

An Employer's Guide to Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs)

The Recruitment Process





#betterbusiness



Business Support
& Innovation

What is the Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) Programme?

- Starting point - Current Northern Ireland skills research has established that there is a significant Skills Gap at Level 4 & 5 (Foundation Degree) across a variety of industry sectors. Also the fact that so many graduates are leaving University after 4 years with a degree but no work experience who then struggle to gain entry level positions within their academic field. It was determined that work experience is key to overall academic success.
- Through collaborative work the Department of the Economy (DfE) and the Northern Irish regional colleges have developed academic working pathways for students as an alternative to university. The student secures employment to become a Higher Level Apprentice while working towards a Foundation Degree or IATI for Accountancy HLA's - all fees are covered currently by the DfE.
- This development work has evolved into a fit for purpose HLA programme with targeted qualifications currently starting at Level 4 (HNC equivalent) with future development to Level 8 (PhD equivalent) which meets the needs of business and provides realistic progression routes for the learner.
- HLA = Foundation Degree or IATI + Employment.
- Southern Regional College (SRC) have successfully introduced the delivery of HLA's in Chemical & Life Science, Accountancy, Mechatronics and Computing.
- SRC were one of the first colleges to facilitate the development of a HLA programme to Level 6. Science HLA graduates working at Norbrook, Radox and Almac now have the opportunity to continue their HLA Journey to BSc (Hons) Level with Ulster University. An HLA Level 6 progression route continues to be funded under the HLA funding structure. This means when they graduate they will have 4 years relevant work experience with a degree and no 'student debt'.
- SRC are continuing to expand their portfolio of HLA's.

For further reading follow the link which will take you to the Department for the Economy (DfE) page, DfE fund these programs <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/higher-level-apprenticeships>.

Higher Level Apprenticeship Programme Overview.

- SRC invite employers to view the current pool of applicants hoping to gain a place on their chosen HLA Programme. These applicants cannot gain entry without employment.
 - The pool of applicants could either be an 18 year old A Level/Level 3 achiever or a graduate seeking a different direction.
 - Applicants will be qualified to a minimum of A Level/Level 3 on entry. Some may present with a degree in a different discipline.
 - Course duration 2/3 years depending on HLA programme. So initial contract of employment will be for this period.
 - The HLA Apprentice will attend college 1 day per week and the remaining 4 days with their employer during term time. Outside of term time the HLA Apprentice will attend the workplace.
 - The HLA Apprentice will be your employee so will be subject to all your employee policies, procedures and discipline.
 - The only cost to the employer will be the HLA Apprentice wage which includes directed training i.e. HLA Apprentice is paid for 5 days per week – the employer pays the HLA Apprentice for their day in college.
 - The HLA Apprenticeship will work towards a Foundation Degree or in the case of Accountancy Apprentices they will work towards the IATI Accounting Technicians qualification.
 - Progression routes – On successful completion of the HLA Apprenticeship Foundation Degree programs the Apprentice progression options are dependent on their course of study. See guide HLA at SRC for further information.
 - The employer can develop the HLA Apprentice according to their own company's requirements where the academic underpinning knowledge is supported by SRC.
 - Each HLA apprentice will have an SRC mentor assigned to them for the duration of their apprenticeship. The SRC mentor will be a point of contact to support employer and apprentice as they progress through their qualification.
 - Participants from other States can apply but conditions apply. Eligibility carried out at point of application.
- *progression into 2nd year of the BSc is determined by grade achieved on the Foundation Degree.

What is the Role of a Higher Level Apprentice Employer?

- HLA apprentice becomes an employee of your company with a contract of employment – minimum of 21 hours per week (including directed training element).
- Directed training in college must be paid as part of the apprentices contracted hours of work i.e 4 days in work + 1 day in college = 5 days pay.
- Study leave paid allowance is at the discretion of the employer.
- Each Employer will draft and sign a contract of employment with their HLA Apprentice in line with their company policies and procedures whilst recognising the HLA Apprentice attendance requirement at college.
- Programme duration is 2/3 years depending on HLA being followed.
- If your company is offering the HLA opportunity to an existing staff member the employer must provide evidence to support the transfer into new role. This will be recorded within Department for the Economy – Existing Employee Application Form to include the current job role and then new Job Role. An existing employee is someone who has been employed by your company for more than 6 months before the start date of the HLA apprenticeship.
- Each employer is required to assign an in house mentor to the HLA apprentice in the workplace (see table page 4).
- Employer's are required to provide the appropriate experience to support the HLA during the course of their Foundation Degree (see table page 4).
- HLA apprentice wage should be commensurate with the industry rate for the job and in accordance with the national minimum wage (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/national-minimum-wage-and-living-wage>) (HLA Apprentices cannot be paid an Apprentice rate of pay).
- If you are claiming financial support from any other Departmental budget or programme this funding cannot be used to pay the HLA apprentice wage.
- Insurance - The minimum level of cover for Employers' Liability Insurance must be in line with the legal requirements under the Employers' Liability (Defective Equipment and Compulsory Insurance) (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. The minimum level of cover is £5 million.
- This HLA programme is subject to Audit by the Department for the Economy (DfE) Inspection Team.
- Course will only run subject to viable numbers.
- To access the pool of HLA applicants employers must complete the GDPR Data Sharing Agreement supplied by SRC

How does an Employer facilitate a HLA Apprentice in the workplace?

HLA	Industry mentor what level does the mentor have to be educated too.	Industry mentor how many years' experience do they need to have to mentor.	Is their specific equipment, software or servers the company needs to have?	Are their specific areas the HLA Apprentice will need experience in. Eg. TAX, Programming etc
Accountancy	An Accounting Technician with 5 years' experience or a fully qualified Accountant	An Accounting Technician with 5 years' experience or a fully qualified Accountant	Up-to-date accounting packages e.g. SAGE	9 out of the following areas: 1. Accounting systems management (e.g. TAS/Sage) 2. Management accounting 3. Budgeting 4. Cash management 5. Computer systems 6. Costing 7. Credit control 8. Payroll administration 9. Purchases accounting 10. Quality control 11. Sales accounting 12. Stock control 13. Tax returns
Mechanics	Minimum requirement of a Level 5 qualification in an Engineering Discipline	5 Years	Ideally a company should have access to a range of Mechatronics Equipment and Software. E.g. CAD, CAM, PLCs, Pneumatics, Hydraulics, Electrical & Electronics, Mechanical Testing and Manufacturing	Companies should aim to provide experience in a range of Mechanical and Electrical/Electronic fields
Computing Infrastructure	Level 5 or above in Computing infrastructure or related field	Ideally at least 2	No specific software/hardware but there needs to be a role performing IT related duties be they hardware or software related.	General Hardware/Software / Networking support requirements. E.g. virtualisation, LAN/WAN technologies & systems, and/or working with programming languages to support or create applications.
Science Chemical	Level 5 OR Level 3	2 years min 5 years min	Analytical equipment such as IR, UV-vis, HPLC, dissolution, disintegration, hardness testing, friability testing, disintegration	General analytical work
Science Life	Level 5 OR Level 3	2 years min 5 years min	Biological analysers, which will vary among companies. Microbiological equipment and immunological, such as SDS-PAGE and ELISA.	General analytical work

<p>Hospitality & Tourism with Specialisms - Hospitality</p>	<p>Minimum requirement of a Level 5 qualification in Hospitality and Catering/ and a good background/employment history in Hospitality.</p>	<p>At least 2 years' experience as a hospitality manager. This experience would include front of house service experience, and/or experience running and managing a bar and a busy restaurant.</p>	<p>No specific software is needed. The employer would be offering the apprentice employment in a restaurant, bar, café, events, or suitable hospitality establishments.</p>	<p>The employer needs to have a good knowledge of the hospitality industry. Companies need to be able to provide students experience associated with their job role. The job role will vary depending on the nature of the hospitality business. The applicant will gain experience in employability skills, facilities, events and food and beverage operations.</p>
<p>Digital Marketing, Advertising & Communication</p>	<p>The mentor in the work placement should have a good knowledge of digital marketing planning and the core aspects to include Search Engine Optimisation, Mobile Marketing, Market Planning, e-mail marketing. As Digital Marketing is ever-changing, it would be ideal if the mentor held a degree in Marketing or Business Studies. The ideal would be that they are engaging in Chartered Institute of Marketing level 4 and 5 qualifications</p>	<p>Ideally the mentor in the work placement and SRC should have at least 2 years' experience of Digital Marketing</p>	<p>Should the employer wish to take video footage, the equipment requires certain software and hardware which will be advised by the course co-ordinator and mentor. Essential software include, Adobe Premier Pro for editing of videos as well as Adobe Photoshop to create promotional materials</p>	<p>The employer needs to have a good knowledge of digital marketing beyond social media platforms, for example, search engine optimisation, mobile marketing, and digital strategy – however it is also important to note that the employer should be keen to learn this alongside the student as the industry changes so rapidly. Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online advertising • Content marketing • Social Media Marketing • Digital marketing planning and brand management • Digital Marketing data and analytics • Video/Imaging creation
<p>Digital Construction</p>	<p>Minimum requirement of a Level 5 qualification in an Construction Discipline with experience of BIM/ Digital technologies</p>	<p>5 Years</p>	<p>CAD software BIM software e.g. Revit Digital software/Apps</p>	<p>Companies need to be able to provide students experience in Digital software associated with their job role. The Apprentice will need experience in planning, management, tendering, procurement, use of Bills of Quantities prepending on their job role. In all the job roles it is important that the company is capable of providing the student with appropriate experience of Digital technologies and Software to ensure the students gains the skills need for the digital aspects of this course</p>

What is the HLA Apprenticeship Recruitment process?

1. Employers register with SRC to view applicant pool.
2. First week of July SRC will submit applicant's Employer Additional Information forms to employers for short listing.
3. Employers will have a timeline between the start of July and A Level Result day in August to shortlist, interview and select a potential HLA Apprentice from the submitted forms.
4. Employers will issue conditional offers of employment to their chosen HLA applicants and advise SRC by email who they are offering the conditional offer too.
5. A Level result day - all HLA applicants will submit their evidence of exam results by close of day.
6. Post A Level result day SRC advises employer if their chosen conditional offer applicant has been offered a FIRM offer so full offers of employment can be issued to successful applicants and contracts of employment can be issued. In the event that the chosen applicant has not met the criteria SRC will advise employers on the status of any reserve candidates. Employers at this point can access the applicant pool again as there may be new applicants post A Level result day.
7. SRC will resubmit applicant pool again with new and existing Employer Additional Information forms to all employers who wish to see the applicant pool again.
8. Employers will hold another round of interviews to fill any vacancies which are still available. Shortlisting and selection to be completed and employment offers made by the end of the 1st week in September.
9. Start date for course 2nd week in September.

Advice for Employers

1. Once you have shortlisted those you wish to call forward for interview send them your company application form to complete to bring with them to the interview.
2. Please ensure your company application form has a section to enquire about special requirements. Also a section to inquire if those not from the UK have the relevant paperwork in place to work in Northern Ireland.
3. Selecting a reserve candidate is advisable.
4. Advise your conditional offer HLA that they must present their A level/level 3 results to SRC by A level result day

What happens once the HLA apprentice starts work?

1. The HLA Apprentice will attend college one day per week.
2. A college mentor will visit the HLA Apprentice in the workplace periodically through the academic year.
3. The HLA Apprentice will be expected to avail of all online support through the college Moodle facility.
4. The employer will appoint a Work Place Mentor to the HLA Apprentice.
5. HLA applicants are encouraged to attend one of SRC Fresher's sessions which are offered on the second week of course (attendance will involve a ½ morning session, HLA apprentice can attend a session at their nearest SRC Campus during this week, further details shared with HLA apprentice as part of course induction).
6. SRC have introduced an on-line portal for employers to have access to their HLA's progression and attendance records. Once your HLA starts you will be sent a prompt email to register to use the portal. Please watch out for this.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can employers complete psychometric test, technical interview questions and/or additional assessments at interview stage?

Yes employers can enhance the criteria. If employers wish to enhance or propose to run pre interview assessment please inform SRC so we can advise potential applicants of this information.

2. Are there a minimum number of prospective HLA Apprentices' sent to employers?

All employers will receive the same batch of applicants, SRC cannot get involved in selecting applicants to send to a particular business, all employers must undertake their own shortlisting, interviewing and recruitment. It is in the interest of each employer when you receive applicants to undertake shortlisting in a timely fashion to ensure you give your business the best opportunity to select the most suitable applicant.

3. Have the applicants that employers receive made planned decisions on selecting this course as some pieces of additional information would not convince employers due to the standard of detail?

All applicants' Employer Additional Information forms you receive are from applicants who have chosen this course as their first choice. When applicants complete the Pre Enrolment Advice Session (PEAS) for their chosen course those eligible will receive a conditional offer from SRC, they can only hold 1 conditional offer. Those who receive a conditional offer we would consider committed to this chosen career path. SRC will invite all applicants to attend sessions on interview preparation and how to prepare a personal statement but as these applicants are not yet our students we cannot enforce their attendance. Applicants are young and may not have the benefit of life experience to present themselves effectively at this stage.

4. Can an applicant hold a job offer from more than one company?

Yes applicants can hold more than 1 job offer. To date this has not been an issue for once they receive their conditional offer from the company of choice they tend to accept it and advise any other companies of their choice.

5. Could employers be inviting the same applicants and therefore creating competition between employers to offer an attractive package to applicant?

Yes this is possible in order to address this we would advise all employers to offer a conditional offer and have a reserve offer. So you have a choice of a minimum of 2 applicants.

6. Can a HLA Apprentice be paid the apprenticeship current rate of pay?

No a HLA Apprentice must be paid in line with minimum wage according to their age. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/national-minimum-wage-and-living-wage;>

7. Are there progression routes for HLA Apprentices for a HLA Level 6 currently?

Yes SRC have facilitated the development of a Level 6 progression route with Ulster University (UU) for SRC's Chemical Science. SRC continue to explore progression opportunities for HLAs.

8. Do many students apply for the HLA program?

Each year there are in excess of 25 applicants who meet or have the potential to meet the criteria which are forwarded onto all registered employers in the first round.

9. What is the catchment area for students applying to HLA?

There is no geographical restriction for students applying to HLAs. Currently SRC have HLA apprentices from Mid Ulster, Down, South Down, Antrim and 100+ HLA Apprentices are attending HLA programmes offered at our Newry and

Portadown Campuses.

10. How useful is an assessment centre for employers to use as part of recruitment and selection process?

Applicants are relevantly young and some may have limited life experiences on how to best present themselves for interview. SRC provides guidance materials to all applicants on how to write a personal statement and interview techniques during the application process. All applicants are invited to attend careers sessions on both topics. Assessment centres are a useful tool to manage large volumes of applicants during initial screening of applicants. If your business plans to use as assessment centre, you must inform SRC so this information can be shared with potential applicants.

11. How many applicants are we likely to receive for holding as assessment centre?

Each employer will receive the full applicant pool for each HLA programme you have registered to view the applicant pool for (depending on the programme the number of applicants you will receive from 20 to 35 applicant details)

12. Where in SRC is the HLA Mechatronics delivered?

HLA Mechatronics - Portadown
HLA Computing - Portadown
HLA Accountancy - Newry
HLA Applied Industrial Sciences is (Chemical) - Newry
HLA Applied Industrial Sciences is (Life) - Newry or Portadown
HLA Digital Construction - Newry
HLA Digital Marketing Advertising and Communication - Newry
HLA Hospitality & Tourism with Specialisms - Hospitality - Newry

13. What day of the week will HLA classes be delivered on?

College lecturers are working on timetabling during the month of June, once we have details of the scheduled college days for the 18/19 academic year for HLA's we will make this information available to you.

14. How is course attendance monitored?

SRC are currently developing an online employer portal. Each employer will have a unique username and password to view apprentice progress, attendance and course modules etc. You will be able to monitor your apprentice attendance at college from your remote location. Until this portal is live you can liaise with your SRC college mentor to arrange the most suitable format to receive attendance information.

15. Are apprentices paid by employer 5 days per week?

Yes, apprentices are your employee from day 1. Employers must pay apprentices for all directed training therefore 4 days work plus 1 College day = 5 days pay.

16. What does apprentices do over the summer when college is off?

When classes are not timetabled for apprentices they should be at their place of work unless they have pre-arranged annual leave with their employer. Annual leave requests should be organised between employer and apprentice and follow employer normal processes and procedures, however we would request that holidays are approved outside of term time. During the summer months depending on the HLA programme a HLA Apprentices may have work based learning tasks to complete

17. How soon can an apprentice start if they have received a firm offer following A Level result day in August?

If your chosen apprentice receives a Firm offer from SRC following A Level result day the apprentice can start work as soon as you agree a suitable date. Apprentices do not need to wait to the actual course start date in September however their contract of employment must be signed and in place. However bear in mind that at the end of the process if there are not enough FIRM offers then the class may not run.

18. What happens if you employ someone and they don't work out?

As the HLA Apprentice is your employee you follow your own company procedures as you would for all employees e.g. discipline, holiday entitlement, sick leave etc. HLA Apprentices will have both an SRC mentor and workplace mentor so their performance will be discussed by all 3 parties and documented within the review documents regularly in the workplace. As a result if there are issues they can be dealt with quickly, if not disciplinary can begin and be recorded. The college will always endeavour to liaise and mediate to try and save the employment. However if the apprentice does not work out you follow your own company procedure in this regard.

19. Are you expecting to offer a further range of HLA options?

Yes the SRC are currently in the development stage in the following areas: Financial Services and Construction Management. We will continue to look in new areas as industry demands.

20. Has any employer not been successful in recruiting a HLA apprentice?

To date employers have not recruited based on the pool of applicants not being successful at interview Or where they have offered a position and the HLA applicant sub sequentially chooses to go the University.

21. What is the process for registering existing staff?

Existing staff apply through our online application portal like all applicants they will then be assessed through SRC Pre Entry Enrolment Sessions (PEAS). We would ask that you inform us of who you are putting forward so DfE paperwork can be completed with you and so their name will not appear on an employer list.

For further Information Please Contact:

Michelle Billham

Business Development Executive

 028 3025 9724

 077 3921 2955

 billhamm@src.ac.uk

- HLA Applied Industrial Sciences Pathways Life/Chemical
- HLA Computing
- HLA Digital Construction
- HLA Mechatronics

Sylvia Moorhead

Business Development Executive

 028 3025 9746

 078 4110 2848

 moorheads@src.ac.uk

- HLA Accountancy
- HLA Digital Marketing, Advertising & Communication
- HLA Hospitality & Tourism With Specialisms - Hospitality HLA



#betterbusiness



Business Support
& Innovation

Business Support & Innovation Centre



Newry | BT34 2QX
Portadown | BT63 5BL

T. +44 (0)28 3025 9664
T. +44 (0)28 3839 7778

E. betterbusiness@src.ac.uk
W. www.src.ac.uk/betterbusiness