

The Application Journey



BE INSPIRED
AND SEIZE
THE OPPORTUNITY

Insight into the Competitive Apprenticeship Application Journey

www.centralcareershub.co.uk

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This event was organised by Central Careers Hub in partnership with BDO on 2nd November 2018, building on the successful event we did together in June 2017.

This unique event was jointly curated by BDO and Central Careers Hub at BDO's impressive Baker Street office which serves clients based in London and throughout the UK. The event focused a lot on BDO's application processes and aimed to give delegates a flavour of the processes they use, but we also heard about other processes from Secret Escapes and LV= and the experiences from Careers Advisers working in two Sixth Form Colleges and a School Sixth Form.

Credit must be given to BDO who have maintained an apprenticeship-like school leaver programme for many years, even in the AimHigher years when university was marketed as the only option!

Setting the scene; an introduction to the application process landscape - Andy Gardner

The vast majority of Careers Advisers now see apprenticeships as a standard part of the school leaver landscape and have moved beyond seeing apprenticeships as an inferior option to university. They see things as they really are. They see that apprenticeships often have far more complicated application processes than university courses and that it involves a completely different approach to the tactics element of the FIRST framework (Focus, Information, Realism, Scope and Tactics) that many Careers Advisers will use in their day-to-do work. We now need a UCAS mindset and an Apprenticeship mindset:

From the UCAS mindset to the Apprenticeship mindset

UCAS Mindset

- Grades
- Personal statement
- Some other things for a minority of students (interviews/tests/portfolio)

Apprenticeship Mindset

- CV and cover letter
- Online application forms
- Psychometric tests
- Video/Skype/telephone screening interviews
- Role play
- Group exercises
- Case studies
- Final interviews
- Grades

Careers Advisers now want to know as much as possible about application processes to apprenticeships so that they can help their clients in schools, FE colleges and Sixth Form Colleges.

At last years' event, Vanessa Kenneth noted that the Online Application Form was a challenge in itself! Like a good weekend of DIY – it's all in the preparation. This is possibly the first time a young person has filled in an online application which asks for more than simply name and address;

- It cannot be rushed.
- It has to be taken seriously.
- It needs care and attention to detail.

For each organisation you are applying to it can be helpful to:

- Do full and careful research of the role and organisation. Why does the company appeal to you?
- Attend an insight day or work placement
- Follow on social media

She also stressed that there can be other pitfalls just in the online application form, such as:

- Jargon and vocabulary – international companies may use words and terminology which are confusing ie zip code instead of post code
- 'Grown up questions' such as right to work, disability 2 ticks, credit checks...
- Saying what you are GOOD at and giving examples of how you have gained from experiences
- Showing real enthusiasm in your writing
- Allowing plenty of time
- Being honest, thorough and ensuring grammar and spell checks

Another confusing element of apprenticeship application is that the vacancies are just not in one place, unlike UCAS!

There are four broad categories:

Where to find the vacancies (it's not always easy)

- Find an Apprenticeship website – only includes live vacancies
- Company/organisation websites – may include info on when vacancies will be live, e.g. BDO or SEMTA
- Jobs Boards e.g. Milkround School Leavers, Young Professionals
- Apprenticeship Training Providers – a single apprenticeship training provider may handle 10's or 100's of vacancies e.g. Just IT, Kaplans

We then looked at the application processes of a range of employers including Dentons Solicitors, Lloyds of London, Cap Gemini, BBC, Google, Unilever, Arcadis and Kier.

If we focus on Dentons and Google we can see that there are both similarities and differences:

Dentons Solicitor Apprenticeship

To apply, first, complete our online application which we will review. If you're successful at this point you'll be invited to take an online critical thinking exercise, which assesses your ability to digest and understand situations and information.

If you do well here, you will be invited to complete a video interview. This is your opportunity to bring your application to life in a quick and easy recorded interview that you can complete in your own home.

If we like what we see in your video interview, we will invite you to attend our assessment centre in February.

The closing date for applications is 4 January 2019.

Google Infrastructure Technician Advanced Apprenticeship

Apply via our Careers site (google.com/careers)

Google will reach out once applications close (Jan 2019) to those selected for a phone interview

Those that pass the phone interview will be invited to an Interview Day (March/April)

Interview Day last year involved three interviews: standard 1-1 interview + troubleshooting interview (fixing something real time) + knowledge interview (how did they absorb information given to them prior to the day).

We then reflected on the limited time we have as Careers Advisers to help our clients. In sixth forms we spend an inordinate amount of time helping clients with UCAS personal statements and references, and it is a sad fact that many university courses do not read them before they hand out offers. Spending more time on apprenticeship applications will be a natural progression for all Careers Advisers especially as it relates so well to all of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

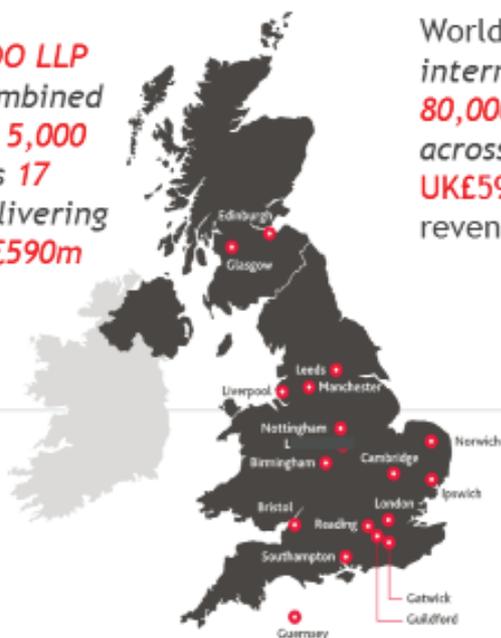
The Who, Where, When, What and How of Applying to BDO

Susie Renshaw, EiC Senior Resourcing Adviser



WHO WE ARE

In the UK, **BDO LLP** now has a combined workforce of **5,000** people across **17** locations, delivering revenues of **£590m**



Worldwide, we're part of the **BDO's** international network, which has **80,000** people and revenues of **\$9bn** across **162** countries. **UK£590m** of this is combined UK revenue.

In the U.K we provide specialist **Audit, Assurance, Tax and Advisory Services.**

What are BDO looking for?

Trainees are a huge part of our business and our plans for growth. We're looking for people who are hungry to learn and inspired to achieve their full potential.

We have opportunities available in four key streams:

- Tax – an understanding of tax legislation related to finance
- Advisory – tends to be more of a graduate role
- Audit (checking that the finance are a true and accurate presentation). This will involve the most travelling
- Business Services (the preparation of accounts before Audit) & Outsourcing

BDO Programmes

GRADUATE PROGRAMME

Our graduate programmes lasts 3 years, combining full time work with study towards professional exams such as ACA

SUMMER INTERNSHIP

We're really proud of our 6-week Summer Internship. Our Summer Internship can also help students secure a place on the Graduate programme.

APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

Our 4-year programme lets students choose the location and business area. They will combine full time work with training and study toward professional exams. Our apprenticeship programme is aligned to the level 7 apprenticeship. The apprenticeship training provider is BPP.

SUMMER SCHOOL

Our one week, work shadowing is for students in their penultimate year at School or College. Completing Summer School puts you in a great position to secure a place on our apprenticeship programme

How to Apply

OUR WEBSITE

Our website to learn more is bdoearlyincareer.co.uk

BDO recruit Apprentices by office – offices outside of London are often less popular.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Our recruitment process involves an application form, online tests, a video interview and an assessment centre

ENTRANCE CRITERIA

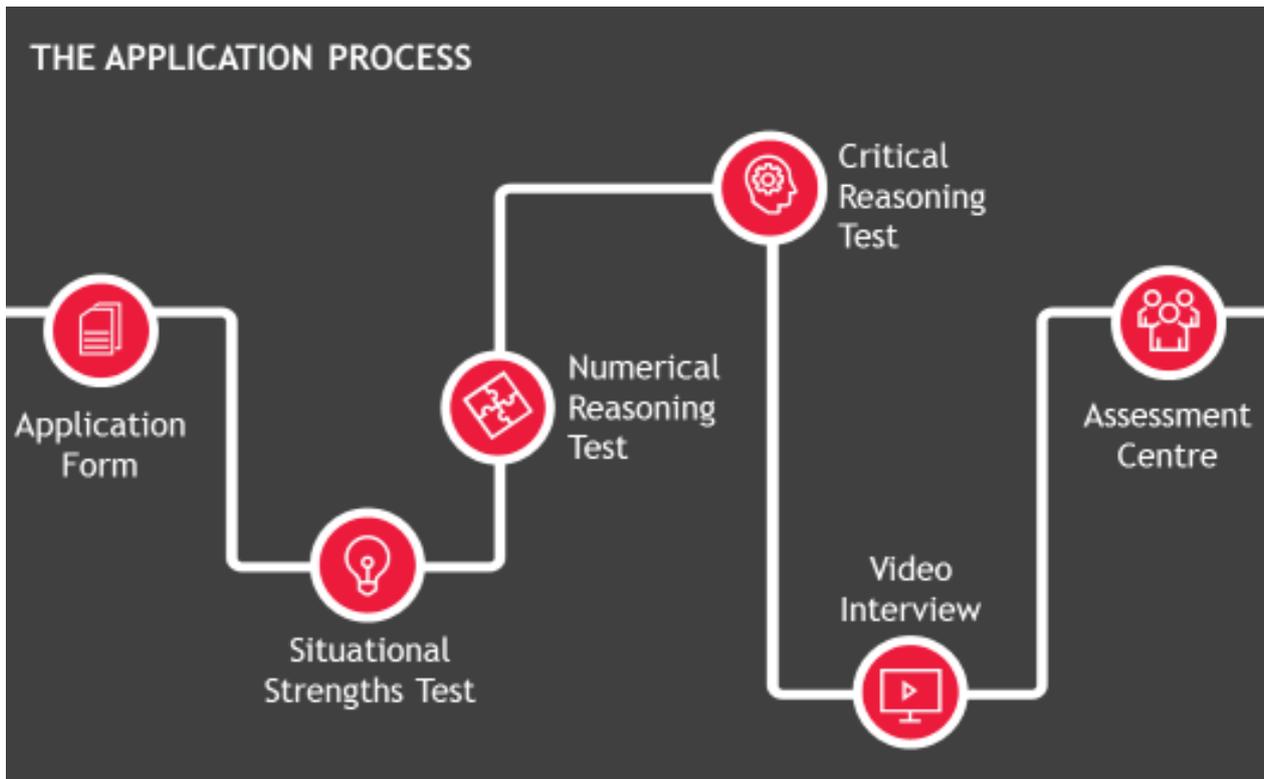
Candidates must have, or be on course for the following grades (or equivalent):

A minimum 2.2 degree in any discipline;

3 A Levels at grades A*- C (or level 3 equivalent), excluding General Studies and Extended Projects

A*- C at GCSE in Maths & English Language.

As long as you get through the wider recruitment process, they really are happy with CCC. The BDO experience is that testing correlates better to work performance than exam grades



The Online Application Form

WHAT DO THEY ASK?

- Personal details
- Academics
- Strength based questions*
- Work experience

*WHAT IS A STRENGTH?

A strength is something that you do well and enjoy doing. When using a strength, people feel authentic and energised as they deliver successful performance."

Alex Linley, 2010. Founding Director at CAPP

WHAT ARE STRENGTH BASED QUESTIONS?

- The BDO strengths-based recruitment process gives students the opportunity to tell us about themselves
- We are interested in what they do well and enjoy doing
- Before applying to BDO we recommend that candidates take the time to learn more about us and the roles available

COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

Various definitions:

"a candidate's general knowledge of business, their business experiences (or work experience) and, specifically, their understanding of the industry which they are applying to join"

"staying up-to-date on daily happenings and developments in the business and commercial world"

“aware of business trends and the impact on their chosen industry and the employers they have applied to”

“Commercial awareness is an understanding of how industries and businesses work. It's about knowing what's going on in the world and analysing the way it might impact on your chosen sector and company”

If a possible applicant attends an Insight Day this will include a skills session on commercial awareness. Also, depending on capacity, BDO can offer commercial awareness sessions to schools and colleges.

Online Psychometric Tests - What Are They?

BDO use three online tests:

SITUATIONAL STRENGTHS TEST

- Asks you how you would respond in certain business situations
- Multiple choice – rank the statements in order of preference
- No right, or wrong answers

e.g. “Susie is very busy at work and a colleague makes a request for her time. Does she:

A - Ignore them

B - Tell them that her work is more important

C - Call/Email them to say can we have a quick chat to find out what she is needed for

D - Complain to her manager”

NUMERICAL REASONING TEST

- Tests you on your numerical skills
- Expect to face questions on graphs, tables, charts, ratios, interpreting data etc.

CRITICAL REASONING TEST

- Tests your decision-making, critical reasoning and thinking skills
- You will face true-false questions, judging the strength of arguments, whether you can distinguish between assumptions and fact based on data etc.

If applicant has special needs make sure they let BDO know.

They will take tests one at a time, receive the results and then move onto the next one.

They cannot reapply for 12 months if they are knocked out.

Online Psychometric Tests - How Can Students Prepare?

- Practice makes perfect
- Example tests can be found on www.jobmi.com *
- Brush up on the maths involved
- Usually GCSE level maths skills – ratio's, percentages etc
- Sit in a quiet room
- Have everything to hand – pen, paper, calculator etc.
- Keep an eye on the time – our tests aren't time limited, but still good to keep an eye on it.

* The idea behind Jobmi was to provide a job matching platform for everyone (16+), allowing a candidate to complete practice tests, learn their strengths and how to apply them, and then signpost suitable jobs from these strengths. This can serve as a precursor to more formal application processes with other companies, allowing young people to have a trial run in effect, whilst gaining useful skills and information.

Video Interviews - What Are They?

- Recorded video interview
- Can complete it via anything with a webcam – phone, tablet, laptop, desktop etc.
- An opportunity for students to tell us about strengths and experience at a time and place convenient for them
- They will be asked a series of questions
- 30 seconds to prepare an answer
- 1min 30secs to answer

Questions are not designed to catch people out. They are designed to encourage people to talk e.g. "what do you like doing in your spare time?"

They do not have to speak for whole time, they can skip on, however they must answer the question. They don't have to use the STAR technique, enthusiasm matters more. It is recommended to practice using a smart phone or laptop.

Candidates are given an opportunity to seek feedback if they fail this stage, the team are happy to provide verbal feedback to support candidate development and learning.

Assessment Centre – What Can I Expect?

- Given a business scenario at the start of the day to work on throughout the day
- Preparation - research BDO, the industry, the role etc. See earlier notes on commercial awareness.
- Day is broken down into different exercises:
 - Written Exercise
 - Group Exercise
 - Presentation
 - Partner Interview

Examples of Good Practice Panel - How Schools and Colleges are Preparing Students for the Application Journey

Kay Williamson, Havering Sixth Form College

Helen Everett, Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar School

Jo Bishop, City and Islington Sixth Form



Helen Everett

Helen has a unique background in that she is a Careers Leader and Maths Teacher but also worked in Graduate Recruitment before she became a Teacher. Therefore, she had an intrinsic understanding of what would be involved when large companies used their graduate recruitment methods for recruiting apprenticeships. She knew that leaving sixth formers to their own devices would not work in the main. The tests, the assessment centres and interviews needed much more preparation than the average sixth former applying to university (apart from a few specific degrees such as Oxbridge, Medicine, Primary Teaching for example). She now has a consistent sizable group applying for competitive apprenticeships every year (approx. 30) which need a significant amount of support.

Jo Bishop

Jo highlighted two issues that were really interesting. Firstly, Professional Etiquette! Sometimes Sixth Formers just don't have it (through no fault of their own). Her careers team have implemented strategies to make their students aware of how important this

is. If they are in a competitive application process, speaking clearly, with enthusiasm and appropriate body language is essential.

Secondly and connected to the first issue, there are real issues in a very large Sixth Form College when it comes to communicating, informing and preparing apprenticeship applicants. Jo explained how they have overcome this issue. At the end of Year 12/lower Sixth, the students are then asked, "what is their primary goal after leaving sixth form?" The ones that identify as apprenticeship applicants are then rearranged into new tutor groups for Year 13/Upper Sixth. One tutor group is for apprenticeship applicants applying to the finance/business sector/law, the other tutor group is more around creative/making/engineering/IT type apprentices.

This system is already running and has really overcome the difficulties in communicating, informing and preparing apprenticeship applicants. It clearly is a system that could work in many other institutions.

Kay Williamson

Kay provided us with this extra detail after the event. Jo and Helen run many similar activities as well.

A lot of my work is on a one to one basis, supporting students through the whole process according to their individual needs. Some require more support than others. This might be checking applications, CVs, discussing interviews and the different forms these might take.

In order to help students locate vacancies more easily, I create a college leaver and apprenticeship bulletin (list of live company vacancies), which is shared with students and coaches with tips and advice on other places to search.

To help students develop the required skills, we encourage volunteering (we have links with local opportunities), assist with finding part time work, as well as sourcing and supporting with work experience. I not only work with the brokerage, but we have links with PWC, EY, Ford's, National Theatre, Wates, Barclays Life Skills, local MPs, the Civil Service etc. and last year we were the first college to work with the local NHS Trust to develop a 'students in volunteering programme' and a number of students successfully took part - this has not only continued this year but more students will have the opportunity to take part (within the BHR Trust area).

As a result of these partnerships we have been able to take students on visits - to Fords, National Theatre, UBS, Deutsche Bank, PwC etc. Some of these visits have included speed networking, mock assessment centres and apprenticeship information (Fords and National Theatre). EY and BDO and others have also been in to college to offer practice assessment centre activities.

We held an apprenticeship information evening for parents and it was so popular that we had to hold four sessions on the evening - this was supported by EY. We are planning to offer this again next year.

We previously arranged an employability (get ready for work) day. This involved local employers coming in to college to offer sessions on interview skills, CV writing, assessment centre tips, mock interviews and psychometrics as well as general apprenticeship information.

As a result of this I have started 'get ready for work' lunch time sessions. This is a work in progress - currently focussing on year 13s. I have found that a number of local employers are interested in being involved in this.

At the end of the last 2 academic years a few local and some London based employers approached the college with positions they were looking to fill (in total 10 students were offered jobs). These were in IT support/networking, business admin, business travel management, accountancy and entry level roles in law firms. Although they were not all apprenticeships - they offered training and progression. I believe that links with local employers are so important and can lead to positive destinations for the students.

I have found that a number of students are keen to apply for the paralegal/solicitor apprenticeships and some have been successful. However, I try to encourage these students to make speculative applications to law firms or look for business admin roles and at least 3 students secured entry level positions with well-known firms. I feel that it is important to not only advise on apprenticeships but also jobs with training, which can be equally valuable in 'getting a foot in the door'. You are probably aware of opportunities with Investment 2020 which offers great one-year training programmes to students. Another growing area of interest for our students are teaching assistant apprenticeships and we help these students to secure work experience with local schools to support their applications.

It seems that one of the most effective ways to inspire and support students in the competitive application process is to invite alumni in to speak to them. I recently had 2 ex-students take part in a 'get ready for work' session and their advice was really useful. They were able to talk about what they found difficult, how they prepared and what helped them to eventually be successful. Also, BDO brought a student with them who left last year - he was so professional and really inspired the students, it was hard to believe he only left in June.

In summary we try to find and advertise as many schemes/opportunities/insights that students can take part in to develop the skills they need to secure apprenticeships/jobs. For example, we search and advertise insight days, company work experience schemes, employability programmes and information evenings - this can be time consuming but students find this useful and are keen to know where these opportunities are. A good example is a student who attended an insight day with Arcadia - she later secured a position on their Merchandising apprenticeship. Another student took part in the KPMG summer school, was then fast tracked and secured a position on their 360 programme.

We currently have students on the Reed Smith Mentoring programme, the Think Investment Programme (offered by Career Ready) and PwC Classroom as well as potentially taking part in TfL Innovate (competition).

I have found these organisations/websites really useful -

Mykindafuture - offers insight events/competitions and work experience to students
<https://www.mykindafuture.com/>

S4snextgen - linked to speakers for schools and is a work experience platform which colleges/schools can sign up to (some good media opportunities) in order for students to be able to apply for work experience/insight vacancies listed on the site.
<http://www.s4snextgen.org/>

Gothinkbig - insights/work experience as well as apprenticeships -
<https://gothinkbig.co.uk/>

Local NHS trusts - offer work experience and volunteering/workshops (including info on apprenticeships)

Working Options - offer free workshops and career insights -
<https://www.workingoptions.co.uk/careers-information-hub/>

Aim Apprenticeships - apprenticeship vacancy platform
<http://www.aimapprenticeships.co.uk/>

Get my first job - apprenticeship vacancy platform
<https://www.getmyfirstjob.co.uk/>

Recruiter Panel

Susie Renshaw, BDO

Allison Sheard, LV=

Cheryl Horn, Secret Escapes



Allison Sheard

LV= (formerly Liverpool Victoria) is one of the United Kingdom's largest insurance companies with over five million customers. It offers a range of products from car, home, pet, travel and life insurance to investment and retirement solutions. LV= is also the United Kingdom's largest friendly society, with 5,700 employees. LV= have a very large office in Croydon.

Allison explained how LV=, while enthusiastic about apprenticeships want to pilot things first and after much consideration have decided to offer apprenticeships to internal applicants only.

The apprenticeships will mainly be in the IT Infrastructure Technician space (with Just IT as the training provider) and applicants right across the business will be able to apply. This is interesting as it relates what Kay Williamson was saying earlier in this report. Students and clients once past 18 years old may need to think about getting a foot in the door in anyway they can and then moving into an internal apprenticeship or they may do a lower level apprenticeship in a related but different field. For example, in LV= they may enter the business in a Customer Service Assistant capacity.

Cheryl Horn

Secret Escapes is a members-only British travel company selling heavily discounted luxury hotel stays and trips through its website and mobile app. They recruit apprentices mainly in Software Development. Cheryl explained that to apply to be an apprentice with Secret Escapes you need to apply through Just IT first and then if you get through their processes you are then forwarded onto Secret Escapes, so while BDO want applicants to apply to them directly and LV= will recruit internally, a person who secures an apprenticeship with Secret Escape will apply to Just IT first (either directly or via Find an Apprenticeship), they will send in a CV, have a telephone interview, attend an induction session and go through a series of interview preparation sessions. Then if they meet a minimum standard they will be forwarded onto Secret Escapes, for a final interview. Commercial Awareness was not so important, but a personality that will fit into the existing team, researching the company and an interest in Software is.



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