

CONCO>E TŪHURA

Quick Guide

Degree apprenticeships: What employers need to know

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KEY DECISIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Degree apprenticeships – 90 second decision

These questions will help you decide whether a degree apprenticeship will work for your business



DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS: WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW

A quick guide for businesses – see the full Employer Guide for more detail.

What are degree apprenticeships?

A degree apprenticeship combines paid employment with degree study. Your employee earns a salary while working towards a recognised degree (bachelor's or postgraduate), with most of their learning planned, supervised, assessed, and credentialled in the workplace.

This isn't a placement or internship. Degree apprentices are employees first. They do real work that generates real value for your business while building evidence towards the same academic standards as campus-based degrees. The difference is where and how learning happens.

Who can be a degree apprentice?

- New recruits entering your business straight from school or another career, or
- Existing staff you want to upskill and develop.

Why employers are using this model

Employers tell us degree apprenticeships deliver three critical advantages:

- Faster productivity and better retention. Apprentices apply theory to your live projects from day one, become competent faster than traditional graduates, and stay longer because they're invested in your systems and culture.
- Access to diverse talent. Because the pathway is paid and work-based, it opens doors for mature learners, regional talent, and Māori and Pacific peoples who are under-represented in degree study.
- Training that fits your business. Work-based degrees co-designed with tertiary education providers mean graduates are fully productive from day one—no need to retrain recent graduates or help them unlearn practices that don't fit your context.

What are my responsibilities?

Hosting a degree apprentice means more than just hiring a staff member. You're part of a three-way partnership with the provider and the learner. This means you will:

- sign a three-way agreement setting out everyone's roles.
- provide supervision and support, such as assigning a mentor, giving time for study, and verifying work evidence.
- be asked to feed into assessment (e.g. signing off that projects were completed to standard).

What support can I expect?

You won't be left to figure this out alone. Tertiary education providers are responsible for the teaching, assessment, quality standards, templates, regular check-ins and supervisor training.

You can focus on workplace learning: giving apprentices tasks, feedback, and opportunities to grow.

What about the finances?

Employers often worry about time and cost. With a degree apprenticeship, you'll pay the apprentice's salary and normally their study fees as well (generally between \$7-10,000 per year).

Apprentices do need support, especially at the start. However, they also deliver value earlier, offer your business access to new skills and reduce recruitment costs.

What do I need to check first?

Not every role needs a degree apprenticeship. Think about whether:

- The role really needs degree skills.
- You can provide a suitable environment with good supervision.
- You have the capacity to invest in someone who is both studying and working.

How do I get started?

- Talk to your industry skills body or professional association.
- Approach a university, polytechnic, wānanga or private training establishment which is already running (or planning) a degree apprenticeship.
- Use the Employer Readiness Checklist in the full guide to test your preparedness.

Final word

Degree apprenticeships are not the right solution for every business. But for many, they're a powerful way to secure skilled staff, shape training to fit your needs, and give people a chance to earn while they learn.

If you want more detail, see the full Employer Guide. It takes you through each stage step by step.

DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS: A PRACTICAL OVERVIEW FOR EMPLOYERS

What they are - A degree apprenticeship is an earn-and-learn pathway. Your employee holds a paid role and studies toward a recognised degree at the same time.

Most of the learning and evidence comes from on-the-job work under supervision, with the provider (university, polytechnic, wānanga, or private training establishment) integrating workplace evidence into courses and assessment.

Same academic standard, different mode: authentic work is planned, supervised, assessed, and credentialled.

Why employers are taking up this option

- **Tackling shortages and lifting productivity:** Degree apprenticeships are associated with higher retention and faster time-to-competence because apprentices apply new theory to your live projects from day one.
- **Access and diversity:** Because the pathway is paid and work-based, it opens doors for mature learners, regional talent, and Māori and Pacific peoples who can be under-represented in degree study.
- **Relevance:** Work-based degrees jointly designed by providers and employers mean graduates will be fully productive from day one.
- **Real results:** Employers agree that degree apprenticeships are a medium for growing talent, bringing new ideas into businesses and increasing revenue.

What success requires from employers

Think of degree apprenticeships as a three-way partnership between **employer–apprentice–provider**. Employers that succeed do five things well:

- 1. Choose the right roles:** Use degree apprenticeships where the job genuinely needs higher level learning and sustained on-the-job development.
- 2. Recruit jointly and fairly:** Agree a joined-up process with your provider, including co-branded advertising, dual admissions (you hire; provider confirms academic readiness), shared interviews/diagnostics, and a coordinated offer.
- 3. Put support around the apprentice:** Name a trained workplace supervisor and a mentor/buddy and involve academic advisors in regular tripartite reviews (every 10–12 weeks) to check progress and adjust the plan early. Protect study time (block or day-release) inside paid hours. Plan rotations and projects that cover all graduate outcomes. Use a simple training plan that maps tasks, evidence and assessment.
- 4. Share information and contribute to assessment:** Your job isn't to grade essays; it's to verify workplace evidence (observations, sign-offs, client feedback, reports), attest authenticity, and confirm impact. Providers handle academic marking and moderation and you provide timely inputs and attend check-ins.
- 5. Plan the business case and risks:** Budget for salary, fee support (many employers pay tuition fees), supervision time, and account for an initial productivity dip. Offset this with earlier productivity, lower churn, targeted skills, and less retraining of new graduates. Track a small set of outcomes: time-to-competence, project ROI, retention, registration, and equity participation.

What you'll sign and use

- **Tripartite Training Agreement.** Establishes the apprenticeship relationship, roles, privacy/IP, release time principle, dispute/variation clauses.
- **Training Plan.** Maps outcomes to tasks, rotations, evidence, assessment timeline, and supports; updated at tripartite reviews.

Practical FAQs

Do degree apprentices meet the same academic standards as other degrees? Yes. They use the same graduate outcomes and academic quality systems; the difference is where and how learning is evidenced.

Can SMEs participate? Yes. And you can talk to providers about brokering rotations across multiple firms in a regional or industry cluster so smaller firms share supervision while apprentices still meet all outcomes.

Are degree apprentices paid? Yes. Apprentices are employees like any other. Make sure you recognise progression and competency development in pay and progression.