What made you apply to Royal Holloway?
I applied to a couple of London universities including LSE, Kings, Queen Mary and Royal Holloway for business courses. I got accepted to all but one of my choices, but the minute I visited Royal Holloway on an Open Day, I just fell in love with the place. It was a sunny day, Founders was gleaming, I really liked the campus and, as well as the course and reputation being really high, Royal Holloway is also the number one sporting university in London. You have the best of both worlds: a London university that’s based on a campus in the countryside but within 40 minutes you are in central London.

What attracted you to study Management?
When I visited on the Open Day, I attended the Management induction talk, which gives you information about the structure of the three year degree and the modules you can take. Straight away I could tell by the students that it was a really international environment, which is great because you get to experience a variety of different cultures, to learn from other people, and that’s a really important skill in life. I chose single honours Management because I didn’t quite know what I wanted to do at that point. I was able to pick and choose modules from the different areas, and I could see how every module I took would help me in my future career.

What were your favourite modules?
The Advertising and Promotions module was assessed through an advertising video that we had to make from scratch. The Consumer Behaviour module gives you a real insight into the marketing world from the consumer’s perspective. By the end of the Accounting modules, producing a balance sheet or a profit and loss statement was second nature. The balance between theory and practical was one of the biggest attractions of the degree. Every year there was a piece of core theory, coupled with something practical like a group led presentation. Every interview I went to I was able to draw on my experiences of delivering presentations, and interview panels love hearing about it because it’s all about how you manage people and balance the competing personalities within that group.

Were you part of any clubs or societies?
First year is about bringing everyone up to the same level, so that left me with quite a lot of free time outside of studying. I joined the Management Society and was elected to President in my first year. I added the element of internships to the society, and focused on bringing in speakers from new business start-ups, as well as arranging tours to companies such as Bloomberg and the BBC. We also held CV and interview technique workshops with the Careers Service to provide targeted guidance for Management students. The whole purpose of the society was really to give people the opportunity to better themselves in terms of exposure to the business world. I was able to build up my own network of contacts, develop my leadership skills and manage various projects; that was the number one experience for me and really helped me when I was going for interviews.

I was also part of SIFE, which had only just started up in my first year, and became a team leader in my second year. On the clubs side, I am a massive sports fan and was part of the Football club for three years, of which two were as a captain and coach. Doing extracurricular activities really keeps you on your toes; the last thing I wanted to do was go to university and lounge about for three years! Most of my friends were on my course and in the societies; so wherever you went on campus you would know someone. In my final year I passed on responsibility for the Management and SIFE societies as the academic workload increased with the dissertation, but getting involved doesn’t have to impact on your studies: you can get a balance.
How have these experiences helped you in the current job market?
Everyone has a degree now, so you need to have something else that sets you apart and makes you unique. I used examples of the core skills I had developed on the course, but was able to draw on many others that I’d gained from running the societies and captaining the football team. I also completed two internships over the summers of my first and second years. The first at HSBC was focused on the retail banking sector, whilst the second at Deloitte was in International Assignment Tax and Value Added Tax. This definitely put me in a good position when I started applying for jobs.

How did you come to be working at L’Oreal?
I applied to a variety of organisations, but the minute I came for the first interview at L’Oreal I was sold on it! It’s a glamorous place to work, with great ambassadors and brands, but the main draw is the youth within the company. If you look at the senior level managers, they have come from the graduate schemes and are some of the youngest directors in the industry.

For me, the most important thing is to be able to progress rapidly, and the one year graduate scheme means that you get great exposure to the different divisions, but are given real responsibility just a year after starting. I started in Category Management in the Irish market, working with the consumer brands L’Oreal Paris, Garnier and Maybelline to determine their positioning and placement in stores. Then I worked with the luxury alternative brands like Kiehl’s, shu uemura and Biotherm in the Sales division, where you manage accounts on a store by store basis. I finished the scheme in the Marketing division, looking at new product development and launches within Ambre Solaire and Garnier Minerals female deodorants.

Now I am a National Account Executive, managing the Boots account for L’Oreal Paris, specifically working on the hairstyling range. It’s like managing your own business: you are responsible for the success or failure of those brands. I manage everything from designing the promotions to setting the profit margins. It’s incredible to have such responsibility at such a young age, and the skills that I am developing are 100% transferable no matter what division I might choose to go into in the future.

Where do you see yourself in five years time?
I want to progress as quickly as possible and I think the opportunities will arise at L’Oreal. To see people so young at the top of the organisation is a massive inspiration, and that’s part of the culture at L’Oreal. You are given the opportunity to progress quickly; there’s no set structure so getting promoted is totally dependent on how well you do your job. I don’t see any reason to move anytime soon.

What is your top tip for current students?
As an undergraduate your focus is on your studies but, in order to compete, you need to have something extra. Whether you get experience through running a society, playing a sport, being a year representative: you will be able to interview confidently knowing that you have a good degree and something extra on top.

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