Moving out of Academic Research

Contents

Dr Andreas Gessner 2
Research Scientist in Drug Discovery at e-Therapeutics PLC, Oxfordshire

Dr Andrew Young 4
Chief Operating Officer (COO), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Dr Claire Wipat 6
Clinical Trials Officer

Emma Barksby 8
Procurement Officer, Newcastle University

Dr Gillian Borthwick 10
National Research Coordinator NIHR Clinical Research Network: Genetics, Newcastle University

Dr Liz Kemp 13
Professional Development Manager (academic staff), Staff Development Unit, Newcastle University

Dr Samantha Dainty 15
Biological Safety Advisor, Human Resources, Newcastle University

Dr Emma Bowen 17
Assistant Research Funding Development Manager, Newcastle University

Researcher Career Stories
Dr Andreas Gessner

**Job title:** Research Scientist in Drug Discovery at e-Therapeutics PLC, Oxfordshire.

**Previous occupation:** Research Associate at the Institute of Cellular Medicine, Newcastle University.

‘Of course starting in a new environment is always bumpy and took a while. But I got used to the industry-way of working which is very different from the academia one.’

**What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?**

The company has developed a network pharmacology platform, which uses a lot of bio- and chemoinformatics to perform in silico drug development. Instead of screening thousands of potential compounds in the lab, we can build protein-protein interaction networks and identify compounds that will disrupt those networks thus reducing a list of 100,000 potential compounds to a few 100. Further investigations might even further reduce this list. I am involved in identifying disease-relevant biological processes and in creating and analysing the disease networks, and further to this, I am working on the compound identification and optimisation process together with the bioinformatics team. As soon as promising candidates emerge, I am also responsible for outsourcing the actual screening work as we do not have our own laboratories. This involves budget planning, site visits, project initiation and project management.

One big difference in working in research within a private company rather than in Higher Education is having a permanent contract – this is just one less concern to have enabling me to concentrate on my work. It also leaves you free to make decisions about your career rather than being forced into it!

**What were the circumstances under which you decided to change career?**

The change from an academic career to an industry career was more a coincidence. My contract ran out and I was looking for new jobs either in or out of academia. I came across an advert published on the Newcastle University Careers Service website. Within six weeks I was hired!
How did you decide on a new career direction and what (and who) encouraged you to make the move?
The biggest motivation was of course the end of the contract with the University. I was (and still am) interested in new, innovative approaches to research so I was lucky to get on board with e-Therapeutics.

What skills, competencies and experiences were needed for this career move?
After contacting the company (e-Therapeutics) they told me they were looking for someone who has cancer research experience and who was willing to adapt to new technologies. And in the end we came to an agreement.

What were the main barriers or difficulties in changing career?
Of course, starting in a new environment is always bumpy and took a while. But I got used to the industry-way of working, which is very different from the academia one. For instance, the research is geared to application rather than publication – publication is not the driver! If the research doesn’t lead to a compound which can go to trial then it is useless. It is important for the company to publish, but not for the individual… I have not published so far within my post. As the end point of the research is so critical, you also have to think in a different way and plan research projects much more in advance. There was also the realisation that there are much larger amounts of money available in industrial research compared with academia.

What helped you prepare for your role (including development opportunities, advice)?
As I have a similar role in industry as in academia, the role itself did not change much. The focus is completely different (as explained above) and that was something I was not prepared for.

What advice would you give to other researchers interested in moving into this field?
Scout the job market as it is a good indicator of what is needed in industry. Currently, project management, quality control, regulatory affairs or clinical trial work (management, monitors, clinical research associate) are high in demand and have good career development opportunities. If you want lab work then currently antibody research, protein characterisation and probably pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics are useful. But the market does change rapidly and what is good today might not be there tomorrow. Planning your move out of research is not easy – but don’t discard an element of luck!
Moving out of Academic Research: Researcher Career Stories

Dr Andrew Young

**Job title:** Chief Operating Officer (COO), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

**Previous occupation:** Research Associate.

‘I decided that however much I loved my research, I wasn’t going to be the next Faraday or Tinbergen and so I decided I’d better do something else.’

**What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?**

I am COO at one of the most research-intensive small specialist institutions in the UK, and I love every minute of the job (more or less!). I particularly like the variety in the role and the size of the institution means that I am never too far away from the action. I particularly enjoy managing my own team and developing them in their roles.

**What were the circumstances under which you decided to change career?**

I did my PhD in Newcastle in the 80s and continued there as a postdoc into the 90s. In 1995 my contract was running out (again) and I failed to win what I thought was a great funding bid, and so I reached a point where I needed to take stock. I decided that however much I loved my research, I wasn’t going to be the next Faraday or Tinbergen and so I decided I’d better do something else. I’ve always been a good organiser and the role of Departmental Superintendent came up. That’s a grand title for Chief Technician with the finance role tagged on, and essentially what we call a Departmental Manager these days. I applied and got it, and it’s the best decision I made in my working life. I love having the ability to make things work for academics and I’ve built my subsequent career on that.

**How did you decide on a new career direction and what (and who) encouraged you to make the move?**

Well it was partly serendipity I have to admit. The right job came up at around the point at which I’d decided that I needed to change career. I was encouraged by my colleagues actually and the Head of School informally indicated that whilst I’d be in a fair competition he would certainly consider my application. I also knew quite a few of the people I would line manage so it didn’t seem too daunting.
What skills, competencies and experiences were needed for this career move?

Flexibility, willingness to learn, to tackle anything coming my way. I needed a practical can-do outlook with good negotiating and influencing skills. I had some experience of purchasing practice and this became really important in the role.

What were the main barriers or difficulties in changing career?

At the time it was not normal for someone to move from an academic to a support role. There were some ruffled feathers and the Unions got a little interested, but nothing serious. This would not raise eyebrows now. Apart from that, nothing outside my own head – I always think that I am going to be found out and suddenly everyone will realise I can’t do the job. It isn’t true, of course (but it’s only a matter of time).

What helped you prepare for your role (including development opportunities, advice)?

Support from my boss. You need that because you do make mistakes. It is inevitable – you are starting again. You need to be ready for this because you should measure success on what you do after you have made a mistake, not simply focus on not making one, because that will always happen. Get up, start again and get on with the job.

What advice would you give to other researchers when planning their own career?

Think about what you like doing and where your natural aptitude lies. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator might be useful for you. It’s not always clear to you what your core skills actually are – we tend not to analyse that in a stable career, but when you need to change it’s useful to pick out your own abilities in a more abstract sense to think about how you could use them in another career. Seriously consider getting help with this. And be honest, this is not time for false modesty.
Dr Claire Wipat

Job title: Clinical Trials Officer.

Previous occupation: Research Associate, Newcastle University.

“It’s easy to just think that the main skills you have acquired are lab based skills that may be very specific to a career in research but you need to focus on the many transferable skills you have acquired.”

What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?

I work at the QE Hospital in Gateshead and coordinate cancer clinical trials. It is my responsibility to set up any trials; to ensure all departments involved, such as pharmacy and radiology, are on board and to get local research and development approval to run the study. I then find eligible patients, usually by attending outpatient clinics, and discuss the trials with them. I follow up patients who consent to the trial and send information to the office running the trial. I recruit patients to studies for breast, lung, haematology and colorectal cancers.

What were the circumstances under which you decided to change career?

Although I enjoyed working as a postdoc I knew that I didn’t have the commitment or the desire to have an academic career. I wanted more job security than working on temporary contracts. I was interested in finding a career that was still involved in research and particularly in the field of medicine.

How did you decide on a new career direction and what (and who) encouraged you to make the move?

I had always been interested in working in the field of clinical trials but I hadn’t realised that there were job opportunities in this field in the North East or that all clinical research was just carried out by big pharma companies. A colleague working at the Bobby Robson Clinical Trials Unit first introduced me to the fact that a lot of clinical trial research is being carried out in the region and she encouraged me to apply for a trials coordinator or officer post.
What skills, competencies and experiences were needed for this career move?
A lot of the skills that I acquired in the lab have been useful in my new career. Sometimes it is great to have a good understanding of University research to be able to talk to patients about why the trials are being carried out. Attention to detail is essential in clinical trials and good communication and presentation skills are important. Knowledge of how research works and the translation of laboratory research into hospital best practice is helpful.

What were the main barriers or difficulties in changing career?
To move into the NHS I had to take a significant drop in salary and had to adapt to working in a totally different environment. I looked at this as a training post and I have now gained the experience to work in other fields of clinical trials should I wish to in the future.

What helped you prepare for your role (including development opportunities, advice)?
I undertook a Good Clinical Practice course at home which is an essential qualification for those working in clinical trials. The course gave me a good understanding of how trials need to be run and showed my potential employers that I was interested in trial research and that I had the foresight to find out what was required before I applied for a job in this area.

What advice would you give to other researchers when planning their own career?
It’s easy to just think that the main skills you have acquired are lab-based skills that may be very specific to a career in research but you need to focus on the many transferable skills you have acquired. Managing your own research, both on a day-to-day and on a long-term basis, is a big undertaking. If, like me, you wanted to still be involved in research but just wanted to escape the nightmare of short-term contracts, I would look for opportunities that may be already linked to what you do such as University Spin-Off companies. I still consider myself to be involved in research but at the other end of the process where I really see if it is making a difference to people’s lives.
‘I would advise others to consider at an early stage what they would like to do in the future and to talk to people who work outside of research. I think it is important to try to broaden your skills by taking opportunities to become involved in other activities, eg teaching or voluntary activities outside of work.’

What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?
I work as a Procurement Officer managing the laboratory supplies commodity area. My role involves administering tender processes for the high-value laboratory equipment, setting up contracts for the supply of laboratory reagents and outsourced services. I meet regularly with representatives from companies that provide laboratory goods and services. I also assist people experiencing problems with suppliers through mediation and negotiation with suppliers to resolve any issues. I enjoy working with different colleagues from across the University and learning about the different types of research the University is engaged in. I particularly enjoy helping people acquire better products and services for research than previously expected in terms of quality and price.

What were the circumstances under which you decided to change career?
Whilst I enjoyed working in research I realised that I wanted to change direction and have greater job security. Towards the end of a third short-term research contract, it was the appropriate time to make a career change.

How did you decide on a new career direction and what (and who) encouraged you to make the move?
I asked people who worked outside of research about what their jobs involved on a day-to-day basis. Initially, I thought about teaching and a friend arranged for me to shadow science teachers in a secondary school for a few days. I quickly realised that teaching in a school was not the job for me. I am pleased I had the opportunity to experience teaching as it helped me make an informed decision about my future. I enjoy learning and I was willing
to undertake other qualifications and acquire new skills and I decided to study law via a distance learning programme. I contacted Procurement Services in the University to request some work experience. I thought one of the barriers to career change to law was that I have lacked experience of working in an office environment. After beginning some unpaid work experience, an opportunity arose for me to apply for short-term contract in Procurement and I got the job, which I did part-time alongside the law qualification. I found that I enjoyed working in the Procurement Office and I could use some of the skills from my previous role to assist with writing specifications for tenders and analysing data. The Head of Procurement encouraged me to consider a career in Procurement and my contract was extended. After finishing the law qualification I was offered an open-ended contract and decided to continue in Procurement. I am able to use both scientific and legal knowledge in my job as Procurement Officer. I have since undertaken further study to become a member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS).

**What skills, competencies and experiences were needed for this career move?**

Good communication skills are important when dealing with colleagues from across the University and suppliers. I have found that having a scientific background has also been very beneficial in managing the laboratory commodity area. The commercial knowledge and experience I required was obtained through studying law, for membership of CIPS and on the job experience.

**What were the main barriers or difficulties in changing career?**

The main barriers were firstly identifying suitable career choices that I would enjoy and trying to relate how the skills I developed in a laboratory environment would be applicable in a different setting.

**What helped you prepare for your role (including development opportunities, advice)?**

I spent time seeking advice from others who worked in jobs which I thought might be of interest to me. I sought opportunities to shadow others at work and to obtain work experience. I also undertook further study.

**What advice would you give to other researchers when planning their own career?**

I would advise others to consider at an early stage what they would like to do in the future and to talk to people who work outside of research. I think it is important to try to broaden your skills by taking opportunities to become involved in other activities, eg teaching or voluntary activities outside of work.
Dr Gillian Borthwick

**Job title:** National Research Coordinator, NIHR Clinical Research Network: Genetics, Newcastle University.

**Previous occupation:** Senior Research Associate, Institute of Genetic Medicine, Newcastle University.

‘...all the time you are learning from your experiences. However, as a scientist you are unaware that you are developing translational skills on a daily basis...’

**What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?**

My role as National Research Coordinator for the NIHR Clinical Research Network: Genetics combines my interest and knowledge of genetics research and my experience of research management. I look on this position as my dream job. Each day is different. Take today for example, I met with a professor at an Oxford College to discuss supporting her research study. This was then followed by attending a meeting with Geneticists, Research Nurses, Genetic Counsellors and Clinical Research Network managers discussing their involvement in research studies across the UK. Tomorrow I will be back at my desk at the Institute of Genetic Medicine in Newcastle coordinating research study NHS permission approvals for rare genetic disease around the UK and negotiating a contract for the packaging of tablets in relation to a clinical trial. Next week I will be running a study day in London, for research nurses coming from around the UK, from Exeter to Aberdeen, involved in recruiting to genetics studies. The topics of this study day include epigenetics, cancer genetics and incidental findings. A few weekends ago I spoke at a patient support group about a new clinical trial. The fact that every day is different, meeting and working with lots of different people with varied and stimulating challenges is why I enjoy my work.

**What were the circumstances under which you decided to change career?**

During my research career I thought that my ideal job was to work in the lab as a senior post-doctoral research assistant supporting a research group, teaching and guiding students and staff, ensuring the long-term smooth running of the group. However, due to the limitations of research funding,
Moving out of Academic Research: Researcher Career Stories

positions like this are not often available within universities. As I had also reached that point in my career where I was too experienced, meaning that I was too expensive to employ, I realised that I had to make a decision about my future career. The challenge was then to decide on possible options.

How did you decide on a new career direction and what (and who) encouraged you to make the move?

With the support of a friend and university manager, who realised that I was at a very uncertain point in my career, or indeed whether I had a career at all, I took a step back and analysed the skills that I had gained and experiences that I had had during my research career. The main skills that I had gained over the years, without realising, were related to research management. Taking a research idea through from being an idea, to writing and costing grant applications and gaining research funding and completing the research is challenging, but all the time you are learning from your experiences. However, as a scientist you are unaware that you are developing translational skills on a daily basis, including project management, troubleshooting, financial budgeting and communication expertise.

What skills, competencies and experiences were needed for this career move?

After deciding that I wanted to transition in to research management the key step was to rewrite my CV. This involved a real turn around in thinking, rather than listing publications and research funding, I had to analyse my experiences, and list my skill sets.

What were the main barriers or difficulties in changing career?

The challenge that I had was to persuade possible employers that a research scientist with a good publication record and significant research income was serious about making a move in to research management, away from actually doing the research and gaining funding. Initially, I applied for positions at an equivalent level to my senior research associate status. However, it became evident that some people found this wish to leave lab research hard to believe and some persuasion and demonstration of commitment was required. It was also apparent that as a research scientist you were thought not to possess administrative and managerial skills. I was very fortunate to gain a post as a Senior Grants Administrator in the University Research Office, under the redeployment scheme at Newcastle.
In this position, with a supportive senior manager, I was able to demonstrate my capabilities with the systems and processes of research funding applications and awards. I then had the opportunity to act up as an Assistant Grants & Contracts Manager, gaining skills in contract negotiation, which I have put to good use recently in my current position developing a UK-wide genetics centres collaboration agreement for NHS permissions. I spent a couple of enjoyable years working in the research office before moving to my current position.

What helped you prepare for your role (including development opportunities, advice)?

I gained confidence and reassurance from talking to university colleagues who had made this transition. Attending SDU courses and coaching was very beneficial in identifying translational skills and CV writing. These courses also provided an opportunity to network and hear of other people’s experiences.

What advice would you give to other researchers when planning their own career?

Look for opportunities in every situation, realise that research scientists are very talented individuals, so be aware of your skill set.
Dr Liz Kemp

Job title: Professional Development Manager (academic staff), Staff Development Unit, Newcastle University.

Previous occupation: Research Associate, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Newcastle University.

‘In terms of skills, I think it was recognising that everything you do can be used in a different way. Whether it’s the attention to detail you need when working with patient samples or how you communicate with different people. All these skills have lots of uses but it’s how you articulate them that’s important.’

What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?

In my current role I work with academic staff at the University to provide development opportunities to support them in their role. I also work with strategic leaders at the University to design and develop bespoke development supporting organisational change.

I love working with people. Finding out their challenges and working with them to find creative approaches to move their thinking forwards. I also like it when I feel I’ve contributed in making a real change in terms of the culture of the University. The frustrations are how slow everything happens and how you have to learn to work within the committee structure to get things to happen. The career trajectory for administrators is quite different and there is no immediate route to promotion, so to progress you may have to move sideways rather than upwards. Also the attitude of some in academic staff that changing route is somehow failing can be frustrating. This is a very personal thing and I think you have to be happy in your own skin.

What encouraged you to change direction?

There are two elements to this. I enjoyed the freedom of being a postdoc, and the science, and the sense of discovery. But on a practical note, having a young family with the insecurity of multiple short-term contracts; this was not sustainable.

Also, I discovered that I enjoyed working with people, and my role in the labs gave me limited opportunity for this. I was very interested in learning and teaching so when I saw an opportunity to work in staff development it seemed perfect.

What was the route between your doctorate and what you are doing now?

After completing my doctorate (at Newcastle) I was offered my first postdoc role in virology. During this
time I had the opportunity to carry out some undergraduate demonstrating this was fantastic! At the end of the three years I decided, given the limited opportunity for lectureships, that I would have a career change and teach. I took a PGCE in secondary science.

After a short period of teaching in schools, I felt that my heart was far more in higher education so I returned to research and took my second postdoc in Human Genetics. I was still very interested in learning and teaching, and always knew for me being a postdoc was a stepping stone role, so when I saw the opportunity for a change in direction (but still in higher education) it felt like I was bringing together two halves.

What skills, experience and tactics were needed for this career/change of direction?

In terms of skills, I think it was recognising that everything you do can be used in a different way. Whether it’s the attention to detail you need when working with patient samples or how you communicate with different people. All these skills have lots of uses but it’s how you articulate them that’s important. For me, the epiphany moment was rewording my CV to suit the changing role. This was very hard because all the achievements I had valued in academia actually needed suppressing and qualities needed for the new role had to be articulated in their place.

I think the other thing was bravery in order to take the risk to make a change. This can be hard when you’ve always thought you would have a certain career and worked towards it. Also being able to admit when you have made a mistake is important! Everything is part of a learning curve.

Which skills were influential in assisting in your career journey?

Being able to reflect on what you can bring to the new role, this is important.

Which skills do you wish you had developed (with hindsight) for either your career in research or to prepare you for your new role?

I wish I had taken something like Career Anchors Questionnaire far earlier in my career. It really helped me to understand what my real drivers are. For me, it's making a difference to people and actually I can do this in a far more hands-on way in my current role than I could as a researcher.

Advice you would you give to other postdocs considering an alternative career path

I suggest talking to as many people as you can in the different roles. If you see an advert that you’re interested in then go and meet that person and find out what it is they are looking for. Even if it’s not right for you at the current time, it helps you to find out more about what might be possible in the future.
Dr Samantha Dainty

**Job title:** Biological Safety Advisor, Human Resources, Newcastle University.

**Previous occupation:** Post Doctoral Research Associate, Newcastle University.

‘Sign up for the Transitions Programme. It really helped me to identify my transferable skills, which in turn helped me to write better.’

**What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?**

Biological Safety Advisor, Newcastle University. My role includes reviewing Genetic Modification (GM) Risk Assessments, providing training in Biological and Genetic Modification safety and answering a wide range of biological-based queries. I enjoy the interaction with a range of different people, working as part of a team and the problem-solving aspect of the role.

**What were the circumstances under which you decided to change career?**

As a postdoc, I was always on temporary, fixed-term contracts and I wanted more stability.

**How did you decide on a new career direction and what (and who) encouraged you to make the move?**

I went on the Transitions Programme provided by the SDU several years ago, which is a course to help research staff explore other careers outside of academia. This helped me to decide what sort of career I wanted but I still did a couple more postdocs before starting a family made me take serious action to make the change.

**What skills, competencies and experiences were needed for this career move?**

All aspects of communication and team working. My heavy involvement in GM risk assessment means I put my degree in genetics to good use.

**What were the main barriers or difficulties in changing career?**

Finding the right job, at the right time, in the right location. Also, in research you become very focused on often quite a niche subject of interest, so it was difficult to identify and develop skills that could be transferred to another role.
What helped you prepare for your role (including development opportunities, advice)?

The opportunity to attend several training courses since the start of my employment. Mentoring and advice from other members of our team.

What advice would you give to other researchers when planning their own career?

Sign up for the Transitions Programme. It really helped me to identify my transferable skills, which in turn helped me to write a better job application.
Dr Emma Bowen

**Job title:** Assistant Research Funding Development Manager, Newcastle University.

**Previous occupation:** Research Associate, Newcastle University.

‘Think about what you actually want to do as this is not only important to you in your career but will make it a lot easier to be genuinely enthusiastic in the job application process.’

**What is your current role and what do you enjoy about it?**

I am currently in a training position as an assistant RFDM working with the RFDM for SAgE. I help academics develop their funding strategies by working with them to identify, prioritise and apply for funding. I also assist the RFDM in some of the more faculty-level strategic research activities which are related to RCUK funding. I enjoy being able to help people, I enjoy interacting with academics from across the SAgE faculty at all levels, I enjoy working with my new colleagues; there is a lot of opportunity to learn from them.

**What were the circumstances under which you decided to change career?**

I knew very early on in my research career that a permanent career in academia was not for me because I felt that in order to be a successful academic, you needed to be extremely driven, single-minded about your research and have a certain level of self-confidence; none of which I had. I stayed in research for eight years because I found the day-to-day aspects of the work very rewarding. Nonetheless, to have tried to become an academic was really against my personality type and also didn’t really suit my skill set.

After five years of being a postdoc, I was at a stage where my years of experience were accruing in number: I was valued as a colleague and I contributed a good deal to the running of the laboratory and the research group; supervising students and visitors etc, but my track record of Scientific Excellence (publications etc.) had not developed at all. This became something I felt increasingly awkward about as I was at the level of a junior researcher in spite of being senior in terms of years’ experience. This really gave me the impetus to move on, but it took me a further three years to achieve it!
How did you decide on a new career direction and what (and who) encouraged you to make the move?

It was very difficult to decide on a new career direction because I didn’t know what I wanted to do, I didn’t know what else I could do (I had been in the laboratory for over 15 years) and I still enjoyed most of the day-to-day life as an RA. I knew that once I had decided what I wanted, it would be easier to work towards it, however.

The first thing I did was to enrol on the Transitions course, offered by the careers service. This gave me a lot of insight into what aspects of work were important to me and what my core skills were, which helped to focus my search for a new career. Following this, I had identified three definite alternative careers that I explored individually before I eventually identified the profession that I knew was for me.

I would say that for me, the process of identifying a new career direction was, in essence, a lonely journey. Although everyone around me was very supportive of why I wanted to move out of academia and helpful in suggesting different jobs and opportunities – especially my fellow researchers, nobody could really help me wrangle with making a decision and taking the risk on a course of action.

Once I had decided on the career move I wanted to make, my immediate line manager and senior colleagues within the School (CEG) were very supportive of me undertaking training to work towards the move, so long as I managed to fit it in with my work as a Researcher.

What skills, competencies and experiences were needed for this career move?

I did not have any experience in Research Funding/Management, hence it was a ‘career change’ but my background in research was valued directly, as my new job involved helping academics to apply for funding. A lot of the more generic competencies that job descriptions ask for, such as ability to work to deadlines, ability to be self-motivated, problem-solving skills, experience of giving presentations and producing written documents, computer literacy, were all easily demonstrable from my experiences as a scientist and a researcher.

What were the main barriers or difficulties in changing career?

Identifying an alternative career was the only barrier. Once I had identified this, I was able to get little spells of work experience around the University to increase my experience of university administration, I was able to speak to people already working in the profession to get advice, to get general mentoring
from someone also working within the University’s professional and support services, to get specific careers help from the Careers Office and even to obtain support from my PI and School admin team and Head of School. I was able to start supplementing my research academic-based CV with evidence of activities in areas relevant to Research Management to plug some of the gaps. When my current job was advertised, I was then in a really good position to be a strong candidate, in spite of the fact that it was a slight career change (there was a certain amount of luck with this too!).

What helped you prepare for your role (including development opportunities, advice)?

Over a period of time, I found the following helped me in this change of direction:

1. Attending the Transitions Course helped me define what I wanted from a job, what aspects of a career were important to me, helped boost my morale and self-esteem, helped to identify those skills which were core to my personality and which I could build on. This helped me to narrow down potential new careers

2. I researched 2 other careers prior to Research Funding Management. In addition to reading information online etc., I went to seminars and networking events for these specific careers and also used friends’ contacts to call people up and find out more. Friends and colleagues were particularly helpful in suggesting ideas and sharing contacts here.

3. I spoke to Deirdre Dodd to ask about careers in Research Management and in a 30-minute chat, she really helped me make the decision that this is what I wanted to do. Following this, I discussed my planned change with Ian Head (my PI) and formalised this in my PDR so that I could identify some training activities which I could undertake whilst continuing my research contract (which still had 2.5 years to run).

4. My HoS, Jon Mills, and the School Management team (Pam Moderate and Dan Brookin-Coker), noted my aspirations because of the PDR paperwork and due to some fortuitous changes in the office structure, I was able to start spending one day per week in the office working with Dan to get work experience in the administrative side of Research Project costings/funding.

5. When the job opportunity with Johanna Gascoigne-Owens came up, I went to see her for an informal chat before I applied and we discussed all aspects of the job and this conversation focused very much on the job description and paperwork. From this discussion, I not only got to know more about the job, but also gained an idea as to how to approach the job application.
What advice would you give to other researchers when planning their own career?

Think realistically about what your skills are as it’s a lot easier to work with your natural abilities.

Think about what you actually want to do as this is not only important to you in your career but will make it a lot easier to be genuinely enthusiastic in the job application process. Break this down into the smallest of chunks to really know what makes you happy. I would say that this should be at the heart of your longer-term career aspirations.

If you can, be open about your aspirations with all those around you, as people can help put you in touch with opportunities as they arise.

Try to formalise a career training plan through the University PDR process; fill the gaps in your CV by attending courses and training seminars.