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# DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS: WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW

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# Introduction

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The landscape surrounding higher apprenticeships in England is changing with a number of sectors developing degree level apprenticeships for roles in teaching, engineering and new technologies. Healthcare employers cannot afford to be left behind if they are to make the most of apprenticeships to train their staff in both clinical and non-clinical roles.

There are currently over 1,000 degree apprenticeship programmes available, with more in development. The programmes are developed by employers, universities, and professional bodies working in partnership and can offer apprentices an opportunity to achieve a full bachelor's or master's degree.

NHS Employers produced its first [NHS apprenticeship guide](#) in early 2017 to help senior managers understand the changes to policy around apprenticeships in England, and the new levy. It aims to support the development of workforce strategies that consider apprenticeships as part of the solution to the challenges employers are facing.

This second guide has been produced for workforce development and recruitment managers in the NHS to support delivery of workforce strategies. It focuses on degree level apprenticeships and offers top tips, advice, and links to further guidance.



# Understanding higher apprenticeships

**Higher apprenticeships are available at levels 4 to 7 and can take between one and five years to complete. The arrangements for study can vary depending on the needs of the employer, but typically they include release from work, either on a day-a-week basis, or in blocks of time.**

The degrees earned via an apprenticeship are awarded by universities and set at an equivalent standard to those gained using the full-time academic route.

Degree level apprenticeships can appeal to people who may not have seen university as a viable option, and attract talented candidates into professional roles they would not have otherwise considered. These apprenticeships may help to improve talent retention for employers, and to achieve goals around diversity, social mobility and widening participation.

## Qualifications gained through apprenticeships

Type of apprenticeship	Level	Equivalent educational level
Intermediate	2	Five GCSE passes at grades A* to C
Advanced	3	A-level pass
Higher	4,5	Higher education certificate / diploma or foundation degree
Degree	6,7	Bachelor's or master's degree

**The new funding arrangements put employers in a strong position to ensure that higher education provision meets their needs.**



# The benefits of degree apprenticeships

**If you are looking to offer degree apprenticeships in your organisation it is worth remembering they are an attractive option that come with a range of benefits.**

We know that supplying a workforce which is capable of meeting the changing needs of the population is one of the NHS' biggest challenges. Investing in skills, training and nurturing talent in the UK is central to supporting the growth and productivity of the economy.

Apprenticeships at all levels can help to form part of an effective workforce supply strategy, supporting you to develop a pipeline of talent, and offering opportunities to your current staff and local communities.

Degree apprenticeships could benefit your organisation in many ways.



## Benefits for the employer

- Employers offering degree apprenticeships may attract applicants that would not have taken the traditional university route of learning.
- Bringing talent into professions that would have otherwise passed them by can boost local graduate retention. According to government figures, 90 per cent of apprentices in England remained in employment after qualifying and 71 per cent stayed with the same employer.
- Degree apprenticeships are developed by universities in partnership with employers and focus on developing particular skills and knowledge required for specific jobs and careers.
- Some apprenticeships can be used across a range of sectors, for example those developed for business-related roles.
- Degree apprenticeships can help organisations achieve their widening participation and social mobility goals when members of staff or the community are supported to access the training roles. There is evidence to show that a workforce that represents the community it serves is more effective than one which does not. See our [widening participation](#) web pages for more information.
- To meet the increase in demand many universities are developing new partnerships with other training providers to help deliver the apprenticeships that employers want.
- The new funding arrangements put NHS employers in a strong position to ensure that the apprenticeships they purchase are meeting their needs.
- Degree apprenticeships can provide a career pathway to develop the workforce, for example, assistant practitioners or nursing associates wanting to become qualified nurses.



**Did you know that 30 per cent of the senior UK managers at Rolls Royce started out at the company as apprentices?**

## Benefits for the learner

- Apprentices are employed and earn a wage throughout the programme. They split their time between university study and the workplace.
- Financial differences for learners are clear; for degree apprenticeships there are no training fees or student loans to pay back.
- The long term earning potential of both degree apprentices and university graduates is often significantly higher than non-graduates. However, this varies depending on the job or career the apprentice goes into.
- Degrees earned via the apprenticeship route are of an equivalent standard to those taken via the undergraduate route.
- Apprentices graduate with several years of work experience as well as theoretical knowledge. They also get to work closely with, and learn from, colleagues.
- The degrees are awarded by universities and the apprentices still get to graduate with a cap and gown.
- The National Union of Students (NUS) has introduced the NUS Apprentice extra card which gives discounts on lots of brands. See more at [www.apprenticeextra.co.uk](http://www.apprenticeextra.co.uk)
- Apprentices may also be eligible for discounts under local public transport schemes, for example, the Apprentice Oyster photo card in London gives apprentices 30 per cent off certain journeys.



# How do other sectors use degree apprenticeships?

**NHS organisations can reap the long-term benefits that degree apprenticeships can bring by looking at how they are being used and developed as career pathways in other sectors.**

For example, within construction, engineering and energy, former apprentices are particularly well represented in their senior management teams.

Many universities now offer higher level apprenticeships in leadership and management to develop middle and senior managers. These could be adapted and utilised within the health sector.

## Examples

### BAE SYSTEMS

BAE Systems use degree apprenticeships to offer career pathways to its aerospace engineering apprentices. This starts with a foundation degree combining tailored industrial placements and study. There is then potential to continue to an honours degree programme, dependent on individual performance and business needs.

### POLICING

A degree apprenticeship standard has been developed to train those wishing to pursue a career in policing.

### EMPLOYERS IN THE ENERGY INDUSTRY

Employers in the energy industry, including the National Grid, have developed a master's level degree apprenticeship. Typically taking up to five years to complete, the programme contains core knowledge and options to train engineers needed for the future and will link to professional registration for the sector.

### EMPLOYERS AND UNIVERSITIES

Employers and universities have been working together to develop apprenticeships needed for specific sectors. For example, Lancaster University Management School is now offering master's level apprenticeships aimed at the manufacturing and finance sectors.

### TEACHING

Apprenticeships that provide a career path into teaching are available for graduates and are being developed for teaching assistants.

### BT

BT has taken a strategic approach to increase the volume of apprenticeships it offers. The company looked at where degree programmes can be used currently across the business, identified new areas and roles where they can be offered, and where a standard does not exist it has looked into developing new ones.

To make full use of the levy, BT is utilising its status as an employer-provider to deliver training internally and is identifying opportunities to fund learning programmes aligned to its strategic workforce plans.

# Career development in the NHS

**A recent survey of UK universities showed there has been a 600 per cent increase in entrants since degree apprenticeships were first introduced in 2015 - and this rise is expected to continue.**

As degree apprenticeships become more prominent, employers are looking at how they can be used to develop attractive career pathways for new and existing staff as well as bringing local talent into NHS organisations.

## What is happening in the health sector?

### Management

North Bristol NHS Trust has developed a leadership and management apprenticeship at level 7 (master's degree level) and is linked to the NHS Leadership Academy and Institute of Health Service Managers (IHSM).

Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, through its partnership with a local college, has jointly delivered an innovative foundation degree in healthcare practice, and currently has a cohort of Chartered Management Institute level 6 management degree apprentices.

### Paramedics

Work is currently ongoing to develop a degree level paramedic apprenticeship standard.

A level 4 associate ambulance practitioner standard, developed by a number of ambulance trusts is now available.

### Nursing

The degree apprenticeship offers an alternative route for people wanting to access a career in nursing and meet the qualification requirements to apply for registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Trust started their first cohort of nurse apprentices in September 2017. More trusts are looking to offer this in 2018.

An apprenticeship standard has been developed for the nursing associate role, which is currently being piloted in England. To read more about this visit our [nursing associate webpage](#).

A level 7 (master's degree level) advanced clinical practice apprenticeship standard is being developed which will support the development of nurses and other registered practitioners.

### Growing your own

University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust runs an apprenticeship programme for clinical support workers. On completion they have the option to move on to a transition to nursing programme that prepares them for the nursing degree course.

Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is using apprenticeships to develop existing staff in roles in bands 1-4. Over a third of health care assistants who started as an apprentice are now working as fully qualified nurses at the trust.

There are a range of degree apprenticeships available, or currently being developed, that can be used by health sector organisations. Examples include digital technology, senior mentoring and coaching, cyber security technology, and digital marketing.

For news, or to search for apprenticeship standards relevant to health, visit [healthcare apprenticeship standards online](#).



# Apprenticeships in healthcare science

**Employers may look to offer apprenticeship posts in healthcare science as they combine work-based and academic learning and can be used to support career pathways that begin as a healthcare science assistant.**

With 52 specialisms in healthcare science, people from a range of academic backgrounds and levels of experience can find a role that suits them.

**The level 2 and level 4 diplomas provide a career framework for healthcare science and also underpin the learning for apprenticeships at this level.**

**There are approximately 100 healthcare science (level 6) degree apprenticeships being delivered across a number of universities in England.**

For more information about careers in healthcare science visit [www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/careers-in-healthcare-science](http://www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/careers-in-healthcare-science)

## Healthcare Science Assistant (Level 2)

Healthcare science (HCS) assistant apprentices also achieve the mandatory level 2 diploma in healthcare science and typically take between 12 and 18 months to complete the apprenticeship. Entry requirements may include GCSEs, or equivalent level 2 vocational qualifications, that demonstrate good literacy, numeracy and IT skills. Apprentices without level 1 English and maths (equivalent to GCSEs at grades D to G) will need to achieve this prior to completion.

## Healthcare Science Associate (Level 4)

HCS associate apprentices also achieve the mandatory level 4 diploma in healthcare science and typically take about 24 months to complete the apprenticeship. Entry requirements are likely to include functional or key skills level 2 or GCSEs at grade A\*-C. Training providers may ask for at least one 'A' level in science or biology, or relevant level 3 vocational qualification in HCS. Apprentices without level 2 English and maths (equivalent to GCSEs at grades A\* to C) will need to achieve this prior to completion.

## Healthcare Science Practitioner - Degree apprenticeship (Level 6)

HCS practitioner apprenticeship leads to a BSc (honours) degree in healthcare science and typically take three years to complete. Entry requirements are set by the university and are likely to include GCSE (or equivalent) mathematics, English language or literature, and a science subject at grade C or grade 4, or above, plus 2 or 3 'A' levels (or equivalent). Universities may accept other criteria such as the successful completion of a healthcare science assistant apprenticeship other laboratory based NVQ's, or sufficient relevant experience in the workplace accompanied with some level 3 study. Employers may be able to negotiate entry criteria for staff who do not have the standard entry requirements.



# Things to consider

## Pay

For higher and degree level apprenticeships, including nurse apprenticeships, there is an emerging preference from employers to ensure some consistency over pay.

As there are no formal agreements in place at the moment, any pay offer will need to look at the context of the work and duties the apprentices will be carrying out as well as any relevant guidance. This may require a job evaluation for the roles to help ensure equal pay requirements are met.



Here are two options that employers could apply locally.

### Option 1

The apprentices start below the qualifying band for the role. Each year they move up a band as they progress and their skills develop.

### Option 2

Apprentices are placed on the qualifying pay band and paid at a percentage of that rate. Each year the percentage increases incrementally as their skills develop.

In both options the apprentices would be paid at the appropriate banding rate upon qualifying. For existing staff there could be a variation to these arrangements due to the rules around protected earnings and depending on which band they start from.

## Off-the-job training

All apprenticeships must stay a minimum of 12 months and involve at least 20 per cent off-the-job training, which is measured over the course of the apprenticeship.

While actual delivery of the training can be handled by a provider or the employer, it is the employer's responsibility to ensure apprentices receive off-the-job training for a minimum of 20 per cent of the time they are paid to work.

Details of what qualifies as off-the-job training can be found at [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).



## Recruiting

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If you are looking to target young people with your recruitment activity for apprenticeship programmes, there are a range of recruitment materials and advice available to help you. For more information visit [ThinkFuture](#).

Social media can be used to create or strengthen your employer brand and to attract talent to your organisation. Read about [using social media to recruit](#).

As well as academic ability, you may also want to look at how an applicant's values sit with those of your organisations. Visit our [values based recruitment](#) web pages for information and a range of resources.

Recruiting from all areas of your local community helps to build a diverse workforce which is more representative of the people your organisation serves. To help you understand the make-up of your local community, use our measuring up tool ([www.nhsemployers.org/measuringup](http://www.nhsemployers.org/measuringup)) and related advice and guidance.

## Advertising

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When advertising apprenticeship opportunities, it is worthwhile considering the points on page five which look at the benefits for the learner. Don't just advertise in the normal places and remember that universities can advertise degree apprenticeship vacancies on their websites.

Some employers are now advertising their degree apprenticeship vacancies via the [UCAS career finder](#).

Not Going to Uni is a website aimed at students leaving school and college who are not sure which route to take. The organisation works with employers to advertise a range of opportunities that exist outside of traditional university learning, including apprenticeships. Visit [notgoingtouni.co.uk](http://notgoingtouni.co.uk) for more information.

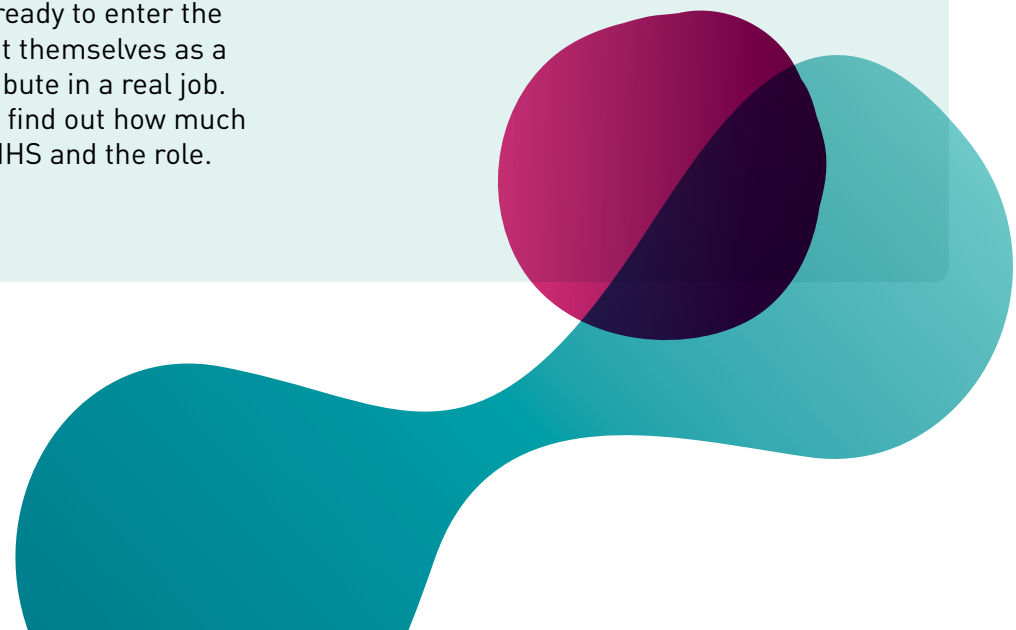


# Top tips

**Remember that you are offering an opportunity that has the potential to be the foundation of a rewarding professional career in the NHS.**

You don't want to set anyone up to fail - so here are things to consider to help you decide if your candidates are ready to complete a degree apprenticeship, and how you can support them.

- With a range of study options available, find out why candidates want to take the apprenticeship route.
- Do the applicants have a genuine interest in what they are studying? Those that do will find it more rewarding, which improves their chances of success and remaining with the employer post-graduation.
- A degree apprenticeship is just as academically challenging as a traditional degree, as it provides the same qualification. You can set some basic grade thresholds, or test for numerical and reasoning skills, to help establish if candidates have the required ability.
- You don't just want academically strong applicants, maturity is also important. Applicants should be ready to enter the workplace and present themselves as a person who can contribute in a real job. Ask open questions to find out how much they know about the NHS and the role.
- If the applicants are new to your organisation don't forget their character is important – they need to be dedicated enough to work and study at the same time, and share the values of your organisation.
- Higher education providers don't only support learning and development but also have support services that degree apprentices should have access to. Find out what pastoral care, information and advice they offer to students and make sure your apprentices are aware.
- Recruit from the widest field possible by advertising in a range of places. Recruiting from your local community can also be hugely beneficial in helping your organisation tackle its workforce supply challenges.



# Next steps

**The introduction of the apprenticeship levy will lead to changes in how employers view and use apprenticeships. For higher education providers this new income stream could see many adapt to ensure they can meet employers' needs.**

If you want to read about the rules surrounding apprenticeship funding and procurement please visit our [apprenticeships policy](#) webpages.



## Engage universities so they can better understand your needs as an employer

If degree apprenticeships are to meet your needs as an employer, it is important that you talk to the universities you are partnered with.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), with funding from the government, has set up the Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund to help and encourage higher education providers to engage with employers and professional bodies.

This fund will be used to support universities to make the cultural and behavioural changes needed to embed degree apprenticeships, improve capability and capacity, and increase the number of degree apprenticeships available for delivery.

## Work collaboratively with universities and other NHS organisations

Most universities employ staff whose role is to develop and maintain relationships with businesses. It is also in the interest of universities to position themselves to attract the best students, but only where the numbers of applicants are right.

If demand is low in your trust, it might be worth scoping the level of interest across your region to deliver particular apprenticeships. Where there is interest, you can work with partner trusts to provide the numbers to make it worthwhile for the university, and to also use collective purchasing power to procure the best deal.



## Explore how universities can promote degree apprenticeships

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There is still a lack of awareness among some employers and the public about degree apprenticeships. As the qualifications become more popular it may help to engage with promotional and marketing teams within universities to advertise degree apprenticeships.

Within your organisation, universities may be able to provide information and raise awareness among your staff and potential learners about degree apprenticeship opportunities.

Have a discussion with your university partners about the ways in which they can help.

## Employers should consider how degree apprenticeships can contribute to a sustainable workforce supply strategy

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Apprenticeships should be included as part of a sustainable workforce supply strategy. Our [📄 domestic briefing](#) provides information about the changing context and policies that are designed to incentivise investment in skills and help overcome long standing workforce supply issues.

For example, Step into Health connects employers in the NHS to talent from the armed forces community. Degree apprenticeships could support this initiative and help to engage work-ready personnel who have transferable skills and cultural values that are compatible with those within the NHS. Find out more at [📄 Step into Health](#).

**Universities have a clear role to help make employers and learners aware of degree apprenticeships. Universities and colleges can provide information, advice and guidance to help with this.**





**NHS Employers is the voice of employers in the NHS,  
supporting them to put patients first.**

We actively seek the views of employers on key workforce issues and use our expertise to support them to develop a sustainable workforce, improve staff experience and provide high-quality care to patients. We influence workforce policy at regional, national and European levels and turn policies into practical workable solutions.

NHS Employers is part of the NHS Confederation.

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