

Who are you and what is your role?

- Melanie O'Dwyer – Branch Manager

Apprenticeship Title?

- Branch Manager Level 4

How would the first chapter in your book “how to survive an apprenticeship” start?

Firstly, if you are passionate about something, you will be willing to put the work in to achieve great results, you can only get out of something what you put into it. I remember the very first few meetings of the apprenticeship and meeting the other apprentices that would be taking the journey with me. I was completely bamboozled with all the technical terms and understanding what my next steps were. However, I was given amazing support from everyone around me, and at the time no question was a silly question to ask, as we were all new to it and chances are, someone else was thinking the same question.

We had regular workshops throughout the year to attend, as well as one to one meetings with our apprenticeship tutor, and regular contact through emails and text. This was to make sure we were aware of what our next goals were, and anything we needed to support that. We were also given a mentor, who was an experienced person that works for the Coop that we could turn to for additional help.

One of the main things to always keep in mind is that support is available for you every step of the way, and it involves all those around you, from work colleagues, senior management, and the Learning & Development Team, and everyone is always more than willing to help, you just need to ask the question.

The apprenticeship involves a lot of coursework, but every module is different and the way in which you learn and present these all vary, giving you great tools for your future career.

What have you learnt about yourself whilst on the apprenticeship?

One of the main things I learnt whilst on my apprenticeship was to look at my own performance. In a management role you tend to spend your time focusing on how others around you are performing and trying to ensure you are helping them to develop. You tend to forget about yourself and your own personal development, performance and goals.

It has given me a good opportunity to look at my strengths and weaknesses, look at different ways I can measure these, and I have used this knowledge to improve upon my own performance.

During my apprenticeship, we also attended “Know How” courses provided by the Learning & Development Team, these workshops were brilliant at giving the opportunity to reflect on your own learning styles, time management as well as lots of other useful skills and tools.

What have you found to be the most challenging aspect of being on an apprenticeship and how did you deal with it?

Time management was the biggest challenge that I faced during my apprenticeship. Three months into my apprenticeship I was seconded to be a temporary Branch Manager, which meant trying to get to know a new team, creating new rotas, employing lots of new staff as well as learning how to do forecasting alongside the other responsibilities of a manager.

After the first couple of weeks of juggling everything, I did set myself a routine of setting time aside on a weekly basis, to focus on the apprenticeship side of things. This was to ensure I did not fall behind, and all of the daily tasks I was doing I was using as evidence to support the apprenticeship, and as I was keeping on top of it, it was easier as all the information was fresh in my mind. This has stayed with me since; I am now a lot better with my time management and knowing how to prioritise my workload.