

Networking & career seeking as Planned Behaviour

experiences of engaging with an
online mentoring platform for
careers beyond academia.

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[@CareerPostPhD](#)

**Tacit ideas, insight,
and cultural
information about a
role or workplace are
more rich if
delivered by an
insider.**

Social networks
matter in career
development and the
effectiveness of a
network depends on
the occupations and
experiences of the
contacts (Podolny and
Baron, 1997;
McDonald, 2011)

**Researchers report
that ‘doing
networking’ is a
‘painful process’; a
‘necessary evil’:**

Engaging in
‘networking’ (taking
action to build career-
related social
networks) is a critical
factor in career
development (e.g.
Wolff & Moser, 2009)
and a core researcher
competency (Vitae,
2010).

**What do I want?
Will my supervisor find out?
Will I know what to say?**

Why do we engage with activities?

(Theory of Planned Behaviour: Azjen, 1991)

We feel we'll benefit

It fits within cultural norms and expectations

We believe we have the ability & control

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The power of 'norms'

For many the post-PhD transition is characterised by exploitative, unsustainable working conditions, emotional upheaval, financial worry, and poor wellbeing. Despite this, most PhD graduates remain absolutely determined to forge an academic career, unwilling to even entertain the idea of working in another sector. This paradoxical condition can be seen as a type of 'cruel optimism', with early-career researchers remaining attached to **the fantasy of the academic 'good life'** despite a precarious lived reality. This may be attributable to the **culture of doctoral training which centralises academic careers as the 'norm', devalues other career paths as 'alternative', and views leaving academia as 'failure'** (Thouaille, 2018).

cruel optimism, the 'condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object' (Berlant, 2011, p. 125).

The v i s t a mentoring portal

Automated
Responsive
Compliant
User controlled

Process

Authentication
Induction
Profile
Availability
Browse
Select
Connect
[mentoring]
Evaluation

v i s t a mentoring: The University of Sheffield's online e-mentoring resource for careers beyond academia

If you are a PhD student, or research associate at the University of Sheffield, you can sign up to the v i s t a mentoring portal free of charge.

Here, you can browse the many profiles of PhD graduates who have succeeded in careers outside the academy, gaining ideas an inspiration for your future career. You can also gain expert advice and support for your development by selecting a mentor to work with on a one-to-one basis. Emailing, Skype chats, or meeting face to face with a mentor can help you understand how you would fit into different roles, and what practical steps you can take now to prepare.

**FIND
A
MENTOR**

**BE
A
MENTOR**

If you have a PhD and now work outside the academic environment, you are exactly the type of person who would make a great v i s t a mentor!

Creating a mentor profile allows current researchers at the University of Sheffield to connect with you to discuss their future career within a mentoring relationship. Sharing your work experiences, practical expertise and insider knowledge will provide a rich career development opportunity for all involved. Mentors receive an induction through the portal sign up process, access to training materials and mentoring guidance, and full mentor support is provided. You have full control over your availability, and who to accept as a mentee.

Sign Up!

Find Out More

Or, take a quick peek at some sample profiles...

Profile

LOCATION: Sheffield

CAREER SUMMARY: Following my PhD and post-doc experience in a molecular biology background, I now have six years experience in researcher development, specifically now in designing mentoring and coaching services. My work focuses on linking people together to talk about the things that matter to them. I design researcher mentoring and coaching programmes, partnering researchers at all career stages with academic and non-academic mentors. I use research methods to ensure programmes are aligned to the researcher voice, are situated in academic development, and fit with the current researcher career landscape. I have a MA in Leadership Coaching, and am a full member of the Association for Coaching.

JOB TITLE: Researcher Mentoring & Coaching Manager

COMPANY NAME: University of Sheffield

REASONS FOR WANTING TO BE A MENTOR: I think that mentoring at it's simplest is a way of providing protected time to think and plan - something that can get away from us and off all out 'to do' lists. I'm interested in people, their lives, how they come to be here at the university. And if I can share any helpful tips then I'm willing!

CURRENT STRENGTHS IN SUPPORTING OTHERS: I have an in-depth knowledge of the career barriers for research staff and students and experience working 1:1 to help people figure out what their next career move will be.

CONTACT: k.guccione@sheffield.ac.uk, http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/lec, @kayguccione, uk.linkedin.com/pub/kay-guccione

SKILLS: Providing a positive challenge, Promoting critical thinking - breaking down assumptions, Sharing your career stories and experience

AREA OF WORK: Teaching (HE, Secondary, and Learning & Teaching service), Researcher Development, Research

TWO OBJECTIVES FOR MENTORING: To meet many new people and understand the decision-making processes that facilitate career changes

- Account
- Mail
- Mentor Guidance
- Mentee Guidance
- Admin Guidance
- Admin**
 - Users
 - Connections
 - Dashboard
 - Search Configuration
 - Mentee Evaluation
 - Mentor Evaluation

Dashboard

244
TOTAL USERS

3
NEW USERS (7 DAYS)

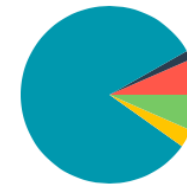
76
MESSAGE THREADS

4
ACTIVE CONNECTIONS

Active/Deactivated Users



Mentor/Mentee Connections



OUTCOMES, researchers gained:

New cultural norms and expectations

- Alternative perspective
- Familiarity with new roles
- Networking skills
- Long term contact

Better ability & sense of control

- Communication skills for applications
- Interview technique
- Career planning opportunity
- Decision making
- Confidence
- Motivation

3 User interviews: themes

OUTCOMES, researchers gained:

New cultural norms and expectations

He gave me the perspective of what he'd look for. It's nice to get that inside perspective of the job...they're people that have got a PhD at Sheffield so you can kind of familiarise yourself

they gave me a fair judgment of what leaving it might be like to leave and it was certainly a big influence in making that decision because you don't really get much chance to speak to people like that.

it seemed like a 'proper job' where as academia isn't in a way and is quite different. So to actually speak to someone who does that job helped me realise that they're just a normal person that was really helpful.

Better ability & sense of control

It was through chatting to him about it that I got my confidence about it back and realised I could definitely do it.

how many different things they've go onto to do so a real insight into how diverse successful PhD careers can be was something I gained from it.

The more I learnt about it the more I thought 'yeah I could definitely do something like this and it ticks all the boxes'.

3 User interviews: themes

...involves a propensity to return to the 'scene of fantasy' as a result of the 'emotional habitus' that has been built up around the object of desire. In this case then, cruel optimism 'is not just a psychological state', Indeed, it may not even 'feel optimistic' as it can 'manifest as a range of emotions. One might be flooded and feel numb, overwhelmed, teary, angry, detached, capacious, sleepy, or *whatever*'. What makes this affective structure cruel is that the thing one desires and develops attachments to (such as the idea of a 'secure' job in the academy, or the university as a 'retreat' from stress) may in **fact be 'an obstacle to your flourishing'**. This 'double-bind' means that 'massive loss is inevitable if you stay or if you go'. **Understanding the double-bind of loss may get us closer to why it can be so difficult for students to re-mould existing forms of attachment to the PhD.**

(Burford, 2018)

It's not just about 'supervisor permission' it's very hard to let go of a dream of the perfect job

1:1 coaching can build self awareness and optimism, hope confidence and positivity (Archer, 2017).

messages

Transition in new career paths is enhanced by a professional network.

We can build initiatives that support network building in a palatable way.

Being 'ready to leave' involves some letting go/grieving, as well as new info

1:1 partnerships support sensemaking, not passive receipt of information

Peer relatability has impact in 're-norming' what happens at the end of the PhD

Change happens over time, with sustained contact

It's not all about supervisor 'permission' to engage

Also about finding **positive** role models, who support **emotional development**

The (voluntary, bounded, defined) **process** of engagement is important

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