

Apprenticeships are a modern way to learn, earn and gain practical experiences that **provide a sense of meaning and purpose**

Hannah Inggs shares how she achieved her dream after joining the fire services as an apprentice.



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Focusing on the firefighting dream

Since the age of around 12, it was a childhood dream of mine to become a firefighter. My neighbour was a firefighter, and he always used to talk to me about his work. However, I studied media at college and had a variety of different jobs, including working in a care home and at Stansted Airport. I noticed firefighters at Stansted and started chatting with them; they explained why they need to have a presence at the airport.

I always liked being active, so I started volunteering for Essex Fire Service, talking about fire safety and handing out leaflets. I worked for them in an admin role and also applied for firefighting jobs in the area but wasn't successful.

When opportunity knocks

I had a friend who always wanted to be a firefighter and whenever any opportunities came up, we would always message each other. One day he told me about an apprenticeship at Stansted Airport, so I jumped at the chance and then applied. My dad was massively into aeroplanes, we used to go to airshows nearly every weekend and my grandad was in the RAF, so it seemed perfect. There's something special about aviation that you just don't get with a local authority, in my opinion. There is so much happening at airports that you don't hear about on the news unless it's something major.

Due to my dyslexia, I was allowed extra time to complete the in-house written exam, unlike some of the other online exams I took. I also passed the fitness test, which was really challenging, but I'd kept my fitness levels up as I knew I wanted to be a firefighter one day.

It was tough and there were lots of applicants, but I was one of four who got through. I was also the oldest at 26 and one of the first two female firefighters at Stansted Airport.

Real-time fire training

I had no idea what to expect and was wary of doing a lot of essay writing. But from day one, we were all in it together and doing the same jobs as the other firefighters. The first time the alarm went off, there was a real sense of "Ok, alright. We're really doing this. This is a real job." Even now when an alarm goes off, it still makes me jump. On my third job I had a pretty nasty first-aid call and it made me realise what all the training was for.

Diverse learning modes for all learning styles

We used an online system called Bud to upload evidence for the different modules (there are around 30 modules in the first and second year) comprising different subjects such as pumps and primers, wildfires, animal rescue and road traffic collision. We took photographs and wrote about what we did, the outcomes and how we could have done better. This enabled us to produce a portfolio. We did the eight-week training at Moreton Fire College, the same as the local firefighters and then we went to Teeside for a few weeks for the aviation training.

Working in this practical and evidence-based way really suited me with my dyslexia. I was able to upload a range of things such as videos, pictures and PowerPoints rather than just write a massive essay. I also loved the hands-on learning aspect.

I was really surprised by how quickly the course finished. My watch – red watch – were so supportive and I can't sing their praises highly enough. Anything I was unsure of, I felt like they had my back straight away.



Lifelong learning and personal growth

There is always room for development and promotion if we want it and there's always learning to do. Currently, we are doing our HGV drivers licence and then in a couple of weeks, we're doing our blue light driver training. We'll then get to ride Panthers and HRETs – these are huge airport fire appliances. I can take further exams with the Institution of Fire Engineers or keep studying towards a diploma. We also have the option to specialise in a particular area – for example there's a guy here who specialises in working at height and helmets.

I have learnt so much from this experience; my confidence has grown, and I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses, as well as the areas where I can improve. Even if you don't do this as a career the life skills you learn doing an apprenticeship like this are incredible. **No two days are the same and I love it.**

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Are you interested in the fire services?

To learn more about the different types of apprenticeships in the fire services, contact apprenticeships@capita.com