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## Education

# Apprenticeships in England deliver lowest quality of further education, analysis finds

Ofsted data show one-third of apprenticeships need improvement or are inadequate



Ofsted's figures suggest providers are failing to deliver on the government's skills agenda, with 42% of apprentices not completing their course © Auremar/Dreamstime

**Bethan Staton** in London 8 HOURS AGO

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Workplace apprenticeships in England continue to deliver the poorest quality of all further education types, according to exclusive analysis of Ofsted data that will deal a blow to a central plank of the government's skills strategy.

Figures compiled by website Apprenticeship Data Insights (ADI) show that Ofsted, the education inspectorate in England, last year graded apprenticeship provision as requiring improvement or inadequate in one-third of cases — a much higher level than classroom training.

By comparison, 12 per cent of young people's classroom provision and 16 per cent of adult classroom teaching were below the inspectorate's expected standards.

The figures, which are available in raw Ofsted data that has been published but not previously analysed, suggest providers are failing to deliver on the government's skills agenda. In the past five years, this has centred in large part on an apprenticeship system paid for by employers with a focus on driving up quality and increasing uptake.

ADI director Nick Linford said all quality metrics pointed to “employers and apprentices receiving a poorer quality experience” than people taking classroom-based courses.

“If young people are to be encouraged into workplace learning, they deserve at least as good an experience as they can expect at college,” he added.

Since 2017, apprenticeships in England have been funded by a levy that requires employers whose annual wage bills exceed £3mn to set aside 0.5 per cent of salary costs.

Employers use the levy to cover the costs of training by approved providers. [Official figures](#) show about two-thirds of apprenticeships were run by private providers and the rest by colleges or other public bodies last year.

The system was introduced to improve quality and increase the number of apprenticeships from 2mn to 3mn.

In February, then chancellor Rishi Sunak reiterated the government's commitment to apprenticeships, saying they played “an essential role in boosting our economy, creating jobs and transforming people's lives”.

Since the levy was introduced, however, take-up has declined. Only 713,000 people were last year registered as apprentices, the lowest annual total since 2010. Official figures show that 42 per cent did not complete their course.

The analysis by ADI also showed independent training providers, most of which are private companies, were less likely to meet Ofsted standards than other further education organisations. Just 64 per cent of apprenticeship provision in this group was good or above, compared with 76 per cent in colleges.

Jane Hickie, head of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, a trade body, said in response to the analysis that Ofsted had inspected a “significant number” of new providers with little experience in workplace training.

“These providers should not have been allowed into the market,” she said, adding that a clear majority of independent providers were good or outstanding. “AELP are working closely with Ofsted to drive quality in a positive direction.”

The Department for Education said it was investing in support for training providers and introducing new accountability measures.

“We know there is more to do to ensure that all apprentices get the high-quality training they need to build successful careers,” it said. “Apprenticeships continue to deliver great outcomes for people of all ages, and both apprentice and employer satisfaction remains high.”

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