

## D. – PhD (Psychology-based) from the Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care (formerly the Division of Population Health), 2010

### UCL Faculty:

Population Health Sciences

### Current Role:

Researcher

### Sectors:

Health

Higher Education

D. currently holds an academic post as a Researcher. His work involves managing a programme of research and mental health projects, managing staff with limited experience in the mental health sector and networking with other services. Prior to this D. has held research positions at the Mental Health Foundation, and at UCL while he completed his PhD on a part-time basis. D. tells us that he took a turn in his career in order to move away from academia and its often-attendant short term contracts. When he was offered his current post, D. accepted the opportunity as it combined what he had learned outside academia with what he had done in an academic setting at UCL.

D. believes that his PhD was essential for securing his current position. Through managing projects and analysing data, D. still uses the technical skills and subject knowledge of his PhD. He considers that his PhD gave him greater independence, confidence and more credibility with the key stakeholders he interacts with now. D. feels that studying for his doctorate enabled him to learn a great deal about executing a project through to completion. Although D's PhD was a crucial asset, he tells us how he also needed 'hands-on experience' to secure his roles after graduating. As D. worked at the same time as completing his PhD on a part-time basis, he had this experience, which he thinks was highly influential; he says that he 'wouldn't have got those jobs with just a PhD.' At present the transferable skills that D. uses in his role include project management, communication and teamwork. While project management was significant in completing his PhD, D. appreciates that there are other ways in which transferable skills can be developed. He emphasises that being able to present 'marketable skills' to employers is important, and that 'the PhD is more a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.'

As D. had already built experience in the field for six years by the time he graduated, he did not have to face the challenges many other PhD graduates deal with when entering the employment market. When looking for jobs D. has found his roles by searching for online adverts on jobs.ac.uk, and on the guardian.com. While at UCL, D. took part in several Careers Service and Graduate School training activities, some of which focused on presenting, writing and networking skills. He thought that he put these courses to good use, and that those which he attended were well-organised. The overall impact of skills training at UCL was beneficial for D. Another course at UCL showed him how not to get 'too bogged down in the detail' of the PhD, and encouraged him to not get too anxious when the 'naysayers' offered their opinions.

When it comes to navigating and competing in the jobs market, D. advises PhD students to equip themselves with a strong understanding of the wider significance of their PhD. With his assertion that, even with a PhD, the 'old academic tracks are now more difficult to get into,' D. believes it is important for PhD students to appreciate that their doctorate carries 'currency', and that this currency should be leveraged to enhance their chances of securing future opportunities. In D's view this involves tailoring your skills and how you present them to the wider jobs market. D. cautions students against the tendency to 'keep falling into postdocs on short term contracts.' He encourages building a valuable, transferable skill-set, 'Move around and learn new things. Lecturing, mentoring, marking student papers' can develop 'line-management experience', which D. suggests is a valuable commodity in the jobs market.

Reflecting on his decision to do a PhD and his subsequent career path, D.'s advice to those who are considering undertaking a PhD is to not let the project become all-consuming. He says, 'Be passionate but keep a distance from it.' In D's view, the PhD is an educational experience, stating that 'it's not really any more than that. If it is any more, it's a bonus.' While deciding, or after having decided to undertake a PhD, D. encourages you to remain focused and stay resolute in your judgement of what you feel you need to do in order to achieve what you want to achieve. 'Don't pay too much attention to other PhD students who are saying how hard it is and how much time it takes. Some PhD students make it hard for themselves. Don't listen to people who are having a crisis of confidence; everyone has a crisis of confidence. Don't feel you have to work Saturdays and Sundays because everyone else is! Don't go down too many blind alleys.'

#### **Tags:**

■ Population Health Sciences, Health, Higher Education, Researcher, Managerial, Academic