

Case Study

Executive Assistant Helps Secure Partnership, Prevents Displacement of 96 Employees



Results



Helped secure a new partnership

by properly organising data ahead of an executive business trip



Prevented a potential displacement of 96 employees

by analysing staff and visitor data



Built interactive reporting

to monitor bartering and rewards programme spend



Helen Berry

Executive Assistant at Virgin Atlantic

Helen Berry is an Executive Assistant (EA) at Virgin Atlantic, Britain's second largest carrier with routes to over 350 cities across North America, Europe and the UK. Helen works closely with Virgin Atlantic's Chief Experience Officer, helping organise travel and meetings, collating information, monitoring projects and more.

Learner profile

Job title: Executive Assistant

Job function: Administrative

Organisation: Virgin Atlantic

Industry: Aviation

Organisation Size: 8,000 employees

Programme: Level 3 Data Citizen

Programme Duration: 13 months

Seeking skills for cross-functional success

Prior to first enrolling in Cambridge Spark's Level 3 Data Citizen apprenticeship, Helen worked as a Personal Assistant (PA) within Virgin Atlantic's Networks and Pricing team. Most team members were analysts working on various projects measuring demand to optimise pricing across different ticket classes and routes. And Helen often didn't understand the analysis and insights from the team.

Part of her motivation for pursuing the apprenticeship was to more easily understand and communicate with the team.

She also considered that she may one day want to become an analyst herself and felt the apprenticeship would help prepare her for that career change.

"You can see how far you've come when, at the start, you see people open a spreadsheet and talk about formulas and you've got no idea what they're talking about. But then later in the course, you think, 'I get it, and I see how they've reached conclusions from the data'. Interpreting data comes more naturally, and you're quicker to understand what's gone into an analysis and what it means."

Helen Berry, Executive Assistant at Virgin Atlantic

Securing a new partnership

Virgin Atlantic were working on a deal to partner with a major airline in India around the time Helen started the apprenticeship in May 2022. The partnership, worth significant revenue to Virgin Atlantic, hinged on a successful launch held in India between senior executives of both companies.

The challenge for Helen, tasked with organising the trip, was to sort out all the necessary travel arrangements for the Virgin Atlantic team.

Securing different types of visas for staff with a variety of nationalities was one difficulty. Further complicating the project, she needed to prepare all the necessary documentation to meet travel requirements for Covid-19, then highly controlled.

Helen's work helped ensure the trip, and the resulting partnership, proceeded as planned. And she credits her course learnings related to data storage and organisation as key to the project's success.

Later in her apprenticeship, she would see an opportunity to use her new skills to avoid a costly overcrowding problem.

"Until I did the course, I don't think I realised how relevant data is in everything. Whereas before I thought, 'data is just zeros and ones'. The apprenticeship has really opened my eyes."

Helen Berry, Executive Assistant at Virgin Atlantic

Avoiding costly staff displacement

Helen had been sharing a floor in Virgin Atlantic's offices with the Commercial and Customer Experience and Technologies teams. Then the IT team one day moved to another floor. This freed up some space on Helen's floor, leading management to consider making that floor the site of Virgin Atlantic's "First Dates", regular meetings where large groups of new starters are inducted into the company.

Suspecting the floor didn't have the necessary space to accommodate these meetings, Helen got to work investigating the relevant data. She analysed data on employee numbers, where employees sat, number and location of visitors in the building and more.

Using the skills learnt on the course, she compiled these multiple data sets in a spreadsheet. Building tables and visualisations to clearly show her findings, she determined the floor was short of space and desks. She presented her findings to senior management.

As a result, the company found space on another floor for those meetings. Helen not only helped Virgin Atlantic avoid staff disruption and displacement. She also saved the facilities team added costs from installing equipment and furniture on one floor and then needing to move everything to the new floor—changes that would likely have happened on the weekend, which would mean overtime.

Her next project would help bring clarity and discipline to the company's bartering and rewards programmes.

"I found the practice sessions ahead of EPA incredibly useful for embedding the skills. For example, my mentor and I reviewed pivot tables, and I had the chance to try exercises and get feedback for improvement. Nothing helped solidify my knowledge of spreadsheets more than the practice sessions."

Helen Berry, Executive Assistant at Virgin Atlantic

Bringing transparency to spending

Virgin Atlantic sometimes use a barter system with suppliers, for example, exchanging flight tickets for services. Virgin Atlantic also has a rewards programme to reward internal staff.

At the time Helen joined the team that managed these, they weren't able to accurately monitor internally within the department and scrutinise the spending.

Helen applied what she'd learnt about spreadsheets to create detailed reporting to track this spending.

Using various formulas and conditional formatting, she's tailored the spreadsheets so that, for the first time, the team can easily monitor spending, preventing duplicate payments and ensuring they don't overspend or underspend against budget.

"Honestly I have gained so much. Now we've got the digital team in our remit. When they talk about data lakes and storage and some of the enhancements they want to do, I know what they're saying and I understand what they want to do."

Helen Berry, Executive Assistant at Virgin Atlantic

Embracing the digital transformation

Helen says the apprenticeship gave her the confidence to progress in her career and make the change from PA to EA.

Beyond her evolution in role, compared to when she first started the programme, she says she can now communicate about data and insights much more effectively.

In this way, Helen continues to be an active participant and a driving force in Virgin Atlantic's digital transformation.