



Placement advice from Dr Sarah Withers

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You have heard a lot over the last few issues about careers, enhancing your employability and even the special 'P' word, yes PLACEMENTS. I have been looking after placements within the Biomedicine programmes for about 5 years, alongside some fantastic colleagues. Over these years, I have gained some insights and I'm happy to share those with you today. One thing I want to remind you is that no one will force you to do a placement, this is a decision only you can make. I recommend taking a look back at page 33 of the Bioscientist edition 2 from May 2021; Dr Namvar has put a really nice schematic together helping you to understand the value of a placement for your chosen career.

So what is a placement?

A placement is optional, lasts for 9-12 months, full-time and sits between level 5 and level 6. We are often asked whether you can do a placement after your degree, unfortunately the answer is no. Placements are worth 60 level 5 credits and contribute to your final degree mark.

Will I be paid?

Most placements tend to be unpaid. We understand that this can have financial implications. However, you won't pay University fees during this time, and you may be eligible for your student loan still. Having said that, paid opportunities are available. There are sometimes funding opportunities to support your placement if you want to go abroad too. We recommend you talk to us about your options and also keep your eye on the advertisements which we release.

If I'm not paid, what's the point?

Students who do placements do better in many ways. Their approach to their studies, time management and grades all improve. But it's not just the academic bits that benefit. Students gain so many valuable skills whilst on placement which all equate to being more employable after graduation. Our placement providers make no secret of saying that a placement is like a 'year long interview'. It's not uncommon for people to contact me asking what's the earliest a student can graduate as they are anxious to get them on the books.

The other benefit is something we probably don't talk about enough, whether a career is right for you! Without experience you have no idea whether your chosen career is the one you will love. I honestly think that this is as useful to learn as the other stuff.

What is expected of me whilst on placement?

Well, you will be part of the working team. You will contribute to that industry's success, whether it's in the NHS and you are ensuring samples are processed properly, carrying out a research project or looking at commercial projects in the pharmaceutical industry. We ask that you work respectfully and professionally, after all, you may want a job with them afterwards or at least a reference saying how amazing you were.

Get involved, ask questions, network and show interest. These may all sound scary, but this is your opportunity to shine. You have about a year to engross yourself in learning new things, meeting new people and developing yourself – use it!! You will have to do a bit of uni work, but don't worry, it's not too tiresome. It will all be explained and you will be supported by a placement tutor.

How will you be supported?

Of course, whilst on placement your provider will ensure you get the right training, know about health and safety and other things that will enable you to do the job properly and safely. We check up on this through our pre-placement agreements which are SEE placement support team will send you. If you need vaccinations or DBS checks, we can (in most cases) support these. If you are taking on an IBMS portfolio placement, we will order this for you once you have started your placement.

You are only an email away from your placement tutor and we are happy to meet with you virtually and face to face if you need to speak to us. In fact, we will visit you during the year (hopefully in person).

Tips on getting a placement

Over the years, I have seen many students apply and secure a placement. So, what can I advise you to do:

- Make sure your CV is tip top – there's no point in saying you've got good attention to detail and your CV is littered with mistakes!
- Some evaluation of CVs showed that people who put their grades on were more likely to get a placement and it wasn't always a case of having top class marks. Be transparent.
- Find a job spec and make sure you can evidence each and every piece of essential criteria. Come up with an example which you can use if you are asked about this! We have been doing this in the workshops recently and it's surprising how hard it is to think of an example on the spot.
- Know the field you're applying to. If it is a training portfolio placement, know what that means!!
- Speak to people. Again, one of the top things people want in the workplace are good communicators, you need to show you can do this!
- Know the 'company' values. Some employers won't let you in the door if you don't know what they stand for. Also in regard to this, if you know the company, then you can show how you will fit into that – if it has 3 people in the team, you'll want to say you're excited to be part of a small team where you will be able to make a visible difference. A company of 1000s, you may want to have a different angle.
- Show your personality! We worry so much about interviews that we forget to let our real self shine through. They want to see how you will fit into their team (and don't forget, the interview often starts before you sit down, so be nice to EVERYONE!)
- Make sure you have some questions for them. Don't ask about pay or holidays, but maybe think about how they can support your growth, CPD or mentorship. You want to demonstrate that you are committed to the role. It's also an opportunity to see whether it's the right place for you! Interviews work both ways after all 😊