



## Student Case Study, Katie Swift – Gleneagles Hotel

“My placement made me feel like I belonged there and has altered my professional mindset and career goals.”

**Katie Swift– BA (Hons) International Hospitality  
Management with Festival & Event**

### Please tell us a bit about yourself.

Originally from Luton, I adore living in Edinburgh and can't see myself leaving anytime soon. I love meeting people from all walks of life, which is one of the reasons I work in hospitality. I am an enthusiastic and optimistic problem solver with a passion for delivering seamless service. Since my late diagnosis of dyslexia last year, I have started to learn more about myself and how my neurodivergent brain ticks. Outside of my work and studies, I thoroughly enjoy creative arts such as theatre, singing and dancing.

### Can you tell us about the placement opportunity you were involved in?

I undertook a six-month placement at the Gleneagles Hotel with the Private Dining team whose responsibilities covered all functions and events. I initially applied for the interview experience, not thinking I would even get offered the job. When I was offered the placement opportunity, I initially had impostor syndrome, and it was a huge step for me to commit to leaving my friends in Edinburgh to move into the staff accommodation on the hotel grounds for a job where I had limited knowledge on what my role would fully involve, but I eventually decided to take the risk and leap straight into this new experience. I can confidently say it was one of the best decisions I have made.

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### What did the role entail?

I worked the operational side of events alongside the head waiters and management team. It is difficult to describe an average day because working in events is so unpredictable. I would follow a new banquet event order (BEO) every day which outlined every detail including setup, duration and running order. My setup duties usually included moving tables and chairs, collecting the correct linen and setting up “mise en place” (MEP); this could be polished cutlery, glassware, cruets, candlesticks, books, cups, and anything else outlined on the BEO. Then I would fulfil my duties as a server for the event, greeting guests with champagne, breaking napkins, pouring water and wine, serving all courses in team service and offering tea or coffee with appetisers. This would be the average duties for a private dinner, which could be anywhere from four to two hundred and fifty people. Then I would close the event and reset the space along with any other rooms in the hotel for the next day's events. I enjoyed working throughout the whole hotel venues and estate. Although this demands much more work than a restaurant, which resets the same way every evening, it ensured my placement was interesting with room for a personal touch in each setup. From lodge buffets to private picnics off site for the owner's family, I was always on the move.

### What key skills did you learn?

Team service is essential to luxury private dining. It is almost like choreography. Team service is commonly used for large groups to ensure swift and smooth service. Everyone must know which position they are in and must correctly place plates in a cohesive manner. This is tricky at first, but with practice it gets easier and looks impressive to guests. Leadership is another; I was often put in charge of leading staff from different departments who also helped with private dining. This involved showing staff where items are stored to how we set our tables and serve our guests. I took the lead during team service after my first two months which involved standing at the front and rehearsing.



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“Working with individuals who are ambitious, proud of their place of work, and have a passion for hospitality is inspiring.”

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### What were your highlights and key successes of your time on placement?

The Dior Fashion Show welcome evening was a surreal experience which made me feel like a valued team member at Gleneagles. We transformed the Strathearn Restaurant by changing all the furniture and redesigned the room to perfectly fit Dior’s vision. It was an evening of champagne, canapes and caviar. The room was filled with supermodels, actors, singers, designers and, of course, exceptional dress sense. Dior even requested we used their own glassware, crockery and aprons boasting the Dior logo. Operationally, the evening was relatively simple as there was no food service other than canapes floating around. I was on trayed champagne service and was completely dazed by the whole experience. I was positioned on the door as soon as guests walked in to greet them with a smile and a glass. I remember my manager telling me to slow down at one point and just take it all in.

### Did you face any challenges?

I was placed into different departments during the low seasons for events. I really enjoyed this, particularly room service which was a lot of fun. However, this hindered my knowledge of event operations at the start as I simply wasn’t working many events. This quickly changed towards the summer, when I started to find my feet rapidly.

### How do you feel your studies at Edinburgh Napier University prepared you for this placement?

My third-year modules prepared me the most for my placement, as they had more practical value. Management of MICE events, and Hospitality Supervision and Training Skills were exceptional modules that I would recommend choosing before a working placement. When I was a team leader, I heavily utilised the skills taught in the supervision module.

### Do you think your experience(s) from the placement affected your future career plans?

My experience was highly valuable, and I learned a lot about fine dining which I didn’t know before. However, I decided that becoming a head waiter and going down the path laid out at Gleneagles maybe isn’t for me. The Gleneagles way is very fixed and therefore effective, but I wish there was more room for creative freedom. I enjoy set up designs and would love to have more of a say in how I can design rooms and express my own creativity rather than being told exactly how to lay out everything.

### Do you think your experience(s) from the placement affected your future career plans?

Yes. Although I have worked part-time alongside my studies, working full time in an environment like Gleneagles was truly incomparable to a regular part time job. My advice would be to try something outside of your comfort zone. This may be your only chance to try something new or in a different location. It is only six months which will fly by. Truly immerse yourself in the experience and you will learn the most and enjoy yourself too.

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