Having graduated from the National University of Ireland, Galway with a B.Sc. in Occupational Therapy, I was immediately drawn to an advertised post for a research internship with the Arthritis Research UK Centre for Sport, Exercise and Osteoarthritis. Applicants were considered for interview based on a cover letter, statement of intent and curriculum vitae. Fortunately, I was called for interview at the Botnar Research Centre, Oxford, in April 2014 and was awarded an internship the following day.

Nine interns in total were recruited and have been based across England in Oxford, Nottingham, Leeds, Southampton, Loughborough and Bath over the summer months of 2014. My research project, ‘A Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) group study on the usability of the myjointpain.org website’, was based at the University of Southampton where I worked closely alongside Assoc. Prof Jo Adams for eight weeks. Recruiting PPI members, interviewing all via telephone, organising and analysing data, to drawing conclusions; I had the opportunity to engage in all steps of the project which gave me an invaluable taster of life in research.

Once a week every intern had the opportunity to visit another centre site. This was a great opportunity to link in with other interns, to learn more about the research being undertaken in each particular site, and to gain feedback from other staff members regarding our own projects. Site visits included Oxford, Leeds, UCL, Nottingham, Loughborough and Southampton. From learning about PPI in research at the University of Southampton, exploring research methods at The University of Nottingham, to observing acute and chronic exercise movements at Loughborough University, we were exposed to a broad range of research aspects.

On September 10th, all interns were invited to the University of Bath for a dissemination day to formally present our research findings. Presentations were approximately 15 minutes long with time allocated afterwards for questions and answers. The day was a great success with the Centre Director, Prof. Mark Batt, a number of the Centre’s Education and Networking Committee members, intern supervisors, administrators, and PhD students in attendance. It was also a fantastic opportunity to debrief each other about our internships and look forward to the Researchers and PPI Day to take place in Nottingham in December 2014.

The internship has opened numerous doors for me. Through networking I have been asked to take on a number of roles; a co-opted systematic reviewer for updated College of Occupational Therapists’ splinting guidelines, and a critical reviewer for the 7th edition of the international core textbook ‘Occupational Therapy for Physical Dysfunction’. I am also in the process of drawing up a conference abstract, poster presentation, an opinion article for ‘Occupational Therapy News’ magazine, and a paper for an academic journal, as a result of the internship.

Overall, the internship has been a fantastic opportunity and I would encourage anyone in the medical and/or sports science field with an interest in research to apply for future internships.

A huge thank you to everyone involved with the Centre for their continued support and guidance throughout the past year.

Naomi Algeo, University of Southampton
Arthritis Research UK Centre for Sport, Exercise and Osteoarthritis Intern - summer 2014