

HAYLEY COOPER

**UNDERGRADUATE PLACEMENT STUDENT
RETURNING AS AN INTERIM HR ASSISTANT**



In this interview, Hayley shares below her experience undertaking a 12-month placement as an Undergraduate Placement Student, to returning to Centerprise, post degree, as an Interim HR Assistant whilst also completing a Master's Degree.

What attracted you to a one-year placement with Centerprise and what did the role entail?

I was initially drawn to HR roles as I really enjoyed the HR element of my Business and Management course at University of Portsmouth. Centerprise had an opportunity available that enabled me to expand my knowledge and experience in a generalist role in a HR function.

My day-to-day role was fairly administration based, however it was so much more than this. It was really varied and I learnt about so many different aspects of HR; the starter process, recruitment, attendance monitoring and holiday booking – to name a few.

I got involved in many interesting projects such as the new company strategy, which included a TUPE process and creating a new application form. I was even able to base my final year dissertation on the TUPE process.

What knowledge did you gain, and which skills and disciplines did you develop which you will take away from your placement and utilise in your final year of studies?

I gained a greater understanding of the workings of a HR department, something that you cannot necessarily learn in a classroom. I was able to draw upon a lot of this in the final year of my studies; particularly as I opted for a HR pathway in my Business and Management degree.

I learnt a lot about using IT in your work, particularly Microsoft programmes which I thought I had a good level of experience. I became a lot more competent at using Excel and learnt many simple things, such as justifying your work in Word, which makes it look better.

I found quite early on in my placement that I wasn't necessarily able to implement some of my knowledge from my university studies. However, there are many transferrable skills, such as time management and communication, I found I was able to implement and develop. In particular, I became a lot more confident at speaking on the telephone.

I learnt a lot at Centerprise about professionalism; how to behave and how not to behave. This definitely changed my attitude towards university, and tutors definitely have a lot more respect for students who show up on time and make the effort to prepare for a seminar. Just think, you would not show up for a meeting with your manager unprepared.

One thing I was told by previous placement students at university was to apply the 9-5 structure to your final year. It makes it a lot easier to plan your day if you know you have a set amount of time to complete your work in. It's also really good to allow yourself time to chill and socialise in the evenings; university isn't necessarily all about studying, you have to enjoy yourself and don't want to burn out. I will continue this mentality into my master's studies in Human Resource Management.

What have you learned at Centerprise that has stuck with you the most?

The thing at Centerprise the thing that has stuck with me the most is the skills I was able to develop. I learnt a lot about managing my time and how to prioritise my tasks, as well as communicating. The former proved very useful when returning to university for final year.

What was your greatest achievement from your time at Centerprise so far?

My greatest achievement from Centerprise, actually follows my time at Centerprise. I found my involvement of the TUPE project very interesting. Due to this, I then went on to base my final year dissertation on the project. I looked at how the process affects employee feelings about their role, including elements such as sense of belonging and job satisfaction. The support I received from Sam, Debbie and the previous Adam team was unprecedented, and I was happy to receive 66% giving me a 2.1 in the unit.

What was your favourite part and the most challenging aspect of your placement at Centerprise?

I would describe as my favourite parts of my placement at Centerprise; learning and the people. I had the opportunity to learn so much from Sam and her experiences, as well as the rest of the team, and I enjoyed every aspect of my role. There are many great characters at Centerprise, everyone is so welcoming and good to work with.

The most challenging aspect of my role at Centerprise was improving my confidence communicating on the telephone. Whilst I was quite comfortable communicating face-to-face and via email, I really struggled with communicating via the telephone. However, this is something I was able to work on by using the telephone more and carrying out reception duties.

How does working in a full-time role compare to your expectations prior to commencing your placement?

Initially, I found working in a full-time role quite hard and very tiring, something I had not necessarily expected. However, once I had been in the role around a month I got into a routine, managed my tiredness and was able fit my personal life around the role better.

I found I had a lot more independence in the role than I expected, and this was particularly true as I become more experienced in the role. I was able to take on a number of elements such as arranging inductions and make it my own.

How does your placement year compare to other employment or work experience you have undertaken?

I found during my placement I was treated much more like an adult and given the opportunity to put forward my own ideas in comparison to my previous employment. I think that is one of the benefits of Centerprise; the SME nature of the business allows you to have a lot more input in comparison to if you carried out a placement or worked in a larger company.

I also found that I was and am now a lot more engaged in this role in comparison to my previous employment. I find it a lot more motivating carrying out a role which you are interested in and see a future career in.

What advice would you give to an undergraduate joining the business in a similar role, especially someone new to the IT industry?

Your placement year is priceless; make the most of every opportunity handed to you – no matter how many or insignificant a task may seem, it is worth it in the end. I did tasks at the start of my placement I didn't think were relevant, but later on, I really benefited from knowing them. I remember some of them to this day, and it still benefits me in my current part time role as HR Administrator.

On top of this, do not be afraid to ask for an opportunity if there is something you want to get involved with. If you don't ask, you don't get.