

Learning to Be Professional: The Story of My Placement Experience

**SCEPTrE / Professional Training and
Careers Committee 2008 Essay Competition**

Contents

Preface

3

Entry	Academic Field	Placement Role and Site	Synopsis	page
1	Management	Buying and merchandising finance intern in a major clothing retailer	A hands-on role in the finance industry of a favourite clothing retailer led to a graduate job offer.	4
2	Management	Operations intern at a large international computer company	The initial temptation to climb the social ladder at work later challenged this student to re-evaluate his priorities.	7
3	Sociology	Part 1: Runner at a creative media production company Part 2: Client services coordinator at a media trends research firm	After the first creative media company fell into administration, this student gained valuable skills in balancing multiple priorities.	10
4	Entrepreneurship in Technology, IT and Business degree	Marketing assistant at a major international software producer	A large-scale software marketing promotion led to a team Marketing Director's Award.	16
5	Law	Legal assistant at a firm in France	Pursuing a placement abroad meant learning to balance personal and professional interests.	23
6	Music & Sound Recording	Runner/Assistant engineer at a music recording studio	Advancing from simple tasks as a runner, this student gained professional sound editing skills and helped set up a major movie soundtrack recording session.	26
7	Psychology	Educational psychology intern at a special autism school	A new placement position was created for this student to work hands-on with challenging autistic students.	30
8	International Hospitality Management	Hospitality intern at a hotel in New Zealand	A bold decision to work abroad led to dramatic personal and professional growth during "the best year of my life."	34
9	Management	Procurement trainee at a global pharmaceutical company	Taking the initiative to produce a comprehensive company procurement report led to a leadership award.	37
10	Management	Marketing assistant in a global electronics company	Top tips on gaining the most from your placement: meet regularly with managers, take on a major project and start networking!	41
11	Biochemistry	Cancer researcher at a university in Finland	The decision to pursue cancer research in Finland resulted in an international conference presentation and overcoming culture shock.	44
12	Psychology	Intern at a psychiatry postgraduate research institute	Balancing three jobs and a long commute, this student gained practical exposure to conducting psychology research projects.	47
13	Food Science and Nutrition	Intern at a product and ingredient development laboratory	From the initial concept to the final result, this student saw all the stages of bringing a product to the supermarket shelves.	52
14	Computing and Information Technology	Programmer/analyst at a major global pharmaceutical company	"Learning to be a professional was not just about learning more technical skills, but learning how to work collaboratively in a team."	55

15	Chemistry	Lab technician at a fuel cell development firm	Overcoming an educational weakness, this student specifically chose a lab-intensive environment to improve her employability.	59
16	Dance, Film & Theatre	Intern at a major touring ballet company	"This professional work placement has been integral in introducing an area of the dance industry for which I am now passionate and intent to succeed in."	62
17	Chemical Engineering	Intern at chemical engineering contracting firm	A position with a major chemical engineering contractor provided opportunities to witness first-hand all the phases of an engineering project.	66
18	Psychology	Learning support assistant in a secondary school	This student overcame many challenges with special education students, misbehaving pupils, and a steep learning curve.	69
19	Mechanical, Medical & Aerospace Engineering	Engineering support intern with major airline producer in France	A keen awareness of the technical context of the workplace was gained during this aerospace engineering placement.	72
20	Management	Secretariat administrator in global petroleum industry	"My placement has been a challenging, rewarding, and enlightening experience that has given me many transferable skills that I will be able to take forward with me in my future career."	77
21	Business Management	Commercial assistant at an entrepreneurial baby food company	After a series of challenges and financial crises at a small company, "I don't know how I survived but I'm very proud to say I did."	81
22	Psychology	Occupational psychologist at assessment and consultancy unit	Working in an occupational assessment office developed organisational skills and time management.	86
23	Psychology	Research project evaluator at a local educational Excellence Cluster	This student gained confidence and independence by completing a major research project for a local council educational enterprise.	90
24	Psychology	Psychology assistant at a prison	Assisting in a prison psychology department offered some unique life experiences and a change of career paths.	94
25	Music & Sound Recording	Assistant at an independent recording studio	This student used her creative and technical skills in a music recording studio and was credited on several albums.	98
26	Psychology	Intern in community mental health team	An inside perspective of a community mental health organisation raised awareness of challenges in the field.	102
27	Law	Parliamentary lobbyist intern at climate change campaign	Bold efforts to campaign against climate change resulted in a parliamentary bill: "I feel honoured and proud to have been part of such a campaign effort."	111
28	Music & Sound Recording	Product specialist in digital media industry	A few perks of working in the digital media industry included travel in Europe, a salary increase, and a Playstation 3.	113

Preface

SCEPTRe (Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education) invited returning Professional Training Year (PTY) placement students to submit entries for a story-telling competition on the theme “What did learning to be professional through the work placement experience mean?” Students were encouraged to develop creative and imaginative accounts of the physical, intellectual, and emotional challenges of their individual placement experiences. Twenty-eight students submitted essays from a broad array of academic disciplines and professional fields. Their stories are collected in the following document. All references to students’ names and placement locations have been anonymised. SCEPTRe would like to thank all the contributors who have generously shared their experiences of learning to be professional.

**1. Learning to be professional:
The story of my placement experience.
Faculty of Management
Buying and merchandising finance intern in a major clothing retailer**

Firstly and arguably most importantly; the dilemma between participating in an industrial placement, or getting onto the career ladder as soon as possible through graduate employment will always demand contemplation. As a second year undergraduate student I was initially unsure which option would be most advantageous for me however after researching the different opportunities available and hearing from previous placement students I was absolutely certain that a placement could actually prove invaluable for me.

A keen interest in finance and addiction to fashion primarily lead me to (a specific company) and indeed this is where I ultimately completed my placement. Their selection process for finance placement involves five stages (consisting online application form, culture questionnaire, numerical ability test, telephone interview and full day assessment centre) and this very rigorous assessment process ensures they find the right candidates.

My top tips when applying for placement are to **start early** (in terms of thinking about field you would like to go into and why and how this fits in with your wider career goals), **be prepared** (in terms of the application processes) and **apply for more than one company**. In my case I was determined to work for my chosen company; it was the only company I applied and although it paid off I now realise how risky and potentially destructive this could have been. The whole application processes of applying for any placement will build you into a better professional so don't put all your eggs in one basket.

I was placed in the finance team and my role involved both Buying and Merchandising Finance and Central Costs Finance. I relished the opportunity to experience, at first hand, how two crucial functions of the finance operation worked and I felt extremely privileged to be in this position. My team consisted of 10 people including the finance director and senior finance manager and was then split into finance managers and finance analysts in each of the different areas of brand finance. From day one my team were absolutely amazing and it is them that I owe enjoying every single day of my placement. The ability to learn from experienced finance managers and analysts helped me thrive in high level of responsibility that I was given.

Buying and Merchandising Finance involved the weekly and month end reporting for the brand director and senior management by creating and using information in collaboration with the buying and merchandising teams. Central Costs Finance required me to report and reforecast the budgets of each of the different departments within the brand, to report travel and telephone costs of each of the brands different cost centres and to complete ad-hoc tasks such as analysing the performance of marketing promotions.

My company gives its placement students a high level of responsibility from the moment they start and this allowed me to significantly contribute to both the team and the brands success. I received an excellent training package that enabled me to carry out my job effectively. A two week handover with my predecessor enabled me to learn from the person that knew how to do the job the best, and after my predecessor had left I was able to continuously learn from the teams Finance Managers and experienced Finance Analysts.

The application of year One and Two knowledge from University enabled me to put into practice what I had actually learnt and I thought this was very rewarding. The knowledge that I had learned in the Accounting modules “Management Accounting” and “Managerial Accounting” during University were applied to the role as Buying and Merchandising finance dealt with profit and loss accounts and the Central Costs role involved accounting ledgers. Additionally the use of “soft skill” courses during the “Management Skills” modules and the Professional Training Orientation Course module were also continuously put into practice during the year.

The main objective of tertiary education such as University is, for me, to better equip myself with the technical and personal skills needed for a successful career in my chosen industry. The placement year offered me the first step in terms of experience in my chosen industry and thus provided me with first steps into my future career path.

A twelve month finance placement for the UK’s largest womenswear clothing retailer has given me an uncensored observation of what will be expected of me in post graduation employment. My company’s placement students are given extensive training for the role in which they work and throughout the placement there is huge scope for development.

As I became established in my role I attended numerous training courses which helped me to perform in my role more effectively. My company offers a range of courses for both technical development and management development. I attended technical courses to improve my use of the company’s systems, for example a course on Microsoft Excel enabled me to learn ways to improve my efficiency such as creating macros and improve my accuracy such as IF(ISERROR) formulae and these both allowed me to save valuable time. The use of management courses such as “Working With Others” enabled me to perform the soft skills more effectively and put into practice some of the theories I have learned during Levels One and Two at University for example the Myers Briggs Type Indicator.

I found my personal development was further enriched by the additional wealth of knowledge I gained from participating in other activities such as Away Days, Brand Updates and Press Launches. These activities increased my wider knowledge of the company’s operational activities and allowed for relationships with the team, the brand and the wider finance community to be built and strengthened.

The opportunity to experience the industry at first hand and the wealth of experience that I have gained has made me realise that a career in finance is exactly what I want. I now have a clear and structured career path to work towards during my final year of University and beyond. I am extremely grateful to my company for the giving me the opportunity to participate in such a varied and structured training programme and feel such training will benefit for many years to come.

The benefits that the placement year has offered me are endless and I literally feel so privileged to have had such an amazing experience. After leaving second year as an undergraduate that was A) rather shy and B) unsure about what they wanted to do in the future I have returned to uni as a confident final year student that knows exactly what they want to do in the future. I am 100% committed to a career within the finance industry and indeed I cannot wait to continue my career as a graduate.

I was fortunate enough for my company to offer me a place on their Finance Graduate Programme upon completion of my degree and I cannot wait to the return to the company. The skills that I have learnt on placement are invaluable and can be used throughout my future with

the company. I see my placement experience as the start of the career and it has given me solid foundations in which to build on in the future. Although I was ecstatic that I was offered a contract, even if I hadn't have been I wouldn't change my placement experience for the world. In both professional and personal contexts I have picked up a wealth of priceless experiences and this has enabled me to meet many of my aims for higher education.

My best piece of advice that I can give to students about to embark on placement is to network. I literally spoke to as many people as possible at all levels and all departments of the organization throughout my placement experience. I was not only able to make a lot of new friends but I was able to build a wealth of contacts that I used both throughout my placement year and beyond. I would also say it's really important they students budget for their placement, keep in contact with the university (and specifically start thinking about final year early) and finally have fun, the placement experience is an extremely unique one that cannot be repeated ultimately it's your year so enjoy it.

I have 100% enjoyed my PTY experience and would recommend it to any student. I have gained a vast amount of experience in both the technical and personal skills required for a career within the finance industry and my company. I believe the offer of a contract has allowed me to achieve my ultimate goal and goes to show that those who put in 100% gain high rewards. I relish to opportunity to pursue a career in the Finance industry after graduation and I very much look forward to returning to my company in the future.

2. Get noticed

Faculty of Management

Operations intern at a large international computer company

This was the single, solitary thought that was going through my head as I walked through the clear glass, revolving doors of my potential company. I knew that the statistical odds of successfully qualifying for a position on their Intern Program were slim. Over 2,000 applicants and only around 100 jobs? That's 1 in 20 and there were already 15 other undergrads sitting in the waiting area already. I was one step ahead though. I was wearing my new black suit; a bright pink Ted Baker shirt with an equally outrageous (yet matching and classy) tie and new shoes that my girlfriend at the time had picked out for me. I looked stylish and confident. What man wouldn't in a pink suit?

As it turned out, style was won out by substance this time around and I was not picked for that particular marketing role. I was however a 'strong candidate' and would be considered for other roles. So that was the assessment day over with. I had already passed through two telephone interviews and the day had been filled with a quick roundtable introduction of employees and candidates, a brief presentation on your past experience and what you are there to offer, a quick lunch and finally an interview with the hiring managers.

Tip for Phone Interviews: Never tell the person interviewing you that you aren't wearing any clothes. As honest and well-intentioned your comment may be, there are some times where certain degrees of honesty... just aren't necessary.

So followed another series of phone interviews; I remained 'unsuitable' with no other feedback than that. By now I was participating in the interviews fully clothed and answering clearly and concisely. The answers were also now thoroughly rehearsed. Finally I received a call from the recruiter asking if I'd be interested in a job in the Operations department. I confirmed my interest, thanked the lady, put down the phone and ironed my pink shirt.

I once again walked through the clear glass, revolving doors but this time there were no other candidates. Not an undergrad in sight. I felt good. I sat down in the waiting area for a minute or two while the receptionist called through to let them know that I had arrived. I was met by the current Intern. I spoke with him briefly and we walked through to the Operations department to meet the manager and his 'deputy'. We walked through to a 'quiet room' and began the interview.

The interview was really more of a 'get to know you' session. We discussed the job but spoke more along the lines of the people I would be dealing with and the team and where it sits in the organisation. This was my manager's style. The interview concluded and I thanked them all for their time and left the building. I travelled then to a Fancy Dress Party... the theme was either Smurfs or Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles. This was of little concern to me as I received the call telling me that they wanted me for the job. It was a good night.

July came round sooner than I had expected and my first day had arrived. The Intern Induction went on and we I became accustomed to the surroundings. I met the team, I met the Director of Operations and I met my fellow intern.

I still haven't worked out whether it was of any relevance that I was surrounded by 50 other Interns, or the fact the Intern Program had such high visibility, but my priority then and there was not to excel at my job... that could come later. My priority was to climb the social ladder as

quickly as I could. I had a fresh start, I could be myself and I was excited. The possibilities were endless and so began the emails.

The Interns are privileged with their own collective email address. This is used to quickly communicate information to all Interns within that particular location but soon became a medium for jokes, pictures, stories and ultimately 'Intern Banter'. This became the common term for any 'unofficial' communication between Interns and I became familiar with this very quickly. After several nights out with the Interns, there were plenty of stories to tell and plenty of opportunities to claim a place in the social hierarchy. With no hint of arrogance and complete humility, I became a 'key' member of the Intern Community concentered by a particular email authored by myself re-telling the events of one particular evening, which has no business being discussed here.

So things were good. I was popular, I was enjoying my work and I liked my team. I had made a lot of new friends who I'd become close with and I was known throughout the company. Unfortunately, what I didn't fully appreciate at the time was the fact that this coin has two sides. On one hand, I had an almost 'celebrity' status amongst my peers and that is without a doubt, an excellent feeling. On the other hand however, the reasons for my popularity were not exactly something you'd place in a marketing campaign. Not for my company at least.

What hadn't even occurred to me was the concept of how other people perceived me. As far as I was concerned, I was well-liked, the conversations that I'd had with others in the business were going well with everyone leaving with a smile on their face and so far I had had no complaints of my work. I'd had one instance where a manager from another department had told me to 'please be quiet' (more or less) because I was tapping a pen on the desk for quite some time and at quite some volume. At the end of the day I approached him and apologised respectfully for a second time. We spoke for a few minutes and became quite friendly after that.

I was under the impression that I'd had no complaints of my work up until my first managerial review. This was... a reality check. As it turned out, there had been complaints. These complaints were never brought to me directly, but were directed to my manager. My conduct was seen by many as inappropriate. The work I'd been doing was sub-standard. I was missing deadlines and losing track of important information. I remember protesting at the fact that nobody had brought their problems to me directly, but of course that didn't carry much weight.

In retrospect, it was arrogant of me, but that was the stage I was at. With this Internship, I had found a new person in myself, a better version of what I once was. I had the same values and the same convictions, but I was more confident and better able to 'put myself out there'. However, I hadn't become entirely used to it yet. I didn't know how to control the new found confidence in myself or when and where to put my extroversion to good use. I remember my manager once telling me "sometimes, less is more... if you talk too much; eventually you lose the value of what you're saying."

So this was the first of what I'm afraid to say was a series of reviews. Each time I would listen to the advice and make the improvements I needed to and this would last for some time. I learned valuable time management skills, I learned how to organise and prioritise my work, and I learned when it was appropriate to talk casually and when it was all business. But with each new advance, I would eventually fall back again into my old ways. This became increasingly frustrating for my manager, not just because he was the first point of escalation... but because he had taken a sincere and genuine interest into my success and development.

My manager knew that I was a prominent member of the Intern Community and he also knew that it was difficult to find the balance between work and social. But the fact of the matter was that I was causing our department to suffer. My job role was extremely visible within the business as we acted as a hub for all the other departments within our division. I, along with my Intern colleague Mark were the focal point for every new piece of business that the sales force had won and it was our responsibility to ensure that it was booked and recorded into the system before the month closed under what were sometimes high-pressured situations. If we weren't performing our roles then the repercussions included a loss of revenue, inconsistent and unreliable data and ultimately failure to meet certain audit requirements. Clearly then, mine was not a position where you could afford to just 'get-along'.

The final review came around December / January time, when I was told in no uncertain terms by my exasperated manager, that I had to get my act together. I had been performing well up until that point and I had finally started to get back the respect that I had lost in the previous months. Regrettably though, I had thought to myself that I had finally 'made it' and could now relax; another instance where I would fall back to my old habits. For simplicity, all I will say is that I had abused a trust that I had developed since my first day and that was... unacceptable. And it was.

While I had never intentionally acted in a way that would be detrimental to my team, the fact is I had been, and I needed to establish my priorities once and for all. I took some time to think about what I was really trying to get out of this year. Why had I applied for the position in the first place? What do I want to achieve? How do I want to be remembered? None of these were easy questions to answer. It is amazing though how you can change your perspective so drastically when you put the effort in.

I knew that Monday would be tough. The situation I had created for myself was not a simple one to fix and I knew that I would have to spend time making up for that while simultaneously giving my all to the role I had promised to fulfil. It was going to be hard, but I took responsibility for that.

I put the 'Intern Banter' on back burner. I kept my social conversations short and to an overall minimum. I was still fun to be around and I was still enjoying myself, but I had finally realised what mattered most to me. My time there was never meant to be about having a fan club. It was never meant to be just another place I could hang out. It was about me taking on the challenges of the real world to see how I measured up. It was a test of my character.

What surprised me though is how much more I began to enjoy myself once I had gotten the job down. As soon as I started to excel, I started to earn respect. People began to trust my judgement. They came to be for consultation. I helped substantially in the co-ordination of the busiest financial close of that year. The service that I was providing had become a reflection of myself. I could never have imagined that the feeling of doing my job well would be so rewarding. It may sound cliché, but it's the truth. The relationships I built with my team, my manager and others by the end stay with me today and I've been invited back for the Christmas Ball.

So how did I learn to be professional? For me personally it revolved purely around my priorities and getting over my ego. I had always had the potential to perform the job well; otherwise I wouldn't have been awarded the position. At no point was there anything stopping me doing so, apart from my own lack of dedication. I am a strong believer in self-expression and a firm opponent of having my behaviour dictated to me, but there is a very fine line between self-expression and arrogance. There is a certain respect that you should carry for others at all times and that can require compromise. Without this, you can end up stubborn and egotistical. To me, that is the essence of professionalism; a mutual respect.

3. Department of Sociology

Part 1: Runner at a creative media production company

Part 2: Client services coordinator at a media trends research firm

Introduction

The following report will give a detailed analysis of the invaluable experiences of my work placement year. Due to unforeseeable circumstances, the company where I was to complete my placement year went into administration after a few months, which led me to undertake a second placement for the remainder of the year. To provide the best reflection of my year in industry, I will analyse each placement separately and then evaluate my experiences over the year as a whole.

Description of Company 1

For my first placement I worked for a small production company. Due to the nature of their work a lot of the staff worked on a freelance basis. Although the company had grown considerably since its initial development, there was still only 17 permanent staff including four directors who owned the company. Predominantly male, the company consisted of young 'creatives' who were highly passionate about their job and great fun to work with.

The company was organised into four departments:

TV and Digital (Video)

Corporate

Mobile Television

Graphics

The main output for the company was in video production and Mobile Television. Corporate production had also begun to develop massively during my time with the company. Their impressive client list included: Disney, Nokia, FHM, Coke, Next and Yahoo. They also produced a variety of content for sky, channel 4 and channel 5.

My Role

I was surprised at how easy the application process was for getting a job as a runner. Although I had an interview, it was extremely relaxed, nothing like I had prepared myself for. I originally thought this may have been because the placement was unpaid, however I later learned that runners weren't usually interviewed as they were only contracted to work for two weeks. I was, affectively, a runner with an extended contract. As the weeks continued I found myself been given more responsibility, a perk the staff had alerted me to from the beginning.

My role within the company varied hugely. In the first few weeks I completed basic runner duties such as reception cover and assisting the permanent staff. This would usually involve booking couriers and buying props and equipment for upcoming shoots. Being a runner is extremely disheartening at times. You are 'on hand' to assist the staff in any way. I was one of three or four at times, which meant we would all wait at reception for someone to ask for help.

I was fortunate in that I was able to attend a variety of different shoots in my first few weeks with the company, allowing me to gain some hands on experience. My duties on shoots included assisting the talent and staff and helping to set up the necessary equipment. Although

being on a shoot was exciting and perhaps far more beneficial, experience wise than being in the office, the hours were very long and the majority of the work involved was physical.

Perhaps the best way to provide an account of my experience with the company is to evaluate my role within each separate production.

My first major production was a major sporting event—a titanic production that we were producing for Sky One. The event consisted of two football games, one with ex England players and the second with celebrities. Due to the scale of the production, our company worked alongside another freelance production team who were sited in our offices for several months. Although when I had first joined the company, the organisation for the event was in its final stages. I was still involved in a lot of the preparation. During meetings the Production Manager would delegate work to me such as organising travel and accommodation for the crew. This finally gave me a sense of belonging and after the event, a great feeling of satisfaction to see how the whole project had come together.

During the actual filming of the event I performed a variety of tasks. Aside from the general runner tasks mentioned previously, I was also called upon to sit in the commentators box and help name celebrities as the commentators were sometimes unsure. Admittedly, one of the highlights was having an 'access all areas' pass and attending the celebrity after-party! The event was however, to me, the beginning of my career in production, in terms of how my hard work was noticed and the experience I gained from working on such a large event.

After the major event, the staff began to ask for me specifically to help them. I was given more responsibility and for a period of two weeks I unofficially took over from the production Manager who was on annual leave. This was a great experience, as I had to make big decisions and deal with a lot of high profile people in the industry.

Another project that proved particularly invaluable to me was for a Sky website. This was another large project that we were doing which involved filming hundreds of cars and providing an evaluation of each, similar to the Autotrader website. For this I was in charge of finding locations for the cars to be filmed. Dropped into the deep end once again, I was sent off alone with a camera to various locations across the country to find a suitable place for the shoots. Although this was at times, great fun, it was my responsibility, which lead to me feeling pressured at times when it proved almost impossible to find a suitable location in such a short amount of time. At this point I was beginning to feel increasingly frustrated with my company for giving me perhaps too much responsibility for the little experience I had. It was also apparent that our company was having problems financially and with staff. This meant I was delegated jobs that were indeed out of my league, simply because I was the only person who was available to undertake them.

The reasons behind many of the problems I experienced, I feel, were due to the disorganisation of the company. This was predominantly because the company had grown too big too quickly and did not have adequate resources. There were unnecessary problems I encountered on a daily basis, such as not being able to book a courier, as we had not paid our account. This then had a knock on affect, which lead to a tense atmosphere within the company. My other colleagues were also becoming increasing frustrated with the lack of resources.

After I had been working there for just over four months, the directors announced that the company was going into administration. We had an official meeting with our administrator and were told to carry on as normal as we had a buyer interested and our jobs would be safe. Over the next couple of weeks I covered reception, which involved taking calls from angry suppliers

demanding payment. This was extremely unpleasant, as I was not allowed to give out too much information about our situation and was under strict instructions to not pass calls onto the accounts department. This was almost certainly the biggest problem I faced during my time, mainly because I couldn't fix the problem myself. After almost two weeks of being in administration, the two remaining directors announced that our buyer had pulled out at the last minute and we were all to go home. Luckily for me, the announcement came as a relief as I was already considering leaving the company. For my colleagues however, the news was particularly worrying as they had families and mortgages. I was lucky in that financially I had the support of my parents.

Extending knowledge and skills

Although the tasks I performed at my first company were predominantly specific to working in production, I developed many skills that can be applied to any working environment. These include; time keeping, self-presentation and organisation. Assuming the title of head runner, I also developed my delegation skills. I was in charge of delegating tasks to the runners on a daily basis as I had been with the company the longest and had an understanding of how it was run. I found having to delegate tasks to the runners relatively straightforward as most of the time it involved common sense, in terms of who was suited best to each role. I did however find the process difficult at times, as some of the tasks I had to assign to the runners were extremely boring and unchallenging. I managed to overcome this guilty feeling by realising that the jobs were instrumental to the industry and that I too had to complete all of these unpleasant tasks when I first started.

Perhaps the most important skill I developed or utilised most extensively was how to organise. I applied this skill everyday, organising runners, organising travel and organising large- scale productions. Working in post-production also involved using a lot of technical equipment. I often used software called Final Cut Pro, which allows you to edit footage. I also had the opportunity to use the camera on certain shoots.

In terms of extending skills from my previous two years at university, I used the content of my Sociology course in an everyday sense- noticing social patterns and recognising particular behaviours. I also extended more practical skills such as obeying regulations and respecting the nature of the industry.

Description of Company 2

My second placement company essentially was involved with 'trend forecasting'. Each quarter they publish an innovation report, which looks at the latest trends in the world of retail and hospitality. The company does not make the predictions themselves; they only report what is out there. The company also has a network of hundreds of design firms, which are recommended to clients for their projects.

There are three packages offered by the company; Platinum, Gold and Silver. As part of the Platinum package, the client has the innovation reports, access to the digital library, networking dinners and tailored- research on any topic required. Gold clients receive similar services but do not have the networking dinners and have less tailored research time dedicated to them. The majority of the company's clients are signed to a silver tier subscription. They receive the innovation reports and have access to the digital library and the network of designers.

The firm is a relatively new company due to its nature and has grown in size dramatically over the last four years. They have clients all over the world, predominantly in the US and the UK, and all over Europe and Asia.

The company itself is made up of two, all female divisions - the Research team and the Client Services team. The Research team consists of the Editor, the Deputy Editor and the Researchers. This division of the company produces the Innovation reports and completes any tailored research requested by the client. The Client Services team consists of the Managing director, the Senior consultants and the Marketing Executive. This division of the company works closely with the clients, presenting the report to the client each quarter after publication. The Senior consultants represent a different continent each: Europe, Asia and the US.

My Role

I worked on the Client Services team. My title was in fact 'Client Services Coordinator'. I began by assisting the Managing Director and the three other Senior Consultants. After a few months the Managing Director decided to employ her own assistant due to the amount of work that needed doing.

When I was assisting the Managing Director as well as the Senior Consultants, my role involved putting together heavy schedules for the trips to the US. Due to the majority of the clients being American, the Managing Director went along with the US representative. Although I thoroughly enjoyed organising such heavy schedules, the workload soon became too much on top of assisting the other Senior Consultants. Planning the trips to the US took a lot of work, as each quarter I would have to arrange three separate trips to the US for a week, sometimes two weeks depending on the clients. The US trips were to New York, the remainder of the East Coast and then the West Coast.

Planning for these trips involved liaising with the clients to find suitable dates for their presentation, booking flights and accommodation, and trying to set up new business meetings for the Managing Director. It became rather complicated at times when we had to fit in several states in one week and clients couldn't do the dates that we had suggested.

Alongside scheduling the US trips, I had to assist the rest of the team, and complete other office duties like answering the phones, ordering stationary, buying tea and coffee and speak to our technician when we were having technical problems (which was almost every day). It was also my responsibility to liaise with our accountant who worked part-time from home. Due to our accountant only working part time, it was also my job to chase our clients for money. This proved quite difficult at times with the time difference. Luckily I managed to resolve the debts with a couple of friendly phone calls the majority of the time.

Although I had to arrange travel and schedule meetings for the rest of our clients in Europe and Asia, this was not on the same scale as the scheduling for the US clients. The senior consultant for Europe would only go for a couple of days at a time and the consultant for Asia organised most of her travel herself. I would spend the remainder of my time assisting the Senior Consultants by carrying out mini research projects that they had promised their clients. This also included producing 'shopping lists' or 'city guides' for whichever city the client required. The lists were essentially travel guides in relation to innovation. I did enjoy the research I was delegated, more so towards the end of my placement when I knew which information sources to use.

I did encounter several problems at my time with the second company. I feel I joined during an adjustment period, where the company had grown but the amount of staff had not. I was essentially taking over from one colleague who had just been promoted to a senior consultant. Therefore throughout my placement there was some confusion over roles. This led to simple tasks not being completed and the other staff not understanding who did what.

As I mentioned previously, for the first three months I was assistant to the Client Services team as well as the Managing Director. This was highly stressful at times as I found it difficult to split my time equally. Although I could prioritise tasks in terms of importance, other jobs were constantly pushed to the back of my list and I rarely had a chance to complete them. Although these were not necessarily important, they still needed doing and would lead to further problems if left. I also felt at times that other colleagues would dump the unpleasant, mundane tasks on me because I was the most junior. I didn't mind that I had to do these tasks, I understood that it was part of my role, I just felt that some of my colleagues didn't know how busy I was and that I actually had far more important things to do.

Fortunately the Managing Director decided to employ her own assistant as she could see that I was struggling with the amount of work I had to do. When the new assistant started, I found it strange at first, adjusting to the fact that I had a big part of my role taken from me. Even though I was grateful that I had less to do, at first I felt I had too little to do. My workload then began to balance itself out and I could spend more time on tasks I had neglected at the beginning.

Towards the end of my placement, a lot of the problems I experienced in the beginning had been resolved. As a company we became far more communicative with each other, which weeded out numerous problems.

Extending knowledge and skills

Working for the first company prior to joining this company enabled me to utilise many of the skills I had newly learnt. I found the different atmosphere refreshing and relieved at the fact I was working for a company that appeared far more organised and stable. Still feeling confident with speaking on the phone to clients and being used to general office duties, I was able to demonstrate that I was fully capable of being given important responsibilities.

At the second company, I was able to exercise my organisational skills further. Putting together heavy schedules meant I had to be organised and extremely efficient. I also used Powerpoint frequently to present the research I had completed, and to assist my colleagues by formatting existing presentations. I was fortunate in that when I began my placement I already understood the basics of Powerpoint due to the fact that I had used the programme at university to give presentations. I also applied existing knowledge from my Media course to understand the industry better. I was able to comment on matters regarding the consumer society, a subject I had learnt in my previous two years at university.

Personal development over the whole placement year

In terms of personal development and change, this year has been particularly beneficial. I wouldn't say I have changed as a person so much, I still believe in the same things and have the same outlook on life; however I feel I have grown as a person in a number of ways. Both placements have certainly helped me clarify career plans. I was adamant before my placement year that I wanted to work in the media, particularly on the production side; however, after

experiencing four months of working for a production company, I have changed my mind completely. I found the industry highly stressful and the hours were extremely long. I could see how the job completely takes over your life and I didn't like the extremity of the commitment involved. Similarly, working for the second company has also helped me decide on which aspects of a job I enjoy and which aspects I don't. Although the second company was not as fun as the first, I preferred the less hectic atmosphere. In terms of what the second company does, I would not like to follow a career in retail research, as I don't feel passionately about the area.

Working full time has given me a great sense of independence and I feel I have matured in my approach to life. It is refreshing to work with people who feel passionately about their career and to see that achieving well at university has lead them to where they are today.

4. Professional Training Story

Department of Mechanical, Medical & Aerospace Engineering

Marketing Assistant at a major international software producer

Introduction

As part of my Entrepreneurship in Technology, IT and Business degree, I have undertaken one year of professional training within industry. I spent my year working for a major international software producer within their marketing department.

This report will look into my role within the organisation, some highlights from the year, an assessment of the differing leadership styles and a look at my own personal development and what I have learnt from the year.

Company History

This company in recent times has been known as the largest computer company in the world, offering hardware, software and consulting services. With 350,000 employees worldwide, the company is also known as the biggest IT employer. The company was founded in 1888. After being incorporated in 1911, the company changed its name in 1924.

Application Process

There is a large investment in the placement scheme and the process of gaining a job there is a thorough one in order to make sure you are suitable for a role within the organisation. After a series of online applications and tests, you are then invited down to an assessment day. The assessment day was made up of group activities and two one-to-one interviews. After coming through successfully I was put into matching. This is where they match your skills and preferences to the right job within the company structure.

The student placement scheme runs for 12 months in various locations across the UK. Around 7,000 people applied to be on the 2007-08 scheme, of which fewer than 400 were selected. I was offered a job as a Marketing Assistant to the company Software Group. The placement started in July 2007 and ran for a year until June 2008.

Job Role

Software Group Marketing is made up of around 30 people based all over the UKISA region. UKISA stands for UK, Ireland and South Africa. The regions in Europe are divided up depending on a country's spoken language and its working culture. Within this team, I was one of three placement students, all marketing assistants.

The software business is divided up into brands, programmes and channels. Brands are the different types of software sold; there are 6 in total. Out of these, I was aligned to help with two.

The programmes have various brands assigned to them and offer complete solutions for certain types of businesses and areas. There are 5 programmes and the ones I was aligned to were Enabling Business Flexibility (EBF) and Empowering People.

Within the channels area I helped with Volume Marketing. This involved working with our business partners who the company use to sell their more 'off the shelf' solutions to the market. The two other marketing assistants on placement covered the other areas of brands, programmes and channels.

As a marketing assistant you were expected to support your area of the business, which involved a wide range of activities. From events to reporting to advertising, the variety experienced within the job was a massive bonus. Looking back over the last year, I will talk about the main areas of activity that have sculpted my year and how these have allowed me to develop my business acronym and my own personal development.

Job Responsibilities

As mentioned previously, my role was to support several areas of the Software Group business. Each area differed slightly in terms of my workload. The majority of my core time was spent supporting the Enabling Business Flexibility programme and Volume Marketing. These required daily attention and were where I managed to experience most of my sole management of projects. Along with my day-to-day areas, were several large ad-hoc projects, which were pivotal in my development this year. The major project was the 'Taking Charge of Change' event where I was part of 4-person project team. I was also involved with working at the Wimbledon tennis championships and events at Wembley, Manchester and throughout London. All these areas will now be looked at in more detail in order for me to evaluate my development and highlight the activities and projects that have lead to this.

Enabling Business Flexibility

Enabling Business Flexibility is one of the software programmes which target specifically to IT Manager level with complete solutions. Enabling Business Flexibility hosts a new concept within the IT market, SOA. SOA stands for Service-Oriented Architecture and is a concept of organising your company structure so it is aligned directly to your IT infrastructure. This allows easier manoeuvrability to an ever-changing business environment. A lot of my work was involved in the marketing around SOA as the company endeavours to steal early market share from its competitors. Within my first month I attended the SOA Executive Event held in London. This was my first experience of hosting an event and allowed me to gain an insight into how large scale events are run on the day. It was an excellent experience to have exposure to executive level customers and enjoy some of the 'perks' that working at the company can offer by attending the dinner and staying the night in the hotel developing my networking skills!

Within EBF I had the chance to see many marketing plays from planning through to fruition. It was a valuable experience to be able to see every stage of the process and what was involved. I undertook the management of the SOA area of the EBF website, making sure that the content was comparable to the Software group and US versions of the website. Seeing the whole process enables you to appreciate what goes into a marketing play and to see firsthand what works and learn from the things that didn't work so successfully.

A large area of responsibility was helping with educational workshops that the company runs for their customers. I started off attending these sessions to assist with registration. By the end of the year I was running my own sessions and dealing with all aspects from planning, bookings and chasing attendees, right through to managing on the days the sessions took place. The largest educational event was the SOA forum for existing SOA customers held at a major automotive headquarters, with factory tours after the presentations.

The Enabling Business Flexibility programme has a tight interlock with one of the software brands, Websphere. The Websphere brand was celebrating its tenth birthday in 2008 and, to commemorate this, we set up a series of internal awareness events at various company locations. The purpose of the events was to drive attendance to enablement sessions for sales representatives on the Websphere brand. During these sessions they were given a presentation on why they should be including Websphere in their sales propositions to their customers.

To support these sessions we had made a birthday-themed booth and stand that we took to each location. The stand had various pieces of Websphere collateral as well as a prize draw. This was a good way of advertising the brand to all corners of the company, including those not in Software group, to raise awareness and to increase familiarisation with what the products actually do.

My role was to work with one of our agencies to create the stand and to co-ordinate the logistics of moving and manning the stand at each location. This involved working and briefing our agency, managing a £8,000 budget and making sure the stand, the collateral and all the giveaways were at the right location at the right time. We travelled all over the country with the stand, from Leeds, down to Portsmouth. The project was a great success and won the Marketing Directors Award for the second quarter.

Overall, Enabling Business Flexibility taught me a great deal about the principles of marketing. The team knew their target market and had become expert at rolling out successful, award winning marketing plays. It was excellent to be part of this and the team facilitated my development by getting me involved from day one, leading up to managing my own high level projects. This improved my confidence in my own ability and allowed me to improve a great deal in project management, communication, and teamwork. The range of activities was also a massive bonus, as we found ourselves with more freedom to try new techniques and technologies with our marketing which was extremely interesting and rewarding when it paid off.

Volume Marketing

This is the area where the company sells through Business Partners to the market with their more 'off-the-shelf' software products compared to the other more complex offerings. The company does not have the resources to sell these cheaper products, so uses Business Partners who have call centres manned by people constantly phoning out to companies.

Here I have helped by attending Business Partners for product focus days. This is where the company goes in and provides training to the tele-sales teams on several of the software products. We then follow the training up with a focus day where the tele-sales team spend their day phoning out with the emphasis on a particular product. Our role on the day was to make sure lead forms are completed in order to gain opportunities for sales. We do this by employing 'carrot and the stick' tactics by providing prizes and incentives for the most leads produced by each member of the sales team. We also worked closely with one of our other Business Partners. They helped us to deliver the activities on the day and I would work with them to plan our future activities.

My largest project within volume marketing was the organisation and management of my own event. We hosted a Business Partner Executive Lunch at a club in Westminster. I was in charge of the event from the planning stage through to execution. The aim of the lunch was to reward our most successful Business Partners with an enjoyable day as well as briefing them on the future aims that the company has for them. It was an extremely rewarding experience to be entrusted to take control of such an important event. The feedback received was excellent with the whole event being marked either 4 or 5 out of 5.

This area of the business was very successful and we won several awards for continued success and impressive results.

Other major projects

'Taking Charge of Change' Event

The most memorable and challenging project of my placement was an event we held in January at the Emirates Stadium, London. I was part of a project team of 4 people to host an event for around 300 executive level customers to address the issue of a changing climate and how their IT systems would help support this change. The event had massive budget and there was a lot of pressure on us to deliver an event to a very high standard.

The event was a chance for sales teams to invite their customers for the day, to network, to listen to a host of high level speakers and to spend the afternoon with numerous hospitality sessions laid on. I was extremely fortunate to join the project team from an early stage to see how much detail you have to go into in order to make a large-scale event a success. There were 3 company executives speaking on how an IT infrastructure can drive business innovation. We also had three other companies talking about how our company has helped them to 'take charge of change'. This was followed by a lunch with speaker afterward. Then in the afternoon there were various hospitality sessions including stadium tours, one-on-one sessions with executives, presentations and demonstrations.

A lot of my work before the event was to advertise the event internally to sales people, in order for them to invite their customers. We did this by holding road shows around the various company locations, in order to give out invites and information on the event. Statistics were required daily in order to see which sales teams had sent invitations and which teams had not. This enabled us to target the appropriate managers to encourage them to motivate their teams to invite their customers. There were numerous major ad-hoc tasks that needed carrying out before the event, such as working with our suppliers for equipment in the 'fun zone' and working with Arsenal football club to purchase football tickets for prizes.

On the day itself my role was to manage a team of 10 individuals who had a number of roles throughout the day. I needed to brief my team effectively before the day and manage them appropriately on the day. This involved being very clear on timings and locations and being aware where everyone was throughout the day.

The event was a massive success. We met our attendance targets with 300 CIO level executives attending and we managed to create a buzz internally for our sales teams to use the event to continue their discussions and make sales. The event was such a success that the project team received the Q1 Marketing Directors award, resulting in the prize of a lunch at Restaurant Gordon Ramsey for us and our partners.

Leadership Styles

During my year I was exposed to differing levels of management, from the Global Software Director at "Taking Charge of Change" to my own day-to-day Software Group Marketing manager. All these managers share similar traits of drive and commitment in order to work their way up to management level. I will now assess the leadership styles I have witnessed during my placement.

Action-Centred Leadership

To evaluate the leadership styles present, I have researched the principles of ACL (Action Centred Leadership.) ACL is where leadership is centred in the actions that a person takes. ^[1] The leader must retain the respect of their team, as they will be judged by the actions they take in doing their job and dealing with their workmates. ^[1] There are three areas a manager needs to consider in order to demonstrate a successful ACL style. Firstly, they must assess task needs, what are the tasks the team needs to complete and how many people are needed to fulfil this. Next, they need to use their team members' strengths and talents in order to co-ordinate and group one person with another to create an effective working group.

The Software Group Marketing team had a great harmony about it. The team was split naturally into the brands and programmes. However, it was my manager who would be in charge of managing the resources, assessing the team's strengths and co-ordinating the sub-groups to create successful teams. I believe my manager had an excellent balance within each group. Each programme would have a programme leader and a programme manager. The leader works on the strategy, observes the market and plans for the future. The manager looks after the day-to-day running of the programme and implements the marketing plays. The same structure was in place with the brands. Every team was successful and constantly over performed and met targets. A lot of credit must go to my manager, who I believe demonstrated excellent ACL and lead from the front.

Company Leadership Style

Our company is a massive global power. It has a long, distinguished history and has built a reputation for quality products and service. Being a large, American company, all the direction and guidelines get sent across from the US. This leads to a very bureaucratic leadership style. This style is very structured with many procedures which have to be adhered to. But not all aspects of the company can be described as being like this. They put in a lot of investment to innovation and new technologies to stay ahead of the competition. This branch needs to be slightly laissez-faire in that the inventors manage their own projects in order to develop new solutions and products. The bureaucratic style is prevalent within the business side. The sales,

marketing and human resources departments have many US lead procedures that have to be adhered to, stifling the ability to innovate and roll out solutions quickly, with appropriate marketing, in response to the demand from the market.

Team manager's leadership style

My manager demonstrated a democratic style. This meant the team were empowered with the chance to make their own suggestions on their marketing plays and my manager would always listen to our ideas whilst still holding the authority to make the final decision. He held weekly conference call team meetings to listen to what everyone had done and to raise issues. These were excellent to bring the team together, even if was only by phone, as the team was spread out across the UK, Ireland and South Africa. He also held quarterly face-to-face team meetings to bring everyone together in person with social activities afterwards. This is why the team had such a strong bond and a willingness to be successful as one force. If you ever needed a question answering or help on a project, there was always a member of the team to help out. My manager would always encourage the placement students to come up with their own suggestions and ideas. The area where I felt I could control what I worked on was with event analysis. I came up with suggestions on how we could analyse all of our events and my manager allowed me to develop this idea and implement my own solution.

Things Learnt & Development

Things Learnt

The fact that I have had exposure to the whole of the Software Group has meant I have experienced and helped with many different types of marketing activities. These experiences have increased my knowledge of marketing and business and have enabled me to learn a great deal about myself. I have learned that, with marketing, certain activities work better than others depending on what you are marketing and to whom you are marketing. Within the company, a large amount of time is spent marketing internally to the sales force. This is easier said than done, with sales people notoriously hard to engage with in order to communicate with them. The best way to market to sales people is either in person or on the phone. E-mails can be sent, but it is hard to get them to open and read the information. I have particularly seen this when advertising the Taking Charge of Change event.

The key to success within marketing is to do your research on your target market in order to see things from their point of view. This way you can appreciate what will work and what will not. If you can tailor your delivery to the correct people, the value and worth you are giving increases hugely.

Development

I have learnt a great deal from my time on placement. I have been given greater responsibility as the year went on and, in the end; I was taking sole management of big projects and learning a great deal from these. This has allowed me to further develop my management skills and everything associated with this. For instance, managing budgets, time scales, interacting with agencies, etc. These hands-on tasks have developed individual elements of my skill set, but I believe, as a result of this, my whole range of communication skills have been greatly enhanced. Dealing with so many different people in different areas of business and locations has increased these skills as a secondary knock-on effect.

Overall, the development from my year has seen a consolidation of all the elements I have learned throughout the year to make me a more effective employee. The smaller projects I undertook originally have led to bigger and better things and increased my range of skills considerably. I believe that, having shown I was prepared to work hard from the onset; I gained my team's respect and was therefore trusted to carry out my own tasks.

Future Career Aspirations

The year at my company has allowed me to experience life within a large, multi-national company and to experience working within a marketing department. I would not change anything from my year but it has allowed me to see that the IT industry is not one I could now see myself developing a career within. During the year I managed to carry out a week of work shadowing at our advertising agency. This was an excellent experience, meeting many likeminded people in a younger, vibrant organisation. This is where I believe my next career step lies and it was only through my placement year that I was able to discover this. From this, I hope to set up my own company incorporating a business built on creativity.

Resources

[1] The Definition of Action Centred Leadership - Jonathan Farrington
Published: 9/10/2006

5. What does learning to be professional through the work placement experience mean?

School of Law

Legal assistant at a firm in France

I admit that on my Erasmus documents I put that I had 'learnt how to be professional' during my work placement. But what did I really mean by that? I had worked for several months with 'professionals' but I certainly didn't mean to say that I had become one. Did I instead learn to *be* professional in the sense that I 'became suitable for a profession', 'engaged in a given activity as a career' or that I 'showed great skill, as an expert'? The latter may be a bit farfetched but when I reflect upon my experience I can see aspects of the other definitions resulting from my placement. I believe I have become more 'suitable' for the legal profession, having a greater understanding of the demands of the job, which can have long hours, or continual meetings and a large work load, an appreciation that not every law student may ever realise until their first day. As for 'engaging in a given activity as a career', spending four months living and breathing my placement couldn't have been more engaging and for that time abroad I was certainly absorbed enough into my work to appreciate it as my career, albeit temporarily.

It's not often that someone has the opportunity to work full time for several months in the career that they are aiming for, because, like in my case, I am studying the degree that will give me the necessary qualification to enter that career. So the work placement can be the first opportunity students like me get to being employed in that profession, because employers recognise the work already achieved and are willing to employ us, not just for cheap labour (as technically we are unqualified), but also to help us become professional at an earlier stage. Learning to be professional through the work placement, to me, means bridging the gap between the jobs you may have had in the past and the future career you hope to achieve, and also between the knowledge you have from your degree, and applying that knowledge in your career and in real life situations. So how did I learn to be professional during my placement? I learnt to be professional through the people I worked with, the environment I was in, my personal mentor and the challenges I faced amongst other things.

The people I worked with

Learning to be professional means working with a huge variety of people from all aspects of life. At my placement, I was at a closer age to my co-workers than I have ever been when I've done work experience. I was still the youngest, of course, but because my placement was two thirds through my degree I was technically only one year behind having the same qualifications as my colleagues, and that made a huge difference to my experience. The only difference then, between my co-workers and I, was their professionalism and to me that only meant experience. Professionalism is the manner that you speak to the people you work with, saying 'hello' in the mornings and 'good evening' when you leave. In my office, for example, I learnt that a few people took it upon themselves to say 'Hello' to everyone in the office before work began. Professionalism also means understanding the office hierarchical system, which doesn't necessarily correlate to position but perhaps age, or even both. In the French language, for example, do you 'vous' someone that is older than you for respect, or use 'tu' because they are the receptionist and you are potentially a Trainee solicitor? In a bid to be professional and formal, I used 'vous' towards all my colleagues until they told me that we could be informal with one another and use 'tu'. It is a great help to have already been immersed in that situation, because I feel now, were it to reoccur, I would know what I would feel confident enough to address them without worry.

The environment I was in

The work environment was also essential to me becoming professional. It is the mirroring of your co-workers and their professional manner in the work place that is the educational tool in this vital experience. I thoroughly enjoyed my work placement because it gave me such an insight into the career. I had learnt a lot about Law at university, but looking back now, I see I learnt how to apply my knowledge in real life situations, and that is what learning to be professional means. Experiencing a work environment at any placement is beneficial because work environments can be so similar regardless of where or for whom you work. There will always be a start to the day, a point where you are tired but a lot is being asked of you, a lunch hour (or two if you are in France) and there may be certain jobs that you don't like doing but that are required of you. Also, from my placement I see now that work environments can involve team work, and everyone has their part to play. As I was on placement I did have some of the more basic and at times monotonous jobs to do, for example, I had to write over fifty letters to town councils regarding different heirs in a succession case asking for birth certificates. Although it was repetitive, having seen the development of the case I now know the importance of that job I had to do. My work environment also involved interaction, cooperation and a pooling of resources with every different demand with every new case as certain people had skills in a different area of law, so there was a great deal of cross referencing. Cooperation is common in most work places, again showing that any experience in a work 'environment' is beneficial and will thus my placement will help me be prepared for my next work environment. I believe this preparation will allow me to be more 'suitable' in the work place because I appreciate all aspects of a job and I am already acclimatised to a work environment, making me more professional. I have had so much experience through my placement, and it must be remembered that learning to be professional has meant learning to apply my knowledge, and that has happened through the experience of working in a placement.

My personal mentor

I had a great mentor at my placement. Not only was she the kindest and most gentle person I had ever met, she was also great at her job and was extremely hard working. Even though I was already hardworking and determined, she definitely helped shape my work attitude and approach, and now I am even harder working and have refined my study skills to include professionalism in the work place. Knowing people in a professional sphere is also a great way to become professional yourself. I have learnt that people can be completely different at work than they are outside that environment, where they can change from being completely focused and driven, to being open and relaxed. Some professionals however, like my mentor, didn't even need this work/social division, and she was extremely professional at the same time being kind and helpful throughout my placement and have become great friends because of it. My personal mentor, along with all my work colleagues at my placement have been great examples of what it means to be professional in a work place.

The challenges I faced

It is certain that through my placement I learnt what it meant to be professional. I maintained this professionalism throughout my placement, and even learnt how to be professional, even when it was the last thing I wanted to do. At my placement I was speaking a foreign language and could easily get frustrated with myself when the language became challenging. Keeping calm under such pressure was another experience I had, because no matter how troubled I felt about the language, I found a way to get around the issue and remained professional. Also, I

understood the complications of working when you may have to face personal difficulties. It wasn't so much whether I had remained professional when I found out my dad was ill, the difficulty I actually faced was how to approach the issue to my colleagues or boss, or whether I approach it at all as it was after all a personal issue. We are now experienced with how our friends, family and even school are able to deal with us when we face a challenge. But how does the workplace react when their staff are faced with such a challenge? My mentor was extremely helpful and my boss even offered me time off if I needed it. It was nice to see that I could in fact approach my work, it didn't mean I was unprofessional by bringing up a personal issue.

The experience abroad was an amazing contribution to my personal growth and that includes how I learnt to be professional. I have recommended to everyone contemplating a work placement to do one, as I believe it is invaluable experience that employers will love, after all, you will not only be newly qualified, but you have a year in industry and will have faced all the uncertainties of a first job during your placement. I know my placement certainly makes me more employable and I have absolutely no regrets about the experience. To everyone that is about to leave on a placement, the only advice I can give is to enjoy the whole experience and although you may face challenges, remember that there is rarely a time in life when you are not faced by challenges, and that it is in fact these challenges that make us better. Go forth and prosper on the placement, the end result is near guaranteed to be amazing if it was anything like mine. Good luck.

6. Department of Music & Sound Recording Runner/Assistant Engineer at a music recording studio

Employer's area of work

Our studio was the first purpose built recording studio in the world when it opened its doors in 1931. It is based in northwest London. Over the years it has recorded a huge variety of musical styles including pop, rock, classical and film. Notable projects have been the Star Wars films, The Beatles and more recently Oasis and Narnia's 'Prince Caspian'. The building houses four recording studios, numerous mastering rooms, video edit suites, edit rooms and a bar/restaurant. It has also expanded into the next-door building, which is the interactive department (web and DVD design). With all of these facilities, this studio is capable of seeing a project through from beginning to end.

Main activities

My primary job as a runner is to ensure the smooth running of the studios and sessions on a day-to-day basis. A typical workday would begin at 8:30am, as I am expected to be in before any clients arrive or sessions begin. The morning routine involves checking every studio and lounge is tidy and stocked with necessary items (pens, pads of paper, etc). Any unnecessary items not required for that day's sessions are removed and put away. Each runner has an internal phone so that we can be contacted by any member of staff. Calls in the morning often include showing clients down to the relevant studios, hence the importance of getting everything tidied before they arrive. Once a client has arrived their needs become my responsibility until they leave. Clients' requests often involve getting food and drinks from onsite or offsite (such as Starbucks, Feng Sushi, and Harry Morgans). Other requests include photocopying music scores and giving tours of the studios. A vast majority of my time is taken up by setups and packdowns. These provide excellent opportunity to become familiarized with the mic collection and engineer setups. It is not uncommon for there to be a different session in for each day of the week, and this can result in derigging at the end of the day and setting up the next days sessions straight afterwards. As most sessions end at 9pm, it is easy to see why long days and late nights are common.

In order to set up effectively I must communicate with the engineer to find out their requests/preferences. Useful information to be obtained is the number of musicians, the mics to be booked, the layout, the plug up sheet and any outboard that is needed. All of this information can allow the assistants and runners to complete the setup.

The hierarchy of a studio session post is as follows: Engineer, 1st Assistant, 2nd Assistant and runner. As the year progresses runners act as 1st and 2nd assistants on numerous sessions.

My duties as a runner on a session are to ensure the studios have jugs of coffee and water, each person in the control room is provided with a drink on request, food is ordered and laid out for clients and engineers during lunch and dinner breaks and the occasional coffee run to Starbucks or Carluccios is undertaken. Whilst these are the main tasks, I must be ready to undertake any task requested by the clients. One particular example involved me buying swimming shorts from Selfridges for a band.

There can often be overlap between runner and assistant duties on a session. Whilst 2nd assistants may undertake runner duties and vice versa, they act in a more technical capacity on the session. They're often required to head out on to the floor to deal with any problems that arise, for example replacing faulty headphones, moving microphones setting up heaters or lights, and moving screens. A 2nd assistant must be alert at all times as any problems on the floor must be sorted by them and within very short time constraints.

The 1st assistant is usually the person operating the record rig (Pro Tools, Pyramix or tape machine). This can mean spending the whole day behind a computer with very few breaks. They must also prepare Pro Tools sessions, import Midi and audio, make edits and do backups of the session data. It is important that a runner and 2nd assistant ensure the 1st assistant is comfortable throughout the session.

When not assigned to a session, my other duties include taking mail to the post office, tidying of the studios and corridors, giving studio tours and talks to clients and keeping a stock check of resources (e.g. CDs, DVDs, tapes). Whilst most of these tasks seem mundane or of low responsibility, they all ensure the studios run smoothly and are presented in the best possible light.

Level of Responsibility

At the beginning of the placement, time is spent doing tasks of low-level responsibility. This would usually mean getting teas and coffees for studios clients and engineers, post office runs, studio tidying and the moving of boxes.

Over time the engineers became less hands on with regards to setting up on the floor. Once they felt confident with my ability, they would let the assistants and myself get on with the setup whilst they continue prepping the control room. Whilst this is a fairly straight forward task, making mistakes can prolong the time it takes to setup which in turn can lead to irritable engineers and clients!

The next stage of responsibility would involve operating a session's backup. Three weeks into my placement I was given the opportunity to operate 4 DTRS machines whilst keeping a take log for a high profile classical pianist and orchestra. Although I was very nervous, I got through the sessions with no problems. This resulted in me continuing on the sessions every time the clients came back. It was reassuring to know a client had requested my services for their sessions.

About 6 months into my placement I was given the opportunity to 1st assist on a rock band session. I was tasked with operating a 2-inch tape machine. This involved recording and playing back the takes, and also doing drop ins for overdubs. Tape machines require time to rewind, drop in and fast forward, meaning tasks are not as instant as on a computer. Missing the drop in would waste time, and would also make me look unprofessional, so for this reason drop ins required a lot of attention and accurate timing so in order to record the right bar. Having proved my ability on this session I was given the opportunity to first assist on numerous sessions I was assigned too for the remainder of the year.

Pro Tools is the primary recording platform used at our studio. On two occasions I was given tutorials on how to setup and operate Pro Tools. With this in mind I would then watch 1st assistants operating Pro Tools on

sessions, and this proved to be a useful learning experience. Soon I was being asked to prep sessions and assist. Once I began working with Pro Tools my level of responsibility stepped up. The pace of a session can be governed by the Pro Tools operator's speed and ability, so it was easy to understand why my hesitation could cost someone money. Fortunately I managed to get through my session with very few disruptions.

Achievements

There were two occasions that I would say were my proudest technical achievements. The first was working on the new Narnia film score 'Prince Caspian'. I worked along side the other placement year runner and together we were responsible for the whole setup of sessions. This meant together we were able to setup the entire orchestra in 5 hours without any assistance. We even received acknowledgement of a job well done from the engineers when after doing a mic scratch and headphone check, there was not one single fault!

The second technical achievement was on the film score 'Defiance'. Again I was working with an studio assistant and together we were tasked with preparing everything for the film sessions. The challenging thing about the project was that it ran for 2 weeks and required numerous studio changes. This meant setting up a large-scale orchestra in studio 1, and then 5 days later moving to studio 2 to do small-scale sections. We had to ensure microphones and outboard were booked appropriately for each studio, and that studios were setup or clear away very quickly.

Technical Development

My placement at the studio allowed me to work on a large variety of sessions. Each requiring different approaches and techniques coupled with the correct choice of equipment. I've gained an understanding of which mics to use and how to place them whether recording for example a large orchestra, Jazz band or solo marimba. I've learned how to operate Neve and SSL desks in every studio, and applied this knowledge appropriately to get the most from my downtime sessions.

I am also familiar with a variety of recording formats I used throughout the year. DAT, DTRS, Analogue 1, and 2 inch machines and of course Pro Tools. Advice and tips from the engineers has allowed me to gain an understanding of our studio's Pro Tools setup. My increased knowledge of shortcuts and has also improved my efficiency and speed of operation.

Professional development

Working on many sessions has given me an excellent understanding of session etiquette. For example when it is appropriate to speak or to keep quiet, and when to leave or enter a control room. These small things display the professionalism of our studio and its employees, something very important in a client based business. Clients walk in and out of our studio everyday so I learnt how to address and interact with them appropriately, and the results were reflected through the numerous positive emails and feedback I received.

Personal Development

The demands of the job meant I spent a majority of my time working, leaving very little time for anything else. It was not uncommon to work late in to the night or be in early, and long days become the norm. This allowed me to show my capacity for hard work, and also tested my perseverance. I impressed myself with how I was able to maintain a high standard of work for an extended period of time without complaining or giving up.

Time management is a very important skill during the placement year. As a runner I often found myself left to my own devices, or alone to complete a task. Knowing when I was needed elsewhere and how long the task may take was useful for planning my day or week. The recording industry often works to very strict deadlines and delays can waste a lot of money, so it was imperative that any tasks assigned to me were completed on time. Something as simple as missing a post office run or a slow pack down had its consequences.

Further Skills Requirement

If I wanted to pursue as an assistant engineer any further I would need to improve my Pro Tools skills. This could include setting up sessions, making quick and accurate edits and learning effective shortcuts. All of these tasks are likely to be performed on a session when under pressure, so mistakes must be avoided.

In conclusion my year at this studio has been a highly worthwhile experience. I learnt skills from some of the best engineering and technical staff in the world and have many amazing memories from my year. Although there were some long days, stressful sessions and difficult clients, I feel I have gained the knowledge to deal effectively with situations like that. I feel confident I can go back to university a more experienced and capable person and hope to apply all the knowledge I gained in to my studies. My year provided me with the most demanding and rewarding experiences in my life, and I have not one regret about working at this studio.

7. Department of Psychology

Educational Psychology intern at a special autism school

Setting up the placement

Choosing an area for my placement was a simple decision for me. I have always known I want to work with children in an academic setting. In addition, as a result of a careers meeting in secondary school I had intended to go on to be an educational psychologist. Further I had decided I would like to live back at home, which would mean creating a whole new placement since none seemed to have been established in the local area. So I set about tracking down 'ed psychs' as they are known. I soon discovered that this would not be easy since ed psychs that are part of the council do not generally take placement students before they have graduated from their psychology degree. This was becoming more of a challenge than I had at first anticipated but I had to persevere despite many closed doors.

The placement co-ordinator then contacted me as a potential placement had come up within a half an hour drive of my house. However, after a few days of consideration I decided to decline the placement since I did not fit the person specification and neither did it fit my expectations. So the search continued. My mum works in a school for disabled children and so I was exercising her contacts to identify any possible ed psychs I could contact. Two potential options came up as a result. The first actually turned out to be a non-starter but still worth considering. Through the other contact I then got in touch with the ed psych of a school for children with autism. I was a little daunted by the prospect of working with children with autism as I had limited experience but I could not turn down the potential of a fantastic experience.

After many emails, telephone calls and an interview the placement was set up. I would be working alongside the ed psych and his two assistant psychologists at a special school for autism. The ed psych, who had interviewed me, would be my supervisor for the placement. Now I just had to get ready for the work that lay ahead. I knew I had a lot to learn so I did some reading about autism over the summer as a basic understanding. Although the placement was unpaid the experience would be fantastic so I was keen to make the most of every opportunity.

The School

My placement location was an independent special school for autism. It caters for boys and girls aged between five and 19 years with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). There are 70 students at the school, which runs across two sites. The primary and secondary departments are in one site, and the post-16 and residential provisions are in a second site. The majority of students are male with only 5 girls in the school. Most students attend the school on a daily basis but there are about 20 weekly boarders between Monday and Friday.

Within the school there are support services to ensure the children are content and progressing optimally. The school has a Speech and Language Team (SaLT) and Psychology department. One of the key aspects within the school is sharing information within and between departments.

The Classroom Setup

Each class consists of between four and ten students. In the primary department students have most lessons in their classroom with the exception of Science, Art and P.E. Secondary students have a base room but then travel between classrooms for lessons.

Psychology Department

The Psychology Department consists of one Educational Psychologist (EP) and two Assistant Psychologists. During my placement I became part of the Psychology team as a Student Psychologist. My time on placement was split between the office, which was shared by the two assistant psychologists, and being out around the school. The psychology department aims to identify the psychological profile of the students, and in connection with class teachers and assistants, to identify the most effective method of working for that pupil to maintain optimum learning. Through monitoring and assessment strengths and emerging skills are identified along with those areas where additional support may be needed. Upon admission of a new pupil a baseline assessment is made. Standardised assessments are used to establish each pupil's strengths and to highlight any problem areas. Pupil's progress is assessed annually and monitored throughout the year. Furthermore, the Psychology department also look into changes in behaviour and try to develop strategies to improve challenging behaviour. The psychology department is also responsible for constructing Behaviour Support Plans and Individual Education Programmes.

The first few weeks

During my first few weeks at the school I attended several training sessions for new staff at the school. Some of these were general autism related sessions, which built on my understanding from the developmental lectures in first and second years of my degree. The remainder of the sessions contained information specific to the school and the students within it. This was a very intense period, during which my understanding grew immensely but the real learning experience would begin in the school.

Tasks on placement

Behaviour Bulletin

It is a requirement of the school that an up-to-date record of behaviours is held and distributed regularly to inform staff of any new or recurring behaviours and strategies implemented to address these. The Behaviour Bulletin is the document that holds this information. Throughout my placement I was responsible for the maintenance and distribution of the bulletin.

Inter-Departmental Review

Each week an Inter-Departmental Review (IDR) was held after school. This is a meeting where all departments involved in a class have a meeting to maintain progress and consistency. Each child in the class was discussed in turn and any problems were highlighted and possible solutions and strategies were discussed. I attended several of the IDR meetings during my placement and was able to give my input and offer additional support for children who were displaying challenging behaviour.

Annual Review

On behalf of every child at the school it is necessary to hold an annual review. This is a meeting which is held to ensure the student is making optimal progress, to review the previous year's achievements and to prepare for the year ahead. On several occasions during the year I have attended the annual review of a student that I worked closely with for a period of time. I often helped with the preparatory work for the review including making observations and helping with assessments which form part of the report.

Observations

Observations are carried out at the school for several reasons. They form an integral part of the review process; they may be used to monitor progress; they may be required to monitor an emerging behaviour; and they may also be used to monitor the effects of an intervention or the use of a new strategy. As part of my role in the school I undertook the task of conducting

observations. During the observation I made notes of key points that occurred relating to the area of focus, for example, this could be student interactions or class participation.

1:1 Tutorial Sessions

As the year progressed I was given the opportunity to support one student to address two objectives that had been identified. The student I was chosen to work with was a 15 year old boy with Asperger Syndrome. I held a support session for him each week which lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. Each week I devised a series of tasks and activities that built upon our previous sessions to explore the different ways of working towards a goal or target. The sessions became a matter of trial and error and constantly refining strategies in order to develop an individualised way he could work best.

Assessments

During my placement I became familiar with assessment tools used to assess numeracy and literacy. Since I had not graduated from my psychology degree I was unable to conduct the tests independently but I was able to assist. Towards the end of my placement I was able to score the assessments with supervision from the psychology team. Often I would be involved in the discussion and interpretation of the scores in comparison to previous years, even if I was not present while the assessment was administered.

Incident recording

Many of the children at the school display challenging behaviour as a result of their autism or another disability. Each of these incidents of challenging behaviour must be recorded. The frequency and intensity of incidents can vary widely but they must all be recorded in the same format. Part of my role was to check the forms had been completed correctly, follow up any omissions on the forms, and to enter the data onto the computer recording system.

Additional support

Since my placement was unpaid I only needed to work for four days a week to fulfill the University requirements of my placement year. On the 5th day I took up the opportunity to become employed by the school as a member of additional support working in classes to support the students' learning. In addition, I was frequently called into class to work as additional support on my four placement days to cover absences and to help with challenging situations.

Evaluation of my progress on placement

Throughout the year I have embraced many opportunities that have arisen through my placement and as a result I have made considerable personal development over my time in the school. During my placement I have developed my independence and maturity in the working environment. Although I have had part-time work before my placement this has been my first experience of full-time job. I have had many experiences as a result, that have allowed me to refine and enhance my skills.

I have had the opportunity over the year to improve my interpersonal and communication skills in a variety of settings. My confidence has grown with experience, particularly when addressing groups and in a formal manner. My placement required that I interact with many different types of people, including children across the full spectrum of age, adults, professionals and other departments within the school. I learnt the essentiality of appearing calm even when nervous and this has improved over the year. I was required to write several reports throughout my placement which has improved my written communication skills. My writing has become clearer and more concise and I realise the importance of being completely informed in the area in order

to plan a report of a high standard.

My timekeeping and reliability have been useful throughout the year, particularly in relation to meeting deadlines or achieving goals. Due to the nature of the tasks I would at times be very busy whereas at others, be searching for tasks to undertake. This required a lot of self motivation and the clear use of time guidelines. Over the year I realised the importance of not accepting too much work at any one time and keeping track of the work in hand. I also learnt that I should ask for help when needed and to clarify a task if I was unsure. The importance of knowing the precise requirements of a task was demonstrated to complete it to the full capacity.

Over the year there have been some difficulties, including being unsure of what I can and cannot do, learning procedures and defining my role within the psychology department. Since I am a determined and motivated person I was keen to get as much out of the placement but this sometimes meant I overstepped the boundary of what it was planned I could do. Since this was a pilot year for this placement there were many discussions redefining my role and ensure the level of work was appropriate.

My understanding of autism has grown considerably over the year. This has been the result of the training opportunities through the school, hands-on experience and independent reading and research I have undertaken throughout the year. This has informed my future plans for my career such that at some point in the future I would like to work with children with special educational needs. I have decided as a result of the varied experiences of my placement that I will train for a PGCE in primary education after graduating from my Psychology degree. The experience has allowed me to clarify my preference to work in the education setting with children but I am now more open to the options of special needs education and to work with older students. However, I would like to train in mainstream school before progressing further into an area of disability. The placement has benefited me in terms of personal development of skills and informing my future decisions regarding my career.

Recommendations for future placement students

- Don't be afraid to turn down an unsuitable placement
- Chose a representative placement of something you might like to do in the future
- If your placement is unpaid, seriously consider living at home
- Explore a range of possibilities and make an informed decision
- Clearly define your role within the workplace at the start of the placement

8. Learning to be Professional: The Story of my Placement Year School of Management Hospitality intern at a hotel in New Zealand

I clearly remember the moment when I realised the significance of what I had undertaken; the feelings of sheer panic, stress and excitement. What had I let myself in for? I was finally, after several months of preparations, sitting in seat 3C on board a flight heading from London to New Zealand. I admit that I had to reach for some tissues as I tried to hide the fact I was crying from a very important looking businessman sitting next to me.

I hadn't planned on doing a placement year abroad. I thought it would be too expensive and difficult to organise even though for my course, International Hospitality Management, there were lots of overseas placements available. I even had doubts about doing a placement year at all. I mean why do one, once you graduate surely you can earn far more than you do when on a placement year? However, as the placement lectures continued I realised the value of the placement year for your C.V and the large number of students who are offered jobs at the end of them.

Using the U-learn application really helped me in my search for a placement. The only problem was there was too much to choose from. Did I want to do a hospitality based placement, or events management or even marketing? Did I want to be based in London, Manchester or abroad? Then the doubts over my abilities crept in. Would I be able to do this placement? Was I clever enough?

One afternoon, during my lecture it was announced that a French hotel company were coming to the University to recruit placement students. What particularly caught my attention was the fact that they were recruiting for their Australian and New Zealand hotels and the fact that they would help with the visas and costs. This was too good an opportunity to miss!

A few weeks later I went for the interview. I was a wreck of nerves. I had been up all night doing research on the company. I could reel off their vital statistics like a professional, I was ready for any question. I was all dressed up in a suit, pad and pen ready. Ten minutes after the interview started, it was all over. I couldn't believe how easy it was. I had been offered a placement in New Zealand at their flagship hotel for the region. I had decided on doing an events placement and I was assured that the hotel offered this opportunity.

The next three months was a whirlwind of university activities, applying for visas and organising my flights. It wasn't until I had that moment on the plane when I stopped to think about the fact I had never been to New Zealand before, I didn't know any one there and it was a jolly long way home if something went wrong!

I arrived early in the morning to be greeted by no one from the hotel and a very grey rain filled sky. The taxi supposedly organised by the hotel hadn't arrived and so after an hour of waiting around the arrivals area I managed to find a taxi and ask to be taken there. This was not quite the arrival I had been expecting. As I drove through the city in the back of the taxi I started to worry about where I was and the hotel I was going to be working for.

My first week in New Zealand was hectic. I spent it looking for somewhere to rent, sightseeing around the city and getting over my jet lag. It was a very solitary week as I still didn't know anyone and staff I did meet were very friendly but not forthcoming with invitations of friendship.

The hotel was very impressive, much grander than I had realised. There was a large restaurant and a separate bar serving bar meals. There was also a conference and banqueting centre, mainly used for corporate events. I had meetings with the HR department and the manager of the Food and Beverage department. Everyone was very encouraging and seemed pleased to have me there. I was the first placement student they had ever had from the UK.

On my first proper day I was given an induction tour and informed of what I was expected to do. I was also given a training manual. I was to work in the restaurant as a waitress doing a mixture of breakfast and dinner shifts. I was aware that I would have to work in the restaurant as part of my placement but had been reassured by the gentleman who interviewed me back in the UK that I would get to work in the conference and banquets department after the first month.

The first week went by very quickly. I was exhausted from the unsocial hospitality hours and still recovering from jet lag. However I was beginning to get to know my colleagues and that weekend I was invited out with everyone else. I quickly made friends with everyone. They were all around my age and working in hospitality I found that we spent a lot of time together and so becoming friends was easy to do.

Although the social side of my placement was going from strength to strength, the professional side was becoming a strain. After a month of just waitressing and not having been given any kind of official training plan I was becoming very frustrated. I asked for a meeting with my manager to discuss this and to talk about what it was I was looking to learn from my placement.

What happened at the meeting greatly shocked me. Instead of discussing a training plan I was instead informed by my manager that I needed to improve on the level of professionalism I was giving at work. I knew I had been late by a few minutes a couple of times and that perhaps I did try to get out of doing the more boring jobs, but I hadn't realised that any one else had noticed. I hadn't realised how de-motivated I had become and how that reflected on the quality of my work.

After a very uncomfortable talk with my managers we managed to work out a plan. I had to fight through the emotion I was feeling to explain how I felt about the placement training and that it wasn't what I had been promised by the gentlemen who had interviewed me. I promised to work better and to be more dedicated and they organised a training plan that was more suited to what I had been looking for. A review date for three months time was set to go over my progress.

Over the next three months I worked hard to improve myself. I was moved to the conference and banqueting department, an area that I had wanted to be in. This was the best department I worked in while on placement and I rediscovered my motivation and the enjoyment I got out of working in hospitality. There were times after a 16-hour shift when I felt like I couldn't go on but with the encouragement of my colleagues and the great friends I had made I carried on. I found myself taking control of situations and organising the team I worked in. I also took the opportunity to volunteer to work on certain events and to do tasks no one else wanted to do so I could get the experience.

After three months I had the review meeting with my managers. I knew that I had changed. I now took ownership for my work and looked to develop better ways of working for the team. I was more organised and careful and had developed higher work standards. My managers also agreed. They congratulated me on my efforts and I was offered the chance to manage a new café opening in the city centre for six weeks. It was a fantastic opportunity, but one I had worked

hard for. It was also an opportunity that would test my professionalism, as I would be managing two other members of staff as well as dealing with the day to day running of a café.

Running the café was a real learning curve. I had to deal with problems ranging from burst water pipes to a member of my staff having to be taken to hospital by ambulance. I was the first person to show up in the morning and the last to go home at night. I had to do all the ordering for the food and beverage supplies and count the tills at the end of the day. Everything I had learned at university was put into practice, motivation theories, financial management and food hygiene practices as well as everything else. Putting into practice what I had learnt was a great experience and showed that I had been listening in all those lectures. Before I started my placement there was no way that I would have been able to take on the responsibility or the commitment. After the six weeks I returned to the hotel and from then on was given more responsibility and rewarded with the respect of my managers.

By becoming more organised at work, I also found that my personal life became more organised too. Instead of keeping friends waiting for me I started to arrive on time, I even started writing lists to help organise myself. I saved enough money to go travelling around New Zealand for three weeks with some friends. The memories from that trip will stay with me forever; it really is the most beautiful country in the world. I took advantage of living in New Zealand as much as possible. During my year there I went skiing in Queenstown, skydiving at Lake Wanaka, tubing through the glowworm caves of Waitomo, surfing in the Corromandel and sailing around Abel Tasman National Park. I made some amazing friends who I still see regularly and who mean that my phone bill is huge.

The day I left New Zealand at the end of my placement I had a leaving party at work. My managers all came to say good bye and to wish me good luck in the future. It made me realise how much I had learnt. I had gone from being the new girl and not knowing anything to being able to manage and train others. When I got on the flight back to England I admit that I cried most of the way home. Not because I was homesick and worried like I had been before, but because it was the end of the best year of my life.

9. Placement: A year of growth and opportunity

School of Management

Procurement trainee at a global pharmaceutical company

My placement journey began by applying for 'Procurement Industrial Trainee (IT)' at my chosen company. This company is the world's largest pharmaceutical company producing drugs that sustain and save lives; from drugs that help fight the symptoms of HIV to therapies for Alzheimer's. I decided they were my first choice because of the reputation of the company, the opportunities it promoted and its culture. I also applied relentlessly to other placement programmes soon becoming busy scheduling interviews and attending assessment centres on top of academic commitments having also decided to go on exchange to Hong Kong the following semester. Fortunately, I was offered the position at Pfizer at the eleventh hour- a few days before I boarded the plane for Hong Kong- I was relieved to say the least!

Fresh-faced and back from Hong Kong I thought to myself "What is procurement? What will I be doing for the whole year? What are the people like?" as I waited in reception the first day.

Procurement is the department responsible for handling the purchasing transactions of a firm, whether buying stationary or contracted services, everything the company purchases is processed by procurement. My role was split between process; handling invoices and purchase orders and sourcing; helping the buyers make strategic decision by running reports and conducting analysis for them.

My colleagues were diverse; from those straight out of university to those who had been with the company for 20 years, people from all over the world, from different departments and of differing seniority. My team encouraged me to constantly ask questions, took me out of my comfort zone via job rotation, taught me new skills and involved me in big strategic projects making me aware of the 'bigger picture' by getting me out of the day-to-day processes and realising the impact procurement could deliver to the whole organisation. We were a close team often going out for lunch, pub quizzes, dog and horseracing or having meals at fancy restaurants. Working makes you realise how important having good relationship with the people you work with is, after all, you do see them everyday and getting along makes a big difference to your job satisfaction.

The culture was professional yet relaxed. The office itself was designed to foster an open environment and demonstrate transparency. All the walls in the building were glass so you could see exactly what everyone was doing, even your manager. There was an open door policy meaning managers left their doors open when they were available for anyone to come in to discuss any work related issue and you were guaranteed complete confidentiality.

Training provided an invaluable cornerstone of my professional development. All the training courses were free and employees are encouraged to attend. I joined as many courses as I could, beginning with ICT courses like Excel to help me with the requirements of my role. As the year progressed I attended the advanced courses becoming the most proficient member of my team in programs such as Excel, PowerPoint and Access and my skills were constantly relied upon and utilised not only by my immediate team but other departments too.

I also attended 'Mind Gym' courses designed to develop soft skills such as effective time management, negotiation and listening. I found myself applying these skills in the workplace

and managing to utilise them outside work like helping to effectively get my point across in a conversation and planning a timeline and objectives for my placement report.

Early on my manager offered me the chance to be involved in a variety of prominent sourcing projects including a supplier cleanse project, spend analysis and a creative agencies project.

The supplier cleanse project was essentially a housekeeping project. My task was to go through each supplier in my division updating details and classifying whether they were redundant or not. This was a laborious effort that I worked on over a few weeks on top of my daily duties but by the end of the project suppliers were reduced from 14,000 to just over 8,000. My efforts were recognised and I was awarded £50, a nice surprise, for displaying key company attitudes such as teamwork and alignment.

The spend analysis project gave me a chance to demonstrate the ICT skills I acquired. I was asked to report the company's annual spend from 2006-2008. This was no mean feat as this had never been attempted before. At the time I thought "just another project", little did I know the impact this would have on the department and others too. Over the months I developed one report detailing what the company spent, with which suppliers, on what commodities and products, forming the basis for future procurement objectives and strategies. Finally the department had one report of all spend and commodities. My manager shared this with the finance manager who, impressed, soon adopted the same way of reporting. It's nice to know that I have pioneered a reporting style that will live long after I have left the company and will provide the basis for future reports.

My last project was tracking invoiced rates by creative agencies. I identified and tracked the changes in rates the company was being charged, compiling these in to a spreadsheet that showed percentage changes in prices. Once the exercise was completed for several agencies the findings were presented to my manager who was surprised to see that a little monitoring and attention to detail could possibly yield huge savings. For a 'quick win' my manager was able to negotiate standard rates with these agencies immediately saving the company thousands. Again my efforts were recognised and rewarded with a leadership award, a certificate and £50.

During placement I was given the task of organising a directorate charity event. This was one of the biggest challenges I faced as my directorate was comprised of over 50 people and coordinating this could be disastrous! As a department we chose to volunteer to landscape the garden of a local respite for teenagers with learning difficulties. I had to arrange logistics, maintain liaisons with the charity and organise the whole directorate into teams and tasks, buy equipment and refreshments... all this on top of my already busy work schedule. It was difficult to be on top of every all the time but following a plan and checklist of tasks to do helped. The day went smoothly and was highly enjoyable and satisfying. Everything I had been organising for weeks went accordingly and the whole team and charity was pleased with the outcome.

I was also given the opportunity to mentor a work experience student. As with most work experience students the tasks assigned were fairly menial; archiving, printing and data entry. Although this was a rather boring I also arranged ICT courses and one-on-ones for him with the team so he could get an idea of what 'procurement' entailed. Having to mentor a fifteen year old was very challenging as his attention span was relatively short. A few times I had to remind him that he was in a professional environment and how understanding how to behave professionally would benefit him in the future. My manager pointed out how important this experience was in developing my managerial skills. Believe me, it's harder than it looks!

I learnt valuable skills and knowledge during my placement year that- had I not done one- I would not have learnt until I was thrown in to my first full-time graduate job.

Firstly I learnt to interact with people of all different cultures, lifestyles and experience. The more I interacted with different people the more my confidence grew in approaching people and not being intimidated by the thought of meeting someone new or who had a different opinion to mine because I was confident in dealing with disagreements or debate in a diplomatic and professional manner.

I was introduced to the concept of 'office politics', something that goes unmentioned at university and you cannot prepare for until you face it. Office politics is the use of power within the organisation to personal gain. It's about who you know and how much they can influence situations to your favour. Knowing the right people can determine how successful you will be in achieving your personal goals.

During my placement I began to link the theory I learnt at university to practical examples in the workplace. I related elements of organisational behaviour to the different management styles I encountered and how an employee's wants and needs are directly linked to job satisfaction. I saw manager's use strategic tools like SWOT and cost-benefit analysis to measure how successful certain decisions would be and the impact of external influences, such as competition, on the company's strategy.

Another contributing factor to my placement preparation was my time as an exchange student in Hong Kong. There I met and worked with people from all different international backgrounds. I developed the art of networking, transferring this to the workplace by building a portfolio of professional contacts. Going on exchange really took me out of my comfort zone- I had to adapt and adapt quickly taking my own initiative in a lot of things which relates to starting full-time employment too.

The whole placement year was truly a test of character. Everything was alien to me at the beginning confronted with situations and people I was unaccustomed to. There were obviously highs and lows. At one point I really missed being a student again; responsible only unto yourself, the amount of free time and going out without the dilemma of waking up to go to work in the morning.

My placement year report was another struggle. Maintaining the motivation to write a report outside working hours was difficult as all you want to do outside of work is devote that free time to things you enjoy doing. The only way I managed to stay on top of it was to do a plan, set deadlines and commit to them.

These issues were nothing however to the amount of enjoyment and benefits the placement year brought.

Placement is a year of immense transition. The experience opened my eyes to the reality and difficulty of working full-time. It also shaped my thoughts on the career path I would like to follow with my sights firmly set on being a buyer. I am also more assertive and confident now than I have ever been. Speaking to a room full of strangers was something I would have been terrified doing before placement but am now not phased by. One thing I set out to achieve during placement was taking more responsibility and accountability. Through my experiences at work I now do not shy away from responsibility. It helped that I developed in a supportive and proactive environment which gave me the assertiveness needed to achieve goals because no one is

there to 'hold your hand'. I have met so many people, learnt new skills and acquired new knowledge, experienced different situations and grown and matured in such a relatively short space. From being quite lost in terms of what direction I wanted to go in life to becoming proactive in my approach to the future. I know what I want and how to get it, all this I owe to the placement year which has helped me take my experiences during university to the workplace and vice versa.

To those who are thinking about doing a placement year I would say- do it! My placement year was an amazing and unforgettable experience. Placement will prepare you for the realities of the world of work with the support of your company and the university. Placement year demonstrates commitment and any valuable contributions or experiences you made during your placement year will be noted by potential employers giving you an advantage over other graduates.

Placement may only be for one year, but it could change your life forever.

10. Learning to be professional: the story of my placement experience

School of Management

Marketing assistant in a global electronics company

With the desire and preference to pursue a career in the marketing industry after graduation, it was seen as an opportunity to acquire invaluable work experience and a chance to develop existing skills, by applying for the position of marketing assistant in the Lighting Division offered by a major global electronics company. It was also recognised that further opportunities could arise due to a placement with a globally recognised company.

The main expectation of the placement year was that it would have been an extensive learning experience, answering any questions in relation to working in a marketing department. Hence, enabling an in-depth learning of marketing skills practised in this particular industry.

The core aspects of the role were managing any public relations and Marcoms – marketing communication - activities within the Lighting division. I was also appointed Project Manager for the Product Launch event in April 2008. This was assigned to me as an additional project in order to help on improving my weaknesses and prove my abilities/skills.

Training for the job was supplied by the previous student in a two week intensive handover. The student then provided general support in the following two weeks. By attending the company Induction Day, I gained knowledge about the businesses divisions and functions, the type of customers they deal with on a daily basis and how to apply the mission, vision and brand promise.

On joining the team, a conscious effort was made to make me feel welcome by all members of the lighting division. All the members of the marketing team were initially introduced, and then an hour was spent with each individual member of the team to provide me with a briefing on their job roles and rules within the marketing department.

The UK Marketing Manager for the Lighting division, commenced his appointment on the same day as my starting date. This brought a positive change of management style and ensured the delegation of some tasks involving wider responsibility.

Throughout my placement I had the opportunity to participate in public events, conferences and exhibitions organised and supported by the company, which enabled me to acquire a clearer image of marketing activities and on the effect of internal and external customers to their successful businesses. The most memorable was a three-day exclusive cruise with VIPs for The Marketing Forum 2007. I also gained further experience on other areas of the business such as sales, finance, legal and HR by undertaking projects or by simply attending sales meetings with customers or financial review meetings. This definitely helped me to reinforce my career choice.

Working for a sector which is “number one in global lighting” definitely helped me to gain knowledge on a strategic level - how to defend and maintain positions of authority within the marketplace and how to challenge competitors. I therefore developed a better understanding and knowledge of aspects such as leadership, strategic thinking and effective business decision-making.

One of my objective during placement was to improve on my weaknesses that were identified prior the placement - lack of confidence in written communication, due to language barriers and the need to improve on skills such as assertiveness and decision-making which I have definitely improved after the project I was given. I had to present to an audience of over 120 people, negotiate with suppliers and provide general support to al the product manager that were launching the latest products.

The placement year did present challenges but also lots of opportunities both inside and out of work -from socialising with colleagues and building relationships, to learning new skills and marketing practises. It also helped to build self-development and evaluation skills as well as providing targets to be achieved at the end of the placement year but also on my final year.

The year spent at my company was enjoyable, challenging, stressful, fascinating, exciting, a great opportunity and a steep learning curve. Central to this learning curve was gaining an understanding of how to work efficiently in an office environment. Formal and informal methods of training occurred throughout the professional training year including opportunities to attend training courses at the Lighting Head Office and other various courses such as Effective Marketing Planning, Marcoms practises, High-impact presentations, Excel courses, and time management course.

I feel a lot more confident in my communication skills especially after being given the opportunity to be a project manager. Participating in social events did build relationships and improved my communication skills. I also feel that I have developed into a team player after attending various team building activities and working closely within the marketing team which supported and helped me throughout the year.

The communication with the team and other colleagues was excellent. Dealing with external customers and vendors helped me to improve my confidence and personal-belief. As a project manager I often had to brief and communicate with senior management including the chairman of the company in several occasions.

Through working in an office environment the importance of achieving and maintaining the correct appearance, punctuality and attitude to work has been achieved as well as understanding of office politics, which will be fundamental in future employment.

The orientation course provided good support to the placement experience. It was really useful and informative and it also gave me the chance to ask any sort of questions, discuss placement opportunities available, most suitable choices and evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses. Most beneficial were the insights of previous students when discussing their completed placements. In hearing the opportunities they were given, it provided evidence that placements can be a highly rewarding experience. The seminars also offered insight in how to perform in interviews, produce a good covering letter, present a CV in order to impress employers.

In addition to this, through setting deadlines to complete the CV and objectives, it helped to motivate and manage successfully the placement students.

The support offered by the tutor both academically and professionally helped to reinforce the commitment of meeting deadlines.

I would advise any students undertaking placement to set monthly meetings with the line manager but also with the general manager/director; it is important to make sure that a major project will be given in order to have the opportunity to show abilities and skills and have something to talk about when reviewing the experience. Networking is also another thing the student should try to do while at placement, not only with the team but with all the other departments, businesses.

To conclude, the placement year was an enjoyable and challenging experience. It has been helpful in determining the future career path in which to follow. The placement also provided the opportunity to conduct an evaluative process through determining various strengths and weaknesses. This was extremely useful as areas of self development could be established leading to efficiency in the workplace. I do strongly recommend any second level students to undertake the placement as it is definitely an experience that will enrich personally but also professionally.

The benefit that stands out most from doing the placement is the knowledge of how highly the placement experience is valued by employers. The experience gained from the professional training year will prove to be invaluable in future roles. Having completed the placement and gained the necessary experience, my wish to enrol on a graduate scheme or apply for a specific role will be now more achievable.

Working at my company offered a great opportunity to allow the theoretical knowledge gained at university to be integrated into the workplace. To complement this, the practical knowledge learnt from exercising a professional training year can now be implemented into the final year at university.

11. Learning to be professional: the story of my placement experience

Department of Biochemistry

Cancer researcher at a university in Finland

Before the placement

After having completed my first year of Biochemistry, I knew I wanted to do a placement because it would give me stronger career opportunities. At level one I was a good student, so when it came to choosing a placement I had many options. I enjoy traveling and was interested in cancer research, and so I took a placement at the Biotechnology Department at a university in Finland to work within the MPC (Markers of Prostate Cancer) project, through the ERASMUS exchange programme.

Before moving to Finland, I was not nervous, or sad; I knew I would miss my friends and family in England but I was excited and curious more than anything else. I was due to arrive in Finland in November so I was expecting to see lots of snow - apart from that, I did not really think too much about it; I assumed life in Finland would be the same as in England, but I just wanted to keep an open mind and hope for a positive outcome.

A new life in Finland

My first week in Finland was tougher than I expected. I did not expect to be homesick but I was. When you move abroad, you don't realise it's happening for real until you are physically there and cut off from the life back at home. At that point, I realised I would not see anyone from home for a long time, and that I would have to make new friends all over again. I guess this is why I was homesick. At first, everything in Finland seemed so unfamiliar and cold - Finland's famously cold, rainy weather; the Finnish people, who are incredibly shy until you get to know them; and my accommodation was so quiet and sterile- looking. One thing I did warm up to quickly, however, was my workplace. My colleagues and supervisors were very friendly from the start, so even though I felt homesick, uncertain and a little lost, I figured if there would be one thing I would enjoy it would be my work.

Of course, as time progressed, things got much better. Any feelings of homesickness quickly disappeared once I met the lively, very sociable exchange students and got to know Finnish people better. Finns can seem very cold but once you get to know them, they are the most trustworthy and genuine people I know. I have made some great friends in Finland and also many other countries; Italy, Canada, Spain, Peru, and everywhere in between! Meeting lots of people from so many different cultures taught me a great deal of things that I cannot even begin to list. I became much more outgoing and started initiating some very large social events, including a costume-themed parties where over 100 people turned up. I became more open-minded to different cultures, and learned many things about them - in the case of Peru and Finland, I even learned some of their language!

Culture shock soon turned into fondness after I learned just how organised and efficient Finland is. I became more culturally aware of the small differences between Finland and England and so learned to adopt some of the Finnish customs in order to respect their culture. I also became more independent as I started traveling to surrounding countries. My despise for Finnish weather soon turned into appreciation after I traveled to Lapland and witnessed beautiful,

untouched forests covered in metres of snow and the beautiful, unspoilt forests of the nearby archipelago in summer. So, I guess the main thing I learned from this travel experience is to never judge by first impressions! At first, a place can seem cold, harsh and uninviting but it will unfold its magic slowly; it's simply a matter of time.

Developing in my work

As for my work, I enjoyed the work environment from the start. People were helpful; there was always a nice, laid-back atmosphere in the laboratory and there was no hierarchy between professors and trainees. I think this is very important for a workplace and if I was to run my own laboratory, I would definitely encourage an atmosphere similar to the one I experienced. Initially, I had to learn many new practical techniques associated with my projects. At first it was challenging but after some practice I could do all of the work accurately without supervision. Now, I am much more confident and professional in my practical skills; something which will help me a lot in my dissertation work. During my time in the university's Biotechnology Department, I was working as part of the MPC (markers of prostate cancer) research group. The aims of this group are to investigate proteins and genes that could have a potential role in the diagnosis of prostate cancer. The group has already done very interesting research regarding prostate cancer diagnostics, and to continue this could vastly improve prostate cancer diagnostics, which is currently hindered by a high amount of false-positive diagnoses, causing unnecessary treatment and surgery.

My particular work involved the preparation of biological reagents as well as two research projects: TATI and hK4. TATI and hK4 are two proteins thought to have a role in prostate cancer. The ultimate goals of the projects were to develop immunoassays for these proteins in order to detect them in patient samples to see if they have any diagnostic value in prostate cancer. Initially, I viewed the placement as an opportunity to practice my practical skills, obtain better career opportunities and have some fun abroad. I did not expect to be given projects of potential importance because of my lack of practical skills, so the fact that I was carrying out novel research really motivated me to become more professional and responsible in my work. I learned how to research journals rather than textbooks for more up to date research, in order to gain more reliable background knowledge for my projects. I became more active in decisions when we encountered problems and had to look for improvements to our methods, which has made me a better problem solver and more independent researcher. I was also encouraged to teach myself a lot of statistics and to use different, more sophisticated computer programmes (LATEX, Beamer, Prism) for making more professional presentations, reports and data analysis. Communication skills and confidence improved through regular interactions with colleagues and bi-weekly presentations of my work to the research group. The hard work seems to have paid off; results for my first project were presented at an international congress in Helsinki, and will probably get published in the next year or so. Looking back upon level two, I have to say my skills have developed enormously! I feel I am now completely ready for my final year and for a professional career as a scientific researcher.

Finally, I also managed to conquer my fear of public speaking at the "Young Scientist Week". For this event I had to write an abstract and present a poster on my work for the TATI project. I also had to give a 20-minute presentation in an auditorium in front of around 40 people including professors and researchers from outside the university. I have never been a good public speaker so of course I was nervous at first, but having been thrown in at the 'deep end', I am much more confident now and no longer have a fear of speaking in public.

Back in the UK

Now that I am back in the UK for my final year, I can look back upon my year in Finland and certainly say I have changed. I am much more focussed on my career goals than before. Previously, I had a vague idea about wanting to do cancer research. Now, I know this is what I really want to do with my career because it is work I find enjoyable, and most of all rewarding. Also, having lived abroad, I am no longer intimidated by the idea of traveling to new places on my own. I have realized that it is possible to make friends and create a home away from home no matter where you travel, as I now consider Finland to be my second home. I have become much more independent as a person, and also more adventurous. I no longer restrict myself to working in the UK, in fact I want to continue my studies abroad, travel everywhere and experience lots of new cultures!

'Learning to be'

So, to bring us back to the original question, what has learning to be professional meant to me in my placement? Well, I have learned that learning to be professional does not just originate from developing new skills in one's career, because a scientific researcher with the best practical skills and exam grades could still fail if they fail to develop a mature, professional attitude towards their work. Learning to be professional involves developing emotionally as well intellectually; becoming mature and focused in one's career, open-minded and unafraid of exploring new ideas. To become fearless of new challenges, and to always stay hopeful when things go wrong. And, in the case of overseas work, to respect different cultures, always stay positive and never judge a country or its people by first impressions!

If I could give any advice to students considering a placement, I would say do it! Not only is a placement great practice for your final year, it is also an opportunity for you to develop professionally and become more aware of what direction you want your career to go in. I would also encourage students to do their placements overseas, because traveling and living abroad really opens your mind and makes you more aware and respectful of other cultures. Overseas placements generally seem more suited to outgoing types, but even if you are shy, you will almost certainly change after one year in ERASMUS!

Finally, is there anything I would have done differently in my placement? Well, even though there were times I wondered if I had made the right decision in coming to Finland, the answer is no! Because all experiences, whether good or bad, always lead to a positive outcome, helping us to gain better insight; good experiences create good memories, and bad experiences can be viewed upon as a learning experience.

12. Department of Psychology Intern at a psychiatry postgraduate research institute

A description of the organisation I worked for, how it is organised and what it does

From the beginning of September 2007 to June 2008 I worked mainly at the Social, Genetic & Developmental Psychology (SGDP) Centre situated at a psychology postgraduate research institute. In addition to this I also spent some of my time at another college, as my supervisor and the research projects I was involved with were split across these two organisations. In order to portray the diversity of my job roles during my placement, I shall talk about both organisations and my involvement with them.

The institute, which is situated alongside a hospital, is a postgraduate institute for a major university and in recent years has also teamed up with another nearby major college. Its main role is to look for effective care and treatments for those with a range of mental disorders via extensive research and teaching. Most of the teaching programmes available at the institute involve an element of research and it has been awarded for the high quality of its research findings. My role as a researcher was based at the SGDP centre, where their main research focus is the gene-environment interaction phenomenon and the origins of the processes which underlie certain mental disorders e.g. depression, ADHD, anxiety and sleep disorders. As well as the research, the SGDP aims to teach others about these areas of psychology through postgraduate schemes, lectures, seminars and conferences.

In contrast, my role at the college was completely different to that at the institute. The college is primarily an educational facility and my work for the Psychology department was geared more towards the educational / admin side of psychology. Like many universities, it aims to teach a vast range of subjects to a diverse range of people. It also supports their PhD student in a range of further research studies.

An account of the range of tasks I performed during my placement, reports written, presentations given, research conducted etc.

One of the best things about this last year is that I have had the opportunity to be involved in such a vast range of tasks both at the institute and at the college. Psychology itself is such a broad area and I feel the range of tasks I've done has allowed me to explore many of these.

Primarily, my role was that of a Research Assistant, especially during my time at the institute. When I started one of my first projects that I got involved with was called STEPs. This is a study which had been running for three years previous to when I joined and was entering its final stages of data collection. The purpose of the study was to examine cognitive and environmental influences on anxiety, depression and sleep disorders in young (primary school) children.

In order to be able to assist with the final data collection phase of this study (Wave 3) I had to undergo extensive training on how to correctly administer the test battery, how to appropriately interact with the children and how to gain the most rich, useable data without displaying experimenter bias. Once this was done, I then had to recruit participants, which was relatively easy as we already had a school on board from the previous stages of the study. I went into the primary school 3 weeks into the start of my placement. This was my chance to meet with the staff and pupils, as well as meeting my two other research assistants. We gave a small presentation to two classes about the study and handed out consent forms for the children to take home to their parents. Gaining participants seemed easy enough at the time, but I was

soon to find out just how difficult it was to get that all important participation rate up. In other words, I had to do all I could to ensure that the biggest percentage of the children we had access to took part in the study in order for our data to be highly valid. At first I struggled to make this happen, as eight year old children tend to be quite forgetful and have a habit of losing things. It took several visits (and a lot of reprinting consent forms) to get the desired return rate. I decided that perhaps a new tact was necessary to get them to remember their forms. As a standard 'thank you' for participating, each child received a £5 voucher and a small toy. I thought that pushing this would be the best way to get them to return their forms. So, after a trip to Woolworth's and a night decorating a 'special toy box' in shiny paper and exciting pictures, myself and my research assistants did one final presentation to the children. Amazingly we completed the testing phase with a participation rate of over 76%, something both myself and my supervisor were very happy with.

The testing procedure itself was perhaps one of the aspects I enjoyed most about my placement. The age range of our participants was 8-9 and, though some were hard to work with due to a limited attention span, they were on the whole a joy to work with. Altogether we tested roughly 45 children, 20 of which I tested myself. The testing procedure involved a range of different sleep and anxiety measures which were administered via computer based tasks and interview like questionnaires. Some of the measures were extremely standardised so had to be administered in a very specific way. Others were more laid back and gave the experimenter room to explore different areas of thought based on answers given. Of course I had to remain objective and not lead the participant into giving a particular answer. This was sometimes difficult to do, particularly in one task, where you had to make the participant understand the question without leading their answer. I found that after testing a few children, that they tended to all struggle with similar words, or parts of the tasks, so devised ways in advance in which I could overcome any problems. The testing procedure took between 1-2 hours, depending the on the individual child.

Once all the data collection had been completed it was then my job to make sure that it was all entered into SPSS ready for recoding and analysis. Luckily the templates for this were already set up from the previous wave. My supervisor went over some of the basics of data entry and also things to look out for to ensure minimizing errors and remaining consistent with previous data entry procedures. It was then my responsibility to show the other research assistants how to do this. After all the data was successfully entered, we then had to go through the process of data cleaning, which involves carefully checking the data entered in each field to ensure it is displayed in the correct way, in the correct field and that any missing data is checked against the original to see whether it was actually missing or just wasn't entered. This was done for waves 2 & 3 and was reasonably difficult for me, not because of a lack of understanding of how to do it, but because of the monotonous nature of the task and the length of time it took. However, I did get to appreciate just how important this part of the data analysis process this is in ensuring we have clean, usable data.

The STEPs research took up about the first 4 months of my placement. In between doing this I was loosely involved in another project running at the SGDP centre. This study was a large twin-based study, which was done on a much large scale to STEPs. I didn't get actively involved in the data collection with this study as such, but instead attended meetings with the team and took minutes for the meetings. Occasionally I would help with mail-outs for DNA collection as well as working with the original data in the project archive.

One of my final roles at the institute which I embarked on was being the SGDP Centre's annual Summer School Coordinator. I would like to point out at this stage, that this was technically a

separate job which was *not* part of my placement job description. Therefore, though both linked with the institute, I had to do it without it affecting my placement work. I feel it necessary to mention it though, as I consider it a big contribution to my work experience this past year. My job as coordinator involved dealing with applications for two summer school courses that were to be run in July 2008. I had to help with the screening and selection of applicants, send out acceptance and rejection letters, give out course details, organise catering for the summer school week, arrange timetables and course booklets to be printed, create name badges for every applicant and help organise a cocktail party for the summer school week. Unfortunately there is not a big enough word limit for me to do justice on just how much was involved in organising the Summer School. I had a huge amount of responsibility and a rather high workload on top of my placement and weekend job. At times I felt rather swamped with the combined workload and got quite stressed. That said, it was a great opportunity to be involved in it and I got to meet and work with some amazing people. I would recommend getting involved with the Summer School as well as a placement at the institute, as the skills I have acquired doing so are invaluable (more on this later).

During my time at the college, I got involved with the lecturing / educational side of psychology as well as the more administrative side of starting research projects. On a weekly basis I would help my supervisor prepare her lectures and get handouts printed for the students. There were also a number of other admin tasks I did such as photocopying, finding journals / articles as well as organising the applications for the next year's placement student. Although perhaps not the most exciting element of my placement, it allowed me some time to relax a little from the intense work of testing and data entry.

Finally, during the last half of my placement I had the unique opportunity for heading a brand new research project. This project was based on the ideas and interests of my supervisor and one of her MSc students, which stemmed from the previous research in STEPs. This project was STEPs Adolescence which myself and my two colleagues created a testing plan for, adapted measures and gained ethical approval. The study, like STEPs, examined cognitive and environmental influences on anxiety, depression and sleep, but this time included the influence of puberty on these factors. After recruiting a secondary school (which proved difficult after being turned down by 20 schools!) we went in and gave a presentation to 150 girls in year 7 who were aged 11-12. Over the next few weeks I revisited the school to collect consent forms, remind people about the study and give out more consent forms. By the time I started the testing procedure we had 40 consent forms returned. This was a good start, but I still needed to push for more returns.

The nature of the testing procedure was like that of the original STEPs, with some measures being computer based and some paper based. Some of the measures had been adapted from their original state so that they were appropriate for the target audience. However, adapting the measures was a task that proved quite tricky. I had to make sure that questions were not changed so much that it deviated too much from the original but at the same time had to change them enough to make the teachers at the school were happy with the questions we were asking, particularly when it came to some of the questions on the Puberty Questionnaire. After going back and forth between my supervisor and the teachers a couple of times we eventually settled on a test battery we were all happy with. Although frustrating at the time trying to keep both sides happy, I feel that in the end we produced the best possible testing battery for our audience, which hopefully provided the most valid and useful data.

I spent the next three months testing these girls and I was lucky to find that they were just as nice and easy to work with as the eight year olds. And it was particularly interesting to see the

difference in their answers and the way that they think compared to the primary school children we tested. I'm hoping that this will be reflected in the data we collected. This part of my placement was by far the best as I was given a huge amount of trust and responsibility from my supervisor to carry out a piece of meaningful research. I experienced the pitfalls, such as being continually turned down by schools, struggling to boost participation rate, as well as experiencing the excitement of research, collecting rich data and working with some great participants.

An evaluation of the utilisation and extension of my previous skills and knowledge

Because of the diversity of the tasks I completed on placement I got a chance to expand on some of the previous skills and knowledge that I had gained in my first two years at University. Some of the most noticeable are listed below:

Practicalities of Research

During my first two years at University I only really got to understand the basics of conducting research and the research projects I did do were on a small scale. The research I embarked on at the institute, however, demonstrated to me just how difficult conducting real life research is. There are so many practicalities you have to consider prior to conducting it and so many obstacles you will face during and after the data collection. I was taught how to overcome these issues along with being given a greater understanding on the importance of thorough planning, something I didn't have before. It also allowed me to be able to train others on testing procedures.

Importance of ethics and confidentiality of data

Again, prior to my time at the institute, I used to take for granted just how important ethics and data confidentiality is in research. Although I had a standard knowledge of ethical procedures and participant data confidentiality, having to put it into practice showed me *just* how important it is. After each testing session I had to secure the data by copying all files onto a memory stick from the testing computer. The testing kit was then locked away, and I would return to the institute with the memory stick and any testing booklets and place them in the archive, which is double locked for security. I also had to ensure that all participants were identified by a test number, age and sex only, with no names being given other than on the original testing booklet. This was a very important part of not only protecting our participant's identity, but the protection of our data.

Using SPSS, data entry, cleaning and recoding

SPSS is an extremely useful package to be able to use, particularly for analysis of psychological research. Although I didn't do any complex data analysis, my use of SPSS over the year allowed me to brush up on some of my previous skills as well as helped me understand some of its features for data entry, cleaning and recoding. I feel this will be hugely beneficial for me in my final year.

An evaluation of any personal change and development as a result of the placement

My placement at the institute was not only great for what it taught me about psychological research but it also taught me a lot about myself and my capabilities. One thing that improved greatly during my placement was my confidence, particularly with meeting new people. Prior to my placement I used to be quite shy meeting new people, but after working with people from all different ages, from all different backgrounds and different professions, I now have much less apprehension when meeting new people. The elements of my placement that helped with this was having to attend meetings and contribute to the content of these meetings, giving

presentations in schools to audiences of varying ages and liaising with people from all around the world during the Summer School.

Another notable change was my organisation and time management skills improving. I've always been fairly organised, but now I can be even more organised and manage my time effectively. This is due to the sheer number of task / jobs that I had to juggle at the same time. I had weekly 'To-Do Lists' which had a range of tasks from testing to photocopying and I had to make sure that most, if not all of these tasks were completed by the end of the week. This became increasingly difficult during the second half of my placement as I had not only taken on the Summer School, but was also working weekends at my Saturday job. To make sure that I had everything done I drew up spreadsheets and tick lists to break up my week and keep on track of what had to be done and when. My time management also improved as I had a two hour commute to and from where I worked, as well as travelling to and from schools to test. I had to make sure I had enough time to complete my journeys and allow for typical delays that occur on the trains.

With the above in consideration I also learnt to deal with stress and lack of sleep in a way which I haven't had to before. Because of having three jobs with occasional high work load and long travelling hours I was often quite tired which made dealing with problems and stressful events even more difficult to deal with. I dealt with this by compromising some of my social life in order to get a good nights sleep, took some time off from my weekend job and utilised my travelling time to do something productive towards my placement e.g. reading journal articles. I also learnt that getting stressed was not an effective way to deal with problems, so developed a calmer, more rational attitude to problem solving. All-in-all my placement has helped me grow and develop in a way in which I never would have had I not done a placement year.

Any other notable features of the placement

For anyone considering a placement year in psychological research I would highly recommend doing one at my institute and college. The diversity of the things I was involved with and the skills I learnt has made this one extremely valuable year. On top of that I have met some very inspirational people during my time who have given me a drive to take up a career in clinical psychology. As I've mentioned I have seen the downsides to research, but I feel the benefits of a good piece of research outweigh these and I would love nothing more than to one day submit a research paper of my own.

There is, however, something you should consider when taking a placement, not just at my site but in major cities in general, is that they tend to be unpaid, particularly in this area of psychology. I did get a contribution of £70 towards my travel, and I was lucky in the respect I lived at home and didn't have to pay rent, however I still had to work at weekends in order to get any disposable income. At times this would hinder my work at the institute due to the fact I was so tired from having three jobs. The downside of living at home was of course the long travelling hours, so if you take a placement far away you may want to weigh up the costs and benefits of living close to your placement or living at home. You will also want to budget for your year ahead.

I wouldn't consider the above to be reasons not to do an unpaid placement. One thing I was told before I joined was that you will get as much out of it as you put in. I can't emphasise just how true this is as I got so much out of this placement, a lot of which was due to having such a fantastic supervisor who allowed me to get involved in so much. I would without a doubt do it again.

13. The Story of my Placement Experience Department of Food Science and Nutrition Intern at a product and ingredient development laboratory

Invaluable experience...

The opportunity to do an Industrial Placement as part of my course was definitely a definitive factor in choosing to apply to the University of Surrey. I felt that the practical experience an Industrial Placement would offer would be invaluable since so many employers are keen for potential candidates to demonstrate some degree of experience which is relevant to the job being applied for.

My placement certainly provided this experience and also gave me an opportunity to consolidate what I had learnt during the first two years of my degree by applying that knowledge to practical applications. Not only that, but it was also great fun!

The application process...

The application process is generally quite intensive and can seem a bit daunting at first, but you'll soon get the hang of it. Most employers seem to favour on-line applications over CVs and these can take a bit of getting used to. In particular, I found that on first reading many of the questions it was difficult to identify exactly what employers were looking for from my answers.

However, the university provides a huge amount of support for those making applications and I found the lectures on how to answer application questions incredibly helpful. As you will hear in the lectures the best way to approach each question is to apply a simple three-part structure based on Situation, Action and Result. Once you break the questions down in this way it becomes much easier to answer them and your answers will be much more structured and comprehensive. Like with anything, practice is the key and the more questions you do the easier it becomes to answer them in a way which highlights your skills and potential.

The next stage of the application process is usually an assessment day or an interview, or both! These can seem pretty scary, but the important thing to remember is that by getting this far you have already impressed the recruiters and an assessment day or interview will give you a chance to shine. Preparation is essential and the best advice I could give you is to thoroughly research the company you are applying to since it is inevitable that you will be asked 'Why do you want to work for us?' and you'll really stand out if you can something insightful and original.

My other top tip for assessment days and interviews is that if you are asked to complete a preparatory task before attending make sure you do it and make sure you do exactly what it asks of you. I know it sounds simple, but you'd be surprised how many people don't follow this simple rule. At one assessment day I attended, candidates were required to turn up having prepared a brief presentation on the company's core values in the form of either a PowerPoint or flipchart presentation. Some candidates hadn't bothered at all, some hadn't prepared the visual cues required and others had prepared a presentation on something completely different! If you get to the assessment day or to interview don't let yourself down like this.

Of course all the classic interview advice about dressing smartly, offering a confident handshake and making eye contact applies as well. Although interviews often seem a bit mysterious at first, just like the on-line applications it doesn't take long for a pattern to emerge in the format and the

types of questions that you tend to be asked each time and after the first one or two all the mystery will have disappeared. The careers service offers practice interviews and this is by far the best way to prepare.

As you will see, the university provides support at every stage of the application process. The tutors are very involved in helping you choose the right placement by suggesting companies which will develop your interests and provide suitable experience for your desired career and are happy to advise on how to approach trickier applications. If you take advantage of this, as well as the lectures and practice interviews, you'll be in an excellent position to make your applications.

My placement...

I did my Industrial Placement at a laboratory facility owned by a major UK confectionary company and based on a university campus. The company is made up of a number of labs specialising in different areas, from microscopy to DNA and proteins. At the interview I indicated that I was interested in product development and so I was thrilled to find out that I would be working in the Product and Ingredient Development Laboratory. The best thing about this was that it allowed me to put all the aspects of my Food Science and Nutrition degree into practice.

My first week passed in a bit of a blur. The emphasis throughout the placement was very much on hands-on experience and by the end of the first week I had already been trained on a dozen pieces of laboratory kit and prepared my first formulations. It might all sound a bit overwhelming but it is amazing how quickly you pick up the techniques and although there was a steep learning curve the work was always enjoyable and I felt that by getting to carry out all these techniques in practice I understood them far better than if I had just learnt about them in a text book.

The focus on hands-on learning meant I was given a lot of independence and expected to take on quite a lot of responsibility. On a day-to-day basis I was responsible for contacting suppliers and working with clients on the development of their products as well as attending regular departmental meetings where I presented my work to colleagues and contributed to work being undertaken by others. The work was incredibly varied and each week I was doing something different and learning something new.

After a couple of months I started to get involved in some of the more important projects coming into the lab. This was particularly exciting as it involved cutting-edge product development for a number of household names. One of the biggest projects I was involved in was the development of a new product for a well-known multinational company. I carried out a lot of the initial research which led to the final formulation and had regular meetings with company representatives to keep them up to speed. After months of work it was time to produce a test batch in the pilot plant which meant I was able to go to the pilot plant in France and see the product being mass produced.

The most rewarding part of being involved in these projects was being able to follow them through from the initial concept to the final product as it allowed me to be involved in every stage of development from the initial meeting to seeing the products I helped develop on supermarket shelves.

What I took from my placement experience...

The most important outcome of the placement for me was that it vastly increased the confidence I have in my own ability. Before the experience I would have questioned whether I was capable of all those tasks and approached them very cautiously. However, working independently in the laboratory pushed me to think for myself and rely much more on my own initiative. Although at the beginning I was daunted by the work load and the speed at which I was expect to complete tasks, the challenge turned out to be great fun and hugely rewarding. I made plenty of mistakes in the beginning but these are all part of the learning curve and as long as you learn from them then you very rarely make the same mistake again.

The placement also provided me with a wealth of experience, not only in the context of Food Science, but also in a much broader, commercial context. There was so much more to the placement than simply applying what I had learned in my degree. I had to learn how to manage clients' expectations and make commercially aware decisions. One of the best things about an Industrial Placement is undoubtedly the variety of the work and the fact that you never know what you're going to be asked to work on next or what challenges you will need to over come to satisfy your client.

Finally, my placement gave me the opportunity to work with some brilliant people whose enthusiasm and energy was so contagious that it has given me more energy for my final year as I now have a focus on what I would like to do as a graduate.

So to conclude...

If you have the opportunity to do an Industrial Placement, you absolutely should take it. You will have a great time and take away so much from it. From the point of view of getting a job you will have the much prized experience which will make you stand out from other graduates, but you will learn a lot more besides.

I had a great year and will now feel more confident going for jobs as a graduate due to the experience I have gained. I hope you enjoy you Industrial Placement Year as much as I enjoyed mine.

14. Learning to be a professional: The story of my placement experience Department of Computing and Information Technology Programmer/analyst at a major global pharmaceutical company

After two years of studying for a BSc (Hons) in Computing and Information Technology, I spent my placement year working for one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies. In addition to my interest in Computing, I have a passion for writing, having been editor of the university's own student newspaper, *barefacts*, as well as being a programme representative and peer mentor. I have now returned to Surrey to work on a final year project on optical character recognition for an electronic voting system.

In September 2007 I took my first steps out into the big wide world of professional working life as I embarked on my industrial placement year, but in reality the beginnings of this learning experience were sown many months, in fact almost a year, beforehand – right from the transition from first year to second.

Having been attracted to Surrey due to its high graduate employment rate, taking advantage of the chance of a year's experience in industry prior to completing my degree seemed like yet another attractive option. Yet despite its sense of being a significant milestone to work towards in both my academic and professional life, I must confess that during my first year it barely crossed my mind: I was a carefree fresher, more than comfortably becoming accustomed and well adjusted to the university way of life. It was perhaps the imminent loss of this 'way of life' that would mark my return to Guildford at the beginning of second year as being somewhat bittersweet: things were starting to get serious and I was getting nervous.

Finding a job was made easy by the superb support from the Department of Computing, whose placement office had a database brimming with job descriptions, roles and salaries on offer. Whilst *finding* a job seemed simple enough, it was *getting* a job which would prove to be a challenge. Having been narrowly knocked back from the first two I applied for, I spent much of the run-up to December 2006 applying for as many jobs I could possibly could. Eventually, the plethora of online applications paid off – leading me to be offered the first job I was interviewed for in January 2007; the role of a programmer/analyst working for one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies. For the time-being, I could sit back, relax and happily allow thoughts about placement linger at the back of my mind – I had a job, a signed contract, a starting date (3rd September 2007) and a "Familiarisation Day" scheduled for the end of June.

However, much of the spring semester would go by quickly, with my attitudes to work, time management and my extra-curricular activities changing for the better. Throughout the entire process of finding a job, filling in the forms and answering the detailed questions, I began to re-assess the way I used my time and how to make better use of it; already making steps towards preparing myself to becoming a professional 'in the real-world', so-to-speak.

Before I knew it, second year was over; I had handed in my last piece of coursework, sat my last exam and with the weeks rapidly turning into months, I arrived at the end of June for what the company called a "Familiarisation Day". A day of finding a bit more about the company, meeting the many other students that were also working there for the year (although in different fields) and banding together to find accommodation! There was also a handover session with

my predecessor who talked me through the job, answered any questions I had and gave me useful bits of tips and advice.

As daunting as some of it may sound (finding accommodation in less than a day with a person who I had just met, for example) it was the perfect preparation for the year to come: being thrown into the unknown, having to think and react quickly. As I panicked in the build-up to starting the job that I would not be technically competent enough, or that I would say something stupid or embarrass myself with a ridiculous question, it wasn't until a few weeks working on the job itself that I learnt that these kind of worries were misplaced.

Every other student I spoke to had, at some point and to varying extents, worried about the same thing and the team I had been placed in were all too aware of this – in fact, they actively encouraged me to ask questions, speak-up and join in on discussions; to be part of the team and more than just someone who had just been plucked out of university part-way through their degree. Once this had been made clear to me, I began to understand more about how my work placement would benefit my professional development.

My team was an application development and support team consisting of four members of staff; the team manager, one placement student (myself) and two senior programmer/analysts (one of which who acts as the placement students' supervisor). The team's main activities centred on providing support to statisticians and non-clinical research and development scientists worldwide with systems developed by the team itself or vendor-supplied packages (e.g. off-the-shelf, commercially available products). My placement provided excellent experience of working for a large multinational company, whilst also allowing me to work closely as part of a small team on a day-to-day basis.

My role working as part of the team had the following four main areas:

- Providing support to in-house applications or vendor-supplied packages.
- Developing, maintaining and testing in-house systems.
- Providing support for and maintaining the department's web sites.
- Maintaining the department's training laptops.

Throughout the year I became increasingly familiar with the many standard operating procedures (SOP) the team had to adhere to for all aspects of work, development, support duties or otherwise. Training and guidance came from other members of the team, as well as e-learning modules, self-study and off-the-job training. Throughout the year I completed several projects and one-off tasks, eventually experiencing all areas of the IT system development life cycle, whilst additionally attending to my other regular tasks which were repeated throughout the year. In doing so, I was able to put what I had learnt at university into practice, in addition to learning new skills that would I would then be able to put into practice upon my return to university (formal documentation would be transferable to my dissertation report writing, for example).

Bridging the gap between study (at university) and work (my employment) was a difficult challenge to master in the beginning, with the added troubles of adjusting to working every single day between set hours instead of whenever I felt was best. Whilst it was arguable that many of the academic assignments set at university were similar in fashion to the types of trials a person may face at work, these would never replicate the surroundings or processes one would need to go through in the work environment. Learning to be a professional was not just about learning more technical skills, but learning how to work collaboratively in a team, yet as an individual learn, develop and nurture new skills, too.

In the first few months of the placement, working life was a nerve-wracking, yet exciting, new experience. Whilst I had worked before part-time in a retail job, not only was this a significantly different experience due to the fact I was applying what I had learnt at university to the job I was doing, but also due to the fact I had moved away to the unknown once again. Much like I had swapped my home town for Surrey at the beginning of my university career, placement saw me county-hopping again this time across the UK and moving to a small, picturesque town far removed from the bustling streets of Guildford. However, in this sense the move to university itself had proved I was already capable of making this kind of change in my life, whilst also making something successful and positive out of it.

Emotionally, the journey – at the beginning – was a time of acceptance and readjustment to my new surroundings and circumstances, and all the while I missed university at the beginning, by the end I had developed a definitive appreciation for working life that made me sad to leave. In my year in industry I had learnt so much, it was difficult not to imagine how much more I could have learnt in another year and so on; although I look forward to the challenges graduate employment will offer!

Learning to interact with the people I worked with was possibly one of the least daunting parts of the entire experience and something I would change very little about if I were to do it again. Part of the entire professional experience was not only applying the skills you already have, but learning from the small mistakes that would inevitably be made along the way, too. My team mates were particularly understanding of this and from the continued support of my supervisor (who I had one-to-one meetings with every 3 weeks to discuss my progress/work) I was able to take on board any issues, criticism and general feedback that would allow me to work better as part of the time.

An advantage of working for a large organisation was that the company I worked for employed a large amount of placement students at its many sites across the country. At my particular site, there was approximately 30 other placement students; all from different universities, scattered across the country and all originating from different places, likewise scattered across the country and in some cases the globe! There was no shortage of potential housemates and clear sense of community amongst the students which complimented the transition from the social life of a university student to that of a professional working full-time, five days a week.

Over the course of the entire placement experience, I noticeably changed as a person. Not only has confidence in my own abilities vastly improved, but I return for my final year with an increased drive and motivation to do well and get my work done. Whilst I still enjoy the benefits offered by university life such as the social and extra-curricular benefits (e.g. societies and sports clubs) I am more capable now of interacting effectively with my lecturers, with a greater discipline in terms of meeting deadlines, attending lectures and managing my own time. Whilst I may no longer be a carefree student, I feel the combination of both my university education and my experience of the working world have equipped me with the necessary skills to go on to get a good quality graduate job upon completion of my degree.

Despite the good and bad times I encountered, I look back fondly on my placement experience and would thoroughly recommend the year out to any student with the opportunity to. Whilst I have only been able to provide a simple overview of a very busy, enriching year away from academia, I believe I have returned to university with an improved work ethic, greater knowledge and skill set that will no doubt benefit me in the completion of my final year, dissertation and all future professional endeavours. To anybody about to embark on a work

placement themselves, I would advise them to approach the year with an enthusiastic, proactive attitude and to not only learn more about the practical application of your degree to 'the real world', but to discover more about yourself and where you might want to go with your career!

Learning to be a professional is about the perfecting the balance of your own knowledge, nurturing your skills and working in collaboration with others.

**15. What does learning to be professional
through the work placement experience mean?
Department of Chemistry
Lab technician at a fuel cell development firm**

Undertaking a year long work placement was one of the best decisions that I had ever made. I started out at the University of Surrey as an immature, hideaway but hardworking girl. Walking to lectures for the very first time, I was unsure of what my degree (BSc in chemistry) held for me. Before my placement year, I had attended two industry days and these involved final year students who had taken a placement year doing a poster presentation in the morning and answering questions from first and second year students, then in the afternoon, each student would have to give a PowerPoint presentation about their placement. I remember feeling excited about the prospect of taking a placement year and then coming back equipped with various skills and a new found confidence.

During my first two years at Surrey, as part of my course, I attended the laboratory to do practical work and although it was only once a week nonetheless I had always struggled to understand what I had to do, why I had to do it hence I struggled in the lab write ups. This was my underlying motivation to specifically choose a placement with plenty of lab work involved to improve my poor lab skills and knowledge. Searching and applying for placements were easy enough but when it came down to the interview, I had failed a few times. By this time (it was my second year and after Christmas, therefore, it was considered quite late in not having found a placement), I was beginning to despair.

At around that time, my interest in fuel cells was beginning to soar (due a coursework assignment which involved writing an essay about a type of fuel cell) and I asked one of my lecturers for contacts within a fuel cell company. I sent off around six letters and CVs to the fuel cells companies and was warned that I may not get a reply, so I applied for other companies as a back up. A few weeks later, I received a reply from one company to say that they were not looking for placement students and another reply from a different fuel cell company inviting me for an interview. This company is a UK based developer of fuel cell stack for portable and small stationary generation applications. It took an enormous amount of preparation for the interview as I really wanted the placement and to stop looking for placements so I could spend more time in my studies, trying to get the best mark possible. I attended the interview and went away buzzing with excitement. After an anxious two weeks, came the email to offer me the role of a lab technician within the catalyst development group.

A few months later, I started my placement and after a nerve-wracking first couple of days, I settled in, learnt about how to run the experiments which provided information about a particular catalyst such as its activity, learnt some theory related to these experiments, learnt about how to carry these experiments out in a safe and responsible manner and learnt some data analysis (this was done using Microsoft Excel). Of course, these were all important skills to learn, but I also learnt something which is of equal value if not more, that is, the importance of taking responsibility for getting to work on time (that is getting out of bed, washed, dressed and getting to work before nine o'clock for five days a week!) and learning to interact and socialise with my colleagues. After a while, my colleagues felt like they were part of my family as we saw so much of one another, we had to work together and we also went to social events such as going to the pub, going to the cinema, playing football and last September, our company entered a six people team for one of the region's largest annual charity races. Companies can enter teams of

six people and each person runs 1.7 miles in the form of a relay. It really was a memorable run and a great day.

In the first few months, I was experiencing the honeymoon period of my placement, there were so many highs and being given responsibility at work gives a boost of confidence and self importance. However, I had yet to experience a low – that is, the ugly nature of company politics. Initially I had moved into a flat with another student who had almost finished his year there and he arranged for his colleague to come to take me to work on my first day (as my flatmate had other plans and we could not travel to work together). Not only did his colleague drive me to work, he really took me under his wing, helped me with everything and made it seem like it was no trouble at all. Three months after starting my placement, he left partly due to the politics. I learnt a really important lesson there, that is, in every workplace; there will always be politics at the heart of it and to be very careful with company politics (it is wise not to mix and stir it up).

As part of my chemistry degree, my personal tutor had to come to the site to visit me three times during the placement year. I would do a technical PowerPoint presentation for him, my line manager and my colleague and afterwards there was a question and answer session. After the presentation itself, we would go for lunch and my tutor and I would have a one-to-one chat and then also with my line manager. Before taking the placement, I was always petrified of doing presentations and had little experience of doing solo PowerPoint presentations. In the first presentation, I was so nervous, my voice was faltering and my hands were slightly shaking. However, by my tutor's third visit, I felt that I had gained the confidence required to carry out a presentation and was no longer shaking.

Earning money and having so much more time (time which would usually be spent doing coursework and studying) felt brilliant. In the beginning, unfortunately I did not use all the spare time as well as I could (I would be sat in front of the television for most of the time and shopping spending my hard earned cash!). Soon I began to realise that this was a waste of my time and money and that I could use these more effectively so I began taking driving lessons every weekend. It did not come easily to me but I persevered and passed the theory test.

Unfortunately I took the practical test at the end of my placement and failed but I haven't given up on trying again. During this time, at one of the social events, I was talking to a colleague's boyfriend and he mentioned that they took pottery classes together at the local college one night a week. Taking classes and learning something new sounded really appealing so I applied to take a six week knitting class. I also had to pay for it but it was worth it and great fun as the knitting teacher taught really well and we (the class) gained a basic knowledge of how to cast on, how to purl, how to cast off and how to interpret and follow a pattern.

In the following term, I wanted to continue with the knitting classes and to take another course called world faith (the classes involve discussing different religions), however, due to a shortage of interest, both classes were cancelled. I decided to take classes in creative writing which sparked off inspiration as the teacher was writing her novel at that time and she would bring random but thought provoking ideas into the classes. It was very enjoyable and a great pleasure to be able to be part of the class.

During the year, I also managed to complete a four day first-aid at work course with the British Red Cross. The company gave me four days off work to go on the course and I thoroughly enjoyed it as there was an opportunity to both meet and work with people from different backgrounds. This course involved being placed in teams and working together to come up with

presentations such as concussion and the first aid treatment for it. During the course, we were also given different scenarios in which first aid is required.

Meanwhile at work, a colleague went on maternity leave and she also handled the stock, that is, ordering, organising and taking requests from other colleagues. I offered to take over while she was away and so I familiarised myself with the procedure, the stock from the suppliers' catalogues, how much stock to order, organising the storeroom when the delivery was made and checking that the right items were delivered. I really enjoy learning and taking responsibility for something else.

Although experiencing the working life felt great, it also felt tiring and hard work at times. Work means working and taking responsibilities from 9am-5.30pm Monday to Friday but being a student involves going to lectures, studying but getting more free time.

For me, learning to be professional through the work placement means learning to interact and build a good working relationship with my colleagues, learning a variety of things both in and outside of work, experiencing the working life and what it has to offer, gaining the lab skills which I had so desperately wanted, increasing self confidence, and maturing as a person. Now I am looking forward to this year's industry day where I will have the opportunity to talk to first and second year students about undertaking a placement year and how it has benefitted me and doing a PowerPoint presentation.

Undertaking a placement year has had a positive impact in terms of my final year project (I am better able to carry out independent lab work), my CV, hopefully my degree and it is the best start to the working life.

16. Learning to be professional: the story of my placement experience Department of Dance and Culture Intern at a major touring ballet company

People say that in order to truly succeed in something one must have a passion for it; the same applies to studying for a degree or developing a career. It was my passion for dance that led me to choose a degree in Dance and Culture at the University of Surrey. Initially, many people could not understand my choice of study and questioned me on what I might do having completed this degree and at the time I admit I was unsure myself.

I chose the four-year undergraduate sandwich course hoping it would enlighten me on possible career paths and also enhance my knowledge and skills; increasing my employability prospects. After two years of study, my third year would involve a thirty-week placement at a professional dance organisation.

As an established dance institution, The University of Surrey Dance Department have connections with many professional dance organisations and they assisted in finding me a suitable placement. Having discussed which area of the industry I would like to work in, they then contacted organisations on my behalf to enquire into possible placement opportunities. It was then my responsibility to contact designated companies to arrange an interview.

Following a successful interview, I was offered a placement position at a ballet theatre based in the North of England. This ballet theatre are recognised as one of Britons leading touring Ballet Companies, touring both internationally and nationally for up to thirty-weeks each year. In addition to performing, the Company also have a large vocational training sector for young dancers and an education department delivering accessible dance work around the country.

Whilst at the company I worked primarily for two departments; the majority of my time was spent with the department for education and community outreach, where I was given the official title Learning and Access Assistant. The role proved extremely varied; assisting with practical delivery, general administration and project management. Whilst out of the office I joined dance education officers around the UK supporting them in facilitating dance workshops and events. In the office I worked under the leadership of the Department Director and Coordinator aiding with general administration as well as being given my own projects and responsibilities. My role within the Classical Training Department was very different as I worked independently as a pastoral member of staff. Within this role I acted as the communication link between parents, students and teachers. As the first point of call for first aid and student support, I had to undertake certified emergency first aid training and a course in child protection prior to this position.

The working environment during the thirty weeks was very supportive; my Departments and in general the whole Company immediately welcomed me. Within the Learning and Access Department I very quickly felt like a fully-fledged member of staff and was immediately involved and asked for input in all meetings and projects. My department helped me understand the general Company structure and certain aspects such as Company etiquette and procedures. The rest of the Company such as the Marketing, Finance and Public Relations Departments were also very helpful, allowing me an insight into what they do to give me a fuller

understanding. I felt able to approach anyone within the Company to assist me or ask for their advice. Seen as a formal member of staff, I felt able to receive work or instructions from Company members outside my Department and I felt able to delegate work to them if tasks were more suited to another Department's expertise.

I was assigned a mentor from within the Education Department to act as my main point of call for support and to assess my progress and provide feedback to the University. They were extremely supportive and encouraging professionally, but also sensitive to external more personal issues. With the placement based far from home, part of my placement experience included having to move somewhere completely new. The extra responsibility of finding somewhere accessible and affordable to rent added an extra dimension to my experience, and I felt even more like I was entering the real world. The Company were sympathetic to my situation, knowing that I knew few people and was unfamiliar with the area, they helped me settle in and were adaptable to my needs.

The Learning and Access Department job role proved vast and varied; as well as travelling nationally with the Company delivering activities; they also work within formal education institutions delivering short and long-term projects. In the entire thirty-weeks, there was not one day that was ever the same. I was constantly challenged with new situations and new people to engage with. The variety of participants and clients ranging from primary school pupils, to Old Age Pensioners to visually impaired adults and mentally disabled children meant I was constantly required to adapt my communication approach in order to engage with them.

Prior to placement I had a small amount of teaching experience from working at a private dance school. I had studied modules at University on how to plan and implement community dance sessions with different participants, however I had never had any practical experience. The opportunity to work first hand with such a variety of participants was stimulating and exciting and I enjoyed the challenge of adapting my approach to different situations. In reflection, it was through these situations that I was able to recognise my ability to communicate effectively with clients and discovered how surprisingly confident I felt working with these different people.

In addition to working in the office, and at events and workshops in the region, I was also offered the chance to go on tour with the Company for a week. This opportunity was completely unique and was excellent in illustrating the range of dance activities on offer and allowed me to see another level to dance access work. I found the experience positively challenging and certainly character building, as I had to accustom myself to new surroundings without the support of my friends and family. At the start of placement I had quickly and easily got into a daily routine of going to work and coming home again. Whether I was working in schools or in the office there were still familiarities, which acted as a means of support. On tour this was completely different; you are away from your home and the majority of your work colleagues thus you are very isolated and can only rely upon your self for help and encouragement.

The placement made use of and extended my organisational skills. Even trivial tasks such as making my own way to workshops and events and on tour required copious research and planning in advance. Having to do tasks like this on a regular basis not only required me to use my initiative but also extended my day-to-day skills such as map reading and using public transport.

In addition to practical facilitation I was given a large amount of administrative work. With this I was able to develop key skills in computer literacy; learning how to competently use databases and functions such as mail merge all of which will be useful in any future career. Having

observed colleagues project manage, I was then given a number of my own projects to take charge of. My own projects were perhaps the most daunting, yet at the same time the most fulfilling and where I can clearly identify the most professional development. Although I had studied project management at University and produced a number of theoretical documents in regards to coordinating projects and events, I had not had many opportunities to put my knowledge into practice. A unique factor about placement is that you get to experience the realities of working in the professional environment; if things did not go to plan then there would be genuine consequences. The role as project manager required me to use my initiative and come up with relief strategies to solve certain problems and overcome obstacles. These tasks required organisation of the highest level, working within budgets and timescales and having to communicate on a number of levels to a variety of people. The projects allowed me to collate all the skills and knowledge I had gathered and gave me a real sense of achievement to see the final results. Whether it was reading a resource pack I had produced or watching the final performance of a course I had organised, I felt a real sense of ownership and pride towards the work.

Despite all the positive comments about my placement experience, it was not all plain sailing and there were difficulties and challenges I had to face on certain occasions. There were projects at the beginning of my placement that were not entirely successful and I look back now wishing I had then had the confidence to persist, to pester clients and be more determined. There are times when I have been bored and completely frustrated by long menial tasks that have no end in sight. The number of times I have stressed when I have had hundreds of pages to photocopy for an immediate deadline and someone has jammed the photocopier. However, all these issues represent realities of full time employment, which come part in parcel of experiencing to be a professional. It cant always be all fun and exciting and things cant always run smoothly, what is important is that when I reflect back now I can see alternative ways of handling these types of situation.

One of the main highlights of the placement was the opportunity to work with passionate people who have an extensive knowledge of the dance industry. With so many years experience in the field, it was a great insight to see how they had achieved many of their accomplishments and the route they had taken to their current position of work. Working at such close proximity to professionals not just within my own Company but extending outside to the self-employed dance and creative artists, I was able to see what qualities and skills professionals look for in their employees.

The amount you are able to learn and the benefits you gain from undertaking a professional placement is very much up to you as an individual. Your host Company can provide you with a basic insight into how the professional industry function. However, it is your responsibility to embody that knowledge to extend your professional development. The more effort and enthusiasm you put into your work the more you stand to gain. The opportunity to learn and work alongside professionals, utilise and expand existing skills and gain inside knowledge is invaluable and puts you at a great advantage when it comes to the stage of starting your career.

Over only a thirty-week period I feel I have significantly developed knowledge and skills that will prove generally invaluable within any professional industry. The department have helped me reflect on the majority of work I have done, allowing me to see the successes as well as identifying my individual strengths and areas for development. All of the opportunities given to me have allowed me to acquire new skills and I take away some formal qualifications in child protection and emergency first aid that all contributed to my professional development.

From initially feeling very apprehensive and unsure about my placement and my career choice at the end, I am now much more excited and focused about the future. Though there are no guarantees, and I have much development to do professionally, I have a much clearer picture of what is available to me and how to try and achieve that. The previously unknown realm of dance education has been exposed to me under the supportive gaze of this ballet company. Now I am back at university for my final year, I feel there is a purpose to my study and I am more independent and inclined to take charge of my own learning and development. I now have the confidence to grasp new experiences and have a greater understanding of how to progress to the next stage of my life. For me this professional work placement has been integral in introducing an area of the dance industry for which I am now passionate and intent to succeed in.

17. LEARNING TO BE PROFESSIONAL

Department of Chemical Engineering

Intern at chemical engineering contracting firm

INTRODUCTION

In my second year at Surrey, I started applying to industry for a one year placement. The application process at first was very stressful and demanding because most companies make industrial placement students go through the same application route of filling in a company form, having an interview and assessment centre, as they do for graduates. This adds to the challenge of finding a placement, because as a level 2 student, you are put through a very competitive process. I remember filling in countless application forms, and at points wanting to give up as the whole process was seemingly difficult.

However, I received an offer for a place from one company, which was followed by an offer from a second, and a summer placement offer from a third! I was now in a position to choose! After carefully looking at factors like location and nature of the job I decided to accept the first offer. As all three companies were leading chemical engineering firms, I was tempted to do multiple placements. I, therefore, decided to have a slightly longer industrial placement, and worked at one for 2 months before starting work at another. As my placement firm is a contracting company, I had the opportunity to work for many different companies. Through the various interactions I had with people in industry, I grew both as a professional and as a person.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Technical development

My placement provided me an opportunity to develop the technical skills that are necessary in an engineering environment. I did a lot of process design work which included carrying out steady state simulations, drawing up piping and instrumentation diagrams and writing up process calculations. Running the simulations for different units of the plant, not only introduced me to the different operations within the plant, but also helped me appreciate that in order to successfully simulate a unit, you need to have not only knowledge about the process, but you also need to know the thermodynamic properties of the system involved and be aware of the interaction of the system with the rest of the plant units.

Team work and organisation

Working there gave me the opportunity to develop my team-working skills and to achieve results in a fast-paced high-pressure environment that is driven by client demands. For example, at one point, there were only three employees in the group, and being the youngest engineer on the team meant that I had to divide my time between doing my daily project related work and helping out the senior engineers with tasks like preparing parts of presentations and event promotion flyers. This thoroughly tested my organisational skills as I had to prioritise my duties according to the deadlines. I was working closely with three other process engineers to develop the final feasibility study report and it was necessary to frequently consult with the clients to make sure that all of their comments had been incorporated in the close-out document.

Communication skills

The management in place lays emphasis on introducing school and university students to engineering. They regularly take on students for summer and one year placements. These students work along-side permanent staff to get an idea of how the company operates and of the various career paths that an engineering degree can support. I worked with two school students for a day each. I explained the process of marking-up process flow diagrams and explained the importance of maintaining consistency across the project deliverables. This thoroughly tested my communication skills as I had to make sure that I gave clear instructions and information to the students, and also to ensure that the work had been completed correctly.

During my different rotations in the company, I had the opportunity to work with a variety of individuals and teams. This required forming and maintaining positive relationships with a wide range of people. As part of this multi-discipline team, I obtained valuable experience working not only with different disciplines of engineers, but also with people with different levels of experience, ranging from fresh graduates to project managers. Working alongside senior engineers at tight deadlines helped me improve my organisational skills and working with different teams has made me appreciate the complications that can arise because of the interfaces on a large scale project.

I also had the opportunity to interact with individuals from a broad range of professions: mechanical, metallurgy, environment, costing, etc which helped me appreciate that process engineers are not the only people that are responsible for successful and safe completion of a process plant! I had to work closely with the clients on both projects, and I made sure that I was representing my company in a responsible manner at all times.

Oral presentation At the end of my placement, I made a presentation in front of staff and placement students about the work I had been involved with. This not only gave me the opportunity to practice my presentation skills, but also to make other students aware of the many opportunities that are offered to placement students in my firm, and to show them how many different roles they can have in industry with a chemical engineering degree.

Report writing I often had to communicate the findings of my work in report form to the other disciplines. The technical report writing course helped me get an appreciation of the company requirements for report writing and presentation. I set out all of my calculations so that they could be easily understood and checked by others. According to the company standards, I would always include the basis of calculation, and any assumptions and approximations made.

Maintaining company standards The management systems in place helps ensure that all work produced by the company meets client and regulatory requirements and aims for continuous improvement. Careful adherence to the resultant engineering guidelines and work practices helped ensure that my work was of a high standard, particularly with respect to co-ordination and consistency of drawings. Also, I received training through the environmental awareness programme for the project which made me aware of the different standards and legislation which the site must adhere to.

Other I had a chance to learn about the graduate scheme at the company and learn about the different career paths available to employees, and to get feedback from my supervisors through the IPF system. At the end of my placement, I was encouraged to fill in the competence and commitment section of the IChemE chartership form with the experience I gained over the 13 months, so that I can use the details in future.

CONCLUSION

The variety and detail of tasks assigned to me during my placement reflected the day to-day work of graduate engineers. This ranged from core process engineering activities like process design, health safety and environment reviews to project/systems engineering which gave me an insight into schedule planning and document management on large-scale projects.

My rotation within the different groups and projects also allowed to me gain an understanding of the way a contracting company does business. During my placement, I had the opportunity of working on feasibility studies, front end engineering design and engineering procurement and commissioning projects, and also performing traditional process engineering tasks and taking part in process coordination activities, and hence getting an overview of not only the different stages that projects go through from start to completion, but also developing the different skill sets that a process engineer needs in order to complete the various tasks.

My 13 month placement has made me aware of the wider implications of my work as an engineer and has provided me with invaluable experience of team work and allowed me to recognise what a worthwhile and rewarding career a chemical engineering degree can support.

18. Department of Psychology Learning support assistant in a secondary school

What does learning to be professional through the work placement experience mean?

My professional placement year was in a comprehensive secondary school. There were about 800 pupils in the school from years 7 to 11 with children from all types of backgrounds and abilities. The school was in an Army town, therefore a lot of the children were from army families and lots of the children were Nepalese, from Ghurkha families and as refugees. I found my placement through the psychology placement website and went for an interview after submitting my CV and then was called up that day to say I'd got the job! It was quite daunting to think that I had finally got a placement, but it was really exciting to think that I'd be 'making a difference' during my year.

The Learning Support Department was the department that I worked in and was the largest department in the school with over 20 full time staff. This was because there are a lot of leaning needs at the school, with approximately 1/3 of the children on the Special Educational Needs register and there were also a number of statemented pupils and many pupils had English as a second language. It was quite scary to think that there were all these children who really needed help and I was meant to be giving them that, but the department were so friendly and supportive and throughout the year everyone got on so well and I had a fantastic year as part of the team. The team was really diverse with people from all works of life and although I hadn't experienced that before in the workplace, it was a really good experience. I had to be really open and just be myself in the department which was liberating as then everyone accepts you for who you are and then each person valued each other as part of the team and the different qualities they could contribute.

My role for the year was a Learning Support Assistant working in class, with withdrawal groups, and in the Study Support Unit. I had never done anything like this before and so didn't quite know what to expect, but when I arrived on my first day, I was well briefed on what my job was and the fact that I didn't know exactly what to do already was not a problem at all. In a way, I was put straight in at the deep end when I began and although this was quite scary to begin with and I wasn't sure how I'd manage, I found that it was by far the best way to learn in that situation and hence I got to grips with the different aspects of my role a lot quicker than I would have done had I been eased into the job slowly!

There were many different aspects to my job, and this took a bit of time getting used to since there were so many things to remember and on top of this I never thought I'd learn all of the children's and teachers names! But the children were really helpful in that and I soon came to realise that the children weren't trying to trip me up but were quite willing to tell me their names over and over again until I remembered them! Once I had settled in after a couple of weeks I was confident to move around the classrooms and help different children out as I became aware of which children had needs in different areas. Withdrawal groups were with children in years 7, 8 and 9 who had the lowest abilities in the year group. They didn't do a second language and instead came to have extra literacy lessons to develop their skills in spelling, reading, writing and understanding what they read.

There were different resources available for me to use as I was in charge of up to 4 groups at a time, teaching them and responsible for their development. I found that it was fairly difficult to come to terms with all of the different resources for different year groups all at once at the

beginning of the term, yet through the year I gained more confidence in asking for advice from my colleagues. I also learnt more and so was able to chop and change lessons and adapt lessons to what I wanted to do. By the end of the year I had frequently been developing my own series of lessons on different topics and looking back, I don't think I'd have ever expected me to be doing that when I first started my placement! I realised that without noticing it, during my placement year I had gained so many valuable skills and learnt so much that I was almost a completely different type of LSA than when I started... definitely for the better!

The children were tested continuously throughout the year on their literacy skills and their underlying ability and reading age. This would indicate, by the end of the year, if and how much of an improvement had been made. Although this frightened me a little as their progress reflected on their teacher (i.e. me!). However, we also had a few observations through the year and the feedback was so encouraging and positive to all the Learning Support staff that it made me feel quite good about my contribution to the team. This was a really nice experience as it is always nice to know that you're doing well!

Apart from small groups and in-class support, my timetable consisted of planning sessions for my small groups and marking the work. For two hours a week, I was also in the Study Support Unit (SSU) which is an alternative to suspending a pupil if the pupil hasn't been so bad that it is necessary to exclude them or even expel them from the school. All of these different tasks developed my skills and it was good to be involved in the general day to day workings of the school in order to understand all the different things that go on in schools from the perspective of the staff rather than as a pupil!

The only significant problems I encountered during the year were with the behaviour of children. One instance was with a girl in one of my withdrawal groups where she was with some of her friends and she was desperate to make herself look cool in front of them. She was very disruptive and I had to send her out of the class a couple of times. This was hard as was in my first couple of weeks on placement and so had not yet developed how I wanted to discipline the children and how to deal with them most appropriately. However, one of the other teachers was having problems with one of the boys in her equivalent withdrawal group and so via the correct protocol, we swapped the two pupils and the situation was much better for everyone. This was just one experience that led to me gaining confidence and experience and various skills during my year.

The other problem I had was when, after the first half term when I had been sharing a group with one of the heads of the department, the other teacher had to leave for medical reasons for the second half term. This was planned but when I took over all the lessons for a particular group one of the children in particular was very badly behaved and very rude. This had a knock on effect to the rest of the group but the problem was that she did not care about punishment and was stubborn and resistant. I found this really difficult with such little experience handling this type of situation and although I tried many different tactics and punishment she would continually misbehave and be very rude in the lesson. The other staff were very supportive and gave me advice and one of the other LSA's who was often in the lesson with a different pupil used to aid me with the discipline, unfortunately to no effect. In the end, I often had to resort to sending her out of the classroom and sending her to the head of department to work alone for the rest of the term. This was discouraging at the time and I would often dread those lessons. Now though, I realise that, should I become a teacher in the future even if I have a role managing other colleagues, this was good experience. I know that I did things that weren't helpful in disciplining and I had to find out how to discipline effectively and this was a really difficult challenge. Nevertheless, it taught me so much in the way of dealing with others in all

types of situations, and how to handle situations to get the best possible outcome. Especially if I become a teacher, I know that these experiences will be invaluable to when I get into the classroom. There were other lesser issues that I encountered on my placement, such as fights between children, potentially very aggressive children in different situations, a teaching strike, and a difficulty in the department with a previous member of staff. All of these developed my skills in dealing with others and communicating effectively.

During my placement, I developed and acquired many new skills in different aspects of work and my life. Going into a job and having to go straight in at the deep end with taking my own groups of children and having to learn everyone's names as well as disciplining children and everything else that came with the job, had a big impact upon my confidence levels. I also developed my time management and organisational skills, and my communication skills definitely improved!

Although my placement was not directly an application of psychology, I definitely found my first two years of the psychology degree useful. In the year I came across many different learning and behavioural difficulties that all had a psychological aspect. Some of these were learning problems such as dyslexia and dyspraxia that have been directly studied to an extent at university. Other difficulties such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, Autistic spectrum disorders and attachment disorder also provided an opportunity to use knowledge of psychology to gain an understanding to some extent of that 'disorder'. On top of using knowledge from the degree programme it was also interesting to learn more from in service training specific to the learning support department where we learnt more about different issues in detail and how these would affect the children in different environments. This was very interesting and enabled me to also combine the new knowledge with previous knowledge about i.e. Theory of Mind.

This placement year was very helpful to me in aiding me with my career decisions. Before starting my placement, I had no idea as to what to do as a career and in the future. Now however, I am inclined towards teaching as a path for when I finish my degree. I had always known it was an option, though now, having spent a year experiencing working in a school, I definitely consider it a possibility for the future. Also, now knowing how much I enjoyed spending a year working in education, I am also aware of the other routes that I could follow that involve education and psychology. Even if I do not decide to do teaching, I know really enjoyed my placement and know that it was one of the most valuable experiences I have had. Through my professional year I learnt so much about myself and about working in a professional field. Looking back, I don't think I'd really change much about what I did as I know that through all my experiences, they all helped me to grow in myself and develop confidence and abilities.

Should someone who is about to embark on their professional placement year ask me for advice, I would say not to have too high expectations but go in with an open mind. Be optimistic, be positive about all experiences and embrace the opportunity to learn as much as you can. I know that although the year does not have a direct 'knowledge' impact on my final year, it has encouraged me to work really hard to achieve the best I can, and it has refreshed me to apply myself completely to what I want to achieve so that in the future and once I have graduated I can be the best employee that it is possible for me to be. I suppose it is really important just to approach the year with a positive attitude and a desire to do the job to the best of your ability and make the most out of each and every situation, then you will find the experience really rewarding

19. Department of Mechanical, Medical & Aerospace Engineering Engineering support intern with major airline producer in France

I was placed in the company's Customer Services and my job function lies within the Engineering Support unit concerning the Hydro mechanical systems and most precisely for the Landing Gear Systems department. My department is in charge of answering customer queries on Landing Gear Systems for all A300/A310 and A330/A340 fleet.

My activity within the SEE33 department consisted in assisting the Landing Gear Systems Engineers in their daily jobs in investigating system failures, prepare corresponding recommendations for troubleshooting, writing service information letters to be dispatched to customers, which are the different airlines and carry out system or component reliability analysis.

Presentation: HISTORY OF COMPANY

Today this company has over fifty five thousand staff of thirty different nationalities working in its headquarters and subsidiaries. This diversity of cultures and languages has enabled the company to work well with the widest possible range customers, to understand their culture and the needs of their particular market. In addition to people directly employed by the company, some 1500 suppliers in 27 countries provide employment for a workforce of around 100,000 supplying components.

The company was established in 1970 as a French legal construct that allows members to work efficiently on a common group project in a consortium framework, while allowing them to pursue other non-competitive projects independently of the other members.

In June 2000, two firms announced the creation of an integrated company, destined to consolidate company resources and know-how around Europe into a single entity. Today, all the company-related design, engineering and manufacturing assets located in France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom have become part of a new company, under the day-to-day control of a single management team. The integration of all its functions enables the company to obtain even greater efficiency through the concentration of purchasing power, faster decision-making and a direct control over costs.

CUSTOMER SERVICES ENGINEERING

As mentioned in the introduction above, my placement was in the Customer Support Engineering. The purpose of the Customer Support Engineering is to ensure that the maintenance of the company aircraft fleet is as effective and cost efficient as possible, leading to the greatest operational reliability achievable. State-of-the-art technical support and a wide range of engineering services are offered by the company to provide operators with the right solution at the right time.

A. PRODUCT SUPPORT ENGINEERING A/C SYSTEM DIRECTORATE- (SEE ORGANIZATION)

This department ensures the after sale service, on following systems:

- Propulsion systems and APU (SEE1)

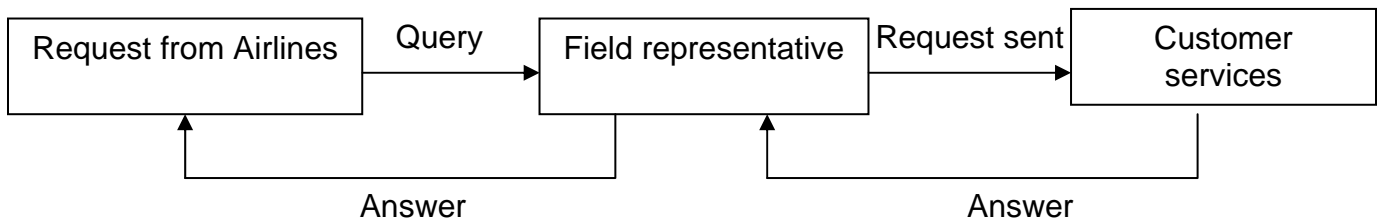
- Fuel and environmental control systems (SEE2)
- Hydromechanical systems (SEE3)
- Avionics systems (SEE4)
- Flight control and electrical systems (SEE5)
- Cabin and cargo systems (SEE6)
- Materials/technologies and training (SEET)
- Structure engineering A300/A310 and A330/A340 (SEE8)
- Structure engineering A320 (SEE9)
- The company technical AOG center called AIRTAC (SEEC)

B. OUTLINE OF PROCESS FLOW

Within the framework of Airworthiness Authorities regulation, in agreement with SEE management policy and procedure, the engineer provides engineering assistance to customers, ensuring timely responses with good quality and with on-site assistance necessary.

The daily action:

Generally, the process flow is as follows:



An airline approaches one of the resident customer support representatives with a request or a question. This question is passed onto the relevant department and group within Engineering Services from whom an answer is expected within the time frame defined by the customer support representative.

The operator's requests are logged in an electronic mail system. Depending on the question, a certain timeframe is allocated. Each question should be answered before the target date. The operator and the local representative set the time frame, but the group has to provide a first reply or acknowledgement within two days to match the quality policy of the company. Actions are launched together with the relevant vendor and design office. If no answer is available before the target date, an interim answer providing a status report on the action is sent to the customer. A new target date is set and agreed by all the people involved in the action.

JOB TASKS IN CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Basic purpose:

- To provide technical assistance to the customer, ensuring timely responses with good quality and with on-site assistance where necessary.
- To monitor in-service events, identify potential impact and launch appropriate corrective action with relevant design organization. To also ensure the required level of follow-up.

- To ensure feedback of in-service experience, maintenance activities and significant issues to management, partner design organization and the vendor.

Main responsibilities:

- Answer all technical queries raised by the customer, within the defined time scale.
- Analyse all in-service events to identify potential impacts (including airworthiness, reliability, cost, etc.), launch and coordinate all actions or product improvement with the relevant partner design organization and the vendor.
- Provide customers with relevant technical information or tools using all customer services appropriate means or media to systems operation.
- Provide customer with technical assistance for troubleshooting.
- Provide technical AOG (Aircraft on Ground) service.
- Provide engineering support to other customer service departments.
- Ensure transfer of in-service experience and maintenance activities to the management, to other customer service division and design organization including partners and vendors.
- Attend technical meetings with customer engineering and maintenance organization.

REFLECTIONS

A. PROFESSIONAL TRAINING VIEWS

My placement year has been a very successful one and a great learning process for me. It has been my first ever engineering job and in a very big worldwide company whereby I was motivated all the way through that year to do very well and achieve success and above all keep my employers happy. Personally, I do not regret having chosen the sandwich course and I do believe it is highly important for all engineering students to make the most of this option given to us and eventually choose to undertake a placement year. It is a real opportunity to discover the outside world and situate us in it.

My year at the company has been a big learning process and where I was supported by very nice people who made my stay there even more joyful. The people in my office have always been there for me and they made sure I was enjoying every bit of my year with them. They would regularly take me out for lunch or dinner or we would have a meal in office whereby everyone would bring something. We were all very well bonded together generating a wonderful atmosphere to work in the team.

B. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The placement year has been a continuous learning curve whereby I kept improving my knowledge and also developed necessary skills in order to achieve success in my job. Besides all the knowledge and experience acquired, I also developed some skills and improved on the existing ones as described below:

- **COMMUNICATION:**

Communication has always been an important aspect from Day 1. Being in a team of 9 members, it was highly essential that there is a good level of communication within the group in order to achieve our targets and get all the work done successfully. And the nature of our job is that we are in constant contact with each other and also with people from other departments or our partners in the UK, France or sub-contractors. Furthermore since I am French speaking as well, it made it easier to settle in the group and to be able to participate actively in discussions or even when cracking jokes and having a fun time. Good ability to

communicate with the team and also customers, and the ability to give a complete and concise account of a problem or solution; both orally and written.

- **MANAGEMENT:**

Management is very essential in any job activity. It includes time managing, organisation of the work schedule, planning, prioritise etc. It is not easy to carry out several tasks at the same time without any planning and also depending on the urgency of the issues. In fact, many of our tasks have a got a target time to respond to, some can take weeks while others simply a day or two. Therefore, it required a good level of management from me in order to be able to progress accordingly with my project and at the same time maintain my schedule for the daily activities, which include reporting to airlines and coordinating the Repair Approval procedure. I had to share my time accordingly between the amounts of work I had, the urgency of the issues and meetings.

- **TEAMWORK:**

Effective teamwork was key to achieving success and meet targets. Our team consisted of 9 members and everyone had a particular area of work specialised in. However depending on the urgency of the issues and the amount of work, we do share the workload between us and help each other. Every now and then, we will be having discussions on hot topics or share an interesting point with the group. Further, we would regularly have social events together and this reflects the excellent bonding we have in the team.

- **LEADERSHIP:**

Leadership was a skill that I improved massively throughout my year. In fact slowly I have been gaining more and more leadership attributes. I was trusted with responsibilities from the team whereby I had to make sure that I do my job as best as I could. Being in charge of the RAS procedure meant that I was the main focal point in the whole process and monitored the progress of the repairs, managing the target dates and eventually keeping all parties concerned aware of the latest progress. Further having been assigned the LDG project, I had to make sure that I coordinate every step of it accordingly by organising meetings to review the whole progress of it with my mentor and manager and sometimes the whole team.

Overall gains:

As my placement went on, I became more and more mature and took on more responsibilities by myself. I had more belief and confidence in myself and this has been induced in me by my manager and the team members who always encouraged me in everything and who supported me all way through.

CAREER ASPIRATIONS:

Following my one-year placement with the company in the Landing Gear Systems group, I did a 2-months training experience with another firm in the UK. This company is the world leader in the design, development, manufacture and support of landing gear systems. Having spent a year providing technical support and assistance to airlines on Landing Gear issues, I wanted to gain the experience of how actually they were manufactured, the different mechanisms etc. In fact through these 2 months, I got to learn about the Landing Gears in details, see the different

manufacturing processes in the workshop, the fatigue/stress tests and the assembly of all those parts. And I do hope to secure a work experience with an airline in the engineering department for next summer. It will be really interesting to get one as I would get to look at the maintenance or servicing of the aircraft while back at my time with the company I used to be giving these maintenance procedures or troubleshoot to the airlines and assist the engineers on site technically.

**20. Learning to be professional:
the story of my placement experience
School of Management
Secretariat Administrator in global petroleum industry**

Details of Professional Training

Dates: 9th July 2007 to 8th July 2008

Position: Secretariat Administrator

Training: None

Duties Undertaken:

- Administration of Powers of Attorney and Proxies
- Drafting and arranging execution of legal documents
- Maintaining Sealing Registers
- Fielding questions from colleagues about company law
- Drafting Board Minutes and Company Resolutions
- Briefing Directors and Company Secretaries with detailed summaries of transactions

Hours Worked: 37.5 hours per week

Supervision: Presented task log at weekly departmental meetings

Job Selection

Before I began to make job applications, I decided that I would like to gain experience working for a large multinational organisation. I believed that exposure of working in an international environment will be very beneficial to my career because globalisation is a prospect facing more and more businesses these days. I felt that I would also gain valuable exposure of cross-cultural communication and other issues affecting companies operating in many countries. I also felt that I would feel more passionate about working for a company if I had already experienced their products or services. Therefore, I wanted to work for a company whom I had already experienced from a customer's perspective.

The position was advertised through the University of Surrey's Professional Training intranet site, and met the criteria I had previously identified. I already considered them one of the biggest oil companies in the world, and relished the opportunity to spend my PTY there. The placement itself would give me exposure to many different areas of the business, particularly legal and accounting.

Evaluation of the Professional Training course

I strongly believe that I have benefited from the Professional Training course. I now know what it is like to work within a professional environment and how my performance will contribute to the success of a team. I found the preparatory lectures in level two invaluable when trying to find a suitable placement. The lectures and arranged employers' presentations gave me many ideas about where to look for jobs, and which kind of jobs would be most suitable for me. The lectures gave me a much better idea of what to expect from participating in a Professional Training Year.

Professional Training Tutor visits

I found my Professional Training Tutor visits very beneficial to me. My tutor was very supportive and seemed genuinely interested in my role and performance for the company. I also found the

sessions useful to look at my job role from a different perspective, and my Tutor raised some questions that I had not previously considered.

Application of Level One and Two knowledge

I found it hard to apply much of my degree knowledge to my specific job role. This may have been because I was in a department in the law function, so my position required me to use more law than business knowledge. IT skills that I gained at university were undoubtedly the most useful, as I had to work with some software packages on a daily basis. There were many aspects of organisational behaviour that were useful to me, including theories of job motivation and satisfaction that I found useful to witness in practice.

Evaluation of My Own Personal Development

I have been pleased with my progress over the course of the year. I feel that wherever possible, I have fulfilled the core objectives that were agreed at the beginning of my contract. In terms of personal development, I am now able to identify new areas that require further improvement. For example, I have learnt that in some circumstances, I need to be more assertive, by being honest and expressing my feelings and opinions on matters openly. This will in turn improve my communication and customer skills.

Skills and competencies gained

- Articulation – I learnt how to articulate my ideas clearly and concisely to convey my thoughts and ideas in an efficient manner, when writing memos and emails.
- My team-working and communication skills have improved and I have learnt how to keep clients and team members updated with the status of tasks effectively.
- I have also improved at prioritising my workload and managing different tasks.

Training

I received no type of formal training and no handover period. I was expected to learn 'on the job'. I found this style quite challenging as the work processes were alien to me and I could not apply knowledge from my degree directly to my job role.

Relationships with Management and Colleagues

Initially, I did not find my manager very approachable. I was given very little feedback about my performance and my manager very often seemed too busy to offer me advice or to check my progress. However, after time, I realised when the best times to approach my manager would be when I had questions about specific requests. I fostered good relationships with my colleagues and feel I had earned their respect and trust when being delegated with tasks.

Evaluation of Goals and Objectives

I had identified the following three personal and three professional objectives for the year:

Personal objectives:

1. To learn more about business operations and the energy industry. I feel I have achieved this objective by reading articles in newspapers, websites and magazines. I have also watched television programmes, DVDs, and attended voluntary 'Lunch and Learn' sessions in which different areas of the company are explained to employees.
2. To participate in the company's ShareMatchUK scheme. I successfully contributed part of my salary every month to the share scheme.
3. To network and make business contacts – I have kept a list of colleagues within Company Secretaries, Accounting, Legal and Tax with whom I hope to stay in contact.

Professional objectives:

1. To gain experience of working in a professional environment. I now know how to use office equipment such as photocopiers, printers, and email clients. I also have a much better idea of different departments interact with each other within organisations.
2. I have developed my team-working skills. I understand that when someone is not in the office, it is important to try to cover some of their work in their absence so that the department can continue to function efficiently.
3. Overall, I found it difficult to apply most of my academic knowledge to my job role. However, I found it useful to apply some theories from organisational behaviour. I also had to apply some IT skills to every-day working practices.

Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses**Strengths**

1. I believe my work ethic continued to remain strong and I worked hard to ensure that I had completed as many tasks as possible under tight deadlines. I also learnt the importance of being proactive and finding new tasks myself rather than waiting for requests.
2. I regularly asked my manager if there were any areas in which my performance could be improved. I accepted constructive criticism and feel that I am now a more rounded employee. At appraisals I also tried to identify ways in which I could become more efficient.
3. Even when I had made mistakes in the early stages of my placement, I saw mistakes as an opportunity to learn and improve. I was always confident that I would be able to reach the level of performance expected of me.

Weaknesses

1. I became more organised whilst I was on placement. I always took copies of my work and filed them away for future reference and to produce an audit-trail. I also became much better at time management and was never late for work or meetings.
2. I became much better at managing different tasks. Sometimes I would have up to 50 requests that I had to prioritise in order of deadlines and importance. I became much better at understanding which requests should be dealt with first.
3. There were few opportunities for me to practice my presentation skills. I had to present a summary of my work at weekly departmental meetings. However, these presentations were never longer than 30 minutes each and I feel that I could still become better at speaking in front of an audience.

Personal Development

My first few months were spent adapting to the working life and culture within the organisation, as well as learning different processes and operations. I have improved at prioritising my workload and focusing on tasks in hand. As my knowledge of the work processes increased, I became more confident in dealing with clients and building relationships both internal and external to the organisation. I have learnt the importance of communication, team working, and attention to detail.

Career Goals

I think it is unlikely that I will pursue a career as a Company Secretary. I found the work too administrative and I would prefer a career where I would be able to use my creative skills in a business context. The PTY has, however, given me great knowledge about company law and corporate structures, delegations of authorities and the responsibilities of company officers. I believe all these factors will be useful to me in the future. My year of professional training has

given me a broad exposure of how international businesses operate. I have directly dealt with many different departments and functions. This broad exposure has led me in a new direction as a business analyst.

Conclusion

The PTY has made me much more prepared to begin my career after graduation. Even though my placement was not in my ideal career, it has provided me with a great experience and evidence of critical business skills that future employers will require. I have been able to improve in areas that I had previously considered myself weaker. I have also been able to identify new areas for improvement such as assertiveness and communication. I am now in a much better position to apply for graduate positions.

Summarising Statement

My placement has been a challenging, rewarding, and enlightening experience that has given me many transferable skills that I will be able to take forward with me in my future career.

21. Evaluation of Professional Training

School of Management

Commercial assistant at an entrepreneurial baby food company

Introduction

As a student of the University of Surrey there is the option to complete a one year placement within an organisation to better equip and individual with new and relevant transferable skills. The professional training year aims to fully utilise the theories and practices applied in the first two years of study, and allow the student to gain a greater understanding of the workplace.

This essay comprises of an overall evaluation of my year as a student within a small business. It looks at my expectations before commencing placement as well as highlighting the personal and professional objectives I had set out for myself as well as highlighting some of the things I experienced. It also provides personal analysis of the Professional Training course and the placement itself.

The professional training year was focused on being a Commercial Assistant within a small innovative and entrepreneurial company, responsible for creating a brand new market sector within the baby feeding category. The role of a Commercial Assistant involved delving into the realms of Marketing, Sales and Customer Services, and assisting in any 'ad hoc' tasks.

The company has currently been operating in the UK for 7 years. It is the holding company for three pioneering brands in baby and toddler food, with an aim to "modernise and make infant feeding more of a priority, with products that break the compromise between convenience, taste and health".

My chosen placement was for a role as a Commercial Assistant, a job advertised through the university placement site. Preferences were immediately determined by my strengths and weaknesses in the different areas offered in the Business Management field including Finance, Marketing, Human Resources and Services within the retail sector. My initial thoughts were that Marketing would be the preferred area as mathematics based subjects have never had any appeal. I also believed that this subject area would compliment my naturally creative persona. I was fortunate enough to be accepted to my first choice company, which was the only company I applied to. My selection was determined by the following factors:

- Innovative and entrepreneurial company run by a working mum
- Gain greater insight into how a business develops, instead of being absorbed into the workings of a large established corporation
- A small company would allow real responsibility and an active contribution towards the business
- Face new challenges and alien concepts (i.e. baby food)
- Enable the comparison of theory in lectures to a real business situation
- Honest belief that a **real** professional training experience would be achieved

For me this placement was more about improving on my personal objectives more so than my professional ones. I believe that by becoming a more confident individual within, the professional objectives would inadvertently be achieved.

My Personal objectives

- Become more assertive
- Develop self confidence in my ability

- Improve on my time management skills and dissolve my nonchalant attitude towards tasks set, enabling myself to become self-motivated
- Become more concentrated and focused
- Develop skills already acquired (interpersonal skills within the workplace)
- Become clear and concise in written and oral communication
- Increase my work environment knowledge base to alleviate internal stress and unnecessary panicking

My Professional objectives

- Acquire new and useful transferable skills
- Be self sufficient and work independently
- Communicate professionally and effectively within the work environment
- Determine future job prospects
- Become a valued employee, actively contributing towards the standing and development of the business
- To succeed in tasks set
- Gain respect through achievement

Strengths, Weaknesses, Skills & Competencies

Strengths

- Good interpersonal skills and capable of communicating effectively within social situations
- Experience of working within a business environment since a child
- Highly critical of myself and work, which forces me to strive for success in business situations
- Creative
- Loyal

Weaknesses

- Sensitive to criticism, even if constructive
- Poor time management
- Communicating effectively within a work environment
- Lack of confidence and self belief
- Lack of concentration
- Shy and tendency to panic in new and alien situations

Skills and Competencies

- Very attentive and analytical
- Observant
- Good language skills
- Detailed

Expectations

I did have a number of primary expectations before commencing my placement. I expected the work environment and the application of business knowledge to be very different compared to sitting in a lecture theatre listening to how ideas and practices theoretically should be applied. I felt that a work placement should offer greater insight and a more realistic view of the working world. I also believed that a few months would be an adequate amount of time to settle into the company and job role. I did believe that having the support of two line managers would make the transition easier. Ultimately I believed that I would be forced to overcome my weaknesses (very quickly) in order to succeed, however I was unsure of how and when this would be achieved. In all honestly I did not believe that my placement year would be the most enjoyable time but I felt that the knowledge that I would gain would compensate for this.

My Placement experience

Job Role

My company was plagued with problems from the first day that I joined, a list so large it would be difficult to document within a 2000 word essay. For me my first day was not as expected. My two line managers (the Marketing and Sales Directors) were told that the decision had been made to outsource the Sales and the Marketing to an external agency. This in effect meant that there was no longer a role for them within the company. Naturally, both were quite upset upon hearing this news and exited the office and did not return for hours. I was left unsupervised and confused in the office with no work to do, and ended up spending most of the day wrapping parcels to be sent out to customers. My managers had to work their notice period before leaving, but because they now had such ill feelings towards the company, a month was spent imposing their negative views on me about the company and especially the Managing Director. This did not fill me with reassurance about my placement.

As my managers were leaving I was due to receive a hand-over. I did not receive this as expected, and it was very 'lazy' and informal. When they left I had to figure things out by myself as I was expected to know all processes. The external agency made no noticeable improvements for the company over the six months they were with us, except incur the company £250,000 worth of debt. They were released of their duties which meant that someone had to absorb their roles, and this responsibility fell to me. In my eyes I was not longer a placement student, but a full time employee, responsible for Sales analysis, managing the Home Delivery system, Customer Service and all of the Marketing. I did however have help from the Office Manager and the Graphic Designer.

My work load was intense and I had no line manager to turn to in times of need and extreme levels of stress. There were rare occasions when I did 'crack' and would spend my day crying in the office whilst completing my list of tasks. If I did not complete the work, it would not get done, and that was the bottom line. There were not enough resources available as the company could not afford them. I had to force myself to think logically and prioritise work to get through it, as I knew that there was no time for stress. I did on one occasion tell my manager that the work load was too intense and was told that I should say if it was becoming too much to handle. Although a nice sentiment at the time, ten minutes later she handed me another task list which I had to complete. I never spoke up again.

Self Motivation

Another serious problem that I encountered was self motivation at times when company morale was extremely low. We suffered massively at the hands of retailers. We witnessed corruption from one of our competitors who were 'buying' a grocery multiple to stop our company from rolling out to a larger number of stores—an action which would in turn put the company out of business, and funding dropped to an all time low. We were forced to cut costs by giving up paying monthly rental of our office and move to 5x5 metre 'Swedish Lodge' on the Managing Directors property, located next to her garage – a garage which was larger than our entire office – and in another city. It was very disheartening to get up so early in the morning and do a 4.5 hour round trip to and from a shed (as we nicknamed it), and at times I felt like my placement had no worth. In an ideal world I would love to say that I overcame this and learned to love it, but unfortunately I did not. Things only got worse when company finances became so bad that at one point the company called in an auditor to assess the company and its financial value. The company was one week from administration when a chance television appearance by the manager secured our company a one of a kind financial investment from the Royal Bank of Scotland. It turned out the Managing Director of RBS, who was on the programme with our

manager, weaned his child with our baby food products and said, 'I will not allow such a company to die'. If it was not for this then my placement may have finished earlier than expected.

Despite my negative views of the company, I do believe that the product and concept is good and regardless of what may happen, or how bad things may become the company would always survive and ultimately succeed, and I think that this time will come with the relaunch scheduled for October 2008.

Responsibilities and Achievements

As stated before, my job role was very varied because I worked for such a small company. Job roles always overlapped and as the 'Commercial' Assistant, if there was no one to do a job it would always be given to me; nightmare at times but also a massive benefit, especially when it comes to writing my CV.

For me, my number one achievement was a campaign I had to launch to find new babies and toddlers for the packaging redesign. I was a long and time consuming process which took me a period of seven months to complete. It very loosely involved me writing adverts and newsletters, screening and short-listing images of our customers' children, organising, co-ordinating and managing photo-shoots of food and babies and sending out prizes to those who attended. I am very thankful to have been given the opportunity and my hard work can be seen on the brand new baby food packaging – as well as one of the babies being my niece.

Evaluation of Personal & Professional Development

Personal Objectives

I am happy with my development over my year in industry and I believe that most of my objectives have been fulfilled. In order to survive within such a company you have no choice but to change detrimental qualities. For me, to be described as calm and organised by the MD is a great achievement. My level of assertiveness increased through organising and conducting meetings, which in turn allowed me to improve on my communication skills within a work environment. To achieve tasks I had to be focussed, organised and motivated, and working with such a small team allowed me to develop my interpersonal skills. I am still overtly critical of myself and do still lack in self belief but not as much as before. As a whole I am a much more confident and well rounded individual.

Professional Objectives

As stated earlier in the report, I believe that by achieving my personal objectives most of my professional objectives would fall naturally into place. From reading my employee evaluation I do believe that I was successful with my objectives, even if I did not realise that I had been. My critical nature pushes me forward and forces me to strive for success to alleviate a fear of failure. I had no choice but to learn to work independently as there were no other individuals to assist me, and the acquisition of new skills came with the territory. I was exposed to countless things which many people would not see within their working lifetime. I gained respect through work and in my final leaving interview was offered the job as the company Marketing Manager after graduation.

Career Goals

Even though I did not enjoy my placement at this baby food company I am very grateful to have been able to work as a part of such a company. Working as the Marketing team, and as part of the Sales and Customer Service team has not necessarily mapped out what field I do want to

enter into when I graduate, but it has adjusted my preference selection criteria needed for the selection of future jobs.

I no longer want to go into Marketing, unless the emphasis is on the creative and I am now thinking delving into Buying or following my natural, creative roots by looking into Interior Design.

Conclusion

I believe that a PT year is a valuable tool to help a person decide on future career plans as well as aid an individual's development. Even though my experience was not the best emotionally, professionally and personally it has forced me to become more like the individual I have always aspired to be. In my work life I am more confident and independent, something I thought I could never be. After my thirteen months within such an unstable working environment, and where by the end I was regarded as a valuable member of the team, I feel very proud of what I have achieved. I have also come away from placement with three very good friends.

In my opinion a professional training year should not be optional as any student who 'cannot be bothered' to look for a job is missing out on an important learning experience, but then again it could be said that a person forced to go on a placement may not fully utilise the opportunity and try to gain from it as much as they can. I have learnt that the 'real' working world is not as easy or a peachy as I had once assumed a long time ago. Working life is hard but you have to actively take steps to allow yourself to take away the positive from a situation and treat it as a learning curve. Over my thirteen months on my placement, I had never been so consistency miserable in my life, but if that had not happened I would not be thicker skinned, increased my tolerance level and equipped myself with such a massive amount of knowledge and skills. I decided to opt in for the experience rather than having the name of a larger company on my CV, and I still believe that I made the right decision when picking a first time office job. I now feel that I am fully equipped with a positive working mindset which can only help me to succeed in any future career plans, and without this professional training year I would not have gained so many transferable skills for the future, so early on in life.

I always hold onto a comment which the finance controller said to me before I left, 'I honestly believe that this is the worst experience you will have in your working life. If you can survive this, which you did, then you can survive anything'. I don't know how I survived but I did, and I'm very proud to say I did.

22. Department of Psychology

Occupational psychologist at assessment and consultancy unit

The Organisation:

I worked within the Assessment and Consultancy Unit (ACU) at a government office. The Unit was a team of Occupational Psychologists. ACU was one of several teams that formed the Leadership and Learning Directorate (LALD). Together with three other directorates, LALD is a part of the Human Resources (HR) Directorate.

ACU develops, administers and analyses assessments for individuals as well as teams. Assessments are used for recruitment purposes as well as the development of existing office staff. For example, trained members of the team carry out assessments of individuals that have been short-listed for appointment to Senior Civil Servants (SCS) posts. Reports are then compiled based on the assessments and are subsequently used by interview boards to provide additional information that can be incorporated into the interview panel's questions and final decision.

Other projects the Unit is involved in include "Talent Management", ensuring diversity in selection and the Core Skills Assessment (CSA). Briefly, Talent Management focuses on the existing employees of an organisation. The aim is to ensure that these employees are being as efficient as they can in the posts they hold. This is a continuous process and the focus is essentially to better current employees' performance and exploring development techniques.

ACU strives to employ as diverse a work force as possible without sacrificing the abilities required by the roles to be filled. In line with the equal opportunities policy, ACU works to assess candidates in a fair manner that does not discriminate in any way. Candidates should only be differentiated on the basis of ability to do the job, rather than any other factors.

Tasks performed:

Intensive Development Programme (IDP)/ New Leaders Programme (NLP) Selection Centre

In December, I helped design an oral briefing exercise that candidates applying to join the IDP/ NLP would complete as part of their assessment. This particular exercise was aimed to test three competencies: initiative and openness, oral communications skills and interpersonal skills and managing relationships. I was required to propose a scenario that would test the three competencies. To assist me with the task, I was provided with two similar exercises that had been used in previous years. I also had access to the Assessment Centre Skills Manual and received assistance from my supervisor.

Apart from the exercise itself, I also had to develop marking guidelines for the assessors. Essentially, a colleague and I had to ensure that there was a candidate pack and an assessor pack for this exercise. The packs included the instructions for candidates and the exercise brief outlining the task and all the relevant materials (a description of the company and a newspaper article). In addition, the assessor pack included the competencies that were being measured through the exercises and other relevant sections that would help the assessors mark the oral briefing exercise. In addition, the evaluation form for assessors to be completing whilst the candidate was being interviewed was also included.

All the exercises to be used for the assessment centre were piloted, and all changes were made accordingly. The next stage involved an assessor meeting to which I was invited to. It was very interesting to see how assessors prepared for the assessment centre. The assessors were provided with time to read and examine each exercise. In addition, they worked in groups to ensure that they had the same understanding of the competencies that were being tested for. Following each exercise, the senior assessor gave feedback on the marking criteria and answered any questions that the assessors had. This was a good opportunity for me to better understand the competencies and the whole process that the candidates were going through.

I really learned a lot about what is involved in setting up and running an assessment centre. Six candidates were scheduled on each day that I helped facilitate the centre. Taking on a facilitator role enabled me to develop my organisational and team-working abilities. The lead facilitator guided me and the other facilitators and we all worked as a team and with the assessors also to ensure that the assessment process was as pleasant an experience for the candidates as possible.

I was invited to attend the summary meeting of the selection centre. This meeting was an opportunity to evaluate the centre. The main aim of the meeting was to decide on the pass mark.

It was really useful to attend this meeting as it was the final stage of the centre. I really enjoyed seeing the centre through from beginning to end. I now have a much better understanding of the requirements that need to be met by candidates that are successful for this programme. It is a very thorough process. Approximately 25% of candidates invited to the centre were successful.

Evaluation of placement in utilising or extending skills and knowledge:

Skills:

Organisational: My placement has really helped to improve my organisational skills. In most instances, I would have several tasks to be working on and therefore needed to ensure that I could prioritise and work efficiently. Use of "to do lists," the "Tasks" tool and calendar in MS Outlook were some of the methods I used to keep organised.

My organisational skills were also developed as I would, at times be required to set my own deadlines. This, I found, needed discipline. During the course of the placement year, I carried out a number of literature reviews. Typically, I was given the freedom to set myself a timeframe in which to work on these reviews. Initially, I found that I spent too long conducting this work and was reluctant to seek feedback. With time, I learned that I needed to plan a better, more organised approach to literature review tasks.

I had to apply organisational skills particularly when assisting with workshops or assessment day preparations. These tasks extended my organisation skills as they demanded various skills to be used simultaneously. Generally, tasks included contacting candidates via phone or email and ensuring the pre-workshop documents to be completed by candidates were submitted by the deadline, ordering and collecting the necessary materials, compiling workbooks, setting up assessment rooms, arranging visitor passes and the construction of assessors' and candidates' timetables. Some of these tasks occurred at the same time, for example, I was to ensure that I

had collected all the necessary information from a candidate during a phone conversation with them in order for me to know whether or not they would need a visitor pass. I therefore, prior to making the phone call ensured that I listed everything I need to cover in the conversation.

Interpersonal: Prior to the placement, I was unsure about the format and writing of professional emails. Within a short-time I was able to develop this skill as it was something I had to do on a regular basis. I have found that this skill has not only helped in the work setting but has generally helped me to adapt the way I write correspondence.

My interpersonal skills were further developed at assessment centres as I interacted with many different people. The thought of meeting colleagues, especially those in more senior roles was unnerving at the start of my placement. However, these feelings subsided as I had interacted with senior employees in previous employment. With time, I found that I could also interact confidently with senior members of staff. Fortnightly team meetings whereby every member of the team briefly outlined what they were working on is something that also aided the development of my interpersonal skills.

As in previous employment, I used the phone to communicate with a wide range of people. When necessary, I took phone messages for members of ACU when they were away from their workstation. Good interpersonal skills were vital as the message had to be accurate and passed onto the relevant recipient at the earliest opportunity.

As mentioned, I worked closely with some members of ACU on several projects such as the development of exercises to be used at an assessment centre. This type of working style not only allowed me to improve the way I conveyed my ideas to others, but also helped build a good working relationship so that I can approach the individuals in question on matters other than our project that I may need feedback on or assistance with.

Knowledge: I have gained a great deal of knowledge about the field of occupational psychology. I now have a good understanding of how some occupational psychologists use their knowledge to help individuals with areas at work. I appreciate that the type of work occupational psychologists undertake does vary somewhat. Tools such as the MBTI, EBW as well as one-to-one meetings help to develop individuals in the workplace. However, the results and feedback obtained from the use of most tools can be utilised in other settings.

I can see that occupational psychologists' work can impact the individual and teams alike. My observations at workshops highlighted the development needs that the individual may have, regardless of position within an organisation. Delegates walked away from development workshops feeling pleased with what they had achieved. Such programmes involved a lot of interaction on their part in order for them to fully engage with behaviours that they may need to adopt to aid their performance in the workplace.

I can also appreciate the importance of good team-working. I recall back to one workshop in which delegates were asked to take on the role of a senior member of staff with a difficult personality, and later, the role of an employee assigned to approach a "difficult", and more senior employee. As well as observing some of the role plays, I was asked to take on the role of a difficult member of staff. With guidance from my supervisor and the cues each role-player received, I played out the character. The delegates took well to the roles and felt better equipped to deal with a similar situation if it were to arise in their office. In playing the role of the

“difficult” senior employee, they could reflect on what characteristics and behaviours someone, possibly themselves in the future, ought to really exhibit.

My confidence has also benefited as a result of the placement. I was given a lot of independence and found this encouraged me to be more confident. In line with this, my interpersonal skills also improved during the course of the year as my work often involved interaction with my different people across the organisation.

In all, the placement was an invaluable experience. I learned a great deal, some of which may not have otherwise been possible to attain without a placement year at this stage. I really enjoyed my time with ACU and feel encouraged to pursue a career in occupational psychology.

Evaluations of personal change and development:

The placement has developed me in various ways. It has given me a real insight to the world of work. I felt very much a part of ACU and was given the support I needed when it was required. I can apply much of what I learned with ACU not just to my future career but in other areas of my life. I also feel that the year has given me the grounding I need to face the final year of my degree and future studies I may pursue. Every member of ACU had successfully completed their psychology undergraduate degree and encouraged. The grades of members of ACU ranged from Psychologists with a Masters Qualification to the Senior Occupational Psychologist.

Shadowing various interviews and facilitating assessments opened my eyes to the standards that are deemed necessary to be successful. I have come across many competencies and understand why they are assessed for at different assessment centres. In some cases, competencies revealed to me a development need I need to work on.

Although I had been in employment prior to the placement, the experience developed me even further. For example, the working hours and the hours I worked were nothing like I had experienced before. I had to adapt very quickly to my new schedule. I had greater responsibilities than those at previous jobs such as the importance of keeping information and documents strictly confidential.

23. What had learning to be a professional meant to you?

Department of Psychology

Research evaluator at a local educational Excellence Cluster

A description of the company or organisation

Excellence Clusters were developed out of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, now Department for Children, Schools and Families) Excellence in Cities programme which aimed to raise standards and promote inclusion in inner cities and other urban areas. Excellence Clusters, however, focused on smaller geographical areas and looked towards tackling underachievement in schools through specific strands, including access to a learning mentor for each school, the development of Learning Support Units and provision for Gifted and Talented pupils.

My local Excellence Cluster aimed to increase life chances of children and young people through the support of targeted schools to raise levels of attainment, raise standards of behaviour, extend opportunities, increase attendance and provide focused support for 'at risk' pupils.

Vision Statement

"To increase life chances for the children of the local Excellence Cluster by helping them: achieve their potential, both academically and for their future employment; feel safe; understand and lead healthy lifestyles; make a positive contribution to their community" (MECP and BIP Service Plan 2007)

Within the local Excellence Cluster Partnership are 20 schools (21 before an amalgamation), 16 of which were formerly receiving support under the Education Action Zone. These twenty schools located within a geographical area serve a comparatively deprived community where educational qualifications and skills have traditionally been low. The wards within the Cluster have high levels of poverty and in terms of education; some fall within the 10% most deprived wards in the country. This is also reflected in the high numbers of pupils with Special Educational Needs and those receiving Free School Meals, which are both above national average in many of the schools.

All of the schools and partners were involved in the planning for the local Excellence Cluster and signed a letter of commitment to the MECP Strategic and Action Plans. The following priorities were agreed by the partnership:

- Raising expectations and attainment at Key Stages 1-4
- Narrowing attainment gaps and tackling underachievement
- Raising expectations and attainment post 16
- Promoting inclusive education and reducing exclusion.

An account of the range of tasks you performed

Within my role as Project Evaluator I was asked to conduct an eleven-month research project to evaluate the impact and success of the local Excellence Cluster Partnership. This project offered twenty local schools Mentoring and Counselling support, Language Enrichment programmes, Behaviour Improvement Programmes and extended opportunities for Gifted and

Talented pupils. The main activities conducted whilst on placement include a literature review, production of a research proposal with suggested methodologies, data collection and analysis and report writing. The findings from the study were presented in the form of an evaluation report and various presentations.

An evaluation of the placement in utilising or extending skills and knowledge

Whilst on my placement with the local Excellence Cluster I was able to use my knowledge and skills developed in the first two years of the psychology course in many ways. Research skills developed whilst preparing for assignments and reports completed at university enabled me to accept the initial task of conducting a literature review with little hesitation. In this way I was also able to transfer writing skills when preparing documents or handouts, with the ability to draw conclusions with all evidence in mind. Using knowledge and skills developed within our Research Methods and Statistics modules I was able to evaluate the effectiveness of various methodologies and analyse the findings once data had been collected. (For example the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for qualitative data and T-Tests for quantitative.) My knowledge of developmental psychology put me in good stead when I attended the Children's Workforce Induction training, as many of the other trainees had more practical experience; I was able to bring theory into our discussions. This meant that we were able to work well as a group to produce a well-rounded argument, with my team nominating me to be the group speaker. Most of all I found it interesting to see how theories and topics studied translated into real life, in the form of interventions and strategies within the education system.

I feel that whilst on my placement year I was given a wealth of opportunities to develop my knowledge and skills and clarify my future plans. When starting work for the MECP I had to learn very quickly to manage my time and plan effectively, right from the start I was aware of the timescale of the evaluation project and so devised a timetable for action within my research proposal. There were stages within my placement where many tasks needed completing simultaneously and so it was vital that I could prioritise. At one stage when working under pressure I felt it was appropriate that I refused a further request from my line manager, although I could have easily accepted the task I knew I would have taken on too much, and I think she later respected me more for being honest with her.

My biggest area of development whilst on placement year, I feel, would be in my communication skills, when I began in the role I was nervous of taking phone calls or making calls to figures of authority. But as communication was a large part of the role I soon became accustomed to using the telephone and email system on a daily basis. These skills were also important when preparing questionnaires and interview schedules, I had to think about how they would be perceived and tailor them appropriately to the audience. Initially I was nervous about conducting the interviews, so I began with members of staff I was more familiar with, when these went well and I felt I could build up a rapport with the participant I felt more confident in interviewing the twenty Headteachers. By the end of the data collection phase I felt much more confident in my communication abilities, feeling I was more able to read verbal and non-verbal messages and respond accordingly.

Following on from communication skills are those of presentation. From the start of the placement I was expected to produce progress reports for members of the steering groups and strand meetings, something which, depending on the audience, I did not find too daunting. However, each term the MECP held a 'full board meeting', at which I was asked to present my findings so far. These meetings were attended by representatives from each school involved, the MECP and local council. Initially the thought of speaking to around twenty-five people, who

would not hesitate to criticise, filled me with fear. At my first full-board meeting my voice was shaking and I could not wait for it to end. However, attending these meetings, over time allowed me to overcome my nerves and produce a presentation for the celebratory event. I was nervous about the event, but this was my chance to shine. There were around sixty people in the audience, but I was determined to appear confident and professional and delivered my speech well. After my presentation, many people congratulated me, including the Director of Children's Services, which left me feeling a great sense of achievement.

Production of the evaluation report lead me to improve my computer skills and my knowledge of programmes such as Microsoft Word, Access, Excel and Power Point. Each of these were used to a large extent during my day-to-day tasks such as database management, data extraction, presentation production and report writing.

Being given the opportunity to work with the local Excellence Cluster, local Council Children's Services and twenty schools in the area allowed me to greatly extend my knowledge of education and educational psychology. I learnt of the many roles that exist in the field and the part they play within the school setting or within the local authority. During the data collection and analysis stages of the evaluation I learnt of the measures used within education for attendance and attainment, as well as those for attitudes and emotions. I was given the opportunity to work with vulnerable children during a summer school held at one of the Cluster schools, which I found very rewarding. In the second half of the placement I worked for one day a week in a primary school, helping me extend my knowledge of teaching practices, such as the use of phonics and high frequency words. Whilst working with the Cluster and with the Educational Psychologists I was able to learn more about special educational needs and interventions put in place to help these children, as well as those with socio-emotional difficulties.

My placement with the local Excellence Cluster Partnership has only strengthened my desire to pursue a career in educational psychology. At this stage I plan to complete my undergraduate degree and look to applying for the educational psychology doctorate course and for funding from a local authority.

An evaluation of any personal change and development

I feel that the largest area of personal change arising from my placement year would be that in my confidence and independence. The evaluation project that I took on was largely self-managed and so I was required to be organised, use initiative and manage my time effectively. The expectations of my line manager and other staff in the team were apparent from the start, and I feel this boosted my confidence, as I was aware of what they felt I could achieve. When I first started in the role I was given support and advice from a supervisor, but when he left the team a few months later I felt even more pressure to be independent as the member of staff who replaced him was less experienced and had less understanding of the MECP than myself. There were many occasions when I would be alone in the office; the feelings of trust installed in me and the responsibility given to me increased my confidence further.

When I was given the opportunity to work with the Educational Psychologists, at meetings or in-school reviews I was often asked my opinion on a certain child or situation. This encouraged me to think like a psychologist and installed a belief in me that other professionals thought my opinions were of value. I hope that from this experience I have also gained maturity.

Any other notable feature of the placement

One notable feature of my placement I would like to mention was my line manager. As a Senior Educational Psychologist she was able to see my potential and push me to achieve it. I feel that I learnt a lot from being able to work with someone with such a wealth of skills, knowledge and expertise. Throughout my placement she was keen to offer me new opportunities, hence allowing me to get the most out of the year possible. Not only did I conduct my daily role as Project Evaluator, I was able to help her with her BPS work, shadow various education professionals, attend training and gain experience of working within a school setting.

Another thing I noted whilst on my placement was just how young I felt in the professional world. Whilst sitting in a room of education professionals with qualifications and experience under their belt I realised that I am really only just beginning my life in the real world and at this stage there are many opportunities open to me. However, it also felt good to be accepted into this world and asked for my opinion on things, with people commenting how I brought a fresh approach to problem solving.

My last comment on this report is how difficult it is to summarize a year of growth and experience in this way when changes take place that can't easily be put into words. Employers are often reluctant to give someone a job with no experience, but following this year I can understand why, I think experience is not something that can be measured, but is of huge benefit when starting out in the professional world.

24. Department of Psychology Psychology Assistant at a prison

For my placement year I worked in an all male prison, which is security rated: category B, meaning that escape must be made difficult however maximum security measures need not be used. On average there are 1,200 prisoners with an age range of 18-60. The prison consists of 5 wings (A-E) a healthcare unit, a segregation unit and a drugs detox wing.

I worked within the psychology department where they run accredited offending behaviour management programmes such as ETS (enhanced thinking skills) which is designed to help prisoners understand and better manage their thoughts and feelings that often lead to offending behaviour and CALM (Coping with Anger & Learning to Manage It). The psychology department are also responsible for the more difficult prisoners and have to closely monitor their behaviour, this includes one to one sessions with them under a scheme called the CMP.

My role within the department as a volunteer was to assist in conducting research projects and surveys (e.g. distribution and collection of questionnaires, entering the data onto SPSS, analysing the results and assisting with the write-up). My role also included supporting the ETS treatment manager and resettlement manager with administrative duties such as responding to prisoners queries and maintaining the departments databases and spreadsheets. Daily tasks included collecting the post for the department and putting it into staff trays, at the end of the day I would collect the mail from the department and return it to the mail room for posting. On a daily basis I would also check to see if any prisoners had put in an application to be considered for the ETS course where I would be responsible to doing the first stage of their risk and needs assessment. This included gathering information about them such as family background, offence details, drugs or alcohol mis-use and Education level. I would have to go to other departments within the prison such as probation and custody to gain this information. Also if any prisoners put in a request to talk to someone from the department regarding the ETS course of any of the other services available to them in most cases I would have to go and answer any queries they have.

As my placement developed and I gained more confidence being around the prisoners and was more comfortable talking to them. Over time I was given more responsibility and more jobs to do. I did more work for the ETS programme such as sitting in on interviews with the prisoners, which was the 3rd stage of their risk and need assessment and towards the end of my placement, I began conducting my own interviews. I also began transcribing interviews that my supervisor conducted, which I had to do alone, as the interviews were strictly confidential. I was also able to attend the review sessions with prisoners who completed the ETS programme, here they were able to discuss the different ways the course had helped them, what they had learnt and how they will conduct their lives differently when they are released. I also did work for the CMP such as anonymising prisoner files as these were strictly confidential, prisoners on the protocol became known as numbers and not by their names. I also inputted the daily diaries of each prisoner on the protocol, this was to monitor their progress, when they had gone a sufficient amount of time with excellent behaviour they were released from the protocol. I became responsible for looking at the prisoners behaviour over time which I highlighted to the staff who manage the protocol, showing changes or non-changes in behaviour. I worked on two major research projects the prisoners' survey and the visitors' survey which aimed to gather the opinions of the two sample groups in regards to the prison and the services that are provided. I was involved in all stage of both pieces of research, starting with the distribution of the survey, collection, data analysis and the write up.

I started my placement wanting to follow a career in Clinical Psychology even though my placement was in a forensic setting. Working in the forensic field however has made me more open-minded to pursuing a career within forensic psychology. Also I experienced many one-to-one sessions with the prisoners where I got the chance to talk to them about their families, their drug habits and how they feel about themselves, which was a great experience for me and one which I found very rewarding, I am now interested in pursuing a career in Counselling Psychology. Even though I didn't directly do any counselling work I got a very good idea of it working with the prisoners in addressing their offending behaviour.

I was fortunate to have been offered lots of training during my placement and learn and develop lots of new skills. I was given full ETS training, this was not training to actually facilitate the programme but to run the admin side of the programme. I was also given dyslexia training and taught how to deal with prisoners who have dyslexia as on average 64% of the prison population have dyslexia. This has now been acknowledged as important training and all staff who work directly with the prisoners must do the training. I undertook breakaway training where I was shown various methods of dealing with prisoners during a conflict situation e.g being attacked by a prisoner. After the unfortunate incident of a prisoner killing himself whilst I was working there all staff and volunteers working at the prison were required to participate in violence reduction and suicide prevention training. This focused on prisoners who were self harming and were a suicide risk. The outcome of the training was to help guide the staff and prison officers on what to do if they found a prisoner in any of the two situations. I was also given the first stage of training into the SOTP (Sex Offenders Treatment Programme). As this prison doesn't offer this programme to the prisoners who require it, I was only given training on what the programme is about, what it involves and I also got to hear from prisoners who had been on this programme and their experiences of it. This was in case any prisoner asked me about the programme, so I would have information to offer them on it. I was also trained in doing a fabric check in rooms where the prisoners have been undertaking the ETS course. This involved checking the furniture and walls for any tampering or substance storage. I also became fully competent in Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint, which I used on a regular basis and I received full training for.

I not only developed skills through the training I received, I also developed personal skills during my time working in the prison. My confidence grew immensely during my placement, working with prisoners can be very intimidating and the unpredictable nature of what could happen whilst you are on the wing and around them can be very scary sometimes especially if fights and arguments are going on around you. I overcame this fear and learnt to become composed during tense situations and I learnt to communicate with prisoners if ever I felt their behaviour was intimidating or inappropriate towards me or one of my team members, this in turn provided a great boost to my confidence. I have also become a lot more comfortable with public speaking which was a hard factor for me to overcome but in my placement I had to give feedback a lot of new developments among the prisoners to my team and I also had to speak during every staff meeting and inform everyone of the work I had been doing and what work I had coming up. I feel I have developed a lot more focus during my placement, this is in regards to my work and the career I wish to pursue. It's very inspiring working with a big group of focused people like the ones in my team. A lot of the people in my team were young like myself, university graduates who had gone on to do a masters and many of which were looking to do a chartered career within forensic psychology. They are all very sure of what they want to do with their careers and this was very inspiring for me to be around for a long period of time. It made me more focused on what I was doing and made me seriously think about the future I want for myself.

I gained a lot of valuable experience from my placement year, especially as I was put in the same job role as the psychology assistants' and given the same training. All of the staff in this position were MSc graduates and I was lucky to work alongside these members of the team because they had a lot of experience and advice which they passed on to me. However, there are a few things I wish I had done to make my experience in the prison even more valuable than it already was. This included sitting in on the ETS programme sessions, I did a lot of the administration work for the programme, shadowed and later conducted my own interviews to assess suitability for the programme and I even got to attend the after course reviews and certificate ceremony. Becoming a tutor in this programme is something every forensic psychologist has to do in order to progress within the field and me being able to sit in on a few of the sessions would have allowed me to see intervention work first hand. I tried on many occasions to sit in on group sessions but the course facilitator was very apprehensive because group sessions are very intimate and prisoners like to reveal some of their most inner feelings about their families and their offence and they will only do this in front of people they trust. The facilitator was worried that an "outsider" such as myself sitting in on sessions might affect how much they open up.

I am considering pursuing a career within the counselling psychology field or the clinical psychology field. Working in a forensic setting has given me lots of experience and skills that I know I will be able to use if I was to pursue a career in one of those fields. For example in clinical and counselling psychology, one of the key factors is to promote psychological well-being and this is done through dealing with personal problems such as relationship problems, learning disabilities, anxiety and mental illness. This is the same method used in the forensic field; psychological problems need to be understood and outlined when assessing criminal behaviour and treating the offenders. Also when assessing a client in a clinical setting, methods such as psychometric tests, interviews and direct observation are commonly used, these are the same methods used in a forensic setting, ones which I was lucky enough to conduct whilst I was on placement. One weakness about experiencing all of this in a prison is that everyone there is an offender and that is the ultimate problem they are trying to face, reducing their offending behaviour. Within the counselling and clinical fields the people I would be faced with would in most cases not be offenders and that would be something which is new to me. I plan to build on my strengths further by seeking more experience, working in a hospital or a school and just broadening my knowledge on assessments and interventions in different settings.

If I had studied forensic psychology during the first 2 years of my degree then that would have been very useful for my placement, however I didn't find it too difficult coming into the job with little background knowledge on the field. I had a very supportive team and I picked up a lot of the things I was taught very quickly. Studying statistics and being taught how to use SPSS was very useful to me because after we conducted our research on the prisoners' survey, we used SPSS to analyse the results, this was mainly done by me.

One challenging interpersonal experience that occurred whilst I was on placement was when the prison officers went on strike over pay. 90% of the officers went on strike; my team members and I were some of the only people to go into work that day. It was up to us to inform the prisoners of what was going on, in regards to the strike and to make food packages and supply cigarettes and tobacco to keep them going through out the day. This was very challenging because a lot of the prisoners were very angry at the situation and being locked in their cells all day, when I spoke to them about what was going on, I was faced with a lot of anger and aggression, which I had never experienced in my whole time working there. The strike only lasted 24 hours and by the next day everything returned back to normal again. The

governor of the prison rewarded me for my efforts on that day. It was one of the hardest days of my placement but I was patient, calm and polite yet assertive when dealing with the prisoners and this gave me more confidence to be around them without feeling intimidated, which I struggled with at the beginning of my placement.

Overall I found my placement very rewarding and an invaluable experience I was given first hand insight into the field of forensic psychology and working in a prison. I was lucky to be within a team where my supervisor and the head of psychology wanted to push me to do some things I wasn't initially brave enough to do, such as working one to one with the prisoners. I have new skills and knowledge of forensic psychology that I didn't have before which I can apply to my final year studies.

25. Department of Music & Sound Recording Assistant at an independent recording studio

My placement recording studio consists of two residential recording facilities, designed to specialise in pop and rock music. Studio 1's live room was tailored from the village's old chapel and therefore has a very distinctive, lively acoustic. Studio 2 has a smaller live room but a larger control room and so it is used for overdubbing and mixing. Further accommodation is currently being built along with the possibility of a third studio.

The business is family run; in addition to the studio manager and his wife, there are only two in-house engineers, a maintenance engineer, another student assistant, a chef and a cleaner. The studio's reputation for its friendly, homely atmosphere and its rural seclusion attracts artists from all over Europe and even further a field.

Main Activities

The initial tasks assigned to me were opening and closing the studio, powering up and shutting down the session rig, setting up and maintaining an organised, safe and tidy recording area, and undertaking the turn-around before next group of clients arrived. I was soon put in charge of meeting and greeting the bands and producers, introducing them to staff and showing them around the establishment. I closely assisted the session engineer and producer technically, whilst making sure that they and the musicians were happy and supplied with refreshments.

During my placement, my duties were progressively increased and I was eventually fully involved in all sides of the recording and mixing processes; towards the end of the year I entirely ran my own session (see later sections). Due to the small size of the business, I occasionally helped out with domestic and secretarial tasks such as cleaning, cooking and answering the telephones.

Level of Responsibility

The level of responsibility depended on the nature of the session. As I was usually the first member of staff to greet the clients (in person or by phone), my role was to create the right impression, representing the company appropriately; on some sessions, I was the only member of staff present. Before a session began, I ensured that all equipment was 'zeroed' and ready for operation. I logged and removed any faulty equipment and, where possible, discovered the problem and fixed it, for example I replaced the drive units of the studio monitors. It was my responsibility to set up clients' additional outboard units prior to the session so that the inputs and outputs came up on the patch bay and were tested, ready to use. During the session, I was expected to maintain a neat and detailed log of the complicated patch bay and know immediately when asked where a signal was going. I would also have to mark and log recall information and re-set equipment quickly on request. With the amount of outboard and multiple isolation rooms used on an average session, this proved to be quite a task. Some clients would constantly change their minds about where they wanted microphones placed and patched to; consequently, there would be a lot of running around to meet their requirements at the same time as keeping the log updated. It was important that the session ran smoothly to avoid the band getting impatient; the reputation of the studio is mostly spread by word of mouth and so it was crucial to appear competent and organised.

I was responsible for safety within the recording areas, making sure all cables were secured and that the clients were aware of any potentially dangerous obstructions; if an accident had

occurred then there could have been legal repercussions for the studio. I would often make headphone or monitor mixes for the band members, set up their guitar pedals and sometimes, having gained a producer's respect, would be left to run overdub sessions. On these occasions, I was effectively in charge and trusted to choose microphones, set levels, and handle the individual artists in a way that kept them happy and got the takes needed. I was frequently left unsupervised to make final 'comps' (choose the best bits of the takes and edit them together), use Auto-Tune to tweak vocals, and add triggered samples to drum tracks. My work was not checked, so it was important that I got it right.

I was entrusted with bouncing down final mixes and listening through the masters as the last check before they were sent to the record company for listening. Anything I missed and any mistakes I made throughout the session would reflect badly on the studio's professionalism and efficiency. At the end of each day I would back up the session files. This was very important as, if a problem occurred with the computer, the backup disk would be the only way to retrieve the work done. If the files were not backed up, the studio would be obliged to offer the band additional free recording days to catch up, which would cost the company money and create a bad reputation for the studio.

My highest level of responsibility attained was when I engineered my own session (see achievements section).

Creative and Technical Achievements

The scope for creative and technical input during a session greatly varied, dependant on the people I was working with. With most bands that arrived with their own producer and/or engineer, it was not appropriate for an assistant to make suggestions; however, some clients were very open to ideas and asked for my opinions. When a band came in without their own producer or engineer, there were more possibilities for me to get hands-on experience.

I had many musical opportunities on sessions; for example, a producer realised that I had a musical ear and asked me to arrange some string parts. I was often asked to improvise backing vocal harmonies and percussion parts and had the opportunity to play violin and kora (African harp) on recordings, as well as socially playing with some fantastic musicians in free time. I am credited for performing on several albums, including vocals on one and solo violin on another.

I sometimes ran vocal warm-ups with singers and made suggestions between takes to help them get the most out of their voices. I was thrilled when a returning producer requested that I be pulled off another assignment to coach the singer of the band he was recording.

I found that the two in-house engineers worked very differently; one engineer liked to do most of the technical running of the session himself after everything was rigged and consequently most of my learning with him was initially from observing his techniques and asking questions. However, I slowly built up a rapport with him and he was eventually comfortable to leave me working alone tracking to ProTools, and later entirely in charge of a session. As the placement went on, he began to ask for my opinions on things such as how edits and microphones sounded as well as about instrumental tuning issues and recognising if microphones were in or out of phase. In contrast, the other in-house engineer allowed me to run ProTools on the night of my arrival and subsequently increased my creative and technical possibilities. My choices of microphone techniques and ideas for getting around technical problems were used as well as compositional suggestions during tracking. On several final mixes, I was involved as an equal partner for decisions and shared controls of the outboard, plug-ins and faders. I have been credited as 'Assistant Engineer' on most of the albums in which I was

involved. Towards the end of the placement, I would be put on sessions without the safety-net of an in-house engineer. I was put in charge of recording guide tracks, which I executed as professionally as possible; on a couple of occasions, the producer was so happy with a guide sound that he used it in the final mix without re-recording it.

One of my greatest achievements was when a well-known producer asked me to entirely engineer, produce and mix a 'bonus track' for a band. I was left to organise the recording around their main session and carried out the project in free time. The producer was very impressed with the end result and my mix was sent to the record company without any alterations. Since that session, he contacted me several times to assist him with sessions in his London studio and is now taking a Tonmeister student as an assistant next year. I am very proud to have made such a good impression and gained respect from an experienced, prestigious contact.

Professional, Personal and Technical Development

A skill that I had to learn very quickly was assessing how to interact with different clients and gauge the appropriate balance of informality to professionalism. For example, one producer did not notice that a vocal take had distorted; it would have been poor etiquette for me to point this out to him, so I privately mentioned it to the engineer, who tactfully resolved the problem.

I learned the importance of maintaining the correct atmosphere in the studio and it was interesting to observe how producers communicated with the musicians to earn their respect and encourage them to get their best performances. As the hours were very long, there were on occasion stresses and irritations between band members and, where I could, I found ways of diplomatically diffusing these situations, either by listening to an individual's complaint or simply by saying "I'll stick the kettle on"! This greatly developed my confidence and interpersonal skills and helped me cope with working with difficult people in awkward situations.

I worked with musicians of many backgrounds from all over the world, developing ways of getting over the language and cultural barriers. I also worked with one person who uses a wheelchair and so I had to improvise microphone and speaker positionings to make the session as comfortable for him as possible. I picked up many 'tricks of the trade' from engineers, gained knowledge of widely used microphones, outboard equipment, instruments and amplifiers, and observed a variety of techniques from producers, seeing first hand how they achieve 'their sound'. I have become a lot faster and more familiar with ProTools and a wide range of plug-ins, and my listening skills have definitely improved, especially during mixing sessions.

When I was not needed on a session, I used my initiative to find things to do, for example creating a standard session sheet for logging signal paths. I always tried to anticipate what was needed so that when I was asked to do something, I could say that it was already done; I sometimes stayed up all hours to get everything ready for the following day, which pleased clients. I asked the in-house engineers to listen to a few of my home recordings and we discussed them in-depth; also, on a few days when there was no session, I went through the studio desks and their automation systems with an engineer to familiarise myself fully with their use. I offered to assist the maintenance engineer on servicing days to help find and fix faults with equipment. I now feel that I have a better understanding of how a studio is put together.

Pursuing This Line of Work in the Future

Working at this studio has equipped me with many transferable skills and knowledge of the recording process from start to finish, as well as the music industry in general; it has aided me in

my professional and personal development and allowed me to also express my creative, musical side. To pursue a future career in a similar role, I would need to continue building on my practical experience, developing a varied portfolio and establishing a solid reputation. I would need to keep up to date with recent technical advances and familiarise myself with as many different studios as possible so as to feel comfortable and confident in all recording environments.

26. Department of Psychology Intern in Community Mental Health Team

Description of Organisation

The organisation in which I work is one of the largest health related trusts, employing over 7,000 staff, including more than 100 consultant medical staff, with an annual income around 327million.

The first place I worked in was a community mental health team, covering a wide area. The community mental health team (CMHT) in which I work, supports people with mental problems living in the community, and also their carers. The team includes community psychiatric nurses (CPN), a psychologist, an occupational therapist, a community support worker, as well as social workers. One member of the team is appointed as a care coordinator of a patient and keeps in regular contact with them. CMHT integration criteria are I). Interagency multidisciplinary staff involving health and social services, ii). Single operational management for all staff within the team regardless of employing agency; iii) integrated assessment, care planning and care co-ordination; IV). Joint recording systems and IT systems. A GP or a doctor can refer people separately for assessment for community care services. These include day centres, housing with care and support, help with employment, support groups, advocacy services, social clubs, befriending schemes and welfare rights advice. Day hospitals however are increasingly giving way to day centres, which should provide recreation, therapy and rehabilitation, as well as helping people feel less lonely and isolated. Drop in centres and social clubs offer people the chance to stay in touch with others in a similar situation. Our nearest day hospital to has inside a kitchen in which teachings of how to cook take place, a gym in which people can exercise, television rooms, arts and crafts room and socialising rooms. This day service currently provides a wide range of meaningful opportunities for individuals who experience mental ill-health. They set up and facilitate groups. They work on establishing self support groups and act as a link between day service and existing groups in the community. The employment development workers provide individuals with the opportunity to explore short, medium and long term goals. These include accessing the community based groups, return to learn classes, college courses and educational opportunities. Hospital can provide a place of asylum, offering shelter and protection. It can also supply an opportunity for the staff to assess people's needs and find the best way of helping them. Unfortunately, a stay in hospital can be distressing for some people. A hospital ward may offer little privacy, and it can be frightening to be with other people who are acting in a disturbed way. Many people go to hospital on a voluntary basis, but there are some compulsory admissions under the mental health act 1983. The Crisis intervention is where special teams are able to support someone through a major crisis at home or in a residential crisis centre, without going into hospital.

Things I have learnt about whilst in the CMHT:

I have learnt about the Care programme approach (CPA) which was introduced in England in 1991 by the department of health and is to be implemented across Wales by the end of 2004 for everyone who receives mental health treatment from secondary services. As a domain of unified assessment, it is the framework by which all mental health care will be delivered and focuses very much on delivering services appropriate to the needs of service users. The key principles are: Integration, especially between health and social care, voluntary agencies and all involved with providing care regardless of setting. Consistency in which ensures a standardised approach to care with all agencies using the same documentation. And a more streamlined approach, reducing bureaucracy and supporting sound professional practice. The essentials of

this programme is a full and comprehensive assessment of health and social care needs, a clearly written care plan shared with all involved in the provision of that care and owned by the service user. Regular reviews and a named worker to co-ordinate care (care co-ordinator) are also put in place. There are two levels of CPA, standard for persons who require minimal intervention, who have a good support network and are functioning well. Enhanced is for those persons who need more support, who perhaps have multiple problems, may be involved with other agencies such as criminal justice system or have substance misuse issues, or are subject to the mental health act.

I have also learnt about the mental health act and the sections on which people can be contained under the mental health act. This was important as most of the patients had previous or are on a section of the mental health act.

Whilst there, I also learnt about the computer system in which all patients are put onto. This is an electrical database of all the patients from psychology, social work, CPN and other mental health professionals. Each patient's file has a colour and a number in which is transformed onto the system in order for professional people to access them.

My placement supervisor also showed me how psychology files were made up, consisting of a section for the clients profile, Psychology audit information, Continuous clinical notes in which start with the person's name and address. Any contact made with a client must be documented here, for example telephone calls and people who did not attend with reason why. This to a psychologist is the only documents of what the psychologist and patient have said to each other so they need to be accurate in case of it needing to go to court. I have actually had to taken notes and make my own psychology file up for a patient. Also in the file is a section for the patient's CPA programme, Assessment charts and Correspondence.

As psychologists have many patients on their case load at one time it important to understand case management. You can try and adapt to the sessions in which a person can attend but if you already have an appointment to do something, you can't change it for a patient if that's the only time they can see you, it must work both ways. You can take into account some people's drugs as it may affect them more in the morning, making them feel sleepy, however this can not be an excuse for those who's drugs do not affect them and it's just the case of them not wanting to get up early.

Whilst on placement with my supervisor I was given the opportunity to learn about Psychometric tests in which can be done during an assessment to help the psychologist understand the sort of problems a patient might have. The MCMI-III is the test that I am most familiar with as I have written up the assessment as a report to give to the patient to explain the problems that person was having and trying to explain why he might be having these problems. The psychometric test takes into account the persons personality, mental problems that person might have on different scales. So the test can help the person and the psychologist/social worker/ CPN understand why the behaviour may behaviour in they way they do and what approach is best for that person. For example, if the assessment showed that the patient was avoidant they may not get involved with there care programme and avoid trying to get better.

I have also learnt about other therapies such as relaxation techniques, where I have listened to relaxation tapes to see what psychologists give patients with anxiety etc to try to relax them. Also, I have learnt the breathing techniques in which a psychologist gets a patient to do when they feel they are in an anxiety situation.

Whilst on placement as well, I have gained a greater understanding of the Clinical Doctorate programme as my psychologist takes on trainees. It has given me the chance to see what clinical trainee psychologists do and what the course entails. I have read reports of clinical activity in which past trainee's have written which showed me the case's in which are taken on and also how these are written.

Tasks performed in the CMHT

Local Mental Health Promotion strategy-

I have completed an extensive literature search about mental health promotion and emotional well being. This was used to inform the mental health promotion and action plan, developed by commissioners in response to the government mental health promotion policy. This also had me involved in the Adult sub group, the Writing group, and the collective group of the young people, adults and older adults group for the strategy and action plan. My research was to help develop a strategic health improvement plan to promote good emotional health and positive sense of well being for the whole local population based on the health needs of local people of all ages and best evidence of effectiveness. I wrote an essay/ information, to give to the group about what mental health promotion and emotional well being was, with definitions, similarities and differences. How services in the local area could promote mental health and emotional well being? And what does psychology have to contribute to this process. When I was first given this essay my supervisor explained how this information would be used in the actual strategy. Whilst researching this topic I have found out an understanding about what mental health was defined as, how in the past mental health has tried to be promoted, the stigma associated with mental health, how in which people can help with their mental health and help their emotional and well being. Also, the ways in which people can promote their own mental health by exercising, the food in which they eat, socialising, their relationships with people, people who are vulnerable to mental illness, what prevents people from seeking help, how health promotion works and what it is, how the public view mental disorders, employment factors and mental health, self esteem and self help techniques. Finding the research on these subjects was extremely interesting and gave me some background information to how people can find it hard to deal with their mental health problems due to discrimination, there preconceptions of what therapy and the professionals were like, financial problems, problems finding a job, housing problems and social problems etc.

Also while looking at research into how people can promote mental health and well being I looked at how psychology can help from past psychological theories I knew from my studies at university such as the health belief model, locus of control, lay epidemiology, social representation approach, social influence and conformity. I have also found out about new psychological theories such as motivation approaches, attitude change, motivational interviewing, positive psychology, critical/community psychology. I also looked at other local strategies and action plans to see what information they had covered and to give examples back to the group as a place to start.

This was an on going process of several months and is still going on now after I have left as government documentation I have learnt can take several months to create. My research though since I started writing it has constantly changed in format, first from a university type essay, to a doctorate style essay, to themes then into a table. This gave me experience of how to write in different formats how to be flexible with what I was writing to adapt to a given situation.

Food and Mood booklet-

This was a booklet in which I made to give to clients to help them have a better diet and to help with their mood. It includes information about the essential principles for a balanced diet, chemicals in the brain in which help with mood and different conditions. It also went through a number of conditions such as bipolar, depression, stress, addictions and cravings, eating disorders, sleep problems, memory problems etc, and gave a few ideas of what foods they can add to their diet to help with a condition, and how they help. Whilst writing this booklet I had to bear in mind that the average person has the reading ability of "the sun newspaper" and also I wanted to make it easy to understand without the complicated words that psychology can sometimes have and try to make it fun with pictures and poems. This gave me an insight into different psychological conditions and a way in which food chemicals in the brain can help such disorders.

Patient satisfaction survey-

I have developed an audit tool to evaluate service users' perceptions of and satisfaction with the Psychological Therapies Service. It is anticipated that this tool will be incorporated into the service in order to highlight best practice and inform service-development (via gathering service-user's perspectives).

Service user involvement-

This was research about individual involvement of patients, group involvement, whether a patient should have choices about their therapy and professional, service user forums, service evaluations being done more often, help inform other service users.

Observation of Clients-

I have observed a PTSD, Personality disorders, anxiety etc with my placement supervisor which has given me the opportunity to observe how a psychologist talks to the patient trying to explain psychological terms, how they try to help and assess their problems with psychometric tests. Also patients interact with my placement supervisor, some being more interested and more willing to do the work and come to the sessions than others. I have also observed my supervisor undertake a course of mindfulness therapy with one patient which was extremely interesting, as I've never been able to look at a raisin in the same way again, as the therapy consisted of looking at a raisin in a mindfulness way.

Eating disorder special interest group-

This group runs as in our location there is not a service for eating disorders, and there have been many arguments since I have been in the CMHT whether eating disorders is in fact a psychological disorder or a way of life. Therefore, this special interest group was organised to give professionals a way in which to discuss and learn about eating disorders. The first one in which I attended was about blood sugar levels and binge eating in which gave me a better understanding of why people binge eat and how blood sugar levels can affect your mood.

PTSD service-

From a service being set up in a nearby location, there were talks and meetings about setting one up in this area. The group included psychiatrists, psychologists, Nurse Therapists. My job was to try and find information about other PTSD services and Trauma services to help create our own. I found information about the inclusion exclusion criteria, the terms of reference and operational policies. Also, I contacted other PTSD/ Trauma services to ask for advice and information in which I fed back to the group. Being apart of this group gave me the chance to see what is involved in setting up a service, information about PTSD and the therapies in which can be undertaken.

Assistant psychologist peer support group

It was suggested to me by my supervisor that I join this group as it would give me the chance to speak to other assistant psychologists in the area and people closer to my own age and own level in psychology. They hold conferences and sessions in which I have attended about driving and dementia, neuropsychological assessment, personality change after head injury, working with older adults, mental capacity act 2005, systematic working with psychological patients and genograms.

Systematic de-sensitisation

I have initiated a programme of systematic de-sensitisation with two service users. One person's difficulties (fear of using public transport at busy times) spontaneously resolved prior to my intervention. The second case (fear of crowded places) didn't progress due to the service-user repeatedly not attending scheduled appointments.

Whilst on placement I have attended many Departmental meetings in the CMHT in which the Manager goes through matters concerning people, new referrals, allocations and assessments, information on patients in the ward, general information and business. Psychology department meetings in which topics are discussed about the development of the departments, any information from courses people have been on etc. I have also observed many professionals and different aspects of mental health services such as the day hospital in which I saw where some of the patients from the CMHT go which gave me the opportunity to see the work in which they do, the types of patients they have their and the sorts of therapies they do. I have been able to observe and learn the role of social worker and have observed 2 schizophrenia patients, a personality disorder and bipolar patients whilst spending my time here. An occupational therapist has also gave me and my placement supervisor a talk about psychosis in which I learnt more about psychosis than what I had previously seen from spending time with social workers and my placement supervisor.

Also from my research about food and mood, I created a display board in which clients could look at in the waiting room which they might feel useful to read and undertake at home.

I have also helped to facilitate social group for long term service –users with severe and enduring mental health difficulties.

Reconfiguration of mental health service-

Since my placement started it has coincided with a large-scale re-structuring of the mental health services, e.g. streamlining the number of CMHT's; creation of a psychological therapies department and the creation of gateway worker posts within primary care. The reason for this reconfiguration was due to the agency trying to meet SAF targets of the waiting time of mental health patients. Over the first few months of my placement I attended many meetings and time-out workshops about these changes in which has exposed to the difficult nature of change within the systems such as the impact on morale and team-working. My placement supervisor and I have had many conversations to reflect on what her position as a psychologist within such processes might change and how other CMHT and Psychological Therapies Service patients and professionals may be affected by the changes.

My first impression of this reconfiguration was that although maybe down the long run the reconfiguration could work as a system, the way in which the reconfiguration was rushed with professionals not entirely sure of what the changes were and how they would work I believed

that it would be the patients who would be waiting longer when the reason for the reconfiguration was to provide these people with a better service. The reconfiguration went ahead despite many of my colleagues view that the changes were not ready to be made, in January 2008. The new structure of the mental health service is now:

Referrals first go to access teams who screen the referral- this then goes to CMHT's for assessment, they then if they have more than one problem e.g. finance, housing etc, stay in CMHT where psychology within CMHT will then help. Otherwise, if they just need psychological therapy they will go to psychology. Once at psychology they will be assessed by 2 people and in time will then go to pre-therapy while waiting in which this will make sure they're ready for the therapy once they get there. Once the waiting time is up for there therapy they will either have group, family or individual therapy depending on the referral. They will then go to a pre-discharge group and once discharged go to social groups etc if needed.

The CMHT's were split into a North and South team, each team having members of the local team to cover the now bigger area of both teams each having an area manager. Also April 1st, 2008 two health service trusts merged with each other to create one trust.

During the re-configuration I think I have demonstrated resilience through the difficult process of service-reconfiguration, and have shown insight and awareness into staff perspectives and experiences. These experiences will also contribute to my competence of working within a constantly changing health system. I have also become aware of many areas of national and local legislation and policies that impact directly on the work of a Clinical psychologist, such as NICE guidelines; National Service Frameworks (and seeing how these differed from England and Wales); BPS Ethical guidance, government Mental health Promotion Policy; Layard Report; Increased access to psychological therapies; differences in service structures between Wales and England.

Things I have learnt about whilst in the Psychological therapies department:

Since the reconfiguration happened, my placement supervisor was moved from the CMHT to the psychological therapies department, so I also moved with her, which has given me the opportunity to experience another type of placement. Whilst at this department I have learnt about what an actual psychological service is compared to the CMHT who only had one psychologist amongst social workers, CPN's etc. In a psychological therapies service you have Nurse Therapists in which can run anger management groups of therapy, anxiety etc. Psychologists only deal with people who have psychological problems, where before they might have carried out assessments such as IQ for a social worker in order for them to understand how to work with a client best, or people who had other issues such as housing etc.

Tasks performed in the psychological therapies department?

Assessment Clinics

I have attended the Assessment clinics every Wednesday where we assess a client for their needs to see if they need to come into psychological services, need it be one to one therapy, or group therapy with a nurse therapist. In the Assessments we use CPA documentation and psychometric tests to assess the person in which I have filled in myself. Attending these clinics has given me one to one contact with clients and has given me the chance to use CPA documentation. It has also given me an understanding of the referral process and the kinds of clients in which are being assessed. Also, it has given me the opportunity to work with nurse therapists on one to one bases.

Screening panel

I have attended the Screening panel Every Monday where we discuss the assessed cases to see what the team of nurse therapists and psychologists feel we can offer that person. This has given me the chance to listen to other people's cases and think about what I think that person needs for their condition, what is available for people with each condition in the area and a better understanding of other things that might play a part in the decision making process such as whether they have been involved in the service before and if they have did they engaged in therapy, what therapy did they receive etc. I have Discussed patients in which I have assessed with a colleague with the panel which has improved my confidence and communication skills.

Case Review

Also on a Monday I attend Case reviews in which psychologists or nurse therapists can bring in a case they are having trouble with or that is going really well to share with the group to discuss. I have been able to hear about the different therapies in which are being used by everyone, and how it goes well, isn't going well for each client.

Group Therapies

I have learnt about the group therapies in which some of our service users go to, such as Stresspac, depression management, anxiety management to name but a few. These groups try to educate the service user about their condition, how to manage symptoms and how to try to lead a normal life.

Arrangement of the psychometric test cupboard

I have arranged the psychometric test cupboard which has given me an extra opportunity to look at the tests and see what they look like and what they are testing. This involved me asking other psychologists in the department where tests were.

Database of Files

Database of my placement supervisor's old case files, including name, address, date of birth, referral date, who referred them, presenting problems, how many session my placement supervisor has had with them and date of discharge. This has given me the opportunity to read her old case files and get more familiar with psychology files where information such as the referral date would be etc.

CBT talk to junior psychiatrists

This gave me the opportunity to hear how psychiatrists feel they should have more psychology talks to help them with their work to give them a better understanding of what psychologists do with some of their patients. The CBT talk gave me the opportunity to know more about the therapy to add to what I already know from previous study.

Helping a Trainee Clinical psychologist in older adults

I have also helped a trainee Clinical psychologist in older adults with her small scale research in which I went through and found psychology files and wrote down information about services in which they received before administration to hospital and during hospital to see if those who have more input before pro-longed the need for administration into hospital. This gave me the experience of looking for where records are kept and the information inside a psychology file. It also gave me the opportunity to use the computer system which will help me in future with psychology jobs as each will use some form of computer system.

I have also helped her with observations with a lady who has severe behavioural problems. The patient spits at members of staff and swears at the top of her voice. From viewing this clients'

behaviour we devised a behaviour record in which we looked at the scene of the behaviour, the triggering events immediately before the behaviour. A description of the behaviour and what happened immediately after/during the behaviour was also recorded. This was turned into a functional analysis chart, which looked at antecedents, behaviour and consequences. After the trainee did 5 visits to this lady using the functional analysis chart I then looked at every individual antecedents, behaviour and consequences looking at how often each one happened for each date. I then added all of them up to see if I could see any patterns to why her behaviour is this way. We came to the conclusion that she was being reinforced for her negative responses.

I also taught the trainee Psychologist how to score the Million Clinical Multiaxial inventory-III (MCMI-III) which looks at emotional, behavioural and interpersonal difficulties. The trainee psychologist then showed me how she wrote up a report to give back to the doctor.

The trainee psychologist has also given me information about older adult conditions such as dementia to learn about and also her file in which contained information about therapies in which she had pick up over the years from attaining courses, such as CBT and stress.

As I've been helping the trainee I have learnt about what doctorate Psychologists do on their course, including the sorts of case they can have, the research they have to do etc.

A reflection on your professional development:

How this placement has affected my career preferences?

I am still considering a career as a clinical psychologist as I love dealing with the different conditions, the assessment in clinical psychology and being part of a multi-disciplinary team. However, I am still considering a possible career in forensic psychology as it has always fascinated me from an early age and the skills in which I have learnt on this clinical placement such as psychometric tests, CPA documentation, working in multi-disciplinary teams, Research and client contact. I could have seen more clients which I did do when I moved to the psychological therapies department, but do to most of the psychologists case load having had lots of sessions already with her, she felt it would be hard on the client to me into the equation of feeling self-conscious. However, doing assessments gave me face to face contact with clients my current strengths regarding my career options is the fact that have seen a massive re-configuration of the health system and the impact that has on its employer and the clients. I have seen the changes from one system of referrals to another being able to see for myself whether the changes put into place actually worked to meet SAF targets like the system was meant to do. I have seen a clinical psychologist in a multi-disciplinary role in a CMHT and a psychological therapies department. This has given me the opportunity to see how a psychologist works with CPN's, social workers on one hand and psychology therapy team on the other. I can do CPA documentation and psychometric tests which will apply to both clinical and forensic psychology. I feel a lot more confident with clients and attaining meetings on my own and feed backing to the psychologist. I know about psychology files and how to keep notes and records which will be helpful for clinical and forensic psychology. One of my weaknesses is the fact that I haven't seen much one-to-one therapy. If I had been able to do this I would know a lot more about the process and see the therapies in which I have read about in action and see how clients react to therapies. If I do go down the forensic route I haven't had much experience as I have had with Clinical psychology. One way in which I could correct this is by doing some work experience with a forensic psychologist or department. As I have spent some time with forensic psychologists whilst on my clinical placement this could be arranged. I plan on building

my strengths by carrying on with reading theories and therapies about clinical and forensic psychology trying to get as much experience as possible.

The skills that you developed during the placement year:

My knowledge from university has been applied when my placement supervisor and other professionals were talking about theories and conditions. It has been applied in the food and mood booklet as some things I already knew about from university such as the chemicals in your brain. In the mental health promotion my university studies already gave me a slight knowledge about emotional health and positive sense of well being. I already had an idea about psychometric test and how they helped psychologists assess and get a better understanding from my university work. I have learnt how to transfer my skills used in University and have started to shift from writing academically to writing in clinical contexts and/or inform professional colleagues. The new skills and knowledge I have learnt are the administrating, scoring and interpretation of psychometric assessments getting a better understanding of them. Clinical interventions such as motivational interviewing, research skills in which could be used for the setting up of a service. Being able to apply my academic skills appropriately to work environment. Personal/ professional development, everyday work disciplines, understanding the pressures of a job like this in a health trust that is constantly changing. I also think in a way it's prepared me more for dealing with mental disorders as it's a lot different from reading about it. I feel more confident to talk to patients as before I was always watching what I was saying and feel more prepared for cases. It's also given me an understanding of other mental health professional and the work they do, and how that work helps psychologists roles, and how some social work theories are similar to that of psychologists and how a social worker in which I had observed use CBT on a patient.

What you could have done to learn more from your placement year?

Due to the nature of some of my placement supervisor's patients I was not able to sit in on many one to one therapy sessions. In the future I would like to have more experience in therapies. Other than this I don't feel I could have learnt any more from my placement year as I have gained a huge amount from these 2 placements.

What advice would you give to Surrey students who are just about to embark on their professional training experience?

I would advise them to be open minded when working in a health setting as it not like how you would expect it to be in terms of psychology. There is a lot of politics in the system that you don't get to hear about when you're doing your psychology degree. The system is ever changing which can be at times very difficult for all concerned but the benefit of working for them is the reward of seeing the patients being able to try to live their lives as best as they can.

**27. Learning to be a Professional:
The story of my placement experience.
Faculty of Law
Parliamentary lobbyist intern at global warming campaign**

When my work placement began, I simply never anticipated the events I would be organising, participating in and receive national press mention for. I never thought I'd be meandering through the arteries of the Houses of Parliament, congested with MPs, civil servants, lobbyists and even the so-called 'Law Lords'. I never considered the possibility that I would have private meetings with influential politicians, and attempt to persuade them to support a Parliamentary Bill.

Let me start from the very beginning: As a Law with International Studies student, the majority of placements available were in solicitors' offices in and around London and Guildford. Valuable experience surely, but this was not a prospect that excited me, or made me feel grateful for having a placement year. I wanted something a little more profound, original and challenging.

Though the demands of a law degree were pressing, I, with help from my placement tutor (to whom I am eternally grateful), found a potential work placement which ticked all the right boxes. I had never seriously considered a career as a parliamentary lobbyist before, but as soon as I saw the opportunity I jumped at the chance to explore it. A C.V. and a couple of informal interviews later, I was given a start date and some information to read. Though the issue I was to be working on is one of the greatest global threats to the modern world, I was grateful for the time to read and digest the information – I had a great deal to learn, if I was going to be trying to persuade MPs!

The organisation I was working for was a prominent environmental charity. I was thrown straight into the deep-end; into the parliamentary team, who were campaigning to amend the Climate Change Bill. The team was relatively small, with a head campaigner who worked part time, a senior campaigner, a consultant and two interns (myself, who worked full time, and another who worked 2 days a week). Despite the limitations on the team's capacity, we worked hard and spearheaded the 'Big Ask' campaign.

My duties varied from day to day. Though there were less exciting tasks such as mail-outs or filing letters from MPs, these were easily outweighed by the meetings in parliament, the grass roots campaigning and the interesting research projects. My team leader was certainly an inspiration, having worked on many successful bill campaigns for a number of years.

I quickly became part of a smaller team of employees from different teams within the organisation, working on lobbying carefully selected MPs (selected by virtue of their ministerial capacity or constituency). In the first few meetings I sat back and observed, but once I gained confidence I learnt that being assertive in meetings certainly pays off. My keenness solidified my place in the group, ensured I got to undertake some of the more desirable tasks, and could offer new ideas.

While my administration work and target lobbying was ticking along, I was invited onto another meeting group – concerned with organising a massive public meeting in central London on the Climate Change Bill. Speakers at the event included the minister for the environment, his Liberal Democrat and Conservative counterparts, and the charity's director. The evening was a great

success, with a turnout of over 1000 people. I acted as a co-ordinating usher for the evening, and even got to share a few drinks with an MP at the pub afterwards!

The success of the meeting inspired me to take action locally. Outside of work, I joined my local branch group in my town. I gave the group an informative speech about the Climate Change Bill campaign. After some research, I found that the MP for the north of our town was also the then Energy Minister. With a little persuasion, I encouraged the group to assist me in organising a (albeit smaller) public meeting for local constituents.

Within 2 weeks, I had worked solidly, arranging, advertising and inviting. The hard work paid off—despite being very nervous on the days before – the room was full. The MP was questioned by many people, including local councillors and GLA candidates. He even made statements supporting the demands of our charity, which was very encouraging to hear from a cabinet minister! The icing on the cake was the press attention the meeting encouraged. Not only did we receive pages of local press coverage, but also BBC.

As the placement began to draw to a close, I was given a task of encouraging lobbying efforts in the constituencies of 3 very high profile MPs. Though I was never able to finish, I set up large databases of information, which was hopefully of some use to the person picking up the work. I also completed two research projects for other related campaigns, promoting food sustainability and 'green' job creation.

My transformation between being a student with some retail experience to becoming a professional was almost unbelievable. For me, becoming a professional meant stepping out of my comfort zone, and learning to deal with situations which I didn't expect or predict to happen. It meant keeping calm and cool, even when talking to influential politicians. It meant an exponential growth in confidence, when speaking privately in meetings or publicly to an audience.

On returning to University, my approach to learning has completely changed. I am now more organised with my work, having learnt how best to deal with multiple deadlines. I am more confident in seminars, and more likely to speak up and offer ideas. I am more streamlined in my research and coherent when writing. Though the experience was an emotional journey of sorts (stress, joy, disappointment (with uncooperative MPs!) to name but a few), the highs by far outweighed the lows and I would not have changed anything.

I advise students looking to a placement to not take the easy or standard option. Look for something that you want to do, that you can really get your teeth into, even if it is different to your peers.

For interest - The Climate Change Bill is about to become an Act. An advisory committee has just recommended all the amendments campaigned for by myself and my charity. The Bill is the first of its kind in the world, and advocates an 80% reduction in Carbon Emissions. If applied properly, it will prevent dangerous climate change. I feel honoured and proud to have been part of such a campaign effort.

28. Professional Training Placement Final Report Department of Music & Sound Recording Product specialist in digital media industry

My placement site is a well established, multi-national company that has worked with the DVD medium since its creation and more recently with the new HD formats; Blu-ray Disc (BD) and HD DVD. From encoding to authoring, the company provides the tools for the complete workflow in DVD production and is responsible for over 80% of the DVD market worldwide. It is made up of several divisions; the division I have worked for is called the Professional Products Group (PPG), there is also a consumer division. Aside from these two groups are several others that deal with more specific markets in the digital media industry.

The PPG headquarters are located in California. There are further offices located around the world, one of which is the London office, from which I have been based. The London office is responsible for our customers from Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), this accounts for about a third of PPG's customers worldwide.

In my first week, I represented my company at a tradeshow. This was quite a useful week to start since I was able to sit in on various presentations given by colleagues explaining what they did. The following week, I set about starting to learn how to use some of the software. I managed to complete a complicated DVD authoring assignment within a few days, something that apparently would usually take at least a week to do. I think my colleagues were quite pleased with my progress since I quickly started to work on the newer HD softwares, that I would later be spending most of my time working with.

During my first six months, I built up a good knowledge of all of our Professional Products, and by the end of the six months held my first one-on-one training session with a customer to teach them how to use the Blu-ray Disc software. I found these couple of days of training very enjoyable – it was good to be able to work face-to-face with a customer.

With the role of Product Specialist, roughly 70% of my job was spent dealing with technical support for our customers. Most of the time support incidents would be answered via the online support system, however, many customers choose to phone in to ask questions, so I would often speak to customers on the telephone. Since I was responsible for answering all incoming calls, I soon became quite proficient at thinking on my feet and finding answers quickly. I was well aware of the fact that time means money!

Working within a relatively small team meant my place within it was quite significant; just a month and a half into my placement, I found myself alone in the office for four days whilst my colleagues were away. Being trusted to keep EMEA in order this early on was a responsibility I was delighted, and a little surprised to be given. By this time, I was able to handle most situations with the help and security of being able to liaise with the US support team should I need to and thus provide better responses to the customers.

In between dealing with support, and any other general things that were going on, I started to prepare all of the equipment we would be shipping to Amsterdam for the IBC tradeshow. This involved going through a list, finding each item, then correctly labelling and safely packing it. If we did not have a particular item then I was responsible for sourcing it and ordering it in. I was meticulous in preparing the shipment since the team would be greatly inconvenienced if anything were to be missing and it would not do our image at the show any good.

The following week, I was informed that I would be attending the IBC tradeshow, where I would be demonstrating our products to perspective and current customers within a small team chosen especially for the show. Attending tradeshow is an important marketing tool and usually a very good revenue resource. I felt excited and quite privileged to be going to represent them at such an important event having only been with the company for a short time.

For the first two and half months of my placement, I had been living in Guildford and commuting up to London each day. Although manageable, I found the long commute a little tiring and it meant I missed out on various “extra curricular” after work activities, usually held in “The Club, Bar and Dining” located quite conveniently below the office. In light of this, and convenience, I found a lovely flat-share in a great location in London, meaning I could walk through Hyde Park to work – a luxury not many people in London have! Living in London, for me, was a fantastic experience. As I spent more and more time there I discovered just what an interesting and exciting place it is, and unfortunately, quite how expensive it is! Still, with the company paying me a fairly generous placement salary, I managed to survive pretty well and take full advantage of being in London.

Pretty soon after moving into my new accommodation, we flew out to Amsterdam a couple of days before the show to start preparing the stand. Luckily my shipment had contained everything as requested and the miles of cables I had labelled all seemed to fit together well. I had also created an auto-install disc that I ran in all of the computers on the stand; this disc installed all of the applications each machine would need. Everyone seemed quite impressed with how swiftly it worked.

Our stand was arranged such that there were demonstration areas where we would present to larger groups of people (up to about 20), and then smaller booths where we could demonstrate one-on-one in greater depth. Over the 5 days of the show, I gave several large and small presentations each day. By the end of the week in Amsterdam I was pretty exhausted; not only was the work during the day very draining, but socialising in the evening with the bosses of the company, and on occasion prospective customers, also quite tiring. That said, it was a fantastic week, from which I learnt a lot. Not only had my knowledge of our products been furthered, but I had become a lot more confident at presenting. I think my social confidence was improved also, since I had to speak to a lot of new people during that week, not only people from our company, but punters walking onto the stand during the show also.

Returning to the office I found myself answering more and more support incidents, meaning the technical support manager for Europe was able to go away to train customers around Europe and leave me alone to keep things under control. Towards the end of my first six months there, I held my first two day training session on one of our HD products. I received useful feedback from which I could realise a few things that I needed to work on to be better prepared for my next session. Evidently my boss was pleased with my performance, since a few days into my next six months (just after the Christmas holidays) he asked me whether I would be able to go to Sweden to train a new customer how to use our BD software.

Thanks to being in London, I had bumped into one of my favourite musicians and having chatted a bit, he had asked whether I might like to come and do some work with him and his band. When I returned from Sweden I went to spend a few days working with him and the band in preparation for a couple of gigs they were doing. I told him about the degree course I was taking so he arranged for me to work with his sound engineer for the two gigs. I was able to

pick up some pretty handy tips and tricks from the engineer; he was a very friendly guy who was eager to pass on as much of his knowledge as I could take!

Upon returning to the office, I was asked whether I could go away to do some more training again, this time to Denmark. A few weeks later, I was off to do the same again in Italy and later still, France. With my increased experience, I was asked to demonstrate our HD software to one of our current SD customers who were potentially looking to upgrade. After the demo, a lovely lunch and heavy business discussion between my boss, the prospective customer and I, we returned to the office where the customer agreed to purchase the \$130,000 worth of software. I found being a part of such a business deal very exciting and satisfying. This had given me a taster into the sales side of the business, something that I thought I might like to pursue further, later on.

Such an opportunity came sooner than expected when I was asked whether I would be able to represent the company at the NAB trade show in Las Vegas. I really enjoyed this show since I had now been there for almost a year and my knowledge had vastly improved since IBC. One of the highlights for me was being personally asked to stay on with the company over the summer by the General Manager for PPG. Having thanked him, I then negotiated a salary increase, which he agreed to and increased further!

Now was the time of year for prospective second year Tonmeisters to come for an interview; I was pleased to be a part of the interview process, dealing directly with the prospective candidates and then sitting in on the interviews, asking questions where appropriate. I learnt a great deal from sitting on the “other side of the table” during these interviews, and feel that when I next have to go for a job interview I will be a lot better prepared now that I have a better understanding of employers’ desires.

My boss was keen to help me get the most out of my placement, being an ex-Tonmeister himself, and helped me to arrange several visits to post-production houses in London so that I could spend a few days learning more about the industry. These days were very useful as I was able to gain a wider understanding of the industry and jobs within it.

With the demise of the HD DVD format, our focus shifted entirely towards Blu-ray Disc support. As predicated sales saw a boost as many facilities who had previously been “sitting on the fence” waiting for one format to prevail over the other suddenly invested. The increased customer numbers put more demand on the technical support team. As a result, my colleagues and I began creating a Knowledge Base where detailed answers could be found to common problems. Around this time, my colleague was promoted into product management so I was appointed the responsibility of the Knowledge Base. This involved ensuring a high quality was kept for all of the articles and working with the US support team to continue producing further articles.

The extra two months I spent with the company seemed to zoom by. I really felt that I had become an integral part of the team, not only in Europe but the entire PPG team. My placement had enabled me to work within many different parts of the company, frequently being in contact with members of the team all over the world. Although my sound recording skills my not have been furthered by taking this placement, I feel my all-round understandings of industry and the real working world have been hugely increased. All in all, it was an absolutely fantastic year for me, full of extremely valuable experiences I will continue to benefit from for the rest of my career. I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to work within such a great team,

and judging by the (apparently unheard of) Playstation 3 leaving present I received; I think they enjoyed having me be a part of it too!