



Supporting apprentices in the workplace

How employers can support, develop and retain early career talent



**UWE
Bristol**

This resource was created with University of the West of England as part of the [STEM apprenticeships: best practice for inclusive recruitment and retention event](#)

Introduction

Apprenticeships are an increasingly popular route into science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) careers. The combined approach of classroom and practical learning offers young people a hands-on way to develop the skills needed for a successful STEM career. This different learning-style helps employers to build a pipeline of talent with the specific skills needed for their organisation.

But for apprentices to thrive, employers must do more than offer a role—they must provide an environment where young professionals feel supported, included and able to develop. The transition from education to employment can be daunting, and the way organisations respond during this period can shape confidence, performance and long-term retention.

This makes the early workplace experience particularly important for groups who remain underrepresented in STEM, where stronger support systems can make a significant difference to participation and progression. Currently, women make up only 20% of STEM apprenticeship starts in the UK¹. While this figure is growing, the gender gap remains significant. Closing this gap isn't just about fairness—it's essential for tackling skills shortages and driving innovation.

This resource outlines **practical, evidence based actions employers can take** to improve recruitment, support apprentices in the workplace, and strengthen long term retention.

¹<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships/2024-25>

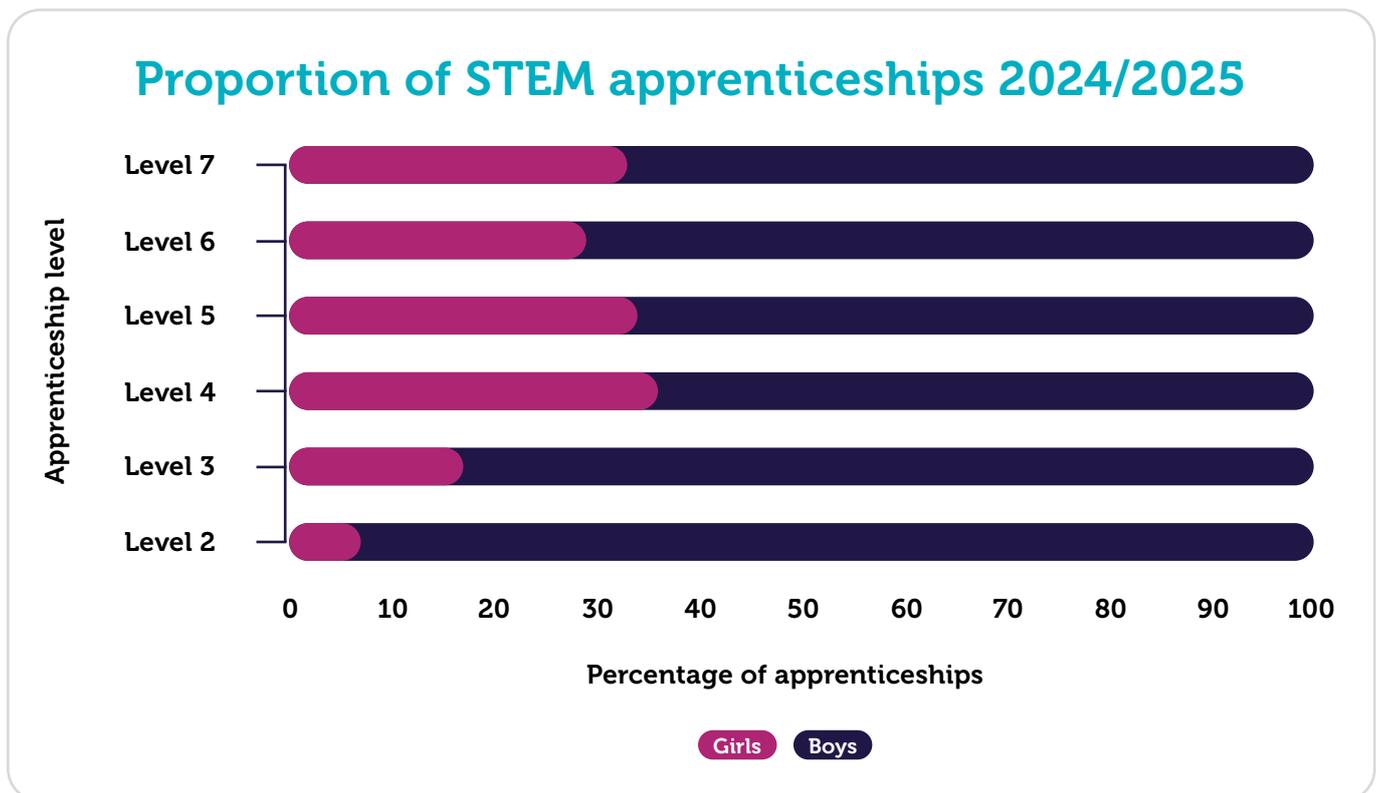
Apprenticeship data

What does the data tell us?

Recent apprenticeship data shows that engineering and technology apprenticeships account for 29% of all apprenticeships, with a 5% growth from last year - this is faster than the overall growth rate of all apprenticeships. Digital technology apprenticeships surged by 17%.

Women's participation has continued to grow, with them now making up 20% of engineering and technology apprentices. This is up 2% from last year and has nearly doubled since 2019.

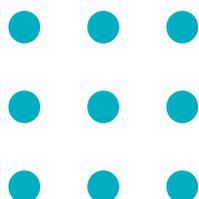
We're seeing a larger proportion of girls taking higher-level apprenticeships (Level 4-7):



All data has been accessed through the Explore Education Statistics data catalogue¹.

¹<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships/2024-25>

What this means for employers: Apprenticeships are growing rapidly, and diversity is improving - but targeted support and inclusive practices are still needed.





Why are young people choosing apprenticeships?

University remains a traditional route into STEM, but many students seek alternatives that better suit their learning style, financial priorities and career goals.

Apprenticeships offer practical, contextual learning from day one, alongside a salary and the prospect of a permanent role, with many staying on in full-time roles within the same company once their apprenticeship is completed.

Degree and higher apprenticeships offer a structured introduction to professional environments. Apprentices rotate through different teams, develop workplace skills and behaviours, and apply their academic learning to real projects. This experience helps them bridge the gap between education and work while exploring which field suits them best.

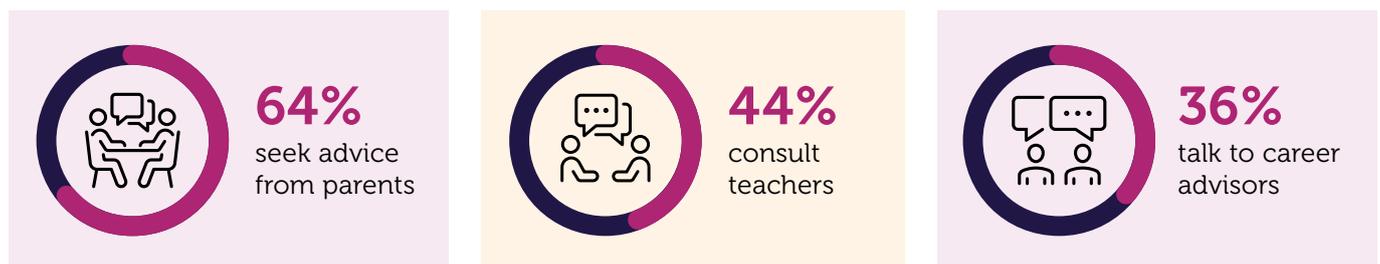
Recruiting apprentices: How to recruit inclusively

But first, how do you get the right talent through the door?

Attracting the right apprentice starts long before day one. Organisations need a proactive, inclusive recruitment approach that reaches a diverse pool of candidates and positions apprenticeships as a credible, exciting career route.

Educate teachers and influential figures in young people's lives

Parents and teachers play a major role in shaping career choices. Research shows that 64% of students seek advice from parents, 44% consult teachers, and 36% talk to career advisors². So it's essential that the adults supporting young people understand the breadth of career opportunities available and how students can access them.



Equip these influential figures with accurate, engaging information about apprenticeships, including progression routes and earning potential. Host information sessions, provide downloadable guides, and collaborate with schools to integrate apprenticeship pathways into careers education.

² <https://www.engineeringuk.com/media/kdkbwsfw/science-education-tracker-2023-engineeringuk-royal-society-apr-24.pdf>

Promote opportunities far and wide

Apprenticeships are a high quality route into STEM careers, but they still require greater visibility compared to the familiar UCAS university pathway. Highlighting their strengths helps students and their supporters see them as an equal and appealing choice.

To diversify the talent pipeline, employers and education providers should broaden how and where they promote apprenticeships. Many students are willing to relocate - just as they would for university - so outreach shouldn't focus only on local communities.

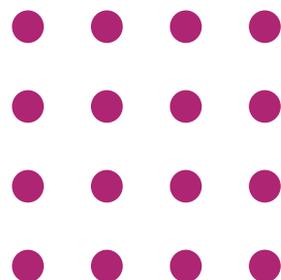
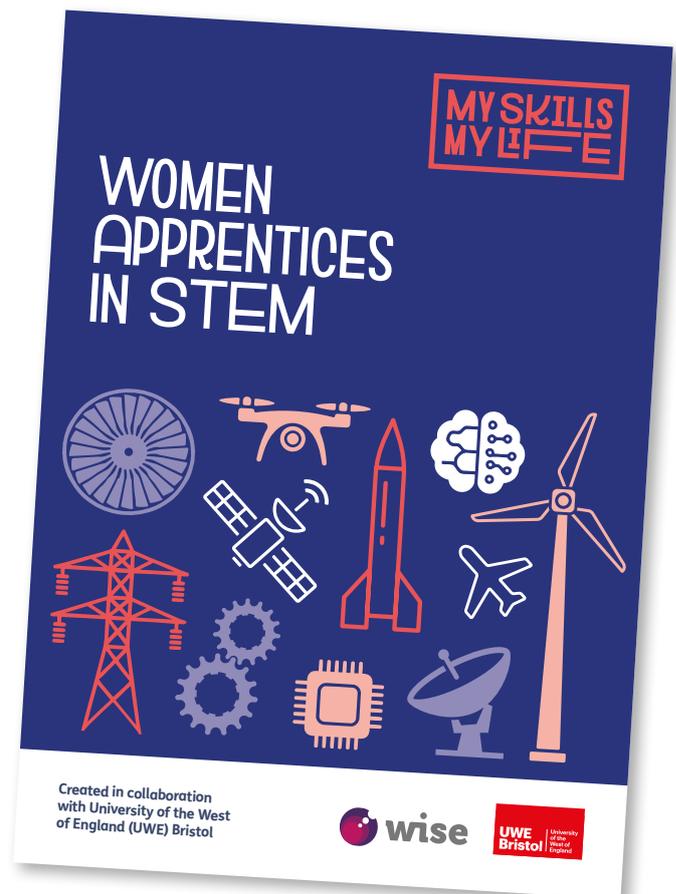
Expanding engagement channels is vital. Virtual events, webinars and online insight sessions help reach students who may not have access to traditional careers fairs and ensure a wider range of candidates can engage.

Early outreach and role models

The journey into STEM starts long before students consider applying. Early outreach - particularly to girls - is essential to challenge misconceptions and broaden aspirations. This is especially important for apprenticeships, which are still less widely understood by many young people.

Showcasing relatable role models can make a significant difference. Employers can use tools like [My Skills My Life](#) and share stories from current apprentices, while partnering with schools and colleges to increase awareness of apprenticeship pathways.

In collaboration with UWE, we've developed a dedicated [My Skills My Life apprentice role models booklet](#), highlighting diverse apprenticeship routes and real-life stories from apprentices.





Supporting young professionals in the workplace

What can organisations do to better support young professionals in the workplace and ensure that they thrive from day one?

Creating a consistently positive apprentice experience requires intentional, whole organisation support. Here are some key considerations:

Make a good first impression

A positive start sets the tone for the entire apprenticeship. Ensure everything is ready for their arrival — systems access, clear points of contact, and a structured onboarding plan, just as you would for any new employee.

A well-planned induction helps apprentices feel welcomed, reduces early anxiety, and signals that their development is valued.

Train employees to provide tailored support

Managers and mentors play a critical role in an apprentice's confidence and progression. Equip them with training on communication styles, setting expectations, and understanding the transition from education to work.

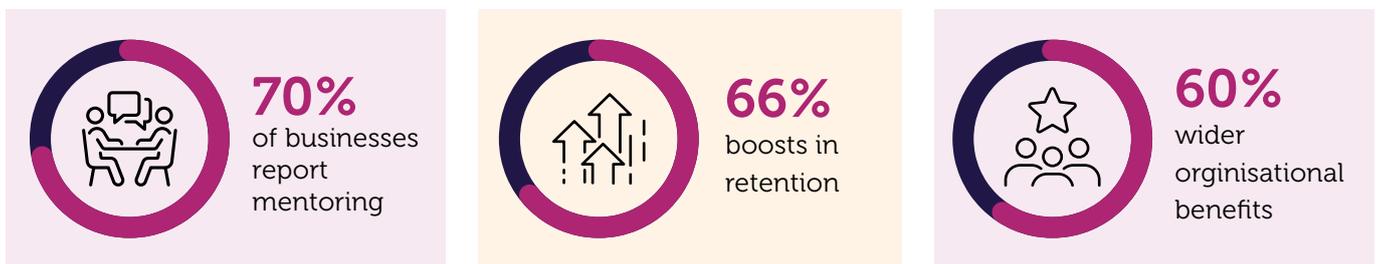
A good and steady support system makes a big impact on the experience, so ensure you think about who you are trusting to support the apprentices. This could make all the difference when it comes to retaining talent. Organisations should monitor these relationships and provide flexibility if a pairing isn't working.



Match mentors thoughtfully

Mentoring is one of the most effective ways to support apprentices.

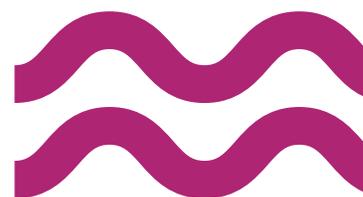
Research shows that **70%** of businesses report mentoring and coaching programmes have improved overall performance with **66%** seeing boosts in retention and talent attraction and **60%** noting wider organisational benefits³.



Mentoring helps apprentices feel grounded and supported. It provides insight into organisational culture and gives young professionals a trusted place to ask questions. Choose mentors with care, especially as apprentices may be new to professional development and unsure of how to make the most of the relationship

Training both mentors and mentees is crucial to set clear expectations, build confidence, and ensure the relationship is supportive and productive.

Mentoring can take many forms. Use a blend of structured mentoring (with goals and accountability) and informal support to offer both practical guidance and personal encouragement.



³ <https://associationofbusinessmentors.org/workplace-mentoring-coaching-report-2025/>



Enable peer support

Apprentices can feel isolated, especially if they are new to the workplace or have relocated. Create opportunities for apprentices to connect through buddy systems, peer networks, or informal knowledge-sharing sessions. Peer relationships provide emotional reassurance, shared learning, and a sense of community that complements formal mentoring.

Ensure consistency and continued support

Apprenticeship schemes often span several years. It's important that support is consistent for the entire duration. Employers should ensure that apprentices receive ongoing guidance throughout their programme. Continuity is especially important during organisational changes—such as manager transitions—to ensure apprentices don't lose momentum or feel disconnected.

Regular check-ins, access to wellbeing resources, and clear communication channels can make a significant difference to retention and overall experience.

Additional resources

UWE Women in Industry research

The University of the West of England carried out a research project which focused on how to recruit and retain more women into STEM apprenticeships – an essential industry in the South West of England. Their key aims were to grow apprenticeship numbers, enhance employer engagement and address inequalities through increasing outreach in the community to raise the profile of apprenticeships.

Working with employers across health, social care, engineering and the built environment, UWE held sector roundtables, partnered with regional organisations, and delivered outreach activities to broaden engagement.



Emerging learnings from the research

- » **An employer led system requires targeted support**
UWE engaged over 100 employers and found that SMEs, in particular, require extra guidance and capacity to fully benefit from apprenticeship pathways.
- » **Increase awareness of Degree Apprenticeships within communities**
Awareness of Degree Apprenticeships remains low across not only young people, but also their parents, teachers and other influential adults in their lives. Many people are unsure what they involve or lack the confidence to provide accurate advice to students.
- » **Create a more accessible and standardised application process**
Interviews with current and previous apprentices showed that applying for apprenticeships can be confusing and fragmented. Many recommended the development of a UCAS-style centralised application system to support clarity and consistency for students.
- » **Collaboration is essential**
Progress is strongest when universities, colleges/schools, and employers work together in a coordinated way.

You can [read the initial evaluation report here.](#)

Championing change: mentorship in action

You can find out more about mentoring in our recent webinar. Laura Fogg-Rogers from UWE joined and shared more information about the success of their Women like me mentoring programme. [Watch here.](#)

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