



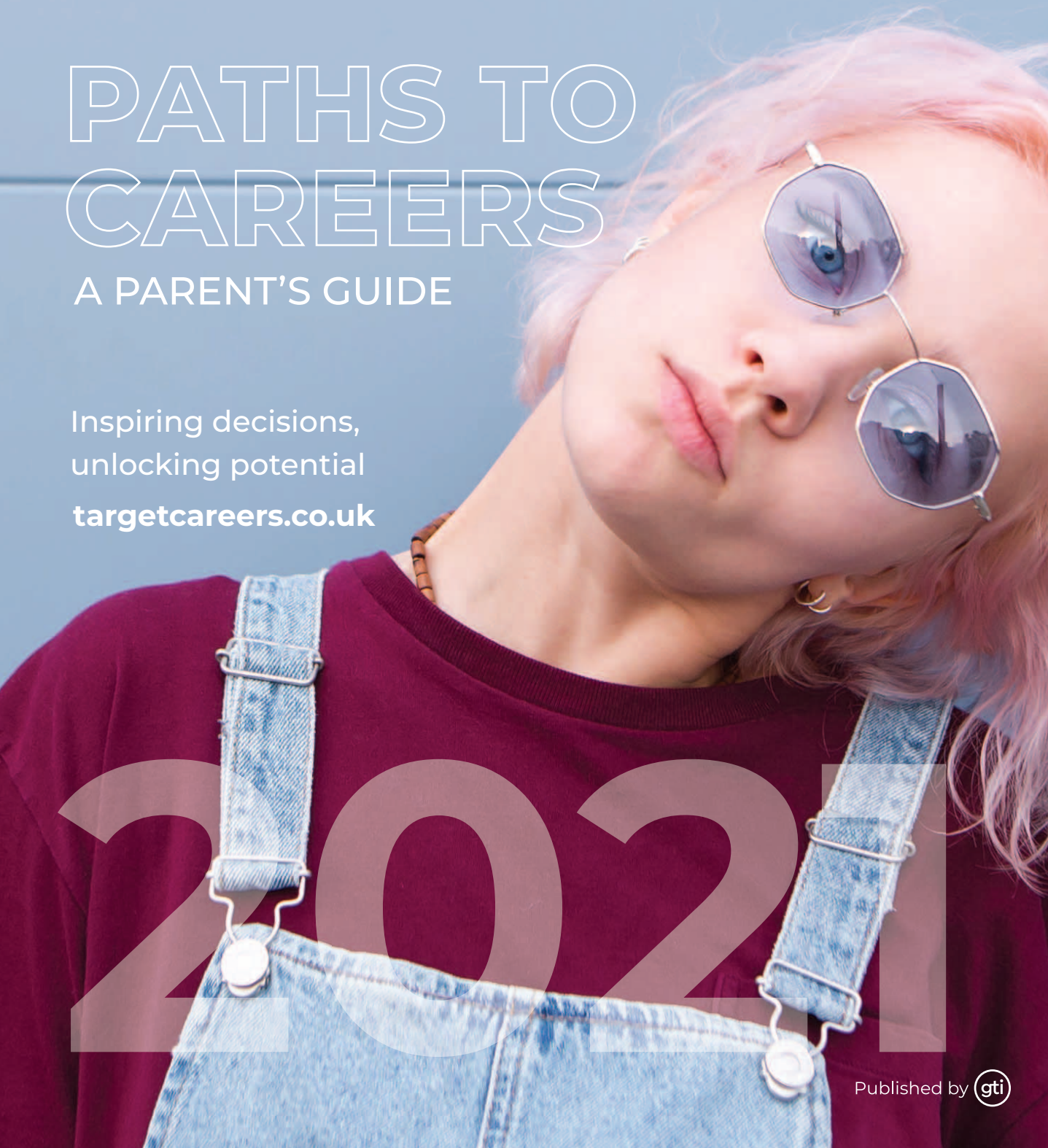
Developed with
Mumsnet feedback

PATHS TO CAREERS

A PARENT'S GUIDE

Inspiring decisions,
unlocking potential

targetcareers.co.uk



2021

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At PwC, we're a community powered by our people who work together to achieve extraordinary things despite the unimaginable challenges that we've all had to face during the last year. Our advances in technology enabled us to respond when we needed to and continue to solve important problems for our clients and the communities in which we live and work.

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Welcome

Welcome to the 2021 *TARGETcareers Paths to Careers – a Parent's Guide*. This year's edition has been developed with Mumsnet feedback. Throughout you'll see references to and quotes from the 'Mumsnet survey*', which was an online survey carried out amongst Mumsnet parents with at least one child between 16 and 22.

A *Parent's Guide* is for parents or anyone in loco parentis to a young person thinking about their next steps; the Mumsnet survey revealed that half of young people start thinking seriously about their future careers when they're 14–15. It also revealed that when it comes to choosing what to do, a child's personal interest and their confidence in succeeding in their post-18 choice are the main influencing factors. We're here to help you boost your child's confidence, by providing them with a clear, unbiased introduction to their options.

The articles in the 'Discovering options' section are all about initial conversations with your child, ensuring they understand all the opportunities available to them: university, sponsored degrees, higher apprenticeships and school leaver programmes. 'Researching and applying' comes next, providing advice about digging deeper into specific programmes – school leaver or university – to find the one that best suits your child. It also covers the important topic of mental wellbeing, offering some key sources of help. Our 'Sector spotlights' section looks at the areas of study and work parents indicated both they and their children were particularly interested in. Finally, our 'Rising Stars' section focuses on seven individuals (a mix of graduates, degree apprentices and apprentices) who have already made an impressive mark in the workplace.

Happy reading!

Jacky, editor

**Overall, between 16–28 September, Mumsnet collected 727 responses amongst parents with a child aged 16–22, with 481 parents having a child aged 16–18.*

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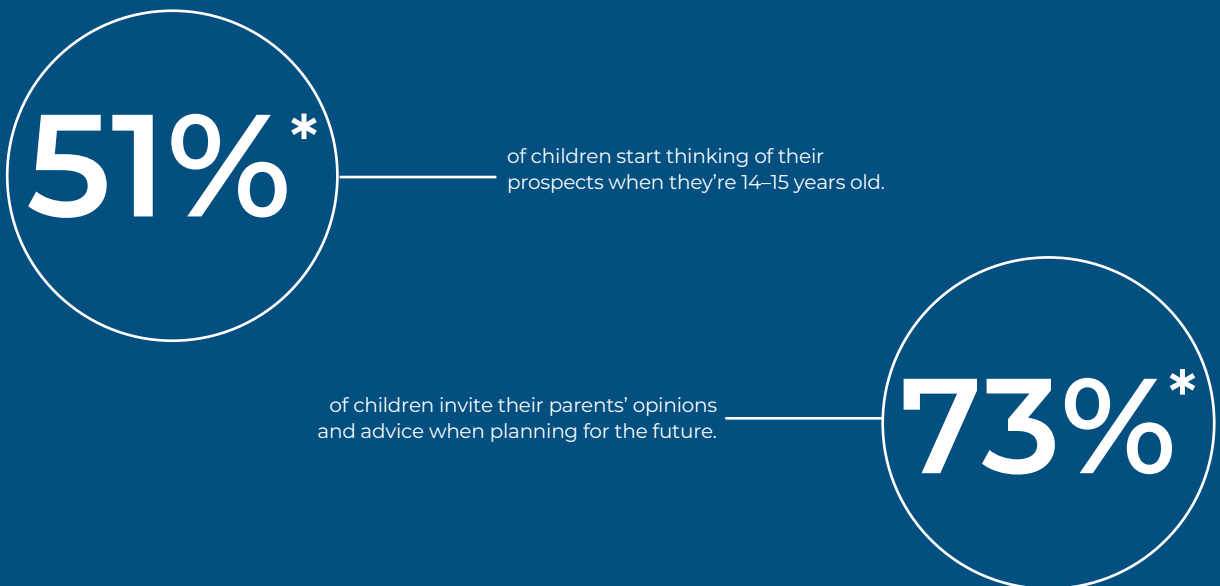
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Your child's career journey... and your involvement

We asked Mumsnet users about their children's further education or career aspirations, where they as parents play a part on their journey and the effect of Covid-19 on their plans.



“My child has to make their own decisions about their life choices. I am there to listen and offer advice if required but not to choose for them.”

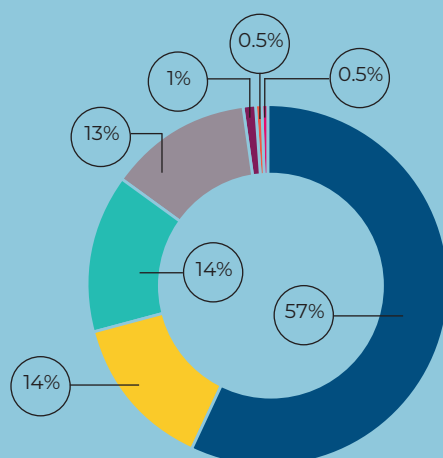
Mumsnet user

“We agree that it's a process and at 16 you can't have all the answers, and also that it's not something you only get one shot at.”

Mumsnet user

The parent effect

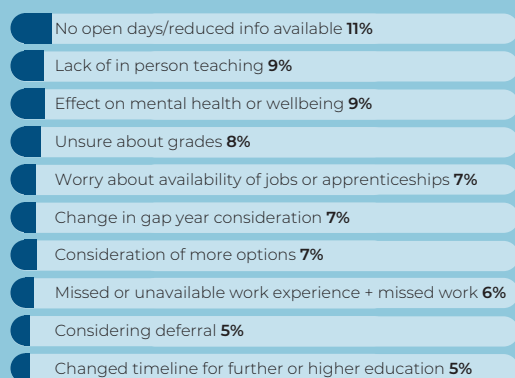
Only 14%* of parents surveyed had minimal or no involvement in their children's plans, which demonstrates the key role parents play in decision making.



- I have/had some involvement but they took most of the decisions about what is next 57%
- I have/had some involvement but only to help with financial planning or logistics 14%
- I have/had major involvement in shaping up their plans but the final decision was theirs 14%
- I have/had minimal involvement and their plans are entirely up to them 13%
- Their plans are/were entirely a result of my decision and advice 1%
- I have/had no involvement whatsoever but was aware of their plans 0.5%
- I am/was not involved in their plans and they haven't talked to me about them 0.5%

The Covid effect

41%* of parents surveyed believe the coronavirus pandemic has had an effect on their child's post-18 plans.



*Mumsnet survey

It has made him consider a range of options rather than focusing on a single path as he's spoken about the unpredictable job market/economy requiring the need for flexibility.

Mumsnet user

[We've been] unable to view colleges to decide between the two that offer the course.

Mumsnet user

Your child's career: the first steps

Understanding what their options are will help ensure your child is informed enough to take their first career steps.

Some people have their mind set on a career from an early age. But what if your child, like the majority, isn't sure? You might find it helpful to work through the following pointers with them.

What motivates them?

It's important for your child to be motivated by their career choice, both in terms of working hard to get the grades they need and progressing their career when it comes to starting work. Encourage them to think about what's important to them in life. Money? Helping people? Being creative? This may help to guide their research into careers.

Their interests can be another useful starting point. If your child is a Formula 1 fan, would they enjoy designing cars as an automotive engineer? If their weekends are spent shopping, how about a career managing a store – or even a whole chain? Also consider with your child which subjects they are good at (and enjoy) and what other skills they have. Perhaps they are good at speaking in front of large groups of people or working out and sticking to a budget. Keep these skills in mind when reading about different jobs.

Learn what's required for their choice

Many careers are open to young people regardless of the subjects they've studied for their A levels, Scottish Highers or undergraduate degree. This is often (but not always) the case in areas such as business, finance, law and the media. However, some careers do require a particular degree or vocational training path and often specific subject choices for A levels/Scottish Highers, too. This tends to be the case in areas such as science, medicine and engineering. So it's a good idea for your child to start thinking about careers now, in order to make subject choices that leave open doors to



Suggest that your child should take a quick look at as many career areas as possible.



“We agree that uni is no longer the immediate, unquestioned best path.”

Mumsnet user

“If we disagree at all it is that I recognise there are other routes to similar careers that could also make him happy.”

Mumsnet user

careers that might appeal. Encourage them to work through the careers that do require particular subjects and decide whether they are happy to rule them out or they would prefer to keep these options open.

Look beyond the stereotypes

Suggest that your child should take a quick look at as many career areas as possible, rather than instantly ruling any out based on stereotypes or assumptions. Plenty of engineers wear suits and go to business meetings – and engineering employers are very keen to hire more women. Many IT professionals spend more time talking to clients about their needs than they do writing code. Lots of lawyers have jobs that don't require them to defend people accused of unpleasant crimes.

Be wary of 'safe' choices

Take care if your child is considering an option because they think it is a 'safe choice' or a 'good job', rather than out of intrinsic interest. IT and law, for example, have a 'solid' image but it may be harder than you think for your child to get their first job and not all roles will offer a high salary. Trading in an academic or vocational path your child will enjoy for assumptions about a 'guaranteed good job' may lead to disappointment.

Take a closer look

Got a shortlist? Find out more with online research. Read information about different career sectors and look at the websites of some employers in these sectors. Then try networking. You and your child can ask your family and friends if they have any good contacts, attend university open days and school leaver job fairs, and look for employers who are willing to offer work experience. ©



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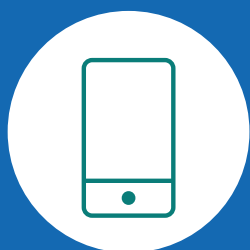
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ibm.com/training

Your child's school leaver options

– an overview

An introduction to the work-based opportunities available to your child.

There are many alternatives to going to university. Apprenticeships, school leaver programmes and sponsored degrees usually involve working for an employer and studying for relevant qualifications, although exactly how your child's time is split between the two will depend on the scheme and the employer. Bear in mind that different organisations refer to their opportunities in slightly different ways, so it's important to look beyond the name of the opportunity and find out exactly what the employer is offering, such as in terms of qualifications and pay. You can find out more about what to research with your child on page 23.

Apprenticeship levels: an introduction

Apprenticeships have equivalent educational levels:

- Intermediate (level 2) apprenticeships are equivalent to GCSEs.
- Advanced (level 3) are equal to A levels.
- Higher (levels 4,5,6 and 7) lead to a qualification that is equivalent to a foundation degree or above.
- Degree (levels 6 and 7) result in a bachelors or masters degree.

These levels are set by the government. An opportunity must meet specific criteria to be able to call itself an apprenticeship. Higher and degree apprenticeships are typically open to applicants with A levels or equivalent qualifications.

It's important to check that your child will gain the qualifications and training they hope to.

“Although I received university offers, I really wanted to learn by doing and have a variety of experiences; the degree apprenticeship appealed.”

Mia Bromige, senior product design engineer, Thales. Read Mia's profile on page 55.

69%

of parents are happy with their child's post-18 plans to do an apprenticeship.*

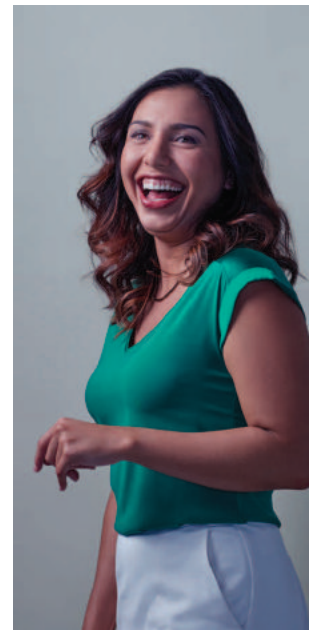
**Mumsnet survey*

An apprentice will typically attend college or university either one day a week (day release) or for a week or more at a time (block release). The cost of an apprenticeship (and any tuition fees) will be covered by the employer and the government. Scheme lengths vary; the higher the qualification involved, the longer the scheme will be. Higher and degree apprenticeships typically last between three and five years. Employers don't tend to guarantee that there will be a job at the end of an apprenticeship but in practice they are typically keen to keep employees on. Some employers – particularly accountancy firms – refer to 'school leaver programmes'. These are generally similar to higher and degree apprenticeships. However, the term 'apprenticeship' necessitates a level and period (minimum of 12 months) of training that isn't required if the term 'school leaver programme' is used. So, it's important to check that your child will gain the qualifications and training they hope to.

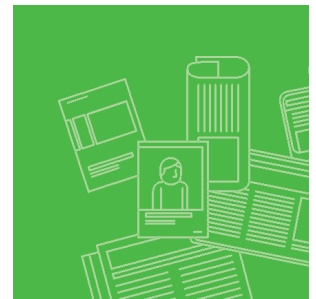
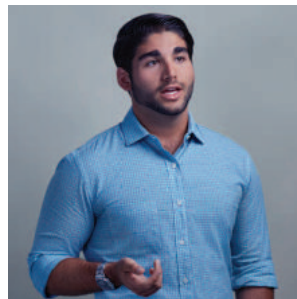
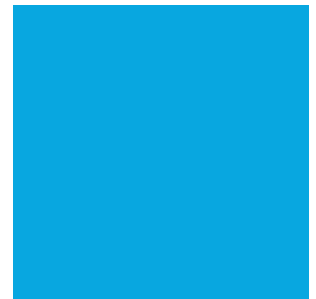
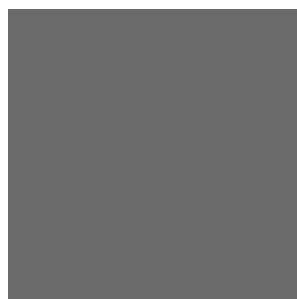
Sponsored degrees: an introduction

There are two types of sponsored degrees. The first (known as a degree apprenticeship) operates in a similar way to higher apprenticeships: your child will work for their employer, earn a wage, study for a degree part time (either by attending a local university or through distance learning) and have their tuition fees paid for them. Their degree is typically chosen by the employer – and it may even be involved in designing the content of the course.

The second type is where an employer offers partial financial support to students who are attending university full time in the traditional way and are studying a subject that relates to the employer's business. Typically, the student will complete paid work with the employer during university vacations. They may also be required to work for the employer for a minimum period after graduation. ©



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The traditional uni experience or earning while learning?

How do going to university and doing an apprenticeship compare? Here are the main factors to consider.

Once you and your child have got a sense of what to expect from the different experiences on offer, your child will be able to make the best choice for them. Bear in mind that due to the coronavirus pandemic, the majority of young people both at university and doing apprenticeships currently are not having 'typical' experiences.

Leaving home and living independently

If your child decides to go to university in the traditional sense, they are likely to share a house or flat with other students and be responsible for buying and cooking their own food, washing clothes and paying bills. This introduces them to living independently, while allowing them to share the experience with others in the same position. Of course, moving away is not essential if your child attends a university close to home.

An apprenticeship might be too far away for your child to commute to, requiring them to leave home. Or they may choose to live independently, as they will probably be earning enough to pay rent. They might be able to share accommodation with other apprentices, but there's no guarantee that they will be living with people their own age.

Academic freedom or real-world results?

Most degrees give your child some freedom to choose which topics they study. Many courses also include a project or dissertation, allowing them to focus on the aspects that they are most passionate about. If your child's apprenticeship includes a degree, the topics they study will typically be chosen by their employer and relate to their working life.

At university, the main outcome of a piece of work will be a grade. Vocational courses, which may include laboratory sessions or work placements, provide more opportunities for students to apply what they've learned to real-world situations, but even these aim to develop a student's understanding from an academic or theoretical, rather than practical, perspective. On an apprenticeship, your child's day-to-day work will have a clear purpose and help their employer work towards its business goals. They may see their work have an impact on clients and possibly even on profits. »





More advice

- Go to **targetjobs.co.uk** to learn about graduate career sectors and entry requirements.
- Go to **targetcareers.co.uk** for more information on whether university or work would suit your child best.

Flexibility or structure?

Universities typically expect students to spend around 35 to 45 hours a week studying. Science subjects tend to have around 20 contact hours a week and arts subjects even fewer. It's up to your child how much time they commit to private study, as there is less direct supervision than at school. Would your child be motivated to put in the hours by themselves?

Apprenticeships tend to have more of a nine-to-five structure. Your child may benefit from this, as their time is usually all theirs once each shift is finished and it offers a clear distinction between work, study and other areas of their life. If the programme involves working towards a degree or professional qualification, they will attend sessions at college or university during work hours but may also need to study at home in their own time – especially as the exam period approaches.

Opportunities to socialise

As a full-time student your child would mix largely with people of their own age. There would be opportunities to socialise with people they live with, people on the same course and those they meet through extracurricular activities. At busy times of the year your child will need to prioritise studying over these activities, of course.

On an apprenticeship your child would have colleagues of all ages. It's likely that there will also be the chance to meet others of the same age, though – both at work and while studying for qualifications. Finding out how many apprentices the employer takes on each year could give you an indication of how many young people they may have to socialise with.

Work experience and keeping options open

Going to university in the traditional way allows your child to explore a wide variety of career options before making a decision. Students can get work experience during vacations, fit part-time jobs or volunteering around their studies, try career-related activities on campus and make use of the careers service. Some courses incorporate a year in industry, while others include work placements that students attend on certain days each week. A lot of graduate jobs don't require students to have studied a particular subject, so your child won't be limited to one career after graduating. However, some jobs do require a specific degree – make sure your child does their research!

Apprenticeships provide excellent work experience in their particular fields. Many will train your child for a specific job, but some will give them the chance to experience different areas of the business. If your child doesn't know what career they want, or has several different ideas, then an apprenticeship is probably not for them. If the programme includes a degree, then this will be transferable to other careers – however, your child may be asked to explain why they chose to train in one career and apply for jobs in another. Check whether your child is expected to work for the company for a set period of time after finishing the programme and whether this is something they are enthusiastic about. ☺

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Rachel Grant

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING APPRENTICE,
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Thinking about finances

If your child chooses an apprenticeship they will avoid student debt, but will they earn as much as a graduate overall?

There's no 'one size fits all' answer to the question of whether school leavers will be better off financially if they go to university full time or join an employer at 18 on a higher apprenticeship. It depends on the career they want to get into and the particular courses or programmes they are considering.

Earnings v. debt

If your child goes to university, they are likely to leave with student debt, which will then accrue interest. Student Finance, which is linked to the government, offers two types of student loan: one for tuition fees, which is paid directly to the university, and a maintenance loan to help cover living costs. The total amount your child repays will depend on how quickly they pay it off and whether they have paid back all their debt 30 years after they graduate (at which point any remaining debt is written off). Repayment will be deducted from your child's monthly wage once they're earning over a certain amount: currently when their income is over £511 a week or £2,214 a month or more in England and Wales, and £372 a week or £1,615 a month or more in Scotland and Northern Ireland (note the threshold amount changes each year on 6 April). They will not need to pay anything while they're earning less than this. The more your child earns during their working life, the more they'll pay back – so the amount they pay for their degree will be more or less in line with the financial benefit they gain from it. Find more information at www.gov.uk/student-finance.



Finances: the basics

Whatever route your child chooses, encourage them to think about their outgoings v. their income (whether that's a salary, loan or savings). Start with the basic essentials, such as:

- rent/accommodation fees
- groceries (food and drink, toiletries, cleaning products etc)
- any bills (eg gas and electricity, TV, mobile phone)
- transportation costs

And then get them to consider other non-essential but definitely nice-to-be-able-to-afford costs, such as:

- nights out (meals, concerts, taxis, alcohol)
- clothes
- gym membership
- clothing
- travel/holidays.

Thinking long term

Will your child be better or worse off financially if they start full-time work sooner, instead of going to university? If they manage to get a place on an apprenticeship that gets them to the same earning level as graduates in the same length of time – and that's as good for their career in the long term – then they will be better off not going to university. This is often the case with employers who offer the chance to do a degree part time while working. However, not all apprenticeships are designed to put apprentices on a par with graduates. In these cases your child might find that in the long term they will earn less than those with a degree. Make sure your child's research includes finding out about the qualifications they need to progress in the long term. For example, in engineering, if they eventually want to become a chartered engineer (the highest level of qualification), it's easiest if they have a masters degree (see page 40 for more on getting into engineering). Also check whether any professional qualifications offered to school leavers are the same as those taken by the organisation's graduate recruits.

Ignoring 'average' salaries

It's wise not to get too fixated on statistics relating to average salaries for all graduates or school leavers. Media reports about how much graduates earn often don't give the full story about their figures. Also, salaries vary so much, particularly for graduates, that averages aren't much help in predicting what your child personally might earn. Remember, too, that school leavers start working at a younger age and may have had several pay rises by the time graduates of the same age join the company. @



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At sixth form college ... university was heavily encouraged as the next step ... however, I didn't think it was the right track for me ... I began looking at apprenticeships that offered CIMA study. My friends are impressed with ... the experience and qualifications I have gained in just two years.

Rosie Shepherd, A-Levels
Finance Apprentice, Fujitsu Services Ltd.

When I was younger, I thought if you did an accounting degree, you were a qualified accountant ... [but] it's the professional qualification that accredits you as an accountant. Apprenticeship schemes ... sounded like a win-win to me ... You're getting experience, getting paid and no debt. When I learned about management accounting ... it sounded exciting. CIMA is the right qualification for me. What I'm learning, I'm seeing it happen at work.



Haider Ali, A-Levels, AAT
Management Apprentice, Rolls-Royce

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All about work experience

How your child can boost their CV and find out what different careers involve before committing to a role.

Work experience will help your child learn about the different careers that interest them and what they do and don't enjoy. It will also help them to:

- develop the skills that employers and universities value, such as communication, teamwork and time management
- experience what working life is like
- increase their confidence, independence and professionalism
- enhance their employability and boost their CV, university personal statement and job applications
- meet people who could help them in their future career – and perhaps find a potential future employer.

At the time of going to press, the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in many work experiences opportunities being run virtually or, unfortunately, being temporarily suspended. We hope things will open up again soon. »



Formal work experience opportunities

These are opportunities usually organised by schools, colleges and employers.

Work experience placements

Often lasting up to a week at a company, these may be arranged by your child's school or college, or independently. Many large employers advertise opportunities on their websites. Your child (perhaps under your supervision) could also approach smaller, local businesses over the phone or by email to say they'd be interested in work experience, check if this is possible and ask about the preferred way of applying. You should follow your child's school/college's

safeguarding guidelines – they will also have a list of approved employers.

Work shadowing

Your child will observe one person to gain insight into their job, usually just for a day. These opportunities aren't advertised, so professionals will need to be approached directly. If any of your family members, friends or neighbours work in an area your child is interested in, you could ask if they'd be willing to help.

Employers' insight days or weeks for school leavers

Some employers offer students the chance to spend a day or more

seeing for themselves what working for them would be like. Your child may also get some handy tips on how to apply for an employer's apprenticeship programme. You can find these detailed on employers' careers websites.

School leaver careers fairs and employer events

Careers fairs allow students to meet lots of employers in one go and ask questions.

An event run by one employer will give your child a deeper insight into that organisation, for example via an open evening.

Other work experience

Beyond formal work experience opportunities, there are plenty of ways that your child can develop useful skills and get a feel for what they enjoy. They may even be taking part in some of these activities already.

Volunteering and fundraising

Your child could volunteer at a charity shop, help with outdoor conservation projects, become a volunteer police cadet or take part in the National Citizen Service. Find out more about opportunities for young people at iwill.org.uk and vinspired.com.

Extracurricular activities

These include activities such as: being part of a sports team or other club; taking part in a theatre production; writing for a student newspaper; joining the school debating society; being a Scout or Guide; and completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Competitions

Encourage your child to research whether there are competitions in areas that interest them, for example in design, creative writing, photography, maths or engineering.

Part-time jobs

Your child could try their hand at babysitting or a paper round, get a part-time job in a supermarket or café at the weekend or look for a temporary job in the holidays. Attractions such as zoos and garden centres often hire more staff for the summer.

Personal projects

If your child designs and makes something themselves, such as through a DIY project, website or blog, they may well develop the problem-solving and creative skills that employers look for. Another option is learning a language independently.

Positions of responsibility

These could include being a head boy or head girl, sports captain, house captain, school council member or a peer mentor. They could also include having a leadership or committee role in a club.

Summer school

Several universities run these, usually for up to a week. They can help your child build their knowledge of a subject and decide whether they'd enjoy studying it full-time – and whether they'd enjoy university life.

Summer schools are quite common for science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. You can find out more on universities' websites and via The Sutton Trust at suttontrust.com. ©

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Researching employers' programmes

What to consider when selecting a school leaver programme.

If your child is thinking of joining an employer to 'earn and learn', it's a good idea for both of you to research the opportunities they are considering. Before getting started, make sure your child knows what career they want so they can assess whether the programmes available are appropriate routes.

Where to research

Using a range of sources will give you the best chance of gaining answers to all your questions and thereby help your child to make well-informed decisions. Below are some options to consider.

- Take a look at employers' websites for the basic details of programmes.
- Ask friends or family members if they have any contacts working at a potential employer.
- Visit careers fairs or open days attended/held by employers your child is interested in (see the box on the next page).

What to research: qualifications

Find out what qualifications your child would gain. Use **targetcareers.co.uk** and **gov.uk** to assess whether these would get your child into the right career at the right level. Remember 'school leaver programme' is not an official government definition so find out exactly what qualifications are offered by the employer your child is interested in. Some employers offer school leavers the chance to study for the same professional qualifications as their graduate recruits, such as the ACA qualification from ICAEW. Professional qualifications certify that you have the training and skills needed to do your job to a high standard; in some industries such as accounting they are essential to progress your career. Check the detail of what is on offer carefully. »



Careers fairs

There are lots of careers fairs held around the country. The following will help you get started:

- nasvfairs.com (National Apprenticeship Show)
- worldskillsuk.org (WorldSkills UK)
- prospectsevents.co.uk (Prospects Events).

If a degree is mentioned, check whether it is a full bachelors degree or a foundation degree (the equivalent of two thirds of a standard university degree) if this is important to your child.

What to research: the contract

Typically, recruiters do not guarantee that employees will be kept on at the end of the programme; however, in practice they often want to keep them. Be aware of whether your child would be offered a permanent or fixed-term contract initially but don't reject opportunities on this basis. Try to find out how many apprentices the employer kept on last year – perhaps by asking at careers fairs and open days.

Take note of whether there is a 'tie-in' period after training has ended. You may also want to investigate what would happen if your child dropped out of the scheme part-way through – for example, whether they would have to repay any training costs.

What to research: support available

Think about the types of support your child might benefit from. Would they have a buddy or mentor? Would there be help with finding accommodation? Does the employer have groups or activities through which your

2 in 5

families have talked about apprenticeships as a post-18 plan (*Mumsnet survey*)

child could make friends, such as social events, an LGBTQ+ group or a women's network? Take a look at page 30 for information on wellbeing and support during apprenticeships.

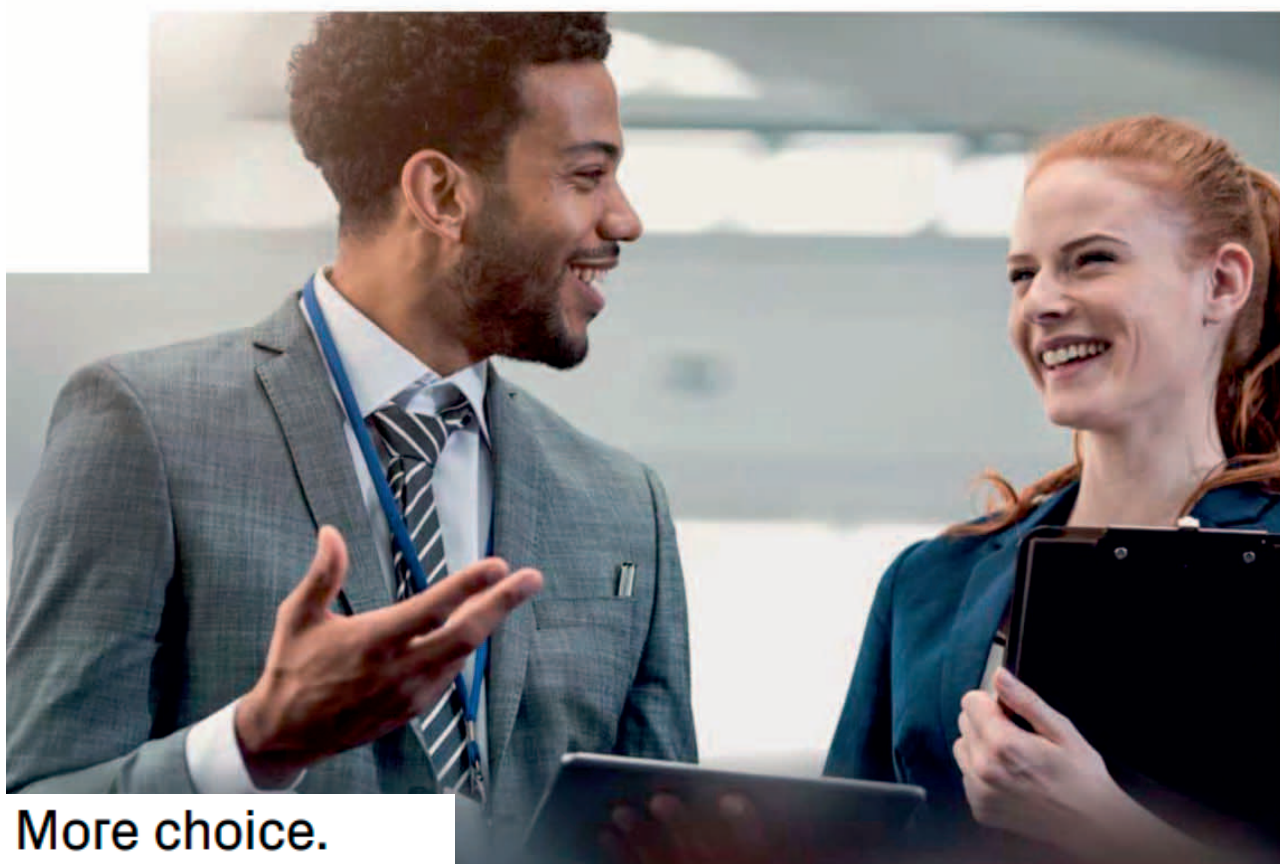
What to research: the travel required

Depending on their role, your child may travel frequently. They might visit different offices or clients while maintaining a regular base, or move around different parts of the country. Make sure your child is happy with the amount of travel involved and the logistics of combining this with time at college or university. Check also whether the costs of travel are met by the employer. This is information that you're likely to have to gather in person.

What to research: career prospects

It's worth asking how, once your child has finished the programme, their career prospects would compare with those of a graduate recruit. Would they be doing the same kind of work? How would their salary compare with that of a graduate of the same age? Would your child's prospects for career progression and promotion be the same as a graduate's? Once again, this may involve discussing at careers fairs or open days. ©

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Researching universities

Taking the time to research universities and courses will ensure your child chooses the best fit for them.

Once your child knows what degree subject they would like to study, draw up a shortlist of universities that they are interested in. You can both then do some further research to narrow this list down. They can apply to a maximum of five courses via UCAS. Degrees in the same subject can differ a lot between universities so it's important to look into each course in as much detail as possible.

You might not be able to find all of the following information on the university's website. If you can't, your child could contact the relevant course admissions tutor or ask in person at an open day (or online, if the coronavirus pandemic is continuing).

We both agree university is the right route. I think he should go and live at uni; he wants to stay at home and commute.

Mumsnet user



Researching courses

- What content is covered? Does this match your child's interests?
- Do the lecturers' backgrounds and research areas tie in with the topics your child wants to learn about?
- How many hours of contact time are there each week and how is this divided up (eg into lectures, tutorials and/or lab sessions)?
- How many hours of study are students recommended to do by themselves each week? If your child is planning to work part time, could they fit this in?
- Are students assessed by coursework, exams or both, and what proportion of their final grade does each element count for?
- What are the student satisfaction ratings for the course?
- What jobs have past students gone on to do?
- How much are the tuition fees and are there any extra costs?
- What are the relevant department's ratings for research and teaching quality?
- Is the course taught at one of the university's main locations or further afield?

- Are there any opportunities to study abroad for part of their degree?

Questions about vocational degrees

- Is the course accredited by a relevant professional body?
- Which employers do past students now work for?
- What percentage of graduates find work in the relevant industry?
- What links does the course have to employers? Are there opportunities for students to meet them, get sponsored by them or do work placements with them?
- What modules are included? Do these relate to your child's career interests?
- Have any of the lecturers worked in the relevant industry?

Researching universities

- How highly ranked is the university overall? Look at several rankings – you'll find they're all slightly different!
- How employable are its students?
- What facilities and initiatives does it have to help them become more employable?



- Where is it located?
- How much would it cost to live there and would the university provide accommodation?
- How long would it take your child to get home for a visit or to commute if they plan to live at home?
- Does the university have clubs and societies that relate to your child's outside interests – or could they find these elsewhere locally?
- Does the local area offer the facilities and opportunities to carry out the activities they want?

Visiting universities – online or in person

Encourage your child to visit universities and departments (online, if the coronavirus pandemic makes that necessary) to meet or listen to the academics who would be teaching them and current students. Are people welcoming? Do they sound passionate about their subject? Open days and taster courses, virtual or in person, are a good chance to do this. You can find out more about taster courses on the UCAS website (www.ucas.com). Parents can usually attend open days with their children but take a step back and encourage your child to speak and ask questions themselves. Have a good wander around to see the facilities – labs, lecture halls, libraries etc

– and what the atmosphere is like. Head further afield to explore the local area. Would your child feel at home?

Impressing graduate recruiters

Knowing what employers like in their graduate recruits could also help your child to make a decision. A good way to research this is to spend some time reading the employer hubs on targetjobs.co.uk. Bear in mind:

- Some recruiters prefer prestigious universities. Investigate higher-ranked institutions if your child is predicted good grades, but find one where they will feel inspired and supported.
- Almost all recruiters want graduates to have taken part in activities outside of their degree; consider whether a university has clubs or volunteering programmes that your child would like to join. If they plan to live at home they might be best at a university that doesn't require a long daily commute so they have time for other interests. Be prepared that you and your child aren't going to agree on everything when it comes to choosing a university – that's normal! **Mumsnet** users report disagreeing about living away v. living at home, which course to choose and prioritising an institution for its social scene over its career-boosting potential. ©

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Mental wellbeing in the workplace and at university

Suggestions for helping your child if they have experienced or are experiencing mental health issues.

Your child's transition into the workplace or university may be a particular source of worry for you if your child is dealing with – or has previously had – a mental health problem. The restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic has made – and may continue to make – this transition even more challenging than usual. This article offers some topics and services to consider when thinking about the mental wellbeing of your child, whether they have a history of mental health issues or not. Discussing these could help you to make sure your child has thought about mental health issues commonly associated with work or higher education.

What support is offered?

Apprenticeships. When looking over the careers section of an employer's website or speaking to

representatives at careers fairs, find out how apprentices are supported. Ideally, a buddy or mentor would be on hand to help your child to manage work and to respond to their questions. Is an employee assistance programme in place or does HR offer equivalent policies/initiatives?

Universities. Look at the university website to find out what's offered. Your child may benefit from letting the university know about a mental health problem before they start – or early on when they do. This will help them to get support during the first few weeks, which can be a crucial time. Reassure your child that declaring a mental health problem on their UCAS form won't impact offer decisions but will help the university to prepare to provide support.

Making the most of spare time

Apprenticeships. Think about the things your child enjoys doing and that have led them to make friends, build confidence or gain interests in

the past – such as sports clubs or volunteering. Does the employer or local area provide the chance to continue these in some capacity? Alternatively, your child might see a new activity or group on offer that they're keen to try out.

Universities. Most universities offer numerous societies and clubs, so encourage your child to take a look. Outside of these clubs, volunteering, community activities and part-time work could help your child to gain perspective if and when they find university stressful.

Communicating problems

Who are the people your child usually talks to? Their list will probably include family and/or friends. Remind them that even if they're moving away from home, these people are still available. Consider how your child best communicates their problems. Are they more comfortable using email or text, or would face-to-face communication (onscreen, if they're

away) be better? This could help you too, as it might be the best way to 'check in' with them.

Apprenticeships. Think about who they might talk to in their workplace, such as a line manager or buddy. As well as providing support with the work itself, a manager will often be able to help your child to reduce stress (eg through time management techniques) and to access support.

Universities. Your child should have a supervisor who will be available to discuss any problems with academic work. Most universities also have a mental health adviser (or equivalent) to give advice on finding the appropriate support. If your child is feeling nervous about making new friends or leaving old ones, they may be able to build relationships early on. Cara, a student at UCL, says 'It helped that there was a WhatsApp group for all the first years with a place in my halls of residence – we got to know each other a bit before we all arrived in London.'

Avoiding triggers and magnifiers

Consider and discuss what could cause or worsen problems, along with how your child might avoid this. If there are aspects of life or education that have contributed to issues in the past – and you feel it's okay to bring them up now – think about how these might come up at work or university and what your child might do to avoid a lapse or relapse.

Apprenticeships. The 'How to be mentally healthy at work' document by the Scottish Association of Mental Health (SAMH) provides really useful advice for coping with problems such as stress and bullying in the workplace. Go to www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/samh-publications/publications-workplace.

Universities. Discuss with your child how they might recognise and work through potential difficulties such as living away from home for the first time or being anxious about achieving academically.

Where to direct your child

If you think your child might be reaching a time of crisis in their mental health, make them aware of the services available (ideally, make sure they are aware before a crisis point). Mental health charity Mind provides guidance for crisis planning and links to details of different types of crisis service (including, for example, contact details for mental health crisis helplines): www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services.

Some mental health conditions are covered by the Equality Act 2010, which could mean your child is entitled to ask for reasonable adjustments for exams or work. See the Mind website for more information on this: www.mind.org.uk.

General services in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland

For an apprenticeship or university located in England, your child should have a Mind service local to them. For Scotland and Northern Ireland, the equivalent services are the Scottish Association of Mental Health (SAMH) and Inspire. What's offered will differ according to the location, but classes to improve general wellbeing (such as running or gardening) usually run alongside one or two initiatives dealing more directly with mental health (eg counselling sessions or peer support groups).

You'll find what's offered in the area local to your child by visiting the relevant website. For Mind, go to www.mind.org.uk, for SAMH go to www.samh.org.uk and for Inspire Mental Health go to www.inspirewellbeing.org.

Further information about how to choose and access mental health services can be found on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services.

Apprenticeships: Remploy

The access to work mental health service offered by Remploy is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. It's a confidential service and is available at no charge to any employees with depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues affecting their work. Take a look at Remploy's website for more information: www.remploy.co.uk/mentalhealth.

Apprenticeships: an employee assistance programme

Some employers offer an employee assistance programme – a scheme to support employees dealing with personal problems that might have a negative impact on their work performance, health or wellbeing. These generally include services such as counselling. You may be able to find out whether a company offers this from its website, or this might be a question for you or your child to ask at a careers fair.

Universities: Student Minds

Student Minds organises peer support groups and staff-led workshops at various universities across the UK. Go to its website to find out which universities are involved, as well as resources for parents and for students experiencing various challenges: www.studentminds.org.uk.

Universities: counselling and wellbeing advice

Most universities offer counselling or mental health advisers, as the bare minimum. All the information should be easy to find on their websites. ©

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Find out how to begin a career in accountancy, banking, insurance or actuarial work.

There are two routes into most finance careers. Your child could go to university full time and then apply for a graduate job, or join an employer after their A levels or equivalent and start earning while they learn. In both cases there are opportunities to gain professional qualifications (and these are essential if your child wants to become an accountant or an actuary). Many finance employers offer internships for university students, which can sometimes lead to a graduate job offer, though other work experience is also welcomed. Along with minimum A level requirements for apprenticeships and graduate programmes, companies normally ask for five GCSEs (or equivalent) at grade 4 or above, including maths and English.

Accountancy

Whichever route your child chooses, once they've started their job they'll work towards qualifying as a chartered accountant. Most school leaver programmes last five years, although some only last four. The first two years are spent working towards a basic qualification plus a higher apprenticeship; the following two or three towards a professional qualification. Some firms offer a combined degree and professional qualification programme – these usually take four to six years.

Graduates take at least three years to qualify as chartered accountants after being hired. As some firms have relaxed their entry criteria, it is now possible to enter the profession with a 2.2 degree (the third highest grade). Arts degrees are as welcome as numerate degrees, though there's often a numeracy test as part of the application process.

Insurance and actuarial work

A number of insurance companies and related organisations (such as the insurance market Lloyd's) offer apprenticeships. Most insurance graduate programmes request a 2.1 degree (the second highest grade) in any subject and some have a minimum requirement for A levels or equivalent. No specific professional qualifications are needed to work in insurance, but both apprentices and graduates often have the opportunity to gain a qualification from a professional body such as the Chartered Insurance Institute.

A few companies recruit school leavers onto apprenticeships in actuarial science, which is closely related to insurance and involves calculating the risk of something happening. These programmes typically require at least grade B, or sometimes grade A, in maths A level (or equivalent). Actuarial graduate programmes require a 2.1 degree – a numerate subject is normally preferred – as well as grade B in maths A level (or equivalent).

Trainee actuaries must study for internationally recognised professional actuarial exams with the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA). Both graduates and those who have entered through an apprenticeship route can qualify as actuaries in this way. Apprentices will sometimes study a lower-level qualification (such as certified actuarial analyst) during their apprenticeship and then move onto the IFoA qualifications in their next role after the apprenticeship has finished.

Banking and investment

Several banks' retail and corporate divisions hire school leavers onto higher apprenticeships. Recruiters typically ask for A levels (or equivalent) in any subject and may also seek customer service experience. Graduate programmes in retail and corporate banking typically require applicants to have a 2.1 in any subject, and some request a minimum number of UCAS points. However, some retail banks welcome applications from graduates with a 2.2.

To get into investment banking, applicants usually need a university degree at a 2.1 or above. The degree can be in any subject but there is often a numeracy test as part of the application process and a relevant internship is a must. However, in future there may not be as much need to go to university before working in investment banking. In 2020 J.P. Morgan announced that it would offer an apprenticeship route into its investment banking roles – this will include a degree and two professional qualifications from the Chartered Institute of Securities and Investments.

There are both graduate and school leaver opportunities in investment management. A few firms offer apprenticeships for school leavers with A levels (or equivalent) in any subject. Graduate programmes in investment management typically require a degree in any subject at 2.1 or above, and some have minimum A level (or equivalent) requirements. ©



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Spotlight

Discover ways your child could kick-start their career in technology.

There are IT jobs available at many different levels and with employers in every sector. If your child is doing well academically it makes sense for them to start a little way up the ladder, either by going to university and getting a graduate-level job, or by starting work after their A levels (or equivalent) with an employer who will train them.

There are a wide range of IT degrees available.

Uni first, job later

It's possible to get into an IT career as a graduate with any subject. A significant number of employers run IT summer internships and placement years for students seeking work experience, as well as graduate schemes for those who have completed their degree. There are also many IT jobs for graduates with companies that don't run formal graduate schemes. However, broadly speaking, the less technical your child's degree the fewer roles will be open to them. Bear in mind:

- Some technology employers require an IT-related degree eg computer science or software engineering. This is particularly the case with smaller employers.
- Some technology employers accept subjects such as engineering, science or maths for IT jobs but won't accept arts or humanities.
- Some technology employers accept graduates with any degree and train them up. To beat the competition for these jobs, a strong academic record and evidence of an interest in technology will help.

There are a wide range of IT degrees available. Your child could choose a broad, technically focused subject such as computer science or software engineering, a more commercially focused degree such as business information technology or something a bit more specialist such as computer games design, cyber security or data science.

Maths at A level or equivalent is typically needed to get onto a degree in computer science or similar at a leading university, often at A or A* grade. Other universities might ask for any science, maths or technology subject and some do not have specific subject requirements.

Starting work at 18

Degree apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships will allow your child to start work in IT after their A levels (or equivalent) and study towards higher level qualifications at the same time. This could be a bachelors degree or a foundation degree – the same level of qualification as a higher national diploma and equivalent to the first two years of a bachelors degree. See page 10 for more details on how such programmes work. Lower levels of apprenticeship are also available.

To get onto a programme that includes a degree or foundation degree your child will typically need three A levels (or equivalent). UCAS points requirements tend to vary between 96 (CCC) and 120 (BBB), but can be as high as 144 (AAA)*. Often their A levels need to include at least one or two science, maths or technology subjects.

There are also numerous higher apprenticeships in IT that don't include university study. Entry requirements for these vary widely so it's important to check for each opportunity. Some employers ask for three A levels or equivalent; others are happy with two. Some expect science, maths or technology subjects; others will accept any subject. And some specify minimum grades or UCAS points they will accept (typically Cs or 96 UCAS points*) while others don't. ©

**This is based on the UCAS points system introduced in September 2017.*





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- Charlotte, Completed Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, December 2020



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Ashley, Technical Trainee

Year 2 – Electrical /ICA apprentice



Ashley is currently completing her UET Level 3 apprenticeship standard and is in her second year of studies.

Ashley is based at our Esher sewage treatment works site and is currently working with her mentor to complete her NVQ level 3 in mechanical and electrical engineering.

In year 1 & 2 of Ashley's apprenticeship she studied her PEO (performing engineering operation) units and BTEC in engineering at Guildford college, full time in year one and day release in year two.

Can you tell me about your background?

I always enjoyed school growing up as I genuinely enjoy learning. College was good fun as well! My parents taught me to work hard; they told me that almost anything is achievable when you work for it, so I've tried to apply this in all aspects of my life. In school I was really bad at physics, I never understood the principles and found it so complicated.

When I got to college however, everything sort of clicked and I knew for sure that I would work in the engineering field. Before secondary school however, I actually wanted to work as a dentist.

Why did you choose to apply for a Thames Water apprenticeship?

I initially never considered Thames Water, but one of the Lecturers from my college recommended that I apply here. For this reason, I never knew much about the company, only that they provide clean water and have reservoirs. I knew that sewage went into sewers and about the clean water treatment because we went on a trip to a Thames site when I was in primary school, but

that was just about all the knowledge I had. My previous knowledge was a reality, just not in the field I was working in.

I work in the Waste networks and so my job involves working with sewage. I was not prepared for the smell, but as time has gone by, I've gotten used to it and it's really not as bad as you would think. I've been fortunate enough to work on the pumping team as well as at the Sewage Treatment Works so I have now seen and completely understand the Sewage treatment process. No two days are the same which is really cool, because I'm always learning here.

Can you tell me about your life and career journey?

From secondary school, I knew that I wanted to work in the engineering sector. My first job was actually as a receptionist in a beauty clinic, whilst I was studying engineering in college. I then did part-time work with a super car mechanic for three months. I've enjoyed all the jobs that I have had. I learnt a lot from them and have been able to use some of the skills I learnt with Thames.

I am hopeful that I will stay with Thames as I work with a great team. Everyone's really encouraging, friendly and helpful and they don't spoon feed us, which has helped me to learn some things very quickly. Once I finish the apprenticeship, I would eventually like to get a degree in electrical engineering.



Lydia, Technical Trainee

Year 2 - Mechanical/Electrical apprentice



Lydia is currently completing her UET Level 3 apprenticeship standard and is in her second year of studies.

Lydia is based at our Ashford Common water treatment works site and is currently working with her mentor to complete her NVQ level 3 in mechanical and electrical engineering.

In year 1 & 2 of Lydia's apprenticeship she studied her PEO (performing engineering operation) units and BTEC in engineering at Guildford college, full time in year one and day release in year two.

Can you tell me about your background?

When I was younger, I was fortunate enough to do lots of travelling and experience many different cultures and ways of life. I like to think this has made me quite open-minded. I'm always excited to meet new people and try new things.

My education was a bit unconventional. My mum home-schooled me from the age of about six and I went on to complete my secondary education with an online school. Having this background showed me the value of learning in a way that was tailored to me, not necessarily sticking to the norm.

Why did you choose to apply for a Thames Water apprenticeship?

I found Thames Water when I was searching for engineering apprenticeships all over the UK. I was really excited to have the opportunity to work on such an important service as water. I also loved the opportunities for progression within Thames and the fact that I could train in both mechanical and electrical.

I come from Wales and grew up overseas, so I didn't know much about Thames Water

before I found the apprenticeship. I've been really happy with my experience, though, and love being able to study and work at the same time.

Can you tell me about your life and career journey?

I was born in Wales, but I spent most of my childhood as a British expat in Saudi Arabia. When I got a bit older, I came back to Wales on my own and started work as a waitress. I liked waitressing, but it was never what I wanted to do in the long-term.

I was really interested in engineering, but I wasn't sure I was quite ready to take up full-time studying again or end up with a massive student loan. An apprenticeship seemed a great way to learn while also earning a good wage and supporting myself. Although I was offered apprenticeships closer to where I lived, the Thames Water apprenticeship offered great training, a generous salary, and some really exciting prospects for the future. It was an opportunity worth travelling for.



Spotlight

Explore the paths into engineering and the grades required.

Would-be engineers who intend to complete their A levels, BTEC or Scottish Highers can either study for an engineering degree before starting work or join a higher or degree apprenticeship programme with an engineering employer.

A level subjects

If your child wants to take a degree in engineering they need an A level (or equivalent) in maths. In many cases they will also need physics. Some chemical engineering degrees ask for maths and chemistry instead; some ask for all three. For some very prestigious universities it is helpful also to have further maths. Top universities ask for A* and A grades or equivalent; universities that aren't as highly ranked often ask for As and Bs.

To get onto an engineering higher or degree apprenticeship your child will typically need maths, science and technology A levels or equivalent. Maths is often requested and some employers specify which science subjects they want your child to have studied. Grade requirements can vary from 96 UCAS points (CCC) to 140 (AAA)*, so it's best to check individual employers' websites.

The university route

Your child could study a particular area of engineering, such as mechanical engineering or civil engineering, or keep their options open with a general engineering degree. They can also choose between a course that leads to a bachelors-level qualification (BEng) or one that leads to a masters-level qualification (MEng).

Many engineering employers run summer internships and placement years for students seeking work experience, as well as graduate schemes for those who have completed their degree. Some engineering degrees include a placement year as part of the course. There are also many jobs for graduate engineers with companies that don't run formal graduate schemes. These are often with smaller organisations.

Joining an employer at 18

A number of engineering employers run higher and degree apprenticeships, which are aimed at those who've just finished their A levels (or equivalent). Some offer the chance to gain a bachelors degree; others offer a foundation degree, a higher national diploma or higher national certificate. All programmes involve combining a job with part-time study, and the employer will typically pay all of the tuition fees. If your child does well their employer is very likely to offer them a permanent job once they finish the programme. It may also support them to continue their studies to a higher level. Several engineering employers also offer sponsored degrees. Find out more about sponsored degrees on page 11.

Becoming professionally registered

Many engineering employers support their apprentices and graduates to become professionally registered. This means a professional body has certified that they have the right level of skills and knowledge to meet its benchmark.

The highest level of registration is chartered engineer, then incorporated engineer, then engineering technician. On average, chartered engineers earn more than incorporated engineers, and incorporated engineers earn more than engineering technicians. The quickest and simplest route to chartered engineer status is with a masters degree and, for incorporated engineer status, at least a bachelors degree. However, it's possible to get there with lower qualifications if you can prove that you've reached these levels of learning in another way. ©

**This is based on the UCAS points system introduced in September 2017.*

Spotlight

Many larger employers run graduate schemes; a few offer higher apprenticeship programmes. There are also some smaller employers in science which tend to take on only graduates.

The area of science in which your child is interested will determine their choice of A levels or equivalent. For example, if they are interested in working in life sciences and food and technology, they will need to take A levels in chemistry and biology. An A level in maths and/or physics may also be needed to get onto many higher apprenticeship programmes and university courses. If they want to work in physical sciences, they will need A levels in physics and maths.

For some science careers, non-science subjects are useful. For example, if your child is interested in becoming a meteorologist then A levels in maths, physics and geography would help.

Apprenticeship schemes

Several employers in the science sector offer higher and degree apprenticeships to school leavers. Entry standards can be high.

After your child has finished their apprenticeship, their employer may well offer them a permanent job as a scientist. However, if they decide that they want to go to university to study for a degree that is of a higher level than the one they gained from their apprenticeship then that could be an option, depending on the entrance requirements of the university they wish to study at and the qualification their apprenticeship gives them.

University route

The more traditional way into the science sector is by taking a degree in a relevant subject. The degree course your child should choose depends on the area of science they want to build a career in; there are many, many options.

In addition, there are some very specific degree courses that can lead to careers in certain fields of science, for example forensic science, biocomputing, and brewing and distilling.

In general, most employers in the science sector will require candidates to have attained at least a 2.1 in their degree (the second highest grade) for research roles, although there are some jobs for which employers will accept 2.2s.

For many careers in science, particularly those in research, candidates will need at least a masters degree and quite possibly a PhD as well. Many science degrees are offered as four-year courses that are a BSc combined with a masters degree (and these can lead straight into a PhD). These courses may be a good idea if your child thinks they have the ability and the desire to study for a higher entry-level role. A degree from a Russell Group university may also give your child the edge when applying for a PhD if their career choice requires it.

Some companies will provide financial support while your child does a degree. The exact details vary – some companies will employ candidates and pay for them to do a degree course part time; others may award students with a sponsorship deal and pay for their degree while they work for them during the vacations. Others will provide students with some money towards the cost of their degree but with no other ties to the company.

The sort of job that your child wants to do in the science sector may well influence their choice of university. If they are interested in working in a research role then they should consider applying to a university that is highly regarded in research in the area of science that interests them. ©



Spotlight

What to consider if your child wants to take a gap year before starting university or a school leaver programme.

There are plenty of potential benefits to having a gap year after but if your child is going to get the most out of it they need to have some idea of what they want to achieve. It will help later on to be able to tell employers why they took a gap year and what they did with it. Recruiters may well ask about it at interview and won't be impressed if they hear about a lot of TV watching!

Traditional gap year options are working, volunteering and travelling, often in combination. For obvious reasons, Covid-19 currently makes all of these options difficult to achieve, if not impossible – the state of the pandemic should definitely be taken into account when considering gap year pros and cons.

Reasons for taking a gap year

These can include:

- having a break from studying
- getting work experience (either in a particular area or just in general)
- getting life experience
- having time to do something they particularly want to do, such as travelling
- having the time to decide what to do in life
- earning some money
- having a second attempt at getting into the university/degree programme/school leaver programme they really want
- being able to apply to university with the advantage of already knowing what grades they've got.

Prioritising a gap year – pinning down aims

Encouraging your child to figure out which aim is most important to them will help them plan their time. If they have a clear aim such as 'Get a job in retail and save at least £2,000 towards the cost of uni' then you are well on your way. If their main goal is less clear, try to pin it down.

If, for example, your child wants to have a second attempt at getting onto their preferred degree or school leaver programme then they'll need to make sure they're available for interviews at the relevant time of year. They might also plan to get some relevant work experience early on in their gap year that will look good on an application.

If their main aim is to clarify their direction in life, they'll probably want to plan in a series of different activities across the year to allow them to try different things, rather than waiting for inspiration to strike while working in a local shop.

Taking action before a gap year

If your child wants to spend a year travelling overseas before going to university, some courses will allow them to apply in their final year at school and then defer entry if they are offered a place. If work is on the gap year agenda, it might be easier to find a job if they have completed relevant voluntary work or training. Before their gap year starts, help your child work out how they'll pay for things such as travelling, volunteering, taking courses. How much can you contribute, if you want to? ☺

12% of parents reveal that their child's post-18 plans are to take a gap year.*

*Mumsnet survey

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‘Even when the work is hard, there are people nearby that can help.’

BENJAMIN FORD is an undergraduate engineer studying an engineering degree apprenticeship at **THE DYSON INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERING** and Technology. He joined in 2020.



How did you first hear about your degree apprenticeship?

The librarian at my school was very enthusiastic about showing us the wide spectrum of different opportunities there were available after school and arranged for some former students who were at The Dyson Institute to come in and speak about their experiences. The combination of campus life and a degree apprenticeship stood out to me as a way of getting the best of both worlds, and the hands-on approach seemed perfect for learning engineering.

Tell us about the application process.

There was quite an in-depth application process, which didn't just look at my grades, but at my mindset and ethos. The recruiters were looking for people with a 'problem solving' attitude, who see problems in the world and in their life, and ask why these things are the way they are and what can we do to fix them.

I first submitted a CV and personal statement, followed by completing some online assessments and, finally, a telephone interview and a technical interview. I really enjoyed the process, especially the technical interview. As they were giving me brain teasers to solve, I had a massive grin on my face. I think that's what showed them that I was truly enthusiastic about engineering. I also think I spelled out my thinking process quite methodologically, which showed that I approached problems logically.

How is your apprenticeship structured?

I started at Dyson in September 2020 and after four years I will graduate with a BEng Engineering degree and a level 6 product design and development engineer standard apprenticeship. Each week is made up of three days work and two days of study.

After a couple of weeks of induction, I hit the ground running working on real projects. Through my three-or-four-month rotations, I'm able to get an insight into every stage in a product's lifecycle, from research to release. I'm currently working in the sensors team, and am responsible for updating the programming on a specific sensor. This update will go out to all Dyson sites worldwide and it's really motivating to know my work will have a real impact. At the end of each rotation I have a session where I log how I've improved in specific skills, which are backed up with evidence by my mentors and line managers.

The academic side is made up of lectures and seminars – though my lectures are now pre-recorded because of the pandemic. On top of this we have coursework and exams and, because everyone is studying the same course and has the same work, there's an absurd amount of support from fellow students and from The Dyson Institute. For example, we recently had a week off from work and a couple of study days to prepare for exams, as well a week of academic leave after the exams.

What's the social side like?

There's a relatively small cohort of people here: there are only 34 people in my year, and 150 students at The Dyson Institute in total. We all share the same mindset and enthusiasm for our subject and it's a positive experience to be immersed in an environment where everyone has a shared interest.

Because everyone has the same work schedule and academic deadlines, it means that, even when the work is hard, there are people nearby that can help. I'm rarely working on a problem on my own, there'll be four or five of us around a table discussing the work. The shared timetable also means we can celebrate together: we have parties fairly regularly and, when we're able, a weekly trip to the pub. Just recently, I made vegetarian burgers for our support bubble and we watched a movie together late into the night to celebrate finishing some exams.

What's the biggest challenge been?

Going from sixth form straight into work can be challenging: I'll have days when I'm working really enthusiastically and others where it feels like a bit of a slog. Waking up at 7.30 each morning doesn't really fit the student lifestyle, so you really need to be self-motivated and prepared to face the challenges of work head on. It's a larger jump than it would be from sixth form to university, but, on the other end, transitioning into full time work will probably be seamless.

There's a lot of manoeuvrability within the business and, if I get a 2.1 or higher, Dyson will help me find a position within the business that suits me, even if it's not 100% engineering-related. So far, I've found happiness and fulfilment by following what I'm most enthusiastic about, and I know that I'll be able to continue to do this during my apprenticeship and beyond. ©

'I'll have a university-level qualification, no debt... and an ACCA qualification.'

VALERIE ONOCHIE is an accounting and taxation apprentice at the **FINANCIAL CONDUCT AUTHORITY (FCA)**. She joined the apprenticeship scheme in 2018.



Why the FCA?

I have always been interested in the way that money works and the idea of working with numbers on a daily basis really appealed to me – finance was the perfect industry for me to go into.

Maths was always my favourite subject at school and I studied economics at A level. During a lesson I learned about the FCA and how it was responsible for regulating firms within the financial industry. When I was first looking at apprenticeships online, I did more research into the FCA, its departments, and what work I could do there. The most exciting thing was how good a reputation it has. The people who worked there talked about it positively and seemed happy to be part of the team.

I knew that it was a chance to do something a bit more practical rather than going to university.

Why an apprenticeship?

I knew that it was a chance to do something a bit more practical rather than going to university. I spoke to my friend who had started an apprenticeship after GCSEs to get more information. He told me how he was learning relevant skills and gaining valuable work experience. The fact that I would be able to get a level 7 qualification (equivalent to a masters degree) in three years was also a positive – it would almost be like going to university!

Tell us about the application process.

The first stages were an online application and a phone interview, where I answered questions about myself and my interest in the FCA. I was then invited to an assessment centre at the FCA's offices a month later. The assessments included job-related tasks such as prioritising tasks and drafting emails to managers, as well as a group task where we had to come up with ideas of how to raise money for charity.

I'd never attended anything like the assessment centre before; it was a whole new experience for me. I made sure that I kept positive throughout the process. Getting rejected from other roles can be disheartening. I just maintained confidence

in myself and I was determined that I'd find the perfect apprenticeship for me.

Tell us about your job role.

My apprenticeship lasts for three years. Initially I was based in the enforcement department, where we looked into the misconduct of firms within the financial industry. If we felt that firms were not following the regulations, we launched an investigation. I worked on investigations, interviewing people and drafting letters to firms.

Next, I completed a six month secondment in the finance department. I quickly realised that this was the department I wanted to work in. I was able to arrange to stay there permanently, and now I spend my day creating financial reports and looking after the finances of different departments within the FCA. My work now is a lot more numbers and accountancy focused, and is what I want to continue to do in my future career.

What has been the most challenging thing about work?

It can take quite a lot of time to adjust to working life, especially when working in a big company around lots of new people. The experience I had gained while working at Pinpoint Partners, a recruitment company, really helped: I knew what being in a professional environment was going to be like. I was also assigned a 'buddy' when I joined, who made sure I settled in well and who I could go to if I needed anything. Settling in still took time though, especially as I'm an introvert.

Balancing work, studying and life can also be hard. When work gets extremely busy or I have a quarterly exam coming up, it really tests my time management. It can be easy to procrastinate and leave things to the last minute, so having that drive to succeed is essential. This is also useful when things don't work out well; I need to be able to get up and do better the next time round.

Most of my friends went to university and it does feel like we are at completely different phases in life. It's been quite difficult catching up with them. I can't go out in the afternoon and sometimes I'll need to spend a weekend studying.

It will all be worth it. My priority is finishing my apprenticeship and in a year, I'll have a university-level qualification, no debt, lots of work experience and a globally recognised ACCA qualification. ©

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‘Being a BAME woman in tech, I do stand out.’

TARA SURAN is a junior management consultant at **IBM**. She joined the apprenticeship scheme in 2019.

Why IBM?

The things that we have been able to achieve with technology are so impressive that working for IBM was a no brainer! I wanted to work for a company that’s dedicated to creating innovations that matter for the world (and those that I’m passionate about too).

Being able to gain experience, build my network and earn a qualification without the hefty student loan, and receive a salary too, was very compelling. At IBM you have a secured position after your apprenticeship, so you are being trained and prepared to enter the wider corporate role while developing your skills and building your network.

Why consulting?

I loved the idea of being able to learn the fundamentals of consulting while developing my technical skills, and collaborate with other companies through projects, with the support of industry experts as colleagues, peers and mentors.

I’ve always been interested in learning ways to improve processes and help others, so consulting was an area that I was naturally inclined towards.

Did you know a lot about technology before starting?

Nothing past the use of social media! But I was ready for a challenge – to apply the skills I had already developed, and to learn new ones too.

Tell us about any work experience before gaining your role.

At a young age I began collecting donations for Syrian refugees displaced by war. I did this via my part time job, through charity events that I organised and other fundraising endeavours. While I was born in the UK, having Kurdish heritage means that I have a clear vision of two different lifestyles and appreciate immensely all of the opportunities that I have – this fuels my desire to help those less fortunate.

I’ve attended debates with politicians and utilised my social media platforms to highlight important topics that don’t have as much coverage in the media.

Before joining IBM I completed a Level 3 Apprenticeship in Business Administration at a solicitor’s office that specialised in wills, trusts and estate planning. From sales admin I was promoted to become a private client legal advisor at the age of 18. I had the ability to talk clients through difficult legal documents, in simple terms, while juggling all of the documents that I had to create for them and still hitting targets.

Did you engage with your careers service at school?

Actually, no – my school really only focused on the university route so when I dropped out in the first year of sixth form, I was incredibly lost and unsure about what I wanted to do and if there were even any options out there.

I feel like there is a bit of a stigma with apprenticeships, that they are just about learning how to make hot drinks, or are only for those who want more of a practical job. I knew that I wanted to work for a large corporate company, but all the requirements just seemed so out of reach. I was looking through Rate My Apprenticeship to find one that would suit me and came across this one at IBM. Junior Management Consultant at IBM was the next level of the apprenticeship I had already completed so it made sense for my natural progression to apply.

Tell us about your job role.

In my main role as a defect manager I am responsible for monitoring the project defects found by the testing team. I am also part of the test practice, working with the test team who identify the defects that are found in the software development process.

Working in a team of professionals who have been within IBM for many years and are experts in their field means that I have a lot of people around me who are willing to share expertise and support me with my career aspirations

Do you do anything outside your core job at IBM?

Feeling so strongly about equal opportunities and helping others meant that I also wanted to be in a position at work where I could do the same thing. The mission of IBM’s BAME BRG (business resource group) is to address



unconscious bias, attract and engage with people from diverse and cultural backgrounds, and to establish the right diverse workforce mix, reflecting the market we serve. Being a BAME woman in tech I do stand out – I'm the first Foundation BAME co-lead, which means I am able to bring my passion for movements, such as #BLM and diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace, to work.

My role has included being the face for D&I adverts that have been posted externally, being included in senior meetings and conducting interviews with other BAME IBMers supporting our mission.

I'm currently a finalist for Pearsons' BAME Apprenticeship awards, which is really exciting!

How is your apprenticeship structured?

Training currently makes up 20 per cent of my job. While gaining a JMC Level 4, I have also gained many other certificates from all the different training that I have attended and completed, such as Global Blue Consulting and Project Management.

You've got the option to learn about other things that you are interested in as well. I had a particular interest in Design Thinking, which is a process of creative problem solving, and therefore undertook training to receive badges to help me learn more about it. I recently attended a training course about mindfulness and have another training session soon to learn all about 'Unleashing Your Leadership Potential'.

What sort of support systems does IBM have in place for its apprentices?

When I first started I was allocated a buddy, who was available to answer any questions I had. Throughout my journey I have gained a few more buddies who provide me with advice on certain areas. I'm now a buddy to two new IBMers and support them with processes/opportunities.

I also have two mentors, who provide me with support to help me develop both personally and professionally. My first mentor helped me with my career progression and gave me opportunities to present in front of an entire practice; from this he saw the skills I had and got me involved in the project that he was managing.

My second mentor helps me with the diversity and inclusion agenda, and the BAME BRG.

Do you work closely with other apprentices?

Being part of an apprenticeship scheme means being around a lot of like-minded individuals of a similar age. Our induction was a two-week residential course and were able to spend a lot of time together. When we attend training sessions we spend our evenings and free time together too.

We also have frequent coffee breaks with one another, from our project team and the cohort that we started with. It's great being able to work together but also have a laugh and a group to post funny memes to!

How has the coronavirus affected your apprenticeship?

Training that was once face to face is now online, but IBM has adjusted well to the current circumstances. Covid has turned our world upside down but being a part of different teams means that no two meetings are the same and it's great being able to connect with so many other people. We're all making an extra effort to put in online sessions to keep in touch and have a break from work.

What is the biggest lesson you've learned in the workplace so far?

Networking is key. Most of the time it is who you know that is more important; the what you know can be taught after. There's always so much to learn from everyone you meet so make sure you are equally as genuine and willing to help.

What types of qualities make you successful in consulting?

I think you need to:

- be open to opportunities
- be a hard worker and a key team player
- have the ability to take the lead when necessary
- use your initiative
- pay close attention to detail!

During the recruitment process, show that you have an interest or a hobby/skill that makes you stand out. Think of a difficult time and how you overcame it – when have you been creative and thought outside the box?

What has been your biggest highlight at IBM so far?

Honestly there are so many... if I had to pick one it would be the time I was a project manager on a project that was so successful we were invited back by the CEO to present what we had been working on through the Digital Skills Academy, one of IBM's training courses.

What are your future career plans?

I'm open to different opportunities so wouldn't say that I have anything set in stone. As long as I am breaking down the barriers for others then I'm happy! ©

'I knew this would be the fastest way for me to qualify as a chartered accountant.'

NAUMAN LODHI is a senior associate in PwC's audit team. He joined PwC after completing its Flying Start degree programme at Newcastle University in 2020.



Why did you choose to go to university?

My plan was always to go to university; I had good grades from a young age, and I'd be the first in my family to go. I wanted to do something that used maths, and during my research around my career options, I had reached out to accounting firms around the Newcastle area to find out about what the job involved and the opportunities for progression. They were all very helpful, and I realised that accountancy would be a great route for me.

Newcastle University ranked highly when I was researching the best universities for accounting, and that's when I came across the PwC Flying Start programme. It's a normal accounting and finance degree (I still paid tuition fees) that includes a number of placements with PwC across the four years and, if you get a 2.1 or above, you're offered a job when you graduate. I knew that this would be the fastest way for me to qualify as a chartered accountant so it was an easy choice.

How was the application process for your degree different?

I still needed to meet the A level grade requirements to be accepted onto the course, but I also had to attend an assessment centre at PwC's offices. Looking back, I think I was able to stand out because of the skills and experience that I'd developed through volunteering and part-time jobs. For example, I had teamwork and communication skills from volunteering at a summer camp and working at a dessert café and I was able to demonstrate these.

Tell us about your placements.

Starting from the second year at university, I spent a couple of months each year on placement in one of PwC's offices. Initially, I was just learning how to do the work of an auditor, but with each placement I progressed a bit more and was given more challenging work and more responsibility. I knew that, even if I wasn't offered or didn't accept a job at the end of my degree, this work experience would be really great on my CV.

Adjusting to work was hard at first but it also really helped to see the things I was studying applied in the real world and vice versa. When it came to exam season I think

I performed better because I was used to the structure of a 'nine-to-five' working day. It was an added bonus that I was paid during my placements too, so I had some money to really enjoy my university life.

What qualifications are you working towards?

As well as getting a degree in accounting and finance, my placements also count towards the academic and technical experience requirements for chartered status with the ACCA. By the end of my course I had completed 12 of the 15 exams needed. I've now completed all exams and will have met the 450 days of work experience needed to qualify by the summer or autumn of 2021.

What was it like starting work after your degree?

I joined PwC as a senior associate in November 2020 – a bit further along than if I'd joined PwC as a regular graduate – and work with a team conducting audits for clients. All the responsibilities are shared, but I'm able to take ownership of areas of the audit and communicate with clients to provide support.

Of course, with everything going on with Covid-19, I've been working remotely, when usually I'd be with my team or on a client site. The team atmosphere and the social side of work have always been my favourite parts of work; even when the hours get longer and the deadlines are approaching, you're all working towards the same goal and we all celebrate together at the end of an audit. My team has been great in keeping communication going remotely, especially with the more junior members. PwC also has a dedicated wellbeing team and I know there's always support available if I need it.

What advice do you have for people entering the world of work?

Nerves are natural, but you need to show your willingness to learn and make an effort to get to know people. I was really scared when I first started: an office environment was very new to me. The team soon put me at ease and I made sure I was open to every learning opportunity and kept asking questions – even about areas I wasn't assigned to. I learned more about the business and it got me talking to people! @

'Being around other apprentices made it easier'

BOLA LAWAL is a finance professional at **SANTANDER**. She started an apprenticeship with Leadership Through Sport & Business and BKL in 2016 and joined Santander in 2017.



Why an apprenticeship?

When I finished college, the usual option was for people to go to university, but there were many reasons why I didn't think this would be for me. I knew I wanted to become an accountant or work in the financial services industry and when I looked at the skills that employers wanted for the jobs I was interested in, I realised that I wouldn't get these from university but could through an apprenticeship.

How did your work experience help you?

Before applying for my apprenticeship, I'd done work experience as a care assistant. This experience taught me a lot: most importantly, that it wasn't the job for me. I also learned about adapting to difficult situations, being professional when dealing with challenges and how to have confidence in myself, which are all skills I use in my work now.

Tell us about your apprenticeship.

I applied for the 'More than an apprenticeship' scheme with the charity Leadership Through Sport & Business, which I found through the National Apprenticeship Service website. This was a social mobility programme, designed to give people the skills and networking opportunities they would need for their future career. The first thing I did was a three-month skills course, where, through sports and training, I developed my communication, team building and leadership skills. These weren't just skills that one employer would need, but would be useful throughout my entire career.

I started working for the accountant and tax advisers firm BKL in 2016, and my job involved producing financial statements for sole traders and limited companies. I worked closely with clients to help them build their yearly financial statements and tax returns. After building my foundational knowledge in class, I was able to come into work and communicate with clients, do what was required and work with complex accounts.

Navigating work and study was a bit difficult at first. I really needed more than the one day a week I was given to revise. At the time I had a two hour journey to work, so I made lemonade out of lemons and used that time to study: it was better than just sleeping or watching stuff online! It was hard at first, but

this was something that I really wanted to do. Being around other apprentices made it a lot easier as well; we had the same exams and same struggles, so it didn't feel like I was on my own.

Tell us about your route to ACCA qualification.

My apprenticeship led to a level 3 diploma in accounting with the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT). I was able to do a lot of my exams early and so could move onto the level 4 qualification. After finishing my apprenticeship, I changed job and moved to Santander – I was now working 'in industry' and I was able to start studying towards an Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) qualification.

Because of my apprenticeship, I was already used to studying and working at the same time. I knew how much time I needed and when I might need my managers' support. The exams were harder, but having completed a level 4 AAT qualification, I had a couple of exemptions. I became officially chartered at the start of 2020. After three or four years of exams, I felt like I had loads of free time... but it started to be filled up with work after a couple of months.

My friends who went to university are now graduating and some are struggling to get jobs. I've been giving advice to my friends who don't know too much about the industry. And, when they get a job, they still have to do the ACCA qualifications, but are finding it more difficult because they've not had that experience of balancing work and study that I have.

What advice do you have for school leavers?

Before assessment days and interviews, do a lot of research and make an effort to at least know the basics of the business. I never want to walk into a room and have no clue what is going on. By doing research, during the social side of the assessment centre, I could engage with people I didn't know. It's something you do on a day-to-day basis in a work environment and it demonstrates your enthusiasm: recruiters can tell when you're willing to put in that extra bit of effort.

Showing enthusiasm is also important in the workplace: show people you're listening, take notes and ask questions. Small things like that are what makes you a professional. @

'I learn best when my study is integrated with my work.'

VERITY MARSTERSON is a software engineer apprentice at **SKY**. She graduated with a degree in French and politics in 2018 and joined Sky's apprenticeship scheme in 2019.



How did you become interested in technology?

French and maths were my best subjects at school and, at the time, I thought that you needed to go to university to be successful. However, I soon found that studying maths at university wasn't for me and was able to switch to studying French and politics. During my degree I did a year abroad working at a public affairs consultancy in Belgium. I was part of a technology team that worked as a bridge between MEPs and big tech companies. I saw how innovative, vast and forward thinking the technology industry could be and how technology impacts every part of modern life.

Why choose software engineering?

After graduation, I wanted to work in tech policy and had chosen tech-related politics modules. However, I couldn't really find any graduate jobs that I felt passionate about. I decided to start my own academic research institute with a friend from university. I took my knowledge of the impact of technology and used it to support students at the University of Sciences Po Bordeaux and diversify conversations around technology in the Bordeaux area. I had a go at building a website for our institute and I really enjoyed this experience; I started looking for ways to develop my coding and technical skills.

Why did you apply for an apprenticeship at Sky?

Through my previous work experience, I had seen how there were still not many women working in technology. I wanted to work somewhere that was helping to make a difference in this regard, and where I would be supported as a complete beginner. Sky's 'Women in Tech Scholars' and 'Get into Tech' schemes were really encouraging and I knew that I would be joining a really good company where I would be working with highly qualified people. It didn't bother me that I would be working towards a qualification that was at a 'lower level' than my degree – I was learning something entirely new to me and being paid while doing it!

Tell us about your job at Sky.

My apprenticeship lasts for 18 months and leads to a level 4 qualification in software engineering. After a three-week 'boot camp' in London, run by my apprentice provider, WhiteHat,

where I learned the basics of Ruby, HTML, CSS, JavaScript and React, I was given my own projects in a web development team at Sky's Leeds office. Working with other apprentices, we had to make our own decisions about what technologies to use and critically analysed why we were making the choices we did.

I learn best when my study is integrated with my work, so I've been able to spread my one day of study throughout five days of working. My manager has been really flexible in letting me do this, and, when I've had exams, assessed portfolios or projects, I've been able to dedicate my time to preparing for these.

How have you been supported at Sky?

I finished my placement in the web development team in February and chose to move to the Android development team for the My Sky app soon afterwards. However, then lockdown happened and everybody started working from home. This was daunting at first, especially as I had a lot to learn, but my colleagues have been really good at reaching out to me, whether it's to show me something they've been working on or to see how I'm doing. I also have a mentor and coach from WhiteHat who I speak to every few weeks. My manager once even built a whole dummy app for me, so I could familiarise myself with an unfamiliar technology. I never feel like I'm just learning things from online tutorials.

What's the biggest thing you've learned so far?

That when you change paths or try something new, you've not 'failed' at the old thing. Switching my degree and starting to work in technology were big changes, but I was able to use the skills from my previous experiences: I use my communication and creativity skills every day, both in my apprenticeship and through getting involved in charity, diversity and inclusion, events planning and outreach initiatives that Sky and WhiteHat run.

My apprenticeship ends in February 2021, and I'm planning to stay with the Android development team and learn as much as I can. In the future, I'd love to find a role where I could use my knowledge of technology in the political world or build technology in a politically minded way – making use of everything I've learned over the course of my career. ©

‘I’m a product design engineer now.’

MIA BROMIGE, a senior product design engineer at **THALES**, has just finished her digital and technical solutions degree apprenticeship in software engineering and now has a degree in software engineering from BPP.



Why did you decide to do a degree apprenticeship?

Although I received university offers, I really wanted to learn by doing and have a variety of experiences; the degree apprenticeship appealed as you don’t have to pay for it, you get the support of your employer and you get to do so many modules during the degree that relate directly to your work.

And Thales?

I’d done a week of work experience at Thales during school and loved the fact that it was so hands-on. We got to experience a systems engineering lifecycle, with everyone taking on a different role – we weren’t just shadowing – and we had the chance to speak to the heads of lots of different departments.

And engineering?

I did A levels in physics, maths, IT and art. I’ve always been fascinated by planes and aerospace, and pulling things apart and seeing how they work! Being able to be part of that process swayed me to software.

What was the reaction of your friends and family to your career choice?

My family was very supportive, not just because it was a local job. They’d seen how enthusiastic I was about the work experience and the prospects were great – within four and a half years you’ve got both a guaranteed job and a degree. And because you’re with other apprentices you get all the new friends and fun you’d have at uni... but while my uni friends were attending lectures, I was contributing to flight simulators, seeing Tornado fighter jets at RAF bases and knowing that software I’d helped develop is everywhere!

How do you combine working and studying for a degree?

I did a distance learning degree, which meant that we had one day a week to study, with coursework-based assessments. You could retake sections if you needed to (thankfully I didn’t!). Thales was lenient if they knew we had a big assignment coming up, and also towards the end of the degree. We had online lectures two evenings a week, which worked well as you could watch them while having dinner; they tended to consolidate the learning we’d done so weren’t too onerous.

Describe your role for us.

I’ve recently moved roles (which is one of the advantages of Thales – you don’t have to choose your area and stick with it). At first I was a full stack developer, working on a cloud-based platform that allowed multiple flight simulators to come together in the same environment.

I also ran the work experience programme to make it more user friendly, so that we could encourage more students to return to work here. I am also a STEM ambassador, giving talks at schools – Thales helps you to develop business and presentation skills like this; it’s not just about engineering.

I now work as product design engineer, combining a focus on user experience, engineering and agile principles to develop a drone mission planning software called SOARIZON. I am also a qualified drone pilot now – in order to be able to resonate with our customers and design an experience they want!

Highlights of the job?

I’ve been able to travel a lot, to different Thales sites across the globe and RAF bases such as Sandhurst. I was also given the opportunity to discuss apprenticeships over dinner with MPs at the House of Commons on behalf of Thales, which was a bit scary but really exciting!

I have loved all the design opportunities I have been given, as well as the experience working alongside many inspiring teams who empower anyone to suggest ideas to solve problems. Tech is so modern, so Thales is always open to new and good ideas from its employees.

Any advice to school leavers trying to decide what to do next?

Do what makes you happy and what you think you’ll enjoy the most. Now I look back I’m so glad I chose this method – getting practical experience instead of just theory.

What about advice for parents trying to help their children decide what to do?

Don’t get too hung up on your kids knowing exactly what they want to do when they leave school. Apprenticeships at somewhere like Thales allow you to experience different areas and move around if you want to. Plus the support here has been amazing – I can’t fault it. @

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Rachel Grant

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