



CAREERS MENTORING PROGRAMME CASE STUDY

Nathan Harpham from TRL

Nathan Harpham is a Data Analyst at TRL (formerly the Transport Research Laboratory), a team of engineers, scientists, data analysts, psychologists and other specialists working together to create clean and efficient transport.

With a love of numbers and transport, he has landed his perfect job at TRL, and with a background in tutoring also, Nathan is well equipped to walk our students through the next six months of their careers mentoring programme.

How did you choose your career path?

I really like maths and data and I really like transport as well. So I merged the two when I joined the data team at TRL!

Most of my work now involves data (data processing, analysis, statistical analysis) and is project based - for example collision prediction modelling - looking at data around traffic accidents.

What do you think will make you a good mentor?

After doing a Maths Masters I was a Maths tutor and ambassador at school for a while. Also, I'm not that much older than the students so I think we can relate to each other. Most of them seem to be interested in Engineering and Maths, which aligns with what I do.

I hope I can bring a connection between what they're learning now and what they could do as work. I want them to have an appreciation for the skills they are learning and think where they might be able to use them in the future.

How did your first meeting go?

The students asked me a lot of questions! I told them about my experience at school and uni and then the jump into the world of work and how that differs. As we progress, I'm hopeful that each of them will have their own thing they want to discuss, be that is creating a CV, or discussing my kind of work or even just the decision process around what to do after school. I really like the UTC set-up - being able to connect work and school by having engagement with employees is definitely a useful thing.

What sort of skills are needed for your kind of job?

It really helps to have a logical and methodical brain. A fair bit of what I do is building structures of things and linking tables together and querying databases - and then understanding how they link. Knowing what information you want to bring out comes from a logical mindset.

You also need resilience because real-world data is messy - it takes a lot of processing before you can even get to a point where you can consider the best approach. And often you'll have to adapt the approach because you realise actually it's not working properly in that model.

Final words of advice?

I want the students to know they don't have to get their career choice right first time. If they are unsure what they want to do, that's actually fine. It's so easy to swap between different career paths and move jobs - the journey is all part of it - you just have to take something from every job you go into.