

DAVIES LEARNING
SOLUTIONS RESPONSE
TO
COVID-19 POLICY
STATEMENT

Version: 03

Last Approved: 21/05/20

Confidentiality level: None

Change History

Version	Date	Author	Description of change
Version 2	11/01/2021	Janet Miles	Update in line with latest Government COVID guidelines
Version 3	08/07/2021	Janet Miles	Updated to include Roadmap out of COVID

Contents

1. Safeguarding and wellbeing of apprentices	3
2. Face to face coaching visits	4
3. Remote coaching sessions.....	4
4. Apprenticeship workshops.....	5
5. Exams and certifications	5
6. Other technical qualifications	6
7. ESFA.....	6
8. Apprentices.....	6
9. End point assessment	9
10. Employers	10
11. Appendix 1 COVID survey results	13
12. Appendix 2 Roadmap out of COVID Statement	14

This policy has been developed to address the global and national COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent serious disruption to business. Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, its impact and effect on all aspects of life and work the UK, in these challenging times we want to reassure you of the approach we are taking to and how we plan to continue to support our apprentices to progress with their studies, and protect you as our workforce with as little interruption as possible. This policy has been implemented and is used in conjunction with our Davies Group Business Continuity Plan.

We are committed through our delivery, operational and client relationship management teams to continue to provide a consistently high quality service and support to all of our apprentices on programme. We encourage and welcome comments and feedback from our apprentices to ensure that we continue to provide a high-quality of education, curriculum offer and education. Please see Appendix 1 for initial apprentice feedback on our support following our Response to COVID survey in December 2020.

1. Safeguarding and wellbeing of apprentices

Apprentices should only attend workplaces where they cannot work from home and it is essential for them to do so. Where it is essential for workers to attend their workplace, apprenticeship training and assessment can be delivered in the workplace where that workplace meets 'COVID-19 secure' guidelines on ensuring the workplace is safe.

Apprentices must follow the advice given to them by their employer regarding safe working from home practices. This includes working online, online safety including Prevent and cyberbullying and GDPR legislation. We encourage all of our apprentices to regularly check for the latest COVID-19 and other updates and advice from Government and the World Health Organisation's guidelines and information due to the daily changes and new statistics relating to the pandemic.

During coach-apprentice discussions and work together, apprentices are provided with relevant information focusing on health and wellbeing, how to care for their physical and mental health, setting up a work area, taking regular breaks from their online screen and IT tools. We advise them on exercising daily and online information relating to good exercise regimes, for both indoor and outdoor programmes, including leave their work desk to take-in some fresh air whilst maintaining social distancing.

We encourage our apprentices to keep in contact and check up on colleagues who they suspect may feel isolated or have a mental health issue which may be caused by social isolation. For example, a quick daily email or call can make all the difference to someone confined to their home during periods of self-isolation. Apprentices should speak to their coach if they have childcare issues and need to reschedule or need us to be flexible with timings of online webinar attendance or remote style meetings and training sessions and above all stay healthy, well and safe.

We have launched a series of online health and wellbeing modules on our learning platform Thrive for our apprentices that they can follow for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, stay safe whilst being a home worker and in self isolation and complying with social distancing. The modules include staying safe whilst working and socialising online, cyber bullying, health and hygiene and GDPR compliance.

Disruption to training

Because of illness, caring responsibilities and operational disruption, apprentices may be unable to attend training, and we may be unable to deliver training.

- For an individual, this might be necessary due to illness or self-isolation, or challenges in getting to their place of employment or location for training provision.
- For an employer, this might be necessary due to a temporary need to redeploy apprentices to different roles.
- For us as your training provider, this might be necessary due to challenges in providing training or assessment due to staff absences or closure of facilities.

If you are experiencing any barriers to learning please contact your Coach who will be able to support you with any concerns or for employers please contact your dedicated Client Relationship Manager.

Our **Safeguarding & Prevent Hotline** for any concerns or issues is open from 9.00am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday: call 0208 304 3666 and ask to speak to a Designated Safeguarding Office or email: DLssafeguarding@davie-group.com Outside these hours you can contact the Samaritans on 08457 90 90 90

2. Face to face coaching visits

Face-to-face coaching visits have been placed on hold and the model withdrawn from mid-March 2020 onwards and until further notice following the advice issued by the UK Government. These sessions will not recommence until we have received clear and formal instruction from the UK Government that it is safe to do so and that the lock-down is easing with specific rules and codes for all of us in our learning community to follow. As a result, all coaching sessions have moved to **remote sessions** for apprentices for the foreseeable future.

3. The Davies Learning Solutions remote coaching session

It is a requirement of ESFA funding rules that apprentices make good regular progress with their learning and development against the Apprenticeship learning outcomes and receive both on and off the job learning opportunities. Therefore, it is important that coaching sessions still happen, even if these are impacted in length, due to constraints caused by COVID-19 and additional pressures placed on an apprentice's time and by their employer, particularly if an apprentice is working in the insurance services sector or front line in

financial services to support clients. If an apprentice is not able to keep to their scheduled session with their coach, they contact their coach soon as possible to re-arrange on a suitable date and within a short timescale. We will however be mindful of the impact of COVID-19 and the effect that it is having on the global and our national economy and employers' businesses and will work closely with each apprentice and employer to find solutions when pressure is higher and time less.

Our remote coaching sessions with apprentices are hosted using Microsoft Teams which allows the coach and apprentice to share documents, information and screens using their desktops, provides a video conferencing facility that can accommodate a number of attendees. The employer and apprentice's line manager are able to join. Apprentices that do not have access to IT and Wi-Fi or their systems are not compatible are provided with a conference call number and pin.

Please note, we are only able to contact an apprentice through the email / telephone number we have on our records.

4. Apprenticeship workshops

Workshops form an important part of our curriculum scheme of work and contribute to the off the job learning activity in the relevant planned month. If a remote workshop session is booked, the apprentice should still attend this wherever possible. Any workshop sessions from 1st April 2020 booked for apprentices will be converted to shorter webinar sessions for the foreseeable future. This then maintains an engaging and effective learning opportunity without the apprentices losing their focus if the webinars were held over a longer duration.

If for any reason that an apprentice is not able to attend the session, they must inform workshops@Davies Learning Solutions training.com as soon as possible and we will arrange an invitation for attendance at an alternative session.

5. Exams and certifications

Davies Learning Solutions have worked closely with Awarding Organisations to ensure that where exam centres are fully operational for remote exam invigilation apprentices have the ability to book exams at the end of their modular study. Where assessments are assignment based there are no changes and this will continue to work as normal. **For more information apprentices will need to contact the CII directly to book and for any queries relating to pending exams: customer.serv@cii.co.uk and inform DLSoperations@davies-group.com and their coach of any changes to the exam date.**

All other Awarding Organisations that we also work with, such as CICM, CISI, PMI, etc. have the same processes in place. Please feel free to contact us on the above e-mail address if you have any queries or questions relating to these other Awarding Organisations.

6. Other technical qualifications

Apprentices are advised to refer to their coach as soon as possible to find out the relevant awarding body arrangements are in place.

7. ESFA

The ESFA has published guidance about how COVID-19 affects Apprenticeships, training and employers. The full guidance is available however, for ease, we have selected sections included within this policy which are more relevant to staff, apprentices and employers. The Government is updating Coronavirus guidance notes frequently, we are advising all parties and personnel that we work with to check for the most up-to-date information. The ESFA guidance is in three sections:

- Apprentices
- End Point Assessment
- Employers

8. Apprentices

What will happen to my apprenticeship if I need to self-isolate or I am working from home?

Apprenticeships are designed to be responsive to changes in an apprentices' circumstances. For example periods of illness etc. If you do need to self-isolate because you or a member of your household is ill, please discuss with your employer and coach about the most suitable way to continue with your apprenticeship or a break in learning may be an alternative. We are flexible and adaptable and can re-schedule remote calls for a convenient time to suit your circumstances. Please contact your coach to discuss a suitable time. Many of our coaches are working flexible hours so maybe able to schedule calls and work with you during the evening.

A short pause of less than 4 weeks in your Apprenticeship while you are in self-isolation means your end-date will not be affected.

A request for a formal break in learning of 4 weeks or more will need to be discussed with your employer and coach and this will result in all of your learning being paused and the planned end-date for your apprenticeship being re-planned, upon returning to learning after the break in learning.

If you have any issues with accessing our OneFile tracking and recording system or Teams (for remote video/conference calls) please contact our Operations Team DLSoperations@davies-group.com who will be able to help with your query.

My employer is placing me on furlough, what happens to my apprenticeship during that time?

Where an apprentice is furloughed, the work on his/her apprenticeship can continue, with no break in continuity and with an opportunity to work on your off-the-job training which will still contribute to your apprenticeship mandatory 20% of hours and will count during your furlough period.

What happens to an apprentice during a period of unpaid leave relating to monies that are usually paid during their apprenticeship and do they have access to universal credit?

Apprentices may be entitled to access Universal Credit during a period of unpaid leave. They may also have access to Universal Credit, even if they were working and being paid. Being on furlough or on a lesser number of hours could increase the rate of the Universal Credit entitlement, however this is on a case-by-case basis. Apprentices on unpaid leave may also be eligible for other benefits. [Find here.](#)

Through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, all UK employers will be able to access support to continue paying part of their employees' salary for those employees that would otherwise have been laid off during COVID-19. HMRC will reimburse 80% of furloughed workers wage costs to an employer up to a cap of £2,500 per month. If an apprentice is furloughed on the minimum wage, please note that the employer will need to top up the Government's 80% payment of each wage with the remaining 20 % to ensure that the wage paid to an apprentice is still within the minimum wage payment band.

How do I record progress towards my apprenticeship while I am subject to different working conditions like working from home?

Apprentices will already have been working on and have recorded their off-the-job training activities, working from home and during social distancing provides a good opportunity to focus on their 20% off-the-job work which will help them to gather hours and make swift timely progress in completing their apprenticeship. If an apprentices work circumstances change due to the COVID-19, and this affects an apprentices commitment to completing his/her minimum 20% off-the-job training, this means that an apprentices' training entitlement cannot be met. The apprentice will need to discuss this situation with their employer and their coach to explore the most suitable options available, in order that collectively the best approach is agreed and used to rectify the situation so that the apprentice is able to carry on with their apprenticeship and not be penalised.

Apprentices will already have been working on and have recorded their off-the-job training activities, working from home and during social distancing provides a good opportunity to focus on their 20% off-the-job work which will help them to gather hours and make swift timely progress in completing their apprenticeship. If an apprentices work circumstances change due to the COVID-19, and this affects an apprentices commitment to completing his/her minimum 20% off-the-job training, this means that an apprentices' training entitlement cannot be met. The apprentice will need to discuss this situation with their employer and their coach to explore the most suitable options available, in order that collectively the best approach is agreed and used to rectify the situation so that the apprentice is able to carry on with their apprenticeship and not be penalised.

My employer is laying me off/ making me redundant. What happens to my apprenticeship?

Apprentices are advised to contact their Davies Learning Solutions coach and we will find a way to support each apprentice through this period of time. If an apprentice is unfortunately made redundant by their employer, their apprenticeship may be able to continue and Davies Learning Solutions may still be able to support an individual and continue to provide training and support, based on each individual's circumstances. In the short term, Davies Learning Solutions can also provide support for apprentices in trying to find a new employer and employment so that they can complete their apprenticeship whilst receiving a wage/salary.

If I cannot work/ attend training, will I still be paid?

An apprenticeship is a job with training, so even when an apprentice is not able to continue to undertake the training, they still will be employed by their employer and will be paid in line with the details recorded in their contract of employment.

Where an apprentice is unable to work, Davies Learning Solutions advises that they speak to their employer to discuss the employee entitlement and sickness leave policy for continued employment wage/salary payments. The government is providing a range of support to employers during the furlough period to help them retain and pay the wages of their employees which includes apprentices.

I am on a fixed-term contract, which would ordinarily have given enough time to complete the training and the end-point assessment. If the training is delayed, and I have not completed my EPA before I leave employment, can I do the end point assessment afterwards?

An apprentice should be employed when they are taking their end-point assessment. Where a break in learning has been necessary, and the planned end-date for the apprenticeship has been extended we ask apprentices to speak to their employer and Davies Learning Solutions

coach. We expect employers to work with their apprentices to re-schedule their training, which may also include reviewing the apprenticeship agreement and commitment statement with the employer to ensure that each apprentices needs are catered for and a solution can be found. Davies Learning Solutions will monitor each case closely and regularly review each individual's apprenticeship and situation with their employer as the situation evolves.

Qualification certificates

Where awarding organisations are unable to issue certificates confirming that apprentices have completed the necessary qualifications to go through gateway, as a temporary arrangement we support training providers and employers in accepting a confirmation email from the awarding organisation as evidence of achievement. To ensure authentication, emails must contain the following information:

- apprentice details
- certification run date
- unique number

In due course the awarding organisation will issue the formal certification. Temporary flexibility for apprenticeship certificate address Apprenticeship certificates are usually sent to the apprentice's employer, but we have introduced a temporary flexibility to allow apprenticeship certificates to be sent to the apprentice's training provider address or to the apprentice themselves if the employer's office is closed. This will ensure that apprentices are not disadvantaged and held up as they plan the next steps in their post apprenticeship journey. The flexibility also applies to the current process to request a replacement certificate.

9. End point assessment

What will happen if I am not well enough to take my end-point assessment?

If an apprentice is unwell, self-isolating or unable to attend end-point assessment, we ask the individual to contact their coach as soon as they are able to. This will allow Davies Learning Solutions the maximum time to re-schedule the assessment. Apprentices will not be disadvantaged by not being able to go through EPA due to illness and a new date will be arranged for the apprentice to take their EPA.

Where the end-point assessment plan states that assessments must be conducted face-to-face, but cannot be under the current circumstances, can these be conducted remotely?

Where an assessment method requires face-to-face engagement, this can be conducted remotely, subject to the following conditions:

- Arrangements are agreed in advance by the EPA provider
- The apprentice's identity is verified by us and the EPA organisation
- Remote tests are supervised by an appropriately trained invigilator or assessor: who has the required qualifications and training and has not been involved in the training, preparation or line management of the apprentice
- Appropriate technology and systems are in place and accessible
- The impact that remote assessment may have on apprentices is to be taken into consideration, to ensure a fair and reliable assessment of occupational competence
- Where alternatives are not appropriate, a pause and re-scheduling might be the only action. Davies Learning Solutions are working closely with our EPA providers to ensure, where possible, EPA is progressed as planned.

If the current situation continues for a long period of time, would you consider awarding the apprenticeship without the end-point assessment?

We are currently in discussion with our EPA providers to seek a solution that will be effective for all parties involved. EPA organisations are being encouraged to advise the ESFA if they are cancelling or postponing EPAs for the provider's partnership manager to monitor the impact on apprentice's timely completion of their EPA and apprenticeship. We are contacting each EPAO directly and are providing updates in our guidance document with further information shared as we hear from each EPO with regard to their approach and support.

10. Employers

Due to business continuity measures in place for each apprentice and for us at Davies Learning Solutions, all staff are required to be available in their usual place of work. How can my apprentices continue their learning?

Employers are advised to contact their dedicated Davies Learning Solutions Account Manager so that we can discuss the best options available and find a solution that works for everyone involved in the apprenticeship.

If an apprentice is unable to attend their scheduled learning sessions, we have several options available:

- Apprentices can engage in digital or remote learning at a convenient time within their agreed working hours
- An apprentice could take a short pause in their learning of less than four weeks while still completing by their apprenticeship planned end-date
- An apprentice could take a formal break in learning of 4 weeks or more and re-calculate their planned end-date upon their return to learning

I am having to move staff into different and/or business critical roles that are not related to their apprenticeship. What happens to their apprenticeship?

If an apprentice's role is changing, the employer is asked to contact their Client Relationship Manager to discuss the new role and discuss if the new role is still appropriate at the right level and functions to allow the apprentice to continue and complete his/her apprenticeship.

Our strategy is to do our utmost to ensure that an apprentice can promptly resume their apprenticeship and continue to successful timely completion of their EPA. The ESFA funding rules currently state that a break-in-learning must be initiated by the apprentice. Employers and training providers can now temporarily also initiate a break-in-learning where the interruption to learning is greater than four weeks.

If the change of job role and function becomes permanent, the employer must inform and discuss the change with their Client Relationship Manager and agree which apprenticeship would be more appropriate to place the apprentice on so that the apprentice is able to continue to build on their substantive new knowledge and skills development relevant to the sector and level of work.

What do I do if I think an apprentice is not well enough to work (especially in a health setting)?

Employers should follow the [government's guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

I am a Non-Levy paying employer recruiting for/ have apprentices due to start. Can I still go ahead and reserve funds on the system?

Employers who do not pay the Apprenticeship Levy are able to reserve apprenticeship funding through the Apprenticeship Service in line with the published guidance. If an employer needs help and support with this, please contact Davies Learning Solutions for information.

What happens to my funding reservation as a Non-Levy employer, if my apprentice cannot start their apprenticeship?

Reservations will expire if they are not converted into an apprenticeship commitment within 3 months of the identified start date as detailed in the reservation document. Where an apprenticeship commitment is required and a previous reservation has expired, a new reservation must first be made.

More information on furlough:

Visit the <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> select the Employment and Financial Support Tab.

11. Appendix 1 – Apprentice COVID Survey Results

In December 2020 Davies Learning Solutions conducted a response to COVID survey to gather information and ensure that we are providing support and guidance to our apprentices during these difficult times and where/how we can improve our delivery of service. Main headline responses and key stats below:

93% of apprentices felt that their Coach had been flexible and met their needs throughout the pandemic

87% of apprentices had additional support from their Coach

95% said that they felt supported by their employer during the pandemic

81% of apprentices said that they are happy with their progress

74% said that they had managed a health and work life balance

3.7% of our apprentices were furloughed during the pandemic but continued with their training

“My coach has provided consistent support regarding exam help and revision. We continued our meetings which are flexible around shift patterns we have introduced in the office”

“My coach has been really supportive during lockdown and understands that I have 2 young children and meetings can be interrupted at any moment. He has been very understanding”

“Coach is very supportive when I speak to her about COVID related concerns and is proactive in checking up on me. She helped turn the experience into some positive learning outcomes and has made extra efforts to ensure changes to our exam schedule don’t impact out apprenticeship work”

13. Appendix 2 – Roadmap out of COVID

As an independent training provider we will closely follow the operational guidance outlined by the Education & Skills Funding Agency:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/further-education-coronavirus-covid-19-operational-guidance>

Although classroom based education has successfully returned, as a work-based training provider, we find the majority, if not all, of our apprentices remain working from home. Our employers are currently reviewing their working policies, with some proposing to move to complete home working, some with an agile working arrangement (with a mix of office and home-based working) and others a return to the office. We expect the majority of our employers will adopt an agile working arrangement and it is important that we remain adaptable with our Apprenticeship delivery and changing working arrangements.

The below outlines our proposed roadmap out of COVID and the progress made at the point of this policy being published:

- Step 1: Staff consultation
- Step 2: New office space
- Step 3: Employer and Apprentice task force group
- Step 4: Delivery model steering group
- Step 5: Development of digital platforms
- Step 6: Remain adaptive and agile

Steps 1 & 2 – Staff consultation & new office space

At Davies Learning Solutions, our workforce remains home working and our office closed. In Feb 21 we invited our pre COVID office-based staff to undertake a survey and provide their views around future working arrangements. Following this consultation with our staff, and aligning to Davies Group strategy, we will be offering our staff an agile working arrangement, where they can either work from home or the office. Staff will be able to book hot desks on the days which they are attending the office and in agreement with their line manager can choose the relevant balance between home and office working.

New offices are being considered (in the same location as existing office) to accommodate a more flexible working space including hot desks, informal meeting/break out areas and meeting rooms. We will not reopen our office until it is considered safe to do so and aligned to both government recommendations and Davies Group policy.

Step 3: Employer and Apprentice task force groups

In March 21, we held remote Employer and Apprentice task force group meetings to gain their insight into their working arrangements as they come out of COVID and also their preferences around our Apprenticeship delivery model. Prior to COVID-19 we delivered our

Apprenticeship programmes via face to face coaching sessions and workshops. We provide this delivery now 100% remote, employers have enjoyed the flexibilities that this has brought and have expressed interest in a more hybrid and blended model of remote and face to face delivery.

The insights gained from these sessions are currently being collated and a report will be circulated to Board to consider as part of shaping our future delivery model.

Step 4: Delivery model steering group

In addition to gaining employer and apprentice insight and preferences, we also established a staff delivery model steering group. The aim of this group is for staff to put forward their experiences of delivering over the COVID 19 period and recommend delivery model improvements/methods moving forwards. This activity is being treated as a distinct project with SMT involvement and ownership. A nominated Quality Managers will report and present the final recommendations from this group to board, which will be considered alongside employer and apprentice insight to shape our future delivery model.

Step 5 Development of digital platforms

Davies Learning Solutions has invested in two new platforms. The first is a learning experience management system called Thrive. This was launched during COVID and provides a strong structure and area for our digital learning content to be housed and accessed by apprentices. Apprentices follow learning pathways and are signposted to content by their coaches, as well as having the option to explore the content themselves.

The second platform is currently being implemented and due to launch for the start of the new academic year. It will offer a new MIS and ePortfolio system called Aptem and will replace Tracker & OneFile. This will provide a strengthened apprentice and coach experience and provide a greater level of real time reporting and progress recording, tracking and monitoring.

These two platforms allow for a digital learning experience for our apprentices with our coaches/tutors still at the heart of the delivery providing regular coaching sessions and workshops to bring the learning and content to life.

These platforms will be fully embedded within our new delivery model and also provide opportunity for social learning within cohorts.

Step 6 Remain adaptive and agile

Davies Learning Solutions will remain adaptive and agile in response to changing and emergent working and learning environments. Through continued consultation with our employers, apprentices and staff and by responding to government and Davies Group guidance and policies, we will ensure that we are keeping everyone safe whilst at the same time providing the best possible learning experience for our apprentices.