WHAT DO PHDS FROM HEALTH SCIENCES DO?

Career Portraits 2019




AARHUS UNIVERSITY

HEALTH

AU CAREER PHD & JR

AARHUS UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

This is a collection of career portraits of former PhD students from the health sciences at Aarhus University. Some of the big questions for PhD students are often “what do PhDs actually do?” as well as ‘’Where do they find work and what are their job positions?’’ This collection of career portraits seeks to answer that question by giving 16 examples of different career paths and the considerations behind the career choices.

The collection of career portraits is the outcome of interviews conducted by PhD-students during a PhD course on Career Management Skills (CMS) held for PhD students from primarily Health in the autumn of 2019.
The focus of the course was primarily on careers outside of academia, so the majority of the portraits are of PhDs working in the industry.

Enjoy the reading and we hope you will gain interesting insights as well as inspiration.

From the course organizers:
Kamille Smidt Rasmussen (AU HE), Anja P. Einholm (AU HE) and Vibeke Broe (AU Career PhD & JR)
Aarhus University 2019

Career Portraits 2019

PhDs in PRIVATE SECTOR job

PhDs from HEALTH

Education:
2017: PhD in Molecular Biology
MSc in Molecular Biology

Jobs:
October 2019- present: Applications Scientist, Taconic Biosciences
March 2019-September 2019: Postdoc, Department of Clinical Medicine, Aarhus University
2016-2018: Postdoc, Department of Biomedicine, Aarhus UniversityJ.

Julie Torvund-Jensen, Applications Scientist, Taconic Biosciences

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

I started applying for postdoc positions 4-5 months before handing in my thesis. My plan was to get some more experience as a researcher before moving into industry eventually.

What kind of position do you have today?

I am an application scientist at a private bioscience company.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I wanted to use my scientific background in the “real world” and get to know the private industry.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Yes, I have had postdoc positions working with subjects different from the one I did my PhD in. They taught me how to quickly adjust to a new environment and learning about new subjects and working cultures. Also, I got experience with new techniques and tasks that are relevant for my current position.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I was headhunted for my current position after having interviewed with the company for a different position in the past.

What contacts - if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I had met a handful of people at the company in the past and kept contact with relevant directors through LinkedIn and through e-mails.

Describe a typical day/week?

The company I work for generate and breed custom-made animal models for researchers in the pharmaceutical/biomedical industry and academia. My main responsibility is to design plans for customer projects to ensure that they will get the models that will best suit their needs, within their budget and time frame. The rest of my team is based in the US and I am the first EU-based application scientist within the company, so an important part of my job is also to implement this role in the EU.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

My experience with designing research projects, my communication skills, and my ability to work independently.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Business acumen and learning how to handle tight deadlines.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I wish I'd had a bit more focus on the commercial potential of my research during my PhD.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Think outside the box when you are looking for new opportunities. Don't be afraid to approach people you don't know and build your network (I know it's a cliché, but it actually works!). And most importantly; be patient! The path to a new job may be long and exhausting.

Anne Borup

Education:
PhD, Molecular Biology
MSc, Molecular Biology

Jobs:
2017-present: QC specialist
2016-2017: QC assistant
2015-16: Postdoc

Anonymous

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

With 6 months left of my PhD, my supervisor got funding to employ me as a postdoc for 1 year.

What kind of position do you have today?

I work with quality assurance in an international biotech company

Why did you decide to go in that direction?

I always knew I would pursue a career outside academia. Ultimately, I ended up in my current position by co-incidence. I started applying for jobs outside academia with 3 months left of my postdoc position. At first, I only applied for research scientist jobs but with two weeks left of my postdoc position, a former co-worker of mine visited our lab for a social get-together. She was working with quality in the same company and told me about a vacancy in her department. I applied for the job, and I got it.

Describe a typical day/week?

There are no typical days really. The job includes many different tasks and requires that I take care of unpredicted situations, for example if the production have technical problems or if there are odd-looking results. The job also requires that I stay updated on legislation and GMP.

What skills and experiences from the PhD studies benefits you the most today?

I think the skills that I benefit mostly from on a daily basis is project planning and time management. Most of the specific knowledge and technical skills that I acquired doing my PhD I do not put in to use in my current position.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during the PhD which you have developed afterwards?

If you know you want to work with quality, I would highly recommend that you take courses in GMP.

What would you have done differently during the PhD (if anything)?

In terms of increasing the chances of getting a job in the industry, I would have like to interact more with the industry during my PhD.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Start applying for jobs sooner rather than later. Reach out to your network.

Thomas Grønnebæk

Education:
2018: PhD in Health Science, Aarhus University
2012: MSc in Medicinal Chemistry, Aarhus University

Jobs:
2019-present: Team Leader at Novo Nordisk, Hjørring
2018-2019: Quality Coordinator at Novo Nordisk, Hjørring
2018: Scientific Assistant at the Department Forensic Chemistry, Aarhus University

Louise Stride Nielsen, Teamleder at Novo Nordisk, Hjørring

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

I started to plan my next career steps within my 3rd year of the PhD. I started to look through Jobindex occasionally for available and interesting positions. I got an offer to work as a Scientific Assistant at the Department of Forensic Chemistry while completing my PhD at that same department. Eventually I also started to apply for jobs outside academia directly after handing in my PhD thesis.

What kind of position do you have today?

I recently switched my position within Novo Nordisk Hjørring from a Quality Coordinator to a Team Leader for a new production line.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I was open to all job positions within both the public sector and the industry, but a major priority was that the working place should be regionally close to northern Jutland.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I started my work as a Scientific Assistant at the Department of Forensic medicine directly after my PhD. A few months after this, I got the firm offer from Novo Nordisk for the Quality Coordinator job. After a year in this position, I was headhunted within the company, and received the offer to move to a new position by the department manager.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I applied for my starting position in Hjørring after a friend told me about this open position.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I did not have any direct contacts when I applied for my starting position. Within the job as a Quality Coordinator, I quickly got in contact with a lot of different teams and I got to know basically the whole production site.

Describe a typical day/week?

The job as a Quality Coordinator varies in weekly and daily tasks depending highly on deviations during the production occurring or not. Handling those deviation reports would always be top priority. I am also working on optimizing processes and quality issues. Within a typical week, meetings with different teams would also take up 1/3 of the working time to process production issues.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

During my PhD, I was already able to work in a Quality Control/ Quality Assurance environment, since the Department of Forensic medicine is an accredited facility handling ISO standards and GXP regulations. Furthermore, the project management skills I acquired during my PhD enabled me to move on to my new position. I also got to know a lot about my own way of working with a high emphasis on organization and structuring. Especially the ability to motivate and drive myself forward was something I saw as a very positive outcome of the PhD.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

My two jobs at Novo Nordisk have mainly been team based and require a high amount of communication. Those parts were very different from my PhD since I was handling my project mainly on my own. It was also important to learn how to give away tasks and trust input from other experts, since within Quality Coordination, I need to take into account a lot of expertise from different sides. I also learned to adjust more quickly and become more flexible with my working tasks since there are numerous accounts where I have to give spontaneous reports without a lot of preparation beforehand.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I am very satisfied with the outcome of my PhD and the skills I acquired during that time. The work at the Department of Forensic medicine helped me with the preparation from the industry. I perceived it as a good middle ground between academia and industry-relevant knowledge.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

I recommend that you look into what kind of positions you can get at different companies and what specific skills are required for said position. If you want a specific position, try to acquire those skills and have an open mind.

Marc Daniel Opfermann

Education:
2016: PhD in Biomedicine, Health, Aarhus University
2011: MSc in molecular biology, Aarhus University

Jobs:
2018- present: Operational manager, Arcedi Biotech
2017-2018: Molecular biologist, Arcedi Biotech
2016- 2017: Post doc in Biomedicine, Health, Aarhus University

Inga Baasch Christensen

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

During the last year of my PhD, I found time sparse to consider career possibilities. When offered a postdoc in continuation of my PhD, it was just a natural step to stay in academia. It was not until the end of my postdoc that I started to consider possible next steps.

What kind of position do you have today?

Today I work as an Operational Manager at Arcedi Biotech, a biotech company focusing on development of techniques for non-invasive prenatal diagnosis using fetal cells in maternal blood.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

During my PhD, I thought the best way to use my skills was to work in academia, and at that time I wasn't aware of all the possibilities outside of university and outside of research. In the end of my postdoc I started to look for vacant positions in biotech companies, public institutions and universities. Since my bachelor, I have had a passion for fetal development and therefore found Arcedi Biotech interesting.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

My postdoc position was not essential for my current employment. My PhD degree would have been sufficient for being considered for the job. Timing and personality/personal qualifications was the main factor.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I applied unsolicited and was called in for an interview. Later, I was offered a maternity cover not yet advertised.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I did not have any contacts within the company before applying unsolicited.

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical day as operational manager in Arcedi Biotech consists of a variety of assignments. A part of my job is to manage larger internal projects and external collaborations. I make sure the projects gets from ideas onto

approved ethical protocols and into actual projects running and being completed. Arcedi Biotech is a small company and everybody contributes to the day-to-day running. Another part of my job is therefore to take care of sample shipments to/from collaborators and purchasing reagents for the laboratory. I like the diversity of the job and that not one day is as the other.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

In my current position, it is crucial to have a solid understanding of basic and clinical research and how this research is carried out, starting from idea to implementation and publication. Her skills and experiences in project management and troubleshooting achieved during her PhD is therefore highly beneficial. In addition, the ability to communicate both written and oral is important skills.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

During my postdoc and work at Arcedi Biotech, I have improved my organizational skills. During my PhD, I found protocol writing a bit boring and was a more innovative type of person.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

Nothing. My PhD has given me a solid box of tools, all of which I use today. The only thing I would have liked was a broader knowledge of the possibility to get a career outside the university and that personal skill matters a lot (more than technical skills) outside of academia.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Try not to confine yourself. Be open-minded and curious on new things and other career paths than academia and 100% research. The PhD provides you with a solid toolbox useful for many different job types, also jobs that at first glance are unrelated to your education and even your research. Keep in mind to highlight what you are good at and tell the company who you are. In many cases, your personality is highly relevant for the employer, not only your academic credentials. Last but not least: do not be afraid of applying unsolicited and focus on what you think is (mind-blowingly) interesting and on what you are good at.

Mette Wulf Christensen

Education:
PhD in Biomedicine/Neuroscience
MSc in Biomedicine

Jobs:
2018- present: Senior Scientist at NMD Pharma
2016-18: Associate Scientific Project Manager at NMD Pharma

Martin Brandhøj Strand, Senior Scientist at NMD Pharma

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

I started to plan my career after my PhD before I even started on a PhD. Initially I wanted to do a career in academia, so when I planned where and with which supervisor to do a PhD, I thought about which research groups and international collaborations that would increase my chances of a career in academia after a PhD the most.

What kind of position do you have today?

I work as senior scientist at NMD Pharma where I am team leader of the pharmacology department. I mostly have desk work where I do project planning, coordinate my team, make deadlines, timelines and guidelines, write reports, communicate and plan with other departments within the company and with out of house services. I travel approx. 45 days a year to e.g. collaborating laboratories where I instruct the laboratories in experimental setups and do hands-on laboratory work. My job is also to ensure a good working environment for my colleague by listening, helping and supporting colleagues to prevent unnecessary conflicts between colleagues and the top executives of the company.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

During the research stay on my PhD, I was offered a post doc position at my research stay, but after finishing my PhD, my personal interests for doing a post doc in that group had changed. Instead, I applied for money for a post doc position in the group at home where I did my PhD. At the same time that I received money for the post doc (time-limited) at home, my supervisor had started the spin-off company NMD Pharma and he offered me a permanent position in the company. In the permanent position, I would still be doing some of the academic tasks that I enjoyed, such as research, writing articles and traveling. Being a little tired of the university environment and the need for constant applying for funding together with the quite higher salary I would get at NMD Pharma for during the type of academic work that I enjoyed, I took the job at NMD Pharma.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I had another job in NMD Pharma as Associate Scientific Project Manager before I got my current job.

How did you find your first job/current job?

My boss and the co-founder of the company was my PhD supervisor.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I knew everyone including the co-founders of NMD Pharma from my PhD study. Easy for me, knowing my new boss from my PhD also meant that I did not have to explain or prove the skills I had learned during my PhD as he already knew me.

Describe a typical day/week?

I start my day by drinking a large glass of water. Then I check my emails and maybe do some data analysis or status on ongoing projects. When people start to show up, my door is open for help, questions and matters, which needs immediate discussion. I do some writing e.g. writing project updates/summaries for the board and prepare for meetings. I eat lunch with colleagues, drink a cup of coffee and then I go to afternoon meetings or I gather with my team to look at data and plan the next steps.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Critical thinking which I use every day in my work when planning experiments and discussing data and new ideas. E.g. does this project/experiment make sense and do the company benefit from these experiments/ analyses and how should we setup experiments in order to draw the correct conclusion. Ensuring that we only do projects and experiments that are need to have/show and not unnecessary projects and experiments that are just nice to show. Also, knowing when I have failed and learned from it, or when I have failed due to being a fool.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

To be pragmatic and adaptable. Being capable of killing your darlings when projects or experiments no longer makes sense in terms of the company's goals. Having people skills such as the ability to see others motivation and needs in order to perform well. To say no and match expectations.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

Being more aware of finishing projects and documenting my technical skills and (international) collaborations

through published articles. Rather make smaller papers documenting all my skills than large high impact papers not showing all my technical skills.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Think about or show that you have thought about taking independent initiative; E.g. “I want to do this. In order to do it, I need these resources. These resources I can get from …”. Finally, someone once advised me that if you think that on the academic/professional level you are the smartest and most clever person in the room, you should find a new job. Otherwise, your personal development will stop, as you need someone to look up to in order to keep developing.

Trine Vilsbøll Larsen

Education:
2016: PhD in Molecular Biology, Aarhus Univeristy.
2012: MSc in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University.

Jobs:
2018- present: Senior Specialist – Arla Foods Ingredients.
2016-18: Chemist – Novo Nordisk

Claus Tofting-Olesen, Senior Specialist at Arla Foods Ingredients

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

After my midterm evaluation, I started thinking about what I wanted to do after my PhD. Here, I decided not to pursue a career within academia. In the remainder of my PhD, I considered the long-term perspectives for a future career and looked for different positions where I could apply my academic skills.

What kind of position do you have today?

Our team is responsible for supporting the different department across Arla Foods Ingredients. This ranges from our production site to the R&D organization and business partners. Some of the tasks we perform involve risk assessments, customer complaints and ensure legal compliance. I like to describe my position as a midfielder on the pitch; I have to be both offensive and provide support that enables our company sell products. Meanwhile, there is also a defensive role, for example, when I have to rationalize the choices made by Arla Foods Ingredients.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I decided not to continue within academia due to several reasons. In my opinion, the industry was able to offer the same possibilities as the university. Furthermore, as my research focus was based in basic science, I had a hard time seeing the actual applicability of this within a short period of time.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

At Novo Nordisk, I learned the basics of how an industrial company operate. This included general knowledge of the supply chain in a company and the main keywords being used in the everyday work. This did not specifically lead to my current position but definitely eased the change from Novo Nordisk to Arla Foods Ingredients.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I attended an event hosted by Novo Nordisk.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I knew a person working at the section through a family member. He provided me with some advice regarding the job interview.

Describe a typical day/week?

I start the day by checking whether there are any new requests from our customers regarding questions or complaints. Every morning, we have a team meeting where we allocate the tasks for the day. My main tasks during a day/week involve meetings with internal/external departments and customers.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

The practical skills and experiences I obtained within the field of protein chemistry during my PhD have undoubtedly been beneficial. Even though my workday doesn't include laboratory work, it still enables me to have a better understanding of the problems we aim to provide support with. This key knowledge also allows me to communicate my work to both specialists as well as non-scientific individuals.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

I would have liked to have more experiences working with "real" project management. It is not to sound brash but managing your PhD project is very different compared to the projects you will run in the industry. As practical examples, I would mention decision making that might affect and have economic consequences for your company. Tools enabling you to prioritize and working with deadlines would also have been an advantage.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I would have prioritized going abroad more. I think it can strengthen you and your work skills greatly when going into an environment outside of the usual comfort zone.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

I would advise people to be open-minded and not too picky when looking at job applications. With a PhD degree, you have many skills that can be used to shape a potential position and make It right for you.

Asbjørn Petersen

Education:
2017: PhD in Cancer Biology, University College London
2011: MSc in pharmaceutical sciences, University of Tokyo

Jobs:
2019- present: Industrial Postdoc in stem cell R&D at Novo Nordisk
2017-2019: Postdoc at Dandrite, Aarhus University

Yutaka Shimizu, Industrial Postdoc in stem cell R&D at Novo Nordisk

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

From the final year of PhD and throughout my postdoc time at AU.

What kind of position do you have today?

I have a research position set up by an Industrial postdoc programme at Novo Nordisk.

Why did you decide to go in that direction?

I wanted to continue research jobs but I have realized that my career prospect didn't seem to suit academic environment. In addition, I have found that there are great possibilities in industrial career while maintaining the work-life balance I would like in my life.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I had a position as postdoc at AU. Part of the research conducted at AU was related to the job specification, and I gained some familiarity in Denmark/Danish culture, which I believe to help obtain the position in a Danish enterprise.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Through the company website.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I did not have any contacts prior to working.

Describe a typical day/week?

Most of the time I am engaged in lab work (cell culture and wet lab) and I attend meetings of a team or division 3-4 times a week.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Logical thinking process and discussions.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Coordination skills with other players in bigger (more demanding) projects.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I would have explored more than research job opportunities. There are so much more a PhD can do.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Keep an open mind and be patient until chances arrive at your door.

Sérgio Eduardo Costa Almeida

Education:
PhD in Neuroscience, National Eye Institue, NIH

MSc in Molecular Biotechnology, Babeș-Bolyai University

Jobs:
2019- present: Application Scientist at MaxWell Biosystems
2015-2019: Postdoc at Dandrite, Aarhus University
2014-2015: Postdoc at National Eye Institute, NIH

Szilard Sajgo, Application Scientist at MaxWell Biosystems

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

During my postdoc time.

What kind of position do you have today?

Application specialist/scientist. I develop protocols, provide technical support to scientists using our products and review grant applications for the company.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Family reasons and to maintain my field of expertise.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?
Two postdoc's positions within academia.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Through networking as well as opportunities presented by my grant applications. I applied for Marie Skłodowska-Curie individual European fellowships Society & Enterprise Panel (SE panel) and got my own funding to work at Maxwell Biosystems.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I collaborated with the Maxwell Biosystems, which enabled a closer networking.

Describe a typical day/week?

- Meetings, technical meetings.
- Data analyses for costumer support.
- Review grants and contribute to write grants.
- Product testing and product development.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Data analyses. Knowledge in development biology and in the field of retina.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Machine learning and Electrophysiology.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I would be a bit more focus on one project instead of spreading to too many.

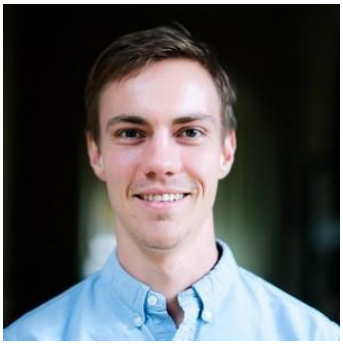
I would have developed my network more.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Decide if you really want academia or industry, take time to apply for positions and grants. Try to go to different interviews. Learn (big) data analyses, which is a very important skill for most positions.

Sérgio Eduardo Costa Almeida

PhDs from ST



Education:
2012-2016 PhD in theoretical atomic physics
2008-2012 BSc + MSc in physics, Aarhus University

Jobs:
2019: Senior Consultant, EY Financial Services, DK
2017-2019: Postdoctoral Researcher, LSU, USA

Jens Bækhøj, Senior Consultant, EY

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

Approximately 6 months before handing in my dissertation, I began thinking about possible career paths. However, I did not apply for any positions prior to the hand-in date.

What kind of position do you have today?

I am a senior consultant within the financial sector. More specifically, I work with credit risk modeling for Nordic banks.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I could see a potentially very interesting match between the skill set I had acquired in the academic world and the tasks and possibilities of the financial sector. In addition, I find the close contact to clients extremely rewarding as you see the impact you make on a day-to-day basis.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I was in a postdoctoral research position in the US for two years.

How did you find your first job/current job?

My first job was offered directly to me. I landed my current job through a standard application and interview process.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

No direct contact. However, as EY is considered one of the mayor accounting firms of the world I expected high

standards and a global network – both of which I have found.

Describe a typical day/week?

Our profession is driven by interaction with clients. As a result, I often have more than 10 client meetings a week. The time not booked for meetings are used for a mix of research on marked standards (often through the EY network), studding the laws of financial risk management, and statistical modeling.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

The three most important skills I have from my PhD studies and postdoctoral position are:

I. **Presentation skills:** During a PhD study you develop your presentation skills daily though a very diverse set of activities including: Teaching, oral presentations at conferences, brief updates on complex matter to colleagues, and poster production and writing of scientific papers.

II. **Numerical/mathematical expertise:** It is hard to find people better skilled within the fields of numerics and applied mathematics than a PhD in theoretical physics.

III. **Teamwork:** is the key to success just like in the corporate world, most work done during a PhD happens in small groups of people. If you understand the dynamics of such groups and are able to benefit from your team, it will be almost impossible not to be successful.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

More specific knowledge about the financial sector. However, my education gave me all the tools needed to accumulate complex knowledge at a high rate

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

Not much, actually.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Always take the job you think would be the most interesting. Some people do not live by that rule, but takes a job because of the salary, the social status or something else. However, my experience tells me that 5 years into the future, both your salary and your social status will be higher if you take the job you find more interesting – because chances are that you will be better at it.

Kia Busch

Education:
2013: PhD in Animal Science, Aarhus University
2009: MSc in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

Jobs:
2016-present: Product Expert at Novo Nordisk, Hjørring
2014-16: Chemist at Novo Nordisk, Kalundb

Jesper Bjerg Christensen, Product Expert at Novo Nordisk, Hjørring

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

I did not do any planning.

What kind of position do you have today?

I am a Product Expert at the needle production site at Novo Nordisk in Hjørring.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

It was by coincidence. After completion of my PhD I applied broadly for various kinds of jobs – also jobs that I was not qualified for.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

My first position was as a Chemist in process support in another department at Novo Nordisk in Kalundborg. After two and a half years, I applied for a transfer due to my pregnant wife in the northern part of Jutland; at Novo Nordisk you can apply for a transfer if you have been in a position for two years, furthermore a position at their department in Hjørring became available – and I got the position.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I got my first job through a friend, who was already employed at the site in Kalundborg. My friend had told me to get in contact if I was interested in a position, and after six months of being unemployed, I reached out to him. He talked to his Team Manager and arranged for a meeting.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

My friend was a fellow student whom I got to know through the student organization and bar, Alkymia.

Describe a typical day/week?

I use most of my time at the office where I am responsible for test methods and design. When we introduce minor changes to the products, I also perform risk assessment, where I evaluate if anything can go wrong – and in that case, what it means to the patient or consumer. I make plans for random sampling and write reports if any deviations are observed. My job includes a lot of statistics. In addition, I am a health and safety representative, which also entails different tasks, e.g. assessing the extent of unilateral work.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

I have mostly benefited of all the generic skills and competencies I acquired throughout my PhD study, e.g. problem solving, work independently, making decisions and using my logical approach when solving things. In addition, I have also benefited of my knowledge on chemicals, storage, elimination hereof and the use of protective equipment.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

In Kalundborg, I learned a lot about process knowledge.

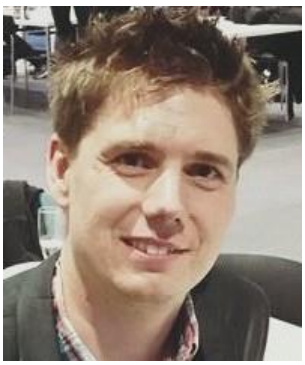
What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

Nothing.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

You should not go into despair if you do not know which career path to choose – you are allowed to be frustrated with the geographical challenge. Be open minded and flexible if it is only for a defined period of time. Apply for maternity leave positions to try different occupational areas and get a foot in the door at the different companies. Have an open mind in learning new things.

Sofie Stokkebro Schmøkel



Education:
2011-2015: PhD at iNano
2011: MSc in Nanoscience

Jobs:
2016- present: Production supporter, Department of Insulin manufacturing plant 1 – fermentation and recovery, Novo Nordisk
2015-16: PostDoc at iNano

Andreas Skytte Andersen, Production supporter at Novo Nordisk

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

Before my PhD was finished, I was ensured a postdoc position for 6 months, in which time I planned to start searching for jobs. Therefore, I did not search for any jobs during my PhD. I ended up getting 2 more 3 month postdocs, before getting a job at Novo Nordisk. I knew from very early on in my PhD that I wanted a job in the private sector and not in academia, but did not do any particular preparations for it.

What kind of position do you have today?

I work as production support in an insulin and GLP1 production plant. I work in the department handling fermentation of the yeast culture.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I wanted to try out the pharmaceutical industry, and when an opening showed, up I took it. I have spent the most of my PhD working with molecular biology, and therefore thought that the biotech industry would be a good fit for me. Furthermore, I thought that knowledge on how the pharmaceutical industry worked would benefit my career on the long run.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

No. This was my first job after my PhD/postdocs.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Novo Nordisk had a recruitment session in Aarhus, and I was at the time searching in Jutland. When they came, I thought it sounded interesting and sent an application. I wasn't actively searching for jobs in Zealand, but the job sounded interesting. After convincing my girlfriend to move with me, I decided to take it and moved to Kalundborg.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I knew a few people working in Novo Nordisk at the time. One person was part of the recruitment session in Aarhus and he was one who could recommend me. Whether or not he actually got a say, I do not actually know.

Describe a typical day/week?

My time is divided between problem solving, documentation reviews, optimization and implementation of new products. Generally, it occurs over longer periods so one month will be spent with a single optimization project and the next month with a particular difficult problem. In between these is inclusion into several other problems in which I am not the lead but merely input giving, general meetings between production plants, planning for new projects in the coming years and day-to-day problems with the production that needs immediate attention. Overall, it is a very varied work environment, with a close link to the ongoing production while handling long-term projects.

What is the best aspect of your job?

Working as part of a team and helping each other to succeed in our joined goals. Everyone works with an individual assignment but they are all linked together and help is given if any problems occurs that need more focus.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

My overall planning skills of my workday. Being responsible for experiments, data analyses and reporting needed a good amount of planning and estimations of time consumptions, which greatly help me in my work today.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Understanding the essential of documentation of everything, or in short good documentation practice (GMP). As this is the most important part of our work in a pharmaceutical company. Courses in this could have helped better understanding this concept.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I wouldn't actually change anything. Even though my PhD work is not at all similar to my work today, I think it helped me to decide in which direction I wanted to go as I completed the PhD.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Do not limit yourself too much in region or type of work. Try to be as flexible as possible as the type of jobs attractive for PhD's are not found everywhere. It got me to move to Zealand, but looking back it has definitely been worth it.

Majken Thomsen

PhDs in PUBLIC SECTOR jobs

Education:
2007: PhD, Institute of Life Sciences, Dept. of Biotechnology, Aalborg University
2003: Master of Science, Biotechnology, Aalborg University

Jobs:
Jan 2019 - present: Molecular biologist, Dept. Clin. Gen, Sygehus Lillebælt
March - Dec 2018: Biochemist, Dept. Clin. Biochem., Hospitalsenheden Vest
Feb 2012 – Feb 2018: Molecular biologist, Dept. Clin. Gen., Aarhus University Hospital
Dec 2007 – Jan 2012: Post.doc., Dept. Clin. Biochem., Aarhus University Hospital
Sep 2007 – Nov 2007: Research assistant, Dept. of Biotechnology, Aalborg University

Dorte Launholt Lildballe, Molecular Biologist at Sygehus Lillebælt

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

I did not have any career plans after my PhD, but I started looking for jobs 4-5 months before handing in my thesis.

What kind of position do you have today?

I am employed as a molecular biologist at Department of Clinical Genetics at Sygehus Lillebælt. Here, I am responsible for developing new analysis, optimizing the laboratory workflow and generating clinical documents comprising results of genetic analysis performed on patient samples.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I had not planned going in a specific direction. It was actually a coincidence: I had a supervisor, who was brilliant to read people. She was aware my preferences diverted from the purely academic field, and so she recommended me to apply for an open position as a molecular biologist at Department of Clinical Genetics at Aarhus University Hospital.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I have had four other jobs than my current job. After defending my PhD, I was employed as a Postdoc. After four years in this position, my supervisor recommended me to apply for a position as a molecular biologist at Department of Clinical Genetics at Aarhus University Hospital. In this position, I developed my field of expertise as a clinical laboratory geneticist, and besides 1 year as a biochemist, I have stayed within this field.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I found my first job after the PhD through a job advertisement.

Describe a typical day/week?

The most important part of my day is data analysis and generation of clinical documents that comprise results of genetic analyzes performed on patient samples. However, most of my time is spend on solving problems in the laboratory, developing new laboratory methods and optimizing the laboratory workflow. The remaining time is spent on research and meetings with managers of the department, academic colleagues and medical doctors.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

The skills I benefit the most from are a structured and efficient workflow, my technical laboratory skills such as pipetting, my knowledge about being in a laboratory, as well as develop and perform analysis of various kind. The latter has made me aware of the importance of systematic workflows, replication and validation of experiments.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

During my PhD, I did not have any colleagues or cooperators working with the same project, and so I did not develop competences within communication and organization in the same degree as many other PhD-students. After working in an interdisciplinary environment for many years, I have developed these skills. In addition, my employment as a molecular biologist required me to gain extensive new knowledge and skills within the field of genetics.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I would not have done anything differently. The skills I did not develop during my PhD could not have been implemented in the project in a natural manner, because I worked alone.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

I believe the most important skill is the ability to learn and use new knowledge. If you can do that, you can learn

every competence and skill required for your future position. In addition, I believe networking is important, since it have benefited me in all of my positions.

Marlene Louise Nielsen

Education:
2017: PhD at AU
2013: MSc in Pharmacy at KU

Jobs:
2019-present: Forensic Chemist
2017-2019: Project Chemist

Christian Fyhn Reuss, Forensic Chemist at the Department of Forensic Medicine, Aarhus University

Christian works as a forensic chemist at the Department of Forensic Medicine, at Aarhus University. For him, a position as a forensic chemist has long been the dream, in fact, his PhD degree became a step toward a career as a forensic chemist.

During his master's degree, he developed an interest in analytical chemistry and he therefore, decided to conduct his master thesis in collaboration with the forensic department at KU. After finishing his master's degree in pharmacy, he applied for job advert as a forensic chemist at the Department of Forensic Medicine at AU. The department at AU also needed a candidate for a PhD-project and they thought Christian was a good fit for the project. So, instead of being employed as a forensic chemist, he was enrolled as a PhD student at AU.

After his PhD, he was employed as a project chemist in a time-limited position (2 years), primarily to finish some projects from his PhD study. This employment was also an opportunity for the department to decide where (and if) he fitted into the department. Furthermore, this position was a chance for him to find out if he enjoyed working as a forensic chemist or if he should pursue a career within research. A high level of job security was important to him and he therefore decided to pursue a career path as a forensic chemist. After the temporary position as a project chemist, he was permanently employed as a forensic chemist at AU.

As a forensic chemist, the Danish police pay him indirectly. However, there is still room for research in the form of method development and optimization. Working as a forensic chemist is not all about spectacular murder cases – far from it, in fact. Though no matter the case, he always finds it very meaningful to contribute to the work of the police and to offer next of kin a sense of closure.

During a typical workday, Christian mostly consult on chemistry tasks like autopsy-related toxicology, traffic cases and narcotics for the Danish police. The chemists take weekly turns on the different assignments, so the

work does not become too repetitious. The chemists also have more diverse assignments besides consulting for the Danish Police, Christian e.g spends his spare time programming a pipetting-robot.

As for skills, he depends a lot on the technical skills he developed during his PhD. However, he also thinks that project management and critical thinking is crucial when working with forensic cases. He does not feel that he is lacking any skills from his PhD, though he has gained a lot of applied knowledge and become more specialized in his current job. He cannot think of anything he would have done differently, because a PhD project is journey and the things that did not go according to plan could not have been foreseen. His main supervisor once told him that a PhD project is "the art of the possible" in other words the best compromise.

Christian would advise PhD students about to finish their thesis, to not focus on the end results of their PhD. There will always be something that did not go according to the plan. The important thing is not to let that break you. The skills that PhDs acquire during the PhD can be used for much more than research and you have to figure out if you want to continue doing research, or if you need a change of directions with new challenges.

Kata Wolff Pedersen

Education:
PhD : 2000-2002: MRI perfusion imaging
MSc in Medicine (MD)

Jobs:
2017- present: Consulting neurologist, associate professor
2014-16: Consulting neurologist
2011-2013: Neurology specialist, AUH
1998-2011: MD 2000, Neurologi specialist trianing 2003-2008

Claus Z. Simonsen, Consulting Neurologist and Associate Professor, Neurology AUH

What kind of position do you have today?

After finishing my PhD, I started the basic clinical training ("KBU") program for medical doctors followed by training in Cardiology and Neurology before finally deciding to specialize in Neurology. I completed my specialist training in Neurology in 2008. Working as clinical doctor was my aim before, under and after my PhD.

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

Consulting stroke neurologist and assistant professor in Neurology, Aarhus University Hospital.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

My PhD was on MRI perfusion imaging and cerebral blood flow estimation which most likely has spiked my interest in the brain with emphasis on vascular brain disorders. My interest in combining the clinical work with academia was founded during my fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and by going to stroke conferences during that period. The implementation of research into everyday clinic was very inspiring – and has followed me ever since.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Yes, I have had numerous clinical jobs during my neurology specialist training. From 2009 to 2010, I did a stroke fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, USA.

How did you find your first job/current job?

My first "real" job after finishing my neurologist specialist training was at the department of Neurology (Aarhus University Hospital). I didn't really find the job, it was more like a "tap on my shoulder" and an advise to apply for the open position.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Worked at the department of Neurology (AUH) during my specialist training.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

It is some time ago I finished my PhD, but since then I have had an in-depth understanding of neuroimaging which has become a cornerstone in modern stroke treatment. In general, my PhD has provided me with a basic understanding of the methodology needed to investigate different clinical questions.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Designing clinical studies and avoiding pitfalls. Writing skills.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

In general, I would have organized my PhD better and prioritized or looked for research groups with at least a few junior researchers.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Get involved! Go to national and international conferences and get new friends and collaborators. I would highly recommend doing a sabbatical in a different country.

Rolf Ankerlund Blauenfeldt

Education:
PhD Molecular Biology and Epidemiology MSc in Molecular Biology

Jobs:
2019- present: Head of Imaging Core Facility AU Health
2014-19: Sales manager Olympus Imaging Solution 2008-2014: Scientific staff (AU), PhD student (SDU and AU), Postdoc (AU)

Christian Hasselbalch Gram, Head of Imaging Core Facility, AU Health

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

I was planning change of career before my PhD ended.

What kind of position do you have today?

Core facility manager.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I realized that I wanted to try a different path than using years in short positions and possible breaks, which was my possibility at the time if I stayed in science. I appreciated lab work but often with the feeling of being inefficient due to budgetary limits. The technical part of my work has always been very interesting to me and it was natural to choose a technical path.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

After a short post.doc position, I applied for a technical sales job working with microscopes. This led the way to my current job managing microscopes and teaching how to use them.

How did you find your first job/current job?

My first job was posted online and I applied for it. I got my current job because I have been here a lot when I was selling microscopes.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

For my first job, I did not have any contacts at the company. My profile just fitted to what they needed. At my second job, I had a lot of contacts.

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical day starts out with half an hour replying emails and administrative work. From 9-12 I teach a small group of scientists how to use a microscope and especially the software controlling the system and analyzing the results. After a lunch break, there are often some things that need to be adjusted or repaired at one of the systems in the facility or somewhere at Health, or users need support at a system. Whenever there is time there is always need to do more administrative work.

My functions:

- Maintenance of 10 advanced fluorescence microscopes and continuously improve them.
- Teach how to use the systems and software, which improves the possibilities of the scientists who previously only had access to few or no advanced systems.
- Manage a booking system and a website: http://imaging.au.dk/
- Do invoicing and purchase
- Apply for funding

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

General knowledge about molecular biology, cell work, animal work, technical skills, knowledge about how to improve procedures in lab, network. Software skills, imaging, data and statistics. Scientific writing. Funding applications

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Being more efficient. For me it is rewarding to achieve goals and "being on the move". In a private company, there are constantly defined deadlines (and a bonus if you reach it). If deadlines are defined in a good way, it is both fun and rewarding. Improved technical skills and collaboration. It is important to use whatever others know already. The PhD years can easily be spend optimizing stuff that someone may help you with

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I would probably have done a PhD in association with a company if possible. Finishing a PhD with only few relevant jobs ahead is not rewarding and I would have liked to tailor my project to be aiming for something interesting afterwards. I did many collaborations and would have liked to done more.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Be curious and outgoing. Join conferences, social events/medias and meet people. If you (like me) will not pursue a scientific career, don't hesitate trying out different kinds of jobs as long as it is challenging in a good way. My time in sales was fun end educational.

Sidsel Dahl Andersen

Education:
MEdu, 2018
DMSc, 2014
PhD in Medicine, 2005
MSc in Molecular Biology, 2002

Jobs:
2012 - present: High school teacher Egaa Gymnasium
2012: Associate Professor Dept. Clinical Medicine
2007-2012: Project Researcher Dept. Infectious Diseases.
2005-2007: Postdocs Aarhus University

Jesper Melchjorsen, High School teacher at Egaa Gymnasium

How early did you plan your next career step after the PhD?

Throughout my studies, both master and PhD, I frequently looked at job applications to evaluate and consider different options. However, I liked doing research and therefore a postdoc was first priority after the PhD.

What kind of position do you have today?

I am a high school teacher (gymnasielærer) at Egaa Gymnasium in the northern part of Aarhus. I teach Biotechnology, Chemistry and Biology.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

For many reasons. I was not unhappy with research as such, but the sum of draw backs like decreasing funding options for my/our research after the financial crisis, the lack of a tenure track at the Faculty of Health (for non-health-educated staff) and the lack of more permanent positions were all part of the decision. Moreover, the working hours I made to accomplish my academic goals were woo much in the long run. Going into teaching had been on my mind for some time and discussions with peers (people going from academia to teaching), and visits at some high schools made the decision easier.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I was doing research and teaching after the PhD. Three different places within Aarhus University and Aarhus University Hospital.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Through network within the field of studies. Getting my own funding for the first major postdoc made the process easy.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I knew 2-3 teachers at the high school, either from sport or from my studies at Aarhus University. I was in contact with two of them before deciding to apply for the job. To know more about the working place. Before applying for the job, I also visited the high school and observed some teaching made by one of my contacts (now colleague). I did similarly for other places with contacts at another school. To get a feeling about the place.

Describe a typical day/week?

No day is the same, and no year are the same. I am involved in a number of projects developing new/improving teaching methods, which takes some time. Moreover, I am talent coordinator, helps students at afternoons with projects and together with some colleagues facilitate an "Egaa Experimentarium" once a week. A place where students can explore things they find fun. In average, I teach three hours a day, and naturally has to set up equipment, prepare solutions, buy stuff for some experiments, distribute materials for classes, evaluate assignments etc. - besides the 3 hours with the students and all the other work. Some days are from 8 to late afternoon/evening and some days much shorter.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Research experiences come in handy in some job situations. I made a Master of Science Education (MEdu) from 2015-2018 and I use the knowledge from that, together with my scientific approach from the many years in research, in order to develop new/improved teaching methods and materials. I also use more problem-based and inquiry-based ways of teaching than average, which is the way "real" research is performed. Moreover, I have had quite some students participating in Unge Forskere ("Young Researchers") - the biggest science competition in Denmark.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

My theoretical knowledge about teaching. Knowledge of and use of motivation theories, and improved communication – especially verbal communication.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything)?

I would have used a bit more time exploring different options for a postdocs and content of postdocs before committing to a place. Meet and talk with the people responsible for your next job. To make expectations and content 100% clear before start.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Look at the options - and do not panic over possible lack of postdocs or jobs within your specific field. Broaden your horizon. Look and search for jobs that are not in the field. You have some valuable knowledge and competences that may be valuable in a neighbor research field or in a company. Be ready to move outside your immediate comfort zone, and take some chances – doors will open. Look at the cheese – and not only on the holes in the cheese.

Kathrine Kjær

AARHUS UNIVERSITY