



CAREER PLANNING **MINI-GUIDE**

CAREER ESSENTIALS FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHERS

WORLD OF WORK CAREERS CENTRE

0151 231 2048/3719 || worldofwork@ljmu.ac.uk || @LJMUWoW
www2.ljmu.ac.uk/worldofwork

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Introduction



This mini guide for postgraduate research students (PGRs) is intended to help you think about different aspects of your employability. It is designed to be a starting point for you to go on and research further and more thoroughly in your area of interest, and as such it is not exhaustive. It is important to remember that often things are fluid and change, and therefore you must check and be prepared for change along your career path and be able and ready to plan for unexpected events. The content below is taken from our PGR workshops based around these areas. You can get fuller details of each of these areas by attending our workshops or visiting the PGR drop-ins. The Careers Team will be producing more detailed guides for PGRs on topics such as CVs, interviews, so please keep visiting the site to see what new resources are available.

1. Careers information and advice



The Careers Adviser for your area is available to offer one-to-one appointments if you are in need of careers advice and guidance. These appointments can be booked at our Careers Zones at Aldham Robarts and Byrom Street. You can use the dedicated PGR drop-in service at the Careers Zones at Byrom Street on Tuesdays (1:30-3:30pm) and Aldham Robarts on Wednesdays (1:30-3:30pm), where you can have a CV or application checked over and receive feedback. You can also book in to see an Employability Adviser at any Careers Zone throughout the week to have CVs and applications checked.

We run events throughout the year that may interest you. These range from specific workshops aimed at PGRs such as academic and non-academic CVs, interview skills, working in academia and outside academia, to general workshops and webinars that you may find useful such as LinkedIn, job hunting, and many more. We also run a number of employer events, which could be useful to develop your understanding of career opportunities outside of academia and to network with potential future employers. All our events are on our website:

<https://worldofwork.ljmu.ac.uk/events/>

Also as a postgraduate researcher you may be familiar with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework Planner – an online tool which maps the skills you should be gaining during the course of your research (details here: **<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework/developing-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework>**). The framework is split into four domains: knowledge and intellectual abilities; personal effectiveness; research governance and organisation; engagement, influence and impact. This may help you understand your skills and expertise, and identify gaps for you to tailor your own professional development towards, but you may feel that you already have the experience and knowledge of your skills.

2. Working in universities



You have many options open to you when you finish your PhD, and these include roles within academia. These broadly fall into three categories: research, teaching and professional / support roles. Research and teaching are often combined in the role of a lecturer, but it is possible to stay in research or focus on teaching opportunities only. Each of these routes has limitations. If you are unsure of which to pursue, you can talk to a careers adviser in the Careers Zones.

Research roles:

You might be applying for the post of Research Assistant, Research Associate, Research Fellow, Research Officer, Research Technician, Project Officer, and so on. Your long term career aim might be to become a Research Fellow. Many of these roles are fixed-term but permanent contracts are possible.

Progression of research roles: You will start as an early career researcher (ECR), the precise definition of which varies. As an ECR you are eligible to apply for various grants and awards. As you progress and gain experience, the next stage of your research career will be as a mid-career researcher (MCR). At this point you may have more responsibilities regarding managing people, teaching responsibilities and be under pressure to attract funding. Ultimately you will likely progress to senior research roles.

Skills for research roles: You will need both practical and intellectual skills including knowledge of theoretical and practical research methods, ability to successfully complete grant applications, report writing, time management, presentation skills (at conferences), critical thinking, problem solving, ability to work collaboratively and networking to create research partnerships within the academic community and/or industry partners. You will pick up skills along the way through gaining experience in different areas, such as managing budgets and managing people.

Research roles outside universities: Research roles outside universities will be both in the private and public sector – see the section on job searches.

Lecturing roles:

Traditional lecturing roles are a balance of research and teaching, which is at times difficult to do. You will be expected to undertake research, apply for funding, deliver at conferences, and undertake a teaching workload (including personal tutor responsibilities) and the admin side of your role to meet assessment deadlines. You would most likely need to complete a teaching qualification once in post, for example a postgraduate certificate in teaching and learning in higher education.

Progression of lecturing roles: Progression may be based on your research profile and the most likely route will be from lecturer to senior lecturer, and then reader and professorial posts. Advancing through these stages in your lecturing career when staying at the same university will usually be based on your performance rather than waiting for the posts to be advertised.

Skills for teaching and lecturing roles: You will need expertise and enthusiasm for your subject area; ability to convey highly complex information, arguments, or debates to an audience – both verbally and through published research; ability to teach wider than your immediate subject area; ability to manage time and competing demands flexibly; confidence in dealing with a range of people from students to senior university staff and external contacts; commitment to continued professional development. You will often work alone but also as a team in various formal and informal teams.

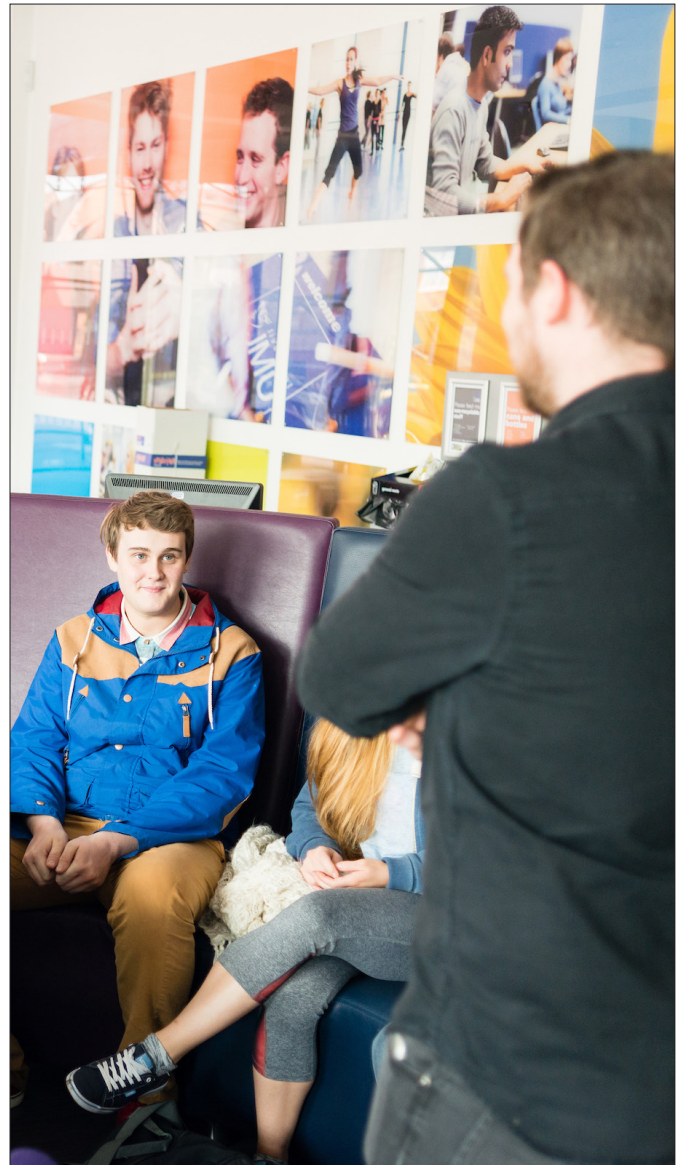
Teaching only roles: Some universities exclusively have teaching roles, and this may be an area that you would like to focus on. These posts may be fixed term or part-time. These roles allow you to focus on teaching without the pressures of balancing research, but that does not mean it is an easy option. Your expertise therefore would be around your knowledge and practice not only of your subject area but also of teaching methods, and you would be familiar with research in the area of education and teaching.



Admin, professional & support roles in universities:

A third area of work within universities are administrative, professional and support roles. These may include working in a central 'research office' which supports the work of researchers, or one of the professional services that falls within 'student support'. You may be interested in teaching support in terms of technical support and innovations. Work in these departments may or may not require your PhD. These posts will be advertised on university websites and also **www.jobs.ac.uk**

Skills for admin, professional and supporting roles: These will vary according to the job specification, as the range of non-academic jobs in universities is broad, but would generally include communication and interpersonal skills, ability to work both in teams and independently, time management and organisation skills, IT skills, confidence in dealing with students, staff and external contacts etc.

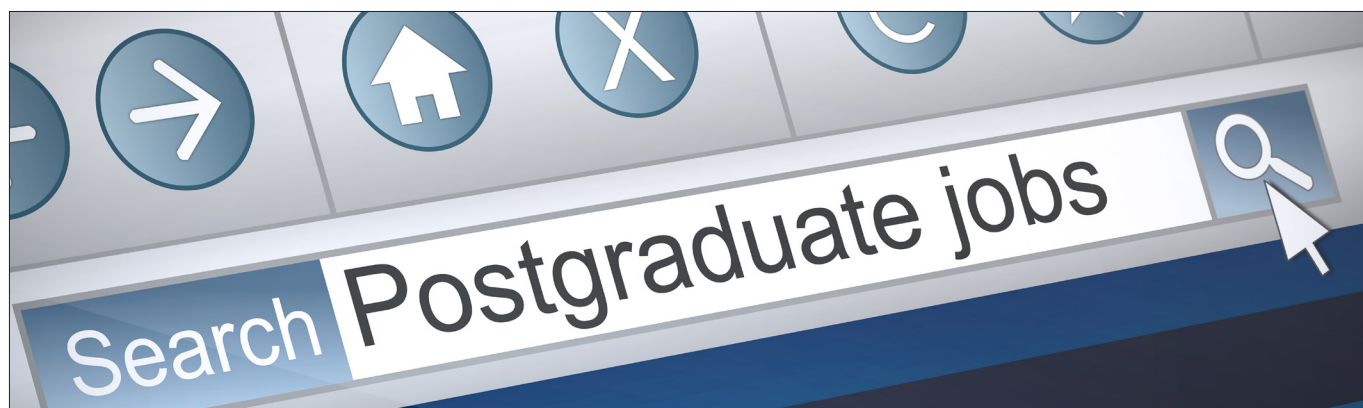


Working outside the higher education sector

You may find a post that requires your PhD outside the H.E. sector, or a post that interests you where your qualification is not specifically required. Research posts can be found in many organisations, from science and technology to those focussed on charitable or social interests. Outside of research, opportunities that may be of interest to you could include policy roles or positions within grant-awarding bodies.

You need to know how to sell and market the skills that you will have gained during your PhD, and these will include: critical and analytical thinking and problem solving; communication and interpersonal skills; project and time management skills; report writing; organisational skills; leadership; ability to collaborate effectively with peers; networking; teaching.

3. Job searches and finding jobs



Job searches may take time, and you need to understand your own limits and boundaries in terms of salary, location, type of duties / tasks undertaken. The more limits you place on job searches, the fewer results you will find. But there may be very valid reasons for the confines you set, and you must set them at levels that you are happy with.

Working in HEIs:

You may hear about a post that is suitable for you from contacts within your department or your wider network. This is an important source of information. You may also see posts mentioned through social media, so it is important to be switched on and receptive to all ways in which you could hear about relevant posts. Another main source of advertisements is on individual university websites, THES and The Guardian's education section.

Jobs:

- www.jobs.ac.uk
- www.academicjobseu.com
- www.prospects.as.uk
- www.targetjobs.co.uk
- www.insidecareers.co.uk
- Professional Associations
- Specialist Press (e.g. New Scientist, People Management)
- Specialist websites (e.g. www.naturejobs.com)
- 'My Jobs & Placements' (LJMU)
- Job Fairs
- Recruitment Agencies

Funding opportunities:

- <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/howtoapply/>
- <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/>
- <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/>
- <https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/>
- <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/>
- <https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/>
- <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/>
- <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/funding/>
- <https://www.britishcouncil.org/new/euraxess/euraxess-working-jobs/More-jobs-websites/>
- www.ResearchProfessional.com
- www.findapostdoc.com

Working overseas:

Research provides plenty of opportunity to work overseas, and you might want to search for posts further afield. A good starting place, again, are individual university websites. You could start looking for opportunities at universities that have similar research interests to your own. Consider, for example, universities where academics you have discussed similar research interests with at international conferences are based, or universities where researchers work whose publications you have used for your PhD.

The hidden jobs market

Not all jobs are advertised – it is estimated that as many as 70-80% of jobs are never advertised, and this is called the hidden jobs market. These jobs are not advertised for a variety of reasons: cost, internal recruitment, speculative applications, too many / more applications than needed, connections, and head hunting. You need to think about how you will access the hidden jobs market. Possible strategies include: asking supervisors / colleagues for contacts, making contacts through LinkedIn, attending conferences and relevant faculty-related events, joining a professional association, volunteering at professional events, or speaking with alumni.

Setting up your own business



You may have a business idea that is emerging from your research, and you may be intending to become self-employed or set up a business. If this is the case, you can contact the Centre for Entrepreneurship for advice around what funding sources may be available to you and about how to set up a business. To arrange a confidential business advice call with a business adviser, phone **0151 231 3300** or visit **<https://www2.ljmu.ac.uk/startup/>**

4. CVs & Applications

CVs

Writing a CV when you are studying for or have attained a PhD can be challenging. Also, the type of job that you apply for will influence your choice of CV. You will have gained a variety of experience on the way and need to make sure you present it in the most logical format. After using this guide, you can have your CV checked at the Careers Zones, either by drop-in or booked appointment.

There are three main styles of CVs: skills (competency) based, reverse chronological and an academic CV. Skills-based CVs are suitable for people who have little employment experience (in particular regarding experience relevant to the role/industry), or for those who want a complete change in career. Here you are able to flag up a list of transferable skills and evidence these with examples from your studies, work and voluntary experience as well as extracurricular activities. Reverse chronological CVs are useful for people who already have a relevant work history. If you use this style, you can still have a skills profile on page 2 of the CV with some evidence for skills. If you are going to be applying for research and academic posts, then you will need to start drafting an academic CV, which is unlimited in length (although you should still keep the CV as concise as possible).

What to include in a CV:

Name and contact details, education and qualifications, employment history ('relevant' and 'other'), skills profile, awards and prizes (including any funding awarded), publications (when applying for academic positions), achievements, voluntary work, interests, referees.

What not to include:

Age, marital status, sexuality, disabilities, political affiliations, criminal convictions, NI number, salary, reason for leaving, the heading 'Curriculum Vitae'.

Tailoring your CV: It is important to make sure that your CV is tailored to each application. You can tailor it by linking the post to your career aspiration in a personal profile. You can also make sure any skills profile or duties and responsibilities within your employment history link with the person specification. You might want to think about your research skills, specific technical skills, but also generic transferable skills.

When to use a CV: If the post requests a CV, or if it states that a CV is optional, then you can send your CV in as part of the application process. You can also use a CV speculatively along with a one page covering letter which outlines why you are applying for the post, the skills you can take to the organisation and why you want to work for them. Applications for university posts (both academic and support roles) usually require you to complete an application form, including a personal statement.

Sources for some example CVs:

- <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/researcher-cv-examples>
- https://www2.ljmu.ac.uk/worldofwork/worldofwork_LJMU_Only_docs/CVs_and_Covering_Letters.pdf

Applications

For academic job applications to be successful, you need:

- Publications in well-recognised journals
- Experience of securing research funding
- Teaching experience: designing, delivering and evaluating degree level courses
- A profile within the academic community: use conferences as well as publications to raise your profile
- Project management skills required to deliver research projects
- International experience
- Understanding the process of quality assessment in teaching and research
- Understanding current issues in higher education
- A network of people who can support and advise you.

(SOURCE: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/pursuing-an-academic-career/applying-for-academic-jobs>)

When writing applications it is important to ensure that your personal statement addresses the essential and as many of the desirable criteria as possible in the job specification. You can use these as headings which will help you to write the statement and provide evidence for each criterion. It is also easier for the shortlisting team when they are sifting applications to read your application if it is set out in the correct order with headings.

If you miss out addressing an essential criterion, then most likely you will not be invited to interview. As you will not know the level of competition for the post, it is best to address as many of the desirable criteria as possible. It is advised that you get applications submitted in good time as some employers close down job adverts once they have received a certain number of applications. This is simply to enable them to shortlist more quickly. When providing evidence to show your skills, you can use the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) technique to frame your evidence, although it is not necessarily always applicable.

5. Interview Skills

Academic interviews are often panel interviews, and staff attend from departments outside the subject area you are in. You need to expect and be prepared for a tough interview. This will be made easier by ensuring that you have thoroughly researched the department and gained as much knowledge as you can about those who are interviewing you. Make sure that you have read relevant papers – from those closest to your subject area, and also from the department you are applying to.

The interview panel are seeking to find out if they can work with you. However, the interview process is also about seeing if you can work with them. Interviews are a two way process, which is why it's good to research and start getting a sense of the culture of the department early on to see if it matches your preferences. The panel will want to establish how much you want the job. This comes back to the research you have done; your ability to reflect your knowledge about the department and the university at interview will indicate how seriously you take this application. This also reflects your level of motivation. Ultimately, the panel wants to be sure that you can do the tasks in the job specification, and they want to ascertain you have the skills, ability and experience which you have claimed in your application.

Areas covered in academic interviews will be:

- Your teaching experience
- Your research
- Your involvement in and experience of course development (content)
- Your skills and competencies relevant to the position

You need to be prepared to answer interview questions based on the above, so it is a good idea to write a list of questions and know how you will answer them. Use the person specification for the role as a starting point for your preparation; this often highlights which criteria will be assessed at the interview stage. You need to sound confident, but not as though you are repeating a learned text. Your interview style should be professional but also natural. Presentations are a common part of the interview process, and you will most likely have to present your research or may be asked to deliver a lecture.

For a useful general guide on preparing for interviews, see our guide: **https://www2.ljmu.ac.uk/worldofwork/worldofwork_LJMU_Only_docs/Preparing_for_Interviews.pdf**

6. LinkedIn and social media



LinkedIn is a vehicle for you to market yourself and your skills effectively. In this sense, it is important to use an appropriate photograph in order to be in control of the image you portray to the outside world. First impressions count with LinkedIn, just as they count in a face to face interview. The content of your employment and academic profile can be drawn from your CV, but you are not restricted by space. You can highlight skills you have, and as you increase your network your contacts will endorse those skills, and you will look to endorse skills of those you know. LinkedIn is increasingly used for networking and getting jobs. It is important not to think about your LinkedIn profile as simply an online version of your CV because it should add value to your application. For example, you can illustrate your (research) interests by joining relevant groups, or you can upload media including documents, e.g. published articles, slides from presentations delivered at conferences.

The Careers Team run regular workshops and webinars to learn more about LinkedIn – look at our Events website for details - **<https://worldofwork.ljmu.ac.uk/events>**

Blogs are a useful way to share your research. It is also a useful way to reflect on where you are at right now, and understand how far you have travelled. It is a way to engage with others, get feedback and reassurance that you are not alone. The usefulness goes beyond sharing knowledge within your discipline. A helpful guide is provided on: **<https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/research-out-there/hello-world/>** Blogs are a big undertaking and can feel like an extra unnecessary drain on your time unless it is something that you are hugely committed to as part of your research. An easier way to engage regularly and quickly with an audience might be through Twitter or other social media (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest).

Twitter can be used for an ongoing long term profile that you update regularly with thoughts around your research, or it can also be used short term around a particular event such as a conference. It is quick and easy to set up and use and if used well, can grow swiftly. Use a photo that you feel reflects what you want your twitter account to represent. It doesn't have to be a photo of you, but could be an item related to your research. Look for twitter accounts to follow such as professional or funding bodies, and as you start following these other suggested accounts will emerge.

Privacy

It is important to be conscious of the levels of privacy that you want for any account you may set up for yourself on any type of social media, whether that is Twitter, a blog or a LinkedIn profile. Once your name is attached to an online profile, then people can search and find you – this is the whole point of social media. If you are concerned for any reason, then you need to think about managing this and your privacy. You can manage the levels of your privacy by looking at the settings, and for example, you can 'hide' from LinkedIn at any point so that no one can see your profile. With LinkedIn, you should be aware that if you are searching for other people, then these searches can be seen by the other person unless you change your settings accordingly. There are positives and negatives to having people see if you are searching for them, such as making new contacts. You should be careful to ensure that no personal details – such as personal e-mail addresses or contact numbers – can be seen on any profile.



7. Useful publications

If you want to learn more about what PhDs do after completion, take a look at these useful resources:

■ [***https://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/what-do-researchers-do***](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/what-do-researchers-do)

8. Useful web links

Vitae – plan your career development:

■ [***https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/personal-effectiveness/create-an-action-plan-for-your-career-development-quick-tips***](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/personal-effectiveness/create-an-action-plan-for-your-career-development-quick-tips)

■ [***https://thesiswhisperer.com/***](https://thesiswhisperer.com/)

And finally...

Please look out for our PGR programme of workshops that happen throughout the year, and our weekly drop-in sessions. Here are recent comments from our PGR drop-in provision and workshops:

“

Awesome advice as always!

It was very helpful and I will use the information given.

Great benefit – liked that there were lots of examples and discussion.

Very happy to hear about the postgrad drop-in session.

It was a nice experience, friendly environment.

Really helpful – want to go write a CV now!

Nice tips, well organised.

Made me think much more carefully about type of CV choice particularly when applying for non-academic jobs.

Good points: tailored examples.

Thank you for your advice this afternoon. I now feel much more confident about the CV.

”

Careers Centre resources

We hope you found this guide useful. Please visit the Careers website to access information about the career support available to you while you are studying at LJMU: **www2.ljmu.ac.uk/worldofwork**.

Find jobs, placements, internships, part time or voluntary work

LJMU's MyJobs&Placements site features a range of opportunities from organisations both big and small, based locally, nationally and internationally. Opportunities are also listed on jobs boards in the Careers Zones.

<http://ljmu.prospects.ac.uk>



Careers Zone 24/7

If you are unable to come in and see us in a Careers Zone you can access a range of online career tools via Careers Zone 24/7. It includes a CV Builder, Interview Simulator, Careers Newsroom, Goingglobal database and a job search powered by Indeed jobs which includes a huge range of jobs both nationally and internationally.

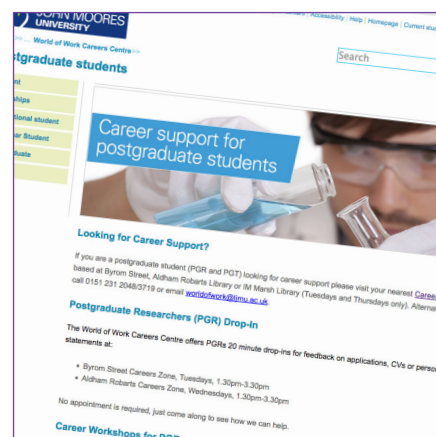
www2.ljmu.ac.uk/worldofwork/123873.htm



Postgraduate Careers Website

We have a microsite devoted to careers support for postgraduate students which is available via the main Careers website. The site includes information about drop-in sessions, bespoke workshops and includes links to useful resources for PGRs.

www2.ljmu.ac.uk/worldofwork/postgraduate





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