Internship at the IDG, Dep. of Med. Phys., UCL

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Why IDG:

I first heard of the Implanted Devices Group (IDG) during my bachelor thesis at the University of Freiburg. This was because I was writing the thesis about the packaging of biomedical implants; more precisely about the hermeticity of implantable devices. My literature research yielded a huge amount of papers and articles published by the IDG. Here I would like to point out, that if you are working on a subject of the implanted devices field it is unavoidable to read several papers of this group.

Because I always wanted to do an internship abroad and in the biomedical field, I asked my former supervisor, Dr. Martin Schüttler (IMTEK, Freiburg), about suggestions and contacts. His advice was (though he had several more contacts) to ask Prof. Nick Donaldson, head of the IDG, for a placement because he himself had spent long time at the IDG during his postdoc. Based on his recommendation and a short visit in November 2011, I got offered an internship at the IDG in late November 2011.

Preparation:

Because I wanted to apply for a scholarship from a German foundation, I had to get an official document stating that I would work at the IDG for several months. Also, in order to avoid the payment of high research-students fees (which apply on postdocs) I was invited to work at the IDG as an honorary researcher. This process of getting an official invitation unfortunately took some time but I still was in time for the application for the scholarship. But this time taking process definitely could be improved.

Another point which had to be settled beforehand was the question if I would get a salary by the UCL. Unfortunately, as we all know, the funds of the British universities are cut and after some back and forth it didn't turn out as there would be some money left as a payment for my work. Because the living expenses are nearly three times the expenses I would have had back in Germany, this was a real shock for me but at this point I already settled with the idea to work in London at the IDG. If I wouldn't have known London before and if I wouldn't have known that I would have loved the time here, I might have applied for another internship in another city. My advice to the Group/Department/ University hereby is that if you want to go on having interns from foreign places (and not students that already live in London) it would be good to find a way to pay them a little salary. Another problem is that if you are not registered with the university as a paying student, you are not allowed to apply for the reduced fares of the public transport of London.

Situation at the IDG:

The start at the IDG was very smooth. The whole group welcomed me kindly, my notebook was made ready for the department's network, I received my key card and I also got handed a key for the group's door. My first impression therefore was absolutely positive.

My work at the IDG consisted in general of a project where I was the only responsible person for. I really acknowledged the confidence in my abilities and my work by the heads of the group. Whenever I had questions I could ask any member of the group or other colleagues of the department. The willingness to help has to be underlined here.

Although the technical equipment of the laboratories at the IDG can be called "antique" compared to the ones I know from the IMTEK, the work done here at the IDG is nevertheless excellent and in some case outstanding (the project I was working on was state of the art). During my work I came across different problems regarding the equipment which had to be solved and I was astonished how good the other members of the group could work under these circumstances.

All in all I really enjoyed the time at the Implanted Devices Group in London. I had a very interesting project I was responsible for and the members of the group always treated me as a member of the group. During my time at the IDG I could look beyond my field of study and learn to think out of the box. I would therefore highly recommend doing an internship here.