



Build Your Career with SJO

Trainee Accounting Associate

Higher Level Apprenticeship | Ulster University

WELCOME

Welcome from Sara



Thanks for picking this up, or for whoever pointed you in our direction.

I'm Sara. I started SJO Accountants 18 years ago, and over the years we have built a team we're genuinely proud of. We have experience of training HLAs and we know what it takes to help the right candidates succeed.

We are about excellent customer service, high standards and a drive to always be the best we can be, personally, professionally and as a firm.

People often ask me whether I'd recommend this route. My answer is simple, both of my daughters chose it. As a mum, there isn't a stronger endorsement I could give. I've seen first-hand how combining university with real work experience builds confidence, maturity and career opportunities.

We're not looking for someone with all the answers. We're looking for someone who's curious, reliable, and not afraid of hard work. If that's you, we'll handle the rest, real clients from week one, a fully funded degree, professional qualifications, and a team that genuinely wants to see you do well.

Have a read through. If it feels right, get in touch.

Sara

"Both my daughters are on this route. That tells you everything."

Why Choose a Higher Level Apprenticeship?

Imagine finishing your degree with zero debt, four years of real-world experience, and a career already underway. That's not a fantasy, it's exactly what a Higher Level Apprenticeship delivers.

Traditional University Route

- ✗ No salary for 3-4 years
- ✗ Potential student debt
- ✗ Limited work experience
- ✗ Graduate job hunt begins after
- ✗ Theory-heavy learning
- ✗ Career starts at 21-22

Higher Level Apprenticeship Route

- ✓ Earn a salary from day one
- ✓ Degree — fully funded
- ✓ Four years' real experience
- ✓ No job hunt — you're already there
- ✓ Learn by doing, every day
- ✓ Career established by age 21-22

By the time your friends are writing their first CV, you'll already have a degree, be well on your way to professional qualifications, and a career you're proud of.

Professionally accredited by Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI), ACCA and CIMA, giving you a significant head start towards becoming professionally qualified.

"I learn something new every day."

Why SJO?

We're not a faceless corporation. We're a team of real people who genuinely care about helping you succeed.

At SJO you won't be hidden away in a back office. From your very first week you'll be meeting clients, working on real accounts, and making a difference to real businesses.

You'll never just be making the tea or photocopying.

Here's what makes us different:

Small enough to know your name — you'll never be just a number here. Everyone knows everyone, and your contribution matters.

Big enough to challenge you — we work with businesses of all sizes across multiple sectors. You'll see variety every single day.

Technology-forward — we use Xero, QuickBooks, and cloud tools that the biggest firms use. You'll be trained on the platforms that matter.

Genuinely invested in you — your mentor, your training, your professional exams. We fund it all and we'll be beside you every step.

A team that has fun — yes, we work hard. But we also laugh a lot, support each other, and celebrate every win together.

More than 18 years helping businesses grow.



"You'll never be making coffee all day here."

What Makes Someone Successful at SJO?

Not qualifications. Not grades.
Behaviours.

- ✓ Notices problems before being asked.
- ✓ Keeps learning.
- ✓ Takes ownership.
- ✓ Helps teammates.
- ✓ Wants to understand "why?"
- ✓ Always looks for a better way.
- ✓ Owns mistakes and learns from them



"It's not about being the smartest. It's about caring the most."

This Probably Isn't for Everyone...

And that's okay.

This isn't for you if you want to coast through three years and figure it out later.

But it might be exactly right if:

You're curious — you ask questions and you're not afraid to say "I don't know yet."

You're reliable — when you say you'll do something, you do it. Every time.

You want to be challenged — in a "we believe you can do more than you think" way.

You're ready to commit.

You don't need perfect grades. You just need to turn up, work hard, and genuinely want to build something.

If that sounds like you, keep reading.

"We believe you can do more than you think."

YOUR SKILLS

What You'll Learn

Within your first year you'll already be helping real businesses understand their numbers and make better decisions. Here's a taste of what you'll develop:



Financial Accounting

Prepare accounts, understand tax, and help clients see the full picture of their business.



Cloud Technology

Master Xero, QuickBooks, and the tools that modern practices run on.



Business Advisory

Go beyond the numbers — help clients make smarter decisions and grow.



Client Relationships

Build trust, communicate clearly, and become someone clients rely on.



AI, Automation & Digital Tools

Use the latest technology to work smarter, not harder. The future starts here.

"Real responsibility from day one."

A Typical Week

No two weeks are identical, but here's what a typical week might look like. The balance of study, client work, and team time keeps things fresh.



Monday

University

University — lectures, tutorials and coursework.



Tuesday

Client Accounts

Client accounts — preparing year-end files, reconciling bank feeds and discussing queries with your mentor.



Wednesday

Tax & Bookkeeping

Tax returns and bookkeeping — working through a mix of personal and business clients with real deadlines.



Thursday

Advisory & Teamwork

Team meeting in the morning, then advisory work — helping a client understand their cash flow forecast.



Friday

Review & Plan

Catch-up day — finishing the week strong, reviewing your learning log, and planning ahead.

Your Journey

This isn't just a job — it's a four-year launchpad. Here's where you could be:



Year 1

Discover

You'll work on real client accounts from week one. Bookkeeping, bank reconciliations, VAT returns — building confidence with every file you complete.



Year 2

Develop

Taking ownership of your own client portfolio. Preparing accounts independently, sitting in on advisory meetings, and studying for professional exams.



Year 3

Contribute

Deeper advisory work — helping clients with forecasts, tax planning, and business decisions. You're becoming someone they trust and rely on.



Year 4

Grow

Degree complete. Four years' real experience. Well on your way to a professional qualification. You're not job-hunting, you're already there.

"You'll never be making coffee all day here."

YOUR PEOPLE

Meet the Team

You won't be a number here. You'll work alongside people who genuinely want to see you succeed. Here are some of the faces you'll get to know:



Sara Otley

Founder & Managing Director



Jane Hill

Senior Manager & Mentor



Ricardo Neufuss

Operations Manager



Jo-Anne Dunn

Payroll Manager



Lauren Otley

Assistant Accountant &
Former Higher Level Apprentice



Ciaran McKee

Qualified Accounts Technician (ATI)
Former Higher Level Apprentice



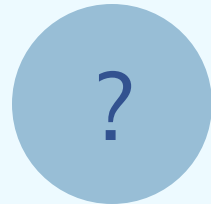
Melanie MacFarlane

Client Support Associate



Alex O'Neill

Office Co-Ordinator



You!

Higher Level Apprentice

"Small team. Big support."

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Where Could This Take You?

Chartered Accountant

Finance Director

Business Adviser

Practice Manager

Entrepreneur

Partner



NEXT STEPS



Ready to Apply?

If you've read this far, you're probably the kind of person we're looking for. Here's what to do next:

1. Send your CV and a short cover note
2. Tell us why you think SJO is the right place to begin your career.
3. We'll invite you in for a chat

sara@sjoaccountants.co.uk

Visit www.sjoaccountants.co.uk to find out more about who we are.

We're not looking for someone who already knows everything.
We're looking for someone who's excited to learn.

"The best investment you can make is in yourself."