

Future Papermakers: a guide to the Apprenticeship scheme



Paper is an integral part of our lives which is often overlooked and can all too easily be taken for granted. Just imagine where we'd be today without paper.

It's the way by which information has been recorded and distributed for thousands of years, and even today it's still widely used in newspaper and books. It's central to hygiene in a wide range of applications. Speciality grades are used in electrical insulation and security applications. Paper-based packaging protects goods on their way to customers in the form of the cardboard box. Last but not least, where would we be without the bag that makes our cup of tea in the morning?

Like much of UK manufacturing industry, the Paper Industry is facing a challenge. Over the next few years, long serving traditional papermakers will be leaving the industry, and when they leave they will take with them many years of technical knowledge, expertise, and skills.

Unless we do something now this will have a significant impact on the future. Planning for the future is crucial, so the Paper Industry has set up an apprenticeship scheme. This is your chance to join a sustainable industry that can provide a wide range of exciting opportunities.

What is an Apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a real job where individuals earn while they learn, and gain valuable skills and knowledge tailored to a specific role. As an apprentice, you would be employed and work to develop your knowledge, skills, and behaviours while undertaking a formal learning programme supported by your employer. You would also get structured support from an education provider and your employer as you learn and work.

To become an apprentice, you must be 16 or over and not already be in full-time education. You can start an apprenticeship whether you're beginning your career, want a change, or you're upskilling in your current job. You can have a previous qualification like a degree and still start an apprenticeship.

What is the Papermaking Apprenticeship?

As an apprentice you'll learn and train for a specific job in the Paper industry, getting hands-on experience in a career with lots of future potential. You'll train off-the-job, studying with a specialist provider and complete assessments during, and at the end of, the three-year programme.

Entry requirements will be subject to individual paper mills, but ideally, candidates will have good GCSE (or equivalent) grades including Mathematics, English, ICT, and possibly a relevant science.

The Paper Industry wants the next generation of papermakers to be technically competent and have the knowledge and understanding of the papermaking process, so the Papermaking Apprenticeship operates as the professional standard for people working as Papermakers at Level 3.

We want you to be able to solve problems and contribute to continuous improvement across the company. So what will you learn?

- The history, materials and science of papermaking
- Process chemistry
- Sheet formation & drying, coatings & calendaring procedures
- Process control, heat transfer, steam generation
- Reel up and slitting
- Team Work and communication skills
- Health, Safety, and Environment
- Quality Assurance
- Business techniques including Continuous Improvement



And, at the end of three years in a Process Industry Manufacturing Technician Apprenticeship, what will you gain?

- Level 3 Diploma in Process Technologies
- Level 2 and Level 3 Papermaking Certificates

On completion of a Papermaking Apprenticeship, you will meet the requirements of the Standard in terms of skill, knowledge and behaviours, both in practice and theory. That means that you will be recognised as competent to perform in the role of a papermaker across the sector.

Why Paper?

Without paper, it is quite probable that the music created by Mozart would have been lost, Leonardo da Vinci wouldn't have been so prolific, and inventions such as the motor car may never have happened. Its usefulness has led to it being a major catalyst in the development of today's world.

Globally, more than 300 million tonnes of paper are produced each year on multi-million-pound machines, at speeds often in excess of 60 mph. Yet, an A4 sheet often costs less than a penny.

One of the attractions of paper is its versatility. It can be permanent or impermanent, delicate or strong, cheap or expensive, and can decompose in water or be water-resistant. Paper can be used as a communication medium; in numerous household applications such as kitchen rolls and disinfectant wipes; goods are packaged in it; and new surface treatments mean it even hastens the healing of cuts and bruises.

Paper products are recyclable and wood pulp, the industry's primary raw material, is infinitely renewable.

The UK has 47 paper mills, with operations spread throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. These mills produce around four million tonnes of product a year, with almost a million tonnes exported, either directly or as packaging around UK manufactured goods.

Paper remains a ubiquitous part of our lives – from traditional uses such as recording and spreading ideas, to its indispensable use in personal hygiene; from hi-tech flexible packaging to good old-fashioned cardboard boxes; and from new uses such as components critical to the development of renewable energy to the generation of green energy from paper once it eventually reaches the end of its renewable life.

We could go on and on, but the key point is that paper is made from renewable and recyclable materials and is part of a growing bio-based economy. It's an industrial sector already of high importance and – with the right Government policies – will stay that way.

A day in the life of a papermaker

Papermakers work in a wide range of manufacturing sites using a variety of natural plant fibres to produce products including newsprint, office papers, packaging and board, tissue, speciality, security, medical, currency and tea bag papers.

Papermakers operate a process using plant equipment to turn raw materials into products using their knowledge of chemistry, production processes and quality assurance standards in a batch or continuous production shift and are responsible for quality, output and safety at all times. Papermakers work in teams and interact with their colleagues from their production teams, engineers, laboratory staff and supply chain/warehouse teams. They are responsible for quality and safety at all times.



Career Opportunities

production supervisor/team leader

quality assurance

maintenance engineer

production process engineer

logistics/distribution

production/operations manager

Revised: October 2024

