

CASE STUDY

PROJECT HIGH FLYER



EAL QUALIFICATION HELPS JOANNE'S CAREER TAKE OFF

Talented engineer Joanne Sharples has seen her career take off, landing a prestigious engineering award on the way, thanks to her grandad's enthusiasm for aviation, a high school teacher and the decision to study for a higher apprenticeship in project management.



Joanne, 25, from St Annes, Fylde, achieved her EAL Level 4 Diploma in Project Management and a Distinction in her Foundation Degree in Project Management in 2016 as part of her higher apprenticeship and had the honour of being named the UK's Higher Apprentice of the Year at skills expert SEMTA's prestigious annual skills awards, which celebrate the Best of British engineering.

She is now working towards her Bachelor's degree in Project Management through Lancaster University and hopes to go on to do a Masters and progress her career further with her employer BAE Systems.

Joanne works as a contract delivery manager at BAE System's Military Air and Information business in Warton, a

high-pressure environment, as part of a team liaising with the Omani Royal Airforce on a major contract for new aircraft, which also involves trips to the Middle East.

She says the Project Management Diploma has given her the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop her career.

“Everything I have learned I have put into practice. For example, as well as identifying risks we need to find solutions and quantify the impact on the business, while stakeholder management is also key to the successful completion of projects.”

Joanne Sharples, Contract Delivery Manager, BAE Systems

Joanne's training involved work on complex engineering projects, such as the F-35 Lightning II and the Eurofighter Typhoon as part of four placements in BAE Systems.

“Within each role, I had responsibility to control costs and schedules, learning about the company and how to manage projects of different size and complexities. The knowledge and experience gained has allowed me to take on more responsibility and widen the scope of the work undertaken.”

She was one of the first learners to successfully complete a higher apprenticeship in project management, and, as well as winning the Semta Skills Award, Joanne was also highly commended in the National Apprenticeship Awards.

“I was very shocked and surprised to win,” she said. “My grandad Brian has a private pilot licence and always encouraged me to pursue a career in engineering but it was my teacher Lisa Fitzpatrick at Lytham High School who was the person who drove me towards it – she introduced me to BAE Systems. I liked what I heard and I joined the apprenticeship scheme.”

Joanne is passionate about promoting engineering as a career – particularly to women. She proposed to invite schoolgirls on site to inspire and inform them about engineering and was asked to project manage the event where she demonstrated excellent skills, holding challenging discussions with many senior stakeholders.

The evening was a fantastic success and offered a great experience for the girls.

More female apprentices started work in the business following the activity, 18% compared to the national average of 5%, as a direct result of Joanne's actions during the previous months. They have now become a regular feature and Joanne is now a company ambassador taking the message out to local schools.

“It is crucial children take the right options in Year 9 and important they gain GCSEs in all STEM subjects because they apply to all careers,” she said. “My Bachelor's degree is focused on the perceptions and reality of a career in engineering. With this generation it is not so much about the stereotype of a male-dominated workplace but more about the confidence to choose engineering and project management as a career.”

Project Management is currently a growing profession with excellent career prospects across a diverse range of sectors. The higher apprenticeship was developed by EAL and the Association of Project Management (APM) and accredited and managed by EAL, for those looking to find a way into a career in project management. The success of that apprenticeship programme led to the creation of the new associate project management apprenticeship standard, which was launched in July 2016.

It allows learners to develop key skills essential for the delivery of projects, including risk management, relationship management and project leadership. The apprenticeship typically takes two years to complete and the nationally recognised qualification is equivalent to the first year of university or a foundation degree. An apprentice may then become an Associate Member of the APM where they can progress to achieve further APM qualifications, such as APM's Practitioner Qualification, and aim towards achieving the designation of APM Registered Project Professional.

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