



Bridging the gap between the robotics workshop and the workplace

Mentors play a key role in *FIRST* Tech Challenge UK, bridging the gap between the classroom and industry. Joss Benyon, team mentor and all-around advocate for encouraging young people to discover their place in STEM is making an impact on a local and national scale. He volunteers at our events field-side as a Game Changer troubleshooting tech problems, and mentors teams in his local area throughout the season.

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Joss' journey with *FIRST* Tech Challenge UK started at Raytheon UK when he discovered that RTX, which Raytheon UK is part of, is a global sponsor for *FIRST*. The more he looked into what *FIRST* is, the more he was hooked – and we're so glad he did!

Having volunteered field-side at events, Joss wanted to get closer to the in-season action and started mentoring teams in his local area. He took his software engineering expertise and project management skills to the classroom and the teams he's been working with have come on leaps and bounds since.

Although technically-minded, as a mentor, Joss largely helps teams with project management, setting realistic goals and making sure they celebrate their achievements. He guides them to find the right answers, rather than teaches them engineering principles. That's the beauty of being a mentor – you get to see the bigger picture, working alongside teams throughout the season.

“*FIRST* Tech Challenge UK shows young people what's possible, just by trying things, experimenting and not having the final solution right away but being able to iterate and work towards it. It shows them mechanical and software engineering is for everybody and you can get involved at some level even if you're not technical in those ways. It shows them there's more than one path into STEM and there's more than one career within it.”

Joss Benyon, Software Engineer and STEM Lead for Gloucestershire site, Raytheon UK

“You get to give something back to STEM and enjoy yourself while you're doing it.”

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You don't need to know the answers, nor do you need to be a coding expert. All you need is a willingness to make an impact and the skills you use every day in your role.





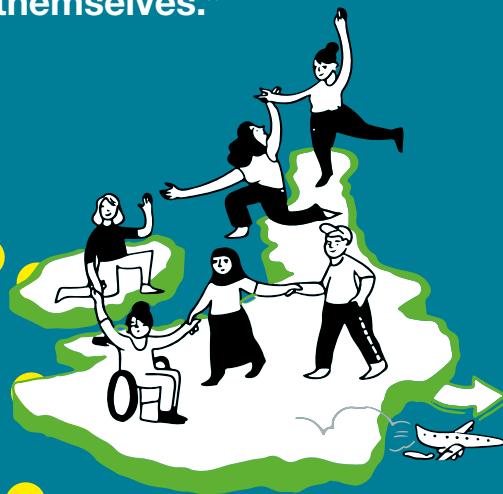
Celebrating success

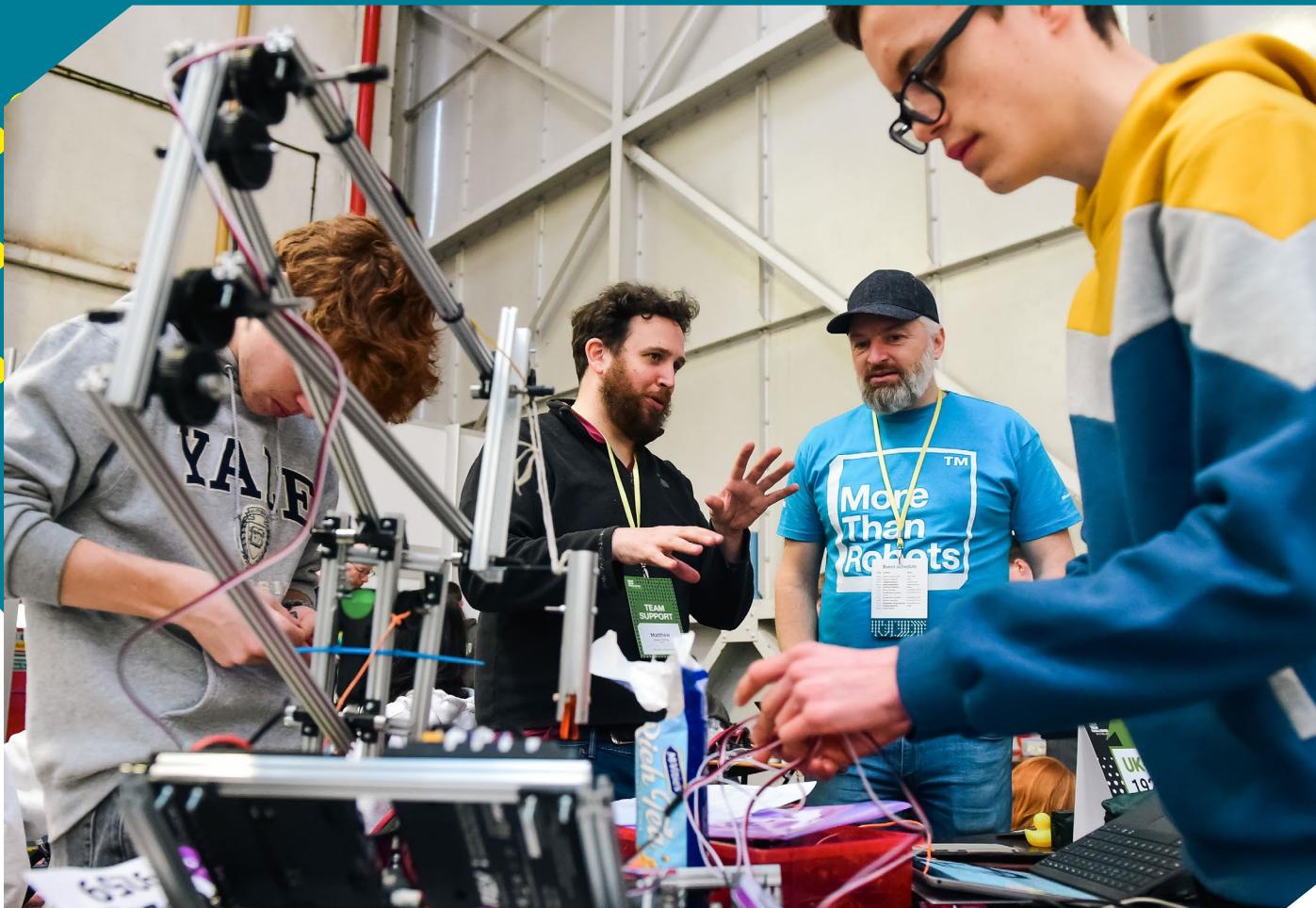
Joss' favourite part of working with teams is seeing them develop. Some young people start quiet and not very confident in their own abilities but gradually, they come out of their shells.

He explains, “**You can see they’re learning not just technical skills, but life skills from all the various aspects of competing and encouraging other teams. I think the greatest professional knows how to celebrate other people’s successes, not just their own, so it’s good to see them be part of the community and develop themselves.**”

But it’s not all give – Joss is learning from the team as well! “**There are definitely things I’ve taken from my mentoring and brought back to the project I’m working on, like new ideas and ways of doing things. For example, a team was using a plug-in for VS Code that I’d not heard of and I took it away to use on my own coding environment. It’s given me experience in managing different people and learning styles too.**”

His teams really value his input and his advice never goes underappreciated. In fact, the teams banded together and nominated him for the 2023-24 Compass Award, which recognises Game Changers’ incredible contributions to supporting young people. They thanked him for always believing in them and being enthusiastic about their progress.





“Just give it a go”

Ultimately, as a team mentor, Joss has a front-row seat to seeing young people become STEM leaders. He shares that the Project Manager of the SGS Berkeley Green UTC team **“has been phenomenal.”** Alongside her studies, she’s created Gantt charts for the whole team and is very on top of things. **“She’s definitely going places, so keep an eye out for her,”** he explains.

Thanks to the team’s hard work and Joss’ support, they won the National Innovate Award in the 2023-24 season, which recognises their creative problem-solving when overcoming challenges on the game field.

Joss’ advice to anyone considering mentoring is to **“just give it a go”** and we think that speaks for itself.

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