Prosper. Unlocking postdoc career potential

# Prosper: Case Studies in Postdoc Career Development

**“It’s great to see just how far Prosper has come since its inception. All the co-creation, testing and refining has culminated in a genuinely unique offering in the postdoc career development space – a rich and comprehensive set of resources designed for postdocs as postdocs, crafted in close collaboration with our partner institutions, the wider sector, employers, and of course postdocs themselves.**

**I’ve seen first-hand the transformative impact Prosper has had on the postdocs involved in our pilots. Now that offering will become freely available to postdocs and institutions up and down the country. I’m confident Prosper can act as a gold standard for the sector from the get-go.”**

Anthony Hollander,
Pro-Vice-Chancellor for
Research & Impact at
The University of Liverpool

**“People are absolutely core to a vibrant research and innovation culture, and a major priority for UKRI and the wider sector. The UK’s postdoctoral community is a diverse pool of world-class talent. With the right support, postdoctoral researchers will play a key role in tackling the myriad social, economic, and scientific challenges of today and tomorrow, driving excellence both within academia and wherever their careers may take them.**

**“What Prosper has built in this regard is very impressive, and the impact it has had on postdoctoral researchers in its pilot phase is extremely promising. I believe Prosper can play a leading role in driving best practice in developing postdoctoral research careers and strongly encourage research institutions across the UK to adopt and make use of Prosper resources.”**

Professor Dame Jessica Corner,
Executive Chair of
Research England

# What is Prosper?

**Prosper is creating a new, holistic model for postdoc career development in the UK – one that unlocks’ postdocs potential to thrive across multiple career pathways, both within and beyond academia.**

Launched in 2019 with a £3.6 million grant from Research England, Prosper’s objective is nothing less than a transformation of research culture – to pioneer an approach that empowers postdocs to take full control of their careers, and opens up the huge talent pool that the UK’s postdoc community represents, to the benefit of all.

Between 2021-23, Prosper co-created and tested its approach over two pilot cohorts, the first involving 53 postdocs within the University of Liverpool, the second involving 75 postdocs from across the University of Liverpool, University of Manchester, and Lancaster University. The cohort participants were carefully recruited to reflect the diversity of the UK’s postdoc population in terms of gender, ethnicity and discipline.

This booklet contains 19 case studies of individuals from both cohorts, their stories and experiences with Prosper. We hope they illustrate on a human level the breadth and depth of talent in our postdoc community, as well as the sheer difference best practice career development intervention can make to the lives and careers of postdocs.


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# Zohra Butt

When Zohra first joined the Prosper pilot, she had been a Postdoctoral Researcher with The University of Liverpool for two years. Working within the Institute of Integrative Systems, Molecular and Integrative Biology, she studied molecular physiology and cell signalling, with specific expertise in oncology and lung disease.

Following Zohra's year with Prosper, she secured a position as Medical Science Liaison at Pierre Fabre UK & Ireland, where she applies her specialist knowledge to the task of improving patient outcomes and care through education, R&D, collaboration and innovation.

## The Challenge

Zohra was eager to get expert guidance and support to enable her to plan out the next phase of her career, not just for the immediate short term but over the next five years and beyond. She wanted the chance to get an outside perspective, and gain a more objective view of her career-to-date and aspirations for the future.

**"I wanted to know what my strengths were – is my personality better suited to one career over another?"**

She was also specifically concerned that there might be a perception in 'industry' that postdoc researchers can fail to adapt to the commercial/clinical environment without years of experience in a similar setting.

## The Prosper Journey

Zohra took full advantage of the range of resources on offer through Prosper, rebuilding her approach to her professional development and career plans from the ground up.

Through the self-assessment tools and individual coaching sessions, Zohra was able to identify her strengths and weaknesses, and embark on a journey of guided self-reflection that helped her to figure out her priorities. The drop-in sessions, group coaching, and buddy scheme allowed her to connect with peers that were facing similar challenges – providing a safe space to discuss anything and everything. Coping strategies and practical advice picked up along the way soon meant she was feeling far less overwhelmed, and able to take a more structured approach to pursuing her longer-term goals.



**"I felt very supported by Prosper – it was like I was building myself up again from scratch. It gave me back the confidence I'd lost. I was able to find more time to do the things that I enjoy and in doing so felt happier and more motivated to tackle career issues."**

With renewed confidence, Zohra was able to use Prosper's various career-focused resources to get a much clearer view of the roads open to her, and where she ultimately wanted to go. She gained an appreciation of just how transferable her skills as a postdoc were, and how those skills were more in-demand outside academia than she had imagined. Sessions with employers gave her insight into how to approach the opportunities she was interested in, and the workshops on interview skills and questions honed her ability to seize them.

**"My year with Prosper really helped provide clarity to my career plans, and improved my ability and readiness to showcase my skills."**

## Next Steps

Following Zohra's year with Prosper, she secured a position as Medical Science Liaison at Pierre Fabre UK & Ireland, where she applies her specialist knowledge to the task of improving patient outcomes and care through education, R&D, collaboration and innovation. She is now squarely focused on progressing in the medical affairs space, and considering enrolling for an MBA.

**"My year with Prosper was fulfilling, insightful and more than helpful – I really felt like it had my best interests in mind."**

**"Prior to joining Prosper I felt so lost in my career. Unsure what to do next, and not having the confidence to take the next step or any sense of what that step might be. Prosper equipped me with the knowledge and tools I needed to change direction and to aim higher in my job search."**

# Ali Ehsan

Ali is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at The University of Manchester. Working within the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, his research focuses on understanding how uncertainty can impact the future electricity, gas and heat networks.

Ali has four years of postdoctoral experience under his belt and is interested in using his diverse skill set to develop and promote technologies that solve energy and sustainability problems.

## The Challenge

When Ali joined the second Prosper pilot, he was keen to take the opportunity to improve his skillset with regards to networking, job applications, and other aspects relating to career development.

But more broadly he also wanted to gain a clearer sense of his long-term professional future. While his instinct told him that he wanted to continue down the more 'traditional' academic career pathway, he also had doubts. He felt he simply did not know enough about his options beyond academia to be able to rule alternatives out, and wanted to be able to make a more informed decision.

**"One of the major challenges I faced was deciding on a specific direction for my career."**

## The Prosper Journey

Ali made extensive use of Prosper's 'Act' resources relating to CVs, social media, networking, and the job application process, in order to improve his knowledge of his options and his chances of securing opportunities of interest.

He found sessions on LinkedIn especially useful - learning how to effectively market himself and his skills, and exchange information with peers along the way. He also made good use of the various sessions around networking, putting what he learned into practice to expand his professional network and make more connections within the academic community and beyond.

**"What stood out to me was the sessions on networking. They provided me with new opportunities and helped me to feel more connected to the broader academic community."**



As well as engaging with the 'Act' section of Prosper, Ali also found the career clusters information in 'Explore' beneficial for getting a better sense of the alternative that various career pathways within industry could offer him.

Combined with the more inward-looking resources on offer in 'Reflect', Ali found his attitude towards his professional future shifting. While he still wanted to pursue an academic route as a first port of call, he became more open to the idea of a career beyond academia. Instead of viewing 'academia vs industry' as an all-encompassing choice he had to make now, he started to view his options beyond academia as something to keep in mind, a potential avenue always open to him in the future, should circumstances change or the right opportunity arise.

Thanks in part to Prosper's resources, as well as his newfound approach to networking, Ali has a much better sense of what sort of jobs are out there should he ever decide to switch – and has the skills to continue to build this knowledge-base, wherever his career journey takes him.

**"With the help of mentors and some personal reflection, I was able to gain clarity about my future aspirations."**

## Next Steps

At the time of writing, Ali is continuing in his current postdoctoral role at The University of Manchester. Meanwhile, he's putting Prosper's job-hunting tools and advice into practice by actively applying for new jobs within academia.

Ali's engagement with Prosper confirmed his desire to continue down the academic pathway. But it also equipped him with a better understanding of the alternative pathways open to him, and the skills to more effectively pursue opportunities in general, both within and beyond academia. It helped him realise that career development is less about one-off decisions, and more about a persistent landscape of potential, to be continually revisited and reconsidered as your career journey progresses.

**"I am still primarily interested in an academic career, but I am now open to exploring other paths in future"**

# Caroline Redhead

When Caroline first engaged with the Prosper pilot, she was in the unusual position of having only recently made a switch into academia from a career as a practising lawyer. She had been a Partner within Burnetts Solicitors' corporate/commercial team, principally advising clients from the education and charity sectors – a role she successfully balanced with achieving a PhD in Palliative Care from Lancaster University. During her year with Prosper she worked on the Reset Ethics project within the Institute of Population Health at Liverpool University. The Reset Ethics research explored the ethical implications of decision-making around 'resetting' non-Covid-related maternity and paediatric services alongside the continuing Covid response in the NHS.

Caroline is now working as a postdoctoral research fellow in the Centre for Social Ethics and Policy at The University of Manchester, researching bioethics and socio-legal issues. Following her year with Prosper, she is considering future sideways moves into research roles in the commercial world.

## The Challenge

Aware of the unusual contours of her career-to-date, Caroline wanted the opportunity to take stock of her position – to reflect on her strengths and weaknesses, and gain an outside perspective on her unique mix of skills and experience.

**"While coming into academia as a second career is generally seen as putting me in a strong position, I was also concerned that I might be perceived as having broad experience but no specific depth of expertise. I wanted a chance to introspect and increase my awareness of organisations that might seek my particular blend of skills."**

## The Prosper Journey

Caroline found the 'reflect' element of her Prosper journey to be particularly useful. Its introspective focus enabled her to more clearly identify her weaknesses, while the individual and group coaching sessions empowered her to make incremental improvements in those areas.

While having only recently made the jump over to academia, and so not immediately on the lookout for a move, Caroline nonetheless found engagement with Prosper colleagues and resources very helpful in terms of organising her thoughts about her future. She was able to develop a greater understanding of the range of opportunities "out there" for someone with her varied background and CV – both beyond but also within academia - and get a better sense of the options available to her come the next stage of her career. Practical advice



on LinkedIn and social media use more generally made her more cognisant of the possibilities for personal brand-building, aiding the development of her professional network along the way.

**"Prosper was fantastic for developing my thinking about where and how to direct my attention in terms of future career progression. When I started with Prosper my role was limited to a single project, by the end I was working on two projects along with teaching responsibilities and editing commitments for a book – so the ability to access resources outside of live sessions really helped me get the most out of it."**

## Next Steps

After just over a year as a postdoc at the University of Liverpool, Caroline is now working as a postdoctoral research fellow in the Centre for Social Ethics and Policy at The University of Manchester, researching bioethics and socio-legal issues. Caroline is now working on the ConnecteDNA project, a collaboration exploring how people involved in donor conception both use and are impacted by the rise in direct-to-consumer online DNA testing. She continues to work on the outputs from the Reset Ethics research, including as part of a national collaborative of maternal and child health researchers in the UK considering the effects of COVID-19 on health and care.

**"My time with Prosper was very enriching; it has definitely broadened my horizons. Being relatively new to academia and recently ex-business, I'm still considering the possibilities open to me both within and outside academia. However, thanks in part to Prosper, I'm more attuned to possible future sideways moves into research roles in the commercial world – the Law Commission is an organisation of particular interest."**

# Efthymios Gavriil

Efthymios joined Prosper as a Postdoctoral Scientist in Medicinal Chemistry at Cancer Research UK's (CRUK) Manchester Institute. Working within the Drug Discovery Unit, Efthymios collaborated on two drug discovery projects aiming for the selection of clinical candidates for cancer therapy. Efthymios' work reflects his passion for developing new drugs that can improve cancer outcomes and patients' lives.

Following his time with Prosper, Efthymios secured a more senior postdoc position as a Research Associate in Medicinal Chemistry and Cancer Drug Discovery at Imperial College London – a role which offers him a chance to further his career development and build on his skillset.

## The Challenge

On joining Prosper, Efthymios faced two main challenges. The first was that he did not feel a part of Manchester's postdoc community, since his place of work was situated far away from other campus buildings.

The second was that Efthymios was interested by the vague prospect of a career in industry, but didn't know how he could go about pursuing this goal, or what it would entail. He hoped that Prosper would increase his knowledge of the processes involved in making this career move, whilst giving him the chance to connect with more postdocs within his community.

**"Before Prosper, I wasn't really sure about the ins and outs of preparing for and applying to positions in industry. I didn't really know how to go about it, or what it required."**

## The Prosper Journey

Efthymios knew that he had gaps in his knowledge when it came to the application process for industry jobs. He had experience and familiarity with preparing his CV for academic positions, grants and fellowships, but didn't how to translate this into recruitment processes beyond academia.

Efthymios found Prosper's 'Act' resources particularly enlightening on this front. He was able to learn all about recruitment processes beyond academia, and how to craft the much shorter, punchier CVs and applications that are more commonplace in industry. He learned what to include, what to omit, how to format so as to stand out, and how to really showcase his skills and tailor applications to the specific requirements of the role.

This has the serendipitous side effect of improving his ability to market himself not just for industry roles, but academic ones too.



**"The 'Act' resources gave me a much better understanding of how to prepare my CV – not just for jobs in industry but for academic positions as well. In academia we're used to listing out all our skills and papers and so on in chronological order – but the net result, even in academia where this is culturally normal, is that your skills get lost in the noise."**

At the same time, Prosper's community element and group coaching sessions enabled Efthymios to connect with his peers and other postdocs in a way that he'd struggled to do beforehand. He found it reassuring to know that so many others in his situation grappled with similar worries and concerns regarding their careers and professional development.

Efthymios also engaged heavily with Prosper's resources around effective networking – putting what he'd learned into practice by making new contacts and reaching out to professionals in the pharmaceutical industry, to learn more about their roles and day-to-day working lives. The process helped crystallise his desire to one day make the move to industry. But it also led him directly to his next career step within academia – a new role in London, with the opportunity to get more responsibility and develop certain critical areas of his skillset.

**"The most important element of Prosper for me was its focus on networking. If I hadn't learned what I did, and put it into practice, I would never have even found out about the position that I have now."**

## Next Steps

Following his time with Prosper, Efthymios secured a role as a Research Associate in Medicinal Chemistry and Cancer Drug Discovery at Imperial College London. The role is a step upwards in terms of seniority and responsibility, and affords Efthymios to chance to develop critical skills and knowledge that will aid him in his eventual ambition of transitioning into the pharmaceutical space.

**"I still have industry in my future plans, and I'd like to get into the drug discovery department of a pharmaceutical company and work on cancer."**

# Priyanka Raina

When Priyanka first joined the Prosper pilot she had been a Research Associate at The University of Liverpool for just under three years. Working within the Musculoskeletal Biology team at The Institute of Life Course and Medical Sciences, she specialised in Computational Biology. Much of her work was centered on the GeneFriends project – employing next-generation sequencing data for the purpose of developing new functional genomics tools to gather insights about gene function, ageing and complex diseases.

Priyanka's time with Prosper helped spur a decision to move beyond academia. She soon secured a role with MOSAIC TX as a Senior Data Scientist.

## The Challenge

Priyanka was unsure about the next step in her career. She wanted to learn more about the inner workings of non-academic sectors and organisations in the healthcare space, and develop a clearer view of the full range of options open to someone of her skillset and background.

Like many postdocs in her position, Priyanka was also keenly aware that she lacked experience and training with aspects of professional development that are often taken for granted in the commercial world – from the ability to network effectively through to very practical things such as having the confidence and know-how to negotiate a salary.

**"I needed support to lay a solid foundation for my future career. I wanted to build my confidence and explore new career paths that I could potentially excel in."**

## The Prosper Journey

Priyanka found her engagement with Prosper to be both informative and inspiring, enabling her to realise her full potential and make a concrete decision about what to pursue next, and how to go about doing so.

Sessions and training on presentational skills proved to be of particular value – through these, Priyanka learned the importance of clear communication, and how to get her strengths and ideas across to a non-specialist audience in an effective and concise way. Resources on careers, employer engagement and networking gave her the means to put this into practice, both in terms of identifying roles and organisations of interest, and creating a system for getting in touch with relevant individuals on platforms such as LinkedIn.



**"Prosper really helped me understand the extent to which persistence is the key to success – get in contact with recruiters on LinkedIn, be bold about what you apply for, keep going until you find the role that matches both your essential and desirable criteria."**

Above all, Prosper imbued Priyanka with a newfound confidence in both herself and her future trajectory. The specialist nature of much postdoc research can sometimes make it a lonely vocation. But Prosper's group sessions allowed her to connect with peers across a range of disciplines and fields, and appreciate the extent to which they were all suffering from similar doubts and challenges.

**"Since working with Prosper I've started to focus my time much more effectively. I express my ideas more confidently in work meetings. I am more confident about the different options I have beyond academia."**

## Next Steps

From an initial position of uncertainty, Priyanka's engagement with Prosper helped crystallise her desire to seek a role outside of academia in the healthcare sector, and gave her the confidence and support necessary to pursue this goal in earnest. So much so that before the year was up, she had secured a new role as Senior Data Scientist at MOSAIC TX, a pioneering healthcare organisation based at the Wellcome Genome Campus in Cambridge, where she works to combine lab-based technologies with data science methodologies to develop innovative new therapies for cancer patients.

**"When I started the Prosper pilot I was very unsure about whether I wanted to move out of academia, or where I would go if I did. Prosper helped me get out of my comfort zone and make a clear decision about my next career move. It was a wonderful experience – informative, well-designed, and thought provoking."**

# Alejandra Zarate-Potes

When Alejandra joined Prosper in 2022, she had been a Senior Research Associate at Lancaster University for two years – with over five years' experience as a postdoc. Working within the faculty of Biological and Biomedical sciences, her research centres on the evolutionary and molecular biology of host-microbe interactions.

Alejandra is passionate about teaching, research integrity, and motivating students to be curious about innate immunity. Following her year with Prosper, Alejandra is continuing her work as a Senior Research Associate and hopes to get more skills under her belt as a biomedical researcher.

## The Challenge

At the start of the Prosper pilot, Alejandra felt worried about her future career. She had spent her career moving from one project to another within academia, investing all her time and energy into them without giving much thought to what she wanted to do in the future or how to get there.

Like many postdocs in her shoes, Alejandra didn't fully grasp how wide her options were and wanted to explore what her future career could look like – both within and outside of academia.

**"I joined Prosper because I hadn't been conscious and strategic about my career path. I wanted to take back control over my career direction and development."**

## The Prosper Journey

Alejandra found Prosper's 'Reflect' resources - with their emphasis on self-understanding - useful, and regularly kept a journal which she used to structure her career development and set action points.

Alejandra also valued taking part in Prosper's coaching activities, regarding it as a safe space to connect with peers, discuss problems, and work together to find solutions.

**"The coaching was a safe space for constructive discussion and getting lots of feedback."**



As well as using Prosper's 'Act' resources to update her CV and LinkedIn profile, Alejandra engaged with the 'Explore' section of Prosper to navigate her options within the life sciences. She initially conducted an informational interview with her boss to better understand his role. Afterwards, she conducted another with a work supplier she knew who had previously worked in the NHS.

As a result of reaching out, Alejandra was able to gain a better insight into research jobs both within academia and beyond, and a greater appreciation of the different pathways open to her.

**"The information in Prosper's career clusters helped me to find a lot of individual industries I didn't know existed within the life sciences space"**

## Next Steps

Following her year with Prosper, Alejandra is continuing her work as a Senior Research Associate and hopes to get more skills under her belt as a biomedical researcher. In the future, she plans to explore how the natural evolution of the immune system can help treat infectious diseases - with the ultimate goal of using this knowledge to improve human health.

While she is keeping her options open about how to best pursue this goal in the long term, with Prosper's support she now has a better idea of what those options are. Importantly, Alejandra has taken ownership of her career development, and started to take a more pro-active, forward-planning approach to her professional journey. Prosper's resources have helped put her in good stead for the job application process, and - with an updated CV and a better appreciation of how to tailor it to specific opportunities - she plans to apply for a broader variety of roles and organisations in the future.

**"Prosper gave me the confidence to know that I will find a role in which I am able to reach my full potential – which may well be outside of academia."**

# Frances Sherratt

When Frances first joined the Prosper pilot she had been a Research Associate at The University of Liverpool for just over five years. Working within Public Health, Policy and Systems within the Institute of Population Health, her focus included leading a variety of projects exploring opportunities to make research more inclusive to individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Following her year with Prosper, Frances made the decision to move beyond academia into the UK Civil Service, to work as a User Researcher.

## The Challenge

At the start of the Prosper pilot, Frances was at a crossroads regarding her long-term future. She knew she was in a strong position to advance her academic career. However she was also in the process of completing a number of large projects that she sensed could make her an attractive candidate for roles beyond academia too.

Frances wanted to ensure that any decision she made was as informed as possible. Like many postdocs in her situation, she felt she lacked a detailed enough understanding of the options open to her outside the academic world. In addition to the chance to identify employers that suited her interests, she was keen to gain insight into what those organisations look for, and strengthen her ability to market her skills.

**"I was aware that there were probably jobs out there that I'd not considered before – roles that I'd not only be suitable for but also really enjoy."**

## The Prosper Journey

Resources within the 'Explore' element of Prosper helped Frances to get a much deeper sense of the range of career options open to someone with her background. The 'Fireside Chats' and other sessions with employees from a range of organisations – usually ex-postdocs themselves – gave her a chance to ask questions about their work and sector, how they found life beyond academia, and their experience of the transition itself.

This information coupled with the 'Reflect' portion of the pilot helped Frances focus her thinking on what she wanted to do next. Group coaching sessions provided a useful forum to talk through her options with others, and she started to consider more seriously the possibility of a move outside of academia.

**"Prosper was really useful for the process of thinking through my options – I became far more open to finding something outside of academia than I had been at the start."**



The 'Act' part of Prosper helped her to put her thinking into practice straight away – before long she had applied for a number of roles and gotten to interview stage. One was a role as a User Researcher in the Civil Service – a role she ended up accepting.

**"The journaling, the individual and group coaching, the CV writing workshop – all of these and more were great, and tremendously helpful to me in terms of securing my new position."**

## Next Steps

In June of 2022 Frances started working for the UK Civil Service as a User Researcher. Her new role involves planning, designing and conducting user research and usability testing to understand user needs and behaviours in support of the design and development of government digital services.

**"I wasn't sure what to expect from Prosper at the start, but in the end it proved surprisingly valuable, prompting me to explore my options in full, and figure out what was right for me."**

**"I heartily recommend postdocs take the time to be more reflective and explore pathways outside of academia. Speak to those who have stayed, others who have made the move – get a feel for what you'd be interested in."**

# Briony Banks

When Briony joined Prosper in 2022, she was a Senior Research Associate at Lancaster University. As a postdoc working within the Psychology Department, Briony carried out research in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology to study how we understand concepts.

Briony's journey culminated in her moving into the third sector, where she now works as a Senior Research Scientist at the Ambition Institute – an education charity dedicated to helping disadvantaged schoolchildren via the provision of training and professional development to teachers.

## The Challenge

When Briony first joined the Prosper pilot, she was dissatisfied with aspects of her career journey-to-date. She felt she had lacked the confidence to chart a course that suited her goals and ambitions.

**"Very early on I realised that I hadn't always made good career decisions, and I'd ended up in roles that weren't that fulfilling for me."**

Briony was keen to figure out what she really wanted from her career, what she valued most in a job, and why she hadn't got what she wanted from her roles up until that point. She was determined to put herself first going forward, and ensure that her next role was not just a good fit for her technical skillset, but also a source of personal satisfaction.

## The Prosper Journey

Briony really valued the 'Reflect' portion of the Prosper offering, with its emphasis on self-assessment, self-reflection and identity. She developed new ways of evaluating her values and career, and made heavy use of journaling to keep a record of them. As a result, she was able to think deeply and systematically about what she wanted from her career, and make a more informed decision about her next step.

**"The journaling and reflecting were the most useful parts of Prosper for me. I learned about what I really value in a career, and that I need to follow my values."**

The community element of Prosper also proved important, including group coaching sessions with other postdocs from a variety of disciplines. She became friends with a few, and they took the time each month to check-in with each other from career development perspective, providing mutual support and advice on applications. She also felt supported by her coach, who gave her invaluable advice on how to move forward with the process, and how to sell herself in interviews.



**"My group coach was brilliant. She helped me get out of an 'I don't know what I'm doing' panic, and gave me some useful tips for interviews."**

The practical resources on offer in 'Act' proved similarly useful to Briony. Learning the 'STAR' (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method completely changed the way she approached job applications, enabling her to showcase her skills in a concise way, tailored to the requirements of the role in question. As she grew more confident about what she wanted from her career, she started applying for vacancies in a range of areas - from public and third sector roles through to lectureships within academia.

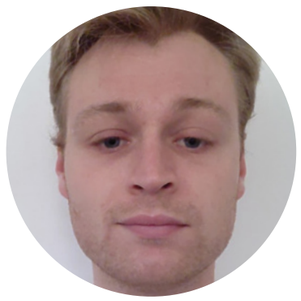
## Next Steps

Briony used her newfound skills to secure a role as a Senior Research Scientist at Ambition Institute where she carries out research into education and professional development for teachers. The position is a good example of what is sometimes termed an 'academia adjacent' position – though not within academia per se, it still involves a heavy research-based element.

Briony found the transition to a non-academic work culture much smoother than initially expected. She enjoys the challenge of a new area of research, and not only feels valued in her new role, but also rewarded by the positive impact her work has on peoples' lives.

**"I'm enjoying my new role so far and I definitely think it was the right move for me. I'm conducting education research for a charity and I'm enjoying doing something that will have a direct impact on people's lives."**

# Alex James



When Alex joined the Prosper pilot he had been a postdoctoral research fellow within the School of Physical Sciences at The University of Liverpool for just under a year and a half, working on a project to discover and synthesise novel porous materials through the computational screening of chemical space.

## The Challenge

Before engaging with Prosper, Alex had a vision of his future that was paradoxically both uncertain and narrow in scope.

**"I was unsure of what I wanted to do when my contract was up. My thinking was that I would inevitably end up as an academic fully committed to the researcher life. And why wouldn't I? I had spent my adult life working my way up the academic ladder. We aren't told any different and are surrounded by people on a daily basis who have done the same."**

It was the invitation to apply to the Prosper pilot that first prompted Alex to consider whether this was what he truly wanted, and to entertain the idea of a career beyond academia.

**"I wanted to hear from others who had moved outside academia. What did they go onto do? Might any of those options suit me, perhaps in areas where I wouldn't have even thought to look? I didn't really know where to start when it came to translating my academic experience into skills employers might find desirable."**

**"Perhaps most of all, I wanted reassurance that postdocs can be more than academics, that we have desirable skills that organisations outside academia both desire and will pay good money for!"**



## The Prosper Journey

As part of their year with Prosper, participants were encouraged to journal their experiences and insights along the way, to help them organise their thoughts and reflect on their own development. Looking back over his own entries, Alex noted a dramatic shift in his outlook for the better.

**"I was extremely pessimistic. My first few months of journal entries were all worded in such a negative and dismissive way. I was cynical when discussing my career prospects, unenthusiastic when listing my skills, and my general outlook was gloomy. A few months later the change was striking – my entries were far more positive, littered with optimism about my career options. I had become quite confident and hopeful about my skills and prospects."**

The initial 'Reflect' stage of Alex's journey enabled him to figure out what he really enjoyed and excelled at in his work (and, conversely, what he liked the least), and what he really wanted from his career in the long-run. It was at this point that he realised a future in academia probably wasn't for him. And through the group coaching sessions he discovered that he was far from alone in his worries and uncertainties.

**"Being surrounded by like-minded people in the same situation, having the space to discuss these issues in a safe and op en way in the group coaching circles – it gave me the confidence to ask the difficult questions of myself and gain insight, help and advice from peers along the way."**

Through Prosper's 'Explore'-themed resources, Alex was able to use his newfound self-knowledge to focus his search for a role and sector he could see himself thriving in. Sessions with senior representatives from employers – many of whom had once been postdocs themselves – allowed him to get a deeper sense of what working for these organisations entailed, and how to go about approaching them.

However, even at this stage, Alex didn't expect to make any moves in the immediate future. Then came Prosper's 'Act'-themed sessions.

**"I attended some Prosper sessions on very practical things such as 'how to write a CV', 'getting started with LinkedIn'. To be honest I wasn't really sure if they were that relevant to me at the time."**

Nevertheless, Alex set aside a few hours to set up a LinkedIn profile, following the advice he'd picked up. What happened next changed everything.

**"It [LinkedIn] was more enjoyable than I expected – addictive even – especially once you start seeing your network grow. I made a conscious effort to ensure my profile drew attention to the skills, background and experience I had learned were key to the roles I had taken an interest in.**

**Just a few weeks later I was – to my surprise – approached by a recruiter. Still not expecting much, I decided to apply to start getting experience of the job application process. The tight turnaround meant I had to write my non-academic CV overnight, essentially from scratch – the Prosper CV seminar and support from my coach was invaluable here.**

**Then I was offered an interview – for which a Prosper session on networking I had recently attended, again, proved invaluable. It went well. I was offered a second interview, this time with the CEO. Then I got the job."**

## Next Steps

Alex now works in his new role as Product Development Scientist at Puraffinity, an innovative new startup based at Scale Space, part of the ICL innovation hub in London, which is working to develop new sorbent materials to treat waste water and remove Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS).

**"I didn't really know what to expect when I joined Prosper. I had only ever considered a career in academia so to go from there to securing a role in industry in less than a year is quite incredible. To say Prosper played an important role would be an understatement – I was approached for the position on LinkedIn... it was only thanks to Prosper that I even thought to make a LinkedIn profile. Across almost every area of personal and professional development – from confidence and self-knowledge through to awareness of the employer landscape, to practical skills relating to applications and networking – Prosper was transformative for me."**



**"I would 100% recommend engagement with Prosper. It's a unique development offering which speaks to postdocs who want to explore the full range of opportunities open to them within and beyond academia – a voice which can quite often find itself diminished across most universities."**

# Christina Picken

Christina joined Prosper as a Research Associate at the University of Manchester. Based within the faculty of Physical and Environmental sciences, Christina is currently working on an industry-led project to create sustainable and biodegradable alternatives to plastic. Her experience ranges across academia and industry as a polymer chemist, with additional experience in the pharmaceutical field.

Christina is a passionate advocate for the environment, with a keen interest in areas of research that can make a meaningful impact in the pursuit of a more sustainable future. Following her year with Prosper, Christina is continuing her postdoc contract, and looking to chart a future course that combines teaching with her commitment to sustainability.

## The Challenge

When Christina first engaged with Prosper, she found herself in a similar position to some of her fellow postdocs. Her career-to-date had not given her much chance to step back and take stock of where her career was taking her in the long-run. She hadn't had the time or space to give much thought to her career development in the round - to truly form a clear picture of her goals, values, and what she wanted from her professional future.

**"Before Prosper, I didn't know what my future career plans were and what they would entail."**

## The Prosper Journey

Christina already had experience of leaving academia for a role in the pharmaceutical industry, prior to her time with Prosper. She returned to academia after realising it better suited her preferred style of working, and after having found a role which aligned with her passion for sustainability.

Her experience made her determined to take advantage of Prosper, and to take a more considered view of her future – and what she wanted from her professional life – going forward. She found the 'Reflect' element of Prosper useful insofar as it provided the space and support necessary to consolidate and examine her experiences, and draw out salient conclusions. She was able to more clearly identify why she had made the move back into academia, as well as what she valued the most in her work.

**"I think the self-discovery part of Prosper is revolutionary. It enables you to provide a narrative to your own experiences, and draw out and condense what is important from that. It's been really useful."**



Christina found the community and group coaching element of Prosper particularly valuable. They were a chance to meet other postdocs from a range of backgrounds and disciplines – to share experiences good and bad in a mutually supportive environment. She came to realise that many of her peers had similar feelings, misgivings and thoughts about their careers and futures. These sessions helped to her to become more comfortable with uncertainty, and also gave her an outside appreciation of her own talents and potential.

**"Because we are a close-knit cohort, particularly with the coaching groups, we have created a strong, supportive environment where I can be truly honest with my colleagues. Being around a lot of people who are uncertain really helps you deal with uncertainty. I'm now far more comfortable with the unknown, which is important."**

## Next Steps

Christina still has time left on her postdoc contract, and is continuing her work with the Sustainable Materials Innovation Hub. Thanks in part to her experiences with Prosper, she now has more clarity about what she wants from her professional future. Rather than view her future through a limiting binary like 'academia vs industry', she now knows that above all she wants a role that combines teaching with her passion for sustainability – whether within academia, the wider sustainability space, or elsewhere.

**"I now know that I want to work in a teaching position - whether this is a formal teaching role, or somewhere within the sustainable realm helping businesses and people to make more sustainable choices."**

# Ashley Gluchowski

Ashley joined Prosper as a Research Associate at The University of Manchester. Working within the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, Ashley's research is centred on ageing and evidence-based strength training interventions for older adults. She is passionate about making a difference in peoples' lives through finding ways to improve physical, social and mental wellbeing.

Ashley went on to secure an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Fellowship from the University of Manchester, and an ECR Engagement Fellowship with the ATTAIN Network. She has now secured a University Fellowship with the University of Salford. Ashley is also building and developing her own business, STRONGER with AGE, which she founded during the course of her time with Prosper.

## The Challenge

While Ashley has always enjoyed working in academia, she first joined Prosper because she couldn't envisage herself continuing down the 'traditional' academic career pathway of research and teaching in the long-run.

She had always been interested in working with older adults, in finding ways to encourage and enable them to exercise, and knew that eventually she wanted to have a more direct role and impact in this area than a 'traditional' academic career might allow for. Prosper offered an opportunity to explore her options.

**"Although I love academia, I wasn't quite sure about continuing in the same way I had. What's great about Prosper is that it gives the 'permission' to think about our careers in this way, to really look at and consider the question of where we're going in the long-term, and the practicalities of getting there."**

## The Prosper Journey

Ashley found the 'Explore' element of Prosper – with its focus on the careers landscape and the options available to postdocs - particularly engaging. She took a particular interest in Prosper's career cluster resources relating to entrepreneurship and policy, as they spoke to her ambition of becoming an academic entrepreneur.

Not long after starting with Prosper, Ashley founded her own company, and Prosper's resources – including those relating to growing a new business – provided insights that she could put to immediate use as she began laying the foundations for the project.



**"The Prosper portal was a treasure trove of useful information relating to careers and the different pathways open to postdocs. As well as being useful for me, a colleague of mine was able to get a job in industry using all the career cluster materials. She wasn't on the pilot but still benefited greatly as I was able to relay all the information."**

As she focused on building her new enterprise, Ashley continued to work on her own professional development through Prosper's resources relating to networking and marketing. She found Prosper's LinkedIN masterclass particularly useful for flagging up improvements she could make to her profile, and before long she was able to pass it on, helping her peers to improve theirs in turn.

The pandemic had meant that Ashley, like many, was out-of-practice when it came to in-person networking. Prosper's networking sessions were a great help on this front, and she found herself leaning heavily on the tips and methods she learned as she returned to the conference scene to start making the necessary connections for her new venture.

**"I've never been a 'natural' networker – but networking is so important if you want to be an entrepreneur. You need to do a lot of networking, and the general skills and support that Prosper offers truly boosts your confidence in this area."**

## Next Steps

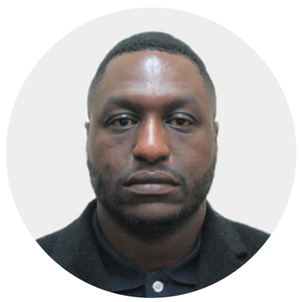
Ashley is passionate about empowering and encouraging older adults to engage in physical exercise. In April 2022 she founded her own wellness and fitness company, STRONGER with AGE, to pursue her vision.

As well as helping her with the various challenges of building a new business, her time with Prosper led Ashley to get a deeper sense of what her business could develop into, and the different directions she could take it in down the line.

While preparing her new venture for launch, Ashley is continuing to pursue her academic career. In January 2023 Ashley secured an ECR Engagement Fellowship with the ATTAIN Network, exploring interdisciplinary ways to tackle the challenge of raising awareness and disseminating evidence-based exercise guidelines to older adults and their exercise providers. In August 2023, Ashley will start a University Fellowship with the University of Salford where she has deliberately designed a project that aligns with her innovative nature.

**"Prosper was an eye-opening journey for me. It changed my perception of academia, and I now actively seek out research projects that encompass both innovation and impact. I was very fortunate to be a part of it, and look forward to the future with confidence. My tip for other postdocs? Be scared and do it anyway!"**

# Dominic Chiwenga



When Dominic first joined the Prosper pilot, he'd been a Postdoctoral Research Associate at The University of Liverpool Management School for two years, where he works across the Operations and Supply Chain Management (OSCM) group to support research development. In addition to his academic work, Dominic has an extensive background working in production and operational management roles within the Agri-Food industry – experience which aligns with his research interests focusing on resilience and sustainability in food industry supply networks.

Following his year with Prosper, Dominic intends to found his own consultancy business to build and grow on the side.

## The Challenge

Having experienced both the academic and commercial world over the course of his career, Dominic was unsure of his medium-to-long-term plans. He wanted the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of his own drives and interests, as well as a better sense of his professional strengths and weaknesses, so that he could make more informed decisions about his future career path.

**"I wanted to reassess my career development to date and its relationship to my true strengths, motivations and values. I didn't feel as though I had enough information to develop a credible career plan – one that balanced my own interests with the various skills and attitudes sought after by employers."**

## The Prosper Journey

Dominic found the extensive Prosper resources and information incredibly helpful in his quest to develop a better understanding of himself and a more detailed idea of the course he wishes to chart in the future.

The self-assessment tools together with the group and individual coaching sessions provided an ideal environment for self-exploration and discovery. Sessions with ex-postdocs who had themselves pursued a variety of pathways – some having stayed in academia, others having transitioned into the commercial world or started their own business – gave him a better sense of the practicalities, pros and cons involved in each, as well as a greater appreciation of the range of options open to someone in his position.

**"Prosper really opened my eyes to the opportunities available to someone with my strengths and motivations."**



The group sessions and social element enabled Dominic to meet other postdocs and ex-postdocs from a variety of circumstances and backgrounds that he would otherwise not have encountered – enabling him to expand his professional network along the way. And the tailored approach of the one-to-one coaching improved his confidence and empowered him to develop a more concrete career plan that worked for him.

**"I have learned so much about myself – I'm now quite seriously exploring some career options that I would not have had the confidence to pursue a year ago. Whether in applications for new roles or in my current work I'm now more comfortable and confident expressing my strengths."**

## Next Steps

Prosper helped Dominic realise that he has the strengths and experience to thrive in both the academic and non-academic worlds should the right opportunity present itself. While he remains undecided whether his next role will be within or outside of academia, he now intends to found his own consultancy business to build and grow on the side.

**"Prosper has been an amazing journey full of self-discovery and development opportunities – it allowed me to re-evaluate where I was and re-imagine my future. The team were supportive and engaging, the sessions and resources incredibly informative."**

# Revathy Krishnamurthi

When Revathy joined Prosper she had been a Postdoctoral Research Associate at The University of Liverpool for just over one year. Working within the faculty of Biological and Biomedical sciences, Revathy's research is centred on understanding the role of bacteriophages in the respiratory pathogen of Cystic Fibrosis patients.

Revathy is passionate about this area of research, and aims to make a move into industry that will orient her towards her long term entrepreneurship goal. Namely, to specialise in phage formulations for aiding global issues like antimicrobial resistance.

## The Challenge

Before moving to the UK and joining Prosper, Revathy felt like she had been following the traditional academic career pathway 'by default'. Having worked incredibly hard to get where she is today, she rarely had the time to self-reflect on her career and long-term goals. She wanted the chance to explore all the options open to someone like her. And though highly skilled and accomplished within her area of research, Revathy still felt like there was a lot she could learn to help realise her future potential.

**"Before Prosper, I had never thought about anything else other than academia."**

## The Prosper Journey

Though initially sceptical, Revathy found the 'Reflect' element of Prosper to be revelatory once she engaged with it. She realised she had been following a very singular path, and that this path wasn't the be-all-and-end-all of success for a researcher, or even necessarily the path she wanted to follow in the long-run. Once she noticed this, she was keen to get a broader understanding of the options open to her.

**"I just wasn't aware of all the kinds of research settings that exist outside of academia – places where you can still do research, learn new scientific skills, even publish papers. It was only via Prosper, and the way it encourages you to talk to people in different organisations, that I came to appreciate the landscape. I realised that while I want to be a researcher, I would much prefer to do research in a non-academic environment."**

The Prosper resources in 'Explore' and 'Act' helped Revathy improve her confidence and ability to showcase her skills. She found the 'STAR' (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method particularly invaluable as a means of structuring and articulating her accomplishments, in a way that can be easily tailored for specific areas of interest or opportunities. She created a STAR-based record of all of her experience-to-date, which she continues to update and maintain – for use in future applications and interviews. She updated her CV for non-academic roles, revamped her LinkedIN page, and worked on her networking skills.



**"Prosper has given me the confidence to articulate myself in a much better way. I can now speak confidently and proudly of my achievements. Updating my CV and online presence had immediate results – recruiters started contacting me directly about all sorts of opportunities."**

Revathy quickly put these skills to work making new connections on LinkedIN and elsewhere. With Prosper guidance, she started conducting 'informational interviews' with people working in industry, in order to find out more about their roles, organisations and what their day-to-day working lives involve. This gave her a better sense of what she might be interested in, and she discovered that people were quite happy to share their experiences with her.

**"I've learned how to network and find people who have similar interests to me. I'm now very active on LinkedIn following people, connecting with them, and studying recent advancements."**

## Next Steps

Revathy also quickly found that her new connections made for a useful source of information about upcoming opportunities. In the course of her informational interviews she learned of several vacancies opening up in the summer – for which she plans to apply. Revathy's postdoc contract is nearing its completion, and she plans on making the most of her newfound skills and connections to secure a role in industry, where she can continue to network, gain more skills and learn about what it means to run a business.

She also now has a much clearer plan for her career beyond the next role. She intends to use her next position as a steppingstone towards starting her own business, specialising in phage formulations as a solution for the problems caused by bacteria.

**"I want to start my own company in the near future. My ideal next move would be a job in a start-up. I've got some skill gaps I need to fill, and need industry experience to understand what a company is all about, so that I can learn to build my own. It's a challenging path with a steep learning curve, but thanks to Prosper I now have the information and skills I need to tread it, and I know it's what I want to pursue."**

# Marcos Del Cueto

When Marcos joined the Prosper pilot he had been a Research Associate at the University of Liverpool for one and a half years. Working in the School of Physical Sciences at the Department of Chemistry, Marcos specialised in the development of data-driven frameworks for materials science, and the application of machine learning to materials discovery.

Following his year with Prosper, Marcos was offered a very attractive job in industry as a Senior Data Scientist at Dataseat.

## The Challenge

Marcos felt he lacked a tangible understanding of the potential career pathways open to him beyond academia, and – like many postdocs – felt that other career and development resources online were too generic and often ill-suited to the particular situation he found himself in.

He wanted to learn more about how to make himself attractive to employers, and was keen to take advantage of the opportunity to engage one-to-one with senior representatives to get their insights, as well as connect with peers across the Prosper programme to share perspectives.

**“I feared that when it came to employers outside academia, we postdocs can be appear too focused on the abstract, and not savvy enough regarding real-world applications.”**

## The Prosper Journey

Through individual and group coaching, Marcos was able to build a concrete sense of where his strengths lay, re-evaluate his goals, and identify specific steps to take. Sessions on informational interviews and job interview practice gave him a newfound confidence in engaging with employers.

**“The coaching sessions were instrumental in enabling me to re-evaluate my goals and progress toward the next stage of my career.”**

Prosper resources also helped Marcos develop a more realistic and structured approach to exploring the world beyond academia and building his own professional profile and network. As well as learning how to match his CV and LinkedIn profile to the opportunities he was interested in, Marcos learned the importance of planning his activities in advance and deciding which chunks of time would be allocated to certain efforts – before long he was actively making lists of employers where he’d like to be potentially be working in 1-2 years time, and starting to contact individuals at those organisations.



**“The resources Prosper offered were extremely engaging and helpful – one year on I felt much more confident about my ability to pursue opportunities beyond academia, and develop my career independently. It demystified a lot of the processes that were previously quite alien to me.”**

## Next Steps

Following his year with Prosper, Marcos was offered a very attractive job in industry as a Senior Data Scientist at Dataseat, where he uses a wide range of computational tools to improve the performance of programmatic advertising.

**“Moving beyond academia had been in my mind for a while as a route to gain more stability, but I didn’t know if it would be career suicide or even where to start. Prosper was crucial to gaining confidence in transitioning beyond academia and shaping my profile to develop my career in the direction I want.”**

**“Prosper was a major factor in my career transition beyond academia – I doubt it would have been anything near this frictionless a process without the support and resources it provided me.”**

# Marieke van der Zande

Marieke joined Prosper as a Research Associate at The University of Liverpool, with over five years of postdoctoral experience. Working within the faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Marieke's research pertains to the field of medical sociology and investigates inequalities in oral healthcare. In her role, she has worked diligently to develop interventions which support patients in overcoming barriers to access dental care.

Marieke's time with Prosper confirmed her desire to pursue an academic career, and she now has more clarity about how to take the next step when her current contract comes to an end.

## The Challenge

Like many postdocs, Marieke felt daunted and overwhelmed by the prospect of personal career development – with all the different things it can entail, and all the myriad pathways open to a skilled postdoc. She simply did not know where to start and what to look at when it came to assessing her options, and making an informed choice about her future.

**"Before Prosper, career development always felt like this massive thing that was too broad to know where to start."**

## The Prosper Journey

Marieke appreciated the structured nature of Prosper's approach to career development – with its different sections under Reflect, Explore, and Act breaking the otherwise daunting scope of career development down into more manageable, bitesize chunks. This structure resembled the approach Marieke was more used to taking in her research, and broke it all down in such a way that she could target specific areas to work on, with concrete action points.

Initially, she used the 'Reflect' resources to identify what she liked about working within a research setting. Marieke is passionate about doing research which makes a difference within communities – especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Marieke then explored her options via looking through job boards, and made use of Prosper's resources in this area to figure out what skills she would need to develop if she ever wanted to make a switch beyond academia.

**"Prosper has made me reflect a lot on what I enjoy doing the most in research."**



Marieke also really valued the community feel of being a part of a cohort, and regularly attended group coaching sessions. She realised that many of her fellow postdocs experienced similar issues to her. She learned from her peers how they had gone about taking the next step in their careers, and how they kept track of their own career development – something she'd never really considered before.

Through Prosper's group sessions and socials, Marieke also came to discover just how many other postdocs shared her interest in ethical and altruistic careers. She and her peers created their own Slack channels dedicated to sharing information and advice about these kinds of roles – an initiative that has continued beyond the confines of Prosper pilot.

**"The connections with other postdocs and with the coaching group were so valuable – it makes all the difference"**

## Next Steps

Marieke still has ample time left on her postdoc contract, doing work she enjoys. Her time with Prosper brought welcome clarity on this front – she is now quite certain she wants to continue to pursue a career in academia, and that its academia that can give her what she wants from a career. Many of Prosper's resources are just as useful and relevant to pursuing an academic career as one beyond, and Marieke will continue to draw on what she learned wherever her future takes her.

**"My next steps will be applying for smaller grants, to then build up to a fellowship application - either that or applying for lectureships."**

# Catherine Hayer

Catherine joined Prosper as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Manchester. Working within the faculty of Science and Engineering, Catherine specialised in using satellite remote sensing technologies to detect trace gases from volcanoes. A keen advocate of equality and inclusion, Catherine worked as a Widening Participation Fellow to improve STEM university participation for students from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Following her time with Prosper, Catherine made the leap beyond academia to become a Consultant Software Engineer for EUMETSAT, where she works on the calibration and validation of data from upcoming Copernicus satellite missions.

## The Challenge

When Catherine joined Prosper, she had a general, uncertain sense that she might want to explore a career beyond academia. But, like many postdocs with this feeling, she didn't know where to start looking, and felt she lacked an informed understanding of her options.

**"I knew that I probably wanted to leave academia, but I didn't know where to start or where to go."**

## The Prosper Journey

Catherine hoped that Prosper would give her the time and mental space to work out what she wanted to do in her career. Engaging with the 'Reflect' section of Prosper, she was able to figure out her career priorities, and what she wanted – and didn't want – from her next role.

Armed with this self-understanding, she then took advantage of the 'Explore' resources to get a better sense of the opportunities available out there for somebody with her specialist knowledge and skillset. The weather monitoring and satellite agency space caught her eye, and struck her as an area she might both be suited to, and interested in.

**"Prosper helped me to work out what I do and don't want from a job, how to pitch my skills, and how to be more confident in myself going forward."**

The group coaching sessions helped crystallise her ambition to make the leap beyond academia. She felt able to talk openly about her career anxieties, doubts and hopes. The other postdocs in the group helped her think through the decision, and weigh up the pros and cons.



Once she decided it was what she wanted, Prosper's 'Act' resources played an important role in enabling her to take the next concrete step. Sessions on CVs, applications and interviews improved her ability to articulate her skills in a concise and effective way. As she gained practice, she gained confidence, both in herself as a candidate, and in her ability to navigate a once-unfamiliar process.

**"My coach and the other postdocs in my group kept me motivated. You will have to have some hard conversations with yourself, and this is easier to do when you have that support."**

By the end of her time Prosper, Catherine had a far more confident, assured outlook on her career – both of her own abilities and in her chances of finding a career pathway suited to her skills and interests. She realised that leaving academia did not mean ceasing to work in research.

## Next Steps

Catherine was able to put what she had learned into practice, and soon secured a role as a Consultant Software Engineer for EUMETSAT, the European operational satellite agency. Her new role involves working on the calibration and validation of data from European meteorological satellites for three upcoming satellite missions.

**"I don't think that I'd have had the confidence to interview for my current role if it hadn't been for Prosper."**

# Anthony Evans

When Anthony first joined the Prosper pilot, he'd been a Postdoctoral Research Associate with The University of Liverpool for just over four years. Working within the Institute of Integrative Systems, Molecular and Integrative Biology, Anthony specialised in investigating biomarkers for therapeutic response in pancreatic cancer.

## The Challenge

At the start of his engagement with Prosper, Anthony had a hazy and uncertain view of his future career trajectory - one marked with doubt. Although he loved research and being a researcher, there were other elements of the academic lifestyle that made him start to wonder whether it was right for him in the long run.

**"I was at the point in my academic career where the 'traditional' next step was to start pursuing a fellowship position. I had some doubts in the back of my mind about this, but my career up until then had been entirely research-focused, and I was fairly ignorant of what alternatives were out there, if any."**

Unfortunately the impact of the pandemic, combined with the demands of work and his new responsibilities as a father, had made it very difficult for Anthony to properly explore his options. The Prosper pilot represented a chance to rectify this.

**"The timing of the Prosper pilot could not have been better for me. I still expected to commit to a future in academia, but I would at least have the opportunity to learn about other careers and know that I made an informed decision."**

**"I had very little sense of what the world beyond traditional academia could offer to someone like me. I wasn't sure how non-academic employers viewed postdocs with our niche specialisms. I wanted to learn about the paths other ex-postdocs had taken, what skills employers look for, and what my academic experience-to-date could be translated into on this front."**



## The Prosper Journey

Within only a few months of starting with Prosper, the 'Reflect' portion of the pilot – encompassing self-assessment tools, individual career coaching,sessions with ex-postdocs who had transitioned beyond academia, and more – had convinced Anthony that the traditional academic pathway was not for him.

**"Prosper really helped bring my priorities into focus. I went from having niggling doubts to knowing I didn't want to be a lecturer. The prospect of moving around a lot, while I can see the appeal to some, didn't sit well with me as a new parent. And hearing from ex-postdocs who'd made the leap gave me much more cause for optimism about the prospect of making a change."**

Of course, this still left Anthony in an uncertain position –while he had decided the traditional academic pathway wasn't for him, he still didn't know what he wanted to do instead.

This is where the 'Explore' element of Prosper came into its own. Using the career cluster resources, including Q+A sessions with employers, Anthony was able to start narrowing down what initially felt like an overwhelming plethora of options. Thinking about what he enjoyed in his current role, and what he didn't – and with a clearer sense of his own strengths and skillset – he was soon enough in a position to start making applications.

**"I learned to be much more mindful of my long-term goals, and to make appropriate time and space for pursuing my own professional development. I started to be much more selective when pursuing new opportunities, with a particular eye for transferable skills. I became more mindful of both my own priorities as well as those of the employers I was considering."**

His first few applications failed to result in an interview. Far from getting disheartened or giving up, Anthony again engaged with Prosper – this time the 'Act' element – to find out where, if anywhere, he was going wrong and to improve his chances going forward. He attended CV and applications workshops, and went over previous applications with his career coach.

**"I realised my first few applications were too subtle in demonstrating how I matched the job criteria – my advice to others would be to be a bit shameless in giving examples! Make it easy for the person to tick the boxes. Prosper support here was really invaluable in getting to grips with this quite practical – but crucial – aspect of it all."**

Feeling more confident, Anthony put what he'd learned from networking sessions into practice and reached out to enquire about future roles at an organisation he wanted to work for – asking if he'd be a good fit based on his experience. He was encouraged to apply. He got an interview. Then he got the job.

## Next Steps

Anthony now works as a Data Scientist at the Computational Biology Facility at The University of Liverpool.

The binary at play in the discourse around non-academic vs academic jobs often occludes the existence of a large swathe of 'professional services' roles at Universities and other Higher Education Institutions – roles that often meld elements of researcher life with more traditionally non-academic job elements. For Anthony, this blend represented an ideal marriage of what he liked in academia and what he was attracted to in the world beyond the traditional academic career ladder. His position is mainly service-based – with a focus on collaboration and teaching with other research groups to help with their data analysis needs – but still retains a heavy research element.

**"It felt like a hybrid of academic and non-academic work and my application reflected that. My CV was structured as though for a non-academic job – something Prosper was a great help in. I wasn't sure if I'd struck the right balance, but even though I wasn't a 'traditional' applicant, they saw my experience and enthusiasm, and here I am."**

**"I feel very fortunate to have been part of the Prosper pilot. It's given me the push and direction I needed to help me manage my career now and in the future."**



# David Ashmore

When David first joined the Prosper pilot, he had been a postdoc at the University of Liverpool for four years. Working within the Geography and Planning team at the School of Environmental Sciences, he conducted research into glaciology and polar science – with a particular interest in applying earth observation and geospatial data to track and model ice and snow melt.

David's time with Prosper enabled him to look past 'the next contract', and the habitual binary of academic vs non-academic careers, and to instead view his research career as a strategic investment – positioning for a more clearly-defined set of long-term goals. He applied what he had learned to secure a new postdoc position with the goal of filling a skills gap, and using it as a stepping stone to a career beyond academia.

He has since secured a role as Remote Sensing Scientist at the Met Office, where he'll be working to derive atmospheric and cloud properties by using instruments on satellites and aircraft that measure how they interact with solar microwave radiation.

## The Challenge

Before engaging with Prosper, David found himself in a position familiar to many postdocs. He was uncertain about the long-term trajectory of his career, and didn't feel fully in control of his professional future.

**"I didn't have a strong sense of where I was going, I just knew I wasn't fully contented with the road I had found myself travelling along. I wasn't convinced a career in academia was right for me, but had no plan for when my contract was up."**

Workload and family commitments limited his horizons to 'the next contract', and he feared as time went on his specialist focus might limit his career options.

**"I had a quite passive mindset – I just assumed I'd muddle through and end up either in academia or some job related to my research. But my specialism was a small sub-discipline of environmental science – I didn't imagine there'd be many directly relevant jobs out there. To further confuse things, my only previous environmental science role outside academia hadn't been a great fit for me. I didn't know where I was going, or even really where I wanted to go."**

David was keen to get better insight into his options, as well as a greater understanding of how to sell his skillset to employers – particularly in regard to roles not explicitly or typically advertised to postdocs.

**"Other career development resources I'd looked at over the years generally didn't give very actionable advice, or were too focused on obvious routes and silo-ing you by discipline. Earth science may have been my focus area, but I have lots of applied programming and data science experience more generally. I wanted this reflected in any potential career plan – I hated the idea of missing out on opportunities just because I don't come from an explicitly maths or computer science background."**

## The Prosper Journey

Through Prosper's initial 'Reflect' stage, David undertook a journey of self-discovery that enabled him to unpick his motivations and values.

**"I wasn't sure what to expect at the start, but the first few months were quite revelatory. The group coaching was stunningly effective for identifying my blind spots and assumptions, and getting me to reflect on what I really wanted from my career. I came to realise that an academic teaching and research route wasn't something I wanted to pursue in the long run."**

This newfound self-knowledge started a process that would lead David to completely change the way in which he thought about his career.

**"I underwent a mindset shift, to what you might call a growth mindset. I was more motivated to investigate different career pathways. I knew what skills I wanted and needed to work on."**

Drawing on resources from Prosper's 'Explore' and 'Act' stages, he started to take a far more pro-active, strategic and long-term approach to his own professional development. He started researching sectors of interest, and monitoring start-up funding and company activities. He learned to network more effectively and make full use of tools such as LinkedIn for this purpose. With Prosper's support, he overhauled his CV and approach to covering letters, and started applying for a raft of positions at SMEs and startups.



However, while David got a slew of interviews, he didn't land any job offers. Then he saw another postdoc opportunity arise within his department.

**"The fact that I got so many interviews was motivating, I was clearly making progress. But something was missing. Then an opportunity arose in my department to stay for an additional year as a postdoc. I wasn't looking for another postdoc role, but the job description suggested it could be an ideal vehicle for addressing a particular skills gap that was hindering my attempts to move beyond academia. I was honest and straightforward about this in my application – rather than just another postdoc contract I saw it as a conscious and strategic step to get to where I wanted to be."**

David secured the role, and worked to steer his part of the project towards his interests. He consciously used techniques valued in industry, with an eye on future applications.

## Next Steps

David's strategic move within academia soon paid off. He was able to parlay his enhanced skillset into a new, permanent role beyond academia. He will soon be starting as a Remote Sensing Scientist at the Met Office, where he'll be helping to improve weather forecasts by leveraging radiometric measurements of atmospheric and cloud properties from satellites and aircraft.

**"I've always been keen to try out new things in my academic research work, but through Prosper I learned to expand that same impulse to other areas of my professional life. I've become more ambitious, and have a much stronger appreciation of the importance and uses of communication and interpersonal skillsets – I no longer just see myself as a repository of technical ability. I feel more able to be honest with myself, about my values, what I want to do day-to-day, and who I aspire to be professionally. I'm more comfortable explicitly pursuing what I want. And now, rather than looking to just pay the bills, I'm actively charting a more fulfiling career path, one that I can continually build upon."**

## Contact

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