unite! | University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering

Unite! Career path guide for early career researchers

Unite! community 6 – Professional development & training
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Unite! career path guide

Unite! is an alliance of nine technical universities in Europe. It was designed as a driving force for technology and innovation, as a multilingual trans-European campus aiming to train the experts and leaders that drive tomorrow's digital and green transition. In much the same way, this Unite! Career Path Guide was designed as a driving force for the career advancement of the researchers of our alliance. It targets the over 2.600 annual Ph.D. awardees of the alliance and aims to provide them substantial support for their career development.

If you are a Unite! researcher at an early stage of your career, then you know: science can be thrilling and rewarding yet planning a career in academia is extremely challenging. You might be determined to stay in academia but need help figuring out how to succeed. You may hesitate to continue in academia and need reassurance that this is right for you. You might feel the need for a career change but don't know where to start. Or you are interested in learning career alternatives – just in case.

No matter what your motivation is, our Unite! Career Path Guide gives you a toolkit that helps you navigate career planning and progression. The underlying principle is that to build a sustainable and successful career you must have a solid basis and clear goals. Being aware of your aptitudes, achievements, and aspirations lays the foundation for a career that builds on these preconditions.

The guide offers a systematic approach, practical exercises and tips to proactively reflect on your career to date and help formulate an individual and ongoing career strategy for the future. By following this framework, you learn how to analyse your potential, set clear goals, develop essential skills and transition successfully to your desired career.

> *"Research finds that people who develop and implement strategies to pursue career-specific goals achieve greater career success as measured by remuneration, promotions, and level of responsibility. They also report greater career satisfaction and rate themselves as more successful than their peers compared to those without career plans."[1]*

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[1] Source: EURAXESS Handbook "Career Development Plan"; p. 4

The guide is divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1: Understand your career

This section leads you through a structured *self-assessment* (1.1) and *career reflection* (1.2). It includes:

→ Identify your values, interests, strengths, and weaknesses
→ Explore career options and job descriptions
→ Determine what jobs best match your profile
→ Review your career decision-making and experiences
→ Recognize your skills, attributes and achievements
→ Reflect on your motivations and goals

Chapter 2: Plan your career development

This section facilitates your *goal setting* (2.1) and the definition of an *action plan* (2.2). It includes:

→ Define short- and long-term career objectives
→ Identify skills to develop for future success
→ Set SMART goals for each skill
→ Create a road map for achieving career goals
→ Identify training and development opportunities
→ Develop a plan for continuous learning and professional growth

Chapter 3: Career progression and transition

This section helps you to plan your *academic career progress* (3.1) and explore *alternative career options* (3.2). It includes:

→ Develop research independence and output
→ Prepare for teaching and management responsibilities
→ Plan for career progression within academia
→ Explore career options beyond academia
→ Identify transferable skills and competencies
→ Develop a plan for transitioning to a new career

Chapter 4: Career support and resources

This section introduces *professional development opportunities* (4.1) and *career guidance and mentoring* (4.2). It includes:

→ Access training and development programs
→ Participate in career webinars and workshops
→ Utilize online tools and resources
→ Seek guidance from leading researchers and mentors
→ Engage in peer-to-peer mentoring and networking
→ Utilise Career Development Frameworks and Templates

Chapter 5: Mobility, multiculturalism and multilingualism

This section focuses on the roles of *mobility* (5.1) and *multicultural and language skills* (5.2) for a career. It includes:

→ Explore opportunities for international collaboration and research
→ Check resources for mobility
→ Develop skills for working in diverse environments
→ Identify language skills required for career goals
→ Access language courses and resources
→ Develop language skills for professional communication

1 Understand your career

A guiding principle of career development is that it begins with taking stock of your career to date. Career development is most effective when it starts early and becomes a continual activity. However, no matter in which career phase you are, it is worthwhile and advisable to step back from the demands of daily life and work and take the time and opportunity to analyse and understand your personal and career development needs. For this, take a close look at your capacities and accomplishments, reflect on your motivation and experiences, and understand how and why your career developed the way it did.

The first part of this chapter leads you through an assessment of your values and interests, your strengths and weaknesses, and your career opportunities. In the second part, you reflect on your decision-making and experiences, your achievements, and your motivations and goals. At the end of this chapter, you should have a better understanding of your individual (career) profile. Exercises will help you to get into a reflecting mode more easily.

1.1 Self-assessment

Identify your values, interests, strengths and weaknesses

Values and interests offer orientation and provide valuable information for career decisions. Think of them as your personal career compass showing you the path that best suits you. You might have made career choices that aligned with both, either consciously or unconsciously. Or you made the experience that a particular decision was violating your core values and beliefs. Take the time to take stock of your values and interests to be well-equipped for future career choices.

Ask yourself: *What are my guiding values? What is particularly relevant to my personal and professional happiness and well-being?* Examples can be respect, independence, meaningfulness, creativity, financial security.

Answer intuitively and note:

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.

Now prioritise by looking at the first horizontal pair (1 + 2) and ask yourself: *Which of these two values could I not do without?* Cross out the other one so that the remaining value is the one that is more important for you. Then, continue the same way with the second and the third horizontal pair until you end up with your three central values. This task can help you to understand which values are key to your happiness. A career path usually only fulfils some of your values. Therefore, consider carefully: If you must compromise, what could you do without, and what is not negotiable for you? You may also use this task to identify your interests.

It might be self-evident to you, but you are equipped with inherent strengths that have led you to where you are now and set you apart from others. Likewise, you might have encountered, or are beginning to see, challenges and obstacles originating in weaknesses. When considering your next career step, it is crucial to move in the direction that is in line with your strengths. Knowing your strengths as well as your weaknesses can help you to opt for the right direction and to identify development areas.

Many people have difficulties seeing their strengths and talents. If this holds true for you, try the following exercise: Look back on your private, academic, and professional life and identify individual achievements that you have made in each area and, importantly, where you were directly involved in the success. Note down on a separate sheet of paper what you have been successful in (success stories). Remember feedback from others, the exact context of that success, and describe how you achieved a goal. Be as precise as possible.

The imposter syndrome is real, and belittling your own work is oftentimes a hurdle to overcome. Also, one tends to evaluate one's work by comparing to others, and we generally only see the successes and positive points of others, while we see our failures and not-so-good points.

Unite! Associate Professor – Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya

Now read through the sheet carefully, deduce three core strengths that were mainly responsible for your successes and list them here:

1.

2.

3.

Like your values, this list of strengths may serve as a career compass.

Tips *Add an external perspective! Ask friends, family, and colleagues to send you a list of up to ten strengths they see in you. What are you particularly good at? What are your talents? Compare their answers to the results of your internal reflection.*

Find alternative self-assessment tools in the EURAXESS Handbook, p. 7.

Explore career options and job descriptions

Equipped with an understanding of your values and strengths, you can now explore matching career scenarios. For that, you first gather all the information you can find about career options with a PhD. Valuable sources of information can be:

➢ Your professional and personal network, e.g., your scientific supervisor(s), mentors and experienced researchers, former and current fellow students, researchers and colleagues, friends, and family. Don't forget to use conferences, academic societies or online networks such as ResearchGate and LinkedIn for networking! → List all people you know who might have information on the topic. Ask them proactively for information and suggestions and use their network, too, for further investigation.

- ➢ Advice from career experts, e.g., career service or consulting in university, literature, and handbooks on academic careers.→ Find out whether your university or other regional facilities offer career counselling and use these offers.
- ➢ Online resources like Pathways for Postdocs or EURAXESS Handbook.
- ➢ Job advertisements → Browse job adverts on relevant career websites and databases and collect anything that interests you.

A helpful way to visualise the findings of your search is a mind map, where you collect and organise all the options you come across. Note all options, including those you rule out for yourself. The goal is to identify as many options as possible.

Determine what jobs best match your profile

Finally, you determine which of the career options you identified are in line with your core values and strengths. Go through the results of the mind map and reflect critically: would this correspond to your profile? If not, cross out. Look at the remaining options and prioritise.

1.2 Career reflection

Review your career decision-making and experiences

By reflecting on your career progression and decision-making to date you learn from previous decisions and experiences and identify successful career and decision-making strategies for your next career step. The following exercise may help you to approach your career reflection systematically:
List the major steps in your career on a chronological timeline. Go to each point in time and ask yourself: *Why did I decide to take this step? What or who has influenced my decision? Looking back, was I happy with the decision? If so, why? If not, why not? What would I do differently next time?*
From your responses, you will be able to evaluate the outcomes of your career decisions.
- ➢ Which were the key decisions you made in your career and how did you arrive at that decision?
- ➢ Which approaches have been beneficial, and which have been disadvantageous for your career progress and your happiness?
- ➢ Can you identify strengths and weaknesses in your career decision-making?
- ➢ What did I learn about me and about other people?

Additionally, think about what experiences have been most influential in shaping your career path.

Recognise your skills, attributes and achievements

To further complement your reflection, you now bring to the fore the skills and achievements that characterise your career to this point. A scrutiny that is both critical and appreciative of the skills you acquired and the value of your contributions to your professional community can bring a clearer understanding of where you stand and which path to choose. Think about the following questions:

➤ Reflecting on your career so far, what accomplishments are you most proud of?
➤ What skills and attributes do you think have been most critical to your success?
➤ Can you share an achievement that you feel exemplifies your skills?
➤ How do you ensure your professional community recognizes your skills and accomplishments?
➤ How have you built on your existing skills, and what new skills have you had to develop during your career?
➤ Considering the times when you felt you made career progress, why was this? Were there specific aspects of that job, the people you worked with or the environment you worked in that contributed to your progress?

The answers to these questions provide a list of evidence that can be used in two ways. First, for yourself as a compass for further career decisions. Second, to present to potential employers in applications or negotiations regarding your career progress.

Reflect on your motivations and career goals

Use the same approach to understand what motivated you throughout your career and what made you chose your career goals up to this point:
➤ What initially motivated you to pursue your current career path?
➤ Have your motivations changed as your career has progressed? If so, how?
➤ How do you stay motivated when faced with career setbacks or challenges?

So, I think this career path guide helps us focus on the important aspects."

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher - KTH Royal Institute of Technology

2   Plan your career development

Are you now ready to plan your career development? Great! Two things are important on your way there. First, you set yourself concrete goals for your career. Second, you define an action plan, in which you formulate how you reach them. This chapter guides you through the process.

2.1   Setting goals

Define short-term and long-term career objectives

Goals are essential for career development. Setting concrete goals gives you the opportunity to develop and the motivation and certainty that the outcome will be worthwhile. It allows you to be dedicated and focused and prevents you from wasting time and effort. While goals are defined more broadly in terms of the outcomes intended from an assignment or project, objectives specify the actionable steps aimed at achieving these outcomes.

Before you set out to formulate a concrete action plan, start with defining your long-term and thus your ultimate objective. Once this is done, define smaller milestones that are relevant to achieve your ultimate goal. In other words, diversify your long-term goal into short-term objectives. This allows you to stay more focused and motivated.

"I have set goals for myself in terms of research output and progress. This has been done as part of Aalto tenure track processes, but I also do this independently. In addition, I benchmark by comparing to highly successful individuals that are on roughly similar career stage."

Unite! Assistant Professor – Aalto University

Identify skills to develop for future success

Once you know your career goal, you need to make sure you got the skills to reach it. The demands for research careers and the variety of career options have become increasingly diverse and dynamic. The Unite! Researchers Development Framework

(URDF) provides an overview of essential skills and competencies to be acquired as a basis for research excellence. These skills and competencies have been clustered into five categories:

Within each category, there are a number of subcategories as well as different levels to reach at different stages of a career, i.e. foundational, intermediate, advanced, and expert level.

Identify which skills are needed for your career goal and compare them to your skills profile. Which of these skills do you already have and on which level and which do you need to improve or gain?

Set SMART goals for each skill

Once you have identified the skills needed, set yourself SMART goals for each skill. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely and is a device to establish criteria for effective goal-setting and objective development. Improving your skills is an integral part of your professional development. Improving one to three skills per year is a good indicator to be well prepared for the next career step.[2]

2.2 Action plan

In the final stage of career development, you formulate an action plan. An action plan is a detailed list of concrete tasks or steps you need to accomplish to achieve your career goals.

Create a roadmap for achieving career goals

Think of your action plan as a roadmap, leading you the way towards your goals by stopping at a number of stations. Begin by asking yourself: *What actions or steps will help me achieve my work, training, and career goals? Where can I get help? Who will support me?* Consider that action steps should be clear and actionable, so be as precise as possible.

> *"I think about what practical steps reaching each goal requires, and I schedule time etc. I do everything I can to meet the goal, and don't give up easily."*
>
> *Unite! Assistant Professor – Aalto University*

Identify training and development opportunities

Include opportunities for training and development in your roadmap. In case your university does not offer (the right) training courses or development opportunities, you might consult the [Unite! training catalogue](#) for faculty and staff. It includes trainings from all Unite! partner institutions and specifically targets postdoctoral researchers of the alliance.

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[2] Source: EURAXESS Handbook "Career development plan", p. 11.

Develop a plan for continuous learning and professional growth

In a rapidly changing world and work environment, it is crucial to embrace continuous learning to excel and stay relevant. Make sure that your roadmap includes a strategy for continuous learning, defining steps to grow your knowledge and skills continuously.

"In short: short term goals should be achievable, long-term goals should lead the way. Whenever you set a short-term goal, it should be a hands-on work that one can finish. It increases the motivation when finished. A long-term goal might be a silver lining that keeps up the motivation for the daily work."

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher – Graz University of Technology

3 Career progression and transition

Career development is a central aspect of a researcher's journey, encompassing opportunities within academia and beyond. This chapter provides a guide to career progression and transition strategies, leveraging insights from the [Career Development Toolkit for Researchers](#) and [Pathways for Postdocs](#), ensuring you have practical tools to reflect, plan, and act upon your career aspirations.

Research careers can evolve in numerous directions, both within and outside academia - from achieving tenure track academic roles to pursuing careers in industry, consulting, government, and entrepreneurship. Regardless of the path you choose, this chapter emphasises how to strategically build your professional identity, navigate change, and recognize the broad transferability of your skills.

A healthy career path is one that aligns with both your professional goals and personal well-being. Mental health, adaptability, and realistic goal setting are essential elements of a sustainable career. As such, we also encourage reflection on work-life balance, stress management, and pacing ambitions.

"Every position needs someone who can identify what needs to be done, look for solutions and the right people/tools to carry out certain tasks, be able to see the tasks through and present results to different audiences. This is what we do in every research project or dissertation."

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher – Technische Universität Darmstadt

3.1 Academic career progress

Developing a successful academic career requires strategic planning, continuous skill development, gathering the required merits, and reflection on personal goals. This section provides a roadmap for researchers seeking to advance their academic careers, focusing on research independence, teaching and management responsibilities, and long-term career planning.

"It was during my PhD, when I began to have a clearer idea that I would like to continue in academia, that I began to have a more professional vision and thought about specific fields I would like to focus on. The choice of these specific fields was based on two points: what topics I liked to work and in which areas I would have more opportunities for growth."

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher – KTH Royal Institute of Technology

Develop research independence and output

Developing a unique research profile is key. Begin by identifying your main research interests:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Then reflect:

- ➢ Are these areas aligned with current institutional or funding priorities?
- ➢ Does your current research environment support these interests?
- ➢ What are the research priorities and plans for your current research environment? → If you are unsure, check the website for a strategic plan or research plan; you could also ask a senior colleague.
- ➢ How do your ideas and plans for the development of your research fit with these plans and priorities?
- ➢ Would relocation to or collaboration with a different institution help?

It's also essential to build a strong funding strategy:

- ➢ Are there funding programs for early career researchers (e.g. MSCA, ERC Starting Grants)?
- ➢ Do you have access to a research support office or grant writing workshops?
- ➢ Can you partner with senior colleagues or research groups to co-develop proposals?

Tips *Make sure you are connected to internal calls and newsletters and seek mentorship for grant application reviews.*

Typically, universities have dedicated teams or services to support researchers to identify competitive funding calls and to apply through successful research projects. Get informed about these services, whether they organise specific trainings on grant writing or proposals, review how they spread the information on funding opportunities (website, newsletter, ...). Additionally, seek opportunities to collaborate with senior colleagues in order to gain experience of grant writing.

To increase your research output:

- ➢ Publish regularly, with a focus on high-quality, interdisciplinary work.
- ➢ Aim for visibility in both traditional and emerging platforms.

"Early in my career, the tricks were to try to alternate between brainstorming, coding, writing, and housekeeping frequently enough to not get tired and keep going. In order to publish more, the tricks are understanding very well what I wanted to explain and try to improve my writing skills as much as possible."

Unite! Assistant Professor – Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya

Prepare for teaching and management responsibilities

Teaching and leadership are vital aspects of academic careers. To prepare effectively:
- ➢ **Develop teaching skills:** Participate in teaching workshops, seek mentorship, and engage in reflective practices to improve pedagogy.
- ➢ **Gain leadership experience:** Volunteer for roles such as committee participation or research group coordination to develop management skills.
- ➢ **Gather feedback:** Regularly solicit feedback from students and colleagues to refine your teaching and management approaches.

Example: Join a teaching development program at your institution and apply active learning techniques in your next lecture. Reflect on the results with a mentor.

Plan for career progression within academia

Map out your career progression with short- and long-term milestones:
- ➢ **Set clear milestones**: Use institutional frameworks or external resources to outline short- and long-term career goals. For guidance on defining career objectives, refer to Chapter 2.1: Goal Setting, and for structuring an implementation roadmap, see Chapter 2.2: Action Plan.
- ➢ **Build a mentorship network**: Seek guidance from mentors who can provide insights and support for promotions or transitions. Chapter 4.2: Career Guidance and Mentoring provides detailed strategies for finding mentors and leveraging professional networks.
- ➢ **Engage in professional development**: Attend conferences, workshops, and training programs to remain informed about emerging trends and practices.
- ➢ **Document achievements**: Maintain a portfolio of your contributions and competencies to support future applications.

Career progress check

What are the requirements, the skills, and the expectations required of researchers at the level(s) above your current position? These might be published as a guide on the Human Resources department website or look for the OTM-R webpage (Open Transparent and Merit Based Recruitment) if your Institution is committed to the Human Resource Strategy of the European Community (HRS4R).

Exercise: Compare your current profile with promotion criteria at your institution.

My experience and academic achievements	Requirements for the next level

What career actions do you need to focus on in the next year or as more medium-term actions?

1.

2.

3.

Create a timeline with actionable steps to address these areas.

*"To enhance my research output I do research on high quality research
(e.g. search for guidelines, best practice examples, study results I
value and have learned from...), attending hands-on workshops for
what I feel I am missing, and asking people or institutions more
knowledgeable than myself to look at my output or give me advice."*

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher – Technische Universität Darmstadt

3.2 Alternative career options

Exploring non-academic career paths is a valid and often fulfilling choice. Many researchers transition into roles that benefit from analytical, project management, or leadership experience. This section outlines how to assess opportunities beyond academia and plan a successful transition.

Explore career options beyond academia

Start by researching industries that value your core competencies:
➢ **Understand the landscape**: Data science, policy advisory, tech start-ups, consulting, education, etc.
➢ **Network proactively**: Connect with professionals in desired fields through LinkedIn, alumni networks, or informational interviews.
➢ **Attend career events**: Attend webinars, alumni events, and networking sessions.

*"I am actively seeking for job opportunities in innovation and data
analysis. The spectrum of possibilities beyond research is huge!"*

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher – Politecnico di Torino.

Identify transferable skills and competencies

You already have highly valuable skills. Examples include:
➢ **Project management**: Experience in coordinating research projects and managing resources.
➢ **Problem-solving**: Analytical skills honed through experimental design and data interpretation.
➢ **Communication**: Expertise in presenting complex ideas to diverse audiences.
➢ **Leadership**: Supervision of students or junior researchers demonstrates your ability to lead teams.

Exercise: Map your transferable skills:
1. List the key tasks you perform in your academic role.
2. Identify the skills associated with each task (e.g., communication, analysis, leadership).
3. Create your 'skills portfolio' to map what you offer and that you can present to potential employers in applications, CVs, or interviews.

The Unite! Researcher Development Framework (URDF) and the Unite! Development Needs Analysis (UDNA) can help you with this mapping exercise.

"I gained skills in project management and communication. I am also able to work in collaboration with many partners from academia and industry, locally and internationally."

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher - KTH Royal Institute of Technology

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"I've gained resilience, because science doesn't always go the way you expect it to and we are constantly subject to peer review. I've gained management and mentoring skills that I'm still working to develop. I've also gained technical skills that can be transferred to many STEM fields, but those skills tend to age as the technology develops, so they need constant updating, which keeps me humble."

Unite! Full Professor – Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya

Develop a plan for transitioning to a new career

Transitioning can be smooth with the right strategy:

➢ **Self-assessment**: Reflect on your strengths, interests, and values to identify suitable roles. Revisit your answers in chapter 1.1 (self-assessment) articulating and prioritising what you most value or what motivates you in your career. Then you can start to look at types of jobs and organizations that would fulfil those values or motivations.

➢ **Skill enhancement**: Undertake relevant training or certifications to address gaps in qualifications or experience.

➢ **Tailor your application materials**: Adapt your CV and cover letter to emphasise transferable skills aligned with the target industry (see the skills portfolio you created chapter 1.1).

➢ **Seek support**: Leverage career counselling services, mentorship, and peer support groups to navigate the transition. Speak with someone who left academia to have realistic and current information about the role you are interested in (use your network and make new connections).

➢ **Get acquainted with the job market**: use job adverts and LinkedIn to get acquainted with the job market language: job titles, positions, skills required. Try putting some keyword related to your competences into a LinkedIn search and just see the range of jobs and organizations that are revealed in the search, see how people have described their skills and job descriptions. And perhaps this may lead you onto a useful contact or employer, or a job title that you never knew existed.

Exercise: Create a transition roadmap:
1. Research three roles that interest you outside academia.
2. Identify the key qualifications and skills required for these roles.
3. Develop a step-by-step plan to bridge any gaps in your experience or training.

Wrap-up

This chapter equips you to make informed decisions about both academic and non-academic career paths. Whether your goal is to advance within academia or pivot to another sector, take time to reflect on your strengths, develop your skills, and actively build the roadmap to your desired future—without compromising your mental health or personal values.

4 Career support and resources

Developing an academic career requires more than just research excellence—it also demands continuous professional development, career guidance, and access to valuable resources. This chapter introduces professional development opportunities and career guidance strategies, helping you navigate your career path effectively.

4.1 Professional development opportunities

Access training and development programs

Universities and research institutions offer a variety of training and development programs designed to support researchers at different career stages. These programs often focus on:

➤ Grant writing and funding applications.
➤ Project management and leadership skills.
➤ Research ethics and integrity.
➤ Effective academic writing and publishing.
➤ Teaching and mentoring in higher education.
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Exercise: Identify your training needs

Reflect on your current skills and career goals. Identify at least three areas where additional training would be beneficial. Use the table below to plan your next steps:

Skill/Area to develop	Available training programs	Action plan
Example: Grant writing	University workshop on funding proposals	Register for next available session

Participate in career webinars and workshops

Many academic institutions and professional organizations offer webinars and
workshops on various career-related topics. These events provide:
➢ Insights into different career paths (academic and non-academic).
➢ Networking opportunities with experts and peers.
➢ Practical advice on job applications, interviews, and career transitions.

Researchers can explore upcoming career webinars and workshops in the Unite!
Training Catalogue, ensuring they remain informed about valuable development
opportunities.

To make the most of these opportunities:
➢ Subscribe to mailing lists from relevant academic societies.
➢ Follow career development centres at your institution.
➢ Actively participate in Q&A sessions and discussions.

Exercise: Create your career webinar calendar

Research upcoming career webinars and workshops. Note down three events you plan
to attend in the next six months.

Event name	Date	Institution	Link

Utilize online tools and resources

You may also explore the <u>Unite! Researcher Development Framework (URDF)</u> and the <u>Unite! Development Needs Analysis (UDNA)</u>, which provide structured methodologies to assess and plan career development.

Online platforms offer valuable tools for career development, including:
- ➢ E-learning platforms (e.g., Coursera, edX, LinkedIn Learning).
- ➢ Networking platforms (e.g., ResearchGate, LinkedIn).
- ➢ Funding databases (e.g., Horizon Europe, national research grants).

Make a habit of exploring these resources regularly to stay updated with career development opportunities.

4.2 Career guidance and mentoring

Effective career planning often benefits from mentorship and structured guidance. Seeking advice from experienced researchers and engaging in peer-to-peer mentoring can provide invaluable insights and support.

Seek guidance from leading researchers and mentors

Principal Investigators (PIs) and senior researchers can offer guidance on:
- ➢ Career progression strategies.
- ➢ Research project development.
- ➢ Grant and publication strategies.
- ➢ Work-life balance in academia.

How to find a mentor:
- ➢ Identify potential mentors within your department or research field.
- ➢ Approach them with clear questions or requests for advice.
- ➢ Engage in formal mentorship programs if available.

Engage in peer-to-peer mentoring and networking

Networking with peers is an effective way to share experiences, seek advice, and build professional relationships. Strategies include:
- ➢ Joining research networks and discussion groups.
- ➢ Attending academic conferences and networking events.
- ➢ Participating in peer mentoring groups within your institution.

Exercise: Build your professional network

List at least five peers and senior researchers you would like to connect with for career discussions. Plan to reach out and schedule a meeting or informal chat.

Name	Area investigation	Institution	Career discussions

Utilize career development frameworks and templates

Several career development frameworks and planning tools are available to help you structure your career goals and actions, including:
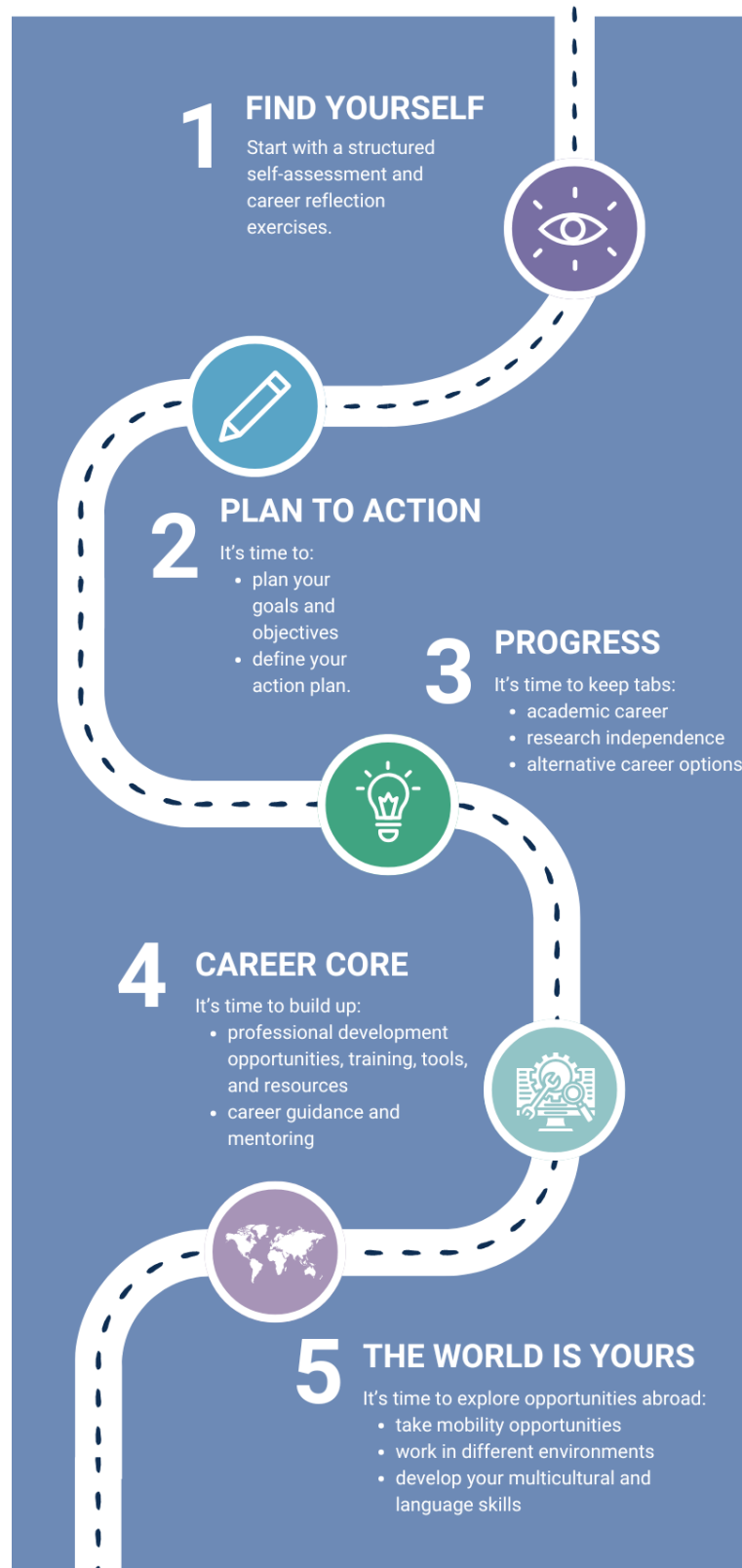➢ Unite! Researcher Development Framework (URDF).
➢ EURAXESS Career Development Toolkit.
➢ Unite! Development Needs Analysis (UDNA).
➢ Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for tracking progress.

You can utilize these frameworks to:
➢ Define clear career objectives.
➢ Identify necessary skills and training.
➢ Develop actionable career plans.

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FRAMEWORK

CAREER PATH PLANNING

1 FIND YOURSELF
Start with a structured self-assessment and career reflection exercises.

2 PLAN TO ACTION
It's time to:
- plan your goals and objectives
- define your action plan.

3 PROGRESS
It's time to keep tabs:
- academic career
- research independence
- alternative career options

4 CAREER CORE
It's time to build up:
- professional development opportunities, training, tools, and resources
- career guidance and mentoring

5 THE WORLD IS YOURS
It's time to explore opportunities abroad:
- take mobility opportunities
- work in different environments
- develop your multicultural and language skills

5 Mobility, multiculturalism and multilingualism

In an increasingly interconnected research landscape, international mobility and multicultural as well as multilingual skills are not just assets—they are essential. Engaging with different cultural contexts and working in diverse teams enhances research quality, fosters innovation, and expands your professional network. However, international mobility also involves personal, logistic, and emotional challenges. This chapter helps you reflect on both the opportunities and the practical realities of mobility while equipping you with strategies to succeed in global environments.

5.1 Mobility

Mobility opens new academic collaborations, access to funding opportunities, and career advancement. It also broadens your perspective, encouraging new ways of thinking and problem-solving.

Explore opportunities for international collaboration and research

Reflect on the following questions:
  ➢ Am I open and able to relocate? What are my limitations?
  ➢ Does my institution offer support for international relocation or family integration (e.g., KTH Relocation)?
  ➢ How does mobility align with my personal and professional goals?
  ➢ What does Unite! offer? Check the Unite! Faculty & Staff mobility manual

Check resources for mobility
  ➢ Explore EU-wide programs (e.g. MSCA, Horizon Europe).
  ➢ Connect with international research networks or attend conferences abroad.
  ➢ Speak with peers who have experienced international transitions.

Exercise: Mobility Readiness Check

Make a list of 3 countries you would consider moving to. For each, research:
  1. Job opportunities aligned with your expertise
  2. Language/cultural integration needs
  3. Institutional/family relocation support

While mobility is an important career factor, moving countries is more than packing bags. It affects identity, relationships, routines—and sometimes also one's mental health.

Coping strategies for international researchers:

- ➢ Find local support groups or counselling services
- ➢ Build a personal support network quickly
- ➢ Be patient with adaptation—it takes time

Tips *Normalize your emotions. Homesickness, uncertainty, or imposter syndrome are common. Seek help early if needed. Check the [Unite! Well-being Guide](#), which includes resources and best practices from Unite!*

"While geographical mobility is highly valued in academia, there is very little practical support to make it feasible — especially for researchers with families. Relocating an entire family for a visiting position is a major challenge, and more institutional and financial support would be needed to enable such opportunities. Despite the difficulties, I believe that spending time at a foreign university is an excellent and important step for career development."

Unite! Assistant Professor – Aalto University

5.2 Multiculturalism and multilingualism

Develop skills for working in diverse teams

Navigating intercultural dynamics requires more than curiosity—it requires awareness, adaptability, and empathy.

"Cultural competence is central, and it's challenging!"

Unite! Assistant Professor – Aalto University

Developing your multicultural awareness:
- ➢ Participate in cultural intelligence or DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) training.
- ➢ Reflect on unconscious biases and assumptions.
- ➢ Embrace diverse work practices and communication styles.
- ➢ Join the [Unite! Socializing Clubs](#)
- ➢ Have a look at the [Unite! Training Catalogue](#) for faculty & staff

Exercise: Cultural Reflection - Describe one moment of cultural misunderstanding in your academic or professional life.

➢ What caused it?
➢ How was it resolved?
➢ What would you do differently now?

Tips *Peer exchanges with international colleagues can provide a safe space to share and learn about cultural differences.*

"Some of the most challenging interdisciplinary problems affect people globally and the most creative solutions will come from diverse, international teams who bring unique perspectives to these problems. Cultural competence helps teams understand each other and leverage their unique perspectives."

Unite! Full Professor – Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya

Identify language skills required for career goals

Language enables access. It is crucial for collaboration, integration, and academic visibility.

""Making an effort to learn the local language has been fun and enriched my experience working in collaborative teams. It has also been slow, and it humbles me daily, but I believe it's worth it because it has helped me feel like I'm part of a deeper research community."

Unite! Postdoctoral Researcher - Aalto University

Ask yourself:
➢ Do your target roles or countries require specific language skills?
➢ Are English publications sufficient in your field or is regional language engagement expected?

Access language courses and resources

➢ University language centers or Erasmus+ language grants
➢ Online platforms (e.g., Duolingo, Tandem, Babbel)
➢ Language cafés or exchange meetups
➢ Join a Unite! Language Tandem

Develop language skills for professional communication

Exercise: Build a Language Learning Plan - Define your goal: e.g., "Present confidently in French at an international conference within 12 months."
List:
- ➢ Resources you'll use
- ➢ Weekly time commitment
- ➢ Peer or tutor support options

Wrap-up
- ➢ International mobility is a powerful career enhancer—but it must be balanced with personal realities.
- ➢ Multicultural environments enrich teams—your adaptability will determine your success.
- ➢ Language development is an investment that multiplies opportunities.
- ➢ Well-being is a core part of sustainable mobility—don't overlook it.

6   References

Career Development Toolkit for Researchers: *career-development-toolkit-for-researchers.pdf*

EURAXESS Handbook: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/euraxess_career_handbook.pdf

EURAXESS Toolkit: euraxess.eventiotic.com/piperstool/

Pathways for Postdocs: https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/staff-development/public/pfdc/Pathways-for-postdocs.pdf

7   Unite! Resources

Unite! Researchers Development Framework (URDF): https://www.unite-university.eu/researchers

Unite! Development Need Analysis (UDNA): https://www.unite-university.eu/researchers

Unite! Training Catalogue: https://www.unite-university.eu/learn/faculty-staff-trainings?sfr

Unite! Faculty & Staff Mobility Guide: https://facultyandstaff.unite-university.eu/mobility-guide

Unite! Well-being Guide: https://www.unite-university.eu/researchers