

Postgraduate & Early Career Researcher Series:

PhD Career Planning Guide

Welcome to your PhD! We hope you're excited as you begin your experience as a researcher at Surrey. There will be many things you need to think about while you are here and your career post-PhD should be one of them. Here's why:

- The more time you give yourself to *think about and explore your options*, the more chance you will have of identifying the *right* next step
- There will be many opportunities to *reflect on your skills and take advantage of experiences* on and off campus during your time at Surrey
- If you do not leave everything until the last few months of your PhD, you are *less likely to feel rushed and stressed* at the pressure of having to make a last minute decision on your next step
- You will *be more prepared to face the inevitable high level of competition* for career paths both within and outside Academia
- There is *dedicated support from Careers Advisers for Researchers* on campus, who offer one-to-one appointments and workshops
- Finding a *good career match takes time and plenty of research* – a skill you should find comes naturally to you!

EARLY ON IN YOUR PHD

Establishing yourself and laying foundations

- Completing your PhD will take planning and self-discipline
Apply these skills to your career and you will give yourself time to identify and take your next step – either within or outside academia
- Start to think about where your strengths lie
What skills do you use as a researcher that you excel at; what do you do outside of your PhD that you enjoy and are good at?
- Build your support network to utilise while you are here
This includes the Researcher Development Programme (RDP) team, Doctoral College, your dedicated Careers Advisers in the Employability & Careers Centre and other researchers
- Keep an eye on the Employability & Careers Centre [employer events programme](#) and attend any that interest you
Employers who come on campus are not just

looking to recruit undergraduates. Graduate schemes are intensive leadership training programmes and should not be ruled out. PhDs are welcome to apply and you may find your skills help you excel once you join. Some employers run specific programmes for PhDs.

- Start to build up your [transferable skills](#) and keep a record of your achievements
Take advantage of opportunities to improve on skills such as public speaking and networking, as these will be invaluable in your career

“Only around one third of postgraduate researchers have definite career ideas in the later stages of their studies”

Vitae

DURING YOUR PHD

Make time for researching your career options

Get to Know Yourself

- Meet with a Careers Adviser to talk about your career, even if you aren't sure what you want to do after your PhD

We deal with all sorts of queries from those who don't know where to start, to those who are very focussed on what they want to do. We can help you identify:

- *Your key skills*
- *Your career options*
- *Your next steps*

Get to Know Your Options

Read and Research

- Identify jobs and sectors you are interested in pursuing post-PhD
To generate options, visit [Prospects](#), which is a career information website. Take the short questionnaire, which will highlight jobs groups and sectors that you might be most suited to
- Read the '[What do researchers do](#)' publications on the Vitae website (login required)
- Read the '[Researcher career stories](#)' on the Vitae website for inspiration and insight into other researchers' career paths in and out of academia
- Read the '[Career Planning for PhDs](#)' ebook on Jobs.ac.uk for advice and activities to help you explore your options and apply for jobs.
- Start investigating your potential options and look for job adverts to identify what employers are looking for.
This will help you identify any skills or experience gaps whilst there is still time for you to fill them
- Regularly check the '[Careers and Employability](#)' section of the Doctoral College website where we highlight relevant employability skills development and job opportunities for PhDs

Expand Your Network

- Attend the Researcher Cafes to meet other researchers, attend conferences and practice talking about your research
You will need to be able to explain your research in simple terms and build confidence in promoting it and yourself internally and externally
- Get a mentor. This can boost your confidence, increase your self-awareness, expand your professional network and give you new perspective on your chosen or other careers
The Doctoral College has a list of mentors

waiting to be allocated to PhD students. Make use of them!

- Create or update your LinkedIn profile to give yourself a professional online presence.
You can use LinkedIn to search for Surrey alumni to find out what jobs they secured after completing their PhD

Attend Events

- Attend the employer events, workshops and careers fairs run by the Employability & Careers Centre, RDP and Doctoral College

Get Experience

- Identify suitable [work shadow](#) or placement opportunities
Speak to your network, let them know you are exploring your career options. If you know someone working in a career you're interested in, offer to buy them a coffee and chat about how they got into it, and any advice they might have for you. Don't ask them for a job, use it as an information gathering exercise initially and approach them about getting some experience after the event, if appropriate
- Take part in competitions and programmes run by other departments in the University to improve your skillset and experience
Check out the [Student Enterprise](#) programme of events, such as the Social Enterprise programme, designed to help researchers develop their enterprise and business skills
- Attend the CVs, Interviews and Career Options workshops run by Careers Advisers and Researcher Development Officers in the Doctoral College
See the [Doctoral College website](#) for an up to date list of dates and workshops

"The skills of postgraduates, especially researchers, are critical for tackling major business challenges and driving innovation and growth"

One step beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education, BIS; 2010

TOWARDS THE END OF YOUR PHD

Continue to set aside time to focus on your career and avoid a last minute panic!

- Narrow down your potential job role and employer options. Plan time for regular job searching
Set up job alerts from recruitment websites and check your ideal employer websites for new opportunities
- Make sure your CV is up to date
Book a one to one with a Careers Adviser to review your CV
- Start applying for jobs – the job application process can take a long time
Target each application to the job description and person specification. Book a one to one appointment with a Careers Adviser to review your application before submitting it
- Attend an Interviews workshop and/or book a practice interview with a Careers Adviser for coaching on how to improve your confidence and tackle difficult questions
Some aspects of an interview – such as the experience of the other candidates – will be out of your control. However, if you attend the interview knowing you have done everything you can to prepare, you will feel more positive about the experience, even if the answer is ‘no’

CAREERS SUPPORT

WHAT WE OFFER

- **45 minute 1:1 appointments**
A confidential discussion on topics such as career options, career planning, CVs, covering letters, application forms and interview preparation including practice interviews. We also offer appointments via Skype and telephone for those not regularly on campus
- **20 minute Quick Query sessions**
Shorter sessions to review your CV, covering letter or application form
- **Interactive Workshops**
1 hour and 2 hour interactive workshops run in the Doctoral College

WHEN CAN I BOOK

- 1:1 appointments are available Monday to Thursday
- Quick Query sessions are on Mondays and Thursday 2-3pm
- Workshops are run throughout the year

HOW CAN I BOOK

- Book 1:1 appointments by popping into Employability & Careers, Philip Marchant Building or called 01483 689001
- Quick Query session sign up opens at 1.30pm on the day and are run on a first come, first served basis
- Workshops are booked via the RDP pages on the Doctoral College website

CAREER PLANNING CHECKLIST

Be realistic and recognise that this process will take time, be challenging and require persistence but your hard work will pay off!

HAVE YOU:

- Reviewed your skills
- Researched your options
- Read the leaflets on Vitae & Jobs.ac.uk
- Reviewed your CV
- Attended careers workshops
- Attended employer events
- Started a regular job search
- Acquired a mentor
- Expanded your network
- Created/updated your LinkedIn profile
- Booked an appointment with a Careers Adviser

“Employers across sectors value...excellent research and analytical skills, particularly for their capacity for critical thinking and ability to solve problems by bringing fresh perspective and a systematic approach.”

*Impact of Doctoral Careers, CFE
Research 2014*

“72% of doctoral graduate respondents were earning over £30,000 in 2010, compared with 56% of masters and 22% of graduates obtaining good first degrees.”

*What do researchers do,
Early Career Progression,
Vitae 2013*

Employers ranked the follow doctoral graduate skills in order:

- 1. Data analysis***
- 2. Problem solving***
- 3. Drive and motivation***
- 4. Project Management***
- 5. Interpersonal skills***
- 6. Leadership***
- 7. Commercial awareness***

Vitae survey

“Personal qualities of confidence, dedication, resilience and motivation were all recognised, and valued by employers of doctoral graduates.”

*Impact of Doctoral Careers, CFE
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