

Finding work experience – information for Chemistry students

Why do work experience?

Whether you're interested in pursuing a career that directly involves chemistry or a career that uses the transferable skills you have developed during your degree, it is a good idea to get some **work experience**.

Many employers recruit significant numbers of their graduate intake from those who have previously completed a placement / internship with them. Having work experience on your CV should mean that your application for the next stage of your career will stand out - your CV will be stronger, your skills and experience can be used in interviews and you should be able to get a job reference. Work experience can also help clarify what you do / don't want to do.

Some general tips

- Ideally, seek work experience that is relevant to the sort of career you'd like. If you aren't sure what you like to do after University, investigate the 'Careers with my degree' section of the Careers Service website: www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/degree/chm. Talk things through with a Careers Adviser.
- It may take a while to find relevant work experience. In the meantime, think about other work experience you have. Can it help you develop skills that will be useful in your chosen career? Can you get any type of experience in an organisation relevant to your chosen career, so you gain an insight into how the organisation operates and make contact with people who might help you find more relevant experience?
- Be flexible in terms of the length and type of experience you seek. For example, you may find it necessary to seek several short placements with different organisations in order to gain a good level of experience. Not all organisations can offer 3-month summer internships.
- Be proactive and imaginative in your search for work experience. Don't limit your chances by only looking for advertised opportunities - some organisations may be able to offer work experience but do not advertise individual opportunities, whilst others may not have yet considered offering work experience but might be persuaded if they see a good applicant. Make speculative applications by sending your CV and covering letter to organisations where you'd like to work. For help, see: www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs/creative. Make use of social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook to identify individuals or organisations you might approach - see www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob/media
- Spread the net as widely as possible. Don't just aim for the larger, well known organisations but also consider work experience with Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). STEP is one organisation who organise summer internships with small and medium sized business (www.step.org.uk/) and the Sheffield Internship Scheme offers paid internships with local companies in Sheffield region (www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs/intern.) Competition is strong for many work experience placements. Ensure your applications for work experience are effective: www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob

Lab based work experience

Popular work experience providers include universities and research institutes. As a starting point, check websites of learned societies and research institutions associated with your area of research interest; for example the Royal Society of Chemistry's 'Chemistryworld' is a web resource for chemistry students and advertises placement and internship opportunities. Other websites to look at include www.studentladder.co.uk. Talk to your tutor or other lecturers within your department whose research interests you to see if they would be willing and able to offer you a summer placement in their lab and act as your supervisor. They may be able to apply to one of the learned societies or research institutes for a bursary to help fund your placement. Do this early - applications may have to be made in the Nov / Dec in the year before your placement. **The SURE scheme** offers penultimate year UG students the chance to participate in a funded research scholarship. Research takes place for 6 weeks over the summer vacation. Applications open in February.

Other possible sources of work experience include pharmaceutical companies (www.careers.abpi.org.uk), agrochemicals, petrochemicals, toiletries, plastics and polymers. **Cogent** are the sector skills council for the life sciences and they advertise internships and placements in industry (www.cogent-placements.com/home). Government and other public bodies (www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/index.cgi) and the NHS (www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)



Make use of online, searchable databases for a wide variety of work experience opportunities suitable for students of any degree discipline. In particular, search in your **Career Connect** – accessed via MUSE.

Work experience during term time

On Campus Placements are paid, 100 hour project based work experience placements at the University of Sheffield. Placements can involve working directly with an academic department, faculty or a professional service department within the University. Past On Campus placements within the Faculty of Science have included laboratory assistant and research assistants as well as placements which help students develop transferable skills such as marketing, social media and market analysis. On Campus placements are recruited for in the autumn and spring semester.
<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs/campus>

Teaching-related work experience

If you are interested in a career in teaching, get as much experience as possible before applying for a PGCE, School Direct or other initial teacher training. Investigate US in Schools (www.shef.ac.uk/schools/outreach-programmes/us-in-schools/applying) and approach schools speculatively for work shadowing and more hands-on work experience as well as getting involved in after-school clubs, youth groups, summer camps, etc. Local authority websites usually list contact details for schools. 'Get into Teaching' has information about other sources of work experience plus comprehensive information on becoming a secondary or primary school teacher (www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching). Other resources can be found via the Careers Service website: www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/Education.php.

Not sure you want to use your science? Or maybe use it differently?

The majority of graduate jobs (about 60%) are open to people from any academic discipline - your personal skills and qualities are more important than the degree topic you study. **Many Chemistry graduates choose to work in roles as diverse as medical sales, medical information and scientific journalism through to retail, recruitment, human resources, business, finance and management.** Summer internships are offered in a number of these business areas and undertaking an internship is a great way to find out if a particular role/ industry is for you. Websites such as www.ratemylacement.co.uk and www.gradcracker.com are good places to start your search. For students who may be interested in a career in finance, the **EY Scholarship scheme** offers Chemistry students at the University of Sheffield up to £3000 in bursaries and the opportunity to undertake a paid summer internship with EY, you need to apply in your first year (or second of four for students on the MChem) to be part of the scheme.
www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/awards

Spending your third year working in industry

As a student in the department of Chemistry you have the opportunity to benefit from taking an industrial placement year as part of your degree. Chemistry students can undertake a placement year via the MChem Chemistry with study in industry, contact Dr Julie Hyde for more information or BSc students can extend their degree by one year by undertaking a degree with Employment Experience. A placement year is taken after your penultimate year of study, returning to University to complete your final year. For more information visit: www.shef.ac.uk/placements/students

Using your experience to enhance your CV

Graduate employers want their new recruits to offer them more than a degree alone - they also want to see evidence of skills and personal attributes. It's a good idea to keep a brief record of the skills you are developing during your experience, with examples of how you have used them. You can then include these examples in applications for future jobs, or refer to them at interview.

The Careers Service "**Skills for Work Certificate**" is designed to help you use your work experience (including voluntary work, summer placements and part-time jobs) to demonstrate to future employers that you have the necessary skills to function in the workplace. It will also help you to learn more about yourself and your career options: www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/sfwc. Also check out "The Sheffield Graduate Award": www.shef.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward, if you are participating in other extra-curricular activities from committees and societies through to sports, enterprise or international activities.

Other help and support from the Careers Service

The University's Careers Service can help you if you want to: discuss your future career options; find out more about employers or further study; obtain further information about graduate vacancies; or get help with your applications, interview or assessment centre technique. Even if you haven't got a clue about where to start, we're here to help! Call into the Careers Service on Level 1 of 388 Glossop Road or, for work experience enquiries, visit the Student Jobshop in the Students' Union Building. Further information is online at www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers.