



# **NUS Postgraduate Campaign and PGR students**

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**SWW Vitae Hub, 24/02/10**

Vice- President (HE)  
FT paid sabbatical position

PGR Rep to NEC  
PGT Rep to NEC  
5 ordinary committee  
members

All but one of these are current  
or former postgraduate students

1 research & policy officer  
(full-time staff)

**Aim:** to represent  
postgraduates within NUS  
and to the HE sector and to  
work to understand and  
improve the postgraduate  
student experience

## Since June 2009...





With students' unions

- Engaging postgrads in students' unions
- Information and briefings
- National practice-sharing events

With the HE sector

- HEA: PRES & PTES
- UCU: Postgraduates Employment Charter
- Vitae: Innovate

Research & policy

- Submission to BIS PG review
- PGs that teach research
- PGT finance and funding
- Concentration of research funding

# Vitae Innovate project: student-led initiatives

**PRES findings:** consistent lower levels of satisfaction among PGRs with their 'intellectual climate'

- A good seminar series
- Opportunities for social contact with other research students
- Opportunities to become involved in the wider research culture
- Research ambience in department stimulates work
- Feeling integrated into the department's community

**OPREQ:** intellectual climate scales correlate with perception of levels of research and transferable skills development

**Student-led initiatives:** a model for giving researchers a stake in their intellectual climate.

**Can student-led initiatives enhance intellectual climate?**

**Can students' unions engage postgraduates via student-led initiatives?**

## **Research strand (report)**

What is known about how provision for student-led initiatives support learning and skills development?

Where is existing SLI practice and how is it managed?

How can we evaluate benefits of student-led initiatives?

## **Practice strand: 5 pilot union initiatives (case studies)**

Bath: creating PGR networks

Kent: 'growing' PG community

Leeds: competition to identify and meet PGR needs

LSE: interdisciplinary poster competition inviting employers

UEA: creating an online blogging community for A&H PGRs

## **Intellectual climate:**

- 'community' is only one part of it
- as-yet-undefined outside PRES
- ANU: Intellectual climate audit include policies, opportunities, behaviours and values of students, staff and academics

## **'Research community': a contested, problematic term**

- PGRs participate in multiple communities
- Communities are shaped by competition as well as collaboration
- Nature of research practice may mitigate against functional community – peer learning is not expected in some disciplines

'Community of practice' model explains how provision for student-led activities can support researcher development (both skills and identity)

- Students apply to run events and initiatives that initiate research communities and offer opportunities to network, often interdisciplinary, sometimes online
- SLIs contribute to skills development (intrapreneurship), make development provisions that would not otherwise have been available to students
- SLIs allow for skills development to be delivered in a way that is relevant and rooted in research student experience/academic practice
- Benefits to institutions include: cost-effectiveness and increased public profile of PGRs

## example of union pilot: University of Kent

Kent: identified dual problem of researcher isolation and disengagement from the students' union

Initiating series of social events specifically for postgraduates (researcher speed-dating, student-society demonstrations, wine-tasting)

Using social activities to facilitate postgraduates taking initiative to lead academic or career-building events using small amounts of money made available for that purpose

Over time, examining how to shift responsibility for programme of social and academic events from union to postgraduate student representatives

Having demonstrated success, seeking funding from university to sustain provision



Feel free to contact me about our work  
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