

Life: After Academia

(Couldn't resist the colon, all those years of social science paper writing!)

Dr Naomi Tyrrell, Spring 2022

In the Live I did in my Facebook Group [Alt Ac Careers UK](#) in March, I promised that I would put together my top tips for transitioning out of academia. I've left academia twice so I do have some top tips for you!

The first time I left academia was in 2005-6 (immediately after my PhD) to work full-time in commercial research. I got this job through my professional network. The Head of Qualitative Research in the company had been one of my Lecturers and he emailed me. The job wasn't advertised, I didn't have a formal interview. I'm giving you this info because it shows the importance of building your network.

I re-entered academia as a PostDoc on a 3.5 year Marie Curie Excellence Grant Project in 2006. I found out about the Postdoc at a conference. The PI saw my presentation, she was acquainted with my PhD Supervisor, and told me the job would be advertised in the next few months. That fabulous person also then became my PhD External Examiner. I was shortlisted for the PostDoc, had an interview and was offered the job. Again, this shows the importance of building your network. I found out about the job a few months before it was advertised. I moved from the UK to Ireland for that position - it was very easy to do in the pre-Brexit days!

In September 2009, my PostDoc contract came to an end and I did some Lecturing part-time at the same university while I decided what I wanted to do next (I'd just got married). I applied for a two-year Marie Curie Research Fellowship. Whilst waiting for the outcome, I went on a course about how to write/structure my CV and how to interview well. I asked people in my network, who had already secured permanent Lectureships, for their advice. I had mock interviews with friends who were academics. I think practicing being interviewed is really helpful! One of them looked at my CV too and suggested some tweaks. I applied for four jobs, two in Ireland and two in the UK, as well as the two-year Fellowship.

I was interviewed for two of the jobs and offered one of them, which was a permanent Lectureship, very close to my family in the UK. I was also offered the Marie Curie Research Fellowship - eek! The application had taken a huge amount of preparation and I didn't know which choice to make. It was a wonderful position to be in! In the end, family and the offer of a permanent contract took priority and I moved back to the UK for the permanent Lectureship in March 2010. This job was one that was not related to my network but my network was crucial in my application and interview preparation. A tricky interview question a friend suggested might be asked was actually asked and, thankfully, I had a solid answer prepared!

I loved many aspects of my job as a Lecturer and had some wonderful colleagues. However, I always felt like a hamster running in its wheel and never catching up with the workload! In 2016, I asked if I could resign my permanent Lectureship and work part-time (from home) as a Senior Research Fellow and Co-I on an ESRC grant I had won with a great colleague. Primarily, this was so that I could achieve a better work-life balance (I had two young children by now). My line managers agreed. Resigning from a permanent post did feel like a risk and it was a really difficult decision - financially and emotionally! If you are juggling an academic workload with multiple caring responsibilities, I can totally relate!

In 2019, I decided to leave academia altogether. There were multiple reasons why I made this decision and I have talked about some of them in [Alt Ac Careers UK](#), and also to Holly Prescott for [PostGradual: The PhD Careers Blog](#).

A lot of amazing people gave me advice during my transitions out of academia and I am very thankful to them. I'm not going to take credit for all of the ideas in the document as they are an amalgamation of things I've read, advice I've been given and 'stuff' I have discovered in the doing of my alt-ac transitions. But I will take credit (a bit uncharacteristically, I'm working on that with my coach!) for the fact that I have done them and therefore I can say they actually work!

I know they work because my dream has become my reality. I work part-time from home and I have two businesses: research and evaluation ([researchyourway.com](#)) and helping families have happy home moves ([naomityrrellphd.com](#)), and I still work less than I did as a full-time academic. My family is delighted with this result! In the first three months of 2022 I matched my full-time academic salary by working part-time across my two businesses.

How have I done this?

- By shifting my mindset out of academia;
- By valuing my knowledge, experience, and skills;
- By networking strategically outside of academia;
- By learning about the alt-ac world and applying this new knowledge;
- By developing multiple income streams.

These are all things I post and talk about in [Alt Ac Careers UK](#).

CAN DO

Let's get to the concrete, realisable steps you can take to transition out of academia well.

1) **Clarity:** who are you & what do you offer?

You need to be really clear on these two questions. This can take some work and time but there are some activities that can help you. If you need to leave academia quickly and need an income fast then you might need to take a job that doesn't really match what you want to do. I get that. However, if you can spend some time thinking deeply about these two questions it really helps you to figure out your next steps and, crucially, your message to others gains clarity. Take two pieces of paper, entitle each one with the questions: Who am I? What do I offer? Then brainstorm. Put everything down - research, teaching, speaking, reading, writing, hobbies, personality, likes, dislikes - you get it, everything about you and what you offer!

2) **Awareness:** what jobs/careers are out there that you'd like to do?

Other academics are not the best people to talk to about Alt-Ac careers. Seeing it in the cold light of day, that seems like a pretty obvious statement, doesn't it? But sometimes people are surrounded by academics; and if we're surrounded by academics our awareness of what jobs/careers are out there that are possible to do nevermind that we would like to do, is severely limited! So you need to raise your awareness of what is out there. One really simple way of doing this is to go to a jobsite like Indeed, type in some keywords related to what you do, pick the salary range

you'd like, and the location if that is important (although a lot of jobs are now remote or hybrid anyway), and see what comes up.

3) **Network:** be brave & put yourself out there in new places

An important part of awareness raising, i.e. letting people know who you are and what you do, is networking. All networking is, is building relationships with people. Meeting people, connecting with people, raising people's awareness of you and vice versa. Your existing network may be really helpful (see my examples above) and it is really easy to build your network through social media. In my opinion, the best platforms for networking if you are making an alt-ac transition are LinkedIn and Twitter. Personally, I much prefer LinkedIn for network building. You may have a different preference, that's ok. Do you know which is the best social media platform for networking? The one you will actually use!

In the alt-ac career workshops I run in universities, sometimes people say variations on:

'I hate networking'

'It feels icky'

'I get unsolicited messages' (& worse!)

LinkedIn tends to be a kind, professional platform so if you feel a bit uneasy then I recommend you start with it. We have social sharing posts in the [Alt Ac Careers UK](#) group so as a first step, you can start to build your network with other friendly, escaped academics by clicking on their links.

4) **Decide:** who should you approach & what should you apply for?

You may not know what to do once you have started to build your network. Sometimes people use a scattered approach, applying for any jobs that seem relevant or achievable to their skills and experience. This might work. However, there are a lot of social media posts recounting how hard and time consuming this approach is. I've never done it. I think a clearly defined strategy of deciding who to approach and what to apply for is more beneficial - in terms of energy spent vs final reward.

Use your network. Ask people in your network for advice about securing an alt-ac position - general and specific. Use their advice to decide your options and how to pursue them. You don't have to start at entry-level jobs. You don't have to retrain. You have skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications that are in demand beyond academia! You might just need some assistance in a) realising that, and b) learning how to translate all you have for the alt-ac job market.

5) **Organise:** what's the process you need to get the job you want?

If you're applying for jobs, and even if you are setting up your own business, then translating your academic CV into a real world CV is a very important step. 2 pages max. Is it heartbreaking to axe so many academic achievements from the pages? Yes. But you're not losing them! You're just making sure your most relevant achievements are the most visible on your CV, and crucially that your achievements are organised in a way that is relevant in the alt-ac world. Do this for your CV and make sure that you have a well-designed LinkedIn profile that shows what you do and have done too.

The key to the Organise stage is being clear about why an organisation needs you to work for/with them. Write a list of all the 'Whys' and keep them at the forefront of your mind when crafting your CV, profiles and job applications. Not just what you did, but the impact it had. Your 'value-added'!

CAN DO!

I will be doing some more Lives in [Alt Ac Careers UK](#) on Facebook to explore these 5 steps in more detail.

If you want help to transition out of academia, I would love to use all of my experience and knowledge to support you.

You can email me at naomityrrell@researchyourway.com to arrange a free chat to see if I am the right Coach/Mentor for you.

I'll also be launching **'It's Your Time'** - a Group Coaching Programme - in September. If you'd like more information, or to be added to the waiting list, email me at naomityrrell@researchyourway.com

If you're feeling stuck in your career, or running around in the hamster wheel of always having too much to do, I'd love to help you.

Naomi x

Dr Naomi Tyrrell
Research Your Way Ltd.
Researchyourway.com

