

ECR Peer Support Network

by Dr Marta E. Cecchinato

This document is mainly based on opportunities and experiences of ECRs in the UK. According to the REF, an early career researcher is defined as *a member of staff who are within four years of starting their careers as an independent researcher.*

However, this seems like a rather restrictive definition and assumes that one takes a linear route to the academic life: undergraduate, masters, PhD, post-doc, lectureship. I see this list of resources as something that can be useful to anyone who feels they are just starting off their path as independent researchers.

As an ECR myself, I started making this list for my own reference, but hopefully it will grow into something useful for others as well.

Career planning

- Look at other people's CVs - what do they have/don't have? should you be spending your time doing something else?
- CV of Failures
- [Researchers Development Framework \(RDF\)](#) by Vitae
- [Planning your career](#) by Vitae
- [A week in the life of an assistant professor](#) by Leigh Hall

Job searching

- David Nemer's suggestions for [academics on the market](#)
- Evan Peck's advice about [liberal art schools](#) (or more teaching based universities)
- [Stanford's guide to a career in academia](#)

Preparing for an academic interview

These questions are based on US academic environments, but some of the questions are generic and can apply to any university:

- <http://web.eecs.utk.edu/~azh/resources/facultyinterviewquestions.html>
- <http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/11/04/the-campus-visit-part-1-search-committee-interview/>

- <http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/11/02/1877/>
- <http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/10/31/thehoneorskypeinterview/>
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Lo8wTG2TuH_gRLhg2ri-npGjz2XCLv6E1npKk0hHY8I/edit

For UK specific questions:

- <http://www.academiccareer.manchester.ac.uk/interviews/academicquestionbank/>
- <https://info.lse.ac.uk/current-students/careers/Assets/Documents/PhD/InterviewQuestions.pdf>
- <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/pursuing-an-academic-career/applying-for-academic-jobs/commonly-asked-questions-in-academic-interviews>
- <https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/recruitment/interviewing/questions/interview-questions.pdf>
- NSS, REF, Impact, TEF, KEF
- <https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/jobseeking-and-interview-tips/>
- <https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/application-interview-advice/interviews/prepare>

Smart Works

Time management

- <https://www.facultydiversity.org/webinars/semesterplan18>

Establishing a regular writing practice

It can be very hard to find time to regularly write. Creating a write club within your department or looking for writing retreats create the perfect opportunity to get momentum going. It can be a in person write club or a remote group of colleagues that coordinate over Slack or instant messaging. I found the following method incredibly useful during my PhD.

Set a regular time to write (e.g. every morning from 9-10am, or every Friday afternoon). At the start of the session get people to share what they plan to work on - this can be done in person or via a group chat. Then, start at 25-minute sessions during which you all focus and write and interweave them with 5-minute breaks. This is called the pomodoro technique. During the breaks, you can share tips and advice.

If you decide to set up your own writing retreat, take a look at how some universities have been doing it:

- Sheffield University [Think Ahead writing retreats](#)
- Newcastle University [ECR writing club](#)
- [5 reasons to start a women-only writing group](#)

Writing retreats

- Writing retreats by [Rowena Murray](#)
- Room for writing by [Maureen K Michael](#)
- [The Sociological Review's Early Career Researchers' Writing Retreat](#)
- [Institute of small business and entrepreneurship writing retreat](#)

If you would like to know more about whether you should take part or organise a writing retreat, these resources might be interesting:

- Kornhaber et al. (2016) The benefits and challenges of academic writing retreats: an integrative review. Journal of Higher Education Research and Development. 25 (6): 1210-1227.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1144572>
- [Writing retreat: academic indulgence or scholarly necessity?](#) By the Thesis Whisperer

Grant writing

- [Dos and don'ts for Grand Challenges research fund](#) by Prof Mark Reed

Funding

Your university will probably organise workshops on how to write grants. These can be very useful when you are starting off, but they are especially useful if you have a draft to start with. These are often hands-on workshops - take advantage of any practice exercise to pitch your idea or get feedback.

- [Twitter threat](#) on grant writing tips
- Sketchnote of [Andrew Derrington's grant writing tips](#)
- [ESRC how to write a grant](#)

Sources of funding

UKRI regularly fund Networks which have the purpose of bringing together researchers working on a specific topic and putting out small funding calls. These are generally funded by ESRC or EPSRC and are called Network+. It's worth looking out for them to check when and what calls they put out.

- [Royal Society grants](#)
- [British Academy grants](#)
- [ESRC New Investigator award](#)
- [EPSRC New Investigator award](#)
- [EPSRC Future Leaders fellowship](#)

- [Leverhulme senior research fellowship](#)
- [Google Faculty research award](#)
- [British Educational Research Association](#)
- [Software sustainability institute fellowships](#)
- [Wellcome trust fellowships](#)
- [Vitae's list of grant funding](#) (login required)
- [ECR Conference grants from Association of Commonwealth Universities](#)

Funding for women

- <http://www.women.cs.cmu.edu/Resources/Funding/>
- [L'Oreal and UNESCO in UK and Ireland Women in Science Fellowship](#)
- [Daphne Jackson fellowship](#) (after a career break)
- [WISE Campaign](#) lists sources of funding for women.
- [Women in Tech fund](#)

Impact and dissemination

As part of the REF, creating impact and disseminating one's work is crucial for each paper submitted and for the Impact case studies. Regardless of the REF though, it is good practice to think about how your research can have impact outside of academia. Giving talks is one way, but that's not enough.

- Consider setting up an account on [Impact story](#) to monitor the impact your research is having online
- Prof Mark Reed has a podcast based on his blog [Fast Track Impact](#)
- [Public engagement resources](#)
- [Social media for academics](#) by Mark Carrigan
- [Creating impact case studies](#) by Katy McEwan
- [Dos and don'ts for influencing policy](#)
- [BSA Media Fellowship](#)
- [Get help writing your pathway to impact case study](#) - again by Fast track impact (Note: this tool will be retired in April 2020, following UKRI's decision to no longer require a separate pathways to impact section in funding applications).
- [Sketching science](#)
- [Animate your Science](#)

Opportunities for dissemination:

- [Bright Club](#)

- [Soapbox science](#) and [why you should do it](#) (women only)
- [Pint of Science](#)

REF for ECRs

The final [REF submission guidance](#) has been published in January 2019. It states:

“Each submitting unit will return a set number of outputs determined by the FTE of Category A submitted staff. The total number of outputs must equal 2.5 times the summed FTE of the unit’s submitted staff. This set number of outputs must comprise of a minimum of one output attributed to each staff member returned, and no more than five attributed to any staff member.”

ECRs can fall under some exceptions, depending on how long they have been at the university and the type of contract they have. In general though, it is expected they should submit at least one paper.

- Navigating the REF for ECRs - [Charlotte Mathieson’s blog](#)

Supervising and mentoring

Supervising PhD students can be one of the most rewarding experiences.

- Supervising a doctorate <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/supervising-a-doctorate>
- [The good supervisor](#) by Gina Wisker

Service

Being part of the broader academic community means taking part in regular service activities. This can range from reviewing papers, to serving as an associate chair (AC) on a conference, a venue chair or taking part in other ‘good citizen’ activities.

- Ken Hickley has a great paper on [how to be a good programme committee member](#)
- [Cliff Lampe's podcast from Changing Academic Life](#) talks about the good that service can bring

Other resources

- ThinkWell resources for [ECRs](#) by [Hugh Kearns](#)
- [Happy Academic Blog](#) by Kylie Bell
- [Advice to my younger ECR self](#) - Happy academic blog

- [ECR chat blog and resources](#)
- Changing academic life podcast - <http://www.changingacademiclife.com/start>