Higher Apprenticeship in Construction Operations Management

Employer Briefing Note

This briefing note gives employers more information about the new Higher Apprenticeship in Construction Operations Management. It sets out what is delivered, how it is delivered, the expectations of employers and apprentices and the grants available to help employers meet the cost of fees.

What is the Higher Apprenticeship?
The Higher Apprenticeship is a nationally recognised apprenticeship approved by CITB-ConstructionSkills and includes a Foundation degree in Professional Practice in Construction Operations Management as part of the final Level 5 Apprenticeship. The Higher Apprenticeship was developed at the request of CITB-ConstructionSkills who in turn were responding to a request from employers in the industry to develop a Higher Apprenticeship. All Apprenticeships are governed by statute and are ‘designed to develop the knowledge and occupational competencies an individual needs to perform a defined job role, by combining learning and work’.

The Higher Apprentice must follow a series of core modules, but there are opportunities to choose from a small number of specialist optional modules, thus tailoring the learning to suit the employer’s business needs.

Apprentices must be employed. The Higher Apprenticeship is only achievable through work-based learning with support from a college or other training provider. Depending on previous qualifications, it will typically take three years to achieve the Higher Apprenticeship.

Why does it include a Foundation degree? How does this make it different from a Higher National qualification?
The Foundation degree is currently only offered by Middlesex University although other universities and their partner colleges may offer the same programme in the near future. It has been approved as meeting industry standards by CITB-ConstructionSkills and meets a national consistent series of learning outcomes meaning Apprentices will have developed the knowledge and occupational competencies the industry requires. The Higher Apprenticeship does, however, allow for flexibility in delivery and the ability to tailor the learning programme to meet specific employer need. Although the university oversees the standard and quality of the course, it is delivered by local Further Education (FE) colleges. All the colleges have well-regarded construction departments and have delivered a range of construction courses from NVQs to HNC/Ds, Foundation degrees and in some cases, Honours degrees for many years.

The fundamental difference between HNC/Ds and Higher Apprenticeship is that a Higher Apprentice must be in work and work-based learning and the development of occupational competence (i.e. the ability to do the job) is at the core of the Higher Apprenticeship. HNC/Ds are not work-based in this sense. As a work-based HE qualification the Foundation degree has been specifically designed, developed and approved to provide

---

1 Meeting Employer Skills Needs Consultation on criteria for Higher Apprenticeships at Degree Levels – National Apprenticeship Service P5
evidence of meeting the knowledge and occupation competence requirements of the Higher Apprenticeship. HNC/Ds cannot provide this evidence. Unlike HNC/Ds the Foundation degree includes guaranteed progression to a level 6 (Honours degree) for all those who successfully complete the learning programme. The Higher Apprenticeship and Foundation degree will be suitable for employees who have the aspiration, ability and potential opportunity to develop into a construction operations management role.

How will my business benefit?
Firstly, your employee will be learning on the job. Your member of staff will be making a link between what he or she is doing in the course of the working day and the formal input that they receive through on-line teaching and perhaps a day a month at college. Part of your responsibility is to ensure that he or she has the opportunity to learn at and though work by letting them attend meetings with more senior staff or help solve a complex real work problem. The college will talk you through this so that you train up your employee to work at a higher level in your business. Other benefits of the Higher Apprenticeship include:

• You grow your own construction operations managers from amongst your most promising employees who have completed a Advanced Apprenticeship at level 3 or who are operating at a similar level in your business
• The learning activities required by the Higher Apprenticeship are all linked to real work opportunities and can be applied to a variety of work locations. You decide how and where your apprentice is exposed to these experiences
• Your staff put their new management skills into practice immediately, for the benefit of your business
• Staff loyalty grows and they are less likely to leave for other jobs: you benefit from working with apprentices for a longer more sustained period.
• One employee following a Higher Apprenticeship can encourage other staff to take training more seriously – it can generate a better approach to learning new skills across the whole of your workforce
• Staff benefit from the experience of acting as mentors as they develop their training skills and become updated with new qualifications
• The “bottom line” improves: highly skilled staff are less likely to make mistakes and will work more effectively.

What is expected of me if I enrol someone on a Higher Apprenticeship?
The main thing is that you offer support to the employee and give them every opportunity to learn in and through work and complete their Higher Apprenticeship. You will also be required to enter into an Apprenticeship Agreement with the Apprentice. This must state that the apprentice will be undertaking an Apprenticeship in a particular skill, trade or occupation – a standard template is available and your college will provide you with further information. Your college will advise you on other statutory requirements.

As an employer you must also appoint a Workplace Mentor for the Apprentice from within your company. The Mentor offers personal support for the employee and acts as the bridge between your business and the college (or other training provider). You may decide to do this yourself if you are a small business or ask another experienced member of staff to become a Mentor if you are a larger company.

The employee will be undertaking the Higher Apprenticeship whilst continuing to come into work on a daily basis. On occasions, he or she must be given the opportunity to work at a higher level than would normally
be the case, under the supervision of a manager. This might involve contributing to the resolution of a legal or financial problem or testing out their technical skills to resolve a practical site problem. The exact way in which this is done will be decided by you, as their employer. The learning must fit in with your needs as a business and the Workplace Mentor plays a key role as the link between the college and the business. You are essentially training up a future construction operations manager. A key role for you in the Apprenticeship is to ensure that by the time that he or she completes their apprenticeship they have been exposed to a range of the experiences and challenges that you would expect a construction operations manager to be able to resolve. You will provide important feedback to your apprentice to help them develop the competence to operate effectively in the workplace. This builds their confidence and their skills.

The Workplace Mentor is therefore a key player in a successful Higher Apprenticeship. He or she will
• Be your link with the college
• Ensure that the work done at college is followed up in the workplace in a way which is acceptable to both the business and the college
• Act as the employee’s main source of professional support within the business.

The Workplace Mentor should be appropriately qualified with significant experience themselves and have a genuine interest in the development of the company’s staff. More details about being a Mentor can be found at www.mdx.ac.uk/higher-apprenticeships

Will I have to pay my employee’s fees? How much will this cost me?
Each college will charge a fee for the Higher Apprenticeship please contact your local college for more information.

Fees can be offset by a grant from the CITB-ConstructionSkills Grant scheme. Currently, grants of up to £1,750 can be claimed for each year of study. An additional £400 can be claimed when the employee completes the Higher Apprenticeship. Information about grants is available at http://www.cskills.org/levy-grant/grant/index.aspx

In addition to this, if the employee is aged 19-24, the National Apprenticeship Service currently offers grant of £1,500 for each person entered into an apprenticeship by an SME, which in this instance covers employers with up to 1,000 staff. Eligible employers are those who have never employed an apprentice before or who have not been in a position within the last 12 months to commit to employing an apprentice again. More information on the Apprenticeship Grant for employers can be found at: http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/Employers/Steps-to-make-it-happen/Incentive.aspx

If the Apprentice contributes to or pays the whole fee, he or she can take out a student loan to cover the cost of the fees the Apprentice pays, providing that they are resident in England. This will only be repayable once he or she earns over £21,000. Some employers/employees may prefer to pay the whole fee upfront.

What do other employers think?
This Higher Apprenticeship has the backing of CITB-ConstructionSkills, major UK employers and the Federation of Master Builders. Companies such as Lovell Partnerships and the Seddon Group both confirm
the need for the Higher Apprenticeship if a steady supply of skilled and knowledgeable managers is to be guaranteed. See the recent article in Construction Manager for further information at http://construction-manager.co.uk/news/work-based-construction-qualification-launched/.

**What doors will this open for my employee – why would they undertake the Higher Apprenticeship?**

He or she will develop the skills needed to perform a construction operations management role and will be well-placed to work as site supervisors, site managers or project managers and will also obtain a Foundation degree. The Foundation degree has a guaranteed link to the final year of an Honours degree, so they could obtain an Honours degree from Middlesex University if they wanted to study for a further year or transfer to another university if there was a course there that they preferred. Alternatively, they would be able to apply for other courses and qualifications to further develop their skills.

CITB-ConstructionSkills estimate that there will be a need for over 3,000 new Construction Operations Managers each year. In their view and that of some of the larger firms within the construction sector, these jobs will require the integrated and applied skills learned in the course of the Higher Apprenticeship².

**For further information:** www.mdx.ac.uk/higher-apprenticeships  
**Email:** higher-apprenticeships@mdx.ac.uk