

Employer Solutions



Apprenticeships Guide



Croner

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Introduction to Apprenticeships

A report from the Oxford Learning College suggests that around 40% of current workers in the UK don't have the right qualifications for their job, either being underqualified or overqualified. It is estimated that by 2030, 20% of the UK workforce will be significantly under skilled for their jobs.

Rishi Sunak acknowledged this matter during his time as chancellor, saying: "We lag behind international peers on adult technical skills. Just 18% of those aged between 25 and 64 hold vocational qualifications, which is a third lower than the OECD average, and UK employers spend just half the European average on training their employees."

So, how can you protect your business and ensure you're educating your existing or new staff?

Apprenticeships could be the solution.

They are a brilliant way of bringing new skills and talent to your business. Through this process, you are able to help fill skills gaps within your business, offer training and provide hands-on experience for inexperienced people in your industry. With apprenticeship participation rates increasing by 1.6% in the last 12 months, now is a great time to invest in the next generation of workforce. As of January 2024, the UK government reported that there were approximately 25,000 new starts onto engineering and manufacturing apprenticeship courses. This makes this sector the third most popular choice for apprenticeships, falling just behind health/social/public services and Business Administration/Law.



Apprenticeships are a long-established method of practical and theoretical training, usually within a skilled profession, undertaken whilst also working in the profession. They are often perceived as a way into employment for younger people. However, apprenticeships are open to all who are aged over 16. Apprenticeships are available in increasing qualification levels, offering a range of training from GCSE level to Master's Degree level. Because of this, they are a fantastic way to accommodate continuous improvement amongst both inexperienced workers who wish to enter an industry, and experienced workers who want to further their knowledge.

In this comprehensive e-guide, Croner are going to walk you through the key points on apprenticeships, how you can manage the life cycle of an apprentice and how they can benefit your business.

Pros and Cons of Apprenticeships

Employers who invest in apprenticeships will encounter a range of advantages and obstacles. It is essential for employers to comprehensively understand the benefits and challenges in order to make informed decisions regarding their workforce development strategies.

The following assessments have been made with electrical and mechanical businesses in mind.

Pros	Cons
<p>Addressing Skills Shortages: By providing structured training and hands-on experience, apprenticeships help to develop a pipeline of skilled workers to meet the industry's needs.</p>	<p>Commitment: Hiring apprenticeships in the electrical and mechanical industries requires a serious commitment from the employer to provide training, supervision, and guidance throughout the apprenticeship program.</p>
<p>Innovation and Adaptability: Apprentices are often exposed to the latest technologies and practices, bringing fresh perspectives and new ideas to the sector. This helps businesses to adapt and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market.</p>	<p>Potential Departure: There is a risk that apprentices may leave the business once they have completed their qualifications, leading to a loss of invested time and resources.</p>
<p>Enhanced Productivity: Apprenticeships enable companies to train individuals specifically for the skills required in their operations. This tailored approach can lead to higher levels of productivity as apprentices learn industry-specific techniques and best practices.</p>	<p>Potential Gap in Quality of Learning: There may be variations in the quality of apprenticeship off-site training, leading to inconsistencies in the skills and knowledge acquired by apprentices.</p>
<p>Cost-Effective Workforce Development: By providing on-the-job training, companies can shape apprentices to fit their specific needs, reducing the need for retraining and minimizing recruitment costs.</p>	<p>Lack of Commercial Understanding: Apprentices may initially lack commercial understanding, which could impact their ability to contribute effectively to business operations.</p>
<p>Long-Term Talent Development: Apprenticeships can contribute to a sustainable talent pipeline for the electrical industry, enabling businesses to build a loyal and skilled workforce for the future.</p>	<p>Potential Productivity Loss: Initially, apprentices may not contribute at full capacity, leading to potential productivity loss as they require time to develop their skills and knowledge.</p>
<p>Improving Industry Reputation: Investing in apprenticeships can enhance a company's reputation as a responsible and supportive employer. This can be particularly attractive to potential employees and customers, ultimately benefiting the industry as a whole.</p>	<p>Risk of Misconduct: Due to their limited experience, apprentices may be more prone to making errors, potentially leading to safety hazards or costly mistakes.</p>

Apprenticeship Frameworks/Standards

Across the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all have their own processes, requirements and criteria for apprenticeships. Depending on where you are based, your apprenticeship courses will either be based on an old style 'framework' or a new style 'standard'. The exception to this is for Scotland, where apprenticeships are governed by common law as opposed to a statutory scheme.

The main difference between 'frameworks' and 'standards' is that standards are occupation-focused and frameworks are qualification-led. For standards, the learning happens throughout the apprenticeship and the apprentice receives an end-point assessment to assess their learnings following completion of their training. They need to prove that they can carry out all aspects of their job competently and to the level established in the standard. They develop transferable skills and gain credibility too. The latest standards have been developed by employers to ensure that the training provides the most relevant skills needed to develop skills within their industry.

In England, all apprenticeships begun on or after 1 August 2020 should be on an Approved English Apprenticeship Agreement under a 'standard'. The old style 'frameworks' have been phased out of England. However, any apprenticeships begun before that date on the old style 'framework' must be completed before 31 July 2025. Presently, there are 859 approved English apprenticeship standards available from level 2 to level 7 across 15 different sectors.



Within Scotland, apprenticeships are governed by common law and are employed on a common law contract of apprenticeship. Scottish apprenticeships are split into three main types: foundation apprenticeships, modern apprenticeships and graduate apprenticeships. These different apprenticeship types cover the various levels of qualification that can be achieved from high school to degree level. These frameworks are based on learning outcomes which apprentices are expected to achieve by the end of their training, Knowledge/Skills/Behaviours which are assessed based on specifically selected criteria for the industry, and meta-skills that help apprentices develop soft skills to work collaboratively and productively within their workplace.

In Northern Ireland there are three levels of apprenticeships; ApprenticeshipsNI which covers levels 2 and 3 and Higher Level Apprenticeships which provide from level 4 up to level 7 qualifications. Currently, there are around 150 ApprenticeshipsNI frameworks and over 70 HLA programmes to choose from. Their frameworks are structured similarly to Welsh apprenticeships, with apprentices needing to achieve qualifications in mandatory skills and competence/knowledge in order to successfully complete the course.

Recruiting an Apprentice

So, you've decided that you'd like to hire an apprentice. Where do you start with the recruitment process? The recruitment process can differ significantly from typical employees. Therefore, it's important to understand the differences so that you can ensure a smooth process.

1. Establish what training your role requires:

Croner recommends that employers conduct an assessment of the role they are looking to fill, by considering all of the competencies, skills and knowledge required to conduct that role. If you have experienced employees who are currently in the role, it may be worth asking them for their feedback on what training or qualifications they feel would have benefited them when they started the position. Once an overview of the role has been developed, you can begin researching which standard/framework is most relevant to the position.

2. Research standard/frameworks:

All available apprenticeships for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can be found online. Each country has its own official apprenticeships website either through the local government or through a dedicated approved institute. These listings will include; the qualification to be awarded after successful completion of the course, typical duration, any entry requirements, sector/industry, the maximum funding available and the skills an apprentice will learn throughout the duration of training. Research a variety of standards/frameworks to establish which apprenticeship is best suited in terms of qualification, teachings and duration.

3. Research local training providers/EPAOs

Once you've found an apprenticeship standard/framework that covers the competencies of your role, it's imperative that you find a suitable training provider to deliver the offsite training to the apprentice. Most official standard/framework websites include searches where you can find the closest training provider for your selected standard/framework. Some providers can offer national training that's fully remote, to be completed either online or at the apprentice's workplace. Whereas other providers will require the apprentice to visit a training centre or classroom. Employers will need to contact training providers directly to arrange a training program for their apprentice, including discussing the frequency of progress reviews and plans for an end-point assessment (if required).

Frameworks will require the apprentice to complete assessments at different stages of the training, whereas standards are assessed at the end of the training via an end-point assessment. If you are recruiting an apprentice in England on a standard, you will also need to arrange for an end-point assessment organisation, this organisation must be different from your training provider. EPA has to be administered by an assessor from an independent organisation on the Register of Apprentice Assessment Organisations. Your training provider can help suggest suitable EPAOs and also work with them to ensure that the delivered training covers all of the areas within the EPA.

Don't hesitate to ask training providers and EPAOs plenty of questions to establish if they are a good fit for your business and read up on employer's reviews to understand other businesses' experiences.

Recruiting an Apprentice

4. Create and advertise apprenticeship vacancy

Once you have established a standard/framework and selected a training provider, you're ready to advertise the position. Recruiting internally is typically a quicker and more straightforward process than external recruitment. However, consider whether your business would benefit more from a brand new apprentice who can bring fresh perspectives and be 'moulded' into an employee who has a thorough understanding of business needs.

- **Choose the Right Job Title:** When you are deciding what the job title will be, have a look at what someone would typically search for when researching the role. Avoid company specific jargon, as this may deter people who are new to the industry. Make sure that you include 'apprentice' in the job title so that you only attract applicants that are open to training and working towards a qualification.
- **Brief Business Description:** Your job advert may be the first time an applicant interacts with your business, so you want to make sure you impress them! Include details on your company's goals and notable business achievements. Think about the kind of person you are looking to fill your vacancy, what sort of company do you think they'd like to work for? Take this chance to prove that you are a workplace worth joining.
- **Detailed Job Description:** Ensure that your job description is clear and defines the everyday tasks of the role, you can usually list these in a bulleted list. It's important to provide details on the training to be provided. This should include; what qualifications will be awarded at the end of successful completion of training, the frequency and location of off site training and the duration of the apprenticeship. If you have expectations to take on a successful apprenticeship as a permanent employee following training, then it's a good idea to include this in your advert.
- **Include the working hours and location of the job:** Ensure that you are including any information that relates to the role's working hours and the primary location of the role. You should also include if the role has any flexibility in the hours or if remote/hybrid can be facilitated. Being forthcoming with these details will prevent applicants from applying if they cannot accommodate the hours or commute, ultimately streamlining the application process. You should also include the location of off site training, to ensure that this can be reached by the apprentice.
- **Include the salary and benefits packages:** By including a salary range in your job advert, you're improving your chances of receiving applications from candidates who would accept the proposed salary. Your job posting may look perfect to a prospective employee, but if they get to interview stage and the salary isn't what they expected, then you've wasted valuable time. You should also consider listing the benefits an employee would receive, as this will help improve the desirability of your company to potential employees.
- **Include contact details:** If an applicant has a question about the job advertised, they should be able to find the contact details at the bottom of the ad. This could include the hiring manager's email address or phone number. In this section, you can also include what it is the applicant needs to submit when making an application with you, for example, their CV, cover letter or application form.

Recruiting an Apprentice

- **Share the vacancy:** If you're open to filling this role internally, you could share an email bulletin detailing the vacancy, approach existing employees who would be suitable for the position or post the vacancy on a notice board within staff break rooms. If you'd prefer to recruit externally, it's highly recommended to share your vacancy via the official apprenticeship website for your country. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have their own dedicated search functions for finding apprenticeship vacancies. You will need to register an account with the relevant gov/institute website in order to submit an advert to be approved.

Utilising the official apprenticeships service requires employers to be an apprenticeship levy payer. If your organisation does not pay the levy, you will be unable to advertise your vacancy via the local government's website. It's also possible to give your selected training provider the permission to recruit an apprentice on your behalf. Online job boards such as Indeed or Monster can also be great ways to reach a wide variety of applicants. On the other hand, local community forums or social media groups are a great way to keep the applicants local.

Apprenticeship Agreements/Employment Contracts & Training Plans

If taking on an apprentice in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, employers will need to provide an apprenticeship agreement.

These agreements detail:

- The skill/trade the apprentice is being taught
- The details of the exact apprenticeship qualification they are working towards
- The start and end dates of the apprenticeship and the amount of training you as their employer will provide.
- Within Scotland, the use of old style common law apprenticeship contracts has been maintained, which offers enhanced protection and rights to apprenticeships.

Examples/templates of apprenticeship agreements can be found online and are available for download through government/apprenticeship institute websites. However, these example agreements do not detail any terms of employment, such as job conditions, work duties, and employment law rights.

Employers may wish to combine their existing employment contract with the relevant apprenticeship agreement or create a bespoke contract in order to ensure that both the training arrangements and employment terms are clearly agreed upon. If you wish to create an original/bespoke apprenticeship agreement, then this is something that Croner's documentation experts can assist with.

In addition to an apprenticeship agreement/employment contract, a training plan/agreement must be in place between the employer, the apprentice and the training provider.

Apprenticeship Agreements/Employment Contracts & Training Plans

The training plan must be agreed before any training is delivered. The training provider will take ownership of developing this plan, however the employer and apprentice will be given opportunities to contribute.

Just like apprenticeship agreements, basic templates can be found online through government/apprenticeship institute websites, or training providers may have their own bespoke document.



Off The Job Training

Apprentices who are working towards apprenticeship frameworks or apprenticeship standards must receive off-the-job training. The purpose of off-the-job training is to help the apprentice achieve the required knowledge, skills and behaviours of the apprenticeship framework/standard they are undertaking. The training plan between yourself and the apprentice's training provider will set out the different training methods to be using throughout the delivery of training. The duration of off-the-job training must be a minimum of 20% of the duration of the apprenticeship, this is a requirement for accessing government apprenticeship funding.

The time set aside for off-the-job training must be within with apprentice's contracted working hours and the apprentice must be paid for the time spent on this training. The only exception to this requirement is for Scottish foundation apprenticeships, as foundation apprentices are not paid for their work experience.

Off-the-job training can include practical training, classroom theory lessons and written assessments, all of which will be delivered by your selected training provider.

Off The Job Training

This training can take place onsite at the place of employment (via remote training sessions) or at a dedicated training facility picked by the training provider. The provider will also be responsible for ensuring that there is off-the-job training scheduled for every calendar month of the apprentice's practical period.

As part of your training plan, you will be expected to support and guide the apprentice so that they can consolidate their new learning within the workplace. The following table layout out which activities fall under off-the-job training, and which would not.

Off-the-job Training	
✓ The teaching of theory (lectures, role playing, simulation exercises, online learning, manufacturer training)	✗ Initial assessment/onboarding
✓ Practical Training (shadowing, mentoring, industry visits and participation in competitions)	✗ English/Maths training
✓ Learning Support	✗ Progress Reviews
✓ Time spent writing written assessments	✗ Training to develop skills, knowledge and behaviours that are not required by the apprenticeship framework/standard
✓ Revision (when specifically required for achievement of apprenticeship)	✗ Examinations/Testing
	✗ Training outside of apprentice's working hours

Apprentice Employment Rights/Young Worker Rights

In the past, old style Apprenticeship Contracts offered an enhanced level of protection from dismissal and redundancies. However, under the ASCLA 2009, apprentices are entitled to the exact same employment rights as all other employees. The exception to this is for apprentices who are employed in Scotland, as the old style contracts and their enhanced protection have been maintained. Apprentices can raise a tribunal claim against their employer if their employment rights are not met.

If you are unsure of what employment rights are in place for UK employees, then Croner's advisors can help you by explaining the latest legislation.

It's important to remember that Young Worker Rights will also apply to any apprenticeships aged under 18. Not complying with these rights can also result in tribunal claims for breach of working time regulations and possible age discrimination.

By law, young workers **must not work more than:**

- 8 hours a day
- 40 hours a week

Apprentice Employment Rights/Young Worker Rights

They must also have, **as a minimum**:

- a 30-minute break if their working day is longer than 4.5 hours
- 12 hours' rest in any 24-hour period in which they work (for example, between one working day and the next)
- 48 hours' (2 days) rest taken together, each week or – if there is a good business reason why this is not possible – at least 36 hours' rest, with the remaining 12 hours taken as soon as possible afterward

Apprentice Wages

It is a legal requirement for employers to ensure that apprentices under 19 and older apprentices in the first year of their apprenticeship are paid at least the apprenticeship rate of the National Minimum Wage. As apprentices progress, once they surpass 19 years of age and complete 12 months of their apprenticeship, they become eligible for the NMW (National Minimum Wage) rate corresponding to their age bracket. It is crucial to note that apprentices must also receive the NMW for the time they spend training, whether it occurs on-site or off-site during regular working hours.

Apprentice Funding

The UK government does have funding in place to assist businesses (in England, Scotland and Wales) with the costs of training and assessing an apprentice. The levy cannot be used to pay apprentices wages. The amount that businesses are eligible for depends on whether or not they pay the apprenticeship levy.

If your organisation has an annual pay bill over £3m, then you will be required to pay into the apprenticeship levy. Employers must report and pay the Apprenticeship Levy each month through their Employee Payment Summary, it is charged at 0.5% of the business's annual pay bill. Support tools for this can be access through HMRC to make sure organisations pay the correct amount. Each employer that pays the levy also receives a £15,000 allowance annually to offset against the levy.

As an example, an employer with 150 employees on salaries of £25,000 will have an annual pay bill of £3,750,000. At a rate of 0.5%, the required levy payment would be £18,750. Once the levy allowance has been applied, this leaves £3,750 left to be paid by the employer into the levy.

The funds collected as part of the levy can then be spent on training and assessing apprenticeships. Funds in this account expire and are paid to the Government if not used within two years of being paid into the account. Employers will need to register with the government apprenticeship service in order to manage/retrieve their funds, they will also receive a 10% government top up on the funds in the account. If an organisation does not have the required funds needed for their selected apprenticeship framework/standard, then they will be asked to pay 5% of the outstanding balance, with the government to cover the remaining 95%.

Apprentice Funding

For businesses with an annual pay bill of less than £3m, then they are only required to pay 5% of the cost of the apprenticeship training. This is known as a co-investment payment, the government will then cover the remaining 95%. The government are also committed to supporting smaller employers. As such, employers with less than 50 employees can receive funds for 100% of training costs up to the funding band maximum. This is applicable when the apprentice is in questions is:

- Ages 16 to 18
- Has previously been in care or has a Local Authority Education Health and Care plan.

There's also an incentive grant available for employers and training providers if they hire an eligible apprentice. Unlike the levy, the incentive payment can be used on any costs associated with supporting a new apprentice. This can include uniforms, travel costs or can be used towards the apprentice's salary. Employers can receive £1000 when taking on an apprentice who is either; aged 16-18, aged 19-24 and has an EHC plan or aged 19-24 and has been in the care of their local authority. The training provider will confirm the apprentices eligibility, following that employers should receive £500 after the first 90 days of apprentice training. The final £500 is automatically paid after 365 days of the apprenticeship training start date.

Terminating an Apprenticeship

As apprentices in England and Wales are entitled to the same employment rights as employees, employers are able to terminate apprenticeship agreements early. However, if an employer reaches a situation where an apprentice must be dismissed, then there are some considerations that must be taken. Apprentices with 2 years service have the right not to be unfairly dismissed, just the same as a typical employee. As such, employers must ensure that any reasons for termination are lawful and do not breach their employment rights.

Apprentices, by nature, are there to learn and will likely require more support than you would generally give an employee. Of course, there are certain standards you might expect them to reach, but there will need to be some management time invested into a successful apprenticeship.

You can implement a short service dismissal, subject to a careful risk assessment. Just be extremely wary of age discrimination, as this tends to be a common claim for unfair dismissal. In order to avoid a claim for unfair dismissal an employer will need to follow a fair process. This will include looking for alternative work.

Always remember that a dismissal should be a last resort!

Under Scottish apprenticeship contracts, it is extremely difficult to terminate an apprentice early without significant risk. This is because common law dictates that the apprentice must be effectively unteachable in order for an employer to terminate early. This means that's typical misconduct matters are not usually enough to justify termination, unless the matter is so extreme that it undermines the employer's ability to teach the apprentice.

Terminating an Apprenticeship

If you're planning to terminate an apprentice, **be sure to give Croner a call** so that their advisers can confirm that you're following best process and mitigating risks.

Unless your apprenticeship agreement states otherwise, you are under no obligation to provide an apprentice with permanent employment once their contract has ended. However, consider how long it would take to hire/train their replacement. It may be more cost/time effective to permanently take on the apprentice.

If possible, create an employment opportunity to utilise the apprentices' newly developed skills. Are there any gaps within your current team structure? Perhaps the apprentice can fulfil the position.

Remember to draft a new employment contract if the apprentice does become a permanent employee. As their role/responsibilities may have changed throughout the duration of the apprenticeship. If the apprentice has either failed their training, or they are just not competent by the end of the apprenticeship, then you may consider dismissing. Just remember the above points and consider if the rehiring process would be worthwhile.



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