

# Researchers: Planning for an academic career

## Introduction

There's no getting away from it: academia is a very competitive field with far fewer positions than well qualified, motivated doctoral graduates. However, as with any competition, somebody has to win it! Although the picture varies between disciplines, in general less than 50% of doctoral graduates are employed in academia 6 months after completion of their PhD and even fewer longer term.\* If you are thinking of a career in academia you need to be proactive in developing your profile: keep assessing what you need to do to make yourself more competitive and take action alongside your current research.

\* <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/02/17/the-employment-of-phd-graduates-in-the-uk-what-do-we-know/>

## Is Academia For Me?

This is an important question to ask yourself! Talk to supervisors, colleagues and people in your network about the realities of working in Higher Education at the early career stage and beyond. Be honest with yourself about what you want from a career, what you are prepared to do to succeed and how well suited you are to the role as it really is rather than how you would like it to be.

**The Researcher Development Framework (RDF)** - provides a useful structure for assessing yourself against the knowledge, attributes and behaviour of successful academic researchers.

[www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework)

**Future Learn: Career Management for Early Career Academic Researchers MOOC**— do a free online course which allows you to explore your options including pursuing an academic career path

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/career-management>

## Useful articles about academic life

<https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/academic/the-challenges-facing-academic-staff-in-uk-universities/>  
[www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/hundreds-academics-give-advice-their-younger-selves](http://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/hundreds-academics-give-advice-their-younger-selves)

## Academic Career Paths

Opportunities and career tracks post-PhD vary by discipline and country. In science and engineering it is common to take up one or more postdoctoral research positions – 'postdocs' - before applying for a permanent lectureship. In the humanities and social sciences there are fewer such research positions (often called Research Fellowships) so continuing with sessional teaching whilst also searching for research or lecturing posts is not uncommon. Find out more about academic career paths in your discipline:

[www.leru.org/academic-career-maps-in-europe](http://www.leru.org/academic-career-maps-in-europe) - maps typical academic career paths in Europe

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/researcher-career-stories/career-stories> - over 150 post-PhD career stories

[www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/the-essential-guide-to-moving-up-the-academic-career-ladder.pdf](http://www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/the-essential-guide-to-moving-up-the-academic-career-ladder.pdf) - a guide to promotion in UK academic careers

[www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/what-do-researchers-do](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/what-do-researchers-do) - What do Researchers Do? Gives information about the employment destinations of doctoral graduates by discipline

## Developing your Academic Profile

Although the balance of activities in academic roles can vary between disciplines, in general you will need to develop experience and expertise across 3 key areas in order to compete successfully for permanent roles: research, teaching and administration. Here are some suggestions for things you can do to actively build your profile alongside your current research:

## Research

Academic selection committees are interested not only in your PhD or most recent piece of research but in whether you are developing an active profile and credible future research plans that they will benefit from.

- Build your networks within the local and wider research community to get yourself and your ideas known, to find out about emerging hot topics in your field, and to gain ideas for future research / collaborations. Attend research group seminars and identify relevant groups and communities at other institutions and online. Ask yourself: where are all the important conversations taking place in my field? then do all you can to take part in them. To get started with digital networking: <https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/resources/the-digital-academic/>
- Present your work at seminars and conferences – ask around, check databases, Twitter, Eventbrite
- Join relevant electronic mailing lists and other online networks e.g. [www.jiscmail.ac.uk](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk)
- Join the Brookes Public Engagement Network and think about how you will be able to broaden the impact of your research <https://sites.google.com/brookes.ac.uk/publicengagement/pen> <https://intranet.brookes.ac.uk/research-support/research-impact> -
- Show you have the potential to secure funding by applying for small bursaries or travel grants, getting involved in joint grant applications with senior colleagues (more realistic in some disciplines than others) and familiarising yourself with future funding sources [www.researchprofessional.com](http://www.researchprofessional.com)
- Understand how research is recognised and rated within the wider HE policy context. Take a look at institutional research strategies and (in the UK) REF news [www.brookes.ac.uk/research/ref-2021](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/research/ref-2021)
- Publish! Access training and advice on where and how to target journals and publishers. Quality matters as much as quantity for academic recruiters – think ‘where’ as well as ‘what’.

## Teaching

Although some permanent academic posts are ‘research only’, the vast majority carry teaching responsibilities. Balancing teaching commitments alongside your research can be difficult but it is worth the effort - although it’s important to know when to concentrate on simply finishing your PhD.

- Undertake relevant training via your Faculty Doctoral Training Programme and [www.brookes.ac.uk/ocsltd/teaching-and-learning/recognition-and-funding/doctoral-students](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/ocsltd/teaching-and-learning/recognition-and-funding/doctoral-students)
- Make it known to your supervisor / Senior Postgraduate Research Tutor that you are interested in taking on some teaching. If module teaching isn’t available ask about other ways you can support student learning e.g. demonstrating or tutoring
- Build your awareness of the full range of activity that goes into effective teaching and get involved if you can in e.g. formative or summative assessment, feedback, online learning etc
- If you have already secured some teaching experience, think about broadening your range both in terms of teaching mode (seminars, lectures, online) and cohort (first years, final years).
- If you’re struggling to get teaching in your department, be creative – volunteer a session for a Postgraduate Seminar Series at Brookes or elsewhere; approach Continuing Education departments to offer classes in your area; contact other institutions where your expertise matches course content or use your wider networks (some sessional teaching opportunities are advertised on [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk)); opportunities exist with schools and in the community - check out [www.thebrilliantclub.org](http://www.thebrilliantclub.org) for short paid placements for researchers to teach in schools
- Keep up with developments in teaching in HE via [www.timeshighereducation.com](http://www.timeshighereducation.com) [www.advance-he.ac.uk](http://www.advance-he.ac.uk) and <https://wonkhe.com/>

## Administration

While not such a key priority as research and teaching in the early stages of your career, it can be helpful to build evidence of the administrative skills required of lecturers, but do be careful how you allocate your time – make sure the benefits to your CV are not offset by time taken away from your research.

- Go to any departmental or faculty meetings you are entitled to attend
- Get involved in committee work e.g. as a Research Student Representative
- Get involved in organising a conference or seminar series

**Further Support at the Careers Centre** See a Careers Consultant to talk through your 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](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/careers)