



Harper Adams
University

Considering a career in research

Permanent contracts

Nicola P Randall

What is a permanent contract?

- An open ended contract rather than fixed term.
- May still be terminated (eg through redundancy, resignation etc.)



What does it mean to have a permanent contract?

- Some contracts teaching only or research only
- Majority in UK combination of both but balance will vary greatly between institutions
- You will also be expected to carry out other tasks:
 - Administration, student (and staff) supervision, sit on boards and committees, apply for funding,



Things to consider

- Do you really want to become an academic? Why? What are your motivations?
- Most PhD students do not become academics.
- What can you do to improve your chances?



My experience – getting there

- PhD
- Teaching qualification
 - taken whilst Postgraduate student
- Combination of research & industry experience
 - Research assistant jobs, evening class teaching, technical writing, working in conservation industry...
- Choices?
 - Potentially high profile research fellowship
 - Full time lectureship



Route to permanent academic contract

- No typical route.
- But.... Some things you can do to enhance your chances:
 - Peer reviewed publications
 - Single and multi- author (collaborative) papers
 - Network
 - Collaborate wherever you can and go to conferences etc.
 - Be proactive
 - Take every opportunity you can
 - Teaching experience if possible
 - Internally, externally, conferences etc.



My Experience – a typical day

- There isn't one! In the last month, I have....
- Spent time in India discussing agro-ecology
- Taught short courses at Harper Adams and in Parma (Italy)
- Worked on a book chapter and 2 papers
- Held lots of interesting discussions with my PhD students (and visited some field sites with them)
- Taught undergrads and postgrads.
- Visited placement students
- Visited the houses of parliament
- Interviewed prospective students
- Sat on Research Degrees Awarding Board
- Written exam papers
- Begun to develop a new postgrad course.....etc



Do I really want a permanent academic contract?

- Availability
- Possible beaurocracy
- Administrative duties
- Grant treadmill
- Shrinking funding sources
- Rejection (grants, papers)
- Potentially high pressure and long hours
- Security
- Flexibility and independence
- Control over your own work
- Variety
- Enjoyment of working with students and seeing them develop

I love my job.....!!



What about overseas?

- You could consider overseas jobs.
- Europe
 - many European countries less competitive than UK, but this varies, as do the opportunities
 - <http://www.eui.eu/ProgrammesAndFellowships/AcademicCareersObservatory/AcademicCareersbyCountry/Index.aspx>
- US
 - Opportunities for non US citizens
 - Many short term contracts again
 - Tenure track – long term probationary period (in the running for permanent position)
 - Tenured – permanent member of faculty



Top Tip!

- Be sure that academia is what you want & seize opportunities if they arise – they may not come again!



The not-quite-permanent-contract- yet perspective

Franciska de Vries
BBSRC David Phillips Fellow
The University of Manchester
@frantecol

Chair of BES special interest group Plants, Soils, Ecosystems



A permanent contract:

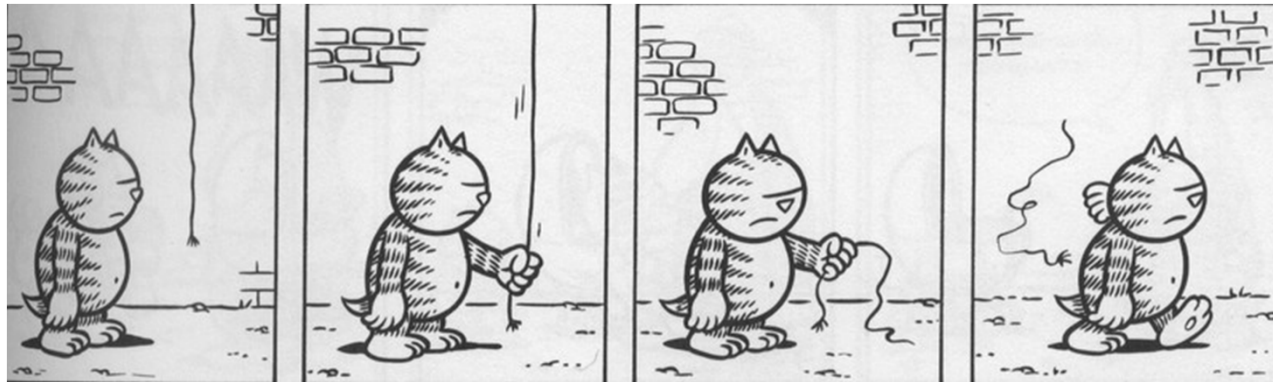
- A goal
- A means?

Building your CV and becoming a leader in your field



Take home messages

- Focus on your research and be wary of distractions



- Find and use (a range of) mentors



Where I am coming from

2015-present

BBSRC David Phillips Fellow, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

July 2014-January 2015

Maternity leave

2013-2015

Faculty Fellow, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

2012-2013

Senior Research Associate, Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

2009- 2012

Research Associate, Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

2009

PhD Soil Biology, Wageningen University, the Netherlands (0.8 fte).

2003

BSc and MSc Environmental Sciences, Wageningen University, the Netherlands.

What employers are looking for

A (future) leader

- Someone who will continue to publish (REF!)
- Someone who will secure research funding (REF!)
- Someone who does their share of admin/teaching (good citizen)
- Someone who the students don't hate

So, how do you get there?



The road to being on the brink of a permanent contract

- Make sure people know you: present your work, go to conferences, chair/organise sessions, get involved in the research community (reviewing, editorial boards), collaborate
- Publish high quality papers (as a lead author!)
- Read!
- Carve a niche
- Start applying for grants



The road to being on the brink of a permanent contract

While balancing all these things, don't forget that in the end, it is about your research - focus!

Be strategic/critical about the things you do:

- What do you get out of it?
- Is it something that you will be recognised for?



My grant applications

- 2008 Dutch Rubicon grant (Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research)
UNSUCCESSFUL
- 2008 Newton International Fellowships (Royal Society)
UNSUCCESSFUL
- 2012 L'Oreal-UNESCO Fellowship For Women In Science
UNSUCCESSFUL
- 2010 BES Early Career Project Grant
SUCCESSFUL
- 2012 NERC Life Sciences Mass Spectrometry Steering Committee Grant
SUCCESSFUL
- 2013 Royal Society International Exchanges Scheme
SUCCESSFUL
- 2013 Royal Society University Research Fellowship
UNSUCCESSFUL
- 2013 BBSRC David Phillips Fellowship
SUCCESSFUL

Personal research grants ~ 10% success rate

The road to being on the brink of a permanent contract

Securing a competitive personal fellowship is a fantastic way of entering an organisation. It shows that you have potential and that you are able to secure funding.

- Marie Curie



- Royal Society URF



- BBSRC David Phillips Fellowship



- NERC Research Fellowship



The road to being on the brink of a permanent contract - where I am now

My BBSRC David Phillips Fellowship



- Gives me the freedom and money to do my own research and set up my own research group
- Limits the amount of teaching I have to do
- Will likely result in a permanent contract soon

The road to being on the brink of a permanent contract - how I got here

Doing what I love: researching, publishing, and being a member of the academic community

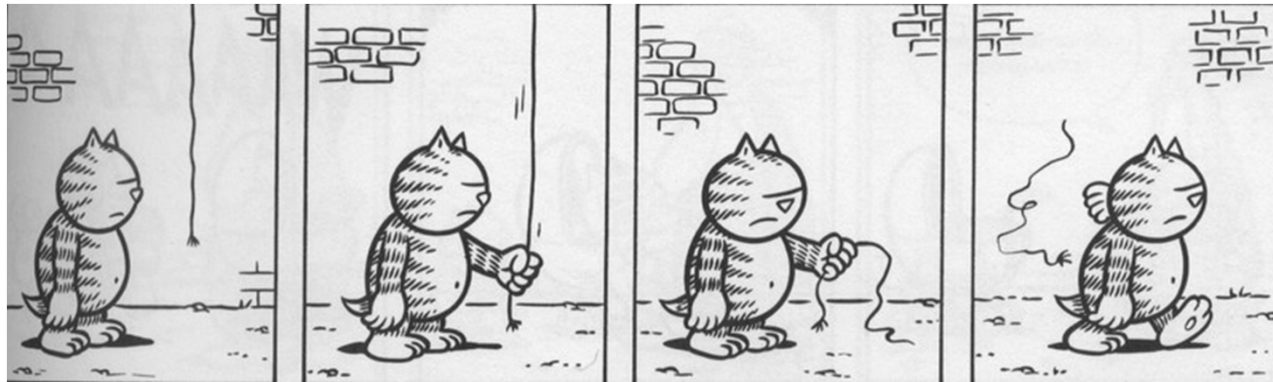
Talking to lots of people and asking for advise (mentoring - whether it's formal or informal - preferably a mix)

Being proactive and grabbing opportunities as they come along



Take home messages

- Focus on your research and be wary of distractions



- Find and use (a range of) mentors



Thanks to all my formal and informal mentors and supervisors

Lijbert Brussaard
Jaap Bloem
Ellis Hoffland
Wim van der Putten
Richard Bardgett
Diana Wall
Julia Jones
Terry Brown
Katarina Hedlund
Liesje Mommer





**BES Careers Webinar 3:
Research Careers – Working
towards a Permanent contract**

Sarah E. Dalrymple
Lecturer in Conservation Ecology
Liverpool John Moores University

Current role:

- Ecology Field Skills (2nd yr); Contemporary Issues in Conservation (3rd yr); various lectures, practicals and fieldtrips across plant sciences, sustainability, ecology; tutorials (all years); supervise research projects. Setting up a new MSc course. Placements co-ordinator.
- PGCertHE
- Research: plant conservation with an emphasis on conservation translocations and response of conservation to climate change. Book on plant conservation, papers, grant proposals, REF 2020 submission?
- Professional Activities: BES Conservation SIG, peer review, BES Review College, SCB Europe Section BoD and Chair of the Education and Student Affairs Committee, IUCN Species Survival Commission Reintroductions Specialist Group.
- Admin: curriculum, student progression (course leadership and tutorials), timetabling, provision of teaching materials in advance, co-ordination with technical support staff, off-site logistics, health & safety, equality and diversity awareness, facility and resource management, workload allocation, committees on employability,



How I found out about the post

- Jobs.ac.uk
- Other H.E.I. Job alerts



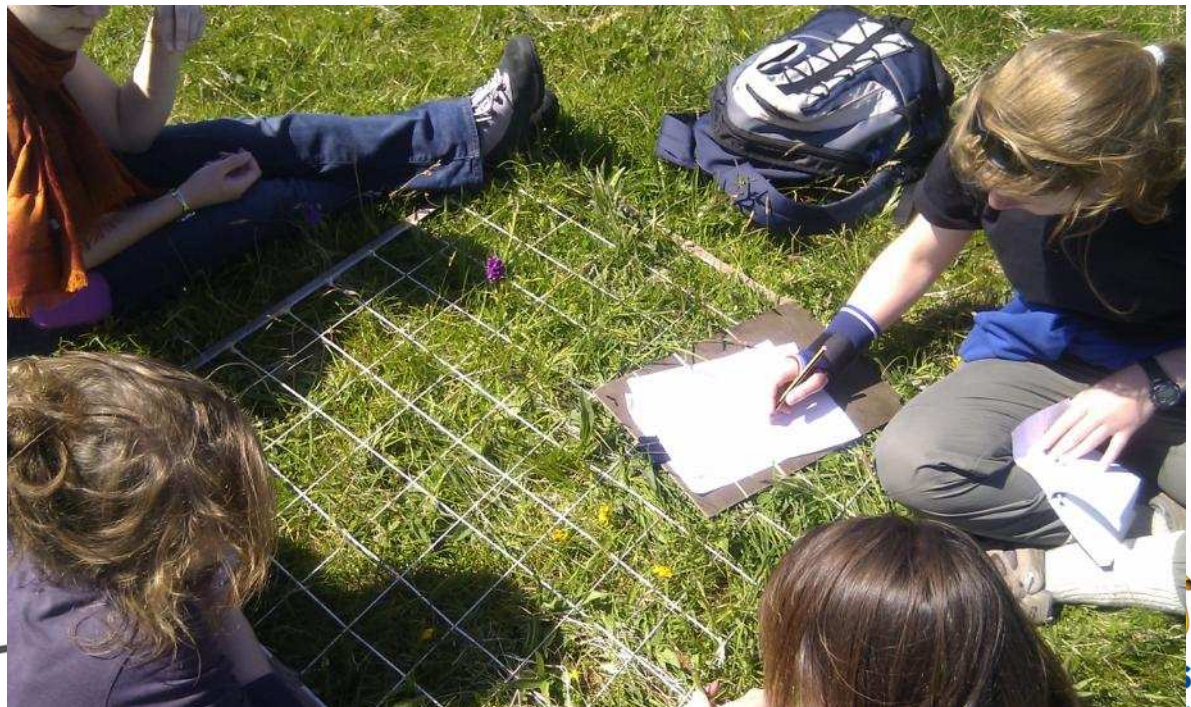
What did the application process entail?

- Application form with lengthy 'personal statement'
- Presentation - lecture for 2nd year UGs
- Questions:
 - how do you convince UGs that learning plants is valuable?
 - other questions very specific to research
- Panel interview inc discussion of teaching roles
 - emphasised 'fit' in LJMU.



What you enjoy/challenges?

- Working with students
- Autonomy over workload



How to improve your chances of landing the ideal academic job

- Try to get a really good handle of what the job entails from someone who does that job already.
- Application form should deliver evidence of exactly what the job spec is asking for.
- Where the job might take you and what you could offer beyond the job spec.



Top tip

Be strategic about what activities you get involved in - if you always say yes to the same things even when you know they are sapping your time, you'll only have yourself to blame when you are unmotivated and stuck in a rut.

If you find it hard to be strategic, imagine what your reference might look like - have you given your referees plenty to talk about to commend you?

