

Opening Doors: How Summer Studentships are transforming research careers

Dr Georgina Fletcher, BioImagingUK Project Officer

When financial barriers stand between talented students and research experience, potential is lost. The BBSRC-funded BioImagingUK and UK Physics of Life Summer Studentships programme set out to change that—and the results speak volumes about what's possible when we remove obstacles to opportunity.

Over summer 2025, fifteen undergraduate students from low-income backgrounds embarked on 5-6 week bioimaging and biophysics research placements

at institutions across the UK. The programme's generous financial model—£466/week stipend plus £500 relocation support—was deliberately designed



to allow students to focus entirely on their research without the financial pressures that typically force them to work part-time jobs or forgo opportunities altogether.

"The fact that it gave me the ability to get experience in research with the stipend to live on," explained one participant. "The options for getting experience are often either unpaid (which is unfeasible for me) or paid within a professional role. These factors mean experience is walled off to certain people. So this studentship was an incredible opportunity."

The demand was exceptional. Fifty-seven supervisors from 23 UK institutions submitted projects for just 20 available places. Of the 122

applications received, 77 met the socioeconomic criteria—including 50.8% first-generation students and 31.1% experiencing financial hardship.

The impact extended far beyond simply providing summer work. Every student reported increased or confirmed interest in research careers, with 75% now more likely to pursue PhD studies. Their skills transformation was equally impressive: microscopy techniques improved by an average of 2.5 levels on a five-point scale, data analysis by 2.0 levels, and image analysis by 1.5 levels.

Supervisors confirmed this remarkable growth. *"I've never worked with a student—especially an undergraduate—who was so immediately independent in the lab,"* one noted. *"They worked diligently and rigorously and the results they produced will contribute to a future grant application."*

The research contributions were substantial. Students generated preliminary data for grant applications (62.5%), produced data for publication (37.5%), developed new methodologies (25%), and even contributed to published papers (12.5%). One supervisor reflected on *"seeing her rapid growth in both technical skills and confidence over the six weeks."*

Perhaps most telling were the students' own reflections. *"I don't think I was aware that PhD studies could be an option for me,"* shared one student. *"I am now considering applying for scholarships to do doctoral training after an MSc."*

Another stated: *"I am incredibly grateful to have had this opportunity. I feel it has put me on the ladder of scientific research and development. In a field where experience is required but incredibly difficult to come by, this project has helped massively."*

Strategic partnerships with Generation Research and the Black in Plant Science Network enhanced



the programme's reach, with Generation Research funding two additional extended projects—demonstrating how the grant catalysed further investment in this successful model.

The universal positive outcomes validate what

many already suspected: when we remove financial barriers and provide quality mentorship, talented students from all backgrounds can thrive in research.

Find out more about the [BiolmagingUK Summer Studentship Projects](#)

Student	Supervisor	Host Institution	Project Title
Ramy Abaker	Daniel Soong	University of Edinburgh	Building an AI-driven multiscale whole organism imaging workflow
Innis Abdulla	Nicola Weston	University of Nottingham	Silken Secrets: Revealing Spider Webs with Electron Microscopy
Katie Clarke	Simon Cleary	King's College London	Modulating pulmonary lymphatics to improve lung health
Anna D'Anna And Emma Watts	Yolanda Calle	University of Roehampton	Role of WASP in EMT
James Harker	Jamieson Howard	University of York	Super-Resolved Mapping of DNA Nanostar Hydrogels Reveals Ionic Modulation of Network Architecture
Nazmul Hasan	Jessica Walker & Archana Jadhav	Diamond Light Source (Harwell, Didcot)	Correlating X-ray Techniques for Cellular Imaging to Model the Uptake and Distribution of Drug-like Molecules
Mia Johnson	Matt Bawn	University of Newcastle	Investigating Environmental Microbes in Newcastle Using Nanopore Sequencing
Fatema Kharbotli	Dale Maxwell	University of Oxford	Investigating the Effect of NFI Loss on Spermatogonial Stem Cells in a Mouse Model
Kacey Love	Simon Walker	Babraham Institute (Cambridge)	Assessing microscopy methods to study localisation of coilin and SMN proteins in mammalian cells
Flora Manu-Fofie	Jim Rowe	University of Sheffield	How does plant water loss affect plant growth at high and low humidity?
Daisy Porter	Laura Cooper & David Corcoran	University of Warwick	User friendly deconvolution tools for microscopy
Amy Raper	Chengxi (Todd) Zhu	University of Cambridge	Imaging, manipulating and measuring HeLa cells
Charlotte Todd	Lydia Kitchen	University of Durham	Expanding our knowledge on Expansion microscopy: Visualising Cancer cell markers and Cell-in cell structures in H1299 Cells
Noir Tucker	Jim Fouracre	University of Bristol	Manipulating miR156 to control vegetative phase change in Camelina sativa

Table showing the 15 summer studentships directly funded by the BiolmagingUK and Physics of Life funding to widen participation in our Networks

<https://www.rms.org.uk/community/networks-affiliates/bioimaginguk-network/summer-studentships.html>

