

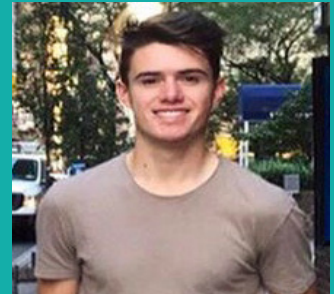
Case Study:

Why the apprenticeship route was right for me.

Luis Wagstaff

Electrical and Instrumentation Apprenticeship Level 3 at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)

Luis Wagstaff, 19, is currently in his third year of his four-year Level 3 Apprenticeship at GSK. Luis has always had a passion for science, especially physics. In this case study, he explains why the apprenticeship route was right for him.



Have you always been interested in science?

All through school I was interested in the sciences, particularly physics. My favourite units were always regarding electricity. I believe it interests me so much because of the large role it plays in modern day society and how few people understand it.



What made you take the apprenticeship route rather than university?

I weighed the pros and cons. I knew I wanted to achieve a degree in electrical and electronics engineering. I realised that going down the university route to achieve a degree meant I'd have to go to sixth form and then university. However, with the right apprenticeship I knew I would have the opportunity to gain qualifications and then have the opportunity to complete a degree a couple years after my apprenticeship, potentially just a year longer than the university route.

I decided to take on the apprenticeship route despite knowing it would take slightly longer because I understood I would be gaining valuable experience in my field. This experience would assist the rest of my career and aid me in finding a job, in case GSK were unable to offer me a full time position at the end of my apprenticeship. In addition to this, I would be earning money the entire time instead of paying university fees.

“I would advise that if you apply for an apprenticeship, it is important to keep in mind, that even though a company must decide whether you are right for them, it is just as important that you find an apprenticeship that is right for you, in order to get the most from it.”

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

I believe that doing an apprenticeship, especially straight from school, allows you to grow into adulthood faster. You are placed straight into a work environment; working everyday with people who are older than you are therefore, you gain a maturity and a different outlook on life. This may not happen whilst remaining in a school environment like sixth form.

Another benefit from doing my apprenticeship is, I have gained relevant knowledge throughout my college courses during my apprenticeship, which is reinforced by the hands-on work I carry out on site. This is the best way for me to learn; I am taught the theory at college then shown how the theory is applied in the real world. Then used on the equipment and machinery I work with/on.

What have you learned in your time at GSK?

Before I joined GSK, I didn't understand the magnitude of what I would learn throughout my apprenticeship. I have learnt about high/low voltages and the applications they have on site and how code is written for the programming of controllers. So that we can automate the sites processes with the aid of the information that different instruments provide, in order to run a pharmaceutical plant such as the one I work on.

What advice would you give to other young people interested in an apprenticeship?

When you join a company, what becomes apparent very quickly, is just because you started at the company in a particular job role, does not mean you have to work the same role throughout your entire career. Throughout school, children are commonly asked the question, 'what do you want to do when you're older?' with the implication that you can only chose one job.

The reality is many people will transition into many different job roles over the course of their career. I advise people who are interested in apprenticeships to decide upon a field that they would like to work in; there are many different roles that you may not have even considered which could be a perfect fit for you.

There may not always be an apprenticeship close to home for the job role you want to pursue. This often leads people down the university route. However, if you apply for an apprenticeship in the field you want to work in, you can always work your way up into the position you've always wanted and because you have worked in different roles along the way, you will have obtained a greater understanding of the field in general which will only assist you later on in your career.

All companies have different levels of structure around their apprenticeship programmes. Some will have regular check-in sessions to monitor your development, in some apprenticeship programmes; check in sessions with your manager may be rare. Due to this, I would recommend asking about the apprenticeship program structure during the application process or perhaps ask some of the apprentices at the company. Ask mentors and colleagues questions such as:

What do you expect I should be able to do by the time I am a year, 2 years and 3 years in to my apprenticeship?

Finally, I would advise that if you apply for an apprenticeship, it is important to keep in mind, that even though a company must decide whether you are right for them, it is just as important that you find an apprenticeship that is right for you, in order to get the most from it.



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