

EARLY CAREER RESEARCH AND CAREER BUILDING

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OVERVIEW
OF THE AREAS GN WILL
COVER

- Case Study: From PhD to Post-PhD; my experience
- Post PhD Options
- Presenting at Conferences
- Dealing with Negative/ Hostile Questions at Conferences
- Negotiating academia as a queer/ neurodiverse person.
- Holistic Networking Practices: Finding your People
- Publishing: Co-Editing
- Work-Life Balance

CASE STUDY: FROM PHD TO POST-PHD, GN'S EXPERIENCE

Lower-middle class family. Non fee paying, community school education. Queer, neurodiverse (autistic).

Fully funded PhD in an Irish University.

Two author PhD in Modernist/ post 1900 literature; one Irish author, one American author.

Was co-opted into a second PhD at another European University, which had a DH element to it.

During PhD: Topped up funding stipend with tutorial work (paid per hour) but also through exam invigilation.

STATISTICS			
	JOB'S APPLIED FOR	INVITATIONS TO INTERVIEW	JOB OFFERS
2016	25	2	—
2017	1	1	1 (fixed term position in Ireland)
2018	5	1	1 (fixed term position in Germany)
2019	—	—	—
2020	—	—	—
2021	1	—	—
2022	1	1	—
2023	—	—	—
2024	5	1	1 (permenant position in Ireland)
	38 applications	6 interviews	2 fixed term postdocs 1 permenant position

6 GRANT APPLICATIONS

4 unsuccessful

IRC Postdoc 2017
Humboldt 2017/18
LMU Munich Excellence
ERC Starting Grant

2 successful

LMU Munich Seed Funding Grant 2022
MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship 2022

CASE STUDY: FROM PHD TO POST-PHD

pre-submission:	Told I would need three published/ accepted for publication articles to compete for permanent positions (lol!). One interview for a research assistant (unsuccessful); one interview for a 3 year post (reserve candidate).
0-6m post-PhD:	Tutorial work (paid per hour), lecturing (paid per hour), JobSeekers Allowance on days with no teaching work.
6-18m post-PhD:	Successfully interviewed for a full time postdoc in the Digital Humanities. Applied for an IRC Postdoctoral Fellowship (unsuccessful; messed up the application) Worked on academic papers relating to my PhD before going into work in the morning.
18-24m post-PhD:	Went down to a 0.5 contract in my DH job. Increasing focus on applying for positions abroad. Applied for a Humbolt Fellowship at LMU Munich. (unsuccessful) But it introduced me to the postdoc system in Germany & gave me contacts in the LMU. Interviewed for a regular postdoc (wissenschaftlicher mitarbeiter/in) at LMU Munich with the professor who has helped me with my Humbolt application. This application/ interview was successful. Moved to Germany in September 2018 on a 2 year contract that was extended to 3 years, then renewed for a further 3 years. Contract was 50% teaching: 50% research. It was very well paid. I switched to a Beamter/in (civil servant) contract. This was even more well paid, especially compared to what I had been used to in Ireland.

CASE STUDY: GN'S PHD TO POST-PHD

LMU Munich 2018–2023 (4.5 years)	Goals while at LMU Munich: • To not fret about contracts/ the future for a while. • Get as much teaching experience as possible. • Get as much supervisory experience as possible. • Get my book published, do some editing projects. • Explore the German / German speaking university system. (Habilitation System) • From year 3 on I made the decision to pursue external funding. • Applied for an ERC Starting Grant (unsuccessful) • Applied for an MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Vienna.
Vienna (1.5 years)	MSCA postdoctoral fellowship in Vienna Goals: Fix the “major gap” in my CV by organising a conference. Apply for jobs.

POST PHD: OPTIONS

Research Fellowships to turn your PhD into a book. (IRL/ UK)

Research Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowships

AHRC in the UK

Leverhume Trust

Teaching Fellowships/ Stipendiary Lectureships.

Increasingly offered in IRL/ UK

I have also seen them advertised in Germany and Denmark and know colleagues who have worked them there too.

Travel/ “International Experience”

Apply for postdocs/ teaching positions in a country other than the country you completed your PhD in.

Applying to be postdoc on Research Projects where a PI / Senior Academic will tell you what to research etc.

PRESENTING AT CONFERENCES

- Write your paper to be read aloud. There is a difference between the language you need to convey information orally and the written word.
- Read your conference paper out loud while writing it. This helps you to understand your own voice. To understand its cadence, and the patterns of your speech. If you write in your own voice, your speaking voice, it will be easier to read on the day. This is particularly important if English is your second/ third language. Learn to know and feel comfortable in the cadence of your speaking voice.
- It also helps you in terms of learning what is or is not possible to read out loud, and whether what you are saying is understandable. A lot of academic papers are written to be read in silence and solitude in a bunker.
- Learn how to make your work understandable. Use accessible language. Avoid the temptation to hide behind/ showcase verbiage. Being pretentious with language doesn't mean you're smart: we are all smart here. Learn to be smarter: make your language accessible and clear.
- You want people to know what you're talking about, to understand your point immediately and without effort. Professors etc might have the luxury of making no sense / being terrible presenters, but as an ECR/ precarious scholar, you need to make sure your message is clear and understood.
- That in itself is a transferrable skill: It will make you a better teacher. It will help with job interviews. It will help when it comes to writing grant applications / applying for jobs.

PRESENTING AT CONFERENCES

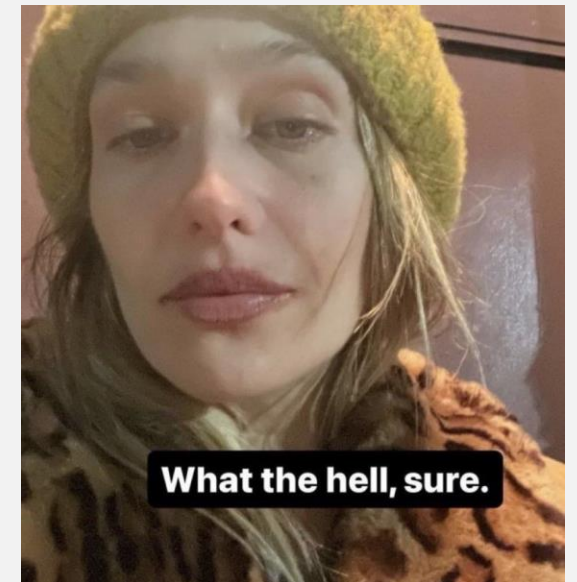
- Avoid the temptation to squish everything you know into the paper and just speak really, really fast: this won't help you.
- Speak slowly: speak slower than you usually do. This will make it easier for people to digest what you're saying in real time. It also sends a message to your brain to stop freaking out over public speaking.
- Never go over the allotted speaking time. No matter how important you think your topic is, even if it's genuinely **really really really** important and **really really really** interesting: never, **ever** go over the time limit. Other people are there to present too. Everybody deserves to have their space and time. If the paper is 20 minutes long, time your talk to be 18 minutes, just in case.

DEALING WITH NEGATIVE/ HOSTILE QUESTIONS AT THE END OF YOUR PAPER.

- As a rule, most people ask well-intentioned questions.
- As a rule, the well-intentioned questions won't be the one we remember and fret over for days and weeks afterwards.
- You are a graduate/ early career scholar. You should not have to defend yourself/ respond to hostile/ bad faith questions from strangers. Conferences are not vivas! This does not fall under the remit of constructive criticism.
- First and foremost, it is the responsibility of the Panel Chair to shut down/ interject if something like this happens.
- If you are chairing a panel and someone asks a hostile/ bad faith question, my advice to you is: Kindly/ gently interject (invoking timekeeping if you need to, for example) and say something like "You know, that sounds like something we might leave for the coffee break." Then redirect or pose a nicer/ fairer question to the presenter.

DEALING WITH NEGATIVE/ HOSTILE QUESTIONS AT THE END OF YOUR PAPER.

- If the Chair doesn't do this, and you are left to deal with this on your own (which is often the case), my advice to you is:
- Take a moment, maybe repeat the question ("That's a very interesting question! So what you're asking is....") to buy some time/ give yourself a chance to settle yourself.
- Keep your response short, sweet, and aim to shut them down. My general practice is actually to, in a roundabout way, agree with them/ shut the invitation to argument down. In other words, the "What the hell, sure" approach.
- **Remember:** Other people will notice this behaviour too. The room will be on ***your*** side.



mfw someone asks
a stupid question

NEGOTIATING ACADEMIA AS A QUEER/ NEURODIVERSE PERSON.

Things you are told are important as an ECR:	NETWORKING
Things you are told are critical to helping you get a permanent job as an ECR:	NETWORKING
Things that are particularly difficult to do ifa you are neurodivergent, or even just a little bit shy, bookish and and introverted (eg. an ideal PhD candidate):	NETWORKING

THINGS THAT WOULD ACTUALLY HELP YOU
GET A JOB

LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM
TO PROTECT VULNERABLE WORKERS
EXPLOITED BY PAN-EUROPEAN
NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY SYSTEM THAT IS
BUILT ON AND SUSTAINED BY PRECARITY

(That, and having a book lol.)

HOLISTIC NETWORKING PRACTICES

Find your people: find friends. Find the friendly people.

Avoid thinking of your friends / fellow ECRs as competition. Solidarity and friendship are what will sustain you.

I have applied for jobs/ fellowships with friends. I have been shortlisted and interviewed for jobs alongside friends. I have known that these people are just as qualified as I am, and are just as deserving. Fight the temptation to turn against each other. Practice solidarity.

All of my “networking”/ “collaborative research activities” have been done with people I am now lucky enough to genuinely consider friends.

These relationships were not established by aggressive / merit based networking practices. They took years, they were not established in a quid pro quo manner. Their foundations are based on solidarity and kindness, and realising that this often difficult career phase is so much easier when you have people to complain about it with.

Try to cultivate a research/ work environment where you want good things for the people around you and vice versa.

Don't be afraid to burn bridges if you need to.

PUBLISHING: CO-EDITING

Editing/ co-editing journals/ edited volumes can be a useful way to:

1. Get editorial experience (useful for refining your academic voice/ learning how to write; useful for learning how to peer review).
2. Get experience writing up a book proposal (particularly useful in advance of preparing your monograph proposal).
3. Meet and work with like-minded people in your field (eg. co-editing with a peer and fellow ECR).
4. Meet and work with established professors in your field (eg. co-editing with an established academic).
5. Meet and work with exciting voices in your field (eg. editing and working with the academics whose articles constitute the volume).

PUBLISHING: CO-EDITING

Why can co-editing be useful to you in terms of career building?

You gain experience: of editing, and of the people you are editing.

You meet people and make contacts within your field. You may meet the people who, if you are lucky, will come to be career-long contacts and allies within your field.

This is useful in terms of meeting 'established' academics yes, but in my experience it's the connections you make with peers and fellow ECRs that prove to be the most valuable and enriching.

Edited Volumes can also be very impactful/ have quite a broad reach. Of everything that I have done to date, it is my work on edited volumes that seems to have had the most significant impact in terms of establishing my voice within my specific field.

It is also how I have met the people whose work and integrity as academics (to me these are of equal importance) bolster and reenergise me, and have helped me keep faith in this discipline.

PUBLISHING: CO-EDITING

Things to keep in mind:

- Be picky. Don't jump into something too soon. Don't overcommit. Focus on your PhD first and foremost.
- There are two main options available to you: Journal Special Issues & Edited Volumes. Journal Special Issues are usually easier to get approved. Both take a long time in terms of going from initial ideas, proposals, to print. Often this can run to years. Eg. A special issue I first proposed in 2018 was not published until 2023.
- If you are working with a peer/ fellow ECR, make sure the work is shared equally. With this in mind: try to make sure the person you choose to work with is someone you think will actually work *with* you. Pick nice people!
- Be mindful that you and your co-editor/s may share the same interest in a given subject, but you will likely have different skillsets as editors. Rather than seeing that as a negative, try to collaborate and build on / bounce off each other's strengths. Some people have hawk-eyes when it comes to copy editing. Some people are good at writing friendly emails. Learning how to work with people like this in a non-confrontational/ mutually uplifting manner will be really useful when it comes to post-doctoral research positions/ working on a research team/ working within a department where you have administrative roles.
- Editing can also give you an insight into good practice when it comes to collaboration. It can also be a useful learning experience in terms of how *not* to treat/ speak to other people. Just as you will find people you want to work with again, it's a useful way to flag people you'd rather not work with again.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The road to getting a permanent job is long, arduous, and uncertain. This necessitates the development of strong personal boundaries in terms of when you are/ are not working/ available to others on your work email.

REMEMBER: WE WORK TO LIVE, WE DO NOT LIVE TO WORK.

The practices you establish now will not just come to define your own working life, but will influence the students around you: don't perpetuate unhealthy and exploitative working practices. Be the change!

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Just because established academics or your immediate superiors/ supervisors in university practice poor work-life balance/ time management does not mean you have to do that too.

Loudly proclaiming about how busy you are/ how many weekends you have worked through/ how you work on your holidays/ throughout annual leave is not a flex. It is not a sign that you are an 'in demand' academic/ 'very important professor'TM. It is a sign that you have bad time management.

When you are an ECR/ precariously employed, it can be hard to say 'No'. But, it can also be a powerful thing to realise that your practice now will determine your practice later, and that by enforcing clear boundaries between work and life, and by practicing and performing these boundaries, you not only help yourself define your relationship to this institution, you also influence those around you: your peers, the students you teach.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Do not work on your PhD/ postdoc at the weekends. Alternatively (depending on part time jobs etc) make sure that you take two days off per week. This may, at times, have to change (eg in the final weeks before PhD submission, etc. But when it does, make sure it's on your own terms.)

Use your Annual Leave! Take time off. Go on hollybops. Make sure when you are on your leave that you set up an Out of Office and that you do not email/ respond/ check your work emails.

Your contractual workload as a full time academic is 40 hours a week. That means that it is, in essence, a 9 to 5, Monday to Friday job. Practice this. Do not allow other people to pressure you into deviating from this. By practicing this you also show your students how to negotiate this field in a healthier, more holistic, more empowered manner.

What tenured professors / chairs choose to do with their free time is their choice. They are paid way more money than you are, so can spend their weekends working if they so wish. You, as an ECR/ precariously employed postdoc, are not in that position.

Know when to walk away: Decide what, (if anything) you are willing to sacrifice/ put up with to get your job, set your boundaries, and if all else fails: know when to walk away

LAST THING:

JOIN A UNION

THANK YOU 😊

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