

I've come to Biology by mistake - Michael Hicks, written 09-May-2022

There's a film called *Withnail And I*. Not sure if you've heard of it or seen it but there's a moment where a couple of struggling London out of work actors are clearly out of their depth in the pouring rain in Cumbria and one of them says to a local farmer, as if to explain their circumstance, "we've come on holiday by mistake"!

I wasn't quite out of work. An HR crossed wire meant that I'd come on secondment to Test Track and Trace for a year but being given only a six month contract, whereas my job in Computer Science had been backfilled for 12 months. The TT&T contract ended and I found myself with time on my hands. My CS job was being done by someone else and I was observing some pretty busy people around me doing stuff I had no knowledge or experience of, but that looked pretty exciting. I didn't want to sit on my hands and ride out my secondment so I approached senior management in Biology (JF and LH) asking if I could get involved in a learning process for me whilst helping them out in terms of manpower. (I had no idea of the staffing structure but in the words of JF "we'll never say no to helping hands" signaled my intro into the biology infrastructure team).

I started by shadowing one member of staff in one area for a few days learning some of the tasks they do so that I could fill in one day a week when they were not here. I also was shown the various daily and weekly tasks carried out by the infrastructure team and given induction training on using equipment and performing tasks.

New experience and learning

I learnt a lot in a very short time. All new experience and knowledge. The time spent working in Biology was really enjoyable and I wanted to stay. Sadly there were no job opportunities and I returned to my substantive role. However, a few months later a job became available. Had I not spent the time here on secondment I would not have had the confidence, knowledge and experience to apply for the job. I applied and was successful and I owe a large part of that success to having had the secondment experience.

I'm not sure how this could be worked out for others but I would recommend some form of scheme for technicians to be able to work across different areas to broaden their experience and skills and enhance their employment opportunities and careers.