

## Getting into... Scientific Research (Biosciences)

### What do researchers do?

Researchers can work within a variety of roles and environments, typically as part of a wider team they will oversee and conduct experiments, carry out field work, analyse results and share these with the wider scientific community.

### Would this career suit me?

There are some significant differences between potential research careers so it's vital that you think about what your career priorities are and the type of working environment you can see yourself in. The broad differences to consider between roles might include the level of salary you can hope to achieve, whether there are opportunities for travel, the level of freedom you might be given within your research, or whether the research is particularly profit driven. For instance, you may find higher salaries within a private pharmaceutical company than in a publically funded institution; however that institution may give you more licence with your research. For more information about the different career options available visit the [Prospects](#) and [Target Jobs](#) websites. If you would like help identifying your preferred working environment, you may wish to take the [Values-Based Indicators of Motivation online assessment](#).

### What qualifications do I need?

You will need a degree relating to the area of research you are interested in. An undergraduate degree will enable you to apply for the roles of Technician and Research Assistant and also some Research Scientist roles. As a Research Assistant you may be offered the chance to study for a second degree (e.g. PhD, MSc, MPhil) whilst you are working. You will normally need a PhD for Research Associate / Senior Scientist positions.

### Improving your employability

#### Work experience

Placements in a laboratory or out in the field are highly valued by employers. It can be difficult to find placements in laboratories though, particularly whilst you are in the first two years of study, but with research and perseverance it's possible to find opportunities. Areas to look for work experience include:

- **Commercial work experience**

An industrial placement allows you to spend between 9 months and 1 year with a company. Biological Sciences, Human Biology and Biochemistry programmes offer a professional placement option during the third year of your degree. If you are considering a professional placement, speak to your professional placement tutor about the university's established links with employers, as well as [subscribing to alerts from Cogent](#).

[www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers](http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers)

Pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies often have Easter and summer placements – to find out who offers long or short term placement opportunities a good place to start is [ABPI Careers](#).

- **Universities / Research Institutes**

Undergraduate studentships are summer placements that normally take place during the summer after the first or second year. They allow you to gain work experience in a particular research area and can involve laboratory work or practical fieldwork.

These may be difficult to find initially, but it is worth checking whether university departments or lecturers linked to your course require assistants or support over the summer. The [Society of Biology](#) has useful information, and The John Innes Centre runs an annual [Summer Research Training Programme](#). Careers Network's online jobs database [Careers Connect](#) is also a good place to search for opportunities.

- **Charities**

Short-term research projects are offered by charities such as the [Wellcome Trust](#) and [Cancer Research UK](#) over the summer, or as a 1 year placement.

- **Hospitals**

Work experience in a hospital laboratory can be hard to find as they require applicants to meet the necessary training standards and the placement will be required to adhere to health and safety regulations. As there is no formal centralised system in the NHS for advertising placement opportunities, or for accepting applications, you will need to contact NHS Trusts individually. For more information and to obtain a full list of NHS trusts in your area go to [www.whatcanidowithmydegree.nhs.uk](http://www.whatcanidowithmydegree.nhs.uk). You might also find it helpful to try the [Care Quality Commission website](#) to source local providers. You can also search for placements and volunteering opportunities on the [NHS jobs portal](#).

## **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](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/internships/funding)

## **What else can I do to improve my chances?**

### **Networking**

A good place to start building contacts and to find out more about the different career paths is by attending the University's [careers fairs](#) and [employer events](#). Also, try asking your tutors if they have any contacts they may be able share with you. Other ways of building a network include:

- **Attend conferences**

This allows you to meet experts in your field of interest and can open up opportunities. Grants and travel awards are available for students - the [Society of Biology](#) has information on specific conferences and awards.

[www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers](http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers)

- **Join the Society of Biology**

You will also receive a copy of the *Biologist* journal to keep you up-to-date with industry news, and through the members' area of the website you can contact other members who specialise in your field of interest.

- **Social media**

Remember that you can also receive up to the minute information from many organisations by subscribing to their social media feeds. You can also join discussion groups on LinkedIn and develop contacts, the Science Jobs group includes many sub-groups, and you may also wish to join the Clinical Research Professionals group, the Health Care Bio Pharma & Life Sciences group and the Human Genetics group.

## **Useful contacts and resources**

[www.bbsrc.ac.uk](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk) Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

### **Work experience**

[www.wellcome.ac.uk](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk)

[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

<https://opportunities.jic.ac.uk/summerprogramme>

### **Career information**

[www.societyofbiology.org](http://www.societyofbiology.org) (select 'Education' then scroll down to 'Careers Advice')

[www.abpi.org.uk/our-work/careers](http://www.abpi.org.uk/our-work/careers)

[www.sciencemag.org/careers](http://www.sciencemag.org/careers)

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

[www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk)

### **Vacancies**

[www.naturejobs.com](http://www.naturejobs.com)

[www.newscientistjobs.com/graduate](http://www.newscientistjobs.com/graduate)

[www.srg.co.uk](http://www.srg.co.uk) (specialist recruitment agency)

[www.labsupport.co.uk](http://www.labsupport.co.uk) (specialist recruitment agency)

[www.alto-marketing.com](http://www.alto-marketing.com) (specialist recruitment agency)

[www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers](http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers)