Building a Successful Academic Career: Insights and Experiences from the Informatics Europe Early Career Researchers Workshop

"Developing a successful academic career is both a personal journey and a collective responsibility of the informatics community."

How can early career researchers navigate the challenges of academia, build a meaningful research career, and prepare for the next stages of their professional journey? These questions were at the heart of the Informatics Europe Professional Development Workshop for Early Career Researchers (ECR WS), held on Monday, 26 October 2026, as part of the European Computer Science Summit (ECSS 2026). Chaired by Dimka Karastoyanova from the University of Groningen (the Netherlands), the workshop brought together researchers at different career stages to exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and explore practical strategies for academic career development.

The workshop opened with a session on *Success Factors of a Research Career – Personal Experiences*, featuring contributions from Letizia Jaccheri, Professor at NTNU (Norway); Gabriella Pasi, Professor at the University of Milano-Bicocca (Italy); Giuseppe Spallitta, University of Trento (Italy), currently a Postdoctoral Associate at Rice University (USA) and Joachim Baumann, University of Zurich (Switzerland) and currently a Postdoctoral Researcher at Stanford University (USA). Drawing on their own academic journeys, the speakers shared personal experiences, lessons learned, and advice for PhD students and early career researchers.

A recurring message across the presentations by Gabriella Pasi and Letizia Jaccheri was that a successful research career requires much more than a strong publication record. Passion, motivation, persistence, and the conviction to pursue meaningful ideas are essential, particularly when facing difficult circumstances. Gabriella Pasi highlighted the importance of depth, intellectual commitment, and the courage to stand by ideas that matter. She also raised a fundamental question about the paradox of academic success: are the things academia measures necessarily the things that truly matter? Her reflections encouraged participants to look beyond conventional performance indicators and focus on research with lasting impact.

Joachim Baumann and Giuseppe Spallitta offered complementary and relatable perspectives on navigating the inevitable setbacks of academic life. They emphasised the importance of recognising that rejection does not define one's abilities or potential. Paper rejections and unsuccessful projects are an inevitable part of an academic career. The key is to use feedback constructively, learn from the experience, improve what can be improved, and then move forward without becoming discouraged. Their advice also highlighted the importance of knowing when to say no, prioritising impactful work over

simply increasing the volume of output, building professional networks, and remaining open to different perspectives while taking time to reflect on one's own ambitions and direction. Above all, early career researchers were encouraged to understand the expectations for their next career step and to take an active role in preparing for it.

The session *Moving to the Next Career Stage in Academia*, chaired by Dimka Karastoyanova, translated these reflections into practical career planning. Participants worked on individual career development plans, considering their next important professional goals and the steps needed to achieve them. The subsequent round-table discussions brought together colleagues from diverse academic career stages and backgrounds. These exchanges proved particularly valuable, offering opportunities to compare experiences, discuss different approaches, and learn from colleagues pursuing similar objectives. A central takeaway was the importance of understanding the expectations and prerequisites for the next career stage early enough to take timely and informed action. The discussions also highlighted the value of the academic community: professional development is not an individual journey alone, but one that benefits greatly from dialogue, mutual support, and shared experience.

The workshop also addressed the increasingly important topic of research integrity and responsible academic publishing. In her session, *Publications' Process and Ethics Challenges and Guidelines*, Elisabetta Di Nitto from Politecnico di Milano (Italy) presented the work of CLEAR, the Task Force on *Community-Led Ethics for Accountability in Research*. The initiative aims to establish a shared vocabulary for addressing integrity problems throughout the academic publishing lifecycle and broader issues of scientific integrity. Her contribution encouraged participants to become familiar with the rules and expectations of their research communities while critically reflecting on how these are implemented. Researchers should pursue their goals without distorting the objectives behind academic incentives, but they should also be prepared to question established practices and contribute to developing a better vision for the community.

Across the sessions, one message stood out: building a successful academic career is not about following a single predefined path or meeting a checklist of achievements. It requires curiosity, resilience, self-reflection, strategic planning, and the courage to pursue meaningful research. Equally important are supportive professional networks and a research community willing to learn, question its practices, and evolve.

By combining personal experiences, practical career development activities, and critical discussions about research integrity, the Informatics Europe ECR Workshop provided a valuable space for early career researchers to reflect on their ambitions, learn from one another, and gain inspiration for the road ahead.

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