ACTIVATE LEARNING
HIGHER EDUCATION

ACTIVATE
BUSINESS SCHOOL

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

After Apprenticeships



What are your options?

A guide to choosing the right leadership and development pathway

The leadership development landscape is changing.

Discover flexible ways to develop aspiring managers, experienced leaders and specialist professionals through Activate Business School and Higher Education at Activate Learning.

Leadership Development
IS CHANGING

For many organisations, management apprenticeships have traditionally provided a clear route for developing team leaders and managers.

Changes to apprenticeship funding and eligibility mean employers may no longer be able to rely on the same programmes in the same way. However, the need to develop confident, capable leaders has not disappeared.

Organisations still need people who can:

- Motivate and **manage teams**
- Communicate **clearly**
- Make **informed decisions**
- Respond positively **to change**
- Understand finance, **marketing and operations**
- Use data and **technology effectively**
- Support productivity and **organisational growth**

The difference is that employers may now need to consider a broader range of development routes.

Rather than looking for one programme that suits every employee, organisations can create a more flexible development pathway that combines:

- Levy-funded development **for eligible employees**
- Commercial leadership programmes **funded by the employer**
- Focused university-level **short courses**
- Full HNC and HND qualifications **delivered around working hours**
- Employee-funded university study **through the Lifelong Learning Entitlement**

The starting point should no longer be:

“ Which apprenticeship can we use?

It should be:

“ What does this person need to learn, and which route will deliver the best outcome?

Activate Business School and Higher Education at Activate Learning can help employers understand the options and identify the most appropriate route.

Different people need

DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT

Leadership development is most effective when it reflects the individual's role, experience and ambitions.

An employee preparing to lead others for the first time may need practical support with communication, delegation, feedback and confidence.

An established manager may need to develop greater self-awareness, strategic thinking and leadership impact.

A professional moving into a broader role may need focused knowledge in finance, marketing, sustainability, cybersecurity or people management.

Another employee may be ready to undertake a complete university-level qualification while continuing to work.

Preparing future managers

For ambitious employees, administrators and new managers who need structured development and a recognised management qualification.

Consider: **Emerging Business Leader**

Developing existing leaders

For aspiring, new and established managers who want to strengthen their confidence, leadership style and impact.

Consider: **Determined to Lead**

Addressing a specific skills gap

For professionals who need focused university-level knowledge in a particular business subject.

Consider: **HE Short Courses**

Gaining a complete university-level qualification

For working professionals who want to undertake an HNC or HND while studying outside normal working hours.

Consider: **University-level HNC or HND study**

Build tomorrow's leaders,
STARTING TODAY

Emerging Business Leader is designed for ambitious employees who are ready to take greater responsibility and begin developing as managers.

The programme combines the Level 3 Business Administrator Apprenticeship with a Level 3 CMI Certificate in First Line Management and Leadership.

It goes beyond traditional business administration training by helping participants develop the confidence, self-awareness and practical skills needed to lead others.

Who is it for?



Ambitious employees **showing leadership potential**



New or **aspiring managers**



Business administrators **ready to take on greater responsibility**



Employees moving into their **first people-management role**



Organisations that want to **build a sustainable internal leadership pipeline**

No previous management qualification is required, **but the employee must be working in a suitable role and meet the relevant apprenticeship eligibility requirements.**



What will participants develop?

The programme covers areas including:

- Communication and **relationship-building**
- Problem-solving and **critical thinking**
- Systems thinking and **process mapping**
- Managing one-to-one **conversations**
- Time and workload **management**
- Digital skills and **AI governance**
- Supporting team **performance**
- Self-awareness and **emotional intelligence**
- Confidence to take **initiative and lead others**

Participants also benefit from professional coaching, peer learning, Thought Labs and specialist Future Business Leader sessions.

The programme is delivered remotely over approximately 13 months and includes a recognised CMI leadership qualification alongside the apprenticeship.

Why choose it?

Emerging Business Leader can help organisations:

- Identify and nurture internal talent
- Prepare employees for their first management role
- Improve the quality of frontline leadership
- Create clearer progression opportunities
- Retain ambitious employees
- Build future leadership capability from within

Using the GROWTH AND SKILLS LEVY

Emerging Business Leader is delivered through an eligible apprenticeship programme. This means qualifying employers may be able to use funds held in their apprenticeship service account to pay for the training and assessment.

The Apprenticeship Levy is moving into the Growth and Skills Levy, but the funding remains subject to government apprenticeship rules.

Levy-paying employers

Employers with an annual pay bill above the government threshold pay into the levy and access their available funds through an apprenticeship service account.

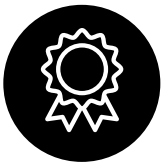
These funds can be used to pay for eligible apprenticeship training and assessment, up to the maximum funding band for the apprenticeship.

Emerging Business Leader may therefore provide a way for levy-paying employers to:

Funds can only be used where the **employee, role, programme and delivery meet current apprenticeship requirements.**



Use available **levy funds strategically**



Combine a recognised apprenticeship **with CMI accreditation**



Develop existing employees rather than **only recruiting externally**



Invest in employees who have **the potential to progress**



Build first-line **management capability**

Employers that do not pay the levy

Smaller employers may be able to access government support towards eligible apprenticeship training.

Funding arrangements vary according to the employee's age, programme and current government rules. Employers may also be able to receive a transfer of levy funds from a larger organisation.

Levy transfers can be used to meet eligible apprenticeship training and assessment costs for a new apprenticeship start. A transferred apprentice can be an existing employee, provided they have not already begun the programme.

Important distinction

The levy can only fund eligible apprenticeship training and assessment.

It cannot normally be used to pay for:

- *Standalone commercial training*
- *General management workshops*
- *A commercially purchased Determined to Lead programme*
- *HE Short Courses*
- *HNC or HND tuition fees*
- *Training that does not form part of an eligible apprenticeship*

Activate Business School can assess the organisation, employee and role before confirming whether levy funding is available.

Government funding rules are subject to change and should always be checked before a place is agreed.



Determined TO LEAD

Strengthen confidence, self-awareness and leadership impact

Determined to Lead is designed for people who want to become more confident and effective leaders.

It supports participants to understand how they currently lead, recognise their strengths and identify practical changes that can improve their impact.

Unlike a standard off-the-shelf training course, the programme combines structured learning with personal reflection, professional mentoring and opportunities to apply new approaches in the workplace.

Who is it for?

- Aspiring **leaders**
- Recently appointed **managers**
- Existing and **mid-level managers**
- Professionals preparing for **greater responsibility**
- Managers who have not previously **received formal leadership training**
- Organisations looking to **strengthen their leadership culture**

What will participants develop?

Participants explore areas including:

- **Leadership identity and personal impact**
- **Self-awareness**
- **Emotional intelligence**
- **Communication and relationship-building**
- **Communication and relationship-building**
- **Confidence and professional presence**
- **Decision-making**
- **Leadership styles**
- **Motivating and supporting others**
- **Workplace application**
- **Personal and professional goals**

Determined to Lead combines CMI accreditation, Insights Discovery profiling, one-to-one mentoring, interactive workshops and relevant workplace activity.

Why choose it?

The programme can help employers:

- **Improve leadership confidence**
- *Develop existing managers*
- **Prepare employees for wider responsibilities**
- *Support talent retention*
- **Create a more consistent approach to leadership**
- *Provide personalised development rather than generic training*
- **Strengthen the way managers lead and motivate their teams**

How is it funded?

Employer-funded commercial training

The organisation pays for the programme **as an investment in its people.**

This allows the programme to be shaped around organisational needs without requiring the participant or role to meet apprenticeship eligibility rules.

It may be particularly suitable where an employer wants a focused leadership intervention but an apprenticeship is unavailable, unsuitable or more extensive than the employee requires.



Higher education
SHORT COURSES

Focused university-level learning for real business needs

Not every professional needs a complete leadership programme or a multi-year qualification.

Sometimes the priority is to address one defined skills gap.

An employee may have strong operational experience but need greater financial confidence. A manager may need to understand people leadership, digital marketing or sustainability.
A business may need someone to strengthen its approach to cybersecurity or data.

HE Short Courses offer focused university-level study without requiring the learner to commit immediately to a full HNC, HND or degree.

Who are they for?

- Aspiring and **existing managers**
- Professionals who need **specialist knowledge**
- Employers seeking targeted **development for individual employees**
- Employees taking on a **new area of responsibility**
- People considering a **return to higher education**
- Learners who want to experience **university-level study before progressing further**



Business and professional subjects include:

- People and Talent Leadership
- Financial Confidence for Aspiring Leaders
- Marketing Essentials for Non-Marketing Professionals
- Marketing in a Digital World
- Sustainable Business Essentials
- Sustainable Business Governance
- Cybersecurity for Business Resilience

The wider portfolio also includes specialist learning in areas such as data analysis, digital technologies and construction management.

What are the benefits?

HE Short Courses provide:

- Focused development
- University-level insight
- Practical knowledge that can be applied at work
- A smaller initial commitment than a full qualification
- Flexible study designed for working adults
- The opportunity to develop specialist capability within a team



How are they funded?

There are two potential routes, subject to course and learner eligibility.

Employee-funded through student finance

For courses approved under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, an eligible employee may choose to apply personally for a Tuition Fee Loan.

The employer cannot use apprenticeship levy funds to purchase a standalone HE Short Course.

Employer-funded

The organisation pays for the employee to undertake a course that supports their role and the needs of the business.

University-level

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Gain a complete qualification without giving up work

For professionals who want more substantial development, Activate Learning offers complete university-level qualifications in Leadership and Management.



Available programmes include:

- **HNC Leadership and Management**
- **HND Leadership and Management**

Although these are classed as full-time higher education courses, teaching is delivered online and outside normal working hours, making them accessible to people who want to continue working while they study.

HNC Leadership and Management

It may suit professionals who want to gain their first substantial university-level qualification or build a broader understanding of how organisations operate.

The Level 4 HNC provides a broad foundation in business, leadership and management.

It can help learners develop knowledge across areas such as:

- **Business and the business environment**
- **Marketing processes and planning**
- **Human resource management**
- **Leadership and management**
- **Accounting principles**
- **Managing a successful business project**



HND Leadership and Management

The Level 5 HND builds on previous university-level learning and develops a deeper understanding of management and leadership.

Areas of study may include: Organisational behaviour, operations management, understanding and leading change, the global business environment and customer value management.

Who are they for?

- Working professionals seeking a **recognised higher education qualification**
- Existing managers who want **broader business knowledge**
- Employees preparing for **more senior responsibilities**
- People who want to study while **remaining in employment**
- Learners considering **longer-term progression to degree-level study**

Who pays for UNIVERSITY-LEVEL LEARNING?

The HNC and HND can provide significant professional and organisational benefits, but they are higher education qualifications rather than apprenticeships.

This means apprenticeship levy funds cannot ordinarily be used to pay the tuition fees.

There are two main funding approaches.

Employer sponsorship

The employer can pay some or all of the employee's tuition fees as part of its professional development offer.

This can be particularly valuable where the organisation:



Wants to develop a **future senior manager**



Is supporting an employee **into a new role**



Sees the qualification as part **of its succession planning**



Needs broader **business capability**



Wants the learner to apply **university-level projects within the business**



Wants to **improve retention**

The organisation may choose to **fund the full cost, contribute towards it or provide other support such as protected study time.**



Employee-funded study

The individual may choose to fund the qualification personally.

Depending on their eligibility and previous higher education study, they may be able to access student finance through the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

In this case:

- The employee **makes the application**
- The student-finance agreement **belongs to the employee**
- The employee is responsible **for any future repayments**
- The employer is not responsible **for repaying the loan**

An employer may encourage and support study, **but it should not describe an employee's student loan as company-funded training.**

The lifelong
LEARNING ENTITLEMENT

student finance designed for learning throughout working life

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement, usually shortened to the LLE, is the student-finance system for eligible courses and modules beginning from January 2027.

It is intended to make it easier for eligible individuals to access higher education at different points in their careers rather than having only one opportunity to use student finance at the beginning of adult life.

Depending on eligibility, it may help employees access approved:

- Higher education short courses
- Individual modules
- HNC qualifications
- HND qualifications
- Other eligible higher education courses

Who takes out the funding?

This is different from **employer-funded development.**

With Determined to Lead or an employer-sponsored HE course, the organisation pays for the training.

With the LLE, the employee applies to Student Finance England. The borrowing is in the employee's name, and the employee is responsible for repayment under the applicable student-finance terms.

The employee **applies for the student loan personally.**



What can an employer do?

An employer can still play an important supporting role by:

- Making employees **aware of the opportunity**
- Discussing suitable courses through **development reviews**
- Allowing flexibility **around teaching sessions**
- Providing **protected study time**
- Offering **mentoring**
- Helping the learner **apply their studies in the workplace**
- Contributing towards costs **where appropriate**
- Recognising the learning **within career and succession plans**

However, the employee should make their own informed decision about whether borrowing through student finance is right for them.

What funding may be available?

Eligible learners starting under the new system may be able to access Tuition Fee Loans from an overall entitlement equivalent to four years of full-time study.

Not every learner, course or module will qualify. Eligibility depends on factors including: the individual's circumstances, previous study, the qualification or module and the provider.

Learners should check the latest official terms before applying. The LLE applies to eligible study beginning on or after 1 January 2027.

Previous government-funded higher education study can affect the amount available.



Which route is right FOR YOUR EMPLOYEE?

Emerging Business Leader

Best for:
Ambitious employees, administrators and new managers with leadership potential

Main outcome:
A Level 3 apprenticeship plus a CMI Certificate in First Line Management and Leadership

Commitment:
Approximately 13 months alongside employment

Funding:
Growth and Skills Levy or other eligible apprenticeship funding arrangements

Choose it when:
The employee, job role and employer meet apprenticeship requirements and you want sustained, work-based development

Determined to Lead

Best for:
Aspiring, new and established managers

Main outcome:
Greater confidence, self-awareness and leadership effectiveness, supported by CMI accreditation, Insights Discovery and mentoring

Commitment:
A focused professional leadership programme

Funding:
Employer-funded commercial training

Choose it when:
You want flexible, personalised leadership development without apprenticeship eligibility requirements

HE Short Course

Best for:
Professionals who need knowledge in one defined area

Main outcome:
Focused university-level learning in a specialist business subject

Commitment:
Shorter and more targeted than a full qualification

Funding:
Employer-funded or, where eligible, employee-funded through the LLE

Choose it when:
There is a specific skills gap to address



HNC Leadership and Management

Best for:

Working professionals seeking a broad university-level business qualification

Main outcome:

A recognised Level 4 higher education qualification

Commitment:

Full-time online study, delivered outside normal working hours

Funding:

Employer sponsorship or eligible employee student finance

Choose it when:

The individual needs substantial development across several areas of business and management

HND Leadership and Management

Best for:

Professionals ready for more advanced university-level development

Main outcome:

A recognised Level 5 higher education qualification

Commitment:

Full-time online study, delivered outside normal working hours

Funding:

Employer sponsorship or eligible employee student finance

Choose it when:

The individual is preparing for greater responsibility or wants to progress towards further higher education

One organisation.
DIFFERENT ROUTES.
The right development.

Leadership development has not become less important. But the way employers access and fund it is changing.

The right solution will depend on: the employee's current role, their level of experience, the skills they need, the time they can commit and the individual's longer-term career goals.

An organisation may choose to use several routes rather than applying one programme to everyone.

For example:

Emerging Business Leader
for ambitious employees and new managers in eligible roles

Determined to Lead
for existing managers who need focused leadership development

HE Short Courses
for specific skills gaps

HNC Leadership and Management
for employees who need broad university-level development

HND Leadership and Management
for professionals preparing for more senior responsibilities

Activate Business School and Higher Education at Activate Learning can help you develop a joined-up approach that reflects your people, priorities and available funding.

Start the conversation

Speak to our team about the right professional development pathway for your organisation.

Explore Activate Business School

Discover HE Short Courses

Explore Leadership and Management HNC and HND programmes

Book a workforce development consultation

SMALL PRINT

Course availability, start dates, content, costs and delivery arrangements are subject to change.

Growth and Skills Levy and other apprenticeship funding can only be used where the programme, employer, employee and job role meet current government apprenticeship requirements. Levy funds cannot generally be used for standalone commercial training or higher education tuition fees.

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement is a personal student-finance arrangement between the eligible learner and Student Finance England. Eligibility for a Tuition Fee Loan is not guaranteed, and not every course or module will qualify. Employees should review the latest official guidance and consider their personal circumstances before applying.