

Emma* completed a three month, unpaid internship with a small performance art organisation in summer 2011. She stayed on at the organisation for several months following the internship in a one day per week paid role.

*name changed

How did you find out about the internship?

I went into the organisation to use some of their resources, and whilst I was looking for stuff on their website I also noticed they had an advert a specific internship to help develop their study room over the summer. The internship policy was there as well alongside the advert.

What was the time commitment?

I ended up doing Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday in the office doing internship things, and on a Thursday or Friday each week I would come in and use the study room myself as a study room user because at the time I was doing research for a [PhD] chapter I was writing.

You mentioned your research, is that what attracted you to this particular internship?

I think in a way because I'm in a department of Performance Studies and within the particular field of performance art and live art in the UK this organisation really is the best organisation, and the people within it are big names in the field. I think to work alongside people like that, you'd not only get really direct experience of what it's like to work in the live art sector but also just to get experience of working with them and, in a way, to become 'professionally related' to them, so that in the future you can call on them for references and things like that. In terms of having someone like that as a referee or having someone say a good word about you from this organisation is quite a good thing in this field.

I think it was in terms of the size of the organisation as well, probably related to how niche it is, but also just that in a small organisation you get to work directly with the director and the co-director and you're really part of the organisation because there's not a lot of people there. I wouldn't necessarily have applied for an internship in a bigger organisation. Not that it wouldn't be good to have that on my CV as well, but just from my past work experience I much prefer to work in smaller organisations. There's also more chance that you'll be able to do things; you're more likely to be asked to do something important in a small organisation where every person counts, every person has to be worth their while, whereas in a big organisation you might be lost a bit, you might make less of an impression.

About the internship itself, on a day to day basis what were you doing?

The main job I was doing was study room cataloguing. We would either buy books with the budget we had or people would donate materials, like books and DVDS, and we subscribe to magazines. They all had to be catalogued in our electronic catalogue, and then given a sticker, and put in the library for people to use. Sometimes this would require a bit of research about the item or watching some of the DVDs, to see what the work was like. Sometimes stuff was sent in by the artist and it was just a DVD on its own without any explanation. That work was quite consistent because you always had stuff going in and I could see what the end product of what it was; that was for people to come in and use it, and I myself as a researcher could see the value of doing that and doing it well. One of the things was to develop a 'key words' document which

we could use to more easily categorise the material that we had, and that was given to me as my responsibility.

Other more boring things, also to do with databases, would be to update the contacts in the database, like press and mailing lists, [deal with] bounced back emails from the mailing list, and also doing order fulfilments for their online bookshop. I would be doing the processing – getting the items off the shelf, packaging them, taking them to the Post Office. Also other things like making up DVDs; we produce a number of artists DVDs which we make in house, burn them, print the covers, cut the covers. So I'd be doing the basic assemblage of DVDs which would then be sent out to people who'd bought them.

Did you receive any training, or did you have enough knowledge to get going straight away? How were you supervised?

I did receive training; people went through things with me and explained what I'd be doing and what that meant within the organisation, but it was pretty much – you can just start doing it. So for example on the first day we went through the databases, and the contact database and the study room cataloguing. To be honest most of the time I was happy to just get on with it, because it was really clear to me what needed to be done, how it needed to be done, and if I had a problem I guess I'd say something.

In terms of supervision, at the end of everything week or every couple of weeks I'd send a document listing what I'd done or what questions I had, things like that. With the key words document I was developing over a month or so, I would sometimes bring that to a weekly staff meeting. Normally that's a point at which everyone says how they're getting on with the various tasks they've got to do. Although mine was very small in comparison to everyone else's, they'd always ask 'what's going on with this'. Normally it was the study room that was most important as the other stuff was just on-going admin, basically. There was a sense that everyone had input as well, as I think they're quite keen for everyone to have a say.

Did you also have weekly check-ins with your supervisor as stated in the internship policy?

Yeah, I think, small ones. It would generally just be that I'd have a ten minute chat on one day a week, normally with the co-director. It was basically just a check-in to see where you're at, what you're doing or if there is anything else you need to be doing this week. Normally it was just a list of tasks or a list of what I'd done. I'm not necessarily sure we talked about how I was developing my skills, because I think in a way it became so obvious what I was doing that there wasn't any need to talk about skills. I'm not sure how many skills you can develop from inputting things into a database.

With the weekly check-ins, did you feel you were able to discuss the internship with the organisation?

I don't think I had anything negative to say that I didn't say about the tasks I was asked to do. I was aware I guess that lots of other stuff was going on that was more to do with the day to day job of the organisation in terms of artists projects, drafting press releases and stuff like that. I guess in a way I should have been more forthcoming in saying – 'that seems really exciting because that's actually what you do, why can't I get a piece of that as well?' But I was also aware that everyone was very focused and to break that up and insert myself into that higher level of tasks... I'm okay to just sit in a corner and get on with what I'm doing rather than bother anyone else.

I think in terms of personally getting to know a lot more about live art and performance it was great. I think the development - not necessarily learning 'educationally' but learning professionally - was in terms of meeting people and making contacts, artists and other academics and stuff. I can credit them with that certainly; I am now in contact or doing small jobs for academics that I wouldn't necessarily have met had I gone the traditionally academic route.

How did the organisation help you make these contacts?

I think they're very much a face to face kind of organisation. It's all in the same office, so if they have a meeting it's just over there, it's not in another room or separate. Also if it's someone that you've not met before they'll make a point of saying 'this is Emma, she's interning here, and she's also doing a PHD'. So they're very personable like that; they'll always make sure you know everyone in the room. So that was good. I think they made a point of doing that not only to make me a part of the organisation but also I think because they're aware that you're in a position to meet people that you wouldn't normally.