

James Lees
Karlstad University

Preparing PhD students for careers within and beyond academia. A research and innovation support perspective on PhD supervisor competence development

In recent years, we have seen significant and lasting changes within research careers globally. It has never been more important for PhD students to be prepared for a wide range of potential employment or for PhD supervisors and support staff to be ready to advise and guide them.

The academic labour market is becoming ever more competitive, with many countries having experienced significant and sustained increases in annual PhD graduate numbers over recent decades. The average for OECD countries rose by nearly 60% between 2000 and 2017, while Sweden saw an increase of almost 80% over approximately the same period.¹ Surveys of career expectations show that most doctoral graduates (some three-quarters) expect to pursue an academic career within universities.² Yet academia simply does not have the capacity to provide posts for the overwhelming majority of them.

At the same time, the advent of Horizon Europe has brought a renewed focus on research and innovation projects which can address global societal challenges through collaboration with non-academic actors. This is a trend which is also apparent in national funding across Europe, with a growing emphasis on wider societal impact appearing in national calls.

Accordingly, researchers pursuing academic careers increasingly need a clear understanding of funding policy in order to position their research competitively. They also need to be able to communicate the value of their research to non-specialists and to engage in effective partnership working with an array of stakeholders both within and beyond the higher education sector. As well as being crucial in academic careers, the skills, knowledge and networks developed through working with the societal impact of research are also valuable in widening the career options of PhD graduates beyond academia.

This dual perspective on the career relevance of societal impact lies behind the twice-yearly input of the Grants & Innovation Office (GIO) to Karlstad University's PhD supervisor course. This practice paper will examine the aims of those sessions, the national and international collaborations which lie behind the content,³ and the way in which they link to the GIO's wider support for PhD students and their supervisors.

1) 1,680 PhD students graduated from Swedish HEIs in 1996 and 2,790 in 2018. Swedish Higher Education Authority (2020) *Higher Education in Sweden: 2019 Status Report*. UKÄ: Stockholm, p. 37. See also OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, 'Indicator B7 – What are the outcomes and characteristics of doctoral graduates?'

2) See, for example, Vitae's work on graduate expectations post-PhD. Haynes, K. et al (2016), *What Do Research Staff Do Next?*, CRAC Vitae, p. 5.

3) Lees, J. et al (2023), 'Transnational cooperation in enhancing researchers' wider employability: the TRANSPEER project', *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, 14(1): 19-25.