

Apprentice Supervisor Report

Research,
insights and
best practices

Introduction

Apprentice supervisors play a crucial role in the success of apprenticeship programmes. While considerable research and guidance exist for apprentices and employers, there has been limited focus on the experiences of those who line manage and supervise apprentices day-to-day.

Our research aimed to address this gap by surveying apprentice supervisors - who are typically also the apprentices' line manager - to understand their experiences, challenges, and the value they bring to apprenticeship programmes.

This report summarises the findings from 256 apprentice supervisors. The research revealed that while supervisors generally feel confident in their roles and recognise the value apprenticeships bring to their teams, they also face specific challenges.

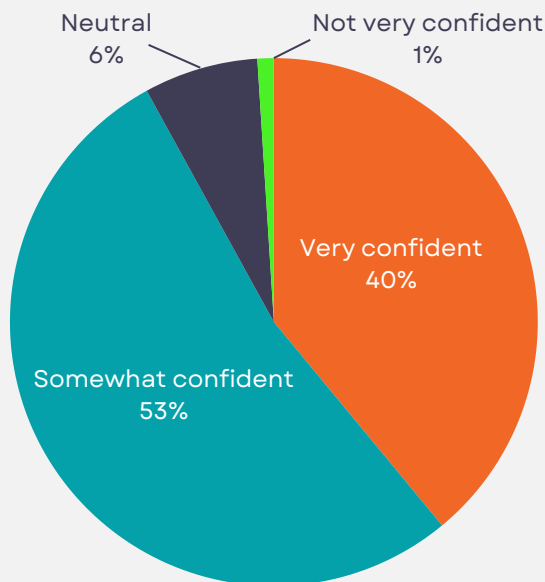
The survey highlighted that supervisors are most confident in the "softer" aspects of their role, such as building rapport and supporting wellbeing, but feel less confident in apprenticeship-specific responsibilities such as keeping apprentices on track with their learning.

Key challenges identified include finding enough time to support apprentices effectively and understanding how apprenticeships work. Despite these challenges, supervisors overwhelmingly agree that apprenticeships bring significant value to both their teams and the apprentices themselves.

This report provides practical guidance for current and future apprentice supervisors, as well as their employer organisations, drawing on survey insights and best practices from across the apprenticeship landscape.



The case for confidence



40% of supervisors reported feeling very confident in supervising apprentices, with 53% feeling somewhat confident. This suggests a generally positive outlook among supervisors regarding their ability to fulfil the role. Having less confidence is, in part, attributable to the length of experience of apprenticeship supervision – 32% of supervisors with less than one year's experience felt very confident compared to 42% of supervisors with more than one year's experience.

Feeling confident as an apprentice supervisor is critical to the success of the apprenticeship and to maximising the impact that the apprentice has within the organisation.

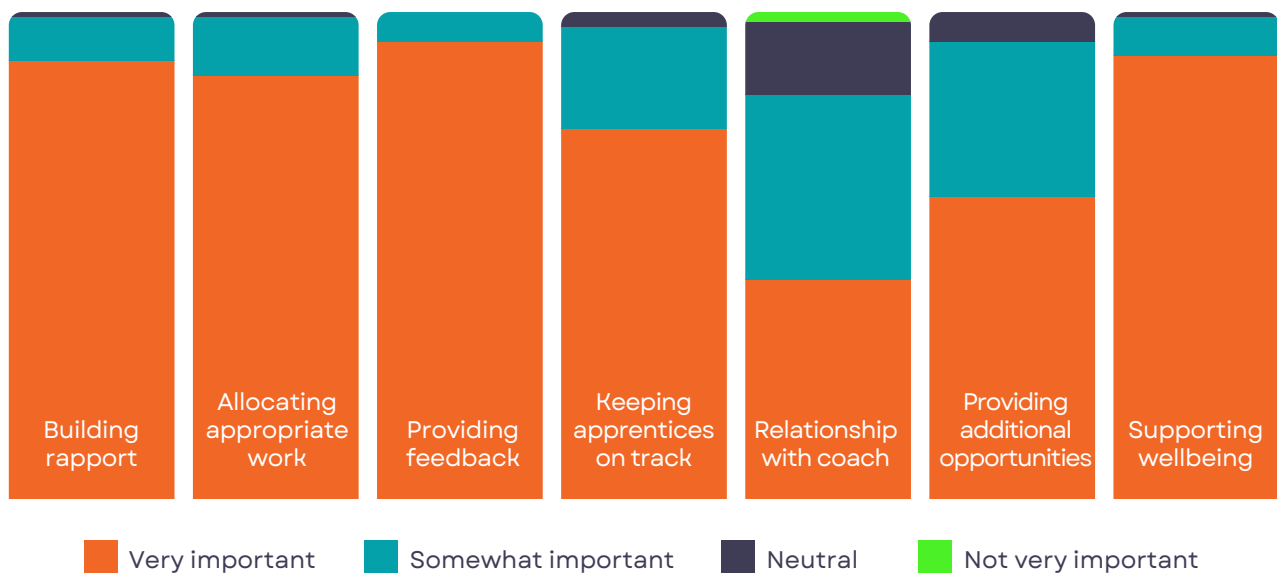
Supervisors who are confident in their role are more readily able to earn the trust of their team members, and this is especially true for apprentices – who are typically new to the role and, in many cases, are in the early stages of their career. It is critical that apprentices feel secure with a manager who is confident, decisive and able to provide a clear vision, in order for them to understand what is required of them, how they fit into the wider organisation, and why their role is important – ultimately feeling valued and motivated to perform at their best.

For those new to the role of supervising apprentices, they should consider connecting with more experienced colleagues who can share insights and best practices. It is important to take time to understand the key differences between supervising apprentices and regular employees, and to recognise that supervising newly recruited apprentices may require more foundational support than working with existing employees. Good apprenticeship providers should also be able to provide guidance on how to be an effective supervisor.

In order to further understand supervisor confidence, we explored what competencies are important to supervising apprentices and how supervisors feel they perform in each of these activities.

Understanding what's important

When asked about the importance of various aspects of their role, supervisors rated providing feedback (94%), supporting wellbeing and motivation (91%), and building rapport (91%) as very important. These were followed by allocating appropriate work (87%) and keeping apprentices on track with their apprenticeship (76%). Providing additional training/work opportunities and having a good relationship with the apprentice coach were seen as less critical, although were still seen as very important by 62% and 45% respectively.



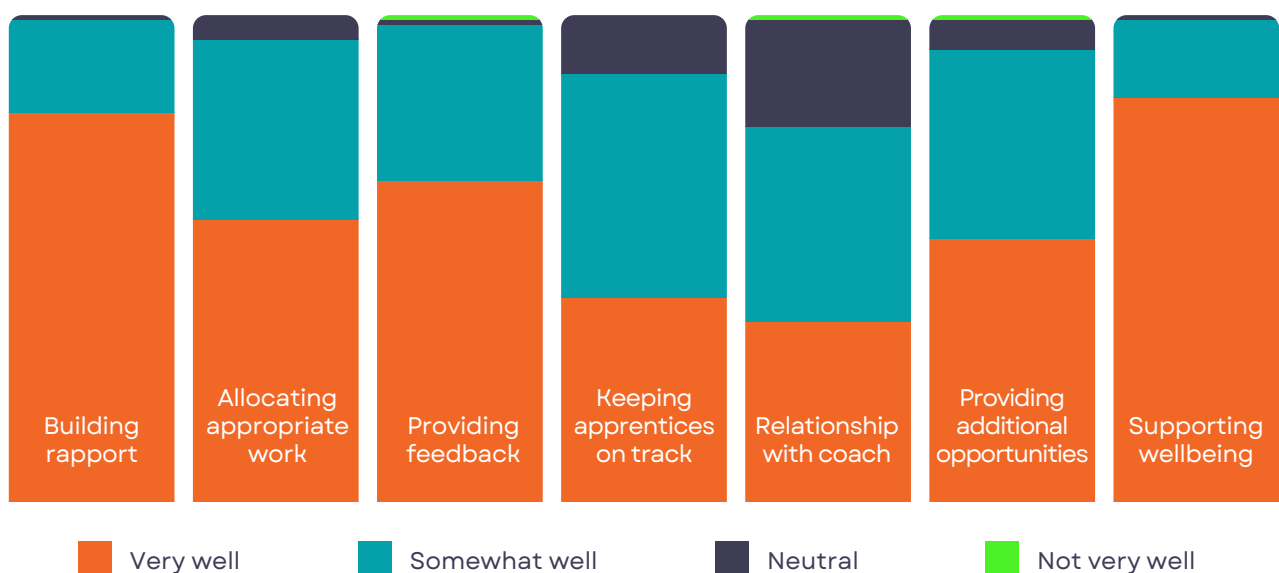
It is interesting to note that the “softer skills” of management were seen as more critical to supervising apprentices than practical activities. This is in line with current thinking and research on management and leadership, which identifies that soft skills are what drive motivation, collaboration and innovation within teams. Keeping apprentices on track and providing additional training opportunities - although important - will have little impact, without a good supervisor-apprentice relationship which fosters open communication, engagement and resilience.

When talking about building rapport and supporting wellbeing, many supervisors commented on recognising differences and having to adapt their management style to suit the apprentice – “I have learnt to be adaptable to apprentices’ ways of learning in order to provide effective support” and “each person is an individual and has their own requirements for how they respond to feedback and how they require instructions / management”. Supervisors also talked about the importance of patience, “allowing people to make mistakes and learn from them” and accepting “it’s a marathon, not a sprint”.

Understanding supervisor performance

Ratings of how well apprentice supervisors felt they were fulfilling each of the competencies deemed important were more mixed but still relatively high, reflecting their overall confidence levels in supervising apprentices.

The activities that supervisors were most likely to think they were doing very well were building rapport (80%) and supporting wellbeing and motivation (83%). Keeping apprentices on track with their apprenticeship (42%) and having a good relationship with the apprentice coach (37%) were the areas that supervisors were least likely to feel they were doing very well.



Again here, it is the softer skills which supervisors feel they are performing more effectively. This is likely because they are skills that they have built from their experience of general line management that can easily be transferred to apprentice supervision. However, this doesn't mean that the aspects specific to supervising apprentices should be ignored.

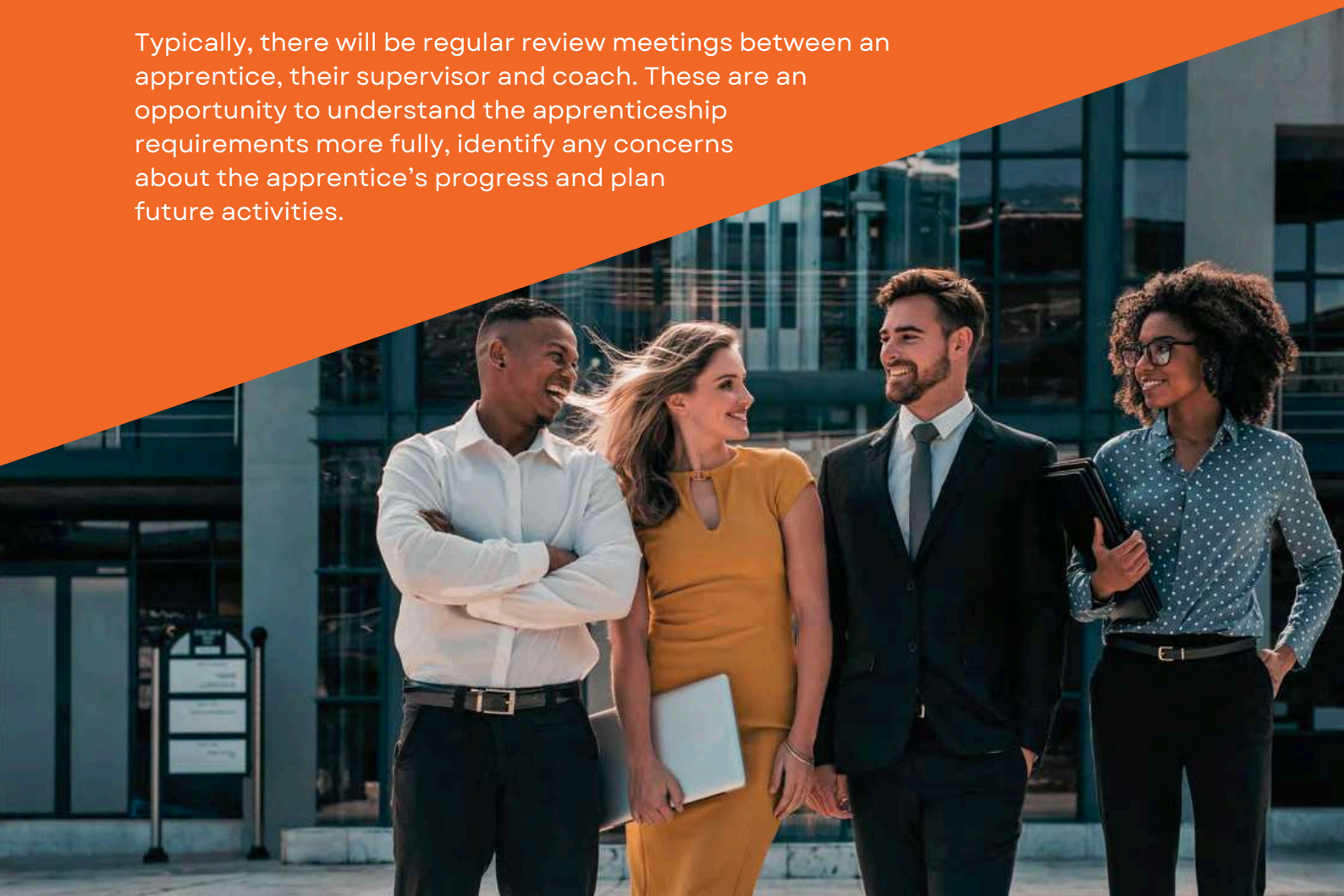
Providing additional training/work opportunities for the apprentice supports their overall learning journey and produces more well-rounded team members who can perform effectively in their role. Supervisors should consider enabling their apprentice to:

- Shadow other departments, teams or colleagues
- Participate in in-house or regulatory training
- Network with other apprentices in the organisation
- Work with a mentor who is outside the apprentice's immediate team.

In the survey, one supervisor commented that they recognise “the importance of ensuring that the whole team be involved in the training of the apprentice and ensuring they have access to a wide range of opinions and views about work / the job / the business. I don't have all the answers or perspectives and each member of our team has added something different to our apprentice and her training.”

Building a relationship with the apprentice coach is also important. The coach is in a unique position of having an excellent knowledge of the apprenticeship and what is required, whilst also understanding the apprentice, their supervisor and organisation. The coach can therefore provide valuable guidance to support aspects that the apprentice or supervisor are finding challenging, and can also play a crucial role in aligning workplace experience with the training requirements.

Typically, there will be regular review meetings between an apprentice, their supervisor and coach. These are an opportunity to understand the apprenticeship requirements more fully, identify any concerns about the apprentice's progress and plan future activities.



Filling the gaps

There are some notable gaps between perceived importance and self-assessed performance. The largest gaps were in areas more specific to apprenticeship supervision, such as keeping apprentices on track with their apprenticeship (34 percentage points), allocating appropriate work (29 percentage points) and providing constructive/positive feedback (29 percentage points). This suggests that supervisors may benefit from additional support and guidance in these areas.



Keeping the apprentice on track with their apprenticeship can be a challenge for supervisors. They should enable the apprentice to have allocated time for their off-the-job elements, when they can work uninterrupted from the day-to-day activities of their role. Monitoring how effectively this time is used by the apprentice can be important, particularly for apprentices who are earlier in their careers or new to the world of work. Good apprenticeship providers will have systems that supervisors can access to see where their apprentice is up to.

Other advice from supervisors included:

- “Don’t assume the apprentice will catch up later down the line if they aren’t given time to complete their work.”
- “It’s critical to free up time in the working week to enable the apprentice the time to do their apprenticeship work. If I don’t support and insist it happens, the work of the business can easily take over.”
- “I’ve had to support my apprentices to develop time management skills. This has then supported them with staying on track with tasks.”



In order to **provide effective feedback**, supervisors should schedule regular structured feedback sessions with their apprentice. It is beneficial for supervisors to be as clear as possible in their feedback, particularly for younger apprentices who may have less appreciation of what is required of them in their role and organisation. Supervisors should be specific about what they're doing well and areas for improvement, using concrete examples (that link to their apprenticeship standard where possible).

Allocating appropriate work can be challenging for supervisors at the early stages of the apprenticeship. Supervisors should start with structured tasks, providing clear guidelines on how they should be completed. Over time, it will be possible to introduce a mix of routine activities to build confidence and more stretching work to promote growth. As the apprentice develops in confidence and competence, autonomy and the complexity of allocated work can be gradually increased.

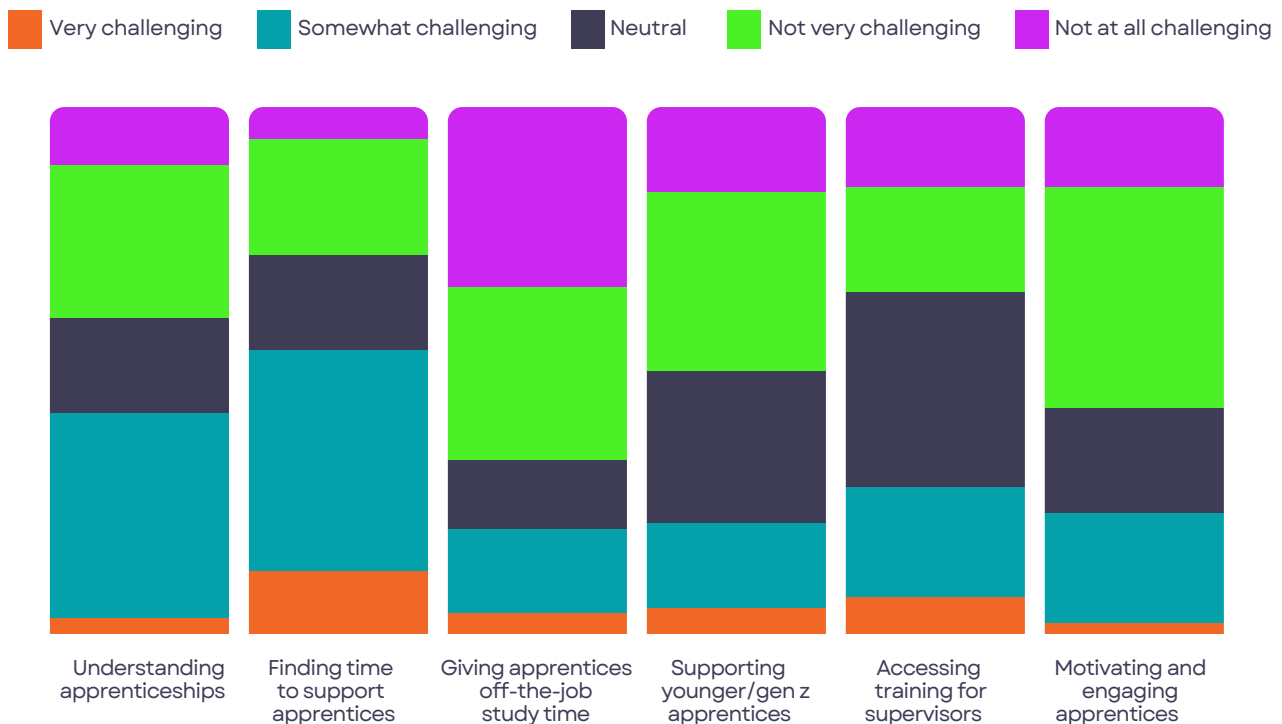
Involving other members of the wider team in the apprentice's journey can also be useful in identifying appropriate work that can be delegated. Supervisors can empower other team members to also assign activities to the apprentice, which will increase the team member's management skills and provide the apprentice with a greater variety of work.

Other suggestions from supervisors included:

- "Give the apprentice a little nudge to push them slightly out of their comfort zones so they can start learning new areas."
- "Always look at jobs/tasks from another perspective such as what could the apprentice learn from doing this task and can any of their objectives be achieved by doing it."

Rising to the challenge

In the next set of questions we asked supervisors about their biggest challenges around apprentice supervision.



Finding enough time to support the apprentice was cited as the biggest challenge, with 53% finding this very or somewhat challenging. There is no getting away from the fact that supervising an apprentice will take up management time initially but depending on the circumstances of the apprentice and organisation, it is often not long before the apprentice is saving management time by completing simpler tasks that the manager would have previously done. And spending more time in the early stages often reduces the need for intensive supervision later.

Supervisors should consider:

- Blocking out dedicated time in their calendar for apprentice supervision
- A structured meeting format to make one-to-ones more efficient
- A "buddy" system where experienced team members can provide additional day-to-day support
- Appointing an apprentice mentor, someone that sits outside the apprentice's immediate team, and that the apprentice can go to for advice and guidance
- Technology to streamline communication, such as shared tracking documents or project management tools.

One supervisor made these suggestions: “Appreciate that it will take time. And bring other members of the team into taking care of and supporting the apprentice - not to let it all fall on me as their line manager. This takes the pressure off me as a line manager but also enables them to learn more.”

The next biggest challenge was **understanding how the apprenticeship works** which 42% of supervisors rated as very or somewhat challenging.

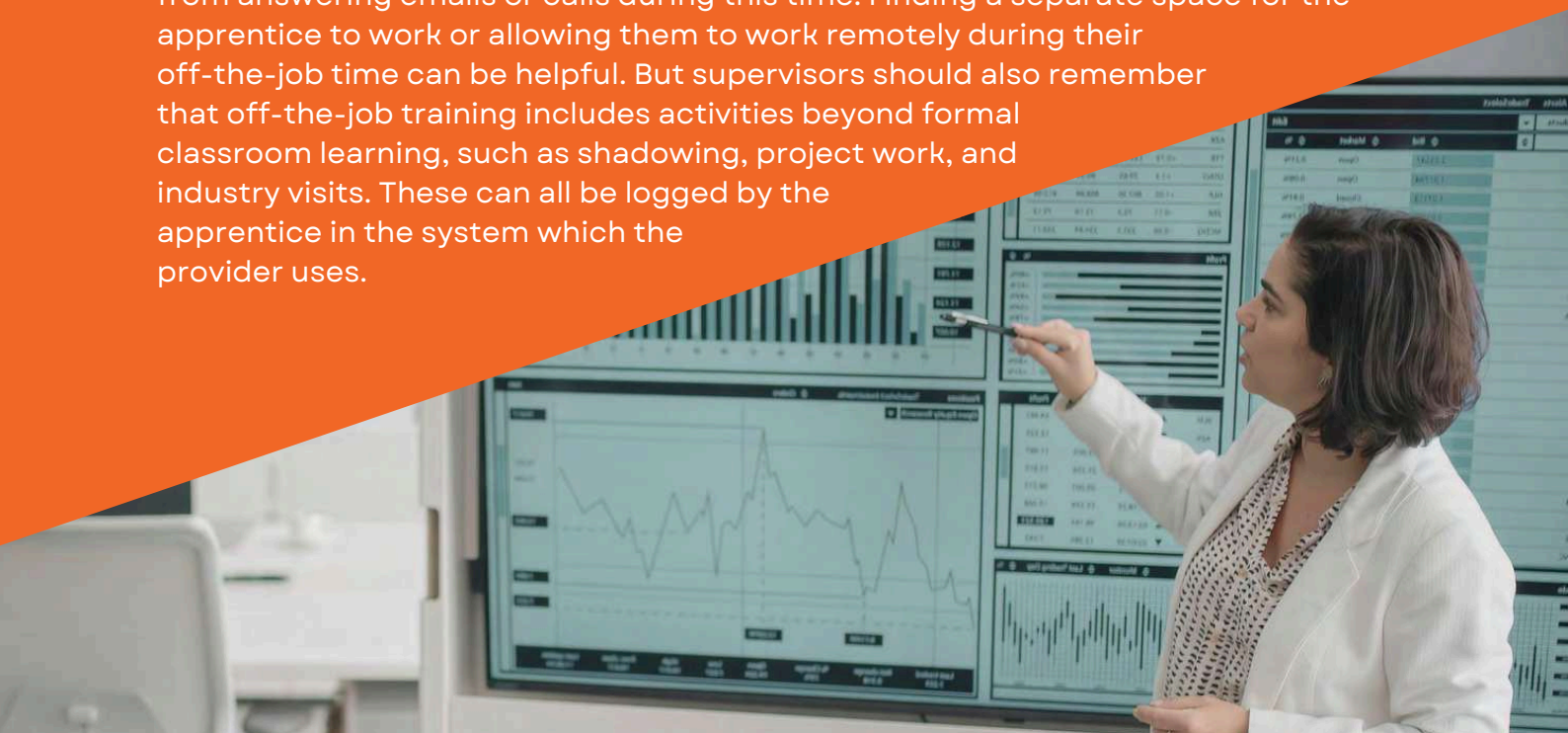
Supervisors should be engaged as early as possible in conversations between the employer and training provider. Good training providers will be able to provide supporting documentation such as a copy of the apprenticeship standard and end-point assessment requirements. The standard outlines the specific knowledge, skills, and behaviours the apprentice needs to develop. They will also often provide supervisor orientation sessions to aid understanding of structure and timelines, and should take supervisors through the apprentice’s training plan in detail.

Supervisors should talk to their apprentice about what they are learning and look ahead to future module content. This allows the supervisor to plan work activities that align with the apprenticeship standard. Regular communication with the coach can also help with this process.

Supervisors must also be clear on the off-the-job training requirements from the outset. As one of our supervisors said: “It felt it was important to set in stone my expectations with the apprenticeship qualification and to manage their time effectively. For example, ensuring their protected time was used for their project rather than extra free time.”

Off-the-job study time must average at least six hours per week, taken during normal working hours, but the actual amount varies by individual and by apprenticeship with some higher-level apprenticeships, such as solicitor, requiring eight to nine hours every week. This time should be protected for the apprentice, and many find it helpful to set aside a particular day or two half-days for the activity.

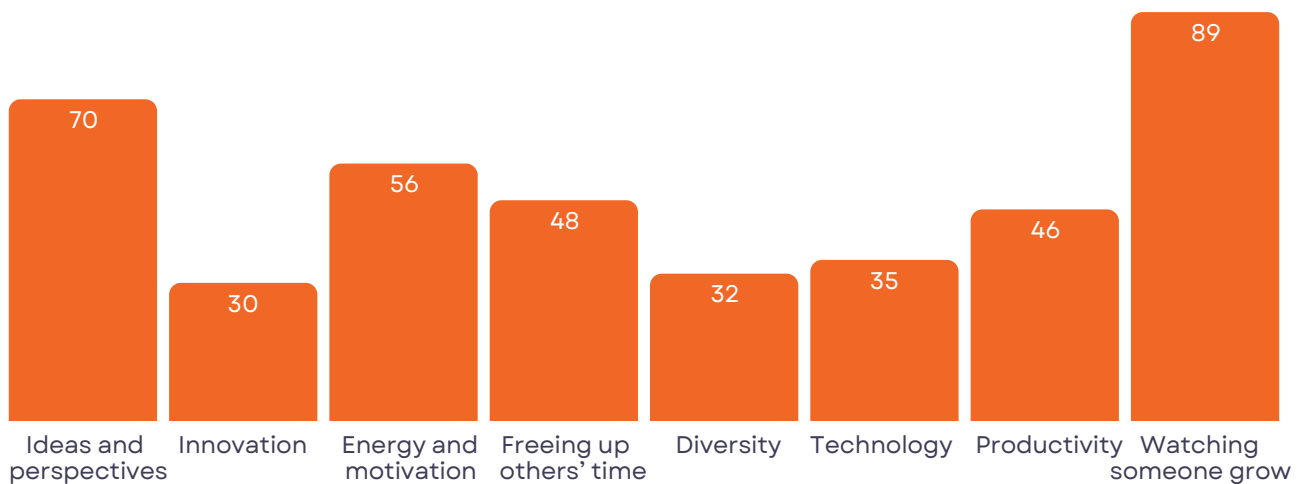
The apprentice will have coaching sessions and visits to attend, as well as independent learning and tasks to complete. If possible, apprentices should be freed from answering emails or calls during this time. Finding a separate space for the apprentice to work or allowing them to work remotely during their off-the-job time can be helpful. But supervisors should also remember that off-the-job training includes activities beyond formal classroom learning, such as shadowing, project work, and industry visits. These can all be logged by the apprentice in the system which the provider uses.



A rewarding investment

Despite the challenges that supervisors sometimes have, they were overwhelmingly positive about the value of apprenticeships, with 94% agreeing that apprenticeships bring value to their team and 95% agreeing they bring value to the apprentices themselves.

When asked about the specific ways apprentices bring value to their teams, the most common responses were watching someone develop and grow (89%), new ideas and perspectives (70%), and energy and staff motivation (56%).



Supervisors also talked about how with the apprenticeship “you have the opportunity to mould them into the team member you want”. Others commented on how having someone younger within the team had had a positive effect on older members: “Seeing how younger individuals work can often make older generations appreciate change. This sometimes proves that work can be done better or quicker if the apprentice is doing it with a new and fresh pair of eyes.”

Finally, many supervisors talked about the impact that their apprentices had had on them personally: “Managing an apprentice has taught me more about my style of management than anything else. It's been incredibly rewarding and I've discovered that you can get just as much from managing an apprentice as the apprentice themselves.”

To get the most out of the apprentice, supervisors and organisations should:

- Create opportunities for apprentices to share fresh perspectives and ideas
- Involve apprentices in innovation projects where they can provide different viewpoints
- Use apprentices' questions about established practices as opportunities to review and improve processes
- Create a culture where learning is valued across the team, not just for apprentices
- Consider how the apprentice's developing skills can fill gaps in the team
- Share the positive impact of apprenticeships with stakeholders across the organisation - capture case studies and success stories to demonstrate the value apprentices bring.


Conclusion

Apprentice supervisors play a vital role in the success of apprenticeship programmes, providing day-to-day support, guidance, and development opportunities for apprentices. While supervisors generally feel confident in their roles and recognise the value of apprenticeships, they also face specific challenges that require support and guidance. By understanding the apprenticeship standard and the training plan, managing time effectively, creating supportive learning environments, allocating appropriate work, supporting off-the-job training, maximising value, and addressing common challenges, supervisors can significantly enhance the apprenticeship experience for all involved.

The insights and guidance provided in this report aim to support current and future apprentice supervisors in fulfilling this important role, ultimately contributing to the success of apprenticeship programmes and the development of skilled and motivated employees.

Recommendations for Organisations

While this report primarily focuses on supervisors, the survey findings also highlight areas where organisations can provide better support:

- Develop formal training programmes for apprentice supervisors
 - Create communities of practice where supervisors can share experiences and best practices
 - Ensure supervisors have sufficient time allocation for apprentice support
 - Recognise and reward effective apprentice supervision
 - Establish clear escalation routes for addressing challenges
 - Provide resources and guidance on understanding apprenticeship standards and requirements
 - Create organisational cultures that value learning and development.
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Supervisor profile

Out of the 256 respondents, most (71%) had supervised only one or two apprentices, with the majority (77%) having less than three years of experience in this role. The survey revealed that supervisors have experience with a diverse range of apprenticeship programmes, with business administration (40%) being the most common, followed by paralegal (23%) and solicitor (19%) apprenticeships.

Supervisors reported working with both newly recruited apprentices (55%) and existing employees undertaking apprenticeships (59%).

Methodology

A 14-question survey was distributed to 1,880 apprentice supervisors between 24 and 27 February, achieving a 13.6% response rate with 256 responses.

The survey was co-designed with independent research company, Laura Lyon Research Trends, and distributed via Survey Monkey and Hubspot.

