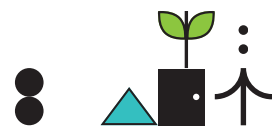


Prosper: Case studies in postdoc career development

September 2023 - September 2026





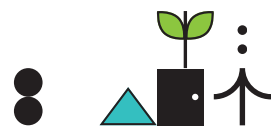
Contents

In September 2023, Prosper secured £450,005 from UKRI to accelerate a UK-wide rollout across higher education and research institutions through to September 2026. This booklet contains a total of 13 case studies collected between April 2025 and March 2026.

The case studies capture stories and experiences from the postdocs who have engaged with Prosper – both through the University of Liverpool's cohorts and at adopting institutions. They demonstrate Prosper's flexibility and usefulness as a postdoc career development resource, and portray individual career journeys across different career pathways.

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Laura Bozicevic

Laura joined the University of Liverpool Prosper cohort in 2025. Laura is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Institute of Population Health at the University of Liverpool. Laura works in developmental psychology, specifically focusing on cross-cultural studies. Her fellowship explores school readiness and educational outcomes across different ethnic groups in the UK.



Case study shared: February 2026

The Challenge

Laura's career path has been non-traditional. She started this in Italy before taking maternity leave to have three children. As a result, her PhD took longer than expected and overlapped with the start of her postdoc position, which she moved to Liverpool to undertake. As an international researcher, Laura did not have a deep understanding of the academic landscape in the UK and felt like she needed to take some time to develop herself and understand this better.

“ I really enjoyed the experience. Prosper provided me with far more tools than I initially expected, particularly on a personal level.”



The Prosper journey

Laura joined the Prosper cohort to enhance her understanding of the UK academic landscape and to explore what potential options existed for her outside of academia. Laura appreciated the structured approach of the cohort as it provided her with dedicated time to reflect on her priorities and how she might improve herself professionally for future roles.

For this reason, Laura found the practical exercises on the Prosper Portal most useful. One of the biggest takeaways was learning about time management in terms of how to prioritise tasks and how to say “no”. It prompted a lot of personal reflection and validated to Laura that she is a good colleague, making it easier for her to set boundaries in the workplace.



“I realised that I am a reliable and valuable colleague, and that acknowledging those strengths actually makes it easier to set boundaries. ”



Laura also engaged with the buddy groups and found that meeting with fellow postdocs before main sessions helped to build her confidence and feel connected to the wider cohort. Laura valued hearing about other postdoc's perspectives and experiences, which in turn enriched Laura's understanding of the UK academic environment..

“A key shift for me through Prosper was the realisation that I want my research to have a practical impact.”



Next steps

Laura's in the first year of her three-year fellowship and is passionate about her research, describing it as her 'first love'. Throughout the cohort, Laura realised that she wants to reorient her work toward policy and developing practical interventions or trials for family.

Although Laura intends on securing further funding and staying within academia, she realised the importance of having a “Plan B”. Prosper helped Laura to become more open to exploring roles outside of academia in the third sector, charities and government.



“Your personal development is just as important as the research itself. We often focus so much on "getting things done" for the project, but you have to be the one to drive your own career development.”





Alzbeta Chabronova

Alzbeta joined the University of Liverpool Prosper cohort in February 2025. Alzbeta is a postdoctoral researcher specialising in molecular and cell biology within the Institute of Life Course and Medical Sciences. Her research explores how cells regulate protein synthesis in aging and various diseases.

Case study shared: September 2025



The Challenge

Prior to starting the Prosper cohort, Alzbeta struggled with time management and prioritisation. Often, the day-to-day demands of her role meant that Alzbeta postponed non-urgent tasks and as a result, professional development fell to the bottom of her to-do list. Alzbeta saw Prosper as an opportunity to be proactive in her career development and invest in herself and her future career.

“The supportive and inspiring environment made the cohort enjoyable rather than a chore.”



The Prosper journey

Prosper gave Alzbeta with the space and structure to reflect, explore and approach her future with curiosity and an open mind. She attended various career development sessions on topics like time management, building confidence, identifying skills and networking.

Alzbeta enjoyed the diverse nature of cohort and found it beneficial to connect with researchers with different experience levels, backgrounds and fields. Amongst whom, she learnt that her peers faced similar challenges and benefitted from hearing the perspectives of others who were further along in their careers or who had taken different paths.

Alzbeta found the ‘Reflect’ section of the Portal most useful as it helped her to identify her strengths, skills, values and motivations.



“It is always worthwhile to invest time and effort into your future.”



The cohort gave Alzbeta space to reflect on what mattered the most to her in a role, while recognising what skills she excels at and enjoys. This provided her with some steer when it came to exploring different types of roles where she could apply those skills effectively.

Alzbeta's attitude to professional development has shifted. Previously, she would postpone development activities until her contracts were ending and then frantically apply for jobs. Now, Alzbeta sees development as an investment into her future, feels better prepared to choose a career path where she can thrive and is more confident in her approach to future job applications.

“Take a moment to pause and reflect. Don't be afraid to consider changing the path or to explore an unconventional career direction.”



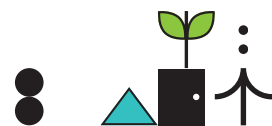
Next steps

Alzbeta intends on using up the two years left on her current contract at the University of Liverpool proactively by exploring opportunities both within and beyond academia.



“Prosper gave me the tools and dedicated time to reflect, explore options and broaden my horizons. I now feel better prepared to choose a career path where I can thrive, and approach applications and interviews with confidence.”





James Charles

James joined the University of Liverpool Prosper cohort in 2025. James is a postdoctoral researcher in evolutionary morphology and biomechanics who works within the faculty of Health and Life Sciences at the University of Liverpool. His current research looks at dog gaits and aims for a better understanding of how shape influences movement from a biomechanical perspective.

Case study shared: February 2026



The Challenge

James has been a postdoc for almost a decade and struggled to find a permanent academic position. Despite seeking out careers advice previously, James found this too generic to be useful. James also felt that his interests and specialisms (biomechanics, anatomy etc.) didn't neatly align with broad, disciplinary definitions, placing him somewhere between biology and engineering.

“Prosper appealed to me as a way of exploring options beyond academia for someone with my experience and skillset.”



The Prosper journey

James joined the Prosper cohort to access a targeted, structured form of career development which would allow him to explore his options beyond academia.



During his time on the cohort, James found the group and individual coaching sessions the most useful. In a one-to-one coaching session, James discussed his career interests and what he would be open to doing outside of academia with his career coach.



The session was great for identifying what skills he had and how they could be applied to a myriad of different contexts elsewhere. James left the session knowing how to better sell himself and with a good list of sectors and job roles to follow-up on.



“Take the time to actually sit and think about what you’re good at, because it’s very easy to just forget about it until you don’t have a job anymore. Even it’s just an hour a week – take the time to think about your skills and career options.”



James attended monthly group coaching sessions across six months and appreciated having time to connect with others and share what each other is good at. Overall, James found connecting with other postdocs outside of his department enjoyable and felt reassured knowing that many other postdocs were in similar situations and facing similar challenges to himself.

“Prosper was useful for identifying sectors to look at where my skills and experience could translate well.”



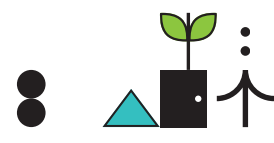
Next steps

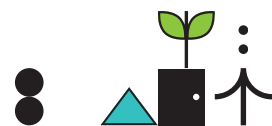
James’s current contract finishes in the summer of 2027 and is hoping that a UKRI grant application will extend his employment. James is considering a fellowship application and keeping his eye out for lecturer positions in the event that his grant application is unsuccessful.

Although James intends on remaining in academia for the foreseeable, he is open to searching for roles beyond academia (e.g., in bioengineering) within the next couple of years if necessary. Engaging with the cohort helped James to identify sectors where he could look for roles where his skills and experience could translate well.



“You are more hireable than you think you are. A lot of postdocs think that they’re only really good at what they do, but you possess a wealth of transferable skills that would be welcomed in a wide range of professions.”





Devon Crouch

Devon joined the University of Liverpool's Prosper cohort in February 2024. Devon was a former postdoctoral researcher in the Institute of Life Course and Medical Sciences. He worked on tissue engineering and regenerative medicine by creating artificial tissues. Since then, Devon has switched to an industry role as a Sustainable Packaging materials Scientist at Unilever.



Case study shared: April 2025

The Challenge

Devon had recently finished his PhD and had been a postdoc for two months before he applied to join the Prosper cohort. Although his PI thought he could have a good career within academia, as a new postdoc, Devon did not know what he wanted his career to look like in the long run. Prosper was recommended by his PI as something which could help him figure out his future career options.

“Before Prosper, I had never really paused to figure stuff out. I went straight from undergraduate, to a Masters, to a PhD and then full-time employment without a break.”



The Prosper journey

Devon joined the Prosper cohort as a new postdoc and found the community element beneficial, particularly the buddy group and group coaching. Having conversations with other postdocs and hearing their viewpoints helped Devon to focus his thoughts at this period of uncertainty in his career journey.

Prosper also helped Devon realise that he has lots of skills which are highly relevant to non-academic contexts that he hadn't thought about before – including the likes of time management, meeting deadlines and presentation skills.

Over time, Devon learnt what he wanted out of a role and his future career. He engaged with Prosper's 'Reflect' resources and ultimately realised that having a sense of purpose was important to him and that he wasn't going to be able to fulfil this within a traditional academic career pathway. He wanted to be on a team making big wins and to see tangible results and impact of his work.



“The resources that really stuck out for me were those on CV development, cultivating an online presence, and interview prep. “



Devon gained much from Prosper’s practical sessions and resources on CV development and job applications, as they filled gaps in his experience and understanding. This proved vital to his job search for roles beyond academia.

Towards the end of the cohort, Devon’s hard work paid off and he secured his current role at Unilever. In this role, he is a valued member of a Research and Development team that works towards the broader aim of making the organisation’s packaging portfolio more environmentally friendly.

“One of the main benefits I got from Prosper is that it really spurred me to reflect on what drives me, and realise the sort of working style I needed.”



Next steps

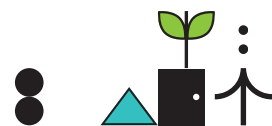
Devon hopes to continue working in his current role to find and test packaging solutions for a range of applications to achieve his organisation’s aim.

Devon hopes that along the way, he will see his team win, grow and is interested in going into a leadership and management role in the future. He plans on making the most of his organisation’s many development opportunities and pathways during his post.



“This mode of thinking and self-reflection that I got from Prosper is something I’ll carry with me for the rest of my career now – I still think like this now in my current role. How do I grow? What do I see my career looking like in the short, medium and long-term?”





Rebecca Jensen

Rebecca joined the University of Liverpool Prosper cohort in 2025 as a postdoc working in the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics. Rebecca is a Pharmacologist working on a clinical trial to improve HIV treatment outcomes in children. She also works part-time as a lecturer to create online learning material for the British Pharmacology Society.

Case study shared: September 2025



The Challenge

Rebecca joined Prosper when she was in the last year of her postdoc contract during a period of career uncertainty. Unsure of what to do next, Rebecca saw the cohort as an opportunity to reflect on what she wanted from her future career and how she could achieve that.

“Sessions which offered practical advice were the most useful for me, especially as I was searching and applying for jobs at the time.”



The Prosper journey

During Rebecca's time on the cohort, she attended a range of career development sessions covering a variety of topics. Rebecca found the various session formats, including online and in-person sessions with group and individual coaching, to be engaging. The most helpful sessions for Rebecca were practical ones related to job-searching. For example, sessions on using AI to find roles and using the STAR method for demonstrating skills.

Rebecca also valued having opportunities to speak with other postdocs facing similar challenges during group coaching and buddy group sessions. This peer-to-peer support meant they could offer each other advice and tips based on previous experiences or information they had learned throughout the cohort.





“There was a lot of useful information that is relevant no matter what stage of your career you are at, and that you could apply to your career development now, or use in the future.”



The individual coaching session provided Rebecca with tailored support and guidance on her future career. From the session, Rebecca identified the skills and values that she would like to take into her next role, as well as what she'd like to avoid. She gained a better sense of the next steps she could take in her career development, alongside different career options she may wish to explore in the future.

“It was good to have dedicated time to focus on my career development and to connect with other postdocs across the University.”

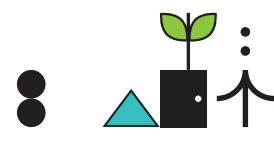


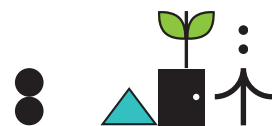
Next steps

Rebecca's current postdoc position has been extended and for now, her focus remains on her current project. She plans to apply for some research grants to continue the work she has doing in her current project.

Rebecca also intends on looking for opportunities to gain more transferable skills in teaching, public engagement and leadership. Although Rebecca intends on staying in academia, she now has back-up options of different career pathways that she can explore for her future career.

»» “There is never a wrong time to start working on your career development, whether you have a permanent or temporary job, or are at the start or middle of your career. It is always a good idea to think about the future and the Prosper cohort is a good place to start.”





Henry Koge

Henry joined the University of Southampton Prosper cohort in 2025. Henry is an educational leadership researcher and entrepreneur and worked within the School of Education at the University of Southampton. Beyond his role, his work at Teach Connect focuses on raising teaching standards and capacity building for leaders.



Case study shared: March 2026

The Challenge

Before engaging with Prosper's offering at the University of Southampton, Henry was questioning his future at the institution. He then met Curie Scott (Researcher Developer at the University of Southampton) at an gained insight which validated his thinking about his future career.

"The cohort experience was fantastic and truly eye-opening. It provided a dedicated space to reflect on my career my past and my strengths."



The Prosper journey

After learning of Curie's career journey and of the possibility to transition between disciplines, Henry was inspired to join the University of Southampton Prosper cohort.

Henry found the sessions focused on practical career tools such as CV-building helpful. He also valued the smaller, activity-based sessions looking at a single problem from multiple perspectives - this pushed him to think differently.

The community aspect of the cohort was another highlight for Henry, who felt like academia could feel very siloed. The Prosper cohort helped to bridge those gaps as Henry was able to connect with peers from unrelated fields, share ideas and get feedback which he could apply to his own work. Henry remains in touch with three members of the cohort despite no longer being a part of it.





“The cohort allowed me to see that my skill-set didn’t limit me to the traditional lecturer to professor path within academia. It showed me there was a much wider landscape of possibilities out there.”



Henry realised that he did not need institutional approval to make an impact in his career and made the decision to resign from his position at the University. He moved back to Cameroon and secured a position as the CEO for a school complex.

“I recommend Prosper to other researchers. It’s a space where you can truly discover your potential and you definitely won’t regret it.

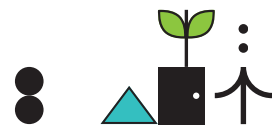


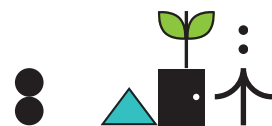
Next steps

Henry hopes that in his current role he can transform educational provision at his school by pushing project-based learning and STEM, giving students more agency and practical skills. While Henry may return to academia one day, he does not see this as a priority right now.

In the meantime, Henry is working on upskilling in data science, machine learning, AI and robotics. He hopes to explore how these technologies can be used for social enterprise and innovations in education.

“Don’t just be narrowly focused on the ‘socio-cultural programming’ that tells you a degree and job is the only path. My advice is to use a space like Prosper to find out not just what you are capable of doing, but who you are.”





Sharon Lin

Sharon is a Statistician currently working on health and preventative health projects at the University of Southampton. She was a member of the University's first Prosper cohort in 2025. Sharon has been a researcher for a long time and has applied her skills and experience in Statistics across a range of disciplines. For example, her previous role involved financial markets whereas her current research focuses on health.

Case study shared: November 2025



The Challenge

Sharon joined the Prosper cohort wanting to gain more independence as a researcher and to explore more options for the future, including those beyond academia. She wanted to feel more confident in her ability to make positive career choices in the future, instead of simply reacting to what roles are available.

“It’s very helpful to look at oneself, your career goals and values. Previously I was more looking at opportunities available to me, rather than thinking about what I can do for myself too.”



The Prosper journey

Sharon saw the University of Southampton Prosper cohort as a great opportunity to engage in self-reflection and challenge her thinking and approach to career development. She found the structure of Southampton's cohort enjoyable, with sessions being built around informal lunches with other cohort members. This fostered a relaxed atmosphere and allowed Sharon to share her experiences with postdocs who were in similar circumstances.

Sharon also enjoyed some of the activity-based sessions during her time on the cohort. She found the practical nature of the sessions a welcome contrast to the more structured, lecture-like form that career development can sometimes take.



“Prosper has given me some useful tools and thinking for how to approach my next step.”



During the cohort, Sharon realised the usefulness of social media platforms such as LinkedIn for networking. From attending a session on this, Sharon went away with clear actions on how to improve her LinkedIn profile and intends on dedicating some time to this.

When the Prosper cohort ended, Sharon had gained some ideas into future possibilities for her career both within and beyond academia. Sharon also left with more confidence in being able to make an informed decision about the next step in her career.

“I think the most important thing is believing in yourself and your capabilities.”

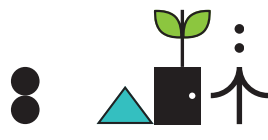


Next steps

Sharon is content in her current role and plans to remain in academia for the time being. Feeling more confident, she is now beginning to explore possibilities for her next career step—including expanding her current role and potentially moving into a more commercial area of work.



“I definitely recommend Prosper to other researchers. I think it’s useful even for postgraduate students. And it’s especially useful for women researchers who have had families/taken a career break.”



Erin McCloskey

Erin joined the University of Liverpool Prosper cohort in 2025 as a postdoctoral researcher in the Institute of Population Health. Erin specialises in public and patient involvement (PPIE) and participatory health research, with a strong commitment to advancing maternal and reproductive health equity. Originally from the USA, Erin had previously worked for several years within universities in professional service roles.



Case study shared: February 2026

The Challenge

Before joining the cohort, Erin had recently returned to work after a period of maternity leave and found herself feeling stuck and unsure of who she was as a researcher. Erin felt unprepared and struggled with prioritisation as she navigated the exhaustion of new parenthood, juggling this with work and searching for her next role.

“I applied to Prosper because I needed a protected space during the working day to step back and think about my career.”



The Prosper journey

When Erin joined the Prosper cohort, she was looking for support with figuring out her identity as a researcher and what her next step would be in her career journey.

Erin really engaged with the group coaching and fostered a great connection with her group. She was welcomed by a group of diverse peers, and Erin found comfort in being around others who were navigating similar career paths and immigration hurdles.

Erin engaged in extracurricular cohort activities which allowed her to reflect on her core values. Erin found this to be valuable, as it made her realise that she values security and working within a positive, team environment. This insight shifted Erin's way of thinking away from pursuing a solo fellowship to looking for future roles that align with her values, whatever they may be.



“The cohort was a fantastic blend of people from diverse backgrounds. As an immigrant myself, I found it comforting to be in a group with so many nationalities.”



Throughout the cohort, Erin realised the importance of goal-setting and saving a small part of her day to have time for herself and work towards her own development.

Erin attended other Prosper sessions outside of the cohort such as one on demystifying the recruitment process. She found this incredibly useful as it destigmatised the idea of working with recruitment agencies and opened her eyes to more creative ways of finding a job.

“In academia, you’re trained to be hyper-focused on your specialism, but Prosper gave me the tools to ask myself what actually makes me want to go to work in the morning.”



Next steps

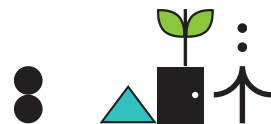
Erin intends on staying in her current role until her contract ends in July 2026. Although she is passionate about women’s health and mental health, she has realised through Prosper that she values security and a positive team environment over following a specific research niche.

Erin is taking a light touch approach to her job search by “job grazing” which involves reading job adverts and newsletters to gain an awareness of what’s out there. In the future, Erin will be looking for roles that align to her values where she can be a strong team contributor, perhaps within digital health or data science.



“I initially went in thinking Prosper would “solve” my career...but what it actually did was far more valuable: it made me ask questions about myself that i’d never been prompted to ask during my PhD. It helped me identify that I value stability and teamwork.”





Rosa Morra

Rosa was a member of Prosper's second pilot cohort in 202X whilst working at the University of Manchester. In May 2023, she transitioned from academia to industry. Rosa now works as a Principal Scientific Programme Manager at EMQN CIC, a leading global provider of quality assurance tools and knowledge to the human molecular pathology and genomics testing community.

Case study shared: September 2025



The Challenge

Rosa's motivation to join the Prosper cohort was to carve out dedicated time for her career development. Juggling parenthood with home-schooling and work, Rosa simply did not have the time to think about her career development. Rosa wanted structure and support with understanding what other options could be available to her beyond academia.

"I think all the resources gave me a shift in confidence. Especially as I didn't have all the tools or know how to sell myself beyond academia."



The Prosper journey

When Rosa joined the cohort, she was a Research fellow at the University of Manchester and enjoyed the lab-based nature of her role. She had some awareness of the things she did not enjoy in a role such as writing and work-place politics.

Rosa found the practical sessions on CVs, LinkedIn and networking the most useful. She learnt the importance of using networking to sell herself. Following a session on LinkedIn, Rosa set up a LinkedIn profile and made new contacts with individuals within companies. Rosa even contacted colleagues who had moved from academia to industry to have exploratory chats about how they found that transition.

Rosa also benefitted from engaging in group coaching sessions. The coaching provided her with space to think about her priorities, what she wanted, and how to make a schedule to boost productivity on a day-to-day basis. Overall, Rosa enjoyed getting to know other postdocs who shared common challenges and experiences.



“I’ve come to appreciate how many transferable skills academia provides — such as problem-solving, project management, critical thinking, and adaptability.”



In 2023, Rosa transitioned from academia to industry where she secured a role at EMQN CIC as a Scientific Programme Manager. In 2025, she was promoted to a Principal Scientific Programme Manager. Her role involves leading and managing a team responsible for delivering quality, ISO 17043-accredited genomic-based external quality assessment (EQA) services. Rosa has found the transition smooth, rewarding and full of professional growth opportunities.

“One key takeaway has been the importance of expanding and nurturing a professional network.”

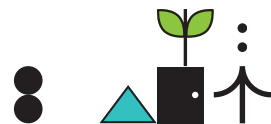


Next steps

Rosa intends on continuing in her current role and developing further as a professional. She hopes to develop new leadership and strategic skills, deepen her understanding of quality systems and broaden her impact within the genomics and healthcare quality sector.

»» “Don’t be afraid to step outside your comfort zone. Even if you find yourself in a new area or a more structured environment than academia, the transferable skills you’ve developed during your PhD and postdoc — such as resilience, independence, communication, and problem-solving — will serve you well.”





Paras Naik

Paras joined the University of Liverpool Prosper cohort in 2024 as a Senior Researcher working within the School of Physical Sciences. Paras is a particle physicist and explores fundamental constituents of the universe to find a better understanding of the symmetries that govern their dynamics.

Case study shared: July 2025



The Challenge

Paras has been a postdoc for almost 20 years and is deeply passionate about his work. For the first few years of his career, he had limited opportunities to engage with career development. On average, he engaged with professional development once a year. Paras applied to the Prosper cohort in the hope that his experience could benefit other researchers.

“I was relatively new to the university at the time I joined, so it was a good way to get out of my bubble and make connections.”



The Prosper journey

Paras joined the cohort with many years of experience working within academia behind him. Although his motivation to join was to help other researchers, Paras got more out of the cohort than expected. The cohort enabled Paras to re-discover his confidence and see outside of his own bubble of working.



During the cohort, Paras attended many of the development sessions on offer. He particularly enjoyed the strengths profile exercise and the coaching sessions. He found the 1:1 coaching so valuable that he is considering continuing with this in his own time.



Paras also reflected on his values throughout the cohort. After attending the Skills audit session, Paras realised that he has more transferable skills than he initially thought. Realising that he possesses many transferable skills, and that there is a market for them elsewhere, reminded Paras of his value.



“I think there’s a lot to be said for resilience and persistence – and for forging a career journey that works for you. Development opportunities like Prosper are useful for getting this sort of perspective.”



A big takeaway from the cohort was the community element. Paras found peer-to-peer communication a great catalyst for organising his own thoughts and enjoyed lending his experience to helping others. As he was new to the University at the time, the cohort also provided him with an opportunity to get out there and make new connections.

“The good thing about the Portal is that when I do need it, it’s there.”



Next steps

Paras’s focus remains on his current project and intends to remain in academia. His aim is to secure a permanent academic position, even in the uncertainty of the wider funding environment.

Although Paras feels strongly about remaining in academia, he is realistic about looking at options beyond if the current research landscape shifts. Paras feels confident that he has more tools at his disposal, including the Prosper Portal, to explore those options when the time comes.

»» “When I’m working or focused on getting the next contract there can be a bit of tunnel-vision – I’m in my own little world, and it’s very competitive. Programmes like Prosper help me see outside of that bubble. It reminds me that I do have many useful skills and that there’s a market for these elsewhere too.”



Ajay Saroja

Ajay joined the University of Southampton Prosper cohort in 2025. Ajay is a postdoctoral researcher in the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering. Ajay's research focuses on the safety on lithium-ion batteries and she is currently researching safer, non-flammable solid materials to create safer batteries of the future.

Case study shared: February 2026



The Challenge

Ajay joined the Prosper cohort to obtain better insight into the direction she needed to travel to reach her goal of becoming an independent academic. Feeling confident with her technical research skills, Ajay knew that she required a broader set of “uplifting skills” to progress, but wasn't sure where to find the right resources or how to avoid deviating onto the wrong path.

“I saw Prosper as a way to access missing information and get the support I needed to move forward.”



The Prosper journey

Before joining the cohort, Ajay tried to explore the Prosper Portal independently, but found the sheer volume of its resources overwhelming. The Prosper cohort at the University of Southampton provided Ajay with a structured package that made the materials much easier to engage with.



The cohort involved working in small groups with other researchers, which Ajay especially appreciated. She felt free to express her views and talk about the challenges that she faced with her peers. Having mentors and postdocs in similar positions with whom she could talk freely made a huge difference.



Being an introvert, Ajay found the networking aspect of the cohort the most useful. She learned how to approach people for informal chats, how to conduct informational interviews and how to use LinkedIn more effectively.

“Prosper was incredibly useful in teaching me how to approach people, especially those at a much higher level in research.”



Ajay has put the skills she learnt into practice and reached out to several people who had recently secured academic positions to talk about their experiences and the difficulties they faced. She even got unexpected feedback on her research and teaching statements, which she found especially helpful.

It was a real success for Ajay to realise that people are actually willing to engage if you just approach them and gained confidence as a result.

“I found the focus on reflection very valuable. I now make a conscious effort to spend time reflecting on whether i’m heading in the right direction.”



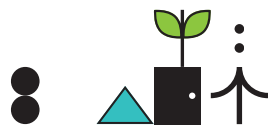
Next steps

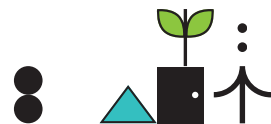
Ajay’s goal is to stay in academia, however, Prosper has helped her to develop a “Plan B”. Although she is still chasing her main goal, Ajay feels more secure knowing that she has other paths available and knowing how to translate her writing and research skills into those industry roles.

Following the cohort, Ajay completed a teaching professional course achieving the Fellow of Higher Education academy (FHEA) certification.



“I’d recommend Prosper to anyone, ideally immediately after they finish their PhD. It’s like a light showing you the path; you still have to take the decisions and do the work, but Prosper shows you the shortest and clearest route to where you want to go.”

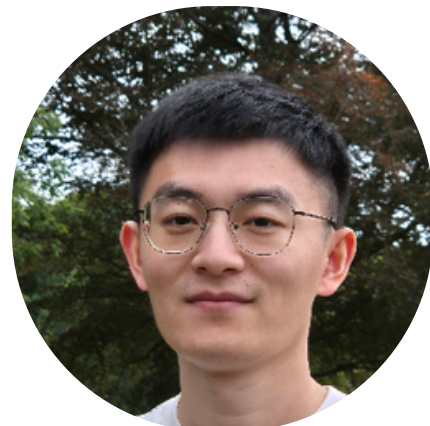




Zaihao Tian

Zaihao is a Research Assistant at the University of Southampton, within the School of Mechanical Engineering. He took part in the University's first Prosper cohort in 2025 as a PGR Research Assistant, and is awaiting his viva at the time of writing. Zaihao's area of research is tribology, the study of friction, lubrication and wear phenomena for interacting surfaces in relative motion.

Case study shared: August 2025



The Challenge

Zaihao first heard about the Prosper cohort in December 2024. During this time, he was a postgraduate researcher and feeling uncertain about his future. As his contract was ending in April 2025 (it was later extended), he felt conflicted between looking for another role in academia or moving to a role in industry.

“The Prosper cohort seemed ideal for figuring out my next career move and developing skills related to careers and job seeking.”



The Prosper journey

At the beginning of the cohort, Zaihao was a PGR who felt unsure about what his next career step would be beyond his PhD.

Zaihao enjoyed the cohort format and its relaxed, positive nature. Sessions were built around informal lunches, and for Zaihao this was a great escape from office/lab-work. He also valued the diverse nature of the cohort, being a mix of young ECRs and more senior researchers, and being able to learn from others' experiences.

One exercise Zaihao found useful involved mapping skills and experience across the timeline of his career to date. Getting this down in a structured way made those things more tangible and less likely to be forgotten, something which Zaihao will benefit from in the future.





“The work around informational interviews was a highlight...It can be easy to be shy, and not believe that senior people will want to talk to you. But this isn’t the case – people like to be asked for advice, and are usually very open to a discussion.”



What was most useful for Zaihao was learning about informational interviews, which encouraged him to get in touch and have open conversations with more senior people who worked for companies and sectors he was interested in. As this is something researchers don’t tend to do in their day-to-day role, Zaihao benefitted from being prompted to do this.

After some time, Zaihao started discussing with colleagues the potential of starting their own spin-out company. He realised that doing something like this would suit him more than a traditional academic career.

“The exercises around maintaining your LinkedIn profile were very useful – making sure to flag your skills etc. This is another thing I was able to put to immediate good use myself.”

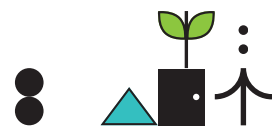


Next steps

Zaihao intends on starting a spin-out company with his colleagues, which is currently in the planning stage. They’ve started conducting market research and are in the process of creating their own prototype machine condition monitoring system. Once done, they’ll be looking to secure IP protection and prepare for approaching investors for funding.

“Myself and some colleagues are planning to start our own spin-out business... Before the Prosper cohort, I was very unsure about whether this was something I truly wanted to pursue. But my time with Prosper reflecting on what we want from a job, from a career – has made me realise starting a spin-out business is the right direction for me.”





Shunqi Zhang

Shunqi is a Research Fellow at the ESRC Centre for Population Change at the University of Southampton. She was a member of the University's first Prosper cohort in 2025. Shunqi holds a PhD in social research methods and statistics. She is interested in issues relating to social inequality and is currently working on a project looking at intergenerational support during the cost-of-living crisis.

Case study shared: September 2025



The Challenge

As an early-career postdoc in her first role since completing her PhD, Shunqi was navigating multiple transitions at once – adjusting not only to the demands of postdoctoral research but also to life in a new city. Keen to build connections and gain clarity on her future, Shunqi joined the Prosper cohort seeking both a sense of community and direction for her next career steps.

“The Prosper cohort seemed like an interesting extracurricular activity and way to make connections. So I thought, why not?”



The Prosper journey

Shunqi attended a session on how to build up her education portfolio through daily practice and met Dr Curie Scott (Researcher Developer at University of Southampton) who shared her expertise and introduced her to Prosper.

Shunqi enjoyed the practical nature of the development sessions she attended during the cohort. Shunqi attended development sessions previously which she didn't find helpful and welcomed the interactivity and usefulness of the sessions. Often, she would come away from sessions with a set of actions which she could put into practice. For example, she attended a session on showcasing skills on LinkedIn and was able to immediately update her profile to better display her skills.





**“I didn’t expect to get nearly as much out of it as I did!
If I could sum it up in three words they would be: supportive,
interactive and practical.”**



Shunqi also found learning about the STAR method and creating an experience bank beneficial. Putting this into practice, Shunqi has made a record of all of her skills and achievements which she can put to future use. She also realised throughout the process that she has much more transferable skills than she previously gave herself credit for.

Being new to the University, Shunqi really enjoyed the community element of the cohort. As sessions were framed around lunches, she was able to chat with fellow researchers informally and have discussions which she couldn’t have done in a lab or classroom. Hearing others have similar concerns and thoughts helped to reframe Shunqi’s thinking about the challenges she faced.

**“When you start to think about your skills in this language of
transferable skills, suddenly you realise just how much you can do. “**



Next steps

Shunqi intends on pursuing an academic career and is currently preparing an application for a UKRI policy fellowship. After engaging with Prosper, Shunqi feels more open to going beyond academia in the future and has an idea of what options are available to her.

»» “Before joining the Prosper cohort, I didn’t even think about the possibility of leaving academia. We pick up our expectations from our peers, and I was always surrounded by academics. But talking to other postdocs on fixed-term contracts, also thinking about their careers, opened up the idea of adventuring outside of this world.”



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