Work Placement Report

Festival Management Internship with West Cork Music

June + July 2018

By Lia Kate Curtin S3404471

University of Groningen, Department of English Language and Culture
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Workplace Supervisor: Francis Humphrys

MA Literary Studies

Track: Writing, Editing and Mediating

University of Groningen, Department of English Language and Culture
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Introduction

Between the 4\textsuperscript{th} of June 2018 and the 20\textsuperscript{th} of July 2018, I completed an internship with West Cork Music in County Cork, Ireland. This seven-week period covered two major cultural festivals – the West Cork Chamber Music Festival (29\textsuperscript{th} June to 8\textsuperscript{th} July) and the West Cork Literary Festival (13\textsuperscript{th} July to 20\textsuperscript{th} July) as well as several weeks of preparatory work. I have always aspired to work in publishing or in cultural event management but have never had the opportunity to experience those industries from an insider’s perspective, or indeed to meet people who work in those industries.

When researching internship or work placement opportunities, I focused mainly on Ireland and the UK. Having spent the academic year in Groningen, I wanted to explore opportunities closer to my home in Ireland where I could spend more time with family and friends after a year abroad, and I also felt that the lack of a language barrier would be beneficial. I experienced several issues with this plan. Firstly, the publishing industry in Ireland is quite small and insular. Internship opportunities are often rare as the publishing companies are usually smaller so require less staff and don’t have the need for interns. Larger companies are more likely to hire interns or have work experience positions, but they are largely based in London or in other UK cities. This created a second problem as many of the advertised positions in the UK were unpaid or offered to cover only travel expenses, and it was not financially feasible for me to live and work in the UK without an income. Nonetheless, I sent out applications and had several Skype interviews but publishing internships are highly competitive and I did not have enough experience.

I began to investigate cultural festivals in Ireland as a potential route. I regularly attend cultural events and festivals, often travelling specifically to see them, and I often volunteer at cultural events such as concerts or art exhibitions. My home city of Cork in the south of Ireland hosts numerous world-famous festivals and events, such as the Cork Midsummer Festival, the Guinness Cork Jazz Festival, Cork Film Festival, Live at St Luke’s and more. I was intrigued to learn how they are developed and managed.
When researching these local festivals, I found an advertisement for a “festival management internship” with the West Cork Literary Festival. I applied and received a call the next day. We organised an in-person interview for the 5th of April as I would be visiting Cork that week. I met with Francis Humphrys (CEO of West Cork Music and West Cork Chamber Music Festival Artistic Director) and Clodagh Whelan (Project Manager) to discuss their expectations for an intern, as well as the University of Groningen’s requirements for work placements. I was offered the job immediately and a starting date was set which worked for everyone.
West Cork Music is a festival management and cultural development company located in Bantry – the largest town in West Cork, Ireland. Established in 1995 as a small voluntary organisation, the company has grown to require 12 fulltime staff, over 20 seasonal staff, and dozens of volunteers. The company organises and manages three annual festivals which attract visitors from around the world and bring more than €3 million in revenue to the Bantry area each summer. The annual festivals are, in chronological order, promote the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, the West Cork Literary Festival, and Masters of Tradition. The company also organises several smaller concerts and events across the year. As well as festivals, the company is involved in cultural development through Tuning-Up and Read-On, programmes in partnership with Cork County Council which bring musical and literary events to 50 schools throughout rural Cork.

I worked with West Cork Music on both the West Cork Chamber Music Festival and the West Cork Literary Festival.

The West Cork Chamber Music Festival began in 1995 and has become one of the leading international chamber music events, boasting a ten-day programme and over one hundred and fifty events. From morning “coffee concerts” to nightly “late great shows”, every day is filled with concerts, talks, masterclasses, and workshops. The program aims to share both obscure and well-known musicians, older and contemporary pieces, and unexpected combinations. The festival engages the entire town of Bantry as concerts are held in local cafes, hotels, schools, and Bantry House.

The West Cork Literary Festival originated in 2000 as a series of poetry readings which ran alongside the Chamber Music Festival and it has grown into a week-long celebration of all types of reading and writing. With a large focus on Irish writing and developing new talent, the programme includes talks with journalists and editors, readings from recently published authors, competitions and open mic evenings. The festival also offers consultations with editors and poetry critics, as well as workshops for children and teenagers. Each event is followed by a Q and A session and book signing, facilitated by the local independent bookshop.
The Student’s Position and Description of Tasks

The festival advertises this position each year. I was fortunate that the 2017 intern, Mary Ellen Nagle, was still employed by the company as she proved to be an invaluable guide and source of information. As Bantry is a ninety-minute drive from my home in Cork city, the company provided me with accommodation with a local family in Bantry which made my commute significantly easier and meant I was fully immersed in Bantry life.

In the period before the festivals, I worked in office in Coomkeen (20 minutes outside of Bantry) with Francis Humphrys (my supervisor) and Mary-Ellen. Our hours were 9AM to 5PM, Monday to Friday. During the festivals, I worked in the West Cork Music office in Bantry town centre.

My hours during the festival were very changeable and dependant on what events I was scheduled to cover. I usually began before 9AM as our earliest events started at 10AM. Events ran as late as 1AM, but the company was very fair and understanding towards not over-burdening their staff with late nights or long hours.

The internship position was very flexible and did not have a set timetable or list of tasks to be completed. I made myself available to all members of staff, as I wanted to learn as much as possible from the experience. I was determined to adopt as many extra responsibilities or tasks as I could. The work I did was hugely varied and often required balancing multiple projects at a time or switching rapidly between different types of task. For the sake of clarity, I have presented the tasks which I undertook in a bullet-proof format. Please note that this is not a complete list of the work I completed, only the most pertinent tasks.

Writing Programmes and Lyric Booklets

- I proofread the Chamber Music Festival programme written by Francis Humphrys and made suggestions for changes to the final draft. I quickly fixed any remaining spelling or formatting errors before it went to print.
- I created programmes for a variety of events (mostly larger concerts with 200+ attendees). I sourced event information from the festival booklet, as well as locating artist biographies from their websites.
or from previous years’ documents. I designed a programme template in Word which could be easily altered for each individual event by inputting the relevant text. This allowed me to be more efficient with my time, as well as developing a neat and uniform look across all event materials. Sought advice and images from Sara O’Donovan (Marketing and Literary Manager) to make them more professional looking.

- I altered my programme template to create lyric booklets for the events which needed them. I sourced the lyrics from previous years’ documents, CD booklets, online research etc. In some cases, we were delayed as obscure songs meant we could not locate the lyrics and had to wait for the artists or composers to send them on, so I had to carefully track the progress of each booklet.

- I worked with Mary-Ellen on a transliteration of Russian lyrics, as well as typing out Italian lyrics. These foreign lyrics had to be placed in columns alongside an English translation and the lines had to match. This provided an interesting challenge from a design view, particularly when the font size and page breaks had to be carefully considered.

- When issues occurred, I made the relevant changes to the documents and communicated with the printers to ensure the correct version was printed. When changes to artists or songs occurred too late to achieve this, I printed the extra notes provided by Francis and ensured they were brought to the venues with instructions to distribute them on the right date.

**Festival Schedules**

- I worked with Mary-Ellen to compare the master schedule to 50+ individual artist schedules, calling out each event and practice and their details and trying to find and rectify any discrepancies.

- I used Mary-Ellen’s example to create schedules for masterclass quartets. When artists requested extra practices, I consulted multiple schedules to find a time and place which worked for everyone and kept them updated on any changes.

**Travel/Expenses**
I organised the travel and expenses folder and updated an Excel sheet of flight information and travel dates. I added up all travel expenses and converted them to Euro where necessary. I rewrote this information clearly in itemised lists for Grace O’Mahony (Finance and Box Office Manager).

I was given responsibility for organising local transport between venues for artists with large instruments. Made a spreadsheet of potential calls by identifying artists with large instruments or those who had no time to travel between venues. My phone number was distributed to the artists and authors, although I never received any calls.

Advertising and Social Media

Muriel Lamb (Office Administrator) taught me how to use Publisher software to create flyers. I made flyers for each day of both festivals which showed highlighted events and basic information, while using publicity images from Sara to make them attractive and banners for each festival to make them uniform. I distributed the flyers early each morning to local stores and cafes where they could be seen by passers-by and help to improve last minute ticket sales.

I used the company YouTube page to make playlists of this year’s artists and authors. I put these playlists on the general page as well as on each individual festival’s page. I was also shown how to update the company Pinterest pages if needed. I ran the company Instagram page where I took and edited photos, responded to comments and tried to engage with our followers.

Administrative Work

I began answering phones and taking messages voluntarily. I was not trained to book tickets, so I ensured that I took customer details and arranged call-backs with someone who could. Assisted customers in the office where possible by answering questions, giving directions, or handing out tickets that they pre-booked.

Stamped and addressed 200+ invitations for the festivals’ opening events. Also did the same when posting Masters of Tradition programmes, and whenever other items needed to be sent out. I transported the post to the post-office and divided them into local and international post.
• I ran the box-office for several events, taking responsibility for handling money and ticket sales, distributing pre-booked tickets, and directing attendees to their seats.

• I was solely responsible for audience research during the Literary Festival. This involved distributing and supervising over 200 surveys and querying audience members.

**During the Chamber Music Festival**

• **Halcyon Quartet:** I took responsibility for this quartet during their stay. I was the point of contact for any issues between the house owner or the group, as well as resolving issues about Wi-Fi or rubbish collection. I made sure they received an updated schedule. I organised their departure and received a message of thanks from the group.

• I printed and bound sheet music when requested by musicians. I did the same for RTE (Irish national broadcaster) when they needed speeches or other work printed before a broadcast.

• I gathered music after a large collaborative performance and communicated with Boosey and Hawkes (music rental company) to organise posting them back. Organised UPS collection and packaged them for postage.

**During the Literary Festival**

• I was solely responsible for supervising the Editor-in Residence consultations with Niamh Mulvey of Quercus (London-based commercial fiction publisher). This included registering arrivals and helping her with anything she needed. It also provided me with the chance to develop a relationship with a commercial editor. She proved to be an invaluable source of information about publishing and career development, and I made sure to ask a lot of questions. I repeated this process with Sarah Davis-Goff of Tramp Press (Irish independent publisher) and Sarah Byrne of the Well Review (Irish literary journal). These sessions were invaluable as they allowed me to develop connections across the Irish literary community and learn what early-career opportunities exist.
Evaluation of the Placement

What aspects of your course have been useful for the placement?

Writing clearly and effectively was central to both my BA and MA degrees. “WEM 1: Modern Language and Mediation” was a particularly useful module because of its focus on adapting information to new audiences and sharing information in a succinct and thoughtful manner. This was essential when creating lyric booklets and programmes as I had to filter a large amount of technical information down to a basic text which would be accessible to all audience members. It was also helpful when designing posters and flyers or when working on social media as I often had limited space with which to share essential information or try to attract new audiences. Deadline management is an essential part of the MA and festival management, as both require balancing multiple projects and multiple deadlines at the same time. This proved especially important during the festivals as we had multiple events in a day and I had to manage my own time effectively without relying on the guidance of others.

What new knowledge and skills you have acquired?

I developed numerous skills over the course of the internship. With writing, social media, and administrative duties I could implement the skills I already had and develop them within a professional context. I also had the opportunity to work with new programmes, like Publisher and Excel, which are essential in any office-based position and which I previously had not encountered. Most importantly, however, I developed essential communication and interpersonal skills. Through the festivals I had to work effectively with different team members, as well as numerous volunteers, so I had to become an excellent communicator as we were often under pressure to meet deadlines or collaborate on difficult projects. I also needed to communicate with members of the public to provide them with essential information, but also to gather surveys and solve any conflicts which arose in the box office.

To what extent did you reach your learning outcomes?

My primary goal was to develop on the skills that I already held, and to learn how these skills could be applied within a professional context. This included developing the organisation and communication
skills required when organising large scale events, which I did daily. I aimed to improve on my existing writing skills with a more focused approach, learning about PR and marketing within a hands-on role. This was achieved through my large variety of documents which I wrote and items which I designed for the festival, as well as my consistent engagement with social media. I actively engaged with all writing tasks I was assigned, and I made sure to request additional marketing-related tasks from the marketing manager.

**How did this placement help to sharpen your career goals?**

The Literary Festival attracted authors, editors, and publishers from all areas of the Irish and UK publishing industry. By networking with these people, I gained an insider view into the publishing industry in Ireland and could develop valuable contacts. As I was responsible for supervising editor consultations, I could develop a relationship with people within the industry which could prove invaluable when applying for jobs. By speaking informally with these people, I gained a better understanding of the different roles within the publishing industry and the potential career progression routes I could pursue. This was helpful for me, as I had previously struggled when applying for entry level jobs as I was unsure about the different business areas and how I should structure my career progression.
Conclusion

The internship with West Cork Music was invaluable for both my personal and professional development.

Over the course of two months, I developed my own abilities and learned new skills which I will bring to all future positions. It provided a fascinating insight into the workload and organisation behind the festivals and cultural events which I had previously only experienced as an audience member, giving me a better appreciation for the dedication of the people involved in the Irish cultural environment. The flexibility and open-ended nature of the internship was beneficial as it allowed me to take the initiative to take on new tasks or start new projects, so I could explore my areas of interest or focus on weaker areas that I wanted to develop. It also made me extremely open to helping other team members which helped me to build stronger working relationships and learn about different areas. The professional contacts which I developed through this internship will be essential in my future careers and have emboldened my decision to work in publishing.