

Lisa\* completed a three month, unpaid internship in the Curatorial department of a large multi-arts centre in autumn/winter 2011, alongside working part-time and completing a part-time Masters degree.

\*name changed

**What attracted you to this internship?**

I study Arts Management at Birkbeck College. Before that I did Art History, and have always focused on curating and organising arts exhibitions. I applied for this internship because it was my main interest and my research topic.

**Was there anything specific about the advert or about this organisation that made you want to do an internship here?**

Yes. At that time they were looking for someone who speaks German, because they were researching an exhibition – Bauhaus – and I applied and I wrote in the second sentence that I used to live in Germany and I speak German.

**What did the internship involve on a daily basis?**

I did a lot of work around databases and images, because when I came to the organisation the team had just started to work on the Bauhaus research. I was responsible mostly for making sure they have all images in the right place. The exhibition was about 300 objects from different collections, so it was very important to not mix up anything, especially as there was around 10-15 people working at the same time on the Bauhaus exhibition. The other things were a little bit of translation and contacting German institutions. I did lots of admin jobs, like photocopying, but everyone was doing similar things to me, so even booking tickets for guests or arranging arts programmes. I really felt like I was part of the team.

**Would you say then you had more regular tasks or one overarching project?**

The Bauhaus exhibition was the main project. I had to be informed about different fields. Sometimes I was ordering books for the main curators or going to the library to check references, books in the British library for example. About a month before I was due to finish they transferred my role into another exhibition because at that time there was another installation which they were late with so they asked me to join that team.

**When you started the internship, do you remember having an induction?**

I think so yes. I was introduced to everyone, they should me my computer, my desk, my tasks. I don't think it was formal, I was just informed what I would do.

**When you left, did you have an exit interview?**

No I didn't have any interviews. I just had goodbye drinks with everyone.

**When you left was there any opportunity to give feedback about your experience?**

It was very informal. At the last meeting all the curators came, even the head of the department, and they all asked me how I found it; what was my favourite task, what did I hate.

**In this meeting, or at any point throughout the internship, was there any talk of what you would learn or what you had learned?**

I think because curating is a very specific field, and to learn how to be a curator is just through experience, for me it was important to attend meetings; all meetings with curators and with other departments. So to me that was learning. I also had access to most files, and all these files are kind of important when you're a project manager, so I have access and I can officially look through these documents and see what is important, for example when I am going to curate an exhibition in the future. So definitely it was about learning.

**Did you feel like you learned a lot about the organisation itself?**

Not really, because it's so huge. The departments are separate, so you can't really know what's going on in the marketing department, you don't really know what's going on in the music department. I just stayed with curatorial department and that's it. I didn't meet many people from other departments.

**How did you feel that you fitted in your team as an intern? Did you feel part of the team?**

Yes, yes definitely. The team was quite small and everyone works with the same tasks so you don't have this feeling that you're just an intern who's only doing photocopying, making coffee for someone, not at all. They always highlight that it's important you should feel a part of the team, and they always invited me to all meetings, even if I didn't join the discussion, to see what the current issues were.

**Do you know why this organisation offers internships in this department?**

I think because there aren't that many opportunities to practice being a curator, they try to be fair to people. There was a girl who wanted to stay longer, in the curatorial department, but they said sorry, we have another person coming in three months' time. So even if you are willing to work for free and stay longer because it's a good experience, they will say no because it's really in demand and people want to get this kind of experience. So maybe they figure out they don't have to pay entry level positions. They can get free people, and those people are all very well educated – they're all doing Masters, either at the Courtauld Institute, or Goldsmiths or Birkbeck. Those people are already very experienced; mostly it's not their first job. Obviously if you have that kind of situation, as an institution you don't want to pay. It's perfect. It seems like it works perfectly for both sides. But definitely when it's not a paid position, I treat it differently. I'm more demanding because I believe that I'm also giving something; I give my free time, which is really precious. And I'm kind of more critical. If people pay me, I can take many things – you know how it is. But if it's something for

free, I try to be more aware of what's going on around me; why am I spending my free days during the week here, for free, in the most expensive country in Europe.

**Would you recommend this internship to others? Would you do it again knowing what you do now?**

Yes, definitely I would recommend it. But, as I said, it would be perfect if - like in other industries – you go for an internship as a try out, to check if you're good or not, then after maybe three months you can be offered a position. I know for example my boyfriend did an internship, he studied economics, and the internship was three months, paid, and after the internship he was offered a job. He knew from the beginning that he had to be good in the internship to get the job. Whereas I knew, from the beginning, one hundred percent, that I would not get a job. I think that makes a big difference.