



Apprenticeships work: Karen's Story



Karen Derbyshire lives and breathes apprenticeships. Working as a Head of Sector, she is responsible for around 800 learners at any given time. But it's not only her job that makes her an advocate; Karen kicked off her vocation by learning and earning. She tells us her story...

Starting out in childcare and education

My career started at fifteen when I left school and desperately wanted to work with children so I joined a local day nursery and commenced an apprenticeship, or Youth Training Scheme as they were called back then.

I have always loved looking after children and babies, so childcare was the natural option for me. I remember my Head of English asking me why I wasn't going to College or University, but I didn't want to take that route, I wanted to learn the ropes straight away. I've never really been one to wait!



In those days, apprenticeships were quite different. Instead of the 20% off the job training you can expect today, you attended fifty hours of hands on work and then went off to College in the evening.

After two years, I completed my Level 2 and 3 qualifications and by the age of 18, I was managing a fifty place nursery.

Moving on up the career ladder with life-long learning

I took some time out to have my son, who's now 20 and completing his own apprenticeship, and returned to a new setting as Nursery Manager. In this role, I participated in inspections and managed a team of Nursery Nurses and Assistants. It was a fast-paced job, writing and implementing policies, as well as being responsible for banking, paying wages and all the other duties related to managing people, processes and buildings!

I was really keen to progress and help others and so off I went to evening classes to complete my Assessors Award. I found this invaluable not just for my own learning, but it also helped me to support others to continue their own development and complete their qualifications.

I really wanted the opportunity to share my own experiences with others so when the chance came up to work as an Assessor, I went for it. I was delivering customer service and childcare apprenticeships and witnessed rigorous inspections and awarding body visits within my first month. It was definitely an eye opener into the industry and what was expected of me. I loved it!

Over the next few years my career in education continued, delivering different levels of apprenticeships and working through the transitions the sector saw. I went on to work for a national training provider, where I stayed for 16 years! During my time there, I became Location Manager and oversaw the delivery of Pre-16 alternative education provision, study programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships in a number of sectors.

Working for Interserve

In February 2015, I joined Interserve Learning & Employment as an Area Manager covering the North West region. 12 months later I was seconded to the Head of Sector role and in 2016, I took up the job permanently.

I absolutely love all aspects of my role, I have been blessed with the opportunities presented to me over my career and managed by people that have had confidence in me when I have lacked it in myself.



Listening to the success stories from across the business just cements what an amazing team of people I work with every day. They amaze me with their commitment to their role, their learners and their employers. This was the main factor in our recent nomination for Education and Childcare Apprentice Provider of the Year award, which we have made the shortlist for. Winning it would certainly be an amazing way of celebrating 20 years in the sector.

I'm so proud to be a female manager at Interserve and will be celebrating International Women's Day with my wonderful team. My gender has never stopped me from achieving my goals and why should it? With the right ambition, manager and employer, anything is possible!

I wonder what my Head of English would say now?

Written by Karen Derbyshire, Head of Childcare and Education and Interserve Learning & Employment