Career exploration strategies

**Session objectives**

* Postdocs understand how their research skills (gathering information, paying attention to detail, taking notes, managing time, problem solving and communicating results) can be used to their advantage in their career exploration.
* Postdocs introduced to strategy to map their own warm network to discover what people in their own network do
* Postdocs introduced to strategy to expand their knowledge of organisations that interest them (perhaps organisations they have seen in the career cluster pages) and using various search tools to find out more about that organisation and similar organisations in the same area.
* Postdocs introduced to job boards and taken through a strategy that uses job boards to search for jobs based on skills (transferable or technical) they like to use. This type of search allows them to uncover job roles and organizations that might interest them, giving them a starting point for further exploration.
* Postdocs encouraged (through all the strategies) to use their existing networks and reach out (e.g. connect on LinkedIn) to people in order to find out more.
* Postdocs set the challenge of testing each strategy to see if they can incorporate them into their own career exploration.

**Sessions this links to/is preparation for**

As the postdocs leave this session, they will have some new strategies to use to enhance their own career exploration. This will help to take them from a passive position of waiting to find the ‘perfect’ career (or relying too heavily on one source of information e.g. the career clusters), to a more active position of becoming fully immersed in, and responsible for, their own exploration.

The third strategy of searching job boards by skills is directly related to the session on ‘Building your skills inventory for the future’ because these same skills can be used to search job boards. The session on building a skills inventory also refers to a number of frameworks (e.g. Eurodocs transferable skills and the Researcher Development Framework) that can be used as search terms if the postdoc particularly enjoys using these skills. For this skills-based strategy to be most effective, postdocs should have a good understanding of their strengths and the skills they really like to use so as to make their searches tailored to themselves.

This current session also links well to the ‘introduction to self-assessment’ session and the self-assessment exercises that postdocs can access on the portal. This is because they are asked to assess careers/organizations/job roles against their skills, strengths, values, motivations and interests (so as to find a match/alignment).

All three strategies converge on using LinkedIn to identify people to connect with at organisations of interest to them. The postdocs are also encouraged to reach out to people and arrange informational interviews so as to find out more about a particular organization/career/ job title and other opportunities. So, this session also links well to the following sessions and videos: ‘The basics of a LinkedIn profile’, Personal branding and positioning using LinkedIn (parts 1 and 2) and ‘Informational interviews with Elizabeth Adams’.

Given the clear emphasis on reaching out to others to make new connections, the current session also links well to the resources on networking (‘Introduction to networking’ and the additional resources from Jeni Smith on in-person and virtual networking events).

Finally, the use of job boards in this session also provides a gentle introduction to these sites ahead of postdocs potentially using them to apply for jobs. There is more information on understanding and navigating job boards in the Act section of the portal.

**Session format/s (inc. virtual/face-to-face/live or on-demand)**

* One hour live in-person or virtual event.
* A recorded on-demand video of this session is also available on the portal.

**Maximum number of participants for this session (also ideal participant/facilitator ratio)**

Up to 100 participants would be fine with a single facilitator as this is mostly an information session (low level of interaction). There is one poll and one prompt to engage in the chat (but with just single answers that are easy to read out, even with a big group). The tasks at the end are to take away with them rather than do in the session so this does not have an impact on the numbers participating.

**Is this session scalable? If so, how many participants could it be opened up to?**

It could be scaled to a few hundred people as it is mostly an information session and quite directive in terms of strategies to try for career exploration. If done virtually, limitations on numbers could be set by the platform. May need support from an additional facilitator to field any problems and admit people to the session if they come in late.

**Session running time**

* Live running time 1 hr (including some time for a poll and audience participation)
* On-demand video running time – 15 mins.

**Session overview**

Slides demonstrating to postdocs how they can use their research skills to their advantage in their career exploration. Starts with slide looking at what research skills are and challenging postdocs to treat the initial phases of their career exploration as a research project. Three strategies to extend/enhance their career exploration are given. The first one asks the postdocs to map their warm network - the people they know personally. They then look at their careers to see if any appeal to them.

The second strategy assumes that they have an organisation or organisations of interest to start with (and suggests that this may have come from them exploring the career clusters, but could also be from other sources e.g. their current network). A summary of the strategy is then given, showing how they can take this organisation, find out more about it and then find additional organizations (e.g. competitors) in the same area using various tools (Google, an organizations website, business databases, Glassdoor and LinkedIn). A worked example is given for one of the organisations found in the career clusters. They are encouraged to record their findings in a list/spreadsheet/journal and to share this with others.

The final strategy does not assume anything, but does rely on the postdoc being aware of their own skills, particularly those that they would like to use in a future career (can refer back to reflection and self-assessment exercises). This approach is an agile job searching strategy using job boards and inputting skills to identify potential jobs/roles/careers. Some postdocs are unfamiliar with the term job board, so you can do a poll to ask if they know what it is and whether they have used them before. You can also ask them to share names of popular job boards. If the group is unaware, you can speak more about job boards – the three sites named are Indeed, LinkedIn and Glassdoor. The final strategy is summarised and an example is given using Indeed. The postdocs are again encouraged to record their findings so they can look back at them critically to assess if that organization/role/career would be a good fit for them.

The three strategies end with the postdocs being encouraged to reach out to people that work in organisations that they are interested in, in order to make connections, conduct informational interviews and find out more.

**Additional session tools/resources/links**

Two twenty-minute videos from Tina Persson (Headhunting your own job) accompany the session and give more details of the agile job-hunting strategy with worked examples.

Full script and slide deck

PDFs of the summary slides are given for each strategy and the three strategies together.

**Detailed session running plan**

* Session outcomes (what will be covered)
* Making use of your research skills. Treating career exploration as a research project
* Strategy 1: mapping your warm network
* Discussing what your warm network is
* Show how to plot your own network
* Discuss how you can use LinkedIn to expand your network
* Strategy 2: Expanding your knowledge of organisations of interest to you
* Go through the overall strategy of taking an organisation of interest to expand your search.
* Go through the various tools that postdocs can use to gather information
* Take the postdocs through the strategy with a worked example of an organisation found in the career clusters: career cluster page>Google to find similar organizations>organizations website (About us)>using business databases>using LinkedIn to find other organizations
* Go through how to expand your network with LinkedIn (identifying people and joining professional groups)
* Give an example of how you might keep track of your finding using a simple spreadsheet
* Strategy 3: a skills approach using job boards
* Do poll to gauge level of understanding of what a job board is and whether they have used them
* Ask them to tell you in the chat (or in person) if they know of any common job boards
* Go through the Agile job searching strategy with introduction to Tina Persson
* Go through the three major job boards used in the UK – Indeed, Glassdoor and LinkedIn
* Take them through what it means to ‘think like a headhunter’
* Summarise the agile job-hunting strategy giving an example on Indeed
* Emphasise the importance of recording their findings
* Go through how - once they have found an job/organisation that interests them – to switch platform to LinkedIn to identify individuals that work there to connect and ask for informational interviews.
* Summarize the three approaches, emphasising how they all converge on identifying people to find out more
* End with some tasks to take away: try all the strategies, reach out to someone on LinkedIn after trying the strategies and make a template to keep notes.

**What does running the session ‘live’ add?**

* Can take them though an example and they can stop you for any thoughts/comments.
* It is good to get their thoughts (e.g. about Job boards) so they can see what their peers are also thinking.
* Allows you to emphasise certain points and set the task at the end in person (they may be more likely to do it)

**Example copy to use to advertise the session on Eventbrite**

Event title (max. 75 characters) – Career exploration strategies

Details>Description>

Summary (max 140 characters) – A run through of three complementary career exploration strategies to come up with ideas of what types of careers/jobs/roles might interest you

Description – How can you understand more about the careers or people in your network. Or if you have identified an organisation (or a few organisations) that interest you, how do you do more research and start building connections in this area? Or maybe you know which skills (transferable/technical) you want to use in a future career, but are not sure of which organisations or job roles might suit you. This session takes you through three strategies to address these concerns and help you to take ownership of your own career exploration. Come along to find out more about these strategies and how you could implement them yourself.

**Frequently asked questions/pain points for this session**

Participants may be interested to know which (if any) business databases (for company profiles) your organization has access to as this is one of the suggestions for tools to use in your career exploration. You might want to find this out before the session by enquiring or looking at your library website under databases.

**Time and resource input level**

1. **Basic/Minimum/Lightest** – signpost postdocs to on-demand video and PDFs giving a snapshot of the three strategies.
2. **Intermediate** – (all of basic plus…) run live session, taking any questions (e.g. about what, if any, business databases are available in your institution).
3. **Premium/Most intensive** (all of basic and intermediate plus…) Demonstrate the three strategies live with organisations and search terms (for job boards) that you have prepared earlier. Commission an expert (e.g. Tina Persson) on using job boards to explore different careers and to give tips on connecting with people on LinkedIn.

**Appendix 1. Live Script for session**

Slide 1 + 2: Hello and welcome to this session on career exploration strategies. I’m Eamon Dubaissi, a research staff developer with Prosper. Today’s session is all about how you can take ownership of your own career exploration using inspiration from the career clusters, other parts of the Prosper portal and elsewhere.

Slide 3: In terms of the outcomes of today’s session, we would like to first touch upon how you can use your research skills to your advantage in career exploration. We will then spend the bulk of the time introducing you to three strategies for furthering your career exploration. We will also touch upon the importance of reaching out to others to take the next step and point you towards the resources we have to assist you. Finally, we will leave you with some tasks to take away with you and try.

Slide 4: So, let’s begin with how you can make use of the research skills you have developed as a postdoc to explore potential careers. In fact, you could treat career exploration as a research project in itself.

Slide 5: As with some transferable skills that you possess, but may not have given any attention to before, perhaps you’ve never really thought about the skills you are using when conducting research. Indeed.com, which we will come back to later in the session, describes research skills as the ‘collection of several separate skills that help you to find and review information and arrive at a decision’. I’m making the argument here that you can apply this to career exploration too.

‘Indeed’ break down research skills into searching for information (career clusters, conversations, browsing the web), paying attention to detail (where is it, what is it, career progression, career development), taking notes (list, journal or spreadsheet of things that might suit you), time management (how long have I got, when do I need to do things by – being organised), problem solving (based on what I know about myself, would this career suit me and what do I need to do to get there) and communicating results (networking and leveraging the support of others). Hopefully, you can see how you might apply this approach to careers. But one difficulty for you might be in knowing where to start and this is where we are going to try to help.

We’re going to focus in on three strategies that you could consider using in your career exploration. The first one is to map your own network to see what people who you know do and if it is of interest to you. The second strategy is to take an organisation of interest to you (perhaps from the career clusters or another source) as a starting point and build out from there. The final strategy is to take a skills approach and use job boards to identify types of careers that might suit you.

Slide 6: The first strategy is to map your warm network. This is a good place to begin and gets you in the mode of exploring careers. You need to zoom out and take a considered look at your current network and what those people in your network do for a job. You can map your current network – the people that you know - in order to assess whether their career is of interest to you.

Slide 7: But what exactly is your warm network? Essentially, it describes the people that you know personally. And importantly, that they know you in some kind of personal or professional capacity. So, this includes people that are closest to you such as family and friends, but also colleagues and ex-colleagues. It also includes acquaintances, those you have had a few conversations and shared experiences with, but perhaps don’t know so well.

Slide 8: But why is it a good place to start when first embarking on career exploration. Well first, it is a quick and simple way to get started, to do something rather than to freeze. It allows you to start getting some new ideas. Also, it is easy to have informal chats with those in your warm network and they can provide support so you don’t feel isolated.

Your warm network can provide you with motivation, you can share your career aspirations with them and they might be able to help you find others to connect with. Many of your ex-colleagues and acquaintances likely have a similar background to your own in terms of their work history and so this can give you confidence that you too can move forwards and on to new careers.

Slide 9: At first, the aim of plotting your network is to get an overview of what everyone does in order to direct further research. There is no requirement for you to reach out to people for informal chats at this stage, it’s just to stimulate ideas. However, as you know them personally, if something does strike you as being of interest, the best way to find out more is to ask them.

So, start by putting yourself at the centre of the map and ask yourself who you know? Think of all the people around you and put a branch to their name. What do they do? Note down their organisation and role.

You could highlight those people that you are initially most drawn to in terms of their careers. Don’t make too many assumptions at this stage and don’t dismiss anyone whose career you have a feeling wouldn’t suit you when you might not actually know much about that career. You can also highlight those people that might be able to give you support and advice or those people that are well-connected and might know others in a field of interest to you. Once you’ve made your map, take a step back and critically assess which areas you might look into in more detail or who you might have a quick chat with. You might choose a few different careers as a starting point for further research.

Slide 10: As you will see with the other strategies, LinkedIn is an extremely powerful tool to strategically expand your network in areas of interest to you, but it can also be of use in these early stages for analysing your current network. As you are creating your map, you can make use of LinkedIn to remind yourself of connections that you might have overlooked. You can simply browse your connections on the LinkedIn webpage to add people to the map. But you can also download your connections to quickly scan them. At the time of recording, you can do this by going to Settings and Privacy, data privacy, get a copy of your data. Decide whether they are worth adding to your warm network map based on your personal connection to them and what they offer.

Over time as you make new connections, perhaps using the next two strategies that we will discuss, you can add to this map. So it becomes not just your warm network, but it starts to change to include people that you know less well or not at all. But these new connections will have the types of careers that you are most interested in.

Slide 11: This second strategy takes, as a starting point, an organisation that you have an interest in – one you’ve seen in the career clusters or have found yourself – and gets you to expand your understanding of this organisation and others in the same area. It helps you to identify similar organisations to build a picture in your head of what the area/sector/industry looks like.

Slide 12: To summarise the approach, you take an organization of interest (or it could be more than one organization in different areas, but we advise to take them one at a time), gather more information on this organisation and similar ones, plus the types of roles available there. Then it is important to record this information somewhere in a list/spreadsheet/journal to come back to. And also record your thoughts, based on what you know about yourself – would the organisation/role suit you in terms of your skills, strengths and values. Finally, you need to take the knowledge that you have gained and reach out to others for further insight, making new connections and potentially opening up new opportunities

Slide 13: now we will focus in on the tools you could employ to gather more information and identify other organisations similar to the one you had an initial interest in.

When you Google the organisation of interest, not only will you find their website, but often you can also see what other ‘People also searched for’ – this will allow you to identify competitor organisations, which you can note down and look into further.

On the organisation’s website, in the ‘About Us’ section, you can learn more about who they are, what they do and why they do it – does this align with what you would like to do? Sometimes larger companies also post their annual report on their website. This is useful for general research but also if you do apply for a job there, it is a good resource to look at ahead of applications and interviews. Sometimes, an organisations website might also have blogs and news items that you can read for more information

Universities often have access to business databases, for example Marketline, Nexis and D&B Hoovers. You can use these to your advantage to understand more about the organisation of interest, similar organisations and the sector as a whole.

Finally, LinkedIn is a fantastic tool to be able to find out more about organisations and roles and ultimately to connect with people that work there

Slide 14: To demonstrate the strategy, I’ll now take an example organisation from the career clusters to show how you can take things forward and expand your career exploration.

The company that I’ve chosen is LettUs Grow, who are found in the Food and Agriculture career cluster, and they design technology for indoor and vertical farms.

Slide 15: When you Google LettUs Grow, you not only find their website, but you can also find what other people searched for, which may allow you to identify other organizations that sit in the same area. You should make a note of these.

Slide 16: When you go to the LettUs Grow website and scroll to the About Us section, you can find out more about who they are and their culture and ethics. You should ask yourself if these align with your own values and the working culture that you would like to be part of. Do the same for similar organizations

Slide 17: In this example, I searched for LettUs Grow on the business database D&B Hoovers and I’ve highlighted some things you can find here. They often list competitor organisations which you can look for, but you can also click on the Industry to find out more about which other organisations are present in this space. I’ve also highlighted the News section, which may give you more insight into the organisation and is also something you can look at if it comes to applying for a job or before going for an interview

Slide 18: Here I’ve used the website Glassdoor to search for LettUs Grow. This website allows you to look at Reviews from employees and get some insight into salaries. However, approach this with caution as sometimes people have an axe to grind with the company or if there are relatively few reviews it might be hard to make a proper judgement.

Slide 19: Finally, when you search for LettUs Grow on LinkedIn you can view their company page, but you can also see pages people also viewed, allowing you to find additional similar organisations, which you can make a note of and come back to.

Slide 20: So, once you’ve used these various tools for your research and recorded your findings, if you’re still interested in the area, the next step is to use your connections to get more insight and expand your network. You can start off small – share your list of organizations with friends and colleagues. They might know of additional organizations or even people that work there.

This is also where LinkedIn comes into its own. Using the People tab on the organizations LinkedIn page, you can see who works there and what their job title is (make a note of these) and also whether you know anyone there or one of your connections does. You can ask to connect with them (more on the next slide).

On LinkedIn you can also search for professional groups in the area of interest. By requesting to join these groups, you can identify more people to talk to and start to learn the language of professionals in this area.

Once you’ve made some connections, it’s a good time to ask for informational interviews.

Slide 21: So how do you reach out to people on LinkedIn? If you take the example of LettUs Grow, under the people tab you can see who works there and request to connect. If you don’t have any link to them, its best to write a short message (e.g. Hi, I’m really interested in your organisation and I was hoping to connect with you. If you can spare some time, I would love to ask you a few questions) with your connection reqiest. Alternatively, you could just try to connect and see if they accept. If you have LinkedIn Premium, you can send InMails to people you are not connected with, which have a greater chance of reply. People might not reply, but don’t take this personally, it’s just part of the process.

Slide 22: Before moving on to the final strategy, I just wanted to share an example of how you can keep track of what you find, which is really important to go back to when deciding on what to do next. In this example, a spreadsheet showing the organization name, location, job, comments, people you’ve contacted, outcomes and next steps is shown. Once it has been populated, you can look back at it as a whole and ask yourself some questions. Do any organizations or roles particularly stand out to you? Can you rule any others out? Is it still an area that interests you or do you need to look elsewhere? And this is also the time to look back critically at what you know about yourself from the reflection exercises to ask if your own skills, strengths, motivations and values match with those of the organisations you have found.

Slide 23: I’m now going to take you through the final strategy which highlights the use of job boards for career exploration and how searching these job boards by skills can be a powerful approach to identify careers, organizations and roles.

Slide 24: But first, I’d like to do a couple of quick interactive exercises to gauge your understanding and familiarity with job boards. So, if you could quickly complete the following poll, answering the two questions 1. do you know what job boards are? and 2. have you ever used them

<give a few mins, then share the results>

Slide 25: So in the chat <or if in-person, can ask the room>, can you give a few examples of some common job boards used in the UK? <give a few mins and read some out>

Slide 26: Now I want to introduce you to Tina Persson, a former academic, who later worked in the recruitment industry and is now a career coach, author and entrepreneur. So, Tina is well placed to advise in the area of career exploration. Tina advocates an agile job searching strategy that can be used for career exploration and please note that this is prior to making job applications – it’s part of your research. She emphasises the importance of searching by skills rather than job titles, as this opens you up to new areas that you might not have considered before.

This approach is ideal if you’re not sure what you want to do or you’re looking for initial inspiration, plus it allows you to get used to using job boards. It also gives you an understanding of the current labour market, but it should be noted that this market is always changing, so don’t be put off if you don’t find anything immediately and revisit the job boards regularly.

Accompanying videos produced by Tina are available on the Prosper portal demonstrating how to use the agile job searching strategy, but I will summarise the approach here.

Slide 27: Three of the major job boards used in the UK are Indeed, Glassdoor and LinkedIn and you can use them in combination. Just a word about job titles before we begin. We’re often asked for lists of job titles as a means to start exploring, but Tina’s advice is to not obsess about them, they are constantly changing, mean different things in different organizations and they may even limit you by narrowing your search. Employers hire YOU and the skills YOU can bring, they might not always know exactly what they want and your job title could change or be negotiated when you start.

Slide 28: Tina advises to think like a headhunter in your career exploration. By this she means that headhunters search for people by the skills they possess, so why not adopt the same approach when searching job boards.

As a starting point for this approach, you first need to identify some of your transferable and technical skills. Visit the reflect section of the portal and ask yourself what are your strengths and which skills do you like to use?

You should look back at your skills inventory, if you have made one, and also frameworks that articulate transferable skills if you’d like some help (for example, the Researcher Development Framework and Eurodocs transferable skills).

Slide 29: here’s a quick summary of the strategy. You should take some of your preferred transferable or technical skills and input them into one of the job boards, Indeed is a good place to start. If you get too many hits to properly look through, one way to narrow it down is to also add in PhD and/or the broad discipline area. Note that the careers you look at might not require a PhD but this is just one way to search a job board that might rerun thousands of hits. In the example here, I inputted supporting, communication and influencing together with Life Sciences and PhD.

Then you need to scan the job ads to see which ones stand out (which roles and organisations stand out to you – as before, keep some notes). Then go to the job description – can you find any additional skills or new terminology that you can use to repeat the search and find more jobs. The final step, much like the previous approach is to switch platforms to LinkedIn in order to identify people to connect with and arrange informational interviews.

Slide 30: Again, like for the other the other strategies, it’s important to record your findings. Remember to copy job ads of interest to your own notes because you will lose it once the deadline for applications passes. If something does interest you, note down the reasons why, the name of the organization, plus at this stage it may also be worth noting down job titles so you can identify people with these titles on LinkedIn. At this point, don’t be put off by the job descriptions and requirements – one, you’re not actually applying yet and two, remember that job descriptions are a wish list - it’s rare for anyone to tick all the boxes.

Slide 31: When you switch platform to LinkedIn, you can search for the organization of the job that interested you, identify people within that organization, perhaps you could look for those with PhDs (you have something in common that could trigger them to reply to your message). Also, at larger organizations, look out for talent acquisition managers whose job it is to interact with potential recruits. As before, with a basic LinkedIn account, connect with a note. If you have Premium, you can send an InMail. But in both cases, be prepared that some people may not reply, don’t be put off, this is part of the process.

Slide 32: I just want to end by summarising the three approaches to enhancing and taking ownership of your career exploration. They have several things in common and can be used alongside each other.

Slide 33: : In all of the strategies, you can leverage your research skills to gather information, record it and reflect on what it means to you. Use this to your advantage, not everyone possesses these research skills.

The first strategy relies on you understanding and mapping your own warm network to identify potential career areas of interest to you. If you find an organisation of interest using this approach, this can then feed into the next strategy. Or maybe you have seen an organisation in the Prosper career clusters that sparks an interest. Wherever you get the initial interest from, the second strategy gives tips on how to find out more about that organisation and related ones.

In the final strategy, you use a skills approach to search job boards to identify careers, organisations and roles that might suit you.

All of the strategies described converge on reaching out to people in order to gain greater insight and realise new opportunities. The Prosper portal has lots of resources on reaching out to others. This includes more details on using LinkedIn, tips on networking and overcoming barriers to speaking with others. Plus, how to conduct effective informational interviews.

Slide 34: So finally, I want to leave you with a few tasks to try in your own time. I want you to have a go at each of the strategies. Start to map your own network using the first strategy. Test out the second strategy by identifying an organisation that interests you in the career clusters. And try the third strategy by searching a job board such as Indeed with skills you particularly like to use. Then, if you feel ready, reach out to someone on LinkedIn to find out more about a particular job or organisation. Finally, make a template or some kind of list/spreadsheet that you can populate over time.

Slide 35: Thanks for attending today’s session, I hope you have found it useful and can try out some of the ideas presented