PATHFINDER: ADVENTURES IN RESEARCHER LAND

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EXPLORING AND CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSE Researcher communities

FOREWORD



Positive and Inclusive Research Culture

Prosper. Unlocking postdoc career potential

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Dr James Howard

Director of the Academy

Welcome to the third edition of Pathfinder: provided by Christian, Ruth, Michael and Katy is Adventures in Researcher Land, a dedicated well worth a read and covers the considerations publication for researchers and research related needed before starting the process as well as the staff across the University of Liverpool. key information that should always be included in an application.

Looking back over the last year, it's hugely gratifying to reflect on the range and quality of Decisions on career trajectory, including researcher development that's been made available applications for funding, are best built on a to colleagues. Whether focused on enhancing deep understanding of one's personal practice practice, developing new skills, building and aspirations. In the next article, the Prosper professional networks or celebrating success, the Project team provide insights into how reflective activities we've collectively engaged in continue to journaling can help with this process. Dr Tamara foreground the critical role of Researchers in the West looks at how journaling can be used to support self-reflection and provides some University's ongoing success. practical tips for getting started.

In this edition of Pathfinder we'll look in more detail at a selection of the resources and support Finally, it was a real pleasure for the Academy to materials created by researchers, for researchers, hostasocial event for Researchers in July, bringing together a wide range of colleagues to celebrate over the past 12 months. their achievements, successes and strengths and Firstly, we'll revisit the fantastic insights captured thank those who've supported them. Colleagues on the Researcher Blog. We owe real thanks to discussed their shared motivations, impact and everyone who has so far contributed to the Blog, the huge contribution the researcher community which continues to grow and develop with each new make to the University. It's been wonderful to post. Special thanks to Dr Revathy Krishnamurthi, hear how much researchers enjoyed the event who chatted to us about the importance of mentors and the opportunity to build new connections to her personal career journey. If you have a topic and relationships - watch this space for many you would like to write about, please do get in more opportunities over the coming year!

touch via researcher@liverpool.ac.uk - we'd love to hear from you. I really hope you enjoy reading this edition.

Next, we'll hear from four researchers in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, as they share first-hand their tips for applying for competitive funding schemes. The really practical advice







Researcher Blog

The Researcher blog includes posts that cover many topics and have been written by researchers at the University of Liverpool and beyond, including career coaches, wellbeing advisers and research consultants to name just a few.

Many important insights and tips have been shared in short posts that only take a few minutes to read.

In Get writing! On the value of #AcWriMo for getting writing done, Dr Eli Saetnan (an academic developer at the University) discusses how writing is an integral part of doing research, but if writing is so important, why do we all struggle so much to find time for it?

In <u>A sense of community, identity and belonging</u>, Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda (Post-doc at the University of Liverpool) and Dr Joan Chang (Research Fellow at the University of Manchester) discuss how being a postdoc often feels like a transition state and the importance of feeling part of a community.

In Difficult conversations - are you ready? Denise Chilton (a career development and leadership coach) provides tips on how to manage professional relationships and on how to prepare not only what to say but how to say it.

In Support that is designed all around you! Tracy Ellis (an organisational developer at the University) talks about the support that the University's mentoring programme offers and provides advice on how to find out if mentoring is right for you.



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about yourself.

Hi Revathy, tell us a little bit I knew nothing other than school, What advice would you give other home, and the train I used to researchers that have a similar background to yourself? travel.

Hello, I am an Experimental University of Liverpool in the for Biological Sciences, India. Department of Clinical Infection,

IVES, investigating the role of about the importance of mentors. clinically significant Liverpool mentors have on your career? Epidemic Strain of Pseudomonas

Association.

part of our Researcher blog series gave me to pursue what I liked. can you give some brief insight He is a boss who still works on his into your journey "From 609503 former student's application form to L69 7ZB"?

My blog post is about my journey from rural India into a career in My current boss Dr Heather E science. I had a typical Indian Allison thinks and practices childhood back in 1990's I was "Women should be uplifting other You can read Revathy's full blog called Koothanur. As no school others that they used to climb researcher/blog/posts/sciencein my village could teach subjects up." I have things to learn from for-a-woman-from-a-ruralin English medium, I was sent to her in day-to-day conversations. <u>background/</u> a higher secondary school that required 54km travel every day.

bacteriophages in one of the What positive impacts did your Adopt your experiences as learning at every step. Very importantly choose your niche, aeruginosa abundant in Cystic My first mentor Dr Aswin Sai where your values are respected Fibrosis patients. I am also a Narain Seshasayee, taught me along with your technical skills. Deputy co-chair of the University how to make quick decisions and Learning is endless and I will of Liverpool's Research Staff move forward. He has supported continue to do so. me in my life decisions as well. I cannot thank him enough for You recently wrote a blog post as all the guidance and freedom he even after a decade, by saying, "let us go through it together!"

From 609503 to L697ZB

Find out more about a recent blog post written by Dr Revathy Krishnamurthi

Molecular Microbiologist. I I developed an interest in Whilst each of us have a different obtained my PhD from the the subject of biology and journey, I believe that every National Centre for Biological did a bachelor's degree in woman in STEM could relate to Sciences, India. I am a Biotechnology. Before obtaining my path in some way or another Postdoctoral researcher at the my PhD from the National Centre across the geographical barrier.

As far as the will is strong, you Microbiology & Immunology, You talk a lot in your blog post will find a way to sail the currents.



born in a small village in India, women by leaving the ladder for at <u>https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/</u>

"There will be many drafts, be open to changes, invite critical feedback"

Development Activities

The University of Liverpool Research Staff Association supported by the Academy help coordinate central support for researcher development through regular <u>Lunch and Learn sessions</u>.

Topics covered include (to access recording staff login required):

- What is mentoring and how it might help you?
- Introduction to Public Engagement
- The good, the bad and the ugly about getting a Tenure Track Fellowship

The Tenure Track fellowship session mentioned above was made up of a panel that included researchers from Health and Life Sciences (an article about this session can be found in the November 2021 edition of the Pathfinder newsletter). As a follow up to this, a session entitled From PhD to PI: Applying for and doing ECR research fellowships in Humanities and Social Sciences took place earlier this year where Dr Christian Cooijmans (British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, Languages, Cultures and Film), Dr Ruth Nugent (UKRI Future Leaders Fellow, Archaeology), Dr Michael Robinson (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, History), Dr Katherine (Katy) Roscoe (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology)_shared first-hand their tips for applying for competitive funding schemes.



Dr Christian Cooijmans studied medieval history at Utrecht University and Trinity College Dublin, and received his MSc and PhD from the University of Edinburgh. He was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) before being awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Liverpool.

Dr Ruth Nugent studied Archaeology at the University of Chester and obtained an MPhil in Early Medival Archaeology and PhD in Historical Archaeology at the University of Chester. Ruth is currently an UKRI Future leaders Fellow at the University of Liverpool.





Dr Michael Robinson started his academic career at the University of Liverpool's History, Languages and Cultures in 2012 successfully completing a PhD in 2016. He is currently a Leverhulme Trust funded Early Career Researcher working in the History Department at the University of Liverpool.

Dr Katy Roscoe following her PhD in History, Katy had a 1 year Post-Doc at the Institute of Historical Research and then an ECR fellowship at the University of Liverpool, before returing to the Insitute of Historical Research for a 3 month library fellowship. Katy is currently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology.





What should you consider when applying for funding?

Christian - Cast a wide net, you can apply to many funding bodies/schemes with the same project, although be careful to not cut and paste and make sure it is tailored to the scheme in question.

Plan ahead, give yourself plenty of time, reach out to colleagues, both known and unknown! Let others read your application, not just direct colleagues, choose people from outside of your subject area too.

Be concise and precise. The people reviewing your applications will be reviewing many applications so make sure you are clear from the outset what your project involves.

There is a time for being humble and it is not when applying for postdocs. If you have been involved in organising events, been awarded any prizes, make sure the funder knows about it.

My main tip would be that when you are thinking of applying for your 1st postdoc, really ask yourself did you enjoy doing your PhD? Did you enjoy writing up the research? Did you enjoy communicating your research? Getting feedback? A fellowship can be stressful and isolating but can be incredibly rewarding if it is something you are passionate about.

Ruth - Fellowships are different to standard grants, the funders are wanting to invest in you and therefore want to fully understand where you have been, what departments you have worked at and what activities you have been involved in. You need to put forward a programme of work that can take you to the next stage of your career and provide a step change in your career level and scope.

It is important to show some independence from your supervisor. Try not to have all your publications co-authored with your supervisor when you apply. Show that you are moving in a slightly different direction/ different area to your current project.

All of this doesn't happen by chance, create a plan. Ask yourself, what kind of academic do you want to become. Then tailor your fellowship to make sure you are building your career in that direction. Keep a strong sence of what it feasible, identify at what point you can say you have delivered on the fellowship and what a successful fellowship would look like.

What makes an application successful?

Michael- I was unsuccessful on my first two applications for my Leverhulme fellowship so I have looked back at these and compared them with my successful application to see what differences there are.

Firstly I would say talk to people that have been successful, before my successful application, I emailed someone I knew had been awarded a fellowship and asked if I could read their application. Successful applications have a feel about them, a pattern to them. You can gain a lot from reading an application that went on to be awarded.

Get in touch with a mentor early on in the process not just when the application is written. Listen to their feedback and incorporate it.

I would definitely stress highlighting any prior funding no matter how small. In my successful application I was able to say that I had already been to the archives/libraries or bought digitalised records from them, due to small grants of around £200 I had been awarded to do this. This made my application feel less risky.

Formating is important, adding bullet pointed questions to be answered during the fellowship can make the structure more clear. Also provide a concise but realistic timeline. Rejection doesn't mean it is time to give up.

Any tips on how to sum up your entire project in a short abstract?

Katy- As already mentioned reviewers will be looking at many applications and therefore it is important to refine you abstract so that you make an impact straight away.

Have a strong first sentence that paints the big picture/problem and then highlight what has been missed. Next say how your project makes an important intervention so that you are answering the "so what?" question. Then provide some specifics, Where? When? Who?

Bring it back to your original argument and have a strong concluding sentence. The abstract should be aimed at an intelligent audience but not for someone specialist in your field.

Finally share and read out the abstract with friends/family /colleagues in a different field. There will be many drafts, be open to changes, invite critical feedback.

From PhD to PI: Applying for and doing ECR research fellowships in Humanities and Social Sciences session can be found here (Staff login required)



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Cohort Journaling and Self Reflection

What is the Prosper Project?

A recap! The **Prosper** project was discussed in the **Pathfinder** newsletter back in November 2021. It represents a new, co-created approach to career development, aiming to unlock postdocs' potential to thrive in multiple career pathways.

The first Prosper pilot cohort of 53 University of Liverpool postdocs were recruited in April 2021. In January 22, following a competitive application process, 86 postdocs from across the University of Liverpool, Lancaster University and University of Manchester were invited to join Prosper's second career development pilot.

With the first cohort having now completed their formal participation in Prosper, the second cohort is just at the start of theirs. They will undertake development activities including the exploration of different career pathways, working with dedicated career coaches, and accessing Prosper's 90+ employer partners.

For now, they are beginning the "Reflect and Explore" component of the pilot, including starting to record their entire Prosper journey via regular journal entries. As such, this seems a perfect time to look at what journaling has meant to the first Cohort and what the Prosper project has learnt from this.

Dr Tamara West (Research Staff Developer with Resources are provided to assist the cohort **Prosper, and a Senior Research Fellow in the** with this and advice, support and journaling **Department of Languages, Cultures and Film),** prompts are given on an ongoing basis by the in this article explores the use of journaling as a cohort's career coaches and the Prosper team. reflective tool and shares some findings from her initial analysis of the Prosper Pilot Cohort journals. Some useful journal prompts to get started

Why Journaling?

Journaling is a means of reflective practice used across, and established within, a variety of professional and academic practice and learning settings. For the Prosper Pilot Cohort journaling is a tool to assist thinking around the career and skills development they are engaged with. They are encouraged to record thoughts and experiences How's the balance? -During the past week firstly as a means of self-development and reflection, and secondly to enable the Prosper team to understand progress and shifts over the course of the pilot in order to improve the Prosper model accordingly.

include:

Just three things - write down three things that went well, you enjoyed or that you acheived each day. Look back at these things five days later and reflect on what you have written. Does anything surprise you, do they have anything in common?

how have you felt in your research role/wider life/overall? Where would you ideally like to be with respect to working in/beyond your comfort zone?

Yes/No lists- Make a list of everything you'd like What are the next steps? to say no to. Make a list of everything you'd like to say yes to. Have a look at your lists, is there Recognising Difficulties and Barriers : We know that journaling is an effective and highly anything you can identify that you could do to make your list of 'no's or 'yes's a reality? informative tool for both the cohort and the future development of the Prosper model, but How did the Prosper cohort find journaling? engagement differs across participants.

After an initial analysis of the journal entries of Even within the entries of those that have Cohort 1, the Prosper team gained some valuable journaled regularly it is apparent that some insights into the impact of the project on the difficulties centre in part around time cohort so far, as well as defined and actionable commitment, and often also uncertainty about ways to make journaling more accessible for the what to journal about. new cohort. Here are some key findings;

It is also apparent that the one to one and **Emergent shifts in narrative**: we found that group coaching sessions also directly influence there has been a shift in narrative during the the mode or content of journaling for several cohort members, shaping the participants first half of the pilot towards jobs, careers, and interviews. A further analysis of keywords and way of recording their self-reflection and their terms demonstrated a change in focus and in activities. some cases action; this also echoes the structure of the Prosper pilot and the journey from Based on this, Prosper have run several focus reflection to action.

The importance of recognising different stages and journeys: Cohort members use their journals to record successes as well as hesitancies. There is no single narrative. While several cohort members have recorded a linear progression towards jobs, careers, and interviews, others are still finding their way through the process and exploring their own individual path.

The difficult process- and ultimate value of self **reflection:** The majority of those who journaled regularly found the process initially difficult but have gone on to value the activity. Some have already used their journal as a tool to monitor their own progress, track shifts in attitude, or make informed choices by revisiting previous entries and identifying key changes in their own perspectives and actions.





groups and have used these to revisit and strengthen the journaling resources and support systems for the second cohort.

Where Can I Find out more?

Take a look at this Reflection Toolkit from the University of Edinburgh https://www.ed.ac.uk/ reflection

For a reflective insight from one of Prosper's Cohort 1 participants, take a look at this blog: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/ prosper/blog/prosper/my-prosper-journey/



"The Celebrating Researchers event was a fantastic opportunity to build connections across the postdoc community, and collectively reflect on our strengths and aspirations, both professionally and personally". Dr Katy Roscoe

"Celebrating researcher event was great. It helped me to meet people from different stages in their research career and learn from their experiences." **Dr Firdaus Parveen**

"I enjoyed the Celebrating Researchers event, it was an amazing opportunity to meet researchers in different areas and to learn more about myself." Dr Veronica Del Angel Hernandez



"It was a fantastic session which reminded us again that being a researcher requires not only dedication and hard work but also inspiration. So, let's not forget how far we have come, and keep up the good work!" Dr Tahereh Nematiaram

Celebrating Researchers- Your time to Shine

celebration event for researchers took place on 7th July 2022. The event involved a morning workshop $\mathbf{H}_{\mathrm{followed}}$ by a BBQ social on campus.

The event was to celebrate the achievements. successes and strengths of researchers at the University of Liverpool. It provided an opportunity for those that attended to connect and engage with other researchers and to explore the strengths, motivations and contributions, researchers bring and to become further aware of how to articulate and build on them.

Researchers were nominated by their peers and managers, all of which spoke of the important contribution the researchers make to University life and the inspiration and support they provide to others. The nominations can be found https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/ researcher/celebrating-success/time-to-shine/

The morning workshop began with a video from Professor Anthony Hollander, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact where he spoke of his pride in the commitment and dedication of researchers at the University and thanked them for all their amazing work.

The rest of the workshop involved short presentations and activities to help everyone engage with one another and connect.

Buddy pairs and group discussions enabled the researchers to reflect on who they are at their best, what helps them to be at their best and how they can best recognise and appreciate all that they do.

The feedback from a number of those that attended are documented in this article and highlight the positive, and uplifting day had by those that attended.







"The event was a fantastic opportunity to take a step back and consider how we work, what motivates us and our individual strengths and attributes as researchers. I came away from the event feeling enthused about my work and future direction and made some lovely contacts too." Selina Johnson



"It was lovely to meet with fellow researchers in person at the Celebrating Researchers event, and to hear about the great things that they are doing in their respective departments. Early career and Postdoc researchers are often unsung heroes and it was wonderful to read their nominations written by their peers. I came away from the event feeling valued and uplifted". **Dr Sophie Jones**

"I enjoyed meeting other researchers, the ladder and card games (listing our mentors, our mates, and juniors who have helped or are still assisting us in reaching our goals), among many other things, were fantastic!" Aderonke Abah

The Celebrating Researchers event was a fantastic opportunity to meet other early career researchers working in different disciplines and to share our successes, difficulties, and steps to overcome these challenges. I learnt a lot about what motivates me to carry out research in the Arts and Humanities and what skills I have to further my career. It was a great end to the academic year. Dr Antonia Wimbush



A word cloud generated when attendees were asked "What did you most appreciate

> about myself talking things through meeting people feeling valued the strength of own the people 5 relaxing feeling appreciated

good connection discussing with my buddy



"First, I want to thank my line manager Prof Kate Baker for nominating me. I especially liked the "inperson" style meeting and really enjoyed meeting other academics from across the university and conversations about their work and experiences. Participating in this event certainly made me feel valued." Dr Malaka De Silva

"The celebrating success event was a wonderful way of showing appreciation while also helping us connect with others. The group activities (especially the card activity) were an insightful way of bringing about conversations about what makes us who we are and seeing the world and ourselves through different eves. Sometimes the best way to understand our own paths is by having meaningful conversations with people who started the day as strangers". Dr Smitha Maretvadakethope

"It was really useful to reflect on my motivations for being a researcher and all the people (peers, mentors, mentees, friends and family) who have been supportive throughout my career. It was a really nice event and it was great to meet and get to know more colleagues. Dr Cordelia Dunai



The Academy is committed to supporting the University's ambition to create a "borderless research community," in which every researcher can access high-quality development.

If you would like to contact us about anything mentioned in Pathfinder, have a contribution or idea for future newsletters or if you simply want to get involved with this work, please email us at:

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or find us on twitter at: @LivUniAcademy and @LivRese<mark>arc</mark>her.

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