

Virgin Atlantic Uses Apprenticeships to Complement its People-Centric Approach



This year Virgin Atlantic has **doubled the total number of apprentices** it has enrolled on Cambridge Spark programmes over the last three years combined. It will secure data & AI skills in abundance across the organisation and uphold the spirit of the Virgin brand: innovation, passion, positivity.

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Client Profile

Virgin Atlantic was founded by entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson in 1984, with innovation and amazing customer service at its core. In 2024, Virgin Atlantic was voted Britain's only Global Five Star Airline by APEX for the eighth year running in the Official Airline Ratings. It employs 8,500 people worldwide, flying customers to 30 destinations across four continents throughout the year.

The most loved travel company and an employer of choice

When you're a Virgin brand, people expect more from you. The organisation believes the '*starting point must be to **demand more from ourselves**, so we can become better, every day.*' By embracing a growth mindset, Virgin Atlantic continues to develop vital future skills and connect its people with the true spirit of the Virgin brand: **innovation, passion, positivity.**

To support its competitive position, the organisation offers its people a range of **apprenticeship programmes to align skills development to the overall business strategy.** This ensures the right learning intervention gets to the right people and drives the organisation's overall ambition.

Data literate professionals in all areas and at all levels

Virgin Atlantic is using apprenticeships to complement its people-centric approach to business. The apprenticeship team champions professional development to **support career progression for every employee.** And encourages internal mobility to **secure a pipeline of talent.**

Cambridge Spark provides **tripartite support** with **expert lecturers** who impart new knowledge, technical mentors who make learning more manageable with clear guidance on portfolio work, assessments, and technical concepts. And **trained coaches** who provide reassurance, practical advice and constructive feedback.

Learners value the structured approach so much, they have given **Cambridge Spark an NPS score of 75.**

"The idea of lifelong learning, being curious and growing is the foundation of everything we do at Virgin Atlantic, because it helps us make the best decision we can. And from our own research, we discovered apprentices are **2x more likely to move jobs internally or get a promotion because of the intensity and relevance of learning.**"

Abbie Simmonds, Head of Learning
Virgin Atlantic



"Cambridge Spark really 'get' what we do. They got to know our culture, how we work in different areas, and took a real interest in what we do to make learning meaningful. Also, they got to know our people and offered coaching and technical support, which the apprentices report helped them complete training and activate learning in their role."

Suzi George, Manager of Apprenticeships and Skills
Virgin Atlantic

Demanding more to become better, every day

Apprenticeship programmes have **empowered** people with the skills to identify and implement different use cases for new technologies, so they can work with autonomy and are less reliant on leaders to dictate outcomes.

Graduates on Cambridge Spark apprenticeship programmes also **achieved 83% merit and distinction grades** – well above the industry average of 33%. Learners attribute this to engaging content that is well-paced and relevant to their work. And includes interactive elements, such as live coding sessions, breakout room activities and real-world applications of data concepts.

Before enrolling on an apprenticeship, Cambridge Spark uses a strong application process to ensure the right learners are placed on the right programme. Additionally, Virgin Atlantic meets with each learner to ensure they know what to expect from their programme, feel prepared, and are motivated to see their study through to completion, so they can reap the benefits – **41% of apprentices receive a promotion or move roles within the business, during or within a year of completing their programme.**



“Now Virgin Atlantic has a portfolio of 45 programmes at 3 levels, across 4 areas: data & tech, management & leadership, people programmes, and specialisms. At any one time there are 120 apprentices. And about 100 of those apprentices are upskilling or retraining – so we’re offering degree-level programmes to all employees, not just those fresh out of university”

Abbie Simmonds, Head of Learning
Virgin Atlantic



Apprenticeships are core to business success

Virgin Atlantic’s apprenticeship programme has gone from strength to strength. After an initial cohort of 4 learners in year one, this year the apprenticeship team will **double the number of learners** from the last three years combined onto Cambridge Spark programmes.

Furthermore, it intends to formalise the structure of its apprenticeships to create a specialist Data & AI Academy. This would include the addition of more programmes, including the AI Champion Apprenticeship (L3). This programme is **tool agnostic and helps develop broader AI capabilities**, including implementation strategies, stakeholder management, feedback gathering techniques, and end user support. This apprenticeship is intended to support the organisation’s internal AI Champion Network, who are tasked with the successful roll out of Microsoft Copilot.