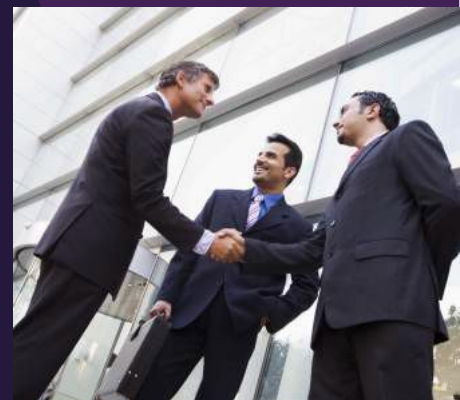


WHAT DO PHDS FROM HEALTH SCIENCES DO?

Career Portraits 2018



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 2018. 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 2018

Career Portraits 2018

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PhDs in PRIVATE SECTOR job

PhDs from HEALTH



Education:
2018: PhD in Health, Aarhus University
2012: MSc in Molecular Nutrition and
Food Technology, Aarhus University

Jobs:
June 2018 – present: Global Quality
Specialist (QEHS) at Arla Foods
Ingredients, Sønderhøj 10-12, 8260 Viby J.

Ann Bjørnshave, Global Quality Specialist at Arla Foods Ingredients

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

I started looking for jobs approximately 6 months before handing in my PhD thesis, and I applied for four jobs during those months. I also attended the PhD course “Prepare yourself on the movement from a PhD in Health to a career in non-academia” in 2016.

What kind of position do you have today?

Global Quality Specialist at Arla Foods Ingredients. Our team is responsible for ensuring uniform quality of our products from our factories on a global scale. In my position, I am responsible for several product groups e.g. the product whey protein isolate (WPI).

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

My main reason for going in this direction was that I wanted to challenge myself and gain competences within quality assurance. I wished to have another perspective than research, and I wanted to experience what it is like to work in the industry. I find it interesting that you get to work in a multidisciplinary environment together with other professional backgrounds. Another reason for choosing the industry was the fact that you obtain day-to-day results, receive regular feedback on your achievements, and you have a shorter timeframe for your work than during the PhD.

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

No, this is my first job after the PhD.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I found it through a job advertisement on Jobindex. I sent an application, and received a phone call where they invited me to a job interview. Prior to the first interview, I prepared by checking the LinkedIn profile of the person I was going to meet with. The first round consisted of a conversation with the team leader, which concentrated on the contents of the position, and how my personal competences matched the demands of the job. Before the second round, I was asked to take a personality test and a logic skills test. The test formed the basis for the second job interview, which involved an HR representative and the team leader.

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

I had some contacts at the company through my PhD project, but who held different job functions. I had also previously held a presentation at one of their symposiums. I did not use these contacts during the application process; however, I was asked to provide internal references at the job interview (although in the end, they were not contacted).

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical day for me would start by checking whether there are any new requests from our customers regarding questions or complaints. Our customers typically consist of other quality specialists representing industries within food production, animal feed, health and performance, or pediatric nutrition. Every morning, we have a team meeting where we distribute the tasks for the day. My main tasks during a day/week involve:

- Review customer specification from both potential new customers and existing customers.
- Evaluate whether we can and will comply with the customers requested quality demands.
- Cooperating with internal departments e.g. the regulatory team, the quality teams at our production sites, or sales representatives concerning requests from customers, and communicating a response to the customers.
- Coordinating complaints handling, and ensuring that the right persons follow up on a complaint.
- Involvement in projects across the organization or within my department to improve internal procedures.
- Participating in audits representing the global quality department.
- Monthly travel activity on a national scale.

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

My project management skills have been a great advantage. During my PhD studies, I gained the ability to switch between functions and prioritize my tasks, and this benefits me in my job today. The ability to gain new knowledge/knowing how to seek knowledge is also very useful. Furthermore, I use many of my fundamental scientific skills within e.g. food chemistry that I gained during my bachelor and master studies.

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

This job is still relatively new to me; however, some of the skills I have already developed are related to knowledge of food production and quality, and to the understanding of how a large company/matrix organization is structured and organized. I continuously learn about the work they do in other parts of the company, such as in the production and logistics departments.

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

It would have been nice to have done more practical laboratory work.

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

I would advise everyone to sign up for the mentor program at AU in order to expand your network and knowledge of companies in the area. This is a good opportunity to reflect upon your competences, and to reflect on what kind of company you would like to work in. I think it is a good idea to do some research on different companies you find interesting, in order to imagine how you could potentially fit in there. I would also advise you to define some specific career-related goals that you wish to achieve during your PhD. An example could be that you want to apply for a certain number of jobs before you finish the PhD, or that you want to construct a good CV before finishing. Lastly, I would advise people to be open-minded, and not be too determined on finding a job in a specific city or area; in many cases, you can find a creative solution in order to make it work, as long as the position is right for you.

Elin Rakvaag



Education:
2013: PhD in Cancer Research, University of Copenhagen
2009: MSc in Human Biology, (University of Copenhagen)

Jobs:
2018- present: Science Liaison at Lundbeck Fonden
2013-2018: Post Doc at Biotech Research and Innovation Center, University of Copenhagen

Anette Høye, Science Liaison at Lundbeck Fonden

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

When finishing her PhD, Anette decided that she was not done with research yet, and she wanted to stay in academia working with science. During her subsequent Postdoc-positions, she then started looking into possible next steps outside of academia.

What kind of position do you have today?

Anette work as a Science Liaison at Lundbeck Fonden, which is a job with a variety of tasks. This includes finding and establishing contact to members for selection committees for the different grant calls and planning the scientific content for meetings/conferences (e.g. Brain Prize). Part of her job is also going to conferences and reading literature in order to stay updated on the research field that Lundbeck Fonden supports. Anette is also involved in writing intern reports on how Lundbeck Fonden evaluates the outcome of the different projects they fund.

Why did you decide to go in that direction?

Anette knew that staying in academia would mean having to move abroad to in order to become group leader at some point, and she also felt that the effort you put into the work not necessarily equals the results in academia. These things combined made Anette look for jobs outside academia. Furthermore, she participated in a course in research assessment during her last Postdoc position, which opened her eyes for working in a foundation and with research assessment. Now, she finds it very motivating to be part of defining the research field.

How did you find her first job/current job?

Anette found a job ad, and applied for the job. The course in research assessment helped her CV stand out for her current position and highlight her interest in this area.

Describe a typical day/week?

Anette's day typically consist of going to meetings (1-2 pr day), writing emails, looking at data and writing reports.

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

Project management, presentation skills, organizing, overview and structure, being able to gain new knowledge quickly, learning new processes.

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

What it is like to be in a company and learning company etiquette.

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

It would be nice to have picked a research field where it is easier and faster to publish. But for this job it is less relevant.

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

Talk to people, find interesting companies and follow them on LinkedIn, get inspiration on LinkedIn.

Sofie Kjellerup Christensen



Education:
1990: PhD Molecular
Microbiology, AU
1989: MSc in Chemistry, AU

Jobs:
2014- present: Director for Strategic Product
Development, Vitrolife A/S
2004-2014: CSO, Unisense Fertilitech
2002-2004: Devison leader New Technology, Exiqon
1994-2002: Associate Professor, Inst. Biological
Sciences, AU
1990 -1994: Postdoc positions, Max planck inst.

Niels Ramsing, Vitrolife A/S

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

I did not really plan a 'next step' - it was more of natural movements and different factors that influenced where I ended up.

What kind of position do you have today?

Director for Strategic Product Development at Vitrolife A/S. Here I work with the development of new products for fertility treatments. Currently we are a 4-man team who work in the hardware development department.

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

After my PhD, I was asked if I wanted to help with starting up the new Max Planck Institute for Marine Microbiology in Germany – this became my first Postdoc position and I stayed for a couple of years. After this, I was offered a position as an assistant professor in a new department in the field of molecular microbiology, Aarhus University. After seven years at Aarhus University, three factors determined that my career would take a different turn. First, a brilliant Master's student of mine would not finish her studies, when I confronted her, she told me that I had no idea what was out there in the industry and how it even was to be employed elsewhere than the university. Second, I had the idea of using a DNA-chip for a digital fingerprint to characterization of changes in e.g. microorganisms or microbial societies. I contacted Exiqon in order to start up a research collaboration. Third, I had personal reasons for wanting to move to Copenhagen.

Exiqon agreed to the collaboration, but pointed out that it could take years to get this project up and running, as I needed funding for the project. The issue with funding in the public sector is that it is hard to get without no prior publications in this specific research area, as you have to be a recognized expert in the field. Instead, Exiqon asked me to take a leave of absence, which made it possible for me to get familiarized with the private

sector in a “safe” way and where I could go back to academia after a short while, if the project did not pan out. I found that, contrary to believes, it was actually possible to have a freedom of research in the industry, with the limitation of a commercial aspect and it should be economically justifiable. This freedom of research could be hard at the university, as you always need to apply for funding and if you want to change your projects you have to run them as smaller side projects and get it published before you slowly can go in this direction with your research.

How did you find your first job/current job?

After two years at Exiqon I wanted to go back to Aarhus, and I met an old friend who had an idea for a startup company in the field of fertility treatments. I quit my job as an associate professor at Aarhus University. It was quite daunting to cut the ties to the university completely, but also exciting.

The idea was to look at respiration rates of embryos with small electrodes, to access the change of pregnancy. We later implemented a microscope camera in the incubator and found that the respiration rates correlated with morphological features, which could be a good predictor of embryonal development. We started Unisense Fertilitech, which Vitrolife bought later on.

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

For my postdoc position, I had previously been working on my Master’s project at another Max Planck institute in Germany and for this reason, I was asked to start up this new one.

As for my position at Unisense Fertilitech/Vitrolife, an old friend asked me to join.

Describe a typical day/week?

In a typical week I will have meetings for 8-9 hours, which is not that much. The most of my time I do not spend on meetings, but the meetings are very determining for how I will spend my time. These meetings fall into the following categories: Development projects, Product care and customer complaints. With medical devices, it is really important that issues are fixed as soon as possible and that we can prevent an issue from happening again. This means that if we get a customer complaint or our service department notice a serious deviation, we need to act right away and all other projects are abandoned until the issue is solved. This means that my weeks can differ a lot. Some weeks you have a clear plan, while others are interrupted by deviations. Some weeks I write technical documentation for the authorities. Other weeks I need to train our technical and sales personnel in the technical aspects of the product or to equip them with the right answers in case our competitors are trying to spread false information on our product. Other weeks I go to conferences as an expert or as a speaker

and other weeks my team and I run brains storms for new products.

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

I know that it is kind of cliché, but you learn how to learn from doing a PhD. What I value the most is my scientific PhD-backpack with all the tools that I have, including teaching and communication.

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

The PhD-study is really academic. It provides you with a very solid academic background. You get at solid understanding of data, statistical methods and a sound feeling of when data looks good and when it does not. All of this is gives you a solid base, but when it comes to the knowledge of how society or a company behaves, you get nothing. I did not get any training in how to do accounting, project management, regulatory processes, patent application, verification and validation processes.

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

I was really happy with what I got in the PhD-backpack and I think that you are already really too busy to do a lot of things outside of my studies. If there was one thing that I could do differently, it would be if the University had offered a general course in "Industry 101", which could include topics like: project management in a company setting; regulatory affairs; Intellectual property; Business economy. Not that you need to be an expert in these topics, but you need to know the language to be able to speak to experts in the field.

What is the next step in your career?

I have reached a position in Vitrolife A/S right now, where I am the experts in my field. A thing that I have been pursuing all my life is to acquire new knowledge. It is more fun to learn than to know, in my opinion. For this reason, I have decided to leave Vitrolife A/S and start a new step in my career. I want to go into the technology of helping elderly people.

Katrine Tang Stenz

Education:
2015: PhD from the Faculty of
Health, Aarhus University
2011: MSc in Medicine with
industrial specialisation

Jobs:
2015- present: Event
Adjudication Professional at
Novo Nordisk

Christina Weide Fischer, Event Adjudication Professional at Novo Nordisk

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

I started approximately a year before I finished my PhD by talking to all the people I knew that worked in the industry. I remember everything was quite overwhelming. I heard good things about working at Novo Nordisk, so I looked at the positions that were offered there. Working within the area of patient safety really caught my interest, as I would be able to use my knowledge regarding research, pathology, and pharmacology. Therefore, I ended up especially looking for positions within this area.

What kind of position do you have today?

I have been working as an Event Adjudication Professional for Novo Nordisk for a little over three years now. My main task is to follow clinical safety events in clinical trials that are recorded by the principal investigators and make the first assessment of these events, before we send them to an external committee.

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

I loved the freedom in science and academia that allowed me to decide myself what kind of research studies I should perform, but I had the feeling of wanting to be part of something bigger. Additionally, I felt like my preclinical research did not really help the patients and I did not enjoy the repetitive lab work. For these reasons, I was looking for a job in a more collaborative environment that would have a real and direct impact on patients' lives.

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

I have not had other jobs after my PhD studies. I directly started working for Novo Nordisk.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I looked at positions offered at Novo Nordisk within the field of patient safety and pharmacovigilance.

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

I did not know anyone in the department I applied to, but I knew someone working at a different department

within pharmacovigilance.

Describe a typical day/week?

There is a lot of variety in my work tasks and no two days are the same, so it is a bit difficult to describe. Many of my daily tasks are related to data handling within various databases in order to track the on-going events, document review, and communications with various stakeholders. I am also part of a training group that also does teaching, which also involves doing many presentations. There are of course also a lot of meetings and interactions with various internal partners.

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

When you have done a PhD, you know how to be a project manager and that is essentially what we are in my department. There are also many other skills that are very beneficial, such as data handling, being able to quickly understand new knowledge and learn new processes, trouble-shooting, communication skills, and being able to read and write scientifically. Additionally, I had a lot of medical knowledge from my studies, which helps a lot.

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

During my first 4 months in this position, I had to learn a lot about the specific work processes that my job entails. However, as long as you are motivated and interested in what you are doing and in learning new things, this is not an issue.

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

I would not have done it differently. I enjoyed doing basic research and that is why I chose to do the PhD. I gained a lot of knowledge and experience during the PhD, which brought me to where I am today.

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

First off, I would say enjoy your PhD now – enjoy the freedom that you have and the little things that are involved in your daily work, because it will be time that never comes back. For specific career advice, I would suggest to spend a lot of time writing your job application and to get feedback on it from someone you trust. Make your motivation for the specific job shine through, because that is what will get the attention.

Denise Fabienne Happ



Education:
2015: PhD in Clinical Epidemiology, Aarhus University
2005: MSc in Human Nutrition, University of Copenhagen

Jobs:
2017- present: Clinical Epidemiologist, The Danish Clinical Registries (RKKP)
2015-17: Postdoc, Department of Clinical Epidemiology (DCE)
2010-2015: PhD student (DCE)
2009-2010: Research assistant (DCE)

Heidi Cueto, Clinical Epidemiologist at The Danish Clinical Registries

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

I never really planned my career. I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time with the right competences and in that way, my career shaped itself. After my PhD, I was offered a 3-year Postdoc position in the same department (DCE) where I just graduated after doing reproductive epidemiology from 2010 to 2015. My PhD research was on vitamin intake and fertility using data from a large cohort with Danish pregnancy planners www.snartforældre.dk, which was an Internet-based study and still ongoing.

Just before my PhD dissertation, we planned a large study on dietary folate intake and fertility among Danish pregnancy planners using data from a FFQ (Food frequency Questionnaire). I helped develop the questionnaire during my PhD. I have always found this area of research incredibly exciting, and therefore it was very natural to continue my employment within the same organization.

During my Postdoc fellowship I also started working with the Danish Clinical Quality databases (RKKP) as an epidemiologist, and in 2017 when RKKP (after a business transfer) became an independent company in the Region, I chose to leave my Postdoc position at DCE, and dedicate all my time to the job in RKKP.

What kind of position do you have today?

I am a Clinical epidemiologist working in the field - Obstetrics and gynecology. In collaboration with the clinicians, I form the indicators of clinical quality, and together with the RKKP-team data-manager, I specify the quality-indicators algorithms and conduct audits. I also have a pivotal role in the Obstetrics and gynecology databases annual reports. In RKKP I work in a total of 4 database teams. Each team consists of an epidemiologist, a biostatistician and a clinical quality consultant. In addition, I am a member of the databases scientific steering committee.

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

During my PhD, I became very interested in the scientific understanding of reproductive epidemiology, fertility

and pregnancy, and in my Postdoc position, I was lucky to be able to continue to work in this area. I was a Postdoc for 2 years, but gradually I became more and more aware, that I also had a desire to be involved in the "present" epidemiology and to conduct studies, that could contribute with rapid results which quickly could benefit the patients – Especially the pregnant women and newborns in Denmark. I knew that working with The Danish Clinical Quality databases, I would be able meet those needs. Therefore, it was obvious to follow RKKP when they were “detached” from DCE as an organization. The opportunity to influence my future work and the young organization (RKKP) in the Region was also important, when I had to decide which career I should pursue in 2017.

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

I worked as a Research assistant at the National Institute of Public Health (SIF in Copenhagen) in the "KRAM-study". In connection with this job, I developed new analytic skills and learned how to interpret data. I also learned to collect large amount of data through questionnaires as well as how to co-work with different municipals in Denmark. Working with the "KRAM study" was my first encounter with epidemiology. The job was incredibly exciting and I was therefore inspired to follow this path forward.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Through a job posting/add. and networking

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

As a Postdoc, I worked in the Competence Center North, which was physically located at CDE. The Center delivered statistical analyzes and annual reports to (and was financed by) RKKP. Since 2017, all Competence Centers in Denmark are located in the “new” RKKP in Aarhus, Odense and Copenhagen.

Describe a typical day/week?

There is no typical day or week in RKKP. My workdays varies a lot. I have many meetings, in both Aarhus Odense and Copenhagen and a lot of correspondence through emails. My work includes a lot of planning, reading, audits, analysis of data and making annual reports.

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

- Descriptive and analytic epidemiology
- Being able to work alone and immerse myself in a subject

- Working in small teams
- Dissemination of results
- Communication with clinicians and researchers

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

Working in a large groups/teams.

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

Nothing, except maybe I would have chosen to give priority to a research stay at a university abroad

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

One must be careful to not stress too much in the three years, where you conduct your PhD.

If you work structured (37 hours pr. week) in all three years, you will be able to complete your PhD with a great result – without sacrificing friends and family.

It may also be a good idea to take advantage of the career adviser at Aarhus University. She helped me a lot.

Maria Daniella Bergholt



Education:
2013: PhD in Molecular Biology
2009: MSc in Molecular Biology
2007: BSc in Biotechnology

Jobs:
2018- present: Industrial Postdoc at Lundbeck A/S
2014-17: Postdoc at BRIC, University of Copenhagen
2009-2013: PhD at Aarhus University
2004-2009: BSc and MSc at University of Warsaw

Michal Lubas, Industrial Postdoc at Lundbeck A/S

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

I started to think about my next career steps 6-12 months before the end of my PhD studies. I was undecided as to whether I would like to pursue my career within the pharmacological industry or academia, and had interviews in both sectors. However, shortly after my PhD defense I received a grant, which allowed me to start researching my own ideas. Because of this opportunity, I ended up choosing to continue as postdoctoral researcher in academia.

What kind of position do you have today?

My position is that of an Industrial Postdoc at Lundbeck.

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

When working at Biotech Research and Innovation Center (BRIC) at the University of Copenhagen, I got to know people focusing on application-orientated research, attended meeting with representatives from industry sectors and had a chance to work with people from a small biotech company. I chose Industrial Postdoc position as my next career step as it allowed me for a smooth transition from academia to the pharmacological industry.

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

Prior to my current job, I played with the idea of travelling to the US for a postdoc position in academia. I attended interviews and conferences in the US and was close to accepting an offer, however, the opportunity at BRIC in Copenhagen turned out more appealing to me allowing me to develop a new skill-set and giving a chance for interaction with an industry partner.

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

I did not have any contacts at Lundbeck, however my own network did help me to identify which people I should

contact in regards to finding a position at this company.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I attended a lecture organized by the Novo Nordisk Foundation, where representatives from Lundbeck had been invited to present. One of the presentations was particularly interesting to me, so I reached out to the speaker, who recommended a contact person in the company. I visited Lundbeck and had fruitful discussions about potential projects that resulted in a grant proposal funded by the Innovation Foundation Denmark. I also had other job opportunities, mostly in small companies, but in the end, I decided that the project based on my own idea was more exciting to pursue and I would also get valuable insight into pharmaceutical industry when working for such a reputable company like Lundbeck.

Describe a typical day/week?

Most of my day I spend on data analysis, planning experiments, writing protocols and reports. Every day, I search through the literature in my research area to stay up to date with the latest discoveries as well as discover potential collaborators. Some days I am in the laboratory or visiting collaborators. I am also receiving help from technicians that is key to my project. I attend meetings, ranging from meetings with my master student I supervise, to meetings with my colleagues working on the same project and all colleagues from the research, as well as meeting with my department director.

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

Teamwork is a very important skill. During PhD studies, I worked alongside other researchers and collaborators to drive new findings and publications, and to ensure stimulating environment crucial for success of a scientific project. I have also learnt how to focus on key information, while processing large amounts of scientific data. Personally, I aimed to gain more experience in data analysis and in-depth understanding of high-throughput techniques, which I found helpful at later stages of my career.

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

During my postdoctoral stay in academia, I decided to further develop my skills in data analysis and broaden my knowledge in scientific topics I have not worked with as a PhD student. I also attended several courses in leadership and management, to learn more about key aspects of group communication.

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

I think that everything I have done has helped me to get to where I am today.

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

Start thinking about your next step in advance, for example 6 months beforehand. This will give you more time to find your dream job. Talk openly about your plans and attend meetings/conferences to get inspired. Try not to follow the crowd, instead focus on your personal goals. Consider applying for all jobs that seem appealing to you, not only those that fit your CV, this way you will get closer to your dream position. If trying to decide between academia and industry, try interviews at both places, and then decide. Stay passionate when choosing your next job.

Do you have any regrets about leaving academia/ would you see yourself returning?

I am very comfortable and very much enjoy my current position. I find the strong focus on application-orientated research very fulfilling, and I enjoy proving things to the end, which is what I am able to do in my current project. Nevertheless, it is too early to answer the question, as I clearly see advantages of both, academia and the pharmacological industry.

Madalina Elena Carter-Timofte



Education:
2015: PhD in Medicine
2011: MSc in Sport Science

Jobs:
2017- present: Regulatory Affairs Specialist, Radiometer
2016-2017: Product Manager – Diabetes, OneMed Group
2015-2016: Product Specialist, Toshiba Medical Systems

Søren Møller Madsen, Regulatory Affairs Specialist, Radiometer

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

I had some speculations about continuing in a postdoc position. However, for two reasons I did not pursue this idea:

- 1) I had to go through multiple short time positions at one/more universities
- 2) During and after my PhD, I attempted to find out how I could apply my academic capabilities to future career in life science business – a thought that was much more attractive to me than academia.

What kind of position do you have today?

Regulatory Affairs Specialist, Vigilance Radiometer.

Why did you decide to go in that direction?

I wanted to translate and apply my experiences with medical devices from academia with regulatory requirements of today's life science business, ultimately saving patients' lives and securing the progress and growth of the organization. To me, it is very satisfying to work in an organization with a clear mission and vision. At the same time, I am proud and humble about working in an organization, which is the leading producer of blood gas instruments.

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

Product specialist (Toshiba Medical Systems) and Product Manager, Diabetes Category (OneMed). From here, I experienced that I wanted to work with medical device legislation working closely with relevant stakeholders.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Very early in my post-PhD career, it was very clear to me that it was an illusion to separate work life from personal life, which was due to chaotic and lacking leadership not supporting one of the most important objects of modern

management, namely the integrity of employees. It was a verbal manipulation, which could have put me in a pond of meaninglessness, ultimately not having focus on optimal balance between work life and personal life. Therefore, it was important to me to sustain my personal values to have a balanced work life with a more meaningful day. Through job research, I found a perfect match between Radiometer and myself, in which I am not only getting my career wishes fulfilled, but also finding a strong and sincere desire on the integrity of people, which I am very happy with.

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

None

Describe a typical day/week?

My work deals with worldwide regulatory affairs, e.g. managing of different types of adverse event reporting with respect to different country-specific legislation, field actions to issue, discussion and implementation of different relevant legislation requirements to improve and sustain compliance. Given the massive work with internal and external stakeholders, development and sustainment of stakeholder management is important. I also work with decision making/strategic outlook of vigilance-related issues, ultimately having impact on the business, customers, user and authorities. I do not like to micromanage, but rather to work with a heavy and strategic decisions.

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

Critical and logical thinking regarding internal and external communication, collaboration between stakeholders, being able to acquire new knowledge fast and scientific conduct: these are important skills/experiences to make the right decisions in a complex and interchanging regulatory environment.

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

I missed and lacked finance/business administration, project management and leadership skills, especially in relation to distributing and prioritising projects. I have had and still have to learn these core business drivers by myself. Furthermore, specific lean tools and tools for problem solving would have benefitted me during my early post-PhD career.

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

If possible, I would like to have had a much closer contact/relation between the industry, patient organization,

hospitals and the PhD project.

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

Seek different career consultants inside and outside the university to find out whether you want to pursue an academic career or in the private sector. Find out those 3-5 experiences/skills that you do are really good at and you really like, and how you see those applied in your future career job. Be open to work with other things than your academic profile suggests, and show your future employer some muscles/confidence (even though your industrial experience may be zero). By having a PhD in Health and life Science, there is a great probability that the need of one's academic competencies and experiences is great and ubiquitous with the nature/type of labour market structure that exists in Denmark.

Peter Sieljacks

PhDs from ST



Education:
2013: PhD in Theoretical physics
2009: MSc in Nanoscience

Jobs:
2013- present: Software developer at
Danske Commodities A/S

Jakob Arendt Rasmussen, Software Developer at Danske Commodities A/S

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

In the last half year of my PhD.

What kind of position do you have today?

I work as a software developer at a trading company.

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

The career path in academia after the PhD did not suit well with the fact that I was already settled with house, wife and three children, and I felt attracted by the more direct usefulness of the conducted work. Furthermore, theoretical physics is de facto performed on computers, so software development was a natural choice.

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

No.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I looked at Jobindex and applied for the Graduate Programme at Danske Commodities A/S.

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

I had contact with an employee that I knew from the university, and had also talked to a manager at the company at a career fare.

Describe a typical day/week?

There is no typical day... My time is evenly distributed between emergency, maintenance, development and planning. I work in normal office-hours with flextime, so I often try to place some work hours in the evenings. My position has no shifts, but if an emergency evolve, we are expected to help in a "best effort"-scheme.

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

I learned programming in Python as a part of my PhD and that was the opening for my position, even though I do not have an IT-education. In addition, the ability to handle complex calculations have been an advantage when solving complex problems in the software for a complex company. Abstract thinking and problem solving is an inherent part of Physics (and PhD's in general) and these are abilities that I use every day.

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

Today I have learned several other programming languages and many business expressions. Teamwork as well, plays a lot bigger role in my current job than during my PhD. In addition, I have learned to seek compromises to a higher extend.

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

I would have focused more on the collaboration/relationship and awareness on personality differences.

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

Do something that is needed – it makes great sense!

What are you particularly satisfied with in your current job?

Being a part of a team where all works in the same direction.

Anne Staub Rasmussen



Education:
2010: PhD in Computer Science
2006: MSc in Computer Science

Jobs:
2017- present: Cercare Medical
2016-2017: Alexandra Institute
2013-2016: Redia
2010-2013: Post doc, Department of
Computer Science, AU

Mads Darø Kristensen, Senior Software Engineer at Cercare Medical

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

I planned to stay as a post doc at the University quite early in my PhD and when I finished I had already ensured funding for my next position. Originally, I wanted to stay in academia but private circumstances meant that I was not able to have enough research stays abroad to get tenure.

What kind of position do you have today?

I am a Senior Software Engineer at Cercare Medical. We are developing an application to visualize brain scans and make decision support for ischemic stroke patients.

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

I do what I am trained to do. Software development and architecture considerations is the same almost independently of the problem you are trying to solve. Right now, I am making medical software and I think that it is an interesting application but it is not a particular direction for me.

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 been a post doc and have had two other jobs before I started at Cercare Medical. My network has been very important in finding these jobs. I was headhunted to my current position by a former colleague who already worked in the company.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I found both my first and the current job through my network. In my field, having a good and large network who knows you for being hardworking and thorough is the most important thing. The most common way to recruit for a job opening is to search the employees' network and the networks' network and then make job adds as a last resort. It is difficult to judge peoples work effort and skills in just a short interview.

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

For my first job, I had many contacts at the University who helped me get funding for my post doc. For my current job, I knew the CTO of the company who recruited me. Again, network is very important.

Describe a typical day/week?

In my current job, I spend a lot of time helping other developers. This is done by architecture discussions, helping to solve specific problems and making code review (all the code we have is read by another person before being included in the code base). The time spend on helping others is caused by my experience and knowledge from my PhD where I specialized in some relevant topics. I also spend time during product development on my own with coding, designing, and such while I listen to music. Because I work in a small company, my job is very varying and I am involved in all aspects and parts of the code and in defining new tasks. If I was a part of a bigger company, I would only be involved in a small part of the code base. I have a very small amount of external communication but my internal communication is extensive.

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

I already had a lot of knowledge of software architecture and coding before I started my PhD. This was obtained from my master studies and working while I studied. During my PhD, I was trained in working independently and being able to control my progress without procrastinating too much. I also got better at learning new things but unfortunately, I do not have much time to do that in my current job because we have to deliver.

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

It is a difficult question as I was able to do the things I am doing now even before my PhD. I have improved my ability to finish things, during the last 10% that account for 90% of the time to make things more polished. I have also improved my team working skills and coordination with others.

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

Nothing, I really enjoyed it.

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

Making a PhD in computer science can be a bit of a waste of time, as employers tend to prefer candidates with more working experience compared to PhDs. A PhD might help on being called to an interview as you have shown yourself as being a clever person but that does not reflect in your salary. I would recommend only during a PhD in computer science if you really want to and think it is interesting, or if you want to stay in academia. Some very big international companies also appreciate it, but that is more like the exception that proves the rule. But it might be a bit late to give you that advice now.

If you want to stay in academia then make sure to have many stays abroad and develop international contacts. If you do not want to stay in academia, then hand in the thesis and get a job!

Anne Nielsen

PhDs in PUBLIC SECTOR jobs



Education:
2007: PhD in Medicine
2000: MSc in Molecular Biology

Jobs:
2018- present: Senior Scientist at NIDO|Danmark and 20% Clinical Associated Professorship at Institute of Clinical Medicine, AU
2014-18: Associate Professor at Translational Neuropsychiatry Unit (TNU), Department of Clinical Medicine
2007-2014: Post doc at TNU (former Center for Psychiatric Research)
2001-2003: Research assistant at Department of Psychiatric Demography, Psychiatric Hospital in

Henriette Nørmølle Buttenschøn, Senior Scientist at NIDO|Danmark

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

After her PhD, Henriette continued in a postdoc position at the same place as she did her PhD. The funding for this position was ensured well ahead before she finished her PhD, why she did not get to the point where she felt uncertain about the future or had to consider other career opportunities.

What kind of position do you have today?

Henriette currently works as senior scientist in the science division of NIDO|danmark. NIDO|danmark is the research- and education support service at the Regional Hospital West Jutland, but they also initiate and conduct their own research.

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

Henriette had thought about trying something new for about a year before she applied for the job at NIDO|danmark. This idea was mainly driven by a wish for new challenges and the opportunity to work in another setting. Henriette also liked the idea of being involved in other projects similar to her own research. Furthermore, she enjoyed to be part of a more collaborative work procedure on a daily basis.

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

Different positions within academia.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Henriette was looking actively for job opportunities and had focus on NIDO|danmark. When a vacancy appeared, she applied for the position.

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

Henriette knew a few people working at the Regional Hospital West Jutland before she applied for her current position, but she did not actively use her network to get information about the position.

Describe a typical day/week?

No day is the same as Henriette has very different work tasks. One important part of her job is to plan, manage and participate in different activities for the PhD students affiliated to the Regional Hospital West Jutland. This includes a joint journal club for all PhD students, workshops, and a research day for all researchers at the Regional Hospital West Jutland. Henriette is also directly involved in different research projects and co-supervising PhD students from very different research areas. Another important task Henriette has is to help brand the research performed at the Regional Hospital West Jutland. By screening published research with relation to the Regional Hospital West Jutland, Henriette helps the communication department to highlight the most interesting and important results. Other communicative tasks Henriette has is to promote to other researchers what NIDO|danmark is and how they can use the center, networking between departments, and consult on and become part of new research projects. Henriette also spend time on more administrative tasks such as writing collaboration- and data processing agreements. Finally, Henriette is involved in the planning of NIDO|danmarks future including the decisions made about the building of NIDO|danmarks new facilities in Gødstrup.

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

During her academic career, Henriette worked with molecular-genetic research, which will become a focus point in her future work at NIDO|danmark. In her current position, Henriette will also get to use her experience with establishing and maintaining a biobank. Of the more general experiences Henriette benefits from today is especially her knowledge about how the research- and academic world operates. Henriette also highlights her experiences from collaborating with researchers from fields different from her own as an important factor, and the ability to network and adapt to different situations.

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

Henriette would have liked a broader knowledge of how other scientific fields than natural science and biomedicine works, and to be aware of, that within one's own field things are don one way, but there are many other ways to do it.

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

When Henriette did her PhD, it was not a requirement to go abroad as part of the education. However, if she should have done one thing differently, it would be to go abroad to experience how other scientific groups works and be part of this.

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

Try not to become too narrow within your own little research field. Broaden up and get new experiences – they are never wasted and can always be used in new and alternative settings you perhaps did not even thought about prior to. Challenge yourself to get outside your comfort zone.

Stine Bak



Education:
2012: Ph.D. in Molecular biology, Aarhus University
2009: MSc in molecular biology, Aarhus University

Jobs:
2017- present: Technology Transfer Manager, Aalborg University
2012-2017: Postdoc, Aarhus University

Louise Berkhoudt Lassen, Technology Transfer Manager at Aalborg University

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

I wanted to stay in my field of studies but was otherwise open for possibilities in positions both in and outside of academia. In the very end of my Ph.D., I started applying for a few jobs, I found interesting. But before I really started planning my career, I was offered a postdoc position in a new laboratory through the network of my Ph.D. supervisor. Thus, my future was settled before I had defended my thesis.

During my postdoc position, I was still open for other possibilities, and I applied for the job at Aalborg University, because I found the link between academia and industry to be very interesting.

What kind of position do you have today?

I work as a technology transfer manager at Aalborg University. When a scientist comes up with a novel invention, which they want to patent and commercialize, we are there to guide and facilitate the process. In this way, I am involved as a sort of project manager from the start of an idea/invention to a finished product. The projects vary a lot in both subject, size and ambition. The first step is always to determine if the invention is applicable for patent. This is usually done with the assistance of a patent agent. If yes, we help the scientists in the following steps, which include funding, patent applications, contact to industry and sometimes founding of a company. It is an interesting process to follow an idea from the laboratory that develops into a commercialized product.

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

I always liked the idea of being involved in projects, which are closer to a usable product. I like the creative process in entrepreneurship, and in my current job, I am involved on both the scientific and the commercial side.

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

I did a five-year postdoc, in which I improved my project managing skills developed during the Ph.D. Having to change the research group from my Ph.D. to postdoc gave me the opportunity to experience different fields of research within molecular biology.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I found a job posting at Jobindex.dk.

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

I had scientific contacts at Aalborg University but no contacts within AAU innovation.

Describe a typical day/week?

My days vary a lot as I work on several different projects, which are at different stages and sizes. Each project needs a unique guidance and approach. I often have meetings with inventors, investors, companies and patent agents. I usually work out of the office one day a week- and this is often in Copenhagen. Between meetings, I have some deskwork, where I coordinate the meetings, help clients get in touch with the right people or companies and optimize applications for patent and funding.

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

During my Ph.D. and postdoc, I learned how to effectively manage projects, which I use in my everyday work at my new position. I have a general understanding of science obtained through my studies and research and this is a huge advantage in understanding and discussing the inventions with the scientists. Having been a scientist and researcher myself, I also have a solid foundation for understanding their mindset and motivations and to communicate in a way they can relate to and understand.

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

As both a Ph.D.-student and postdoc I did not gain any insight into the commercial part of research. It would have been interesting to know more about how collaborations between universities and companies can be developed. Furthermore, I did not have any prior knowledge about patenting, regulatory affairs and the approvals you need before commercializing a product.

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

I enjoyed working very intensively with a specific narrow topic during my Ph.D., but my supervisor still encouraged

me to be very open minded for different areas of my field of science, which meant that I learned the advantage of having general knowledge as well as a huge network. I did not, however, focus on entrepreneurship and the possibilities for having a scientific career within this field.

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

My first advice is that you should figure out what your passion is and what you find exciting. This is what has always motivated me in my jobs. Second, use and expand your network. Through my current job, I have experienced the advantages of having a great network as well as how the right network can help you get the resources you need.

Emil Gregersen



Education:
2013: PhD in virus in spermatozoa
2008: MSc in molecular biology

Jobs:
2018: Teaching biology at Aarhus Katedral Skole.
2017: Online teaching at Kolding HF and VUC, Teaching biology at Tørring High school and teaching chemistry at Vejle Fjords Skolens Gymnasium.
Coordinator at a scientific project in a private company 5h per weekly.
2015: Temporary position as Teacher in biology and chemistry at Kolding IF and VUC
2013: Scientific Assistant

Maja Døvling Kaspersen Fedder, Teacher at Aarhus Katedralskole

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

Maja actually started considering her area of interest before the Ph.D. was initiated. The Ph.D. protocol was designed according to interest and carrier goal. Maja contacted Skejby Fertility clinic at Aarhus University Hospital in order to start a collaboration. The aim was to gather experience within fertility treatment. During the PhD Maja also contacted a private company making fertility related supplements. She was thus active already during her Ph.D., making contacts and investigating the files of interest.

After her PhD, she was open to many types of positions such as post docs or a position in the industry.

At this point Maja had not yet thought of teaching as a possible carrier opportunity.

What kind of position do you have today?

Today Maja works primarily as a teacher. She is also responsible for a project initiated by the company she made contact with during her PhD. Her current position is temporary and even though her experience currently lies within teaching, she has an open mind towards other types of positions.

However, as Maja says, when you have been working within the teaching area it can sometimes feel as if you lack the necessary competences to seek outside teaching.

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

This was actually somewhat of a coincidence that Maja ended up in teaching. A temporary position opened up and Maja took it after a period of unemployment. Suddenly she had relevant teaching experience and the next job opportunity presented itself.

The fact that she still has contact to the industry is a nice “backdoor” if she at some point wishes to pursue a carrier outside teaching.

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

The temporary position gave rise to experience, which could be translated to the next position and so forth. She is now in her fourth employment as a teacher.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Maja found her first job through an add seeking a temporary teacher.

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

Maja both had contact to Skejby Fertility Clinic and a private company producing fertility supplements. She wrote her Ph.D. within the area of fertility. As the world of fertility is rather limited, it proved difficult to find a position after the PhD.

Describe a typical day/week?

The days are very diverse. Within a week, she typically has 12-13 “blocks” of 1½ hour. Between teachings, there is room for preparation. This part of the job can be rather time consuming as it involves preparation for class, evaluation of papers and planning laboratory experiments.

Currently she teaches five different classes. Besides classroom teaching the job also involves 20% laboratory experiments with the students as well as field trips, e.g. to study invertebrates.

“Teaching is actually quite fun” Maja replies and even though it was not in her initial carrier plans, she is happy doing it.

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

When applying for a teaching position it was an advantage with research experience. It was thus a significant asset in the job hunt that Maja had research experience.

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

As Maja ended up in teaching, it could have been an advantage to have a bit more teaching experience. This skill had to be developed later.

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

Maja would have liked to be more conscious about her carrier choices. Perhaps by adding more aspects to the PhD for example by including more industry orientated projects. This could perhaps have opened doors into the industry.

It would then have been possible to upgrade the skills that are asked for, e.g. taking a course or planning a project within e.g. next generation sequencing.

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

When asked for any good advice for new carrier makers, Maja says, “Start looking for jobs early. That way it will be easier to gather the specific skills needed to optimize the chance of getting the job you want. Make contact to the industry and make them aware of your interest for their product/company. Be open-minded towards minor positions as maternity leaves, temporary positions or internships. It is important to get a “foot in the door”.

What considerations have you made concerning work/life balance?

As Maja has family with small children, I asked her about how she maintains work/life balance. She replies that it can be difficult to pursue a carrier when you have small children. You sometimes have to make compromises, on the home front as well as carrier wise, and sometimes you have to say “yes” to a bit more and make an extra effort in order to show, that you want this job. This can at times compromise the work/life balance.

However, several of her female colleagues with small children have chosen not to work a full schedule.

Research can be time consuming. You have to write protocols, apply for funding and gather the necessary approvals from scientific committees. It can thus be difficult to change carrier path and gain new skills when family has arrived. However, Maja adds, it is of course not impossible.

Anne Sofie Rex



Education:
2006: PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience
2002: MA in Cognitive Semiotics

Jobs:
2010-present: Associate professor
2006-2010: Post.doc.
2003-2006: PhD-student
2002-2002: Theatre critic and
research assistant

Mikkel Wallentin, Associate Professor at Aarhus University

What kind of position do you have today?

I am an Associate Professor in Cognitive Sciences at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, affiliated with Center for Functionally Integrative Neuroscience (CFIN).

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

My next career step after the PhD was not as much planned as it was a result of the circumstances. Some of the people I worked with during the PhD secured a large grant, and gave me the opportunity to continue my research with them in a post.doc-position. During that position, I received a grant to continue my research from the Carlsberg foundation, and later got my permanent position through the grant awarded to MINDlab.

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

When I finished my Master's degree in Cognitive Semiotics, the field of Cognitive Neuroscience was on the rise. I was given an opportunity to continue with my research along that line, and I decided to see where it would take me.

How did you find your first job/current job?

During my Master, I started attending meetings and seminars at CFIN, and got to know many of the influential people in the field. When one of them received a large grant, I was hired as a research assistant for a short time. During this employment, I wrote an application for a PhD-grant from Arts, which I was awarded.

Describe a typical day/week?

My typical week differs a lot, depending on which projects I am currently doing. Lately, we have been working on starting a Master's degree study in Cognitive Sciences, which has taken a lot of my time. In addition, I supervise PhD-students, and continue my own research and writing.

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

I learned most of what I do today through my PhD studies, such as running experiments, doing statistics, and technical skills such as operating an MR-scanner. In addition, I learned self-leadership, which is the ability to get things done without someone standing behind you with a whip in hand. In academia, you are never done with learning, and the PhD studies was a great opportunity at learning how to gain new knowledge in an efficient way.

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

While there are many things that could have been done better with the experience I have today, there is nothing in particular I would have done differently. In hindsight, I would have considered taking an education that would have prepared me better for the tasks I do today.

Ole Adrian Heggli

**Education:**

2014: PhD in Genetic Engineering, Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University

2010: MSc in Nanoscience, iNano, Aarhus University

Jobs:

2018: Associate Professor (non-tenured) and Group Leader, AIAS and Department of Biomedicine, Aarhus University.

2017: Assistant Professor and Group Leader, Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) and Department of Biomedicine, Aarhus University.

2014: Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Divisions of Hematology, Oncology and Human Gene Therapy, Department of Pediatrics, Stanford University, California, USA

2014: Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University

Rasmus O. Bak, Associate Professor at Aarhus University and Group Leader at AIAS

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

During his studies in Molecular Biology (elected field during seventh semester of Nanoscience), Rasmus went to California State University, San Marcos, California, USA. From that point on, he focused on pursuing a postdoc in California and during his last year of the PhD, he started applying for grants. Rasmus received a postdoctoral fellowship and a Sapere Aude award from The Danish Council of Independent Research, Medical Sciences to cover 3 years of Post.doc.

How did you find your first job/current job? What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Rasmus contacted laboratories in California without any help from his network in Denmark. He applied for grants in Denmark and told the mentors that the only expense for them was research materials etc.. He is quite sure that his resume and publication list helped him getting their attention since he published well during his PhD.

What kind of position do you have today?

Rasmus is a non-tenured Associate Professor and group leader. An AIAS-COFUND Marie Curie Fellowship that he received in 2017 supports this position for three years. His group and laboratory facilities are located in the Department of Biomedicine, Bartholin building.

After 3 years in California your family and you decided to return to Denmark. Why?

At the end of his postdoc at Stanford University, Rasmus was up for some new challenges.

Companies in California reached out and wanted him to join them and of course, his mentor asked him to continue as part of his research group. At that time, Rasmus received a Lundbeck Foundation Fellowship (5 years) to establish his own research group in Denmark, and he and his family decided to return to Denmark. The main reason for their return was the distance to the family and of course the possibility for Rasmus to become a group leader. Besides the Lundbeck Foundation Fellowship, he also received the AIAS-COFUND Marie Curie Fellowship.

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

The focus has always been on academia. The possibility to go deep within the field of research and being free to go (almost) in whatever direction you want. This part of independency and self-control is very important. For many, working in academia means no work-life balance because it is difficult to stop working. There is always an extra experiment, articles to read, grants to apply for, but for Rasmus this is not always negative. The fact that you can bring work home make it work when it comes to family. Of course, the interest is the main driving force. He doesn't mind working before 08:00 and after 16:00 because he loves what he does. The work environment is and has also been essential and is also one of the reasons that he is still part of academia. As he said, his journey in academia has been through a safe and comfortable route. The most stressful was actually getting the PhD fellowship – it took him three application rounds to get in.

You have only been in academia. Why?

Rasmus has always been in academia and the plan is to stay. As long as it is fun, challenging, rewarding, and exciting he can't see why he would shift to a non-academia job. He likes and appreciates the control and being in charge of where the different projects are going. Nevertheless, you never know, maybe at some point non-academic jobs are a possibility.

Describe a typical day/week?

Rasmus meets around 07:15 and leave between 16:00 and 17:00. Sometimes earlier and he might work in the evenings if necessary/possible. A typical week is applying for grants, looking at the economics of the labs (payments etc.), supervision sessions, meetings, lectures, and teaching. The group is new and there is many new things for Rasmus to learn and handle. The biggest contrast to his last position as a postdoc is the work function, not doing research in the laboratory, but doing research and administration by the desk in his office.

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

During his PhD he gained technical skills that he especially uses when supervising. Troubleshooting, thinking in a different/creative way and being part of many different projects (different collaborators) and project design are all competences that has helped him in his current new position.

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

During his Postdoc-position at Stanford University he was introduced to a different work environment compared to Denmark. They had a different work structure and he was surrounded by very talented and ambitious colleagues. The focus was on producing data and sparring with each other instead of teaching and supervision. At Stanford he gained more knowledge about how to structure a laboratory in the most efficient way and at the same time create a good work environment.

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

Given the opportunity, Rasmus would have been abroad for his PhD. Staying at Aarhus University was really good, but it was the safe way. Taking the jump to California for a PhD, he would probably have gained even more knowledge and experience, and it would have been an amazing and fun experience.

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

Have in mind what is right for you. Maybe you enjoy working more than 37 hours per week and maybe you need that to be happy. Do not look at every step of your career with a "business" perspective but more in a fun and happy way - follow you heart.

Camilla Gunderstofte Nielsen

**Education:**

2015: PhD in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

2013: MSc in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

2010: BSc in Biology, Aarhus University

Jobs:

2017-present: Biochemist, Biochemistry and Immunology, Vejle Hospital

2016- 2017: Postdoc at Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of California San Diego

2015-16: Postdoc at Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics, Aarhus University

Tobias Kromann-Tofting, Clinical Biochemist at Vejle Hospital

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

During my PhD, my main ambition was to establish a career as a research scientist within academia. Therefore, my plan was intentionally to do a couple of postdocs and then move on to become an associate professor. My ultimate goal was to establish my own research group. To increase my chances of becoming an associate professor I planned to strengthen my CV by spending some time abroad both during my PhD and after my PhD. Thus, during my PhD, I went to a university in Leuven (Belgium) as an exchange PhD-student for 6 months. A year before finishing my PhD I applied for several postdoc scholarships in order to get funding for at least 2-years postdoc abroad. I received a scholarship from the Carlsberg foundation and did a postdoc at UCSD.

What kind of position do you have today?

Today I am a clinical biochemist at Vejle Hospital. I work in a clinical laboratory where we analyse blood samples from hospitalized patients and blood samples from local physicians. As a clinical biochemist you have a lot of different tasks. One may say that I act as an operational manager responsible for quality assurance of the biochemical blood tests, but I am also involved in research project in which we develop new and improved methods for analyzing biochemical components in blood samples.

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

Well, I guess it was a mix of coincidence and interests. During my second postdoc at UCSD, I decided to try something different than academic research. My main motivation for applying for a job outside of academia was the constant pressure of getting funding for the next postdoc. Leaving academia, I was still looking for a job where I could apply my research skills within a new area. In other terms, I was looking for a job in which I could work with applied research more than basic research.

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

Yes. I was a postdoc, first at Aarhus University, and then at UC San Diego. I was working within protein biochemistry and biotechnology. Thus, I understand biochemical processes and analytical methods within biochemistry. A basic understanding of biochemistry is fundamental for my current position.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I was looking at job ads on the internet.

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

None. I was living in the US when looking for a job in Denmark, so I did not call the hospital beforehand.

Describe a typical day/week?

In modern jobs, there is no such thing as a typical day. I am in contact with many different people during my day, working on many different tasks. I spend a lot of time writing emails or on the phone coordinating tasks talking with physicians, lab-technicians, and representatives from different commercial companies. I also participate in many meetings. In addition, I have to deal with a lot of ad-hoc assignments related to supporting the lab-technician staff.

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

As a PhD, I learned how to manage a project throughout all phases from the initial planning to evaluation. I use these skills every day, as my job contains a lot of micro project management. In addition I acquired extensive knowledge and insight about biochemistry and biochemical analysis during my PhD. Today I use this knowledge every day to support production of blood analysis results.

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

Since a hospital laboratory is an ISO15189-accredited institution, a lot of documentation is required. During a PhD, you also document your work, but most of it is mainly for your own purpose and is not under any kind of external audit. As a clinical biochemist you have to document all your work in order to fulfill the requirements of ISO15189. The amount of documentation is very extensive, and this is certainly a skill I further developed after my PhD.

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

Nothing. I got to travel a lot. I did exciting research. I was among exciting people. Ultimately, I developed a lot of useful skills that can help me get different types of job in the public as well as the private sector.

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

Use your supervisor's network to get in contact with people both inside and outside of academia. Moreover, plan ahead – at least one year before ending your PhD. Some funding agencies have a very long turnaround time and maybe just one application deadline a year. If you apply for a job outside of academia then do not be afraid of applying for a job that does not match your background 100%. As a PhD, you are educated to adapt and study new areas all the time - and the companies (hopefully) know this.

Ruthe Dieu

