



PhD Horizons Conference 2017

Panel 1A: Science and Technical Communication

Dr Gary Kerr, Researcher in Science Communication, University of Salford

Gary began his studies at the University of Glasgow, from which he holds a BSc Hons in Genetics and an MSc in Medical Genetics. He completed a PhD in Biological sciences from the University of Warwick in 2012, researching the molecular basis of various conditions including Down's syndrome. Following doctoral study, he became a Senior Research Specialist at the Scottish Parliament, before moving into science communication, holding positions at the Edinburgh International Science Festival and the Abu Dhabi Science Festival, amongst others. He now regularly provides training and consultancy on science communication, and serves as Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Science Policy and Governance.

Key messages: Persevere with your PhD – It gives you credibility and opens doors. Develop and evidence your transferrable skills – you've been developing them all through your PhD, show this to employers. Say yes to opportunities – small ones will lead to much bigger ones. Apply for jobs even if you think you're unqualified – your PhD goes a long way to demonstrating your competence. Promote yourself – network, get on social media, get your name out there. There is no right or wrong way to develop your career – do what works for you and do what you enjoy.

Dr Simon Gage, Director, Edinburgh International Science Festival

Simon completed a BSc Hons in Physics at the University of Bristol and a PhD in Microelectronics and Solid State Physics at the University of Edinburgh. Since 1995, he has been the Director of the Edinburgh International Science Festival. He previously worked as the Festival's Educational and Hands-On Programmer, and established the Schools Touring programme. As Director, he has worked with the Abu Dhabi government in launching an annual science festival in Abu Dhabi. In 2008, he undertook an executive MBA at Oxford University, and in 2011 he was awarded an OBE for science communication.

Key messages: Your PhD gives you credibility – it demonstrates you understand your subject area and businesses want this. His PhD helped him to understand that he could find out anything – a PhD gives you the necessary research skills to find whatever you want. A PhD shows you are analytical. Get as much help as you can, be that from your supervisor, colleagues or support services like the Careers Service. Understand what your day-to-day persona is – when you know this, this will influence your company choice. Do your research when looking for work – for every big company there are 30 smaller ones doing the same thing. Go and find them. Talk to people – network, be active on social media, get your name out there. Your dream job probably won't come immediately – work out how to reach your end goal. Do something you enjoy – if you don't enjoy it you won't do it well.

Dr Vinca Russell, LNG Product Manager at Witherby Publishing Group Ltd

Following her BSc in Biological Science (University of Edinburgh) and MRes in Computational Biology (University of York), Vinca completed her PhD in genetics and epidemiology (University of Warwick and the Roslin Institute, Edinburgh) in 2012. She joined Witherby





Publishing Group in 2013, where she initially worked as a Technical Researcher and Writer. She is now their LNG Product Manager, and focuses on data management, writing, and research in the shipping industry. Vinca is also musical – in 2013, she co-founded Cat-Like Tread, an amateur theatre group which performs Gilbert and Sullivan shows in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and she has acted as a Producer for a number of these shows.

Key messages: Your research skills from your PhD will apply to all sorts of different jobs – you know how to find information and judge what is reliable. You will develop presentation skills and how to present to different audiences – this is key in industry. Continue to develop your transferrable skills – these are important in the work force. You have project managed your entire PhD, show this to employers. Don't sell yourself short. Sell your PhD – it's hard work so show that. Tailor your CV to the job you're applying for – sell your skills in different ways. Good English is imperative in your applications – bad will be weeded out. Smaller companies often more willingly to look outside the box for candidates. PhD gives you respect, particularly if the industry is male dominated. Take opportunities and see where they lead.

Further advice from Q&A session

Keep your goals in sight but sometimes you will have to get a job to pay the bills.

There is demand for people with the skills a PhD student has.

Be determined in your job hunt. You will succeed and don't always have to settle for less.

Make speculative applications – there's lots of interest in PhD graduates even if companies aren't advertising jobs.

Relocating for work is often necessary, particularly if you're focussed on a specific role.

Do your research – the jobs are out there you've just got to find them and find someone you want to work for.

Keep looking for jobs. Once you find one you're interested in this will often lead to finding others.

Use LinkedIn. It's the best tool for networking digitally. It is time consuming but it can really pay off.

Look for local events that are related to the industry you want to work in. This is the perfect opportunity to network.

The work you do is what matters, not the hours you work. Find a job and the environment you thrive in and don't discount the value of working 9-5.

