

L4 Regulatory and Compliance Apprenticeship experience

Suzie's story

Hi, I'm Suzie and I first started working at the Environment Agency (EA) around 5 years ago as a Water Quality Permitting Officer. I moved to the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Team just over a year ago, here I carry out complex habitats assessments for Regulated Industry, Water Quality and **Water Resources**. We plan to expand into the Flood Risk Activity regime soon. We also offer a helpdesk where we aim to support and advise permitting officers on habitats queries. A large part of the role is working with Natural England – developing and maintaining strong relationships, and working together to achieve a mutual resolution which protects the environment. **I love my job, and whilst challenging at times, I feel a huge sense of satisfaction**, especially on complex activities which, without our intervention, could significantly impact the environment.



Valuable benefits in developing myself and my team

I chose to enrol on the '**Regulatory and Compliance officer**' (RCO) **apprenticeship** just before I joined this team. The Habitats Directive has kept millions of tonnes of pollution out of the environment, and the HRA team are a crucial part of enforcing and maintaining the Habitats Directive. **I knew a Regulatory and Compliance Officer Apprenticeship was the right fit for me.** Having such a key role in regulation meant an RCO course would provide valuable benefits in enhancing and developing myself and my team.



The EA is a regulatory authority and as such, completing an apprenticeship of this nature would help me understand and implement regulation and legislation within the Habitats Directive, and help me understand the wider regulatory industry and how we all fit together to achieve the EA goals. When I first signed up, I was nervous. Not only was this my first experience of an apprenticeship but it was also the first time this course was being run within the Agency.

I felt like a guinea pig, out of my comfort zone, trialling a course which may not work out. **My apprenticeship group was full of fantastic, welcoming and enthusiastic individuals** - all from similar backgrounds and with the same goal – to better understand regulation and to be able to apply it to the wider industry to achieve better environmental protection.

Our trainer was so energised, full of encouragement, and whilst initially not having much of an environmental background, made a huge effort to understand each of our roles and would gradually tailor the course and his support to suit our needs.

The course was 18 months long and consisted of a range of learning techniques to keep us on our toes! We had assignments, workshops, Kahoot quizzes, scenarios, practicals, interactive questions and discussions, role plays and reflective logs.

Throughout the course we were encouraged to obtain progress reviews, witness testimonies and feedback. This helped me identify my strengths, and the areas I needed to work on. Throughout the course I gained valuable regulatory knowledge but I was also developing key transferable behaviours and skills.

I learnt about the court system and structure, risk management, conducting investigations, compliance, and continuous improvement; but what interested and benefited me the most was the several learning units around how to effectively deliver legislation and maintain regulation in various scenarios. One scenario involved me shadowing an enforcement officer as they attended a site to carry out an audit. Here I learnt how to effectively communicate legislation requirements, deal with any non-compliances, and most importantly how to offer support and guidance to help the site come back into compliance. I was able to apply what I had learnt but also see the skills being used in a real-life scenario.

“ I could see the skills [I had learned] being used in a real life scenario ”

The course went quickly and before I knew it, it was exam season! This was the most challenging part for me. I put a lot of pressure on myself to perform well and I wanted to make the agency proud of me. The exam period involved a timed knowledge exam as well as two professional discussions - 3 hours in total! I have to say, I love to talk and I'm well known as a bit of a chatter box, but talking for three hours on what I had learnt terrified me.



I had so much support from my trainer, my skills coach, my team leader, my mentor and my colleagues. I was surrounded by so many people who were constantly encouraging me to strive to do my best. **The EA has been such a brilliant supporter during the course** – I feel so thankful to have had this opportunity, as well as the flexibility to complete it when it suited me.

Not once did I ever feel that this course was an inconvenience to my team leader or colleagues, it was the exact opposite and **I received more than enough support and praise.**

“ I was surrounded by people encouraging me to strive to do me best ”

Thankfully the knowledge exam went well, and since I had learnt so much from this apprenticeship, the professional discussions went so smoothly and before I knew it, it was all over.

Whilst I had a slippery start (changing job roles halfway through, and having our original skills coach leave) I feel overall the experience was a great one and **I would recommend anyone to complete an apprenticeship within the EA.**



Written by Suzie, Regulatory and Compliance Apprentice in the Environment Agency