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**03 August 2014**

**RE: Reference for Christian Laurent**

Dear Dr Evans,

I am sorry that this letter of support is late: I have been working in Romania for the last two weeks without internet access.

I am writing to express my very strong support for Chris Laurent's application to work on a PhD with you: Epithelial mechanics and the stem cell niche. I have read the PhD description and can attest that Chris is perfect for this work. Indeed, he came to work with me via the Southampton Marine Biology degree programme (where he attained a high 2.1) after an early attempt to enter medical school.

Chris decided to enroll on our Vertebrate Palaeontology MRes because he enjoyed our 3rd year taught course (which is available to marine biology students in Southampton) and because of our research-led teaching. Chris has a deep interest in technology and the ways in which new approaches can be applied to biological questions. It has been more than a pleasure to work with him this year; of the >100 undergraduate students I have worked with in my 13 year career as an academic, he has been one of the most personable, intelligent and quick to adapt. These key personality traits have been evidenced in his work with our team this year for his masters (resulting in a paper soon to be accepted in Royal Society Interface): Chris started working with the biomechanics of bird feathers but has quickly developed a collaboration with materials scientists and high-resolution imaging facilities in Southampton. He is a well-versed anatomist and an excellent statistician; perfect, in many ways, for this PhD on offer.

I count Chris as a personal friend of mine and I know he is very keen to further his academic career. The synergy between medicine, biology and technology is perfect for him; he will excel if given the chance to work on this project. He is also a great team-worker and will make a hugely positive contribution to your group. I recommend him to you without hesitation.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Gareth Dyke