

Creating equitable pathways into work through Tesco's Stronger Starts Retail Apprenticeship



Tesco is one of the UK's largest employers, with stores rooted in local communities across the country.

Through its Stronger Starts Apprenticeship programme, Tesco uses Level 2 apprenticeships to create accessible, inclusive entry points into work for young people – particularly those who might otherwise struggle to get started in the labour market.

Why Tesco made it a Level 2

Tesco's focus on Level 2 apprenticeships sits within its wider inclusion and social mobility ambitions. Tesco recognises both a responsibility – and an opportunity – to widen access to work and training for those who may otherwise be excluded.

At the same time, Level 2 apprenticeships play an important role in Tesco's long-term workforce planning, helping the business develop the skills, confidence and values it needs to remain **resilient and future ready**.

Level 2 apprenticeships enable Tesco to:

- Create more accessible entry points into employment for young people with potential
- Support social mobility by offering a paid route into work without the need for academic qualifications
- Build a sustainable talent pipeline, developing people early and supporting progression over time.
- Strengthen workforce diversity and reflect the communities Tesco serves.



Make it an Apprenticeship

A powerful starting point for young people

Tesco's Level 2 Retail Apprenticeships are designed to offer young people a positive first experience of work, particularly for those who may not have had access to traditional academic or professional pathways.

For apprentices, the programme offers:

- A real, **paid** job from day one, with training integrated into everyday store roles and routines
- The opportunity to gain a recognised **qualification** while earning
- Structured support to build **confidence**, routine and transferable skills
- A sense of **belonging**, with apprentices treated as valued members of store teams

Value for Tesco as a business

Level 2 apprenticeships also deliver clear benefits for Tesco's workforce and operations.

By redesigning entry-level roles as apprenticeships, Tesco is able to:

- Reach a broader and more diverse pool of candidates, including young people who might not otherwise apply
- Grow skills in line with real operational and customer-facing needs
- Improve engagement and retention by investing early in people's development
- Strengthen inclusive culture at store level

Apprentices bring motivation, fresh perspectives and strong local connections, helping Tesco build a workforce that is skilled, diverse and well-prepared for the future.

Last year, Tesco announced a major expansion of its Stronger Starts Apprenticeship programme, introducing **five times more places** on the programme in 2025 and targeting **1,500 apprenticeship opportunities for young people by 2027**.



Make it an Apprenticeship

Making apprenticeships work through inclusive recruitment and in-work support

Tesco's experience shows that Level 2 apprenticeships work best when inclusion is designed in from the start.

To support young people to succeed, Tesco:

- Uses clear, accessible language in job adverts that focuses on **potential, not prior experience**
- As a Disability Confident Leader, ensures adjustments and **accessible routes** for applicants
- Highlights **diverse role models** in recruitment campaigns, helping young people see people 'like me' in retail careers.
- Offers multi-layered **in-work support**, including an in-store buddy, a training coach and regular wellbeing and progress reviews.



Working in partnership with The King's Trust, Tesco is able to offer a combination of inclusive recruitment and practical, on-the-job support, helping apprentices to settle quickly, build confidence and perform well, thereby **addressing one of the biggest challenges in entry-level apprenticeships – attrition.**



What other employers can learn

Tesco's approach demonstrates that Level 2 apprenticeships can be both inclusive and effective at scale when they are treated as a core workforce strategy, not an add-on.

Key lessons for other employers include:

- Design apprenticeships with inclusion at their heart - minimise entry barriers and offer clear support
- Link the programme to credible pay and permanent employment, making it appealing and sustainable
- Partner with expert organisations (for outreach, coaching, or mentoring) to reach underrepresented young people
- Be transparent about progression, so apprentices see a career pathway, not just a single job.



By making entry-level roles into apprenticeships, employers can widen access, support social mobility and build the workforce they need for the future.