Case Study 4 – Leicester Graduate Internships 2012/13

The graduate
Robert Harding graduated from the University of Leicester in 2012 with a BA in English. Prior to undertaking the internship, Robert was struggling to find a job related to his academic studies. For him, Leicester Graduate Internships presented an excellent opportunity for finding an entry-level role, where he would be able to directly apply the skills and knowledge gained during his degree. Following an application, Robert successfully secured the role of Communications Executive with Leicester Shire Promotions\(^1\) and embarked on an exciting learning journey.

Simon Gribbons, Head of Communications at Leicester Shire Promotions was looking for fresh graduate talent with sound local knowledge, who would join him in the communications department. He was keen to find an individual to help with writing editorial content for magazines, developing press releases and using social media in order to promote the city and the county. Simon saw Leicester Graduate Internships as a great opportunity for acquiring a potential new employee through an easy and flexible recruitment process.

The internship experience
First Robert had to spend some time learning about the nature of the business. Initially Robert’s internship set out to focus on developing PR, communications and the social media side of the business. As time passed, gradually Rob was given more responsibility and became more involved with the integral processes. This enabled him to broaden his skills and gain varied experience: “The internship has really helped me to develop skills that I learned in education and apply them to practical world of work.” He studied English, so knew how to get his points across through writing, but learned how to make this advantageous to the company.

The biggest challenge for Robert was understanding how to apply his skills to tasks, such as writing a press release. This was an area for development and through the positive feedback and support he received from the organisation, he was able to develop the writing style required. Overcoming such challenges proved to be a great achievement for Robert: “I have really enjoyed organising press visits. At the beginning I was mainly contributing towards final bits and pieces, but now I am actually responsible for visits right from the beginning till the end.”

For Simon, hosting an intern presented also an excellent opportunity to reflect on his own work: “It is always good to have a fresh pair of eyes and a second opinion. When training a new member of staff, you actually have a chance to re-think your job – what you are doing/how you are doing things. It has given me a chance to re-assess some things that are working and some that are not working so well”, adds Simon.

\(^1\) Leicester Shire Promotions is a destination management organisation responsible for promoting Leicester and Leicestershire to visitors.
Advice to students and employers
Roberts’s advice to others thinking of undertaking an internship would be to start looking early and to research the field of interest so that you know what is happening. He sees that this way individuals can put themselves one step ahead of others applying. Internships in his view act as an excellent bridge between academia and the world of work: “[They] are really good because they feel like a next natural step to take and they can give you a really good footing in terms of where to go next.”

Equally, Simon highly values taking on an intern, highlighting it as an opportunity to trial someone before recruiting them as a full time member of staff: “If the internship is a success, you have a fully trained member of staff committed to your work at minimal cost.” His advice for employers would be to ensure that there is a genuine need for the role and it is pitched at the right level, e.g. the work is not too challenging for entry level, but at the same time not too junior that they end up doing mainly admin for three months. He says: “you have got to reach the balance – an intern’s work is valuable for the company, but it is also helping the individual to develop. Don’t get someone just to fill in X, Y, Z jobs. At the end, even if they do not stay with the company they will be a better proposition for a future employer.”

Plans for the future
The internship at Leicester Shire Promotions has instilled Robert with great confidence and an appetite for working within the field of communications. Following an additional placement with the company (thanks to the sponsorship via Santander Universities), Robert has now been offered a full time job as Communications Executive.