



National Apprenticeship Week #NAW2024



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National Apprenticeship Week 2024

To support National Apprenticeship Week, we have collated some interviews from Environmental Practitioner Degree Apprentices to give you an insight into their journeys and experiences. All of the interviews were conducted by apprentices who are studying at Keele University, of which their course is accredited by the Community for Environmental Disciplines in Higher Education (CEDHE), which is part of the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES) family.

We hope this resource will help you to navigate the environmental sector, and decide if an apprenticeship is the right path for you.

Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to:

Abbie Aleksic

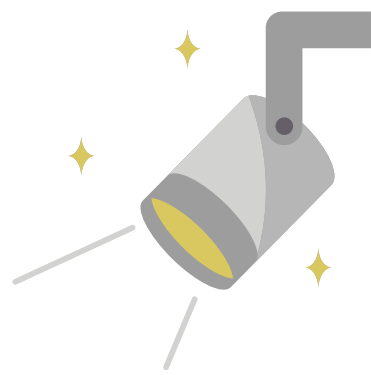
David Morris

Harriet Codling



Hear from the apprentices

Abbie Aleksic



What did you study before starting your apprenticeship?

Before starting the apprenticeship, I completed a two-year Level 3 Extended Diploma in Performing Arts. My original plan was to pursue a career in the theatre industry, but over time, I developed a real passion for the environmental sector and knew I wanted to switch paths. After experimenting in full-time jobs in other industries and feeling dissatisfied, I successfully applied for this apprenticeship and feel so lucky to have been chosen!

Which organisation do you work for and what university degree will you achieve on completion of your apprenticeship?

I work for the Environment Agency and will attain an Environmental Science (Practitioner) BSc degree from Keele University upon completion. In the Agency, I move between placement teams every 6 months, so I have been able to develop a great breadth of knowledge and experience in different areas of the organisation.

What made you choose an apprenticeship?

There were many factors at play when deciding to choose an apprenticeship. I had applied for university courses for two consecutive years prior, but always felt that it wasn't the right path for me so backed out of my applications. I was still keen to get a degree, but didn't want to have student loans to repay, move away from home, or no longer earn a salary. When I found this degree apprenticeship advertised, I couldn't believe that such a scheme existed! For me, this apprenticeship is the best of both worlds, as I get to gain 5 years of practical work experience while developing a strong understanding of the sector from an educational perspective.

What skills have you gained so far?

Some of the most important skills I have gained are **soft skills**. My communication and interpersonal skills have developed greatly, as I have the opportunity to speak with people within and outside of the Agency. Working with others has helped me learn my strengths within a team dynamic, and my public speaking skills have greatly improved through delivering presentations. Time management and organisational skills are fundamental to successfully balancing placement work with university work, and I think this is something I have developed over time. I have also gained **technical skills**, which are crucial to the industry, like having a basic understanding of GIS and mapping software.

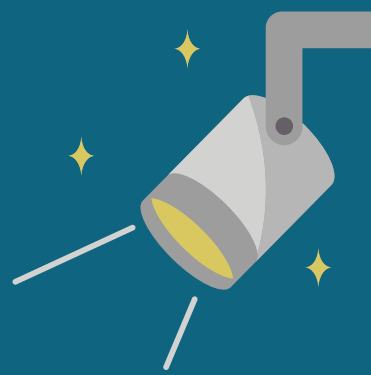
What top tips would you give to someone applying for an apprenticeship?

I think the most important thing is to believe in yourself and your ability. Like me, you may not have directly relevant qualifications to the apprenticeship you are applying for, but as long as you can show your passion, motivation, and dedication, you will do great! A practical tip I can give is to do your research beforehand and make sure that the course is the right fit for you, as it will make the journey so much more enjoyable.



Hear from the apprentices

Harriet Codling



What did you study before starting your apprenticeship?

I studied Geography, Biology and Computer Science at A Levels, so very much tailored my A Levels to the career I wanted to head into. I always loved Geography at GCSE, particularly for the field trips and natural hazards! Computer Science enabled me to use a different “logical, problem solving” part of my brain and Biology was my favourite science to complete the set!

Which organisation do you work for and what university degree will you get on completion of your apprenticeship?

I currently work for the Environment Agency (EA) rotating round different departments in the company every 6 months while studying Environmental Science (Practitioner) (Hons) at Keele University one day a week. We have “block release” on campus twice a year for practical and field based experience.

What skills have you gained so far?

I think with any degree apprenticeship, the skill you develop most is time management and organisation. It can be difficult to ‘flip’ between academic studies and workplace commitments, but the fast paced, dynamic environment is thrilling!

What made you choose an apprenticeship?

Although quite liking an academic setting in sixth form and successfully getting 5 UCAS offers in the summer of Year 13, I believe (and still do!) that working alongside colleagues already in the profession is the best way to fuel your passion for the subject that you’re interested in! From going out on site visits with stakeholders and team members, meeting and inspiring members of the public at engagement events, to leading on projects within the EA that make an actual difference to people and planet straight out of A Levels was something that really appealed to me.

Through all my experiences I’ve mentioned, I’ve also developed a lot of key communication and soft skills. I am a self-confessed environmental nerd who was quite introverted at times, but since I took this apprenticeship on and jumped very far out of my comfort zone, I feel like I’ve gained a lot more confidence speaking publicly and on my own ideas when working on projects.

Rotating round teams within the EA has allowed me to gain so much breadth and depth of environmental knowledge, from flooding to drought to biodiversity. By the end of my degree I will have been in 10 different teams and that really excites me to be exposed to, and to be involved in, all the different projects that the teams work hard on: something that I never would have achieved at such an early stage in my career with a full time degree.

What does a typical week look like?

Although it’s the most cliché thing you will hear from an apprentice, every day really does vary! I could be helping my colleagues with consultations for flood risk activities (making sure people are taking enough steps to avoid ecological and environmental harm in their projects), or I could be out in a boat conducting electrofishing, fish and water vole surveys, or visiting places with our assets experiencing flooding or coastal erosion. I am also training as an incident officer, so I’ll be out engaging with communities after an environmental incident which can include pollution spills, fish distress or flooding incidents. My favourite days are on site without a doubt!

Hear from the apprentices

David Morris

What did you study before starting your apprenticeship?

I'm on to my third career now! I started off in catering management and I didn't get the best of grades and always thought I could do better. I took some time off to travel after university and then worked in hospitality. The economic crisis meant that hospitality took a hit so I ended up working in the family business as a butcher. I took some career guidance and worked out that I wanted to work in this sector and ended up taking a job at Natural England.

Which organisation do you work for and what university degree will you get on completion of your apprenticeship?

I work for Natural England and will achieve an Environmental Science (Practitioner) BSc degree from Keele University upon completion. This is a full degree over 5 years.



What made you choose an apprenticeship?

I've always been interested in food and how that gets to our plate, this has fuelled my interest in the natural world. I was one of the first people through the door in the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) team at Natural England and when 3 months into the degree apprenticeship scheme and I got asked if I would be interested in doing the degree apprenticeship. I knew that degree apprenticeships were a thing but nothing had stuck out to me before but, this did! This seemed to be the right fit and there seemed to be no downsides. My organisation pay for my qualification and I get time at work to study. The apprenticeship runs in a way that I can fit it in to 20% of my working time.

Have there been any challenges?

I have a young family so juggling work, studying and family time has been a challenge. I can fit my apprenticeship in my working hours but I would be scraping a pass, if I want to achieve good grades then I need to put some work in over the weekends. I was having problems getting started with coursework, the university offered me the opportunity to go for an ADHD assessment and I have now been diagnosed with ADHD. I am hopeful, because of the opportunities available to me, I can now work on getting the help to get on with the course as well as putting steps in place to make my life easier in the long run. I don't think I would be in this position if I hadn't taken the opportunity of the apprenticeship.

What does a typical week look like?

I work Monday – Friday and I take Friday as my study day. I have weekly lectures which come as a 2 hour block, these are sometimes live and sometimes pre-recorded. When we start new modules, we have a week on campus for lectures and practicals. Mornings tend to be for lectures and afternoons for practicals. There is a really nice learning environment and it helps to engage with the module better, building relationships with the class so that you can support each other.

Find out more

What is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a career pathway that allows you to learn while gaining experience on the job. It is a job, with a salary and contract of employment, and it gives you the chance to study while you are working.

Available to those 16 and over, apprenticeships in science offer hands on experience, combined with at least 20% of your time in off-the-job learning at a college, university, training provider or within your workplace, away from day-to-day working environment and duties.

More information can be found on the [Science Council website](#).

CEDHE Accredited Courses

We currently accredit the Environmental Practitioner Degree Apprenticeship offered by Keele University. You can find out more information about this course on the [Keele University website](#).

Useful resources

Click the links below to find out more.

Find a training provider

All you need to know - Society for the Environment

Professional body registration - Science Council

Find an Apprenticeship - UCAS

Find an Apprenticeship - GOV.UK



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