

## HAIDER ALI - LEVEL 7 ACCOUNTACY OR TAXATION PROFESSIONAL APPRENTICE

Lucy Hunte, National Programme Manager-Apprenticeships at Health Education England, had the pleasure recently of watching Haider Ali speak at The Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards. Haider received a standing ovation for his inspiring speech to future apprentices. Lucy is part of the Apprenticeship Champions Diversity Network Ethnic Minority Working Group and his words really resonated. He kindly agreed to be interviewed to share his experiences to help reassure potential apprentices and their parents.

**How did you start your apprenticeship journey and why did you choose the apprenticeship route?**

So the first time I ever came across apprenticeships was at an event called **What Career Live** in Birmingham. It was advertised within my sixth form to provide students with career guidance ahead of applying to university. In my mind, I was going there just to speak to the universities as apprenticeships hadn't really been covered at school. When I got there, I was really surprised to see companies there too which I wasn't initially expecting. For example, ALDI had a stall there and there were a range of accounting and finance companies like RSM present too. I was a bit confused as to why they were there so, being curious, I went up to them to find out what kind of opportunities they were promoting. It was then I found out about apprenticeships. As a young person you usually associate the company with the consumer angle. So, for example with ALDI, I was thinking mainly of working on the checkout but they offered a much wider range of business-related apprenticeships. I was interested in accounting apprenticeships because that was what I was considering as a field via the traditional university route. I couldn't believe that I could do an apprenticeship instead and become fully qualified without going to university!







It was a huge eye-opener for me and I did a bit more research and spoke to my family. They also were not aware of the benefits of the apprenticeship route. When I realised I could get into the career I wanted and progress up to Level 7 (Master's degree level) without any student finance, I thought it was too good to be true! The apprenticeship route offered the professional qualifications to become a qualified Accountant while earning a salary and getting valuable work experience. I was thinking there has got to be a catch?! It can't be that straightforward? From what I had learned, I couldn't see any reason why people everywhere weren't shouting about apprenticeships.

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My whole careers advice at school had been very geared towards university. Also, my Head of 6th Form, who was traditional and academic, couldn't understand why I was contemplating an apprenticeship when I had offers from top universities like LSE and UCL. I believed that an apprenticeship was a good option for me but as I had little encouragement from school, I decided the safest thing was to apply for both. So that's exactly what I did. I applied to university and continued to explore apprenticeships. Deep down, I wasn't really passionate about the courses I was applying for. I felt like part of me was only doing it to keep my teachers off my case and because everyone else was doing it! So, for me, the motivation was purely just having a safety net. What I didn't appreciate was that applying for an apprenticeship was very different than the UCAS application. I assumed I could just apply for 5 apprenticeships like university, and I would get 5 offers. In my mind because I had the grades, I thought applying for the apprenticeship route would be simple, but I didn't fully realise I would be applying for a job and there would be way more to it!



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**What do you think are the main differences between UCAS and apprenticeship applications?**

Well firstly we didn't get any allocated time or support for apprenticeships in school like we did for UCAS. You also had to tailor each application to the employer and couldn't just bulk apply like with university. At first, I got a lot of rejections for my apprenticeship applications given how automated the first few stages were. There were lots of online/psychometric tests which I was not prepared for at all and really struggled with initially. I just thought that if I could get to the interview stage, I could sell myself but when competition is fierce, employers will only interview very few applicants. I did try to research online how you can prepare for psychometric tests but unfortunately a lot of them were resources that you had to pay for. If you are not able to afford those resources, then you are already at a disadvantage and my school provided no guidance. After repeated rejections from other companies, I was delighted to finally get an interview with Rolls-Royce. I was later made an offer and started on their Level 7 Management Accounting Apprenticeship. My family were really pleased that I secured a role with Rolls-Royce; they could see that I was really passionate about the apprenticeship route more so than the university option. It also helped given that Rolls-Royce was a globally recognised company. I think it would have been harder to sell the idea with a smaller, less well-known employer, even though the education would have been the same.



# HAIDER'S TOP TIPS!



**So, what would be your top tips for a young person considering an apprenticeship?**

1. Be prepared! You will need to tailor each application to the specific job role and apprenticeship you are applying for.
2. Do everything you can to showcase what makes you unique in all the application stages. Your individuality is your superpower.
3. Challenge myths and misconceptions around apprenticeships not being for everyone. You have to be the representation that perhaps you might not currently see!
4. Don't self-reject. Even if the company you're interested in is one of the biggest in the country, never talk yourself out of applying. You could be the exact talent they've been looking for.
5. Rejection is redirection. Given how competitive apprenticeships can be, rejections are almost inevitable. The key thing is to learn from them and to keep going – it only takes one yes for your life to change!