

Professional placements: your way into work

The best way of proving you can do a job is to show that you've already got experience.

That's why you can take many of our undergraduate courses over four years, spending the third year gaining real industry experience. These used to be called 'sandwich years' but, to reflect the emphasis we place on future employment, we now refer to them as professional placements.

Professional placements are real, paid jobs with employers who want to develop you and your skills; you might even go back to work for them after graduating.

You'll gain an insight into business and how it works and, as you'll be working alongside professionals of all ages and backgrounds, it will give you extra self-confidence for when you finish your degree and start your career. And with real experience to add to your CV and talk about at interviews, it will improve your chances of getting the career that you want.

Most placement students come back for their final year of study full of enthusiasm, with an understanding of the role of their course in the real world. This invaluable experience helps with their studies, too; research shows that a placement year can potentially improve a final degree by at least half a class – in other words, a projected 2.2 grade can become a 2.1.

Before placement



"I'll be joining GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) for 12 months at the end of my second year. I'll be working with researchers on clinical trials and development projects, which is a chance to develop the statistical knowledge I've got from the course.

"I didn't originally plan to take a placement, but I saw a presentation about the benefits, both to my final year and my CV, which got me interested. But it was the range of jobs that got me hooked and I'm delighted to be going to such a good employer. I'll be based in Hertfordshire for a year and in many ways I'm sad to be moving away from the Uni, but I'll be joining up with my friends again for our final year very soon."

Pavneet Arora, Actuarial Mathematics and Statistics

During placement



"I'm nearing the end of my placement at the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) in Teddington. I've been working as a technical coordinator in the knowledge transfer team doing web development and managing technical setups at events and conferences.

"I've learned how to deal with everyday office life such as deadlines, difficult customers, and managing my own mini projects. I've also met people from other companies and organisations, expanding my network of contacts for the future.

"My placement has helped me prepare for my final year and, ultimately, life after university. NPL have offered sponsorship to help with tuition fees during my final year, plus the chance to go back to them after I graduate. Imagine that – I've got a career organised before I start my final year!"

Lloyd England, Computer Science (Digital Imaging)

After placement



"I had my professional placement last year, within a global law firm called Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. My role was to manage the deployment of the largest IT rollout the firm has ever had. I had the opportunity to travel to their offices in Spain and Amsterdam.

"My final-year project is based on my placement experience at Freshfields. I'm pleased to say that the firm have adopted it and it's due to go 'live' – a tremendous achievement for me.

"I recently secured a position as an IT consultant with a leading consultancy firm, FTI. I believe that the success of my placement played a big part in getting me the job. In our field it's vital to gain industrial experience before you finish your course, as most prospective employers want to see more than exams on a CV."

Jeelna Karia, Computer Science

All comments June 2008