Interning at Akasha Innovation, sustainability pioneers

An internship at the heart of positive change
A dynamic social enterprise that aims to inspire and empower the next generations of changemakers, Akasha Innovation has an internship programme that focuses on helping its interns flourish both in and out of the workplace.

After social entrepreneur Greta Rossi saw that young changemakers wishing to contribute to the creation of a better world weren’t receiving enough support from their institutions, she decided to create an environment that would give them what they need. Along with Dr. Mark Spokes, she founded Akasha Innovation in September 2013, with an exciting vision to help changemakers between 18–30 become leaders capable of co-creating a world for all life to flourish in.

An inspiring approach
A not-for-profit social enterprise, Akasha Innovation trains future leaders through programmes in sustainability leadership that develop soft skills and emotional intelligence as much as they help consolidate hard skills. In 2014, Michela Palese (BA European Social and Political Studies, UCL) joined Akasha Innovation as an intern through the UCL Advances Summer Internship Programme, part-funded by Santander Universities. “In line with our ethos, it’s absolutely crucial to invest in young people,” says Greta.

As Community Engagement Intern, Michela was given a wide range of work to do, allowing her to both build on some skills and learn others from scratch. She organised events, helped with the Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, contributed to the website and to social media marketing, as well as doing community engagement. She found Akasha’s approach truly transformative, and says that of the many aspects of her internship that contributed to this, her leaps in confidence and communication skills were crucial.

Sharing the same values
“I was amazed by my internship – I wanted to contribute everything I had. No day was the same, and through the fantastic coaching sessions with Greta and feedback meetings with the team, I felt fully invested in Akasha and aligned with its values,” she says.

“They’ve totally got it right.”
Greta is just as enthusiastic. “We learnt so much by having an intern,” she says. “It’s made us feel more confident about our own skillsets and strengths, and the good work we’re putting out there in the world. It’s also pushed our understanding of the concept of leadership.”

With such a positive experience behind them, both Michela and Akasha Innovation are moving forwards in the ethical arena. Michela is pursuing an MSc in Public Policy at UCL while working for Positive News, one of Akasha Innovation’s partners, while Akasha Innovation continue to innovate and create great changes both in leadership and sustainability.
UCL (University College London) was established in 1826 and is ranked as one of the world’s top ten universities. The university is a modern, outward-looking institution, with more than 4,000 academic and research staff committed to engaging with the major issues of our times. It has a global reach, with 34% of its students coming from outside the UK, from almost 140 countries.

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About UCL

UCL Advances, UCL’s centre for entrepreneurship, helps anyone who wants to learn about, start or grow a business. Its primary role is to promote a culture of entrepreneurship on campus and engagement with entrepreneurs and small businesses beyond UCL’s boundaries. It works to support start-ups and small businesses across London by helping them to access the technical and business expertise of UCL’s staff and students through a series of programmes to help support ambitious young companies.

UCL Advances is affiliated with UCL Enterprise, which provides UCL’s structures for engaging with business for commercial and societal benefit.

www.ucl.ac.uk/advances
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About Business Support

UCL Advances provides direct business support for internal and external organisations through a variety of programmes and activities such as 1–1 advice, problem solving through student consultancy, student internships, training, mentoring and others.

- We help London-based businesses grow and develop by analyzing business needs and connecting them to relevant interventions such as industry mentors;
- Through pairing teams students with businesses we deliver short-term consultancy projects addressing specific organisation needs;
- We broker relationships and fund exchanges between new and aspiring entrepreneurs with experienced entrepreneurs in another member state of the European Union;
- Individual angel investors connected to UCL provide seed investment to SMEs engaged with UCL Advances programmes;
- We offer fully funded SME Internships where UCL students spend eight to twelve weeks in a London SME working alongside the director(s) to deliver real results and lasting impact in the host organisation whilst learning about enterprise; and
- We offer a variety of training courses and workshops are available to help you learn about, start or grow your business – Boost your business learning with challenging courses at UCL!

www.ucl.ac.uk/advances/business/support

About Student Engagement

UCL does more to help students learn about, start or grow a business than any other UK university, giving them the critical skills to get a job or start their own venture. UCL Advances offers a whole programme of support – taking them through their entrepreneurial journey. This includes access to training, mentoring, one-to-one business advice from our in-house advisors, access to loans and grant funding, placements and the use of our Hatchery space.

The Summer Internship Programme (SIP) puts UCL students leaps and bounds ahead of the competition when it comes to professional development and applying for jobs. It offers over 100 students the chance to work for SMEs across London for eight weeks in the summer. It’s a brilliant opportunity to gain in-depth work experience and pick up entrepreneurial know-how directly from business owners.

Full-time internships receive a tax-free training allowance of £250 a week and are open to UCL students across all disciplines or very fresh graduates (students due to finish their course this summer).

www.ucl.ac.uk/advances/advances-programmes/summer-internships