



# **Advanced SEND Leader programme**

## **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship**

**Funded through the Growth and Skills levy**





## Welcome to the Advanced SEND Leader programme

Take your SEND expertise (and your career) a step further by becoming a high-impact, strategic SEND leader.

You'll gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to advance your whole-school vision for SEND, create data-driven financial and resource management strategies, inspire and lead others and establish a culture of innovation to improve the learning environment for your pupils.

This programme is designed to build on the skills gained in the National Award for SEN Coordination (NASENCO) or NPQ SENCO qualification, supporting experienced SENCOs and SEND leaders to become more effective in their roles. It is not however a requirement that you have undertaken these qualifications.

As well as covering the highly transferable knowledge, skills and behaviours of the Senior Leader Apprenticeship, this course empowers SENCOs to champion and implement a comprehensive inclusive vision for their school.

### At a glance:

-  **Duration:** 18 months
-  **Study method:** Blended learning
-  **Qualifications:** Level 7 Senior Leader apprenticeship
-  **Delivery:** Delivered by ESF Apprenticeships

## Who we are

ESF Apprenticeships are an innovative Ofsted 'Outstanding' apprenticeship training provider, that creates opportunities and raises aspirations through apprenticeship pathways. Founded in 2011, we have deep roots within education and partner with schools, Multi-Academy Trusts and colleges to help build successful and effective teams.

SEND experts from our sister company Real Training have co-developed this programme with us, bringing together the very best of our collective expertise.



## Programme content

The programme content is varied, offering ways to boost your leadership skills so that you can deliver impactful improvements within your setting. The content includes:

- Phase 1: Leading SEND Vision
- Phase 2: Leading SEND Culture, Ethos and Strategy
- Phase 3: Driving Positive Change
- Phase 4: Evaluating Impact and Supporting Sustainable Change






## Expert-led, person-centred leadership development

This programme is delivered by a team of experienced tutors, with backgrounds in senior leadership across the SEND landscape including, education, local authorities and national policy development. They offer a strong mix of strategic insight and practical understanding to drive inclusive practice and improve outcomes for young people with SEND.


Our tutors' person-centred approach creates a reflective, supportive space where senior SEND leaders can explore their leadership styles, challenges, and contexts without judgement. Each session is shaped around the needs and goals of the participants, enabling tailored guidance that feels relevant and practical. This approach has a powerful impact; participants consistently report feeling more confident, better equipped to lead strategically, and re-energised in their mission to champion inclusion.

### Through this comprehensive programme, you will:


Transition from operational to strategic leader – gain the skills to develop and execute a strategic SEND plan, foster an inclusive culture, and build a high-performing SEND team




Develop an understanding of national trends and innovative approaches in SEND using the latest research and case studies from other settings




Build on your existing SENCO training and gain advanced knowledge of leadership and change management strategies in SEND, including data-driven budgeting and resource management, workforce planning, and external communication




Learn how to improve your leadership behaviours by working with a specialist coach



Benefit from group SEND community circles led by an Educational Psychologist once per term, in which you can ask questions and gain feedback



Create a stronger professional profile for yourself through the achievement of a Level 7 Senior Leader qualification, recognised within and beyond education



## Your Advanced SEND Leader programme

### How will I study?

The programme runs for 18 months during which you will participate in a variety of activities through our blended learning model:



**Online learning**  
Study flexibly at a time and place that suits you



**Live online workshops**  
Mandatory workshops with SEND experts, plus follow-up discussions and opportunities to share good practice



**Self-directed project work**  
Apply new knowledge and skills through practical projects and research in your setting. Build a portfolio for immediate learning and impact




**Online progress reviews**  
One 60-minute review per term with your apprenticeship coach and in-school mentor



**Live online SEND community circles**  
Once a term, optional 90-minute community circle session hosted by an Educational Psychologist



**Leadership coaching**  
x3 one-to-one leadership coaching sessions with your dedicated coach



I wanted to do something leadership-based and related to SEND, as that is my passion, so this course seemed like the perfect fit. I am hoping to develop my leadership skills as well as develop my knowledge of SEND and how to look at this strategically.

I enjoy the workshops as it gives you a chance to interact with other people on the course that all come from a variety of provisions and have a range of different experiences. I enjoyed completing the 360 leadership tool and am hoping that what my colleagues have answered about me will be useful in my development as a leader.

– Jody Ling

# The Learning Journey

### Phase 1: Leading SEND Vision

- Articulate and influence your setting's mission, culture and values
- Learn how to gather and incorporate stakeholder perspectives in your SEND vision – including students, colleagues, governors and the wider community
- Develop your emotional intelligence and moral purpose as a SEND leader
- Understand how to make the most of your governing bodies

SEND  
Community  
Circle: Hosted by  
an Educational  
Psychologist

### Phase 3: Driving Positive Change

- Understand risk and crisis management techniques
- Learn how to stay solution-focused under pressure
- Learn how to have difficult conversations but also look after yourself
- Commission and evaluate service provision
- Discover advanced techniques for eliciting meaningful pupil voice

SEND  
Community  
Circle: Hosted by  
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Psychologist

### Phase 2: Leading SEND Culture, Ethos and Strategy

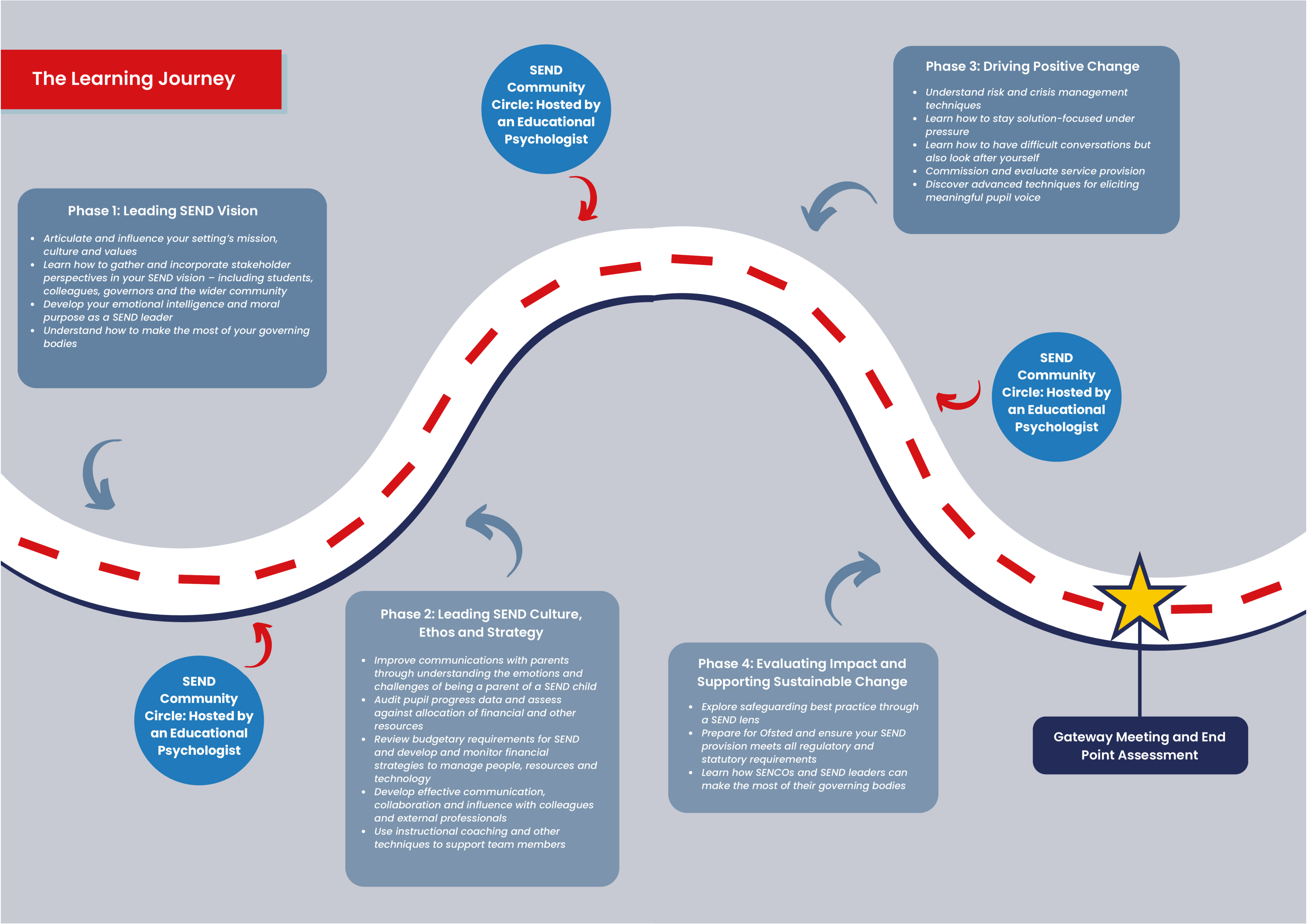
- Improve communications with parents through understanding the emotions and challenges of being a parent of a SEND child
- Audit pupil progress data and assess against allocation of financial and other resources
- Review budgetary requirements for SEND and develop and monitor financial strategies to manage people, resources and technology
- Develop effective communication, collaboration and influence with colleagues and external professionals
- Use instructional coaching and other techniques to support team members

SEND  
Community  
Circle: Hosted by  
an Educational  
Psychologist

### Phase 4: Evaluating Impact and Supporting Sustainable Change

- Explore safeguarding best practice through a SEND lens
- Prepare for Ofsted and ensure your SEND provision meets all regulatory and statutory requirements
- Learn how SENCOs and SEND leaders can make the most of their governing bodies

Gateway Meeting and End  
Point Assessment





## Assessment

You will have termly progress reviews in which you'll celebrate your growth and successes and discuss challenges you have been facing. These will be scheduled with your mentor and apprenticeship coach at a time that is convenient for you.

The final progress review is combined with a Gateway Review. Once you have completed this, you'll then undertake the End-Point Assessment (EPA). The EPA for this programme involves:

- Creation of a strategic business proposal (4,000 words) which you will present and answer questions about (60 minutes)
- Professional discussion underpinned by a portfolio of evidence (60 minutes)

The results from these assessments are then combined to form your overall apprenticeship grade (fail, pass, merit or distinction).

Whilst nerves are always to be expected when being assessed, your apprenticeship coach is on-hand to support you in the run up to the End-Point Assessment. We'll ensure that you have everything you need to approach it with confidence!



I'm studying this apprenticeship to enhance my knowledge of SEND and build on my existing skills to support the whole school SEND provision. Approaching it from a business mindset, with strategic planning as a focus, also interested me.

So far, I've found the monthly workshops informative, relevant and inspiring. Meeting other participants to share best practice, knowledge and resources has been very helpful and I'm loving the academic challenge! Have just had my first leadership coaching session too which was superb - I now have a medium-term goal and the tools to implement it.

- Emma Guild

## Exclusive invitations to SEND Masterclasses

Available to all ESF apprentices, these virtual masterclasses will develop your knowledge and understanding of supporting children with SEND.

Topics include:

- Dyslexia & practical tips to support pupils
- Trauma
- Communication needs
- Autistic Spectrum Conditions
- Behaviour and barriers to learning - including mental health
- Understanding and supporting learners with sensory and visual needs
- Challenges related to accessing Maths
- Supporting and understanding attachment disorder
- Executive functioning and concentration difficulties (including ADHD)
- Speech and Language delay

Attendance of the SEND Masterclasses is optional, and recordings will be made available if you're unable to attend live.







## Eligibility

- You must have at least one year's experience working in a SEND role, or alongside the SEND team in your setting and be looking to develop your leadership skills
  - You most likely will have completed the National Award for SEN Coordination (NASENCO) or other SEND-related training
  - You must not have already completed a Level 7 Senior Leader apprenticeship
  - You must have lived in England for the last three years and have the right to work in the the UK
  - You must be employed at least 16 hours a week and spend at least 50% of your working hours in England
  - Your employer must agree to appoint a workplace mentor to attend the termly progress reviews
- Please note: This programme is open to participants in England only.

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I'm genuinely enjoying the course. The blended approach of online training, practical assignments, and personalised coaching creates a valuable and engaging learning experience. The course has prompted deep reflection on my leadership style, and the broad range of topics and required reading has kept me informed of key educational developments, such as Ofsted updates. [The Advanced SEND Leader programme] has been transformative, shifting my perspective from simply implementing strategies to rigorously evaluating their impact. I've learned that effective leadership and impactful SEND provision hinge on clear communication, strategic foresight, and a data-driven approach.

– Yasmine Dhillon

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## How does the funding work?

- The Advanced SEND Leader programme can be fully funded using the Growth and Skills Levy. In line with government apprenticeship funding bands, the cost of the full training package is £14,000.
- If your employer (school, nursery, MAT, or local authority) has a salary bill of over £3 million, they will be a levy-paying organisation, which means 100% of the cost of the programme can be funded from the employer's levy pot. Levy paying employers can access their funds through the central Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS).
  - Local Authority schools contribute to a large levy, known as a shared levy pot. Funding can be accessed even if your school payroll is below the £3 million levy threshold and this can be requested via the Local Authority's Apprenticeship Levy Manager.
  - Where a maintained school sits within a Local Authority levy arrangement, ESF Apprenticeships can work with the Local Authority to explore procurement processes.
  - Non-levy paying employers (i.e. with a salary bill of under £3 million) are required to contribute 5% to the cost of the programme - this is £700. Where this is the case, ESF Apprenticeships can work with your employer to seek support from a levy transfer partner with the aim of alleviating the fees, however this cannot be guaranteed.

For further information about funding this programme (including frequently asked questions), please visit our dedicated webpage.





# Off-the-job training

Off-the-job training is a key part of your development. This means dedicated time during your normal working hours to focus on learning and applying new skills related to your apprenticeship.

Think of it as your chance to dive deeper, expand your knowledge, and grow professionally.

All of the required learning during the programme (asynchronous learning, workshops, webinars, leadership coaching and progress reviews) count towards your Off-the-job time. It can however also include a variety of other activities, such as:

- Reading relevant articles or publications and staying up-to-date on education or leadership trends and developments
- Applying your knowledge to real-world projects, solidifying your leadership skills and confidence
- Networking with peers and education leader

- Spending time learning from colleagues and leaders across your setting
- Setting personal and career objectives and reflecting on progress
- Research and revision
- Coaching and mentoring with both your apprenticeship coaches and your in-school mentor

Essentially, any activity that helps you develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviours outlined in your apprenticeship standard counts as "off-the-job" training. This dedicated learning time is crucial for your success and will help you become a skilled and competent leader in your setting.



# How to apply

- 1 Please register at: [learn.esfapprenticeships.co.uk/forms/apply](https://learn.esfapprenticeships.co.uk/forms/apply)

Programme: Level 7 Advanced SEND Leader

Cohort: Choose your preferred start date

You'll need to enter your personal details.

You will then receive an email with your login details for ESF Learn, where you will continue your application. Please note, you will need to work with your Manager / school to complete some sections of the application
- 2 Complete your Applicant registration form

Enter your personal details, contacts, tell us about your role and confirm your eligibility for the programme

Upload Photo ID

Share your reasons for choosing this programme
- 3 Confirm the point of contact at your school (the person who will approve your application)

Our online dashboard will guide you through each step of the process.





## Frequently asked questions

**01. Can I complete an apprenticeship as a part-time member of staff?**

You need to be employed for a minimum of 16 hours per week to undertake the apprenticeship and will need to attend all the synchronous training events as outlined in the calendar. It is likely that the duration of the apprenticeship will be extended so that you have longer to complete the evidence tasks and asynchronous learning.

**02. How do I know if my school pays into the apprenticeship levy?**

If your employer (school, nursery, MAT, or local authority) has a salary bill of over £3 million, they will be a levy-paying organisation, which means 100% of the cost of the programme can be funded from the employer's levy pot.

Non-levy paying employers (i.e. with a salary bill of under £3 million) are required to contribute 5% to the cost of the programme – this is £700. Where this is the case, we can work with your employer to seek support from a levy transfer partner with the aim of alleviating the fees, however this cannot be guaranteed.

**03. What if my school is a local authority school and doesn't have a payroll of £3 million?**

Local Authority schools contribute to a large levy, known as a shared levy pot. Funding can be accessed even if your school payroll is below the £3 million levy threshold and this can be requested via the Local Authority's Apprenticeship Levy Manager.

Most Local Authorities have a list of the apprenticeship providers they work with. If you let us know which local authority you fall under and we can check whether we are already on their list or work with your Local Authority to explore procurement processes.

**04. What commitment do I need to make during my time at work in order to fulfil the requirements of the apprenticeship? Do I need to be 'off the job' 1 day per week?**

Off-the-job training is dedicated time, during your normal working hours, in which you focus on learning and applying new skills related to your apprenticeship.

All of the required learning during the programme (asynchronous learning, workshops, webinars, leadership coaching and progress reviews) count towards your Off-the-job time.

Additional activities such as project work, shadowing colleagues, wider reading and research all count. Via our online platform, ESF Learn, we're able to sign-post a number of opportunities which count as Off-the-job. During your enrolment meeting we can discuss how this can work alongside a busy job role!

**05. If I move school halfway through the apprenticeship, is it transferrable to my new employer?**

Yes, it is possible to change schools and continue on the apprenticeship. You'll need to speak to your apprenticeship coach if this situation occurs so that we can ensure your new employer is suitable.

**06. How can I apply for this programme?**

Please see the 'How to Apply' page for a breakdown of the application steps. These will be completed online. You will be required to upload photo ID – you might like to look this out early on in the application process.





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