

What are Apprenticeships, and how do I get one? An ultimate guide for Aspiring Apprentices

Our guide for Aspiring Apprentices

If you have clicked on this link, you are interested in finding out about apprenticeships. We have put together a guide for all you need to know about apprenticeships, how apprenticeships work, how to find and apply for an apprenticeship, CV and interview tips and useful apprenticeship resources to help you on your apprenticeship journey.

What is an apprenticeship? And is it for you?

An apprenticeship is a real job; you will earn a salary while training and gaining a recognised qualification. Anybody can do an apprenticeship, as long as you are 16 or over, living in England and not in full-time education.

You are treated just like all other employees, with a contract of employment, a salary and holiday leave. You have real job responsibilities, so you will gain valuable work experience whilst training to be fully competent in your chosen occupation.

How apprenticeships work

You will spend at least 20% (equivalent to 1 day a week) of your time completing off-the-job training at a college, university, or an apprenticeship training provider. Your 20% off the job training can work differently depending on your chosen profession and employer.

- Once a week (day release)
- In blocks of a week or more
- Studying online
- Blended (a combination of face to face and online learning)

Types of apprenticeships

There are thousands of apprenticeship vacancies in almost every sector. The course you take will fit your chosen occupation. Courses are named apprenticeship or trailblazer standards, and there are currently around 600 approved, with many more coming on stream.

The great thing about learning an apprenticeship standard is that 'employer trailblazer' groups have developed them. Employer trailblazers are a group of employers that have come together to define their requirements for various standards and set the course modules, topics and assessment criteria relevant to the role, sector, and industry. Standards are approved by awarding bodies just like any other qualification. So, once you have completed your course, you will have the right qualification and the skills, knowledge and

behaviours that employers in your chosen sector are looking for. And of course, you will have gained work experience!

Choosing the right apprenticeship and standard for you

The level you will need to start at will depend on the job role, your prior qualifications and your experience. Keep your options open when choosing a course.

Standards have multiple occupational job titles applicable to a course with core learning modules. In addition, some have optional learning routes that can qualify you for certification or membership to professional bodies. So, if a vacancy offers a different level to the one you had in mind, don't dismiss it; read through the fact sheets your training provider gives you or read the in-depth standard in a bit more detail, which they can also provide. You'll be surprised at the range of available opportunities covering different levels and durations.

Choosing your occupation and career path

Many standards provide you with transferrable skills. Take Business Administration Level 3, for example; you will learn all about how the office works, front office, back office, accounting, administration, operations and project management. These skills can be transferred to many job roles and can lead to a higher-level course in accounting, operational leadership & management or even sales. Another example might be a Digital Marketing qualification with core learning modules such as SEO, web analytics, technical applications, coding, and marketing principles, which could transfer to higher-level web development, marketing manager, or market research roles.

Qualification Levels and Certifications

Name	Level	Equivalent educational level
Intermediate	2	5 GCSE passes at A* - C or 9 - 4
Advanced	3	2 A Level passes/Level 3 Diploma/ International Baccalaureate
Higher	4, 5, 6 & 7	Foundation degree or above
Degree	6 & 7	Bachelor's or master's degree

How are apprenticeship qualifications assessed?

Apprenticeships are about learning and applying what you have learnt to your real job. Therefore, each standard has its own assessment criteria. Assessments are carried out by an approved independent assessor called EPAO – End Point Assessment Organisation. Some standards have exams set after completing a set of modules throughout the course. For other courses, you may work on employer-led projects or tasks and create reports, summative portfolios and presentations about what you have learnt and how you applied your skills and knowledge to these tasks or projects.

At the end of the course, you may have to demonstrate your skills in the workplace, present your portfolio of work and answer some questions. You will have time to prepare for your EPA, usually a few weeks or more. Your training provider will ensure you with all this information at the start of your course and help you prepare in plenty of time for your EPA.

How long does an apprenticeship last?

This depends on your job role, qualification standard, and qualification history. The length of each course varies from Level 2, 12 months, Level 3,4, 18-24 months, Levels 5, 6, 7 can range from 2 to 4 or 6 years.

What will I earn?

The course length does not mean that you will always be paid an Apprentice wage, currently £4.30 per hour. Whilst this might seem low, remember that going to university costs £9250 per year in course fees. In an Apprenticeship, you are earning and gaining a fully funded qualification. If you are 19 or over after completing 12 months of your apprenticeship, your wages will increase to the national minimum wage. Some employers pay more than the minimum apprentice or national minimum wage or offer travel or other benefits.

Once you have completed your course, you can move to a full-time role and take the next course level up or diversify your skills on a new course with your current employer or a new employer, and your employer will be fully or 95% funded.

If you are still not sure, The London School of Economics (@LSEnews) has found that apprentices in their twenties earn anything between £1,000 – £7,000 more per year than their graduate counterparts, who tend to harbour the weight of student debt.

What will I learn, how will I learn

Training providers like Aspire to Learn deliver training through blended learning, both online and face to face. In most cases, classes are one to one, enabling flexible learning for you and your employer and ensuring that you have a face-to-face person to train, mentor, and guide you throughout your course. They will also work with your employer to ensure you have your 20% off the job learning to complete course-related projects.

With colleges, in most cases, means 'day release.' You will attend the college on a set day. How you wish to learn depends on the occupation you choose. The beauty of apprenticeships is the option you have. So talk to training providers and colleges to see what suits you best.

Choosing your employer

There are many and different benefits to working with both large and small employers. Big brands can often be the most attractive when choosing an apprenticeship, but they often have fixed roles, and it may not be easy to diversify or gain experience in other areas of a business. In addition, you may have a longer travel time to the workplace, which may cost more. On the other hand, smaller companies can offer apprenticeships with more opportunities to diversify and gain broader work experiences that may not always be as accessible in a large organisation.

Asking yourself some questions can help you decide:-

- What's your end career goal? How can you get there?
- What type of work environment do you like working in?
 - Indoor/outdoor
 - Large/small employer
 - Office/customer facing/travelling
- How far are you willing to travel?
- Will you relocate?

- How long do you want to study for?
- What is important to you about the employer/scheme?

Talk to and be open to suggestions from training providers or your career advisors. Training providers help you match your skills to an occupation; they will encourage you to consider how your skills will fit specific roles. There are over 1500 apprenticeship vacancies and 600 apprenticeships courses with differing job roles, and you might find there are vacancies that you had never thought of and lots of specialist advisors who can help you.

There are many ways to find an apprenticeship

Some large companies in construction, utilities, rail, banks, and retail hire groups or cohorts each year; they will advertise vacancies a year ahead. Ensure you don't miss these opportunities by registering for alerts before leaving school or further education. You can also set up alerts on well-known job sites for specific sectors.

Other companies will advertise when they are ready to expand or add new skills to their business throughout the year. They will typically select a training provider who will advertise, recruit for the role and provide your training. Training providers advertise on the National Apprenticeship Web Site, Find a Job, well-known job sites, and their own vacancy pages.

The great thing about training providers is that the vacancies will vary from companies large and small and therefore have a wide range of jobs to apply for in lots of different sectors, they will also give you advice on your career options.

Your training provider will also be a crucial link between you and your employer. They will help guide you through your apprenticeship programme and support you if you have any concerns or worries.

Job fairs

There are lots of job fairs this time of year. [In addition, National Apprenticeship Week](#) runs from 7th to 13th Feb 2022, so be on the lookout for employers and training providers who will be advertising and giving lots of advice over that week. We have also prepared a helpful [information sheet for Apprentices](#) with links to useful resources to search career options and vacancies.

Applying for Apprenticeships

Once you have found the vacancies you want to apply to, you need to make sure all your documents are in order; these are:- your CV, qualification records, references and I.D. We have addressed each of these below:-

The importance of a good CV

A well-constructed CV **could be the difference between getting an interview for your dream job or not**, so knowing what you should write and how you should do it is paramount to your success.

Your CV is the first thing an employer will have to go on, so make it count.

Think of a CV as an essential piece of personal marketing to promote yourself to an employer so that you stand out and want to meet you. Use your CV to let the reader (employer) see what there is to know about you, your education, achievements, skills and abilities.

Getting your CV started

Create a standard CV which you can then adapt to EVERY individual application you intend to make:

1. **Personal details and contact information:** Consider placing this in the header. Name, address, phone number and email. (You do not need to include your date of birth or age)
2. **Personal statement:** If you are not writing a covering letter, you should include a personal statement which should be two or three lines detailing your strengths and why you are suitable for the role
3. **Education:** Start with your most recent place of study and qualifications you achieved first
4. **Employment history or work experience:** If you have both, detail as two separate sections and detail the skills you acquired and any achievements
5. **Skills:** Employers will be keen to know what skills you have - [scroll down to see what is a skill](#)
6. **Strengths and achievements:** Detail things like team working, a school or college project or an event you took part in, a hobby where you have gained an award such as a certificate, trophy or award
7. **Interests and voluntary work:** Detail your interests and any volunteering work such as fundraising or sponsoring which you have taken part in

Tailor your CV!

Once you have a basic CV, you should tailor it for each application you make. It takes just a few minutes and demonstrates to the employer that you have researched the company and looked at the job description the employer has taken time to write.

Make sure you research the job role and detail the skills you have to match.

For example, if you want to be a [Teaching Assistant](#), you might detail a time you worked with children or cared for a younger family member, such as babysitting. Something you might think is irrelevant can demonstrate your experience. For a [Digital Marketing Apprenticeship](#), you may want to include all the social media platforms you understand. As an ['Aspiring' Business Administrator](#), you should showcase any relevant skills, such as P.C. literacy or filing methods you have used.

You might be daunted or think you don't have any skills; this will not be the case; think about what skills are required for the role and then draw the skills from your experiences. Here are some ideas to get you started: -

- Even if you are a school leaver, there are some key life skills that you have begun to learn; for example, did you engage in team working activities? That's a skill! **Teamwork** skills are the qualities and abilities that allow you to work well with others during conversations, projects, meetings, or other collaborations. For example, if you have worked on a successful group project or played in a sports team, motivating friends and classmates, these are all examples of how you have developed skills.
- Did you use software for homework such as Microsoft **suite**? That's a skill
- If you're leaving university without practical job experience? Did you manage your student loan? **Budgeting** is a skill.

- You may have prioritised your assignments to meet deadlines. That's **organising, prioritising** and **working to deadlines** and is a skill that can translate into completing tasks & project assignments.

The key is adding the skills you have acquired and tailoring them to the role you are applying for.

Remember, you are applying for an apprenticeship

When hiring apprentices, employers are looking for someone who has the skills and desire for the job role, and experience isn't always necessary. However, if you haven't thought about your CV, it will show, and the same for interviews.

So prepare!

Think about your CV, why you're writing it, and to whom you are writing. You are not the only one applying, so you have to make your CV stand out.

Then **check, check and check again!** Ensure your CV is accurate and get someone else to check it before sending it.

If you get to the next stage, you will need to provide examples, such as certificates and references of the details of your CV. It is ok to show off your skills to put you in the best light, but remember that you will need to back up what you have written if you attend an interview.

Preparing for your Apprenticeship interview

Employers differ in the way they interview. While many small businesses will interview you over the phone, online, or face-to-face with a senior manager, larger employers may ask you to complete assessments and attend assessment days, workshops, and interviews. So ask your H.R. contact about the interview process.

I. Research the employer

The employer is offering you the opportunity. They have to know that you're interested in working for them in particular, so do a bit of professional stalking. Go on their website, blog and social media pages.

You can generally find out about the company and the directors on the 'About Us' of their web page; you can also find out about any contracts won or new projects they're working on on their news pages. So, make some notes and be ready to talk about it.

Just two or three facts will show you have done your research. Also, try to talk about why you have found your research and the company of interest.

I. Read the job description and list how your skills meet the role

Understand what you're applying for and the kind of skills and experience they are looking for, then match your skills to the position. The key here is to understand what you're good at and how your skills are relevant to the job.

Then think about how to get that across to the employer; for instance, through your summer job down the pub, you gained customer service skills, or working on the school newsletter shows your creativity and writing skills.

In the last two years, all students had to work online, using google docs, Microsoft Suite, Teams, or Zoom. This shows I.T. skills, organisational skills and adapting to new situations.

Nobody likes selling themselves, but you've chosen to apply for this role for a reason, and that is because it interests you, you have skills to match, it's a great opportunity.

Just making these points will help you on your way, but keep reading below to ensure you get the offer.

1. Practise interview questions

Practising answers to popular apprenticeship interview questions will give you the confidence to provide convincing answers on the day. Do not worry about sounding rehearsed; they're unlikely to notice – and even if they do, it just shows that you have prepared.

Practise with a friend, your pet, or just by yourself. For example, you might be able to arrange a mock interview with your school or college or practice with your family members, who will ask you different questions to help you prepare.

It's also worth giving your telephone manner brush up. Many of our employers require the first interview over the phone and/or online. You can read about our **online interview tips** [here](#).

You may be asked to do an assessment before your interview or complete a pre-interview questionnaire to test your people skills, as well as functional Maths and English. Your training provider or H.R. contact will let you know this in advance, but if not, when contacted to attend an interview, ask if you need to prepare anything. Again, it shows that you are willing to make an effort in advance. You can view some [advice for assessment interview days](#) on the video from Sky's Startout team.

1. Think of a few questions to ask

In the interviewing world, it's expected that you will ask some questions at the end. So, have some ready. Questions like, 'What would a normal day for me look like?' or 'What career progression could you offer me?' can help the employer start to picture you in the role.

Don't forget, you are doing an Apprenticeship, so ask about how your training will be delivered. For example, blended learning means a mix of online and face to face, block learning and day release means time out of the workplace, or will it be a combination? Your [Training Provider](#) or H.R. contact may have discussed this with you, but different people might interview you; it shows you are committed to the course as well as the job.

1. Follow up with the employer

After the interview, make sure you send an email thanking the interviewer for the opportunity and their time and that you look forward to finding out if you are successful; doing so will enforce that you are interested in the role

Now you have completed your interview successfully, you have to wait for the outcome!

Remember, it often takes more than one interview to get a job, so don't be downhearted if it does not go your way the first time. Instead, think of the positives, what you have learnt, and the confidence you have gained to succeed next time.

Even though these are challenging times, you can take advantage of this time to learn different education routes and career paths, about applying for a job and new recruiting methods. So, take action to look at as many opportunities as possible, then plan, prepare and rehearse. But, above all, learn and enjoy the experience while you can!

We hope that you have found this guide helpful. We keep our Aspiring Apprentices updated with lots of information, apprenticeship news, vacancies and career advice. You can [sign up for our mailing list here](#), and we have listed a few other blogs that you might be interested in below:-

Other articles that might interest you:

[Apprenticeship benefits that will help your career](#)

[Common Apprenticeship Interview Questions](#)

[Time Management Tips for Apprentices](#)

[Making the most of your Apprenticeship wages](#)