Choosing a career: making the right choice for you

Alexa Hime
(Science Education Manager)

Once you have completed your first degree, making the right choice from a wide range of different careers paths can be daunting. Biochemistry graduates can be found doing various jobs throughout society, from research into a cure for Alzheimer's disease to designing proteins and product management. This is because the key transferrable skills obtained from studying a bioscience degree are highly sought after by employers, making a plethora of career options available.

It is important that you select the path that is right for you upon completing your studies. Do you use your scientific knowledge in a direct hands-on manner by embarking on a career in academic research or industry? Do you select a job that uses your knowledge in other ways, such as teaching, scientific publishing or science communication? Perhaps you might be interested in a job that is more linked to your skills than your scientific knowledge, such as finance, IT or working as a civil servant? Some of these options may require further study. As a graduate, you also have the option of gaining postgraduate qualifications in university (for example, a PhD), at specialized institutions or even 'on the job' as part of a career.

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Key transferrable skills that are sought after by employers, such as critical thinking, time management, data analysis, communication, numeracy, creativity, problem solving and team management, are acquired during a bioscience degree. For example, time-management skills are gained through planning laboratory activities during an extended project, communication skills gained through presenting project work during lectures, and analytical skills are developed by analysing and interpreting data; all are valuable to potential employers.

Whatever you decide, it is important to know how best to sell your knowledge and skills. The information in this article, and upcoming articles in this series, can help you to make an informed decision.

The first step

The knowledge and skills that you acquire from your studies, laboratory and work experience placements open the door to a huge range of jobs and training opportunities. The difficult part is narrowing down the options in order to single out the perfect career that's right for you. A good place to start is to use websites, such as the career tests on www.careerpath.com, which are specifically designed for this task. Further links to advice on choosing a career can be found in the job seeker's guide on our website, www.biochemistry.org/careers.

In order to get a bit of a feel for the jobs around, you could also:

Go to a job fair. If you are not sure which direction you would like to take after your degree, employment fairs can be used to get a feel for all the different opportunities that are out there. Often held in university career centres, particularly in the autumn period known as 'the Milk Round', job fairs allow you to speak directly with representatives from different sectors, helping you to narrow down what type of job is right for you. Remember, a job fair will not show you everything that's available, but is a good way to see some of the choices open to you and get advice from people working in those sectors. Some job fairs are very general, whereas others may be tailored to just the sciences or the biosciences, such as the Naturejobs Careers Expo, held annually in September in London, and the Society of Biology's Life Sciences Careers Conferences, held at various locations throughout the UK. Find out more at www.societyofbiology.org.

At the Biochemical Society, we organize free careers events specifically for members, known as our Bioscience Careers Workshops. These events provide the opportunity for undergraduate and postgraduate students to meet representatives working in a variety of professions. More information can be found in the careers section of our website, www.biochemistry.org/careers.

Research the sector. Take some time to look at the background literature available, describing the job sector you might be interested in. A good place to find this is by visiting careers websites and contacting your university careers office. Relevant publications will be filled with detailed job ads showing what you can expect from various careers. You will also be able to speak to a careers advisor through your university, which is a great way to get information on the job sector as a whole. Look out for career profiles in future issues of *The Biochemist* to gain an idea of what sort of jobs are available with a molecular biosciences degree.

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 and applying for a job. It 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. When applying for a job, prior relevant work experience is a huge bonus on your CV.

Remember, as a biosciences graduate, you don't need to leave study at all. Postgraduate courses allow you to specialize further into a field that you enjoy, and many highly specialized technical jobs require these postgraduate qualifications as a prerequisite. More detailed information on postgraduate study options will be available in upcoming issues of *The Biochemist* in your new Student Focus section.

For more information about choosing a career and general career information with useful links, see our web pages at www.biochemistry.org/careers. ■