



My apprenticeship experience

Doing an apprenticeship is a great way to earn and learn.

Here are some personal stories from Disabled young people who have done an apprenticeship.

Luke: Learning on the Job

I joined Microlink in August 2018, in the role of apprentice technical support.

At the time I was not fully aware of what an apprenticeship entailed until it was fully explained to me. I was told that it was 'learning on the job'.

My job role is to assist the research and development sector of the company. This includes meetings with different departments to gain a better understanding of their specialism, and how they relate to all areas of the business. This level of diversity means I am always learning!

My employer has been very supportive, taking time to understand my skills and placing me in the right situation to help me progress.

The company empowered me to complete my apprenticeship studies whilst doing my day job and being there to answer my questions if I was struggling. They made me feel like a valued member of the team.

My apprenticeship was run by a training provider called **Kiwi Education**. A Kiwi trainer would come in on a weekly basis to discuss my progress and how I was settling in. The training provider marked my work which went towards my final portfolio and my endpoint assessment.

These regular meetings were good, as I would know if the work I was doing remained at a consistent standard. What I found particularly



pleasing was that my disability did not come into whether I could pass my apprenticeship. It was all on my ability, which I found liberating.

Even though I have a degree, the value of what I learnt from the apprenticeship is still vital, as it has given me so much practical experience - learning on the job. Just like they said! I endeavour to use the skills and knowledge that I have gained from my apprenticeship throughout the rest of my career.

For anyone struggling to find work - consider an apprenticeship, even if you have a degree, because there is nothing better than gaining hands on experience.

Luke is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN)

Megan's Story - Supported Intern/Apprentice



Hi, my name is Megan. I am Autistic and have learning difficulties which means I find reading and writing difficult.

I left college and was worried about how I was going to find a job. I really wanted to work with children, but I did not have any experience.

I was very lucky to move to a nursery where I completed a supported internship and was then offered an apprenticeship.

I love working at the nursery and although the apprenticeship can be hard it is all worth it as I will get a childcare qualification while doing a job that I love.

Everything I have done has felt like huge steps and although I often felt worried and scared, with some help and giving it a go. I have managed to get an apprenticeship in something I love and hopefully at the end I will have a job.

Katie- my apprenticeship

Katie said that she always struggled with classroom style learning and her attention span but did not know there was a reason for this. She has since learned she has ADHD, autism and sensory processing disorder along with suspected dyspraxia.

At the age of 16 she went to college to study Performing Arts. Whilst she very much enjoyed the practical element, she struggled to keep up with the assignments and withdrew from the course. Katie knew she could achieve great learning results and is a keen learner but did not know why she couldn't apply herself and complete education.

She began working full time and had many jobs. In some jobs she settled well but others have not been suited to the way she works.

She tried college once again as she liked to feel she was progressing and developing but withdrew again realising she wasn't suited to classroom learning. Katie did not know there were other ways to gain qualifications.

After a few years' break Katie applied for an apprenticeship position within Great Western Hospital. She knew little about apprenticeships, but the hours worked around her family life.



“During my nearly 3 years here I have learnt so much and grown so confident. I have been doing a Learning Mentor Level 3 apprenticeship which has been an entirely different experience to college. I am able to play to my strengths of working and progressing in my role, whilst completing manageable assignments within my working time. I am going to gain the A level equivalent I never thought I would.”

She now also has a completely different outlook on learning and feels so confident that she wants to progress further and do a Coaching Professional Level 5 apprenticeship.

“I have finally found a career path that suits me and plays to my strengths.”

Since working for Great Western Hospital Katie feels more confident in being open about who she is as a person. She does not feel she needs to mask her symptoms as much and is accepted with her additional needs.

Katie is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN)

James: What I'm learning from the apprenticeship programme

Doing an apprenticeship has given me opportunities to work in different environments. There are many roles you can work in within a workplace, and you have access to working in a variety of roles through an apprenticeship. You also learn as you go through the course and you're provided with support throughout your development.

As a college teaching assistant, I'm working in Art, Multimedia, Employability Skills, Life Skills and Sports classes specifically for young adults with autism and disabilities in the Hammersmith College Inclusive Learning Centre. I support students academically and pastorally while collaborating with my colleagues on ensuring that the students know we want them to succeed as they embark on their learning experience and fulfil their potential.

Through the apprenticeship, I'm developing my leadership skills and social skills by keeping students in the right direction and being a responsible influence for them with the understanding I have of where they are as someone with autism. I also study outside of the classroom as I acquire and build up on knowledge as the weeks of work go by. The key to the apprenticeship course is being a keen learner.

Autism and disabilities don't hold anyone back, and you recognise this especially when you're with this group and you witness the work they can produce and put in. Like everyone else, they express who they are, give to the society and the world and along with the rest of the people continue to keep going.



Sky-Elouise - my apprenticeship

I work within the Research and Development at HepcoMotion, an engineering firm that manufactures products that are used in factories in the UK, Europe and around the world.

I am currently training and learning lots of new skills. I partake in technical drawing updates and amendments, along with learning how to render, model and animate.

I am currently doing a Level 2 apprenticeship on an Engineering Technical Support Pathway. I will be moving onto a Level 3 Pathway soon.

I chose to do an apprenticeship, based on the “earn whilst you learn” factor. It eliminated the need to take on an extra job alongside my studies at college and meant I could avoid having a large amount of student debt at a young age, which I would have had if I had gone to university.

I have benefitted in many ways through my apprenticeship. Not only have my technical and practical skills advanced, but I have also advanced my soft skills.

I am more confident, more organised and have the ability to approach things in a more work catered manner.

I also moved out at 17 to fulfil my role as an apprentice at HepcoMotion, which has enabled me to be far more independent than I was before.

I have learnt many skills through my time as an apprentice:

- How to organise my workload
- How to speak to an audience
- How to develop good working relationships
- How to manage money
- Technical skills, e.g. in IT and design software
- People skills
- How to project manage

My employer (HepcoMotion,) has provided me with enlarged display screens to cater for my visual impairment, (Nystagmus) and moved me to an office-based role, rather than a factory position as I found the loud noises trigger my anxiety.

I think an apprenticeship would be beneficial to an individual with a disability as it enables you to cater your career path to your needs. By



working with your employer, you can set out adjustments to your working environment, and it makes the process of learning much, much easier. I have found these adjustments more challenging in educational sectors such as college.

Watch Sky-Elouise's video: **[HepcoMotion Apprentice Raises Awareness of Disabilities and Apprenticeships \(exe-coll.ac.uk\)](http://exe-coll.ac.uk)**

Harry :The perception of autism is outdated; a large percentage of people with autism can study, work and live independently

Diagnosed with autism at eight years old, Harry has been surrounded by disabilities his whole life. Like him, his sister has autism and lives a normal life, despite assumptions she may need care. With an estimation of 700,000 people with autism and 5% of people in employment in the UK, Harry wants to challenge the negative stigma that surrounds it.



Undertaking an Adult Care Worker Apprenticeship at East Kent Mencap, with **Qube Learning**, Harry is keen to expand his skill set, while understanding how to do his role more efficiently and to evolve into a better Support Worker.

At a primary school level, Harry experienced sensory issues and found echoes, lights, and sound levels overwhelming. Faced with a negative prediction from one teacher, who unfairly judged him

and said he would not amount to anything, Harry was determined to prove them wrong. This, and the lack of understanding around autism, resulted in him being taken out, halfway through year six.

Harry's mum worked hard to get the support and with the help from their local MP, found a place at a school that was dedicated to working closely with those with learning disabilities. It was a small school that has two students to a tutor and with a total of 25 students, which allowed for a more concentrated style of learning. Now, with a degree in Commercial Music from Canterbury Christchurch University, Harry is incredibly proud of this merit and hopes to set an example for people with autism that they can do it too.

Harry says: *“With or without autism, everyone deserves a chance to prove themselves and with backing and belief from others, this can make a huge difference. Living with dyslexia and dyspraxia, I have gone against the grain of a traditional student, and hope I am setting a positive*

example of what is possible. With a degree and now completing an Apprenticeship, it didn't come easy. I taught myself to learn and I am very driven to shine a light on what I, an autistic person, can do. I have studied, I am increasing my skills and earning a salary and coping very well! I really hope the perception changes and that people avoid assumptions that individuals with autism can't do everything that others can do."

Once afraid of 'owning his autism', Harry didn't declare his disability when he worked for two butchers and throughout his first year at university, but eventually, when he addressed his needs, he found he was given more time to complete work tasks and assessments. Now comfortable with autism and being outspoken about it, Harry is enjoying his role at East Kent Mencap, and the great support from his two coordinators and his Qube Learning Tutor has given him more confidence in areas he never imagined possible. He looks to continue his good work at the organisation and wants to install belief in those who share a similar disability. Harry is passionate about driving change on some of society's outlook on autism and their stereotypes.

Harry is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN)

Kelly - my apprenticeship

My name is Kelly, and I completed a Learning and Development Practitioner level 3 apprenticeship this year passing with a distinction.

Since I was a young girl, I have struggled with my speech and went to speech specialist when I was in primary school to identify what was going on.

It was decided that I had a stutter and attending speech and language therapy helped me understand how to control my stutter and use coping mechanisms for when I was in a stressful or new situation, where my stutter would be at it's worse.



Over time I attended speech therapy again when I was in secondary school, as this was a particularly stressful point in my life.

I left education without any real qualifications and went straight into full time work after 2 years of college.

I had always tried to put myself in situations where I felt outside of my comfort zone. After several years I found myself drawn to the training world and learning and development. This involved me talking to large groups of people that I did not know.

I had not got any formal qualifications in Learning and Development, and it was only when I joined the NHS in 2020 that my line manager spoke to me about doing an apprenticeship to support the knowledge, skills and behaviours not only for my role, but also for my personal confidence and development.

I was enrolled and had a meeting with my training provider. I was open from the start to share that I had a stutter and how it may affect my apprenticeship. As I was doing a Learning and Development apprenticeship my end point assessment involved me creating and delivering a piece of training to a group of people. We spoke about reasonable adjustments I needed, and both my training provider and employer was extremely supportive throughout all 18 months of my apprenticeship.

In terms of reasonable adjustments in work and training: I was made to feel that I could raise any issue if I was not comfortable with a task. For example, it may take me longer to feel I was able to talk in a large group, especially when I first started in my role.

For my apprenticeship and my End Point Assessment, I was offered to be recorded by my training provider instead of someone observing me, and that would be used to be marked. This helped me, as being monitored in an already nervous situation can bring on bad periods in my speech.

My apprenticeship has supported me greatly in my Learning and Development career as it has allowed me to understand the theory behind Learning and Development provisions and then meant I can put it back into practice in my role.

Since completing my apprenticeship, it has given me the confidence to apply for my next role, which I am pleased to say I have been successful in and am now moving into a Learning and Development Specialist role with a new organisation next month.

My advice to anyone looking to do an apprenticeship is to go for it. Do not let your disability hold you back! You can achieve anything you want to!

Kelly is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN)

Scott - a Tale of Two Apprenticeships

My first experience of apprenticeship did not go too well. I started my first job as an admin apprentice. I was really looking forward to it, but the employer was not very disability friendly.

I have cerebral palsy and long working hours can make me tired. The apprenticeship was full-time and there was also a long journey to get there. I started to become really overtired and stressed. At that time, I didn't know anything about reasonable adjustments, and the employer did not offer to make any useful changes. I wasn't able to carry on with it for long and decided to leave after 3 months.



In July 2015 I began working with an apprenticeship provider called Hull Training. I started out on their traineeship programme for the rest of that year learning valuable skills towards going into an apprenticeship. This included a short stint on a work placement with Hull Training themselves working with the Functional Skills team.

I was a bit worried that I was going to end up back on Jobseeker's Allowance as apprenticeship schemes are usually full time, 30 hours which as previously mentioned, has proven to be too much for me.

In January 2016, an apprenticeship placement was secured. The Hull Training team made reasonable adjustments which enabled me to do an apprenticeship part-time, with 21 hours spread over three days. They also extended the apprenticeship from 12 to 18 months, including release days to do the qualifications.

I started as an Admin Apprentice in February 2016 with company called CHCP (City Healthcare Partnership). I worked with them on Mondays and Tuesdays and went to the training provider on Thursdays to do the education side of the apprenticeship.

I was sad to leave CHCP a year later in February 2017 when my apprenticeship contract ended; for the remaining six months up until September 2017, I worked with the Hull Training education provider at Hull Kingston Rovers ground, Craven Park behind their reception desk. I'm happy to say that at the end of the apprenticeship I got my Level 2 Business Admin Qualification.

Highlights of the 18 months I spent on the apprenticeship, included gaining my level 1 and 2 English, level 1 Maths, and level 1 ICT qualifications. The best moment, however, has to be winning the

Business, Media, and Digital Apprentice of the year at the Hull Training awards.

Even though it wasn't pleasant at the time, I am glad that I had the first experience, as I discovered a lot about myself and have been able to use that to move forward in a positive way.

Scott is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN)

Tom's Inclusive Apprenticeship Journey

How working in partnership with the Targeted Employment team can create meaningful employment or training opportunities for young people with additional needs



"Everyone working together has helped give me a really good start in my career. I would like to say thank you to all of the people who helped me get to where I am now"



Tom, 19, is a Level 2 Sports Activator Coach Apprentice at St Elizabeth's School in Much Hadham, where he helps to organise and lead events and activities to help other young people grow and develop through physical activity, organised play and sport.

Having been a student at St Elizabeth's, a school for young people with epilepsy and complex needs, staff recognised the potential in Tom when undertaking work experience in his last year of school. Through partnership working with Stuart Bruce, Deputy Head, Tom's Social Worker and Preparing for Adulthood Adviser, Targeted Employment have been able to work with Tom to match his aspirations, skills and interests to a realistic employment and training pathway, at the same time as working with St Elizabeth's to create an opportunity that met the needs of all parties.

Aspirations

Tom told us: *"When I was younger, I wanted to be a football player but then I realised that I have my own problems and needs so it wasn't going to be that simple for me. Doing this apprenticeship still lets me enjoy the love of sport whilst helping other people grow within sport too".*

Stuart Bruce adds *"Taking the time to vocationally profile Tom over a good period of time really helped him to focus his thinking on what he wanted to do; deciding on the right programme and career pathway has allowed him to hit the ground running".*

Bradley: Autistic Apprentice overcomes years of anxiety and sleep deprived nights as a teenager to reap professional success!



Bradley spent four years at West Suffolk College, enrolled on various courses, wondering what he would do once he finished, but couldn't forecast a clear future where he would feel confident in a professional field. For three years alongside his studies, Bradley worked part-time in the retail industry and continued to do so a year after finishing education. During this time, he recognised a strong desire to try something else.

Identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at three and a half years old, Bradley's mum saw a noticeable difference in his speech and interactions with other toddlers at two years old. Bradley has faced judgement and a lack of understanding from individuals in a work and personal setting.

Shortly after his stint in retail, Bradley was excited to join West Suffolk Council, after applying online for two roles, having two interviews, and then being offered both positions. Bradley accepted the position as Apprentice Business Support on a Level 3 Apprenticeship programme in Business Administration in January 2020, where combining work and learning was to be his new reality. Nervous about what felt like a major challenge, Bradley had trepidations about balancing coursework and the tasks expected of him at the council, especially with ASD. The loyalty and encouragement of his Skills Tutor, Vanessa Godden from Qube Learning, has seen his abilities to learn rapidly grow and now, at 21 years old Bradley says: *'The biggest hurdle I have faced living with autism is feeling so different to everyone else, performing differently in exams, processing information much slower, I felt I really stood out.'*

Also suffering with bad sleep in my teens, I didn't feel safe in my own home and I was constantly worrying about people breaking in. I always checked to see if the doors were locked, that's how bad it got. I also have type 1 diabetes. The high blood glucose impacted on my stress and anxiety, so that took a bit of time to get under control, and don't get me started on the hormone stage! So, having this condition and autism to deal with is a lot on my shoulders, but the support from my employer, Qube Learning, colleagues, friends, and family, especially my mum, is invaluable as it really keeps me going. It has been an uphill climb, I hope

my story inspires others with autism to keep going and remember they are an equal to anyone!

Bradley is encouraged by the prospect of his career continuing to prosper and looks to embark on Level 3 diploma in Business Administration. Working at the council, he no longer feels at a disadvantage with his disability but is supported by his peers, who have taken the time to learn about him, his background and experience with ASD. Passing his driving test and getting best maths student of the year in 2017, he can now look back and see his own merits and is hopeful for more reasons to celebrate in the future.

Emma: Doing an apprenticeship was an opportunity to change careers

Emma was referred to the Employment Service by her Social Worker on 11th March 2020, to get support with gaining part time employment.

Emma has a visual impairment where she has 0% vision in her left eye and 17% vision in her right eye. Emma had a good career in a jewellery shop, which she really enjoyed but had to give that position up because she could not complete the work without full vision.



Emma stated that her barriers were looking "normal" but having a cane and people making fun of her, laughing at her and making comments like 'what benefits is she trying to blag' and actually being reported to Walsall's fraud team about being a fake blind person and again blagging the benefit system. This really knocked her confidence.

She was scared to leave the house at one point; even now, she still does not like using her cane because of what people say about her, she feels she battles that every day. She had struggles getting help in shops and buying clothes etc. because of her age and the way she looks, people did and still do look at her and laugh and say she's fake. Emma says she still lacks in confidence even though she acts as if she is full of confidence.

Emma attended her appointment at the Civic Centre with myself, we sat down and discussed what work she wanted to go into, she mentioned retail or customer services because she felt she was limited in what she could apply for because of her vision and the lack of experience in other jobs. I asked Emma if she would like to attend a jobs fair after the appointment with me, which was taking place at Walsall College, she agreed to go there once we had completed the paperwork. Whilst

walking around the jobs fair Emma had the opportunity to talk the employers that were in attendance, she was told by quite a few employers that they would consider employing her, which helped her to broaden her horizons with her job search, which she would never have done before.

A few weeks later we had lockdown because of Covid-19, Emma could not really apply for work because she had to isolate and look after her child, I kept in touch with Emma every four weeks to see how she was getting on and if there was anything I could support her with. In April 2021, I sent Emma a link to an administration apprenticeship for Walsall Council.

Emma completed the application form and e-mailed it back to HR, she was shortlisted for an interview so I helped her with interview preparation and we discussed questions which could be asked and what questions would be good to ask in the interview. Emma's interview went well and later that day she was contacted by the interviewer to say they would like to offer her the position.

Emma has come a long way since the first appointment I had with her, she not only applied for jobs she never dreamed of applying for, but she also gained a full-time position, when she only wanted to get a part-time position to start with to ease her back into work. Emma not only completes her work to a high standard, but she is also supporting new staff even though she has only been employed for a short period of time. Emma's confidence has improved, and she feels she has a purpose and she is part of the community again.

Emma:

"It only takes one person to show you a different path to explore instead of being on one you thought you was stuck on, Sue Adams you are this person! I thought my working life was over when I lost most of my sight, but you showed me that no matter what situation your life is in, people will always give you a chance if you just believe in yourself."

Simon Bacon, Rehabilitation Officer Visual Impairment:

"I am so pleased that Emma has found new employment, given all she has had to cope with due to her sight loss, and having to give up her previous job. Gaining new employment in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic is also impressive." Very big thanks for your role in helping her.

The reasonable adjustments Emma has are a large-screen monitor, Dragon Software, light-touch keyboard and adjusted lighting.

Emma is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN).

Katie

Katie said that she always struggled with classroom style learning and her attention span but did not know there was a reason for this. She has since learned she has ADHD, autism and sensory processing disorder along with suspected dyspraxia.

At the age of 16 she went to college to study Performing Arts. Whilst she very much enjoyed the practical element, she struggled to keep up with the assignments and withdrew from the course. Katie knew she could achieve great learning results and is a keen learner but did not know why she couldn't apply herself and complete education.

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She now also has a completely different outlook on learning and feels so confident that she wants to progress further and do a Coaching Professional Level 5 apprenticeship.

"I have finally found a career path that suits me and plays to my strengths."

Since working for Great Western Hospital Katie feels more confident in being open about who she is as a person. She does not feel she needs to mask her symptoms as much and is accepted with her additional needs.

Katie is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN).



Vicki



Vicki is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN).

She is doing a Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship level 6 at the BBC.

“I decided to do an apprenticeship because I wanted to get a degree with practical experience. The best thing about doing an apprenticeship is gaining practical experience from knowledgeable staff whilst also completing a degree.”

See **Vicki's apprenticeship journey** video for **UCAS**

Ellie

Ellie is a member of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN).

My choice to become an apprentice was after my discovery of apprenticeships in Year 10 at school. After exploring the opportunities, I made my decision to complete an apprenticeship after considering all my post -16 options.

I knew that the apprenticeship route was the right one for my development and career. It took me 2.5 years to finish my apprenticeships as I completed both Level 2 and 3 in business and administration.

The best thing about being an apprentice is that you are learning valuable skills and earning a wage at the same time. As an apprentice you gain a qualification as well as industry experience.

Choosing to become an apprentice means you are in charge of the best learning path for your career - you choose which apprenticeship programme, which employer, which training provider and most of all you choose your own success and goals for your future. That's what I like about apprenticeships the most!

“An Apprenticeship was the best choice I ever made! Becoming an Apprentice enabled me to take charge in choosing the best learning path for me where I could choose apprenticeship, employer, training provider and most of all you choose your own success and goals for your future. That's what I like about apprenticeships the most!”

