

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK

Kelvin Hughes recognises the importance of apprenticeships within the workplace, and has run its own successful apprenticeship scheme, the Kelvin Hughes Apprenticeship and Training Academy, for the past three years. This interview with a Kelvin Hughes apprentice has been carried out in support of National Apprenticeship Week 2017 - taking place from 6 to 10 March.

National Apprenticeship Week is co-ordinated by the National Apprenticeship Service. It is designed to raise awareness of the

value that apprenticeships and traineeships can bring to both individuals and companies alike, and to celebrate the positive impact they have on the wider economy. By raising awareness in this way, it is hoped that even more people will apply for apprenticeships and the opportunity to learn in a real workplace setting and enjoy a fast track to a great career.

The Kelvin Hughes Apprenticeship and Training Academy website can be found at:
www.kelvinhughes.com/about/careers/apprenticeships

AN INTERVIEW WITH ASHLEY DIBLEY-HARPER

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Q. How did you hear about the apprenticeship opportunities at Kelvin Hughes?

A. I first heard about the apprenticeship scheme at Kelvin Hughes when I was doing a BTEC Level 3 Engineering course at Hertford Regional College. Towards the end of my course, I started thinking about where I wanted to move on to in my career. I had the options of going to university or doing an apprenticeship. At university, you learn the theoretical side but you don't necessarily get the experience in the field that you need to fulfil a role.

I saw signs up in the college promoting the Kelvin Hughes Apprentice Academy and I thought why not give it a try? So, I sent in my CV and then, after a few interviews, I was offered the chance to join the company as an apprentice.

Q. What attracted you to Kelvin Hughes?

A. Prior to my interview, I did some research into Kelvin Hughes and found that it was a highly reputable company both within the UK and across the rest of the world. It stood out to me as a really good company to work for and an excellent opportunity to gain some real experience in engineering.

Q. Why did you choose the Security Systems team?

A. It was the option they offered me but I was very happy about that. I've always had a particular interest in and, to be honest, a real passion for engineering. This role is fulfilling it perfectly. Every day, I'm problem-solving; every day I'm coming across something new, testing myself and pushing my boundaries. Security is the perfect field for that.

Q. What would you say have been the biggest challenges of your apprenticeship?

A. There have been a fair few challenges! I think my biggest one was designing a new product only six months after I started my apprenticeship. My boss came to me and said he had some new ideas and that it would be a perfect chance for me to learn about the product development cycle and how the process works. It would give me the chance to really get to grips with a range of different types of engineering. That project is coming to an end now which fits in very well with the timescale of my apprenticeship.

In the office, my routines can really vary. Some days, I'm checking emails and



Ashley Dibley-Harper,
Apprentice at Kelvin Hughes



answering technical questions, while other days I'm setting products up and testing them, seeing how and why things work and solving problems. I'm getting hands-on with equipment as well as being behind a desk. I've also spent time in the engineering labs and used the equipment there when required.

On the technical sales side, I've experienced challenges too. I've not just been sitting behind a desk handing out advice to customers, I've also been going out to exhibitions and interacting with customers face-to-face. I found it hard in the early days to have the confidence to actually go out there and speak to potential customers about a piece of equipment and to trust that I had enough knowledge to come across as a professional, not just as an apprentice. But I managed it!

Q. Does that mean you've had the opportunity to travel?

A. Yes, I have been to Europe a number of times, including to France and to Poland twice and also to Belgium and Luxembourg. Getting out there to see new places and have new experiences has been very useful and enjoyable.

Typically for exhibitions, I travel out in advance to help set up the equipment,

make sure everything is working as it should be and resolve any problems, While the exhibition is running, I am on the stand giving technical advice to customers and sales people and answering questions. Then, I help with entertaining customers in the evening.

Q. How do you think your apprenticeship will benefit your career?

A. I'm confident it will have a major effect. A lot of young people believe that employers only want to see pieces of paper with lots of A grades on them but I think what really stands out nowadays is experience. Evidence that you've actually held down a job and been capable of getting out there, talking to people and communicating effectively. Not just passing a test.

Q. What would you say was the best thing about being an apprentice?

A. Earning while you're learning. I don't know how much it would cost to go on the necessary courses to learn everything that I've already learnt during my apprenticeship. But it would be a lot. Whereas, here I am, being put through this fantastic education, earning money at the same time.

Q. So what advice would you give to young people considering an apprenticeship?

A. Stay open-minded and think 'outside the box'. When you walk into a job, it is totally different from the way things are at university or college. You have to be open to different ways of thinking and learning. An apprenticeship can help you deal with that.

I think a lot of people are realising that university is not necessarily the 'be all and end all'. A few years ago, I didn't think I would ever want to do an apprenticeship but I soon realised I was more of a 'hands-on' kind of person and that joining an apprenticeship scheme would really suit me. People know a lot more about apprenticeships now and are thinking that, maybe, if university is not for them, then this other path can be just as good, if not even better.

