



BRIEFING PAPER

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Constituency Casework: Training

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Summary

This note provides Members of Parliament and their staff with information related to frequently asked questions from constituents about training.

Training and skills are devolved policy areas and this note refers mainly to schemes and policies operating in England.

The key sources of funding for training are outlined, and the types of courses that are fully-funded by government are identified.

Government support for apprenticeships is explained, and some key advice for prospective apprentices and employers of apprentices is provided.

The key schemes to provide training to unemployed people are also outlined, including Sector based work academies and aspects of the Work Programme.

Finally, some other useful sources of advice and assistance for people seeking training are included.

1. Qualification levels

Training courses that lead to qualifications are divided into various levels according to the demands they place on the learner. Examples of qualifications at each level are given below:

Qualification levels

Level	Examples of qualifications
Entry	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life Functional Skills (English, maths and ICT)
1	GCSEs at grades D-G BTEC Introductory Diplomas and Certificates OCR Nationals Key Skills
2	GCSEs at grades A*-C NVQs at level 2 Intermediate apprenticeships
3	A levels International Baccalaureate GCE in applied subjects BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 3 Advanced apprenticeships
4	Certificates of Higher Education Higher National Certificates BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards Higher apprenticeships
5	Diplomas of higher education Foundation Degrees Higher national diplomas
6	Bachelors degrees Bachelors degrees with honours Graduate certificates and diplomas Professional Graduate Certificate in Education BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards
7	Masters degrees Postgraduate certificates Postgraduate diplomas
8	Doctoral degrees Specialist awards

Source: Ofqual, *Comparing Qualifications* and Archived Direct Gov, *Qualifications: what the different levels mean*, 2012

Various qualifications can be studied at several different levels. For example, Key Skills courses can be studied at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

2. Financial support for training

There are a number of potential sources of financial assistance available to those seeking to take a training course. These are dependent on the learner's circumstances such as their age, any qualifications they have already attained and whether they are unemployed (training for out-of-work benefit claimants is discussed in section 4).

2.1 Courses fully funded by the government

Funding entitlements are outlined in the table below:

Qualification levels

Provision	Learner	Funding
English and maths qualifications and units to help adults progress to GCSE A* to C (Level 2)	Learners aged 19 and over	Full
Traineeships to help young people progress to an Apprenticeship or other job	Young people aged 16 to 24	Full
Qualifications and units (up to and including Level 2) to help adults into work	Learners aged 19 and over	Full
Qualifications and units (up to and including Level 3) to help adults into work	Learners aged 19 to 23	Full
Entry and Level 1 qualifications to help adults to progress to their first full Level 2	Learners aged 19 to 23	Full
First full Level 2 qualification	Learners aged 19 to 23	Full
First full Level 3 qualification	Learners aged 19 to 23	Full
Intermediate-level Apprenticeships (Level 2)	Apprentices aged 19 and over	Contributory
Advanced-level Apprenticeships (Level 3)	Apprentices aged 19 and over	Contributory
Higher Apprenticeships (at Levels 4,5 and 6)	Apprentices aged 19 and over	Contributory
Entry, Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications	Learners aged 19 and over not qualifying for full funding	Contributory
Level 3 or 4 qualifications	Learners aged 19-23 not qualifying for full funding	Contributory
	Learners aged 24 and over	Advanced Learning Loans

Source: Skills Funding Agency, Skills Funding Statement 2013-16

2.2 Professional and Career Development Loans

[Professional and Career Development Loans](#) are available to people over the age of 18 seeking to 'pay for learning that improves [their] career prospects' without necessarily leading to a qualification or 'help[s] get [them] into work'. The loan can either be used for course fees or other costs including books, childcare, travel and living expenses.

These loans can be between £300 and £10,000 and must be paid back after the training is completed. These loans will be charged commercial rates of interest after the training is complete – during the training period, no interest will be charged.

To apply for a Professional and Career Development Loan an individual must have lived in the UK for three years before the course starts. Courses must help an individual with their career and be a maximum of two years long (or three with a year work experience).

The Gov.uk website provides information on [applying for a Professional and Career Development Loan](#).

2.3 Discretionary learner Support

[Discretionary Learner Support](#) is available from further education providers to help people aged 19 and over with costs associated with studying and training. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills provides funding for support offered directly by the provider.¹

To be eligible for this type of support, people must be enrolled on a fully-funded course. Colleges determine their own eligibility criteria, but the over-arching aim of this type of support is to assist financially-disadvantaged learners.

This type of support can be used for travel costs, childcare costs, accommodation costs and in times of financial hardship or emergency. It is at the discretion of individual colleges to decide who receives this type of support and how much money is provided in each case.

2.4 24+ Advanced learning Loans

Since August 2013, the government no longer funds qualifications at Level 3 and above for people aged 24 and over. People wishing to study for these qualifications will have to cover the training costs themselves and [Advanced Learning Loans](#) are intended to enable them to do this.

Advanced Learning Loans operate on a very similar system to Higher Education (HE) loans. People who take up these loans will not have to pay them back until they are earning at least £21,000 a year. The loans will be paid back in monthly instalments equal to 9% of the learner's income, and if the borrower never earns more than £21,000 then they will not have to repay the loan.²

¹ Skills Funding Agency, [SFA Funding Rules 2015 to 2016 - version 2](#), 9 February 2015, pp.104-109

² Gov.uk, [24+ Advanced Learning Loans, 5.Repayments](#), 27 August 2015

3. Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are paid jobs that incorporate on and off the job training. A successful apprentice will receive a nationally recognised qualification on completion of their contract. Further information is available in the [Apprenticeships Policy Standard Note](#).

3.1 Government support for apprenticeships

The employer is expected to cover the apprentice's wages and normally the government will pay for part of the training costs. The government will cover:

- 100% of the training costs if the apprentice is aged under 19;
- 50% of the training costs if the apprentice is 19-24;
- Up to 50% of the training costs if the apprentice is aged over 24.

This funding system will be replaced in 2017 by employer-led funding with the creation of the apprenticeship levy: a 0.5% levy on UK employers whose paybill exceeds £3 million. The funds collected will be redistributed and used to pay for the costs of all apprenticeship training delivered in England.³

3.2 AGE 16-24

The [Apprenticeship Grant for Employers of 16 to 24 year olds](#) (AGE 16-24) pays £1,500 to small businesses that take on a young apprentice, if the firm has never hired an apprentice before. The scheme, announced in November 2011,⁴ was recently extended to the financial year 2015/16 with new criteria.⁵

AGE 16-24 is designed to encourage more small businesses to take on apprentices, to encourage more young people into apprenticeships and to raise the skill level of apprentices. As of 2015, the recently amended details of the scheme are as follows:

- The apprentice must be 16-24 years old when hired.
- The firm must have 50 employees or fewer – as opposed to 1,000 or fewer up until 2014 – when they take on the apprentice.
- For a business to be eligible for payment, the employer must not have taken on an apprentice in the last 12 months. An employer can claim up to 5 grants – as opposed to 10 grants up until 2014.

As of 2015, the government granted control of the local AGE budget to Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Sheffield City Region and West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

³ See the House of Commons Library note on [Apprenticeship Policy, England](#) for more details on the levy (section 1.2).

⁴ BIS, [Press release: Apprenticeships: Cable guarantees quality, slashes red tape and delivers cash boost for firms](#), 16 November 2011

⁵ SFA, [Facilities for Apprenticeship Grant for Employers: Financial Year 2015 to 2016](#), 27 March 2015

3.3 How to become an apprentice: first steps

Apprenticeships offer a way to gain work experience, study towards achieving a qualification for free (since employers and the government will normally cover any training costs) and get paid.⁶

Since apprenticeships are jobs, prospective apprentices should only consider apprenticeships in sectors or workplaces where they would like to work in the longer-term. Although there is no guarantee that an apprentice will get a job in the company with which they have trained, employers often view taking on an apprentice as an investment. This means that they will be keen to see a 'return' on this investment, in the form of employees with higher levels of skill and experience.

The National Apprenticeship Service offers an [Apprenticeship vacancy matching service](#). This database contains apprenticeship vacancies organised by sector and region. There is also an option to register details, encouraging employers of apprentices to contact prospective applicants if a suitable vacancy becomes available. Note that apprenticeship vacancies can be also advertised in a range of other places including recruitment websites, trade magazines and local newspapers.

The [Online Guide to Apprenticeships](#) provides further information and case studies. The National Apprenticeship Service website also has a page of '[top tips](#)' for prospective apprentices.

3.4 How to take on apprentices: first steps

Initially, the business should contact the [National Apprenticeships Service](#) (NAS), either via their [online enquiry form](#), or on [08000 150 400](#). The NAS offers expert, tailored advice to employers and will be able to provide detailed information relevant to your constituent's specific case.

Below are outlined some key steps businesses will need to take before hiring an apprentice.

- Decide how many apprenticeships the business wishes to offer, and whether the business wishes to recruit new people to fill these places, or put existing employees onto apprenticeship programmes. Apprentices are paid a minimum wage by their employer (see previous footnote for details). If the apprentice is over 18 their employer will also be expected to contribute a minimum of 50% of their training costs.
- Apprentices spend part of their working week at a training provider (often a local college) studying the theoretic aspects of their sector, so it is important to take into account the fact that

⁶ Apprentices aged 16-18 are entitled to the 'apprentice minimum wage' of £3.30 an hour. Apprentices aged 19 and over in the first 12 months of their apprenticeship are also entitled to the apprentice minimum wage. After the first 12 months of their apprenticeship, people aged over 19 are entitled to the National Minimum Wage. National Minimum Wage rates are age dependent and rise from £5.30 an hour for under 21 year olds to £6.70 an hour for people aged 21 and over in 2015 (Gov.uk, [Become an apprentice, Pay and conditions](#)).

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apprentices will not spend all their time performing day-to-day duties.

- Find out about [Apprenticeship Training Agencies](#) in your area. These agencies offer to take on and pay apprentices in return for a fee from businesses. This is a cost effective way to work with apprentices as the costs associated with the bureaucracy of setting up an apprenticeship scheme are largely taken up by the Agency.
- Contact local training providers to see what courses are on offer that can be taken as part of an apprenticeship in the relevant sector. FE colleges and private training companies are the main sources of apprenticeship training. The training provider will also be able to advise how much the course will cost, and will often already be involved in training apprentices so will be familiar with the examination schedule (which normally involves some workplace observation of the apprentice).
- The [Apprenticeship Vacancy Service](#) is where the NAS recommend apprenticeships are advertised, so good examples of adverts can be found on this website relating to your local area.

The NAS has a [dedicated section for employers](#). [Gov.uk](#) also provides information for prospective employers of apprentices.

4. Training for out of work benefit claimants

Various forms of assistance are available to unemployed out-of-work benefit claimants who may improve their chances of employment through training. It is important to note that claimants may not be able to choose the training assistance they are offered.

4.1 Skills Conditionality

As part of the Skills Conditionality programme, some Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants and some Universal Credit claimants may be required to attend training courses as a condition of continuing to receive their full benefit entitlement. These training courses will be fully-funded by the government.⁷

The decision to make someone's receipt of benefits conditional on them training is entirely at the discretion of Jobcentre Plus. Once an advisor has indicated that a claimant may benefit from training, the claimant's skills will be assessed and local training providers will be contacted to confirm that a fully-funded place is available.

Attendance at the proscribed training course is mandatory and failure to attend can result in benefit sanctions.

4.2 Sector-based work academies

[Sector-based work academies](#) are collaborations between Jobcentre Plus, businesses and training providers. Only unemployed people currently claiming benefits are eligible to use the academies.

The academies consist of three components:

- Pre-employment training in the essential skills of a sector which has local vacancies
- Work experience in a local business in that sector
- A guaranteed interview for a job vacancy at the same local business

The training element of the academy is fully funded by the Skills Funding Agency in England and by the Scottish Government and partner organisations in Scotland. The job interview may also lead to apprenticeship places, and the training element of the academy may be used as the foundation of apprenticeship training.

Sector-based work academies are offered in England and Scotland and provision is based around actual job vacancies. Claimants may be referred at any point in their claim prior to referral to the Work Programme. Whilst engaged in the academies, people will continue to claim benefits. Any travel and childcare costs associated with taking up a place in an academy will be covered. Claimants' decision to participate

⁷ Department for Work and Pensions, [Back to Work schemes, Jobseeker's Allowance and Universal Credit](#), JSABWS1 v5.0, October 2014

is voluntary, but attendance becomes mandatory once a claimant has accepted a place.

4.3 Work experience

Young people claiming Jobseeker Allowance may be offered a period of [work experience](#) by their Jobcentre Plus advisor in order to improve their skills and employability.

This scheme is aimed at 16-24 year olds who have not worked before and have no or low qualifications. Those on the scheme do not receive a wage but continue to receive benefits. Childcare and travel costs will also be paid. Participants must continue to look for permanent work and attend their regular reviews at Jobcentre Plus.

The placements last between two and eight weeks and involve between 25 and 30 hours a week of work experience. There is no benefit sanction for leaving the scheme early, unless the individual has exhibited gross misconduct.⁸

4.4 The work programme

The [Work Programme](#) is the Government's main welfare-to-work scheme, and offers support to long-term unemployed benefit claimants. After an individual has been claiming JSA for more than three months or claiming the Employment and Support Allowance, they will be referred from their local Jobcentre Plus to a Work Programme 'provider'.

Service providers are free to implement their own ideas and schemes to help participants find work. Providers may feel that an element of training will increase an individual's chances of finding sustainable employment and are free to pursue this option. If individuals on the Work Programme do undertake training, then the content, type and level of this training is at the discretion of Work Programme providers.

⁸ DWP, [Press release](#), 29 February 2012

5. Other sources of advice and assistance

The [Gov.uk](#) website is a key source of information on a [range](#) of government schemes and policies. The Gov.uk [webpage](#) on career skills and training contains a selection of useful links and advice on training support, including additional advice and sources of assistance for learning costs.

The [National Careers Service](#) is run by the [Skills Funding Agency](#) and offers a lot of useful resources, including advice of finding [funding for courses](#).

The [Learner Support Helpline](#) on 0800 121 8989 can provide advice and information on specific queries about training and how to fund adult learning.

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