



## PhD Horizons Conference 2017

### Panel 3A – Non-Academic Science

#### **Dr Alison Clayton, General Manager, Eurofins**

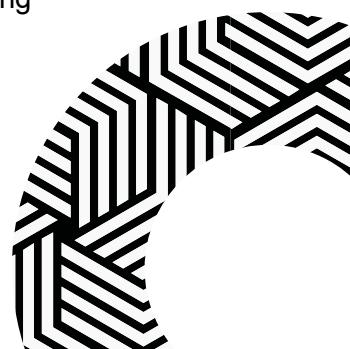
*Biography:* Alison completed both her undergraduate degree and her PhD in Pharmacology at the University of Glasgow. She spent over 10 years working in the laboratory – six of them as a post doc - before taking on her first management position. She held various other senior positions in the pharmaceutical industry at Quintiles, Aptuit, and the Exova Group Plc before joining [Eurofins](#) as General Manager. The nature of the pharma industry, with a high number of buy-outs and takeovers, has meant that she has worked for four different companies without actually moving; and each time she pushed for a more senior role. Eurofins is a biopharmaceutical product testing company working with a range of clients across various industries. In Alison's current role, she manages three UK sites, delivering stability storage and pharmaceutical testing. With a focus on staff, customers, and process she regards the improvement in staff retention as one of her most significant achievements within this company. She has also volunteered as a STEM Ambassador in secondary schools in Glasgow, working with pupils to encourage them to consider scientific careers.

*Key messages:* PhDs are passionate, positive and driven to succeed. Demonstrate this by taking on responsibilities, and you'll put yourself in a position where people want to employ you.

#### **Dr Helen Newbery, Ethics Scientific Officer, NHS**

*Biography:* Helen obtained her PhD in Medical Genetics at the University of Edinburgh in 2003, following a BSc (Hons) in Biochemistry at the University of Birmingham and an MSc in Medical Genetics at the University of Newcastle. She subsequently worked as a postdoc at the University until 2017, although she has always had other professional interests, including an extensive teaching portfolio and membership of the local Research Ethics Committee. She also did lots of outreach, including the Science Festival, and took some regulatory courses. She always watched out for extra things to do that looked interesting. She made a point of networking – chatting to other people at events, following up with a chat over coffee. When the Ethics Scientific Officer post became vacant she was approached informally as a result of her contacts and her skills (science background, interest in ethics, knowledge of ethics committees). She began working for NHS Lothian as their Ethics Scientific Officer this year. There are only 3 other Ethics Scientific Officers across the UK. In her role she is responsible for organising three Ethics Committees and their associated staff and advising scientists, clinicians and the wider research community on their ethical applications.

*Key messages:* During your studies and post-doc, network in order to get a sense of the sort of things you need to be doing to get a job outside academia. Be open to opportunities. Use the Careers Service and other sources of advice too, such as post doc and student societies. Remember that the many transferrable skills you develop at university may be taken for granted there, but will impress employers and colleagues in other working environments.





### **Dr Paul O'Neill, Medical Writer, McCann Complete Medical**

**Biography:** Following his studies in Glasgow (BSc Pharmacology) and London (MSc Toxicology, Imperial College London and PhD Developmental Neurobiology, UCL), Paul held postdoctoral positions at the University of Cambridge and RIKEN CDB in Japan. He also worked as a Research Associate at the University of Glasgow. He was becoming dissatisfied with lab work, and job stability was becoming more of an issue as he started a family, so he took the decision to leave academia. His interest in writing had been growing; he'd enjoyed the writing-up of his PhD, had done some writing for a scientific journal, and had started a small company editing manuscripts for non-native English speakers in Japan and Korea. He therefore started to look for work in journals. He stumbled across the field of medical communications (recommends [www.firstmedcommsjob.com](http://www.firstmedcommsjob.com)) and a friend mentioned **McCann Complete Medical** to him. McCann Complete Medical is a group of expert agencies delivering medical communications, regulatory support, strategy development, and multichannel stakeholder engagement. Roughly 85% of the 130 staff have PhDs. After sending in a CV and completing a remote writing test he was called for interview and given an on-site writing test before being offered the job of Medical Writer. Key attributes they looked for were attention to detail, a science background, enjoyment of writing, and good organisational skills. The job is office-based, with occasional travel, and mostly non-client facing (contact with clients is usually by email or phone). His role involves delivering communication services to the pharmaceutical industry: manuscripts, posters, presentations, web content, congress reports, infographics; and he is supported by a team of medical editors, designers, and editorial coordinators. He enjoys the variety of work, being part of an international team, and being valued for the accuracy and quality of his work. Downsides are the sedentary nature of the work, the occasional difficult client, and workload bottlenecks.

**Key messages:** Make the most of international opportunities while you're doing post docs – his research fellowships in Japan were a fantastic opportunity.

### **Dr Rachel Smith, Programme Manager, MRC Regulatory Support Centre**

**Biography:** Rachel graduated with a PhD in Plant Science from University of Edinburgh in 1992, and thereafter worked as a post doc in Australia and UK. Realising academia was not what she wanted she made the decision to take another Masters, in nutrition. One of the lecturers asked if she'd be interested in doing cover for his wife's maternity leave, as an R&D manager in the NHS. Since then, she has also worked for the Scottish Government Chief Scientist Office and the Central Office for Research Ethics Committees (now Research Ethics Service at the Health Research Authority). She didn't have to apply for her current role, but was approached, on the basis of her previous experience and the contacts she had made. She is now working for the Medical Research Council (MRC) Regulatory Support Centre, providing learning and support in research regulation and governance for those conducting research involving human participants, their tissues or data in the UK. Besides delivering training (necessitating lots of travel) this role involves writing guidance on regulatory affairs.

**Key messages:** A PhD equips you with multiple transferrable skills: familiarity with scientific language, self-motivation and initiative, problem-solving, project management, adaptability, interpretive and analytical skills. It demonstrates that you can learn, and stick at something. You have lots of options. Know yourself (team player? Detail person? Initiator? Organiser? Take a risk sometimes – remember that nothing is for ever.





### Questions from the floor:

*Would you have stayed in academia if more tenured positions had been available?*

- HN: not necessarily; it's always been competitive and still would be.
- RS: No!
- AC: No; no regrets about doing post docs, but always knew she wanted a leadership role.
- P O'N: Might have done, especially if it didn't involve much lab work; but wouldn't go back to one now.

*Has it been difficult to combine your work with children/family life?*

- HN: Yes. Needed the support of her parents for childcare.
- RS: No children; no regrets about that; post doc work did see relationships break up.
- AC: Yes. Now offers her female employees very flexible working patterns. A good support network and a flexible employer are essential.

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