

## Case Study: Internship

Janetta Skarp, Third Year Life Sciences Student

### Which company did you undertake work experience with?

I worked at Harper Adams University on a project funded by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board.

### How did you go about finding the internship?

An advertisement for the internship/summer placement was e-mailed to all Biology undergraduates by our department's Undergraduate Office. I then e-mailed the person advertising the placement to find out the specifics.



### What was the application and interview process like?

First, I was asked to send a motivational letter and a CV to my supervisor, after which I was invited for an approximately 20-minute long Skype interview with my supervisor and her supervisor. During the interview, I was asked about my knowledge on scientific concepts related to the project I would be doing during my placement and about my motivations behind applying for it.

### How big was your team and where did it sit in the organisation?

Often, I was working on my project either on my own (while being supervised), or together with my supervisor, who was a PhD student. Sometimes I also worked under the supervision of other PhD students or researchers. When I was not working in labs, I was working in the office, which I shared with approximately ten PhD students and postgraduate researchers.

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- Janetta Skarp

### What was your role and what did it involve?

For my 10-week placement, I was given a project that would contribute to my supervisor's research, meaning that the findings of my project would be used when conducting further experiments. While I was responsible for planning out my experiments and planning what kits, DNA primers etc. needed to be bought, I received a lot of help and guidance from many researchers and PhD students. The staff at Harper Adams were very friendly and were always ready to help if I got stuck.

My project mostly involved molecular biology along with some bioinformatics and fieldwork. I obtained a DNA sequence from a pest species that my supervisor was studying and designed DNA primers that were specific to it. I also tested my DNA primers by attempting to amplify pest DNA from the gut contents of the pest's natural predators. At the end of my placement, I wrote a 10-page report on my project, which was structured much like a research paper.



### **What was the most valuable thing about your work experience?**

The most valuable thing about my work experience was that I got a glimpse of the day-to-day life of a researcher, while also having the opportunity to do some research of my own. Due to this, I gained invaluable insight into how research projects are designed and adjusted, and how to go about troubleshooting when one encounters an issue.

### **Do you have any tips for future Imperial students looking to make the most of their summer?**

- If you want to do a placement, start browsing for potential internships and placements early, so that you know what kinds of options you have out there.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help from the Careers Service when preparing for interviews. I felt like the advice that I received from the Careers Service when preparing for my Skype interview was very useful.
- Once you are doing your internship, try to talk to a variety of people during your lunch and coffee breaks. Learning about other people's career paths might inspire you with your own plans for the future.

