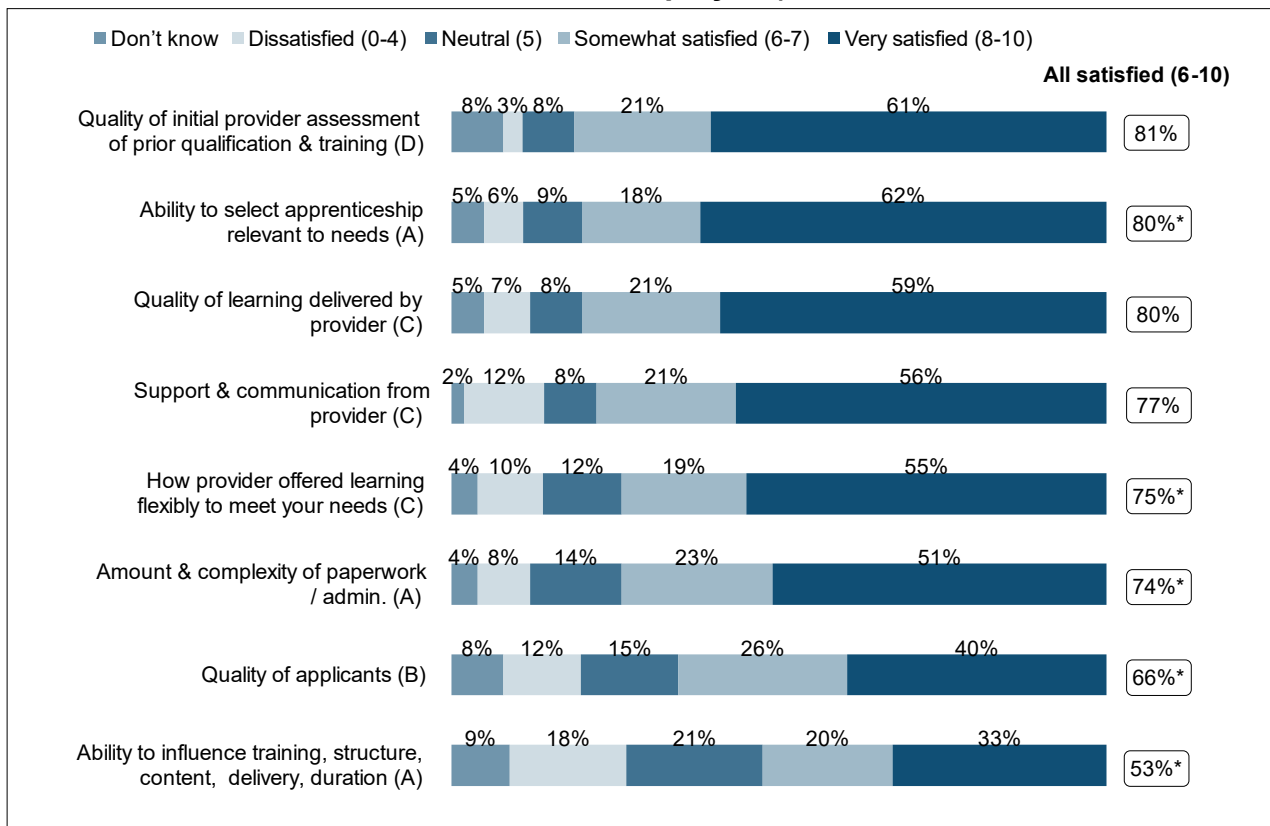
Employers were asked to rate their satisfaction with eight different aspects of apprenticeships relating to quality and service received from the learning provider (if used), the extent to which the programme and delivery met their needs, the level of administration involved on their part and the quality of applicants (if they recruited externally). As with overall satisfaction, these ratings were based only on the employer's main apprenticeship subject and level.

The majority of employers were satisfied with each element, as listed in Figure 8-4. Having been able to select an apprenticeship relevant to their needs was the element employers were most likely to be very satisfied with (62%). Other elements which employers were very satisfied with were the quality of the initial assessment of apprentices' prior qualifications and training carried out by the provider (61%) and the quality of the learning delivered by the provider (59%). Only one-third (33%) were very satisfied with their ability to influence the structure, content, delivery and duration of the apprenticeship and 40% were very satisfied with the quality of applicants for apprenticeship positions.

Of the elements employers were asked about, they were most likely to be dissatisfied with their ability to influence the structure, content, delivery and duration of apprenticeship training (18%). This is in line with 2021. Among employers who recruited externally for apprenticeships, there were mixed views about the quality of applicants for apprenticeship positions, with 12% dissatisfied. Among employers where the provider

carries out training, 12% were dissatisfied with the support and communication from the provider.

Figure 8-4. Satisfaction with specific elements of apprenticeships (all employers)



Base: All employers (Base A): (3,758); Employers who recruit Apprentices from outside the organisation (Base B): (2,760); Employers where the Apprenticeship provider carries out training (Base C): (3,598); Employers where the Apprenticeship provider carries out training and assessments (Base D): (3,194).

* indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Although overall satisfaction had changed little over time, satisfaction with some of the listed elements had shifted. Overall, satisfaction with the following elements across all employers had decreased since 2021:

- Ability to select apprenticeship relevant to needs (80% vs. 82% in 2021).
- Ability to influence training, structure, content, delivery, duration (53% vs. 56% in 2021).
- Quality of applicants (66% vs. 69% in 2021).
- How provider offered learning flexibly to meet their needs (75% vs. 78% in 2021).
- The amount, and complexity, of paperwork and administration involved with apprenticeships (74% vs. 76% in 2021).

As shown in Table 8-2, among employers of completer apprentices, satisfaction with how the provider offered learning flexibility to meet their needs reduced (77% vs. 81% in 2021) and employer satisfaction in their ability to influence training, structure, content, delivery, duration also reduced (54% vs. 59% in 2021). Among employers of current apprentices, their satisfaction decreased when considering the quality of applicants (67% vs. 70% in 2021), their ability to select an apprenticeship relevant to their needs (80% vs. 83% in 2021), and how the provider offered learning flexibility to meet their needs (75% vs. 78% in 2021). There were no significant differences in levels of satisfaction at individual elements between employers of current, and employers of completer apprentices.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Some questions shown in Table 8.2 (those marked ^ on the table) were changed slightly in 2021, which may be responsible for some of the change in results shown between 2018-19 and 2021. Summarised, the changes were; 'ability to select apprenticeship relevant to needs' was previously 'ability to select an apprenticeship framework or standard relevant to needs', 'quality of learning delivered by provider' was previously 'quality of training delivered by provider', '*how provider offered learning flexibly to meet needs' was previously 'how provider offered training and / or assessment flexibly to meet needs' and 'quality of initial provider assessment of prior qualification and training' was previously 'quality of assessment carried out by provider'. These changes were made to reflect the shift in terminology with the introduction of apprenticeship standards and the End Point Assessment. Therefore, apply caution in the comparison of figures between 2021 and further back in the time-series.

Table 8-2. Percentage of employers satisfied with elements of apprenticeships compared with previous years (completer apprentices only)

	2015 (Completer)	2017 (Completer)	2018- 19 (Completer)	2021 (Completer)	2021 (Current)	2023 (Completer)	2023 (Current)
Base: All employers	(4,000)	(4,004)	(4,000)	(905)	(2947)	(912)	(2846)
Ability to select apprenticeship relevant to needs [^]	77%	76%	75%	81%	83%	81%	80%*
Amount and complexity of paperwork required	74%	73%	72%	77%	75%	74%	75%
Ability to influence the structure, content, delivery and duration of training	65%	62%	61%	59%	55%	54%*	53%
Base: Employers with completer apprentices who recruited externally	(2,636)	(2,881)	(2,640)	(629)	(2154)	(646)	(2114)
Quality of applicants	63%	64%	67%	70%	70%	66%	67%*
Base: Employers with completer apprentices who used a learning provider for training	(3,777)	(3,746)	(2,640)	(864)	(2801)	(867)	(2731)
Quality of learning by provider [^]	86%	84%	82%	80%	80%	82%	80%
Flexibility of provider learning offer [^]	86%	83%	82%	81%	78%	77%	75%*
Support and communication from provider	84%	81%	78%	77%	76%	79%	77%
Base: Employers with completer apprentices who used a learning provider for prior assessment	(3,777)	(3,663)	(3,871)	(781)	(2559)	(771)	(2423)

	2015 (Completer)	2017 (Completer)	2018- 19 (Completer)	2021 (Completer)	2021 (Current)	2023 (Completer)	2023 (Current)
Quality of initial assessment of prior qualifications / training ⁷⁶	88%	85%	83%	83%	82%	83%	81%

* indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

⁷⁶ The * attached to question text indicates that the wording was slightly changed in between 2018-19 and 2021, which may be responsible for some of the change in results shown between 2018-19 and 2021. Summarised, the changes are; 'ability to select apprenticeship relevant to needs' was previously 'ability to select an apprenticeship framework or standard relevant to needs', 'quality of learning delivered by provider' was previously 'quality of training delivered by provider', *'how provider offered learning flexibly to meet needs' was previously 'how provider offered training and / or assessment flexibly to meet needs' and 'quality of initial provider assessment of prior qualification and training' was previously 'quality of assessment carried out by provider'. These changes were made to reflect the shift in terminology with the introduction of apprenticeship standards and the End Point Assessment.

Employers whose main subject area offered was in Business, Health, Leisure or Retail were more likely than average to be satisfied with multiple elements, compared with the average. For example, employers whose main subject offered was in Business, were more likely than average to be satisfied across five of the elements presented. Almost three quarters (72%) of employers who offered Business as a main subject were satisfied with the quality of applicants for apprenticeship positions, compared with an average of 66%. Just over fourth-fifths (81%) of the same group were satisfied with the way the provider offered learning in a flexible way to meet their needs (compared with an average of 75%). Health, Leisure and Retail employers were also more satisfied on average with this element (80%, 91% and 84% respectively).

Employers whose main subject offered was in Construction or Engineering were particularly less likely to be satisfied with multiple elements of the apprenticeship, compared with the average. Across six of the elements surveyed, employers in Construction were below average in terms of satisfaction. This was most notable when comparing them to the average for how the provider offered learning in a flexible way to meet their needs (63% vs. 75% average). Employers whose main programme was in Engineering were less likely to be satisfied with five of the surveyed elements, also most markedly regarding how the provider offered learning in a flexible way to meet their needs (67% vs. 75% average).

Overall satisfaction was highest (81%) for the quality of the initial assessment of apprentices' prior qualifications and training carried out by the provider. Satisfaction of this element was highest among employers whose main subject was Health (84%), and lowest among those whose main subject offered was Construction (74%).

Overall satisfaction was lowest (53%) regarding employers' ability to influence the structure, content, delivery and duration of the apprenticeship, this was particularly low for those whose main subject offered was Construction (45%), but higher for employers whose main subject offered was Leisure (70%) and Retail (67%).

Considering satisfaction by SIC sector, employers operating in the Accommodation and Food Service sector were more likely than average to be satisfied with the quality of the learning delivered by the provider (90% vs. 80% average), and the support and communication from the provider (87% vs. 77%). This could be due to the cross over between this SIC sector and the main subject area of Leisure, which had high satisfaction in 2023. Employers in the Arts and Entertainment SIC sector were particularly satisfied with the quality of the initial assessment of apprentices' prior qualifications and training carried out by the provider (92% vs. 81% average).

As seen in 2021, there was little difference in levels of satisfaction between employers with completer apprentices and those with current apprentices.

By level, overall satisfaction was higher among employers whose main programme was at Level 4 and above (87% vs. 83% for Level 2 or 3), however there was less difference

by level in satisfaction with each individual element. In some cases, satisfaction with an element was higher among employers whose main programme level was Level 2 or 3. Half (49%) of employers whose main programme was Level 4 or above were satisfied with their ability to influence the structure, content, delivery and duration of the apprenticeship, compared with a higher 54% of those whose main programme was at Level 2 or 3. Just under seven-in-ten (69%) employers whose main programme was Level 4 or above were satisfied with the amount and complexity of any paperwork and administration required of them, lower than the 75% among those whose main level was Level 2 or 3.

Larger employers with 100 or more employees in their organisation were more likely to be satisfied with a few of the elements, but less so than in 2021. Satisfaction with the quality of applicants for apprenticeship positions was higher among larger employers (71% vs. 66% average), it was also higher among these larger employers (100 employees or more in their organisation) regarding their ability to select an apprenticeship relevant to their needs (84% vs. 80% average). Larger organisations (those with 100 or more employees) also felt more satisfied with the quality of learning delivered by the provider (83% vs. 80% average) as well as being more satisfied that the provider offered learning in a flexible way that met their needs (79% vs. 75% average).

Advocacy

Overall, the majority (84%) of all employers would recommend apprenticeships to other employers.⁷⁷ This was split between around four-in-ten (43%) of all employers who would recommend apprenticeships without being asked, and the further four-in-ten (41%) who would recommend apprenticeships if they were asked.

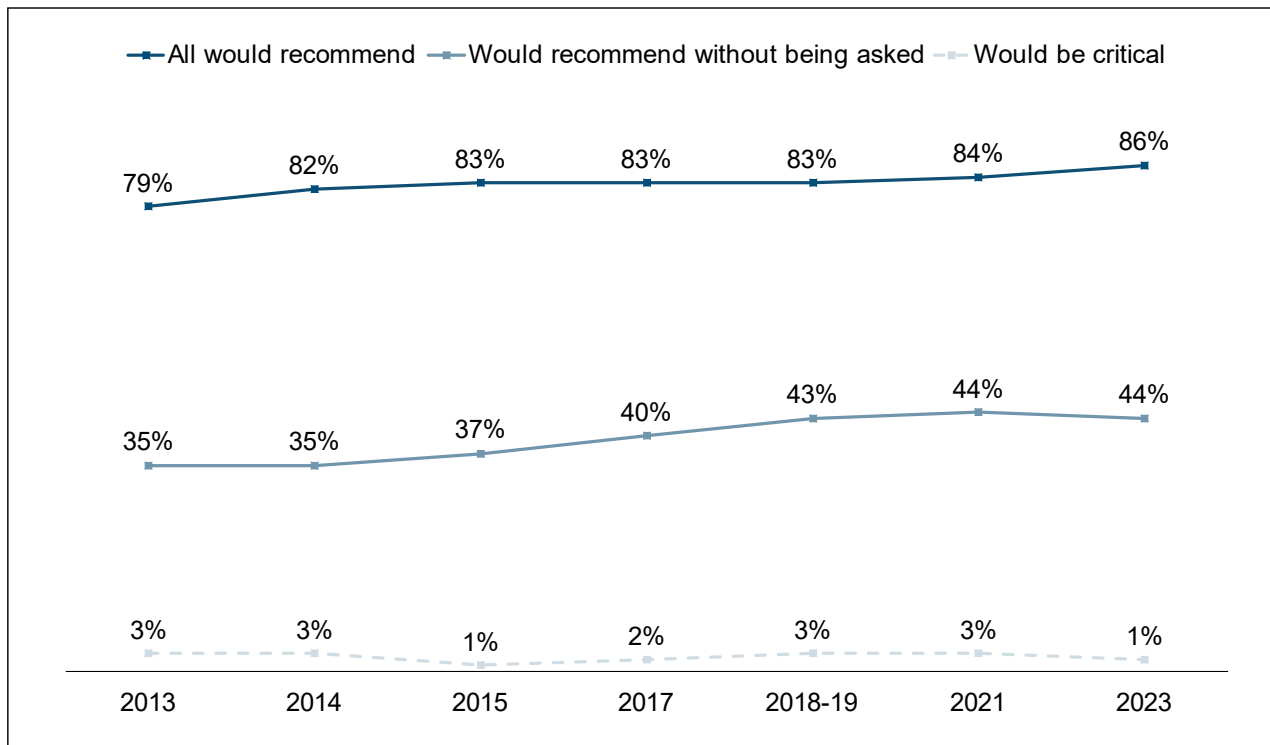
Only 2% of all employers would not recommend apprenticeships, and 14% would be neutral.

As in 2021, the small differences between those with completer apprentices and those with current apprentices detailed above were not statistically significant.

Among completer apprentices there had been an upward trend since 2013 in the proportion of employers that would recommend apprenticeships without being asked. In more recent years (since 2018-19), the shift was only small and not statistically significant in itself (44% of those with completer apprentices would recommend without being asked compared with 44% in 2021, and 43% in 2018-19), however, the 2023 result was higher than results seen from 2013 (35%) to 2017 (40%), as shown in Figure 8-5.

⁷⁷ Employers were asked whether they would recommend apprenticeships in general, rather than the specific programmes they provided.

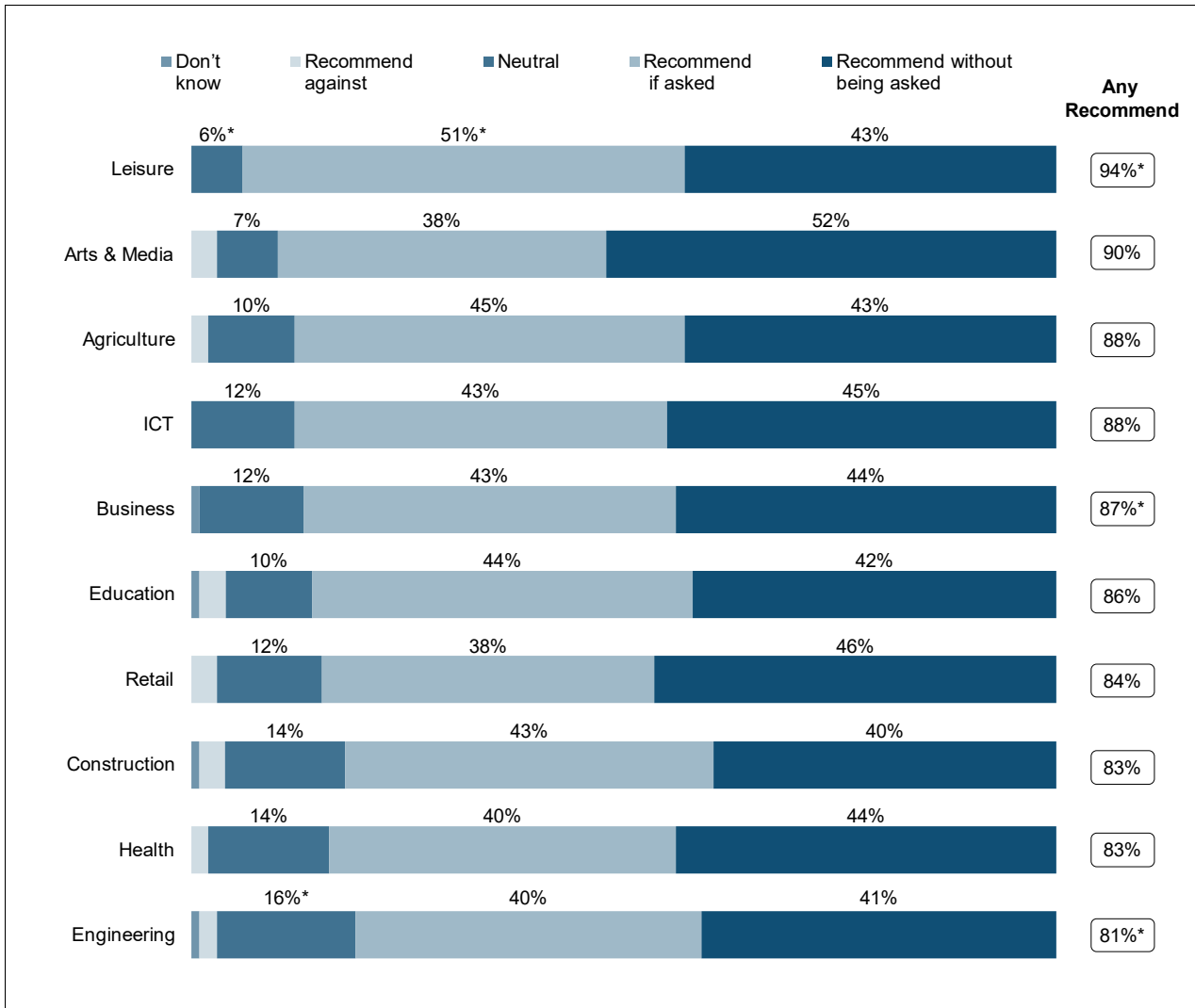
Figure 8-5. Whether employers of completer apprentices would recommend apprenticeships



Base: Employers with completer apprentices: 2023 (945); 2021 (977); 2018-19 (4,000); 2017 (4,004); 2015 (4,000); 2014 (4,030); 2013 (4,009)

Across all employers in 2023, 87% of those whose main programme was at Level 4 or higher were more likely to recommend apprenticeships to others, compared with 83% of those who mainly provided Level 2 or 3 apprenticeships. There were also notable differences in attitudes to advocacy of apprenticeships in general by the subject area of the main programme provided, as shown in Figure 8-6. Employers whose main subject area offered was in Leisure or Business were particularly likely to recommend apprenticeships (94% and 87% respectively). Employers whose main subject area offered was in Engineering were more likely to say they would be neutral about apprenticeships if asked (16% compared with 14% overall). There was no difference between employers of current apprentices and employers of completer apprentices compared to the overall average (84%).

Figure 8-6. Advocacy by main subject area



Base: All employers (3,926). Subgroups: Leisure (140); Arts and Media (81); ICT (162); Business (793); Agriculture (189); Education (192); Retail (350); Health (702); Construction (483); Engineering (792).
 *indicates where a result is significantly different from the average. Data labels below 4% not shown.

Larger employers were more likely to recommend apprenticeships to others, 88% of those with 100 or more employees in their organisation and 85% of those with 10 to 99 employees, compared with 75% of those with less than 10 employees in their organisation. Employers who had dismissed at least 1 apprentice were less likely to recommend apprenticeships to others (72% vs. 84% average). Employers who had all of their apprentices stay with the company were more likely than average to say they would recommend apprenticeships (88% vs. 84%). Employers who had offered apprenticeships for a short amount of time (0 to 3 years) were less likely on average to say they would recommend apprenticeships (79% vs. 84%).

Benefits

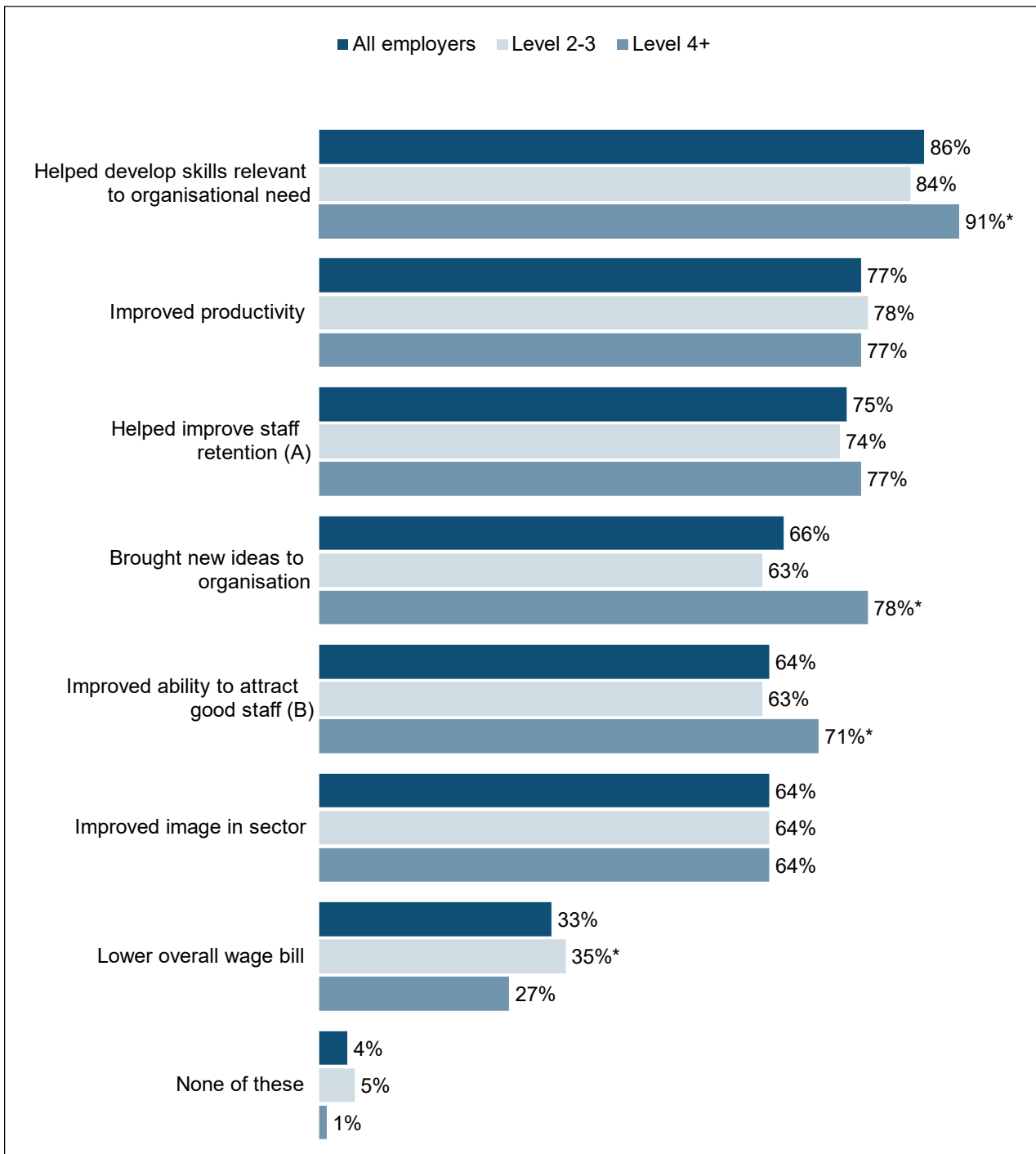
Employers were read a list of seven potential benefits and asked which, if any, their organisation had experienced as a result of offering and training apprentices. As in 2021, the vast majority of employers reported at least 1 benefit of offering and training apprentices (96%, the same as in 2021). Again, this was asked about apprenticeships at an overall level, rather than any specific frameworks, standards or levels.

The most common benefit confirmed by employers was that apprenticeships have helped them develop skills relevant to the needs of their organisation (reported by 86% of employers), as shown in Figure 8.7. This was also the most common benefit in 2021 (85% of all employers). Improved productivity was the second most common benefit, reported by over three-quarters of employers (77% of all employers). Three quarters (75%) of employers that had recruited existing staff said that running an apprenticeship had improved staff retention. Around two-thirds of employers said they benefited from new ideas as a result of offering and training apprentices (66% of all employers), this was higher among employers of completer apprentices (69%) compared with employers of current apprentices (65%).

Just under two-thirds (64%) of employers offering and training apprentices said it improved their image in the sector. The same proportion (64%) thought their involvement improved their ability to attract good staff. All of the benefits perceived by employers are shown in Figure 8-7.

There were notable differences in perceived benefits by the main level of apprenticeship employers provided. Employers whose main apprenticeship programme was specifically at Level 4 were more likely to select at least 1 benefit (99%), compared with employers who mainly provided Level 2 or 3 (95%). Employers whose main apprenticeship programme was specifically at Level 4 or above were particularly likely to benefit from skill development (91% compared with 84% of those who mainly provided Level 2 or 3) and bringing new ideas to the organisation (78% compared with 63% of those who mainly provided Level 2 or 3). Employers whose main apprenticeship programme was specifically at Level 2 or 3 were particularly likely to benefit from a lower wage bill (35% compared with 27% of those who mainly provided Level 4 and above).

Figure 8-7. Perceived benefits of apprenticeships to employers (prompted), by level of main apprenticeship



Base: All employers (3926). Subgroups: Level 2 (1,139); Level 3 (1,964); Level 4 + (823). Employers giving apprenticeships to existing staff (A): (1,489). Subgroups: Level 2 (331); Level 3 (651); Level 4 + (507). Employers recruiting apprentices as new staff (B): (2885). Subgroups: Level 2 (884); Level 3 (1,528); Level 4 + (473). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the average.

Perceived benefits also varied by subject area, as shown in Table 8-3. To some extent these differences may be linked to level. Employers whose main subject offered was Leisure were particularly likely to report having benefited in several areas, including a lower overall wage bill (63% vs. 33% average), improved productivity (85% vs. 77% average), new ideas into the organisation (81% vs. 66% average) and improved image in the sector (73% vs. 64% average).

Larger employers (with 100 or more employees in their organisation) were more likely to report benefits in skills development (93% vs. 70% of those with less than 10 employees in their organisation) and new ideas (76% vs. 51% of those with less than 10 employees in their organisation). They were also more likely to report that apprenticeships improved their ability to attract good staff (75% vs. 50% of those with less than 10 employees in their organisation).

Table 8-3. Percentage of employers perceiving specific benefits of apprenticeships (prompted), by main subject area

	All employers	Agriculture	Arts	Business	Construction	Education	Engineering	Health	ICT	Leisure	Retail
Base: All employers	(3926)	(189)	(81)	(793)	(483)	(192)	(792)	(702)	(162)	(140)	(350)
Summary: Any benefits	96%	96%	95%	97%*	94%	98%	94%*	97%	98%	98%	96%
Helped develop skills relevant to needs of organisation	86%	85%	87%	89%*	82%*	90%	79%*	92%*	86%	88%	85%
Improved productivity	77%	79%	78%	78%	70%*	78%	74%*	83%*	80%	85%*	80%
Brought new ideas to organisation	66%	65%	78%*	74%*	52%*	67%	54%*	77%*	67%	81%*	72%*
Improved image in the sector	64%	66%	67%	59%*	68%	47%*	62%	65%	60%	73%*	72%*
A lower overall wage bill	33%	43%*	36%	29%*	32%	46%*	31%	33%	41%*	63%*	37%
Base: Those who recruit apprentices externally	(2885)	(131)	(65)	(559)	(406)	(126)	(702)	(415)	(135)	(117)	(194)
Improved ability to attract good staff	64%	65%	67%	67%	60%*	64%	58%*	74%*	68%	66%	64%
Base: Those who train existing employees	(1489)	(67)	(17)	(348)	(139)	(92)	(170)	(405)	(38**)	(32**)	(166)
Helped improve staff retention	75%	77%	-	76%	72%	81%	63%*	77%	74%	92%*	76%

* indicates where a result is statistically different from the average (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than the average).**Low base, findings should be treated as indicative only and with caution. Figures not shown if base size below 30. Science not shown due to low overall base size (<30).

There were some shifts in results for employers with completer apprentices between 2021 and 2023. More employers in 2023 with completer apprentices thought that offering an apprenticeship helped them to develop skills that were relevant to the needs of their organisation (88% vs. 84% in 2021) and bring new ideas to the organisation (69% vs. 64%), compared with in 2021. Over the longer term, the benefits of apprenticeships as perceived by employers of completer apprentices have remained broadly stable, with no clear long-term trends.

Table 8-4. Benefits of apprenticeships compared with previous years, percent of employers with completer apprentices

	2015	2017	2018-19	2021	2023
Base: All employers with completer apprentices	(4,000)	(4,004)	(4,000)	(977)	(945)
Helped us to develop skills that are relevant to the needs of our organisation	^	86%	86%	84%	88%*
Improved productivity	76%	78%	76%	78%	78%
Brought new ideas to the organisation	67%	65%	63%	64%	69%*
Improved our image in the sector	67%	67%	66%	62%	63%
Lower overall wage bill	36%	39%	35%	39%	37%
Base: Employers with completer apprentices giving any of those apprenticeships to existing staff	(1,502)	(1,241)	(1,456)	(325)	(302)
It has helped to improve staff retention	73%	73%	72%	76%	76%
Base: Employers with completer apprentices who recruited any of these as new staff	(2,636)	(2,883)	(2,640)	(681)	(669)
It has improved our ability to attract good staff	65%	64%	60%	68%	67%

* indicates where a result is statistically different from the average (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021) Wording changed in 2021, see footnote.⁷⁸ ^Not asked in 2015.

In 2023, around one-third of all apprentice employers (33%) reported they had benefitted from a lower wage bill; this would relate to the minimum wage for apprentices being lower than for other employees.⁷⁹ The proportion of employers who reported this had

⁷⁸ This figure was reported for all employers with completer apprentices in the 2019 report and has been recalculated in 2021 to be comparable with the base used in 2021 (only those recruiting new staff, among their completer apprentices).

⁷⁹ [National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

decreased since 2021, when it was 36%. In 2023, employers with completer apprentices were more likely to report this benefit (37%), compared with 32% among those with current apprentices in 2023. This was also true in 2021 (39% of employers of completer apprentices vs. 35% of employers of current apprentices).

It is not always desirable for employers to provide apprenticeships for the purposes of lower wage costs, since the reduced wage was intended only to offset the costs of training, not to commercially benefit the employer in itself. Employers using fixed-term contracts for the length of the apprenticeship were particularly likely to report the benefit of a lower wage bill (41%), reinforcing this impression, since this option would enable the employer not to offer ongoing employment at a higher wage once the apprenticeship had finished.

Employers who were more likely than average to agree that a benefit of providing apprenticeships was a reduced wage bill include the following:

- Those whose main apprenticeship programme was at Level 2 or 3 (35% compared with 27% of those who mainly did Level 4 to 7 apprenticeships).
- Those whose main subject offered was in Leisure (63%), Education (46%), Hair and Beauty (44%), Agriculture (43%) and ICT (41%), compared with 33% overall.
- Smaller employers with less than 10 employees in their organisation (37% compared with 30% of organisations with 100 or more members of staff).
- Those who only provided apprenticeships to externally recruited new employees (41% compared with 20% of those who only trained existing employees).

What employers would like to change

Two-thirds (63%) of employers did not wish to change anything about the structure, content, delivery or duration of apprenticeship training. There was no change compared with 2021. However, around one-third of employers (34%) of employers indicated they would like to change apprenticeship training in some way.

Among those with completer apprentices the proportion who would like to see change (34%) was similar to the proportion seen in 2021 (36%) and 2018-19 (33%), remaining higher than 2017 (28%) and 2015 (26%).

Employers whose main apprenticeship was at Level 4 or above were less likely to want any change, compared with those whose main level offered was Level 2 or 3 (29% vs. 35%). This was particularly true of those whose main level was 6 or 7, with just one-quarter (26%) wanting to change anything, compared with the 34% average.

The most common change was to want the course to be more specific to their needs, requested by 9% of all employers. This had been the most common response since

2017. Secondly, employers wanted improved training provider communication (6% of all employers). More employers of current apprentices wanted to make this change (7%), compared with employers of completer apprentices (4%). This was followed by 5% wanting a more flexible structure / timing.

The proportion of employers who wanted to improve the training provider support / attitude since 2021 had decreased, from 5% in 2021 to 4% in 2023.

Employers whose main apprenticeship level was Level 2 or Level 3 were more likely than those whose main level was Level 4 and above to want to make the course more specific and relevant to their organisation's needs (10% vs. 7%), improve the training provider communication (7% vs. 4%) and improve the quality of teaching (5% vs. 3%). Employers whose main subject offered was Engineering were also more likely to report they wanted to make the course more specific and relevant, compared with the average (12% vs. 9%). Employers whose main subject area was Education were more likely to want a more flexible structure / timing (11% vs. 5% average), Engineering employers were less likely than average to want this (3%). Employers whose main subject was Health were more likely than average to want to improve training provider support / attitude (7% vs. 4% average), employers whose main subject was Construction were more likely to want an improved quality of teaching / teacher / trainer knowledge (6% vs. 4% average).

Employers of smaller organisations were more likely than larger organisations to want to make the course more specific to their needs (13% for organisations with less than 10 staff vs. 8% for organisations with more than 100 staff). This is the same for wanting improved training provider communication (9% for organisations with less than 10 staff vs. 5% for organisations with more than 100 staff).

9. End-point assessments

This chapter covers employer levels of knowledge of the end-point assessment (EPA). This includes how they selected their EPA organisation (EPAO), how they informed their apprentices about the EPA, and their level of satisfaction with the EPA overall. This chapter also includes new questions for 2023 asked about EPA, around how important employers view the EPA, and how they thought it could be improved in the future.

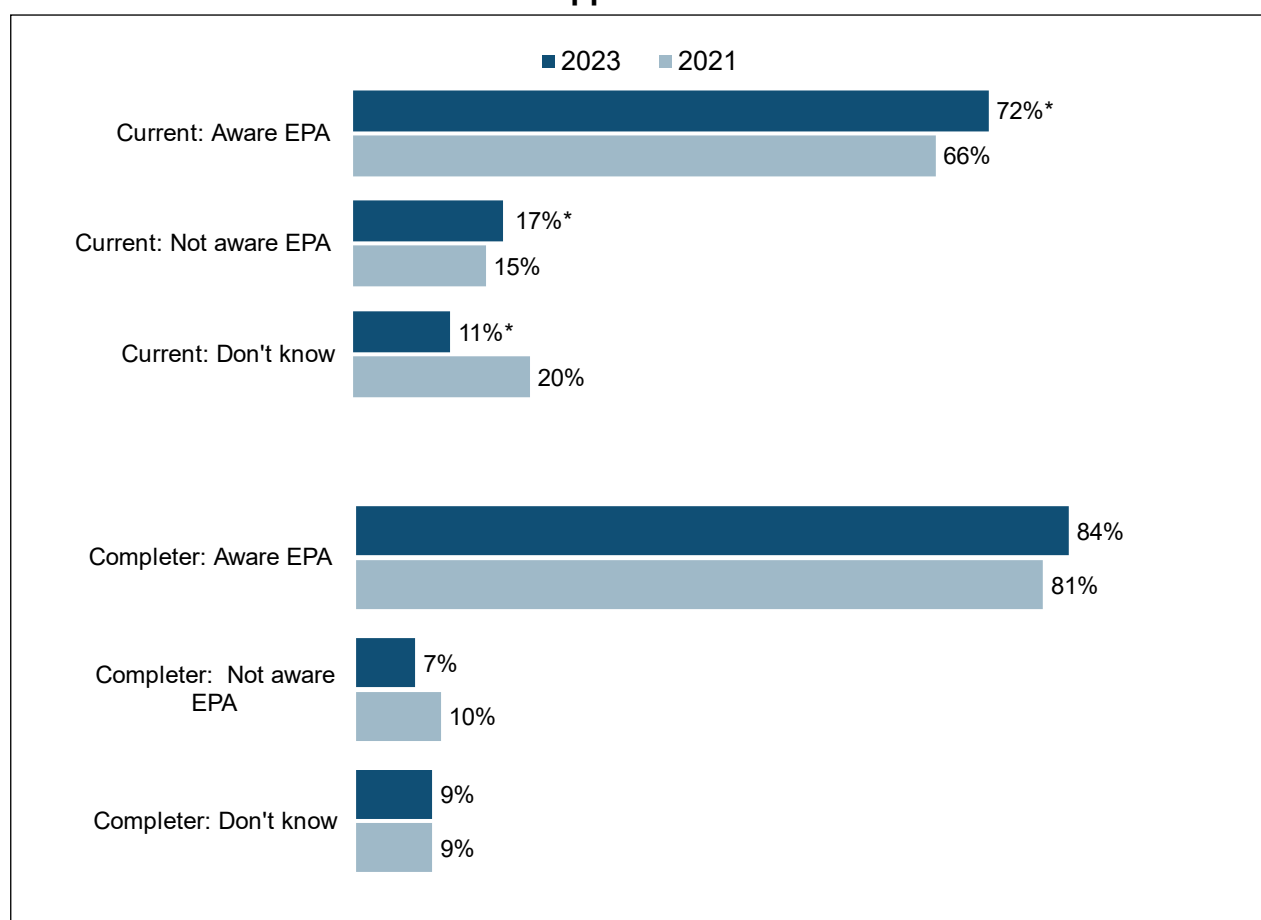
Key findings

- **Seven-in-ten (72%) employers with current apprentices on standards were aware that these apprentices would be required to undergo an EPA.** Among employers of completer apprentices who completed standards, 84% were aware.
- **The majority of employers (72%) with apprentices on standards had not chosen an end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) themselves, as it was chosen by the training provider.** One-in-ten (9%) reported the selection of the EPAO was a joint decision between themselves and the training provider, the same proportion (9%) reported there was no choice as only 1 EPAO was available.
- **Apprentices were most commonly informed of the EPA when they signed up (66% employers of completer apprentices, 45% employers of current apprentices).**
- **Eight-in-ten (83%) employers with completer apprentices felt that the assessment apprentices completed was a good test of their occupational competence to do the job.**
- **Eight-in-ten (80%) employers with completer apprentices thought the EPA was important for their organisation, 17% thought it was not.**
- **Employers of completer apprentices did not have much they wanted to see improved with the EPA process,** the most common response was that they did not know what could be improved (45%) or that the EPA did not need to improve (14%).

Level of knowledge of end-point assessment (EPA)

Among employers with current apprentices on standards (according to the Individualised Learner Record, ILR), seven-in-ten (72%) were aware that their apprentices would be required to undergo an EPA. This was an increase from 2021 (66%). Among employers of completer apprentices who completed standards, just over four-fifths (84%) were aware of the EPA, higher than employers of current apprentices undertaking standards (72%).

Figure 9-1. Awareness of EPA among employers of current and completer apprentices

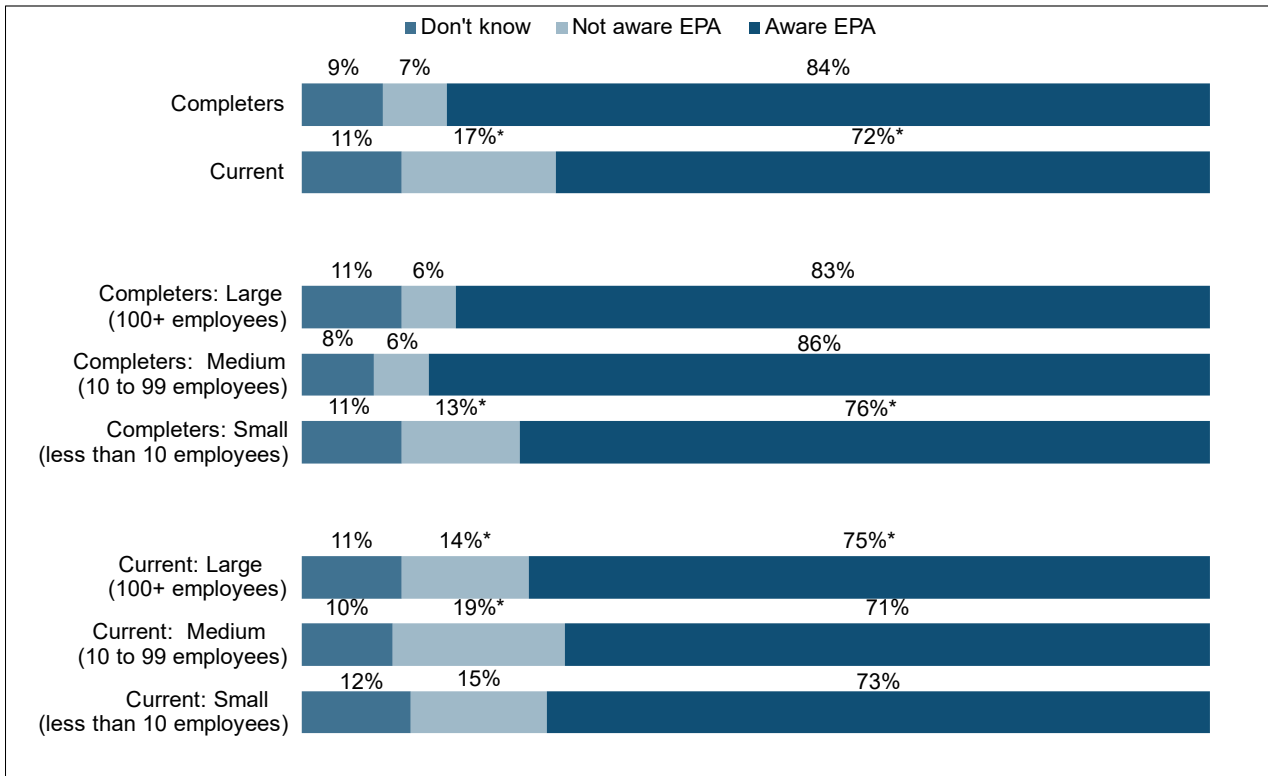


Base: Employers with apprentices that have completed standards: 2023 (691); 2021 (368). Employers with current apprentices undertaking standards: 2023 (2,974); 2021 (2753). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Employers with current apprentices undertaking standards, whose main subject area was Business, were more likely than average to be aware of the EPA (75% vs. 72%), as were employers whose main subject area was Hair and Beauty (90%). There was no difference in awareness by main level of apprenticeship offered. As found in 2021, employers with 100+ employees at their organisation were more likely than average to be aware that their current apprentices on standards would be undertaking an EPA (75%). A

further breakdown of EPA knowledge by number of employees at the organisation is shown in Figure 9-2.

Figure 9-2. Whether employers are aware that their apprentices on standards have undergone or will undergo EPAs, by organisation size



Base: Employers with apprentices who have completed standards (691); of which Large organisations (283); Medium sized organisations (304); Small organisations (85). Employers with current apprentices on standards (2974); of which Large organisations (1157), Medium sized organisations (1298), Small organisations (403). * indicates where a result on the current data is significantly different from the completer data and for subgroups where a result is significantly different from average.

Large site employers with apprentices who had completed standards were also more likely to be aware that their completer apprentices had undergone an EPA (90% of those with 100 or more employees at their site compared with 78% of those with less than 10).⁸⁰ Third sector employers of apprentices that had completed standards were less likely than average to know about EPAs (74% vs. 84% average).

Employers who were particularly likely to be unaware that their current apprentices on standards would need to undergo an EPA (compared with 17% overall) included those who only had 1 or 2 apprentices during the survey window (18% and 21% respectively).

⁸⁰ There was no difference between large and small employers by size of organisation, when considering those who has apprentices who had completed standards.

Selection of end-point assessment organisation

It is envisaged that employers will drive EPAO selection, with support from their learning providers if they wish, ideally early in the apprenticeship. Since 2021, the survey has checked how this process works among those with completer apprentices who had undertaken EPAs, and those with current apprentices who would be taking EPAs in future.^{81, 82}

The analysis in this report has been based only on those employers who were aware of the EPA (i.e., 84% of those with apprentices who had completed standards, and 72% of those with current apprentices on standards), so it excludes the most uninformed employers.

The majority of employers with apprentices on standards had not chosen an EPAO themselves, and this was organised, or was expected to be organised, by the learning provider (72% of all, 77% of employers with completer apprentices, 71% of employers with current apprentices), as shown in Table 9-1. At an overall level, this had increased from 63% in 2021. Across both completer and current apprentice employers, this had also increased since 2021 (67% to 77% for employers of completer apprentices on standards, 62% to 71% for employers of current apprentices on standards). Employers of completer apprentices were more likely to report that it was, or expected to be organised by the training provider, compared with employers of current apprentices (77% vs. 71% average).

One-in-ten (9%) of all employers with apprentices on standards reported that the EPAO was a joint decision between themselves and the training provider. Across current and completer apprentice employers, as shown in Table 9-1, this had decreased since 2021 (17% to 10% for employers of current apprentices on standards, 12% to 7% for employers of completer apprentices on standards). Employers of current apprentices were more likely to report there was no choice, compared with employers of completer apprentices (10% vs. 6%).

⁸¹ To note, on the 1st of August 2023, the ESFA formally moved responsibility for the choice of EPAO to providers. This is a shift from the previous focus of employer choice of EPAO. The employers surveyed with completers in 2023 will have gone through the EPA prior this date, indicating that this was common practice even prior to the formal change.

⁸² Prepare to offer apprenticeship end-point assessment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Table 9-1. How EPAOs were chosen by employers with apprentices on standards who are aware of EPAs (completer and current)

	2021 (Completer)	2021 (Current)	2021 (All)	2023 (Completer)	2023 (Current)	2023 (All)
Base	(268)	(1585)	(1,853)	(582)	(1,809)	(2,391)
All by training provider	67%	62%	63%	77%*	71%*	72%*
No choice, only one organisation available	5%	9%	8%	6%	10%*	9%
Joint decision employer / training provider	12%	17%	16%	7%*	10%*	9%*
Training provider gave choice to select from	3%	5%	4%	3%	3%*	3%
Employer found & chose	4%	3%	3%	1%*	2%	2%*
Can't remember / Don't know	7%	3%	4%	6%	3%	4%

*indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

Employers with 100 or more employees at their organisation were less likely to have had their EPAO selected by their provider (66% vs. 72% average). Larger employers were however more likely to report it was a joint decision between them and the provider (11% of those with 100 or more employees compared with 7% of employers with less than 10 employees at the organisation).

The group of employers who were aware of EPAs and had chosen their EPAO were asked when they had done this, the most common response (5%) was at the start of the apprenticeship, 3% had done (or planned to do) so just before Gateway, and 3% had done so well before Gateway (1% of those with completer apprentices, 4% with current apprentices).⁸³ All response are shown in Table 9-2.

⁸³ Gateway is the point at which the employer and training provider review the apprentice's knowledge, skills and behaviours to see if they have met the minimum requirements of the apprenticeship standard and are ready to take the assessment.

Just less than one-in-ten (9%) of employers report that there was only 1 EPAO available, this was higher amongst employers of current apprentices in 2023 compared with employers of completer apprentices (10% vs. 6%).⁸⁴ This was 3% among all employers.

Table 9-2. Timing of selecting an EPAO

	2021 (Completer)	2021 (Current)	2021 (All)	2023 (Completer)	2023 (Current)	2023 (All)
Base	(268)	(1585)	(1,853)	(582)	(1,809)	(2,391)
At start of apprenticeship	13%	7%	8%	6%*	5%*	5%*
Just before Gateway	3%	6%	5%	2%	3%*	3%*
Well before Gateway	3%	8%	7%	1%*	4%*	3%*
After Gateway	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
At Gateway	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%*	1%*
Don't know	6%	4%	4%	7%	4%	5%

* indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Informing apprentices about EPA

It is also intended that employers inform apprentices early in their apprenticeship about the EPA and what it involves. As in 2021, the 2023 study explored whether employers had informed their apprentices (who had completed their studies) about their EPAs, and also (if they had not done so) when they planned to inform current apprentices about them. This analysis has only been based on those employers who were aware of the EPA (i.e., 84% of those with apprentices who had completed standards, and 72% of those with current apprentices on standards). As such, it excludes the most uninformed employers. There was variation among employers regarding what stage apprentices were informed about their EPA. As shown in Figure 9.3 employers of completer apprentices were more likely to have informed apprentices when they signed up, compared with employers of current apprentices (66% vs. 45%). Among employers of completer apprentices, the two-thirds (66%) that had informed them when they signed up

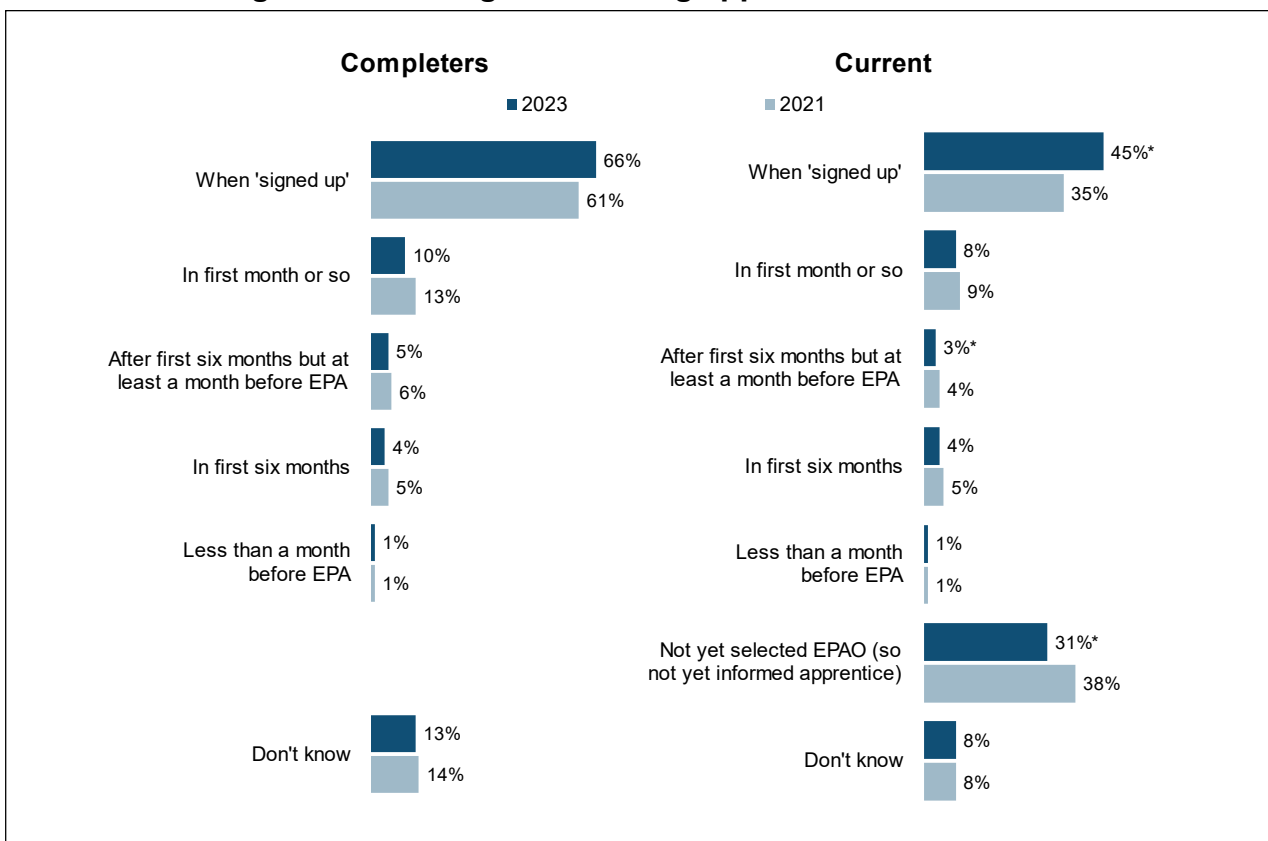
⁸⁴ Across all employers this was 9%.

was an increase compared with 2021, when this was 61%. Among employers of current apprentices, the 45% that had informed them when they signed up, was also an increase since 2021, when this was 35%.

Among employers of completer apprentices, 10% informed their apprentices of the EPA in the first month or so. A small minority (5%) informed apprentices after the first six months (but at least a month before the EPA), and within the first six months (4%). Around a sixth of employers of completer apprentices (13%) did not know.

As shown in Figure 9-3, among employers of current apprentices, 8% informed their apprentices of the EPA in the first month or so, a small minority (3%) informed apprentices after the first six months (but at least a month before the EPA), and 4% within the first six months. Most of the remaining employers of current apprentices had not yet selected their EPAO (31%), so were unable to inform their apprentices. Compared with 2021, more employers of current apprentices had selected their EPAO (Figure 9.3), therefore this response had decreased since 2021 (38% to 31%). Employers of completer apprentices were more likely to respond that they did not know when they informed apprentices about the EPA, compared with employers of current apprentices (13% vs. 8%).

Figure 9-3. Timing of informing apprentices about EPA



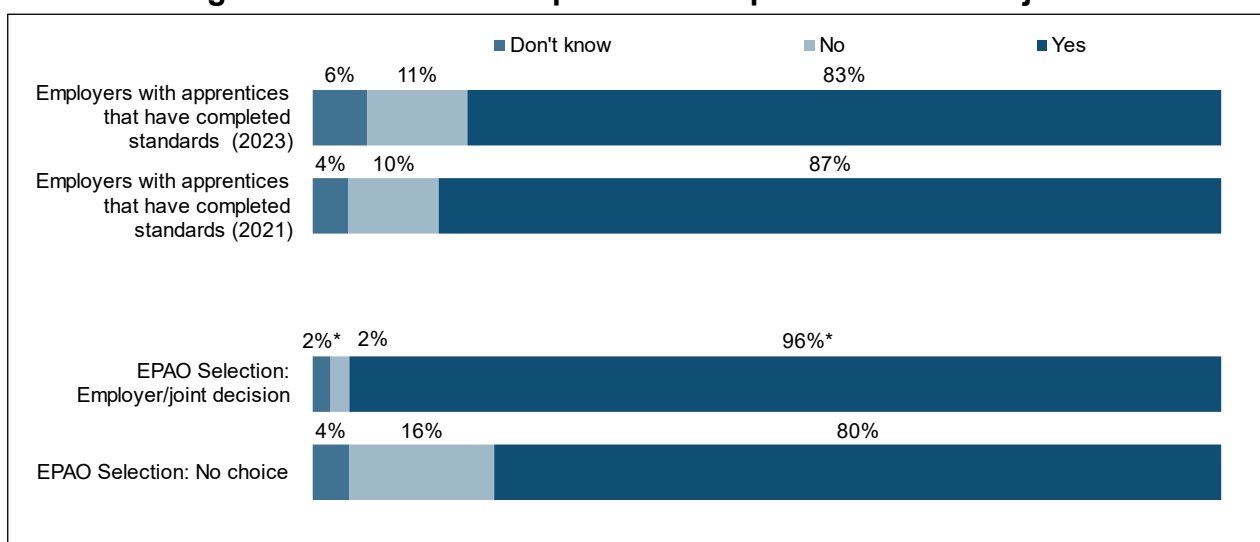
Base: Employers who have had or are likely to have apprentices undertaking EPAs: Completer 2023 (582); Completer 2021 (268); Current 2023 (1,809); Current 2021 (1,585). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

Satisfaction with EPA

Employers of apprentices were asked about their satisfaction with the EPA process. Eight-in-ten (83%) employers with completer apprentices felt that the assessment of apprentices completed was a good test of their occupational competence to do the job. This was similar to the proportion who reported this in 2021 (87%).

Among all employers with apprentices who had completed standards, those whose main level of apprenticeship offered was at Level 2 were less positive (78% thought it was a good test, compared with 85% of Level 3 employers). Employers whose main subject area offered was Business were more likely to be positive (89% vs. 83% average). Smaller employers with 10 or fewer employees at their organisation were less likely to think it was a good test (70% compared with 83% average). Employers who had themselves, or joint with the training provider, decided on their selection of EPAO, were far more likely to say that it was a good test, compared with employers who had no choice of EPAO (96% vs. 80%).

Figure 9-4. Employers' perception of the assessment apprentices completing as a good test of their occupational competence to do the job



Base: Employers with apprentices that have completed standards 2023 (582); 2021 (268). Subgroups: Of which selected their EPAO provider / a joint decision (73); of which had no choice (34). * indicates a significant difference compared with the average

Importance of EPAs

In 2023, a new question was asked to employers of completer apprentices, who had apprentices undertaking EPAs. Employers were asked how important the EPA was for their organisation. Four-in-five (80%) thought the EPA was important for their organisation, 17% thought it was not.

There was no difference in the proportion of employers of completer apprentices who thought the EPA was important to their organisation depending on the main level or subject they offered. Employers who have had apprentices undertaking EPAs and had 10 or more apprentices, were more likely than average to report the EPA was important to their organisation (95% vs. 80% average). Employers who had any of their apprentices stay after completing their apprenticeship were also more likely to report that the EPA was important for them (83% vs. 80% average), as were employers in the third sector (95%) and the non-commercial sector (87%). Employers who selected their EPAO themselves, or jointly with the training provider, were far more likely than average to report the EPA was important to their organisation (94% vs. 80%).⁸⁵ Employers who had at least 100 employees in their organisation were more likely than average to report the EPA was important to their organisation (85% vs. 80%).

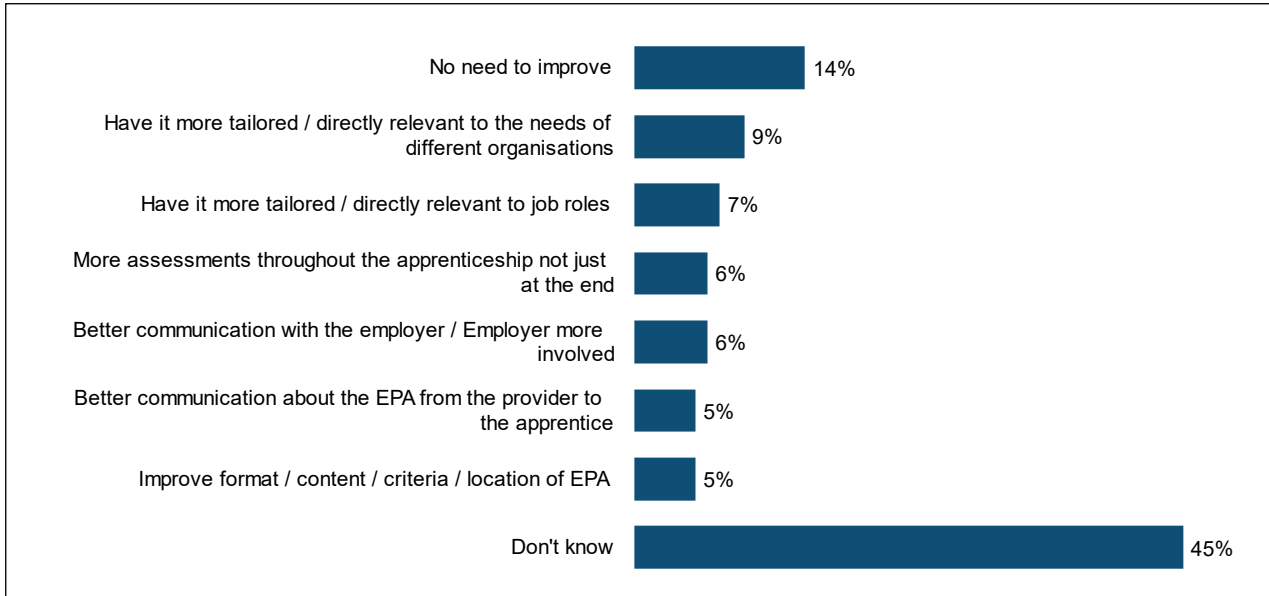
Improving EPAs

Employers of completer apprentices who have had apprentices undertaking EPAs were asked how the EPA could be improved. This was a new question for 2023. The most common response given was 'don't know' (45%), followed by 'no need to improve' (14%). As shown in Figure 9-5, the most common area of improvement suggested was to make the EPA more tailored and directly relevant to the needs of different organisations (9%), followed by making the EPA more tailored / directly relevant to job roles (7%). Employers who suggested an improvement regarding tailoring accounted for 12% of all responses to this question. Employers suggesting changes to the structure of the assessment accounted for 9% of all responses to the question. Figure 9-5 shows the full range of responses given above 5%.

Public sector and non-commercial employers were more likely than average to report no changes were needed to improve the EPA (20% respectively vs. 14% overall), as were employers in the South East (20%), and employers who had either themselves, or jointly, selected their EPAO (22%). Employers whose main subject area offered was Education (33%) were almost 3 times more likely than average (12%) to report that tailoring the EPA would improve it. This group were also more than twice as likely to report that the EPA could be improved via changes to its structure (22% vs. 9% overall). Employers in the Manufacturing Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) sector were also twice more likely than average to report improvements could be made from tailoring the EPA (24% vs. 12% overall), as were employers based in London (23%).

⁸⁵ This is a summary of the response, combining those that selected their EPAO themselves and those that selected it jointly with the training provider.

Figure 9-5. How the EPA can be improved



Base: Employers who have had apprentices undertaking EPAs (582). Responses given by less than 5% of employers not shown.

10. Employers' awareness and understanding of apprenticeship funding

In England, since 2017, as outlined in the [Introduction](#), there have been significant changes to the apprenticeship funding process, including the introduction of the apprenticeship levy for employers with a UK wage bill of more than £3 million.

There have also been changes to payments made to employers of apprentices. Since 2017, DfE has been making additional payments for apprentices aged 16 to 18 or for those aged 19 to 24 who are care leavers or who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). These additional payments of £500 are made twice, 90 days and 365 days after the start of the apprenticeship, totalling £1,000 if the apprentice completes their first year. This chapter explores employers' understanding of the funding process of apprenticeships in England, their awareness of the additional payments and for employers who receive these additional payments, how this money has been used.

Key findings

- **Half (50%) of employers reported understanding the apprenticeship funding process very or fairly well.** This represented a marked drop since 2021 when 67% felt they understood the process well.
- **A quarter (25%) of employers were aware of additional payments to both eligible groups, with 38% aware of payment to at least one of the eligible groups.** Six-in-ten (60%) were not aware of either payment. This was more likely among newer employers of apprentices (70% for those offering apprenticeships for 3 years or less vs. 53% 10+ years).
- **Just over half of employers aware of the payment (54%) reported having received the £1,000 payment for apprentices aged 16 to 18 years, while under a quarter of those aware of the payment (22%) reported having received the payment for eligible apprentices aged 19 to 24 years.**
- The most common uses of the payments were to pay for training (53%) or equipment or other materials for apprentices (51%).

Understanding of apprenticeship funding

All employers were asked how well they felt they understood the apprenticeship funding process. As shown in Figure 10-1, half (50%) of employers reported understanding the process very or fairly well. This represented a marked decrease since 2021, when two-thirds (67%) felt they understood the process well. Conversely, 45% employers felt that

they did not understand the funding process very well or at all well, compared with around three-in-ten (29%) in 2021. The following employer subgroups were more likely to report that they did not understand the process well or at all:

- Employers whose main subject area offered was Agriculture (54%), Health (49%), Engineering (49%), or Retail (excluding Hair and Beauty) (52%).
- Employers in the Wholesale / Retail SIC sector (54%).
- Employers offering apprenticeships for three years or less (49%).

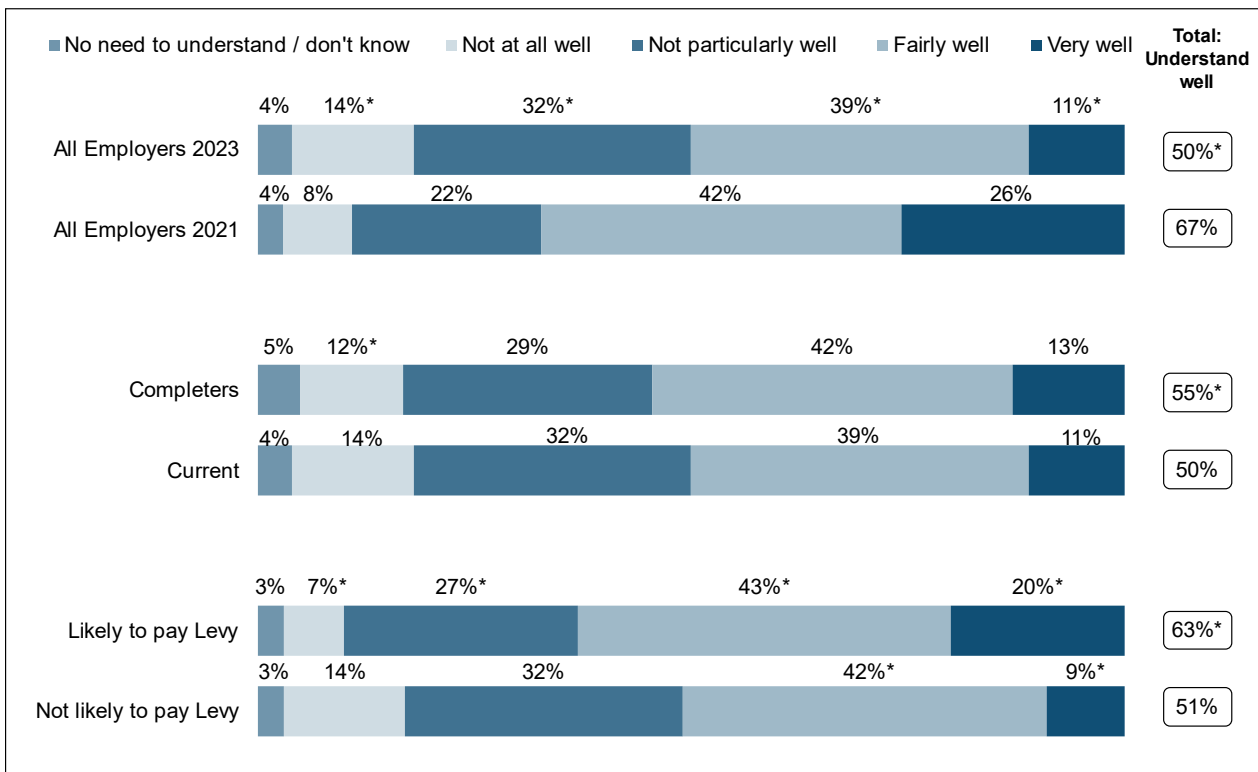
Employers with completer apprentices were more likely than employers with current apprentices to report understanding the process well (55% vs. 50%). This represented a decrease from 2021 for both groups (71% employers with completer apprentices compared with 68% of employers with current apprentices).

However, as also shown in Figure 10-1 and in line with the 2021 trend, employers likely to be eligible for the Levy were considerably more likely to feel their organisation understood the funding process well (63% compared with 51% of those not likely to be required to pay it).

Understanding of the funding process increased by size of employer, larger employers with more than 100 employees at their site were more likely than employers with ten or fewer employees at their site to report understanding the process well (64% vs. 43%). Understanding increased too by size of organisation, with employers at organisations with 100 or more employees being more likely than employers at organisations with less than 10 employees to report understanding the process very or fairly well (53% vs. 45%).

Employers who mainly provided Level 4+ apprenticeships were more likely than those who mainly provided Level 2 or 3 to think their organisation understood the funding process well (57% vs. 48%).

Figure 10-1. Understanding of apprenticeship funding by whether have completed apprentices or current apprentices and whether likely to be required to pay Levy



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). 2023 subgroups: Completer (945); Current (2981); Likely to pay Levy (1,006); not likely to pay Levy (1,935). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the 2023 average (for subgroups) and 2021 (for time series).

Awareness of additional payments for employers to support young apprentices

All employers were asked whether they had heard (before the survey) about the additional payments made by DfE to employers for apprentices aged 16 to 18, care leavers or EHCP-holders who are aged 19 to 24.⁸⁶ The transfer of these payments takes place through training providers, who are responsible for registering apprentice details on the ILR in order to access payments from DfE. The payments are then passed on to the employer within 30 working days.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The question was changed partway through fieldwork to check awareness of each type of additional payment separately. The report presents overall awareness (awareness of either payment) to capture data from initial question.

⁸⁷ For more information about additional payments available to employers based on the age of an apprentice, see: [Payments for hiring a young apprentice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/payments-for-hiring-a-young-apprentice); [Apprenticeships care leavers' bursary guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeships-care-leavers-bursary-guidance); [Resources to support care leavers into apprenticeships - Learning and Work Institute](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/resources-to-support-care-leavers-into-apprenticeships); [Apprenticeship funding rules - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules); [Apprenticeship technical funding guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-technical-funding-guide).

A quarter (25%) of all employers were aware of additional payments to both groups, with 38% aware of payment to at least one group. One-in-ten (11%) were only aware of the payment for 16- to 18-year-olds, while a much smaller proportion (2%) reported being aware only of the payment to eligible 19- to 24-year-olds.

Six-in-ten (60%) employers reported not being aware of either payment. This was more likely among employers who had only been offering apprenticeships for 3 years or less (70% vs. 53% of employers who had been offering apprenticeships for 10 years or more).

Other employers more likely than average to report not being aware of either payment included:

- Those employers whose main subject area offered was Agriculture or Education (both 71%).
- Employers in the Accommodation (69%) or Education (71%) SIC sectors.
- Employers who mainly offered Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships (67%).
- Employers in London (68%), East of England (65%) and the South West (64%).

In contrast, the following groups were more likely to report being aware of payments to both groups, compared with the overall figure (25%):

- Employers who had 100 or more employees at their site (30%).⁸⁸
- Employers in the Public Administration (68%) or Information / Comms (37%) SIC sectors.
- Employers in the North West (29%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (31%).

Usage of the additional payment

Employers who were aware of the additional payments were asked if they had received them for either group. Just over half (54%) reported having received the £1,000 payment for apprentices aged 16 to 18 years, while under a quarter (22%) reported having received the payment for eligible apprentices aged 19 to 24 years. Across all employers, not just those who were aware of the payments, this equates to 20% of all employers who had received the payment for 16- to 18-year-old apprentices, and 6% of all employers who had received the payment for 19-24 year-old apprentices.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ In this instance, the figures from the size of employers site rather than the size of the employers' organisation has been included in the report. This is because the difference between the large (100+) and small (less than 10) employers by size of site is of statistical significance, whereas this does not exist in the difference between the large (100+) and small (less than 10) employers, by the size of the organisation.

⁸⁹ The following analysis of those who had received the payment, and what they used it for, is based on all of those who were aware of each payment type.

Among employers aware of the payment, employers with completer apprentices (35%) were more likely than employers with current apprentices (29%) to report not having received the £1,000 payment for apprentices aged 16 to 18, but there were no differences between the two groups in terms of receiving the payment for eligible 19- to 24-year-olds. Employers who reported they had not received the payment, could have done so as they had no apprentices eligible for the payment. Alternatively, an organisation may have received the payment, but due to the funding mechanism that pays providers, the respondent to the survey may not have been aware of this payment.

Among employers aware of the payment, employers whose main subject area offered was Agriculture (75%), Hair and Beauty (71%), Construction (70%) or Engineering (62%) were more likely to report they had received the payment for 16- to 18-year-old apprentices than compared with the overall figure (54%). This was also more common among employers whose main level offered was Level 2 (62%).

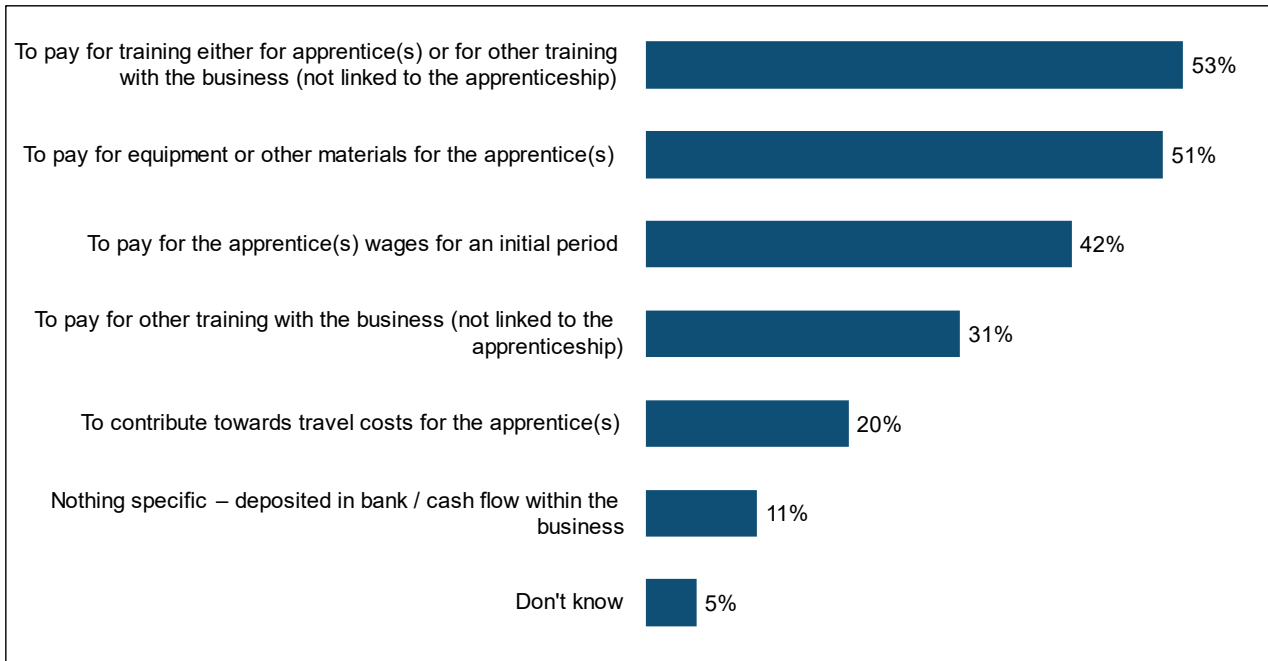
Reporting receiving the £1,000 payment for eligible 19- to 24-year-olds was more common among employers offering a main level of Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships (32% vs. 22% overall).

As shown in Figure 10-2, the two most common uses of the £1,000 payment among those that reported receiving it, mentioned by more than half of employers were:

- Paying for training either for apprentices or for other non-apprenticeship linked training needs (53%).
- Paying for equipment or materials for apprentices (51%).

Another commonly mentioned use of the payment, selected by around two-fifths (42%) of employers was to pay for apprentices' wages for an initial period. This was more widespread among employers with completer apprentices than with employers with current apprentices (50% vs. 37%).

Figure 10-2. What additional payment was used for



Base: All employers that received additional payments (1,029). Responses given by less than 5% of employers not shown.

Paying for apprenticeship or non-apprenticeship related training was more often than average mentioned by:

- Employers whose main subject area offered was Health (69%), as well as those employers who were in the Health and Social Work SIC sector (70%).
- Employers whose main level offered was Level 4 or 5 (65%).
- Employers who had offered apprenticeships for 10 years or more (60%).

Paying for equipment or other materials for the apprentice was also more frequently than average reported by:

- Employers whose main subject area was Hair and Beauty (68%).
- Employers with less than 10 employees within their organisation (59%).

Paying apprentices' wages for an initial period was more likely than average mentioned by:

- Employers whose main subject area offered was Health (50%).
- Those with less than 10 employees within their organisation (60%).
- Employers with a main level of Level 2 (47%).

11. Future plans

This chapter explores employers' plans for future apprenticeship provision. Employers were asked whether they expected to continue to offer apprenticeships, and if so whether they planned to increase or decrease their apprentice numbers, over the next 2 to 3 years (and the reasoning behind these plans). Differences by subject area, employer size, sector and level are discussed alongside this.

Key findings

- **Just over a quarter of employers (26%) were planning to increase the number of their apprenticeships in the next 2 to 3 years.**
- **Employers planning to increase their number of apprentices most commonly said this was because the organisation was expanding (45%), or secondly because it was a good way to meet their skill needs (33%).**
- **The top reasons for planning to decrease or stop offering apprenticeships were that they were not looking to recruit new staff (35%), followed by the lack of (good) candidates (11%).**
- **Just under one-in-four (24%) employers with existing apprenticeships at Levels 6 or 7 expected to introduce more subject areas or levels at Levels 6 or 7.** The most common subject areas expected to be introduced at these levels were Business and Admin (37%), followed by Health and Social Care (15%).

Future provision of apprenticeships

Employers were asked about their future intentions regarding the provision of apprenticeship over the next 2 to 3 years, and whether they planned to increase numbers, keep numbers about the same, decrease or stop offering. In 2023, around a quarter of employers of apprentices (26%) overall were planning an increase in the numbers of apprentices over the next 2 to 3 years, a decrease from just over a third (36%) in 2021.

Three-in-five (60%) employers were planning to keep the number of apprentices at their site at about the same level, an increase from just over half (52%) of employers who reported this in 2021. The proportion of employers planning to decrease the numbers of apprentices at the site grew from 4% to 5% between 2021 and 2023.

In the 2021 report, we suggested that the higher proportion of employers who planned to increase their future apprenticeship offer could be the result of a bounce-back, after the reduction in apprentice numbers seen during COVID-19. Comparing figures from 2023

(completers only) to 2018-19 supports this, as the 2023 proportions were more in line with what was seen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among employers of completer apprentices, three-in-ten (29%) were planning on increasing (a decrease from 36% in 2021, this was not different from the 27% in 2018-19 and 29% in 2017), and three-fifths (59%) were planning on keeping their numbers at the same level (an increase from 53% in 2021).

As shown in Table 11-1, among employers of current apprentices, the trend was the same. Around a quarter (25%) were planning to increase (a decrease from 37% in 2021), and 61% were planning to keep the number the same (an increase from 52% in 2021).

Table 11-1. Future intentions for apprenticeship numbers by all employers, completer and current

	2017 (Completer)	2018-19 (Completer)	2021 (Completer)	2021 (Current)	2021 (All)	2023 (Completer)	2023 (Current)	2023 (All)
Base	(4,004)	(4,000)	(977)	(3,108)	(4,085)	(945)	(2,981)	(3,926)
Increase numbers	29%	27%	36%	37%	36%	29%*	25%*	26%*
Stay at about the same level	55%	56%	53%	52%	52%	59%*	61%*	60%*
Decrease numbers	5%	5%	4%	3%	4%	4%	5%*	5%*
Stop offering	8%	10%	7%	5%	6%	6%	5%	6%
Don't know	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%*

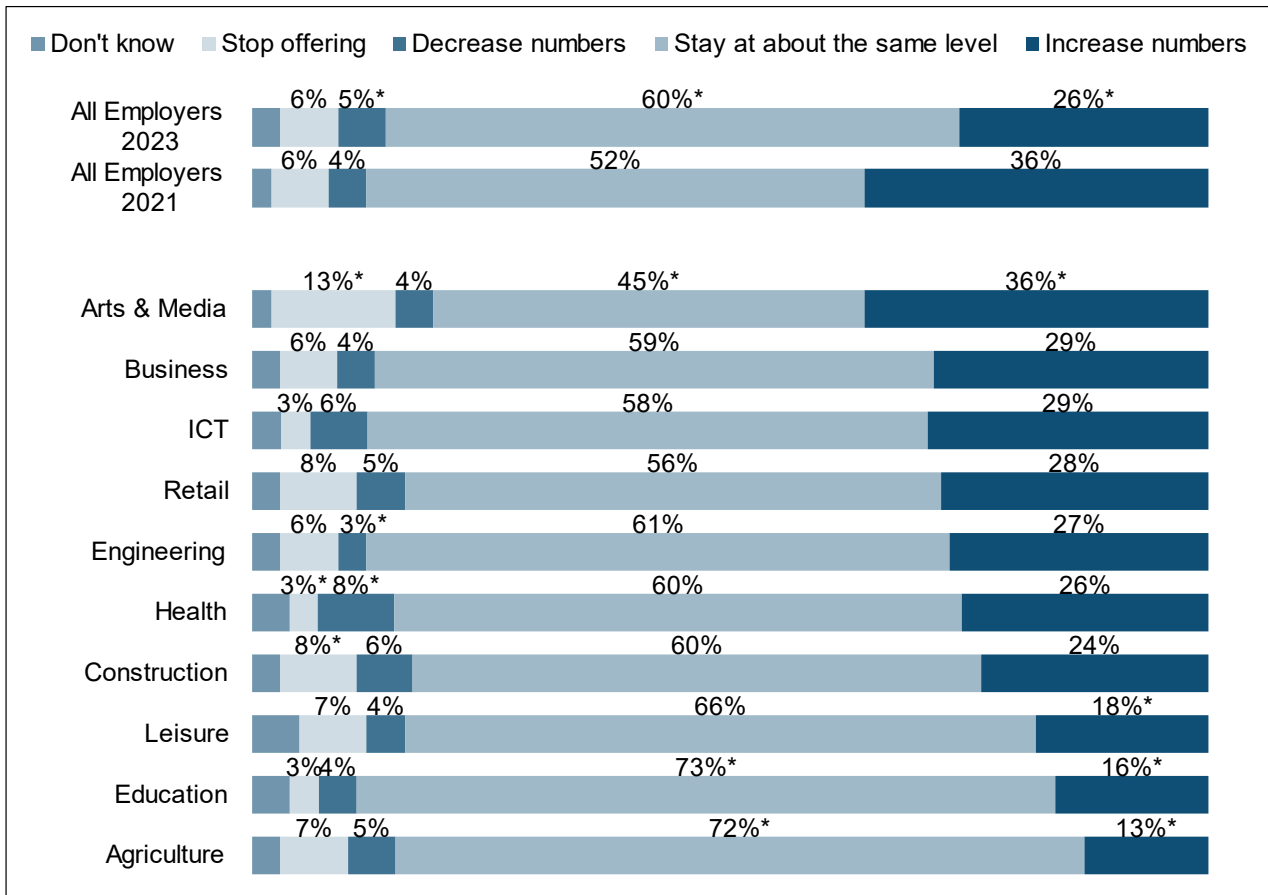
* indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

Employers whose main level of apprenticeship was Level 4 to 7 were more likely to report expecting to increase the number of apprentices than average (33%), as were employers with more than 100 employees within their organisation (36%).

Figure 11-1 shows how this breaks down by main subject area; as can be seen, some subject areas were much more likely to see an increase in demand from existing apprentice employers than others. Employers whose main subject area offered was Arts and Media were more likely to report they were planning to increase their numbers (36% vs. 26% average). However, they were also more than twice as likely than average to report they were planning to stop offering apprenticeships in the future (13% vs. 6% overall). Employers whose main subject area offered was Hair and Beauty were 3 times more likely than average to report they were planning to stop (19% vs. 6%). Employers

whose main subject area offered was Health were more likely than average to report they were planning to decrease their apprenticeship offer in the future (8% vs. 5%).

Figure 11-1. Future intentions for apprenticeship numbers by main subject area offered



Base: All employers: 2023 (3,926); 2021 (4,085). 2023 subgroups: Arts & Media (81); Business (793); ICT (162); Retail (350); Engineering (792); Health (702); Construction (483); Leisure (140); Education (192); Agriculture (189). * indicates where a result is significantly different from the 2023 average (for subgroups) and 2021 (for time series). Don't know not shown, 5% or less.

Employers that were more likely to expect a decrease the number of apprentices (or stop offering apprenticeship altogether) compared with the average (11%) included:⁹⁰

- Employers whose main level of apprenticeship offered was Level 2 (14%).
- Employers in the SIC sector of Construction (15%).
- Employers who had offered apprenticeships for 3 years or less (16%).

Employers who had recruited a larger number of apprentices in the previous 12 months were more likely to plan increase in the number of apprentices, compared with employers who had recruited fewer apprentices. For example, 58% of employers who had hired 10

⁹⁰ This is a sum of those that reported they were expecting to decrease their offering of apprenticeship, or those who were planning to stop them all together.

or more apprentices in the last 12 months reported they planned to increase their numbers of apprentices. This is higher than the number of employers who planned to increase their apprentice numbers, who had employed no apprentices in the last 12 months (24%). Employers who had recruited no apprentices in the previous 12 months (13%) were more likely than average (11%) to expect a decrease in the number of apprentices or to stop offering apprenticeships altogether.

Employers were also asked why they expected their apprentice numbers to increase or decrease (Table 11-2). The reasons employers gave around future plans for apprentice numbers were closely linked to their future business expectations. For instance, employers who planned to increase the number of apprenticeships they offer most commonly said this was because they were experiencing business growth / their organisation was expanding (45%, though a decrease from 54% in 2021). This was 47% for employers with completer apprentices, 45% for employers of current apprentices.

Meanwhile, the top reason for employers planning to decrease or stop offering apprenticeships was that they were not planning to recruit new staff (35%, an increase from 25% in 2021). This was 34% for employers with completer apprentices, 35% for employers of current apprentices.

Table 11-2. Reasons for employers expected to increase, decrease or stop offering apprenticeships over the next 2 to 3 years

Increase	2021	2023	Decrease	2021	2023
Base: Employers who expect the number of apprentices to increase over the next 2 to 3 years	(1,579)	(1,111)	Base: Employers who expect to stop offering apprenticeships or for the number of apprentices to decrease over the next 2 to 3 years	(327)	(382)
Business growth / expanding	54%	45%*	Not looking to recruit new staff	25%	35%*
Good way to meet skill needs	29%	33%*	Lack of (good) candidates	8%	11%
Career progression / benefits staff	6%	7%	Apprentices have not been of a good enough standard	9%	11%
Apprenticeships becoming easier to recruit	5%	6%	Business not growing (incl. we are contracting / poor sales)	11%	9%
Investment in future of company/industry	2%	6%*	We cannot currently afford to offer more	9%	8%
High staff turnover	5%	4%	Bad experience with training providers	10%	8%
Increased range of apprenticeships (including degree apprenticeships)	2%	3%	No time to deal with apprenticeships	6%	7%
Staff request	1%	3%*	All our staff are fully skilled	8%	6%
Ability to influence content of training	1%	3%*	Due to low staff turnover	2%	6%*
Company initiative / policy	3%	3%	No space / capacity to take on any more	10%	5%*
Want to help the local community / young people	2%	2%	Prefer to recruit experienced staff	3%	5%
To claim back Apprenticeship Levy payments	3%	2%	Prefer other forms of training	2%	4%
No apprentices currently	<0.5	2%*	Red tape / bureaucracy	1%	3%
Past experiences of them have been good	2%	2%	Retiring / Closing	7%	2%*
			Changes to apprenticeships funding / funding reform	1%	2%

Reasons cited by fewer than 2% of employers in 2023 omitted. *indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021 (bold figures show results that are significantly higher than in 2021).

There were some differences by subgroup in employers' reasoning behind increasing or decreasing apprentice numbers, compared with the average:

By size

- Employers with more than 100 employees at their organisation were more likely to report that they had no space / capacity to take on any more apprentices, as a reason for decreasing apprenticeships (10% vs. 5% average).
- Employers with more than 100 employees at their organisation were also more likely to report a preference to recruit experienced staff (12% vs. 5% average) and a preference for other forms of training (15% vs. 4% average), as reasons for decreasing apprenticeships.

By SIC sector

- Employers in the SIC sectors of Professional, Science and Technology (70%), Information and Communications (62%) and Manufacturing (53%) were more likely on average to report business growth as a reason for increased apprenticeships (45% average).
- Employers in the SIC sector of Health and Social Work (40%) were more likely to report an increase in apprenticeships in the next 2 to 3 years because it was a good way to meet their skills need (40% vs. 33% average), and because of career progression and a benefit to staff (10% vs. 7% average).
- Employers in the SIC sector of Education were twice as likely than average to report that they cannot currently afford to offer more apprenticeships, as a reason for planning to decrease apprenticeships (16% vs. 8%). However, employers in this sector who were planning to increase apprenticeships in the next 2 or 3 years were more likely than average to report this was because apprenticeships were becoming easier to recruit (12% vs. 6% average).

By subject area

- Employers whose main subject area offered was Agriculture (65%), Business (56%) and Engineering (52%) were more likely than average to report they expected apprenticeships to grow, due to business growth (45% average). This was less likely with employers whose main subject area offered was Education (26%), Construction (34%) and Healthcare (33%).
- Employers whose main subject area offered was Construction (42%) and Health (39%) were more likely than average to expect apprenticeships to increase at their site because apprenticeships were a good way to meet their skills need. (33% average). This was less likely than average among employers whose main subject area offered was Business (25%).

- Employers whose main subject area offered was Health were the most likely to report that career progression was why they expected an increase in apprenticeships (10% vs. 7% average). These employers were more likely to say they expected a decrease because of low staff turnover (17% vs. 6% average).
- Employers whose main subject area offered was ICT were 3 times more likely to report that apprenticeships becoming easier to recruit was why they expected an increase (18% vs. 6% average).
- Employers whose main subject area offered was Construction were the most likely to report an expected decrease in apprenticeships due to their business not growing (17% vs. 9% average).
- Employers whose main subject area offered was Engineering were more likely than average to report not having any space or capacity to take on any more apprenticeships as the reason they expected a decrease (10% vs. 5% average).

Future of degree and Level 6+ non-degree apprenticeships

In March 2023, the DfE announced a £40m Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund, delivered by the Office for Students. This fund was launched in September 2023 and could be used to support projects with potential to diversify the growth on Level 6 apprenticeships. The fund enabled this by supporting providers to deliver degree apprenticeship provision for the first time, and assisted them in delivering a wider range of apprenticeships, with improve access for apprentices.⁹¹ This survey ran from August to October 2023, therefore the launch of this fund happened during the fieldwork period. It is not possible to know whether employers considered this in their responses when asked about their future plans for degree and level 6+ apprenticeships.

Employers who had existing apprentices at Level 6 or 7 who planned to continue offering apprenticeships (or those who were unsure) were asked whether they planned to offer any new apprenticeship standards at degree level or Level 6+ over the next 2 to 3 years. Around a quarter of (24%) employers with existing apprenticeships at Levels 6 or 7 were expecting to introduce more subject areas or levels at Levels 6 or 7. This was a decrease compared with 2021, when this was 32% of Level 6+ employers. This was consistent across employers of completer apprentices (22% in 2023, from 34% in 2021) and employer of current apprentices (25% in 2023, from 33% in 2021).

As found in 2021, employers with more than 100 staff within their organisation were more likely to propose to introduce new Level 6 or 7 apprenticeships (34%) than medium-sized

⁹¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8098/ofs-spg-guidance-2023-24.pdf>

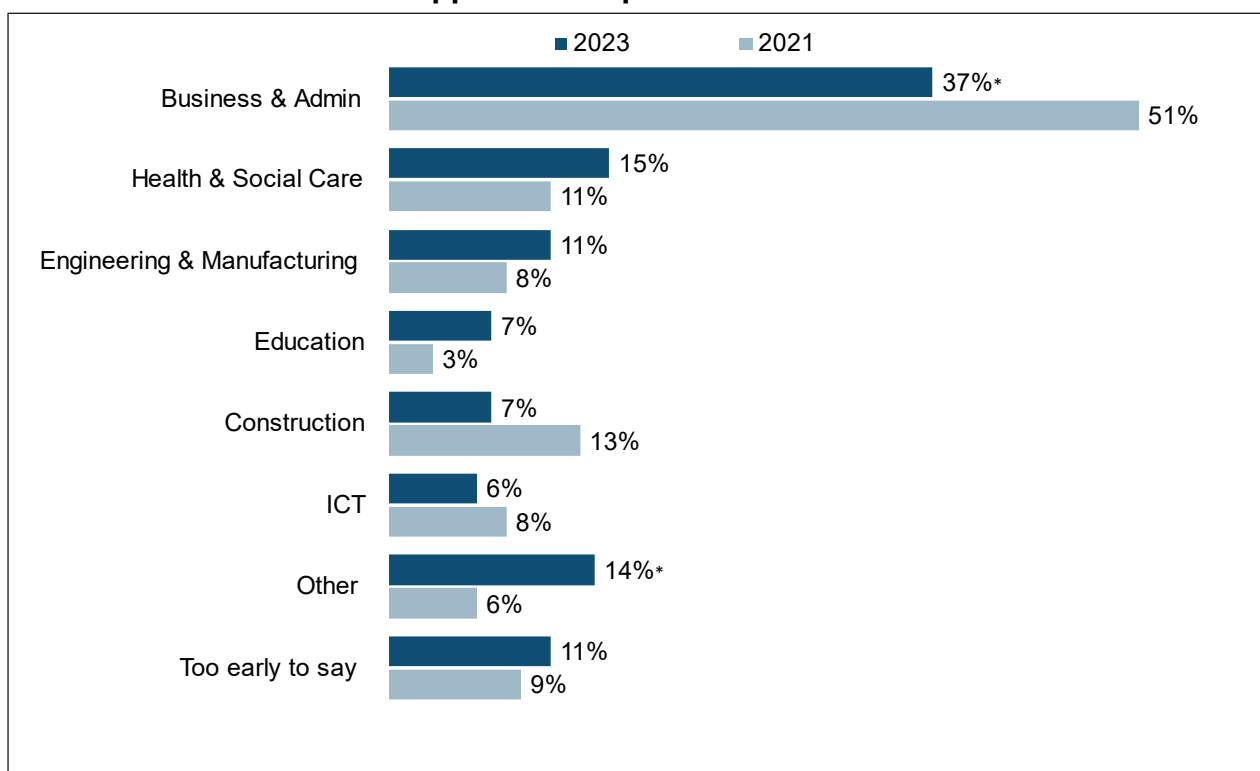
organisations (16% for employers with 10 to 99 employees). Employers likely to be paying the Apprenticeship Levy were also more likely than average to report this (38%).

Employers whose main subject area offered was Health were almost twice as likely than average to report that they propose to introduce new apprenticeship standards at degree level or Level 6+ (46% vs. 24% average).

Finally, employers who reported that they planned to introduce new apprenticeship standards at Level 6+ were asked which subject areas they expected to introduce new degree apprenticeship standards in. Figure 11-2 shows the proportion of employers who knew what subject areas they planned to introduce.

Business was most commonly chosen (37%), however this was far lower than the proportion who said this in 2021 (51%).⁹² This was followed by Health (15%) and Engineering (11%).

Figure 11-2. Subject areas employers expect to introduce new Level 6 or Level 7 apprenticeship standards in⁹³



Base: Employers who plan to introduce new apprenticeship standards at Level 6+ and know what subject areas these are in: 2023 (147); 2021 (194). * indicates where a result is significantly different from 2021.

⁹² These figures exclude those who said they did not know or told us it was a new apprenticeship, in both 2023 and 2021.

⁹³ Figure also shows the proportion of employers who said that it was too early to say what subject areas they expected to introduce.

12. Conclusions

This report outlines the findings from the 2023 Apprenticeships Evaluation Employer Survey. The survey marked the eighth wave in a series that began in 2011. The survey offers insight into how employer views of apprenticeships have evolved over time and provides an assessment of policy changes. The survey contacted employers with apprentices who completed their programmes between July 1, 2021, and February 28, 2022, as well as those who employed current apprentices as of January 1, 2023. A total of 3,926 interviews were conducted; 945 with employers of completers and 2,981 with employers of current apprentices.

The findings from the survey show that there are a wide range of strengths to the apprenticeship programme. Employers see real benefits in having apprenticeships, and overall experience high levels of satisfaction. The survey also highlights challenges for policy, including declining take-up among some groups of employers, and some of the recent changes around apprenticeship funding, and OTJT requirements being less well understood. We summarise these strengths and benefits of the programme, alongside the challenges below.

Apprenticeship growth

One success of the apprenticeship programme is that many apprenticeship employers were well established in offering apprenticeships, suggesting that once employers start engaging with apprenticeships, they continue to do so for long periods of time. There was a steady reduction in the proportion of employers who have only offered apprenticeships for 3 years or fewer since 2017 (10% in 2023 compared with 29% in 2017).

Alongside this, some subject areas have enjoyed particularly strong growth among employers, for example there was an increase in employers providing apprenticeships in Construction, and ICT. Similarly, the percentage of employers providing Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships has consistently risen since their introduction. Positively, there was also a steady increase in the proportion of employers who were open to offering apprentices to all age groups (60% compared with 56% in 2021), suggesting that employers increasingly see apprenticeships as being a good training route for all ages.

This growth however has not been uniform. There are some subjects and levels where there were challenges with employer take-up. The proportion of employers offering Retail apprenticeships continued to decrease, as had the share of employers offering Level 2 apprenticeships. Looking to the future, a further potential challenge for the growth of the apprenticeship programme may be a slow-down in the number of existing apprenticeship employers saying they will increase their apprentice numbers in the future. The proportion

of employers who were planning to increase their number of apprenticeships over the next 2 to 3 years had decreased (from 36% in 2021, to 26% in 2023). This difference could reflect wider economic trends. For example, there was a post COVID-19 boost in 2021, where employers were making up for a previous dip in recruitment, and it appears has 2023 returned to prior levels of growth. Alternatively, it may reflect more employers with existing apprentices have now reached the maximum feasible number of apprentices they can employ. Among those employers who were planning to decrease or stop offering apprenticeships, this was most commonly because they were not looking to recruit new staff (35%), and a lack of (good) candidates (11%).

Employer satisfaction and benefits

The 2023 survey indicates that levels of overall employer satisfaction with apprenticeships remained high. Most employers (83%) were satisfied with their main apprenticeship programme, and this has remained consistent over time. Despite this, there are still areas of improvement that can be identified. Employers were less satisfied than in 2021 with five particular elements of apprenticeships. For example, employers were less satisfied with how the provider offered learning flexibly to meet their needs, less satisfied with their ability to select an apprenticeship relevant to their needs, and less satisfied with the amount and complexity of paperwork / administration involved with apprenticeships. If overall employer satisfaction is to continue to remain at high levels in the future, these specific areas where employer satisfaction has fallen could be considered further as areas of focus for policy.

Across the survey there are a range of measures that point towards the benefits of the apprenticeship programme, and the reasons employers use it. These positive messages, alongside the findings around high employer satisfaction, could be used in wider communications by stakeholders in the apprenticeship system to encourage further take-up of apprenticeships by employers in the future. These messages include:

- Most apprenticeship employers would recommend an apprenticeship to others (84%).
- Employers experienced a wide range of benefits as a result of training apprentices. The most common benefit was the development of skills relevant to the organisation (86%), and more than three-quarters (77%) of employers experienced increased productivity.
- The main reason employers offered apprenticeships was because of the benefit to the apprentice/community (20%), other key reasons for choosing to offer apprenticeships rather than (or as well as) other training were the inclusion of practical/vocational elements in the training, and the content and the design of the training.

- Retention of apprentices is high, and this is a consistent trend over time - the majority of employers with completer apprentices had retained at least one of the apprentices since completion (69%).
- Among employers who were planning to increase their number of apprentices, the main reasons tended to be because their organisation was expanding, or because they saw it as a good way to meet their skills needs.

This final message that apprenticeship employers see apprenticeships as a good way to meet their skills needs is of particular importance in the current labour market, given the recently published Employer Skills Survey 2022 highlighted that skill shortages vacancies and skills gaps were at their highest level in ten years.⁹⁴

Impact and awareness of apprenticeship reforms

Significant reforms have been introduced to apprenticeships over the course of the Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey series. Apprenticeships have moved across to a Standards model, with an end-point assessment. Virtually all current apprentice employers and most completer employers in the 2023 survey had apprentices on these types of apprenticeships. These reforms are now more embedded than they were at the time of the 2021 survey. Other recent reforms have included an update to the minimum amount of OTJT that an apprentice should complete, and an increased emphasis on higher and degree-level apprenticeships.

The 2023 survey is therefore a crucial data source in evidencing the longer-term impacts of the 2017 reforms, particularly given the challenges in assessing these impacts in the 2021 survey which reflected the apprenticeship landscape at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2023 survey found several areas of reform-related improvements; however, challenges are also evident in terms of employer awareness and understanding in some areas:

End-point assessment (EPA): A success of the transition to standards is that the EPA process has become more embedded among employers, and satisfaction with the EPA process is high. An increased proportion of employers were aware that their apprentices needed to undergo an EPA compared to 2021, and this was higher among those employers who had completer apprentices. Positively, most employers who had completers had positive views on the EPA, the majority (83%) felt the assessment was a good test of their apprentices' occupational occupation competence to do the job, and that the EPA was important for their organisation. Satisfaction around the EPA was high among employers with completer apprentices, and most commonly employers weren't

⁹⁴ [Employer skills survey: 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/employer-skills-survey-2022)

sure what could be improved about the EPA process when asked. One possible area for improvement would have been that most employers with apprentices on standards had not chosen their end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) themselves (72%). However, on the 1st of August 2023 the ESFA formally moved responsibility for the choice of EPAO to providers, a shift from the previous focus of employer choice of EPAO. The employers surveyed with completers in 2023 will have gone through the EPA prior this date, indicating that this was common practice even prior to the formal change.⁹⁵

Apprenticeship funding: One challenge that emerged from the survey is that employer understanding of the apprenticeship funding process had decreased since 2021. Half (50%) of employers thought their organisation understood the apprenticeship funding process well, compared with 67% in 2021. It is unclear why overall understanding has fallen, and so the key policy challenge will be how understanding of apprenticeship funding can be improved among groups of employers (such as employers who are newer to apprenticeships, and smaller employers) where it is low. One specific example of low awareness of apprenticeship funding rules was around additional payments. The majority of employers were not aware of the additional payments for apprentices they employ between the ages of 16- to 18 and eligible 19- to 24 year olds. This most likely included employers who were eligible for and had received the payments. This lack of awareness of either payment was highest among newer employers of apprentices.

Minimum off-the-job training requirement: Positively, the majority of employers reported that their apprentices had received training from an external training provider, separate from their day-to-day work duties (95%). Alongside this, there was a relatively high level of understanding of which activities counted towards the OTJT requirement (70% of employers). However, employer understanding of what counted towards this requirement had decreased. This decrease in understanding followed a period over which changes were made to OTJT requirements (changes were made in 2022). Only a third (35%) of employers were aware of these changes to the requirements, which coupled with the decrease in understanding of what counts towards the requirement, suggests that there is a need to improve communication of these changes with employers. However, the majority of employers who were aware of the OTJT changes had found the existing guidance clear (84%), this suggests that the challenge is this guidance reaching employers rather than the guidance itself.

Flexi-job and accelerated apprenticeships: A similar communication challenge is apparent for the new flexi-job apprentices and accelerated apprentices introduced by DfE in 2021. Employer awareness of these new apprenticeship types was low (21% were aware of accelerated apprenticeships, and 13% of flexi-job apprenticeships). However,

⁹⁵ [Prepare to offer apprenticeship end-point assessment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/preparing-to-offer-apprenticeship-end-point-assessment)

once employers had heard more about what these apprenticeship types involved, more employers were open to offering these apprenticeship types. This suggests if more could be done to improve initial awareness of them these options, it would likely increase employers' use of them.

Higher and degree apprenticeships: Finally, a key success of the apprenticeship reforms has been the rise in the proportion of employers offering higher and degree apprenticeships, as outlined earlier. Alongside this, overall awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships has increased slightly. One potential consideration for policy is that although awareness is increasing, employers' knowledge about them has remained unchanged since 2021 and has not followed suit with increasing awareness (60% of employers reported having some knowledge of higher apprenticeships, in line with 2021). There is also initial evidence from the survey to suggest that the growth of higher and degree apprenticeships may start to slow. The proportion of employers providing or having plans to provide higher apprenticeships remained the same compared to 2021. The survey also found fewer employers with existing apprenticeships at Levels 6 or 7 were expecting to introduce more subject areas at this level than in 2021 (22% compared to 32% in 2021). Where employers were not already offering, or planning to offer higher or degree apprenticeships this was most commonly because there was a lack of demand from employees. Given that awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships was high, increasing employer understanding around apprenticeships among groups of employers where both understanding and take-up is low may help sustain further increases at these levels in the future, if that continues to be a policy priority. The Office for Student's Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund, launched in September 2023 may also accelerate growth in the future.

Differences in employer experience

Throughout the report, findings have varied by types of apprenticeship offered by employers, for example by the main level or the main subject area offered. This suggests that the experience of delivering apprenticeships is impacted by a number of factors.

Both satisfaction and retention of those who completed their apprentices was higher among employers who offered apprenticeships at Level 4 to 7 (compared to Level 2 and 3). This group of employers were also more likely to understand apprenticeship funding, and more likely to hire apprentices from their existing staff only. As noted in the report, the proportion of employers offering Level 2 apprenticeships has continued to decrease.

Within the main subject areas offered by employers, there was a mixed picture. For example, whilst there was an increase in employers providing apprenticeships in Construction as their main subject area, satisfaction was lowest among this group of

employers. Whilst satisfaction was the highest among employers offering Leisure as their main subject area, they were the least likely to retain their apprentices. A clearer picture was present among employers whose main subject offered is ICT, satisfaction was high, and ICT apprenticeships among employers of completer apprentices doubled over the past 4 years. Employers who main subject area offered was ICT had high awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships, and they were more likely to plan to provide these.

There was a positive picture for larger employers (100 or more employees at their organisation). These employers were both more likely to be satisfied with apprenticeships, and more likely to recommend apprenticeships to others, compared to smaller employers. They were also more likely to report expecting to increase the number of apprentices and to report the information and support available around apprenticeship was sufficient. These findings for larger employers raise questions around engagement with smaller employers and suggest more could be done to help close the gap with larger employers who present a more positive apprenticeship experience.

Throughout the report, we have seen how findings on employers' experience and views on apprenticeships continue to differ between types of apprentice employers. This includes the main type of apprenticeship employers offered (e.g., level and subject area), the length of time employers have offered apprenticeships, and also by firmographics (particularly size of employers and SIC sector). The survey provides a rich dataset to explore further the factors driving these differences, and the interplay between factors such as main level offered, main subject area, employer size and SIC sector.

13. Appendix A: Glossary

AS – Apprenticeship Service

ASK – Apprenticeship Support & Knowledge programme

AWD - Apprenticeship Workforce Development

DfE – Department for Education

EHCP - Education, Health and Care Plan

EPA – End-point assessment

EPAO – End-point assessment organisation

ESFA - Education and Skills Funding Agency

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

IDBR - Inter-Departmental Business Register

ILR – Individualised Learner Record

IfATE – Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

OTJT – Off-the-job training

RPS - Random Probability Sampling

SSA – Sector Subject Area

SIC – Standard Industrial Classification

14. Appendix B: Detailed profile of employers

Appendix B considers the detailed profile of two main groups that are discussed in the employer report. These are employers of completer apprentices and employers of current apprentices. It also covers the profile of employers by:

- Main apprenticeship subject area
- Size of the of the site by number of employees
- Level of the employer's main apprenticeship
- Region in which the employer's site is located
- Employers' likelihood to pay into the Apprenticeship Levy

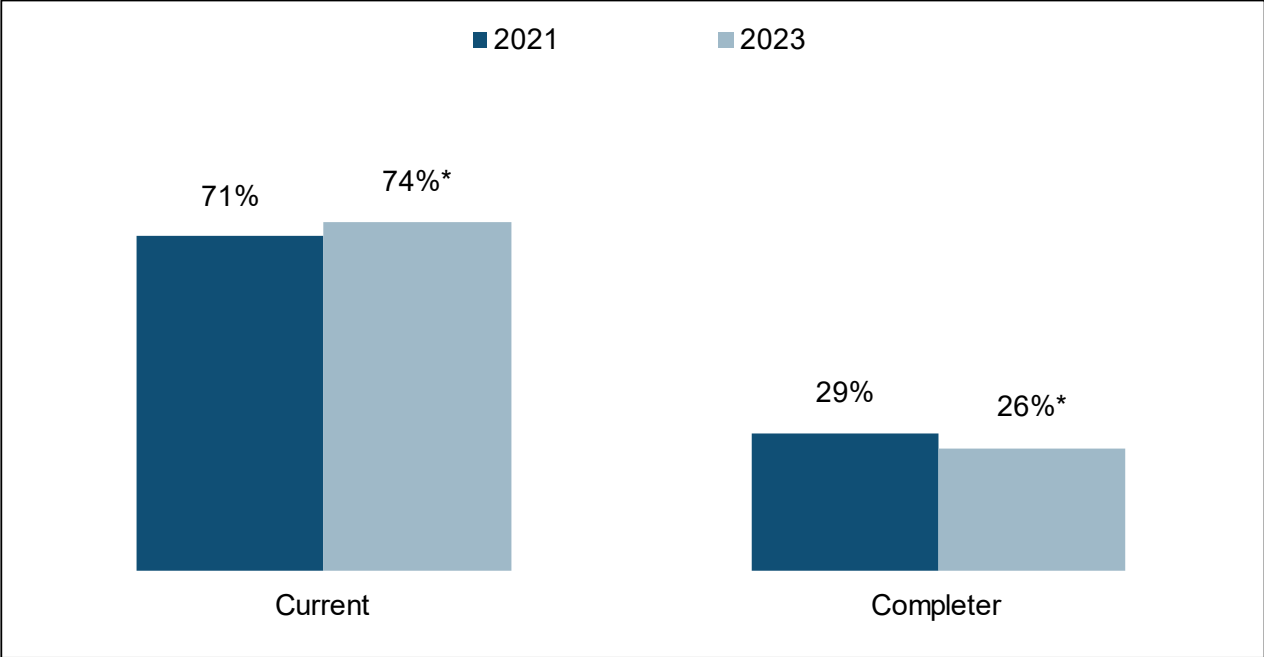
Completion status

Employers of completer apprentices were defined as employers who had had an apprentice complete an apprenticeship between July 2021 and February 2022. Employers of completer apprentices represented 945 of the interviews achieved.

Employers of current apprentices were defined as employers who had an apprentice on the 1st of January 2023.⁹⁶ Employers of current apprentices represented 2,981 of the interviews achieved.

⁹⁶ This date was selected because it was the most recent available for sampling purposes

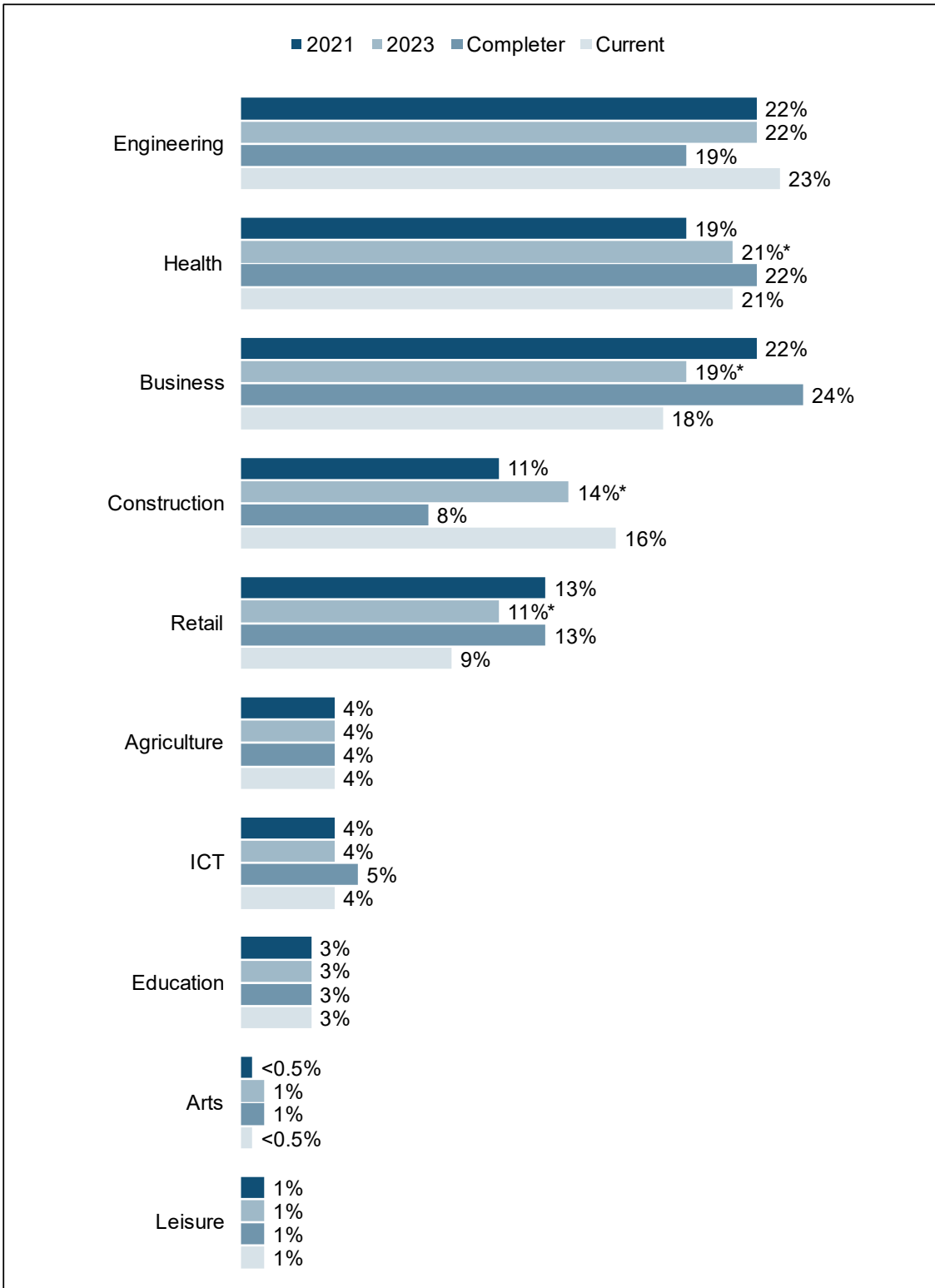
Figure 14-1. Proportion of employers interviewed as employers of completer apprentices or employers of current apprentices.



Base: All 2023 employers (3,926), All 2021 employers (4,085).

Employer main subject area

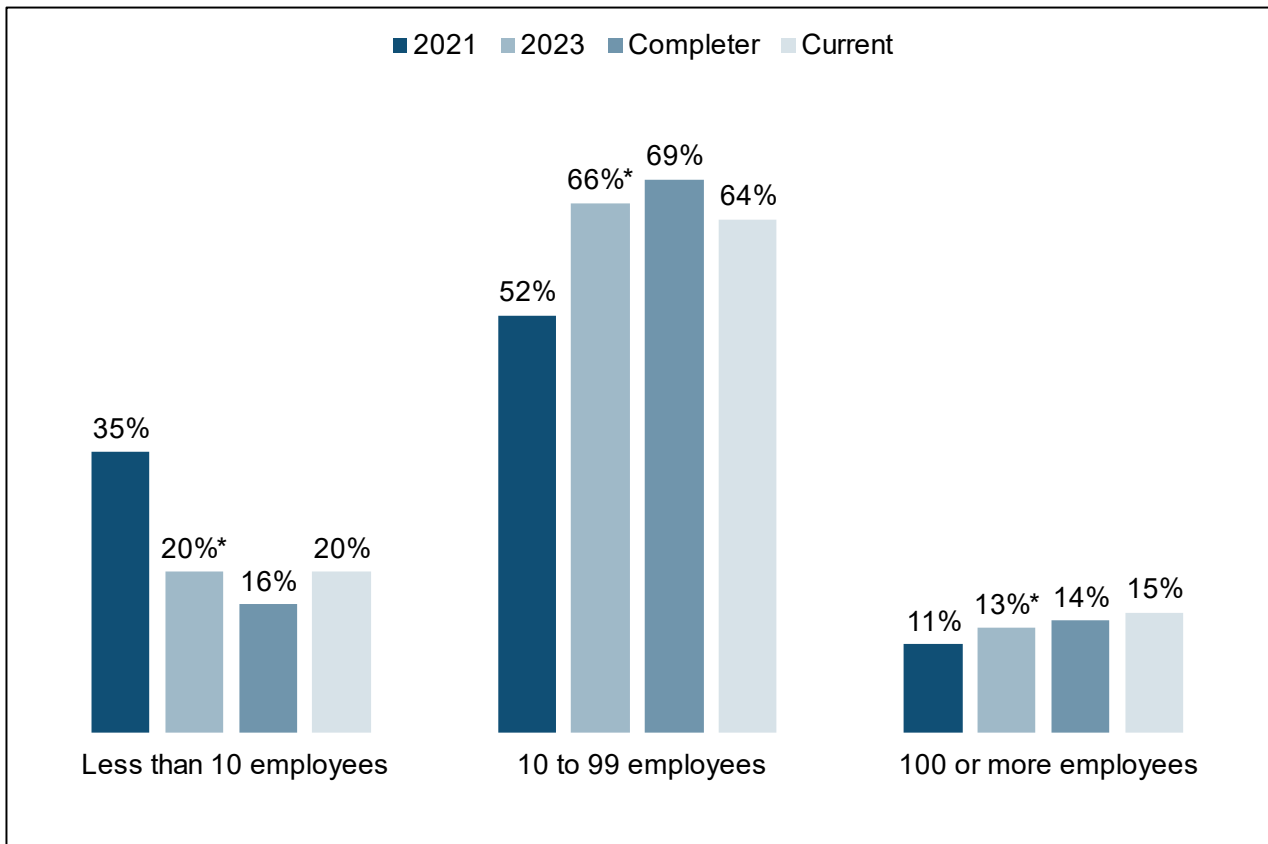
Figure 14-2. Proportion of employers by their main subject area



Base: All 2023 employers (3,926), All 2021 employers (4,085), Completer (945), Current (2,981). 'Other' not shown. * indicates where 2023 figures are significantly different to 2021.

Employer size

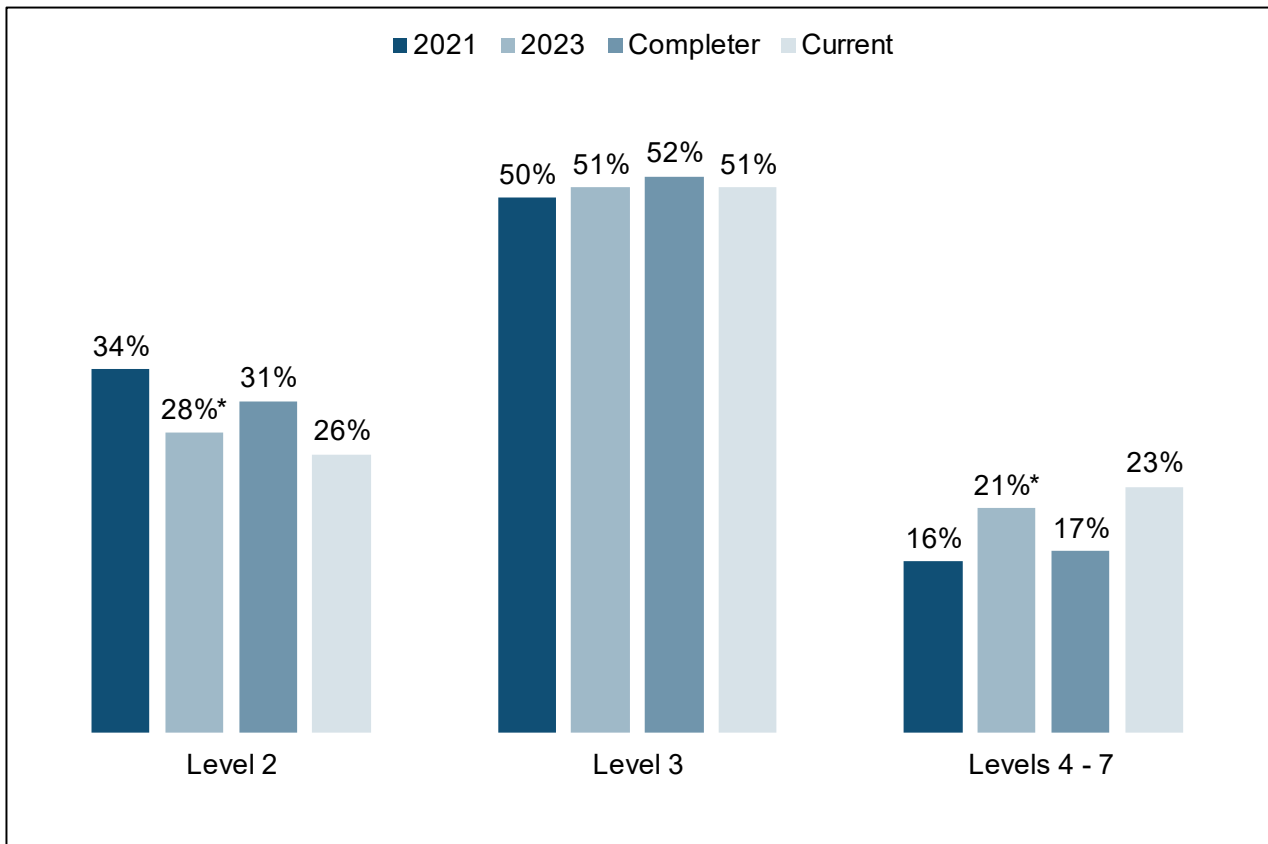
Figure 14-3. Proportion of employers by the size of their site



All 2023 employers (3,926), All 2021 employers (4,085), Completer (945), Current (2,981). * indicates where 2023 figures are significantly different to 2021.

Employer main level

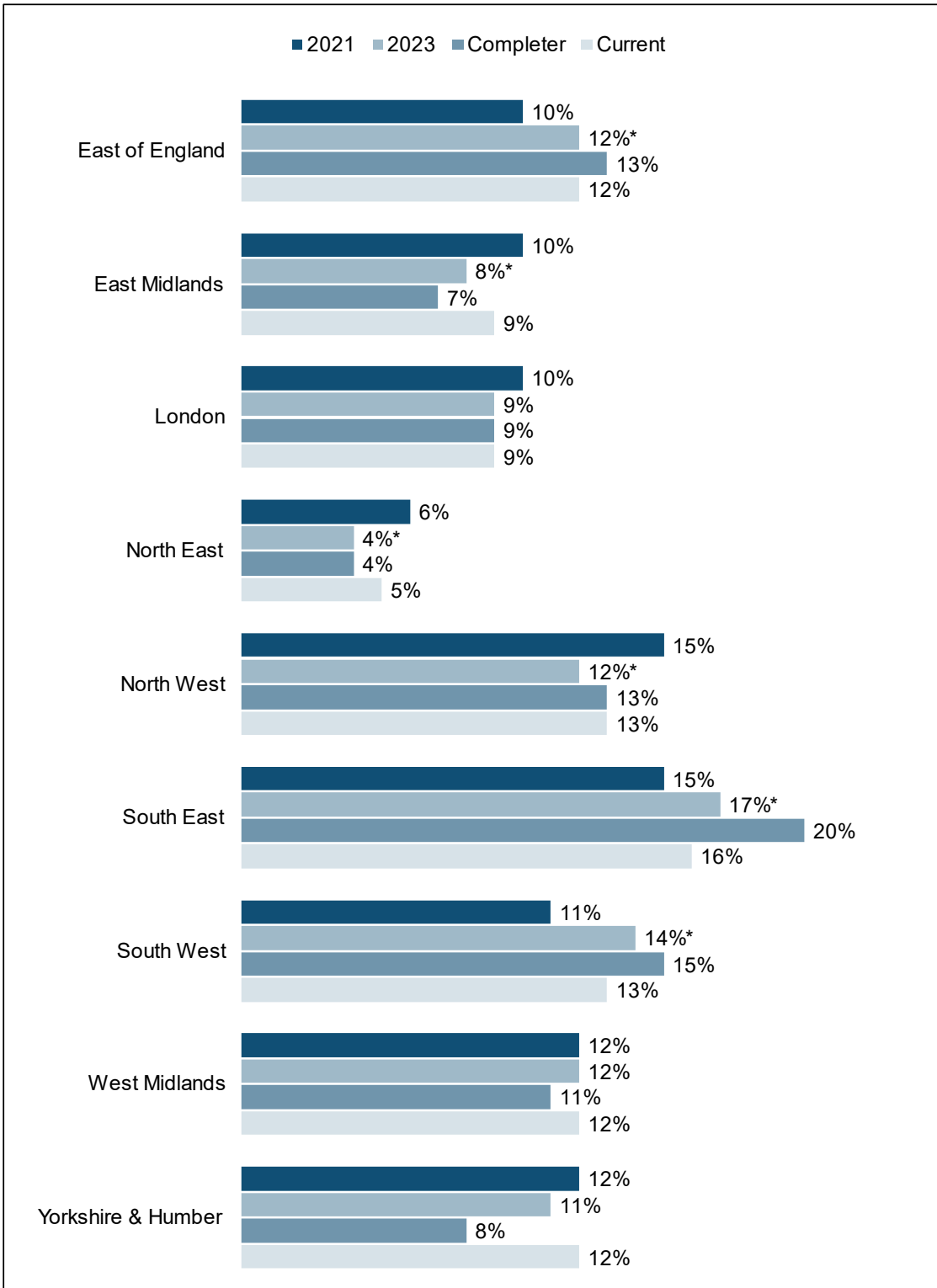
Figure 14-4. Proportion of employers by the level of their main apprenticeship.



Base: All 2023 employers (3,926), All 2021 employers (4,085), Completer (945), Current (2,981). * indicates where 2023 figures are significantly different to 2021.

Employer region

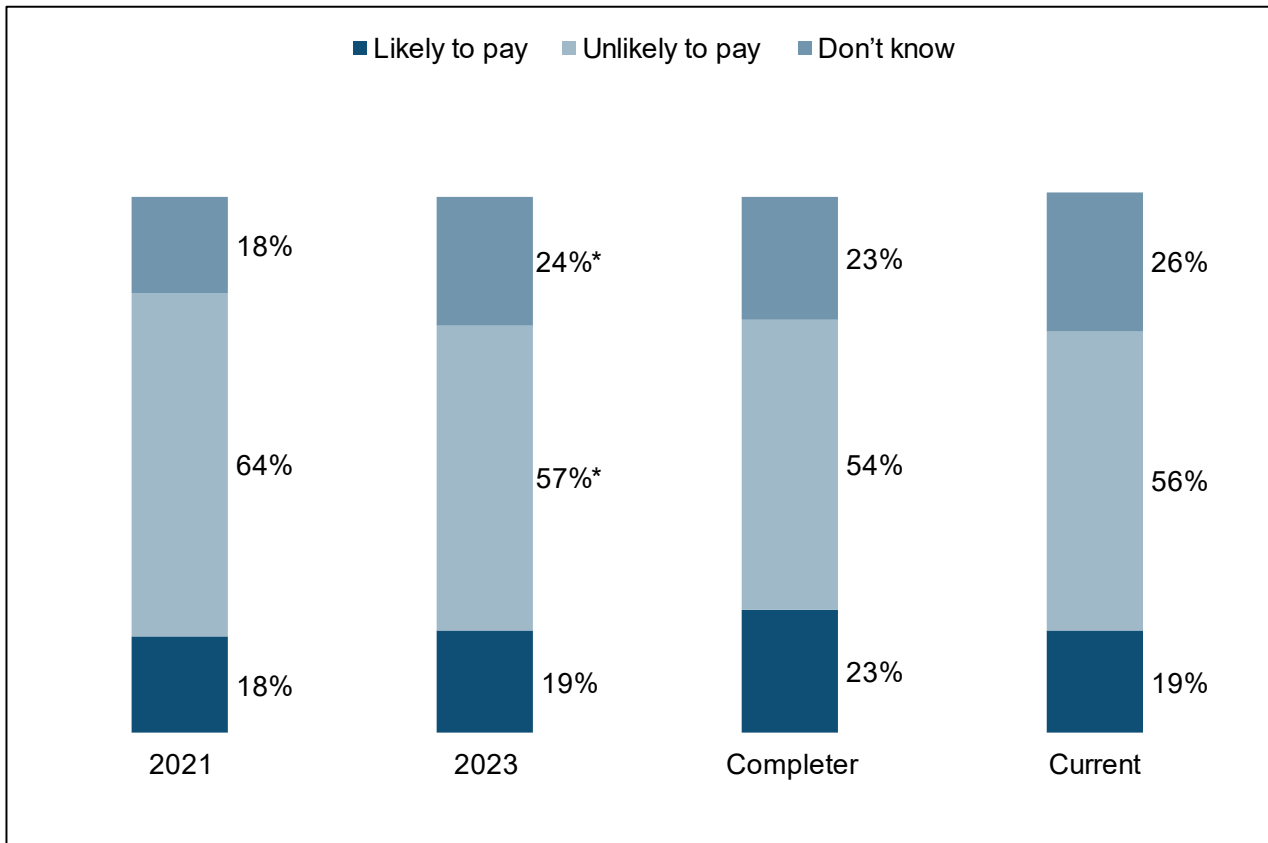
Figure 14-5. Proportion of employers by the region of their surveyed site.



Base: All 2023 employers (3,926), All 2021 employers (4,085), Completer (945), Current (2,981). * indicates where 2023 figures are significantly different to 2021.

Employer Levy payers

Figure 14-6. Proportion of employers who were likely and unlikely to pay into the Apprenticeship Levy



Base: All 2023 employers (3,926), All 2021 employers (4,085), Completer (945), Current (2,981). * indicates where 2023 figures are significantly different to 2021.



Department
for Education

© Department for Education copyright 2024

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Reference: RR1436

ISBN: 978-1-83870-558-9

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact www.education.gov.uk/contactus.

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications