How to Find Work Experience in a Lab
There are 1.2 million people employed in primary science based roles in the UK, even so, many graduate scientists still encounter problems finding work in labs. The problem is that they have strong theoretical knowledge but they do not possess the technical skills to back it up. Work experience increases your chances of securing a graduate job or a place on a Masters or PhD programme after university.

“61% of employers felt relevant work experience or an industrial placement was the most important factor to consider when recruiting graduates.”

COGENT (Skills body for the science industry)

What counts as work experience?
It can include everything from a day spent shadowing a researcher in a lab, through to a 12 month industrial placement. It could be paid or done as a volunteer – it all counts!

There are no longer clearly distinct disciplines within science-based roles and scientists work in multidisciplinary teams with a range of other scientists and also those from commercial functions like marketing and sales. Be flexible where you look. Here are some of the key sectors:

- Health service – both private hospitals and NHS trusts plus national and global health-related charities
- Research institutions and Research councils
- Educational institutions - Universities
- Pharmaceutical industry and cosmetics companies
- Agro-chemical industry
- Biotechnology sector
- Scientific and technical consultancies
- Food and drink industry
- Utilities

Because of the multidisciplinary nature of science work, there is a need not only for an in depth knowledge of your discipline, but also to demonstrate a range of other skills:

- Communication
- Negotiation
- Team work
- Presentation
- Project management
- IT skills

You can acquire these from lab work and from extracurricular activities such as part time work, volunteering, student ambassador work etc.
“We need people with interpersonal skills as strong as their science.”
Head of R&D Recruitment, GSK

Work experience gives you:

- Knowledge of what is going on in the sector - demonstrates you are up to date and on the ball.
- Appreciation of the regulations which govern the scientific industry - paperwork is a large part of the job
- Opportunity to make a real contribution to the lab
- Understanding of the job application process

Formally advertised internships and work experience

Many organisations offer formal work experience to undergraduates (aiming them at second year students onwards). The majority of these are advertised from the autumn term for the following summer. These are usually competitive so do your homework, put time into your application and apply early!

Some employers will advertise later on in the year, so don’t panic if you have not found anything by the end of December! And if you are a final year student, some organisations may still consider you for a summer internship e.g. if you intend to pursue post graduate study in a related subject.

Where to look

Graduate Talent Pool - includes internships in scientific services in the UK
graduatetalentpoolsearch.direct.gov.uk/gtp/index

Graduate Step - paid work placements with SMEs (small/medium sized firms) step.org.uk

Cogent - sciencecareerpathways.com/recruitment,-placements-other-opportunities

Reed Scientific - reed.co.uk/jobs/science

Gradcracker - gradcracker.com

Milkround - milkround.com

Prospects - prospects.ac.uk

Rate My Placement - ratemyplacement.co.uk
Use graduate recruitment directories to research opportunities. Copies of these are found in the Employability Hub in the Business School.

**Some application tips from Employers**

- Apply early to make your application stand out and show you are keen
- Tailor your CV and covering letter to the role
- Include course grades, detail about relevant modules, projects and skills developed
- Avoid typos and check your formatting

**Speculative Applications**

This involves looking for scientific employers to see if they have any opportunities. The great thing about this approach is that you may find an opportunity but even if they don’t have
anything available, they may keep you on file. This means that when a vacancy does occur, they may contact you before even considering advertising it so there is less competition but the downside to this method is that they may not be recruiting when you need a placement.

**How to make Speculative Applications**

- **Research suitable companies and organisations** – see the information below
- **Check their websites for information about vacancies and schemes** and if they don’t mention work experience opportunities get in touch
- **Send a targeted CV and a covering letter focused on why you are interested in them and why they should be interested in you.** Try to write to a named technical or lab manager rather than “personnel” or “human resources”. Such managers are more likely to know if there is a project, or work pending that could lend itself to a summer placement.

**Tip:** Search for people on LinkedIn or who are name-checked in publications or online.

**Researching Employers**

The following websites are useful to research potential employers:

**Labhoo** - searchable directory of thousands of companies with a detailed level of classification. labhoo.com

**UK Science Parks Association (UKSPA)** - links to science parks across the UK (e.g. Manchester Science Park) ukspa.org.uk

**Bionow** - a NW membership organisation for bioscience biomedical and life-sciences, drug discovery and development and more. The site includes news, a members’ directory and jobs bionow.co.uk

**Research Councils** - Government research centres and institutes are normally funded (at least in part) by one of the UK Research Councils. Check each Research Council for lists of its funded institutes ruc.uk.ac.uk

**AIRTO** - airto.co.uk/our-members.html - a membership organisation for a number of commercial and government funded research organisations and institutes.

**Trade Associations** - taforum.org/Members - find a relevant trade association. Their websites often list members e.g. the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry abpi.org.uk/membership/

**Linkedin** - linkedin.com - If you are a member of Linkedin, you can join groups which are relevant to your interests.. You can also search companies by keyword and filter by location etc.

Research companies in Greater Manchester. Here are some ideas of organisations that have
previously provided placements to students:

Tip: Look for news articles about companies in the business sections of newspapers: winning a new contract could mean they are in a position to recruit.

Other ways to find lab work experience

Networking

- Meet employers and enhance your employability by attending our workshops, employer events and careers fairs. Key events include the Science and Environment Café and the Science and Engineering Fair. For details go to mmu.ac.uk/careers/events

- Read our ‘Finding opportunities through your contacts and networking’ careers guide: mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides

- Speak with your tutors or other staff members. They may know of potential vacancies, who you should speak to or even offer you some work themselves!

- Moodle and email - Some recruiters may advertise directly with an academic department, so make yourself familiar with Moodle announcements. You may also hear of opportunities throughout the year via forwarded emails from staff, so keep an eye on your inbox.

Specialist Recruitment Agencies

Agencies can arrange short-term placements of between four and six months, which can give you the practical experience you need and may lead to a permanent job. Examples include:

- Cranleigh Scientific
- Hobson Prior
- Lab Support UK
- SRG
- Reed Scientific

Volunteering
• Flashbang Science is a mobile laboratory created for primary aged children flashbangscience.co.uk/

• Manchester Museum of Science and Industry msimanchester.org.uk/

• STEMNET – Volunteer as a STEM ambassador and encourage and inspire young people stemnet.org.uk/ambassadors/

• Manchester Met's Student's Union run the online volunteering hub, where you can search for volunteering opportunities and keep a record of your hours and skills: mmu.ac.uk/volunteering

Sources for further information

Many societies offer annual careers conferences and regional events. They may also advertise placements and Internships:

• Royal Society of Chemistry - rsc.org
• Association of Clinical Biochemists - acb.org.uk
• Institute of Physics and Medicine in Engineering - ipem.ac.uk
• Institute of Physics—iop.org
• British Pharmacological Society—bps.ac.uk
• Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council - bbsrc.ac.uk
• Institute of Mathematics and its Applications - ima.org.uk
• Institute of Science in Society—i-sis.org.uk
• Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining—iom3.org
• Chemistry World Jobs—jobs.chemistryworld.com/jobs/

Careers & Employability Service Support

The Careers & Employability Service offers a range of support to Manchester Met students and graduates:

• Detailed careers guides: Access our full range of careers guides on our website.

• Ask a Careers Question Online: Get online advice through My Career Hub, ask your question at any time and receive support via email.

• Careers Consultant Appointments: Book a 30 minute appointment to discuss preparation for upcoming teacher training interviews or review your performance with a Careers & Employability Consultant.

• Careers Events: Meet employers and enhance your employability by attending our workshops, employer events and careers fairs.