



The
University
Of
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The
Careers
Service.

Your PhD... What Next?

Where do you start?

There are many people available in the University to assist you in your career planning process, including your supervisor(s) and other departmental colleagues. Also the Careers Service, Research and Innovation Services and the faculties have formed a unique partnership to provide you with a well designed and comprehensive range of career management tools and personal support.

So, what next?

A good place to begin is to reflect upon why you first embarked on a PhD. Was this a long held ambition, or was it simply a chance occurrence? Did you have a clear idea as to where your PhD might lead you? Has the reality lived up to your expectations, and what impact has undertaking the PhD had upon you as a person? By thinking about some of these questions you will begin to clarify what the next stage might be and identify further issues that you might need to investigate.

Your options

There are a number of options open to you on completion of your PhD. You may wish to explore employment opportunities within the UK or abroad. You might also wish to consider alternative work styles such as self-employment, freelance work or developing a 'portfolio' career.

You may have chosen to undertake a PhD as the first stage in establishing an academic career. The natural progression is into a postdoctoral research fellowship at an HE institution, almost certainly on a fixed term contract, usually for 1–3 years. Alternatively, and especially if your PhD is in the humanities or the social science, you might move into a 'teaching only' post at a university or (rarely) directly into a lectureship.

However successful your PhD has been, the idea of using the experience gained in industry, commerce or the public services may appeal to you. PhDs are recruited to a wide range of research-based roles with manufacturing companies, charities, pressure groups, 'think tanks' and cultural institutions.

The third option is to explore opportunities based not so much upon your area of research, but rather on the range of transferable skills developed through both your PhD and earlier study. Recent research shows that almost 60% of UK PhDs in science and engineering and 35% in arts and social sciences leave academia. Nonetheless, many PhDs underestimate what they can offer to employers outside academia, especially if they have been concentrating exclusively on their research project for the last three or four years. To some, the idea of working outside the academic environment is unknown territory and they may experience difficulty in identifying their 'selling points'.

Skills developed through your PhD

Some of the transferable skills that you are most likely to have developed as a result of undertaking a PhD are listed below

- Communication skills
- Organisational ability
- Data collection and analysis
- Problem solving
- Team-working
- Negotiation skills
- Project management
- Time management
- IT skills
- Working autonomously
- Networking
- Lateral thinking

You may also have been required to: teach; handle budgets; use cross cultural communication skills; develop commercial awareness and demonstrate perseverance, creativity and determination. For further analysis, see our briefing sheet *Skills of Researchers*. All of these skills will be of immense interest to employers in a range of management functions.

The publications in this series are: Support for Postgraduate Researchers; Support for Research Staff; Your PhD - What Next?; Skills of Researchers; CVs and Covering Letters for Researchers; Interview Tips for Researchers

Career management and planning

The term 'career management skills' is one that is increasingly used, but what exactly does that mean? There is no simple definition, but it involves most of the following elements

- being able to look objectively at yourself in relation to your work
- identifying your career goals and ways of achieving them
- making effective use of the resources available to assist you in this process
- taking responsibility for your own career development
- seeking out opportunities
- reviewing your career progression regularly, identifying learning gained through experience and highlighting further action to be taken

Once you have begun to identify what you are looking for in a career, and gained a deeper awareness of what you have to offer an employer, you might like to use the **Prospects Planner** career choice program – (accessible at www.prospects.ac.uk) This allows you to build up a detailed profile of yourself, which is then matched against an extensive database of graduate –level jobs.

For information about other tools for exploring options see our website at: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes>

Marketing yourself effectively

The key to success in the employment market is the ability to identify clearly what you have to offer and to use this knowledge to enable you to promote yourself effectively to potential employers. It is not sufficient to say you possess a PhD, especially if you are looking for employment in a field unrelated to your subject. You will need to highlight the range of transferable skills that you have developed through study, work experience and additional responsibilities, and then relate these to the requirements of the post that you are applying for – see our briefing sheets *Applications and Interviews and Assessment Centres*.

Targeting employers

Most employers do not operate a separate recruitment process for postgraduate students. The starting salaries offered to PhDs may be no higher than for people with a first degree only, although some employers may be open to negotiation. Therefore it is up to you to demonstrate the 'added value' that you can offer, as a result of undertaking your PhD and the wealth of transferable skills that you possess.

In addition to applying for advertised vacancies, use a variety of job search strategies, such as

- speculative applications
- networking/creative job searching, ie through conferences and seminars
- work shadowing
- links through supervisors and professional bodies

Familiarise yourself with some of the most common sources of vacancy information, eg newspapers, journals, websites, recruitment agencies and recruitment fairs.

On the Careers Service's website –

www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs/ – you will find details of all the vacancies of which we have been notified, together with links to other recruitment sites. Information about employer presentations and recruitment fairs can be found in the 'Events' section – www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/events. For further information read our briefing sheets *Job Hunting Strategies* and *Meeting Employers*.

How the Careers Service can help you

As part of a joint initiative with the Research and Innovation Services department, the Careers Service offers skills-sessions throughout the year, covering such topics as careers in/outside academia, job seeking, CVs, and interviews. A full list of these sessions, together with details of how to book a place, can be found at www.shef.ac.uk/ris/pgr/ddportal/

A careers adviser is available in the Graduate Research Centre once a fortnight for bookable thirty minute careers support sessions.

The Service is open throughout the year, not just in semester time. We also have an **e-guidance service**, which can be accessed via our website. There is a wide range of publications, audio-visual materials and software packages in the Careers Library, most of which are available to borrow. Information held covers: occupations, employers, further study, work and study abroad, CVs, applications and interviews. The events section of our website provides full information on the talks, workshops, and other events organised by the Careers Service www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/events

A full description of the support we offer is given in our briefing sheet *How Can the Careers Service Help?*

Further sources of information

The prospects website – www.prospects.ac.uk – contains a section specifically for postgraduate research students under the title 'Your PhD What next?', and this includes a list of websites for both job search and professional development.

In addition, the following reference books, all of which are available at the Careers Service may be of interest to you:

Moving on in Your Careers – a Guide for Academic Researchers and Postgraduates by Lynda Ali and Barbara Graham (ISBN 0415178703)

How to Get a Job You'll Love by John Lees (ISBN-10 007712180-5)

The Art of Building Windmills by Peter Hawkins (ISBN 0 9535980 04)

The Academic Career Handbook by Loraine Blaxter et al (ISBN 0335 19827 9)