

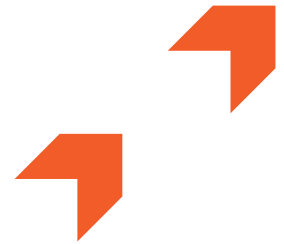
Get #apprenticeReady!

Keeping your options open

Be apprenticeReady alongside
applying for a full-time degree

Introduction to the apprenticeReady Post-18 Toolkit

This apprenticeReady Post-18 Toolkit has been designed to support students interested in exploring apprenticeships alongside other options, such as undergraduate courses. This is commonly referred to as 'twin tracking'. It provides information for schools, sixth forms and colleges to help students, teachers, parents, and carers understand, find, and apply for apprenticeships.



The toolkit aims to:

- Raise awareness of apprenticeships as an equally prestigious and viable route, a view most associated with a degree.
- Improve school culture and awareness of the organisations available to increase the promotion of and access to apprenticeships.
- Improve teacher knowledge and confidence to enable and inspire students to apply for apprenticeships via the twin tracking approach.
- Support post-18 progression and sustained destinations.

Employers would like more young people to consider apprenticeships and to make applications to their programmes, but school leaders often communicate they lack confidence in advising and supporting students in this pathway. In contrast, the sequence of events leading to a successful degree application via the UCAS portal is deeply embedded in the sixth form calendar and well understood by most teachers.

This 'twin tracking' approach advocates the need for a more integrated and effective timeline of activity, supporting sixth form students and college leavers to build their confidence in researching and applying for an apprenticeship alongside a suitable university option.

It has been created to signpost school leaders to resources that will help them plan and implement an apprenticeship support programme, within the UCAS time frame. It contains advice, tools and resources that will help school leaders promote the apprenticeship pathway alongside the degree route, and to encourage more students to apply for both simultaneously. It will be particularly useful to professionals such as heads of sixth form, career leaders, subject teachers, heads of Year 12 and Year 13 and heads of curriculum and student services at colleges.



Understanding apprenticeships: What is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a job-based training programme that allows students to gain the skills and experience needed to achieve success in a specific occupation or industry. An apprenticeship consists of a partnership between:

- an apprentice
- an employer
- an approved training provider

All three elements are equally important and necessary for a successful relationship and partnership to work. An apprenticeship typically involves a combination of on-the-job training and off-the-job learning and leads to recognised qualifications and opportunities for young people to progress within an organisation. Apprentices are paid by their employer and are entitled to the same benefits as other staff, e.g., holidays and sick pay.

What do the apprenticeship levels mean?

There are different entry levels for apprenticeships. The right level for a student may depend on their age, their experience, qualifications already achieved, the occupation or industry of interest, and/or specific requirements of the employer.

An apprenticeship programme can be made up of a mix of levels, allowing the opportunity for the apprentice to progress to a higher-level apprenticeship as they gain more skills and experience.

Apprenticeships currently last between one and seven years, depending on the final qualification. They provide a genuine opportunity for students to earn as they learn and to enter the world of employment straight after their GCSEs, after sixth form or college.

Find out more about the levels of apprenticeships [here](#).

The entry requirements for an apprenticeship differ according to the level of apprenticeship.

- **Level 2** apprenticeships, often referred to as Intermediate Level Apprenticeships, are normally agreed to be the equivalent of 5 GCSE passes. There are generally no eligibility criteria for application, but employers will look for a good attitude towards the course.
- **Level 3** apprenticeships, also known as Advanced Apprenticeships, would be the same as 2 passes at A-Level and are a common next step for those who have completed a Level 2 apprenticeship or have 5 passes at GCSE. There will be instances where no formal qualification will be needed to apply for a Level 3 apprenticeship. However, in this instance you will generally need experience of working in the industry to be considered.

Higher level apprenticeships combine on-the-job experience with academic learning and result in a Level 4 qualification or above:

- **Level 4** apprenticeships are equivalent to a foundation degree, a Higher National Certificate (HNC), or the first year of an undergraduate degree. You must be aged 18 years or over to apply for a Level 4 apprenticeship.
- **Level 5** apprenticeships are also classified as Higher Apprenticeships but are the equivalent of a full undergraduate degree.
- **Level 6** apprenticeships give candidates the opportunity to obtain a full bachelor's degree. Degree apprenticeships are new types of courses offered by universities and further education colleges who have awarding powers to deliver higher technical qualifications.
- **Level 7** apprenticeships are equivalent to a postgraduate degree, as these are demanding courses. It is common to see strict requirements from employers for these apprenticeships. You will almost certainly need prior qualifications which are transferable to the apprenticeship.

Higher and degree apprenticeships provide qualifications equivalent to those gained through full-time university study. They are a highly credible alternative to going to university. This route is a very compelling option for students to gain a degree without the debt – the programme is free to students, as the funding for the training comes from the current apprenticeship levy.

The future of the apprenticeship landscape

There are changes affecting the apprenticeship landscape which will include the introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships and shorter duration apprenticeships. There will also be an introduction of a Skills and Growth Levy which will replace the apprenticeship levy.

Level 3 apprenticeships now carry UCAS Tariff points. From September 2025 onwards, applicants to higher education with a Level 3 apprenticeship will be able to list their apprenticeship with the associated Tariff points in their applications for 2026 entry.

Skills England is a new government body tasked with overseeing the skills system, including apprenticeships, and taking over many of the functions previously held by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). It aims to address skills gaps and meet the needs of businesses and the future workforce. You can find out more about the range of apprenticeships, including other technical education pathways here: [Explore Skills England's occupational maps](#).

Apprenticeships are approved by employers, and you can keep up to date with the range of apprenticeships available at [Skills England - GOV.UK](#).

What are schools and colleges' legal duty towards apprenticeship education?

Schools and colleges have had a legal duty since January 2018, under the Provider Access Legislation (PAL), to inform all students in Years 8–13 about apprenticeships and other approved technical qualifications. The PAL was strengthened in 2023, so it is now mandatory for schools and colleges to provide two encounters for students in Years 12 and 13 (although these are optional for students to attend).

Key messaging to students

Thinking about what to do after school is almost always a difficult decision for young people. There can be a lot of pressure to make the right choice, especially considering the long-lasting impact of any decision. Going to university to study for a degree is still the most popular education option for school and college leavers, but an increasing number of students are considering other options such as an apprenticeship or an alternative higher technical qualification.

Apprenticeships now offer a viable route to many careers that were once only accessible through university degrees. Opportunities for an apprenticeship are available in a wide range of industries such as media, law, teaching and finance; and apprenticeships provide entry to all types of careers, including medicine, engineering and the health care sector. With more young people realising the value of the apprenticeship route, building confidence and expertise in helping young people apply for opportunities is key.



Apprenticeships vs University



Apprenticeships

Education vs Employment

- Working, earning, and learning on the job from the very start.
- Generally, more challenging as along with studying, apprentices work at least 32 hours a week as full-time employees within the company.

University

- Purely studying your chosen subject. However, some courses will encourage work experience, unpaid internships, volunteering, or even seeking part-time employment.
- A great learning opportunity where you can pick up useful life-skills like living away from home, attending lectures, and creating a social life somewhere completely foreign to you!

Competitiveness

- Many apprenticeship schemes have a very tough application process and strong competition for places. This can mean that employers close their application deadlines earlier because of the number of applicants so do not delay your applications.
- People who do apprenticeships are more likely to be hired if they can demonstrate a good work ethic, a track record of work experience and/or skills drawn from voluntary/paid work, or hobbies and interests.

- Your university application is focused on achievement of UCAS points which comes down to your study commitments and the entry requirements for your chosen institution. Oxbridge and Russell Group University placements tend to be competitive, requiring you to demonstrate more of your educational attainment.
- In the 3+ years you've been studying, others, who may very well be competing with you for a job in the future, will have been earning work experience. To make yourself stand out further from other candidates, it's beneficial to try and secure work experience to demonstrate skills and competencies

Financial Considerations

- Free training and earn a living during your course - resulting in no student debt!
- Pay for degree-level apprenticeships is rising more rapidly than that of traditional graduate roles.

- Pay for fees unless sponsored, resulting in final debt of approx. £40K - £60K. However, it is important to understand what this means and how student finance works. [Understanding student living costs - GOV.UK](#)

Aspirations

- You can apply for a higher or degree apprenticeship

- You can pick from a range of courses which can be useful if you're unsure what to do after graduation, as you can opt for a broader subject and keep your options open.

The apprenticeReady Twin-Track Timeline for Post-18 Success

Aligning the windows of support for both university degrees and apprenticeships allows students the opportunity to consider both pathways equally and to apply for an apprenticeship as well as meeting key UCAS deadlines. This toolkit spans the full two years of study in a post-16 setting, with a tailored programme of activity for Year 12 and Year 13 students. The apprenticeReady Post-18 Toolkit provides a term-by-term summary of activity to be completed in Year 12 and Year 13, highlighting the areas that students need to consider at each stage.

Some of the activities within the toolkit may be embedded and sequenced within the PHSE curriculum. All sixth form and college students should receive a full programme of input in Year 12, which showcases all the opportunities on offer such as enterprise and employability activities. The wider programme may form part of the post-16 curriculum, with opportunities for students to learn about different careers and the relevance of their subjects and learning in the classroom.

Year 12 Autumn Term: Career Planning and Goal Setting	Year 12 Spring Term: Exploring Pathways
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Provide students with career advice at enrolment.▪ Share termly careers programme, giving details of drop-in sessions, employer talks, external events, etc.▪ Enable students to sign up to school careers portal (if applicable) and introduce personal career action plans.▪ Provide careers assemblies, covering post-18 destinations, goal setting and raising aspirations.▪ Encourage students to research local labour market information (LMI) and emerging industries.▪ Record student competencies, skills, and strengths.▪ Start to explore post-18 destinations.▪ Provide a post-18 progression event for students and parents, with equal time dedicated to the launch of UCAS and the apprenticeships process.▪ Complete career questionnaires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Share termly careers programme, giving details of drop-in sessions, employer talks, external events, etc.▪ Work through personal career action plans with students.▪ Discuss chosen subject areas at this stage and enhance research further into post-18 pathways and sectors.▪ Develop students' awareness of apprenticeships with webinars, guest speakers (including employers and school alumni who have gone into apprenticeships) and webinars.▪ Begin to explore university courses and potential universities.▪ Identify early-entry* and degree apprenticeship applicants and hold an information briefing for students and their families.▪ Plan National Careers Week and National Apprenticeship Week programme for students and families.▪ Research work experience for the summer and prioritise work experience for students who are interested in following the apprenticeship or employment route.▪ Register students on UCAS.▪ Offer mentoring support

Year 12 Summer Term: Boosting Skills

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share termly careers programme, giving details of drop-in sessions, employer talks, external events, etc. ▪ Work through personal career action plans. ▪ Student research on universities and courses, with preparation for the personal statement. ▪ Student research on apprenticeship job roles, creating a list of companies to apply to (look at organisation mission statements, core values, etc). ▪ Additional reading and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students complete draft personal statements for UCAS. ▪ Students are supported to write CVs for apprenticeships. ▪ Develop students' confidence and communication. ▪ Provide personal branding session, including how to develop a social media presence. ▪ University open-day visits, including for degree apprenticeships. ▪ Students complete initial sections of the UCAS application (except course choices). ▪ Individual guidance sessions to confirm career choices, subject choices, university courses and apprenticeship interests. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drop-in workshops planned for students and parents to support applications for UCAS (lunchtime and twilight sessions). ▪ Workshops covering apprenticeship selection processes – telephone interviews, online tests such as critical thinking, verbal reasoning and numeracy, faceless interviews testing for short, succinct answers, psychometric assessments, group tasks to demonstrate leadership, team work and problem-solving skills, competency-based interviews and presentation techniques. |
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Year 13 Autumn Term: Making Applications

- Students firm up course choices.
- Students complete remaining sections of UCAS application and submit.
- Students enter and prepare for entrance exams for early entry* UCAS courses.
- Workshops covering apprenticeships, where to find them, how to apply and selection processes.
- Finance sessions for parents and students, covering apprenticeships as well as university.
- Apprenticeship promotion activities, delivered by training providers and employers.
- Students' complete apprenticeship applications – the majority are advertised and close by Christmas with a few advertised in February. Apprenticeship vacancies tend to close early owing to demand – encourage students to submit early.
- For students who are applying for degree apprenticeships it is important to familiarise with the company's recruitment and assessment processes once you have submitted your application.

Year 13 Spring and Summer Terms: Preparing for Interviews and Assessments

- Workshops covering apprenticeship selection processes – telephone interviews, online tests such as critical thinking, verbal reasoning and numeracy, faceless interviews testing for short, succinct answers, psychometric assessments, group tasks to demonstrate leadership, teamwork and problem-solving skills, competency-based interviews and presentation techniques
- Apprenticeship promotion activities, delivered by training providers.
- Students supported in accepting and finalising university offers.



*Early-entry courses include applications to Cambridge and Oxford (Oxbridge), in addition to medical, veterinary, and dental courses, as well as many applications to conservatories.

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To support more students in applying for both university degrees and apprenticeships, schools may find it helpful to group students into three broad categories:

1. Students applying for competitive programmes, including degree apprenticeships.
2. Students applying for both an undergraduate degree and an apprenticeship.
3. Students aiming to secure a place on an apprenticeship programme.

1. Students Applying for Competitive Programmes, Including Degree Apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships are popular with students and parents and are extremely competitive (with some attracting 10 times the number of applicants as Oxbridge). A set of good grades forms only part of a successful application. Recruiting students for degree apprenticeship programmes can be likened to the graduate recruitment process, where there are often several stages of the assessment process such as online assessments, psychometric testing, and attending an assessment day. This is especially the case for students applying to the larger and more prestigious degree apprenticeship programmes.

Extra preparation for early-entry students and those applying for competitive degree apprenticeship programmes should start at the beginning of Year 12. It is advised that these students have a specific programme of support in place to help them progress onto their post-18 destination. The programme of support for these candidates should include input from sixth form and college staff and other staff members such as subject specialists, heads of careers, careers coordinators, academic tutors, and senior leadership team members.

Students benefit from the support from staff trained in reference writing and can be guided by teachers' advice on specialist knowledge,

based on the subjects they teach. Teachers can support with mock interviews, mentoring students, and delivering sessions that work to their strengths and in line with their expertise and experience. Some activities may require support from external specialists, which may include preparing students for interviews, online tests, psychometric testing, and group tasks. Schools can also benefit from working in collaboration with other sixth form centres and colleges to deliver specialised support services to students, or to forge strong relationships with careers professionals and other organisations that can offer support for these candidates.

2. Students Applying for Both an Undergraduate Degree and an Apprenticeship

Students applying for both a degree and a higher-level apprenticeship will require support in maintaining motivation beyond the deadline for their UCAS application, as most apprenticeships are advertised in autumn and recruited for in the spring terms. Having a member of staff who knows where their interests lie and can guide them towards relevant employers and opportunities is of real value. Students who are applying for degrees and apprenticeships can adapt their personal statement and use it to support an apprenticeship application, as per this [UCAS guidance](#). Those students will also need to be prepared for interviews and assessment processes that a university is unlikely to require and should be prepared to be invited to these during spring time.

3. Students Aiming to Only Secure a Place on an Apprenticeship Programme

Students who choose the apprenticeship route require a specific programme and can be supported on this route throughout their time in sixth form and at college. Many firms will recruit throughout the academic year of a student's Year 13 or end of the college programme. Smaller firms that follow a less structured recruitment process may recruit later than the larger, higher-status programmes. Information on types of apprenticeships can be found here: [Skills England's occupational maps](#).

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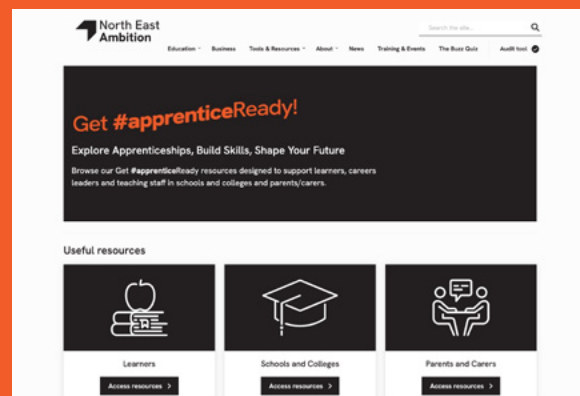
Useful Resources

North East Ambition

North East Ambition offers a range of resources for use in schools and colleges, including an apprenticeReady webpage with information aimed at institutions, parents & carers and learners.

[apprenticeReady homepage – North East Ambition](#)

[apprenticeReady – North East Ambition](#)



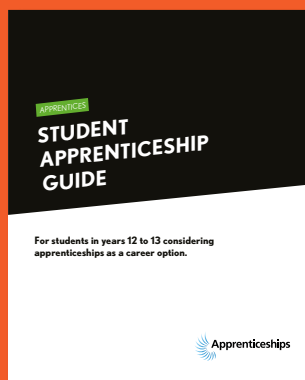
Local Apprenticeship Providers

This is a simple overview of the regionally funded organisations and FE colleges that provide careers programme support. It includes the engaging activities they offer to help promote apprenticeships as a visible and viable progression pathway.

[Unlocking Apprenticeship Potential: A Guide for North East Schools and Colleges - North East Ambition](#)

Resources for Unifrog schools

Unifrog offer a complete and comprehensive careers package full of advice and information at every stage of the careers journey, for students in Years 7-13. The platform provides resources for students and lesson activities for teachers and leaders. A full outline of how Unifrog resources can be used to support students applying for apprenticeships is included and you can request a demo of the platform [here](#).



Sixth Form Student Apprenticeship Guide

Most students and their families will be aware of university as a post-18 progression route, but many will be unfamiliar with the range of opportunities available if they progress onto an apprenticeship. There are many sources of information that schools and colleges can use to help students explore the full range of opportunities available to them. The [Sixth Form Student Apprenticeship Guide](#) is a comprehensive interactive guide for students, which they can download and use to track their progress.

Careers And Enterprise Company (CEC) Provider Directory

The [CEC Provider Directory](#) allows careers leaders and teachers to search for providers that can help them deliver careers support such as enrichment support, employability and skills training, and work experience and other activities, to help schools achieve their Gatsby Benchmarks.



UCAS Career Planner

The UCAS Career Planner is an excellent tool, full of practical ideas and inspiring activities for teachers to work through with students, highlighting the key issues and questions they need to consider during Year 12 and Year 13.

[Download and print the free planner here.](#)

The front side of the planner is designed for students. The reverse side provides guidance for teachers on the activities that can be used to develop students' understanding of the post-16 careers process. There are several follow-on activities for teachers to explore with students and resources for them to use, including PowerPoint documents that can be adapted for different year groups.



Amazing Apprenticeships Career Planner

The [Amazing Apprenticeships career planner](#) includes key resources for you to share with students, parents and carers, along with ideas to help you support your careers provision.



Frequently asked questions

Understanding apprenticeships

During an apprenticeship, what I am expected to do?

In England, an apprenticeship is a paid job where the employee learns and gains valuable experiences, alongside on-the-job training. Apprentices spend at least 20% of their working hours completing classroom-based learning with a college, university or training provider which leads to a nationally recognised qualification.

Off-the-job training is delivered by subject experts and can include:

- teaching theory (e.g. classroom lessons, lectures and online learning)
- practical training (e.g. shadowing, mentoring, industry visits)
- learning support and time to write assignments

[What is an apprenticeship?](#)

For more detailed information about what an apprenticeship will involve you can access information on the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to complete an apprenticeship [HERE](#).

What level of apprenticeship can I do after A Levels?

After A Levels, you can apply for apprenticeships from Level 2 through to Level 7. The level you start at is dependent on your skills and competencies rather than your educational attainment. Don't be put off if you start at a Level 2 or 3, it's about you gaining the practical skills.

Can I finish sixth form / college first before taking on an apprenticeship?

It is highly recommended that you finish your college/sixth form course before starting an apprenticeship. Speak to your college/sixth form careers adviser as there could be options you haven't considered.

I've heard that apprentices earn below the National Minimum Wage (NMW), which is not very enticing. Is this true?

The gap between apprentice earnings and NMW has closed over the last few years, so improvement can be seen. By the age of 21, there is almost zero pay gap between apprentices and those in full time education (i.e., university).

If I want to relocate, will employers help with any costs?

It is unlikely you will get help with relocation costs, consider this when choosing your options.

Do I get any help with travel costs?

Not unless your employer chooses to provide this. That said, some employers may offer additional benefit schemes which may help with discounts for bicycles.

Where do I study on study days/off the job training?

This will entirely depend on the structure of your programme. Your training will be provided either by the employer directly or at a college, university, or independent training provider, and therefore often takes place at these institutions or online.

Roughly what is the percentage of practical work compared to study?

Your off-the-job training must be at least 20% of your apprenticeship, which means up to 80% of your time will be spent on the job. The actual amounts will vary for each apprenticeship, with some having a higher proportion of study.

Do all Level 3 apprenticeships offer further training and/or a full-time role?

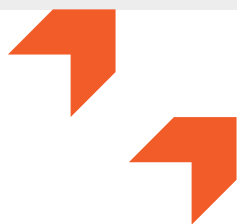
Not necessarily. At the end of your Level 3 apprenticeship, your employer is not obligated to offer you anything additional – however, many will offer you a job role, or additional training. It would be an important question to ask in your interview, so you know the employer is planning for the role once the apprenticeship ends.

If I get a university related apprenticeship, would I have to pay the university fees?

No – these are covered by your employer.

Is work experience a pre-requisite for degree apprenticeships ?

Employers are generally looking for the right skillset, which can be demonstrated through a variety of activities, such as hobbies, interests, paid work and voluntary work experience. However, employers can set whatever requirements they like for their opportunities and will usually require you to complete assessments to demonstrate your skills and competencies.



Finding apprenticeships

When is the latest I should be looking for an apprenticeship?

Apprenticeships are available all year round, however, some larger employers recruit in the Autumn for apprenticeships starting the following September.

How do I find opportunities?

- [Find an apprenticeship - GOV.UK](#) - you can sign up to alerts and notifications.
- [Smart Alerts for Apprenticeships | Apprenticeships, 16-18 Choices | UCAS](#)
- [Job Search | Indeed](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Contact local training providers and colleges](#), as they often have links with local employers and apprenticeship opportunities.
- [GetMyFirstJob | Apprenticeships, Degree Apprenticeships, Work Experience & Graduate Jobs](#)
- [Gradcracker - Careers for STEM Students](#)

Applying for apprenticeships

Can I apply for apprenticeships at any point in my life?

To start an apprenticeship, you will need to be:

- 16 or over
- Living in England
- Not in full-time education

I am concerned about the application process. What do I need to know?

- [Application form advice | National Careers Service](#)

It's also important to visit the employer's website where they will detail recruitment and selection processes, often providing information for Early Career entrants.

Do you have any resources that could support me with my CV?

- [How to write a CV | National Careers Service](#)

When do applications open and close?

This will vary from employer to employer. Some larger employers recruit in the Autumn for apprenticeships starting the following September. Smaller Employers tend to advertise vacancies as soon as they have a need. Employer's may close vacancies early if they have enough applicants, so apply at your earliest opportunity.