



Student Case Study - Cameron MacInnes, Altus group

“My placement year has easily been the highlight of my university career.”

**Cameron MacInnes - BSc (Hons) Real Estate
Surveying**

Please tell us a bit about yourself

I'm Cameron MacInnes, I am originally from Inverness, and I am currently living in central London completing my placement year with Altus group.

Can you tell us about the placement opportunity you were involved in and what your role entailed?

My role at Altus group has been working in the office and being out on-site inspecting properties. The job is client-facing and I have benefited from working with a wide range of clients. When I am out inspecting properties, I get to travel to various commercial properties around London. My job is to take measurements of the space to work out floor areas, take notes of the building specifications and take photos of the space. The other 50% of my time, which is spent in the office, where I write up surveys for the properties that I have visited so that the survey can find an appropriate angle to try and reduce our client's rateable value and therefore save our client money, as they have been wrongfully overcharged.

What key skills did your placement teach you?

One of the main skills that I have improved whilst on placement is my communication skills. I have learnt how to communicate clearly and succinctly, both verbally and over email. It takes time to develop this skill but by constantly being in a professional environment, sending and receiving emails, and meeting clients, I feel you naturally start to communicate in a more professional manner. Another one is my problem-solving and decision-making skills. After around two months of shadowing surveyors, Altus thought that I was ready to complete inspections by myself. Some properties I visit are very unusual shapes and can be difficult to measure. I need to work out the most logical and practical way of measuring the property. This can sometimes be stressful working out how to measure correctly and still apply time management. Over time, I feel like I am much more confident in making the correct decisions and now have a general idea of how to solve the problem. Other skills that have improved massively are my planning, organization, and time management skills. I visit around 10-15 properties a week and each client has different requests so, it's essential that I have properly planned my day efficiently, so I keep customer satisfaction up. I feel like this skill will really help me going into my final year of university with keeping on top of my dissertation and group projects.

What were your highlights and key successes of your time on placement?

A highlight of my placement is when something that you flagged to the surveyor when doing your inspection has led to large savings for the client. Normally the savings have been due to retail relief. Retail relief was introduced due to corona virus and meant that any property that's main use is retail will not have to pay business rates (property tax) for that property. Most retail properties got this automatically but there were others that didn't, meaning we'd then argue a case as to why the client deserves retail relief with the valuation office.

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Did you face any challenges during your time on placement?

After my first week on placement, Altus group suffered a cyber-attack globally which meant everyone had to work from home as we were unable to use the servers in the office. Having only spent one week on my placement this was a real challenge for me as I hadn't really had the chance to learn much yet. I had lots of questions about my appointed work and due to us working from home the only way to ask questions was via Microsoft teams. It was frustrating as often the answer to my question was quick and easy, but it could take a while to get a reply. I feel like my learning over the period of the cyber-attack was really slowed down due to working remotely. Because of this, I would recommend that anyone who is thinking about doing a work placement looks to do one in a shared workplace. Being in an office with other colleagues means that you are constantly learning just by overhearing conversations with other members of staff and any questions that you have can be answered immediately.

How do you feel that your studies at Edinburgh Napier University prepare you for this placement?

Having done coursework that covers a wide range of surveying in first and second year of university helped when applying for a placement. It was most helpful during the interview stage as any question that they asked me I was able to relate it to some sort of coursework I'd done. This meant there was never a question I couldn't answer, which avoided awkward silences and made the interview run smoothly.

Do you think your experience(s) from the placement affected your future career plans or last year of university?

Before my placement I was certain that I would get a job in my hometown after university but spending the last 9 months in London has made me realise that after university I 100% want to come back to the city to work. Also specialising in business rates this year has opened a new door for me in surveying that I was completely unaware of before starting my placement.

Would you recommend doing a placement to others?

I would highly recommend that anyone who has the opportunity to do a placement does it! Moving to a new city and meeting lots of interesting new people has been a great experience, not just in terms of education, but I feel it is a great life experience in general. I also feel like it's a great chance to move somewhere new as it's only for a year and if after a year you feel like that area isn't for you then there is no pressure to stay there.

What advice would you give to someone considering doing a placement at university?

Firstly, make sure your CV and covering letter looks professional. It's the first thing a company will see and if doesn't look professional and well written it instantly creates a bad first impression. Secondly, start your placement search as early as possible and apply for as many as you can. Even if you don't end up getting the placement it gives you a good idea of how the process works and questions you are likely to be asked at an interview. Finally, if you make it to the interview stage make sure you have done your research. I think being able to show a little bit of knowledge about the company shows the interviewer that you have been proactive.

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