

Tyler McKeown

At Sterling, our highly experienced team members and their passion for what they do are central to who we are. This month, we spoke with Tyler McKeown, Apprentice Laboratory Scientist, to learn more about Sterling's apprenticeship programme and the opportunities it provides.



Can you briefly describe your background, and what made you apply for a Sterling apprenticeship?

After secondary school, I had decided that sixth form college didn't suit me, but I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do next. The idea of gaining valuable, real world experience while completing my studies is what really drew me to look into apprenticeships.

When searching for opportunities online, the Laboratory Technician apprenticeship programme at Sterling initially jumped out because I had previously visited Sterling's headquarters on a school trip when I was 12. I was very familiar with the organisation's strong reputation and passion for scientific excellence. The idea of working in a chemistry laboratory sounded quite exciting, and the opportunity was especially appealing to me because of its hands-on nature. I started my journey with Sterling at age 17.

After completing the two-year advanced apprenticeship programme, I was thrilled to accept an offer to remain at Sterling for the four-year degree apprenticeship as a Laboratory Scientist, which I will complete this year as I have recently earned my degree in Analytical Chemistry.

What has been your experience with the apprentice programme?

The opportunities for learning and growth I've had over the course of my apprenticeship have been incredibly valuable. From gaining exposure to different departments within Sterling analytical team early on, to becoming a tenured analyst on the day shift team in Quality Control, it quickly became apparent to me that Sterling sees their apprentices as valued team members.

Anyone that knows Sterling recognises there is something different about their team. Their passion, engagement and commitment are core to the organisation's differentiation. This is rooted in a people-first culture that values the contributions and aspirations of each and every team member, from senior executives to seasoned scientists and apprentices. Sterling's culture really elevated my experience in the apprenticeship programme.

Fast Facts

ROLE

Apprentice Laboratory Scientist

YEARS AT STERLING

6

EDUCATION

BSc (Hons) in Analytical Chemistry, Newcastle College

SPECIALISATIONS

Analytical Chemistry, Quality Control, HPLC, Gas Chromatography, cGMP, GLP

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I had never worked in a lab when I first started my apprenticeship, and I started off by shadowing many experienced scientists across the analytical team. I was impressed by how welcoming everyone was; the team was more than willing to let me observe their work and assist with projects. Seeing the team's genuine passion for their work first hand was really inspirational to me, and it ingrained a strong sense of drive and motivation in me from the very start. The Sterling team enabled me to hit the ground running, performing a lot of small, but essential, functions and tests early on. Fairly quickly, I was entrusted with more and more responsibility, and I was ultimately able to perform comprehensive analytical work on a variety of high-profile projects.

Eventually, my experience came full circle when I started to mentor new apprentices. It's been really rewarding to be able to harness my experience in the programme to show other apprentices the ropes.

The programme has really expanded since I started my journey with Sterling, now offering a variety of different apprentice positions across diverse departments of the organisation. There's something for everyone with an interest in chemistry, and I'd certainly recommend it to others.

What kinds of opportunities have resulted from your work with Sterling?

Sterling has opened up opportunities for me that I never would have expected.

First, I developed a lot of responsibility in customer-facing projects. One of my most memorable experiences was an opportunity with a high-profile client. A project manager there approached me to perform beta prototype testing on a new piece of analytical equipment. It was a six month project that would require me to run a variety of diagnostic tests. Upon completion of the testing, I was asked to travel to the United States and Switzerland as a representative of Sterling to present my findings in front of major pharmaceutical companies. This was an unforgettable experience, and it is really a testament to the leadership and trust Sterling bestows upon its apprentices.

I have also become really involved with the Young Apprentice Ambassador Network (YAAN) during my time at Sterling. I was a contributor for several years, and was then invited to join their executive board as a Projects Coordinator. This has been an entirely different, but equally beneficial, experience to my day-to-day work as an apprentice at Sterling. It has enabled me to champion apprenticeship programmes and offer support and advice to future apprentices, which is something I've become extremely passionate about.

Finally, I am honored to have won several awards for my work at Sterling—the 2020 Royal Navy Regional Higher/Degree Apprentice of the Year Award at the National Apprenticeship Awards, and the 2021 NEPIC (North East Process Industry Cluster) Scientific Industry Apprentice of the Year. I would not have applied for these awards without encouragement from my colleagues at Sterling, and I am so grateful for their support and recognition.

What advice would you give to prospective apprentices?

I would highly recommend a Sterling apprenticeship to anyone that has interest in cultivating their passion for science and desires valuable, hands-on experience in the laboratory alongside some of the very best the industry has to offer. This experience has given me so many exciting opportunities, and I have really grown over the course of my apprenticeship.

Before starting with Sterling, I was uncertain about what direction I wanted to take for both my education and my career. The apprenticeship provided me the experience and motivation to work towards a successful career in analytical chemistry, as well as experiences that I never could have imagined and will never forget. For any future apprentice, I would say to take the opportunity and give it your all, because you never know what may come out of it.

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