

Daniel* completed a three month, paid internship in the Learning and Participation department of a circus arts organisation in summer 2012, alongside finishing his undergraduate degree.

*name changed

How did you find out about the internship?

I did my dissertation on circus, and my tutor teaches flying trapeze, and she said you should apply for this internship because it's very similar to the course that I did. I did Drama, Applied Theatre and Education at Central School of Speech and Drama. So it's all about the participation and outreach aspect of bringing circus and accessibility to people who don't necessarily have that option.

What's your time commitment here?

I'm in two days per week, Wednesdays and Sundays. That's very flexible, for example they've just had half term so I came in on other days. It's for three months – they do three terms per year, so it's just one whole term.

What does the role involve on a day to day basis?

It varies. Wednesday is more of an admin day, because that's my office day. Usually I just catch up on work, so logging on databases, helping make spreadsheets. At the same time I also help coordinate the projects. For example, at the end of the term there are open studios where every member from the youth circus and the adult circus can invite friends and family into the space. So my manager has given me the opportunity to coordinate that and make sure it runs smoothly, given me a budget for food and stuff. I'm also helping out on other projects that need it, so today we had a workshop come in, usually I help coordinate that and make sure people are in the right places.

Sunday is youth day. In the morning, from ten o'clock to half one, we have all the under 11s. They all come in at different times and it's my job to make sure they are all checked in, labelled up with their names. In the afternoon it's quieter because it's the older teenagers and they know what they're doing, so then I catch up on work and chase up some of the students. For example, because this organisation does bursaries for people who can't afford to attend the circus sessions, they have to do certain questionnaires and plans. Those often don't get filled in, so I usually have to chase them up.

My manager wanted me to make some templates. Every day they coordinate every night, and after every night they have to write a report of what happened, so that it can be passed on. They wanted me to create templates for that. So that's my own job, and then my other job is to recreate the filling system. So I have my main jobs that I need to do slowly over the time, and then at the same time I have my coordination jobs and helping to create projects.

Where do you feel you fit within the organisation? Do you attend staff meetings?

The staff meetings just kind of happen in the room, because everyone is in the same office. It's nice because you get to be included in that, get to put in your opinion if you have an idea. Because I come from a different background than some of the team, I have different ideas, which is always helpful. I think being included in meetings has put me in the mind-set of 'working'.

How have you been supported by the organisation during the internship?

The good thing is, my manager basically asked what I wanted to get from the internship. Really I just wanted to learn about the business and the company. So she's letting me do projects and help coordinate projects, because that's the kind of stuff I want to learn about, and how the business actually runs. As well as that, my manager set up a mentoring scheme. I had to contact specific people in the company, introduce myself, and ask if I could come and learn about what they do as their job. So I did that and kind of met everyone. From that, my manager asked - if you were going to pick a mentor who would you pick. So I picked by mentor, and she's been really helpful really. I think every mentor would be different, but the good thing about this mentor is that she's not focused on the organisation, she's focused on where I want to go in life and what I want to do in my job. Which I think is a lot better than being more, what do you like about Circus Space this organisation?

It sounds like having a mentor has been useful...

Exactly, even just the contacts that they have. I knew nothing really about business plans, and I want to go into producing, and she was like: okay we can do this, we'll go through business plans and interview skills. Just that higher authority that you don't really think about, and lecturers don't necessarily teach you. She put me in contact with directors and producers to meet up with and find out about their experiences. I'm not going to get a job out of it or anything like that, but just to get the experience of talking to them about the type of stuff they do. Mentors are the best thing.

It's nice because they're not just supporting me as an intern at *this* organisation, they're supporting me in my career path and where I want to go in life. Which I think is really more beneficial than saying: this is how you make a spreadsheet, which I already know how to do. It's not just that type of thing.

Do you feel able to discuss any problems with the organisation?

I haven't had any problems at all, which is good, but if I did that's why the mentor is there, so I wouldn't have to consult someone in the office. I feel like I'm not exactly stepping into work, I'm stepping into experience, and that's what my mentors for, to guide me through that.

Do you think pay is a factor in how you view the internship?

If I wasn't getting paid I would probably classify it more as just an experience, as opposed to a job. I think every job in this industry is a networking position; everything is about networking, so I think I'd still get the same out of it. I think it becomes a lot more competitive as well, in that respect. Because it's so competitive, the whole industry, when an internship is paid it becomes something more special, so that as a person you then have to fulfil that internship and push it forwards. I feel like I have a responsibility to myself as well as the organisation, to do this best that I can for them

Do you see the internship as a learning experience, or something else?

I think I see it as three things. I see it as a learning curve, but not administratively. Actually, yes and no administratively. I already have the spreadsheet, mailing, calendar skills, mainly from a previous work placement. But in terms of writing documents and letters and emailing people, I think your skills are always developing and building so in that sense I don't want to throw the administrative work away.

I also see it as a networking opportunity because these are people that I can always get back in contact with, which is why I try and spread myself around the company, in a good way, and make friends with people. The other thing is I see it as a job, and as an experience that can go on my CV. For example I know people on my course who are not going to have the same experiences that I have, so it puts me a step ahead in the industry and trying to push myself in terms of where I'm going in life.