

Supporting Enterprise: Industry Mentors

Bath Chronicle is headline act for September

Overview

September Withers – a BA student in Creative Writing – wanted to gain as much experience as possible within the creative industries, specifically journalism. She applied to Bath Spa University's industry mentors scheme as she felt her CV needed to show her determination to succeed within this competitive industry and might also help her application for a place on a NCTJ course.

About the Project

September had undertaken, and thoroughly enjoyed, a work placement at the Bath Chronicle newspaper, spending a day each in different features departments and getting to know the vast number of tasks and jobs needed to put together a newspaper against deadlines. The Bath Chronicle in previous years had enjoyed a long-term placement of a Bath Spa University graduate in their offices and the sense of helping on the next generation of young journalists. When September was willing to further her association with the Chronicle and the Chronicle were keen to give her this opportunity, it took less than a week to join the dots and arrange for them both to benefit through the Industry Mentors Programme. The Assistant Editor at the Bath Chronicle – Graham Holburn – agreed to become a mentor to September.

After the initial introduction to the programme, Graham and September arranged to meet at the Bath Chronicle's offices once every two weeks, to fit around both Graham's work schedules and September's studies. During periods like the holidays, when university work wasn't taking up so much time, September was invited to spend longer spells at the offices with Paul Wiltshire – the Head of the News Desk, where she was kept busy writing articles and doing interviews.

With 29 years' experience in journalism, Graham Holburn has a wealth of knowledge, experience and contacts, which has enabled him to construct a range of opportunities for September that cover as many aspects of journalism as possible.

Bath Spa University's Industry Mentors Programme develops opportunities for students to receive expert advice, guidance and access to business practices from businesses and organisations in their chosen field. The vision is for the Industry Mentors Programme to be a career and work-related mentoring experience, which will raise a student's sights and broaden horizons in terms of career or learning goals, whilst also developing knowledge, skills and personal qualities that are valued by employers.

Fast Facts

- A four month mentoring partnership has provided a valuable insight into the journalism/publishing industry
- September has gained a range of skills that she will be able to use in many work settings, including writing and interviewing techniques
- Working to deadlines and having her work published have given September focus and a determination to continue to find her way in to publishing and writing

Benefits

Being part of a welcoming and helpful working environment, September was made to feel valued. News desk staff helped her to develop her writing skills, teaching her different techniques and ways to approach introductions to articles and the correct formats used for the newspaper.

September gained confidence in arranging meetings with people who needed to be interviewed and later was given the opportunity to go out on her own to meet the people and do the interview herself before returning to the office to write up the articles. For September, it felt 'fantastic' to be able to say that she was representing the company.

Graham was also very encouraging in terms of September's university course work and offered help if she needed it. Additionally, he also gave September the option of working in the offices and using their computers, which was very useful to her.

Outcomes

When September wasn't in the offices writing articles and gaining valuable experience, Graham set her achievable tasks to undertake before their next scheduled meeting. For example, September would have to find a story that the newspaper might be able to chase up, or work on different introductions to articles to help her get to grips with the structure.

Graham has been instrumental in helping September to find suitable journalism courses and placements to apply for. He and Paul Wiltshire also advised her to start a cuttings book, which she has now done. This means that September now has a portfolio of all the work she has had published, including four articles that have been published in the Bath Chronicle this year and three large articles she wrote for a pet magazine.



September Withers

Perspective

“The industry mentors programme wasn't just a work experience placement, it was much more. I felt really lucky to have a mentor like Graham, who was so willing to help me learn and understand more about the industry. I have felt really well looked after and so comfortable in the company of everyone at the Chronicle.”

September Withers, student mentee

“The industry mentors programme is a two-way vehicle. Not only, I hope, has September benefited, but it has been beneficial for me to step outside the world of newspapers and work with September in tackling any problems that have cropped up. It's given me a fresh perspective on the industry I work in. The programme has brought home to me how different it is now for young people trying to enter journalism, compared with my experiences 29 years ago!”

Graham Holburn, Assistant Editor Bath Chronicle, mentor