### Meet the Academic – Kevin Couling

### Introduction

My name is Kevin Couling. I am a third year, PhD student here studying active manufacturing or 3D printing as it's more commonly known.

# What route did you take into your current role?

I did GCSE's at school, really enjoyed science and I really wanted to go further. However, I was informed that I wasn't quite smart enough, didn't have the grades to go into a levels, so I took a different route and went down and did a BTEC National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering. Which got me into my family trait, which is Victorian Steam railways and my boss at the time who pushed me, made me realise and appreciate I could do more and was capable of more. So I went back to university to further my education.

### What sort of science activities did you do at school when you were younger?

I will be honest, school was good, was fun. There was lots of stuff. I remember making pencil cases and toothbrush holders, but most of what I did in my youth was probably what my brothers and I did. We used to take apart a lawn mowers, motorbikes, and chainsaws, anything we could that had an engine that rotated. Even building treehouses. You'd be surprised how much science goes into one of those to make sure you're safe.

# How has the reality of your job measured up to your expectations?

You go to university thinking, right? I'm going to learn what the world knows about this subject and then you get into that subject and you realise, well, actually we know very little. So it's like you end up asking all these questions which ask more questions. So like coming in to doing my PhD, I've helped with other projects and you realise this stuff that we can do as engineers from one industry that helps others because they have not quite thought about it. Apply the technology, especially 3D printing, which you can use in so much.

#### What inspired you to become an engineer?

I have a love for challenges. It's really hard to explain. There is something in my mind that is just fascinated by how something is built and made, what's gone into achieve that? Engineering is playing.

# What advice would you give for someone aspiring to go into a STEM career?

It's fun. It's enjoyable. When I came up with one of my concepts for my PhD for my materials, I was in a conference on medieval Medicine books, which is what gave me the idea to try something different and it was purely playing with chemicals which you have to do cautiously. But if you do it right, you can come up with a new material and develop. So this is somebody like myself. No, A levels, was told I was not smart enough, pushing the boundaries of what is the current state-of-the-art technology and it's really cool doing that sort of work.