

C. – PhD Psychology and Language Sciences, 2009

UCL Faculty:

- Brain Sciences

Current role:

- Senior Assistant Statistician

Previous Role:

- Lecturer

Sectors:

- Government
- Higher Education

C. is a Senior Assistant Statistician in the Knowledge, Analysis and Intelligence Division of Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Previously C. held the post of Lecturer in Hearing Science at the University of Manchester, where she taught Statistics to MSc students and continued her research. Her PhD was in Speech Hearing and Phonetic Sciences.

After graduating with a PhD C. accepted the lecturer's position because she wanted to stay in academia; she 'wanted to settle down so (she) had ruled out postdoctoral roles.' Later deciding that neither the city of Manchester nor the job were for her, she moved back to London. C. was enthused by the Fast Stream Statistician's job as it seemed to offer the potential for a 'long-term career in an interesting area that would allow me to continue analytical work at a faster pace, without the constant threat of failure to publish or get a grant.' C. feels that what she does is 'like a halfway point between academia and the corporate world.'

Her role entails a range of responsibilities such as modelling the cost of changes to incentive and growth tax reliefs and the cost of introducing new schemes, leading an evaluation of some existing schemes, modelling the accumulation of various tax reliefs in large businesses, developing guidelines for the use of sampling for claiming various tax reliefs and leading on the provision of internal statistics training. The non-technical, transferable skills that C. uses in her current position include scientific and analytical writing, analysis of complex information, project management, teaching, collaborative working and meeting deadlines.

C. believes that her PhD is desirable for her role and that it developed transferable skills that are essential for her work. Having a PhD gives C. credibility with key stakeholders and it is advantageous for career progression. While C. believes that a PhD is not necessary in her case, she suggests that 'people with PhDs do well and seem to progress faster than those without.' C. explains to us the aspects of her work that bear similarities with her PhD; she uses the same analytical tools, 'the writing is very similar' but 'the data is on a different topic.' She tells us that her current job 'feels a lot like my PhD- but at a faster pace, and with more practical rather than theoretical solutions.' However C. does not think that she would have passed the statistical competency requirement for her current job 'based on the knowledge gained in my PhD.' She learned more about statistics from teaching it when she was a lecturer. C. tells us that her current job 'has a requirement for about thirty hours a year of CPD and a few additional courses.' For her previous role C. was required to obtain certification from the Higher Education Academy through the New Academics Programme. This involved attending workshops and completing a portfolio.

C. found that 'changing careers was very difficult. Apart from large graduate schemes, I did not know where to look for jobs for someone with my skills, and I felt too old to join traditional graduate schemes. After discussing careers options with a UCL Careers adviser, taking part in careers adviser-led skills training, attending PhD-specific employer events and a careers event open to all students, C. took on the view that 'government seems more open to non-traditional candidates than other graduate schemes.' She became aware of the Fast Stream after attending UCL Graduate School's session on research careers outside academia. C. found this session useful but 'had no idea how much people were expected to prepare for assessment centres,' adding that she was 'fortunate to have passed on my first attempt, but I wish I'd been more prepared.' C. found that attending some of the UCL Careers information sessions and training events was helpful for understanding the UK job market for PhDs; these included sessions on research careers outside academia, non-research careers in academia and on CVs and applications. Since graduating with a PhD C. has secured her positions using a range of methods, which include searching for adverts on online job sites, adverts in industry/sector-specific publications, talking to personal contacts, searching for advertised positions on company websites, using social media like LinkedIn and sending speculative applications.

When asked about the advice she would give to PhDs who are close to entering the academic or non-academic jobs markets, C. recounts her time as a lecturer and how she spent 'almost all of my working day in meetings. The only time to do research was in the evenings and weekends.' C. is encouraging about the possibility of success after leaving academia, 'There are a lot of analytically-minded people, many with PhDs, who have left academia and are doing fine.' Reflecting on her career to date the advice C. gives to those considering whether to undertake a PhD or not, is that a PhD is 'really rewarding personally, extremely valuable preparation for many careers, but it is important to keep an open mind about what it will lead to. Staying in the field almost always requires a high degree of geographical mobility, a high tolerance for job insecurity and a certain amount of luck.'

Tags:

■ Brain Sciences, Government, Higher Education, Technical, Lecturer, Policy, Non-Academic