

# Options for PhDs and early career researchers outside of academia

Through your PhD you will have gained skills such as project management, critical thinking, and evaluation skills, which will be of value in a number of different career areas. Knowing what options are available and identifying potential areas of interest are key first steps in deciding what to do next.

There are a number of websites and blogs that look at career options for PhDs and ECRs which can be a good starting point for your exploration into other careers.

- 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](http://www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/10-career-paths-for-phds.pdf)

There is also a summary of the main industries PhDs enter on the final page of this guide.

It is often easier to rule out certain career areas rather than identify those that interest you. This process is a useful way to start refining your options, allowing you to hone in on avenues to pursue further. Keep in mind that many PhD graduates will change careers a number of times during their working lives, so any decisions you make now will not be forever.

If you enjoy the university environment you might decide to explore non-academic roles, or look at similar types of organisations such as professional bodies or research institutes.

Another option would be to 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 work in an unrelated field, where your transferable skills from your PhD can be used in a new area e.g. using research skills in a policy or stakeholder analysis capacity.

## Testing your ideas: Networking

Talking to people about their work, whether online or in person, can uncover new roles and employers, and provide insight into the realities of a job to further inform your decision making. Allowing yourself to gain first-hand information about a role, career path and organisation, as well as how and when they recruit, and what they look for, will be of huge benefit when it comes to your job search.

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

Explore relevant groups and people from industries that interest you on LinkedIn and Twitter. Use LinkedIn to look at the work history of those working in the profession you are looking to enter and to see what their current role entails. Are there any courses or internships they did that you could consider pursuing yourself?

Following updates and conversations on social media is an excellent method of staying up to date with the latest developments and opinion about the industry, while creating an online network of contacts you can ask about their work.

Your university alumni network and relevant professional associations could also be useful ways of making contacts. Having awareness of the industry will strengthen your answers at application and interview, and demonstrate your motivation for working in the field.

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?
- 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?

#### **Testing your ideas: Work experience**

Gaining work experience will broaden your skills and experience, while allowing you to try different roles and working environments to help inform your future career decisions. The more you are involved with work experience and work related projects, the better understanding you will get about what it is you want from a job; what you enjoy, what you are good at, and what your values are.

Think strategically about opportunities to further develop skills you need to build your employability. Look at job descriptions and use the responses from your networking to identify the skills and experience valued by employers in the industry you are looking to enter.

Are there additional opportunities for you to write about or present your research? For example, could

you start a blog, take part in community engagement activities, arrange an event, write a bid, or learn a new skill?

Extracurricular activities such as taking part in competitions, teaching, and conferences can also allow you to develop useful transferable skills and develop your network of contacts. Many work experience opportunities aren't advertised, and it might be that you need to contact organisations directly to gain these. See our title on *Applying for unadvertised jobs and work experience* for more on this.

#### **Selling your PhD**

It is vital that you sell your experience in a way that is customised to each individual role you are applying for. Giving examples of when you have used a skill effectively in the past will provide evidence that you possess the skills and ability to do the job. Be aware you may find that you will have to enter a profession at a graduate level – there is unlikely to be a specialist or fast-track route for PhDs.

However, you could find that your qualifications allow you to progress faster. Be aware that not all employers will be familiar with PhDs and what additional skills you can bring. Make it easier for them by not using overly complicated or technical language and explaining any academic terminology you do use.

#### **Commercial awareness**

Do not underestimate the value of commercial awareness in all roles and industries whether you want to work in a bank, charity, or in the public sector.

Having an awareness of the wider industry and landscape in which the organisation operates, will make you a more credible candidate. Understanding the potential impact new developments will have on the organisation, plus how and where you can add value, will also help you market yourself effectively.

## Industry overview

Below are examples of some of the areas you could work in, but it is by no means an exhaustive list. Make an appointment to speak to a careers consultant at your university for further information and to explore alternative 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](http://www.museumsassociation.org)
- [www.museumjobs.com](http://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](http://www.mca.org.uk)
- [www.efinancialcareers.co.uk](http://www.efinancialcareers.co.uk)
- your university careers vacancy site

Use [www.totalprofessions.com](http://www.totalprofessions.com) to identify the relevant professional association for vacancies and advice about how to enter the sector. See also professional networks on LinkedIn such as “Alternative PhD Careers”, “PhD Forum” and “From PhD to Consultancy” groups.

## Health and pharmaceutical

Options include healthcare scientist, various clinical roles, research and development e.g. drug discovery, biotech and clinical trials, as well as the business support functions mentioned above.

See:

- [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)
- [www.abpi.org.uk](http://www.abpi.org.uk)
- [www.icr-global.org](http://www.icr-global.org)
- <http://oxbridgebiotech.com>

## 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](http://www.jobs.ac.uk)
- [www.researchresearch.com/jobs](http://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](http://www.jobsgopublic.com)
- [www.lgjobs.com](http://www.lgjobs.com)
- [www.charityjob.co.uk](http://www.charityjob.co.uk)
- [www.thirdsector.co.uk](http://www.thirdsector.co.uk)
- [www.w4mp.org](http://www.w4mp.org)

## **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](http://www.nctj.com)
- [www.bookcareers.com](http://www.bookcareers.com)
- [www.thesyp.org.uk/](http://www.thesyp.org.uk/)

## **Science and Engineering**

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, plus the business support functions mentioned above.

See:

- [www.justengineers.net](http://www.justengineers.net)
- [www.engineerboard.co.uk](http://www.engineerboard.co.uk)
- <https://jobs.newscientist.com>
- [www.nature.com/naturejobs](http://www.nature.com/naturejobs)
- find your relevant professional association at [www.totalprofessions.com](http://www.totalprofessions.com)

## **Entrepreneurship and freelancing**

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

See:

- [www.gov.uk/set-up-business](http://www.gov.uk/set-up-business)
- [www.startupdonut.co.uk](http://www.startupdonut.co.uk)
- [www.ipse.co.uk](http://www.ipse.co.uk)