

# Apprenticeship Journey

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## How did you get into your apprenticeship?

I took 3 A levels in sixth form in Biology, Chemistry and Economics and at that point in my life I had my sight set on university as it was the traditional way to continue my education and it was heavily promoted by my school. As a result, in 2020 I began a Bsc in Economics at the University of Glasgow.

Due to it being the first year of Covid I didn't manage to make many friends and I was stuck in my accommodation for the duration of the first and second year during my time there. It was a very unpleasant experience with some bad teaching and limited support. Therefore, I decided it was in my best interests to drop out of university and take a year out to decide what I would like to do.

I started a job at my local pub which really got me back into the right head-space, I met some of my best friends and gave me the opportunity to look for a job I was really passionate about.

I began searching for science related degree apprenticeships on different websites such as Gov.uk and UCAS. I was lucky enough to fall upon the CSL Seqirus degree apprenticeship (the first of its kind at CSL) and I applied. I submitted my CV alongside some video interview questions, and I was fortunate to be asked in for an "assessment day". This is where they invite the remaining candidates to the site and we are given tours, practice some lab techniques, meet some key members of staff, and do some short tests.

A couple of months later, I got a call to say I had been offered one of the two roles in the company. I was so excited and delighted and I began my degree apprenticeship in September 2023.



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

For the first 11 months of my degree apprenticeship, I started as a Quality Control Analyst in the QC Bioassay lab on the Seqirus site. Here, I began learning about what it takes to be a lab analyst and started training in different assays within the lab, one of which is called SRID and is a very technical skill which requires a steady hand and concentration. I am happy to say I am very competent at this assay now due to the great help and support of my peers.

At the same time as working, I study online at home for a Bioscience degree at Manchester Metropolitan University. This might sound like a lot of work, but the study/work/life balance is incredible. My work allows me to have one day off a week to carry out my study and then the rest of the working week I am on site. Not only this but they are brilliant at supporting me in both roles in and out of work.

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I then took a month secondment in the Environmental, Health and Safety department where I met new people and began to expand my network and understanding of the business. Although short, it was a brilliant time for me as it gave me a completely different outlook on the job I will hopefully be carrying out once my study is done and I am hopefully offered fulltime employment.

Finally, now I have completed my first year at the company and I am well settled in, I have begun my next 11-month stint in QC Microbiology. Once again, this is another opportunity to expand my knowledge of different aspects of the business and meet more new people.

## What does the future hold?

The future is so exciting for me and my fellow degree apprentices. We have a three-year plan from now (four from when I started) which outlines what we will do over the duration of our degrees. We will be moving from department to department to gather valuable skills, expand our network and link our university work to our everyday work.

Not only this but we are provided with some of the biggest opportunities that others may not get the chance to be involved in such as myself speaking on a panel at the Bionow Pharma Manufacturing conference in May 2024, speaking in front of large audiences on different topics and meeting senior people in the company such as Paul McKenzie, the CEO, and his board members. Opportunities like this really allow you to grow your personal brand which then opens up external opportunities to do the same.

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

### Pros:

- Paid to do a degree (no debt at the end)
- Work experience for 4 years alongside a degree at the end
- Get to travel to university a few times during the year with expenses to meet other degree apprentices on the same course
- Networking opportunities with established business professionals
- Advantage over a typical graduate who comes out of university with just a degree and no work experience

### Cons:

- You miss out on some of the traditional university life
- Commuting is a slight issue for me if you live at home (not for everyone)
- Can be long hours depending on the degree apprenticeship
- You can't decide your own study days, the university sets them for you
- Not guaranteed a job after the four years

## What skills have you developed during your apprenticeship?

You learn a multitude of different skills during a degree apprenticeship. Here is an example of just some of the skills I have already gained in my first year:

- **Communication and public speaking skills** – having to work day-to-day with new people and even senior members of staff forces you to develop your ability to talk and can really help you break down barriers if you are someone who struggles with public speaking or just talking to new people.
- **Organisational skills** – if you aren't organised in your degree apprenticeship you will really fall behind, you learn to manage your tasks effectively and get them completed to the best of your ability.
- **Time management skills** – it is likely you will be involved in various meetings through your time as an apprentice and managing your time can be tricky but working in an environment with more experienced people can really help you develop this skill.
- **Networking skills** – apps like LinkedIn really allow you to grow as a great employee as you expand your network with people through your business.
- **General work skills (in my line of work, scientific assays)** – carrying out different kinds of tests and being taught by experienced professionals allows you to become particularly skilled at different aspects of your working life which will carry through into your future career.

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

Weigh up your options. In my opinion, starting a degree apprenticeship was the best decision I ever made, but make sure it is something you want to do and will be able to handle. It's not easy by any means but it is unbelievably rewarding, knowing you are working a full-time job and getting a degree at the same time will make you feel immensely proud and really mould you into a brilliant person who anyone would be lucky to have in their team.

If you end up getting an opportunity to undertake a degree apprenticeship, my best piece of advice would be take every opportunity presented to you. Although it may seem scary when presented with some tasks such as presenting to a large group of people or having lunch with the head of the company, it will give you the life experience to be able to deal with all kinds of challenges you may face in the future.