

Have the best of both worlds!

IN the latest of our features, in conjunction with Maidstone Council, to help young people discover education, employment and training opportunities in the borough, we look at **apprenticeships**.

ARE you thinking of heading off to university or going straight into work? There is another way to start your career that could offer the best of both worlds.

An apprenticeship is a real, paid job with both on and off-the-job training. This means you achieve nationally-recognised qualifications at the same time as getting valuable work experience.

Apprenticeships last between one and four years, giving you time to develop your skills and knowledge and get practical experience.

You will be in good company. Al-

What's in it for you?

- **Progress in your career:** surveys show that employers recognise and value apprenticeships so with hard work you could move up quickly in your chosen career.
- **Qualifications:** apprenticeships lead to nationally recognised, sought after qualifications.
- **Job-specific skills and training:** on-the-job experience means you will learn important skills from experienced staff, while off-the-job training teaches you essential knowledge.
- **Earn a salary:** the average wage for an apprentice is £170 per week.

most 320,000 people started apprenticeships in the first nine months of last year in a wide range

of industries, from retail and hospitality, to engineering and manufacturing, to animal management

and accountancy. The majority of apprentices (85%) will stay in work, with two-thirds (64%) staying with the same employer.

So how do you go about becoming an apprentice?

Start by thinking about the kind of job you would like in the future, and in which area you want to work, and go from there.

The National Apprenticeship Service has a list of available apprenticeship courses and vacancies. Go to their website at www.apprenticeships.org.uk for more information.



In April MEP apprentices David Sutton and Alex Grindley attended a parliamentary reception along with Jay Cheema, MEP quality manager at the House of Commons. The event was hosted by ADS, the national trade association for all companies operating in the UK aerospace, defence, security and space industries.

Employer's benefits

THERE are many myths surrounding apprenticeships, from the way they operate to the level of input required from an employer.

However, modern apprenticeships are quite different to their 1960s counterparts, giving businesses far greater flexibility.

There are now more than 100,000 employers in England offering apprenticeships in more than 200,000 locations, covering 170 industries and 1,500 different job roles.

What are the advantages to your business of taking on an apprentice?

- A pipeline of fresh recruits.
- The right skills and knowledge for the job; apprentices are an asset to your workforce.
- Apprentices are highly motivated, keen to learn and progress within your business.
- Apprenticeships enable you to pass skills and experience through

your workforce, giving you the edge over your competitors.

● Apprenticeships can help your company give something back to the community you work in.

There are also cash incentives for employers:

● **Apprenticeship grant for employers of 16 to 24-year-olds:** up to £1,500 for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) who are new to apprenticeships or have not had an apprentice in the past 12 months.

● **Kent Employment Programme:** a grant of £2,000 is available to SMEs that take on an apprentice aged 18-24 who has been claiming job-seeker's allowance for at least three months.

Do you want support in developing the skills of your workforce? Call the economic development team on 01622 602344 or email economicdevelopment@maidstone.gov.uk

An apprentice's story: Experience is so valuable

Apprentice: Alex Grindley (20)

Level 3 apprenticeship in engineering

Employer: MEP Ltd, specialists in moulding, precision machining and fabrication solutions for the industrial and aerospace sectors

● **What made you do an apprenticeship?** I knew I wanted a career that was hands-on and with great career prospects. This ticked all the boxes. The first-hand industry experience, qualifications and the opportunities that come with the apprenticeship are phenomenal. Also, apprenticeships are well recognised and valued within industries which open pathways for success.

● **How did you hear about apprenticeships?** Through a friend.

● **What were the stages in securing your apprenticeship?** I applied for the position at www.apprenticeships.org.uk. Then I was invited to an assessment day to see if I had the academic skills for the role. I was interviewed to see if I had the right personality and accepted the offer of employment.

● **What does a working day involve?** It varies. One day I might be inspecting components, another day might be office-based dealing with

supplier issues and another day could be a visit to a supplier or customer to help resolve an issue.

● **What's the best bit about being an apprentice?** The experience I wouldn't get if I was at college.

● **What's not so good about being an apprentice?** I could enhance my skills further by getting an insight into other parts of the business such as the machine shop.

● **What opportunities have you gained from being an apprentice?** Education (putting theoretical knowledge into practice); trips out (engineering exhibition at the NEC, Farnborough Air Show, Houses of Parliament and customer/supplier visits); knowledge of industry (how customers and suppliers work, awards, standards and products); developing my career (having the real-life experience and qualifications to further my career).

● **What kind of support have you had from your employer?** I have received exceptional support. My training in the company and academic qualifications have been designed to help me become an asset to my employer. They have also been supportive with any queries, concerns or worries I have had.

Find out more online

- Most apprenticeship vacancies are advertised online by the National Apprenticeship Service: www.apprenticeships.org.uk.
- Want to tell us about your experience of taking on an apprentice? Contact Downs Mail on stephen@downsmail.co.uk
- Dates for your diary: National Apprenticeship week will take place on March 9-13 2015, with a range of activities taking place to showcase the achievements and benefits of apprenticeships

In next month's edition:

Ever thought about starting your own business or becoming self-employed? Find out how to get in touch, get advice and get started.