

# NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK 2024

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**APPRENTICESHIPS**

# NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK

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# The case for change is undeniable. It's decision time.

SHANE CHOWEN  
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Welcome to FE Week's special supplement marking this year's National Apprenticeship Week. With the support of NCFE, we've brought together this year's key news, announcements and highlights.

In the following pages, you'll also find exclusive and sometimes provocative opinions from sector leaders and insiders.

Getting people to write for a publication like this is the easy bit; everyone wants to make the apprenticeship system work. As you'll see for yourself, the sector isn't short on ideas either.

What sets 2024 apart from previous years though is the sense of urgency behind calls for change. There will almost certainly be a general election this year and the sector is hungry for detail from politicians on what's to come.

Since last year's National Apprenticeship Week

supplement, there's been some good progress. Funding for functional skills qualifications was increased last month following a concerted lobbying effort from training organisations and, as Billy Camden reports on **page 12**, there are signs small businesses are making use of the removal of the cap on apprenticeship starts.

Apprentices Susan Loughlin and Adam Henderson have their say on **pages 14 and 15**. Loughlin's inspirational story reminds us of the harsh realities faced by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and makes a powerful argument for a living wage to widen access to apprenticeships.

Organisations like the Association of Apprenticeships, the Chartered Institution for Further Education and the Union of Jewish Students are also doing their bit to improve the status and experience of doing

an apprenticeship on **pages 16-17**.

Debates about funding and tweaks to the levy are of course important, but we shouldn't forget that with low completion rates in much of the sector, apprentices themselves have to see the value.

New AELP chief executive Ben Rowland shares what he has learned from touring the country on his CEO roadshow, paying tribute to the "unsung heroes" that make up the apprenticeship eco-system on **page 10**. And Ofsted's FE chief Paul Joyce shares what his inspectors find are the common elements to the very best training on **page 24**.

While there are debates about detail, what is uniting the apprenticeships sector is that the current system isn't doing enough for young people or small businesses. The longer we go on as we are, the deeper inequalities in the system will be entrenched. The status quo isn't acceptable to anyone. Now is the time for choices.



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# SUZANNE SLATER

Commercial director,  
NCFE



## Why apprenticeships have shaped skills for generations and are meeting the needs of tomorrow

**From humble beginning in the middle-ages, apprenticeships are now more diverse than ever before – yet remain crucial for equipping people with the skills the workforce needs, writes Suzanne Slater**

From medieval origins to the digital age, apprenticeships have undergone a remarkable evolution, mirroring changes in society, economy, and technology.

The medieval era marked the birth of apprenticeships. These were more than just a means to a trade; they were a social contract. Young people were bound to a master craftsman, learning a trade such as blacksmithing or carpentry.

As the industrial revolution swept through Britain, apprenticeships began to shift away from traditional guilds. The focus was still on manual skills, but now within the context of emerging industries like manufacturing, engineering, and later, rail transport.

The 20th century brought further changes. Two world wars and the subsequent societal shifts saw a diversification in the types of apprenticeships available. Traditional trades remained, but new fields like electrical engineering, automotive repair, and even early computing emerged.

### Decline and rebirth

Later in the century, we witnessed a decline in apprenticeships. The shift towards a service-based economy, the closure of many traditional industries,

and an increasing emphasis on academic qualifications led to a reduced focus on vocational training.

After a series of reforms in the early 21st century, new frameworks were introduced that focused on creating high-quality, employer-led training programmes. These reforms also aimed to elevate the status of apprenticeships as a viable and prestigious alternative to university education.

**Integration of technology in the EPA process can also lead to significant improvements**



Today, apprenticeships are more diverse and accessible than ever. They span a wide range of sectors, from traditional trades to cutting-edge fields like cyber security, data analysis, and renewable energy.

Technology has also revolutionised apprenticeships themselves, with virtual learning and online platforms complementing hands-on training.

### End-point assessment

As apprenticeships evolve, so must the system around them. End-point assessment (EPA) is a crucial component of the apprenticeship journey, designed to rigorously test the skills, knowledge, and behaviours that apprentices develop.

For providers, EPA represents the culmination of their training efforts, yet it also poses significant challenges as well as opportunities.

One place to start is streamlining communication between apprenticeship providers, employers, and end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs).

A more collaborative environment can be fostered through regular meetings, clear documentation, and the use of digital platforms. As an EPAO, we work hard to provide the right guidance to all, for example ensuring employers are clear on their involvement.

Integration of technology in the EPA process can also lead to significant improvements. Digital portfolios, online assessment tools, and virtual simulations provide apprentices with a more engaging and flexible way to demonstrate competencies.

For providers, these technologies also offer an efficient way to track progress and prepare apprentices, and at NCFE we've listened to their pain points and implemented newly automated processes.

### Back to the future

Recognising the diverse needs and learning styles of apprentices is crucial. Personalised support not only improves the apprentice's chances of success but also enhances their overall learning experience.

With our data technician standard, we carry out the professional discussion before the scenario-based assessment. This places the learner at the heart of the apprenticeship and helps them feel invested in the process – as well as making the assessment itself more industry-relevant.

It's a small but important change and takes us back to the essence of apprenticeships from their very first beginnings – the social contract.

While things have moved forward, and we continue to improve and innovate our offer to fit demand, the creation and development of the learner relationship should remain fundamental to everything.

NCFE is equipping apprentices with future-ready skills, preparing them to thrive throughout their careers and building skills for life. Discover more at [www.ncfe.org.uk/national-apprenticeship-week](https://www.ncfe.org.uk/national-apprenticeship-week)

# Wigan tops 'best place to be an apprentice' list

**JOSH BARRIE**  
**NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

**Affordable rents, high business growth and 'apprenticeship density' among local businesses has placed Wigan at the top of the table of best places to be an apprentice, according to tech training provider Multiverse**

**W**igan is the best place in England to be an apprentice, according to analysis by apprenticeship training provider Multiverse.

The Greater Manchester town topped the table for its high "apprenticeship density" – apprenticeship starts per 100 businesses – alongside its cheap average rental prices and high rate of business growth.

Multiverse, now the country's fourth-largest apprenticeship training provider, published its inaugural "best places to be an apprentice" ranking during National Apprenticeship Week. It covered local authority areas in England.

Towns and cities in the north of England claimed almost half of the top 20 list with Hull, Barnsley and Sunderland earning places on the ranking.

London does not feature at all.

Average rental prices for a one-bedroom flat or home in Wigan are £450 per month, the second lowest on the list and second only to Darlington at £400.

In close second and third on the overall ranking are Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, both of which are seeing positive numbers when it comes to apprenticeship starts.

The latter is also strong when it comes to new starts, with a rise in interest among the population of over two per cent: between 2019 and 2022, the time period covering the figures, there was an increase in apprenticeship numbers, bucking the overarching trend.

Multiverse's top 20 list is dominated by towns, with just five cities making the cut; Stoke-on-Trent, Plymouth, Hull, Southampton and Sunderland.

Just four towns in the South East feature, and

only one in the South West.

Euan Blair, CEO of Multiverse, said: "Apprenticeships are an incredible vehicle for social mobility across the UK – and at Multiverse we're proud to have apprentices in every corner of the country. Access to our apprenticeships has been unlocked by the use of tech to scale our offering nationwide and has allowed us to reach often overlooked areas.

"The spread of opportunities supports our belief in the ability for apprenticeships to be the tool that enables equitable access to economic opportunity, for everyone."

Towns and cities were ranked against five variables in total, with a score for each then being tallied up to determine its place in the top 20: apprenticeship density, apprenticeship starts change between 2019 and 2022, employment rate, business growth rate and the average price of a one-bedroom rental.

Founded by Blair in 2016, the now seven-year-old "tech startup" recorded 5,770 apprenticeship starts in 2022/23, the fourth

**"Apprenticeships are an incredible vehicle for social mobility across the UK"**

highest in the county, up from sixth the year before. It had a 62.7 per cent achievement rate in 2021/22, slightly higher than the national average.

But it's not all been good news for the now international training company. It's now made a loss for its seventh consecutive year, according to its latest accounts. Its losses nearly tripled in its last full reporting year; from £14.4 million in 2021/22 to £40.5 million in 2022/23 as it heavily invests in its burgeoning operations in the United States.

## Top 20 best places to be an apprentice

Rank	Place	Apprenticeship density (apprentice starts per 100 businesses)	Apprenticeship starts (% change 2019-22)	Employment rate (%)	Business growth 2019 to 2022 (%)	Average monthly price of 1 bedroom rental (£)
1	Wigan	30.22	-0.71	60.6	6.42	450
2	Stoke-on-Trent	27.66	-8.92	58.3	9.62	450
3	Newcastle-under-Lyme	26.56	2.08	57.8	4.53	490
4	Plymouth	39.21	-3.14	58.6	9.19	600
5	Crawley	22.01	8.22	67.9	2.28	925
6	Stockton-on-Tees	28.50	-6.43	58.4	2.74	450
7	Barnsley	26.35	-11.71	58.5	6.84	475
8	Chorley	18.82	-12.75	61.8	8.49	485
9	Mansfield	23.65	-12.22	59.8	20.36	540
10	Dartford	16.56	5.48	68.2	4.49	900
11	St Helens	27.88	-12.58	58	10.90	495
12	Dover	19.65	10.61	56.2	6.60	555
13	Kingston upon Hull	29.12	-24.71	59.9	12.30	425
14	Harlow	16.47	-6.78	66.8	10.96	850
15	Ipswich	20.17	-13.89	63.6	11.35	675
16	Southampton	18.76	-9.20	61.9	12.47	750
17	Darlington	26.11	-7.14	59.4	-1.13	400
18	Bedford	14.74	-6.78	64.7	5.96	700
19	Rotherham	24.74	-14.80	57.8	7.41	475
20	Sunderland	36.05	-15.97	55.7	8.50	450

Source: Multiverse

## ROBERT HALFON

Minister for skills,  
apprenticeships and  
higher education



# The numbers don't lie; apprenticeships are a success story for opportunity

**Our Ronseal apprenticeship model delivers 'exactly what it says on the tin' – but we will continue to improve the formula, says Robert Halfon**

We had a lot to celebrate this National Apprenticeship Week. And not just the huge number of people now participating in apprenticeships and climbing the ladder of opportunity. This has taken place against a backdrop of rising standards in apprenticeship training and assessment.

In 2009/10 there were fewer than half a million people doing apprenticeships. There was no requirement that training must last at least a year and no minimum amount of guided learning it must include.

Last year, over 750,000 people were participating in apprenticeships, training to the rigorous, industry-designed standards we

introduced from 2014.

This academic year, we've already seen 130,830 apprenticeship starts between August and October, up seven per cent on the same period the previous year. Among those, the number of young people under 25 starting an apprenticeship is up by six per cent, at 78,960 starts.

And the number of achievements is up 22 per cent so far this academic year, with 37,400 people passing their apprenticeship.

This is a huge achievement – brought about by the businesses, training providers, colleges and universities that worked with the government to get this right. There are now over 690 high-quality apprenticeships in roles ranging from forestry to data science. Most importantly, each now delivers the skills businesses need, helping them grow their turnover and contribute to economic growth.

### The Ronseal Levy

The apprenticeship levy has been a huge part of this success story. I think of it as the Ronseal Levy because it does what it says on the tin: supports employers to take on more apprentices and invest in the high-quality training needed for a skilled workforce.

There are calls for flexibility to spend the levy on other types of staff training, but its funds have contributed massively to the proliferation of apprenticeships.

Diluting its use would significantly decrease these opportunities. Allowing employers to use

half of the fund for other skills training last academic year could have resulted in a near-60 per cent reduction in apprentice starts.

### Cutting red tape

Small businesses are the levy's great beneficiaries. It subsidises 95 per cent of a small employer's training costs, rising to 100 per cent for the smallest firms who hire apprentices aged 18 and under.

We want to encourage SMEs to make the most of this funding, and I'm determined that they're not put off by paperwork. That's why we are slashing red tape for these employers by ending the limit on the number of apprentices they can hire and reducing the steps needed to do so.

### A social justice mission

But it's not just about total numbers. We also want to find more ways to support groups that are underrepresented in the programme. That is why we have begun a pilot scheme to help training providers offer quality mentoring to disabled people starting an apprenticeship.

## "The best sign of progress is the success of individual apprentices"

Apprenticeships also serve social justice by offering new routes into professions traditionally reserved for graduates. The teacher degree apprenticeship announced at the start of National Apprenticeship Week will allow trainees to earn and learn while gaining an undergraduate degree and qualified teacher status.

Degree-level apprenticeships like this one have been incredibly popular since their launch in 2015, with over 218,000 people starting on these prestigious training pathways.

There is still more to be done to build a world-class skills system in this country.

And the best sign of that progress is the success of individual apprentices, who are putting in the hard yards of rigorous training to climb the ladder of opportunity and build a better life for themselves.





# HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WEEK

## Prime Minister 'blown away' by Cornwall apprentices

The Prime Minister spent the Thursday of National Apprenticeship Week with engineering and motor vehicle apprentices in Cornwall.

Rishi Sunak toured the Camborne campus of The Cornwall College Group (TCCG), including its body and paint workshops and heavy goods vehicle training facilities. He praised the college for "helping lead the charge" on promoting "world-class apprenticeships."

"It was incredible to visit Cornwall College and I was blown away by the talent and skill sets of the apprentices there."

"In our view, not everyone needs to go to university; you can start earning and learning at the same time. It's a great way to start a career," the PM said.

Sunak was joined on the visit by local MP

George Eustice and TCCG chief executive John Evans.

Apprentices on motor vehicle, electric

vehicle and engineering courses had the chance to show off their skills and the college's state-of-the-art facilities.

Evans said he was "delighted" to host the prime minister during National Apprenticeship Week.

"We were thrilled to have the chance to showcase our dedication to top-quality education and training," he added.



## Halfon on tour

Skills and apprenticeships minister Robert Halfon was on the move again for this year's National Apprenticeship Week visiting training providers and employers.

Halfon said he travelled 843 miles east-to-west this year on a tour which started in the westcountry and ended in his Essex constituency of Harlow, mirroring his north-to-south tour last year.

The minister couldn't resist beginning his tour from a Cornish hamlet just south of St Austell called London Apprentice, which he passed through on his way to his first visits of National Apprenticeship Week to meet apprentices and T Level students at the Eden Project and Bodmin Hospital.

After a stop at the University of Exeter to check out their degree apprenticeships, Halfon

continued his eastward journey to an Airbus

site in Bristol before casting an eye on the apprenticeships on offer at Specsavers in Bath.

From there, the minister headed to Suffolk New College in Ipswich to law

firm Irwin Mitchell in Cambridge to cross-examine their apprenticeships in the legal sector. Then it was homeward bound to Harlow to open the college's new Institute of Technology.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WEEK

## Apprentices lobby for change

The shadow education secretary heard directly from apprentices and apprenticeship leaders about their experiences and the need for more support for disadvantaged young people.

Bridget Phillipson visited the offices of Amazing Apprenticeships in Hitchin during National Apprenticeship Week and took part in a roundtable with apprentices working in IT, teaching, childcare and sport.

As well as discussing their own experiences, the apprentices shared their ideas to improve apprenticeships for future generations.

Phillipson was accompanied by Alistair Strathern, Labour's MP for Mid-Bedfordshire.

Amazing Apprenticeships, led by Anna

Morrison, works with schools, employers and training providers to promote the benefits of apprenticeships and technical education.

Morrison used Phillipson's visit to push for reforms to make entry-level apprenticeships more accessible, particularly for disadvantaged groups like care leavers.

Morrison said: "It was an absolute pleasure to host Alistair and Bridget today. We had many valuable discussions about the future of apprenticeships and to be able to bring in such a diverse mix of apprentices to share their views was incredibly important".



Bridget Phillipson with apprentices at Amazing Apprenticeships

Apprentice Becca, who works at Amazing Apprenticeships, said getting to meet the shadow education secretary was an "amazing" experience.

"I can't believe I had the opportunity to meet Bridget and Alistair and tell them about my apprenticeship! It was the perfect way of proving the amazing opportunities that apprenticeships can offer," she said.

## AAC awards finalists celebrated in Parliament

Finalists for this year's AAC apprenticeship awards were joined by over 100 guests for a celebratory reception in the House of Commons during National Apprenticeship Week.

Now in their seventh year, the awards, organised by FE Week and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) in association with City and Guilds, recognise outstanding delivery of apprenticeships across the UK.

A judging panel of industry experts whittled down hundreds of entries for the awards' 20 categories which span various subject areas as well as special awards for widening participation and the coveted awards for apprenticeship provider, employer and champion of the year.

Ben Rowland, chief executive at AELP, hosted the event which was once again sponsored by Robert Halfon, the minister for skills, apprenticeships and higher education.

Guests heard a video message from Halfon, who was in Cornwall on his National Apprenticeship Week tour at the time.



Provider of the year finalists Osborne Clarke, Torus, Hobs Salons and Labcorp

Patrick Craven, director of policy and strategic partnerships at City and Guilds, and Shane Chown, editor of FE Week, also spoke at the event.

"With a general election on the horizon, now is the perfect time to share the inspirational stories of what it takes to deliver brilliant apprenticeships," Chown said from the stage.

Thirty training organisations are vying for 15 sector-specific awards this year. These include provider of the year awards for hair and beauty, care services, business and

administration, digital and engineering and manufacturing.

Four organisations are in the running to be named apprentice employer of the year: Hobs Salons Limited, Labcorp, Torus and Osborne Clarke.

And the prestigious apprenticeship provider of the year award will be one by BPP Education Group, Bauer Academy, In-Comm Training or Salford City College.

Winners will be announced at the AAC gala dinner and awards evening on February 27 in Birmingham.





**SEEMA  
MALHOTRA**

Shadow skills  
minister, Labour

# We'll listen to businesses and reform the levy

**T**ime and time again, businesses and training providers call for reform of the apprenticeship levy. Shadow skills minister Seema Malhotra outlines Labour's plans for its growth and skills levy and bringing back work experience in schools

Last week, as part of National Apprenticeships Week, it has been a privilege to celebrate apprentices and thank colleges, businesses and training providers for all they are doing.

On my recent visits to Bristol, Milton Keynes, Newcastle and many towns and cities across the country, it's clear that the greatest advocates for apprenticeships are the businesses employing them and the apprentices themselves.

They have shown that apprenticeships can be the best route for so many young people. They told me how much they value earning while they learn, all while developing specialist skills empowering them and our country's economy.

That's why Labour believes that apprenticeships and in-work training are such an important part of delivering the high-growth economy we need, breaking down barriers to opportunity and driving success for our communities, companies, and country.

But the truth is that for too long, apprentices and businesses have been let down by a Conservative government that has presided over more than a decade of decline in training opportunities.

Apprenticeship starts among young people down, apprenticeships in small businesses halving, opportunities at levels two and three collapsing. Time and again, employers and providers talk of their frustrations with the apprenticeship levy, and despite the government's denials, it is in urgent need of reform.



Labour will value apprenticeships and ensure that these opportunities are always available to young people and adults wanting to learn and progress in their careers, but we will listen to and work with business too.

We'll reform the failed apprenticeship levy into a growth and skills levy, enabling businesses to spend some of their funds on modular, or short courses to upskill their workforce to best meet their business needs.

Let me be clear, this is not a free for all. Skills England, which Labour will establish, will work with employers, unions, colleges and training providers to maintain a list of qualifications which employers need and which we'll enable them to spend this funding on.

For too long the Conservatives have talked about the importance of apprenticeships even while apprenticeship starts decline, businesses struggle with the bureaucracy and burdens of the levy and money slips back to the Treasury unspent.

Businesses and trade associations across the country are crying out for more flexibility in the levy. The Conservatives, once claiming to be the party of business, simply aren't listening, and businesses, learners and workers are missing out as a result. Labour will enable employers to upskill their

workforce in the agile way they need for the skills of the future.

The apprenticeship levy also isn't the only thing the Conservatives are failing on, because the causes go deeper than that. Apprentices tell us that from early on in their education journeys they've struggled to understand and get a picture of the full options available to them, and in no area is this clearer than that of work experience and careers advice.

Work experience was compulsory under the last Labour Government, but this was scrapped under David Cameron. Way back in 2013, a freedom of information request revealed that in the first year after it was scrapped, 60,000 fewer students had a work experience placement.

Labour knows how important these experiences and getting independent advice on next steps is for young people. We will transform careers education in school, with over a thousand new careers advisers

## "Businesses struggle with the bureaucracy and burdens of the levy"

and guarantee two weeks' worth of work experience for every student.

And we will devolve skills spending decisions to local areas, empowering colleges to specialise as Technical Excellence Colleges, aligning local skills needs with provision.

Whether it's apprenticeships, careers advice, or the levy itself, this Tory Government has short-changed businesses and young people.

Across the country, businesses and apprentices are ready to rise to the challenge of rebuilding our skills system after 14 years of decline. And that's precisely what a Labour government will deliver.

# BEN ROWLAND

Chief executive,  
Association of Employment  
and Learning Providers



## Thank you to the unsung training providers

**E**mbarking on a tour of the country as AELP's new CEO, Ben Rowland has seen first-hand the sacrifices and risks it takes to create brilliant apprenticeships

National Apprenticeship Week is, rightly, always a wonderful celebration of all the brilliant people involved in making the apprenticeship programme so important. This year will be no different as it remains an incredible programme that improves the lives of hundreds of thousands of people each year.

### "The apprenticeship eco-system relies on unsung heroes"

We all know the major benefits for the learner who undertakes an apprenticeship. Apprentices can get those vital industry-ready skills that are recognised by employers, while at the same time earning while they learn.

We also know what an employer gets out of it: a work-ready employee whose training is aligned with the needs of the sector. The all-ages, all-levels approach to apprenticeships means they also have a real ability to drive social mobility and support a diverse workforce.

Don't just take my word for it, many, many employers agree – for example, here's what Jill Coyle from Nestlé UK & Ireland has to say about apprenticeships: "Our apprenticeship schemes are open to people from all backgrounds. Diversity brings fresh thinking, new energies and great ideas to Nestlé and plays a crucial part in ensuring that our business continues to meet the needs of our consumers and customers."

It is AELP members that ensure these benefits are realised though, with independent training providers (ITPs) delivering 63 per cent of apprenticeships last year. In certain sectors – such as business, retail, healthcare and IT – this goes up to 8 in 10 of all apprenticeships delivered.

There are currently over 1700 ITPs across the country, employing 42,000 people, with both employers and learners reporting high levels of satisfaction with ITPs. We also have members that are universities, colleges, end point assessment organisations and awarding bodies all involved in making the programme a success.

Since the start of 2024, I've been embarking on a tour of the country with the AELP CEO Roadshow, which, by the end of the spring, will have seen me visit every region of England to hear from our members – and soon to become members – about the great work they do and the challenges they face.

It has been truly inspiring and humbling to see the impact they have and the sacrifices and risks they take to deliver those impacts:

I have seen workshops full of heavy-duty capital equipment funded not by a handout from the government, but from their own organisation's reserves; I have met learners who have been dealt a crap hand in life being supported and engaged to build a sense of self-worth as they build practical skills; I have seen the frustration and fatigue of committed managers and owners battling what they perceive to be the innate suspicion of 'the system' of their motives.

All this blood, sweat and, yes, tears, that have – between them – delivered so much for the country may sadly be at risk.

You don't need AELP to tell you that funding has fallen behind inflation dramatically, and that the added regulation the sector in recent years means the sector risks taking its eye off the ball on what matters most – delivering skills training to the learners who need it most.

National Apprenticeship Week is about recognising those learners and employers, of course.

But I also want to celebrate the unsung part of the apprenticeship system: the organisations who provide the skills, look after learners and keep the paperwork to demonstrate value for money.

Despite all the hardships facing the sector, it's amazing what providers do, whether AELP members or not (yet!). From training providers, to colleges and universities, right through to awarding bodies and end point assessment organisations, the apprenticeship eco-system relies on unsung heroes working hard to ensure the system works effectively. Thank you for all that you do.





**JO SAXTON**  
Chief executive, UCAS



**OLI DE BOTTON**  
Chief executive,  
Careers and Enterprise  
Company

# Don't leave young people out of the apprenticeship conversation

**The evidence shows work to improve awareness of apprenticeships among young people is making a difference, but more needs to be done to create opportunities and bed in good practice with schools and employers**

As we pause for reflection and celebration this National Apprenticeship Week, we need to make sure we include the voices of young people in the conversation.

We often hear about what business needs or what training should look like. Skills gaps, industrial strategies, funding. All crucial. But this all begins with a young person having access to an extraordinary experience. A job with training now, and a pathway to continued learning later.

And what are young people saying?

They increasingly know about apprenticeships...and like them. UCAS's Project Next Generation report reveals that 59 per cent of young people in Years 9-12 are now considering an apprenticeship. Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) data finds that understanding of apprenticeships doubles from 39 per cent in year 7 to 79 per cent by year 11.

Young people see – as we do – that apprenticeships can be life-changing routes. An opportunity for hands-on learning, a chance to find their way to rewarding careers.

However, awareness and ambition are not the same as uptake.

And there remains friction at points of transition. Part of this relates to the dynamics (and geography) of supply and demand. Previous UCAS research has revealed one in three

students were prevented from pursuing an apprenticeship due to a lack of roles in their desired industry.

There are other factors at play too, though, which UCAS and the CEC are committed to tackling.

Firstly, we need to make sure young people are inspired by apprenticeships from an early age. Deciding to take a work-based route rather than the well-trodden academic pathway can be daunting and there is a long lead-in time.

High-quality, employer-focused focused and integrated careers programmes are important here. The enhanced provider access legislation which CEC is supporting schools to implement can make a difference too. It entitles learners to six encounters with providers of apprenticeships or other technical pathways.

## “Awareness and ambition are not the same as uptake”

Secondly, we need to ensure there is parity in the way that students explore and connect to apprenticeship opportunities and more established academic routes.

Last year, more than 40 per cent of students applying through UCAS expressed an interest in apprenticeships. UCAS's expansion of its apprenticeship services last year means young people can see more personalised options, including apprenticeships within the UCAS Hub, alongside undergraduate choices.

Students can search for an apprenticeship at any time throughout the year, as and when employers are hiring, with vacancies updated in real-time.



These enhancements are transforming the experience of students taking that next step towards an apprenticeship – and connecting employers to apprentice talent that best fits their business needs and skills shortages.

Thirdly, we need to help young people have meaningful and ongoing experiences with employers. UCAS found that 85 per cent of young people consider this important for getting their apprenticeship. This work is good for young people and businesses alike.

A CEC survey of more than 300 firms, who together employ more than one million people found, as a result of their work in schools and colleges, they are boosting apprenticeship and job applicants (75 per cent and 78 per cent respectively). Seven in 10 say it is helping close skills gaps. In practice, this has seen employers gaining a better understanding of young people, with a number of firms adapting their outreach and application approaches as a result.

So, as we marvel at the superb achievements of many apprentices for National Apprenticeship Week, we know there is more to do to make the system both inspiring, accessible and as easy as possible to navigate. Our collective ambition is to help everyone find their best next step – so they can be set up for a life of opportunity and success.



# Hundreds of small businesses utilise removal of apprenticeship cap

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
**BILLY.CAMDEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

More than 250 small and medium-sized employers have already recruited over 10 apprentices each since the government scrapped a cap on starts last year. SMEs were restricted to a maximum of ten apprenticeship starts from 2020 until April 3, 2023. Ministers finally decided to abolish the cap after consecutive resets amid warnings from FE Week and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers that non-levy paying businesses were being forced to turn away apprentices after hitting the limit. Skills minister Robert Halfon has now revealed, in answer to a parliamentary question from Grahame Morris MP, that 256 non-levy payers have recruited 11 or more apprentices since the policy change came into force 10 months ago. The majority – 214 – hired between 11 and 19 apprentices, while 33 had starts of between 20 and 29. Six other SMEs managed to enrol between 30 and 39 apprentices, another recruited between 40 and 49, and two managed to enlist over 50.

Tina McKenzie, policy chair at the Federation of Small Businesses, said: “It’s great to see so many non-levy payers taking on larger numbers of apprentices since the cap was lifted, bringing in lots of new talent for them to nurture.”

**“It is critical to get the apprenticeship service system working more effectively”**

However, McKenzie warned that taking on numerous apprentices is still financially out of reach for most small businesses. She called for the current £1,000 bonus for hiring an under-19 apprentice to be increased to £3,000 for small businesses and expanded to cover under-25s. The SME cap was originally introduced in January 2020 with a limit of three new apprenticeship starts, before it was lifted to ten in summer 2020. Small businesses that do not pay the apprenticeship levy receive 95 per cent of training costs from the

apprenticeship budget, funded by levy paying businesses. The rationale of the cap had been that it would help prevent the overall apprenticeships budget from being overspent. Simon Ashworth, AELP director of policy, said it was “positive that the removal of cap of ten non-levy starts cap has enabled more employers to access the benefits we know that apprenticeships bring”. However, he warned that although the changes have helped, the government still hasn’t “addressed the wider barrier of employer engagement and accessing opportunities in the first place”. “It is critical to get the apprenticeship service system working more effectively, for SMEs including by giving providers more autonomy,” Ashworth said, adding that the current “expert” provider pilot has the potential to support this change.

Number of starts since April 2023 (grouped)	Number of non-levy employer accounts
11-19	214
20-29	33
30-39	6
40-49	1
50+	2

Source: Department for Education





# Proud supporters of **National Apprenticeship Week** 2024



Apprenticeships are a fantastic way to get on-the-job training and experience to prepare you for the working world, and they can be life-changing for those who choose to follow this route."

**Suzanne Slater,**  
Commercial Director, NCFE



**SUSAN LOUGHLIN**

Leadership team  
member, National  
Society of Apprentices

# Young apprentices must be paid a living wage

**H**ow can we expect young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to take on apprenticeships paid just £5.28 an hour? Susan Loughlin shares her story and makes the case for a living wage for young apprentices

My name is Susan I'm part of the leadership team for the National Society of Apprentices. We represent apprentices across the UK, and I'd like to share a story with you.

The experiences of apprentices vary wildly but this is mine.

**“Fifty-five per cent of apprentices surveyed cut back on food because they can't afford it”**

I'm a child of the state. I've been through the system here in England, in my country of birth, Scotland and in France. I went to 19 schools before I was 16.

When I was 17, I was supported by the government to leave a dangerous situation at home and get my first-ever flat. I loved my

wee studio, even the horrendously vomit-yellow couch that I had.

So put yourself in my shoes for a moment.

You don't have a cooker or a TV but you've got a roof over your head and you're safe.

But you're hungry.

You need money. You can't get into uni or college because instead of studying for exams you were moving house.

You don't qualify for most benefits because you're under 18 so it's a long process to apply under exceptional circumstances. It won't put food on your table for another few months at least. You have rent to pay. You need hot water to wash your clothes in the bath because you don't have a washing machine. You need the lights on. You need to get internet to apply for jobs because the local library limits your time on a computer.

But above all, you need food. Every day. Lunch and dinner because breakfast is a luxury.

Hunger like this isn't just painful. It's terrifying because you don't know when it will end. Without access to benefits, you don't even qualify for access to a food bank.

But you've got this. You will find work.

You're committed and passionate. There are lots of jobs out there and you would give your all to any of them. Except you need to have experience.

And if you don't have experience you need to have qualifications. You go home and you sit in the dark. Tomorrow you will need to sell your phone at a pawnbroker.

It's pretty depressing, right?

Seventeen-year-olds are seen as teenagers living at home with mum and dad. They aren't really working to survive. They are working to get pocket money. But that isn't true. I was one of 8,000 homeless youth across

Scotland.

In England, that number is estimated at 129,000 young adults.

Apprenticeships are an amazing opportunity for folks like me.

**“Apprenticeships are an amazing opportunity for folks like me”**

You can get the education you missed out on. You can get the experience you need to be a part of the workforce. You can help governments reach their green targets by working in sustainable industries. You can add to the economy by helping close the skills gap. You can bring innovation and energy to an ageing workforce.

You can give back to the system.

And for it, at 17 years old, you can be paid £5.28 an hour.

Take a second to think about how much you spend on your monthly food shop.

Fifty-five per cent of apprentices surveyed by the National Union of Students cut back on food because they can't afford it.

We are not all children living in well-lit, warm family homes. We are the young adults trying to find our feet independently and we are going hungry trying to help you.

The Labour Party said it, “wants to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child, at every stage and shatter the class ceiling ... To provide high-quality pathways onto apprenticeships.”

The minister talks about his ladder of opportunity.

Why should I care about the path you can provide when I will go hungry while walking it?

We need a living wage now.







## ADAM HENDERSON

Customer service  
apprentice at Mitie &  
Events ambassador at  
Association of Apprentices

# My top tips to get the most out of your apprenticeship

**C**ustomer service apprentice Adam Henderson refuses to let his disabilities get in the way of making the most out of his apprenticeship. He shares his top tips to help others get the most out of their experience

I've faced a number of barriers in education until I found my apprenticeship. I truly believe that an apprenticeship provides so many opportunities and I wanted to share my story and my top ten tips for making the most of an apprenticeship in the hope that it will encourage others to explore this route.

The reason I joined Mitie as a customer service level 2 practitioner was because I was at college for a few years and would get bullied and that's when my parents said it was time to get an apprenticeship that could lead to a career in the future.

**"It doesn't matter if you have disabilities, you can get through anything if you put your mind to it"**

This is when a full-time job was coming up at my dad's work at the Mitie site in Newcastle. I had a three-week trial to make sure I liked the job and to see what the team thought of me. After the trial, I got some news from my manager saying that I had performed extremely well and wanted to offer me a full-time apprenticeship.

I would say some days can be challenging for me as I have autism and ADHD which affect the way I learn.

But nothing stops. I keep fighting my battles and breaking

barriers to show the world that it doesn't matter if you have disabilities, you can get through anything if you put your mind to it and believe in yourself. I see it as an ability, not a disability.

One of the main tips I could give would be to not be afraid to ask questions as this is key within your apprenticeship to learn from your colleagues and managers. If you think about it and you just guess, then you might do it wrong. The best way would be to ask, there is no such thing as a silly question just remember that.

There are things you can do though to take the initiative. You should make sure you're getting the right resources for your course and level, so you know you are learning as much as possible.

You can also find, or organise your own, social events for fellow apprentices to get together to network, share ideas and make new friends.

I joined the Association of Apprentices, a membership organisation for apprentices in the UK in August. I went to one of their apprentice-led social events in Newcastle. I had a dream and thought, I could run my own event in Newcastle. Let me tell you, when I have dreams and goals, I hope that they come true, and it did just a few weeks ago.

I organised my own apprentice social event, and it got some amazing reviews. I hope to run more events in the future.

Recently I joined the North East Apprenticeship Ambassador network as an ambassador and looking forward to all the opportunities they have to offer like going into schools and talking about my apprenticeship journey so far and attending conferences across the UK.

If you are an apprentice or hope to be in the future, here are my top ten tips to get the most out of it:

### TIP 1

Always be reliable and punctual

### TIP 2

Be enthusiastic about the tasks you have been set

### TIP 3

Get to know the people you are working with

### TIP 4

Don't be afraid to ask any questions

### TIP 5

Take ownership of your apprenticeship

### TIP 6

Organise your time

### TIP 7

Pay attention to workplace mentors

### TIP 8

Be an independent learner and proactive

### TIP 9

Keep a logbook of jobs you complete in the workplace

### TIP 10

Try and invest in your apprenticeship by getting the appropriate resources

Remember it's your apprenticeship! Work hard and get the most out of it!



Henderson was named Mitie professional apprentice of the year

## MATTY FISHER

Apprenticeships officer,  
Union of Jewish Students



# Bridging the gap between the university student and the apprentice experience

**University students get access to a wealth of extra-curricular opportunities. Why can't apprentices too? Matty Fisher explains how the Union of Jewish Students is bridging the gap**

When considering whether to go to university or to start an apprenticeship, the main differences that people talk about are the lack of student loans with apprenticeships or the opportunity to gain an academic qualification whilst obtaining valuable experience in the workplace.

The positives are promoted, but the vast difference in experiences is often neglected.

A large element of the university student experience is meeting new people, socialising and learning to live away from home.

Many apprentices may struggle to benefit from these experiences. The element of a '9 to 5' alongside training courses means apprentices have a much less fluid schedule than university students.

However, these experiences can open doors and help students connect with people of similar interests.

So many university students (myself included) praise how extra-curricular life at university has been instrumental in our professional development.

Without the space to network, apprentices may feel lonely, especially in smaller organisations where there aren't many colleagues their own age. Apprentices should

have the resources to make the most of all the benefits of what an apprenticeship brings whilst ensuring they don't sacrifice the opportunity to meet and connect with others.

That is why, when I began my term as apprenticeships officer at the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), I made it my mission to represent Jewish apprentices across the UK and Ireland and to give them the opportunities to engage in student life.

**"We are launching a campaign to urge apprenticeship providers to strive for an inclusive and welcoming environment for Jewish apprentices"**

We realised that apprentices needed a space to socialise and network with other people their age. That is why we launched the UJS Apprenticeship Network, providing Jewish apprentices a place to connect.

It includes running regular after-work social events and inclusion in wider UJS programmes. Apprentices are now, constitutionally, members of UJS and therefore have access to our convention, conference and all the other events we put on for members. Utilising our network of over 75 Jewish societies (JSocs) across the UK and Ireland, we are connecting



apprentices to their local JSocs to ensure they can have the opportunity to experience a Jewish student life.

As part of our work supporting apprentices, we are also bridging the gap between the support and representation university students receive in comparison to apprentices.

For over a century, UJS has defended Jewish student lives on university campuses. This year, we are proud to be continuing this work, defending Jewish apprentices as well.

We are launching a campaign to urge apprenticeship providers to strive for an inclusive and welcoming environment for Jewish apprentices. This includes ensuring every observant Jewish apprentice can leave early on a Friday to prepare for the Jewish sabbath and religious festivals stress-free and have the option of kosher food at events.

Outside the workplace, we also support apprentices in receiving accommodations should training, assessments or exams take place on the sabbath or a festival.

In addition, we have two seats on the National Society of Apprentices (NSoA) leadership team, ensuring the issues facing Jewish apprentices can be represented nationally.

As apprenticeships continue to grow in popularity, ensuring apprentices have the space to network and connect with others will become increasingly crucial. Apprentices should be able to capitalize on all the benefits that come with doing an apprenticeship, whilst not sacrificing the opportunities to socialise and network with others.

Jewish apprentices can sign up to the UJS Apprenticeships Network here: [www.ujs.org.uk/apprenticeships](http://www.ujs.org.uk/apprenticeships)

# First apprentices awarded ‘professional status’ post-nominals

**SHANE CHOWEN**  
**SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

Post-nominals are often associated with high standards in education, industry or civic life. For the first time, they have been awarded as ‘professional recognition’ for recently qualified apprentices

Sixteen apprentices were among the first to receive post-nominals through a new “game-changing” professional recognition scheme during this year’s National Apprenticeship Week.

The Association of Apprentices (AoA) and the Chartered Institution for Further Education (CIFE) joined forces last year to launch the post-apprenticeship recognition scheme (PARS) to “elevate the societal and industrial cachet” of apprenticeships and help to increase retention and achievements.

Post-nominals are typically associated with graduate-level qualifications, professional body memberships or national honours, but were last week awarded to apprentices for the first time.

Jason Holt, co-founder and vice-chair of AoA, said at the PARS scheme’s launch last year it would be “game-changing for apprenticeships, elevating the recognition and value of vocational education and raising parity of esteem with other learning routes.”

CIFE and AoA ran a pilot of the scheme and said all 16 participating former apprentices were successful. Individuals recognised completed apprenticeships ranging from level 2 to level 7.

They were announced during National Apprenticeship Week at a joint AoA and UCAS event at Mansion House in London.

Speaking at the event, Dawn Ward, vice chair of CIFE and chief executive of Burton and South Derbyshire College, said: I want to pay special thanks to a group of 16 amazing former apprentices who have taken part in the PARS pilot programme. I’m excited to announce that as of today, they are able to use their post-nominals.

“They are trailblazers – first in the country – for many more



qualified apprentices to follow this route. Congratulations.”

Apprentices recognised through the scheme can use post-nominals that correspond to the level of their apprenticeship:

- CSA (Certificate of Standard Apprenticeship) – level 2
  - CAA (Certificate of Advanced Apprenticeship) – level 3
  - CHA (Certificate of Higher Apprenticeship) – level 4/5
  - CGA (Certificate of Graduate Apprenticeship) – level 6+
- Employers signed up to the scheme to

date include the BBC, Royal Mail, Amazon and training providers Umbrella Training and Lifetime Training.

The AoA and CIFE are now evaluating the PARS pilot and said the programme will be open for applications in “early summer”. There will be a fee to apply, which will be set once the PARS pilot has been evaluated.

To be eligible, apprentices need to have passed their end-point assessment and have their application supported by their employer or an industry sponsor.

Applicants also need to provide examples of how their apprenticeship has “helped them to make a positive impact”.

## Post-apprenticeship recognition scheme recipients

Name	Apprenticeship	Employer
Lois Hempston CSA	Delivery Operative	Royal Mail
Hammad Lateef CSA	Supply Chain Warehouse Operative	Amazon
Marshall Bax CAA	Team Leader/Supervisor	Home Grown Hotels
Emily Milcoy CAA	Team Leader/Supervisor	Lifetime Training
Nalini Sivathanas CAA	Data Technician	BBC
Joseph Lennox CHA	Policy Officer	HMRC
Bilaal Khan CHA	Associate Project Manager	Via East Midlands
Andrew Cooper CHA	Assessor Coach	Lifetime Training
Zakaria Bentaleb CHA	Operations and Departmental Manager	Umbrella Training
Emaan Warraich CHA	Journalism Fast Track	BBC
Chloe Gilmour CGA	CMDA	BBC
Jordan Lewis CGA	Digital Marketing Campaign Manager	BT
Sarah Taylor CGA	Cyber Security Technical Professional (Integrated Degree)	BT
Emma Nolan CGA	Digital and Technology Solutions Professional	Thales
Alison Watson CGA	Senior Leader	Royal Mail
Holly-Mae Darling CGA	Accountancy and Taxation Professional	Siemens

Source: Association of Apprentices





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# Apprenticeship **data**: So far this year

Just before National Apprenticeship Week, we got a first look at how apprenticeships are performing so far this academic year. Here are the highlights from the first quarter of the year, covering August, September and October...

SHANE CHOWEN SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

## 1 NUMBERS ARE UP OVERALL

Overall, apprenticeship starts in England were up 7 per cent in the first quarter of this academic year compared to the same period last year. There were 130,380 starts recorded, up from 122,290.

Also, the proportion of levy-funded apprenticeships during this period has continued to rise. This year, 62 per cent of starts so far were levy-funded apprenticeships, up from 57 per cent three years ago.

### Q1 APPRENTICESHIP STARTS

2023/24	130380
2022/23	122290
2021/22	130240
2020/21	91080
2019/20	125800



## 2 BUT LEVEL 2 STARTS ARE DOWN

Starts on advanced and higher-level apprenticeships both increased by 10 per cent respectively. Meanwhile starts on intermediate-level apprenticeships declined by 2.5 per cent.

There were 28,400 level 2 starts last quarter, down from 29,150 the year before and 21 per cent fewer than in quarter one of 2021/22.

There were also 400 flexi-job apprenticeship starts recorded, signalling growth in the programme as there were 640 starts for the whole of 2022/23.

## 3 ONE IN THREE STARTS WERE UNDER 19

Nearly 43,000 under-19s started an apprenticeship in quarter one, up 11 per cent on the year before.

This means a third of new apprenticeships starts this year were aged 16-18, up from a quarter in 2020/21.

Young adults aged 19-24 made up 28 per cent of starts so far this year, 1 percentage point lower than last year, and adults 25 and over made up 40 per cent.

CONTINUED

4 MOST POPULAR STANDARDS

So far this year the most popular apprenticeship is the installation and maintenance electrician standard. The two-year level 3 apprenticeship had 4,700 starts in the first quarter of this year.

The early years educator course continues to be popular and has clocked up the second highest number of starts so far this year.

There were just over 2,700 starts on the level 3 lead adult care worker apprenticeship, nearly 4,000 team leaders and 1,740 teaching assistants.

At level 2, the most popular apprenticeships so far this year are carpentry and joinery, with 2,790 starts, hairdressing professional with 2,550, and early years practitioner with 2,160. Apprenticeships in adult care, customer service, bricklaying and engineering operatives also make up the top 10 list for level 2 standards.

At the higher end, the level 7 accountancy and tax professional apprenticeship was the most popular higher-level standard with 3,960 starts. Just over 2,400 people started the high-profile level 7 senior leader apprenticeship this quarter, while 720 started the solicitor apprenticeship.



TOP 10 MOST POPULAR APPRENTICESHIPS IN Q1 (STARTS)

RANK	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4/5	LEVEL 6/7
1	Carpentry and Joinery (2790)	Installation and Maintenance Electrician (4700)	Operations or Departmental Manager (3020)	Accountancy or Taxation Professional (3960)
2	Hairdressing Professional (2550)	Early Years Educator (4430)	Data Analyst (1990)	Senior Leader (2410)
3	Early Years Practitioner (2160)	Business Administrator (4420)	Nursing Associate (NMC 2018) (1770)	Chartered Manager (Degree) (1360)
4	Adult Care Worker (1910)	Team Leader or Supervisor (3940)	Children, Young People and Families Practitioner (1520)	Digital and Technology Solutions Professional (1200)
5	Customer Service Practitioner (1580)	Engineering Technician (3160)	Professional Accounting or Taxation Technician (1240)	Teacher (1160)
6	Bricklayer (1290)	Lead Adult Care Worker (2730)	Leader in Adult Care (1170)	Chartered Surveyor (Degree) (1120)
7	Engineering Operative (1060)	Data Technician (1750)	Associate Project Manager (960)	Police Constable (Integrated Degree) (760)
8	Autocare Technician (1050)	Plumbing and Domestic Heating Technician (1740)	Coaching Professional (720)	Registered Nurse Degree (NMC 2018) (750)
9	Accounts or Finance Assistant (1040)	Teaching Assistant (1740)	People Professional (630)	Advanced Clinical Practitioner (Integrated Degree) (730)
10	Hospitality Team Member (790)	Maintenance and Operations Engineering Technician (1600)	Lead Practitioner in Adult Care (580)	Solicitor (720)

5 BIG PROVIDER TRENDS



The country's largest public sector employer-provider is off to a slow start this year. The British Army started only 1,530 apprenticeships in quarter one compared to 2,224 for the same period last year.

Lifetime Training continues to dominate the number one position though. It started 4,590 apprentices so far this year, up from 3,336 for the same period last year.

BPP Professional Education started 2,400 apprentices in quarter one, around 300 fewer than last year, trailed closely by Multiverse with 2,230.

Multiverse's numbers continue to rise. It's seen its first quarter apprenticeship starts rise from 1,922 last year from a base of just 205 for the period in 2019/20.





**DAVID  
HUGHES**

Chief executive,  
Association of  
Colleges

# We can do better for employers, young people and the economy

**A**pprenticeship reforms have come at a cost, writes David Hughes, but by setting some clear priorities for the system, the damage can be undone

It's easy to celebrate the achievements of apprentices and the positive impact they have on our society.

There are inspirational stories all over the country of hard work and great support from employers showcasing the best of a programme that does so much good.

Whilst those celebrations are easy, it is also far too easy to point to improvements that are needed to the system. This might sound a little sour just after National Apprenticeship Week, but it's important to be candid because more must be done to achieve the programme's aims.

On overall numbers, the programme is falling short. For instance, when the apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017, the government set itself a target to deliver three million apprenticeships by 2020.

A report published by the Department for Education in 2020 though found that the target had been missed by roughly a million; 2,087,300 starts on apprenticeships since the apprenticeship reforms began in May 2015.

When the levy was introduced, there were many claims for what it would achieve and some of those have been realised.

There is more interest now from a wider array of large employers and there is more prestige from the numbers of higher and degree apprentices. But both have come at a cost, with far fewer young people and far fewer SMEs now being supported by the programme nationally. The data on young people is particularly

stark: for years now, we have seen a dramatic decline in the number of young people undertaking apprenticeships, from an already low bar – as AoC's Opportunity England report highlighted in summer 2023, we are down to just 60,000 young people starting apprentices each year. As for SMEs, the numbers engaged are less than half now compared with pre-levy days.

As a country, we need to do better than this for employers, for young people, for the economy.

We would like to see much clearer priorities for the programme to deliver better productivity, inclusion, transition into work for young people, balancing large and small employer needs, tackling skills shortages, and helping improve regional equality.

**“The levy has not widening participation, but narrowed it, particularly for young people”**

The failure to set any priorities for how the levy is used by employers has seen those unwanted and major shifts. That has resulted in the levy not widening participation but narrowing it, particularly for young people.

Some simple tweaks to the programme could make all the difference. The levy should stay but some constraints need to be put on how employers can spend it – for instance with minimum levels for young people and for those entering the labour market.



Apprenticeships also need to be included as a route within the emerging Advanced British Standard (ABS) so that they have parity with A-levels and technical education.

In our Opportunity England paper we set out five actions including better integration to allow apprenticeships to progress into other learning, an open review of the levy with consideration of raising it to 1 per cent over time, a focus on new starters, more training for people at lower levels as pathways into apprenticeships, and, more transparency from levy-paying employers about how they have used their levy and the impact it has had.

Beyond this there are other considerations too: what role is there for elected mayors and LSIPs to focus the programme on their economic priorities, the local labour market and employer priorities, for example? And what can be done to increase the number of apprenticeships in small and medium businesses?

None of these changes are simple, but they are vital because the apprenticeship programme does so much good but could do so much more.



**MARIUS  
OSTROWSKI**

Executive director,  
Lifelong Education  
Institute

# Reform is coming for the apprenticeship levy — but what it needs is a revolution

**C**onsensus among opposition politicians and employers is clear – there's a mood for change in apprenticeships. Marius Ostrowski has bold ideas to reshape employer investment in apprenticeships

Depending on who wins the next election, the apprenticeship levy may be one of its major casualties – at least in its current form.

Faced with the government's rigid efforts to double down on the levy, ideas to overhaul it have been advancing apace.

These include a flexible skills levy, proposed by the Lifelong Education Institute, designed to cover a wider range of training including short and modular courses, and a plan by Onward for 16–19 apprenticeships to be fully funded by the DfE, at an estimated cost of £1.6bn.

Labour's plan to turn the apprenticeship into a "growth and skills levy", allowing businesses to use 50 per cent of their contributions on non-apprenticeship training.

Judging by recent interventions by Tesco

and Marks & Spencer, employers are firmly in the mood for change.

So, if we are plausibly months away from a massive transformation in how we fund a quarter of our vocational learning and training in the UK, we should use this moment to take stock of what the apprenticeship levy – or its successor – is trying to achieve.

Fundamentally, the levy works as a redistribution mechanism within the relatively closed system of the UK business community.

It redistributes a small share of the profits of the 2 per cent of businesses eligible to pay it – those with over £3m in payroll – to make more money available for smaller businesses to invest in human capital. It is, in effect, a hypothecated corporation tax with a payroll-based eligibility threshold. We should bear this in mind when we think about how to make the levy more effective.

One way is to lower the eligibility threshold to bring more businesses into the levy system, and introduce a progressive step system to levy rates.

For instance, the current 0.5 per cent rate could apply to businesses with over £1m in payroll, rise to 1.25 per cent for those over £2m, and 2.5 per cent for those over £3m.

This would significantly raise the revenue available to fund upskilling. This revenue should be divided according to the Labour 50–50 model: 50 per cent to fund higher and degree apprenticeships for mid-career workers over 25, 50 per cent for short course provision for all employees, which would apply above all to larger businesses.

Apprenticeships at level 3 and below should be taken out of the levy system and fully funded through the DfE, to put apprentices on a par with their school and college peers.

All training for 16–21-year-olds should be subject to a minimum pay mandate, set at the national living wage. This would ensure that younger workers, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefit not only from upskilling but also from an additional income buffer when they commit to an apprenticeship.

The revised levy should introduce a 20 per cent funding uplift for SMEs taking on all types of apprentices, and an equivalent uplift for all levy-payers taking on new employees as apprentices – since an estimated 60 per cent or more are currently existing employees. This should be covered by the levy income left unspent at the end of each fiscal year, which ran to £550m in 2022/23 alone. To aid with this, the levy budget should be updated quarterly to reduce the lag on "underspend" discrepancy.

The reformed levy should raise the share that businesses can allocate to others in their supply chain from 25 per cent to 100 per cent.

This capability should also be extended so that businesses with surplus levy funds can act as sectoral or regional "anchor institutions", in effect sponsoring and supporting SMEs in their orbit that would otherwise struggle with the administrative burden of participating in the apprenticeship framework.

The aim should ultimately be to create an adult skills account that empowers individual learners to take charge of their own upskilling journey.

That is what kickstarting a skills revolution looks like.





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## PAUL JOYCE

Deputy director, further education and skills, Ofsted



## The best training leaders are forensic about quality

**Inspectors are seeing more examples of great practice. Paul Joyce outlines what the best examples of apprenticeship training have in common**

National Apprenticeship Week has come round again and it's a great time to take stock of this complex part of the further education and skills sector.

Apprenticeships have had some challenging press recently and there is no denying that they still have their problems. Inspection outcomes of apprenticeship providers have lagged behind those of other types of further education and skills providers.

However, there are reasons to be optimistic.

Over the past three years, the proportion of apprenticeship provision graded good or outstanding, or getting at least reasonable progress in all three themes in the new provider monitoring visit has increased. And there are more and more examples of really great practice out there.

Where apprenticeships are taught well, they can provide an excellent route into an industry and a long-term career.

Successful apprenticeship training is characterised by high-quality on, and off-the-job training, that develops apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours to meet employer needs.

In the best provision, we see tutors undertaking comprehensive and frequent progress reviews with

apprentices in which employers, tutors and apprentices themselves all discuss achievements and agree on next steps.

It is also vital that leaders focus on their communication with employers. Both sides must work together to ensure that both on-the-job and off-the-job training are linked together coherently and that apprentices' knowledge is built logically and sequentially.

By using the close links they develop with employers, apprenticeship providers can ensure that they are planning and teaching qualifications that contribute to closing local, regional and national skills gaps. We recently inspected one provider who identified the need for employers to recruit staff trained in cybersecurity. They were able to offer a level 3 course in this area and meet local employer needs.

But it's also true that the relationship must go both ways.

It's important that employers are committed to providing apprentices with meaningful opportunities to practise what they have learned and contribute meaningfully to the business.

Employers need to set out clearly what they are looking for in an employee to ensure that apprentices are matched successfully. They also need to work proactively with training providers to confront and mitigate any problems faced with the apprentice in a practical and supportive way to give apprentices the best possible chance of achieving their qualifications.

Leaders should always have one eye on



apprentices' next steps, ensuring that courses provide them with everything they need to flourish whether they remain with their current employer or move on.

The great thing about apprenticeships is that they are available at a range of levels in most sectors. This means that apprentices can continue learning new knowledge, skills and behaviours as they move on up their career ladder. Employers gain so much from having apprentices in their workforce too.

So often inspectors hear about the new ideas, processes or attitudes that improve the way a business or organisation works that apprentices have suggested or introduced.

While great apprenticeship training relies on having skilled trainers who have expert sector knowledge, they also need to be great teachers.

The best providers we inspect pay very close attention to making sure that trainers are supported to develop their teaching skills.

The best leaders and managers that we find during inspections know their provision well. They are forensic in how they evaluate the quality of education in their organisations, and they are assiduous in their work to secure improvements.

Apprenticeships offer a great route into work for many people, younger and older, and it's vital that they experience the best possible training and development.

Ofsted will continue to work hard with the sector to help providers do their very best for apprentices.



**LINDSAY  
CONROY**

National head of  
apprenticeships,  
UCAS

# Celebrating success and creating pathways for all

**UCAS is doing its bit to close the disadvantage gap in access to apprenticeships, writes Lindsay Conroy, but more needs to be done to create good opportunities for younger people**

National Apprenticeship Week is rightly filled with celebration, applauding the outstanding contributions and bright futures of apprentices across the nation.

Every story deserves a standing ovation, whether it is the woman returning to work for a new career in tech after raising her children or the young solicitor apprentice, brought up by foster parents, who surpassed even her own expectations. These individuals exemplify the power of apprenticeships to unlock potential and fuel our economy.

**“We see that twice as many degree apprentices from wealthier areas than disadvantaged areas”**

Yet, amid the celebration, a reality demands attention: a stark contrast between surging demand and lagging opportunities.

While thousands of young people look to

apprenticeship pathways for their next step, the number of available positions remains largely static.

Employers across the nation grapple with widening skills gaps and rising costs, yearning for fresh talent and innovative solutions.

Apprenticeships offer exactly that: a pipeline of motivated, future-ready individuals eager to learn and contribute. But too often, opportunities fall short, particularly for those from dis-advantaged backgrounds.

Through our Journey to a Million project, UCAS has been leading the conversation about what the increase in the 18-year-old population means for those considering their next steps.

Simultaneously, we have been tracking the level of interest in apprenticeships. Nearly half a million users registered on UCAS this year have told us they are interested in apprenticeships – a threefold increase since 2021.

This rapidly growing demand puts a real spotlight on the lack of supply – there are simply not enough apprenticeships available.

Our research with the Sutton Trust What Influences the Choices of Would be Apprentices, found three in five (61 per cent) apprenticeship applicants didn't continue with apprenticeship pathways because there were no relevant opportunities in their area.

We know there are challenges to overcome in supporting every person – no matter their background – into apprenticeships.

Those from disadvantaged areas are more likely to be interested in apprenticeship options (46 per cent compared to 41 per cent from the most advantaged area).

Yet, looking at degree apprentices, we see that twice as many are from wealthier areas when compared to the most disadvantaged areas.

Policy change is needed to shift the dial on this, but we all have a critical part to play in widening access and ensuring the disadvantage gap narrows with a greater number of 18-year-olds in the population.

At UCAS, we are driven by our passion to support every young person to make the right next step for them but the concern is the lack of opportunities available if that right next step is an apprenticeship.

**“We need to break the perception that younger apprentices are less productive and harder to manage”**

We want to integrate IfATE's occupational maps to present pathways to young people when they are exploring their options. This will show the journey from level two to level seven and create a wider gateway to education post-18.

The St Martin's Group research Enabling Better Outcomes, tells us that employers see greater success when they hire new staff as apprentices, rather than only placing existing staff on programmes.

Apprenticeships are for all and must be available to upskill and re-skill, but we need to break the perception that younger, new-to-work, apprentices are less productive and harder to manage – instead showing employers the benefits of the new perspective they bring.

The Journey to a Million presents an economic opportunity for employers that only happens once in a generation, we must harness this opportunity and do more to support young people into apprenticeships.



# Teacher degree apprenticeships: questions and answers on the new career pathway

FREDDIE WHITTAKER  
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

**A** new apprenticeship route into teaching for non-graduates will launch in 2025. The Department for Education will begin recruiting for a pilot of 150 maths trainees in the autumn, with training beginning next September. Here's what you need to know...

## Why is the government creating this route?

Since the advent of the apprenticeship levy in 2017, schools, trusts and councils have struggled to find ways to spend the money they pay in.

Because teachers make up such a large proportion of schools' workforces, the lack of an undergraduate route leaves leaders with few options. A one-year postgraduate route was created in 2018, but requires an existing degree.

The government is also under pressure to plug worsening gaps in teacher supply. They missed their secondary teacher recruitment target by 50 per cent this year.

The DfE has also said it wants to provide a route for teaching assistants to become teachers. Entry requirements will be GCSEs at grade 4 (or C) or above in English and maths, and also in science for primary.

## How long will it last and what will trainees get?

The teacher degree apprenticeship (TDA) will last for four years, with trainees getting a degree at level 6 and qualified teacher status (QTS).

The DfE said QTS would be "awarded against the Teachers' Standards – this is the same for all other routes into teaching". The courses "must adhere to the ITT [initial teacher training] criteria [and] encompass all aspects of the ITT core content framework [CCF]".

Apprentices would spend "around 40 per cent" of their time studying and the rest of the time in the classroom. It is not clear whether they will need to be supervised when teaching classes.

## Who will deliver the training?

The DfE has said the apprenticeships will be delivered by organisations with "degree awarding powers", such as universities, but said other teacher training providers could "partner" on the training.

There will be one apprenticeship standard, but individual courses will be "subject specific", the DfE said. For example, providers will offer a TDA course in secondary maths or chemistry, or primary education.

The department said it was "working with subject experts and the trailblazer group to co-develop how universities and schools offering the TDA can ensure secondary subject specialism is comprehensive and high-quality".

ITT content will be the same as other routes to qualified teacher status.

## What will apprentices get paid?

Apprentices are paid on the job, but it is not clear what rate those on the degree apprenticeship route will receive.

The apprentice minimum wage is just

£5.28 for those in their first year, but trainees on the current postgraduate route into teaching are paid on the unqualified teacher pay scale, which starts at just over £20,000 a year outside London.

The DfE said details on salary for teacher apprentices "is under review".

## Why are unions concerned?

Paul Whiteman, of the National Association of Head Teachers, said the threshold for entry to teacher training "should continue to include holding a degree". He feared the proposals would "truncate degrees and teacher training".

It is worth pointing out that the apprentices will have a degree by the time they finish their training. It is also already possible to enter undergraduate teacher training routes, such as a bachelor's degree in education, without an existing degree.

The DfE said the structure of the TDA "will ensure trainees have sufficient time to attain their degree while also spending a portion of their time in school".

## What happens next (and who pays)?

Ministers will launch recruitment to the pilot scheme in the autumn. This will see the government "working with a small number of schools and teacher training providers to fund up to 150 apprentices to work in secondary schools to teach maths".

Training providers "will bid to partake in the pilot and trainees will be recruited from this autumn and start their training the following year".

The pilot will only include government funding for the training of one cohort.

After that, schools will have to use levy funding. The DfE said providers and schools could also "develop and run" apprenticeship courses with their own funding from September 2025.







**JEAN-NOËL  
EZINGEARD**

Vice-chancellor, University of  
Roehampton, and education  
route panel chair, IfATE

# The role apprenticeships now play in the teaching sector

**As the head of the employer group overseeing the new teaching degree apprenticeship, Jean-Noël Ezingeard explains what's in it for schools and the wider education sector**

Apprenticeships are crucial in marrying academic learning with practical skills. This synergy is vital to address workforce shortages, notably in the education and early years sectors.

My dedication to this cause is personal, not just as a parent, but also in my role leading a university with a rich legacy in teacher training and early childhood education.

As chair of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) education and early years route panel, I witness the growing impact of apprenticeships on meeting employer demands and workforce needs.

Research highlights a concerning trend in the early years and school sectors, with significant workforce shortages already here, or looming.

There is a real urgency in developing additional robust pathways, such as apprenticeships, to attract and retain talent in this amazing and crucial sector.

I am enthusiastic about apprenticeships as a recognised pathway into advanced careers.

This stems from the fact that apprenticeship standards are crafted in direct response to employer needs, guaranteeing the skills and knowledge acquired are pertinent and instantly valuable in the workplace.

The employer-driven method adapts education to the changing demands of practice, turning apprenticeships into a direct route to excellent employment opportunities and a competent

workforce.

Teachers who excel combine practical experience with intellectual insight, making apprenticeships a logical alternative route for entering the profession.

At my university – a provider of high-level and degree apprenticeships – I am continually inspired by the dedication and resilience of apprentices who balance the rigours of academic study with the practical demands of on-the-job learning.

This blend of learning styles is indeed challenging, yet it embodies the best of both worlds, preparing apprentices for a dynamic work environment. Their success stories are a testament to the effectiveness of apprenticeships in nurturing skilled professionals.

I recently asked some of our apprenticeship students what they value most about this route of study. They highlighted that they are working alongside experts and are given enhanced opportunities and responsibilities which are allowing them to grow professionally and to develop their careers. They benefit from learning through a very hands-on experience, and they very much feel a part of the communities in which they are working and learning.

Additionally, earning a salary whilst studying is particularly important in the current financial environment and means that apprenticeship pathways are not limited by the ability to take time off work whilst studying.

The route also allows our students to balance family and caring responsibilities.

Our education and early years route panel, together with collaborating employers, continues to contribute to the dynamic offerings of the apprenticeship landscape.

It's been encouraging to witness the media attention on the emerging undergraduate teacher degree apprenticeship.

Awaiting approval this coming autumn, it holds promise for helping teacher recruitment in schools and early years settings.

It will improve access to the profession to those who might find traditional full-time study challenging, such as teaching assistants or existing educational staff.

This initiative is anticipated to be a catalyst for social mobility and a substantial support to schools in engaging and maintaining the skilled teachers they necessitate.

We are amidst an educational evolution, with apprenticeships broadening access to numerous professions for a diverse array of individuals. This is instrumental in bridging skills shortages and is of immense benefit to the country.

Apprenticeships – as they have evolved – have rapidly become a foundational element within our educational framework, essential for bridging the skills gap and mitigating workforce shortages and I am pleased to see them growing in importance within education and early years settings.

As we celebrate National Apprenticeship Week, I'm delighted to recognise and endorse the significant contribution of apprenticeships to cultivating a robust, well-skilled, and flexible workforce for the future.



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