

## Jade Hall, Society of Environmental Exploration (Frontier)



*'This placement has confirmed my intended career choice of going to work for a conservation organisation. I have a passion for animal welfare and their environment and feel my skills gained throughout my PhD can be applied to make an impact'*

For my PIPS placement, I carried out an internship working as a project development intern for the Society of Environmental Exploration (also known as Frontier). I was based in the London head office. Frontier is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) that specialises in setting-up and developing environmental conservation and community-based projects worldwide. The majority of Frontier projects are based in developing countries typically found in Africa and Asia. Currently Frontier has over 400 projects in 60 different locations around the world. Frontier is not only able to support some of their projects financially but also provides support by sending volunteers to help work on project development and growth.

I chose Frontier, as I agree with their overall goal as an organisation to “safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem integrity to aid in the development of sustainable livelihoods”. Frontier additionally has links to several reputable NGOs including: WWF and DEFRA. I chose this placement, as I felt it was a good opportunity to work outside of academia and apply my varied skill set to a commendable organisation, in a field that I am passionate about.

Frontier divides their projects into 2 main divisions. The first division is called ‘Group’ projects. Frontier employs all members of staff to run the projects abroad and Frontier was involved in the creation of the project. The second division of projects are called ‘Partner’ projects. Partner projects are important because Frontier searches for existing community or conservation projects that are in need of extra support. My main role as an intern was linked to the partner project division of the organisation. As it was our busiest time of year, I also worked with the events team to promote Frontier and sustainable eco-tourism.

At Frontier, I reported to the head of operations and the head of development. My primary goal as a project development intern was to assist with the creation and development of new and existing partner projects. This was exciting as I could make a large impact. Over my 3-

month internship, I was given the target area of the Caribbean. Project development work would consist of searching the internet for conservation and community based organisations that would be applicable to the Frontier mission statement. To establish feasibility and initiate a partnership, I would have to construct personalised emails to set up a dialogue. It was also important to carry out competitor price analysis as there are several non-governmental organisations (across the international volunteering, conservation and travel sectors), which might be working on similar projects. Once contact had been made, the next step would be to write up a 'project brief' document to showcase what the project had to offer. To attract volunteers, Frontier has a very distinctive writing style that had to be applied to all written documents, as once approved the information would be uploaded to the official Frontier website. Although I had a target to find new projects, it was also important to monitor and evaluate current projects. During my time at Frontier, I was involved in writing up briefs to set up two new projects in the Dominican Republic.

Another large element of my placement was volunteer support and coordination. The summer was the busiest time of year as it is when our target audience (18-25 years old) is most likely to travel. For partner projects alone, we saw over 270 volunteers travel throughout June to August. In order to effectively manage all volunteers, I had to update the volunteer database daily. I had to ensure that we had all of the necessary documents and project specific requirements were met before the volunteer commenced their trip. An example of the important information we require would be flight information to ensure the volunteer would be picked up at the airport by our in-country contacts. It was often a common occurrence that I would have to chase volunteers via email or phone call to ensure payments and documents were uploaded and up-to-date. As an intern, I would also be the first point of contact for the volunteers. Another daily task was to answer the office phone and check general emails. By working on the databases daily and using my knowledge in Microsoft Excel, I have helped to improve the daily regime of working with volunteer databases, which will make future interns more efficient and allow volunteer contact to be easily tracked.

My most rewarding and most challenging role as an intern was working with the events and outreach team. I had to assist with volunteer recruitment by attending fairs and giving presentations. I have always enjoyed outreach and it was exciting to get sent all over the UK to speak at different schools. A challenging aspect were the hours, as often you would have to arrive at the school once it opened regardless of the travel time (this often meant early starts to catch the first train out). I travelled all over the UK by train and travel expenses were paid for by Frontier. To get over my fear of public speaking, I signed up for as many presentations as I could. The longest presentation I could give was an hour. During our busiest time period, I ended up giving more than 10 presentations, across 8 different locations in under 2 weeks. You get the best feeling, when talking about commendable projects and inspiring future generations to not only make a difference but also ensure that they learn about sustainable and eco-friendly travel from a young age. At most of the events there was also the opportunity to communicate and network with professionals within the travel, careers and conservation sectors. With each event attended, I had a target number of sign ups that had to be achieved. A rewarding aspect of this role is that out of all the interns, I averaged the highest number of sign ups per event.

Working at Frontier has been valuable, as I have been given the opportunity to gain experience in office management and administration, in addition to experience working for an international travel and volunteer organisation. I have been given the opportunity to build on skills that will be valuable for my PhD including: report writing, communication, presenting, database and spreadsheet management. It was important that I had the ability to work alone, be proactive with tasks, and manage my time effectively, with a high attention to detail as mistakes could impact a volunteers trip abroad. Towards the end of my internship it was my role to train new interns and pass on the skills that I have learnt. By doing this placement I have learnt that it is possible to have a good work/life balance, which is something I have struggled with throughout my PhD. At 17:30 I was always encouraged to go and enjoy my evening, which taught me to work efficiently throughout the day instead of feeling like I had to continue working additional hours that were not necessary.

This placement has confirmed my intended career choice of going to work for a conservation organisation. I have a passion for animal welfare and their environment and feel my skills gained throughout my PhD can be applied to make an impact. Although this wasn't a paid position, upon completion of the project I have the possibility to take a subsidised 10-week placement abroad on a Frontier research programme (excluding return flights, visas, and insurance). At the end of my PhD I intend to travel with Frontier and help a community-based project in Africa.

## Top Tips for other PhD students?

- In regards to top tips for other students when contemplating carrying out a placement, I would suggest picking a placement in an area that you have always been passionate about. I initially was hesitant to take a placement during my PhD but now that I have finished my internship, I can confirm it was the right the decision. I not only have confirmation of what field I would like to specialise in the future, but also have built on skills that will be valuable for my final year of my PhD. I was fully supported by UCL careers and Frontier management, which was also an element that made my PiPS placement enjoyable.

I feel my placement at Frontier was a success, with a great team of people and a great location, it provided a fantastic opportunity to gain new skills and an insight into what it will be like working for a conservation NGO.

*For more information please contact Jade Hall directly: [jade.hall.14@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:jade.hall.14@ucl.ac.uk)*