



Sarah Tate, Business Administration Apprenticeship (Level 3), Great Yarmouth Borough Council

My name is Sarah Tate and I would like to share with you my experience of joining the sector as an apprentice way back at the start of my career in 1997 and how the sector has supported me on my journey to the role I am in today as the Head of Organisational Development.

When did you join Great Yarmouth Borough Council?

06 April 2020 (for the second time)

What made you apply for an apprenticeship role?

When I left college, I knew that I didn't want to go to University to study for 3 years but I didn't know what I wanted to do, or where. It was just by chance that Norfolk County Council were advertising for apprentices for a Level 3 Business Administration NVQ. It interested me because it meant that I was working but also that I could continue my studies without having to go to University. I was extremely lucky to secure the role and started in the Education department in September 1997.

The job wasn't based in one part of the team but a role which moved around and gave me experience in a number of areas within the Education department. I moved teams every 3 months and was fortunate to work with some wonderful people. By May 1998 I applied for and was offered a permanent role with the Council. I was able to complete my apprenticeship but it didn't stop there, I was fully supported to undertake more learning and complete my Level 3 Customer Services NVQ and Prince 2 foundation project management qualifications.

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

The council were incredibly supportive of learning and development and during my 8 years with Norfolk County Council my career progressed in a number of departments. My experience whilst working at Norfolk County Council was fantastic and by undertaking an apprenticeship, I was able to undertake a variety of roles whilst continuing my learning and development. It was the best decision I made to undertake an apprenticeship and my career went from strength to strength.

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

It was so long ago that I don't remember! However, when I then went to another part of the public sector and joined Norfolk Constabulary, I discovered HR and my learning and development went from strength to strength, fully supported by the Constabulary I grew my career as an HR professional from an Assistant HR Advisor to an HR Service Delivery Manager by the time I left in 2015. The Constabulary supported me to undertake my CIPD Level 7 in HRM, study was tough, but with the support of my family and a lot of hard work I found a balance and managed to work full time and study.

In 2016 I move to Great Yarmouth Borough Council, for the first time! During my three years with the Council I was supported to study for my ILM Level 5 in Leadership and Management and in my spare time I completed my Post Graduate Certificate in Employment Law. My study and learning during this time not only enhanced my skills as an HR professional but as a manager also. It was fantastic that the Council supported me to do this as I continued to develop my career.

2019 I left the Council to work in the private sector, something which I had always wanted to do and spent 15 months with a fantastic company who specialised in expat medical insurance, still working in HR in a stand alone role I was able to use all of my skills and learning over the years to successfully undertake the role.

Then I was extremely lucky to be successful in the role which I hold today as the Head of Organisational Development for Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

What does your typical day look like?

My role was so varied and exciting, no two days were the same.

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

There are huge benefits to the apprenticeship route and certainly in the public sector where my ongoing learning and development have been fully supported for the whole of my career to date. Being an apprentice and experiencing a number of different roles helped me to decide what I wanted to do and where I wanted to do it whilst also giving me formal qualifications.

What makes apprenticeships a good development route (journey) for your career?

Apprenticeships allow us to experience new things whilst continuing to learn. From more generalist qualifications to more specialist roles, the variety of what you can access as an apprentice is fantastic.

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

A career in local government is rewarding, varied, supportive, challenging, and exciting. There are so many different opportunities and jobs to choose from and local government is committed to ongoing learning and development as you will see from my journey. Without the support of local government and the wider public sector I am not sure I would have achieved everything I have during my career so far.

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

Go for it, don't hesitate, come and work with us and just see where a career in local government might take you.

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

I have so much to do and achieve over the next 5 years in my current role I want to do all of that and then in the longer term who knows, a Director of HR or another senior position within local government that branches out beyond HR.