

Options for PhDs and Early Career Researchers Outside of Academia

A career within academia is just one of the options available to you after finishing your PhD. You will have gained skills which are highly valued by employers in many sectors.

If you enjoy the university environment you could explore non-academic roles or look at similar types of organisations such as professional bodies or research institutes. You might use the subject knowledge from your research in a related organisation e.g. using your science knowledge to work in a science organisation in a non-research role. Alternatively, you may choose to apply the transferable skills from your PhD in a new area e.g. using research skills in a policy or stakeholder analysis capacity.

These websites and blogs look at career options beyond a PhD, so could be a good starting point for ideas.

- Beyond the PhD <http://beyondthephd.co.uk>
- The Versatile PhD <https://versatilephd.com>
- Cheeky Scientist <https://cheekyscientist.com>
- Jobs on Toast <http://jobsontoast.com>
- www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/10-career-paths-for-phds.pdf
- <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/doctoral-careers-outside-he>

Exploring ideas

Talking to people about their work, whether online or in person, can generate lots of ideas to explore and give you an insight into what specific jobs are really like. This not only helps you decide whether that job or sector would suit you, it also gives you greater understanding of how and when they recruit, and what they look for.

Consider who you know from previous work experience, education, and conferences - people are generally happy to answer questions about their role. These contacts may also be able to put you in touch with people in their own networks.

Your university alumni network and relevant professional associations could also be useful sources of further contacts.

Broaden your network by using LinkedIn and Twitter to find relevant groups and people from industries that interest you. Social media is also an excellent method of staying up to date with the latest developments and opinion about the industry. Having an awareness of the wider industry and landscape in which the organisation operates will make you a more credible candidate.

Plan your questions and conduct initial research into the sector to ensure the interaction is effective and you make a strong first impression.

Potential questions could be:

- How did you get into this area of work?
- What does an average week look like?
- Are there any related roles or sectors I should consider?
- How are candidates recruited?
- What advice would you give to someone looking to enter this profession?
- What are your main tasks and responsibilities?
- (If they have a PhD) How did they find the transition into the workplace following their PhD?

Browse LinkedIn profiles to identify relevant job titles to use as search terms. You will also be able to see what kind of previous experience those working in jobs that appeal to you tend to have, which may give you further ideas for exploration.

Consider joining professional groups on LinkedIn such as “The PhD Forum” and “PhD to Consultancy”.

Having identified potential industries, organisations and job titles, examine some job descriptions/person specifications to see in more detail the skills they require. This will help you identify any gaps in your own experience. Be strategic in seeking out opportunities to fill those gaps. You might demonstrate writing skills through a regular blog, presentation skills through presenting at conferences or be able to evidence your ability to turn research into policy by undertaking voluntary projects with charities.

What level should you aim for?

Be aware you may have to enter a profession at a graduate level – often there is no specialist or fast-track route for PhDs.

However, your qualification will be valued and will often allow you to progress faster. Make it easy for the employer to see the additional skills you have gained from your PhD by highlighting those transferable skills on your CV.

Use the requirements in their job description and person specification to structure your application so that it is very clear how you match their requirements (see our help sheet *How to Write a CV* for more information).

Sector-specific resources

This is by no means an exhaustive list, with just a few of the many websites relevant to each sector. Make an appointment to speak to a careers consultant at your university for further information and to explore options.

Arts and heritage

There are a number of jobs in museums from management and planning, to outreach, conservation and education. Consider also information and records management and archive related roles. Experience of writing bids and funding applications could be particularly relevant in this sector. Museum roles are not just for arts and humanities graduates – there are a number of STEM museums where staff with a STEM research background are required.

See:

- www.museumsassociation.org
- www.museumjobs.com

Business, professional services and consultancy

This covers a wide range of opportunities from management and strategy, to training, business intelligence (statistics and analysis), and business support functions such as sales, operations, finance, marketing, information management and HR. These roles are available working directly for an organisation or on a consultancy basis. PhD candidates with strong statistical, economic and numerical skills are viewed favourably in certain finance roles.

See:

- www.mca.org.uk
- www.efinancialcareers.co.uk
- your university careers vacancy site

Consultancy, entrepreneurship and freelancing

Many opportunities are project-based or available on a part time or fixed term basis, particularly policy and research work. This can make freelancing or starting your own business an alternative option to full time paid employment.

See:

- www.gov.uk/set-up-business
- www.startupdonut.co.uk
- www.ipse.co.uk

Health and pharmaceutical

Options include medical statistician, medical writer, health economist, healthcare scientist, various clinical roles, research and development e.g. drug discovery, biotech and clinical trials, as well as business support functions.

See:

- www.nhscareers.nhs.uk
- www.abpi.org.uk
- www.icr-global.org

Higher Education

Consider roles in areas such as business development, public engagement, administration, management, policy, research co-ordination, tech transfer and patent law. Use your knowledge of the university and funding environment as an additional selling point to potential employers.

See:

- www.jobs.ac.uk
- www.researchresearch.com/jobs
- the recruitment pages on university websites

Public sector, charity and not-for-profit

Opportunities exist in the Civil Service, local government, NGOs and think tanks in a wide range of roles including policy, research, lobbying, administration, management, project evaluation, and stakeholder management.

See:

- www.jobsgopublic.com
- www.lgjobs.com
- www.charityjob.co.uk
- www.thirdsector.co.uk
- www.w4mp.org

Within the charity sector a speculative approach can be very effective (see our help sheet on *Unadvertised jobs and work experience*).

Publishing and the media

Potential roles include journalism, academic publishing, science / medical communication, writing, public speaking, publicity and PR. Use opportunities to blog or speak at conferences to promote your research to your advantage.

See:

- www.nctj.com
- www.bookcareers.com
- www.thesyp.org.uk/

Science and Engineering

As with health, opportunities include technical and business support roles where technical knowledge can be useful. Roles include research and development, manufacturing and technical services, strategy and planning, business development and sales.

See:

- www.justengineers.net
- <https://jobs.newscientist.com>
- www.nature.com/naturejobs
- For engineers, the chartered institute relevant to your discipline can be useful.

This resource is available in alternative formats.

Please contact your careers service or email careersgroup@careers.lon.ac.uk