



SULSA's Graduate Employability Masterclasses *Developing Meta Skills*

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University is great at teaching theory. Teaching so-called “hard” skills. And, in the words of one of my professors, teaching students how to be good students. On the other hand, when it comes to practical – in the sense of useful, rather than hands-on – knowledge to help us succeed in an ever-changing, fast-paced, competitive industry, academia often falls short.

Therefore, when I heard about SULSA's Graduate Employability Masterclasses (GEM), I signed up immediately. I hoped these would broaden my awareness of the Life Sciences industry and the possible career paths within it; highlight the key skills needed to succeed; give insight into successful Life Sciences companies and what a life working for them would look like; and introduce me (albeit virtually) to like-minded participants and, of course, industry professionals. Needless to say, my hopes were surpassed.

My experience could be summarised as follows: I discovered that building a career in the Life Sciences industry is not purely dependent on and limited to laboratory skills and scientific theory. In fact, there is a plethora of “soft” skills (more adequately termed “meta” skills by SULSA's Executive Director, Alison Dun) – from creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship to problem-solving, critical thinking, leadership, and teamwork – on which are built the foundations of a successful scientific career. Not to mention the industry's shift towards data- and digital-driven science which brings with it another wave of alternative skills. Furthermore, this discovery or realisation was made tangible through the masterclasses' highly interactive nature, with group exercises challenging the very concepts to which we were being introduced. If we did not know the importance of creativity, business-acumen, and critical thinking before, we certainly did after attempting to prepare a sales pitch and storyboard for the hypothetical roll-out of Canon Medical's relocatable diagnostic solutions in rural Scotland!

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that a career in the Life Sciences must be lived pipette in hand and one petri dish at a time – but GEM has highlighted how diverse the industry is, with careers away from the lab bench that are engaging and exciting, and beyond anything I had imagined when I started my degree in Biotechnology!

Whilst I may not yet know what career path I want to go down – if anything, because I am now aware of even more routes from which to decide – GEM has certainly opened my eyes to the possibilities I am presented with as a Life Sciences student in Scotland and I am better equipped to navigate the industry when my graduation comes. Participating in GEM has cemented my decision to pursue the Bio-Business option available at my university, to further build my understanding of the inner workings of the industry and business models underlying it; and likewise for my decision to undertake

a bioinformatics industrial placement, with the goal of developing the computational attributes so many of the GEM speakers praised. Furthermore, GEM has encouraged me to search for non-laboratory-based experience opportunities too, so that I can immerse myself into the “meta” side of the Life Sciences.

Through attending the GEMs over the past month, I have been inspired, engaged, reassured, challenged in my thinking, and empowered to follow my passion for science and apply all my skills in its pursuit. Many thanks to SULSA and the masterclasses’ supporters, speakers, and participants!

Resources

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