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Finding a work placement for my year abroad in crisis-stricken Spain was not an easy endeavour. At the time, Spain's unemployment rates were at an all-time high so finding a company that was willing to take on a foreign student for a year was a bit of a task. However, I pulled out all the stops; personal contacts, university resources, jobs websites and general asking around, and finally managed to secure a 9 month placement with Tetra Pak, a multinational packaging company, at their office in Madrid.

However, a year's work placement doesn't come easy! While your student friends can enjoy the Erasmus lifestyle of sea, sun and sangria, you become confined to weekends only. Early starts and late finishes become a bit tiresome, but I was lucky enough to love my job so I barely noticed it and really got into the swing of things.

I was placed in the marketing department and was given my own market research project to carry out. Being in a professional environment day in day out really changes your perspective on what you want from life and how to achieve it. I met many people from a great variety of roles which has helped me identify which career path I want to follow after I finish University. It's also exposed me to a whole world of multinational companies that I never even knew existed, which will seriously help me in my job search come September.

Working on your year abroad has amazing advantages.

Pay- To put it bluntly, the best part is definitely the money you receive from the grant and (if you are lucky enough) any salary you may receive. Through my Erasmus work grant and my salary combined, I have managed to fully support myself with rent, bills, food and transport (with not much left for much else) and so this year will not be contributing to my rapidly accumulating student debt. Some companies will help pay for lunchtime meals, so working is definitely cheaper than studying when it comes to surviving. It also keeps you occupied all day and reduces costs that would otherwise be spent shopping/lunching/meeting up with friends.

If you aren't paid on your placement, as tends to be the norm at the moment, the Erasmus grant will alleviate money pressures at a time where you're at your most vulnerable in a place that you are not familiar. For example, the grant was enough to just about cover my rent on a monthly basis, so that is automatically a cost that I will not have to worry about when it comes to repaying my student loan.

Networking- I've made hundred of contacts and connections which will definitely improve my chances in the world of work come graduation.

Adapting to a new culture- By offering ready-made friends and colleagues from day one, having a stable working environment really made the transition easier when moving to a new country. After the initial few days at work, you become comfortable at a time when your surroundings are new and constantly changing. My colleagues were great in providing me advice on places to visit, shop opening hours, where to buy this and that, and overall the transition so much easier! Working abroad is, in my point of view, the best way to

understand a culture, as people you meet are usually delighted to give advice and help you to understand the way things are done in that place.

However, it also has its disadvantages.

Early nights and early mornings- I usually really hate routine, but as my work is constantly changing it really didn't matter. It is sad, however, when you have to turn down Erasmus parties because you have to be on a bus at 8am...

Commutes- I had an hour commute, which according to most Madrileños is pretty standard.

Limited holiday- I only had 15 days paid holiday for the whole of my 9 months stay. However, by the end it gave me a few trips home, a nice 2 weeks at Christmas and a few weekend trips to other parts of Spain. Also, Spain has loads of holidays so there were lots of bank holiday weekends I took advantage of!

All in all, I would definitely recommend a work placement as part of your year abroad to those interested in gaining a head start in their career and making your year abroad an even more valuable experience.