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The Global Academic Careers Guide

Essential advice and top tips for academics
looking to expand their horizons overseas

Introduction

As an academic, you're used to the idea of an international competition for students. At every university there is a growing cohort of students from around the world, and ongoing efforts to maximise the university's international reach. From overseas satellite campuses to targeted recruiting, it's an everyday reality.



But alongside these new opportunities for students, there are corresponding opportunities for academics – and, indeed, an international competition for the best candidates.

This ebook from academic careers pioneer jobs.ac.uk will tell you more about the scale of the new global market, help you consider the pros and cons of seeking employment outside your nation of origin, and give you important information that will improve your success rate if you do decide to give working abroad a try.

Who should read this ebook?

Anyone who is considering applying for academic jobs abroad. It may also be helpful to staff involved in recruiting academics, as it provides a good overview of the issues they face.

This ebook will cover:

- Academics in the global job market
- Preparing for an international job search
- Carrying out your international job search
- How to present yourself as a strong international candidate
- Preparing for and succeeding at an international job interview
- Success: What you need to do before you go

It also includes a helpful **Resources** section.



1 Academics in the global job market

There are almost as many reasons to consider a global job search as there are academics, but some of the most common are:



- Relevance of the location to your academic discipline: e.g. an Archaeology lecturer would no doubt jump at the chance to work in Egypt, and employment in France has obvious relevance to a lecturer in Modern French Literature
- Desire to add international experience to your CV to enhance future career prospects
- Availability of excellent research facilities at a specific overseas university
- Desire to work with specific academics who are the world's best in your field
- Poor job prospects, job security or pay in your current location

Of course, working overseas also opens up possibilities for travel and cultural interests, not to mention the simple pleasure of a change of scene.

The rise of the “passport professor” has been noted by many observers and documented in surveys. It is particularly marked in STEM fields, where language ability may be less important than technological expertise. In countries with a young HE sector, the number of academics from overseas often exceeds that of homegrown lecturers: for example, in Qatar's ambitious Education City, about 80 percent of staff are American (Wheeler, 2014), and some of the remaining 20 percent are from Europe or Asia.

Expansion of the Bologna Process has certainly facilitated staff mobility within the EU, as has expansion of cross-border activities by US, Canadian and European universities. Although research indicates that early-career academics and those in STEM subjects are the most likely prospects for moves between European countries (Cradden, 2007), there are also many later-career academics working abroad as well. Often these are clustered within overseas campuses run by a university in their home country, but not a few have used working on an overseas campus as an entry point to finding direct employment with a foreign university.

For universities, hiring international candidates can be route to capacity-building and can be a key part of their own “internationalising” agenda for programmes. This means that you may be expected to take initiative to set up programmes or improve standards.

2 Benefits and Drawbacks

Potential benefits

As the list above indicates, there can be some very real benefits to individuals who take a post abroad. It still adds cachet to the CV, may broaden your horizons as a person or as an academic, and will certainly widen your circle of professional connections.

It does not always lead to a drastically better standard of living, but sometimes that is the case – salaries may be higher, and workload and/or professional autonomy may be better, depending on where you relocate to.

For many applicants in countries where academic posts are very hard to get, applying overseas can provide a welcome solution to a job-search that has stalled. Writer Emily Matchar (2012) provided many examples in an article on American academics leaving for posts overseas, including her philosophy-professor husband. Having applied for 279 jobs at US universities in two years, he finally took up an offer in Hong Kong. For him, she notes, the higher starting salary, side benefits and work environment have come as extras after an exhausting hunt for work. But these extras have meant a very good standard of living, she notes:

“ His colleagues, about half of whom are from abroad, are smart and engaged. His schedule is humane. His students are curious and hard-working. In addition to the generous pay, we get a housing stipend for rent and have great health insurance.

Because of the United States' foreign earned-income exclusion, we don't have to pay U.S. taxes on most of our Hong Kong income. Hong Kong's income tax is generally lower than that in the United States, and most expats in Asia have similarly favourable tax situations.”

Emily Matchar (ibid.)

Potential drawbacks

For those who work in countries where there are linear paths leading to tenured positions in academia, overseas work that is not explicitly within this system (for example, in the form of working abroad during a leave of absence, research project or sabbatical) can take you off the track. It may then be hard to regain your place.

There can also be substantial costs associated with working abroad, although careful planning and flexibility can mitigate some of these. Housing costs, healthcare and the actual cost of moving are three of the top issues, and can come as a shock (See **Preparing for an international job search** and **Success: What you need to do before you go** for helpful information, below.)

Two additional barriers identified by the European University Association (2014) are problems with career development for foreign academics, and visa rules that may make it difficult for your spouse, partner or children to move with you.

Occasionally new members of staff may feel excluded from projects until they get to know their colleagues, the best way to deal with any tensions is to go out of your way to make links with coworkers from the country where you are now based. Do your best to learn some language basics, ask their advice, invite people for office and lunchtime conversations, show interest in the work of others. Show that you respect their expertise and how they do things, and you will earn their appreciation.

“ I took a one-year research post at an American university on the West coast. I loved the experience, but the cost of living was astronomical! The university helped me find housing before I arrived, but the rental cost took almost half of my income. Much of the rest went for health insurance, which is very expensive there. I also had not factored needing to own a car into my budget, but public transport was very poor. These are things that might have made me think twice had I known about them in advance of applying.”

British academic

“ I was fortunate to have a friend who was already well-established in the areas around the main/southern campuses. Without that network, the first period would have been much more difficult. During the first weeks, everything is very exciting and new. I was able to make some new friends very quickly, and always had a relatively easy time getting along with my students and co-workers.”

Canadian English Teacher at
Guangdong University of Foreign Studies



3 Preparing for an international job search

Before you start sending in applications, there are some research tasks ahead of you. This includes ensuring that you have set clear goals and criteria for posts that you apply for, and for your potential future move itself. The worksheet on the following page has been created to help you do this.

But first things first: you need to start by taking stock of the market for your skillset and background. Through reading academic journals and attending research conferences, you should already know which universities around the world are best known for research in your field. These are obvious targets for your job search. Research the departments that you would be especially proud to work in. If information is not available online, you may be able to receive course prospectuses, university information packets and so on by post, just as an overseas student might.

There is, however, a second group of institutions that you should consider. In particular, new universities, new departments, and universities that are growing quickly are those most in need of academics. They are also precisely the places where an academic coming in from overseas can really make a mark. You may be able to have opportunities that would take you years to earn at home, such as shaping a new department's research agenda and making decisions about additional hires. Use search engines, news reports and job listings to make note of any developments announced and to spot trends in hiring patterns.

Finally, think about any professional contacts you may already have overseas, from academics you have met at conferences to former colleagues who are themselves working overseas. They can give you an informed view of the job market where they work, and may have additional contacts.



Important considerations

Among the most important things to consider are whether you meet the language requirements for the post, whether the university abroad will assist you in navigating visa and/or work permit requirements, and whether your diplomas and other qualifications map over to those required in the country where you are applying.

Language

“ Colleagues working in Asia have told me that there is rarely any expectation for learning the local language, but that they sometimes struggle because the level of English spoken by co-workers and students is not actually very high. Where I currently work, however, there is an absolute expectation that you will gain full fluency either before taking up a post or within a year. My teaching is entirely in English, but staff meetings and hallway conversations are almost always in Dutch. If you don't speak it, you will be left out of decision-making and social networks, and your career will stall. ”

American academic
working in the Netherlands

As this lecturer notes, even when the actual teaching will be in English, some universities will require applicants to have or develop proficiency in another language. Indeed, some observers of the European scene have noticed that at the time of this writing, more job descriptions appear to be asking for proficiency at the time of application, which may reflect a retrenchment towards hiring locally during an era of austerity and high unemployment amongst academics. If you meet all other qualifications and believe you have extras to offer, however, it can't hurt to try anyway. You may also want to consider starting a language course as part of your preparation process, and flagging this up on your CV.



Visas and permits

Visas and work permits need careful planning. The European University Association (2014) have identified this as a crucial barrier to academic mobility. Investigate what is needed while you are working on your application, and make sure you have requested or downloaded the correct forms. You can work on gathering documents you may need while you wait to hear about the post. For example, some applications require a version of your birth certificate with a special stamp called an apostille attached, which may take some time to receive.

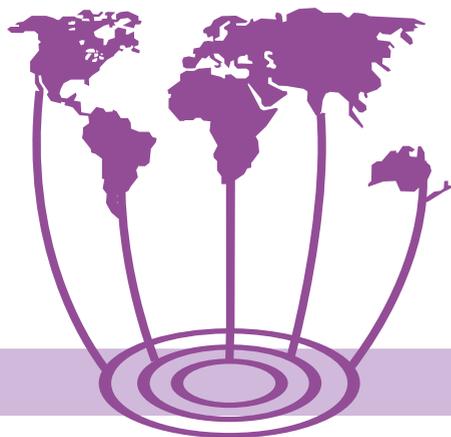
That said, most universities roll out the red carpet to new hires, and provide a great deal of help with navigating these systems. Sometimes, however, concerns over immigration numbers can drive tighter regulations that adversely affect academic staff. Before applying, it is a good idea to discuss how easy (or not) this process will be with the Human Resources department at your target university or a trusted colleague currently working in-country.

Most countries have a formal mechanism for determining how degrees are evaluated for hiring purposes. For example, those seeking in work in Europe may need to submit to one of the agencies that is part of the ENIC-NARIC network (<http://www.enic-naric.net/>).

This may seem like just a bureaucratic hurdle, but it is actually quite important. Without these checks, unscrupulous applicants might be able to pass off a degree purchased from a “degree mill” as a valid PhD, for example. If yours is from an accredited university, you usually have nothing to worry about.

“Applying for a job at the University of Copenhagen was quite a lengthy process. I first saw the job advertised in April 2009, and heard that I had been short-listed in June. The interview took place in Copenhagen during August and I started my new job at the beginning of October. The application process to work abroad took a few months and it is important not to become disheartened by this.”

Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark



Global job search goals and criteria worksheet

What are my top three goals for working overseas?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What five countries would I be most interested in working in and why?

1: Country

Why?

2: Country

Why?

3: Country

Why?

4: Country

Why?

5: Country

Why?

For each country that you wish to target with applications, make a copy of the following basic information checklist. Use it to ensure you have key information before applying.

Country:

(Best) universities with programmes in my subject area:

Typical salary range in my area*:

Particularly positive aspects of working in this country:

Drawbacks of working in this country:

Key contacts – colleagues currently or previously employed in this country:

Language requirements*:

Qualifications equivalency agency (if any):

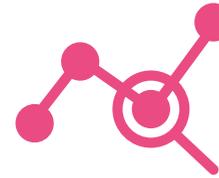
Visas/work permits required:

*These can usually be found in current job listings

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Carrying out your international job search

Once you have decided what you want from an international post and where in the world you would most like to work, how can you find out about posts?



One of the most obvious routes is via academic job-listings websites like jobs.ac.uk. However, in some countries not all posts are externally advertised. It's a good idea to create a list of weblinks to the universities you have identified on your worksheet, and regularly check their own job listings.

Direct approaches are also possible. If you already have contacts at your target universities, you might ask whether they can pass your details on to colleagues, or simply ask if they have time for a chat about what you should do to find work at their institution or in their country.

Senior academics may be in a position to be approached by recruiters or headhunters, as it is not uncommon for universities to undertake an international search of their own to fill top posts. There are firms that specialize in finding stars (or rising stars), especially for research-intensive universities (see Fazackerley, 2012, for a discussion of how these operate in the UK and Asia).

Universities planning major moves, such as opening new departments, may have a corresponding internal headhunting team.

Do be cautious about what posts you apply for and how you present yourself, warned one veteran of working overseas:

Important Tip:

It is almost always the case that services that offer to connect you with jobs for a fee, or that promise to sort out visas and other paperwork for you, are a scam. Headhunting does happen at the top level of academia, but headhunting firms charge the employer, not the employee. Your best source for accurate information about work visa requirements is the embassy of the nation you are applying for work in (and do beware of sites that pose as "official" but are not).

“ We're just advertising for two posts at the moment. My best advice would be to read the job description carefully – no end of unsuitable candidates apply. PhDs are crucial these days. Explain clearly why you're interested in the job and [in] working overseas. ”

British academic now working in China

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How to present yourself as a strong international candidate

The most likely way to ensure that you are actually approached or approved for a post is maintaining a high academic research profile. This is part of your everyday job description, of course, but if you're thinking of an international move you may want to think especially carefully about what the world sees when they look at you.

First, think about where you are submitting papers for publication and which conferences you are attending and, hopefully, presenting at. Focus on journals and conferences that bring you and your work to the attention of academics in the countries you would like to work in. Consider whether a translated version of a paper or book chapter could be resubmitted to an overseas journal, for example. Also, be sure to follow up quickly on any international contacts that you make at conferences.

Making direct contact by email with academics in your countries of interest can't hurt. This usually shouldn't be the kind of job-focused approach that you could safely make to someone you already know. Instead, collegial contact about research they have recently published or topics of common interest could spark a conversation that puts your name in the picture. This goes double for initiating actual research collaborations, which are one of the best ways to eventually find your way into overseas work.

Second, consider your online presence, both on your current university's website and elsewhere (e.g. professional networking sites like LinkedIn and research-sharing sites like Academia.edu). Make sure everyday social networking is out of public view unless it burnishes your reputation – if someone searches for your name online, or searches for, say, "Professors of American Studies," you want to ensure that anything they find about you is positive, complete and updated. You may also want to raise your profile by starting an academic blog.

Finally, give some attention to preparing a country-specific CV and cover letter. Different CV "rules" and standards apply in different countries, and you can find out what best to do by checking what successful applicants have done. For example, you could ask a colleague working in the country to give you suggestions, or you could look at the CVs of academics already working there (often findable via their academic website, personal website or LinkedIn).

Some countries expect additional items with the application, such as a "statement of teaching philosophy." If you have never prepared these before, look for country-specific guidance if possible.

“ I asked the head of my department why I was hired, and his reply was that the steering committee was impressed that even though I was working part-time, I had a number of publications and was active as a presenter at Japanese domestic and international conferences. But that's my story; I've talked to other teachers who excel at teaching, and so are hired on that basis, rather than on the basis of the research they do. Being clear about what your interests and ambitions are helps make it easier for potential employers to decide whether you will be the right match for the positions they have available. **”**

Associate Professor at the University of Toyama

Important Tip:

Consider joining or becoming more active in international research or subject associations in your field. These are great networking opportunities, because their members are precisely the people who can suggest your name for a post – but only if they know who you are.



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Preparing for and succeeding at the international job interview

Interview procedures can vary from country to country. In the UK, for example, applications usually begin online, and panel interviews for short-listed applicants are common. Interviews are short, and applicants are often expected to deliver a presentation on the kind of topic they are applying to teach. In China, however, there are sometimes group interviews at the beginning of a lengthy process that may also include writing an essay or delivering a research seminar to a large group of staff and students. In the US, the interview may include multiple parts over two or more days.

If you are unsure of what to expect, search online (there are now many sites offering “reviews” of interviews at universities around the world by successful and unsuccessful applicants) or ask the Human Resources department for further details.

Occasionally, overseas applicants will be interviewed via telephone or video link/Skype. Karen Kelsky (2011) provides an excellent guide to doing well in what will be for many a rather unfamiliar and off-putting format for an interview.

Make sure you are familiar with the research in the department where the post is located, and with national and university priorities for research and teaching. Being able to refer to recent academic or sector policy initiatives during the interview, for example, will show that you have done due diligence regarding relocation.

Make sure you know what the rules are about salary negotiation before you receive an actual offer. In some countries it's simply not done, in others it is expected and will seriously improve your position. Along with salary, there may be other things that you can negotiate, such as a relocation allowance, dual-career package if you are part of an academic couple, workload and research agenda issues, and so on.

If you don't seem to be getting through to or doing well in interviews, it's time to have your documents looked over by an expert. There are consultants who provide this service for a fee; alternatively, you may be able to get feedback from a knowledgeable and sympathetic colleague. Check for cultural issues, omissions, or skill gaps as well as formatting and presentation issues. Some candidates may benefit from country-specific coaching.



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Success? There are still things to do before you go!



The hoped-for end of every job search is a good offer of employment. If you get an offer, make sure that you send official acceptance quickly, and then make direct contact with the Human Resources department. They should be able to guide you through all of the tricky issues that relocation brings up.

In addition to visas, work permits and housing, there will also be personal details to consider. These may include:

- Storage and moving costs and plans – sometimes a relocation allowance is available to overseas applicants, but not always
- Visas for spouse, partner and/or children
- Education for children – school places for expat families can be hard to find and costly, with an application process of their own
- Helping your spouse or partner also find work (or, perhaps, continue their education, volunteer, or find out what they need to know about living in your soon-to-be new country)
- Language learning – if you are relocating to a country where English is not the primary language, a crash “survival language” course is advisable before you go, and you may be able to negotiate with your employer for language instruction as part of your contract

Make sure that you are aware of any cautions or hazards of living and working in your new country before you leave. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, US State Department and similar departments in other countries usually publish warnings if any of these are of a serious nature, e.g. travel advisories or safety alerts. Your employer should also be able to provide guidance if there are local cultural or safety issues that foreigners should be aware of.

Finally, once you are on the ground, pay close attention to academic protocol. Don't be afraid to ask questions about what you should do or say, and take time to observe how others act in staff meetings, while teaching and when working individually with students. Standards of dress, behaviour and interpersonal relations can differ, as do rules of etiquette. Don't expect your host country and university to change just because you have arrived with new ideas from abroad. You are the newcomer, and that means you will need to be adaptable to fit in and thrive. If you can find someone to act as a formal or informal mentor, this process is likely to be much smoother.

“ One of my best moments outside the classroom was when a mature student invited me out to his camel farm in the desert outside Doha, where we tasted fresh camel's milk, and I felt very honoured to meet the student's family and friends who have mixed modern and traditional Bedouin lifestyles.

Within the University I have taken great delight from being able to celebrate victories with my students, and see them progress happily onto their chosen courses.”

English Lecturer at the
University of Qatar

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Resources



[jobs.ac.uk Country Profiles](#)

View information on different countries including key facts, travelling, business etiquette and the education system.

[jobs.ac.uk Working Overseas](#)

Browse articles with tips and advice if you are considering an international career move.

[ASEAN University Network](#)

Key HE organization in Asia, involved in everything from quality assurance to staff internationalization initiatives.

[Association of American Colleges & Universities: Resources for Academic Exchange](#)

This longstanding US HE organisation provides an extensive list of partner organisations around the world. These should lead you to reams of data on international work opportunities and HE systems.

[The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)

Looking for work in the US? This publication carries advertisements but also very helpful stories on the job market and career planning.

[European Association for International Education](#)

Organisation that sponsors and publishes research on internationalisation in HE.

[Institute of International Education](#)

This organization is involved in promoting both student and academic staff mobility. It provides helpful country reports and other information.

[International Association of Universities](#)

This is a fantastic source for information about HE systems around the world.

[Preparing for the Academic Job Market](#)

Prepared by Tufts University in the US, this includes helpful guides to all parts of applying within the fiendishly complex US system.

[The Professor Is In: International Perspectives](#)

This academic blog is very popular in the US, and will be of great help to candidates seeking to understand how to find work in that market. This section also includes links to guides on applying for work in various parts of Europe.

[SEMEO Regional Centre for Education and Development](#)

Organisation, which is working towards internationalising HE in 11 Asian countries.

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About the author



Dr Mitzi Waltz has recently embarked on working as a freelance disability consultant, trainer and writer, based in Amsterdam. She was previously Senior Lecturer in Autism Studies at The Autism Centre, Sheffield Hallam University, following five years with the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER), University of Birmingham, and a long career as a journalist and journalism educator. She has contributed to many key pieces of autism research and resources, including the DCSF Inclusion Development Programmes on working with children and young people with autism. She has written ten books, the most recent of which is *Autism: A Social and Medical History* (2013, Palgrave Macmillan).

Recommended Reading



[The Internationalisation of Higher Education Whitepaper](#)



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