

Transforming the public and third sectors:

The role of professional training





Professional training and development



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Professional skills underpin the core of every organisation by providing essential expertise, governance, systems and processes that drive organisational productivity. The Professional and Business Services (PBS) sector has been identified by the government as a priority growth area in the 2025 Industrial Strategy with a commitment to enhance skills and talent pipelines in this sector.

Whilst apprenticeships continue to be available for learners of any age, there are now extra incentives for hiring younger apprentices, enabling them to access the first rung of their career ladder. This shift in emphasis is expected to create further opportunities at levels 2-5 and increase demand for entry- and mid-level professional training, particularly in accounting, HR, business administration, and law. The introduction of a new Administration Assistant Level 2 apprenticeship for 16-24 year olds has been particularly welcomed by the NHS and local authorities after years of lobbying.

In this thought piece we will discuss how professional training can transform long term learning and development strategies, and power career pathways within the public and third sector workforce.

The rise of blended learning: Delivering flexibility in the workplace

Post-pandemic shifts in work and study preferences for hybrid and remote working have led to an increasing demand for more flexible blended models of delivery. The CIPD reports that 74% of organisations now have hybrid working in place. This structural change in working patterns has reshaped expectations around training delivery, with both employees and employers expecting delivery models that mirror this flexibility.

Demand is rising for flexible, blended delivery models that balance digital access with face-to-face learning – particularly in professional subjects requiring applied practice and collaboration.

"The delivery model must offer different modes of study, including a blended learning approach to include face to face and virtual/online delivery."

December 2025 - Warwickshire County Council.

Learners can choose how, when and where to complete theoretical study, whilst group workshops give learners the opportunity to discuss real-world business challenges and bring solutions back to their organisation.

Public and third sector employers place high value on training provisions that can adapt quickly to changing skills needs. These models enable individuals to progress or change careers while balancing study with work and personal commitments, and allow organisations to upskill staff with minimal disruption to day-to-day business operations.

Together these findings underline employer demand for more responsive, flexible models of delivery, making blended learning a natural fit. Senior leaders at the NHS tell us that they are working most successfully with training providers that can offer a flexible training option.



Funded solutions for learning and development

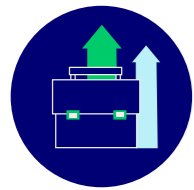
Public sector learning and development strategies need to harness opportunities for funding training programmes. Recent apprenticeship reforms, including the reduction of minimum duration to eight months and the streamlining of assessments, have made these programmes easier to integrate into workforce planning.

Professional apprenticeships continue to be key to building a workforce for the future, and enable organisations to deliver on the following internal objectives:



Talent strategy

Apprenticeships are no longer just for school leavers, they offer a fantastic pathway for succession planning and filling skills gaps - which means that employers are increasingly enrolling current, and long-standing team members onto apprenticeship programmes.



Diversity and inclusion

Organisations are increasingly using apprenticeships to drive social mobility and diversity in the workplace. With hundreds of apprenticeship standards available, employers can use this training to build a diverse and inclusive workforce across all departments and divisions.



Upskilling teams

Many organisations seeking an affordable way to upskill current team members, for example individuals who are looking to gain professional qualifications to progress in their role, are also turning to apprenticeships. 86% of companies said that apprenticeships helped them develop skills relevant to their organisation!



Staff retention

Apprenticeships can improve team performance and boost staff retention. Knowing your organisation is prepared to invest in you is a huge driver for workforce loyalty, and is key for organisations looking to improve talent retention, particularly for highly sought-after roles. 80% of companies investing in apprenticeships experienced an increase in staff retention.

Powering professional career pathways

Employers in the public and third sectors have made significant commitments to integrating professional training into their long-term workforce planning.

Most commonly, employers are looking to upskill current employees rather than hire new ones, with reports from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and long-standing employer surveys showing persistent recruitment challenges in business-critical roles, particularly as the need for technological adoption accelerates.



The NHS has committed to ensure that every single member of staff has their own personalised career coaching and development plan, to help them acquire new skills and practice at the top of their professional capability.

90%

of Councils have said they have a 'grow your own' scheme, with finance, legal and human resources schemes in the top 5 most popular areas.

The Association of Apprentices has identified three key steps to developing a dedicated and cohesive workforce:



Develop

Comprehensive training programmes that combine practical experience with theoretical learning



Embed

Pair learners with mentors to guide their development and integrate company culture



Progress

Provide roadmaps for career progression to motivate and retain talent

The enduring value of apprenticeships in the workforce

Apprenticeships are instrumental in facilitating the transfer of knowledge and expertise within public sector organisations. In the long run, this strategic approach to workforce development not only sustains growth, but also contributes to organisational stability.



“The NHS long term workforce plan is enabling growth, particularly through apprenticeships, using the Growth and Skills levy to provide learning and training opportunities.

Our Trust uses apprenticeships because they are well-rounded programmes and apprentices can study alongside their day-to-day role. We find this works better than sending people away to do vocational courses.

Working with Mindful Education works fantastically, especially in an NHS organisation because it gives apprentices the flexibility to study when it's convenient for them.”

Heather Ainscough
Apprenticeship Compliance and Funding Manager
Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust



“We have used apprenticeships to upskill our workforce, which is where the big wins are for us as an organisation. When I first looked for an apprenticeship package, I wanted an online platform that would provide everything the apprentices needed. The flexibility in the platform and the variety of information has been really helpful. For us, the blended option will always be the preferred option, because of the flexibility it offers to all parties involved.”

Emma Hart
Deputy HR Director
Ambitions Academies Trust



Watch case study

The role of professional and business services



The need for skills development in professional and business services is self-evident. Employers regularly flag skills shortages across all areas and levels, with Learning and Development teams tackling these skills gaps as a “top priority”.

Achieving a professional qualification provides an additional endorsement for apprentices and can be the first step on the path to chartered status. Apprenticeships continue to be an excellent way to fund many professional qualifications including CIPD and AAT programmes.

Expanding professional training routes across an organisation offers a strategic solution to workforce shortages by providing a clear professional development pathway for team members with potential and ambition.

This approach especially benefits those who have previously lacked a consistent route to gain the skills and knowledge needed to progress in their careers, particularly in non-core areas like business administration, estates, and legal services.

If you're interested in incorporating professional apprenticeships into your learning and development strategy, then please email:

apprenticeships@mindful-education.co.uk

References

1. <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/employers/understanding-apprenticeship-benefits-and-funding>

Find out more

At Mindful Education, we produce flexible, award-winning, blended learning courses and apprenticeships that continue to set new standards in digital education.

Working in partnership with hundreds of colleges, training providers and employers, we support thousands of learners each year, helping people to take the next step in their careers and realise their ambitions.

If you are interested in partnering with Mindful Education to deliver professional courses and apprenticeships then please email:

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