

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.”



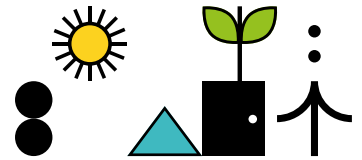
It was the invitation to apply to the Prosper pilot that first prompted Alex to consider whether this was what he truly wanted, and to entertain the idea of a career beyond academia.

“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 open 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.”

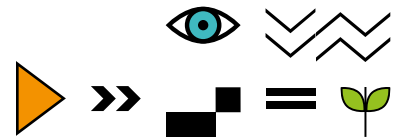


Through Prosper’s ‘Explore’-themed resources, Alex was able to use his newfound self-knowledge to focus his search for a role and sector he could see himself thriving in. Sessions with senior representatives from employers – many of whom had once been postdocs themselves – allowed him to get a deeper 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.”

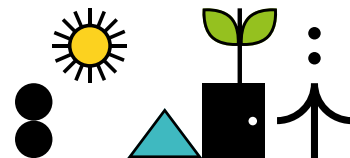


Next Steps

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.”**

