



Learning Labs: Placements and Science Communication

Clare Wilkinson and Ann Grand

Science Communication Unit, University of the West of England, Bristol
23 August 2012



University of the
West of England

Learning Labs: Placements and Science Communication

Contents

- Executive Summary 1
 - Key conclusions 1
 - Key recommendations 1
- 1. Project description 2
 - Aims and objectives 2
- 2. Comparable placement programmes at UWE 3
 - Application and payment..... 4
 - Health & Safety requirements 4
 - Visa restrictions..... 4
- 3. The Learning Labs placements..... 5
 - Identifying suitable organisations 5
 - Setting up the placements 5
 - Placements offered 6
 - Advertising & students’ response..... 7
 - Starting the placement 7
 - Experiences of the placement..... 8
- 4. Evaluation 9
 - Method 9
 - Respondent selection 9
 - Evaluation results..... 10
- 5. Summary 14
- 6. Appendices 16
 - Appendix 1: Project timeline 16
 - Appendix 2: Learning Labs advertisement..... 17
 - Appendix 3: Health & Safety documents..... 20
 - Appendix 4: Survey questions..... 25

Executive Summary

Learning Labs was a six-month project, carried out between February and July 2012, supported by UWE's Higher Education Innovation Fund. The project's focus was to establish connections between science communication organisations and science communication students based at the Science Communication Unit (SCU), primarily through creating opportunities with external organisations for one-month placements. These placements were intended to be a creative and innovative time for both the students and the organisations involved.

Key conclusions

- Learning Labs was perceived very positively by students and potential host organisations
- The placed students and their host organisations felt the students had created something of value to the organisations
- Students appreciated the opportunity to enhance their work-related skills and hence their CV
- Both students and host organisations were happy with the level of support from the SCU
- Host organisations preferred to identify areas where students could contribute but were open to input from the students
- The timing of the placement caused some difficulties for host organisations and students
- Students and host organisations would have liked greater flexibility in the timing and length of the placements
- Participants would have liked more opportunities for feedback among students, host organisations and the SCU

Key recommendations

Future similar projects could consider:

- Setting up and advertising the placements well before the start date, to allow students to better incorporate placement opportunities into their work schedules
- Allowing longer lead times between advertising and starting the placement, to allow students and host organisations to establish good working relationships, set objectives for the placement and so on
- Allowing greater flexibility in the timing and structure of the placements
- Incorporating planned opportunities for feedback between students and host organisations
- Developing ways in which placed students can feed back on their experiences to fellow students and the SCU

We would like to thank all host organisations and students that gave their time to the Learning Labs placements and evaluation.

1. Project description

Learning Labs was a six-month project, carried out between February and July 2012, by Dr Clare Wilkinson and Ms Ann Grand (RA) of the Science Communication Unit (SCU), University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE). The project was supported by UWE's Higher Education Innovation Fund.

The project's focus was to establish connections between science communication organisations and science communication students, primarily through creating opportunities with the organisations for one-month placements, intended to be a creative and innovative time for both the students and the organisations involved.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this project was:

- To establish a series of innovative placements for UWE science communication students, in addition to a plan for the project's sustainability.

The objectives of the project were to:

- Investigate comparable placement programmes currently offered at UWE and the structures supporting those programmes.
- Identify key organisations that could offer 'Learning Lab' placement opportunities and develop at least two pilot placements.
- Advertise the placement opportunities to science communication students and identify suitable students.
- Evaluate the outcomes of the Learning Lab placements with students and employers.
- Produce a project report, with a view to developing further training programmes, modules or materials.

Keywords: work placement, employability, science communication

2. Comparable placement programmes at UWE

UWE presently runs placement programmes for both undergraduate and post-graduate students in all faculties and schools. The length of placements varies from a few weeks to 18 months and includes 'sandwich' placements which are constituent parts of courses in some schools, such as Construction & Property and Engineering.

- Over 4,000 students at UWE undertake placements each academic year
- Placements are an assessed component of some courses (e.g. Business School, Health & Social Care courses)
- University endorses placements as advantageous for students' employment prospects

(Source: www.uwe.ac.uk)

At the time Learning Labs was being set up, the university was in the process of bringing faculty-based placement teams together in one unit. Among other effects, this will produce a single set of requirements for placements that will apply across the university. For placements to be successful (for both students and host organisations), the university believes placements should meet certain requirements.

- have clear objectives and goals, both work-related and personal
- offer adequate time for pre-placement preparation and post-placement reflection
- have a clear line of contact – preferably one person in the university
- enable the student to offer unique input, rather than simply shadow existing employé(e)s
- focus on placement content, not the status of the organisation – especially important for international students working in smaller organisations

(Source: Interim Student Placements Manager (interview))

A close parallel to the style of placement intended to be offered by Learning Labs were the placements run as part of the MBA offered by the Bristol Business School (BBS). BBS placements generally last about three weeks, to consolidate the value of the placement to both student and organisation. However, unlike Learning Labs, which were extra-curricular, MBA placements are assessed components that count towards the degree award. BBS objectives for placements are broadly similar to those described above, in that organisations are expected to:

- offer students a clearly-defined role, good induction and relevant training
- offer students the opportunity to add value to the organisation
- have a designated line manager or mentor who will both liaise with the university and offer support and feedback to the students
- not ask students to replace professional staff

(Source: Assistant Placements Manager, BBS (interview))

Application and payment

BBS asks organisations to identify a problem or issue on which students can work during their placement. From these descriptions, the students identify their personal preference(s). Students 'apply' by short covering letter and are allocated to placements by BBS, by negotiation between the student and the course tutors with reference to the student's profile, other commitments on the course, and their chosen area of specialism. Host organisations sometimes ask to see the students' applications and can comment on them if they wish. Monitoring of the placement is undertaken by school staff.

(Source: Assistant Placements Manager, BBS (interview))

BBS asks organisations to pay students' travel expenses, on the basis that the placement will leave behind something of greater value to the organisation. The Faculty of Health and Life Sciences occasionally is able to offer placements with a small bursary (usually within NHS departments). These are usually extended placements, of up to twelve months and bursaries are typically the equivalent of £2–3000pa, which equates to between £166–250pcm. Students are paid by the Finance Office via the standard university bursary form.

(Source: Placements Co-ordinator, HLS (email correspondence))

Health & Safety requirements

As the SCU is part of HLS, faculty Health and Safety guidelines were followed for this project, based on the documents which are given to students and employers for 12-month 'sandwich' placements in the Department of Applied Sciences, modified to remove requirements solely relating to laboratory-based procedures. See Appendix 3.

(Source: Placements Co-ordinator, HLS (email correspondence))

Visa restrictions

Visa restrictions preclude certain students from undertaking placements. Legally, for non-EU students, typically studying on PBS Tier 4 + CASS visas, any activities undertaken in study time must be an assessed part of their course. Any work (including voluntary work) must be undertaken outside study time, for example at evening and weekends. Students on other visas (e.g. dependent visa, dual passport) may be able to undertake placements; this can be determined individually by the International Students' Office.

(Source: PBS Compliance Officer (interview))

3. The Learning Labs placements

Identifying suitable organisations

To identify organisations that could be approached regarding placements, we drew up a list of the kinds of organisations in which the science communication students typically find employment, such as science centres, museums, broadcasting, charities, publishing, educational organisations and science festivals. Some organisations in these categories were readily identifiable through personal connections; others were identified by a web search. From that list we approached the following organisations:

- Science centres - @Bristol (Bristol) and Thinktank (Birmingham)
- Publishing – Focus magazine, Institute of Physics Publishing (Bristol)
- Charities – MS-Research (Bristol)
- Educational organisations – Culham Centre for Fusion Energy (Oxford)
- Other – Science City Bristol

A further contact, at Cheltenham Science Festival, was identified but not approached; we considered that sufficient requests had been made to meet the aim of setting up two placements.

Responses were received from all the organisations except IoP Publishing.

Setting up the placements

The organisations were first contacted by email, with a wording that emphasised the aim for the placement to be a creative and innovative time:

Dear XXX

I have just started work on a small-scale project at UWE, called Learning Labs. A major part of the project is to set up a number of month-long placements (the Learning Labs) at science-based organisations. We intend that the Labs should be creative and innovative spaces for both the students and the organisation. The MSc Science Communication students very often go on to work for [*type of organisation*], so this is why I am approaching you.

My hope is that we would be able to work with you to develop a student placement for some time in the early summer. If you have an area that you think a student could contribute to, that would be very worthwhile discussing but equally, our students are very self-starting, so if you were happy for them to develop their own project that would be very acceptable.

As this is a pilot for what we hope will be a larger project, we have a modest amount of funding available to support the students in their placements.

Following a positive response by email, the project RA then met or telephoned senior members of the organisations. A number of pertinent issues were raised by the host organisations during these discussions:

- Allow time between offering the placement to students and the placement starting
Host organisations suggested this would allow the student and the organisation to meet and to negotiate the student's project/activity during the placement.

- Allow organisations to suggest topics on which the student might work
While host organisations welcomed the idea that the students would bring creativity and new ideas to the placement, they also wanted to offer suggestions about topics on which the student might work, to make it more likely that the output of the placement would meet a genuine need in the organisation.

- Allow flexibility in timing/length of the placement
Some organisations would have liked greater flexibility in the timing of the placement, suggesting that a block of four weeks was too long; shorter length, part-time working and longer duration were all suggested.

- Recognise organisational demands
All the potential host organisations had relatively small teams, often part-time. This limitation meant students might not always be closely managed and monitored and would need to be self-reliant and purposeful.

- Match students' skills and organisations' needs
Organisations wanted to ensure that students' existing skills and interests were aligned with the organisations' purpose. One organisation asked to read any applications received and all were offered the opportunity to comment.

Placements offered

Four placements were agreed, with MS-Research, Focus magazine, Thinktank and Science City Bristol.

Arising from the discussions outlined above, all four organisations indicated areas in which they would like the students to work or for which they had a particular need and their preferred placement timing. These details were worked out via email. The project RA used this information to draft a placement description, which was reviewed by the organisations before the placements were advertised to students.

Advertising & students' response

See Appendix 2 for full details of the advertisement.

The project was advertised first via UWE's Blackboard communication system but when no student enquiries came back, the information was directly emailed to the MSc students. Approximately 30 students were registered for the MSc course (a mixture of part-time and full-time registrations). However, the pool of potential applicants was smaller because of students with visa restrictions and because part-time students very often combine study with work and other commitments.

Students could apply for one, two, three or all four placements and were asked to indicate an order of preference. Application was by letter (maximum of 250 words), outlining how the student believed he or she could leave something of value behind them after the placement, and a bullet-point list of applicable key skills. The applications received were shared (anonymously) with the host organisation, to give them the opportunity to comment. Students were offered an honorarium of £100 per week, plus reasonable travel and lunch costs (based on UWE standard rates and against production of receipts).

Three students applied for placements: one for Focus magazine placement, two for MS-Research and one for Science City.

Starting the placement

The applications were sent to the host organisations for comment and all agreed the placement could go ahead. The RA introduced the student to the organisation by email and the students then took responsibility for contacting the host organisation to make arrangements for the placement, copying the RA in to emails.

Experiences of the placement

Placement timing:

The start of the placements was delayed compared to the planned timing. One began in late June, one in early July and one in mid-July. One placement was set up to last four weeks, one was set up for three weeks but extended to a fourth by mutual consent and one lasted five weeks; this student negotiated part-time working of two to three days a week.

Initial contact:

All the students experienced difficulties in getting in touch with the managers in the host organisations. For all three, several emails and phone calls were needed before the first meeting could be arranged. This was understandable as the host organisations were small and in two cases had part-time managers, which compounded the difficulties. However, eventually, all the students managed to arrange meetings and starting dates for their placement.

Placement objectives:

The students worked with the host organisations to set objectives for the placement but each varied in the level of detail in which they described them. One student emerged with a very detailed work plan, which she was happy with; the others were left more open. For one student, this caused no problems, for the third, this lack of clarity compounded with communication difficulties left her at times unsure of whether she was meeting the organisation's and her own criteria.

During placement:

Two of the students needed no support during their placement. The third took some time to settle; her difficulties were exacerbated by communication difficulties with the host organisation and the fact she was largely working at home.

Placement outcomes:

The outcomes varied according to the host organisation: one student produced a report and guidance document, with a supporting presentation to the Board of Trustees; one researched, collated and wrote content for a commercial project for potential publication; the third researched content for the organisation's website.

4. Evaluation

Method

The project was evaluated by means of a web-based survey, comprising a mix of open and closed questions. For full details of the survey, see Appendix 4. A web-based survey was chosen in preference to personal interview because of time constraints.

The placed students were also asked to make time to reflect on their experience of the project and the placement. To this end, students were offered a pro forma document to enable them to set out their personal and work-related objectives for the placement but – in line with the aim of allowing the placement to be as creative and untrammelled as possible – with no compulsion to use it.

Respondent selection

In the draft design, the respondents were envisaged as being:

- Host organisations
 - Those where a placement was not set up
 - Those where a placement was set up
 - Where no student was placed
 - Where a student was placed
- Students:
 - Those who did not apply for placements
 - Those who applied for placements
 - Successful applicants
 - Unsuccessful applicants

However, in view of the small numbers of organisations and students involved, this design was reduced in complexity to:

- Organisations where a placement was set up (4)
- Students who successfully applied for a placement (3)
- Students who did not apply for a placement (~30)

Evaluation results

Placed students

All three students who undertook placements responded to the survey. Before the placement, the aspects that most interested them were the chance to enhance their skills and hence their CV and to create something that was of genuine value to an organisation:

I wish to gain employment in a job where writing is essential, and enjoy developing this as a core communication skill. I thought the placement would give me a good opportunity to write about something I had not before, while giving me extra experience with a company of consequence, to put on my CV. (student B)

[the organisation was] relevant to my future career direction so provided an opportunity for development in this field (student C)

The honorarium was not an influencing factor; neither was the chance to be innovative and creative. In this context, it is notable that all the organisations made suggestions about the kind of work students might do in their placement, so students may have felt the opportunity for creativity came during, rather than before the placement.

Two students felt the advertisement gave enough information about the placement; one would have preferred more information about the organisation and the working arrangements, as she had experienced difficulties at the start of her placement:

Communication between organisation and myself delayed meeting of objectives and they were not clarified until after the start of working with the organisation. (student C)

One student set personal objectives; the other two worked with the host organisation to set work-related objectives.

All the students were positive about the level of support they received from the SCU. They mostly felt comfortable with their host organisation:

I felt very welcome by the small but friendly group of staff at [organisation] and felt the experience was not only very useful for developing my skills and CV, but was really enjoyable. (student A)

Although there were some concerns about the level of support the small organisation teams were able to offer:

I enjoyed the placement, yet felt it difficult doing my own project within a busy team environment, where I was not really involved in day to day tasks. (student B)

The students felt they gained useful employment experience, enhanced their skills and took responsibility for their contribution (which reflected their reasons for being interested in the placements at the outset).

For two students, their overall experiences of their placement were mostly positive; the third tended towards the negative, with concerns around the level of supervision, time taken to set up the placement and the level of challenge in the work.

The chief suggestions for improving the experience concerned feedback. The students would have welcomed a planned opportunity for reflection and feedback, written feedback from their host organisation and the chance to reflect on their experiences to the SCU and other MSc students.

Host organisations

The three host organisations where students were placed, plus the one host where a student was not placed, completed the survey. The host organisations were positive about the outcomes of the Learning Labs placement and particularly working with the students:

Good experience of a bright and committed student and good support from UWE
(organisation A)

Before the placements, the managers at the host organisations felt the most beneficial aspects of the placements were the possibility that the student would create something needed by the organisation and the benefits of creating or maintaining a link with the SCU.

It's a good link to have with the science communication course. (organisation B)

The major difficulty in setting up a placement was the timing of the placement in the summer, coinciding with staff holiday or other commitments. Other minor difficulties were noted, such as the organisational constraints of providing adequate supervision and mentoring and suitable working conditions and the length of the placement:

The challenges were those I expected, of managing the interface when we are all out of the office so much. (organisation C)

Hosts found the experience of devising a project very easy, drawing on their experience of setting up other projects, ideas within their organisation or projects they needed but did not have the staff for:

This was not a problem and my own past experience meant that it was relatively straightforward to convert this into a set of meaningful objectives. (organisation C)

Very straightforward, as we already had what we considered a good idea for a project that could be pursued over several weeks by the student. (organisation B)

Not too bad once a bit of thought had gone into it - finding the time to do that though can be tricky! (organisation D)

However, one organisation noted that they had to refine the project, due to time constraints:

Found we needed to cut down on the work due to timing and time allotted.
(organisation A)

The hosts were very satisfied with the experience of working with their students, especially their ability to work without needing close supervision and their efficiency and effectiveness in meeting deadlines. This enabled all the students to create something genuinely useful to the organisation.

The student has made a worthwhile contribution (organisation C)

I was impressed by [the student's] ability to work on the project for several days without needing a large amount of input (organisation B)

Excellent! [The student's] input to a board meeting was very much appreciated and well presented (organisation A)

All the hosts said this experience, particularly the opportunity to forge links with the SCU, had contributed to their willingness to offer placements in future learning Labs-type projects. Although all the host organisations said they would be willing to have placed students again, two organisations noted constraints to do with resources:

... the concern that we are unable to offer sufficient support to make it a worthwhile experience for the student. (organisation C)

... our ability to offer placements, given that we have a lot of interest from students elsewhere. (organisation B)

The major suggestion for improvement from organisations is that they would have welcomed a planned opportunity for reflection and feedback with students and the SCU. However, overall, the experience had been very positive:

We enjoyed the experience and benefitted from the efforts of the student. We would like to see such opportunities continue. (organisation A)

Students who did not apply for a placement

Seven students who did not apply for a placement responded to their survey (out of thirty; a response rate of 23%). The students felt very positive towards the idea of Learning Labs:

I think they are a fantastic idea, and really hope you will be able to continue with them. Maybe next year I will be able to apply. (student 6)

Asked for reasons why they had chosen not to apply for a placement, three indicated the timing of the placement was unsuitable:

The placement would be more useful nearer the start [of the MSc course] ... towards the end of the academic year, many of us are looking for longer-term jobs (student 7)

I would have loved to apply for a placement but due to the timing I was unable to stay in Bristol and had to move away and commute instead. I ended up being too far away to any placement to be able to afford to do it. (student 1)

Three students were already currently working and two had commitments that meant they could not take on a placement. Two had visa restrictions that meant they could not apply.

Six students agreed that if the scheme were to run again, it would be useful to offer more flexibility in the placements, for example part-time but spread over a longer time. (This was also noted by one of the organisations where we were unable to set up a placement; their preference would have been for a placement of one or two days a week, for ten to twelve weeks.) One student felt the placement should have been advertised earlier in the course, rather than at a time when students were already busy:

The timing for application happened during the busiest assignment time, this opportunity may be place at the back of student's priority. If the announcement was made perhaps before Easter break, given more time for planning and consideration. (student 3)

5. Summary

The aim of the Learning Labs project was to set up a pilot programme of innovative and creative work placements for UWE MSc Science Communication students, with a view to establishing a sustainable and continuing project.

The concept of the Learning Labs was received very positively by students – including students who did not choose to apply for a placement – and potential host organisations.

We first investigated existing comparable placement programmes within UWE. These discussions indicated that experienced placement staff considered placements should:

- Have clear objectives
- Offer students adequate time for preparation and reflection
- Have clear support structures and identified staff
- Offer students the opportunity to contribute something of value to the organisation

Discussions with possible host organisations to set up the placements identified a number of issues that they felt would affect their ability to offer a placement:

- How to allow enough time between offering the placement to students and the placement starting
- Whether organisations could suggest topics on which the student might work
- How to allow flexibility in timing/length of the placement
- Recognition of organisational demands
- Matching students' skills and organisations' needs

All the host organisations made strong suggestions about the content of the placement (although all were open to ideas from the students). Once the placement was established, they felt they had no problems in setting objectives with the students. All the students set personal objectives or devised work-related objectives with the organisation. For two students/organisations this worked well; the third student had difficulties in establishing contact with her host organisation at the start of the placement, which she felt had an impact on achieving her objectives.

Largely due to the demands of the project timetable, we decided to keep the placements to a block of four weeks' full time, starting at different times in July 2012, although at least one potential host organisation would strongly have preferred a placement for one or two days a week, spread over a longer time. Two of the three students who took up a placement suggested they would have preferred more flexible placements, as did two of the host organisations and six of the seven students who chose not to apply. In fact, some adaptations to the pattern were in practice negotiated by the students and the host organisations.

We were able to set up four placements, which were then advertised to the students. The most productive route for advertising was direct email. Three students applied for three of the placements – the fourth was not taken up. The students' applications were shared with the host organisations. All the students had difficulties in establishing contact with their hosts but all eventually succeeded.

The timing of the placement in the summer caused problems for the host organisations, with staff on holiday or away due to other commitments. (All the host organisations had small, in two cases part-time, management teams.) For the students, the timing also caused difficulties, because the placements were advertised at a busy time in the students' year and also because the advertisement and the start of the placement came very close together.

All the students – and the host organisations – would have liked more planned opportunities for feedback, both between the student and the organisation and also, for the students, the opportunity to feed back to their colleagues and the SCU. It should be noted that the majority of recommendations made by students and organisations could easily be absorbed in a future scheme which was not under the same time constraints as this project.

Both students and host organisations felt the level of support from the SCU was good.

The chance to enhance their skills and hence their CV and to create something that was of genuine value to the organisation was highly rated by the students – including those who chose not to apply – and to the host organisations. All the participants felt this had been achieved.

Unfortunately, we were unable to identify any potential funding streams and therefore could not prepare a full-scale bid as yet. For reference, an internal document has been created outlining the funding requirements established from this pilot programme, should such a bid become possible in future.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Project timeline

Task	Week beginning																								
	13-Feb	20-Feb	27-Feb	05-Mar	12-Mar	19-Mar	26-Mar	02-Apr	09-Apr	16-Apr	23-Apr	30-Apr	07-May	14-May	21-May	28-May	04-Jun	11-Jun	18-Jun	25-Jun	02-Jul	09-Jul	16-Jul	23-Jul	30-Jul
										‡		§													
investigate placement programmes at UWE	█																								
identify potential placements /employers	█	█																							
set up placements				█	█	█	█																		
advertise placements								█	█																
select students														█	█										
design evaluation								█	█																
identify sustainability criteria for future placements													█	█											
identify potential funders for major bid; prepare application													█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
learning lab placements																	█	█	█	█	█	█	█		
evaluation																							█		
Draft project report																						█	█		
Final report editing																								█	█

Outside events involving both the project leader and RA:

‡ PCST 2012 Conference

§ SCU Masterclass

Appendix 2: Learning Labs advertisement



Keen to learn more about working in science communication?

Would like to build up your profile of skills before starting your science communication career?

Want to network and meet others working in the science communication field?

Learning Labs is a project based in the Science Communication Unit, with the aim of enhancing our science communication students' learning through establishing strong connections with relevant organisations. As your attention might be turning to finding a suitable job at the end of your postgraduate course, we are keen to support you as much as possible in making your CV attractive to employers. Brand new for 2012, we hope that Learning Labs will offer you a unique opportunity to develop your skills.

As part of the pilot for this project, we have four placements available (see page 2). The placements will take place in June-July 2012, so successful students will need to be flexible in their availability, to fit in with the host organisations' needs. This project will be evaluated to provide evidence for future funding applications, so we hope that successful students will be willing to engage in reflection on the project and their placement experiences.

These placements are only being offered to UWE postgraduate science communication students, so you have an excellent chance of being selected. Unfortunately, due to visa rules, they are not available to students on PBS Tier 4+CASS visas.

Financial support

Because this is a pilot project, we are able to offer an honorarium of £100 per week, plus reasonable travel and lunch costs (based on UWE standard rates and against production of receipts). For the Birmingham placement, we will offer support towards accommodation costs (again based on UWE standard rates). Non-Bristol-based students may apply for accommodation costs for the Bristol placements but would need to show that daily travel to Bristol from their home would be impractical. Contact (...) to discuss any questions you may have about financial support. All expenses and honoraria will be paid after the placement has finished.

Applying for the placement(s)

The aim of Learning Labs is to be a creative and innovative space for both you and the organisation. You can apply for one, two, three or all four placements and should indicate your order of preference in your accompanying email. Your application should comprise a covering letter (maximum of 250 words), outlining how you believe you can leave something of value behind you after the placement, and – for each placement for which you want to apply – a bullet-point list of the key skills you possess that you believe would be appropriate to that placement. Please attach this letter as a separate document. If you have any questions, please email (...). Applications should be emailed by 5pm on the closing date of Tuesday 15th May 2012.

- Placement 1: MS Research

MS Research (<http://www.ms-research.org.uk/>) is a small Bristol-based charity that aims to seek better ways of treating multiple sclerosis and help people living with this condition make the most of their capabilities. MS Research are happy to be flexible in project design but have suggested ideas around looking at how health information can be disseminated using social media or other online formats in ways that meet the needs of their supporters, who are mostly in younger age groups (20 to 40 years). This could lead to setting up a “rapid response” communications system (possibly an app) for people who have MS and who wish to understand fast-moving developments in research and treatment of their condition.

This placement will be based in MS Research’s new office in The Vassal Centre, Fishponds, Bristol, and at Frenchay Hospital, and will be for four weeks.

- Placement 2: Thinktank

Thinktank (<http://www.thinktank.ac>) is the Birmingham Science Museum, based at Millennium Point, Birmingham. As well as being a modern and interactive science centre, Thinktank is also home to part of the City of Birmingham’s Industrial Heritage and Natural Sciences historical collections. Thinktank has recently merged with the central museum sites to form a nine-site Birmingham Museums organisation, which is scheduled to become one of, if not the largest independent Museums Trust in the country.

Thinktank would be very happy to discuss students’ own ideas but have suggested two possibilities: creative and innovative contributions to creating an in-gallery handling collection for young children or an online digital walking trail for young adults. Both ideas would be part of a Heritage Lottery Fund-supported Participation Programme,

which is running alongside a new gallery redevelopment project. The products of the placement will be a long-term contribution to Thinktank's public programme of events and activities and will give a genuine insight and practical experience of how co-produced activities are developed by, and with, our visitors. Thinktank is also scheduled to open the UK's first outdoor Science Garden at the start of June and there is the potential for an evaluation-based work around this space as well.

This placement will be based in Thinktank and will be for four weeks. Ideally, it would start as early in June as possible since the first phase of the young people's project is scheduled to take place during the Birmingham schools' June half term.

- Placement 3: Focus Magazine

Focus (<http://sciencefocus.com/>) is a well-known science and technology monthly magazine. The placement would involve contributing to the magazine's website and online activity and researching material for a special issue. The successful student would be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement. In applying for this placement, in addition to the information required above, please include examples of your science writing, links to relevant blog posts and social media activity.

This placement will be based in the offices of Immediate Media Ltd, Bristol and will be for three weeks, with the possibility of extending to a fourth week, circumstances permitting. Focus would like the placement to start in mid-July.

- Placement 4: Science City Bristol

Science City Bristol (www.sciencecitybristol.com) works to make Bristol, Bath and the surrounding areas even more widely known as a global hotspot for science and technology skills and business. The team would like some inspired and creative input to refresh their 'ten things Bristol brought the world' postcard series. The resulting material may be used on the SCB website, for publications and events and potentially as part of an art installation at the VentureFest Bristol 2012 event in November.

This placement will be based in the office of Science City Bristol, on the Bristol and Bath Science Park but could also offer an opportunity for some working at home. The placement will be for four weeks.

Appendix 3: Health & Safety documents

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT

During your placement, it is important that your health and safety is protected.

The primary responsibility lies with your host organisation, which must ensure that the activities you perform do not risk your health and safety. This document outlines some of your responsibilities toward the host organisation, to help ensure they can meet this commitment.

You should consider informing the project RA of any health issues, including any disability, which may affect your health and safety whilst on placement. This allows the University, you and if necessary the host organisation to consider any reasonable adjustments which may be required to provide for your health and safety whilst on the placement.

While on placement, if you have any concerns regarding your health and safety you must inform the project RA as soon as possible.

The RA may visit while you are on placement. If they have any concerns they will inform you and this may lead to the placement being reviewed.

If you have any questions contact ...

HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE NOTES FOR STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT

This document outlines the health and safety aspects of placements.

There are health and safety aspects to every placement, such as:

- being under the supervision of a third party
- being involved with, or undertaking, activities of which you have little or no experience
- working in and visiting environments and locations with which you are unfamiliar

Health and safety responsibilities of host organisation

- General duty to ensure your health and safety whilst on placement.
- Taking account of your potential inexperience of activities you may be undertaking and putting appropriate measures in place
- Providing you with information, instruction, training and supervision

Students' health and safety responsibilities

- Do nothing to put your or other people's health and safety at risk
- Follow health and safety instructions, information and training
- Never intentionally misuse equipment or anything provided for health and safety reasons
- Bring any health and safety concerns to the attention of your host organisation and the placement organiser as soon as possible

Health and safety induction

At the beginning of the placement, you should receive a health and safety induction. If you do not, raise this with your host organisation. The induction should include:

- Emergency Information – what action to take if you:
 - Hear a fire alarm
 - Discover a fire
 - Require first aid
 - Meet a threat to your personal safety
 - Other situations particular to the placement, e.g. spill of a hazardous substance
 - Are involved in an accident or near-miss of an accident
- Assessing and controlling risks
 - How to control risks – e.g. using guards, ventilation, and so as appropriate
 - How to ensure the equipment you are asked to use is in a safe condition
 - How to obtain and use protective equipment, if necessary
- Never undertake an activity until you have received sufficient information, instruction and training for you to feel competent and confident to carry on.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions of your host organisation and if you feel there is a lack of supervision then raise this concern.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). If you are issued with PPE it is important you know:
 - Why it's needed
 - How to wear it so that it works efficiently and effectively
 - How to maintain, store and recognise defects in it and how to obtain replacements
 - How to operate it correctly
 - If you believe an item of PPE is defective do not continue to use it. Do not carry out the work without the correct protection.

Reporting accidents, incidents and health and safety concerns

- Report to your host organisation any accidents and incidents – whether or not you or someone else has been injured – in which you have been involved

Complete the Health & Safety Induction checklist (page 4) and ask your supervisor at the host organisation to countersign it. Return a copy of this form to the project RA.

If you do have any health and safety concerns during your placement the first action is to raise these with your host organisation. If you believe these concerns are serious also make the project RA aware.

Monitoring and feedback

You are an essential element in the monitoring of the health and safety performance of the host organisation. Ensure you discuss any health and safety concerns with the project RA and complete any necessary paperwork required.

Health and Safety Induction Checklist

Student: _____

Host organisation: _____

Please ensure the following aspects of Health & Safety matters are covered in your induction meeting at the host organisation. Ask your supervisor at the host organisation to countersign the form. Please return a copy to the project RA.

Health & Safety aspect	Covered
Emergency procedures (e.g. fire evacuation routes)	
Health & Safety policy (copy of, or made aware of where it can be found)	
Location of First Aid box	
First Aid arrangements, including names and contact details for first aiders	
How to report an accident and where to find the accident book	
Specific rules or risks for the area you will be working in	
Standard operating procedures or protocols for any equipment you will be using	
Familiarisation with any relevant risk assessments	
Information on access to safety equipment, including personal protection equipment	
Information on any special security or access arrangements or precautions	
Any other issues (describe)	

Signed:

Student: _____ Date: _____

Comments

Supervisor at host organisation: _____ Date: _____

Comments

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION FOR HOST ORGANISATIONS

Current legislation places the primary responsibility for the health and safety of placement students with the host organisation, which sets the health and safety environment. The University retains a degree of responsibility for the student and students are encouraged to be responsible for their health and safety while on placement. However, the University must seek assurance that the host organisation complies with the fundamentals of health and safety regulation.

Students may not have much previous work experience and although they are encouraged to consider health and safety issues as part of planning their placement, they may not be confident in extending this to the workplace. Accordingly they will need to be made aware of workplace risks.

The students are asked to complete a Health & Safety induction checklist. For your information, I have included a copy of the checklist overleaf.

We would be grateful if you could acknowledge compliance with the basic requirements of health and safety regulation (see below).

If you need clarification of any points, please contact me. The form should be returned to me, either by post at the address above or via email.

I confirm that my organisation:

Is registered with the Health and Safety Executive or the Local Authority.	
Has a written Health and Safety Policy.	
Has Employers Liability Insurance cover that acknowledges placement students as employees.	
Has Public Liability Insurance cover with a limit of liability of at least £5,000,000.	
Will advise the appropriate insurers of the proposed placements, as appropriate.	
Has carried out risk assessments of the work activities that the student will participate in or be affected by, to identify, minimise and / or eradicate possible risks to the student.	
Will provide the student at the beginning of the placement with health and safety information and instruction and any further training as appropriate to the work they will do.	
Has first aid facilities and that protective clothing (as appropriate) will be supplied if the student is to be working with machinery, equipment or substances hazardous to health.	

Will ensure the student is supervised appropriate to the level of health and safety risk.	
Will inform the university if the student suffers an accident at work of a severity that warrants a RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1995) report.	

Signature: _____ Position: _____

Organisation: _____

Date: _____

Health & Safety checklist for students

Health & Safety aspect	Covered
Emergency procedures (e.g. fire evacuation routes)	
Health & Safety policy (copy of, or made aware of where it can be found)	
Location of First Aid box	
First Aid arrangements, including names and contact details for first aiders	
How to report an accident and where to find the accident book	
Specific rules or risks for the area you will be working in	
Standard operating procedures or protocols for any equipment you will be using	
Familiarisation with any relevant risk assessments	
Information on access to safety equipment, including personal protection equipment	
Information on any special security or access arrangements or precautions	
Any other issues (describe)	

Appendix 4: Survey questions

Organisations where a placement was set up

1. When considering whether to offer a placement, what possible beneficial aspects of the Learning Labs project particularly interested you? (You can select more than one answer.)
 - The skills the science communication student would be able to bring to my organisation
 - The possibility of the student being able to create something that my organisation needed
 - The link with the Science Communication Unit / the University of the West of England
 - That the placement was funded for the student
 - To offer a student experience of employment and the workplace
 - Other(s):
2. When considering whether to offer a placement, did any potential difficulties occur to you? (You can select more than one answer.)
 - Providing adequate supervision / mentoring
 - Providing suitable working conditions for the student
 - The challenge of devising a project with the student
 - Constraints within my organisation
 - The timing of the placement
 - The length of the placement
 - The 'block' nature of the placement
 - Students' likely skills
 - How the student would fit into the organisation
 - Other(s)
3. How did you find the experience of devising a programme of work with the student?
4. What were your overall experiences of having the student at your organisation?
5. Was the student able to leave behind something of value to your organisation?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Further comments
6. If the Learning Labs project were to run again, would you be willing to offer a place?
 - Yes (Q7)
 - No (Q8)
 - Perhaps (Q9)
7. What makes you willing to offer a place in future? where a student took up the placement
8. Why would you not be willing to offer a place in future?
9. What makes you unsure about whether you would offer a place?
10. If the Learning Labs project were to run again, is there anything you think should be done differently?
 - More time to plan the placement with the student before the placement starts
 - Planned opportunity for reflection / feedback/ discussion / appraisal at close of placement
 - Written feedback from student
 - Better communication among students/SCU/ my organisation
 - More flexibility on how placement runs (e.g. not a block of time)
 - Different time of year for placement
 - More input into choice of student for placement
 - Other(s):

Students who successfully applied for a placement

1. What aspects of the Learning Labs project particularly interested you? (You can select more than one answer.)

The opportunity to:

- learn more about working in science communication
- enhance my skills
- establish a connection with a science communication organisation
- enhance my CV/employability
- gain experience of employment and the workplace
- be innovative and creative
- create something that would be genuinely useful to an organisation
- earn something (the honorarium offered)

Other(s):

2. Do you think that the advertisement for the Learning Labs placements gave you enough information?

(If no: what further information would you like to have had?)

3. What attracted you to the specific placement(s) for which you applied?

4. Did you set yourself work or personal objectives for the placement?

I set myself some personal objectives

I set myself some work-focussed objectives

My work-focussed objectives were set after discussion with the host organisation

I did not set any objectives

Briefly, what were your objectives?

5. Did you meet your objectives?

6. Briefly, can you describe the key task(s) you undertook on the placement?

7. What were your experiences of the placement? (Answer as many as apply.)

Very positive

Mildly positive

Neutral

Mildly negative

Very negative

Felt I had contributed something valuable to the organisation

Level of supervision/mentoring on placement

Enhanced my personal skills (e.g. organisation, communication, time-management etc)

Financial cost

Being paid

Helped me understand areas I might like to work in in future

Working on my own in the organisation

Level of challenge in the work

Length of placement

Gained useful employment experience

Time taken to plan and set up placement

Taking responsibility for my contribution

Worked alongside professionals

Learned new work-specific skills

Level of support from SCU

8. If the Learning Labs project were to run again, do you have any suggestions for improving the experience?

More time to plan the placement with the organisation before the placement starts
Placement at a different time of year
More flexible placement e.g. one or two days a week, spread over a longer time
More flexible financial arrangements (e.g. payment in advance of expenses)
Placements in other areas of the UK
Placements outside the UK
Planned opportunity for reflection / feedback/ discussion / appraisal at close of placement
Written feedback from student / organisation
Better communication among students/SCU/ the organisation
Wider range of placement types e.g.
Opportunity to feed back on placement experiences to SCU/ MSc students
Other(s):

9. Do you have any further comments?

Students who chose not to apply for a placement

1. Why did you choose not to apply for a Learning Labs placement? (You can select more than one answer.)

I am currently working
There wasn't enough information about the placements
The honorarium was too small
None of the placements were in a location I could get to
The length of time I needed to commit to the placement was too great
I don't need to gain any additional experience in science communication
I have personal commitments that would have prevented me from taking a placement
The timing of the placement was unsuitable
I wasn't interested in any of the placements on offer
Visa restrictions
Other(s):

2. If the Learning Labs project were to run again, do you have any suggestions for improving the experience? (You can select more than one answer.)

More flexible placement e.g. one or two days a week, spread over a longer time
Shorter placements
More flexible financial arrangements (e.g. payment in advance of expenses)
Placements in other areas of the UK
More information about the placement
Wider range of placement types
Placement at a different time of year
Placements outside the UK
Other(s):

3. Do you have any further comments? We would particularly welcome suggestions for types of placements, locations and organisations that might have interested you but any comment is welcome.