

## Jerzy Samolej's, National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC)



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I wanted to find out what work was like in a non-academic environment, especially in a government agency as working for the government is one of the career paths I was considering. After doing some research, I ended up sourcing the placement with NIBSC who is a global leader in the characterisation, standardisation and control of biological medicines. NIBSC plays a major role in assuring the quality of biological medicines worldwide through the provision of biological reference materials, by testing products and carrying out research. Their expert scientists also provide advice on a routine basis and in response to emergencies.

After a pre-placement appointment with one of the Career Consultants, I was encouraged to explore the field I would be interested doing my placement in. As a result, I approached NIBSC and applied for an advertised internship - I was already familiar with the general area of the business (vaccines, medicine, etc.). The company were impressed with my CV and application and invited me to join their team for a 12 weeks experience.

NIBSC were seeking a self-motivated and freethinking person who could analyse a problem and develop a plan to address it. The person needed to be sufficiently self-confident to find the best people to talk to in order to understand the problem/challenge in greater detail, comfortable handling large bodies of data and capable of learning how to apply appropriate software to manipulate and present the outputs in a clear and concise manner.

I was placed in the Division of Virology where I did market research on the clinical diagnostic reference materials, in an attempt to help develop plans to market these materials better. I investigated new ways to present the information more clearly and analyse the data to investigate trends and identify good and poor customers.

This required a scientific understanding of the materials produced by the Division of Virology as well as application of other skills. It also required researching potential competitor materials and studying the economics of reference material market.

This work provided me with the scope of working with a varied range of people in the organisation and I was able to identify who could assist with information in encouraging more people to utilise the reference materials. In addition, I was able to explore new ways of presenting the data that brought together sales information and other details.

I was also expected to collate information collected by scientists from NIBSC who had manned trade stands. This information was then used to create an action plan to improve visibility of the diagnostic reference materials available from the group. I was asked to develop his own methods to collate and present the results for discussion and action by the team.

Although I knew the general area of the business (vaccines, medicine, etc.) most of the marketing/business elements of the placement were new to me. The key skill I developed whilst on the placement was enhancing my basic knowledge of Excel and Word. Secondly I gained a better understanding of how a government agency that has to adhere to all kinds of standards and policies works. I also developed a better appreciation for the number of companies within the related industry and the scope of their work. I learned about the field of clinical virology, and the importance of standardization for hospital testing validity.

I undertook a short market survey amongst a key group of NIBSC potential customers. The output of this customer survey has been extremely helpful guiding the group's future activities to improve sales of these infectious disease reference materials. The data analysis that I performed resulted in a better understanding of the types of organisations that purchase NIBSC reference materials and the amounts and combinations of materials they purchase. This information is helping the company to develop a 2-year plan to market these materials in ways that highlight new materials to existing customers as well as seek out new customers based upon the types of labs currently using out materials.

The highlights of the placement were getting involved in many meetings, both scientific and organisational. I realised that I really enjoy being busy! However, it also occurred to me that marketing and business development is not the right pathway for me. The placement made me even more enthusiastic about becoming a bench/R&D scientist in the future.

## Top Tip for other PhD students?

1. Make sure you that you pick an area that could actually be of interest to you, therefore ensure you do some in depth research into the different areas first!