

# TRANSFORMING LIVES

## INTERNATIONAL PLACEMENT

### CASE STUDIES



In this series of case studies 6 former Academy students share their experiences of completing an international placement. They discuss their placement activities, what they learnt and how these experiences have shaped their personal and professional lives. The students also offer advice on planning and preparing for placement.

Each story is unique - they are intended to motivate and inspire our students to think positively about their placement and to take the necessary steps to maximise the opportunities that placement provides.

### Case study 1: Craig Barry - BSc Sports Development with Coaching 2010-2013

Craig's placement was in Shanghai, China with a charity which arranges sports activities in inner-city and underprivileged schools. He organized the placement using his own initiative and contacts and by advertising on LinkedIn.

Craig spent 6 weeks on placement with the charity 'Sport For All'. He was hosted by The Shanghai Rugby Club who offered their large facilities to disadvantaged schools with limited outdoor space due to overcrowding in the city.

*"My role was initially to go into schools with coaches, run lessons, give lesson plans...towards the second half of the placement I was there to coach their coaches."*

Craig managed to deal with cultural differences, including the language barrier.

*"We had learnt to say 'run', 'bounce', 'kick', so everything else was done through demonstration. But generally the Chinese children were very engaging in sport...they would do everything we asked them to do and laughed and smiled the whole time because it was something new."*

The experience reinforced to Craig certain aspects of his own personality – a particular highlight for him was his sense of achievement and personal growth.

*"It showed me how independent I was...The biggest thing that comes from it is you have the confidence...I had the confidence to go back to China and it made the world seem like a smaller place."*

Craig's experience was so profound that he returned to Shanghai following the completion of the first year of his Master's degree and lived and worked there for 2 years as a PE teacher and coach in international schools. He believes his choice of placement changed the direction of his life.

*"I don't think I would have got the job offer if I hadn't gone there on placement... I was very comfortable going back...for me everything now is beyond the UK."*

Craig offers other students some advice on how to get the most from their placement.

*"Just try to think outside the box. There's nothing out of reach these days...you just need to be confident...it was literally one message on LinkedIn which has put my life in a different direction. It's a life experience which trumps the whole university experience for me. [The placement] has opened doors I didn't even know were there."*

Craig reflects on the rewards of perseverance.

*"[The University] actually told me I couldn't go...[but] I was adamant I was going to go, that this was going to set me apart from others...Don't give up at the first hurdle...It is a big experience but it's risk and reward, and it's so worth it...I'd highly recommend it. It's the only thing I think about when people ask what was the best part of my undergraduate degree."*

## Case study 2: Callum Cooper - BSc Sport Coaching 2012-2015

Callum's placement was in South Africa with the Football Foundation. The placement was supported by the University and involved a competitive recruitment process. He spent three months in Gansbaai, primarily coaching grassroots football to local young people.

*"There were some children who had never played football before, had never been given that opportunity...I was doing things I'd never been involved with before. But I wanted that; I wanted something different."*

He felt the language barrier was problematic but found ways to overcome it.

*"Some didn't know any English...but I realised that football is a kind of universal language...even if they're speaking another language you can get what they're saying because they're pointing and using their heads."*

The local culture and society was new to Callum but he learnt a great deal from the South African lifestyle.

*"They were very friendly, enthusiastic people...very positive...[But] it was definitely segregated; it wasn't often you'd see people of different ethnicities working together. But I think that comes down to the classes...who could afford a good education...What we wanted to do when we were there was to close the gap. Obviously we can't give them all money but we can give them an education and coaching to allow them to develop."*

Callum lived with people of other nationalities and found he grew as a person in adapting to that. His confidence, resilience and coaching skills also developed significantly as a result of being out of his comfort zone.

*"You had to be very confident...I take [the skills] back to England too, different ways to do things, different ways of communicating...Being put in a difficult situation and being able to work through that...learning that if you make a mistake it's not the end of the world, it's a learning curve – you can learn from it and then overcome it."*

Callum believes his placement influenced his career and life choices, in particular his decision to move to the US and work for Global Premier Soccer.

*"I know now that I can work independently...I think if the placement didn't happen I might never have ended up out here. I don't believe I would have. It's definitely made me more confident to try new things."*

For Callum his placement was the highlight of his university experience. He also found he was more motivated on his return to academic study.

*"It's definitely one of my fondest memories at university, probably the most significant...in terms of assignments, the placement taught me to think for myself and figure out what needs changing...[on placement] I was the only coach there, I couldn't ask anyone for help."*

Callum offers other students advice on how to get the most from their placement.

*"You've got to choose a placement which is going to benefit you in the future...I've taken so much from my placement and used it since...You're going to get a lot of experience and it's going to benefit you beyond university. [An international placement] will give you a taste of what it's like to work abroad. You definitely learn a lot from it and it could change you as a person. I think students should be encouraged to look for opportunities to go abroad...there's a lot out there...having an international placement has taught me so much, it's given me so many tools that I still use now and I'll use in the future. A lot of life experiences as well."*

### Case study 3: Shereen Hutton - BSc Sports Development and Coaching 2009-2012

Shereen's placement was in Tanzania as part of the International Development Through Excellence and Leadership in Sport programme.

*"[The placement] sounded really appealing to me...I've always been a person who wants to push themselves out of their comfort zone."*

Alongside three other students Shereen spent 8 weeks in Tanzania. The days were spent working with children and young people, teachers and peer leaders.

*"We did leadership courses...teaching them different techniques of teaching, how to coach a session, how to adapt a session...we worked with groups that covered different age groups and also did a session with students, kind of young leaders."*

The evenings were spent coaching youth football teams for the East Africa Cup which took place towards the end of placement, and which provided an extremely rewarding and educational experience for Shereen.

*"We had built really good bonds with the team...one particular player, amazingly talented football player, and really physically fit. He would probably be in one of the top academies if he was here [in England]. But because of where he lives he hasn't had these opportunities...It makes you grateful [for] the opportunities you have just by living in a country like England."*

Shereen observed differences between British and Tanzanian culture and feels her compassion, particularly for those in crisis, has developed significantly as a result of her experiences.

*"It does make you grateful for what you have got, being in and around that culture and seeing what they have, and reflecting on how my life is here...I have a lot more of a humanitarian approach to things...I think those experiences kind of influenced that. I might not have developed that if I hadn't gone further afield."*

Shereen's personal confidence and resilience have also been enhanced as a result of being put out of her comfort zone.

*"I've always been quite confident...a natural leader. I think growing up in sport has always kind of helped with that...[Tanzania] was one of the most extreme experiences that I had which boosted that...It's given me perspective."*

Since her placement in Tanzania, Shereen has been living and working in the UK but is keen to travel more and would consider working abroad again.

*"I want to see more of the world...if no ties and money wasn't a problem I would love to work abroad for the rest of my life."*

Shereen offers advice to other students on how to get the most out of placement, particularly those considering going abroad.

*"If you get the opportunity to do a placement abroad I'd say definitely take it because it's an amazing once in a lifetime opportunity...If it links to your course it makes perfect sense...It's not for everyone but I think for the majority of people it's going to be a positive experience. It's only going to better you and give you additional learning than just doing a job at home. If you can you should definitely consider it."*

Shereen comments on how her time on placement has affected her life.

*"I'm really grateful for the experience. I still use it in my life...still talk about those experiences and probably will do for years to come. They are experiences that will stay with me for the rest of my life."*

#### Case study 4: Sophie Johnson - BSc Sports Development and Coaching 2010-2013

Sophie's placement was in South Africa working with the Football Foundation. She had never travelled outside Europe before but she did not let this put her off. During her placement Sophie was given a variety of responsibilities.

*"My role was a netball coach so I taught the after-school clubs...During the daytime I went to the office for a sport development programme, looking at all the different summer holiday programmes and how I could plan sports within them. I designed promotional materials that would go out locally. I also wrote reports straight after events and after each of my sessions...on weekends we went into the townships and socialised with families. Otherwise we went sight-seeing."*

The experience put Sophie right out of her comfort zone but she grew from this.

*"There were areas where I felt out of my depth because I hadn't done those things before...The practical side, I felt confident, but with the planning stages I was a bit out of my depth. But I did pick it up...We had to relate back to the modules at university and think of the step-by-step processes and methods."*

Sophie observed the vast cultural and social differences between South Africa and the UK.

*"The language barrier was really difficult...it was so hard to communicate and try and develop them as players...[but] it had its positives because you did see them develop. Another challenge was poverty...it was difficult in the respect that I learned so much about the culture...there was a black township and a coloured township...I was understanding their point of view of living there...Overall the people were absolutely fantastic. They were always happy despite having so many personal issues."*

Coming to terms with the tough reality of life for some in South Africa, Sophie began to appreciate the value of the role she was playing.

*"Some of them turned to sport and they were so happy because they were focusing on something else. It was so great that the power of sport could change someone's outlook, their personality, the way they feel about themselves...Sport can touch on so many different areas and for me it was such a big thing that I could be part of that, that I was helping those kids go on a positive journey through netball. It was really rewarding."*

Sophie learnt a great deal about herself during her placement, and believes she returned home a more confident and resilient person.

*"I was out of my comfort zone for three months. I'd never been around people who were from completely different backgrounds, I was by myself...interacting with so many different cultures...I definitely improved myself for the better. I am more confident than I thought...as a person I definitely changed, the way I look at things, my views, never to take anything for granted. I definitely improved my people skills, communication and putting myself in different situations."*

She also found her experiences had an effect her attitude towards her studies.

*"I was more driven. I was thinking back to the people I worked with who didn't have anything yet were still so focused and ambitious...I knew I could succeed if I really pushed myself."*

Sophie offers advice to other students on how to get the most out of their placement.

*"Look abroad. Honestly, the list Hallam provided was fantastic...it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity...it is such a valuable experience. You've got to put yourself in those situations to learn. Be prepared to put yourself out of your comfort zone, it's all about developing yourself and the sport industry...It's about you putting your own twist and knowledge on things. I'd recommend it to everybody. It's been a life changing experience. I'll always have it with me."*

### Case study 5: Oli Porter - BSc Sport Development with Coaching 2011-2014

Oli's placement was in Tanzania as part of the International Development Through Excellence and Leadership in Sport (IDEALS) programme. He had to compete for the opportunity with other students but was determined to succeed.

*"I actually joined the university for that opportunity...I'm not the kind of person who wants to sit still and get an average degree. I knew I needed to apply for it."*

Before making the journey to Tanzania Oli attended a two-day induction programme in Liverpool which prepared him for what he was about to experience.

*"We met our hosts...we learned about the resources, how to deal with stress, how to work as a team, how to tackle challenges such as the language barrier, how to learn about culture, how to be safe in Tanzania... [Afterwards] I felt even more excited than I did from the beginning."*

During his 8 weeks in Tanzania Oli led workshops, being observed by other teachers and visited orphanages with gifts from the UK such as stationary and sports equipment.

*"I worked with the rugby club, something I kind of co-founded...now they've got over 3 training sessions a week and lots of sponsors...seeing how much the kids were enjoying it as a sport none of them were familiar with before...[that] was my most enjoyable and rewarding moment."*

Oli observed the vast cultural differences between the UK and Tanzania and feels this experience has affected his attitudes to other people and cultures subsequently.

*"You face lots of different challenges every day. You learn not to take stuff for granted...I had to associate with African culture every day, every hour I was there...Definitely thinking of others around me has been a big cultural impact."*

In addition Oli feels his placement made him a more confident and resilient person.

*"I had to learn demonstration skills – what I learnt spoke for itself, I got better grades in coaching modules when I was back at university...I think my confidence and speaking skills improved...I was speaking in front of 100-200 people which I had never done before...I felt like I became a stronger person because I was learning more every day, dealing with each challenge differently each day."*

Oli's placement experiences also affected his approach to his studies.

*"In group activities you would think about the others around you...you had to build relationships with those individuals, people's culture and background... Beforehand I think I would have been quite bossy in group projects but I tried to slow the pace and take everybody into consideration...I was in a position where I got on with my lecturers fantastically...Things I learnt from Tanzania went straight across to my dissertation."*

Oli offers some advice to other students, particularly those considering a placement abroad.

*"Think outside your comfort zone...If you don't you're not going to learn as much as someone who has...Think about your aspirations, your long-term goals. Tanzania put me in a fantastic position, from the very start it gave me opportunities...it's helped me in interviews, it's been good for my CV... Tanzania gave me so much for which I'll be forever indebted. It's led me to be the person I am today."*

### Case study 6: Emily Silcock - BSc Sport Coaching 2011-2014

Emily spent her placement in Uganda with The King's Foundation, a sports charity which trains leaders and school teachers to use sports equipment in lessons and within their communities. Emily was determined to have an international experience.

*"If you want something enough you can get it. Money's not a big issue to think about either because it's seven weeks – if you plan in advance it's easy to fund."*

Emily was given a lot of responsibility but she relished the completely new experiences.

*"I gained a lot of experience in things like how to run a business or charity on my own, leading myself and getting that kind of independence. I loved visiting schools, youth leaders and teachers who I could work alongside, support and train...I did some sessions on how to create leaders, how to be a coach, and showed them some of the sports we do back in England...I didn't deliver any sports to young people, all the work I did was training leaders and teachers."*

Emily considers the most rewarding moments of her placement in Uganda.

*"I was working alongside a guy called Emmanuel who was really lovely and sweet. We had a children's celebration day where 250 children from the community came to their centre...Being able to see those children who normally work to earn money come and be children was amazing."*

She also observed the differences between British and Ugandan culture and lifestyle.

*"[I was] realising that most of their aspirations are the same as ours, they're just in a different context...in the UK you have lots of opportunities...things come your way and you can take them or leave them. In Africa you take an opportunity with both hands and you don't get them very often...In Africa I believe they can get something if they want it but it's a lot harder. I think education is a real barrier there."*

Emily believes she learnt a lot about herself during placement and even improved on a particular weakness.

*"I'm not organised. I did have a lesson in learning to be organised because there was no one there to help me out...so this was an opportunity for me to prove myself...that's something that has been really beneficial, my organisation in my work has really improved...[Also] that I'm a people person, that was reinforced. And that I can be a leader and facilitate and help people."*

Upon returning to university Emily found her study skills and motivation to study had improved.

*"A lot changed for me in third year...I became interested in children and sport because of placement. And also part of my monitoring and evaluation in Uganda was to do with how they were catching. I did some fundamental movement tests...I could see how much my study could relate to an actual working environment, whereas the previous year it was just theory for theory's sake."*

Emily offers some advice to other students who are considering options for their placement.

*"Don't go for the easy option. You'll be surprised to see what opportunities are out there if you look...don't make money an issue, there are ways around money issues, there are things you can do to fund trips. And at the end of the day the experience you will get from going out of your comfort zone will outweigh any money issues."*

Emily offers some final thoughts on her placement experience.

*"I think it's an essential part of university learning for young adults. It's really important for people to see how other people live in different contexts and how work can fit into those patterns. Opening people's eyes to other experiences."*

## Acknowledgements

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