

My mentoring journey with BW3 and Manchester Airport, by Daisy Warrell

I joined the mentoring scheme almost by chance two years ago. As someone who struggles to check their emails (I'm working on it), I happened to read an email asking for volunteers for an upcoming scheme for students at my sixth form college. I try to say yes to as many opportunities as I can, so I signed up and went along.

I was partnered up with someone from Manchester Airport. Following our first meeting, which was very casual and loosely structured around getting to know each other, we began meeting once a month at my college. Each time I would bring a range of slightly off-topic stories from the previous weeks. Some of these initially felt too trivial when discussing something as important as my future, especially at 17, when A-levels can feel like a matter of life or death. However, these conversations often lead to some of our most engaging discussions. They left me with a better understanding of my own thoughts and, importantly, a feeling of satisfaction that even though I struggle to make it to class on time, it didn't mean I didn't care about my studies or my future. It was, in fact, mostly just very bad time management – my mentor made clear it was important but helped me see it didn't reflect a deeper problem about myself.

Over our meetings, we spoke about future career paths, past work experience and wider life goals. One of the biggest takeaways from the mentoring was learning how to manage my time better, as poor time management had started to affect almost every area of my life, particularly completing assignments in good time.

Something else became clear to me over the course of our meetings: my struggles with starting work weren't because I was a disinterested student (something I began to think), but instead were partly caused by a small fear of not completing my work to the best of my ability. Ironical, but I worried so much about the finished product that I would push back starting the work until the "right time", when really there is no right time to complete geography course work. My mentor understood this and drew from his experience in journalism, encouraging me to write everything down: the plan, the main points and the ideas in my head.

Although this sounds like a very simple solution, it made a huge difference to me, as someone with dyslexia who often has a million ideas flying around my head at once; putting those ideas onto paper gave me somewhere to start. It helped me to organise my thoughts and make assignments feel much more manageable. In many ways, our conversations became a form of "Academic Therapy" and a place where I could say my thoughts out loud, and eventually realised they were much more complicated in my head.

What the work experience was like

Through our meetings, my mentor invited me to gain work experience at his office at Manchester Airport. I first visited the office two years ago and have recently returned, now at a completely different stage of my life, having come home from university in London for the summer.

During my first week, I was incredibly nervous about being in an office. I was scared to use the staff kitchen and strangely excited to have a key card for the big door. Looking back, these small things show how unfamiliar the working world felt at 17.

That week gave me the opportunity to experience a working environment that I otherwise would have had very little access to. I was lucky enough to have a tour of the airfield, complete work for the media department and sit in on a BBC interview while they toured the new AeroZone education centre at Manchester Airport.

Returning two years later has allowed me to see how much I have changed since that first experience. I am now at university studying environmental science, and the work I have been given has worked alongside my interests. This summer, I spent another week at Manchester Airport, where I spent the afternoon with the BBC following their interview with the TUI pilot (I even managed to sit in the cockpit), I witnessed the briefing for an interview with the managing director of Manchester Airport and worked on summarising a sustainability scheme developed by the airport.

The sustainability work was particularly interesting to me because it connected directly to what I am studying at university. It showed me that the opportunities created through the mentoring scheme weren't limited to helping me decide what I wanted to do when I was 17; they have continued to develop as I have grown and changed.



Why I would recommend the mentoring scheme

The mentoring scheme gave me a place to talk about my academic and personal worries without fear of worrying my parents with some less traditional ideas about my future, or being given less tailored advice from teachers.

Having dedicated time to talk through my racing thoughts is incredibly valuable for a young person; most of the time, I found that my problems became much simpler once I had actually said them out loud. Having someone outside my immediate circle listen, ask questions and offer advice gave me a different perspective on decisions that at the time felt incredibly important.

I therefore cannot recommend enough that the other young people take part in similar mentoring schemes. I understand the idea of talking to someone new can be intimidating, particularly if you are unsure what you are supposed to talk about. But I think that is exactly why these opportunities are so valuable. You don't need to have a perfectly planned career or a list of questions before you start. Sometimes, simply having a conversation can help you understand what you actually want.

For businesses, I would also strongly encourage getting involved; it can be easy to think that mentoring is primarily about what the young person gains from the experience, but I think that there is value on both sides. Businesses have the opportunity you introduce young people to industries and careers they otherwise may never encounter, while gaining a better understanding of the concerns, ambitions and the new perspectives of the next generation.

For me, the mentoring scheme has provided far more than just career advice. It has helped me become more confident in my abilities, understand how I work best, and feel more comfortable talking about my future; most importantly, it has shown me that opportunities don't always need to have an obvious purpose when you first say yes to them.

I am now at university and am incredibly lucky to still be benefiting from the relationship and opportunities created through the mentoring scheme at Manchester Airport they have been valuable across all areas of my life.

