

# Life as an apprentice

Meet Charlie, a Food Technical Degree Apprentice at Samworth Brothers

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I started my 3-year degree apprenticeship at Samworth Brothers straight after completing my A-Levels. I was quite academic at school and was proud to achieve A grades in Biology and Geography and a B in Maths. I really enjoyed biology at school; my teachers made the subject interesting, and it was something I wanted to pursue as a career. Food was a hobby of mine, so a Food Technical degree apprenticeship was the perfect match for my interests and hobby.

## What do you do?

During my apprenticeship, I completed three placements within three different sites. I was exposed to many different areas of the technical food industry and was involved in multiple projects and tasks during each placement. My role now as a graduate is a Process Development Technologist. I am responsible for planning and running factory trials for our flagship customer, to develop our products from concept (kitchen) to launch (in stores). I also do many day-to-day tasks such as taking microbiological / nutritional samples, carrying out travel testing, developing finished product quality standards, building factory specifications and much more!

## Why did you choose an apprenticeship?

I decided to become an apprentice because it seemed like a great debt-free alternative to university, that would give me a brilliant head start into my career with hands on learning and a salary. My mum always taught me not to be a sheep and do what everyone else was doing. This mindset, and the constant support from my family,

gave me the confidence to break the mould and apply for an apprenticeship instead of a university.

## How did you find out about apprenticeships?

A member of the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (AAN) did a presentation at my sixth form, which opened my eyes to the opportunities away from the conventional university route and the benefits of an apprenticeship. They informed me of the Find an apprenticeship website and following the session, I signed up for alerts for Level 6 (degree) apprenticeships based on my interests. I did lots of research into apprenticeship opportunities. When the vacancy at Samworth Brothers came up, it fitted my interests and skillset, and I thought it was the right business/apprenticeship for me. I felt that the food industry is a great industry for job security, career progression and variety.

*“Being in Food Technical is a great way to continue my interest in Biology in a science-based career!”*

## What was the recruitment process like?

I completed an online application and submitted it through the company website from a link on the Find an apprenticeship website. I then had a telephone interview. A few months later, I attended an assessment day. This included a factory tour, a group practical activity, a presentation and a formal interview. I had supportive family and friends who helped me prepare for the interview by practising interview techniques and most importantly, I researched the company to understand its values, structure, and business.



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## How was your apprenticeship delivered?

My training provider was Sheffield Hallam University (SHU). They are a top university in the UK for Food Technical, so I was very lucky to have the opportunity to study there. I balanced work and study by managing my time well and made the most of my 'off the job' learning time. I did, however, need to sacrifice some of my personal time (especially towards the end of my dissertation). Approximately six times a year, I visited SHU for 2-4 days in block sessions to go over module content, do any practical tasks and gather all necessary information to complete the coursework. I had support from a work-based learning coach, who came to my workplace four times a year to keep track of my progress and offer guidance. This support allowed me to discuss any concerns and ensure my progress was positive.

## What would your advice to others be?

Apprenticeships truly are a fantastic route. Doing an apprenticeship changed my life and has given me so many opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise. Yes, there are some things I did miss by not doing the traditional university route (i.e., crazy parties) but doing an apprenticeship by no means causes your life to be over or your youth to disappear. Apprentices can still enjoy themselves (usually having more money available to do so).

## What are your goals for the future?

My ultimate goal is to keep thriving in my food technical career and perhaps one day be a Site Technical Manager or a Head of Technical in a food business. I am naturally ambitious and hope with more work experience and development I will grow and get there.

***“Following my degree apprenticeship, I started my graduate role in Sept 2022, and I have just received a Bachelor of Science Degree from a top university with First Class Honours in Professional Practice in Food Technology.”***



## What are you most proud of?

My proudest achievement is taking the route I did. I knew university wasn't for me, and I made the decision to take a chance on an apprenticeship. It has been an incredibly influential choice on my life, which has led to me being able to buy my first house at 21 years old and have a salary higher than I ever imagined I could at my age. I now earn more than my university counterparts due to the work experience I have alongside my degree.

## Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (AAN)

I wanted to become an apprentice ambassador to be with a network of like-minded people who are as passionate about apprenticeships as me. I was already a big ambassador for apprenticeships within Samworth Brothers, so joining the AAN allowed me to spread the word with greater reach. I have benefitted personally by building friendships with other ambassadors and professionally I have broadened my network. On top of this, being an ambassador and attending events has helped me to develop confidence and presentation and communication skills, which are invaluable in the world of work. It brings me so much pride to upskill people on apprenticeships and open their eyes to the possibilities they bring. I am now a Co-Chair of the East Midlands AAN and use my story to inspire students, parents, teachers etc, on apprenticeship routes.

To search for apprenticeship opportunities for you, visit: [Find an apprenticeship - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/find-an-apprenticeship)