Case Study 3 – Leicester Graduate Internships 2012/13

The graduate

Katherine Stroud graduated from the University of Leicester in July 2012 with a degree in Psychology. Upon completion of her studies, she had a dream of becoming a clinical psychologist, but before embarking on this route she decided to acquire more practical work experience. She found out about the Leicester Graduate Internships offer and applied for a three month Research Executive role at Adroit-e Research, a local company specialising in market research: “I applied for this internship based on my research experience during my course, but I actually was not expecting to get it, but I did!”

The organisation

Adroit-e Research has had a long history of taking on interns having hosted 21 over the last ten years. Jonathan Brill, Director at Adroit-e Research, chose to engage with the internship programme as it fits well with their own recruitment plans. He surmised that the programme works well as: “[it] respected our own internship programme and experience and allowed the proper development of the intern within the context of our expanding company”. Jonathan was pleased with Katherine’s approach to the application process and the fact that she made a very good impression right from the beginning.

The internship experience

Katherine’s experience as a Research Executive has been a very positive one and deepened her research knowledge: “I have learnt so much in such a short amount of time. I now have hands on experience with quantitative market research design, data and analyses,” she admits. During this time and her role managing a team of field researchers, her leadership and management skills in particular have been enhanced. Moreover, Kat recognises that the experience has also greatly improved her confidence: “The experience has also taught me a lot about the extent of my abilities and confidence. I felt as if I had fallen into the role comfortably and most of all I really enjoyed it.” Kat’s internship project also gave her the unique opportunity to travel to Cannes, France, WHERE SHE SUPPORTED A FIELD RESEARCH TEAM AT A MAJOR EXHIBITION. She views THIS as her greatest learning experience: “It was an intimidating yet empowering experience. This forced me to network with people that I wouldn’t have normally done.”

Whilst Katherine went on to complete her internship successfully, the internship presented some initial challenges. The biggest challenge was “overcoming the embarrassment of not knowing what to do straight away”. She learnt that asking for help early on was something that you have to do in order to be able to complete tasks - and there is no harm in doing so. A key element of the internship was exercising end to end ownership of a project - for Kat this was the most enjoyable aspect of her placement: “to be [involved] right at the beginning, speaking with a client, trying to get the job (contract) first, then working with a client, doing research and then sending the report off”.

Jonathan seems to be equally satisfied with the internship experience:

“Recruiting Kat was a really good decision. She is undoubtedly in the top 3 interns we have employed. An Adroit-e internship is a two way street - interns genuinely get the opportunity to learn and are given more responsibility as their capability develops.” Following Kat’s initial internship, Jonathan did not
hesitate to offer an extension of her contract, and following on from this Adroit-e was able to keep her for a further three month period thanks to sponsorship via Santander Universities.

Advice to students
Katherine has gained a lot from her internship experience and feels it has changed her: “I feel like a totally different person. I feel like I have learnt so much in this internship and it is only been 6 months!” adds Kat. She would encourage any graduate to apply for an internship despite the pressures of studying - “when you are doing a degree, it is stressful, it is busy and you are constantly under pressure to meet deadlines, but in your downtime, in your holidays you should be really doing an internship. I think you really grow when you are working. In order to really stand out against all the other graduates, an internship really puts you up farther than anyone else.” Her other piece of advice is also about being open to new experiences and making sure you learn from them - “Try everything once – in other words, relish every task that is given to you, because more often than not, you don’t realise the importance of that task for your personal growth until long afterwards.”

Advice to employers
Likewise, Jonathan would also recommend an internship programme to any employer considering recruiting new graduate level staff. Having hosted interns for the last 10 years, he is keen to continue taking on graduates and utilising their skills and knowledge. He admits that the internship programme does not only bring benefits to interns themselves, but also to the company itself as interns often bring “fresh and vibrant ideas from which the company can also learn.” He also highlighted the benefit of doing an internship as a way of enhancing graduates’ long-term employability and enhancing career prospects – “The success rate of landing a job at the end of the internship with Adroit-e is very high, and the interns that are successful in completion of their internship with us are the ones that are getting a job fairly quickly!”

Plans for the future
An internship can really shape the career path graduates decide to take; galvanising career aspirations or highlighting new career options. For Katherine this has certainly been the case, and she now has the experience and confidence to explore a new career avenue, combined with a wider understanding of what she can achieve: “Throughout the internship my plans have changed, because I feel like I fit this role very well, better than I ever imagine myself fitting it.” Following her graduate internship, Kat has accepted a permanent job at the company. Her long-term aspiration is to work in a more managerial role in either charity sector or conferences. Undoubtedly her internship experience will help her realise these plans one day.