

Maximising level 7 apprenticeship funding before deadline

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The looming changes to the UK Apprenticeship Levy are causing ripples across industries. For some sectors which often rely on Level 7 apprenticeships to address leadership skills gaps and workforce challenges, these changes are particularly significant.

“With Levy funding for new Level 7 apprenticeship starters aged 22 and over ending in January 2026, many organisations need to act swiftly to capitalise on current funding opportunities before the December cut-off,” explains **Steven Hurst, Director of Corporate Learning, at [Arden University](#).**

Here, Steven explores the potential impact of these changes, highlights the opportunities still available and proposes practical solutions to ensure companies can maximise the remaining funding to future-proof their workforce.

Why do level 7 apprenticeships matter?

Level 7 apprenticeships, equivalent to postgraduate qualifications, have become an invaluable tool for many sectors. They fill critical skills gaps, upskill existing talent and develop leaders who are equipped to tackle some of the industry’s most pressing challenges.

For instance, the senior leader apprenticeship has helped organisations to address issues such as:

- **Leadership diversity:** Leadership remains predominantly white and male in many sectors. Level 7 apprenticeships foster diversity at this level, by offering training pathways to underrepresented groups.
- **Accidental managers:** Many professionals can find themselves in leadership roles without formal training. Leadership apprenticeships bridge this gap, providing essential management and strategic skills.
- **Digital transformation:** Legacy systems and tight budgets have slowed efforts to adopt and scale digital technologies. Training through apprenticeships can prepare leaders to drive successful digital initiatives.

However, with the government's impending restrictions on Level 7 funding, many industries face a narrowing window to maximise these benefits.

Funding challenges and the narrow window of opportunity

From January 2026, government Levy funding for Level 7 apprenticeships will no longer be available for new starters aged 22 and over, which is likely to cause a key pain point for those wanting to formally upskill more senior staff. However, there's a silver lining for organisations that act quickly, as businesses can still utilise the Levy funding for new level 7 learners, as long as they're enrolled before the 31 December deadline.

This urgency presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Left unchecked, skills gaps and leadership deficits may exacerbate already critical workforce shortages, but organisations that proactively plan can not only mitigate these risks but also strengthen their position for the future.

To make the most of the remaining Level 7 funding, firms should consider these four key actions:

1. Audit skills needs and workforce requirements

Conduct a thorough assessment of the current workforce to identify skills gaps and forecast future needs. For example, consider areas like leadership and digital transformation, where advanced training will be essential. Use this information to prioritise staff who are ready to enrol in Level 7 apprenticeships while funding is still available.

2. Accelerate recruitment for cohorts

With the December cut-off fast approaching, ramping up recruitment efforts for apprenticeships is crucial. Partnering with education providers now can help to ensure smoother enrolment processes. Many training providers are already working with employers to fast-track applications and onboarding.

3. Focus on age-eligible candidates

With the age cap for funding set to change, targeting talent before the end of the year, who will be ineligible to access funding from 2026, makes strategic sense. Prioritise candidates aged 22 and over for enrolment this year, ensuring that funding supports this group before eligibility shifts.

4. Explore Level 6 apprenticeships as alternatives

For organisations where Level 7 funding may no longer be feasible from 2026 due to budget restrictions, Level 6 apprenticeships remain a valuable alternative. Equivalent to degree-level qualifications, these programmes still deliver high-quality training while addressing workforce diversity and retention goals.

Addressing broader apprenticeship challenges

While the funding restrictions may signal a shift in apprenticeship opportunities, they also highlight the importance of future-proofing workforce development strategies.

Employers committed to investing in apprenticeships can take steps such as:

- Adjusting training budgets to cover the full cost of Level 7 programmes post-2026, where possible.
- Collaborating with universities and training providers to explore tailored solutions and alternative programmes.
- Staying informed about evolving government funding options, tax incentives and sector-specific initiatives.

Proactively adopting these strategies can ensure that organisations maintain access to vital skills and leadership development in the years ahead.

The clock is ticking for businesses to make the most of current Level 7

apprenticeship funding. Acting decisively over the next few months can help secure the training and leadership development necessary to address workforce challenges and prepare for future demands.

“While the government’s decision to restrict funding may create some obstacles, it also presents an opportunity for organisations to demonstrate resilience and adaptability,” advises Steven.

“By planning strategically and taking immediate steps to optimise remaining resources, businesses can continue to build the skilled and diverse workforce it needs to thrive.

“Don’t wait until it’s too late. Begin your workforce audit, accelerate apprentice recruitment and explore alternative opportunities today to maximise the value of your Apprenticeship Levy funding.”

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