

EMPRESS

Employers' Perceptions of Recruiting
Research Staff and Students



Clair Souter
Careers Centre, The University of Leeds

Funded by Research Councils UK
(Roberts' Skills Training)



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EMPRESS Project Team

Project Manager	Clair Souter	Assistant Director, University of Leeds Careers Centre (U.L.C.C.)
Project Researchers	Paul Grimshaw	Primary Researcher, Leeds Graduate
	Clair Souter	Assistant Director, U.L.C.C.
	Samantha Aspinall	Enterprise Learning Adviser, U.L.C.C.
Project Consultant	Jane Conway	Assistant Director, U.L.C.C.
Administrative Support	Gemma Williams	Careers Assistant, U.L.C.C.
	Stefanie Klinge	Careers Assistant, U.L.C.C.

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SUMMARY

The EMPRESS (Employers' Perceptions of Recruiting Research Staff and Students) project is nationally funded through Roberts' money, and focuses particularly on external (to Higher Education) employers' perceptions of recruiting people with a research background. This focus was chosen in order to explore in more detail the reality of the current employment market for researchers, where they are considering and/or applying for posts outside H.E. – either by desire or necessity.

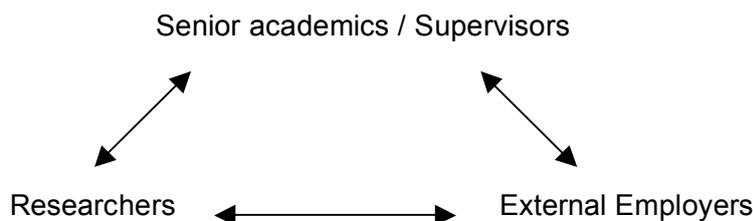
Of 116 questionnaires distributed, 47 employers responded, representing a broad range of size and sector. 26 of these were followed up by telephone and 10 were chosen for specific detailed interview. A number of the initial findings formed the basis for four focus groups comprising junior (PhD students) and experienced (post qualification) researchers. The focus groups were not a part of the original project brief but the feedback from them gives additional balance and reinforcement of issues emerging from the employers' responses. In addition a small number of academic responses were sought to a key question relating to the university's responsibility in the holistic development of researchers.

Each summary of the three sections pulls together the key points from that particular section. The final recommendations are written for The University of Leeds but potentially applicable to any university with a similar composition in terms of researchers. For Leeds they reinforce steps which have already been taken in some areas and flag a need for action in others. We should aim to:

1. Reposition research as a dynamic career proposition with excellent internal and external career development potential.
2. Positively combat stereotypes – those held by external employers relating to researchers and vice versa.
3. Embed consistency in university based supervisory/managerial approaches to supporting researchers' career development.
4. Build a culture of mutual understanding and trust between university departments and external employers (supporting the knowledge transfer ethos).
5. Enhance integration rather than isolation of researchers.
6. Establish systems for continuity of positive activity post Roberts.

None of these recommendations preclude each individual researcher's responsibility for managing and developing his or her own career. This is essential – even with excellent support from other parties.

However, the findings of this project suggest that the key players would all benefit from more open and frequent dialogue. This dialogue needs to be in the correct 'language' for it to be understood and acted on. A "communication triangle" approach, supported by other university based "enablers", is important if we are to move forward positively.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to all the participants in this research, who gave of their time voluntarily (or at least with minimum persuasion!).

Thanks to Paul Grimshaw for his excellent research, and to my administrative support in the form of Gemma Williams and Stefanie Klinge – both of whom are currently studying at The University of Leeds.

Thanks too, to my husband Clive whose researcher's eye was, as ever, invaluable.

And finally, many thanks to all my Careers Centre and University of Leeds colleagues who have supported this endeavour.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

At the University of Leeds we have over 3,500 researchers containing the spectrum from junior, studying towards their PhD, to experienced, post qualification and possibly many years into a sequence of research contracts or even a permanent, research position. It is a complex picture of a great many individuals linked only by the common theme of research.

Within this lies an even more complex picture of motivations and aspirations, both of the researchers and of the University, of individual relationships and of expectations, many of which are unpredictable and possibly even unreasonable or unmanageable to a certain extent.

We have a picture of increasing interest in postgraduate study against a background, in many disciplines, of insufficient academic research posts for those who desire them. According to a University of Leeds survey in 2003, 46% of current researchers at Leeds wanted to stay in the Higher Education (H.E.) sector and, of those, 57% wanted to remain in research. The reality is that only 20% of those are likely to obtain an established academic position. The availability, or lack of university academic posts is not, however, the focus of this study. Having worked with both PhD students and post doctoral researchers over the last 14 years it is clear that, for a substantial proportion, work outside academia is a desired option, a necessity, or both.

In 1999 the Office of Science and Technology (O.S.T.) funded a number of national projects charting researchers career paths and related issues. I managed one of these projects (completed 2001) and the ten career transition case studies, from H.E. into the external workplace are attached to this report as Appendix 3. They contain insights into why the external employment option was chosen and are pertinent to observations made by various contributors to this project. No continued funding for an extended project was available at the time. However, in 2002, Professor Sir Gareth Roberts' Review "Set for Success" provided the impetus for The Research Councils UK Roberts Skills Training Funds to be established. It is this positive step which has allowed the agenda of training for researchers to move forward, and provided funding for what I consider to be a continuation of my research into career development issues for university researchers.

As Project Manager my experience in this field has been built over 14 years working as a qualified Careers Adviser in the Careers Centre at the University of Leeds. I have tutored on EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) Grad Schools, worked with the Staff and Departmental Development Unit on the University's response to the 1996 Concordat, and have, throughout, worked with individual researchers on all aspects of career planning. As Assistant Director at the Careers Centre, working with employers is a key part of my portfolio. Both AGCAS (the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) and UKGRAD/CRAC have expressed strong interest in the findings of this report as the employer focus of this research merits additional exploration.

EMPRESS is specifically about external employer perceptions of recruiting researchers – not necessarily into research posts. The participating employers represent a range of size and sector, from an organisation set up in 2002 with 3 employees to a major, international fast moving consumer goods organisation with 250,000 employees worldwide. For the purposes of this project the term 'employer', unless otherwise specified, refers to employers outside Higher Education. The issue of what H.E. is delivering as an employer in its own right is raised in association with researchers and external employer expectations.

The purpose and outcomes of the project were originally set out as follows:

Purpose: To develop a bank of case studies focusing on employers' perceptions of what contract research staff and research students have to offer. The project seeks to identify both positive and negative aspects – illustrating employers' hopes and concerns.

Outcomes: a number of case studies accessible to contract research staff and students with information that could be used independently, or incorporated into existing career development sessions and materials, helping them to assess their own employability and to understand the position of employers.

A broader outcome was to help inform departmental and senior management within the University of some of the challenges facing researchers considering external posts – whether from desire or necessity.

The process of analysing questionnaires and speaking directly to employers - before even reaching the specific case studies – threw up an enormous amount of useful information, all of which is incorporated into the body of this report. In addition to the original project plan I have chosen to incorporate the views of junior and more experienced researchers and, for the sake of balance, the views of a small number of academics.

All the participants (47 individual company representatives, 13 researchers, 7 University of Leeds academic staff) in this project gave of their time freely and voluntarily. They spoke as individuals – a reflection of the diversity of opinion likely to exist in any given group or organisation.

It became clear very early on that there is much more mileage than the current parameters of this project allowed. From the outset it should be noted that this project is not an exploration of the significant efforts made by many at the University of Leeds to support researchers as they navigate a path to excellence in their field. Neither is it a proposal that we should ensure a massive drain of excellent researchers out of universities towards other employers, leaving gaping holes in our academic knowledge bank. As the project progressed it was apparent that many of the issues are not only about training for researchers but about the positioning of research as a career, the extent to which people feel able to embrace a knowledge transfer ethos and the continuing existence of myths and misconceptions. Notwithstanding this last statement what emerges is largely both helpful and positive – or at the very least, offers reasons and ideas for improvement.

1.1 EMPRESS project timescale

2005 / Month	Activity
February	Detailed project scoping completed Project team established Questionnaire and letter developed
March	Employer contacts identified Database established Questionnaire finalised
April	Questionnaire mail out Responses sifted Non respondents followed up
May	Responses selected for telephone follow up Telephone interviews conducted
June	Telephone interviews conducted Interim review of project to Graduate Centre / SDDU
July	Focus groups organised and conducted Organisations selected for visit / extended telephone interview
August	Visits / extended telephone interviews Focus groups completed Academic staff interviewed
September	Final employer visits Writing up UKGRAD conference attended.
October	Writing up
November / December	Project finalised and published Formal dissemination begins / Employabilityleeds forum, 16 th November
Total funding	£11,000

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology to this project is very straightforward, in keeping with the focused, time limited nature of the research. This is “practitioner research”, not supported by full time dedicated researchers, and does not claim to be an “academic” project in respect of exhaustive research around other work in this area. To my knowledge no other project has been conducted with this specific angle or integration of responses and views, however a number of the many websites which focus on the skills development issues for researchers are noted in the bibliography. Many of the issues thrown up could be explored themselves in more depth. However, this project was intended as an action orientated, dynamic view – which can be acted upon in whichever way is most helpful within individual departments / faculties.

A total of 116 questionnaires were mailed to organisations currently held on the Careers Centre database. The employers were selected on the basis of known, recent contact with the Careers Centre and represent a broad spectrum of size and sector. (It was important that all participating employers were familiar with the University and with graduate recruitment - though it could not be said that all were familiar with other aspects of the University or of its broader products). 47 questionnaires were returned. The returned questionnaires were analysed and a sample was selected for follow up by phone call. 26 of these were followed up. The reasons for follow up ranged from ‘filling in’ any gaps from the information supplied (particularly negative/positive attitudes), those that reflected a consensus view and those that raised additional questions outside those originally defined. The iterative process of the follow up resulted in ideas and themes being thrown up which in turn were used as avenues to pursue. It was employed so that the perceptions themselves would lead the project and to avoid predetermined conclusions or ‘shaping’ by the researcher.

In terms of the written results, no differentiation is made between data collected by questionnaire or by telephone. Where organisations had not filled in any tick boxes an approach was employed to try fill gaps by asking similar, but not specifically the same, questions – the aim being to avoid the prospect of people thinking they had filled in the form ‘incorrectly’ and causing frustration in repetition of parts they had particularly avoided. Subsequent to this 10 employers were selected, representing a range of sectors and on the basis of mainly positive and some negative views, for detailed case study follow up. These took the form of either a face to face or further telephone interview.

As part of the iterative process involved in the creation of this report it became clear that the perceptions of employers would become more salient if they were compared and contrasted with those of the PhD and Post Doc. employees within the University. The Post Doc. researchers were all identified as potentially looking to move on from University in to industry within the next 6 months to 2 years. Similarly, academic responses to a particularly key question were added following animated discussions around this theme by employers and focus group participants.

A full list of the employer contributors is to be found in the appendices and, though we have respected people’s desire for confidentiality, all the responses and words contained are completely authentic. The summaries and recommendations are owned by the research team and are our professional view based on the feedback from our participants and our understanding of this area.

2.0 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire was devised to facilitate qualitative feedback. It sought to gain a broad picture of the organisations' recruitment approaches and then to zoom in, specifically on the actual experience or perceptions of recruiting researchers.

Questions were structured to elicit responses on the following key areas:

- Recruitment of graduates generally
- Disciplines most frequently targeted
- Skills sought in recruits
- Recruitment of post graduates/type of qualification sought
- Level of specific targeting of postgraduates
- Perceived added value of a PhD
- General perceptions about recruiting researchers
- Views on recruiting junior vs. experienced researchers
- Understanding / knowledge of access to researchers as potential employees

2.1 Employers' Perceptions of recruiting Research Staff and Students (EMPRESS)

Employer Questionnaire

Name of respondent:.....

Role in organisation:.....

Name of organisation:.....

Size of organisation:.....

National International (please tick)

Sector:.....

Contact telephone number:.....

Contact email:.....

Contact address:.....

1. Does your organisation actively recruit graduates?

Yes No (if "no" please go to question 5)

2. Which degree subjects do you target?

.....
.....

3. What skills do you particularly look for?

.....
.....

4. Does your organisation recruit people with post graduate qualifications?

Yes No

If yes, what are these likely to be?

MSc MA PhD All of these

5. If you have personally recruited a postgraduate what was your experience of this?

Did you find it:

More difficult than recruiting a graduate
Less difficult than recruiting a graduate

Why?.....

.....

6. Did you specifically look for a post graduate?

Yes No

7. If not, did they apply along with other graduates for a graduate level job?

Yes No

8. What was the title of the job on offer?

.....

9. Were you looking for a post graduate because: (tick more than 1 box if appropriate)

- You wanted a very specific skills/knowledge set
- You wanted enhanced research skills
- You wanted someone with more experience generally
- You felt that you would get someone with a mature outlook
- You have successfully recruited someone with this sort of background before
- You felt the job required someone with more than an undergraduate degree

10. If you have recruited postgraduates before, have you observed a difference in skills sets between taught masters postgraduates or PhD students?

Yes No

11. If you have not recruited post graduates before and you were given a choice between: -a one year taught postgraduate in the specialist area you require or -a PhD student in the specialist area you require with both very similar personal attributes, which would you chose?

Taught postgraduate PhD

Please say why:.....
.....

12. If you have not recruited a postgraduate research student before would you have any concerns?

Yes No

If yes, what would your concerns be?
.....
.....

13. Would you feel differently about recruiting a junior researcher (PhD student) from a more experienced researcher?

Yes No

Please say why, whether you answered yes or no:
.....
.....

14. If you were recruiting for a research based/technical post would you have any particular concerns about taking on a more experienced researcher (i.e. someone who has worked in research for over 3 years after completing their PhD)

Yes No

15. Look at all of the following statements. Put a tick if you agree or a cross if you disagree, by each of them.

- University researchers would do the best to stick to what they do best i.e. university research
- I suspect that university researchers have a lot to offer but I am worried they won't make an effective transition out of the H.E. into my organisation
- I would like to see more people with a university background applying for some of the jobs I advertise
- I would be/am surprised when researchers apply for positions I advertise
- I am confident university researchers, at whatever stage, could potentially offer the skills package I am seeking
- I would be very concerned that anyone who has been in university research for over 3 years may have lost touch with the reality of the commercial world
- The longer someone stays in university research the less likely they are to be able to make the transition out of it
- Retraining is likely to be a serious issue for someone who has spent over 3 years in university research- even if their specialist area of research is directly related to my organisations focus
- I would feel differently about taking on someone whose research was in a business related subject
- I believe that experienced researchers are likely to have highly developed project management skills
- University researchers who have experience of collaborating projects with industry are potentially very valuable to my organisation

16. If you decided that you wanted to take on a junior or more experienced researcher, would you know how to go about it?

Yes No

Please use this space to make any additional comments

.....

.....

.....

.....

.

If you would prefer to complete this questionnaire electronically please contact me on c.i.souter@leeds.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your help with this project.

3.0 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE AND TELEPHONE FOLLOW UP

This section gives a detailed summary of employer responses taken both from the questionnaire responses and subsequent follow up by telephone where applicable. 47 employer responses are summarised and presented in percentage and qualitative summary, as appropriate.

1. Does your organisation actively recruit graduates?

Almost all companies answered positively and will actively seek out graduates for their core recruitment programmes.

2. Which degree subjects do you target?

There were no obvious patterns in terms of disciplines recruited for and likelihood of recruitment as a postgraduate. Most targeted 'All disciplines'. The main exceptions were Engineering and Law who target more specific subject experience.

Evidence

Any 2:2 and above

We look at any discipline however we do favour life science/business/marketing degrees with placement years

Law & others

Civil engineering, hydrometry/hydrology, environmental science. The degree subject is not vital but most staff are degree educated

3. What skills do you particularly look for?

These were dependent on the specific roles recruited for but they tended to be split in to three main categories: academic, interpersonal & extra curricular. The three most mentioned skills were communication, academic/intellectual ability & teamwork. Although good academic skills figured highly, for many they were secondary to the personal criteria that they themselves had developed. Most skills seemed highly congruous with postgraduate abilities. It should be noted that here and throughout placement and relevant work experience was highly attractive, even to those that look for qualities that are more academic.

Evidence by Sector

Legal

Commercial awareness, planning and organising, career motivation, social interaction, intellect, analysis and judgement, goal orientation

Adaptability, creativity, organisation, communication, I.T, languages, academic ability, intellectual ability

Engineering

Numerate, analytical skills, clear presentation and discussions, empathy with customers – attitude

Professional Support Services

Enthusiasm, determination, responsibility, communication, pro-activity, ambition to develop, commitment, technical ability

Manufacturing

Motivation, passion for chosen career, relevant work experience, commercial awareness, interpersonal skills

Medical Sales

Sporting achievements/active involvement in university i.e. president of the student union or community involvement/raising money/ability to communicate achievements verbally/ambition/tenacity/enthusiasm

Comments on work placement

We actively recruit to the skill requirements to undertake this role which best comes with some (min 2 yrs) work experience in the productivity/business performance area

We look more for practical work experience than specific academic skills

We tend to favour life science/business/marketing degrees with placement years

4a) Does your organisation recruit people with postgraduate qualifications?

Although over 75% state that they employ people with postgraduate qualifications it should be stated that many of these are employed via the annual/regular graduate recruitment drive, which is open to graduates across the board. Organisations that recruit postgraduates into their graduate intake mainly do so incidentally - although once postgraduates apply, the additional skills may give them the edge.

Evidence

Everyone has a PhD these days

We do not differentiate between PhD and undergraduates; everyone completes the company training programme regardless of qualifications

A post grad was recently recruited because they had worked on a particular type of software and this saved us having to pay someone else for additional training

We could place people with certain PhDs relevant to this sector but not say 'English'

4b) If yes, what are these likely to be?

Over 50% recruited all graduate levels (MA, MSc, PhD). Disciplines such as Engineering and Law in particular lean towards very specific qualifications designed for their sector. There seemed to be no course that gave people an edge in this respect.

Evidence

Most are undergraduates, postgraduates are the exception

5a) If you have personally recruited a postgraduate what was your experience of this? Did you find it more or less difficult than recruiting a graduate?

This question elicited a high non-response rate - perhaps because most of the respondents suggest that postgraduates will apply for vacancies in the same way, all complete the same

in-house training programmes and, as such, they do not differentiate. Again, their own criterion tends to override individual academic background. Those who did respond noted 'more', 'less' and 'no difference' in equal numbers.

5b) Why?

Those that did state a preference as 'more' difficult tended to quote the overly high expectations of the postgraduates, that they were too academically focused, there was stiff competition for 'good' candidates from employers and the difficulty in targeting appropriate courses / universities. Those that stated 'less' difficulty often erred on the side of no difference by suggesting, for example, that the programmes from which they recruit include an MSc as a matter of course. Or that postgraduates come with more experience and a bank of previous work experience, which gives them an advantage.

Evidence

More difficult

Increased expectations - most totally unrealistic

They often have an inflated image of qualification – it's more chance than purposefully recruiting postgraduates

Less difficult

We prefer postgraduates because they have come from vocational courses and they take time out to understand the organisation. They have generally done placements and have a wider experience of organisations like ours

We only recruit MSc's

No Difference

No difference. Postgraduates with relevant degrees (e.g. Marketing, HRM with CIPD) tend to have more of the skills experience/ maturity we look for

Civil engineering is a four year course. Generally students automatically have an MSc

6. Did you specifically look for a postgraduate?

The majority do not specifically look for a postgraduate. It should be noted that many of those interviewed answered the questionnaire in accordance with their own recruitment experience. That is, specific targeting of postgraduates may take place but in distinct areas of the business and outside the general graduate intake.

53% responded 'no'
14% responded 'yes'

7. If not, did they apply along with other graduates for a graduate level job?

All respondents who stated that they had not looked specifically for postgraduates suggested that they applied along with other graduates.

63 % answered positively.

8. What was the title of the job on offer?

These were predominantly graduate or trainee programmes particular to each organisation.

Evidence

New Analyst Training Programme

Management, Finance, HR Management Trainee

Trainee Solicitor

Management Trainee'

9. Were you looking for a postgraduate because....?

Respondents suggested their recruitment preferences are based more on positive previous experience. This has implications for those who have never recruited PhD students, who may hold more negative views of a candidate with this background, which in turn can be linked to the low placement of the desirability of 'research skills' generally.

Listed below are the questions in order of most often selected to least often selected:

- (1st) You have successfully recruited someone with this sort of background before.
- (2nd) You wanted a very specific skills/knowledge set
- (3rd) You wanted someone with more experience generally
- (4th) You felt the job required someone with more than an undergraduate degree
- (4th) You felt that you would get someone with a mature outlook
- (6th) You wanted enhanced research skills

10. If you have recruited postgraduates before - have you observed a difference in skills sets between taught master's postgraduates or PhD students?

Three quarters of respondents found no difference between Taught Masters & PhDs. Again, many of these recruit purely for a large graduate intake and so are not looking for differences but qualities that fit their own well-developed criteria. Of those that stated differences the differential tended to be disparate. Follow up phone calls revealed more detail as to the kinds of attributes people saw as a distinct differences between the groups.

Evidence

Cannot say whether PhDs are very different or bring anything different to the role but their qualifications can be a great selling point to clients

We generally prefers Masters though we see no intellectual difference. Masters students tend to be better rounded individuals

We see PhD students as having a wider range of skills to offer – analytical and numeracy amongst others

PhDs tend to go technical on us [in the interview process]

We see a qualitative difference between all 3 levels of undergraduate, masters and PhD and offer a remuneration package that reflects this

I tend to think of PhD students as more worldly wise and would expect to be getting additional maturity when we recruit them

We only recruit MScs. Anyone who has spent four years studying in a specialist field is of no use to us

11. If you have not recruited postgraduates before and you were given a choice between:

-a one year taught postgraduate in the specialist area you require or

-a PhD student in the specialist area you require

with both very similar personal attributes, which would you chose?

Three times as many people suggested they would recruit a taught postgraduate in preference to a PhD student. Both types of responses focus on the 'specialism' of PhDs. A significant number also stated that they would not differentiate on academic background alone but were more likely to differentiate on their own criteria.

Evidence

Would select taught postgraduate

[Taught postgraduates] would have hands on experience of the tools needed in our industry

We need breadth not specialism

Our business can rarely deliver opportunities for research style experience - we require technical knowledge and a more practical outlook

PhD's tend to have higher expectations but do not demonstrate any higher skill level or maturity when it comes to personal skills

PhD too specialised. Too academic

Managers are not asking us to recruit more PhDs

Would select PhD

Likely to have more specialist knowledge

I would assume that the student had more specialist knowledge'

I would welcome more applications from PhD students. I think the organisation needs their qualities'

No Preference

We would not target them directly but they get a golden hello one off payment if they have a PhD

We would not differentiate on the basis of the post grad qualification. We only differentiate on their ability to do the job

I would choose the candidate that most closely matched our criteria

Neither. Depends who meets our criteria

The majority of the management team do not even have a degree. What matters to us is how do people cope the first time they go on to the shop floor and someone refuses to do what they are asked

We would not favour one over the other as academic legal study is very different to practice

12. If you have not recruited a postgraduate research student before would you have any concerns? If yes, what would your concerns be?

Three times as many people responded that they would have no concerns recruiting a postgraduate. Possibly because the majority will do this as a matter of course via their normal graduate intake. In addition, no distinction was made here between PhD and other postgraduate qualifications. A significant number did suggest concerns and some of their responses are documented below:

Evidence

We would have concerns over relevance of study to role

Salary expectations ; as we recruit onto a generic graduate programme all salaries are the same

Too academic

Too specialist

We are concerned that they may be isolated by their background in research. They may not fit into a team environment. They may be too specialist in that they are interested only in their topic and don't make connections to other issues

They may be more suited to an academic career

So much depends on the individual and their attitude. Because someone has been in a research post does not mean to say that they can't translate to a commercial/public sector job BUT I would probe their motivation and do role-play to assess their personal behaviours

For us, university researchers would have to retrain, so their academic background is not really an issue. We are more concerned with their transferable skills and motivation for a legal career

13. Would you feel differently about recruiting a junior researcher (PhD student) from a more experienced researcher?

The majority suggested that they would not feel any different about recruiting either a junior or a more experienced researcher. Although this does not seem to be reflected in the mix of people many organisations actually recruit. Some organisations look openly for recent graduates in which case experienced researchers would be excluded. See below:

Evidence

Not eligible to apply to the scheme if you have more than two years experience

Company policy is to not employ anyone who graduated more than 2 years previously

We simply don't get experienced researchers applying

I have no personal experience of employing ex-academics or experienced researchers

I'm not aware of any experienced researchers wanting to do this role – I see it as contradictory to their personality [sales v academia]

14. If you were recruiting for a research based/technical post, would you have any particular concerns about taking on a more experienced researcher (i.e. someone who has worked in research for over 3 years after completing their PhD)?

Again, the majority suggested that they would not feel any different about recruiting a more experienced researcher. However the possibility that this answer is the 'politically correct' response cannot be dismissed, and other answers to questions elsewhere seem to expose it as such (see perceptions about recruitment). It is also possible that many of those interviewed did not see this as a current possibility within their organisation or within their particular remit and so were unable to address this as a potential reality.

Evidence

We see ourselves as an equal opportunities employer. We recently recruited a 29 year old Chinese PhD graduate and a 27 year old UK PhD graduate. We welcome applications from anyone

I have no personal experience of employing ex-academics or experienced researchers

15. Look at the following statements. Put a tick if you agree or a cross if you disagree by each of them.

The results below were well reflected in the telephone follow up interviews. People tend to value their own criteria and other interpersonal and personal skills as highly as any academic criteria. For these organisations an MSc, MBA or PhD are often judged as being of equal status. (Only one organisation directly targeted PhDs and only two differentiate financially between PhD and other Post Grad qualifications).

Beyond this, certain negative aspects begin to erode some of the potential benefits a PhD student may offer. Concerns include overspecialisation and difficulty of integration, question marks over interest in a particular field and even suspicions about personality.

There seemed to be a discrepancy over the fact many people answered positively (2) that researchers at any age could potentially offer the correct skills package – yet few seem to employ these people. Perhaps more tellingly the questions relating to time spent in academia proving negative (4) and the problems transferring out of it also scored highly (6). There may be a 'chicken and egg' situation as a significant number of organisations also stated that these experienced people also seldom apply for posts for which they could be suited.

In general, when speaking with recruiters, there seemed to be little perception that their organisations were missing out by not employing people with a research background.

The statements are ordered in terms of those that elicited most agreement to those that provoked the least.

- (1) University researchers who have experience of collaborating projects with industry are potentially very valuable to my organisation.
- (2) I am confident university researchers, at whatever stage, could potentially offer the skills package I am seeking.
- (3) I would like to see more people with a university background applying for some of the jobs I advertise.
- (4) I would be very concerned that anyone who has been in university research for over 3 years may have lost touch with the reality of the commercial world.
- (5) The longer someone stays in university research the less likely they are to be able to make the transition out of it.
- (6) I suspect that university researchers have a lot to offer but I am worried they won't make an effective transition out of the H.E. into my organisation.
- (7) I believe that experienced researchers are likely to have highly developed project management skills.

- (8) Retraining is likely to be a serious issue for someone who has spent over 3 years in university research- even if their specialist area of research is directly related to my organisations' focus.
- (9) I would be/am surprised when researchers apply for positions I advertise.
- (10) I would feel differently about taking on someone whose research was in a business related subject.
- (11) University researchers would do best to stick to what they do best i.e. university research.

16. If you decided that you wanted to take on a junior or more experienced researcher, would you know how to go about it?

People were divided 50/50 in response to this question. For many it is not relevant because of their recruitment position within the organisation or the fact their organisation does not have roles that they think would be suitable for researchers. The type of approach people would take in terms of recruiting a researcher, should such a post arise, seems to depend on their own experience. Organisations that are more commercial appear to rely on recruitment firms to supply any additional needs whereas areas that are more technical may rely on their own contacts. Where these exist they seem to be direct with departments of universities that specialise in the particular knowledge they require. Often this is linked to their own educational experience ('old boy's network') or by simply searching the web and finding research groups that are linked to certain heads of departments. In only two cases did people specifically mention they would use the relevant careers department as a starting point. This may be because people perceive the roles as technical and wish to talk 'technical to technical'.

Evidence

I have contacts at Leeds University because I went there myself

I have contacts at various universities. To be honest I would use the 'old boy's network

We use specialist recruitment firms

I did the research on the internet and found various research groups which I traced back to university departments

We tend to look internally initially

We are a member of the Association of Graduate Recruiters, so we'd probably use them

We have direct links with engineering and engineering materials departments within our target universities

We'd use the 'Milk round'. All the students know about this

3.1 SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Many organisations recruit a large graduate intake centrally. Within this intake, postgraduate application is often welcomed but not a central requirement. This questionnaire was targeted at the people whose greater role is recruitment via these programmes so people often viewed the questionnaire as not fitting to their particular remit or their particular sector (see Law example below). This highlighted a general problem when trying to elicit useful information. In such large organisations, it seems to be the case that 'autonomous centres' outside of the 'core' intake will employ individuals as and when the business needs change without directly involving the Human Resources department in the selection process. People often made the general comment 'I am sure we have PhDs working here but I could not tell you where'. Whether or not Human Resources help in the logistics of hiring, they may not understand why such people are chosen or how they differ to other target recruitment groups.
- The difficulty in targeting the correct individuals was highlighted by the Law sector. They seem to explicitly target, few, if any, postgraduate researchers – although, arguably, this type of work should particularly lend itself to skills researchers have to offer. Further investigation revealed anecdotal evidence that previously employed PhD students have brought benefit. One organisation stated the example of a PhD graduate in engineering taking up practice within construction law where this individual could and did bring significant and tangible additional benefits to the organisation. These benefits however only become clear at practice stage. For this reason, the annual recruitment is in no way tailored to recognise the added benefit these people may bring.
- Some of the recruiters interviewed were new to the role and as such may not have been fully aware of historical appointments and the skills that researchers may have brought to previous / current posts. Differences in approach within departments were also noted.
- People were often reluctant to reflect on the anomaly that they are open to employing people with a range of educational backgrounds but clearly (in the main) do not – perhaps resulting in some answers that erred on the politically correct. This may have skewed some of the results.
- It appears there can be no blanket approach to the issue of how to improve perceptions of recruiting researchers. Clearly, organisations are fast moving and forever changing - including Human Resources departments who may not have access to the kinds of success stories that have occurred in their organisations.
- A ramping up of qualifications e.g. 'everyone has a PhD these days' means employers seem to be getting a premium in terms of skills without having to target or necessarily initially pay more to such individuals. These additional skills are seldom differentiated or distinguished in terms of remuneration.
- When organisations do recruit specialist researchers they take a number of approaches but in the main, they tend to bypass the Careers Centre. For example, one company recently discovered an academic employee by 'googling' and tracing research groups that led them to academic departments specialising in an area of interest. Others state they use the 'old boy network' or go directly to their own, previous university academic departments. There was some evidence that for the 'specialist' nature of the kinds of posts that researchers may fill, people have a desire to talk 'technical to technical'.

- It was stated by one respondent that that it is now almost impossible to maintain relationships with 100+ universities. The respondent suggested that they would like one point of contact who could help them locate people with particular specialist skills.
- The most commonly noted negative statements concern specialisation, narrowness of interest, too deep in one particular area, problems of integration, too old to mould to business needs, lack of interpersonal skills and over expectation in terms of salary and career progression. The most positive attributes include being worldly wise, more mature, having better analytical and research skills, better ability to work autonomously and good project management.
- Intangible benefits may also come from employing highly qualified graduates. Less technical businesses that are more commercial suggested that employing a researcher may add gravitas and 'look good' to clients - they impress with technical knowledge even though this is not key to their role.
- In this particular sample, Engineering appeared to be the sector most likely to directly target postgraduates and researchers as potential employees. They were also most likely to differentiate in terms of career path and remuneration. The legal sector was the least likely to differentiate as they offer mainly training contracts which can be undertaken from undergraduate level.

4.0 FOCUS GROUPS: EXPERIENCED RESEARCHERS (POST DOCs) AND JUNIOR RESEARCHERS (PHD STUDENTS)

Introduction and methodology

This part of the report was an addition to the original project plan. Specifically, it was a response to the notion that a marrying up of Post Doc. and PhD students' perceptions about external employment would make the views of employers more salient.

The focus groups were conducted with four small groups – two groups of Post Docs and two groups of current PhD students. A loose framework of questions was created for each session but opportunities were available for the participants to make comments outside this. These questions were generated from the responses reviewed within the questionnaires. It was made clear all comments would remain anonymous. All comments were documented on flip charts and the summaries are detailed below.

Focus Groups Part 1: Post Doctoral Researchers

This section refers to 2 focus groups conducted on the 1st August 2005 with 8 Post Doc. researchers, all of whom were identified as people who are potentially looking to make the move out of H.E. within the next 6 – 24 months.

1. What benefit is an employer likely to gain by employing someone from a research background?

This generated a relatively short list of responses with the emphasis being on the intellectual benefits. The idea that people developed 'transferable' skills as part of their everyday working was shared by some though not all. In general skills identified seemed to tie in with employers' views. However, a major exception seemed to be team working - a skill mentioned consistently by employers yet not emphasised here. Only further probing brought out the view that people did mostly work in teams in one form or another.

Evidence

Intelligence

Good time management from working alone

Critical thinking skills

Good communication skills

Presentation skills

2. What kind of skills do the researchers (in our focus groups) believe that employers generally look for- specifically with regard to the type of post for which they (a researcher) may apply?

This exercise generated a fairly comprehensive list. Covering most of the comments also stated by the employers. The main exceptions, that employers stated but which were not noted by the researchers were; client care skills, empathy with clients, passion about business, work experience, flexibility and commercial awareness in general. This seemed to reflect some antipathy towards the business environment (see question 3). However, one group stated they felt confident that they possessed most if not all the skills requested.

Evidence

Fast learner

Communication and interpersonal skills

Time management

IT

Leadership

Project/People management

Teamwork

Self management

Innovation

Technical know-how

Ambition

Task orientation

Strategic and creative approaches to business development.

3. What might prevent you from moving out of H.E. into industry?

This generated a comprehensive list. It could be suggested that some of the comments relate to an outdated or perhaps unchallenged view of industry. Only one person mentioned the area that seemed to summarise employers' concerns regarding 'specialisation', 'isolation' and 'institutionalisation' in that researchers may be 'closeted'. Virtually none of the comments here were picked up by employers. Some employers were concerned that they may not offer specific research roles applicable to research applicants but none suggested their environment would not allow intellectual freedom or flexibility. It seems employers were much more concerned about the applicants' personal skills than how they would adapt to the different environment, whereas the researchers focused more on the environmental and practical concerns rather than any lack of personal skills. This perhaps reinforces a notion of cultural differences.

An area where there may be some agreement is in the area of team working. One person suggested that researchers may be more suited to working alone. However, this may also simply mean that researchers may not be fully aware of how best to present their skills and talents in a more "commercial" language.

Evidence

The opportunity to gain some skills important to industry is not available unless you are in industry

Less flexibility and freedom/ intellectual freedom.

Can work independently but not with others.

People are closeted in the academic world

Outdated employer perception – 'do they believe that people walk around with sandals and beards?'

Employers want ideas and commercial experience. The universities see themselves as being there to produce blue sky thinkers

We have collaboration with industry but they aren't really working closely with us. There are questions of commercial trust and ownership

Relationship between academia and industry is critical. Too often there is lack of trust – No shared understanding and at worst hostility

People in industry are secretly worried that the post docs may be more capable – better qualified, better at their work

Much more competitive environment than that which researchers may be used to

More time working away from home

Less holidays – less time off outside H.E.

Work life balance is not as good

Reduction of intellectual freedom outside H.E. - doing what the organisation dictates

Lack of exposure to and management of budgets

Would be asked to work longer hours

Concerns about having a bad experience and losing ground in research area. How easy is it to make the return?

Driftage. The longer I stay in research the harder is to come out' Having been in HE research for 6 years I feel 'pigeon holed'. I have worries over institutionalisation

Many people in our position have not really left university. Gone from undergrad to post grad to post doc without having a steer outside this as to what happens next

I look at job adverts and see that skills do not match and feel how can I apply for that job?

4. What skills and benefits do you possess that undergraduates may not?

Responses such as maturity, higher level of thinking (though not universal) overlapped with some of the views of employers however again the majority of the list did not concur with the employers' list. What may be considered as highly valued attributes, particularly in a multinational environment, such as experience of working within cross-cultural teams and international exposure was not mentioned by employers. This suggests some shortfall in understanding of the modern researcher. One major omission would seem to be project management skill - highly prized in industry but perhaps down played here.

Evidence

Maturity

International exposure – Have worked with multi-national teams – high level teamwork.

Cultural flexibility

All necessary research skills already highly developed

HR and day to day management skills

Negotiating

Mentoring

Highly motivated

Organisational skills

Different or higher level of thinking

Work experience

Tutoring

Sharing experience

Teaching

'We are quite nerdy, but that's good now, isn't it'

5. What processes or actions have you undertaken to try and make the transition out of H.E.?

The responses in general seemed to suggest a need for some additional focus on targeting particular sectors or environments that people could make the transition into. For example, few appeared to have developed contact with outside organisations directly which may be because there is no single, obvious way to do this. Researchers often struggle where there is no visible point of entry. There appears to be scope to make people more aware of the kind of opportunities for employer contact that may already be available or develop new points of contact. There was no direct mention of developing relationships with supervisors, which has been identified as a useful contact and possible "gatekeeper" of connections to industry. Job fairs were not mentioned – it was perhaps felt that this fell into the 'for undergraduates only' category, even though it is clear some employers do recruit PhD researchers from their yearly graduate intake.

Evidence

Currently Doing

Will meet with supervisor to agree the opportunity to develop a technical skill that the researcher has found out was useable and desirable

*Identifying key skill areas and including these in publications – Both technical skills
Look at skills in the broader sense not just focusing on the technical skills*

Self assessment and get objective feedback and act on it

Making sure CV is kept up to date and working on filling gaps

Networking and having informal discussions

Might do but are not currently doing

Might send a letter

Contact individuals in industry with a view to having an informal chat or conversation

Do another qualification

Use a recruitment agency – specific to field that they want to go in

Target a specific company

Geographical barriers

No industrial placements in the north

Effectively analyse job adverts rather than see that skills do not match and feel that they cannot do the job

6. A company is currently paying £27,000 as a starting salary for graduates. What salary would you expect to receive?

The average estimate was between £25-30k. This is perhaps more realistic than some employers suggested. Those employers who stated unrealistic salary expectations as a barrier to recruiting researchers may have been drawing from their experience in a general recruitment position where PhDs may not draw a premium. There was also some evidence

to suggest people may expect that there is a formula for the kinds of salary they may receive ie x experience plus x qualification will lead to certain remuneration. The idea that people may have to negotiate their own salary was neglected. Interestingly most people had the expectation of joining an organisation - no-one mentioned starting their own business. Whilst these focus groups are minute in terms of relative numbers there is a clear impact on the knowledge transfer agenda if this is a more general feeling in the research community.

7. What recommendations would you make for improving the support of Post Docs at the University?

There was a general view that most of the career development presence is designed for undergraduates and more development / support should be available. Special reference was made to the Staff Review and Development Scheme which, it was felt, could be implemented more helpfully by staff with supervisory responsibilities within departments. More presence of career development specialists in the process was suggested.

Evidence

The university could set up a short term secondment to industry or commerce

There could be a "Skill set database" where researchers' specific skills and expertise were logged

Maybe a "One stop job shop" – employers come to the university with a wish list and this is then matched to people via department

8. What motivations are there for making the transition out of H.E.?

Only one group was asked this question of which only one response could be said to be positive about wanting to move out of H.E. This may explain some of the lack of active job search and career development towards this end. Employer perceptions that people may carry on in H.E. because they are not motivated to get a 'real job' may not be combated effectively if people do not develop positive reasons for wishing to enter employment outside H.E. No-one mentioned the creative opportunities that exist when experienced researchers move from one field to another. This is explicitly encouraged by at least one employer interviewed.

Evidence

Lack of opportunities in H.E.

No grants available

H.E. not well paid

Age – if I don't do it now....

Catch 22 – No permanent positions unless money available through grants. No grant money available unless researcher is in a permanent position

Departments not communicating to researchers about their future leads to uncertainty.

Feel cut off from longer term developments and strategic decisions at departmental level

Curious about life outside H.E.

Positive about broad skill set and want to be able to apply this skill set to an area of value outside H.E.

Focus Groups Part 2: PhD students

This section of the report reflects the views of 5 PhD students, 2 x 1st years, 2 x 2nd years & 1 x 3rd year. The focus groups were conducted on the 8th and 24th August 2005. No pre-selection was carried out with views towards their future career orientation.

1. What benefit is an employer likely to gain by employing someone from a research background?

This produced a wide range of skills, most of which tally with employers requirements in overall recruitment. The main differences seemed to lie with the fact that the 'specialist' nature of their work was perceived mainly in a positive light. Work experience was mentioned but seemed underplayed although this was top of the list of benefits for employers –particularly with regards to direct collaborative work with industry. Employers stated their recruitment was only loosely based on research skills which was picked up by the students, none of whom mentioned directly their 'research' skills. Most seemed to realise the skills acquired during their research were more saleable manifested as 'planning' or 'independent working'.

Evidence

Thinking to a deeper level

Advanced critical thinking and more detailed analysis

Added work experience

Planning and co-ordination skills

Time management

Independent working skills

Experience of working in a wide cultural mix

Networking and problem solving abilities.

Specialised knowledge

Built in benefit of less skills training – up and running quickly

2. What benefit is an employer likely to gain by employing someone from a research background as opposed to an undergraduate?

The results suggest that the main aspects relate to quality and depth of knowledge and working practices as opposed to more personal or interpersonal skills. Maturity and in depth knowledge were the most quoted benefits for employers and were picked up on here. Career focus was mentioned as a benefit by students, but the extended time spent in education can be seen as a lack of career focus by employers.

Evidence

Complete tasks to a higher standard

Better presentation skills

More career focused

Maturity

*Deeper understanding/analytical skills***3. What types of sectors and roles have you considered in terms of potential employment?**

Although a range of views were expressed it maybe possible that career focus has taken a back seat as the research aspect of the PhD qualification becomes 'all consuming'. This was reinforced by the job search activities listed below.

Evidence

Financial sector

Not really thought about it / broad views

Would like to work in both private sector and in education. Cross over into some form of consultancy

Stay in academia if possible.

4. What are you doing in order to find the ideal role?

The variety of actions here suggest a willingness to use a range of sources and an expectation that they need to be proactive and outward facing. This contrasts with the responses given by the more experienced, longer term researchers and could be a reflection of the approaches encouraged by EPSRC Grad Schools (in which focus group PhD students had participated).

Evidence

Locate suitable university that allows me to work externally as well as for the university

Ask supervisor for contacts

Use web sites such as 'Jobs.ac.uk'

Tuesdays Guardian & Times Higher Educational Supplement

Use research web sits that outline positions available within University

Job adverts

Research employers and what skills are required

Look at the culture of the organisation – is there a fit?

Make contacts in an organisation.

5. What are the main barriers to gaining employment – both personal and in terms of employers' perceptions?

Students picked up on the perception that that undergraduates are easier to mould. This seems to be reflected in the overall recruitment policy of many employers - being suitable for internal training by an organisation is often viewed as more important than additional academic skills. The negative aspects of specialisation were also identified which correlates closely with one of the employers' major concerns. Lack of team working skills was identified by both employers and researchers.

Evidence**Personal**

Ethical concerns over the approach of business as opposed to academia

There is less flexibility in commercial environment

Industry maybe be more monotonous and less varied

The environment is more pressurised

Current research commitment prevents development of 'nice to have' skills

Fear of not getting back into academia after leaving or having to come back at a lower level

The kinds of links you mentioned with employers are actually frowned upon (by academic department) if not actually discriminated against due to confidentiality issues

As perceived for employers

Too focused and over specialised

We are more difficult to mould as we have our own ideas

Time spent in education is time spent not gaining 'real' work experience

There is a general 'two cultures' barrier which reflects the 'theoretical' versus the more 'practical' approaches employed outside academia

May be isolated in terms of team working.

6. What role can your supervisor play in helping to find a suitable role outside H.E.?

This revealed that there appear to be differing perceptions on how this relationship can be exploited. Some see it as central in gaining the correct experience and navigating a way out - others almost as a barrier to moving outside H.E. Reassuringly perhaps, supervisors stated as being "progressive" were also those noted to have taken part in the R.A.E. However for this particular sample there were more negative than positive comments.

Evidence

Supervisors do not have the qualities required to give career advice

They are low on people skills

Supervisors tend to assume that researchers would not want to leave academia

They tend to have visions of a 'mini-me' and would not contemplate researchers moving out

Supervisors are 'out of touch'

The supervisors have different priorities and will not encourage any kind of activity outside of academia. In fact I sometime think they see us as an extension of their ego

My supervisor is a great help and has encouraged me to get involved both in conferences and networking with individuals who may help my progression

7. How much would you expect to earn in a first year of work?

Overall this seemed fairly realistic with a general view of £20-25K in both groups. This contradicts employers' perceptions that PhD students would expect inflated salaries.

Evidence

I would expect to get more than in academia

It seems clear academics are underpaid

8. What recommendations would you make for improving the support of PhD students at the University?

The PhD students shared the general view that most of the career development presence is designed for undergraduates and more development and support for researchers should be available. In particular the students felt a need to have some form of forum where they could discuss their experiences with other students.

Evidence

How about having some kind of drop in lounge where students could meet up

A shared office where students could go and work and meet other students to share their ideas

There appears to be no infrastructure for PhDs

The 16 days training we get needs to be better advertised

I would like to see more Grad Schools and an increase in the frequency of development programmes

I'd like to work more closely on the development of 'graduate' skills

9. What motivations are there for making the transition out of H.E.?

Only one group was asked this question. The responses were in general more positive than those suggested by the Post Doc group. Debt figured highly.

Evidence

More job security

Lack of turnover in top jobs. Fellowships are impossible to come by

Fellowships – people are much older

Unstable nature of academia

Increasing debt

Bonuses and benefits are better

Profit share

Better career planning

Much better focus on personal development [outside H.E.]

To do something different – escape the 'tunnel vision'

The only reason to stay in academia is if you want to become a lecturer. Otherwise forget it

4.1 SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Post Doctoral researchers

- In general people seemed aware that there may be negative stereotypes out there to be combated but would value support in achieving this. The researchers were also aware of the skills they possess in addition to research but are not always able to articulate these successfully in a commercial language. A common stereotype stated by some employers is that people may not be used to the competition of the commercial world. On the face of it many researchers accepted this proposition but when questioned were able to come up with many areas where they were indeed exposed to, eg. the scramble for funding and the competition between researchers for a diminishing number of posts.
- Researchers may hold a one sided or outdated view of industry and the commercial world which will have a negative impact on their approaches or connections to it.
- People were not that certain of the types of remuneration they could expect outside of H.E. There was also perhaps a lack of awareness that they would have to negotiate this on an individual basis.
- A number of researchers identified that, within the University, there was limited career development provision specifically tailored for them and noted how this type of support could be helpful both in terms of academic or external career development.
- Many of the researchers expressed the difficulty of, and their desire not to look to, moving into areas that required extensive further training. The cost implications, lost income and a reluctance to do any more academic study were the key factors. This may close down possible opportunities as a relatively short period of training may give the PhD student a large premium within a chosen field.
- At the moment the main motivations for wanting to leave H.E. appear to be based on negative rather than positive drivers.

PhD students

- PhD students seemed to have a good understanding of the kinds of transferable skills that come through study. Like the Post Docs they were happy that the negative perceptions of employers could be combated. However in terms of career planning those that were closer to completion appeared, not surprisingly, to be more focused. There was a feeling that perhaps career decisions could be 'kicked into the long grass' until the third year
- Students appeared to have a realistic view of life after study in academia. The fact that students are now more encumbered by debt perhaps meant they are becoming more open to considering life outside academia. Negative stereotypes of commercial activity appeared less likely than in the Post Doc experience although the self selecting nature of the groups cannot be ignored in this respect. Most of those taking part were active in trying to explore and gain additional skills.
- People seemed to agree that some of the perceptions of employers, such as lacking team working through working in isolation, were justified. This shortfall was

not seen as insurmountable and people were generally confident of addressing this in interview. Both groups were unaware of how highly employers would actually value team working skills.

- Although, as stated, our PhD students appeared to have a realistic view of life in academia, it may still be seen as a softer option by some students.
- There appears to be a need to implement a more consistent approach with regard to career development for PhDs. Students want clarity about what they can reasonably expect from their supervisor, with regard to experience building and career development and regardless of which department / faculty they are in. There was a suggestion that may be inherent features of the relationship between the PhD student and both the university and the supervisor that stand as a barrier between the student and gaining experience that employers appear to value - in particular with respect to collaborative projects where students are working directly with employers.
- PhD students noted 'isolation' as a critical issue.
- In common with Post Docs there was a resistance to leaving academia to do further vocational study outside H.E.. Debt and weariness with study were both cited.

5.0 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR RESEARCHERS: THE ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

As this project progressed it became increasingly clear that both employers and university researchers were interested in personal development and the acquisition of additional, marketable skills. For many employers this was expressed as a need for more “commercial awareness”. For the researchers themselves it translates into the self confidence to operate more effectively both within and outside a university setting. Whilst some conclusions and recommendations on this theme are drawn in the final section of this report, the question about where the responsibility for skills development lies, and how far this should extend, remains critical.

Although we recognise this issue merits much wider investigation, a small number of academics at The University of Leeds, representing different faculties, were asked the following question:

“To what extent does the University have a responsibility to develop researchers holistically i.e. to develop skills which will make them marketable outside H.E. as well as within research in H.E.?”

“Any employer has a responsibility to develop their employees, particularly with regard to future employment and their own wishes and desires for the future.”

Engineering

“We have a huge responsibility. It’s like an apprenticeship in research. We are making a researcher but I can’t think of any instances where those people are preparing for a career solely in H.E. research.”

Education, Social Science and Law

“It is an important fact that only 17-20% of PhD students go on to be university academics. The vast majority of them, no matter what their personal ambitions might be, will have to consider work in other areas. The University has a moral responsibility to ensure that PhD and Masters students are, as a minimum, given the opportunity to understand options and given the opportunity to develop necessary skills. A world class university would do this.”

Earth and Environment

“It depends on the discipline. For example, if you look at a subject like Philosophy it is perhaps more likely that that person is looking at an academic research career. If you look at other disciplines people are more likely to be considering other careers as well as academia. However, most universities when taking on a researcher will be mentally preparing them to stay in a university and they hope they will develop as a researcher in a university context. Universities want good researchers to stay with them. If you put money and effort into people you are more likely to keep them.”

Maths and Physical Sciences

“I consider it is essential that the development of a range of transferable skills should be an integral part of our degree programme, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level.”

Biological Sciences

“We must make sure that the post graduates are holistically developed – for example it is really important for them not to become so focused on their work that they cannot communicate it. They need to be able to talk about their research to non specialists and to the general public. Other skills they need are to be good colleagues – team workers. They particularly need to have creative thinking to apply their specific research results to broader issues such as knowledge transfer.”

Earth and Environment

“Yes, we do have a responsibility to help researchers develop generic skills, in the same way that we have a responsibility to develop – as we do - these sorts of skills in our undergraduate population.”

Arts

6.0 EMPLOYER CASE STUDIES: INTRODUCTION

The ten employers in this section were all selected for further follow up on the basis of their responses to the idea of recruiting researchers. They reflect groups which could broadly be described as positive, negative and neutral.

The follow up for the majority of these was a face to face conversation. Given that direct contact with external employers is what we would particularly encourage for researchers seeking external opportunities, it is important to note that even those employers who may be described as negative were amenable to this.

The main aims in the case study interviews were to:

- pick up information in addition to that which had been shared through the questionnaire.
- encourage employers to explore perceptions or assumptions and to articulate more fully the reasons for these.
- engage employers in a discussion about where the potential for development lies - either in terms of researchers themselves, or with regard to the University's relationships with external employers.

The summary of key points is to be found in 6.2.

6.1 EMPLOYER CASE STUDIES

Employer Case Study 1

Sector: Retailing

Setting the organisation in context

As a major, international retailer this organisation is a key player in the undergraduate recruitment market. In their own words “We have never specifically set out to recruit people from a research background but as we recruit entirely against a consistent set of criteria it is all about whether the individual matches up to those. We would never want to close the door on anyone.”

Given the context as set above, are you surprised when people do apply from a research background?

Slightly surprised –after all they have invested time and probably money on their research and whatever their specialist background they would be starting with the undergraduates on the undergraduate training scheme. But then I would imagine that they could progress more quickly because of their learning experiences. We would expect people to make it Branch Manager within two years (salary £30k - £35k) and it is realistic to aim to achieve general manager level after around 10 years. We like to promote from within. Actually I would like to see more people applying from this sort of background. I would have thought that the extra years of experience would have enabled them to develop a whole raft of higher level skills.

What may people from a research background be able to offer you in skills terms?

The fact that someone has done research can show enthusiasm, dedication and focus. Additional maturity can bring with it a better work ethic and more organisational loyalty.

Would you have any concerns about them being able to make a successful transition from the university environment to the commercial sector?

My concerns would mainly be related to assumptions which I would actively manage i.e. too academic, too theoretical, may not be able to deal with the pace and interruptions of the business world, may be too narrow and focused. I would consciously put these concerns to one side. There would be no difference for me between a relatively junior or a more experienced researcher in terms of concerns – it would depend entirely on the individual. We telephone screen virtually everyone. Anecdotally – the PhD graduate I recently telephone screened did not do very well. She was unfocused in terms of what she wanted from her career (and us), I struggled to get information out and I felt she was relying completely on her intelligence as proven by her qualification. Doing a PhD does not set you automatically above undergraduates in our business – but if you have a PhD plus all the other skills we seek, you would be very appealing.

How can a researcher best promote themselves to you as a potential employee?

We want people who want to continue to develop – who are looking forward at their own careers and making the most of opportunities. Do your research on the organisation and closely match your skills to what is required. Be ready to talk about what you have to offer and think carefully about what the organisation wants. You really need to link yourself to the career you have chosen – it is not enough to say “this is me – take it or leave it”. Sell

what you have done to the recruiter - the whole package - as exciting and full of opportunities for self development towards other roles.

What should universities do to support researchers?

Actively support the personal and career development of researchers – promoting research as a valuable role in itself or an avenue that can lead to a number of other opportunities. Encouraging researchers to look at themselves as part of the broader picture will help to minimise transition difficulties and reduce the kind of assumptions and stereotypes people may have which act as barriers to the recruitment of researchers into their organisations. I can see that Leeds is trying to shape the mould, to change the isolationist culture and to make the links clearer between academia and business. It can be a slow process – a lot of people need convincing.

Employer Case Study 2

Sector: Government Agency

Setting the organisation in context

This organisation recruits people according to their skills, they do not have a formal graduate recruitment scheme. They feel that they do not offer high enough salaries to attract this calibre of student although, conversely, their area of work is likely to make them particularly appealing to researchers with expertise in this field.

Does your organisation actively recruit graduates?

No we do not have a graduate recruitment scheme. We take people depending on their skills. Sometimes we would ask for a degree, but not always. It just depends on the job.

Have you ever recruited post-graduate students?

No, I have no experience of recruiting people with post graduate qualifications.

Do you have many students applying?

Not really, I think that this is because we do not offer very high wages for post-graduate students. I think that the idea of working for us sounds better than it is. Our externally advertised jobs are usually lower graded than internal ones. I am sure that they could earn more by doing consultancy work. We do have national campaigns through our National Recruitment Team.

Which academic disciplines would you target?

We target all degrees but in particular engineering, environment, biology, ecology and the sciences in general. We also sponsor students for a specific and relevant degree. Clearly we want to target these students.

Would you have any particular concerns about employing a post graduate?

I wouldn't have any concerns about employing a post-graduate student as long as they fitted the job specification. At the end of the day we recruit the best person for the job based on a competency-based interview. We look for the person with the best skills.

Which particular skills do you look for?

I really couldn't say that we look for a particular set of skills. It depends on what role we are recruiting for. We are looking for different things depending on what area the job is in, for example engineering or administration. However, we look for people with good customer-facing skills. These skills are more important than academic skills. However, if a person applies without a degree and we have asked for one then they won't get through. If we had a PhD student who had these skills and their research, then they would be head and shoulders above the rest.

What type of skills do you think that PhD students might have developed?

Analytical skills, finding new solutions to problems and openness, these are very important skills.

Do you think they would have any others?

Not really, no.

Employer Case Study 3

Sector: Steel Manufacturing

Setting the organisation in context

Although a massive international organisation with a centralised recruitment function in the UK, it is composed of a number of individual parts. In recruitment terms this means different requirements for different sections and indeed, different answers to recruitment questions depending on where you address them within the organisation. This is typical of many of the larger organisations in this research.

How are people generally recruited into the organisation?

Central recruitment focuses on graduate recruitment. Both the website and the application form, which is what any browser would have access to, are focused on graduates. This is something we are working on as we need a mix of people including graduates, post graduates, “first time bouncers” and A Level students who we will sponsor. Often the most successful recruitment for me in particular is of direct applicants to direct advertisements. This can be the best way to fill the gaps and address shortage areas.

How important to successful recruitment are personal connections between industry employees and university departments?

Direct links with universities are vital. Alumni links are very helpful with the “University Ambassadors” programme that we currently have and are seeking to build. Links through academic advisory boards are helpful but the most important connection of all has to be through collaborative projects i.e. CASE Awards

What are the issues for researchers wanting to make the move into industry from academic research?

One of the problems can be that their experience is purely lab based. Many of the jobs that we are offering, although they have a significant amount of research in it, are very much outside the lab, based in and around the plant, dealing with a massive range of issues including health and safety, finance, management. People need to look beyond pure lab based research, to think about the practical application of what they are doing and be ready to really broaden the application of their specialist knowledge.

Are there any particular barriers for longer standing university researchers?

We want people to join us and build a lifetime career with us. I would have a small worry that someone who had been in a series of fixed term contracts was a) subconsciously married to that system or b) not proactive enough to identify and go after other opportunities. It can be a vicious cycle. If you stop being creative and moving forward perhaps you don't have that skill, or you lose it. They can become more set in some of the traits I would describe as negative i.e. not able to accept other peoples' opinions, unable to compromise and not able to discuss broader issues.

So what are you really looking for from a researcher wanting to work with you?

Very often it comes down to whether you can identify the practical applications and potential of your research area and communicate that effectively. Can you see the broader picture. Can you prove that you have the potential to juggle safety, financial, project management and financial issues?

We need creative people – and those who are dynamic and will integrate well. People who can work with looser information, weigh up pros and cons given the available facts, and come up with solutions. This is a business environment which is fluid and dynamic. Very

often there is not time for the full analysis or to produce a comprehensive research paper before a solution is proposed.

How can researchers present themselves to best effect in their applications?

I really want people to lift out the transferable skills i.e. "I worked on my own initiative... I work within x timescales". I would like people to say things like "I want to build on my technical and other skills, to be able to develop them within a business context". For me, this sort of focus is far more important than the exact detail of their specific research - I just look for a taster of that.

How would you see the universities' role in terms of knowledge transfer?

Universities provide a natural home for the internal rotation of knowledge in independent but connected spirals. But the real knowledge transfer benefit comes through identification of the spin offs and the successful transference of the application of these. Those spin offs can be passed into industry and a whole other set of internal knowledge spirals begin. Partnerships and collaborative projects are absolutely critical to this. There is a very important role for the research supervisors and professors here. Some are very business orientated with strong connections to industry and encourage researchers themselves to develop these connections. Others can be very poor at networking and that will be the culture which the researcher will consider to be the norm.

What should universities do to support the development of researchers?

The university is an employer and as such, has a duty to invest in and to help people make the most of what they have to offer. I believe it is actually a moral duty to help people to identify the next opportunity. And this is much wider than just peering down a microscope. Universities need to be able to produce people who can put things in the broader context. More senior academic staff could take time to network with businesses and involve their researchers in this. Universities could look at more joint research proposals and organise more informal meetings to discuss possibilities and encourage understanding. This creates a win/win for everyone involved. And there could be more specialist support and advice for the postgraduate population in general.

What hints and tips would you share with the researchers themselves?

In addition to what I've already said:

Look around to see what sorts of businesses exist – over and above those with a direct specialist link to your area of research - in which you could apply your work.

Think about what you want longer term (training and development).

When you have identified businesses, make contact with them through careers fairs or any other means. Speak with representatives in person. Follow it up. Arrange a visit.

Don't just apply through the standard graduate recruitment cycle. Do a CV and covering letter and send it as soon as you have done your research (as suggested above). In fact the best time to apply can be outside the graduate recruitment cycle as larger organisations can be less bogged down with undergraduate applications.

Employer Case Study 4

Sector: Environmental Consultancy

Setting the organisation in context

This organisation often recruits post graduate students for engineering and geological posts within their company. In general they value the maturity that post graduate students bring but the issue they face is that they have difficulties in recruiting them.

How do you recruit post-graduate students?

We use trade publications and agencies.

Why do you recruit PhD students in particular?

They have specialist knowledge that can be applied to work; they have basic skills and intelligence.

At interview we ask general skills questions to get an idea of a person's attitude. We like them to show a willingness to work hard.

We have a relationship with University of Leeds and through placements, and then we often take the students on afterwards. We would like more access to university students particularly post graduates.

How do you think that the skills of a PhD student and those of a graduate differ?

I think that they have better management skills, better at managing time and managing resources. They also have specialist knowledge. They have a more mature manner. We like people who are good at project work, depending on who we can get.

PhD students state that international collaboration is a real skill that they can bring to employers, what do you think about that?

It would be useful as we often have to work across the UK, Northern Europe (Scandinavia) and Worldwide. There is some inter-office working; we usually work in Projects of 3-4 people.

I find that PhD students have improved skills over recent graduates, but fewer skills than someone who has been in industry for 3-4 years.

Employers consider project management to be a key skill, yet PhD students in our focus groups didn't really mention it. Do you think that this might have an impact on employees?

It is useful, in fact essential as a key part of what we do. New PhD students would not be expected to manage projects until they had been with us for three to four years, if they were already showing competency. They would progress more quickly than graduates.

Many employers say that they would like students to have commercial awareness. What do you think about this?

We don't really look for it. We like a mixture in a team, with perhaps some budget awareness. I do think that it is difficult for new graduates to perceive internal and external customers.

Do you think that there is a difference in the skill set of MSc v PhD students?

There is a difference in the level of maturity. An MSc is basically an undergraduate degree with one more year. PhDs are self-managed, they have improved skills. PhD recruits do the same level of work as graduates but progress faster. For the first six months they are very hands-on.

Employer Case Study 5

Sector: Oil and Gas

Setting the organisation in context

This company regularly recruits people with a range of post graduate qualifications and the company representative has direct recent experience of recruiting someone from a research background onto their management development scheme.

Which skills are particularly valuable?

For us analytical skills were noted as particularly relevant. They are desirable in all jobs, and to a high level, being an essential part of complex problem solving and an integral part of intellectual capacity.

Is this a skill researchers possess over and above graduates?

Definitely. PhDs /research requires complex problem solving and data analysis.

If a PhD was not a specific requirement for the post and you were given a choice between a taught postgraduate (masters) student and someone with a PhD, which would you choose?

Candidates with PhDs are often more isolated and so they don't possess the same level of interpersonal skills. I cannot stress the importance of these enough. I believe that universities have a responsibility to help with individual / personal development as well as the academic/research side. Employers must also have a part in this. It seems that although academic supervisors / managers recognise this they do not do anything about it. It's a difficult issue and there are no easy answers. I have had the same discussion, about the skills development of researchers with other universities.

What would be the main barriers for you in recruiting someone from a research background?

If an individual has been in academia for seven years (undergraduate course plus PhD) they are then "moulded" to academia. This will make it more difficult for them to compete with their peer group who have at least three years direct industrial experience. They can be simply too focused – not able to see the broader picture. Their project management skills can be very narrow – not enough exposure to broader / commercial issues and so lacking in substance.

We look hard at past behavioural evidence to ensure any candidate will have the best chance of integrating into our environment.

How would you go about recruiting someone with a research background?

We would use known professorial contacts in known universities alumni – and not just an alumni in a research position. Simply someone who knows how the university works and can point us in the right direction

What advice would you give to researchers who are looking to make a transition from university research to an industrial career?

We are looking for people who can prove their ability to communicate, to network, to work with a team, to present themselves and their work, to assess and take on the broader picture in project management terms.

We need solid evidence that you have taken yourself out of your lab / office, that you interact regularly with others, that you are able to work with a range of people both inside and outside the research environment. Active participation in conferences / networking or discussion groups /informal contacts with industry and what you do with your time outside your research generally are all important to us.

What could / should universities be doing to support researchers and in doing so, actively support the knowledge transfer agenda?

This is not all down to universities. There is a considerable onus on the individual themselves to take responsibility for assessing and broadening their skills base. But they do need to have the opportunities to broaden whether through activities or specific training. I feel it is very important that supervisors and professors support the holistic development of researchers. In the end this is likely to be beneficial to universities, researchers and industry.

Employer Case Study 6

Sector: Engineering – Water and Environmental

Setting the organisation in context

This organisation has different levels of local and global programmes. They are looking for graduates for specific disciplines and those with work experience are desirable.

Their parent company runs a graduate development programme which lasts for 2 years. The areas range from Human Resources, Quality, Health and Safety, Engineering and Environment, Marketing, Sales, training across the board.

The participants train for two years in their specific discipline area and training in some generic skills. Participants are from all different levels, Degree, Masters and PhD. It is a leadership programme, helping participants to become well-rounded managers. In the UK the programme has been running for three years.

Employers consider group work to be a key skill, yet PhD students in our focus groups didn't really mention it. Do you think that this might have an impact on employees?

In your PhD you do have to work alone and in a business your success does relate to group work. But if you have studied a PhD does not mean that you are good at group work.

Do you think that this should be something the Universities address?

I am part of the recruitment team and group work is part of every single job advert that I write, so I think that it is very important to businesses that people can work as a team. We have competency based interviews and we have nine key competencies, for example; teamwork, accountability, excellence and integrity, customer focus, empathy, flexibility and business acumen.

We recognise that business acumen is something that you develop while at work. We would like people to understand how businesses work but no more than that. You can't have that experience unless you have been in a business. We do encourage our graduates to spend some time developing this in their first year of work.

In terms of flexibility, one of the biggest shocks to the system is that working is nothing like studying. Especially when you have done a discipline specific degree, you focus on that so you don't have to be as adaptable to take in other aspects that might affect your study. When you are working you have to juggle so many other things at once. You have to be very adaptable and very focused."

What type of skills do you think that PhD students have?

- a depth of knowledge is incredible at that level
- an ability to set their own targets – the PhD is reliant on you setting your own targets and goals. The more you put into it, the more you get out of it – the truest example of that phrase
- confidence in their own ability – it is completely focused on you
- report writing
- communication skills – they have to work with a variety of people
- project management

Collaboration - working with industry - is something that employers prize, but PhD students don't think that they have good relationships with industry. How do you think that we can overcome these barriers?

Something that is very important is a university's relationship between business and industry. Businesses could expose themselves to a university. A lot of careers fairs are not pitched at PhD level, recruiters are looking for 'fresh graduates'.

When recruiting people have you noticed a difference between those who have work experience and those who haven't?

There is a difference in responses in competency-based questions – makes you come across as more experienced with a richer experience. It has an impact on a competency interview.

What do you think we could do to help you get your hands on the right students?

We go and do company presentations when we go into universities. These can be quite beneficial and site visits when students come on site. If we can raise our profile then we can arrange to invite students to our sites.

PhD students state that international collaboration is a real skill that they can bring to employers, what do you think about that?

It depends on the nature of the business because one of businesses that recruit for our graduate programme considers that to be the most important skill, whereas our business is very locally focused.

How do you think that PhD students could market themselves?

A popular misconception is that they are too 'academic.' I was recruiting recently and the person I was working with said of one candidate that the person with PhD with work experience 'looks very academic but should interview them anyway.' You can have work experience but sometimes the PhD drowns it out.

What advice would you give to employers who were concerned about recruiting PhD students / graduates?

I can't comprehend why employers wouldn't consider them because they are the ones with the most amount of knowledge and need least amount of support. I think that the concern is that they might be institutionalised but Medics are trained for five years in a university and they aren't institutionalised.

Employer Case Study 7

Sector: Health

Setting the organisation in context

This organisation has a history of successful recruitment at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Junior researchers have been recruited to management as well as technical posts.

Does your organisation actively recruit people with a research background?

We look specifically at a set of competencies – these are well documented and easily accessible. We do not specify a particular background – we look for applicants who can relate real life experiences to the roles we offer. We believe that recruiting to competencies supports our equality of access ethos.

In your experience which particular skills can researchers offer?

They have the ability to be precise and abbreviate. The skill of condensing information correlates well to their research experience. Skills of interpreting information and being able to set things in context feature highly. In the PhD graduates I've recruited I've observed their ability to take on research based assignments essential for professional qualifications and integrate these into their daily management role. Researchers have to manage tight and often conflicting deadlines. They have to manage complex relationships (supervisors / senior staff) and often need teaching / tutoring skills. There's a lot in there but I think sometimes they don't realise that this is what recruiters look for.

What would you see as the barriers they can encounter in applying for work outside academic research?

A stereotype of researchers exists "the lone working, introverted academic". Similarly the perception, in some circles, that "researching isn't real work". Researchers need to get beyond that and to do so they need to be able to learn and use a different language when presenting themselves outside academia. Researchers at any stage can often be lacking in these necessary "translation" skills. They need to be able to interpret requirements and match those to what they've done. Within our organisation we are very used to dealing with extremely highly qualified people so we have a culture of understanding of and respect for academic qualifications.

We are very positive about what people with a research background have to offer and would not question their motivation in coming to us after doing a PhD more than if they had done any other qualification.

Can you expand on "research in university not seen as real work"?

What we see as added value to our organisation is not the case for all employers. Stereotyping of researchers by employers can be attributed to organisational culture or the personal background and experience of the individual recruiter. Organisational culture is very important when it comes to perceptions of recruiting different people. I believe that a much greater variety of people are taking PhDs these days – for reasons other than a decision to have an academic career. The PhDs I've recruited are all capable of being very senior managers within our organisation. The jobs involve significant interaction with other people as well as the ability to influence rather than manage, to develop and build good relationships and to deliver an agenda. None of the PhDs I have taken on were

management based but they all scored highly on the competencies we sought. The mindset of “research isn’t real work” is simply not true.

What support can universities realistically give?

The academic view of what a researcher is there for can be too isolationist. Researchers have to look at what they are doing (career wise) next and professors should recognise this. Researchers (junior and experienced) are essential to a university but I believe that you are more able to encourage people into research if they know they have a positive route out. If you want to dilute the quality of people coming into research you could label it “dead end job” and only attract people who can’t do anything else. It’s important to look for people who want to develop. So the question is, what are the opportunities for researchers to develop in other ways as well as research whilst in a research job? Sometimes the deep set, long held beliefs within universities about what a researcher is, are unhelpful to everyone involved.

Any ideas or parallels relating to the way forward?

Looking at my personal experience in the Services – they invested heavily in training whilst I was in post and equally heavily in what they termed “resettlement”. The extensive management skills I had developed in the Services were simply not recognised externally until I was able to translate them into words that were meaningful to a prospective recruiter. I was taught how to translate the person spec for a job into service language and then the answer back into commercial speak.

Getting input from other people who have made the transition successfully can be very helpful.

I would have thought that a specialist service for researchers could be very appropriate.

Final words for universities?

Consider the longer term issue for the individuals. This is not about social responsibility, it’s about the risk of research populated by the “wrong” sort of person. There is competition for good people and universities need to look at what they can offer them beyond two years and support them in developing a marketable skills set. This will make them more valuable to the university as well.

For researchers?

You must make an effort to understand the language of external organisations and translate what you have done into that language. Don’t try to be over ambitious with your starting point outside academic research. Focus on a viable start point and let your skills speak for themselves once you are in.

Employer Case Study 8

Sector: Engineering and Construction

Setting the organisation in context

This company does not recruit any post-graduate students other than MEng students. They have very specific requirements for their recruits and are unwavering in this. PhDs students, they feel would not add value to their organisation for their type of work. It is preferred that the students come through with the basic skills required and the company will train them with their own requirements.

What is it about MEng students are you particularly looking for?

We carry out competency-based interviews. We are looking for skills of communication, planning and organisation, decision-making, leadership potential, team working, problem analysis, flexibility, tolerance of stress and performance under pressure. We want our recruits to be able to delegate and develop others plus have job motivation.

In an interview we ask candidates about “softer transferable skills.” We ask them to give an example of the skill and how it might be applied.

How do you recruit?

Pre-interview candidates send in their CVs where we expect them to list a set of skills against their criteria – we do not ask them to fill in an on-line application form.

We recruit students through Careers Services, Graduate Publications and Employer Visits. Currently we target Leeds; Sheffield; Manchester; Nottingham; Birmingham; Imperial; UCL; Brunel; South Bank.

Why do you think that your company does not recruit other post-graduate students?

We have very few opportunities for post-graduate students. We want recruits who are fresh and raw. We teach them what we want them to know.

We recruit MEng students because we need to comply with our Chartership. They also receive on the job training – otherwise we’d be happy with bachelors.

What type of skills do you think that a PhD student might bring to a job?

Very academic skills – we wouldn’t use PhDs. I am sure that they have good skills but as an organisation, we wouldn’t value them.

During our focus groups the PhD students stated that they thought a useful skill they had is the ability to work in cross-cultural teams, do you think this would be important?

No, teams are important because we work in project teams of up to 400 people. We find that work experience is what they need.

Do you think that universities could do more to help students to prepare post-graduate students for employment?

Yes, tell them to read the website to find out what a company does and find out how to apply. On the whole universities do a good job.

Many employers say that they would like students to have commercial awareness. What do you think about this?

Since recruiting MEng students we have found that skills development has heightened their awareness. It gives people high expectations, but they have to understand that they have to do the donkey work too. They have a perception of fast-tracking that means that will be running a project. Until they are chartered, they wouldn't be running a project.

If it weren't for the Institute, we would see a three year degree enough to work with. It would have originally been a hands-on engineering apprenticeship."

We expect recruits to have a degree, numeracy and competencies for internal potential and the personality for the organisation. We also give them two years training in personal development and for professional accreditation.

Employer Case Study 9

Sector: International Fast Moving Consumer Goods

Setting the organisation in context

The respondent for this interview joined on a technology graduate scheme with a post graduate qualification. Her post is technical rather than recruitment focused.

Is there a particular type of person that would be particularly appropriate for a technical scheme with your organisation?

The scheme really is open to everyone. It is about the skills you have and different roles require different skills. There is no reason why people with a research background should not have the general skills required which may include project management, team working and also the desire to understand a business and how R & D fits within that.

Relevant to your organisation - what might be the particular skills people with a research background have to offer?

- Focus
- Often analytical
- Interest in and capability with detail
- How to identify facts and provide evidence
- How to plan and deliver a research project

What could be the potential barriers to a move from H.E research to industry?

The time scales in industry can be faster.

Possibly a lack of exposure to different types of management skills - although there is no reason why people may not possess or be in a position to develop these.

Potentially a lack of understanding about the practical application of academic knowledge.

Does your organisation regularly recruit people into research posts?

Yes, there is ongoing recruitment into research. We would use a range of media to advertise these (papers / web / scientific journals).

Would a taught MSc post graduate be more appropriate to your organisation than someone with a PhD?

This would depend entirely on the role and on the skills of the individual.

Do you feel that university researchers would do best to stay with what they do best i.e. university research?

This really depends on the skills they have been able to develop through their work in the university and the appropriateness of those skills to the role in industry.

It is easy to stay with what you know – i.e. in an academic environment, however, there are some interesting opportunities in business if you are looking for a different challenge.

Do you feel that universities have a responsibility to help researchers develop a range of skills to make transition into industry easier?

From my point of view broadening skills can be beneficial but it could also be seen as losing research focus. It also depends on how the university wants to be seen externally. Is

it to develop and provide H.E. based research expertise or is it to prepare people to move from one work environment into another? This has to be about what the university's mission is and there is no "best route". Universities should be clear from the outset what their training is geared to so that individuals give some thought to future career plans and whether certain universities are therefore better suited to their needs.

What would you recommend to researchers wanting to move from H.E. into industry?

Think about the type of role you are looking for. If a job is advertised, look hard at what the job requires and think about what you have to offer. What are your competencies and those required for the role.

When looking into a particular organisation it is unlikely that any single person in an organisation has all the recruitment answers. If you are starting from scratch you need to identify the type of role you are looking for. From here, identify specific people in the organisation who may know more about the roles you are interested in, i.e. identify particular research sites and then target people who are specifically involved in recruitment.

What about skills / personal development whilst in their present role?

People should try to make the most of opportunities they have and create opportunities to develop skills which may help them in their future career.

In my opinion people should try to get involved in other activities above and beyond the research role to give individual breadth.

Finally, take individual responsibility for your own development. Do yourself a favour and figure out what you get a buzz from – what gets you out of bed in the morning? Then seek a job that will fulfil your expectations – that way you are more likely to put more into (and hence get more out of) your role.

Final observations?

Research isn't all about having your head in a petri dish. People with research skills are needed to make big business. If applying your knowledge whilst working as part of a multi-disciplinary team excites you, then perhaps you should think about what else your studies prepared you for.

Employer Case Study 10

Sector: Nuclear Power

Setting the organisation in context

This organisation does not differentiate between graduates and post-graduates when they are recruiting for graduate posts. As long as a candidate fulfils the basic criteria, they could be recruited for a job. Other parts of the company may sometimes require more specific technicalities.

How do you recruit?

Any candidate must have a 2:1 for the Business and Commercial Sector and a 2:2 for Engineering and Science.

The process has four stages

- An on-line application covering three competency areas: delivery for customers; self-confidence; analytical thinking.
- An on-line Aptitude Test: general verbal; numerical
- A telephone interview based on competencies: drive and energy; analytical thinking; team working; delivery for customers; self-confidence.
- An assessment Centre – 1.5 days: group work; presentations; fact finding and repeat the Aptitude Test (under invigilation)

We recruit through the internet, milk rounds, Times Top 100 publication and target 10 universities in the North as that is where the majority of vacancies are.

Are work placements a part of the recruitment process?

We run a work placement programme. In the past recruitment for this has been somewhat ad hoc, using students who were relatives, friends etc. For the last two years we have had a policy whereby placement students go through the same procedure as those applying for jobs apart from the assessment centre. However, before leaving the placement, they go through the assessment centre if recommended and can often return to university with a job offer on graduation.

How is training structured within your organisation?

We run a two year development programme with different aspects. There is the corporate aspect with soft skills and behaviours, which every graduate undergoes. Then for some recruits there is the Business Group element with a business skills programme. There is also the professional element which is co-ordinated through disciplines to help employees gain chartership.

What skills do you think PhD students would bring to a job?

We don't differentiate between graduates and post graduates, but I suppose that they (post graduates) would have more technical ability. I also think that they would have, in general, more maturity being able to translate what they've learnt into practical things, to be able to apply it. That is something that the younger ones cannot do. They don't understand the skills that they have.

Students can be very, very technically competent but not have the basic skills. For example they don't understand time management, they can't express it, evidence it.

Is that all students? For example do you see a difference in students from different disciplines?

No, no difference, and the split between the students who are aware and aren't, is about 50-50. When I first started doing this job about 12 months ago I had it in my head that Business Studies students would be better able to market themselves at interview, but they

aren't. I do wonder whether it makes a difference if they have visited their careers centre, or had the nous to do it.

During our focus groups the PhD students stated that they thought a useful skill they had is the ability to work in cross-cultural teams, do you think this would be important?

It would be of value if they could relate it to the team working question. We had a candidate who actually gave that as an example of team working – a successful candidate.

Some employers mentioned project management as an important skill, the students didn't mention it. What are your thoughts on this?

We think that it is very, very important especially for engineering. Project management is how our company works. All the reactors we look after or decommission are different, so each one is a different project. This is a very important skill; our employees often move teams to work on different projects.

Many employers say that they would like students to have commercial awareness. What do you understand by commercial awareness?

I think it is having an understanding of the customer: Understanding that we have different types of customer, internal and external. Also an understanding that we haven't got unlimited funding, we have to stick to budgets. And finally an understanding of relationships between supply and demand. They don't always understand how an organisation like ours determines how we do things; the inter-relationships between us and government bodies.

How do you think that universities can help students to develop these understandings?

[We had previously spoken about Grad schools and Roberts funding for training and the use of situational exercises]

I think that you could run more of those situational exercises, specifically targeted at commercial awareness skills.

6.2 SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Those employers who use competency-based interviews tend to employ people from a wide range of backgrounds and rely on their processes to recruit the right person for the job - whatever that background is.
- Entry points into organisations for junior or experienced researchers are much less visible than for undergraduates for whom there tend to be set timescales, schemes or patterns. Similarly, employers who would actively like to recruit employees with a PhD often do not know how to gain access to them.
- Some employers see the level of maturity offered by a PhD student or Post Doc. to be a real advantage in the external workplace.
- The majority of those employers who do not recruit PhD students or Post Docs are unable to list their skills. Even those who did try to list the skills a PhD student might develop were unable to do this comprehensively.
- The employers who said that they did employ post-graduates made very positive comments about them as employees.
- Whilst respondents stated that they thought project management skills very important, they often do not identify a PhD as a project.
- Generally employer respondents seem to feel that people emerging, at whatever stage, from H.E. have a lack of commercial awareness.
- Researchers do not appear to articulate their personal skills well. Employers want to be talked to in 'their' language.
- Closer working between Universities and employers, developing projects and developing relationships is seen as desirable and to potential mutual benefit.
- The longer someone stays in research in H.E., with little or no evidence of industrial collaboration, the more employers worry that they will be unable to make the transition.
- Researchers' experience in H.E. is often seen as 'narrow'. Employers state that they want people who are not just lab based and who can see the broader picture.
- Where asked, employers in this research feel that universities should whole heartedly support the holistic development of researchers – this is seen as ultimately to everyone's benefit.
- Several employers stressed that they were happy to be contacted by individual researchers (not simply research supervisors or senior staff) with a view to establishing closer working relationships, project partnerships or, indeed, discussing individual career development.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the spirit of practitioner research this section seeks to focus on the key challenges facing university management, individual researchers and external employers, and to propose ways of tackling them. Whilst these are written with The University of Leeds in mind as the major investor, these suggestions are likely to have currency in any institution which has a strong research base, a large researcher cohort and extensive connections to external employers. None of the recommendations which follow preclude each individual researcher's responsibility for managing and developing his or her own career. This is essential - even with excellent support from other parties.

Challenge 1: Reposition research as a dynamic career proposition with excellent internal (within H.E.) and external career development potential.

- . In order to help researchers become more aware both of what is required of them, and what they can expect in the commercial environment, more contact should be encouraged. Tailored open days or short placements specifically for researchers could be organised. Advocates for this could be investigated by the initial perceptions questionnaires which identified those employers who may be more open to piloting this. It could also be emphasised that time spent in industry may actually prove useful for researchers to resell themselves as experts or lecturers within academia.
- Research needs to be repositioned as a dynamic career, leading to a number of different opportunities within and outside H.E. The view of H.E. research as a stagnating road to nowhere (short term contracts/no academic jobs, no way out to industry) is immensely de-motivating, perpetuates employers' perceived stereotypes and does a great disservice to the substantial bank of talent we have in researchers. The "inclusive" - rather than "expert with novice" - role of the supervisor is key here, as is the integration of a forward looking, broad spectrum, knowledge transfer ethos. More events celebrating success, individual or collaborative projects, or H.E. research staff now working successfully in industry, commerce or spin outs can help. More openness in discussing career paths could be helpfully encouraged.
- It could be emphasised to researchers that a continual assessment of career path could lead to taking advantage of opportunities for development - either as they arise, or indeed to create them whilst in post. Being a member of a university has some tremendous advantages in terms of opening doors (ie conferences / collaborations) that may not be accessible if employed externally.

Challenge 2: Positively combat stereotypes – those held by external employers relating to researchers, and the university culture, and vice versa.

- This report seems to indicate there are ways that these negative stereotypes can be tackled in the recruitment process. Where the candidate maybe viewed by those at interview stage as 'overqualified' or 'over specialised' there maybe a need to actually play down the academic attributes and stress other personal skills such as work experience (vital for many employers) or project management and other extra curricular skills that researchers possess. Converting previous experience into team working scenarios that can be understood by business is often simply be a question of language. For example, researchers never really leave their work – they are constantly thinking of ideas and having to document them. This can be re-framed as an intense commitment to task completion and an ability to work flexibly. A possible

'jargon buster' session by business and employers could help researchers to rethink how they are presenting themselves to an external market.

- Employers are still making assumptions based on no direct experience of recruitment of, or any dealings with postgraduates and researchers. Even employers who are extremely familiar with the undergraduate recruitment market often have little or no grasp of what a current day researcher is. Increased understanding, and ideally first hand experience, of researchers' skills, values, aspirations, the demands of the job – would help significantly. Basically universities are now operating in a new competitive market, where delivery of a marketable product is one of the key aims. Secondments, visits, exchanges, industrial open days, joint talks, collaborations are all critical to mutual understanding. Again, knowledge transfer activities have an important role here.
- A significant number of employers that responded (over 50%) stated that they would not know how to go about recruiting senior researchers – or indeed what they have to offer. Given that the need to seek external employment is a reality for a significant percentage of researchers, we could more proactively help researchers to market themselves. Whilst this may be an anathema to some, in fact what we are marketing is the potential broader value of the university and its products. Some sort of education programme may be necessary to let employers know that this body of people exists and that they may have skills and experience that could be invaluable to their organisation..
- Many of the qualities which are essential to success in research in H.E. also directly translate into highly desirable qualities for success outside H.E., so it is important not to feel that the focus is only on combating stereotypes in order to be successful in the external employment market. For example one person remarked that the most successful researchers were those that were the 'most entrepreneurial' and were the best at 'crystal ball gazing' to work out the upcoming trends in research. These seem ideal qualities for people wishing to start their own business – possibly in a university spin out.
- Currently most organisations are recruiting researchers through a myriad of routes dependent on their own experience. If this is the case there seems to be an opportunity to deploy an individual/s in a kind of 'Key Accounts' role. They could act as a facilitator for conversations between departments This individual/s would represent a kind of on-site representative for certain major accounts, be a central point of contact for business needs - developing closer relationships with the organisation and identifying specialist individuals who may fit the organisational requirements.

Challenge 3: Embed consistency in supervisory/managerial approaches to supporting researchers' career development

- This report reinforces what seems to be an important need to stress the building and exploitation of networks both within and outside the university. Particularly helpful and important is be the relationship between the researcher and their supervisor / manager as they are often in a unique position of having both 'active' contacts with commercial organisations and understanding the full breadth of the researcher's abilities. Supervisors/managers can effectively build good industry links, which is precisely what employers say they want and generate a more effective knowledge transfer culture around them. The university culture and supportive training is essential to this – as is the cascade down to researchers who are the supervisors of the future. Relationships between researchers and supervisors can benefit from additional training and support i.e. mentoring,

coaching, building networks. This requires openness to the idea that additional training, particularly for supervisors, is helpful and positive and not an admission of failure or incompetence.

- Supervisors/managers of researchers have an extremely important role to play. They need to be positive, proactive, broad and outward looking, communicative, sharing and, in particular, supportive of and involved in the personal development of their staff. This is a big task for a person who is likely to be in that role as a result of years of excellence in their particular academic field and not as a result of a predisposition for people management. Universities have a major role here in ensuring that training for this vital role is not only supported but made a very visible part of the role – right from the outset – whether that is recruitment to the post or internal agreement of acceptance of this responsibility.

Challenge 4: Generate mutual understanding and trust between University departments and external employers

- It should be noted that most of the positive attributes of researchers tend to be stated by people who have actually had previous success in employing them. For those that don't there is a clear an overhanging stereotype that many who have been in academia for long periods need help to combat. The reluctance to change recruitment approaches may be understandable. In law for example, training one individual can cost up to £90,000. To aid a change in views it may help to develop some kind of advocacy system whereby those employers that are vociferous in their appraisal of such people could be cultivated and invited to share their experiences with more cynical , harder to convince employers – perhaps establishing a focus group where both advocates and 'hard to convince' are engaged.
- Views about researchers vary enormously even within individual organisations. Establishing and nurturing good relationships with key contacts is vital. Neighbouring departments in industry can have extremely different views. Where stereotypes exist (often based on no practical experience of recruiting or working with researchers) should be challenged – by the employers themselves, and by universities. Mutual understanding and respect is the key. Neither party is 'better' than the other. Employers should move on from the fallacy that research in the university is an 'easy option', universities should abandon the myth that moving on from 'pure academic' research is somehow 'selling out'.
- More opportunities to speak openly about individual / group aims and aspirations would help. Perhaps more employers could be involved in open, university forums, discussion groups, strategy teams and vice versa? In fact those employers falling into the "positive" camp were very keen to be approached in this way – with a view to discussions relating to collaborative projects or career planning or both. Tellingly, both this project, and my previous extensive work with researchers has identified the direct approach as something researchers can be both unsure of and uncomfortable with. Arguably, this discomfort could reflect their existing departmental culture which in turn, has potentially a very negative impact on the filtering through of a more open Knowledge Transfer / Enterprise culture.

Challenge 5: Enhance integration, rather than isolation, of researchers

- The isolation of PhD students may be addressed by establishing, and enhancing where they exist, regular forums or discussion groups, involving more senior researchers and indeed PhD graduates / Post Docs who are now working outside H.E.. This could help in transferring information with regards to opportunities for further training and discussions about skills and personal development. This

function could also be fulfilled by a web site specifically for PhDs allowing people to communicate and share experience including case studies and other material that may help remove some of the isolation and facilitate the sharing of information on employer forums/training etc. It could also be used as a resource for people considering undertaking a PhD or research at the University enabling people to explore the nature and culture of particular departments to see whether they would be a suitable fit.

- Researchers need to be proactive in networking, establishing contacts, using existing resources, i.e. recruitment fairs, employer presentations, conferences. In short, they need to work on generating potential opportunities. This applies whether their career path is within or outside H.E. Much more support for development of networking skills is required and this could be developed through workshops, individual coaching by successful 'networkers' in their departments.
- Researchers should try, and be supported in their efforts, to get involved at departmental level – to expand their skills outside the parameters of their PhD or research. To get the "broader view" which is desirable for career progression both internally and externally, one needs first to develop understanding. This is impossible if the researcher exists in a vacuum of anything except research. Integration into and contribution to departmental decision making procedures is essential if they are to position themselves for a successful university based research career. The culture of the department and the support of senior academics / managers therein is critical to this.

Challenge 6: Establish systems for continuity post designated Roberts' Skills Training Funds

- Individual responsibility for a personal training budget (enabling researchers to undertake development programs of their own choice) may encourage people to be more proactive in their own development.
- Establishing the culture of 'training for mutual benefit' is essential. It relies on continual reinforcement of knowledge transfer benefits whilst also firmly repositioning research as a dynamic career in its own right or as leading to other opportunities. The holistic skills training on which this is based should be embedded and integrated so it becomes 'business as usual'. It is heavily reliant on the University's approach to the recruitment, training and support of all staff who have to deliver to a complex range of individual requirements as well as their own academic / research objectives.
- Employers need to be encouraged to feel that they not only have something to offer but that they do, in fact, have a responsibility to engage with universities more creatively. There appears to be a reluctance in some sectors to abandon the notion that universities are 'ivory towers' - that they do not understand the pressing demands of modern commercial life, and that university researchers are often the embodiment of this. University staff could helpfully move external employers on from this stance where necessary and an excellent way to approach this is through more effective use of successful alumni who have moved on from an H.E. based research background.

7.1 CLOSING REMARKS

It will be apparent to even the most casual reader that the evidence, conclusions and recommendations to this project are much broader than the original premise which was to elicit employers' perceptions with regard to recruiting people with a research background. It was clear before even commencing this project that one of the major issues is how all the elements are inextricably linked. It is what makes the dynamic interesting and what makes the challenge complex.

There are many, many good reasons why we should continue to build on the work we are currently doing to support our researchers.

At the Fourth UK GRAD conference ("Profiting from Postgraduate Talent: 13th September 2005), Professor Sir Gareth Roberts quoted Aristotle:

"It is difficult, if not impossible, to engage in noble enterprises without money to spend on them". As a total of around £20m is being distributed in 2005 / 06 for postgraduate research student and post doc. training we cannot claim to be short of funds for this endeavour

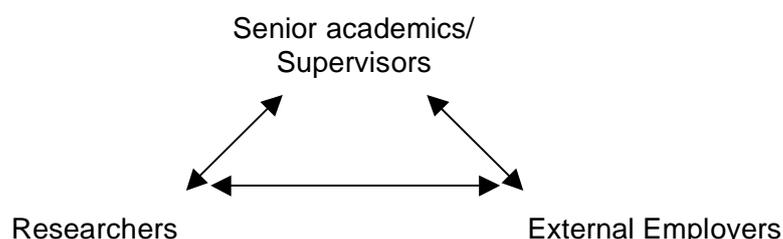
Then there is the newly established national working group which will be updating the 1996 Concordat and producing a Code of Practice for researchers, to which universities will be held.

There is also the next RAE in 07/08 which will have, in Professor Roberts' words "a much stricter approach to people issues" including assessment of early career researchers. The UK GRAD conference summary stated "the important theme of honesty in the careers advice we give to doctoral and post doctoral researchers was reiterated. Academia needs to develop a culture that gives parity of status to career choices within and outside the sector; leaving academia must not be viewed as failure."

We even have to battle with the media's ongoing misconception of "ivory towers" and academics divorced from reality "They (the retailers) were so desperate they hired an academic to give them insights into why the shoplifters were so successful" Dispatches, Channel 4, Thursday 15th September.

But most compelling of all are surely the enormous benefits to be had by all parties – university supervisors / managers, individual researchers, external employers if we can communicate effectively. Employers generally want to be positive and involved with universities and researchers. They want more involvement in fact. Universities want knowledge transfer to work and develop; they want innovation and excellence. Researchers want to look at their research "career" as just that – dynamic, supported and full of potential. There needs to be common ground for the definition and value of 'commercial awareness' and the critical role that knowledge transfer has in this cannot be stressed enough.

We must continue to talk to each other – as openly and as frequently as possible. We are in a very good position, at The University of Leeds and within H.E generally, to reinforce and enhance the premium on our researchers. Many of these will become the employers whose perceptions are likely to be influential in the future. Many of them will become the senior supervisors and managers within H.E. whose approaches will inform future cohorts of researchers. A 'Communication Triangle' is the key.



Equally important is the role that professional “enablers” (ie Careers Centre staff, departmental champions, Staff Development Units) have in supporting this triangle and working with each part of it – individually and as a whole.

Our values at The University of Leeds, stated in our Strategy are

- to create, advance and disseminate knowledge
- develop outstanding graduates and scholars
- to make a major impact upon global society

Ensuring openness, understanding and mutual respect and taking steps into unfamiliar – even unknown – areas, is all part of delivering to those values. Each individual member of the University is a potential employer (within or outside H.E.) of the future and their perceptions and realities are vital to the success of the educational system in a competitive global marketplace.

8.0 Bibliography

This list gives a number of the web based resources supporting the training and development of researchers.

www.hefce.ac.uk/

www.heacademy.ac.uk

www.hesda.org.uk

www.shef.ac.uk/~gmpcrs/CRS_guide.pdf

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/GRADskills/about_skills.php

www.grad.ac.uk

www.careerweb.leeds.ac.uk/academics

www.leeds.ac.uk/sddu/gts

Conferences attended by C. Souter in 2005:

Association of Graduate Recruiters Annual Conference, 11th & 12th July

UK GRAD 4th Annual Conference "Profiting from Postgraduate Talent" 14th September 2005

9.0 APPENDICES

- 1. List of external employer contributors**
- 2. EMPRESS Employer contact letter**
- 3. OST/DTI funded transition case studies project, completed 2001**

Appendix 1: List of external employer contributors

Accenture	RAF North East
Addleshaw Goddard	Richards Butler
Allen & Overy	Samworth Brothers
Berwin Leighton Paisner	Shell
British Nuclear Group	Simmons & Simmons
Bullen Consultants	South Yorkshire Police
Chase Recruitment – Medical Sales	Sport Lived Ltd
Chevron Texaco	TNS Market Research
Corus	Unilever
Creda	Web Translations
Deloitte & Touche	Wragg & Co LLP
DLA Piper Rudnick, Gray Cary	WSP Environmental
Earth Tech UK	
Enterprise Rent a Car	
Environment Agency	
Exxon Mobil	
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	
Hammonds	
HSBC	
IGEN Ltd	
Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators	
Irwin Mitchell	
JP Morgan	
Kerry Group plc	
Logica CMG	
Lovells	
Majestic Wine Warehouse	
Marchel Parkman	
McCain Foods	
Mercer Human Resource Consulting	
MW Kellogg Limited	
NHS	
Norton Rose	
Probos Promotions Ltd	

Appendix 2: EMPRESS Employer Contact Letter

Employers' Perceptions of recruiting Research Staff and Students (EMPRESS) Project

Dear

As an employer with a strong association with the University of Leeds, and particularly the Careers Centre, we are seeking your help to complete a project regarding employers' perceptions of recruiting people from a research background. We are interested in your views - whether or not you have had experience of recruiting researchers in the past.

At the University of Leeds we have more than 3500 researchers. Whilst for many their focus is on continuing work in a university environment, there is also significant interest in external commercial or industrial careers.

Your responses will be used to inform research staff and students to help them make sensible choices, to identify barriers and opportunities and to continue to build mutual understanding between Higher Education and employers.

In order to ensure that we capture your data fully and accurately I would like to follow up this questionnaire with a one to one conversation, by telephone and/or face to face, by myself or one of my colleagues.

If you do not feel you are the best person to respond but know someone that is, please do pass this to them. In order for the project to remain on schedule please can you return the completed questionnaire to me as soon as possible.

I do hope you can help with this and look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.

With best wishes

Clair Souter
EMPRESS Project Manager
Assistant Director, The University of Leeds Careers Centre

Appendix 3:

OST/DTI funded Transition Case Studies Project, completed 2001. Project Manager / Researcher: Clair Souter

The ten case studies included here tracked people who made the transition from research in H.E. to a business related or other post outside H.E.

CASE STUDY 1

After completing a PhD in Computing, S held two research contracts over a period of two and a half years before moving into his current job as a research scientist with a major electronics firm.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

After my PhD I stayed at university to try out contract research work as a possible long term career choice however the best the department could offer me was a 6 – 9 month extension to my 18-month contract. I was looking for more stability and options outside academia seemed to offer more permanence, a better salary and the opportunity for career progression. I wanted to really get stuck into a proper career path with the associated responsibilities and rewards.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

Initially I had hoped to stay roughly within my research field but this did not happen so I knew I would carry little of my expertise across. I did have a concern about not using my specific subject knowledge but I was confident about the general transferability of my skills – particularly computer programming and research methodology that apply in many situations.

Coping with the transition

I'd started to think about what might come next quite soon into the first research contract having seen other people having to move from one contract to the next. What happened was, the contract would start, you'd get into it, then you'd have to start looking for the next contract. The lack of security within the university was a strong motivator for me to move. I used the Careers Service (including attending focused sessions for contract research staff on CV and interview skills), newspapers, trade magazines, the internet and recruitment agencies to help identify vacancies. I found the transition to be lonely – but it got better. Leaving friends and family was difficult and I had to get used to having less freedom. I'd enjoyed the relaxed, friendly environment and good social life at the university. In terms of integrating into the new work environment, on a personal level there were no problems (good interpersonal skills were pretty important to smooth the way). However, it took several months before I felt I was doing anything useful.

The application and interview process

I needed both a CV and an application form for the jobs I targeted. The university CV course was very helpful for this. I would encourage people to identify exactly what the job is and try to match their CV / application form accordingly. For the job I am now in a fairly broad CV was sufficient as they took me on as a research person and then allocated me to a project. The interviews for different jobs were very mixed so I never knew what to expect. Some were heavily technical, others completely non-technical, which seemed strange for I.T. jobs. When asked why I wanted to move out of academia I said that I wanted to do something 'more real' and that would actually be useful to someone rather than research for the sake of it. The whole process was a lot more enjoyable than I expected. I felt filled with confidence and raring to go. The 'real world' isn't so bad!

Your current job and future plans

My current job involves developing high-end set top boxes for next generation digital TV and embedded software development. I really enjoy bringing all the bits together from the various project partners – very much what I enjoyed in my university project research. There is still the issue of 'will it ever get used' and I do a lot of demos. Working for a customer brings an increased commercial emphasis – things have to work! I don't write papers but I do write documentation. Typical tasks in my working day (I have a nominal 37 hour week) might include software development, systems design, demonstrations (sometimes up to 5 a day), team planning, technical meetings, customer handling, co-ordinating other groups (internationally), networking and internet browsing. I get to play around with a lot of interesting software! I work flexitime and find I have more free time now than I did at university – work outside academia is **not** 'harder'. Part of my work at university that I enjoyed was the teaching and I find I can use those pastoral, mentoring skills in my present work. Generally I have a much clearer sense of direction, though my current job can be frustrating. I do miss the pure research – the freedom to try really new things – and the social side of the university, especially football! I would re-enter the university sector for the challenge of doing something really new and I think I'd be better at it after a period in industry. Taking a salary cut would be painful and the issue of stability / security would still be there. In the meantime I have another job move on the cards – hopefully to a role with more responsibility, still outside academia.

Hints and Tips

- Don't move because of perceived lack of opportunities in academia. You need to try even harder to find them than other jobs but they do exist.
- Be sure of what you want and make sure your new job provides it.
- Consider trying to obtain extra business qualifications (if you don't already have them).
- Search on the www for vacancies and always get as much information about a company as you can before interview.
- Look through trade papers and magazines to help identify sector specific recruitment agencies and web sites.

CASE STUDY 2

After completing a postgraduate diploma in European Studies followed by an MSc in Entrepreneurial Studies, L held one research contract for one year before moving to her current job as a marketing manager for a European industrial supplies company.

What prompted you to consider options out side academia?

My contract was coming to an end so I needed to consider a range of options – in and out of academia. The idea of more job security really appealed – most of the companies I looked at did not work on just yearly contracts. I wanted to move into a job with prospects.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

I had developed various skills – in particular negotiation and communication – through my contract research work – and looked forward to applying these in a different environment. The transfer of my knowledge I saw as a positive challenge. In the event, the main skills I am now using are mathematical pricing and analysing data, as well as communication and linguistic skills.

Coping with the transition

It took me a few months to make the transition – a time consuming process involving applications and time off for interviews. I looked for vacancies in newspapers, on the internet and through agencies, plus I used the university Careers Service and the vacancy bulletins they produced. My main concerns were about being unemployed and forced into accepting call centre work (something I could easily do because of my linguistic skills). Overall the whole process was challenging but I was able to integrate into my new work environment very quickly.

The application and interview process

The jobs I applied for required either a CV or an application form and my interviews were mainly skilled based. Actually I found that the business interviews were less pressured with a more laid back approach compared with the intensive academic panel set up. I wasn't asked why I wanted to move out of academia. Generally I was pleased to be moving on and felt positive about things.

Your current job and future plans

In my academic contract I really enjoyed liaising with people and now meeting customers is still the most enjoyable aspect of my work. The work environment I'm in is faster moving and dynamic and I am working with people mainly with industrial backgrounds. I still use my writing skills extensively (production of brochures and pamphlets), and my understanding of the marketing process is invaluable. Not using reference and textbooks to back up my knowledge is quite a challenge and I do miss the library being on hand! My current work environment is much more free, much less 'ivory tower' and I see my progression over the next few years in terms of gaining status and taking on extra responsibilities within the company. I believe there is more room for

promotion within the business sector and have not maintained my academic contacts as I would not seek to re-enter academia.

Hints and Tips

- Be flexible. Look at what the different environments (university and business) have to offer. Weigh up the pros and cons for you.
- Be open minded and prepared to try different things in order to build a range of skills that will make you more marketable.

CASE STUDY 3

After completing a PhD in Maths, A held two research contracts over a period of four years before moving to work as a software engineer for a growing consultancy and product supply firm, based in the south of England.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

It is very difficult to get a lectureship in pure maths and the research area I was in was not really what I wanted. Although the work environment was relaxed with flexible hours, I would like to have spent more time working with others. Getting experience outside academia seemed a good way to develop commercial programming skills, and to achieve a better salary!

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

I was confident that I would be able to apply myself well to technical jobs provided they were interesting enough. Whilst my general maths and computer science knowledge were useful, I realised that I needed to target a company prepared to train me. My main concern was about being bored at the job or being in an unpleasant working environment. However, I knew about the company through a personal recommendation and they came across well in my interviews.

Coping with the transition

I found this job through an employment agency who were very good in terms of time and passing feedback to the company. Geographically moving wasn't difficult though it has taken a while to settle in. Everybody is easy to get on with and people have been ready to help. Although the transition process is tiring I feel very happy about my job and the company are giving me time to get up to speed.

The application and interview process

I had two interviews for my current job. The first interview was mainly technical and I had to work through two technical problems whilst guided by my two interviewers. The second interview was with the company owner and focused more on what I think of as Personnel (skills and motivation) questions. The technical problem solving questions were very different from an academic interview. I felt I coped with them so well but I was concerned about whether I came across as enthusiastic enough, particularly as I realised that the company would need to invest a lot in training me.

The Personnel type questions which came up in the second interview included; 'why did you do a PhD?', 'why did you stay in one university as long as you did?'.
When asked why I wanted to move out of academia I avoided being negative and focused on my interest in working on less speculative issues than I had in academia that is focusing on problems important to industry.

I have since been told that for my organisation very few people fail the 2nd interview and that it is the first one that counts!

Your current job and future plans

Programming, understanding the maths of problems and learning code written by others are the main features of the job. The programming is similar to what I was doing in academia. The main difference is the fact that I am working in a team and so team-working skills are vital. I feel I have less freedom to decide how to work and generally am working longer hours than I did. My intention is to build my programming knowledge and continue in the field of computer programming. I have maintained contact with my university supervisors and would consider re-entering academia but only if I could focus on exactly the area in which I have most interest.

The working hours in my present job are similar to those at university – around 9.30 – 6pm with occasional periods of longer hours if a deadline is approaching. The work has a very commercial focus and I spend a considerable amount of time communicating with the agency in the USA. who subcontract work to us. Diplomatic communication and sensitivity to others are both extremely important. There are regular company meetings and, as the company is smaller than my previous department you really get to know the people, to know what's going on.

Update 6 months later

Over the last six months I have become much more responsible for my own work which is different from the close supervision I received in the first six months. Although managers in the USA and here in the UK decide what I am going to do, I am free to decide how to go about it. I ask for help if I need it rather than having my work checked. As my original supervisor left the company five months after I had joined I have been able to take on more responsibility earlier because of a redistribution of his responsibilities between myself and another member of the U.S.A. team.

Hints and Tips

- Be clear about your reasons for wanting to leave academia.
- Focus on your motivation.
- Think about the kind of work environment you want and the sort of work style you have.
- Try using an employment agency.
- In an interview, look enthusiastic and try to prepare beforehand for what you think you might be asked – be ready for Personnel type questions.
- Ask yourself how commercially you are prepared to operate and how you will feel about the strong influence customer requirements will have on your work – you may have less freedom to decide how to work.
- Consider the size of organisation you would like to work for.

CASE STUDY 4

After completing a PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, H held one research contract for two years before moving to work for a major pharmaceutical company as a postdoctoral scientist.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

The fact I was on a temporary contract with uncertainty about its renewal was a major incentive to look outside academia. Options within academia seemed very limited, the prospects for advancement poor with too many postdocs applying for too few positions. Although I enjoyed aspects of my work – getting new techniques to work and getting results – and the atmosphere which was relaxed and friendly, I wanted more job security, better career prospects and better pay.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

I had developed laboratory, organisational and planning skills during my PhD and actually felt that both my knowledge and skills would transfer into another work environment quite easily.

Coping with the transition

I started looking for jobs around four months prior to the end of my contract. I looked for vacancies in a number of sources – the internet, New Scientist, Nature and the national press (i.e. T.E.S. and The Guardian). It took a lot of time, lots of reading and thinking about what I could realistically move into. After getting the job offer I then had six weeks to plan, move and start work. This timescale meant that I couldn't finish everything I wanted to in my current position (I didn't have the time). From a personal point of view my partner's work is geographically flexible and we agreed to go with my job move and then look for opportunities for her.

The biggest challenge for me was moving from a comfortable situation to one where I was unfamiliar with procedures, people etc. The whole process was, in a word, stressful! But after about a month I felt quite at home, though the workings of a multinational are still somewhat mysterious at times.

The application and interview process

I needed to prepare both a CV and application forms, depending on the job. I would encourage people to keep CVs precise and to the point – avoiding any waffle and focusing on how you would help improve the employer's business. Application letters and CVs need to be tailored to each and every job. In the end the interview I attended was for the job I got and was very formal and comprehensive. I had two technical interviews and one human resources interview – this had followed a difficult, technically demanding second application form with a very tight return deadline. In addition the interviews included competency tests and psychometric profiling, a group discussion session with other candidates and a presentation of my current work. It was much more formal than the process I had gone through to get my research post (which was basically a discussion with my PhD supervisor who already knew me and wanted me to continue

working in the lab) and I was put up in a very nice hotel! I wasn't asked specifically about my motivation to move out of academia and suspect this is because the reasons are pretty obvious i.e. pay and prospects. If asked, I would have been honest.

The whole process was very demanding and comprehensive but worth it. Even if I had not got the job, it was excellent experience for future interviews. People were thorough but friendly and I never thought I was being 'cross examined'. After going through this I felt, more confident and self-assured that I could actually do it.

Your current job and future plans

My current job is primarily focused on laboratory research, involving internal progress meetings and discussions with other research groups about their projects. It's great to be somewhere where there are both funding and resources for the project. If we need something and can justify it, we get it, making the work considerably more fun! I work with people from a variety of backgrounds – some have moved from academia and some have been in the industry since graduation. The physical lab environment is similar to university and there is the same friendly work atmosphere. Although there is a little more pressure I think the difference is minimal given the pressure of grants and funding in academia. It is not true that work outside academia is more stressful with tighter deadlines and inflexible targets. You have your say in setting targets and the end result is something both you and your manager are happy with. The lab skills I am using are similar to those used in my post doc but I am using communication skills more in terms of discussing my work with other employers who are unfamiliar with it. Certainly my organisational and research skills are vital in what I do now. I feel a great sense of relief in my present job. I can pay the bills and do a job I enjoy. Although this contract is fixed term I hope to have a permanent position in two years time and promotion to a more senior position after that. I do maintain academic contacts, particularly with my ex supervisor and lab members, but would not consider re-entering the university sector unless a remarkable increase in salaries occurs and much longer contracts are offered. I am much happier in a job where the future prospects are better and the career structure more defined.

Hints and Tips

- Go for it. Do not expect it to be easy but it is rewarding.
- Learn to talk about your work. Many people do great work but bore the pants off you or blind you with reams of data. Learn to be brief and to the point. Practice your talk at home!
- Hone your CV for each individual application and really sell your skills / experience.
- Be honest in interviews. If you have not done something admit it.
- Try to think like the company. What do they want? How can your skills / knowledge help them improve their business? Why would employing you be a good move for them.
- Company internet sites can be illuminating.
- Use the Careers Service for practical advice regarding applications and interviews.

- Talk to potential employers if you have concerns or just want some clarification. They are people too and generally understand your wishes.

CASE STUDY 5

After completing a PhD in Computer Aided Aerodynamic Design, N held two research contracts over a period of three and a half years before moving to work for a financial software company as a systems integrator.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

Six months before the end of my research contract, I accepted a temporary six months post of admissions tutor. Although I had more or less decided I didn't want to do another post doc or lectureship, it was the admissions post that really convinced me to consider other options. I was keen to develop new skills, meet new people and was ready for a change of work environment. The potentially higher salary also appealed. I looked mainly into I.T. and finance jobs but did apply to the Civil Service too. Although my supervisor encouraged me to apply for lectureships – warning me that competition was strong but that it was important that I was seen to be applying – I was fairly certain I wanted to make the move.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

Apart from my computing knowledge, the knowledge gained during my post doc and admissions post wasn't really transferable to the options I was considering. In general I was very happy about the transferability of the skills I had developed including written and oral presentation, self-discipline, self-motivation and organisation. I was, however, a little concerned that my computing skills were limited to those required to do my PhD research.

Coping with the transition

I had been applying for jobs during my post doc and had, in fact, been offered a job by British Aerospace. In the event it took very little time to identify vacancies by talking to colleagues/friends who had already moved out of academia, looking at job adverts in the papers, attending job fairs and joining both a recruitment agency and a job e-mailing list. The transition process for me was painless – even though it meant moving from Leeds to London, leaving good friends behind in Leeds and paying a lot more for a similar standard of accommodation. Frankly, the biggest challenge for me was disappointing my supervisor and I was concerned that I might regret the move out of academia and either not find the work challenging and interesting or be out of my depth! I hoped I would get a lot of training and become operational quickly.

The application and interview process

I needed a CV for my current job – though most of the others I considered required only an application form. For attendance at job fairs I would suggest a one page CV, keeping it simple but clear and attractive, on good quality paper. Just for information, part of the Civil Service selection procedure involved taking a test with literally thousands of other candidates – quite daunting!

Both of the first interviews for the two jobs I went for consisted of two parts: an overview of the company and the job, followed by a fairly informal interview to determine if I would 'fit in'. The second interviews of these two jobs were very different; the interviewer for

one was a computer guru and for the other a pushy salesman. The computer guru wanted to find out if I had adequate computer skills, the salesman wanted to find out if I was brash enough to sell. In both interviews I was specifically asked why I wanted to move out of academia. I said that I did enjoy research but was being snowed under with administration and teaching, adding that I wanted to be more challenged, to work as part of a team and to broaden my knowledge, experience and skills. I felt calm about the whole process until they told me that the job for which I had been selected no longer existed so I was in competition with the other candidates for the remaining job. I then felt very stressed for a few days whilst waiting for the outcome, it made me realise how much I wanted the job.

Your current job and future plans

I am very content in my present job, which involves setting up bespoke software for financial institutions. I really enjoy the challenge of doing something at which I am relatively inexperienced. At the moment I am working Monday to Friday in Brussels, spending only occasional days in London. The computer programming and preparation of written reports is similar to my academic work but I have more frequent, critical and consequential deadlines. I'm also paid for overtime! Although I miss being experienced in my area of research and the freedom to explore novel ideas, I like the fact that my work is more consequential. I work closely with a number of colleagues from a similar background to mine although many of the senior people in the company do not have academic backgrounds. Hopefully I will continue to build my understanding of finance and business and perhaps move into the area of mathematical financial modelling.

Hints and Tips

- Fill in photocopies of application forms before filling in the originals.
- Allow plenty of time for travelling to interviews.
- Re-read your CV before the interview and plan your responses to predictable questions.
- Find out whether your university runs courses to help you with career planning.
- Don't go for the first job that comes your way.
- Gain as much computer experience as you can – it's invaluable.

CASE STUDY 6

After completing a Masters course in a Civil Engineering department, D held one contract for nine months before leaving to work as a learning mentor in a secondary school.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

Although initially working in academia interested me, and the environment was informal and flexible, the research was not working for me. I felt there was very limited support and could not see a future in my job even though I had been offered an extension on my contract. I also had a strong desire to work with people, to be in a team environment.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

My Masters course had helped me identify and develop a wide range of transferable skills. I was not afraid of the challenge and knew I could do it. I was also learning new skills through doing practical courses and was very positive about my ability to continue learning. In the event the job I got marries up very well with where I wanted to be.

Coping with the transition

I realised half way through my contract that academia was not for me and it then took 4-5 months to do the research, apply and get the job I am currently in. I had a very strong need to change and that spurred me on. It was also helpful that I saw lots of vacancies that appealed. I used my research skills to good effect, looking on the net, in magazines and newspapers, the Careers Service vacancy bulletins, city council vacancy lists, temping agencies, the Volunteer Bureau and of course word of mouth. I have been able to integrate into my new environment very quickly and extremely easily.

The application and interview process

I had to complete an application form for the job I got. In the interview a lot of questions were asked and the job outlined was far more specific than my academic post. When asked about my motivation to leave academia I was honest and said it wasn't for me. I felt the preparation for the interview was vital and would encourage people always to ask for feedback and not to get downhearted. Use it positively. For me the whole process was quick and painless. Afterwards I felt I could achieve anything and was surprised at the ease of it.

Your current job and future plans

My current job involves working with children who are underachieving at school – trying to enable them to realise their full potential. I really enjoy the fact that there is a huge people focus that I have freedom in which to work and am part of a strong team. The work is worthwhile and meaningful and I get support from the team – very different from my experience of academia. It's not all roses. People do fight their corner and there are boundaries but I value the chance to share ideas and the feeling of not being isolated. The working hours and pattern is not dissimilar to university but I work with a very wide range of people coming from youth work, community work, teaching and commercial backgrounds. On a typical day I start work between 8 and 9 am, having planned the

night before who I will try to see that day. When I get in I start with paperwork, talking with colleagues and having casual chats with teachers. Then I'll see referrals for the rest of the morning, taking a break before lunch to walk around the school, meeting the kids informally and showing an interest in what they do. The afternoons I try to keep free so that I can see people on spec (and do more paperwork!). then of course there are the meetings with other staff to promote the scheme and keep the momentum going. As the communication structure is quite hierarchical it's important not to leave anyone out of the loop. The main skills I am using now are, listening, organising, dealing with meetings, planning, report writing, time management, networking and counselling. In fact counselling is the area I would like to move into eventually so the job, as well as being extremely satisfying, is reinforcing my definite direction. The work is definitely not more stressful than work in academia and I would not consider going back.

Hints and Tips

- Don't worry. If things are properly thought through, and the skills you have are transferable, then everything will work out.
- Consider developing other useful skills through evening classes and voluntary work.
- Make contacts, speak to people, bang on doors.
- Don't be timid.
- Use everything as a positive experience.
- Be prepared to need a lot of energy – it may be a rough ride.
- Most people can achieve exactly what they want to achieve.

On a practical note, D found the university Careers Service (and reference to the book "What colour is your parachute") extremely helpful. He would also strongly recommend keeping a log as a reference for self reflection and skill logging.

CASE STUDY 7

L held one research contract prior to his PhD in Electronic Engineering, and worked as a consultant for the department during his PhD, before moving to a company in the USA to work as a design engineer.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

I wanted to gain hands on experience and take on bigger challenges – particularly in terms of developing design skills in an industrial environment. I enjoyed very much the academic research in my university, however there did not seem to be much scope for career development and I did not push for my development in the university at that time.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

Although I felt skills never seem enough, I felt good about my knowledge. I hoped I would be able to have an active role from the beginning so my main concerns were about integrating into a new team / work environment and keeping myself up to date. I had developed patience, research and commitment through my academic work and knew that these would still be useful.

Coping with the transition

My timescale to move from academia to industry was one year. It took a few months to identify vacancies, during which time I sought advice from people I believed were trustworthy and motivated to help. I faced one issue at a time, related the issue to my overall goals and dealt with it, involving others where appropriate. I found the whole process painful – with one of the biggest challenges being the logistics of relocating to the USA. Having a good supervisor at the university, who understood my desire to move and was very supportive, was a great help. Networking generally was vital.

The application and interview process

I needed a CV for the job I now have. I kept it to two pages and focused on my strengths but was honest. My interviews were fair but demanding. I found them very intense – focusing on my skills and work experience. This was quite different from my academic interviews as they focused on the specific project in hand and my willingness to work on it. When asked why I wanted to move out of academia I said that I wanted to gain hands on experience in an industrial rather than academic environment. Although the process made me feel like a fish being grilled it taught me things about myself that I was not aware of. And finally, luck is always welcome!

Your current job and future plans

My job now goes from design to production of integrated circuits. Basically I get enormous satisfaction from seeing my circuits actually placed in everyday items. Although carrying out an assignment within a project mirrors the process that I experienced in academia, the demands are much greater and the timescales much tighter. I work with people from a mix of academic / commercial backgrounds and find that the boundaries between academia and the commercial work I am now doing are rather blurred. The technical and personal skills I use have broadened, incorporating things I used in my research work combined with the commercial requirements of my

present company. I am really happy in what I do and enjoy being part of projects that integrate different expertise; it's rewarding to feel like a peer among peers! I want to continue to acquire industrial experience, to increase my understanding of how low level requirements affect the performance of the whole system. That said, the freedom that academia grants you to drift your focus towards unknown areas is something I have not felt for a while! I maintain my academic contacts as much as I can and would definitely consider re-entering the university sector once I have gained enough experience and exposure to different issues.

Hints and Tips

- Don't do it for the money – do it if it will make you happy.
- Focus on what you want to achieve.
- Take time to make every step of the transition successful (do not rush if possible).
- Broaden your interests in order to develop additional skills.
- Seek advice from people you know to be trustworthy and dependable.

CASE STUDY 8

After completing a PhD in a sociology topic, E held 5 short-term contracts before moving into work as a research officer for a charity based in Scotland (from which E has since moved on – see update).

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

My situation was rather different from other contract research staff as I held a number of short-term contracts on a free lance basis. After about a year my financial position was not very positive so I took a part time job in IT support within an academic department. Basically I looked outside academia for a mix of personal reasons and because I wanted to re-evaluate. There were some noises from some of the lecturers in the department I was in about finding me a research assistant job. And ultimately there was such an offer but this came after I had accepted the post I now hold. My part time job in particular was a really valuable period of time as it allowed me to work through those silly fears about being “tied down” and having a nine to five job after a PhD, and also to appreciate how pleasant it can be to work alongside colleagues as part of a team and not as a lone warrior. I analysed my experience of academia at some length and decided my personality would be best suited to doing social research outside of both academia and the corporate world in a policy development organisation, NGO, charity or think tank. I very much wanted to have the chance to experience a different research environment.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

I felt there was a strong case that my knowledge could be transferred. My PhD was quite generalised in the sense that it drew on a number of different disciplines – organisation theory, employment studies, feminist theory, sociology of science – and with each position I applied for there was some way of tying my knowledge into the post by emphasising certain aspects. The jobs I targeted were those where I perceived I would be able to contribute efficiency and management skills but also be involved in knowledge and policy. I felt I had a useful set of skills, including marketing, communication and general business skills developed through my free-lance contract work, and never had any lack of confidence in selling these to a potential employer in any environment.

Coping with the transition

It took about 6 months to identify vacancies but that did include November to January where the job market was non-existent, and a house move which took up a month. Mainly I read the job pages in the local and national papers and used internet job sites. There were a couple of less formal opportunities which fell through because of lack of funding. I had a lot of support from my partner and family and there were no major issues for me. The biggest challenges were:

- Leaving behind an incredibly flexible and autonomous culture and accepting I would need to go into an office roughly 9-5 (this has not been precisely the case but it is still more structured)
- Giving up an idea of purity – that being involved in making knowledge is somehow a higher plane of activity

- Not having control over what research I do and how. To an extent this is a symptom of working in a very “controlling” culture, but would likely be the case anyway.

However, I have found the whole process satisfying. I have had no real regrets about it so far and feel my assessment about the environment that would suit me best has been a fair one. I integrated immediately into my current job and feel it is a far more comfortable work environment than academia – it seems to suit my approach far better in that I still do research but it is more varied, dynamic and practical in orientation.

The application and interview process

I needed to prepare both a CV and application forms and at one of my interviews was asked to sit a test and give a presentation as well as having a panel interview. The differences between academic and non-academic interviews are, in my experience, quite marked. In academic interviews the focus has generally been on intellectual orientation with little apparent interest in practical details such as terms, conditions, management styles, accountability, allocation of work etc. In non-academic interviews the focus has been on practical and procedural aspects rather than theoretical positions ie “what would you do if X happened”, “how would you go about dealing with Y”. The whole interview is more about doing the job than making the knowledge.

I was regularly asked about my motivation to move out of academia. I tended to emphasise a desire to work on more short term projects, to have more than one project on the go at one time and to have a more immediate connection to policy processes and practical outputs. This seemed to be generally accepted. The motivation for asking the question seemed to be a concern on the part of the interviewer that I was an “airy fairy” intellectual in an ivory tower who would not understand the need to compromise results in favour of practicalities.

In the interview for the post I got, both the manager and the director had worked extensively in academia and seemed to understand my desire to move out but not “burn my bridges” so I felt there was some sympathy of values and intent there which was part of my decision to go with them.

On the whole I find non-academic interviews easier to deal with, not least because they are less likely to focus on the specialist area of the interviewer which may not be yours! Looking at the process of applications and interviews as a whole, I felt reasonably positive about it. It gave me the chance to present myself fairly.

Your current job and future plans

At the time of writing I am about to change my job again but still outside academia. However, my work as a research officer with a voluntary agency (working for children and families) has given me a sense of achieving social action rather than just creating ideas and this has been extremely important to me. I have a varied workload, so I’m not in the library all the time (or indeed, ever!) and have the chance to get involved in staff management. I am closer to the policy process and feel as though I am helping to make the world better rather than just engaging in sophistry. Research and funding applications are still part of my work but the emphasis is much more on the practical application of my work and timescales are much shorter. Sometimes there is a tendency for senior managers to rush into projects without paying attention to the need for sound intellectual foundation and thought over detail. This is due primarily to the pressures of time and money.

I do miss the “pure” values academic work places on reading and learning, the thrill of creating knowledge, and the atmosphere of leisurely discussion. But I do enjoy my actual work and I like my colleagues (who come from backgrounds including services delivery, academia, local authority and voluntary sector) a lot.

I use an enormously wide range of skills – practical project management, proposal writing and budgeting, diplomacy and negotiation, staff supervision and mentoring, project planning, responding to tender invitations, dissemination to practitioner audiences rather than academics – and am confident in transferring these to my next job.

In terms of the future, I maintain good links with academic friends and colleagues and may at some stage want to return to academia. I have not ruled out trying for lectureships eventually but at the moment I see myself going to Senior Principal Officer level (and beyond!) in the voluntary sector or the Civil Service. I feel that I enjoy the idea of academia much more than the reality. The area of work I am in now connects my research to the broader picture and gives me the chance to work with some incredibly committed and stimulating people who really want to change society and improve it.

Update 3 months on

I can now add, being three months into a new job, that I am definitely using all these wide skills in the new post!! I feel the move has been a success in that it has vindicated my decision to focus more on project management and staff management skills rather than pursuing a research topic per se. I now do not conduct the research myself but manage the staff who do, and am involved in different activities such as negotiation, liaising with senior management, budgeting and representing the project externally. My personal path has led away from “pure” research as I am more practical-minded but also, to an extent, has been dictated by the fact that the higher salaries and status / perks are offered for management rather than being an active researcher – unfortunately!

Additional note

One final thing that occurs to me is the gender issue. I find that in the voluntary sector / quangos where I have worked latterly, there is a majority of women in senior positions and the gender issue doesn't arise. For example, I am currently one of three female, senior managers, managed in turn by a man who is himself managed by a woman, whereas in academia I was conscious of the splits between “women's subjects” and the paucity of female lecturers in all subjects. It is by no means a perfect environment, but I enjoy the fact that I don't generally have to worry about sexism in the workplace!

Hints and Tips

- Work on a concise and business-like CV which emphasises skills rather than publications.
- Don't be put off by the perception of what a 9-5 job will entail but do prepare for a more structured work culture.
- If you do really love the research topic you are working on within academia, and are fascinated by research and finding things out, staying in academia could be best for you. If you do not have a passionate intellectual attachment to your topic, to do research for its own sake, it is worth looking outside. Social research exists

in a lot of other environments and it can be well worth seeking this sort of experience.

- Develop additional skills – in particular awareness of policy processes and structures and presentation skills.
- Focus on professionalism. Being “corporate” (in dress, approach, manner) can be seen as a dirty word within academia but wearing a suit does not negate the quality of your ideas.

CASE STUDY 9

After completing an MSc in Social Research methods, C held one research contract for 18 months before moving to work as a consultant for an executive search company.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

My contract had run out (having been extended by 3 months already) and wasn't able to be renewed. At this stage although I had enjoyed the freedom of the work environment and the focus on meeting and interviewing people, I particularly wanted to get a permanent job with a future. I also wanted something with more of a team spirit. Where I was in academia, it felt like everyone was only out for themselves, all trying to make it as social researchers or academics rather than working for the unit.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

I had been using a wide range of skills in my research, including interviewing, statistical and computing skills, administration, analytical and writing. I felt fine about the transferability of my general skills and although I had a concern that I might feel I was going backwards if I wasn't using my academic knowledge I knew that if I went into something different I would have to start again.

Coping with the transition

I knew my contract was ending in October and started looking for work in mid-June. It was awkward at work because everyone knew I was leaving so I just had to get on with it. I looked everywhere for vacancies – newspapers, magazines, the internet and it didn't take long to identify ones to go for. Although I did not enjoy the applications / interviews process the actual transition into my current job was easy and I was able to integrate into my new work environment very well and very quickly.

The application and interview process

I used both CVs and forms in my applications. The interviews I attended were not dissimilar to the one I had for my research post and I wasn't asked about my motivation to move out of academia. The fact that decisions were not made quickly made the whole process very time consuming and, frankly, depressing.

Your current job and future plans

My job now is ideal for me. I love interacting with people on a daily basis and I get people jobs so it makes them happy! It's a rewarding environment to work in – even if I do have to work on a Friday afternoon! The job is all about people skills and although the interviewing and analysing people is similar to what I was doing in academia the whole environment is more professional, corporate and exciting. The tangible rewards are in the form of bonuses, huge pay rises, incentives, no bureaucracy and getting immediate results. I feel as if my career is developing very quickly which is exactly what I wanted. I don't maintain my academic contacts and would never consider re-entering the university sector – I love my job here. I don't work long hours, it's fun and exciting and very rewarding.

Hints and Tips

- Typing application forms can make the presentation look a lot more professional.
- Any additional computer skills you can develop will help.
- Working outside academia is not cut-throat or ruthless.

CASE STUDY 10

After completing an MSc in Public Health and Health Promotion, S held one research contract for three years before moving into her current job as a health promotion adviser for an NHS trust.

What prompted you to consider options outside academia?

I wanted more varied experience and the thought of working in a less isolated environment appealed. I did consider both academic and non-academic jobs but the security of my next job was important.

How did you feel about the transferability of your skills and knowledge?

I felt very lacking in confidence about my knowledge as I was moving into a completely different area. Conversely, I was confident about my skills – communication, IT and interviewing skills were all things I had developed in my university post. The change in work environment was both a hope and a concern as I knew the change from operating as an individual to being part of a team would place different demands on me. In the event, the main skills I am now using are communication and planning.

Coping with the transition

I probably spent around four hours per week looking for vacancies, mainly in the Guardian, local papers and on the internet. Having been offered my current job I spent five months doing both my university research and my health promotion job part time. In some ways my transition was easier than others because it was gradual. On the other hand it was difficult juggling two part time roles, both of which required different modes of working so I tried to keep strict boundaries in terms of time given to both posts.

I was able to integrate into my new work environment very quickly and am now working with people from a range of backgrounds – industrial, public sector and academic. The whole transition process for me has been, in a word, exciting.

The application and interview process

I needed to complete CVs and application forms for the jobs for which I applied. The main thing is to be focused. The interviews I attended were very skills based and I was asked to give a short (10 minute) presentation for one of them. I wasn't asked specifically why I wanted to move out of academia. The whole process generated mixed feelings. I was nervous about the interviews but excited by the opportunities. Overall it really increased my self confidence.

Your current job and future plans

My current job mainly focuses on strategic policy development. I anticipated that it would be more hands on and have had to get used to not actually having tangible results – thought it will be good to see the results eventually when longer term strategic initiatives come to fruition. I have the freedom to make day to day and longer term decisions and a significant part of my job involves researching national initiatives, plus investigating and applying for funding. I am very much a team member, working with a group of people who are extremely enthusiastic and dedicated to what they do. Although there is still

some isolation in that everyone has their own area of expertise, we all share ideas. Working in an open plan office (I miss having my own room!) brings its challenges. There are five of us in a “talking profession”, the phone is always ringing so there is constant noise. On the other hand it was a very good learning environment – I could listen to what people were saying and pick things up quickly. A really positive aspect of my work is the health promotion mentality; the team is really supportive of the physical and mental health of individual members.

Regarding skills, my research skills are invaluable, and so are communication skills for the many meetings I have with often very senior people from voluntary agencies, education and social services. Organisation (time management and planning) is vital.

Although my job is called health promotion I do not have to sell or negotiate – the people I deal with are there because they want to be.

My career development is likely to be further into policy development rather than research. I do still maintain my academic contacts and would happily consider moving back into academia as I enjoy research and think that the longer timescales are less stressful – though maybe this is balanced out by the stress of the insecurity of contract research.

Hints and Tips

- Speak to a Careers Adviser as an impartial sounding board.
- Be open to suggestions and new ideas.
- Get the whole process underway earlier than you would anticipate.
- Have a really good look around, read up about a variety of jobs and apply to “test the water.”
- Trawl websites widely – www.jobs@ac.uk had health authority as well as academic jobs.
- Specifying a geographical area can help in targeting specific websites which can then be checked regularly.
- Be honest and open. Let people know you are looking for jobs, network and use people’s advice and expertise.



Clair Souter, Assistant Director
Careers Centre, 5-7 Cromer Terrace, The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

