

Careers Options for Researchers

Research graduates have a lot to offer the modern knowledge-based economy and go into a wide range of roles and sectors, not just academia. Although they typically have lower unemployment rates than other graduates, many of the areas they move into - including academia – may be highly competitive. Take time to explore the full range of options open to you and gain as much advance knowledge of sectors and roles as you can. Thinking strategically can help you decide if a career area is right for you and ensure you have done everything necessary to make yourself competitive when it comes to entering recruitment processes in your chosen field.

Top Tips in career planning

- Explore and broaden your horizons - make the most of time alongside your research to get involved, experiment with different activities and build your skills
- Look ahead - use your research skills to find out about the realities of working in different roles and sectors
- Network effectively - connect, talk, reach out and join the conversation. Connecting with others can unlock new sources of information and support and ultimately even lead to job opportunities
- Reflect and talk things through - take time to think about your values, skills and interests and what roles you are best suited to, then use your support networks (including Careers) to help you identify the practical steps on the way to achieving your goals.

What options do I have as a research graduate?

❖ Academic Research

If you are enjoying your research you may aspire to a career in academic research / lecturing. A large discrepancy between the numbers of researchers and the number of lecturing posts available means that you need to be prepared for high levels of competition, however. To maximise your chances of success, gain awareness very early on of the career journey from PhD to successful academic in your field and take control of your own development to make yourself as competitive as possible.

Vitae – advice, practicalities and career stories

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/pursuing-an-academic-career>

Jobs.ac.uk – pathways, advice, topics and issues, discipline-specific advice

<https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/career-development/academic-careers/>

Academia Sector Briefing from Oxford University Careers Service

<https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/academia>

***For further resources and suggestions, see: Hot Tips for Researchers: Planning for an Academic Career**

❖ **Research but in a different environment**

The commercial, public and charitable sectors also do large amounts of research and value the skills and experiences of academic researchers. The research environment outside academia may differ in many ways from what you are used to, though, so it pays to take time to find out as much as you can about cultures and expectations in different sectors.

Depending on your discipline, you could pursue a research career in:

- Research institutes and research councils
- Commercial R&D in e.g. pharmaceuticals, biotech, manufacturing and other high-tech industries
- Central and local government
- Think tanks and social research bodies
- NGOs, charities and campaign groups
- Market research organisations
- Specialist consultancies

Research Careers Outside Academia - a dated but still useful overview with links from The Careers Group, University of London www.soas.ac.uk/careers/links/file59156.pdf

Sector Briefings - useful briefings with comprehensive links from Oxford University Careers Service on sectors including Science R&D, Charity, Think Tanks, Consultancy etc. <https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/sectors-and-occupations>

❖ **Higher Education but not in research**

If you enjoy working within a university setting but don't want to follow the academic route, there are a range of roles within professional / support services where your skills and understanding of the HE and/or research environment could be an advantage:

- Researcher training and development
- Research management and governance
- Research enterprise and knowledge transfer
- Public engagement and communications
- Careers support
- Widening participation and schools outreach
- Academic administration

Use your own networks at Brookes and beyond as well as sites like www.jobs.ac.uk to find out about the full range of professional / managerial / support services roles across HE institutions.

The **Sector Briefing** from Oxford University Careers Service includes a section on non-academic roles within HE <https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/academia>

❖ **Related to your subject knowledge but not research**

If you enjoy your subject area but do not see yourself in a long-term research career there may be a range of non-research roles where your advanced subject knowledge is an advantage. Some roles will specifically require a PhD while for others you may be competing with other graduates and need to consider additional factors such as relevant work experience. Take time to research the sector carefully and develop networks so you can build up 'insider' information. Alternatively, if you are currently taking time out mid-career to conduct research related to your professional experience it may be possible to go back into the sector at a more senior or strategic level.

Some examples:

- Science and technical communication, medical writer, sales rep, patent attorney for scientists and technical graduates
- Engineering or technical consultancy
- Specialist consultancy roles
- Policy roles for social scientists
- Analyst roles e.g. in finance for highly numerate disciplines
- Teaching outside HE
- Academic publishing
- Museum curator, journalism, cultural sector for humanities graduates

Use www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles as a starting point to explore occupations and sectors

See the useful overview of discipline-specific options for researchers on the Bath University Careers website www.bath.ac.uk/guides/career-options-for-researchers

University of Oxford Careers Service Sector Briefings www.careers.ox.ac.uk/sectors-and-occupations

Find relevant professional body websites for valuable careers information and jobs boards www.gov.uk/government/publications/professional-bodies-approved-for-tax-relief-list-3/approved-professional-organisations-and-learned-societies

Management Consultancies Association - search for sector-specific consultancies using the 'MCA Members' directory www.mca.org.uk

❖ **Transfer skills and experience into something new**

Research graduates can enter the same range of career areas as other graduates including through applying onto graduate schemes. In addition, you will usually have developed specific transferable skills associated with completing a research project - such as project management, data or information literacy, problem-solving and advanced communication - which you may be able to transfer into a new career area. Don't be afraid to explore the full range of your options and be honest about what you really want from your next career transition. You may be leaving behind your research area, but no research experience is ever wasted.

- To explore a wide range of graduate roles, and find graduate training scheme vacancies www.prospects.ac.uk <https://targetjobs.co.uk/>

❖ **Working for yourself**

You may not think of yourself as an entrepreneur but conducting an independent research project requires a good deal of creative thinking and self-reliance and the enterprise to move the project forwards, find your next project and locate funding sources. In a climate which increasingly emphasises the impact of research, more academics are engaging in various forms of spin-off activity, freelance or consulting work alongside or following research.

- To find out about the Enterprise Support (including one-to-one) available at Brookes: www.brookes.ac.uk/enterprise
- For further advice, links and resources to support self-employment, see the Hot Tips in our Resources section via www.brookes.ac.uk/careers 'Self Employment: am I suited? Starter resources'

❖ Further Resources to support exploration of your career options

- **Vitae** <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers>
- **The Career-Wise Researcher** (downloadable booklet) <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/guides-briefings-and-information>
- **Jobs.ac.uk** <https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk> 10 Career Paths for PhDs e-book www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/10-career-paths-for-phds.pdf
- **PGR careers 'explorer' website**, outlining popular career options for postgraduate researchers beyond academia, from The University of Birmingham: <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/employability/careers/postgraduate/pgr/pgr-career-options/index.aspx>
- **Prospects** www.prospects.ac.uk **Target Jobs** <https://targetjobs.co.uk> **Inside Careers** www.insidecareers.co.uk
- **Discover PhDs** UK-based resource with post-PhD advice www.discoverphds.com/advice/after

❖ Career Stories

Find inspiration by exploring the destinations and career stories of other research graduates:

- **Research Careers** - career stories from PhD graduates who have transitioned beyond academia (in collaboration with University of Oxford Careers Service) <http://research-careers.org/>
- **Vitae Researcher Career Stories** - over 150 career stories across disciplines and destinations <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/researcher-career-stories>
- **From PhD to Life** - interviews with people who have made the transition into a fulfilling career outside academia <https://fromphdtolife.com/resources/transition-q-as/>
- **Jobs on Toast**- blog with advice and resources for PhD students interested in transitioning outside of academia <http://jobsontoast.com>
- **PhDs at Work** - 'week in a life' series of interviews with professionals with PhDs working across a range of industries <https://phdsatwork.com>
- **PhD Career Stories** - a mix of personal stories and tips and advice for your career search <https://phdcareerstories.com>

Further Support at the Careers Centre

We warmly welcome all Brookes research students and contract research and research-only staff at Careers. (For Brookes students, support continues for up to 3 years after graduation). See a Careers Consultant to talk through your options or emerging career plans, get feedback on applications and receive practical training through the interview process, whether for an academic or non-academic role: www.brookes.ac.uk/careers