Student Focus

Choosing a career

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As a bioscience student or graduate, you will have already made some important decisions about your life concerning your career. Whatever influenced your decision, you are now faced with a set of new choices, based on not only your degree course, but also your likes, dislikes, beliefs, experience and the job market.

The knowledge and skills you acquire from your studies, laboratory and other work experience placements open the door to a huge range of jobs and training opportunities. It is never too early to start thinking about your next steps and making plans to realize those opportunities, and deciding what direction you want to take.

The first step, and often the hardest, is narrowing down the options in order to single out some of the initial career paths that are right for you. One place to start is to use computer programs and websites, such as the career tests on www.careerpath.com or the career planner on www. prospects.ac.uk, which are specifically designed for this task.

In addition to this, there are numerous other avenues you can try in order to get a feel for the jobs available.

Visit your university careers service

Speaking to a career advisor from your university careers service is an invaluable way to obtain information on the job sector as a whole. These departments and services are there to help you, so make time to go and speak to the experts. Staff will be able to provide you with relevant literature and local contacts, arrange appointments with any relevant specialists, and be able to inform you of any nearby career fairs, training workshops and events.



Go to a career fair

Employment and career fairs are an excellent way to discover more about the jobs available, the companies currently recruiting, and the skills and attributes they are looking for. These are often held in university career centres, particularly in the autumn period known as 'the milk round'. These fairs allow you to speak directly with representatives of many job sectors, helping you narrow down what sort of job is right for you. Organizations exhibiting at careers fairs tend to be large finance, management, retail or public sector organizations, plus a few pharmaceutical companies.

Remember, one career fair will not show you everything that's available, so you may want to attend numerous events for a wider perspective. When attending events, take some time to see who is exhibiting so you can plan who to speak to. It is often useful to take along a CV, either to hand out to employers or to take to CV workshops for advice.

Research the sector

Spend time looking at the background literature available on the job sector you might be interested in. Relevant publications and websites may have detailed job adverts that show exactly what an employer wants from prospective candidates, meaning you can then plan the next steps in acquiring those attributes. The Prospects website (www. prospects.ac.uk) also has numerous job titles that can be searched, with information on typical work activities, requirements, training, career development and related jobs.

Get some work experience

Whether you've firmly decided on your career path, or simply want to test the water before committing, work experience is incredibly useful when deciding on and applying for a job. It not only gives you hands-on experience in the role that you're interested in and allows you to talk to those already working in the field first-hand, but also makes you more attractive to potential employers and provides evidence that you are able to carry out relevant tasks that may be expected of you once employed.

Finding work experience can be tricky, but it can be a lot easier getting that helping hand while you are still studying, rather than going it alone once you have graduated. Look out for summer internships that can be carried out in between years of study. A lot of internships and placements are for students in their penultimate year of study and take place

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during the summer before starting their final year, such as our Summer Vacation Studentships, which are grants to fund laboratory-based placements. More information on internships and placements can be found on our website at www.biochemistry.org/Internshipsandplacements.

More information about the Biochemical Society Summer Vacation Studentship scheme can be found at www. biochemistry.org/summervacationstudentships.

Postgraduate study

As a bioscience graduate, you may want to choose to continue studying rather than seek employment. Postgraduate qualifications often allow you to apply for more specialized jobs that aren't available to the majority of graduates, and allow you to concentrate on a particular subject that interests you most.

There are a variety of different postgraduate courses available, such as PhDs which are research-based and allow you to develop your scientific knowledge. Or others such as a PGCE teaching qualification or a Masters course in business or journalism, for example, which allow you to gain a new skill set while still building on your scientific knowledge.

Useful links

www.prospects.ac.uk: the UK's official graduate careers website, it contains CV and interview advice and job listings ordered by job sector

www.careerpath.com: a website which has several online career tests, as well as CV builders, resources and links to career-oriented sites

www.gradjobs.co.uk: an online magazine with information on where to look for a job, how to spice up your CV, interview techniques and more

http://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/science-and-research: information on the skills that science employers look for, as well as FAQs and interviews with employed science graduates

www.jobsinscience.com: a recruitment site that also contains CV and interview guides www.biosciencecareers.org: a useful blog to keep you up to date with news, events, tips and tools, career paths, and other useful information



Check out our careers guide for bioscience graduates, produced in collaboration with numerous other bioscience learned societies, *Next Steps: Options After a Bioscience Degree*. This is available online at www.societyofbiology/ nextsteps and a hard copy is sent to all undergraduate members when joining the Biochemical Society.

Recognizing rising stars in biochemistry

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The Society exists to promote excellence in research and education in the field of molecular bioscience. As part of this, we sought to recognize excellence at an undergraduate level, which led to the creation of our Undergraduate Recognition Awards. These Awards are offered for institutions to award, at their discretion, an outstanding undergraduate from a molecular bioscience or related course, from any year of study.

The awards not only recognize the rising stars of tomorrow, but also provide the students with something to distinguish themselves from their peers, and demonstrate commitment to science and their career. For the student, the Society provides one year's free membership as continued support.

Anna Kam, the prize winner from the University of Edinburgh, said, "I feel so privileged to have received this Biochemical Society Award. It really is an extremely encouraging and rewarding way to finish university life. Id like to thank all the people who helped me achieve it, particularly all my professors and supervisors who were so patient and supportive, and my peers who I know all worked just as hard and would have equally undoubtedly deserved the award too. Finally, thank you to the Biochemical Society for granting this prize; adding extra motivation for all students to aim high and showing that hard work pays off." If you are interested in finding out more about the prizes, please contact your Local Ambassador (www. biochemistry.org/LocalAmbassadors), see our webpages (www.biochemistry.org/UndergraduateAwards), or contact membership@biochemistry.org.

Please note: only one prize will be awarded per institution per year.



Anna Kam with Matt Brook (Local Ambassador for University of Edinburgh)