



# APPRENTICESHIPS A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

# FOREWORD

Jackie Martin  
Director of Education and  
Lifelong Learning

You want the best for your children's future, yet the education system can seem far more complex now than when you were a student. To help you understand more about the opportunities available APM, the chartered body for the project profession, has produced this short guide.

Apprenticeships are a great idea whose time has come again. The word 'apprenticeship' now covers more careers than ever before, including professions such as project management.

Apprenticeships are now a valid alternative to university – an important difference being that they don't carry the debt of a traditional, on-campus degree. There are more degree apprenticeships than ever before, including the Project Manager standard.

Apprenticeships are learning programmes designed by employers, for employers, who are looking to recruit keen, want-to-learn talent. As a result, you can be sure that apprentices gain relevant knowledge and qualifications to prepare them for a successful career in their chosen sector. They also develop the transferable skills to ensure a breadth of opportunity in future.

Apprenticeships will help to reshape many professions – including our own of project management, which has had more than 6000 apprenticeship starts for the two standards that contain our Project Management Qualification.

**There has never been a better time to take a closer look at apprenticeships.**

## ABOUT APM

Association for Project Management (APM) is the chartered body for the project profession. We have over 30,000 individual members and more than 500 organisations participating in our Corporate Partnership Programme, making APM the largest professional body for project management in Europe.

We are committed to developing and promoting project and programme management through our FIVE Dimensions of Professionalism. There are a number of ways in which you can benefit from

# CONTENTS

**04** ▶ Post-16 education  
and training

---

**05** ▶ Case Study:  
BT

---

**06** ▶ Apprenticeship  
basics

---

**07** ▶ Case Study:  
Network Rail

---

**08** ▶ Apprenticeship  
or university?

---

**10** ▶ Companies and  
apprenticeships

---

**11** ▶ Case Study:  
ARUP

# POST-16 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The education landscape continues to evolve. Vocational and professional options, such as apprenticeships and T levels, offer more high-quality opportunities than in previous generations.

The way that companies are recruiting and developing their talent is also changing. Employers now view apprenticeships as valuable programmes not just for those new to a business, but also for those in the company with several years' sector experience.

Thankfully, recruiting employers don't want to see every applicant with a set of GCSEs and A levels, plus a degree. More learners are mixing academic and vocational qualifications, even those applying for university. It is clear that there are many ways to begin a career - and it is also clear that the traditional route of A levels and a degree is not the best option for everyone.

It is well-known that the cost of going to university has increased significantly in a single generation –at the same time as the number of people graduating rises. For some, this is an investment in their children's future and the price won't affect the application decision; for others, it creates a reason to research alternative options and make an informed choice about next steps.

Apprenticeships have traditionally been associated with particular sectors such as engineering, plumbing and other manual trades.

The range of companies now offering apprenticeships has increased hugely and even well-established professions such as accounting, and law now have apprenticeship pathways.

This APM guide explains why apprenticeships are now part of the decision-making process for more parents and young people considering what to do after school, college – and even university.

You will discover some key comparisons between apprenticeship and university routes, with case studies from current and former apprentices working in project management across different sectors.

The real-life examples show how pursuing an apprenticeship scheme can be a successful career choice.



# CASE STUDY

Sean Farrell

BT

Business Improvement  
Consultant



“ When I left school the only route offered to us was to attend university. Apprenticeships were not mentioned as an option I could pursue. I knew university wasn't for me so I took a part-time job at Sainsbury's whilst I decided what I wanted to pursue. As it turned out I ended up working my way up in Sainsbury's from part-time to a department manager in a flagship store.

As my career progressed within Sainsbury's I realised I wasn't fulfilled. I felt I could push myself to achieve more. My partner and I had recently become parents and I wanted to push myself and feel proud of the job I did while enjoying more of a work-life balance, moving away from shift work and early mornings and late evenings. Once I began to research my options, an apprenticeship became a great option for me and my young family, as I would be able to gain skills and an industry-recognised qualification whilst also earning. Since starting my Associate Project Manager apprenticeship I have loved learning new skills and putting them straight into practice rather than learning a theory and waiting weeks or years like with a degree to put these into practice.

During my apprenticeship I have completed a number of projects for the NHS and local councils which have had varying levels of complexity. The skills I have learned have taught me how to address the issues as they arose. Dealing with these issues had allowed me to step into a new role within BT and join the transformation team, dealing with much larger and complex projects with exposure to directors within the business. This was a daunting prospect when I was offered the move up within the business but one I felt capable of and I was fully supported by my previous manager and new manager.

I would recommend an apprenticeship to anyone who is considering it, either as an option after coming out of education or using it to make a career change. It is a decision I haven't regretted once and has given massive opportunities to me and my family. ”

# APPRENTICESHIP BASICS

## WHAT IS IT?

An apprenticeship is a work-based programme that is delivered within a full-time job. Available at a range of levels, it can set a foundation for a career or demonstrate capability at a higher level. In many professions, including project management, an apprenticeship includes a professional qualification relevant to the role.

For example, in an IT, financial services or media company, there are apprenticeships that include a professional qualification from the Association for Project Management (APM). There are also apprenticeships with qualifications from other professional bodies in areas such as accounting, law and marketing. These show that apprentices are not just those who want to work in manual trades.

## HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

All apprenticeships have to last at least one year although many run for two or more years. They are available at different levels, including degree level, and since 2015 there have been degree apprenticeships. These blend academic and professional study with a full-time paid job. Importantly, the employer pays for all apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships. There is no study debt or student loan required.

Degree apprenticeships, and integrated degree apprenticeships, which contain a degree as well as a professional qualification, can last up to five years, depending on the subject area.

## APPRENTICESHIP LEVELS

APPRENTICE LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS AT THE SAME LEVEL	MINIMUM DURATION
Level 2	GCSE	12 Months
Level 3	A level/BTEC National	12 Months
Level 4	First year of Bachelors degree/ Foundation degree	12 Months
Level 5	Level 5 Second year of Bachelors degree/ Foundation degree	12 Months
Level 6	Final year of Bachelors degree	12 Months
Level 7	Postgraduate degree	12 Months

# CASE STUDY

## Rebecca Radford

NetworkRail

Graduate Project Manager  
and Apprentice



“ Before I started the apprenticeship I didn't know too much about it, other than it was a programme that included a recognised qualification, and it was gained from the graduate scheme.

I was previously at university studying for a degree in Sociology and undertaking the role of Student Officer at the same time. When I graduated in 2018, I knew I wanted to gain experience and a further qualification whilst working, and an apprenticeship and graduate scheme seemed a good way to do this.

The application process for the programme was intense, with testing and an assessment centre before gaining the position.

My friends and family thought it was a great idea for me to develop professional skills after my graduation and gain a recognised professional qualification at the same time.

The Associate Project Manager apprenticeship has given me professional skills and knowledge around project management, meaning I am able to deliver projects in the railway. By doing the apprenticeship alongside working I could regularly put into practice what I was learning.

Previously I have worked with Network Rail on Kings Cross Remodelling and Crossrail 2 and I am currently working in delivery with the Central Rail System Alliance (CRSA) on the Werrington Grade Separation. I have a variety of responsibility from commercial approvals and budget control to managing contractors and integration of delivery.

The apprenticeship has given me a solid foundation of knowledge for my career and provided a professional understanding of project management. It has helped me lead projects, be commercially analytical and implement governance processes effectively by understanding the theory behind the work and using this in the delivery of projects. By undertaking this apprenticeship I have been given increasing responsibility and been selected to be a panel member for the National Rail Awards.

It is important to realise that there are different routes in to an apprenticeship. Some people join straight after school or college, others (like me) graduated first from university and still others have a different career in another area before joining the programme. ”

# APPRENTICESHIP OR UNIVERSITY?

For many students and parents, the prospect of a full-time job as an apprentice with qualifications included is an attractive one. Here are some other areas to consider.

University is the right option for some – indeed, it's the only option for a small number of roles where there is no apprenticeship currently available. Moreover, there are still some companies that continue to use their

graduate scheme as a leadership programme, whereas their apprentices will likely fulfil a middle manager role.

Yet in other cases, companies are replacing their graduate schemes with high-level apprenticeship programmes, so it is more important than ever to make an informed choice based on preferred roles, sectors and companies.

## COMPETITION AND JOBS

Graduate schemes are more established than apprenticeship programmes in most companies. As such, there is keen competition for places.

There are many sectors, including project management, where apprenticeships have only recently launched in comparison. These will, in the short term at least, be less competitive than graduate schemes, but we expect

apprenticeships to become more competitive over time as more people realise their value – and more successful former apprentices go on to take senior roles in companies.

The apprenticeship levy has made many large companies invest in apprenticeships, both for new joiners and existing members of staff. These larger companies are driving the growth of degree apprenticeships in a wide range of areas including project management.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

'Earn while you learn' is a phrase that could have been designed for apprentices. They are full-time members of staff, receiving high-quality learning and development to

enhance their career. While a professional qualification is valued by many, the programme also includes soft skills – including how to present, how to network with others and how to be resilient.

## NETWORKING

Building networks in and out of a business is an essential way to progress your career at any stage, and apprentices are given this opportunity from day one. Excitingly, there

are opportunities for 'reverse mentoring' - this gives the apprentice access to a senior executive who can offer advice and guidance; in return, the executive understands more about millennial mindsets and social media channels.

## COSTS

The cost of graduating from university with a typical degree (three years, full-time, on campus) comes with a debt, on average, of just over £50,000\* according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Conversely, apprentices have no debt from

their studies and their salary will increase over the course of their programme. It is not unusual to see apprentices with three years' experience earning more than those who have just graduated from university. It is also worth remembering that many CEOs are not graduates.



	APPRENTICESHIP	UNIVERSITY
<b>QUALIFICATIONS</b>	Apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships, often contain relevant professional qualifications	Degrees can contain relevant learning but rarely include professional qualifications. Graduate schemes usually contain these qualifications
<b>COSTS</b>	Apprenticeships are employer-funded programmes for those in full-time, paid roles. There are no costs to the apprentice	Graduates from English universities have an average debt of £50,800*
<b>DURATION</b>	Apprenticeships last 1-5 years, depending on the level and sector	Degrees last 3-7 years, depending on the subject
<b>STARTING SALARY</b>	Apprenticeship starting salaries vary by sector, location and company size; the average starting salary was £282 per week**, or just over £14,500 per annum. Some sectors offer starting salaries exceeding £20,000	Graduate starting salaries vary by sector, location and company size; figures also depend on whether a graduate is on a formal scheme; graduate starting salaries range from £15,000 to more than £40,000
<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	Full-time employment	Optional placements and internships
<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>	Soft skills, technical knowledge. Apprentices and graduates can both lead a business – ultimately it's down to ability and drive	Soft skills, technical knowledge. Apprentices and graduates can both lead a business – ultimately it's down to ability and drive

\* Institute of Fiscal Studies report, *Higher education funding in England: past, present and options for the future*, 2017

\*\* BIS Research paper No 15, *Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2016: England*

## APPRENTICESHIPS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Level 4 Associate Project Manager apprenticeship is available in England. It usually takes 12-15 months to complete and contains a professional qualification from APM.

The Level 6 Project Manager degree apprenticeship is also available in England. It usually takes 3-4 years to complete and those finishing it will receive an APM professional qualification and a Bachelors degree in Project Management. Those completing it will receive an APM professional qualification, an apprenticeship certificate and a degree certificate.



# COMPANIES AND APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships and graduate schemes are both examples of early careers programmes. Both help companies to grow new ideas, understand their younger and prospective customers better and have robust succession planning in place.

The apprenticeship levy has seen larger companies work harder to attract school and college leavers, and some have supported the development of degree apprenticeships too. Companies of all sizes offer apprenticeships. You can find them across the country in companies ranging from tech startups to established corporations.

The examples in this guide, from a range of sectors, show why companies support apprenticeships.

## CAREERS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management is becoming a more popular first-career choice for young people. Offering a portable set of skills that can be applied in sectors and locations across the country, project management is a temporary, group activity that requires strong technical and people skills. From huge sporting events to infrastructure projects and business change programmes, project management gives you the opportunity to drive improvement and, put simply, get things done.

### USEFUL LINKS

#### APM

[apm.org.uk/apprenticeships](http://apm.org.uk/apprenticeships)

Features more information on apprenticeships that contain APM professional qualifications. APM's free Student membership is also available to project management apprentices. For more information on project management apprenticeships contact [apprenticeships@apm.org.uk](mailto:apprenticeships@apm.org.uk)

#### THE NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP SERVICE

Apprenticeships work for people of all ages and backgrounds and can transform lives. Apprentices gain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, in some cases up to degree level, while working and earning.

The National Apprenticeship Service supports the delivery of apprenticeships in England. It offers free impartial advice and support to employers looking to recruit for the first time or expand their apprenticeship programmes. This includes simplifying the process of recruiting an apprentice through the support of employer focused teams. Through the Find an apprenticeship site on GOV.UK employers can advertise their vacancies and potential apprentices can apply.

Call 0800 015 0600 or search for apprenticeships on GOV.UK to find out more.

#### FIRE IT UP

[apprenticeships.gov.uk](http://apprenticeships.gov.uk)

Features information for employers, potential apprentices, parents and teachers. There is also a vacancy matching service.

# CASE STUDY

James Currie

Arup

Project Manager  
Degree Apprentice



“ Apprenticeships at school were always advertised as being traditional career paths to becoming a type of tradesperson. It wasn't until I did my own research that I began to discover apprenticeships in roles such as Project Manager. It wasn't like university, in that there just wasn't the same mass of information on the internet or through the school about degree apprenticeships. The guidance and support from teachers and career advisors seemed to be very university-orientated. It was simple to them: if you were academic you went to university and if you were practical you did an apprenticeship. When I showed them the Level 6 Project Manager Degree Apprenticeship they were initially taken aback but then said that it looked like a very good career path. This was due to both the invaluable practical experience and a relevant degree with no fees.

Before my apprenticeship I was at college studying 3 A levels in Business, Economics and Law. I knew that I wanted to go into the world of business and was drawn to it as my dad and uncle, two of my biggest role models, work in business.

I chose to do an apprenticeship over the traditional university path as, for me, it was important to gain experience in the working world whilst gaining a relevant qualification. In my opinion, having both the practical and theoretical knowledge makes you more well-rounded and employable in any sector.

The application process was more straightforward than an application to university. I found the apprenticeship through searching for degree apprenticeships online leading to me seeing an advertisement for this job. This led me to an application on Arup's website consisting of questions ranging from 'Why do you want to work for Arup?' to 'What Arup project inspires you most?'. I was shortlisted and invited to an assessment day at the Arup London office which consisted of teambuilding exercises in the morning followed by interviews in the afternoon. Arup was very accommodating throughout, answering any questions I had and making me feel welcome from the moment I arrived by offering me a drink at the door and everyone generally taking time out of there day to talk to me.

My friends' and family's reactions were similar to that of my tutor: they were initially surprised that I didn't want to go to university but once I told them about the apprenticeship they thought it was almost too good to be true. My dad, being a project manager working in the industry, thought the experience that I would receive would be invaluable for my future. On top of that I would be also getting a degree.

This apprenticeship has really boosted my confidence and social skills. At school, if someone had asked me to present in front of senior project managers and directors it would have been a real challenge. I am now developing the skills that I need to plan a presentation and manage my nerves so that I feel more confident during it. I have gained vast amounts of knowledge in such a short period of time as everyone in the company is so unique and has a different story to tell. The saying 'the answer is only two phone calls away' could never be truer, especially at Arup. As well as acquiring practical knowledge I am also working towards a Project Management Degree and gaining my APM PMQ at the same time.

The apprenticeship itself entails a variety of work where no two days are the same. I have been given a number of tasks from creating flow diagram processes and managing events to actually going on site and seeing the day-to-day activities and changes occurring on the project. During this apprenticeship I have been given the responsibility to undertake tasks in my own way and been empowered to see them through to their conclusion.

At school, university will most likely be presented as your main option for higher education but do your research and make informed choices that suit you. There are so many different apprenticeships available in a variety of different industries, that you just have to find the one that is right for you. ”



**ASSOCIATION FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

Ibis House, Regent Park  
Summerleys Road  
Princes Risborough  
Bucks, HP27 9LE

Tel (UK) 0845 458 1944  
Tel (int) +44 1844 271 640  
[ptf@apm.org.uk](mailto:ptf@apm.org.uk)  
[apm.org.uk](http://apm.org.uk)



*Association for Project Management is incorporated by  
Royal Charter RC000890 and a registered charity No.  
1171112. Principal office as shown. V2*