

Aiming for a Lectureship

If you enjoy university-based research, through your experiences as a postgraduate/postdoctoral researcher, you may well be considering a career as a lecturer. The competition for lectureships can be tough so it is worth finding out what makes a successful candidate.

Lecturers have two main roles: teaching and research. Prior teaching experience is useful but

not always essential since all new lecturers attend training courses to develop these skills. However, before applying for jobs, a future academic should consider how s/he plans to build up a research group, how s/he will fit in with other research interests in a department and how s/he plans to attract funding.

Building your skills and experience portfolio

Doctoral study involves you developing research skills and becoming an expert in a very defined and focused area of research. A postdoctoral position continues this development, but is also a transition from supervised research student/assistant to an independent researcher and involves acquiring many skills apart from those involved in your scientific research. When you become a lecturer this broadening of skills and expertise will be expected to continue.

In addition to your research you should take full advantage of staff development training courses offered by university staff training units or careers services. You can also equip yourself with skills and experience that will demonstrate you have what it takes to excel as an academic.

Publications

Publications are the most important way of assessing the quality of a researcher. They show motivation to succeed. It is not just about the quantity of publications you have, but also the quality; publications in high impact factor journals are read by the widest audience. Identify which journals you should be targeting in your field.

Project planning and management

Your supervisor may need your help to set and supervise undergraduate/MSc projects. You can take the initiative by suggesting ideas and perhaps planning the projects, or even applying for a vacation studentship to fund a project and directly supervising the student. This can be a way of starting to build your own mini research group.

Communication

Take every chance to present your work orally and in writing. Society conferences are an ideal opportunity to present work – offer to give an oral paper. Look out for competitions, such as the **Sir Howard Dalton Young Microbiologist of the Year Competition** (www.sgm.ac.uk/meetings/SgmPrize.cfm), which provide experience and a chance of winning a cash prize. Practise communicating at different levels e.g. undergraduate practical demonstrations and tutorials or explaining your science at university open days.

Motivation to succeed

Applying for research grants or fellowships and going on career development courses are good ways to show motivation. Get out there – networking at conferences provides opportunities to develop potential collaborations and better understand the context of your own work.

Imaginative and creative thinking

It can be difficult to show evidence of this quality. Make yourself aware of the research going on around you, read widely and try to think laterally. With your supervisor's approval, take opportunities to branch out from your main research programme – making sure the key objectives are still met. When you apply for a lectureship, look at current research interests within the department and identify possibilities of collaboration between you and existing staff.

Fundraising

This may be something to think about after a few years as a post-doc. You can apply for grants on your own initiative although, for some schemes, your supervisor has to be the named academic. Grants can support you or another researcher depending on timescales. More generally, you should make yourself familiar with the funding landscape in the UK, EU and overseas. Find out what sources of funding exist to support your research area (both at the start of your academic career and in the long term).

Microbiology Careers

www.sgm-microbiologycareers.org.uk

Sources of funding for early-career scientists

The Medical Research Council (www.mrc.ac.uk) offers grants, including the Career Development Award, to post-doctoral non-clinical scientists with 3 – 6 years experience.

Postdoctoral researchers in biomedical sciences can apply for funding from the Wellcome Trust (www.wellcome.ac.uk/funding). Schemes include the Research Career Development Fellowships which provide the opportunity for postdoctoral scientists to become independent researchers.

The Royal Society offers a number of funding schemes (www.royalsoc.ac.uk/funding) to support postdoctoral researchers, including: Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowships designed to support the first step into independent research and University Research Fellowships for postdoctoral scientists with 2–7 years research experience.

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council offers BBSRC David Phillips Fellowships (www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/fellowships) to scientists who have demonstrated high potential during their research training and initial years of postdoctoral research.

General information

It can take two or three post-doc contracts to build up all the skills and experience you need. In the early stages of each appointment you should make a professional development plan with your supervisor. Universities have a commitment to postdoctoral staff development and should support you.

5 hot tips for the swiftest way to a lectureship:

- plan your personal development strategy
- think about the career stage after next
- take whatever professional development opportunities are on offer
- be aware of funding landscape and political developments affecting research in the future
- publish effectively and network wisely.

Further information

- **Sir Howard Dalton Young Microbiologist of the Year Competition**
(www.sgm.ac.uk/meetings/SgmPrize.cfm)
- **SGM Microbiology Careers Factsheet** - Research Careers
(available from www.sgm-microbiologycareers.org.uk)
- **Gradline, *Microbiology Today***, Vol 36, Feb 2009 (www.sgm.ac.uk/pubs/micro_today/pdf/020909.pdf)
– Funding your research, getting your hands on the money
- **Gradline, *Microbiology Today***, Vol 33, Feb 2006, (www.sgm.ac.uk/pubs/micro_today/pdf/020608.pdf)
– Beyond the postdoc, planning for a career in university research and teaching.

Written and edited: Karen McGregor and Jane Westwell
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Design: Vicki Symington

Image: ThinkStock

SGM Careers, Marlborough House,
Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood,
Reading RG7 1AG
t 0118 988 1807; f 0118 988 5656;
careers@sgm.ac.uk; www.sgm.ac.uk

society for general
Microbiology