

The Employer Perspectives Project: Supporting PhDs to Explore Careers Beyond Academia

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Careers support for researchers at King's

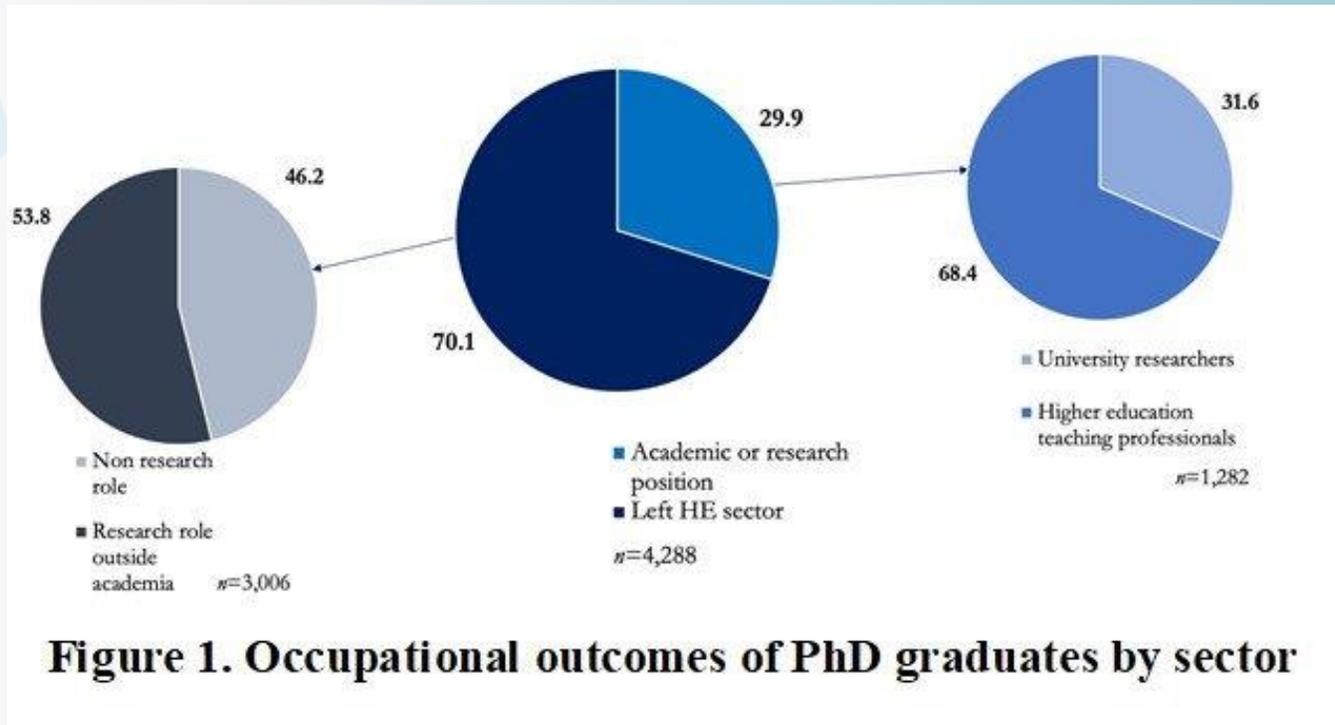
We support:

- Post Graduate Research (PGR) students (around 4000)
- Research Staff (postdocs, technicians, teaching fellows, research assistants) (2000+)
- Across 9 faculties

With career development within and beyond academia



Context- PGR graduate destinations



Many PhDs go on to roles beyond academia but there is little research into employer perspective

UK graduate outcomes 3.5 years after graduation Hancock, S. 2020
[The employment of PhD graduates in the UK: what do we know? - HEPI](#)

Employer Perspectives Project – Aims

- To understand employer perspectives of the value of PhD holders in sectors beyond academia as well as common challenges
- To gain insights and practical information for supporting researchers in their career development.

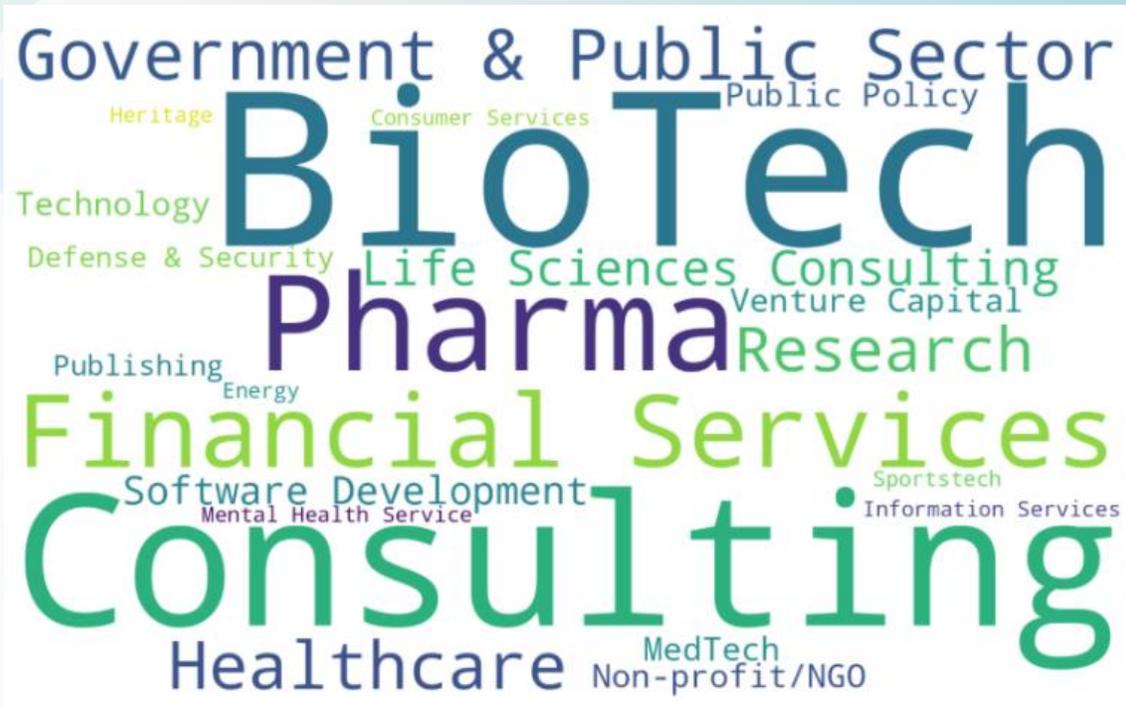
Employer Perspectives Project – What we did

LinkedIn Database (100+) - Using Graduate Outcome Survey (GOS) data, alumni & existing contacts.
Supported by internal seed funding

Employer Survey (20) – For those with experience of hiring or managing PhD holders in roles beyond academia. Skills valued by employers and potential challenges.

Qualitative semi-structured Interviews (8) – Topics such as - what researchers do particularly well, how to talk about experience for other sectors, how to prepare for challenges, recruitment and progression

Employer Perspectives Project – Findings: LinkedIn Database



Where are King's PGR alumni employed?

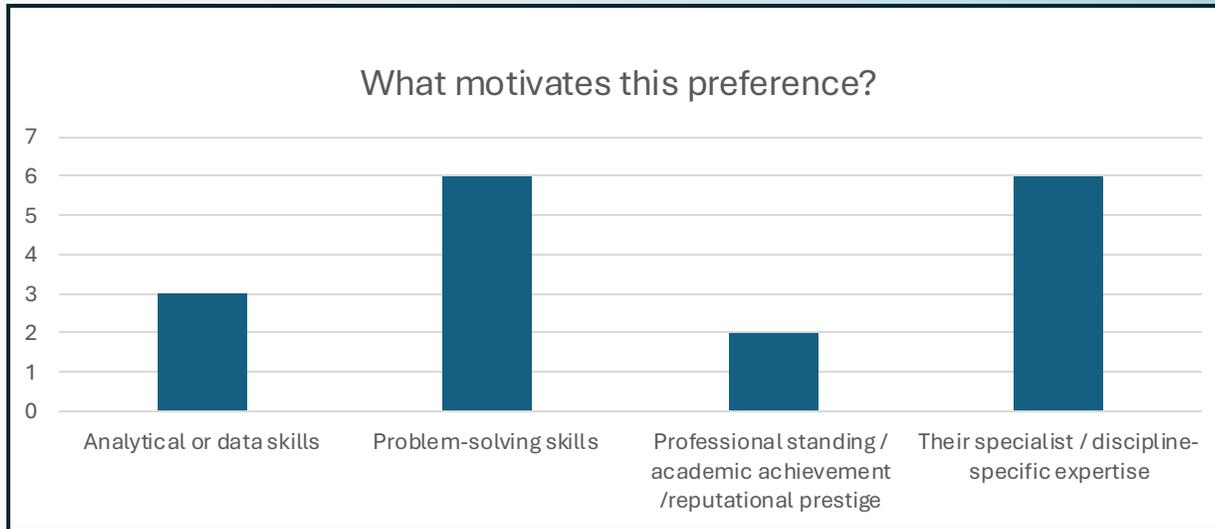
Working in 100+ different organisations including:

- GSK
- NHS England
- McKinsey
- Deloitte
- Springer
- Costello Medical
- Google
- Johnson & Johnson
- Institute for Cancer Research
- LifeScience Dynamics
- Bridge Group
- Citi

Employer Perspectives Project – Findings: Survey (recruitment)

Respondents came from 5 broad sectors: Academic/ research institutions, Finance/consulting, Government/ Public Sector, Healthcare/ Biotech, Technology/AI

- 89% of the companies had actively sought to recruit PhD holders
- 84% regularly hired PhD holders



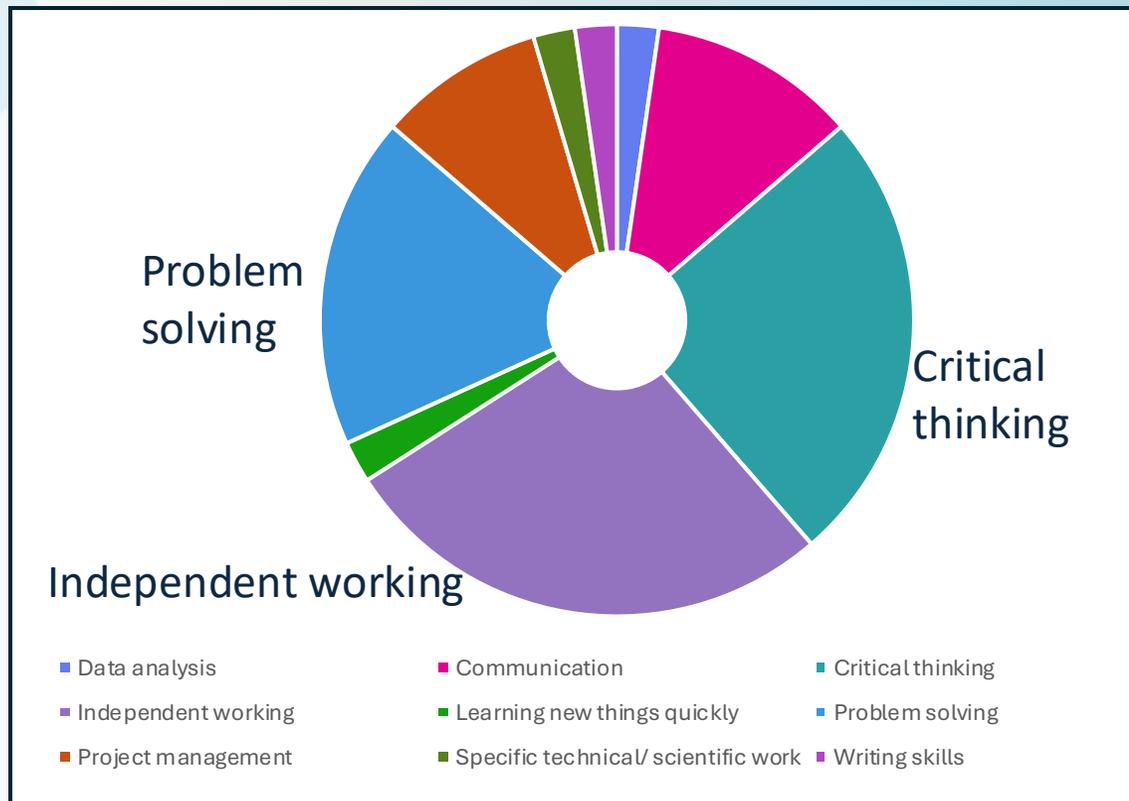
Roles commonly held by researcher alumni at their organisations included:

- Research & Development
- Data Science & Analytics
- Consultancy/advisory
- Stakeholder management
- Technical/ engineering
- Public engagement

Employer Perspectives Project – Findings: Survey (Skills valued)

“You have a range of highly valued skills that many sectors outside academia are craving.”

Ana, Public Sector



“the learning of new things quickly coupled with independence and critical thinking is really valuable to a team.”

Andy, AI Engineer

“the ability to spot where assertions are not based on evidence, to spot flaws in logic and to identify when causal links have been claimed that can't actually be evidenced.”

A Peer (member of House of Lords),
Government/Public Sector

Employer Perspectives Project – Findings: Survey (challenges)

- ❑ Lack of industry experience / Commercial awareness- 90% respondents
- ❑ Different communication style – 79% respondents
- ❑ Adjusting to fast-paced environments- 63% respondents

"How can researchers demonstrate that they have prepared for these challenges?" Tips from employers:

- Do research into the sector and keep up to date with news
- Practice communicating research to different audiences
- Find opportunities to work to shorter deadlines

"[researchers] at times undervalue (themselves) their skills and contributions."
Ana, Public Sector

Researchers need support to be able to identify the range of skills they offer beyond the discipline specific



Employer Perspectives Project – Findings: Interviews

Transferable skills:

“sometimes people underestimate **the value of some of the interactions they have day-to-day**, you know, like ... communicating with your PI or whoever on your progress, communicating with other members of the lab. when you need equipment, when you need help... **those are all important things** that people tend to forget when they're putting together a job application ” **(John, Bio Tech consultancy)**

Communicating research impact:

“appreciate the **importance of being able to tell a story** ... because stories stick. So if you can,...package all the achievements in a narrative ... what is the problem and why is it important? And then where we are now ...**that's really valuable** ”
(Yanik Foerster, Research & Development, Consultancy)

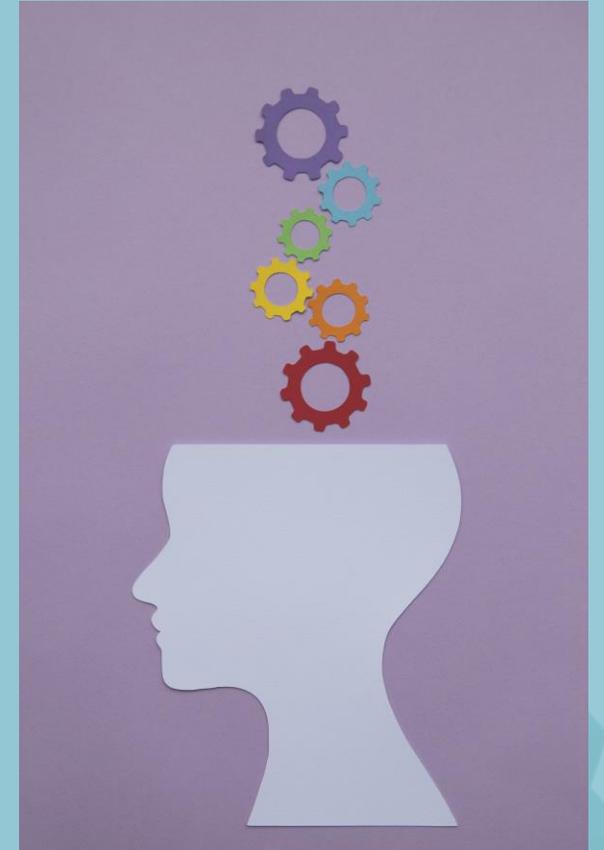
Expanding networks:

“networking is always helpful because you just don't know when that opportunity or your name pops up to a job... **just get your CV out there, get your name out there.**”
(Ana, Public sector)

Employer Perspectives Project – Findings: Interviews

Variations across and within sectors and for specific roles...

- Understanding of/ appreciation for research experience and what it entails varies depending on the hiring team and specific requirements of the role
- How much research experience "counts" and how much industry experience is required
- Starting points for PhDs/ PostDocs – sometimes will start with new graduates and other times may be able to apply for more senior roles

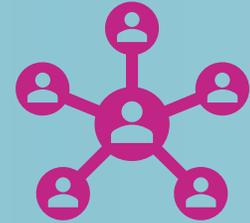


Employer Perspectives Project – Top Tips from Employers

1. Speak to lots of people (and not only when you are looking for a job!)
2. Always tailor your application to the specific role & organisation that you are applying for
3. Focus on "higher level information" when including your research in applications

Translating research into practice

Implementing findings across our range of delivery....



Three key areas:

- Networking
- Reflecting on skills
- Articulating value

Reflections

Database – Guided by GOS (what is missing?)

LinkedIn response rates – 102 potential participants identified, 52 connected, 16 responded

Sample – PhD Alumni (often had previously engaged with careers service)

Employer voice – Valuable insight, increased confidence & credibility

What's next?

- Developing digital resources - putting findings into practice
- Sharing with other stakeholders at King's
- Sharing findings externally – **follow us on LinkedIn!**, look out for our "Careers in your Ears" podcast episode
- Identifying areas for future research- SHAPE destinations and employers
- Keep in touch! **Lindsay.2.parker@kcl.ac.uk**

