

Researcher work experience: Placements/internships outside academia

Introduction

Placements/internships can widen the talent pool available to an organisation. Placements/ internship programmes allow organisations to develop a new pipeline of talent, introducing innovation and transferable skills, to build relationships with universities and to engage with university research activities. They offer the opportunity to give researchers professional development. Submitting a placement/internship application form is beneficial for researchers, to have experience in the job applications processes and requirements as well as work-based learning in a non-higher education environment and managing career expectations outside academia.

In order to develop world-class researchers higher education institutions have acknowledged that in coming years, work experience opportunities for researchers will be essential to the development of higher level skills and in the transition into work outside academia.

Vitae has gathered a collection of case studies 'Researcher work experience: Placement/internships outside academia'. The eight stories illustrate the work experiences of doctoral researchers in placements/internship programmes from the perspective of the employer, the researcher and the academic. This collection aims to:

- Explore how placements/internships can enhance the development of researcher employability skills
- Provide employer guidance on internship/placements best practice
- Show the benefits that doctoral researcher work experience can offer to the employer, researcher and academic

The case studies provide detailed information with more about particular placements/internships, such as interview transcripts, direct quotes, links and relevant documentation.

Benefits

This collection shows three perspectives on doctoral researcher work experience. The interviews with the employer, researcher and academic reveal not only how work experience can impact on the development of employability skills but also the benefits that placements/ internships programme can have for the three parties involved.

Benefits for the employer

“Interns bring a fresh perspective, enthusiasm and new ideas. We made changes to the project as a result of Christen’s research.”

Gemma Winterton,
Southampton City Council

- **Innovation and new ideas.** Introducing new, talented people to the organisation who have a fresh perspective and transferable skills
- **Developing solutions.** Accessing research expertise to add value to projects and to inform and develop practical solutions
- **Getting the job done.** Accessing an additional resource to complete small research projects
- **New resources.** Gaining indirect access through the intern to the considerable resource of a university e.g. sponsoring an EngD programme
- **Recruiting new talent.** Screening potential employees for talent, skills and organisational fit and developing a pipeline for hiring
- **Increasing visibility.** Increasing the profile of the organisation, making it more attractive to new talent

Benefits for the researcher

“I would recommend work experience to all researchers. It has broadened my outlook and the experience will be valuable whether or not I choose to stay on in academia.”

John Valletta,
Postgraduate Researcher,
University of Southampton

- **Working in a commercial environment.** Gaining first-hand experience of workplace expectations and the current challenges for the company/organisation and corresponding industry in which the internship takes place
- **Developing team work skills.** Working in a multi-discipline team, often in an open-plan environment
- **Increasing self confidence.** Building self-confidence and self-esteem making completion of a doctorate easier
- **Broadening horizons.** Developing fresh, new perspectives which help to bridge the gap between academia and the research environment outside university
- **Problem solving.** Applying research skills outside academia to a given problem within a given timeframe
- **Demonstrating impact.** Exposing research to a wider audience and demonstrating its relevance
- **Networking.** Meeting new people, developing internal and external relationships that might support future career development
- **Informing career plans.** Clarifying career priorities, preferences and goals

Benefits to the university

“Experience outside academia is now a vital component of an academic CV. Even if the researcher wants to remain in academia he/she will need partner support for their research applications”

Dr Danielle Leahy Laughlin,
Research Associate,
University of Sheffield

- **Promoting postgraduate opportunities.** Maximising the career potential of the university’s research students by increasing their employability
- **Offering a learning experience to present the skills developed during a doctorate.** Ensuring that researchers understand the variety of career options open to them and the relevance of their skills gained through research whilst maintaining a high profile of transferable and generic skills through embedding them in research degree programmes
- **Adding value to the researcher’s experience.** Providing the opportunity of work experience as an essential part of active career development
- **Bridging the gap.** Building and reinforcing ongoing links between the university and external partners
- **Engaging with industry.** The university is willing to prioritise internships and opportunities in the commercial environment in following years
- **Demonstrating impact.** Providing an opportunity for the university – through its researchers – to demonstrate the wider impact of the university’s research activities

Methodology

Sample

An invitation to participate in the project was sent throughout Vitae's networks. Responses to this invitation were followed up and additional direct approaches were made to individual employers and university staff who had been identified as potential contributors. The aim was to develop a diverse collection of case studies to represent different universities, employment sectors and research backgrounds and disciplines.

Questionnaire

Three questionnaires were designed, one for each party of a case study. They contained between seven and ten questions. The intention for each was to create a framework for stimulated-recall telephone interviews which would last no longer than 45 minutes. The questions sought responses to specific aspects of a work placement.

Data collection

Once the three parties of a particular work placement had agreed to be interviewed, dates were made for a telephone interview to take place at a time which was convenient to the interviewee. The appropriate questionnaire formed the basis for the interview although the approach to the interview was sufficiently flexible to encourage the interviewee to give further details, expand the scope of a question or to add other information which they felt was relevant.

Where possible, the interviewee was invited to follow up the telephone interview by sending other relevant, secondary documentation which would provide colour and depth to the case study.

The interviewer took detailed notes throughout the conversation, trying to capture actual quotes where it was evident that the interviewer felt an issue or topic was particularly important or relevant.

Preparation of the interview scripts

Written in the first person, the interviewer wrote up each interviewee's response to the questionnaire using direct quotes where they conveyed a particular viewpoint. Links were included to supporting documentation which they had provided and to websites which provided context and/or additional background.

Preparation of the case studies

Written in the third person, the interviewer drew together the three parties' views of a work placement in one overview document. The case studies set out to summarise the experience and views of each contributor and to convey the importance of this shared experience of the work placement. The interviewer's goal was to describe the study in a way which enabled the reader to determine whether or not the case study was relevant to their own situation.

The case studies link back to the relevant source information, i.e. the interview transcripts. This approach ensures complete transparency as well as providing more detailed information for those readers who wish to know more about a placement from a particular perspective. Again, direct quotes and links to supporting information and documentation were included.

Achieving accuracy

It was felt important that the reader of the interview transcripts and case studies could assess their validity or credibility, i.e. the degree to which they represent an accurate reflection of the views and experiences of the interviewees. To this end, all contributors to a case study were sent all of the draft documents, i.e. three interview transcripts and the case study. They were invited to make changes or delete text where they felt the interviewer had not recorded or interpreted their views accurately. They could also add information which may have occurred to them since the interview or where they felt that further clarification was needed. All of these changes were accepted, without question, by the interviewer.

Each interviewee has signed a release form certifying that the information contained in both the transcript of their telephone interview, and the way which this has been summarised and interpreted in the resultant case study, is an accurate reflection of their experience and views.

Case study:

Heritage internship – ‘Walk the Walls’ – Southampton City Council

Background

Walk the Walls was a heritage project, which aimed to redevelop the ‘Walk the Walls’ interpretation panels that form a walking trail around the medieval walls and structures of Southampton’s Old Town district. The successful intern was required to dedicate an absolute minimum of one day per week over a ten week period between the beginning of June and mid August 2010.

The employer’s perspective

Gemma Winterton,
Learning and Outreach
Projects Officer



Engaging an intern for the ‘Walk the Walls’ project provided a focused opportunity for Southampton City Council’s [Arts and Heritage](#) team to undertake and complete a project within a given timeframe. This would have been difficult to accomplish otherwise with the staff available. An added bonus was the fresh perspective, enthusiasm and new ideas that an experienced researcher could bring to the project. Gemma supervised and guided Christen Ericsson, the successful applicant. Christen had access to Southampton libraries, archives and resources but much of the work was undertaken part-time in Christen’s own work environment. The project was informed and enriched by Christen’s research and was completed on time. Delighted with the success of this first internship, Gemma is in the process of recruiting another intern.

“Interns bring a fresh perspective, enthusiasm and new ideas.”

The researcher's perspective

Christen Ericcson,
Postgraduate Researcher,
University of Southampton



Christen saw the 'Walk the Walls' project as an opportunity to directly engage with the community within the context of heritage, making her academic study come alive. She is keenly aware that competition for employment is fierce either inside or outside academia, particularly in the current climate of austerity. Christen believes that practical experience is an essential part of her career development. The project played to her strengths and interests whilst offering her the chance to develop her writing style through rewriting over 14 [interpretation panels](#) in family friendly language blocks of text, each limited to approximately 150 words. Since the project was bounded in terms of resource required from the intern, Christen found it relatively easy to combine it with her academic studies. Much of the time Christen was working remotely, an important skill in itself. Her 'client' comprised a diverse team from different departments with different expected outcomes for the project – all good, valuable experience which she can now evidence in her CV.

“Internships like ‘Walk the Walls’ help the researcher to stay in contact with institutions outside of academia, and serve as a reminder of the variations in work environments.”

The University's perspective

Richard Carruthers,
Specialist Practitioner (PGR),
Career Destinations,
University of Southampton



The University of Southampton, through [Career Destinations](#), has developed a graduate culture which embraces work experience as an essential ingredient of effective career development. This policy has the backing of the Pro Vice Chancellor. The introduction of a work experience offering in 2010 for postgraduate researchers was a natural progression of this policy, indeed the graduate work experience team actively promote postgraduate opportunities when they talk to employers. In his role as Specialist Practitioner (PGR), [Richard Carruthers](#) is the catalyst which makes the internships happen. Both Gemma and Christen responded to, rather than initiated, the contact with Career Destinations. One of Richard's priorities is to secure work experience opportunities which reflect a cross-section of academic disciplines including humanities and social sciences as well as science and technology.

“We are particularly keen to develop opportunities for those studying humanities and social science areas – ‘Walk the Walls’ is a good example – in which it is often more difficult for researchers to gain valuable work experience”

Case study:

Market Researcher – delivering low carbon technology – Hyperdrive Technologies

Background

Hyperdrive Technologies is a new company, founded at the start of 2010 by two automotive engineers, to research and develop systems for hybrid electric vehicles. The internship involved undertaking some in-depth market research in order to support the development of a business plan. The project was for 18 days work to take place over a six week period.

The employer's perspective

Stephen Irish,
Joint Founder and
Commercial and Projects
Director, Hyperdrive
Technologies Ltd



The first essential requirement to generate funding for a new business start-up company is a business plan. One of the many critical parts of that business plan is the market research which validates the business idea. An intern provided an ideal, low cost way of engaging the services of someone with the right background and skills to undertake market research, leaving the two business partners free to focus on all of the many other demands that are involved in launching a new business. An added bonus was indirect access to the University of Southampton's resources. Stephen supervised and coached JJ, the successful applicant, although the work was part-time and undertaken by JJ remotely, in his own work environment. The completed research report has been integrated into the business plan.

“We chose JJ because he seemed to have what we were looking for. He had taken the trouble to do some research before the interview. He asked all the right questions.”

The researcher's perspective

John Valletta (known as JJ),
Postgraduate Researcher



JJ saw the advert for the internship through an email circulated by [Career Destinations](#); JJ saw the internship as an opportunity to work in a commercial environment for the first time and to see 'how the real world' works. He quickly realised the crucial difference between raising funding in academia and business. The latter involves risking one's own savings and assets! The internship also provided an opportunity for JJ to use his research skills to a different end. It meant he had to learn to write in a different style, and Stephen Irish provided some valuable coaching in this respect. Supervision via Skype with a client who was always travelling was also a useful opportunity to learn some of the important skills associated with working remotely. Although the research probably took more than the 18 days allotted, JJ feels that his internship with Hyperdrive Technologies was an invaluable opportunity.

“I learned a huge amount. I now understand much better, how the real world works. It's not enough to have a good idea; you have to be able to sell that idea to raise funds to make the idea into a reality.”

The university's perspective

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“Many postgraduate researchers have no idea of what career options might be available to them outside of academia. They may also fail to understand just how competitive the job market is both in and outside of academia.”

Case study:

Engineering Doctorate (EngD) – The Application of Fire Engineering in the UK, Fire Protection Association

Background

The Fire Protection Association (FPA) is the UK's national fire safety organisation. The Association is sponsoring one of their Associate Directors to undertake a four-year EngD at the University of Loughborough's **Centre for Innovative and Collaborative Construction Engineering (CICE)** to undertake some active **research** which aims to develop best practice methods to reduce the risk of intentional and unintentional misapplication of fire engineering techniques.

The employer's perspective

Dr. Jim Glockling,
Technical Director



In order to maintain their status as the leading fire safety organisation in the UK, the FPA needs to build and maintain a team who are acknowledged to be the UK's, and often international, experts within their given area of expertise. Because it is a vocationally orientated doctorate, [Dr. Glockling](#) sees the [EngD at CICE](#) as a way for the organisation to accomplish both of these aims. The research that Peter Wilkinson, an Associate Director of the FPA, is undertaking is central to the FPA's remit and therefore integral to the organisation's commercial strategy. Furthermore, sponsoring an employee enables the FPA to actively support Peter's personal and professional development. As Peter's supervisor, Dr. Glockling also values the links with the University of Loughborough's academic staff and resources. Everyone benefits!

“Having now ‘discovered’ the EngD programme, we are finding that it works really well for us and we are already sponsoring a second doctorate.”

The researcher's perspective

Peter Wilkinson,
Associate Director FPA



With a degree in civil engineering, an MSc in fire and explosion and 13 years working in the fire protection industry, [Peter](#) was looking for ways to further develop his skills and career prospects. The [EngD programme](#) seemed to be ideal. It is providing a way for him to achieve a doctorate whilst continuing in his role as an Associate Director of the FPA. Of course, holding down a demanding role whilst undertaking a doctorate is not an option for the faint-hearted, but Peter believes that the benefits far outweigh the costs. On completion of the EngD, he hopes to have established an international reputation as a UK expert without needing to give up his 'day job' or incurring any debt in the process. The fact that his EngD research was recently recognised, when he became the 'Student of the Year' at the Continuity, Insurance and Risk (CIR) Business Continuity Awards, would seem to indicate that Peter's career ambitions are going according to plan!

"I thoroughly recommend an industrial doctorate as a way of developing and applying a research project to a real, industry-based problem."

The University's perspective

Professor Dino Bouchlaghem,
Professor of Architectural
Engineering, Loughborough
University



As the Director of CICE, [Professor Bouchlaghem](#) believes that the EngD programme is an ideal option for leading research engineers who aspire to key managerial positions in industry or indeed, in academia. The core of the degree is the solution of one or more significant and challenging engineering problems with an industrial context. With 136 applications for only ten places in 2010, Professor Bouchlaghem looks for individuals who can not only innovate but who can implement that innovation. 70% of the programme takes place in the workplace and for the remaining 30%, the researcher undertakes taught modules in the Centre. However, although the EngD is a vocationally orientated doctoral programme, the Professor's experience indicates that CICE graduates are equally sought in academia as well as in industry.

"Employers quickly recognise the value that they can bring to an organisation because the practical nature of the programme means that the value of their research is more visible"

Case study:

Project Officer – Affordable Housing, Sheffield City Council

Background

The [Affordable](#) Housing Team at Sheffield City Council is committed to increasing the supply of affordable housing for people who are unable to buy or rent suitable property on the open market. Richard Dunning, a second year postgraduate researcher researching housing economics in the University of Sheffield's Department of Town and Regional Planning, is their first doctoral researcher intern. The placement is for 30 days over a period of six months.

The employer's perspective

Christine Rose, Manager,
Affordable Housing



Christine was approached by Richard's supervisor who asked if she was interested in providing an internship for Richard. The placement would be fully funded through [Roberts funding](#) which was being managed by the [Public Service Academy \(PSA\)](#). A meeting with Richard and his supervisor clarified mutual expectations of the placement and they developed a win-win plan which was tailored to meet the objectives of both Richard and Christine. From Christine's perspective, it was an opportunity to have access to an experienced researcher 'outside of the core team' who could tackle projects which would otherwise have been challenging with the available existing resources. It has also been useful to have indirect access, via Richard, to the University of Sheffield's IT resources and expertise. The placement is working well and Christine would welcome another researcher intern, providing that, like Richard, they are self-starter and able to work independently.

“Richard has begun to understand how affordable housing policy has to adapt and change, often very quickly, in response to a changing social and political context.”

The researcher's perspective

Richard Dunning, second year postgraduate researcher, Department of Social Science, University of Sheffield



Richard heard about the possibility of funding for an [internship](#) through an internal University email from the PSA. To access these funds, it was up to him to find a willing employer who could offer work experience to add value to his [research](#) into the economics of housing. Within six weeks, with the help of his supervisor, he had secured a placement. He was allocated a number of discreet and varied projects which included writing a clear guideline document for the public relating to Shariah compliant mortgages, undertaking a feasibility study for an online 'One Stop Shop' for first time buyers in Sheffield and working out how to link Sheffield City Council's Housing Development database to a Geographic Information System (GIS) and setting up and facilitating meetings for the Affordable Housing Scheme. Richard feels that the experience has extended and challenged his knowledge and understanding beyond his PhD and that this can only be a positive outcome in relation to his future career planning – whether inside or outside academia.

“I have increased and widened my understanding of the whole issue of affordable housing, developed some valuable new skills and extended my professional networks.”

The academic facilitator's perspective

Dr. Danielle Leahy Laughlin



Danielle is a Research Associate (Policy Exchange) for the [Public Services Academy \(PSA\)](#) at the University of Sheffield. The PSA serves as the Knowledge Exchange hub for the Faculty of Social Science and forms the bridge between the Faculty and external partners. Richard's internship was one of 11 placements in a new scheme which aims to support researchers who are in the final stages of their research. The organisation of the placement is flexible. Most importantly, it needs to be mutually beneficial for both the employer and the researcher. Danielle believes that the internships are providing an invaluable opportunity for researchers to generate impact and to demonstrate the relevance of their research topic to a wider audience, outside academia. If funding permits, the PSA hopes to expand the scheme next year to include untapped opportunities which are relevant to social science, for instance, internships in consultancy, planning and architecture, the media and advertising, and marketing.

“Experience outside academia is now a vital component of an academic CV”

Case study:

Visual Arts Public Programmes Officer, work placement, Nottingham Contemporary

Background

At over 3,000 square metres, Nottingham Contemporary is one of the largest and most ambitious contemporary art spaces in the UK. The Assistant Curator Internship was facilitated by the [Graduate Arts Centre](#) at the University of Nottingham. Madhu Krishnan, a second year postgraduate researcher, at the School of English Studies successfully applied for the 90 day placement which took place over a period of four months.

The employer's perspective

Robert Blackson, Curator of Public Programmes (June 2009 to December 2010), Nottingham Contemporary



[Nottingham Contemporary](#) regularly offers a varied range of internship opportunities to both undergraduates and researchers. They might be public facing or back of house, or a mixture of the two. Madhu's application was successful because she demonstrated clear and confident communication in her interview. Undoubtedly, Robert found Madhu's extra pair of hands really helpful but this only worked because she was able to work flexibly and independently and was able to act on her own initiative in response to briefs she was given. Madhu's placement took place at a time when the entire Centre was moving into brand new premises so it was even more important for her to have these qualities. He also valued Madhu's fresh pair of eyes and her dissimilar views which she brought to bear in the projects she was given. Robert believes that the major outcome from a placement is the increased self-confidence that results from developing new skills working within a different setting and with a range of people outside of academia.

“...their views are often dissimilar to the mainstream. This can be really useful. They may challenge the way things are done, seeing a more simple solution which cuts through bureaucracy.”

The researcher's perspective

Madhu Krishnan, second year postgraduate researcher, School of English Studies, University of Nottingham



Madhu comes from the USA where work experience is more the norm, so she was on the lookout for paid work experience opportunities when she saw the email from the Graduate Arts Centre advertising the internship with Nottingham Contemporary. She was already teaching for six hours per week but if this [opportunity](#) had not come up she would have looked for something else. She has been a little surprised to find that attitudes to work experience can be different to her own. In the US, working alongside studying is her norm born out of necessity. Education is expensive. She has been working in some capacity since she was 14. Whilst doing her first degree she worked between 10 to 20 hours per week. This means that she has learned to manage her time efficiently, something which she thinks many UK researchers find more difficult. During this placement Madhu realised that gallery work, behind the glamour, involves a lot of administration, much of which can be mundane. As a result, she is no longer interested in pursuing this kind of work as a career. She regards this realisation as a valuable outcome from her work experience placement.

“The US approach to earning and learning demands that you quickly learn time management skills and how to juggle work, education, sport and social activities. In order to meet all of my deadlines I have learned how to get down to it.”

The academic facilitator's perspective

Sarah Kerr and Rebekah Smith McGloin, Arts Graduate Centre Managers



Sarah and Rebekah share the job of Arts Centre Manager. Both believe in the importance of researchers thinking about their professional development and career options throughout their studies. The work experience scheme started out as a way of providing internal placements but a successful bid for widening participation funding in 2008 meant that the Centre is now able to offer approximately 30 paid placements. They have forged strong relationships with a small group of local employers who offer work experience for researchers on a regular basis. Sarah and Rebekah believe that it is important for researchers to extract the full, transferable value from the whole process of applying and undertaking work experience. Approximately ten applicants per placement compete with each other through a formal application and interview process. Whether they are successful or not, they each receive valuable feedback. Those who are successful are helped to analyse their work placement so that they learn to present the skills they have developed in terms which make sense to a perspective employer.

“Project subjects are targeted at areas where there is a perceived skills gap between the competencies of PhDs when they graduate, and the skills they then need in their jobs.”

Case study:

Marketing Assistant – Lakeside Arts Centre, University of Nottingham

Background

Lakeside Arts Centre is a hugely successful multi-arts centre offering a year-round programme of high quality, diverse exhibitions, music, theatre, dance, comedy and literature performances, as well as the chance to participate in out-of-school workshop activities for children and young people. The Marketing Assistant Internship, facilitated by the **Graduate Arts Centre** at the University of Nottingham, was a 90 day placement to be organised flexibly over a period of between three to six months.

The employer's perspective

Sofia Nazar,
Marketing Manager,
Lakeside Arts Centre



Lakeside offers a number of internships to both undergraduates and researchers. However, Sofia only offers work experience opportunities to researchers. She feels that their research skills, coupled with their ability to work independently, work best for her busy marketing department. This approach is supported by the fact that she has had four researcher interns so far, all of which have been successful. Apart from a very welcome 'extra pair of hands', Sofia values the fresh perspective that interns bring to the team. Interns have the opportunity to use their research skills in new ways which are action and results led. The time scales are shorter and the turnaround is faster, for instance, "how can we increase ticket sales for an undersubscribed event – today?" In return, Sofia believes that the researchers develop a range of skills through their placements. Most importantly, she thinks they learn how to work as part of a team in an open office environment.

“In our small team each person has some involvement in what the other is doing. The skill is to know when to embrace the involvement and contribution of others and when to politely desist!”

The researcher's perspective

Sylwia Szostak,
second year PhD Candidate,
School of Culture, Language
and Area Studies,
University of Nottingham



Sylwia completed her first degree in Poland after which she worked for two years teaching English to children and young adults. She came to England to do her Masters but was encouraged to stay on to complete a PhD. She welcomed the opportunity to do a [placement](#) with Lakeside Arts Centre since these kinds of opportunities do not occur in Poland. It was a particularly challenging prospect to fit into a busy office environment whilst working in the UK for the first time. In the early days of the placement Sylwia sometimes felt foolish and slow to understand what was expected. But her confidence quickly grew as she was given real projects and trust to work independently. She developed new writing skills, working to a tight brief and for a different audience, as well as really useful website management skills. Sylwia also welcomed the opportunity to experience, again for the first time, what it is like to work in a small, open-plan office. She quickly became a valued member of the marketing team, so much so, that she was asked to stay for one day a week after the placement formally ended.

“Attending conferences and publishing papers are important of course, but it is also important to see what’s out there and what kind of job might make you happy.”

The academic facilitator's perspective

Sarah Kerr and
Rebekah Smith McGloin,
Arts Graduate Centre
Managers



Sarah and Rebekah share the job of Arts Centre Manager. Both believe in the importance of researchers thinking about their professional development and career options throughout their studies. The work experience scheme started out as a way of providing internal placements but a successful bid for widening participation funding in 2008 meant that the Centre is now able to offer approximately 30 paid placements. They have forged strong relationships with a small group of local employers who offer work experience for researchers on a regular basis. Sarah and Rebekah believe that it is important for researchers to extract the full, transferable value from the whole process of applying and undertaking work experience. Approximately ten applicants per placement compete with each other through a formal application and interview process. Whether they are successful or not, they each receive valuable feedback. Those who are successful are helped to analyse their work placement so that they learn to present the skills they have developed in terms which make sense to a perspective employer.



“There is a culture change under way. Increasingly, academics welcome and support the opportunity for their students to generating impact and demonstrating the relevance of research topic to a wider audience.”

Case study:

Archive Assistant – Weston Gallery, University of Nottingham

Background

The Weston Gallery is part of the Lakeside Arts Centre, and was purpose built in 2001 for library and archive displays. It provides the public showcase for the University's prized and unique manuscript and rare book collections. It also hosts visiting exhibitions of national and regional historical interest.

The Manuscripts and Special Collections team has been managing this collection on behalf of the University of Nottingham for almost 70 years. They work to acquire material which has important historical and social relevance to the East Midlands and/or is directly relevant to the curriculum or the research of the University. Matthew Mead, a postgraduate researcher in his third year of study, worked for the Weston Gallery as an Archive Assistant for 90 hours over four months through an internship scheme organised and managed by the Graduate School's Arts Graduate Centre.

The employer's perspective

Dorothy Johnston,
Keeper of Manuscripts and
Special Collections,
Faculty of Information
Services



The Faculty of Information Services offers a number of internships to both undergraduates and researchers. Dorothy believes that the experience that students gain through working for the museum is invaluable. All employers look for evidence of hands-on experience – some researchers still don't understand this. When the Gallery recruits for an Archive Assistant or Junior Archivist, Dorothy receives applications from researchers who either feel that they are over-qualified for the job or simply expect to walk into it. They are shocked to find that they are not the first in line for the job. Whether or not a researcher chooses some kind of archival work as a career, practical experience matters. Matt is a good example. He is clear that his experience at the Weston Gallery was instrumental in him securing a job as a Research Officer for the University of Arts, London which started only one week after his viva!

“Interns may discover that archive work is just not for them... they dislike the strict procedures involved in managing unique collections. This is an important discovery and is a valid outcome from a placement.”

The researcher's perspective

Matthew Mead,
Research Officer,
University of Arts, London



Matt has completed his PhD and is delighted to be in a full-time job of his choice. He is clear work experience was 'life changing' and that it was instrumental in making a painless transition from academic study to employment. He learned and developed a whole range of skills which made his CV a more attractive proposition to perspective employers. But more than that, his internship enabled him to see other opportunities outside of academia which would have otherwise been difficult to imagine. They helped him to see the kinds of work which he would enjoy and find rewarding. Matt also believes his internship gave him the perspective, confidence and focus he needed to complete his PhD on time.

“Sometimes I think that researchers can tend to be a little resentful. They ‘shake their fist at the sky’ feeling that they have not been given the opportunities they deserve in academia, having completed all their training.”

The academic facilitator's perspective

Sarah Kerr and
Rebekah Smith McGloin,
Arts Graduate Centre
Managers



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“There is a widely-held perception amongst staff and students that postgraduates are largely destined for careers in academia. This isn't the case, there simply aren't enough jobs”

Case study:

Vice-Chancellor's Intern, Planning, Policy and Project Support Office

Background

The Vice-Chancellor's role as Deputy President of Universities UK creates a constant requirement for research, which is difficult to meet within the resources of the [University's Planning, Policy and Project Support Office](#). A dedicated resource was needed and the creation of a researcher internship provided the perfect solution. Not surprisingly, this unique work experience opportunity attracted over 60 applications. Rachel Minto, a third year postgraduate researcher (politics) was the successful candidate and she was offered the chance to work for the Vice-Chancellor for two days a week for six months.

The employer's perspective

Rachel Acres,
Senior Planning and
Projects Officer,
University of Bristol



Rachel Acres works as a member of a high-powered, busy team of eight people and she is delighted to have the additional pair of hands as well as Rachel Minto's research skills. But above all, it was Rachel's enthusiasm and excitement about the internship, together with her preparatory research prior to interview, which singled her out from all the other high calibre applications as an exceptional candidate. Although the role has not required any formal training, she formally meets with Rachel every week to supervise her work, provide feedback and answer her questions. Rachel's research skills are excellent but not surprisingly, she does need support to unravel the protocol, politics and personalities which can be challenging at times! Rachel is trying to ensure that Rachel Minto has varied opportunities to further develop her skills. For instance, in addition to her research work for the Vice-Chancellor, she recently presented her own ideas to the University's Senior Management Team on new postgraduate courses and how they might be delivered. The presentation was well received. She is also working with the Planning Team to organise a conference. Their first internship is proving to be very successful and the Planning Team intends to offer another placement next year.

“Rachel brings a bright, young and enthusiastic view of the world into our office. The Vice-Chancellor finds her different perspective very helpful.”

The researcher's perspective

Rachel Minto, third year postgraduate researcher (Politics), School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, University of Bristol



When Rachel spotted the internal email advertising the [opportunity](#) for an internship to work for the university's Vice-Chancellor, she thought it was too good an opportunity to miss! The interview process was thorough and highly competitive. It involved a formal application and covering letter, informal interview, panel interview and presentation and finally an interview with the Vice-Chancellor. Both of her academic supervisors endorsed her application. The considerable effort that she invested in this process paid off and she was offered the internship. Rachel feels that she is gaining invaluable experience as well as developing her skill base. When she finishes her PhD, she knows that she wants to work in a research and policy role and this placement is providing a bridging experience between the university environment and research environment outside academia. With good time management and hard work, interning for two days a week has not had a detrimental effect on her research. She remains confident that her PhD remains on track and that she will still submit her thesis in December!

“When I go to work in the Planning Office I am focusing on something completely different from my PhD. I find that I return to my research with a fresh perspective and renewed enthusiasm.”

The academic facilitator's perspective

Jo Hutchings,
Careers Adviser,
University of Bristol



The University of Bristol Careers Service offers tailored provision in the form of workshops and one-to-one interviews to meet the needs of researchers. It also offers a range of internal and external internships which are open to all students. Currently, however, the majority of the [opportunities](#) come from inside the university and many of these favour the skills that researchers can offer, including the ability to work independently. The placements average four to six months, working 15 hours per week which equates to two days a week. All of the internships are paid at rates which vary between £7 and £9 plus per hour, depending on the degree of complexity, skill and responsibility involved. Most of the researchers who apply for internships, are from Arts and Social Science backgrounds, however they are open to students from all disciplines. The interns are offered additional support from the Careers Service throughout their internship which helps them focus on future career decisions. Jo has kept in touch with them throughout so is able to monitor how things are going, and the feedback at the end of the internship is always extremely positive.

“The University hopes to be able to prioritise internships for researchers next year – especially opportunities in an external, commercial environment.”