

National Apprenticeship Week 2026: Stuart Crooks CBE on his Apprenticeship

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Stuart Crooks is Managing Director of Hinkley Point C, the new nuclear power station under construction in Somerset by EDF. He's worked in the industry for more than 35 years and his career began with an electrical apprenticeship. In 2019 Stuart was awarded a CBE for services to nuclear energy.

What was the name of your apprenticeship and how did you come across it?

I grew up in a small village near Wigan and went to Shevington High School. My teachers wanted me to go on to A levels and university, but I was adamant that I wanted to choose my own way. An apprenticeship seemed the best choice for me and so I started applying, travelling around the North West by bus for the apprentice testing. In the end, I started an electrical apprenticeship at the local mail order factory, Great Universal Stores, within walking distance of home.

How did doing an apprenticeship shape the way you work today? Do you feel it provided you with a unique approach to your current role?

On my first day as an apprentice, I turned up at the factory, dressed smartly and excited to begin, only to be told that I would have to go to Leigh College for a full year before starting work. I thought, I'm 16 years old, just left school, I just want to be given a screwdriver and wire up electrical things.

But I learned quickly that college was a fantastic experience! I was in a class of electrical apprentices from hospitals, factories, manufacturing, support services – a whole mix of kids from across the North West. You suddenly had to build new friendships and new understandings and make your own way in life again.

At the end of my apprenticeship, I was awarded a sort of 'apprentice of the year' by the local training

council and given a trip to Berlin to meet other apprentices there. My first time abroad! Being around different people, experiencing new things, hearing different views and approaches has definitely impacted my management style today.

When you're leading a project like Hinkley Point C, an international project, with multiple cultures, it helps to have a management team around you that think differently. Different people are more interesting. They challenge your thinking and that's a good thing. It leads to better results.

How do you feel doing an apprenticeship scheme benefited you over university?

It doesn't have to be one over the other. You should do what is right for you. My apprenticeship opened up opportunities that I otherwise would not have had. As an apprentice you learn confidence to tackle anything.

After finishing my apprenticeship, I joined the nuclear industry at Heysham 2 power station on the Lancashire coast. Here I worked on the installation and commissioning of the main computer control and protection systems. At the same time, I continued to further my education part-time, gaining an honours degree in Applied Physics at Manchester Metropolitan University. I then went on to complete an MBA at Lancaster University and that allowed me to progress from a technical and engineering role into becoming a leader.

Were you always set on this path? Did you know from a young age what you wanted to do with your career?

The one true passion I had at school was sport. As a youngster, I wanted to be a professional footballer. I have always been determined to make my own choices and not let obstacles get in the way of success. I guess you could say that my goals changed - quite literally - but that sense of striving to be the best you can be and pushing a team forward has helped to shape my later career.

How important is it to you that apprenticeships are promoted as a valid route into the workplace?

As a former apprentice, I know that giving people the chance to learn new skills can change lives and communities for the better. Here at Hinkley Point C we have created more than 1,500 apprenticeships - 500 over our original target - and there's more to come. Our investment is a 100-year commitment to the area and I'm determined that our social impact will endure for many years.

I'm particularly proud to see people from very different backgrounds discover what they are truly capable of, with young men and women starting out in careers that will not only benefit them, but the country's vital skills base. Apprenticeships are a brilliant way to start really exciting and rewarding careers. They're not just a 'valid route' into work, but so much more than that.

What would you say to young people looking to start a career in energy?

Don't be afraid of opportunities and it will never be as bad as you think if it doesn't work out! Every opportunity will give you learning. You will learn a lot about yourself and what it is that you love doing. Do what you love doing.

I've enjoyed every single day of my career, always learning, getting out of bed thinking, okay - what



problems are we going to fix today? And energy plays such a key part in everyone's daily lives, tackling climate change, energy security, delivering the green and growth agendas, driving innovation and developing new skills.

So, for any young person thinking of joining us, I'd say seize the opportunity and don't look back!