

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.

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.



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- Janetta Skarp



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.

