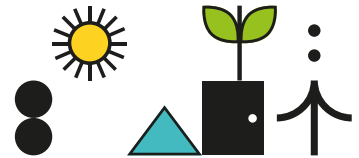


David Ashmore

When David first joined the Prosper pilot, he had been a postdoc at the University of Liverpool for four years. Working within the Geography and Planning team at the School of Environmental Sciences, he conducted research into glaciology and polar science – with a particular interest in applying earth observation and geospatial data to track and model ice and snow melt.



David's time with Prosper enabled him to look past 'the next contract', and the habitual binary of academic vs non-academic careers, and to instead view his research career as a strategic investment – positioning for a more clearly-defined set of long-term goals. He applied what he had learned to secure a new postdoc position with the goal of filling a skills gap, and using it as a stepping stone to a career beyond academia.



He has since secured a role as Remote Sensing Scientist at the Met Office, where he'll be working to derive atmospheric and cloud properties by using instruments on satellites and aircraft that measure how they interact with solar microwave radiation.

The Challenge

Before engaging with Prosper, David found himself in a position familiar to many postdocs. He was uncertain about the long-term trajectory of his career, and didn't feel fully in control of his professional future.

“I didn't have a strong sense of where I was going, I just knew I wasn't fully contented with the road I had found myself travelling along. I wasn't convinced a career in academia was right for me, but had no plan for when my contract was up.”



Workload and family commitments limited his horizons to 'the next contract', and he feared as time went on his specialist focus might limit his career options.

“I had a quite passive mindset – I just assumed I'd muddle through and end up either in academia or some job related to my research. But my specialism was a small sub-discipline of environmental science – I didn't imagine there'd be many directly relevant jobs out there. To further confuse things, my only previous environmental science role outside academia hadn't been a great fit for me. I didn't know where I was going, or even really where I wanted to go.”





David was keen to get better insight into his options, as well as a greater understanding of how to sell his skillset to employers – particularly in regard to roles not explicitly or typically advertised to postdocs.

“Other career development resources I’d looked at over the years generally didn’t give very actionable advice, or were too focused on obvious routes and silo-ing you by discipline. Earth science may have been my focus area, but I have lots of applied programming and data science experience more generally. I wanted this reflected in any potential career plan – I hated the idea of missing out on opportunities just because I don’t come from an explicitly maths or computer science background.”



The Prosper Journey



Through Prosper’s initial ‘Reflect’ stage, David undertook a journey of self-discovery that enabled him to unpick his motivations and values.

“I wasn’t sure what to expect at the start, but the first few months were quite revelatory. The group coaching was stunningly effective for identifying my blind spots and assumptions, and getting me to reflect on what I really wanted from my career. I came to realise that an academic teaching and research route wasn’t something I wanted to pursue in the long run.”



This newfound self-knowledge started a process that would lead David to completely change the way in which he thought about his career.

“I underwent a mindset shift, to what you might call a growth mindset. I was more motivated to investigate different career pathways. I knew what skills I wanted and needed to work on.”



Drawing on resources from Prosper’s ‘Explore’ and ‘Act’ stages, he started to take a far more pro-active, strategic and long-term approach to his own professional development. He started researching sectors of interest, and monitoring start-up funding and company activities. He learned to network more effectively and make full use of tools such as LinkedIn for this purpose. With Prosper’s support, he overhauled his CV and approach to covering letters, and started applying for a raft of positions at SMEs and startups.



However, while David got a slew of interviews, he didn't land any job offers. Then he saw another postdoc opportunity arise within his department.

“The fact that I got so many interviews was motivating, I was clearly making progress. But something was missing. Then an opportunity arose in my department to stay for an additional year as a postdoc. I wasn't looking for another postdoc role, but the job description suggested it could be an ideal vehicle for addressing a particular skills gap that was hindering my attempts to move beyond academia. I was honest and straightforward about this in my application – rather than just another postdoc contract I saw it as a conscious and strategic step to get to where I wanted to be.”



David secured the role, and worked to steer his part of the project towards his interests. He consciously used techniques valued in industry, with an eye on future applications.

Next Steps

David's strategic move within academia soon paid off. He was able to parlay his enhanced skillset into a new, permanent role beyond academia. He will soon be starting as a Remote Sensing Scientist at the Met Office, where he'll be helping to improve weather forecasts by leveraging radiometric measurements of atmospheric and cloud properties from satellites and aircraft.



“I've always been keen to try out new things in my academic research work, but through Prosper I learned to expand that same impulse to other areas of my professional life. I've become more ambitious, and have a much stronger appreciation of the importance and uses of communication and interpersonal skillsets – I no longer just see myself as a repository of technical ability. I feel more able to be honest with myself, about my values, what I want to do day-to-day, and who I aspire to be professionally. I'm more comfortable explicitly pursuing what I want. And now, rather than looking to just pay the bills, I'm actively charting a more fulfilling career path, one that I can continually build upon.”

