

# A PhD is just the beginning...

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A PhD is the next logical step for many people to further their scientific career after a Bachelor's or Master's degree. Doctoral training programmes are a chance to tailor your scientific knowledge into more niche areas, learn new and exciting techniques and find your feet in the field of research. There are numerous resources available about how to get, survive and achieve your PhD; but at some point, you have to start considering and focusing on life post-PhD. While achieving your PhD is a brilliant milestone, sadly it does not guarantee you your dream job. What is guaranteed, however, is that if you apply for positions in academia and likely in industry or science, in general, your competitors will also have a PhD. So, how do you make yourself stand out from the crowd? It is important to utilize your time during a PhD to make yourself more marketable in your chosen career path. Coming into the last year of my PhD, I am starting to consider my options in academia, industry and beyond and scrutinize my CV for inevitable gaps. Speaking to fellow PhD students, postdocs and people who moved away from research, I have picked up some useful advice that could help boost your CV and better prepare you for your future career.

## Talk about your science

During a PhD, there are many available avenues that allow you to talk about your work, ranging from small group meetings to international conferences. These not only offer a great opportunity to share your scientific passion and research, but also allow you to build confidence in public speaking and one-to-one dialogue. These are highly transferable skills which would be invaluable for any job, and highly beneficial when preparing for interviews, since many now have a presentation element. Presenting data can take you out of your comfort zone, test your knowledge and ability to hold an intellectual conversation with peers, and sometimes even give you the chance to discuss your work with experts in the field. Presenting at smaller lab meetings can also enhance your science communication ability. Mastering the skill of presenting is a great thing to gain during your PhD and will help you in future interviews.

## Science communication and public engagement

It is an essential skill to be able to translate scientific jargon to the general public, both inside or outside of research. If you can explain your thesis hypothesis to a passing bystander, then the chances are you will be able to do so effectively to a future employer. The changing era we live in today shows that public engagement is becoming increasingly important on your CV. Getting involved in science communication and engagement projects provides transferable skills that can bolster your CV, offering evidence of skills in teamwork, organization and project management. It also provides talking points and examples of where you have used your skills for interviews. Take opportunities to get involved with outreach and get in touch with your university public engagement department, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) clubs and science festivals. I have been involved with Pint of Science for the last few years; it is a great opportunity to see what the public think about 'hot topics' in the science community.



Writing for a blog is also a great way to communicate science. The Biochemical Society offers opportunities for this with their blog (<https://thebiochemistblog.com>).

## Networking

Take the opportunity to meet people during your PhD. A lot of postdoc positions are advertised at conferences or through collaborating labs. This is a great chance to get your name out there and advocate yourself as the perfect candidate. Putting a face to a name always helps when considering job applications. There are many opportunities to network within a PhD programme. Attending conferences and workshops is one way, as well as networking events held by your university

and scientific societies. Contacting supervisors who work in areas of interest can also give you a chance to talk about your research and widen your collaborative network. Spending time in other labs can help boost your scientific skill set and again open up your scientific network. Talking to your PI or university careers services may open some doors you did not know about or recommend training courses or job opportunities. Attending science festivals and society-led events can help you establish connections and gain a better understanding of the field.

## Placements

During my PhD, I was lucky enough to spend 3 months on a placement. I experienced a new field and was able to expand my understanding and skill set outside of the lab into public engagement. I worked with the Biochemical Society, supporting public engagement events, the blog and helping to create STEM learning resources for school children. The exposure built on my CV and gave me the opportunity to transfer some skills I had learnt during my PhD to an external setting, specifically organization and time management. Placement opportunities can be utilized to learn new skills both inside and outside of the lab and gain a broader appreciation for science in the wider community.

## Look for jobs early

Finding a job before you finish can be a difficult thing to achieve, especially when you have the pressure of writing a thesis alongside completing any final experiments. There are many job sites and it is always good to keep an eye open to get an idea of potential opportunities. Looking for jobs 3–6 months before you plan to hand in could be useful, and perhaps could be used as a break from thesis writing. Job boards at conferences may offer positions, and speaking to your PI may give you a good starting point. This advice also applies for those considering leaving academia. You can reach out to companies in industry and find out what the specifications are for available positions, which would provide you with plenty of time to make your CV more marketable and obtain any specific skills that might be required. Another way to find a job is through recruitment agencies. Many companies hire recruitment agents to find the best



candidates and you may miss exciting opportunities by not looking at these sites. For this, you need a good general CV to really highlight your attributes, helping you to stand out when agencies are recruiting. Job hunting can be a long and laborious process, and can be rather demoralizing; therefore, breaking it up and spreading it out can help the process and take the pressure off.

## Remind yourself what you love about science

A PhD can be a hard and stressful time, especially in your final year when you are worrying about lack of data, writing your thesis and the very fast approaching period of unemployment. However, it is important to remember why you chose to do a PhD in the first place. Whatever job you end up applying for, it still requires you to retain your passion for science, and this can be detected in a CV and interview. Therefore, throughout your PhD, remind yourself why you love it so much. Whether this be reading scientific journals and magazines, getting involved in outreach or just doing that 'something extra' experiment you have wanted to do for a while. One of the most important things when applying for jobs is to show that you really want it, and if you still love science, that is a good start.

The main focus during a PhD is to learn, absorb and develop as a researcher. The goal is to carry out experiments and complete a thesis, but it can never hurt to be prepared for the future, develop your CV and establish your next steps. There are many resources out there at your disposal. You could even start by checking out the biochemical job board (<https://biochemistry.org/education/careers/jobs-board/>), your university careers site and [jobs.ac.uk](http://jobs.ac.uk), a valuable resource for academic jobs in the UK. ■



*I am currently writing up my PhD thesis on biochemical analysis of the human helicase protein HelQ in DNA repair. I studied undergraduate Biochemistry and Genetics at the University of Nottingham before taking a year out to experience life in industry. I returned to Nottingham to carry out my PhD which I hope to finish this year. I am involved in a range of outreach projects including Pint of Science and the Festival of Curiosity and also had an amazing time carrying out an internship at the Biochemical Society. I am very excited to be embarking on the next step in my career this year and can't wait to keep combining my love of science and outreach. Email: [tabijenkins@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:tabijenkins@hotmail.co.uk)*