

Foreign and Commonwealth Office – leading the way in large scale apprenticeship recruitment

The Corporate Services Centre of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), based in Milton Keynes, has embraced the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy and public sector apprenticeship targets. Through a partnership with Milton Keynes College, the FCO has recruited 35 new apprentices in less than twelve months.



The Permanent Under Secretary Sir Simon McDonald meeting new apprentices on a visit with the FCO Management Board

The case for apprenticeships

Like all employers with a pay bill in excess of £3m, the FCO is now required to pay the Apprenticeship Levy. Not only that, but as a public sector organisation, it is also expected that 2.3% of the FCO's workforce should be an apprentice. Keen to meet this target and to utilise their levy payments, in February 2017, 20 level 2 business administration apprentices began with the organisation. In November 2017, 15 customer service apprentices began.

It's not just about the levy though. The FCO has faced challenges around recruitment and retention and an apprenticeship programme offered an opportunity to address this.

And already, the apprenticeship programme is yielding a number of benefits. These include:

- New ideas and a fresh way of thinking that the apprentices bring
- A challenge to accepted and traditional ways of working
- Re-motivating and energising those who may have been in the organisation for some time
- A more diverse workforce, better reflecting local and national demographics. Apprentices range from school leavers to graduates, those changing career and those already working with the FCO.
- Opportunities to develop skills, talent and expertise which can be utilised across the organisation
- A chance to tailor training to the needs of the business
- Building for the future

The success of the programme in Milton Keynes has been recognised by the wider organisation, with the London office now working with Milton Keynes College to offer a number of apprenticeship opportunities themselves.

Future ways of expanding the scheme in Milton Keynes are also being explored, including possible apprenticeships in HR and junior management.

For more information contact:
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**Tom Pollitt-Evans,
Debt Management, Business
Administration Apprentice**

Prior to starting his apprenticeship, Tom worked in the private sector and most recently was a contractor with the FCO:

“An apprenticeship with the FCO allowed me to take up a permanent position whilst working towards a qualification. I knew that I wanted a long term career in the FCO and developing my skill set through a course approved and recognised by the organisation was a real positive for me. The apprenticeship was a great opportunity for me to start a career in my chosen field and develop academically at the same time.

There are many positives to the apprenticeship including the support provided by both the employer and the college. Managers at the FCO have been accommodating of study requirements and ensure that the correct time and support is available to all apprentices. From a working perspective, they understand that apprentices are learning on the job and have again offered great support throughout. The college has also been extremely supportive in helping us through the course.

I also feel that the apprenticeship has been designed with development in mind. We have received great advice on appraisals and development plans which prepares us for the future. Additional training has been made available, including an IT qualification, and we also get the same opportunities as other staff at our grade. The whole experience has been positive and enjoyable.

I would fully recommend an apprenticeship to others. They are a great opportunity to start a career, and allow you to learn a job whilst continuing development.”



**Helen Wilson,
Invoice Processing, Business
Administration Apprentice**

Following redundancy from a local school, Helen was unemployed for a number of years before securing employment as a contractor in the Accounts Payable department of the FCO.

When the apprenticeship opportunity arose, Helen was keen to apply:

“I really enjoyed working at the FCO and I felt becoming an apprentice was a good way to learn and progress. It gave me the job security I was looking for as well as opening many doors to an exciting and fulfilling career.

I have gained the love for learning again. I have learnt how to manage my time more effectively and knowing I will have a Diploma in Business Admin and a great career at the end of it makes it all worthwhile. I have also gained functional qualifications in Maths, English and ICT which is a bonus.

The best thing about the apprenticeship is learning whilst still getting paid! And being able to do a job I really enjoy.

I would most definitely recommend apprenticeships schemes, as they give people the chance to learn whilst working. A lot of training courses don't offer a permanent job at the end whereas apprenticeships do. It also doesn't matter what age you are, what your background is or what qualifications you have there is an apprenticeship out there for everyone.”

Supporting apprentices and their managers

The wellbeing of their employees is extremely important to the FCO and ensuring that support is available for both apprentices and their line managers is a key factor in the success of the apprenticeship programme.

All apprentices have access to wider training opportunities, to support from the FCO's employee associations, and are encouraged to join in with activities across the organisation. The aim is to create a rewarding and motivating apprenticeship and for all employees to view the FCO as a good place to work.

The apprenticeship also opens up a range of opportunities for individuals, both within the organisation in Milton Keynes, London and potentially in overseas offices.

The first cohort of business administration apprentices have formed a strong bond and support each other.

They also presented to the new cohort of apprentices at their recent induction. Members of staff from Milton Keynes College work with the apprentice, their line manager and HR, and there is a real appetite to learn from the programme and to look at ways of improving this for both the business and the apprentices.



"I'm really pleased with how the apprenticeship programme is going and I'm proud to be at the forefront of the scheme. It has been really encouraging to see how well the apprentices have settled in and applied themselves to their roles, and they are a real part of the team.

The relationship, collaboration and support from Milton Keynes College has been key to the success of the programme and we look forward to welcoming more apprentices in the future".

Sarah Spencer, Finance Directorate Business Manager and Head of CSC Support team