

# The difference is you

How to ace your  
apprenticeship  
application



A guide to applying for an apprenticeship,  
produced by Network Rail

## So, you'd like to be an Apprentice?

With so many apprenticeship opportunities available, making the right choice can be a daunting prospect, especially if it's your first experience of applying for a job.

The good news is you're reading this guide and have taken a positive step towards making the right decision and getting your application spot on!

Apprenticeships combine working alongside experienced people and gaining job-specific skills, with time off to study towards recognised qualifications. Applying for an apprenticeship takes time and effort, so it's important to make sure it's the right career choice for you.

This booklet has been designed to guide you through the entire application process, from researching opportunities to completing, submitting and following up your application. Consider it your trusty companion as you enter the next stage of your career.

### Good luck!

## Contents

Do your research	3
Types of apprenticeships	4
Decision time	5
Completing your application	6
Submitting your application	8
Following up	9
Application checklist	10
Further advice	11



## Do your research

Before you begin your apprenticeship application, it's important to make sure the opportunity is right for you. Spend some time on research to understand your potential employer and what the apprenticeship involves. An appreciation of the company and the role will help your application stand out from the crowd.

Some employers may ask you to complete an online questionnaire or test before you start the application form, so it's essential to know your stuff.

### — Online fact-finding

Research your potential employer on their website and social media feeds to get an overview of what it's like to work there. Read the profiles of current and former apprentices to get an understanding of the scheme, what you'll be doing and the career paths available. Follow relevant social media feeds to demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm.

### — Speak to people who already work there

If you know someone who already works for the organisation, contact him or her and ask what working there is really like. Prepare a list of questions in advance and make a note of all the answers.

An appreciation of the company and the role will help your application stand out from the crowd.

### — Location and travel

Some apprenticeships may require you to relocate and/or work in different locations throughout the scheme. Look into where you might be based and ask yourself how you'll feel about living, working and studying away from home. Consider whether you'll travel or relocate. Are you willing to make the commitment?

### — Salary and benefits

Check what your starting salary will be and if any other expenses will be paid, for example, accommodation. Is the salary enough for you to live on, particularly if you're living away from home? Are you entitled to holiday pay and any other employment benefits?

### — Qualifications

Make sure you meet the minimum academic requirements and that you have access to your original exam certificates. You will need to submit copies of these with your application to prove your qualifications.

## Types of apprenticeships

Deciding what type of apprenticeship is right for you is an important step on your career journey. There are three distinct levels of apprenticeship to suit every skill, from engineering, science and IT to marketing, health and beauty, media and sports.

### Intermediate apprenticeships

Intermediate level apprenticeships equip you with all the skills and vocational qualifications you'll need to break into your chosen industry. They're available in a range of industries and can be accessed through Government programmes.

- **Duration:** Around 12 months
- **Qualifications needed:** Some apprenticeships may require some GCSE qualifications, however most intermediate schemes only ask that you demonstrate key skills through work experience or volunteering.
- **Qualifications gained:** You'll work towards work-based learning qualifications, such as an NVQ Level 2 with key skills in English, Maths and ICT. An NVQ Level 2 is equivalent to five GCSEs.

### Advanced apprenticeships

Advanced apprenticeships can include everything from mechanical engineering and vehicle maintenance, right through to health and beauty and hairdressing.

- **Duration:** Between 12 and 48 months
- **Qualifications needed:** 5 GCSEs (grade C or above), or an intermediate apprenticeship qualification.
- **Qualifications gained:** You'll work towards work-based learning qualifications, such as NVQ Level 3, Key Skills and, in most cases, a relevant knowledge-based certificate such as a BTEC. An NVQ Level 3 is equivalent to two A-Levels.

### Higher apprenticeships

Higher apprenticeships are post A-level, work-based qualifications. They are competitive courses so it's advisable to check with employers you want to work for to see what they might offer.

- **Duration:** Up to 48 months
- **Qualifications needed:** There are no mandatory entry requirements, although some employers may set their own. Advanced schemes can be highly competitive so having qualifications, such as A-levels or an advanced apprenticeship, is an advantage.
- **Qualifications gained:** You'll work towards an NVQ Level 4 or above, or a knowledge-based qualification such as a HNC, HND or a Foundation degree. An NVQ Level 4 is equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree.

Your entry level depends on your existing qualifications and what level of skills and knowledge you want to acquire.



## Decision time

You've completed your research and decided what level of apprenticeship is right for you. Now it's time to decide which scheme/s to apply for. Consider the following questions when making your choice.

### — Does the sector interest you?

An apprenticeship is a long-term commitment so it's important to choose a sector of work that interests you and you want to learn more about.

### — Is it the type of company you'd like to work for?

It's likely that apprenticeship schemes in different sizes and types of organisations will offer you different experiences. Working for a large national or international organisation could open up opportunities to travel and meet new people, whilst some large national organisations offer you the chance to still live at home and commute nearby. Think about the type of team that you'd like to work with and whether you'd be prepared to do shift work as part of your apprenticeship.

### — Does the training meet your needs and match your learning style?

Check if the training is pitched at the right level and equips you with the skills and experience you'll need to prepare for the career path you've chosen. Apprenticeships combine on-the-job learning with studying for qualifications. Make sure your chosen programme has a balance to match your personal learning style.

### — Will the apprenticeship help you meet your career goals?

Depending on the duration of the apprenticeship, some schemes will help you develop over time, others teach you practical skills to get you on your chosen career path quickly. Where do you want to be in five years' time and will your apprenticeship programme help you gain the skills, knowledge and experience you'll need to get there?

### — If in doubt, talk it over

If you're still unsure which scheme/s to apply for, why not have a chat through the options with your family or friends. Don't face such an important decision alone.



## Completing your application

It's time to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and complete your application. Whether you're submitting an expression of interest or a full application form, it's important to take your time and follow some simple rules. Making a positive first impression will help you to get past the initial filtering process.

1

### **Allow plenty of time**

Start your application at least a week before the deadline. Places on apprenticeship schemes can be competitive. Allowing yourself plenty of time will help you submit a quality application and make you stand out from the crowd. Find a quiet place where you won't be distracted.

2

### **Read the instructions carefully**

Take time to read any instructions before you start writing. Understand what the employer expects you to submit. Is it an expression of interest or a full application? Are they asking for a CV and covering letter or just an application form? Does the form need to be completed in black or blue ink?

3

### **Read the job description thoroughly**

Use a highlighter and pick out any keywords to use in your own application to show that you have the right skills, qualities and experience.

4

### **Refer back to your research**

This is when all your early research comes into play. Use the information you've found to demonstrate your knowledge of the organisation and how suitable you are for the role.

5

### **Make it personal**

If you're asked to write a covering letter or email with your application, tailor it to the organisation you're applying to. Find out the name of the person who will review your application and address the letter or email directly to them. Try to avoid using the same letter for each application.

6

### **Write your responses offline first**

For online applications, it's a good idea to type out your responses in a separate document, then copy and paste them into the application form. Online forms don't usually have spelling and grammar checkers. This way, you can avoid making any mistakes and also save a copy of your answers to refer back to if you're invited for interview.

7

### **Be clear about what you have to offer**

Write a list of all your skills, experience, personal qualities and achievements and refer to these throughout your application. Use them to show what you can bring to the role and how you could make a difference to the organisation. If a question asks about your personal interests, try to choose hobbies that highlight your skills and keep them relevant to the role.

continued overleaf >



### 8 Be honest

Employers will expect you to present yourself in a positive light, but make sure everything you write in your application is the truth. Qualifications and references will be checked so dishonesty will be uncovered eventually.

### 9 Make it look attractive and easy to read

Whether you're completing a paper or online application, separate your paragraphs and make your answers short and punchy. Consider using bullet points to break up long lists of information. Try not to leave any questions blank. If a question is not applicable to you, write n/a or use a dash to make this clear.

Understand what the employer expects you to submit. Is it an expression of interest or a full application? Are they asking for a CV and covering letter or just an application form?

---

### 10 Choose the right referee

Applications usually ask for one academic and one work-related referee. You must not use friends or family members. Be prepared that the employer may contact your referees in the early stages of the process. Remember to ask their permission first. Try to choose referees that can vouch for the key skills, characteristics and experience required by the apprenticeship you're applying for, such as a teacher from school or your manager in a previous job.

### 11 Complete everything asked of you

Refer back to the questions and check you've included everything required. Have you provided examples or evidence when asked?

### 12 Proof read it

It's crucial to pay attention to detail and review your application. Check your spelling, grammar, and look out for words that you may have used incorrectly. Ask someone you trust to read it and give you honest feedback. A poorly written application can make you stand out for all the wrong reasons.

## Following up

---

You've submitted your application but don't sit back and put your feet up. A company representative could contact you at any time to invite you to attend interview or progress to the next stage of the recruitment process. Be prepared for the call!

#### — Make a note of key dates

Apprenticeship programmes usually work to a timeline of key dates, which are provided on the employer's website. Make a note of these in your diary, and if you don't hear any news on your application by the date stated, contact the company.

#### — Stay in touch

Make sure you check your emails regularly, including your junk mail box. If you've been successful in getting through to the next stage of the process, there will be strict deadlines by which you'll need to respond.

#### — Remain professional at all times

Treat every follow-up call or email as part of the application process. You may get through to a key person involved in the programme so always be polite and courteous and make every conversation a memorable one.

#### — Ask for feedback

Even if your application has not been successful, you should always ask for feedback. Take lessons from your experience and apply them to achieve success with your next application.



These questions and tasks are thrown in to see how you react under pressure and how well you think on your feet.

---

## Next steps

If your application is successful, it's likely you'll be invited through to the second stage of the process. Here's some information on the next steps you might encounter and how to approach them. Remember, these assessments are not about passing or failing, they simply allow the employer to build up a picture of you.



### — Competency assessment

An online competency assessment is designed to test your knowledge, skills and abilities to do the job. It will measure your ability to analyse situations, make decisions, collaborate and communicate with others. You'll usually be presented with different scenarios that you might encounter in the role. Read any instructions carefully and take your time.

### — Telephone interview

Phone interviews are often used to get to know you better. Treat it as you would a face-to-face interview, be polite and professional and have a copy of your original application to refer to along with a pen and paper to take notes.

### — Personality profiling

This type of test is often completed online. You'll be presented with a number of statements and you must select those that describe you and your personality the closest. Your answers will give the employer an insight into your personality, values and behaviours and indicate whether you'll be a good fit for their team.

### — Assessment centre

You may be asked to attend an assessment centre and take part in a group exercise and/or a face-to-face interview. This is your chance to show your knowledge of the business and to prove your skills, abilities and enthusiasm for a career there. This could be your chance to stand out from the crowd!

## Application checklist

Follow our handy checklist to ensure your apprenticeship application is the best it can possibly be.

- 1 ✓ Start your application at least one week before the deadline.
- 2 Research your potential employer, including what it's like to work there and the practicalities and benefits of the role.
- 3 Learn about the different types of apprenticeship and find out which ones are offered by the organisation you're interested in.
- 4 Answer the questions honestly and refer to your experiences, skills and the research you've done.
- 5 Be clear about what you have to offer the employer.
- 6 Complete all the tasks asked of you on the application form.
- 7 Proof read your application to check for any spelling and grammatical mistakes.
- 8 Attach or enclose copies of all the documents and certificates requested.
- 9 Check you have the correct postal or email address.
- 10 Allow enough time for your application to reach its destination.
- 11 Save a copy of your application and the confirmation receipt.
- 12 Make a note of the key dates in the process.
- 13 Ask for feedback, whether you are successful or not.

## Further advice

If you'd like more information and advice on applying for an apprenticeship, here are some useful contacts.

National Apprenticeship Service  
[apprenticeships.org.uk](https://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)

National Careers Service  
[nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk](https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk)  
Speak to an advisor on **0800 100 900**

# Find out more about the Advanced Engineering Apprenticeship Scheme at Network Rail

Go to: [www.networkrail.co.uk/apprenticeships](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/apprenticeships)

 [facebook.com/NetworkRailAdvancedApprenticeship](https://facebook.com/NetworkRailAdvancedApprenticeship)

Produced by Network Rail  
The Quadrant: MK  
Elder Gate  
Milton Keynes  
MK9 1EN

© 2017 Network Rail