

Finding work experience – information for Physics students

Why do work experience?

Whether you're interested in pursuing a career that directly involves physics 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/project 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/phy. 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. Use social media such as LinkedIn to identify individuals or organisations you might approach 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). 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 Institute of Physics or Royal Astronomical Society. 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. **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. The **Physics department** at the university offers a limited number of paid research placements over the summer, visit <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/physics/teaching/summerplacement>. The White Rose Industrial Physics Academy (**WRIPA**) will have opportunities for University of Sheffield Physics students to undertake industrial projects and placements in industry, visit <http://wripa.ac.uk/student-info/>

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>



Physics-related work experience

The **Space Internship Network (Spin)** offers undergraduate students considering employment in the space sector an 8 week paid summer internships with companies and research organisations in the space industry.

<https://sa.catapult.org.uk/space-internship-network-spin-scheme>.

Companies operating within the nuclear industry, defence, telecommunications and space technology will have opportunities for physics students to undertake work experience. The Institute of Physics have careers guides for physics students who wish to work within these industries www.iop.org/careers/resources-for-students/page_58488.html other websites to look at include www.studentladder.co.uk

The **Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl)** offer summer and year-long work placements where you have the chance to work on practical lab-based and research projects. Opportunities are advertised via the Civil Service jobsite from late October/November with placements commencing the following summer.

www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk

Target jobs runs an annual competition to find the 'low carbon student' of the year, aimed at Physics students. The prize is a paid internship with EDF Energy. Closing date February 2015. <http://undergraduateoftheyear.com/lowcarbon>

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. **The I.O.P help students organise work experience in schools through their School experience programme**

http://www.iop.org/education/teach/sep/page_57440.html. 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 physics graduates choose to work in roles relating to engineering and high tech industries including IT but also jobs as diverse as investment banking and management consultancy.** 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.gradcracker.com and www.ratemyplacement.co.uk and are good places to start your search and in particular, visit **Career Connect** – accessed via MUSE.

Spending your third year working in industry

As a student in the department of Physics and Astronomy you have the opportunity to benefit from taking an industrial placement year as part of your degree via the degree with Employment Experience which extends your degree by one year. 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. 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 call 0114 222 0910 to make an appointment with a Careers Adviser. Further information is online at www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers.