The Complete Guide to Higher and Degree Apprenticeships
Higher and degree apprenticeships: the basics
If you thought apprenticeships were just for 16 year-olds leaving school, it’s time to take another look

Apprenticeships offer a valid alternative to university, with the qualifications to match. If you choose a degree apprenticeship, you still get to graduate with your cap and gown, along with several years of work experience under your belt.

First and foremost, though, an apprenticeship is a job with substantial training and the development of transferable skills. It’s a way to earn and learn, gaining a real qualification, long-term career path and the possibility for higher earnings.

And, best of all, no university debts: you’ll have been earning for the length of your apprenticeship and there are no tuition fees.

What is an apprenticeship, exactly?
An apprenticeship is a combined package of work and study. As an apprentice, you’ll be employed by a company and paid a wage for the work that you do. Apprentices are entitled to the same rights as other employees: a contract of employment and at least 20 days paid holiday per year, plus bank holidays. Apprenticeships are available across the UK, but this guide focuses on England.

How does it work?
You’ll spend most of the week at work (usually a minimum of 30 hours) watching, learning and getting stuck in. You will be learning from colleagues across all levels of the business, typically working closely with someone more senior who will review your progress and coach you.

You’ll also spend time attending college, a university or training provider, training at work or online. Some apprenticeships use a combination of options; your employer will decide which method works best.

The Institute for Apprenticeships is an independent public body which works to ensure apprenticeships are the best they can be. It develops apprenticeship standards with employers that meet the needs of the companies and learners alike.

What grades do I need?
Enter requirements vary from programme to programme, and depend on the sector and prior skills. If you have achieved A-levels you may still be expected to start at intermediate or advanced level as some sectors, such as engineering, require you to build up your occupational skills. See examples of entry requirements:

- Unilever requires five GCSEs including English and maths and two A-levels
- Deloitte requires five GCSEs including maths and English Language, grade 4 or above (previously grade C or higher) as well as 104 Ucas points (previously 260 pre 2017 Ucas system).

What could I earn?
If you’re aged 16–18, or aged 19 or over and in the first year of your apprenticeship, you’ll earn at least the minimum wage for apprentices (£3.50 per hour, rising to £3.70 per hour from April 2018).

Many companies pay more than this, particularly for higher level apprenticeships:

- An aerospace engineering apprentice at BAE Systems UK can earn £22,975 per year.
- A higher accountancy apprentice can earn over £13,000 per year.
- A software engineer apprentice can earn £14,500 per year.

In fact, you could potentially earn upwards of £300 per week plus your employer and the government pay your tuition fees, meaning no university loans for you!

In contrast, English students taking a full-time university degree pay a maximum of £9,250 per year in tuition fees.

Many employers advertise roles with a ‘competitive salary’. This could mean the salary and benefits will be in line with similar roles for other organisations, or that it depends on your current skills and experience.

Benefits could include a pension, access to a car, leisure facilities or a relocation allowance if you have to move.

Apprenticeship discounts
You’ll be classed as an employee, rather than a student, so you won’t be entitled to student discounts, but the National Union of Students (NUS) has an Apprentice Extra Card. For £11 per year you can get discounts on lots of brands. See more at apprenticeextra.co.uk. You may also be eligible for discounts on public transport. Many local schemes are available, like the Apprentice Oyster photo card in London, which gives apprentices 30% off certain journeys.

87 per cent of higher (Level 4 plus) apprentices were satisfied with their apprenticeship.**
Got what it takes to be the next apprentice?

You’ve heard what an apprenticeship is, but how do you know if it’s right for you?

An apprenticeship is not the easy option. You’ll be starting a challenging job and trying to prove yourself in the workplace, while getting to grips with studying for a degree. You will be expected to achieve academically and at work, managing your time and adjusting to longer hours with fewer holidays than at school or university. You might have to travel or relocate to find the right opportunity for you.

What are employers looking for?
An apprenticeship is actually designed by employers, meaning you’ll be developing the right skills and knowledge to be a success in your chosen industry. They’re looking for personal aptitude and enthusiasm rather than just your academic ability; in fact, some employers don’t ask for specific grades at all. It helps if you have a particular interest in the area you want to work in and can demonstrate this from previous experience. Anything that can demonstrate your interest and your readiness for work could help you stand out from the crowd.

Which level is the right level?
There are various levels of apprenticeship you could apply for (see table, right). Some courses could be up to four, five or six years long.

Which higher level apprenticeships are available?
There are more than 100 apprenticeship types available. From accounting to aerospace engineering, new apprenticeships are being developed all the time with more highly skilled apprenticeships popping up each year.

Big companies like Rolls Royce, GlaxoSmithKline, Goldman Sachs and BAE Systems offer degree apprenticeships, but you’ll also find smaller companies offering them, too.

As well as being flexible and adaptable to suit changing business needs at work, you’ll also need to be self-motivated during independent study, and be prepared to put what you learn into practice.

Sought-after skills and qualities
- Teamwork
- Collaboration
- Interpersonal skills
- Enthusiasm
- Motivation
- Communication
- Analysis
- Creative solutions
- Attention to detail
- Logical thinking
- Initiative

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Equivalent educational level</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 GCSE passes (grade A*-C or 9–4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 A-level passes/Level 3 Diploma/International Baccalaureate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>4, 5, 6 and 7</td>
<td>Foundation degree and above</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>6 and 7</td>
<td>Bachelor’s or master’s degree</td>
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* Statistics from GOV.UK
“University had always been the expected route for me and something which my school had pushed. When I just missed my university offers with AABB grades I was devastated and considered entirely rethinking pursuing the technology route. Since joining Capgemini as an apprentice, I’ve gained so much. I’ve achieved a university degree but also worked on my professional skills, been able to travel, and really developed in confidence.”

James Gee, Higher Apprentice, Software Engineering, Capgemini

“When I first started my apprenticeship I knew I wanted to work in engineering, and I thought I would likely go down the manufacturing/theory route but my apprenticeship enabled me to maximise my experience by rotating around different parts of the business including finance and marketing. This granted me a good insight into how the company is run and ultimately allowed me to realise the area that best suited my skills.”

Holly Broadhurst, Higher Design Engineering Apprentice, JC Bamford Excavators

“Apprenticeships allow us to attract the very best of talent and to keep it, through a focus on upskilling the entire workforce regardless of age or role. We’ll continue to promote apprenticeships as the right thing for our employees and our company.”

Barry Norris, Training and Development Director, Mitie

“We took on apprentices because it was the right thing to do; for social mobility, improved staff retention and for the future of our business. But what’s amazed us most is how well the apprentices have performed. They still surprise us every day.”

Sam Lee, Head of Recruitment, Bond Dickinson LLP

“I chose an apprenticeship because university is an expensive route to take. I am also aware many employers value relevant work experience when hiring new staff, particularly in the scientific field. The apprenticeship scheme has allowed me to earn while I learn and gain industry experience far beyond what I would’ve gained at university.”

Charlotte Hughes, GlaxoSmithKline, Higher and Degree Apprentice of the Year 2017
What’s on offer: subjects

At a glance: higher and degree apprenticeship sectors

Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care  Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
Arts, Media and Publishing  Health, Public Services and Care
Business, Administration and Law  Information and Communication Technology
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment  Retail and Commercial Enterprise
Education and Training  Science and Mathematics

In detail: subjects and professions

Accounting  Facilities Management
Actuarial Technician  Financial Adviser
Advanced Dairy Technologist  Financial Services Professional
Aerospace Engineer  Food Industry Technical Professional
Aerospace Software Development Engineer  Healthcare Assistant Practitioner
Agriculture  Healthcare Science Associate
Airline Maintenance Certifying Engineer  Healthcare Science Practitioner
Assistant Technical Director (Visual Effects)  High Speed Rail & Infrastructure Technician
Associate Ambulance Practitioner  Hospitality Manager
Associate Project Manager  HR Consultant / Partner
Aviation Operations Manager  Human Resource Management
Bespoke Tailor And Cutter  Insurance Professional
Broadcasting Technology  Intelligence Operations
Building Services Design Engineer  Investment Operations Specialist
Business And Professional Administration  IS Business Analyst
Care Leadership And Management  IT, Software, Web & Telecoms Professionals
Chartered Legal Executive  Junior 2D Artist (Visual Effects)
Chartered Manager  Junior Management Consultant
Chartered Surveyor  Laboratory Scientist
Civil Engineer  Laboratory Scientist
Commercial Procurement And Supply  Legal Services
Construction Management  Licensed Conveyancer
Control / Technical Support Engineer  Life Sciences And Chemical Science Professionals
Conveyancing Technician  Management
Creative And Digital Media  Manufacturing Engineer
Cyber Intrusion Analyst  Manufacturing Engineering
Cyber Security Technologist  Mineral Products Technology
Data Analyst  Network Engineer
Dental Practice Manager  Non-Destructive Testing Engineer
Dental Technician  Nuclear Scientist And Nuclear Engineer
Digital And Technology Solutions Professional  Nuclear Technician
Digital Learning Design  Nuclear Welding Inspection Technician
Electrical / Electronic Technical Support Engineer  Nursing Associate
Electrical Power Networks Engineer  Operations / Departmental Manager
Electrical Power Protection And Plant Commissioning Engineer  Outside Broadcasting Engineer
Embedded Electronic Systems Design And Development Engineer  Paraplaner

Passenger Transport Operations Manager  Retail Manager
Policy Office  Road Transport Engineering Manager
Postgraduate Engineer  School Business Professional
Power Engineer  Senior Compliance / Risk Specialist
Probate Technician  Senior Housing / Property Management
Process Automation Engineer  Senior Insurance Professional
Product Design And Development Engineer  Social Media And Digital Marketing
Professional Accounting Taxation Technician  Software Developer
Professional Services  Software Tester
Project Management  Solicitor
Public Relations  Supply Chain Management
Public Sector Commercial Professional  Sustainable Resource Operations And Management
Rail Engineering Advanced Technician  Systems Engineering Masters Level
Recruitment  Teacher
Registered Nurse  The Water Industry
Relationship Manager (Banking)  Unified Communications Trouble Shooter

Please note that this information is correct as of publication. For an up-to-date list please visit [gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship](http://gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship)
What’s on offer: unis and employers

**Universities**

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<tr>
<th>University Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ada, the National College for Digital Skills</td>
<td>University of Bedfordshire</td>
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<td>Anglia Ruskin University</td>
<td>University of Bradford</td>
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<td>Aston University</td>
<td>University of Cambridge</td>
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<td>Bath Spa University</td>
<td>University of Central Lancashire</td>
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<td>Birkbeck College</td>
<td>University of Chester</td>
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<td>Birmingham City University</td>
<td>University of Chichester</td>
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<td>Bournemouth University</td>
<td>University College of Birmingham</td>
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<td>BPP University</td>
<td>University of Cumbria</td>
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<td>University of Derby</td>
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<td>Buckinghamshire New University</td>
<td>University of Durham</td>
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<td>Canterbury Christ Church University</td>
<td>University of East Anglia</td>
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<td>City, University Of London</td>
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<td>Coventry University</td>
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<td>Cranfield University</td>
<td>University of Exeter</td>
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<td>De Montfort University</td>
<td>University of Gloucestershire</td>
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<td>Edge Hill University</td>
<td>University of Greenwich</td>
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<td>Harper Adams University</td>
<td>University of Hertfordshire</td>
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<td>Imperial College Of Science, Technology And Medicine</td>
<td>University of Huddersfield</td>
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<td>Kingston University</td>
<td>University of Hull</td>
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<td>Leeds Beckett University</td>
<td>University of Keele</td>
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<td>Leeds Trinity University</td>
<td>University of Kent</td>
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<td>Liverpool John Moores University</td>
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<td>London Business School</td>
<td>University of Leeds</td>
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<td>London Metropolitan University</td>
<td>University of Lincoln</td>
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<td>London South Bank University</td>
<td>University of Newcastle Upon Tyne</td>
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<td>Loughborough University</td>
<td>University of Northampton</td>
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<td>Manchester Metropolitan University</td>
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<td>Middlesex University</td>
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<td>Nottingham Trent University</td>
<td>University of Plymouth</td>
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<td>The Open University</td>
<td>University of Portsmouth</td>
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<td>Oxford Brookes University</td>
<td>University of Reading</td>
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<td>Plymouth College Of Art</td>
<td>University of Salford</td>
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<td>Queen Mary University Of London</td>
<td>University of Sheffield</td>
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<td>Ravensbourne Limited</td>
<td>University of Southampton</td>
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<td>Sheffield Hallam University</td>
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<td>Southampton Solent University</td>
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<td>Staffordshire University</td>
<td>University of Warwick</td>
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<td>Teesside University</td>
<td>University of West London</td>
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<td>The Royal Agricultural University</td>
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<td>University of Bath</td>
<td>University of Wolverhampton</td>
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<td>University of Bedfordshire</td>
<td>University of Winchester</td>
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<td>University of Birmingham</td>
<td>University of Worcester</td>
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<td>University of Bolton</td>
<td>Writtle College</td>
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<td>York St John University</td>
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**Examples of employers offering apprenticeships**

| Accenture | Fujitsu | Royal Air Force |
| AECOM | GCHQ | Royal Navy |
| Airbus | GE | Sainsbury’s |
| Arcadis | Grant Thornton | Santander |
| Balfour Beatty | JCB | Sky |
| Barclays | KPMG LLP | Staffordshire University |
| BBC | Laing O’Rourke | Tesco |
| BDO | Lloyds Banking Group | Thales |
| Boots | Mace | Transport for London |
| BT | Marks & Spencer | Troup Bywaters + Anders |
| Capgemini | McCann Worldgroup | TUI |
| CGI | National College for High Speed Railway | Unilever |
| Cisco | Nestlé | Virgin Media |
| Civil Service Fast Track | Network Rail | Vodafone |
| Deloitte | OMG | Wates |
| Dentus Aegis | PwC | Wessex Water |
| Dyson | QA | Willis Towers Watson |
| EDF Energy | Renishaw | WSP |
| EY | Rolls-Royce | |

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Over the past three years, 56,200 people have started a higher or degree apprenticeship. The government has pledged to create 3 million apprenticeships across all levels by 2020."
A week in the life

There’s no such thing as a typical week, or even day, in the life of an apprentice.

From travelling to an office in another city, meeting with clients to visiting a construction site: who knows what you might be doing next. Employers expect a lot, but no-one expects you to know how to do the job already. That’s what the apprenticeship is for, after all. The organisation you work for should help you to adjust to your new working life with induction programmes or personal development activities to help you get started. Later on, you’ll meet buddies or mentors who you can turn to for support.

“A typical day could see me sketching up ideas on paper or Computer Aided Design (CAD) software, transferring them to engineer drawings, completing stress analysis calculations, writing user instructions or conducting a risk assessment on the design - essentially, anything that goes into the design of that machine.”
Adam Sharp, Advanced Level Mechanical Design Apprentice and National Advanced Apprentice of the Year 2017, Sellafield

“My role as an apprentice is highly varied. I work across commercial and private banking on large change projects and for the past 18 months, I’ve been leading part of a large project on improving customer information security across the bank. I’ve been able to work with some of the most senior managers in the bank and it’s been a great learning curve for me.”
Ross Aynsley, Degree Apprentice Graduate, Banking and Finance, Royal Bank of Scotland

“We’re getting a high level of academic performance from apprentices on our programme as the relevance of the material is immediate.”
Ian Nabney, Deputy Dean, School of Engineering and Applied Science, Aston University

“Jaguar Landrover apprentices spend most of their first year at college, learning the fundamentals of engineering. Practical experience of the workplace takes place in a manufacturing plant or vehicle workshop outside term-time. Attendance at college drops down to two days per week in the second year, while attendance at work increases. This is later followed by block-release study towards BEng Applied Engineering at University of Warwick.”
Engineering Degree Apprenticeship, Jaguar Landrover

“The CapGemini programme starts with a seven-week block of residential practical training attended by apprentices working for various different employers. Apprentices get to network, make friends and learn from each other. For those based in the same towns or cities, some even move into shared accommodation afterwards. After this, the programme is delivered online by Aston University through recorded lectures, online tutorials and case studies. Online seminars and tutorials might take place in the evening. Each week, apprentices are expected to do at least five hours learning and an additional five hours self-study, on top of their full-time job.”
Digital and Technology Solutions Degree Apprenticeship, CapGemini
Your long-term career prospects

What kind of difference could an apprenticeship make to your life in the long-run?

Although no-one knows exactly what the future holds, the prospects for higher and degree apprentices look bright. One of the reasons businesses take on apprentices at this level is that they need a highly-skilled workforce. This is a good thing for the company but also for you. Exactly what happens after an apprenticeship will depend on your employer and your contract. Many higher and degree apprenticeship programmes are designed to develop the leaders and managers of the future. The experiences you gain as an apprentice can provide a springboard towards promotions and higher level opportunities.

After several years working with managers and peers, experiencing various aspects of the business and developing the essential skills and knowledge, you should have become a very valuable employee. It’s not unusual for an ex-apprentice to work their way up to the boardroom. Former apprentices are particularly well represented in senior management teams in construction, engineering and energy. 30% of the senior UK managers at Rolls Royce started out at the company as apprentices. Remember to make sure you keep track of the key skills and experience you’ve gained for your growing CV.

“My apprenticeship has, quite frankly, changed my life. My confidence has grown from being a very shy person to being able to present in front of both client directors and in local schools to help promote apprenticeships. Family and friends have noticed that I have grown as a person. I can honestly say that without this apprenticeship I would not be the person I am today.”

Joshua White, Business Analyst, IBM

“My apprenticeship has offered endless development opportunities. I would never have thought that by the age of 21 I would be given the chance to manage a team, travel to BT offices abroad and contribute to the business economy”.

Memona Mohammad, Higher Apprentice, Technology, Service and Operations, BT

“I’m very ambitious about my future. I started at university in September, studying a BEng in Computer Aided Engineering. Without my apprenticeship, I wouldn’t be the confident, mature, challenge-driven individual I am today: greatest decision of my life.”

Jade Aspinall, Manufacturing Engineer, MBDA UK

“The degree apprenticeship has been designed by employers to teach students the cutting-edge technical skills that they need to stay ahead in an ever-changing market. This means that the sky really is the limit for those who graduate from a degree apprenticeship and businesses are benefiting from the skills that they bring from day one.”

Sasha Morgan Manley, Managing Director, Morgan Manley Ltd
How to apply and next steps

Raring to go? Here’s how to make an application - and be successful

With so many opportunities on offer there are several ways you can find the apprenticeship that’s right for you.

Where to apply
For apprenticeship opportunities local to you and further afield go to ‘Find an Apprenticeship’ on GOV.UK. Once you register you can set up email and text alerts to inform you about new apprenticeship roles.

You can also find a range of vacancies at ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk, as well as over 12,000 reviews. It’s worth checking directly on employer recruitment sites too.

Head over to amazingapprenticeships.com to use ‘Vacancy snapshot’ which provides useful information on well-known employers which may help you with your application.

When to apply
Unlike university applications, there is no fixed deadline when it comes to applying for apprenticeships. Vacancies appear throughout the year.

Don’t wait until the deadline to apply, some companies close their recruitment as soon as they have sufficient candidates.

As a general rule, vacancies with larger companies start appearing in the autumn, but the majority pop up from January or February onwards. Smaller businesses might start recruiting a month or two before the job starts, so if you hope to start work in August or September, you might start looking from Easter onwards.

Do check start dates closely, to make sure you’ll have finished school or college. Start your research early – the sooner the better, so you have time to fill any gaps in your CV with the things employers are typically looking for (see page four), including getting some relevant work experience.

Stay focused
It’s really quite normal to have some doubts and nerves about the process, especially around spring-time, when your friends have their university offers and you might still be waiting to find the right vacancy to apply to.

Don’t panic! Keep calm and focus on making a great application when the right opportunity arises. Remember this is a competitive process: you’re applying for a job, so make sure you sell yourself as best you can.

The recruitment process
There can be a number of hurdles to leap before you even get to a face-to-face interview: an application form, online tests, perhaps a phone or online interview, before heading to an assessment day.

You might find that smaller organisations have a slightly more informal or personal process, perhaps involving an initial written application, followed by face-to-face interview stages if you’re shortlisted. Good luck!

APPLICATION TIPS

- Clearly read the job description, making note of key points such as entry requirements and ‘essential’ qualities
- Research the company beforehand, so you understand its key areas and priorities
- Include relevant experiences and skills
- Be specific and give examples to demonstrate what you have to offer
- Back up your statements with evidence
- Use an appropriate email address and voicemail message on your phone
- Regularly log on to your account to track your applications
- Don’t let emails end up in your junk folder
- Don’t undersell yourself. Be confident (but honest!) about your abilities.

‘Find an Apprenticeship’ has between 12,000 and 20,000 vacancies listed at any one time.*

If you have a specific query you can also contact the National Apprenticeship Helpdesk on 0800 015 0400 or email nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk.

* Statistics from GOV.UK