



**Student
Subject of Study**

Intikhab Akhtar
BSc Management
with Marketing



**Year of Graduation
Placement**

2012
Account Management Specialist at HP

Intikhab applied for a placement between her second and third years to spend a year in industry. She worked at HP as an Account Management Specialist which involved responsibility for half the Irish account base as well as managing the Customer Complaints Service. She is currently finishing her final year studying BSc Management with Marketing

What motivated you to apply for a placement?

Going into my second year I knew that we were at the stage where we had to start thinking about what we were going to do after our degree, and with economic climate the way that it was I wanted something solid on my CV that would improve my employability. I did some research into the differences between internships and placements, and decided to apply for the one year placement programmes as I didn't feel that a summer internship would be enough time to get to grips with the business.

What support did you get in your applications?

After deciding to apply for placements, I visited the Careers Centre. They told me that I would not get a personal tutor, as there was no formal placement scheme at that time, but they gave me as much help as I needed, checking my application and helping me with interview preparation. It was a bit scary, and the workload is much more intense in your second year. I managed my time by researching placements and putting information into a spreadsheet. I signed up to ratemyplacement.com, a service that sends you job alerts matching your preferences, and I applied for everything that I was interested in.

Why HP?

Obviously IT is something that I want to go into now, purely from having worked at HP and really enjoyed it, but prior to starting there I wasn't particularly interested in the IT industry! My primary goal was to work for a large organisation, to take advantage of the networking opportunities that come with working for a globally established company. When I was making my applications I applied to a range of companies and had been really interested in Pharmaceuticals, having worked in this area in my part-time job. I applied to the GlaxoSmithKlein placement, for example, and although I wasn't successful, I learnt a lot from the process. The IT and Pharmaceuticals industries are both really similar because they are dynamic and constantly changing.

What's the process of the application?

Having done some research over the summer between my first and second year, I allowed myself a couple of months to settle down into studying again before starting to get my spreadsheet up to date in October/November. I set aside a couple of hours each day just to apply for the various placements, so I would definitely recommend doing your planning in advance. With HP, the initial application included a few structured questions like 'Why HP?' or 'Why IT?', as well as my CV, which I had adapted to give

examples of all the skills that they were looking for. At this stage I also had to indicate which area of the business I was interested in and why. The next stage is the telephone interview, which was much more intense and very industry focused, which I had not expected. For instance, the interviewers did not just ask about HP's business competitors but their software competitors as well, so another tip would be to do your research about the industry. I did not know whether the telephone interview had gone well or badly; I was very nervous but I think the interviewers expect that because it's a very intense process for someone who doesn't even have a degree yet.

How did you find the Assessment Centre?

The Assessment Centre followed the telephone round, and it consists of a whole day spent up at the head-quarters. There was a lot riding on the day for me, because, having done all the research about HP, I realised that it was a company I really wanted to work for. The Assessment Centre is two individual interviews, a prepared presentation, tour of the building and group exercise. The individual interviews cover similar ground to the telephone interview, so it's important to have lots of different examples. My examples were drawn from my academic experience of presentations and group projects, as well as extra-curricular activities like



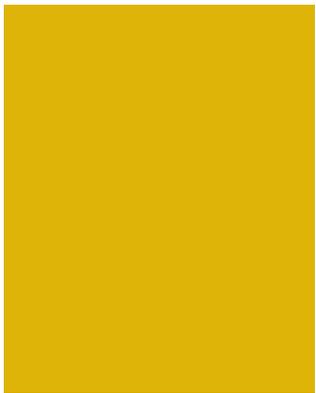
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the SIFE, Management, and Islamic Societies, and volunteering projects I had been involved in. My prepared presentation was to do with a charity project I was involved in. It lasted for ten minutes and I couldn't use Powerpoint, but the Careers Centre had advised me to do something a bit different to stand out, so I prepared handout leaflets for the assessors and used one of these myself to guide the presentation.

What are the group interviews like?

There were six in my group and all were on formal placement years at their universities, so they had previous experience of assessment days, personal tutors to coach them on what to do and say, and they knew what they were talking about. For me, though, the one piece of advice that was absolutely invaluable came from David White, who took my first year communications course. He said that, during a group exercise, there will always be a board placed in the room because the assessors want to see who has the initiative to get up and use it. So I acted on that during my group exercise, which was about a bank robbery, so completely unrelated to the industry, and from then on the day just went fantastically well. And afterwards, having learnt that I had got the placement, my manager actually mentioned it and said how pleased they were that I had used my initiative and taken the lead in the group.

How did you find the transition from studying to working?

I started soon after my exams had finished so had about a month to read through the information pack I had received with my conference, in addition to moving to Reading with the other interns for that year. The fact that everyone moved in together at the same time to start work the following Monday really helped me, particularly to know that there were other people in the same boat as me. The placement was structured so that I was with an intern for four weeks, after which I was assigned a mentor who guided me through the year. I set targets to improve my presentation skills, for instance, as well as personal development goals with my manager. At the end of the year it was such a good feeling to look back and see how much I had achieved, and that I had fulfilled all the goals I had set myself.

What was it like working in the team?

I absolutely loved it. The responsibility I was given at the start was a little daunting, but it's all about time management skills and being able to prioritise your own projects to get the job done. I never felt like the intern because the rest of the team's responsibilities were the same as mine, and the expectations were the same as well. It is hard to start as the new person, but everyone was really friendly and I got so much support.

What were the key skills you developed?

Presenting, communicating and application of theory. I had always been nervous with presentations, but after presenting on a monthly basis at HP I feel so much more comfortable with the process and that's reflected in my performance in class. In terms of communication, you have to be able to communicate with such a broad range of people from all areas of the business, so I am much better at adapting myself to the audience I'm speaking to. Lastly, I am able to apply all my examples from HP to what I'm learning in the lectures: I can see how it fits together. I have learnt so much and I've come back feeling like a different person.

What are your top tips for students considering a placement or internship?

You should definitely consider it if you want to differentiate yourself. It's not enough to say you have a First Class degree; employers are looking for something extra and you gain so much from doing a placement or internship. Second, don't be too narrowly focused, as you will just end up disappointed if you don't get into that particular area. Third, use the Careers Centre! I really believe that people don't use it enough, but it is such a valuable resource.

For more information visit: www.rhul.ac.uk/management/placements