

Selena Harries

Selena Harries works as a Customer Success Public Sector Team Leader for Huddle, a UK-based company which provides collaboration software. She graduated from the university in 2011 in International Business (German Stream). Student Careers and Skills spoke with her on 12th February 2016.

1) *Compared with other students for whom going to university was more likely to be expected, did you experience any additional challenges with settling in and getting started?*

Yes! Finance, for a start. Also, my fellow-students who were from private or international schools were very well prepared for university and aware of what it would be like. There had been expectations and plans from their earliest years that they would go to university. There was no assumption at my school that any one at all would go to university. Once I got to Warwick, there were a lot of super-intelligent and rich people around, but I was a long way from the Shropshire rural life I knew and way out of my comfort zone. My parents were super-supportive and really proud that I had got a place at a good university, but because they hadn't been to university themselves they were unable to prepare me for what to expect

2) *Did you experience any additional challenges in thinking about, planning and organising for what happened for when you finished?*

There was a lot of talk about placements and consultancies and people asking me 'What are you doing?' I just had a job in a supermarket and no contacts, and to begin with I felt massively behind when considering what might happen next. I'd never heard of the likes of PWC and had no idea what professions like audit, tax or investment banking really were. This felt particularly overwhelming as a student in the business school – everyone else seeming to know what they wanted to choose from a list of professions I'd barely even heard of!

3) *How did you overcome these challenges?*

They made me more determined! WBS and Student Careers and Skills were really supportive. I went to careers fairs and talked to potential employers. I got involved in the WBS society. Being at Warwick was great – companies want Warwick graduates and so there they were on campus, and all I had to do was get involved in what was going on. There were amazing things happening and loads of opportunities. Because my family didn't know about, say, becoming a tax consultant, I knew that I had to build my own network, and Warwick was an ideal place to do this. I could talk to students further on in their degree or just more knowledgeable about a certain subject, I could visit careers fairs and events and meet people early in their careers and found out how they did it. I had a year abroad as part of my degree, which was a really helpful experience including enabling me to get some experience within a

large company. Then there was a lot of support with finding jobs on campus – which helped with the finances too!

4) *What advice or reassurance would you have for current students coming from an atypical background or facing additional challenges compared to many other students?*

Make the most of the opportunities and the services available – it's about not being afraid. I felt anxious about doing a maths module because I knew that I'd be surrounded by super-bright people, but I did the module anyway. I ended up with a first class degree! I was worried that I had no contacts in London, but this turned out not to matter. Companies just want good graduates; they're not interested in which school you went to. By the end of your time at Warwick, it's a level playing field for all graduates. So don't feel that your background somehow makes you second class – graft and work hard, take advantage of any opportunity to broaden your horizons such as internships and schemes and involvement in societies. You will get a good degree, *and there will be companies desperate to employ you at the end of it!*