

Phelim Brady, PPS (Politics & International Relations) – Switzerland, Summer 2013

This summer I was very fortunate to be offered a placement in the Director General's Office (DGO) at the World Health Organization, as part of the Cambridge Careers Service Global Health Internship scheme. The DGO was a brilliant environment for me, as a political and social science student, to get a taste of the politics and diplomacy of public health and of a large United Nations agency.

By my second day in the office I had already met Director General Dr Margaret Chan and as my internship continued I was able to meet other senior officers in the DGO, legal and governing bodies departments to learn about their work. While perhaps half the office had been trained in medicine, the other had social science and legal backgrounds which demonstrates how the work of the DGO is a marriage of health and diplomacy.

My main project for the summer was to review the resolutions adopted by the World Health Assembly, WHO's decision-making body, from the last 10 years in order to document all the actions WHO Member States had committed to undertake. This was an important project given that this was the first analysis of its kind, which for the first time created a consolidated record of commitments taken by the 194 Member States, categorised by health topic, strength of commitment and the kind of action being undertaken.

Analysing these resolutions was an education in itself, as I broadened my knowledge of some of the key issues in global health. But the process of combing through hundreds of resolutions and analysing the meaning of these texts, which in several cases had as much to do with politics as they did with global health, was also like a course in international diplomacy. I received excellent feedback on the project from my supervisors, the results of which will be presented to WHO's Executive Board in January.

This project was quite different from the kind of work I had been doing in my internship last summer working in an election campaign office, but it was a vital experience of office work, research and of the process of governance at the very highest level of international organisations. All organisations, whether they be national, supranational or intergovernmental, or even private, have to grapple with such issues of governance and so the experience will be widely applicable. During my last few weeks in Geneva I was also lucky to be involved with some other projects, including assisting with the production of the newsletter produced by the DGO.

While there are many interns working at WHO and the other international organisations in Geneva, the majority of others were graduates studying for further degrees, which makes the Careers Service internship scheme all the more special. While a small city, Geneva is a good place to be in the summer and it was great to be together with such a large group of other Cambridge students, and hundreds of interns from other countries. Geneva is also perfectly located for trips into France and the rest of Switzerland. While all my office work and conversation took place in English, I was also very glad to have the chance to use and improve my French every day when outside work in the city.

My summer was an extremely rewarding experience, but it was also an expensive one, so I am grateful for the College's assistance with meeting the costs of my trip.