

The education landscape: A guide for employers



September 2023



Introduction



A skilled workforce is at the heart of every business. As a business leader you get enquiries to work with local schools, colleges and universities – and you'll probably have some questions given the education and skills landscape can be complex to understand. There are many different ways to get involved – but which are the best fit for your business, and how will they help connect you to your future workforce, or boost productivity by upskilling your current team?

That's why we've created this resource – The Education Landscape: A Guide for Employers. It describes options for working with schools, colleges and universities, young people* and older learners, and the benefits of doing so for your business. You can also find out how technical education is changing to better meet your skills needs – including apprenticeships, T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications.

In the accompanying Index you can find out more about the business benefits of different opportunities – from providing workplace experiences for students, using your industry expertise to help design courses, to getting training for your new employees and existing staff.

Developed in partnership with:



* The term young person is used to include students at schools, colleges and universities up to age 24.



Education and skills

The benefits for business



Discover new talent

Being involved with schools, colleges and universities is an opportunity to identify potential employees who are a good fit with your organisation. In the medium-term this can reduce expensive and time-consuming recruitment activity and support your planning for the future.

Fresh perspectives

Students on an industry placement will quickly acquire new knowledge and skills and make a real contribution to your team as they do so. They can also bring awareness of emerging trends and new ideas to your business.

Develop your current team

Getting your employees involved in education engagement activities can be rewarding and inspiring. It contributes to your team's professional development, helping to build communication, leadership and management skills, and can strengthen their loyalty to your company. Linking up with your local college or university can also open the door for technical training to upskill your existing staff.

Build new partnerships

Connecting with schools, colleges and universities offers a strong value exchange. The institutions gain broader insight into your industry needs, and you can get involved in shaping the skills being taught in your local area, whilst benefiting from building your existing knowledge and expertise, for example, in developments in technology. This collaboration also demonstrates the wider contribution your business makes to the community.

Connect locally

Working with your local education institutions can contribute to your organisation's social responsibility and reputation. Your real-world input brings the curriculum to life and gives learning a concrete focus. It's also a great opportunity to inspire, inform and help young people – which is good for them, the community, and you.



Education and skills

Ways to get involved



Supporting students

Much of your future workforce is currently in education. Sharing your knowledge, experience and advice will inspire and inform their career choices – helping them to develop the confidence to move into a role that is right for them – and to be the right employee for you. Opportunities include giving a class careers talk or providing one-to-one mentoring for a student on a longer-term basis.

Providing workplace experiences

Nothing beats hands-on experience for gaining an insight into working life, and your business can also benefit in a number of ways. Opening your doors to young people is an opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of your organisation and industry, and help students transition into the workplace. And in the longer-term you could have a future employee. Activities include hosting short workplace visits or longer industry placement opportunities for older students.

Supporting high-quality teaching

Your input into classes will ensure that teachers can share up to date knowledge, and gives you the opportunity to shape the skills being taught around your business needs. You could help design a course or support a student project, give teachers the opportunity to find out about current industry practice by hosting a site visit, teach a masterclass yourself, or even donate some equipment or workshop time for students.

Work-based learning

Helping an individual learn whilst they work in your business is a great way to develop a motivated, skilled, and qualified employee. For example, apprenticeships offer real job experience whilst a person studies for a formal qualification. You can adapt these training programmes to meet the needs of your organisation and fill gaps within your workforce skillset, and managing students offers professional development for existing employees.

Providing expert guidance

Nobody knows your business like you do. Sharing your knowledge and expertise with government, and with the education institutions around you, will help to influence what is taught so that it is relevant to your business. You could work with a college to design a course relevant to your business or be a school or college governor. Or you might contribute to the expert employer panels that shape technical education nationally or locally.

To find out more about this wide range of opportunities take a look at The [ABPI Education Landscape: Index \(here\)](#) or visit [educationlandscape.org.uk](https://www.educationlandscape.org.uk). You will find more information about these different activities, the likely commitment required from your business, and the benefits they offer for you and the students.



Education and skills

What is changing?



In England at age 16, young people have a range of options for the next step towards their career. The academic path, with GCSEs, A Levels and undergraduate courses, is well-understood. But not everyone is familiar with our technical education system, and this has not always met the needs of employers. Government has been working with employers to change technical education – to benefit industry, and help individuals gain good jobs.

What is key?

Employers are at the heart of our new system for technical education. Groups of employers are setting the standards for different occupations. Each occupational standard describes what a person needs to know and be able to do for a particular role. These standards are grouped into fifteen technical education routes – from agriculture, to catering, to health and science. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education works with panels of employer experts to make sure that the standards stay up to date.

Apprentices are employed and learn through on and off-the-job training. An apprentice develops the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the employer designed standard for their occupation. They are assessed against this standard so you can be sure an apprentice can really do the job. Most of the apprentice's training is on-the-job working with a mentor, and additional off-the-job training is provided by a training organisation. Depending on the occupation an apprenticeship can take between one and six years to complete.

T Levels are new two-year courses that launched in September 2020. They will be the main college-based technical option for students at age 16, sitting alongside apprenticeships and A Levels. T Levels offer students a mixture of classroom learning and 'on-the-job' experience during an industry placement of around 45 days. The content of T Levels has been developed with employers, using the occupational standards as their reference. Alongside their technical knowledge, T Level students also build maths, English and digital skills. So you can be sure that these new qualifications meet the needs of industry and prepare students for work, further training or study. T Levels in more than 20 different subject areas were introduced between September 2020 and September 2023.

Higher technical qualifications are, specialised training for adults, at higher levels 4 and 5 (A Levels and T Levels are at level 3). Employer expert panels will decide which qualifications meet the employer designed occupational standards. Only level 4 and 5 qualifications that do this will be approved by the Institute as a Higher Technical Qualification. These qualifications will be awarded a quality mark so you can be sure they will develop the knowledge and skills needed by employers.



Education and skills

Case studies



Case study

Work-based learning: Apprenticeships



"I found my apprenticeship at Labcorp through the government apprentice website; which is really useful for searching through a variety of different apprenticeships in sectors I didn't even know would offer an apprenticeship."

I am currently undertaking my second apprenticeship at Labcorp, progressing from a HNC in Biomedical science to a BSc in the same subject. The HNC interested me as it would give me a great foothold in the sector at a young age. I found this aspect of the apprenticeship really appealing due to it being incredibly hard to get into the pharmaceutical industry with no actual experience.

The programme has given me access to a high level of education through a much more accessible route into the sector. For me university cannot provide the experience that an apprenticeship does, as there is no way for university courses to educate and skill you in all the specialist methods that pharmaceutical companies have access to. This means entering the company via the apprenticeship scheme benefits both myself and the company, I am getting access to the highest-grade equipment and teaching whilst my employer is getting an employee who is trained to work within the industry not just the classroom.

Through my apprenticeship, I believe it will give me access to more opportunities within the company much sooner than if I had come from the traditional university route. Upon completion of my BSc, I will be looking to complete a master's degree and potentially move into a higher level within the company. Through the apprenticeship route I am on the ladder to a fulfilling career at Labcorp.

Jack Train, Apprentice, Labcorp



Case study

Work-based learning: Apprenticeships

“I enrolled on the Level 4 Quality Practitioner Apprenticeship at Labcorp at the start of my career in Quality Assurance (QA). I was made aware of the apprenticeship by my then manager and I took the opportunity to enrol to widen my knowledge and skills in QA.”

The Level 4 Quality Practitioner Apprenticeship is recognised by the Chartered Quality Institute for Practitioner, successful completion, therefore allows you the opportunity to apply to be a Practitioner. This was one of the main reasons I decided to enrol, in addition to increasing my QA knowledge. This opportunity enhances my career prospects and would enable me to apply for various roles within the regulatory field. This will be particularly beneficial as I gain more experience and want to develop myself professionally by taking on more responsibilities and roles. The topics covered within the apprenticeship could be applied to various scenarios and roles, which broadens my career opportunities.

Likewise, I wanted to contribute more to departmental meetings. Hence, by increasing my knowledge, I hoped to build myself within my team as a valuable member and have a presence in various workstreams focusing on quality improvements and tools. I knew the apprenticeship had several assignments that had to be delivered via presentations, this was my opportunity to build my confidence and showcase my ideas to a wider team and gain valuable feedback for improvement.

I would encourage companies to take on apprentices as they would be building up their organisation with a skilled, knowledgeable and talented workforce that will be equipped to do their tasks efficiently. By investing in apprentices, companies are ensuring they are equipping individuals to develop themselves professionally and contribute towards their role. Investing in apprentices is the same as investing in the company itself as organisations are more likely to retain personnel and perform well within their respective industry.

Ashly Shagee, QA Auditor II , Labcorp



Case study

Work-based learning: Apprenticeships

UCB is a leading investor in biopharmaceutical R&D in the UK which is home to one of its three global discovery research centres.

Since 2017 the company has been welcoming apprentices in scientific and non-scientific roles. With an average of 12 apprentices at any time, UCB values the energy and enthusiasm of the students and the ability to invest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) careers in the UK.

"The apprenticeship programme is a proven resource and one that UCB has actively embraced for six years. It offers a different, more affordable route in to further education for our young, up and coming talent."

"I personally have reaped the rewards of the scheme, having had two very successful apprentices in my team. The real benefit of the scheme is that the apprentice gets expert, on-the-job experience and the employer gets a valuable headcount and the opportunity to nurture the future of our business."

Justin Staniforth, Analytical Scientist, Global Chemistry UCB.

"After my A-Levels I wanted to continue my education but was concerned about the level of student debt that often comes with university. I was interested in how I could earn and learn, and an apprenticeship seemed like a good solution – I could get hands-on experience in the workplace and study for a qualification."

"I found my apprenticeship at UCB on the gov.uk website which is a great resource of what's available. At first, I was apprehensive applying to a scientific organisation, as I wasn't strong at science at school, but I soon realised that this wasn't an issue. In this role I support our scientists and know that indirectly I am also making a difference to the lives of the people who benefit from our science. That is a great feeling."

"An apprenticeship feels like a direct route to a career and my experience with UCB has shown me that I want a career in HR, so I am committed to doing well both on the job and in class to progress to my Level 7."

Jimmy Hunt, Level 5 HR apprentice, UCB.



Case study

Work-based learning: PhD funded employment placement

“As part of my PhD studies at King’s College London researching cancer cell biology, I had the opportunity to undertake a 3-month Professional Internship for PhD students (PIPs) at the ABPI.”

This was a great opportunity as, despite having prior skills and expertise in biomedical research, I had limited exposure to professional environments beyond the laboratory. This internship provided me with the opportunity to explore alternative careers and gain a better understanding of my suitability for them.

Many BBSRC-funded PhD programmes, including the London Interdisciplinary Doctoral Programme (LIDo) that sponsors my PhD, require students to undertake the PIPs Programme. These 3-month internships are intended to give students exposure to different professions and prepare for careers beyond academia.

My internship at the ABPI focused on research into Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) initiatives in the life sciences sector and beyond. Through this work, I gained insights into the regulatory aspects of the pharmaceutical industry and the continuous efforts to improve it. The experience allowed me to apply my research skills in new ways and develop transferable skills like conducting interviews and leading meetings. Additionally, interacting with professionals from various parts of the organisation provided me with a clearer understanding of career opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry and related fields, alongside scope for building a professional network.

Overall, this internship has been invaluable in expanding my skillset, gaining practical experience, and guiding my future career path. It has equipped me with a broader perspective and confidence about my career beyond academia.

Samina Juma, Student, King’s College London



Case study

Support high quality teaching: Professional development for teachers

“Technology moves so fast it’s important that businesses give teachers like me the opportunity to visit them.”

I worked for Fujitsu for eight years before moving into education and teaching Digital subjects. However, technology moves so fast it’s important that businesses give teachers like me the opportunity to visit them and see first-hand how industry is changing. This helps to inform the content I teach, but it also benefits small businesses in our area as they get to help shape the skills being taught around their business needs. I recently spent a day with LMS Recruitment Systems, not just to learn about the software they use or the projects they are working on, but to understand what skills and behaviours businesses are looking for from their staff. I use this insight to deliver up-to-date, industry-relevant, content to the Digital T Level students at the college.

The positive impact of employer engagement on both students and employers is great to see. A local software engineer recently told us that our second year T Level students are working on similar projects to final-year Computing Degree students he’s also met. He was amazed by the calibre of our students’ technical ability and felt they were ready to step straight into digital jobs in businesses like his.

We’re always open to hearing from small businesses to learn more about their industry requirements and to co-create great course content.

Nafisa Naheed, Nelson & Colne College Group, Lancashire



Case study

Providing expert guidance: Supporting Careers Events



“Across the four home nations, we at the ABPI support careers events both face to face and in the evolving virtual world at many touchpoints along the education pathway.”

In supporting such events, we draw on our extensive careers resources (abpi.org.uk/careers) and the content on our dedicated schools website (abpischools.org.uk). Specifically, out of the ABPI Cymru Wales office, we have been supporting Science in Health Live!, an annual Cardiff University event, for over 10-years.

Supporting this event is always an absolute pleasure and a great way to engage with teachers and sixth form students from Wales and the border counties. In addition to sharing ABPI resources, we also get the opportunity to chat about their concerns as they prepare for examinations and hear about changes to the types of courses they are hoping to study. Given the longevity of our involvement with the team at Cardiff University, we've seen a rise in interest for digital and data courses, as well as a greater interest in the allied health professions amongst sixth-form students.

We have also taken opportunities offered by Cardiff University to become involved in the Life Sciences Challenge, an inter-school competition for year 10 pupils consisting of a quiz designed and delivered by PhD students and early career researchers. We know it's never too early to get people really engaged in the STEM subjects, and the Challenge helps to do this. The team leading both Science in Health, Live! and the Life Sciences Challenge are keen to ensure their reach crosses gender, economic, and societal boundaries – something that is incredibly important to us at the ABPI. STEM is for everyone – a message we work hard to amplify.

Year on year we can feel we are really helping students to gain a better understanding of the science behind medicine whilst opening up a range of career options that span biomedical, healthcare and scientific fields. The education and careers outreach work at the ABPI is driven by a passion to support STEM education to inspire young people to develop foundational STEM, and in-demand skills and knowledge that will support young peoples' ability to make informed career choices to better their chances of a fulfilling career. We hope to continue supporting careers events and STEM education, and thoroughly recommend other businesses do the same.

Joanne Ferris, Operations Manager, ABPI Cymru



Education system at a glance



There are plenty of reasons why businesses should get involved at all stages of the education system. The starting point is understanding the landscape:

	Age	Phase of education	Where this is provided	Description
	Age 18+	Further Education for Adults (19+) Higher Education (18+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▮ Colleges ▮ Universities ▮ Institutes of Technology ▮ Training companies ▮ Employers 	Higher education (HE) is education and training at a standard beyond A Levels and T Levels. HE programmes are offered by universities or colleges, and vary in size and type. HE can include: Higher Technical Qualifications (including Higher Nationals and foundation degrees), undergraduate degrees, higher apprenticeships and postgraduate courses. Many adults also continue to improve their skills by studying Further Education (FE) courses – from basic skills to technical courses.
Key stage Five	Age 16–18	Further Education (16+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▮ Colleges ▮ School sixth-forms ▮ Training companies ▮ Employers ▮ Charities 	At this stage young people may undertake a full-time course at college or school sixth-form, such as A Levels or a T Level, or start an apprenticeship or traineeship. They can also combine work or volunteering with part-time study or training. Education or training is compulsory until the age of 18 in England.
Key stage Four	Age 14–16	Secondary Education	▮ Secondary schools	Secondary education starts at age 11 and continues until age 16. Students are usually studying GCSE courses, and/or other courses as appropriate (e.g. a technical qualification). Some regions also have middle schools, and a small number of students attend specialist secondary school settings.
Key stage Three	Age 11–14			
Key stage Two	Age 7–11	Primary Education	▮ Primary schools	Primary schools generally have students aged 4 to 11 years, with infant and junior classes. Government has set out a national curriculum for all subjects across Key Stages One to Four, and there are national tests and teacher assessments for students at the end of both Key Stage One and Two.
Key stage One	Age 5–7			
	Age 0–5	Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▮ Nurseries ▮ Primary schools 	Government sets standards for learning, development and care of young children to age 5 in the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. This can take place in state nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes within primary schools, but also in voluntary pre-schools, privately run nurseries and with childminders.



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