Level 4 Software Developer Apprenticeship



Samuel James Culley

Apprentice Developer

I am currently an apprentice developer working on the website GOV.UK. I have been working here for 9 months, and before this I worked as a business analyst on another government web application, Verify. My role involves working within a large team, looking at various applications that make up the government website. In particular, I’ve looked at how the search functionality for the website works, both from the front end and the back end. I’ve also been involved with providing technical support for the 2nd line team, user research, and design sessions for new features.

Before I became a developer, I worked in government organisations, mainly the NHS and the Government Digital Service. Here I learned a lot about how large products are put together, and all the checks and balances that go alongside this. In particular, I have a background in software testing and requirements gathering - and these are both skills I’ve brought to my current role. I’m a fast learner, and I can understand new things fairly confidently. This has let me get acquainted with intricate systems, and contribute to them effectively.

The Government Digital Service helps government work better for everyone by leading digital transformation. They help people interact with government and support government to operate more effectively and efficiently. They create best practice guidance for digital services; set and enforce standards; help the government choose the right technology; and maintain a selection of platforms, including GOV.UK.

My workplace is an open plan office, with rows of desks that are available to anyone on the team. Overall there are at least 100 people on the GOV.UK programme, but within my team there are 11 of us. This includes a Product Manager, Delivery Manager, Designer, Frontend Developer, Apprentice-to-Senior developers, and a Performance Analyst. I’ve worked with all of these people on various different projects, and it’s been great fun contributing to a multidisciplinary team.

My work is done in an Agile environment, which I will go into a bit more detail on later. The programme I am on is organised around quarters, so every three months, people tend to shift around. In addition to this, teams that aren’t needed any longer are closed, and new teams are created depending on various needs. Some teams are more stable and long term than others, and in particular second-line support is done collectively by every team. I have been on the support team for a short amount of time during this apprenticeship, and this is done on a rota basis.

The projects that I worked on in the last year have all revolved around the search tool used by GOV.UK. The search functionality has to cover a wide range of topics and departments, and there is a range of sub-tools that are used to make more refined searches. The projects are listed below in the order that I worked on them. They should be read in this order, as the earlier documents have information that is sometimes referred to in later ones.

1. Adding a Redirect to a New Webpage

2. Adding a Feed Subscription Redirect

3. Adding a Rake Task to Remove Unused Subscriber Lists

4. Fixing Email Signups Across Search Tools

5. Adding Spelling Suggestions to Search Tool

6. Adding Highlights to Relevant Search Terms in Their Results