



Forum House | Stirling Road | Chichester | PO19 7DN

[CTJT mentor programme](#) article by Samson Dada

The importance of work experience

Work experience has become essential for undergraduates hoping to secure employment in competitive professions such as journalism and law. In April this year, Martin Birchall, managing director of *High Fliers Research* said that new graduates who've not had any work experience during their time at university have little or no chance of landing a well-paid job with a leading employer." I told a college friend two years ago that I would be doing work experience at the Guardian newspaper, who replied "Will you be making the tea and coffee?" I replied, "No. So far I have not made tea and coffee for my colleagues during any work experience placements." You may be asked to do these tasks, but from doing eight work experience placements, I have learnt that work experience is much more than this and it is hugely important.

Work experience gives you immediate exposure to the work environment that you may later gain employment in and shows you how the industry works. When I did my first work experience placement at my local newspaper, *The Guardian*, by observing editorial meetings – which is the meetings between editors of each section of the newspaper, I learnt about how decisions are made about what stories to work on. For instance, during my time on The Comment Is Free desk, my suggestion about commissioning James Purnell to write a piece about welfare reform was placed on hold because of other more newsworthy stories. This experience will allow me to assess the newsworthiness of my idea relative to other stories that a newspaper or magazine is working on when suggesting story ideas to them. You can request feedback from your work experience co-ordinators, to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of your character and work, which means that you be a better person and will produce polished work that will be expected of you if you are hired in that the profession you aspire to work in. In my case, I was told by *The Guardian's* News Reporter Lexy Topping that I am "producing publishable work ahead of my years" but that I need to "caution against being over-formal both in demeanour and writing style." Therefore, I need to continue to get as many articles published as possible and be a little more relaxed when talking to people. Similarly, The Leicester Mercury's News Editor Linda Steelyard said that I have a generally good journalistic writing style, but that I need to have a gripping introductory paragraph to entice the reader to read the rest of the article. Consequently, I can demonstrate the positive aspects of my writing, like using good quotes and include more engaging introductions when writing news articles in the future.

Work experience is the perfect opportunity to make long term contacts and impress your possible future employer. Your employer may be so impressed by your work that you are invited back for a further work placement or internship at the company, or even offered employment. I met numerous work experience students at the Guardian who I will keep in contact with and who made my experience more enriching because of their friendly and warm personalities. Because I keep in regular contact with Guardian's Managing Editor Elisabeth Ribbans, it is easier for me to gain annual summer work experience placements at the newspaper; compared to if I had no contacts at the newspaper.

I will be doing another work placement at The Leicester Mercury and The Guardian next summer. So, if anyone tells you that unpaid work experience is pointless, then remind them of the old adage that "it is not what you know, but who you know" – that may be the difference between whether you land your dream job.

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