

Summary of 2019 NTNU Postdoc Career Conference:

Life Outside Academia

Over 60 postdoctoral fellows registered for NTNU's first-ever postdoc career conference, titled *Life Outside Academia* 30. August 2019, in Trondheim. The career conference featured presentations by alumni who received their doctoral degrees at NTNU in diverse fields:

Heidi Anett Øvergård Beistad PhD, Head of History and Chief Curator at Stiklestad National Culture Centre;

Øystein Torbjørnsen PhD, Performance Architect at Microsoft;

Leslie Euceda PhD, Data Scientist at Camo Analytics;

Kim Andre Ha Stiberg PhD, Medical Science Liaison at Chiesi Nordics;

Åsa Alexandra Borg Pedersen PhD, Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Environment Agency;

The alumni stories included moments of uncertainty, perseverance, challenges, and personal reflections. Åsa Alexandra Borg Pedersen commented on the ability “use scientific knowledge in a societal context” in the public sector, while at the same time managing constraints on time, quality, and priorities. Heidi Anett Øvergård Beistad encouraged the attendees to “Do something you feel passionate about and never allow yourself to forget that feeling.”

Participants had the chance to gather in small groups led by the alumni to discuss career planning challenges. One group addressed the question: Do we have the competence that “life outside academia” is looking for? Some postdocs were skeptical and concerned that they would not be happy in jobs outside academia. The group discussed that it is difficult to define their individual competences and translate their skills into words that “the outside” can easily understand. Salary, travel requirements, and opportunities for permanent positions were also discussed. On the topic of job searching and applications, one speaker had applied for dozens of positions, 5 to 10 interviews, and even worked as a taxi driver between jobs. Multiple speakers mentioned the benefit of getting involved with other organizations while you are still working at the university, such as through a part-time job or freelancing.

The final speaker of the event, **Lisa Vivoll Straume PhD**, Academic Director of MIND: offered a perspective from positive psychology as she reflected on her journey through her studies, the push to complete her PhD, and career path. “The focus of the positive psychology presentation on identifying a job that builds on personal strengths and values was a particularly helpful reminder for me,” said one postdoc participant. “It

should be an obligatory presentation for PhD and postdoc students to remind them not to be desperate (which happens very often),” remarked another postdoc.

Networking throughout the conference provided a unique forum for postdocs to get to know one another that they often do not get on a daily basis. “I have extremely limited contact with other postdocs,” said one postdoc. Another added, “For me, the most important was establishing new networks with the speakers and participants.”

After the event, almost 60% of those who provided feedback said that the career conference made them more likely to apply for a job outside the university setting. The attendees also provided many ideas about future activities for postdocs for NTNU to consider.



Above: Heidi Anett Øvergård Beistad PhD presents.



Above: Small group discussion.



Above: Small group discussion.



Above: Lisa Vivoll Straume PhD presents on positive psychology.



Above: Small group discussion.