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UCAS' guide to apprenticeships

Everything you
need to know about
apprenticeships



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Earn while you learn – study an apprenticeship

Inside this guide you'll find:

- apprenticeship key facts
- the difference between a uni degree and a degree apprenticeship
- who they are for
- what they involve
- what apprenticeships are available
- entry requirements
- how and when to apply
- the recruitment process and interview tips
- tips from unis offering degree apprenticeships



Ten things you need to know about apprenticeships

- 1. An apprenticeship is a real job with training.** Apprentices are given real responsibilities, expected to work hard, and are given a contract of employment, holiday, and sick pay – exactly the same as any other member of staff! They will also gain a qualification and valuable skills and experience.
- 2. While working for an employer, apprentices also work towards a qualification.** They are supported by a training provider (a university or college), that will help them achieve their qualification and make sure they complete their apprenticeship.
- 3. An apprenticeship can take two to four years to complete** and is usually made up of three parts – all completed on the job, online, or in a classroom.
- 4. There are hundreds of new apprenticeships in a wide range of industries and job roles** – much more than the traditional apprenticeships, like construction and engineering. Apprenticeships are available in many jobs where previously, the only route to those jobs was through full-time, traditional university study, such as nursing and becoming a solicitor.
- 5. The majority of apprentices (around 90%) stay in employment.** If they do change companies, it's usually because they're able to compete for a better job, perhaps with more pay or more responsibility.
- 6. Degree apprenticeships offer the benefits of higher education with none of the cost.** Tuition fees are paid for by the employer and the government, so apprentices will graduate debt-free, without having to pay fees. Apprentices will also earn a salary from day one, so they are actually getting paid to study.
- 7. Degree apprenticeships are still quite new,** so there are only a limited number of vacancies available at the moment. The number of vacancies is anticipated to grow over the next few years.
- 8. Apprenticeships have changed considerably over the last few decades** and higher and degree apprenticeships are now a credible alternative to traditional full-time university courses.
- 9. Universities and colleges offer their degree apprentices a strong student experience** – apprentices are still able to access the students' union, sports facilities, and student discounts.
- 10. You can apply for degree and higher apprenticeships at the same time as applying to uni.** Applications for apprenticeships are made directly to the employer, usually through their own online application. Details of how to apply will be given on each apprenticeship vacancy.

What's the difference between doing a degree at uni and doing a degree apprenticeship?

Both routes offer the opportunity to gain a full degree qualification, but there are some key differences.

- Apprentices split their time between university study and the workplace, and are employed throughout the course.
- Traditional degrees offer a much broader choice of courses, subjects, subject combinations, and the range of modules you can cover. However, degree apprenticeships are limited to the universities working with the employer and the employer's location, and the course content is industry-specific.
- Degree apprenticeships are focused on developing the skills and knowledge for specific jobs and careers. Traditional degree courses, on the other hand, offer a wide range of career prospects, but some are focused on particular professions and there are still many careers that require traditional qualifications which cannot be attained with a degree apprenticeship.
- The experience of student life will be different for apprentices. Traditional on-campus learning, with the social life it offers, can be particularly important to some students. While degree apprentices do experience some elements of campus life, it will be different and combined with additional work-based experience.
- Degree apprenticeship fees are funded by the government and the employer, and apprentices are paid a wage throughout the apprenticeship, meaning degree apprentices can be debt-free. Studying a traditional degree will cost students their tuition fees (around £9,000 per year) plus living expenses. There are student loans, bursaries, and scholarships available – find out more at ucas.com/finance-and-support.



Who are apprenticeships for?

To start an apprenticeship, you need to be:

- aged 16 or over
- living in England
- not in full-time education

Do you want to study in the UK?

If you're thinking about applying to study an apprenticeship in England, Scotland, or Wales, you must be eligible to work in the UK, and meet any other entry requirements. It's important to contact potential employers to check their eligibility criteria.

Apprenticeships aren't the 'easy option'

Holding down a full-time job and studying takes commitment and hard work, and it won't be right for everyone.

No matter what kind of career you want to follow, you need to do your research and find out if you can reach your career goals through an apprenticeship, or if you need to/would prefer to study full-time at university or college.

An apprenticeship could be perfect for you if you:

- have a clear idea of the career you want to pursue and are willing to commit to work and study
- are ready to start work – an apprenticeship is primarily a job
- wish to continue studying at a higher or degree level, and you prefer a more practical and work-related approach to studying
- are well organised and will be able to cope with the competing demands of work and study at the same time
- are prepared to be assessed through a mix of assignments and written work/essays, reports, practical exercises, end tests, and exams

Take a look at the pros and cons of apprenticeships at ucas.com/apprenticeships.

Let's talk money

Many people think apprentices aren't paid very much, and this can be true depending on the employer. Legally, an employer must pay an apprentice the National Minimum Wage – for apprentices, this is currently £3.40 per hour. This is lower than the normal National Minimum Wage, but it recognises that some people will be going into their first job with no experience at all.

What does an apprenticeship involve?

- Apprentices are employed to do jobs, and spend most of the week at work (a minimum of 30 hours) where they focus on learning to do the job. They could be learning from colleagues across all levels of the business, typically working closely with someone more senior who will coach them and review their progress.
- They will also spend time attending college, university, or a training provider, or training at work.
- The study element of an apprenticeship fits around the job commitment and will be agreed with the employer. Apprentices can either attend one day per week (day release), in blocks of a week or more (block release), or study online. Some apprenticeships use a combination of these options. Apprentices are required to study and complete assignments in their own time.
- Apprentices complete assessments which test both academic learning and occupational competence developed through on-the-job training. These are taken both during and at the end of the programme.
- Each apprenticeship has a **standard or framework**, which outlines what apprentices will learn and how their learning and skills will be assessed. These may vary depending on the apprenticeship.

What apprenticeships are available?

There is a wide range of apprenticeships for over 1,500 jobs, offering you the opportunity to enter careers in anything from business, engineering, and boat building, to veterinary nursing, technical theatre, and environmental conservation.

Below is a summary of the sectors and levels of apprenticeships on offer, with examples of what's available.

New apprenticeships are in development all the time and more universities, colleges, and different employers will be offering apprenticeships in the future, so keep looking! You can see a live list of higher and degree apprenticeship vacancies at ucas.com/apprenticeship-search.

Creative, media, arts, and digital technologies – degree, higher, advanced

This sector covers jobs from photography, visual effects, and journalism, to technical theatre, interactive product development, and technology.

There are also degree apprenticeships available in digital technologies, including digital, television, archive, animation, interactive media, film, photo imaging, and radio.

This sector is known for being very competitive and there is high demand for apprenticeships.

Information and communication technology – degree, higher, advanced

Apprenticeships include IT infrastructure, systems analysts, IT security, software specialists, testers, website developers, and network engineers. There are also other IT-based apprenticeships in digital industries, which are included in the creative sector above.

Employers include large IT and business-related companies such as BT, Capgemini, Cisco, Santander, Deloitte, BAE Systems, GCHG, HP, and banks.

TV production and broadcasting – degree, higher, advanced

Job roles in this sector include broadcast production assistant, production runner, assistant camera crew, and researcher. For those with an engineering or technical degree, there is a postgraduate-level apprenticeship in outside broadcasting engineering.

Employers include BBC Academy, ITV, 4Talent, and Sky Academy.





Business management, administration, law, and financial services – degree, higher, advanced

There are many occupations across these sectors which can lead to careers in every sort of industry and business. Apprenticeships range from administration through to HR, management, leadership, marketing, PR, finance, accounting, consultancy, and a variety of legal roles, including solicitor, conveyancing technician, and legal executive. There are also banking and investment-related specialisms.

Construction, planning, and the built environment – degree, higher, advanced

Construction is a huge sector, including varied jobs from practical hands-on plumbing, heating, and construction, through to chartered surveyors, construction engineers, civil engineering, and engineering technology. Employers range from large construction companies to specialists.

Engineering and manufacturing – degree, higher, advanced

Apprenticeships in these sectors include aerospace, maritime, gas, power, water, defence, and nuclear industries, as well as vehicle, automotive, and electrical systems. This extends to a range of manufacturing specialisms such as furniture, tailoring, silversmithing, print, and packaging, as well as food technology and production. Employers range from large engineering and aerospace companies, power suppliers, defence industry, and food manufacturing companies, to smaller, specialist companies supplying key parts and services.

Health and care – degree, higher, advanced

Apprenticeships range from dispensing medicines in a pharmacy, dental nursing, maternity support, and social work. A new nursing degree apprenticeship is in development. The NHS is the largest employer for this sector, as well as independent healthcare organisations, voluntary, and non-profit organisations.

Life and industrial sciences – degree, higher

These apprenticeships offer the training to go into a range of science and research-based jobs, including laboratory technicians and science manufacturing technicians. These jobs are in a wide range of companies, including chemical and pharmaceutical businesses, biotechnology, and nuclear manufacturing.

A woman in green scrubs is holding a dog in a veterinary clinic. The dog is lying down, and the woman is looking at it. There are other people in the background, including a man in a white coat. The scene is brightly lit and appears to be a professional setting.

Universities and colleges involved in higher and degree apprenticeships.

Over 70 universities and around 200 colleges are approved to deliver higher and degree apprenticeships.

This list is growing all the time as new apprenticeships are developed and more employers look to recruit apprentices.

Always check the university or college website, and each apprenticeship vacancy will identify the university or college involved.

Retail and commercial enterprise – higher, advanced

There are higher level apprenticeships in facilities and hospitality management, as well as supply chain management. The advanced level apprenticeships range from retail and customer services to beauty, fashion, hair, and hospitality. Many local and national employers are involved in apprenticeships, including retailers of all sizes and specialist businesses.

Agriculture, horticulture, and animal care – higher, advanced

This is a broad sector covering everything from farming and farriery to veterinary nursing, horticulture, animal care, and land-based engineering. Many universities and colleges offer a range of courses in agriculture, horticulture, and animal care, as well as specialist agricultural colleges offering courses and apprenticeships. Employers in this sector are smaller businesses as well as farms of all sizes, and specialist companies and services.

Public sector/public services – higher, advanced

These apprenticeships can lead you into a wide range of careers from the fire and ambulance services, waste management, social services, youth work, supported housing, and policing. They range from entry level jobs through to senior management. Key employers include the civil service and armed forces, local authorities, police, and fire and ambulance services. Specialist services also run their own apprentice training.

Education and training – advanced

If you're interested in teaching or training, apprenticeships are available as a teaching assistant and learning support assistant. Many universities and colleges also offer a range of teacher training and learning support programmes. Higher level apprenticeships are in development, and will be available once the standards have been approved.

Leisure, travel, and tourism – advanced

There is a range of advanced apprenticeships for careers in these industries, including travel consultancy, leisure management, exercise and fitness, coaching, personal training, and sports development. These jobs operate across a wide range of businesses and locations, offering opportunities for career progression. Many colleges offer a range of apprenticeships across this sector, working with local and national employers from small enterprises through to major tourism and leisure venues.

It's competitive out there...

There are only limited numbers of both higher and degree apprenticeship vacancies available at any one time. This means there may not be much choice, and competition is likely to be high.

You also need to be aware that school/college leavers and adults already in employment are able to apply to them.

Employers could also be considering applications from existing employees, who may be applying for apprenticeships for the career progression opportunities they offer. Start your research early and keep looking!

What are the entry requirements for apprenticeships?

Apprenticeships are available at four levels. Each level has different entry requirements, which may depend on the skills and qualifications you hold.

Level	Entry requirements
Intermediate (Level 2) – generally considered to be equivalent to five GCSE passes.	Applicants need to be over 16 years old, and show they have the ability to complete the programme.
Advanced (Level 3) – generally considered to be equivalent to two A level passes.	Some industries want apprentices who have three or more GCSEs, but other employers don't specify any formal qualifications. Some may ask for previous experience in the industry. Check apprenticeship vacancies to see if there are any specific subjects and/or grades you need to have.
Higher (Level 4 and above) Level 4 – equivalent level to an HNC, a foundation degree, or the first year of an undergraduate degree. Level 5 and above – equivalent to full degree.	Entry can include at least five GCSEs grades A – C, and Level 3 qualifications, including A levels, NVQ/SVQ Level 3, or a BTEC National. Some will expect or require applicants to have subjects related to the particular apprenticeship. Check apprenticeship vacancies to see if there are any specific subjects and/or grades you need to have.
Degree (levels 5 to 7) – these are new and enable apprentices to achieve a full bachelor's or master's degree as part of their apprenticeship. Levels 5 and 6 – equivalent to a full degree. Level 7 – equivalent to a master's degree.	Entry can include at least five GCSEs grades A – C, and Level 3 qualifications, including A levels, NVQ/SVQ Level 3, or a BTEC National. Some employers have specific entry requirements. For example, recent IT degree apprenticeship adverts have required an A level (or equivalent) grade range of ABB to CCC. Many employers will expect or require applicants to have qualifications in subjects related to the particular apprenticeship. Check apprenticeship vacancies to see if there are any specific subjects and/or grades you need to have.

The level of apprenticeship you start at will depend on the kind of job you are applying for. You can start an apprenticeship at the level appropriate to the job, and work all the way up to achieving a master's degree for some job roles.

Each apprenticeship vacancy listing will specify the entry requirements and qualities the employer is looking for. For higher and degree apprenticeships, employers are generally asking for A levels and other Level 3 qualifications.

Where can I find apprenticeship vacancies?

You can see details of a number of new higher and degree apprenticeship vacancies in England on our website at careersfinder.ucas.com/jobs/apprenticeship/#browsing. These include vacancies being advertised by a small group of employers well in advance of their September start date (or later), giving you plenty of time to consider all your options.

You can also find apprenticeships in England on the National Apprenticeships Service website, at findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch.

How to apply

Once you have found an apprenticeship you like the sound of, you will need to apply to the employer. Remember:

- many employers use their own online application system
- some vacancies in England use the National Apprenticeships Service application form
- you can find out how to apply on ucas.com

When to apply

Apprenticeship vacancies appear throughout the year. Each vacancy will state a deadline for applications and when the programme will start. It's important you don't wait until the deadline to make an application – some companies close their vacancies as soon as they have a sufficient number of suitable candidates.

You can find hints, tips, and advice to help you with your apprenticeship application at ucas.com/apprenticeships.

For more information, head to the National Apprenticeships Service's website at www.getingofar.gov.uk.



Top ten tips from unis offering degree apprenticeships

1. What are the key features and aptitudes of successful apprenticeship applicants?

Willingness to work hard, because they will be studying and doing a full-time job. They also need to be confident and mature to handle their responsibilities in the workplace. Academically, they can have different types of qualifications, but they all need to be bright and able to learn independently.

2. What are the biggest challenges for young people doing a higher or degree apprenticeship?

Just making enough time to do everything in the day calls for great time management skills.

3. Apprenticeships are still seen by some people as 'second best' to full-time higher education. What is your view of apprenticeships as an option?

A degree apprenticeship is academically just as challenging as a traditional degree, but has additional pressures of working at the same time! Apprentices need to be as bright as undergraduates, but more disciplined too. I believe people who have gone through the degree apprenticeship route will outstrip graduates, because they have deep experience of work context in addition to theoretical knowledge.

4. What advice would you give to students who are considering a degree apprenticeship, but are not sure if it's for them?

Start planning early and try to get some work experience in the sector you're interested in. Go to university open days and talk to the people who are delivering the programmes to find out more. There is a range of different study options available. If you really aren't right for it, don't do it.

5. What are the top three things you look for in an application?

Enthusiasm for the subject. Secondly, we need to establish the applicant has the academic ability to succeed, so we don't set up weak applicants to fail. That involves grades, but we would also test numerical and reasoning skills. An applicant's character is also really important – they need to be mature enough to enter the workplace, and dedicated enough to work and study at the same time.

6. What are the most common weaknesses in applications/applicants?

We need academically strong applicants – some people apply after exhausting other possibilities, and they can really struggle. Maturity is very important, so if you feel you have some growing up to do, consider taking some time out of education to build your confidence.

7. What do you consider when deciding whether or not to interview applicants?

They have to pass some basic grade thresholds, and online tests for numerical skills, aptitude, and attitude.

8. What tips would you give applicants for getting the most out of interviews?

Remember you are being interviewed to be an employee, as well as a student. You need to present yourself as a person who can contribute in a real job. Then do all the things you would normally do to prepare for an interview.

9. Where can students get support when they are doing an apprenticeship?

The employer will provide all the normal HR support, as well as mentoring and line management, and input on career development in the company. Higher education providers will provide support with learning development and all the normal pastoral care, information, and advice that any other student would get. A degree apprentice is also an undergraduate and has access to all normal support services.

10. What's your top tip for young people thinking about applying for an apprenticeship?

Go for it! It's a really great opportunity that has the potential to set you up well for the rest of your life. Start investigating the opportunities available, and find out as much as you can.