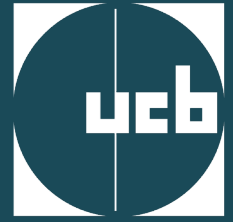


Case Study - apprenticeship journey to a PhD

Abbey Lightfoot

Apprenticeship in Applied Biosciences – Level 6 (Degree)

UCB



Exam fears almost saw 23-year-old Abbey Lightfoot drop out of A levels; but thanks to the support of her school and an apprenticeship with UCB she has embarked upon a prestigious four-year Wellcome Trust PhD in the mechanisms of inflammatory disease at the University of Birmingham.

Have you always been interested in science?

Yes, I guess so. I was always asking questions, so my mum used to buy me the New Scientist books, to find out the answers!

What made you take the apprenticeship route rather than university?

I did badly in my first year of A levels because I wasn't able to perform under exam conditions. At one point it looked like I would have to leave but thankfully my biology teacher saw that I had potential and supported me to work through the exam pressure. It was the same teacher that told me about apprenticeships and helped me find one at UCB. I got a lot of support and information from that teacher and that encouraged me to continue with education through an apprenticeship. And now I have just passed my Level 6 apprenticeship with a BSc in Applied Biosciences for laboratory scientists.

What benefit do you think you have gained from doing an apprenticeship?

At first, I thought I might be missing out on the university experience but over the last five years I have had a great social life and been paid at the same time, so I can afford it! I have made many friends at UCB and really haven't missed out on anything. In fact, I have appreciated the time to focus on work without distractions. Plus, there was much more course work, so not the same level of exam pressure which suits me much better!

Feedback from my PhD application was that my presentation was exceptional, and I think this was in large part due to the experience I have had during my apprenticeship. I have had the opportunity to take theory and apply it on the bench to see how science works in real life, this is invaluable. I have also been trusted to supervise students coming in under me which provided me with great workplace experience.

What have you learned in your time at UCB?

The people at UCB have been everything for me. I talked to people, whoever they were, whatever their status, and they have all taken the time to talk to me, to share knowledge and offer advice to support me. Although my work at UCB wasn't specifically in any of the company's therapy areas, the work they do and the support they have given me has influenced my decision to focus on immunology for my PhD.

I am sure that the people who have been so important over the last five years will always be there for me I am looking forward to taking everything UCB has taught me into academia – you never know, I may be back! .

UCB is a member of the Science Industry Partnership which works in partnership with government to establish the skills needed to build a high value, competent scientific workforce



Science Industry Partnership

What advice would you give other young people interested in a career in science?

Be informed and know what your options are.

I have been very fortunate to have a lot of support to point me towards this information and that's one of the reasons that I have been involved in UCB's [Work in Science Week](#) event – designed to let students sample life as a scientist. It's quite a competitive process to get a place on *Work in Science Week* and I am keen to share with those successful students my journey.

I am proud of what I have achieved but it's thanks to other people supporting me and empowering me with information about the different routes and options. I want to make sure others know what's available to them, particularly those not lucky enough to be as well supported at school or home as I was.

What's next?

I don't know! I have four years in academia coming up which I am very excited about. After that I will have many options open. One of the things that has been so beneficial about my time at UCB is the outside speakers, from academia, and internal speakers from industry who have been so inspirational about the huge scientific and personal progression this career holds.

Whatever happens next, I know that it will only ever be me holding me back!



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