

Case Study: Gareth Hughes – Apprentice with Perenco

“I was 25 when I started my Apprenticeship – quite late compared to a lot of people but it’s a decision I don’t regret at all!”



“Since leaving school, I’d always had a job of some sort, mostly bar work and I’d even run a night club at one point. I fancied a change of scene and decided to move to Bournemouth – I’m from Preston originally. I found a job there labouring for a chap who was self-employed and he suggested looking at an Apprenticeship. I started off paying to put myself through classes at college, while still working for him, but quickly realised the job wasn’t going to provide me with enough range to complete my qualifications. So I decided it was time to look for a proper Apprenticeship.

Someone I know told me that Perenco at Wytch Farm were recruiting Apprentices – my initial reaction was “I don’t want to work on a farm!” but then I discovered it was engineering so was just what I was looking for. I thought the interview went quite well and I was really chuffed to be offered the job.

Photo: Gareth (left) receives his Apprentice of the Year award

I started the Apprenticeship with a year off-the-job at SETA’s training centre, learning practical engineering skills and the theory. Although I was older than most of the other Apprentices, coming to SETA didn’t feel like I was going back to school – it felt like a really positive step forward into a career. In many ways, I think being older was actually an advantage – I knew what a great opportunity this was and had the maturity to make the most of it. Starting the Apprenticeship meant a reduction in wages for me but, again, I had the maturity to see the bigger picture and that it would likely lead to a much greater earning potential in future, so it was worth doing. Also, I think my years of minimum wage jobs and un-social hours really gave me the drive to succeed now I’d found what I wanted to do! I won Apprentice of the Year at SETA, I think because I was always asking questions and wanting to do more.

I really enjoyed SETA - it was a great atmosphere and we learnt loads – but I am enjoying being on site now even more. We are buddied up with a skilled engineer so there was lots of watching them and holding stuff to start with but, as our knowledge and experience grows, then us Apprentices get to do much more on site. Recently, for example, we had a UPS (uninterruptable power supply) go down and it tripped out another, so it was ‘all hands on deck’ to fix it. I was working on some things while my colleagues worked on others; we were there until late repairing it but, as a team, we got it sorted. I went home with a real sense of achievement that day!



I think engineering was a really great choice for me; as soon as I tried practical work, I realised that was what I wanted to do. Although we don’t do as much ‘mass production’ in the UK as we used to, we still need engineers to keep things running and British engineering still has a quality reputation. The progression opportunities are there as well; I will be starting an HNC in September and one of my colleagues, who did an Apprenticeship a few years ago, is now doing his engineering degree. The Apprenticeship seems to give you the best all-round mix of practical skills and academic qualifications to enable that to happen.

So, I don’t have any regrets starting my Apprenticeship at 25; perhaps my only regret is that I didn’t know at 16 what a great thing it would be!”

