

Case Study: Alumni

Benjamin, Aeronautics (MEng)

Graduation Year: 1998

Job Title: New Vehicle Development & Testing Manager

Employer: PSA Peugeot Citroen

What has been your career path up until now?

Based in France, I spent 3 years doing vehicle pollution testing on rolling road test benches, before 3 years as a vehicle performance development engineer. This second role took me to Japan (13 times), Brazil, Mexico, Finland (3 times), Spain (5 times) Germany, and England testing new cars and developing them with engine calibration engineers. This used both my French and English language skills, the French having been learned through my ERASMUS year in Europe. Now I am a development and test manager for new vehicles, coordinating a team of 8, as well as 15 specialist engineers who I have to manage without being their direct boss.

What does your job involve?

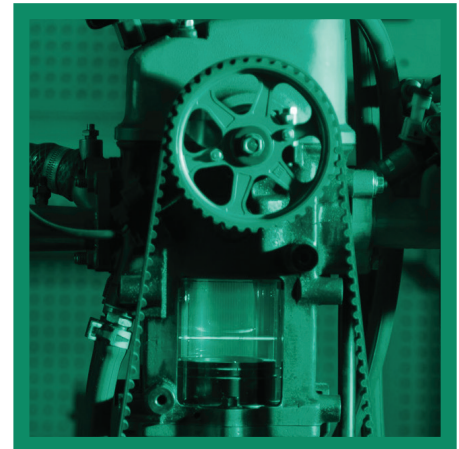
A typical day will involve reading through some test reports and finding out what problems are to be solved, before working out what to do about them, participating in several meetings ensuring test engineers are coordinated with the engine development department and the new vehicle project department, checking up on my team, thinking about the future of the team (size, work sharing) and dealing with their personal issues, building relationships TAKES TIME! I'll finish off taking my boss for a short test drive on the tracks to explain some of the technical issues we are dealing with before the inevitable few hours of catching up with the day's emails.

Can you name three things you like about your job?

Testing cars, what I work on being so in touch with the real world (everyone has an opinion on cars, global warming from cars is an issue and I love being in the middle of it making each car "a little bit of me"), managing my team and learning how to do it (yes, even after 10 years I still have much to learn).

Is there anything you are less keen on?

The amount of emails to deal with, working in a huge company which whilst it has huge resources allowing you to let your imagination run free also has the inertia of a huge machine which sometimes feels like you're stifled - sometimes I wish I was in a company of 100 people and not 200,000. Also the difficulty finding the right balance between how much I feel my job is my life (because I enjoy it) and how much I feel my wife is my life (because that's what it's really about, isn't it?)



**"Internships: get one!
Go out and look hard, it
really is worth it"**

- Benjamin



Did you choose your course with this particular occupation in mind?

I chose aeronautics at Imperial simply because I wanted to be an engineer and it was one of (if not the) best engineering course in the UK. 1st and 2nd year felt a little too theoretical, despite the practical exercises.

What part of your course did you particularly enjoy?

The 3rd year in Europe (France) was the best choice I ever made, since it opened my eyes so much and, I have to admit, I had a much better time in France than in London thanks to the simple fact that it was so, so, so much cheaper. I didn't need to have a job in France (I did in London, and it really impacted my studies). Discovering new culture, making the most of weekends travelling and learning French were just fantastic. 4th year was much more enjoyable since (1) it seemed like it was more applied engineering, everything we'd learned before suddenly seemed to make more sense as we saw what we could really do with it, and (2) because I asked for help, financially (grandparents) and was hence lucky enough not to have to work during 4th year and thus make the most of my studies. It really did make a difference, so all I'm trying to say is: be proud, try to shoulder it all yourself, but at the same time, don't be afraid to ask for financial help. The other thing I regret is not having done an internship whilst at Imperial. I did search, but not hard enough and I didn't realise at the time just how great a difference that would've made both to my experience and on my CV.

Could you give us one or more career tips for Imperial graduates?

1. Financial: be careful! I don't have any regrets and I'd certainly do it all again the same way, but whilst student loans are a good investment it will take you years to pay back that money. I finished last month, after 9 YEARS! Until 3 years ago I couldn't afford to buy a house, despite a good salary. Just remember every pound you spend will have to be paid back.
2. Internships: get one! Go out and look hard, it really is worth it and not doing one is something I regret.
3. Looking for jobs: don't think coming from Imperial makes you better than anyone else! Whilst it is a fantastic foundation, there are a lot of other good people out there. Lose the attitude (if you have one!)
4. Masters / MBA: if you're not sure what you want to do, but you have an idea for the field, the best idea is to find a good specialised masters or MBA. A degree from imperial is great, but something on top of that is fantastic, and while doing it you're sure to make up your mind what you really want to do. In my case, I did a masters in engine engineering in France, which led to my job in France and was the perfect way to set me up for car engineering given that I felt, despite it being very good, that my aeronautics degree had somewhat skipped over car engineering too fast.
5. Life / Study: I found the perfect balance in 4th year. It's just a pity it took so long to find it. While going out and having fun after lectures is tempting, you can have just as much fun if you set yourself some simple rules. My rules in 4th year were to finish lectures, work until 9pm or 10pm every day, and only after that go out and meet some friends for a few drinks. My results in 4th year were not just slightly better, but much, much better than 1st year... I just wish someone had explained that earlier. It's much better than working all night at the last minute.