

INVEST EAST YORKSHIRE

Taking on an apprentice

Introduction

As your business grows you may consider taking on an apprentice. Essentially an apprenticeship is a job with training. An apprentice will gain a recognised qualification whilst they are working and earning a wage.

There are 4 types of apprenticeships: -

- Intermediate – Level 2, equivalent to GCSE
- Advanced – Level 3, equivalent to A level
- Higher – Level 4 to 7, foundation degree up to a Masters degree
- Degree – Level 6 and 7, Bachelors up to Masters degree

Considerations

When you're thinking about taking on an apprentice, it's important to think about the resources you have and need to support them, how they will fit into your organisation and who will act as their supervisor. There are further considerations in identifying the type of training that would benefit your organisation and the apprentice the most.

In summary, an apprentice requires structure and support to ensure the training they undertake with the training provider is put into practice at work and vice versa. Further considerations may include:

- Identifying the appropriate apprenticeship framework which matches the job they will be doing. (See useful guidance below)
- Your ability to provide the necessary on-the-job training, resources and facilities the apprentice will require to complete their apprenticeship.
- Ensuring the employees who will be training the apprentice are performing in their roles and have coaching and mentoring skills.
- Reviewing the organisational schedule and allowing the apprentice time to attend agreed off-site training sessions if necessary, or facilitate visits by the training provider to assess the employee.

- Ensuring that the organisation's premises are suitable, that there are adequate facilities, and that all statutory health and safety requirements are met.
- Ensuring that you have the appropriate policies and procedures in place, including policies on health and safety, equal opportunities, fire risk assessment and young workers.
- Providing a copy of the organisation's public liability insurance documents.
- Reviewing the salary budget and deciding what the apprentice will be paid.
- Finding the right provider for your training needs – or developing your own training programme.

Where to start looking for an apprentice

Once you have decided to invest in an apprentice, there are some steps to follow. First, choose an appropriate framework or standard (depending on the location of the organisation) fitting to the role that you require to be filled – this will depend on the industry that you work in and to a certain degree your location.

Then you should speak to a training provider, who can advertise the job for you through the “Find an Apprenticeship Service”.

How you pay for the apprenticeship depends on the size of your organisation. If you are required to pay the apprenticeship levy (organisations with an annual wage bill of £3 million or more), these funds can be drawn on to pay for an apprenticeship. If you do not pay the levy, you must contribute 10% of the apprenticeship cost directly to the training provider and the Government will pay the rest up to a maximum funding cap.

Recruiting an apprentice

Although apprentices can be of any age, it is likely that for many this will be their first experience of working life and therefore a selection process may need to refocus attention on skills that are transferable from skills and experiences gained at school and extra-curricular activities.

It's also important to remember that you're recruiting an apprentice, not a finished product i.e. a potential employee with skills and experience in the role. Therefore, you need to be looking at their future potential and the skills and behaviours they display such as taking feedback and being able to apply it to their own development.

As with any recruitment and selection exercise writing a clear job description and person specification or role profile before you start recruiting for an apprentice is important. This will mean that the organisation is clear on the skills and requirements for the role, whilst the apprentice is able to understand the expectations of them. Highlighting the types of tasks of the job role once they have completed their apprenticeship is useful as it gives them an idea of the goals they are aiming for.

The job description should cover:

- the duties and responsibilities of the apprentices
- the training they will receive
- the qualifications involved
- brief information about the organisation.

The person specification should detail:

- the knowledge and skills required
- personal characteristics – avoid personality traits but instead focus on aspects that are relevant to the role and organisation such as flexibility, reliability, critical thinking, calmness, confidence etc.
- the qualifications and training that are entry requirements for the apprenticeship.

In job interviews we tend to focus on questions relating to the role and the candidate's previous experience/skills. With apprentices it may be more appropriate to focus on their strengths and focus on the candidates' abilities and interests. Build up a rapport by engaging in small talk prior to the interview and explaining to them how the interview will be structured. Having an interview plan which starts with questions to get them to talk about their interests and then probe on how these would transfer into the role is more likely to generate greater discussion.

Depending on the role, you may want to host a small assessment centre where you interview/test all potential candidates in one day. This would involve a range of exercises that mirror the type of tasks or skills required in the role. For example, if you were hiring a social media apprentice, you may provide them with a mini client brief and get them to develop a social media plan. You would need to develop an objective scoring plan and employ the support of managers within your organisation to participate in administering the tests on the day.

Apprenticeship agreement

Once you have completed the recruitment process and have chosen your ideal candidate for your apprenticeship, you will need to provide them with an offer detailing the start date, salary and major terms of employment. As with an employee you will also need to complete right to work checks, obtain references and undertake any other essential requirements specific to the role.

You will need to provide the apprentice with a contract of employment prior or on their start date, this is also known as an apprenticeship agreement. The agreement must contain the normal elements required in a written statement of main terms of employment, and the "practical period" i.e. the length of the apprenticeship and the amount of "off-the-job" training the apprentice will receive.

Employment under an apprenticeship agreement is a requirement for completing an apprenticeship. Without the agreement, an apprenticeship certificate cannot be issued.

You may also want to consider the following provisions in any written contract:

- the length of the fixed term the apprenticeship is to last
- if the apprentice is under 18, signature from their parent or guardian
- a probationary period before the formal apprenticeship begins, to make it easier to remove any unsuitable candidates at the outset
- the appointment of a mentor or person with special responsibility for apprentices who will take care of their welfare
- details of how progress will be reviewed and monitored, and at what intervals
- the ability to terminate the relationship if the apprentice does not attain the necessary standards after a sufficient opportunity to do so

- requirement for those who leave at the end of the apprenticeship to pay back certain training fees if they do not stay with you for a stated time period – this would **not** relate to apprenticeship fees but additional training the company has provided (it would be appropriate for the employer to prepare a training fee clawback agreement prior to the apprentice undergoing training)
- arrangements to transfer or redeploy the apprentice in the case of redundancy, or at least to make reasonable efforts to find alternative work for them to enable them to complete their training.

For any apprenticeships started after 1 August 2023, the Apprenticeship Agreement must cover the actual duration of the apprenticeship (e.g. if the apprenticeship is extended, the apprenticeship agreement must also be extended.) It must also set out the start date, duration and end date of the practical period (the training period).

You must verify also that the Apprenticeship Agreement is complete and correct and that it has been signed by both the organisation and the apprentice.

Off-the-job training

Apprentices of all levels must receive “off-the-job” training for at least 20% of their employed time of a 30-hour week, which equates to an average of 6 hours per week. For those who work more than 30 hours a week, it is not necessary to increase their off the job training. For those who work less, it must be 20% of their employed time.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) defines off-the-job training as training which is undertaken outside of the normal day-to-day working environment and leads towards the achievement of an apprenticeship training. It could include:

- the teaching of theory (for example: lectures, role playing, simulation exercises, online learning or manufacturer training);
- practical training: shadowing, mentoring, industry visits and attendance at competitions;
- learning support and time spent writing assessments/assignments.

This is commonly the ‘day release’ model but does training not have to be done in this format. It could, for example, be a single block of training lasting for several months provided that the time spent on that training is equivalent to a minimum of 20% of the duration of the apprenticeship. It is measured over the entirety of the apprenticeship rather than over a week, month, or academic year.

It can take place at the employer’s workplace or elsewhere e.g. online. If it is at the workplace, it does not necessarily need to be away from the apprentice’s normal workstation. The off-the-job training is normally provided by the training provider.

The 20% requirement is part of the ESFA funding rules and therefore evidence will be required of this as part of normal audit arrangements. Funding rules require the recipient of the funding (usually the training provider) to keep the records.

Apprentice pay

Apprentices usually work for at least 30 paid hours a week and must work more than 16 hours in a week.

Pay includes the time spent training or studying for a relevant qualification, whether while at

work or at a college or other training organisation.

Apprentices must have the same conditions as other employees working at similar grades or in similar roles. This includes:

- paid holidays (20 days plus bank holidays)
- sick pay
- any benefits you offer, for example discounted gym membership
- any support you offer, for example coaching or mentoring.

Apprentices need to be paid the National Minimum Wage and ensure this is correct for their age.

Employers may not need to pay Class 1 National Insurance contributions for an apprentice, if the apprentice:

- is under 25 years old
- is on an approved UK government apprenticeship standard or framework (these can differ depending on UK country)
- earns less than £967 a week (£50,270 a year)

Choosing a Training provider

Choosing a training provider may be based on location, but it is important to choose one that will meet your business needs. Aspects such as: -

- the business area and job role (and potential frameworks and levels)
- the size and scope of the programme (numbers, geography and age groups)
- whether you can integrate your in-house training materials if this is important to you.

Identifying good providers through Ofsted (or other external auditing bodies across the UK) can be a useful exercise as well as looking at their ratings and feedback by apprentices or other employers would enable you to make a decision.

Supporting an apprentice: Onboarding

Prior to the apprentice starting their employment, it is vital you spend some time preparing an onboarding programme.

A good onboarding programme should:

- help the apprentice settle into the business and make them feel comfortable in their new surroundings
- give an overview of the apprentice's role and how they fit into the wider team
- provide practical guidance in areas such as working time, breaks, pay, working conditions, dress codes and health and safety
- help the apprentice understand their duties, as well as clearly explain the line of authority, including an introduction to the roles of the supervisors and managers
- inform the apprentice where they can go for help if difficulties arise
- give the apprentice opportunities to get to know their colleagues and to integrate effectively into the wider workplace culture

- provide plenty of opportunities for the apprentice to ask questions.

Remember as this may be the first experience of employment it is important to give more time and extra supervision than other employees. Therefore, perhaps plan the onboarding process over a longer period of time rather than bombarding them with all the information in one go. In planning an induction think about providing information that is relevant to the company, the job and their team. Your overall aim should be about building their confidence, settling them in and encouraging them to develop good working relationships, particularly with their mentor and/or line manager.

The apprentice's manager should set clear work plans, provide informal coaching, ongoing feedback and evaluate tasks undertaken to aid the apprentice's development.

Supporting an apprentice: Ongoing support and evaluation

It is important to remember that whilst an apprentice is an employee they are learning on the job and therefore you need to provide them with both challenge and support to be successful.

You can do this by:

- giving apprentices a clear outline of expectations and a safe supportive environment to learn and develop
- encouraging them from the start to own and drive their programme targets and to seek regular feedback to self-assess their performance
- up-skilling and developing line managers so they can coach their apprentice and act as a role model/mentor
- putting a workplace learning mentor in place to further enhance the experience
- creating a proactive environment that builds on their eagerness, motivation and commitment.

Regular scheduled meetings to assess and discuss performance should be factored into their training programme and this should allow for both self-evaluation and constructive feedback to keep the apprentice on track to complete their qualification at the required time.

What happens after the apprenticeship?

Most apprentices stay with their employer after the successful completion of their apprenticeship, so your investment will result in a committed and valuable workforce. You will therefore need to provide them with a new contract of employment maintaining their continuous service date i.e. when they originally started with you.

However, if you are unable to provide the apprentice with permanent employment you will need to discuss this with them and give notice that their employment will end on their end date specified in the apprentice agreement. Early discussion allows the apprentice time to plan their next steps.

It is valuable to gain feedback from apprentices at the end of their qualification to help their organisation learn and plan for future apprentices.

Useful Guidance

[Find training and employment schemes for your business - Apprenticeships](#) – guidance from the Department of Education and skills for life.

[Apprenticeship training courses](#) – A search tool from .gov.uk of the apprenticeship training courses available

[Search apprenticeship – Find an apprenticeship – GOV.UK](#) – find an apprenticeship service, where training providers can advertise apprenticeship opportunities

[National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates - GOV.UK](#) - .gov.uk website for current minimum wage requirements.

The Information in this document is correct as of 1st March 2025. It has been written as a helpful guide, but does NOT replace legal or HR expertise.

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