

ACL



Employer Toolkit

Apprenticeships | Careers | Learning





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Who We Are

Thank you for choosing ACL as your Apprenticeship Delivery Partner.

ACL is proud to be the largest provider of Adult Education in Essex and the primary Apprenticeship provider for Essex County Council. We work in partnership with businesses and public sector organisations across the county and surrounding areas to deliver high-quality apprenticeship programmes that support workforce development and business growth.

We offer apprenticeships at intermediate, advanced, and higher levels across a wide range of sectors. Our programmes are suitable for both new recruits and existing staff who are looking to upskill for promotion, transition into new roles, take

on additional responsibilities, or address identified development needs.

Flexible, Employer-Focused Delivery

Our programmes are designed to be as flexible as possible to meet the demands of a busy workplace. Delivery methods include:

- Taught sessions at one of our seven centres across Essex
- Distance learning via our virtual and digital platforms
- One-to-one coaching delivered at the apprentice's place of work

This blended approach ensures that learning is accessible, relevant, and aligned with your operational needs.

Comprehensive End-to-End Service

ACL offers a fully managed service to support employers throughout the apprenticeship journey, including:

- Recruitment support for employers looking to hire new apprentices
- Guidance and support to help existing staff access apprenticeship funding
- Dedicated account management to ensure successful outcomes for both employer and apprentice
- Professionally qualified and occupationally competent delivery teams
- Robust skills scans and training needs analysis to ensure the right programme fit
- A wide range of supplementary courses to support apprentices and your wider workforce

This guide has been developed to provide clear, practical information about every stage of the apprenticeship process with ACL.

We look forward to working with you to develop the skills and potential of your business.

Kind regards,

The ACL Apprenticeship Team

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Dispelling Common Myths

At ACL, we understand that there are still some misconceptions about apprenticeships. Here are five of the most common myths we encounter and the facts that set the record straight:

1. Off-the-job training means one day a week at college.

Not true. Our blended delivery model is designed to be flexible and workplace friendly. Off-the-job training can include:

- Online learning and digital modules
- Research and project-based work
- In-person and virtual classroom sessions
- Employer-led activities
- One-to-one coaching in the workplace

This approach ensures apprentices can learn effectively without disrupting business operations.

2. The paperwork is complicated and time-consuming.

We keep things simple. While there are a few formalities to complete, our team is here to guide you through every step—from initial setup to programme completion—ensuring a smooth and straightforward process.

3. Apprenticeships are expensive.

Apprenticeships offer excellent value for money. Whether you're using your Apprenticeship Levy or contributing the 5% co-investment, our programmes deliver a rich curriculum that helps apprentices embed and apply new skills directly in the workplace. In some cases, grants and incentives may also be available to support costs.

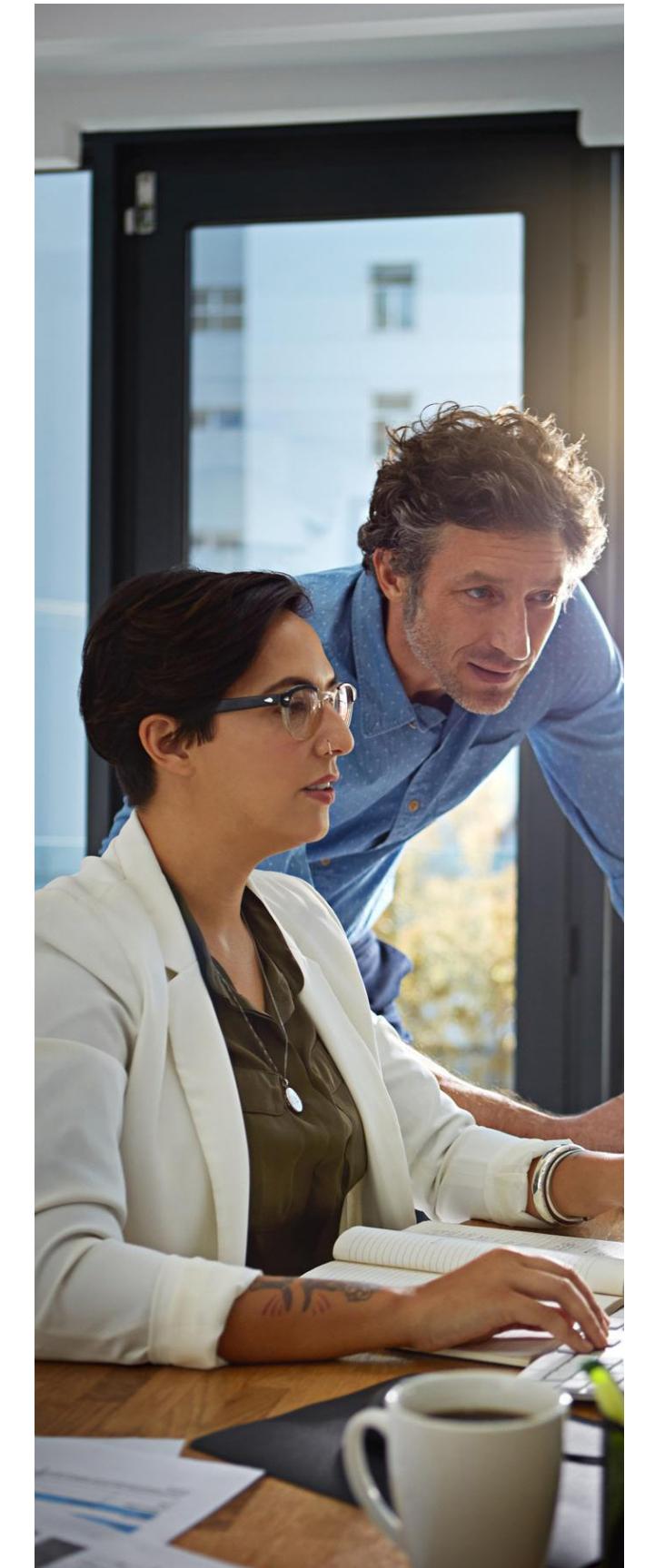
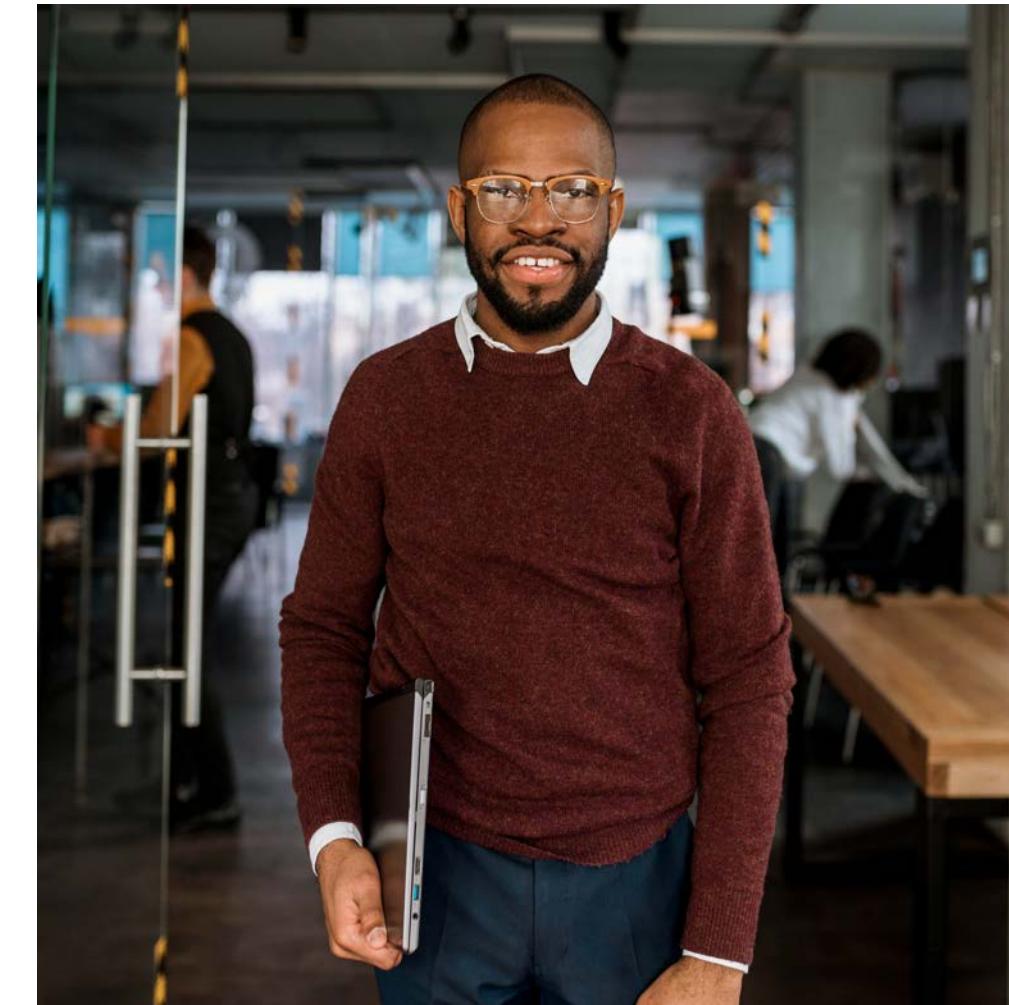
'The ACL apprenticeship has been a real eye opener. The cost to the business is minimal and the potential benefits are significant. Whilst I understand that businesses may feel hesitant in bringing in an apprentice, I cannot stress enough that there are huge benefits.'

4. Apprenticeships are only for school leavers.

Far from it. Apprenticeships are a powerful tool for developing existing staff. They're ideal for employees who have taken on new responsibilities, changed roles, been promoted, or simply need to upskill in their current position.

5. Recruiting an apprentice is difficult.

We make it easy. Our Business Development Team will work with you to source the right candidate. We advertise through the National Apprenticeship Service, our digital channels, and collaborate with colleagues across Essex County Council to help you find the best fit for your team.



Quick Guide: How It Works

Here's a simple overview of the apprenticeship process. We'll explain everything in more detail when we meet with you.

1.

Initial Chat

You'll speak with one of our apprenticeship training experts, who will be your main contact throughout.

2.

Getting Started

We'll send application forms to any existing employees, or provide a vacancy template if you're recruiting.



6.

Programme Setup

We'll ask you to complete a Health and Safety checklist, sign a contract, and agree the cost and start date.

7.

Induction Meeting

The apprentice, their line manager, and the tutor will set targets and agree off-the-job learning.

8.

Progress Reviews

These 60-minute sessions include the apprentice and line manager to review progress and set new goals.

3.

Shortlisting Candidates

If we're advertising the vacancy for you, we'll share CVs and applications as agreed.



4.

Onboarding

The onboarding process will support you to complete an initial assessment, skills scan, and interview with us.

5.

Employer Input

For existing staff, we'll ask you to complete a skills scan to highlight development needs.

10.

Completion & Assessment

Once the learning is complete, we'll book the Apprenticeship End Point Assessment (EPA).

Before the Apprenticeship Begins

Before the apprenticeship starts, there are a few key steps we'll need you to complete.

Your apprenticeship training expert will guide you through the process, explain what's needed and when, and provide ongoing support.

All documents will be sent to you via a secure web service (known as PICS) for ease and efficiency.

Here's what we'll need from you:

- Set up an account on the Government's Apprenticeship Service. There is helpful guide here, if you need to create an account.
- Sign a contract with ACL confirming your responsibilities and compliance with ESFA (Education & Skills Funding Agency) rules.
- Complete a Health & Safety checklist for the apprentice's workplace.
- Agree to the Employer Agreement, which outlines financial arrangements and payment schedules.
- Provide a copy of your Employers' Liability Insurance.

- Confirm that the apprentice has (or will have) a contract of employment in place on the first day of their programme.

The Contractual Bits

The contract and Health & Safety checklist only need to be completed once every three years—regardless of how many apprentices you take on. However, if there's a significant change or an incident, we may need to carry out an additional Health & Safety check to ensure our records are up to date.



Programme Structure and Duration

Each apprenticeship is made up of different components and typically lasts between 8 and 30 months, depending on the level and the apprentice's existing knowledge, skills, and behaviours.

Before the programme begins, the apprentice will complete an Initial Assessment, which includes:

- Maths and English assessments

- Sector-specific skills scans
- An interview with a member of the ACL Apprenticeship Team

If the apprentice is already employed by you, we'll also ask the line manager to complete a skills scan to provide their perspective on the apprentice's current abilities.

This information helps us determine the programme content, cost, and duration. Once agreed, we'll ask you to sign the Employer Agreement, and the apprenticeship can begin.

Some apprenticeships include formal qualifications, while others are purely competency-based. In some cases, qualifications can be added for an additional fee to cover registration and exam costs.

Each apprentice is assigned a dedicated tutor, responsible for delivering the programme on time and involving the employer and line manager at every key stage.

Induction

Once a start date has been agreed for the apprentice, we will book their induction.

This session will take approximately two hours, and the line manager will need to be present.

During the induction, the tutor will:

- Go through the setup of the apprentice's Training Plan
- Discuss the content of the programme
- Set some initial targets
- Ask the line manager and apprentice to sign the Training Plan, including the Apprenticeship Agreement and Commitment Statement

Reviews of Progress

At the induction, the line manager will be asked to set some initial learning targets for the apprentice, these will be complemented by targets set by the tutor.

The first progress review will take place four weeks into the programme. After that, reviews will be held every 10 weeks. Each session lasts approximately one hour and functions like a mini-appraisal.

During these reviews, the tutor will meet with both the apprentice and the line manager to:

- Track progress against previously set targets and objectives
- Set new targets for both the programme and the workplace
- Ensure off-the-job hours (OJH) are being met and recorded
- Adapt the delivery plan if needed to ensure OJH requirements are achieved
- Check that the apprenticeship is progressing as

expected

- Answer any questions or address concerns about the programme

Off-the-Job Learning (OJH)

This is the part of the programme where the apprentice develops the new skills, knowledge, and behaviours needed to become occupationally competent.

Our blended learning approach means apprentices can access a wide range of learning opportunities in different formats—so not all apprentices will need to attend a weekly taught session.

Off-the-job hours are calculated over the lifetime of the apprenticeship and may include:

- Taught sessions at an ACL centre
- Online tutorials or training sessions
- Virtual or digital learning activities
- Research projects linked to the occupational area
- Self-guided study (including remote tutor support)
- Workshops and seminars
- Attendance at conferences or trade shows
- One-to-one meetings with their tutor or line manager
- Related industry or employer-led training
- Staff meetings or away days
- Induction training

Essentially, any activity where the apprentice is gaining new knowledge, skills, or behaviours relevant to their apprenticeship can count.

The tutor will show the apprentice how to record

their OJH activity, and at induction, the Off-the-Job Learning plan will be agreed and documented.

Maths and English

Maths and English skills are a core part of every apprenticeship. Whether through formal qualifications or embedded learning, these skills are developed throughout the programme.

Initial Requirements

If an apprentice does not hold a recognised Level 2 qualification (e.g. GCSE grade C/4 or above) in maths or English—or cannot provide certificates to prove exemption, they will need to complete Functional Skills as part of their apprenticeship.

Our Initial Assessment will determine the apprentice's current level and how long it may take to complete the required qualifications.

Functional Skills do not count towards Off-the-Job Hours (OJH). In some cases, we may recommend completing them before the apprenticeship begins.

Age-Specific Guidance

• 16-18 Year Old Apprentices

Apprentices in this age group must meet the required level of maths and English for their apprenticeship standard. If they do not hold the necessary qualifications (or cannot provide certificates), they will be required to complete Functional Skills.

• 19+ Apprentices

In most cases, the employer decides whether a 19+ apprentice should complete maths and/or English

qualifications.

However, if the apprenticeship standard requires a specific qualification, it becomes mandatory.

Our apprenticeship training experts will discuss this with you during onboarding to confirm what's needed for the role.

Functional Skills Delivery

Functional Skills qualifications assess everyday maths and English. They are delivered through a mix of:

- Classroom sessions
- Online learning
- Self-study resources

There are three exam components for English and one for maths.

Ongoing Development

Even if an apprentice is exempt from formal qualifications, maths and English are embedded throughout the apprenticeship. Tutors will continue to develop these skills through contextualised learning and assessment relevant to the apprentice's job role.

Not all previously achieved qualifications provide an exemption. We will confirm with both the apprentice and employer before the programme begins if Functional Skills are required.

Digital Skills

As part of their programme, all apprentices will have the opportunity to develop and improve their digital skills. This may include attending workshops at one of our centres, covering topics such as:

- Spreadsheets

- Word processing
- Using AI in the workplace

We also use a range of virtual learning tools and an e-portfolio system to support delivery and manage progress. These tools help apprentices build confidence in using different systems and platforms.

- **Virtual Learning and E-Portfolios**

To support a blended learning approach, we use several digital platforms:

- **Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)**

Apprentices access and complete online learning activities aligned to their programme. The VLE also hosts a range of supporting resources.

- **Microsoft Teams & Hybrid Delivery**

Tutors use Teams to deliver virtual classroom sessions or conduct remote one-to-one meetings.

- **Learning Assistant (E-Portfolio)**

Apprentices use this system to store their work and track progress. Line managers also have access, allowing them to monitor development between review meetings.

Apprenticeship Assessment (End Point Assessment)

The Apprenticeship Assessment takes place at the end of the programme and is a comprehensive, holistic evaluation of the apprentice's skills, knowledge, and behaviours, as outlined in the apprenticeship standard.

It is conducted by an External Independent Assessor and typically includes:

- **Portfolio of Work**

A collection of written, audio, and video evidence demonstrating how the apprentice has applied their learning in the workplace.

- **Online Knowledge Test**

A series of scenario-based questions to assess the apprentice's understanding. This is completed online and on demand.

- **Competency-Based Interview**

A structured one-to-one interview to evaluate the apprentice's knowledge, application, and soft skills.

- **Professional Discussion**

A detailed conversation led by the assessor, focusing on the apprentice's personal and professional development, including evidence of CPD and its impact on workplace performance.

Apprentices will receive a Pass, Merit, or Distinction upon completion. If the result is a Fail, a resit will be arranged in agreement with both the apprentice and the employer.

Safeguarding and the Prevent Duty

At ACL, we have a legal and moral duty to safeguard all learners and apprentices, including our responsibilities under the Prevent Duty.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding means protecting individuals from harm and promoting their wellbeing. This includes:

For children (as defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children):

- Protecting from maltreatment
- Preventing impairment of health or development
- Ensuring safe and effective care
- Taking action to secure the best possible outcomes

For vulnerable adults (as defined in the Care Act 2014):

- Protecting the right to live safely, free from abuse or neglect
- Working together to prevent and stop abuse or neglect

- Promoting wellbeing and respecting the individual's views and wishes
- Recognising complex personal circumstances and potential risks

The Prevent Duty

Under Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, certain organisations—including education providers—must have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.”

This applies to sectors such as Education, Health, Social Care and Police.

You can find full details in our Safeguarding and The Prevent Duty for Employers booklet, available on our website or in hard copy: aclessex.com/safeguarding

Reporting an Absence

To help us safeguard apprentices, it's important that we are informed of any unexpected absences.

- If your apprentice does not attend work and fails to make contact, you must inform ACL on the same day.
- If your apprentice misses an ACL learning session, we will notify the line manager.
- If the apprentice needs to cancel a session, they must inform their tutor in advance.
- If the apprentice is absent from work for more than one day due to injury, illness, or disease linked to their employment, you must notify us.

To report an absence, please call: 03330 130926

Funding & Costs

The government sets maximum prices for each apprenticeship.

The final cost depends on the occupational area, programme level, and the apprentice's existing knowledge, skills, and qualifications which we assess through an initial assessment and skills scan.

Our apprenticeship training experts will work with you to agree a fair and transparent price, discuss payment options, help you register your digital account and support you in accessing any available funding.

How Employers Pay for Apprenticeships

You'll pay for apprenticeship training in one of three ways:

Apprenticeship Levy

If your annual payroll is over £3 million, you'll pay into the Apprenticeship Levy. Funds go into your digital account and are used to pay for training monthly.

Co-investment

Most small and medium-sized employers will pay for apprenticeship training through co-investment, which means:

1. You pay 5% of the agreed apprenticeship cost

2. The government covers the remaining 95%

In some cases, the government will fully fund the apprenticeship training cost if the apprentice is:

- Aged 16 to 21, or
- Aged 19 to 24 and has either:
- An Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan provided by their local authority
- Been in the care of their local authority

Levy Transfer (Gifting)

Levy-paying employers can transfer up to 25% of their unused funds to support other businesses.

The Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service can help you give or receive funding; Your apprenticeship training experts will support you with this.

Additional Funding

Employers receive a £1,000 incentive for each apprentice aged 16-18, or 19-24 with an EHC plan or care experience.

This is paid in two instalments of £500 by ACL.

- Care leavers aged 16-24 may also receive a £3,000 payment.
- Employers can receive National Insurance relief when hiring apprentices under the age of 25. This relief means employers do not pay the usual employer National Insurance contributions (NICs) on the apprentice's earnings, up to Upper Secondary Threshold of less than £50,270 per year (£967 per week - 2024/25 tax year).



Apprentice Wages

Apprentices must be paid at least the apprentice minimum wage if they are under 19, or 19+ and in the first year of their apprenticeship

Most employers pay above this rate, especially for existing staff who usually remain on their current salary.

FAQs

1. What happens if my apprentice leaves or we no longer wish to employ them?

Please contact your apprenticeship training expert or the apprentice's tutor as soon as possible. Where appropriate, we will work with both you and the apprentice to resolve any issues. If a resolution isn't possible, the tutor will continue to support the apprentice to help them find a positive outcome. Our team can also assist you in recruiting a new apprentice.

Payment Guidance

Levy-Paying Employers: Payments will stop from the point the apprentice is removed from your Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS) account.

Non-Levy Paying Employers: ACL will calculate the co-investment received up to the apprentice's last day.

- If there is an underpayment, we will invoice the employer.
- If there is an overpayment, we will issue a credit.
- Any underpayment is the responsibility of the employer, not the apprentice.



2. What happens if we no longer wish to continue with the apprenticeship?

Please contact your apprenticeship training expert in the first instance. There may be a financial penalty for early withdrawal. Full details are outlined in your apprenticeship contract and our ACL Fee Policy

3. What happens if we experience any problems or concerns?

We aim to provide a positive experience throughout the apprenticeship. If you have any concerns, please speak to the tutor or your apprenticeship training expert. They will work with you to resolve the issue and, if needed, guide you through our complaint procedure.



Get in Touch

ACL Essex is the largest provider of adult education in the county. We're at the heart of our communities across Essex making a difference to residents and businesses.



aclessex.com/employers



acl.businessdevelopment@essex.gov.uk



03330 139 502



Essex County Council