

## Employer Case Study

# Apprenticeships



## n. family club

Founded in 2017, [N Family Club](#) provides early years care to families across 31 nurseries within England. Identifying a shortage of qualified early years practitioners N Family Club has invested significant time and resource into their apprenticeship programmes. across all of their sites.

Looking after their 1,000 team members is paramount to their success and is central to their ethos of fostering a happy and supported workforce, which in turn will mean happy children and happy families.

We spoke to [Sophie Hayter, Senior Talent Development Partner](#) at N Family Club, about their approach to recruiting and retaining talent, who recently transformed and expanded her role from Apprenticeship Manager, acknowledging that the careers education and work placements on offer at N Family Club, needed to extend much further than just apprenticeships.



### **Sophie, tell us about the types of apprenticeships on offer at N Family Club.**

At the moment we're supporting around 140 apprentices out of a workforce of roughly 1,000, covering a range of areas from Early Years Level 2/3, to a Chef's apprenticeship and opportunities for our office team to take on courses in areas such as Team Leadership or Business Admin.

Our Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships are a fantastic way to get new talent into the company and to support those team members to grow into the outstanding educators that we need here.

We're intentional in offering the Level 2, in acknowledgement that some of our apprentices might need to develop other skills, for example some might still be doing their Level 1 in Maths & English at college and may not be ready to jump straight into a Level 3 apprenticeship.

We also offer a higher level apprenticeship for those who want to pursue their career or level of responsibility with us, such as a Level 5 Lead Practitioner. This enables new recruits joining our company to see opportunities to grow and develop with us.

All of our 31 nurseries have at least 2 apprentices and we always aim to have multiple on each site because of the benefits that peer support and mentoring from those who are further ahead can offer.

### **What would you say are the benefits of hosting apprentices from a diverse range of backgrounds? What value does diversity bring to N Family Club?**

We love the enthusiasm and energy that our diverse team members bring to the company. We find that having a mixture of ages and backgrounds across our workforce means that there is a deeply ingrained culture for shared learning across generations. Our team members with more life experience learn so much from our apprentices who are just starting out, and vice-versa. All of this skill sharing and collaborating is super relevant for working with our families.

It's really important for our families to see that we're supporting young people to join the sector and that we're advocating for young people to pursue meaningful careers with us.

Some of our nurseries, particularly those in inner cities, have such a diversity of cultures and languages spoken across our families. Having apprentices who are representative of those communities is invaluable to us. It helps our families and children feel welcome and understood, both culturally and practically, as our apprentices are able to translate and speak their own first languages with our families and children.

It's so important for us to be rooted in the communities that we serve and for children to see representation in team members who are like them.



## How do you advertise your roles and attract marginalised young people into apprenticeships with you?

This is where my role has become so much more than just supporting our apprentices once they're in their roles. We do a lot of outreach in local schools, colleges and community spaces, enabling young people to see a pathway into Early Years and opportunities in this sector. If we didn't do this, they might be unaware of what is possible for them. When we advertise roles, we make it really clear that we will support anyone who is still completing their Maths and English. We take a personalised approach to deciding which apprenticeship level to offer, working with each applicant to ensure that they are placed on a course which will work for them. We want every apprentice to succeed!

We are so proud of the diversity of our workforce and we ensure that our marketing materials and social media are a good representation of who we are, promoting diversity and showcasing that we are an inclusive employer.

## Have you experienced any underrepresentation across your apprenticeship programmes?

It might not be a surprise that we struggle to get male candidates for our apprenticeships, but we'd love to see more young men interested in Early Years and roles across our company. We've mindfully offered a diverse range of apprenticeships to attract a whole range of people into our workforce.

At times, we have struggled to fill apprenticeship roles in some of our more rural or suburban areas. We've reflected on this and understand that public transport in more rural areas can pose as a real barrier for young people in accessing employment. It does demonstrate that there's a disadvantage for young people living away from the infrastructure of an inner city where public transport is reliable, more affordable and easy to access.

## How do you support apprentices who have additional needs or need additional support?

We work closely in partnership with their training provider and advocate for their needs across both sides of the apprenticeship. This joined up approach is so important, because some of our youngest apprentices (aged 16-17) aren't experienced in asking for help or advocating for their own needs.

We have had instances where young apprentices haven't known to share that they have an EHCP or additional needs with us, so it's important that we are working together as a group of professionals, to ensure that no one slips through the net. One apprentice let us know that they were struggling with the 1on1 learning aspect, so we contacted the training provider who ensured that they were enrolled into group learning sessions, which suited their learning needs much better. We saw a real improvement in their development and confidence.



## What does a good quality apprenticeship look like to you?

Well firstly, unlike many employers, we offer our apprentices a permanent contract with us from the very start. We think this is so important in giving them the knowledge that this is a sustainable job and that they are a valued member of our team from day 1, receiving all of the same benefits as other employees, including our bonus offering. This really helps our apprentices to sustain their development and ambition throughout, knowing that there is a job for them once they qualify.

We also offer flexible working contracts. This could be condensed hours or a 30 hour contract instead of the standard 40 hours. For example, we have supported apprentices who fast during certain periods or on certain days of the week, to take that time and work a schedule which suits their religious commitments.

I can't stress how important it is for the apprentices to have a consistent team of trusted supporters within the company, including support from their line manager, from myself as Talent Lead and their peers within other nurseries. Finally, we have an apprenticeship mentor at each of our nurseries. This is someone who guides and offers a listening ear to the apprentices and who they can relate to- especially in times where their line manager is busy with workload or supporting large fast-paced teams.

The N Academy, is our brilliant internal learning resource where we provide mentor training for all team members who are working with apprentices. This is so important both in supporting our apprentices and in ensuring that those who are working with them feel supported and skilled when doing so.

## What has been the biggest challenge for the company and how have you overcome these?

I think the biggest challenge that we've had is ensuring that our youngest apprentices, aged 16 and who are in their first job, are prepared for the world of work. Many come with little understanding or experience about what working life is like and we need to dedicate time and support to building their basic professional skills.

This could be anything from arriving to work on time to remaining vigilant whilst at work. Because we're responsible for the safety of children, it's important to have clear expectations around this. For the first 3 months we don't count our new apprentices as staff in ratio to children, just so there is an easing in period and to give younger apprentices a chance to adopt and practice basic work skills.





Find out more about  
N Family Club on  
their website

[www.nfamilyclub.com](http://www.nfamilyclub.com)

### What is your top tip or piece of advice for employers who are at the beginning of their apprenticeship journey?

Be open minded, when you take on an apprentice- they are not the final package and will need support which might look different from your more experienced team members. They won't know everything when they start and you've got to be patient with them and invest time, support and resource before they transform into the team members that we need. This won't happen overnight and each young person is on a very different journey from the next.

My other piece of advice is to use the Levy Transfer Scheme- this can be a great help in covering the cost of the apprentices' training. Many small employers don't know where to start with this or have no idea it exists. We've had invaluable support to get additional funding from large employers who aren't using their own levy and have offered to transfer over to us. I'd recommend that all employers look into how the Levy Transfer Scheme can help them.

Finally, don't forget to celebrate the achievements of your apprentices. When someone passes their final assessments or reaches a milestone, we celebrate that and show that we have such pride in their achievements.

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