Apprenticeships at the double

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Overview

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The qualification employers want

Recent reforms have made apprenticeships an even more attractive option, says Richard Doughty.

Contrary to popular belief, an apprenticeship is far removed from the old stereotype of an oil-drenched mechanic in a draughty garage. Today’s apprenticeships provide you with a wage and free training, both in the workplace and through day release at college or university, to help you build a career in almost any line of work.

Different levels of apprenticeship are open to anyone living in England aged 16 or over, covering some 1,500 occupations in 170 industries, according to government figures. They range from IT, media and engineering through to the NHS, education and professional services, such as lawyers and accountants. They will take one to five years to complete.

Recent reforms that introduced employer-designed standards to apprenticeship delivery mean you can expect close mentoring, at least 20% time off to study, more stringent testing and general all-round support from workplace colleagues. The changes, which will be introduced gradually up to 2020, are designed to simplify existing demands on apprentices and expand the scheme into previously untouched sectors.

When your employer judges that you are at the required standard, they will “sign you off” to be independently assessed and graded. After completion, they will generally offer you a full-time job. Your apprenticeship will show you are fully competent in a stated role and that you match as easy to read standard devised by employers in your sector.

Until 2020, some apprenticeships will continue to operate under the old-style “framework” system, encompassing intermediate, advanced and higher-level apprenticeships.

Salaries start at £3.40 an hour, rising to £3.50 as of April 2017, although many are considerably higher depending on location, industry and skill level. Some higher-level apprentices can earn as much as £300-£500 a week.

To apply, talk to a careers adviser, check out the government’s getingofar.gov.uk website, or contact an employer direct.

The engineer apprentice

Lois Medley, 17, began her two-year apprenticeship last September with WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff, an engineering services firm whose contracts include the Shard, High Speed 2 and London Bridge station. She had considered staying on for sixth form after GCSEs, but decided against it: “I didn’t want to be stuck in the classroom – you’re treated as an adult, “ she says. Medley was one of 43 apprentices, allocated to different teams, to join in September. She is based in the rail team, which is engaged in the Crossrail project, a high-capacity railway network for London and the south-east, earning £15,000 a year. Medley works four days a week in the firm’s Devendrastate office, acquiring engineering skills, such as the use of computer-aided design software to create drawings of cables. “It’s just a different world to school – you’re treated as an adult,” she says.

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In the meantime, Medley is keen to spread the word by taking part in the Brathay Apprenticeship Challenge and going back into her old school to encourage others to follow in her footsteps.

For Lois Medley, an apprenticeship has been an ideal route to real-life construction experience. Medley is keen to spread the word by taking part in the Brathay Apprenticeship Challenge and going back into her old school to encourage others to follow in her footsteps.

On track for engineering success

Lois Medley is keen to get others to follow in her footsteps.

It’s just a different world to school – you’re treated as an adult.

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The comeback kids of their increasing vitality, apprenticeships is a sign
A levy to fund more skilled staff.

BT and Barclays, and public-sector leavers and older job seekers.
were women. were aged 25 and over, while under-19s
• Some 44% of these new apprentices in 2015/16.
• About 2.4m apprenticeships were started in England
• Apprenticeship starts by people 2020.

The Guardian | Tuesday 7 March 2017
learning the ropes The rise of the apprentice

- About 2.4m apprenticeships were started between 2010 and 2015. The government vowed in 2015 to create 3m apprenticeships by 2020.
- More than half a million new apprenticeships were started in England in 2015/16.
- Some 44% of these new apprentices were aged 25 and over, while under-18s made up 26% of the total. Some 53% were women.
- Intermediate level apprenticeships - which offer level 2 qualifications, equivalent to 5 GCSEs - made up 56% of new starts, while advanced level - offering level 3 qualifications equivalent to five A-levels - accounted for 38%. Higher level starts, which are equivalent to foundation degree and above, made up 5% of starts.
- There were more than 900,000 people on apprenticeships in 2015/16 – nearly double the number in 2009/10.

The academy chain Ark takes a two-pronged approach to employer
students and their parents address year 10 students

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“Don’t think you can
Apprenticeships in England are open to anyone aged 16 up who is outside full-time education. But with so many opportunities on offer, it can be hard to know where to start.

The government’s Find an Apprenticeship service has thousands of opportunities in England on its website. Applicants need to create an account to apply for apprenticeships, after which they will receive email and text alerts about what’s available and be able to track their applications.

Candidates can search by job role, occupation, type, apprenticeship level and location. They don’t need to open an account to search. Once they set up an account, they can store the application, so if it wasn’t successful they can work on it for another vacancy.

The service offers advice through a document called How to write a winning apprenticeship application, which gives a step-by-step guide to the process.

Apprenticeship hopefuls should listen out for recommendations from friends and family. They should also attend school careers fairs. Some colleges and schools advertise apprenticeships, as do employment agencies. It may be worth approaching agencies if a company you are interested in isn’t advertising. The important point is to research widely, also attend school careers fairs. Some colleges and schools advertise apprenticeships, as do employment agencies. It may be worth approaching agencies if a company you are interested in isn’t advertising. The important point is to research widely.

### Research your development

If you want to become an apprentice, but don’t know where to start, fear not - David Benady has the answers.

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### Apprenticeship levels

There are three levels of apprenticeship: intermediate, advanced and higher. Higher apprenticeship standards also include degree apprenticeships. Every qualification in the UK has a level, ranked from 1 to 8 on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Each apprenticeship qualification has a corresponding level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>NQF rank</th>
<th>What you will achieve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate apprenticeship</td>
<td>Level 2, equivalent to five good GCSE passes.</td>
<td>Apprentices look to achieve a work-based qualification, such as a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), Level 2, Key Skills in English and maths, and often a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) award or BTEC first diploma or certificate. These qualifications allow entry to an advanced apprenticeship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced apprenticeship</td>
<td>Level 3, equivalent to two A-level passes.</td>
<td>Candidates should have either five good GCSEs, or have completed an intermediate apprenticeship. At this level, they work to achieve qualifications, such as NVQ level 3, Key Skills and often a BTEC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher apprenticeships</td>
<td>Between level 4 and level 7.</td>
<td>Higher apprenticeships are a route to achieving qualifications, such as an NVQ level 4, a foundation degree or BTEC professional diploma, certificate or award. They can lead to a bachelor's degree. For entry, candidates need a level-3 qualification, such as A-levels or an advanced apprenticeship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree apprenticeships</td>
<td>Equivalent to a bachelor's degree (level 6) or master's level (7).</td>
<td>Degree apprenticeships are a newly launched alternative to full-time university study. Apprentices are employed full-time for three to six years, working 30 hours a week and getting practical on-the-job training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ucas.com; unionlearn.org.uk/levels-apprenticeship.

### Zoe Bradwell: ‘You get to see more of what the business is like and how it works’

Zoe Bradwell joined BT’s customer service division in Accrington, Lancashire, in a customer service apprentice in 2015 at the age of 16.

“This apprenticeship was quite local. We drove past and there was a big recruitment banner outside, so my mum said: ‘Why don’t you try that?’ That would be a good company to get into and there’s lots of different paths you can take.’

Bradwell originally considered a finance apprenticeship, but decided on the customer services course as it was closer to her home.

“What you learn a lot of things, such as how to have difficult conversations with people and how every customer is different. You gain lots of knowledge. I have gained a lot more confidence and if you need any support someone is always there to offer it to you. We’ve got the apprenticeship coach who comes down every two weeks, and there is an apprentice manager who you can speak to if you need anything. There are six of us doing apprenticeships together,” she says.

The 18-month apprenticeship finishes in May. “We had an initial five weeks of training for the job, then we had six weeks where we had full support. Then they slowly took the support away so you were eased into it,” she says. “Once a month, we have a day with an apprentice coach. She comes down and makes sure we are doing fine. In June, we had a week where the apprentices all got together.” Training is given by internal BT trainers.

“My twin is doing an apprenticeship as well,” Bradwell says. “There’s quite a few of my friends who originally went to college, but they didn’t like it and they’ve dropped out and done an apprenticeship.”
Lessons about the workplace

Tomorrow’s apprentices are making their career choices in the classroom, says Kim Thomas

In Angell’s 18-year-old son is expected to do well in his A levels and has had offers from three Russell Group universities to study computer science. However, he’s also applied for a degree apprenticeship with a government organisation, after his school brought it to parents’ attention. Angell thinks that it’s a good alternative: “It makes sense for him to get some hands-on experience, get paid while he’s doing it and also get a degree at the end of it.”

This view illustrates a growing acceptance among both parents and students that apprenticeship schemes offer a good alternative to other academic routes. Keisha Walker, head of careers and employability at Phoenix Academy in London, says there has been a surge of interest this year, from both high achievers and less academic students, particularly in subjects such as engineering and ICT. Walker does, however, sound a note of caution: “I do say to the students: ‘Apprenticeships are so competitive that you still need to apply to a university or college as a backup.’

So how can parents and teachers help students make an informed choice? The first port of call has to be the government’s Find an apprenticeship website that allows you to enter the broad job role you’re interested in (such as engineer), the level and location.

This will bring up a list of available apprenticeships, with details of the role, entry requirements and how to apply. The government’s resource site for apprenticeships is also an invaluable tool for teachers and parents, including links to videos and webinars.

However, there is no substitute for hearing from people in the know, such as employers or current apprentices. Walker enthused the services of Aim Apprenticeships that not only gave a talk to year 11 students about how apprenticeships work, but also ran a workshop for those who expressed an interest, and then helped students complete their applications.

The academy chain Ark takes a two-pronged approach to employer relationships.

Its head of university and careers provision, Hannah McAuley, says that at a national level, Ark has developed strategic relationships. However, individual schools within the chain have also developed their own relationships, inviting local employers to do work-readiness activities with students. Ark students have been accepted onto apprenticeships with architects KPMG and accounting firm Deloitte, among others.

Because not all teachers are aware of what apprenticeships have to offer, Ark also runs a training programme to help teachers build long-lasting relationships with businesses and deliver expert guidance on the schemes.

McAuley advises students to keep their options open, but adds: “Think about how you learn best — fundamentally going to university or staying at school is an academic route, but if you’d rather be hands-on and learn by doing, then an apprenticeship route might suit you better.”

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The best of both worlds

An apprenticeship that’s part academic and part hands-on is an unbeatable mix, says Kim Thomas

Higher and degree apprenticeships represent the cream of the crop. Typically lasting three to four years, higher apprenticeships provide students with a qualification at level 6 or level 7, equivalent to a foundation degree - although some are available at level 5. Offered in vocational areas, such as engineering, accountancy and law, higher apprenticeships still represent only 5% of all apprenticeship starts.

Degree apprenticeships, introduced in 2015, last between three and six years and are provided by employers, including Rolls-Royce and GlaxoSmithKline, in partnership with universities. Apprentices typically spend 30 hours a week working for their employer, and some time studying at university, either on a block release basis, or through distance or blended learning. The employer pays both a salary and the apprentice’s tuition fees.

Susie Howe, careers adviser at Sandringham School in St Albans, Hertfordshire, sees them as an attractive option: “You don’t get into debt at university, and you still come out with a degree.” Howe is inviting employers into school to talk about what’s on offer, as many parents and students are still unaware.

Competition is fierce - currently there are only about 1,000 degree apprenticeship places on offer. This may change with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April, which employers can only recoup if they use the money to fund apprentices’ training. It may change with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April.

To gain a place on a higher or degree apprenticeship it’s best to start by looking at the government’s Find an Apprenticeship website. You could also contact universities direct to see if they’re offering apprenticeships in the field you’re interested in. Applications go to the employer, however, rather than the university, and both higher and degree apprenticeships require similar entry qualifications to those for a traditional university degree.

Poulson believes that higher and degree apprenticeships offer a unique opportunity: “The world of work is tough out there and you can’t beat a CV with a academic qualification on it as well. “You don’t get into debt and you still come out with a degree.”

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Having it all figured out

Good with numbers - never keen on university - Chris Garry chose an apprenticeship and never looked back

Throughout his school career, Chris Garry, 20, was always good with numbers, but he knew from an early age that he didn’t want to go to university.

At his Marcheheiroth sixth-form college he took A levels in accounting, economics and IT, but saw an alternative route open up for him when accounting giant Grant Thornton gave a talk about higher apprenticeship roles. Seeing his enthusiasm, the firm’s representative encouraged him to apply. Although his A-level grades fell slightly short, Grant Thornton was impressed by his abilities, and Garry started a four-year higher apprenticeship in August 2015.

It’s an environment in which he has thrived. “It looks to me really well because I always wanted to go into accounting,” he says. “I just wanted to make sure I could do it as best as I can.” Four days a week, Garry is based in the office, where he reviews financial statements under supervision. He will progress to working without supervision, before moving next year to charging jobs on his own. “It’s a structured and quick development process,” he says.

One day a week, Garry studies for his Association of Accounting Technicians qualification at Kaplan Financial college, which he will complete in August this year. In the final year of his apprenticeship he will gain chartered accountant (ACA) status.

His bosses have been so pleased with his performance that his starting salary of £15,500 has now risen to £18,500. Once his apprenticeship is over, Garry plans to stay with the firm on secondment to another country, such as Australia or Singapore: “If you’re ACA qualified you can go anywhere in the world.”
A recipe for financial stability

Money is normally tight when studying, but not if you’re an apprentice, says Richard Doughty

T

wenty years ago, being an apprentice was an absolute win-win. You’ve got a job, you are earning a salary and you get (free) training at the same time,” says Jamie Stevenson, director of business partnerships at South Thames College, south London. “At no point should apprentices make any financial contribution towards their training costs.”

So who does pay for the training – an expensive prospect at higher and degree apprenticeship level? From April 2017 any employer in the UK with a wage bill of £3m-plus, regardless of whether they employ apprentices or not, must pay an apprenticeship levy – a new tax of 0.5% of their annual pay roll – to help fund 3 million new apprenticeship starts up to 2020. Large employers based in England can reclaim the levy in apprentice training vouchers for every £1 paid as part of the levy, they get back £1 plus 10% in vouchers to support apprentice training from May 2017 onwards. Companies with an annual wage bill under £3m are exempt from the levy, yet still qualify for 90% government funding for apprenticeship training and assessment; the employer pays the remaining 10%. Employers with fewer than 50 members of staff, who take on a 16- to 18-year-old apprentice or a 19- to 24-year-old apprentice with disabilities or learning difficulties, will get 100% government funding. In addition, even if apprentices leave a programme prematurely, they are not expected to pay back anything to cover the costs of training and assessment. Apprentices have to fund living costs themselves. However, for an annual £1 subscription, they can buy an NUS Apprentice extra discount card.

If based in London, apprentices also get a subsidised Oyster card. If they are living independently from their families and face financial difficulties they are encouraged to call their college or other training provider, Stevenson says. “Some employers will band-out loans and travel allowances. If an apprentice does well, we encourage employers to look at performance and give them pay increments during their apprenticeship.”

Apprentices who complete a full-time apprenticeship programme at South Thames College can qualify for the Go-Live Certificate – a real life experience which includes: a) a recognition of their achievement at a London venue; b) a certificate of achievement; and c) a £200 gift card.

Not a lot of people know that ..., explains Jamie Oliver.

Michael Caine was once a dab hand with a spanner. Proof that apprentices are real stars. By Kim Thomas

Billy Connolly completed a five-year apprenticeship as a butchermaker in the Gowan shipyards in Glasgow. He left to become a folk singer, eventually finding success as a comedian and actor.

Actor Michael Caine served a two-year apprenticeship as a plumber before giving it up to star in films such as Alfie, The Italian Job and Educating Rita.

John Caudwell, the founder of retailer Phones4u, was once an engineering apprentice at the Michelin factory in Stoke-on-Trent.

Alex Ferguson spent five years as an engineering apprentice at the Remington Rand typewriter factory in Glasgow, before becoming one of the most successful football managers of all time.

TV chef and healthy food campaigner Jamie Oliver was a catering apprentice at Carluccio’s restaurant in Neal Street, London, and now owns numerous restaurants including the Jamie’s Italian chain. He also runs his own apprenticeship programme.

Fashion designer Stella McCartney served as an apprentice at Edward Sexton, Savile Row, before attending Central St Martin’s, the internationally renowned art college. Career highlights include designing Team GB’s kit for the 2012 London Olympics.

Ian McKellen completed a three-year acting apprenticeship at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. He has since had a long and distinguished acting career on stage and screen.

Ozzy Osbourne was an apprentice toolmaker at the General Electric company in Birmingham before joining Black Sabbath.

Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay, who owns 40 restaurants worldwide, started his career as an apprentice studying hotel management at North Oxfordshire Technical College.

Alan Titchmarsh was an apprentice at Ilkley Park, West Yorkshire, before going on to study horticulture and later becoming a television gardener and novelist.

Mike Smith

An apprenticeship is a full-time, paid job

A level has reached a tipping point in terms of skills. Numerous businesses and sectors are reporting significant skill shortages. In the engineering and manufacturing sectors alone we need something like 30,000 new apprentices each year for the next 10 years just to replace those retiring. And yet, according to EngineeringUK, we are producing only 16,000 annually. Demographics is a big issue, but so too is skills provision. We are not upskilling in vocational, but also social and “work-ready” skills. I hear employers constantly complaining about school leavers not being ready for work and lacking the right attitude and behaviour to enter the workforce.

This is where apprenticeships must play a central role. They offer incredible opportunities, and the higher and degree level apprenticeships are now recognised by the government as having parity with university degrees. The big selling point of an apprenticeship - and something many parents, students and teachers fail to recognise is that it’s a full-time, paid job with a structured development and education programme. At Gen2, for instance, we know that about 94% of our learners who complete their apprenticeship, at any level, are taken on in well-paid, full-time work by the same employers, post-completion of their apprenticeship.

The key game-changer is the government’s double incentive of recognising degree apprenticeships and introducing an apprenticeship levy on larger companies (starting this April and the first new tax on employers for many years). Employers are being encouraged to see the apprenticeships as a way of securing the next generation of highly skilled workers and recoup the costs of paying the tax by using their levy fund to take on their own apprentices.

Meanwhile, the brightest students are starting to realise that aside from missing out on “the university experience” they can gain a degree on day release, without having to pay a penny towards tuition fees, and start a salaried career much earlier than the traditional graduate.

The government’s target of 3m apprenticeship starts by 2020 seems a big ask, but may be not such a leap from the 2.4m starts during the coalition. The real yardstick, however, will be the quality of the apprenticeship and the number of students who complete the course – at Gen2, 90% of our apprentices complete each year. Better, therefore, to set a lower, more realistic target – how about aiming for 2.7m starts nationally?

Mike Smith is chief executive of Gen2 Training, a not-for-profit, independent training provider supporting more than 1,300 apprentices across Cumbria. As former vice-chair and chair of the Further Education Trust for Leadership, he started out as an apprentice draughtsman before qualifying as a chartered engineer.

Interview by Richard Doughty
Owners of Superdrug and Savers, the A.S. Watson Group are one of the fastest-growing retailers in the world. Part of this achievement is recognising the value of being trained while you work, which is why their forward-thinking Apprenticeship schemes have been leading the way for a decade. Apprentices are employed 30 hours per week during their 12-month programme, which can open many doors for ambitious and self-motivated young people – people like Sam Cooper (below).

Now a Regional Security Manager for Savers, Sam started as a part-time Sales Assistant in Superdrug. In 2008 she moved onto their Apprenticeship Programme and over the next few years qualified in Customer Service, then Retail Management. “The courses gave me new skills”, she comments. “They gave me a higher level of understanding about effective communication, customer service and management in general. I feel I’ve been challenged to step outside of my comfort zone and learn.”

Fast Track to Success

Hard working and keen to succeed, Sam progressed quickly, taking on a variety of managerial roles before moving across to Savers just over a year ago. “It’s been great to move around to different towns and areas and meet different people. Every store I’ve moved to has been a bigger store with more staff, which means I’ve continued to learn more and more about management.” Her advice to anyone thinking of applying for an apprenticeship? “Go for it!” she urges. “Apart from experiencing it for myself, I had an apprentice working with me in the Solihull Touchwood store and saw the opportunity. It had given her at her hand; the skills she had learnt and the experience she gained,” adds Sam.

“Take the Plunge”

Harriet wouldn’t hesitate to recommend the Programme to other school and college leavers. “I believe the apprenticeship has massively boosted my employability prospects,” she confirms. “Unlike a college course or A Levels – where you just get a qualification – I have gained qualifications and experience where I have been learning on the job; the skills I’ve gained have been rewarded with a promotion to Assistant Store Manager. I feel that determination and a proactive attitude can certainly take you places.”

Diverse and enjoyable, Savers’ and Superdrug’s Apprenticeship Programmes could even launch you into Buying, Logistics, Store and Regional Management, as well as Resource and Social Media. Offering Retail and Customer Service Apprenticeships – with the option of specialising in beauty and healthcare at Superdrug – apprentice benefits include 28 days paid holiday and a 30% store discount. So become part of something bigger today; apply online at: www.superdrug.jobs or www.savers.jobs