



NORTH EAST 6 APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS 2026

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WINNERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Apprentices, Employers and Providers Recognised for Remarkable Achievements



On Thursday, 25th June we held the Annual North East Apprenticeship Awards, held at St James Park, Newcastle. Guests were welcomed with a drinks reception, followed by a three-course meal and, of course, the prestigious awards ceremony. We celebrated 14 award categories, recognising both outstanding apprentices and the employers and training providers who support them.

The awards serve as a platform to showcase the outstanding contributions of apprentices, employers, and training providers across the North East, recognising the vital role they play in developing future talent and supporting the region's economy.

Celebrating the individuals who have embraced the opportunities apprenticeship programmes provide and flourished within their chosen careers. Through dedication, ambition and hard work, they are building strong foundations for the future while making a meaningful impact within their industries. As the innovators, leaders and skilled workforce of tomorrow, they continue to inspire those around them and showcase the true value of apprenticeships.

Apprentices prove that it is possible to rise to the top, driving change and innovation in their workplaces while making significant contributions to the local economy. This celebration marks the achievements of a generation that is breaking barriers, investing in themselves, and playing a vital role in regional growth. We thank everyone who supports these rising stars, and to those embracing apprenticeships, for their contributions benefit us all.

A special thank you to our esteemed panel of judges, comprising industry experts, diligently reviewed every nomination to determine this year's finalists and eventual winners. The judging process was meticulous, reflecting the high calibre of submissions received across the region.



Our judges are:

Ashleigh Elliott Assoc CIPD,
HR Advisor - Cintra

Greg Mattinson,
Senior People Development Partner -
Alfred H Knight

Cerys Glynn, Emerging Talent and
Careers Co-ordinator - Jet2.com and
Jet2holidays

Jess Duff, Cyber Security Coordinator
& North East Apprentice Ambassador
Network Chair - Newcastle Building
Society

Beth Wade, Senior Marketing Account
Manager - Team Valley Group

Aneela Ali, Executive Director - North
East Chamber of Commerce

Jenienne Hinchcliffe, OD & Culture
Partner (Communities First) -
Northumberland County Council

Amanda Bourn, Editor in Chief
North East highlighted the vital role
apprenticeships continue to play in
shaping the future of the region.

Speaking at the event, Amanda said "the North East has long been built on skill, hard work and opportunity, with generations of people helping to shape the region through learning, developing expertise and passing knowledge on to others.

They said apprenticeships remain one of the most powerful ways of creating opportunity, providing young people and career changers with a direct route into rewarding careers, valuable practical experience and the chance to earn while they learn.

With businesses continuing to face

skills shortages, Amanda praised the employers and organisations investing in the next generation of talent, as well as the apprentices who have embraced those opportunities and achieved so much. They also recognised the high standard of entries across this year's awards, highlighting that every finalist had demonstrated commitment, ambition and excellence".

Amanda thanked the judges for their time and expertise, as well as the sponsors, partners and everyone who supported the event, before congratulating all finalists on their achievements.

Before presenting the Technology & Digital Award Sarah Beck, Academic Director of Apprenticeships said "It was a privilege to present the Technology & Digital Apprentice of the Year Award and celebrate the incredible achievements of this year's nominees. At the University of Sunderland, digital apprenticeships have become a significant area of growth, and we've seen first-hand the positive impact apprentices are making within their workplaces and the wider community".

And before presenting the Intermediate Apprentice of the Year - Alison Maynard, Deputy Principal of New College Durham said "At New College Durham, we understand the transformative impact apprenticeships have not just for individuals but for industries as a whole. It's an honour to celebrate these inspirational stories tonight" We believe that success is built on strong foundations - and there is no stronger foundation than developing talent from the ground up through apprenticeships"

During the event we organised a raffle raising funds for our Charity Partner Feeding Families a North East charity

dedicated to tackling food insecurity through dignified, community-led support. They deliver tailored food provision, including low-cook food boxes and rough sleeper packs, and work collaboratively to build stronger, more connected communities across the region. We are pleased to share that the raffle donation raised £2,780, which will be match-funded, increasing the total funds to £5,560. These funds will support their END Holiday Hunger Appeal and will feed 370 families.

The event was hosted by Tom Campbell, who hosts live events of all shapes and sizes across the North of England. He's also a regular voice on BBC Radio Newcastle, a Wedding MC, a video presenter for Catholic Wrestling and - believe it or not - a professional wrestling ring announcer! Tom joined us for the very first time and you can find out more about his very unusual life (along with pictures of his cat Pablo) on [Instagram.com/mrtomcampbell](https://www.instagram.com/mrtomcampbell)

Keep up to date with the event visit the website <https://www.neapprenticeshipawards.co.uk/>





Intermediate Apprentice of the Year

Sponsored by New College Durham

WINNER

Joe Deas, Bagnalls



Presented by - Alison Maynard, Deputy Principal of New College Durham

Joe Deas joined Bagnalls in August 2023 at age 20, quickly distinguishing himself as a talented and dedicated apprentice. Completing his Level 2 Painter and Decorator apprenticeship in November 2025 with Merit, Joe's journey has been defined by his artistic abilities, proactive learning, and commitment to high standards. He has showcased advanced skills in mural creation and wallpapering, earning Junior Apprentice of the Year at the Painting and Decorating Association's 2025 competition and representing Bagnalls at major industry events. Notably, Joe painted a mural of the company's founders at the Doncaster Training Academy, inspiring fellow apprentices. Always keen to develop, he plans to pursue his Level 3 Craft Decorator apprenticeship, aiming for supervisory roles. Joe's achievements and positive attitude have earned him respect from managers and peers alike, making him a valuable ambassador for apprenticeships and a promising future leader within Bagnalls.



Advanced Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Lucy Box, Newcastle University

Presented by Amanda Bourn, Editor in Chief, North East

Lucy's apprenticeship with the Postgraduate Taught Medicine team at Newcastle University exemplifies the transformative power of learning through experience. From her first days, Lucy became an indispensable member of the team, managing key communications, supporting programme delivery, and stepping up during critical periods to ensure smooth operations. Her initiative, reliability, and calm approach made her a trusted point of contact for both staff and students. What makes Lucy's story especially inspiring is her resilience in the face of personal challenges, including navigating Autism and the onset of Tourette's during her apprenticeship. Rather than stepping back, Lucy has consistently stepped forward—demonstrating adaptability, professionalism, and a positive impact on her colleagues. Her achievements culminated in a Distinction at End Point Assessment, with external assessors praising her project management and event delivery skills. Lucy's journey highlights the value of apprenticeships in nurturing talent, fostering growth, and breaking down barriers.



Higher Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Emily Hailes, Nexus

Award accepted by Ally Jennings

Presented by Beth Wade, Senior Marketing Account Manager -Team Valley Group and NEAAN Vice-Chair
Highly Commended Awarded to Jake Lightowler, Healthworks

Emily serves as the Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Apprentice at Nexus, the organisation overseeing the Tyne and Wear Metro, Shields Ferry, and key bus services. Her role in the Corporate Planning team has spanned policy writing, strategic planning, impact assessment, and managing projects that positively influence Nexus's CSR efforts. Emily's contributions have helped Nexus formalise and expand its social value and ESG strategies, reflecting the company's mission to benefit communities, the economy, and the environment. Through her apprenticeship with LDN Apprenticeships, Emily has blended theoretical learning with practical application, gaining first-hand experience in environmental management, stakeholder engagement, and digital social value tools. Highlights of her apprenticeship include updating ESG and Diversity & Inclusion reports, co-managing a Cultural Food Festival, and running work placement schemes. Emily's communication, organisational, and analytical skills have set her apart, and she now aspires to promote ESG awareness and learning in future roles.



Degree Apprentice of the Year

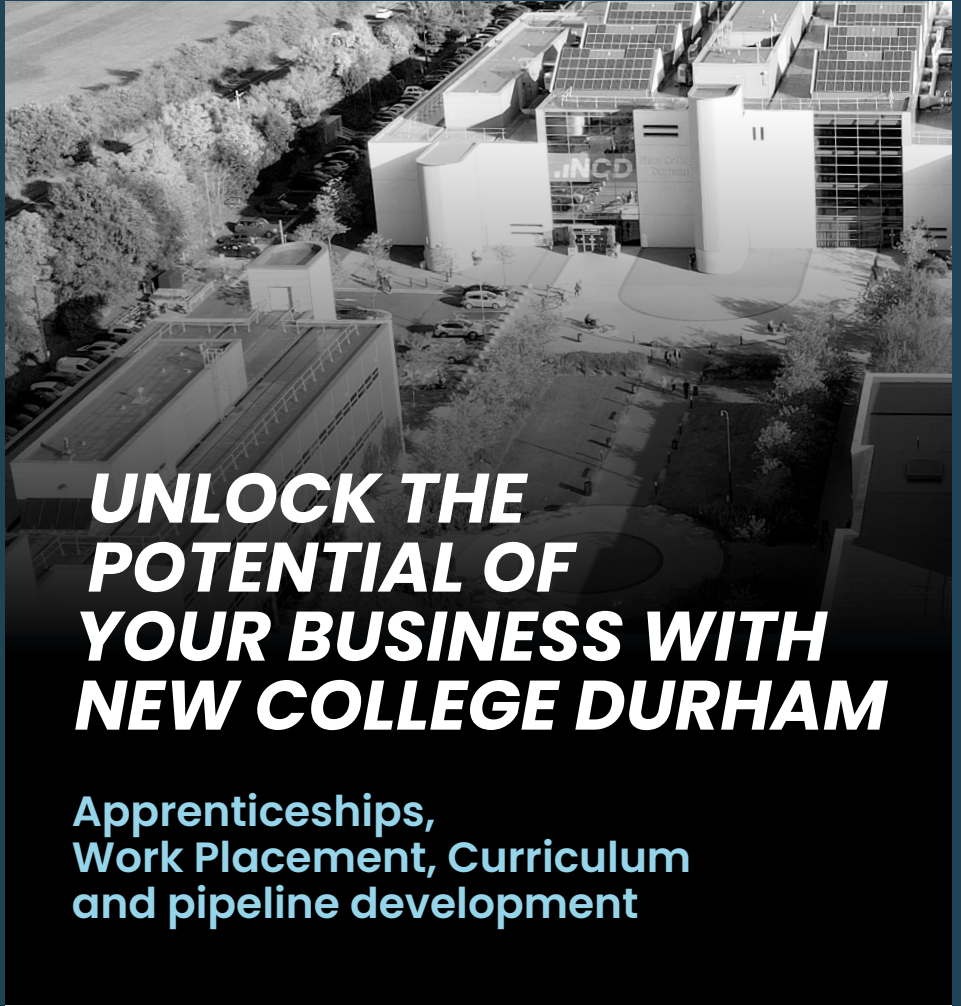
WINNER

Amy Norton, South Tyneside Council

Presented by Emma Blenkinsop, North East Media Sales Consultant at Iconic Media Group

Highly Commended awarded to Daniel Cooper, North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust

Amy's apprenticeship journey has been a testament to dedication, growth, and the power of hands-on learning. Over the course of her program, Amy quickly distinguished herself through her strong work ethic, adaptability, and eagerness to embrace new challenges. From day one, she contributed meaningfully to her team, demonstrating both technical skill and a collaborative spirit. Amy's ability to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios not only enhanced project outcomes but also inspired her peers. Through mentorship and continuous feedback, she developed a well-rounded skill set, mastering both core competencies and emerging industry practices. Amy's commitment to personal and professional growth was evident in every task she undertook, consistently exceeding expectations. As her apprenticeship concludes, Amy stands ready to embark on the next phase of her career, equipped with invaluable experience, confidence, and a passion for lifelong learning. Her journey exemplifies the impact and importance of apprenticeship programs.



Find out more at
www.newcollegedurham.ac.uk



Construction Apprentice of the Year

Sponsored by Northumberland Skills

WINNER

Megan Emerson,
Gibson & Harris Plumbing & Heating

Presented by Lyndsay James, Lead Officer of Apprenticeships



Megan's apprenticeship journey is a testament to her dedication, resilience, and ambition within the plumbing and heating industry. Starting as a Level 1 Plumbing student in 2020, Megan quickly distinguished herself through hard work and a strong commitment to learning. She progressed through full-time Level 2 and 3 programmes, earning her GCSE Maths and excelling in all areas of her studies. Recognised by her tutors for her technical ability and professionalism, Megan secured an apprenticeship with Gibson and Harris after a successful work trial. Since joining the organisation, Megan has become an integral part of the team, supporting experienced engineers and taking on increasing responsibilities. She has achieved her Level 3 Diploma, passed her gas assessment ahead of her peers, and completed an outstanding portfolio. Megan's professionalism, reliability, and positive attitude have made her a role model for others, and her achievements continue to support both her own career goals and the high standards of her employer.



Engineering / Manufacturing Apprentice of the Year

Sponsored by MTC Training **mtc training**

WINNER

Ethan Taylor, Pearson Engineering, including Responsive Engineering

Presented by Chris Room, Business Development Director

Ethan's apprenticeship at Pearson Engineering has set a benchmark for early-career development in UK manufacturing. Appointed as a manufacturing engineering degree apprentice, Ethan quickly established himself as a key member of the team, supporting design, testing, and project planning while ensuring quality and compliance. His proactive approach, technical proficiency, and knack for challenging established processes have led to improved internal workflows and successful project outcomes—including leading a major assembly build that delivered significant benefits to the company. Ethan's hands-on involvement ranges from producing detailed manufacturing drawings and managing engineering change requests to facilitating stakeholder meetings and aligning processes with international standards. Recognised by his supervisors as pivotal to project delivery, Ethan demonstrates resilience, adaptability, and ambition far beyond his experience level. His contributions not only support Pearson Engineering's growth and innovation, but also help deliver vital defence products that are saving lives on the frontline. Ethan exemplifies the impact of high-quality apprenticeships.



Health and Public Service Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Dan Riseborough, Newcastle Clinical Trials Unit, Newcastle University

Presented by Host, Tom Campbell

Dan's apprenticeship journey at Newcastle Clinical Trials Unit stands as a testament to the transformative power of combining academic study with real-world clinical research. Shortly after being promoted to Trial Manager, Dan embarked on a Level 6 Clinical Trials Specialist degree apprenticeship, balancing demanding operational responsibilities with rigorous academic learning. Her impact has been immediate and significant—she played a pivotal role in reopening a complex, previously paused study and quickly progressed to leading multiple trials. Dan's technical expertise, composure under pressure, and leadership have earned her the UK Trial Manager Network Rising Star Award and widespread respect from colleagues. Her apprenticeship has directly enhanced her scientific understanding, leadership, and communication skills, benefiting both her career and the organisation's capabilities. As a role model and emerging leader, Dan exemplifies the value of apprenticeships in developing talent, fostering innovation, and ensuring the success of high-quality clinical trials.



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Technology and Digital Apprenticeship of the Year Award

Sponsored by the University of Sunderland

WINNER

**Matthew McGregor,
Durham University**



Presented by Sarah Beck,
Academic Director of Apprenticeships

Matthew, a Level 7 Data Analytics Degree Apprentice at Durham University, has made a transformative impact through his apprenticeship. Identifying major inconsistencies in how student maintenance requests were handled across the University's 12 colleges, Matthew led the design and implementation of a unified, data-driven solution using the Planon Integrated Workplace Management system. By engaging with stakeholders and piloting his approach, he ensured the new process was effective, user-friendly, and tailored to operational realities. The result has been a streamlined maintenance reporting system that improves service for students and staff, centralises key data, and enables more proactive problem-solving. Completing the project ahead of schedule, Matthew's initiative, technical skill, and commitment have set a new standard for apprenticeship success, making a lasting difference to student experience and university operations.



Professional Services Apprenticeship of the Year

WINNER

**Joe Hudson,
Commercial Maintenance Services LTD**

Presented by Host Tom Campbell

Highly Commended awarded to
Amelia Skevington, J Barbour & Sons Ltd
and Emily Russell, ECBS Energy

Joe's apprenticeship marks a remarkable career transition from plumbing to data and technology, driven by his recognition of the critical role data and AI now play in business. As a Commercial Data Technician, Joe rapidly established himself as an indispensable member of his organisation. He took full ownership of the HubSpot CRM, transforming an outdated Excel tracker into a dynamic, accurate system that delivers real-time commercial insights. Joe's initiative extended beyond his formal duties: he independently researched and implemented AI tools, including a Tender Assistant and Marketing Assistant, boosting efficiency and output quality while ensuring robust governance. Trusted by senior leaders, Joe's clear communication and proactive problem-solving have materially reduced management workload and improved decision making. His generosity with knowledge has fostered skills and confidence among colleagues, exemplifying the true value apprentices bring. Joe now aims to specialise in AI-led business transformation, continuing his impressive trajectory in data-driven innovation.



Apprentice Ambassador

Sponsored by Tacs Training



WINNER

**Neil Mawson, Pearson Engineering including
Responsive Engineering**

Presented by Rob Dignen,
Managing Director of Tacs Training

Highly Commended awarded to Hannah Mehr, Arup

Neil, Learning and Development Manager at Pearson Engineering, has made a remarkable impact as an ambassador for apprenticeships. Since joining in 2023, he has expanded the company's apprenticeship programme from just five to 52 apprentices, championing in-house accreditation and forging strong partnerships with educational institutions. Neil's passionate advocacy extends across the North East, where he delivers presentations, interactive workshops, and outreach at schools and colleges, dispelling myths and inspiring young people to consider apprenticeships as a first-choice career path. As an Apprenticeship Ambassador and member of the T Level Ambassador Network, Neil represents the sector at major events, earning repeat invitations for his authentic, apprentice-led approach. His efforts have increased awareness, diversity, and applications, and his mentoring has supported over 70 apprentices into successful engineering careers. Neil's work exemplifies dedicated leadership and collaboration, raising the profile of apprenticeships regionally and nationally.

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Mentor of the Year
WINNER
Adrienne Clark, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

Presented by Rachel Lister Public Funding and Communications Manager at Feeding Families
 Award accepted by Gemma Goodwin
 Highly Commended awarded to Alexandra Crowther, Sunderland City Council
 Adrienne Clark stands out as a transformative mentor whose influence has shaped countless careers within South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust. With over 40 years of dedicated service, Adrienne has been instrumental in developing and supporting apprentices, guiding them through significant educational reforms and the evolving needs of the NHS workforce. Her mentoring style is deeply personal—she invests time to understand each individual, offering tailored support that builds confidence and resilience. Adrienne’s commitment goes far beyond expectations, providing reassurance at critical moments and ensuring that every learner feels valued and supported. Her impact is evident not only in the Trust’s remarkable apprenticeship success rates, but also in the testimonials of those she has inspired—many of whom now hold senior roles and mentor others. Adrienne’s legacy is a culture of development, compassion, and excellence, making her a role model and a true architect of future NHS leaders.



SME Employer of the Year
WINNER
Apex Radio Systems

Presented by Aneela Ali, Executive Director - Finance & Corporate Services, North East Chamber of Commerce
 Apex Radio Systems stands out as an exemplary SME employer of apprentices, weaving apprenticeship into the core of its business strategy since 2008. Nearly 20% of its workforce are current or former apprentices, reflecting a genuine commitment to developing talent from within. Apex’s approach is not symbolic – apprenticeships are integral to succession planning, operational resilience, and margin growth, with apprentices placed across accounts, sales, and technical departments. Their contributions deliver measurable impact, including £20,000–£50,000 in annual business value, significant operational efficiencies, and enhanced customer satisfaction. Apex’s structured support includes senior mentorship, protected study time, and clear progression routes, resulting in high retention and multiple internal promotions, including its current Office Manager. The company’s investment extends to professional qualifications and well-being initiatives, fostering a culture where apprentices are valued as future leaders. Apex’s collaborative, people-focused model sets a benchmark for best practice in SME apprenticeship employment.



Large Employer of the Year
WINNER
North East Ambulance Service

Presented by host Tom Campbell
 NEAS (North East Ambulance Service) stands out as one of the region’s largest employers of apprentices, playing a pivotal role in developing local talent and supporting workforce growth. With a strong commitment to nurturing future healthcare professionals, NEAS offers a diverse range of apprenticeship opportunities spanning clinical, operational, and administrative roles. These structured programmes provide apprentices with hands-on experience, nationally recognised qualifications, and ongoing mentorship, ensuring they are well-equipped for rewarding careers within the NHS. NEAS’s investment in apprenticeships not only addresses critical skills shortages but also fosters staff retention and progression, creating a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals. By championing inclusivity and personal development, NEAS empowers individuals from all backgrounds to embark on meaningful career journeys, contributing to the resilience and excellence of the ambulance service. Their ongoing dedication underscores NEAS’s vital contribution to regional employment and the broader healthcare sector’s future.



Training Provider / Programme of the Year
WINNER
New College Durham - Firefighter Apprenticeship Programme

Presented by Amanda Bourn, Editor in Chief North East
 New College Durham’s (NCD) Firefighter Apprenticeship Programme is a pioneering initiative developed in collaboration with regional fire and rescue services to address workforce challenges such as succession planning and diversity within the sector. Spanning 38 months, the programme offers apprenticeships in both Community Safety and Operational Firefighting, equipping learners with advanced technical and professional skills. Apprentices benefit from a blend of academic study and real-world operational experience across multiple fire stations, with early-entry recruitment from age 17 creating a direct pipeline into the service. The programme stands out for its co-designed curriculum with employers, rotational placements, and integration of leadership masterclasses. To date, it has attracted 378 apprentices and boasts a 96% achievement rate. Its innovative, employer-led model ensures training remains responsive to sector needs, preparing apprentices for immediate impact in their communities. Recognised nationally, NCD’s programme is setting new standards for firefighter training and workforce development.



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