Abisola Sanusi graduated from her PhD in Cardiovascular Sciences in July 2016 from the Department of Cardiovascular Sciences.

Pursuing a career in academia was something that I largely did not consider. Although I possessed a passionate love of science, I had one large question looming over me: ‘Do I want to devote my entire life to this area of study?’ The simplest answer was no.

CAREERS INSIGHT

Upon deciding that a lifelong career in science was not suitable for me, I began researching the graduate schemes listed in the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers list. I took part in a wide range of extracurricular activities during the course of my PhD, in particular the Biotechnology YES competition offered me an excellent insight into alternative career paths. In addition to further developing my transferable skills and how to apply them in a business type environment, it gave me, someone who came from a background in science, an insight into what a career outside research and academia might be.

Because all the participants in my group came from my department, it was very easy and simple for us to regularly discuss our ideas. The University aided us in simplifying our highly complex idea into a more publicly orientated product idea. The product we designed was a fictional novel strain of yeast that allowed bread produced from traditional wheat strains to be safe for consumption by people who are gluten-sensitive. We prepared our presentation and practiced our sales pitch until we were good to go!

A RECOMMENDABLE TIME

Reflecting on the experience, I feel that the Biotechnology YES competition played a significant part in the success of my job applications. Whilst certain skills utilised in my new position were acquired during the years I carried out research, the competition gave me insight into alternative career paths, and also provided me with another set of skills that I hadn’t previously had an opportunity to develop.

I would certainly recommend others to take part in the competition, regardless of whether a career in academia is your ideal career path or not, the experience this opportunity provides is invaluable.

Training up business skills

The three-day Biotechnology YES competition was a fantastic experience. We were given a tour of the Unilever site, observed ground-breaking research they are undertaking, and contributed to their work. In addition, we were given a tour of a manufacturing site where ice creams were made, visited greenhouses that housed various strains from across the globe and heard from different employees about their careers in transitioning from an academic background into industry.

What Biotechnology YES did for me went beyond a simple addition to my CV and a short visit to a manufacturing site. In my group, I was the Chief Executive Officer, tasked with the development of a viable financial strategy. This needed to include a balance sheet, a cash flow forecast, and a calculation of the company’s Net Present Value. This would enable an equity offer to be made for the company. As the project was unexplored territory, we were presented with a massive challenge.

This experience has proved invaluable, as in every interview I have undergone, there was always a question of my competency asked that linked back to my experience of taking part in Biotechnology YES. Th is enabled an equity offer to be made for the company. As the project was unexplored territory, we were presented with a massive challenge.

The competencies I developed included ‘teamwork’, ‘communication’, ‘leadership’, ‘problem-solving’, and importantly persuading others to buy with my idea. Discussing the experience became very natural and it eased the pressure of every interview.

After the interviews, I was offered positions within three companies that I applied to, of which I decided to accept a procurement role within a multinational company that sold some of the ingredients we used in our sales pitch at the competition.

Why Biotechnology YES?

For many PhD students, a PhD is a time to train your scientific skills and build a research base in academia. But, as FRONTIER author Abisola Sanusi writes, this is also a good time to discover your entrepreneurial skills with a nationwide competition called the Biotechnology Young Entrepreneur Scheme (YES).

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3-Minute Thesis Competition

Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) is an academic competition developed by The University of Queensland, Australia. Now used by universities around the world, the University of Leicester is hosting its own 3-Minute Thesis competition for the fourth time in 2017.

Calling research students from ALL disciplines who can deliver a compelling talk on their research and its significance in just three minutes…

When: Spring 2017.
Where: TBC
For more information see: www2.le.ac.uk/research/festival/2016/3mt

Festival of Postgraduate Research

A key event in the University’s calendar where 50 of University of Leicester’s best research student’s display their work to the world outside the University the impressive and ground-breaking research they have achieved. The festival features a presentation of cutting edge research to academics, employers, and the public through posters.

When: June 29th 2017 11-2pm
Where: 2nd Floor Charles Wilson Building
Watch for abstracts in early 2017