

Developing communications skills to engage the public and promote safety

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service used a Digital Community Manager apprenticeship to expand the capability of their communications team.

The challenge

Ros Barbour is Corporate Communications Supervisor for Humberside Fire and Rescue Service and oversees all internal and external communications for the service. Her role includes press liaison, consultations, external and internal campaigns.

Fire and rescue service communications are complex. Incidents call for warnings, informing messages and follow up. It's crucial to consider the right timing and address language barriers to make sure the information reaches everyone that needs it. At the same time preventing incidents and encouraging people to adopt safer behaviours is important.

“One of the challenges with fire and rescue service communications is that we’re not as visible as the police for example, apart from when you see firefighters riding engines to incidents,” says Ros. “We need to reach out to the public to remind them we are here 24/7, not just when you need us. We use social media to deliver key information quickly, so people don’t have to go to the website to find it.”

Ros recognised the need to expand the communications team, particularly in the digital area to cover social media channels, the website and any future developments as new channels evolve.



“ This was a brand-new role and it seemed like a good opportunity to bring in someone from the local area, who was keen to get into communications as an apprentice. We wanted to give them a level of responsibility but also in a supported learning environment. This was the first time the communications team had taken on an apprenticeship, although Humberside Fire and Rescue had apprenticeships in other sections.”

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The solution

The organisational development team helped to find suitable apprentice providers. “We looked at the criteria for apprenticeships and the job description for this role and found the Digital Community Manager apprenticeship fitted with our longer-term vision for building digital communications,” explains Ros. This is one of the portfolio of communications and marketing apprenticeships that The JGA Group provides.

Meanwhile, Ed Hulme saw the advertisement for the Digital Communications Officer role. Ed had studied Theoretical Physics at the University of Lancaster. He gained some experience in comms whilst at university by managing the “What’s On in Lancaster” Facebook group. This led him to be interested in a career in digital communications and apply for the apprenticeship with Humberside Fire and Rescue Service.

“My experience at university showed me how powerful and useful social media could be. I saw this role and thought this is a bit of a change and an interesting start. I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn while I was doing and to gain a qualification in something completely different.”



The outcome

Ed is now one year into his role and apprenticeship as Digital Communications Officer at Humberside Fire and Rescue service. He enjoys the challenge of using his skills to communicate important safety messages and using data to target his communications to specific audiences.

“My role as digital communications officer is planning online communications with the public. An example is the Getting Summer Ready campaign, which prepares people for hot weather and awareness of cold water shock. I look at where the biggest risks are, for example men between the ages of 18 and 34 statistically have a higher risk of drowning during the summer months. I build up the communications plans, write the copy and create video or social media content. Sometimes I get to go out with fire crews and go to the stations, so that’s always good fun.”

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“We try and prevent incidents from happening and keep people safe. It can be difficult to keep people engaged with safety information, as most people think it won’t happen to them. We use data to find out who’s most at risk. For example, fires in the kitchen are a big risk for students and for adults over the age of 40. The situation is the same but what caused it is different, so you’ve got to vary the approach and use appropriate channels for each audience like TikTok and NextDoor.”

“The apprenticeship sessions have been really enjoyable. My tutor is very knowledgeable. The discussions are interesting because you hear other people’s takes. Learning things then being able to apply it to the role is the best part.”

“It was really straightforward working with The JGA Group” says Ros. “We have regular progress meetings and I can find out about what modules are coming up, so I can tailor Ed’s work to apply his learning to different areas. I’ve not had to worry about anything and it’s been nicely moving along.

“In addition to the support and development the organisation can give apprentices, they are also getting support in a team learning environment. So, even if they are in different sectors, the apprentices are all learning from each other and bring different experiences. Fire service communications is very specific, so it is good to see other perspectives.”



Ed concludes by saying “I couldn’t imagine learning about this role in a non-apprenticeship situation. I think it would be impossible to learn this in an academic scenario without having hands on work experience. I’ve also learnt things that are outside our sector and I think you probably become better at comms because you have a better knowledge of the wider industry.”

Ed Hulme, Digital Communications Officer for Humberside Fire and Rescue Service studied for a Level 4 Digital Community Manager apprenticeship with The JGA Group.

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