



Top insights and advice from Prof. Gordon Harold

Early Career Researchers Webinar: Networking and Career Development (7 Dec 2020)



eNurture Director, Prof Gordon Harold, outlined his academic career path at the beginning of the webinar. See his University of Cambridge [profile](#) for a summary of his inspirational journey.

Highlights from the webinar

"To identify your research objectives, ask yourself, what questions might I be asked that will challenge what I recommend?"

"Learn about other disciplines that you want to collaborate with first. You need to understand the backgrounds of those you'd like to work with and then find a common purpose."

"It is important that people feel they able to make mistakes. Rather than calling it a mistake, think about what you would do differently? Engage the right strategy and processes. Reflect on it and absolutely learn from it!"

"It is a huge privilege to be a mentor and is the most rewarding part of my work..."

"Don't be afraid to embrace change."

"Develop your unique selling point."

"Size does not matter at the beginning of your career."

"Work as a team and look out for one another."

"Take the work outside the academy – think about outputs and impacts."

The image is a screenshot of a Zoom meeting. At the top, there is a header bar with the text "You are viewing Sam Parsons's screen" and "View Options". Below this, there is a row of participant video thumbnails. From left to right, they are: Nina Rowley, André Tomlin, Sam Parsons (who is the current screen), Stephen Eccles, Laura Neenan, and Gordon Harold. The main content area shows a slide titled "Top tips: Impact". The slide has a background image of a desk with a white keyboard, a pair of glasses, a smartphone, and a cup of coffee. The slide text is as follows:

Top tips: Impact

- Particularly as an ECR – how will you build on this initial work to develop future research proposals, etc.
- Who needs to be involved to support future work/impact? E.g. if working with schools, how do you take the work beyond one or two schools?

At the bottom of the Zoom window, there is a control bar with icons for Unmute, Start Video, Security, Participants, Chat, Share Screen, Record, Reactions, and a red Leave button.

Gordon answered questions posed by ECRs during the session:

"I don't have a traditional psychology background; how can I work in Mental Health?"

Gordon: "What is your starting place? A starting point is to recognise what is typical development and what is atypical development. Ask yourself what can your expertise bring to the field of mental health? It is important to be able to move beyond the research question you are asking and think about what questions you might be asked that will challenge what you are recommending."

"I'm currently working in primary healthcare and would like to work in Mental Health, what advice do you have?"

Gordon: "You must be strategic about building your capacity and role. It is easy for a methodologist for example to always remain a methodologist. You must build qualitative and quantitative skills – avoid being pigeon-holed as technical support. Package your contributions in a way that advances your career path."

“I have a psychology background and I’m interested in interdisciplinary collaboration what advice do you have?”

Gordon: “Learn about the different disciplines you want to engage with first. You need to gain knowledge about those you want to work with. Other disciplines can include social workers and teachers. Gain an understanding of the terminology used within their fields of work. Then you can find a common purpose and common question that everyone can buy into. Remember that you are the expert in your field – you do not have to be someone else to provide the expertise. The core elements you are bringing should not be compromised.”

“I work across several fields including genetics, neo-natal and diabetes, how can I move in mental health within collaborative groups”

Gordon: “Have a very clear idea of your own objectives and how these align with the individuals within the groups you are working in, is this a good fit? Make sure the synergy is mutually beneficial and helps to move knowledge in the area forward.”

“How can we find time to pursue our specific professional interests?”

Gordon: “Ask yourself, what is work and what is a privilege to do? Reconcile your work loads. Feel able to talk to those around you (including your mentor) about your work and responsibilities so that they might help you.”

“How do you set up a research group?”

Gordon: “It must start with you, you need to be strategic and select people carefully and really understand what their trajectories are. To secure research funding you need a track record. So, build a track record then gradually build a team (including PhD students) to contribute to your research objectives and create an evidence base. Timing is important – you do not want to spend time managing/working with people who are not ready. Be prepared to say ‘no’ or ‘not yet’.”



Mentoring: What to look for

Gordon:

- Find a mentor who is genuinely interested in your career and is there for you.
- Find a mentor you can trust, who is honest, objective and fair.
- A good mentor is not someone who tells you what you want to hear.
- A mentor does not necessarily have to work in the same academic area as you. You can have several mentors.
- Arrive at a topic that really inspires you, and that is publishable.
- Mentoring is a two-way relationship.
- It is also important to help others.
- Be your own toughest audience!



All the senior researchers at the webinar were asked: “If you were an ECR now what would you ask in the breakout rooms?”

Gordon:

“The landscape is very different now for ECR’s from when I first started out. The infrastructure is there. Credit to the UKRI for being architects of change that improved the framework of support for ECRs and made it more open and collaborative.”

Rory O’Connor from Triumph Network:

“Learn more about potential collaborators early on. Consult others to find out more about people before asking them to collaborate. Some collaborations simply don’t work out and that is ok. Go with your gut.”

Senior Researcher:

“What I wish I had known? To develop the ability to say no! To be more selective about the work I take on and those I work with. Also, don’t only try to reach out to more senior researchers than yourself. Good collaborations can come from working with those on the same level as yourself.”

Kate Pickett from Closing the Gap Network:

“Networking shouldn’t just be transactional. As an ECR you are an apprentice who is learning alongside someone more senior. I asked “Is there anything I can help with?” not to be a brown-noser, but in this way I developed useful skills such as grant writing, teaching and how to review papers.”

Gordon:

“When considering a PhD, I asked a potential supervisor, ‘Why should I do this?’ when I noticed that he was working on weekends. My supervisor said, I don’t see it as work, I see my position as a great privilege that gives me the potential to influence others and have a voice.”

“You shouldn’t ask why do it, but why wouldn’t you do it?”

To which an ECR responded with following comment:

“Gordon, that is the most inspiring statement I have heard today”.

