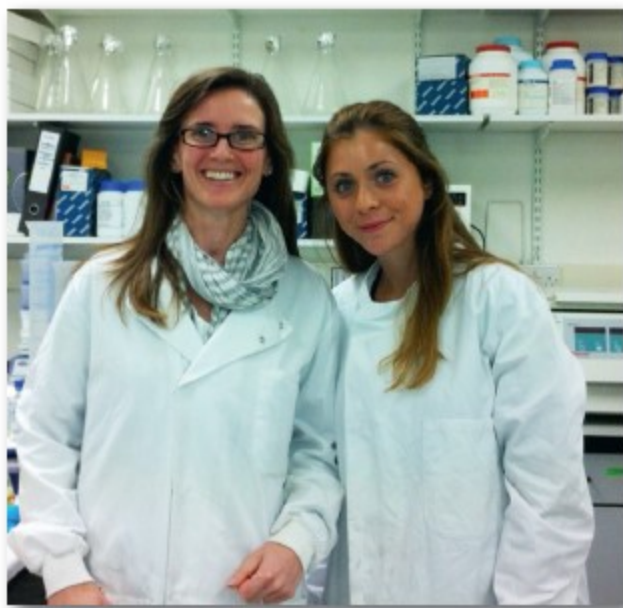


Laura Mariotti carried out her placement at Birkbeck College, London, with Dr Cara Vaughan



Laura Mariotti (right) with her supervisor Dr Cara Vaughan

“The day before starting my placement, I was so nervous that I had trouble going to sleep. I was scared of disappointing my supervisors with the little I thought I knew. Fortunately, within the first few days, I already felt ‘at home’ (even if I still felt a little bit clumsy), I was comfortable asking questions not only of my supervisor but to other people in the laboratory too.

My project was related to Hsp90, a chaperone. Pp5 is one of its substrates and its activation allows it to dephosphorylate cdc37, an Hsp90 cochaperone. We designed a chimeric protein with the catalytic domain of pp5 on one side of a linker and a cdc37 peptide on the other side. The aims of the project were to clone,

express and purify this chimeric protein in order to visualise the cdc37 peptide bound in the catalytic site of pp5.

The first two weeks were physically and mentally tiring, as I had a lot of information to assimilate and running around the laboratory all day turned out to be an effective work-out. Having to write all the experiment details in a lab book helped me to check that I had understood everything. I also had weekly meetings with my supervisor to present my results and discuss the following week’s experiments which were very beneficial for my understanding of all the techniques used.

I purified my protein after 3 weeks but the yield was very low. This disappointing result turned out to be a valuable source of information: I got a chance to see and compare how the yield increased when the fusion tag was changed and therefore further understand the properties of my protein. This studentship was not focussed on getting results; learning was what mattered most.

As the weeks went by, I got more and more committed to the project and it saddened me to leave the laboratory when the studentship was over. You also get to experience many feelings: satisfaction, patience, disappointment, excitement, etc. These are the sort of feelings that you don’t discover in laboratory sessions at university. This internship was much more than work experience; I grew up as a person (my confidence increased dramatically!). I met incredible and friendly scientists at different stages of their careers and I certainly will stay in touch with most of them. I am now sure that I want to pursue a career in research and I am much more prepared for the choices I have to make this year regarding PhD applications, for instance. This placement was the best work experience I’ve had and I strongly recommend all undergraduate students to apply. ■