

AccessEd and Commonwealth Scholarship Commission Leaders in Sustainable Development Programme

Workshop: [Transitioning to a career \(training session\)](#)

Overarching workshop theme:

This training session will focus on your career development and immediate potential next steps following the completion of your degree. You will gain a global view on different job sectors around the world, and roles which are most common for people like you who are transitioning from academia.

These sub-themes will be discussed during the training session:

- What are the different career paths and sectors that researchers can pursue when transitioning to a career?
- What skills are most valuable for the career paths and sectors you would like to pursue? What skills do you have that are valuable in non-academic settings?
- What roles are you considering outside of academic and how do they fit what's important to you?
- How should you interpret job adverts?
- How can you tailor your cover letter and CV appropriately?
- What steps can you take to learn from job rejections?

Session pre-work

Bring one example job description either from your home country or the UK that you might be interested in applying to to the training session. This can be hypothetical (you don't have to have full intention to apply), but for the purposes of talking through a worked example during the session.

You should also come prepared to discuss your own CV/cover letter in either your home country context or the UK.

Session pre-reading

Read the following article. Which of the guidelines outlined below resonate strongly with you, and how do you plan to apply these guidelines when transitioning to a career?

Article: 6 things to consider when transitioning from academia to industry

*The article below summarizes the experience and advice of three researchers for transitioning from academia to industry.

When a researcher decides to switch from academia to industry, there are important elements for them to consider and skills they need to build. If you're thinking about making that transition, focusing on these can help you make the most of opportunities in an industry job and choose an organization that's right for you.

In May, Elsevier's Researcher Academy held a [webinar](#) for researchers thinking about moving from academia to industry. Presenters were Dr. Craig Gorin, Associate Research Scientist for Dow Inc; Dr. Alessia Amodio, Policy and Project Officer for the European Commission, DG RTD; and Dr. Samuel Levi, Senior Scientist in Discovery Chemistry at Merck Research Labs. Dr. Gorin and Dr. Levi were Reaxys PhD Prize finalists in 2014 and 2019 respectively, while Dr. Amodio won the Reaxys SCI Early Career Researcher Award in 2015.

They focused on four key aspects: when to make the move, where to move, what tools you need to make the right move and how to remain productive in the industry space. They also shared their reasons for opting for a career in industry.

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Dr. Gorin pointed out that there's "overlap" as well as differences: *"First and foremost in either career, you need to be a good scientist, you need to follow the scientific method, you need to innovate and understand and keep up with literature. But there are some key differences"*.

1. Understand your organization.

To excel in an industry job, it is important to learn about the organization and industry you work in. A good knowledge of your organization helps put things in perspective. You know where you fit and how you can be invaluable and relevant to the organization. In addition, it's important to pay attention to investors' reports, global trends and realities, and the industry news in general.

2. Connect with others.

Networking with others in the industry is beneficial. It is important to connect with colleagues with skills complementary to yours. When connecting with others, ensure you update them on what you are working on, your expertise and areas in which you might be able to collaborate. This helps you build your reputation and their perception of you. In sum, this approach helps you build a strong network of colleagues who understand you and can go above and beyond to complement your output.

As Dr. Amodio explained, for an industry role you need to be comfortable depending on others: *"In industry, it's extremely important to be able to work in a team and be a good communicator. In academia, you can do a project all by yourself, or maybe do one part and hand over to someone else, or maybe you work in parallel. In industry, there's always a lot of different expertise involved in one process, and so most of the time you'll need someone else's experience and expertise in order to proceed with your job"*.

3. Team building is the best way to work.

Being able to connect with others makes team building approach easier to learn. Most industry jobs thrive on a team-based approach in carrying out its numerous projects. A successful project depends on the team working together. An industry job gives you the opportunity to interact with team members who are experts in their field. It is necessary to learn how to collaborate efficiently with them to ensure that every project is completed seamlessly.

Dr Gorin explained, *"There are times you'll be a key contributor to a team, and other times when you're leading a team. You really need to understand how to organize a project, and how to motivate your team to accomplish the project goal. It also means you need to understand that people have different priorities and motivations, so if you can play to their needs your project can be much more successful"*.

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4. Build your multitasking and project management skills.

Organizations will have multiple team-based projects running concurrently, and you will likely find that you are part of several of those. Therefore, it's necessary for you to understand how to manage projects effectively. You must be able to keep track of each project's progress rate, communicate effectively with teammates and learn how to harness the strength of the team for the project's good.

5. Develop a business mindset.

For you to have a successful career in an industry job, you must be business-minded. There is a need to know the right business language and how to translate ideas into marketable applications. Every business owner must see the incentives your ideas can accrue from investing in your project. Therefore, you must understand what works and how viable your propositions are to the organization's commercial innovation goals.

Dr. Gorin elaborated: *"At a company, you still need to focus on good fundamental science, but part of the goal now is to enable commercialization rather than just publishing or advancing science. It can mean that projects are shorter-term than the usual 5-year PhD, and it will mean interacting with other functions, such as sales and marketing, which means figuring out how to speak their language. In the early days in one role, I prepared about 25 slides, including full testing results, and when I started presenting to the team in marketing, I got about two slides in before I was asked to summarize and skip ahead. They don't necessarily need to know all the fundamental details. They want to know the advantages and disadvantages and the things that establish if it's a viable business approach".*

6. Stay up to date with research.

You must stay up to date with the latest research findings in fields related to your work. There's a tendency to get stuck with activities and industry-based projects. Deliberately devoting time to reading the latest research findings in academic journals keeps you updated and relevant in on the job.

As Dr. Levi said, this is one of the skills that remains important whether you're in academia or industry: *"The first thing I do on a typical day is read for about an hour. It's really important to be up to date not only on the literature on your project, but what's going on in the world. That's important for scientific literacy but also in maintaining a network. Being able to talk about different people's work is really critical".*

*[Written by K. Amakoh, July 13, 2020.](#)