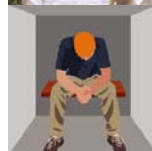




Page 2: Top Ten ways to avoid writing up



Page 4: Dr. Flo solves isolation woe



Page 7: Mental health and your PhD



Editorial: Welcome to GB!

Paul Wicks, Editor-in-Chief
King's College London
gradbritain@grad.ac.uk

Welcome to the first edition of GRADBritain (GB for short), an online magazine by and for postgraduate researchers (PGRs, doctoral students) in the UK. We started life as a local publication in London, called "LonDoc". That turned out to be quite popular, and via the web it extended far beyond the M25. The first two issues are online at www.grad.ac.uk/londoc/ if you're curious to find out more.

The overall aim of both LonDoc and now GB are to foster a sense of comraderie amongst the disparate and sometimes isolated PGRs scattered amongst universities, industries, and labs across the land. Whilst our specific fields of study vary enormously, from particle physics to dance studies, there are a lot of things we have in common, and we hope you will identify with some of the articles in this issue. We also want to provide practical tips that can help make your journey to the hallowed thesis slightly less stressful.

Sponsored by the UK GRAD programme, we aim to attain a balance in representing PGRs both full-time and part-time, UK and international, and from the science and humanities. We're also keen to get involvement from all parts of the UK so do please send something in. Not only do you get to see your name in print (and £50 for your time) but it's also an opportunity to write something a bit different and flex your creative muscle!

A quick word about me so you know what I'm doing here. I finished my PhD in psychology last year at the Institute of Psychiatry (IOP), part of King's College London. I spent three years racing up and down the country performing cognitive tests on patients with motor neurone disease, which was a fascinating and unforgettable experience. I also ran the "student forum" for a year which is like a student's union for the ~400 postgrads at the IOP. During this time I saw a variety of experiences, good and bad, and became convinced that by sharing our experiences and tips with one another we can make the whole process a lot less stressful.

I got involved with UK GRAD when I went on one of their local "GRAD schools" in my 2nd year and spent a great week talking to other PGRs from all over the place. Sometimes just knowing you're not the only one stressing about literature reviews and word counts can be a big help! Anyway, for queries/comments/insults please feel free to drop me an email at the address above, and see page 8 for details of how you can submit articles to us.



Did you know Word can completely automate your table of contents and figures? Make sure you consistently apply heading styles to chapter titles, subheadings, and figure titles, and you can do it all automatically with a few clicks.

<http://tinyurl.com/ccx9n> for more details

Beijing - bound for a conference

- Katie Anderson (Guy's Hospital) on a revitalising trip to the Orient



Armed with nothing more than 18 months' worth of slightly flimsy data compressed into a three-hundred word abstract, I managed to convince the organisers of the 21st International Complement Workshop in Beijing to offer me a poster presentation. (Just so you know, "Complement" refers to a facet of the immune system which help protect against infection.)

Since finishing university I've had to listen on as friends I graduated with have been steadily climbing the ladders of their chosen careers in the "real world"; sadly, terms like *salary*, *promotion* and *pay rise* are not concepts I'm familiar with. When I hear of their successes it sometimes induces bouts of jealousy and self-doubt as I wonder, "Why aren't I going anywhere?" So then, I basked in the green-eyed gazes which I encountered when announcing to my friends that I would be travelling all-expenses paid to China!

In the final year of my PhD I was still pondering why I had chosen this difficult path. All that fades away when I walk through the spectacularly decadent five-star Beijing Hotel which plays host to my conference. I find myself in a breathtaking conference hall elaborately decked in red, gold and turquoise mosaics with giant chandeliers, and I'm reassured that a PhD was a good thing to do.

Over the next four days I tune into a series of impressive oral presentations, from sprightly PhD students through to musty old professors at the top of their game. The passion and professionalism with which the talks and ensuing debates

are delivered are inspiring. I gain a greater sense that the minutiae of day-to-day laboratory experiments are critical to the eventual generation of paradigm-shifting theories, which in the biology / medicine-based field of Complement can in turn impact upon the lives of patients with an array of immune conditions. Together with the realisation that there are in fact hundreds of people across the globe working in the same niche subject area as you (which can be easy to forget given the solitary nature of the PhD), the romantic sentiments that originally drove me to pursue a scientific career are reawakened.

My poster presentation gives me the opportunity to discuss my work with various delegates, some of whom take an extraordinary interest in what I'm doing. This makes a pleasant change to the meagre level of interest that usually results when I try to explain my work to ordinary members of the public. I also gain insights into possible post-PhD career options as I in turn interrogate various post-docs and members of academia about their work.

But aside from the conference, one of the best reasons for coming to Beijing was to experience this incredible city in itself. Currently undergoing expansive construction, both as a consequence of China's recent economic upheaval and in preparation for the 2008 Olympics, Beijing presents a dizzying hotchpotch of glossy high rises and shoddy Stalinesque housing blocks, sliced up with reels of eight-lane freeways. Bicycles amass and weave in between the hoards of cars and pedestrians. Spitting is commonplace, even amongst elderly ladies. Everyone is either buying or selling something as consumerist drives and Western aspirations ride high. And the food is phenomenal.

I leave feeling immensely privileged to have had the opportunity to come here, by virtue of my PhD.

Top Ten: Ways to avoid writing up



1. Play all 32,000 iterations of Freecell sequentially
2. Enter vaguely-remembered acquaintances as "friends" on MySpace / Facebook
3. Descale the kettle and clean tea stains out of mug with steradent tablets
4. Order / purchase way too much stationery
5. Find someone else that is actually getting on with their work and distract them
6. Teach cat to use toilet, post video on YouTube
7. Register on a training course for something you can already do
8. Edit Wikipedia articles on your PhD subject
9. Re-do your word count just in case magic thesis elves have finished it for you in your sleep
10. Write articles for GB....



Photo: AP

Duly acknowledged

- Bradley Smith (UCL) on the closest most of us will ever get to a blubbery Oscar acceptance speech...

My plan had worked. At the viva half-time break, examiner number one left the table to organise tea for the three of us with his secretary. As soon as the door closed, examiner number two immediately blurted out in a loud whisper, "So (pause) ... are you really a prawn molecular biologist from outback Australia?" Small talk works wonders, especially in a tense, academic interrogation situation such as a PhD viva. And the secret to breaking down the barriers is... the acknowledgements!

Lets face it, the most creative, personal aspect of a PhD thesis is writing this final vote of thanks after a grinding 250 pages or so of dry mumbo-jumbo. For months on end we become dependent upon a phrase palette of uncertainties: "These results suggest...", "We can postulate that...", "It is possible however that," "Upon further examination..." and so on. You get the picture.

By contrast the acknowledgments can be a little chattier. You would never say "I would like to thank my Mum and Dad, because their behavioural characteristics during the last three years imply that a positive fervour for my well being was manifest and perhaps strongly associated with my academic endeavours." Well you could, but you'd obviously have lost the plot.

Besides, we need the relief and a self remedied means of closure to three or more years of intense intellectual intercourse. The writing style of this prologue itself is a return to normal everyday expression. But a degree of effort must go into this list of praises.

After the mammoth sweat of rushing the manuscript to the binders and then collecting the final product, within 24 hours one will undoubtedly be presenting it to fellow colleagues for inspection and back patting. And do they feverishly flick to the grand final conclusions that will unlock the secrets of the universe? No, it's straight to the acknowledgments for a giggle and to name-check themselves for thank-yous. Yes admit it, it's true; we've all done it. But ironically, your final unsaid acknowledgement is that people undoubtedly read the acknowledgements first, as this for them is an instant summary of how important they have been in your life during the last couple of years. They've dealt with your whingeing, whining, bitching, tears, laziness, moodiness and occasional lack of confidence.

The acknowledgements are the most powerful section of a thesis as it documents a significant period of your life. I personally give thanks for that little section that says thank you.

Stuff wot' undergradz say

On the nature/nurture debate:

"Nature is when you were born blonde whilst nurture is when you dye it"

In an essay about psychology:

"Not much research has been done on the brain"

On maternal bonding:

"Having a mum isn't that important because John Fashanu grew up in a Barnado's home and just look at him."

(Ed: We're not creative enough to have made these up, they're real. Please send us more)

Presentation Tips

- Alexandra Smith (Cardiff)

I used to be dreadful at talking in public, but slowly I've managed to get over my fear. It's hard enough when the one academic you want to impress is in the audience, without factoring in your worries about the way you look, how your hands are shaking, and whether you really have anything worthwhile to say anyway! Here are some tips that have helped me come to grips with this slightly scary, but important aspect of academic life:

Prepare in advance. I find having a well-rehearsed introduction that I can reel off without thinking is good, as it builds my confidence, gains the audience's attention, and gives me a few moments to compose myself.

Accept the nerves. I always get a surge of adrenaline that gives me butterflies in my stomach; I used to fight it, but I've found that if I just try to calmly let it wash over me, it has less of an impact on my actual demeanour.

Stick to the plan. Do not suddenly try adding in off-the-cuff jokes and spur-of-

the-moment realisations about your research, they'll throw you off your stride.

Don't worry if you say the wrong thing. If you realise you just claimed that lemons are smarter than humans, just take a deep breath and start that sentence again. In normal conversation we all make these sorts of mistakes, and as long as you correct yourself, no one will remember.

And finally, remember that 'confidence' just means the audience couldn't perceive that you were really nervous!

Dear Dr Flo...

I have two supervisors but one is in another department and I hardly ever see him. My first supervisor has cancelled my last two meetings and hasn't yet set another date with me. I also feel that I have no-one to talk to on a day-to-day basis and am beginning to feel very isolated. Although I attended a central university induction for new PhD students in October, I didn't meet any of the other students after this event and now feel totally on my own. I'm beginning to get upset and depressed and this is impacting on my work.

Any advice?

Lost-and-Lonely

Dear LOL,

Firstly it is important for you to realise that although you might FEEL alone, you are actually not so! The feelings of isolation and loneliness that you are expressing here are extremely

common amongst PhD students, but particularly amongst those based in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The reason for this is that the lab-based sciences have a tradition of working in teams and the main time that isolation becomes any sort of a problem for these students is when they start their writing-up period which is normally 3-6 months before the end of their registration period. By contrast, Humanities and Social Science research students are very often fewer in number in each department and tend to work on individual projects, rather than individual sections of a team-based-project.

There are a number of things you can do to improve your situation:

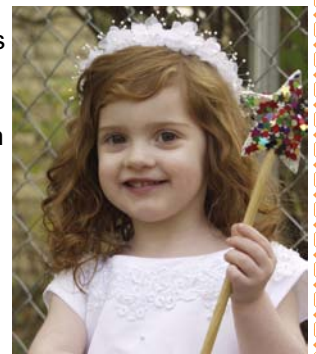
Firstly, you need to accept that you have the responsibility for making the changes and that no-one else is going to come along and miraculously do this for you. It is your responsibility to chase your supervisor for an appointment and you shouldn't be waiting around for her to get in touch with you. Secondly, find out about other PhD students at your university

and in your local area. Is there some kind of a regular social meeting that you could go along to? You might need to pluck up the courage to go alone the first time, but it is guaranteed that they will make you welcome and you will discover by talking to them that although they may not be in the same discipline, there are some generic issues which are common to nearly all PhD students regardless of individual circumstances.

Thirdly, find out what skills training courses are available at your institution, or at others in the local area. Fourthly, the National Postgraduate Committee (<http://www.npc.org.uk/>) has an online forum which might help to reduce some of your isolation. It is also a very good source of information and events.

Good luck!

Dr. Flo



Time management Domination

- Tim Mannville (Royal Holloway) takes no prisoners.

Time is not something that will succumb to mere 'management', so I'm going to tell you about the much more serious business of time domination.

The first thing you have to do is scale down your target. Writing a thesis in three years is not something most people can easily quantify; in that timescale, accidentally procrastinating for an entire day – or even a week – doesn't seem to matter much. Concentrate instead on doing a week's work in the course of a week. To do this, come up with a reasonable, quantifiable estimate for how much work you can do in an average day. I found six sessions of 45 minutes in length was a reasonable ballpark to start with. Then, draw up a calendar and mark these sessions on it.

Cross each one off as you complete it. If at the end of the day you haven't filled your quota, then you can see exactly how much harder you will have to work over the following days to complete a weeks' worth of work in one week.

To make a session really work, you're going to have to be strict. No goofing off to look at the internet for 'just a couple of minutes'. If you have to, use a kitchen timer; while that timer is ticking, do not touch your browser.

Another way to control your use of time is with a daily timetable of work. This simple idea can very easily go wrong. Suppose your timetable begins at 9:30am. It only takes a short lie-in and some particularly interesting morning emails to delay your start by an hour or more.

Suddenly the entire timetable is shot; you can never quite muster the strength to start working properly again that day. Disaster.

Solve this by cutting your timetable in half, vertically. On one side, time; on the other, your work plan. When you wake up, align the two halves to reflect when you actually started your day, as opposed to when you planned to. Bingo: a custom timetable for that particular day.

My final piece of advice is this: *feel the fear*. Think about what will happen if you keep on procrastinating. You won't finish on time; your funding will run out; you won't be able to afford to do the things you enjoy; you'll have to move.

Feel that fear, and then start to work. Not tomorrow, not after you read just a few more articles or emails – start now. Right now!

Life at the Top... by Professor Geoffrey Thickett

Insights from the dizzy heights of the ivory tower

I woke up early because the cleaners were making an infernal racket outside. I don't think they suspect that I sometimes sleep on the old sofa in my office. I've been here so long now that there are more of my personal belongings here than there are at home. I suppose it's rare to stay at the same University for your whole academic life, but I liked Bookback College in 1975, and I like it just as much now.

Anyway, after the cleaners' alarm call came my most 'challenging' research student. At 8am on the dot I heard Mavis shuffling down the corridor. I've tried to explain that 8am is rather early to come and see me, but she's got the skewed body clock of a 92yr old, and tells me every time that she's already been up for hours.

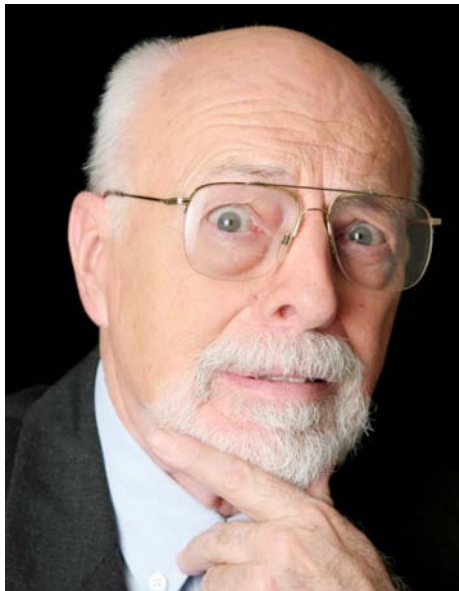
'Well HELLO!' she booms in her shaky RP. Mavis Bunion-Smythe is at the very upper limit of what we would term a *mature* research student. However as she has a first from Girton (admittedly in 1937) and an MA from Harvard (sometime in the 1940s I think) we certainly couldn't fault her academic credentials.

Mavis is coming to me several times a week so that I can teach her how to use the computer. Although she tells me proudly that she was taught touch typing at school, she bashes the keys in a way that would make IT technicians wince and she has been caught yelling orders into the mouse on several occasions. She also holds some rather outspoken political views which have been an embarrassment at departmental seminars. Sunil, a very nicely mannered young man researching "Issues of Race in Shakespeare's Tragedies" has been driven to complain twice now.

Anyway, back to this morning. 'HELLO Geoffrey!' she says. 'Brought some tea with a dash of Rum for breakfast. Gets the old brain cells working you know, what what?! Now young man, let's give this infernal machine another try shall we?'

Bash, Bash, Bash. I'll be surprised if the computer keyboard makes it through the term at this rate. Or my nerves for that matter. I do wish Mavis would treat me with SOME respect. Problem is that at 65, I'm a youngster as far as she is concerned. 'I don't see why I have to use this Infranets anyway! There's nothing I need to know that I can't find in a book you know, and I have a rather fine library at home. Daddy's books, can't beat them.'

Mavis is convinced that anything written after the early 50's is superfluous rubbish, and therefore justifies the use of her own books and little else. I am showing her how to



use the internet so she can access the other sources that she will need, and search the university library catalogue remotely. This latter skill has become crucial since I've been specifically asked (begged) by the library staff to keep her out as they still haven't fixed the electronic barrier since she jammed her umbrella in there.

Well, after an hour of key bashing Mavis made no progress but the space bar on the keyboard broke, so I sent her on her way. Whilst wading through the daily torrent of emails (no, I don't have any spare "dry ice"!) another of my students turned up unannounced.

Lucy De Dragon Amore. Yes, I know, it's a perfectly preposterous name, but she's changed it by deed poll and we must (I am told by our new "diversity manager") respect her wishes. Lucy is one of those skinny velvet-clad creatures who always look like she is barely alive, an image I am sure she takes pains to maintain. Her PhD thesis is on 'Lesbian Fairy Fantasies in Victorian Literature' (or *Faerie* as Lucy insists). She dripped in this morning smelling of sandalwood and sniffing. Snuff. 'Lucy, PLEASE, no snuff in my study'. The only reason I'm strict on this point is that I was once rather fond of the stuff myself. At this simple and not unreasonable request Lucy burst into tears. This is Lucy's reaction to most of my requests. I now keep a supply of tissues in my office especially for her.

I asked her once again if I could see some new work. This week her excuse was as follows, 'I don't know how you could even ask me that! Don't you know that there are solar storms? All that energy is giving me headaches and blocking the chi in my Chakras. I can barely think, let alone write.' If it was up to me I probably would have given up and failed her by now, but her research topic is just the sort of thing that Bookback is keen on at the moment. When I arrived in 1975 English meant Chaucer, Donne, and Shakespeare. How it evolved to include Lesbian *Faerie* Fantasies I just don't know.

After lunch I had a nice quiet afternoon doing my own research. There is something so comforting in burying myself in the pages of a nice musty book... I fell asleep on the sofa and woke up just now. Rather late to head home, so I might just spend the rest of the night here...

Prof. Geoffrey Thickett
Head of Department
Bookback College

(with help from Kiri Bloom)

Awful undergraduates?

- Shzr Ee Tan (SOAS, University of London) on growing old gracefully. Or not.



“Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed” isn’t quite the right phrase these days. More like “noisy drinkers doing karaoke on cut-price offers on alcopops at the Fresher’s Fair”. Cyberjunky multitaskers at photocopy machines who, unlike you, have conquered Photoshop, maintain “blogs” and can hold knowing conversations about Maximo Park (hello? who?) at bottlenecking turnstiles. Or, just hanging around exuding that aura of “I dress younger than you, I think younger than you, I am younger than you” –

Yes: those awful undergrads.

You know you’ve truly upgraded to postgrad status when you wince at the smallest signs of undergrad activity; a hapless kid opens the wrong door to a lecture in progress, and cheerily apologises too profusely; a chronic hand-raiser asks the not-quite-dumb-but-obvious questions during a tutorial; “doing up” hall hovels with Cargo Home Shop rejects and Keira Knightley posters: try to remain sufficiently Zen.

The truth is, you’ve “been there and done that”, but only just. Perhaps you’ve taken a few years out to – gulp – actually work in the real world; or you’ve decided to dive straight into research. Either way, you’ve chosen to stay on in education, but you’re caught in university limbo. Perhaps because you’re not quite part of the staff establishment, it becomes more important to distinguish that you’re a cut above the newbies. You’re different; you have experience. You don’t just know about things – you are knowing.



And that’s something undergraduates are decidedly not. They haven’t earned their stripes. They still stare in wide-eyed amazement at 15-page reading lists even as you think it barely enough space to footnote one chapter of your thesis. But what’s more worrying is that they are fast catching up to you. In no time at all they’ll be graduating from eager-beaver earnestness to speaking with the patented old-handedness you’ve worked so hard for. So enjoy your tiny elevation of status in the lower rungs of academic hierarchy; it won’t last long!

What is?



What is the aim of a PhD? Is it just to have a nicely bound book full of great ideas to sit on a shelf? Or is it really more about the process and the experience which turn you into a more productive member of society?

Launched in January 2003, the UK GRAD Programme is funded by the UK Research Councils to promote and enable the personal and professional development for all of the UK’s PGRs.

One of their major areas of focus is to encourage opportunities for transferable skills in research degree programmes. These are the crucial “soft skills” that will make you a great catch for any employer out there as well as helping your personal development.

You may have heard about their regional and national “GRAD Schools”, residential courses where participants get a chance to put their PhD into perspective, learn more about themselves, and meet other PGRs. They also support universities delivering their own training programmes.

Read more about the UK GRAD Programme (www.grad.ac.uk), Just for Postgrads (www.grad.ac.uk/jfp) and PGR Tips (www.grad.ac.uk/PGRtips).

Mental health and the PhD

- Mary Stevens (UCL) on a neglected area of PGR wellbeing

John's been seeing a counsellor for over a year now. He doesn't think it's helping; he still thinks his work is worthless. Claire says she's scared. Too scared to make plans for the future, sometimes too scared to go out. And Sam's been going through a bad patch recently. So bad she recently checked herself into hospital, feeling suicidal. What do these people have in common? Apart from the fact that they are all in different ways and to different degrees suffering from mental health problems, they are all PhD students. And these are not isolated incidents. They are just people I happen to know.

Of course, we all have our ups and downs. Working for a PhD is intellectually extremely demanding, and we're not always going to be at the top of our form. It's normal to doubt one's ability, to feel low, not to want to get out of bed in the morning. The problem is that in the context of a PhD these problems often develop into something worse. To get a sense of the scale of the problem I sent an email to a few friends asking if they had any experiences they were prepared to share.

The answers I received confirmed my hunch. Here's Laura: "Absolutely every single PhD student that I know here has suffered or is currently suffering from mental health problems." Laura herself was diagnosed with depression in her second year; she attributes the onset of her difficulties to feelings of isolation and her inability to gauge her progress, leading to anxiety attacks. Paula summed up the experience: "I found my thesis a truly challenging and not always rewarding experience, skirting the borderlines of sanity at times!" She saw university counsellors ("without much headway") and ended up paying more than she could afford for private therapy. But is the situation really any worse amongst PhD students than amongst undergrads, for example?

Quite possibly. PhD students, especially in the arts and humanities, often work alone. Our days are unstructured and solitary; we are at the mercy of our own motivation. As an undergraduate I juggled exams, deadlines and extra-curricular activities. But if I had disappeared for more than half a day someone would have noticed. During my PhD there have been times when I could have gone off the radar for months at a time without alarm bells ringing. Moreover, rising property prices mean that few graduate students enjoy adequate facilities. My own department provides neither



common room nor workspace, and this is not unusual. Social activities happen only by arrangement and I can spend a day at a university of over 20,000 people without seeing a single friendly face. Once you lose your footing there is not a lot to catch you.

Fortunately my family and almost all my friends are also nearby. But this brings its own stresses. My old friends in some cases now earn several times my income and it can be hard to keep up, and harder to say no. Graduate students are often forced to live in the nastiest accommodation, a long way from their place of study, with the constant nagging feeling that they are letting down parents and friends who had such high hopes.

Sadly, support is often inadequate when such problems arise. Few supervisors know how to recognise the symptoms, still less how to address them. At the back of their minds is often the fear that a failure to complete will reflect badly on them. Peer-led services tend to be run by undergraduates, for undergraduates. And some subjects

even have a culture of the ordeal as rite-of-passage: philosophy, for example, or anthropology with its "in-the-field-I-ate-gravel" mentality (not my personal experience, I should add).

It's not all bad of course. Sam (who has a long history of depression) explained, "the variety of each day, and the fact that I really really enjoy the intellectual aspect of my work keeps me going, whereas the tedium of other jobs would crush me." Autonomy is also a luxury.

The mental health of PhD students still appears to be a taboo. The scale of the problem is unknown, and research needs to be conducted as a matter of urgency. Supervisors need to be trained and peer-support networks set up. If the universities need motivating they should consider the fact that unhappy PhD students are unproductive, and reflect badly to funders and prospective students. But above all we are some of the brightest, most talented people in the UK and in the process of achieving our intellectual goals we need to be nurtured, not crushed.

www.grad.ac.uk/stayinghealthy

(ed: names in this article have been changed)

Stuff wot' undergradz say

From History undergrad essays:
'In 19th century Britain, during the period of industrialization, most women lived in the countryside, whilst most men lived in the city'

'To begin with, historians argue whether there was in fact an industrial revolution or not, this is daft as of course there was a revolution'

'During the first half of the twentieth century, the British government implemented a policy to keep working class people in houses in special zones and made them wear uniform.'

(Be sure to send any more intellectual gems you come across to gradbritain@grad.ac.uk)



The final word...

Liza Filby -
Deputy Editor

University of Warwick
gradbritain@grad.ac.uk

Welcome to the first issue of GRADBritain, I hope you have enjoyed the magazine and been informed, amused, and enthralled! Let me introduce myself, I am a 2nd year history PGR at the University of Warwick working on religion and politics during Margaret Thatcher's premiership. In addition to my role as Deputy Editor of GradBritain, I also help run a national postgraduate network called the History Lab, based at the Institute of Historical Research, London (www.history.ac.uk/histlab).

PGRs are a complicated mixed breed. Divided by discipline, subject, period and methodology, it is sometimes hard to see what commonalities we share. What, for example, does a student from Strathclyde researching a thesis on pet-owning in medieval Scotland really have in common with a student in Exeter working on subatomic physics?

An important unifying factor is the 'university'. Its library, labs, lecture halls and fairtrade coffee shop become the focus of our existence during our PhD years. But how much do we really know about their structure and operation?

The universities have gone through a great deal of change in the last 15 years with student numbers rapidly expanding, the introduction of fees, and the drive to accumulate more income from non-government sources. In the 1960s one in eighteen people in the UK entered higher education, today it is one in three; higher education is big business. In an age when the 'knowledge economy' makes up an increasing proportion of our GDP, the universities are seen as key contributors to economic prosperity.

I would suggest therefore that it is crucial that PGRs become engaged and informed about the debates and issues surrounding higher education today. There is a tendency to assume that because a PGR is not yet a fully fledged member of academia that there is no need to concern themselves with the politics of higher education. How many PGRs really understand how the RAE works? It may not be thrilling but it's the reason your supervisor is too busy to see you!

How many are aware of the significant differences within the university systems in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England? Postgrads need to know about this stuff - the RAE, DfES, HEFCE, QAA etc. The PhD isn't the only acronym you should be aware of!

An excellent way to tap into the current issues within higher education is reading education supplements in the broadsheets, as well as the weekly Times Higher Educational Supplement.

For a basic break down for all things concerning higher education the department of Education and Skills has an informative and accessible website: www.dfes.gov.uk/

For a more detailed look at some of the initiatives going on the UK and more widely throughout Europe, go to www.grad.ac.uk/policy/

Finally, if you have any suggestions for features, interviews, or articles please drop me an email. We hope GRADBritain will continue to grow and evolve each term to bring PGRs together. If you've got an interesting perspective on a particular aspect of the PhD process (or research more generally), do send something in.



Don't leave writing up to the last minute; it's inevitable that your analysis will need to be repeated several different ways before you can start writing up your results.

However you can start writing up your methodology during data collection and keeping your literature review updated will encourage you to keep up to date with recent developments.

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The end bit...

GRADBritain is seeking contributions from postgraduate researchers, postdocs, and those with an interest in the development of early career researchers. We pay £50 for articles we use plus you get the opportunity to write something that doesn't need a references section!

Whilst we're slightly easier to get into than a journal like *Nature*, we do still have high standards!

See our author guidelines at www.grad.ac.uk/gradbritain/ for hints and tips on how to utterly impress us. Please also send in jokes, tips, and any juicy quotes from undergraduates in essays / exams.

Issue 2 will be published at the end of July, deadline for submissions is Friday, June 15th. Please be sure you adhere to our author guidelines, then send submissions to: gradbritain@grad.ac.uk

Don't forget your full address and institutional affiliation!

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Made with QuarkXPress, Paint Shop Pro, Fotolia.co.uk, PDF995, Adobe Distiller, Green Day, and caffeine.

See you in the summer...