

Lab Assistants scheme, School of Biomedical Sciences

What did/do you do?

A scheme for students to work as paid part-time Lab Assistants in research laboratories.

Who is involved?

The Senior Technician runs the scheme for up to 20 UG students. The scheme was initiated by Professor Monica Hughes.

How do you do it?

The Senior Technician contacts research labs to ask whether they want a part-time student lab assistant, and promotes the scheme to UG students. Students who apply for the scheme are shortlisted and interviewed by the Lab Technician of the lab in which they will work and by the Senior Technician. The Senior Technician gives a safety talk to students, monitors students' work sheets and liaises between labs and the School in case of problems.

Vacancies are for one academic year (excluding examination periods) and students can work in their lab for 5 to 8 hours per week. Students are appointed at Grade A Point 1 technical posts and given simple, repetitive tasks: for example making buffers and solutions but not doing a research project.

Why do you do it?

Benefits for labs include support for lab staff for simple but essential tasks. Employing students is preferred to recruiting externally for these posts.

Benefits for students include exposure to working labs (not only teaching labs) and an enhanced awareness of the types of jobs/careers available in labs. Many students who work as part-time Lab Assistants go on to do summer lab placements: for Zach this meant he had done an independent research project before entering Stage 3, contributing to his decision to apply for a PhD. Being paid above minimum wage for doing a job related to their degree Programme is also an advantage.

Does it work?

Yes, evidenced in a number of ways:

- 74 students over 5 years were invited to take part in a re-view of the scheme: 50 students responded, of which 49 responses were positive and 1 neutral
- 3 to 4 students apply for each vacancy
- labs involved in the scheme ask for more students
- the majority of students who work as part-time Lab Assistants go on to do paid summer lab placements. Others, including Lucy, find this early experience of lab work invaluable in deciding whether it is a career that suits them.

Teaching and Learning Case Study

QuILT Teaching and Learning Seminar 2nd November 2011

Chris Baldwin, Head of School (School of Biomedical Sciences) Lucy Crawford and Zach Dixon (Undergraduate students, School of Biomedical Sciences)

Coherent Curriculum themes:

- Student engagement
- Research-informed Teaching
- Employability