

PSI Placement Student Profile Competition

Winning entry:

Rachel, Pfizer



Applying to study Maths, Statistics and Operational Research at Cardiff University, I had the option of taking a sandwich year as part of my degree. When choosing whether or not to do a placement, everyone told me that it would be so much better for finding a job after graduating, and that is the main reason why I applied. After attending talks about the different types of placement available, I had no preference over where I wanted to go for the year, however I had a vague idea about the pharmaceutical industry and so when it was time to start filling in applications I applied to Pfizer.

Getting the call to say I had been offered a place was a huge relief, but then the nerves kicked in. In the run-up to starting I was so scared about moving to a new place and meeting all new people but I needn't have worried; having such a large network of Industrial Trainees (IT's) at Pfizer meant it was easy to establish strong friendships helping me to quickly settle into work.

I work as a statistician in Clinical Research. Being an IT, I have had the chance to get involved in a number of different studies, working with a variety of people. It has been great seeing the things I am learning at university come to life; it is one thing learning how to carry out a test in the lecture room, but another completely to apply it to some data and use it to help decide whether a compound will one day make it as a new drug!

At the beginning of my placement, a lot of time was spent learning different computer programs and working side-by-side with other people to get to grips with the work and make sure I was doing it correctly. I was surprised at how quickly people had confidence in my work and let me get on with things independently. This was a great confidence boost although a little scary at first, made better by the willingness of everyone to help out with anything I needed.

My work has been very varied and has involved many smaller, more immediate projects as well as some exploratory work which has been a more lengthy process. With the smaller projects, it has been exciting knowing that the results that I find are immediately applied / used to make important decisions. With the exploratory work, I have had the freedom to do what I like with the data and try to draw my own conclusions. I also had the opportunity to write a statistical analysis plan which showed another side to the kind of work carried out by a statistician on a regular basis. Having this wide range of experiences has given me a great insight into a career that I knew very little about until starting this year.

We have the opportunity to do 5 days of voluntary work throughout the year, and for these I helped out at the Kent Festival of Science which is a chance for the children to take part in lots of different activities geared at teaching them a bit about science. For both festivals I was talking to the children about statistics and I really enjoyed this,

but also realised that a job in teaching is not for me! Socially there has been plenty to do, and it has been really nice living a stones throw from the beach – something which we will hopefully make the most of during the summer months.

Overall, I have had a fantastic year that has far outlived my expectations. Starting again in a completely new place has been a great experience in itself. Adding to this the confidence I have gained in both my stats knowledge and in communicating with other people, this year has been invaluable and can only benefit me not only going into final year but also moving forward after graduating.

Anyone considering doing a placement year, I would say go for it! Not only is it an opportunity to have a taster of life after university, it is also another opportunity to meet some great friends and try something different.