

Lizzie Black
Bid Management Placement Student



In the interview below, Lizzie tells us about her Undergraduate Placement experience at Centerprise.

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

I was unsure what I wanted to do for my placement year, but I was fortunate to be introduced to a former Ci undergraduate to understand what Centerprise do and what a placement with the company would entail. I was not familiar with 'Bid Management', or the terminology of tenders or frameworks; however after reading the job description, some of the responsibilities such as monitoring the inbox, coordinating training, governance and assisting with tender responses, I felt that I could apply some of my university report and essay writing experience to the placement role. In addition, I considered the personal development opportunities I would benefit from as a result of this role and grasped the chance to learn something new.

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?

Throughout my placement year, I have improved my IT knowledge, although I wouldn't call myself an expert! I have valued having a routine and becoming disciplined in managing my time and approaching tasks, such as word count restrictions when responding to tenders and the deadlines, which is very similar to my university assignments. My communication skills have also improved, much more than I could have imagined. I have grown in confidence and feel this has been achieved largely by interacting with my team, colleagues and account managers within the business and observing how people interact and communicate. I have recognised that communication is key for any successful business and the people working within. My team working skills have also developed. Working within a small team, I grew to trust and be trusted with sensitive information, as well as being given added responsibility to share the knowledge I had gained and help train a new colleague.

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

I have learnt that help is there, but have recognised that sometimes you need to ask for it. Some tasks can appear overwhelming initially and whilst I know I am capable of completing a task, sometimes help or reassurance is needed. Throughout my placement year I sought and was given help by my immediate line manager, HR and my fellow placement student group. I was also mentored by a Business Unit Director from another area of the business, who was invaluable in providing guidance on how to approach tasks as well as having someone to confide in.

My key learning from my placement year with Centerprise is to always give things a go, as only you can find out how far you can push yourself.

What was your greatest achievement from your time at Centerprise?

Every day has felt like an achievement. My initial line manager taught me so much, which gave me the confidence and belief in myself. I have found it so rewarding to work within a small team, having regular interaction with the Chairman and CEO and seeing our hard work pay off when Centerprise was successful in winning contracts or getting onto frameworks. It was particularly rewarding when both personally congratulated me for my contribution, and this has helped reinforce that I am more capable at dealing with pressure than I give myself credit.

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

Even though it was the most daunting aspect at the beginning of my placement with Centerprise, my favourite part has been building relationships with my colleagues. Centerprise is quite literally like a big family and the people make it worthwhile and bring enjoyment to coming in to work. The most challenging aspect that stands out is when I had to train a new team member whilst co-ordinating a large tender and working closely with the CEO and Chairman. It was daunting but these aspects made me realise a lot about myself; that I am capable of undertaking new tasks, I just need to push myself and interact with people.

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

I wasn't very sure what to expect as I have worked a 9 to 5.30 role in a supermarket, albeit a very different sector. However, it did prepare me for the fast-paced environment of fulfilling customer requirements and completing tasks in between. My placement year has made me value having a routine, especially after experiencing working from home for Centerprise during the COVID-19 lockdown. I enjoy being around other people as well as the office atmosphere, so I missed it. I am proud that I have still managed to keep up with the expectations on me from the business and continue working at a rapid pace.

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

Firstly, I would **highly recommend doing a placement year**, no question! Whilst I have worked in a supermarket (alongside my studies) and previously undertaken weeklong placements, these were not long enough to have any major responsibility or have an impact. My Bid placement on the other hand has given me far more responsibility and experience. It has taken me time to understand certain processes – which I am continuing to do nearly a year on – as well as understand how some individuals work differently; build my confidence; and demonstrate my capabilities, especially when under pressure. I have learnt to appreciate that I can leave work *at work* (most of the time) compared to the hovering expectation of constantly revising for exams at university.

Whilst I may not pursue Bid Management as a career, it has emphasised my interest for marketing and being creative, a department which I have been able to assist on occasions during my placement, hence my strong belief that **everyone should do a placement**.

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

- Make the most of every opportunity, even if it is not the avenue you thought you would pursue.
- Ask questions: for example, there are tenders that still come through where I do not understand the requirement.
- Communication is key: if you don't understand something, ask. It is good to remain curious and it is a chance to interact with people who are willing to help.
- **Do a placement year!** I have learnt so much, not only about how businesses function, but also about myself and what I like and don't like for consideration after graduating from university. Just do it!