



Melissa Towlson, Environmental Health Apprenticeship, Basildon Borough Council

My name is Melissa Towlson and I work for Environmental health in Basildon Council, I have been working there since September 2019. I really wanted to go into an apprenticeship once I had finished secondary school because I knew it was an amazing opportunity, it gave me the chance to get the experience that most companies want from an employee, and it also gave me the chance to get a qualification whilst gaining so many important skills.

Why did you choose an apprenticeship?

I chose an apprenticeship because I knew full time education wasn't for me, I wanted to go into the world of working as soon as I could. I was lucky enough to find Basildon Council did apprenticeships when I attended an apprenticeship fair, I spoke to some people who were working there at the time, and they explained to me what a day-to-day work life is like and what would be expected. It was something I knew I wanted to do instantly, I then applied and got an interview, and after the interview I was lucky enough to be chosen as one of the apprentices. If I wasn't chosen to get an apprenticeship, I had plans to go to college to do my level 2 and 3 in business but that was always going to be my back up plan.

How have you found the experience of being an apprentice in local government?

I have been lucky enough to work in 2 different departments and they have been Environmental Health and the Communications and Marketing team. Wherever I went I always felt excited to go, as I knew everyone I worked with would be so kind and very helpful. If I didn't get something I always felt like I could ask for help without feeling embarrassed and I knew the people who I was working around only wanted the best for me. I have learnt so much along the way with many different IT skills and many different communications skills. I was a bit nervous and shy going into my apprenticeship as I had just left school with no working skills, but I explained to everyone that I was a bit nervous and they were all so understanding and wanted to help me out.

How do you balance working and studying at the same time?

When you do an apprenticeship, you also must do a qualification alongside working. At the start I was very nervous about this because I was thinking to myself how I will balance working and learning at the same time. When you are at work you are allowed to take one afternoon each week to complete your college work and if you need more time for example, you need a whole day in a week to do it your manager is understanding about it and will let you take the time. I sometimes take a full day if my workload is complete, and my manager is so understanding she lets me complete it whenever I need to because she understands that sometimes it is hard to do the balance. I also have once a month college day where you must attend and that day is for college only, you're not expected to do work as well. I also have quite a lot of meetings with my college assessor who helps me out with college work and if I ever get stuck, I know I can always have a chat to her, and she will always help me out to her best ability.

What does your typical day look like?

At work every day is different, for example my typical day would probably be me logging on at 9am checking my emails and getting back to any unanswered questions. I also like to write down all the things I need to get done during the day and tick them off along the way, so I know I'm getting my work done. Now I'm doing a lot of Low-risk food businesses work and that's what my day consists of, so I check any emails that have come through and then I update our software's and send out some letters or emails if needed. However, this can change and I sometimes go to events to help my colleagues out or if I'm needed anywhere, I always like to volunteer myself to help because I learn a lot from all my colleagues around me.

On reflection, what do you think are the benefits of an apprenticeship route?

There are so many different benefits of the apprenticeship route, such as I have got to complete my level 2 business admin and I'm currently doing my level 3. Another benefit is that I was lucky enough to go through my level 2 and 3 food safety training which was such a good thing for me - I learnt so much. One of the biggest benefits is I believe now I do know what I want to be doing for the rest of my life. I believe this apprenticeship has really set out my future for me because I have literally learnt from the beginning and now working my way through Environmental Health, like many of my colleagues they started out as apprentices and now they are Environmental Health Officers.

What's the biggest impact you think you have made in your Council?

I think the biggest impact I have made whilst working at the council is showing everyone that anything is possible, even when you have a massive step back in life that you can come back and still get your qualifications and still work to your best ability and no matter what happens in life that everyone around you is there for you.

What's been the most rewarding part of your apprenticeship so far?

The most rewarding part of my apprenticeship is getting my level 2 business admin qualification and being out through for my level 2 and 3 food safety training because I do believe that these qualifications will one day make me a good Environmental Health officer.

Why would you recommend an apprenticeship in local government to someone considering one?

My current role is now an Environmental Health Apprentice. I would recommend an apprenticeship in local government because it is such a great experience because you are learning all the skills employers are looking for and you are also getting the experience that many companies out there are looking for. I would also recommend an apprenticeship in local government because you get a lot of experiences within different departments for example I've worked in Environmental Health, communications, and marketing, but if there is one department you would like to work for or are interested in there is a possibility that you could work there and learn about the department.

How would you promote 'working for a local authority' to other potential apprentices?

To promote working for a local authority, I would put more adverts on social media because when I was looking for apprenticeships, I didn't know local authorities did apprenticeships. It was only when I went to the apprenticeship fair and spoke to someone I realised.

Do you have any advice to offer anyone considering an apprenticeship role in local government?

If I could give anyone some advice considering getting a role in Local Government and I would say is just yourself because I was so nervous going into that interview, but I sat down and answered the questions how I would and let them see your personality, they just want to get to know how you are as a person.

What do you hope to accomplish career-wise over the next five years?

In 5 years, I'm hoping to complete my level 3 business admin and got mu university qualifications and just be starting out as an Environmental Health officer helping all the residents in the Basildon borough and giving back to the community.