

We are Generation Z – the tech generation and the youngest generation currently in the laboratory. We are the 1997–2012 generation and we are your children and mentees. The emerging workforce and future biomedical scientists.

I am a Gen Z student on my sandwich year at the cellular pathology department at University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust, with the intention of pursuing a career in healthcare. I am also the president of the IBMS-affiliated and newly founded University of the West of England Biomedical Science Society.

After watching IBMS' Deputy Chief Executive Sarah May's talk about multigenerational workforces, I was inspired to write about my experiences. If you have not seen it, I would highly recommend it. It shows the differences and strengths between generations as well as their preferences for work environments. The video can be streamed on the IBMS website and a podcast in which Sarah discusses the issues can be listened to at ibms.org/resources/podcasts.

While the generational characteristics are not 100% accurate for me – I lean towards Gen Y, probably due to the fact I was born in 1997 – it does help explain that different generations will have different preferences for communication methods, mindset and behaviour. Understanding these differences will reduce miscommunication and conflict.

Placements

I have been lucky enough to secure a placement at a training laboratory to complete my registration portfolio.

Laboratories that offer placements are few and far between, often requiring a direct email to the training officer, but a reply is not always guaranteed. I secured my placement through a job interview for a medical laboratory assistant post in early



TALKING ABOUT MY GENERATION

Biomedical science student **Iggy Mason** on why Generation Z offers a fresh perspective on biomedical science.

2019. The job interview went well, however, I could not start till after exams in June and the laboratory was looking for someone to start sooner. One of my interviewers then asked if I would be interested in a placement.

It may also be infeasible for some students to undertake such placements due to a lack of funding. Students are passionate about science and helping people, but sometimes they simply cannot afford to.

Conversations about “what happens after graduation” often end in people wanting to work in an NHS laboratory. But with no portfolio, the highest role offered is a Band 4 assistant practitioner, which can be achieved without a university degree, or applying for a position at the extremely competitive STP where, according to the National School Of Healthcare Science, there can be over 100 applicants per position.

Technology

My generation has grown up alongside technology and it is thoroughly embedded into our everyday lives. From when we wake up until we go to bed, our phones are glued to our hands and when the older generations say that “kids these days are always on their phones” it seems like a fair statement to make (for me, at least), but why is that such a bad thing?

A modern smartphone is more powerful than the Apollo Guidance Computer used in the Apollo 11 mission to land humans on the moon. Mine is used for a plethora of reasons from storing reminders, taking notes, taking pictures, navigating around new places, turning off the lights when I cannot be bothered to move from bed and much more.

Use of technology is increasing within the world of healthcare, from specimen tracking systems to the use of tablets to take and store images. Gen Z has grown up with these technologies and we are familiar with them inside-out.

A visit to another hospital highlighted the difference in understanding of technology when I was tasked with taking a photo on the iPad but was told that I had to hold it a certain way. It turned out that the staff had not known about the auto-rotate feature.

Fresh eyes

Gen Zs provide a fresh pair of eyes in a laboratory setting. Some processes and methods can be modernised, such as converting traditional reagent log-keeping to digital -reducing time needed to scan each piece of paper and reducing the risk of lost sheets. COVID-19 has shown that even verification may be done via online video calls and that final-year biomedical science students who

had previous IBMS-accredited laboratory experience were being asked to aid laboratories around the country.

We are eager to help and are willing to work hard, even for free.

We just require an opportunity to do so. If your laboratories have spaces for placement students, perhaps it could be advertised; maybe a partnership between your department and a local university biomedical science society would be beneficial for both parties.

While I have received excellent support from the IBMS, the hospital, my training officer and the university, I cannot help but to wish that all biomedical science student were afforded the same opportunities that I have been given. Stronger links need to be forged between universities, the IBMS and the NHS. With COVID-19 putting a halt on all placements over the next year, many students will be graduating with a lack of NHS laboratory experience and registration, leaving them with limited career choices. Biomedical science is rapidly evolving and has an exciting future. I can only hope that more laboratories see that the generation that enthusiastically embraces change can be a fantastic asset to their teams. 



KEY POINTS

- ✓ Gen Z can be valuable assets to the team, but there are not enough opportunities out there at present
- ✓ Technology should be better utilised and the current portfolio could be improved
- ✓ More can be done to educate students on careers and pathways within the NHS
- ✓ Relationships between university societies and laboratories should be established.