

# A Career in Consulting

A Guide for  
School Leavers

## INTRODUCTION

**THIS GUIDE HAS BEEN COMPILED BY THE MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCIES ASSOCIATION (MCA), THE TRADE ASSOCIATION FOR THE CONSULTANCY SECTOR, TO SUPPORT SCHOOL LEAVERS IN CONSIDERING A CAREER IN THE CONSULTING INDUSTRY.**

The document is supported by commentary from our Young MCA association, providing first-hand insight from consultants who

have joined the industry on school leaver programmes. A school leaver program facilitates the transition for young people from school to work. The nature of these programs will vary by company, with most programmes on offer being apprenticeships, or the opportunity to study for a degree whilst working full-time, and gaining hands-on experience. Some companies also offer gap year internships.

### THIS GUIDE WILL:

- Provide you with a definition of what Management Consulting is
- Give an overview of what to expect from working in Consulting, and the key skills involved
- Respond to Frequently Asked Questions whilst challenging misplaced stereotypes about the industry
- Share tips for getting into the industry and sources to find out more about our member firms and the MCA in general
- Provide a list of our member firms who offer school leaver programmes

Consulting is a fantastic career path, filled with numerous opportunities, as described first-hand in this document by our contributors. More generally, school leaver

programmes are increasingly becoming adopted across various industries and our sector employed nearly 800 school leavers across the country last year.

## WHAT IS MANAGEMENT CONSULTING?

**MANAGEMENT CONSULTING IS THE PRACTICE OF CREATING VALUE FOR ORGANISATIONS, THROUGH IMPROVED PERFORMANCE, ACHIEVED BY PROVIDING OBJECTIVE ADVICE AND IMPLEMENTING BUSINESS SOLUTIONS.**

Members of the Management Consultancies

Association help public and private sector organisations to become more effective and more efficient by improving how they operate, accelerating growth, reducing costs and changing the way they do their business with the ultimate aim of creating value and/or driving growth.



### WHAT DOES CONSULTING MEAN TO YOU?

**Abdul Hassan** - Strategy Consulting at KPMG

“ To me, consulting means helping organisations to find solutions to their problems. Consultants can dedicate 100% of their time to the task at hand, provide an independent view and draw on expertise from helping other businesses in similar situations. Consulting firms usually have subject matter experts who have extensive experience within the fields of their client, however, this by no means excludes apprentices/graduates, as fresh perspectives and by extension diversity of thought, is highly valued. ”



### WHAT DOES CONSULTING MEAN TO YOU?

**Izzy Fewster Jones** - Rewards Consulting at Deloitte

“ In my opinion, consulting is about building meaningful, long-lasting partnerships with our clients and working with them (not for them!) to deliver impactful change. It's about more than simply giving advice for an immediate problem, but about establishing trust with our clients whilst focusing on their long-term interests and goals and supporting them in achieving them. ”



## WHY CHOOSE AN APPRENTICESHIP / SCHOOL LEAVER PROGRAMME OVER UNIVERSITY?

**Abdul Hassan** – Strategy Consulting at KPMG

“ During Sixth Form I was really unsure about what I wanted to do in the future so chose to join a wide-ranging apprenticeship over University. My programme allowed me to experience vastly different service lines and specialise in a business area which I find interesting and one I’m passionate about – The prospects of better job security, being debt free and gaining a masters level qualification (CIMA) was also very appealing. ”



## WHY CHOOSE AN APPRENTICESHIP / SCHOOL LEAVER PROGRAMME OVER UNIVERSITY?

**Simren Samra** – Technology Consulting, CIO Advisory at KPMG

“ I chose a degree apprenticeship rather than going to University as I am able to academically develop whilst gaining hands on experience in a field I am interested in. I was also a part of a cohort of apprentices who are in a very similar situation to myself. Having the support of my peers is encouraging, motivating and a great way to meet people from across the firm! Finally, the opportunities - there is nothing I can’t do as an apprentice and I am encouraged and supported by my colleagues to achieve what I want to. ”



## WHAT TYPE OF WORK CAN I EXPECT TO BE DOING?

**Luke Phillips** – Management Consulting, Finance Transformation at KPMG

“ One of the best aspects of a career in consulting is that the work varies day to day. This variety ensures that I am constantly learning and working with different people, in and out of my firm. The type of work you can expect to do will depend on the organisation you join. You could find yourself tasked with conducting research, drawing conclusions from the information you have collated and presenting your findings to the client. ”



## WHAT TYPE OF WORK CAN I EXPECT TO BE DOING?

**Akram Halim** – Management Consulting, Business Transformation at Arcadis

“ As an Apprentice Consultant, we play a key role supporting our team in understanding the client problem and helping to deliver strategies, methods and tools which shape an effective, sustainable solution. Being an Apprentice Consultant gives you the opportunity to learn on the job and see how consultants analyse challenges and work collaboratively to deliver high quality outputs. ”



## WHAT DO YOU LIKE / DISLIKE ABOUT CONSULTING?

**Abdul Hassan** – Strategy Consulting at KPMG

“ I love that I’m able to have a positive impact on the world by pursuing my passion in helping the world be more sustainable. I am currently studying towards the CIMA qualification (Chartered Institute of Management Accounting), during exam season it can be difficult to balance your studies and work alongside your social, personal, and family life. It requires dedication and some sacrifices along the way. My job is also challenging and often forces me outside my comfort zone, however, this is great for long-term growth and development. ”



## WHAT DO YOU LIKE / DISLIKE ABOUT CONSULTING?

**Harriet Willsher** – Service Design at IBM

“ I really like the variety that comes with a job in consulting; moving around different projects means that I have the chance to work with so many different people, within different industries but also on different types of work. It almost feels like starting a new job when you move on to a different project. Initially I didn’t enjoy the travelling associated with consulting (travelling to client sites and my firm’s offices around the country/world) but I have learnt to make the most of it and exploring new places! ”



## WHAT OPPORTUNITIES CAN AN APPRENTICESHIP IN CONSULTING LEAD TO?

**Izzy Fewster Jones** – Rewards Consulting at Deloitte

“ Since joining my firm as a school leaver, the opportunities I have had to develop both personally and professionally have been incredible. I have been able to work across several different areas of the firm and have also been lucky to receive financial support from my firm for educational purposes and completed professional qualifications through the training programs. I have been able to travel abroad to India and Chicago on client projects and am currently applying for a transfer to one of our US offices. I truly believe the opportunities are limitless if you are willing to work hard and put yourself out there!

”

## WHAT OPPORTUNITIES CAN AN APPRENTICESHIP IN CONSULTING LEAD TO?

**Hassan Kamara** – Technology Consulting at EY

“ I’ve seen some of my peers move onto other roles within industry (i.e. Government, Energy, Start Ups). I am also finding an increasing amount of Senior Manager, Director or Partner colleagues who started out their career as an apprentice which makes me realise that I have an opportunity to go far.

”

## WHAT OPPORTUNITIES CAN AN APPRENTICESHIP IN CONSULTING LEAD TO?

**Simren Samra** – Technology Consulting, CIO Advisory at KPMG

“ I feel like the opportunities are endless. After I’ve finished my apprenticeship, I will look to get promoted within Technology Strategy, the business areas I have specialised in, and continue on to become a subject matter expert, while also growing and developing our business in this space

”

## CHALLENGING CONSULTING STEREOTYPES & MYTHS



WHAT DID YOU FIND MOST DIFFICULT, TRANSITIONING FROM SCHOOL TO A PROFESSIONAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES?

**Joana Skendo** - Management Consulting, Business Operations at Deloitte

“ The transition from school to a professional working environment is a difficult one and takes time to get used to, i.e. you will have to discover and learn new skills, take more responsibility, find out what working styles best suits you, understand the type of work you enjoy and ultimately grow as a person over time. ”



WHAT DID YOU FIND MOST DIFFICULT, TRANSITIONING FROM SCHOOL TO A PROFESSIONAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES?

**Harriet Willsher** - Service Design at IBM

“ With consulting comes a lot of travelling away from home which I found difficult at first because I was having to stay away in the week and missed time with family and friends in the evenings and it felt lonely at times. I overcame this by filling my evenings with going to the gym and also growing my network at work and attending social activities with people after work! ”



## ARE SCHOOL LEAVERS TREATED DIFFERENTLY TO GRADUATES?

**Lucy Thomas** - Management Consulting at PWC

“ In my experience, apprentices are always looked upon positively by colleagues and the business. Most people I meet are very interested in the non-university pathways into a career and even sometimes wish they had done the same themselves! In terms of not having a degree, I have never found this to be a hindrance. Lots of people have a degree that’s not related to consulting so your educational background really doesn’t matter; it’s more important that you’re willing to learn and are enthusiastic about the work. ”



## WHAT OPPORTUNITIES CAN AN APPRENTICESHIP IN CONSULTING LEAD TO?

**Izzy Fewster Jones** - Rewards Consulting at Deloitte

“ I would say that school leavers are treated differently to graduates but for positive reasons! People are very conscious that you have come straight from school to the workplace and that this is a big transition. As a result, they will offer you more support and guidance than they may offer to graduates. However, once you have settled in there is no difference and you are not disadvantaged by not going to university. ”

## QUALIFICATIONS, SKILLS AND TRAINING



### WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO I NEED TO HAVE AS A SCHOOL LEAVER IN CONSULTING?

**Luke Phillips** – Management Consulting, Finance Transformation at KPMG

“The entry requirements for a consulting apprenticeship vary by organisation. Usually, the best place to check is the organisation’s website. Whilst organisations will define their academic requirements, there is a strong emphasis on skills such as communication, teamwork and problem solving, rather than just formal qualifications alone.”

### WHAT SKILLS WILL I DEVELOP AND WHAT QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING CAN I EXPECT TO RECEIVE?

Qualifications will differ by organisation and even by different service lines, so it is always best to check the consulting firm’s website. Here are some qualifications that our school leaver contributors have completed:

- Chartered Management Consultant (ChMC) – Created in Partnership with the MCA and the CMI. The ChMC award is the only Chartered award for management consultants and sets and maintains the highest standards for the Management Consulting profession
- Chartered Institute of Management Accounting (CIMA)
- Diploma in Financial and Management Accounting (offered by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants)
- Associate Chartered Accountant (ACA) through the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
- Our school leaver contributors have studied the following degrees, across a number of different Universities, throughout the UK:

**| Digital & Technology Solutions | Computer Science |**  
**| Software Engineering | Data Science |**

## QUALIFICATIONS, SKILLS AND TRAINING



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### WHAT IS THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE LIKE?

**Hassan Kamara** – Technology Consulting at EY

“ Working and completing a qualification at the same time is never going to be easy, whichever way you look at it. When I first started my apprenticeship, I admittedly had quite a poor work life balance. I quickly realised that I needed to develop some time management skills and learned some techniques to help with this such as managing others’ expectations, setting boundaries, making to do lists, time boxing tasks. ”



### WHAT IS THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE LIKE?

**Izzy Fewster Jones** – Rewards Consulting at Deloitte

“ On the whole, my life-work balance is good! I definitely feel that my life comes first and that my team are supportive of this. However, I will say that consulting is a career of contrasts – there are very busy periods and very quiet periods. Make the most of the quiet periods by making sure you get a break but also using them productively. This will ensure that you are well-rested and prepared to dive straight into your next project. ”



### WHAT IS THE SOCIAL LIFE LIKE?

**Simren Samra** – Technology Consulting, CIO Advisory at KPMG

“ The social life is amazing. I have met so many likeminded people through the apprenticeship and working at my firm in general. ”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### WHAT IS THE SOCIAL LIFE LIKE?

**Ethan Harwood** - Aerospace, Defence, Security & Technology Consulting at Atkins

“ For me, my social life has been brilliant. It is, however, worth mentioning that your peers at university will tend to have more free time than you. My advice is to utilise your free time, weekends and holidays to the maximum potential. ”



### ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL?

**Akram Halim** - Management Consulting, Business Transformation at Arcadis

“ As an Apprentice Consultant there are many opportunities to travel nationally and internationally. Usually we work with many of our clients directly on site. Embedding ourselves with the client helps us to better understand the client problem, form strong relationships, and deliver lasting solutions. ”



### ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL?

**Hassan Kamara** - Technology Consulting at EY

“ It really depends on the business and your client. I've had some good opportunities for both national and international travel but equally, I know others who haven't travelled at all. The travel can be great sometimes as it gives you a chance to explore a new location but also you're probably working really hard while you're there or you're away for long periods so some consultants enjoy it less so. ”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE OF WORK (E.G. VOLUNTEERING, CHARITY ETC.)?

**Abdul Hassan** - Strategy Consulting at KPMG

“ My firm provides 6 days of volunteering a year, giving us the opportunity to get involved in loads of activities. Colleagues have raised over £1m for the NSPCC by abseiling, trekking across the Great Wall of China, cycling across the UK, cake sales and much more! Colleagues have also been able to pursue charitable activities close to their heart such as protecting wildlife in South Africa and supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds. ”



### HOW CAN I STAND OUT IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS?

**Katie Trybus** - Early Careers Development Manager at KPMG

Here are my top tips before you apply:

- 1:** Some firms recruit on a rolling basis, and some routes fill faster than others, so I'd encourage you to apply as early as possible
- 2:** Give sufficient time and attention to ensure the information in your online application form is accurate and well written, as this will be used to decide whether to take your application forward
- 3: Be yourself!**
- 4:** You will be assessed against the strengths that we know are key to a successful career at our firm. We recommend that you spend time learning about each of the strengths recommended, and consider how they align to your own strengths before submitting your application
- 5:** Research the business thoroughly

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### HOW CAN I STAND OUT IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS?

**Luke Phillips** – Management Consulting, Finance Transformation at KPMG

“ I know it sounds very clichéd, but in my opinion, the best way to stand out in the recruitment process is to be yourself! If you are genuinely interested in the company and enthusiastic to learn, then that will shine through. Another great way to stand out is to ask the right questions. The recruitment process is just as much of an opportunity for you to get to know the company as it is for them to get to know you! ”



### WHAT'S EXPECTED OF A NEW APPRENTICE JOINING CONSULTING?

**Hassan Kamara** – Technology Consulting at EY

“ Apprentices are not expected to know the ins and outs of the job or have the delivery skills required – that's up to the firm to teach you! However, the following skills and attributes will help to give a strong first impression: Enthusiasm, willingness to learn, writing important things down, asking questions, taking on-board constructive feedback and being willing to go outside your comfort zone. ”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### WHAT'S EXPECTED OF A NEW APPRENTICE JOINING CONSULTING?

**Fiona Grant** - Management & HR at EY

“Apprentices can be expected to be made welcome from their very first day. Due to the nature of consulting you will need to be adaptable to different projects and solution areas as well as being open to change, as it can be a fast-paced working environment. We will also expect you to be passionate about your work and reach out to a colleague for anything you are unsure of.”



### WHAT IMPACT CAN AN APPRENTICE MAKE IN CONSULTING?

**Lucy Thomas** - Management Consulting at PWC

“An apprentice can have a huge impact. From building a personal relationship with a client to presenting a new idea to a team, every small interaction we make adds to the bigger picture of helping our clients to solve their problems. Apprentices can bring fresh perspectives and new ways of thinking to how we work, naturally bringing drive and enthusiasm to their work.”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### WHAT IMPACT CAN AN APPRENTICE MAKE IN CONSULTING?

**Hassan Kamara** - Technology Consulting at EY

“Apprentices are absolutely crucial to consulting for two main reasons. Firstly, those who we work with didn’t study consulting and had to pick up those skills along the way whereas as an apprentice within consulting, you’re bringing a valuable skillset that’s aligned an industry standard so you’re bringing best practice to your day-to-day work. Secondly, apprentices think in a different way to those who have been in consulting for a while. This ability to think outside of the box and to challenge ways of working can create some fantastic solutions personally, to your firms and your clients.”

## OUR MEMBER FIRMS WHO OFFER SCHOOL LEAVER PROGRAMMES

- ARUP
- ATKINSRÉALIS
- BAE SYSTEMS DIGITAL INTELLIGENCE
- BEARINGPOINT
- BJSS
- BMT
- COGNIZANT CONSULTING
- DELOITTE
- ETCH
- EY
- GRANT THORNTON UK
- IBM CONSULTING
- IPSOS UK
- KPMG
- PPL
- PWC
- RESULTING
- SYSDOC
- THE GAP PARTNERSHIP
- TPHC CONSULTING
- VENDIGITAL
- VERSION 1

## THE MCA

### THE MCA IS THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY FOR THE UK'S LEADING MANAGEMENT CONSULTING FIRMS.

For over 65 years, the MCA has been the voice of the consulting industry, promoting the value of consulting to business, the public sector, media commentators and the public. The MCA's mission is to promote the value of management consultancy for the economy and society. The MCA's member

companies comprise over 50% of the UK consulting industry work with the vast majority of the top FTSE 100 companies and almost all parts of the public sector. The UK consulting industry is amongst the best in the world and a vital part of the business landscape.

Click the link below to see the full list of current MCA members.

[www.mca.org.uk/members](http://www.mca.org.uk/members)

To find out more about the Young MCA, follow us on LinkedIn:  
[www.linkedin.com/company/young-mca/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/young-mca/)

For more information regarding the MCA, please contact us:  
**Management Consultancies Association**  
5th Floor, 36-38 Cornhill, London EC3V 3NG

+44 (0) 20 7645 7950

[www.mca.org.uk](http://www.mca.org.uk)

[info@mca.org.uk](mailto:info@mca.org.uk)

 /  @TheMCA\_UK

© Management Consultancies Association 2023

Designed by Defcorp Limited ([defcorp.co.uk](http://defcorp.co.uk))

Updated 11/2023