My name is Sam Leonard. I am a part 3 student in Biological Sciences and I am study on the Biomolecular stream.

At the end of my part 2, I took part in a 6-week placement in the summer 2012 at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The placement was primarily lab-based. Every day I took part in different activities including biochemical, biophysical characterisation of different proteins.

I took part in a lot of different techniques, including establishing crystallisation experiments, site directed mutagenesis, PCR, affinity chromatography purification of proteins.

It was the first time I have done a lab placement like that type.

Although I have visited the city quite a lot of times before, so I was very familiar with the location, I was quite apprehensive about working in the university for the first time, with the new research culture, an entirely new environment to me. But the second I got there, these apprehensions were mis-founded and I was able to start work straight away.

The working environment in general was very friendly. Everyone who was working in the lab was very forthcoming, very communicative, quite happy to communicate in English as well, which obviously is not their first language, but made facing it very well and quickly make friends with everyone.

I take a Mandarin Chinese course as part of the IWLP, as part of 20 credit course, a 20 credit module part of the course and I learn Cantonese as an extra-curricular activity.

Everyone who worked in the lab was a native from mainland China, so their first language was Mandarin Chinese. But most of them could speak very good English and the limited amount of Mandarin I learnt before helped to bridge the gap in work communication.

Much of the process of applying for the placement and applying for visas was handled by the IAESTE organisation, which is the organisation that organised the placement for me. And Hong Kong are quite strict on their visa requirements, and I was strictly limited to the 6 weeks period of stay. The visa was organised by the Hong Kong office of IAESTE.

As far as applying for the placement and taking part in the natural placement itself, I would really not change anything. It was such a positive experience.

And really the only thing I would like to change is I would have liked to spend longer at the university. But as I said the visa requirement it was quite strict and as to how long I could actually work there.

I would strongly recommend to anyone to take part to a placement abroad. It adds a lot of added value to the placement in your home country; you get to develop extra communication and interpersonal skills, plus to experience the culture of the foreign country, as well as, gaining on practical experience.

And also the lab I was working has sponsored my application for the Hong Kong PhD scholarship which is a Hong Kong research grant council funded post graduate scheme, and so it was incredibly a formative experience. Well hopefully definitely if I can secure a position like that, I am looking forward to taking part.

Well before I went to the placement, I was quite apprehensive about how my family would think about me being potentially away not just for the summer but potentially for 3-4 years of studying a PhD, but in the end they were incredibly supportive and it was quite surprising that they supported me for that.