

The Career Pathways of Doctoral Graduates

Case Studies

Intended for use by a variety of audiences, including employers, policy makers, academic and professional staff in higher education, and prospective and current doctoral students or recent graduates

Introduction

Following the publication of *The Right Skills* report as part of the British Academy's Flagship Skills Project, the Academy took forward several strands of work based on the report's final findings and recommendations.¹ These case studies form part of the work to provide further evidence for the diversity of career pathways taken by doctoral graduates in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

The case studies look at the value of high-level skills developed by doctoral study in these disciplines to the wider economy and society, and how we can better understand the pathways of postgraduate researchers from these disciplines who pursue careers beyond academia or roles which traverse the normal distinctions between academia and other sectors.

Our participants were asked to reflect on their career pathways from their time as doctoral students to the present. In sketching out their pathway from doctoral research onwards, they have picked up on key moments and decisions which formed their particular pathway, as well as how the knowledge, skills and experience of academic research helped them to shape their subsequent careers. They provide an honest assessment of the barriers that can exist for researchers traversing the boundaries between academia and careers beyond academia, as well as offering personal insights into how doctoral students can succeed beyond traditional academic career routes. They also offer advice to employers on what doctoral graduates from the arts humanities and social sciences have to offer and why they should consider recruiting more of them.

The case studies highlight the value of high-level research skills in arts, humanities and social science doctoral study and the opportunities and barriers to utilising this value. They are intended for a variety of audiences including employers, policy makers, academic and professional staff in higher education, and prospective and current doctoral students.

The postgraduate research community is diverse and vibrant. The case studies provided here represent a variety of experiences and voices, but it is hoped that they will encourage a wider range of people to come forward to share their stories and pathways. As this resource evolves, we hope to better represent those voices that are currently underrepresented in the postgraduate research community so that we can showcase the diversity of the community while also showcasing the value of a PhD for many and varied career pathways.

The views expressed in these case studies are given in a personal capacity by the individuals concerned and should not be taken as a reflection of the views of their employers or previous higher education institutions.

¹ The British Academy (2017), *The Right Skills: Celebrating Skills in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*

List of case study participants

Dr Vanessa Collingridge, Writer, Broadcaster, Impact Coach, Owner of Monster Media Productions

Dr Alex Harden, Student Voice Manager, University of Surrey Students' Union

Dr Sanda Ionescu, Professional Development Manager, University of London Careers Group

Professor Farah Karim-Cooper, Head of Higher Education and Research at Shakespeare's Globe

Dr Artemisa Montes Sylvan, Founder and Executive Director, Observatorio Mexicano de la Crisis (OMEC)

Dr Paul Munday, Associate Director, Climate Adaptation and Resilience at S&P Global Ratings

Dr Paul Phillips, CBE, Principal and Chief Executive, Weston College

Dr Jenny Putin, Co-founder, Director and Leader of Asian Team, AMICULUM Pharmaceutical, Biotechnology and Medical Device Consultancy

Dr Ruth Strain, Development Manager, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Dr Ben Taylor, Senior Policy Advisor, Cabinet Office Open Innovation Team (OIT)

Dr Emily Troscianko, Recovery Coach, Research Associate at the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH), Baillie Gifford Writing Partnerships Programme Coordinator, Writer, and Data Science Support for texture.AI

Dr Wanda Wyporska, Executive Director, The Equality Trust



**Writer, Broadcaster, Impact Coach,
Owner of Monster Media Productions**

**Geography and Earth Sciences, University of
Glasgow**

Dr Vanessa Collingridge

After graduating with my first Geography degree in 1990, I began my career as a broadcast journalist in television and radio, specialising in factual programmes, current affairs and documentaries. I worked largely in the fields of science, environment and history – areas that drew heavily on my geographical training. In 2001, I published my first book (a biography of explorer navigator, James Cook that was later made into a 4-part documentary series) and I continue to write factual books on historical and geographical themes.

My PhD at the University of Glasgow took around ten years to complete, part-time and entirely self-funded. During this period, I also had four children, two life-threatening illnesses, completed a two-year filming project around the world and was relocated through my partner's work to Hong Kong for three years. I loved my academic research – even the writing-up! However, it was extremely challenging to balance a demanding professional and family life with my studies, and I faced significant hostility and institutional barriers from within the university. Eventually, I decided to take almost a full year off my professional work in order to finish my PhD, which I did, on schedule.

After graduating, I attempted to get part-time lecturing work at some other universities, drawing on my 30 years of experience in broadcasting, journalism and lecturing as well as my academic research. However, this came to nothing: the general difficulties getting grant or university funding, plus my age (I was now in my late 40s) and the fact that I was only looking for part-time work have proved insurmountable barriers. I am currently involved in one major research grant application – but in my capacity as a freelance filmmaker, rather than an academic.

My media contacts in academia have led to invitations to collaborate on two research publications with a small group of superb academics at Oxford and in Hong Kong. However, this is all unpaid work, subsidised by my professional work in the media.

Thankfully, I have had the option of reverting to working full-time in broadcasting, journalism and especially impact coaching. This is one area where my PhD has opened doors: I am increasingly busy running workshops on personal and professional impact for students and staff in the university sector, both in the UK, and internationally. Prior to the PhD, I worked largely in the corporate sector, but the balance of my coaching has now shifted, probably due to the added credibility of the title “Dr”. Alongside my media work, I am now busy working with universities all over the world, developing

communication skills and leadership programmes, and helping students and staff with public engagement.

Despite not “fitting” with the traditional image of a postgraduate, and the difficulties this caused, I have no regrets about doing my PhD. While I’ve made a career from being able to research and write, I’ve now proved beyond doubt that I can also produce rigorous and exacting work that stands up to the scrutiny of peer-review. I’ve expanded my own knowledge and added to knowledge in my field. In hindsight, I should have chosen the best university for my research area, rather than the one that was geographically closest. Studying part-time was also not ideal but with my career and young family, I could not have done it any other way. What I learned most, however, was that support networks and good mentoring are key to success – and I use that knowledge and experience in my leadership and communications programmes both in academia and business.

Mature students – and part-time students – and working parents - build up a wealth of skills and experiences during their studies that go way beyond academic learning. Logistically, I challenge anyone to have better time management and discipline! And, having seen the very best and worst of behaviours, I know how good communication skills can transform people’s lives. Such “soft” skills are often undervalued but recognising the growing need for them within both academia and business has helped to reshape my professional career for the better – and pass on those skills to others.



Student Voice Manager, University of Surrey Students' Union

**Narrative Theory and Popular Music,
University of Surrey**

Dr Alex Harden

Between 2014 and 2017, I researched a PhD about how we imagine and navigate possible worlds to understand storytelling in pop music. Like many others, my path to submission wasn't always smooth, but was certainly rewarding; the personal and academic challenge of a doctorate set me up with the critical acuity, resourcefulness, and resilience to succeed in the workplace. Having been motivated to apply the skills I gained to representation and advocacy, I chose a non-academic career in higher education and stood successfully for election as Vice-President and then President at a Students' Union where, as the Student Voice Manager, I now oversee our member insight and democratic functions.

Much like my studies, work in a Students' Union has involved an exciting mix of responsibilities, including trusteeship, membership of governing University bodies, and considerable involvement in areas of policy and strategy. In my short career so far, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to make the most of what I learnt during my PhD in order to support others. In 2018, for instance, I set up an informal network of Students' Unions in our region, drawing from my conferencing and networking experience. The following year, my analytical ability helped me to refocus work to address the gap in good degrees awarded to BAME students by identifying relevant local factors and drawing from a wide range of evidence to create recommendations at a rapid pace. And, as the world adjusts to the disruption from COVID-19, creativity and problem solving have helped me to ensure business continuity across my current portfolio.

In my role at a Students' Union, communication with diverse audiences has been vital, but as arts researchers generally work with very accessible subject matter, this often comes naturally. During my own PhD, I chaired a Public Engagement Forum, organised a series of events for local professionals via a competitive funding process, and even performed sets of research-related standup comedy. From the student bar through to the boardroom, this experience of engaging with different stakeholders has helped me to secure strong working relationships that get things done.

I believe that the critical self-reflection that comes from working in the arts, social sciences, and humanities also offers a key defining factor for employers. As a queer person, I have had mixed experiences in my local area, and am a minority amongst senior colleagues, but my reflective outlook has helped me to build an authentic personal approach to leadership that applies and respects the lived experiences of different people. Whether or not I resembled

the faces around the boardroom, my doctoral background provided a confidence and literacy to actively get to grips with difficult discussions, invoke understanding and compassion for the lived experiences not present at the table, and present the best possible case for those I represent. I believe that a PhD gave me the skills to recognise the right things to do, and the ability to get them done.



**Professional Development Manager,
University of London Careers Group**

**Anthropology/Religious Studies, King's
College London**

Dr Sanda Ionescu

I never envisaged a career outside academia. Even before completing my M.Phil., I was employed as a lecturer in Japanese Studies at the University of Bucharest. Doing a Ph.D. was mandatory. With no one to supervise me in Romania, I came to King's College London to join a research project into Japanese new religions, following the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo metro. During the course of my studies, I met the man I later married, so I looked for a post-doc position in the UK. Romania was not part of the EU in 1998, so it was impossible for me to demonstrate why I should be preferred over UK and EU applicants for those rare positions, especially with 400 applications each time.

My husband was also pursuing an academic career, so someone had to be flexible in terms of job and location. I started working for a boutique HR consultancy, first as a researcher, then as an executive advisor, presenting best practice research and advising on implementation. When I had children, it was easy to move into Management and Leadership Development in the public sector, and later as a freelance consultant when we moved abroad (for ILO, WIPO, Council of Europe, amongst others). Upon returning to the UK, it has been a pleasure to reconnect with my lost academic roots at the University of London, where I work in professional development for The Careers Group, which provides careers services to colleges within the university.

My Ph.D. research covered both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research skills such as interviewing, listening and questioning, establishing rapport, summarising and detecting patterns have been critical in my consultancy work, so that I could fully understand client's needs and parameters before offering solutions. However, to my surprise, even the quantitative research proved useful, although I've never had to use SPSS again. My experience in survey design and analysis has allowed me to critically examine and interpret big data, whether in the form of staff satisfaction surveys, skills gaps for emerging leaders or, in my current role, student career aspirations and graduate outcomes.

Writing and presentation skills are taken for granted when you are a Ph.D. student, but surprisingly few people in the corporate world are capable of eloquent writing or engaging presentations without excessive use of buzzwords or acronyms, so I quickly became the go-to person for presenting complex ideas in an entertaining and informative way. Furthermore, working as part of an international collaboration meant that I developed skills of cross-

cultural communication and remote teamworking which has become an indispensable part of working life in global organisations.

Last but not least, having to plan, organise and conduct fieldwork abroad developed those skills that are consistently rated as most in demand by employers in the current economic and political climate: initiative, problem-solving, resilience, adaptability, flexibility and continuous learning.

If I could advise current PGR students contemplating a career move outside academia, I'd say: Ignore that very young recruitment consultant who's advising you to drop the Ph.D. off your CV. You don't want to work for an employer who doesn't respect your achievement. However, although a doctoral title may have considerable cachet in some countries, the onus is on you to show you've emerged from the ivory tower and mingled with real people. Commercial acumen is not just a buzzword. When getting involved in a new project in the workplace, always ask yourself how you can apply that learning.

Finally, a word of caution to employers who believe that doctoral students are lost in irrelevant, obscure topics. The passion and commitment required to complete a Ph.D. can be applied in other areas of work. Avoid dampening their enthusiasm by trying to turn them into corporate clones. If you can harness their curiosity in productive ways, these are the people who will ask the difficult questions, investigate root causes of problems and spearhead change initiatives.



**Head of Higher Education and
Research at Shakespeare's Globe**

**Shakespeare Studies, Royal Holloway
University of London**

Professor Farah Karim-Cooper

When I graduated from high school in the US, I knew that I wanted to go onto graduate study and to teach in a university. During my undergraduate degree at California State University Fullerton I had fallen in love with the world of Shakespeare and, following a move to the UK for a Masters on Milton at Royal Holloway, I did a PhD on cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance drama. My PhD was self-funded and I supported my studies through teaching part-time at an American school in Surrey. This experience, however, led to more and more teaching work during my PhD and after.

The end of my PhD was a very chaotic time. I had a baby; I was applying for jobs, and had also started doing some teaching for the Open University, through a connection from one of my advisers at Royal Holloway. During my maternity leave, as well as doing a lot of marking for Royal Holloway, I turned my thesis into a book.

Academia didn't feel a very welcoming place for me, having come from outside the traditional channels and having tutors in my Masters programme tell me that I should focus on teaching in schools and forget about a PhD, because it was assumed I wouldn't be successful based on conscious and unconscious bias! I somehow knew I had the skills to be an accomplished academic, but my confidence suffered. It was clear that there was and remains a lot of gatekeeping. I was very fortunate to have a lot of family support around me and I was encouraged to continue. It can be a problem in particular for students from a BME or working-class background to find a support network when it comes to postgraduate study in the arts and humanities. Academic gatekeeping deeply affects women. Thinking intersectionally, however, if you are a woman of colour things may be a little tougher for you and it feels like the system wants to hold you back. You have to really believe in what you are doing and push hard against the roadblocks, even if you have to be realistic, about the academic job market.

When a job came up as Lecturer in the Education department at Shakespeare's Globe, my research area and teaching experience was an ideal fit. The interview also involved colleagues from King's College London, as they had previously launched an MA in Shakespeare Studies and part of my job would be teaching the MA students. This brought with it an honorary affiliation with King's which has since become a permanent appointment at professor level. At the Globe, however, for the first ten years, I was the only academic in the building.

My role has given me the space to do the academic work that I wanted to, but the public-facing nature of the Globe has also allowed me to broaden my research and apply it in more tangible ways. Because the Globe Theatre is an historical space, research plays an important role in informing productions and I have worked directly with a many actors and directors to support developing productions. I am also Chair of the Architecture Research group, helping to 'finish' development of the Globe as a historic theatre and on projects such as construction of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. Having an in-house academic is something that the Globe, as a hub for all things Shakespeare, has really embraced since it helps in the validation of such projects from a historical perspective. This entails a lot of responsibility but having one foot in the cultural sector has enabled me to shape and develop my role in liberating ways.

There are very few jobs exactly like mine, but the cultural sector is certainly one that is open to PhD students from the humanities. I think of my role as comparable to a museum curator; I am an academic, thinking about my peers when writing, but I also curate and translate complex material for public consumption, simplifying things without academic jargon and without being too reductive. If you can make yourself agile in this way and cultivate this dual voice from early on, it is a valuable transferable skill.

There is a trend for universities to partner with a cultural sector body to form knowledge transfer partnerships. Without that academic experience within the cultural organisation, however, these cannot be truly equitable exchanges. Doctoral graduates can help organisations to shape these projects and relationships more because they bring that authority and knowledge to facilitate true exchange of knowledge.



**Founder and Executive Director,
Observatorio Mexicano de la Crisis
(OMEC)**

Political Economy, University of Bristol
Dr Artemisa Montes Sylvan

As early as I can remember I have always been interested in development and equality, so a PhD was something I always wanted to do. I went into my PhD at University of Bristol with the idea to work on a development plan for my home country: Mexico. In fact, my thesis: *Transitional crisis: A new way of understanding the transformation of Mexico's political economy* was written with this in mind.

But the PhD as a whole ended up being a much more integrated experience, in terms of intellectual and personal growth. I was able to improve my analytical skills to identify strengths and weaknesses in arguments and proposals. Furthermore, I learned the value of original thinking and that knowledge goes beyond observation and reproduction into the understanding and transformation of reality.

The University was also very keen in providing us with the skills needed to advance our careers such as effective presentations and networking.

Having obtained my PhD, in 2006, I came back home and started working as the Head of the International Studies Department at a University in Mexico City. A year later I had the opportunity to work as the General Director of Training, Promotion and Professionalisation of Civil Society Organisations for the Social Development Ministry in this position I was able to use the time management and professional learning skills, acquired during my PhD, to undergo the modernisation, human capital development and social improvement of this sector in Mexico.

However, everything changed in 2008, when the financial crises struck my PhD knowledge and experience really came into play. After the crisis outbreak there was a lot of uncertainty about what was going on and what would happen afterwards. As my studies were on crisis, I received a lot of requests for help and advice, in particular on how to shield programmes such as the Millennium Development Goals or the 2020 European Union Agenda.

So, in 2009, I was spurred to create Observatorio Mexicano de la Crisis (OMEC) a Think Tank and Research Centre which engages in research of the critical issues through the collection, preparation and evaluation of data in the areas of: social, economic, political management, rural development and environmental sustainability. The purpose is to encourage socio-economic change by providing accurate and thorough information for use in policy making, resource allocation, yearly planning, public participation and

identification of investment opportunities. For this goal OMEC acts as an advisor for the Mexican and international governments and companies.

I am, now, the Founder and Executive Director of this organization and I am convinced that without my PhD in Political Economy at the University of Bristol, I would have never been able to create this centre which through my leadership has become a well-known and respected think tank both in Mexico and internationally.

Thanks to my doctoral studies, I can say that I am not just a noted academic, but also a socio-economic change agent. I am also a frequent presenter and panellist at international conferences such as the: UN, the OECD and the G20.



Associate Director, Climate Adaption and Resilience at S&P Global Ratings

Environmental Science/GIS, University of East Anglia

Dr Paul Munday

I completed my PhD in 2010, at the University of East Anglia, looking at climate change and using GIS (Geographic Information System). My Masters course had sparked new ideas and made me consider a PhD, as I could explore a topic in more depth. The PhD itself was fully funded and my supervisor had an idea for a topic which he thought I would be well suited to. Despite the PhD ending up being very different in scope, I found that I liked academia, and having a doctorate seemed like a satisfying ambition and something which would be a bit different.

After my PhD, I used my GIS expertise as a postdoc on a project for the UK National Ecosystem Assessment. Following this, I worked at Land Use Consultants as a GIS consultant in London. I decided not to pursue an academic career for a variety of reasons. I wanted greater job security and felt that I would be able to achieve the career progression that I was looking for by working in a different sector. I also wanted to focus on real-world projects and for my work to have real-world impact: to be *doing* rather than just thinking. Consultancy seemed to offer this and so I became a climate change consultant at Atkins.

Following six years at Atkins, developing strategies and action plans to help companies and communities deal with risks from climate change, I was headhunted for a role at WSP. It was the chance to move to a consultancy firm that were still developing their reputation in the climate resilience space, so it offered a fantastic opportunity to grow my own team. It also enabled me to utilise the skills I had developed over the course of my PhD, rather than solely focusing on GIS. More recently, I noticed how the financial sector has picked up on the importance of being prepared for the impacts of climate change. I saw a great opportunity and moved to S&P Global Ratings as global lead on climate adaptation and resilience.

I believe that clients and employers genuinely value the PhD and it may have helped get my CV closer to the top of the pile. At S&P Global Ratings, my PhD was considered valuable as a manifestation of my expertise in a specialist area relevant to the financial markets. International clients especially like having certified experts working on their projects, and having a doctorate is a way of demonstrating that credibility. One thing I struggled with initially, however, was knowing when enough was enough and identifying cut off points for my work. During a PhD you have the luxury of time and sometimes the funding to concentrate on perfecting every aspect of your

thesis; in a consultancy environment you usually don't have the time or budget for the same level of perfection.

Coming to the end of the PhD and thinking about your next step is daunting, but I would really emphasise the importance of networking. This is something I hadn't fully appreciated the benefits of when I was at that stage but a lot of business, including academia, is built on relationships. PGRs should be proactive in meeting people and having conversations; even a quick chat over a cup of coffee can lead to unexpected opportunities. Similarly, strong communication skills are so important and very difficult to teach. If you are someone who enjoys the technical aspects of research, but also enjoys communicating it clearly, succinctly, and in an engaging manner, then that is very attractive to employers. The PhD also gives you that critical thinking, which organisations are really focused on. They want people who think about projects and ways of working through different lenses, rather than being carbon copies.

There are plenty of opportunities out there, but it's important to think about the value that you as a doctoral graduate can add to companies. A PhD is difficult for employers to value, compared to work experience, and so it's on the candidate to sell their doctorate as an additional benefit which makes them stand out. Candidates should also be realistic with their expectations, as they will often be going into an opportunity with less work experience, but there are going to be benefits to having PhD which can put you on an accelerated pathway if you want it.



Principal and Chief Executive, Weston College

Cost Benefit Analysis, University of Wales

Dr Paul Phillips, CBE

After a career spanning Hotel Management, research within the NHS and project-based work for the MoD and others, I entered the world of teaching in 1982 as a Teacher in Mathematics up to what was then Ordinary level. Some two years later however I applied for a job as a Lecturer in the newly established tertiary college in South Wales. This was the catalyst for me to develop my career and during that time I embarked upon a Post Graduate Certificate in Education; a master's degree in Law and Economics related to education and then a PhD in Cost Benefit Analysis.

There is no doubt that following achievement of my PhD, which had looked at expenditure methodologies in education, my career took off. Shortly after achieving my PhD from the University of Wales in Cardiff, I was offered the position of Assistant Principal at another college specialising in Resource Management, Marketing and Public Relations (including Student Services). It was not the most auspicious of starts: within a matter of weeks we were subject to inspection and the results were diabolically bad. It was a major disappointment, but not a surprise, as this college was in the doldrums and changes had to be made.

This was potentially where my experience of academic research came into its own, as I was able to start with a blank sheet of paper and to strategically plan the curriculum. I utilised the skills and pedagogy from my research, performing a collation of SWOT analyses and developing new skillset requirements for the organisation. The regression studies and correlation theories I had learned through my research experience were all rigorously applied. As a result, I was able to justify through trend analysis the rationale behind the changes.

There was one problem however – whilst The PhD provided me with the research tools, it had not given me enough insight into the people skills. I had examined the psychology of change management in my research studies, but I underestimated the significant HR stages that had to be considered. Nevertheless, with the help of a very able solicitor, I was able to advance change and develop new approaches that had the desired result in terms of both learner progress and change management. In my academic research I learned how to construct an argument, how to evaluate and compare models of approach and how to use data and other parameters to measure and act as a catalyst for change. They were invaluable tools for the future.

My career in FE developed, and from an Assistant Principal I moved on to become a Campus Director, Vice Principal of a College and Principal of

Weston College, where I currently work. There has been a common thread, however, between all of the roles and that is robust, calculated strategic planning, researching issues before the implementation of change strategy and the ability to justify and influence change. Despite the current inadequacies in the funding of the FE sector, I believe both the research skills I was taught and implemented in my PhD have been my own catalyst for dealing with issues. They have been essential for delivery of quality and sustainable education.

As I reflect on my career to date and my experience as the postgraduate doctoral student, I recognise that achieving the PhD is part of a complex equation. Within that equation is also commercial and industrial focus, but the initial skills of research, the hypothesis, the data collection, the significant testing, the correlation and the creation of the strategic plan are imperative.

I am an employer of over 1000 staff now and, when we recruit, I look for the people skills, the analytical skills and the ability to strategise. Two of the three are clear components of research allied to postgraduate/doctorate level studies – the value of a PhD therefore is major!



**Co-founder, Director and Leader of
Asian Team, AMICULUM
Pharmaceutical, Biotechnology and
Medical Device Consultancy**

Chinese Literature, University of Oxford
Dr Jenny Putin

According to my parents I expressed an interest in China when I was 11 after a visit to the British Museum Genius of China exhibition. My decision to read Chinese at university was prompted by a conversation with my school headmistress who suggested China would be a key centre of development and influence in the 21st century. But at the time many other people were puzzled - what on earth would I do with a degree Chinese?

I applied and was accepted for a place at Oxford in 1982. As my final year approached, I faced the same question. Studies had gone well but I felt they were just the beginning – there was so much more to know about the language and civilization. I didn't want a career with no connection to China, but in 1986 China-related options were limited. Investment in Chinese studies as an important future field, however, was growing. I was encouraged to take a scholarship in Taiwan prior to starting a DPhil in Oxford.

The undergraduate course had instilled an enthusiasm for 20th century Chinese fiction, the role of writers in socio-political developments, and their responses to literary influences from other countries. As a postgraduate, I was drawn to one writer and the extent to which his explorations of individualism drew on his engagement with Japanese contemporary literature. For this line of enquiry, however, I needed to learn Japanese so the department arranged language tuition to supplement substantial self-study. During the next five years, I worked my way through the author's writings, and the literature from Japan and elsewhere he had enjoyed, building a picture of the man and his work.

I spent the final months in Japan consulting key sources and writing my thesis. This was before the days of affordable laptops and accessible email, so I travelled with a print-out of the thesis and a suitcase of notes and references. I hand-wrote changes to the draft and air-mailed chapters to my partner who updated the files and forwarded them to my supervisor for review. When I returned from Japan, I had a fortnight to finalize and submit the thesis. In Japan and those final weeks, I learned what can be achieved with determination, inventiveness, collaboration with friends and colleagues, and minimal sleep.

Then I faced another decision. I had enjoyed research and teaching but knew I would not thrive in academia. I did not share my colleagues' intense passion for research or their talent for teaching. And lectureships were limited. I decided to apply my knowledge and skills in business.

I partnered with a friend who had a background in Chinese healthcare, and through contacts in the medical communications business we were introduced to several pharmaceutical clients who were launching their products in China. I had always been intrigued by medicine, so this was an opportunity to combine interests. Subsequently, I co-founded a healthcare communications agency, which we planned to extend to Asia to support regional expansion of the pharmaceutical sector. We started with one employee and a laptop in a spare room near Oxford; the company now employs 250 people globally.

It seems a long way from individualism in Chinese literature. Yet, as I lead our Asia team and live in Shanghai, I conduct business in Chinese. Postgraduate research and teaching nurtured many other essential skills: how to digest complex information, identify themes, and to write. Establishing a business also requires self-sufficiency, independent thinking and persistence, as well as team collaboration and an interest in the development of employees. Willingness to learn and adapt are important too - businesses must be able to analyse new situations objectively and respond to change.

I learned many of these skills during my research, and they are certainly qualities our company seeks when recruiting new talent for our team.



Development Manager, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

English and Scandinavian Studies, University College London

Dr Ruth Strain

I started my academic career focussing on English literature, then medieval literature, and finally Old Norse Poetry, with the initial intent to pursue teaching in Higher Education. Between my Masters and PhD, I began working in the Development Office for St Hilda's College at the University of Oxford, assisting with fundraising events and communications; this was quite by chance, as I had originally applied to work with the Registry department. I found work in fundraising interesting and continued to gain part-time work experience in Oxford University colleges while pursuing my PhD, carrying out undergraduate tutorials, and planning academic conferences at University College London. By the end of my doctorate, I decided that Development work aligned well with my ideals and standard of living, and thus began to pursue Development work as a career. In the process of actively seeking full-time positions supporting philanthropy for Higher Education, I secured a role in the University of Edinburgh's Development & Alumni Team, where I worked for 3.5 years before starting my most recent role as Development Manager at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in December 2018.

Employment throughout my postgraduate studies was something of a balancing act; on the one hand pursuing opportunities that would best demonstrate skill and experience, and on the other ensuring I stayed within the maximum work hours of casual work for a non-UK/EU student. For potential employers unfamiliar with the nuances of the visa system, this often placed me at a disadvantage when seeking employment. Thankfully, beginning my fundraising career in a Higher Education setting meant that my circumstances were much better understood, as were the critical thinking, research, writing, presentation, and coaching skills I brought to the table with my PhD background.

For anyone considering moving into a career outside of higher education, I would strongly recommend requesting phone calls or coffees with people in careers of interest to you, as this has been the means by which opportunities have opened up for me over the years. I would also look at salaries, job descriptions, and career trajectories on LinkedIn, to see where the jobs tend to be located, and whether they would align with the lifestyle you envision for yourself. If you are in the UK on a visa, I would also highly recommend familiarising yourself with work visa requirements and the Home Office's criteria for skilled work and minimum salaries. Having an overview of these details can help you identify possible pathways, and address any skill or experience gaps you may have at present.

As a Manager that is now in a position to recruit new employees, I would view doctoral graduates as individuals with a valuable set of high-level leadership skills, and a demonstrable record of seeing complex and challenging projects through to completion. While these candidates may not have as much traditional work experience as other candidates, they are keen to prove themselves and can nimbly adapt to office-based skill sets with appropriate training.



**Senior Policy Advisor, Cabinet Office
Open Innovation Team (OIT)**

**History and Philosophy of Science and
Technology, King's College London**

Dr Ben Taylor

I began my PhD at Imperial College, in the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine (CHoSTM) in 2011, and was funded by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for the first three years. I was also awarded an additional year of funding from the Institute of Historical Research and the Royal Historical Society. I successfully defended in early 2016.

From the outset, I wasn't certain that I wanted to remain in academia — my reasons for undertaking a PhD were primarily a passion for the study of history, and enthusiasm for my subject specialism: the history of policing, science and surveillance in twentieth-century Britain. I was aware of the extremely crowded academic jobs market, and, helpfully, my supervisor was unusually encouraging of PhD students who expressed interest in non-academic careers.

During my PhD, I completed a three-month placement with the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), facilitated by the AHRC. The facilitation of this programme was surprisingly personal and very encouraging, but it was a small scheme, greatly reliant on a few individuals who promoted and sustained it. The placement had a significant impact on my future career choices and employability, and it helped me understand how expert evidence is gathered and deployed within Parliament and Government. I was struck by how uncommon it was for arts or humanities PhDs to engage with such placements, compared to natural or social sciences PhDs.

I also pursued other policy-orientated opportunities during my PhD, including a part-time 'Young Academics Network' fellowship with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies.

Towards the end of my PhD, I received useful guidance from King's College London careers service, which had an advisor who specialised in postgraduate career opportunities. I was also fortunate enough to attend several tailored careers events, including a PhD 'non-academic jobs showcase', in which a number of AHSS PhD graduates discussed their non-academic careers.

After five months of applying for many different roles, I successfully interviewed for a position as a Policy Analyst at the House of Lords, at least partly due to my prior experience at POST. While there, I worked on a number of intellectually stimulating policy areas, including most notably the House of Lords Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence.

I recently moved onto a role as a senior policy advisor within the Cabinet Office Open Innovation Team (OIT), where I oversee digital policy projects. The OIT aims to generate policy analysis and insights by deepening collaboration between academia and Government, and my experience of both academia and policymaking is incredibly useful in this regard. I also oversee the PhD placement programme at the Open Innovation Team and see first-hand how valuable their skills are, as do the teams we work with across Whitehall.

AHSS PhD students face many obstacles when considering non-academic careers. The most insidious of these is the stigma within academia concerning non-academic careers. This is further amplified by the lack of knowledge and exposure which many academics, including PhD supervisors, still have regarding non-academic careers, making it difficult for them to provide relevant and useful advice, even if they were so inclined.

There may also be preconceptions amongst non-academic employers that those with PhDs could be difficult to manage, overqualified for jobs and therefore more likely to leave after a short period of time. However, this could not be further from the truth. There are many skills acquired during a humanities PhD which are of great value outside academia. These include, but are not limited to:

- Considering how a project is framed, how it fits within a wider context, and fundamentally ‘think differently’ about problems; they are usually well versed in taking reflexive approaches to systems of understanding and issues more generally, in a way which is sometimes lacking in the policy profession
- Self-discipline, and an ability to manage, shape and refine often vague and uncertain projects and concepts
- Ability to absorb large amounts of information about a complicated subject area which they may previously have been unfamiliar with, see how different elements of the landscape fit together, and produce well-written, insightful and original analysis
- Experience of public speaking, and teaching/explaining skills (easily translatable to ‘briefing’ skills)

Often students are not well-equipped to identify and translate their skills for a non-academic context, but with the right support and opportunities, humanities PhD graduates can thrive outside academia, and the country at large would reap dividends from this still largely untapped supply of highly skilled and capable individuals.



Recovery Coach, Research Associate at the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH), Baillie Gifford Writing Partnerships Programme Coordinator, Writer, and Data Science Support for texture.AI

German Literature, University of Oxford
Dr Emily Troscianko

I have what I learned a few years ago is called a portfolio career: I provide recovery coaching for people with eating disorders; I run a writing partnerships programme for the Oxford University Humanities Division; I'm a freelance writer; I offer data science support for start-up texture.AI; and I have an unpaid Research Associate position at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH).

The narrative that was supposedly leading to the lecturership is easy to tell: I got the top First in my BA in French and German at Oxford, went on to postgraduate study in German also at Oxford, stayed at Oxford for a Junior Research Fellowship, and then in 2014-15 was a Knowledge Exchange Fellow at TORCH (still Oxford). Everyone told me that after the JRF my academic future was guaranteed. I believed them – and believed I wanted it. Until my job and grant applications started to get rejected. By the end of my KE Fellowship I'd applied unsuccessfully (even though very selectively) for 13 mostly research-heavy positions.

At the end of this string of failures I successfully applied for the role of Postdoctoral Training Coordinator in the Humanities at Oxford, which turned out to give me free rein to design support for welfare, work/life management, and writing, drawing on events-organising skills and many others I'd picked up during my academic life. The next six funding and job rejections disillusioned me about academic selection processes but allowed me to devote two years to collaborating with my mother on a textbook on consciousness – one of the two writerly endeavours I'm most proud of. Around the same time, my partner was offered a senior postdoc position at Caltech, in Pasadena, LA. I wanted to be able to spend real time there, so I gave up applying for fulltime jobs. This made the need to develop a paying portfolio even more urgent, and so I decided to do something I'd been toying with for years: I set up a recovery coaching business. Since 2009, partway through my own recovery from anorexia, I'd written a blog on eating disorders for Psychology Today (the other writing project that matters most to me), and had built up a lot of expertise in processing the clinical research, as well as in responding to readers' questions and requests for advice. Having worked with the eating disorders charity Beat during my KE Fellowship, investigating the effects of literary reading on eating disorders, I also had the foundations of a research profile in more medical territory. I'm building on those now through collaborations with clinical researchers and by advising a graduate student doing empirical bibliotherapy research.

My work on bibliotherapy requires the cognitive science/humanities bridge-building skills I started to learn during my doctorate, and the clinical/humanities synthesis I'd gravitated towards late on in the JRF. It may sound like my academic training is underused in the non-academic parts of my portfolio, but it isn't. My blog is real research – as real as I've ever done (and reaches vastly more people than the rest); I'm just more than usually open about my personal commitments and have to rely on my partner for peer review. My training/welfare/support activity depends on all I've learned about what it means to work in the academic world. Everything I do depends on being able to write and speak well: to sift material, to construct an argument, to create prose people want to read, to speak and write in ways that make people ready to change. Academia doesn't exactly teach that. But without ten years of higher education and nearly the same again of academic and then "alt-ac" employment I would write and speak very differently.

I have learned that the boundaries between the humanities and the sciences, between the academic and other professions, and between the professional and the personal, are as porous as you want them to be. That it is possible to escape the feeling that all the work you are doing is never enough. That believing in your research is not the same as believing that you have to be the one to keep doing it. That I've been privileged to be able to open myself up to radical career uncertainty, and have found it more liberating than frightening. And that the next change is always imminent, and that I love not knowing what comes next.



Executive Direct, The Equality Trust

Early Modern European History, University of Oxford

Dr Wanda Wyporska

As Executive Director of a national charity that works to reduce inequality, familiar with the Gini coefficient and a range of statistical data, people often assume that my D. Phil was on a similar subject. However, when I am introduced at an event, it is usually with the ‘surprising fact’ that my doctorate was on early modern Polish witchcraft and that I have written a book that was short-listed for an award. It always goes down well at school and college talks and neatly illustrates the point that a humanities doctorate in what some might see as a rather obscure subject, does not restrict one to a career in academia.

The rather torturous process of applying for junior research fellowships, short-term positions and the sheer lack of Black and Asian professors all played a part in my decision to go back to my first love, writing. After submitting my doctorate, I became a press officer and then managed the press office at a campaigning organisation, moved to the TUC’s learning department, unionlearn and then took a role as the lead on equalities for an education union. The golden thread throughout my roles was communications and a love of writing in its many forms. At the education union I was reviewing, writing and influencing policy, using my interdisciplinary skills, life experience and analytical skills. All of this was underpinned by a deep love of reading, research and an historical perspective.

During the many years I was carrying out research, I lived in Poland and in Oxford, travelled and delivered papers at conferences and gained confidence in public speaking. As my research on witchcraft in Poland was the first to be available in English, I was often challenging the assumptions made by senior and established historians. As a young Black female, this was often particularly daunting. However, that turned out to be a good practice ground for debating in the media, rethinking and challenging traditional views and framing and for finding new solutions.

Just as I fought to bring an interdisciplinary approach to my research (comparing witchcraft trial record texts with representations of the witch and the Devil in a diverse range of literature), so I continue to advocate collaboration across civil society organisations working over a range of social determinants, to reduce inequality.