

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS CASE STUDY:

Jake Sharp | Skanska Technology Ltd UK



About Me:

I studied game design at university, which included game engines, programming, texture, animation, and modelling, and worked in IT support for about a year before hearing about the KTP.

SKANSKA

Project duration: 24 Months

End date: 10/01/2018

How did you initially hear about the opportunity of becoming a KTP Associate?

Someone I know saw the opportunity advertised who then sent me the link.

Please could you give a short description of the project from your perspective?

The project here is to implement immersive technologies into the company in a way that saves money and increases efficiencies. That's the project at its most basic, and we've now been able to progress the project in the virtual reality route as its main focus.

How did you find the support once the partnership began?

The support is great. The team in the Knowledge Transfer Centre at University of Reading are always extremely helpful, and Skanska have been great in getting me the resources, help or training I need.

How has the triangular relationship between the business, the University, and yourself resulted in being a key factor in your development?

This is the second KTP at Skanska so they already have an excellent understanding of the KTP setup, and it's been good because it's not just about me helping Skanska or me helping Reading, it's about all of us working together. We have our LMCs every four months to keep everyone up to date as to what is going on and falling within the outlines of the project. The triangular relationship is great because everyone knows each other and there's a very real element of "we're all in this together".

What impact have you seen so far on the company as a direct result of your role as the KTP Associate?

My project is going really well; Skanska is taking Virtual Reality on board very quickly and I've had people say to me that this is literally changing the company already, which is quite amazing. We had presentations this week to SET (the senior executive team of Skanska Global) who came over here from Sweden to see how we're doing. I showed them the VR and the simulation module that I've made, and they were ecstatic about it. It already feels like what I'm doing here is making a huge difference.

Are there any other factors which have aided your successful undertaking of this Associate position?

I'd definitely say the support I've been given from Reading and Skanska has been hugely helpful. My supervisor has been really helpful in organisation and management, and has been helping me with modelling and content whilst providing me with everything I need or pointing me in the right direction. Aside my own hard work, it's really thanks to the help I've been given and the people around me that have allowed this project take off so quickly.

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What do you see as being the key successes to the project?

The Virtual Reality system; the Vive, is really selling itself. Anyone that uses it is enraptured and wants to use it more. If the technology hadn't already been so "cool", it certainly wouldn't have taken off so fast. Additionally, once people use the Vive they can really see the scope it can be used for in enterprise. We currently have training in how it can be used in visualisation and risk assessment and anything else virtual reality can be utilised in, so that scope and increased popularity has really been key.

You have been given £2k each year to spend on your own personal career development; how have you utilised this so far and do you have any further plans on how this can benefit you?

I've had regular online training via a site owned by Pluralsight, which is all about modelling, animation, texting, coding; pretty much anything you'd want to do creative wise on a computer. This has been really helpful as you can actually contact the lecturers themselves. Also I went to the VR LA convention in Los Angeles which focuses on where the technology is going. That was hugely useful as I met a lot of relevant people who I could talk to such as the Head of Business Relations at HP, employees at MSI, and lots of other interesting people. It's important to create a network of contacts relevant to your field so this was an ideal opportunity to do so. I do have plans to spend the rest of it on courses that Reading offer.

Please could you describe the other benefits of becoming an Associate?

It's a phenomenal way of starting at a higher level within the business, and the work you're doing is accepted by everyone. People at Skanska don't see me as "that guy from the university", they see me as "Jake doing Virtual Reality", which is great. It's as though becoming a KTP Associate is a leg-up.

How do you think being employed under the partnership would differ from a standard post-graduate employment?

The company know you're there to fulfil a defined project; you're there to accomplish your own objectives as well as the University's, which gives you a lot more freedom. I can get on with and showcase my work with the trust from Skanska to do so appropriately. I could go demo my VR somewhere offsite, which I did a few weeks ago in Wales for example, and Skanska are happy for me to do that and supportive of my decisions. I'm in complete control of the project which isn't something you'd get from standard post-graduate employment.

Have you faced any challenges as an Associate so far? And if so what have you, the company, or the University done to help you overcome these to ensure continued success within the KTP project?

Everyone has been really helpful in keeping any challenges to a minimum. The only challenges I would say there are for me personally are technology blockers. Convincing people that the tech is the right thing to get, especially when they don't understand it fully can sometimes be very difficult. But as long as you're willing to explain what you need in a clear and non-condescending way then people are generally more than happy to help.

You have had to work hard to develop an internal network in order to get buy in and support for your work. With that in mind, how has it been working in such a large organisation on a strategic project?

It's been really good; the size of the company does play a big part. It's an established business, so convincing people this is the right way to do things or certain things are the right thing to buy and spend their budgets on can often present a challenge. Building up a network of people who understand the technology is really important. The positive is that this has started to happen; I get emails from different departments now saying they saw the work I've done and can I help them with a project or an animation. The fact that these kind of emails are now coming in from around the business is really great, but without that network then people either wouldn't know about what I'm doing or simply wouldn't want to take the risk. For this to be successful, it needs to be accepted

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around the company, but the way we're working on collaborative data environments I'm confident that's going to happen.

Working in Skanska means you're working with some pretty cutting edge technology. Can you please tell me about the challenges and opportunities revolving around that?

New technology always has its pros and cons; it's always fun and interesting, and because it is cutting edge we're using some of the most advanced technology around. Saying that, there are issues when tech is new as there's less documentation about it and there are less people developing it, so if I want to resolve an issue I have to figure it out myself. There are also the general software issues that everyone in development will encounter, but they are always going to be around with new technology. It is primarily the documentation, but it is exciting being one of those people who gets to help create that documentation for others.

Would you recommend KTP to other graduates? If so, why?

Yes! I would definitely recommend it, and have already done so to my friends. I think it's important to have an area that you know you want to work in, but to me this is the best job I could have hoped for in terms of what I get to do and the freedom I have. I have met other associates at conferences who have all said the same.

And finally, what one piece of advice would you give to a graduate considering KTP?

My biggest piece of advice is to not underestimate how far being friendly and polite can get you in business. People are always more likely to go to or help someone approachable. Even if your expertise is limited, be welcoming and pleasant, and things will work out!