Apprenticeship Policy

# Version Control

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# Introduction

 Historically, apprenticeships have been a great way to combine learning and earning whilst also meeting employers’ skills needs. Microlink has a history of employing apprenticeships. Microlink apprenticeships cover a range of skills for new and existing employees. Microlink is committed to creating real opportunities around employment and training.

 Microlink apprenticeships combine job and educational training. The employment market focuses on technical education as well as on the job experience and Microlink promotes the apprenticeship programme to give experience of both. To qualify, individuals must:

* Be eligible to work in the UK.
* Meet the minimum selection criteria for the role as specified in each vacancy job description.

 It is important for the future of Microlink to maximise upon apprenticeships to focus on quality and access.

# Benefits to the Community

1.1 Microlink works in conjunction with individuals in their local communities who are seeking employment and boost employment and training opportunities by:

1.2 Enabling individuals to gain nationally recognised qualifications whilst they earn and thus increase their employability in the future.

1.3 Develop employment links in the community, within the higher education sector and local job centres.

1.4 Apprentices will enable Microlink to build a strong pipeline of future talent and ensure succession planning, develop knowledge-transfer and build a committed, loyal workforce whilst addressing future skills gaps.

1.5 Managing and mentoring an apprentice is a great development opportunity for the existing workforce, especially for those that do not currently have people management and leadership experience.

# What is an Apprenticeship?

3.1 An apprenticeship is a job with training, designed around the needs of employers that leads to national recognised qualifications.

3.2 Apprenticeships can be used to train new and existing employees at a local college or Skills Funding Agency approved training provider.

3.3 The length of apprenticeships can vary between one and four years to complete.

# Apprenticeship Conditions

4.1 Apprentices are employed by Microlink for a fixed term until the end of their apprenticeship.

4.2 Microlink’s training provider delivers the apprenticeship framework in order that the individuals can achieve qualification. Microlink’s apprentice co-ordinator acts as the first point of contact for the training providers and manages the liaison between the line managers and the apprentices.

4.3 The typical levels of Apprenticeship-Training programmes are:

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| **Type** | **QCF Level** | **Equivalent Qualification** | **Average Length** |
| Intermediate | 2 | 5 GCSE passes | 12 months |
| Advanced | 3 | 2 A level passes | 12 to 24 months |
| Higher | 4 | Foundation Degree | 36 to 48 months |

Microlink seeks to work towards a Level 2 competence qualification as a minimum.

4.4 Apprenticeship frameworks are made up of three elements:

4.4.1. A competence qualification which examines the apprentices work based skills.

4.4.2. A technical certificate which examines the apprentices’ theoretical knowledge.

4.4.3. Functional skills which improve essential skills needed to succeed in employment and training and includes communication, numeracy, and IT.

# Funding – The Apprenticeship Levy

5.1 Employers that operate in England and that pay the apprenticeship levy can access funding through an online apprenticeship service account. Each employer can register its own individual account, linked to its PAYE scheme.

5.2 The Government will pay funds into individual accounts monthly. The employer can use the money to pay for the training and assessment of apprentices in England. The Government tops up the amount paid into the account by 10%.

5.3 The Government uses the home addresses of employees, from PAYE records, to work out what proportion of an employer's pay bill relates to employees living in England. This will determine the amount that is paid into the employer's account. Separate arrangements for funding apprenticeships apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as this is a devolved matter.

5.4 The employer must spend the funds in its digital account within 24 months of them being paid in. Employers will be notified in advance when funds are due to expire.

5.5 The apprenticeship levy is a levy on UK employers to fund the costs of apprenticeship training and assessment. The levy is set at 0.5% of an employer's pay bill (the pay bill is the employer's total employee earnings subject to Class 1 secondary national insurance contributions). The levy came into force on 6 April 2017.

5.6 Each employer has an annual allowance of £15,000, which is offset against the levy. In effect, only employers with a pay bill of more than £3 million will be liable to pay the levy (because 0.5% of £3 million is £15,000).

5.7 Companies and charities that are connected in a group structure have one £15,000 allowance to share between the group. The levy is paid through PAYE monthly. The allowance is also applied on a monthly-basis, and any unused allowance can be carried forward to the next month.

5.8 Funds raised by the levy are distributed via the online apprenticeship service for employers to use on apprenticeship training and assessment in England. Separate arrangements for funding apprenticeships apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as this is a devolved matter.

# Funding – If employers cannot access the Apprenticeship Levy

6.1 Not all employers are liable to pay the apprenticeship levy. Employers that do not pay the levy can receive government funding towards the costs of apprenticeship training and assessment through co-investment.

6.2 The Government will pay 95% of the price agreed with the training provider, up to the maximum allowed by the funding band for the relevant apprenticeship standard or framework.

6.3 Employers with fewer than 50 employees are not required to pay a contribution to the cost of the apprenticeship where the apprentice is aged 16 to 18 inclusive, or aged 19 to 24 inclusive if they have previously been in care or has a local authority education, health and care plan. The Government will pay 100% of the training and assessment costs in these circumstances.

# Apprenticeship Pay

7.1 Employers are required to pay apprentices the national minimum wage. The apprenticeship rate, which is £4.81 per hour from 1 April 2022, applies to workers who are employed under a contract of apprenticeship, or under a specified government apprenticeship arrangement, who are aged under 19 or in the first 12 months of the apprenticeship. Apprentices who are aged 19 or over and not in the first 12 months of the apprenticeship are entitled to the relevant rate of the [national minimum wage](https://www.xperthr.co.uk/quick-reference/national-minimum-wage/27693/) depending on their age.

7.2 Microlink pays the national minimum wage as standard to all Apprentices regardless of age.

7.3 The national living wage is the top rate of the national minimum wage, which must be paid to workers aged 23 and over and Microlink adheres to this legislation.

# Identifying Apprentice Opportunities

8.1 Apprenticeship opportunities can arise when:

8.1.1. Recruiting a member of staff at entry level.

8.1.2. Restructuring or reviewing a team/distribution of duties.

8.1.3. Designing succession planning models.

8.2 Managers must not create apprenticeship opportunities to replace jobs which have been deleted. Recruitment of apprentices is in line with Microlink’s Recruitment and Selection Policy.

# Support and Mentoring

9.1 Line Managers are responsible for allocating mentors to any apprentices they manage. The role of the mentor will be to support the transition to the workplace. They will meet with the apprentice to discuss any problems and to give help so that they can reach their goal.

# What happens once the apprenticeship is completed?

10.1 Although Microlink is not obliged to guarantee the apprentice a permanent position at the end of the Apprenticeship, it is intended that all Apprentices will be successful in gaining full time employment.

# Exceptions

11.1 There are no exceptions to this policy.

# Monitoring

12.1 MLPC commit to reviewing this policy and procedure regularly to ensure best practice and that they remain within the legal framework and current legislation. The policy will be reviewed annually.

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| Signature: |  |