

CHRIS LEVEL 3 MAINTENANCE (ELECTROMECHANICAL) APPRENTICE



What does an average day look like for you?

I am at the beginning of my apprenticeship, I have been attending the SETA Apprenticeship Centre in Southampton with fellow Southern Water apprentices to undertake my foundation training. An average day differs depending on what discipline you're doing that month, but every day is fun and different which is great and keeps you motivated and driven to succeed.

So far it has been an amazing experience. In the 4 months I have been there I have learnt so much and studied a different discipline every 4 week rotation. So far, these have included Mechanical Maintenance where we disassembled and reassembled a car engine and gear box. Electronics which included soldering components and creating circuit boards to power motors. We have also completed Manual Metal Arc (MMA) welding where we had to weld pieces of mild steel together using different techniques. I am currently doing general engineering where we are learning the functions of various hand tools.

Why did you choose to do an apprenticeship?

Southern Water plays a vital role in the community that my family and I live in, and I wanted to be a part of something that genuinely matters to people every day. They are investing heavily in upgrading their sites, improving reliability and protecting the environment which really motivates me.

I feel that doing an apprenticeship with them is a great way to learn real engineering skills while doing a role that actually matters. It is not just theory, but working on real mechanical and electrical systems in real world scenarios that have an impact on your community. Southern Water gives you a chance to earn whilst you learn and gain a recognised qualification with hands-on experience, whilst working alongside qualified engineers. I have been fully supported every step of the way so far and feel happy and confident with the beginning of my journey.

I would recommend an apprenticeship, specifically with Southern Water as they are fully supportive, always checking in with you to make sure you're doing okay, and checking in on your progress - it makes you really feel part of the company. The work we will be doing with Southern Water when we have finished our foundation year at SETA will be useful, meaningful and essential, as well as having the reassurance of knowing that what I am doing is protecting the environment. Overall, it's a fantastic long-term career with amazing training and development opportunities backed by a fantastic company with a fantastic team ethos.

What has been your personal highlight so far?

My personal highlight so far has been meeting all the new people on the same journey but with different destinations. I have really enjoyed making new connections and friendships building rapport with my fellow apprentices and instructors alike. The atmosphere around SETA is really infectious and it makes you feel like you belong and gives you confidence in what you're doing.

Educationally speaking, the highlight has been completing the first few units of my BTEC. Having been out of education for a quite a while, I found it challenging to begin with. I knuckled down and with the support of my tutors I successfully passed the first few units and can leave this year feeling very proud with a sense of accomplishment.

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What was your route in to engineering?

I'm not your average young person starting their apprenticeship as a school leaver. I am 42 and have been out in industry already. I have both Level 2 and Level 3 Diplomas in Electrical Installation. I have had various electrical roles including working as an electrician's mate and an electrical improver – all reactive maintenance roles. This has given me a good background in electrical and mechanical work, as well as a good understanding of basic systems, tools, and of course health & safety.

I applied directly to Southern Water through their recruitment process. This included various assessments and interviews, that focussed on my practical mindset and problem-solving skills, rather than just looking at my qualifications. Luckily they recognised my desire and motivation for engineering, and my willingness to learn.

I am now at SETA for 40 weeks as part of the 'off-the-job' foundation training, alongside other Southern Water apprentices as we gain invaluable hands-on practical experience developing both my technical knowledge and real-world engineering skills. It's been a step-by-step journey growing from a simple interest in electrics into a full mechanical and electrical engineering apprenticeship, supported by structured training and future onsite experience.

Why did you choose to be an Apprentice Council Rep?

I wanted to be more involved and help improve the apprenticeship experience not just for myself but for all other apprentices as well. Being an apprentice with Southern Water I know how important good training, communication and support are. Joining the Apprentice Council felt like a good way to share feedback from my fellow apprentices, raise any issues and help make positive changes between apprentices, tutors during my time in the Apprenticeship Centre. I also wanted to further develop my confidence, communication and leadership skills. Engineering isn't just about technical ability it's also about working with people, speaking up when needed and being part of a team. Being on The Council gives me a chance to practise these skills in a professional environment.

We have participated in many activities during our meetings enabling us to gain valuable leadership and communication skills. Overall, I joined because I care about getting the most out of my apprenticeship and helping keep SETA a supportive place where apprentices feel listened to and motivated.

What personal qualities do you think are important to do your job?

I think the most important personal qualities for my job as an apprentice mechanical and electrical engineer are a willingness to learn, good problem-solving skills, attention to detail, a strong work ethic and having the right attitude. As I am still learning, I feel being open minded and keen to improve is really important. There is always something new to learn, whether this is understanding a mechanical system, fault finding an electrical circuit or learning how different components work together. It's important to be comfortable asking questions and taking advice from more experienced engineers because I know that's how I'll develop my skills.

Southern Water uses a lot of different mechanical and electrical systems so I know I won't know everything straight away. Problem solving is a key quality as well because when something goes wrong it is important to stay calm and work through the issue rather than rushing. I enjoy figuring out what's causing the problem and rectifying it brings great satisfaction. Having a good positive attitude and being reliable is really important, as is working well as part of a team and being willing to 'get stuck in'.

