

### From Apprentice to 'Ambassador'



Only one year after completing his Advanced Apprenticeship in Flexographic Print at Alcan Packaging Cumbria, Jonathan Straughton is an 'ambassador' for the company. His age, 21, works to his benefit as students readily identify with him when he is explaining what life is like as an apprentice.

*"As part of careers evenings, I am invited to give advice to students looking to consider an apprenticeship or thinking about career moves, based on the experiences I have gained during my own apprenticeship," says Jonathan. "This has involved visiting local schools and colleges to provide information about Alcan Packaging and how apprenticeships operate."*

When he had completed his GCSE exams Jonathan was in a similar position to most sixteen year olds. "I was looking for a career that suited my personality, which would further my skills and give me nationally recognised qualifications that could help push my career forward. I was advised by a careers advisor to take an aptitude test, which resulted in the offer of an interview with Alcan Packaging, although I had no idea what they did! Following the meeting, I had a tour round the factory and from that point onwards I knew this was the opportunity I had been waiting for."

Jonathan started at Alcan Packaging Cumbria, which specialises in producing printed packaging for the food industry, as a flexographic print apprentice. For the first two years his time was split between the short-run and long-run flexo departments. He then remained with the latter to complete his training and has stayed in the same department. He has now been with the company for four years, three as an apprentice and one as a qualified flexographic printer.

*"The Advanced Apprenticeship I completed consists of completing NVQ Level 2 and Level 3 in Flexographic Print together with a Technical Certificate. I now want to work my way through others courses that will help progress my career as and when they are available. However, with the training I have, I am able to operate either of the eight-colour flexographic printing presses here at Alcan Packaging."*

*“The experience I gained during the three years of my course has given me a more rounded understanding of the whole print production process, which allows me to identify and rectify problems that arise during printing quickly and efficiently, resulting in higher print quality and productivity,” says Jonathan. “This knowledge has enabled me to design an auxiliary piece of equipment that has helped to reduce downtime.*

*“Based on my experience, an NVQ Level 3 is a high qualification to achieve and can lead to excellent career opportunities. I would highly recommend an apprenticeship to any student who wants a life long career in a particular field or requires qualifications to open doors to new jobs in different industries, as these qualifications are both transferable and nationally recognised.*

*“I have been very lucky at Alcan Packaging and couldn’t have asked for more support. The company has assisted me with any problems I encountered as well as with my course work and my job in the factory, making my apprenticeship a really enjoyable experience. I believe I have received the best training available. My aims now are to advance within the company and the apprenticeship has given me the knowledge I need to do this. It has certainly started me in the right direction to a better future.”*

The importance of apprenticeships and the value of apprentices are now widely recognised throughout all industry sectors and Government funding is available to make the choice easier for both employer and employee. Apprenticeship programmes are credited with lowering the cost of hiring and training staff, while companies operating these courses report being able to fill vacancies more easily and that applicants are generally of a ‘better calibre’.

Even in the current difficult times, training staff is key to the future success of businesses, with research showing companies that do not train their workforce being 2.5 times more likely to fail than those that do. Opportunities are there for those with the will to grasp them.