



ESPA

The Next Generation
of International Talent

European marketing and technical interns deliver fresh skills and international perspective to ASSA ABLOY

Introduction

Door Group, a unit of ASSA ABLOY Opening Solutions UK & Ireland worked with ESPA UK to bring in European student interns to test a new local marketing capability in its Northern Ireland base and support a manufacturing data research project

ASSA ABLOY Group is a world leader in access solutions, with headquarters in Sweden. Its UK & Ireland Door Group designs, manufactures, and supports pedestrian doors for the construction sector and is based in Lisburn, near Belfast.

As part of an international firm, its marketing needs have been supported in the past via a shared services team based at Willenhall in the West Midlands. While business units located nearby found this an excellent solution, Managing Director Brian Sofley was never sure it was the best way to support local marketing needs.

To test this, he took a decision to hire a marketing intern for six months. Having been introduced to ESPA recently, he asked for their aid. He recalled "At that time I wasn't necessarily thinking I needed a European student, but I thought: why not? When you bring different cultures into an office and they interact with local people, everybody benefits. We get to know their culture and they get to know ours."

He moved ahead to hire an intern with ESPA's help. The process proved so successful that he has repeated the process several times, not just to add to the marketing resources but also to staff a manufacturing data project.

Connecting your business with European interns

Introducing intern candidates with care

Bringing in young staff was not unprecedented. The Lisburn team had previously hired local apprentices and welcomed graduates from other business units. However, it was the first time it had used this type of facilitated service.

Brian was keen to find a marketing intern that would not only benefit from the opportunity but bring value to the company. He said "ESPA had obviously taken time to understand what the role was about and what our requirements were. They did a fabulous job of weeding out those less relevant to present us with the candidates that were most relevant and very much aligned to the need."

He asked ESPA to tailor the interview process to their needs, explaining that "We wanted the process to help us recognise people who were fast learners. We asked candidates to do a little research and a short presentation on a subject related to our business. All the interns we have since chosen in this way have quite evidently worked hard and showed they could apply some of their University knowledge to the job."

In practical terms, this proved to be an easy experience for ASSA ABLOY. Aside from paying for the accommodation and planning for the intern's deployment, it needed to do little else. "ESPA looked after everything from organising visas to travel and accommodation, so I needed to have no involvement – that part of the process is seamless" he added.



Young minds, fresh ideas and modern knowledge

Marketing post-grad student Maria from Spain became the first intern to join the ASSA ABLOY team. This brought in modern marketing expertise that the company found increasingly valuable throughout the six months. Maria quickly began to make a difference to the company. He told us *“She started to understand our business needs very quickly. Our online presence started to become a lot more effective. She was very literate around social media and generated lots of activity on LinkedIn and other platforms too. Maria has helped us create content for the new global website and ensure all our documentation was up to date, with a consistent and corporate feel.”*

Young minds often bring fresh ideas, as Brian noted *“Some of these students not only have bright ideas but they think in a different way. They also have access to the world of technology and understand the role of things like AI. They use technology as part of their daily lives.”*

At the end of the placement, Assa Abloy did not want to lose either its marketing momentum or new resource. It decided to hire Maria on a permanent basis. Brian stated: *“Maria demonstrated not just a high level of skill and talent but helped us show clearly that there was merit in having a decentralised solution in marketing. She’s still with the business and doing a fabulous job.”*

With marketing work gaining momentum, Maria herself then needed some extra support. The solution appeared obvious. ESPA repeated the intern recruitment process, and the team was joined for the next six months by Croatian student Marija, who took on some of the social media and online work.

ESPA coordinate the logistics of the interns accommodation and travel.



Getting interns that last mile to work

Although ESPA supports students’ travel arrangements to get to the UK as well as their accommodation and welfare during the internship, Brian recalled one practical challenge that ASSA ABLOY still had to meet. *“ESPA looks after their accommodation, but of course we do have a responsibility to make sure they can make it safely from their accommodation to our offices.”*

He explained: *“The student accommodation in Belfast city centre is ideal for the intern. Their social life and the bars and leisure facilities are all close by. Every single one has thoroughly enjoyed living there! But it can be a challenge to get the 10 miles from the inner city to an industrial estate in the outskirts of Lisburn, without a car.”*

So, Brian and the team got creative. *“Our first intern, Maria, got a lift in with another member of staff. We then bought our second intern, Marija, a bicycle – that way she could cycle to the station, jump on the train to Lisburn, then ride to the office.”*

Proving perfectly that a good turn is often repaid, when Maria was hired on a permanent basis and was able to buy a car, she then provided lifts to other interns.

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Technical project support

ESPA places interns studying for degrees in many disciplines. When ASSA ABLOY realised it required extra resources to support a very different challenge, the ESPA team helped it to recruit a further intern named Alberto, from Italy.

“This particular project was a short-term requirement, which was perfect for a six-month term internship. We needed to develop a database of all the information we hold in the production area. Our intern would need to collate and organise the data so that it could present consistently to all our production systems and processes.”

“Alberto was looking at manufacturing and data as part of his course, so he knew exactly how to capture the data and use it in a meaningful way.”

Brian believes that the company has a responsibility to help each intern be successful, and that the company gains from doing so. As well as having the financial controller as his line manager, Alberto was assigned the chief manufacturing engineer as a mentor. *“It made sense that he worked directly with the person who would be using the data he was working with, and who had the experience to show Alberto how the data translates into practical information on the factory floor.”*

Recruiting for permanent or contract positions in the traditional way does not always fit the bill in a fast-moving business. Brian spoke of the difficulties: *“It’s so hard to get somebody on a temporary contract or short-term contract of six months for projects like these. The six-month internship timetable works really well for us, because to go through a whole recruitment process to get somebody in on a fixed term contract of six months is very difficult. Recruiting Alberto worked perfectly in that respect.”*

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The power of international perspective

Brian’s team is part of a wider EMEIA organisation that in turn is part of a global business based out of Sweden. It deals with colleagues in units from all around the world. Brian believes the injection of international perspective is a win-win for everyone, saying: *“These interns can bring a new and international dimension to the team. Because we are a global group, we deal with colleagues in lots of units outside UKI itself. It was useful to have people who had an international perspective and an interest in exploring areas outside their own country. At the same time, they are learning the world of business and how to do that role.”*

He continued *“We derive benefits from having interns, and we’re giving opportunity to the student to learn about business, to get practically involved in the area they are focused on. We are helping to grow talent, and sometimes we get the chance to bring them on full time – but even if not, it’s good for them to have ASSA ABLOY on their CV; it helps them in terms of being attractive to future employers.”*

Brian summed up *“Internships work well for us and I can’t fault ESPA at all. It was straightforward to set up: they listened to the brief, they selected the right candidates and looked out for their needs. I have no issues with them at all.”*

His advice to other businesses was to *“Make sure you take your time. They will all have to learn, so choose candidates that can work on their own initiative. The quicker they can get on to practical and productive experience that aligns to their thesis or course, the better it is for everyone.”*

ASSA ABLOY will shortly be welcoming two more students to the team, this time from Moldova and Italy.



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