

Guide to Career Management Research Staff

Career Management Research Staff

This guide sets out a range of methods for planning and managing your career, no matter which direction you would like to follow.

What are my options?

You might look at these in terms of three broad directions:

1. Linear Progression

Continuing with your research career in one of the following ways:

- extending your current contract or taking a new research position in this or another university in the UK or overseas;
- obtaining a fellowship;
- seeking work as a lecturer or tutor, perhaps in a different department or university;
- taking a research position in an organisation outside academia - for example in industry, in central or local government, in a research organisation or research institute, in a charity.

2. Changing Emphasis

Using and developing your expertise, not as a researcher but, for example in one of the following ways, by:

- moving to an occupation related to your subject knowledge (e.g. biochemistry is relevant for forensic science, psychology for human resource management, history for archive work);
- building on a specific aspect of your current job (e.g. IT, project management);
- using your experience of working in higher education to move into a non-teaching/ research-active role (e.g. research support, general administration) within the sector.

3. New Direction

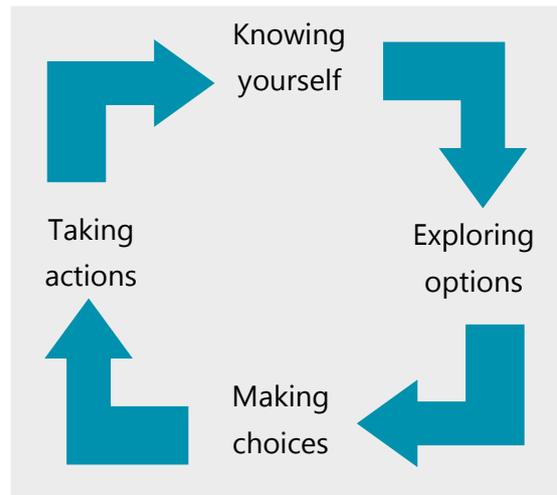
Exploring something entirely different, for example:

- related to an outside interest;
- using your transferable skills in a new environment;
- starting your own business;

For suggestions as to how you might progress your career in each of these directions, please see the section in this document on *Strategies for Linear Progression, Changing Emphasis and New Direction*.

Reviewing your options

Whether or not you decide to stay in academia, you will need to review your options and engage in aspects of the career planning process from time to time throughout your working lives. Career planning is the process of making and implementing informed career decisions. Effective career planning involves engaging with all the elements in the career development cycle illustrated below. The extent to which you need to cover all four elements at any one time will depend on how clear you are about your career direction. Career management should be an ongoing activity and good career management can help you to plan an effective strategy for achieving your short and long-term goals.



Knowing yourself

This involves taking stock of your current position by: reviewing and assessing your strengths, skills, personal attributes, interests and experience; reflecting on what you want and need (your priorities in terms of career and lifestyle), what is important to you (your values/motivators) and what might hold you back (your constraints). This self-appraisal will give you a picture of where you are at now.

To help you to review your skills, there are researcher-specific tools to help you such as the skills audit based on the *Vitae Researcher Development Framework* and the *Skills Guide* and *Skills Audit Template* for research staff on these web pages:

[Researcher Development Framework](#)

[Skills Guide and Skills Audit Template](#)

Many of the skills you have gained as a researcher are also valued by employers outside academia but you will need to articulate the benefits in your applications. For some job roles, your specific technical or specialist skills may be particularly important but most employers will be just as interested in your 'transferable' or generic skills.

Other tools to help you with evaluating your skills/interests/values and the career management process include *University Researchers and the Job Market*, *Career Planner* and the *Windmills Programme*.

[Vitae: The Career Wise Researcher](#) (Login to Vitae for free with your university email)

[Prospects Career Planner](#)

[The Windmills Programme](#)

Exploring your Options

If you wish to stay in academia, the range of options you might be thinking about could include applying for a fellowship, for advertised research associate positions, for a teaching fellow position or for lectureships in different types of university. You will already know a lot about the higher education sector and what is needed to progress to the next stage. If you are considering leaving academic research, the exploration process will encompass a wider range of factors including researching job roles, potential employers, prior experience and/or further study requirements, labour market trends, entry routes and qualities/skills sought by employers. To help you to generate job ideas, see strategies for *Changing the emphasis* and finding a *New Direction* below. See also the resources in *Careers outside academia* and the section on *Finding a Job* to find out more about employers, further study and the labour market.

Making Choices

This part of the process will include deciding on the best options as a result of the first two stages (carrying out your self-appraisal and exploring options) and assessing whether your choices are realistic in view of what you can offer, the state of the job market and the opportunities available. It may include finding out what else you might do to improve your chances (i.e. how to remedy any gaps in your skills or experience) and using relevant contacts and networks to aid your decision-making. It also includes working out how best to achieve your goals and having contingency plans in case your first choice does not work out successfully.

Taking Action

This part of the process involves identifying appropriate approaches/paths/routes and preparing to market yourself effectively through applications (e.g. developing a good/appropriate CV) and interviews (including familiarising yourself with other selection procedures which the employer may use). Set yourself realistic timescales (what you need to do and when) and break down a medium or long-term plan into identifiable steps so that you can measure and record your progress. Review your strategy regularly and adjust your plans as necessary.

Strategies for Linear Progression, Changing Emphasis and New Direction

The strategies suggested below under each of the three broad career directions are to help you to appreciate the range of ways in which you can enhance your career development and progression. Remember other sources of support available to you including case studies, being able to speak to a careers consultant, taking part in the mentoring programme and taking advantage of postdoctoral society activities.

Linear Progression - What counts?

For academia:

- Building a significant body of research publications in high impact journals
- Success in applying for and securing research funding (e.g. fellowship to develop own research)
- Invited papers/lectures at symposia/conferences/other universities
- Collaboration with other researchers/groups nationally/internationally
- Working with colleagues with a good reputation
- Membership of learned bodies and societies where academic distinction counts
- Gaining some teaching experience
- Contributing to the supervision of postgraduate students
- Networking with colleagues internally and externally to become known in your field
- Gaining some project management experience (e.g. organising a conference or guest lecture series)
- Participating in appropriate internal (e.g. Institute for Academic Development) and/or external courses/events to enhance a skill or increase your range of contacts
- Awareness and knowledge of current higher education issues (e.g. quality assurance, public engagement, Research Excellence Framework developments)

For research positions outside academia:

- Keeping an eye on relevant journals and websites for information, contacts and vacancies
- Talking to your supervisor(s) and other research staff who may have a network of contacts you can explore
- Networking at conferences with non-academic delegates to find out what fields of research are of interest to them and following up relevant leads
- For industry, enhancing your commercial awareness (through networking, collaborations, informal visits)
- Investigating your options through informal visits and work shadowing

Changing the Emphasis - What helps?

- Gaining new job ideas from professional body web pages (e.g. Society of Biology, British Psychological Society) or from a specialist publication in your field (e.g. New Scientist includes job advertisements for scientific administration, editorial work, environmental consultancy, regulatory affairs, bioinformatics and technology transfer).
- Getting ideas from the first destination statistics for PhD and Master's degree graduates in your subject area. You can search the statistics by subject area. These are available on the Vitae website or to see what University of Edinburgh graduates have done go to the Careers Service website (www.ed.ac.uk/careers)
- Considering a different role within the university environment. See the internal vacancies for *Edinburgh University* and the vacancies in other *institutions of higher education*.

[Edinburgh University vacancies](#)

[Higher Education vacancies](#)

- Looking at the Case Studies section of this website to see some examples of career transitions made by former academic researchers and their messages for current researchers.
- Attending Careers Service events of interest or relevance, e.g. Alternative Science Careers, PhD Horizons Careers Conference
- For private sector research, demonstrating your commercial awareness, e.g. through collaborative activity with industrial researchers, through involvement in funding / budgeting issues, through project management experience.
- Gaining extra skills or qualifications, e.g. languages, proof-reading, learning a new software program
- Investigating job roles further through work shadowing where possible.

New Direction—Ideas to help your exploration

- Consider occupations which will draw on your existing strengths, e.g. those with excellent problem-solving skills might consider management consultancy, logistics or IT; those with good writing ability might consider technical writing.
- Look at the first destination data for PhD and Master's degree graduates for ideas – you can search the statistics by subject area.
- Look at the Case Studies section to see some examples of career transitions made by former academic researchers and their messages for current researchers.

- Take advantage of networking opportunities through work, friends or family to learn of new possibilities.
- Use Career Planner (computerised career guidance tool used in higher education) to find occupations which might match your skills, interests and values.
- [Prospects Career Planner](#)
- Use the *Careers Service* web pages to find out more about occupations of interest to you.

[Careers Service – Occupations](#)

- Attend Careers Service events of interest or relevance, e.g. Alternative Science Careers, employer presentations.
- Consider taking courses in the Institute for Academic Development (e.g. managing people, networking skills) to enhance your employability or seek out part-time courses to gain skills appropriate to a new area.
- If you are thinking of starting your own business, the Careers Service website has a lot of useful information including details of organisations which can help.

[Careers Service - Starting your own business](#)

- Undertake voluntary work, where feasible, to gain insight and experience in an area of interest.
- Consider work shadowing to find out more; this can help you to make the right career choice and convince potential employers of your motivation.