

Real-life story - Katie Smith

Katie left her job as a pub/restaurant manager to pursue her dreams as a paramedic. She completed her apprenticeship with North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and is now a student paramedic at Sunderland University.



Katie Smith Student paramedic

Employer or university North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range Unknown

How I got into apprenticeship

In 2007 I made a drastic career change from a secure, well paid pub/restaurant manager job to follow my dreams of becoming a paramedic. I was successful in getting a post at North East Ambulance Service (NEAS), first as a call handler, then I progressed to be a dispatch officer within the control room. It was both stressful and rewarding but my ultimate goal remained to become a paramedic.

I took my second career leap of faith and applied internally to become a services scheduled care apprentice. I thought it would give me frontline experience and prepare me to take the next step.

Towards the end of my 12 month apprenticeship, I applied to become a student paramedic. Through a rigorous recruitment process, I was awarded a much coveted spot at Sunderland University.

What I do

As an apprentice and a student paramedic, no two days are the same. Every day is varied and poses different challenges. We bear witness to the harsh realities of all sorts of environments and circumstances.

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The best bits and challenges

The best bit by far is the team - you become a family. No matter how bad your day has been, you can always expect the people in the crew room, back at the ambulance station, to lift your spirits. The management team is very supportive too.

You also make friends for life with the people on your course; nothing cements a friendship more than a shared goal.

One challenge I've encountered about apprenticeships and university education has been the issue of age. People assume that apprenticeships are only open to school leavers or those under 25, but that's not the case. In my apprenticeship cohort, the age ranged from 19 to 44. It's also similar on the degree course.

Life outside work

Going to the gym is a hobby. I'm glad I started going before I went on the road as the job requires a certain level of strength and fitness. Maneuvering patients isn't an easy task; you have to look after your back and knees. Cardio work and training with weights is a great way to keep them up to the task!

Career plans and top tips for others

As a student paramedic, my focus is on graduating, getting out on the road as a newly-qualified paramedic, and taking it from there. There are various options open to us once we qualify. I'm very interested in the role of emergency care practitioner. I'm not one to settle; I keep pushing and working towards the next goal.

I'm proud of myself most for making the bold decision to leave my secure dispatch officer position. Seeing where I am now, and where I am headed, it's really paid off. And being recognised for such a bold move as student of the year at the NEAS 2018 awards was another proud moment!

My advice to anyone thinking about a paramedic apprenticeship? Go for it! Make sure you have a good network support to help maintain a healthy work/life balance. I'm a single mum and without a good network of family and friends behind me, I'd find some of the shifts and studying tough. The role is stressful enough at times so having a solid foundation of support is a massive bonus.

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