

Season Three Episode Three: Placements

[00:00:20] **Tom:** So hello and welcome back to the third episode of the third season of the Pathways Podcast in the chemistry department. My name is Dr. Tom Ritchie. I am the Director of Student Experience. I'm one of the co-hosts on the podcast. We're really lucky today to be joined by Jess Mann, our other student, co-host, third year undergraduate in the department. And Harriet Cruikshank, another third year undergraduate. You've not heard from before to talk about their experiences of chemistry placements. So Jess Harriet. Hello.

[00:00:48] **Jess:** Hi everyone.

[00:00:50] **Harriet:** Hey,

[00:00:52] **Tom:** Brilliant. So let's get started. Jess, how did you find your placement and what did you do?

[00:00:58] **Jess:** I really enjoyed my placement. [00:01:00] I was quite surprised that I liked my placement because it was within engineering and technology, which I hadn't really had any experience with doing my undergraduate studies or just in general. Um, and kind of working at rolls Royce I thought, you know, prestigious firm, a lot of expectations, but it was really, really nice. Really enjoyed it. Um, had a good time and yeah, really interesting. Gave me a lot of insight into like different areas within stem. So yeah, that was really nice.

[00:01:30] **Tom:** That's great. It's really interesting. So what was it like working at Rolls-Royce? You know, what was the work life balance like?

[00:01:37] **Jess:** Um, yeah, the work life balance was surprisingly really good. Again, I was expecting it to be a lot worse, just. Yeah, a lot of people that I've spoken to just in general about, um, a lot of like corporate jobs and things have always said, you know, it's difficult to have that, you know, social life. As well as kind of working and yeah, just like all the time. Um, but [00:02:00] there was a big emphasis on us interns just to kind of work, you know, the nine to five or like the eight to four and then just completely shut off.

[00:02:08] Like we wouldn't be expected to, to take any of our like, laptop for devices home and just to enjoy your evening because obviously, you know, it was kind of a summer for us as well, um, as well as working. So we kind of want, they wanted us to enjoy our summer as well. So yeah, it was a good, it was a good balance.

[00:02:24] **Tom:** That's great. It's really good to know that, you know, you're not being worked too hard, but you still get an opportunity to learn some, some really interesting things. Are there any skills that you, that you kind of learn from it that you've brought back into your studies?

[00:02:37] **Jess:** Yeah, I think, in terms of like technical skills, there's quite a big distinction and kind of a divide between what I learned there, because a lot of it was related to engines

and like engine parts and engineering, which isn't really covered during, you know, my chemistry degree at all. Um, but there are some sort of components of like physics and [00:03:00] things that I can tie into, like the physical modules. But I'd say it's more the sort of, interdisciplinary skills I learned there.

[00:03:07] So I guess like teamwork, there was a lot of speaking and having discussions and giving presentations to like the, the chief engineers, which was quite scary at first, but after a while, like it was really good. And yeah, I think just taking those skills back to uni, um, when I'm giving presentations and talks is yeah, probably the, the one thing that I've taken away from the most.

[00:03:27] **Tom:** That's great. That's really interesting. So, Harriet how about you, you know, you are on a placement at the moment, so what is it exactly that you're doing?

[00:03:34] **Jess:** So, I'm currently on placement at Pharmaron in Hertfordshire. And I'm carrying out a research project within the company.

[00:03:42] **Tom:** That's great. So, so can you tell us a little bit more about the research project or is it something that you, you're not allowed to say because of what you're working on?

[00:03:49] **Harriet:** I'm doing research project on, late stage jam reduction. So I'm in the lab quite a lot, which is really enjoyable doing a lot of synthetic chemistry.

[00:03:57] **Tom:** That's great. Thinking [00:04:00] about what you've learned on your placement, you know, the things that you're doing right now, do you, do you feel that they'll impact or benefit you kind of coming back to studies or kind of in the future for your career?

[00:04:10] **Harriet:** Yes, most definitely. I've learned a lot like Jess, like presentation skills, so I give biweekly updates to the other placement students and their supervisors, which has really helped me to build my confidence. Giving presentations, in front of people, I don't know, or people who are more experienced than me as well, that can be really scary.

[00:04:30] Also I'd say just my lab skills as well in general have really, really improved and I've become way more confident in the lab and a lot more independent.

[00:04:39] **Jess:** Are the ways, like the labs work there, are they quite similar to like uni labs and stuff, or is it quite different?

[00:04:44] **Harriet:** Similar, I guess in the way, you know, you have your own fume hood, to work. That's the same every day. And I get to like, have my own set of glassware, which is quite nice. no sharing or anything.

[00:04:57] **Tom:** That's great. I think it'd be really interesting to get both of your [00:05:00] perspectives on kind of the process of applying for placements. So I know it's something that

our students will be starting to think about now. I guess the first question for you both is, who did you get in touch with when thinking about your placements?

[00:05:11] **Jess:** So with mine it was quite different to the sort of typical. Placement application process at the department undergoes. Mine was sort of like an individual thing. So I was kind of reading the student newsletter one week and I saw there was an advertisement out about the undergraduate of the year.

[00:05:31] And so it's basically just like an award which has lots of different categories and. Yeah. And then by the end of it, like if you win or if the, the company particularly liked you, then you can get like a placement or an internship out of that. And yeah, that's pretty much, kind of how I got my placement really.

[00:05:51] But yeah, I mean, I got in touch with Adam Alcock, a fair amount and I was kind of low on liaising with him, about like CVs and like, just like experience and stuff like interview.[00:06:00]

[00:06:01] **Tom:** Great. Harriet, what was your experience to kind of finding your placement? How did you start down that road?

[00:06:06] **Harriet:** I believe there is a big spreadsheet somewhere on Moodle, which had a list of all the previous placements or the current placements, and I basically went through all of those ones because I was like, I really want to do like a synthetic organic chemistry placement. So, most of them were like, send a CV or cover letter or, um, you have to do like an online assessment. Um, so I basically went through and picked out the ones I thought that I would enjoy doing and applied to all of the, all of them.

[00:06:36] **Tom:** Yeah. I mean, I guess Jess coming back to you thinking about that undergraduate of the year process, like, could you tell us a little bit more about that? Like what, what, what was it like, you know, how long did it take, what did you have to do for it? Was it just interviews and cvs, you know, similar to what Harriet just said, or was it, was it something.

[00:06:54] **Jess:** Yeah, sure. So the application process for me, yeah, it was an [00:07:00] interesting one because I kind of applied on a whim. So I saw the advertisement as I said on the newsletter, and I thought, you know what? Like it'll be a really good opportunity, good experience just to, I don't know, have experience with interviewing interviews and just writing my CV and cover letter. Um, but then when it came to actually. Submitting my application, I realized I had to do like tests and things as well, and me being me just kind of put it aside and didn't really want to do it.

[00:07:28] But then I got kind of reminded by my friends saying, You know, you should definitely just apply. Just see how you do, see how you get on. And then I applied, heard back, and then got through to, I think it was like a selection process of 20 people, and then it

was like an assessment centre where you just had to do interviews with, like Rolls Royce sponsors.

[00:07:50] And they would just ask kind of engineering type questions, but nothing that was like too technical cause they knew that not everyone had an engineering background, and yeah, [00:08:00] that was pretty much it. And then the award ceremony, after that, and I think around April and then they announced the winner.

[00:08:06] **Tom:** What sort of questions did they ask you? And Harriet, you can answer this as well if you'd like, you know, what questions did you get asked on the interview process?

[00:08:13] **Jess:** So I had two interviews. My first one was kind of a person personality based interview, and the other one was a technical interview. So the personality one was kind of your generic, like, you know, why Rolls Royce and what kind of puts you.

[00:08:27] Or like, why, why are you most suited to work within our company or for this role? So it kind of be like your typical standard application questions. And then the technical ones, I can't really remember, to be honest. It was quite a long time ago. Yeah, I think they just gave us like a map or something and they just asked us to explain why they can't ship something to a certain place or something like that.

[00:08:49] **Tom:** Great. Harriet, how about you? Yeah, so mine was fairly similar to Jess's and the first one was more of a personality, based like questions, and the second technical [00:09:00] assessment, I remember this quite well because I remember it was like an hour long, teams call and they had numerous slides they went through.

[00:09:06] **Harriet:** And the first one was, it started out simple, like, you know, name as many the functional groups you can see and then I was tested on proton NR spectrum and I had to draw quite a few mechanisms as well. Um, and PPAs that. A good one. That's one you should know is your PTAs.

[00:09:26] **Tom:** Yeah, that's great. I think it's, it's really useful to kind of talk a little bit more about the process of interviewing, because I think for a lot of people applying to placements, they may never have had an interview of that type before. You know, we've all, we all did interviews when we were younger to get jobs here and there, but you would never have had, you know, probably technical tests and things like that. So it's, it's really useful to, to get those tips from you both. I guess the question for you both is, would you recommend your placement to someone?

[00:09:52] **Harriet:** Yes, I would, I feel like I'm really, really happy in the decision I've made to do a 12 month placement. I feel like I've been here for three months [00:10:00] now and I've really learned so much and I feel like it's really going to help me in the future, to know that industry is something I would like to do after my degree.

[00:10:08] And it's also improve my confidence massively in multiple areas, which will definitely carry me through the rest of my degree.

[00:10:15] **Jess:** Yeah, for me, I would definitely recommend my placement because although it was during the summer, it didn't really feel like it was work to a degree because, as I, again, as I said before, like the work life balance was good that I still had a life and it did feel like it was a summer for me.

[00:10:31] And yeah, like I was really fortunate to be put in a really good team that I got along with really well. They were quite young as well, so yeah, I had a really good time, learn a lot as well, and by the end of it I actually ended up missing going into work every morning, which is really weird and I didn't expect that. But yeah, it was good.

[00:10:46] **Tom:** That's great. And, and I think it's, it's really useful that you've both kind of recommended it in terms of Harriet for you, the skills that it's, it's giving you and the confidence. And Jess, as you say, that kind of helping you get over the fear potentially of that, that working [00:11:00] life that will come after graduation of meeting people and being in teams.

[00:11:02] That's great. Harriet, I guess a couple more questions for you. So you mentioned you're on a 12 month placement, so how are you coping with balancing work with university lectures and other commitments that you have?

[00:11:14] **Harriet:** I'm only two weeks into lectures, so I feel like I'm still adjusting. Um, but I'm trying to do a little bit of work and a little bit at home to balance it out, um, and I believe the content's taught in like five weeks at work in person really intensely. But I've kind of spread it out over a longer period of time. Um, so I feel like I will be able to manage, coping with uni work as well as being at work.

[00:11:42] **Tom:** Do you get space at work to do your uni lectures or is it something that you do at say lunchtime or you mentioned you do it at work and at home and I just wondered if it was something you get kind of, uh, you get given time for.

[00:11:55] **Harriet:** Yeah, I'm allowed to, uh, spend a bit of time on my uni staff while I'm [00:12:00] at work, um, which is really handy, but sometimes it can be tricky to, I don't know how long I'm going to be spending doing a reaction in the lab, for instance. And then by the time I'm done, it's home time. Um, so last week I ended up doing three lectures at home and two at work.

[00:12:16] Um, and I think it'll probably be roughly about like that every week. But I can spend time doing uni work at work, which is nice. And there's people who are willing to help me as well. Um, people who've obviously got PhDs, um, very knowledgeable.

[00:12:33] **Tom:** I guess for anyone listening, it's worth saying if you are interested in doing a placement.

[00:12:37] Stefan Bonn is the person to get in touch with for placements in the UK. Uh, and, Paolo Coppo is the person to get in touch with for placements overseas.

[00:12:47] Um, Great. So do you have any kind of final tips for people who are interested in applying for, um, placements? And Jess, if you, any tips for people applying to, uh, undergraduate of the [00:13:00] year as well would be useful?

[00:13:02] **Jess:** Um, for me, I would definitely say just believe in myself. I know it's a really cliché thing to say and I hate saying things like that, but I wouldn't have got the opportunity that I got if I didn't just think, you know, what? There's no harm in just applying and just doing it. Like, as I said, I did everything on a whim and I didn't expect to get as far as I got, and I ended up getting a placement out of it that I really enjoyed.

[00:13:26] Like it was a complete, like it was a paid placement as well. So yeah, it's just. Take every opportunity as it comes, and don't be worried about getting rejected or failing at the first step. Like you get experience every step of the way. So it's beneficial, you know, there's, there's, um, pros and cons. So yeah, just learn from the mistakes and failures, I guess.

[00:13:48] **Harriet:** Yeah, I would definitely agree with, yes, I think. . I remember the first placement I applied for. I got rejected from about two days after, which kind of really knocked my confidence. But just perseverance is [00:14:00] key. Just believing yourself, like Jess said, and push through. And you will definitely, if your heart is there, like you will find a placement that's right for you.

[00:14:09] **Tom:** Yeah, I think it's a really, it's a really good point how you raise about kind. Accepting failure. You know, failure is part of that process. And we talk a lot about, in a module that I teach that Jess is actually on called Innovation 1 0 1, about, um, failing fast and learning fast. And it sounds, from what you've said, you know, you got that back within two days, but you didn't just sit and, you know, let it get to you too much because you straight away went out and, and found another placement, which is, which is fantastic.

[00:14:35] Um, are there any questions that you'd like to ask each other based on hearing the others' experiences?

[00:14:42] **Jess:** I was just going to say it is really interesting hearing your stance on like balancing your like lab work and everything at your placement with uni work because as you said, we've only been, you know, time started like two weeks ago.

[00:14:57] We were only two weeks in, but for me, [00:15:00] I'm already feeling quite snowed under with the amount of content and the amount of work. Um, because yeah, it's just very content heavy, so. Yeah, like in terms of your like work life balance and just like going out and stuff, how have you found that like, um, mixing with people? I don't know, like are they all like your age as well, Like the other placement people?

[00:15:21] **Harriet:** Yeah, so the other placement that students are, um, in the same year as us, third year or fourth years. Um, and we do like beat up a lot outside of placement. Um, we have lunch together and things like that as well. Um, and I'd say my work life balance probably better than it would be if I was at uni, I think because work, um, don't expect you to do any stuff outside of work. So when I get home of an evening, I do tend to have the rest of evening to do what I'd like to do. Um, so I go and play badminton with some colleagues as well on a Monday and Tuesday.

[00:15:56] Um, and I've got time to go [00:16:00] to the gym and I've got time to go to, into London to go to gigs as. So I do have a pretty good work life balance at the moment. I don't know if that's going to get any harder as I've got more and more lectures that keep adding on to the ones I need to do. But I hope to maintain the work life balance I have.

[00:16:20] **Jess:** And like on the thing about you saying, um, like you don't really do any work when you get back. Um, do you, do you take like your devices and stuff that, because I know when I worked at Rolls Royce, it was, everything was about like, um, export control, safety, confidentiality, Like that was like a really big thing that in the company.

[00:16:39] So I'm just wondering like, is that really, is that the same for you and, and the company? Like, are they quite, you know, top secret? They don't really like, divulging too much information to other people.

[00:16:50] **Harriet:** Um, I'm not really too sure , I don't have like a laptop or anything at work, so I can't [00:17:00] exactly take anything home with me. I don't have access to my emails at home either.

[00:17:04] **Jess:** Yeah, that was the same with me, actually, to be fair. Um, and my final question was like housing and accommodation, because I don't really think the, I don't know whether the uni helped you with, Finding accommodation. Um, there, but definitely like for my placement, because it was quite an external thing, like the uni weren't really involved too much with, um, like undergraduate of the year or Rolls Royce. So I had to find, um, accommodation in housing myself. And I was lucky that my brother went to Bristol Uni. Um, so I could just take over his tenancy but I was just wondering how you found your place like you're staying at now and like if it was difficult and if you have any tips for other people.

[00:17:42] **Harriet:** I had to be honest, I found it quite tricky finding a place to live. Um, I've ended up living with three other placement students. We managed to find a house, but we probably signed the contract like two weeks before we moved in. Um, and it's also unfurnished, so we had to sort out [00:18:00] some furniture as well. But I'm close to work, which is really good. But I think my advice would be to contact other employees, um, of the firm you're going to go work in and figure out where the best place to live is locally. I was going to ask how, um, how did you find that as well and who did you end up living with?

[00:18:20] **Jess:** Yeah, so as I said, my brother, um, like moved, like it was quite lucky. Everything worked out quite well because he was starting his internship in London, so he moved. To our home in London. And then I moved into here is where my internship started,

um, and by the time I moved in, his, all of his flatmates had moved out, so I pretty much had the place of myself, which was really, really nice. Um, but yeah, I mean, it was, yeah, I think everything worked out pretty well in the end.

[00:18:46] **Tom:** I think it's really interesting to kind of hear your lived experiences on placement, because I know that I, I never did a placement as a student. It makes me slightly nervous, so I can't imagine if you were still studying, you know, that it, it could be quite a nerve-wracking thing to think, right I'm [00:19:00] going to have to either do this alongside my studies or kind of give my summer to do it. So it is really useful for you to be able to kind of share your experiences with our students. So thank you so much for that. I guess if anyone is interested in, applying for placements, the best tips would be to get started quite quickly. Some will already be, be beginning to close. Um, if you're listening to this within a few days of release, uh, on Monday the 17th of October, Uh, from 5pm till oh 7 pm Chem, so are running a CV writing session, uh, in B 2 0 2 on the science concourse, so you can come along to that and get some tips from some academics and others about tips for your cvs for applying for placements and things like that.

[00:19:40] Uh, but if you are listening to this after that date, there will be more opportunities throughout the year for you to be able to come along to. So make sure to follow us on Instagram at @ Warwick Chem. Otherwise, I think that's it from me. Um, Harriet, Jess, thank you so much for joining us and for giving your perspectives.

[00:19:56] Uh, and yeah, uh, Harriet, good luck with, with everything that's going [00:20:00] on in your placement. And Jess, um, I'm sure I'll see you in the next one. So thanks so much,

[00:20:05] **Jess:** Thank you. Bye guys.

[00:20:06] **Tom:** Bye-bye.

[00:20:07] **Harriet:** Thank you.

[00:20:07] **Tom:** Thanks so much.