

# INDUSTRY PLACEMENT REPORT

Dayna Keaney

B00810302

Module DES337

Tutor: Alec Parkin

Placement Company & Dates:

ALT Animation

Supervisor: Tim Bryans

July 2022 to April 2023

Main Report Word Count: 2,023

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Tim Bryans, Lee McQuade, Andrea McQuade and the rest of the talented team at ALT Animation for training and guiding me throughout the year. Thanks to Northern Ireland Screen, especially Clare Campbell, for conducting my interviews and offering me this opportunity. Thank you to my tutors for preparing me for this year, and thank you to my family and friends for their support.

## **Summary**

This report analyses my 3rd year of my BDes (Hons) Degree in Animation, where I spent 9 months of my placement year with the Belfast studio ALT Animation. This was established under the NI Screen Ulster University Undergraduate Placement Scheme, which took place in the academic year of 2022/2023.

<b>Table of contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Acknowledgements.....	2
Summary.....	2
Introduction.....	5
Main Report.....	6
Conclusion.....	17
Recommendations.....	18
Bibliography.....	19
Appendix.....	20

<b>List of Images</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Fig 1.</b> <i>Northern Ireland Screen</i> .....	7
<b>Fig 2.</b> <i>ALT Animation</i> .....	8
<b>Fig 3.</b> <i>Animating on Adobe After Effects, using plugin Duik Bassel</i> .....	10
<b>Fig 4.</b> <i>An example of the project file setup</i> .....	11
<b>Fig 5.</b> <i>Referencing the animatic video to the animation scene</i> .....	11
<b>Fig 6.</b> <i>Implementing fixes to a scene, based on feedback on Shotgrid</i> .....	12
<b>Fig 7.</b> <i>Distillery Films</i> .....	13
<b>Fig 8.</b> <i>Promotion image of Better Weather</i> .....	14
<b>Fig 9.</b> <i>Article image of Sullivan Sails</i> .....	16
<b>Fig 10.</b> <i>Me with the ALT team</i> .....	16
<b>Fig 11.</b> <i>List of each day recording my tasks and progression</i> .....	20
<b>Fig 12.</b> <i>Details of information and tasks I did on a specific day</i> .....	20

## Introduction

This academic year involves preparing, applying and fulfilling a placement role to test the animation industry. When searching for placement opportunities, I was steering towards 2D animation, as I favoured it the most, and had recent experience completing one of my modules in 2D rig animation.

I had my placement year with the Belfast-based studio ALT Animation, and worked with them for 9 months from July 2022 to April 2023. My role title was a Junior Animator, and I worked on the 2D animated series *Sullivan Sails*, the co-production between Distillery Films and ALT Animation. During my time I developed skills in 2D animation, lip sync, acting and fixes/revisions.

## Main Report

As I was working through assignments in the second year of my course, I made time to prepare my CV, showreel and portfolio in a presentable way, suitable for any applicable job role. Inside my CV I described myself and my strengths in a profile paragraph, listed my job experiences and their key tasks, and I added a list of my strongest soft and technical skills. On the side of the page, I also included links to my portfolio and showreel, my education list, and lastly the software I am most experienced in. My CV is presented in a clean and organised layout, with an illustrated headshot, and readable font.

For my portfolio page I set up an Artstation account to present my work. Artstation is effective in making posts for my projects, and displaying them in a neat format. I have included a range of my past university projects, and my personal projects on my Artstation account.

Furthermore, I edited together a showreel of my overall progress in both 2D and 3D animation, from my university projects and my personal projects. I had edited the opening sequence on After Effects, using its tools to animate the text that presented my name, email, and title of the video. Preparing these essential materials made me prepared to start my job search.

In February 2022 I started my job search, navigating through LinkedIn and studio websites for potential placement role openings, or junior role applications. However, up until May, I could not find a suitable position. Most applications asked for previous experience, relocation, and preferred 3D animation; all that I was not prepared for.

I was introduced to the NI Screen Undergraduate Placement scheme by my university tutor, Alec Parkin. The organisation offered many animation jobs, especially 2D projects in areas close to home. Some companies included Paper Owl Films, Makematic, Flickerpix, ALT Animation and more. I worked through the application process and submitted my portfolio and CV to the available jobs.

I made sure to gain general knowledge of each company before I applied by researching their social media, websites and current projects. During the application process, I altered each form specifically relating to the role and skills they were looking for. For example, I showcased a 3D-based showreel to 3D modeller roles, and a 2D-based showreel to 2D animator roles.



Fig. 1, *Northern Ireland Screen*

One of the companies included in the application was the Belfast Studio *ALT Animation*. I discovered this studio a few years ago and they seemed like an interesting team, so I was excited to see them in the list. ALT Animation is managed by Andrea McQuade, Lee McQuade and Tim Bryans.

*“Together we have over 50 years of experience in the creative industries during which we've produced dozens of hours of animated content... Making animation & motion graphics for film, tv and digital with a focus on character building and storytelling.” (ALT Animation, 2023)*

Some time after sending my applications, I was offered a couple of interviews, including one for ALT Animation. For their interview, I reviewed the job description and made sure to prepare myself to speak about my 2D animation and After Effects experience. I planned to mention key tasks I took on; character design, rig building, and keyframe animation. I also made sure to mention my soft skills; I work great in team projects and get on very well with those in my course. I manage and organise my projects efficiently so it is clear to understand my process. Also, I work well with problem solving, thinking of alternative routes when something goes wrong.

I was interviewed by Tim Bryans from ALT Animation, and Clare Campbell from NI Screen. I was quite happy with how the interview went, and had expressed my main points. I did fumble a little but Tim picked me back up by asking what my favourite show was. This sparked some confidence in me to talk about the show, and continue with my interview with a good boost. A couple weeks later, I received an offer to work for ALT animation. I immediately accepted the offer, and got started with the process.



Fig. 2, *ALT Animation*



I started my first day on July 19th 2022 as the role of a Junior Animator. Being a remote workplace, I was added into their Slack channel, their main communication space, and introduced myself. Andrea, Lee and Tim introduced me to their current co-production along with Distillery Films; *Sullivan Sails*.

Watson (2022) describes the series:

*“The show features aspiring cartographer Sullivan, who uses his atlas and imagination to create worlds he can explore. Accompanied by an imaginary talking fox and a Navy admiral named Benji, the crew casts off on quests to help solve problems affecting the many animals and people they encounter”.*

I started communicating with the animation lead for the series, Elèonore, to take on some test files of a previous episode. The team used *Adobe After Effects* for animating this project, and features of the DUIK plugin for the rigs (Fig. 3). I started by opening each project, observing the set up, and then animating the shots labelled easy, medium and difficult. This gave me a great idea of what to expect from the production, and how varied work is required for particular scenes e.g. how many characters go into a scene, what props are used, and if the camera is still or moves.

I worked on these test scenes for a few weeks so I could grasp the overall animation style of the series, to test the rig abilities, and revise important actions such as walk cycles. The process took some getting used to, but I eventually understood with each practice I completed. The animation lead helped me most with understanding the walking elements for the rig, and its lip-sync process.

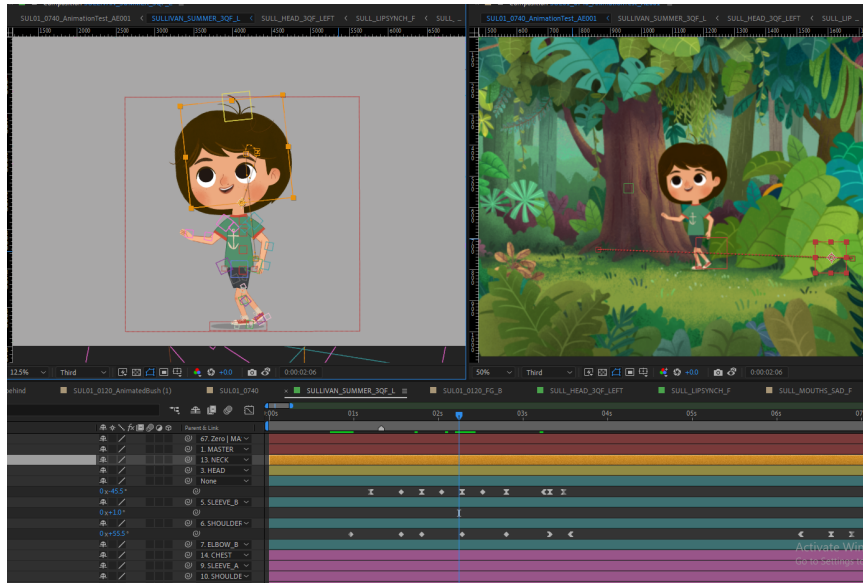


Fig. 3, *Animating on Adobe After Effects, using plugin Duik Bassel*

From August onwards, I was animating on episodes. For each episode we were assigned a handful of scenes to animate listed in the animation tracker; a sheets file to organise and record the progress of each episode. I would open the project files, add in the correct characters and props for the specific shot, and start animating based on the theme of the episode and animatics provided (Fig. 4, Fig. 5).

I animated the actions, expressions and lip-sync of each character, and worked through any problems or complex actions. For extra help with these actions, I would gather reference videos online, or act out the motion myself. I would go through my shots and my teammates' shots thoroughly so that our acting and position of characters can hook up with each other. Once the shots were complete, we sent the file to a watch folder, which produced a render of the shot.



Fig. 4, An example of the project file setup

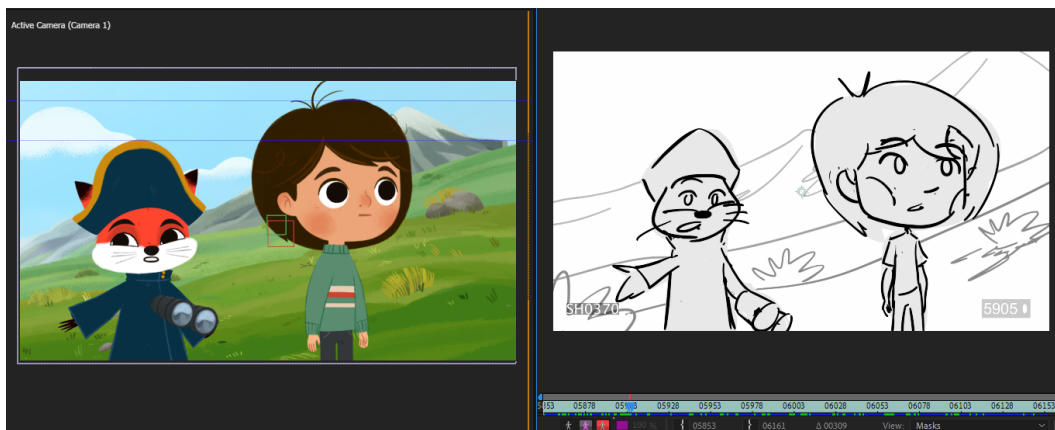


Fig. 5, Referencing the animatic video to the animation scene

After the first pass of animation, we picked up fixes. Fixes are completed with feedback on what to improve on, add or remove. Our animation lead provided us with internal feedback first for helping us find anything we missed, and fix off-model visuals. Then we were provided with feedback from the director in Distillery Films, focusing on the actions or expressions they prefer, any additions or reductions. Distillery Films used *Autodesk ShotGrid* to display the episode edit, and highlight the areas that need fixing. Fixes would range from misplaced mouths, to rearranging or

redoing animation. A fixed example (Fig. 6) is where Benji's head was tilted too far, and the position of Sullivan's hands needed adjusting. Going through this process of fixes was a new experience for me in both the communication side and the implementation side. I have learnt lots about this process, such as the type of issues to look out for during animation passes, and the management of small and big fixes.

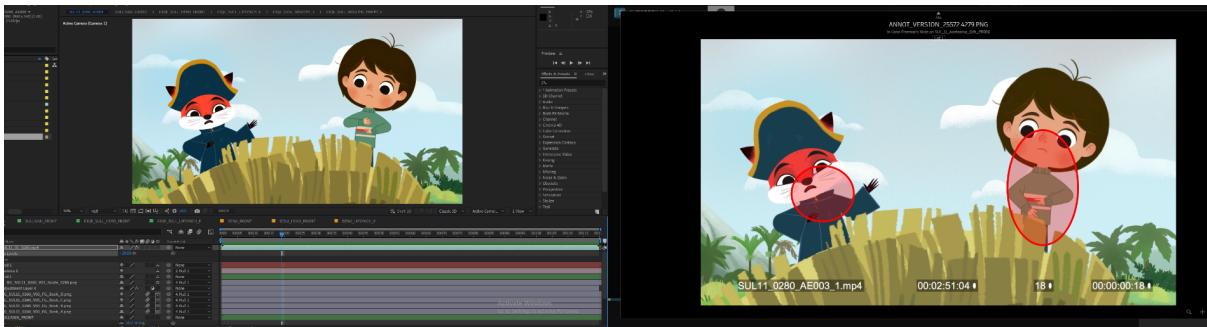


Fig. 6, *Implementing fixes to a scene, based on feedback on Shotgrid*

Nearing the end of the production, I took more of a prominent role in animation fixes. While the other animators took on the last batch of episodes, I returned to previous episodes. The director would provide lists of fixes for each episode, then I would implement those fixes and prepare it for the compositing stage. I worked closely with the editor, compositor and director to discuss the fixes by attending meetings and overlooking the ShotGrid notes. During this time we would plan the directions to take together. I could consult them about any issues I see and which fixes were more important.

Distillery Films were the co-producers of *Sullivan Sails* along with ALT Animation. Inside their team they produced scripts, designed storyboards, animatics and backgrounds for the series. They also organised the briefs for each episode. The

producers and director from Distillery Films attended the briefs, along with producers from ALT, the Animation Lead and the animators scheduled for the episode.

We analysed the episode animatic, and voiced any concerns about any shots that would be difficult to translate to the rigs, what the characters will be wearing, and any scenes that require a bespoke pose to accommodate the visual. We came back from the brief with informative notes for each scene, and as soon as backgrounds were approved, we started animating again. The briefs were efficient as it helped me to understand the next directions to take, and allowed time to ask any questions.



Fig. 7, *Distillery Films*

Apart from working on *Sullivan sails*, I tried out a scene for a short film called *Better Weather*. This was directed by Matthew Bradley, and animated by the ALT team.

*“Better Weather offers a relatable, slice-of-life look at one family’s struggles and the hope that can be found in the most troubling times.”*  
(RTÉ, 2022)

*Better Weather* was a part of RTÉ2’s programme to mark World Mental Health Day. I helped to animate a scene of the little girl spotting her mum. Unfortunately, I came across difficulty with the rigs on another scene. They were handed back to the

technical rigger, Michael, to handle. I moved back to *Sullivan Sails* after this, but kept track of the production as it was still interesting to see the process. The short aired on RTÉ2 the week of October 10th 2022.



Fig. 8, *Promotion image of Better Weather*

Within my job role I was prepared and required to use soft skills. I used my teamwork skills to work alongside the ALT team. It was a new and anxious experience working with animation professionals, however it was easy-going, and they communicated well together. Furthermore, the team's organised workflow helped enormously to keep me focused and find content easily.

Additionally, I had experience with new skills like critical observation, which I used to find issues for fixing shots. Soft and technical skills are both a necessity within the industry. I made use of these skills almost everyday in my job role.

The production workflow inside ALT Animation was very well handled, especially since the company is completely remote. Communication between our own team, and the Distillery Films team worked great. We used Slack for messaging, and Zoom or Google Meet for meetings. However, working remotely can come with problems. At times we would experience holdups in workload that could pause our own tasks, which was discouraging at times.

Despite this, I completely understand that throughout a production there will come miscommunication and delays. It is not always a smooth track from one task to another. I am glad I experienced this, because it prepares me for rocky workflows in the future. From this I have learnt to be vocal with anything that needs flagging, to pace out my workload each day, and to always ask if there are tasks to pick up.

By April 2023, the production of *Sullivan Sails* finally wrapped up. I stayed with the team as a freelancer for a few months after my initial contract's end date to help finish the revisions. The series officially premiered on RTÉjr and RTÉ2 on 17th April.



Fig. 9, *Article image of Sullivan Sails*

Working with the team of ALT Animation was delightful. Each of them were very friendly, funny, and were always willing to help each other out. The heads of ALT organised a couple meet-ups to catch up and socialise. These days allowed me to break free from the barrier of messaging, and talk to everyone face-to-face. I enjoyed learning where everyone's been, what projects they've worked on, and their own range of experiences.



Fig. 10, *Me with the ALT team*



## Conclusion

Taking on placement year was ultimately the stepping stone I needed before going into final year. I now acknowledge my self worth, my competence in After Effects, and great understanding of workplace production and communication. I am still passionate about 2D rig animation and grew to love it even more throughout this year, so I plan to use it again for my major project. With all I have learnt, I believe I can come up with interesting ideas and visuals that will reflect my creative input, and skills I have gained.

I am very proud of myself to have already been a part of an animated series production. The process was nerve wracking, but rewarding. It has given me great insight into the area of animation I could lean towards, and the possibilities that 2D Animation on After Effects has to provide. I am thankful for the ALT Animation team for introducing me to the creative industry, for their genuine support and teamwork. The variety of experience I have gained will guide me through final year and beyond.

## Recommendations

- All I could recommend to ALT Animation is that they keep going with reaching out to young artists/animators. Recently they attended a range of young artist events, such as the CCEA Moving Image Arts Showcase. As a student that tested the industry with ALT Animation, it means a lot that they care and inspire those who want to go into animation!
- What I would recommend to students making their way into placement year is to not be afraid to ask questions. At this stage, we are only interns/trainees. You shouldn't have to figure everything out on your own. Placement year is meant for asking questions, and problem solving with your team. You're not any less competent at your skills for doing so!

## Bibliography

*ALT Animation* (2023) Available from: <https://www.altanimation.com/> [Assessed 5 July 2023]

Adobe (2022) *Adobe After Effects* (Version 22.6.4) [Computer program] San Jose, CA: Adobe Systems Incorporated.

*Better Weather* (2022) [TV]. RTÉ2, 11th October, 12:50 hrs. Available from: <https://www.rte.ie/player/> [Viewed 16 May 2023]

*Distillery Films* (2023) Available from: <https://www.distilleryfilms.ie/> [Assessed 16 May 2023]

*Northern Ireland Screen* (2023) Available from: <https://northernirelandscreen.co.uk/> [Assessed 16 May 2023]

RTÉ2 (2023) Available from: <https://www.rte.ie/source/940060-rte-2/> [Assessed 17 May 2023]

RTÉjr (2023) Available from: <https://www.rte.ie/kids/> [Assessed 17 May 2023]

RTÉjr. (2023) *Brand new: Sullivan Sails | intro & theme Song | season 1 episode 1: sloth | @RTEjrOfficial*. YouTube. Available from: <https://youtu.be/j-LjnXhmZrM> [Viewed 16 May 2023]

*Sullivan Sails: It's time for an adventure!* (2023) Available from: <https://www.rte.ie/kids/> [Assessed 16 May 2023]

*Sullivan Sails* (2023) [TV]. RTÉjr, 17th April, 07:45 hrs. Available from: <https://www.rte.ie/player/> [Viewed 16 May 2023]

Watson, C. (2022). *Distillery Films signs Superights as global distributor for Sullivan Sails*. Kidscreen. Available from: <https://kidscreen.com/2022/10/11/distillery-films-signs-superights-as-global-distributor-for-sullivan-sails/> [Assessed 16 May 2023]

## Appendix

Appendix 1: *Primary research documenting my placement year, on the productivity software, Notion. (2022, 2023)*

Date	Tasks	Month
15/08/22	Animating	August
16/08/22	Animating	August
18/08/22	Animating	August
19/08/22	Animating	August
23/08/22	Animating	August
24/08/22	Animating	August
25/08/22	Animating, Exporting	August
26/08/22	Animating	August
29/8/22	Animating, Exporting, Prop set-up	August
30/8/22	Tracker set-up	August
31/8/22	Tracker set-up	August
1/9/22	Animating	September
2/9/22	Animating	September
5/9/22	Observing, Animating	September
6/9/22	Animating	September
7/9/22	Animating	September
8/9/22	Animating	September
9/9/22	Animating	September
12/9/22	Animating	September
13/9/22	Animating, Tracker set-up	September
14/9/22	Animating, Tracker set-up	September
15/9/22	Animating	September
16/9/22	Animating	September
19/9/22	Animating	September

Fig. 11, *List of each day recording my tasks and progression*

**16/9/22**

Tasks: Animating

Month: September

info on beach clean brief

- mums hand in beginning is taking the disc out
- Sullivan summer all throughout the episode
- scale down head in first shot or else show one eye
- two be-spokes for mum
- Sullivan is also kneeling down but I think its a bespoke

Today I: took on some more scenes and attended beach clean brief

Tasks finished: 490, 500, 510, 460,

Tasks to complete: 470, 450

Who did I talk to?: Andrea, the brief team

How did it go today?: all good & fun

Fig. 12, *Details of information and tasks I did on a specific day*