



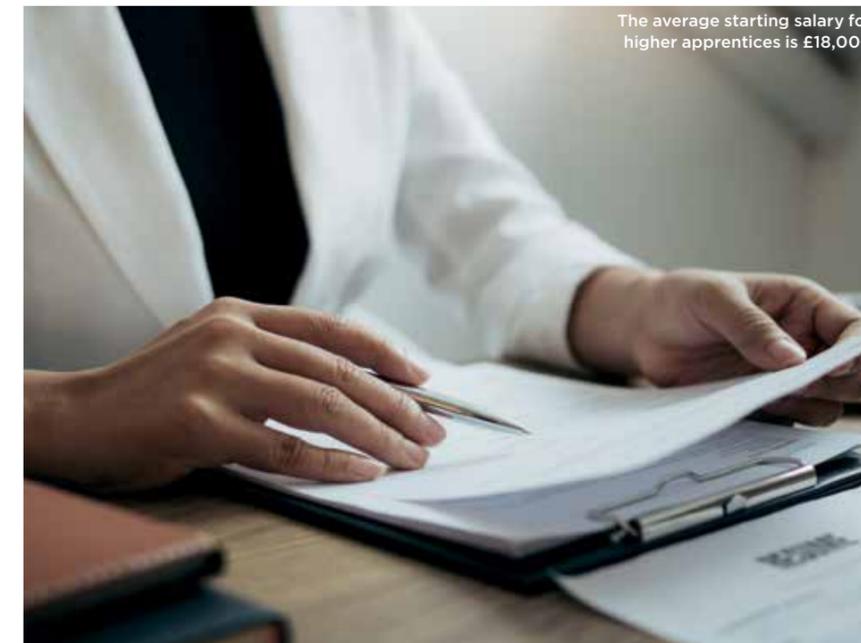
To undertake an apprenticeship, you'll have to dress smart to look the part

KICK START YOUR CAREER

The apprenticeship has undergone a 21st century makeover, shaking off the age-old perception that it's only a path for entering a trade, says **ANDREA SCOTT** Head of Careers and EPQ at The Grammar School at Leeds



As well as earning a wage, apprentices aren't liable for their own tuition fees



The average starting salary for higher apprentices is £18,000

Although apprenticeship training models have been around for centuries, they have only become established as a route to a professional career since the turn of the millennium.

Some major financial companies led the way, introducing school leaver schemes to combat an apparent lack of employability skills among graduates. Then, in 2015 the government launched the new apprenticeship scheme to broaden access to professions and meet the needs of the workplace, funded by a levy on large employers.

New apprenticeships offer a structured programme of work and study with at least 20 per cent of time allocated to study. Intermediate and advanced apprenticeships require applicants to be educated to at least GCSE level. Higher apprenticeships are Level 4 qualifications, equivalent to the first or second year of a degree, and expect at least two A-levels or the equivalent BTEC diploma. Degree apprenticeships lead to a full honours

degree and have entry requirements similar to those of many universities: three A-levels or BTECs at high grades.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education is responsible for quality assurance, and their website shows over 300 apprenticeship standards approved or in the pipeline, at Level 4 or above. These cover a huge range of occupations within law, business and finance, as well as engineering, construction, digital technology, health and many more.

Have you got what it takes?

Sally Everist, editor of *The Good Schools Guide's* directory of degree apprenticeships, advises us to think of apprenticeships as "earning with learning". She cautions that it's not a way of life for the faint-hearted, due to the rigours of studying for a degree alongside a day job.

In my own experience as head of careers, I concur that apprenticeships are not for

everyone. The young person must be ready for the world of work, possess the maturity and resilience to turn up on time and well presented every day, ready to give their best efforts and interact positively with both clients and colleagues.

Anyone who thinks apprenticeships are second class to university need only look at what it takes to apply. The popular programmes may have more than a hundred applications per place – which are whittled down through a multi-stage selection process, usually involving an exhaustive application form, psychometric testing, assessment centres and interviews.

Employers want their apprentices to show determination, curiosity and initiative, and navigating the application process certainly

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proves possession of these attributes. You can find advice and opportunities on the gov.uk website, the UCAS website and many others such as Amazing Apprenticeships, Not Going To Uni and High Fliers. Follow companies in your chosen sector on Twitter – they may advertise openings this way and it'll give you a head start with the in-depth employer research that's essential for each application. When you're invited for selection tests and interviews, research and prepare thoroughly. Employers may produce their own guidance, such as PWC's Employability Guide. Practise your answers and think about scenarios that will illustrate your experience and suitability

PHOTOGRAPHY: ISTOCK

for the role. Finally, even if it's a telephone interview, stand tall and wear a suit!

Work experience is a great way to find out whether you're ready for the workplace and could even land you an offer. A local law firm was so impressed by our placement student Harry Arnison (read about his apprenticeship on page 61) that they set up their first ever apprenticeship programme specifically for him, enabling him to begin training as a solicitor after his A-levels last year.

The appeal of apprenticeships

In this era of tuition fees and student loans,

apprenticeship programme. (Read more about Josh on page 80). Josh feels that the opportunities are second to none – he has six-month rotations round the business, giving him the chance to find out where his strengths lie and gain experience that will inform his future career choices. He hopes to stay on at KPMG, but if he has to look elsewhere his CV will rival those of many new graduates.

Like many potential apprentices, Josh was worried about missing out on university social life. His firm's induction programme soon put his mind at rest; he met apprentices from across the UK and regularly socialises with his peers in the London office. He even says: "I'm essentially a student with money!"

Apprenticeships are here to stay

Future labour market challenges including skills shortages and an ageing workforce have focused minds on recruitment and retention of the best staff. Large employers pay the apprenticeship levy, which is refunded if they offer apprenticeship programmes. These issues make a compelling business case for apprenticeships, which also have cross-party political support, given their potential for increasing workplace diversity and improving social mobility.

We have our part to play as teachers and careers leaders too. Our duty is to prepare young people for life after school by ensuring they understand all the options open to them, including alternatives to university. With our support, students can make informed choices and achieve their ambitions in whichever way is right for them. ☺



LEGAL ARRANGEMENT

HARRY ARNISON, 18 is an apprentice solicitor at Oakwood Solicitors, Leeds. Working while studying means he will qualify with hands-on experience

What made you want to apply for an apprenticeship?

The apprenticeship offered a practical route that I found really enticing. Studying a law degree at university means you graduate with hardly any experience of a solicitor's work. Skills like time recording, even simpler aspects such as email etiquette, are best refined on the job and by the end of my apprenticeship – when I receive my degree – I will have six years' experience.

I'm being paid to study. A full 20 per cent of your paid hours as an apprentice are dedicated to your degree. I have one day a week out of the office for study, plus the two-year training contract is included. To me the apprenticeship option was a no brainer. No debt. A wage. A degree. Don't mind if I do.

How easy a process was it?

I applied through BPP, whose online application process was very straightforward and simple to use. BPP asked for references, passport photos, A-level predictions and GCSE grades alongside all my relevant personal information. I could check on the status of my application at any time and queries were quickly resolved online or over the phone.

What A-levels did you take?

I took psychology, English language and history at The Grammar School at Leeds



Harry will be studying law to Master's level

(GSAL). BPP required BBC or 128 UCAS points, which I feel is surprisingly attainable when compared with most university law courses, which require a minimum of ABB.

How did you find out about the apprenticeship?

After doing my own research, I consulted careers guidance staff at GSAL, who saw the apprenticeship as an excellent pathway to a legal career. They helped me find the work placement at Oakwood Solicitors, during which I enquired about the law apprenticeship. The firm had never been involved in the apprenticeship programme before, and I was so honoured when they offered me this opportunity with them.

What was your work experience placement like?

I spent my work experience week with the clinical negligence team and they helped me with live cases in an over-the-shoulder manner which I find I learn best in.

What kind of tasks were you given on work experience?

Though, like all solicitors, I did my fair share of pagination, I was also given live cases to deal with. I would review medical records and piece together a medical history relevant to a client's injuries. I then cross-referenced this medical history with the client's account of events to look for inconsistencies and assess whether the claim was worth pursuing.

How long does it take to qualify as a solicitor through the apprenticeship pathway?

Depending on the provider, five to six years. I'm studying to Master's level, whereas some apprenticeships only teach up to degree level.

Do you have any tips?

Do work experience at more than one firm to find one you like. Making a good impression in your placement could be all it takes to be offered one of these sought-after apprenticeships. Having shown the firm that you're willing to work hard and efficiently should put you ahead of other applicants from the start.

What have your first few weeks been like?

It's been brilliant; I've learned lots working in the road traffic accident department with hugely experienced colleagues. I've drafted court documents, done medical précis documents and spoken on the phone with clients, third party solicitors and insurers. I've done face-to-face interviews and have helped issue court proceedings.

Plans for the future?

I'm at the law firm for the next six years working away at my degree, but when I finish I hope to become a solicitor at Oakwood – after a belated gap year to go travelling! 🍷



STRICTLY BUSINESS

JOSH PORT, 19, is an apprentice at KPMG. He chose an apprenticeship over university after a week of work experience with the firm

Why did you apply for an apprenticeship?

I had always assumed I would apply to uni. However the fast-paced working environment I encountered on my week's work experience with KPMG changed my mind. I'm on the two-year KPMG Business Services 360° apprenticeship programme, which offers four six-month rotations in different areas of the business as well as the opportunity to study for a Level 3 Business Administration NVQ (20 per cent of the working week is dedicated to study).

How did you apply for it?

The first stage was online, where you submit your CV and answer questions about your previous experience, values and why KPMG would be right for you. If you were successful you would be invited to the London office, for a written assessment testing your ability in different scenarios and an interview designed to test your competencies and ability to hold a conversation about things other than work.

What qualifications did you take? Did KPMG stipulate entry requirements?

I took A-levels in government and politics, business studies and economics at The Grammar School at Leeds. KPMG specifies a minimum of five GCSE passes including maths and English language.



Josh moved from Leeds to London to undertake the KPMG apprenticeship

How did you find out about the apprenticeship?

After deciding I wanted an alternative to university, I looked online for advice and talked to the school's careers team. Having done work experience at KPMG already made it the obvious first choice, and happily my application was successful.

What has your first year with KPMG been like?

It has superseded all of my expectations, with so many opportunities in such a short space of time at this stage of my career. The programme is called 360° because it allows you to rotate round the business, with four rotations of six months in different teams. I've joined teams I

never knew existed, dismissed departments I thought sounded cool but in fact weren't for me and overall, it's really helped me to find out where my strengths lie. When it comes to specialising in one team, if I am offered a job, I'll be in a well-informed position to make that decision.

Do you have any tips for current sixth formers thinking about alternatives to uni?

Be open minded and take every opportunity that's thrown at you. It may not sound right for you but if you explore a little further you may find the perfect thing to challenge you, take you out of your comfort zone and build you as an individual. This attitude will propel you much

more quickly than sitting back and just doing what's asked of you.

It's only natural to worry that you might miss out on the student social life. I'm not shy to say that moving away from my friends and family in Leeds at the age of 18, and living on my own in London was daunting as well as exciting. KPMG put on an incredible induction week in the Cotswolds, where around 180 new apprentices came together. Activities that took place during the week were designed to help you form bonds with the rest of the new intake, which made coming into the office for the first time far less intimidating knowing that I'd bump into familiar faces and had people to talk to if I felt lost. We go out after work, go to events and festivals, booked holidays; I'm essentially a student with considerably more money!

Plans for the future?

I would love to stay on at KPMG - the opportunities are second to none, with a broad scope of roles. There's a real family atmosphere here, with an eclectic mix of diverse and driven individuals. Also, KPMG have more than 20 offices across the UK and operate in more than 150 countries worldwide, so secondments and transfers are possible, which might not be on offer in a smaller organisation. 🍷