

Case Study:

From HR Apprentice to Learning & Development Professional: Jimmy's Apprenticeship Journey



Jimmy Hunt is a Learning & Development professional at UCB who began his career as a Level 5 HR apprentice through Cogent Skills' outsourced employment service.

Can you talk us through your apprenticeship journey and how you first came into the HR Level 5 programme with UCB?

My journey is somewhat unique as it was impacted heavily by Covid-19. Whilst in my final year studying my A-Levels, the world shut down due to the pandemic. I did not want to attend university whilst in lockdown so therefore explored the route of apprenticeships. Had I gone to university, I most likely would have studied HR. It therefore made sense to me to search for HR apprenticeships available. I then found and applied at UCB, which I was then offered the role after the interview process.

What attracted you to an apprenticeship route in HR?

The opportunity to learn and work at the same time made the apprenticeship very attractive

to me. I was studying relevant material that I could apply day to day at UCB, I could apply into practise and see the impact that had directly. It also meant that by the time I had finished my apprenticeship, I had years of workplace experience that my peers that went to university did not have. Furthermore, it was a great chance to learn from experienced colleagues in the biopharmaceutical industry.

How did Cogent Skills support you throughout your apprenticeship journey?

Cogent Skills ensured I was supported by UCB and that I remained comfortable with balancing studying and working.

What role did your Skills Account Manager play during your apprenticeship, and can you share an example of where that support made a difference?

Paul organised regular check-ins with me to understand how I was finding both my course and my job. He helped me understand how to navigate the corporate environment whilst remaining on top of my studies. Paul was also always available for support whenever needed.

"By the time I had finished my apprenticeship, I had years of workplace experience that my peers that went to university did not have."

Case Study:

From HR Apprentice to Learning & Development Professional: Jimmy's Apprenticeship Journey

What was your experience like working within UCB during your apprenticeship, and how did it help you develop your HR capability?

During my time at UCB, I was exposed to numerous development opportunities that some HR professionals may not encounter so early on in their career. For example, an acquisition and site relocation taking place at the same time, there were always things going on for me to get involved with. UCB also always made sure I had enough time to complete my coursework and provided mentoring when needed. The wider team also were more than happy to allow me to shadow them to gain broader HR knowledge.

Were there any key projects or responsibilities during your time at UCB that had the biggest impact on your development?

There were numerous key projects such as acquisitions and site relocations, however I think what benefitted me the most was the opportunity to gain broader HR knowledge across the entire function. This allowed me to explore where my career could go once I left UCB.

After completing your apprenticeship, what influenced your decision to leave UCB at that point?

Once my apprenticeship had finished, UCB did not have headcount to take me on permanently at that time. Therefore, I sought full time employment elsewhere.

What led to your return to UCB in a full-time Learning & Development role, and how did your apprenticeship experience help prepare you for that step?

In my previous position, my role was split 50/50 HR Operations & L&D. It was within that role I developed a key interest in Learning & Development. When I saw an L&D role open up at UCB, it made sense for me to return due to how much I enjoyed my apprenticeship.

Looking back, how has completing a Level 5 HR apprenticeship shaped your career progression?

A L5 HR apprenticeship shaped my career progression massively. It gave me a huge headstart compared to my peers and has allowed for constant progression within each role I have had. My next employer after UCB valued the two years' work experience I had, and that gave me an advantage over other candidates.

What would you say to employers considering working with Cogent Skills to bring apprentices into their organisation and develop future talent?

I'd strongly recommend it, based on my own experience. It is designed so that people are applying what they learn directly into their day-to-day roles, which accelerates both capability building and performance. Employers are not only developing in the future but also seeing tangible value in the present. I also think it's a strong way to retain and motivate talent. Apprenticeships like this show a real commitment to people's development, and that builds engagement and loyalty. People feel invested in, and they're more likely to grow with the organisation rather than look elsewhere (or rejoin!).