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Developed with  
Mumsnet feedback

# PATHS TO CAREERS

A PARENT'S GUIDE

Inspiring decisions,  
unlocking potential

**targetcareers.co.uk**

2022

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# Welcome

2022  
Edition

Welcome to the 2022 TARGETcareers *Paths to Careers – a Parent's Guide*. For the second year, this guide has been developed with Mumsnet feedback. Throughout you will see references to and quotes from the 'Mumsnet survey'\*, which was an online survey carried out in late 2021 among Mumsnet parents with at least one child between 16 and 22.

*A Parent's Guide* is for parents or anyone in loco parentis to a young person thinking about their next steps. It is no surprise that once again the Mumsnet survey revealed that half of the children of survey respondents started thinking seriously about their future careers when they were 14–15. It also revealed that when it comes to choosing what to do, a child's personal interest and their confidence in succeeding in their post-18 choice are the main influencing factors. We're here to help you boost your child's confidence, by providing them with a clear, unbiased introduction to their options.

The articles in the 'Discovering options' section are all about initial conversations with your child, ensuring they understand all the opportunities available to them: university, sponsored degrees, higher apprenticeships and school leaver programmes. 'Researching and applying' comes next, providing advice about digging deeper into specific programmes – school leaver or university – to find out if there is one that particularly suits your child's aspirations. It also covers the important topic of mental wellbeing, offering some key sources of help. Our 'Sector spotlights' section looks at the areas of study and work parents indicated both they and their children were particularly interested in. Finally, our 'Rising stars' section focuses on individuals (a mix of graduates, degree apprentices and apprentices) who have already made an impressive mark in the workplace.

Happy reading!

*Jacky, editor*

\*Overall, between 14 and 17 November 2021, Mumsnet collected 796 responses amongst parents with a child aged 16–22.

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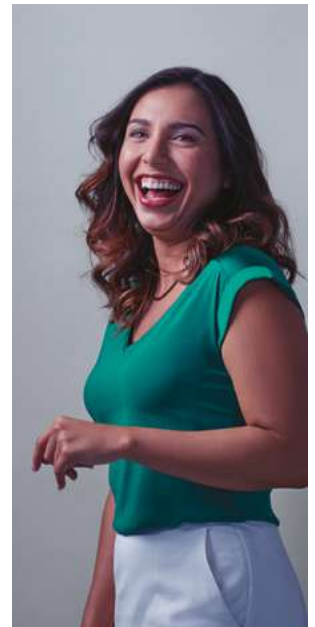


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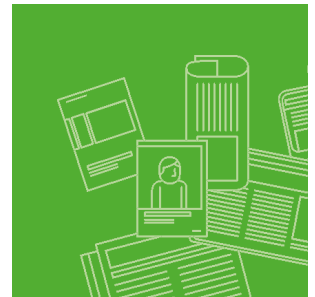
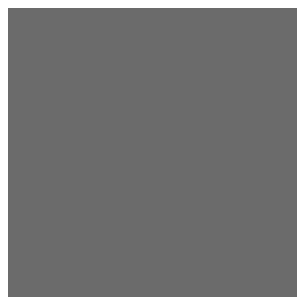


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# Your child's career choices and your involvement: a team effort

We asked Mumsnet users about their children's higher education or careers aspirations, and the role they as parents played in their children's career journeys. We also asked about the main factors influencing their children's decisions about their next steps and the impact of Covid-19 on these plans.

84%\*

of parents are happy with their child's post-18 plans.

76%\*

of parents have discussed alternatives to going to university with their child.

72%\*

of children invite their parents' opinions and advice when planning for the future.

*My child at times lacks confidence but I truly believe she can achieve anything she wants with the right attitude and support.*

Mumsnet user

*It's their future, not mine. I try to advise and help make the right choice but it's not my final decision.*

Mumsnet user

\*Mumsnet survey

## How Covid-19 has affected my child's plans

*They're more likely to stay at home for university than move away due to risk of further lockdowns.*

Mumsnet user

*He lost momentum and enthusiasm for a while. I'm uncertain if that has ever fully come back.*

Mumsnet user

*Studying from home has had an impact on mental health and making friendships.*

Mumsnet user

*It's maybe inspired her towards a medical career.*

Mumsnet user

## Making decisions – what factors do children consider?

These are the top five factors, according to the Mumsnet survey, that parents thought were affecting their children's post-18 plans:

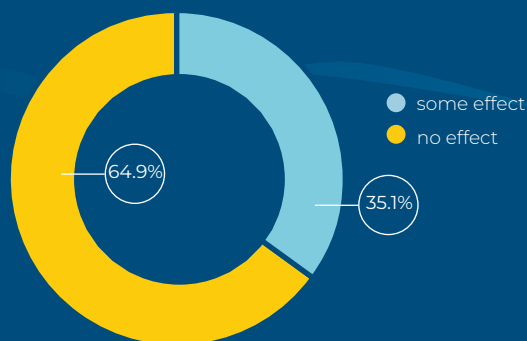
- 1 Their interest in a subject.
- 2 Their confidence in succeeding in their choice.
- 3 Career prospects.
- 4 Type/focus of programme or course, eg theoretical/practical.
- 5 Expected career salary.

## Plans and pandemics

Over one third (35%) of parents who responded to the survey say that the coronavirus pandemic has had an effect on their child's post-18 plans. However, this is fewer parents than said the same in 2020 (41%). As in 2020, parents mentioned the following effects of the pandemic on post-18 plans:

- children's travel plans being on hold or abandoned
- fewer work experience opportunities
- mental health difficulties arising from the pandemic, resulting in changing plans
- an impact on attainment and grades affecting university choices.

## Has the coronavirus pandemic had an effect on your child's post-18 plans?



# Your child's career: the first steps

Understanding what their options are will help ensure your child is informed enough to take their first career steps.

**S**ome people have their mind set on a career from an early age. But what if your child, like the majority, isn't sure? You might find it helpful to work through the following pointers with them.

## What motivates them?

It's important for your child to be motivated by their career choice, both in terms of working hard to get the grades they need and progressing their career when it comes to starting work. Encourage them to think about what's important to them in life. Money? Helping people? Being creative? This may help to guide their research into careers.

Their interests can be another useful starting point. If your child is a Formula 1 fan, would they enjoy designing cars as an automotive engineer? If their weekends are spent shopping, how about a career managing a store – or even a whole chain? Also consider with your child which subjects they are good at (and enjoy) and what other skills they have. Perhaps they are good at speaking in front of large groups of people or working out and sticking to a budget. Keep these skills in mind when reading about different jobs.

## Learn what's required for their choice

Many careers are open to young people regardless of the subjects they've studied for their A levels, Scottish Highers or undergraduate degree. This is often (but not always) the case in areas such as business, finance, law and the media. However, some careers do require a particular degree or vocational training path and often call for specific subject choices for A levels/Scottish Highers, too. This tends to be the case in areas such as science, medicine and engineering. So it's a good idea for your child to start thinking about careers now, in order to make subject choices that leave open doors to careers that might appeal. Encourage them to work through the careers that do require particular subjects and decide whether they are happy to rule them out or they would prefer to keep these options open.

**Suggest that your child take a quick look at as many career areas as possible.**





I'm still old school and think that a uni route is preferable.

*Mumsnet user*

I'm happy that either route is a good option – feedback from friends' children who have done apprenticeships is good.

*Mumsnet user*

We agree about doing something they really want to do – no point in shoehorning them into something just because it sounds better.

*Mumsnet user*

#### **Look beyond the stereotypes**

Suggest that your child take a quick look at as many career areas as possible, rather than instantly ruling any out based on stereotypes or assumptions. For example, plenty of engineers wear suits and go to business meetings – and engineering employers are very keen to hire more women. Many IT professionals spend more time talking to clients about their needs than they do writing code. Lots of lawyers have jobs that don't require them to defend people accused of unpleasant crimes.

#### **Be wary of 'safe' choices**

Take care if your child is considering an option because they think it is a 'safe choice' or a 'good job', rather than out of intrinsic interest. IT and law, for example, have a 'solid' image but it may be harder than you think for your child to get their first job and not all roles will offer a high salary. Trading in an academic or vocational path your child will enjoy for assumptions about a 'guaranteed good job' may lead to disappointment.

#### **Take a closer look**

Got a shortlist? Find out more with online research. Read information about different career sectors and look at the websites of some employers in these sectors. Then try networking. You and your child can ask your family and friends if they have any good contacts, attend university open days and school leaver job fairs, and look for employers who are willing to offer work experience. ○

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the industry.



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# Harriet Willsher

## Service Designer in IBM iX Customer Transformation – Junior Management Consultancy Apprenticeship

### **What made you decide to come to IBM as a school leaver?**

I particularly enjoyed business and psychology at college, so I was keen on a career working in business but in a role that would allow me to explore my interest in psychology. I knew I didn't want to go to university because I was bored of classroom learning and I was keen to apply the theoretical knowledge I had gained so I applied for apprenticeships. A few things about the apprenticeship at IBM really appealed to me: being a consultant and working on different projects excited me because it would mean that the work I would do would vary and I could try different roles to find my fit; the opportunities to travel and see different places – as a global organisation with offices all over the world, IBM offers the opportunity to travel within the UK but also globally; and the fact that IBM sits at the forefront of the technology industry which is imperative in the world we live in because the world is becoming increasingly reliant upon technology! As a Service Designer at IBM I am able to satisfy my interest in both business and psychology because I am designing services for businesses based upon the end users' needs and wants which allows me to work with users to understand how they think, feel and behave in response to different stimuli.

### **What hints or tips would you pass to those who are interested in applying to IBM as a school leaver?**

Do your research about the different areas of IBM and what they do – it is a huge company with so many different career opportunities so investigate those areas and see what appeals to you!

Don't be put off if you're not technical or don't have specific skills – you will have transferable skills that you will have obtained throughout your studies, from extra-curricular activities that you have done, from part time

jobs. IBM will teach you the specific skills you need – they are looking for competences, work ethic and a keen desire and attitude for learning!

### **What's the best thing about your current role?**

Making a difference! As a Service Designer I am responsible for reimagining services or creating new services that meet the needs of the end service users. Therefore, I am designing valuable service experiences for people! Moreover, I work within the public sector which means that I am designing services for citizens of the UK which gives me a sense of gratification in giving back to the country! I also love that as a consultant I work on lots of different projects so my work is varied!

### **What support was available to you when starting at IBM?**

When I first joined IBM, the support I had was a Foundation Manager who provided support with all aspects of my apprenticeship, a buddy (an existing apprentice with some experience in the business to help navigating IBM) as well as the apprentice lead within iX who could help with specific iX questions or concerns. As well as peers; the apprentices that I joined IBM with formed a strong support network as we all settled in together. Other apprentices also helped in providing support and guidance! IBM also has lots of communities of like-minded people that you can join such as the Apprentice Community, Service Design Community as well as programmes to support employees such as mental health first aiders and counselling.

### **What's the best thing about being at IBM?**

The people! At all levels, IBMers are so happy to support you in getting to where you want to be if you let them!

# Introducing your child's school leaver options

Discover the work-based opportunities available to your child.



**T**here are many alternatives to going to university. Apprenticeships, school leaver programmes and sponsored degrees usually involve working for an employer and studying for relevant qualifications, although exactly how your child's time is split between the two will depend on the scheme and the employer. Bear in mind that different organisations refer to their opportunities in slightly different ways, so it's important to look beyond the name of the opportunity and find out exactly what the employer is offering, such as in terms of qualifications and pay. You can find out more about what to research with your child on page 22.

## Apprenticeship levels: an introduction

Apprenticeships have equivalent educational levels:

- Intermediate (level 2) apprenticeships are equivalent to GCSEs.
- Advanced (level 3) are equal to A levels.
- Higher (levels 4, 5, 6 and 7) lead to a qualification that is equivalent to a foundation degree or above.
- Degree (levels 6 and 7) result in a bachelors or masters degree.

These levels are set by the government. An opportunity must meet specific criteria to be able to call itself an apprenticeship. Higher and degree apprenticeships are typically open to applicants with A levels or equivalent qualifications.

An apprentice will typically attend college or university either one day a week (day release) or for a week or more at a time (block release). The cost of an apprenticeship (and any tuition fees) will be covered by the employer and the

government. Scheme lengths vary; the higher the qualification involved, the longer the scheme will be. Higher and degree apprenticeships typically last between three and five years. Employers don't tend to guarantee that there will be a job at the end of an apprenticeship but in practice they are typically keen to keep employees on.

Some employers – particularly accountancy firms – refer to 'school leaver programmes'. These are generally similar to higher and degree apprenticeships. However, the term 'apprenticeship' necessitates a level and period (minimum of 12 months) of training that isn't required if the term 'school leaver programme' is used. So, it's important to check that your child will gain the qualifications and training they hope to.

## Sponsored degrees: an introduction

There are two types of sponsored degrees. The first (known as a degree apprenticeship) operates in a similar way to higher apprenticeships: your child will work for their employer, earn a wage, study for a degree part time (either by attending a local university or through distance learning) and have their tuition fees paid for them. Their degree is typically chosen by the employer – and it may even be involved in designing the content of the course.

The second type is where an employer offers partial financial support to students who are attending university full time in the traditional way and are studying a subject that relates to the employer's business. Typically, the student will complete paid work with the employer during university vacations. They may also be required to work for the employer for a minimum period after graduation. ©





# 72%\*

of parents are happy with their child's post-18 plans to do an apprenticeship.

*\*Mumsnet survey*

It was my dream to work for a company at the cutting edge of innovation.

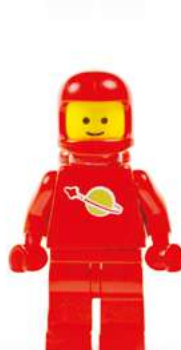
*Lori French, digital and technical solutions apprentice, IBM. Read Lori's profile on page 42.*

I liked the idea that I could get started in my career early, and without student debt.

*Malachi Boyce, marketing executive, Sky. Read Malachi's profile on page 44.*

A scheme that introduced pre-university students to law and the professionals within it sounded perfect.


*Chloe Lettington, trainee solicitor, Clifford Chance. Read Chloe's profile on page 46*





# Create value

You don't need a background in finance to apply for one of our schemes. Whichever area you choose, you'll have lots of responsibility and you'll be adding value to your team from day one.



# The traditional uni experience or earning while learning?

How do going to university and doing an apprenticeship compare? Here are the main factors to consider.

Once you and your child have got a sense of what to expect from the different experiences on offer, your child will be able to make the best choice for them. While a general transition back into campuses and workplaces after the lifting of many Covid-19 restrictions means your child may well have a 'typical' experience at university or during an apprenticeship, it's worth bearing in mind that the extent to which this is the case differs across different institutions and organisations – and could be subject to change.

## **Leaving home and living independently**

If your child decides to go to university in the traditional sense, they are likely to share a house or flat with other students and be responsible for buying and cooking their own food, washing clothes and paying bills. This introduces them to living independently, while allowing them to share the experience with others in the same position. Of course, moving away is not essential if your child attends a university close to home.

An apprenticeship might be too far away for your child to commute to, requiring them to leave home. Or they may choose to live independently, as they may be earning enough to pay rent. They might be able to share accommodation with other apprentices, but there's no guarantee that they will be living with people their own age.

## **Academic freedom or real-world results?**

Most degrees give your child some freedom to choose which topics they study. Many courses also include a project or dissertation, allowing them to focus on the aspects that they are most passionate about. If your child's apprenticeship includes a degree, the topics they study will typically be chosen by their employer and relate to their working life.

At university, the main outcome of a piece of work will be a grade. Vocational courses, which may include laboratory sessions or work placements, provide more opportunities for students to apply what they've learned to real-world situations, but even these aim to develop a student's understanding from an academic or theoretical, rather than practical, perspective. On an apprenticeship, your child's day-to-day work will have a clear purpose and help their employer work towards its business goals. They may see their work have an impact on clients and possibly even on profits. »





### More advice

- Go to **targetjobs.co.uk** to learn about graduate career sectors and entry requirements.
- Go to **targetcareers.co.uk** for more information on whether university or work would suit your child best.

### Flexibility or structure?

Universities typically expect students to spend around 35 to 45 hours a week studying. Science subjects tend to have around 20 contact hours a week and arts subjects even fewer. It's up to your child how much time they commit to private study, as there is less direct supervision than at school. Would your child be motivated to put in the hours by themselves?

Apprenticeships tend to have more of a nine-to-five structure. Your child may benefit from this, as their time is usually all theirs once each shift is finished and it offers a clear distinction between work, study and other areas of their life. If the programme involves working towards a degree or professional qualification, they will attend sessions at college or university during work hours but may also need to study at home in their own time – especially as the exam period approaches.

### Opportunities to socialise

As a full-time student your child would mix largely with people of their own age. There would be opportunities to socialise with people they live with, people on the same course and those they meet through extracurricular activities. At busy times of the year your child will need to prioritise studying over these activities, of course.

On an apprenticeship your child would have colleagues of all ages. It's likely that there will also be the chance to meet others of the same age, though – both at work and while studying for qualifications. Finding out how many apprentices the employer takes on each year could give you an indication of how many young people they may have to socialise with.

### Work experience and keeping options open

Going to university in the traditional way allows your child to explore a wide variety of career options before making a decision. Students can get work experience during vacations, fit part-time jobs or volunteering around their studies, try career-related activities on campus and make use of the careers service. Some courses incorporate a year in industry, while others include work placements that students attend on certain days each week. A lot of graduate jobs don't require students to have studied a particular subject, so your child won't be limited to one career after graduating. However, some jobs do require a specific degree – make sure your child does their research!

Apprenticeships provide excellent work experience in their particular fields. Many will train your child for a specific job, but some will give them the chance to experience different areas of the business. If your child doesn't know what career they want, or has several different ideas, then an apprenticeship is probably not for them. If the programme includes a degree, then this will be transferable to other careers – however, your child may be asked to explain why they chose to train in one career and apply for jobs in another. Check whether your child is expected to work for the company for a set period of time after finishing the programme and whether this is something they are enthusiastic about. 🕒





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# Weighing up your child's finances

Undertaking an apprenticeship cuts out concerns about student debt, but will it mean your child fares better financially in the long run?

**T**here's no 'one size fits all' answer to the question of whether school leavers will earn more overall if they go to university full time or join an employer at 18 on a higher apprenticeship. It depends on the career they want to get into and the particular courses or programmes they are considering.

## Earnings v. debt

If your child goes to university, they are likely to leave with student debt, which will then accrue interest. Student Finance, which is linked to the government, offers two types of student loan: one for tuition fees, which is paid directly to the university, and a maintenance loan to help cover living costs.

The total amount your child repays will depend on how quickly they pay it off and whether they have paid back all their debt 30 years after they graduate (at which point any remaining debt is written off). Repayment will be deducted from your child's monthly wage once they're earning over a certain amount: currently when their income is over £524 a week or £2,274 a month or more in England and Wales; £480 a week or £2,083 a month or more in Scotland; and £1,657 a month or £382 a week in Northern Ireland (note the threshold amount changes each year on 6 April). They will not need to pay anything while they're earning less than this.

The more your child earns during their working life, the more they'll pay back – so the amount they pay for their degree will be more or less in line with the financial benefit they gain from it. Find more information at [www.gov.uk/student-finance](http://www.gov.uk/student-finance).



## Finances: the basics

Whatever route your child chooses, encourage them to think about their outgoings v. their income (whether that's a salary, loan or savings). Start with the basic essentials, such as:

- rent/accommodation fees
- groceries (food and drink, toiletries, cleaning products etc)
- any bills (eg gas and electricity, TV, mobile phone)
- transportation costs.

And then get them to consider other non-essential but definitely nice-to-be-able-to-afford costs, such as:

- nights out (meals, concerts, taxis, alcohol)
- clothes
- gym membership
- travel/holidays.

## Thinking long term

Will your child be better or worse off financially if they start full-time work sooner, instead of going to university? If they manage to get a place on an apprenticeship that gets them to the same earning level as graduates in the same length of time – and that's as good for their career in the long term – then they will be better off not going to university. This is often the case with employers who offer the chance to do a degree part time while working. However, not all apprenticeships are designed to put apprentices on a par with graduates. In these cases your child might find that in the long term they will earn less than those with a degree.

Make sure your child's research includes finding out about the qualifications they need to progress in the long term. For example, in engineering, if they eventually want to become a chartered engineer (the highest level of qualification), it's easiest if they have a masters degree (see page 38 for more on getting into engineering). Also check whether any professional qualifications offered to school leavers are the same as those taken by the organisation's graduate recruits.

## Ignoring 'average' salaries

It's wise not to get too fixated on statistics relating to average salaries for all graduates or school leavers. Media reports about how much graduates earn often don't give the full story about their figures. Also, salaries vary so much, particularly for graduates, that averages aren't much help in predicting what your child personally might earn. Remember, too, that school leavers start working at a younger age and may have had several pay rises by the time graduates of the same age join the company. ○





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When I was younger, I thought if you did an accounting degree, you were a qualified accountant ... [but] it's the professional qualification that accredits you as an accountant. Apprenticeship schemes ... sounded like a win-win to me ... You're getting experience, getting paid and no debt. When I learned about management accounting ... it sounded exciting. CIMA is the right qualification for me. What I'm learning, I'm seeing it happen at work.

**Haider Ali, A-Levels**

Management Accounting Apprentice  
Rolls-Royce

BAME Apprenticeship Award winner  
in 2020.



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# All about work experience

Work experience will give your child an insight into working life and boost their CV. Discover their options here.



**H**ow can your child boost their CV and find out what different careers involve before committing to a role?

Work experience will help your child learn about the different careers that interest them and what they do and don't enjoy. It will also help them to:

- develop the skills that employers and universities value, such as communication, teamwork and time management
- experience what working life is like
- increase their confidence, independence and professionalism
- enhance their employability and boost their CV, university personal statement and job applications
- meet people who could help them in their future career – and perhaps find a potential future employer.

Although the coronavirus pandemic has caused disruptions to employers, companies are still offering in-person work experience at the time of writing. There are also some virtual work experience opportunities.

## Formal work experience opportunities

These are opportunities usually organised by schools, colleges and employers.

### Work experience placements

Often lasting up to a week at a company, these may be arranged by your child's school or college, or independently. Many large employers advertise opportunities on their websites. Your child (perhaps under your supervision) could also approach smaller, local businesses over the phone or by email to say they'd be interested in work experience, check if this is possible and ask about the preferred way of applying. You should follow your child's school/college's safeguarding guidelines; they will also have a list of approved employers.

### Work shadowing

Your child will observe one person to gain insight into their job, usually just for a day. These opportunities

aren't advertised, so professionals will need to be approached directly. If any of your family members, friends or neighbours work in an area your child is interested in, you could ask if they'd be willing to help.

### Employers' insight days or weeks for school leavers

Some employers offer students the chance to spend a day or more seeing for themselves what working for them would be like. Your child may also get some handy tips on how to apply for an employer's apprenticeship programme. You can find insight days detailed on employers' careers websites.

### School leaver careers fairs and employer events

Careers fairs allow students to meet lots of employers in one go and ask questions.

An event run by one employer will give your child a deeper insight into that organisation, for example via an open evening.

## Other work experience

Beyond formal work experience opportunities, there are plenty of ways that your child can develop useful skills and get a feel for what they enjoy. They may even be taking part in some of these activities already.

### Volunteering and fundraising

Your child could volunteer at a charity shop, help with outdoor conservation projects, become a volunteer police cadet or take part in the National Citizen Service. Find out more about opportunities for young people at [iwill.org.uk](http://iwill.org.uk) and [vinspired.com](http://vinspired.com).

### Extracurricular activities

These include activities such as: being part of a sports team or other club; taking part in a theatre production; writing for a student newspaper; joining the school debating society; being a Scout or Guide; and completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

### Competitions

Encourage your child to research whether there are competitions in areas that interest them, for example in design, creative writing, photography, maths or engineering.

### Part-time jobs

Your child could try their hand at babysitting or a paper round, get a part-time job in a supermarket or café at

the weekend or look for a temporary job in the holidays. Attractions such as zoos and garden centres often hire more staff for the summer.

### Personal projects

If your child designs and makes something themselves, such as through a DIY project, website or blog, they may well develop the problem-solving and creative skills that employers look for. Another option is learning a language independently.

### Positions of responsibility

These could include being a head boy or head girl, sports captain, house captain, school council member or a peer mentor. They could also include having a leadership or committee role in a club. Part-time jobs will of course also offer the opportunity to hold a position of responsibility.

### Summer school

Several universities run these, usually for up to a week. They can help your child build their knowledge of a subject and decide whether they'd enjoy studying it full time – and whether they'd enjoy university life. Summer schools are quite common for science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. You can find out more on universities' websites and via the Sutton Trust at [suttontrust.com](http://suttontrust.com). ©



# Researching employers' programmes

What to factor in when exploring school leaver programmes with your child.

If your child is thinking of joining an employer to 'earn and learn', it's a good idea for both of you to research the opportunities they are considering. Before getting started, make sure your child knows what career they want so they can assess whether the programmes available are appropriate routes.

## Where to research

Using a range of sources will give you the best chance of gaining answers to all your questions and thereby help your child to make well-informed decisions. Below are some options to consider.

- Take a look at employers' websites for the basic details of programmes.
- Ask friends or family members if they have any contacts working at a potential employer.
- Visit careers fairs or open days attended/held by employers your child is interested in (see the box on the next page).

## What to research: qualifications

Find out what qualifications your child would gain. Use [targetapprenticeships.co.uk](https://www.targetapprenticeships.co.uk) and [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) to assess whether these would get your child into the right career at the right level. Remember 'school leaver programme' is not an official government definition so find out exactly what qualifications are offered by the employer your child is interested in.

Some employers offer school leavers the chance to study for the same professional qualifications as their graduate recruits, such as the ACA qualification from ICAEW. Professional qualifications certify that you have the training



## Careers fairs

There are lots of careers fairs held around the country. The following will help you get started:

- [nascentral.vfairs.com](https://nascentral.vfairs.com) (National Apprenticeship Show)
- [worldskillsuk.org](https://worldskillsuk.org) (WorldSkills UK)
- [prospectsevents.co.uk](https://prospectsevents.co.uk) (Prospects Events).



of families have talked about doing an apprenticeship as a post-18 plan, up from 45% in 2020.

*\*Mumsnet survey*

and skills needed to do your job to a high standard; in some industries such as accounting they are essential to progress your career. Check the detail of what is on offer carefully.

If a degree is mentioned, check whether it is a full bachelors degree or a foundation degree (the equivalent of two thirds of a standard university degree) if this is important to your child.

### What to research: the contract

Typically, recruiters do not guarantee that employees will be kept on at the end of the programme; however, in practice they often want to keep them. Be aware of whether your child would be offered a permanent or fixed-term contract initially but don't reject opportunities on this basis. Try to find out how many apprentices the employer kept on last year – perhaps by asking at careers fairs and open days.

Take note of whether there is a 'tie-in' period after training has ended. You may also want to investigate what would happen if your child dropped out of the scheme part-way through – for example, whether they would have to repay any training costs.

### What to research: support

Think about the types of support your child might benefit from. Would they have a buddy or mentor? Would there be help with finding accommodation? Does the employer have groups or activities through which your child could make friends, such as social events, an LGBTQ+ group or a women's network? Take a look at page 30 for information on well-being and support during apprenticeships.

### What to research: the travel required

Depending on their role, your child may travel frequently. They might visit different offices or clients while maintaining a regular base, or move around different parts of the country. Make sure your child is happy with the amount of travel involved and the logistics of combining this with time at college or university. Check also whether the costs of travel are met by the employer. This is information that you're likely to have to gather in person.

### What to research: career prospects

It's worth asking how, once your child has finished the programme, their career prospects would compare with those of a graduate recruit. Would they be doing the same kind of work? How would their salary compare with that of a graduate of the same age? Would your child's prospects for career progression and promotion be the same as a graduate's? Once again, this may involve discussing at careers fairs or open days. @

“She will be earning while she is continuing to learn and can then go on to university if she wants.”

*Mumsnet user*

A person with dark hair, wearing a grey and blue patterned shirt and light blue jeans, is sitting cross-legged on a brown and beige patterned rug. They are using a silver laptop with their left hand and writing in a spiral notebook with a blue pen in their right hand. An open textbook is also visible on the rug to the right. A large yellow circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title text.

# Exploring and choosing universities

Once your child knows what degree subject they would like to study, draw up a shortlist of universities that they are interested in. You can both then do some further research to narrow this list down. They can apply to a maximum of five courses via UCAS. Degrees in the same subject can differ a lot between universities so it's important to look into each course in as much detail as possible.

You might not be able to find all of the following information on the university's website. If you can't, your child could contact the relevant course admissions tutor or ask at an open day. Open days might be held online or on campus, depending on the situation with the coronavirus pandemic and the experience of the university.

“I think a degree would show employers her academic and intellectual ability if she doesn't make it in the media and has to seek other work.”

*Mumsnet user*

“I'm happy [that my child has chosen to apply to university] as no one in my family has ever been to uni before.”

*Mumsnet user*

### Researching courses

- What content is covered? Does this match your child's interests?
- Do the lecturers' backgrounds and research areas tie in with the topics your child wants to learn about?
- How many hours of contact time are there each week and how is this divided up (eg into lectures, tutorials and/or lab sessions)?
- How many hours of study are students recommended to do by themselves each week? If your child is planning to work part time, could they fit this in?
- Are students assessed by coursework, exams or both, and what proportion of their final grade does each element count for?
- What are the student satisfaction ratings for the course?
- What jobs have past students gone on to do?

- How much are the tuition fees and are there any extra costs?
- What are the relevant department's ratings for research and teaching quality?
- Is the course taught at one of the university's main locations or further afield?
- Are there any opportunities to study abroad for part of their degree?

### Questions about vocational degrees

- Is the course accredited by a relevant professional body?
- Which employers do past students now work for?
- What percentage of graduates find work in the relevant industry?
- What links does the course have to employers? Are there opportunities for students to meet them, get sponsored by them or do work placements with them? »



of parents reveal that their children have post-18 plans to continue their education and go to university in the UK.

69%\*

\*Mumsnet survey

- What modules are included? Do these relate to your child's career interests?
- Have any of the lecturers worked in the relevant industry?

#### Researching universities

- How highly ranked is the university overall? Look at several rankings – you'll find they're all slightly different!
- How employable are its students?
- What facilities and initiatives does it have to help them become more employable?
- Where is it located?
- How much would it cost to live there and would the university provide accommodation?
- How long would it take your child to get home for a visit or to commute if they plan to live at home?
- Does the university have clubs and societies that relate to your child's outside interests – or could they find these elsewhere locally?
- Does the local area offer the facilities and opportunities to carry out the activities they want?

#### Visiting universities

Encourage your child to visit universities and departments (whether that's on campus or online) to meet or listen to the academics who would be teaching them and current students. Are people welcoming? Do they sound passionate about their subject? Open days and taster courses are good ways to do this. You can find out more about taster courses on the UCAS website ([www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)). Parents can

usually attend open days with their children but take a step back and encourage your child to speak and ask questions themselves. Have a good wander around to see the facilities – labs, lecture halls, libraries etc – and think about what the atmosphere is like. Head further afield to explore the local area. Would your child feel at home?

#### Impressing graduate recruiters

Knowing what employers like in their graduate recruits could also help your child to make a decision. A good way to research this is to spend some time reading the information provided about different employers at [targetjobs.co.uk/organisations](http://targetjobs.co.uk/organisations). Bear in mind:

- Some recruiters prefer prestigious universities. Investigate higher-ranked institutions if your child is predicted good grades but find one where they will feel inspired and supported.
- Almost all recruiters want graduates to have taken part in activities outside of their degree; consider whether a university has clubs or volunteering programmes that your child would like to join. If they plan to live at home they might be best at a university that doesn't require a long daily commute so they have time for other interests.

Be prepared that you and your child aren't going to agree on everything when it comes to choosing a university – that's normal! Mumsnet users report disagreeing about living away v. living at home, which course to choose and prioritising an institution for its social scene over its career-boosting potential. ©



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# Mental wellbeing in the workplace and at university

Suggestions for helping your child if they struggle with their mental health.

**Y**our child's transition into the workplace or university may be a particular source of worry for you if your child is dealing with – or has previously had – a mental health problem. This article offers some topics and services to consider when thinking about the mental well-being of your child, whether they have a history of mental health issues or not. Discussing these could help you to make sure your child has thought about mental health challenges commonly associated with work or higher education.

## What support is offered?

**Apprenticeships.** When looking over the careers section of an employer's website or speaking to representatives at careers fairs, find out how apprentices are supported. Ideally, a buddy or mentor would be on hand to help your child to manage work and to respond to their questions. Is

an employee assistance programme in place or does HR offer equivalent policies/initiatives?

**Universities.** Look at the university website to find out what's offered. Your child may benefit from letting the university know about a mental health problem before they start – or early on when they do. This will help them to get support during the first few weeks, which can be a crucial time. Reassure your child that declaring a mental health problem on their UCAS form won't impact offer decisions but will help the university prepare to provide support.

## Making the most of spare time

**Apprenticeships.** Think about the things your child enjoys doing and that have led them to make friends, build confidence or gain interests in the past – such as sports clubs or volunteering. Does the employer or local area provide the chance to continue these in some capacity?

Alternatively, your child might see a new activity or group on offer that they're keen to try out.

**Universities.** Most universities offer numerous societies and clubs, so encourage your child to take a look. Outside these clubs, volunteering, community activities and part-time work could help your child gain perspective if and when they find university stressful.

## Communicating problems

Who are the people your child usually talks to? Their list will probably include family and/or friends. Remind them that even if they're moving away from home, these people are still available. Consider how your child best communicates their problems. Are they more comfortable using email or text, or would face-to-face communication (on-screen, if they're away) be better? This could help you too, as it might be the best way to 'check in' with them.



**Apprenticeships.** Think about who your child might talk to in their workplace, such as a line manager or buddy. As well as providing support with the work itself, a manager will often be able to help your child to reduce stress (eg through time management techniques) and to access support.

**Universities.** Your child should have a supervisor who will be available to discuss any problems with academic work. Most universities also have a mental health adviser (or equivalent) to give advice on finding the appropriate support. If your child is feeling nervous about making new friends or leaving old ones, they may be able to build relationships early on. Cara, a student at UCL, says, 'It helped that there was a WhatsApp group for all the first years with a place in my halls of residence – we got to know each other a bit before we all arrived in London.'

### **Avoiding triggers and magnifiers**

Consider and discuss what could cause or worsen problems, along with how your child might avoid this. If there are aspects of life or education that have contributed to issues in the past – and you feel it's okay to bring them up now – think about how these might come up at work or university and what your child might do to avoid a lapse or relapse.

**Apprenticeships.** The 'How to be mentally healthy at work' document by the Scottish Association of Mental Health (SAMH) provides really useful advice for coping with problems such as stress and bullying in the workplace. Go to [www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/samh-publications/publications-workplace](http://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/samh-publications/publications-workplace).

**Universities.** Discuss with your child how they might recognise and work through potential difficulties such as living away from home for the first time or being anxious about achieving academically. ©

## **Where to direct your child**

If you think your child might be reaching a time of crisis in their mental health, make them aware of the services available (ideally, make sure they are aware before a crisis point). Mental health charity Mind provides guidance for crisis planning and links to details of different types of crisis service (including, for example, contact details for mental health crisis helplines): [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services).

Some mental health conditions are covered by the Equality Act 2010, which could mean your child is entitled to ask for reasonable adjustments for exams or work. See the Mind website for more information on this: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/legal-rights/disability-discrimination/equality-act-2010](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/legal-rights/disability-discrimination/equality-act-2010).

### **General services in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland**

For an apprenticeship or university located in England, your child should have a Mind service local to them. For Scotland and Northern Ireland, the equivalent services are the Scottish Association of Mental Health (SAMH) and Inspire. What's offered will differ according to the location, but to improve general well-being (such as running or yoga) often run alongside one or two initiatives dealing more directly with mental health (eg counselling sessions or peer support groups).

You'll find what's offered in the area local to your child by visiting the relevant website. For Mind, go to [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk), for SAMH go to [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk) and for Inspire go to [www.inspirewellbeing.org](http://www.inspirewellbeing.org).

Further information about how to choose and access mental health services can be found on the NHS website: [www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services](http://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services).

### **Apprenticeships: Remploy**

The access to work mental health service offered by Remploy is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. It's a confidential service and is available at no charge to any employees with depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues affecting their work. Take a look at Remploy's website for more information: [www.remploy.co.uk/mentalhealth](http://www.remploy.co.uk/mentalhealth).

### **Apprenticeships: an employee assistance programme**

Some employers offer an employee assistance programme – a scheme to support employees dealing with personal problems that might have a negative impact on their work performance, health or well-being. These generally include services such as counselling. You may be able to find out whether a company offers this from its website, or this might be a question for you or your child to ask at a careers fair.

### **Universities: Student Minds**

Student Minds organises peer support groups and staff-led workshops at various universities across the UK. Go to its website to find out which universities are involved, as well as resources for parents and for students experiencing various challenges: [www.studentminds.org.uk](http://www.studentminds.org.uk).

### **Universities: counselling and wellbeing advice**

Most universities offer counselling or mental health advisers, as the bare minimum. All the information should be easy to find on their websites.



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fresh.

## Discover the options open to your child if they are interested in an accountancy, banking, insurance or actuarial career.

**T**here are two routes into most finance careers. Your child could go to university full time and then apply for a graduate job, or join an employer after their A levels or equivalent and start earning while they learn. In both cases there are opportunities to gain professional qualifications (and these are essential if your child wants to become an accountant or an actuary). Many finance employers offer internships for university students that can sometimes lead to a graduate job offer, though other work experience is also welcomed. Along with minimum A level requirements for apprenticeships and graduate programmes, companies normally ask for five GCSEs (or equivalent) at grade 4 or above, including maths and English.

### Accountancy

Whichever route your child chooses, once they've started their job they'll work towards qualifying as a chartered accountant. Most school leaver programmes last five years, although some only last four. The first two years are spent working towards a basic qualification plus a higher apprenticeship; the following two or three towards a professional qualification. Some firms offer a combined degree and professional qualification programme – these usually take four to six years. Graduates take at least three years to qualify as chartered accountants after being hired. As some firms have relaxed their entry criteria, it is now possible to enter the profession with a 2.2 degree (the third highest grade). Arts degrees are as welcome as numerate degrees, though there's often a numeracy test as part of the application process.

### Insurance and actuarial work

A number of insurance companies and related organisations (such as the insurance market Lloyd's) offer apprenticeships. Most insurance graduate programmes request a 2.1 degree (the second-highest grade) in any subject and some have a minimum requirement for A levels or equivalent. No specific professional qualifications are needed to work in insurance, but both apprentices and graduates often have the opportunity to gain a qualification from a professional body such as the Chartered Insurance Institute. A few companies recruit school leavers onto apprenticeships in actuarial science, which is closely related to insurance and involves calculating the risk of something happening. These programmes typically require at least grade B, or sometimes grade A, in maths A level (or equivalent). Actuarial graduate programmes require a 2.1 degree – a numerate subject is normally preferred – and often a grade B in maths A level (or equivalent). Trainee actuaries must study for internationally recognised professional actuarial exams with the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA). Both graduates and those who have entered through an apprenticeship route can qualify as actuaries in this way. Apprentices will sometimes study a lower-level qualification (such as certified actuarial analyst) during their apprenticeship and then move onto the IFoA qualifications in their next role after the apprenticeship has finished.

### Banking and investment

Several banks' retail and corporate divisions hire school leavers onto higher apprenticeships. Recruiters typically ask for A levels (or equivalent) in any subject and may also seek customer service experience. Graduate programmes in retail and corporate banking typically require applicants to have a 2.1 in any subject, and some request a minimum number of UCAS points. However, some retail banks welcome applications from graduates with a 2.2. To get into investment banking, applicants usually need a university degree at a 2.1 or above. The degree can be in any subject but there is often a numeracy test as part of the application process and a relevant internship is a must. However, you may not need to go to university before working in investment banking. J.P. Morgan offers an apprenticeship route in investment banking – this includes a degree and two professional qualifications from the Chartered Institute of Securities and Investments. There are both graduate and school leaver opportunities in investment management. A few firms offer apprenticeships for school leavers with A levels (or equivalent) in any subject. Graduate programmes in investment management typically require a degree in any subject at 2.1 or above, and some have minimum A level (or equivalent) requirements. ●

## Get the information you need to help your child kick-start their IT career.

**T**here are IT jobs available at many different levels and with employers in every sector. If your child is doing well academically it makes sense for them to start a little way up the ladder, either by going to university and getting a graduate-level job, or by starting work after their A levels (or equivalent) with an employer who will train them.

### Uni first, job later

It's possible to get into an IT career as a graduate with any subject. A significant number of employers run IT summer internships and placement years for students seeking work experience, as well as graduate schemes for those who have completed their degree. There are also many IT jobs for graduates with companies that don't run formal graduate schemes. However, broadly speaking, the less technical your child's degree, the fewer roles will be open to them. Bear in mind:

- Some technology employers require an IT-related degree eg computer science or software engineering. This is particularly the case with smaller employers.
- Some technology employers accept subjects such as engineering, science or maths for IT jobs but won't accept arts or humanities subjects.
- Some technology employers accept graduates with any degree and train them up. To beat the competition for these jobs, a strong academic record and evidence of an interest in technology will help.

There is a wide range of IT degrees available. Your child could choose a broad, technically focused subject such as computer science or software engineering, a more commercially focused degree such as business information technology or something a bit more specialist such as computer games design, cyber security or data science.

Maths at A level or equivalent is typically needed to get onto a degree in computer science or similar at a leading university, often at A or A\* grade. Other universities might ask for any science, maths or technology subject and some do not have specific subject requirements.

### Starting work at 18

Degree apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships will allow your child to start work in IT after their A levels (or equivalent) and study towards higher-level qualifications at the same time. This could be a bachelors degree or a foundation degree – the same level of qualification as a higher national diploma and equivalent to the first two years of a bachelors degree. See page 10 for more details on how such programmes work. Lower levels of apprenticeship are also available.

To get onto a programme that includes a degree or foundation degree your child will typically need three A levels (or equivalent). UCAS points requirements tend to vary between 96 (CCC) and 120 (BBB), but can be as high as 144 (AAA)\*. Often their A levels need to include at least one or two science, maths or technology subjects.

There are also numerous higher apprenticeships in IT that don't include university study. Entry requirements for these vary widely so it's important to check for each opportunity. Some employers ask for three A levels or equivalent; others are happy with two. Some expect science, maths or technology subjects; others will accept any subject. And some specify minimum grades or UCAS points they will accept (typically Cs or 96 UCAS points\*) while others don't. ●

*\*This is based on the UCAS points system introduced in September 2017.*

**I'm involved in the production of IT products for clients. This can involve anything from coding to making prototypes and designing models to aid software development.**

*Lori French, digital and technical solutions apprentice, IBM. Read Lori's profile on page 42.*



## The coronavirus pandemic shone a spotlight on the teaching profession, highlighting the key role schools and teachers play in children's development, both social and academic.

**T**eaching is by and large a graduate profession, and it will be much easier for your child to find work if they have a degree and have completed a teacher training course. However, some types of schools and further education institutions are allowed to employ teaching staff who are not formally qualified, so in theory it is possible to get into the profession without going to university – though the odds are very much against it. There are no fixed educational requirements for teaching assistant jobs, so this is a role that is open to both university graduates and school leavers. Some schools may ask for applicants who are educated to A level standard or equivalent as a minimum.

In England and Wales you need to have professional qualified teacher status (QTS) to work as a teacher of children from age five to sixteen in state-maintained schools (excluding academies and free schools). Attaining QTS involves completing a period of training, which can be one of:

- an undergraduate teacher training degree
- a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
- the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)
- the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)
- school-centred training, which recommends you for QTS.

If you would like to teach children aged up to the age of five, you can pursue a course of early years initial teacher training, leading to early years teacher status (EYTS).

### Key qualities for wannabe teachers

- Communication and collaboration. Teachers need to be capable of giving compelling lessons, and they also need to build relationships with parents and colleagues, including both teaching and support staff. Excellent written communication skills are also essential.
- Organisation. There's a lot of administrative work involved in teaching, from planning lessons to tracking pupils' development to staying on top of a demanding workload.
- Adaptability. The teaching profession is subject to regular change, such as revisions to the national curriculum or the introduction of new qualifications or types of school. Teachers also need to be able to adjust to commit to ongoing professional development.
- Resilience. Teaching is both intellectually and emotionally demanding. It's vital to be capable of managing challenging behaviour, keeping up with marking and paperwork, handling stress and taking a caring, responsible approach to your pupils' problems.

On the plus side, teachers have access to plenty of support. If your child is motivated to succeed, teaching can be a profoundly satisfying profession, as they can have a huge positive impact on the lives of individual children and the community around the school.

### Would a career in teaching suit your child?

Is a career working with children right for your child? The best way to explore this is to encourage them to gain some relevant experience, either on a voluntary basis or as paid work. For example, have they coached younger children at an after-school club or worked as a babysitter? Teaching would be challenging if your child is acutely shy, short on patience or keen to work in a highly competitive commercial environment where the priority is making a profit. They might also think twice about teaching if they want a job that fits within strictly defined working hours.

### Where to get advice

On [targetjobs.co.uk](https://www.targetjobs.co.uk) you can find advice on training to teach and finding your first job in teaching in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Much of it is written in partnership with AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services). The Get into Teaching website ([getintoteaching.education.gov.uk](https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk)) is a great source of information about the profession. It also lists Train to Teach events (many virtual), where your child can hear from teachers, training providers and expert advisers and learn more about ways to train and funding. ●



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Explore the grades your child will need and the paths they can take towards a career in engineering, and find out about professional registration.

**W**ould-be engineers who intend to complete their A levels, BTEC or Scottish Highers can either study for an engineering degree before starting work or join a higher or degree apprenticeship programme with an engineering employer.

#### A level subjects

If your child wants to take a degree in engineering they need an A level (or equivalent) in maths. In many cases they will also need physics. Some chemical engineering degrees ask for maths and chemistry instead; some ask for all three. For some very prestigious universities it is helpful also to have further maths. Top universities ask for A\* and A grades or equivalent; universities that aren't as highly ranked often ask for As and Bs. To get onto an engineering higher or degree apprenticeship your child will typically need maths, science and technology A levels or equivalent. Maths is often requested, and some employers specify which science subjects they want your child to have studied. Grade requirements can vary from 96 UCAS points (CCC) to 144 (AAA)\*, so it's best to check individual employers' websites.

#### The university route

Your child could study a particular area of engineering, such as mechanical engineering or civil engineering, or keep their options open with a general engineering degree. They can also choose between a course that leads to a bachelors-level qualification (BEng) or one that leads to a masters-level qualification (MEng).

Many engineering employers run summer internships and placement years for students seeking work experience, as well as graduate schemes for those who have completed their degree. Some engineering degrees include a placement year as part of the course. There are also many jobs for graduate engineers with companies that don't run formal graduate schemes. These are often with smaller organisations.

#### Joining an employer at 18

A number of engineering employers run higher and degree apprenticeships, which are aimed at those who've just finished their A levels (or equivalent). Some offer the chance to gain a bachelors degree; others offer a foundation degree, a higher national diploma or higher national certificate. All programmes involve combining a job with part-time study, and the employer will typically pay all of the tuition fees. If your child does well their employer is very likely to offer them a permanent job once they finish the programme. It may also support them to continue their studies to a higher level. Several engineering employers also offer sponsored degrees. Find out more about sponsored degrees on page 10.

#### Becoming professionally registered

Many engineering employers support their apprentices and graduates to become professionally registered. This means a professional body has certified that they have the right level of skills and knowledge to meet its benchmark.

The highest level of registration is chartered engineer, then incorporated engineer, then engineering technician. On average, chartered engineers earn more than incorporated engineers, and incorporated engineers earn more than engineering technicians. The quickest and simplest route to chartered engineer status is with a masters degree and, for incorporated engineer status, at least a bachelors degree. However, it's possible to get there with lower qualifications if you can prove that you've reached these levels of learning in another way. ●

*\*This is based on the UCAS points system introduced in September 2017.*

## Discover the choices your child should make now in order to gain the science job that suits them in the future.

**T**he area of science in which your child is interested will determine their choice of A levels or equivalent. For example, if they are interested in working in life sciences and food and technology, they will need to take A levels in chemistry and biology. An A level in maths and/or physics may also be needed to get onto many higher apprenticeship programmes and university courses. If they want to work in physical sciences, they will need A levels in physics and maths.

For some science careers, non-science subjects are useful. For example, if your child is interested in becoming a meteorologist then A levels in maths, physics and geography would help.

### Apprenticeship schemes

Several employers in the science sector offer higher and degree apprenticeships to school leavers. Entry standards can be high.

After your child has finished their apprenticeship, their employer may well offer them a permanent job as a scientist. However, if they decide that they want to go to university to study for a degree that is of a higher level than the one they gained from their apprenticeship then that could be an option, depending on the entrance requirements of the university they wish to study at and the qualification their apprenticeship gives them.

### University route

The more traditional way into the science sector is by taking a degree in a relevant subject. The degree course your child should choose depends on the area of science they want to build a career in; there are many, many options.

In addition, there are some very specific degree courses that can lead to careers in certain fields of science – for example forensic science, biocomputing, and brewing and distilling.

In general, most employers in the science sector will require candidates to have attained at least a 2.1 in their degree (the second-highest grade) for research roles, although there are some jobs for which employers will accept 2.2s.

For many careers in science, particularly those in research, candidates will need at least a masters degree and quite possibly a PhD as well. Many science degrees are offered as four-year courses that are a BSc combined with a masters degree (and these can lead straight into a PhD). These courses may be a good idea if your child thinks they have the ability and the desire to study for a role at a higher level of entry. A degree from a Russell Group university may also give your child the edge when applying for a PhD if their career choice requires it.

Some companies will provide financial support while your child does a degree. The exact details vary – some companies will employ candidates and pay for them to do a degree course part time; others may award students with a sponsorship deal and pay for their degree while they work for them during the vacations. Others will provide students with some money towards the cost of their degree but with no other ties to the company.

The sort of job that your child wants to do in the science sector may well influence their choice of university. If they are interested in working in a research role then they should consider applying to a university that is highly regarded in research in the area of science that interests them. ●

There are some very specific degree courses that can lead to careers in certain fields of science.

SCIENCE

A gap year could give your child the money, experience or clear mind with which to take the next steps in their working or academic life. So, how can you ensure they make the most of it?

**T**here are plenty of potential benefits to having a gap year after school but if your child is going to get the most out of it they need to have some idea of what they want to achieve. It will help later on to be able to tell employers why they took a gap year and what they did with it. Recruiters may well ask about it at interview and won't be impressed if they hear about a lot of TV watching! Traditional gap year options are working, volunteering and travelling, often in combination. Of course, the impact of Covid-19 on the countries your child hopes to visit should be considered when it comes to travelling.

#### Reasons for taking a gap year

These can include:

- ☐ having a break from studying
- ☐ getting work experience (either in a particular area or just in general)
- ☐ getting life experience
- ☐ having time to do something they particularly want to do, such as travelling
- ☐ having the time to decide what to do in life
- ☐ earning some money
- ☐ having a second attempt at getting into the university/degree programme/school leaver programme they really want
- ☐ being able to apply to university with the advantage of already knowing what grades they've got.

#### Prioritising a gap year – pinning down aims

Encouraging your child to figure out which aim is most important to them will help them plan their time. If they have a clear aim such as 'Get a job in retail and save at least £2,000 towards the cost of uni' then you are well on your way. If their main goal is less clear, try to pin it down.

If, for example, your child wants to have a second attempt at getting onto their preferred degree or school leaver programme then they'll need to make sure they're available for interviews at the relevant time of year. They might also plan to get some relevant work experience early on in their gap year that will look good on an application.

If their main aim is to clarify their direction in life, they'll probably want to plan in a series of different activities across the year to allow them to try different things, rather than waiting for inspiration to strike while working in a local shop.

#### Taking action before a gap year

If your child wants to spend a year travelling overseas before going to university, some courses will allow them to apply in their final year at school and then defer entry if they are offered a place. If work is on the gap year agenda, it might be easier to find a job if they have completed relevant voluntary work or training. Before their gap year starts, help your child work out how they'll pay for things such as travelling, volunteering or taking courses. How much can you contribute, if you are able to? ●


[My child and I] have discussed a gap year – but not for travel.

*Mumsnet user*

We have talked about a gap year to gain experience in the relevant field.

*Mumsnet user*





# Inspiring the next generation of chemical engineers

When it comes to their future career, we understand that you may have different questions than your child. This is why we've put together some information specifically for parents on what to expect from a career in chemical engineering, such as:

- make a difference - opportunities to get involved in solving some of society's biggest challenges including sustainable production, clean energy, and addressing the impacts of climate change
- plenty of choice - chemical engineers work in a huge range of sectors including pharmaceuticals, energy, water and food
- great prospects - a variety of job roles, opportunities to travel, and competitive starting salaries.

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## I already have my own patent.

**LORI FRENCH** is a digital and technical solutions apprentice at **IBM**. She is studying digital solutions, with a specialism in software engineering, at the University of Exeter.

### Why did you choose the apprenticeship route?

My entire friendship group chose to do a degree in the traditional way and my family is very academic, so I was fully prepared to go to university to study computer science when I finished college.

However, by this time I was certain that I wanted to work for IBM. The catalyst was Watson, the computer developed by IBM that competed against champions on the game show *Jeopardy!* and won. It was my dream to work for a company at the cutting edge of innovation. So, I looked at IBM's careers pages to see what qualifications and grades I'd need at university to get in, and it was here that I saw its apprenticeships. I thought, if I know where I want to work, why delay for three or four years?

### Why did IBM choose to recruit you?

I think largely because I knew exactly why I wanted to work for them. It was obvious that I had done my research, rather than just stumbling upon the opportunity. For me, the biggest reason was IBM's technical achievements – the fact that they had achieved more patents than any other company for the past five years.

### How is your apprenticeship structured?

I attend university remotely every Monday, and work at IBM during the other four days.

I suppose my route has been a little different from the 'typical' one as I have moved around a bit. I spent my first two years working in consulting, then moved to work in research for the next two years. I effectively irritated researchers into giving me the opportunity to work with them, because I knew this was where I desperately wanted to be! But IBM set me up for this, by providing and encouraging the kinds of networking opportunities needed to start these conversations.

I have moved again now, for the final year of my apprenticeship, to work in client engineering. There are so many exciting things going on here that I find it hard not to be pulled in by new departments!

### Can you describe your current role at IBM?

I'm an engineer on the client engineering team, and as part of this I'm involved in the production of IT products for clients. That can involve anything from coding to making prototypes and designing models to aid software development.

In 2021, one of these clients was Wimbledon. IBM is its main technical provider, and each year it chooses graduates and apprentices to take on the software engineering roles. My job was to develop the applications used during the tournament.

### What kind of training have you received?

Apprentices are given all the generic training needed to their job well. So, when I started out in consulting I attended a consulting course given by Global Blue, which made sure I understood things like how to consult, what it means to be a consultant and how to deliver value to clients before I started working. However, IBM also allows apprentices to take on any learning opportunities they would like to. So, while my role is not linked with cybersecurity, I undertook a training course in ethical hacking because I thought it would be really interesting. It didn't disappoint!

### How do you balance university and IBM work?

This is definitely something I struggled with when I started out. I would spend my weekends and evenings studying because I wanted to get the best grade possible. However, a turning point came when I spoke to my mum after having achieved a commendation from my university's dean for getting one of the best grades in my year. Of course, she was proud of me, but she also said that I'd have the same grade whether I chose to spend all my spare time making sure I got the highest marks or not. So, I now give myself set time limits for work and prioritise meeting the required standard, rather than spending entire weekends finessing.



**What is the main quality you need to do an apprenticeship?**

I would say the most important quality is resilience; as I have mentioned, working and studying at the same time can be a challenge. However, I do think resilience can come when you're truly enthusiastic about the work you're doing and the company you're working for. For me, as well as this enthusiasm, the year I took out between college and starting my apprenticeship, to travel and work at Waitrose, also gave me a level of resilience. This is because I was doing these activities independently – without the support system of my family and friends permanently on hand.

**Have you felt supported during your apprenticeship?**

Yes – IBM provides learning opportunities, as well as experts to talk to if there's anything I'd like further information on or assistance with. In terms of wellbeing, the company has an early professionals manager whose sole job is to support apprentices and interns. They can signpost to the right person in the pastoral team, which includes mental health first aiders.

**You mentioned innovation as a reason for choosing IBM. Have you been able to innovate?**

After I'd made it clear at interview that I wanted to work in patenting, IBM ensured I was exposed to people working in that area. I was provided with experience in the labs, the epicentre of invention, and my mentor here was a senior inventor who was only in her 20s. This is testament not only to the opportunities apprentices have to learn from those so acclaimed in their field but also to the fact that reaching this level is possible for newer employees.

I already have my own patent! When developing this I was helped by the company's patenting groups, which give expert guidance on how to think like an inventor and the patenting process used by the company.

**Have you been involved with anything outside your main role?**

I'm involved with the IBM early professionals LGBT+ support community, which I cofounded. There was already a group for LGBT+ employees when I started but I thought there should also be a focus specifically on those starting out in their career, particularly because statistics show that people in the queer community often face more mental health challenges in their early careers.

As well as informal coffee break sessions, we have hosted educational events such as ally training and a panel talk about trans identities.

IBM also has early professionals groups for women and for Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, alongside a whole host of groups not focused directly on early professionals, such as one for people with diverse abilities.

**What has been your biggest achievement at IBM?**

As a result of my interest in Watson and natural language processing functionality, which I had no prior knowledge of but made clear during my interview with IBM, I was put on a project to create a chatbot, a computer program that simulates human conversation. This would be live to over 60,000 users a week to start with, before being ramped up to 100,000.

I couldn't believe it when the chatbot was showcased at IBM THINK in San Francisco, where the company highlights the most innovative tech products we create every year. My surprise only grew when I got an email from Ginni Rometty, CEO of IBM at the time and the first woman to head up the company, praising it. I was absolutely delighted – I remember sending the email over to my manager to say this was the *coolest thing ever!* ©



No one has ever said to me, 'No, I can't help you.'

**MALACHI BOYCE** is a marketing executive at **SKY**.

**What work experience did you have prior to your apprenticeship?**

I worked my way up to the level of shift manager in my part-time job at Burger King while I was in sixth form. Although this wasn't directly relevant to marketing, it gave me transferable skills I could draw upon at my Sky interview. The most important of these were teamworking, communication and managing expectations. Monitoring progress was also an important aptitude I had gained – in marketing, you keep on top of how well campaigns are doing (eg how many people are clicking on an online advert) and use the insights you gain to influence future campaigns.

Before my apprenticeship I had also taken over the social media side of my mum's car rental business, which I mentioned at my interview. When posting on the social media pages, I learned how to create a consistent and persuasive brand voice, which is distinguishable from your personal voice. Again, this is beneficial to have in marketing.

**What made you apply for Sky's marketing apprenticeship?**

I studied for a level 3 extended diploma in business at sixth form and found that I was most interested in the marketing modules. I first heard about Sky's marketing apprenticeship when the company visited the school at a careers event. I had learned at school that I preferred to pick up knowledge while working rather than spending hours with my head in a book, so a marketing apprenticeship sounded like a route that would suit me. I also liked the idea that I could get started in my career early, and without student debt.

When I saw Sky at the careers event, I was excited about the prospect of working with such a big-name company that everyone recognised. I knew this would mean my work would have a far-reaching impact. The wide variety of teams and projects I would be exposed to throughout the apprenticeship also appealed, as I would

complete the programme with a strong foundation of knowledge for a marketing career.

**How did you stand out to Sky at interview?**

Perhaps more influential than my transferable skills was the fact that I could talk honestly about the impression Sky's marketing campaigns had made on me. I referred to an advert based on *The Incredibles*, in which the powers of the heroes reflected the qualities of Sky Broadband (super strong and super fast!). I think talking about what I thought was clever about specific campaigns like this one demonstrated my passion, both for Sky and for marketing.

I also researched the company to get a decent grasp of its larger values, rather than focusing only on marketing. This actually made me more enthusiastic about the prospect of working for Sky. For instance, I was impressed by their commitment to values such as environmental responsibility when I discovered it was the first media company to go carbon neutral.

**How was your apprenticeship structured?**

The marketing apprenticeship lasts for two years, during which you work in three different departments while studying for a digital marketing level 3 qualification.

During my first rotation, I was part of the TV products and customer marketing team. This involved designing and creating products such as newsletters to encourage people to make better use of the services they have already purchased from Sky – for instance, to watch in HD. My second rotation was spent on the digital team, mainly working on adverts displayed on social media and websites. I went on to work in customer relationship management and digital marketing for NOWTV, including looking into ways to improve cross-selling as well as social media adverts and email campaigns.

I'm glad Sky offered a choice over the departments I worked in by allowing me to submit preferences. For my third rotation, I knew I had enjoyed many aspects from my previous two and so picked a department that included elements from both.



**How much responsibility did the apprenticeship give you?**

One of the main ways the company has built up my confidence is by giving me responsibility from day one. Throughout my time at Sky, I haven't felt like an apprentice. Instead, I have felt included by my colleagues, who have supported me but also trusted me to play important roles in projects. So, in my third rotation I took ownership of the creative process – this high level of involvement meant I felt really proud when I saw the adverts pop up on my Instagram.

**What kind of support has Sky offered?**

There's a mentor scheme for work-related support and a buddy programme that covers all kinds of support. For me personally, however, the most important source of help has been the colleagues I come across every day. Instead of booking in a formal meeting, I have found that I can just ask a question whenever I'm stuck. No one has ever said to me, 'No, I can't help you.'

**What learning opportunities have you had?**

The knowledge-building opportunities outside of day-to-day work have been practical, which has really suited my learning style. One of the learning sessions, for example, was around producing new campaign ideas for companies such as Apple. So, following briefing talks from leaders in the company, we were allocated teams and tasked with developing ideas, before presenting them back to colleagues. This was such a beneficial experience, as it helped me to get a better grasp of both the briefing process and exactly what Sky wants from campaigns.

**What makes someone successful in a marketing role?**

Curiosity is important, as you need a desire to find out why one thing works and another thing doesn't – and to think up and try out new ideas. What grabs people's attention is constantly changing, so you need to be consistently curious to find out what it is that will capture imaginations at that particular moment.

Secondly, marketing involves multi-tasking, so you must be able to keep on top of a few different projects at once. In my experience, proactivity is the best way to do this – if you get ahead of things in one project, then if a problem arises in another you will have the capacity to deal with that without letting other projects fall behind.

This leads on to the final requirement: problem-solving. Unexpected issues arise in marketing. For example, you might be ready to launch a campaign about a TV show and its release date gets delayed by a month. Under such circumstances, you need to be able to consider your options and think logically about which will work best. Or, sometimes, you will need to think creatively to come up with a new solution that works for the specific situation.

**How do you think your experience differs from that of someone who chose university?**

When choosing an apprenticeship over university, some people worry about whether they will get the same kind of social life. Of course, the pandemic has thrown this out for most people over the past couple of years, but Sky has done what it can to ease the impact with events such as virtual escape rooms and team quizzes over Zoom. And, more recently, I have been pleased that these have become in-person again, with evenings at bars and restaurants, as well as a fun trip to a modern bingo hall in central London.

I also know a couple of my friends who go to university have had lectures cancelled and periods of time when their learning came to a standstill, while universities were getting used to moving online. However, even when I was at home my work and development never stopped. Although I could never have accounted for the pandemic in my decision making, Sky was definitely the best place for me to ride it out. ©

## Kindness is part of the culture at Clifford Chance.

**CHLOE LETTINGTON** is a trainee solicitor at **Clifford Chance**.

### What made you choose law?

My maths teacher at sixth form gave students the opportunity to get involved with a 'mock trial'. This was a scheme run by the Citizenship Foundation, in which we were given a case to learn and each assigned a legal role. We rehearsed the case before visiting a courtroom to run trials just as we would in 'real life', as part of a competition with other schools. This was the first exposure to the legal profession I had gained outside of the minimal amount I had picked up from TV shows, and it sparked my desire to be a lawyer.

### Why did you decide to apply for the ACCESS scheme with Clifford Chance?

I had decided to study law at university when the week-long ACCESS scheme opened for applications. However, this was the result of a gut feeling left over from the mock trial rather than a researched decision: I didn't even know the difference between a solicitor and a barrister at that time! So, I wanted more information, and a scheme that introduced pre-university students to law and the professionals within it sounded perfect. In fact, it seemed to me that it was the only law firm offering this kind of exposure to such young aspiring lawyers at the time.

This scheme was also particularly appealing as, at that stage, I knew it would be my only opportunity to find out about law from those who practised it. Coming from a regular state school and having no particularly 'high flying' connections, ACCESS seemed like a necessity if I was going to discover the profession and start making connections within it.

### How did you feel when you started the ACCESS scheme?

Just getting the Tube, stepping into the office and being given a key card was amazing at the time – I didn't feel like I was going on a school trip but like I was going to work. Of course, given my age and inexperience (I had

never actually seen the inside of an office!) I did also feel nervous, but the warm welcome and willingness to help I was met with soon calmed me down.

At breakfast each morning, we would listen to a talk by a leading figure in the firm before getting involved with Q&A panels with trainees and lawyers. During the first morning, this talk was by Michael Bates, a managing partner at Clifford Chance who welcomed us to the firm. Right from the beginning I could see that everyone was working to make us feel included.

### What stands out as the best part of the scheme?

The networking lunches and dinners attended by trainees and qualified lawyers were so beneficial, as they gave me a chance to talk to them in a more informal setting. I asked all the burning questions I had, from more general advice-seeking ones such as 'How did you make up your mind about which law specialism to qualify in?' to specific questions based on the workshops we undertook. We worked on legal case studies in these workshops – so, at a lunch I might ask, 'Why was a lawyer needed in this specific transaction?'

I was also so pleased to see that professionals at Clifford Chance wanted to give up their lunchtimes or after-work hours to talk to us – they joked that it was for the free food, but I knew it was a big ask of busy lawyers!

### Can you talk a bit more about the workshops?

A workshop that sticks with me was focused on mergers and acquisitions (when companies transfer ownership or part ownership to other companies). I worked as part of a group to come up with different options for the company. We then used role play to discover what would happen if each one was put into effect. This showed me the scope of the legal profession, as I recognised the crucial role lawyers play in providing legal advice for businesses. It also helped me to consider cases from the perspective of clients.



**What lasting impact did your time on the ACCESS scheme have?**

Firstly, it gave me knowledge. I gained an understanding of law and of the legal profession. I also got a better idea of what it would be like to work for a large firm like Clifford Chance. Going on to study law at university, I could do so with plenty of 'food for thought', which would help me when it came to considering my choices in the profession. And, having later decided to undertake my training contract at Clifford Chance, where I'm currently on my final six-month 'seat' (placement), it's clear that keeping the firm at the back of my mind went on to be beneficial to my future.

Secondly, ACCESS gave me the beginnings of a network. I was uncertain at first about whether to connect with the lawyers I met outside of the workplace, but so many people said, 'Add me on LinkedIn.' So, I went for it and I'm so glad that I did. It gave me long-lasting sources of support and information.

**What qualities are needed to work in law?**

Working in law can be tough, from the competition it takes to get the position you want to the long hours you work when you do. So, in order to be resilient and keep pushing through, you will need dedication backed up with a keen enthusiasm for law.

Organisational skills are also crucial – you must be able to manage your time and manage the expectations of others by being clear about what your tasks are and how long each will take.

Lastly, a quality that people don't consider when it comes to legal careers is kindness, but it is so important. The legal profession may be deemed 'high flying' yet that doesn't mean you need to be cut-throat to work in it. In fact, it's quite the opposite. After a long day of hard work, no one wants to come across a mean colleague, so a lack of basic kindness can make you less employable. Kindness is part of the culture at Clifford Chance, where

A quality that people don't consider when it comes to legal careers is kindness, but it is so important.

I still experience the support and consideration I first encountered during the ACCESS scheme.

**What are you most proud of from your career so far?**

Actually, the fact that I am here talking to you and hopefully inspiring a younger generation to consider a legal career makes me very proud. Given my 'ordinary' background at a state school and initial uncertainty as to whether I would make it in law – despite the fact that I was so keen to do so – I'm glad I can now say to anyone in the position I was in seven years ago that I'm doing it so they can, too.

I'm also proud to be working for a firm that shares my belief in widening access to the legal profession. Clifford Chance does this not only through ACCESS, which is targeted at students from backgrounds not traditionally as likely to lead to a career in law, but through other schemes such as ACCEPT, for LGBT+ students interested in law, and networks such as REACH (race, equality and celebrating heritage). Positive change towards diversity and equal access does seem to be taking place across the legal profession, but it's clear to me that Clifford Chance is ahead of the game. ©





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“My journey hasn’t been straightforward; I knew I wanted to get into law from a young age, but the timing just wasn’t right. Resilience and my determination to succeed is what has got me to this point. Clifford Chance is a place of opportunity, it is innovative and unique and not afraid to break the mould if it means attracting the best and most diverse talent. It’s a place I already know I can completely be myself. Which is why the SPARK scheme was a natural fit for me. Securing a place on the programme means I will have access to all the tools and resources I need to become a world-class lawyer. The additional option of interviewing for a Training Contract at the end of the scheme is amazing.”

**Jas Sahota**  
**SPARK student**

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