Career obstacles facing Early Career Scientists (ECS) and a first look at solutions

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Despite the growing number of PhDs awarded in the geosciences in the last decade, the availability of permanent or more senior positions hasn’t matched this trend. Recent estimates suggest that less than 1% of graduates become professors/senior lecturers and only 30% stay in academic roles after graduation (The Royal Society, 2010). To analyse the impact of these developments on the Early Career Scientist (ECS) community, the ‘Careers and Jobs Working Group’ of the EGU representatives designed a survey. The survey focused on the motivation as well as obstacles faced by ECS in their decision to pursue a career in academia and on suggestions for resources to help them with their career decisions. The survey was distributed to ECS via social media platforms, webinars and newsletters.

Here, we present the preliminary outcome of the survey, received up until December 2020. The survey highlights that despite high interest in remaining in academia, many scientists are also interested in alternative careers, but face a number of barriers in their quest for both academic and non-academic positions. Some of the most prominent hurdles to a continued career in academia include poor job security and lack of support for families. The interest in non-academic careers varies by career stage and family status (whether single, in a relationship or a parent). The importance of this research is underlined by the recent ‘Graduate student happiness and wellbeing report’ conducted at the University of California, Berkeley, which identified job insecurity and low career prospects as having a large negative impact on the mental health of ECS.

ECS are particularly interested to learn more about work fields that are related to their subject of study, about transferable skills and are keen to participate in events such as webinars and networking events. These findings highlight the role that international organisations (such as EGU, AGU, ERC) can play to help and guide ECS in finding a career path. Through their extensive networks both inside and outside of academia, such organisations are in a powerful position to facilitate interactions between members of different career stages and work fields. We suggest that a stronger focus on career development within such organisations – for example by creating a dedicated point of contact for careers information and regularly organising career-related events-
will create a better outlook for ECS whilst also contributing to their mental health and overall wellbeing.