

Meet the Apprentice



Ali Walker became an Apprentice Trading Standards Officer at Leicestershire County Council last January. Since then, she's had a fast-track initiation into a career where no two days are the same, and she has developed a passion for a profession with public protection at its heart.

What was it that initially sparked your interest in the Trading Standards profession?

I had been working as a probation officer for 12 years and was ready for a career change. I happened to be looking on the internet at job opportunities and came across the apprenticeship scheme at Leicestershire Trading Standards. It seemed to have a lot of transferable skills in terms of the investigation side of things, professional curiosity and working with other agencies – they were all things that really interested me, and still do. And you get to be out of the office quite a lot, which I really enjoy!

What does the apprenticeship entail? Is it quite practical?

It's a really nice mix of learning theory and legislation, and then being able to put that into practice. I can take away what I'm learning and then go out and apply it on a visit or a raid.

Is there enough understanding of Trading Standards and its role in keeping people safe?

I feel there's a real lack of insight into what we do. It's something we should be blowing our own trumpet about a bit more, and highlighting the good work that we do. There's a lack of understanding among the public and also other agencies, which don't fully realise how they can utilise us and what we can offer them in return.

Do you feel that working in Trading Standards gives you a sense of moral purpose?

The work we do against scammers, for example, is invaluable in terms of protecting vulnerable members of society. With our tobacco visits, often we see that people are being exploited to run the shops. We went to one recently where there were just a couple of mattresses on the floor upstairs in a bedroom, and it was freezing. It's an awful situation that people are being forced into, and you've got to have empathy and understanding of how people have found themselves in this situation. I think that's an important quality for Trading Standards officers to have.

How can you encourage more people to see Trading Standards as a career option?

The variety of work that you do, and the fact that no two days are the same, is a massive draw. It was for me, because I love that variety – I love that one minute you're out dealing with avian flu, and then the next minute you're doing enforcement visits for illegal tobacco, or talking to businesses about vapes.

The opportunities that I've had with training have been brilliant. There was a great induction program, and that training and development has continued. We can get on courses through CTSI, as well as local opportunities to learn and develop.

The staff here are excellent as well; everyone couldn't be more helpful. I ask questions constantly, and people are very happy to listen and try and point you in the right direction.

I really push for people to think about Trading Standards as a career because you're always developing. I didn't know anything about it until I just happened to stumble across it, but I'm really pleased I did. There's something new every day.