

Reflections from the 2018 CREATE Workshop

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When I realised that the EHPS conference was being held in Ireland I was overjoyed. My interest was sparked the previous year when my twitter feed was inundated with tweets from Padova. I was also delighted at the relevance of the accompanying CREATE workshop's theme to my career stage "What do I want to be when I grow up – and how to get there?". As I am entering the final stage of my PhD I am currently facing this question. What kind of career do I want? What do I need to achieve this goal? And, what should I do if (a) I cannot achieve it, or (b) I decide it is not for me? The only issue was funding to attend the workshop and the conference, but luckily, I was awarded one of this year's CREATE workshop grants which covered the costs of both!

The workshop, facilitated by Pilvikki Absetz and Brian Oldenburg, was held over two days with a pre-workshop networking event. The activities during this pre-workshop event were brilliant at establishing a relaxed and an inclusive environment for the remaining two days. The structure of the networking session ensured that nearly all participants spoke to each other and got to know where people are from, what their research area is, what their career stage is and their personal likes/dislikes. I felt this was important in developing a space where everyone felt they could share their thoughts and ideas, resulting in high quality, honest discussions.

What struck me most about the experience was the uncertainty among participants about entering academia. But if someone does not choose an

academic career what other options are there? If any? It was reassuring to know other people had similar concerns and worries about the future. We often hear professors complaining about workloads, the amount of administration, the lack of work-life balance. We see senior lecturers in their offices early in the morning and office lights on around campus until well after 8 or 9pm. The discussions were open, honest and quite a relief. It is clear that entering such a profession needs to be a calling. But with excellent time management skills, and a good support network it is extremely possible to enjoy life while also being successful in the academic sphere.

There was also a lot of discussion regarding the opportunities available outside academia. To be honest this choice never really appealed to me, despite the clear statistics that it is not possible for everyone with a PhD to be a lecturer! However, it was interesting to learn the ways in which different businesses can utilise the skills that a PhD cultivates. In particular, job opportunities within government and nonprofit organisations which require individuals to test interventions, design research, analyse data and disseminate the results to the public. The most appealing aspect of this work, for me, is how research within such organisations can help inform policy and have real life, applicable results. It gave me food for thought in how my skills can be used, and the different projects running that perhaps one day I could become involved in (outside of teaching of course)!

On the final afternoon we had to "sell" a product/research idea that we created in our groups. Compared to the activities that required us

to sell ourselves or plan our career milestones, this activity was relatively easy. It was effortless to brainstorm advantages and unique selling points of our imaginary business, but when it came to myself I was stumped. From group conversations it appears as if we all suffer from a case of “everyone has these skills”. However, if we hadn’t engaged in the PhD process would we have developed these skills and attributes? We live in a culture where everyone we work with on a daily basis has these skills. But outside of our immediate work and academic networks not as many people know how to, for example, manage large projects or conduct statistical analyses. During the research process PhD students learn skills which industry and organisations are actively seeking. However, among students these skills tend to be viewed as common-knowledge and ordinary within our work circles!

An additional benefit of receiving the grant was the opportunity to attend the EHPS conference. I was able to attend presentations from some of the leading researchers in Health Psychology, giving me plenty to consider in terms of my current, and future research. Because of this funding I was also able to present my own research orally at EHPS, an opportunity I otherwise could not afford. I had a brilliant week at the workshop and conference; discussing research, potential collaborations and having fun. I left Galway full of ideas, unforgettable memories and plenty of motivation to finish the PhD.

I am extremely grateful to the organising committee of the CREATE workshop for the grant to attend this year. It truly was a fantastic experience. The whole week was well-organised and filled with stimulating discussions and friendly people. I am looking forward to next year’s conference already!



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