

## Student summerships

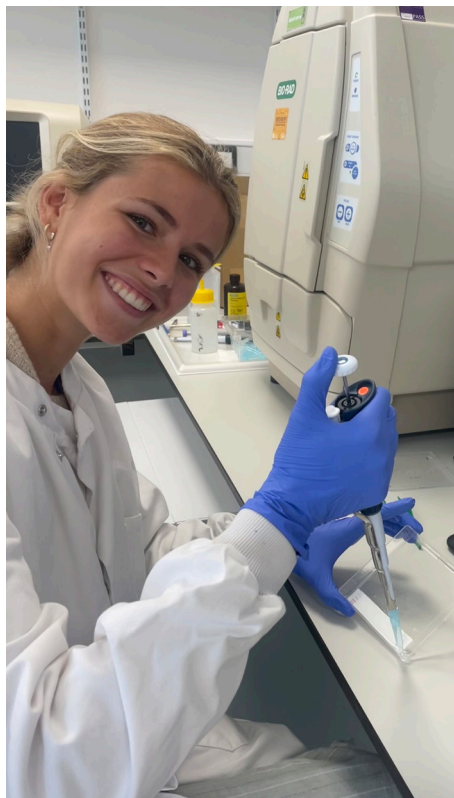
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A student studentship is essentially an extended taster day, where you are given—or come up with—a small project to work on during the allocated time and funding to support you. There is no pressure to achieve anything beyond gaining valuable experience and a deeper insight into medical, dental, or veterinary research. In my experience, the facilitators are incredibly helpful and kind, genuinely aiming to inspire the next generation of researchers! Before we hear from those who have been awarded and completed these incredible opportunities, I'll take a moment to go over the application process, why you should apply and share some top tips.



The INSPIRE Research Studentships are open to students in years

1–4 or those intercalating, with opportunities to work with research teams in Plymouth, Bristol, Cardiff or Exeter. These studentships are a fantastic way to build on the interests sparked during the taster days at the start of the year, or even to explore a completely different area of interest.

The application process is fairly straightforward and requires a project plan, your CV (which doesn't need to be extensive—after all, the purpose of Inspire is to encourage medical students into research!), and a statement from your supervising researcher, confirming they're happy with the plan. Projects typically last between 4 to 6 weeks, so it's important to choose a project outcome that is realistic within this time frame.

You'll usually be notified of your success by mid-May, and from there, you can begin developing your project in more detail.

My own project, conducted in the Bristol endocrinology labs in July 2024, involved a week of shadowing researchers and PhD students, followed by 3 weeks of working on my own project. I was given my own set of cells to care for and study, observing their response to various independent variables. This hands-on experience was not only enjoyable but also provided valuable insight into laboratory research—an experience I would have struggled to find anywhere else at this stage in my medical career.

Although I initially found the scheme daunting and a bit intimidating, I'm incredibly glad I applied. If you're interested in exploring an area of medicine/dentistry/veterinary science that is being actively researched or simply want to experience a different side of your subject beyond what your school typically offers, I highly encourage you to apply. There's little pressure other than to fully engage with the opportunity by showing up, being enthusiastic and doing your best. So, what are you waiting for?

**Cameron Case,  
Medicine,  
University of  
Plymouth**

My experience with the INSPIRE scheme has been pivotal in shaping my passion to pursue a career in research. Through student-selected units, including a recent project with Plymouth Integrative Health and Social Care Education Centre (PICH) exploring healthcare students' attitudes towards interprofessional education, my interests in public health research have grown over my time at university.



Having written for the INSPIRE journal, I was aware of their summer studentship projects. This led me to attend one of the taster days at the University of Exeter run by the Children and Young People's Mental Health (ChYMe) research collaboration. Hearing the portfolio of projects run by the collaboration and first-hand experience from research fellows aligned with my interests in child and adolescent medicine. My personal experience volunteering with Routeways, a Plymouth-based local charity providing respite care for children with SEND, further sparked my interest towards the existing SPaCE project.

Collaborating with the team, I developed a research proposal focusing on neurodiverse parent carers' experience in accessing mental health support. Beyond my aim of conducting a research project, I knew I wanted to strengthen my project management and teamworking skills. This would also provide an opportunity to network with academic foundation trainees and clinical research fellows, understanding the training routes to these research posts. Initially set for four weeks, I extended the project by another four weeks to meet the ongoing development of my aims. The highlight of my studentship by far was the dedication and enthusiasm of my project supervisor, Dr. Tamsin Newlove-Delgado, whose support made me feel genuinely integrated into the team, enhancing both my personal and professional development.

At the project's outset, we defined key aims, focused on producing a research paper and preparing a conference abstract for an oral presentation. I focused my learning objectives towards improving my understanding of different qualitative research methods, writing for publication, and developing public speaking skills for presenting at a conference.

Beginning the research activities, I immersed myself in the interview transcripts and survey responses, implementing reflexive thematic analysis through a critical realist framework, having been introduced to this technique. Navigating my positionality during the coding process proved challenging, especially when dealing with emotionally charged experiences. I initially struggled, finding that I made assumptions from my own understanding when developing concepts, and so I had to actively challenge myself against this. Through discussions with the team, I reflected on the significance of returning to the data source and encapsulating the experience of parents rather than forming my own judgements. To achieve this, I kept reflective memos during the process as a way to guide my analysis more objectively.

I also had the opportunity to participate in patient and public involvement and engagement (PPIE). I spoke with a group of parent carers about their reasons for involvement, learning about their

own passions and practical involvement within the development of research goals and outcomes. I was able to present my results and preliminary themes, incorporating their feedback to finalise the generated themes and illustrative quotes. This experience highlighted the value of co-developing research goals with public groups who are directly impacted, emphasising the importance of advocacy in shaping meaningful outcomes.

In terms of my revised project outputs, I have developed a qualitative research paper as a first author. Once this has been reviewed our aim is to submit this for publication. This process allowed me to refine my writing style and tone to present qualitative data in a holistic and objective manner. I also developed the paper into a conference abstract. I have since presented this as an oral presentation both regionally at the Inspire Research Conference and nationally at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Conference in Glasgow.

This experience has solidified my ambition to pursue a career in academic research. It has inspired me to apply for the specialised academic foundation programme and consider the academic clinical fellowship pathway post-foundation training. I am very fortunate to have established a network of experts for guidance along the way as a result of this studentship.

For anyone curious about research, I recommend exploring the opportunities provided by the INSPIRE scheme. This has undoubtedly ignited my passion, and I am excited to see where it leads me next.

**Millicent Brodie  
Cooper, Dentistry,  
Cardiff University**

Last summer, I completed a 3-week INSPIRE Summer Studentship at Cardiff, my home university. I was first introduced to the scheme at a 'taster session' run by the Improving Dentistry research group at my school. Having heard about the fascinating projects previous students had undertaken, I left the session – quite literally – inspired to apply.



Having already had some exposure to research during my dental degree, I was keen to gain a deeper understanding of how academic projects operate in real-world settings. So, after approaching a potential supervisor with my project idea, I submitted a short application just before the Easter holidays and, a few weeks later, was delighted to learn I'd been accepted. The process was refreshingly straightforward and accessible.

My project, titled 'An Investigation into the Content of Dentistry-Related Smartphone Applications', explored the availability, functionality and content of mobile apps related to dental health, focusing on their potential to support evidence-based care and improve patient outcomes.

As the lead investigator, I designed and managed the project; conducting a systematic review of free, publicly available dental apps across the Apple App Store, Google Play Store and Microsoft Store. My research team gathered key information about each app's purpose, target audience, features and technical elements, such as the app's privacy settings and offline functionality. I was responsible for training others to carry out this process consistently, providing



a fantastic opportunity to strengthen my leadership and teamwork skills.

One of the unexpected highlights of the studentship was experiencing Cardiff in the summer. The city takes on a different energy during the quieter months and I could enjoy events I would usually have missed out on during my evenings and weekends. The programme is very flexible – I spent my last week working remotely from home, meaning I didn't miss out on valuable family time which is so precious during our all-too-brief period of warmer weather! Additionally, the stipend ensures you don't lose out by partaking; particularly if, like me, you would usually have worked through the break.

Undertaking this project has given me real insight into how collaborative research operates. I strengthened my academic writing and analysis skills, was introduced to platforms like the Open Science Framework (OSF), and, perhaps most importantly, confirmed that research is something I truly enjoy. The studentship has already opened doors to future opportunities, such as a possible publication, presentations and prizes.

INSPIRE has also played a key role in shaping my long-term aspirations within academic dentistry, as I have now secured an Academic Dental Foundation Training (ADFT) post for September. I believe the skills, experience and confidence I gained through this studentship gave me a competitive edge when applying.

My advice to future applicants would be: if research interests you, go for it! Reach out to a supervisor whose work excites you, don't be afraid to propose your ideas and enjoy the process. INSPIRE is what it says on the tin and could be the first step in your academic journey.

**Phoebe Sussman,  
Veterinary Science,  
University of  
Bristol**

During my second year at vet school, I carried out an INSPIRE Summer Studentship where I spent a month working in Professors Linda Wooldridge's laboratory, studying T-cells and immunoassays targeted to stimulate and optimise T-cell function.



It was a very interesting month where I learned a lot about working within research and immunology. I also developed a lot of new skills, which I wouldn't have been exposed to during the veterinary degree; I was able to gain experience with lab work, carrying out cell cultures and working to keep sterility under hoods, something which looks easier than it is! I also learnt a lot about flow cytometry and FloJo, a software used to interpret flow cytometry results. Learning to use the software was definitely a good challenge but I was able to create beautiful graphs when I did manage to get it to work! Alongside developing my practical skills and helping to set up some pretty interesting experiments, the studentship was a great opportunity to talk to researchers and PhD students about their pathways into academia and gain advice on working within research. This has really been a pivotal step in my journey through vet school, as it really opened my eyes to the different opportunities which were available to vet students within research. Equally, this month counted towards my clinical Extra-Mural Studies (EMS) requirements; it was a great

way to get a chunk of clinical EMS out the way early in the degree, taking pressure off my third and fourth year. Additionally, EMS can be expensive — the studentship provides you with a stipend for the number of hours you work, which makes this placement a lot more accessible. Overall, this experience was very enjoyable, and it definitely inspired me to pursue more opportunities to get involved in research. I would highly recommend a studentship to anyone considering going into research or even if you are just curious about what it's like to work in academia. It is just a great opportunity to dip your toe into research and understand what goes on behind the scenes in some of the leading research groups within the GW4 (University of Bristol, Cardiff University, University of Exeter and University of Plymouth).

**Alex Turlea,  
Medicine,  
University of  
Exeter**

I applied for the INSPIRE student summership to enhance my understanding of the clinical auditing process and data analysis, whilst also gaining hands-on experience in the research field.

As part of the summer project, I was fortunate enough to start auditing clinical data on patients with gestational diabetes mellitus, offering the team valuable insight into the insulin requirements in pregnancy. The observational database created around the rapid insulin titration algorithm in patients with gestational diabetes can be used to explore questions around basal insulin dosage previously not answered.

Building upon the work I did in the student internship I have successfully submitted an abstract and presented a poster at Diabetes UK. This is a leading professional conference for healthcare professionals involved in diabetic care, where I was able to attend and present my research to colleagues and other students.

This experience has been instrumental in advancing my career, providing me with skills in auditing and creating a scientific poster for a conference. I hope to take this further and progress into an academic career after graduation.

My advice for students looking to apply for this year's summership grant is to have clear objectives on what they want to achieve over the summer and to not get discouraged by obstacles, and communicate with their supervisors when issues arise.

Supervisor's comments from the INSPIRE outcome report submitted at the end of the summer:

Alex has been fantastically studious and enthusiastic during the INSPIRE project. She has overcome several hurdles to data access and achieved a fantastic amount in a short period of time. I have thrown her in the deep end of research and she has swum! The data she has collected and started to analyse will be invaluable in improving the care and outcome for women with gestational diabetes in the UK and beyond. I am very happy to continue to support her with her ongoing involvement in this project and beyond. Very well done!

