Apprentice Case Study

Fabrication and Welding

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Hi, my name is Dale Preston, I'm 18 and I started my Fabrication Apprenticeship two years ago after I finished my GCSEs. I'm currently a welder and fabricator with Agrilek in Barrow in Furness.

Why did you apply for a GEN II?

When I came out of school I knew I wanted to do something to do with engineering, I had been learning about it at school for the last few years in my Technology and Design classes and really enjoyed it. I found out about GEN II at a Careers Evening, GEN II had a booth and it looked like a good option, the staff were knowledgeable and told me about the different options. I applied in January and later in the year I was called and asked if I'd go for an aptitude test. The tests weren't too difficult, it was a few maths questions and a few engineering questions. I'd say it definitely helps to brush up on these sorts of subjects before you go in for the test. Not long after I was asked if I would attend an interview with Agrilek, I was over the moon when they offered to hire me!

What did you think when you first arrived?

Very good, the facilities were top notch, the tutors; the welding tutor Pete Graham specifically was brilliant, he got us all through our jobs really well. He helped us at every step of the way and always gave great advice.

Is there one piece of advice you'd give to someone who is thinking of doing an Apprenticeship?

I'd say to take it as far as you can! I'm currently doing an HNC with Agrilek, I'm the only one from my original class to go on to do this. You'd be foolish to not take advantage of the opportunities they offer you, so make the most of them whilst you can.

What did you do during the first few weeks of your Apprenticeship?

Training jobs, everyone at the GEN II Furness Skills Centre had to do the same six training jobs to get us all up to speed; I had to make things, chiselling metal to a certain size to turn it into a stopper. It was to get you used to the different tools we'd be using like files and grinders, going on to actually make

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some of the tools you use in the future. I still have some of them with me at Agrilek and I use some of them pretty regularly too. What did you do during your first few months of Apprenticeship?

During my whole first year I learned all about the different welding techniques I would need like Metal Inert Gas welding (MIG) and Tungsten Inert Gas welding (TIG). It was quite a lot of welding work really, gas cutting and air plasma cutting; these are practices that are often used in pretty high up trades.

What is a typical working week?

I'm in work all day Monday through Wednesday with a Night Class on Tuesdays, Thursdays are at Furness college and Fridays are a half day. My work is pretty varied, there's a bit of everything thrown in, I'm not just tied to welding all day so the work stays interesting. Iam visited by GEN II trainers to assess my work and portfoio on a regular basis. When I first started with Agrilek I was really pleased with myself, I helped to make part of a Fire Escape for Tronic and I was commended on the quality and speed of my work. I had zero errors whilst making it, I was pretty nervous because it was the first industrial piece I had worked on for a customer.

How does working for your employer differ from the work done in the Training Centre?

The Training Centre work was 100% welding practice but for me the workplace is much more enjoyable, you get to see the fruits of your labour and they are for customers and not just practice pieces. You take real pride in your work.

What's the best bit of an apprenticeship?

More money than all my mates! A lot of my friends went off to sixth form or college and some are now in Uni, they say they enjoy it but they always seem worried about debt, others weren't as bright and are doing small stop gap jobs that they don't really enjoy. But me, I'm gearing up for a career. It's a much safer option in my opinion than going off to college or Uni at the moment.

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What's the worst bit of an apprenticeship?

The transfer from GEN II to the workplace was tricky, the workplace is very real, the safety net of the GEN II training centre is removed, if I messed up there, I could go get another bit of scrap and try again, if I make a mistake here, I'm risking customer satisfaction, we can't sell a badly done bit of work. There's more pressure in the workplace.

What are you intentions after your apprenticeship ends?

My HNC is a two year course and I want to finish that first. After that, I want to move onto a degree, but I'd like to take a gap year from college studies, it really takes it out of me. I want to take the time to do more workplace activities to work on my craftsmanship and in the future I'm aiming to progress to the office side of the workplace, If I work on my CAD skills, then that can help me to become a Planner. Planners are responsible for setting out the individual stages of each of the jobs we work on.I want to improve my CAD skills to help my design knowledge too; I want to keep my options broad.

Has there been any surprises during your Apprenticeship?

The atmosphere in the workplace was a big surprise! When I first started in the workplace I expected it to be a very heads down and get on with it kind of place, but I was wrong, I love the people here, it's a great laugh and everybody is really friendly and open. Everybody has time for each other, everybody helps each other out, if there's a problem then there's always a tradesperson or another apprentice that you can turn to ask for help from. It's good to feel like you're part of a team; I think I could vouch for everybody here to be honest, it's a very accepting place and everyone works together. We had two new apprentices arrive just a few months ago and they've fit in well very quickly and they like it here too.

GEN II

To apply for a GEN II Apprenticeship visit the online recruitment portal at www.gen2training.co.uk