

1st cohort of Lancaster MChem with Industrial Placement Students on course to Graduate in July 2026

The Chemistry Department at Lancaster University launched the MChem with Industrial Placement in October 2023, and obtained interim Royal Society of Chemistry accreditation in early 2025. The degree has been specifically designed to allow students the opportunity to spend the final year on placement doing a research project in an industry setting. We believe this arrangement benefits both the student and the placement host. The first cohort, who transferred onto the degree programme during their 2nd year of studies, are currently on their industrial placements. Leena Duong is a 4th year MChem with Industrial Placement student at Lancaster University, currently doing the placement at Sika in Preston, UK. We met Leena online to ask her about her experience so far as a placement student in the CASE industry.

Why did you want to do a degree with an industrial placement?

I wanted to go into industry after my degree, so it just made a lot of sense to see what it's like on the other side of Academia without the risk of starting a job and then not enjoying it. I also thought it would be fun. I thought it would be an interesting way of doing my degree in a less standard fashion. Also earning money whilst doing the degree was a big factor because it's a good way to just get started in the job market. For Lancaster University students the placement is at the end of the degree; if I do want to continue at the job that I am in or if I want to continue somewhere else, I have the possibility to do it straight after the placement.

How difficult was it to find the placement? How was the application process?

I think it depends on the chemistry that you're interested in. I knew that I wanted to go into material sciences, and I knew I was more attracted towards the coatings industry. So, it was a bit easier for me to narrow down which companies I was interested in, what their values were. I had attended SURCON as a 2nd year undergraduate student with an OCCA Surfex bursary and got a few contacts and ideas for placement through that.

In terms of applications, different companies had different requirements. I found the online assessments a bit more challenging, but once it got to the in-person interviews, I found it very informative and very important for my academic and professional development.



What does your placement involve?

I'm using organic synthesis to make polymeric intermediates for floor coatings and roofing products, crossing over into multiple disciplines such as materials and emulsion chemistry.

My main project is on the development of waterborne epoxy hardeners, and I'm going to be writing my University report and other assessment pieces about this. But in Sika, everybody is very supportive and they're showing me different parts of the business and the different products that Sika makes as well. So, I'm getting both a broad experience combined with a specific project that I need to write up for University. So, it's good!

How is the engagement with the Lancaster Chemistry Department during the placement?

Even though I'm not physically present at the Lancaster campus, I'm still doing academic work and engaging with pieces of coursework that makes sense for somebody who is currently doing a job at the same time. Through Teams and all the online meetings I've been having, I still feel like I'm connected with the University. I am finding the reflective aspects of the modules very helpful for understanding the company and for my professional development.

I am very satisfied with the support from the Chemistry Department at Lancaster University. I really appreciate the flexibility with deadlines; especially when things get busy at work and projects need to keep moving forwards and reports need to be written within the company, the University has been understanding of that and allowed me to prioritise the company work over the academic.

How different is it to work in a company than in an academic lab?

Very different because it's a lot more self-driven and you must organise your own time. In the academic world, at least from my experience as an undergraduate student in first to third year, you get set times of what experiments you need to complete and what

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synthesis or what products you need to have done, and that's very guided by the academics. But here, there are multiple responsibilities competing for your time. Sometimes you completely need to change plans or pivot your ideas and your lab work to problem solve, and it is a lot more spontaneous.

What skills have you developed during the placement that you think will be valuable for the future?

I think the resilience that I have developed working in industry during the placement will be very valuable for me in the future. For example, I have been developing a polymeric intermediate for a few months, but pricing changes from suppliers have meant we've had to completely change the development, despite the months I've put into it. I have learnt that failure is a core part of the development process and you have to be resilient and think, "OK, it's not the end of the world". Industry is a more solutions-orientated environment, so the pace can feel much faster, and you must move on from setbacks more quickly.

What advice would you give to students that are looking for placements now?

Just keep applying and don't feel disheartened if you don't get something first try, because especially towards the end of an interview process it gets very competitive. So, if you get

rejected from one job, just keep going and trying to improve your applications. Don't feel too disheartened from that. That's my advice!

Do you have any plans after the placement?

I need a job! I have very much enjoyed my placement in the R&D department at Sika, and I'm looking to get a job in that area, and ideally, I would like it to be in the materials and coatings industry. I am graduating in July 2026, and I will be ready to join a graduate scheme straight after my placement, if anyone is hiring.

Any final thoughts about your placement?

Working at Sika has been great because it's a big company with great values and a strong safety culture. I've been able to get a lot of training within the company, and my professional development has been a key part of the placement.

Sika is a member of the Lancaster Chemistry Industrial Advisory Board. To strengthen relationships with local academic partners, Sika offers early access to students at Lancaster University to its placement's opportunities at the Preston site, with applications from LU's students advertised over the summer and opened nationally from the end of September, ensuring equal access to all eligible candidates across the UK.



Ways to Engage with Lancaster Chemistry

1. Student Projects & Placements

Businesses seeking to recruit students for placements for the academic year 2026-27 or 2027-28 are welcome to contact me with information to pass directly on to our students.

Our Chemistry Undergraduate and Postgraduate students are also interested in shorter summer placements, internships and other opportunities to learn and network with industry all year round.

2. Events & Collaborative R&D

If you are interested in contributing to undergraduate career events or working on collaborative R&D with Lancaster Chemistry, please do get in touch.

For more information contact:

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