

Paying a HLA



When employing a Higher Level Apprentice (HLA), the minimum rate of pay they can attract is the minimum wage according to their age.

See <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates> for guidance.

This is the baseline salary. Employers may choose to pay more.

For clarification a HLA cannot be paid the Apprentice Rate of £8.00 per hour. See statement below from the national minimum wage NI direct page.

“The apprenticeship rate does not apply to Higher Level Apprenticeships”.

	Hourly Rate (1st April 2026)	Hours worked per week (inclusive of day in class)	Annual Salary (Before Tax)
Age 18-20	£10.85	-36 hours -37 hours -40 hours	-£20,311.20 -£20,875.40 -£22,568.00
Age 21 +	£12.71	-36 hours -37 hours -40 hours	-£23,793.12 -£24,454.04 -£26,436.80

HLA apprentice becomes an employee of your company where you issue them with a contract of employment. The minimum contract of employment which can be offered is 21 hours per week which is inclusive of their day in class – Directed training element.

Directed training must be paid as part of the apprentices contracted hours of work.
i.e., 4 days in work + 1 day in directed training = 5 days' pay

Savings on National Insurance

Employers do not have to pay NIC for an apprentice as long as they are on an approved apprenticeship scheme.

The guidance from NI Direct covers the following qualifications:

- *Level 2*
- *Level 3*
- *Higher Level Apprenticeships*

To qualify for NIC Relief the apprentice must be under 25 and meet the conditions set out by HMRC. Employers do not pay NIC for any employee under the age of 21.

