

# TIPS AND ADVICE FOR SKILLED TRADE APPRENTICES

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# A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Embarking on an apprenticeship can be an exciting time. There's a whole range of possible paths your career could take and a wealth of experiences ahead to look forward to. But, ask anyone who's been an apprentice in any industry and they'll probably tell you they faced very similar challenges.

We were keen to get some of these things together in a handy guide for those new to the working world. So we went out and talked to some of the those who have recently started an apprenticeship, are far enough along to know about what it entails – and even those who've made a successful career off the back of one.

You'll find people talking about the courses they're doing, what made them choose the option in the first place, what they enjoy and the challenges – all of which could be handy if you're looking for the right programme. It's important to see how the hard work can pay off so there are real-life experiences from those who have been through it all and can discuss how they might do things differently knowing what they do now.

This guide gives you information which may not be covered as part of your course or apprenticeship training including some of the workplace jargon you might have to deal with, as well as some of the on-the-job pranks newcomers need to watch out for!

The best employers will always want employees that understand the industry and have a working knowledge of their sector. We hope you'll find something useful within these pages that helps you get the right start and enjoy a long and successful career in the years to come.

***Trevor Culpin,  
TradePoint Marketing Manager***

# APPRENTICESHIPS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*If you've been considering an apprenticeship as a way to kick start your career, it's likely you'll have a few questions.*

*These might range from what to expect on the job to how you can make the most of your time in the job.*

*Hopefully, you'll find the answers you want throughout this ebook, but first let's start with some of the more basic questions...*



## ***Who can do an apprenticeship?***

Anyone over the age of 16 may apply for an apprenticeship, providing they're eligible to work in the UK and not in full-time education. It doesn't matter if you've already started working elsewhere (as you'll find out in our 'Apprentice to small business owner' interview on page 9).

## ***What preparation or experience will I need?***

With more than 1,500 apprenticeship roles available in a range of industries, skills or qualifications needed can vary. Typically grade C or above in GCSE Maths and English, along with Science and Design and Technology will prove useful, as will some work experience. There are a number of other routes, such as a National Progression Award or completion of a Ready for Work programme or similar.

## ***What are the typical questions I might be asked in an interview?***

The National Apprenticeship Service offers a range of useful advice relating to preparing for an interview. There are a whole variety of questions that could come up, but there are always a few that are worth preparing answers for... these include:

- How well do you work in a team?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why do you think you're suitable?
- Why do you want the job/apprenticeship?
- What are your career goals?

## ***Where can you find out more information?***

We've included a range of useful websites and telephone numbers at the back of this guide. You'll also find plenty of hints and tips about where to go when you want to learn more. Speaking to a careers adviser is a good starting point though. You can contact the National Careers Service by calling 0800 100 900 or visiting [www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk](http://www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk)

# THE APPRENTICE EYE VIEW: WHY CHOOSE AN APPRENTICESHIP?

*One of the most important choices you'll face as you embark upon a career in the industry is what type of apprenticeship to choose. We contacted people who were starting out as a trainee to find out how they came to make their own decision...*



Making decisions about your future isn't always easy. You might feel a bit overwhelmed by the number of options available and find yourself struggling to see where the best place is to start. There are plenty of good reasons why an apprenticeship might be right for you, so we asked those who've most recently faced those same choices.

We had responses that gave a real insight in to why people are where they are now. For many, the chance to earn and learn at the same time was more appealing than the alternative, with one trainee telling us they "didn't want to get into future debt by going to university". For others, it was more about the practical approach to personal development and a "hands on" way of learning.

Another thing people said informed their decision was the promise of variety, with "the split between work placement and college" noted as a definite plus. Apprentices pointed out it was important to consider who you'd be learning from too, making looking into the reputation of the company and the experience of its staff an important thing to do. "Try to research the company as much as possible," we were told. Of course, you can do this by searching the web to see what projects the firm is involved with, or contacting employees or former employees through social media sites like LinkedIn for a more personal insight into the company.

Of course, when making any important decision, do your homework about some of the wider points that will help you on a longer-term basis. "Really research the sector you want to go into," one of our respondents told us. "Know the hot topics surrounding your chosen area including what's trending in order to get the best out of the course." But whether researching the company or the sector, one thing you must do is speak to professionals or related trade bodies – some of which you'll find listed on the back page of this guide.

For some, the apprenticeship they chose was one that followed a long-held interest or was inspired by the career of a family member, with one in particular saying they "had an interest" in the sector because of their dad. But, however you come to it, "make sure it's something your passionate about" by looking out for any taster sessions that are running at your college or place of learning.

And once you're on the job? What happens if you hate it? Well, one handy piece of advice that came up was making sure you "keep an open mind" at all times and avoid making yourself cynical by ignoring co-workers who tend to have nothing good to say about the company.

One of the best bits of advice offered on helping you choose the right apprenticeship was to "make sure you choose a career you will enjoy, as you'll have more fun and are more likely to give it your all" and to "believe in yourself".

# ON-SITE JARGON (YOU MIGHT NEED TO KNOW)

*The early days in a new job can feel at times like you're learning a new language, with all kinds of strange words being used. Don't panic, jargon is something you'll hear on a lot of jobs and in time you'll get used to it all.*

*We've rounded up some of the more unusual ones you might hear. Take a look and you might just find you're a step ahead when you start work with experienced people in the trade.*

**'BANKSMAN'  
or 'SLINGER'**

The man on the ground before and after moving a load

**'DOB 'N'DAB'**

A process used to glue plasterboards to masonry walls

**'FIRST FIX'**

All work undertaken before plastering walls and ceilings

**'FLASHING'**

Using sheet metal or other impervious materials to prevent water leaking through a roof or wall

**'FRENCHMAN'**

A tool for forming the shape of pointing in bricks

**'GRUBBING'**

The removal of trees, shrubs and other obstacles before construction starts

**'GUY WIRES'**

A wire used to secure a tall exterior mast, antenna or other structure in place

**'PURLIN'**

A horizontal timber rafter support, supported by walls, hip and valley rafters and roof trusses

**'QUOIN'**

The external angle of a building – or the bricks or stone blocks forming that angle

**'SARKING'**

Felt used as an underlining to a roof

**'SOFFIT'**

The visible covering of the underside of stairs, or a projecting surface like the eaves of a roof

**'SPIGOT'**

A tap on an outdoor water pipe

**'SQUINT'**

A special brick for use on a corner that is not a right angle

**'SUMP'**

A low open area in the ground that waste liquid flows into

**'TAKEOFF'**

An estimate of all the materials needed to complete a job

# THE APPRENTICE EYE VIEW: MAKING THE MOST OF IT FROM THE START

*When you start your apprenticeship, it's essential to make sure you get your learning off to a good start. We asked the question: 'If you could give one important piece of advice to somebody about to start their apprenticeship, what would it be?' Here's a look at some of the responses we received.*



From apprentices on all manner of courses and job roles, there were a number of themes that seemed to come up time and again. One common concern was around suffering from 'first-day jitters'. Fortunately, the overwhelming message was that, while you might be nervous, there really isn't any need to be – so "just stay calm and enjoy it".

However, one of our interviewees said it was also pretty natural for these nerves to turn into more permanent negative thoughts. "It's a new beginning and a completely new challenge so it's normal to have doubts – make sure you give it a go before you decide you made the wrong decision."

Another tip for the early days of your apprenticeship is to get to know as many people on your course or in your company as possible, as this will help you

to start building up good working relationships. Once work starts to come your way, make sure you keep it that way. If the work starts to dry up, always "ask for more" rather than sitting around doing nothing as this will "impress your employee and show you're enthusiastic and determined to do well".

***Don't panic if you start and don't like it***

If making mistakes is something that worries you, you'll be pleased to hear our respondents said that was completely normal too. No one's an expert straight away, they added, and errors are all part of your learning. One in particular advised any new apprentices that they should always "be patient when learning new trades and concentrate in class".

"Make the most of the expert knowledge that's available," we were told, as they will allow you to pick up skills that will last you for years to come. Now, this might seem like common sense, but it seems failing to do so or picking up bad habits as a result is an easy

thing to do. You can do this, it turns out, by ensuring you always listen carefully and aren't afraid to ask as many questions as possible (even if you think they are silly ones).

And lastly, it's important to be as enthusiastic as possible, or as one respondent told us: "Try to get involved in all different aspects of whatever your apprenticeship involves. Don't focus on one area, as after your apprenticeship you could end up doing a multitude of different things and will develop all round skills."

***Make the most of the expert knowledge that's available***



# INTERVIEW:

**Everyone needs to start somewhere and, for some, an apprenticeship can lead to bigger things. Iain Harris, owner of Complete Carpentry, is just one of those success stories, so we had a chat with him to find out about how he got started, his experiences on the job and how this led to him running his own company.**

## ***How did you start out as an apprentice?***

It was actually through my dad. I came in to it quite late, I was actually 25 when I started doing my apprenticeship. My dad's a roofing contractor and I'd been saying to him I wish I'd pursued it years ago. He spoke to a couple of builders and they were looking for an apprentice, pretty quickly I was on site and on the tools.

## ***How did you find your experience as an apprentice?***

I'd done a bit of roofing with my dad, in the holidays as a teenager to help him out, but it was completely different to anything I'd ever done. The physical side of it was tough and after the first day I went home, got in the bath and was absolutely knackered thinking: "what have I done? I had a nice cushy little office job and now I'm feeling like this!" But you soon get used to that and people pay a lot of money for that kind of thing!

## ***Can you tell us how you got from being an apprentice to running your own business?***

I stayed at that company for 11 years. We had several different carpenters come and go in that time, so you get paired off with different blokes and you pick up different stories and ways of looking at things from those people. It was a good experience doing it like that. I then started doing my own bits and pieces for friends and family at weekends and built up little clientele that way. So I started to think about making the push to start out on my own.

The decision wasn't really a financial one, although obviously I'm financially a lot better off now. It was more that, by the end, me and my business partner were pretty much running the jobs anyway. The boss would send us there to measure up all the kit you need and tell them when you wanted the other tradesmen out. So, he wasn't really taking any part in it. So I thought, I know now I can do it, so why not do and reap the rewards from it?

## ***What's one piece of advice you'd go back and give yourself as an apprentice?***

Don't be scared to ask questions. Sometimes you do feel a bit of a fool asking, but with carpentry it's quite a varied trade, so you might be cutting the roof one day and the next day laying the floor. So, you might not be doing that roof again until six, eight or 12 months down the line. I'm one of those people that really needs to do things a couple of times before the method sticks. The more people you can work with the better as everyone's got a slightly different twist on things, so then you can really just find what suits you.

# APPRENTICE TO SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

## *What would you look for in an apprentice?*

Someone who's keen and not afraid to be chucked in the deep end. I always found it's easier to just do something. Watching someone do something is one thing, but if you're just watching there's no method or reason. So, if you try it and mess something up you realise "ah that's why he did that".

It's a bit of a confidence thing to be honest. In carpentry, it varies, it's not like you're on the same thing every day to build your confidence up. It was only after maybe three, four or five years I thought "I could go out and do this off my own back". But there was the financial security of having someone find the work for you.



## *Where do you see future skills in the industry being most needed?*

I don't know, the market seems to be quite flooded at the moment. The economy's picking up, so the first thing people start spending money on is their house but there are a lot of tradesmen out there...

My brother's a plumber though and I know the eco side of plumbing has really taken off. I think that'll be one of the biggest change industries coming away from domestic, oil-based radiators and using air heat source pumps etc.



# INTERVIEW:

**Aspiring to have your own business is one thing, but first and foremost you need to know what employers will expect of you during your apprenticeship. We spoke to Andy Tickner, skills manager for skills regeneration and partnerships at Southampton City Council, about what it is that makes some young employees stand out from the rest.**

## ***What do you need to know to become an apprentice?***

Firstly, you should look into what an apprenticeship is and what levels of work and study will be involved. There are some great websites out there that will help with this (see the back of this guide for examples), along with how to go about making an application and what the terms and conditions are in the work place.

## ***What kind of experience can apprentices expect?***

Apprenticeships give you the opportunity to work for a real employer, earn a real salary and gain a real qualification whilst gaining valuable workplace skills and experience.

Anyone living in England, over 16 years old and not in full-time education can apply and those accepted receive the appropriate national minimum wage – though this doesn't apply to Higher Apprenticeships. You'll be expected to work for at least 30 hours a week, for at least 12 months, with a national qualification at the end.

## ***What's one piece of advice you'd give to an apprentice?***

Take advantage of the opportunity you've been given – you're going to learn the real skills that you need for the workplace - these can't be taught inside a school or college and there will come a time when learning won't be free anymore, learn what you can now and get your qualification so that you have a sound base with which to build a future on.

## ***What do employers look for in an apprentice?***

An interest in the subject and a willingness to want to learn more is important. Though if you've ever belonged to a youth organisation like the cadets, scouts or had a part-time job while at school this can also be attractive to an employer – as this proves you have the get up and go that some people don't have. You might also be seen as someone who is used to taking instruction, has discipline and is used to working hard.

You should be able to turn up on time every day and know when to be at certain places or take breaks, and have the potential to do the job in hand. For example, if you want to be a tree surgeon it's not much use to be scared of climbing trees, using a chainsaw or hard physical work! Aside from that, you should have a good attitude, be able to work well with others and have the skills to listen and efficiently implement the training you receive.

# BEING THE BEST APPRENTICE YOU CAN BE...

## *What can you do to stand out from the crowd?*

Apprenticeships are preparation for future careers, and employers want to hire workers who can develop their skills quickly and steadily improve their productivity over time. With that in mind, employers love problem solvers.

Throughout the workday, minor problems will always arise and companies need employees who can think on their feet to fix or circumvent the obstacles that inevitably come up, without having to always rely on others for help.

Southampton City Council was recently recognised as 'best construction client' by the CITB National Skills Academy for Construction. For more information, visit the council website at [www.southampton.gov.uk](http://www.southampton.gov.uk) or the NSAC at [www.cskills.org/nsacademy/](http://www.cskills.org/nsacademy/).



# AVERAGE EARNINGS COMPARISONS

## Bricklayers & masons



2013 avg: 23k

2012 - 2013 change: -3.5%

2000 avg:- 16k

*Before settling on an apprenticeship, you'll probably want to know what sort of pay you can expect once qualified. Annual salaries can vary a lot depending on things such as the level of experience and who you work for, but to give you some idea we've listed figures across a range of careers.*

## Site supervisors & managers



2013 avg: 32k

2012 - 2013 change: 5.4%

2000 avg:- 27k

## Carpenters & joiners



2013 avg: 23k

2012 - 2013 change: 1.3%

2000 avg:- 17k

## Electricians & electrical fitters

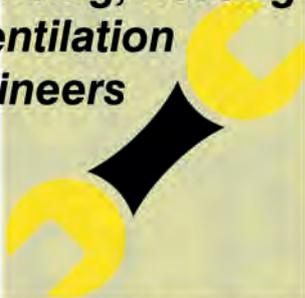


2013 avg: 29k

2012 - 2013 change: 2.4%

2000 avg:- 21k

## Plumbing, heating & ventilation engineers



2013 avg: 27k

2012 - 2013 change: -0.4%

2000 avg:- 20k

## Roofers, tilers & slaters



2013 avg: 21k

2012 - 2013 change: -5.1%

2000 avg:- 15k

## Plasterers



2013 avg: 22k

2012 - 2013 change: 1.2%

2000 avg:- Unpublished

The figures are rounded from the Office for National Statistics' Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2013 – and we've compared these with the same report carried out back in 2000. These are calculated using a median average (which takes the middle number from the list of wages reported in its research), so half of all wages are below it and half above it.

# THE APPRENTICE EYE VIEW: FACING THE CHALLENGES OF AN APPRENTICESHIP



**Learning on the job was one of the main reasons our apprentices said they enjoyed what they were doing, but many were quick to add that this didn't mean there were no challenges to face. Like any role, an apprenticeship comes with good days and bad days, so here are a few things they thought you might need to look out for...**

Everything from settling in and meeting new people to taking on board all sorts of new

information were highlighted as common obstacles of an apprenticeship. However, the good news is that, while all of our contacts could point out good and bad things, all said that with the right attitude, getting over them was no problem.

One of the most common challenges mentioned was the fact that a working day will be very different to what you would expect from school or college. The days are longer and will probably be more intensive, plus you'll be expected to crack on with certain tasks yourself without being told to do so. It's certainly a different routine than you may be used to, but that's not such a bad thing. "You've gone from a completely protected and guided environment like school where you're told what to do, to guiding your own learning and managing the task put in front of you," one respondent said.

Another explained that while it's best to take full responsibility for yourself before you even get started, that's a more manageable task when you take every challenge one step at a time – starting at the very beginning before you even show up on the job. "Research the best routes – nobody's going to do it for you. I used Google maps to find [where I had to be]!"

Meeting friends can be tough, but of the people we spoke to (no matter what type of training they were doing) all told us they found themselves in this position. Making friends might not come instantly, we were told, but by "being yourself" and "being confident and speaking to people" you should find some you get along with pretty soon. And, if you have to work with someone you don't really get on with, just "remain professional at all times and get the job done regardless".

But, there are other more practical considerations too, like getting to grips with particular tools, machinery and even mathematical equations that other staff members take for granted as part of their daily duties. One way to make learning easier if you get stuck on any of these areas though, couldn't have come across more clearly. "I wish I would have asked as many questions as possible," one apprentice told us regretfully. "I felt shy and didn't want to ask what I thought would be seen as an obvious question."

***"I wish I would have asked as many questions as possible"***

Getting a handle on some of the complicated jargon and slang on site is certainly something you might find tough to tackle, as will be those staff members who use it to try and play pranks on you. Luckily, this eBook has a couple of handy guides on these subjects so– if you haven't already – it's worth giving them a read to prepare yourself!

# PRANKED!

Speak to anyone who's been an apprentice and you're sure to hear a few horror stories about how they (or 'a friend') were the victim of a prank by a more experienced person on site. To help you avoid being left red-faced on your first day we've listed a bunch of them below. Don't say we didn't warn you!

**A BUCKET OF SPARKS / STEAM / DIAL TONE**



Think about it. They all sound like things that might be useful, but how would you go about carrying a bucket of any of them?

**SOME FALLOPIAN TUBING**



Maybe you missed it in biology class, but this description has more to do with making a baby than plumbing or cabling.

**A GLASS HAMMER / GLASS NAILS**



A glass hammer and/or glass nails would probably send the number of workplace accidents rocketing. Don't be fooled by this golden oldie.

**LEFT-HANDED / 25-OHM SCREWDRIVER**



Screwdrivers only really come in a few different types – and those generally relate to the shape of the head, rather than how they can be held or what they are used for.

## A LONG WEIGHT / LONG STAND



If you're sent for a long weight or a long stand, you're being duped into look for something that doesn't exist. In other words, you'll be in for a 'long wait' or a 'long stand' (get it?).

## PAPER STRETCH



Have you got a piece of paper to hand? What happens when you stretch it? One thing is for sure, it won't stretch... so don't expect to find a gadget that will do it for you.

## SKIRTING BOARD LADDER



Unless you have a mouse working on site, its unlikely you'd need a ladder to climb the wooden trim that skirts the floor of a room isn't it?

## SPIRIT LEVEL BUBBLE



A spirit level would be pretty useless without one, but replacing one would be physically impossible too wouldn't it?

## SKY HOOK / STRAIGHT HOOK



A hook has only a couple of different traits, it needs to be curved (not straight) and you need to be able to attach it to something tangible (not the sky).

## TARTAN PAINT



Scotland would likely rejoice if such a thing were invented, but at this stage paint technology is pretty far from being able to do this. Don't hold your breath.

# USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS AND WEBSITES

## **ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)**

Offers a range of useful free advice on a range of issues, including rights for apprentices.

[www.acas.org.uk/](http://www.acas.org.uk/)

## **Apprenticeships.org.uk**

The Home of the National Apprenticeship Service gives information about apprenticeships and traineeships, as well as a selection of useful information on employers and vacancies.

[Apprenticeships.org.uk](http://Apprenticeships.org.uk)

08000 150 600

## **CITB: Construction Industry Training Board**

A social enterprise providing a range of help and information for the construction industry and those working in it.

[www.citb.co.uk](http://www.citb.co.uk)

0344 994 4010

## **City & Guilds**

A vocational education organisation offering a range of qualifications and apprenticeships, as well as news and help and support.

[www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com)

0844 846 0969

## **First4Skills**

A training provider offering a range of recognised qualifications, as well as advice for those considering applying for a course or apprenticeship.

[www.first4skills.com](http://www.first4skills.com)

0845 071 9011

## **Gov.uk Pay and Work Rights Helpline**

A free and confidential help and advice service focusing on workers' rights in the workplace.

[www.gov.uk/pay-and-work-rights-helpline](http://www.gov.uk/pay-and-work-rights-helpline)

0800 917 2368

## **London Apprenticeship Company**

An apprenticeship training agency, partnered with more than 15 local authorities, connecting employers and apprentices.

[www.londonapprenticeship.co.uk/](http://www.londonapprenticeship.co.uk/)

020 3651 4747

## **National Careers Service**

Careers advice and information relating to a range of jobs, training courses and apprenticeships.

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

0800 100 900

## **Not Going To Uni**

An online advice service dedicated to people wanting to explore options other than going to university.

[www.notgoingtouni.co.uk](http://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk)

0203 691 2800

## **TradePoint**

Offering thousands of quality products at special prices, as well as help and advice on finding what you need, only for trade customers.

[www.trade-point.co.uk](http://www.trade-point.co.uk)

0845 605 6666

## **Training2000**

A training course and work-based learning provider based in the north-west of England.

[www.training2000.co.uk](http://www.training2000.co.uk)

01254 54659