The Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA), based at Sand Hutton on the outskirts of York, specialises in the applied sciences and has an overarching purpose of supporting and developing a sustainable food chain, a healthy natural environment, and protecting the global community from biological and chemical risks. FERA engaged with seven student interns over the summer to work on a variety of projects within three key areas of the organisation: Business and International Development, the Proficiency Testing Group and the National Bee Unit.

**Business Development Internships**

The Business and International Development (BID) Team appointed James Pearl, a final year Economics student, to work on improving the process by which FERA brings new tenants onto their site at Sand Hutton and to create an open innovation hub. James conducted research to produce a comprehensive site guide and a set of useful documents, presenting his findings to key members of staff. James said, “I decided to do this internship for reasons of personal development and the enhancement of careers prospects. I feel that both of these targets have been met.”

Ellen Teder, a final year Psychology student, was taken on by the BID Team to work with the Conferencing team and compile an action plan as to how their service can be improved. Ellen also worked partly on a marketing strategy for the launch of the International Food Safety Training Laboratory. Ellen’s supervisor, Deborah Jones, says, “I would have no hesitation recommending Ellen for work in a commercial environment … and would have happily kept Ellen as part of the team. I would thoroughly recommend taking up the opportunity to have an intern.”

The Bids and Tenders Team were looking to recruit an intern to undertake research on available EU funding which FERA may be interested in applying for. The intern would also be required to analyse the best ways in which to inform FERA staff about EU funding opportunities. Unjulie Maumi, a final year Environmental Economics and Environmental Management student, rose to the challenge and spent twelve weeks focussing on developing the EU bids and Tenders intranet web pages alongside completing a range of other mini projects. She said, “this project has enabled all the relevant information and external links to be stored in one place, making it easier for FERA staff to search information.” Claire Charlton and Christina Steveni, Unjulie’s supervisors both agreed that, “the placement has also given a greater understanding of various funding streams that are available, both UK and internationally based and how this funding is applied for, by whom and the lessons learnt in generating a successful bid …” Unjulie has now been offered a second internship with the FERA’s Land Use and Sustainability Team, to assist with a project to undertake an assessment of the impact of policy on the agricultural environmental using aerial photography and historic mapping ranging from the 1930s to the present day.
National Bee Unit Internships

The National Bee Unit (NBU) at FERA comprises specialists concerned with all aspects of the husbandry and protection of bees in the UK. The NBU’s major role is to protect the honey bee, an essential pollinator of crops and wild plants, and to support the beekeeping industry. The NBU required two student interns to work with them over the summer vacation to assist in the work of the NBU diagnostic laboratory, and with the maintenance of apiary and survey based research projects.

The NBU recruited final year Environmental students Hannah Starr and Hannah Curzon, to work with its team. Hannah and Hannah worked on a variety of laboratory tasks during their internships, however their main focus was assisting the NBU in their involvement in the European Union’s Pilot Surveillance Programme; a project designed to try and harmonise and standardise honey bee health and disease monitoring across the EU.

Hannah Curzon said, “my involvement in this project has not only given me a real insight into the work of the NBU and the importance of the honey bee, but it has also given me a real sense of achievement as I am now in a position to say that I have contributed to a real government project that will inform future environmental policy.” Hannah Starr feels as though she has really benefitted from her work experience at the NBU. She said, “having completed the internship one of my main achievements was developing laboratory skills, particularly learning lab work complying to Good Laboratory practice … I have gained experience of working in the field, and have gained confidence talking to a range of people at different levels within an organisation … in addition it has confirmed my desire to apply for an environment related job once I have graduated.”

Ben Jones, of the Inspectorate Department at FERA, was really impressed with the work conducted by the two interns. He said, “the work the NBU undertakes is extremely dynamic during the beekeeping season. Priorities often shift rapidly and staff are resourced to numerous projects spanning admin support, data entry, sample preparation and receipt and field work. [Hannah and Hannah] remained calm and consistently delivered.”

51/51 of the student interns agreed that they had developed at least 2 out of the 3 skills they identified as wanting to develop at the beginning of the internship.
Proficiency Testing Internships

FERA’s Proficiency Testing Group (PTG) is responsible for an organisation of proficiency testing schemes for food and environmental analysis laboratories on a world-wide basis known commercially as FAPAS. The PTG supplies assessments of laboratory performance to participants around the world in more than 110 countries, by independently checking their laboratory procedures and providing a completely confidential assessment of their capabilities. Participation in the relevant testing schemes allows demonstration of systems and the technical ability of staff, and proves to customers that the organisation has quality systems in place. The PTG recruited Emma Lord, a final year Biology student and Mike Trousdale, a second year Environmental Science student, to assist them with dispatch and administration duties and to help assess trends in proficiency testing data. Emma explains the variety of work she undertook during her internship: “The main body of my work over the past twelve weeks has focused on analysing the data received from the FAPAS food chemistry scheme. I have had the chance to meet the scientist behind the equations and statistics used by the team. My role within FAPAS has brought to my attention that there are many other career options within science and has spurred me on to diverge from biology alone.” Kate Wilkinson, Emma’s supervisor within the PTG stated that Emma’s work made a significant impact on the department. She says, “Emma’s help with admin and dispatch tasks ensured that the vital functions of the team were maintained during a period of short staffing. Papers from the two scientific projects were presented on time and to quality at the external Advisory Committee Meeting … No task was above or beneath her – all was seen as valuable experience and benefit to the team.”

Mike also provided substantial support to the PTG Team, applying various techniques for data analysis and conducting research into future proficiency tests for business expansion. He was particularly commended on his team working abilities. Kate Wilkinson said, “the dispatch team reported Mike had been a great help on a variety of tasks …and readily mixed, worked and socialised with the team at all levels.” Mike feels the internship has been advantageous to his personal and professional development. He said, “I think having completed this internship has been hugely beneficial in having actual real world work experience and evidence of various skills which employers in future will look for. I have already been offered another part time internship for during University term time in another group within FERA so that will also be a great opportunity!”

7/7 of the student supervisors at FERA agreed that managing a student was beneficial to them and their professional development.

Students: To view the latest internship opportunities logon to www.york.ac.uk/careers/ics and search for Student Internship Bureau.

Employers: To find out how to engage with the skills of a student intern contact careers-sib@york.ac.uk