

# Pathways into the bioscience industry

This tip-sheet suggests ten steps on the pathway to a job in the bioscience industry – whether that's in a small biotech start-up or a big multinational pharmaceutical company. The advice here is primarily intended for postdocs who are just beginning to explore their options.

Many companies value the specialist knowledge that postdocs can bring to the job, but no amount of scientific expertise will be enough on its own. You need to show that you understand how scientific work in industry differs from academia, and that you're aware of the potential 'culture shock'.

## 1. Research the sector

Employers will want to see that you have a positive motivation for making a career change – they have enough good applicants that they don't need to settle for being your back-up option.

Assess how positive you really feel by thoroughly researching the sector before you apply.

- Several of the major consultancy firms produce annual reviews of the sector, e.g. Ernst & Young publishes *Beyond Borders*, a survey of global business trends in biotech.
- Keep abreast of news stories and relevant discoveries in the major scientific press. Read relevant papers in the scholarly press too, and see who has funded the research.
- Find out what it's really like to work for a commercial employer. Who do you know who has made the move into industry? Who do your colleagues know who have made the move? Ask them to describe their experiences.
- Read others' career stories, e.g. the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry has a careers website with 80 case studies.

## 2. Identify your place

Do you have to make a specific choice – small biotech or big pharma? Not necessarily. Both share a common goal: bringing forward a marketable product. But differences in organisational culture can be significant.

For example, start-ups are often fast-moving and unpredictable, and the fate of the company may hang on a single product. That is exciting to some, stressful to others. By contrast, if you work for a big pharmaceutical company and your product doesn't work, you probably move on to another. Here, stability is higher, but the rewards might be lower.

Similarly, when it comes to R&D, it's important to be aware of what those two letters mean in practice: many companies are scaling back on basic discovery (the 'R', which is the bit probably closest to academic life). Instead, companies are investing more heavily in process development (the 'D'), where elegant science and a strong publication record matter a lot less than relevant technical know-how and the attributes needed to get projects done on time.

Identify where you see your place in the sector.

## 3. Build your network

Getting to know who is out there, who they work for, and what they work on – these are essential steps in understanding the sector and learning how to make successful applications.

Ask around: if people in your network don't know what you're needing, they won't be able to help put you in touch with people in *their* network.

In addition to informal networking, here are examples of professional associations where you can find out about events and the latest sector-specific news (several of them also have bespoke careers blogs):

- **Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI)**
- **One Nucleus** – a not-for-profit regional biotech network
- **Oxfordshire Bioscience Network (OBN)** – a not-for-profit membership organisation
- **BioIndustry Association (BIA)**
- **British In Vitro Diagnostics Association (BIVDA)**
- **British Biophysical Society (BBS)** – specialist network hosting biennial meetings.

## 4. Translate your skills

Your scientific credentials are only part of the story. Hiring managers in the bioscience industry will want you to translate your experience into the competencies and attributes that they are looking for.

Commonly sought competencies include:

- commercial awareness
- project management
- team work, collaboration, leadership
- adaptability, openness to change
- communication – especially writing and presenting.

Read job descriptions carefully and look for patterns. For example, the following phrases are taken from three biotech job ads: 'excellent organisational skills', 'proven ability to prioritise and manage time', and 'a sense of urgency' – but all of them mean essentially the same thing, i.e. *the capacity to get things done*.

## 5. Show commercial awareness

In the end, the bioscience industry is about bringing products to market – and thereby making a profit. Understanding what really affects profit is key to making successful applications in this sector.

Employers won't necessarily expect postdocs moving on from academia to have lots of commercial experience. But they do expect you to have done some research into their business.

- To practise, take a specific company that you've found and do a PESTLE analysis. What factors – political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental – influence that company's business?
- Then you can take your analysis a step further and do a SWOT analysis: strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats.

## 6. Add to your experience

In addition to doing your research and building your network, you can add to your CV by getting involved in activities that show your interest in business:

- [Imperial CrowdSolve](#)
- [Imperial Business Partners](#) (IBP)
- [Imperial Consultants](#) (ICON).

You can also attend relevant courses run by the PFDC, e.g. 'The Postdoc Entrepreneur: Business Plan Basics' – refer to our website for more information.

## 7. Focus on management

Few postdocs have formal management experience as part of their contracts, and yet every postdoc will have informal management experience – of projects as well as people. This is what recruiters will need to see.

Take a broad view: project and data management, time and risk management, career management, supervision, leadership, mentoring, budget and finance management, allocation of resources, and so on...

Start to gather your evidence. For example:

- When have you managed a complex task to completion? What did you do to monitor progress and manage risk?
- When have you worked with others to achieve a shared objective? Did you have responsibility for managing a part of that process? How did you keep everyone on track?
- When have you helped somebody else to maximise their potential and achieve their goals? How did you manage that process with them?

## 8. Be adaptable

Commercial organisations have to take tough business decisions when projects aren't yielding promising results or company strategy changes. And generally speaking, researchers tend to move projects in industry more frequently than in academia. You have to be prepared to let go of projects that you are attached to.

What evidence do you have of being adaptable? When have you changed plans or direction successfully? How did you cope? What was the outcome?

## 9. Search for vacancies

Bioscience vacancies are regularly advertised on the following jobs boards:

- [New Scientist Jobs](#)
- [Nature Jobs](#)
- [Science Careers](#)
- [www.eurosciencejobs.com](http://www.eurosciencejobs.com)
- [www.emedcareers.com](http://www.emedcareers.com)
- [www.jobsinpharma.co.uk](http://www.jobsinpharma.co.uk)
- [www.biospace.com](http://www.biospace.com)

Increasingly, employers are using LinkedIn to advertise their vacancies, so make sure you have a profile and it's up to date. Explore relevant companies by doing a keyword search.

## 10. Prepare your industry CV

The following is the basic content of an industry CV:

- **Personal details** – home address, not Imperial
- **Research experience** – this should not be too technical and always include key outcomes (quantify these as far as possible)
- **Qualifications** – your post-school education
- **Technical skills** – main techniques, instruments, programming languages, organised by relevance
- **Patents** – demonstrates commercial awareness
- **Other skills** – use the job description to create relevant headings
- **Referees** – 'available on request'.

Possibly include:

- **Publications** – do your research on the company and take a lead from how much they publish
- **Funding & awards** – to show your achievements
- **Professional memberships** – where relevant.

And don't forget to book a one-to-one meeting with the PFDC to go through your application with you.

Contact us: [pfdc-support@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:pfdc-support@imperial.ac.uk)

