



LANCASHIRE & NORTH WEST APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS 2026

LANCASHIRE SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT HUB

Part of the Lancashire Combined County Authority

CancerCare
Registered Charity Number: 1120048

SP Electricity North West

B&FC
BLACKPOOL AND THE FLEET COLLEGE

B&FC FOR BUSINESS

VEKA

AAN
Apprenticeship Ambassador Network
#AAN

North West

The Gazette



Eric Wright Group

University of Lancashire

Lancashire Post



WINNERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Apprentices, Employers and Providers Recognised for Remarkable Achievements



On Thursday, 7th May we held the Annual Lancashire Apprenticeship Awards, at Blackpool Football Club. Guests were welcomed with a drinks reception kindly sponsored by Blackpool FC, 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 Lancashire, 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.

We extend our sincere thanks to our judging panel; they are;

Cllr Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Young People and Aspiration - Blackpool Council

Katherine Higgins, Business Development Team Manager at B&FC for Business - Blackpool and



The Fylde College

Ste Molyneux, Emerging Talent Lead | People Team - Matalan

Graham White, Chief Executive Officer - Lancaster and Morecambe Chamber of Commerce

Rebecca Wharton, Talent Development Manager - Government Commercial Agency

Rebecca Wharton, said "I would like to congratulate all of the finalists. The standard of entries blew me away. What a celebration of all your ongoing achievements"

Graham White said "I want to congratulate all our finalists. You are the future of our industries, and tonight is a celebration of your hard work and commitment. It's been an honour to be a judge. The calibre has been exceptional, and your achievements and ambitions are genuinely inspiring"

Nicola Adam, Iconic Media Editor in Chief North said "Welcome to the Lancashire Apprenticeship Awards 2026. In a world where it is harder than ever to get a start in life, apprenticeships play a critical role in identifying talent and potential early and in shaping the future of our young people. These awards celebrate those who have grasped the opportunity and bloomed within their own chosen apprenticeships, setting a solid base for their future while playing an invaluable role within industry. They are the leaders, the creative force and the skilled workforce of the future, they are an inspiration to their peers and today is for them and as a thank you to those who have embraced and supported them"

During the event we organised a raffle to raise funds for our Charity Partner CancerCare North Lancashire & South Cumbria. CancerCare provides

vital counselling and complementary therapy services to adults and children affected by cancer, life-shortening illnesses and bereavement. For more than 40 years, the independent local charity has supported thousands of people across the region through its dedicated centres in Lancaster, Barrow, Kendal and Morecambe. While all services are provided free of charge to those who need them, CancerCare relies heavily on fundraising and community support to help cover its annual running costs of around £2 million.

We are pleased to share that the raffle donation equated to £2,390. Thanks to all our guests for your generosity.

CancerCare's Deputy Head of Fundraising Kat Michaels said: "What an honour it was to be the charity partner for the 2026 Lancashire Apprenticeship Awards. CancerCare is a local, independent charity that supports people affected by cancer and bereavement across North Lancashire and South Cumbria, and we're incredibly grateful to have been part of an event that champions local people, businesses and organisations.

"On behalf of CancerCare, a huge congratulations to all the finalists and winners who were celebrated at the fabulous awards evening. And thank you to the LAA team for allowing us to be part of the celebrations, whilst helping to raise awareness of our vital services and the impact cancer can have on our lives."

The event was hosted by Neetal Parekh. Neetal is a broadcaster, educator and changemaker whose work across radio, television, podcasts and social media reaches millions. She is recognised for promoting cultural understanding, community cohesion

and diverse storytelling, with a strong digital presence attracting more than 2 million daily Instagram views.

In 2021, Neetal was shortlisted for the Harper's Bazaar Change Leader Award for producing multilingual COVID-19 vaccine awareness videos later adopted by the UK Government. She has also led landmark cultural initiatives, including the first Diwali prayers at Liverpool Football Club, while continuing to champion diverse voices through her media and education work.

Keep upto date with the event visit the website lancashireapprenticeshipawards.co.uk





Intermediate Apprentice of the Year

Sponsored by Blackpool and The Fylde College

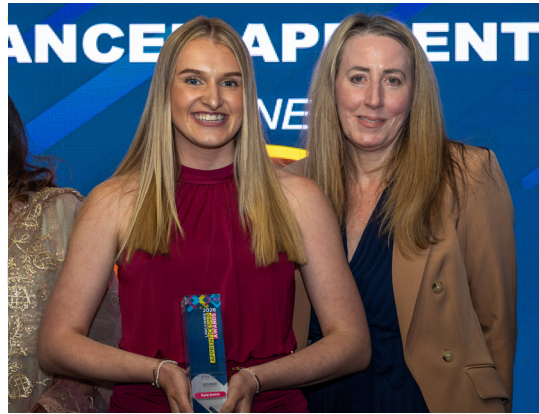


WINNER

Erin Leadbeater, Lancashire Constabulary

Presented by Colleen Hickson, Head of Apprenticeship Performance of Blackpool and The Fylde College

Erin's apprenticeship journey within Lancashire Constabulary's Safer Roads Unit exemplifies transformation and achievement. Initially reserved and lacking confidence, she embraced every challenge, quickly developing the skills to handle sensitive, high-pressure situations with composure and professionalism. Her dedication led to exceptional results—three distinctions in her Level 2 Customer Service Practitioner apprenticeship End-Point Assessment, missing only one mark, and earning Apprentice of the Month in September 2025. Erin's ability to manage difficult conversations and support her colleagues has seen her grow into a reliable, trusted team member and a role model for new starters. Now progressing onto a Level 3 Business Administrator qualification, Erin is already demonstrating the qualities of a future leader, with aspirations to mentor others. Her journey highlights the power of determination, resilience, and personal growth, embodying the very best of apprenticeship learning and setting a benchmark for others to follow.



Advanced Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Kate Smith, Rufford Arms Hotel

Presented by Iconic Media, Editor in Chief North, Nicola Adam

Highly Commended awarded to Owen Hook, WWL Teaching Hosp. NHS Foundation Trust

Kate's apprenticeship journey epitomises professional growth and determination. Starting as a valued front of house team member, she enrolled on the Level 3 Team Leader apprenticeship with a passion for service and a readiness to learn. From the outset, Kate embraced every opportunity, developing her leadership skills through active engagement and a commitment to self-improvement. She quickly moved from supporting colleagues to leading both the front of house and housekeeping teams, demonstrating adaptability, strong communication, and organisational skills. Kate's ability to earn trust, delegate effectively, and remain composed under pressure was especially evident when she stepped up to cover managerial duties during a challenging period. Throughout her apprenticeship, she consistently applied theory to practice, building confidence and capability. Her exceptional progress was recognised with a Distinction at End Point Assessment, highlighting her readiness for further responsibility and showcasing the real-world impact of apprenticeship training on individual and organisational success.



Higher Apprentice of the Year

Sponsored by VEKA PLC

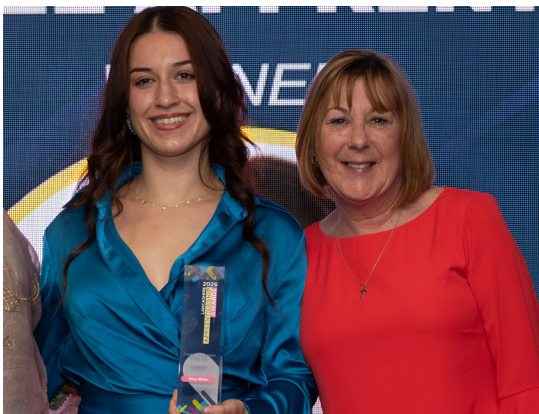


WINNER

Sebastian Chadwick, One Fylde

Presented by Sally Blades, VEKA HR Director

Seb joined One Fylde through a local college partnership and quickly became an invaluable team member, bringing maturity, enthusiasm, and a passion for supporting people with disabilities and autism. Despite limited prior experience, Seb has excelled in digital transformation, improving our data quality, reporting methods, and staff efficiency. He rapidly developed advanced Excel and data management skills, contributed to major projects like our asset register, and introduced new processes such as a formal data cleanse plan. Seb's commitment to learning, teamwork, and organisational improvement - alongside his positive attitude - Seb has accelerated our IT modernisation and inspired colleagues. A role model for apprentices, Seb truly embodies dedication, impact, and resilience.



Degree Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Amy Witts, OCU Group

Presented by Judge and Councilor Kathryn Benson

Amy, a third-year Quantity Surveying Degree Apprentice at OCU Group and Chair of Generation for Change (G4C) Northwest, is recognised as a future industry leader. Since joining OCU in 2023, Amy has rapidly become an influential figure within the Utilities Division, leading the implementation of Payapps to streamline subcontractor payments and compliance, and driving operational improvements across newly acquired entities. Her commercial acumen is evident through her management of reporting and profitability processes, helping transform divisions to exceed budget expectations. Amy's mentorship of students and colleagues exemplifies her commitment to workforce development, inspiring others to pursue apprenticeships and professional growth. As Chair of G4C Northwest, she champions sector advocacy, outreach, and the development of emerging talent. Amy's blend of technical expertise, leadership, and passion for collaboration strengthens both OCU Group and the wider industry, making her a role model and a worthy award recipient.

B&FC FOR BUSINESS
Blackpool and The Fylde College

★ RATEMY APPRENTICESHIP
BEST 50 TRAINING PROVIDERS

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE FINALISTS AT THE LANCASHIRE APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS

WANT TO BECOME AN AWARD-WINNING APPRENTICE OR APPRENTICESHIP EMPLOYER?

Let B&FC help you:

- + Find the right vacancy or candidate
- + Get your business apprenticeship ready
- + Sort the paperwork and apply for funding
- + Provide ongoing support and mentoring

Contact us to find out more on business@blackpool.ac.uk

[BLACKPOOL.AC.UK/EMPLOYERS](https://blackpool.ac.uk/employers)





Engineering/Manufacturing Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Adil Mohammad, SP Electricity North West

Presented by host Neetal Parekh

Highly Commended awarded to Abbie Prior, Leyland Trucks

Adil embarked on his career through an apprenticeship, seeking a blend of practical engineering experience and structured learning. Motivated by the chance to learn directly from seasoned professionals and earn industry-recognised qualifications, he began as a Cable Jointing apprentice. There, he gained hands-on expertise in electrical safety, network construction, fault response, and customer service—building a strong foundation in how the energy network operates and impacts customers. In 2023, Adil advanced to The Control Hub, progressing from Dispatcher to Hub Technician (Control Engineer). In this pivotal role, he coordinates field teams, manages faults and planned works, and upholds rigorous safety standards. Adil's real-time, safety-critical decision-making ensures efficient network operation and minimal customer disruption. His efforts bolster operational reliability, enhance cross-team communication, and help deliver a safe, resilient, and high-performing service, making him integral to the organisation's ongoing success.



Health and Public Service Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Matthew Roberts, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Trust

Presented by judge Rebecca Wharton, Government Commercial Agency

Matt chose the Advanced Clinical Practitioner (ACP) apprenticeship to enhance his clinical expertise and impact patient care. The apprenticeship's collaborative approach allowed him to tailor learning to his development needs, building on his experience as a senior nurse at The Harbour. Throughout the programme, Matt excelled—earning distinction awards and being shortlisted for two Nursing Times accolades for his leadership and commitment to education. He focused on improving care for patients after self-injury, reducing unnecessary emergency department visits, and developing staff skills in wound assessment and DVT risk. Matt integrated advanced physical health assessments into his practice, undertaking complex reviews and leading MDT meetings. He also inspired colleagues by developing educational interventions and participating in a podcast to encourage ACP apprenticeships. Matt's passion for excellence and advocacy for high-quality care has made a lasting impact, embedding ACP roles within mental health services and motivating others to follow his path.



Professional Services Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Megan Pritchard, Burnley College

Presented by Graham White, judge and Chief Executive Officer of Lancaster and Morecambe Chamber of Commerce

Megan's journey as an apprentice at Burnley College stands as an inspiring example of dedication, ambition, and leadership. Recognised by colleagues and managers alike, Megan's ability to balance demanding academic study with high-level workplace responsibilities demonstrates her exceptional time management and resourcefulness. Determined to rebuild her confidence after previous educational challenges, she chose the Degree Apprenticeship route to apply classroom knowledge to real-world scenarios. As a vital member of the Senior Management Team Support staff, Megan has driven operational improvements, enhanced communications, and contributed to strategic initiatives that put learners at the heart of the College's mission. Her initiatives, such as launching The Apprenticeship Exchange, have empowered dozens of regional apprentices. Megan's commitment is further highlighted by her roles in industry boards, public speaking achievements, and award nominations. With a clear vision for her future, Megan continues to champion apprenticeships, promote leadership growth, and inspire others in the education sector.

40 years of building careers and celebrating success.

At VEKA, we build careers that last. Through skill development and personal growth, we invest in every individual, creating a workforce that drives lasting success within our company and beyond.



veka.co.uk

Proud Sponsors of



Hi, we're SP Electricity North West...

We manage the overhead lines and underground cables that keep power flowing across the North West.

If you're in a power cut, we'll keep you safe and informed until the power is back on.

We're investing over £2bn in the electricity network from now until 2028. Our apprentices play an important part in delivering our commitments.

Learn more by visiting www.enwl.co.uk



SP Electricity North West



Technology and Digital Apprentice of the Year Award

WINNER

Aaliah Mohamed, SP Electricity North West

Presented by host Neetal Parekh

Highly Commended awarded to Felicity Bruce, Vodafone Aaliah's apprenticeship journey as a Software Tester has been marked by rapid progression, technical excellence, and outstanding professionalism. Joining the organisation in September 2024, she quickly became an integral member of the digital team, mastering tools like ZephyrScale and Jira, and contributing to critical digital transformation projects. As the team's first apprentice, Aaliah embraced her role with maturity, developing robust stakeholder management and communication skills while supporting multiple projects. Her diligence and technical capability enabled her to complete her apprenticeship six months early, setting a new benchmark for future apprentices. Aaliah's impact spans writing pivotal test scripts, ensuring high-quality software launches, and fostering strong cross-functional relationships. Her extensive industry qualifications and commitment to continuous learning underpin her ambitions to advance within the digital sector. Beyond technical achievements, Aaliah stands out as a proactive ambassador for Early Careers, supporting recruitment, mentoring, and community outreach, and embodying the organisation's vision for digital excellence and talent development.



Mentor of the Year

WINNER

Marc Thomas, CaviTech Solutions Ltd

Presented by Kat Michaels, Deputy Head of Fundraising at CancerCare

Marc Thomas's mentorship at CaviTech has had a transformative impact on the company's apprentices, setting a benchmark for dedication and expertise. As Apprentice Supervisor, Marc—known as Bobby—has taken it upon himself to guide six apprentices, delivering structured, hands-on training that bridges the gap between theory and practice. His weekly two-hour sessions over eight weeks cover technical essentials such as injection moulding and engineering drawings, ensuring apprentices gain practical, job-ready skills. Beyond formal teaching, Marc is a constant, approachable presence, tailoring support to each apprentice and providing encouragement that boosts confidence and independence. His proactive approach addresses knowledge gaps and he fosters a resilient mindset where mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn. Apprentices consistently credit Marc with their improved technical skills, confidence, and motivation. His mentorship not only shapes individual growth but also strengthens CaviTech's future by cultivating a highly skilled and confident workforce.



Apprentice Ambassador

Sponsored by Lancashire Skills and Employment Hub

WINNER

Zafeerah Bagas, William Hare

Presented by Sara Gaskell, Manager Lancashire Skills and Employment Hub

Zafeerah Bagas's apprenticeship journey is a remarkable story of skill, advocacy, and leadership in engineering. Opting for a hands-on pathway after deciding college wasn't for her, Zafeerah quickly excelled, earning distinction in her Level 3 Welding and Fabrication qualification and making history as the first female to reach the WorldSkills UK national finals in her discipline. Her technical talent is matched by her commitment to promoting apprenticeships: as a STEM Ambassador, she has inspired countless students at schools and colleges, openly sharing her experiences and championing engineering as a career for all, especially young women. Within her workplace, Zafeerah is known for her positivity, professionalism, and supportive mentorship. Her recent transition to Metal Fabricator Tutor at Alliance Learning further amplifies her impact, as she now helps train the next generation of engineers. Zafeerah's journey exemplifies how apprenticeships create skilled professionals and role models who shape the future of engineering.



WE BLAZE OUR OWN TRAIL

As an apprentice you get on the job experience as well as training

SCAN ME



The Northwest Apprenticeship Ambassador Network

Join other Ambassadors passionate about apprenticeships to share best practice, network and inspire others

SKILLS FOR LIFE

APPRENTICESHIPS



JOIN OVER 320 ACTIVE LANCASHIRE BUSINESSES & SIGN UP TO THE LANCASHIRE SKILLS PLEDGE TODAY

BUILD. GROW. INSPIRE.

The **Lancashire Skills Pledge** gives your business one simple gateway to Lancashire's leading skills and training initiatives.



Whether you want to **recruit, upskill, or give back to your community**, we're here to support you every step of the way.

ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES

Choose any of the 9 pledges that fit your business — and get recognised for the work you're already doing.

WHY GET INVOLVED?

Grow Your Workforce

- Reach new talent
- Diversify your recruitment
- Bring fresh skills into your business

Upskill Your Team

- Access subsidised training
- Develop staff at every level
- Strengthen your future workforce

Boost Your Social Value

- Support Lancashire residents
- Enhance your public profile
- Demonstrate real community impact

Connect & Collaborate

- Build relationships with colleges, universities, schools, and community partners
- Shape the skills pipeline your business needs



Sign up or find out more: www.lancashireskillspledge.co.uk





**Construction Apprentice of the Year Award
WINNER**

Erin Wall, OCU Group

Presented by Lee Good, North West Media Sales Manager at Iconic Medi

Erin's journey in construction began with a hands-on GCSE project, igniting a passion that led her to pursue a BTEC and ultimately a degree apprenticeship with OCU Group. As an Assistant Estimator, she has quickly become integral to OCU's commercial success, developing innovative tools that streamline tendering, resource management, and bid governance. Erin's technical skill and strategic thinking have already helped secure major contracts, while her commitment to mentoring colleagues and promoting women in STEM highlights her leadership potential. The blend of academic study at Sheffield Hallam and real-world experience has accelerated her growth, giving her the confidence to deliver impactful presentations and influence key decisions. Erin aspires to achieve chartered status and progress into senior leadership, inspiring the next generation and contributing to a more inclusive industry. Her dedication to excellence, learning, and advocacy makes her a standout apprentice and a promising future leader in construction.



SME Employer of the Year

Sponsored by North West Apprenticeship Ambassador Network.

WINNER

Bambers Building Contractors

Presented by Alys Reeves, Spire Healthcare and Co-Chair of the NWAAN

Bambers Building Contractors' apprenticeship programme is a model of integrated workforce development, underpinning the company's long-term strategy and delivering real value to both apprentices and the business. Employing 17 apprentices across trades and office roles, Bambers partners with Blackpool and The Fylde College to combine academic learning with hands-on site and office experience. Trade apprentices rotate through construction and adaptations teams, while office apprenticeships cover quantity surveying, finance, and management, ensuring broad skill development. Every apprentice is paired with a dedicated mentor, providing daily support and structured skills training. This approach not only addresses industry-wide skills shortages but also strengthens retention, boosts productivity, and creates clear progression routes—including into senior and management roles. The programme is recognised for its high standards, with apprentices like Tomas Jay McGeough and Will achieving notable success and recognition. By embedding apprenticeships at all levels, Bambers is building a sustainable, skilled workforce and delivering meaningful local impact.



Large Employer of the Year

Sponsored by SP Electricity North West

WINNER

OCU GROUP

Presented by Chris Havard, Career Development Manager



Highly Commended awarded to Essity UK

OCU Group's apprenticeship and early careers programmes are at the heart of its "Connecting the Future" strategy, driving workforce capability across the Utilities and Energy sector. Since 2024, OCU has created structured pathways for apprentices, industrial placements, and T Level students, covering technical, professional, and emerging disciplines. Each participant benefits from a tailored development plan, high-quality mentoring, immersive national induction events, and ongoing support via the RISE Learning Management System. The impact is significant: the Early Careers population grew 767% in under three years, with 100% retention for recent intakes, strong diversity (34% female, 66% BAME), and multiple industry recognitions. OCU's innovative initiatives—including a sector-first Women into Leadership Apprenticeship, new technical apprenticeships, and a Professional Coaching Network—ensure every learner has a clear, supported progression route. Partnerships with universities, community initiatives, and a focus on inclusion make OCU a benchmark for excellence, building a diverse, future-ready workforce that supports both industry and community.



**Training Provider / Programme of the Year
WINNER**

Myerscough College Centre for Sportsturf Excellence – Apprenticeship Programme

Presented by host Neetal Parekh

Myerscough College stands as the UK's leading provider of sports turf apprenticeship education, supporting over 550 apprentices and holding 35% of the national market. With a 26-year legacy and more than 5,100 trained apprentices, Myerscough's impact is profound—graduates now manage elite venues, including Premier League stadiums and international golf courses. The College's structured pathways span from Level 2 to Level 5, including the sector's first Foundation Degree-integrated apprenticeship, ensuring clear progression and addressing industry skills gaps. The work-based model, delivered by 16 industry-expert tutors, is enhanced by digital learning and inclusive support, especially for those with additional needs. Employers praise the curriculum's real-world alignment, while apprentices achieve strong outcomes: 97% rate teaching as excellent, 35% attain distinctions, and retention exceeds national averages. Myerscough's commitment to innovation, diversity, and international leadership is evident in its future-focused Centre of Sports Turf Excellence and award-winning apprentices. This programme sets the benchmark for sports turf training in the UK.



