

Demand for higher level apprenticeships grows across science sector

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Demand for higher level apprenticeships grew significantly across the science sector over a five-year period – to almost one-fifth of starts – demonstrating how employers value using them to upskill their workforce.

New research published today by Cogent Skills, on behalf of the Science Industry Partnership (SIP), also shows large science-based employers are continuing to use apprenticeships at a sustained level.

The SIP's Apprenticeship Survey 2025 shows significant increases in starts in industries including pharmaceuticals (31 per cent) and scientific research and development (R&D) (38 per cent) between 2017/18 and 2021/22.

Across life sciences as a whole, 30 per cent of apprenticeships were at degree level (Level 6+). The SIP is calling for the protection of funding for a comprehensive, flexible range of apprenticeship standards – including at degree and master's level – to help learners enter the sector and progress their careers.

Degree-level apprenticeships have become increasingly popular – between 2019/20 and 2021/22 there were around 1,500 starts on Levels 6 and 7 apprenticeships at science employers.

However, apprenticeship starts at small and medium-sized science-based employers fell by 39 per cent over the same period, which remains a concern across the sector.

Established in 2014, the SIP is an employer-led membership alliance committed to the growth and development of a highly skilled, world-class workforce for the science industries.

Chair of the Science Industry Partnership, Alex Felthouse, said:

"The science sector plays a vital role in many aspects of daily life and has a crucial economic function within the UK.

"A highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce is the foundation for a successful sector. This research demonstrates a consistent uptake of apprenticeships in larger employers, as well as increasing numbers in key industries.

"The importance of higher-level apprenticeships in upskilling existing employees remains – they provide a pathway to increased capability and greater success for individuals and the sector. "While there are some challenges to address, the outlook for apprenticeships in the sector is positive and I'm confident we'll rise to the task of ensuring science employers play a crucial role in boosting economic growth in the years to come.

While there are clearly some hugely positive findings in this research, we remain concerned about apprenticeship starts in SMEs and the impact this is having on the health of the sector's long-term talent pipeline."

Cogent Skills' CEO, Justine Fosh said

"Initiatives already underway – such as our work with medicines manufacturers, connecting SMEs facing critical skills gaps with sources of training and funding – is helping address these challenges. But more work is needed to move forward together, including protecting vitally important higher-level apprenticeships."

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