

A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

INTRODUCTION

If you're hoping to become an academic historian, this section gives advice on applying for postdoctoral fellowships and lectureships,.

This section has been written with the UK job market in mind, but much of the advice would apply wherever you are applying. Specific guidance is given about the United States. Please bear in mind that what is said here will not necessarily apply to every situation. Consult your supervisor and/or Graduate Tutor for advice particular to you and any post you are considering. What you will find here is a distillation of the accumulated experience of RHS historians who have sat on many appointment committees.

The single most important piece of advice is to think hard about what you would like to do with the range of skills developed during your PhD, which include research, evaluating evidence, writing, teaching, organising and networking. Academia is not the only option. Ask yourself:

Do you *really* want to be an academic?

This is an important question to consider. Many people start a History PhD wanting to become an academic historian and most of them are still keen to do so when they finish. Others do the PhD for its own sake and don't necessarily want to continue on to an academic career. Either way, it is worth taking the time to **think hard about the right next step for you**, rather than moving on automatically to making applications for postdoctoral grants or academic posts. Life as a university historian can be immensely rewarding: it is endlessly varied and interesting; you will spend your time with many committed, intelligent people, both colleagues and students, who share your interests; you will never stop learning and nor will you ever lack for challenges, either intellectual or personal. It is also likely to be highly demanding on your time, your self-belief and your adaptability.

Everyone is aware that permanent university posts in History are highly competitive; fewer seem to take into account that it is down to the luck of the draw whether a post will come up in your field in a place where you, or your family, wish to live. Even the best-qualified candidates usually end up doing at least two or three years on a post-doctoral grant and/or short-term teaching contracts, sometimes combining part-time posts at two or more institutions, before they get a permanent job. Even when you are passionately committed, this is not an easy route to take. Remember that universities have very high expectations of their staff: not only will you be expected to research and publish high quality work that gives you an international reputation, but also to design and teach stimulating courses for students; carry out administration and pastoral care; organise seminars, conferences, workshops and networks; and to ensure that your work has "impact" through public engagement and/or knowledge transfer. If you are only really content when you are sitting in an archive with your sources, think very hard before you decide to become an academic (unless you can find a research-only post, which are usually fixed-term, for 1-5 years, and often not renewable).

In any permanent lectureship teaching will be a large part of your job and it's too demanding an activity to be endured for the sake of research time. So if you don't find teaching rewarding, think about another career. PhDs are becoming increasingly desirable as a qualification in a range of other areas of work, so it may be worth

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

exploring these possibilities, which include: civil service, media, law, think tanks, charities, local government, museums, school-teaching, university administration and publishing.

Preparing yourself to apply for academic jobs

The academic jobs market is most active from September to March. If you are considering an academic career it's a good idea to familiarise yourself with this annual cycle as soon as possible (at least in the third year of your PhD and preferably in your second year). You should take it into account when planning your submission and viva dates. The major postdoctoral schemes (British Academy, Leverhulme and so on) have deadlines around the same time each year. Advertisements for Oxbridge JRFs start appearing as early as September. Some postdoctoral fellowships are open to applicants still doing their PhD, others are not. If a PhD is specified, there will be no point in applying without one, so be guided by their statements. In April/May of the year before you wish to start making applications, you should draw up a list of the forthcoming deadlines of all the post-doctoral schemes for which you wish to apply. Then you will have a clear sense of the lie of the land and won't miss any opportunities.

There is little point in applying for any permanent lectureships unless you already have your PhD, or at the very least, if it's a junior lecturer post, you have submitted and know the date of your viva, which should be well in advance of the start date of the job. Most lectureships are advertised from January to March, although there may be some earlier and later (especially temporary posts).

Your postdoctoral project

Whether you are applying for a postdoctoral grant/fellowship or a lectureship, you will have to present a convincing proposal for your next research project. This is the most important indicator that potential funders or employers will use to assess whether you are capable of developing into an independent researcher who can make significant contributions to your field. It is also a valuable guide for yourself, in taking decisions about your future and in defining your approach to history. If you find it really difficult to come up with another project, pause to ask if this is what you really want to spend the rest of your working life doing. There are more people who can produce good research to a specific brief, under the guidance of a supervisor and/or project leader, than can do so when they have to generate their own ideas. If you do have ideas, then the process of developing them will help you to define yourself as a historian.

A good postdoctoral project should have a clear intellectual connection to your PhD research, yet be sufficiently different from it to demonstrate that you are moving on. The most common mistakes people make are to be either far too ambitious, or far too cautious. You need to think in terms of a book-length project, which you should be able to justify both in terms of the work that you have already done and in relation to the kind of historian you want to be. Think about your position within the field. Where do you stand in relation to the debates in your area? How do you hope to move them on? Are you a global, transnational or comparative historian, or none of these? Talk to historians beyond your field and, just as importantly, to friends and family outside of academia, and try to explain to them what kind of questions you hope to answer through your research. If they can't follow you, your ideas are probably not clearly thought out. Clarifying your intellectual self-awareness through such conversations will help you to develop into a historian who is thinking about the big questions that most people are interested in. Thinking about the big picture will help you to be appropriately

A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

ambitious in your project; you then need to think carefully about how to make it viable. Viable means: do-able within 3 years (for a research fellowship) or within 5-7 years (for a lectureship, depending on your institution's sabbatical leave entitlement). If you're applying for a lectureship, plan the project taking into account that time spent in archives will be limited to a couple of months at most over the summer. Remember that in designing your new project you are not necessarily committing yourself to doing exactly that work (although it will look odd if you don't do something related): the important thing is to present an intellectually coherent, exciting and realistic piece of research. But you need to be passionate about your ideas and to convey that sense of excitement. If you aren't enthusiastic about the project, no-one else is likely to be.

The quality of your next research proposal is at least as important as your publication profile in determining whether or not you are ready to start making applications. It is also crucial to have a clear sense of how you hope to develop as a historian. A candidate who can give a convincing account of his/her intellectual trajectory is likely to impress as much, if not more, than a candidate who has a longer list of publications but little sense of direction. You are unlikely to be successful in job-hunting until you have developed that degree of self-awareness.

Publications profile: There are many urban myths about how many publications you need before you stand a good chance of a lectureship. The fact is that it varies greatly, from appointments made on the basis of one good article to junior lectureships going to someone with two books. The following factors are worth bearing in mind:

- i) Articles in reputable journals are usually more impressive than chapters in edited collections. [See [ADD LINK TO RELEVANT BIT OF PUBLISHING SECTION](#)]
- ii) A book contract from a good publisher is worth securing, so that even if publication of your first monograph is a couple of years away, there is proof that your work of interest to senior figures in your field. Start work on a book proposal as soon as you can, even if you are too busy teaching to do any more work on the book itself.
- iii) The REF cycle. Well in advance of the next REF, recruiters are often more willing to appoint candidates who have a lot of potential but fewer published items; the closer it gets, the more they are likely to select candidates who already have a strong suite of publications. Make sure that you know the REF rules for ECRs and how they apply to you. If you are job-hunting before they are announced for REF 2020, work it out on the basis of the rules for REF 2014. Make a publication plan for the next five years, and make it *realistic*.

Making an application: general dos and don'ts

Bear in mind that even for temporary posts there are often 100+ applications. Try to imagine what it would be like to be on a selection panel and confronted with such a big pool of applicants. Think about how you would wish applicants to behave. Most people on recruitment panels prefer candidates to do the following:

- 1) Send exactly what is specified, no less but also no more. Do not send attachments of articles, chapters of your thesis, additional letters of recommendation, course outlines, copies of student evaluations or any other extra materials, unless or until they are requested. The panel will not read them, because it would be unfair to all the other candidates to do so. And part of what the panel will be assessing from the application materials is your ability – and your willingness – to follow specific instructions to the letter.

- 2) Check your application very carefully for any errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation, typing or layout. This should go without saying, but experience tells us that it does not. The abilities to write well and present material clearly are still highly prized by historians, and rightly so. An application that is full of mistakes and/or messily

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

presented will deter your readers before they have even absorbed the information about your achievements. Even people who know this perfectly well still send in forms with mistakes. CHECK AGAIN. Have someone else read it through for you. CHECK, yes, one last time.

3) If there's an application form, fill it out intelligently, even if it's not a good form. Many of these forms are not very well designed, often because they are generic HR forms covering a range of jobs, which ask questions that are not necessarily appropriate for academic posts. Give the information requested, because you need to show that you are taking the process seriously, but take into account what a committee of academics will want to know, i.e. you could probably omit the fact that you worked in Tesco's ten years ago, but you might want to include your stint at the local library. Don't repeat information, even if different questions seem to be asking the same thing: make a judgement about where to include which items.

4) Tailor your application to the post and try to persuade your referees to do the same by sending them your letter of application along with a summary of the job specification. Generic applications stand out a mile and are not worth making. It's time-consuming and can seem pointless after a run of rejections, but if you want to get the job, even a short-term temporary teaching post, you will have to ensure your application is specific to that role.

5) Be circumspect about making enquiries before you apply. Most advertisements specify someone you can contact to ask questions. Bear in mind that these people are likely to be very busy. Some applicants think that they can secure an advantage by asking questions in advance, but this is rarely the case. Make sure that the answer to your question is not already available in the application materials or on the university's website. If you spot inconsistencies in the application materials (which are not uncommon) and are left unsure what to do, you should certainly write to enquire, but be careful about your tone – don't make it sound like a complaint. Never just email your CV and ask if it's worth applying – no-one can possibly answer this, because that would be pre-empting the judgement of the whole selection committee. Keep any enquiry short and avoid follow-up questions unless they are really necessary.

6) Be prepared for the next stage. If an interview date is specified, keep it clear until you hear whether or not you've been shortlisted. It is hardly ever possible to change an interview date, because panels want to assess all candidates together and in any case it is usually impossible to reconvene the panel because everyone has other commitments.

7) If you don't get shortlisted, don't ask for feedback. You are unlikely to be told anything other than that it was a highly competitive field with many strong applications. The time to ask for feedback is after the interview. Review your application materials carefully to ensure that they are as well presented as possible, but apart from that you just have to accept it and move on to the next application.

8) If you are offered the post, you will be expected to decide within a short space of time, usually only a few days, whether you want to accept it. If you are shortlisted, start finding out then whatever you need to know to enable you to come to a quick decision.

A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

The application letter

Most applications require an accompanying letter; even if it is not specified, it is worth sending one (this is the one exception to the rule stated under Application Materials about not sending anything not requested). A good application letter will go a long way to making your application stand out from the pile. The letter's purpose is to convey your significant achievements, your suitability for the post and your commitment to it.

1. If a length has been specified, keep to it. If not, two A4 pages is a good rule of thumb. Less is more here – you need to be able to convey the main features of your profile to make the committee interested in you. Then they can go to the CV for the detail.
2. Achievements: if you already have a book published, or a book contract, or an article in *Past and Present*, then so much the better: of course you should draw attention to it. But remember that achievements should also be thought about more broadly, e.g. contributions of your PhD research to the field; methodological or theoretical problems with which you believe you have successfully grappled; your self-definition as a historian, which can then lead into the next paragraph on your suitability for the post.
3. Suitability: Ask yourself, if I were on the hiring committee, why would I appoint myself to the job? Remember that many applicants will have strong CVs: what can make you stand out is evidence that you have thought carefully about the role and what you can bring to it. If the advertised post is in your field, then the case for your suitability may seem clear, but bear in mind that at least some members of the recruitment committee are likely to be from a different field of history or a different discipline, and there may also be senior university managers there. You will have to convince the non-specialists as well as the specialists that you are someone who can make a valuable contribution to the department and to its broader context of the faculty/school and the wider university.

If the post is more broadly defined, as is increasingly common, e.g. History since 1850; Global History; Early Modern History, you will have to do even more background research in order to make a convincing case for your particular suitability. You will either be bringing something completely new, e.g. a historian of India in a department that does not have one, or you will be helping to consolidate an existing strength. There is little point in applying to a department which already employs someone whose interests are *very* close to yours, but complementarity and the possibility of establishing a concentration of specialists can be attractive. You cannot second-guess what the recruitment panel will be looking for and they may well not have any fixed ideas: the important thing is to make a persuasive case.

If you have experience from outside academia, for example in library or archive management, IT, administration and/or research in other organisations, think about how that experience translates into skills that you can bring to an academic post in History. Universities often greatly value people with experience elsewhere, but it's important to show that you have thought hard about how you will adapt to an academic role.

4. Commitment: it's not enough to state your commitment, because everyone will do that – you need to show it by providing evidence that you have done your research about the department/university. Mention names of people whose intellectual interests match yours (not necessarily in the same field, but it could be through theoretical or methodological approach and/or scope for comparative discussion).
5. Write the letter as well as you can. It should be clear, precise and elegant.

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

Your CV

Good advice is available from university careers services about how to present your curriculum vitae; bear in mind those general points about clarity and order when applying for academic jobs. The most common problem with a CV is that it is hard for readers quickly to identify the important information. Think about this every time you apply for a job. For some posts, you might want to put teaching first, then research. For one particular job, you might want to highlight a specific course that you've taught, or conference that you've organised, because it fits well with the remit of the post. As with all other application materials, think what you would like to committee to realise about you, and arrange your material accordingly. Don't make it too fussy in appearance: a variety of italics and bold scripts and underlining and capital letters bewilders the eye.

Think particularly hard about how you present your publications, which is often done badly. Committees will not be fooled by information that is deliberately left imprecise to make the list look more substantial than it is. Items that have already been published should be clearly distinguished from those that are forthcoming. And "forthcoming" should be used for pieces that have been accepted by a publisher and are in press, not things that you hope to write next summer. If an article has been accepted subject to minor revisions, say so. If a piece is under review, say so. The more precise information you can give, the more you show that you are au fait with the process of academic publishing. Make sure there's nothing on your publications list that you couldn't give further details about at interview if asked. If your list of actual publications is still short, add a section on Publication Plans.

Statement of significance of your research

This is now a common requirement, and one which applicants often do badly. The most common mistake is to claim too much: everyone got it wrong before you came along. Try to think precisely what contribution your findings make i) empirically; ii) methodologically; and iii) theoretically – if relevant (it isn't for everybody, and it is best to avoid making woolly theoretical claims for work that does not support it). If your main case is empirical, that's the case you should make, but remember that it's not enough to say that your research fills a gap in the literature. There are many, many gaps in our knowledge of the past and there always will be: you need to explain what we gain in understanding from filling the particular one you have chosen. Go back to your original research questions and think about the extent to which they have been modified or addressed as your research progressed. What surprised you in the archives? Think about the questions and feedback you have had at seminar or conference presentations: what interested people, what connections were they making to their own work, to other fields or periods of history? All these things can help you to come to a measured, realistic assessment of your contribution. In writing about the significance of your work it is also good to draw out connections between your current project and your next one.

Statement of teaching philosophy

This can often be adapted from work you have done on training courses. Avoid jargon and wherever possible give examples from your own experience to illustrate any general points you make. Address various different teaching modes: lectures, discussion classes, one-to-one meetings. Remember that it is not another opportunity to trumpet your high evaluation scores: what this statement is testing is your capacity to reflect creatively upon

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

your teaching and the principles that lie behind it. How do you think people learn best? What is the teacher's role in that process? How have you changed your teaching practice in light of feedback from students and/or colleagues?

Our section on Teaching might also give you some ideas [ADD LINK]

Referees

If two references are required, the usual choice is your main supervisor and your external examiner, if you've had the viva, or a second supervisor or Graduate Tutor if not. If you need a third referee, bear in mind that it is better to ask someone who knows your work well than a "big name" who has only heard you give a seminar paper and can't say very much about you. Unless someone invites you to send them your work so that they can read it, don't expect referees to do this. They will already have many students of their own to support. See Getting your work known and read for advice on how to extend your circle of referees [ADD LINK].

Treat your referees with courtesy and don't take them for granted. Always ask them, including your supervisor, if they are willing to give you a reference for any particular application, unless they have specifically told you it is not necessary to do this. Give your referees plenty of notice of the deadline. It is your responsibility to check job sites regularly so that you see advertisements in good time, not theirs to conjure up a reference in 24 hours. Send them details of the post in readily accessible form (NOT a link to a department website, which will take time to navigate); your application letter and an up-to-date CV. This will enable them to tailor the reference to the particular post, which will ensure a stronger reference. When you do get a job, write to let them know and thank them for their support. You will almost certainly need to ask them again later, for a grant application or a promotion.

Job presentations

Follow the brief. If it's a research presentation, don't include information about all the courses you have taught; if it's a mini-lecture for students, don't discuss your research. Don't say: "I know you said this was about research, but I thought I would also tell you a bit about my teaching", or vice versa. Don't give a guided tour of your CV – those that need to know what's in it will have read it, others will be looking for intellectual and/or pedagogical abilities not information. Don't say why you have applied for the job, because you will almost certainly be asked that at interview. These points may sound so obvious as not to need making, but time and again candidates don't stick to the remit. By not doing so, you lose precious time to communicate what was required; you also give the impression of being unable or unwilling to do what has been asked.

Keep to time. Most recruitment days are designed around a very tight schedule and you will irritate everyone if you take more time than you are allotted. Nearly everyone tries to say too much in their presentation. Practice it several times and strip out unnecessary detail, which no-one will be able to absorb anyway. It's far better to convey one idea clearly and convincingly than to raise a range of possibilities that you can't develop. If you have too much material, you will end up gabbling and everyone will switch off. There will be less time for questions, so you will have less time to allay any doubts in your audience's minds.

Manage your own timing. Don't break off to ask how much time you have left. Decide in advance what you will use, e.g. the clock on the computer or a watch. Have a page or so of material that you can include if you are running ahead (and nerves often make people speak quickly) and omit if you still have time, but do not draw attention to that as you speak ("oh, I'd better omit this bit").

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

Look at the audience. Include everybody in your gaze and maintain regular eye contact. Think in advance about how to do this, whether you have a written text or a Powerpoint presentation. Bear in mind that the room might not be ideal, or the equipment might not be set up in a way that makes it easy to engage with the audience and speak to what's on the screen.

Answer questions succinctly. Don't comment on the question ("that's a great question") – they are interviewing you not the other way around. Don't respond impatiently ("as I've already said") – if they are asking about something it's probably because they don't think you explained it well during your presentation, so it's your opportunity to do better. Don't make it obvious that you think it's a stupid question ("well, of course..."), even if you do. Don't say you agree with everyone who asks you something -- there are bound to be a range of views in the room and you will come over as inconsistent if you are too eager to embrace them all. If you haven't thought about an idea that's put to you, it is best to say so rather than to flannel, but try to give some indication of how you might set about applying it to your work. After the session is over, write down the questions you were asked and think of further responses in preparation for the interview (assuming it comes later, as is usual).

Interviews

Most interviews open with a question designed to put you at your ease, such as why you have applied for the job. Prepare a succinct response that shows you have done your research about the department and the role and what you think you can bring to it. The panel will not want this answer to take up very much time.

There will probably be follow-up questions from your presentation. If a member of the panel repeats a question that was asked after your presentation, this is probably a sign that they were not convinced by your previous answer. Hence the importance of doing some thinking in between the presentation and the interview.

In general, though, the interview is likely to be focused on areas not covered in your presentation (so if you did a presentation on your next research project, expect the interview to concentrate on your previous research, especially any written work you have submitted, and on teaching).

Other questions you might be asked include: the significance of your research; grant-raising plans; plans to meet the next REF requirements, both publications and impact; academic networks, especially with colleagues abroad; experience of academic administration; what connections you might make with other disciplines (again, do your research about the place to which you have applied). Prepare answers that highlight the most important points, so that the panel gains a clear idea of your strongest claims to the post. Bear in mind that no answer should be too long, because there will be a lot of ground to cover. Stay alert for cues that your responses are long enough. They will ask follow-up questions if they want more information.

At the end, you will usually be given an opportunity to ask any questions that you might have. There is little to be gained and something to be lost by accepting this invitation. Candidates often seem to think they have to come up with something clever here, but panels are usually relieved when someone says they don't have any questions. Detailed questions about terms and conditions are inappropriate until you have been offered the job. Panels are usually irritated by questions such as "Where do you see the Department in five years' time?". It's impossible to answer quickly and in any case you are being interviewed, not them. The most sensible question to ask is when you will hear the outcome of the interview.

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

If you don't get the job

Remember that in many cases the job will have gone to someone else because that person is a better fit for it, with more directly relevant experience and/or better matching intellectual interests. It is not necessarily the case that you performed badly on the interview day, or that you would have got the job had you performed better. Even so, the most important thing to do, once you have got over the inevitable disappointment, is to learn what you can from the experience. Most chairs of recruitment committees will offer feedback, but even if they don't, you are entitled to ask for it at this stage. If it proves difficult to get feedback from the recruitment panel, you should contact the university's HR department and ask them to help you.

Feedback is most useful if done by telephone (or in person), rather than by email. Whichever mode is arranged, make sure that you clarify in your own mind how *you* think the interview day went before you start the feedback session, so that you can ask specific questions and be responsive to what you are told. Prepare yourself carefully to stay calm during the conversation. Do not try to argue your case or justify yourself (even if you feel that what you are being told is unfair). If you came across in a certain way, even if you feel that's not how you are, then it will be worth thinking about what aspect of your behaviour contributed to creating that impression. It is often the most irritating comments that really help us; in due time we recognise that they were so annoying because they hit home. Be alert also for cues that the other person wishes to close the conversation. Above all, keep in mind that feedback is given because someone wants to help you; be gracious and appreciative. Apart from anything else, the person you are talking to might well be on the recruitment panel for a future post.

Then do a short review of what you have learned. If there are questions you know you answered badly, think through what you wish you'd said and have it prepared for next time. If your presentation went on too long, note that you *must* take out some of the material next time. Like anything else, being a good job candidate is partly a matter of practice. Unless you are very lucky, you will need to fail several times before you can be successful. Some of the most renowned historians in the UK today went through many job interviews before being successful. Don't agonise over jobs you didn't get: learn what you can and move on.

Applying to US Universities: It is not easy, but it is by no means impossible, for UK-trained historians to be appointed to posts in the United States. If you think that you might be interested in applying there, try to plan ahead. Spend some time at a US university during your PhD. US resources are so vast that nearly all PhD topics, whatever your area of history, could benefit from research at one of their institutions. If your own university offers an exchange that gives you a relatively easy route, but if not, remember that many US libraries/research centers offer funding for visiting fellowships, many of which are open to graduate students [see Grants section [ADD LINK](#)]. You could also apply for a US postdoc. Make sure you attend the AHA at least once, say in the third or fourth year of your PhD.

The job cycle starts earlier in than in the UK (as does the academic year): start looking in August for the subsequent year. Job postings can be found at H-Net Job Guide, the Chronicle of Higher Education and the AHA listings (for which you have to be a member). The Chronicle also gives good information about navigating the job market. The importance of doing your research about the institution to which you are applying cannot be emphasised too much here. There is a wide range of US universities and liberal arts colleges, both state-funded and private, and you will need to understand the priorities and remit of anywhere you hope to work. The following are useful **RESOURCES**: *The Academic Job Search Handbook* (available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)) or the AHA's

EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



A CAREER AS A HISTORIAN

relevant publications: <https://secure.historians.org/members/services/cgi-bin/msascartdll.dll/productlist?ONWEBFLG=Y&RANGE=1%2F20&COLUMNS=4&MAJORCAT=PROFESSIONAL&WHP=pubsProfessional.htm>

Recruitment procedures in the United States take longer than in the UK. The US market is large, both in terms of posts and applicants, so each year a cohort of new PhDs will be competing for the available jobs in any particular field. For a US graduate student, missing out in the first year after PhD leaves you permanently disadvantaged in subsequent years, because although you may be more experienced, it will also be obvious that you weren't successful the first time round. An initial selection is often made at the big conferences, such as the AHA, which many people attend mainly to go to a series of quick-fire interviews in hotel rooms. This is a pretty gruelling process, not for the faint-hearted.

If you get over that first hurdle, you will be invited to the university itself for a couple of days. A typical schedule would be: dinner the first evening, a full day of interviews, job talk and meals, followed by breakfast before departure the next day. During this time you will meet most of your potential colleagues and some students. All of these meetings can influence your chances because it is likely that the whole department (as distinct from a recruitment committee, as in the UK) will vote on the candidates. There is really no time when you are not being interviewed. This process has the advantage of giving you, as well as your potential employers, a good chance to find out if you are suited to the post.

It may then be some weeks, or even months, before you hear the outcome, because other candidates will be doing the same, in sequence rather than all on the same day(s) as in the UK. If you are offered the post, remember that there are no national salary scales and each new recruit engages in a negotiation about salary and other terms and conditions. It is not easy for someone with little experience of US universities to know how to negotiate, but you should bear in mind that it would look odd not to do so. Being modest or unassuming does not have the appeal there that it still tends to have in the UK – instead, it is usually interpreted as undervaluing yourself. Try to get advice about how to negotiate a salary deal from someone who has worked in a US university.

Application materials: Much of the general advice given above is equally valid to US applications. Keep your application letter (cover letter) to 2 pages, although US curricula vitae (or resumés) tend to be longer than in the UK, 10-15 pages. This is partly because US graduate students have more separate components to their doctoral training, although the UK has moved some way in this direction. You should go into detail about your MA, specifying the modules you took, because this covers some of what is done in the early stages of a US doctorate, and also about the skills training you did during your PhD. If your PhD was funded, draw attention to that in your letter and explain, preferably with statistics to back you up, how competitive these awards are. Highlight your teaching experience: there tends to be a perception that UK PhD students graduate with less teaching experience than US students, perhaps because of the shorter time to degree. And more references are required: US applicants compile a dossier of recommendation letters, usually at least 5-6, sometimes more; again this is easier for them to do because they will have been supervised by a committee of five or more people. In drafting your materials, bear in mind that the members of the search committee will not necessarily know what a UK PhD entails (and may well be sceptical as to its comparability with US training), so you will need to explain carefully how it has equipped you for the post, along with your other experience.