
Don't Stop at the First Hurdle – an interview with a Deaf student on placement

I first became aware that Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) were offering work placement to students in the Creative Digital Media degree programme upon talking to a lecturer in January. This programme is designed to equip students with a good combination of technical and creative skills relevant to the Digital Media industry in Ireland. As part of their third year studies, students can undertake a professional project during their second semester. This project normally takes place over 12 weeks.

Society is constantly changing, and the deaf community is no different. Last December, Irish Sign Language (ISL) was recognised as the third official language of Ireland, a few weeks ago the UNCRP made it through the Dáil and on a personal level, I was awarded by the Irish Research Council (IRC) to carry out a research with the aim to develop and set up a support service for ISL/English interpreters. Due to all these positive changes, we felt that there was no more pertinent a time to reinvigorate and adapt our company, Bridge Interpreting, so we decided to submit a professional proposal project to ITB with the aim of finding a student interested in working on the development of Bridge Interpreting's new website.

In January, we received the good news; one of the students from ITB was interested in working with us for 12 weeks. John Braga is a Deaf student in his third year at ITB and he will be working within the company until the end of April. John kindly accepted to be interviewed and talked about his experience with us.

Interview between Lucia and John

Why did you select Bridge Interpreting?

I read the project and after the conversation I had with you through Skype, I really wanted to do my work placement at Bridge Interpreting. I had a look at the current website and I really wanted to undertake the challenge. When I read on the proposal, I appreciated that you wanted to make a website accessible to everyone, hearing and deaf people. I thought this would help me to develop many more skills like filming videos in ISL, subtitling videos, building up a blog and many other tasks. I knew this was a goal with which I could challenge myself.

Did you know about the business of the company?

I knew Bridge Interpreting as I have been in ITB for the last three years, and since then I have been in contact with the staff from Bridge Interpreting, as they provide ISL/English interpreters for my classes. I knew that the business provided professional, qualified sign language interpreters to hearing and Deaf clients within the deaf community.

How do you find your work experience?

My work experience has been very positive so far, I am really happy and I am learning so much. I would say overall it has been a very productive experience. It can be challenging sometimes but with very good results, I would say a learning curve.

Irish Sign Language is your first language, how do you find the communication with the staff?

The communication was not a barrier, there was no communication breakdown. You sign, the director of the company signs and when we need a meeting with the rest of the hearing staff, I was accommodated extremely well. An interpreter has been booked every time we had 72 a staff meeting. At the end of the day, once I know what you want from your project, **I can work independently**; I can keep working on the website and then every time I needed to ask a question, you were there so it was fine. Here in Bridge Interpreting the communication was not an issue, it is probably a lot easier rather than if I had been in a company with hearing people only. If there is even only one person signing it is sufficient. I would say it made it easier.

Are you learning and is it what you were expecting?

I am learning a lot more than I was expecting, about diverse topics. There were a few things I had in mind I wanted to learn about, for example when we were talking about the live chat, it gave me something to focus on. The placement has been fantastic, it is really enjoyable and the progress we have already made is great, chatting with everyone in the office has been good. It was interesting to work with external professional people like the person responsible of the IT department within the company, having staff meetings, and working within a team.

I normally meet to discuss the website every Friday with my supervisor. We discuss what I need to do, how to amend details and many other aspects related to the project. For example, you asked me a few questions today, now I can go back and check with my supervisor. He always gives me good advice and he is very supportive. Any good ideas I never thought of before, I can bring them back and ask my supervisor.

What about theory into practice?

It is a little bit different compared to class. Coming here it was different compared to college. In college you go to class and you attend your lectures. In a working environment, you can put your learning into practice, it gave me an idea what to expect when I leave college, a small window into the future. In the work placement, there is an employer telling you the goals that need to be achieved and you do your best to achieve them. You are not only working for yourself but you are working with other people involved in one project. I also appreciate when the staff ask me for my opinion or specific technical questions I can answer and collaborate. **I was able to give input, definitely.** I have been really happy here, it was great.

What do you want to achieve at the end of the placement?

At the end of my placement, I really hope to produce a website that you are happy with and a website that everybody can use and access.

We would like to thank John Braga from ITB for his fantastic contribution to Bridge Interpreting and wish him well for a bright future.

**Lucia Venturi**

Advocacy Executive Officer, Citizens Information Board

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Lucia Venturi holds a Bachelor in Deaf Studies (Hons) from Trinity College. After graduating, she worked as a research assistant at the Centre for Deaf Studies (TCD) and contributed to a number of papers and publications. In 2017, she received the Employment Based Programme Scholarship from the Irish Research Council (IRC). From 2017 to 2019 she carried out a research master (M. Litt) about the development of a support service for Irish Sign Language (ISL) Interpreters. Currently, she works as the Advocacy Executive Officer at the Citizens Information Board (CIB).

**John Braga**

ITB Student

John Braga is a Deaf student in his third year at ITB working within the company until the end of April.

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