



University College Dublin  
Ireland's Global University

# UCD POSTDOCS WORKING ACROSS SECTORS: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



1st Edition



## UCD Postdocs Rising to a More Sustainable Future

I am continually struck by the depth and diversity of talent within UCD's Postdoctoral community, which is central to our ability to deliver on our research mission. During your time in UCD, we want you to build the skills and experience that you need to advance your careers. We share your ambitions for research and want to support you in realizing them.

The UCD 2020 - 2024 Strategy Rising to the Future has four strategic themes: Creating a Sustainable Global Society, Transforming through Digital Technology, Building a Healthy World and Empowering Humanity. It also maps to the UN agenda of delivering a more sustainable, prosperous and peaceful future through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This handbook showcases and celebrates a sample of the outstanding researchers who have moved on from their UCD postdoctoral roles in the past 5 years. These researchers have moved to an impressive variety of diverse positions, bringing outstanding leadership and commitment to their work. Through that work they are continuing to deliver impact across our four strategic themes and advance the SDGs.

It is very encouraging to see these researchers describe how the skills they developed as postdocs in UCD have supported them in taking the next steps in their careers. I am also delighted to see their willingness to share their experiences and pass on advice to the next generation of postdocs.

I hope that you find this handbook useful, and that the supports available to you in UCD help you too to develop personally and professionally.

**Professor Orla Feely**  
Vice President for Research, Innovation and Impact



## **Professor Mark Rogers Registrar and Deputy President**

The UCD Careers Network recently conducted a desk-based 'destinations' study on Postdoctoral researchers, as we wanted to find out where the 600 or so researchers who were postdoctoral fellows in UCD in the past 5 years, are now. The results demonstrate that at least one third of the group immediately transitioned out of the academic sphere. Out of the 22 people in this handbook, the 5 in academic positions are working closely with industry or the NGO sector to carry out their research. This underlines how increasingly important the relationship with a wide variety of stakeholders is to support excellent research, excellent researchers, and provide excellent role models for current Early Career Researchers. Equally, it is evident that for those who moved out of academia, the skills developed through their time in research were integral to their subsequent success and professional satisfaction in their careers. I am delighted to see that since I was a postdoctoral fellow, there is now wider knowledge of the career pathways available for Early Career Researchers, and an understanding of the value of career support dedicated to their needs.



## **Tristan Aitken, Director of Human Resources SIRC & Legal Affairs**

The UCD Research Skills and Career Development programme for Postdoctoral researchers has been in place now for ten years. This framework represents a joint initiative between UCD HR People & Organisation Development and UCD Careers Network, both working closely with UCD Research. These excellent teams are committed to building innovative and practical supports in line with the arising needs of our Early Career Researcher community. Over this period the remit of this collaboration has developed from providing technical skills training and career guidance for researchers into a more developed and comprehensive set of dedicated supports with a keen emphasis on transferable skills. This handbook presents a fascinating set of cross-discipline career stories, both describing what their jobs entail and sharing advice with current Postdocs curious to know more about or indeed, follow a similar path. These stories draw the reader in and help make personal connections to someone else's journey to engage, enthral and we hope, inspire. Enjoy.



## What do researchers do all day after the Postdoc?

**Dr. Claire O'Connell**

When I was a child, one of my favourite books was 'What Do People Do All Day?' by Richard Scarry. It followed the daily tasks of the animals that lived in Busytown. The cats, dogs, rabbits, foxes and even the worm inexplicably dressed and worked like humans, and I devoured the cartoons showing how they made roads, practised medicine, cut hair and ran shops.

Several decades later, that fascination continues: what 'do' people with different jobs do all day? As a science journalist I have the honour of talking to researchers working in different fields, in labs, in actual fields, on computers, in start-up companies, in multi-nationals and in the many other situations in which they use their insights to do new things.

I was once one of those researchers. After my primary degree in botany in UCD, I moved to the Pharmacology Department and did a PhD on what cancer-related genes do when they are not leading to cancer. Next, I became a travelling Postdoc. I examined the kidneys of fruit flies at the University of Glasgow, to see how their cells sprang into action. Then, at the University of Sydney, I used a microscope to map plaques of damage in older human brains.

A move into science journalism in 2005 allowed me to talk to other people about what they do, both in science and beyond. I noticed that writing about the people involved in research made those stories 'stickier' - readers remembered those articles and would ask me more about them.

Then, when I was researching for my Master's degree in Science Communication at Dublin City University, I read something startling that resonated with me: that we normally find out about the personal side of scientists in their obituaries. Perhaps this explained why bringing the personal details and thoughts of a living scientist into a story makes such a connection.

Of course, there are famous scientists whose processes and personalities we get to know, for good or for ill, during their lives. But what about the ones who are not normally in the spotlight? What do they do all day? And what gets them out of bed every morning to do it? These are the kinds of questions I ask interviewees in the regular 'Research Lives' column in The Irish Times, and the interest in other people's lives shows no sign of abating.

Getting such insights from researchers can only enrich us. The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest example of how important scientific literacy is for a society that seeks to keep people safe and to build a future where we can thrive. Part of that literacy is understanding how people 'do' science and other forms of research, understanding that questioning findings and assumptions is useful and understanding that our insights can legitimately change with new evidence.

It is heartening to see the breadth of 'what people do all day' featured here, and heartening to know that their research jobs at UCD provided a springboard to such a diversity of career paths. Read their stories with the interest of a gossip, eager to know the details of what others do. Because that could help you to decide what you want to do all day, too.

Dr Claire O'Connell is a science writer and a regular contributor to The Irish Times. She is based in Dublin and has worked with UCD on several projects, including the Science Apprentice book series for children. In 2016, she was Irish Science Writer of the Year. She is an Adjunct Professor at UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Science.

## Section 1 : Where are they now? Empowering Humanity and Building a Healthy World



**Dr Tricia Keilthy**  
The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP)



**Dr Goiuri Alberdi**  
University of the Basque Country



**Dr Paul McGettigan**  
Novartis

**Dr Wei Gao**  
Cook Medical Europe

**Dr Louise Dolphin**  
Auckland UniServices Ltd

**Dr Michelle Trenkmann**  
Springer Nature



**Dr Robert Schwamborn**  
Teacher Academy Ireland Ltd

**Dr Marina Ansaldo**  
Researcher Development Centre, NUIG



**Dr Karen Murphy**  
Trócaire



**Dr Rachel Howcroft**  
UK Civil Service



**Dr Francesco Fattori**  
Codicci Research and Intervention, Milan



**Dr Aisling Soden**  
IDA Ireland

# EMPOWERING HUMANITY



# BUILDING A HEALTHY WORLD





## Dr Tricia Keilthy

**Head of Social Justice & Policy  
The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP)**

**PhD Social Policy  
Postdoc in UCD from Oct 2015 to Nov 2016**



### What do you do in your current role?

My role requires the management of multiple projects including the research programme, the development of a public facing digital campaign and the annual budgetary process. However, a lot of the work is reactive, so you have to be prepared to drop something you are working on to respond to a new or emerging issue. This might require quickly drafting a press release or asking a member of the team to develop a brief policy position paper.

The day typically starts by checking the news to see what policy issues are being discussed. I will also check the Oireachtas website and the Dáil schedule to see if any topical issues, debates or committee meetings of relevance are taking place. These two tasks can set the agenda for the day if issues of significance to SVP are up for discussion.

Most days I will attend internal meetings checking in with my team or with my colleagues in Communications to discuss any upcoming campaigns or external facing engagement opportunities. I also regularly meet with the membership support team to discuss issues that are coming up from the ground from our volunteers. External meetings with other NGOs to discuss joint campaigns or advocacy work occur frequently and we regularly meet with Government departments, elected officials, and state bodies to discuss the issues facing the people SVP assists and to outline our policy solutions.



### How did you get to where you are now?

I took part in interview skills training with the Research Careers team for an upcoming Postdoc interview. I was unsuccessful and at the time I was very disappointed. I went back to the careers office to debrief from the interview and reflect on the process. This prompted a much more in-depth reflection and analysis of my career plans and trajectory. Considering my own values, motivations and priorities I mapped out my 'ideal job' taking into account everything from the day-to-day activities of the role to the physical environment of the workspace. Just as I had completed this task, I saw a Policy Officer job advertised with SVP and it pretty much ticked every box on my list. I applied, interviewed and was successful. I don't think I would have applied for that role if I hadn't paused to reflect on what is important to me in my work. I was nervous about leaving academia at first, but the feeling soon faded and to be honest it was the best decision I ever made. I haven't looked back since.

“

Considering my own values, motivations and priorities I mapped out my 'ideal job'

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### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

The role requires the ability to quickly analyze, critically appraise and synthesise policy documents, draft legislation, new research and statistics. Importantly, from my PhD and Postdoctoral work I have the key skills to appraise the quality of different sources of evidence. The role requires communicating complex problems and data in a clear and succinct manner through policy submissions, press releases, op-eds, blogs and e-zines. Teaching at UCD and presenting at conferences strengthened my skills and confidence in this area and are invaluable in my current role.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

Broaden your horizons and don't box yourself in based on the specialized set of skills and knowledge you have developed during your PhD and Postdoc.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

Take part in interview skills training delivered by the Research Careers programme



## Dr Goiuri Alberdi

**Marie S. Curie 'Career Restart' Fellow  
University of the Basque Country**

**PhD Nutrition & Health  
Postdoc in UCD from May 2015 to March 2017**



### What do you do in your current role?

I am still a researcher but this time under a Marie S. Curie grant, specifically for researchers who have been out of work for some time (i.e. Career Restart). I work in a small team focused on sustainable food system research. I have jumped from public health nutrition to food system policy research so the way of doing research has also changed drastically. In my current job I liaise with people from the whole spectrum of the food system from farmers to food industry, social groups and consumers, policy makers and governmental professionals.

The biggest part of my job is to run the research project called RENASCENCE, a study that develops a set of indicators for the European health services to advance sustainable food procurement and sustainable diet advice strategies. My responsibility is to manage the project from design and implementation through to evaluation and communication. I also co-coordinate the Basque policy-lab as part of the European project Fit4Food2030, which aims to develop the European Research and Innovation strategy to achieve sustainable food systems by 2030.



### What brought you to where you are now?

When I decided to leave Ireland and move back to the Basque Country with my partner, we initially took a long trip of three months in our van along the south west of Europe. I had known for a long time that I really wanted to switch the direction of my work to food systems, policies and sustainability but I knew nobody in the area and didn't know how I would do it. When I got home, I took a summer course in the area and got on well with the facilitator whose values felt similar to mine, even if she is an economist. After this, I asked if she would be willing to work with me and we went on the journey of preparing a Marie Curie Individual Fellowship together. The application was initially rejected with 'recognition for its excellence' so we applied for another call, again unsuccessful but a year later with the benefit of the panel's feedback and another year out of academia it meant I could apply to the 'Career Restart' panel and this time we got it - a three year funding program to carry out my own research project in a subject area that I chose. It has been a year since I started, during which I have expanded my network in and around the Basque Country and I am participating in other projects related to sustainable food systems.

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Having a clear objective of work and life helps to jump into unknown areas of work

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### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

The main skill that I got during my stay in UCD is undoubtedly Project Management. Not just looking for and writing grants but also the elaboration of projects from scratch, including all the documentation and permits needed to carry out those projects, personnel required, work specifications, communication with other departments, and other centers, time management, work organization, team work, communication strategy. To be part of a European Project while working in UCD was also very helpful, in order to understand what it means to be part of such a big research project, how a consortium works/ behaves, basically to understand the European network of research is very useful for my current position.



### **Advice to other Postdocs?**

Having a clear objective of work and life helps to jump into unknown areas of work. In my case, I have the clear objective that I want to contribute with my knowledge and skills towards building sustainable food systems and societies, from food production to consumption by empowering citizens for their right for sustainable food. Sustainable development means that there has to be a multilevel, horizontal, multidisciplinary work, with a systemic or holistic perspective. To achieve sustainable societies we need to start thinking out of the box and not to be afraid of going out from our own comfort zone in our own work. That clear professional, as well as personal objective, has helped me to venture into the unknown, with my mind open to learn constantly and to push myself further. The road has not been easy, to the point of sometimes doubting my own ability and professional capacity. But I think it is a matter of maintaining a mental balance, acknowledging that everyone has good and bad days, but the reassurance comes because I work in what I have chosen and definitely it helps when you believe in what you do!



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc**

Project management  
Grant writing  
Organisational awareness



## **Dr Paul McGettigan**

**Senior Data Scientist  
Data Science and Artificial Intelligence  
Novartis, Dublin**

**PhD Bioinformatics  
Postdoc in UCD from 2010 to 2015**



### **What do you do in your current role?**

I work for Novartis, one of the largest pharma companies in the world. I am part of the Data Science and Artificial Intelligence team. Our group is a new function within the company and is mandated to apply data science, machine learning and AI techniques across the entire organisation. I work mostly with the research division of Novartis called NIBR. In that respect my current role is much closer to what I was doing in my Postdoc. In the past 12 months in particular I have been using many of the same bioinformatic techniques and algorithms as I was using during my PhD and Postdoc. My initial role was much more removed from my academic work. I started as a statistical programmer – working on the analysis and coding of clinical trials. After about 18 months I had the opportunity to move into a different team – Real World Data Analytics.

My typical day will involve a few hours of meetings, many of them happening over skype or MS Teams. All of the projects I work on include team members based in different countries – usually Switzerland (Novartis HQ), Cambridge, MA (USA) or Hyderabad in India. My project work can involve everything from bioinformatic analysis, machine learning, R programming to writing up project documentation or study protocols in MS Word or putting together project slide decks.



### **How did you get to where you are now?**

I took the first role with Novartis as a 'foot in the door' opportunity. I'll be honest, the first few weeks in particular were very difficult re-adjusting to the corporate life. I had worked in industry for several years prior to going back to do my PhD. In my initial role I wasn't utilizing as much of my research skills as I do now. I was lucky to have a very supportive boss who made a point of trying to make my role as interesting as possible and who offered me projects that were more research oriented. The lesson I took from that was to be open about what your aims and goals are. If you tell people you want to get into a particular area then your name will be top of their mind when the right opportunity arises. If you sit silently in the corner and don't verbalise your goals then everyone assumes you're happy with your lot.

“  
Tell people you want  
to get into a particular area  
then your name will be top of  
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opportunity arises]  
”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

The communication skills both written and verbal from writing academic papers and theses are probably skills that are most transferable to any role. The ability to project manage and manage small teams will also be valuable as you start out in your career. Having experience of mentoring undergrads, Masters or PhD students is great experience for helping to onboard junior team members. Troubleshooting and operating in areas where there isn't a well defined solution will also be valuable to an organisation.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

Read the book 'Never split the Difference' by Chris Voss. And, always try to get a contact inside the company to find out exactly what the role is about – it shows initiative and can give you an ally in the hiring process. They should also be able to give you information about a likely salary range for the role. If they know you they should also be able to indicate where you should be on the range.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

Use the UCD Research Careers roundtable sessions to get a contact inside the company to find out exactly what the role is all about



## **Dr Louise Dolphin**

**Contracts and Growth Manager  
Auckland UniServices Ltd, New Zealand**

**PhD Psychology  
Postdoc in UCD from 2014 to 2015**



### **What do you do in your current role?**

In my current role, I draft and negotiate research and consulting contracts for academic projects in the University of Auckland. My current portfolio includes Psychology, Computer Science, Statistics, and a number of Business Units. My team has a mixture of research and legal backgrounds and are brilliant to work with. It is really interesting learning about intellectual property, licensing and patents. I also enjoy gaining understanding of the research ecosystem in New Zealand and how research is funded here. It is exciting to be working in the Education sector again, but from a different angle.



### **How did you get to where you are now?**

I finished my Postdoc in 2015 and transitioned into a research role in an Irish charity, working on data analysis, reporting and academic publications. It was a great step, as I still had the comfort of using my academic research skills, but in a new setting. When I finished that contract, I decided to try something completely different and I worked in a Management Consulting role for a large firm. Finally, before moving to New Zealand, I worked in standards and guidance development in the Health sector. Again, I enjoyed working in a research-related role, but outside of an academic setting and with a different, more applied focus.

I had always hoped to live abroad but the timing never worked out. Last year I decided to bite the bullet and move to Auckland. I worried I had left it too late and it was at a time when many of my friends were starting a family or saving to get a mortgage. However, it's been a really brilliant experience. I really like the focus on the outdoors, the people are so welcoming and the work-life balance here is great.

“ I had excellent PhD and Postdoc supervisors in UCD, and it taught me to seek out mentors in the workplace ”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

The largest practical transition when I finished my Postdoc, was the shift from working predominantly alone, to working in a team-based setting, and contributing to joint deliverables. I also had to adapt to having shorter periods to focus, with the increase in team and client meetings throughout the day. I think the skills you hone as a Postdoc are valuable in many industries. For example, seeing a large project, with many moving parts through to completion.

Good research needs good mentorship. I had excellent PhD and Postdoc supervisors in UCD, and it taught me to seek out mentors in the workplace - formal or informal - who I can learn from. This is not always for technical knowledge; some people are incredibly skilled at handling difficult client meetings, building relationships, or presenting information clearly. Finally, the analysis skills you learn as a Postdoc are invaluable in any role that relies on problem solving and sound decision making.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

If you are curious about working outside of academia after your Postdoc, take the plunge. Otherwise you will always wonder 'what if?'. Reach out to people on LinkedIn or loose connections in your networks for a coffee or a call to ask more about what they do and how they got there. And, in the words of Tim Minchin 'Put your head down and work with pride on whatever is in front of you... you never know where you might end up. Just be aware that the next worthy pursuit will probably appear in your periphery. Which is why you should be careful of long-term dreams.'



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc**

Building relationships  
Planning and organisation  
Analytical skills



## Dr Wei Gao

**Medical Advisor, Cook Medical Europe**

**PhD Vascular Biology**

**Postdoc in UCD from April 2010 to Sept 2015**



### What do you do in your current role?

I am working as a medical advisor in a medical device company. This involves providing clinical/medical knowledge to R&D engineers whenever they need an answer or direction to develop a product. On a day-to-day basis, this means I work with multifunctional teams so communication is really important. I reach out to clinicians and figure out their needs, then take that feedback and help the Engineer to achieve what the Clinician needs. I work with the Quality Engineer to deal with complaints related to the devices and I provide risk analysis from a clinical perspective. Part of my role is to figure out what possibly happened when the device was used in clinical settings and what the risk could be in relation to patient's safety. I build up knowledge by going to conferences, talking to physicians, watching procedures in theatre and - most importantly - self-educating and not being afraid of learning new things. I work with the Regulatory Affairs team to help them with documenting submissions to (e.g.) the FDA or European Commission. Critical appraisal of journal articles or providing insight from the articles are the keys to support this team. And then I also work with the Marketing Team and help them with marketing material (e.g. posters, video content, slides).



### How did you get to where you are now?

I planned to move on from my Postdoc about 1 year before I was actively looking for a new job. I also attended almost every relevant training UCD had on offer - which means I had to work extra hours in the lab to get my project done. Not only did all this training teach me new things, it helped me to build my own confidence and get over that confusing and panic phase in which I thought I only knew how to be a Postdoc and I wouldn't know what to do outside of the academic circle. Through one-to-one career development meetings, I came up with a plan to get where I wanted to go and I started to reach out to lots of people I had never met asking about their career stories. When I was ready, I met the Sales Rep from a pharma company whom I had known from a previous journal club and asked him to pass my CV directly to the Director and I then got an interview. It was to cover a maternity leave position but I was willing to take the risk of possibly not working after that but when I was eventually employed by my current company and I asked my director: why me? I was told that I was one of the final two on the list after 3 rounds of interviews and when the company still couldn't decide they went with the person who had industry experience (i.e. me) so those initial few months in the sector had really paid off.

“ On a day-to-day basis, this means I work with multifunctional teams so communication is really important ”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

Postdocs have plenty of knowledge in their mind, how we can transfer that to benefit others (e.g. multifunctional teams in a company) is the key or the value to a company. Things that really helped me were having had experience doing the following: managing a project or multiple projects; writing scientific/clinical assessments with a strong research background; having expert ability to search literature with scientific and clinical knowledge; the ability to extract relevant and useful information; the ability to transfer and convert the knowledge to a way that engineers can understand; the ability to self-educate and quickly learn in a new area.

A skill to learn - Postdocs have their own project to do and the project can often be managed without much collaboration. This is quite different from how it works in a company in which, for different teams working together, communication and coordination is crucial. Any experience you can get to communicate with different teams, show them you are willing to help and show them you can bring value will be a skill you will use in industry.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

First off, don't be afraid of getting in touch with people who have done something you would like to do; most of them are very kind and helpful and even if some are not, there is nothing to lose. Try to hand over your CV directly to the key person (e.g.) manager or director in the very department you plan to work.

It took me a few months to find my feet after maternity leave cover. I went to job interviews uncountable times. I was in the final shortlist most times but I didn't get the job. I even started lowering my expectations at one stage because I just wanted a job, but I still didn't get the role. Now I really appreciate that the companies that rejected me pushed me to something much better and something I truly deserve. My message to Postdocs is there are times that we feel we are not good enough for certain positions, but there are many more times when we are too good for the positions. Keep trying and keep learning, everything will be fine. As Steve Maraboli said: 'As I look back on my life, I realise that every time I thought I was being rejected from something good, I was actually being redirected to something better'. That was exactly what happened to me.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

Make the most of UCD's great training and development opportunities for researchers - it will help build confidence



## **Dr Michelle Trenkmann**

**Senior Editor, Springer Nature, London**

**PhD area Rheumatology, Molecular Biology  
Postdoc in UCD from 2013 to 2017**



### **What do you do in your current role?**

I handle manuscripts in genetics, genomics and molecular evolution at Nature and I guide papers and authors through the entire process from initial submission to final acceptance. This involves reading fresh submissions as well as revised manuscripts, discussing them with my colleagues, sending papers for peer-review, rejecting papers (which happens a lot) or accepting manuscripts (which happens a lot less often and mostly after at least two rounds of review). For the manuscripts under review, I enlist suitable reviewers (e.g. experts in certain methodologies, experts who can give us an overview opinion on a specific topic), a process that can be quite time-consuming because we have to take conflicts of interest, expertise, availability and reliability into account. Once all the reviews on a paper are in, we discuss them and - taking all the different aspects into account - make a decision on whether to invite a revised manuscript or not. The post-review decision-making for me is one of the best parts of the job; it's where the paper is taking shape in my head and where I can give authors specific guidance on what they should focus on with their revisions. Reading and thinking about varied research topics on a daily basis is fun and intellectually challenging.



### **How did you get to where you are now?**

While I was a Postdoc in UCD (first at St. Vincent's University Hospital and later at the Conway Institute), it became clear to me that an academic career wasn't what I was after and I started thinking about what else I could do. During my PhD, I had been helping my supervisor with peer-review and I played with the idea of becoming an editor someday. And so this is what I set my heart on and I started applying for editor roles; there aren't many, so I had to be patient - many journal editors are academic editors which means they edit manuscripts in addition to their normal academic roles, but they do not do this full-time or get paid for it. In February 2017, I started working as an associate editor at Nature Communications, first in a locum position covering for another editor's maternity leave, but I was soon offered a permanent position. It was a steep learning curve, and the job was a lot more varied and interesting than I had imagined - it sounds cheesy, but I had found my calling. I was promoted to senior editor in March 2019 and in April 2020, I moved to Nature. Working for Nature comes with a number of different tasks and new challenges which I felt ready for after three years at Nature Communications.

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Managers want to hire people who want to do the job and who are willing to learn

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### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

Being organized and having a rough plan helps, but also being flexible enough to respond to unforeseen emergencies and changing plans at the last minute without descending into complete chaos. You have to be able to work in a team with very varied backgrounds, roles and interests – you have to be willing to make compromises and see the bigger picture. And just as for a researcher, networking is very important for my role. I still go to conferences, I visit research institutes and I talk to researchers. If I have a good relationship with someone and they understand how we work, then they are more likely to submit their best work to our journal instead of taking it to another publisher.



### Advice for other Postdocs?

Whatever role you want to move into, persistence is important and sometimes you have to take a risk. I moved to a different country for a six-month locum position and there was no guarantee that I would have a job after that though it did work out for me. A locum position can help you to get your foot in the door of an industry, give you some experience, or even help you realize that this was not what you wanted or imagined it to be (and then you move on). Talk to someone who is doing or has done the job – they know best how to apply, how to prepare for an interview and what to expect from the job. When you apply in your cover letter, in your interview, show enthusiasm for the role. I think this can make up for your CV maybe not matching the job description perfectly. Managers want to hire people who want to do the job and who are willing to learn.



### Transferable skills from Postdoc

Flexibility  
Teamwork  
Networking



## Dr Robert Schwamborn

**Co-founder & Director  
Teacher Academy Ireland Ltd**

**PhD Neuroscience  
Postdoc in UCD from Oct 2010 to May 2014**



### What do you do in your current role?

Teacher Academy Ireland Ltd provides training courses for teachers from other European countries (mainly funded through the ERASMUS PLUS programme). Topics include ICT in education, 4C's (Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking and Cooperation), soft skills for educators, etc.) The organisation is linked with similar institutes in Florence, Barcelona, Berlin and other European cities. I often facilitate training courses from 9 am to 2 pm. In the afternoon, I take care of administrative tasks, course development and strategic planning.



### How did you get to where you are now?

I always enjoyed attending and organising workshops and training courses. I attended several training courses offered to Postdocs as part of the UCD Research Skills and Career Development programme. I built up a good connection with one of the trainers and was given the opportunity to shadow one of her courses. While working as a postdoc at UCD, I volunteered as a tutor for practical Science classes. I was also active in a young scientist association, the Young European Biotech Network (YEBN). As head of YEBN's Career Development team, I organised an international, EU-funded conference about Careers in Life Sciences in 2012. As a local follow up from the conference, I organised a Science2Business workshop for UCD Science & Business students in partnership with UCD Michael Smurfit Business School. While in-between Postdoc contracts, I also attended a train the trainer course (I paid the course fee myself). Based on these experiences, I was hired as Project Coordinator for the Amgen Biotech Experience programme, which provides Irish secondary school teachers with equipment and training for state-of-the-art science experiments for the classroom. From there it was an easy transition to providing the courses we do at Teacher Academy Ireland Ltd. I was also very interested in working on a European level. Volunteering for YEBN was the entry to this area. As a postdoc at Systems Biology Ireland (SBI), UCD, I voiced my interest in contributing to SBI's European project work. This ultimately led to me becoming Administrative Manager of the European Association of Systems Medicine. This was allowing me to take on the Director position at Teacher Academy Ireland Ltd.

“The ability of a scientist to understand and process large amounts of information is very helpful in adapting to new situations and challenges”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

First and foremost, I believe that the ability of a scientist to understand and process large amounts of information is very helpful in adapting to new situations & challenges. I bought my first smartphone about a week before I was to facilitate a workshop about using smartphones for education, so I had to be a quick learner. As a scientist, I also learned to think independently, which is vital when you are becoming the Director of a company.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

Use the university infrastructure to further your career goals – attend the training courses and lectures on offer, organise activities/lectures/seminars/conferences yourself with the support of your PI, schools and/or local associations. Be prepared to invest time and resources outside your standard Postdoc work. I did a lot of volunteering even after a long day and paid for activities with my own money. While it was tough at the time, it gave me an edge that allowed me to realise my career goals. Network – I invited people whose job I found interesting for lunch to find out more about how they got there. In 2014, the year I finished being a postdoc, I attended ten international conferences and events, some of which I had organised myself or was invited to as a speaker. Get involved in a professional association – it’s a great way of creating new contacts and acquiring new skills.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

Use the University infrastructure to further your career goals



## **Dr Marina Ansaldo**

**Researcher Development Manager  
Researcher Development Centre, NUI Galway**

**PhD Medieval and Early Modern English  
and Italian Literature  
Postdoc in UCD from Jan 2012 to Dec 2012**



### **What do you do in your current role?**

My role as a Researcher Development Manager in NUI Galway involves supporting Research Staff and Research Students in their career development. I provide individual consultation sessions, deliver and organise training in transferable skills, give individual support for job applications and interview preparations. Our Centre was launched just six months before I started and, in collaboration with the Head of the Centre, I am contributing to shaping and developing our suite of supports. As a former researcher myself, I am very much aware of the challenges that researchers face, especially when it comes to building fulfilling and financially viable careers. This is why I am very passionate about supporting the continuing professional development of our researchers.



### **How did you get to where you are now?**

I love research and teaching, but after two postdocs and years teaching on an hourly-paid basis, with no job security in sight, I began to long for a more stable career path. I was fortunate to avail of the excellent services of the Research Careers programme in UCD Careers Network and it was during a career consultation there that I first realised working in research support could be a good fit for me. I had always taken great satisfaction in educating and mentoring students, and the idea of supporting researchers, and helping them overcome some of the same challenges I had to face, was particularly appealing. I started applying for research support roles, and within three months I was offered a job as a Research Support Officer in NUI Galway. It did take some time to get used to the new role, and to become familiar with how funding agencies work. But it was a rewarding experience, and after a year in the post I was able to finally secure a permanent job. A few months later, I was successful in becoming a Senior Research Support Officer. As time went by, I realised that, while research support was something I was very excited about, I didn't want to remain in the research funding area. What I really wanted was to work with researchers on their career development. This would combine my interest in research support with my passion for educating and coaching. I began to keep an eye open for suitable vacancies, and to work towards refining my skills in relevant areas. This careful planning helped me to secure my current post as a Researcher Development Manager. This role suits my interests and lifestyle more than an academic job could ever have.

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This role suits my interests and lifestyle more than an academic job ever could have

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### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

First and foremost, my experience as an educator, gained while teaching both at NUI Galway and UCD, has proven invaluable in designing, delivering and organising courses and workshops in my current role. My first-hand experience as a researcher is also key in providing support to the research community, as I understand their key concerns. Of the skills gained while completing my PhD and Postdocs, project management, time management and problem solving have proven essential. In my job I have to work independently and develop my own projects, finding new ways to support our research community, and adapting to their ever changing needs. Communication skills are also key, as I have to engage both our research community, their supervisors/PIs and colleagues in other support roles across the University. My web design skills, gained when I was working on Digital Humanities projects as a postdoc, are also coming in handy, as I am able to take a very active role in the development of our website and online resources.



### Advice for other Postdocs?

Take the time to think about what you really want from your career. It is only when I took a step back from my day-to-day job and really examined what I wanted, both in terms of my career and my life overall, that I realised I needed a change in my career path. By carefully planning how to achieve my new goals, I was able to find a job that is a good fit for me. Changing tracks in your career can be a very difficult decision to make, not least because of what we perceive other people's expectations of us might be. For some, choosing to move away from an academic career can be perceived as a 'failure'. In fact, the skills and experiences gained as researchers can prepare us for a variety of jobs. It is down to each of us to decide which career options better suit us. My own background as a researcher and educator enabled me to flourish in research support. Don't be afraid to consider alternative paths if you think they might suit you better than what you are currently doing, both in terms of type of job and lifestyle.



### Transferable skills from Postdoc

Teaching/ training  
Project management  
Digital humanities



## Dr Karen Murphy

**Women's Empowerment Advisor, Trócaire**

**PhD Politics and International Relations  
Postdoc in UCD from 2014 to 2016**



### What do you do in your current role?

I'm part of a HQ based programme advisory team with Trócaire, an international non-governmental organisation working to support communities on issues such as resource rights, women's empowerment and humanitarian response. Our work supports our country-based teams and partner organisations by providing strategic advice and reviewing programme quality. Several times per year we also travel to the places where we work so it's a really enriching role.



### How did you get to where you are now?

My route was a scenic and winding one. Before and after completing my PhD I had worked with grassroots NGOs and multilateral organisations in non-academic roles, working in the areas of policy and human rights protection. I started out my career as an intern in a small grassroots NGO in Egypt. Later, my PhD focused on human rights protection which opened some doors into overseas roles in complex and sometimes conflict-affected environments, giving me experience that was essential to equip me for the work I do today.



### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

The ability to conduct a sharp analysis of complex environment, and also of human interactions, is really important in the work I do, and I'm grateful for my PhD and Postdoc training in that regard. Working with people from different institutions, cultural backgrounds and life situations and managing budgets are important and so Postdoc positions that have a regional or global dimension provide opportunity for skills building in these areas. In the area of women's empowerment, while we may want radical and rapid change, the reality is that we are working towards bringing about gradual but meaningful change, and so having an academic background, and practice in framing, reframing, testing and retesting arguments is an asset. Patience is also important.

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Postdoc positions that have a regional or global dimension provide opportunity for skills building

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### Advice for other Postdocs?

I am not sure I have advice to offer but I can share my own experience: for me, jumping the academic ship and investing my skills and energy in a more practical role has been hugely rewarding. I love my job; I work with wonderful people in Ireland and around the world. Working with Trócaire and moreover with communities around the world is an enormous privilege. One caveat though is that this sector is competitive and funding sources often very insecure, so you need to be comfortable with a certain amount of personal risk.



### Top tip for current Postdocs

Having an academic background, and practice in framing, reframing, testing and retesting arguments is an asset



## Dr Rachel Howcroft

Policy Advisor, UK Civil Service

PhD Archaeological Science  
Postdoc in UCD from 2014 to 2015



### What do you do in your current role?

I'm currently working in Local Government finance policy, gathering evidence about future demand and spending need in local councils to develop policy relating to local government funding. As a policy official in the civil service my role is to support the government of the day in developing and implementing its policies, and to do so with the civil service values of integrity, honesty, objectivity, and impartiality. On a day-to-day basis I might be designing a sector engagement strategy to gather views and information from local councils, drafting responses to parliamentary questions or inquiries on my policy area, providing briefing to Ministers and Senior Officials ahead of important meetings or public appearances, putting advice and recommendations to Ministers on the different policy options available to them and the risks and benefits associated with each...and more, it's very varied!



### How did you get to where you are now?

I applied for the UK Civil Service Fast Stream while doing a Postdoc in Archaeological Science at UCD. The fast stream means doing placements in different government departments to get a wide ranging experience of the types of work government does. I've had policy roles in energy security and improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities and health conditions, as well as roles focussed on organisational strategy and transformation. At some point during my PhD I had the thought that policy development would be an interesting alternative career if I ever wanted to get out of archaeology and academia. A couple of years later I was a few months into a Postdoc at UCD and commuting back to London every other weekend to see my partner with no clear route to us both living in the same city. I also realised that I really didn't enjoy what I was doing enough to justify the impact on my personal life, so took the decision to change track and applied to the UK Civil Service. Making that decision was incredibly hard, but having made it I've really not looked back.

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Making that decision was incredibly hard, but having made it I've really not looked back

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### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

I use so many skills from academia on a day to day basis now - drawing objective conclusions from a wide range of data, communicating complex ideas in a way that is easy for others to understand, building and working in multidisciplinary teams to deliver shared objectives, managing projects, being resilient when things don't go to plan...and more!



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

Your research area may be niche, but your experience is not. You just need to translate what you do into the language of the industry you want to get into.



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc**

Communication skills  
Multidisciplinary team-work  
Resilience



## Dr Francesco Fattori

**Evaluation Researcher**  
**Codici Research and Intervention, Milan, Italy**

**PhD Psychology**  
**Postdoc in UCD from April 2018 to August 2019**



### What do you do in your current role?

Codici is an independent research institute dedicated to values like justice, well-being and citizenship. We work primarily in three areas within the applied social research sector: evaluation, training and project supervision. There is no such thing as a typical day! I alternate days where I'm busy evaluating or supporting evaluation processes for national or European projects, analyzing data or reviewing materials (desk, back-office work) to others more on the field, collecting primary data or meeting with project partners to update them about the progress of the projects and decide the following steps and potential adjustments. It is a highly stimulating environment where you are encouraged and driven to learn every day, new ways of reading, studying and impacting communities' welfare. Codici's approach towards its members is to nurture and encourage their specific professional interests, evaluation research in my case, but also to involve them in activities and areas which may not be their primary area of expertise to broaden their professional knowledge and practices.



### How did you get to where you are now?

Since the second year of my PhD, I started to look for a type of research that could fit with my way to see life and society. When I found out about evaluation research, I realized where I wanted my career to go. From that moment on, all the steps that I took in my research career were driven by the desire to work in evaluation research projects. In my case, the transition from being a UCD Postdoc to work for Codici also meant going back home to Milan, my hometown. This smoothed the transition from a contextual perspective. Still, I was transitioning to a professional context I had not experienced before: I was going from an academic environment, and a specific way of managing and conducting research, to an independent organization, with a strong focus on applied social research. Practically, I never stopped studying and researching how and what it could mean to work in evaluation research, mapping the types of projects, highlighting specificities and differences with academic research, the theoretical approaches and the techniques applied in this area and specifically at Codici. Once I joined Codici, I also gave myself the time to try to understand the explicit and implicit dynamics and learn what my role within this specific system was.

“ Once I joined... I also gave myself the time to ... understand the dynamics and learn what my role within this specific system is ”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

Going from the idea of being an evaluation researcher to where I am now, it has not always been a linear path. I had experiences that seemed to take me off the road, but I knew what I wanted to be as a professional. That specific focus helped me also to make the most out of professional or personal experiences that were not related to evaluation research. For instance, living in Dublin for three years improved my spoken and written English, something that I'm using now to write and review project applications for European projects applications. Professional experiences, such as being involved in addiction prevention, for example, taught me how to deal professionally in casual situations with young people, learning how to deliver an evidence-based message in lay language - something I'm now using in my current role when I go, for instance, to collect primary data in schools and I have to describe the research we are performing. Also working with kids as a teacher or on the football pitch may seem very far from research. Still, it has taught me how to manage professional relationships within potentially stressful environments and to solve problems within fast-changing scenarios in appropriate and functional ways.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

My advice is to perform two thorough types of research before moving across sectors.

First and foremost, do inner research to realize where your personal and professional authenticity can be maximized and fulfilled. Look at your interests, desires and values and profile an ideal place (company/agency/industry) that embraces those interests, desires and values. At the same time, openly share your thoughts to someone that you consider a mentor. Ask them also for potential connections and contacts, so that you can talk to people that have already walked the path you want to pursue and can give you useful tips. Be also open to moving into intermediate steps that may be functional to get where you want (i.e. doing further study, networking at conferences) and that can help you to shape your professional profile towards that idea that is driving your choice. While you are doing all this, map the available options, also on an international level if you wish. Then, whenever you feel ready to move, start to contact the options you found, sincerely presenting your passionate interests and your professional aims and skills.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

Match your interests and values to an ideal workplace, whether it's a company/agency/industry



Partnerships  
to achieve the  
Goal



## Dr Aisling Soden

Policy Manager, IDA Ireland

PhD Geology  
Postdoc in UCD from 2011 to 2015



### What do you do in your current role?

IDA Ireland is a non-commercial, semi-state body promoting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Ireland through a wide range of services. We partner with potential and existing investors to help them establish or expand their operations in Ireland. Over the past 70 years IDA Ireland has evolved to become a global force in attracting FDI to Ireland and a key influencer in the development of the Irish economy and its reputation abroad. As a Policy Manager in IDA's Strategic Policy Department, I carry out in-depth analysis of public policy, provide policy advice, and develop and advocate for strategic public policy initiatives that will maximize Ireland's attractiveness as a location for Foreign Direct Investment. Central to my role is engaging with stakeholders across government departments and state bodies on a range of public policy areas.



### How did you get to where you are now?

After completing my PhD, I worked with a junior mineral exploration company for two years. I returned to academic research when an opportunity to lead an interesting research project arose with my PhD research group in Glasgow. Once that project ended I secured a postdoc in UCD working on an industry funded project. After 4 years in UCD as a postdoc and part-time lecturer I decided I wanted to move out of academia and into a policy or business sector role. I started an online MBA to gain knowledge and skills relevant to both business and policy sectors. I had completed a number of modules of the MBA when I moved to SFI as a Programme Manager in the Post-Award and Research Centre team. In two years with SFI I gained valuable experience of both programme management and policy development, and subsequently moved to IDA as a Policy Manager where I have been for almost three years now.

“ Being enthusiastic and excited about the work you are doing will show through in your work and to the people you work with ”



### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

Essential to my role is developing a comprehensive understanding of policy issues. This requires sourcing and assimilating large amounts of detailed documents and data to gain an in-depth knowledge of the particular policy area and staying current on policy developments. Consequently, I apply my research and analytical skills on a daily basis. I am also still distilling and communicating complex issues in a clear and effective manner to a range of audiences and media (written, visual and oral). Unlike a research role, new issues and challenges arise frequently, and although there are projects I develop over weeks and months these must be balanced with responding to immediate requests. Flexibility to move between different tasks, prioritize tasks and manage your time effectively is essential and differs to the majority of postdoc roles where the focus is generally on one research project.



### Advice for other Postdocs?

If you are considering moving to another sector choose one you are genuinely interested in. Being enthusiastic and excited about the work you are doing will show through in your work and to the people you work with. This makes you much more likely to be successful in your chosen career, as well as enjoying your working week. I'd also advise getting some experience of the sector you want to move to, be that through industry placement, taking a course in the topic or finding the opportunity to build that role into your daily work, such as taking on a Project Management role in your department or focusing on building up the data science aspects of your work. This will give you a flavour for what it's like to do that role, as well as experience for job applications and demonstrating to potential employers that you are genuinely interested in moving into the sector.



### Transferable skills from Postdoc

Analytical skills  
Communicating complex issues clearly  
Managing stakeholders

## Section 2 : Where are they now? Transforming through Digital Technology and Creating a Sustainable Global Society



Clean Water

**Dr Jim Johnson**  
Local Authority Waters  
Programme (LAWPro)



Affordable and  
Clean Energy

**Dr Cian Quinn**  
Highview Power, London, UK



Decent Work &  
Economic  
Growth

**Dr Charles Nwankire**  
Bank of Ireland



Industry,  
Innovation &  
Infrastructure

**Dr Jessica Amadio**  
JA Italia (Junior Achievement  
Italia), Milan



Sustainable cities  
& communities

**Dr Sina Shahab**  
Cardiff University, UK



Responsible  
Consumption and  
Production

**Dr Lucy McCarthy**  
Queens University Belfast



Climate Action

**Dr Lucy Cradden**  
Commission for Regulation of  
Utilities (CRU)



Life Below  
Water

**Dr Marco Garcia-Vaquero**  
University College Dublin



Life on Land

**Dr Niall O'Brien**  
Institute of Science &  
Technology, Austria

**Dr Sven Batke**  
Edge Hill University, UK



**TRANSFORMING  
THROUGH  
DIGITAL  
TECHNOLOGY**



**CREATING A  
SUSTAINABLE  
GLOBAL SOCIETY**



## Dr Jim Johnson

**Catchment Scientist  
Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPro)**

**PhD Environmental Science  
Postdoc in UCD from 2014 to 2017**



### What do you do in your current role?

The objective of the Local Authority Waters Programme is to protect and improve water quality in rivers, lakes, groundwater, estuaries and coastal waters. I work in areas where water quality has deteriorated. As a Catchment Scientist, my role is to figure out what significant issues are impacting water quality and then to work with stakeholders to address them. The role has great variety involving scientific work but also communication and public engagement. In each area we first prepare a desk study to gather all available information. Next we hold a public meeting to inform the local community and to engage them in the process. Then we carry out our field assessment involving catchment walks and sampling. We then refer our findings to the relevant stakeholder and work on coming up with suitable mitigation measures to address the significant issues. So on a typical day I could be meeting with a local authority about a particular river, preparing for a public meeting or on the river doing some field assessment.



### How did you get to where you are now?

Moving from academia was challenging at times. After almost ten years in academia, I was considering a change, but what to do next? Would I find non-academic work fulfilling? I got a lot of help from the UCD Careers Network. I found them incredibly useful in providing advice on transferable skills, putting together job applications and preparing for interviews. I did several courses through UCD Research Skills and Career Development programme in particular the Project Management Course was invaluable. I also found it useful to hear from other PhDs and Postdocs who had since left academia. The last year of the Postdoc was somewhat stressful - my contract end date was fast approaching and I was finishing research work and applying for jobs at the same time. I was mostly applying for non-academic roles - some in scientific outreach, others were more analytical. My current job was advertised around this time, the mix of scientific work and public engagement appealed to me. I also felt that it would give me experience in a regulatory setting that would help give me more career options.

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Working in academia, surrounded by other researchers it's easy to forget the skills you've built up over the years

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### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

Working in academia, surrounded by other researchers it's easy to forget the skills you've built up over the years. When I started my current job, these skills really stood to me. For example, my work involves giving presentations to the public at meetings with other government agencies. I had done presentations at conferences and given some undergraduate lectures, so I felt fairly comfortable from the outset, which would have not been the case otherwise. As a researcher you learn to figure out things for yourself. Starting my new role, I was a little concerned that I didn't know some of the regulatory background or technical skills. But these came relatively quickly with some research and practice. It was noticeable how quickly the other ex Postdocs and PhD students I work with are able to get up to speed so quickly in their new roles. My current role also requires a considerable amount of writing – both non technical and technical, often summarized in a brief paragraph or a few lines. The writing skills I developed doing research have really stood to me on a daily basis.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

When you're a Postdoc, the key outputs in research are grants and papers. As soon as you leave, these cease to be important; no-one has asked me about my papers since the day I left UCD. It is the technical knowledge of the discipline and key competencies that are important. Every interview I've done has been competency based (e.g.) asking about team working, project management, managing stakeholders etc. For anyone, considering working across sectors I would first suggest talking to someone in that sector to get a feel for what key competencies are important and then to try to fill in any gaps from your work experience to date. Also, get some input from someone for any applications or interviews. You may not realize that you can demonstrate many of the competencies already. Thirdly, if you are working under a PI, I would suggest trying to get a project or other work under your own name. It might also be worth considering broadening your work experience by (e.g.) volunteering or by taking on non-research work. For example, UCD has seed funding for cross-campus projects (SPARC). This will give prospective employers an idea of your skills and interests apart from research and has the potential to open new opportunities.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

The QQI Project Management course run by the UCD Research Careers programme is invaluable



## Dr Cian Quinn

**Lead Process Development Engineer  
Highview Power**

**PhD Mechanical Engineering  
Postdoc in UCD from Oct 2015 to June 2017**



### What do you do in your current role?

Highview Power is a relatively small company working on Liquid Air Energy Storage (LAES) as a novel alternative to batteries, to store energy from renewable sources, on the scale required by national electricity grids. I lead a small team of research engineers that is focused on modelling different aspects of the LAES process. Basically, we try to answer our colleagues' difficult questions. My day can involve running simulations, preparing reports and presentations to share analyses with the wider engineering team, planning and reviewing my team's activities and making sure they have what they need as well as being responsible for setting the direction of our R&D efforts to address the challenges our wider engineering team faces. I also coordinate research projects carried out by external partners, primarily in the University of Brighton, and I spend time every month visiting their labs. One aspect of my job that I find particularly satisfying is the variety of work I do, nothing is routine. We are constantly improving our understanding of the complexities of the system, there is always something new to learn and try out.



### How did you get to where you are now?

This is the second job I have had since finishing my Postdoc. I worked in the Research Department for Dyson, near Bristol, for 18 months before moving to London to work for Highview. When I left Dyson, my boss told me that he had watched me change from a 'stereotypical academic' into a 'research engineer with an industrial mindset'. When I reflect on that statement, what I have found is that, in my experience, moving from academia to industry meant moving from a highly individualised and single-minded form of work to an atmosphere that involved a lot more collaborative work with people from a wide range of disciplines on projects that often have short timeframes. This is something I have hugely enjoyed because I have always been motivated by trying to learn something new. I have been asked in job interviews questions relating to how I will cope with the strict deadlines imposed by working for an industrial R&D group. I fundamentally do not buy the notion that academics are inexperienced at working to tight deadlines. What I have learned is that a good skill to develop is knowing how much detail is required to answer a question and stopping there. In my mind, that question has become less about hitting deadlines, and more about being efficient with the time I have.

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I fundamentally do not buy the notion that academics are inexperienced at working to tight deadlines

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### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

My PhD and Postdoc were both entirely experimental projects. I have since moved away from this into an entirely simulation-based role. However, the main thing I learned during my time in academia is how to teach myself something new, quickly but thoroughly. I have found this skill invaluable since moving to industry, especially as I have moved disciplines. I spent a lot of time while in academia trying to figure out what was wrong with experiments that were not working. I believe that this experience taught me how to break down complicated problems into their constituent parts to try and figure out a path forward. My current role does not involve working out why experiments have gone wrong anymore, but these days I find that skill very helpful when scoping and prioritising work packages or projects that come together to deliver on something larger. I underestimated that skill until I came to industry, but now I am almost thankful for the long nights watching my rig not work!



### Advice for other Postdocs?

I underestimated the importance of my network when I was a Postdoc. I have always wanted to work in R&D in the renewable energy sector, and I have ended up doing so because of a brief conversation I had with my PhD supervisor and her husband at a wedding. I am not advocating hassling everyone around you for a job but spending a bit of time thinking about what you want and if you know anyone who has a connection to it is a good first step. It can be hard when moving into industry to know if one is suited to a potential job or not. I tried to focus not on what I studied, but what was a field I was interested in and allowed me to do what I felt I was good at during my studies: generally figuring out why something wasn't working and learning how to fix or improve it. I would then try and find someone working in that company to ask questions and see if I was a good fit. If you're not in you can't win, and the worst these people could say is no. Following that approach means I now work in the renewable energy sector in a job I find very satisfying, but in a completely different engineering discipline from my undergraduate degree.



### Transferable skills from Postdoc

Adaptability  
Analytical skills  
Problem solving



## Dr Charles Nwankire

**Data & Analytics Manager  
Bank of Ireland**

**PhD Mechanical Engineering  
Postdoc in UCD from 2014 to 2016**



### What do you do in your current role?

I have a strategic role working across the full spectrum with banking transaction data. This involves harvesting, manipulating and analyzing data sets (e.g. the previous day's transactions in the bank) to communicate insights to product owners and the Business. On a typical day, I analyze transactional data to identify hidden patterns, and then pass this onto my team to evaluate and implement the output. Secondly, I manage stakeholders within our business unit as well as making their data digestible for consumption by the business and product owners. I'm also involved in business process improvement and optimization which help make the customer journey smoother. Finally, I'm passionate about training and development, so I train my colleagues in analytics to help them thrive. It's important to not just understand the data but to also understand the business, the customers and colleagues. It's really exciting from that perspective, working across the full spectrum.



### How did you get to where you are now?

During my Postdoc in UCD we launched a small Biomedical start-up, 'SensoMapp' for testing diseases from a finger prick of blood and using the generated data to create an epidemiology map. When we tested our idea in the market, we quickly pivoted because we found a different need existed, so instead of bringing another device to the market, we realised there was actually an abundance of data waiting to be analyzed and be put to good use. At that point I started to think about my future and wondered if I wanted to continue being a technical analyst or did I want to evolve, if you like, and go into that whole executive management type of role. I started to critically examine myself and concluded that with a PhD in engineering I have a strong technical background but also huge experience in data and analytics. However, I didn't have managerial experience in business. So I explored the possibility of working in industry to get some management experience, attended some roundtable sessions where Postdocs meet potential recruiters and had a good chat with a few people in Novartis, which led to my first role there as a Market Research Analyst. After that I moved to Bank of Ireland as a Data Scientist. But it was still a slow process and I realised I would either have to climb the managerial ladder, which could be several years in the making or pursue an Executive MBA. So I have also started an Executive MBA. Although I moved to Industry and didn't continue the start-up, I have since applied the start-up idea to a not-for-profit exercise at home in Nigeria where I help the organization use data to track diseases in some of the poorest communities.

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I have since applied the start-up idea to a not-for-profit exercise at home in Nigeria

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### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

Critical thinking and the ability to logically determine outputs from inputs. Project management is another massive transferable skill. Being in charge of a research project you essentially started means you manage the project, stakeholders, workload, writing papers, budget. It's all down to you and those skills are things that people shouldn't take for granted. Public speaking is another good one. Combining my technical abilities and PhD with the knowledge and proficiency from the MBA, I believe will open the whole horizon of possibilities for my career.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

You really have to think twice about your career plan and what a sustainable career is going to look like. It's important to think about what kind of jobs will need your brainpower. Artificial Intelligence and robots are going to be automating a lot of manual processes but any job that involves using your brainpower, to come up with ideas, as well as relate to people is less likely to be affected by artificial intelligence and robots - at least we don't have thinking robots yet!

I found the career development planning sessions particularly useful in UCD. One-to-one coaching offered by UCD Careers Network then helped me piece everything together with a 'helicopter' view when I was still down in the 'woods'. The non-academic CV and interview practice sessions were also very handy to help organize my thoughts and prepare me for the challenge of identifying the transferable skills I had gained from all my years of research to be able to talk about them in an industry-oriented interview. This can be difficult for many Postdocs as people sometimes think that if the job in question does not involve their academic research then they are not qualified for it, which really isn't true! As Postdocs we don't know just how employable we really are until we try!



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

The non-academic CV and interview skills sessions [offered through the Research Careers programme]... help in identifying transferable skills



## Dr Jessica Amadio

**Program Manager**  
**JA Italia (Junior Achievement Italia), Milan, Italy**

**PhD Microbiology/ Organic Chemistry**  
**Postdoc in UCD from 2013 to 2015**



### What do you do in your current role?

I work for a worldwide non-profit organization, the mission for which is to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy. In partnerships with business, educators and governmental agencies, at the national level and in specific for Rome and the Latium region I manage programs that aim to provide students with hands-on experiences in entrepreneurship, finance and innovation and prepare them to pursue their dream career. Every day is different and this is what drives me: novelty and diversity. What I enjoy the most is working alongside leading multinational companies and non-profit organizations to raise public awareness on topics such as gender diversity in STEM disciplines and UN development sustainable goals. I meet people of all ages, social and cultural backgrounds in different settings and who all have in common the spark to empower - or be empowered by - the future generation to impact society positively and build a sustainable future.



### How did you get to where you are now?

The transition from Postdoc to Program Manager started once I discovered that my mission was to raise the powerful mix of science and design for social impact. Between my first and second Postdoc - and my first maternity leave - at the Engineering School I realized I wanted to transform my research ideas into real products that people could use - and enjoy the experience of use! Moved by curiosity I started to study Product Design and after one year of studying I grasped the importance for scientists to stay in touch with people outside the research world to understand their needs and to make science more accessible to them. The discovery of several design disciplines, in particular service design and design thinking, made me decide to look how to link science and society: this was the pitch for my beginning as Scientific Fellow at Science Foundation Ireland in the pre-award team. Working in a governmental organization allowed me to be more in touch with people and their tangible problems and contribute to design solutions for an advanced and equal society, using the power of science and innovation with an empathic and human touch.

“

Every day is different and  
this is what drives me

”



### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

I believe that the added value of being a scientist does not lie in my scientific skills but on the acquired transferable skills side which made it possible to have a career change in a non-profit organization. Working in multicultural and multidisciplinary laboratories has taught me to work in a team, to share and support my ideas, to always listen and consider everyone’s opinion important; more than anything else it has made me empathic and open-minded. Research experience made me able to work independently, form and defend autonomous conclusions; starting from the understanding and synthesis of large quantities of data I am able to use logical arguments to persuade others and I have the ability to make decisions confidently. Thanks to multiple experiences public speaking with diverse audiences and to the practice of writing scientific publications, my communication skills are sharp and clear. Today I work in the third sector where every experience in research is used to help people to improve their lives and consequently our society.



### Advice for other Postdocs?

Anyone considering working across sectors should reflect on taking courses and attending seminars of different disciplines along with one’s research studies. During my Postdocs I found the time to talk to Postdocs in other fields - psychology, architecture, economics...anything! - deepen their interests, shadow their day-to-day routine and investigate how creatively my skills could fit into their work and vice versa how my research could be enriched by their knowledge. My advice is to keep an open-minded attitude toward diversity and always search for solutions outside the box – and outside your comfort zone. Be curious and humble: everybody has an interesting story to tell and a precious lesson to teach. Be an ambitious and lifelong learner: every day ask yourself, what can I learn next? But most importantly, be true with yourself: looking at the future, don’t focus on your field of studies but search out an organization that shares and lets you express your personal core values and you will feel that you are fulfilling your mission in life.



### Transferable skills from Postdoc

Team-working across cultures and disciplines  
Logical thinking  
Public speaking



## Dr Sina Shahab

Lecturer in Planning and Environmental Policy  
Cardiff University

PhD in Planning and Environmental Policy  
Postdoc in UCD from Oct 2017 to Dec 2018



### What do you do in your current role?

I am a Lecturer in Planning and Environmental Policy at the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University, UK. I am a co-lead of the Spatial Planning and City Environments Research Group (SPACE) and an affiliate of the Sustainable Places Research Institute (PLACE). My role as a lecturer involves both research and teaching. Informed by various economic theories, particularly New Institutional Economics and Behavioural Economics, my research explores the ways in which decision-makers can design and implement policies that are more effective, efficient, and equitable. Since the start of my lectureship career, I have expanded my research into new study areas and geographical contexts. My most recent work has analysed a land policy in Switzerland, Land Improvement Syndicates, from the lens of transaction costs and property rights theories. Regarding teaching, I am the module leader for three modules, whilst contributing to several other modules in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.



### How did you get to where you are now?

Becoming a lecturer has been a dream come true. I have always been passionate about academia, although I knew the pathway to becoming an academic involves many milestones and takes a longer time compared to many other careers. The main milestone was completing my PhD, and perhaps more importantly, securing the required funding to do so. Following my successful application for the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme (Irish Research Council scholarship), I started my four-year PhD studies at UCD in 2013. While living abroad and studying in a new institution with a different education system and language has its own challenges, my time as a PhD candidate was very productive, having five articles published in top-tier journals and getting involved in various teaching and learning activities. The results of my PhD research were highly regarded by experts in the field, leading to me being awarded two prestigious awards: The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Award for Research Excellence 2018 and the Journal of the American Planning Association (JAPA) Article of the Year Award 2019. After my PhD studies, I continued my career in academia by working as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow for over one year at UCD on a research project funded by Environmental Protection Agency. I secured my permanent position as a lecturer at Cardiff University in 2018, leaving UCD with a heavy heart to move to the other side of the Irish sea.

“

Make sure you are fully aware of the opportunities offered by your school and the University

”



### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

I found my postdoc experience at UCD very fruitful, in terms of both hard and soft skills. The Postdoc not only gave me the opportunity to expand my knowledge of planning and environmental policy beyond the PhD research, but also enabled me to further develop my transferable skills. The one-to-one meetings with the experts of the UCD Research Careers team greatly helped me to learn how to develop a robust international network of researchers in my field. These meetings also assisted me to understand how to effectively communicate in job applications. Developing the skills needed to write a strong CV and cover letter, and to prepare for academic job interviews was essential in that stage of my career. During my Postdoc, I greatly developed my teaching and project management skills through successfully completing various training courses, including the Professional Diploma for Entrepreneurial Educators offered by the UCD Innovation Academy and the QQI Project Management course for Postdocs. In addition to the experience of leading a module in postgraduate level, I had the opportunity of supervising several MSc theses which helped me to further develop my teaching and supervision skills.



### Advice for other Postdocs?

Postdocs offer exciting opportunities for personal and professional development. After 3-4 years of focusing on one very specific topic as part of the PhD research, in a postdoc there's the chance to see the bigger picture of your research area, to share the results of your PhD research with other scholars as well as non-academics and decision-makers, to build a strong reputation in your field through presenting your research in international conferences and events, and to develop your transferable skills (e.g. communication, networking, project management, leadership, etc.) required for a successful career within and beyond academia. Make sure you are fully aware of the opportunities offered by your school and the University. These opportunities might range from taking various teaching and supervisory responsibilities within your school to participating in training courses, workshops, and events that take place in the university or elsewhere. And last but not least, I totally recommend having regular meetings with the experts of the Careers Network on how to make the most of your time as a postdoc in UCD.



### Top tip for current Postdocs

Develop the skills to... prepare for academic job interviews with the help of UCD Research Careers programme



## **Dr Lucy McCarthy**

**Lecturer in Management  
Queens University Belfast**

**PhD Rural Development, Dept of Modern Irish  
Postdoc in UCD from 2013 to 2015**



### **What do you do in your current role?**

I am currently a Lecturer in the Management School in Queens University. I mainly research agri-food supply chains, questioning how we can collectively transform our production and consumption networks, as they are key to transitioning to more ecologically resilient and socially equitable societies. I explore these globally and locally. The more I learn and reflect the more I consider that it is important not to look at (international) issues with a Western lens. Given the worsening environmental conditions we must find alternative ways of working and they must be co-created and inclusive so that it is best for local communities and the environment. Currently I am exploring how we need to re-value food, the producers, the human and non-human labour, the cost of externalities, the impacts of supply chains on planetary health and rethinking our consumption practices.

On the teaching side I am now in my fourth year and the good news is, it does get better and you will get to do some research informed teaching. I also have management/ administrative roles including programme directorship and an advisor of studies role which looks at the pastoral side of student progression.



### **How did you get to where you are now?**

My primary degree was a BComm with Irish followed by a PhD looking at the impact of socio-economic development of rural and marginalised communities (written through Irish). A nuanced narrative emerged but one that exposed a need for more context appropriate development so I worked as a Research Assistant, exploring the management of intergenerational transmission of minority languages. Another RA post followed and subsequently I had my Postdoc funded by the IRC on transparency in supply chains. The Postdoc provided a great foundation in broader research skills and the supply chain discipline. I had an excellent, encouraging mentor. It also exposed me to different types of management scholars and industry insights which are excellent when considering the drift between research and practice. After some interviews I secured a post in Queens, I found the transition to Lecturer more challenging on the teaching side as I felt research was my passion. I felt under-prepared and the impostor syndrome weighed heavily. With support from my sister (who listened to my lectures) and a far more accomplished colleague, I honed (and edited) my lecturing. I learned to focus on structure, that decision-making also involves considering what not to include and building a coherent narrative in a safe environment.

“ I collaborate across disciplines on my agri-food research and it encourages translation, listening and new understandings ”



### Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?

During my Postdoc I learned how to write and enjoy it, my mentor supported me in developing this skill. Having written my PhD in Irish I was not familiar with a lot of the terminology or how the field worked. Although my PhD was in a different discipline, the narrative of 'development' exists in both and fascinates me, so I could draw on existing skills there. The Postdoc taught me how articles are built, how the story should work and with trial, many errors and support I started to develop my own style. I was encouraged to talk to scholars across the School, which is something I have expanded upon and now I work across faculties of the University I work in. Writing and presenting a paper coherently is invaluable when it comes to presenting ideas in the classroom and meetings but really, the network I was fortunate enough to build at UCD was and is incredible; they are always there when I need advice, a laugh, a friend/colleague or a mentor. They continue to expose me to new ideas and I really value that community.



### Advice for other Postdocs?

I am still co-creating my research identity, and that's okay. I am (slowly) crafting more focused research, but I still consider it from different lenses, disciplines and methodologies. Questioning fundamentals may be the long way round but it is infinitely exciting. Say yes to cross-disciplinary research, to conversations and conferences outside your field, to methods that are alien, to participation and research with, rather than research on! I collaborate across disciplines on my agri-food research and it encourages translation, listening and new understandings. Fundamentally, if we want to create real change we must question and challenge the underpinning existing world structures, the world is not siloed, nor should academia be.

I advise working with people you enjoy if you can, this has been key for me. It may not seem strategic but it has brought me immense happiness. I love collaborating with my colleagues and co-authors. The brainstorming, the process, I would encourage co-writing where possible. Virtually or other writing together is a beautiful experience.

It's okay to say no, often it is better and necessary. It's important to put boundaries on commitments and engagement. It's a constant balancing act between your time and resources and sharing that with others



### Transferable skills from Postdoc

Statistical analysis  
Paper writing skills  
Networking



## Dr Lucy Cradden

**Senior Analyst  
Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU)**

**PhD Wind Energy and Climate Change  
Postdoc in UCD from Oct 2015 to Sept 2018**



### What do you do in your current role?

The CRU is the regulator for electricity, gas, water and energy safety in the Republic of Ireland. I work in a small team responsible for networks and security of supply. Our work covers a variety of themes, including monitoring electricity capacity planning, licensing new electricity generation and interconnection, and overseeing the implementation of EU regulations in the sector. On a day-to-day basis, I analyse reports, prepare new consultations, and work with stakeholders such as the transmission system operator (EirGrid) to ensure policies and procedures are working effectively. I also engage with renewable energy project developers to help manage their licensing process.



### How did you get to where you are now?

Whilst at UCD I had the opportunity to do a certified Project Management course which I really enjoyed, and I then made my first move out of academic research into a temporary role as a Research Project Manager in another university. The area of research was one that I wasn't technically familiar with and in that role I was able to identify lots of my re-applicable skills and interests, whilst also realising that I missed the themes of energy and climate in my work. That helped me with the search for a more permanent position. I find my current role busier than the research environment, with shorter timelines and often rapidly shifting demands and priorities, so I take a different approach when I sit down for a day's work. I don't get to delve so deeply into questions and need to be prepared to discuss a very wide range of issues, so I have had to reset my own expectations about how much knowledge I actually need to acquire on a topic!

“

I have to reset my own expectations about how much knowledge I actually need to acquire on a topic

”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

One thing that is very similar across both research and regulation is the need to be able to communicate complex ideas to non-experts, both verbally and in written form. I write consultation papers that must be accessible to the general public, and I have to relay technical concepts to higher management who might be from a non-specialist background. I also have to read and understand policy and technical documents that are outside of my field of expertise and apply that new knowledge – something that I am familiar with from multidisciplinary research.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

Don't be afraid to take small steps in different directions, whilst trying to find out what kind of new environment might suit you best.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

Complete the certified QQI Project Management course offered by the UCD Research Careers programme



## **Dr Marco Garcia-Vaquero**

**Assistant Professor, UCD**

**PhD Veterinary Medicine  
Postdoc in UCD from 2016 to 2019**



### **What do you do in your current role?**

Before starting as an Assistant Professor in UCD, I was working as a Research Officer at Teagasc (the Agriculture and Food Development Authority in Ireland) collaborating on several European research projects to produce food and pharmaceutical compounds from seaweed and algae. As part of this role I supervised Postgraduate students, supporting them to develop their research and transferable skills. I continue their supervision in my new role, which is a great ongoing collaboration with Teagasc. I'm also working to establish new collaborations and partnerships to my work in UCD. As part of my current role I'm developing new research projects to promote the use of sustainable technologies within the food industry, and producing compounds with health promoting benefits, or nutraceuticals, from underutilized marine resources. This links well with the global challenges being tackled by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. My current role also involves a deeper involvement in teaching and learning with undergraduate and postgraduate students in UCD, and new responsibilities as a module coordinator. Exciting opportunities have also opened to me, including more active participation in key decisions at the section, School and University levels, to improve the research and teaching experience in UCD.



### **How did you get to where you are now?**

Preparation for my current role developed progressively through my experience in other similar positions, my Postdoc positions and as a Research Officer. During that time, I actively collaborated with multiple industries and researchers from several universities that could help me meet my goals securing independent funding, while keeping engaged with the needs of industry and other alternative career routes that could be intellectually challenging and in which my experience and abilities as a researcher would be considered as a valuable asset. As a Research Officer at Teagasc I supervised Postgraduate students and developed the mentoring skills that I'm also applying now, building their capacities and skills, including laboratory, data management and writing skills as well as supporting them to publishing articles in scientific journals and magazines, and to secure their own funding. My previous experiences - as a guest lecturer, speaker at conferences and participating in the teaching and learning community at UCD - have helped me to transition to my role as module coordinator in UCD. As a new lecturer and in collaboration with colleagues at the School of Agriculture and Food Science I am exploring novel educational strategies, such as online tools and design thinking approaches, to promote the engagement of the students in the class and enrich their educational experience at UCD.

“ I actively collaborated with multiple industries and researchers from several universities that could help me meet my goals securing independent funding ”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

My research, teaching and management experience from my Postdoctoral position in UCD and as Research Officer at Teagasc have given me really valuable skills for my role as Assistant Professor. As a Research Officer I had to manage my own research (i.e. scientific writing, laboratory work), while supervising the research activities of other members of the group (Masters and PhD students) and reporting on activities to my supervisor, my institution and European collaborators from multiple projects. These research and managerial skills are essential when organizing and prioritizing my responsibilities as Assistant Professor. Moreover, the communication skills acquired by supervising students, lecturing or speaking at conferences are also useful when lecturing groups of students in my tasks as module coordinator.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

Take a deep look into the job you want and analyze what it involves on a day-to-day basis. Once you've taken a deep-dive into the role profile and the nuances of the position, and are sure you will really enjoy doing that job, take steps to build your experience and skills required for that role. I'd also recommend seeking professional advice, such as the UCD Careers Network, to evaluate your career to date and design a plan that could help you become the best candidate that you can be when the proper opportunity crosses your path.



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc**

Research management and supervision  
Teaching  
Presentation skills



## Dr Niall O'Brien

**Grant Office: Pre-award  
Institute of Science & Technology, Austria**

**PhD Biosystems Engineering  
Postdoc in UCD from 2013 to 2016**



### What do you do in your current role?

I am part of the Grant Office at a rapidly growing research institute with a unique interdisciplinary design and remarkable early success (e.g. it has an ERC success rate of almost 50%). I head a three person 'pre-award' team, helping faculty, postdocs and PhD students to identify funding opportunities and develop grant and fellowship applications; essentially supporting the most promising international researchers very early in their career, some of whom have never applied for funding before. It's very rewarding to see their group and research portfolio develop. I offer a lot of 1-on-1 support, but also workshops and webinars. In cooperation with the Postdoctoral Office, I also manage two internal postdoc fellowship programs.

My job allows me to collaborate with the Technology Transfer Office, Graduate School, Ethics Officer, Communications, Scientific Service Units and Faculty Recruiting. After just two years, I have a deeper insight into the research and innovation process on the group, institute, national and European scales and feel I am now contributing in the best way I can.



### How did you get to where you are now?

I contacted UCD Careers Network eleven months from the end of my postdoc contract. I was living in my fourth country in five years, had two small children approaching school age and had never planned my academic career more than two years ahead. After a couple of sessions, it was clear that while I loved the research culture, a research management/support role would not only offer an academic setting, but also allow me to indulge in science and research on a much broader scale. We also determined that if I wanted to ultimately move back to Vienna (my partner was also eager to restart her career and continue further education), I would need to immediately factor this into my career choices.

As my German was only at a conversational level, moving directly into a research support role in Austria was unrealistic so in addition to completing a Project Management Certificate offered by UCD Research Careers programme, we identified the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Fellowship Program as the ideal pathway from Postdoc to research support. After arranging an informal chat with my future supervisor prior to applying, the insight I gained in the just the first few months at SFI crystalized my career decision. I continued to monitor the job market in Vienna while taking German courses and interviewed for my current position approximately nine months later.

“ We also determined that if I wanted to ultimately move back to Vienna I would need to immediately factor this into my career choices ”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

My postdoc experience provides crucial insight into the faculty, postdocs and students I support: I understand their motivations, roles and priorities, as well as the multiple demands on their time. This last point is particularly crucial, as during the funding application process I am not so much managing my own time, but that of a number of other people. I was not particularly enthusiastic about writing papers and proposals as a researcher, but I've found editing much more enjoyable. My previous scientific writing experience gives me credibility when I provide constructive criticism on early drafts and advise applicants on how much progress they can realistically expect to make on a proposal in a limited amount of time. Other skills such as statistics, budgeting and analysing/optimising processes can all be directly related to my previous laboratory and modelling work.

The international experience (Austria and the US) my research career provided further assists communication with researchers. I can empathize with the 85% of scientists who have joined IST from abroad: Although I am lucky enough to work on an English-speaking campus, I have also been in their position, trying to survive bureaucracy and daily life through a foreign language, often with a young family!



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

It's never too late to change direction or even sectors – ignore the 'sunk cost', you are not 'stuck' in academia. In fact, you are often only one or two career steps away from your ideal job. However, you need to be aware of the work and preparation required to take these steps and be realistic about the timeframe. Once you see the job advertisement, it's too late to change your CV, the groundwork ideally should be laid 12 months previously. Deciding to stop pursuing an academic career is not something you process and accept overnight. Convincingly articulating the reasons to myself let alone a potential employer required months of contemplation. However, positive experiences outside of academia helped accelerate this process. Because of the advice and support I received and my preparation over the previous eighteen months, when the opportunity for the ideal job in the ideal location arose, I could not have been more mentally prepared for the interview: I knew what they wanted in an employee and exactly what I wanted short and long-term career-wise.



### **Top tip for current Postdocs**

Contact UCD Careers Network for career development support well in advance of your contract ending



## Dr Sven Batke

**Senior Lecturer and Plant Science Programme Leader  
Edge Hill University, UK**

**PhD Plant Ecology  
Postdoc in UCD from 2015 to 2017**



### What do you do in your current role?

I am very fortunate that I have a role that allows me to pursue my academic research interests and at the same time influence the next generation of Biologists. My current role as a lecturer is very versatile. It includes anything from conducting scientific experiments in the lab, to designing new teaching modules and content at undergraduate and postgraduate level, all the way to conducting exciting collaborative expeditions to tropical destinations including to Papua New Guinea, Brazil and Honduras.



### How did you get to where you are now?

Having a successful career (however this may be defined...) is not just the result of hard work and sacrifice but also the effort of your support network, including your family and friends! In my case I was very fortunate to have had excellent PhD and Postdoc Supervisors to guide me. Both have been, and still are, excellent academic and personal role models. It's important to think beyond academia; I put myself forward for any role including teaching and supervisory roles that became available and took part in any extra training that I felt would enhance my CV like volunteering at Nova, UCD's commercialisation and Technology Transfer Office.

I started to apply for lectureships at the beginning of my second Postdoc. I think what made my interview so successful and resulted in me getting offered a position, was the great match between what they were looking for and I had to offer. What stood to me was that I had experience in many different areas, that I had built a strong academic network and was also able to demonstrate links with industry. During the interview they showed interest in the external funding I had been awarded, my publication record and asked questions where I had to demonstrate my academic adaptability and versatility. We have to remember that research is only part of what is required for a lectureship.

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Having a successful career... is not just the result of hard work... but the effort of your support network, including family and friends!

”



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc to now?**

I think the most important skills I learned from my postdoc at UCD were adaptability, resilience and creativity. Adaptability in the sense of being able to integrate expertise from different subject disciplines, to grow with new challenges and to anticipate and take advantage of changes. As my postdoc supervisor used to say: Change is good!...it helps you to develop as a person. Resilience is important because you will have to deal with a lot of rejections, better get used to it! Creativity on the other hand is not always about innovation but can also simply just be the discovery of your own unique set of skills and combining these areas of expertise and implementing them into practice.



### **Advice for other Postdocs?**

Embrace new opportunities, no matter how distant from your area of expertise they may seem at first. You never know what they may lead to. Maintain good relationships with your peers throughout your career. It's a small sector! You will cross paths again. Surround yourself with people that don't hold you back! Learn from your role models and build your career on their good principles. Always be willing to help others! Remember, you are not the fountain of all knowledge and you may also need help in the future from others.



### **Transferable skills from Postdoc**

Adaptability  
Resilience  
Creativity

## Ongoing Opportunities for Postdocs

The UCD Research Skills and Career Development programme invites you to consider building and refining your transferable skills according to four specific competencies - Research and Research Management; Teaching, Learning and Mentoring; Innovation and Transferable Skills and Personal and Professional Excellence. Along with one-to-one career meetings, alumni roundtable discussion sessions and funding-company networking events, these activities give you the chance to gather data to inform your own career.

The chart below lists some of the courses tailored specifically to help strengthen your profile whether you wish to pursue your own funding in academia or with enterprise partners, or move directly to a transferable-skills role in another sector. The following pages provide some opportunities offered by funding agencies and companies to Postdocs on an ongoing basis.



### Research & Research Management

- Building Research Leaders
- Get That Paper Written and Published
- How to Peer Review Manuscripts for Journals
- Grant Writing in the Life Sciences
- Scientific Paper Writing (Life Sciences)
- Research Impact
- Data Management Plans for Postdoc



### Teaching Learning & Mentoring

#### Teaching & Learning Seminar Series

- Critical Reflection and Review and Design of Classes
- Developing a Teaching Portfolio
- Review and Design of Teaching Materials
- Presentation, Communication and Facilitation
- Design of Effective Student Assessment
- Peer Review and Portfolio Preparation



### Personal & Professional Excellence

- Presenting and Communicating your Research Effectively
- Well Balanced Working
- Pitching your Research and Expertise - Networking in Practice
- MBTI exercise for Postdocs
- Imposter Syndrome - Secrets and Solutions
- Charisma - How to Engage an Audience
- Preparing Academic/Non-Academic Applications & Interviews



### Innovation & Transferable Skills

- QQI Project Management course
- Alumni Postdoc Career Roundtables
- Communicating your Research - How to Write a Plain English Summary
- Exploring Teamwork and Leadership
- UCD Nova Commercialisation Bootcamp
- CSTAR Statistical Support



“For any candidate applying to work with us there are three things we look at: knowledge, experience and attitude. Knowledge is a given. Experience matters - so have they done this job before? If not, we look for potential. If they have worked for a time in one type of job (researcher) and want to move into a new one with us (case manager/project manager) we don't consider them new hires but they need to convince us they know what the job is about and what we do. This leads to the number one attribute in a person, their attitude. Do they work hard? Can they work with other people? Can they get things done (deliverables)? Do they share our passion?”



**Joe Kenny**  
Founder & CEO  
Zeeko



## MSCA Society and Enterprise Fellowships

Experienced Researchers who wish to carry out a research and training fellowship outside of academia, for example in a company or an NGO/CSO, Government Department etc. can apply for the Society and Enterprise fellowship. If the application is successful, the beneficiary receives the funding and employs the researcher. IP therefore rests with the beneficiary. Awardees will receive approx. €90,000 per year to carry out a project for up to 2 years. Part-time fellowships can also be carried out (max. 4 years at 50% FTE).

The researcher must be excellent for their career stage and the project must be innovative, addressing a societally important issue/need. In order to prepare a competitive application, it is strongly recommended to use the Handbook produced by the Irish Marie Skłodowska-Curie office in conjunction with the Guide for applicants, and to engage early with the supervisor and Beneficiary/Host Organisation.

The national success rate for the 2019 call was 33.3%.  
The next deadline falls on **September 9th 2020**.



**Dr Geraldine Canny**  
Head of the Marie-Sklodowska Curie Office  
MSCA National Delegate, National Contact Point  
Irish Universities Association



## Irish Research Council Enterprise Partnership Scheme

The Irish Research Council mission is to enable and sustain a vibrant research community in Ireland by supporting excellent researchers across all disciplines and career stages. The annual call for the Irish Research Council's Enterprise Partnership Scheme supports collaborations between researchers and enterprise. The awards are two thirds co-funded by the Council and one third by an enterprise partner, which can be a national or international company, charity, non-governmental or other organisation. These fellowships are awarded to postdoctoral researchers to undertake research for a period of two years with the application developed by the postdoctoral researcher in collaboration with an enterprise and an academic mentor.



**Dr Maria Morrissey**  
IRC-EP contact point

## Irish Research Council Internship Programme

“ The IRC regularly offers paid internships to their fellows. The application process is quite simple: it consists in a short, written application followed by an interview.

I was granted my first postdoctoral fellowship by the Irish Research Council and had, at that time, very limited work experience outside academia. I was aware of the insecurity that a career in academia represents and the difficulty in getting a permanent job. Through the IRC Postdoctoral Internship I am involved in the daily management of funding programmes, which includes replying to queries from stakeholders, finding assessors to review projects, organizing and assisting to panel meetings, etc. Thanks to my experience at the IRC, I understand better how research funding works and what makes a great funding application. I feel more confident now and realise that my research skills are real assets. I would highly recommend IRC postdocs to undertake an internship; it is an amazing opportunity that broadens your skillset and prepares you for working in the outside world. ”

For more information on the IRC postdoctoral internships, please send an email to [Info@research.ie](mailto:Info@research.ie)



**Dr Aude Cincotta**  
IRC Postdoc Fellow & Intern



Stronger Charities.  
Stronger Communities.

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities, and social enterprises. Inspired and empowered by our 1700+ members, we represent, support, and connect non-profit organisations of every size, from the smallest community and voluntary groups to the largest charities and social enterprises. We believe strongly in engaged research, (i.e.) research that is advanced *with* community partners rather than *for* or *about* them.

The Wheel is interested in working with researchers to explore innovative means of maximising civil society impact through better systems of regulation, funding, and collaboration, and to develop better ways to measure civil society impact and potential for addressing key societal challenges.

We are also eager to promote engaged research through facilitating opportunities for researchers to connect with our members who together encompass the full spectrum of societal challenges that communities face today, including health and wellbeing, climate change, and inequality.



**Emma Murtagh**  
Grants Research Officer  
The Wheel



**FISHAWACK  
HEALTH**

Established in 2001, Fishawack Health is an independent, global healthcare communications group with over 850 medical experts, marketing professionals and strategic specialists (<https://fishawack.com/>). Our mission is to improve outcomes for patients through the communication and application of healthcare knowledge, and we do this by providing premium communications services tailored to meet the individual needs of our clients across the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries.

Our large team of talented and enthusiastic medical writers are at the heart of our business! With their range of life sciences backgrounds, they are able to apply and build on the scientific and communication skills gained through their academic careers, and to do this within a uniquely diverse and rewarding career structure, and in a well-established and supportive training environment - Medcomms with personality!

As our success continues to grow, so does our need for talented individuals. If you have a love of biomedical science, are a keen writer and communicator and want to work in a fast-paced, creative and innovative environment, then please send your CV and application letter to [diane.sutherland@fishawack.com](mailto:diane.sutherland@fishawack.com). We'd love to hear from you!



**Dr Diane Sutherland**  
Professional Development Director  
Fishawack Group, Oxford, UK



The SFI Fellowship Programme provides successful candidates with the opportunity to develop their careers through experiencing first-hand, the diversity of activities carried out by a funding agency. SFI is keen to be part of a framework that enables researchers and others to seek and secure diverse career opportunities in areas such as industry, research funding and administration, public administration and Government Affairs. The SFI Fellowship programme will provide an opportunity for Fellows to develop key skills which will assist them in securing these types of roles. Applicants who are successful in obtaining a place on the Programme, will be assigned to work in Departments such as SFI Research Centres, Enterprise Partnerships, Challenge Research, Individual-Led Research, Education & Public Engagement, Strategy, International Corporate Communications and Research Policies. During the course of this programme the Fellows will rotate between Departments in order to obtain a broad range of experience. Competencies such as project management, teamwork, stakeholder & client service (building relationships with internal and external stakeholders including Industry, Academic and Government Partners), presentation skills, initiative & creativity, personal effectiveness, flexibility & resilience, communication & influencing, problem analysis & resolution, networking are developed and enhanced through on-the-job training, access to appropriate training programmes and mentoring. Previously Fellows have secured excellent positions within international funding agencies, research offices and training & research centres.

The Programme is currently under review. Any queries can be directed to [Fellowship@sfi.ie](mailto:Fellowship@sfi.ie)

## UCD Postdoc Research Careers Key Contacts



**Naoimh O'Connor** is the Research Careers Manager. She is based in UCD Careers Network and is responsible for developing services and provisions that support Postdoctoral researchers' career development both inside and out of the Academy. This includes providing one-to-one career coaching, facilitating workshops related to researcher career development and hosting researcher-funder-company networking events with PhD employers and alumni Postdocs.  
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**Alanna O'Sullivan** is the Researcher Development Specialist. She is based in the UCD HR People and Organisation Development team and manages the Research Skills and Career Development training programme. Alanna also runs one-to-one orientation meetings for Postdocs.  
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**Claire Kavanagh** is Team Lead on the Proposal Support Team in UCD Research office. Her team provides a range of supports for researchers applying for Early Career Researcher grants, including the enterprise-partnership opportunities to work across sectors.  
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**Amy Fox** is a Careers Consultant located in UCD Careers Network. Amy provides advice to all students on Effective Applications and Interview Skills, including CVs, cover letters and LinkedIn, by delivering one-to-one appointments and regular workshops. She also supports career development events and initiatives for both Graduate Research Students and Postdoctoral Researchers.  
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**Niamh Kelly** is a Careers Network Assistant who looks after the reporting of feedback from students, staff and employers and provides part-time administrative support to Postdoc-related events and projects.  
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