

A THOROUGHLY MODERN APPRENTICE

If you need to recruit new staff or develop your existing workforce, it's worth considering a Modern Apprenticeship, suggests **Dr Marcus Sangster FICFor**

Vocational training is in flux and attracting new funding and resources, which presents opportunities for employers, new entrants and also existing employees. Apprenticeships are among these opportunities and, nowadays, can train people to degree level and beyond, providing a valuable addition to your human resources 'toolkit'.

However, apprenticeships are a complex field, so this article is a guide, not an expert review. Most Further Education providers can provide expert advice but, online, one of the best websites to start with is the Northern Ireland Government Business Portal: <http://bit.do/modapprentice>

How Modern Apprenticeships work...

For anyone aged 16 or over, Modern Apprenticeships offer a combination of paid employment and an opportunity to train for jobs across a wide range of sectors. Promoted as a means of gaining vocational skills and qualifications without having to study full-time, they are available in a range of industry sectors, where employers can be large or small.

Intermediate, Advanced, and Higher levels are currently offered, with degree-level apprenticeships expected within the next few months. While most Modern Apprenticeships are open to people aged under 25, selected apprenticeships are also available to older applicants.

Modern Apprenticeship terminology is complex and varies across the four UK countries. Scotland, in particular, has its own approach with Technical and Professional

Apprenticeships offering the opportunity to train for jobs at senior supervisory and management levels.

Off-the-job learning usually takes place through colleges or training providers, so there are three key participants in an apprenticeship:

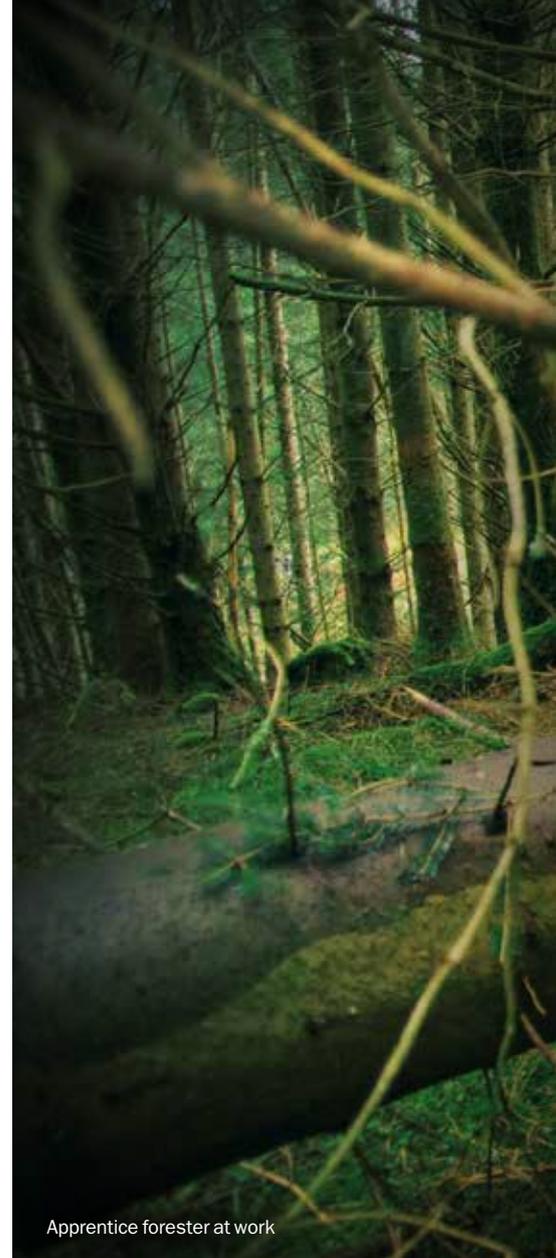
- The apprentice
- The employer
- The training provider.

The Frameworks

The skill sets that an apprentice is expected to master are set out in sectoral 'Frameworks', each of which is developed by the appropriate sector skills council, e.g. Lantra for land-based skills (www.lantra.co.uk/apprenticeship) in consultation with their industry.

In Scotland alone, there were 87 frameworks listed on the Skills Development Scotland website in July. In addition to setting out the framework for apprentices, these frameworks can also be used by employers as the basis for training established employees.

In forestry and arboriculture there are frameworks within the agriculture and land-based category offering apprenticeships in Trees and Timber at Intermediate Level 2 and Advanced Level 3. However, there are other frameworks that are relevant, such as those in Environmental Conservation, Fencing, Game and Wildlife Management, Horticulture and Land-based Engineering. Outside the Trees and Timber category, there are other relevant frameworks in a range of business and management-related disciplines.



Apprentice forester at work

England's Trailblazers

The Government introduced England's Trailblazer¹ initiative in 2014. The scheme aims to give employers a greater say in designing apprenticeships and, like Scotland, has its own terminology. A Trailblazer Group is a group of employers developing apprenticeship standards (rather than frameworks) specific to job roles in their sector. The standards they create will either be completely new or will gradually replace existing apprenticeship frameworks. These standards are expected to describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to undertake a specific occupation, and operate confidently within a sector. Guidance on the Trailblazer scheme is available but the initiative's underlying philosophy is that a company can design an apprenticeship to meet its own particular needs, rather than apply generic training.

From September 2017, apprentices in England will be starting on one of the new apprenticeship standards². Happily, and thanks in no small part to ICF members, our own sector was sharp enough to make a case for Trailblazer standards of its own. Thus, in December last year, Lantra announced that Government approval had been granted for two new Trailblazer apprenticeship standards – forest operative and arborist –





© Forestry Commission



Climbing is one of the skill sets in the arborist apprentice standard

giving forestry and arboriculture a high profile in the reform of apprenticeships in England. The standard for a forest operative³ provides specific training in the two main forestry disciplines, establishment and harvesting, while the arborist standard⁴ provides a range of basic technical skills, both on the ground and aerial, to enable tree work jobs with indirect supervision or to support a tree work team. Assessment plans for each occupation will explain how to test an apprentice's expertise.

Contracts, commitments and costs

A Modern Apprentice is employed from the start of his or her training and receives a wage from their employer. They are given the opportunity to develop expertise and knowledge through on-the-job assessment, and to gain general skills such as teamwork and problem solving. Many Modern Apprentices attend colleges or training centres to study the theory relating to their chosen occupation, usually more so in the first year than in subsequent years. Employers need to factor this into their planning.

For apprentices aged between 16-18, the Government will pay the full cost of training, while for those over 19 the employer is expected to contribute to training costs.

Apprentices over 24 are expected to contribute towards the cost of their training. In England, there is an adult apprenticeship scheme where an Advanced Learner Loan⁵ might be available, but other countries differ.

Boom and benefits

When the higher and degree-level apprenticeships are up and running in England, they will offer the chance to earn high-level qualifications without the apprentice incurring the personal costs of following a traditional higher education route, such as university. My prediction is that once youngsters and their parents realise this, we will see a surge in demand for apprenticeships, giving employers an opportunity to recruit very capable young staff.

Employers will benefit from subsidised training provision for their new apprentices, and they can use any more experienced mature apprentices to help develop existing staff. Also, in terms of staff turnover for an employer, there is some evidence to show that the retention of apprentices is greater.

Specific sector issues

In relation to forestry and arboriculture, there are some issues relating to the

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structure and geographically dispersed nature of a sector dominated by micro-businesses. It might not be possible to provide the supervision necessary or to deploy an apprentice in roles where they can meet the needs of the framework or standard. Also, accommodating their weekly attendance at a training provider might be difficult. Discussions are therefore under way to explore the possibility of developing collaborations where businesses might share an apprentice, and whether block release, where apprentices spend several weeks with a training provider, is a more practical approach.

Add an apprentice to your staff

The arborist and forestry operative standards in the Modern Apprenticeship scheme will provide the training necessary to make the apprentice a useful asset to both their employer and the industry. Now, I see that as a real investment.

Dr Marcus Sangster FICFor,
Principal, People and Land Ltd

References:

1. Department for Business, Industry and Skills and Department for Education jointly: <http://bit.do/trailblazers>

Apprenticeships vs other qualifications

Modern Apprenticeships sit between GCSEs and A levels, or Higher and Advanced Higher levels in Scotland. Advanced (Scotland 'technical') apprenticeships bridge HNC/HND levels and can be equivalent to a foundation degree. Degree-level (Scotland 'professional') apprenticeships sit at Bachelor's or Master's degree level.

Regulated qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are in either the Regulated Qualifications Framework or the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. Go to <http://bit.do/qualificationlevels> to compare them. In Scotland, they are part of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) which is found at: www.scqf.org.uk

Qualifications can also be compared by country on the Excellence, Achievement & Learning Limited (known as EAL) website (<http://bit.do/comparisontable>). It positions the different types of apprenticeships across all three of these frameworks. There are also comparisons on the SCQF website. All are approximate.

Chartered status of the Institute is equivalent to a postgraduate diploma or Masters-level qualification, with ICF Fellowship almost in professional doctorate territory.

2. The Government's new apprenticeship standards developed by employers: <http://bit.do/Apprentice-standards>
3. The forest operative standard (<http://bit.do/forestoperative>) was developed by Acorn Environmental Management Group, Confor, Duchy of Cornwall, Euroforest, Forest Enterprise, FC England, Fountains Forestry & Utilities, ICF, Lockhart Garratt, RFS, Say It With Wood, TEP and Tilhill Forestry.
4. The arborist standard (<http://bit.do/thearborist>) was developed by the Arboricultural Association, Bartlett Tree Experts, Beechwood

- Trees, Glendale Countryside, Ian Trueman Specialist Tree Services, Ringrose Tree Services, Tree Maintenance, Oakdale NE Ltd, TreeWorks (West Wales) Ltd, Central Tree Services Ltd and Hi-Line.
5. Advanced Learner Loans: <https://bit.do/learnerloan>

Find out more...

For more information about taking on an apprentice, contact your local Further Education provider.

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