

Jana - (BSc Biochemistry with a year in industry) UCB BioPharma in Belgium.

Already being an international student in Leeds and having lived in various countries throughout my life I was very enticed by the internship at UCB BioPharma when I saw they are based in Belgium. The project itself seemed interesting, UCB itself is a well renowned pharmaceutical company, but mostly I was drawn to the idea of moving to Brussels, as a sort of break away from university.

Here at UCB I'm working in the Investigative Toxicology department on a project with the aim of identifying novel biomarkers of drug-induced kidney injury. I have a supervisor whose project I am working on, who taught me all relevant lab techniques and gave me advice on what work I should do, particularly at the start. However, I am still given quite a lot of responsibility in terms of choosing how to go about the project, which experiments to run, how to interpret results, etc. It may seem daunting at first having someone rely on you for their project, but I would not worry, they are always there to help and know how to be patient with students as this is probably everyone's first proper lab work experience. My favourite aspect of the internship itself is the chance we are given to try a variety of different lab techniques, to tackle the question of the project from different perspectives to get a clear idea of what is going on. This has definitely helped me understand all the techniques I've learnt in lectures and will give me an advantage when it comes to my third year dissertation!



Picture of the lovely people I share an office with

In terms of what living in Brussels is like, I would say I love it. It's a vibrant city, with such a variety of different nationalities and backgrounds, and there is always something going on. Belgium is a beautiful country, there are so many cities that we visited and I would highly recommend seeing, including Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp. It is also strategically placed in Europe making travel to places like Paris and Amsterdam super easy. I would say the only issue would be the language, as French is mostly spoken in Brussels, and Flemish is spoken in the northern part of Belgium. This

may come as an issue when dealing with paperwork or bills or appointments, but you learn to get used to it, all you need is a French-speaking friend to translate everything!



Sure being away from home and familiarity is difficult at first, but the advice I would give it try to adapt as well as possible. It may have been easier on me considering I had done this before, but it was never in this manner. I never moved to a country where I don't speak the language, where I'm not surrounded by people my age and where I'm not living in student accommodation. My way of adapting is just embracing what the place has to offer. I keep myself busy with things like yoga classes, dance classes, salsa classes, volunteering, the gym, and spending time with new people I have met here. We tend to travel on the weekends, and seem to always have visitors! The good thing about moving away for a year is having a limited time to see everything there is to offer and you get an experience like no other. If I was told all this before, I wouldn't even think twice about doing the placement!