

**"The best thing about an apprenticeship is getting the balance of education and practical work. You see what you're learning in action."**

After deciding university wasn't for her, Olivia decided to do an apprenticeship as she is passionate about practical challenges.

## **Olivia Hawke**

### **Clinical engineer**

#### **Employer or university**

NTH Solutions LLP

#### **Salary range**

Band 6



- How I got into the apprenticeship and why I chose an apprenticeship**

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University never felt like the right option for me as I am passionate about practical challenges. I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and given the opportunity to switch careers.

I saw the job opportunity while working as a ward hostess at North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust. An estates manager also told me about clinical engineering apprenticeships that were coming up. I couldn't wait to apply.

Before the interview, I received a list of potential questions. Every night after work, I dedicated my time to learning and took in as much information as I could. It was fascinating so I knew it was the right path for me.

Learning a new area of work one day a week was a challenge, but the lecturers at Middlesbrough College were brilliant. They knew that I only had one day a week in college, so they supported me as much as they could. My colleagues were also amazing - and never made me feel stupid for asking questions.

Being the only woman on my course and entering into a traditionally male-dominated role could have been challenging, but the hospital and college staff all made me feel welcome.

The best thing about an apprenticeship is getting the balance of education and practical work. You see what you're learning in action. When I was in school, I thought, 'I'll never use trigonometry', yet in this job, I need it!

It's the same with electrical principles. When I was doing my A-levels, I didn't have other engineers to turn to ask, 'Where would I use this?' so it wouldn't make sense. But during my apprenticeship, I could ask my colleagues and lecturers, making it a lot easier to understand.

## **What I do**

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Simply, my job is to make sure the hospital's range of medical equipment is working so that it can be used effectively for patients. Any mistake could impact could have severe consequences. For example, if a patient is being checked and diagnosed, and the engineer didn't carry out the service correctly, it could lead to misdiagnosis for the patient, either missing the problem or falsely diagnosing them.

Every month, we receive a list of high-risk items that need to be regularly checked, ranging from thermometers and observation machines to incubators in special care baby units. It is a privilege to know my job is making a difference to people's lives.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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I am part of a team helping people and saving lives but in the background. Knowing this gives me a purpose. I love working as part of a team. Despite working on our own to prioritise jobs, we work as a team to make sure every bit of equipment is checked and fixed.

There is a bit of pressure as you can't do anything wrong as it could impact a patient's health! But this is balanced by the job satisfaction of knowing I have made a difference.

Explaining my role can be challenging, as many people assume I'm a nurse when I mention working for the NHS.

One of the best things to happen to me is winning a series of apprentice awards, including apprentice of the year in my first and second years, as well as overall apprentice of the year.

I am also the Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estate Management (IHEEM) National Apprentice of the year award for 2023. I never, in my wildest dreams, imagined that this would happen to me.

## **Life outside work**

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I read, crochet, and dabble with other crafting methods. I enjoy the gym and walking my dog called Sadie as well as travelling when possible to events and beautiful locations. My hobbies helped me get the job as I am quite practical. I have a natural inclination to do practical things!

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

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I am keen to take my Electrical and Electronic Engineering BEng (Hons) qualification in engineering and stay in the profession. With more experience, I may explore managerial

roles. There is always potential for career progression, which I love.

As for tips. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your lecturers, colleagues and fellow apprentices will help you.

Be prepared to work as much as possible during your apprenticeship. It will be so worth it! I became an official clinical engineer in August 2023, and it has helped me move forward in my personal life goals, too.

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