What is the subject of your PhD?
I am using weak gravitational lensing measurements to produce maps of the dark matter in the Universe and using these maps to infer cosmological properties.

Describe a typical day on placement
My placement was in the technology team at Earth-i, a company specialising in geospatial intelligence. Using satellite imagery and machine learning software, they are able to create new products for a variety of applications. I chose to work as part of the ACCORD programme which helps coffee farmers in the developing world. I was using satellite imagery to construct a neural network in Python to identify the location of coffee fields and then using this to try and extract information about the health of the fields.

What skills and knowledge have you gained during the placement?
I used a variety of software packages that were new to me, to analyse and process the imaging data and managed to get a lot of experience in developing a machine learning pipeline. I found being able to dedicate myself to learning these new skills full time was much more efficient and fulfilling than the shorter study sessions on similar topics that I had previously done in my spare time. The placement was also useful for exploring a commercial environment in a sector that I was unfamiliar with and to experience how a data scientist fits into the broader activities and expertise in a company.

How do you think doing a placement has benefited you for the future?
The internship helped me to better understand the skills and experience that employers are looking for in a data scientist, by giving me a familiarity with the industry. This made me more informed when I was filling in job applications, and gave me much more confidence in interviews.

What advice would you give to a PGR student who might be interested in seeking a placement?
Try to find a role where you can use some of the skills you already have, but also try and find something outside your comfort zone. The placement was a great chance to take a few months to develop new skills and deal with new problems. Focus on finding a friendly and encouraging place to work that will help you develop these new skills. The employers are looking for your new ideas and fresh approach to problems.