

2011 Career symposium Report

Preamble

This report has been written not only as appraisal of this year's event but also, and specially, focusing what can be done differently or better in the future.

Overview

First of all we should thank all our guest speakers and members of the workshop panels for their exciting and insightful contributions. One common theme of this edition of the Career symposium was the down to earth, practical advice that many offered.

In 2011 we decided to continue with the successful format (one day and an half) and organization of 2010 (joint predocs and postdocs organization) but also take on board some of the comments from the previous symposia and improve the event. The main differences were (i) the inclusion of a professional career advisor (Barbara Hoffbauer) that provided both dedicated workshops and 1-on-1 advice; (ii) a larger number of Industry stands in our own "mini career fair".

Judging from personal comments and the online survey it is fair to say that, as usual, this was a great event from which many benefited. Here are some numbers, taken from the online survey (72 respondents), to substantiate this:

- Roughly 90% of participants came from 3 institutes: MPI-CBG (38.9%), BIOTEC (30.6%) and CRTD (23.6%) and the majority of these were Predocs (34.7%) or Postdocs (36.1%). Worthy of note was that a group leader also filled in the survey.
- The talks were considered largely informative or inspiring and 43.5% of respondents talked to the speakers during the breaks. As for the range of topics/speakers, 43.5% considered it good and 14.3% great.
- Most of those receiving personal advice from Barbara Hoffbauer considered it helpful or informative (~80%) and those attending her Workshops shared that opinion.

- Regarding the Industry the majority liked the idea and thought that more stands would have been better (please refer to “Industry stands” for an in depth consideration on this matter).
- Importantly, when participants were asked if the Symposium helped with decisions regarding their career, 66.7% said that they got some ideas and 20% that it helped a little bit. It seems like the vast majority got something positive out this event!

Future events

As always, we are trying to improve the event and asked the attendants for comments and suggestions. During the course of the event we also asked participants about their opinions and reflected amongst us what could have been better and what should be repeated. Here is a summary of our discussion and comments from the audience on specific events.

1-on-1 advice

It should be stressed that we had 73 persons signing up for Barbara Hoffbauer’s workshops and 1-on-1 advice for only 51 slots – clearly a case of more demand than supply.

We initially thought of having these in an open space so that interested people with similar CVs could eavesdrop. This way a larger number of people could take advantage of the presence of a professional career advice (that was overbooked). Unfortunately this seems to have not happened and some people talking to the advisor expressed concerns about lack of privacy. When repeated it should be done in a private space such as a seminar room.

We could have also stressed to Barbara that people running late should have lost their slot. Overall the time management of the interviews was good but could have been better.

Overall we think that this should be repeated.

Workshops

Day 1- Barbara Hoffbauer

Very successful! We had loads of people registering and according to the feedback we got these workshops were very useful.

Comments from the online survey:

I really liked to professional career advisor!!

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The topic of the Workshop 2 was actually how to write a cover letter. The title is misleading and I think that the first and second Workshop should be held together. Both of them prepare you how to find a job and it should be allowed to attend both of them.

10/15/2011 7:17 PM [View Responses](#)

Day 2 - Academia

Although talking from a personal perspective does have its advantages, the format has some limitations. Not always the panel can give specific answers about fellowships available or how to apply make a good application for a given position – not their own fault. People do seem to enjoy these but it might be time to experiment different approaches. One possibility is to invite people from one or more funding agencies – e.g. Marie Curie national contact point or DFG – for a focused workshop were they would bring their own material and address a specific issue. A workshop by Kisswin would also be greatly beneficial. They are a German government funded body that specializes in information and consulting for Academic jobs. They were present with a stand but we feel that their expertise was not totally taken advantage of.

Comments from the online survey:

The how to get a group leader position workshop is always interesting but the only information you can squeeze out of it is that you either need a bombastic CV or lots of luck.

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Industry stands

Overall attendants felt that this was a good idea and would have liked that more stands were present. This is however contradictory with the number of people actually going to the stands and talking to the companies. This is a view shared by the companies themselves that felt that not enough people visited the stands (companies estimate about 15-30 persons), especially during the talks, and thus consider that coming here was not worth the journey.

Nonetheless, the companies liked the idea and a couple of good suggestions were put forward for next events:

1. Sending a person with material that would also give a talk, talking for instance about differences in working in academia and industry or skills required for a certain job.
2. Create a mini-event (more like a forum) focused on a particular sector of the industry where a couple of companies would be invited to present themselves, talk about working

in industry vs academy, careers available, etc. This would be a smaller event and would guarantee that the audience would be mostly people really interested in making a move.

It could also be requested to the companies propose in advance which job opportunities are available and explain to participants how to find out what exactly what the position entails, what skills are necessary, what are the career prospects, etc. It was felt that the companies' representatives were notable to provide much information about specific positions open. This option would benefit everyone – participants would benefit much more from such practical insights and companies would know how many people would be present in such event.

Comments from the online survey:

I liked the idea, but a broader range of fields would have been nice!

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I didn't visit

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Speakers

It was felt that the speakers were good but that too many of them are based in Germany or that they are not diverse enough. We partly acknowledge the criticism about most being based in Germany, but that not that it was not diverse enough. Former organizers will know that we depend very much on acceptance of invitations and that somewhat moulds the final group of speakers. Also, it is not always possible or desirable to invite people from editing or public relations, for instance. In fact these were present in 2010 and thus in 2011 we made an effort choose speakers from other sectors, namely Biopharma industries.

Two things could have been improved: ask the speakers for a title of their talk that reflects their path, and ask them to mention what other people around them do. That is, a speaker that is a biologist might be working with a Mathematician – this would be appreciated by participants that do not hold a life sciences degree and there were quite a few of those in the audience.

Comments from the online survey:

did not comment on the ones I could not go to.

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all in all you chose great speakers this year! well done.

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I believe Dorian's talk (especially the first part) was going too much into the details of his work and not really helping people understand what a consultant does.

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I would have liked to see more non-science type positions represented, for those who are considering making a bigger switch from academia. It seemed that most people worked either for a science supply company, or doing some sort of clinical or applied research in a medical company. These are great to hear about, but it's also very helpful to hear about other possibilities.

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The symposium was a lot focused on biology and chemistry, which is clearly the best choice for this kind of institutions. However, nowadays there are many people in the PhD and postdoc program with other backgrounds (physics, medicine, engineering): it would be good for the future to dedicate a small part also to them, explaining what they could do outside science, or as part of the research and development teams of the companies.

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The topic range was pretty much focused on clinical research which is totally fine, it was just not my topic.

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I would have liked to see at least one woman with children and a successful career.

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From the program it seemed that the talks are going to be pretty much the same. That is why I didn't attend. Last year there was more diversity among speakers.

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Comments from participants when asked what else would you have liked to see on the program (online survey):

The program was well balance. Thanks for your organization.

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I honestly think this years symposium was the best of all. The idea of having Barbara was great and in my opinion it should be included in every years symposium (Barbara or someone with the same experience)

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some people from the scientific writing area, e.g. editors, scientific journalists, Public relations people etc.

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Journal editors, Teachers, jobs in public relationships

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It was my first time in this Career Symposium, so I liked and it was very useful. I think you guys made a great job. Thanks a lot!

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More information/tips about finding "international" jobs in different countries. I found the program and information that was given was mostly useful for people who want to find a job in Germany.

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More different speakers...

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it was ok. Some other alternatives (scientific editor, patent office, governmental institution..) were already covered last year.

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Final words

The Career symposium/day is now an established part of the Dresden International PhD program and the MPI-CBG MPI-CBG Postdoctoral Program and this year was another success with the inclusion of professional career advice and a larger Industry fair. We hope that this will continue in the future, and if not in the current format in any other form that allows our research community to keep their eyes open for exciting career opportunities, in Academia or elsewhere, and equips them for the challenging task of job hunting.