



Information Pack for Applicants 2023



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Durham County Council is the largest council in the North East, we employ over 16,000 people and have a budget of around £1.3 billion which helps us provide services for more than 513,000 people.

We are a forward-looking council and recognise that we need passionate people who share our enthusiasm to deliver fantastic services to the people of County Durham. The council is recognised in the government's Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers List and celebrates the huge benefits apprentices bring to us as an employer. Apprentices bring fresh ideas and new ways of doing things, challenge our thinking, bring new skills and knowledge that enables us to strengthen our workforce and ensure we have an organisation that is fit for the future.

We are a modern employer with a range of employee benefits and have a successful track record in supporting our apprentices to secure permanent employment with the council.

Apprenticeships are a great way to earn and learn, they are a direct route to employment where you'll get hands-on training and everyday opportunities to put your new skills and knowledge into practice.

Alongside 'on the job training', you'll also undertake formal study through a university, college, or training provider, this is where you'll work to achieve a recognised qualification.

Durham County Council is a fantastic place to work but if you need convincing, we've asked some of our apprentices to share their own stories at [Apprenticeships and Work Experience – Durham County Council](#). You can also hear from John Hewitt, our Chief Executive, and how his career started with an apprenticeship.

What can you expect at Durham County Council?

- A workplace induction to help you understand who we are as a council, where your role fits and what you should expect in your first few weeks.
- A manager and team willing to share their experiences and expertise to encourage you and support your development.
- A structured work programme.

- A workplace mentor.
- Paid time off work to complete a recognised qualification with a local college, university or training provider.
- Regular review meetings with your manager and workforce development team.
- Opportunities to undertake work-based and off-the job training.
- A range of benefits including generous holiday entitlement, local government pension, employee assistance scheme and cycle to work scheme. Further information can be found in the rewards and benefits section of our [Jobs & Careers](#) page.

Additional support

As a disability confident leader, we welcome applications from people with disabilities and as an inclusive employer we recognise the importance and benefits of having an inclusive and diverse workforce.

To ensure we can offer the best possible support for applicants, we will pro-actively make reasonable adjustments within the recruitment and selection process for disabled people.

Reasonable adjustments

If you require any reasonable adjustments at the application or selection stage, please contact please email: HRCorporatetraining@durham.gov.uk.

The range of reasonable adjustments that can be accommodated throughout the selection process include but is not limited to:

- Alternative formats for job applications.
- More detailed/pictorial instructions for interview.
- Support from an appropriate person at the interview.
- Adjustments to method of testing.
- Additional time to complete applications and or tests where appropriate.
- Adjustments to interview venue/accommodation.
- Adjustments to interview questions eg receiving questions in advance.



What makes an apprenticeship a great choice?

Apprenticeships are lots of great things rolled into one and are really simple to understand. You will work, train and develop the skills, knowledge and competences you need to carry out your role confidently.

Levels

You might be wondering about the different levels of apprenticeships, so we have listed the levels below:

Level 2 – Intermediate: Equivalent to five GCSE passes.

Level 3 – Advanced: Equivalent to two A level passes.

Level 4/5 – Higher: Can lead to a higher national certificate (HNC) or a foundation degree.

Level 6/7 – Degree: Can lead to the achievement of a full bachelor's or master's degree.

Next steps

We're delighted to think that you are considering an apprenticeship with Durham County Council and want to give you as much information as we can to make your next steps really simple.

The application form

The application form is your opportunity to tell us about your skills, experiences and qualities, we want to know about you as a person as well as your ability to carry out the role you are applying for.

Guidance for applicants on competency-based questions

It is really important to tell us why you think you will be the best applicant for the role, to help you do this so we have included 4 questions within the **job application form** that will enable you to demonstrate how you meet the requirements of the role which are set out in the **person specification**.

The questions ask you to think about the following skills:

- Communication.
- Teamwork.
- Decision making.
- Problem solving.

What are competency-based questions?

Competency based questions are your opportunity to provide evidence of experience relevant to the role, it is not sufficient to say that you **have** the relevant experience, you must show evidence of making a success of that experience by describing how you acted and the impact of your actions.

It is important to answer the competency-based question in full giving as much detail and description as possible, your responses to the questions will be compared against the responses from other applicants and used to assess your suitability for the role.

How should I answer a competency-based questions?

When considering your responses to the questions, the following should help you form an effective answer:

- Read the job description and person specification carefully, think about the tasks you will be required to undertake and the specific skills, knowledge and experience you have to carry out this type of work.
- Draft your answer on paper first, that way you can add to your response if you feel you haven't answered the questions in full, you could also ask someone else to read your response to get a second opinion.
- When writing your response, be specific, provide an example which shows what you did, how you did it, why you did it and the affect this had.
- Draw upon a range of experience, this could include, school, college, work, community of volunteering activities, groups you attend as well as hobbies and general interests.
- Keep your examples relevant to the role, always describe your own actions and contributions rather than actions someone else carried out.

It can be challenging to know exactly what to write so we have provided some example responses below that you might find helpful.

Example responses:

Example 1

You might say: “The team were asked to look at ways we could improve customer service so there was a meeting arranged to talk about it”.

Try saying this instead: “A team of us were asked to look at ways we could improve customer service. I was asked to look at the data which is a strength of mine. I analysed the number of customer complaints we had received looking for patterns, I then drafted a report summarising what I had found and made recommendations that we thought could improve the experience for the customer”.

Example 2

You might say: “I was in charge of organising a team event at school, so I spoke to the people I needed help from and planned”.

Try saying this instead: “I took a lead role by arranging for the group to meet regularly, I set the dates and times in advance so everyone knew what was happening and when. I also drafted a plan of actions that needed to be completed and the timescales, I also allocated tasks to people so I knew the plan would come together on time”.

Example 3

You might say: “I am good with data and enjoy putting information in spreadsheets”.

Try saying this instead: “I am confident working with data and enjoy working with spreadsheets. I was recently asked to transfer multiple sets of data from a written report to a spreadsheet. Keeping the spreadsheet up to date is something I now do on a weekly basis”.

Additional information

It is important to tell us everything we need to know about your skills and experience so we have provided some additional space in the application form for you to do this.

We would encourage you to go back to the **person specification** and detail anything which you feel will support your application, for example, a particular IT skill that we may be looking for that you haven't been able to detail elsewhere in your application.

If your application is successful

If your application is successful, you will be invited for an interview, this invite will be sent to the email address you have provided in your application form, this email will come from North East Jobs.

As part of your interview, you may be asked questions about the specific examples you have used in your application form so you should go back to your application form and remind yourself of those examples before you attend for interview.

Hints and tips for successful interviews

Do your research

Do your homework, find out as much as you can about Durham County Council, things including:

- Our values.
- Our history.
- Our services.
- The geographical area we cover.

Read the job description and person specification

Be clear on the role, responsibilities and the task you'll be undertaking, you will be asked questions about the role so a good understanding is essential.

Dress appropriately

First impressions are really important so plan your outfit, if you're not sure, ask for a second opinion from a parent, guardian or friend.

Your outfit needs to be comfortable; you want to be able to relax during your interview and focus on the questions.

Arrive on time

Doing the journey in advance of the interview will give you the best chance of arriving **ahead of time**.

If you're catching a bus, know how often they run and what the alternatives are if that particular bus doesn't arrive.

Practice

Anticipate what you might be asked during the interview, there could be questions based upon what you wrote in the application so go back to it to remind yourself.

What will happen if I am offered an apprenticeship?

You will be required to have some pre-employment checks, eg references, qualification certificates and we will also need confirmation from the training provider that you meet the requirements to undertake the training element of the apprenticeship before your employment is confirmed.

When you start your apprenticeship with the council, you will undertake a full induction programme.