



SOUTH YORKSHIRE 6 APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS 2026

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WINNERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Apprentices, Employers and Providers Recognised for Remarkable Achievements



On Thursday, 21st May we held the Annual South Yorkshire Apprenticeship Awards, held at Sheffield United Football Club. Guests were welcomed with a drinks reception kindly sponsored by the Football Club and greeted by our Reception Sponsors Clear Quality. 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 South Yorkshire, 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;

DR Graham Honeyman CBE,
Managing Director - Sarach Steel
Technologies Ltd

Natalie Evans, Apprenticeship Lead -
Asda



Bex Darch, Learning Specialist - Arla
Foods

Ava Jones, Head of Marketing -
AESSEAL

James Beighton, Development Lead -
Skills Street

Lisa Pogson MSc, M.Inst.R, MWES,
Managing Director - Airmaster

A few words from our judges, who were incredibly impressed by the quality, passion and dedication demonstrated throughout this year's award nominations, highlighting the outstanding impact apprenticeships continue to have across South Yorkshire.

"The award nominations showcased incredible pride, passion and dedication from apprentices and their supporters, highlighting the inspiring impact apprenticeships continue to have on individuals, businesses and future talent." **Lisa Pogson**, Managing Director, Airmaster

"The exceptionally high standard of award nominations demonstrated the vital role apprenticeships play in developing talent, strengthening businesses and creating future career opportunities across the region."

Ava Jones, Head of Marketing and
Executive Assistant, AESSEAL plc

"Judging the award nominations was a rewarding experience, with submissions reflecting the creativity, hard work and commitment of apprentices, mentors and organisations alike." **Dr Graham A. Honeyman CBE**, Sarach Steel Technologies

"The award nominations highlighted the outstanding commitment, resilience and talent of apprentices, alongside the transformational impact apprenticeships have on businesses,

communities and future careers." **ASDA Apprenticeships Lead Natalie Evans**

Claire Lewis, The Star's Editor welcomed our guests and said "It is my pleasure to welcome each and every one here to the return of the South Yorkshire Apprenticeship Awards.

This annual event, hosted by the Star in partnership with the Doncaster Free Press and Rotherham Advertiser, recognises the vital role apprenticeships play in bridging the gap between education and the world of work.

Tonight we celebrate something powerful. Potential turned into progress. Apprenticeships don't just build careers - they build confidence, communities and the future. Every challenge faced, every skill mastered, and every qualification earned represents hard work and commitment, but apprentices never succeed alone. Behind every successful apprentice is an employer willing to invest in potential and a training provider dedicated to guiding, teaching and inspiring the next generation. Together, you are creating pathways that transform lives, strengthen businesses and shape the future of our economy.

Apprenticeships show us that you are never too old to learn a new skill. Everyone here in this room is a shining example of how you contribute to this and you should be rightly proud of your accomplishments. So tonight, let's celebrate every lesson learned, every opportunity given and every success earned. Congratulations to you all".

During the event we organised a raffle raising funds for our Charity Partner Roundabout. Roundabout is South Yorkshire's youth homelessness charity, supporting young people aged

13-25 who are homeless or at risk. Through emergency accommodation, tailored support, life skills training, and long term housing solutions, the charity helps over 500 young people daily to build independence and break the cycle of homelessness.

We are pleased to share that the raffle donation equaled £2,010. This amazing total represents 2 defibrillators that could be installed in Yorkshire communities to help save more lives. Thanks to all our guests for your generosity.

The event was hosted by Rich Williams, an award-winning radio presenter and live event host, currently part of the Breakfast Show team on the Absolute Radio network. A former Arqiva Commercial Radio Presenter of the Year, he has hosted major international sporting events including FIFA World Cups, UEFA Women's EUROs and Champions League Finals. Rich also produces podcasts and is an award-winning children's author.

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





Intermediate Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Freya Priestley, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Freya's apprenticeship journey at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has been a model of ambition, growth, and impact. Starting as a PROUD Level 2 Customer Service Apprentice with The Sheffield College, Freya embraced hands-on learning, quickly mastering frontline roles in the Contact Centre and Outpatient Reception. Her professionalism, adaptability, and eagerness to learn saw her entrusted with Personal Assistant duties for the Sexual Health Clinical Lead—a rare step for an apprentice at her level. Freya's achievements include streamlining administrative processes, supporting national data requirements, and providing vital organisational support under pressure. She consistently demonstrates the Trust's PROUD values through her commitment, reliability, and proactive attitude. Freya's journey highlights not only her remarkable progression and growing confidence, but also the value of apprenticeships in nurturing NHS talent. She stands out as a role model for peers, embracing every opportunity to learn, improve, and contribute meaningfully to patient care and team success.



Advanced Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Hasiba Nawaz, Balmoral Tanks Ltd

Highly Commended awarded to Katie Cherry, Age UK Barnsley and Paul Kaye, Syngenta Ltd.

Hasib's apprenticeship journey began with a childhood fascination for engineering, sparked by hands-on experiences at construction sites. Choosing a Level 3 Advanced Manufacturing Engineering apprenticeship, Hasib thrived through a blend of practical learning and technical challenges, mastering CNC programming, robotics, and 3D printing. Beyond technical growth, Hasib became a STEM Champion, visiting schools and founding GirlsGoneSTEM on TikTok to inspire and empower young women in engineering. Key milestones included speaking at the Egnuity 365 Live event and contributing to a parliamentary roundtable on apprenticeships, strengthening Hasib's commitment to advocacy and mentorship. Supporting fellow apprentices and work placement students, Hasib found fulfillment in helping others gain confidence and skills. Upon completing the apprenticeship in February 2026, Hasib advanced to Junior Systems Development Engineer and now looks forward to a degree apprenticeship and professional chartership. Hasib's journey is a testament to curiosity, resilience, and the power of representation in engineering.



Higher Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Paul Preskey, Agemaspark



Sponsored by University of Sheffield

Presented by Judy Clegg - Head of School, and Steph Allen - Apprenticeship Operations Manager

Paul Preskey's apprenticeship journey is a testament to the transformative power of vocational learning. Building on strong technical qualifications and workplace achievements, Paul chose the Level 5 Operations/Departmental Manager apprenticeship with Whyy Change to align his practical engineering expertise with his ambitions for senior leadership at Agemaspark Ltd. He not only achieved a Distinction and a CMI Level 5 Diploma, but also embedded leadership theory into daily practice, introducing operational KPIs, structured improvement plans, and employee feedback cycles that have strengthened performance, engagement, and transparency across the business. Paul played a pivotal role in Agemaspark's attainment of Fit For Nuclear (F4N) accreditation, positioning the company for growth in the nuclear sector. As Agemaspark prepares for employee ownership, Paul's apprenticeship has equipped him with the strategic, financial, and leadership skills to help lead the business into its next chapter—demonstrating how apprenticeships drive personal growth and organisational transformation.



Degree Apprentice of the Year

Sponsored by Sheffield Hallam University

WINNER

Charlotte Elliott, Affinity2020CIC



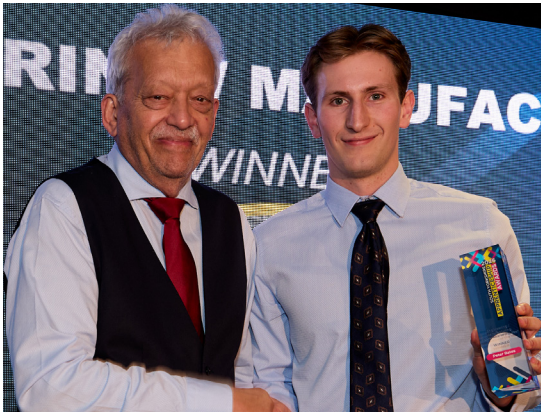
Presented by: Deputy Director of Partnerships, Stephen Bolton

Highly Commended in this category to Charlie Hickey, AESSEAL and Jessica Walklett, Unilever

Charlotte, Founder and CEO of Affinity 2020 CIC, embarked on her own apprenticeship journey to inspire care-experienced young people (CEYP) and demonstrate the transformative power of apprenticeships. Despite holding a degree and a senior background in education, Charlotte sought to expand her leadership skills in a commercial, non-statutory environment, embracing continuous self-development. Facing the additional challenge of dyslexia, she persevered through demanding written assignments and exams, ultimately excelling and sharing her learning across her team and directors. Charlotte's apprenticeship not only strengthened Affinity 2020—enhancing strategy, KPIs, and commercial acumen—but also set a powerful example, with the organisation offering apprenticeships and traineeships to CEYP. Her journey has raised Affinity's profile, fostered innovation, and reinforced the company's mission: empowering CEYP to achieve meaningful careers, not just jobs. Charlotte's leadership showcases the enduring value of apprenticeships at every level, exemplifying lifelong learning and advocacy.



YorkshireWater



Engineering / Manufacturing Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Peter Bates, Sheffield Forgemasters Engineering LTD

Presented by Graham Honeyman, Managing Director - Sarah Steel Technologies Ltd

Peter's apprenticeship at Sheffield Forgemasters has been marked by outstanding technical achievement, leadership, and a drive for continuous improvement. Joining as an apprentice metallurgist, he quickly made a measurable impact through innovations in material analysis and problem-solving. Peter's work in optimising R&D processes and leading complex failure investigations has directly improved product quality and saved the company from costly defects. He has taken full ownership of the Scanning Electron Microscope capability, leading key investigations and communicating findings to senior management. Beyond technical roles, Peter has stepped up during team shortages, deputising in critical functions and maintaining business continuity. He also manages major defence projects and leads significant improvement initiatives, such as thermal imaging technology upgrades. As a mentor and ambassador, Peter inspires future engineers and supports fellow apprentices. His professionalism, integrity, and business impact make him a standout candidate in engineering apprenticeships.



Construction Apprentice of the Year

Sponsored by Yorkshire Water

WINNER

Luke Lewis, Dalton Roofing Ltd



Presented by Lucy Parr, Funded Learning Adviser.

Luke Lewis's apprenticeship journey with Dalton Roofing exemplifies passion, commitment, and rapid growth in the roofing industry. Joining the company at 19 with no prior experience, Luke quickly embraced both the craft and technical demands of roofing. His enthusiasm and work ethic earned him a place in the Leeds Building College apprenticeship program, where he balances hands-on site work with academic learning. Mentored daily by an experienced roofer, Luke has developed advanced skills, including working with diminishing slate and heritage stone roofing. Consistently organised and ahead in his coursework, he impresses both tutors and customers with his professionalism, reliability, and positive attitude. Luke's willingness to tackle new challenges and support his team has built his confidence, transforming him from a shy newcomer to a valued team member. As he aims to qualify fully and lead his own team, Luke's journey highlights the impact of apprenticeships in shaping the next generation of skilled professionals.



Health and Public Service Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Kirsty Wright, NHS Rotherham

Presented by Emily Jones, Fundraising Manager, Roundabout

Kirsty Wright's apprenticeship journey is a testament to dedication, growth, and impact in the NHS. Over her 18-month Team Leader Apprenticeship with NHS Rotherham, Kirsty excelled as Administration Supervisor for the Children's Therapy Admin Team, displaying professionalism, resilience, and remarkable leadership. She stepped up during a period of managerial absence, ensuring stability and high standards, and earned the respect of colleagues through her calm authority. Kirsty's approach combined rigorous study with hands-on improvement, culminating in a Distinction for her consistently high-quality work. Notably, she introduced key service improvements, such as a new referral system, and embraced feedback to refine her leadership style. Her ability to operate beyond apprentice expectations, support her team, and embrace challenges marks her as a true role model. Kirsty's journey not only aligns with her ambition for NHS leadership but has also left a lasting positive impact on her team and organisation.

Sheffield Hallam University
Knowledge Applied

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Professional Services Apprentice of the Year

WINNER

Lily Graham, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Lily Graham's apprenticeship journey with Sheffield College's PROUD Customer Service Level 2 programme has been a testament to her ambition and dedication. Motivated by a desire to make a difference in the NHS, Lily quickly excelled at Charles Clifford Dental Hospital, mastering patient enquiries, conflict resolution, and the demands of a busy clinical environment. Within just months, her professionalism and commitment to the Trust's PROUD values led her to secure a permanent NHS position—all while continuing her apprenticeship studies. Lily's contributions extend beyond her role, as she supports new apprentices, enhances team capacity, and reinforces a culture of patient-centred care. Her growth in confidence, communication, and problem-solving has been widely recognised by colleagues and managers alike. Lily's journey exemplifies the impact of apprenticeships: building resilient, skilled professionals who strengthen healthcare delivery and inspire others to follow in their footsteps.



Technology and Digital Apprentice of the Year

WINNER:

Kennedy Ellis, HSBC

Presented by Marcus Schofield, Iconic Media - Media Sales Director (Yorkshire)

Kennedy's apprenticeship journey is rooted in deep personal motivation and family legacy. Inspired by her father's lifelong dedication to skilled trade in South Yorkshire and her brother's transformation through a degree apprenticeship, Kennedy saw this path as the ideal platform for technical and professional growth. She joined HSBC, driven by its focus on social mobility, and navigated early challenges in cloud computing by actively reshaping her learning approach. Embracing cloud security, she quickly became an instrumental DevSecOps Engineer, leading initiatives that improved security and compliance across HSBC's global teams. Kennedy's efforts resulted in significant reductions in policy violations and high customer satisfaction. Beyond technical achievements, she is passionate about outreach—expanding technology access in South Yorkshire, supporting Women in Tech, and building inclusive experiences. Her ambition is to lead in cloud accessibility and AI, using her journey as a blueprint for aspiring digital leaders, especially women and underrepresented communities.



Mentor of the Year

WINNER

Emily Whitfield, Rotherham, Doncaster & South Humber NHS Foundation Trust

Presented by James Beighton, Development Lead - Skills Street

Highly Commended awarded to Bethany Dunnill, Barnsley College

Emily's journey as a mentor exemplifies dedication, innovation, and compassion. As a Registered Mental Health Nurse and Placement Learning Facilitator at RDaSH, Emily has been instrumental in shaping the next generation of nursing professionals. She champions a culture of learning by supporting apprentices from recruitment through to qualification, offering tailored pastoral care and fostering strong peer networks. Emily leads on placement allocation, collaborates with educators to enhance clinical experiences, and delivers training on creating safe, inclusive learning environments. Her introduction of regular peer supervision sessions has empowered apprentices to share challenges, learn from one another, and build resilience. Beyond apprenticeship completion, Emily continues to guide newly qualified staff, promoting reflective practice and professional growth. Through developing clear procedures and robust support systems, she has ensured consistency and confidence in apprenticeship pathways. Emily's unwavering commitment has left a lasting impact on the workforce, making her an inspiring Mentor of the Year.



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Apprentice Ambassador

Sponsored by Barnsley college



WINNER

Jashanpreet Ralla, HSBC UK

Presented by Claire Schofield, Curriculum Leader and Christina Cooper, Apprenticeships Manager

Highly Commended awarded to Amy Wheatley, Equans Regeneration Ltd

Jashanpreet's journey as an Apprentice Ambassador exemplifies resilience, leadership, and advocacy. Relocating from London to Sheffield to pursue a Level 6 Digital and Technology Solutions Professional apprenticeship, he overcame barriers as a first-generation immigrant and professional, connecting authentically with young people across South Yorkshire. Jashan has delivered talks in schools, organised visits at HSBC, and inspired students by showcasing apprenticeships as aspirational pathways to success. Within his organisation, he fosters inclusion and wellbeing, organising Mental Health First Aid training and community-building events for early-career colleagues. His advocacy extends to national platforms, delivering keynote speeches and representing HSBC in the King's Trust Million Makers programme, raising over £20,000 for social impact. He also led a global AI hackathon team, placing second and influencing company sustainability efforts. Through outreach, mentorship, and innovation, Jashanpreet elevates apprenticeships, empowering the next generation to pursue professional success.



SME Employer of the Year

WINNER

OLS Ltd

OLS Ltd, a Doncaster-based SME, is a market leader in cloud-based access control solutions with a global client base. The company employs 23 staff and 20 contractors, with apprenticeships at the heart of its workforce strategy. Since 2019, OLS has supported 12 apprenticeships at Levels 3 to 6 across engineering, software development, marketing, and business administration. Over 50% of the team are current or former apprentices, who are integrated into operational teams from day one, contributing to live projects and receiving structured mentoring, formal reviews, and industry-recognised certifications. The apprenticeship programme is designed to foster long-term career growth and support OLS's technical innovation and expansion, with 100% apprentice retention and rapid progression into leadership roles. Apprentices have supported major deployments for high-profile clients, contributed to software platform development, and gained multiple industry awards, making OLS a model employer for high-impact, future-focused apprenticeships in the tech sector.



Large Employer of the Year

WINNER

The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust

Presented by Claire Lewis, Editor of The Star

Highly Commended awarded to St Leger Homes of Doncaster Ltd

The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust has been recognised as a leading employer for apprenticeships, earning its nomination as Large Employer of the Year. Apprenticeships are at the heart of the Trust's workforce strategy, addressing national staffing shortages while ensuring high-quality patient care. With over 170 apprentices across 39 pathways—spanning both clinical and non-clinical roles—the Trust offers opportunities from entry-level to degree apprenticeships, supporting career progression and skills development for new recruits and existing staff alike. This inclusive approach has resulted in a 104% increase in apprenticeship starts and impressive completion rates, with many apprentices transitioning into permanent roles. The Trust's commitment extends to the local community, providing accessible pathways for school leavers, career changers, and those returning to work, thereby improving social mobility and supporting Rotherham's economy. The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust's apprenticeship programme is a model of workforce sustainability, talent development, and community investment.



Training Provider / Programme

Sponsored by Sheffield Forgemasters



WINNER

Police Constable

Degree Apprenticeship Programme - Sheffield Hallam University

Presented by Early Careers Manager, Jenna Carr

Sheffield Hallam University has been recognised as a leading training provider through its nomination for the Apprenticeship Programme of the Year Award, reflecting its role as the National Centre of Excellence for Degree Apprenticeships. The university's flagship Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA), delivered in partnership with South Yorkshire Police, exemplifies high-quality, inclusive professional training. The programme blends academic study with operational policing, ensuring apprentices develop the knowledge, skills, and ethical standards needed for modern policing. Key strengths include strong employer collaboration, expert teaching, robust support for apprentices, and a curriculum focused on evidence-based practice and community impact. The PCDA has produced over 290 new officers with a 100% pass rate and has driven increased diversity in recruitment, underlining SHU's commitment to widening participation. With high retention and progression rates, and recognition through national awards, Sheffield Hallam's apprenticeship provision is making a significant impact on individuals, employers, and communities.



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Category at the South Yorkshire
Apprenticeship Awards 2026



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