

## Vision Express celebrates five years of its coveted apprenticeship scheme, as UK marks National Apprenticeship Week 2019

This National Apprenticeship Week (4th-8th March 2019) Vision Express is celebrating the fifth anniversary of its in-demand apprenticeship scheme – with almost 150 apprentices completing the programme so far.



Owen Bairstow, former apprentice and now team leader at Vision Express Worcester

Welcoming a new intake of 19 youngsters on to its coveted apprenticeship scheme in February, the 13-month employer-embedded programme is embarking on a fifth year of success, with over 80 apprentices currently enrolled. The new apprentices, aged between 16 and 25, are all beginning their optical careers in Vision Express stores nationwide – from Kent to Fife, and Llandudno to Scunthorpe.

Since accepting its first recruits in February 2014, Vision Express' nationally-recognised scheme has gone from strength to strength and expanded in October 2018 to offer an advanced Level 3 pathway, in addition to its Level 2 Optical Assistant Apprenticeship and Intermediate Apprenticeship in Optical Retail. Almost 150 trainees have achieved

their qualification and over half remain employed with Vision Express.

Every apprentice successfully completing the scheme has the opportunity to secure a full time, permanent post as an optical assistant within Vision Express, with the option of embarking on further training with the optician. Since its inception, almost 2 in 3 have gone on to complete their internal 'Silver' training programme and 12% have achieved the 'Gold' level training.

One former apprentice is employed as a store manager with Vision Express, and four have been appointed team leaders, including Owen Bairstow, from the Worcester store. Owen explains: "If you have an interest of optics and love working with people, the apprenticeship scheme is an experience you'll never regret. The programme gave me the training, experience and growth to achieve my goals – I'd 100% recommend it!"

“I’m now in my final year of a dispensing optician course provided by Vision Express and once I’ve completed this, I intend to further my career and progress into training at head office or even become a lecturer in the field of optics.”

This year, the 12<sup>th</sup> annual National Apprenticeship Week campaign has a theme of ‘Blazing the Trail’, and will highlight the benefit of apprenticeships to employers, individuals, communities and the economy, with events hosted across the country. Vision Express has invested in a number of activities to take place across the week including in-house career workshops and community-based events, such as local schools.

Human resources director, Kate Glasby, who joined the organisation herself as an apprentice, said: “We’re thrilled to celebrate the five year anniversary of our apprenticeship scheme. At Vision Express, we’re fully committed to further investment into apprenticeships, continuing to ensure the highest quality of the programmes we deliver for those who join us, so we’re delighted to host events this year that can demonstrate to future apprentices, parents and academic institutes the benefits of undertaking an apprenticeship with us.”

Managed and delivered by in-house optical experts, the scheme gives candidates the opportunity to earn while they learn, with assessor support and hands-on experience. In 2017, education regulator Ofsted awarded Vision Express a ‘Good’ rating across all areas of its apprenticeship programme.

Vision Express joined forces in December 2018 with ITN Productions and the Association of Colleges (AoC) for a programme championing the benefits of skills-based learning, which can be found here: <https://itnproductions.wistia.com/medias/x38sl875cc>

Applications are now open for the next intake of apprentices. To qualify candidates must be at least 16 years old and not in full or part time education. Find out more at: [www.visionexpresscareers.com](http://www.visionexpresscareers.com).

## **ENDS**

Notes for editors

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About Vision Express

Vision Express is one of the largest optical retailers in the UK and part of [GrandVision](#), the global leader in optical retail operating in more than 40 countries, spanning over 6,500 stores and online.

With almost 600 stores nationwide, Vision Express first opened its doors in Newcastle in 1988. Built on a passion for the profession, it has gone from strength to strength, driven by a commitment to unparalleled customer service and providing the best individual optical care, the right product and great value. Customers can select from a vast range of genuine designer brands and the latest technology lenses, through to complete glasses from £39.

With around 6,000 employees, Vision Express makes a significant difference to the communities it operates within, and the organisations it chooses to support. As part of its commitment to [Vision Taken Seriously](#), and as a responsible and caring retailer, Vision Express is proud to partner with a range of healthcare charities, which have touched the lives of customers and teams. These companies provide vital support to people affected by vision-related conditions. They are part of the [Vision Express Charity Project](#) and include:

1. Childhood Eye Cancer Trust (CHECT)
2. International Glaucoma Association
3. Macular Society
4. Stroke Association
5. Temple Street University Hospital
6. Brake