

Software Testing Case Study



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
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Invest
Northern
Ireland

Software Testers Academy Champions:

Name: Peter John McIvor
Position: Senior Verification Engineer

Company: Liberty IT
Sector: Financial Services

Employees: 310 locally & 44,000 globally
Website: www.liberty-it.co.uk

My 'Pathway' into Testing

It is clear from speaking with Peter that he is passionate about what he does. Computers have always interested him, forming the basis of his studies. Peter successfully achieved 11 GCSEs and four A-Levels (Mathematics, Computers and Additional Maths), before studying a joint Computers and Maths degree at Queen's University, Belfast.

Peter's degree course included an industrial placement year. Following a visit to the Queen's career fair, Peter applied for, and was successful in gaining a year-long work placement with Liberty Information Technology (Liberty IT).

"My placement year with Liberty IT was a great all round experience. I'll be honest with you, one of the main reasons that I opted for Liberty IT over other placements was because it was an American based company. I was sure that there would be an opportunity to travel to the States and as I'd never been there before I thought it was too good an experience to turn down.

"My first six weeks were spent in training. I had to learn and understand a variety of computer languages including SQL and Java, as well as getting to know the business and the role I was expected to carry out. My training finished with a series of exams - which I thankfully passed with flying colours, before I was assigned to the verification team."



Viewed in the same light as a graduate employee, Peter's placement with the verification team proved to be a career defining moment.

"My team lead was fantastic. It wasn't the case that I was there to make up the numbers - in fact quite the opposite. Yes, you could say that I was thrown it at the deep end, but I was given all the support I needed and I was actively encouraged to contribute. Looking back it was definitely a steep learning curve, but it was also one that I wouldn't change."

During Peter's placement he had the opportunity to work on two long term projects. Both were financial based and certainly helped to advance Peter's skills and knowledge within a test environment.

Peter's placement year was time well spent as upon returning to Queen's he was invited to attend an interview at Liberty IT with a view to gaining full time employment. The interview was a success and Peter was offered a graduate test position with the company on the condition that he obtained his degree.

"I was delighted to receive the offer and it certainly allowed me to focus on the remainder of my studies. I knew I was lucky to have a firm job offer on the table going into my final year - not all students get this type of security following their placement year."

“Liberty-IT has been fantastic to work for. I have been given plenty of career development opportunities and while I’ve had to work hard for each promotion, I have also received a huge amount of support, encouragement and training along the way.”

Peter John McIvor

My Liberty IT Career

Peter started his career with Liberty IT in July 2000 following his studies and much to his delight was reassigned to the verification team. “I was really pleased to join the team again, not least because I felt as if I had an understanding of the dynamic and what was required of me. I spent time getting up to speed on the new developments and tools that the guys had been using, but after that it was all systems go” explains Peter.

Peter has climbed the career ladder at a rapid rate, and now holds the position of Senior Verification Engineer. “Liberty IT has been fantastic to work for. I have been given plenty of career development opportunities and while I’ve had to work hard for each promotion, I have also received a huge amount of support, encouragement and training along the way – in fact I’ve never had a training request turned down.”

The world of testing has experienced a great deal of change in recent years and this is something that is being reflected at Liberty IT as Peter explains, “For many years those that opted for a career in computing were viewed as ‘geeks’ and testers were seen as ‘geeks’ that weren’t very good at computing. Thankfully times have changed and I certainly believe that the industry now views software testing as a key discipline within the software development life-cycle.

“In fact at Liberty IT software testers and developers are on a par when it comes to career development. The introduction of a new Principal Verification Engineer is proof of this and matches the opportunities on both sides of the career ladder.

“Gone are the days of software testers and developers sitting at opposite ends of the office. New agile methods of working have created a need - driven by the client in many respects - for the two disciplines to work hand-in-hand in order to deliver a client solution.”

My Typical Day

Peter’s day is varied and his position means that he must also manage a team of test engineers on a range of different projects. “No one day is the same which is great as it keeps me on my toes! Essentially my team produces automation frameworks to allow our business analysts to perform tests on their solutions. We ensure this is kept up-to-date, robust and look at how the framework can be enhanced. Most of these are based on Internet Explorer, but with people using a variety of browsers, we are currently developing a cross browser framework to allow for greater flexibility across the company.”

Software Tester Academy

For Peter the creation of the Academy is very much a step in the right direction. “In the Verification Team we focus on technical testing activities (test automation and performance testing) and finding people with the right training can be hard. The pool of qualified (automated) testers in Northern Ireland is relatively small, so having the Academy in place will certainly help with the recruitment process. Yes, we’ll need to supplement their training, but taking students on that have an understanding of the profession will certainly make things a lot easier.”

So what makes a good tester? Well for Peter it’s about having a questioning nature and ensuring the solution cannot be broken. “Testers need to look outside of the box and question the solution, but not to undermine a colleague, rather to ensure the solution works and works first time. It’s a great career choice, one that offers a wealth of options and a fantastic sense of achievement.”

