

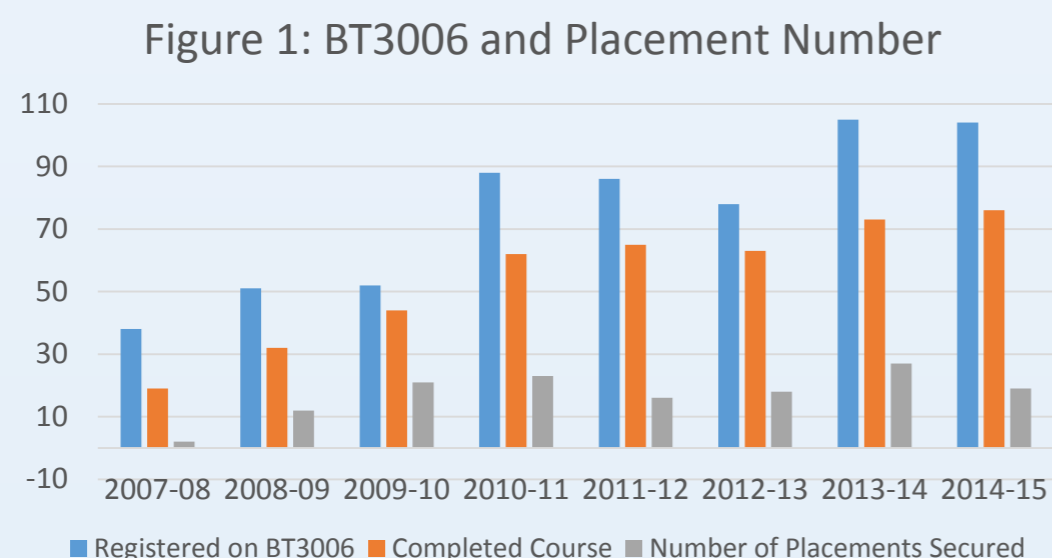
# Medical Science Students Actively Prepare For The Transition To Work

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More than half of graduate-level recruiters say they would be more likely to employ graduates if they had previous work experience<sup>1</sup>. Life science employers surveyed by the author in 2012 (11 respondents) all stated that undergraduate students with a year's relevant work experience as part of their degree were more likely to be shortlisted for interview and offered work related to their degree than academically equal graduates without such experience. Indeed, a report in 2015 by High Fliers Research Ltd.<sup>2</sup> stated "Recruiters have confirmed that 31% of this year's entry-level positions are expected to be filled by graduates who have already worked for their organisations, either through paid internships, industrial placements or vacation work."

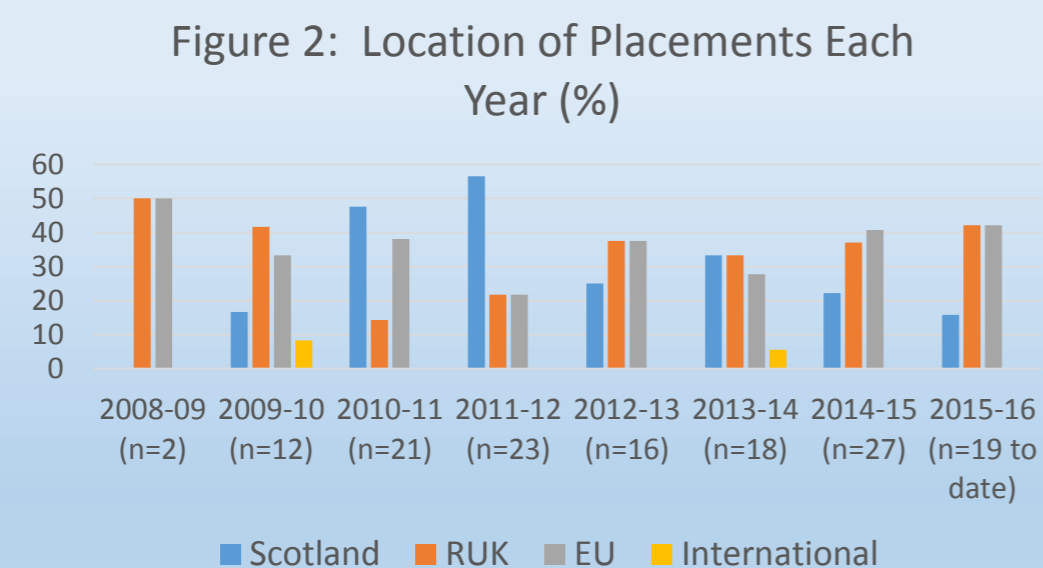
Students are rapidly realising that relevant work experience gives them a fundamental advantage when entering the job market and the demand for summer internships and year-long placements is soaring.

All degrees offered by the School of Medical Sciences allow academically qualified students the ability to apply for a year-long placement in a company or research institute as part of their degree and graduate with an MSci rather than a BSc. BT3006 (Fig. 1) is a prerequisite course for those students wishing to take a placement.



Students are automatically registered on BT3006 if they are on the MSci degree programme. The course is designed to identify those students who are interested in applying for a placement and are academically qualified to do so. However, as the course provides advice on all aspects of applying for jobs including job searches, writing CVs and covering letters, completing application forms and interview technique a large number of students who are not interested in applying for a placement attend the course. Some of these students will attend for information but do not complete the compulsory coursework, preferring instead to withdraw from the course after they have attended the relevant sessions. Generally about 30% to 50% of those students who complete the course are actively seeking placements.

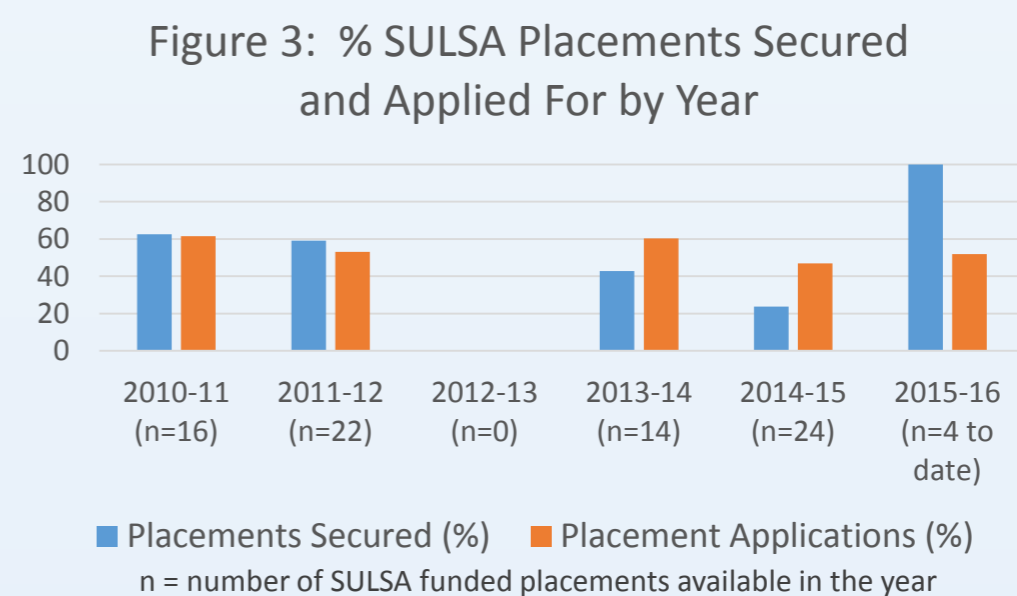
Interestingly the trend towards undertaking a placement year outside the UK is growing (Fig. 2).



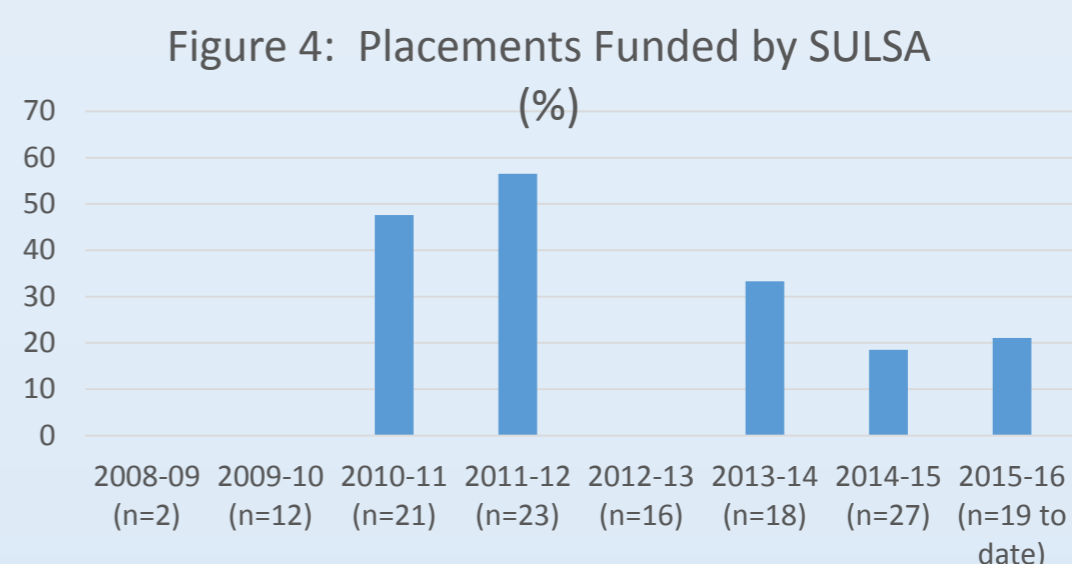
About 25% of students from Scottish universities tend to undertake their year-long placements in Scotland with the majority being in the UK<sup>3</sup>. However, there is a trend amongst students from Aberdeen to undertake their placements in the EU, and a number of links have been formed with successful companies or research institutes which offer placements on a regular basis. This goes a long way to enhancing the internationalisation of our undergraduate study programmes as per the focus of the EU2020 policy.

It is clear that providing assistance and dedicated help to our students to search and apply for placements is having a positive impact. While no data is available on the number of individual placements each student is applying for it is possible to compare our success rate with that of the 5 other SULSA universities in relation to the SULSA funded undergraduate placement programme<sup>4</sup> which has run over a number of years (Fig. 3, note there was no SULSA funding available during 2012-13).

Of the 6 SULSA universities only Aberdeen and St Andrews provide dedicated help, outside the careers service, to students applying for undergraduate year-long placements although Dundee and Glasgow also offer degrees with an integral year-long placement..



During each of the years that the SULSA scheme has been in operation students from Aberdeen have submitted an average of 55% of the applications for the placements advertised and have been successful in securing 58% of the placements to date. This achievement accounts for the higher than average numbers of Scottish placements undertaken by our students in the initial years in which the scheme was running (Fig. 2 & 4). The percentage of placements undertaken in Scotland fell dramatically during 2012-13 when there was no SULSA funding available but interestingly this percentage did not increase again when more Scottish places were available. This may be in large part due to the links created by students in companies and research institutes in other parts of the UK and in the EU where the standard of our students is encouraging the companies to take more students from Aberdeen (personal communications).



With the ever-increasing demand from employers for graduates with relevant work experience and the associated demand from students for such experience it is vital that we continue to expand our number and range of placements. Employers are keen to hire students into a number of roles outside the laboratory and careers are available for science graduates in areas such as administration, business development and quality assurance and our students are now also actively pursuing such roles for their placement years.

## References:

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