

Raising the Participation Age (RPA) – Information for Employers

What is RPA?

The Government has changed the law so that from start of the 2013/14 academic year, all young people are required to continue in education or training:

- Until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17.
- From summer 2015 this will be until their 18th birthday.

The information here will help you to understand what this means for you, although it should be noted there will be no new legal duties on the employers of young people.

Young people have a choice about how they continue in education or training post-16, which could be through:

- Full-time study in a school, college or with a training provider.
- Full-time work or volunteering combined with part-time education or training.
- An Apprenticeship (www.apprenticeships.org.uk).

Here, full-time work is defined as a job lasting a period of 8 or more weeks consecutively and for 20 or more hours per week. Part-time accredited training is defined as a minimum of 280 guided learning hours per year, which is the equivalent to one day per week but doesn't necessarily have to be taken that way – it could be distance or evening learning for example.

It is important to note that these definitions are only relevant for young people who choose to meet the requirement to participate through full-time work combined with part-time study. Where jobs do not meet the definition – such as part-time, holiday or weekend work – this can continue as now, but young people will need to participate in education or training in line with one of the other options above.

What does this mean for me

As an employer of apprentices? There are no other changes to be aware of as Apprenticeships count as a valid route in themselves for young people to continue their education.

As an employer of other 16 and 17 year olds? The vast majority of 16 and 17 year olds already continue in some form of education or training. Many of these young people will also be working part-time – in the evenings, at weekends or in the holidays, and this will be unaffected.

However, young employees who work full-time are required to take part-time education or training alongside their work. There are no new legal duties on you as an employer and you are not required to give your employees time off for this training, but you may want to consider how you can support them to meet the requirement placed upon them.

How can I help support my 16 and 17 year old employees to meet their new duty?

Having a trained and qualified workforce has clear benefits for a business, particularly in terms of productivity, so you may wish to consider how you could support them in this learning. For instance, you could discuss with them how their training could support your business needs. The Government fully funds accredited training for 16-18 year olds and local authorities have a duty to secure a suitable education or training place for all young people. Your local council can provide further information about training opportunities that can best support your business needs in your area.

You are also free to design and fund training programmes of your own and work with awarding bodies to get these accredited, or consider becoming an awarding body yourself. Find out more at: www.awarding.org.uk.

What will happen to me if the young person I employ doesn't take up part-time training?

There are no duties on employers in relation to RPA, so there will be no action taken against you if your employee fails to undertake part-time training.

However, your employee is under a legal duty to undertake this training and by failing to do so they will be missing out on fully funded training that will be beneficial to them as well as to your business. Evidence shows that continuing in education or training and attaining qualifications has positive effects for young people and businesses in the future, increasing earnings but also productivity. We would expect that as an employer you will be keen to enable and encourage your young employees to fulfil their legal duties.

I thought I would have to comply with new duties?

No, although the original 2008 legislation contains two duties for employers - to check that a young person is enrolled in a suitable training course, and to agree suitable hours to allow them to access this training – these will not be introduced. We think that employers will encourage young people to train without the need for burdensome new duties and so we have decided not to commence these two duties in 2013.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on raising the participation age, please visit the Department for Education website: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rpa>.

If you would like information about apprenticeships, and how to convert your existing jobs into apprenticeships, please contact the National Apprenticeship Service <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk>.

For more information on further education and skills and its links to business, please visit the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/further-education-and-skills>.