



Student: Rowan Curtis

University: University of Surrey

Placement: Optoelectronics Research Centre, University of Southampton

Role: Summer Placement Student

“Placements are the best way to work out what you want (or don’t want) to do when you graduate.”

Can you describe a typical working day on your placement?

09:30 – get to the lab and have a coffee and a chat with the PhD student in the group and our supervisor. Spend the morning considering how to further improve the experimental set-up for a new type of optical fibre. This involves hands-on creativity and a lot of trial and error. 12:30 – lunch: we sit in the university gardens (if it’s not raining!) and have lunch and chat. 13:30 – back in the lab experimenting and working out if the morning’s improvements made things better (or worse). Sometimes there are seminars to attend (or pub sessions, purely for networking. 17:00 – hop on the bus home.

How do you think this internship has benefited you for the future?

To gain knowledge in such an important area of physics for today’s technologically connected world is a huge benefit. Also, to see how an organisation like the Optoelectronics Research Centre (ORC) works is great for anyone considering a PhD or work in industry. To network with international experts in the field is as enjoyable as it is useful. (There are some wonderful characters at the ORC!)

What skills and knowledge have you learnt during the placement?

A lot of fibre optics knowledge and how to do experiments on optical set-ups. Lots of practical skills learnt such as soldering and even a bit of vacuum chamber knowledge (consolidating vacuum work done at Diamond Light Source on an industrial placement year). Also, I’ve observed how to splice fibres and use laser systems.

What advice would you give to an undergraduate student who might be interested in seeking a placement?

Do it! Placements are the best way to work out what you want (or don’t want) to do when you graduate. You’ll learn things useful to you in your career; not just physics-related knowledge but personal skills that are vital in any workplace. It’s a great opportunity to discover what is important to you in a job.

Employer perspective:

It was amazing to see the smoothness with which Rowan ‘integrated’ into my team and how quickly he became extremely useful for our work. I like to have summer intern students because I think it is an important part of their training. Another reason is to showcase our research to smart young people that may decide to do further study or work in our field and for those students to then promote our research to their peers. I find it very rewarding to work with smart people that are learning new skills and Rowan definitely makes me look forward to coming to work in the morning – I know that after I deal with the boring paperwork, I can come down to the lab and discuss (and do!) science with them.

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