

How apprenticeships are helping Youth Futures Foundation build a stronger, more diverse organisation



Through our *Make it an Apprenticeship* campaign, we are championing employers who create opportunities for young people. It's given us the opportunity to reflect on our own journey in offering entry-level apprenticeships – what's worked, what we've learned, and why it matters.

Youth Futures Foundation is a non-profit with around 80 employees based across three working locations in Leeds, London, and Birmingham. As the national What Works Centre for youth employment, we use robust evidence to understand what helps young people access and thrive in good work.

Why we invest in apprenticeships

Our [Youth Employment Toolkit](#) shows that apprenticeships can have a high positive impact on youth employment outcomes. We know they make good business sense, align with our values, and help us create opportunities for young people.

We currently have two Level 3 Business Administration apprentices (one with an HR specialism), and one of our Finance Officers secured his permanent role after completing his apprenticeship with us. We recruit apprentices based on business need and capacity, and our ambition is to host an apprentice in each of our six directorates.



Make it an Apprenticeship

How we make apprenticeships work for our organisation

- **Tailored support for young people new to work.** Many young apprentices are stepping into a workplace for the first time, each with different backgrounds, experiences and learning needs. We design our onboarding and support around the individual, ensuring that each apprentice has what they need to thrive.
- **Protecting time for study.** Balancing work and learning can be challenging. We set clear expectations from day one and ringfence 20% off-the-job learning time, so apprentices never feel pressured to sacrifice study for workload.

Elisa, People Assistant Apprentice: “The education side is challenging, but it is manageable because it is only 20 percent”.

- **Preventing isolation through buddies and peer support.** With hybrid working and a small apprentice cohort, staying connected matters. Every apprentice has a buddy from day one who acts as a trusted guide and sounding board, helping them to integrate smoothly and build confidence.

Surayah, Business Administration Apprentice:
“Everyone has been so supportive and helped me to ease into the role. Having buddies has been amazing and helped me to learn about first-hand experiences. I have been prepared and not felt blindsided.”



Make it an Apprenticeship

The benefits we're seeing

- **A more diverse workforce.** Bringing younger employees into the organisation broadens perspectives, strengthens our culture and aligns directly with our youth-focused mission.
- **Stronger business and succession planning.** Apprenticeships support long-term workforce planning. They help us grow talent aligned to our values and future needs.
- **Structured learning and clear progression.** Apprenticeships prevent stagnation often found in entry-level roles, offering structured development and genuine career paths.
- **Financial benefits and smart use of our levy.** Failing to use our levy funds would mean losing money we could invest in developing our workforce. Hiring apprentices ensures those funds benefit our organisation. We also receive a £1,000 government incentive for our apprentice who's aged 16–18, and we benefit from National Insurance exemptions for apprentices under 25. These incentives reduce payroll costs and make hiring an apprentice more cost-effective than recruiting a non-apprentice into an entry-level role.

Surayah, Business Administration Apprentice:

“You're giving opportunities to young people while creating a valuable member of your

workforce...

Employers have the safety net of education to support learning.”



Our advice to other employers

- **Build a supportive culture.** Beyond securing senior buy-in, it's important to nurture a culture across the organisation that will support apprentices to thrive. Normalise supporting inexperienced young workers, be transparent about expectations, and make apprentices a visible and valued part of your organisation.
- **Build your infrastructure and support systems.** Young apprentices often need more support than other entry-level recruits. They must balance job responsibilities with structured study commitments, which is demanding, and can be overwhelming without the right systems in place. Strong onboarding, safeguarding measures and regular feedback help apprentices to manage both sides of their programme. Supporting the apprentice to build connections with from colleagues across all levels gives them a broader, more supportive learning network.
- **Continuous learning.** Learning from past challenges is central to improving our apprenticeship offer. Earlier apprenticeships highlighted challenges in hybrid working, linemanager consistency and unclear expectations. By working through these issues, we've strengthened our approach. Continuous improvement helps us build a more consistent, supportive and apprentice-ready environment.



Our work is rooted in evidence and apprenticeships are one of the strongest interventions we champion. By investing in apprenticeships ourselves, we're not only supporting young people into good work, we're strengthening our organisation, widening our talent pipeline and living our values in practice.

If we expect employers to create opportunities for young people, we must do the same – and apprenticeships are one of the most powerful ways we can live that commitment.