Job title: Business Analyst Graduate Trainee

Current employer: NHS Digital

Sector: Health

Tell us about your current role and organisation

NHS Digital is the national information and technology partner to the Health and Social Care system. Our mission is to harness the power of technology and data to improve health and care. We do this by:

- ensuring that every citizen's data is protected
- establishing shared architecture and standards
- implementing services that meet national and local needs
- making better use of data and information

I am a Business Analyst on my 2nd year of the NHS Digital Graduate Scheme. I currently work in Urgent and Emergency Care under the Data Insights team. We are responsible for linking and analysing data from patient journeys to create products and services that improve the evidence-base for operational decision-making.

As a Business Analyst, I investigate operational needs and problems by engaging with stakeholders from across the NHS and seek effective solutions via improvements to new or changed processes. One of the benefits of the Graduate Scheme is that you rotate assignments every 6 months – this gives great exposure to different projects across the NHS. There is so much going on and you have a lot of freedom to pursue the areas in Health that interest you the most!

What sort of person would this role suit? *(i.e. personal skills, qualities and values)*

You need to be a good listener and to not be afraid of asking questions – especially the ones which establish common understanding. Whilst the Business Analyst role is varied, the common thread is the ability to elicit information from stakeholders into clear requirements that are understood across the board.

A proactive approach is key to a career in project delivery, your team have deadlines to hit and often the information you need to progress is in the heads of other people! So managing your time well is a must.

Business Analysis is a mixture of analytical skills and people skills. The role suits someone with can form meaningful relationships with different people across the business spectrum and analyse information, whether qualitative or quantitative.

What does a normal working day look like for you?

Working in an agile team, the morning always starts off with a daily stand-up. This is an opportunity to share your priorities for the day with your team, to highlight any blockers to progress and get the latest information from team-members.

Every day is different. One day, I could be in and out of meetings whether they are calls over skype with team members in different parts of the country or making presentations to external stakeholders about the project I work on. Another day, I may be refining information gathered from previous calls into requirements in the form of user stories or running queries in SQL to summarise data for analysis and visualisation in Power BI. My team are always on hand to help for any questions I might have – which is great!

How did you get to where you are now? *(i.e. what are the entry-level roles graduates would apply for to get where you are?)*

The Business Analysis Graduate Scheme at NHS Digital is an entry-level role, however, competition for places is tough. After I graduated from UCL, I only had lab-related experience. However, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career away from the lab but related to Health/Life Sciences, so I decided to send out prospective applications to organisations in the industry.

After weeks of effort and no results, I decided to volunteer as an intern at a local Health Tech charity whilst continuing my job search. This internship allowed me to gain experience in an office environment whilst demonstrably helping towards a good cause. It was this industry experience which ultimately gave me the transferrable skills for my successful application to NHS Digital.

How would you go about getting experience (*placements, work experience, internship*) in the industry you work in?

Securing a role after graduation is a daunting prospect. In my experience, sitting at home all day to browse job vacancies and send off applications into the abyss is the single worst way to achieve that goal. The best way to get experience in your desired industry is through the people you know. This could be literally anyone e.g. your sibling's friend, your parents or even your UCL Career's consultant!

There are infinitely more opportunities available in the real world than there are job adverts promoting them! And the best way to hear about them is through people who work in that industry. I found it a difficult transition to make moving from the laptop to the phone call. You would be surprised how many people are willing to help if you just speak up!

What are the biggest challenges you face in your work?

Work in the public sector certainly has its challenges. In general, there is a slower pace of change but also ever shifting priorities. Sometimes, projects that you are working on can be deprioritised depending on availability of funds. It can be frustrating to work hard and not see the fruits of your labour manifest!

The NHS is the 5th biggest employer in the world. With this comes the usual challenges of process and internal politics which can obstruct your line of sight to seeing how your work impacts the front line. However, you can temper this by volunteering at hospitals during working hours (this is encouraged) and maintaining a positive attitude in the face of adversity. Keep a positive attitude and you will always win!

What's the progression like/where do you see yourself going from here?

One of the big pros to working in the public sector is the transparency of career progression and the support you receive from your line manager. At the end of the year, I have an interview for a senior BA role. After that, there is a defined career progression structure where you can map experience against competencies. I am also working towards professional qualifications in Business Analysis.

The International Institute of Business Analysis defines a BA role in part as 'an internal consultant'. The mixture of analytical and stakeholder engagement skills in my current position lend themselves well to other roles in consultancy which may well be a move I consider further down the line.

What top tips would you pass on to students interested in this type of work? *(i.e. any particular skills, knowledge, experiences, volunteering, extracurricular activities)*

Communication skills are a key weapon in the Business Analyst's arsenal. You can bolster these at university by practicing your presentation skills – this will be handy whichever career path you choose!

You can learn most BA knowledge on the job, although having experience in constructing process maps using tools like PowerPoint is a definite plus. For those with an interest in data, I would recommend familiarising yourself with SQL as this is a sought-after skill for many employers.

Business Analysis is closely tied with the Project Delivery environment. Having examples of personal projects that are important to you and that you have seen through from start to finish can help demonstrate that you have the skills needed to succeed in business.

Finally, the best tip I can pass to you is to be enthusiastic in whatever you do. This is particularly true at interview! No matter how uncomfortable the situation, if you maintain a positive attitude you will bring people with you. Good luck!