

# Apprenticeship Journey

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## How did you get into your apprenticeship?

At 16, I knew I wanted a career in Science, but I assumed the main paths were Medicine or Dentistry. With that in mind, I chose A-levels in Biology, Chemistry, and Maths, and began preparing to apply for Medicine. However, the more I learned, the more I realized the course content wasn't exactly what I had anticipated. I discovered that my true passion lay closer to the science itself, particularly in Microbiology. This shift in focus was largely influenced by my A-level Biology teacher, a former microbiologist, who introduced me to fascinating topics like antimicrobial resistance through additional webinars.

To gain relevant experience, I worked at my local pharmacy, which helped me better understand the principles behind pharmaceutical science, setting a solid foundation for my later interest in AstraZeneca's work.

I thoroughly researched different career paths, but I found that apprenticeships weren't as well-promoted as university options, especially in sixth form. When I came across AstraZeneca's Microbiology Laboratory Scientist Degree Apprenticeship on their website, I realized this was exactly what I was looking for. I wanted hands-on experience, which is crucial in fields like Microbiology and Pharmaceutical Science. University became my backup plan as I focused on securing this apprenticeship. After putting in the effort and successfully passing the interview stages, I was thrilled to be offered the role at AstraZeneca, and I've never looked back.



## What is your job/study now, and what do you do day-to-day?

I'm currently in the third year of my four-year BSc in Bioscience at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), where I study one day a week remotely. Each year, I visit the university for a week to assess my lab skills and connect with other apprentices and lecturers. My current units include Business Improvement, which ties into my workplace project, and Biotechnology. My previous modules have all been relevant to my role and the broader Pharmaceutical Industry.

Throughout my apprenticeship, I've rotated through various teams. I spent a year in QC (Environmental Process Assurance), six months in Product Quality Testing, six months in QA (Environmental Assurance Officer), and I'm now working in PT&D (Pharmaceutical Technology & Development) Microbiology. My role as an EAO was particularly insightful. I was responsible for reviewing Environmental Monitoring data for a sterile manufacturing plant, advising production teams, and investigating non-compliance issues. I quickly learned how essential quality is and how it directly impacts patient safety. Currently, I'm involved in technology projects like the Synthetic Endotoxin Reagent project, which means my daily tasks vary between lab work, report writing, and training.

## What does the future hold?

The future looks incredibly exciting. As I continue to progress through my apprenticeship at AstraZeneca, I'll deepen my understanding of the business and my role within it. I'm particularly passionate about using my skills to impact patients' lives through my work in PT&D, and I aim to introduce new technologies to streamline lab processes.

My academic goal is to achieve a 1st class BSc in Bioscience, and I'm also considering pursuing a Master's degree after my apprenticeship. As a registered STEM and SIP ambassador, I'm committed to outreach and mentoring, and I hope to inspire young people who, like me, once thought Medicine was their only option. I want to improve access to careers fairs and other opportunities, especially for those who may not be aware of apprenticeship options.

## What are the pros and cons of an apprenticeship versus traditional routes?

I'm naturally biased, but I'd recommend an apprenticeship to anyone considering it. One of the biggest advantages is the hands-on experience, which has significantly boosted my employability compared to a traditional university degree. Additionally, I've gained invaluable insight into the areas of science I enjoy most, which has helped me narrow down my future career path.

Financially, apprenticeships are a huge benefit. Unlike traditional university routes, apprenticeships don't come with the burden of rent, debt, or other costs, which can be a barrier for many students. Another misconception is that apprenticeships are limited in scope, but they're incredibly diverse. You might find yourself on a path you never expected.

Networking and professional development opportunities are also plentiful in apprenticeships. While I haven't experienced the typical "university life," I don't feel like I've missed out. There are many social events for apprentices and graduates, and frankly, I don't think the traditional university lifestyle would have suited me anyway.

## What skills have you developed during your apprenticeship?

During my apprenticeship, I've developed a wide range of technical skills related to Microbiology and the broader pharmaceutical industry. However, I've found that soft skills are just as crucial, if not more so, in a professional setting. AstraZeneca and MMU have given me countless opportunities to build these skills through outreach and networking sessions.

I've learned to present posters, pitch ideas to leaders, and actively seek out mentors. I've become more proactive in my personal and professional development, and I've honed my leadership, organizational, and project-planning skills. I've also learned how to promote and ensure compliance with quality and safety standards, and how to design and implement new processes based on scientific data.

## What advice would you give to someone considering an apprenticeship?

My biggest piece of advice is to research all your options. Apprenticeships are incredibly diverse, and resources like IfATE and UCAS websites now list them alongside university degrees. Take the time to explore different universities and employers offering apprenticeships in your field.

Also, don't rush your decision. It's important to gain work experience and practice for interviews, even if that means doing mock interviews with friends or family. Once you're in an apprenticeship, remember that you're responsible for your own development. The more proactive and engaged you are, the more you'll get out of the experience. Seek out opportunities, ask to shadow different roles, but also make sure to maintain a healthy work-life balance.