

Apprentice FAQ's for Starting an Apprenticeship

How do I find an apprenticeship?

To do an apprenticeship you need to be employed and be doing a job that is relevant to the apprenticeship you want to complete. There are a number of ways to find an apprenticeship, for example:

- Go to www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship to register with the National Apprenticeship Service. You can search, apply and sign up for alerts to let you know when a new vacancy is registered on the service.
- Check on-line job sites, putting 'Apprentice' in the search title.
- Get in touch with companies that employ people to do the job you would like to do.
- Ask around. Friends, family, neighbours may know of an opportunity for you to explore.

What is off the job training?

Off-the-job training is learning, which is undertaken outside of your day-to-day work duties, and leads towards the achievement of your apprenticeship. This training takes place within your normal (contracted) working hours. All apprentices are entitled to paid time away from their work to enable them to train and learn. You need to spend at least 6 hours of your time undertaking your studies.

There are a range of activities that will contribute to this such as, shadowing and observing other skilled and experienced employees to learn new skills; day release at college; time during your day to gather evidence for your portfolio and time to work on assignments and course work. The off-the-job training must be directly relevant to the apprenticeship. Off-the-job training can take place at many locations including: the workplace, off-site (e.g., classroom) or from home via distance learning. Additionally, if you must attend any courses that are relevant to your job, to support your learning, this can go towards your 6 hours of off the job training. Your provider can support both you and your employer to know what you can use as evidence, and will have resources you can use, such as an online portfolio, to make sure that this off the job training is recorded.

Who will deliver the training?

Most employers will appoint a training provider, to deliver part of your off the job training and support you through the apprenticeship, but some employers have their own training programmes in place and can deliver all the training themselves. The off-the-job training activities can often take place at any location as part of a mixed training approach, therefore some of the training may be provided by the training provider and some, by your employer. If you apply for an apprenticeship through the National Apprenticeship Service, the advertisement will tell you who the apprenticeship provider will be.

Do I have to pay anything towards my apprenticeship?

An apprentice, by law, is not allowed to pay for their apprenticeship. The cost is covered by the government and your employer. If an employer asks you to pay for, or contribute to, the cost of your apprenticeship you must tell your provider and seek their advice. This also applies if you leave the employer for some reason before your apprenticeship is completed, or shortly after it is completed.

If I leave my apprenticeship, do I have to pay my employer back for any money they have paid?

No, it is illegal for an employer to ask you to pay anything to them, whether you leave when the apprenticeship finishes or before.

How much will I get paid?

The minimum wage for an Apprentice is currently £5.28 per hour for those apprentices aged between 16 and 18. If you start an apprenticeship when you are 19, or you turn 19 in the first year of your apprenticeship, your employer can only pay you this wage for the first year. In the second and/or subsequent years they must then pay the national minimum wage for your age. For more information see www.gov.uk/minimumwage

Can I be self-employed or a subcontractor?

No, all apprentices must be in paid employment on a PAYE basis and have deductions made for tax and national insurance if applicable.

Does that mean I have to have a contract?

Yes, funding conditions require all apprentices to have a job description detailing what they will be expected to do as well as what skills they will acquire whilst working. You must also be given a contract of employment detailing all of the statutory employment requirements.

Do I get paid for holidays?

Yes, all apprentices are entitled to the statutory holidays that all other permanent employees are entitled to. This is currently 20 days per year plus the 8 statutory bank holidays. For more information see www.gov.uk/holiday-entitlement-rights

If I go to college, do I get paid for that day?

Yes, you must be paid for any college attendance or study time. If you need to go to college for one day a week and are at work for the other 4, you must be paid for all 5 days. There is also some 'off the job' training time that you need to be paid for too. For more details, visit the Off the Job Training.

How many hours should I be working?

If you are aged between 16 and 18, you must not work more than 40 hours per week, including your college time (if applicable). If you are over 18 then there are no restrictions on your working hours except for the working time directive, go to www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours for more information. If you are asked to work extra hours to complete a specific job, that is ok provided that you agree, and it is not compulsory or on a regular basis. You will need to be paid for these extra hours or have time off in lieu. It is also recommended that an apprentice works a minimum of 30 hours a week in order for you to have sufficient time to learn the job. If you are employed for less than 30 hours, the duration of your apprenticeship will be extended. Your employer and provider will agree with you how much additional time might be added on, and the employer must continue to employ you for the whole duration.

How long does an apprenticeship take?

An apprenticeship can take between 12-72 months to complete, depending on the apprenticeship standard and the level you are studying. Apprenticeship levels range from Level 2, which is equivalent to 5 GCSE's graded 9-4 (A*-C), all the way up to a Level 7 apprenticeship, which is equivalent to a master's degree. The higher-level apprenticeships take considerably longer to complete.

As an apprentice what can I expect?

You will be supported by your employer to ensure you have the right opportunities to gather the evidence required for your apprenticeship, to allow you to develop your skills. They will make sure you are appropriately supervised whilst at work and given a mentor who can support you. This does not have to be your line manager or supervisor, just someone who can help you with any issues or difficulties that you might encounter during your apprenticeship, and to provide general support. Your mentor might even be someone who has recently completed their own apprenticeship. They will also be responsible for your health, safety, and welfare and must provide any mandatory Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), that is relevant to your industry sector. You will also be supported by your training provider, who will help you with the knowledge, visit you in your workplace, and carry out reviews to check your progress.

Can I do an apprenticeship if I am already employed?

Yes, if you are an existing member of staff, you can do an apprenticeship, provided that you will be learning sufficient new skills relevant to your current job role, or to support you within a new job role. Your employer does not need to pay you the apprenticeship wage, but they must provide you with an Apprenticeship Agreement that outlines what new skills you will be learning. The provider may discuss with you and your employer about reducing the duration of the apprenticeship to allow for any prior experience you may have and to allow for the things that you already know, and therefore do not need to be taught or trained to do. This will be carried out as a skills scan.

What is in it for me as an employee or apprentice?

As an apprentice you will be contributing to the success of the organisation you work for and at the end you will have gained a range of new knowledge, skills and behaviours to help you in your chosen career. In many cases you will have achieved a recognised qualification and completed an apprenticeship which will support you in any future work applications. At the same time you will have been earning a wage and developing other employability skills to support further progression. Here are some of the benefits:

Apprentices enjoy marked salary increases when they complete their training, and those with an Advanced Apprenticeship earn around £117,000 more than those without over the course of their career. (Parenta Online)

85% of apprentices will stay in employment, with two-thirds (64%) remaining with the same employer (Reed Online)

One in three (32%) of all former apprentices received a promotion within a year of completing their apprenticeship, whilst three-quarters (75%) stated that they were given more responsibility in their role. (Reed Online)

9 in 10 (87%) apprentices 'strongly agree' that they feel more confident in their own abilities as a result of undertaking their apprenticeship. (Reed Online)

What is the apprenticeship providers role in the apprenticeship?

Your provider is there to support you to successfully complete your apprenticeship. They will work with you and your employer to ensure that you have all the available opportunities to evidence your apprenticeship training and complete successfully. They will take you through the mandatory paperwork and visit your employers' premises to ensure that that are providing a working environment that meets Health and Safety legislation. They will conduct regular reviews with you and your employer to check on progress, put action plans or targets in place as required, address any learning needs that may arise, and provide mentoring support for you throughout the apprenticeship. They will put in place a training plan, including any mandatory qualifications, and provide the underpinning Apprentice FAQs knowledge and skills required to complete the apprenticeship. They will meet with you and your employer to make the decision about when you are ready for your End Point Assessment and provide information and feedback on your progress and performance to date to ensure that everyone agrees that they are ready.

What is End Point Assessment?

End Point Assessment, or EPA, is the final stage of the apprenticeship. It is conducted by an independent assessment organisation who will take you through certain assessments to ensure that you have retained the knowledge you have been taught and can display the correct skills and behaviours required for the job. This usually includes two or more of the following:

- multiple choice test
- a skills-based task
- an interview or professional discussion
- a portfolio of evidence

The decision to put you through to EPA, referred to as the Gateway, is usually made approximately 3 months before the end of the apprenticeship, to allow you enough time to prepare for the process which your employer and provider will support.

What if I do not want to do the End Point Assessment (EPA)?

It is essential that you complete this EPA, even if you have achieved any mandatory qualifications that are required. This is because you will not achieve a recognised apprenticeship if the EPA is not completed. If there is no qualification provided within the apprenticeship, the final apprenticeship certificate is proof that you have completed the required knowledge, skills, and behaviours that are associated with the role you are carrying out. Also, any mandatory qualification that is part of your apprenticeship standard is likely to be a knowledge only qualification and therefore will not provide evidence that your skills and behaviours are also at the correct level for your chosen career. Ask your provider to explain to you and your employer what is involved in the EPA for the standard you have chosen to study towards.