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# Apprenticeships In Northern Ireland- A Guide For Employers





# **A Guide for Employers**

# Contents

<b>1. Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland– A guide for Employers</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. What is an Apprenticeship?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. ApprenticeshipsNI</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Higher Level Apprenticeships</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6. How Do I Find An Apprentice?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>7. How Do I Find A Training Provider for ApprenticeshipsNI?</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>8. How do I Find a Training Provider for Higher Level Apprenticeships?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>9. Who Pays For The Training?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>10. Implementing the Apprenticeship Strategy in Northern Ireland</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>11. The Apprenticeship Levy</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>12. Useful Links</b>	<b>26</b>

Details correct at time of printing. For updates, please see  
<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/apprenticeships-employers-guide>.

December 2017.

# **1. Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland – A guide for Employers**

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**1.1.** In Northern Ireland a range of training and skills development programmes to help support employers meet their skills requirements are provided by the Department for the Economy and Invest NI, an arm's length body of the Department.



**1.2.** This guide provides information specifically in regard to apprenticeships.



# 2. Introduction

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**2.1.** The Northern Ireland Executive, through the Department for the Economy supports apprenticeship training through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. Apprenticeships are a valuable investment for individuals, for businesses and for the economy as a whole. They support increased productivity, reduce youth unemployment and are a sound financial investment for public money. Many of the best economies in the developed world have strong apprenticeship programmes and they offer a real alternative to the academic path into Higher Education.



**2.2.** In tandem with its existing programme, the Department for the Economy is also currently implementing reforms to Northern Ireland's professional and technical education and training system in support of Securing our Success, the Apprenticeship Strategy and Generating our Success, the Strategy for Youth Training. Core to these strategies is ensuring that employers are at the centre of the apprenticeship system, helping shape and design that system, and expanding the apprenticeship offering, particularly in the form of Higher Level Apprenticeships.



**2.3.** Further information on the strategies can be found at:

[www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/securing-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-apprenticeships](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/securing-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-apprenticeships)

[www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/generating-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-youth-training](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/generating-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-youth-training)



**2.4.** This information bulletin provides advice on the current apprenticeship programme in Northern Ireland and the changes being made to the apprenticeship system. It also provides some information on the Apprenticeship Levy which was introduced by HM Revenue and Customs across the UK on 6th April 2017.

# 3. What is an Apprenticeship?

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**3.1.** In Northern Ireland an Apprenticeship is a job offering a minimum of 21 contracted hours per week with the same employer with a structured period of both on and off the job training leading to an industry-approved nationally recognised qualification. Currently in Northern Ireland there are around 170 approved apprenticeship frameworks with many more being developed in sectors like professional services, that are new to the apprenticeship concept.



# 4. ApprenticeshipsNI

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**4.1.** There are approximately 6,600 people on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in a wide range of occupational areas. Apprenticeships are available for new entrants to a job or to existing workers significantly changing their job roles. ApprenticeshipsNI is available at Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) or more advanced Level 3 (A Level equivalent). The qualifications for each level are set out in what are known as Apprenticeship Frameworks.



**4.2.** The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is employer-led training provision, with employers creating apprenticeships in line with their business needs.



**4.3.** Apprenticeships usually take between two to four years to complete and each framework for the specific occupational area is agreed with the relevant industry-led representative body and comprises of directed training, related knowledge, appropriate essential skills (developing literacy, numeracy and ICT skills) and structured workplace training.



**4.4.** Full details are available on:



<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/apprenticeships-employers>



**4.5.** Please click on the link below to find out more about the experiences of those working in a range of apprenticeships in different industries.



<http://bit.ly/2hHYd1J>

# 5. Higher Level Apprenticeships

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**5.1.** The world of work is continuing to change and there is a need for higher level skills in the NI economy. As a result the Department has developed Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) which give the opportunity to gain a degree whilst still in work.



**5.2.** Since September 2015, in partnership with local employers, further education colleges and universities, the Department has been piloting the Higher Level Apprenticeship concept with over 600 participants across 40 occupational areas including ICT, engineering, accounting and digital marketing. The Department plans to make this a permanent offer to employers from September 2017.



**5.3.** Please use the web addresses below to find out more about the experiences of Emmet Lagan and Cara Hadden. Emmet is completing his foundation degree in Engineering (Wind Turbine Technology) at South West College, Omagh and is employed by SSE Utility company. Cara is completing her HLA in Accounting at Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) and is employed by Goldblatt McGuigan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RoYaO2WSfQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpSL9YvP7ao>



# 6. How Do I Find An Apprentice?

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**6.1.** You may have a potential apprentice in your workforce and, if not, there are various methods for finding one. If you have an apprenticeship vacancy you can for example:

- Place a vacancy on the 'Connect to Success NI' website:



<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/connect-success-ni-advertise-apprenticeship-opportunities-online>

- Contact your local Jobs and Benefits offices and Jobcentres websites;
- Place a vacancy on Employers Online NI website:



<https://www.employersonlineni.com/>

- Place an advertisement in the newspapers;
- Contact a local further education college, university or contracted training provider who may be aware of potential employees.

# 7. How Do I Find A Training Provider for ApprenticeshipsNI?

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**7.1.** The Department for the Economy's further education colleges and the universities, together with contracted training providers, provide opportunities across Northern Ireland for employers to train apprentices to help them qualify in their chosen profession. The employer and the apprentice must speak to one of these colleges or contracted training providers to arrange the 'off-the-job' training.



**7.2.** ApprenticeshipsNI training is provided by the six Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland, listed below:

- Belfast Metropolitan College;
- Northern Regional College;
- North West Regional College;
- South Eastern Regional College;
- Southern Regional College;
- South West College.



**7.3.** A refreshed list of training providers is available at:



<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/apprenticeship-training-contractors>



**7.4.** To talk to someone about Apprenticeships call 0300 2007876, Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm or email



[Apprenticeships@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Apprenticeships@economy-ni.gov.uk)

# 8. How do I Find a Training Provider for Higher Level Apprenticeships?

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**8.1.** As the training for Higher Level Apprenticeships is a Foundation or Honours Degree the training is usually undertaken at a further education college or university.



**8.2.** Higher Level Apprenticeships training, at degree level, is provided by the three universities in Northern Ireland, listed below:

- Queen's University Belfast;
- Ulster University;
- The Open University.



**8.3.** A current list of Higher Level Apprenticeships can be found at:



<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/higher-level-apprenticeships>



**8.4.** To talk to someone about Higher Level Apprenticeship opportunities call this number 0300 200 7876 or email



[higherlevelapprenticeships@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:higherlevelapprenticeships@economy-ni.gov.uk)

# 9. Who Pays For The Training?

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**9.1.** For Apprentices on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme aged 16-24, the Department pays the full cost of the off-the-job training at a specified rate aligned to a wide range of approved apprenticeship frameworks. For those aged 25 and over, the Department provides 50% of the costs for apprentices who wish to follow apprenticeships in priority sectors including business services specifically ICT; financial services; food and drink manufacturing; advanced manufacturing; and advanced engineering, health sciences and the creative industries.



**9.2.** Many employers have reported that by employing apprentices they have realised growth and improvement in productivity in their businesses. As well as this there is a real sense of contributing to the skills need of the Northern Ireland economy. Employers receive a financial reward at the end of Level 2 and Level 3 of the apprentice's training when they have achieved all their targeted qualifications (as set out in an apprenticeship framework), and enjoy the benefits of having a loyal and motivated workforce that has been trained to meet their own specific business requirements.



**9.3.** For Higher Level Apprenticeships the Department provides funding at a specified rate calculated with reference to mainstream Further and Higher Education funding. In addition, mentoring and on the job support from the training provider will help ensure the work-based learning is fully linked to the off-the-job teaching.

# 10. Implementing the Apprenticeship Strategy in Northern Ireland

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**10.1.** Key to the implementation of the Apprenticeships Strategy is placing local employers at the heart of the apprenticeship system. This will see employers reviewing and renewing the training curriculum and qualifications in each occupational sector. It will see the employers setting the standards that training organisations must reach, thereby making sure that the reformed apprenticeships have quality and are relevant for the modern economy. To support this an Apprenticeship and Youth Training Strategic Advisory Forum was established, to advise on the most important aspects of the new system, alongside Sectoral Partnerships across a number of priority economic sectors which bring employers, qualification experts and policy advisors together.



**10.2.** The current Sectoral Partnerships are in Hospitality and Events, Manufacturing and Engineering, ICT, Finance and Accounting, Life Sciences and the Built Environment. These will be expanded to a further twelve sectors over the next three years. The Sectoral Partnerships are led by employers, knowledgeable about the skills needs of their sector and any employer wishing to know how they can contribute to the work of the Partnership in their sector can contact the email address below for more details.



[sectoralpartnerships@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:sectoralpartnerships@economy-ni.gov.uk)

# 11. The Apprenticeship Levy

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**11.1.** The UK wide Apprenticeship Levy was introduced on 6 April 2017 and applies to all employers in Northern Ireland, across the public and private sectors. The collection of the Levy is a reserved matter for the UK Government.



**11.2.** The Levy will be paid on annual pay bills in excess of £3 million. The Levy will be charged at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's pay bill. Each employer will receive an allowance of £15,000 to offset against their Levy payment.



**11.3.** The Levy will be collected by HM Revenue and Customs via the PAYE system. Specific queries on collection of the Levy should be directed to HMRC.



**11.4.** Whilst the Levy is a policy introduced by the UK Government, skills and training are devolved matters and each administration has developed their own training and apprenticeship strategies. As a result there are a number of differences in the skills and training systems operating across Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.



**11.5.** The Northern Ireland Government have developed a specific apprenticeship system to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland economy in line with employers' requirements. Private sector Levy payers and non-Levy payers can benefit from taking on apprentices for their business and the Department for the Economy will pay for the off-the-job training for those apprentices, subject to the age eligibility criteria explained at paragraph 9.1. As detailed above, there are currently over 170 different apprenticeship frameworks which are supported by the Department for the Economy.



**11.6.** Frequently Asked Questions on the Apprenticeship Levy can be found at:



<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/apprenticeship-levy-faqs>

# 12. Useful Links

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**12.1.** For more information on paying the levy:



[www.gov.uk/guidance/pay-apprenticeship-levy](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/pay-apprenticeship-levy)

**12.2.** For information on ApprenticeshipsNI:



<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/apprenticeships-employers>

**12.3.** For information on the reforms to the Apprenticeships system in Northern Ireland, including the introduction of Higher Level Apprenticeships:



[www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/securing-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-apprenticeships](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/securing-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-apprenticeships)

**12.4.** For information on the new Level 2 Youth Training system in Northern Ireland:



<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/generating-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-youth-training>

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