

Encouraging Employers to Engage with Researchers

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Experiences from the University of Cambridge engaging postdoctoral researchers with employers

Setting the Scene

- Focus on non-R&D related employers
- Discuss the dynamics of researchers engaging with employers and versus employers engaging with researchers – the former is not largely a problem but the latter is
- Why are employers reluctant to engage with researchers: time, expense, lack of knowledge of the skills that researchers can offer them, lack of conviction that they need researchers in their firms ('What is the business case for hiring a PhD/postdoc?')
- Examples of researcher specific recruitment schemes: PhD entry in ManCon
- Our impressions as Careers Advisers attending graduate recruitment fairs

Examples of Successfully Engaging with Employers at Cambridge

1) Using Role Models: our main tool to attract employer interest

- Examples of such an event, speakers – who they are and how we convinced them to come, funding such an activity
- Feedback from researchers
- Feedback from employers

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- **An Academic's Perspective on Non-Research Careers**

Professor Chris Smith, Department of Biochemistry, University of Cambridge.

- **Science Policy**

Sarah Bunn, Adviser, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology.

- **Consultancy**

Sumner Makin, Consultant, BMG Strategy Consulting.

- **Alternative Career Routes in the Ivory Tower**

Duncan Simpson, Partnership Development Manager, Research Services Division, University of Cambridge.

Q&As with above 3 panellists

- **Operational Research**

Marianne Bacon, Operational Researcher, Department for Work and Pensions.

- **Science Communication**

Sharon Tate, Audio Information Manager, Cancerbackup.

- **Something *Completely* Different**

Jon West, former postdoc from the Department of Genetics who now runs his own gourmet Butcher's shop in Cambridge.

Q&As with above 3 panellists



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Results of this engagement

- These companies have since sent us vacancies to advertise
- Request from a firm that the speakers recorded talk at our event can be used on their company website
- Speaker offering to be available in an ongoing fashion to talk to postdocs
- Speakers seem to act as a go-between or ambassador for their company and also their former university
- Validation that as a former researcher that their new career is 'legitimate'

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Feedback from researchers:

“Ability to hear from different professionals and able to chat to speakers afterwards.”

“When you 'line up' in the lab you lose sight of other opportunities out there. This was an eye-opening experience”

Feedback from employers:

“Thank you for inviting me. I was really pleased to participate and it was great to meet so many enthusiastic people. As I said yesterday I would have really appreciated an event like it when I was doing my PhD,” speaker Science Policy maker, *Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology*

2) Example of 'New Recruiters Day'

Employers to talk to careers advisers that work with researchers by default – mainstream careers service event

Results of this engagement:

- Employer mentioned the lack of commercial awareness of some researchers and agreed to take part in a skills sessions on commercial awareness that Liz Simmonds is organising this

Autumn

- Alerting employers on ways that can raise their profile ('PhD is the top keyword search in our vacancies system)

Brainstorming Exercise

Put together a brief outline of an event or activity (any size or format) that you could feasibly organise at your university that would be attractive to both employers *and* researchers

Feedback from Brainstorming

Ideas to Engage Employers:

- Organise mentoring schemes with employers – work well with undergrads (often dedicated co-ordinator)
- University of Manchester 'Pathway's events – panels of employers invited as speakers to cover a wide range of sectors
- Business Plan Competition with employer forum/reception
- Sector specific employer event, within workplace e.g. Vitae Finance Event at Canary Wharf
- External Consultancy – short term projects for researchers
- Part-taking in KTPs
- Workshop Series with industry speakers
- Organise networking opportunities

What's in it for Employers?

- Talent pool
- Skills range
- Maturity
- Placements/secondments – lower cost in time and money
- Encourage alumni