

ANDREW HELLIWELL

**UNDERGRADUATE PLACEMENT STUDENT
TO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/TENDERS TEAM**



In the interview below, Andrew tells us about his Undergraduate Placement experience at Centerprise

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

One of the key attractions that influenced my decision to pursue a placement at Centerprise was the promise of exposure to important business activities and the knowledge that I would be able to get whatever I wanted out of my internship, providing I put in the effort. The company had also been recommended to me by someone who described Centerprise as a “forward-thinking” and “innovative” place to work.

My primary role revolved around bid administration and support. I was responsible for configuring and monitoring framework portals, administering bid governance and managing the Tenders team inbox. After appropriate training and shadowing of an experienced bid manager, I was able to lead in the governance and tendering of active opportunities and essentially assume the role of a Bid Manager.

My other main role was the responsibility of managing and coordinating the vendor training requirements. This involved proactively communicating with our vendor account managers on a regular basis to ensure that all the required training/qualifications were kept current. Furthermore, I needed to liaise with fellow members of staff to confirm they were completing the correct training and were keeping to the tight timescales. This was an important role as without our certifications, we would be unable to access rebates and discounts which would therefore reduce the profitability of the company.

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?

This year has shown me that I am capable of undertaking tasks I never knew I had the skill set and confidence to complete. One of the key skills I wanted to improve upon was my leadership qualities. Just a few weeks into my tenure I was organising and leading vendor accreditation meetings with our partners, something I may have shied away from in the past. My confidence has grown vastly, again down to the amount of interaction with colleagues and customers I have been faced with.

I've also learnt a lot about the IT industry and Centerprise as a whole. I am intrigued by the fast pace in which the industry is evolving as technology continues to develop, and I am certainly now considering a career in this sector one day. I also hope to utilise what I have learnt and the skills I have developed in my final year degree studies. I believe they will help to contextualise the modules I am studying so I can relate the theory back to real life examples at Centerprise.

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

This year has really shown me that if you get stuck in and put your mind to something, then you can achieve anything. When I first started, there were tasks in front of me that looked daunting and I was unsure that I would be able to complete them to a high standard, in particular, managing our training requirements. However, the pro-active approach I took allowed me to overcome any problems I encountered and develop solutions to achieve the desired goal.

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

From start to finish I felt I achieved a great deal throughout my tenure. I was on the winning team for the Dragon's Den competition run by the Chairman, Rafi Razzak, which involved creating a business plan for a wearable piece of technology and presenting our findings to the board of directors. I also took the lead on managing a variety of tenders with total contract value well above £1,000,000.

However, my proudest achievement this year was when I was tasked with overseeing all tender activity for over a month - a task that normally was carried out by at least 2-3 people, whilst other collaborated on one large tender opportunity the business was submitting. This meant that I took charge of all other bid activity running through the business which involved liaising with both the CEO and Chairman on a regular basis. Although this was an incredibly strenuous period, the empowerment was liberating and gave me a great sense of personal satisfaction.

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

The most enjoyable aspect of my year with Centerprise was the warm community vibe that resonated throughout the company on a daily basis. Since the beginning I was welcomed with open arms from my team and other work colleagues around the business, making coming into work every day a pleasant experience.

The part I found most challenging was balancing my workload during some of the busiest times throughout the year. With tenders having such strict deadlines, I had to prioritise certain parts of my role and learn to say no when I was at full capacity.

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

Entering the professional environment came with all sorts of uncertainties and additional stresses which makes it very different to student life. From personal experience, university is comparable to living in your own bubble; full of freedom and independence but, at times, vastly dissociated from the real world. Right from the get go I was exposed to significant responsibility as in my role I was expected to make decisions that could have potential ramifications for the entire company. The empowerment was liberating but I initially felt apprehensive as to whether I would be able to adjust to the professional environment and perform my role effectively. How would I cope with the long working hours? How would I deal with interacting with senior members of the company? When would I feel fully integrated into the team? Overcoming this heightening of mixed emotions was challenging at first but in time I felt myself adapting to the demands of the workplace.

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

I was pleasantly surprised by the way I was treated by my fellow employees; I was not used to being viewed as an adult, which differed greatly from previous work experiences. In the past I had spent time at different places, not being empowered in any way shape or form. Right from the start I was trusted to take on important tasks independently.

Something that I was not expecting this year on placement was the exposure I would get to senior members of the company, in particular the CEO and Chairman. Not many people could say they sit in and are involved in regular meetings with the CEO of the business. Being able to learn from both of them has been a unique and eye-opening experience and I hope to use what they have taught me in my studies next year and my future career.

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

My main piece of advice to anyone looking to endeavour on a placement year is to make the most of the opportunity in front of you. Gaining experience at this stage in your career is invaluable, therefore I'd encourage you to get involved in as many different areas of the business you can. Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions, at the end of the day you are in a work placement to learn so spend some time with a variety of different people and find out about their experiences.

Prior to joining, do some research into the key offerings of the business and the important members of staff at the company. This will help contextualise your role and provide you with a platform to succeed.

In terms of the role itself, bid management requires flawless time management, close attention to detail and seamless organisational skills so my advice would be to stay on top of your work and write everything down as we all forget things!