

# Apprenticeships

A student guide:  
everything you need to know

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# An introduction to apprenticeships



Apprenticeships are becoming an increasingly popular choice with school leavers, but what are they and who can apply for them? This article will help you get to grips with the basics.

## **What is an apprenticeship?**

An apprenticeship is a job in training. It allows you to gain a qualification, new skills and valuable experience – all whilst earning a wage.

There's a huge range of apprenticeships to choose from. Apprenticeships used to be mainly in trades like construction and engineering, but now they're in any type of work, so you can work in anything from floristry to aerospace engineering.

Because different jobs need different qualifications, there are a number of options available.

In England, there are 4 levels of apprenticeship:

- Intermediate (Level 2 – equivalent to 5 GCSE passes)
- Advanced (Level 3 – equivalent to 2 A level passes)
- Higher (Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 – equivalent to a foundation degree)
- Degree (Levels 6 and 7 – equivalent to a bachelor's or master's degree)

## Who can apply?

Anybody who is over the age of 16 can apply (there is no upper age limit), as long as they're not in full-time education.

However, each apprenticeship has its own entry requirements. For example, some Intermediate apprenticeships only need the applicant to show they're willing and able to complete the programme. A Higher apprenticeship, however, may ask for GCSEs and Level 3 qualifications, such as A Levels.

## How do I apply?

First, you must choose a standard or framework (all frameworks are being replaced by standards by the end of the 20/21 academic year). An apprenticeship standard is similar to a university subject, in that it tells you what you will study. Similar to how a university student might study the subject of Computing, for example, an apprentice might study the standard of Information Technology (IT).

Once you've chosen your standard, you can look for suitable apprenticeships through [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), and then apply.

## How long do they take to complete?

Each apprenticeship is different – they vary in length. An apprenticeship can take between one and four years to complete, depending on the level of the programme, the apprentice's ability and the industry sector.

For example, an Intermediate Level 2 Apprenticeship usually takes around 12 to 18 months and an Advanced Level 3 Apprenticeship around 24 months.

If taken part-time, they obviously increase in length, depending on how the apprentice's time is split.

## How much do they pay?

An apprentice is entitled to the 'apprentice rate' of pay if they're either:

- Aged under 19, OR
- Aged 19 or over and in the first year of their apprenticeship

The apprentice rate is currently **£3.90** per hour.

*For example: An apprentice aged 22 in the first year of their apprenticeship is entitled to a minimum hourly rate of £3.90.*

An apprentice is entitled to the national minimum wage for their age if they both:

- Are aged 19 or over, AND
- Have completed the first year of their apprenticeship

*For example: An apprentice aged 22 who has completed the first year of their apprenticeship is entitled to a minimum hourly rate of £7.70.*

You'll be paid for your normal working hours and any training that's part of your apprenticeship. You'll also be entitled to 20 paid holiday days per year, plus bank holidays.

**Good to know:** Although these rates might seem quite low, employers often pay more than the national minimum wage and trade unions often push for employers to pay over and above the apprentice rate too.

# 5 reasons to love Degree apprenticeships



The government describes them as ‘bringing together the best of higher and vocational education’. They’re an exciting new way for students to earn an academic degree, while gaining hands-on experience. Find out why Degree apprenticeships are becoming an increasingly popular choice for young people, with advice from a range of apprentices and employment experts.

## **A degree qualification**

Degree apprenticeships are different from most apprenticeships in that students have the opportunity to gain a full bachelor’s (Level 6) or master’s (Level 7) degree.

On top of their work with an employer, apprentices study part-time at a university or college. They work at least 30 hours a week, studying around these times using whichever method suits the employer’s needs.

Example:

*The teaching for Exeter University's Digital and Technology Solutions Degree Apprenticeship takes place through residential sessions, online learning and virtual workshops, to complement apprentices' work with their employers.*

## Finance

Degree apprentices receive a salary while they study, earning at least the apprentice's minimum wage for the whole 3-5 years of their employment.

The minimum wage for apprentices is £3.90 per hour, but earnings are usually much higher. Degree Apprenticeships are also completely free, so apprentices will avoid the usual degree tuition fee debt!

## Real-world experience

Degree apprentices gain valuable real-world experience as they learn in a working environment. They will be delegated responsibilities and tasks as an employee within the company.

Apprentices benefit from being in a professional environment, training alongside qualified employees and learning from experience. They can also network and make contacts in their industry that will help them in the future.

*"A graduate doesn't always have the employability skills. They might come out with the technical knowledge but they might not have the work skills because they might not have had any work experience... by the time they finish their apprenticeship they are so much more valuable than a graduate coming through the door."*

(Emma Choat, Emerging Talent Development Manager at Arcadis)

*"Many employers are finding that recent university leavers lack work experience, and the soft skill this brings... it is perhaps unsurprising that companies are therefore looking to take on apprentices to shape them for the roles required."*

(Mike Feters, Graduate Director at totaljobs.com)

## Employability

Degree apprentices tend to be highly employable, as they come away having benefited from both the academic rigour of a degree and the practical experience of an apprenticeship. These apprenticeships are designed by the employers themselves, meaning apprentices leave their training with the exact skills necessary to start their career. A poll by Positive Outcomes

found that 93% of employers would take on an apprentice over a graduate.

Many apprentices find employment straight away, staying on at the companies who provided their course. According to a survey by GovUK, 77% of apprentices stayed with the same employer whilst 46% received a pay rise and 36% reported getting a promotion.

*"The beauty of Degree apprenticeships is that you're gaining hands on experience that is of direct value to an employer. An apprentice is contributing to a business while also developing their own personal skills and abilities."*

(Kelly Ball, Managing Director of Positive Outcomes)

## Variety

There are a huge number of Degree apprenticeships to choose from, with over 100 companies (such as HSBC, Siemens and Nestlé) currently working with over 20 universities (including UCL, Manchester and Exeter) across the UK.

There are Degree apprenticeships available in areas ranging from Aerospace Development to Public Relations.

## Apprentice case studies

We caught up with some students working towards their Degree apprenticeships. Here's what they had to say:

**Ashok Hemmings went straight into a Degree apprenticeship in Engineering after Sixth Form, working for Rolls-Royce and studying at Sheffield Hallam University.**

*"I chose a Degree apprenticeship rather than going to university as the whole package seemed a lot better. It gives me real world experience and the same level of education while avoiding fees and being paid a salary. Being an apprentice lets me work with actual engine hardware which is always fascinating, plus I have a huge variety of tasks or roles to do so no day is ever the same!"*

**Jenny McHale is doing her Degree apprenticeship in Business Management. She studies at Pearson College London, and works at the BBC.**

*"I have always wanted to work in a creative industry and I wanted to further my management and leadership skills. I didn't go to Uni but have always wanted to do a degree. The combination of working in an exciting industry whilst completing a BA (Hons) in Business Management really appealed to me. My favourite project at the BBC so far has been to take the lead in producing some diversity and inclusion videos."*

# Financial support for UK apprentices



While you're on an apprenticeship, your employer will pay you a wage. If you're between 16 and 18 the government will pay the full cost of your training and, if you're 19 or over, they'll offer partial support. If you're worried this may not be enough to get by on, however, there is support available. Read on to find out what you're entitled to...

## **Advanced Learner Loan**

If you're aged 19 or over and asked to pay towards the cost of your training, you can apply for an [Advanced Learner Loan](#) from the government to cover these costs.

You're eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan if:

- You're aged 19 or over on the first day of your apprenticeship
- Your apprenticeship offers you a Level 3, 4, 5 or 6 qualification
- Your apprenticeship is completed through an approved training provider in England

Your loan eligibility **doesn't** depend on how much you will earn and there are no credit checks.

As it's a loan and not a grant, you will have to pay the money back, when the following apply:

- You've finished your course, **AND**
- You're earning more than £25,000

Similar loans are available if you want to study in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales.

## Advanced Learner Bursary Fund

If you secure an Advanced Learner Loan, you may also be able to apply for an Advanced Learner Bursary Fund through your apprenticeship provider. You don't have to pay this back and it can help to pay for things like accommodation, travel, course materials and childcare.

## Bursary for care leavers

If you're aged 16-24 and leaving care to start an apprenticeship, you may be entitled to a £1,000 non-repayable bursary. Your apprenticeship provider will be able to help you apply.

## IET Engineering Horizons Bursary

This bursary is designed to support engineering apprentices who face obstacles or personal challenges and need financial assistance.

To be eligible to apply, you must be completing an IET-approved apprenticeship and show a genuine passion for engineering.

Bursary award winners will receive £1,000 per year for the duration of their apprenticeship (up to four years). Find out more [here](#).

## Benefits

Apprentices working more than 33 hours a week are entitled to the same benefits as everyone else in the workplace, including Working Tax Credits.

To be eligible for Working Tax Credits, you must:

- Be aged 16-25 and have a child or a qualifying disability, or be aged 25 or over (with or without children)
- Work a certain number of hours a week

- Have an income below a certain level

The basic amount of Working Tax Credit is up to £1,960 a year, but you could get more or less depending on your circumstances and income.

## **Discounts**

The National Union of Students (NUS) offers an NUS Apprentice Extra card, which will entitle you to loads of discounts at shops and restaurants, both in-store and online.

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