SULSA's Forging Futures Scheme
Overcoming my fear of LinkedIn

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The transition from academia to industry or simply trying to form new collaborations with companies can sometimes feel like a very big ask. Young career researchers are faced with this during or at the end of their PhDs and postdocs, and are not always equipped with the skills, know-how and language needed to make fruitful connections with industry. SULAS has recognised the gap in knowledge and is running the Forging Futures Scheme aimed at developing a cohort that is capable of recognising the opportunities in both academia and industry and can successfully work between the two. To achieve that the course combines self-study and live sessions complimented by expert speakers with a range of backgrounds.

This week's workshop focused on utilising LinkedIn to connect with industry and individuals. When I first heard about LinkedIn I didn't really feel the need to make a profile, finding it unnatural to use social media for work interactions. Fast forward a couple of years and the platform had become the place for job advertising and making new connections with people you share common interests with. I was told by my career advisor at the time "You simple cannot not have one!", and so I went and with much effort I created a profile. It took me what felt like months to populate my page and paint a picture of an employable young scientist. Over the years I polished the content, but I never really got in the habit of engaging with the platform regularly as it always felt a bit forced.

With the end of my PhD fast approaching and the sometimes scary prospect of finding a job becoming ever so imminent I decided it is time to whip my profile into shape and start making connection with the right people. As with most things in life this was easier said than done, until the SULSA workshop on LinkedIn for PhDs came along.

Through the self-study session I learned many tricks and tips on how to improve my profile so I can reach the audience I want to engage with, while also making it visible and easily discoverable for people and companies that are looking for someone with my skill set. It started with some very, what I thought at the time, obvious things such as choosing the correct profile picture. Turns out it's not all about good lighting and angles, the setting that we are in, as well as our clothes and expressions have a huge effect on how people view us on LinkedIn. Sometimes what is a good image for someone in academia might not be appropriate for someone looking for a job in industry. Thankfully, there is a website where you can upload your selected photos and get an idea of the perception you are giving. Being visible to the right people on LinkedIn can make a big difference in getting a job, but how to achieve this was a bit of a mystery for me. I was already familiar with tailoring my CV and cover letter to a specific role I was applying for, but didn't know how to alter my LinkedIn page to target multiple

ads in the area I would like to work in. We were taught the clever application of word clouds for homing in on key words that are repeatedly used in advertised positions by companies we are interested in. Carefully choosing the right vocabulary to use in your profile makes it easier for recruiters to find you and ultimately get you to that coveted dream job.

Armed with all of this new information using LinkedIn doesn't seem so daunting anymore, so much so I went on my profile straight after the seminar and edited my headline so it is more impactful. Small start I know, but my interest in using the platform to make new connections has certainly been piqued and the Forging Futures Scheme has played a major part. I am certain that the skills I have acquired through this workshop, as well as the rest of the training programme have made me a better communicator that can engage successfully with industry.

Resources
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