

Conference Report

Career Workshop at ETH Zürich: How to land your first job when moving from academia to industry

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The transition from being a (full-time) student to joining the work force not only involves leaving university but also often one's comfort zone. Graduates need to overcome several challenges, including the pressure to find 'the perfect job' among many different options, cryptic job descriptions and competitive application processes.

The mission of Chemtogether, an ETH Zürich chemistry, chemical engineering and pharmaceutical sciences career fair, is to facilitate this transition. This year, our team of 12 highly motivated Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD students from the Department of Chemical and Applied Biosciences (D-CHAB) organizes the 10th edition of the fair, which provides an exchange platform for talents and 18 specialized companies from the chemical and pharmaceutical sector.

In addition to the organization of the fair, Chemtogether has joined forces with the youngSCS and the ETH Zürich Career Center to provide a workshop dedicated to students, PhDs and postdocs at D-CHAB looking for support in securing their first job. The workshop took place on May 10th, 2022 and was fully booked with 55 participants, the majority being PhD and MSC students.

The event was moderated by *Christine Kaiser* (Deputy Head of ETH Career Center) and *Michael Grunder* (Career Advisor ETH Career Center), both having extensive experience in the Swiss job market, talent acquisition, and coaching students as well as professionals during their career.

From the start, they immediately gained the full attention of the audience by emphasizing that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' decisions when taking the first steps, thereby reducing the potentially self-imposed pressure of graduates to make 'perfect' choices. Therefore, one of the key messages of the workshop was the importance of self-reflection, analysis, research, and exploration before starting to apply for open positions.

The workshop, however, also provided a very concrete overview of the Swiss labor market in general and the chemical and pharmaceutical industry in particular. Although global companies might operate entirely in English, knowledge of the local language was considered key for successfully entering the workforce. A fact that might pose challenges to the highly international student body at ETH Zürich and, conversely, provides a potential weak spot of companies trying to attract and retain global talents. Unlike many other countries, such as the United States and United Kingdom, a further peculiarity of the Swiss job market is the soft requirement for applicants to include a photo in their CV. This need motivated us to provide vouchers for a professional photo shooting to the participants who registered early for the event.

Moreover, the role of LinkedIn and other platforms was discussed, emphasizing the importance of such tools to connect with peers (e.g. ETH alumni, student and professional groups) and to learn about their career paths. Since a majority of open positions



Fig. 1. Finally in presence again: Participants following the presentation given by the ETH Zürich Career Center.

are found in the hidden job market, networking (online and offline) is crucial for a proactive and successful job hunt. Indeed, our survey with the participants revealed that even though LinkedIn and other portals were by far the top methods used to look for jobs, the tool 'personal network' was not as popular. Hence, learning how to expand one's network by using social media and attending physical events should not be underestimated. Consequently, the event also included an apéro, during which the participants had the opportunity to recharge and connect with each other. Afterwards, the audience was divided into two groups such that students could choose between learning more about interview preparation techniques or informational interviewing.

The high demand for this event, the received feedback from the participants and the increasing importance of industrial internships in the curriculum of D-CHAB students led us to the conclusion that physical and targeted career workshops should take place on a regular basis. Furthermore, inputs regarding career decision making, interview preparation techniques on informational interviewing can easily be transferred to the academic job market. Students and graduates interested in staying in academia, therefore, benefit from these events, too.

No career workshop is able to provide clear, straight forward, one-size-fits-all instructions to find and land a dream job. Nevertheless, the learned insights and tools can hopefully aid students who undertake the exciting journey from being a student to an industrial or academic professional.

Chemtogether 2022

This year's Chemtogether will take place on 8 and 9 November 2022, in the HCI building at ETH Hönggerberg. 18 employers from the chemical and pharmaceutical sector as well as approximately 1000 students and graduates will have the opportunity to connect in a familiar setting and find out about different career paths.

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