Who is your current employer and what do they do?

The Beltane Public Engagement Network is dedicated to supporting academic staff, contract researchers, and students interested in making their research accessible to the wider public. Beltane provides:

- Training for people wishing to undertake public engagement
- Networking events where people can meet other researchers and external organisations
- A central source of information for people at Edinburgh universities looking to undertake public engagement

A lot of the people we support already know with which public(s) they wish to engage, but Beltane also acts as a relationship-broker. Our function means that we have good links with non-academic organisations. Our key partners include the Stand comedy club, the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Storytelling Centre, and the National Museum of Scotland.

What is your job title and what does the job entail?
Project Officer; I only started it 2 weeks ago!

My role is to organise training for people who want to find out more about how to do public engagement, to facilitate networking events, and to develop new initiatives such as festival workshops, internships, and fellowships with our external partners. Maintaining the Beltane website and promoting awareness of public engagement opportunities through social media is also going to be central to my role.

How did you achieve your current position?
After I submitted my PhD, I spent about 9 months seriously applying for every job I could find, both in the UK and overseas. (I had actually been applying for academic jobs since the second year of my PhD.) Most of the jobs I applied for were academic; I also submitted two unsuccessful postdoctoral funding applications and applied to do a PGDE. After being offered a fixed-term academic post which would require me to leave Edinburgh, I realised that I really didn’t want to move away: I would either have to live away from my husband (then, my fiancé) or force him to uproot his own career, plus I really love Edinburgh. So, I turned down that job and started considering non-academic jobs in Edinburgh more seriously – I knew the chance of me making a long-term living as an academic without leaving the city were virtually nil. Around the time of my graduation, I stumbled across a job as a funding advisor at Edinburgh Research and Innovation (ERI) on the University of Edinburgh website and ended up getting it. Just as well, as I would have been a terrible teacher!
How do you feel you have used the skills and/or knowledge developed during your research degree in your career to date?

When I worked at ERI, I became an informal go-to person for when anything needed writing – event adverts, reports, guidance documents. I have always loved writing, but I’ve no doubt that the process of drafting and re-drafting my PhD thesis, punishing as it sometimes was, really helped me tighten up my technique. I know that my current boss also wanted someone with strong, flexible writing abilities.

I haven’t used the subject knowledge from my PhD at all in my ERI job or my current Beltane job. However, particularly when I first started my ERI job, having ‘Dr’ before my name definitely helped me be credible in the eyes of the academics and researchers I was helping. This isn’t right – I think you should value people on their abilities, not their title – but that’s how it was.

I’ve not been at Beltane long, but it does seem to be the case that a lot of the people working in public engagement have a science research degree. Coming from the humanities, I am a little bit different, but it shows the value of transferable skills!

Other qualifications
MA (Hons) English Language and Literature, 2004