

7 easy steps to start an accounting apprenticeship

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Let's get started

This AAT guide is a practical help in setting up an accounting apprenticeship for a financial role. As we walk you through the process, you'll soon realise that whatever your organisation's size, it's not hard to do. By the time you've finished, you should have a clear idea of how to take action.

There are two big takeaways you will want to know at the outset:

- 1 The net cost is negligible** – if you're a small company with a salary bill of less than £3 million, the government will cover up to 95% of the training costs. Above this level, your company will already be paying the apprenticeship levy to the government, so you can use your levy pot to cover your training needs.
 - 2 The work is manageable** – you'll partner with other organisations who will bring expertise and experience, handle the administration and manage the education of your apprentice.
- Let's get started

Recipe for success

A successful accounting apprenticeship will blend at least three key ingredients:

- a suitable role in your finance team that you will fill or create through an apprenticeship
- an appropriate qualification that the apprentice will earn
- an apprenticeship programme that is designed to deliver the education and experience needed to acquire those qualifications.

Sometimes some simple advice and tweaking is helpful to balance these elements. This is where AAT can assist. AAT is a professional membership body specialising in accountancy qualifications to get started in the profession (as well as an approved End Point Assessment Organisation for the Accountancy Apprenticeship Standards at Levels 2–4). So we're ideally placed to help you achieve the right mix and begin working towards your business goals.

83%

Number of employers who try an apprenticeship who go on to rely on them to provide the skilled workers of the future.

Source: aat.org.uk/apprenticeships/employing

1. Identify the job role

The first question is, what kind of role are you hoping to fill with an accounting apprenticeship?

Speak with colleagues to determine why and where your business needs an apprentice.

- What skills gaps are you lacking in your team/organisation?
- Does your sector face any future disruption where your business might need new skills? Are you embarking on a digital transformation and need to inject some tech-literate talent?
- Have you got an aging workforce? Not only could apprentices be trained to replace these workers once they retire, but they could also bring in newer, younger clients.

Build in development

The role needs to allow reasonable room for the apprentice to develop.

"Look at the apprentice's potential development," advises David Malthouse, Managing Director at training provider First Intuition Chelmsford. "If you're taking somebody on to become an accounts receivable clerk where all they'll be doing is processing transactions, an apprenticeship will never work in that role."

Apprentices don't have to be school-leavers in their first job: they could be career changers or part of your existing workforce who want to progress their careers by acquiring new skills and qualifications.

"You might have a graduate working in marketing who wants to become an accountant or a middle-aged worker who wants more qualifications," says Simon Deane, Director at training provider Accountancy Learning.

Identify a champion

Before implementing a scheme, identify a staff member who will manage and mentor the apprentice(s), such as a potential line manager. As Malthouse notes, "Apprenticeships really fly when they've got a brilliant advocate for the scheme, who's a great mentor."



Apprenticeships really fly when they've got a brilliant advocate for the scheme who's a great mentor and spends time with them; ensure you've such a champion within your workplace.



David Malthouse

Managing Director at training provider
First Intuition Chelmsford

Key question: What is your job description for the apprenticeship role?

2. Approach AAT



Contacting AAT is the first practical step in setting up your apprenticeship. We'll help you fully understand your options:

- which AAT qualification or qualifications would be suitable
- how qualifications fit into apprenticeships
- how an apprenticeship can meet your business's needs.

We can also explain some benefits you might not have thought of – like the workplace skills and behaviours your apprentice will acquire, which will make them a more rounded and productive member of your team.

Do you want them to start at AAT Level 2 (which provides a Foundation Certificate in Accounting) or Level 3 (Advanced Diploma in Accounting)? You might want to design a programme for Level 4 (the Professional Diploma) or even one that ends in chartered status.

Finding a training provider

As your ideas begin to take firm shape, you'll be ready to begin talking with a training provider who will deliver the apprenticeship for you. Going through the (online) Yellow Pages is not always the best way to start.

The training provider relationship is critical to your success, so it's important to find one who can work according to your timescale and specifications. AAT can point you towards training providers who will be a good fit.

In Scotland

AAT can help you decide whether you want to train a Foundation Apprentice (16–18-year-old who takes their apprenticeship alongside other school subjects; you can recruit them after finishing school) or hire a Modern Apprentice (who studies qualifications while on the job).

Key question: What qualification do you want your apprentice to achieve by the end of the programme?



Talk to AAT. Their team knows everything about apprenticeships and will always give you a list of quality training providers or colleges to choose from.



Simon Deane

Director, Accountancy Learning

➤ Email the team

You could also speak to one of our advisers on **+44 (0)20 3735 2434**. Lines are open Monday to Friday 09.00–17.00 UK time.

3. Work with your training provider

Having sought AAT's advice, finding a training provider is your next move. A training provider is there to help you navigate the process of designing, setting up and running your apprenticeship.

With the right training provider on board, things will really start to come together. "Training providers are brilliant – they have so much knowledge and are always there to help you navigate through the processes. It's a really straightforward process once you know what programme and what apprenticeship it is you want to set up," says Helen Bloodworth, Senior Manager – Professional Qualifications, RSM.

In the early stages, they will provide invaluable advice – for example, in defining your job. Your apprenticeship role can't be just for to have someone make coffee, it must have scope for learning and development in order to qualify for funding. Using their experience, the training provider will help you tweak your job so it contains the right elements to fit with the apprenticeship standard.

Off the job training

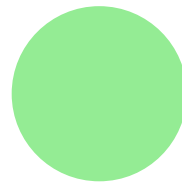
'Off the job' training is a critical part of an apprenticeship. It doesn't automatically mean 'off company premises', but it does require that apprentices spend 20% of their time away from work duties focussing on acquiring the skills and knowledge for their qualifications. This can all be managed by the training provider. A good training provider will "hold the employer's hand" throughout the apprenticeship process, from helping you place the initial advertisement through to coaching your apprentice in their end-point assessment (final exam).

■ ■
Setting up an apprenticeship is all to do with your relationship with your training provider. They do most of the work.

■ ■

Catherine Walsh

Human Resources Director, Buzzacott



Jade Cheshire Affiliate

Finance Apprentice
Network Rail



3. Work with your training provider

How will a training provider help you?

Training providers can also do much of the 'heavy lifting' (functions such as HR and handling the paperwork) that your team might not have time to deal with. Aside from training, a quality training provider can:

- tailor the apprenticeship training towards the needs of your business. If a training provider teaches apprentices bookkeeping at the start of their course, but you feel costing is more relevant to your firm, they may be able to accommodate these requests
- recruitment help: writing and listing the job spec/advert; help with interviewing candidates
- handling administration and paperwork.

Key question: Arrange to have a conversation with any prospective training providers.

Interview questions

- What qualifications do they offer? Are they AAT accredited?
- What are their fees?
- What is the course duration? When are the course enrolment and end-dates?
- How do they deliver their apprenticeship? In the college, at your workplace, remote learning or a blend?
- What are the class sizes?
- How regularly will the training provider keep you updated with the apprentice's progress?
- Are all optional papers offered at AAT Level 4 (some training providers are not able to do this)?
- What are their success rates?
- Also, find out which staff member at the provider will be working with your apprentice; arrange to speak with them if you can.



Kaitlyn Beetz AAT student
Assistant Registrar and Accounts Clerk,
Lighting Industry Association

4. Craft your job advert

Once you've decided upon a role for your apprentice, it's time to craft a compelling job advertisement. Here are some pointers

- Summarise what the job entails.
- Outline the personal characteristics and skills you are looking for.
- Specify any responsibilities and duties you'd like the apprentice to deliver for your business, such as assisting the department, meeting clients, travelling to sites (if working in audit).
- State the desired educational level such as GCSEs/ national 5, A-Levels/Scottish Highers.
- Some information about your business to convince the candidate your workplace is right for them. Are you an equal opportunities and Disability Confident employer? Are you a hybrid organisation where the apprentice may be required to spend part of the week working from home? Also, what benefits can you offer, such as gym membership and duvet days?
- The duration of the apprenticeship plus any qualifications they will study.
- And, of course, salary details.

Mark Sykes Employer
Head of Entrepreneurial Business, BDO

■ ■
Set your wage expectations higher and you'll see a stark difference in the number of applicants you'll get.

■ ■

David Malthouse Managing Director at training provider First Intuition Chelmsford



4. Craft your job advert



What should you pay?

If your apprentice is aged under 19 or in the first year of their apprenticeship, the employer must pay the apprentice rate of £4.30 an hour. In April 2022, this figure will rise to £4.81 an hour.

If your apprentice is aged 19-and-over, or if they have completed the first year of their apprenticeship, the employer must pay them the national minimum wage. From April 2022, these rates will be:

- Age 19–20: £6.83 an hour
- Age 21–22: £9.18 an hour
- Age 23-and-over: £9.50 an hour.

However, you may want to consider offering a more competitive salary for your apprentices to attract and retain the top talent.

Nearly all employers with training provider First Intuition choose to better the minimum wage, according to the firm's Chelmsford MD, David Malthouse.

Think long-term

"In order to get eyes on your advert, you've got to offer a competitive salary," he says.

Experience shows this pays in the long term with higher levels of loyalty.

You must also offer apprentices the same conditions as other employees in your organisation, such as paid holidays, sick pay, benefits such as childcare vouchers, plus any support such as coaching and mentoring. Apprentices will also have the same employment rights as your other workers.

Scotland

If you employ a foundation apprentice, you won't pay any wages as the apprentice will still be at school. If you employ a modern apprentice, your apprentice will be paid a salary, which must be at least the national minimum wage or higher.



Chloe Pickering AAT student
Finance Apprentice, Network Rail

5. Finding your apprentice

It can take as little as four weeks to employ an apprentice, however 12 weeks may be a more realistic time frame to work towards.

This includes the following:

- **Week 1:** Listing the job spec.
- **Weeks 2-5:** Job advert is online; candidates' CVs arrive.
- **Weeks 6-8:** Interviewing candidates.
- **Week 9:** Notifying candidates whether they've been successful.
- **Weeks 10-12:** Time for the successful candidate to work out their notice.
- **Week 13:** The candidate starts.

■
Creating a compelling job advert is the key to hook promising new talent in.
■

Promote your vacancy

- **findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk** – the government's Find an Apprenticeship portal is where many job-seekers head to search for apprentice opportunities. Adverts posted here are shared widely with schools/colleges and on social media, plus the site also has a high Google search ranking. Find an Apprenticeship will check your advert and let you know within 24 hours whether you need to re-draft and make any edits.
- **Social media channels.** "If you're advertising on Facebook or LinkedIn, remember few students are there, so tailor the advertisement towards any parents who might be reading," says David Malthouse, Managing Director at training provider First Intuition. "And if you've got a corporate TikTok account, shouting about your apprenticeship opportunities through a video is a brilliant way to engage this audience."
- **Contact local schools and colleges** if appropriate to see if they can share the advert.
- **Careers fairs/events.**
- **The AAT website** – the team at AAT are able to support in promoting your Apprenticeship vacancies.

Job advertisement websites may prove hit and miss. "You get people applying for apprenticeships because it's a job – often applications will mention the candidate's love of working outside or with animals, but nothing about accounting," says Simon Deane, Director at training providers Accountancy Learning.

Key question: Did you know that apprenticeships are not just for school leavers, they're also for career changers and upskilling existing employees?

6. Accessing funding

Government financial support means for many businesses recruiting and training an apprentice is more cost-effective than hiring skilled staff on a higher salary.

The amount received is dependent upon whether your business pays the levy or not. If your business has an annual wage bill of less than £3 million each year, you are exempt from the levy.

Smaller businesses

If your wage bill is less than £3 million, you won't pay the government's apprenticeship levy. Instead, up to 95% of your training fees will be paid for by the government. These funds will be paid directly to the training provider.

Your business will need to pay the remaining 5% of training costs. For this, you will need to agree a payment schedule with your training provider.

For small businesses, these incentive payments can have a positive impact on cashflow. For example, the maximum training funds for a Level 2 apprentice is £6,000. With the government paying 95% of this, the SME will only pay £300. For Level 3, it's only £400.

If your company has fewer than 50 employees, you won't pay the 5% contribution: the government will cover all the apprentice's training costs if the apprentice is a) 16–18-years-old or b) 19–24-years-old and has an education, health and care plan provided by their local authority or under care of their local authority.

When employers take on a 16–18-year-old on an apprenticeship or anybody under 25 and has an education, health and care plan or who has been under the care of their local authority, they receive an additional £1,000 grant.

The government pays 95% of your apprentice's training costs. If you hire a Level 2 apprentice, this means your company will only pay £300 every year: it can really boost a small company's cash flow.

Brian Nounév Affiliate
Apprentice, KPMG



6. Accessing funding

If you pay the levy:

The apprenticeship levy sees larger businesses (those with a pay-bill of over £3 million) contribute 0.5% of their payroll towards the government’s central training fund for apprenticeships, this can then be used to fund your apprenticeship training. These companies still receive some government funding, with the sum calculated by the levy currently declared to HMRC (through PAYE) and the proportion of their pay-bill paid to your workforce. The government then tops this amount up by 10%.

Funding in Scotland

The Scottish government contributes towards training costs through Skills Development Scotland (SDS), which is calculated using the type and level of apprenticeship, plus the apprentice’s age. For example, a SCQF Level 6 accounting apprentice aged 16–19 will receive £3,200 from SDS (with the company topping up the rest).

In Scotland, levy-paying companies can apply for up to £15,000 towards the cost of training your workforce. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Scotland can access training up to the value of £5,000 through the Scottish government’s Flexible Workforce Development Fund.

Wales

Apprenticeship funding is accessed through Welsh colleges and training providers contracted by the Welsh government. The Welsh government also offer incentives to employers that are based on contract hours and age of apprentices. For example, if you employ an apprentice aged 16 or over and they are contracted to 30 hours a week or more, you can currently receive up to £4,000.

Northern Ireland

For apprentices aged 16–24, the Department for the Economy (DfE) pays the full cost of off-the-job training. For those apprentices aged 25-and-over, DfE pays half (50%) of the training.

Under the Apprenticeships NI programme, an Employer Incentive Payment is available for employers whose apprentice successfully completes their full Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeships framework. This incentive ranges from £250 to £1,500.

7. The final steps

Once you've shortlisted your preferred candidates, have a preliminary video chat with them to discover more about them before a face-to-face interview

Candidates may not have much work experience, so tailor your questions accordingly. Ask them why they applied for the role, what they think an accountant does, their biggest accomplishment to date (a school project or personal achievements), a time they've dealt with a problem or difficult situation, and their favourite subjects at school. Give them plenty of opportunity to ask questions too.

You might want to act quickly when offering a job to the apprentice. "Things are moving fast," says Malthouse. "We're seeing young people have a telephone interview and then called for a face-to-face interview five days later, but over the weekend they've accepted another job offer. It's very much a candidate's market right now."

There are two final admin tasks to undertake before your apprentice can start their job...

A contract of employment

You must sign a contract of employment with your apprentice, which gives details of pay, working hours and conditions. It must also specify the duration of the apprenticeship, plus any qualifications they'll be working towards.

A commitment statement

You must sign a commitment statement with your apprentice and the training provider. It must include the planned content and schedule for training, what is expected and offered by the employer, training provider and the apprentice.

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We're seeing young people have a telephone interview and then called for a face-to-face interview five days later.

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David Malthouse Managing Director at training provider First Intuition Chelmsford

Conclusion

Now you've reached the end of this guide, you see that setting up an accounting apprenticeship is practical, affordable, and within reach of every professional business in the UK.

More and more businesses are turning to them for all kinds of positions and to create a talent pipeline of future managers and leaders.

If you still have questions, you can find more information at:

- AAT's [apprenticeship pages](#)
- or you can watch our [myth-buster videos](#)

Alternatively, if you are ready to get started, AAT's employer team is waiting to hear from you.



Freya Horrocks Employer
Project Manager, Finance
Strategy & Development,
Network Rail

Let's make it happen...

AAT's team is ready to help you take the next step.

As an independent body, AAT can help you decide on the right apprenticeship for your business and find local training providers.

Get in touch with us now at the email address below, or call to speak to one of our advisers.

➤ **Email the team**

➤ **Book a meeting**

➤ **Call +44 (0)20 3735 2434**

Lines are open Monday to Friday 09.00–17.00 UK time.



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