



*A simple guide to*  
Starting an Apprenticeship  
programme from scratch

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## **Who is this guide for?**

Employers, especially HR Managers and Apprenticeship Managers.



## **Is there a simple roadmap for setting up an apprenticeship programme?**

Every organisation is different so it's difficult to recommend a one-size-fits-all solution, however we think there are six steps (not necessarily linear) to developing an apprenticeship programme:

- Get your strategy right
- Identify your Learning & Development needs
- Get to grips with the financials
- Choose your provider(s)
- Get senior management on board
- Communicate with the business

Each of these steps is of course a meaty project in its own right, but this list does provide some simple headings for you to focus on in establishing a new programme. The following questions will help you think about some of the issues that fall under these headings.

## **How long will it take to develop an apprenticeship programme?**

Unsurprisingly there is no hard or fast answer to this question. It may be helpful to start with a desired implementation date and work your way back from that in terms of project planning and milestones.

Once you start scoping everything out you may be surprised at the number of internal functions and systems impacted by the introduction of an apprenticeship programme. You must factor in time for change management, training and new systems development as well as time for procurement and recruitment.

That said, an apprenticeship programme should be constantly evolving and as more new standards come through there will continually be exciting opportunities to develop your programme. Plus, if this is an entirely new area for you it is to be expected that there will be some trial and error and there is nothing to stop you tweaking and improving your apprenticeship programme post launch, so be agile.

## **Where do we start in putting together a project team?**

The composition of your project team may shift and evolve at different stages of the process. However, if you are looking to employ a large number of apprentices at different levels and within different parts of the business, it would be wise to involve qualified project managers and technical experts from the beginning. This ensures that planning is both robust and comprehensive, that you have identified all your key stakeholders, and planned how to communicate with them.

We would also recommend having a senior sponsor to ensure that your programme receives the profile and push it needs within the business.

## **What sorts of things should we be considering as part of our strategy?**

There are lots of questions to address in the early planning stages, such as:

- How many apprentices would you like to/ can you afford to bring into the business?
- Are you willing to offer flexible or part-time apprenticeships or will they all be full-time?
- What are your skills requirements now and in the future?
- How will you procure providers?
- What apprenticeship standards would you like to offer?
- What levels of apprenticeship do you wish to offer?
- How do you want apprenticeships to sit within the business?
- How do they fit in with your workforce strategy?
- How can you align apprenticeships with graduate entry?
- How do apprenticeships fit with internal training?
- What is your approach to social mobility?
- How will you measure return on investment?
- How do you ensure they are aligned with your wider Learning & Development strategy?
- Could any of your internal training programmes be a precursor to an apprenticeship?



## **How does an apprenticeship programme sit with Learning & Development strategy?**

It's important to have a clear view of how apprenticeships fit with your wider L&D strategy to avoid duplication. Your apprenticeship programme should be new, different or add value. Perhaps it's about bringing different types and different ages into your business. It might seem difficult to reconcile what is essentially an England-only initiative within a global operation, but you may be able to map global L&D content onto apprentice standards. Indeed the type of exciting innovation you are likely to implement through your apprenticeship strategy may well have scope for extension globally too.

## **Should we use apprenticeships to attract new talent into the business or use them as reward and development for existing staff?**

This is entirely up to you and the needs of your business, but there is nothing to stop you doing a mixture of both. It is worth remembering though that an apprenticeship is a high-quality, high-investment bit of training and therefore not suitable to meet remediation needs for staff who are underperforming. On the contrary, you should be looking to offer these precious opportunities to members of staff you actively want to retain, facilitating career trajectory within your company.

## **What kind of KPIs should we be setting for our apprenticeship programme?**

It's important to track the success of your apprenticeship programme and have the ability to report on Return on Investment. At Pearson, our KPIs for the programme itself centre on:

- Employee retention
- Employee engagement
- Social mobility within the business
- Take-up of additional learning.

## **How do I create the right culture for apprenticeships within my organisation?**

Three words: sponsorship, communication, expectations. It is crucial to have ambassadors among senior leadership so that everyone within the business recognises that apprenticeships have support at the highest level.

You should work up an internal marketing plan from the beginning to create ongoing awareness and excitement about your apprenticeship programme. Educate your workforce about modern apprenticeships, update perceptions and highlight the benefits they'll bring including internal development opportunities. You may need to segment your audiences and use all available channels of communication - from a good old fashioned brochure to video and your intranet. Finally, it is important to set the expectations of what an apprentice should be doing and what support they will need with the recruiting manager to avoid a dissonance between manager expectation and apprentice capacity.

## **What 'behind-the-scenes' work needs to occur to make implementation of our apprenticeship programme possible?**

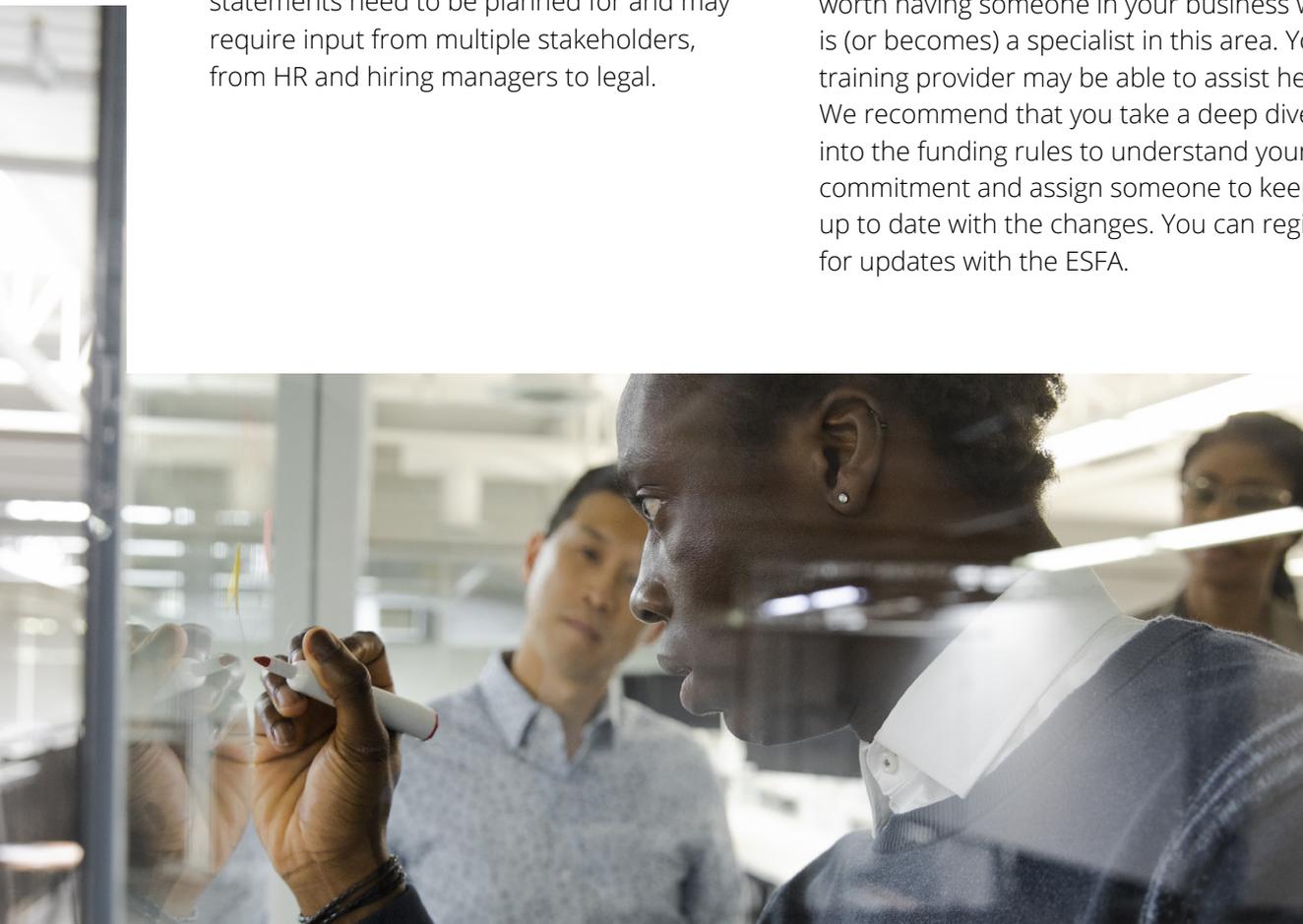
There is likely to be a large piece of work to do around recruitment and selection. This could take the form of training for talent acquisition teams who may not be used to recruiting in this way, or configuring of internal systems and technology so that they align with your apprenticeship goals. You might also consider aligning your recruitment traction strategy with the National Apprenticeship Service website for example.

If you decide that initial assessment of candidates is to be carried out by your organisation as opposed to by your training providers or a third-party agency then capacity and systems must be arranged for this. Similarly, contracts and commitment statements need to be planned for and may require input from multiple stakeholders, from HR and hiring managers to legal.

One of the most challenging and intensive pieces of work will be around procurement of subcontractors and delivery partners (if you are not an employer-provider). While Levy funding may be 'yours' to begin with, once it has passed into the Digital Apprenticeship System it is deemed to be government money, so your procurement procedure must be robust and show due diligence. The upside of this is the opportunity to find and develop partnerships that are truly beneficial to your business.

As Levy payers you have the power to design the contract with your partners, define delivery models, account management processes, schedules of work and KPIs. As a big company it is unlikely that your training needs will be met by a single provider. While this multiplies the procurement task it also offers an opportunity to establish cross-party working arrangements that are to the benefit of all.

Government education funding rules can be complex and continually evolving so it's worth having someone in your business who is (or becomes) a specialist in this area. Your training provider may be able to assist here. We recommend that you take a deep dive into the funding rules to understand your commitment and assign someone to keep up to date with the changes. You can register for updates with the ESFA.





## **How can we make the experience the best it can be for apprentices?**

This is an area that is ripe for innovation and one that is crucial for the success of your apprenticeship programme. You will need to give thought to your onboarding programme for apprentices, and how to manage the balance of the apprenticeship as training versus job. At Pearson, apprentices are given the same respect and standing as employees on standard full or part-time contracts (including benefits), for example, but in the full recognition that they are in a training role, and must be given support and adequate study time by hiring managers.

At Pearson we also operate a reward system for apprentices, using the normal employee award system for those working above expected standards, and a digital badging system to recognise achievement

of milestones and work done as an ambassador for apprenticeships within the wider business. Indeed, our approach to apprentices once they have begun their training is very inclusive and we promote the 'apprentice voice' to help us continually improve. This has even included having apprentices on our procurement panel for new providers.

We also aim to be flexible with our apprentices in terms of balancing business needs with their needs as a learner. Apprentices work with line-managers and training providers to time-table their off-the-job training and additional study time (the latter is not mandatory but part of the internal Pearson apprenticeship programme that allows more time for e.g., functional skills study, revision and completion of assessment tasks - and works well for us).

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Where can I go for more information?  
[www.pearsonhq.com](http://www.pearsonhq.com)