

**In 2019 Danielle moved back in with her parents after completing her languages degree. Eager to start work, over the next two years she would apply for jobs, but without any success. Her confidence was at an all-time low when her careers advisor suggested she try Smart Works.**

**The 25-year-old now works as an Audit and Risk Apprentice at a large London Council and has joined the organisation's Women into Leadership Network.**







# This is Danielle's Story

**Like many students, I thought I would get a job straight after graduating. I assumed that if I applied for enough roles, I would eventually get a place on a graduate scheme. I was naïve about how competitive the graduate jobs market would be.**

I sent out so many applications and faced rejection after rejection. The pandemic made everything so much harder because all the entry level roles just disappeared overnight.

In the meantime, I kept my head above the water by tutoring GCSE students.

My interview skills were lacking, and I didn't know what I wanted to do in terms of my career. Each time I was told I'd been unsuccessful, I thought I'm just not good enough – the constant rejection was a huge hit to my confidence.

By September 2022 I got called for a face-to-face interview. I didn't have any proper interview outfits because the formal clothes I had pre-pandemic didn't fit me anymore.

So I borrowed my mum's blazer and thrifted a blouse. I also dug out some trousers that were really tight, as well as a pair of Chelsea boots which didn't fit with the outfit. Throughout the whole interview I felt aware of the tight fabric on my skin and how the style did not suit me. The endless interview preparation went out the window because I didn't feel comfortable with myself.

After that, my careers advisor suggested I visit Smart Works. From the moment I entered I was made to feel like a celebrity or a princess because of the warmth, love and support the staff poured into me. They helped me pick out a bright red blazer I would never have chosen without them and really helped me explore different styles which fitted my body shape.

Going through my CV with one of the work coaches, I was able to pinpoint which interview questions I found tough. 'Tell me about yourself?' is in my opinion, one of the worst questions to answer. But I role played an answer at Smart Works, so the next time it came up I was able to relax and present the real me. The practice enabled me to start the interview on the right foot, ace the questions and ultimately land my current role!

I've been working on my apprenticeship for three months now and I feel incredibly supported by my mentors at Smart Works. I've attended two Smart Works events since getting my job; one at the Bank of America where I got to meet some inspirational women who are leaders in my industry, and the other at the House of Lords at the launch of the Smart Works Female Unemployment Index. The energy in that room was incredible, I hadn't realised how many barriers women face to get into the workplace and now I'm determined to try and help others.

When I was applying to roles, I always thought that the jobs market was very cutthroat, but the women I've met through Smart Works show me that it can be supportive and caring. Six months ago, networking and talking in a business environment was completely unfamiliar territory to me, so attending these events would have felt impossible. For someone like myself, this whole experience has been literally life changing.





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A burden was lifted  
from my shoulders  
and I left with all  
the tools I needed to  
handle any type of  
interview situation