

Updated for  
**2017/18**



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, long-term career path and the possibility for higher earnings.

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

### 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 it work?

You'll spend most of the week at work (a minimum of 30 hours) watching, learning and getting stuck in. You will 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, training at work or online. Some apprenticeships use a combination of options; your employer will decide which method works best.

### What could I earn?

If you're aged 16-18, you'll earn at least the minimum wage for apprentices (£3.50 per hour\*) but many companies pay more than this, particularly for higher level apprenticeships:

- An aerospace engineering apprentice at BAE Systems UK can earn £21,971 per year.
- A higher accountancy apprentice can earn over £13,000 per year.
- A software engineer apprentice can earn £14,500 per year.

In fact, you could potentially earn upwards of £300 per week plus your employer and the government pay your tuition fees, meaning no university loans for you!

In contrast, English students taking a full-time university degree pay around £9,000 per year in tuition fees, as well as day to-day living, rent and travel costs.

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.

The good news is that new funding rules mean you're likely to see more employers offering apprenticeships in 2017 than ever before.

Benefits may include 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 [apprenticeextra.co.uk](http://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.

### What grades do I need?

Academic requirements vary from programme to programme. Some

apprenticeships are awarded purely based on how you perform at interview.

- Unilever requires five GCSEs including English and maths and two A-levels
- Deloitte requires 260 UCAS points, GCSEs in English language (grade B) and maths (grade C)
- Network Rail requires A-level grades A-C, plus maths and English GCSEs minimum grade C.

Over the past three years, 56,200 people have started a higher or degree apprenticeship. The government has pledged to create 3 million apprenticeships across all levels by 2020.\*

\* Statistics from GOV.UK



89% of apprentices were satisfied with their apprenticeship; 97% of apprentices said their ability to do the job had improved and 92% of apprentices said their career prospects had improved.\*

\* Statistics from GOV.UK

\* National Minimum wage for apprentices will increase on 1 April 2017 to £3.50 per hour.

# 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?

An apprenticeship is actually designed by employers, meaning you'll be developing the right skills and knowledge to be a success in your chosen industry. They're looking for personal aptitude and enthusiasm rather than just your academic ability; in fact, some employers don't ask for specific grades at all. It helps if you have a particular interest in the area you want to work in and can demonstrate this from previous experience.

Anything that can demonstrate your interest and your readiness for work could help you stand out from the crowd.

### Which level is the right level?

There are various levels of apprenticeship you could apply for depending on your qualifications and skills (see table, right).

Some courses could be up to four, five or six years. 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.

### Which higher level apprenticeships are available?

There are around 75 different higher and degree apprenticeships. From accounting to aerospace engineering, new apprenticeships are being developed all the time with more highly-skilled apprenticeships 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.

Across all types of apprenticeship, there were 1,656,680 online applications made in 2015 to 2016.\*

\* Statistics from GOV.UK



Type of apprenticeship	Level	Equivalent educational level
Intermediate	2	5 GCSE passes at grades A* to C
Advanced	2	A-level pass
Higher	4, 5, 6, 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6, 7	Bachelor's or master's degree



“When I first started my apprenticeship I knew I wanted to work in engineering, and I thought I would likely go down the manufacturing/theory route but my apprenticeship enabled me to maximise my experience by rotating around different parts of the business including finance and marketing. This granted me a good insight into how the company is run and ultimately allowed me to realise the area that best suited my skills.”

**Holly Broadhurst, Higher Design Engineering Apprentice, J C Bamford Excavators**

“My apprenticeship allowed me to learn whilst gaining masses of experience at the same time. I’m now doing my dream job and my ultimate goal is to study for a BA and Masters in mechanical engineering and become a chartered engineer. The big dream is to one day be Sellafeld’s chief mechanical engineer.”

**Adam Sharp, Advanced Level Mechanical Design Apprentice and National Advanced Apprentice of the Year, Sellafeld**

“Apprenticeships allow us to attract the very best of talent and to keep it, through a focus on upskilling the entire workforce regardless of age or role. We’ll continue to promote apprenticeships as the right thing for our employees and our company.”

**Barry Norris, Training and Development Director, Mitie**

“We took on apprentices because it was the right thing to do; for social mobility, improved staff retention and for the future of our business. But what’s amazed us most is how well the apprentices have performed. They still surprise us every day.”

**Sam Lee, Head of Recruitment, Bond Dickinson LLP**

Want to find out about other apprentices’ experiences? Try Rate My Apprenticeship, a website featuring over 4,000 reviews. [ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk](http://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	Intelligence operations
Actuarial technician	Investment operations specialist
Advanced dairy technologist	IT, software, web and telecoms professionals
Aerospace engineer	Junior 2D artist (visual effects)
Aerospace software development engineer	Junior management consultant
Agriculture	Laboratory scientist
Aircraft maintenance certifying engineer	Legal services
Assistant technical director (visual effects)	Life sciences and chemical science professionals
Associate ambulance practitioner	Licensed conveyancer
Associate project manager	Management
Aviation operations manager	Manufacturing engineer
Bespoke tailor and cutter	Professional development for work based learning
Broadcast technology	Network engineering
Bus and coach engineering manager	Nuclear scientist and engineer
Business and professional administration	Nuclear welding inspection technician
Care leadership and management	Operations/Departmental manager
Chartered legal executive	Outside Broadcasting engineer
Chartered manager	Paraplanner
Chartered surveyor	Product design and development engineer
Construction management	Professional accounting taxation technician
Control/technical support engineer	Professional services
Conveyancing technician	Project management
Cyber intrusion analyst	Public relations
Cyber security technologist	Public sector commercial professional
Data analyst	Rail engineering advanced technician
Dental practice manager	Recruitment
Dental technician	Relationship manager (banking)
Digital and technology solutions professional	Retail manager
Digital learning design	Senior compliance/Risk specialist
Electrical/Electronic technical support Engineer	Senior housing/Property management
Electrical power protection and plant commissioning engineer	Social media and digital marketing
Embedded electronic systems design and development	Software developer
Facilities management	Software tester
Financial adviser	Solicitor
Health assistant practitioner	Supply chain management
Healthcare science associate	Sustainable resource operations and management
Hospitality management	Systems engineering
Human resource management	The water industry
Insurance professional	Unified communications trouble shooter

Please note that the above standards and frameworks are correct as of publication. For an up to date list please visit [gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship)

### Universities and Higher Educating Institutions delivering apprenticeships.

Anglia Ruskin University	Oxford Brookes University	University of Exeter
Arts University Bournemouth	Plymouth College of Art	University of Gloucestershire
Aston University	Queen Mary University of London	University of Greenwich
Birmingham City University	Ravensbourne	University of Hertfordshire
Bishop Grosseteste University	Royal Agricultural University	University of Huddersfield
Buckinghamshire New University	Sheffield Hallam University	University of Hull
Coventry University	Southampton Solent University	University of Kent
De Montfort University	Staffordshire University	University of Lincoln
Falmouth University	Teesside University	University of Plymouth
Harper Adams University	University College Birmingham	University of Portsmouth
Kingston University	University for the Creative Arts	University of Salford
Leeds College of Art	University of Bolton	University of Sheffield
Leeds Trinity University	University of Bradford	University of Sunderland
Liverpool John Moores University	University of Brighton	University of the Arts, London
London South Bank University	University of Central Lancashire	University of Warwick
Loughborough University	University of Chester	University of Winchester
Manchester Metropolitan University	University of Chichester	University of Wolverhampton
Middlesex University	University of Cumbria	University of Worcester
Northern School of Contemporary Dance	University of Derby	University of Wolverhampton
Northumbria University	University of Durham	Writtle University College
Nottingham Trent University	University of East London	
Open University	University of Essex	

### Examples of employers offering apprenticeships

Accenture	BT	HSBC	RBS
Airbus	Cabinet Office	IBM	Rolls-Royce
ASOS	CapGemini	Jaguar Land Rover	Royal Air Force
Astra Zeneca	Carillion Civil Engineering	John Lewis	SABIC UK Petrochemicals
BAE Systems	CGI	ITV	Santander
Balfour Beatty	EE	Lloyds Banking Group	Sellafield
BAM Nuttall	E.ON	MBDA	Siemens
Barclays	EDF Energy	Mini	Sky
BBC	Ford	MoD	Specsavers
BMW Group UK	Fujitsu	National Grid	Starbucks
Boots	Goldman Sachs	Network Rail	Toyota Manufacturing UK
Bright Future	Google	Pets at home	Transport for London
British Airways	GSK	Pfizer Inc	Vauxhall Motors
British Gas	HMRC	Price Waterhouse Coopers	
Broughton Laboratories	HP	QinetiQ	

Employers of all different sizes and from different sectors employ apprentices, visit [gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship) for all the latest vacancies.

# 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.

"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."

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

"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."

**Engineering Degree Apprenticeship, Jaguar Landrover**

"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."

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

"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**

"Studying whilst working means you always have to be one step ahead but the experience you get as part of an apprenticeship; working in the same environment every day and meeting and building relationships with a whole host of different people, is both rewarding and invaluable."

**Charlotte Blowers, Intermediate Apprentice of the Year, Exceed Training Academy**

# 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 you. 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 company as apprentices. Remember to make sure you keep track of the key skills and experience you've gained for your growing CV.

After finishing, 77% of apprentices stay with the same employer, 46% received a pay rise, and 36% reported getting a promotion.\*

\* Statistics from GOV.UK

"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**

"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, Higher Apprentice, Technology, Service and Operations, BT**

"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**

"I'm very ambitious about my future. I started at university in September, studying a B.Eng in Computer Aided Engineering. I cannot have enough passion and enthusiasm for apprenticeships. Without mine, I wouldn't be the confident, mature, challenge-driven individual I am today: greatest decision of my life. Since starting my apprenticeship my confidence has increased significantly." **Jade Aspinall, Manufacturing Engineer, MBDA UK**

"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**

# 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: [gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](https://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 place 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. You can also search for apprenticeship vacancies on both [The Student Room](#) and [UCAS](#) websites.

### 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 [gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](https://gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship) to hear about vacancies as they

Up to 28,000 apprenticeship vacancies are available online at any one time.\*

\*Statistics from GOV.UK

### 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.

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 companies 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.



### Stay focused

It's really quite normal to have some doubts and nerves 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! Keep calm and focus on making a great application when the right opportunity arises. Remember this is a competitive process: you're applying for a job, so make sure you sell yourself as best you can.

### The recruitment process

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.

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!

### 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



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