

# Summer Studentships: a personal experience.

Stephen Holman talking to Mark Barrow:



**Q** You've been active in supporting summer studentships. When and where were you involved?

**A** I co-supervised two summer studentships, in 2012 and 2015. I was a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Manchester in 2012, and the University of Liverpool in 2015, although the studentship was conducted in Southampton.

**Q** Who else was involved with the summer studentships?

**A** These projects were working with Claire Evers (then University of Manchester, now University of Liverpool) in 2012 and John Langley (University of Southampton) in 2015. We had two very talented students working on the projects; Rebecca Mackenzie (2012) and Liam Furness (2015).

**Q** What were the research topics?

**A** The first studentship involved using a library of peptides in equimolar ratios to understand the factors influencing ionisation efficiency using nano-ESI. The 2015 studentship focussed on the use of ultra-performance convergence chromatography (UPC2) for peptide separation.

**Q** What attracted you to the scheme?

**A** From an altruistic point of view, I was attracted to the chance to help a student gain exposure to a research laboratory and experience working life in that environment, and to develop their research skills to equip them for their later studies. From a personal perspective, the opportunity to develop skills in grantmanship and supervision were the main attractions, as well as explore some of my own research ideas.

**Q** How did supporting the studentships affect your own professional development?

**A** The application for the studentship enabled me to experience and develop grant writing skills, which necessitates a much more persuasive style than I was used to using for research papers, reports etc. This has helped me with other funding applications since that time.

**Q** What were the main benefits/advantages of taking part in the scheme?

**A** The main benefit for me was challenging myself to do things that I don't normally do routinely as part of my role as a post-doc, such as writing a competitive funding application. That took me out of my comfort zone, but stepping out of it from time-to-time is key to personal development.

**Q** Were there any disadvantages?

**A** I guess the only downside is the limited time available to make progress, especially if there is a setback early on in the project, but summer doesn't last all that long unfortunately (if it ever arrives in the UK!).

**Q** Did additional opportunities arise during your career as a result of the studentship?

**A** I wouldn't say anything has arisen directly, but certainly being involved in two summer studentships stood me in good stead to win other competitive funding and run research projects.

**Q** Would you encourage others to take part in the scheme?

**A** I would definitely encourage others to take part in the scheme, irrespective of their career stage.

For undergraduate students, it gives them a great opportunity to experience what it is like to work in a research laboratory, which can be valuable in shaping their career aspirations. For post-docs like myself, it is a great opportunity to receive some funding to develop your own research ideas as a stepping stone towards independence if an academic career is the ambition, but also to obtain experience of supervising others, which is a valuable transferable skill. Finally, for faculty members, the studentships are a chance to inspire a mind at the early stages of their research career, and pass on valuable skills and knowledge to the next generation.

**Q** What advice would you provide to the students?

**A** I'd advise them to grab the chance with both hands! It's a great way to spend eight weeks learning and contributing to some great science, and you also get paid a few quid as well!

**Q** What advice would you give to the supervisors?

**A** The same as I'd give to students I guess – just go for it! The educational stage of most summer studentship students (end of year 2 of their undergraduate studies) means that their exposure to mass spectrometry, and its great power and diversity, is likely to be quite minimal. The studentships therefore offer us as academics a chance to demonstrate our passion for the technique and inspire our younger colleagues to pursue it as an area of research, thus helping to grow our science. The studentships also offer a nice opportunity for obtaining pilot data to support larger grant applications.

**Q** Anything else to add?

**A** Just that I'm very grateful to the BMSS for supporting research by non-tenured academics in the UK through the summer studentship scheme, and to Claire and John for their efforts in co-supervising the projects that I've been involved in.

## Biography

I read for my PhD in Professor John Langley's laboratory at the University of Southampton, collaborating with Dr. Pat Wright (now of Smithers Rapra) at Pfizer Global Research & Development. The work focussed on the rapid and definitive identification of oxidised drug metabolites using tandem mass spectrometry. Upon completion of my PhD in 2009, I took up a post-doctoral research position at the Michael Barber Centre for Mass Spectrometry at the University of Manchester, working in the group of Professor Claire Evers. Here I learned about quantitative proteomics, applying the QconCAT method to the quantification of the yeast proteome. Upon the relocation of Claire's group to the University of Liverpool in 2013, I began working in the Centre of Proteome Research, where I now conduct research in Professor Rob Beynon's group with a focus on protein dynamics and turnover.