



PhD Horizons Conference 2018

Panel 4B: Business and Consultancy

Dr Peter Watts, Product Manager – Investment and Pensions, Moody's Analytics

Dr James Miller, Financial Risk Manager, Lloyds Bank

Eleanor Smith, Research Operations Associate, Wood Mackenzie

Dr Peter Watts, Product Manager – Investment and Pensions, Moody's Analytics

Peter gained his PhD in Astronomy from the University of Edinburgh in 2000. He followed this with postdoctoral positions in universities in Nottingham and then Bonn, Germany. After a few years, he decided to leave academic research and successfully applied for a graduate position as a trainee actuary for a consultancy in Glasgow. After working as a pensions actuary for 2.5 years, he moved to a position initially as a quantitative analyst and then a consultant with Barrie and Hibbert (now Moody's Analytics) before taking up his current role in 2013 as Product Manager with the same company.

What do you do in your current role?

When Barrie and Hibbert was taken over by Moody's Analytics Peter's role morphed into Product Manager. He now decides what to build, based on what clients want (and therefore does a lot of thought leadership with clients). He designs software and attendant products, and oversees the development process, keeping a strategic overview, and working with everyone from researchers and quant consultants to economists and the marketing team.

How did you decide to pursue your current career path?

Peter had been set on an academic career, but after two postdocs he and his wife ran into the two-body issue and he therefore took the decision to leave academia. It was a hard decision but realised that what he was doing (basically debugging code) could be done just as well in industry – and pay more there. His choices were influenced by knowing that he didn't want to live in London or to work in finance. His first actuarial role was with Hymans Robertson and Towers Watson. Moving to Barrie and Hibbert gave him more involvement with technical economic models, wrapping them in software and selling them to the insurance business.

How has your PhD influenced your career?

All the soft skills he was developing while doing his PhD are used as much now as they were then.

What advice would you give to current students?

Don't just send off your CV – always follow up. None of his jobs came from just sending off a CV.

Making the next step up is easier in industry than it is in academia – and your PhD will set you apart.

Dr James Miller, Financial Risk Manager

James gained his PhD in Statistics from the University of Glasgow in 2009. He then joined Lloyd's banking Group as a graduate trainee, rotating round various in the company. In April 2013 he became an Associate Director in Financial Markets – Risk Management and has worked in a variety of related roles in this area with Lloyds.

What do you do in your current role?





As Associate Director in Lloyds Bank Financial Markets he works with businesses to help them identify and mitigate market-based risks, usually related to interest rates and exchange rates. His role involves spending time with customers to understand their businesses in depth, entering into transactions with customers, working on projects to build wider business, and keeping up with the financial markets.

How did you decide to pursue your current career path?

After his undergraduate degree and Masters, James “stumbled into” his PhD, knowing all along that he did not want to work in academia but wanted the opportunity for more interaction with people. He applied for the bank’s graduate scheme and this gave him two years learning about the various different areas, finding out what he enjoyed and making contacts across the organisation.

How has your PhD influenced your career?

He doesn’t use any of the statistical analysis which formed his PhD, but did notice that he had a wider set of soft skills than those who joined straight after a first degree, such as presentation skills, the ability to interact with stakeholders and build relationships, and numerical reasoning and analysis in a team environment.

What advice would you give to current students?

Bear in mind that banking is very much open to non-numerate disciplines. In the commercial world, you don’t get promoted if you’ve done a good job...You have to spot a role and go for it.

Eleanor Smith, Research Operations Associate, Wood Mackenzie

Eleanor gained her PhD in Music Instrument History from the University of Edinburgh in 2013. Following that she worked as a temporary Lecturer at Edinburgh Napier University before taking a role as Associate Research Fellow at the Orpheus Institute in Belgium in November 2015. She started working with Wood Mackenzie initially in a temporary role as a Database Administrator in September 2017 before being offered her current role in Research Systems support in December 2017.

What do you do in your current role?

Wood Mackenzie is a research and consulting firm operating in the global energy market. Eleanor’s role involves looking after the databases which contain the whole of Wood Mackenzie’s knowledge, making sure they’re working, fixing them if not, and making things run smoothly for the analysts.

How did you decide to pursue your current career path?

After part-time and temporary academic posts and research projects she decided to move into something else, and started temping in Client Operations at Wood Mackenzie. Within a couple of months she was offered a permanent position.

How has your PhD influenced your career?

Her PhD involved a lot of measurement, using spreadsheets and databases, and familiarity with these transferred across to her new role. She welcomes the problem-solving element of her job and the opportunities for learning new skills.

What advice would you give to current students?

Make contact with people in areas you’re interested in. Find out what they’re looking for.

