

# BREAK INTO Apprenticeships



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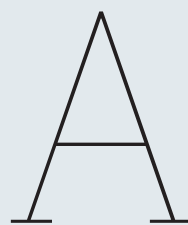
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## Secure a career without the debt of a degree



Apprenticeships have become an increasingly popular career route for young adults. There were more than 900,000 people on apprenticeships in 2015-16, nearly double the number in 2009-10, and they span a wide range of careers from creative and media, to construction and engineering.

In this supplement we explain how to apply for an apprenticeship and explore career opportunities. We hear from employers and apprentices and as Robert Halfon, the apprenticeships and skills minister, says: "We know apprenticeships work - 90% of apprentices go on to secure a job and nobody understands the skills employers need better than employers themselves."

We look at funding and the new apprenticeship levy: a tax on all UK companies and institutions with an annual pay bill of more than £3m

that the government hopes will fund much of its investment in apprenticeships up to 2020.

And we hear from Chris Garry, 20, who saw an opportunity to embark on his dream career when accountancy firm Grant Thornton gave a talk about higher apprenticeship roles: "I took to it really well because I always wanted to go into accounting."

We also look at higher apprenticeships - typically lasting three to four years, these apprenticeships offer a qualification equivalent to a degree. Careers adviser Susie Howe sees them as a particularly attractive option: "You don't get into debt while studying at university, and you still come out with a degree."

There really has never been a better time to consider doing an apprenticeship - you can earn while you learn and as Lois Medley, 17, says: "It's just a different world to school - you're treated as an adult."

**Sarah Jewell**

## Overview

# Apprenticeships at the double

Record numbers of young people are becoming apprentices and, with a new employer levy encouraging more firms to get involved, this trend looks set to continue, writes **Richard Doughty**



A stream of statistics has been pouring out of education department offices in recent months ... more than 900,000 apprentices in 2015-16 - the largest number since records began ... £2.5bn being invested in apprenticeships by 2020.

Yet more than 12 million adults in the UK lack the basic digital skills needed in today's workplace and the UK is the only Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development country whose 16- to 24-year-olds are no better at literacy and numeracy than those aged 55-65.

The good thing is the government, with the odd blip, seems to have stuck doggedly to its pro-apprentice policy with the apprenticeships and skills minister Robert Halfon stating in January: "We know apprenticeships work - 90% of apprentices go on to secure a job and nobody understands the skills employers need better than employers themselves."

Halfon was announcing details of the Institute for Apprenticeships, a new independent body tasked (from April) with vetting new, more workplace-relevant apprenticeship standards created by employers. April also marks a significant change in funding with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy; a tax on all UK employers with an annual pay bill of £3m-plus.

The government hopes the levy will fund much of its investment in apprenticeships up to 2020. It wants companies to recoup their levy payment from a central levy fund, provided they support new apprenticeships.

The new levy fund has already convinced one law firm to create two solicitor apprenticeships. "The levy coming in has really helped the business case as we have the money there to spend," says Sam Lee, recruitment manager at Bond Dickinson LLP. "At an open day promoting our paralegal apprenticeships, we were surprised at the high quality of candidates present - they could have been choosing university but seemed very thoughtful about their options and seeing this as an alternative. We've got 100 applicants for three places - four months before entry deadline."

But what of colleges and schools, often hamstrung by "bums on



**Apprentices at Bond Dickinson LLP. The law firm says it was impressed by the quality of candidates**

seats" dictating funding levels? Derwentside College, County Durham, has long fought against the "league table" trend of getting students through qualifications, regardless of workplace relevance. It only runs courses linked to local commercial need. Partly as a result, it has almost doubled its apprentices since 2012-13 to reach 6,000 last year and works with 1,193 employers. Its executive director for business development, Susan Errington, says: "The biggest mistake is saying apprenticeships are for non-academic people. It's not necessarily so."

Liz Pickford, career adviser at Rickmansworth School, Hertfordshire, says: "Both parents and teachers now have a more open attitude - much is down to how well the various schemes are marketed. We're also getting local firms saying they don't want graduates, [instead they're] seeking sixth-form leavers to put through university."

By contrast, Adam Sharp, an apprentice engineer at Sellafield, who won the Advanced Apprentice of the Year award, says students on school visits are shocked to hear he is taking a degree at no cost to himself: "They don't know anything about apprenticeships and they want to know more!"

### In numbers

# 904,800

In the academic year 2015/16, 904,800 people were in apprenticeships.

# 53%

Women have consistently outnumbered men in apprenticeship starts - in 2015/16 women accounted for 53% (268,730).

# 44,000

The number of starts by those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in 2014/15 reached 9% (44,000) of all starts, 16% up on the previous year.

# 25%

Qualified higher apprentices are considered 25% more employable by businesses than job applicants following other routes into the workplace.

Sources: House of Commons Library/ICM Research

## Deloitte.

### What inspires you?

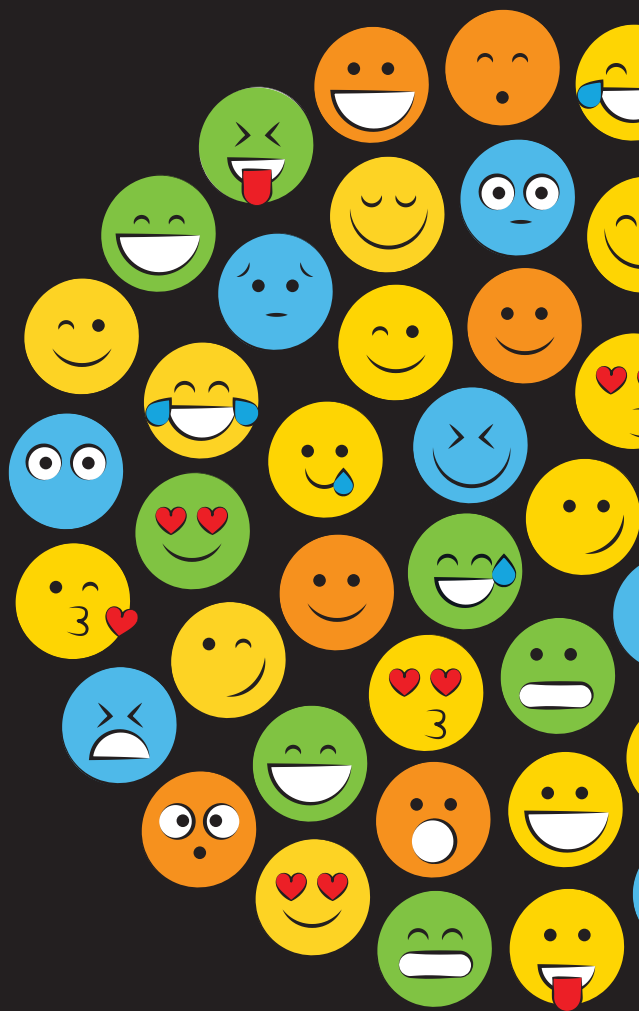
What gets your heart racing? What moves you to act? What is it in fact that lights your spark, adds that zing, makes your mind sing? What've you got that never fails to inspire?

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## Reforms

# The qualification employers want

Recent reforms have made apprenticeships an even more attractive option, says **Richard Doughty**

Contrary to popular belief, an apprenticeship is far removed from the old stereotype of an oil-drenched mechanic in a draughty garage. Today's apprenticeships provide you with a wage and free training, both in the workplace and through day release at college or university, to help you build a career in almost any line of work.

Different levels of apprenticeship are open to anyone living in England aged 16 or over, covering some 1,500 occupations in 170 industries, according to government figures. They range

from IT, media and engineering through to the NHS, education and professional services, such as lawyers and accountants. They will take one to five years to complete.

Recent reforms that introduced employer-designed standards to apprenticeship delivery mean you can expect close mentoring, at least 20% time off to study, more stringent testing and general all-round support from workplace colleagues. The changes, which will be introduced gradually up to 2020, are designed to simplify existing demands on apprentices and expand the scheme into previously untouched sectors.

When your employer judges that you are at the required standard, they will "sign you off" to be independently assessed and graded. After completion, they will generally offer you a full-time job. Your apprenticeship will show you



**Looking ahead: apprenticeships take one to five years to complete**  
**Tom Whipps**

are fully competent in a stated role and that you match an easy-to-read standard devised by employers in your sector. Until 2020, some apprenticeships will continue to operate under the old-style "framework" system, encompassing intermediate, advanced and higher-level apprenticeships.

Salaries start at £3.40 an hour, rising to £3.50 as of April 2017, although many are considerably higher depending on location, industry and skill level. Some higher-level apprentices can earn as much as £300-£500 a week.

To apply, talk to a careers adviser, check out the government's [getingofar.gov.uk](http://getingofar.gov.uk) website, or contact an employer direct.

## The engineer apprentice

# On track for engineering success

For **Lois Medley**, an apprenticeship has been an ideal route to real-life construction experience

**Lois Medley is keen to get others to follow in her footsteps**

and decided that this was the route for her. She had a "mini interview" over the phone, and was then invited in for a day-long interview at the firm's Chancery Lane office.

Medley was one of 43 apprentices, allocated to different teams, to join in September. She is based in the rail team, which is engaged in the Crossrail project, a high-capacity railway network for London and the south-east. Earning £15,000 a year, Medley works four days a week in the firm's Devonshire Square office, acquiring engineering skills, such as the use of computer-aided design software to create drawings of cables. "It's just a different world to school - you're treated as an adult," she says.

She particularly likes being involved in a real-life engineering project: "It's real buildings and real stations that my team is working on. One day I can be a part of one of those stations and say I helped participate in that."

Medley attends South Thames College one day a week, where she is studying for a level-3 BTEC in building services engineering. She is also studying for EngTech (engineering technician) and IEng (incorporated engineering) qualifications and will receive a bonus once she achieves them. Medley says she enjoys college because it's related to what she's doing every day: "We create a portfolio based on the work we do on a day-to-day basis." This portfolio is then used as evidence towards her qualification.

Once she has completed her apprenticeship, Medley hopes to stay with WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff to take an advanced apprenticeship and perhaps even a degree apprenticeship.

In the meantime, Medley is keen to spread the word by taking part in the Brathay Apprenticeship Challenge and going back into her old school to encourage others to follow in her footsteps. "We need more girls in engineering," she says.

**Kim Thomas**

Lois Medley, 17, began her two-year apprenticeship last September with WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff, an engineering services firm whose contracts include the Shard, High Speed 2 and London Bridge station. She had considered staying on for sixth form after GCSEs, but decided against it: "I didn't want to be stuck in the classroom for another two years. I wanted to get out there and start a career. I wanted to be in the real world."

At her all-girls school, her class was shown videos about apprenticeships, but it was a family friend working for WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff who suggested she apply to the firm. The conversation "really grabbed my attention", she says, and so she read up more on the company



“It's just a different world to school - you're treated as an adult”

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All of our apprentices have their own reasons for joining us. Take HR apprentice, Caleb, for example. "I chose an apprenticeship at DLG because I'm a practical person. Doing a job whilst learning is a much more enjoyable way for me."

Striking that balance between developing your skills and putting them into practice is a big part of life as an apprentice here. As you'd expect, you'll start with a full induction into our business, plus training in your chosen area. After that you'll become an integral part of your team, with real responsibilities.

You'll have plenty of support along the way – whether it's from the person sitting next to you, a team leader or your dedicated mentor.

Plus a personalised learning plan, training towards a professional qualification and – subject to performance – a permanent role at the end of the programme.

Who you work with and the environment you'll work in was also a key consideration for Caleb. "Before I applied I looked closely at what the culture would be like, and I wasn't disappointed when I joined. The environment is really open and you get to work with a lot of different people. They all have different personalities, senses of humour and beliefs."

As for any advice on going straight from school into work, Caleb says it's all in the preparation. "Search for and participate in any CV building and interview skills sessions. You can gain a real advantage here."

Earning as you learn isn't the only benefit you'll get as an apprentice. Your rewards package will include 50% off motor insurance, pension planning, and great discounts off high street brands, gym memberships, tickets and much more.

You can find out more about kick-starting your career with one of the UK's leading companies at [directlinegroupcareers.com](http://directlinegroupcareers.com)

Always progressing



Foot to the floor: Mercedes-Benz is investing heavily in apprenticeships

## The comeback kids

A levy to fund more apprenticeships is a sign of their increasing vitality, says **David Benady**

Thousands of organisations are ramping up their apprenticeship programmes and offering learn-while-you-earn schemes to a growing number of school leavers and older job seekers.

From giant corporations, such as BT and Barclays, and public-sector bodies including the NHS, to small and medium-sized businesses, apprenticeships are becoming key to the drive to recruit, train and retain skilled staff.

To fund its aim of creating 3m new apprenticeships by 2020, the government is launching a new scheme called the apprenticeship levy.

From 6 April, UK employers with a wage bill of more than £3m will pay 0.5% of that annual bill into the levy. All businesses will be able to draw on the fund to pay for apprenticeships. While there is concern that a rapid expansion could harm the quality of what's on offer, others see the move as a welcome boost to skills training. Just 2% of businesses will be eligible to pay into the fund, helping to subsidise the apprenticeship costs of the rest.

Ebsford Environmental in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, which specialises in aquatic management, has 29 employees: six on apprenticeships, three who have completed their schemes. "We have never lost an apprentice," says managing director Nick Hartley. The way we have integrated apprenticeships is core to our recruitment strategy – 20% of our staff are apprentices. They are young people who we're trying to develop in a rounded way. That is the most

“I don't think you can learn the same qualities as you can in the workplace”

important thing to us.” Jemma Scott did an apprenticeship in business administration at Ebsford: “I was a bit older – 23 at the time – and wanted to get a qualification. I looked at college courses, but I don't think you learn the same qualities as you do in the work environment.”

Big businesses are also boosting apprentice recruitment. Whitbread employs about 1,000 apprentices in its Premier Inn hotels group and Costa Coffee division as part of its Whitbread Investing In Skills and Employment scheme.

Sandra Kelly, head of education at Whitbread, says people are hired by the company and then given the opportunity to do an apprenticeship, rather than joining as apprentices. And she is keen to emphasize that “they don't take a pay cut. We don't pay apprenticeship wages – we pay team-member wages.” At entry level, the average wage for a team member is £7.74 an hour – significantly higher than the current minimum apprenticeship wage of £3.40 an hour for under-19s or those in their first year.

Mercedes-Benz has doubled its new apprenticeships over the past four years. The company has 570 apprentices on three-year programmes in its UK retailer network. They train in three disciplines: parts operation, heavy vehicle technician and light vehicle technician. These are offered at both intermediate level 2 and advanced level 3.

BT has about 1,600 apprenticeships, covering everything from customer service, sales and engineering, to digital and information technology at degree level. “The benefits to BT are massive,” says Viv McSweeney, director of talent acquisition at BT. “Our attrition is very low across our apprenticeship programmes, and some of our most senior managers and directors started off their careers as apprentices.”

Companies can enter their schemes in to the National Apprenticeship Awards, which has recognised the work carried out by all the companies featured here.

### Learning the ropes The rise of the apprentice

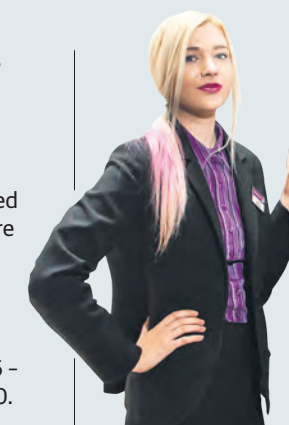
- About 2.4m apprenticeships were started between 2010 and 2015. The government vowed in 2015 to create 3m apprenticeships by 2020.

- More than half a million new apprenticeships were started in England in 2015/16.

- Some 44% of these new apprentices were aged 25 and over, while under-19s made up 26% of the total. Some 53% were women.

- Intermediate level apprenticeships – which offer level 2 qualifications, equivalent to 5 GCSEs – made up 58% of new starts, while advanced level – offering level 3 qualifications equivalent to two A-levels – accounted for 38%. Higher level starts, which are equivalent to foundation degree and above, made up 5% of starts.

- There were more than 900,000 people on apprenticeships in 2015/16 – nearly double the number in 2009/10.



- Almost three-quarters of apprentices are training in three main areas: business, administration and law; public services and care; and retail and commercial enterprise. In fourth place is engineering and manufacturing technology.

- Apprenticeship starts by people with a learning difficulty or disability nearly doubled from 26,000 to 50,000 between 2009/10 to 2015/16.

Source: BIS FE data library: apprenticeships, quoted in Apprenticeship Statistics: England, Nov 2106, The House of Commons Library.

## Applying for an apprenticeship

# Research your development

If you want to become an apprentice, but don't know where to start, fear not - **David Benady** has the answers

Apprenticeships in England are open to anyone aged 16 up who is outside full-time education. But with so many opportunities on offer, it can be hard to know where to start.

The government's Find an Apprenticeship service has thousands of opportunities in England on its website. Applicants need to create an account to apply for apprenticeships, after which they will receive email and text alerts about what's available and be able to track their applications.

Candidates can search by job role, occupation type, apprenticeship level and location. They don't need an account to search. Once they set up an account, they can store the application,

so if it wasn't successful they can work on it for another vacancy.

The service offers advice through a document called How to write a winning apprenticeship application, which gives a step-by-step guide to the process.

Apprenticeship hopefuls should listen out for recommendations from friends and family. They should

“**Even if a company hasn't advertised, it's worth approaching it if it interests you**”

also attend school careers fairs. Some colleges and schools advertise apprenticeships, as do employment agencies. It may be worth approaching a company that interests you even if it hasn't advertised. The important point is to research widely.



The Find an apprenticeship service advertises thousands of opportunities online  
Alamy

In Scotland, school students can begin an apprenticeship foundation course or take a modern apprenticeship when they leave. There are also graduate-level apprenticeships up to a master's degree level on offer. The website apprenticeships.scot hosts

# Time to apply yourself

Making a good impression is key if you want to land your dream training role, says **David Benady**

You can boost your chances of getting the apprenticeship of your choice by taking time to research the role and writing a strong, personalised application.

Find out as much as possible about the apprenticeship, the company and the industry it operates in. You need to develop a clear idea about your desired career path and where the apprenticeship will take you.

A mistake that young people often make is failing to personalise their applications and CVs. You need to avoid sending out generic applications, but should tailor each one to highlight how your relevant experience and skills are suitable for that particular role.

Amanda White, head of specialist markets at recruiters Manpower, says young people often feel they have little relevant experience, but advises parents: "You need to start talking to them and extracting things they may have done in the past - for instance, whether they were part of a football

team and have that team ethic. Get them to think of when they have had to overcome difficulties, influence people's opinions, or get people on side.

"Young people have a lot more experience than they might think, it is a question of sitting down with somebody - whether that is a family member or a friend, a school teacher or careers adviser - and extracting some of these points."

Being positive and pro-active, investing time in each application and demonstrating knowledge about the role, the company and the industry is essential if you want to secure an interview. Looking the part with a smart appearance is the next step, says White. Displaying confidence is important, too, for instance by looking people in the eye when shaking hands.

John Endersby, employment and skills director at Futures in Nottingham, says: "They need to make sure they are able to sell themselves. If they have done that and have managed to get the interview, then they have to be well prepared, which means understanding what the employers expect from them. It is all about presenting yourself in the best possible light."

Above all they need to remember the old advice to job seekers: if you fail to prepare, you should prepare to fail.

“**It is all about presenting yourself in the best possible light**”

## Apprenticeship levels A route to the top

There are three levels of apprenticeship: intermediate, advanced and higher. Higher apprenticeship standards also include degree apprenticeships. Every qualification in the UK has a level, ranked from 1 to 8 on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Each apprenticeship qualification has a corresponding level.

Name	NQF rank	What you will achieve
Intermediate apprenticeship	Level 2, equivalent to five good GCSE passes.	Apprentices look to achieve a work-based qualification, such as a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2, Key Skills in English and maths, and often a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) award or BTEC first diploma or certificate. These qualifications allow entry to an advanced apprenticeship.
Advanced apprenticeship	Level 3, equivalent to two A-level passes.	Candidates should have either five good GCSEs, or to have completed an intermediate apprenticeship. At this level, they work to achieve qualifications, such as NVQ level 3, Key Skills and often a BTEC.
Higher apprenticeships	Between level 4 and level 7.	Higher apprenticeships are a route to achieving qualifications, such as an NVQ level 4, a foundation degree or BTEC professional diploma, certificate or award. They can lead to a bachelor's degree. For entry, candidates need a level-3 qualification, such as A-levels or an advanced apprenticeship.
Degree apprenticeships	Equivalent to a bachelor's degree (level 6) or master's (level 7).	Degree apprenticeships are a newly launched alternative to full-time university study. Apprentices are employed full time for three to six years, working 30 hours a week and getting practical on-the-job training.

Sources: ucas.com; unionlearn.org.uk/levels-apprenticeship

## Zoe Bradwell 'You get to see more of what the business is like and how it works'

Zoe Bradwell joined BT's consumer division in Accrington, Lancashire, as a customer service apprentice in 2015 at the age of 16.

"This apprenticeship was quite local. We drove past and there was a big recruitment banner outside, so my mum said: 'Why don't you try that? That would be a good company to get into and there's lots of different paths you can take.'"

Bradwell originally considered a finance apprenticeship, but decided on the customer services course as it was closer to her home.

"You learn a lot of things, such as how to have difficult conversations with people and how every customer is different. You gain lots of knowledge.

"I have gained a lot more confidence and if you need any support someone is always there to offer it to you. We've got the apprenticeship coach who comes down every two weeks, and there is an apprentice manager who you can speak to if you need anything. There are six of us doing apprenticeships together," she says.

The 18-month apprenticeship finishes in May. "We had an initial five weeks of training for the job; then we had six weeks where we had full support. Then they slowly took the support away so you were eased into it," she says. "Once a month, we have a day with an apprentice coach. She comes down and makes sure we are doing fine. In June, we had a week where the apprentices all got together." Training is given by internal BT trainers.

"My twin is doing an apprenticeship as well," Bradwell says. "There's quite a few of my friends who originally went to college, but they didn't like it and they've dropped out and done an apprenticeship.



On call: BT customer service apprentice Zoe Bradwell

"I've completed all my assessments and NVQs, but they still leave you on the apprenticeship and give you more development time for yourself. You can develop your CV and look at the wider business at BT.

"It's really great as you get to see

more of what the business is like and how it works."

Earning while learning was a big attraction. She has already saved up for driving lessons and a car. What a difference from coming out of university thousands of pounds in debt.

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## Lessons about the workplace

Tomorrow's apprentices are making their career choices in the classroom, says **Kim Thomas**

**M**ia Angell's 18-year-old son is expected to do well in his A-levels and has had offers from three Russell Group universities to study computer science. However, he's also applied for a degree apprenticeship with a government organisation, after his school brought it to parents' attention. Angell thinks that it's a good alternative: "It makes sense for him to get some hands-on experience, get paid while he's doing it and also get a degree at the end of it."

This view illustrates a growing acceptance among both parents and students that apprenticeship schemes offer a good alternative to other academic routes.

Keisha Walker, head of careers and employability at Phoenix Academy in London, says there has been a surge of interest this year, from both

“**If you'd rather learn by doing, then an apprenticeship may be the thing for you**”

high achievers and less academic students, particularly in subjects such as engineering and ICT. Walker does, however, sound a note of caution: "I do say to the students: 'Apprenticeships are so competitive that you still need to apply to a university or college as a backup.'"

So how can parents and teachers help students make an informed choice? The first port of call has to be the government's Find an apprenticeship website that allows you to enter the broad job role you're interested in (such as engineer), the level and location. This will bring up a list of available apprenticeships, with details of the role, entry requirements and how to apply. The government's resource site for apprenticeships is also an invaluable tool for teachers and parents, including links to videos and webinars.

However, there is no substitute for



Ark academies are keen to foster links with local employers

hearing from people in the know, such as employers or current apprentices. Walker enlisted the services of Aim Apprenticeships that not only gave a talk to year-11 students about how apprenticeships work, but also ran a workshop for those who expressed

**Jason Wing**  
 'We give the university and apprenticeship route equal weighting'

**J**ason Wing, principal of Neale-Wade Academy in Cambridgeshire, is determined to challenge the view of apprenticeships as inferior to the university route. He has appointed a full-time careers adviser and invites local businesses to meet the students in different contexts. Last year an employability skills day was attended by 30 local businesses, while earlier this year, local packaging company Smurfit Kappa came in to address year 10 students about apprenticeships and help them practise mock interviews.

The school talks to students and their parents about apprenticeships, both as

**Learning to fly:**  
 Jason Wing says it's important that students are not pushed, but just given the facts



an interest, and then helped students complete their applications.

The academy chain Ark takes a two-pronged approach to employer relationships.

Its head of university and careers success, Hannah McAuley, says that at a national level, Ark has developed strategic relationships. However, individual schools within the chain have also developed their own relationships, inviting local employers to do work-readiness activities with students. Ark students have been accepted on to apprenticeships with architects KPMB and accounting firm Deloitte, among others.

Because not all teachers are aware of what apprenticeships have to offer, Ark also runs a training programme to help teachers build long-lasting relationships with businesses and deliver expert guidance on the schemes.

McAuley advises students to keep their options open, but adds: "Think about how you learn best - fundamentally going to university or staying at school is an academic route, but if you'd rather be hands-on and learn by doing, then an apprenticeship route might suit you better."

a post-16 and post-18 option. "When we have a year 10 or year 11 parents' evening, we make sure that we have local businesses there saying what they have on offer and how an apprenticeship is a real option for your child," says Wing.

"We've been transparent about both routes, and we've given them an equal weighting in our sixth-form handbook - we include people who went to Durham and Cambridge universities, but we've also made sure that we've got students who went on to apprenticeships."

Currently, students tend to take level 3 or 4 apprenticeships, often in sectors such as agriculture and construction.

One student who could have gone down the A-level route chose instead to take an apprenticeship with a building contractor. Wing also cites a student with three grade-A A-levels, now taking a level 5 (higher) apprenticeship at a large medical practice.

Neale-Wade's efforts to inform students about their choices has also seen an increase in numbers of sixth-formers applying to university. The school's role, says

Wing, is not to push students in a particular direction, but to "give them the facts and let them make the choice". **KT**

## Apprenticeships on campus

# The best of both worlds

An apprenticeship that's part academic and part hands-on is an unbeatable mix, says **Kim Thomas**

Higher and degree apprenticeships represent the cream of the crop. Typically lasting three to four years, higher apprenticeships provide students with a qualification at level 4 or level 5, equivalent to a foundation degree - although some are available at level 7. Offered in vocational areas, such as engineering, accountancy and law, higher apprenticeships still represent only 5% of all apprenticeship starts.

Degree apprenticeships, introduced in 2015, last between three and six years and are provided by employers, including Rolls-Royce and GlaxoSmithKline, in partnership with universities. Apprentices typically

spend 30 hours a week working for their employer, and some time studying at university, either on a block-release basis, or through distance or blended learning. The employer pays both a salary and the apprentice's tuition fees.

Susie Howe, careers adviser at Sandringham School in St Albans, Hertfordshire, sees them as an attractive option: "You don't get into debt at university, and you still come out with a degree." Howe is inviting employers into school to talk about what's on offer, as many parents and students are still unaware.

Competition is fierce - currently there are only about 1,000 degree apprenticeship places on offer. This may change with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April, which employers can only recoup if they use the money to fund apprentices' training.

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) has been offering higher apprenticeships in food science since 2012 and is in negotiation with a number of employers. Sara Poulson, subject leader



**“You don't get into debt and you still come out with a degree”**

for food and horticultural sciences at NTU, says: "The food industry is desperate for good graduate skills. It's the biggest employer in Europe. And students also build up a professional network, because they're building up those contacts right from the first year of university studies."

NTU degree apprentices will study the same content as traditional students on the food science and technology degree, but will either do it on day release or on a block release basis in intensive four-week periods.

To gain a place on a higher or degree apprenticeship it's best to start by looking at the government's Find an apprenticeship website. You could also contact universities direct to see if they're offering apprenticeships in the field you're interested in. Applications go to the employer, however, rather than the university, and both higher and degree apprenticeships require similar entry qualifications to those for a traditional university degree.

Poulson believes that higher and degree apprenticeships offer a unique opportunity: "The world of work is tough out there and you can't beat a CV that has work experience and a formal academic qualification on it as well."

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## Accountancy

# Having it all figured out

Good with numbers - never keen on university - Chris Garry chose an apprenticeship and never looked back

Throughout his school career, Chris Garry, 20, was always good with numbers, but he knew from an early age that he didn't want to go to university.

At his Manchester sixth-form college he took A-levels in accounting, economics and IT, and saw an alternative route open up for him when accountancy firm Grant Thornton gave a talk about higher apprenticeship roles. Seeing his enthusiasm, the firm's representative encouraged him to apply. Although his A-level grades fell slightly short, Grant Thornton was impressed by his abilities, and Garry started a four-year higher apprenticeship in August 2015.

It's an environment in which he has thrived. "I took to it really well because I always wanted to go into accounting," he says. "I just wanted to make sure I could do it as best as I can." Four days a week, Garry is based in the office, where he reviews financial statements under supervision. He will progress to working without supervision, before moving next year to charging jobs on his own. "It's quite a structured and quick development process," he says. One day a week, Garry studies for his Association of Accounting Technicians qualification at Kaplan Financial college, which he will complete in August this year. In the final year of his apprenticeship he will gain chartered accountant (ACA) status.

His bosses have been so pleased with his performance that his starting salary of £15,500 has now risen to £18,500. Once his apprenticeship is over, Garry plans to stay with the firm on secondment to another country, such as Australia or Singapore: "If you're ACA qualified you can go anywhere in the world." **KT**

**“If you're ACA qualified you can go anywhere in the world”**



# A recipe for financial stability

Money is normally tight when studying, but not if you're an apprentice, says **Richard Doughty**

For young people, being an apprentice is an absolute win-win. You've got a job, you are earning a salary and you get [free] training at the same time," says Jamie Stevenson, director of business partnerships at South Thames College, south London. "At no point should apprentices make any financial contribution towards their training costs."

So who does pay for the training - an expensive prospect at higher and degree apprenticeship level? From April 2017 any employer in the UK with a wage bill of £3m-plus, regardless if they

employ apprentices or not, must pay an apprenticeship levy - a new tax of 0.5% of their annual pay roll - to help fund 3m new apprenticeships up to 2020.

Large employers based in England can reclaim the levy in apprentice training vouchers: for every £1 paid as part of the levy, they get back £1 plus 10% in vouchers to support apprentice training from May 2017 onwards.

Companies with an annual wage bill under £3m are exempt from the levy, yet still qualify for 90% government funding for apprenticeship training and assessment; the employer pays the remaining 10%. Employers with fewer than 50 members of staff, who take on a 16- to 18-year-old apprentice or a 19- to 24-year-old apprentice with disabilities or learning difficulties, will get 100% government funding. In addition, even if apprentices leave a programme prematurely, they are not expected to



**Food for thought: some companies will hand out pay increments during an apprenticeship**  
Michael Cockerham

pay back anything to cover the costs of training and assessment.

Apprentices have to fund living costs themselves. However, for an annual £11 subscription, they can buy an NUS Apprentice extra discount card.

If based in London, apprentices also get a subsidised Oyster card. If they are living independently from their families and face financial difficulties they are encouraged to call their college or other training provider, Stevenson says.

"Some employers will hand out loans and travel allowances. If an apprentice does well, we encourage employers to look at performance and give them pay increments during their apprenticeship."

# Not a lot of people know that ...

... Michael Caine was once a dab hand with a spanner. Proof that apprentices are real stars. By **Kim Thomas**

**Billy Connolly** completed a five-year apprenticeship as a boilermaker in the Govan shipyards in Glasgow. He left to become a folk singer, eventually finding success as a comedian and actor.

Actor **Michael Caine** served a two-year apprenticeship as a plumber before giving it up to star in films such as *Alfie*, *The Italian Job* and *Educating Rita*.

**John Caudwell**, the founder of retailer Phones4u, was once an engineering apprentice at the Michelin factory in Stoke-on-Trent.

**Alex Ferguson** spent five years as an apprentice toolmaker at the Remington Rand typewriter factory in Glasgow,



before becoming one of the most successful football managers of all time.

TV chef and healthy food campaigner **Jamie Oliver** was a catering apprentice at *Carluccio's* restaurant in Neal Street, London, and now owns numerous restaurants including the *Jamie's Italian* chain. He also runs his own apprenticeship programme.

Fashion designer **Stella McCartney** served as an apprentice at Edward

**Michael Caine served a two-year apprenticeship as a plumber**  
Stephan C Archetti / Getty

Sexton, Savile Row, before attending Central St Martins, the internationally renowned art college. Career highlights include designing Team GB's kit for the 2012 London Olympics.

**Ian McKellen** completed a three-year acting apprenticeship at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. He has since had a long and distinguished acting career on stage and screen.

**Ozzy Osbourne** was an apprentice toolmaker at the General Electric company in Birmingham before joining Black Sabbath.

Celebrity chef **Gordon Ramsay**, who owns 40 restaurants worldwide, started his career as an apprentice studying hotel management at North Oxfordshire Technical College.

**Alan Titchmarsh** was an apprentice at Ilkley Park, West Yorkshire, before going on to study horticulture and later winning fame as a television gardener and novelist.

## MANAGEMENT DEGREE

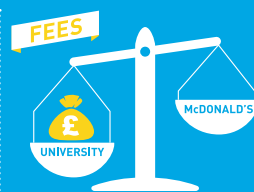
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## Mike Smith

'An apprenticeship is a full-time, paid job'



UK plc has reached a tipping point in terms of skills. Numerous business sectors are reporting significant skill shortages. In the engineering and manufacturing sectors alone we need something like 87,000 entrants at level-4 (equivalent of HNC/HND) per year for the next 10 years just to replace those retiring. And yet, according to EngineeringUK, we are producing only 66,000 annually. Demographics is a big issue, but so too is skills provision.

We are not only lacking in vocational, but also social and "work-ready" skills. I hear employers constantly complaining about school leavers not being ready for work and lacking the right attitude and behaviour to enter the workforce.

This is where apprenticeships must play a central role. They offer incredible opportunities, and the higher and degree-level apprenticeships are now recognised by the government as having parity with university degrees.

The big selling point of an

apprenticeship - and something many parents, students and teachers fail to recognise is that it's a full-time, paid job with a structured development and education programme. At Gen2, for instance, we know that about 94% of our learners who complete their apprenticeship, at any level, are taken on in well-paid, full-time work by the same employers, post-completion of their apprenticeship.

The key game-changer is the government's double incentive of recognising degree apprenticeships and introducing an apprenticeship levy on larger companies (starting this April and the first new tax on employers for many years).

Employers are being encouraged to see the apprenticeships as a way of securing the next generation of highly skilled workers and recoup the costs of paying the tax by using their levy fund to take on their own apprentices.

Meanwhile, the brightest students are starting to realise that aside from missing out on "the university

experience" they can gain a degree on day release, without having to pay a penny towards tuition fees, and start a salaried career much earlier than the traditional graduate.

The government's target of 3m apprenticeships starts by 2020 seems a big ask, but may be not such a leap from the 2.4m starts during the coalition. The real yardstick, however, will be the quality of the apprenticeship and the number of students who complete the course - at Gen2, 90% of our apprentices complete each year. Better, therefore, to set a lower, more realistic target - how about aiming for 2.7m starts nationally?

*Mike Smith is chief executive of Gen2 Training, a not-for-profit, independent training provider supporting more than 1,300 apprentices across Cumbria. A former vice-chair and chair of the Further Education Trust for Leadership, he started out as an apprentice draughtsman before qualifying as a chartered engineer.*

**Interview by Richard Doughty**

“The yardstick will be the quality and number of students who complete the course”

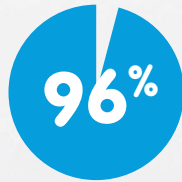
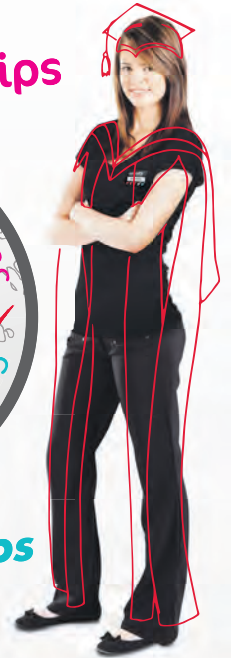


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...of our Apprentices would recommend the programme to others



...over 750 new Apprentices joined in the last 3 years



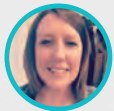
After completing ...of our Apprentices want to do another qualification



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**Celebrating ten successful years of its Apprenticeship Programme, global retail group A.S. Watson knows on the job training is the springboard to a lasting and rewarding career.**

Owners of Superdrug and Savers, the A.S. Watson Group are one of the fastest-growing retailers in the world. Part of this achievement is recognising the value of being trained while you work, which is why their forward-thinking Apprenticeship schemes have been leading the way for a decade. Apprentices are employed 30 hours per week during their 12-month programme, which can open many doors for ambitious and self-motivated young people – people like Sam Cooper (below).



Now a Regional Security Manager for Savers, Sam started as a part-time Sales Assistant in Superdrug. In 2008 she moved onto their Apprenticeship Programme and over the next few years qualified in Customer Service, then Retail Management. “The courses gave me extra skills”, she comments. “They gave me a higher level of understanding about effective communication, customer service and management in general. I think having that level of training gave me a step up on someone who didn’t.”

### Fast Track to Success

Hard working and keen to succeed, Sam progressed quickly, taking on a variety of managerial roles before moving across to Savers just over a year ago. “It’s been great to move around to different towns and areas and meet different people. Every time I’ve moved it’s been to a bigger store with more staff, which means I’ve continued to learn more and more about management”. Her advice to anyone thinking

of applying for an apprenticeship? “Go for it!” she urges. “Apart from experiencing it for myself, I had an apprentice working with me in the Solihull Touchwood store and saw the opportunity it had given her at first hand; the skills she had learnt and the experience she gained,” adds Sam.

**“ It has such a friendly environment and was not 'just a job'. The amount of support and training I have received is incredible. ”**



Such is the group’s belief in apprentices that they have taken on more than 750 over the past three years, all of them learning on the job at the same time as getting paid... and getting ahead. 2017’s Superdrug Apprentice of the Year, Harriet Haygreen (left), is one of these. Despite starting out studying animal management at college, Harriet quickly discovered she loved working with the public while waitressing part-time. She thoroughly researched retail apprenticeship schemes and found the Superdrug Programme stood out from the rest: “They really value all of your hard work and it is true to say the more you put into it, the more you get out. It has such a friendly environment and was not ‘just a job’. The amount of support and training I have received is incredible.”

### Take the Plunge

Harriet wouldn’t hesitate to recommend the Programme to other school and college leavers. “I believe the apprenticeship has massively boosted my employability prospects,” she confirms. “Unlike a college course or A Levels - where you just get a qualification - I have gained qualifications and experience where I have been learning on the job the previous year.” With her sights firmly set on continuing to work her way upwards, Harriet’s passion has recently been rewarded with a promotion to Assistant Store Manager. Proof that determination and a proactive attitude can certainly take you places.

Diverse and enjoyable, Savers’ and Superdrug’s Apprenticeship Programmes could even launch you into Buying, Logistics, Store and Regional Management, as well as Resource and Social Media. Offering Retail and Customer Service Apprenticeships - with the option of specialising in beauty and healthcare at Superdrug – apprentice benefits include 28 days paid holiday and a 30% store discount. So become part of something bigger today; apply online at: [www.superdrug.jobs](http://www.superdrug.jobs) or [www.savers.jobs](http://www.savers.jobs)

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