Guide to Apprenticeships

What is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship combines paid employment with a formal learning programme and qualification. The apprentice receives most of their training on the job with their employer. However, they will also be enrolled in a course programme with an external training provider (usually a college or university), and must spend a certain amount of time in off-the-job training, either in person or online. This could be one day per week, or it could be through block release, for a few days or more spread throughout the year.

As an employer, you'll work with the training provider to ensure the training is tailored to meet the needs of your business. One of the first steps you'll take in hiring an apprentice is to make contact with a training provider that offers the apprenticeship you're interested in. This may be your local further education college, or, if there's nowhere nearby who can provide what you're looking for, it may mean contacting a training provider that operates nationally and delivers training remotely.

There are several apprenticeship programmes available in agriculture, horticulture and forestry. Apprenticeships vary in duration, but typically take between 12 and 24 months to complete and the apprentice must be employed for the full duration of this period.

National Minimum Wage requirements for apprentices are lower than those of a regular employee for the first 12 months. Nevertheless, some employers choose to pay more than the apprentice wage in order to attract better candidates and to encourage retention.

For each apprenticeship there is a curriculum that needs to be covered in the workplace, but this often includes broad tasks such as 'operate tools' , 'maintain plant health', or 'process waste from horticultural activities', that will likely be part of your daily routine. Any of the curriculum that cannot be covered by you can be flagged to the training provider and delivered by other means.

Apprenticeship programmes and National Minimum Wage requirements differ between England, Wales and Scotland. Please see the nation specific sections below for more detailed information.

Responsibilities as an apprentice's employer

If you employ an apprentice your responsibilities will include:

- Training them in the skills and behaviours needed to complete their job, including broad competencies such as health and safety and working in a team.
- Provision of an employment contract for the duration of the apprenticeship, which should outline pay, working hours, sick pay, holiday and their rights under employment law.
- Provision of any equipment they need to safely and successfully carry out their job.
- Communication with the training provider: a coordinator from the programme will need to visit in order to carry out the apprentice's assessments. You may need to speak with them to provide feedback about their progress.
- You must have public liability insurance.

Benefits to you and your business

- Apprenticeships are a way to cost-effectively train a new employee, since they can be paid at a lower rate during the early stage of training. Their skills and capacity for responsibility should then increase in line with the required pay increases over time.
- It can be a way to improve staff retention, with an apprenticeship lasting a minimum of one year, and often two years or more.
- Whilst being employed by you, an apprentice is also enrolled on a formal training course. Your apprentice will therefore bring in new skills and ideas that could benefit your business.
- It can be hugely rewarding to pass on your knowledge to someone who is eager to learn.
- The training provider is able to advertise the availability of an apprenticeship on your behalf, and can even take responsibility in the early stages of the recruitment process to ensure candidates are well suited to the job.

Some important things to consider before taking on an apprentice

- Apprentices have to be employed year-round, for a stipulated minimum number of hours, depending on whether you are in England, Wales or Scotland. It's therefore important that you can provide enough work, even during the winter season.
- Whilst an apprentice can be paid the apprentice's wage for the first year, after that their wages must increase in line with National Minimum Wage requirements for their age, so you must be sure you can afford to employ them beyond the first year.
- An apprentice will need to take holiday. It's good to have an idea of how this will fit into the running of your business. They might not want to take their holiday at the

same time as you, in which case, will there be someone else around to supervise them when you are away?

- Apprentices require active training. If you're a small business with limited capacity, it's important to think about whether you're able to dedicate the time and energy that an apprentice will require if they are to have a positive learning experience.

Apprenticeships in England

National Minimum Wage for Apprentices in England

Table 1: Yearly breakdown of costs

	Rates from 1st April 2026	
Age of the Apprentice	**Year 1**	**Year 2 and beyond**
Under 19 (16-18)	£8.00	£8.00
19-20	£8.00	£10.85
21 and over	£8.00	£12.71

All apprentices are entitled to 20 days paid holiday per year, plus bank holidays and sick pay.

Where accommodation is provided, a deduction can be made in line with a set rate, defined by the government as 'accommodation offset'. In England this can be up to a maximum of £11.10 per day (this sum must include rent and any charges that are a condition of being provided with the property (e.g. utilities). For more information on how this can be calculated please refer to the government guidelines.

Employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy are required to make a contribution of 5% of the programme fees to the training provider. The remaining 95% is paid by the government. As an example, the L3 Crop Technician Apprenticeship is delivered at the cost of £15,000. A business employing an apprentice on this programme would therefore be required to pay £750 to the training provider.

This charge would not apply for non-levy paying employers if at the start of their apprenticeship training:

- the apprentice is aged between 16 and 21 years old (or 15 years of age if the apprentice's 16th birthday is between the last Friday of June and 31 August).
- the apprentice is aged between 22 and 24 years old and has either an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan provided by local authority and / or has been in the care of their local authority

How many hours must the apprentice be employed for?

Full-time apprentices in England must work a minimum of 30 hours per week and a maximum of 40 hours per week year-round, with the equivalent of at least 6 hours off-the-job training time included within this (though this may be delivered across the year, rather than weekly). Some off-the-job training will be delivered by you and includes time spent demonstrating tool and machinery use or how to perform specific tasks. The rest of the training will be delivered by the training provider, and you will work with them to develop a plan for how this will be structured.

The apprentice's salary must include payment for the hours they spend in off-the-job training i.e if your apprentice works for 24 hours per week and does 6 hours of training per week, they must be paid for 30 hours.

The number of hours for which you employ an apprentice can vary depending on the season, provided this never falls outside of the minimum and maximum hours required. So, for example, an apprentice might work 30 hours per week in winter and 40 hours per week in summer.

If you don't feel you have enough work to employ an apprentice for the minimum 30 hours per week year-round, it may be possible to share an apprentice with another business, whereby each of you provides work for a lesser number of hours (e.g. 15 hours each) to make up the minimum required. Another way to overcome this challenge could be through a part-time apprenticeship, whereby the apprentice works less hours per week over a longer period of time. These options are not always available so should be discussed with your training provider.

Which apprenticeship is most suitable?

In England each apprenticeship is defined by an Apprenticeship Standard, which outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours that an apprentice needs in order to obtain the qualification. A training provider will be able to advise you on which apprenticeship is most suitable for the role you have available. There are a range of standards that are relevant for farming and forestry businesses:

Apprenticeship Standard	Level of Qualification	Duration	Link to programme content	Training providers offering the standard
General Farm Worker (Livestock or Crops)	2	12-18 months	Farm Worker Standard	20 providers
Horticulture Operative	2	12-24 months	Horticulture Standard	38 providers
Livestock Unit Technician	3	18-24 months	Livestock Tech Standard	15 providers
Crop Technician (Arable, Horticulture or Viticulture) *	3	18-24 months	Crop Tech Standard	12 providers
Forest Craftsperson	3	24 months	Forestry Standard	4 providers
Assistant Farm Manager	4	18-24 months	Farm Manager Standard	9 providers

* Please note, the Crop Technician Standard currently includes a module on pesticide use. Whilst we recognise this isn't ideal, we've been advised it can be delivered exclusively by the training provider, and the content can otherwise be tailored to the needs of agroecological and organic farms.

The full list of apprenticeship standards in England can be found here.

The Landworkers' Alliance is currently working with Plumpton College to develop an online version of the L3 Crop Technician Standard, so that apprentices employed on farms and market gardens across England can be enrolled on the course and receive the majority of their off-the-job theoretical training remotely. In addition, there would be the opportunity for the apprentices to meet for in-person training events, at different locations across the year. If you'd be interested in employing an apprentice on this programme and being part of our first cohort of employers, please contact chloe.broadfield@landworkersalliance.org.uk.

For more detailed information about employing an apprentice in England, please refer to the toolkit for apprentice employers in England.

Apprenticeships in Wales

National Minimum Wage for Apprentices in Wales

Table 1.2: Yearly breakdown of costs

	Rates from 1st April 2026	
Age of the Apprentice	**Year 1**	**Year 2 and beyond**
Under 18	£8.00	£8.00
18-20	£8.00	£10.85
21 and over	£8.00	£12.71

All apprentices are entitled to paid holiday, plus bank holidays and sick pay.

Where accommodation is provided, a deduction can be made in line with a set rate, defined by the government as 'accommodation offset'. In Wales this can be up to a maximum of £6.31 per day for optional accommodation or £1.97 per week in a house (this sum must include rent and any charges that are a condition of being provided with the property (e.g. utilities). For more information on this please refer to the government website.

How many hours must the apprentice be employed for?

In Wales, an apprentice must be employed for a minimum of 16 hours per week throughout the year. The number of hours for which you employ them might vary between the seasons (e.g. they may be employed for 16 hours per week in winter and 40 hours per week in Summer).

In addition, an apprentice will also spend some time engaged in formal training with the training provider. The amount of time dedicated to this, and whether it's scheduled to take place on a weekly basis or in blocks of a few days throughout the year will vary depending on the apprenticeship framework and the training provider. It's recommended that 20% is a good amount of time for an apprentice to spend in off-the-job training. However, there is flexibility for this to be decided between you and the training provider .

The apprentice's salary must include payment for the hours they spend in off-the-job training i.e if your apprentice works for 16 hours per week and does 4 hours of training per week, then they must be paid for 20 hours.

If you have limited availability of work for an apprentice, it's possible that you could share your apprentice with another business, so that they are employed for more hours each week. This might be especially relevant during the winter months and is something which can be discussed with your training provider.

Which apprenticeship is most suitable?

In Wales each apprenticeship is defined by an Apprenticeship Framework, which outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours that an apprentice needs in order to obtain the qualification. The training provider will help you to decide which framework is most relevant to the role you have available and can incorporate optional units to meet the needs of your business. The frameworks that are relevant for agricultural and forestry businesses include:

Apprenticeship Framework	**Level of Qualification**	**Duration**	**Link to programme content**	**Training providers**
Horticulture	L2 L3	24 months 24 months	L2 Framework L3 Framework	Bridgend College (South Wales, near Cardiff and Swansea) Coleg Cambria (Nationwide provision) * NPTC (Nationwide provision)
Agriculture	L2 L3	24 months 21 months	L2 Framework L3 Framework	Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (North Wales) Coleg Sir Gâr (South West Wales) Coleg Cambria (Nationwide provision)* NPTC (Nationwide provision)
Trees & Timber	L2 L3	18 months 21 months	L2 Framework L3 Framework	Coleg Cambria (Nationwide provision) *

A full list of Welsh apprenticeship frameworks can be found here.

* Coleg Cambria is a training provider offering horticulture, agriculture and forestry apprenticeships across Wales, with much of the theoretical off-the-job training being

delivered remotely. The college is keen to work with our members to expand the provision of these apprenticeships for agroecological enterprises and hosted a Q&A session for interested employers, which we have recorded. If you would like access to the recording, please contact chloe.broadfield@landworkersalliance.org.uk.

For more detailed information about employing an apprentice in Wales, please refer to the Welsh government's employer toolkit, employer's guide and the Skills Academy Wales website.

Apprenticeships in Scotland

National Minimum Wage for Apprentices in Scotland

Table 1.3: Yearly breakdown of costs

	From April 2026	
Age of the Apprentice	**Year 1**	**Year 2 and beyond**
Under 19	£8.00	£8.00
19-20	£8.00	£10.85
19 and over	£8.00	£12.71

All apprentices are entitled to paid holiday, bank holidays and sick pay.

Where accommodation is provided, a deduction can be made in line with a set rate, defined by the government as 'accommodation offset'. In Scotland this can be up to a maximum of £11.10 per day (as of April 2026) (this sum must include rent and any charges that are a condition of being provided with the property (e.g. utilities). For more information on how this can be calculated please refer to the government guidelines.

How many hours must the apprentice be employed for?

There is no legal requirement for the minimum number of hours an apprentice must be employed in Scotland, however the general recommendation is at least 16 hours per week. An apprentice must also spend a defined amount of time in off-the-job training (either on a weekly basis, or on block release throughout the year), which varies depending on the apprenticeship programme they are enrolled in (see below).

The apprentice's salary must include payment for the hours they spend in off-the-job training i.e if your apprentice works for 16 hours per week and does 4 hours of training per week, then they must be paid for 20 hours.

Which apprenticeship is most suitable?

In Scotland apprenticeships are referred to as Modern Apprenticeships. Each has a framework which outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours that an apprentice needs to achieve to obtain the qualification. The training provider will help you to decide which framework is most relevant to the job you have available and will incorporate optional units relevant to your business. These could include, for example, chainsaw skills, machinery driving or first aid. The frameworks that are relevant for farming and forestry businesses include:

Apprenticeship Framework	**Level of Qualification**	**Duration**	**Approx no. of hours for off-the-job training**	**Link to programme content**	**Training providers**
Horticulture	SCQF L5 SCQF L6	12-18 months 24 months	360 540	Horticulture SCQF L5 Horticulture SCQF L6	95 providers
Agriculture	SCQF L5 SCQF L6	12-18 months 24 months	280 340	Agriculture SCQF L5 Agriculture SCQF L6	46 providers
Trees & Timber	SCQF L5 SCQF L6	12 months 18 months	234 351	Trees & Timber SCQF L5 Trees & Timber SCQF L6	67 providers

In Scotland, an apprentice can only be dismissed under very limited circumstances. It's worth informing yourself about this before taking on an apprentice.

For more detailed information about employing an apprentice in Scotland, please refer to the Scottish government's employer toolkit.

Apprenticeship Case Study: Ash & Elm Horticulture

Emma Maxwell at Ash & Elm Horticulture has employed two apprentices on her market garden in mid-Wales. She shared the following with us about her experience:

> "One of the main benefits to me as an employer is that I can pay the apprentice's wage. As a small business I can't afford to pay someone who doesn't know what they're doing a proper wage, but after a year they're working at a commercial rate and then they receive the full National Minimum Wage."

Emma also appreciated that the training provider takes responsibility for the pastoral care and general competencies of the apprentices:

> "It's nice having a third person doing that. I'm a horticultural trainer so they're trained on the job with me, but it's the other life skills bit that the training provider offers - background support."

When asked about the bureaucratic burden of employing an apprentice, Emma responded:

> "It was really nothing. Someone from the college visited once a month, filled out a form and signed it, then it was emailed to me and I signed it. If I wasn't on site on the day they visited then it didn't matter, they would just speak with the apprentice."

Emma shared her perspective on why apprenticeships are a good model for agroecological training provision:

> "We're so used to having seasonal workers - you train them up, then you say goodbye to them in winter. They get another job, another life and you don't get to keep working with them. I'd had enough of that. I wanted to employ local people who were going to stay around and become part of the business and therefore help grow the business….Going forward as an industry I don't think we can keep employing seasonal workers and dumping them every winter. We need horticulturalists that keep at it long enough to become head gardeners and manage the site."

First steps for hiring an apprentice

The steps required to employ an apprentice differ slightly between England, Scotland and Wales, but the following gives you a rough outline of the process, which can be expected to take roughly 3-4 months:

1. Identify the job role you want to fill
2. Search through the apprenticeships available in your nation and decide which is most relevant

3. Identify a training provider that offers this apprenticeship programme. This might be your local further education college, or it could be a provider that offers national coverage and delivers training remotely
4. Work with the training provider to define the conditions of the role and then advertise for it
5. Shortlist applicants, carry out interviews and select your apprentice
6. Provide an employment contract
7. The training provider will work with you to create a training plan that lays out the expectations and responsibilities of all parties involved, and must be signed by you, the apprentice and the training provider
8. Welcome the apprentice to your business and carry out an induction.

For more detailed information on the steps required to employ an apprentice please refer to the nation-specific guidelines for England, Wales and Scotland.

Can't find a training provider near you?

If your local training provider isn't currently offering the apprenticeship you're interested in, it may still be worth reaching out - especially if there are other land-based businesses in your area who would like to employ an apprentice on the same programme. With sufficient evidence of a gap in provision, the training provider may be in a position to expand its capacity.