Career paths of academic researchers:

VETERINARY SCIENCES

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**Veterinary Microbiology - Ali**

**Background**
I enjoyed the idea of running my own research programme so, following a B.Sc. in Medical Microbiology and a Ph.D. in Veterinary Microbiology, I obtained the first of several postdoctoral fellowships, one of which was based in the U.S.

I found the work enjoyable and personally rewarding but became frustrated by the lack of career structure and the short-term contracts. I realised that the lucky few (very few) got lectureships, but others in my position, on the top of scales, were simply being discarded.

When considering the alternatives, I did not have focus on one particular career. I just wanted a job which had some security and which I would enjoy doing. I browsed newspaper adverts, waiting for something to catch my eye.

Eventually, after 10 contracts, ranging from 1 month to 3 years in length, I left academic research to become a programme manager with a large health organisation. This role involves working as part of a team to develop guidelines for doctors about new treatments and new medicines.

I find this work equally rewarding and enjoyable despite the fact that it is very different from what I am used to. So far, I have no dislikes. My salary is currently the same but I hope to move up the career ladder in the new organisation.

The feedback from my current employers on the value they attach to academic research experience has been very positive.

**Transferable skills**
During my research career I made a conscious decision to try to gain other skills and experiences which might help me to change careers. Over the years I started to volunteer for teaching duties and to represent the department on various committees. I also attended staff development courses to improve my computing, management and supervision skills. I basically did a lot of tedious jobs which academics didn't want to do or did not have time to do. The department eventually offered me a 2 year contract to run the Honours course. Unfortunately, the contract wasn't renewed, so I started to look for other jobs outside academia.

During my research career, I gained experience in teaching, supervision, course organisation and management. My management experience when I was running the Honours course was the main factor in obtaining my current job. My analytical skills as a researcher were also important, as were my experience in writing reports and communicating at conferences and at university.

**Messages**
I have found that getting involved in all sorts of extra duties opened some doors. Going on Staff Development courses was also very useful.
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