M. PhD Ophthalmology, 2009

UCL Faculty:

▶ Brain Sciences

Current Role:

▶ Laboratory Manager

Previous Role:

▶ Postdoctoral Researcher

Sector:

▶ Higher Education

M. is currently a Laboratory Manager at the University of Oxford, which involves grant management, procurement, supervision of junior staff and some input into current research projects. He held a previous position as a Postdoctoral Researcher for three years at the UCL Institute of Child Health.

After his postdoctoral role, continuing with research seemed a logical choice. But then M. moved from his scientific position into laboratory management to find a better work-life balance for his personal circumstances and due to his experiences as a postdoctoral researcher. As a Researcher he found that the focus on the long-term goals was hard to visualise, and when he became a father, he decided to have a closer look at his personal circumstances. At the time M was finding the day-to-day life of a researcher hard and subsequently found that he was better suited to laboratory management, which seemed to come with a little more job security.

M.'s PhD was desirable in securing his current position as he has a very accurate insight into the workings of the lab. He can appreciate problems from different perspectives. Neither his current nor previous roles required him to gain further qualifications or work experience in addition to his PhD.

In his current position, M. uses the subject knowledge and technical skills of his PhD in everything he does. This could include all of his technical knowledge on procurement in the lab. He is also responsible for training junior staff on how to use equipment. M. adds that the experience gained in a Research Assistant's role could offer a route to the role he has, but he suggests that a PhD gives a more insightful perspective on independent research work and getting used to working alone. The key non-technical skills that M. uses are people management, time management, numeracy, helping students make presentations, logical thinking, making decisions and sticking to them.

M. did not face particular challenges when entering employment for the first time after graduation. He found his postdoctoral role by networking, attending a talk and approaching one of the speakers. He secured his position at Oxford through the networking options that resulted while working as a bench scientist alongside a UCL Professor.

When at UCL M. found the help of UCL Careers advisors very useful in that it gave him a sounding board for ideas to move away from being a bench scientist, and move into the field of laboratory management. For current PhDs entering the academic job market, M. advises you to research your potential employment environment and consider what it is going to be like. For example, if there is no laboratory equipment it could be frustrating. M. also encourages you to appreciate your PhD as a multitude of experiences that can be transferred, rather than only viewing it as the knowledge that you have learned. Although M.'s PhD was in Cell Biology, an area of expertise not necessarily required for a Laboratory Manager, he does use the skills gained of time management, people management and decision making. When considering the future M. suggests that you "Don't just look 5 to 10 years ahead, but look 15 to 20 years ahead. Do you want to run your own lab? Do you want to be in charge? If you don't want to get on the first rung of academia which inevitably leads to running your own group, why do it?"

When asked to reflect on his own decision to do a PhD and on his career path, M. offers the following advice to those considering a PhD: 'It's good to have an idea on what you want to do with your PhD. Don't just follow the steps people suggest to you for the sole reason that they seem logical, or is what is 'expected' of you. He adds that it is a great idea to ask someone who has completed a PhD to assess to what extent your reasons for doing a PhD make sense.

Tags: Brain Sciences, Higher Education, Researcher, Technical, Managerial, Academic