

# Travellers' Tales: Career Journeys after the PhD

Case Studies from the Arts, Humanities and  
Social Sciences

A flexible resource booklet for staff working with  
PhD students

“Education is the guidance of the individual towards a comprehension of the art of life; and by art of life I mean the most complete achievement of varied activity expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the fact of its actual environment... ***Each individual embodies an adventure of existence.*** The art of life is the guidance of this adventure.”  
Alfred North Whitehead<sup>1</sup>

A project led by the Centre for Career Management Skills at the University of Reading (CCMS)

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<sup>1</sup> Whitehead, A. N. (1929). *Aims of Education* cited in Palmer, J.A., (2001) *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education From Confucius to Dewey*. London: Routledge. Emphasis added.

# Background

While many students studying for PhD harbour hopes of establishing an academic career, a significant proportion will through force of circumstances or choice find themselves exploring other routes. Rarely will these routes be clearly laid out like well trodden paths. More often they will require that the individual leaves the beaten path and strikes out on their own. A process by turns exhilarating and bewildering.

Nicholson (1990, in Arnold, 1997, p157) writing about employees newly arriving in a company, a situation not dissimilar to the transition out of study into the world of work, says that:

...to minimize the impact of negative emotions and to avoid defensive coping, the individual needs a map, a bicycle and good weather. The good weather is a climate of psychological safety and supports, the bicycle is the psychological freedom to explore and pathfind in the new environment; but the maps which organizations usually give to people are totally inadequate.

*What help is available to guide these explorers?*

The idea for this case study project came from the Postgraduate Careers Education Working Group – a group led by CCMS and composed of staff from many universities and organisations working with PhD students. The impetus arose from the conviction that much of the territory to be traversed by those with PhDs is unmapped. Indeed that the way ahead is often particularly unpredictable for those whose qualification is not in the natural sciences. Nevertheless this terrain it is not at all un-navigable as the stories collected here testify.

The case studies included in this resource capture the complexity and messiness of individuals' career paths after PhD study. They draw on examples from across the UK and Northern Ireland and span over two decades. The goal is to provide accounts that current students peering into the future can listen to and learn from. In these stories they can hear echoes of regret as well as the sound of success. They can see how a person's life has unfolded through twists and turns, negotiating pitfalls perhaps and ascending to new heights. They are a resource that can be used by university staff to enable PhD students to project themselves into the time after their PhD. To begin to identify issues that they might face and to tease out lessons that can be learnt. Not that these stories provide answers and are certainly not a ready made guide. However, our hope is in that the absence of reliable maps these travellers' tales will encourage students to imagine new possibilities and embark better equipped for the journey ahead.

***David Stanbury, September 2008.***



# Using the resource booklet

**This resource booklet will be of interest to the following staff:**

- PhD supervisors
- Teaching and learning staff
- Roberts funded staff developers
- Study advisors
- Careers advisors

It aims to:

- Provide an innovative teaching and learning resource
- Outline some of the theories that underpin a narrative approach to career learning
- Offer a menu of ways in which the case studies could be used with your students
- Inspire you to gather your own case studies

**The case studies can be used in the following ways:**

- In group sessions for PhD students (e.g. career planning) as a basis for discussion or individual reflection
- Made available to students via a university's website or VLE
- As a prompt for doctoral students completing a skills audit or personal action plan
- As a point of discussion between an individual doctoral student and an advisor / supervisor
- In any of the above ways with taught masters or undergraduates, to illustrate general points about career trajectories and / or to engage with issues about further study

## **The nature of the case studies**

Some case studies have been written by the respondent. Others are notes transcribed from interviews. All but one case study has been written in the first person and all have been based on a common set of prompts. While each has been edited, the final form of the text has been checked with the respondent. Respondents were given the option of using their own name, or a pseudonym. Most have elected to use their own name. Occasionally some details have been disguised to protect the confidentiality and interests of the respondents.

# Narrative approaches to career case studies

Narrative approaches to careers emphasise the subjective meaning of career to the individual, the way that career unfolds through time, the interrelationship between career and the person's wider life.

At the heart of narrative approaches to understanding careers is the insight that the events of our lives are given significance by the meanings that we attach to them. Carr (1986, cited in Cochran, p117) puts it like this:

...at no level, and certainly not at the scale of the life-story itself, is the narrative coherence of events and actions simply a 'given' for us. Rather it is a constant task, sometimes a struggle, and when it succeeds it is an achievement. As a struggle it has an adversary which is (described in the most general way) temporal disorder, confusion, incoherence, chaos. It is the chaos and dissolution represented paradoxically, by the steady running off of mere sequence. To experience, to act, to live in the most general sense, is to maintain and if necessary, to restore the narrative coherence of time itself, to preserve it against this internal dissolution into its component parts. What is at stake at the level of events and experiences is the temporal coherence of my surrounds, their 'making sense'; at the level of my actions and projects, their completion and success. What is at stake on the plane of 'life' is my own coherence as a self, the unity and integrity of my personal identity.

The stories we tell about ourselves and the stories we hear from others can have a transformative effect (Buber, 1991). Inkson (2007), in his discussion of researchers and theorists of narrative approaches to careers notes the following:

- Storytelling is a fundamental human activity (Polkinghorne, 1998).
- When people tell their stories they start to make sense to themselves (Cohen and Mallon, 2001).
- In hearing our own stories we give shape to our unique identities (Ricoeur, 1985).
- Career stories give access to dimensions of career development that otherwise would be hidden (e.g. complex feelings, the interplay of chance and planning).
- The act of creating stories enables them to become public and to be shared.
- We have several stories, or several different versions of the same set of events, which can be retold for different audiences (Linde, 1993).
- Using fantasy, we can envisage new futures, by varying the possible stories we imagine for ourselves (Young, et al, 2002).
- Personal career stories can be related to other cultural narrative frameworks and products (e.g. soap operas) (Collin, 2000).

Narrative approaches to understanding career development are a branch of career theory in their own right. However, they naturally resonate with:

- Constructivism (which looks at the individual process of knowledge creation).
- Social constructionism (which places knowledge creation within a wider interpersonal context of social learning) (Inkson, 2007).
- Developmental approaches to career development for e.g. Gottfredson, Super, Savickas, (see Brown, 2002).
- Life Span Development theories, for e.g. the work of Erickson, Gould, Levinson.

- Planned happenstance (Krumboltz, 1998).

The use of narratives for interpreting the past and planning for the future, is however, not un-contentious. Hastie and Dawes (2001) coming from a positivist perspective, see the ability of stories to impose meaningful patterns upon events as potentially dangerous. For them stories can cause the unwary to misapprehend the past and can lead to unreliable ways of thinking about the future.

They draw attention to the phenomena of 'hindsight' bias which occurs where past events are reconstructed in the light of present knowledge. Psychological studies have shown that under certain conditions recall of past events is conditioned by subsequent knowledge of what actually happened. For example, Fischhoff asked people to predict the likelihood of certain political events (e.g. the election of a presidential candidate) occurring. When asked later to recall their estimates, participants adjusted their estimates in the light of events. This re-remembering, can lead to people seeing the things they did as more likely to occur than they actually were. This has important consequences for Personal Development Planning as well as career learning. As Dawes and Hastie warn: 'It follows, as Fischhoff points out, we are "insufficiently surprised" by experience. One result is that we do not learn effectively from it' (p147) Hindsight arguably can lend a patina of false naturalness to events, gilding them with a greater coherence, organised around the perspective of the present than might be justified.

Hastie and Dawes also highlight risks occasioned by basing forward planning on overly detailed scenarios. Scenarios, or detailed stories about the past or possible futures, have force, they argue from drawing on the stock of popular images culturally available. The availability of such images, they maintain, condition what we can easily imagine. A story about a reformed alcoholic who triumphs over adversity to win a great sporting victory, is more plausible, for instance, than one in which an unreformed alcoholic just gets lucky. Planning based upon scenarios occasions a specific risk; the risk of estimating the probability of a sequence of events occurring as being greater than the probability of the separate components. Hastie and Dawes point out that the more detail rich and unique a story is, the more it is judged to be believable. They conclude: 'Scenario thinking grossly overestimates the probability of scenarios that come to mind and underestimates the long-term probabilities of events occurring one way or another...and diverts the decision maker from the broader more systematic representation of the decision situation.' (p 146).

The issues raised by Hastie and Dawes, which are part of a wider literature on probability and decision making, can be seen as useful correctives to uncritical approaches to narrative theory. Stories are one person's account of events, crafted for a particular purpose. They are an invitation to enter into a dialogue with that story, to set it within what is known about the wider landscape of career learning, and labour market conditions, and to consider the various discourses that have shaped and formed the plot.

Others' stories can provide fuel for the imagination, and ideas for action. The uniqueness of each person's story precludes them from being read as a route for others to trace, as if they were a trail of magic breadcrumbs through the forest, or an exercise in painting by numbers. Stories provide possibilities not patterns to be directly copied. Each person's route has an unrepeatable, almost ephemeral quality; as they thread through the trees the foliage closes behind them. Those who follow will discover the way for themselves as if it had never before been trod.

# Using the case studies with students

It is expected that you will copy the case studies (or sections from them) for your students, rather than giving them this booklet. For this reason a generic briefing sheet for students has been supplied, for you to adapt and edit for your local situation.

Narrative material can be used as the basis for group discussion, individual reflection or other learning tasks. The case studies can be engaged with diachronically (how one person's story changes over time) or synchronically (taking a theme or cross section through several stories). In practice many teaching and learning methods have relevance to both diachronic and synchronic approaches, indeed separate study of stories could be preparation for a comparative analysis of several.

## Taking one case study on its own

1. Icebreaker
  - a. How does the story resonate with other stories that they have heard (from friends, from the media)?
2. Analysing the narrative flow, for example
  - a. Provide evocative titles to the different 'chapters' of the story
  - b. Pinpoint the turning point in a story
  - c. Identify recurrent themes
3. Affective engagement, for example
  - a. What adjective and verbs are used in the story?
  - b. What are the 'absent present' emotions – emotions that are present as silences?
  - c. What discourses are used to give coherence and value to the plot?
  - d. Speculate about the emotional effects of an event on the various participants
  - e. Respond emotionally to the story. What does it make *them* feel?
  - f. Draw a time-line for the story with the vertical for highs and lows. Then draw their own time-line and discuss.
4. Critical instances, for example
  - a. Take a decision and identify the factors bearing upon it (including probable factors not mentioned by the respondent)
  - b. List the benefits and drawbacks of a particular decision (including those implied in the account)
  - c. Envisage how a decision might have been regarded from the stand point of other actors in the story
  - d. Propose alternative courses of action from the one taken in the story
  - e. How does research on career decision making relate to the example?
  - f. Imagine themselves in the role of a supervisor / careers advisor. How would they advise the person?
5. Filling in the gaps, for example
  - a. Imaginatively reconstruct the missing part of a story (what might have happened to bring the respondent to this situation?)
  - b. Imagine how a story might unfold (for e.g. where they are provided with only the first part of the story). Groups of students could be given different scenarios to explore (each scenario slightly varying the factors – e.g. gets promotion, doesn't get promotion) and then contrast.

- c. These activities could lead into a discussion about the nature of the future (constrained verses open), or the role of imagination, vision and determination in creating careers.
6. Identity and presentation
  - a. What are the different roles adopted by the protagonist?
  - b. How do these change through the events?
  - c. What part does work and study play in identity formation?
  - d. How might the protagonist have presented the presentation of themselves (e.g. has it been self-edited). What effect has the mediated nature of the case study medium affected the portrayal?
  - e. What identities does the protagonist adopt?
  - f. Retell the story with either a positive or negative spin for different audiences (e.g. in a job interview, for friends in a pub, for strangers you meet at a party)
7. Consider what lessons might be drawn out from the story? Can the story be summed up into a moral? How would they want to respond if faced by similar challenges?

### **Looking at several case studies**

1. Compare how different respondents dealt with similar challenges
2. Explore an issue (e.g. networking, or the interaction between employee and employing organisation) as touched on in several stories
3. Consider how representative the stories are.
  - a. How do they match what is known about career paths from surveys and research?
  - b. Examine them from the perspective of probability theory. What are the issues related to scenario planning?
4. Comment on respondents' views of the value of a PhD. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. Apply different theories of career development to the stories. Which theories are most applicable? What aspects do they leave unexplained? Some examples:
  - a. How does the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) help to explain aspects of Jonathan and Jane's work history? Contrast this with John's situation.
  - b. To what extent can we see Planned-Happenstance at work in Jonathan, James, Paul and Greg's stories?
  - c. How do Life-span Development theorists such as Havighurst, Levinson and Roberts and Newton (see Sugarman, 2001) throw light upon the notions of 'normal development' implicit in Jonathan, John and Caroline's stories?
  - d. Drawing on Hawkins, where can we see career management skills coming into play?

### **Alternative approaches**

A thorough going approach to helping students re-tell their stories is outlined by Sugarman, (2001) who adapts McAdams' (1997) methodology for exploring our own life-story. This model provides a process for enabling someone to tell their own story in a way which is insightful and leads to new ideas for the future. Some of the steps are:

- Begin by dividing your life into a series of chapters, giving each a heading and synopsis of contents

- Focusing on 8 key events
  - A peak experience
  - A nadir experience
  - A turning point
  - Earliest memory
  - Important childhood memory
  - An important adolescent memory
  - An important adult memory
  - An other important memory
- Focusing on important people in your story
- Describing a possible future script
- Considering areas of stress in your life
- Exploring how your life story is informed by your belief system
- Identifying overall life themes

Another source of ideas is Cochran's book 'Career Counselling: A Narrative Approach', which concludes each chapter with practical exercises that could be given to an individual or group of students.

In addition to the resources mentioned above, the following have been selected for their relevance to narrative approaches and / or non-academic career paths for those with PhDs

#### **Additional printed resources**

Basalla, S. and Debelius, M. (2001). *So What are You Going to do With That?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Two American PhDs who have left academia write encouragingly about how other people can develop non-academic careers.

Bolton, G. (1999). *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing: Writing Myself*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Frame, F. and Burnett, J. (2008) *Using Auto/Biography in Learning and Teaching*. SEDA Paper 120. London: SEDA.

Packed full of practical and theoretical ways of applying narrative approaches

*Newhouse, N. L. (1993) Outside the Ivory Tower*. Atlantic Books

A guide for academics considering alternative Careers.

#### **Additional web resources**

AHRC

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Publications/Documents/On%20The%20Right%20Track.pdf>

On the Right Track is an AHRC research project into the career directions of funded postgraduate arts and humanities students in 2006.

BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives/>

Video stories from across the regions of the UK

Beyond Academe

<http://www.beyondacademe.com/>

A site aimed at US historians examining the careers of those who have left academia.

Hihohiho

<http://www.hihohiho.com/>

Website with wealth of thought provoking resources on career theory including narrative approaches.

Ironstring

<http://www.ironstring.com/sellout/> An American website with resources for Humanities PhDs considering careers beyond the university.

Missenden Centre

<http://www.missendencentre.co.uk/>

The web site of the Missenden Centre for the Development of Higher Education. See the Links sections for PhD diaries and stories of PhD life.

Patient Voices

<http://www.patientvoices.org.uk/>

An NHS project that has captured 100 patient stories as a learning resource for health care professionals. Website has link to some papers on narrative learning on the <http://www.pilgrimprojects.co.uk/papers.htm> website.

Shinton Consulting

<http://shintonconsulting.com/> This site contains researcher profiles, case studies, and information about careers within and outside academia.

Story Centre

<http://www.storycenter.org/index1.html>

The Center for Digital Storytelling is a California-based non-profit arts organization rooted in the art of personal storytelling. That assists people of all ages in using the tools of digital media to craft, record, share, and value the stories of individuals and communities.

# Gathering your own case studies

This set of case studies is intended as a starting point; an encouragement for you to seek out and add stories from your contacts. To make this easier the Prompt Sheet and the Release Form have been included in the pack. You are welcome to use the Prompt Sheet as it stands. However, unless you plan to pass any case studies you gather to CCMS, you will need to change the Release Form, removing references to CCMS / the University of Reading and replacing these with information about your own organisation. Either way you can expand the range of stories available to you. If you chose to adopt the 'Creative Commons Licence' used for this resource (which is explained further in the Copyright section), then you can easily share the stories you collect with your colleagues, whilst retaining copyright.

When collecting new case studies the confidentiality and interests of the client must be paramount. We recommend the following considerations:

- Always ensure that respondents are fully informed of possible uses of their material and have signed a release form giving permission for the use of their material. You can seek advice from the data protection and intellectual property departments at your university about this.
- Always have respondents 'sign off' the public version of their text if it has been edited.
- Always check what the respondent has written for anything that might be regarded as defamatory or that could put the respondent in a difficult position if they were identified. For example, a respondent might make what could be construed as a negative comment about their current work colleagues, or imply that they are thinking of leaving their current employer. Such issues should be addressed through the editing process or resolved in dialogue with the respondent. As the publisher of material you have a duty of care towards the respondent.
- Provide respondents with the option of having the story published under their own name or a pseudonym.
- If a respondent elects to use a pseudonym, other identifying details (name of institution they studied at, name of current employer etc), may also need to be changed.
- In general, case studies published under the client's own name work better than those published anonymously. The former makes it more straightforward to identify employers and institutions, and to tell a story that is more interesting and easier to follow.

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Note: these references are in addition to the resources listed on pages 9 and 10.

## Careers after the PhD: Jonathan

<b>Background</b>	<b>Jonathan gained his PhD in 1986 in Computer Applications in Archaeology. He studied at the University of London.</b> <b>He is currently Head of ICT at the Ashmolean Museum.</b>
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### Life before PhD

My PhD research was a logical follow-on from the choices I made at school. During my 4<sup>th</sup> year of secondary school (now Year 10) I decided I wanted to become an Archaeologist, instead of a Civil Engineer. The Careers Advisor gave us one piece of advice that I remember, choose a career for the money or for job satisfaction. I decided on the latter. I had become interested in ancient history a couple of years before after listening to a radio play about Pharaoh Akhenaten, although it was the people called the Hittites that were the focus of my interest.

In the summer of that year (1974), I met an Archaeology Professor at Durham University, at my sister's Graduation ceremony. She gave me some advice on what subjects to study at A-Level. In the sixth form I applied to Durham as my first choice to study Archaeology. Unfortunately, I did not get the grades and went through Clearing. I was offered a place at Bradford University for Archaeological Science, but I declined and spent a third year in 6<sup>th</sup> Form to improve my grades.

I reviewed my choices for that year and decided to again apply for Archaeology, but this time my first choice was Birmingham University as they focused more on the Middle East. Again, I did not get the required grades, went through Clearing, and was again offered a place at Bradford University studying Archaeological Science. This time I accepted.

It was a four-year sandwich course. In the first year we were introduced to computers and I found out that I enjoyed programming (in BASIC and FORTRAN). This led to my spending 6 months of my third year at Mucking Post-Excavation, based in Grays, Essex, programming a microcomputer in Assembly Language to enable archaeologists to input data about the finds. It was at this time I was introduced to Ian Graham (an academic), who, during my final year at Bradford suggested I apply to study for a PhD at the Institute of Archaeology in London, researching "Computer Applications in Archaeology". I obtained a 2.1 and was accepted (in 1981) as a research student at the Institute, funded by the SERC.

### The experience of research

My research involved writing a database management system for a microcomputer, which could be adapted to any archaeological situation. This continued the work I had begun at Mucking, creating a network database for excavation data, but I also expanded the work to include the Bedfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), as well as a Radiocarbon database.

Despite having an office literally labelled “Room 101” (it was room one on the first floor), I enjoyed my time at the Institute. I became Ian Graham’s unofficial Computing Assistant, helping him set up a Computer Suite and assisting in his practical computer classes. A consequence of my research was that I also delivered a number of papers at various conferences, most frequently at the annual Computer Applications in Archaeology conferences. I also helped develop databases for projects run by the Museum of London and the York Archaeological Trust.

To a large extent I was left to my own devices: supervision was of the “light-touch” variety. Even so after 3 years I was able to give my Supervisor a draft copy of my thesis. In the meantime, I successfully applied for a 2 year Post-doctoral Research post. However, when my Supervisor did return my thesis almost a year later he had written only 5 comments on it. Fortunately, I had asked the Head of the Prehistory Department to read a copy and he provided a very thorough critique. At the same time as returning my thesis my Supervisor told me he was going to emigrate to New Zealand and suggested I have a Viva before he went. This we did at the beginning of December a week before he left the country. I passed, although was asked to make some amendments.

### **Finding employment: Data Manager for the Ashmolean**

In October 1985, a job advert was pointed out to me on the Institute’s notice board, for the post of Data Manager based at the Ashmolean Museum, in Oxford. Ian suggested that I apply because I was well qualified for it. Consequently I did and had an interview the week after I had my Viva. The Data Manager post was actually two half-time posts, one setting up a database for the Department of Antiquities (i.e. the archaeological collections held by that Museum), the other supporting and developing databases for a number of British Academy projects based in the University of Oxford,. All of these projects were using a network database management system, IDMS running on an ICL 2988, operated by the University’s Computing Service (OUCS) and so my background in archaeological network databases proved an ideal match for this post.

### **Reflecting on the transfer of experience from the PhD to employment**

Despite this “match”, when it comes to assessing the results of my three years of research, it could actually be considered as something of a failure. I began in 1981 with state-of-the-art equipment: a Z80-processor based microcomputer with 64Kbytes of memory, using a 20Mbyte hard disk, two 8” floppy disk drives, operating under CP/M 2.2 and using a Network Database Management System that required embedded instructions in Pascal programs. By the end of the research (1984), technological changes had made this computer model obsolete. In its place the IBM PC and its many clones were “taking over the world”. Consequently Z80 processors were replaced by the 8086 processor, 8” floppy disks were replaced by 5½” disks, CP/M had been replaced by MS-DOS as the industry-preferred operating system, BASIC was the predominant computer programming language and relational database management systems were becoming the norm.

However, the fact that my original PhD research had been overtaken by events was actually good preparation for the Data Manager’s post. Over the next few years the British Academy projects were forced to radically re-evaluate the technology they were using by the arrival of new systems. Consequently, databases had to be restructured and programs had to be re-written. This included converting FORTRAN and Spitzbol to

the computer language C, with embedded SQL. Although I did not necessarily have a deep knowledge of some of these languages, my experience gained during my time at the Institute stood me in good stead. The surprising fact is that some of the programs I wrote at the beginning of the 1990s are still being used by the LGPN in 2008.

The Antiquities Department database also went through a similar change. I decided that the existing structure was far too complex and consequently introduced a new system, which was subsequently extended to include the photographic archive of the Western Art department.

### **Developing roles: IT Manager for the Ashmolean**

The post of Data Manager was initially a five year post, although I did tell the interviewing panel that by the end of that time they would need two people. Fortunately the post was given a three year extension, and then in April 1994 the Antiquities Department of the Ashmolean surrendered a Departmental Assistant so that the Museum could employ myself as an IT Manager; I decided on a change of title to reflect the changing nature of the role.

During my eight years the time I could spend on my original task of creating a database system for the Antiquities Department began to shrink as the number of computers grew and the need to support them became greater. In 1989 the new Keeper of Eastern Art decided that the Department should become computerised. In 1990, the new Keeper of Western Art decided the same thing. More computers continued to arrive in the Museum, and as the only person who knew much about them, I increasingly took on a support role.

Meanwhile, although the work for the British Academy projects remained mostly a programming one, it was quickly extended to include supporting computer use at the Head Office in London. However, by 1990 there was too much work for me to do, and so the Academy created a separate post to support their Head Office IT. By April 1994, the Academy had also recognised that the IT needs of each of their projects was growing, and so provided funds for them to employ their own programmers.

I took up the post of Ashmolean IT Manager in April 1994, but this was at a time when the 3 other Museums at Oxford University were asking for their own IT support staff. The University offered to fund a single shared post, but I managed to persuade the relevant authorities that three half-time posts, all of whom would be supervised by me, would be more appropriate. This was accepted, so that in August 1994 I was re-graded and became the University's Museums IT Manager.

Since then IT has continued to expand into almost all aspects of Museum life, transforming the working environment. However, at the same time the nature of the Museum has changed. In 1986 I would characterise the Ashmolean as being an internationally regarded University museum with a reputation for academic excellence as a research institution. However, by the beginning of 2008, the teaching and research aspect of the Museum have faded into the background as it has been forced to focus more on its public outreach. Partly this was a consequence of being one of the outward faces of the University, but also because a lot of the money that funds the Museum demands a more accessible environment for the public. Another factor has been a tighter financial environment and with this has come modern management practices.

Therefore, line management and project management are terms that are now part of everyday vocabulary where once they were not.

### **Reflections: one employer yet many jobs**

Although I have only worked in this one institution since completing my PhD I would say that I have not needed to go anywhere else. As I have described above, the nature of my role as well as the whole working environment has changed around me.

As Head of ICT at the Museum, I am now responsible for developing strategies, policies, procedures, controlling budgets and overseeing my 3 full-time assistants and one part-time web developer. I still try to retain contact with the “coal-face”, so occasionally I set up new computers, fix user problems and maintain the Museum’s web site (although I do need another assistant for this task). Nonetheless I still enjoy my work, even if it is not what I had originally intended.

Working in a museum environment has also enabled me to maintain a good work and home-life balance. I married at the same time as I started my PhD and the flexibility of that life-style has continued throughout the time I have worked at the Ashmolean. When I started, the Museum shut at 5pm. Although this is no longer the case, I have always gone home as close to 5pm as possible, which was especially important as my two daughters were growing up. This free time has also made it possible for me to be actively involved in the leadership team of my local church. Looking back, from a Christian perspective, I can see that my career has been made up not so much of *coincidences* but of a series of ‘*God-incidences*’, that all began with listening to a radio play.

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## Careers after the PhD: James

<b>Background</b>	<b>James completed his PhD in Composition at the University of Ulster in 1989</b>  <b>He currently works full time as a freelance composer</b>
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### Experience of studying for PhD

It was a positive experience and I enjoyed working with my supervisor who was very encouraging. When I started my PhD we were both a little vague about my ability to complete it – it was in the area of composing and analysing 21<sup>st</sup> Century music. However by the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, composing was the focus of the PhD and over time I was really enjoying it and I felt it was a real luxury to have all day every day to write music; it was around then that I started to think that it was something that I would enjoy doing full time after my studies.

### Transition from academia

When I finished my PhD I became a teacher. For 2/3 years I taught on a BTEC Performing Arts course. I also gave instrumental tuition at different schools for 8 years and was soon teaching 4 out of 5 weekdays and composing the rest of the time. Gradually over time I started to get requests and commissions for pieces. Within a few months of finishing my PhD I was approached by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland who wanted to fund a Northern Irish performer and as a result received my first paid commission. Even during my PhD I was getting requests for works (which at that stage I wasn't getting paid for), one of which was from the Irish ensemble Concorde which after I'd finished my PhD (around 1990) commissioned a new work (which they paid for). Yet another early commission came through my own boldness in introducing myself to a performer and suggesting he might like to commission a new piece from me, which he duly did. As time went on I began to get more commissions from groups I already knew, a few from performers I didn't know, and some through competitive 'tenders'.

By early '98 I was down to a 1-day teaching week due to the number of commissions I was receiving so I was able to quit and concentrate on composing full time. A couple of years later I did a 3 year research fellowship at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. Towards the end of the fellowship I was a bit nervous about going back into freelance work after academia but it was fine as there was enough work around.

### Current Role

I have been a freelance composer for 10 years now and what I find most enjoyable about it is being my own boss and having the flexibility to be able to travel for performances and enjoy being an artist. A positive aspect to living in the South of Ireland is that there are a lot more funding opportunities available than there are in the North of Ireland. The only frustrating thing about my job is the constant lack of certainty about where money is going to come from a year down the line but you learn to push that aside and get on with things.

A normal day consists of starting to compose music at 10am and except for tea breaks work till 3pm when my son comes home from school. After that I do admin and put music onto the computer and that could go on to midnight if you allowed it to. The writing and peripheral stuff really does take a whole day.

In my area my PhD does not make any difference unless I am giving a guest lecture or something maybe for AHRB, and that is the only time that the doctorate comes into play. The qualification itself doesn't make any difference but the experience was very valuable. No matter what I experience it feeds into my work: going to a concert, reading a piece of literature, poetry, going to the theatre - any and all of these activities can inspire my work.

My PhD has been very important for me as it was a starting point for acquiring my skills which have since grown and developed. I now have the personal freedom to evolve as an artist to write as I wish. Nothing could entice me out of this role.

### **Job searching**

Re. seeking jobs they come in various ways. Some via referrals and some through work that I have tendered for, eg Public Art projects that I have tendered for in the South of Ireland; I have been successful with 3 of these. The Arts Council of Ireland has a number of different schemes which composers can now apply for. I have had commissions from the UK, Europe and the USA.

These days I still receive occasional commissions from previously unknown sources, or musicians which haven't previously commissioned me but who have performed my music before. I've written a lot of music over the years and many musicians in Ireland and even in the UK have been involved in performing it, so this has become a natural network of people who have experienced my music. Quite a lot of work I generate myself through encouraging musicians to commission a new work, or from accessing other types of funding for new projects.

It's basically a matter of putting as many eggs as you can in different baskets.

### **Advice**

There is no easy or simple way of being a composer full-time. It takes time and effort to make a living and you have to work at other things along the way in order that you can afford to eventually spend time composing. Part of it is plugging yourself into the various networks available and producing good work. You need a wide body of musicians to know about you. There are a lot more opportunities for that due to the greater amount of funding in the south of Ireland than in the North.

In order to develop yourself as a composer you have to develop other skills outside of the principal ones if you want to succeed. You need to develop a public persona in terms of projection and clarity, both of speech and of ideas or people may not want to work with you. You also need to be able to take on all sorts of jobs ... and still keep the same integrity in your writing whether working with the best in the music scene or with amateur groups etc...

Ultimately it comes down to how much you want to do something as opposed to any clear guidelines.

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## Careers after the PhD: Jane

<b>Background</b>	<b>Jane gained her PhD in Socio-legal studies from the University of Plymouth in 1998</b>
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### Life before my PhD

I initially started my social science career by doing a BA (Hons) in Sociology and Social Administration at the University of Warwick. I was at Warwick from 1986-89, then spent about 18 months in London working in hospital administration and then did a TEFLA (Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults) course so I could teach abroad for a year (1991-2). Prior to going to Naples in Italy I applied for, and was successful in deferring for a year, a place at Bath to do their MSc European Social Policy Course. While abroad I applied for an ESRC grant which I got which enabled me to do the mobile version of the MSc. I got to study in three European Universities including Bath.

### Why did I do a PhD?

I was finalising an MSc in European Social Policy Analysis at the University of Bath and was applying for junior lectureship/research posts. As a result I was interviewed by the University of Plymouth to be the first lecturer on their Social Policy year 1 and 2 BSc degree at a satellite college on Jersey. While I was offered the post I was separately approached by one of the interview panel about working as a researcher on a cross EU research project (based at the University of Plymouth) and using this as a way of working towards a PhD. I jumped at the chance. It had not occurred to me that a PhD was a possibility until the Professor advised that it was the next logical step after obtaining an MSc.

I had never expected to be offered the chance of doctoral study and working in an area related to my MSc seemed a better option than moving to live nearer the satellite college – a choice I do not regret. Consequently instead of becoming a lecturer at the University of Plymouth, I became a funded PhD student there from 1993-1996.

### What was the PhD experience like?

Overall, I feel that I was fortunate with my PhD studies for various reasons:

- I was funded for three years with the opportunity to teach to top up the PhD funding.
- I worked on a focused piece of research that reflected a 'real' and emerging issue.
- I worked as part of a wider team – and being a European project - I got the chance to travel to each of the participating studies.
- I was able to work alongside other PhD students which was good for morale and sharing experiences.

I relished working on a wider project that had a specific remit and focus rather than determining my own question of enquiry and working on my own. I got on well with my first supervisor who was the research co-ordinator of the whole project. I joined at the early part of the project so I got involved in setting up the project - securing additional EU funding, establishing the other research partners in other EU countries and scoping the research instruments. I was responsible for the UK part of the project and this was the focus of my eventual PhD. The aim of the project (a socio-legal study) was to investigate the gender implications of the EC Freedom of Movement of Workers legislation which was the basis for more fundamental citizenship rights of EU nationals. The study involved an analysis of case law which indicated that EU citizenship rights were evolving in a different manner for men compared to women and, through primary research, exploring the experiences of EU women who had migrated to each of the participating countries.

### **Moving on – establishing a new career while finishing my PhD**

Towards the end of the PhD funding I started to look for a full-time research job – my supervisor had also accepted a post at another university and had agreed to 'keep me on' until my viva. I could have applied for a lectureship within the Social Science Faculty at the university I was based at, which I stood a good chance of getting but at that time I was set on moving to London.

I responded to a generic advert and was offered a post at the entry level grade for Government Social Research (GSR) working at the then Department of Social Security (DSS). I was keen to carry on in a research post but was attracted to doing applied research in an environment where research questions are policy relevant and findings have a more immediate resonance. I was also attracted to a permanent post and the attractions of a good pension which is why I applied for a job in the civil service. However, I see myself as a researcher first rather than a civil servant!

I took up post in July 1996 with the DSS having completed the fieldwork for my PhD and having started to write up the analysis. I naively thought that I would find time to work one or two evenings a week and a day over the weekend for a few months to reach completion. I totally underestimated the impact of moving to London and working full-time. It took me another two years before I was awarded my PhD. If I had not progressed as far I had done before I had left full time study I very much doubt if I would have persevered. While I am a 'completer finisher' sort of person I found it very hard working on my PhD in isolation while getting to grips with a new job. I discovered my spare time to be particularly precious and I came to resent spending it on my thesis.

While tough, I found the experience of working as a researcher in government particularly helpful as I wrote up my PhD. I had not really had much instruction or insight into how to write up qualitative research and some of the early projects I worked on/was exposed to in government were about this. I am convinced that the write up of my fieldwork greatly benefited from my new working experience and contributed to my thesis succeeding first time around at viva with no significant amendments required.

### **Career development and the role of my PhD**

While not originally intending to, I have remained in the Civil Service as a researcher (with a few spells of doing wider analytical and policy related posts). I took up my current role heading a new Social Science Research Unit in the Food Standards Agency in July

2007. I am really pleased to have been successful with this appointment. I have a long standing interest (since school) in food and nutrition and in many ways regretted not pursuing a career in food science or dietetics. This job allows me the chance to combine my career in social science research in a subject area that I have remained interested in all my life.

When I joined DSS in 1996 I did not declare that I was working towards completing a PhD – partly because I could not guarantee that I would achieve it and partly because I perceived it might go against me in civil servant circles. In fact, I could have declared it although it would not have made any difference to my starting salary nor my subsequent promotion within the civil service research service. It's been a 'nice to have' for personal reasons of achievement but in many ways it has delayed my civil service career. I remember the director of one of the research organisations I work with (government research involves commissioning the bulk of research requirements to contractors as there is not enough capacity to meet the huge demands for research evidence internally) congratulating me on achieving my PhD but (in a nice way) saying that all it shows is that I have stamina and can work on one project for three years – and that this does not cut the mustard in the commercial world!

Now, however, that I have arrived in my current role in the Food Standards Agency my PhD is definitely an asset. Over half the Agency is scientists with PhDs so, as the sole social scientist (until very recently), it's good to be able to call myself a doctor too. My work in the Agency will also involve working with academics more so I am confident that my PhD will stand me in good stead.

I also detect a move within GSR of reaching out to make more links with academia so it could well be that having a PhD stands the test of time while not necessarily affording any initial benefits outside academia.

### **A typical day in my job at the Food Standards Agency**

There is no typical GSR post –they tend to vary from department to department but they will involve combinations of developing and commissioning programmes of social science research working closely with research contractors and academics, conducting in house analysis and literature reviews, disseminating research evidence helping to inform the policy making process.

At the moment I am starting from scratch in terms of setting up a social science research presence within the Agency. I do everything from 'making the tea to meeting the Chief Executive'. I was tasked with setting up an independent social science research committee which I have done single handed and carrying out a review of social science needs in the Agency. As part of this I have started to recruit staff so there is a small in-house capacity, develop a module of questions for the annual British Social Attitudes Survey, provide advice on a big evaluation study and commission a methodological study to look at the role of eye tracking technology for observing shoppers' behaviour.

I am also contributing to a GSR led project looking at the major behaviour change theories and how to make effective use of them for government policy making. I am also Head of Profession for Social Science Research at the Agency so am responsible for ensuring that work is carried out in line with the GSR professional code and that staff are developed in line with GSR standards.

### **What next – my thoughts about the future?**

Having only recently started in my current role I have no plans to move on for a while. I am keen to establish a solid social science presence within the Agency over the next few years by developing a team that is able to forge good links with scientists/policy makers and help them to become 'intelligent customers' of social science research. I hope to get a new social science committee off to a good start and hope that it can help me develop the role of my Unit as well as advise the Agency on external work of interest.

My grade in the civil service is at a point where my next move would be to try for a post in the Senior Civil Service (SCS) and there are various training courses and mentoring opportunities to support me in this aspiration. Ideally, I would like to achieve this within the Agency given my strong interest in the subject area. However, as it is a small department I am likely to need to think about another move if I aspire, and have the ability, to be part of the SCS.

Now that my work is involving me more and more in academic circles I would be interested in pursuing more collaboration in the future. I think I have pretty much limited my career options having been a civil servant for twelve years. Although I have a PhD I do not have a publications record so do not think that a move back to academia would be possible, particularly at a level and salary that would match my attainment in government.

### **Concluding remarks**

I don't think having a PhD has particularly helped me in my career as a researcher in government. I don't regret the experience as I feel that having a PhD has subjective qualities which I am finding to be of use over time. The PhD I pursued was interesting and I certainly enjoyed my time at the university. I am still in touch with a few former colleagues from there and have recently rekindled these links in a work capacity which is something that I hope will continue.

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## Careers after the PhD: Paul

<b>Background</b>	<b>Paul gained his PhD in Music in 1998.</b> <b>He is currently a freelance journalist and composer as well as working freelance for a national music charity.</b>
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### Experience of studying for PhD

While I am glad I did a PhD I had no support from my university and I unfortunately had problems with my supervisor. Basically I had no support so it made doing my PhD and using it productively very difficult. I have found that my PhD was a hindrance when searching for work, it hasn't seemed relevant. I would like to get into academia but due to lack of support from my university I have been left under-qualified. I got no support to get into postdoc. The preferred route through to that is to engage in teaching during your PhD in order to establish yourself as a lecturer. So I think support is needed to develop networks, engage in research projects and form links with other performers.

### Transition from academia

I have worked a lot of short term contracts. I used to work in a bar part-time and it's only through sheer persistence that I have carved my own niche. I used to freelance teaching music in a local college of further and higher education from 2002-2006. But cuts in education forced me out.

The nature of music has changed considerably in the last 10 years. My DPhil was in traditional music whereas now music is techno and technical. The thing of concern is that while you are doing a research degree the music you are researching is going out of date very quickly. With my DPhil it was 10 years ago when I completed it. The interests of the university have moved and the jobs that I would like to apply for have gone now as the job market has shrunk by three quarters.

### Current Roles

In my present situation I work freelance for a range of organisations.

I currently work for a music outreach charity that operates across the UK, Northern Ireland and the Republic Of Ireland. I run the Irish branch of it, which has been in existence for 10 years. It is a half time job which I freelance for. My role consists of fundraising, running concerts, projects and so on.

As a freelance journalist I write for various mediums – Journal of Music in Ireland, the Belfast Telegraph, various websites and occasionally for the BBC.

The positive aspects of this situation are that I am being creative and I write about music. The problems relate to the structures and nature of it. I am paid hourly without a support structure in place. So I would prefer working somewhere with a support structure.

Another difficulty with my dual role is that I work for so many different bosses and have different deadlines it gets a bit harried and stressful sometimes. On the quieter times that can be stressful as well as you are then looking for work to pay bills!

## Job searching

My doctorate keeps getting in the way of securing employment so I have stopped mentioning it. It only has value for an academic employer.

Regarding what I learnt in my PhD it has been helpful from the point of view that I am now a researched musician which informs what I say in my job, though obviously depending on the audience I may have to 'dumb down' what I say!

In Belfast the music world is very small so a lot of my work has come through referral from other jobs I have done and people approach you. For other official jobs you go through the formal routes in adverts but then you are competing with the hidden world. For e.g. I applied for a lecturing post in Edinburgh and went for interview at considerable expense getting through to second round, only to find out that the job was not given out but divided out into little pieces and given to their students. That's unfortunately what you are facing sometimes but I want to do music research and it can only be done properly in academia as the culture centres around teaching and research. I would still like to get a lecturing post in academia.

## Hindsight

With hindsight I would have gone to Head of School and worked out a plan with him and my supervisor about what they can do for me. I would have made sure that it was a more structured support mechanism in place for me.....maybe even gone to a different university.

## Advice

If you want to succeed in the music world now you have to be a much more practical, popular musician with the ability to sell readily and often, which I don't. I work in the classical music world which is very small. Music now has turned into sound production not music production. Age is also a factor now – employers will go for someone younger and cheaper. There is also an element of being in the right place at the right time. A PhD in itself is useless unless you are staying in academia.

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## Careers after the PhD: Iona

<b>Background</b>	<b>Iona completed her PhD in Ethnic Relations in 1999 from a research intensive university.</b> <b>Currently she runs her own consultancy business.</b>
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### The start of an unpredictable journey

How does a probation officer end up working for the BBC as a diversity manager? Why does she then set up her own equality and diversity consultancy? Career paths are not as straightforward as they used to be. As we all know, long gone are the days of 'a job for life'. We have to look for opportunities to develop our careers and ambitions, sometimes in unusual ways.

My early passion was, rather naively, to be in a job that would 'help people', particularly those whose life chances were limited. I came from a family where barriers had to be overcome either due to economic deprivation or 'race' discrimination. I was the only person in my family to go to university. I studied sociology at Liverpool and, after taking a year out working in a bookshop, I did a post-graduate diploma in social work at what was then Manchester Polytechnic. My social work training began in Greater Manchester Probation Service and my first 'proper job' was as a probation officer in the West Midlands. I have also worked in Berkshire and what is now known as West Mercia Probation Service where I was promoted to senior probation officer. I was given the responsibility of co-chairing the equal opportunities advisor group and thus my passion for equality issues had a chance to be developed. In my SPO role I was tasked with setting up Asha, one of the first women's centres in the country. Asha is now an independent charity doing excellent work with disadvantaged and vulnerable women.

### Moving into research

At this time I became interested in researching a subject close to my heart, namely, how people of mixed heritage understand their identity in a world which likes to categorise people. A friend suggested that, rather than doing the research in my spare time, I should work towards a qualification. I scoured the internet for appropriate courses and found that the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations offered an MPhil/PhD course which I could do part time.

It was useful for me to start with the MPhil as I had been away from studying for 14 years. I sat in on the taught MA during the first year so that I could update my knowledge and studying skills. With a family and bills to pay, I couldn't have managed full time study. The probation service paid for my first year's fees and, following another 12 month career break, I decided to leave the probation service and work part time providing equality training, mainly for criminal justice agencies. With exceptional support from my supervisor I was awarded my PhD 5 years after beginning the course.

## **Working for the BBC**

At this point I wondered what to do next. Should I continue to develop a business in equality training or should I look for more settled work? The internet was my first port of call. I searched for a variety of roles. I wondered whether being a researcher would be the way forward and thought that the BBC may want researchers. I discovered that researcher roles in the BBC were not the same as academic research. However, I found a job advert for a diversity manager for BBC English Regions. I applied and, to be honest, was very surprised to be offered an interview and then be offered the job. One interesting observation in the process was that the interviewers wondered whether someone with a doctorate might be too 'hands off' and not really know how to work with people. Having spent the previous few years studying, I could see their point when thinking about some of the PhD students I had come across. However, having been a practitioner first and then moving into academia part time, they were reassured that I knew what 'real life issues' were.

For the next 5 years I worked with managers and staff across England, specifically on recruitment, retention and progression of minority ethnic and disabled staff, as these were pressing issues for the BBC. I encouraged staff to be more involved in their local communities and to open their doors to people so that they could experience the world of media without having to have a relative get them in 'through the back door'. I also provided support and encouragement to those wanting to work in the BBC and who had found it to be inaccessible.

## **Responding to redundancy**

In 2006, as a result of financial pressures on the BBC, I was made redundant, along with 3500 other staff. I was offered the chance to work in a generalist role but, having spent many years studying and working as a specialist, I decided against that option. Redundancy knocks your confidence but the BBC provided a lot of very helpful support to staff facing an uncertain future. I decided that I would put all my experience into working in a more flexible (and hopefully fulfilling) way. I set up Imagine Associates, an equality and diversity consultancy. I had secured two significant contracts before leaving my BBC role. The first was providing consultancy to the Royal Shakespeare Company on how to implement its race equality action plan and the second was providing team building and diversity training to BBC Monitoring staff in Ukraine and Azerbaijan. I am still providing consultancy to the RSC and have worked with a number of other clients since setting up the company.

My aim is to offer specialist consultancy in as flexible as way as possible. For some organizations I offer training, for others research and for yet others, one to one consultancy and mentoring. I might be lecturing at a university one day and attending a race equality audience forum the next. Some contracts are small and might be half day presentations to businesses, others are long term and require good relationship building and communication skills.

## Reflections on having a PhD

There are some advantages in having a PhD in my current role. It helps people to have confidence in my expertise and to accept my advice and guidance. However, sometimes it can alienate people who think I only have theoretical knowledge. I have to make sure they know of my experience of working and volunteering in the public and voluntary sectors too.

For anyone thinking about how to have a career outside of research, I think the most important strategy is to develop skills and experience which are transferable into non-academic workplaces, even while they are studying. For me it was fairly easy as I had returned to studying having had a career but for those who have only been in a university setting, it is essential that they take every opportunity to show that they can work in 'real life' situations.

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## Careers after the PhD: Caroline

<b>Background</b>	<b>Caroline completed her PhD in Medieval Studies from a research intensive university in 2001.</b>
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### Current situation

I am currently employed as the Academic Manager (an administrative position) in a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at a leading university. This post involves managing all aspects of the Centre, including budget control, oversight of funding streams and line-management of staff, as well as a few more “academic-related” activities which involve writing, co-writing and editing papers and reports.

The most enjoyable parts of my role are that I am involved in a project which is completely new, and which is enabling undergraduate students to develop skills which they might not otherwise be able to practise, and that I have the opportunity to work with a very diverse range of people at both internal and external levels. The most frustrating thing from my point of view is that I am working in an academic department without actually being an academic: the subject is very different from my own, and many of the staff here at the university see administrators rather as glorified secretaries, so it is sometimes difficult to be taken seriously. I have tried to keep up with my own research just as a personal interest but it has rather fallen by the wayside due to time constraints.

### Post-doc career developments

The career path which took me into the job is slightly meandering. I completed my PhD in 2000, and was then fortunate enough to be employed as a postdoc on a research project which matched my subject area almost perfectly. However, the interdisciplinary nature of my research meant that I was always aware that further opportunities might be few and far between, and by the time my three-year contract was nearing its end I had not seen another postdoc or a lectureship for which I could even realistically apply. Also by this time I had a spouse, a mortgage and a baby, so there were plenty of financial constraints – I needed to find something fairly permanent.

This left me in something of a quandary: should I (a) hold out for something in my subject area, without knowing how long this might take, (b) find something outside academe which was related to my subject area (in my case, something like museum work), or (c) ditch my subject area completely and use my transferable skills in order to find an unrelated job in another sector. There were plenty of jobs around to apply for which did not actually require a PhD – graduate training schemes etc – but none of these really appealed as I didn’t want to end up effectively admitting that the past six years had been ‘wasted’ and that I’d have to start all over again alongside people who had just graduated from a first degree and who would be a number of years younger than me.

### Moving into university administration

As I was researching the jobs market I found a sector which I thought might provide a suitable compromise: university administration. After all, a university was an environment I liked, and there were people here and there in the administration with PhDs, so my background might come in useful. I applied for a position in the central administration of a university and was offered the post. I went into it with my eyes open, knowing that it wasn't exactly my dream job and that it would be a real wrench to leave my subject, but I had a family to feed so I decided to make the best of it.

I knew almost immediately that I had found a job to which I was not suited. This was mainly my own fault: I had become so immersed in the world of my subject during the previous six years that I had become unused to having to deal with difficult people, of whom I encountered many in my new post. I also found many of the tasks I was asked to perform mundane, and although I carried them out well, I did not enjoy it and felt as though I was only using half my brain. It was also the first job I had ever done which did not involve writing as a primary component, and I found that I missed this greatly. Drafting minutes just wasn't the same!

However, the post was an extremely useful introduction to how a university worked, how it functioned overall; something from which I had previously been isolated. I think it's true that many people who work in universities see themselves as members of their department first and the university second, and they have no overall conception of how things happen: now I have much more of an idea.

### **Academic Manager in a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

This experience stood me in very good stead when I saw the advert for the new position in one of the newly established CETLs. They were looking for an academic administrator, one who had experience both of academe (a PhD was an essential requirement) and HE administration. I applied for the post and was appointed.

This post has turned out to be an excellent move for me. It is extremely demanding in terms of being able to do lots of things simultaneously, which I enjoy, and I have the opportunity to develop new ideas and procedures. There is also enough of a balance in terms of the academic-type activities: I write or co-write various papers, and I also do a fair amount of editing work on the academic contributions to our various publications.

### **Wider reflections**

I am now ambivalent about my original choice of moving out of academe. Whenever I read anything related to my subject, or hear about a new publication from someone I know, I yearn to return to it and feel incredibly jealous of those who have managed to get their foot on the ladder (especially those who moan non-stop in the Times Higher and other publications about how awful their jobs are!). On the other hand, I am aware that an academic's life can be difficult and that I am looking at it with rose-tinted spectacles simply because I am on the other side of the fence.

In theory, I would move back to an academic life like a shot if offered the opportunity. In practice this has not happened, for two reasons. The first is that, having now been out of academe for nearly four years, I have not published anything in my field (other than items which were still 'forthcoming' which I wrote during my postdoc), nor have I been gaining extra teaching experience. Therefore it would be extremely difficult to achieve anything in competition with others who have been continuously employed in the field: I

have dipped my toe in the water with a couple of applications, but apart from one unsuccessful interview I didn't get anywhere. The second is the insecure nature of the jobs market. My spouse changed jobs and my son is at a local nursery: I can't keep uprooting them all in order to take up one-year or two-year temporary positions. When examined in this light, my current post is vastly preferable.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and when I look back I can see a number of things which could have been done differently. The major one is that I would probably have tried to hold out for an academic job in the first place; however, like many people I chose to value job security over job enjoyment.

One thing which I would never exchange, however, is having done a PhD in the first place. I rank this as one of the most valuable experiences of my life. I was able to spend three years researching and writing about a subject for which I had, and still have, an abiding passion, and this was a privilege. In addition to this, I did gain all those really useful transferable skills which everyone talks about: not only things like time-management and the ability to see a project through from start to finish, but also critical thinking and writing skills which many others never have the time to polish. These are things which are highly valued in any workplace: just look at the number of people who can't string a coherent paragraph together, or the number of badly worded corporate publications you see.

#### **Final advice**

I don't think I'm really qualified to offer advice to anyone else, but if I did feel able to do so, it would run something along the lines of: enjoy the experience of doing your PhD; realise that there are many career options open to you, both within and outside the HE sector; choose carefully what you want to do after your PhD is finished (yes, there is life after that thesis); and find a fulfilling job which you can enjoy.

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## Careers after the PhD: John

<b>Background:</b>	<b>John gained his PhD from Queens University Belfast (QUB) in 2004</b>
	<b>He is currently employed as a Research Fellow, at QUB</b>

### Experience of studying for PhD

My PhD was in humanities – it covered three different areas – Irish studies, human geography and politics/public administration. My route was a bit unusual. As I was doing my masters I realized that it was going nowhere which gave me the impetus to push forward to do a PhD. I was motivated by an abortive attempt to create an administrative career and I felt that “it was now or never”. However, during my PhD at Queen’s I received much less guidance from my supervisor than I would have wished for, and as a result needed to resubmit to tighten the PhD up. Despite the difficulties with support I did find the PhD process very enjoyable – the research end of it, and following new leads to their natural conclusion, was stimulating.

### Transition from PhD

I completed my PhD on a part-time basis while still working full-time as an administrator. It took me 3 ½ years of very intensive work to break the back of the PhD and I finished it in 2004. In order to try and wean myself out of administration (as I realised that this was not the career that I wanted to stay in), I took a position as a research manager which combined two roles, research and administration. I felt and still do feel that academia is a more transparent process than administration and I really enjoy the research end of academia.

### Current role

As a research fellow I am now in the traditional career route of a young academic at a middle stage of my life (almost 45). I now hope to do more publications and so hope to move into a more traditional academic route. There is no real research fellow career path to follow unfortunately; and as independence is my key aim, becoming a lecturer is the route to follow. Within some institutions research fellows are not regarded as highly as academics: there is a gulf between core staff who are research fellows and those that are academic staff. As a researcher there is a difficulty in building a formal career; although I would prefer doing research alone, becoming a lecturer is the only way forward for me.

In academia I have found it advantageous to have my doctorate, as you have respect from your academic colleagues. In my current role, although I am not able to draw directly on my PhD subject knowledge, the experience of research management has been a bonus when liaising with funders.

### Job searching

I have always found it easy to find out about jobs either via contacts or via the internet. When completing my postgraduate diploma in Human Resource Management at the University of Ulster in the 1990s I received practitioner advice from Queen’s personnel

department. This stressed the importance of gaining a job in Human Resources (HR) in order to utilise this professional qualification properly. I found this advice very valuable, although I didn't follow a HR career.

I obtained my current role because I was determined to return to research and away from the purely administrative role which my previous position comprised. I wanted to bring myself back into my key area of expertise in order to gain job satisfaction, raise my self-esteem and my career prospects.

Two roles are open to me – senior research fellow or academic. Senior researcher is usually externally funded and thereby limited in scope; as a result a lecturing post is more likely the way to go.

I do feel that if I had completed my PhD 10 years earlier, then it would have been a wiser path to follow; but due to the lack of encouragement to undertake this, I attempted to diversify into a career in administration, which I now feel was a mistake. However, a role I undertook as Principal Investigator (1998-2000) got me back into the route that I wanted to be in now. I sometimes feel that I maybe should have gone on and done a Law degree and become a solicitor, as in my early years I would have never envisaged myself as an academic.

#### **Advice**

- Decide what you want to do but don't limit yourself.
- If doing a masters, think about a slightly different subject, as it makes you more marketable.
- Enjoy your student days: they go by so quickly!
- Remember **you** are responsible for your career. Plan where you want to be in five years. The onus for your own career development is on you. Don't rely on others.

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**Date 30<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

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Date collected, August 2008

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## Careers after the PhD: Greg

<b>Background</b>	<b>Greg completed his DPhil in English Literature at Sussex University in 2006 and is employed as a Technical Writer: Rail Safety and Standards Board</b>
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Greg describes his current job title as a misnomer, and explains his role as being like an English Teacher. He completed his DPhil in English Literature in 2006 and moved directly to the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB), having found the job advertisement in 'Railnews' six months before his viva. His job title is technical writer, but his role also covers writer-in-residence and press office-type activities.

### Current role

The purpose of my job is to raise the standard of written English in the office where I work. I write reports, proof read the work of others, raise enthusiasm for words amongst my colleagues and run tutorials to support the better use of language. In a sense I'm a writer in residence. I earn my living by playing with words. Many of my friends come from a background in maths and physics and are very able in their own fields, but have less experience of report writing. This means I can stand out and make a difference. Helping people and seeing their work develop has been very rewarding.

In addition to supporting the writing of others, I produce a regular summary of rail industry press coverage, write reports and attend (many!) meetings. I run a 'Lit Crit' group too, sending round various pieces of text and asking others to comment on it. This helps them gain knowledge of word usage beyond the business.

I enjoy the contact I have with people and the fact that I am a bit different here. My colleagues want to learn and appreciate the support I give them in both one-to-one and group sessions. I don't have to wear a suit to fit in, and I like being part of a team (which is very important). Before returning to university for postgraduate study, my work had not been satisfying; I had rather dull office jobs and am glad that this one is so much more 'me'. My employer is supportive and appreciates what I do. There is training available and I have a sense that my career can develop here. I know I am building my skills through employment.

### Transition from academia

I would have really liked a post doc position after my DPhil to enable me to continue my research in a similar vein. However, funded post doc positions were hard to come by and I had to start looking for paid employment. I knew I didn't want to teach at university or 'A' level but, apart from that, was pretty unsure as to what my next move should be. It was pure chance that a neighbour showed me the advert for this job in his copy of the trade journal 'Railnews'. I would never have found it myself so, in that way, I was very lucky.

My DPhil really helped me get this job. In addition to the subject matter, it provided evidence that I could work hard on my own and be independent to a large degree. It was important to emphasise at the interview that the self-discipline of DPhil study, where you are managing your own time and – in my case – working part time too, means that you have a heightened ability to manage your workload successfully.

## **Future plans**

I want to go on writing. My articles and book reviews continue to be published and I would like to do more. One book, based on my DPhil, is with a publisher and will be out soon. Maybe one day I'll write 'the big romance', but there is scope to be promoted at RSSB and I am happy to stay where I am for the moment.

## **Tips**

Moving out of academia has suited me. You take parts of your DPhil work with you and soon find how they fit into a new environment. I wondered what I was going to do after my DPhil, but could not have imagined this role. It's worth hanging in there and applying – you do get your rewards. I've found that working outside academia can be very fulfilling indeed.

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## Annex 1 - Prompt Sheet

**Don't feel constrained to address all of these prompts, to treat them in order, or to be limited by the list.** Everyone's career is unique and requires its own shape and structure. Recount your journey in the way that seems best to you. We would suggest using between 1 and 3 sides of A4. ***Please don't overlook the emotional side of events. Try to include your feelings and reactions.***

- What was the experience of studying for your PhD like?
- How did you manage the transition from study to full time employment?
- What are the major career moves you've made and why
  - Have you stayed within research or moved into something different?
  - What factors encouraged you?
  - What were your motivations?
  - If you moved outside of research, what did you move into?
    - What was the experience like initially?
- What are you doing now (job title and brief role description)?
  - What do you find most enjoyable / most frustrating about your current work?
  - What is your work environment like? (e.g. company culture, facilities, working hours)?
  - Can you give a flavour of a 'typical' working day?
  - How do you think you are perceived for having a doctorate?
  - How does your work role relate to your wider life?
- Are you able to draw on your research subject knowledge / skills in your role? If so how?
  - How does your move from PhD into your current role fit into your 'life story'?
- What has your experience of job seeking been like?
  - How have you found opportunities (through contacts, adverts etc)?
  - How have your planned efforts interacted with chance to affect the course of events?
  - What was the job seeking process like for you?
- Why did you seek / accept your current job?
  - What other options did you consider?
  - What factors influenced you?
  - If you weren't in your current role what else might you be doing?
- Have you received any advice on careers which was particularly useful?
  - What was the advice and who was it from?
- Where do you want to go from here and what options are open to you?

- Have earlier career moves helped or limited the options available to you now?
- With hindsight, what would you like to have done differently?
- What advice would you give to someone who is looking to embark on a similar career?
- What are the most important lessons that you have learnt about career development?
- What's your general view on post PhD career development?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Annex 2 - Careers of Researchers: Case Study Release Form

Your name		Area of PhD	
Date of completion		Awarding University	
<p><b>Release statement</b></p> <p>The data collected in this form will be processed by the University of Reading<sup>2</sup>, and other participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), for the purposes of making case studies available to the wider education community through print, electronic publication and the internet, and to promote further public engagement in education.</p> <p>The Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) is the national co-ordinator for the sharing of these case studies and related information. Your information will be processed by participating organisations according to their data protection policies. A list of participating organisations is available on request from the CCMS; see <a href="http://www.rdg.ac.uk/ccms">http://www.rdg.ac.uk/ccms</a> for contact details.</p> <p>By submitting this response you are giving permission to the University of Reading and other participating organisations to reproduce, edit and make your case study and its contents available to third parties for the purposes described above under the <b>Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike License</b>. You also release the University of Reading and other participating organisations from all claims, demands, and causes of action of every nature and kind arising out of or connected with the information provided.</p> <p>If you wish to see your personal data held by the University please see <a href="http://www.rdg.ac.uk/data_protection">http://www.rdg.ac.uk/data_protection</a> for information on how to make a data subject access request.</p> <p><b>Signature</b> - please sign to indicate your agreement with the above. If returning this by email, either use an electronic signature, or in your email clearly state your acceptance of the release statement.</p>			
Date			
Contact address			
Email address			
Can we contact you in connection with future projects? <i>Please note this does not commit you to providing any particular information.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes I can be contacted for future projects <input type="checkbox"/> No		
<b>University that has collected this case study</b>			

<sup>2</sup> All personal data will be processed by the University of Reading according to its Data Protection Policy. See [http://www.rdg.ac.uk/data\\_protection](http://www.rdg.ac.uk/data_protection) for details

## Case Study Release Form (continued)

This section is to help users understand and find case studies (for example as part of a search facility) and to ensure proper and confidential treatment of your material.

<b>Your Name</b>		
<b>Can we use your name in your case study, or do you wish us to use a pseudonym?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Use real name <input type="checkbox"/> use a pseudonym	
<b>Can we refer to institutions mentioned in your case study by name, or would you prefer us to use a generic descriptor (e.g. research intensive university)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Use name of HEI <input type="checkbox"/> Use generic descriptor	
<b>Have you held a research / teaching post in HE after completing your PhD?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Information withheld	
<b>Have you had a career break?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Information withheld	<b>If so, during which years?</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male	
<b>Age range</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29 <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50+ <input type="checkbox"/> Information withheld	
<b>Current salary (£K):</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Below £20 <input type="checkbox"/> £20-29 <input type="checkbox"/> £30-39 <input type="checkbox"/> £40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> £50+ <input type="checkbox"/> Information withheld	
<b>What is your ethnic group?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Black <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> Information withheld	
<b>Disability: Do you consider yourself to have a disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Information withheld	
<b>Please indicate the nature of your disability.</b>		

## **Annex 3 – Briefing sheet for students using the case studies**

The career paths open to those with doctorates are diverse and often unpredictable. Having a PhD necessarily opens up new possibilities and in general those with a PhD enjoy a wider range of options than those with lower qualifications. At the same time holders of a PhD face unique challenges. The idiomatic nature of doctoral careers means that there may be few 'obvious' career routes to follow, particularly if the well trodden paths of research are left behind.

These case studies seek to address the situation by tracing out the unrepeatable patterns of individual's career trajectories. These stories are not supplied as routes to follow, nor as cautionary tales. They are however, real accounts from the front line, which may offer hope and encouragement as you seek to navigate your own unique journeys provided in the hope that through reflecting on their experience you might be encouraged and better enabled to undertake your own unique journeys.

The idea for this case study project came from the Postgraduate Careers Education Working Group – a group led by the Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) based at the University of Reading, and composed of staff from many universities and organisations working with PhD students.

Some case studies have been written by the respondent. Others are notes transcribed from interviews. All but one case study has been written in the first person and all have been based on a common set of prompts. While each has been edited, the final form of the text has been checked with the respondent. Respondents were given the option of using their own name, or a pseudonym. Most have elected to use their own name. Occasionally some details have been disguised to protect the confidentiality and interests of the respondents.

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