

Workshop: Careers in Publishing, Administration & Industry

Organised by Dieter Lukas, Constance Dubuc and Timothy Smithson

Presented by: Rafael Mares, Liz MacRae, Anne Forde and Sally Thomas

SALLY THOMAS, EDITOR OF PALAEOLOGY

Background

- NatSci (geology) undergraduate in earth sciences
- PhD at the Museum in paleontology studying a distinct research topic
- Opted not to do a postdoc, applied for job at Cambridge University Press
- Job provided basic training in publishing
- After starting a family, returned to freelance work
- Contacted people to copy-edit small journals, developed professionally through networking
- Later went on to manage and run a journal (building it up slowly)
- Was contacted to bridge the gap between larger publishers and authors (dealing with authors frequently) as publications officer for the Palaeontological Association

Requirement or characteristics of current non-academic job

- applied for job at Cambridge University Press who were recruiting grad trainees
 - it was competitive (5 out of 300 applicants were taken), and this scheme is now not so common
- Undergrad and PhD in different subjects was very beneficial for this role
- Created her own job through networking and contacting people

Benefits of current position

- Freelance work has more flexibility
- Gets to know all papers in the journals, have input, without needing to write them
- Deals with authors frequently

Disadvantages of current position

- Publishing hard to get into, not lucrative
- Jobs often geographically restricted (London, Cambridge, Bristol)
- Variable workflow in publishing means unpredictable hours etc. (need a support network to help e.g. with childcare)
- Freelance – problem of not declining jobs in case future jobs dry up

LIZ MACRAE, [PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT OF ZOOLOGY DEPARTMENT IN CAMBRIDGE](#)**Background**

- Undergrad degree in medical microbiology at Newcastle (wanted to pursue medical research)
- Technician job at research lab
- Immunology PhD at Sheffield
- Postdoc at Harvard: interesting project, good team, but very challenging working at Harvard
- Wanted shift to technical roles, i.e. still science but logistics/management etc
- Stem cell centre lab manager – still carrying out some lab-work, plus management tasks and admin etc
- Cambridge medical research technician: managing labs for enormous grants. Human tissue and mice stem cell project management. Still doing bench research
- Now as Principal Assistant, no longer doing research, but very involved in making others' research possible
- As a PhD/post-doc, other researchers seemed to be having "big ideas", but it was clearly very stressful to be so invested in research

Requirement or characteristics of current non-academic job

- Having science background helps enormously

Benefits of current position

- Interesting and diverse work.
- Contribute to make her own job description, find herself new problems to solve and things to improve
- Clear career progression: next step as department administrator
- Postdoc salary, permanent job, gaining lots of experience, very varied

Disadvantages of current position

- Can be stressful and people have high expectations
- Unusual role, only found at larger universities
- Some tasks institutionalized and outdated, need improvement
- Hard to give up bench lab research!

Example day to day tasks

- Produce laboratory allergy list for occupational health
- Produce policy for staff/student induction and for those moving on
- Regulated safety for GM research, make presentation at safety committee
- Dealing with tea-room and catering
- Servicing gas monitors

ANNE FORDE, [CAMBRIDGE CAREER SERVICE](#)

Background

- Biomedical background, immunology PhD
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- Postdoc in German cancer research centre 5 years
- Great boss, lab, project, but felt stressed about the next step
- Always felt out of place in the lab, didn't feel gifted in technical tasks or passionate, but liked giving talks and general communication
- Talked to others about careers outside academia
- Fostered interest in science communication, journal editing, outreach etc
- Reporting on careers and science, freelance (part time whilst finishing lab projects)
- Editor for "Science careers", moved to Cambridge
- Began writing and editing as a science journalist
- Exciting to write stories and contact researchers (new content every week – unlike academia!), but after publication no feedback or follow-up
- Wanted to work more with people
- Started work in Careers service, supporting post-docs' career progression

Requirement or characteristics of current non-academic job

- applied for job at Cambridge University Press who were recruiting grad trainees
- having good communication skills, liking people
- was informed of the job through networking

Benefits of position in Cambridge Career service

- Diverse: Meeting people, networking, workshops, events, writing
Rewarding, meeting people directly, get to know postdocs over the years, seeing previous postdocs return to give talks at events
- One to one discussions, helping people find their own path (not just dispensing info)
- Writing workshops, organising events
- Investing in long-term projects
- Very varied, interacting with employers
- Occasional international events

Disadvantages

- Need to enjoy meeting many people! Don't need to be chatty and extrovert, but need to enjoy interacting and not judge people.

RAFAEL MARES, [SENIOR RESEARCHER FOR A CLINICAL RESEARCH COMPANY](#)

- PhD in Zoology Cambridge, 2012
- Enjoyed research but not sure about generating ideas (crucial for big grants)
- Unsure of what to do after PhD. After 8 months, got a 1 year postdoc in Portugal – but partner still in UK.
- Duration not long enough and had to apply for next position

- Liked research and tackling large datasets but didn't enjoy stress of constant grant applications
- Wanted similar analytical role outside of academia, but where?
- Family commitments became important – so got a job as medical data analyst/medical report writer
- After 1 year, secured a postdoc in Panama, for 2 years
- But with complications; away from home for 8 months per year, what next?

Benefits of position at medical company

- 9-5, secure job with good salary
- Felt recognition of PhD and postdoc were being rewarded by permanent job (no such recognition in academia!)
- Experience outside of academia gives context of benefits of each, broadens options

Disadvantages of position as company analyst

- Wasn't heavily involved in the projects or personally invested in the company
 - After 3 months, knew it wasn't right job (never felt this during PhD or postdoc)
 - Left after a year, didn't enjoy it but didn't regret it
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Why did the panel explore carers outside of academia?

- Most of the panel experienced a growing feeling that the academic career doesn't suit everybody, and it didn't suit them
- Academia is inherently risky: we can work hard and not get the grant or paper – and not feel rewarded at all
- In other sectors, if we achieve goals we get credit for it. We will be judged by how hard we work and not unpredictable rewards
- People who are confident academia isn't the right choice for them have easier route ahead. Those who want to stay in academia but can't see opportunities have it harder.
- The career service can help! Talk to career service and discuss worries and ideas. If you are even just mildly interested in another career, talk to people who know about it!
- There is a grief period after leaving academia. It can be considered failure. But it's merely that not everyone enjoys it, and many are much better at something else!
- Academic support salaries are usually more than e.g. postdoc
- But don't be seduced by famous company names- Nature publishers don't pay as generously as other publishers

How did the panel explore career options outside of academia?

- Have a career plan, but keep it flexible and be open to opportunity and unexpected possibilities (luck!)
- Build up portfolio of transferable skills (e.g. writing reports, finance of grant, management, communicating results, managing safety etc). Extracurricular activities can help.
- Every committee you join extends network, shows people you are problem-solver, team-player etc (may seem boring at the time!).
- Talk to people, get their impressions of their choices, potential ways in, what they like about their new job etc.
- As with any position, it is worth doing research on the company you apply to work for: e.g. not just see “medical analyst”, but figure out exactly what they work on, who else they have hired, and how you would fit in
- The longer you are in academia, the harder it can be to pursue other careers.
 - Five years and under – not a problem as long as you research your new job and tailor your application
 - >Ten years can be more difficult – we begin to get more specialized. May need to change role in a stepwise fashion

Additional advice

- Think deeply about careers you could pursue – what are they like on a daily basis?
- You can move jobs frequently, not a problem as long as you provide justification and give details of what you learnt at each job
- Don't think of a job as permanent – any job can end
- Think: “how much more employable am I after this?”
- “Stick your nose in” - ask why things aren't working right, suggest improvements, contact people
- Once you find something enjoyable, investigate what options there are ahead
- Take additional training, for example accredited schemes on “Leadership and Management” – often additional skills are valuable even if you stay in academia (e.g. leadership skills great for heading a lab group), for other positions provides evidence why you are qualified for certain task.