



MENTOR Machine LEarning in optical NeTwORks

A European Industrial Doctorate [EC GA 956713]

D5.11 (D25) Transferrable Skills Workshop III (TSWIII)

Making Effective Job Applications and Interviews; Career and Personal Development Planning; Research Grants: An Introduction

Project Details

Grant Agreement	956713
Project Acronym	MENTOR
Project Title	Machine Learning in Optical Networks
Call Identifier	H2020-MSCA-ITN-2020
Project Website	https://mentor.astonphotonics.uk
Start of the Project	1 January 2021
Project Duration	48 months

Document Details

Title	TSWIII, Making Effective Job Applications and Interviews; Career and Personal Development Planning; Research Grants: An Introduction
Deliverable number	D5.11 (D25)
Deliverable Type	Report
Work Package	WP5 Recruitment, Management and Implementation
Deliverable due date	31 March 2024
Actual date of submission	31 July 2023
Lead beneficiary	Aston University
Version number	V1.0

Dissemination level

PU	Public	X
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including Commission Services)	



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School of Advanced Studies – Pisa



EC Funding



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement number 956713.

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Beneficiaries

Aston Institute Of Photonic Technologies (Lead Beneficiary at Aston University)
Infinera Germany (Non-recruiting Beneficiary)
Infinera Portugal (Non-recruiting Beneficiary)
Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies
Technical University of Denmark
Polytechnic University of Catalonia

Industrial Partners

Telecom Italia Mobile

Orange Telecom Company

List of Acronyms

AIPT	Aston Institute Of Photonic Technologies
AST	Aston University
CA	Consortium Agreement
DTU	Technical University of Denmark
EC	European Commission
EID	European Industrial Doctorate
ESR	Early Stage Researcher
GA	Grant Agreement
INF-G	INFINERA Germany (Non-recruiting Beneficiary)
INF-P	INFINERA Portugal (Non-recruiting Beneficiary)
MENTOR	Machine Learning in optical Networks
ORANGE	Orange Telecom Company
SB	Supervisory Board
SSSA	Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies
TIM	Telecom Italia Mobile
TSWII	Transferable Skills Workshop 2
UPC	Polytechnic University of Catalonia

Executive Summary

This document is a public deliverable based on **Transferable Skills Workshop (TSWIII)**, organised by Aston University.

This 2-day workshop took place in person at Aston University in Birmingham in June 2023 for all six MENTOR ESRs and 21 ESRs from two other ITNS, detailed below.

It consisted of:

- Day 1 on 13 June 2023:
 - An introduction to research grants with Paul Knobbs, European Project Partner at Aston University
 - A session on career paths with Prof Andrew Ellis of AIPT, Aston University
 - Job applications with Professional Development Consultant Sandy Sparks.

- Day 2 on 14 June 2023, again with Sandy Sparks:
 - Building CVs
 - Careers guidance
 - Marketing oneself
 - Interviews and networking

TSWIII addressed:

- MENTOR's six ESRs

- and

- 21 ESRs from two sister ITN projects, MEFISTA ETN and POST DIGITAL ETN.

These two projects are also coordinated by AIPT at Aston University under MSCA Horizon2020 Grant Agreements 861152 and 860360 respectively.

Attendance:

All six MENTOR ESRs attended in person on both days.

1. Workshop Content

The content of the two-day workshop was as follows:

1.1 Research Grants

Paul Knobbs, European Project Partner, Research & Knowledge Exchange, Aston University

Paul Knobbs's expertise lies in obtaining research funding and this was a session on career progression in academia, with a focus on research funding. Paul Knobbs spoke about the funding landscape and Horizon Europe.

Topics covered included:

- Types of Research Grants (conference grant, seed funding, fellowships, project grants, equipment grants, programme and collaborative grants)
- The benefits of fellowships
- Who offers fellowships
- The ERC and ERC starter grant
- Horizon Europe and information on calls
- The importance of building a track record through funding and publications
- Doing your research on the funding scene (joining newsletters, spotting trends, reading funder guidelines, getting involved)
- The importance of tenacity and resilience.

1.2 Career Paths

Professor Andrew Ellis, AIPT, Aston University UK

This was a personal and informal autobiographical account of Professor Andrew Ellis's career, with a Q&A with the ESRs afterwards. The goal was to illustrate the development of a career, with all its bifurcations, twists and turns along the way.

Professor Ellis spoke about his time in industry and academia and gave a flavour of both working in both worlds, the pros and the cons and the differences and similarities between the two.

1.3 Careers, application forms, CVs and interviews

Sandy Sparks, Professional Development Consultant

Sandy Sparks covered:

- Assessing current capabilities and identifying areas for personal development
- Understanding how to market yourself through a CV, types and ranges of CVs
- Considering different career options (e.g. academic and industrial, UK versus international / national/ local and higher education versus industry / other alternatives)
- Understanding the whole recruitment process – application – interview etc
- Considering the need for raising one’s profile, how to do this, and reputation building
- Making new contacts and networking

The workshops were experiential and interactive with a high degree of delegate participation.

Theory had an application ‘back to the workplace’ or a research environment.

The session included inter-disciplinary aspects and international and cultural aspects to looking for work in industry or research.

The workshops enabled ESRs to develop their skills and confidence. Slides were shared post session.



Figure 1 Professional Development Consultant Sandy Sparks during TSWIII

Biographies of the session leaders can be found in Annex 1 on pages 14-16.

2. TSWIII on Social Media

The Workshop was publicised on [MENTOR's Twitter stream](#).



Figure 2 TSWIII on MENTOR Twitter, with a retweet by trainer Sandy Sparks

It was also featured on [MENTOR's LinkedIn profile](#):

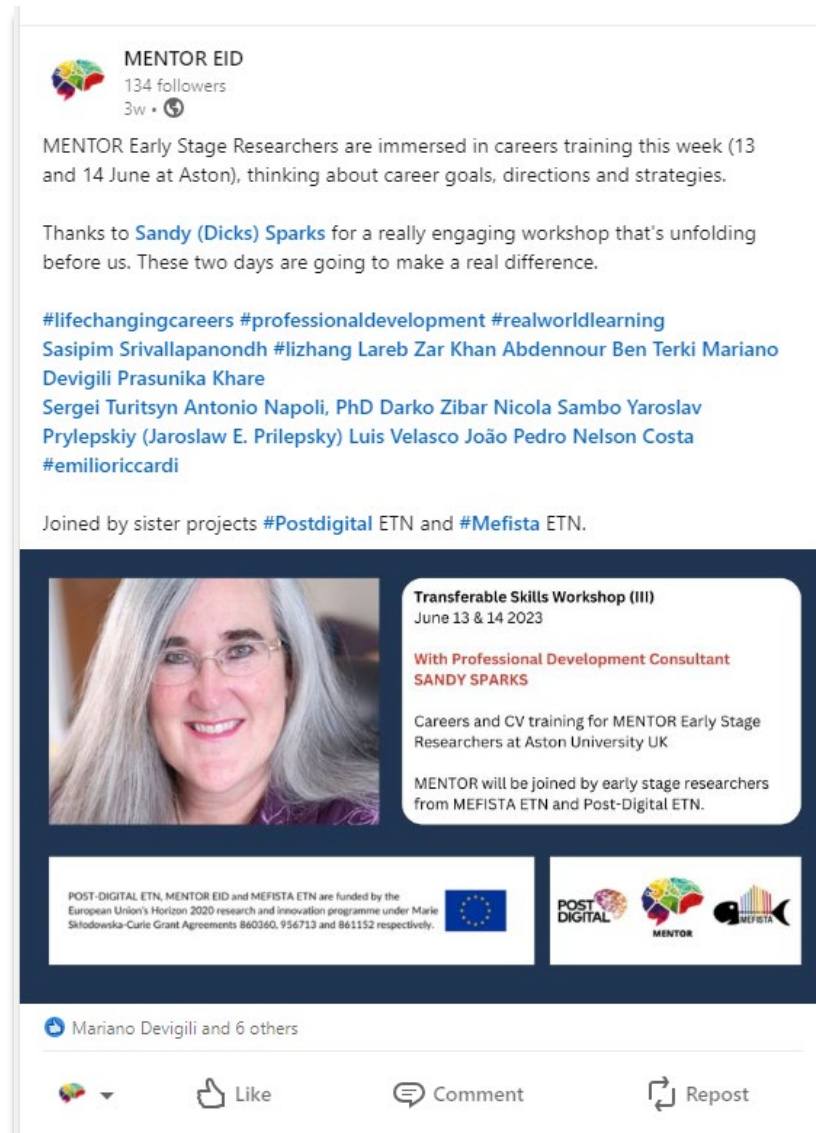


Figure 3 TSWIII on MENTOR LinkedIn

3. The Goals of TSWIII

The main goal of the TSWIII was to provide the ESRs with the following skills:

Research Grants

- Where to look for grants
- The evolving UK and international research scene

- Who funds and where to look
- How to be successful in applications, reading successful applications
- How to build a track record (grants and publications)
- The importance of involving industry in applications

CVs, application forms and interviews

- Selling oneself through an application form, a CV and the interview
- How to construct a CV with different versions for different sectors
- The importance of forming relationships and networking
- Understanding how people recruit and interview
- How to prepare for an interview and what to expect



Figure 4 MENTOR ESRs joined by Sandy Sparks and ESRs from MEFISTA ETN and POST DIGITAL ETN

3. Post Event Monitoring of TSWIII

In order to improve the workshop, MENTOR created an anonymous feedback form about TSWIII for its six ESRs.

Three out of six MENTOR ESRs provided feedback. Some answers were sentences, some answers involved ratings.

A 5 rating was the highest; 1 was the lowest.

The questions were as follows:

1. Overall, how did you find the careers training at Aston on 13 and 14 June? 5, 5, 5
2. Was it well organised? 5, 5, 5
3. What was/were the best thing/s?
 - a. Preparing for interviews
 - b. Interview role play
 - c. Sandy Sparks being so engaging
4. How did you find Sandy's sessions? 5, 5, 5
5. What was the best thing about her sessions?
 - a. The chance to express ourselves
 - b. Mock interview questions, tips and tricks, networking activities
 - c. Well organised, simple to follow and understand
6. What could be added/ improved about any part of the workshop or speaker?
 - a. A case study/practical example
 - b. Nothing to add/improve
 - c. Paul Knobbs and Andrew Ellis did quite well
7. Do you have a better way of creating your CV? 5, 4, 4
8. What were two important things you learned from the careers training days?
 - a. Having a well-prepared CV and paying attention to details that could be easily ignored in an interview
 - b. How to prepare for an interview and networking at conferences
 - c. How to prepare for an interview and how to network at conferences.

4. Annexes

Annex 1, Session Leader Biographies

Paul Knobbs, European Project Partner, Research & Knowledge Exchange, Aston University, UK

Paul Knobbs is a highly experienced Research Funding Manager at Aston University with a demonstrated history of success with a range of funding schemes, UK, EU and International. He has considerable experience of programme and project portfolio management and is highly skilled in proposal development.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/paul-knobbs-15428490/>

*

Professor Andrew Ellis, AIPT, Aston University UK

Professor Andrew D. Ellis Andrew is professor of optical communications at Aston University where he is also the Deputy Director of the Aston Institute of Photonic Technologies, and he holds adjunct professorships from University College Cork (Physics) and Dublin City University.

Professor Ellis has academic and industrial experience in optical communications including 13 years for BT, 10 years at Aston, nine years at University College Cord in Ireland, four years at the COOP and Spar - and three years at Corning Ltd and 0.5 years at The Griffins Head.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrew-ellis-bb650724/>

*

Sandy Sparks, Learning and Development Consultant, West Midlands, UK

Sandy has over thirty years of experience in professional and personal development, especially leadership & researcher development, working in both the private and public sectors, in the UK and internationally. She has experience as an employee, and of running her own business. She has had various roles supporting her passion of building the capacity & capability of people. She has a proven track record of successful design, development and facilitation of programmes / projects, delivering to budget, agreed timescales and outcomes, with extensive expertise in impact reporting.



Figure 5 Sandy Sparks, Professional Development Consultant

Sandy worked at the University of Warwick for twenty years (until December 2019), of which over ten years were as an Organisational Development Consultant leading the research-focused staff, teaching-focused staff and research and teaching focused staff (circa 2400 staff, what she refers to as Research Active Staff (RAS)), including various career training / learning and development initiatives.

Sandy has supported learners using a range of approaches, including blended learning, in-person and online workshop programmes, coaching, and

one-to-one support. Sandy designed and delivered numerous career programmes to staff across a range of grades, roles (Research and Teaching, Academic roles and professional services) and disciplines. Sandy has developed a Managing your Research/ Academic & Industry Career series of workshops that include appropriate CV's, transferrable skills, the interview process and interview skills etc.

Sandy has been an invited speaker and trainer/ facilitator, produced specialist and generalist publications for practitioners and non-practitioners, presented at conferences, written blogs and articles as well as submitting tenders and getting funding. She is an associate for Advance HE (AHE), The British Council on their Researcher Connect Programme, as well as an International FameLab Science Communicator / Facilitator. She has facilitated on the British Council Newton Funded Researcher Connect Programme in Brazil, China, India, Kenya (since 2017) and more recently online (Vietnam, Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan and Brazil), and is also an associate for Vitae.

Her areas of expertise include:

- Career Development
- Skills Development e.g. academic writing, presentation skills, networking skills
- Research Leadership Development / Researcher Development
- Research Culture
- Inter-cultural and cross-cultural work esp. Unconscious Bias
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Impact & Evaluation
- Enterprise, Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Creativity
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Mediation

- Bespoke consultancy supporting a number of UK and international institutions, sharing her experience and knowledge, having worked as an academic and in professional services.

Sandy is a Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Everything DiSC Accredited Practitioner, undertaken 360 Reviews on a senior leadership programme, Belbin Team Roles Accredited Trainer, Realise 2 Strengths Profiling Practitioner, TEIQue (Emotional Intelligence) and experienced coach / mentor and mediator, all useful skills incorporated into leadership & development training.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sandy-dicks-sparks/?originalSubdomain=uk>

https://twitter.com/Sparks_Dicks

EC Funding



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement number 956713