

Fiona Shilliday, C4X Discovery



'This internship has definitely influenced my career plans. I am pretty set on returning to industry after completion of my PhD and think that small biotechnology companies are a great option given the range of activities you can be involved in and how valued you feel as part of a small team.'

I wanted to gain experience of working in a small-medium size biotechnology company to compare and contrast with working in academia completing my PhD and working in a large pharmaceutical company (GSK) whilst completing an industrial placement year for my Masters at the University of Sheffield. This type of placement also enabled me to assess whether a career in this area would be desirable and gain a wider understanding of the drug discovery / pharmaceutical development sector.

During my internship at C4X Discovery I aided the Target Proposals team in undertaking reviews of potential new drug targets in the areas of neurodegeneration and inflammation. These targets had been identified from Taxonomy 3, a software developed by C4X Discovery which identifies novel disease targets from genome-wide association studies (GWAS). I conducted literature reviews on these targets to assess the relevance of the target to the disease in question, the viability of the target for a drug discovery programme and whether there were any existing compounds already available for this target. I prepared many documents summarising my findings and presented any interesting results to the rest of the company.

On my first day I had to adapt to a completely new disease area and quickly bring myself up to speed on the main disease pathways and the existing drug discovery landscape.

I felt valued throughout the placement and some of my work was taken forward to the next stage in the company's drug discovery pipeline. I was given regular positive feedback on my work which was highly rewarding.

I have gained confidence in my abilities to complete tasks in a timely manner and recall information from my undergraduate degree. This was backed up by regular positive feedback from my supervisor and other members of the company. I also developed confidence to provide my opinion after it was asked for in meetings and discussions. This internship has also provided me with a wealth of experiences outside of academia. Due to the small size of the company I was able to interact with and be introduced to the roles of everyone in the company from geneticists, biochemists, chemists and the commercial team, providing me with an awareness of how a drug discovery company operates.



During this placement I have learnt a lot about myself. I have more confidence in my abilities and realise that I can apply a lot of my previously gained knowledge to new situations. I have developed new skills but also had many of the required skills already which I have had the opportunity to realise and strengthen.

A placement is an excellent way to experience a different scientific environment and develop new ways to apply your scientific knowledge to a variety of situations. It is also a great way to explore potential career options and build a network of contacts for the future.

Top Tips for other PhD students?

- Think carefully about what you would like to gain from the placement and whether there is a particular area you would like to experience.
- Take time to get to know your colleagues and network with them as they may be important people to know in your future career.