



HOW NOT TO GET AN ACADEMIC JOB

Prof. Andrew Hill FBASES provides a satirical insight into gainful employment in academia. Or not.

It is apparent from being part of hiring committees at universities over the years that many of us are highly skilled at avoiding interviews and job offers despite our apparent suitability. Indeed, some of the best academics and doctoral students I have had the good fortune to work with and manage have, for whatever reason, proved the most skilled at putting off interview panels. It struck me that there are lessons to be learned from this unique skillset.

You may, for example, find yourself managing or supervising someone like this - a highly skilled teacher and researcher - a collaborative colleague or rising star - someone you would basically like to keep around as long as possible, but they are oblivious to how to successfully navigate the process of how universities hire academic staff.

Alternatively, you might want to prolong your own PhD experience, by far the most enjoyable part of a career, to avoid the crushing reality of being a fully-fledged academic or simply want to know how to press the self-destruct button in an interview where you now don't like the

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sound of your potential new department and university, and a job offer is getting perilously close.

To help in all these circumstances, I have provided some key pieces of advice below. Hopefully, you find the advice helpful at each stage of the process, from ensuring a negative impression preapplication to avoiding being the preferred candidate when all is said and done.

In support of the advice given, close colleagues and I have all followed at least some of it ourselves at one time or another to good effect. Personally, I have found the interview the perfect place for self-sabotage on more than one occasion.

Advice for you and your colleagues

- The first thing is the advert. It is never wise to read it too closely. It will include clues to what they are after. If they mention teaching responsibilities first and research second, best to assume it is a mistake. If something is flagged as advantageous, it can be ignored.
- Avoid learning anything about the university. If you know someone at the university, or someone who has previously worked at the university, certainly don't contact them.
- To get on the front foot, reach-out to the named person in the advert with a question that is already answered in the advert. They are busy. It could annoy them. Plus, be really informal and overfamiliar. "Cheers" is a good way of signing of this type of email.

- All jobs will have specific criteria. "Tell us this" or "that" the application will say. Best to be vague and brief. The aim is to get the panel to have to google you.
- Difficult to know if a CV is unhelpful. In case of uploading one, refer to it constantly, like "see my CV" or "dealt with elsewhere." A sure way to give the impression you are too busy to repeat yourself for the hiring committees benefit.
- You will need to score poorly on at least one of the criteria. It will be enough to avoid getting an interview. Leave at least one section blank or almost blank.
- Use ChatGPT to write the responses. Everyone can tell. This could be enough to sow at least a little bit of doubt about suitability for the post (or "Relying on ChatGPT for responses is noticeable and might raise some doubts about the person's suitability for the position" says ChatGPT).
- If an invitation to an interview comes along, wear something to stand out and that is memorable.
- Being combative in any interview is imperative. A sure way to give the impression we might not be likeable, not a safe pair of hands, or difficult to work with.
- Be sure to ask how much teaching is attached to the job first chance you get (ideally in a way they understand the less the better). Say you will be

"too busy to concern yourself with undergraduates" (this is a great line, use it).

- There is a lot of jargon and acronyms in HE - REF, TEF, KEF, or whatever. These could be important to the department so best not to learn what they are.
- When talking about research, time to brag. Best ever. Avoid appearing humble and reflective, or giving the impression you care about the real-world impact of your work.
- They might want to know how you will fund your research. Tell them that university will pay for it, obviously. Plus, getting external funding is easy anyway. Tell them that people who don't get external funding are just bad academics. No turning back now.
- To close the interview, when asked if you have any questions, ask again about how much teaching the job involves.
- If you find yourself being offered the post, tell them you will think about it, don't give them a timeline, and definitely don't reply to attempts to contact you. Time to go on holiday.

Well, hopefully you are now ready to misguide your best colleagues and students in to staying with you, at least for a few more semesters, and also have the know-how to make yourself appear unappointable to even the most accommodating hiring committee if needed. Cheers. ■