

ALTERNATIVES TO UNIVERSITY

The Guide to School Leaver Programmes and
Apprenticeships for Students, Parents & Teachers

PURE
POTENTIAL

HOW CAN PURE POTENTIAL HELP YOU?

Today's students are faced with a wider array of post-18 options than ever before and it is crucial they are making informed decisions. The recent growth of school leaver programmes means there are even more opportunities for forward-thinking, career-minded students who are considering bypassing university (and student debt) to kick-start their careers. At Pure Potential we passionately believe that all students should be given access to advice, information and contacts to help them make the right decisions about university and careers.

For those investigating an alternative to uni, our website www.purepotential.org is packed full of completely free information and resources, including templates for CVs and cover letters.

If you register your email on our website then you will be the first to hear about all of the brilliant events and opportunities that we run with employers who feature in the pages you're about to read. These can range from webinars to insight days to work experience placements - but they are all guaranteed to help you stand out from the crowd, whatever you decide to do after uni.

You can also get in touch with us at any time at info@purepotential.org. We've worked with thousands of students over the years and we know how daunting making decisions about what to do after leaving school can be. We're happy to support you in any way we can, so just drop us a line - whatever your future after sixth form holds, Pure Potential is here to help!



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SCHOOL LEAVER PROGRAMMES

School leaver programmes offer you the chance to earn a competitive salary, gain qualifications and get real-life commercial experience. We think a good place to start is by dispelling some common myths:

MYTH 1 – “School leaver programmes aren’t well-respected”

There are over 300 leading employers who offer competitive programmes with many more each year. With recent changes in higher education, employers predicted a decline in the number of students applying to university and decided to offer an attractive alternative for smart, ambitious students. The ‘rise of the school leaver programme’ has caused a shift in employment, and companies are quickly realising the talent, enthusiasm and fresh ideas younger students can bring to their organisations. They are investing time and money into hiring, training and developing their school leaver workforce – this definitely would not be happening if employers did not consider school leaver programmes a well-respected route. This shift in

focus is causing a stir amongst students, parents and teachers – there are more students than ever before opting to go down the school leaver route and an increasing number of teachers and parents are supporting this move too.

MYTH 2 – “A university degree is your passport to employment whereas a school leaver programme can only get you so far”

There was once a time when you could waltz out of university with a degree and land yourself a first-class job. Unfortunately, times have changed, and with thousands of graduates entering the job market each year, students are now required to go the extra mile (or two) to get a job when they leave university, and there are many who are still unemployed. The majority of school

leaver employers offer reputable professional qualifications as part of their programme (including some employers who run sponsored degree programmes). These professional qualifications are widely recognised and can be your passport for working not just in the UK but around the globe! In some cases, you could even complete your qualification faster than if you were to go down the university route. You can also make excellent professional connections which will be valuable further down the line if you decided to move jobs.

MYTH 3 – “School leavers aren’t paid well”

The vast majority of school leaver providers pay their school leavers a competitive salary and they cover the cost of all training and any qualifications they gain, which can be very expensive! Salaries usually increase as

you progress through the programme and take on more responsibilities which means you will have more money to spend or to put towards buying your first home.

MYTH 4 – “School leavers miss out on the social life that university provides”

Without doubt, university is a lot of fun – you spend three years having a great time, making friends and develop a lot of life skills. Employers recognise that students are giving up three years of socialising and more, which is why they often have a dedicated team that looks after social activities for new starters. They will organise away days, team building retreats and regular social events to give you a chance to meet new people, make friends and build that all-important social network.

**It's important that you think carefully about what you want to do after sixth form.
If you're not sure whether a school leaver programme would be a good fit for you, considering the pros and cons might help:**

PROS



CONS

Gain a professional qualification

Earn a competitive salary

**Get first-hand, real experience
with professionals**

No student debt

**There is less competition for places
at school-leaver level than
graduate level**

**You can be financially independent
– and not reliant on loans**

**Many companies offer the chance
to try different areas of the
business which can help you find
out what you enjoy**

**You will receive extensive training
by leading professionals in a
structured programme**

**Some companies offer students
the chance to study part-time at
university and gain a degree
alongside working**

**You'll have to make a decision
about where to begin your
career sooner than some of
your peers**

**You might feel worried you're
missing out on some of the
experiences that your friends
who go to university are having**

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

The difference between the following programmes and just getting an ordinary job is that schools leavers programmes offer a training schedule, qualifications or progression infrastructure of some sort. These programmes are a launch pad into an advanced career level, which is why they are so sought after! Here is a brief guide to each type, but check each company's specifications because they vary enormously.

SCHOOL LEAVER PROGRAMMES

A school leaver programme is a fixed-term, paid job available to students after sixth form which provides an intensive, structured training programme and in some cases formal professional qualifications.

APPRENTICESHIPS

An apprenticeship is usually referred to as a job in a vocational industry where young people can train while they earn money from the age of 16 in careers as diverse as nursing, engineering, finance, and carpentry. Confusingly, some professional school leaver programmes are also known as apprenticeships.

HIGHER APPRENTICESHIPS

These are paid apprenticeships that give you the chance to progress academically to degree level (such as NVQ levels 4&5, Foundation Degrees, HNCs or HNDs) through practical work experience.

SPONSORED DEGREES

As the name suggests you will work towards a degree as part of the programme, normally whilst working as a permanent employee for the organisation and normally with your fees paid for!



Experience can be the greatest teacher

School and College Leaver Programmes

Give your career a flying start. Join KPMG straight from school or college and you'll receive training, qualifications, experience and rewards to help you thrive in the world of business. With opportunities across the UK, Live, Learn, Earn with KPMG.

kpmgcareers.co.uk/school-leavers



KPMGRecruitment



kpmgtraineesuk



"During my time at sixth form, I was unsure what I wanted to go on and do at the end of my studies. I started looking at options such as apprenticeships because I liked the idea of starting working straight away, and studying towards a recognised qualification. The rotational KPMG360° programme really stood out as I liked how I'd have time to decide what I actually wanted to do, whilst gaining in-depth experience and knowledge about Professional Services and the work carried out.

I'm really enjoying my time as an Apprentice on the KPMG360° programme because I have been able to understand more about myself and been able to drive my own career. I have learnt so many new skills since joining, and developed a broad business knowledge from all my work placements. What's great is a wide range of people can apply – you don't need a business background to join because KPMG360° is all about gaining experience and learning."

Saniyah

Are you currently considering what to do after you have completed school or college?

Want to help make a positive, lasting impact on governments, business and society straight after leaving school or college? Imagine earning a salary, developing skills, building your confidence and gaining professional qualifications along the way. On our **KPMG360° programme**, you can. We'll work with you to identify your strengths and offer the support and training you need to reach your potential.

At KPMG, we recognise that our inclusive environment helps to provide a better service to clients and makes for a great place to work. That's why we value difference and seek out potential. In addition, KPMG is a founder member of the 30% Club, working to increase the number of women on the boards of businesses and we're proud to be a 'Business in the Community – Top Employer for Women'. At KPMG, we're putting theory into practice.

Our people are at the heart of our continued success. No one type of person succeeds at KPMG; a diverse business requires diverse personalities, characters and perspectives. There really is a place for you here.

Opportunities are available nationwide.

Sound good? Find out more and apply at
www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/school-leavers

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APPRENTICESHIPS AND HIGHER APPRENTICESHIPS

Work with some of the most exciting and innovative companies across the country straight out of sixth form.

What is the difference between an Apprenticeship and a Higher Apprenticeship?

There are various levels of apprenticeship you can undertake depending on the skills and qualifications that you leave school or college with. A Higher Apprenticeship is a nationally accredited work-based programme designed to meet employers' needs at higher skill levels and include qualifications at a level equivalent to higher education. There are three levels of apprenticeship:

- Intermediate Apprenticeships, which are equivalent to five good GCSEs
- Advanced Level Apprenticeships, which are equivalent to two A-levels
- Higher Apprenticeships, which can lead to a HND, HNC or foundation degree

You should note that...

Higher levels might require more qualifications: for example, some Higher Apprenticeships require you to have A-levels.

Apprenticeships in some areas are only available at particular levels. For example, Emergency Care is only available as an Intermediate Apprenticeship.

Your apprenticeship may last longer at a higher level, although this can vary. There are fewer apprenticeships available at Higher level than at the other levels.

A Higher Apprenticeship can lead to a professional qualification, such as a Certificate in Finance, Accounting and Business (CFAB).

Will I earn money?

All apprentices earn a salary and will work for at least 30 hours per week.

How long do apprenticeships take?

An apprenticeship takes between one and five years to complete, depending upon the level of apprenticeship and the industry sector.

What will an apprenticeship be like day-to-day?

Most of the training is delivered in the workplace, so you will learn the skills you need to do the job well. The rest is given by a training organisation, either at the workplace, off-site (perhaps at college) or via online courses. The training is specifically tailored to ensure you develop the skills the employer wants, giving apprentices a real advantage in the workplace.

SPONSORED DEGREES

Sponsored degree programmes are becoming increasingly popular and it's no wonder why - they allow you to go to university and get a degree whilst having your tuition fees paid for and earning a salary. What's not to like?

What is a sponsored degree programme?

A sponsored degree acts as an alternative for those who wish to gain a degree qualification but do not necessarily want to attend higher education full time.

Sponsored degree programmes are made up of both employment and study. Your time will generally be split between attending university and working for the company that are sponsoring your degree – meaning you gain both a qualification and valuable work experience.

Are all programmes the same?

Sponsored degree programmes can really vary. Depending on the programme, you might attend university in person or undertake a distance learning course remotely

from home or your employer's office. For those courses where you will physically attend university, the amount of time you spend there will differ for each course.

For some you may do one or two days of the week at university and be in the office the rest of the time. For others, you might attend university on a full-time basis, and just spend holidays working for the company.

Some programmes will offer only a specific degree from a specific institution whereas others provide some choice in where you study and what qualification you work towards. There are also slightly different forms of sponsorship that act more like a scholarship, with universities sponsoring students irrespective of their course or university. Students might undertake work placements or graduate schemes with the employer in return.

What are the benefits?

There are plenty!

- Getting to study towards and gain a degree, an internationally recognised qualification which you can refer to throughout the rest of your working life
- Having your university fees paid for/ contributed to and potentially avoiding thousands of pounds worth of student debt
- Earning a salary whilst you study
- Access to work experience with a professional employer and an opportunity to develop valuable skills
- The likelihood that once your sponsored degree programme reaches its conclusion, you'll be offered a graduate position with the company.

'Any downsides?

By choosing to work whilst studying

you might feel like you're missing out on the full uni experience. Also, it's likely that your employer will only sponsor a specific course at a specific university so you might not get much choice in what you study.'

Where can I find out more about sponsored degree programmes?

Big companies are increasingly offering sponsored degree programmes. If you think you might be interested in sponsored degrees then start researching online. Think about the industries and employers you would like to work for in the future and then go and see if they offer a sponsored degree programme.

Many of Pure Potential's partners offer sponsored degrees so it's worth registering at www.purepotential.org for events where you can meet a sponsored degree programme provider.

My Experience

LARA IS ON HARRODS' SCHOOL LEAVER PROGRAMME

Can you tell us about your experience on the programme so far?

"I have been on my first placement for roughly 3 months and I'm thoroughly enjoying every moment of my experience so far. On a day to day basis, I am a Sales Associate on the shop floor working with my team to sell our products. However, by being part of the Harrods programme, I also attend additional training sessions and gain exposure to other aspects of the business. All of these added extras have not only given me a broader understanding and awareness of how Harrods operates as a luxury retail company, but have also lead to my development as an individual seller and communicator."

What attracted you to the Harrods School Leavers Programme?

"I knew that going to university wasn't the right decision for me. I didn't want to spend the next couple of years learning in a school-like environment without being able to apply my skills to the working world. I was accepted to study business at a few universities, but when I came across this programme I knew it was the perfect choice for me personally. I realised that everything I could learn from studying a degree in business, I could learn from a company who practises it daily."

How did you find the recruitment process?

"Truthfully, I did find the recruitment process a little daunting. I did have to put a lot of hard work into my application, alongside several journeys to London, in order to feel that I performed at my very best. However, it was definitely worth it, and, as with all of the people I have met in Harrods, I was immediately made to feel at ease during the group interview that I attended and ended up rather enjoying the experience."

Describe the programme in 3 words.

"Valuable, interesting and incomparable."

CHARLOTTE IS A FOOD OPERATIONS APPRENTICE AT NESTLÉ

"Before joining Nestlé, I was studying for A-Levels at sixth form and decided that I wanted work experience that would lead me to a career."

The scheme was recommended to me through a friend that already worked at Nestlé in York. I chose the Food Operations Apprenticeship because of diversity of the job. As part of the scheme I spend four 6 month placements in departments such as KitKat and Polo. This means that I have the opportunity to understand four completely different types of machinery and fully understand the importance of each department to the business. From this I am gaining hands on production experience, as I am running multi-million pound machines that are producing tonnes of product each shift. Therefore I am responsible for the machines I run. Through the apprenticeship I have become a functioning member of my shift by attending meetings and representing my area. The scheme allows me time to study towards my Level 3 in Food Industry Skills by collecting work based evidence for my portfolio. On a day-to-day basis I complete work around safety, quality and hygiene which means there is a lot of variation and I am able to spot problems quickly. I have developed my problem solving and team work skills around the challenges I faced. Working shifts on a rotation also means I enjoy some great time off- 4 and 5 days off at a time, which is ideal for hobbies such as going to the gym.

At the end of my apprenticeship I hope to become a Process Operator in the factory in one of the areas I have worked in and hope to eventually become a shift manager."

My Experience

REBECCA SMITHSON JOINED UBS AS AN APPRENTICE IN 2014

Did you always plan to become an apprentice?

Yes, always. I was never keen on the idea of going to university because I always wanted to start a full-time job as soon as I left college.

What made you choose that route?

Knowing that I didn't want to go to university, but that I did want to gain a useful qualification that was equivalent to a degree, I knew that going on an apprentice program was the best route for me. Being an apprentice has given me the on-the-job experience that I wanted as well as gaining a qualification that will help towards my career.

What made you choose this specific apprenticeship?

I studied business at college and liked the idea of being involved in the financial services industry, especially after being exposed to economics and accounting. After some research, and seeing there were many areas I could go into, I realised an apprenticeship within a bank was the perfect opportunity for me to start my career.

What drew you to UBS?

UBS is a very well-recognized, highly reputable wealth manager. I knew going for one of the best would be a massive benefit to me and my career. Once I'd had my assessment day and interview, I knew I wanted to work here because I got a really great vibe from the company; the people were so friendly and supportive.

What does your role entail?

I am involved in the front office, which means talking to clients, assisting Client Advisors and their assistants, and making sure the client has the best experience possible. I get involved with opening client accounts, maintaining them and helping with interesting projects within our teams. As an apprentice within UBS we get to network with a lot of people and see different areas of the bank and how they work.

Do you have any top tips for applications or interviews?

Just be yourself; as relaxed as possible – it's normal to be nervous. Asking questions to the interviewer about parts of the business or company you're applying for always helps.

JACK DANN IS WORKING TOWARDS SPONSORED DEGREE AT ROLLS ROYCE

"I decided to join a sponsored degree programme after looking at the rising cost of living for students – on top of university fees themselves. Also, with a sponsored degree I could earn money and learn how to stand on my own two feet, whilst still being able to study at one of the country's top universities! I adore the programme I have chosen because it provides a great deal of variety and experience. I am gaining genuine experience in business – undertaking numerous real world business improvement projects. I can see the difference my work makes, and I am picking up endless amounts of knowledge along the way. All this whilst undertaking a structured and recognised Masters Degree at a Russell Group university, which I never have to worry about paying for.

Of course being on a programme like this won't be for everyone. Personally, one of the biggest challenges has been just choosing a different path from many of my friends who went to university via the 'traditional' route. It has been difficult relocating and learning how to look after myself without the protective university bubble. The commitment is also much greater; you are given a great deal of responsibility to propel your own career – and this can be challenging.

My advice to anyone considering a sponsored degree programme is to do some serious research and consider all your options. There are some outstanding programmes out there – but they are not always easy to find. Take all the opportunities that come your way and really take charge of your own future."

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR STUDENT

Helpful tips for parents, teachers and carers

Your student is bright, talented and full of ambition. No doubt as a teacher, parent or carer you will want to support them as they make crucial decisions for their future but the school leaver market is relatively new and you may have concerns or hesitations if your child is interested in this path.

Whatever your student goes on to do it is important that you are involved in the decision-making process and are able to offer informed guidance.

Check out the Useful Resources page to see where you can find out more about school leaver programmes.

Talking to your student to build an understanding of their thinking is important
- try some of the following prompts:

Have you considered the pros and cons for each, and are you happy to accept the cons?

Have you looked into the application process? What is involved? What are your long term career prospects?

Why have you decided to apply for a school leaver programme?

What research have you done on the type of programmes out there?

How does your career path compare to the university route?

Why don't you want to go to university?

Which particular programmes or companies have you researched?

Have you spoken to any school leavers? What do they think of their chosen path?

At the National Audit Office, we offer something different – the chance to be part of work that has real impact on the nation. Our School Leaver scheme is amongst the best out there, providing you with an excellent path into accountancy and the public sector.

What do we do?

There are five main strands to our work; Financial Audit; Value-for-Money audit, Investigation and Insight, Parliamentary Relations and International Audit. Being a trainee at the NAO gives you access to these strands as well as valuable experience and a perspective that you would not get working anywhere else. Our unique clientele includes the Royal Household, Ministry of Defence, NHS and Nuclear Decommissioning Authority amongst many others.

Our people have a great reputation among our clients, Parliament, other international audit institutions and the wider accountancy profession. In addition to Accountants we employ Analysts, Statisticians, Economists and specialists in a variety of other disciplines to foster a fantastic learning environment.

In addition to our career opportunities, we offer a list of benefits including:

A starting salary of £23,610 (London) or £18,122 (Newcastle), which will increase year-on-year and be subject to increases for success in exams to take it around £36,00 (London) and £30,000 (Newcastle), 25 weeks College and study leave, interest free season ticket loan, an on-site gym and activity centre at our London office and post-qualification earning potential of £50,000 plus.

Training with the NAO School Leaver scheme will open a world of career opportunities.

Please visit our website today to find out more about the programme and how to apply. At the NAO, we're committed to helping you build your career, so take yours further in public sector audit.

Earn and Learn

Our school leaver scheme is a 5-year training programme which will see you right through to qualification as a Chartered Accountant (ACA) with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). Our pass rates are consistently at or above the national average.

Day to day you will be working in either our London or Newcastle office as part of our Six Clusters, each offering a range of exciting and challenging work. There are also opportunities to travel nationally to our different clients and stakeholders, a highlight for many of our current trainees.

Career. Influence. Impact.

Build yours in public sector audit while training as a Chartered Accountant

The NAO scrutinises public spending for Parliament to help the nation spend wisely and improve public services. You can support that work by joining our School Leaver scheme in London or Newcastle.

You will receive first-class tuition over the five-year programme to qualify as a Chartered Accountant whilst learning the latest auditing techniques and working with a unique set of public sector clients.

Find out more about how you can open up a world of career opportunities whilst doing work which has a real impact on the nation.

nao.org.uk/school-leavers



97



of the world's 100
global leading brands employ
ICAEW Chartered Accountants

Find out more and start your career
journey at icaew.com/purepotential

Source: ICAEW member data at January
2016, based on Global Brand 2015.





START YOUR STORY

Do you want to work for a global business with lots of famous brands and innovative ideas? Working in our forward-thinking business, you'll gain invaluable experience and be given real responsibility from the start!

"MY APPRENTICESHIP HAS JUMP-STARTED MY CAREER. I'M GAINING UNPARALLELED EXPERIENCE. A WEALTH OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE AND FORMING REAL CONNECTIONS WITH INSPIRING PEOPLE WHO ARE TRULY PASSIONATE TO HELP ME DEVELOP."

Samantha Whitbread, Business Administration



THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Employers are exceptionally good at making candidates jump through hoops to secure a job. Irrespective of the type of school leaver programme you are applying for, employers are looking for candidates who submit quality applications and perform exceptionally well during interviews and on assessment days. We have summarised the various stages in the application process that an employer might use.

YOUR CV

COVERING LETTERS

APPLICATION FORMS

COMPETENCY BASED
QUESTIONS

MOTIVATION OR STRENGTHS
BASED QUESTIONS

ONLINE TESTS

JOB INTERVIEWS

COMMON QUESTIONS

ASSESSMENT CENTRES

We like to think of a CV as a personal marketing document – it offers employers a snapshot of who you are and sells your strengths, achievements and any relevant work experience you’ve gained. A concise CV is extremely important when it comes to making a positive first impression – never let your CV expand beyond two sides of A4, preferably one side.

A CV should have the following:

PERSONAL DETAILS

Include your name, address, contact number and email. Don’t include a photo!

EDUCATION

Organise these in reverse chronological order

WORK EXPERIENCE

Start with your most recent job and work backwards. Prioritise those that are most relevant, and give brief bullet points to outline what you did.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mention any voluntary work you do, awards you have won, or positions of responsibility you hold.

OTHER

Include IT skills, sports, languages and hobbies.

REFERENCES

Give the name and contact details of two referees or state that they are “Available on request”. Contact your referees in advance to check that they are happy to provide a reference, send them your CV and give them some basic information about the job.

When it comes to the style of a CV, remember to use an easy to read font and size, use subheadings and bullet points where relevant and don’t forget to add spaces between each section; you should be aiming to format it to a professional standard.

YOUR CV
COVERING LETTERS
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COMPETENCY BASED
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ASSESSMENT CENTRES

You will need to send a one page letter, or in some cases an email, with your CV called the covering letter. This is where you can discuss the skills and achievements most relevant to the position you are applying for in more detail. The covering letter, like your CV is a very important document and will usually be the first thing a potential employer will read, so it must be unique to that company.

THE PLANNING & RESEARCH STAGE

Read the job description carefully and find out what they are looking for in their ideal candidate. Highlight which aspects of the job you feel or know you are capable of doing and the aspects that appeal to you. Look at the skills required and highlight which of those you have gained from past work experience or your education.

STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

State which position you are applying for, where you saw the vacancy and briefly explain your current circumstances.

HOW DO YOUR SKILLS AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES SUIT THIS ROLE?

Discuss how you became interested in the industry and support your points with past work experience, knowledge you've gained

from your sixth form qualifications, or extracurricular activities which have sparked your interest.

WHY HAVE I CHOSEN TO APPLY TO THIS PARTICULAR COMPANY?

Discuss aspects of the company that you find particularly inspiring. Show that you have researched the firm and the sector. You need to be able to say why you have been inspired by what the company has done and why you want to be a part of it.

SIGNING OFF

A weak, half-hearted ending to a cover letter can leave the employer wondering whether you really want the job, so make sure you sound enthusiastic and super keen. The final paragraph should include a word of thanks and how you're looking forward to hearing from them.

YOUR CV
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ASSESSMENT CENTRES

The application form will ask you to give much of the same information as on a CV such as your name, address, your school and grades and employment history. The most important thing with the basic questions is to ensure there are no errors whatsoever. Companies may also ask you to answer a number of questions such as “describe a time when you have worked as part of a team”. Known as competency questions, there is no clear right or wrong response, but here are some important things you should consider before you tackle this part of the form:

MATCH UP

Your answer should match the nature of the job on offer. Try to structure your response in a format appropriate to the industry or job.

KEY SKILLS

Focus on the key skills and qualities the employer is looking for. Have a look at the company website for buzzwords used to describe their employees.

EXAMPLES

Use an example to demonstrate your skills and qualities. Employers are looking for the perfect candidate – you need to show them how great you are using evidence.

Not sure where to start or how to structure your answer? The STAR model is an excellent framework which we recommend to help structure your answers:

SITUATION: Open with a brief description of the situation and context of the story (who, what, where, when, how).

TASK: Explain the task you had to complete highlighting any specific challenges or constraints (e.g. deadlines, costs, other issues).

ACTION: Describe the specific actions that you took to complete the task. These should highlight desirable traits without needing to state them (initiative, intelligence, dedication, leadership, understanding, etc.).

RESULT: Close with the result of your efforts and include figures to quantify the result if possible. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, what new skills have you learnt from the experience that you can apply to the role you are applying for?

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ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Whether you're filling in an application form or sat in a job interview, it is incredibly likely that at some point in the application process for a job you will be asked a competency question. These are often tricky to answer as there is no clear right or wrong response, but you can use the STAR method from the previous page to master them.'

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT AND WHY?

The employer does not need to see that you've won an Olympic gold or found a solution to world peace, but a personal achievement that you can be proud of. If you have ever solved a problem, overcome a challenge or persevered with something then you're on the right track. What the employer definitely doesn't need to know is that you fluked something! They want to see

an example that shows hard work paying off or difficult challenges faced rationally and logically – and above all a process or work ethic you can apply to future situations that can allow you to achieve even greater things.

DESCRIBE A SITUATION WHERE YOU WORKED IN A TEAM

Almost any job you can think of will involve teamwork. You will have to report to someone, or present your findings to colleagues, so make sure you show that you understand how important being a team player is to maximise performance. The challenge with this question is that everyone, and we mean EVERYONE, has experience of working in a team in some shape or form, so it won't be enough to simply describe the situation. The way to stand out is to show what you took from those experiences. The employer will be interested to know what role you took within that team, and will be looking out for evidence of your ability to listen to, and be listened to, by others. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that the 'best' role to take in a team is leader – if everyone did that the

workplace would be a nightmare, so be true to who you really are, and if you take a more passive role such as planning, executing, co-ordinating then talk about that, and how effective communication between all the team players is the most important thing. When choosing which anecdote to discuss think about any problems that arose, who tackled them, why and how? What observations have you made about teamwork going wrong? What about teamwork going right? Whether it was in your school sports team, a theatre production, academic project, or Duke of Edinburgh you should be able to find common themes, but make sure you talk about how this can apply to the job you want!

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO PRACTICE

1. How do you go about solving a problem?
2. Have you ever influenced someone to do something or changed their mind?
3. Tell me about a time when you failed to complete a task or project on time, despite intending to do so.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

YOUR CV
COVERING LETTERS
APPLICATION FORMS
COMPETENCY BASED
QUESTIONS
**MOTIVATION OR STRENGTHS
BASED QUESTIONS**
ONLINE TESTS
JOB INTERVIEWS
COMMON QUESTIONS
ASSESSMENT CENTRES

A newer line of interview questioning is focussed on your motivations and strengths. These questions look at what you enjoy doing and what you do well. Sometimes they will be asked at speed to prompt you to answer quickly (and interviewers hope more honestly!). These questions aren't asking why you're applying for the job or what your career goals are, they're asking what motivates you in life in general? What makes you tick? What gets you out of bed?

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

WHICH TASKS DO YOU GET THE MOST SATISFACTION FROM?

HOW WOULD YOUR MANAGER MOTIVATE YOU?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN LIFE IF MONEY WAS NO CONCERN?

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

DO YOU NEED OTHER PEOPLE AROUND TO STIMULATE YOU OR ARE YOU SELF-MOTIVATED?

DO YOU ENJOY WORKING?

These questions are hard to prepare for as the best answers are honest ones. However, it won't hurt to have thought about your answers in advance and to think about what the employers might be looking for.

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Focus on the key skills and qualities the employer is looking for. To find out exactly what your prospective employer wants to see in your answers, we suggest doing some snooping around on their website. Here you will find buzzwords which they use to describe the important qualities and skills of their employees. Create a list and try and include as many of these buzzwords in your answer as possible – this will definitely score you some extra brownie points! Try to use examples that are relevant to the job and company you're applying for. If you're able to, then select examples which match the nature of the job role you're seeking – e.g. if you're applying to a financial institution and you're asked about problem solving, describe a situation that demonstrates your financial or commercial awareness rather than selecting an example which demonstrates how good you are at navigating yourself around a forest for your DoFE expedition.

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It has become standard practice for candidates to sit an online test. This is an additional filtering process to help employers select candidates to progress to the next stage. They can comprise of the following sections:

NUMERICAL REASONING

This is one of the more popular tests used by employers, especially if you're applying for a financial role such as tax, audit or consultancy. They certainly don't expect you to remember your entire Maths GCSE textbook, but they want to see that you can solve basic mathematical problems and interpret data in graphs, charts and tables.

VERBAL REASONING

Employers are testing your ability to interpret text here. You will most likely be given a paragraph or extract where you will have to identify and extract key bits of information. You can't revise for this test as it's not really about what you already know, but about demonstrating your ability to interpret information. You can however do plenty of online practice questions to improve your technique and speed.

INDUCTIVE REASONING

This one is all about shapes and patterns. It will probably seem really abstract at first, but inductive tests assess your ability to problem solve and think logically. You are usually shown a series of patterns and you will have to work out the next pattern or shape. Mainly used when applying for a technical or financial role, practice definitely improves performance for this one.



MOVE ON

It's can be easy to get stuck and caught up on answering a particular question, but if you can't answer it, make an educated guess and move on. You can always come back to it if you have time later on.

TIME KEEPING

Keep a watch on the table so you can keep an eye on how long you've got. It's all about finding a good pace and this will definitely come with the more practice you do.

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

There are plenty of times when candidates have rushed and misinterpreted the question. Read the question carefully and check your answer before you move on.

FEEDBACK

Some companies will offer you feedback and this will help you to work out your strengths and weaknesses, which will be useful for future tests. Email the HR team to request feedback.

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If an employer is impressed by your application, you may be asked for an interview. There are lots of different types of interview; the standard interview with members of staff from the potential employer, telephone interviews (which are just as important and some people find more difficult), video interviews (often via Skype) or panel interviews with several people grilling you. You may even get several kinds of interview with the same company as you progress through the application process. It's natural to feel nervous before an interview – in fact it would be impossible not to! Here are some simple tips on how to appear confident, and employable:

RESIST THE URGE TO FIDDLE

Don't play with your hair, nails, sleeves or jewellery. Instead use your hands to emphasise points.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

Try and find out the dress code of the office you're interviewing at. If in doubt wear a smart suit.

SMILE

Sounds easy, but when we are nervous we lose our ability to control even the most simple facial expressions. Make sure you keep your smile in check to look friendly and confident

PLAN AHEAD

Plan your journey in advance so you know exactly where to go and how to get there, find out if there are any delays on public transport or road works on your route.

SMALL TALK

Don't be afraid of the old clichés about the weather or traffic, it's a great way to get started. Just allow the conversation to flow... and don't give a one-word answer to simple questions.

PREPARE AND READ UP

You should be fluent in the job description, the company and how you fit in.

SIT CONFIDENTLY

Shoulders back, legs together, chin up, feet pointing straight forward, hands in lap.

YOUR CV COVERING LETTERS APPLICATION FORMS COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS MOTIVATION OR STRENGTHS BASED QUESTIONS ONLINE TESTS JOB INTERVIEWS COMMON QUESTIONS ASSESSMENT CENTRES

It's always a good idea to practice questions out loud before an interview. Once you feel confident practice with a family member or friend and see what tips they can give you. Practise these common interview questions:

"TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF"

This question gets asked a lot and can really throw people so it's a good idea to rehearse your answer beforehand. Make sure to keep it focussed on the professional (not the personal) and keep your answer relevant to the job you're applying to. Start by talking about past achievements, give a little information on your current situation and end by stating what you're hoping to do in the future and how the job you're interviewing for fits into that plan.

"WHAT APPEALS TO YOU ABOUT THE ROLE?"

In order to give a good answer to this question you need to have done your research and be very familiar with the job description. Use the question to apply your strengths to the different elements of the job role and use positive words and body language to show that you're enthusiastic about the position on offer.

"WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK FOR THIS COMPANY?"

This is another question where preparation is key. Google the company before the interview and think about what it is that makes them attractive to you, what their values are as an organisation, what makes them stand out from their competitors and what exciting things they have on the horizon that you'd like to be part of.

"WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST WEAKNESS?"

This feels like a scary question but it's not really so bad. The trick is to talk about a problem you've had in the past (which displays self-awareness) and what you did in order to manage or combat it – showing you can learn from experience is what they want to see evidence of. It helps to choose a weakness that wouldn't be a key requirement of the job you're applying to.

"WHAT CAN YOU BRING TO THE ROLE?"

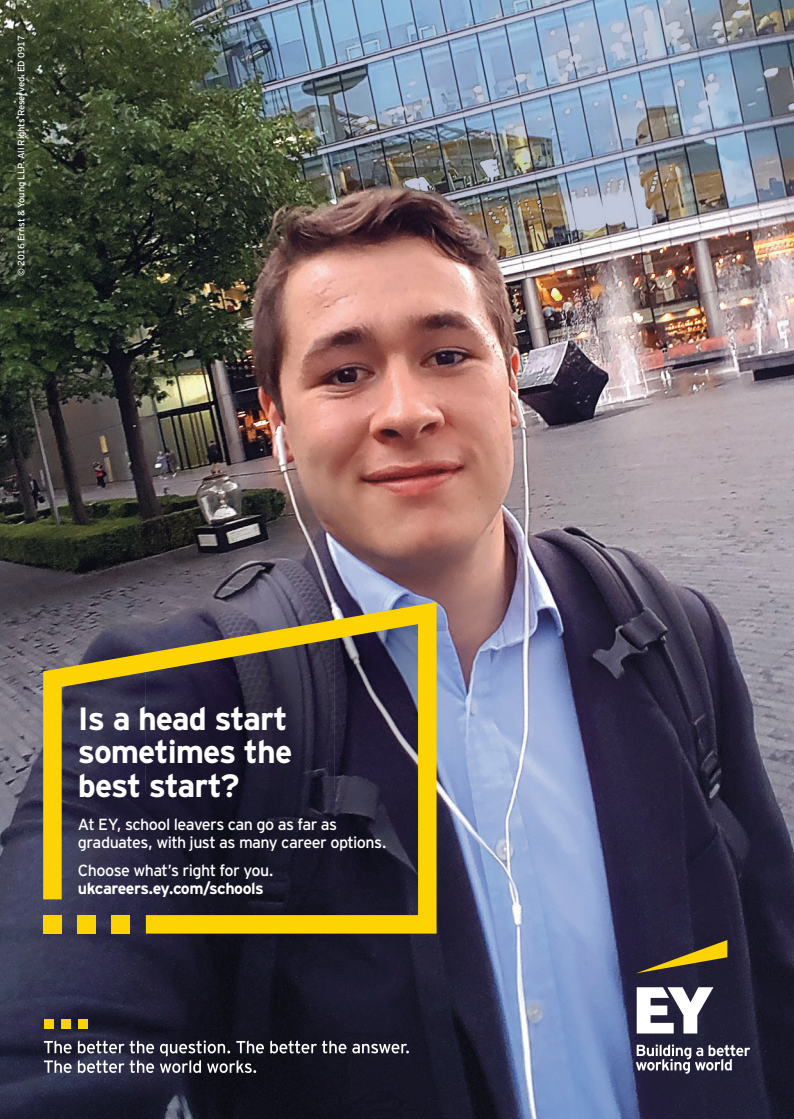
This is a great opportunity to really sell yourself to your interviewer. Be confident in talking about your strengths and past achievements and make sure to link them back to the role description. Don't forget to talk about your passion for the role (especially if you're at the start of your career and a bit thin on experience) – bringing positivity and enthusiasm will only be seen as a good thing and can help you to come across as motivated and committed.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?"

Talk about any ambitions or plans you have for the future and explain how the role you're applying for will help you get there. Be sure to give the impression you intend to stay in the role for some time – they might not want to employ someone for the short-term. If you're not exactly sure of what you would like to do in the future, don't worry – you can explain that your current goals are to learn and experience more to develop your skills and plans.

"HOW WILL YOUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES HELP WITH WORKING AT THIS COMPANY?"

Think about what work you would be doing if you secure the job and give examples of how previous experiences have prepared you to do those things well. Don't just list off everything you've ever done – try to give specific examples that link to what you know about the role you're interviewing for.



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My Experience

FLORENTYNE BARRETT IS A TRAINEE ASSOCIATE AT EY

The ACA was always presented to me as a highly regarded qualification. I came across it when competing in BASE, ICAEW's business and accounting competition and when EY explained it further I knew it was the right qualification for me. Trainees are extremely important within our organization. Not only can we complete the work that is time consuming for someone of a higher level but we are the auditors of the future. We are a vital part of the company being able to move forward and adapt with changes in the industry. I have two highlights since I've started working. The first was being nominated for the TARGETjobs Apprentice of the Year award. This was a great honour and showed me how much my peers value what I do. The second was being asked to speak at the ICAEW BASE Final. I was absolutely thrilled to do this as it was something I was part of at school.

I've matured a lot since joining EY, I have to take a lot more responsibility. It is up to me to ensure that I balance my work with my studies and personal life. It has also amazed me how much knowledge I've gained. I complete work now that I never thought I'd be able to do when I first joined. The most enjoyable part of my job is all the networking I get to do. I love meeting new clients and

getting to know them on a professional level. I'm constantly working with new EY employees as well which is great, as each person teaches me something new. And of course, I do a lot of networking with people outside the company at some fantastic events.

I have never once regretted not going to university. It was never something I wanted to do so I've never felt like I've missed out. Not only am I studying something I enjoy, but I am earning a salary as well. I really do think I've got the best deal.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

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Employers use assessment centres to get an impression of how candidates will perform in simulated circumstances designed to replicate aspects of the real job, and to gain a clearer picture of the sorts of qualities which are also tested in interview. Placing you directly alongside your competitors allows your assessors to see how you perform in comparison with your peers.

We've seen enough to know the pitfalls and traps that employers might lay and have provided you with five tips for how to avoid them, and most of all how to shine throughout the day:

PREPARATION

The format of an assessment day can vary from one employer to the next, but common elements do still exist. Among the kinds of tasks most frequently set are group exercises where candidates are divided into teams and asked to work on a problem, deliver a presentation and answer questions from a panel. This part of the day is very difficult to prepare for but it's definitely worth thinking about how you come across in a group, ways you can demonstrate your best traits, and remember to brush up on your presentation skills. Most assessment days also include a partner or panel interview. Preparing for this part of the day is crucial if you want to do well. Read the section on interviews for more advice.

DRESS CODE

You need to be dressed smartly but comfortably. Assessment days usually last for the full day so you need to look the part but last the whole day too!

LOGISTICS

You should plan your journey well in advance and leave plenty of time just in case there are delays. Take a notepad and pen with you so you can make notes during the talks and group exercises, and bring a copy of your CV and covering letter so you can refresh your mind before you go.

SKILLS

Employers are looking for people who demonstrate a range of "ideal skills". You must articulate and demonstrate your best skills throughout the day. There will be a group exercise during the day and you will be expected to contribute. Some candidates will naturally take the lead, if you're not in a position to do so, that's fine. Just be sure to contribute confidently to the group and communicate your thoughts with clear purpose and insight. Whether you're the group leader or not, be a good listener, include those who haven't yet spoken and be willing to compromise.

PERSONALITY

Through all the trials and tribulations of the day, employers will be watching your every move which can be nerve-racking. Just remember that you've been asked to attend because they see potential in you so let your personality shine through in the various tasks. If you fulfil the criteria and you've got a great personality to match, it will be really hard for them to turn you down.

One final note, assessment centres are comprised of various mini activities, so if you mess up in one part, don't feel disheartened as the employers will be looking at all aspects of the application process when making their decision.



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USEFUL RESOURCES

When making a big decision, like what to do after leaving sixth form, it's a good idea to be as informed as possible. We've put together a list of all the best that's out there on the web to check out when considering your options:

www.purepotential.org

Check out our own website for more tips about applying and securing school leaver programmes. You can register your e-mail and receive alerts about events and opportunities from us and our partner employers that will help give you greater insight into your future options.

www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

Has lots of information for both students and their teachers/parents/carers about all of the different apprenticeships on offer and how to access them.

www.schoolleavers.milkround.com

Has live vacancies and advice and information on most school leaver programmes with major employers'

www.allaboutschoolleavers.co.uk

Pretty much does what it says on the tin! All About School Leavers has lots of information about all of the different options out there as well as advice about how to make a great application.

www.ratemyapprenticeship.co.uk

Want to know what previous school leavers have thought about their experiences with employers? This site enables people to review their school leaver programme (like you would a restaurant or hotel) which can be really helpful when deciding which schemes you might want to apply for. It also has a brilliant 'advice hub' with articles, discussions and news about what's going on in the world of school leavers.

www.studentladder.co.uk

Has a comprehensive school leaver section with different opportunities split out by industry, making it easy to find schemes you might be interested in.

www.thebigchoice.com

Answers the big questions about school leaver programmes in different sectors, such as 'what's it all about?', 'where can I work? And 'how much can I earn?'. Also features lots of school leaver job opportunities to apply for.