

Apprenticeship-type schemes and structured work-based learning programmes

United Kingdom



This article on Apprenticeship-type schemes and structured work-based learning programmes written in 2014 is the second one of a set of articles prepared within Cedefop's ReferNet network. It complements general information on VET systems available online at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Information-services/vet-in-europe-country-reports.aspx>.

ReferNet is a European network of national networks providing information and analysis on national VET to Cedefop and disseminating information on European VET and Cedefop work to stakeholders in the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland. The article has not been revised by Cedefop and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Cedefop.

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Author: Torjus Abusland

ReferNet UK, UK NARIC, ECCTIS Limited
Oriol House, Oriol Road, Cheltenham, GLOS, GL50 1XP, United Kingdom.

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Background

This article provides an overview of the existing Apprenticeship programmes in the UK, their specific features, main strengths and weaknesses. Similar articles are produced in European countries covered by the ReferNet network. These articles are intended to support Cedefop in developing a comparative picture of Apprenticeship-type schemes and structured work-based learning programmes across the EU. More specifically, the information in these articles will contribute to:

- Cedefop's research work, and specifically to support cooperation at European level and among Member States, also in the context of the European Alliance for Apprenticeship;
- A snapshot with comparative information and country examples on this issue that Cedefop is to prepare for the meeting of Directors General for VET in autumn 2014 under the Italian Presidency of the EU;
- Inform the activities of the Commission's thematic working group (TWG) on VET whose primary focus is on the effective implementation of national VET reforms.

A. Definitions and statistics

Apprenticeships in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are offered in the shape of Apprenticeship Frameworks which include a work contract, technical and occupational competency qualifications within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) / Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales (CQFW) and Functional Skills / Essential Skills / Key Skills / GCSEs in English language, mathematics and ICT. Apprenticeships are available at Intermediate, Advanced and Higher level.

Scottish Modern Apprenticeships are generally accompanied by Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and core skills comprising IT, problem solving, numeracy, communication and working with others. Technical Apprenticeships and Professional Apprenticeships introduced in place of Modern Apprenticeships at SCQF level 8 and above, may be studied alongside SVQs, HNDs or degree level qualifications.

Table 1: NQFs and Apprenticeship levels in relation to the EQF

QCF / CQFW	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	EQF	Scotland	SCQF
8				8	Professional Apprenticeships	12
7	Higher Apprenticeships	Higher Apprenticeships		7	Professional Apprenticeships	11
6	Higher Apprenticeships	Higher Apprenticeships		6	Professional Apprenticeships	10
					Technical Apprenticeships	9
5	Higher Apprenticeships	Higher Apprenticeships		5	Technical Apprenticeships	8
4	Higher Apprenticeships	Higher Apprenticeships			Modern Apprenticeships	7
3	Advanced Apprenticeships	Apprenticeships	Level 3 Apprenticeships	4	Modern Apprenticeships	6
2	Intermediate Apprenticeships	Foundation Apprenticeships	Level 2 Apprenticeships	3	Modern Apprenticeships	5
	Traineeships	Traineeships				

(*) Please note that it is the qualifications within the Apprenticeship Frameworks that are benchmarked to the NQFs, not the Apprenticeship Frameworks as a whole.

A small number of Higher Apprenticeships are currently being piloted in Northern Ireland.

Apprenticeship training generally lasts between one and four years in the UK depending on the Apprenticeship Framework, the starting level and prior learning.

1. Number of participants

A total of 868 700 Apprentices were in learning in England in 2012/13 ⁽¹⁾. There were a total of 510 000 Apprenticeship starts in the 2012/13 academic year, which is 10 000 less than in 2011/12, but numbers are up by 231 000 from the 2009/10 academic year. 55% of Apprenticeship starters in England in 2011/12 were female ⁽²⁾.

In December 2013 there were 35 900 Apprentices in training in Scotland ⁽³⁾. Scottish Modern Apprenticeship starts amounted to 25 700 in 2012/13 which is a small decline from 2011/12, but in excess of 5 000 more starters than in 2009/10. 57% of new starters were male ⁽⁴⁾.

In Wales, 46 800 Apprentices were in learning according to provisional data for 2012/13, which also shows a substantial increase over previous years with 27 900 learning programme starts compared to 17 900 in 2011/12. In addition, provisional data for 2012/13 shows that 2 265 Higher Apprenticeship places had been created, which is an increase from 280 in 2011/12 ⁽⁵⁾.

Just short of 8 000 Apprentices were in training in October 2013 in Northern Ireland. There were just over 6 000 Apprenticeship starts in 2012/13 which is a fall from a little under 8 000 starts in 2011/12 and it is the lowest number since 2007/08. 49% of Apprenticeship starts were female in 2012/13 ⁽⁶⁾.

¹ [Statistical First Release, Further Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held](#), ONS, January 2014

² [Apprenticeship statistics](#), House of Commons Library, February 2014

³ [Modern Apprentice Programme 2012-13](#), SDS

⁴ [Modern Apprenticeships Summary Information: 2012-13](#), SDS

⁵ [Further education, work-based learning and community learning in Wales 2012/13 \(provisional figures\)](#), Statistics for Wales, November 2013

⁶ [Statistical Bulletin ApprenticeshipsNI](#), DEL, February 2014

2. Minimum education / qualification entry level required

Entry requirements for Apprenticeships vary depending on the level of the Apprenticeship, the sector, and requirements of specific Apprenticeship Frameworks. Minimum requirements to certain programmes only include having reached 16 years of age; however, many programmes require applicants to have completed lower secondary education (EQF level 3) subjects in English and mathematics. A number of Apprenticeship programmes, such as advanced engineering, attract a high number of applicants and subsequently demand more rigorous prior training and higher qualifications.

Traineeships and similar programmes are available in the UK to provide young people lacking the required qualifications and employability skills with the necessary training to qualify for entry to full Apprenticeships. These programmes include numeracy and literacy learning, work preparation training and sometimes a work placement.

Apprenticeships placed at post-secondary level would normally require prior qualifications and relevant work experience before entry.

3. Sectors / occupations covered

Apprenticeships are available in a broad range of sectors in the UK and new sectors are being included. Recently, Apprenticeships have been developed in sectors such as law, accountancy and advanced engineering as an alternative to qualifying for these professions by completing university degrees.

The sectors in which the most Apprentices have been training in the last few years include health and social care, business administration, management, customer service and hospitality and catering. Traditionally Apprenticeships were most common in construction, technical and manufacturing occupations, but this new trend reflects the fact that the service industries have become more dominant than the manufacturing industries in the UK economy (^{7 8 9 10}).

⁷ [Apprenticeship statistics](#), House of Commons Library, February 2014

⁸ [Modern Apprentice Programme 2012-13](#), SDS

⁹ [Projected Apprenticeship Framework Success Rates](#), Statistics for Wales, November 2012

¹⁰ [Statistical Bulletin ApprenticeshipsNI](#), DEL, February 2014

4. Funding arrangements

Employers in the UK have been required to pay Apprentices at least the minimum wage set by the UK government since 2010. The minimum wage per hour is £2.68 for Apprentices under 19 years of age, which will rise to £2.73 from October 2014. Apprentices above the age of 19 are entitled to the UK national minimum wage for employees according to their age ⁽¹¹⁾, except for the first year of Apprenticeships comparable to EQF levels 3 and 4 where the minimum hourly wage is £2.68. Training taking place away from the company where the Apprentice is employed is mostly covered by the government with some exceptions within the UK.

In England, the UK government covers all or part of the cost of training for Apprentices. The full training cost is paid for young people between 16 and 18, but only 50% for Apprentices aged 19-24. The government may also provide funding for up to 50% of the cost for those who are 25 or older. The employer often covers the remaining cost.

Scottish Apprentices aged between 16 and 24 that are following approved Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks are eligible for funding from the Scottish government. Apprentice training for individuals aged 25 and over is only covered in certain sectors according to need and economic growth targets.

The Welsh Government funds training for Apprentices of all ages registered on approved Apprenticeship Frameworks. However, priority is given to young people between 16 and 24.

The cost of training for Apprentices in Northern Ireland under the age of 25 is fully covered by the government; however, adult Apprentices over this age will only receive 50% funding, and are only eligible if the Apprentice trains in certain sectors specified by the government.

5. Formal qualification / certification

Apprenticeship training in the UK includes formal learning at a training provider leading to a technical and occupational qualification and core, transferable skills such as numeracy, literacy and ICT and a final certificate from the awarding

¹¹ [National Minimum Wage rates](#), UK Government, checked 25 March 2014

organisation. The certification from the awarding organisation might not indicate that the qualification was studied in conjunction with an Apprenticeship as a number of qualifications in the UK can be completed independently or within an Apprenticeship Framework. Most are national qualifications registered within the QCF, SCQF or CQFW and are credit-based.

Apprentices successfully completing their training may also apply online for a certificate from the Apprenticeship Certificates England (ACE), Apprenticeship Certification Wales (ACW) or Modern Apprenticeships (MA) Online systems managed by the Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards. The Department for Employment and Learning issues ApprenticeshipsNI certificates in Northern Ireland. Apprenticeship certificates, however, are not registered as national awards within the UK.

6. Guidance, selection arrangements and completion rates

The completion rate of Apprenticeships in the UK has in the main risen in recent years; however, there has been a slight dip in England during the last academic year.

Table 2: Apprenticeship training success rates ^(12 13 14 15 16)

England	2011/12	2012/13	Achievements 2012/13
	73.8%	72.3%	252 900
Scotland	2011/12	2012/13	Achievements 2012/13
	75%	77%	19 921
Wales	2011/12	2012/13	Achievements 2011/12
	78%	86%	11 840
Northern Ireland	2011/12	2012/13	Achievements 2012/13
	Level 2: 63%	Level 2: 63%	Level 2: 3 276
	Level 2/3 and 3: 69%	Level 2/3 and 3: 70%	Level 2/3 and 3: 2 265

¹² [FE data library: apprenticeships](#), SFA, BIS, 27 March 2014

¹³ [Statistical First Release, Further Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held](#), ONS, 27 March 2014

¹⁴ [Modern Apprenticeships statistics](#), SDS, 01/04/2014

¹⁵ [First Release, Projected Apprenticeship Framework Success Rates and Provisional Destinations Data for Traineeship and Steps for Employment Learners: 2011/12](#), statistics for wales, December 2012

¹⁶ [Statistical Bulletin ApprenticeshipsNI](#), DEL, February 2014

Careers advice, as well as assistance with job seeking, applications and interview techniques, is available from four publicly funded agencies; the National Careers Service, Skills Development Scotland, Careers Wales and the Careers Service Northern Ireland. Job centres, schools and VET providers offer advice and support and there are also specific services that match up Apprenticeship vacancies and young people through online portals in England, Scotland and Wales. Prospective Apprentices must apply for jobs within companies and candidates who have successfully passed the employer's selection process may sign a work contract and start the Apprenticeship programme. Individuals who fail to secure a contract with a company may enter onto a school-based VET programme or a Traineeship to prepare for an Apprenticeship at a later stage.

B. Specific features of UK Apprenticeships in relation to the following policy challenges identified at EU level

1. Support for companies, in particular SMEs, offering company placements

The UK Government has made available an Apprenticeship Grant for Employers incentive (AGE 16-24) in England, providing financial assistance for businesses employing less than 1 000 people to take on 16 - 24 year old Apprentices within a formal Apprenticeship programme. More than 49 000 Apprentices started training with the assistance of an AGE 16-24 payment between February 2012 and October 2013, according to provisional data ⁽¹⁷⁾.

From April 2012, the Small Employer Incentive to Employ an Apprentice has also become available in England in the shape of payments to small enterprises that currently do not employ any apprentices, but wish to do so.

Employers in Scotland are being offered Employer Recruitment Incentive payments to take on disadvantaged young people as Apprentices. These employers are also then eligible for support, such as coaching, mentoring and staff advice and training, from agencies with experience in working with young people.

¹⁷ [Statistical First Release, Further Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held](#), ONS, January 2014

The Adopt an Apprentice incentive includes a payment to cover wage and recruitment costs for companies in Scotland willing to take on a Modern Apprentice who has been made redundant, so that the training can be completed.

The Young Recruits Programme is a Welsh Government initiative that provides financial support to employers who take on additional apprentices in the 16-24 age group offering high quality apprenticeship opportunities. In addition, to support SME participation in Apprenticeships, funding is available to support Apprentice recruitment costs for small and micro businesses.

In Northern Ireland employers may receive a payment if their Apprentice(s) complete a full ApprenticeshipsNI programme. The size of the payment depends on the complexity and level of the apprenticeship.

2. Enhance programme attractiveness and career guidance

The introduction of tuition fees for academic higher education study has made Apprenticeships an increasingly attractive alternative as they are considered to lead to good job opportunities and do not result in incurring a student debt. Although the Apprenticeship study route is increasing in popularity amongst young people, it is still not perceived as equally prestigious as university study by many parents, teachers and young people themselves.

The National Careers Service provides advice on learning, training and employment for young people and adults in one place. An increasing amount of information is available online, but is also offered face-to face (for those aged over 19) and by phone (also for those under 19). The National Apprenticeship Service in England runs an Apprenticeship Vacancy Service, which includes an online search function and mobile app. Schools in England have a duty to secure access to independent and impartial careers advice; however, there are concerns that the service is not currently providing face-to-face advice to young people.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provides a Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) service across Scotland. SDS works in partnership with education providers and job centres. SDS has also set up the My World of Work (MyWoW) website containing CIAG resources. Apprenticeships in Scotland is a national vacancy handling service run by young people and the Scottish careers community.

According to a University of Edinburgh study, SDS's input in schools is now based on the expectation that all pupils will use its MyWoW website and many may not need individual contact with a careers adviser. On the other hand, the study found that just over two-fifths of grade 11 pupils had made use of MyWoW (¹⁸).

Careers Wales offers an all age careers guidance service and has also introduced an Apprenticeship Matching Service available for employers as a recruitment tool to advertise vacancies. Potential Apprentices are able to apply online. An Estyn evaluation concluded that schools generally give pupils good careers advice, but improvements can be made in terms of making use of labour market information to better inform students (¹⁹).

The Careers Service Northern Ireland provides an all age Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) service regarding employment, education and training opportunities. Careers Service advisers in Northern Ireland operate in schools and job centres.

Reports show that many pupils don't receive sufficient information about further vocational study opportunities. A survey by Edge of A level (EQF level 4) students revealed that they felt teaching staff lacked awareness of vocational courses. A third of young learners polled stated that vocational opportunities had never been presented to them as an option, while 77 per cent were even discouraged from pursuing a vocational path (²⁰).

School and college performance tables exist in England. From 2016 there will be separate tables for vocational qualifications and progression within subjects will be measured. Within the current system secondary schools lack incentives to advise students to embark on a post-16 vocational study route, as the current school league table ranking takes retention, GCSE results and progression to academic higher education into consideration, but excludes VET. The new system, however, will highlight performance levels in VET more accurately.

¹⁸ [CES Briefing, What's the evidence? Comparing the impact of career websites and other career support](#), University of Edinburgh, 2013

¹⁹ [Informed decisions: The implementation of the Careers and the World of Work framework](#), Estyn, October 2012, page 8

²⁰ [Press Release, Vocational Stigma Starts in School](#), VQ Day, May 2012

Apprenticeships are being promoted to prospective Apprentices, parents, employers and education providers during the annual Apprenticeship Week.

3. National governance, regulatory frameworks and social partners' involvement

Apprenticeship Frameworks in England and Wales must comply with the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) and Wales (SASW). The same standards apply in Northern Ireland as in England, whilst Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks in Scotland must be approved by the Modern Apprenticeship Group.

Employers, training providers and awarding organisations along with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs) develop Apprenticeship Frameworks across the UK to meet the needs of employers.

Increased employer engagement in VET is encouraged by the Employer Ownership of Skills pilot ⁽²¹⁾, which is part-funding employers in England to develop VET, including Apprenticeships, that is specific to industry needs. Two rounds of funding have been made available and have proven to be an incentive for employers to invest in VET that will raise the skill levels of their future work force.

As part of the UK government's reform of Apprenticeships in England, employer-led trailblazers are developing new Apprenticeship standards in an increasing number of sectors. Giving employers direct control of funding for Apprentice training and development of the content of the training is envisaged to create programmes that are relevant and up-to-date in each sector.

4. Quality assurance

VET delivery is regulated by separate organisations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The timing of inspections varies between the regulators and in some cases depends on institutions' prior inspection results, performance levels in terms of achievements and grades in addition to the number of years the training provider has been operating. Other quality assurance procedures include

²¹ [Employer Ownership of Skills pilot](#), UKCES

provider self-assessments, publication of performance levels and reviews by funding organisations.

Colleges may subcontract smaller providers in the private, voluntary or not for profit sectors to provide work-based learning to Apprentices in specialist areas. Colleges are responsible for ensuring quality standards are being upheld in providers they have subcontracted training to through observation, review meetings, advice and administration support.

A distinguishing factor of the UK VET system is the large number of independent awarding organisations responsible for qualification development, assessment and awarding of qualifications. These awarding organisations set quality standards for education providers offering their qualifications. Awarding organisations' qualifications are moreover subject to regulation and registration requirements in the UK.

C. Main strengths and weaknesses of UK Apprenticeships

The last few years have witnessed record numbers of Apprentices and rising completion rates in the UK. Employers are discovering the benefit and value of Apprentices which is translating into increasing interest in hiring Apprentices. The government is directing more of the VET funding towards Apprenticeships and establishing measures to increase employer engagement in qualification design. Apprenticeships are available in a broad and growing range of sectors in the UK, and although the number of employers taking on Apprentices is on the rise, there is still demand for more Apprenticeship opportunities.

On-going Apprenticeship reforms and increasing employer engagement are keeping Apprenticeship training in the public eye. Research has found that Apprentices contribute to net productivity gains for the UK economy ⁽²²⁾ and that employers can quickly recoup the expenditure of training Apprentices if they are able to retain them after they complete their training ⁽²³⁾. Surveys show that most Apprentices plan to continue working for the same employer or in the same sector after completing the Apprenticeship.

²² [Productivity matters: the impact of apprenticeships on the UK economy](#), CEBR, March 2013

²³ [Employer Investment in Apprenticeships and Workplace Learning: The Fifth Net Benefits of Training to Employers Study](#), BIS, May 2012

Table 3: Planned Destinations of Apprentices post completion (2012) ⁽²⁴⁾

Proportion	England	Scotland (2011)	Wales	Northern Ireland
Stay working for the same employer	67%	68%	74%	77%
Stay working in same sector	17%	20%	14%	11%
Work somewhere completely different	7%	7%	6%	4%
Stay in education	6%	4%	4%	5%
None of these / something else	2%	2%	2%	1%

Whilst the number of Apprentices in the UK has risen sharply in recent years, a large proportion of the vacancies have been filled by adult learners above 25 years of age. Adult Apprentices are often viewed by employers as more capable workers who already possess both technical and soft skills and therefore require less training than young people. Certain Apprenticeships have also been used to up-skill or retrain employees. Despite the competition from adult learners, it should be noted that the number of young people under the age of 19 engaging in Apprenticeships is also on the rise.

In the period between August 2013 and February 2014 the UK government withdrew direct funding for Apprenticeship training for adults of 24 years of age and above in England, which saw the number of Apprentice starts reverse. In the first quarter of 2013/14, provisional data shows that the number of Apprentice starts for the 24+ group has dropped significantly in England. Most starts were made by under 19 year olds ⁽²⁵⁾. Instead of direct funding, 24+ Apprentices were eligible for a loan; however, due to a very low rate of applications for such a loan, this group can now also benefit from funding from the government's Adult Skills Budget.

Currently the majority of Apprentices are pursuing qualifications at skilled worker level (comparable to EQF level 3), which is the lowest level that Apprenticeships are offered at in the UK. To better match present and future labour market demand in the UK, Apprentices are encouraged to train at technician (EQF level 4) and higher levels

²⁴ [An International comparison of apprentice pay: Final Report](#), LE London Economics, October 2013

²⁵ [FE data library: apprenticeships. Apprenticeship geography, age and level: starts 2005/06 to 2013/14](#), SFA, March 2014

(EQF level 5 and above). Applications for higher level Apprenticeships are very low compared to the other levels.

Table 4: Apprenticeship participation rates by level

England (2012/13)	Intermediate	Advanced	Higher
	501 700 (56.3%)	377 000 (42.3%)	13 000 (1.5%)
Scotland (28/12/12)	Level 2 (SCQF 5)	Level 3 (SCQF 6)	Level 4 (SCQF 7) +
	10 421 (29.1%)	24 874 (69.4%)	560 (1.6%)
Wales (2012/13)	Foundation	Apprenticeships	Higher
	25 115 (53.6%)	19 235 (41.1%)	2 475 (5.3%)
Northern Ireland (2012)	Level 2	Level 2/3 and 3	Higher
	4 092 (51.9%)	3 758 (47.7%)	-

Northern Ireland concluded a consultation in April 2014 on interim proposals for a new model of Apprenticeships, aimed at delivering highly skilled apprentices in areas of economic importance as well as raising the status of Apprenticeships and providing progression pathways. The proposals include that future provision will commence at Level 3 (EQF 4) or higher and that an Apprenticeship will be for a minimum duration of two years in a bid to ensure quality and relevance to the labour market. A separate review will examine VET provision at level 2, including simplifying the offer and providing clear progression pathways to an Apprenticeship, employment or further and higher education.

Following concerns about the quality offered by some Apprenticeship providers, the minimum duration of Apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds in England was extended to 12 months in December 2011. This also applies to Apprentices over 19 years of age since August 2012, unless prior learning or attainment has been recorded.

Further on-going reforms to raise the quality of Apprenticeships and VET in England are looking to introduce more rigorous assessment methods and trade tests to ensure that Apprentices possess the skills to practice a profession. The future is also likely to see greater involvement of employers and employer organisations to better reflect in the training the skills and knowledge needed in the labour market.

D. Conclusion

The growing interest in Apprenticeships from employers, employees and young people is encouraging and measures to raise quality and standardisation of training are improving the provision. However, the Apprenticeship and VET systems in the UK are undergoing several changes at the moment with emphasis on creating training that is better aligned with labour market needs, increasing employer engagement, more rigorous assessment and encouraging more young people to apply for and complete Apprenticeships at technician level and above. The next few years are likely to see a number of changes to the different Apprenticeship services across the UK.