

OCTOBER 2024

CAREERS IN NEUROSCIENCE

*EVENT REPORTED BY BNA PLACEMENT STUDENTS
NINA MCLEAN & ALEXIS ARCHER*



Overview

The second BNA 'Careers in Neuroscience' event took place on 10th October 2024 at the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre (SWC). This was a brilliant opportunity for BNA members to hear about the diverse and unique career paths a foundation in science can lead you to. The panel of esteemed speakers led a transparent and open discussion on the types of roles available to neuroscience graduates, the value of networking, salaries, and how circumstances and unexpected changes can influence your career path.

Delegates had time to network with the speakers and each other over refreshments, making valuable connections for their future careers.

“I enjoyed the fact that it was all women (the panelists) and very casually so. It wasn't advertised as women in STEM - it just was.”

“I also liked the fact that they were quite honest- even with their salaries and their opinions about leaving research. They could have sugar coated it - but they were really honest with how they felt, which was nice.”

Sahla Ansari,
Second Year BSc Neuroscience & Psychology,
King's College London



CAREER JOURNEYS

Dr. Ruth Weir

Dr. Ruth Weir earned her BSc in Biochemistry, where she first discovered her passion for neuroscience after taking a module on the subject. This interest led her to complete two summer research placements in the United States during her undergraduate studies. She went on to complete a PhD at UCL, focusing on ADHD research and later conducted postdoctoral research at the University of California, Davis, where she studied autism.

Upon returning to the UK after her postdoctoral program, Dr. Weir faced the challenging decision of whether to remain in academia. After several months of job searching, she learned about a junior position in UCL's entrepreneurship team through a PhD colleague and fellow panellist- Dr. Rebecca McKelvey. This role opened a new path that aligned her scientific expertise with an entrepreneurial focus.

Now Head of Entrepreneurship at UCL, Dr. Weir spoke about the value of applying research skills to entrepreneurship.

She explained that researchers make great entrepreneurs because both fields focus on identifying gaps, solving problems, and iterating solutions. Entrepreneurs find market gaps, test their solutions by engaging with customers, and adjust their strategies based on feedback, much like researchers who test hypotheses through experiments and collect data.

Dr. Weir highlighted that entrepreneurship is not just about starting a business, but about developing valuable employability skills — how to approach problems and create impactful solutions. Just as science students and researchers write grant proposals, entrepreneurs write impact statements. Both fields work towards creating solution, making a broader impact on the world.



**Head of Entrepreneurship
at University College London (UCL)**

“
I didn't plan
this career, It's
been complete
serendipity, so
if you haven't
got a plan -
don't panic
”

“
I hope in a few
years time, a
group of you
(the audience)
will be able to
sit in a room
and tell your
story on
network
effects .
”

CAREER JOURNEYS

Dr. Keri Tochiki



**Manager in the Strategy
and consulting practice
at Accenture**

Dr. Keri Tochiki relocated from Hawaii to Massachusetts, USA to study for a BSc in Neuroscience at Wellesley College. She completed a semester abroad in London, UK at University College London (UCL) and after graduation, moved to the UK to pursue an MSc focusing on the developmental neurobiology of pain at UCL.

Dr. Tochiki discussed how her location and experience as an international student influenced her career choices. She initially worked in a temporary role as a research assistant before securing a permanent position as a research technician at UCL.

After completing her PhD part-time in Neuroscience, Dr. Tochiki transitioned into a strategy and consulting role. Before leaving academia, she took advantage of training opportunities available to her as a PhD student, including management consulting and an entrepreneurship scheme competition.

Dr. Tochiki currently works in the Health and Public Services team at Accenture, where the focus is on enhancing citizen services by helping governments organisations streamline operations and build digital capabilities. She learned about the position through her connection with fellow panellist Dr. McKelvey, highlighting again the importance of networking. In this role, Dr. Tochiki has experienced steady career progression in a competitive environment.

KERI TOCHIKI

CAREER JOURNEYS

Dr. Sophie Morgan



**Senior editor in the
Neuroscience Team
at Nature Communications**

Dr. Sophie Morgan completed her BSc in Neuroscience at University College London (UCL) and went on to earn a PhD in Molecular Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge.

After 3.5 years of postdoctoral research in drug discovery, she transitioned from lab work to science editing, becoming an associate and later a senior editor at Nature Communications in the neuroscience team. In this role, science editors read innovative research, mediate peer review, foster relationships with researchers within the field, and commission timely reviews, perspectives, and write editorials.

While Dr. Morgan loved her research field, she was unsure whether a career in academia was for her long term. During the pandemic, when she was out of the lab, she applied for science editing and communication roles. Dr. Morgan's decision to pursue science editing stemmed from a desire to remain in her research field without working in a lab. She sought a permanent role that allowed her to stay engaged with research, attend conferences, and avoid relocating. She advised those interested in science editing to reach out to editors, demonstrate interest beyond their specific research, and maintain a broad knowledge of their field. Her advice to her younger self would be to seek out more mentors to discuss career possibilities.

SOPHIE MORGAN

“(There were) people I can look up to”

“I feel very happy with the outcome”

Michaela Boahene,
Second Year BSc Neuroscience & Psychology,
King's College London



“I mostly liked the diversity of the career choices - It was a good insight for all the students”

Duru Hakkacirmaz,
Second Year BSc Neuroscience,
King's College London



CAREER JOURNEYS

Dr. Sandrine Géranton

Dr. Sandrine Géranton shared her academic career journey. She completed her Baccalaureate and preparatory classes in France, focusing on mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

She then attended engineering school and, during her final year, participated in the Erasmus programme, moving from France to Bristol in the UK to study for an MSc in Biotechnology.

Dr. Géranton also completed a microbiology lab placement in Spain before returning to the UK to pursue a PhD in pharmacology at UCL. After her postdoctoral research, she became an independent researcher and later started teaching as a lecturer. She is now an Associate Professor at UCL.

She believes that a multidisciplinary background enables one to integrate information from various fields. Dr. Géranton emphasised the importance of dedication and passion in academia, given the long hours required. She also highlighted the complex reality of how she manages her time to balance all aspects of her role.

Additionally, she highlighted the value of networking within academic departments and the importance of taking advantage of training programmes during a PhD.



Associate Professor,
Department of Cell and Developmental
Biology, University College London

“
You can come from any background.. you never know what you are going to find exciting in your life and what you are going to focus on
”

“
The question I often get is - How do I split my time? That is something you need to consider quite carefully if you want a career in academia
”

SANDRINE GÉRANTON

CAREER JOURNEYS

Dr. Rebecca McKelvey



Dr. Rebecca McKelvey graduated from the University of Bath with a BSc in Biology. She secured a role as a science teacher through the Teach First graduate programme, quickly advancing to Head of Department.

After four years, she left teaching to pursue a master's degree at UCL, where the support of an excellent postdoctoral mentor helped her excel. She then went on to complete a PhD. Dr. McKelvey discussed the differences she found between working in academia and teaching. She noted that doing a PhD equips you with highly sought-after skills such as problem-solving, project management, presentation, and writing skills valued by employers across various fields. She encouraged that PhD students stepping out of academia should highlight these skills during interviews.

Dr. McKelvey is now the Education Partnership Lead at Google DeepMind and the founder of In2scienceUK. She was inspired to create In2scienceUK by reports on social mobility in the UK and her own experience teaching in a low-income school. Her goal was to provide greater opportunities for students. She began an initiative where PhD students from her lab would support secondary school students, which evolved into In2scienceUK.

Dr. McKelvey has worked at Google DeepMind for two years, working on many inspiring projects and describes her team as *incredible*.

Education Partnership Lead at Google DeepMind, Founder of In2scienceUK

“
I think a master's or PhD is such a unique and fantastic opportunity... It gives extraordinary grit.
”

“
It's great fun (working for a non-profit- In2scienceUK), really flexible in terms of the hours that you put in and also extremely rewarding because you are giving back to society and you're using your expertise, your knowledge and your networks to really support very deserving people who are extremely bright - it was a wonderful experience.
”

REBECCA MCKELVEY

PANEL DISCUSSION

Chaired by Rebecca McKelvey

WHAT DID YOU DO IN YOUR EARLY CAREER OR DURING YOUR PHD THAT HAS REALLY SET YOU UP FOR SUCCESS TODAY?

Dr. Sandrine Géranton: "I think anyone can achieve a PhD with success at their own pace. It's really all about working hard—that's what matters. But you have to find the motivation; if you don't enjoy it, forcing yourself won't work, especially with the long hours involved. Motivation and genuinely liking what you're doing makes all the difference."

WHAT SKILLS OR KNOWLEDGE FROM YOUR PHD HAS MADE YOU SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

Dr. Keri Tochiki: "Problem solving—in my job, you need to be keen, proactive, and independent. You're given a lot of tasks where you have to go off and do research. You need the confidence to take that on and produce something to discuss with the team."

WHAT MADE YOU LEAVE ACADEMIA?

Dr. Ruth Weir: "On Thursday evenings, I volunteered at an institution to help children with autism develop their communication skills. That experience had a much bigger impact on their lives and was more fulfilling for me. I realised I don't have to be a researcher to support my stakeholders—people with autism—and make a difference in the community."

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKING IN ACADEMIA AND WORKING IN OTHER INDUSTRIES?

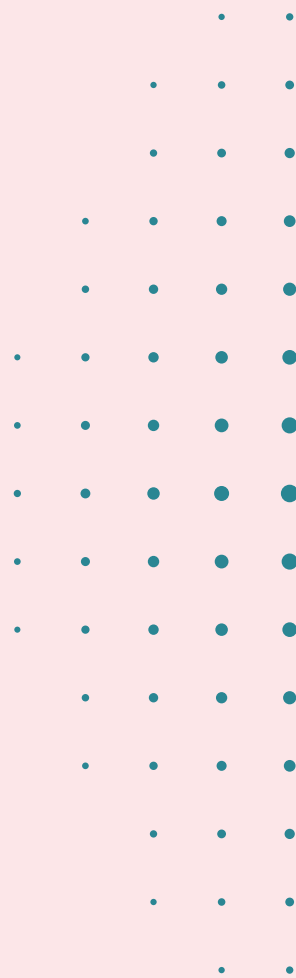
For Dr. Keri Tochiki and Dr. Sophie Morgan, a key difference in transitioning from the PhD student environment to the corporate world was the significant shift in pace. Dr. Tochiki moved directly from her PhD into the public sector, while Dr. Morgan transitioned from her postdoctoral position to science communications. Both quickly adapted to a business-focused mindset, working with targets that needed to be met faster. Additionally, unlike academia's informal setting, large corporations impose strict data-sharing controls.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T HAVE PEOPLE THEY CAN TURN TO WHEN WORKING IN ACADEMIA

Dr. Sophie Morgan and Dr. Sandrine Géranton suggested seeking advice from mentors in different labs or departments, and look for mentors at every stage of your career—most people are open to helping, so don't hesitate to ask. Be proactive in choosing someone who fits your goals, and don't feel limited to just one; you can have both career and life mentors for valuable perspective.

WHAT TRANSFERABLE SKILLS FROM ACADEMIA TEND TO BE OVERLOOKED?

A PhD helps you develop strong communication skills through presenting research and networking confidently—skills that are valuable in any industry. Dr. Ruth Weir honed these skill through participating in public speaking workshops- held by *Toastmasters*. You also gain project management and organisational skills, learning to deliver on complex tasks and follow through on goals, which are essential in any workplace.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

There are many different career paths in Neuroscience

The panellists showed just how many directions a neuroscience background can take you—whether that's in entrepreneurship, consulting, science editing, or academia. Their stories made it clear that there's no one "right" way to build a career in science.

Your career does not have to be linear and certain

The panellists weren't afraid to be candid about career shifts, salaries, and balancing work with personal life. It gave attendees a relatable view of what to expect along the way.

Networking and making connections is important

Dr. Rebecca McKelvey emphasised the importance of networking, describing it as exploring a common interest with someone and encouraged everyone to use networking to connect with people across fields. Both students and panellists agreed: networking is key to discovering new opportunities and finding mentors who can offer guidance.

You gain many transferable skills from science

Skills like problem-solving, project management, and communication are highly valued in multiple fields. Panellists encouraged attendees to recognise their scientific training also as valuable preparation for roles outside of research, such as in technology, public services, and education.



REFLECTIONS FROM OUR 2024/25 PLACEMENT STUDENTS

Nina McLean, Marketing & Communications Assistant:

Most STEM Career events I have attended tend not to cater to those studying biology-related subjects - let alone neuroscience! The BNA has done an excellent job bringing together individuals who have a foundation in academia and where they have taken it.

I believe events like this are the perfect way to find a community with similar academic interests to you, outside of university. A chance to have conversations about neuroscience, minus the deadlines and exams.

Alexis Archer, Events Assistant:

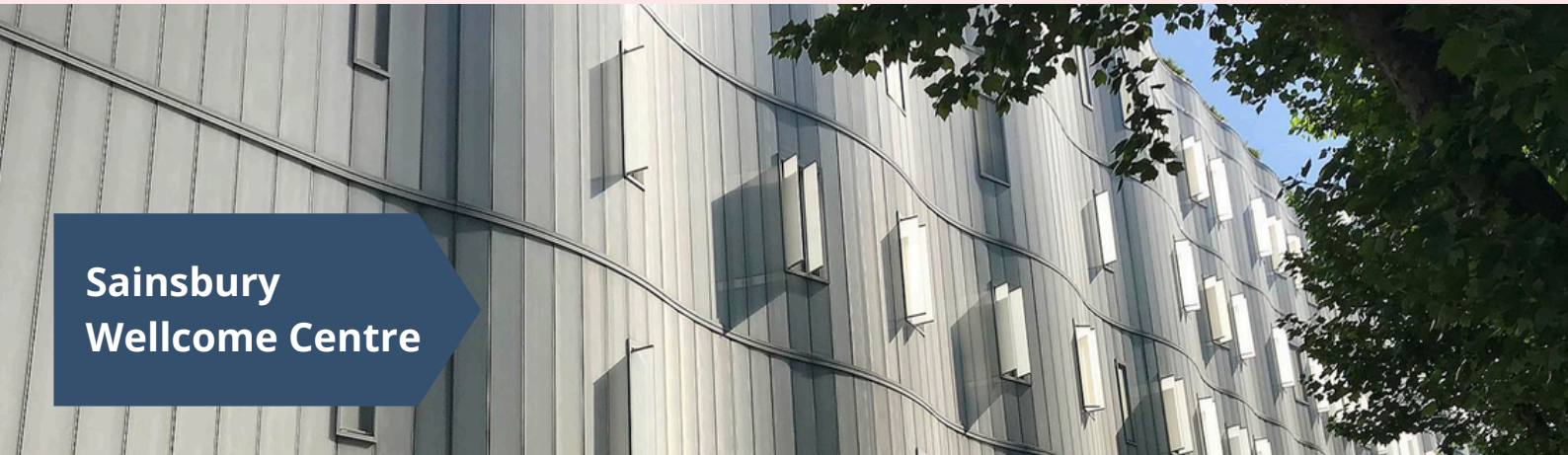
Attending my first careers event focused on neuroscience was such a great experience! I loved hearing the panelists share their journeys in areas like AI, consulting, and education, along with how they dealt with things like moving countries and balancing family life.

These sessions are super valuable for career insights and building connections in a really supportive community. I can't recommend it enough for anyone eager to explore new opportunities in neuroscience.

Thank you!

The BNA extends its thanks to all who attended and welcomes you to future events.
Visit BNA.org.uk/events to attend our next event and build your network.

Thank you to our supporters who helped make this event possible...



**Sainsbury
Wellcome Centre**



Our delegates



Our speakers