

FEB / MARCH 2026

# THE APPRENTICE UPDATE



## OPERATIONS DIRECTOR



I'm delighted to introduce myself as Michael White, the Operations Director here at Semester Learning and Development.

Our mission is to deliver high-quality, flexible training that supports both learners and employers to achieve real, lasting success. As Operations Director, my role is to ensure that our programmes, apprenticeships and support services run smoothly and consistently deliver the best possible experience for everyone we work with.

We are committed to maintaining high standards, continuous improvement, and a learner-focused approach in everything we do. Whether you are just starting your apprenticeship journey or you have been with us for a while, you can expect clear communication, strong support, and a team that genuinely cares about your progress.

I look forward to working with you and supporting your success. If you have any questions or feedback, please do not hesitate to reach out to the apprenticeship team.

I wish you every success in your apprenticeship journey.

Kind regards,  
Michael White  
Operations Director

## KEY DATES

### February

February 2026 Key Dates  
2-8 Feb: Race Equality Week.  
4 Feb: World Cancer Day.  
5 Feb: Time to Talk Day.  
9-15 Feb: National Apprenticeship Week.  
14 Feb: Valentine's Day.  
17 Feb: Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day).  
17 Feb - 18 Mar: Ramadan.  
18 Feb: Ash Wednesday.

### March

March 2026 Key Dates  
1 Mar: St David's Day.  
8 Mar: International Women's Day.  
10-19 Mar: British Science Week.  
17 Mar: St Patrick's Day.  
19 Mar: Mother's Day (Mothering Sunday).  
20 Mar: First day of Spring (Vernal Equinox).  
25 Mar: Earth Hour.  
25 Mar: Holi Festival.



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## A NEW YEAR, A NEW FOCUS

As we step into a new year, it is a great opportunity to pause, reflect, and look ahead with renewed energy and purpose. The start of the year often brings a sense of momentum and a chance to build on what we have achieved and set clear intentions for the months to come.

For apprentices this is an ideal time to think about your goals and priorities. Whether you are beginning a new apprenticeship or progressing through your current programme, planning ahead can make a real difference to long-term success.

We encourage all learners to take a moment to reflect on your own journey. Setting realistic goals, staying organised, and regularly reviewing progress can help turn ambition into achievement. Small, consistent steps taken now can lead to significant results by the end of the year.

As we move forward together, we remain committed to delivering high-quality training, clear communication, and a supportive learning environment for everyone we work with.

Here's to a positive, productive, and successful year ahead — we look forward to supporting you every step of the way.



### Our Mission:

Semester Learning and Development's mission is to increase flexibility in learning and in life. We do this through innovative use of technology whilst using sustainable training methods to help protect the environment. We work closely with employers to upskill their workforce by providing a flexible and bespoke service.

As part of our continued growth, and development of Semester Learning and Development, we are proud to unveil our new logo. This refreshed design represents our values, our ambition, and our ongoing commitment to empowering apprentices to succeed. Although our visual identity has changed, our mission and dedication to quality learning experiences remain at the heart of everything we do.

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## SAFEGUARDING

Semester Learning and Development are here to support and listen!

If you have worries or concerns regarding your safety, or the safety of someone you know, please use the hotline number or email address below:

**01792 278154**

**[safeguarding@semesterlearning.com](mailto:safeguarding@semesterlearning.com)**

Worries and concerns could relate to:

- Working Hours
- Being underpaid
- Working in dangerous conditions
- Living conditions
- Financial worries and difficulties
- Mental Health worries and concerns
- Concerns relating to radicalisation and



**For emergencies relating to your safety or someone you know, please contact 999.**

## Apprentices & Mental Health

Think of mental health like a physical wound.

When you get cut, you clean it, protect it, and let it heal. You don't constantly reopen it. So why are we so hard on our minds?

It is important to TALK before you get to the point where everything becomes too much.

Here at Semester Learning and Development, we want to support you with developing ways to deal with stress, anxiety and improve your overall mental health.

**We are here to listen, support and offer guidance!**

**01792 278154**

**[safeguarding@semesterlearning.com](mailto:safeguarding@semesterlearning.com)**

**Mind**

**Young  
Minds**

**NHS  
Mental  
Health**

**Samaritans  
116 123  
(UK helpline)**

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## Apprentices & Mental Health



Mates in Mind is a leading UK charity raising awareness, improving understanding, implementing effective interventions and addressing the stigma of mental ill-health.

They promote and lead on the development of positive mental health in and through work.

Mates in Mind works across industries, focusing on construction, as well as related sectors including transport, logistics, manufacturing, energy, farming and agriculture, and others.

Mates in Mind aims to provide clear information about the available support and guidance on mental health and wellbeing, and how you can address this within your organisations.

They offer organisations a number of tools and resources to help you improve mental health such as; awareness day resource packs, posters, infographics, factsheets and much more.

- **Supporting Anxiety Guidance**
- **Stress Awareness Guidance**
- **Spotting The Signs Guidance**
- **Let's Talk, Let's Act Guidance**
- **Financial Wellbeing Tips For An Uncertain World**
- **Mental Health Quiz**
- **Neurodiversity**



THURSDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2026

## TIME TO TALK DAY

A day for all communities and workplaces to come together and talk about their wellbeing.



Follow Us  
@matesinmind  
Visit Our Website  
www.matesinmind.org

You're Not Alone



**Samaritans**

You can call the Samaritans for free 24/7 on **116 123**



**Be A Mate**

You can text "BEAMATE" for free 24/7 support at **85258**



**Be a Mate Be the Change**





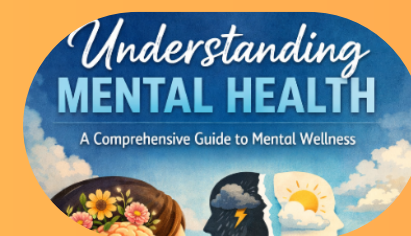
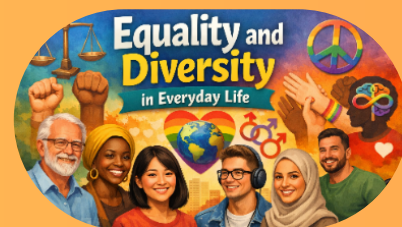
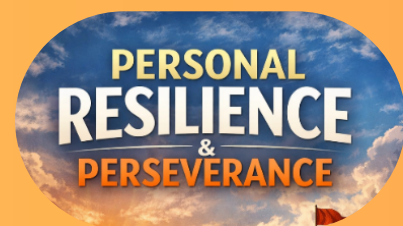
## E-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ONEFILE COURSES

All apprentices have access to additional learning through OneFile, where you can complete a range of online e-learning modules to support your development alongside your apprenticeship. These short, flexible courses are designed to help build your knowledge and skills beyond your main programme and can be completed at your own pace.



Available modules include further learning topics such as Safeguarding, Digital Skills, and Employability Skills. There are modules available relating to Mental Health, Forming Positive Relationships, Equality and Diversity and Personal Resilience and Perseverance. Log in to OneFile to explore what's available and make the most of this extra learning opportunity.

For more support and guidance regarding these courses, please contact your tutor or apprenticeship coordinator.



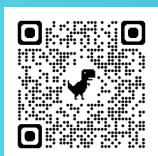
## Let's talk about.... OFF THE JOB HOURS



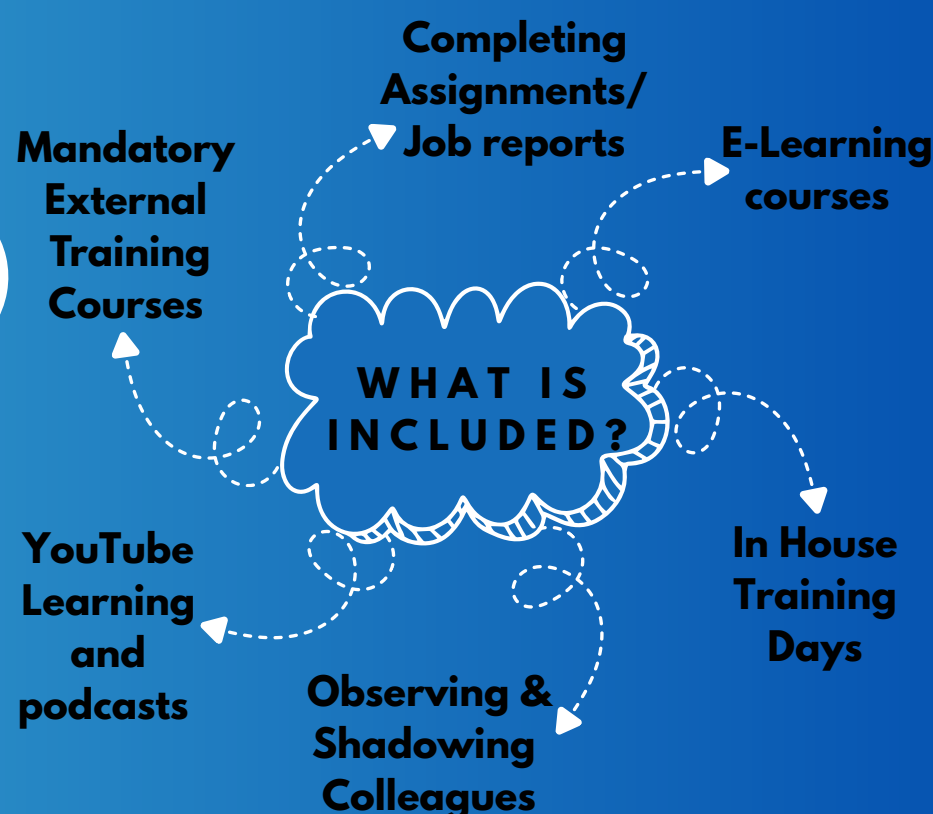
### What is 'off the job' ?

'Off The Job' is any time spent developing knowledge, skills or behaviours linked to your Apprenticeship Standard. It is important that it is within your working hours.

You can download OneFile onto your mobile or tablet:



Are you remembering to record your weekly 'Off the Job' hours in your 'Learning Journal'?



## NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK 9<sup>TH</sup> - 15<sup>TH</sup> FEB 2026

National Apprenticeship Week (NAW) is the biggest celebration of apprenticeships and skills in the calendar and it is back from Monday 9th to Sunday 15th February 2026. Now in its 19th year, NAW highlights how apprenticeships and skills:

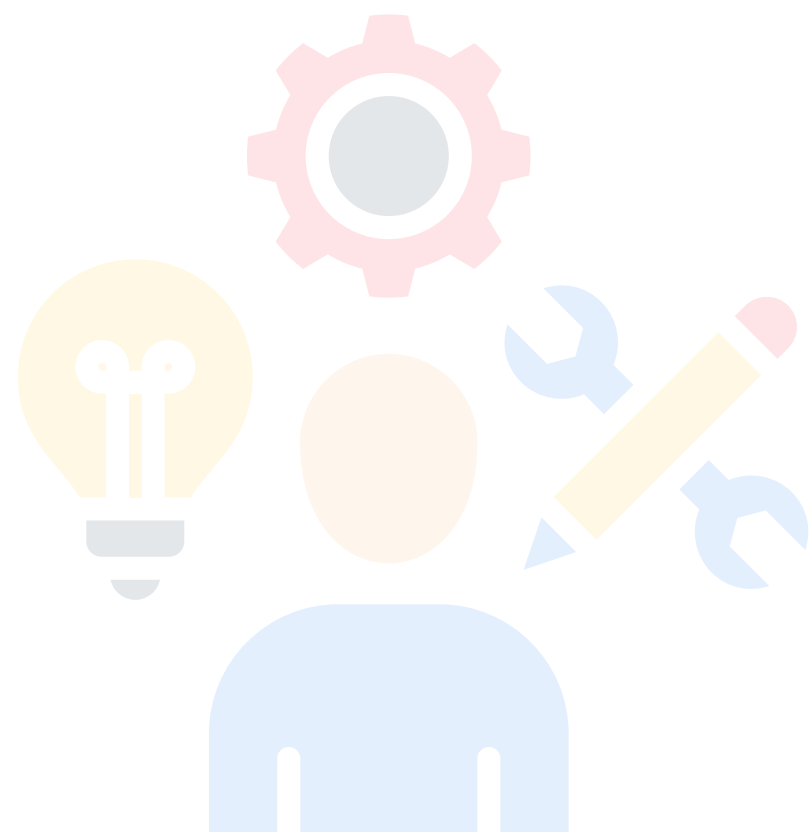
- Open doors to exciting and rewarding careers, especially for young people entering employment for the first time
- Help businesses build future-ready workforces
- Support economic growth by addressing priority skills gaps

Join us for a week-long national celebration honouring the people who make apprenticeships thrive!

From apprentices and employers to training providers, parents, schools, colleges, universities, Assessment Organisations and ambassadors, they are shining a spotlight on the incredible contributions that drive skills, success, and opportunity across the country.



## NAW #2026 WEEKLY THEMES



FEBRUARY 2026		
MON 9	TUES 10	WED 11
SKILLS FOR LIFE	EMPLOYER TUESDAY	APPRENTICE WEDNESDAY
THUR 12	FRI 13	SAT 14 & SUN 15
T LEVEL THURSDAY AND OPPORTUNITY THURSDAY	CELEBRATION FRIDAY	THE NAW WEEKENDER

## GETTING INVOLVED WITH NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK

National Apprenticeship Week is a great opportunity for apprentices to celebrate achievements, share their experiences, and inspire others. Apprentices can get involved by:

**Sharing their story** – Talk about your apprenticeship journey through short testimonials, case studies, or social media posts using official NAW hashtags.

**Taking part in events** – Join employer-led activities, careers talks, open days, or online webinars running during the week.

**Supporting promotion activities** – Help promote apprenticeships by speaking to new starters, school leavers, or colleagues about your experience.

**Celebrating achievements** – Get involved in award nominations, internal celebrations, or team shout-outs recognising apprentice success.

**Engaging online** – Follow National Apprenticeship Week on social media, like and share posts, and join the conversation.

Getting involved is a great way to build confidence, develop communication skills, and showcase the value of apprenticeships.



**Have a look online at the events that will be available around you to see what you can get involved in during National Apprenticeship Week!**



## 8 WEEKLY TOPIC: CULT AWARENESS

When people hear the word cult, they often imagine something extreme or obvious. In reality, many cults do not look strange at all, at least at first. They can appear as clubs, self-improvement groups, spiritual movements, political causes, or even professional networks. Understanding how cults work is an important life skill, especially for apprentices who are building confidence, careers, and social circles.

### What is a Cult?

A cult isn't defined by unusual beliefs alone. The key issue is control.

A group may be considered a cult if it:

- Exercises excessive control over members' thoughts, time, or behaviour
- Discourages or punishes questioning and independent thinking
- Creates an "us vs. them" mindset
- Uses fear, guilt, or shame to keep people loyal
- Is centred around a charismatic leader who is treated as unquestionable



Not all intense or close-knit groups are cults. The danger comes when a group removes your freedom to think, choose, or leave.

### Why Apprentices Can Be Targeted

Apprentices are often at a stage of life where they are:

Looking for belonging and identity

Wanting guidance, purpose, or success

New to workplaces, cities, or adult independence

Cults often target people during transitions like starting a new career, moving away from home, or feeling uncertain about the future. That doesn't mean apprentices are naïve—it means they're human.

### Common Red Flags to Watch For

- Promises guaranteed success, happiness, or enlightenment
- Pressures you to commit quickly or keep secrets
- Suggests your family, friends, or coworkers "don't understand" and should be avoided
- Makes leaving sound dangerous, selfish, or shameful
- Requires unpaid labour, large donations, or total devotion
- Healthy groups welcome questions. Unhealthy ones shut them down.



## How Cults Keep People In

Cults rarely trap people overnight. They often use:

- **Love-bombing:** intense praise, attention, and acceptance early on
- **Gradual escalation:** small commitments that slowly become big ones
- **Isolation:** reducing outside influences
- **Fear tactics:** warning of failure, loss, or harm if you leave
- These techniques are subtle, which is why shows like *Runaway* can be useful learning tools when viewed critically.

### NEW NETFLIX SERIES ALERT:

## RUNAWAY



is a Netflix thriller based on Harlan Coben's novel, featuring a sinister cult called "The Shining Truth" or "Shining Haven". The plot involves leader Casper Vartage, who sends followers to kill his estranged, adopted children to protect his fortune and legacy. The series is a fast-paced, 8-episode, UK-based mystery.

You may be watching the new Netflix series *Runaway*. While it is presented as entertainment, it highlights patterns that appear again and again in real-world cults.

Without giving spoilers, the series shows how:

- People are drawn in through connection, support, and promises of something better
- Control builds gradually, not all at once
- Questioning authority is discouraged or reframed as weakness
- Leaving feels difficult because of fear, loyalty, or loss of identity

What makes *Runaway* so relevant is that the people involved don't start out looking for a cult. They're looking for belonging, meaning, or a fresh start and exactly the same reasons many people join harmful groups in real life.



# Let's explore real world experiences of Cults

**Paul Mackenzie encouraged his followers to move to Shakahola forest and prepare for the end of the world to "meet Jesus"**

**B B C****NEWS**

26 January 2026

**The leader of a Kenyan cult accused of encouraging his followers to starve themselves to death will be charged over a further 52 deaths at another village, prosecutors say.**

Self-proclaimed pastor Paul Mackenzie was arrested in 2023 after 429 bodies, including children, were dug up from mass graves in the remote Shakahola forest.

He has been in custody since his arrest and has been accused of luring the latest victims to their deaths by writing notes from his prison cell.

Mackenzie has pleaded not guilty to multiple counts of manslaughter.

Last year, around 34 bodies and more than 100 body parts were discovered by investigators in Binzaro, around 30 km (20 miles) from Shakahola along the Indian Ocean coast. This is what has led to the latest charges.

They come two weeks after one of Mackenzie's co-accused and the former head of security at Shakahola, Enos Amanyangala, pleaded guilty to charges related to the deaths of 191 children found in the original mass graves.

Survivors say children were supposed to be the first to starve themselves, according to a macabre order drawn up by Mackenzie. Then the unmarried, women, men, and last of all, church leaders.

**Kenyan cult leader faces charges over 52 further deaths**



## Final Thoughts

Cults thrive on silence and misunderstanding. Awareness is the best protection. Watching shows like *Runaway* can start important conversations but real safety comes from knowing the signs and trusting your right to think independently.

As an apprentice, your time, energy, and future are valuable. Any group worthy of them will respect your independence, not try to take it away.

## 8 WEEKLY TASK

As part of our commitment to keeping everyone safe, informed, and supported, all apprentices are required to complete the Safeguarding E-Learning Course.

This short online course helps you:

- Understand what safeguarding means in everyday life and work
- Recognise situations where you or others may be at risk
- Learn how to stay safe, set boundaries, and seek help
- Know who to talk to and what to do if something doesn't feel right

You will be able to access this course on your OneFile account within the 'Courses' tab.

Upon completion, please log in your learning journal and make a note about what you have learnt during this course and we can explore this within your progress reviews.

