

Future of Excellence in Education Award Winner 2026



ercol

Established over 100 years ago in 1920 by Italian designer Lucian R Ercolani, ercol remains family-owned to this day.

Why is education and training important to your business?

ercol has a long history of apprenticeships with all the factory management being apprentice trained.

We started our drive on modern apprenticeships in 2017. This started with two apprentices in the first two years.

Following a break in recruitment and recovering from the Covid pandemic we started again in 2021 with a higher target figure.

We became more proactive in our approach, with outreach work creating partnerships with schools and training providers.

This approach has proved to be successful, resulting in greater numbers of applicants, culminating in 60 applicants last year for five positions.

What are the training initiatives you have introduced?

ercol offers apprenticeships at Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and starting in 2026, Level 6 in machining, assembly, finishing, maintenance, design & marketing and, in 2026, production control.

We use Wadkins Dalton and Didac to update our training programmes.



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How do you attract talent?

Our recruitment plan begins in earnest with our Apprentice Open Evening in early February, supporting the National Apprenticeship Week. This is followed with a careers fair at a prominent Oxfordshire school and the Bucks Skills Show in early March.

During the rest of March, we invite applicants to visit the factory to see the roles first hand if they have not done so already. In April we interview. As we had 60 applicants for five positions in 2025, we extended the number of positions to eight.

Training providers for our apprenticeship programmes include:

Activate Learning including Rycotewood: 18 apprentices, 5 current, 15 complete, 11 remaining in business, Level 3



Engineering Trust Training (ETT): 15 apprentices, 13 current, 2 complete, 1 remaining in business, Levels 2, 3 & 4



LDN Apprenticeships: 1 apprentice complete and remaining in business, Level 3



We also work with several schools in our catchment area to support their careers programmes and for recruitment opportunities.

To support these partnerships we attend:

- *careers fairs*
- *interview day*
- *school assemblies*
- *classroom lessons*
- *factory visits and tours*
- *design and building projects*
- *mentoring, seminars and offer a four-day work experience programme*

Within the Bucks Skills Show ercol is part of the Furniture Hub alongside William Hands, The Furniture Makers, ETT and are being joined this year by WFF and Morley College.

We contribute to case studies for the DfE as well as articles and videos promoting the industry and our apprenticeship programme.

We hold the position of chair in the machining and upholstery trailblazer groups and are participating in the Local Skills Improvement Programme with BBF.

We feel it is important to have a voice in structuring future training to continue to support the industry.

How do you provide a rewarding working and learning environment?

The technical team provide mentoring for apprentices during their ercol college day, as well as allowing them one day per week to come into the technical office to complete their logbooks and training questions.

Here we can provide them with help or provide the correct source of information.

They also mix with apprentices at different stages of their apprenticeship and benefit from the peer-to-peer interaction sharing information and experiences.

The apprentices have regular meetings with the training provider for review, feedback and action planning, with the technical team.

The factory management actively support their training while working on production to ensure they have opportunities to complete the apprenticeship standard.