

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR DIGITAL IT APPRENTICESHIPS

Robin Bradford
Software Engineer, Sainsburys

Digital IT Apprenticeship standard: BCS Software
Developer, Level 4



Robin started a physics degree, the subject choice wasn't right for him, and he dropped out. Through his personal determination and hard work, Robin is now a software engineer.

After uni I worked in retail, and made a decision to learn programming. I bought an introductory book for C++. I instantly loved the puzzle of creating algorithms, hooked, I started working through many books and online courses in my own spare time.

Eventually, I attempted to apply for some junior developer roles, but received feedback that without a degree I would at least need some work experience.

Whilst working at Sainsbury's and purely by luck, I became aware of their apprenticeship programme, they were advertising for an apprentice software developer, so I applied online.

To support my application, I had to submit a body of sample code that I had completed or an essay about my interest in technology. I submitted a link to my github account that consisted of some work on sorting and searching arrays, an implementation of a spell checker and hangman game.

I had a telephone interview with Just IT, the training provider and then one with Sainsbury's head office, which was a more software development orientated interview and questions about my previous experience. In my final interview I got to showcase what I had learnt in my own spare time.

Out of the many applicants, I was one of ten selected.



'I felt trapped in a catch 22 situation and very unsure about how to progress into the career I really wanted'

As a software developer apprentice, I worked on a range of projects, gaining exposure to the front end, back end and app development areas, documenting what I learnt throughout. I submitted my best pieces of work to my apprenticeship portfolio, which was used to demonstrate my knowledge at end point assessment (EPA) stage and one of the requirements to complete my apprenticeship.

I absolutely loved the work I did and benefited from many different opinions and ways of working, from heavily OOP projects to cutting edge functional approaches. My personal appointed mentor taught me software design patterns and higher level architectural patterns that I could apply to the problems that I brought to him from my projects, to discuss in our meetings. Mentorship certainly helped me become more effective as a software developer.

By doing an apprenticeship, you will gain invaluable experience within the business, learning real work practices which builds confidence, competence and knowledge. You will escape the catch 22 scenario 'you need experience to get a job, and need a job to gain experience'.

An apprenticeship can be an amazing route into a career. Providing you with the powerful combination of knowledge, support and experience without having to endure the debt resulting from university education.

Now my apprenticeship has finished I will continue to develop my software development knowledge and career.

My top tip for interview success when applying is:

Prepare yourself as best you can by demonstrating your ambition and what you already know, your potential as an employee, as well as your passion for the field that you are applying for.



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