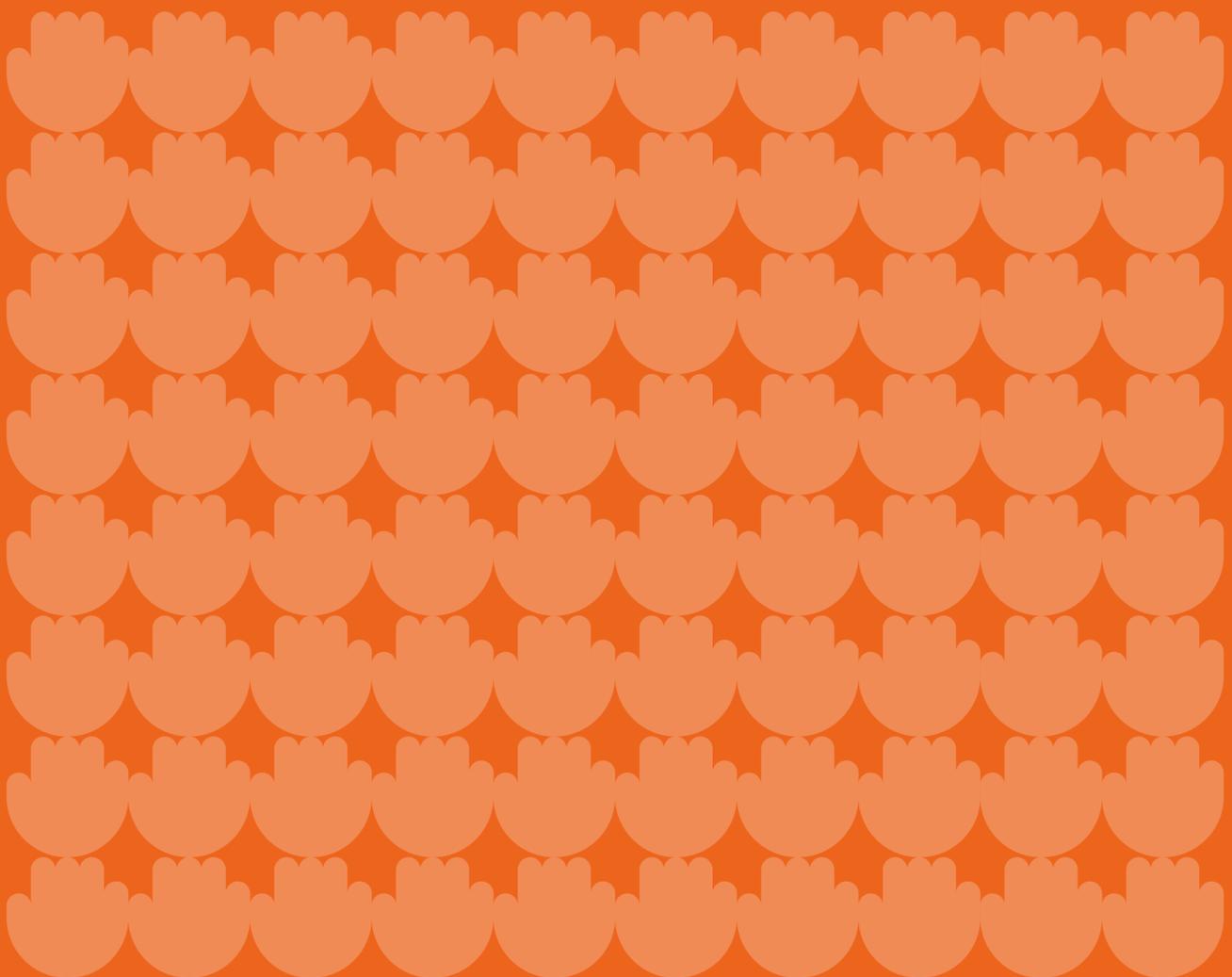


Apprenticeships for older people

Perceptions and experiences of apprenticeships among Greater Manchester residents

5th July 2021



Contents

Introduction	2
Background	2
Project Rationale and Aims	3
Policy Context	4
Apprenticeships.....	4
Older people.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Results	7
Demographics	7
Older apprentice experiences	9
Perceptions from the general public.....	12
Conclusions.....	17
Recommendations	18

Introduction

Background

In Greater Manchester, we want to improve the lives of older people, so that residents can contribute to and benefit from sustained prosperity and enjoy a good quality of life. The GM Ageing Strategy sets out 12 key pledges which offer a framework for achieving this vision, including a pledge to “create opportunities to maximise the skills and experience of older workers”. Evidence shows that good employment beyond the age of 50 can support financial resilience and promote positive emotional wellbeing. Good quality work can also contribute to opportunities to remain socially connected and improved healthy life expectancy¹.

Good jobs and training, both in work and for those looking to reskill or re-enter the workforce, are a key part of this vision, and apprenticeships can be an important part of achieving it.

In Greater Manchester we will create opportunities to maximise the skills and experience of older workers

Apprenticeships are available to people of any age, including over-50s, however there is a lingering perception that apprenticeships are only for young people, and those at the very start of their careers. This may mean that older people are not aware that they can do an apprenticeship, and so miss out on these opportunities. There are other lingering misconceptions about apprenticeships, including that they are only in manual professions, and that they are poorly paid, which may put off people of all ages.

¹ [Greater Manchester Combined Authority Age-Friendly Strategy, 2018](#)

Despite this, many older people do undertake apprenticeships, often as in-work development, as a way to achieve mandatory qualification in a new job (such as in children's residential care), or as a way to reskill. In GM, 834 people over the age of 50 started an apprenticeship in the 2019/20 academic year, which is 5% of all apprenticeship starts in GM. Many of these starts were in business and management, but also in health and social care, engineering, retail, and hospitality.

Project Rationale and Aims

This project has two aims:

1. To understand the experiences of older people in GM who have done or are doing an apprenticeship, and
2. To understand the perception of apprenticeships among older people in GM.

Both aims contribute to the wider goals of raising the profile of apprenticeships in GM, improving access to apprenticeships for older people, and ensuring apprenticeship provision for all learners in GM is of a high quality.

Anecdotally, we understand that older people may be put off an apprenticeship, and that those who do take up an apprenticeship may face different challenges to their younger peers. This project will provide detail on the most influential factors, and offer an evidence base and recommendations for future work in this area.

Policy Context

Apprenticeships

In 2015, the Government set out its ambition for 3 million new apprentice starts by 2020, with an obligation on the Government to report annually on its progress toward this.

This was followed by the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in April 2017. The levy must be paid by all UK employers with a wage bill of over £3 million per year. The levy is set at 0.5% of the value of the employer's pay bill, minus an apprenticeship levy allowance of £15,000 per financial year. Apprenticeship levy funds can then be used to pay for the training and assessment of apprentices.

There is currently no upper age limit for apprenticeship starts, however historically there have been various financial incentives to encourage employers to recruit apprentices aged 16-18 and 19-24, with no equivalent incentives for over 24s. Since August 2020, in response to unemployment as a result of the covid-19 pandemic, employer incentives of £3,000 per apprentice have been introduced for apprentices of any age. However these are in addition to existing incentives of £1,000 that employers already receive for hiring an apprentice who is aged 16 to 18 years old, or is under 25 with an education, health and care plan or is a care leaver. There are also national insurance savings for employers that hire apprentices aged under 25. In combination, this means that while there are financial incentives to hire apprentices of any age, the incentive to hire young people is greater.

There is no explicit provision for apprenticeships for older people in ESFA funding rules; over 50s are considered part of the wider '25 and over' category. Over 50s can be paid the apprentice minimum wage (currently £4.30 per hour) during the first year of an apprenticeship, though many employers chose to pay more, but after the first year they must be paid at least minimum wage for their age, (currently £8.91 per hour).

Older people

Age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, meaning that no-one may be discriminated against because of their age. There is an exception for organisations to use positive action to encourage or develop people in an age group that is under-represented or disadvantaged in a role or activity.²

The Greater Manchester Ageing Hub was established in 2016, with the initial aim of “helping many more people aged 50 and over stay in work and get into work”³, and in 2018, the Greater Manchester Age-friendly strategy was launched, with an ambition to “create opportunities to maximise the skills and experience of older workers”⁴. More recently, The Centre for Ageing Better, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and the Department of Work & Pensions have announced the ‘Greater Manchester Employment Support for Over 50s’ pilot programme to tackle worklessness in over 50s⁵.

² [Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

³ [Greater Manchester Ageing Hub](#)

⁴ [Greater Manchester Combined Authority Age-Friendly Strategy, 2018](#)

⁵ [Centre for Ageing Better, Feb 2020](#)

Methodology

A survey was developed by colleagues across the GMCA's Education, Work and Skills department, including the apprenticeships & technical education team, and with the GM Ageing Hub. The Centre for Ageing Better also supported the development of the survey.

The survey included 93 separate questions, but participants were directed down different routes depending on their profile, so they experienced the survey as around 20 questions. The survey was built by the GMCA research team in SurveyMonkey to be distributed online, and all the questions were optional (none required a response to move on).

The survey was distributed through various professional networks including the 10 local authorities, GM public sector network, Jobcentre Plus, GMLPN, and the GM Ageing Hub. It was also shared on social media, and featured on *Talking About My Generation*, a group of older community reporters working across GM.

One possible challenge was identified around reaching older people who are not online or do not regularly use the internet. While it was not possible, due to the pandemic, to seriously explore any in-person engagement, this should be considered for future research in order to reach the widest possible audience.

The survey was open for 6 weeks, and shared multiple times within that period, to reach as many people as possible.

Results

Demographics

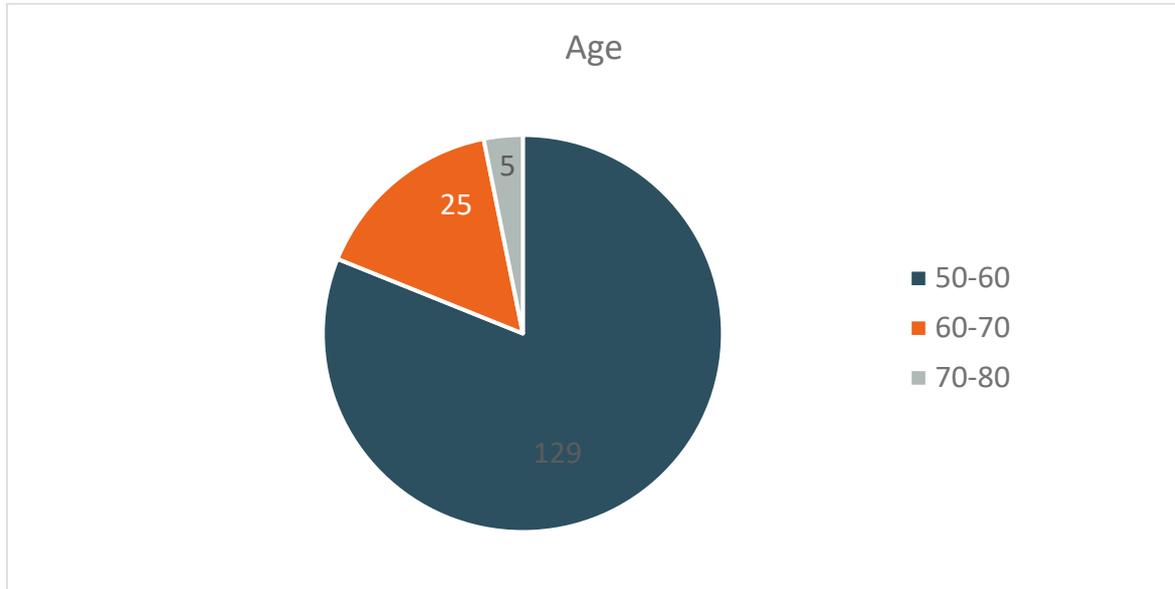


Figure 1

There were 159 responses to the survey, with the majority being from people aged between 50 and 60 (fig. 1), and around 75% from people who are currently employed either full time or part time (fig. 2).

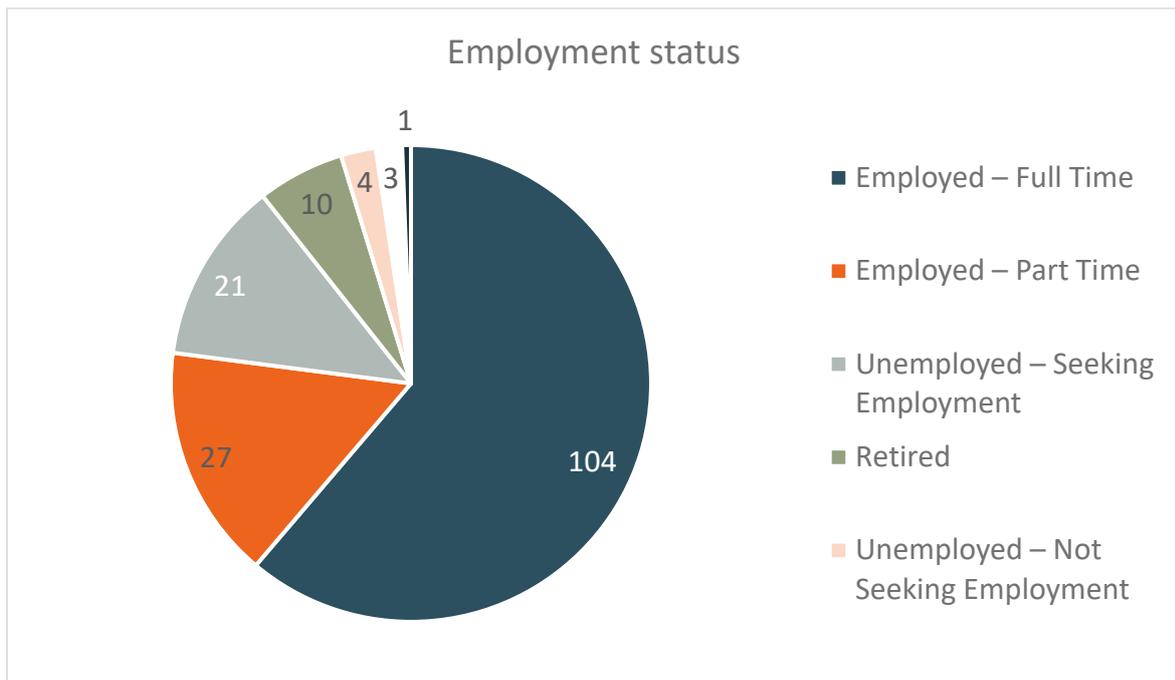


Figure 2

The survey asked about whether the participant has any children, as this might impact their exposure to information about apprenticeships, for example if they have a teenage child who finds out about apprenticeships at school.

Most of the participants had grown up children, but many had younger children, and some had no children.

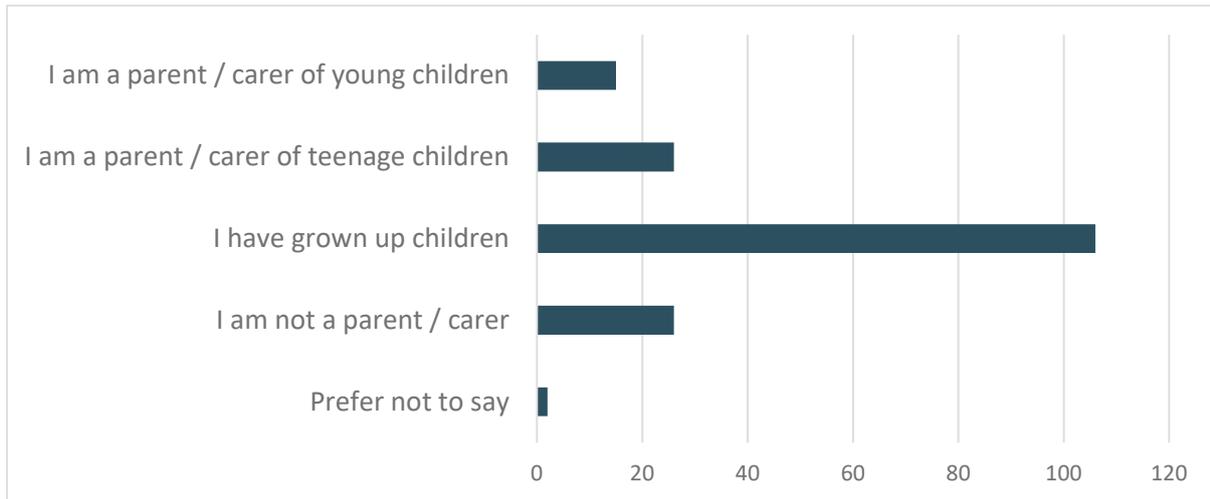


Figure 3

We can see that older people are often influencers of young people, so raising the profile and perception of apprenticeships amongst older people may trickle down to young people too.

Older apprentice experiences

28 of the responses came from older people who had personal experience of doing an apprenticeship (either currently enrolled, or started an apprenticeship in the last 10 years). The majority of these (79%) were offered the apprenticeship by their existing employer as a way to upskill (a CPD-type apprenticeship), rather than starting a new apprenticeship role, and 13 of the 28 (46%) did an apprenticeship on the business and administration route.

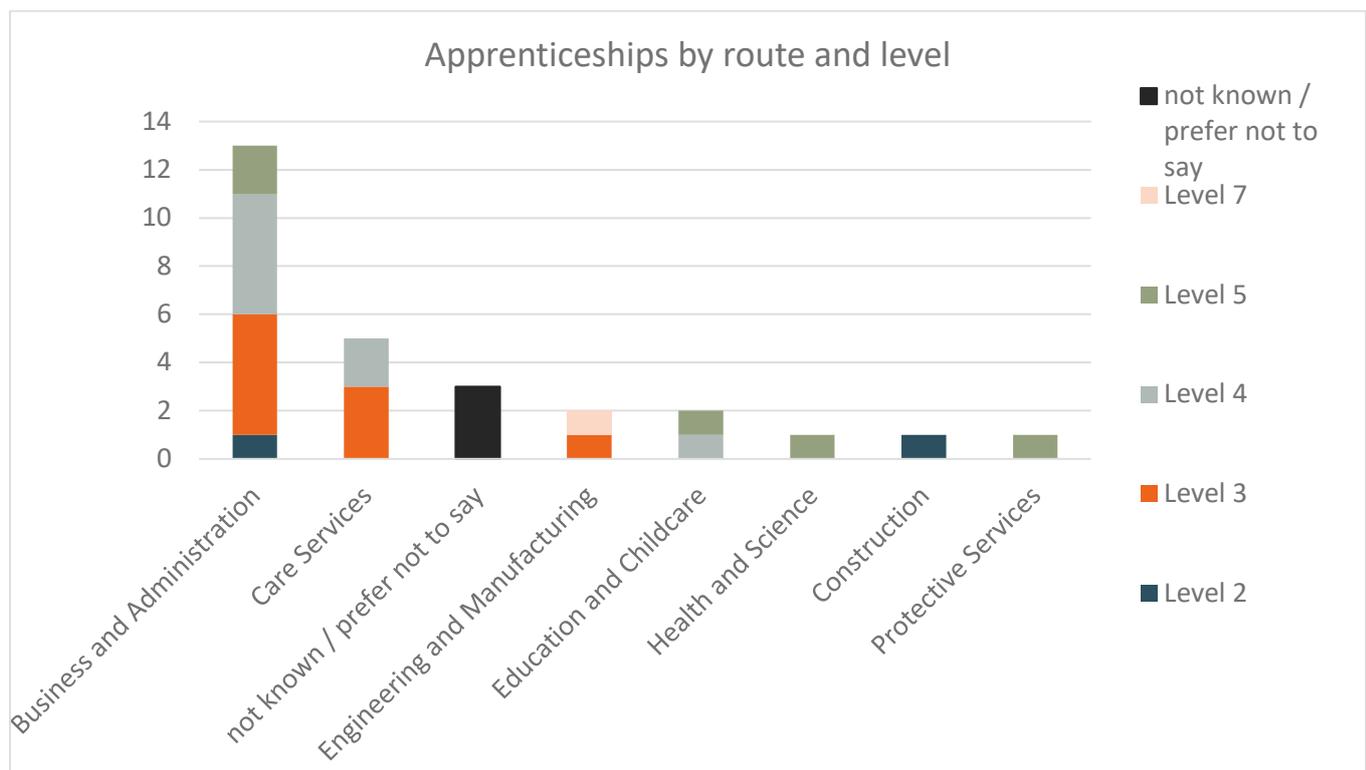


Figure 4

The is in line with our understanding of apprenticeship demographics – many employers use apprenticeships as a way to provide management training for longstanding employees who are new to management roles, or want professional development.

Level 3 and 4 apprenticeships were more popular than other levels, in particular the Business Administrator Level 3, Team Leader / Supervisor Level 3 and Associate Project Manager Level 4.

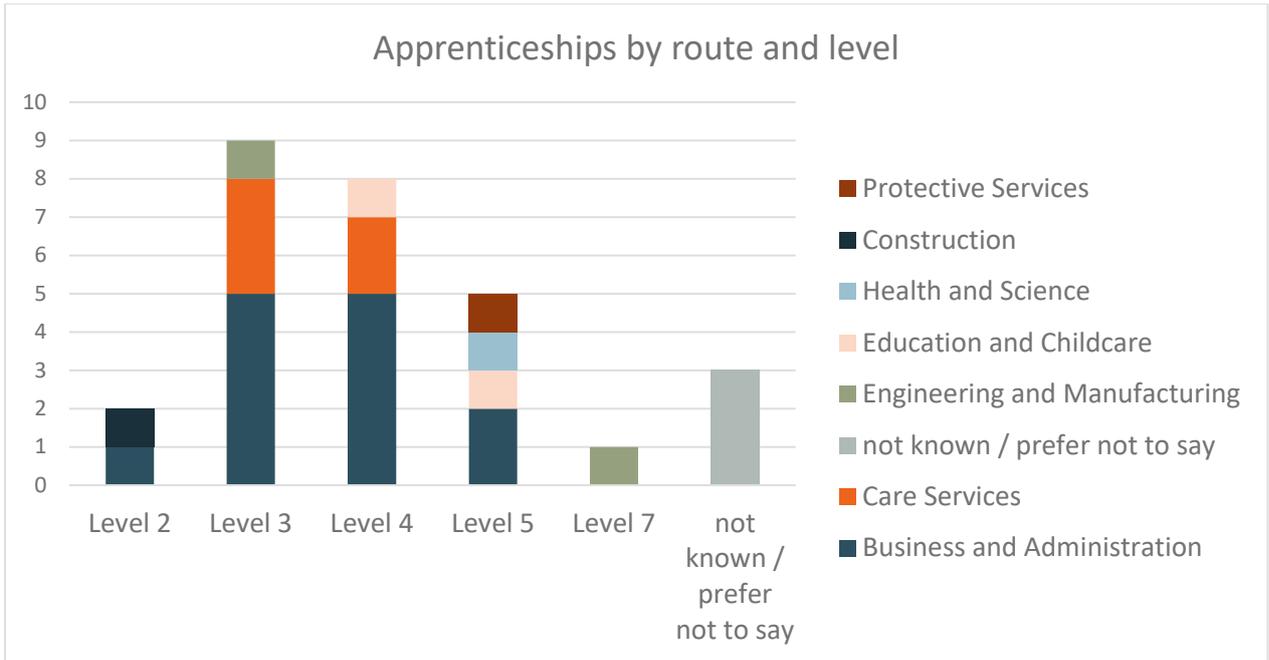


Figure 5

Our survey asked participants whether they were worried about anything ahead of starting their apprenticeship, and whether they faced any challenges when actually enrolled. In most cases, the perceived and actual challenges were fairly similar, however some early concerns were not borne out by the experience on programme (fig. 6).

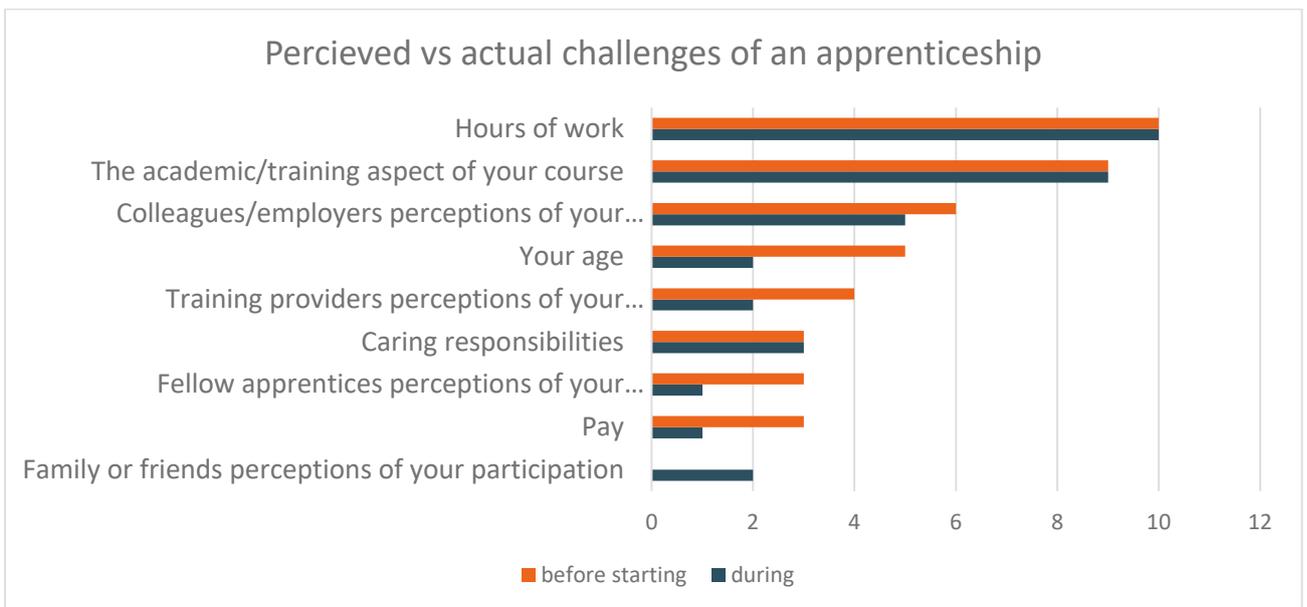


Figure 6

Many older apprentices faced challenges around their hours of work and the academic aspects of their course. It is possible that some of these responses may relate to completing functional skills specifically, which is often seen as a particular challenge for older apprentices, but the survey did not make this distinction.

Several responses said that they expected their age to be a challenge or barrier, but this did not actually pose any issues for them on their apprenticeship.

In the free-text section of this question, several responses mentioned difficulties juggling work and study, which is a common challenge for apprentices of all ages, and a reminder that older apprentices are one subset of apprentices as a whole, rather than an entirely separate group.

All older apprentices would recommend an apprenticeship to someone over 50

Of the people that have done an apprenticeship themselves, 100% say that they would recommend it to someone over 50 in a similar position to themselves. Comments on this question frequently mentioned the importance of lifelong learning and developing new skills to become more effective in your work. Others said that, while they had specific problems with their own apprenticeship, they could see how an apprenticeship would be beneficial for other people.

Several responses also mentioned gaining a formal qualification for knowledge or skills they felt they already had from on-the-job learning. While gaining formal recognition of skills is certainly desirable, training providers must be careful to recognise an apprentice's prior learning to avoid repeating content that is not new.

Perceptions from the general public

There were 129 responses to the survey from people who had not started an apprenticeship in the past 10 years. These responses are treated as being from the 'general public' of people over 50, but they should not necessarily be considered to be completely representative of the general population due to not being a random or stratified sample.

The survey asked these people questions about their understanding and perceptions of apprenticeships, and whether they would be interested in doing an apprenticeship themselves.

Most respondents thought that apprenticeships were aimed at young people, especially those aged 19-24. Most respondent also thought that they were aimed at 16-18 year olds, but people who have teenage children were slightly more likely to think this – perhaps because they receive information from their children's school or college around apprenticeships.

Only 26% of people thought that apprenticeships were aimed at over 50s. This clearly points to a gap in awareness, which could be stopping some over-50s from accessing apprenticeship opportunities, and could perhaps be tackled through information and marketing.

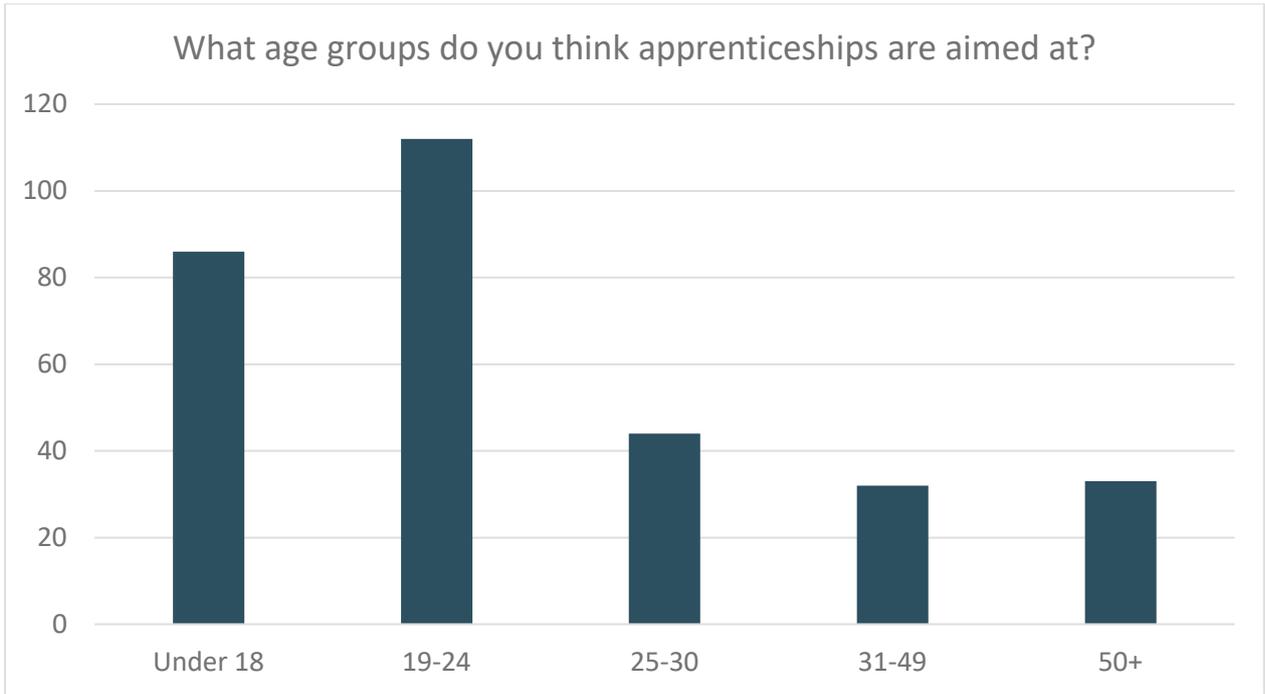


Figure 7

When asked if they would consider doing an apprenticeship if it was offered, 38% of responses said yes, but 48% said no or that they were unsure (Fig. 8).

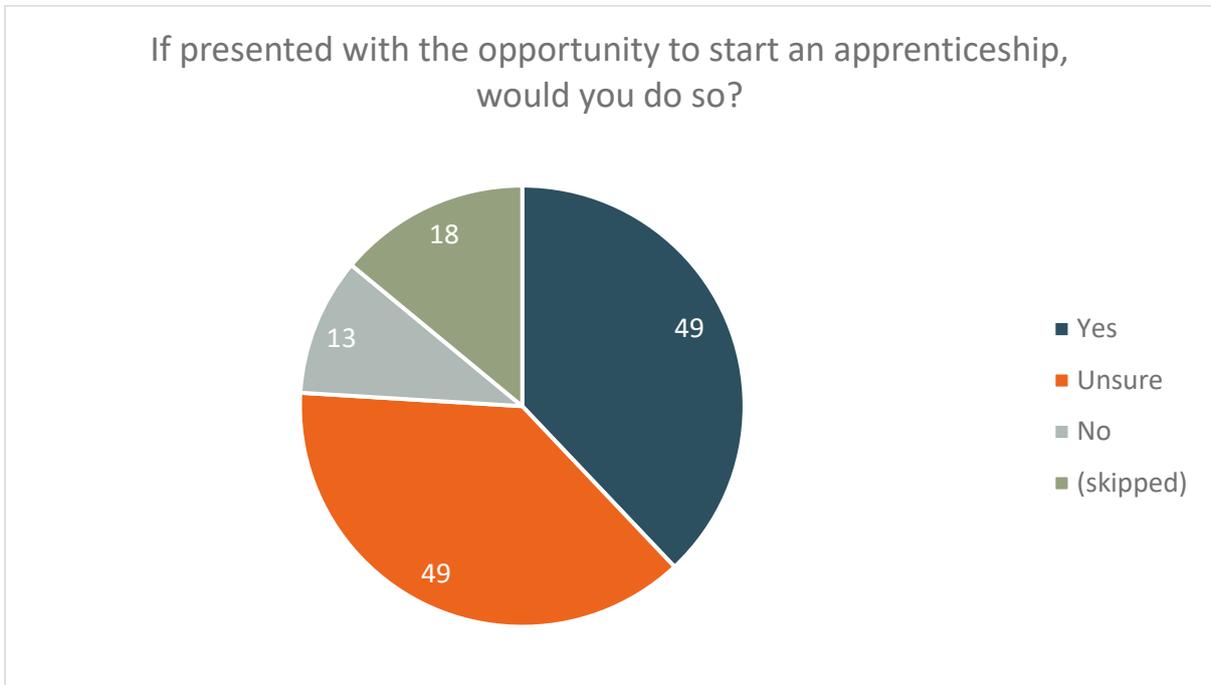


Figure 8

Some of the negative or neutral responses gave reasons around being happy in their current role, or being retired and not looking to work in the future, so it is important to look specifically at those who told us they were currently looking for work (Fig 9). For this group, more than half of responses said they would be interested in an apprenticeship if offered, and the rest were unsure or skipped the question – no-one gave a definite no.

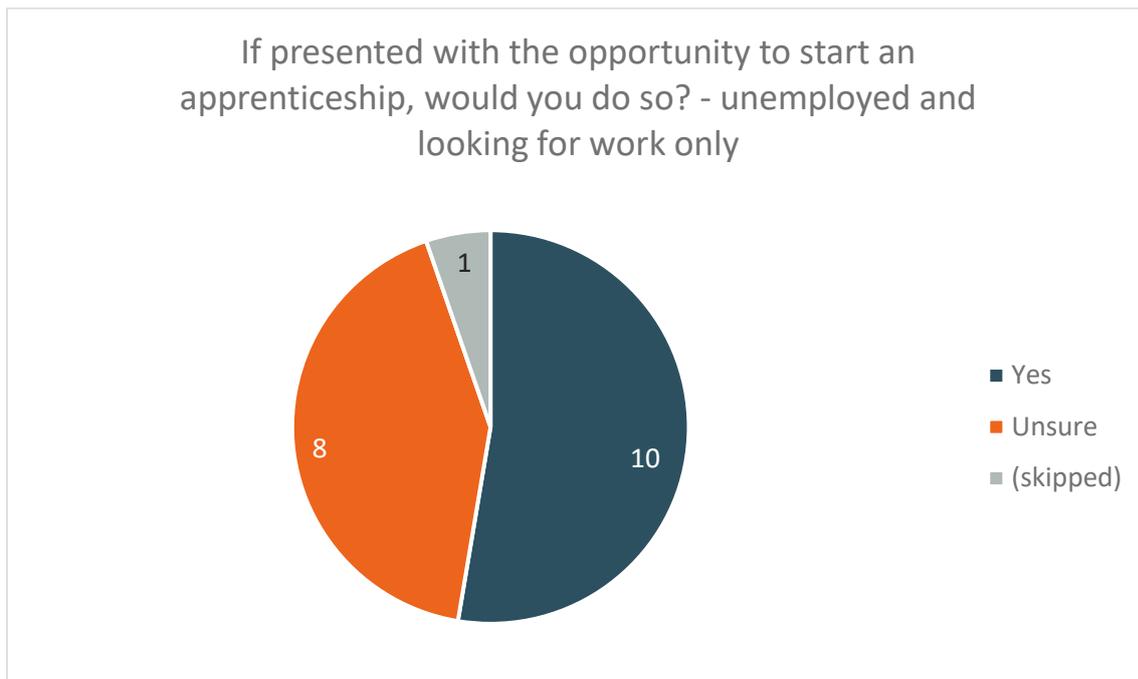


Figure 9

The most common concern that people had about doing an apprenticeship was pay – this was true even for people who said they would be interested in an apprenticeship (Fig 10). Many people also saw their age as a concern, and in general, concerns around other people’s perceptions (be that colleague, peers, providers or friends and family) do seem to be a concern too.

Given this combination of factors, it is possible that some older people are concerned about being the only older person in a group of young people, and therefore being the odd-one-out. While this is understandable, given the lingering perceptions of apprenticeship among the general population, it is often not the case; not all apprenticeships use classroom based learning, and cohorts include people of a mixture of ages.

In the free-text part of this question, several responses mentioned health concerns, having studied plenty already, or not wanting to take an opportunity away from a young person.



Figure 10

Concerns were similar among people who were looking for work (Fig. 11), and free text responses mentioned worries that there wouldn't be a 'proper' job at the end of the apprenticeship, and concerns that processes around reasonable adjustments will be based on young people, asking for EHCPs or a statement of needs which is not easily accessible to an older person.

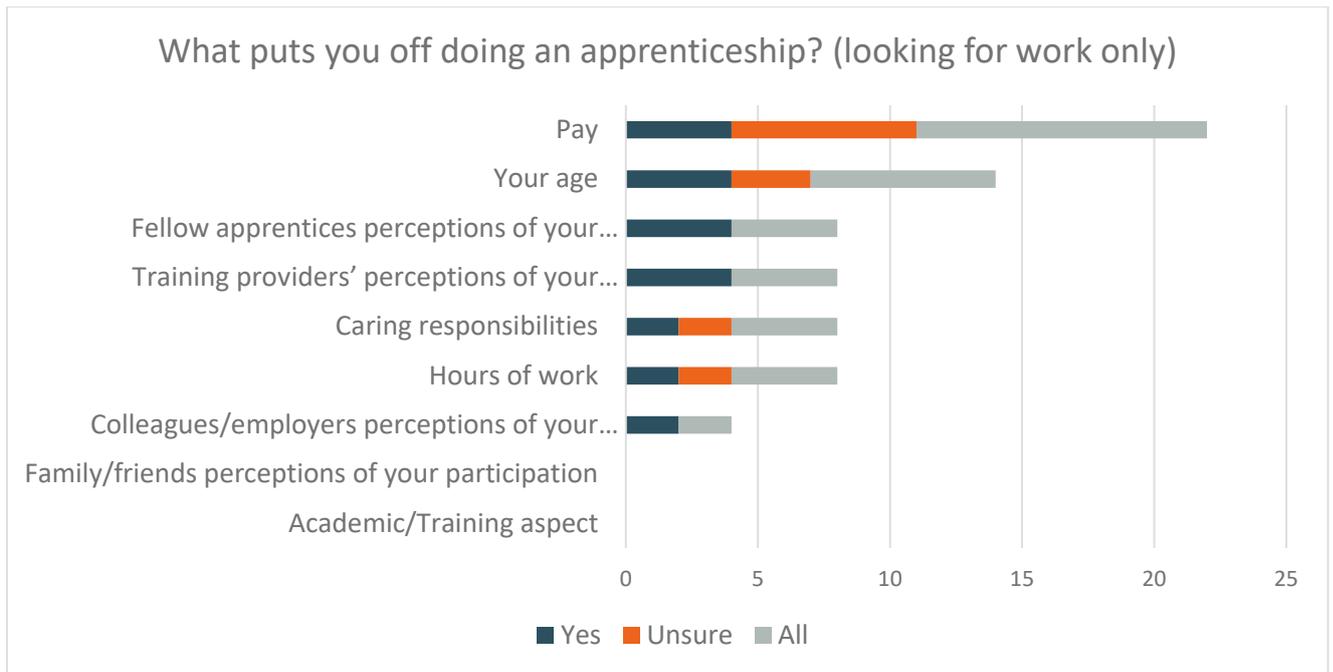


Figure 11

It is worth noting that the academic / training aspect was relatively uncommon as a concern, considering that this was a major challenge mentioned by people who had done apprenticeships themselves. This may suggest that there are lingering misconceptions among the general population that apprenticeships are an 'easy' option, or only for manual or low skilled roles, and people are therefore surprised by the level of academic rigour in modern apprenticeships.

Conclusions

Most people who responded to our survey did not think that apprenticeships were for people of their age group, and many had concerns which were serious enough that they would not choose to do an apprenticeship. This is a significant missed opportunity, given that older apprentices generally had good experiences and would recommend them to someone else in a similar position.

Many of the major concerns mentioned in this survey could be seen as relating to misconceptions around apprenticeships, such as their being poorly paid, and only associated with young people. These misconceptions could be tackled through information and marketing, and this is especially relevant for older people who are unemployed and looking for work.

Several responses mentioned not wanting to take an opportunity away from a young person, which was unexpected, and is an important factor to consider with any marketing or engagement work.

Recommendations

From the survey, several recommendations can be made for any future work around raising the profile of apprenticeships in GM, improving access to apprenticeships for older people, and ensuring apprenticeship provision for all learners in GM is of a high quality.

- Apprenticeship marketing should explicitly mention that older people are welcome to apply, as older people in general do not realise that apprenticeship opportunities are open to them.
 - This may involve using images of older people in any marketing materials alongside images of young people.
- Apprenticeship messaging should aim to show older people that they are not just able, but entitled to apply for an apprenticeship, and are not ‘taking an opportunity away’ from anyone else.
- Messaging should try to tackle lingering misconceptions around apprenticeships, especially those around low rates of pay and job security, as these are the biggest factors that prevent older people applying for apprenticeships
- Marketing should aim to include depictions of practical, work-based learning wherever possible, showing apprentices in the workplace rather than only in a classroom setting, to tackle concerns around being the ‘odd-one-out’ in a classroom.
- Training providers should take extra care to assess older apprentices’ prior learning thoroughly, including both formal and informal / on-the-job learning, to ensure that they are prepared for an apprenticeship.
- Employers and training providers should take extra care to support older people with the academic aspects of an apprenticeship, as they may be unaware of the level of academic rigour in modern apprenticeships.
- Any future research in this area should ask specifically about functional skills, as this may present different challenges to the rest of the apprenticeship training.