



Build Your Career with SJO

Trainee Client Support 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.

"I learn something new every day."

OUR PRACTICE

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."

What You'll Learn

Within your first year you'll already be helping create an exceptional experience for our clients while supporting the smooth running of a modern accountancy practice.

You'll develop skills in:



Client Experience

Creating positive first impressions and building trusted relationships.



Digital Business Systems

Using cloud software to manage client records and business processes.



Business Operations

Supporting projects, improving systems and helping the practice run efficiently.



Office Management

Co-ordinating daily activities, managing priorities and supporting the wider team.



AI, Automation & Digital Tools

Using technology to improve efficiency and deliver an outstanding client experience.

"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

Building your knowledge through lectures, coursework and collaborative learning.



Tuesday

Client Experience

Front of House & Client Experience — welcoming visitors, supporting client meetings and helping create a brilliant first impression.



Wednesday

Client Administration

Client Administration — Companies House filings, onboarding new clients and helping keep records accurate and up to date.



Thursday

Business Support

Business Support — supporting the wider team, managing priorities and helping improve internal processes.



Friday

Projects & Improvement

Projects & Continuous Improvement — learning new systems, developing your skills and helping us find better ways of working.

YOUR PATH

Your Journey

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



Year 1

Discover

Learn how a professional practice operates while becoming the welcoming face of SJO.



Year 2

Develop

Take ownership of key administrative processes and become a trusted support for clients and colleagues.



Year 3

Influence

Lead improvements, support projects and help shape an outstanding client experience.



Year 4

Grow

Graduate with a degree, four years' experience and the confidence to progress into business operations, client management or leadership roles.

"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?

Client Support Associate

Senior Client Support Associate

Operations Co-ordinator

Practice Manager

Business Operations Manager

Client Relationship Manager

Operations Director



Every Great Business Needs Great Organisers

Behind every successful business is someone who keeps everything moving.

They're organised.

They solve problems before anyone notices them.

They create exceptional experiences for clients.

They make life easier for colleagues.

They embrace technology.

**They are often the people who keep the whole
business running.**

If that sounds like the sort of impact you'd like to have,
this could be the perfect career for you.



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."