

Always have a backup plan: Resilience in the world of fixed-term contracts

Christopher Randall

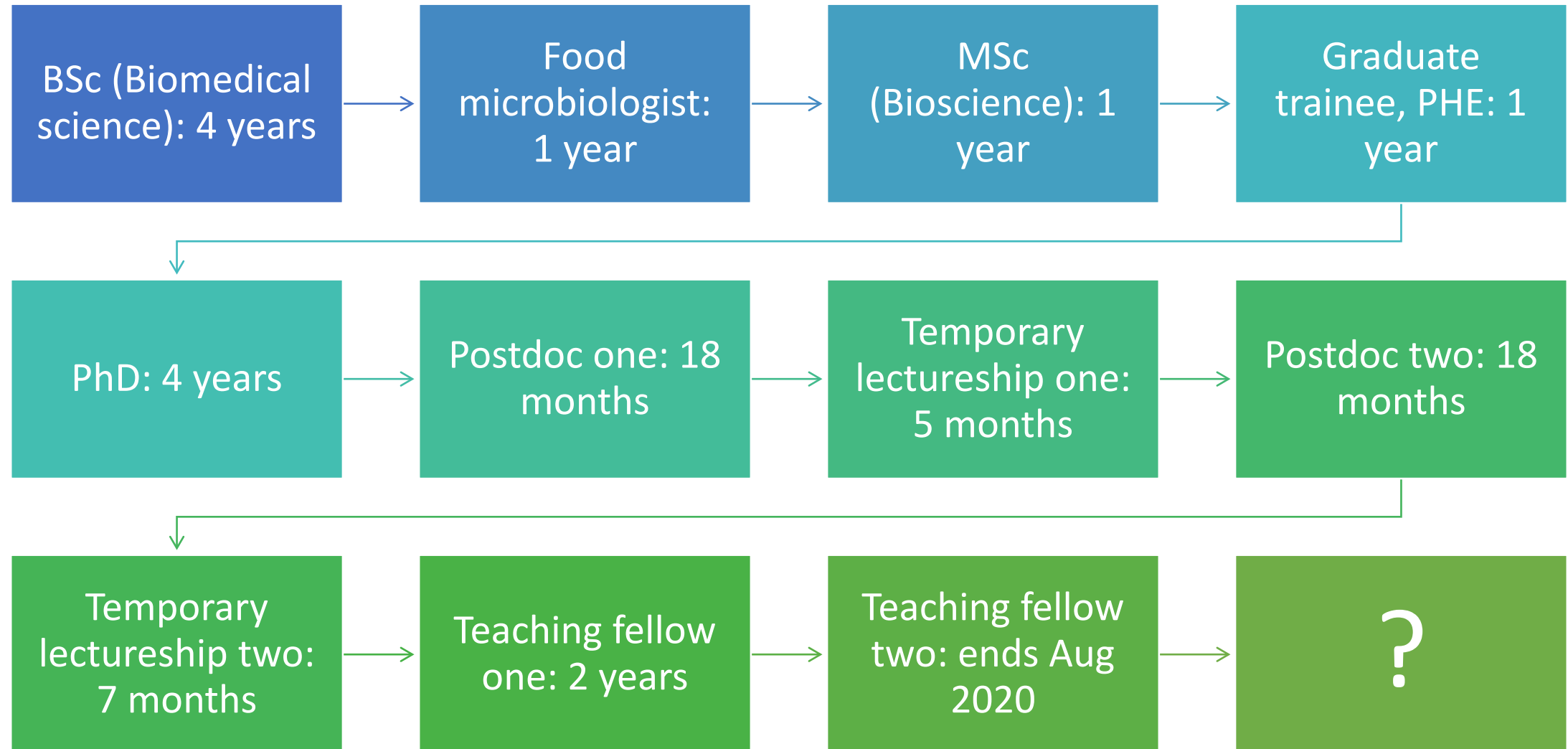
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My career path



Temporary lectureship one: 5 months

- Cover workload of a teaching-focussed colleague
- Opportunity to get teaching experience beyond demonstrating
 - Thoughts at time: Good for the CV, desire to be a “well-rounded” academic
- Loved it
 - Return to microbiology as a field, rather than a focussed sub-section
 - Recognition/gratitude from students



Microbiology for intercalated medical students (2015)



Teaching microbiology is fun!

Postdoc two: 18 months

- The push for independence

- Lab work
- Papers
- Grants
- Supervision
- Work life balance

Didn't want (didn't know?) to say no

- A lot of problems...

- Burnout
- Did not want to do research
 - Conflicted
 - Felt I had failed
- Stressed

Didn't seek any support
"Career paralysis"

Temporary
lectureship
two: 7 months



Teaching fellow
one: 2 years

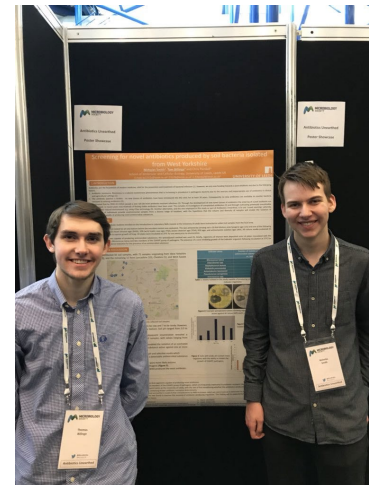
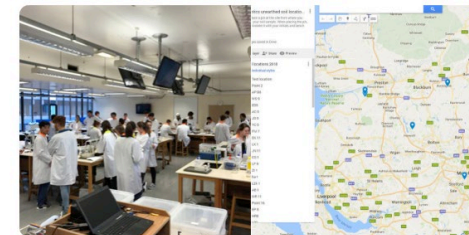
- Was extremely lucky
 - Early retirement of a colleague → teaching contract
 - Relief → imposter syndrome
- Started to seek advice
 - “Hope for the best, plan for the worst”
 - Do you have a plan/strategy if your contract isn’t renewed?
 - Focus on things that are the most impactful
 - Be realistic, and say “no” sometimes!



Novelty graduation poses = highly recommended!

 Chris Randall
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And we're off for week one of
[#AntibioticsUnearthed](#) @UniversityLeeds!
Students have brought in soil samples from
the local area and we're looking forward to
seeing which bacteria we'll find! Fingers
crossed for antibiotic producers!
[@MicrobioSoc](#) @ScienceLeeds



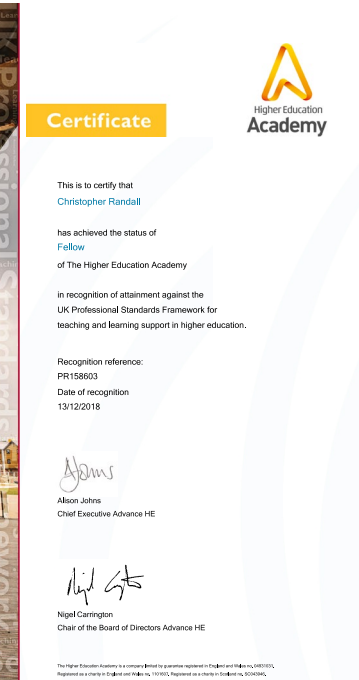
Antibiotics Unearthed @Leeds, 2017

Teaching fellow
one: 2 years



Teaching fellow
two: ends Aug
2020

- End of first contract:
 - Moving into teaching was the right choice
 - Teaching award (helped with my imposter syndrome!)
- ...given another fixed-term contract
 - “How do I get an open ended contract?”
- Spent more time on things that would benefit me
 - Professional development
 - FHEA, working towards SFHEA
 - Communications committee application



Fellow of the Higher
Education Academy:
A more useful
certificate to obtain?

Teaching fellow
two: 6 months
(Aug 2020)

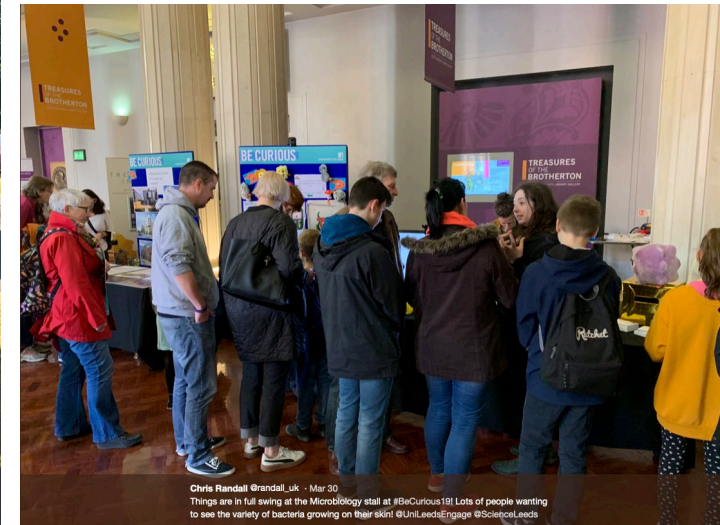
→ ?

Please [click here](#) to see the outreach timelapse used in this presentation

Today

- Want to pursue an open-ended teaching contract
 - Leeds or elsewhere
- Contingency careers
 - Outreach
 - Science communication

Outreach: A fun and fulfilling CV booster!



My advice

- There is nothing more important than your emotional health and wellbeing
 - Don't suffer in silence
 - Don't be afraid to talk to someone
- Learn how to say “no”!
 - Don't rush decisions
 - “I'll get back to you”
 - Beware people who say “it will be good for your CV”, decide for yourself and/or get a second opinion
- Twitter resources:
 - #ECRchat
 - @ithinkwellHugh
 - Lots of resilience advice

- Do you have a backup plan?
 - Reality: only 3.5% of science PhDs secure a permanent academic position
 - Explore other options, speak with a careers advisor
 - Are there things you could do now that would have a big impact on your CV?
 - Network!
 - More people to support you
 - More opportunities present themselves

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