Getting into…laboratory work

What do Bioscientists do?
Bioscientists can be found in a range of laboratory settings including:

- Commercial organisations - e.g. within pharmaceutical, energy, agriculture, medical, food and drink or cosmetics sectors.
- Public sector – research institutes, government, hospital, university laboratories.

As a starting point, find out more about the roles and responsibilities for entry level laboratory workers by reviewing job profiles available on the Society of Biology website and Prospects.

Work experience

The speculative approach

- There are very few advertised vacancies for laboratory based work experience.
- Convince potential placement hosts of the added value you can bring to their company.
- The Careers Network Internships website has useful advice for approaching an employer speculatively.

Stay up to date

- Keep up to date with developments in the sector.
- Use the careers pages on society website such as The Royal Society of Biology.
- Check out what's going on at the university via Biosoc and the Bioscience May Lab.

Work shadowing at the university

- Approach staff in your department for work shadowing or mentoring opportunities.
- Ensure you clearly demonstrate you have a specific area of interest or expertise.
- Identify a project you could pitch to someone in the field.
- Align yourself to those with similar interests as your own - use the university website to look up staff research areas.
Don’t give up!

- If you don't get what you want first time round, don’t give up.
- Use knock-backs as a means of identifying the skills you need to acquire before being considered as suitable, some useful skills can be identified below:
  - Knowledge of the standards and quality management systems required in the relevant field
  - Practical analytical skills and experience of instrumentation processes
  - Problem solving
  - Public engagement or science communication
  - Report-writing
  - Team work
  - Bid writing
  - Attention to detail

- Identify roles outside of biosciences that can offer you the opportunity to develop these or similar transferable skills.

Strengthening your CV

Not finding paid work experiences in a lab?

- Consider furthering your experience to help you build a CV that is tailored for scientific opportunities by:
  - Work shadowing a lab-based professional
  - Organising a laboratory visit where you can meet and discuss career routes with scientists
  - Volunteering
  - Project work in your own department or in another university that involves time in the lab
  - Finding a scientist mentor

- Investigate small to medium size enterprises using The United Kingdom Science Park Association (UKSPA) - www.ukspa.org.uk/

- Generic volunteering sites – www.guildofstudents.com/jsv/volunteering/
  www.do-it.org.uk and https://vinspired.com
• Useful websites for vacancies for placements and funding with professional societies:
  - Learned societies map
  - Opportunities overseas – IAESTE, Careers International, European Youth Portal, AIESEC
  - See the handouts available via your school’s Careers Network Canvas page: www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careerscanvas

The hidden job market - How to look speculatively for laboratory work

• The 'Resources for Researching employers' document lists the resources available to you on campus and online to help you identify organisations in the relevant sector.

• LinkedIn can help you to find people working in laboratories to contact - find University of Birmingham alumni contacts and use LinkedIn’s employer database to target organisations.

• Careers Connect – use Careers Network’s employer database to find employers currently advertising and those who have advertised scientific roles in the past.

• Widen your circle of employment connections - join professional institutions, go to conferences, trade and industry events such as the annual Lab Innovations event, attend careers departmental workshops and fairs

• ‘Careers Lab’ – this annual event facilitated by Careers Network in February brings a range of science employers onto campus with whom to engage.

• Careers Network intranet pages list all employer events and fairs. www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers/events

Funding your work experience

If you source your own summer placement you may be eligible to apply for financial assistance via the University’s Work Experience Bursaries Scheme - for more information go to:

www.birmingham.ac.uk/internships/funding
Finding advertised vacancies

- Check Careers Connect for advertised internship and work experience vacancies either sourced by our internship officers or placed by employers.

- Talk to your College Internship Officer about our ‘Pass It On’ survey and find out where past students been able to secure laboratory work.

- Check the destinations data for your college on the Careers Network intranet pages to see where last year’s graduates went on to work or study.

- Use the Cogent Skills for science - Life Science placements service for finding you a placement: www.cogentskills.com/careers/

- Graduate careers sites include Prospects, Targetjobs, Milkround.com, RateMyPlacement

- Online job boards to find laboratory assistant roles include:
  - www.jobs.nhs.uk/
  - www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/
  - www.srg.co.uk
  - www.labsupport.co.uk/
  - www.jobsinscience.com/
  - www.labhoo.com/