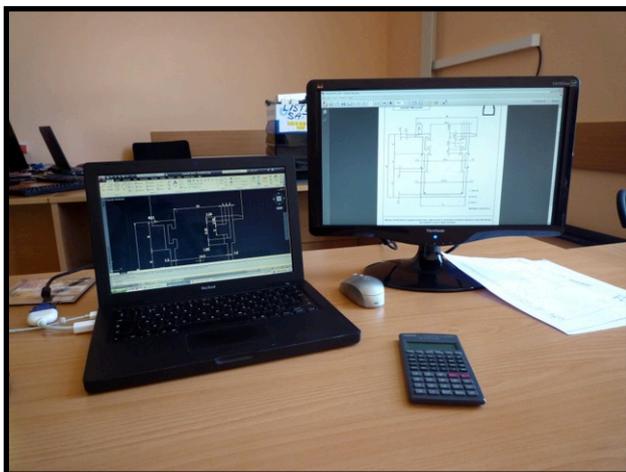


Summer Placement in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This summer I had the opportunity to embark on a 4 week placement in the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I secured the placement through an organisation called IAESTE. The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience, or IAESTE is a student exchange program which operates in over 80 countries world wide. It allows students to gain technical experience in their chosen subject in a foreign country with a local support network of IAESTE representatives. The placement was to work for an aluminium extrusion company known as Presal Extrusion, which operates in a small town called Široki Brijeg, near the historic city of Mostar. The company has 80 employees and is located on a single site which includes design and administrative offices, and a full production and packaging line.



The main duties of my placement were to work alongside the other engineers in the design office to produce designs for aluminium profiles. This involved using Solid Works and AutoCAD drawing packages to draw two dimensional profiles. I was then introduced to the process of designing the moulds, which are known as dies used in the production of the profiles. Although the finished profiles are based on a 2 dimensional design the dies must be designed in multiple stage three dimensional sections. This is to achieve the correct flow of aluminium through the die to produce the complex hollows and fine tolerances needed.



The other main part of experience was to learn about the extrusion process through observing the operators and technicians on the main production floor. The entire process from extrusion to packaging is

automated with minimal interaction from operators when changing the dies. Gaining experience in such a process was extremely valuable for me, as I was able to apply my theoretical knowledge of heat exchangers, pressure vessels and manufacturing processes taught at University to a real process, which is very desirable to graduate employers.



During the evenings I was able to meet up with other students on placement in Mostar over a beer or a meal. As well as myself, there were students from England, Hungary, Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey, Germany and the Czech Republic. It was fascinating listening to their own experiences of studying in their countries, and the placements they were on. I was also able to experience other areas of the country during the weekends. The local IAESTE committee organised trips to some of the nearby cities and areas of interest, including visits to Banja Luka, Sarajevo, the historic town of Jajce and the Croatian coast. These weekends also gave me great chance to meet up with other students on placement in the wider area and share experiences.

In addition to the industrial experience gained, the placement gave me the valuable experience of living and working abroad. Travelling to an area of Europe I hadn't visited before, and going somewhere on my own, where I didn't know anyone, gave me a feeling of independence and flexibility I had never experienced before. Becoming immersed in the culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina was also at times a challenge. One particular aspect of the culture is that politeness (or more accurately 'British' politeness) is often considered as an undesirable trait. Because this I had to become accustomed to not waiting to be offered things such as food, and having to interrupt people if I wanted to be heard! I also had to become more used to their more 'relaxed' work style, and was told on some occasions that I was working too hard! These experiences along with many others greatly advanced my communication and initiative skills and gave me a great perspective of working practices compared to those in the UK. During my time it became apparent that along with Presal Extrusion, companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina are very keen to cast off their country's war torn image and appear as a legitimate contributor in the European Economic Community. Presal as a company was undergoing major changes during my placement in order to better comply with EU regulations.

Overall I found my experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina extremely rewarding, both in terms of technical experience and developing interpersonal skills. The opportunity of networking with other students from around the world has also resulted in many lasting friendships with people I would never normally have had the opportunity to meet. Without a scholarship it would have been very difficult for me to pay for travel expenses on top of financing my final year at university, and I am therefore extremely grateful to the members of the Hammermen of Edinburgh who generously provided full financing for my placement. My experience has set me apart from other students as I apply for graduate schemes in engineering companies back in Scotland.

