Leicester Graduate Internship Case Study – From archaeological volunteering to outreach in the community

The graduate
Jennifer Drapans studied a BSc in Archaeology and Ancient History, and as a compulsory component of her degree did a placement at The Sir John Moore Foundation (a heritage charity in Appleby Magna, Leicestershire). Inspired by her experience at the Foundation, she decided she was interested in becoming a freelance community archaeologist working with museums and schools. In order to realise her career plans, Jennifer gained funding via Enterprise Inc to germinate her business idea whilst continuing to volunteer at Sir John Moore. However, when the possibility of doing a graduate internship arose, Jen seized the opportunity and brokered her own placement as Research Project Officer with the Foundation.

The internship experience
Jen’s employer, Susie McGraw, Heritage & Education Officer, had been impressed with her enthusiasm for the chosen sector and eagerness to learn as well as her archaeological knowledge and research and communication skills. She had no hesitation in taking Jen on board as an intern.

Jen’s internship experience enabled her to gain a wealth of experience that included creating her own community exhibition, working as an events’ assistant for the BBC and managing excavations and communications. She also tutored youth groups as part of their Alternative Curriculum. “I have gained an excellent opportunity to network within my field. I [now] have strong communication skills and I am comfortable working with a diverse range of people”, adds Jen. “This ‘can do’ attitude has enabled Jen to develop her skills in the heritage sector. [...] She proved to be amiable member of the team who is able to communicate with a diverse range of people in a variety of circumstances. [...] She was also invaluable in reopening the heritage centre, which now provides educational, marketing and heritage support”, admits Susie.

The biggest challenge for Jen was understanding the internal structure at the Sir John Moore Foundation and roles and responsibilities of her colleagues. Given the small size of the team, she initially found it difficult to know who to liaise with to implement projects, as well as understand the office culture. “Having an intern has demonstrated the need for rigorous induction and procedures, especially as it is the first time an external person has been introduced into the team at a project management level - historically we have all started as volunteers and built up our role in our individual areas”, admits Susie. “We learnt to ensure that tasks are set out clearly so that they can be fully and effectively communicated to the person carrying them out, as in the past I have tended to hold information internally while expecting people to know what to do!”

Jen explains that the most enjoyable aspect of her internship was participating in an archaeology event ‘The Path Beneath Your Feet’. This was an international conference that brought together
more than 100 exhibitors and the stand that she exhibited on behalf of the Foundation, was ranked within the top ten exhibits.

Following her internship, Susie was able to continue to employ Jen by successfully receiving sponsorship through the Santander Universities Programme. In her new role, Jen was given greater responsibility and she now manages a group of volunteers, runs excavations with young people and coordinates the Grassroots Festival (annual heritage event). In order to help develop Jen’s skills further and successfully realise her ambition of running an archaeological outreach programme, Sir John Moore Foundation decided to partly sponsor Jen’s teaching qualification which she has recently completed.

**Advice to students and employers**

Jen’s gives two pieces of advice to other students considering doing an internship: firstly research the options available, particularly in regards to funding and, secondly, be brave in realising your plans. Doing an internship is a “great opportunity for developing your skills in a safe environment and enhancing your career prospects, while at the same time [it is] an excellent chance for networking in the industry of your choice.” In as far as advice to other employers Susie underlined the importance of having “clear tasks for the intern to undertake to make sure they are able to work independently towards a set goal, giving them ownership of the project while offering support as needed.” She would also advise employers “to ensure that their staff team are clear about the intern’s role, expectations and boundaries to avoid any conflict or bad feeling.”

**Learning gained**

The internship at the Sir John Moore Foundation enabled Jen to gain a solid understanding of working within the museums and heritage industry. It has tested and strengthened her project management and communication skills, enabled her to gain basic teaching qualifications and equipped her with real life work experience, which made her even more confident in realising her career goals.

**Next steps**

Jen’s plan is to continue working part-time at the Sir John Moore Foundation as a freelance archaeologist and outreach consultant. She will also start teaching from September following the successful completion of her teaching qualifications. Susie is really pleased with the fact that Jen will be able to stay with the organisation for a bit longer and will have a chance to utilise her growing skill set by fully incorporating her into the team.