



## PhD Horizons Conference 2018

### Panel 4A: Social Impact

#### **Dr Catherine Thomas, Head of Fundraising, Aberlour**

Catherine decided to undertake her PhD on a part-time basis whilst working full-time in a variety of fundraising roles. She felt as she was young, it would be manageable but in reality it was a real challenge. In 2009, Catherine completed her PhD in American History at the University of Edinburgh.

Catherine has worked in fundraising for 15 years in a variety of roles. She gained a full-time position as Trusts and Corporate Fundraising Manager with Alzheimer Scotland in January 2009. She also worked as Head of Fundraising Events and Trusts with Alzheimer Scotland and left the organisation in April 2017 to take up a role as Head of Partnerships and Philanthropy with Aberlour, a children's charity. In November 2017, she moved to her current role as Head of Fundraising with Aberlour.

#### **What do you do in your current role?**

Catherine is a fundraiser. In her current role she raises money for Aberlour but spends most of her time managing the team, strategic planning etc. Her specialism is securing donations and grants from organisations.

Catherine also spends a lot of her time looking at the work Aberlour does, the evidence they have about the difference they're making and turns all that data into a Case for support. This is targeted at a specific organisation, individual or group and is designed to elicit support for Aberlour. It can be quite a challenging job because Aberlour is a children's charity and works across five themes and does lots of different things.

#### **How did you decide to pursue your current career path?**

Catherine realised that there were career aspects of her PhD that weren't for her. She loved the pure research but that was as far as she wanted to go with it and hasn't pursued academic studies since. Catherine realised that she loved her career that she did in fundraising and pursued this.

#### **How has your PhD influenced your career?**

It may seem that fundraising and advanced research have very little in common; the work that Catherine did in her PhD has benefited her greatly in her fundraising career. Professional fundraising is about making a case, persuasion, gathering evidence and drawing conclusions from it. Transferrable skills gained from Catherine's PhD studies have been extremely useful - analytical skills, questioning skills, interpreting skills and expressing ideas with clarity and coherence.

#### **What advice would you give to current students?**

Communication in the workplace setting can be difficult – you may meet people who are difficult and being able to listen to them and analyse what they're saying is again not a skill that everyone has but this is a key skill gained from PhD study.





## **Dr Nur Abdelkhaliq, Senior Consultant – Migration and Refugee Expert, IOD PARC**

In 2012, Nur gained her PhD in Politics and International Relations from the University of Edinburgh. During her PhD she worked as a Research Assistant at the University and as a Media Monitoring Assistant at Press Data. In 2014, she began her current role as Migration and Refugee Expert with IOD PARC.

### **What do you do in your current role?**

Nur works on migration and refugee issues. She works with international organisations whether it's through an agency or international NGO based in different parts of the world. Nur does evaluations for programmes that are implemented in different regions or countries or she does what is termed "diplomatic or technical advice" which is more on the content of the programme. She works mostly on evaluations and the study of migrations and refugee programmes, including the content of these programmes. Most of Nur's work is on the Middle East, North Africa & some EU countries.

### **How did you decide to pursue your current career path?**

At the end of her PhD, it almost seemed like a natural progression to look for a job in the academic sector. Nur did a series of research positions, applied for longer term permanent positions but also put her name in a roster for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). At that point Nur was also doing some teaching and when she was offered a job in a consultancy project in Libya from the IOM, she thought she would give it a try. Nur went for it and really liked it. That was the switch for her – she really enjoyed consulting much more than she had done research.

Consulting is very short term, you do small projects that change all the time and you end up doing different things that are all interesting. For example, since Nur joined IOD PARC she's been involved in projects on labour migration and labour rights in Qatar, victims of trafficking and refugee response; which not only focuses on giving assistance on basic services but the need to think of longer term solutions.

### **How has your PhD influenced your career?**

Nur found the career switch challenging - not all sectors recognise the skills that you may gain in a PhD. For instance, in consulting the most important thing is "what's your consulting record?". Nur only had the consulting experience from Libya so she started at a very junior level in the company and that was difficult as she felt she had done a lot of work in her PhD but started at the same position as Masters graduates.

However, a lot of the skills Nur gained from doing her PhD were helpful for securing consultancy projects – evaluation, methodology, fieldwork and analysing data. Also, the content of what you do your PhD on; for Nur it was migration – her knowledge of the migration field was really helpful for securing projects with different organisations.

### **What advice would you give to current students?**

Project management has been a learning curve for Nur. When she did her methodology for her PhD she spent a month doing this and in consulting fieldwork can be one week or two. So, the compressing of time is really difficult – you do have to end up making compromises and navigate priorities; it is still a very interesting process.





## **Dr Jenny Bloomfield, Policy Officer, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)**

In 2011, Jenny gained her PhD in Mathematical Biology from Heriot-Watt University. She worked part-time and undertook an unpaid internship for a mental health charity in London. She then worked at the University of Strathclyde for 18 months as a Policy and Public Affairs Adviser. In March 2013, she began her current role with SCVO.

### **What do you do in your current role?**

As SVCO is a membership organisation and the umbrella body for the charity sector in Scotland, Jenny might be speaking at events with them or helping them to speak to each other. The role is really wide ranging and it uses a lot of the knowledge that she gained from her PhD.

In a typical week, Jenny might be:

- working on briefings for MSPs
- meeting MSPs or ministers
- undertaking desk research,
- writing some blogs for their website
- organising events
- speaking at events.

### **How did you decide to pursue your current career path?**

Jenny started her PhD with a focus on cancer until she discovered that lots of people were working in cancer and it's really hard to work in that area as a PhD student as all the easy stuff has already been done. Jenny moved into working on fish which was less exciting but there were fewer people and less competition. She has always been interested in helping people - throughout her undergraduate studies she was involved in charities and student societies like Oxfam, People on Planet or Student Action for Refugees. During her PhD, Jenny felt she had lost her motivation for social impact and helping others so after completion of her PhD Jenny decided to go back into the charity world and thought the best way to do that was to be a Policy Officer.

The career switch took less than a year. In 2011, before Jenny did her VIVA, she started applying for internships. She undertook an unpaid internship for less than six months for a mental health charity in London whilst working part-time before gaining her role at the University of Strathclyde as a Policy and Public Affairs Adviser.

### **What advice would you give to current students?**

- If you ever hear anyone say 'I just got that job straight away', they're either lying or they're really lucky. Jenny undertook eight or nine interviews to get the unpaid internship in London because she was career searching. Jenny started at the bottom in terms of working in policy but she was able to show that she had a genuine interest because she had been working alongside her PhD for free in Oxfam Scotland bookshop.
- When job hunting, be realistic and Jenny strongly recommends going for what you can get. It may not be your dream job but it will give you enough experience to go where you want to go.





- If you're doing a career switch you have to demonstrate to recruiters that you have experience.
- Make the most of your Careers Service and take part in mock interviews.

#### Further advice from Q&A session:

##### **Are there opportunities for quantitative research in the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector?**

Jenny: "In my organisation even though we cover the whole of the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector, we just have one research officer and she's the only one that does anything quantitative."

Catherine: "In my experience, the bulk of organisations will contract that type of thing out. I suspect it would be the larger organisations which would have scope for that."

Nur: "There are opportunities in consulting. You could also look into the Civil Service as they do have statistician roles and social research roles."

##### **Potentially subcontracting from consultancies - how do you build up that expertise?**

Catherine: "A lot of it is recommendation and word of mouth. A lot of it is where you happen to be at that point in time."

Nur: "In the field of international development, there are two routes to doing work as consultants – some of them prefer individuals - not with consultancies. Sometimes it's just via networks - consulting companies work with associates who are not staff members but they would have contracts with them for specific projects."

Jenny: "It's also worth looking at organisations that you're interested in working with and seeing what's on their website now. You could send a quick email to say, 'I'm going to be speaking at xxx in July on that subject you just wrote a blog post about, here's my research and it would be great if you could come along'. There's no harm in doing that."

