

Being an apprentice a lesson for life

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Rosaline Kunrunmi joined Acas in September 2018 as organisational and people development manager to increase the number of apprentices and to ensure our apprenticeship levy expenditure is used in the most cost-effective way possible.

It's easy to forget what it's like starting work for the first time. For many of the apprentices I help look after, I am opening the door to a new world. It's vital that they are made to feel welcome and they, and us, can get the most from their opportunity to learn while they earn.

The theme for this year's [National Apprenticeship Week](#) is 'Build the Future'. You could argue that, while we have never been more in need of a bright future, there has never been a more challenging time to start work – particularly if you are working remotely.

Inside and outside

At Acas, we currently have 10 externally recruited apprentices and last year we were fortunate enough to be able to retain 5 as permanent colleagues. I was chatting to one of our recruits, Olivia, and she told me that the hardest part of working remotely in her first job was the difficulty of trying to "replicate the informality". It got us both thinking of a parallel world where we were able to meet other apprentices face to face!

Our apprenticeship scheme isn't just for new recruits. We encourage existing staff to combine formal learning with on-the-job experience: helping build their confidence and enhance the contribution they make to the business. One of these apprenticeships has worked in our finance team for many years but wanted to get the qualification to match her undoubted expertise. It's win-win all round.

Lessons for life

As an HR professional I firmly believe that apprentices have something to teach us all about how we mix earning with learning. There is an interesting book by Professor Lynda Gratton called 'The 100 Year Life', in which she argues that the traditional 3-phase life of

'education, employment, retirement' needs to be replaced by a much more progressive mix of learning and life opportunities.

For me, apprentices are a reminder that:

- it's good to be identified as a 'learner' and it's something we should embrace at different points throughout our lives
- different voices are always welcome – apprentices help promote workplace diversity as well as social mobility
- every workplace can seem a bit unusual – apprentices help you stand back and take a fresh look at the way you do things

We have been lucky to be able to keep our apprenticeship scheme going during the pandemic. Seeing this group complete their end point assessments, as many here have, has been very satisfying for me personally.

One tip for anyone thinking of taking up this great scheme: many of us are finding it hard to maintain the right amount of visibility at work – with friends, colleagues and managers. Think how hard this can be for someone who isn't used to the organisational culture, in terms of how you are expected to speak to people or even how you dress for those Zoom meetings!

Olivia told me that she picked up on this by observing others but do try and reach out to your apprentices – both the new recruits and existing staff.

[Find out more on the government's Apprenticeships website.](#)