

Ask Aberdeen Episode 7 transcript Day in the life of a Science Student

Georgie [00:00:07] I'm Georgie.

Michaela [00:00:08] And I'm Michaela.

Georgie [00:00:09] And we're here to tell you about the University of Aberdeen.

Michaela [00:00:11] In each episode, we will discuss frequently asked questions about topics such as applications...

Georgie [00:00:15] Go abroad...

Michaela [00:00:17] Student life...

Georgie [00:00:18] Sports and Society's...

Michaela [00:00:19] Budgeting for Uni...

Georgie [00:00:20] And life in Aberdeen.

Michaela [00:00:22] We will be speaking to current Aberdeen students, those who really know what it's like to study and live here.

Georgie [00:00:27] And we'll be getting exclusive tips from members of our amazing staff.

Michaela [00:00:31] Join us for this episode of Ask Aberdeen.

Georgie [00:00:36] Hi and welcome to this week's episode of Ask Aberdeen. My name is Georgie and I'm pleased to be joined by two of our current Aberdeen students who are here to tell you about a day in the life of a science student. We're often asked questions about how many labs you have or what the facilities are like and many other questions, so we are very lucky to have Sam and Max here today to tell us about their experiences. So would you like to both introduce yourselves?

Max [00:00:57] Yes. Hello there, everyone. My name's Max. I'm an MSci biological sciences student and I'm currently in my fifth year.

Sam [00:01:04] And I'm Sam. I am currently in my third year studying neuroscience and psychology. And yeah, it's going fairly well

Georgie [00:01:12] So we've got two kind of similar, but also different, science subjects that we're going to cover. But for any of the people listening, what Sam and Max say will hopefully be fairly generic across the sciences. So, if you're thinking of starting a science degree, the things that they advise and the kind of experiences they've will relate to most people. So, Sam, you do psychology with neuroscience, so you're obviously doing the BSc, which is the science version. But something Aberdeen offers is a master of arts in psychology and a bachelor of science in psychology. And that often confuses quite a lot of people. So could you just explain a little bit about what the difference is between the MA and the BSc for psychology?

Sam [00:01:47] Sure, so the raw course that you'll be doing is the same, regardless if you take the MA or the BSc, you will still have to do statistics, which a lot of people who come from more the Arts side really don't like. But it is a fundamental part of the degree and you'll obviously be dealing with all the science and the research and the literature. However, psychology is in that weird in between period where you can for example, in social psychology, there is a lot of overlap with sociology and some other kind of more global theory and social studies where you're looking more at society and into links and anthropology history. And so those connections can be really useful. So what actually changes is the subjects that you take alongside the degree. So you have additional credits and you need to make up a certain number of science credits for the science course or of essentially arts credits for the arts course. So you can take it with something like sociology, history, anthropology, linguistics, and that will maybe map on, and so you'll probably have preferred area that you quite like and that work works well within the arts or within the sciences if you want to focus more on the biology or genetics or those kind of features. But the core course that you'll do will be the same. And what you can do with the course is mostly the same. There's very few things that specify some skills, but for the most part, if it's specific, then there'll be a masters that will train you into that which will accept people from either course.

Georgie [00:03:17] Brilliant that's a great explanation of it. I think I need to learn all that. And something else is obviously, people who are considering which MA or BSc, is obviously the entry requirements are slightly different as well. So Sam said once you're on the course it's very similar, but if you're applying for the science version, you will need some sciences from your Highers or your A-levels. If you're applying for the M.A. psychology, you may not need any at all. I don't think there are any specific entry requirements, just the grades that we look for there. So that might make a difference as well which one you're choosing. So kind of focusing on the sciences. How did you guys find moving from school or college to university. For some people can be quite a big jump? How did you find it, Max?

Max [00:03:55] Well, that's a good question. I actually went to high school in Italy, and when you start senior school or high school there, you sort of choose certain topics, certain subject areas to focus on. So I went to a science based school. I knew from a very young age that I wanted to study science, but I did maths, physics, chemistry and biology was funnily probably the subject that I did the least at school, but I just really enjoyed it, had a lot of passion for it and wanted to move back to the UK as I'm half Italian and half Scottish to study in an English speaking university. And the transition was very smooth. Everybody who I've spoken to who's maybe gone to high school in the UK or to a high school in a different European country, they found the transition in terms of content to be quite smooth. They all feel quite prepared. And the first year is generally quite introductory. It covers a lot of broad subject areas just so it's not too intimidating. And people get to get a little taste of everything and then decide which areas of biology or science in general to specialise in in their subsequent years. So the main thing that you need to adapt to is more just living by yourself if that's the first time that you're doing that or moving to a new country, which was the case for me. But the student community, the staff at the University of Aberdeen are all very welcoming and absolutely fantastic. So the transition was as smooth as possible. And I think most people would say the same.

Georgie [00:05:39] It sounds great, I think it's good if you know what you want to do, straight from school like you did, having done so much science leading up to it. That's really great. How did you find it Sam?

Sam [00:05:48] I will mostly echo Max here where I found the transition very straightforward. It was a lot of continuations. And because, again, psychology falls in that ground. I found that I was able to continue both philosophical, kind of artistic, more analytical thoughts and kind of long form ideas, as well as my interest in science. So I'd done a lot of biology and was considering something like medicine as an alternative. So I've always been quite eclectic and I found it a really useful continuance to always like every idea that I dealt with before, which was very nice. So I had the kind of chemistry and biology and biological psychology and the brain working in the neuroscience. And I had just continuing to critically deal with theories, ideas, arguments, philosophy, which was also very useful, so very smooth transition and enjoyed it.

Georgie [00:06:39] Brilliant, and I think possibly for science students you're more likely to study the subject at like high school or A level or whatever. I think maybe some of the art students may have not studied their subjects before. It might be a slightly different transition. I did Law and the transition from school to A level that was really difficult, but from A level to uni was actually OK. So I think if anyone's experience that kind of jump from GCSE to A level or from Nat 5 to Highers, it's not as bad I think going into university, which you guys have both kind of said is the case for you. So at uni, people talk about seminars and lectures and labs and kind of what does that mean to someone who's never heard of it before? Max, do you want to kind of explain how many lectures and seminars you have and what's the difference?

Max [00:07:23] OK. Absolutely. As a science student, you're probably going to get a mix of all of that from your very first year. So lectures, they in the first year usually last just about an hour or two and then they can become a bit longer as you progress through the years, up to three hour lectures. And that's just when you'll have an academic member of staff essentially just speaking to you and describing some kind of interesting, sometimes complex topic. And then usually what you'll do in your courses is you'll be able to apply that knowledge that you've gained from lectures in both seminars and lab practicals and the seminars you might be encouraged to speak up a little bit more and discuss some ideas just to test your understanding and to ask questions. Even if there's something that's been unclear and in the lab practicals, you'll be able to learn important techniques that actually apply the concepts that you've learnt about in these lectures. And it's all very, very fun. My first labs in the first year were quite an eye opening experience. School in Italy is very theory based. So I was excited to get some of this practical experience as well.

Georgie [00:08:36] And Sam, how is it for you with doing psychology and neuroscience? I know psychology is a very popular subject. Did you find your lectures are quite big and how was that?

Sam [00:08:44] So our lectures are actually a little shorter, but more spread out. So we have four lectures a week. We're usually covering three different topics within psychology, which will have lectures on every week and those will be about an hour and then we're covering a mythological or statistical topic, which would be another lecture. And so those are obviously what used to be, we're recording this during Covid, but in a big lecture hall with everyone in the course. And then you would have the smaller workshop or seminar groups, which would often be more discussion focused. Or you might have to do some research and prepare a presentation or discuss a particular topic, do a certain activity. One of the things that we have in psychology that isn't in most classes is a flipped lectures or flipped classrooms, which are something which is kind of new and like pedagogical research and it's where you do work before hand and then you come to the lecture and

you treat the lecture as kind of a large workshop with everyone in the class. So you've done the actual reading and that before. And then you're coming with ideas for group activity, those are actually really useful and hopefully will make even more use of them. Then we've got workshops and then we've got labs which are where you would be doing experiments, you'd run through participants. Some of ours are also statistics practicals where it's more just using the software and doing the data analysis. So we have usually about one of those a week, sometimes two for the psychology course. Then obviously you'll have additional ones for any other courses that you're doing along with that.

Georgie [00:10:19] Brilliant! That sounds very interesting. The flip lecture sounds very interesting as well as I think, some people from my experience at university, not everyone comes to seminars and they don't do the prep work either. And it's just it's so beneficial if you do if you really like, engage with those seminars. That's your time to spend more kind of interaction with your lecturers and ask more questions, and if you've done the prep obviously then are prepared for that. So, yeah, a note to listeners if you're starting university, do engage with lectures and things because in the seminars, particularly because they are really, really useful to you. So in terms of a facility, something again we get asked a lot is where will I be studying? Which building will I be based? And Sam I'll come to you first this time. Do you have a building your kind of particularly based in.

Sam [00:11:05] Yes. So we're mostly based in the William Guild is the one where a lot of the Psychology and Neuroscience labs and research things, all the EEGs, those kind of equipment is all set up through those. You occasionally will be doing some lab work, which might be in, what's the zoology building to the left as you're looking to the library on the left, is that Meston?

Georgie [00:11:30] Yeah that's Meston.

Sam [00:11:30] Yeah. So you'll occasionally be in either side of the library one and very occasionally in the zoology building. But for the most part, we are based in William Guild and that's what most of the equipment and labs will be, as well as the workshops.

Georgie [00:11:43] It's also got the enormous Arts Lecture theatre hasn't it in William Guild so you're probably in there for psychology. What about you, Max? Are you in Meston and Fraser Noble, I presume?

Max [00:11:52] Yeah, in first year I experienced the Arts Lecture theatre and William Guild and I actually quite missed that because it's massive. It's a fantastic place to have first year lectures with those larger classes. But yeah, now as a biological sciences student, I'm mainly based in the zoology building. That's where we have all of our lab facilities and a lovely Crookshank garden just outside as well. So if you have a little break between lectures, you can go for a walk in there. There's lots of beautiful, cool little bits of nature and exotic plants. And yeah we have our lectures in that same building as well. In first year, you'll probably be getting a tour of the entire campus though since classes are a bit larger, your lectures will likely be in a series of different buildings. So I've also had lectures in the Meston building that Sam mentioned and also in St Mary's and New Kings, which is quite central just on Elphinstone Lawn.

Georgie [00:12:51] Yeah, I think it's nice with Aberdeen it being a campus university, everything's pretty much in one place. It sounds like you're both pretty much constantly down on our Kings College campus. If anyone's listening, thinking medicine, we do have our medicine campus up at Foresterhill, but pretty much all our other science courses, are,

on the whole, based down on King's College and it's all quite close together. So the guys have discussed the various buildings. You have a look at a campus map and see where they are. But it's not very far to go between them. And you can always tell when it change over time, because there's millions of students everywhere like crossing over and going down the little lanes on campus. It sounds like you kind of have an area based in, but like you said, in first year you may be based across the campus a bit more. And so with your degrees, we try and explain to students how there's lots of optional modules and the flexibility of the degrees with Aberdeen. And I think Scottish students perhaps understand a bit better because lots of the Scottish universities offer this. But some other students from other countries or from England maybe have no idea what we mean when we talk about the degree flexibility. So Max I'll come to you again first. Do you want to just explain kind of what optional modules you took and how it works?

Max [00:14:01] Yeah, absolutely. The MSci Biological Sciences degree that I'm on is fantastic for flexibility. So essentially each year I'm required to take a fixed amount of credits from biology courses, usually around about half or more of my credits. And then those remaining credits, I can either select more biology courses if that's just what I'm set on and all I want to do. Or I can broaden my horizons and take a few other optional non biology courses, particularly in the first two years. So with that, I took advantage and I did chemistry for the first two years as well. I even did a history course on history and philosophy of the scientific revolution. A lot of people do languages. I personally didn't do that, but there's plenty to choose from. And it's a nice option because it means that you won't necessarily just be focusing on one topic, that you might get a little bit tired with a little bit bored of. Even if it's your favourite topic, you get to mix it up a little bit and experience different subject areas.

Georgie [00:15:10] I think it helps with employability as well doesn't it, because you stand out from other students. So, if a student's been to another university where they've just studied biological sciences. You've both got a degree in Biological Sciences, but you can say to an employer, yeah, but I've done a bit of history. I've done a bit of you know, I've delved a bit deeper. So, I talk about the kind of depth of the study that we can do in our degrees at Aberdeen. How's that been for you Sam? Have you taken optional modules in different subjects.

Sam [00:15:35] Absolutely. So primarily I've been doing biology courses aside, actually most terms. I've also taken quite a few chemistry. I've taken one maths. But again, having that flexibility because you don't have to do all your credits in a science course. There are a couple of crossovers. I did a theory of mind philosophy course, and I actually really enjoyed that. That is kind of one of my favourites I've done there was something very different but certainly really enjoyable and a lot of interesting ideas to deal with in that. And I took a counselling course which is also more on the Art's side but again ties in if you're looking to go into specifically counselling psychology and I just found that a useful exploration of those ideas and it comes with its own qualification if you continue it through

Georgie [00:16:21] Nice, that sounds really cool and something people sometimes ask ourselves is 'do I have to take option modules in other subjects, and what if I don't like them? What if I do badly?' How does it affect your grades, how are you assessed with those optional modules? Do you want to explain that Sam?

Sam [00:16:37] So you will have a set number of credits that you will have to make up. So from what I'm remembering, it was 60 from my Psychology and Neuroscience, which was the three main theory courses and the one practical methodology and statistics course,

those count as 60 of the 90 grades that you need for each term. So you then have two 15 credit courses that you need to pick up essentially per term. So you would have a selection of courses that you could do. You can change those, but only in the first few weeks. So try and, you know, have a long think about it. You can talk to some of the lecturers and in those early weeks really think, is this something that I want to be doing? Look through the course guide, look through the exams. But there are lots of options and I would hope that most people could find something that interests them and they enjoy. And if you don't, do be prepared to explore because you might find something that's your next degree. I have a met a load of people who were doing modular degrees who are like 'oh, I took this one course and then a year later I switched degree and now I'm a linguistics major' or something because it just really clicked with me.

Georgie [00:17:45] Yeah, that's so true. That's something we really try and explain to people is you could start on a degree in Art History and you could try a module in a different History or something completely different right in the first few weeks of your university degree. And if you decide actually you are on the wrong degree and you prefer something else, you can switch in the first two years of studying your degree. So as long as you've taken modules and enough modules from that that new topic early enough in your university career, then you can change to a completely different degree when you finish university. So you might have applied through UCAS with one thing in mind and you might finish with a very different degree. But that's really great because lots of people have never tried their subject before and they don't know what to expect. And it's a bit daunting to kind of commit so early when you're at school. But yeah, as these guys have said, you can try different subjects. And I think you've both stuck with what you applied for, but people do change a lot and that's completely OK.

So for your assessments again, that's something people ask, how will I be assessed? Is it exams or is it coursework? How often, is it through the year or is it at the end of the year? Max, do you want to explain what you've experienced?

Max [00:18:53] Sure. The short answer is you'll be assessed in a bit of everything, a bit of all of the above. But to elaborate on that, I would say biology at the moment is maybe a 50/50 split between exams and a continuous assessment. Continuous assessment can be anything ranging from just online multiple choice tests, all the way to essays on the topics of your choice or oral presentations, for example. They're quite common in the later years, the beginning, the first year. It's mainly just lab practicals that you're assessed on. So you usually get a lab notebook that you have to fill out for each course and also maybe some lab worksheets that you need to fill out and just answer questions. Jot down your results at the end of every lab session, a few essays and then exams at the end of each term, which are usually worth about 50 percent of each of your courses. And they can be daunting at the beginning. But once you get past the initial experience, the initial hurdle, they just become second nature and much less intimidating.

Georgie [00:20:07] And you can correct me if I'm wrong, but Aberdeen do the exams before Christmas, right, rather than in the New Year. So you actually get to enjoy your Christmas break rather than my experience of being at a different university was revising on New Year's Day and all through Christmas and being really stressed, but that's right isn't it, that Aberdeen exams before Christmas?

Max [00:20:24] That's absolutely right. Yeah.

Sam [00:20:25] I really enjoyed having a free Christmas break and actually being able to just sit with family and have fun and not be incredibly stressed and worry about all the revision you need to do before you get back.

Georgie [00:20:36] That's so nice. And Sam how's it been for you and Neuroscience with psychology? How are you assessed?

Sam [00:20:42] Very similar to what was said. So we have exams at the end of the year, but we also have continuous assessment. It's probably weighted slightly heavier on the continuous assessment. So I'd say maybe 70 percent continuous assessment, 30 percent end of year assessments. The end of year assessments are often essays for the theory courses. So those will be something like here is a theory and the research area or critically analyse a particular paper or idea that kind of take what you need to have a deep dive into the research and explore it and then come up with some critical analysis and creative writing on the subject. Or you might have MCQ's which would be, again, more theoretically based on the science or the methodology and the statistics. Then throughout the year you'll have practicals which will be assessed. You will have statistical tests that you'll have to go through. You will have MCQ's, you will have essays. Some of those will also be in the format of things like recommendation reports. So as if you were writing a policy document essentially, or you were doing a literature review and then sending a recommendation document to say, implement a particular kind of programme to a developmental in a child psychology unit or in school. We also have lab reports and a big piece throughout the year will be a experimental report, which in the early years will just be something you do quickly in a practical class, or you can just get a sense of what you're doing. And then you'll get the data, you'll get the results, and you'll just have to do the report. In later years you will actually have to design that experiment to play a key role in designing that, carrying that out, gathering the data, cleaning the data and preparing it, doing the analysis and then writing up the report so it gradually builds on itself over time each year.

Georgie [00:22:35] And something to say to our listeners, as we talked about the progression to university in general, and we've all experienced that it's not too bad and that as you kind of build into it. But there are sometimes different things like referencing which you may not have done at school, which you then do at university, and you learn the joys of referencing. But at Aberdeen you have to pass all your modules and pass each year. But it's actually your last two years, or if you're doing five year, the kind of last few years that count towards your final degree classification. So in the first year or so, if it's not your highest grade and it's not your best mark, it won't necessarily affect your final degree classification. So it's something to kind of just remember that you're kind of working in gently and you've got time to learn how to do this all before it actually affects your final degree. So I know I did lots better in my final years once I'd learn how it worked and got my head around it more than I did in the first assessment I ever had to university. I also experienced I don't know if you have this being able to see when I was choosing my modules, how they're assessed so I could see, like, is that module going to be an exam based or are they going to be coursework based? Because some people will feel much stronger towards one way or the other that they excel in. Was that the same for you? You're nodding Max.

Max [00:23:46] Yeah, absolutely. You can browse the course catalogue online before selecting your courses. And there's information on obviously what the course will be about, the learning outcomes, who's going to be coordinating the course so you can maybe look up the member of staff or speak with them if you want to find out a bit more. And yeah,

there's also a little section on assessments and grading. So it's clear in advance before you choose your courses, exactly how you'll be assessed. So maybe you can strategically avoid courses that have an assessment that looks absolutely terrible that you would you feel you wouldn't do well and or you could challenge yourself and try and choose, of course, like that's just whatever you'd prefer, really.

Sam [00:24:29] Absolutely. Always read the course guide booklet before you take it, because you might find out that that course has 70 percent is one massive essay exam and that could be something that you're prepared for and you like or it could be something you absolutely do not want to deal with. And that might be a deciding factor if you're trying to pick between a few courses you like.

Georgie [00:24:49] I definitely did that. I chose tactically. I decided what I liked. I don't like exams, but I always did better in exams than I did in coursework. So I was like, right, I'll choose some that are exam based, although I also chose one that was 50 percent of that module was examined with a presentation. And at the time I was like, I hate presenting. What have I done to myself? Why am I doing this? And actually it went really well and it was quite a good way of getting a good mark as well. So, yeah, as the guys have said, you can have a look and see. So do you think tactically what you are choosing your modules. So moving on to a different area of the study in subjects is field trips. So I know for things like geography, people would do lots of field trips and archaeology and those other science subjects. Have either of you experienced any kind of field trips or can you talk about them from your subjects?

Max [00:25:37] I've not experienced a field trip in the traditional sense, I've experienced a virtual field trip, actually, because the year that I was meant to go on one, I was meant to go to Catalonia and yeah, that wasn't possible due to Covid. So instead of the School of Biological Sciences organised a selection of virtual field courses, which they were fantastic to be on. And so I feel like the learning outcomes were still exactly the same. And yeah, it almost felt as if we were there. But a traditional field courses, they tend to happen in second and third year at the end of the of the year for biological sciences students. So usually in the first summer months and yeah, there were lots of fantastic local options in the UK and then some overseas ones. So with the Catalonia one that I mentioned, there's a marine biology field course in Greece as well. And the newest one is actually all the way in South Africa. So there are lots of fantastic choices. I can't speak from personal experience, but students from previous years that I know who got to experience these, they feel really valued the field trips.

Georgie [00:26:54] That sounds amazing. Even I've learnt something I knew obviously on the north east coast of Scotland, we've got amazing wildlife, say, for our biology and marine biology, zoology students. There's lots of opportunities to go out and see wildlife and kind of have practicals in that sense, as well as the labs and things but being able to go abroad sounds great. Sam, did you want to add to that?

Sam [00:27:14] Yeah. So I cannot comment on the abroad field trip, which sounds fantastic. And it's such a shame that that's made virtual and I hope you get a chance to really go to explore that. But I can't comment on the Northeast one, because we had a field trip for ecology where we just went to around, I think a little bit above Newborough and just looked at the types of plants and animals that you saw. So we had our quadrats and we're cataloguing trees and PH of soil and kind of ground like levels, those kind of things, just different areas as you move towards the beach and how nature progresses in its various cycles and life builds up and you get different stages of life in different areas.

Georgie [00:27:57] That sounds really interesting. You mentioned Newburgh there. We've got the Seal Beach as well nearby, which is amazing. Like even if you're not on a science course, you should go and have a look. There's like a seal colony all year round and take some binoculars if it if the sea isn't right in because they can be further away. But it's incredible. Just masses and masses of seals. That's very nice to just look at in the area. And talking about kind of extra things you do outside your course. What about societies? Obviously, we have lots of sports clubs, lots of society, and many of them are linked to sciences or courses that people do. Sam, I know you've been part of some of these. Do you want to speak about your experience.

Sam [00:28:34] Sure. So, first of all, I am part of the neuroscience journal club, which is just it's kind of like a reading club, except rather than read a book, you're reading some papers, a theory, an idea in neuroscience, then you get together and discuss it. I'm also vice president of the Psychology Society, which that's a guess a bit more of a social one. We do try and do things like exams and revision help, but that's a lot more just like trying to keep the community and talking to everyone and hosting a bunch of events to keep people entertained throughout the year. Then I really think that science can be useful for public policy, keeping people informed. I guess there's no better example of that than the last year. And covid just how important public health, safety and well-being kind of good science, communication, understanding is. So I'm also part of things like the science mag and I occasionally work with a podcast like the content creators and with the Aberdeen Student Radio when that was running to just get out some science news, some science journalism and to try and do my best to keep people informed and practise my own science communication skills, because I think that is really important.

Georgie [00:29:49] Sounds like you keep busy Sam, but it's great for your CV as well, these are all the extra things that I think I still wish I'd done more when I was at university. I wish I'd joined more societies and done more things because they're such an easy way into getting work experience or relevant things, even if not work experience. As such, it's relevant things that you can then put into your CV when you're applying for a job and shows that you're also really engaged and you're really committed to kind of what you're interested in. Do you have anything to add to that Mzx that societies that you've been part of?

Max [00:30:17] Yeah, absolutely. To add onto Sam's great examples. I would say if you're looking for societies that are quite strictly linked to the biological sciences subject area, there are three. There's the Conservation Society and they're well known for going on these fantastic excursions where maybe they. They all pay a fee to take a bus and, you know, just go and visit some fantastic natural area around Scotland. Then there's also the marine society and the zoology society. And all three of these collaborate quite often. They organise pub quizzes, for example, just chat's, documentary screenings. They love watching David Attenborough documentaries as all biological sciences as well as all people do in general, I would say. And yeah, and they also get together to organise the biological sciences ball every year, which is a fun experience usually around about March, I think. And yeah, on top of that, there's such a wide selection of sports clubs as well to choose from. If you would like to keep active during your time here. The Aberdeen Sports Village is just about a five minute walk from campus. So it's really easy if you have a free slots between lectures to just run over, have a quick trip to the gym or to the swimming pool and or do training with whichever sport society you would like to join.

Georgie [00:31:41] Brilliant thank you. And anyone who's listening or wondering what other societies there are, they can have a look on the AUSA website that's A U S A, and if you just search that it will come up with the website and you can see all the sports and societies that the university has. So there are loads for different subject areas. And I recommend joining them because there's lots of fun things that you don't really know are related to your degree that would do trips and they'll get you work experience and things like that. So kind of on the note of work experience and kind of your degree leading to something beyond the university. What about placement years? Aberdeen doesn't do a huge number of actual placement or gap type things in your degree, but a lot of our students do summer work and summer placements. Sam, I know you've done some of these things or have experience of them. Do you want to explain what you've done?

Sam [00:32:25] Sure. So I have mostly done things within the uni. So Aberdeen has a fairly prolific research department, especially around psychology, neuroscience. It was the birthplace of the fMRI or the MRI, and there is a lot of interesting research coming out. So pretty much every summer you can apply for various research roles as a research assistant or intern or if you have your own project and then you may get a grant to get that funded. Or you can possibly just volunteer as a general assistant if you just want to gain some experience. If you don't have a sure idea that you're interested in or a particular lab you really want to do an internship with, and that can be a really great way to do experience or gain experiences. I currently have an internship planned that's going to start in a week or two that will be looking at cognitive modelling of various biases and ways to reduce and minimise them, especially self based biases and egocentrism. So that's a lot of fun. And then for work outside, I tend to work quite a bit in education. So I do tutoring. I was doing some covid test stuff and I work with Tech Fest, which put on essentially science communication events and education events, especially for schools to come and experience. So those have been a lot of fun and that's what I'm doing when I'm not in an internship or something.

Georgie [00:33:48] That's amazing. You're so busy, Sam, but it's just it's the perfect time to do it, cram it all in while you're at university and make the most of it. What about you, Max? Have you done any placements or work experience related to a degree or outside your degree?

Max [00:34:00] Yeah, absolutely. Pretty similar stuff to Sam actually. For the past two years, I've been working as a student ambassador with the university. So we work open days. For example, information sessions give campus tours to students and parents who are looking to join maybe from abroad or just from another city. And they aren't familiar with Aberdeen. They just want to get a feel about what and how the campuses and what the whole university experience is about. And then on top of that, last summer, I did a research project funded by the Carnegie Trust. So my supervisor and I, the same supervisor actually helped me with my honours project in my fourth year, which I've just finished. We applied for funding to carry out a summer project on an area of biology that was of particular interest to us. And finally, the last thing I would say is this summer I'm on the Aberdeen internship programme where a lot of different departments within the university each seek out one intern. I'm working with the Postgraduate Research School and they provide this intern with a project to carry out for the entire summer. And it's fantastic because you just get to meet a lot of staff members who you wouldn't otherwise and get to help student experience for future students coming in. So my current project, for example, is just mapping out and improving the communications that are given to postgraduate research, offer holders and. Also, the communications that are provided to them throughout their experience at the university and to just the objective is to just

enhance that and, uh, hold focus groups with these students, find out what they like, what they dislike, and just try and make the experience as enjoyable as possible for them. So there's plenty to do even just within the university.

Georgie [00:35:58] That sounds really great. How would a student find out about these opportunities if they're starting Aberdeen and they're really keen to do all these things you are talking about? Where do they start? Who can they speak to?

Max [00:36:09] A great place to start would be the careers and employability service of the university. They give fantastic careers advice for current students and even graduates. I think you can ask them for advice up to five years after graduating, even just for help with your career. And there will be a professional within the careers service for each subject area, for each school. So an expert in careers, in biological sciences and law, psychology, neuroscience, everything. And yeah, they're they're particularly well versed in providing information on opportunities that you could that you could look at during the summer, both within the university and out with as well. So a great, you know, a great point of call for something.

Georgie [00:36:59] Again, we recommend people do because you have a really long summer holidays, which is lovely at university. But if you can do something productive with that and kind of find some part time work, it helps, you're often paid, sometimes it's voluntary. You can find that out as well. But it gives you, again, something to put on your CV when you're finishing university to kind of make you stand out from every other graduate. Sam, did you have anything else to add to what Max has said about where to look for help?

Sam [00:37:24] I think Max discovered the main place that I'd go to. The other thing I'd just say is check with your friends and sometimes they'll be a particular person at the schools and they might be able to point you in the right direction.

Georgie [00:37:34] Brilliant. So I think we've covered so many different topics and hopefully people listening will have a really good idea. Now, I've got an even better idea of what it is like to study science at Aberdeen. So I'm going to come finally to you each to give a kind of top tip. So if a student is starting in September or they're listening and they're going to apply for the 2022 entry, what would be your top tip to that student? Max, I'll come to you first.

Max [00:37:57] Oh, that's a fantastic question. My top tip would just be to get involved and be active, do as much as you can starting from your first year. I know because I've been guilty of this myself, it can be very easy to just sit back in your comfort zone, maybe make a few friends right at the beginning and get a few hobbies. But you should just always be trying new things, particularly in those first two years, just so you don't miss out on any cool opportunities. And because there is just so much to do, so much to do at the university. So that would be my top tip.

Georgie [00:38:31] Good advice.

Sam [00:38:32] And I would absolutely agree with jumping and get involved. I would also add to that, and especially in science, don't be scared of exploring new things and it will be a lot of work, but you definitely can do it. I know so many people who've been put off with statistics or we've done a bit of coding, especially using data analysis and things. And there are a lot of people who are really put off by that. And there's maybe certain

stereotypes and assumptions about who that's for and who it's not for. They are really important to challenge and just being in group. So for example, currently I'm learning and I'm in a coding club which is like 80/90 percent female, psychology of course is kind of that a much higher number of female students, and those kinds of things just show people that you can do statistics, you can do cognitive modelling, you can do coding. These will seem scary at first and they will put a lot of people off. But if you stick with it, you absolutely can do it and you will gain a lot from that. So jump in, get involved in societies and challenge yourself a bit with what you think might be just beyond your horizon or might not initially seem like it's for you. But if it's useful, you might gain a lot out of it.

Georgie [00:39:46] Brilliant. Thank you so much. That's been really, really interesting. I hope our listeners enjoyed finding out about what it is like to be a science student at Aberdeen. If anyone listening does have any questions or the guys have mentioned something and it's really kind of prompted your interest you can go onto our website and you can chat to some of our ambassadors through our website, or you can send an enquiry through and then we'll get back to you as well so we can chat to you before you even start at the university. And we have more episodes coming up in the next weeks, which is going to be a day in the life of an arts and humanities student, so if you're thinking it's not science for you, but you're more kind of maybe English or something like that have a listen to that one as well, because you'll find out all about what's different for an Arts and humanities student. And if you've missed any of our episodes so far, you can check them out on the Web page or wherever you listen to your podcasts. So I hope everyone has enjoyed this episode. And thank you so much, to max and Sam.

Voiceover [00:40:42] Thank you for joining us for this episode of the Ask Aberdeen podcast, if you would like to suggest a topic we should cover, please email us at UKteam@abdn.ac.uk. We would love to hear from you. To be alerted about new episodes subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.