

ALWAYS LEARNING



by Lena Forsyth

former TechFest Festival assistant



Let me take you back to a careers lesson in secondary school where 14-year-old me stumbled across her dream career whilst passively scrolling through the biology section of a website. The words Biomedical Science jumped out to me and I clicked to learn more.

I was immediately interested when the description of the role of a Biomedical Scientist said that they work in laboratories where they analyse blood, tissue and other bodily fluid samples from patients in the NHS. It seemed to tick all the boxes and I decided I wanted to pursue this further.

The more I learned the more I realised how vital a role Biomedical Scientists play in the NHS. They are the hidden backbone of our health service and without their work, 70% of all diagnoses would not be able to occur! I also realised the huge impact that Biomedical Scientists had had on the management of my own medical conditions and it seemed right to give back to that service.

I left school in 2018 with an unconditional offer for the Biomedical Science Programme at Robert Gordon University (RGU) in Aberdeen, my dream university and degree. During the summer before starting university I discovered that TechFest was recruiting Festival Assistants for their annual science festival on RGU's campus. I applied and after the interview, I was given the role.

This was my 1st job and I have to say to date the funniest job I have had. I learned so much and improved my confidence greatly. I enjoyed it so much I was back for more a year later. This time as a Demonstrator, teaching classes of Nursery and Primary school children about "Glorious Germs", allowing them to design their own germ, learn the importance of handwashing and travel back in time to when the black death was rife in Aberdeen. This was a topic that aligned with my interests in Biomedical Science, and I was able to use my knowledge to answer the questions the children had.

But who would have thought just over 6 months later, how important learning to wash your hands properly would be? I was proud of myself for being able to hold the interest of a room full of children for 45 minutes. If I can speak to a room of 5-year-olds I can do any other public speaking that is thrown my way. And I have been able to draw on those skills during other situations like presentations and interviews.





I have enjoyed my time at university so far, over the past 3 years I have grown academically and as a person. The diversity of modules has allowed me to hone my skills and interests in the vast field of Biomedical Science.

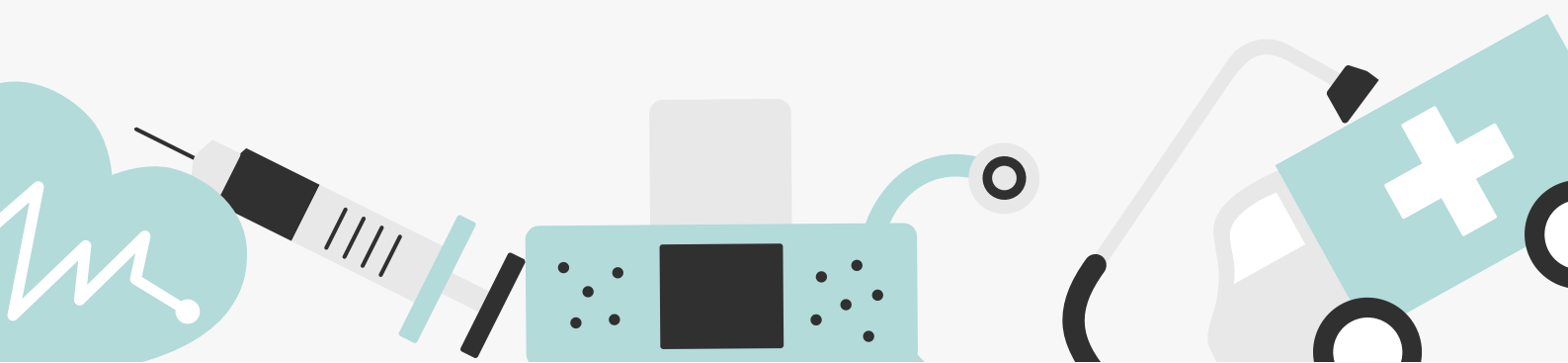
During my 2nd year, I had the opportunity to go on placement in the Biomedical Laboratories at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI) for 6 weeks rotating around the main disciplines, experiencing what is involved in each. I have to say this was the highlight of my university experience so far, allowing me to gain 1st hand experience of working in a Biomedical Science laboratory, learning what exactly is involved in the job and how samples are processed.

The work was very varied, meaning that there was always something new to learn each day. I was allowed to get hands-on with the sample analysis, carrying out antibiotic resistance testing in Microbiology and Infectious Mononucleosis (IM) screening in Haematology to name but two examples. These six weeks confirmed to me that this is definitely the career I want to pursue once I graduate. The confidence and communication skills I developed whilst working at TechFest allowed me to work effectively across each department during my placement.

The pandemic has made an impact on my university experience, since my next placement at ARI had to be postponed and is now set to take place as of September 2021. I have been studying from home over the past 16 months, this hasn't been without its challenges but I have continued to put in the effort.

This hard work didn't go without notice since I achieved the highest grades in my year and was awarded the NovaBiotics Best in Stage 3 prize. I was delighted to receive this as it was totally unexpected. I have also worked with RGU's Student Recruitment and Marketing departments, engaging with prospective students from all around the world.

I have written an article for the RGU Student Blog, been a Schwartz round Storyteller and most recently written an article for the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) magazine The Biomedical Scientist, for their August issue.





I have also started my 1st job in the NHS as a Biomedical Support Worker in the Haematology laboratory in ARI. When I got the call offering me the position I couldn't quite believe it! I had just been offered an entry-level position in the laboratory I would ideally like to work in as a Biomedical Scientist once I graduate next summer.

It has been great to be back in Haematology, one of the laboratories I experienced on placement. My main role is to book blood samples into the laboratory system that arrive from local GP's and inpatients and put them on the appropriate analyser. It has been a huge learning curve and I continue to learn new things on each shift. I look forward to spending more time there and continuing to learn.

7 years on from discovering Biomedical Science I have come a long way, and couldn't be more proud of what I have achieved in that time. If I could go back and tell 14-year-old me all the things I have done and that I would be working in the NHS I don't think I would have believed it.

Working with TechFest has allowed me to develop the skills that are needed in any professional setting and I have already used and further developed these. I enjoy working with Sarah, Jenny and the rest of the team and appreciate their support.

Looking to the future I would like to continue to give back to the NHS, a service that we all rely on to keep us healthy, and be involved in providing high-quality results for patients throughout the region. I would like to continue to work at ARI and progress to Biomedical Scientist and into more senior roles later in my career. But I will always be thankful to TechFest for being the best 1st job I could ask for.

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