

Bonus Case Studies



APPRENTICE CASE STUDY: YASMIN GANLEY

Yasmin, like everyone else in her sixth form, was being pushed towards university. She knew it wasn't for her, but she didn't know what else to do next. Her great fear was ending up in a random job that she wouldn't enjoy.

Her story is a great example of what can happen if you just keep busy and give things a go.

She offered her time as a volunteer at a National Trust property helping with summer activities, setting up sports equipment and overseeing the young people using it. She clearly impressed, because at this point her colleague suggested that she would be a great fit for the new apprenticeship programme that they were taking part in. Although she still didn't know what she wanted to do, this sounded like a great option.

The apprenticeship was via Coach Core. During her apprenticeship she got to work on lots of really different projects, for example, getting women and girls more involved in football and learning about the history of the women's game.

Yasmin says her apprenticeship, as a Level 2 Community Activator Coach, has been transformative: 'It has given me the platform to grow myself as a person, to understand the world of work, to learn new and transferrable skills.' Sometimes this has been about confronting her insecurities: 'Having to go to a group of young people, speak in front of them and coach them when, in fact, I am shy and introverted, has really helped me to grow. It has been great to be out of my comfort zone and to get through the challenge.'

She has done so many things through her apprenticeship, many of which she didn't even realise existed – like becoming a qualified referee for Boccia!

Her main advice: 'Trust your instinct, go with what you want. For me, an apprenticeship was great: earn, get experience and a qualification – but you need to do what is right for you. Whatever you decide to do, make sure you take every opportunity you are presented with.'

Yasmin now works for Rise, an Active Partnership in Northumberland, Tyne & Wear where she supports with overseeing the Coach Core apprenticeship programme herself, bringing on the next generation of people like her. She says, 'I am excited about the future and looking forward to getting more involved and learning more.'



APPRENTICE CASE STUDY: ALEX FRESCO

Alex is a great example of how an apprenticeship can launch your career without defining it.

Alex finished her Level 3 apprenticeship in 2014 in Digital Marketing at global giant Google. After working for some great companies after Google, including large media agencies like Mindshare Worldwide, and taking some time out to travel the world, she wondered whether advertising was what she really enjoyed and wanted to pursue.

She decided it wasn't, so she took her well-developed marketing skills to a sector where she could make more of a difference and got a job at the British Heart Foundation as an Events Marketing Executive.

While at Mindshare she had completed a Level 4 apprenticeship in Digital Marketing and is about to embark on a Level 7 apprenticeship in Leadership and Management. In other words, she has 'scaffolded' her career using apprenticeships – not just using one to get started.

She is currently a Senior Fundraising Events Manager at the charity Alzheimer's Society, managing the Bespoke Events team: 'I love the feeling you get at the end of a long event day, when the final participants cross the finish line with so much determination and passion. You and your team have worked incredibly hard to make the day happen and raise money for an important cause.' Alex, still in her twenties, manages a team of 12 and works on the strategic side of things for the organisation, as well as continuing to help develop people in her team – something she enjoys.

'Apprenticeships are amazing: you don't have to stop your career to learn. On the contrary, you learn while you're getting paid and gaining experience. More than that, what you are learning turbo-charges your work, while at the same time your work is the subject of your learning. There is no other way of learning quite like this, and it works perfectly for me. Being able to do an apprenticeship that was just over a year-long was a great way for me to test what I wanted to do in my career.'

She notes that it can be tough in terms of workload as you have to be ready to truly invest your time and effort to get the most out of an apprenticeship.



APPRENTICE CASE STUDY: OCEAN RIANNA

Lots of people are intrigued by the route Ocean has taken with her career. Certainly, it has worked for her.

Her apprenticeship was as a Sports and Community Coach, working with Birmingham City FC as part of Premiership Stars, bringing the benefits of playing sport – and a little bit of elite football glitter! – to primary schools in the West Midlands. She completed the apprenticeship in February 2023 – with a Distinction.

Before her apprenticeship, while growing up Ocean loved playing football, but – like many people who dream of becoming a sports star – suffered an injury which meant that path was shut off. She was almost resigned to another route (in her case, studying accountancy at college, which she did not enjoy), before she found the Coach Core programme, offering an apprenticeship.

‘For me the apprenticeship was perfect way to start my career: I wanted first-hand experience, to learn by doing, not from someone talking at me. It’s been fantastic to be involved in so many physical activities for children – not just football, but also dance, cricket, basketball and a whole load of other activities.’

She has found something she loves and can see her career progressing, perhaps even one day setting up her own community-based organisation.

Her advice? ‘Back yourself to find something you really enjoy. Even if one door is closed, there are always other routes and options to get you to where you want to be. Keep an open mind, don’t be fixated on just one option, like college. Go and find out as much information as you can.’



APPRENTICE CASE STUDY: MARIAM SHAIKH

It is sometimes thought that a Level 3 apprenticeship (officially equivalent to A levels) in a generalist occupation such as Business Administration will not provide a strong foundation for a good career. Mariam Shaikh's story says otherwise.

As with most in her year at school, Mariam was set on going to university – going through the usual UCAS process alongside all of her peers. And if she had got the results she was hoping for, she may have continued on that path. But on results day, having got what at the time felt like disappointing news, she had a feeling that maybe university was just not for her.

She took some time out as a gap year, working in retail. Inspired by her brother who had begun an apprenticeship (in IT), she started looking for and applying for different business apprenticeships, not just in business administration, but also in HR and accounting. Going via the Government's Find an Apprenticeship website, she set up a routine of looking and applying every Monday – applying in the end to about 50 different apprenticeships. Some employers thought she was overqualified(!), but she persevered, getting better and better at the application process every time.

'My advice is to research the organisation you are applying for – it worked for me, and now when I interview people applying for apprenticeships it is obvious who has done their research and who hasn't – and it is always impressive when they have.' She also advises people to understand whether the apprenticeship is going to provide good opportunities or not: 'Make sure you understand the job you are applying for and if it is going to stretch you: I do know people who have done apprenticeships that sounded similar to mine, but where in fact they didn't get the same opportunities as I have had.'

And what an experience it has been for her – she has learned about the fundamental nuts and bolts of business: accounts, payroll, project management, people management. 'I know what a GANTT chart is, I know what a SMART target is – I am so much more knowledgeable about business than when I began. The fact that I was able to apply what I was learning straightaway in my actual job – unlike doing an A level or a degree – meant the learning has really stuck. I love it.' She has been involved in marketing and outreach, which really helped her develop confidence and communication skills – to the point where she co-hosted the Regional Finals of the 2022 National Apprenticeship Awards in front of an audience of hundreds.

'Apprenticeships are the way forward as far as I'm concerned. There is a reason why so many employers are now embracing them as a way to recruit people. And it has been so good for me – I have grown as a person, and not just in work.'

Mariam has now embarked on a Level 6 apprenticeship which will give her a Chartered Management Degree; and as she goes through the different modules she is rotating around her business to work in the equivalent department. This combination of study plus real world experience means that the business world really will be her oyster when she qualifies in 2026. She says, 'I don't know which branch of business I will go down – but I am excited to find out.'



APPRENTICE CASE STUDY: AIDAN LANCASTER

Aidan was coming to the end of his A levels at college and, like many others, felt the peer pressure to apply to university – and that’s what most others seemed to be doing. But he knew that, while university might be lots of fun, it wouldn’t suit him, not least because of his dyslexia. Aidan had a strong sense that he would flourish in an environment where he could put his learning into practice.

Although the ‘current’ that pulled people towards university was strong, Aidan was lucky in that his parents were supportive of his quest to find an apprenticeship instead of completing his UCAS form along with everyone else. Once his teachers understood his approach, they supported him too.

‘My parents were ahead of their time really, and saw the potential of apprenticeships for me. They encouraged me to ask not about my short-term next step, but instead to ask myself: ‘Where do I want to be in five years’ time?’”

He concluded that an apprenticeship would be right for him, and set about finding one. He succeeded in getting one at McDonald’s, doing a Level 3 programme in Hospitality with training provider Lifetime. ‘The values and ethos of McDonald’s as a business really fit well with mine, and the fact that they are one of the biggest organisations in the world in the hospitality sector and are renowned for their early talent and career development investments meant it was a no brainer.’

Since starting in a restaurant as a crew member preparing orders for customers, Aidan has not looked back. He quickly moved up the rungs to become an Assistant Manager for one of the largest McDonald’s restaurants in the country.

After five years working in restaurants, Aidan got the opportunity to apply for a secondment role in McDonald’s UK headquarters, working in the learning and development department, developing and delivering online courses to newly promoted leaders across the business. ‘It’s a two-year secondment that is providing me with the opportunity to see a totally different side to the business,’ says Aidan. ‘What’s great about this role is that I can use the knowledge I’ve built up from working in restaurants to help educate new leaders. Having that experience is really helpful and means I’m well-placed to answer any questions. Being here is making me excited about my career in the future.’

He credits his learning for much of his rapid development – not just the apprenticeship, but the BA Honours degree in Business Management (with a retail specialism) that McDonald’s went on to sponsor him to do part-time at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School.

‘In the apprenticeship there were some elements of theory, which I thought I wouldn’t like – but because I was able to apply them directly to my work in the restaurant, it somehow made so much sense. But then with my more advanced studies, I learned about how businesses really work, way beyond what I might have seen at an individual McDonald’s restaurant level.’

As importantly, the learning opportunities afforded him by McDonald’s have enabled him to create a strong professional network with like-minded people. ‘I’ve got some amazing friends and colleagues across the country who I continue to share ideas and learnings with.’

Aidan mentions specifically the traditional stigma associated with ‘flipping burgers’ for a business like McDonald’s: ‘You need to really look beyond whatever impression you might have and evaluate for yourself what the real career opportunities are for you. Find something that interests you and that will work with how you like to learn. Finally, make sure you get a role with a business that aligns with your own personal values and morals – this made a huge difference for me and my career progression.’