



National Apprenticeship Week



BEN MCMULLEN

Name: Ben McMullen
Current Position: EC&I Engineer
Location/Site: px House, Stockton/UK Wide Sites
Apprenticeship position: Apprentice Electrical Technician, PD Ports
Apprenticeship start date: September 2007

Can you tell us about how you came to be an apprentice?

I applied through NETA for my apprenticeship prior to leaving school (2007). NETA then helped me to set me up interviews with different companies in which one was PD Ports. On GCSE results day I called NETA and updated them with my grades and within the hour I had a job offer - a really smooth process!

Why did you want to do an apprenticeship?

I knew from around 12 – 13 years old I wanted to go into engineering. Following my work experience at 14 and a few presentations from EAL and ECITB I decided I wanted to go down the advanced apprenticeship route, rather than the college apprenticeship. I understood I could do my college work, and potentially university through my apprenticeship at the same time as on the job learning whilst getting paid - the best of both worlds.

What was the most valuable aspect of the apprenticeship program, and how did it help you further your career in the future?

Getting good knowledge from both the practical and theoretical aspects of my discipline were the most valuable, especially where they worked hand in hand. For example, I could see why a calculation was used and what it linked to practically. I think this aspect in particular has made me a much better engineer today.

How did the apprenticeship program enable you to apply your knowledge from your studies?

From a practical point of view, I was able to use my studies every day. My academic studies are great for the theory side of engineering, and probably make up around 50% of the learned skills I use today. Being able to use them both allows me to fulfill my role in both the office and sites effectively.

How has your career progressed since joining px Group?

The role I am in now at px Group would probably be somewhat more limited without my apprenticeship. i.e. covering site engineers where both office based and practical based skills are required. This would not have been possible without the practical technical background I gained from my apprenticeship and time being a technician.

What skills did you learn as an apprentice?

I gained a lot of experience in a full time career at an early age, which I would not have gained at college, or a college apprenticeship. I also learned how to work with people much older than myself and eventually younger than myself where I also trained apprentices.

Following my apprenticeship and time as a tradesman I progressed onto a graduate scheme with Wood. Moving into an office environment was a huge eye opener, compared to being based on sites where cultures can be very different. Again, having the apprenticeship and trade background knowledge allowed me to understand the way site personnel work, and that prepared me well for work in an office environment.

What skills have stuck with you throughout your career at px Group?

My role within px Group has allowed me to really tap into the knowledge I gained as an apprentice, tradesman, graduate engineer, and other previous engineering roles, be it design engineering, or operations and maintenance engineering. The role I currently occupy makes work enjoyable as it is always different. Some companies can't offer roles like this due to their rigid structure.

What do you enjoy about working at px Group?

In terms of headcount, px Group is the smallest company I have worked for, but what I immediately noticed is the close knit community and the pride taken in the work. To take just one example, our HR team is approachable and I can walk in the office and speak to them about various matters, which in all previous companies HR felt as though it was just an email address.

The company also has good, easy, open communication routes all the way through to the directors and nearly everyone is on first name terms. Again something I never experienced before in previous companies.

What's the best piece of advice you received as an apprentice?

It is the nature of the job that there will be breakdowns and issues to fix - as long as you trust your knowledge and to have a clear mind, things can be fixed and problems averted.

What advice would you give to those considering an apprenticeship?

One thing that really helped me was going through an experienced training provider like NETA where they will help you actively search for companies through which you can complete a full advanced apprenticeship.

Additionally, it's a good idea to ask early on if the company will support you to complete a degree part time following your apprenticeship with them - both in terms of study time and financially. This made a huge difference in the longer term for me than I originally thought.

Do your research on a company if they offer you an interview, and if you end up with multiple offers don't go for the highest pay, go for the one where you will get the most experience and support.