

Apprenticeships After Year 11: A Guide for Students

What is an Apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a paid job that combines employment with training and study. As an apprentice, you will work for an employer, earn a salary, gain valuable workplace experience, and gain qualifications that are recognised across your chosen industry.

Apprenticeships are available in a wide range of sectors including engineering, construction, healthcare, business, finance, digital technology, hospitality, education, manufacturing, marketing, and many more.

Apprentices typically spend most of their time working alongside experienced colleagues while also completing training through a college, training provider, or online learning platform.

Why Choose an Apprenticeship?

Apprenticeships offer many benefits, including:

- Earning a salary while learning
- Gaining valuable workplace experience
- Achieving nationally recognised qualifications
- Developing practical skills employers value
- Building professional networks and contacts
- Progressing to higher qualifications and career opportunities
- Avoiding university tuition fees while continuing your education

Apprentices are employees and receive the same workplace rights as other members of staff, including paid holidays and employment protections.

Apprenticeship Levels Explained

There are several levels of apprenticeship available in England, allowing students to progress throughout their careers.

Level 2 – Intermediate Apprenticeship - Equivalent to: GCSEs (Grades 4-9)

This is often the starting point for students leaving Year 11. Intermediate apprenticeships provide foundation knowledge and practical skills within a chosen industry.

Typical duration: 12 to 18 months

Level 3 – Advanced Apprenticeship - Equivalent to: A Levels

Advanced apprenticeships build on existing skills and knowledge and prepare apprentices for skilled roles within their industry.

Typical duration: 18 to 48 months

Levels 4 and 5 – Higher Apprenticeship - Equivalent to: Foundation Degree, Higher National Certificate (HNC), or Higher National Diploma (HND)

Higher apprenticeships provide advanced technical and professional training and are often undertaken after completing a Level 3 qualification.

Levels 6 and 7 – Degree Apprenticeship - Equivalent to: Bachelor's Degree or Master's Degree

Degree apprenticeships allow individuals to achieve a university degree while working full-time. Tuition fees are funded through the apprenticeship programme, meaning apprentices can gain a degree without paying university tuition fees.

Can I Apply for an Apprenticeship After Year 11?

Yes. Students can apply for apprenticeships from the age of 16 once they have completed Year 11.

Many employers recruit school leavers directly into Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeship programmes. These opportunities can be highly competitive, so it is important to start researching and applying early.

How to Apply for an Apprenticeship

Step 1: Explore Career Options

Consider the following questions:

- What subjects do I enjoy?
- What skills am I good at?
- What type of work environment would suit me?
- Which industries interest me?

Research different careers and apprenticeship pathways before applying.

Step 2: Search for Apprenticeship Vacancies

The Government's Find an Apprenticeship service is the main source of apprenticeship vacancies.

Students can search for opportunities by:

- Location
- Career sector
- Employer
- Apprenticeship level

Many employers also advertise vacancies directly through their own websites.

Step 3: Prepare Your CV

A strong CV should include:

- Personal details
- Education and predicted GCSE grades
- Work experience placements
- Volunteering activities
- Extracurricular achievements
- Skills and interests

Employers are often looking for evidence of teamwork, communication skills, reliability, commitment, and a positive attitude.

Step 4: Complete Applications Carefully

Take time to complete each application thoroughly.

Check spelling and grammar and ensure your answers explain:

- Why you are interested in the role
- Why you want to work for that employer
- What skills and qualities you can bring

Tailor your application to each vacancy rather than using the same answers for every application.

Step 5: Prepare for Interviews

If shortlisted, you may be invited to:

- An interview
- Online assessments
- Skills tests
- Assessment centres

Before an interview:

- Research the employer
- Review the apprenticeship role
- Prepare examples of your achievements and experiences
- Practise common interview questions

Step 6: Accept an Offer

Successful applicants will receive an apprenticeship agreement outlining:

- Salary
- Working hours
- Training arrangements
- Qualification details
- Start date

Top Tips for Success

- Start Early
- Many apprenticeship vacancies for September start dates are advertised during Year 11. Begin researching opportunities during the autumn term.
- Focus on Your GCSEs
- Good GCSE grades, particularly in English and Maths, can improve your chances of securing competitive apprenticeship opportunities.
- Gain Experience

- Part-time work, volunteering, sports leadership, school clubs, and work experience placements all help strengthen applications.
- Apply for Multiple Opportunities
- Apprenticeships can be competitive. Applying for several suitable vacancies increases your chances of success.
- Keep an Open Mind

Many successful careers begin with a Level 2 apprenticeship and progress through higher-level qualifications over time. An apprenticeship can provide a pathway all the way to degree-level study.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I be paid?

Yes. Apprentices are employees and receive a salary from their employer.

Can I go to university later?

Yes. Many apprentices progress through Higher and Degree Apprenticeships or choose to attend university later in their careers.

Are apprenticeships only for trades?

No. Apprenticeships are available across hundreds of career areas including business, law, accountancy, healthcare, cyber security, engineering, marketing, digital technology, and education.

How long does an apprenticeship last?

Most apprenticeships last between one and four years depending on the level and occupation.

Useful Websites (and see Websites tab for more suggestions)

Government Apprenticeships Service: <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk>

National Careers Service: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk>

UCAS Apprenticeships: <https://www.ucas.com/apprenticeships>

Need Further Advice?

Students interested in apprenticeships are encouraged to speak with the school's Careers Adviser or Careers Leader, who can provide guidance on career pathways, application support, CV writing, and interview preparation. Please also sign up for the Sussex Apprenticeship Bootcamp!