How to get on and get ahead working in Higher Education
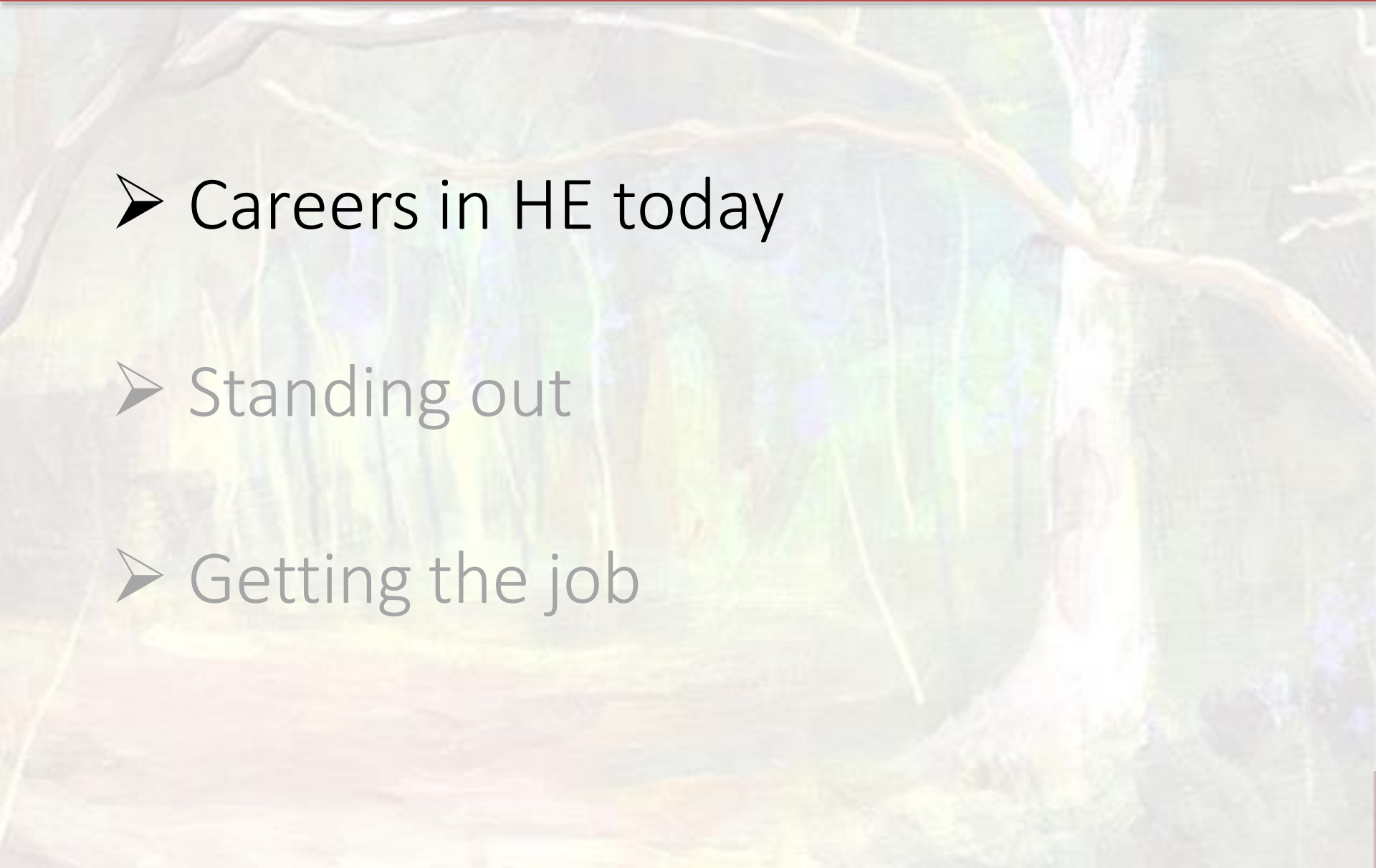
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Opening questions

Please raise your hand if:

➢ You have applied for a role within your own University / organisation in the past year?

➢ You have applied for a role externally to your own University / organisation in the past year?

➢ You think that the right people get rewarded / promoted in your University / organisation?

➢ You think that the sector runs interview and selection processes that are robust and lead to good outcomes?

➢ You think that the sector is good at developing its people?

➢ You are optimistic that your own potential is going to be realised in the sector?

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➢ Careers in HE today

➢ Standing out

➢ Getting the job

The context for careers in HE today

➢ Change will be only story for the next decade at least;

➢ The next few years offer an exceptional window for thinking differently / innovating and doing things differently.

➢ Many of the old processes and systems no longer deliver;   everything we do needs to be about outcome and strategic value now;

➢ A sector privatised by stealth that is doing a mixed job of integrating mission and purpose with financial / sustainability imperatives;

➢ Culture crises in the work-force – many yearn for a golden age that will never return;

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The context for careers in HE today (2)

➢ Many are agnostic about the idea of corporate possibility – "I work at the University but not for it";

➢ Challenges integrating the contribution of academic activities and professional services;

➢ Growing pressure to show the added value: is HE delivering what society needs? What students need?

➢ Context of mental health / welfare challenges, economic and social inequity, sustainability issues argues for an increasingly holistic and engaged role of HE;

➢ Many institutions are really struggling to adapt;

➢ Leadership in the sector is not always open to challenge / change; engaged people can be stifled;

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➢ Careers in HE today

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The right mindset to build a career

- ➤ Never have more than half an eye on what it says on your job description.   Concentrate more on what needs to be done and what could be done.   Be a driver not a passenger;

- ➤ Technical excellence gets you to a certain point, but beyond that other skills will matter more.

- ➤ It is easy to get stuck in a narrow specialism; try to broaden out. Avoid being typecast for being brilliant within a core competence;

- ➤ Raise your profile internally. Put yourself forward for project roles, interim/acting cover, taskforces, etc;

- ➤ Represent your function / team within the institution;

- ➤ Gain experience in both the centre and faculty/school;

- ➤ Ask for feedback and opportunity; the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

Getting a reputation

- Demonstrate outward-facing skills:
    - Demonstrate that you are not a faceless rule-bound back office professional; you know how to engage with students and build relationships, etc.
    - Create strong relationships – with professional service functions and faculties/departments, and with academics.
    - Collaborate with other parts of the institution
    - Put your hand up to take on cross-institutional leadership roles.
    - Get networked with the outside world.
    - Take a genuine interest in the broader sector, government policy, the role HE plays in the health of the nation, etc.
    - Demonstrate an open-minded, can-do, collegiate, constructive approach.
    - Reflective / self-aware.

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Build a track record of….

- ➢ Develop and deliver strategy

- ➢ Change, and the ability to help others embrace it

- ➢ The ability to develop people, build teams and bring out the best in others

- ➢ Seeing beyond my area and contributing to the broader institutional goals

- ➢ Understanding resource implications of decisions - finances

- ➢ Evidence of delivering excellence, ramping up performance, etc.

- ➢ Evidence of strategic impact and understanding of the big picture

- ➢ The ability to communicate your message effectively in formal settings

- ➢ The ability to offer innovative and creative solutions, and add value

- ➢ Flexibility to respond to urgent needs, e.g. student incidents

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➤ Careers in HE today

➤ Standing out

➤ Getting the job

CV : Keep it simple and clear

- There is no need for a picture ever on the CV. Make sure there is a good one on linkedin.

- Two columns makes it too busy for someone to read simply.

- The contact details are clear.

- Lots of white space is good.

- Summary statements and skills highlights are completely unnecessary. They are normally mocked.

- Education is clear.

- Is the formatting so pretty to cover up for the fact that there is nothing to say?

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Make sure you include….

- Make sure you include:

  - Email address and a mobile number. Home location?

  - Complete employment history with no gaps

  - Positions of responsibility held, and ideally key accomplishments and achievements relevant to job description (rather than a list of past duties)

  - Academic and professional qualifications with dates and awarding institution

  - Referees – although this is ambiguous.

  - Personal interests and hobbies – not essential but can bring you to life; fine balance.

  - 3-4 pages maximum

  - Keep older roles brief and focus more on recent roles

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Describing the role

- DON'T list tasks / committees / bullet points from your job description

- Before you write anything about each role think about three questions:

    - What was most difficult about the role?

    - What am I proudest of having delivered?

    - What was the difference to the organisation, before and after? How do I show the impact?

- Use your reflections on these questions as a basis for what your write.   Make it brief, bulleted and engaging.

- DO draw out anything meaningful that is quantitative: team size and any changes, financial position, numbers of customers/students etc....

- DO avoid too much specific jargon and acronyms; give a one-liner summary of organisations the reader is unlikely to know.

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A cover letter has the same dynamic as a love letter

- If it's all about you – don't bother putting in the application!

- You need to show you've thought about the role, the organisation and articulate why you find it attractive;

- Why do you want this job? What excites you about the role and the organisation? Get some of your passion across!

- What you would bring to the role, based on your experience and record of achievement to date?

- DON'T give a blow-by-blow response to every element of the job description / person specification; show you understand the essence of the role and can see the wood for the trees; two or three well-thought through sides is better than ten slides of detail;

- It is a sales document but don't be dishonest; but you don't need to point out gaps!

- Insight into the dynamics of the sector, the challenges and opportunities

- Internal candidates – never assume your employer understands your potential. Ensure that you do justice to yourself. Assume nothing!

Performing well

➢ A simple and clear CV, and tailored cover letter

➢ Don't make the mistake of trying to impress with technical knowledge

➢ Don't prioritise preparing for the presentation over practising interview questions

➢ Make sure your LinkedIn profile is up-to-date and appropriate

➢ Make sure the pull seems stronger than the push

➢ Don't be too critical of your current employer

➢ Be open and honest with headhunters / recruiters – it's much easier to advise you and represent candidates when there are no surprises

➢ You will be unsuccessful many times – practise is never wasted;

➢ Wanting it too much can be a challenge, particularly at top level.

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Constructing a great LinkedIn profile

➢ Professional photo (always better to have a photo than no photo).

➢ Up-to-date information; make sure titles in synch with university webpages

➢ Minimum should be name of position and organization and dates – for each role

➢ Should be concise and contain relevant keywords; think carefully how to describe yourself so that your profile is more likely to come up in relevant searches

➢ Include duties/responsibilities/achievements with each position listed

➢ Full record of education and dates

➢ As many contacts as possible; completely acceptable to send friendship requests to people you don't know

➢ A short summary/profile statement at the top serves as a nice introduction

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If you don't get the job

➢ Remember there really is an element of luck in these processes; your chances depend on the field, the particular response of the panel, etc.

➢ These processes can be political.

➢ Don't over-react to feedback – be gracious.   Learn how to shrug shoulders and move on.

➢ Persevere; you have to have a go at a few processes to work out how to play them.

➢ Don't take it personally; for every one successful candidate, there are many who don't get the job.

➢ Think twice about complaining – it has never changed the outcome in my experience, but tends to confirm the pane decision; awkward conversations do not help your cause next time around.

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Your turn – group exercise

How might you answer the following interview questions?

➢ Tell us about a cross-institutional project you have made a major contribution to?

➢ Give an example of a difficult situation you have had to handle. What went well? What would you do differently?

➢ Tell us about the difference you have made in your current role? What is your legacy?

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Thank you

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The recruitment process in a nutshell (I)

➢ We are tipped off about a new search opportunity and then formally invited to tender

➢ We submit a written proposal and pitch in front of a panel

➢ Briefing meetings take place with various stakeholders

➢ Headhunters go out to market; we contact sources of advice and seek recommendations, and follow up with potential candidates

➢ Advertisement appears; candidates respond

➢ Possible candidates have early phone conversations and then face-to-face meetings with headhunters

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The recruitment process in a nutshell (II)

➢ Candidates submit a cover letter and CV

➢ Headhunters write a report on the candidate, and send this (with the candidate's CV and cover letter) to the client ahead of shortlisting

➢ Shortlisting meeting

➢ Client selects a shortlist of candidates

➢ Shortlisted candidates are invited to informal, due-diligence meetings at the university

➢ Sometimes the shortlist is whittled down to a smaller finalist list

➢ Formal interviews

➢ Referencing

➢ Appointment announced

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