Virginia undertook an internship with Aktis Strategy Ltd, an international development consultancy.

What she did

During my internship, I assisted Aktis in the drafting and preparation of project proposals, evaluations, and implementation plans. I mainly helped produce reports, which would then be sent to clients after a more senior member of the team checked my work. Additionally, I assisted my supervisor with the development of the online client database and updated the company’s track record. I spent one week in Turkey assisting in one of their projects, and have also worked as an interpreter during meetings between Aktis staff and clients. I also took part in meetings with Aktis associates, and took part in a one-week-long training on strategy consultancy delivered by senior Aktis staff. Throughout the eight weeks, I received mentoring and one-off trainings with specialised staff on the business development of the company within the aid industry, the client database, and how to use the Excel worksheets for budgeting and implementation plans, which required advanced Excel skills.

Did it meet her expectations?

My aims and expectations were exceeded in all possible ways. Not only did I learn about the work that Aktis does, but also about the broader picture and the way in which the aid industry works, with all its processes and stages.

I was not expecting to get such constant support and mentoring; my supervisor organised individual trainings and coordinated other members of staff (both in and outside UK) to instruct me with relevant tasks – and even to meet with me for coffee to chat about their work. From the beginning, she had a series of meetings and trainings arranged for me, which I found enormously helpful throughout the rest of my placement.

Towards the end of my internship, I did not expect to be given so much trust in terms of the responsibilities that I was given. This made me work even harder, and I feel I learned a lot from being put ‘out there’ and being pushed beyond the intern position.

How has it impacted her professional and personal development?

I have definitely improved my writing skills; I am now more able to produce a well-written piece of work in much less time. In fact, I feel my efficiency has improved in many different ways: I have learned how to say more with fewer words, and how to stick to the point and hence to focus specifically on what the reader (in our case the client) wants to read. I have also learnt how to make a report or a text a ‘winning’ piece of work by enhancing the layout and through the use of language. All of this is vital for Aktis, as their business development is guided by the development projects they get selected to work in as a consultancy.
The internship has influenced my future career path in that I have gained a deeper understanding of how the international development sector works and most importantly how my skills and interests fit within this context. I have learnt about the process of funding projects in the international aid industry and have gained deep insight into the situations of many of the countries the firm is working in.

My internship has allowed me to hold eye-opening discussions with senior staff members and other international experts. These conversations have introduced me to new ideas and development work that mixes environmental engineering and security sector reform. These are two topics that interest me, however until then I had never thought of applying both in one same project.

**Internship at UBS Investment Bank**

*Marianne, BA French and Spanish (Joint Honours), 2016 Graduate*

Marianne did a summer internship in the HR department of investment bank UBS.

**How did you secure your work experience?**

I was already aware of UBS as a company after having had the opportunity to complete a week’s work experience with them back in 2011. Our paths crossed again at the UCL Banking & Finance Fair, where I was able to speak with representatives from the company and gain more of an understanding of what their summer internship would involve. After researching their programmes further online, I filled out the online application and was then invited to take 3 further assessments (verbal, non-verbal and numerical). The next stage was a competency-based telephone interview lasting approximately forty-five minutes and, following this, if successful you are invited to attend an assessment centre. The small group of candidates at the assessment centre are put through another numerical reasoning test (which must be passed in order to proceed further), a case-study to review and on which to prepare a presentation to give to a current employee, two interviews (one competency and one commercial), and finally, a group case-study exercise which leads to an assessed group discussion. It is a lengthy and challenging process, but a very rewarding one if successful.

**What did you do in your work experience?**

The nine-week internship began with an introduction week, during which we were able to attend several guest speaker events, workshops, introduction sessions and social events. During my first rotation in Recruitment, my day-to-day responsibilities consisted of tracking interview schedules: organising venues, arranging dates and times, and corresponding with candidates, and senior staff. I was also fortunate enough to be invited to attend several interviews for roles across different divisions within the bank. In addition to this, I took ownership of a large project in which I was able to create an updated online version of an important document that was previously only available as a hard copy. During my second rotation, the main project I worked on was the annual Talent & Development audit. I had no previous experience with undertaking an audit on such a large scale, but I was always given the guidance to feel confident with the progress I was making. Alongside our daily tasks, the interns were also asked to research and prepare for an assessed presentation, which were based on a variety of different topics concerning Human Resources or the investment bank on a whole. These were usually expected of us once every two weeks, having been briefed on Monday morning and with a deadline of Friday morning. It goes without saying that one of the skills most tested during the internship was time management, but it was a very useful process in learning how to multi-task and prioritise effectively.

**Did the work experience meet your expectations?**

I was expecting the internship to be an extremely busy nine-week experience, full of hard work, long hours and demanding deadlines. It is true that this was the case, and the work was certainly challenging at times,
however the working hours within the support functions are not as long as others within the investment bank. I was astonished at how everyone I came into contact with was more than willing to give up their time to speak with me and to demonstrate exactly what it is that they do in their role. This was extremely helpful in giving me as much exposure to the industry as possible. We were often treated to all-inclusive social events at high-profile venues and speaker events from guests such as Olympic gold medallist Victoria Pendleton and founder of The 30% Club, Helena Morrissey CBE. Overall, it was a very rewarding experience.

**How has the internship impacted on your professional and personal development?**

First and foremost, I was able to greatly increase my awareness of the kinds of internal processes at work in a company such as UBS, as well as broadening my knowledge of the financial services industry as a whole. More specifically, I have also become much more proficient in Excel, having attended a workshop that was organised for the interns during our introduction week. More than anything, for me, the whole experience was a brilliant exercise in networking, and I have come away with a wealth of contacts in a variety of different fields. To make the most of an experience like this, you always have to go the extra mile by raising your hand for things that you think you might be interested in. The internship has certainly helped to shape the way I now see the financial services industry, and has since been very influential in the decision-making process regarding my future career.

**Internship at Oxford House**

*Jack, BASc Arts & Sciences), 2017 Graduate*

Jack interned at Oxford House, as their Heritage Lottery Fund intern.

**How and why he secured the internship**

For my application process to Oxford House; I had to send my CV with an attached cover letter explaining what I knew about Oxford House, why I wanted to work there, why I wanted that particular position (Heritage Intern), and what relevant experience both academic and professional that I had for the role. I had a lot of help from the UCL Careers team with my application; they really helped me create a relevant cover letter and CV for my application.

**What he did**

I came to Oxford House at the preliminary stages of their Heritage Lottery Fund application which set out three objectives as part of their project:-

1. To fix the roof to protect the Victorian chapel in the building
2. Create heritage activities over two years
3. Transform the back of the building to open up a cafe onto Weavers Fields (the park next to the building).

As part of the preliminary stages of this project I was responsible for coming up with potential ideas and themes that could work as part of the heritage activities. This involved me looking at annual reports, looking through the boxes of stuff that was left from long ago at Oxford House, visiting archives and also trying to find first hand information from people who had been going to Oxford House for a long time. As I was only there in the early stages of the project I am yet to see how my ideas will be used in the heritage activities ahead.

I also helped to create and carry out the survey for Heritage Project which took a lot of planning. During the survey we discovered that many people answered one of the questions incorrectly because it was not clear
enough how we wanted them to answer it. This taught me about the importance of clarity when you are writing something for an audience.

My second responsibility involved helping with the launch and maintenance of the Bethnal Green Business Forum (BGBF). The BGBF is a scheme run by Oxford House in order to offer businesses a forum to discuss collective problems and offer resolutions. One of the outcomes of this was that the forum resisted the rise in fees that was proposed to have a market stall on Bethnal Green Road.

Another aspect of the forum was that it created a website called lovebethnalgreen.com which was designed to promote the businesses of Bethnal Green and offer news stories of events and activities that were on offer through articles. I was responsible for getting new businesses on board which meant going out and speaking to people face to face in order to convince them of the advantages of being on the website. Later on in the internship I wrote many articles about the kinds of events that were happening in Bethnal Green from week to week. We managed to get well over 100 businesses on the forum and the number is still rising.

Did it meet his expectations?

My aim was to learn more about how charities work and whether I could see myself working for a charity in the future. I also wanted to learn more about heritage work and how exactly this is carried out as well. I feel that these aims and expectations were met. Although I learnt that I am also very interested in helping local communities and speaking to people within that community. I also was able to write articles which I wasn't really expecting to have the opportunity to do.

How has it impacted his professional and personal development?

I feel that I have improved my interpersonal skills through having to speak to so many new people in Bethnal Green from all sorts of different backgrounds. Also I feel that I have better knowledge of how charitable organisations work and also how to make formal reports using statistics. I think that through doing the internship it has made me consider the possibility of working for a charity and also the possibility of journalism as I really enjoyed writing articles.