



The Complete Guide to  
**Higher and Degree  
Apprenticeships**

**Which?** University



# Higher and degree apprenticeships: the basics

**If you thought apprenticeships were just for 16 year-olds leaving school, it's time to take another look**

Apprenticeships offer a valid alternative to university, with the qualifications to match. If you choose a degree apprenticeship, you still get to graduate with your cap and gown, along with several years of work experience under your belt.

First and foremost, though, an apprenticeship is a job with substantial training and the development of transferable skills. It's a way to earn and learn, gaining a real qualification and future.

And, best of all, no university debts: you'll have been earning for the length of your apprenticeship and there are no tuition fees to pay.

## **What is an apprenticeship, exactly?**

An apprenticeship is a combined package of work and study. As an apprentice, you'll be employed by a company and paid a wage for the work that you do.

Apprenticeships are available across the UK, but this guide focuses on England.

## **How does an apprenticeship work?**

You'll spend most of the week at work (a minimum of 30 hours) watching and learning, but mainly having a go yourself. You could be learning from colleagues across all levels of the business, typically working closely with someone more senior who will review your progress and coach you.

You'll also spend time attending college, a university or training provider, or training at work. You might attend one day per week, sometimes called 'day release', in blocks of a week or more ('block release') or study online through e-learning.

Some schemes use a combination of options; your employer will decide which method works best.

## **Which level is right for you?**

Apprenticeships are offered at a range of different levels, from intermediate (level 2) upwards.

If you're looking for an option after

A-levels (or other level 3 qualifications), a higher or degree apprenticeship is worth considering. Essentially, a higher apprenticeship leads to a higher education-level qualification (at level 4, 5, 6 or 7).

Qualifications on offer include NVQ level 4, HNDs and foundation degrees. Degree apprenticeships offer a full bachelor's or master's degree.

## **Course duration and entry criteria**

Apprenticeships last a minimum of one year, but at higher or degree level, you could be looking at up to four, five or six years.

Entry requirements depend on the sector and your prior skills (see page two), with employers looking not just at grades but other aspects that demonstrate your potential - from work experience to an understanding of their field. Even with A-levels you may still be expected to start at an intermediate or advanced level in job areas such as engineering, while you build up your occupational skills.

## **Money, money, money**

If you're aged 16-18, or aged 19 and in the first year of your apprenticeship, you'll earn at least the minimum wage for apprentices.

Some companies pay more than this, particularly for higher-level apprenticeships. Recent vacancies at this level show wages from around £170 to £300 per week (see page six).

In addition, your employer and the government pay your tuition fees, meaning no university loans for you!

## **Pros and cons**

The combination of work and study means that apprenticeships aren't an easy option; you'll need to be focussed and committed to succeed.

It can be tough to get in, too. Employers are looking for top calibre individuals and opportunities are still relatively limited. Around 500,000 new students start undergraduate study in the UK each year, compared to tens of thousands of new higher apprentices.

Employers want committed candidates, so do your research.

You may find there are penalties for leaving programmes early (paying back course fees, for example), although not all organisations do this.

On the plus side, you could gain:

- Higher-level qualifications
- Professional accreditation and membership
- Job-specific skills sought after by employers
- A degree without the tuition fees
- A long-term career path and the possibility for higher earnings.



Over 20,000 people have started a higher apprenticeship since August 2013 and this figure looks set to grow. The government has pledged to create 3 million apprenticeships across all levels by 2020.

# Got what it takes to be the next apprentice?

## You've heard what an apprenticeship is, but how do you know if it's right for you?

An apprenticeship is not an easy option. You'll be starting a challenging job and trying to prove yourself in the workplace, while getting to grips with studying for a degree.

You will be expected to achieve academically and at work, managing your time and adjusting to longer hours with fewer holidays than at school or university. You might have to travel or relocate to find the right opportunity for you.

### What are employers looking for?

Apprenticeships are designed by employers, meaning you'll be developing the right skills and knowledge to be a success in your chosen industry. As such, they're looking for the right combination of personal aptitude and enthusiasm in their apprentices.

It's about more than just your academic ability; in fact, some employers don't ask for specific grades at all. It

really helps if you have a particular interest in the area of work you are applying for and can demonstrate this from previous experience.

Perhaps you've had some work experience which proves your relevant skills or you have an interest or hobby that fits in with the role or the company. Anything that can demonstrate your commitment, your interest and your readiness for work could help you stand out from the crowd.

### What grades do I need?

Academic requirements vary from programme to programme.

- BT requires BCC at A-level for applicants to their IT degree apprenticeship.
- GlaxoSmithKline is asking for 240 Ucas points from three A-levels including biology or chemistry for their Level 5 laboratory technician higher apprenticeship.

- Grant Thornton doesn't look for minimum academic criteria for their Level 4 accounting apprenticeship, instead looking for "interesting candidates who can show that they've done some great things outside of their studies".

### Which jobs offer apprenticeships at this level?

There are around 75 different higher and degree apprenticeships covering some 100 job roles, from accounting and advertising to aerospace engineering, with new apprenticeships being developed all the time. You can even become a qualified solicitor.

Not all jobs are represented yet, but more highly-skilled apprenticeships are popping up each year.

Big companies like Rolls Royce, GlaxoSmithKline, Goldman Sachs and BAE Systems offer degree apprenticeships, but you'll also find smaller companies offering them, too.



### Sought-after skills and qualities

- Teamwork
- Collaboration
- Interpersonal skills
- Enthusiasm
- Motivation
- Communication
- Analysis
- Creative solutions
- Attention to detail
- Logical thinking
- Initiative

As well as being flexible and adaptable to suit changing business needs at work, you'll also need to be self-motivated during independent study, and be prepared to put what you learn into practice.



### **Why I decided on a higher apprenticeship**

“Despite getting decent grades through school and sixth form, I struggled at university. I decided to start a higher apprenticeship at BT and my potential soon became clear; within just six months I’d made significant improvements to our monitoring systems.”

Sean led the integration of a new data analysis system, configuring the system, writing technical documents and training staff. He became the go-to expert, with experienced members of staff coming to him for advice.

Sean has also worked on a BT app which lets customers watch TV on their mobile devices; this involved collating data from test users to solve compatibility issues.

He believes that BT has been very encouraging and his confidence has increased dramatically. He feels that he has already started to build an excellent career and has learnt a wealth of new skills.

“It’s important to remember that university isn’t for everyone, and I’m living proof of that. An apprenticeship is an excellent career choice and I’m determined to share that message.”

**Sean Norgate, higher apprentice, BT Technology, Service and Operations**

“We’re bringing fresh minds into the business, and there’s a real keenness among them. Their enthusiasm is contagious and fantastic for morale and motivation.” **Simon Harper, Training and Development Manager, Port of Tilbury**

“Many software engineering higher apprentices will be working on multi-million pound accounts within three months of joining the company.” **CapGemini**

Want to find out about other apprentices’ experiences? Try Rate My Apprenticeship, a website featuring over 4,000 reviews. [www.ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk](http://www.ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk)

# What's on offer - subjects, unis and employers

**Who could you work for - and doing what? The higher and degree apprenticeship landscape is becoming more diverse**

## Sectors and occupations with higher or degree apprenticeships

Accounting	Human resource management
Actuarial technician	Information security
Advanced manufacturing engineering	Insurance
Advertising and marketing	Intelligence operations
Aerospace engineering	Interactive design and development
Agriculture	IT, web and telecoms
Aviation and pilot practice	Jewellery and silversmithing
Banking	Laboratory science
Broadcast production and technology	Legal services
Business and professional administration	Life sciences and chemical science
Business innovation	Management
Chartered surveying	Manufacturing engineer
Construction management	Mineral products technology
Control support engineering	Network engineering
Conveyancing	Nuclear science and engineering
Criminal investigation	Paraplanning
Dental practice manager	Power engineering
Dental technician	Professional services
Diagnostic and management principles	Project management
Digital and technology solutions	Public relations
Digital learning design	Recruitment
Education, training and professional development	Retail management
Electrical technical support engineering	Social media and digital marketing
Engineering environmental technologies	Software development
Express logistics	Supply chain management
Facilities management	Sustainable resource management
Furniture manufacturing	Systems engineering
Health assistant practitioner	Technical fashion and textiles
Healthcare leadership and management	The water industry
Hospitality management	

## Universities awarding qualifications

Anglia Ruskin University	University of Chester
Aston University	University of Cumbria
Birmingham City University	University of Derby
Coventry University	University of East London
Harper Adams University	University of Essex
Liverpool John Moores University	University of Gloucestershire
Manchester Metropolitan University	University of Hertfordshire
Middlesex University	University of Kent
Northumbria University	University of Salford
Nottingham Trent University	University of Sheffield
Sheffield Hallam University	University of Sunderland
Staffordshire University	University of Winchester
Teesside University	University of Wolverhampton
University of Central Lancashire	

## Organisations offering apprenticeships

There are plenty of big-name firms hunting for the right apprentice, along with smaller businesses. Think about which would suit you better: a small company where everyone knows one another, or one with offices around the globe.

Accenture	E.ON	MoD
Airbus	EDF Energy	National Grid
Astra Zeneca	Ford	Network Rail
BAE Systems	Fujitsu	Pfizer Inc
Balfour Beatty	Goldman Sachs	QinetiQ
BAM Nuttall	GSK	RBS
Barclays	HMRC	Rolls-Royce
BMW Group UK	HP	SABIC UK Petrochemicals
Bright Future	HSBC	Santander
Broughton Laboratories	IBM	Sellafield
BT	Jaguar Land Rover	Siemens
CapGemini	John Lewis	Toyota Manufacturing UK
Carillion Civil Engineering	Lloyds Banking Group	Transport for London
CGI	MBDA	Vauxhall Motors

The number of companies and universities getting involved in apprenticeships is on the increase - so our tables here aren't exhaustive.

# A week in the life

**There's no such thing as a typical week, or even day, in the life of an apprentice**

From travelling to an office in another city, meeting with clients to visiting a construction site: who knows what you might be doing next.

Employers expect a lot, but no-one expects you to know how to do the job already. That's what the apprenticeship is for, after all. The organisation you work for should help you to adjust to your new working life with induction programmes or personal development activities to help you get started. Later on, you'll meet buddies or mentors who you can turn to for support.

## **BAE Systems Engineering Degree Apprentice, Michelle**

"Every week I have a two-hour project review session with my department head. This meeting gives me the opportunity to see where we are up to with our activity plan as well as see if we are on track with our budget, cover off any risks and opportunities, and generally discuss the project and where we need to keep our focus."

## **Jaguar Landrover Engineering Degree Apprenticeship**

Apprentices spend most of their first year at college, learning the fundamentals of engineering. Practical experience of the workplace takes place in a manufacturing plant or vehicle workshop outside term-time. Attendance at college drops down to two days per week in the second year, while attendance at work increases. This is later followed by block-release study towards BEng Applied Engineering at University of Warwick.

## **CapGemini Digital and Technology Solutions Degree Apprenticeship**

The programme starts with a seven-week block of residential practical training attended by apprentices working for various different employers. Apprentices get to network, make friends and learn from each other. For those based in the same towns or cities, some even move into shared accommodation afterwards.

After this, the programme is delivered online by Aston University through recorded lectures, online tutorials and case studies. Online seminars and tutorials might take place in the evening. Each week, apprentices are expected to do at least five hours learning and an additional five hours self-study, on top of their full-time job.

"We're getting a high level of academic performance from apprentices on our programme as the relevance of the material is immediate." **Ian Nabney, Deputy Dean, School of Engineering and Applied Science, Aston University**

# The financial stuff

## What you'll pay, what you'll earn - let's explore the all-important numbers

### Who pays the fees?

Apprentices don't pay tuition fees! Your employer will contribute and the remaining funding comes from the government. This means degree apprentices can graduate debt-free, earning a wage at the same time.

In contrast, English students taking a full-time university degree will typically pay around £9,000 per year in tuition fees. On top of that, there are day-to-day living costs to consider, rent or travel costs, equipment and materials.

### What could I earn?

The current National Minimum Wage for apprentices is £3.30 per hour\*, but most employers offer more than this. Businesses looking for top apprentices know that they need to offer a competitive salary.

The minimum wage for apprentices applies to 16-18 year-olds, or 19 year-olds in the first year

of their apprenticeship. After that, apprentices are eligible for at least the minimum wage for their age group.

- Engineering degree apprentices at Jaguar Landrover start off on £18,550 per year. Salaries increase every six months subject to meeting expectations, with apprentices expected to earn over £35,500 per year on completion.
- Higher apprentices at Virgin Media start off on £17,500 per year, increasing to £21,000 based on good progress.
- National Grid pays its higher apprentices a starting salary of £23,500 per year.

Many employers advertise roles with a 'competitive salary'. This could mean the salary and benefits will be in line with similar roles for other organisations or that it depends on your current skills and experience.

### Other financial benefits

Alongside the salary, some firms offer other benefits including a pension, access to a car, leisure facilities or a relocation allowance if you have to move.

Apprentices are entitled to the same rights as other employees: a contract of employment and at least 20 days paid holiday per year, plus bank holidays.

### Apprenticeship discounts

You'll be classed as an employee, rather than a student, so you won't be entitled to student discounts, but the National Union of Students (NUS) has now brought out an NUS Apprentice Extra Card.

For £11 per year you can get discounts on lots of brands. See more at [www.apprenticeextra.co.uk](http://www.apprenticeextra.co.uk).

You may also be eligible for discounts on public transport, with many schemes running on a local basis, like the Apprentice Oyster photo card in London, which gives apprentices 30% off certain journeys.



\* National Minimum wage for apprentices is reviewed annually by the Low Pay Commission and rises on 1st October.

# Your long-term career prospects

## What kind of difference could an apprenticeship make to your life in the long-run?

Although no-one knows exactly what the future holds, the prospects for higher and degree apprentices look bright.

One of the reasons businesses take on apprentices at this level is that they need a highly-skilled workforce. This is a good thing for the company but also for the apprentice's future employment prospects.

Exactly what happens after an apprenticeship will depend on your employer and your contract.

Many higher and degree apprenticeship schemes are designed to develop the leaders and managers of the future. The experiences you gain as an apprentice can provide a springboard towards

promotions and higher-level opportunities.

After several years working with managers and peers, experiencing various aspects of the business and developing the essential skills and knowledge, you should have become a very valuable employee.

It's not unusual for an ex-apprentice to work their way up to the boardroom. Former apprentices are particularly well-represented in senior management teams in construction, engineering and energy; 30% of the senior UK managers at Rolls Royce started out at the firm as apprentices.

Make sure you keep track of the key skills and experience you've gained for your growing CV.

"The degree apprenticeship has been designed by employers to teach students the cutting-edge technical skills that they need to stay ahead in an ever-changing market. This means that the sky really is the limit for those who graduate from a degree apprenticeship and businesses are benefiting from the skills that they bring from day one." **Sasha Morgan Manley, Managing Director, Morgan Manley Ltd**

"Apprentices leave the Nestle Chartered Manager degree apprenticeship with a guaranteed job, a degree, membership of the Chartered Management Institute and three years' work experience in a range of roles, having made a meaningful contribution to the workplace from the outset." **Conor Moss, Director of Education and Employer Partnerships, Sheffield Hallam University**

"My apprenticeship has offered endless development opportunities. I would never have thought that by the age of 21 I would be given the chance to manage a team, travel to BT offices abroad and contribute to the business economy". **Memona Mohammad, BT Higher Apprentice, Technology, Service and Operations**

"My apprenticeship has, quite frankly, changed my life. My confidence has grown from being a very shy person to being able to present in front of both client directors and in local schools to help promote apprenticeships. My personal boundaries are tested and are expanding on a weekly basis and family and friends have noticed that I have grown as a person. I can honestly say that without this apprenticeship I would not be the person I am today." **Joshua White, Business Analyst, IBM**

On completion, 90% of apprentices stay in employment, with 71% staying with the same employer. A quarter received a promotion within 12 months.\*

\* Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Apprentice survey, 2014



# How to apply and next steps

## Raring to go? Here's how to make an application - and be successful

Your starting point when searching for apprenticeship vacancies is the **Find an Apprenticeship** tool: [www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](http://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship).

Some employers will ask you to apply directly to them. If this is the case, you'll be directed to the right spot from the Find an apprenticeship results page.

If you are interested in working for a particular employer, take a look on their website. Most businesses have a page on careers, apprenticeships or vacancies.

### When to apply

Unlike university applications, there is no fixed deadline when it comes to applying for apprenticeships. Vacancies appear throughout the year, so it is worth registering for alerts at [www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](http://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship) to hear about vacancies as they appear.

Don't wait until the deadline to make an application. Some companies close their recruitment as soon as they have sufficient candidates.

As a general rule, vacancies with larger firms start appearing in the autumn, but the majority pop up from January or February onwards. Smaller businesses might start recruiting a month or two before the job starts, so if you hope to start work in August or September, you might start looking from Easter onwards.

Do check start dates closely, to make sure you'll have finished school or college.

Start your research early – the sooner the better, so you have time to fill any gaps in your CV with the things employers are typically looking for (see page two), including getting some relevant work experience.



### Keen to work for a particular company?

Follow them on Twitter and other social media. This is often the first place you'll hear about recruitment updates.

### Stay focused

It's quite normal to have some doubts about the process, especially around spring-time, when your friends have their university offers and you might still be waiting to find the right vacancy to apply to. Don't panic! Focus on making a great application when the right opportunity arises. This is a competitive process: you're applying for a job, so make sure you sell yourself.

### Application tips

- Clearly read the job description, making note of key points such as entry requirements and 'essential' qualities
- Research the company beforehand, so you understand its key areas and priorities
- Include relevant experiences and skills
- Be specific and give examples to demonstrate what you have to offer
- Back up your statements with evidence
- Use an appropriate email address and voicemail message on your phone
- Regularly log on to your account to track your applications
- Don't let emails end up in your junk folder
- Don't undersell yourself. Be confident (but honest!) about your abilities

### The recruitment process

In larger firms, the selection process shares some similarities with graduate recruitment programmes. There can be a number of hurdles to leap before you even get to a face-to-face interview: an application form, online tests, perhaps a phone or online interview, before heading to an assessment day.

That's likely to involve individual or group activities, as well as further interviews.

You might find that smaller organisations have a slightly more informal or personal process, perhaps involving an initial written application, followed by face-to-face interview stages if you're shortlisted.

Good luck!



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**Scotland:** [www.skillsdevelopmentcotland.co.uk](http://www.skillsdevelopmentcotland.co.uk)

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