Career paths of academic researchers:

ARTS AND HUMANITIES

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American Studies - Simon

Route into HE
Simon started life from school as a journalist and entered HE as a mature student at a northern university, where he achieved a B.A.(Hons) American Studies, followed by a Ph.D. in American Studies. Simon would have loved an academic post and did part-time teaching as a Ph.D. student. However, he was told it would not happen and as he had 3 children to support he had to accept that he would finish his Ph.D. and then have to find permanent employment.

Exploration of Options and Sources
Simon looked at his experience and transferable skills, together with his preferences. These included journalism, academic success and a wish to stay in education. Simon was restricted to his local area and he saw an advertisement for an administrative post at a local college, applied and got it. It did not specifically offer opportunities to use his skills - but Simon looked ahead and saw this as a step to something he valued more. He was in education and he could take it from there, because he had something of a vision for himself - Press Officer type of role.

Simon describes himself as evangelical about opportunities in HE at the time and foresaw the growth of the Polytechnic sector. Simon knew he would have credibility with academics, with his academic success and he had the experience of journalism and skill with words and presenting, from his academic career.

In time he persuaded a 'floundering' Public Relations Officer at his Polytechnic to let him 'have a go' on the basis of what he had to offer. A job was created for him, thanks to his persuasion skills and 5 years later he had a large department with a healthy budget.

Messages for contract researchers
· Be prepared to overcome the disappointment of not being able to pursue a career in academia. Positive thinking is vital if the rest of your career is not going to be embittered by such disappointment. There are limited possibilities and many of us must move into other careers. It is possible to have a very fulfilling career doing something else.
· Use your strengths and preferences in looking for something else.
· Accept less than you actually want in a job, if there is scope for you to persuade the organisation that you can offer much more.
· Are you passionate about anything? Can you find a niche in that sort of field?
· Get a crystal ball - learn to scan the environment - look into the future by looking at trends/talking to people who have ideas about the future - see where the opportunities might lie in fields where you feel you could make a contribution.
· Be very lateral in your thinking about what you have done and been good at and how those skills could be transferred to something else, wholly unrelated.
· Have a vision for achieving your aims. Be thorough and realistic but do not be afraid of being evangelical and taking some risks - if they are well calculated.
· Identify things others are less accomplished at and make yourself indispensable by being good at those things.
Archaeology - Gail

Route into HE
Gail took the traditional route from school to university, where she gained a B.A Hons Archaeology and then a Ph.D. in Archaeology.

Route into Contract Research
Gail was made a verbal offer by a former tutor and spent over two years at her northern redbrick University between her degree and PhD. She also did some work for English Heritage and freelance work.

Nature and range of work
Gail supervised a large scale fieldwork project and got a number of projects to publication. In addition, she did research for English Heritage National Projects Protection Programme. She did some part time lecturing as a research student.

Likes about Contract Research
- Gail enjoyed the variety of work and the freedom to organise her own work/day, including from home. There were very few meetings!
- She found, too, that she could often achieve outputs without being overly reliant on other people meeting deadlines etc.

Dislikes about Contract Research
- Gail disliked the insecurity and low salary as well as the expectation that you become increasingly specialised.
- She found, too, that it can be a bit isolated if you don't have direct contact with the people you work for.

Exploration of Options and Sources
Gail was aware that jobs in archaeology were very limited and mostly short term - which she did not want - and so she started to look for a new direction about 4 months before her funding for her Ph.D. ran out. Gail identified her transferable skills and the constraints she was placing on herself in looking for a position (she wanted to stay in the north-east of England). Gail then bought newspapers and scanned them and used the Employment Service to find posts which would allow her to use her transferable skills and strengths.

For a little while Gail felt a sense of panic and was applying for and spending/wasting time attending interviews for posts which were wholly unsuitable. Finally, she realised this and stopped, concentrating only on opportunities which were appropriate for her career. She was still attracted to working in the higher education sector, albeit in a different capacity. Concentrating on this sector, she was selected for a job as Management Information and Development Director in a northern university.

Messages for contract researchers
- Start to prepare for a transition early enough not to find yourself panicking about getting a job.
· Be aware of the likely future in your discipline and decide if that is what you are looking for/going to be happy with.
· Look at your transferable skills from all aspects of your work - including, for example, that you have taken a very broad approach to your work - a novel approach.
· Beware of over reacting to time scales, in the stress of writing up - to find yourself going for interviews for 'jobs' rather than career posts. This will lead to wasting precious time, when you should be finishing the project/Ph.D.
· Remember there is always scope to earn money, if it comes to it, whilst you find the right position.
Archaeology - Rebecca

Route into HE
Rebecca took the traditional route via A levels to university. There she attained a B.A. Archaeology and Anthropology and a doctorate in Archaeology. Whilst still a contract researcher and aware that other 'irons in the fire' might come in useful, she took and passed Parts I and II of the Financial Practitioner Certificate.

Route into Contract Research
Rebecca loved her subject and applied for and won a Research Fellowship - in open competition - and started immediately her doctorate ended. This was a three year Research Fellowship at an Oxbridge college which was followed by a two year Research Fellowship at a northern redbrick university and a one year Research Associate at this same university. Rebecca felt she hit a 'glass ceiling' at this point.

Nature and range of work
Her work included research, project co-ordination (international), teaching, Health and Safety in lab, lab manager, first aider, departmental 'haggler' with suppliers and merciless chaser of 'lost' orders.

Likes about Contract Research
- Freedom.
- Flexible working environment.
- Extended periods of foreign travel.
- Nice pension scheme.

Dislikes about Contract Research
- Too much admin - being bogged down by bureaucracy - no time to progress research.
- Too little job security.
- Limited opportunities for career progression.
- Apparent need to re-locate regularly to take up post - leading to strife in personal life.
- Status within department and university; perception of being a dogs-body who will forgo personal aspirations and ambitions and does not mind being stuck in a dead-end job.

All of these meant Rebecca had to move on.

Exploration of Options and Sources
Rebecca had been interviewed at 12 of 18 UK Universities in her subject and came second every time. The final straw came in one last interview when she had a particularly hard time when a referee's comment was taken out of context and was made to be very damaging. This was the final straw and Rebecca decided to move on.

She started by looking at
- what she is good at
- where she wanted to work
- where she could go.

She listed a wide range of transferable skills and recognised that being involved in both Teaching Quality Assessment and the Research Assessment Exercise had given her another perspective on life.
She listed lifestyle prerequisites and the salary that would be the minimum to achieve/maintain these.

Rebecca had already been successful in entering financial services and had not taken up the opportunity because the lifestyle she had already achieved could not be maintained. Nor could she be sure to be where she wanted to be.

She then thought about friends and relations and what they do and realised that a field into which she could fit and where they were making good careers was IT.

Rebecca then added all her peripheral 'qualifications' to her list and looked into starting a computer course, whilst still a researcher. She looked at a distance learning course from which to gain practical experience rather than a qualification.

She set down what she wanted over the next 5 years - the vital quality of life issues and what she liked about her current job and hoped not to lose - the flexibility and the overseas travel, for example. Then she looked at specific geographical locations where friends and family would be accessible and then looked to see what was there by contacting friends in those locations.

She also asked friends what they thought she would be best suited to. She realised she would be making a big jump, but thought back to starting Archaeology and how big a jump that was and how she had been advised against it. She did it then and she knew she could do it again. After taking a long hard look at herself and what she wanted, Rebecca worked on her CV. She sent it to a friend in the industry and got significant feedback. Rebecca followed most of his suggestions.

The friend, who had just started work for a small software consultancy said he would like to give Rebecca's C.V. to his boss. She panicked a bit because she had not expected anything to happen for a while - but realises she could not let any opportunity go by. She realised it would all be a valuable learning experience. This led to an early evening telephone interview, which Rebecca found very hard because the interviewer was incapable of being 'read'. She felt she handled it badly and became angry with herself. She had not prepared - she was talking about how she had handled situations in an academic environment which was wholly unsuitable for a commercial environment. Rebecca had to try to retrieve the situation - to show she could offer the company something of value - if not what she had been interviewed for.

She was given a second chance, purely because she came recommended and at face to face interviews she made the right impression. Following a job offer, Rebecca then had to become a skilled negotiator for salary and conditions to match those she was leaving and that was quite hard. She learned that she had not to move or let them think that she would give in because she wanted the job so badly. She was clear about her minimum and she stuck firmly to it, until she achieved it.

**Messages for contract researchers**

- Recognise all the signs which are telling you that it is time to move on - don't keep thinking 'something will turn up'.
- Don't dither for too long - decide to stay or to go.
- Then think about -
- what you are good at; what experience has given you which skills and competences?
- where you want to go (aspirations change as you get older); you acquire things which you do not wish to give up
- where you want to be (physically).

· Start to think about things you could do, with your skills, qualifications, experience, peripheral qualifications (driving licence etc).
· Look forward 5 years and make some notes about where you'd like to be and the general nature of your job (travel involved; flexible; variety etc).
· Some leads may be good learning experiences but may lead neither to short-listing nor interview. Accept the learning experience and benefit from it.
· Prepare for telephone interviews in the same way as for others but remember that you have to 'smile' on the telephone.
· Be ready for unexpected and very short notice opportunities, which may come at the 'wrong' time. Remember, there won't be lots of opportunities, so reflect carefully before rejecting one.
· When you are being interviewed and meeting various people and it all looks reasonably positive - be flexible. Return to meet significant people, when they ask, if at all possible - even if you have to change some arrangements.
· Send any additional information to the relevant people in the organisation to give further, broader evidence of your experience and competence - as you realise, through interview, that it will help them clarify their thoughts.
History - Mark

Background
After obtaining 2 M.As, I decided I wanted to pursue my interest in Liberal Party history, so I undertook a D.Phil. This offered an opportunity to pursue my interest whilst breaking new academic ground.

I enjoyed the research and using evidence to develop an argument. In particular, I enjoyed making use of several different archives and using interview as a research technique. My main dislike was the lack of interaction and isolation from other students and academics.

I did not want to stay in academia and decided instead to obtain a professional qualification. I regularly consulted the careers service weekly mailing and eventually chose accountancy with a tax bias because it gave me the opportunity to obtain a professional qualification whilst being paid and gaining work experience.

The main parallels with academic research are using evidence to construct an argument and looking in different sources to find supporting information. Good drafting skills in tax work are at a premium. The main difference is the amount of interaction with people - both clients and colleagues.

I left public practice to move into industry as a tax manager. My main aim is to develop tax awareness at my current employer before moving to a FTSE 100 company as Head of Tax.

Transferable skills
In my current profession I use various skills that I gained as a researcher:
• writing skills
• the ability to read quickly, extract key information and deploy it succinctly in argument
• presentational skills
• the ability to complete work to a deadline
• the ability to organise one's own workload.

Useful sources of information
Chartered Institution of Taxation
Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales

Messages
Focus on the soft skills acquired in academia as these are not always appreciated by interviewers.
Theology - Rachel

Route into HE
Rachel took the traditional route to gain her B.A. She then took time out to work as a Careers Officer for three years before embarking on her Ph.D. This led to her becoming a Tutor in Christian Worship; Director of Studies and Vice Principal at a Theological College. Rachel's research involved a major state studentship for three years followed by a bursary for another year, before she continued research as part of an academic lecturing job.

Nature and range of work
5th Century theology - Cyril of Alexandria.

Exploration of Options and Sources
Rachel used the Careers Service in the areas where she thought she might like to work, to find both guidance and advice and also information about vacancies. She had decided to make a change in her career and had formulated a plan to help her to identify opportunities and help Careers Advisers help her. Rachel had looked at her strengths and her preferences to narrow down the sorts of things she'd probably be interested in applying for and sought advice on her C.V. in relation to making her applications - which advice she took.

Rachel spent a year looking for a suitable job and had to bear and overcome disappointments. Each time something did not come to fruition, for whatever reason, Rachel had to acknowledge her emotions and then put the experience behind her and move on to devote her energies and attention to the next opportunity. Each time there was an opportunity, Rachel put a great deal of time and effort into it - including once when she did not really understand what was expected of the post-holder. Rachel had to go to a local Careers Office to help her to interpret it. Even when Rachel came to the organisation where she eventually found a post, she did not get the job she applied for initially. She was invited, however, to apply for an alternative and secured a post as a Research Services Director in a higher education institution.

Messages for contract researchers
- When you realise you do not wish to continue (Rachel had lost her motivation) start by looking to see what opportunities there may be.
- When you seek advice from others, try to have some ideas and plans about what you might do rather than just problems to talk about.
- Be prepared to change/amend plans as options disappear.
- Pursue plans simultaneously, if possible.
- Identify what you enjoy/are good at and see how those things could fit into other positions.
- Seek advice on your C.V. from anyone who can give you sound advice, because they know what employers in your field of interest will be looking for.
- Seek feedback on any plans for suitable occupations from people who know you well enough to be able to comment in detail.
- Use your networks to hear about jobs.
- Don't be brought down by having to make many applications and undergo many interviews. The right thing will come along.
- Start in good time to allow for some lack of success before finding the right one.
· Be aware of the environment you will be working in and do not accept a job where you feel it is not the right environment.
· Develop your stamina, if necessary, to get upset by disappointment and then recover and move on to the next attempt.
· If job details do not make much sense, do your research until they do - ask appropriate people, contact the employer, talk to Careers people etc.
· Seek and accept support to help you through the transition.
· Be available to anyone else doing the same - to help them benefit from your experience and vice versa - or just offer mutual comfort.
The Competences displayed by Contract Research Staff who make a successful transition from one career to another

1. COMMUNICATION

1.1 Making an impact
- writes to provide evidence of suitability
- writes concisely and unambiguously, with a variety of layouts to help the reader
- presents self effectively in interviews and presentations with the intention of demonstrating strengths for the post
- asks questions to ensure the post and organisation are appropriate for the candidate
- articulates constraints (such as geographical limitations) effectively

1.2 Networking effectively
- networks with people who can influence
- uses a wide range of sources of information, both print and electronic
- builds relationships with named people in careers services or recruitment agencies
- asks questions of careers/recruitment staff to ensure that they understand what is sought and what will be suitable
- scans the environment by asking questions, visiting appropriate web sites and listening to people who might have an idea about the future

1.3. Persuading
- uses well reasoned arguments in applications, interviews and presentations
- is thoroughly prepared for application and interview - having researched the organisation and its environment and being fully self aware
- provides a range of examples of achievements which used relevant key skills

2. COGNITIVE

2.1 Positive/analytical thinking and use of judgement
- positive thinker, when things go wrong, looking forward and putting effort into next attempt
- sees potential in things which are not immediately obviously suitable
- uses judgement to assess the suitability of a post in relation to key skills, preferences and potential
- analytical thinker in identifying own strengths, key skills from experience in the present and previous positions and relating them to requirements of new posts
- makes timely decisions to take action (or not)

2.2 Lateral/creative/conceptual thinking
- lateral thinker, in looking far outside the expected posts in seeking a change - systematically assembles and presents relevant data about self and links it to qualities required for posts
- makes connections between unrelated fields of work and the application of key skills
- innovative in seeking posts and presenting oneself as a candidate
- uses initiative to make self known to people who can help

2.3 Political/Collaborative thinking
- strategic thinker, planning the 'campaign' for finding a new career
· understands the political implications of situations and events by being sensitive to the environment in which an organisation is operating and to interview questions or answers to candidate’s questions
· collaborates with colleagues, friends and advisers who can give advice or feedback to help the process of changing career

3. SELF DEVELOPMENT

· undertakes voluntary work/work shadowing to get experience to help in decision making
· uses mentors to support transition
· gets additional qualifications to help transition
· has an ongoing personal development plan which is regularly updated

4. SELF MANAGEMENT

4.1 Positive/enthusiastic
· realistic about how long things will take and expectations
· has energy
· is enthusiastic - talks with passion/sees a positive side to everything/does things does with good spirit even when they are not preferred tasks
· responsible - works to standards expected/meets deadlines/has pride in work and self

4.2 Persistence/stamina
· persistent in making applications despite disappointments
· stamina to keep making consistently high quality applications and attend and make an impression at interviews whilst still maintaining standards in current duties and responsibilities

4.3 Flexible/open-minded
· flexible, in listening to feedback which requires action not previously thought of and in applying for posts which had not appeared appropriate formerly
· open minded in applying for a range of posts which require key skills but will need a lot of new learning as well
· inquisitive about what the world outside academia has to offer
· does not dismiss anything

4.4 Self confident and self controlled
· talks objectively about strengths, needs for development and achievements - with evidence
· self aware - has a list of everything to offer an employer, backed by evidence for previous performance (at work or elsewhere)
· objective - looking at things as they are - without bias from past experience
· adaptable, being willing to try new things which are necessary to progress in the direction required to fit a career plan
· assertive
· self controlled when facing anger, disappointment, frustration and able to vent these emotions quickly and then move forward positively
· has a clear vision for self
· insightful - knows how to build a positive reputation
5. DRIVE TO ACHIEVE

- immerses self in finding knowledge about new career field
- proactive in seeking new opportunities
- uses external resources to help achieve goals
- pays attention to detail