

UNDERSTANDING LEVEL 3/SCQF LEVEL 6-7 APPRENTICESHIPS AND THEIR ROLE IN HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS

Level 3/SCQF Level 6-7 (L3/6-7) apprenticeships in the UK offer a dynamic and practical route for students to gain industry-specific qualifications, hands-on experience, and valuable transferable skills. They provide a structured, work-based learning experience that equips individuals with essential skills and knowledge to succeed in various industries. As the HE sector looks to increase participation and support diverse entry pathways, it is important to understand the role of L3/6-7 apprenticeships within the educational landscape.

STRUCTURE OF LEVEL 3 APPRENTICESHIPS

L3/6-7 apprenticeships typically take 1-2 years (sometimes longer) to complete and combine practical, on-the-job learning with academic instruction. Apprentices are employed full-time within an industry, gaining valuable experience whilst participating in structured off-the-job learning, often in collaboration with a college or training provider. There are a wide range of sectors offering L3/6-7 apprenticeships, from healthcare and engineering to digital marketing and business administration.

Whilst apprenticeships across the four nations of the UK differ slightly, the apprenticeship structure includes:

On-the-job learning: Apprentices apply their skills directly in the workplace, gaining real-world experience under the mentorship of experienced professionals.

Off-the-job learning: Apprentices spend a portion of their time learning theory, industry practices, and technical knowledge in a classroom setting, working towards qualifications and certifications.

Assessment: All qualifications which support apprenticeships are assessed. These may involve practical assessments, written exams, and the submission of a portfolio of work.

Through this structure, apprentices not only develop sector-specific technical and academic skills and knowledge but also a variety of transferable skills.

The exact structure and content is set out in regulated documents. In England these are called apprenticeship standards and in all other nations they are called apprenticeship frameworks.

DIFFERENCES ACROSS THE FOUR NATIONS

Varying titles

- Advanced Apprenticeships – England and sometimes this is used in Wales
- Apprenticeship - Wales
- Foundation Apprenticeships and Modern apprenticeships across SCQF levels 6 and 7 – Scotland
- Level 3 apprenticeship – Northern Ireland

Assessment structures

In England, a mechanism called end-point assessments are used. At the end of the apprenticeship, apprentices undergo a formal assessment to evaluate whether they have achieved the required competencies. This may involve practical assessments, written exams, and the submission of a portfolio of work. This can result in a variety of grades (pass, merit and/or distinction). However, merit and distinction are not always included in the grading structure, which is determined in the development of the standard.

Across Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, there are various component assessed qualifications that are set out in frameworks and specific pathways.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

L3/6-7 apprenticeships are designed to meet high industry standards and provide academically grounded learning experiences. Apprentices are assessed on both theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that they develop a deep understanding of their field. For example, a L3/6-7 apprenticeship in engineering will not only cover technical skills such as machinery operation, but also essential theoretical knowledge in mathematics, physics, and problem-solving.

The academic structure of the apprenticeship ensures apprentices build the analytical, research, and study skills required for higher education. This is supported by the off-the-job learning components, which involve significant classroom-based instruction, often linked to professional qualifications such as BTEC or City & Guilds.

Apprentices also develop valuable skills such as:

- **Problem-solving:** Apprentices regularly tackle complex real-world challenges in the workplace, sharpening their analytical and critical thinking abilities.
- **Time management:** Balancing work responsibilities with study helps apprentices develop the organisational skills needed for university coursework and deadlines.
- **Communication and collaboration:** Apprentices work in teams, communicate with supervisors, and often interact with clients, fostering effective teamwork and written and oral communication skills.
- **Resilience and adaptability:** Apprentices must adapt to changing work environments and demonstrate perseverance when solving real-world problems under pressure.

UCAS TARIFF POINTS FOR L3/6-7 APPRENTICESHIPS

In recognition of the value of apprenticeships and to support HE providers in considering them alongside other qualifications, UCAS has announced that L3/6 apprenticeships will be allocated UCAS Tariff points. In Scotland, this announcement relates to Modern Apprenticeships at Level 6 only and does not include Modern Apprenticeships at other levels. Tariff points are already allocated for Foundation Apprenticeships at Level 6

The detailed breakdown of Tariff points for L3/6 apprenticeships can be found on the UCAS website. This system supports HE providers with incorporating apprenticeships into their admissions processes, ensuring that apprentices are not disadvantaged when applying for higher education, and broadening the range of qualifications that providers recognise. Tariff points are allocated to a pass of an apprenticeship only, and does not recognise where a merit or distinction is possible through an EPA in England, as these levels are not always included in possible outcomes.

INCORPORATING L3/6-7 APPRENTICESHIPS INTO HE ADMISSIONS

By considering L3/6-7 apprenticeships for entry to HE, providers can create more inclusive entry pathways, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to access higher education. Bringing real world experience into providers also provides many benefits to the cohort. This aligns with the growing movement towards widening participation and promoting alternative pathways into HE.

HE providers should review and update their admissions policies to consider and reference apprenticeships. Key recommendations include:

- Reviewing entry criteria to ensure parity across L3/6-7 routes. When considering what education and training to accept, you should consider their relevance to the course, the content and preparation for HE level study, alignment with national policies, and participation and contextual factors.
- Disseminating L3/6-7 apprenticeship information across relevant teams to ensure understanding and support.
- Considering looking at frameworks and standards (including grading structures in English EPAs) in their subject/industry to understand what they entail, as well as speaking with local employers and colleges/training providers.
- Developing confirmation processes – there is no one date where L3/6-7 apprenticeship results are published, and results may become available throughout the confirmation period and into September. Applicants should not be disadvantaged by this circumstance, which is outside of their control.
- Updating information on entry requirements across relevant channels, for example on UCAS course search.