

My work experience at the BBC

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Now in my final year, I've been thinking more seriously about the type of industry I'd like to be involved in after my university education. How could I transfer my passion for the arts and scholarly research into a modern day career that is visually engaging, includes a wide-range of practical skills and is interdisciplinary? The answer was media. Factual television programmes, especially those on BBC 4, Sky Arts and independent productions have always caught my attention.

My initial step was going on the BBC work experience website. I found a four week placement in London for Scotland Arts as part of the creative development team. There was a rigorous application process and then a telephone interview. I would like to point out that I had been persistently applying for the position since February and after continuous rejections was finally given the placement in their December opening so perseverance definitely paid off!

The creative development team is the hub where all the ideas for television programmes come and go, where they become more refined and developed until finally they become concrete and interesting enough to be sent away for commissioning. Luckily, Scotland Arts only has a small department, which means more power and responsibility for the people at the bottom. I found that my input of ideas and knowledge of art history was greatly appreciated. I was given the chance to develop my own treatments for programmes on Imagine, The One Show and BBC 4. I was also given researching tasks to assist my superiors who had already had their programmes commissioned but needed their facts to be backed up or an interest angle to be more developed. The department works on longer deadlines than current affairs, with some programmes being developed for screening in 2013/2014 but that does not mean that there is no work to be done under pressure. You have to be adaptable. I found myself time-coding short clips for a variety of factual departments who needed the reels sent off the same afternoon.

There is also a chance for cross over. After a little pestering, I worked my final week on the production side, essentially filming 'on location'. As an intern, the jobs can be pretty basic, predominantly carrying out minor errands for the camera men and director, but again with the size of the department being a strength for juniors, I was able to suggest filming shoots/angles and help out with the last minute re-writing of scripts. Being assertive, having confidence in your ability and knowledge enabled me to leave my mark on the department and even walk away with a positive future reference. As you only get to attend one placement a year for the BBC it's important to get the most out of being on the 'inside'. With a department email address and therefore access to all the employees I was able to ask different people about their positions within the BBC, the type of work their position involves and whether I was able to attend their development meetings to gain an insight into the different types of programmes that are in the pipeline and gauge an understanding of what the general public want to watch. Of course, always ask your superior for permission, but as it's your work experience placement, everyone understands that you are primarily there for clarity into working in the media industry and all its sectors. One day I was researching articles on Elizabeth I, the next contributing the current affairs programme ideas and even attending seminars for Arts, Politics and 3D TV. There also are endless opportunities of free screenings, discussions groups and even social events, like the Christmas quiz that you tag along to.

Overall, transition from history of art research to modern day viewing was challenging at first, but looking back, the placement has encouraged me to continue searching for a career that can ultimately make art understandable and accessible to all.

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