

The high life: maintain and repair airplanes at 👉 Thomas Cook Airlines

Hearing the words “Thomas Cook” instantly conjures up sunny beaches and package holidays, but the company is currently on its own journey: from “the best-known name in travel to one of the most loved airlines in the UK”, to quote its website. It has a growing fleet of planes to maintain, and comes to PROCAT to find the best apprentices.

This should be no surprise. PROCAT is one of the few colleges in the UK that’s certified by the Civil Aviation Authority to run aviation courses, helped by a close relationship with nearby Southend Airport, and this in turn helps it attract highly motivated aspiring airline engineers.

“I always wanted to be aviation based, so it was really perfect” said Steven Porter, one of the current Thomas Cook Airlines apprentices. “It’s good to get hands on the aircraft... it’s amazing.” After his GCSEs, Steven started as a student at PROCAT and then took the opportunity to earn-as-you-learn via an apprenticeship scheme.

As with most apprenticeships, the course is a mix of theory and practice, with time in college to help students understand the concepts plus days and sometimes weeks at an employer’s place of work.

“It’s, say, a month in the hangar and then maybe two to four weeks down at the college. It works out really well,” said Steven.



Image: Thomas Cook Airlines apprentice Steven Porter fixes a virtual problem on a simulator



Image: PROCAT instructor Anthony Bates helps set up an issue with apprentice Leroy Manuerey at a college open day

PROCAT instructor Anthony Bates is full of praise for the apprentices who take up the challenge. “You’ll find that these guys are hardly ever late into college,” he said. “Their attendance is pretty much 100% for every learner, which translates very well into the industry, because they’ll run a shift system on completion of their apprenticeship.”

Leroy Manyewe, now in the third year of his apprenticeship, is one student who will soon be making the jump from apprentice to full employee. “I could have gone to university, could have gone into IT, software development, which was the field I was in before, after I left school,” he said. Given the choice of software and aviation, though, he knew which was right for him – with the lure of travel a key consideration.

“I’d like to go travelling with my trade, so Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Australia, America, see the world a little bit, see what’s out there,” he said. “Aviation is everywhere, really, every country, so wherever you desire [to go is] just a bit of hopping really.”

As with many other apprentices at PROCAT, Leroy doesn’t see much point in studying at university if you know where your interests lie. “If you go to an interview [for an airline engineering job] with someone who goes to uni or someone on apprenticeship, the apprentice is going to get the job, really, just because you’ve had the experience as well.”

And then there’s the killer point: as an apprentice, you’re typically paid a wage of between £15,000 and £18,000 per year. As Steven said, “Why go to uni if you can get paid and learn at the same time?”