EMPLOYER HANDBOOK

Supporting your apprentice

SKERN SKILLS

Who are we?

Skern Skills delivers apprenticeship programmes, qualifications, short courses and workforce development training across the UK. Our programmes are designed to support the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours through practical, applied learning.

Working with employers across the public and private sectors, we provide accredited training, professional qualifications and personal development opportunities for both early-career and experienced employees. Alongside technical learning, our programmes support the development of communication, leadership, collaboration and other workplace skills.

As part of the wider Skern organisation, our approach is shaped by fifty years of experience in delivering learning that creates lasting impact for individuals and organisations.

About this handbook

This handbook provides employers with a clear, practical guide to successfully recruiting, developing, and retaining apprentices—outlining expectations, processes, and available support—while highlighting how apprenticeships can help address skills gaps, strengthen your workforce, enhance employee loyalty, and maximise access to government funding opportunities. Apprenticeships are a practical, cost-effective way to build talent, develop your workforce, and future-proof your business.

The Skern mission

Our mission is to create meaningful experiences that build confidence, develop skills, and shape futures. Through experiential and applied learning, we help people discover what they are capable of and empower them to carry that learning into education, work, and life. Everything we design is created to have lasting impact: confidence that continues to grow, skills that open opportunities, and experiences that inspire people to achieve more than they thought possible.

Our values

We are connected

We work together as one team across Skern and the wider group, sharing successes, challenges and experiences. Strong relationships, open communication and a shared sense of purpose help us deliver consistency for our customers.

We care

People come first. We care deeply about our customers, colleagues and community, creating experiences where people feel supported, respected and encouraged to grow. Whether we are helping a customer, supporting a teammate or simply being fully present in our communication, care is at the heart of what we do.

We make learning memorable
We believe learning works best when it is lived, not just taught. Through outdoor learning and further education experiences, we help people build confidence, resilience and understanding that lasts long after they leave us.

We grow together
We embrace a growth mindset — learning, evolving and improving together. We create environments where people feel safe to try, reflect and develop, recognising that growth comes through curiosity, challenge and support.

What is an Apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a job with structured training, designed to develop the skills your business needs.

As an employer, you will:

- Employ and pay the apprentice
- Provide meaningful, role-relevant work to the apprenticeship standard they are on
- Support the development of Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs)
- Allow protected time for off-the-job training (minimum 6 hours per week within paid hours). This includes teaching and coaching time with Skern Skills

Apprenticeships are not just training programmes—they are a strategic workforce development tool. Hire an apprentice

Your role as an employer

Your involvement is critical to the success of the apprenticeship.

You are responsible for:

- Providing a structured and supportive working environment: supporting your apprentice
- Giving the apprentice opportunities to develop skills in real work situations
- Allowing time for training and study during working hours
- Monitoring performance and giving regular feedback
- Attending progress reviews every 10–12 weeks with your apprentice and Skern Skills
- Ensuring health, safety, and well-being in the workplace.
- Working in partnership with Skern Skills
- To support your apprentice with their career progression and aspirations during the apprenticeship.

Your engagement directly impacts the apprentice's success and long-term value to your business. Training your apprentice

How Skern Skills supports you

We work in partnership with you throughout the apprenticeship.

We provide:

- A dedicated trainer to support both you and your apprentice
- Structured teaching, coaching, and progress tracking
- Regular progress reviews with clear action planning as needed

After receiving your initial enquiry, we will:

- Support you in setting up and managing your **government apprenticeship service account**
- Full guidance given on funding, including:
  - Levy-paying employers
  - Non-levy employers
  - Access to **donor funds** where you are eligible
- Advise on programme content, delivery model and compliance requirements
- Safeguarding and wellbeing support offered

Our role is to make the process straightforward and to support you every step of the way.

Funding and financial support

We make funding simple by:

- Explaining all available options clearly
- Supporting the setup of your **Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS)** account
- Managing funding applications and transfers
- Helping you access **levy transfer (donor funds)** where eligible
- Ensuring compliance with funding rules

Our team ensures the process is clear and manageable.
Understanding apprenticeship benefits and funding

Mentor support

Each apprentice has a workplace mentor. This could be the employer themselves or a dedicated member of the team.

To support you with this, **Skern Skills offers mentor training** delivered through an e-learning package and includes:

- Understand the apprenticeship journey
- How to effectively support and guide apprentices
- Build confidence in managing development

Strong mentoring improves apprentice performance, retention, and overall success.

Programme structure

Duration

- Apprenticeships typically last between 8 and 15 months or longer, depending on the programme and level. We look at this on an individual basis.

Time commitment

- Around 80% on-the-job learning
- Minimum of 6 hours per week off-the-job training (during paid hours)

Off-the-job training

This is a mandatory requirement and includes:

- Training sessions (online and/or face-to-face)
- Coaching and mentoring in the workplace
- Shadowing and sometimes project work
- Assignments and reflective learning

This time must be protected within working hours and agreed before the start of the apprenticeship.

Safeguarding responsibilities

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. As an employer, you must:

- Provide a safe and supportive working environment
- Act on any concerns relating to wellbeing or safety
- Work with Skern Skills to address safeguarding issues
- If you have any concerns, then you can raise as can your apprentice through Safeguarding Referral Form (SRF)

We provide:

- Safeguarding training for apprentices
- Access to trained safeguarding staff
- Clear reporting processes
- We can offer safeguard training through our commercial courses

Equality, diversity and inclusion

You are expected to:

- Provide a fair and inclusive workplace
- Prevent discrimination, bullying, and harassment

- Promote equal opportunities

A positive working environment is essential for apprentice success.

Health and safety

As the employer, you are responsible for:

- Ensuring a safe working environment
- Completing risk assessments
- Providing appropriate training and supervision as required for the task
- We can offer First Aid through our commercial courses
- You must have an up-to-date Employers Liability Insurance

Skern Skills will support you in ensuring all requirements are met.

Initial assessment (skills scan)

Before the apprenticeship begins, a skills scan is completed by your apprentice to assess:

- Existing knowledge
- Current skills
- Development needs

This ensures the training plan is tailored to both your apprentice and your business requirements.

Progress reviews

Every 10–12 weeks, a formal review will take place involving:

- You (the employer)
- Your apprentice
- The Skern Skills trainer

These reviews focus on:

- Progress against learning goals
- Workplace performance
- Development planning
- Any support required

Your input is essential to ensure the apprentice stays on track.

Knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs)

All apprenticeships are built around KSBs:

- **Knowledge** – what the apprentice needs to understand
- **Skills** – what they need to be able to do

- **Behaviours** – how they perform in the workplace

As the employer, you provide the environment and opportunities for these to be developed in practice.

English and maths requirements

Depending on prior qualifications:

- Some apprentices may need to complete English and/or maths
- This is mandatory for 16–18-year-olds (unless exempt)
- Optional for those aged 19+ (at employer discretion)

Skern Skills provides full support where required and offer different remote delivery options.

Supporting apprentices with additional learning needs

Some apprentices may have **Additional Learning Support (ALS) needs**. Where these needs are **declared to both the employer and Skern Skills** then as an employer, your support is essential to helping the apprentice succeed. Together, we will:

- Understand the apprentice's needs and any agreed adjustments
- Provide reasonable support in the workplace to enable learning and development
- Ensure the apprentice has the tools, guidance, and time required to complete tasks and training successfully
- Work collaboratively with Skern Skills to review progress and adapt support where needed

Key point: ALS support is designed to give every apprentice the **best possible opportunity to succeed**, benefiting both the individual and your business. Skern Skills will guide you on **practical ways to support your apprentice**, while ensuring compliance with funding and apprenticeship standards.

End Point Assessment (EPA)

The EPA is the final stage of the apprenticeship.
It is:

- Conducted by an independent assessor within the workplace. Each standard varies on what's required and where they are held.
- Based on the apprentice's competence across all KSBs
- Completed once the apprentice is fully prepared

Assessment methods may include:

- Professional discussion
- Workplace observation
- Projects or tests

We will prepare both you and your apprentice for this stage.

Managing performance

If concerns arise with your apprentice, we will support you initially through your trainer with:

1. Informal discussion and guidance
2. Clear action planning
3. Formal review if required
4. Further steps where necessary

Our approach is always supportive, aiming to achieve the best outcome for both you and the apprentice.

What happens after the apprenticeship?

At the end of the programme, you may choose to:

- Offer a permanent role
- Progress the apprentice to a higher-level apprenticeship
- Continue developing their skills within your business
- To support your apprentice to progress with another business.

Apprenticeships are designed to create long-term value for your organisation

Next steps

1. **Contact Skern Skills** - enquiries@skernskills.co.uk
2. **Initial setup**
   One of our BDM`s (Business Development Advisors) will complete a business needs analysis (including sharing an information pack and set up a call or visit)
3. **Agree programme details**
   Confirm role suitability for the apprentice and appropriate apprenticeship, apprenticeship timeline, delivery model, and training schedule (including English and maths if required)
4. **Recruitment**
   a. **If you have a candidate** – we will contact them and support their application
   b. **If not** – our recruitment team can advertise and support you in finding the right apprentice

5. **Set up your DAS (Digital Apprenticeship Service) account**
   We will talk you through the process and support you to connect your DAS account and grant permissions with Skern Skills
   Employing an apprentice – create an account
6. **Confirm funding**
   Funding route to be agreed and set up.
7. **Start the apprenticeship**
   Once eligibility is confirmed for yourself and your apprentice, we will agree a sign-up date for your apprentice and yourself (or mentor if a different person) to attend through Teams and a start date for the apprenticeship (First day in Learning) between your apprentice and trainer can be agreed.

If you need any support or have any questions, then please contact **enquiries@skernskills.co.uk**

or call **01237 809 469** and we will be happy to help you.

www.skernskills.co.uk

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