

Apprenticeships for sixth form leavers – Information and Advice

What is an apprenticeship?

- As an apprentice you work for an employer
- Get paid to work and undergo a period of training
- Learn a particular workplace skill or set of skills
- Work towards a qualification that will certify and confirm your knowledge and experience
- Be able to use this qualification to access future job opportunities
- They usually last between one and four years
- Can be undertaken in a huge number of different sectors and industries
- Apprentices can find themselves working for a whole range of employers, from the big household names to smaller local companies.

There are also three different levels: intermediate apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships.

- From an apprenticeship, apprentices can go onto a further level of training or secure a job in a relevant industry
- Pay: Apprentices are guaranteed at least £2.65 per hour, though it's not uncommon to be earning in the region of £150 to £260 per week for an advanced apprenticeship and salaries for higher apprenticeships usually progresses year on year starting between £7-20K and completing on £18 to 26K+
- The amount they will get paid will depend on the level of skill they possess and the industry they choose. For example, some starting salaries for large engineering schemes are between £16,000 and £22,000.
- Apprentices under the age of 19 and those on an accredited framework will have their training costs covered by the government.
- Costs: The government pays a proportion of the training costs for apprentices, depending on their age. The apprentice's employer will normally cover any remaining training costs.
- 100% of the training costs if the apprentice is aged 16-18.
- 50% of the training costs if the apprentice is aged 19-24.
- Up to 50% of the training costs if the apprentice is aged over 25.

New directions for apprenticeships

- Government policy is currently focused upon increasing the number of Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships
- Higher Level apprenticeships did not exist before 2006/07. There were 9,200 Higher Level apprenticeship starts in 2013/14, 2% of all starts
- The government have made a funding commitment of £6 million to increase the range and number of higher apprenticeships to 40,000 over the next few years

Higher Apprenticeships: An Employer's Perspective

"Given the current focus on rising university tuition fees, plus the shortage of IT skills, offering Higher Apprenticeships to talented school leavers seemed a natural extension to our existing graduate, apprentice and student programmes."

Jenny Taylor IBM Graduate, Apprenticeship and Student Schemes

Higher Apprenticeships

- Launched in 2009, it is the only type of apprenticeship that leads to a Level 4 or above qualification, which is the equivalent of a higher education qualification
- Like a normal apprenticeship, it will give you a mix of on and off-the-job training. However, these apprenticeships are designed to equip you with more advanced skills and qualifications.
- In some cases, they offer another (albeit sometimes longer) route to gaining a university qualification. It's a really unique chance to earn while you learn
- Because it's the crème de la crème of apprenticeships, there are fewer higher apprenticeships. However, more and more companies and organisations are offering them
- There are currently 47 Higher Apprenticeship frameworks from Accounting to Construction management, to Facilities management, to Human Resource Management, to Intelligence Operations to Power Engineering, to Social Media and Digital Marketing

Higher Apprenticeships: Key Opportunities

- Many well-known companies as well as small and medium sized
- Fast tracked to a specialist or technical role
- NVQ /qualification framework training
- Usually professional qualifications related to the field and often foundation degree/ degree level qualifications
- In two to four years you are progressing in a role that previously would have taken graduates two years
- Salary usually progresses year on year starting between £7-20K and completing on £18 to 26K+
- Demanding work load
- Supportive structures and progressive future opportunities
- Entry requirements range from a minimum number of two A-level passes to at least 340 UCAS points

Advanced apprenticeships: Opportunity for entry

- Although these are level 3 qualifications, they can offer a 'foot in the door' to particular careers and industries

- Some industries and sectors have yet to create higher apprenticeship opportunities, but are still keen to take on bright and capable young people and progress their careers
- Some careers do not need to train staff to level 4 and beyond. They may be more focused on developing a person's skills and experience beyond the completion of an apprenticeship rather than qualifications.
- There are many more of these opportunities available than higher apprenticeships

What is a school leaver programme?

- Aimed at recruiting A-level students who might otherwise be considering going to university
- They tend to be offered by large companies in industries like accountancy, banking and finance, engineering, retail, hospitality and IT
- Usually intended for students who either want to avoid some of the cost of university education, or want to jump straight into employment
- Gives school leavers the chance to work for a company whilst gaining a professional qualification and/or university degree.
- Some of the most competitive programmes have entry standards to rival top universities.
- For school leaver programmes with large employers, school leavers have been known to earn over £22,000 a year during training.

School leaver programme: An Employer's Perspective

“Like graduates they'll follow a structured training and development programme, and also get to work on high profile client work. And just like our graduate trainees, joining as a school leaver can still be a pathway to Partner. We believe that joining as a school leaver is a real choice, not a compromise, and is a route to achieving their full potential.” Gaenor Bagley, Head of People, PwC

- For companies, it's their chance to grow their own talent and encourage social mobility within the industry.
- At the crux of a school leaver programme is the aim to attract bright, ambitious A-level talent to the company.
- Largely, they look to provide trainees with a superior level of training and qualifications than they might get through an apprenticeship
- There are currently only a small number of school leaver programmes. Consequently, competition for places, particularly for the ones with the big employers, can be intense.

What is the difference between School Leaver Programmes and Higher Apprenticeships?

- “School leaver programme” is a pretty flexible term and, from the range of different school leaver options available, it is evident that companies have interpreted it differently
- The issue that many companies have come up against is that there are currently few Higher Apprenticeship frameworks to suit their business needs. This is due to change.
- Industries have taken advantage of the funding to create Level 4, 5 and 6 Higher Apprenticeships.
- As a result, some companies have replaced their existing school leaver programmes with Higher Apprenticeships. However, some companies integrate a Higher Apprenticeship into their school leaver programme.

Entry, Salary and Qualifications

- Entry requirements range from a minimum number of two A-level passes to at least 340 UCAS points
- Salaries for the duration of the programme can be anywhere from around £14,000 to £24,000 a year depending on the industry
- Duration can last anywhere between three and seven years
- Working towards a bachelor's degree or foundation degree, and possibly a focus on the achievement of a professional qualification, or postgraduate professional qualification, such as chartered accountancy or incorporated engineer status.

Overview of what is out there for School leaver programmes

- Accenture School Leaver Programme
- Airbus Undergraduate Apprenticeship
- Barclay's Retail Development Programme
- BDO School Leaver Programme
- Deloitte BrightStart Scheme
- Grant Thornton School Leaver Programme
- KPMG School Leavers' Programme
- Marks & Spencer's Trainee Retail Management programme
- National Audit Office School Leaver Programme
- National Grid Engineer Training Programme
- PwC Higher Apprenticeships
- PwC Flying Start Degree Programme
- RSM Tenon School Leaver Scheme
- Siemens Finance & Commercial Academy
- Tesco Trainee Management Options Programme
- Commercial Development Programme
- Travelodge Junior Management Programme

What is a sponsored or partnership degree?

- Partnership and sponsored degree programmes are schemes that focus on the fact that trainees will get a degree as part of the programme.
- A sponsored degree programme is a way of getting a degree and being paid while you study, as well as gaining valuable work experience with a reputable company. It means you study and work alongside each other and graduate without a student loan to pay off.
- Details of the schemes vary, but typically you might find yourself working four days a week and studying one day a week on campus at the associated University. Some will be largely based at university, with an employer offering placements to students on the degree programme

- You will also receive a range of benefits and support as well as a job when you graduate.

How to search for vacancies

1. The following websites are brilliant:

www.studentladder.co.uk/School-Leaver-Programmes/school-leaver-programmes.html
schoolleavers.milkround.com/jobs/
www.allaboutschooleavers.co.uk/
www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/
<http://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk/>

2. Industry skills boards or councils websites

e.g www.creativeskillset.org/
www.directions.org.uk

3. Company websites – sign up to job alerts or follow them and their schemes on social media

4. Training providers e.g Q&A

5. Recruitment agency websites

Applying for apprenticeships

The application process for leading employers is increasingly multi faceted and complex. Be prepared to undertake:

- Online application form
- Online tests: numerical, verbal and logic
- Competency Interview: telephone or face to face
- Assessment centre: this may include group exercises, presentation, case study, in-tray exercise and further interviews

On-line application form

- This is usually the first stage of the process
- The company you are applying to will have created an application form to gather information about you and consider if your answers at this initial stage suggest you have potential for the role and company

Tips for completing an effective application

- Make sure you have read the job role thoroughly and know what the company is looking for
- Check you have the academic requirements
- Write in rough first, reflect and re-write before completing detailed questions online.
- Keep to the suggested word limits. Accurate, concise answers are generally better received.
- Save your application regularly – you don't have to complete it all at once.
- Check grammar and spelling, and get someone else to proofread your application.
- Print a copy of your application – in case you need to refer to it again

A good application that makes you stand out from the crowd

- Making a good application that helps you stand out from the crowd takes time, energy and thought. The key to success lies in preparation and careful research into the role, as well as consideration of your own skills – long before you log on to your computer.
- They will ask you about your academic background, work experience and extracurricular activities.
- This is your first chance to show why they should consider you, so make your answers as relevant and engaging as you can. Without exaggerating, don't sell yourself short.
- It is key that all candidates can demonstrate an understanding of the role applied for and are able to articulate this, including the professional qualification studied for, whether for a full time role or for a summer opportunity to demonstrate depth of understanding of a career in that area.
- Answer each question fully and correctly. Present clear evidence that you have all the qualities and skills they are looking for.
- Companies are interested in what you've done, but even more interested in what you've achieved or learned from the experience

The following three areas are crucial to creating your CV and the content of your application form, but also form the essence of what you will want to communicate in an interview in order to successfully achieve the job:

- Your skills
- Your experience of work/ or transferable experience
- Your personality
- Your skills

Include:

- **Communication skills**
- **Interpersonal skills**
- **Numerical skills**
- **Analytical skills**
- **Problem solving skills**
- **Team work skills**
- **Leadership skills**

- **Information technology skills**
- **Initiative skills**
- **Organisational skills**

Rather than listing that you have any or all of these skills it is important to do the following:

- **Think of examples where you have used these skills and work this into your CV content**
- **Identify the main two or three relevant skills that you possess and that are also most relevant for the job role**

Your experience of work or transferable experience

- Think about the work related experience you have had and if you feel you have very little, consider transferable experience

Personality

- Probably the most difficult aspect of your CV to demonstrate....
- Allow yourself to shine – modesty has no place
- Enable your personality to be seen between the lines: use key words
- Ask the person next to you to describe what you are like.... in a minute!

On-line tests: numerical, verbal and logic

- **Numerical:** generally there are around 12 - 30 questions and you are given about 1 minute per question. They are always multi choice with 4 or 6 possible solutions to choose from.
- You can use a calculator.
- The questions themselves are not always difficult; the problem is the lack of time and the need to work very fast.
- It's important not to get stuck on a question – if you cannot answer it, guess and move on. There is generally a mix of harder and easier questions. All the tests require:
- *Interpretation of data from a table, Interpretation of data of graphs and charts, Percentages, Fractions, Ratios, Currency conversions, Understanding of inflation & rebasing, 'real' prices*
- **Verbal:** Verbal reasoning tests are a form of aptitude test used by interviewers to find out how well a candidate can assess verbal logic. They are easier than the numerical tests but require you to be very precise. You are typically provided with a passage of information and required to evaluate a set of statements by selecting one of the following possible answers:
 - **True** - The statement follows logically from the information or opinions contained in the passage
 - **False** - The statement is logically false from the information or opinions contained in the passage
 - **Cannot Say** - Cannot determine whether the statement is true or false without further information
- You are to assume that all the information in each of these written passages is true, and you should only use the information in each passage to work out your answer. Candidates should not use prior knowledge when answering verbal reasoning questions. It is best to read the questions first so when you are reading the passage you know what you are looking for.
- Generally speaking you have about 2 minutes a question, however it's important to work out your timing per question before hand.
- **Logic:** These tests can vary but often are about patterns and numbers and choosing the missing one in a sequence. Generally speaking you will get less time per question than the numerical or verbal tests.
- **You can get hold of Verbal, Numerical and Logic tests on-line**

What to expect and how to prepare in interviews and assessment centres

- When you are invited to interview, well done, you are almost there, but the hardest may yet to come as you may be invited to an assessment centre
- These vary from firm to firm but generally last half a day and can consist of:
 - *Group Exercise*
 - *In tray exercise*
 - *Case Study*
 - *Interviews*
 - *Online tests*
 - *Presentations*
- **Group Exercise:** you are normally split into a group of 4 and given a task. You will be observed throughout. You are being observed as to how well you work in a group, collaborate, influence, lead, support and get the best out of people. This does not mean you therefore have to immediately lead or dominate but neither is it acceptable that you contribute little. You need to take an active part.
- **Case Study:** The case study exercise can be for individuals or groups. You will usually be given some information about a business scenario and invited to examine the evidence before presenting your findings and advice. You may also be drip-fed additional information to assess and respond to throughout the allocated time. They are typically based on real-life business situations.
- **In-tray exercise:** The basic idea of in-tray exercises is to place you in a realistic although simulated work situation, and to assess your workplace behaviour and attitudes in that context. You'll probably be asked to imagine that you're an employee of a fictitious company, and to work through the contents of your in tray in that role.

Interviews

This is your chance to show them that you have what they are looking for. Preparation is key to a successful interview:

Before the interview

- Check you know where you're going and who you're meeting. Leave yourself plenty of time. Better to arrive early than late!

- Research is vital. Be prepared to discuss why you want to join the company and the business area to which you've applied. Impress them by knowing key facts about the firm, the business area you're applying to and the qualification route.
- Review your application beforehand. The interviewer will refer to it, so it's important you remember what you put down.
- Prepare for your interview by studying the list of competencies that they consider most important, and be ready to explain how you have demonstrated these in your experience to date. Remember to be clear and concise.
- Ensure you have done your homework about why you want to join that company and why that position

During the interview

- The interview is likely to be competency-based. They will be looking for behavioural evidence from your past that shows you are strong in certain competencies. They will also be asking questions that enable you to demonstrate the attributes they ask for.
- There may well be a number of these with managers from the actual business.
- Be yourself! They want to know the real you. Relax and answer the questions as honestly as you can... and don't forget to smile.
- Speak clearly and concisely.
- Listen to the question, to help you give an answer that is relevant to the competency you are being asked about.
- Think about questions that you want to ask. Remember, an interview is a two-way process and you should be making a decision as to whether you want to work for us as well.

Interview Questions

- You may get asked detailed questions about the company such as its share price, its market cap, latest deals, and latest news.
- You may also get asked about current affairs or something topical. It depends who you are interviewing with.
- Some companies like brain teasers - these can be lateral thinking questions as well as genuine mathematical problem solving. Popular are questions such as:
 - *How many people fly from Heathrow each day?*
 - *How many cups of coffee does Costa sell in the UK in a day?*
 - *How many golf balls can you fit into a mini?*
- You are not expected to know the answer. You are being tested on your logical approach to it. Make an assessment at each stage. So for example you may say that there are on average 300 people on a plane and one leaves Heathrow every 3 mins from 7am to 11pm which is 20 planes per hour for 16 hours which is 320 planes x 300 people = 96,000 people every day.
- It does not matter that there maybe 500 people on average on a plane or that one leaves every 1 min – **it's your approach that they are looking for. Just be brave and make an assessment.**

Example interview questions

- Why have you applied for this apprenticeship?
- Give an example of a time when you have coped well under pressure.
- What do you think we want from our apprentice?
- Apprenticeships mean working full time alongside studying for a qualification. How will you prioritise your workload?
- Rate your organisational skills on a scale of 1-5 (5 being the highest). Give an example of when you have used these skills.
- Give an example of how you have dealt with a difficult situation.
- What do you think we mean by customer-focused service and how will it relate to this job?
- What is your understanding of equal opportunities and how it applies to this job?
- Give an example of a time you have worked independently.
- Give an example of a time you have worked as part of a team.
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?
- Have you got any questions for us?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us to support your application?

Again it is really important that you use this as an opportunity to show how you have researched the role, considered what they are looking for, and selected evidence from your own experiences to suggest the kind of skills, personal qualities, competencies and attitudes they want to see

Windows of opportunity: When to apply

- Higher Apprenticeships – all the time but particularly from late Autumn/ New year of year 13 onwards
- School leaver programmes – sometimes these are open from the previous September. If it is a popular programme their may be a cut off at January or March
- Sponsored degrees – some programmes you need to apply throughucas. Others you apply direct through the company. Often they except applications from September of year 13 to January

As you can see there are no set rules like theucas process but many follow a logical recruitment window depending on their type.

Windows of opportunity: how to make the most of your time

For year 12s or year 13s who have not applied to university

- Sponsored degrees: start researching this summer after your exams
- School leaver programmes: research what has been available this year in order to prepare for the window of application – September to March/ April
- Higher apprenticeships: year 13s you can start applying! Year 12s – get a flavour of what is available now or has been available this year

What to do if I leave school and I do not have anything lined up?

- Don't panic, but be proactive!

- If you keen on an apprenticeship, then remember that these opportunities come up all the time
- Make looking for an opportunity your full-time job. You should be applying for 3-5 opportunities a week
- You need to be ready in case you hear back and you are called to an interview or an assessment centre
- If the gap is getting to be longer than three months, then make sure you arrange either a work placement, voluntary work or take some temporary work
- If even if you are really keen on one particular opportunity, keep applying to others to keep your options open.

Looking for work and job opportunities

- You do have the option of going straight to work
- Many companies are keen to take on school leavers with A levels but perhaps have not got the structures or need to provide you with further qualifications like the schemes we have seen
- It depends on what type of work you are looking for.
- If it is your long term career goal, then break it down and think about what stepping stone roles you could do that will build the skills and experience you will eventually need.
- If you want to just get out there and figure out what you want to do longer term, then consider all opportunities and potentially take something you wouldn't mind trying and getting experience in.
- Many companies may advertise for junior or assistant positions.
- You could also consider temporary positions or taking opportunities with people you know

If you are looking for work try:

- Searching and submitting your CV on-line. Check out reed.co.uk or totaljobs.com
- Contact and meet with recruitment agencies. They will keep you in mind when companies are looking for staff
- Create opportunities by temping or if you are keen on a particular company or role, offer your services for free or try and arrange work experience placements
- Social media such as LinkedIn is very important now for creating a profile like your CV and networking with recruiters or resource staff at companies. This is particularly important for creative careers but increasingly for all sectors. You can also follow companies on Facebook and Twitter where they nowadays announce opportunities
- Think about who you know, and who they may know
- Speculative CVs and cover letters are still a good to find opportunities

Summary: what you can do to make the most of the opportunities

Research the options and opportunities

- There's nothing stopping you applying to universities and apprenticeship schemes simultaneously
- Through the application process, you'll be able to find out more about the different universities and companies, and get a better sense of what the university course/apprenticeship will involve. This will help you decide which route you want to pursue.
- Take the time to do your research, talk to people who've done an apprenticeship and those who have been to university and consider your own personal motivations.
- Take a look at the websites and explore what is available and what appeals to you

Get prepared with your CV content

- Start to think of the three areas, skills, experience and personality and develop a personal statement that can be adapted and re-edited when completing applications.
- This is definitely something you can be doing right now!