

BPF Apprentices in Industry Data Report 2019

18th March 2020

Contents

Objective and conduct of the study	3
Key Findings.....	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Apprentices	6
3. Recruitment.....	6
4. Age Groups	7
5. Sector Breakdown.....	8
6. Recruitment.....	9
7. Apprenticeships	10
8. Summary	11
9. References	12

Objective and conduct of the study

The survey is intended to gauge the number of apprentices within the plastics industry, as well as their level, age and specific sector. This will help facilitate the British Plastics Federations (BPF's) efforts within the education and skills sector.

The report is based on the "Education and Skills Survey Report" conducted in 2016. Since then, the BPF has rolled out polymer ambassadors training sessions with Cogent Skills, hosted a yearly apprentice awards ceremony with the Worshipful Company of Horner's and developed a Level 4 Apprenticeship standard via a trailblazer group just to mention a few. In addition, the Education and Skills committee is now monitoring and developing Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to keep record of progress.

The report will help better understand the skills gap in the Industry and ensure the BPF has a sound grasp of future training requirements. The survey was conducted by the BPF. The questionnaires were administrated by Mr Mohamed Elkhaila at the BPF and all information received from specific companies has been treated confidentially. Analysis was conducted by Mr Mohamed Elkhaila at the BPF and only he had sight of the data received.

The survey was conducted, as with all other BPF surveys, in line with UK and EU Competition Law.

The survey was conducted via a questionnaire sent to all members of the BPF. A total of 68 responses were received.

This report does not reveal any information specific to any companies and only shows trends and averages of the figures received.

The British Plastics Federation has taken every possible care to ensure that this document is correct in all aspects.

However, the BPF cannot be held responsible for any errors therein, nor accept any responsibility for any use which may be made of the information in this report. All information given in this report is given in good faith, but without legal responsibility.

March 2020

Key Findings

This summary lists some of the Key Findings from the report, including important statistical points realised within it.

- **Approximately 90% of respondents currently take on apprentices.**

This highlights the industry's interest in apprentices and their efforts in addressing the growing gap in skills.

- **In total, the respondents have 526 apprentices. Of those, over 46% were recruited in 2019 alone.**

With almost half of the apprentices recruited in 2019 alone, the industry is actively taking action to plug this ever-growing gap. This data is encouraging and suggests that we could see an increase in the upcoming years in apprentice recruitment.

- **Over a third of all apprentices are recruited between the ages of 18-20.**

- **Over half the apprentices recorded are in an engineering role at 51%, whilst processing is the next most common sector with 16%.**

Together the apprentices enrolled in these two disciplines amounted to over 67% of the total intake. This data appears to be in-line with the fact that the plastics industry is a manufacturing sector.

- **Training providers contributed to the highest percentage of recruits.**

25% of all apprentices were recruited via training providers, highlighting their importance to attracting new talent and upskilling existing staff.

- **Level 4 and 5 apprentices make up 14% of apprentices currently undertaking courses.**

Where members identified Level 4 as an area for further development, the BPF has successfully helped develop a Level 4 standard.

1. Introduction

The BPF's education and skills committee is constantly aiming to assist members with valuable information that would benefit them in sourcing talented personnel, raising awareness of the resources available and updates on changes within the education and skills sector. Furthermore, the committee aims to provide students with information about the plastics industry, information on how to embark upon a career in plastics and the enlighten them to the different pathways available.

Manufacturing industries in the UK have long faced challenges in addressing the growing gap in skills. The plastics industry has certainly experienced this and the BPF has facilitated efforts to help bridge the generational skills break. Manufacturers have shown a change by prioritising apprentices over graduates [1]. The government in April 2017, introduced the apprenticeship levy at 0.5% for all employers with a pay bill of more than £3 million annually. The money is then invested in increasing the number of apprenticeships and improving the quality of training provided. It is also worth mentioning that this levy is mandatory regardless of whether an employer has apprentices or not. This introduction was accompanied by the Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS). The purpose-built online portal is intended to aid employers with searching for training providers, recruiting apprentices, managing their levy and accessing apprenticeship funds. The main drawback to the system was that it was only accessible to employers who contributed to the levy. However, during January 2020, the DAS was made available for non-levy payers. The plastics industry is composed of approximately 97% small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) [2], hence the significance of this change. This benefits the plastics industry allows non-levy paying companies to a more information than previously. Moreover, employers will be able to access levy funds which have been paid but not used. Theses are held as general funds by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

For more info, see our apprentice brief:

<https://www.bpf.co.uk/media/download.aspx?MediaId=2509>

2. Apprentices

The total number of apprentices currently in industry received from the respondents is 526 and the total number of employees is 21,726. This shows that apprentices make up 2.4% of the total workforce. Looking at the 2016 report, this is a slight decrease from the 3.7% previously. With the skills shortage growing, this highlights the need for continued work on promoting apprentices within our industry.

Table 1: Main respondents' values regarding apprentices and percentage breakdown.

Total Number of Employees	Total Number of Apprentices	Apprentice Percentage of Total Workforce - 2016	Apprentice Percentage of Total Workforce – 2019
21,726	526	3.7%	2.4%

3. Recruitment

Employers were asked whether they did recruit apprentices at all. Approximately 90% all respondents currently take on apprentices. This is encouraging and highlights the industry's effort.

Percentage of Employers who take on Apprentices

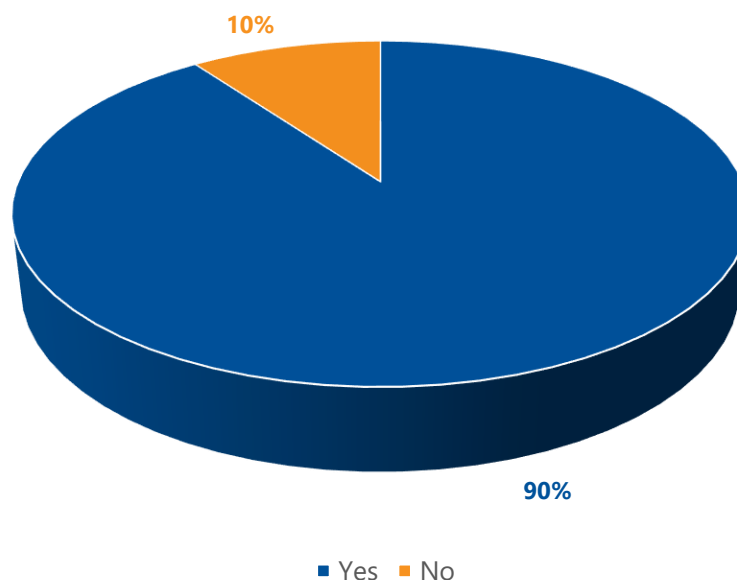


Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who currently recruit apprentices.

Furthermore, of the employers who do recruit apprentices, 46% of the total 526 apprentices currently undertaking apprenticeships were recruited in 2019. Courses range from a Level 2 to a Level 5 which vary in length from 12months to 48months.

4. Age Groups

Employers were asked on the most frequent age group that they recruited apprentices. The age groups were not equally spaced intentionally as the groups created cover the critical education ages. The range covered was 16- 24 and 25+.

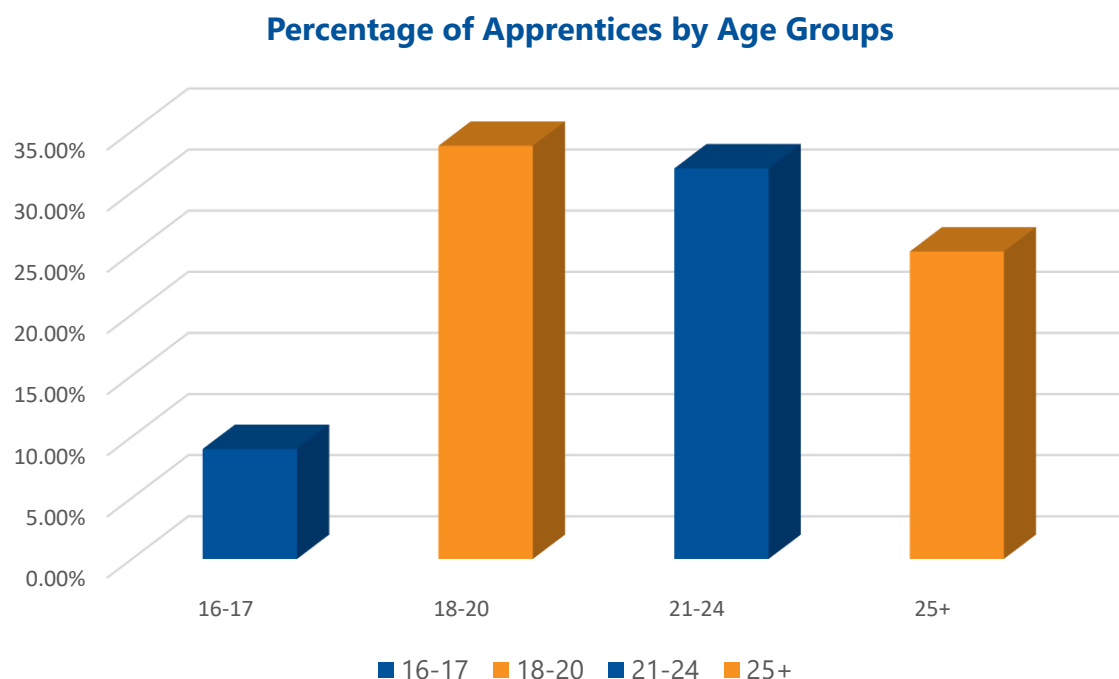


Figure 2: Percentage breakdown of the different age groups apprentices were recruited.

The data in Figure 2 shows that the largest percentage of apprentices are between the age group of 18-20-year olds. This is followed closely by 21-24 then 25+. The lowest percentage category is 16-17-year olds.

Apprenticeships can start as early as 16 years old, however, members believe that it is too early as the teenagers are not ready for a full-time job. This includes health and safety constraints on machinery usage as some equipment requires a minimum age of 18 years old for use. The data agreed with the reservations which employers shared.

In line with the wider manufacturing sector in the MAKE UK report [3], younger apprentices remain the focus. 16-24-year olds account for 95% of apprentices is the results provided by MAKE UK whilst the BPF saw 75% accounting for the same age range.

5. Sector Breakdown

There is a wide variety of apprenticeships which can lead to a career in the plastics industry. In order to dive deeper into the numbers, the survey requested a category breakdown of the apprentices recruited. The different sectors identified were, Engineering, Processing, Management, Clerical, Sales and Other. As the main gap in industry has been identified over the years as the shortage of “skilled operatives” specifically, the two most relevant categories are Engineering and Processing. Figure 3 below displays the percentage of intake of each category.

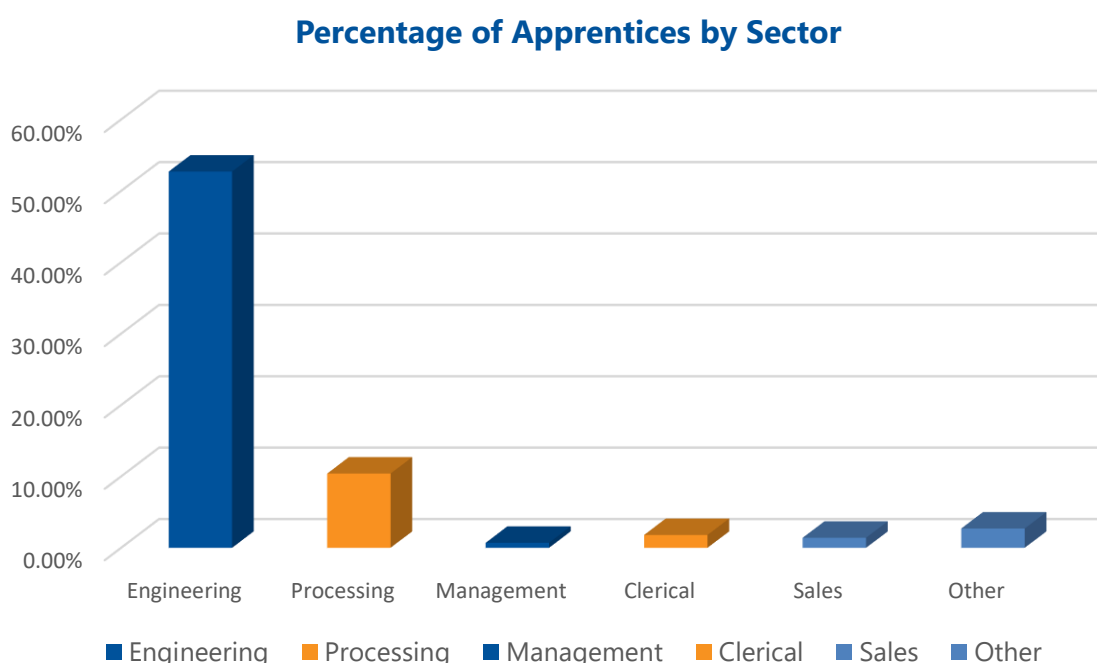


Figure 3: Percentage breakdown of the different age sectors where apprentices were recruited.

The data shows that the highest percentage of apprentices by sector in the plastics industry is within Engineering at 52.7%. The second highest is processing with 10.4%. As these are the two most relevant sectors when addressing the shortage in “operatives”, it is clearly something the industry is addressing with a positive total contribution of 63.1%.

The MAKE UK report showed that manufactures are continuing to recruit apprentices in engineering disciplines as they accounted for 60% of recruit’s vs 40% for non-engineering apprenticeships [3].

6. Recruitment

There are many different avenues which employers can use during recruitment of staff. The shortage in talent is highlighted throughout and the BPF seeks to understand the most common route taken by employers to help direct the committees focus. Once the largest contributing route is identified, the BPF can facilitate efforts in ensuring the support of that route. The categories included were Websites, School Visits, Careers Fairs, Recruitment Agencies, Apprenticeship Agencies, Training Providers and Others.

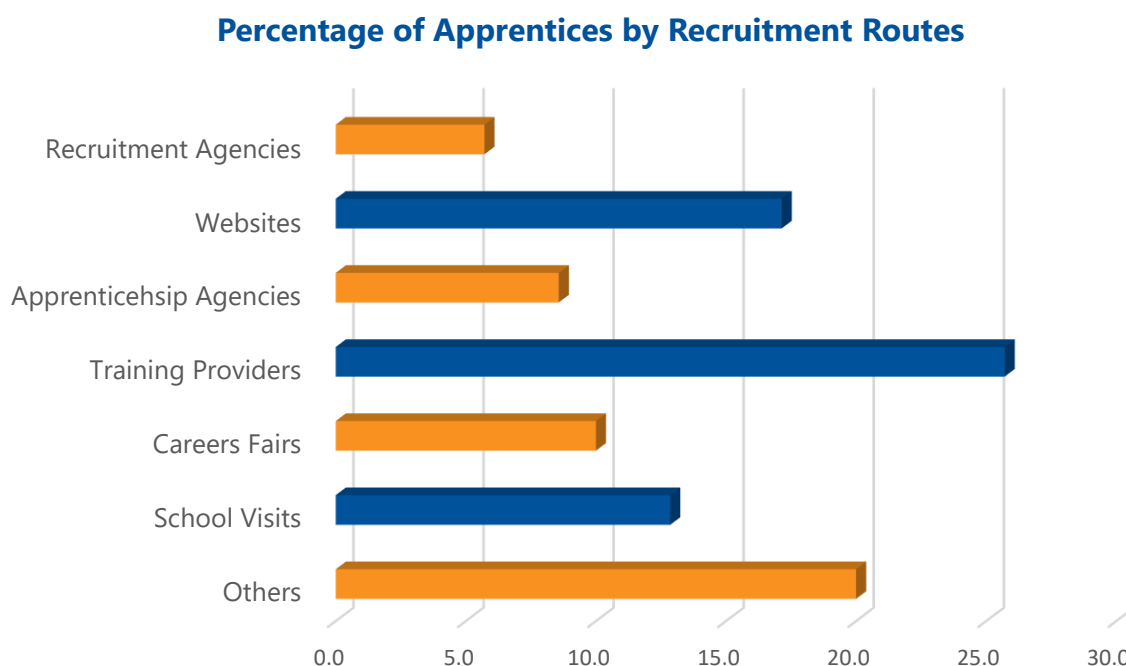


Figure 4: Percentage breakdown of the different avenue's apprentices were recruited.

Figure 4 shows that the most common avenue of recruiting apprentices is through training providers with a high of 25.7%. Training providers play a vital role in ensuring that companies recruit the most competent apprentices within the industry. The BPF supports training providers in their work and collaborates with many of them through the Education and Skills Committee. It is positive to see their work recognised in this section as the largest contributor of apprentices to the industry. The second highest contribution avenue is "others", which includes family members, company partnerships, in-house talent suppliers, recommendations (i.e. word of mouth) and annual recruitment drives. The third largest contributor is websites. The BPF helps sign post training through its guide to training section on CareerZone.

7. Apprenticeships

There are many levels and types of apprenticeships which a student can undertake that lead to a career in the plastics industry. This can include apprenticeships in processing, manufacturing or engineering. As plastics are used in many applications, the variation of products and production routes are endless. In the 2016 Education and Skills survey, the results showed that as the level of apprenticeship increased, so too did the importance it had to the plastics industry. The 2019 report looked at the current number of apprentices completing each level to supplement the data from 2016. Figure 5 shows the percentage breakdown per level of apprenticeship.

Percentage of Apprentices at Different Levels of Apprenticeships

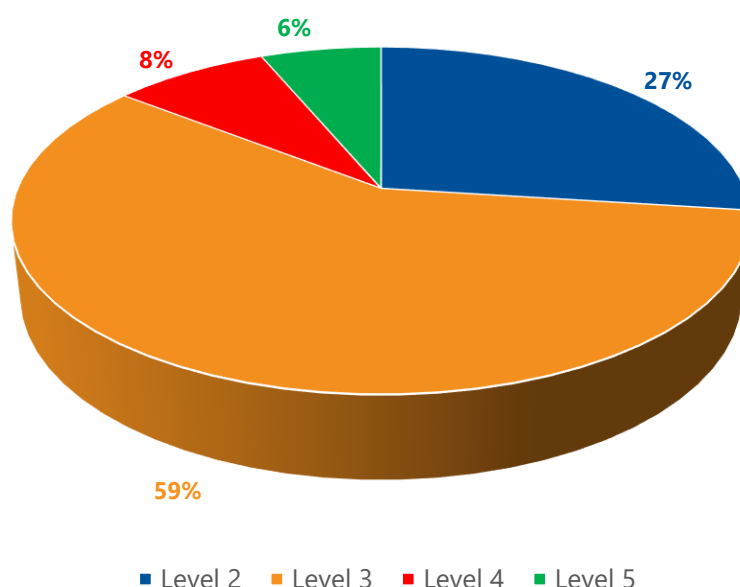


Figure 5: Percentage breakdown of the different avenue's apprentices were recruited.

The data shows that as the level of apprenticeship increases, the proportion of apprentices at that level decreases. The second highest percentage of students is at Level 2. In fact, Level 2 and 3 accounts for 86% of all apprentices whilst Level 4 and 5 only accounts for 14%. The BPF members in the 2016 skills report that level 4 is a key area where training is needed. Whilst Level 4 apprenticeship starts come in at 8%, the BPF has worked closely to develop a Level 4 Engineering Manufacturing Technician standard which contains polymer specific modules. This is now live.

In line with the wider manufacturing sector in the MAKE UK report, the majority of apprentices are in the intermediate level which is equivalent to Level 3 [3].

8. Summary

Some of the key findings from this report showed promising and encouraging data. 90% of employers take on apprentices, 46% of the number of apprentices stated were recruited in 2019 and over half of all apprentices seen from the respondent's data are in an engineering related apprenticeship. Although the proportion of apprentices on a Level 4 and 5 apprenticeship is low, the development of a Level 4 standard should help address this imbalance. It is worthwhile noting that apprentices are mainly being recruited via training providers. The providers play a major role in recruitment and the BPF can help by closely aligning its ambitions. In conclusion, the data provided highlights the industries need to continue working in addressing the gap.

9. References

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