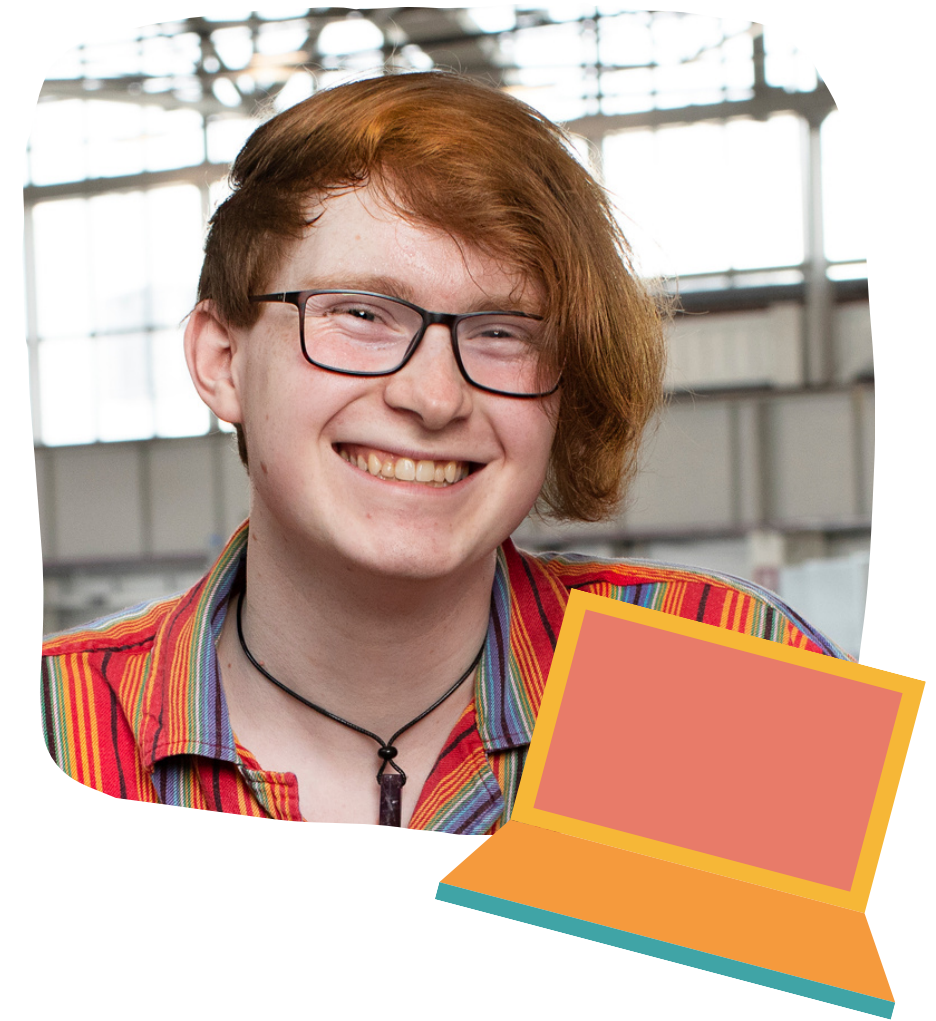


MIKA SHEARWOOD

**SOFTWARE ENGINEER,
SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY
FACILITIES COUNCIL**

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I started my Software Engineering apprenticeship in 2019 with STFC, a world-leading multi-disciplinary science organisation, after realising how much I prefer practical work to theory while studying Maths, Further Maths and Physics. An apprenticeship in computing was a logical next step!

A typical day varies by which team I'm in, but generally breaks down to three things: researching an issue, communicating and planning with the team, and making (usually coding) a solution to that problem.

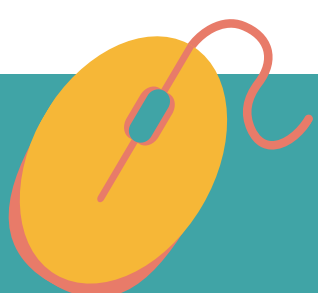
I felt at the time that my school offered me very little guidance about apprenticeships, so it was tricky to get started searching. I wanted to be an apprentice to put my knowledge to practical use, so I took a gap year to get plenty of work experience to back that up. I got interviews at around 10 places before getting the STFC position, and by coincidence, it was my very last option. I couldn't defer university again, so it was a bit of a gamble and thankfully I got the apprenticeship!

My degree apprenticeship is with the University of Roehampton, who supply the materials to QA, the actual course provider.

I get one day a week for online learning: that might be reading over the material, relevant books or literature, or attending virtual workshops. I also have a skills coach to support me with the cross-module larger assignments. The balance is quite nice, and I'm able to get most things done in the allotted 20% time, leaving me most evenings free.

My ultimate goal is to be a positive influence - whether that be showing someone they have options like apprenticeships, or being openly non-binary, or just making someone's day brighter - that would be a success. That's why I like public engagement and theatre. Aside from theatre, I enjoy learning new instruments to record covers of songs and drawing (badly). I've also recently read a lovely novella called 'Travel Light', by Naomi Mitchison.

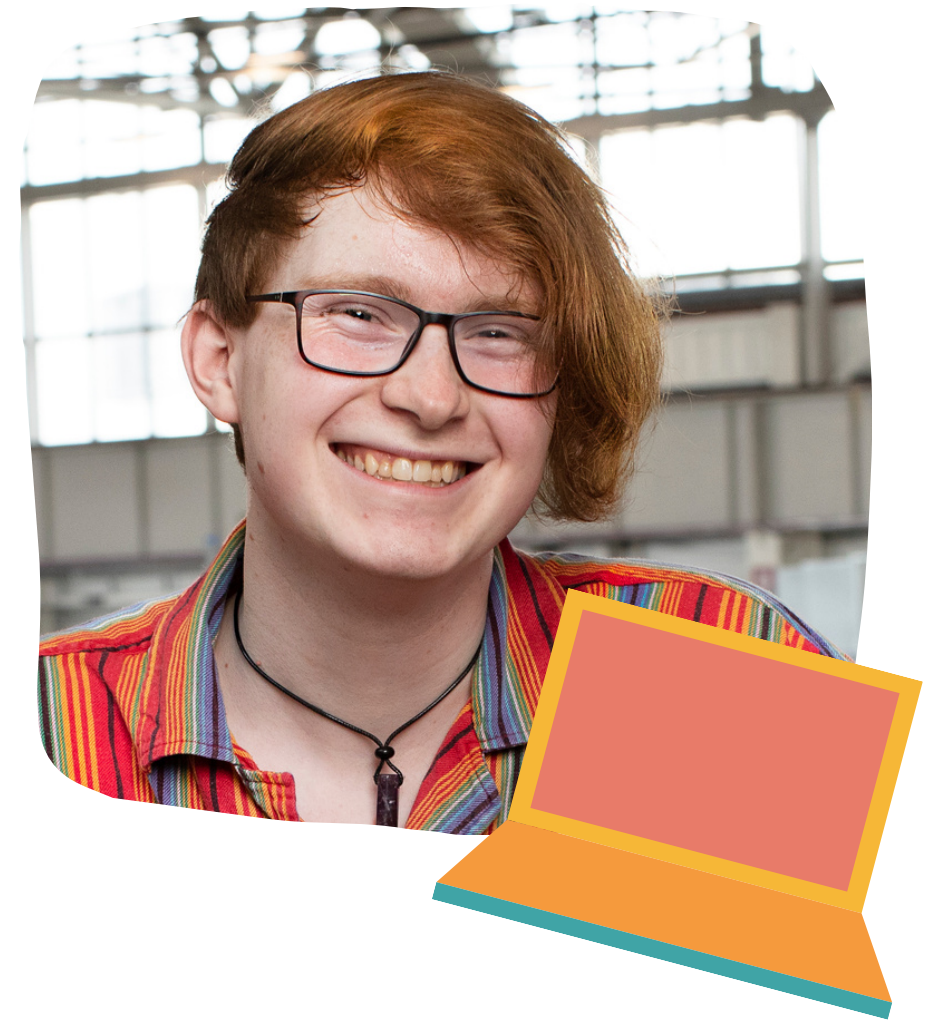
I wish I had known that apprenticeships were even an option! Aside from that, the main bit of advice I'd give is that they're not as intimidating as they sound ('work AND studying?!'). That you won't be missing out on the 'uni life', it's just a different route to a degree, you can still socialise.



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Oh, and finally, throw yourself at every opportunity. Do cool stuff, meet cool people, get experience. That goes for both university or apprenticeships.

The process of finding the apprenticeship was made more difficult by mental health troubles. I don't have an overarching moral for this point, but I think it's important to know that you can succeed even if you're struggling.

It has been a long road for me, and I've found that having this environment here at STFC where I am actively supported and encouraged to reach out (either to others or help or to take opportunities) has done a lot to help me progress and improve myself, in addition to the other things I do.

Like all things, it starts tricky and is scary to get into. It was a total gamble for me, given that I didn't know any apprentices as a reference, and I had to give up university for the chance because I was slow on the uptake.

But it's been amazing for my self-confidence, and the longer I go on the easier the work becomes, the study becomes, I balance my time better, and so on and so forth. It was the best choice that I have ever made.

