

Careers

A guide to navigating and planning post-PhD life

LAURA COX | LUND'S DOCTORAL STUDENT UNION | LUND UNIVERSITY



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Dr Laura Cox



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Introduction

Hello! This booklet is focused on **Careers** and specifically focuses on the experience of figuring out what you want to do beyond doctoral studies, planning your career while completing a PhD, and navigating the steps in making your ideal future a reality. This booklet connects with other resources, for example the **PhD Wellbeing** and **Collaboration** booklets, and the **Wellbeing in Academia Canvas** portal for researchers at Lund University. You can find all of these by heading to the Resources section of my website: www.drlauracox.com/resources.

My name is Laura Cox, and I am a recent PhD graduate from the Department of Psychology at Lund University, having defended in September 2024. In addition to my PhD, I hold qualifications as a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner and Transformational Coach, both of which address professional development, the role of employment in mental health, and task management.

I have also gained a lot of experience as a PhD representative at faculty, university-wide, and national levels which has brought me into contact with senior leadership, supervisors and a variety of staff members across faculties. Since December 2024, I have had the honour of working in the new role of Wellbeing and Career Mentor, which has involved helping dozens of current PhD students manage their wellbeing and career planning over the last few months. The guidance in this booklet is a combination of all my training, personal experiences, and topics that have been brought to me as a mentor.

Finally, while this booklet aims to be as widely applicable as possible, please note that I offer **individual support** for personalising these tools and tips to specific situations. For LU PhD students, this is included in the Wellbeing and Career Mentor service funded by Lund's Doctoral Student Union (LDK). You can find more information about booking appointments and links to my booking calendars on my website: www.drlauracox.com/contact.

Please also feel free to contact me via email (support@ldk.lu.se) or connect on LinkedIn.

Wishing you a smooth and deeply fulfilling career,

Laura Cox, September 2025



Career Planning as a PhD Student

Although this booklet is likely most relevant to PhD students who are nearing the end of their PhD, I would like to encourage you to start looking through it as early as possible and keep coming back to it throughout. A PhD is a long journey, and it is completely understandable (and a good thing) for your plans to develop as you develop. You might start out thinking that you will do one thing at the beginning of your PhD and later find that something else suits you much better. You might also be open to different things at different stages of your PhD, for example taking on departmental duties or representation roles. This booklet addresses a variety of components of career planning, including broader frameworks to help you identify where you might want to go, and suggestions for how you can build for different options.

Framework for Career Planning

The ‘Inwards, Outwards, Forwards’ model is a commonly used framework to organize one’s thinking about career options. There are at least two online tools within Lund University itself that use this framework:

The Faculty of Medicine: <https://www.intramed.lu.se/en/employment/professional-and-career-development/career-support>

The Faculty of Social Sciences: <https://canvas.education.lu.se/enroll/7CFXGW>

This booklet won’t go into as much depth, as I aim to focus on career planning specifically from the PhD perspective, but here are the ideas in brief, and the above resources are fantastic for digging deeper.

Inwards: Your values

It’s quite common (and understandable) to jump straight into job adverts and CV preparation, especially when the clock is ticking for finding your next move. However, many people miss an important first step, which is properly taking some time to consider what *you* would actually value, what you are best suited for and what you would find most interesting long-term. If you are aiming to build a career (as opposed to taking on jobs that may or may not be connected), it is truly worth spending a bit of time on this step.

This is particularly important in the context of a PhD, as there is always more to be done in the field and there is often an assumption that you'll be looking to do a postdoc right after you finish. If your supervisor has funding, or is preparing funding applications, you might feel that the logical next step is to continue on with them. This might indeed be the best thing for some people, but for others, the 'path of least resistance' can lead to realising later down the line that it might have been a better fit to go another way. This is not to say that you should reject these opportunities, but rather fully consider them and their long-term implications. This will benefit both you and those you end up working with.

Here are a few questions to prompt your reflections (and as I'll say many times, please feel free to get in touch if you would like to talk through them, or get a few more):

- **What does your ideal life look like?** Day-to-day, in a year's time, in 5 years' time, in 20 years' time? What is the future you doing, and how do they feel about it?
- **What life factors might you need to consider?** For example, would you like to move or stay in the same location, will you have family (especially children) who are part of the equation? What do you want in your life beyond work?
- **Which options would grow with you?** Are there some options that seem good right now but might not suit you later on? Are there ones that might take a bit of compromise in the short-term but would be far more beneficial later in life? Are there any that suit you now *and* later?
- **What matters most to you?** What would produce a sense of lack if you didn't have it, or a sense of fulfilment even if other areas are lacking? This is highly individual and reading through value lists can be really helpful (see the Resources tab on my website). If you value security, you might want the most straightforward option that gives you the highest income and long-term stability. If you value the meaning of the work above this though, you might think of tolerating a bit of instability for options that meet that need. Are there any areas where your values conflict?

These are just a few questions to get started in building a firm foundation of your personal aspirations and non-negotiables. It's best not to rush this step, and it can be helpful both to get some input from people who have known you deeply and/or for a long time, and to talk to a professional who can ask the right questions specific to your situation but doesn't have any stake at all in the outcome. Most importantly of all

though, try not to get too swept up in what others are saying, and get to know your inner dialogue with yourself. It can take some time to build that internal knowing, but once you do, it is extremely valuable.

Outwards: The job market

Once you have given some attention to your own internal world and vision, it's time to look to the outer world and find out what's possible. It is incredibly helpful to know what you ideally want to happen, but often there are external constraints that condition how possible that ideal is. These could include things like legal components (e.g. permits, citizenship), financial needs, personal and social needs (e.g. if you have a partner who is also planning their career, or children to think about) and much more. Similar to the 'inwards' point, it is really worth exploring these factors before launching into taking action. Without this, you might start building an option that doesn't really work for you and bending your life around it, rather than finding options that align much better.

Here are a few questions to help with this step:

- **What restrictions are there on your mobility?** If you're an EU citizen and you want to stay within the EU, this is fairly simple. If you're from a non-EU country and you'd like to stay in Sweden, that might take some planning. Likewise, if you're from the EU and you want to go elsewhere, what would be needed for that to happen?
- **Have you got any family members to plan for as well?** Have you talked through different options with them? Are there paths that suit one of you but not another, or any that suit everyone?
- **What does your financial situation look like?** Have you got savings? If you're approaching or even already in your final year, have you started paying into A-kassa?
- **What time of year will you be looking?** If you're thinking of academia, keep in mind that there are funding cycles and you might want to plan your career actions and even your defence considering this. If you're thinking of jobs outside academia, keep in mind that advertisements quieten down towards the summer and increase when people come back after a break.

- **What does your current educational profile enable you to do?** Do you have qualifications that in themselves qualify you to do something specific, or do they need complementing with a bit more? Does your ideal path require a blend of more than one area?
- **What does your current work experience profile make you suitable for?** How many years of experience do you have in particular areas? Can you show evidence of teamwork and leadership if that's needed?
- **What connections do you have and how strong are they?** Have you worked closely enough with people for them to provide a good reference for you? Do you know people in different areas who might be able to help you on your search?

Forwards: Planning ahead

Finally, now that you know both what you want and what is possible, it's time to take some action and start working on making your ambitions a reality. This is the step where you work on your CV, cover letters, looking further into jobs, developing your skills and experience and so on.

Some useful things to do in this step:

- **Let those around you know what you are aiming for:** It sounds quite obvious, but we sometimes don't make the most out of this. With the clarity you've gained in the first two steps, you can let others know what your ideal is and they can help with ideas and connecting you with relevant people. You can take this up in supervision (e.g. scheduling a specific conversation to discuss this in depth), amongst friends, and with family for example.
- **Set up alerts on job search forums** (e.g. LinkedIn and any profession-specific platforms), so that you get notified when relevant opportunities come up. Even if you don't end up applying to them, it can be useful to have an ongoing sense of what is required and what the flow of opportunities looks like. When you do see something that you are really interested in, this will also help you act fast and be an early applicant.
- **Use filters:** Similar to the above, you can narrow down your search to find things that more closely fit what you would like. Aside from the classics like location, a really good one is the 'within the last 24 hours' filter.

- **Look into opportunities in your direct environment** – have a look at the later sections in this booklet for how you can give yourself more time whilst also building skills and experience within the environment you’re already in. You can also look into events and social gatherings within your department or faculty to start getting to know more people.
- **Talk to people who are already in the position you’re aiming for** – find people either in your direct environment or on LinkedIn and have an informal conversation about what they like and dislike about the position, what they would recommend doing to prepare for it, and how to communicate your skills and experience.
- **Use the ‘Future Pacing’ tool** to visualise your future context and work your way back from there. The specific steps are also available on the **Wellbeing in Academia Canvas**, but they are also visually shown below:

Tool 1: Figuring out different paths

‘Future Pacing’ is a helpful tool for working out what you need to do to move forward... from the perspective of looking back

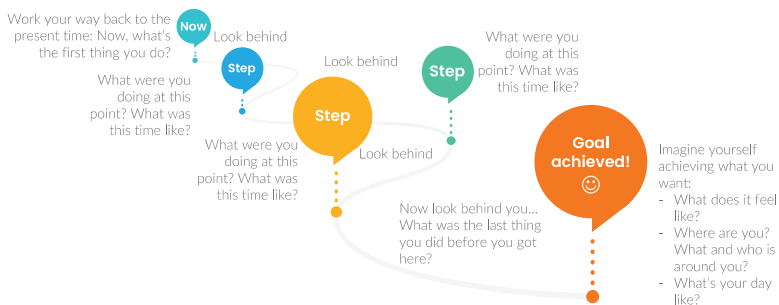


Figure 1. Future Pacing tool for planning ahead by working backwards

This tool is best used with another person, with at least you (if not both of you) in a physical space where you can literally look over your shoulder and get fully immersed in the process.

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) has been around for many years and was created using empirical insights from interviews with researchers. The RDF has recently been updated in 2025 and is shown in Figure 2. The original 2010 version covered 4 main domains in developing as a researcher: Knowledge and intellectual abilities, Personal Effectiveness, Research governance and organisation and Engagement, influence and impact. The original framework and related guidance can be found using this link: <https://vitae.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Researcher-Development-Framework-RDF-Vitae-4.pdf>

The revised 2025 version now has three domains of: Researcher, Research and Research Communities. Similar to the original, there are sub-sections with specific attributes and practices that can be very useful for understanding which areas you are strong in and which areas need more development.

I personally used the earlier version throughout my PhD, pairing it with the learning outcomes in the general study plan (ASP). It can be especially helpful to review the framework every 6 months and reflect on which areas your research has enabled you to develop further (for example if you have recently begun teaching, you could think about how this fits in the ‘Engagement and Impact’ subsection of ‘Research’).

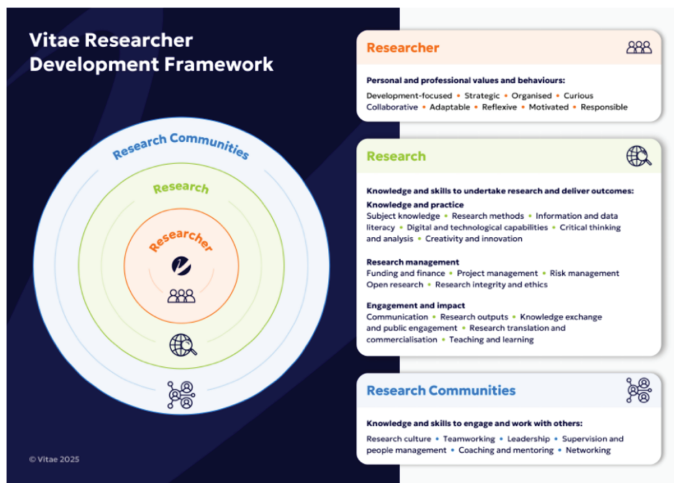


Figure 2. The Vitae Researcher Development Framework 2025 (with permission from Vitae)

Post-PhD Pathways

Even though the assumption is often that you will continue in academia, there are a lot of other pathways you might also want to consider. This section covers a few ideas of things you could think about and how you could prepare for each of them.

Within academia

The two main pathways within academia are teaching (for example getting a lecturer position) or working as a post-doctoral researcher (either with your own funding or with funding within a project). If you would like to pursue teaching positions, you will need to have completed a certain number of credits on pedagogical courses (including the foundational Teaching and Learning in Higher Education course). You will also need to have taught a certain number of hours during your PhD and given that there is a limit of 20% of your time for departmental duties, you may want to plan this carefully.

For research, think about whether you would like to stay in your current department or continue elsewhere. If you would like to stay, it is a good idea to develop strong connections within your department. This could look like having more frequent informal conversations in the lunchroom, reaching out to people you would like to work with and meeting them to talk further, and getting involved in other types of departmental duties such as board meetings and recruitment processes (see later sections for more on this). If you're active and well-known within the department, people will be more likely to think of you when opportunities arise, and you'll have a better foundation to develop funding proposals with those you would like to work with.

It's also a good idea to get used to applying for grants – you don't have to wait until the end of your PhD to apply for money; you can start honing this skill by applying for smaller funds e.g. for conferences. In general, it is a good idea to start preparing for and applying for any post-PhD grants as early as you can, as competition can be very high and it can take a long time to hear back.

If you know you would like to continue in academia but move to another research environment, you might want to think about enrolling in courses at other universities, attending conferences independently, and considering your commentators, defence opponent and examining committee with this in mind.

Think about where you would like to go with your research after your PhD and how can you use your current work as a track record. If you would like to shift into another idea, think about ways this transition could work – e.g. could you go further in the same topic with a different method, or could you continue with the same methods in another topic? Keep in mind that the further you want to transition out of your current research, the more preparation you are likely to need and the more building a variety of connections will help you.

Finally, although academia is perhaps the strongest pull as you finish your PhD, keep in mind that there are other options. There are unfortunately far more PhDs than there are jobs in academia, and as with other professions, the top positions also only get narrower. It is really worth considering whether you genuinely want to continue in academia for your own sake, and where you would like to find yourself in the field later. If there is any chance that you are considering continuing in academia just because it seems like ‘the logical next step’, keep reading the next two sections.

Outside academia

Aside from academia, most other options are grouped into ‘industry’. However, this in itself can be very varied, and you might be more drawn to some aspects than others, and some areas might be easier to transition into than others. Options outside of academia can include companies of different sizes, start-ups, government agencies, consultancy firms and much more. Keep in mind that company size can play a big role in what type of employee they’ll be looking for and what level of experience they’ll be expecting.

Having connections with current or previous employees (even if they are not remotely in the same field) can also help a lot in understanding if and how you would be a good fit, and for helping you get better attention from the talent acquisition team. Finally, being active on LinkedIn by interacting with others’ posts and creating your own (beyond just updating your information and searching) can be a really good way to show who you are, what you are doing, and the type of value you could bring.

Beyond the boxes

Finally, I would like to encourage you to think even further than the ‘Academia or Industry’ options and consider whether there are less talked-about options that could

suit you, or that you might need in order to get to your eventual ideal profession. These options can be particularly good if you have prior qualifications that you can use alongside your PhD, and/or if you are able to build other experiences within your PhD. You could consider self-employment for example and begin setting up the frameworks for this before you finish. You might also want to consider if there are any options you would be very interested in long-term but require some more training or licensing. Finally, it's not impossible to create something entirely new if there is a need for it, if you're the right person to meet that need, and if you prepare as effectively as you can. Of course, there are no guarantees, but I would just like to encourage you to think outside the existing boxes and consider all your potential options.

Managing uncertainty

It might seem a bit strange, but sometimes the hardest part is just waiting. Timelines can be incredibly long in building a career beyond your PhD, particularly if you are applying for funding or building something entirely new (e.g. for self-employment). It can be hard to build a vision of your life until you know what you'll be working with – getting that grant might mean securing yourself in one place working on project X for the next 3 years, but equally, not getting it might mean an entirely different set of circumstances.

This can be the case for any option you choose for beyond the PhD: if you're applying for something, there will be period of preparing, sending in an application, waiting to hear back about interviews, waiting to hear back from interviews, and so on... If you're doing this multiple times over, it can feel like you're creating and casting off many different versions of your future each time. For this reason, even though things like finishing your kappa and defending are big, important and challenging, one of your main tasks towards the end might actually be finding and maintain a sense of peace and calm while just not knowing what's ahead.

- So, how do you go about that? From my own experience I would recommend:
- **Doing something physical where you can see your progress:** for example, decluttering, working on fitness goals, baking, painting etc. Reading and writing can also be good if they work for you, but keep in mind that these might not necessarily get you out of your head in the same way.

- **Working on long-term skills:** Your development doesn't have to come to a grinding halt just because you're waiting to know exactly what you'll be doing. Consider any courses or practice you'd like to do beyond whatever the outcome is – these can be work related or not, they just need to give you something to apply yourself to in the meantime.
- **Read and watch relevant content:** Regardless of the outcome, it doesn't hurt to gently prepare yourself just in case. I say read and watch because these are relatively passive activities that don't commit you to a specific thing, but they do benefit you by giving you more context and information if and when different things materialise.
- **Plan ahead for different eventualities and think about your journey so far:** It can be helpful to spend some time mapping out your whole journey and where different things might take you. If you would like some help drawing out your trajectory, please get in touch – I have many examples that were actually inspired by a central theory I used in my own PhD about multidimensional development.
- **Set limits on how long you spend on tasks (e.g. job applications):** It's easy to get swept up in countless applications and options, particularly if you feel you will need to lock down a role soon. However, this can end up being counter-productive as it might drain your energy and create more anxiety. Setting a limit can allow you to give some attention to these things without them swallowing up your whole life.
- **Talk to others and join forums, discussions, workshops and groups:** Let those close to you know that you're finding the searching and waiting process difficult: they may come up with something surprising that helps you take your mind off it. You might also consider joining forums and groups where people are going through similar things, for example applications for programs or the migration Facebook forum (please get in touch for links). Pay attention to whether these groups help you though: they can be full of useful information, moral support and great updates, but they can also result in collective hysteria which might be counterproductive. Just remember to try and keep a cool head, check all information with the official authorities and distance yourself if you feel it's getting overwhelming.

- **Do something new:** If you can, consider travelling to a new place, going to a new restaurant, taking up a new hobby or making some new connections. These things will help you contextualise your current situation and remind you that there is so much more beyond your next career step. There is an entire world out there.

Keep in mind that there are also ways of coping that don't necessarily serve our health or outcomes, even if they provide some sense of relief at the time. There are also a few traps that we can inadvertently find ourselves in as we wait. Here are a few things to try to avoid if you can:

- **Using addictive behaviours to cope:** This includes having a lot of comfort food or substances (e.g. alcohol) to relax. While they may seem to help in the short-term, these can disrupt your physiology (e.g. your sleep and digestion) and end up making you feel worse. They are also quite difficult to stop the longer they are relied upon. It might sound boring, but focusing on nutritious food and healthy behaviours such as exercise will actually pay off far more and have similar effects, even if they're not as immediate.
- **Putting off plans and things that would make you happy:** When you don't know what the future will hold, it's understandable that you might not want to do anything that might clash with the possible outcome. That trip, concert or stand-up comedy show (or whatever you are interested in) months from now might not seem like an option until you know. However this approach can make you feel incredibly stuck, powerless, and miserable – like you can't do anything you want until you know. Consider if there are some things you could do – those smaller one-evening events are entirely possible to keep (especially if they're on weekends) unless you move halfway across the world. Even bigger ones like holidays or moving house can be manageable no matter the outcome, you'll just need to plan ahead for it, communicate it with your future employer and/or find an option that is not too problematic.
- **Feeling like you have no control over anything:** When you're waiting to hear back about something, it can feel like a massive power imbalance: like they hold all the cards and you simply have to twiddle your thumbs until the other side feels like involving you. This doesn't have to be the case though, and you have much more control than you might feel at the moment. Look to the earlier point about working on your long-term skills and below for ways you can create more options for yourself.

- **Putting everything you have into just one thing:** This is particularly the case for grant applications, where the waiting times are long and the chances of success are quite small. Try to avoid only having one major application or one option, and consider a few other things that could work for you as well.
- **Only thinking about the work itself – consider related aspects and whether it’s a good fit as a whole:** It can be easy to zoom in on just the work itself and what having that job would mean but take some time to think thoroughly about related components. Are there any areas where it might *not* be your best case scenario? It’s unlikely that a job will satisfy every single need: that’s not to say you no longer want it, but thinking of the areas where it’s not totally ideal might help you not to pin all your hopes and entire future on the outcome (and to prepare for those aspects if they do come to be).
- **Forgetting how you’ve made it through challenges before:** Even getting to the end of the PhD is a major accomplishment, and has surely had at least a few challenges along the way. But aside from that, you’ve also likely been through other types of challenges and periods of waiting before. Think back over previous years, for example waiting for exam results or waiting to find out if you got the position as a PhD student in the first place.

Planning the transition

As you get closer to the end, things can start feeling like a lot: practically, emotionally and intellectually. This section is all about how you can make the finishing and transition processes a little easier on yourself. As with everything else in this booklet, the earlier you start, the more time and space you give yourself to navigate things with peace and a clear head.

Professionally

Once you have settled on a couple of paths you would be happy with, consider the ‘currency’ and the professional language of the fields you are interested in. In academia, it’s wise to focus on things like publications (both in terms of quantity and well-respected journals), teaching hours, conferences, and grant applications. If you would like to continue as a lecturer, keep in mind that you will need to have a certain number of credits in pedagogical courses and this standard can vary between institutions. You

will also need a certain number of hours by the time you finish your PhD (check with your department for specific numbers) and you might also want to think about how you demonstrate a variety of teaching skills (for example having a mix of lecturing, seminars, supervising theses) and range (i.e. having a variety of courses as well as or instead of having the same thing that you taught year-on-year). If you are aiming to continue as a researcher, it's best to focus on securing funding or an advertised post-doc position. Related to this, it's worth building your connections with other academics as mentioned in the earlier 'Within academia' section.

If you are aiming to transition into industry, you may want to simply meet the academic requirements of your PhD and focus on showing other types of experiences and skills that companies would value more. See the final section for specific ideas on how you could go about this alongside your PhD. It's also wise to focus on learning how to 'speak the language' of other industries (for example using terms like key performance indicators (KPIs), return on investment (ROI) and so on). Similarly, many industry options will likely require a level of proficiency in Swedish, so this might be your main professional task even if it is not the profession itself.

Finally, if you are open to multiple options (i.e. academia *and* industry), you might want to focus on preparatory activities that benefit both, and prepare two sets of CVs and cover letters. Keep in mind that the presentation of each of these will differ – feel free to get in touch if you would like some help drawing the line.

Practically

The previous section was about the broader things you can do to prepare for your chosen path(s). Each of these activities will have sub-tasks that you can keep in mind and prepare for as well though. In this section, I would like to encourage you to tailor your communications and practical efforts over your final year, so that you avoid leaving it until the very end. Connections and engagement take time to build, and there are likely a number of opportunities over the course of the year that can help you get yourself into the right spaces. For academia, you may want focus on attending and presenting your research and meeting others, for example at conferences and following up these connections later on as you get closer to the finish line. For industry, it can be a good idea to focus on regular active engagement on LinkedIn and making time to learn about the industry you are interested in, and how to translate your PhD experience.

These types of activities can often get lost in other more urgent and obvious tasks, and I would recommend using a priority matrix (see Figure 3) to identify where they might sit. Most are likely to be in the ‘Plan and do soon’ category, so think about how you might be able to schedule them in as habits or specific tasks.

Tool 2: Working step-by-step

A priority matrix (also known as an Eisenhower matrix) can be very helpful for working on long-term goals whilst also taking care of day-to-day demands

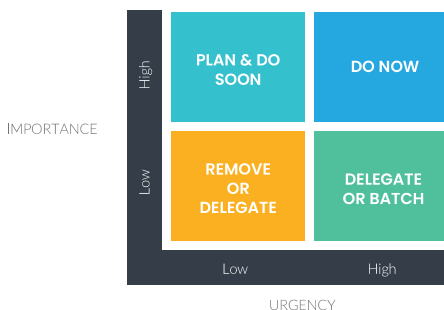


Figure 3: Priority Matrix

Emotionally

The emotional part of the transition is often the most overlooked – it is a huge journey and as mentioned in the Wellbeing booklet and earlier sections, finishing your PhD is also likely to mean changes in your personal life too. There can be a major identity shift upon completing the PhD, which can take some time to adjust to, as well as letting go of a lot of what has made up your working life for the last 4+ years. If your post-PhD transition also involves moving city, country, or even continent, this can compound even more. It can be helpful to take some time to think ahead and consider what things you’ll miss, be relieved about, and feel the absence of. If you do this in good time, you can make the most of the things that mean a lot to you before they come to their natural end (for example, fun and interesting conversations with others in your lab or office).

The ceremonial aspects of completing a PhD can be very helpful in really *feeling* the end of the journey. It can feel like a lot on the defence day itself, and it is not unusual to feel all sorts of things including overwhelmed, exhausted, and even a bit disembodied

as there is just so much going on. Keep in mind that there are further parts that can really help the feeling of transition and celebration, such as applying for your PhD certificate, and the doctoral conferment ceremony.

Finally, if your schedule and financial situation allows, I would highly recommend taking a big holiday somewhere far away (ideally even switching time zones). This can help you recalibrate after the experience and come back ready for something new.

Applying for funding

If you would like to continue in academia, it is likely that you will need to prepare grant applications to try to secure your own funding (unless you decide to only apply for existing positions). Although this is often viewed as boring and difficult, it can also be really fun, and you can learn more about how you work and write with other people outside your research team. For example, I had the chance to draft an application with someone who was a very different style of writer: she was great at getting a lot of material down and working with references, while I was able to carve out our key points and make things concise. We each learned a lot from each other even if we didn't get the grant and we both really enjoyed writing together. I also learned a lot of valuable lessons from the senior researcher we put the application in with, so if I did want to do more applications, I'd know what the end product should look like compared to the initial idea.

Here are a few reflections and recommendations I have after my own experience:

- **Don't assume anything** (e.g. that someone might not be interested in being on the application, or that because they already have funding they wouldn't have time),
- **Understand that it sort of has its own etiquette** and that asking someone to join in your grant idea is a valuable and honourable thing,
- **Recognise that it is also a time commitment** for them though and **be clear on what you'd be asking for** upfront,
- **Get support from the finance admin** at your department as soon as possible,

- **Attend funding seminars run by funding bodies** (see newsletters mentioned in the Useful Resources section) to learn about the opportunities and what they're looking for,
- Try to have **interdisciplinary** components (ideally co-applicants),
- **Submit well before the deadline to avoid technical complications,**
- **Keep in mind that it can take a very long time and chances are very small** – spread your applications over multiple areas and keep yourself busy while you wait.

Top tips

1. Start early

Cue eye roll. Yes, I'm sorry, I know you'll have heard this before and *of course* this is top tip number 1... but truly, it is the most important of them all. It's understandable to focus only on your PhD, but if you leave all your career planning until the very end you are likely going to be far more stressed and make more rushed decisions than if you give it a bit of thought earlier in the process. It's not that you must have your CV and a full career plan lined up by year 2, but it's good to start thinking about what you want and need to build sometime before your final year. You'll likely be getting a sense of what academia is like and whether you might want to stay or transition elsewhere, and you can start setting yourself up for success even by dedicating just a few hours a month if you start early. You can begin deciding what tasks are bringing you closer to goals you're interested in vs taking you further away from them, rather than just taking on whatever comes up. You can go down different routes and have the space and time to decide that maybe they're not for you in the end, and you won't have lost anything major. Finally, if you're building something from scratch (like we did in LDK the Wellbeing and Career Mentor role), you'll need to give it time to develop, time for initial conversations, time for decisions, and time for actual processes to take place. This role, in this format, probably wouldn't have been possible if its development hadn't started 2 years in advance and if there hadn't been time for a lot of other work relating to it to take place (e.g. surveys, booklets, proposals, meetings, votes, and recruitment).

2. Be open

With the above in mind, I would encourage you to be relatively open particularly in your first and second year. As mentioned, starting early means you can test out different things, speak to different people, and gather information for your later reflections. If you're less than halfway into your PhD, I would recommend keeping an open mind until you've heard the good, the bad and the ugly for possible post-PhD options. You might already have a sense of what you want and that's fantastic, but it's worth keeping the doors open at this point in case further information might add some nuance to your impressions. For example, if you are in a particularly difficult research team and everyone seems stressed and miserable, try finding examples of different team styles and speak to people who have actively built a great working dynamic with one another.

3. Get connected

As you might have gathered from the above point, it's important to meet a variety of people and learn about your options directly from others. Isolating yourself will not only lead to the same types of thoughts and feelings but also limit your options. There might be opportunities that you couldn't have known about, or options that only come about through connecting with others. In academia, this is particularly important if you are looking to join other research teams or develop grant proposals towards the end of your PhD – if you already have connections and familiarity it will be much easier to initiate these transitions, rather than coming in cold right when you really need it. For options outside academia, these connections will help you make your PhD relevant for other environments, give you information about what's expected elsewhere, and put you in touch with people who can help you get a foot in the door (which is often far more important than even your work itself).

4. Focus on what is most important

As I mention in the **Wellbeing** booklet, it's important not to get sidetracked by tasks others are asking of you if they're not your responsibility and they don't align with what you're trying to build. I recommend going over that section and thinking about what exactly is necessary for completing your PhD, and what's necessary for building your career, and getting those into your schedule and your plans first. In terms of career planning itself, once you know what direction(s) you are heading in and which ones you aren't, you can then focus on what's most important within that. Not all tasks are

created equal, and some things will get you much further in the process than others. Focus on those and then do any other tasks if you have time. For example, if you are planning to go self-employed, it's far more important to build your service/product and make connections than to spend all your time building a website when you have no one to send it to. This of course is a good thing to have later on, but it's not the first thing that's needed, and it might actually benefit from things you gather from earlier, more important tasks. Similarly, if you want to continue as a researcher and you're not that interested in teaching, I would recommend focusing on research and getting into academic recruitment discussions rather than building your teaching hours (and vice versa if you're interested in being a lecturer more than being a researcher).

5. Make use of the systems you have, and set yourself up for security

There are several support systems in place in Sweden for helping you have a more secure financial and employment situation after your PhD. The first is of course **A-kassa**, which is the unemployment insurance fund. You need to have been paying into it for at least a year before your contract ends in order to be able to claim any funds. You're likely not *planning* to be unemployed, but it's an extremely helpful safety net to have even for a short period after your PhD. This is particularly true in academia when outcomes take a very long time to come through and things might not align exactly perfectly when you defend. In my own case, I only used A-kassa for a 2-3 of weeks in the gap between my PhD contract ending and my new contract beginning, but that was helpful and worth it.

Similarly, getting prolongation for other tasks throughout your PhD (teaching, PhD representation, other departmental duties), is extremely beneficial for giving you more to work through your contract itself. See the next section for how you can both make these roles suit your development and your time availability, as well as give you more time and income towards the end of your PhD.

Finally, trade unions offer coaching and employment support to members, and can be very helpful for guiding you in your next steps.

How to make the most of your current environment

If you know you want to stay in academia...

I would highly recommend taking on a representative position in your faculty's **Academic Appointments Board** if you can. This will help you get insights into what is considered in decision-making processes for academic positions. The meetings are fairly infrequent so they wouldn't compete a lot with your current research, but the learning you'll gain from the meetings will likely make your career planning much clearer and more efficient. You will also likely gain important connections who could be willing to provide further information and help.

You might also consider getting involved in your faculty's Research Education Council (forskarutbildningsrådet, or FUR), or becoming a representative on the university-wide research education board (forskarutbildningsnämnd, or FUN). These meetings are a little more frequent and longer but would help you understand current topics in research education and research. Getting involved in Ethics Councils is also a great way to gain more exposure to research topics and have experience to put down on your CV.

Finally, being involved in your department or Faculty Board is a good way to get a greater understanding of the specific environment you are in, and other considerations in pursuing research (e.g. departmental funding). While this may not be research topics or decision-making about positions themselves, this could provide important information for your own decision-making. You could also make connections within your immediate environment that you wouldn't otherwise have (e.g. getting to know your prefekt more or seeing other academics you don't generally cross paths with). These things can lead to unexpected developments and can be immeasurably valuable.

How to make this happen

If you are interested in getting involved in anything to do with your department, speak to your departmental PhD rep and see what positions are available. You could also talk with your prefekt or director of studies. If you are interested in anything at faculty level (e.g. academic appointments board, faculty board, or research education council), you'll need to be elected to these positions by your faculty's PhD council (dokorandrådet). Look out for email invitations to meetings throughout the term (there should be about 3-4 each term) and try to get involved in council meetings in general. Elections are generally held around the summer for the next year's positions, but if a

position is vacant, by-elections can be held anytime. Talk to your council chairperson, and/or get in touch with me if you would like some help.

If you know you want to pursue options in industry...

I would recommend going for roles that are as close as possible to company positions, or broad roles that are relevant in many environments. My top choices would be **communications officer** roles (faculty or university-wide), **events officer** roles and **financial** roles (e.g. secretary in faculty councils or chief financial officer of LDK). I would also recommend election committee roles both in terms of gaining experience of recruitment, interviewing and candidate management that you can show on your CV *and* the potential for reflecting on your own employability through needing to think about skills, experience and qualities.

There are many options at each level (department, faculty, and university) that could help you build and show skills beyond your PhD that would be valuable in industry. You can get involved in these in a similar way to other positions: simply get in touch with the relevant election committee and put your foot forward. Remember that these environments will be much more open even if you lack experience, so don't let that stop you getting involved.

If you're not sure or you want to prepare for any type of career...

Finally, there are a few roles that can be relevant no matter what type of career you are heading for. These include **secretary** roles, **working committee member** roles, **equal opportunities**, and **health and safety committees**. Each of these will enable you to learn more about working environments which you can apply anywhere.

Leadership positions are especially great, for example being a chairperson or vice chairperson in your faculty, within LDK or at national level. These experiences can be valuable in many different ways including: putting you in touch with a variety of people, building on your own professional skills development, leading projects that you can show and talk about later, and developing your confidence, giving you more prolongation, and even giving you a bit of extra salary in some roles (e.g. LDK director roles). You can learn so much beyond the PhD experience itself and develop different types of professional relationships that can be both very fulfilling and very productive, as you'll work more closely and frequently than in other roles.

Final note

I hope this booklet has given you a few ideas and some structure to get started with Career Planning throughout your PhD. It is of course a very individual journey and there will be some things that you are drawn to more than others. It is part of the process to figure out what you like and don't like, and what feels just right versus too much. I would just like to end by saying that some opportunities can feel a bit scary at the start, but sometimes this is in a good way and indicates that there's some really valuable development for you up ahead. When I first considered taking on the Director of Internal Affairs role within LDK, it felt huge and quite intimidating, but it also felt exciting, and I knew it would be a positive step somehow. I couldn't have imagined all the amazing things that came from taking that leap, and I'm so glad I did. So, this is just a little note to encourage you not to shy away from these things because you don't feel qualified, ready or totally comfortable. If you feel actively uncomfortable, that's a different thing, but if it feels just outside your comfort zone, it might be that it's just what you need. I highly recommend taking that leap ☺

Useful Resources

EU Modules: <https://www.career-modules.eu/>

This is a free online portal with modules that were originally developed in Australia and have been adapted to the European context. The modules cover topics like understanding yourself, managing finances, preparing motivation letters and CVs, seeking work opportunities, workplace communication, branding, entrepreneurship, negotiation, and business culture.

EURAXESS: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development>

EURAXESS is a similar online portal but focused on career development for researchers specifically. It also takes a European stance, and is therefore likely relevant for opportunities outside of Sweden as well as within the country. It's free to register and includes a career orientation tool, career handbook for young researchers, webinars and trainings, and podcasts. The tool focuses on helping you identify what matters most, exploring your options and planning ahead, while the handbook helps you develop a Career Development Plan. There is also a 'Beyond Academia Career Development Module', International Mentoring programme and career development centre in the Industry and Entrepreneurship section. The portal also includes categories for different stages: First-stage researcher, recognised researcher, established researcher and leading researcher which might help you plan long-term.

Funding pages

Lund University has an extensive list of research funding bodies within Sweden and internationally. If you are looking to submit grant applications, this is a great place to start in terms of thinking about which funding providers might be most suitable for your field and your ideas: <https://www.staff.lu.se/research-and-education/research-support/research-funding>. There are also sections on international collaborations, navigating project costs and understanding overhead, as well as specific lists for postdocs and conferences. This is all provided by **Research Services** at LU, which is a dedicated section of external relations for supporting researchers in funding applications and international opportunities.

Newsletters

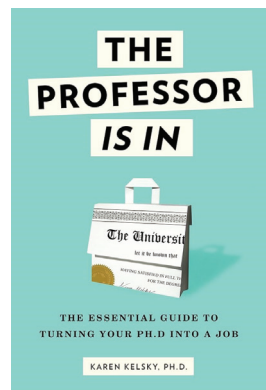
Similar to the funding pages above, there are very helpful newsletters within LU's internal framework that can help you identify opportunities as they come up. For Careers, I would recommend the International Desk newsletter and Research Funding news in particular. You can find a list of all options here: <https://www.staff.lu.se/support-and-tools/communication-and-graphic-profile/press-and-news/internal-newsletters>

Kompetensportalen

I would highly recommend checking Kompetensportalen at intervals throughout your PhD to see what workshops are available. This will vary from time to time, but some fantastic ones I was able to attend during my PhD included: 'Take Charge of Your Career' and 'Careers Beyond Academia'. If you think you might forget, try setting some dates or reminders in your calendar now, as you're reading this.

Books and websites

The Professor Is In by Karen Kelsky, PhD: This would be my number one recommendation: even if you do nothing else, please read this book. Although it is primarily focused on academic careers, it has incredibly helpful insights and tips on the psychological and social process of navigating careers after a PhD (including unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that are important to unlearn). There is also a very useful list '100+ skills that translate outside the academy' on pages 396-402, that are great to look over no matter what you're doing. It's even just a nice boost to reflect on how much you've developed and how far you've come.



The Thesis Whisperer: <https://thesiswhisperer.com/>

The Thesis Whisperer is a blog written by Professor Inger Mewburn, director of researcher development at The Australian National University. New posts are released on the first Wednesday of each month on academia, literature and PhD life, and the

blog is over 13 years old. You can find helpful articles, book recommendations, software suggestions, worksheets and materials, networks and workshops on the website.

Voices of Academia: <https://voicesofacademia.com/>

Voices of Academia is a blog and podcast specifically focused on mental health in academia, and includes a variety of perspectives, or 'voices'. It aims to cover marginalised experiences and promote wellbeing using different strategies, and create community. It may be a helpful space to find others experiencing the same things as you, and you can also write posts yourself.

The PhD Proofreaders: <https://www.thephdproofreaders.com/>

The PhD Proofreaders is another great site with lots of downloadable resources and advice pieces about productivity and succeeding in a PhD. They have a weekly newsletter, free writing guides, workshops, writing retreats, and for more in depth support they also offer proofreading, coaching, courses and mock exams.

Careers Checklist

Overall:

- I have **read the Careers booklet**
- I have found and signed up for the **Wellbeing in Academia Canvas**
- I know how to book an appointment with the PhD mentor or **get in touch with someone for personalised support**

General Career Development:

- I have had or planned at least one **specific discussion with my supervisor** about Careers (for example talking through options, needs, pros, cons)
- I have **checked Kompetensportalen**
- I have **considered different career options**
- I have **looked into the Vitae Development Framework(s)** and reflected on how they can apply to my development
- I have **considered any additional learning and experience needs and how I could build on these during my PhD**

Psychological:

- I have **considered my values and needs**, and how these relate to my career choices
- I have thought about **planning ahead for the future**, including personal goals
- I have thought about ways I can **plan in time to process transitions** and changes
- I have **considered how I manage uncertainty** and anything I could do differently

Practical steps:

- I have **created or updated my LinkedIn account** and connected with others
- I have **created and updated my CV(s)** for the role(s) I am interested in
- I have **considered who could provide references for me** and considered if they will have enough knowledge and experience of my work to comment fully
- I have **connected with relevant people in the field(s)** I am interested in, whether digitally (e.g. on LinkedIn) or in-person (e.g. within your department)
- I have **signed up to relevant newsletters and job alerts**

PhD-specific (same as Wellbeing booklet):

- I know the **requirements of my PhD programme** (e.g. number of course credits I need to complete, key milestone seminars, and type of thesis)
- I understand **what my ISP is**, and why it is important
- I understand **what prolongation is** and what qualifies for it
- I know **how to report activities and leave** (e.g. sick days, vacation days, and parental leave)

