

What is a career talk?

A career talk, as we use the term here, is someone sharing what they have learnt in their personal career journey that has helped them progress, alongside some broader insights into their sector, emerging recruitment trends etc.

Such talks are a tremendously valuable resource for PhD students and research staff to learn more about the diverse range of jobs available to them. A first-hand account of the day-to-day life on the job is the best way to consider whether this career path might be an option for them – short of trying out the job, for example in an internship.

Opportunities for listeners to ask questions during or after the talk are always appreciated.

Career talks can be included in whole-day conferences or careers fairs, or be organised as a shorter session with only one or two speakers, perhaps followed by a networking drinks reception or a dinner.

How to find a topic

- Generally, if there is a career path that you would like to learn more about personally, you can assume this will also be interesting for others.
- Find topics on the [Careers Service website](#).
- Consult www.research-careers.org - our growing open-access resource run by Oxford DPhils and postdocs. This database profiles PhD graduates and postdocs who transitioned from academia into rewarding roles that build on their research training. It also showcases their employers. Existing profiles will give you ideas for a sector or role focus in your Career Talk.
→ You can also invite your speaker, and their employer, to contribute their profiles so that key learning can be shared with those who cannot attend the Careers Talk. And, because it is free to feature on the site, you can offer this as an easy opportunity for organisations to promote themselves as attractive places for world-class researchers to work. For more information, write to contact@research-careers.org

How to find speakers

- Before you invite speakers, make sure you have adequate rooms booked for your event. This might sound obvious, but can be problematic in some departments. Some facilities will not be available during term time due to teaching, some venues will not allow food and drink, or require you to use internal caterers. Your divisional office might be able to help you find a suitable venue.
- Use your network. Think about your contacts within the University, the Research Councils and other funding bodies, journal editors, sales reps and lab suppliers, industry collaborators, former colleagues or anyone who you may have met at a conference. People are often keen to help support career events and willing to talk about themselves.
- Use your department's network & alumni. There might be an official alumni LinkedIn or Facebook group or the department might keep a list of alumni contacts, for example with the communications office, graduate studies administrator, human resources or research facilitators. Research group leaders also often stay in touch with their alumni.
- Look at people and organisations who have participated in previous career events in Oxford. Download brochures produced by The Careers Service for each of the 15 annual [Careers Fairs](#). These contain

information on each organisation, recruitment and internship pathways for DPhils/research staff and contact details. You could use these, for example, to invite a different person from the same company.

- Search LinkedIn for people in specific roles, companies or sectors. Those who studied or worked in Oxford are often keen to give back by offering tips and their time. You can search this subset of LinkedIn profiles via the [University of Oxford's LinkedIn page](#).

How to secure funding

- First: You can do this without a budget – Ask speakers if their company would cover travel costs or find a local speaker. Let them know that you don't have any funds available.
- Ask your department for financial support for this specific event. Before drafting your proposal, ask the administrator about the department's targets for student/research staff careers support and write with those in mind. Include the purpose of the event, a breakdown of the estimated costs and your expectation of attendance numbers.
- Find external sponsors. For example, if you organise your event for lab scientists, you can approach lab suppliers. Identify the rep responsible for the Oxford area and email them. Include information on your expected audience and numbers and how the sponsor could benefit from this (for example their logo on posters, emails and registration website, handing out leaflets, advertising a specific product at the start of the talk, or inviting them to attend in person). If you organise a series of events, you can sell this to a sponsor as a bundle.
- Team up with postdoc or student groups in other departments, or a relevant university society, to distribute costs and attract more participants.

Questions for speakers (these can be sent to the speaker beforehand by the organisers)

- Provide a definition of your role. Does this role mean largely the same kind of job in different companies or is it only loosely defined? Are there different types of job under this role title?
- Give an overview of your career stages. Is this a standard career path or are there unusual steps? Why did you take each step? Describe the failures as well as the successes at each stage.
- What are the main tasks you perform regularly? What does your average day look like?
- Which aspects of the job do you enjoy/not enjoy? What are the challenges?
- Why is what you do important and what impact do you think it has?
- What skills do you need in your role and how do they relate to skills acquired as a researcher? Which skills did you have to acquire and how difficult was it? For example, fill in the sentence: If you enjoy ____, this is the right job for you. (e.g. Writing papers/thesis/grant applications, reading and assessing papers, giving presentations at conferences, planning and carrying out experiments, discussions in lab meetings, getting involved in collaborations, supervising undergraduates, lecturing ...)
- Which other jobs might be similar or related to what you are doing?
- What could the next career step be from where you are now? What have others done?
- Have you been involved in recruiting for your current company? Any tips are welcome.
- Have you noticed any trends in your sector that may affect recruitment in the near future?
- What would you advise someone here to do in terms of equipping themselves to enter this sector/role?
- Where could we go to find out more?