bio**Focus**

Mark Downs discusses the concept of "Jobs for Life"

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Whatever happened to a job for life? A nice linear pathway that everyone understood: do well at school, go to a good university, possibly a higher degree and then a job with prospects? If you weren't academically inclined, then of course you focussed on an apprenticeship and learning a trade. We all know the answer — it was never that universal or straightforward, and it was certainly a long time ago! What is clear is that career paths have radically changed and it is an employers' market. In the biosciences it is not at all unusual to get well over 50 applicants for jobs, especially early career roles, even for those on relatively short fixed-term contracts. So what can differentiate candidates who want to work in science and engineering? I suggest two potential areas are demonstrating breadth of interest or experience and a commitment to ongoing professional learning. The Society of Biology is seeking to help with both through professional registers and (as with all learned societies) wide networking opportunities.

Learned societies have a great opportunity to help existing members and attract new ones through the value they can add in a challenging job market. Increasingly, expert knowledge needs to be coupled with transferable skills. In his recent "*Making Science Work*" lecture Sir Paul Nurse FRS, Hon FSB made clear his view, supported widely in the audience, that science will no longer be carried out primarily inside organizations but between them; to make that happen, scientific staff at all levels need to be competent at managing external partners and collaborative research alongside customers, suppliers, investors, politicians and the media. A good example is of course the pharmaceutical industry where research is increasingly collaborative using academic partners and contract research organizations. Major pre-competitive projects are also expected to grow using the much touted "open innovation" model. This will need a different skill set beyond excellent science. And the same is true of many other areas. Applied microbiology has a rich source of experts who have highly transferable skills that perhaps just need highlighting: individuals need to make them stand out.

Learned societies can really make a difference by offering members the chance to meet not just peers but potential colleagues at all levels and from diverse backgrounds, supported perhaps by professional development programmes. Showing a new employer, or even your existing employer, that you have breadth as well as depth and skills beyond a specialism has always been helpful but now they are essential.

As part of a License from the Science Council, the Society of Biology has just launched a series of professional recognition programmes: Registered Science Technician (RSciTech), Registered Scientist (RSci) and Chartered Scientist (CSci) alongside Chartered Biologist (CBiol); these all recognize the competencies of individuals in the workplace. To be added to the relevant professional register there needs to be a demonstration of how skills are applied in a work environment and then annual CPD (continuous professional development) to maintain registration. It is this recognition of the application of skills in a broad way, rather than demonstration of knowledge, that is so important in showing employers transferability of skills. For example, an individual may know how to operate a piece of equipment or run an assay, but can they communicate what it does and how to interpret data to both specialist and non-specialist alike?

Critically for the individuals, there is no requirement to have existing qualifications. Whilst they may help they are not a prerequisite. For guidance, a rough comparability is that RSciTech is approximate to A level, RSci to Foundation degree and CSci/CBiol to Master's degree. To learn more visit the website: http://www.societyofbiology.org/development/rscitech.

To ensure more support for members across the spectrum the Society of Biology is now also set to introduce regular half and full day training courses covering everything from being an "expert witness" to Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) and presentation skills. For a full day this will typically be offered at a nominal fee of £10 for individual members, £75 for members of our member organizations such as S*f*AM and £150 for non-members. Needless to say, CPD points can also be accumulated through these courses to help with annual returns.

Let us know if you would like to get involved in our professional development programmes. As a member of S*f*AM, the Society of Biology is offering new applicants half-price membership for the next two years.

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Dr Mark Downs, PhD, FSB
Chief Executive, Society of Biology