



Case study: T Level Science industry placement at Sainsbury Laboratory

Laboratory technicians are in short supply, so when the Sainsbury Laboratory were asked to host T Level Science students on placements, the possibility of recruiting new staff was an incentive to agree. Simon Foster, the Laboratory Manager, sees T Level Science as a pipeline for new talent. He says:

"It's remarkably difficult to recruit technicians when we have vacancies... so that really encouraged us to look at the T levels... we saw it as a way of getting people through at an early age to get them into the technical stream and help them build up the skills that they need"

City College Norwich worked with them to set up placement opportunities. Interviews were arranged to ensure prospective students were a good fit for the workplace. From the outset, the students were treated much like any new staff member, going through the same induction process as anybody coming into the laboratory environment and complying with Health and Safety requirements.

Block placements were chosen, giving students an immersive and realistic experience that showed a variety of work and gave a good understanding of the purpose of different tasks.

Supervision arrangements were distributed across staff, who found the students quickly developed the skills needed to work independently. With a small core team in place, these extra pairs of hands became very useful as the students picked up responsibilities for key tasks and took pressure off staff. Simon says:

"Once they're fully integrated into the team and they're used to the work... it's been invaluable, actually... once they are used to the work tasks, it really does help the rest of the team"

Key tasks included pipetting, weighing materials, adding and mixing solutions, checking pH, washing up equipment and steam sterilisation. Students also spent time in the plant tissue culture laboratory and got involved in the company's sustainability initiatives.

Beyond skills development, students gained valuable insight into the realities of working in a scientific laboratory. And existing staff benefited from the experience of managing new staff members and enjoyed taking these young people under their wing.

The company is continuing to offer placements. They've also recruited Francis Aclan, one of their first cohort of students, to a full-time position as a lab technician – a great outcome for everybody concerned. Simon explains:

"That was a huge benefit for us... We knew that Francis had finished his course. He was looking for a position. We were able to reach out to him immediately - ordinarily it could have easily taken us 3-4 months."



Francis has been a lab technician for over a year now. He quickly got up to speed with the demands of the role, drawing on the experience and skills he developed on his placement. He says:

"I think it is the practical experience, which is really useful... it's something that employers really value."

This placement developed a young person's skills enough to enable direct recruitment. With science technicians in demand, the T Level Science route is a promising piece of the supply jigsaw.