

PATHFINDER:

ADVENTURES IN RESEARCHER LAND

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EXPLORING AND CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSE
RESEARCHER COMMUNITIES



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FOREWORD



Dr James Howard

Director of the Academy

Welcome to the third edition of Pathfinder: Adventures in Researcher Land, a dedicated publication for researchers and research related staff across the University of Liverpool.

Looking back over the last year, it's hugely gratifying to reflect on the range and quality of researcher development that's been made available to colleagues. Whether focused on enhancing practice, developing new skills, building professional networks or celebrating success, the activities we've collectively engaged in continue to foreground the critical role of Researchers in the University's ongoing success.

In this edition of Pathfinder we'll look in more detail at a selection of the resources and support materials created by researchers, for researchers, over the past 12 months.

Firstly, we'll revisit the fantastic insights captured on the Researcher Blog. We owe real thanks to everyone who has so far contributed to the Blog, which continues to grow and develop with each new post. Special thanks to Dr Revathy Krishnamurthi, who chatted to us about the importance of mentors to her personal career journey. If you have a topic you would like to write about, please do get in touch via researcher@liverpool.ac.uk - we'd love to hear from you.

Next, we'll hear from four researchers in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, as they share first-hand their tips for applying for competitive funding schemes. The really practical advice



provided by Christian, Ruth, Michael and Katy is well worth a read and covers the considerations needed before starting the process as well as the key information that should always be included in an application.

Decisions on career trajectory, including applications for funding, are best built on a deep understanding of one's personal practice and aspirations. In the next article, the Prosper Project team provide insights into how reflective journaling can help with this process. Dr Tamara West looks at how journaling can be used to support self-reflection and provides some practical tips for getting started.

Finally, it was a real pleasure for the Academy to host a social event for Researchers in July, bringing together a wide range of colleagues to celebrate their achievements, successes and strengths and thank those who've supported them. Colleagues discussed their shared motivations, impact and the huge contribution the researcher community make to the University. It's been wonderful to hear how much researchers enjoyed the event and the opportunity to build new connections and relationships - watch this space for many more opportunities over the coming year!

I really hope you enjoy reading this edition.



Researcher Blog

The Researcher blog includes posts that cover many topics and have been written by researchers at the University of Liverpool and beyond, including career coaches, wellbeing advisers and research consultants to name just a few.

Many important insights and tips have been shared in short posts that only take a few minutes to read.

In [Get writing! On the value of #AcWriMo for getting writing done](#), Dr Eli Saetnan (an academic developer at the University) discusses how writing is an integral part of doing research, but if writing is so important, why do we all struggle so much to find time for it?

In [A sense of community, identity and belonging](#), Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda (Post-doc at the University of Liverpool) and Dr Joan Chang (Research Fellow at the University of Manchester) discuss how being a postdoc often feels like a transition state and the importance of feeling part of a community.

In [Difficult conversations -are you ready?](#) Denise Chilton (a career development and leadership coach) provides tips on how to manage professional relationships and on how to prepare not only what to say but how to say it.

In [Support that is designed all around you!](#) Tracy Ellis (an organisational developer at the University) talks about the support that the University's mentoring programme offers and provides advice on how to find out if mentoring is right for you.



From 609503 to L697ZB

Find out more about a recent blog post written by Dr Revathy Krishnamurthi



Hi Revathy, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Hello, I am an Experimental Molecular Microbiologist. I obtained my PhD from the National Centre for Biological Sciences, India. I am a Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Liverpool in the Department of Clinical Infection, Microbiology & Immunology, IVES, investigating the role of bacteriophages in one of the clinically significant Liverpool Epidemic Strain of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* abundant in Cystic Fibrosis patients. I am also a Deputy co-chair of the University of Liverpool's Research Staff Association.

You recently wrote a blog post as part of our Researcher blog series can you give some brief insight into your journey "From 609503 to L69 7ZB"?

My blog post is about my journey from rural India into a career in science. I had a typical Indian childhood back in 1990's I was born in a small village in India, called Koothanur. As no school in my village could teach subjects in English medium, I was sent to a higher secondary school that required 54km travel every day.

I knew nothing other than school, home, and the train I used to travel.

I developed an interest in the subject of biology and did a bachelor's degree in Biotechnology. Before obtaining my PhD from the National Centre for Biological Sciences, India.

You talk a lot in your blog post about the importance of mentors. What positive impacts did your mentors have on your career?

My first mentor Dr Aswin Sai Narain Seshasayee, taught me how to make quick decisions and move forward. He has supported me in my life decisions as well. I cannot thank him enough for all the guidance and freedom he gave me to pursue what I liked. He is a boss who still works on his former student's application form even after a decade, by saying, "let us go through it together!"

My current boss Dr Heather E Allison thinks and practices "Women should be uplifting other women by leaving the ladder for others that they used to climb up." I have things to learn from her in day-to-day conversations.

What advice would you give other researchers that have a similar background to yourself?

Whilst each of us have a different journey, I believe that every woman in STEM could relate to my path in some way or another across the geographical barrier.

As far as the will is strong, you will find a way to sail the currents.

Adopt your experiences as learning at every step. Very importantly choose your niche, where your values are respected along with your technical skills. Learning is endless and I will continue to do so.



You can read Revathy's full blog at <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/blog/posts/science-for-a-woman-from-a-rural-background/>

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"There will be many drafts, be open to changes, invite critical feedback"
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Development Activities

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"What kind of academic do you want to become?"
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The University of Liverpool Research Staff Association supported by the Academy help coordinate central support for researcher development through regular [Lunch and Learn sessions](#).

Topics covered include (to access recording staff login required):

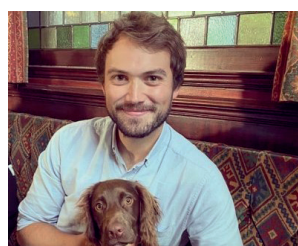
- [What is mentoring and how it might help you?](#)
- [Introduction to Public Engagement](#)
- [The good, the bad and the ugly about getting a Tenure Track Fellowship](#)

The Tenure Track fellowship session mentioned above was made up of a panel that included researchers from Health and Life Sciences (an article about this session can be found in the November 2021 edition of the [Pathfinder newsletter](#)). As a follow up to this, a session entitled From PhD to PI: Applying for and doing ECR research fellowships in Humanities and Social Sciences took place earlier this year where [Dr Christian Cooijmans](#) (British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, Languages, Cultures and Film), [Dr Ruth Nugent](#) (UKRI Future Leaders Fellow, Archaeology), [Dr Michael Robinson](#) (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, History), [Dr Katherine \(Katy\) Roscoe](#) (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology) shared first-hand their tips for applying for competitive funding schemes.



Dr Christian Cooijmans studied medieval history at Utrecht University and Trinity College Dublin, and received his MSc and PhD from the University of Edinburgh. He was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) before being awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Liverpool.

Dr Ruth Nugent studied Archaeology at the University of Chester and obtained an MPhil in Early Medieval Archaeology and PhD in Historical Archaeology at the University of Chester. Ruth is currently an UKRI Future Leaders Fellow at the University of Liverpool.



Dr Michael Robinson started his academic career at the University of Liverpool's History, Languages and Cultures in 2012 successfully completing a PhD in 2016. He is currently a Leverhulme Trust funded Early Career Researcher working in the History Department at the University of Liverpool.

Dr Katy Roscoe following her PhD in History, Katy had a 1 year Post-Doc at the Institute of Historical Research and then an ECR fellowship at the University of Liverpool, before returning to the Institute of Historical Research for a 3 month library fellowship. Katy is currently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology.



What should you consider when applying for funding?

Christian - Cast a wide net, you can apply to many funding bodies/schemes with the same project, although be careful to not cut and paste and make sure it is tailored to the scheme in question.

Plan ahead, give yourself plenty of time, reach out to colleagues, both known and unknown! Let others read your application, not just direct colleagues, choose people from outside of your subject area too.

Be concise and precise. The people reviewing your applications will be reviewing many applications so make sure you are clear from the outset what your project involves.

There is a time for being humble and it is not when applying for postdocs. If you have been involved in organising events, been awarded any prizes, make sure the funder knows about it.

My main tip would be that when you are thinking of applying for your 1st postdoc, really ask yourself did you enjoy doing your PhD? Did you enjoy writing up the research? Did you enjoy communicating your research? Getting feedback? A fellowship can be stressful and isolating but can be incredibly rewarding if it is something you are passionate about.

Ruth - Fellowships are different to standard grants, the funders are wanting to invest in you and therefore want to fully understand where you have been, what departments you have worked at and what activities you have been involved in. You need to put forward a programme of work that can take you to the next stage of your career and provide a step change in your career level and scope.

It is important to show some independence from your supervisor. Try not to have all your publications co-authored with your supervisor when you apply. Show that you are moving in a slightly different direction/ different area to your current project.

All of this doesn't happen by chance, **create a plan**. Ask yourself, what kind of academic do you want to become. Then tailor your fellowship to make sure you are building your career in that direction. Keep a strong sense of what is feasible, identify at what point you can say you have delivered on the fellowship and what a successful fellowship would look like.

What makes an application successful?

Michael- I was unsuccessful on my first two applications for my Leverhulme fellowship so I have looked back at these and compared them with my successful application to see what differences there are.

Firstly I would say talk to people that have been successful, before my successful application, I emailed someone I knew had been awarded a fellowship and asked if I could read their application. Successful applications have a feel about them, a pattern to them. You can gain a lot from reading an application that went on to be awarded.

Get in touch with a mentor early on in the process not just when the application is written. Listen to their feedback and incorporate it.

I would definitely stress highlighting any prior funding no matter how small. In my successful application I was able to say that I had already been to the archives/libraries or bought digitalised records from them, due to small grants of around £200 I had been awarded to do this. This made my application feel less risky.

Formating is important, adding bullet pointed questions to be answered during the fellowship can make the structure more clear. Also provide a concise but realistic timeline. Rejection doesn't mean it is time to give up.

Any tips on how to sum up your entire project in a short abstract?

Katy- As already mentioned reviewers will be looking at many applications and therefore it is important to refine your abstract so that you make an impact straight away.

Have a strong first sentence that paints the big picture/problem and then highlight what has been missed. Next say how your project makes an important intervention so that you are answering the "so what?" question. Then provide some specifics, Where? When? Who?

Bring it back to your original argument and have a strong concluding sentence. The abstract should be aimed at an intelligent audience but not for someone specialist in your field.

Finally share and read out the abstract with friends/family /colleagues in a different field. There will be many drafts, be open to changes, invite critical feedback.

From PhD to PI: Applying for and doing ECR research fellowships in Humanities and Social Sciences session can be found [here](#) (Staff login required)



Cohort Journaling and Self Reflection

What is the Prosper Project?

A recap! The [Prosper](#) project was discussed in the [Pathfinder](#) newsletter back in November 2021. It represents a new, co-created approach to career development, aiming to unlock postdocs' potential to thrive in multiple career pathways.

The first Prosper pilot cohort of 53 University of Liverpool postdocs were recruited in April 2021. In January 22, following a competitive application process, 86 postdocs from across the University of Liverpool, Lancaster University and University of Manchester were invited to join Prosper's second career development pilot.

With the first cohort having now completed their formal participation in Prosper, the second cohort is just at the start of theirs. They will undertake development activities including the exploration of different career pathways, working with dedicated career coaches, and accessing Prosper's 90+ employer partners.

For now, they are beginning the "Reflect and Explore" component of the pilot, including starting to record their entire Prosper journey via regular journal entries. As such, this seems a perfect time to look at what journaling has meant to the first Cohort and what the Prosper project has learnt from this.

Dr Tamara West (Research Staff Developer with Prosper, and a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Languages, Cultures and Film), in this article explores the use of journaling as a reflective tool and shares some findings from her initial analysis of the Prosper Pilot Cohort journals.

Why Journaling?

Journaling is a means of reflective practice used across, and established within, a variety of professional and academic practice and learning settings. For the Prosper Pilot Cohort journaling is a tool to assist thinking around the career and skills development they are engaged with. They are encouraged to record thoughts and experiences firstly as a means of self-development and reflection, and secondly to enable the Prosper team to understand progress and shifts over the course of the pilot in order to improve the Prosper model accordingly.

Resources are provided to assist the cohort with this and advice, support and journaling prompts are given on an ongoing basis by the cohort's career coaches and the Prosper team.

Some useful journal prompts to get started include:

Just three things - write down three things that went well, you enjoyed or that you achieved each day. Look back at these things five days later and reflect on what you have written. Does anything surprise you, do they have anything in common?

How's the balance? -During the past week how have you felt in your research role/wider life/overall? Where would you ideally like to be with respect to working in/beyond your comfort zone?

Yes/No lists- Make a list of everything you'd like to say no to. Make a list of everything you'd like to say yes to. Have a look at your lists, is there anything you can identify that you could do to make your list of 'no's or 'yes's a reality?

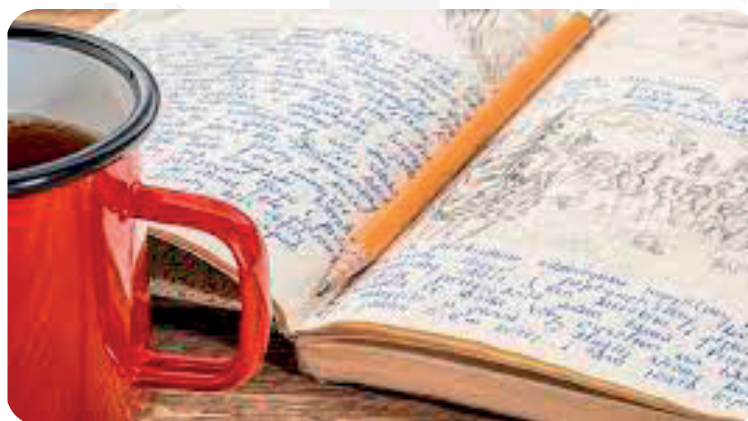
How did the Prosper cohort find journaling?

After an initial analysis of the journal entries of Cohort 1, the Prosper team gained some valuable insights into the impact of the project on the cohort so far, as well as defined and actionable ways to make journaling more accessible for the new cohort. Here are some key findings;

Emergent shifts in narrative: we found that there has been a shift in narrative during the first half of the pilot towards jobs, careers, and interviews. A further analysis of keywords and terms demonstrated a change in focus and in some cases action; this also echoes the structure of the Prosper pilot and the journey from reflection to action.

The importance of recognising different stages and journeys: Cohort members use their journals to record successes as well as hesitations. There is no single narrative. While several cohort members have recorded a linear progression towards jobs, careers, and interviews, others are still finding their way through the process and exploring their own individual path.

The difficult process- and ultimate value of self reflection: The majority of those who journaled regularly found the process initially difficult but have gone on to value the activity. Some have already used their journal as a tool to monitor their own progress, track shifts in attitude, or make informed choices by revisiting previous entries and identifying key changes in their own perspectives and actions.



What are the next steps?

Recognising Difficulties and Barriers : We know that journaling is an effective and highly informative tool for both the cohort and the future development of the Prosper model, but engagement differs across participants.

Even within the entries of those that have journaled regularly it is apparent that some difficulties centre in part around time commitment, and often also uncertainty about what to journal about.

It is also apparent that the one to one and group coaching sessions also directly influence the mode or content of journaling for several cohort members, shaping the participants way of recording their self-reflection and their activities.

Based on this, Prosper have run several focus groups and have used these to revisit and strengthen the journaling resources and support systems for the second cohort.

Where Can I Find out more?

Take a look at this Reflection Toolkit from the University of Edinburgh <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection>

For a reflective insight from one of Prosper's Cohort 1 participants, take a look at this blog: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/prosper/blog/prosper/my-prosper-journey/>





The Academy is committed to supporting the University's ambition to create a "borderless research community," in which every researcher can access high-quality development.

If you would like to contact us about anything mentioned in Pathfinder, have a contribution or idea for future newsletters or if you simply want to get involved with this work, please email us at:

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or find us on twitter at:
[@LivUniAcademy](https://twitter.com/LivUniAcademy)
and [@LivResearcher](https://twitter.com/LivResearcher).