

A summer placement in industry

As a pharmacy student I am eager to experience all aspects of pharmacy so that I will have a broad background of practical knowledge and training when I graduate. Since starting the course at the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, I have been interested in the pharmaceutical industry as I thoroughly enjoy the practical work undertaken at university in the laboratories. However, finding a summer placement in this field was difficult.

At the start of the year I sent out letters to all relevant companies within Scotland but they replied stating that they did not have funding to take on students. After writing to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain describing the problems I was having, they helped me by sending details of companies that participated in student summer placements. However, these companies gave preference to students who lived in their area.

Following a community pharmacy placement in July, I decided to write again to the Society to find out how I could plan in order to guarantee an industrial placement the following summer. My e-mail was forwarded by the society to various people within the industry and, despite the fact I only had just under a month before returning to university, Pfizer offered me a three-week placement in their pharmaceutical research and development facility at Sittingbourne in Kent.

I was unsure of what to expect from my time at Pfizer, as all I had been told was the department in which I would be working and that I would be assigned to a project team. I was hoping that I would be working in a laboratory carrying out experiments. I wasn't disappointed.

On my first day I was taken for an induction at the main Pfizer site at Sandwich. I did not realise the site was so extensive; with 1,500 employees it is the company's largest facility outside the United States.

Back at Sittingbourne, the work I carried out in the laboratories was similar to the theory and some practical elements I had been studying at university, such as dissolution testing, making tablets and granulation techniques. But I was also learning more about processes that we had only briefly covered during lectures at university including tablet coating. It was interesting to see and use equipment and machinery up close rather than the pictures I had previously seen in the course of my studies.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the placement at Pfizer, the people were friendly and really made an effort to make me part of the team. The only downside was that the three weeks went by so quickly. Hopefully I will be able to return next summer because the whole experience has confirmed that I would like to work in the pharmaceutical industry. ✕

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pharmacy at Aberdeen's
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