

# overVIEW

## UK GRAD Bulletin for Supervisors

### Welcome

A rather belated welcome to 2007 – likely to be a big year for those interested in the skills agenda and for all those with an interest in developing their researchers and the future of the PhD in Europe.

Firstly – funding – the government will report on its Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) which will set spending plans for 2008 - 2011. The outcome of the CSR will give us an idea of how future funding for career development and skills training will be affected.

Secondly – the Bologna Process. In hosting the next ministerial summit in London, the UK has a unique opportunity to influence Bologna developments for the Doctoral Cycle. As the 2010 target for realising the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) approaches, the resulting London Communiqué will set priorities for the remaining years of the Process and will consider its future beyond 2010. (See [www.grad.ac.uk/bologna](http://www.grad.ac.uk/bologna)).

At institutional level, discussions about evaluation of researchers' skills programmes are likely to dominate; the first

cohort of Roberts' PhD graduates will emerge – it will be interesting to see how they fare in the employment market, with the benefit of extra skills training; and the RAE – the first where evidence of research training and mechanisms to develop the careers of postgraduates will be required, is looming ever closer. In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Special Review of postgraduate research degree programmes for England and Northern Ireland and Wales has now been published ([www.grad.ac.uk/qaa](http://www.grad.ac.uk/qaa)) and the first Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES) ([www.grad.ac.uk/hea](http://www.grad.ac.uk/hea)) has now been launched..... interesting times.

We have a packed issue of overVIEW for you. Online resources; using technology; employability and knowledge transfer – these are just some of the topics covered in this edition.

The UK GRAD Database of Practice, set up in 2005 for institutions to record and share practice in skills development for researchers, has expanded rapidly over the last year – there are some fascinating

examples of how skills training has been taken to the next level, and we highlight just a few of them.

We also feature a couple of examples of using technology to deliver skills training – we know that there are many more projects being developed in this area – write to [overview@grad.ac.uk](mailto:overview@grad.ac.uk) and let us know what you are doing.

The employability of PhDs is also highlighted in this edition – a number of new reports have been published recently and they make interesting reading.

There has been lively debate between the Government and the Research Councils concerning how universities should increase their emphasis on knowledge transfer and the economic impact of their work. Leeds University has developed a series of linked workshops in the area of knowledge transfer and enterprise for health science postgraduate researchers – you can read all about it on page 3.

So enjoy overVIEW 2007!

**Anne Goodman**, Editor

### A Word about Terminology

Institutions use a variety of terms to describe those studying for a PhD: PhD students, doctoral candidates, PhD researchers, postgraduate researchers, early career researchers – these are just some that we have come across. Here at overVIEW we have taken the decision to use postgraduate researcher or PhD researcher rather than student. We often urge this group to consider themselves as 'professional researchers in training', and the Salzburg Principles (see [www.grad.ac.uk/policy](http://www.grad.ac.uk/policy)) recognise their status as early stage researchers vital to Europe's development. We feel that it is only right and proper to acknowledge in the way that we address them, the rigorous intellectual journey on which they are embarking ..... but we'd like to hear what you think...

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## Focus On: The Employability of PhDs



There have been a number of reports published recently, which look at various issues around the employability of PhDs. They throw up some interesting topics, which you may like to discuss with your PhD researchers....

### What Do PhDs Do? – a Regional Analysis (WDPDR?)

You may remember that in the first issue of overVIEW, we featured 'What Do PhDs Do?' (WDPD?) – the first ever analysis of destinations of PhD graduates.

WDPD? was produced in response to requests from UK GRAD's key stakeholders – PhD researchers; their supervisors; the bodies which fund and represent them; careers advisers and employers. At a series of launches for WDPD? across the UK, information was also presented on the regional labour markets. The levels of interest in this data

and the questions asked about inflows, outflows, reasons for leaving and remaining in regions have added to the motivation to produce this new publication.

Since the publication of 'What Do PhDs Do?' we have seen a dramatic growth in research training activity driven by the recommendations of the SET for Success (Roberts') review and increasing interest in the role that PhD graduates can play in local and national labour markets. Our researchers have a vital role to play in the development of the UK economy with its increased focus on knowledge and technology based industries. Much of this economic activity is being delivered through the UK regions, so there is a stronger need than ever for a clear picture of how and where researchers are employed.

**'What Do PhDs Do? – a regional analysis'** complements and extends the analysis within WDPD? with details of the variation in gender, mode of study and subject groups within the UK regions, information on the variations between the regions in terms of employment sectors and types of work attracting doctoral graduates, and migration patterns between the regions. The data for WDPDR? is mapped against the boundaries of the Regional Development Agencies for England. Figures for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are reported in total.

The information in WDPDR? raises a number of strategic questions for a range of stakeholders:

- what are the implications (for some regions) of almost 50% of PhD graduates moving out of the region they were studying in?
- does this migration support or hinder regional development agendas?
- is a mobile postgraduate researcher population important for the UK?
- what role should HEIs be playing in this agenda to encourage or discourage mobility?

By raising these questions, UK GRAD hopes that this publication will contribute to a strategic debate about how we train and prepare our researchers for their professional lives.

The report is available at [www.grad.ac.uk/wdpdr](http://www.grad.ac.uk/wdpdr) with breakdowns for each Region available as pdfs.

### Recruiting PhDs – What Works?

In recent years there has been growing interest from non-academic employers in recruiting newly qualified PhD graduates. However, a large number of employers, particularly SMEs, have not yet considered targeting PhDs as a cohort. This study, undertaken for UK GRAD by the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC), aims to provide a guide for employers and university careers services about the best ways to target, recruit and support newly qualified PhD graduates.

The report examines the recruitment of newly-qualified PhD graduates by non-academic employers and the experience of people with PhDs as they move into the labour market. By interviewing employers, careers advisers and PhD researchers the report provides a 360 degree view of the PhD recruitment market and highlights some examples of good practice.

Sections of the report include:

- looking for work as a PhD researcher
- how are university careers services responding?
- the employers' experience
- experience of recent recruits.

The report also provides a number of recommendations highlighting a need for further engagement and dialogue as well as the importance of direct communications mechanisms between researchers and employers. The report can be read on:

[www.grad.ac.uk/publications](http://www.grad.ac.uk/publications).

### SEARCHing for an Answer

In early 2006, the University of Sheffield undertook a survey of employer attitudes to postgraduate researchers – SEARCH.

The survey aimed to:

- inform the training and professional development of researchers within the institution
- explore attitudes to the recruitment of PhD graduates with a view to bridging the gap between recruiters and potential applicants

- add to research into skills awareness in the 'pre-Roberts' agenda era'.

Analysis of the responses revealed that potential barriers to recruiting PhDs included: lack of commercial awareness, over specialisation, difficulty in adapting to non-academic work cultures and unrealistic expectations. However, when PhD candidates held industrial experience, they were considered to be highly commercially aware and showed great capacity to learn.

Most of the recruiters took experience and skills into account when deciding salaries, with only 21% saying they would take on PhDs at the same salary level as other university candidates, but most acknowledged that progression through grades was faster than for other candidates. The full report, with recommendations, can be viewed at: [www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/pdf/employersurvey.pdf](http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/pdf/employersurvey.pdf).

Members of UK GRAD and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) postgraduate task force have undertaken an analysis on behalf of the Rugby Team of the existing research into the views of non-academic employers of postgraduate researcher employability. The aim is to highlight any recurring themes and conclusions. This report will be available in April from [www.grad.ac.uk/rugbyteam](http://www.grad.ac.uk/rugbyteam).

## Leitch Review

In 2004, the Leitch Review was tasked by the government with considering the UK's long-term skills needs. The final report, **'The Leitch Review of Skills - Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills'** was published in December 2006. It proposes that at the current rate of development, the UK will still lag behind its competitors in 2020. Although the review does not specifically cover PhD graduates as a cohort, it does recognise the value of higher level skills. It states that:

'Postgraduate, or level 5 skills, such as MBAs and PhDs, can provide significant returns to organisations, individuals and the economy as a whole. These higher level skills are key drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, management, leadership and research and development.' (p.73). The report goes on to say that a target for level 5 skills is not considered appropriate at this stage, but stock and flow of such skills in the economy should be monitored. The report can be accessed at: [www.grad.ac.uk/policy](http://www.grad.ac.uk/policy).

## Increasing the Impact – Getting Research Findings into Practice

*Dr Susan Hamer, Director of Health Enterprise and Knowledge Transfer, University of Leeds*

Like many of my colleagues I have been following with interest the lively debate between the Government and the Research Councils concerning how universities should increase their emphasis on knowledge transfer and the economic impact of their work. This is not a new debate but one which in the field of health sciences has been gathering a new momentum. The moral and fiscal responsibility actively to account for what we do with funding (particularly public funding) is now a global trend. There is also a real need to ask hard questions about our research investment and to be able to have better answers. As the WHO notes in its position paper Knowledge for Better Health 2004:

"Stronger emphasis should be placed on translating knowledge into action to improve public health by bridging the gap between what is known and what is actually done."  
([www.who.int/rpc/meetings/pub1/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/rpc/meetings/pub1/en/index.html))

Clearly, the skill set we seek to develop in our future scientists has to understand and meet the challenges of this different context.

This changing context has resulted in some fundamental changes in the University of Leeds. There is now a growing awareness throughout the University of the need for knowledge transfer (KT) and enterprise activities to permeate all that we do. To this end there is now an active network of KT activists in each of the Faculties developing capacity and capability supported by the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). However unlike other universities we see KT not as a separate activity (a third way) but as a key skill set which we have to get better at in order to achieve our purpose. It is no longer good enough to create research findings; we have to be equally committed to transferring our expertise and knowledge outside of the academic environment. Clearly, ensuring that the next generation of researchers has this skill set is critical if we don't want to be playing catch up forever! To meet this goal we set about developing and piloting a

series of linked workshops for health science postgraduate researchers. (This development was supported by Roberts' funding). The programme design team consisted of a KT lead, a research supervisor, and two graduate training experts. As a team we set about defining the key skills we would focus on. An examination of the KT literature started to identify key themes which were viewed as essential for effective KT practice; we also linked at this stage with a Canadian academic who was running a similar programme in a clinical facility. After some great debate we settled on four aims and four workshops.

### The Programme

The programme of workshops is titled *Increasing the Impact – Getting research findings into practice*. A flier was sent to all supervisors and a series of briefings were given to key committees. We also touted for business during the new postgraduate researchers' induction programme.

The overall aims for the workshops are as follows:

- to enhance their perspective on knowledge transfer and delivering its practical relevance for their field of research
- to develop their skills in the methods and techniques appropriate to undertaking knowledge transfer relevant research
- to develop their personal effectiveness in communicating, networking and presenting decision relevant findings.

### The Workshops

Each workshop, which lasts for 3 hours, comprises of a mix of presentations, exercises and expert seminars and is supported by a workbook and a reader containing key articles. Wherever possible these articles are chosen for their robustness and evidence base. They are drawn from the international literature on KT practice.

1. **Workshop 1 Knowledge Transfer – Context, trends and opportunities:** considers in detail both the global and national case for improving KT skills particularly as they relate to improving health outcomes. The University's approach is then painted in. We also look specifically at the changing expectations of funders, and examine in detail a number of grant application forms from Research Councils in the context, of the earlier conversation. This enables participants to see the

opportunities for KT activities throughout the research cycle. (Usually postgraduate researchers just see KT as an aspect of dissemination at the end of the project and give it little or no thought).

## 2. Workshop 2 Influencing Key Stakeholders – Developing credibility:

in this we focus on different forms of credibility as defined by the multiple stakeholders we seek to serve. Group members are asked to have a conversation with a number of influential experts drawn from across the university. The group then reflect on just what it takes! The final speaker for this session is the leader of one of our peaks of excellence (areas with a critical mass of world-leading research in which Leeds excels and is internationally renowned). This is a team that has numerous KT activities integral to its way of doing things. It enables the participants to benchmark what key behaviours are associated with being part of a high impact and high performing team. It certainly provokes some discussions!

## 3. Workshop 3 Getting the Message Across – Writing for purpose:

as many of our health scientists are working in areas on developments which will ultimately have consequences for clinical practice, it is clearly critical that they understand early in their careers that good researchers must factor in an

understanding of the complexity of changing health systems. The importance of getting the right message to the right audience is also considered. Finally KT is not a free option so just how do you write it in to grant applications so that it is funded?

## 4. Workshop 4 Making Research Accessible – Engaging the public:

the final session is to raise awareness about the importance of public engagement throughout the research process, how to move this from tokenism to a meaningful dialogue. Fortunately this is an area in which the university has many strengths and it is great to be able to showcase some real examples of how we successfully do this in our work.

## Evaluation

Ten participants took part in the pilot programme, and a simple pre and post programme questionnaire was designed. All respondents valued the programme and improved their understanding but what has been exciting to see is that two participants are now actively networking within the KT forum, and one of these has put in an application with a costed KT strategy. Another participant was successful in getting a research post elsewhere in the University which has a KT/public engagement focus. We have also been successful in attracting funding to run the programme twice in this academic year.

## Final Thoughts

In recent months both the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology<sup>1</sup> and an External Challenge group of RCUK<sup>2</sup> have produced reports on Research Council knowledge transfer. In both of these reports three key challenges reoccur for the research community:

- how do we actively engage in leading the KT agenda?
- how do we influence KT behaviours within Universities and Research Councils?
- how do we increase the research community's engagement and confidence with user organisations?

All these are big questions and I guess that what this programme provides is one practical step to ensure that the next generation at least can produce some answers when asked the same questions.

The other thing we need to learn in addressing this skills area is that, as you may expect, it does need a team approach and using the expertise of KT practitioners in your own organisation might be a resource you find helpful – it's certainly great fun.

If you want to talk/find out more do contact us: Susan Hamer [s.hamer@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:s.hamer@leeds.ac.uk) or Heather Sears [h.j.sears@adm.leeds.ac.uk](mailto:h.j.sears@adm.leeds.ac.uk). We would also welcome networking with anyone else who is working in this area.

<sup>1</sup> [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmsctech/1653/1653.pdf](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmsctech/1653/1653.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.rcuk.ac.uk/aboutrcuk/publications/policy/exchallenge.htm](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/aboutrcuk/publications/policy/exchallenge.htm)

## European Update



## Inquiry into the Sustainability of the Higher Education Sector

The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee announced in November that it would be undertaking two inquiries into the Higher Education Sector:

- the implications of the Bologna Process for the UK HE sector
- the future sustainability of the HE sector.

The inquiry on the Bologna Process will examine the advantages and disadvantages of the Process for the UK and help to clarify the UK's position ahead of the May 2007 Ministerial Summit. It will also look at the broader impact of the Bologna Process across Europe.

The inquiry into the future sustainability of the higher education sector will look at the role of universities over the next 5 – 10

years: what do students, employers, society want from HE, how should HE be funded, and what is the best structure?

Written submissions were requested in December. The Committee is chaired by Barry Sheerman and began taking oral evidence in the New Year. For more details visit: [www.grad.ac.uk/reviewofresearch](http://www.grad.ac.uk/reviewofresearch).

### Last Doctoral Seminar before Ministerial Meeting

The final European University Association (EUA) Bologna Seminar on doctoral programmes took place at the University of Nice in December. It brought together all the main stakeholders to prepare recommendations for the Ministerial meeting in London in May 2007.

Issues examined included:

- doctoral programmes (supervision; monitoring and assessment; generic skills)
- institution (role of institution in organisation of doctoral programmes; Masters-PhD transition; new ways of organisation such as graduate/doctoral research schools; ways of promoting the European dimension; internationalisation and mobility; interdisciplinarity)
- state, government and other stakeholders (funding of doctoral programmes and doctoral candidates; competitiveness of European doctoral programmes/schools in the global market; status and profile of a doctoral candidate; career development of PhDs and link to the Researchers' Charter and Code of Practice).

Details of the conclusions are available on: [www.grad.ac.uk/bologna](http://www.grad.ac.uk/bologna).

(For information – an updated *Guide to the Bologna Process* has recently been published by the Europe Unit. [www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna\\_process/index.cfm](http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna_process/index.cfm))

UK GRAD will shortly be submitting a paper to the Bologna Follow-Up Group based on views from our network on the future of doctoral programmes in the European Higher Education Area.

### DOC-CAREERS

EUA has begun a follow-up project to their doctoral programmes project that focuses on doctoral careers entitled "From Innovative Doctoral Training to Enhanced Career Opportunities" (DOC-CAREERS). This new study aims to explore the relations between doctoral training programmes and the career development and employability prospects for doctoral candidates.

The DOC-CAREERS project is groundbreaking in a number of respects: by underlining the need to incorporate demands from a highly diversified labour market directly in the planning of doctoral programme structures; by introducing case studies among employers to highlight such demands; and by focusing on mobility as an inter-sectorial as well as a cross-border activity. Read more at [www.grad.ac.uk/eua](http://www.grad.ac.uk/eua).

### FP7 Marie Curie Actions (January 2007)

UK GRAD and the UK Research Office (UKRO) have produced a briefing paper that highlights the opportunities of the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The new programme started on 1 January 2007, will run for seven years and has a total budget of EUR 50521 billion.

The programme of most interest to the UK GRAD network is the People programme – the 'Marie Curie Actions' (MCA), dedicated to researchers' career development. This programme has a budget of more than EUR 4.7 billion over the seven-year period, a 50% rise compared to FP6. More information about the Seventh Framework Programme and the briefing paper can be seen at: [www.grad.ac.uk/ukro](http://www.grad.ac.uk/ukro).

### International Conference on Doctoral Education in a Global Context

In September, participants from 19 countries across Europe and the US attended a conference on 'Doctoral Education in a Global Context' about the role of doctoral education in the production of global talent and national research capacity, and in strengthening economic competitiveness. The event was

sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the European University Association (EUA).

Participants agreed that doctoral education has moved to centre stage as the key to responding to the challenges of the knowledge society in North America and Europe. Information was exchanged about shared priorities such as: provision of adequate financing as crucial to success; better preparing postgraduate researchers for careers both inside and outside academia; emphasising teamwork; and enhancing the generic skills of PhD researchers to ensure their success in all aspects of their future careers as researchers and scholars and leaders/policy-makers. Discussion focused on issues of the structures of successful doctoral education systems and strategies for an inclusive graduate community in different regional and national contexts. Participants agreed that further discussion is needed in relation to the articulation of master's and doctoral education and definition, purpose, and structure of PhDs as well as professional doctorates.

### Charter & Code HE Sector Gap Analysis

Universities UK and Research Councils UK have published the results of a mapping exercise of the European Charter and Code against existing legislation, guidelines and good practice in the UK in order to provide a comprehensive gap analysis. The working group included wide stakeholder representation and the analysis demonstrated that the UK broadly meets the requirements of the European Charter and Code for Researchers. The publication uses a 'traffic-light' system to help institutions to identify actions to take to align themselves with the Code and Charter. You can download the full report at: [www.grad.ac.uk/researcherscareers](http://www.grad.ac.uk/researcherscareers) or pass the link on to others in your institution who may be interested in these developments.

# UK GRAD Update

## What's Happening in....?

### A Look at the Database of Practice

If you've ever wondered how other institutions are approaching skills training – then wonder no more – just take a look at the UK GRAD Database of Practice. It's been up and running now for just over a year. Over 460 examples of practice are currently live, and below we highlight just some of the more recent entries. The database gives a fascinating insight into the range of activities institutions are providing for their PhD and early stage researchers. Better still, each entry comes with contact details of the staff who are responsible for posting the practice, and supporting weblinks where appropriate. It's a very easy way of networking with colleagues and for getting some great ideas! We have picked out a few we thought you'd be especially interested in and reproduced them below, with permission.

### Peer Observation – University of Nottingham

[www.grad.ac.uk/practice/307](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/307)

A belief that supervision practice and research meetings had previously been 'hidden' experiences, conducted in private, led to the development of a Peer Observation project at the University of Nottingham.

Through a series of peer observations, guided reflections and focus group discussions, participants (postgraduate researchers, supervisors, research staff and PIs) have opportunities to explore different models for conducting doctoral research supervision and research project management meetings and find support in developing their awareness of generic skills. The project aims to identify good practice which could be disseminated in various ways including the development of training materials and practice guidelines.

The programme involves recruiting volunteers, briefing observers, matching observers with possible observations, gathering feedback and reflections, facilitating focus group discussions after the observations, and distilling themes and evidence of good practice for subsequent use in training and guidelines.

In the course of the project, volunteers (postgraduate researchers, research staff

and academic staff) observe either a doctoral supervision session or a research project management meeting, depending on which it is they themselves are currently engaged in. In order to preserve confidentiality, observers attend supervisions/meetings in a School other than their own. The project gives them an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and to develop their awareness and use of generic skills identified by the Roberts' Report.

Those participating in the project are briefed about their roles either through paper instructions or (for observers) in briefing sessions with their peers e.g. postgraduate researchers, supervisors or research staff. Observations are undertaken with a structured system of recording and reflecting on the experience. Observers subsequently attend a focus group with peers to reflect on some themes emerging from the observations, to consider the implications for their own approach to research supervision, and to explore the impact of the observation on their subsequent practice.

The structured process of reflection is unusual. In designing the briefing workshops for observers, Nottingham has developed innovative methods of using video clips of real episodes in supervision sessions to heighten the observational awareness of those taking part in the project.

The process was piloted late in 2005 and a full programme of observations began in January 2006. 2006-7 will not only see the project expanding into other Schools and increasing the cross-disciplinary nature of the observations, but will also see the emergence of some key themes and messages for both the training of postgraduate researchers and academics. In accordance with the original objectives, in 2007 the focus will also move to developing good practice guidelines and possible training materials.

### How to Conceptualise Research – Durham University

[www.grad.ac.uk/practice/470](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/470)

There is little insight into how postgraduate researchers conceptualise research or into the research concepts that this group finds particularly challenging – this research project is designed to address these issues:

- there is both a quantitative and

qualitative aspect to the research design: the externalisation of postgraduate researchers' conceptions of research will be captured via an online inventory; the Students' Conceptions of Research Inventory (SCoRI) has already been developed and extensively trailed

- the identification of threshold concepts will be a conceptually discrete study, with a focus on the social sciences. Interviews will be carried out with Course Convenors, other relevant members of academic staff and postgraduate researchers engaged on the University's faculty wide, ESRC recognised programme – the MA in Research Methods.

By both externalising postgraduate researchers' conceptions of research and identifying threshold concepts, Durham hopes to begin to construct a conceptual framework (which is empirically grounded) that has some explanatory power in terms of the quality of research outcomes. Modelling research as learning outcomes, in the way in which student learning has been modelled, can give us an insight into new ways in which to support its postgraduate body.

### A Development Programme for New and Aspiring Research Leaders – University of Newcastle

[www.grad.ac.uk/practice/466](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/466)

This programme offers a range of transferable skills training, designed to assist the professional development of postdoctoral researchers, who are new to, or aspire to, the role of research leader. It has been developed in response to information gathered from the recent Research Leaders Survey and focus groups within the University. There is a demand for a comprehensive development programme to enable researchers to acquire the skills for the multi-faceted role of the research leader. The programme includes:

- strategic planning (how to think strategically and consider the 'bigger picture' when planning your research and future career)
- the role of the PI (covering recruiting and selecting your staff and postgraduates, responsibilities as a manager, how to conduct appraisals, the Concordat, contracts)

- support for PIs and their researchers (human resources, mentoring, training and development, research services and business development)
- getting the most from your research team (performance management, avoiding conflict, positive management)
- project management
- financial management of the research project
- user engagement and interdisciplinary networking.

### Inaugural Public Lecture Series – University of Warwick

[www.grad.ac.uk/practice/322](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/322)

Held in the Arts Centre of the University of Warwick, these themed monthly lectures give newly awarded PhDs an opportunity to present short public lectures about their research.

In addition to sharing their research with the wider community and network with potential employers, the events offer an opportunity for the University to give credit and awards to their PhD researchers on completion and provides a platform to advertise the research that takes place within the University.

The event runs every other month and lectures are themed by discipline or faculty to allow for targeted invitations to specific groups and therefore increase the value of networking.

To take part, postgraduate researchers must have successfully completed the viva and made and submitted changes, but may or may not have formally graduated.

These high profile events are organised by the Graduate School in conjunction with the postgraduate careers advisors and postgraduate society.

### Researcher Managed Online Journal – Institute of Education

[www.grad.ac.uk/practice/305](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/305)

*Educate* is an online journal with all roles involved in its production and management taken by postgraduate researchers. Published twice a year under the auspices of the Doctoral School at the Institute of Education, University of London, *Educate* aims to provide:

- opportunities for the dissemination of the work of current postgraduate researchers at any stage of their research, and recent doctoral graduates, on any aspect of education or related areas

- opportunities for the dissemination of 'work in progress' to the academic community
- a resource for professionals involved in educational enquiry and research.

*Educate* has been in existence since 2001, but with recent developments in online journal software it was decided to build on its success by putting the archive online, managing the production of the journal online and opening up the editorial process to postgraduate researchers anywhere in the world. In addition, this expansion would be supported within the Institute of Education by the provision of training in editing, reviewing, proofreading etc to supplement existing provision on writing papers.

The online version was officially launched in late June 2006.

The journal itself has many innovative features allowing full-colour in articles, audio (the inaugural online editorial is available as a download spoken by Prof Geoff Whitty) and video, as well as feedback to authors and doctoral reviewers. Google analytics provides detailed data on every site visitor, including their geographic location indicating that visitors come from over 90 countries. Spontaneous submissions have already increased dramatically reducing the need for calls for papers. Feedback has been sought from the postgraduate researcher representatives during development and will be invited in regular feedback sessions.

Sessions to develop expertise in specific tasks such as writing papers are already provided by the Doctoral School. Additional classes are being provided by existing staff on editing, reviewing, proofreading etc. These sessions are also being delivered at Oxford University and Cambridge University to facilitate participation from doctoral researchers from those institutions.

It is hoped that the current cohort receiving training will go on to train further participants as the journal grows. [www.educatejournal.org](http://www.educatejournal.org)

### Organising Academic Conferences – University of Leicester

[www.grad.ac.uk/practice/355](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/355)

Not all learning has to be done through formal training courses. Many key aspects of personal development for researchers are likely to be best served through engagement in the life of their academic discipline. Conferences, in particular, can

provide an excellent opportunity to learn about the latest research within a given field, to network with other researchers, make useful contacts, help facilitate publication as well as providing researchers with a platform on which to present their research.

The Student Learning Centre now provides a package of training, consultancy and mentoring services for postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers wanting to organise their own academic conferences.

The training was first delivered in September 2006 and covers: what makes for a good conference experience; team roles, preferences and dynamics; and the fundamentals of event management. Consultancy and mentoring are provided on demand and will be tailored to meet specific needs.

The primary aim is to equip postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers with the skills and confidence required to plan and deliver an academic conference.

The wider academic community will benefit from attending and presenting at the conferences that are organised in that new research will be showcased, new ideas will be generated, new networking opportunities created, and the possibility of building personal profiles.

One of the biggest challenges is ensuring that the initial members of the organising committee stay engaged in the process, that the team is strong, supportive and has clearly identifiable roles that will enable the conference to be successfully delivered. This is why ongoing support is needed after the initial training has taken place, and a different approach required for each conference team.

### New and Improved!

UK GRAD has very recently made improvements to the Database of Practice. Now you can link to an individual record – a great time-saver for Roberts' reporting. The input process has been streamlined and the presentation of the list of practices improved, to include a summary of why each practice is distinctive or innovative so you can more easily scan your search results for practices that interest you. If you are looking for examples of practice from a particular institution, you can also rank the practice alphabetically or by date of entry. Go to: [www.grad.ac.uk/practice](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice).

## Using Technology



The following two articles demonstrate just some of the technology that can be used to deliver successful skills training.

### What is the Answer to the Postgraduate Research Training Question?

Dave Middleton (Open University, [d.j.middleton@open.ac.uk](mailto:d.j.middleton@open.ac.uk))

A quick quiz to start off with: (Tip – read the article that follows first and you will get top marks!)

- what postgraduate training programme is built around a virtual role play?
- what portable postgraduate training programme includes a specially commissioned 2-hour drama dealing with ethical issues?
- what postgraduate training programme, which satisfies ESRC criteria, contains an interview with award winning photojournalist Eamonn McCabe of The Guardian?
- what DVD resource contains a focus group on freedom and security, commissioned and run by international research company Ipsos MORI?
- what one-year programme, aimed at politics postgraduates, is currently being used by over 200 postgraduate researchers?

- what easy-to-navigate research training programme contains ice-skating penguins, camels in a discussion group, and a dog playing a triangle?
- what HEFCE-funded training programme has an observation tutorial in which postgraduate researchers are virtual observers?
- what self-contained 1-year training programme for researchers includes a website called Political Research Online?
- what training resource contains clips from *The Office* and *Monty Python*?
- what programme, developed by the Open University, is a resource for postgraduate researchers and staff on-campus or at a distance?

The answer to all the questions is the Politics Active Research Learning Environment, or as it more commonly known PARLE (pronounced in the French way, for no reason than that we prefer it).

### Engaging Postgraduate Researchers

PARLE is a 3-year £250,000 HEFCE project led by the Open University. Its premise is that students learn when they are engaged. In this self-contained DVD the postgraduate researchers are introduced to their new role as a parliamentary researcher working for Kim Toopsin, MP for Kentonville. Kim is a demanding employer asking the researcher to write briefing notes,

responses to constituents, drafts of papers and articles and research proposals. This is a tall order for any inexperienced researcher.

But, help is at hand. Stuart Dent (or “Stu”, as he is known to his friends) is able to provide guidance and support. His emails tend to include materials for the researcher to browse (web links, PDF documents, video) to help with the task at hand. In addition, Stu is a big fan of the Political Research Online tutorial system used by researchers in the Houses of Parliament. This website helps the researcher to brush up on their research skills, but if it were used by a postgraduate researcher it would look very much like a one-year research training programme! The website contains 14 interactive, multimedia tutorials covering research design, data collection, data analysis, and research issues. In working through the tutorials, the researcher is able to remember that all data has strengths and weaknesses and that the tasks require an understanding of data and research methods as well as an engagement with the substantive issues – be they, immigration, global warming, abortion rights, development, animal rights or democratic systems.

The tutorials have been designed to be self-contained learning experiences. Each of them contains a number of self-test exercises to help the postgraduate researcher navigate the tutorial.



Screenshot showing 'Political Research Online' website



Screenshot showing links

Some have been written around specially commissioned video sequences, while the ethics tutorial contains a 2-hour audio drama of a dialogue between a postgraduate researcher, Sally Jenkins, and her supervisor, Professor Eric Hafabee. I don't want to give too much away, but there is political intrigue, demonstrations and the arrest of a leading character. Oh yes, and we teach a bit about ethics too....

Tutorials also contain links to web resources and to PDF files contained on the DVD. The library section lists all the assets, including the multimedia applications, so that tutors are able to use PARLE as a resource to build their own course. The flexibility inherent in this system is such that tutors can adopt the whole package (role play and all) or use just parts of it (perhaps a tutorial on discourse analysis or doing a literature review), or take out just one 'asset' (technical term meaning software element) – perhaps the ethics triangle or the margin of error polling calculator for use in their own seminars and workshops – or the sea serpent (yes, you read that correctly!)

### Developing PARLE

At present the PARLE project is releasing evaluation copies of the DVD to any department wishing to take part. So far, the DVD is being used by York, Aston, East Anglia, Hull, Coventry, Newcastle, Cardiff and the Open University. Over 200 postgraduate researchers are taking part in the evaluation already. The full DVD is planned for launch in June 2007 with an official launch at Westminster currently being planned.

Some interest has already been shown by other disciplines, including health care, criminology, business and education. The framework is easily adaptable as are the tutorials, many of which would work for any postgraduate researcher. The plan, as the HEFCE part of the project concludes, is to encourage as many politics departments as possible to adopt the DVD (preferably in its entirety, we didn't



Ice-skating penguin!

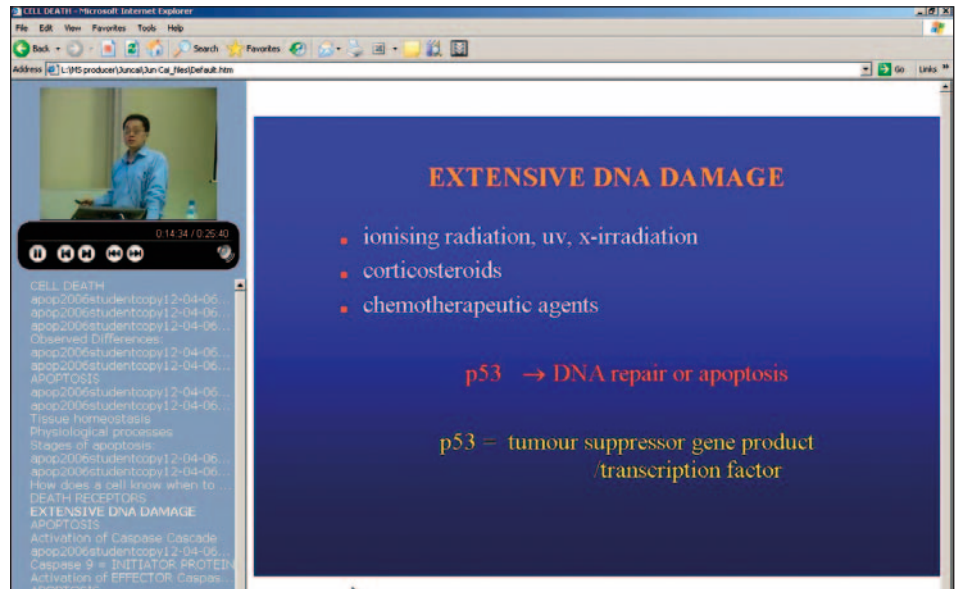


Fig 1: The user can view a video of the lecture, whilst viewing the slides and also has access to relevant bookmarks and weblinks.

do all that work for nothing – we hope!), and then to see whether there is any possibility of cascading the approach taken into other discipline areas.

With the change in research funding after the next RAE it is highly likely that postgraduate numbers and the training environment will become key drivers of the new metrics system (along with research grants, citations, and being in a University ending in 'bridge or 'ford). Given that much postgraduate research training is still offered on a generic basis, often taught by people who would rather be doing something else, then a resource such as PARLE offers the possibility of subject-focussed research training on a value for money basis.

*\*And, if you are wondering about the penguins, camels, dog and sea serpent, we just could not think of a better way to introduce a tutorial on planning your research. It all makes more sense when you see the disc.*

Further details of PARLE can be obtained via the PARLE website: [www.open.ac.uk/parle](http://www.open.ac.uk/parle) or by emailing us at [parle@open.ac.uk](mailto:parle@open.ac.uk).

## Electronic Delivery of Postgraduate Research Training

The School of Optometry at Cardiff University has a large number of postgraduate researchers who are currently studying remotely in Europe and

North America. The remote accessibility provided by e-based technology is therefore of particular interest to the School. A pilot project was begun in 2005 to look at the electronic delivery of lectures and postgraduate research training, as well as a trial of e-based supervision.

### Recording Lectures for Revision Purposes

Over a period of five months from October 2005, the School successfully installed, tested and implemented an electronic archive system for slide-based lectures. The resulting archive and related documentation now permanently resides on the School's Blackboard system. A screen capture from an archived lecture can be seen in Fig 1 (above).

Overall, the resulting product is of high quality and is relatively simple to download and view, requiring only the installation of a web browser with embedded MediaPlayer Software. The required network resources are minimal, although the quality of archives could be greatly improved.

### Live Lectures

Although it is useful to have the information from lectures accessible to view at any time, this system does not allow for a live distance lecturing system or for any interaction between the lecturer and the audience. Traditional webcasting has the same limitations. The School therefore began investigating Access Grid<sup>1</sup> technology [www.accessgrid.org](http://www.accessgrid.org) (open source<sup>2</sup> software) and this seems to provide a good solution.

The advantages of using Access Grid as an infrastructure in a lecture room is that it includes multiple video streams eg speaker, presentation material, live experiments, views of other participants, and a high quality audio environment which can provide dual communication between two or more sites. In addition, all of the Access Grid software is freely available.

In order to test the usability and reliability of the system, the School used this technology for webcasting a lecture which was broadcast between two sites in June 2006. The infrastructure of the remote lecture hall was a 'subset' of the infrastructure at the primary site with basic camera and microphone equipment. Postgraduate researchers with standard webcams and microphones connected to their home PC could also join the session from remote sites. Participants were impressed with the technology, but were less satisfied with the quality of the audio.

This trial brought a number of other issues to the fore – the execution was more technically difficult than first thought, and the lecture was simply a 'talking head'. The issue of unicast or multicast also needs to be addressed. (Unicast servers provide a stream to a single user at a time, while multicast servers can support a larger audience by serving content simultaneously to multiple users and saves bandwidth).

## E-Supervision

Another aim of the project was to set up and trial interactive means of e-based supervision. Although Access Grid technology is an ideal solution for two-way interactive supervision to students at geographically distant sites, it requires a very specific network infrastructure in place. However the user-interface is less than friendly so this could pose problems.

The School looked at solutions which were very cost effective, free or open source, and were easy to set up. Users want to plug in and go! After much investigation, Skype technology was deemed to be the cheapest, easiest solution. With a standard microphone and web camera set up on their desk, Skype users can make free telephone calls and video calls through their computer using Skype software and the internet. Skype also allows users to host a small group meeting with five people from different locations. The basis of the system is free communication between users of Skype software; however the product also allows

Skype users to communicate with users of regular landline and mobile telephones. This software is currently available free of charge and can be downloaded from the internet. ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)).

After the internet connections were configured and permissions were obtained, a schedule of supervision was drawn up. The use of Skype has greatly reduced the costs and loss of productivity associated with supervision of remote postgraduate researchers: the supervisor is able to remain in his/her own office while conducting supervision meetings; the PhD researchers report decreased stress and an increased feeling of independence when supervised using this technology. The technology allows the supervisor to control the video image and provide audio feedback to the student without disrupting the session.

The project is being continued in 2007. For more information please contact Dr Nan Zhang, School of Optometry, Cardiff University [ZhangN@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ZhangN@cardiff.ac.uk) [www.cardiff.ac.uk/optom](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/optom). Our thanks to Dr Zhang for providing information for this article.

<sup>1</sup> The Access Grid is an advanced videoconference system where people in different places meet in a 'virtual venue' using audio and video tools, and other shared applications, such as presentations. It is particularly suited to group-to-group collaboration between potentially large numbers of sites. It can also be used for collaborative work sessions, seminars, tutorials and training.

<sup>2</sup> Open Source Software is software for which the underlying programming code is available to the users so that they may read it, make changes to it, and build new versions of the software incorporating their changes. There are many types of Open Source Software, mainly differing in the licensing term under which (altered) copies of the source code may (or must be) redistributed.

## Miscellany

### Support for PIs

Newly appointed PIs are expected to lead and manage a research team, secure new research grants, liaise with stakeholders, publish, respond to institutional issues and agendas, and maintain and develop their own research expertise. Frequently they simultaneously carry out a range of teaching and administrative duties too.

To help new Principal Investigators navigate the bewildering array of leadership and management

responsibilities that come with this role, a new online resource has been developed. Aimed at new and inexperienced Principal Investigators and also for those who support them, such as Research Officers and trainers, it provides guidance and support in five key areas:

- leading a research team
- legal and ethical issues
- developing your researchers
- managing your research career
- managing research finances

A key feature is the explicit focus on the issues identified by PIs in a large-scale survey and in local focus groups. These issues are exemplified through the use of case studies, scenarios and quotations provided by real PIs.

It has been developed by the University of Leicester, the University of Cambridge and Loughborough University in partnership with Imperial College London, the London School of Economics and University College London. Funding was provided by HEFCE's Leadership, Governance and Management Fund.

For details of the project contact Miranda Carr, Project Manager (Cambridge) Tel: 01223 765786 email: [mjc204@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mjc204@cam.ac.uk) [www.le.ac.uk/researchleader](http://www.le.ac.uk/researchleader).

### Worth a Look

A new development from UK GRAD is GRAD Britain – a termly newsletter written by postgraduate researchers and people who have recently finished their PhD – for people like them. Based on the successful LonDoc, the newsletter focuses not on the nitty-gritty technical details but the things which all postgraduate researchers have in common – the result is humorous and quirky! The newsletter is edited by Paul Wicks, a postdoctoral fellow in the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College. Plans for the future include hosting an online forum. Postgraduate researchers will be able to sign up to have the newsletter emailed to them. Read GRAD Britain at: [www.grad.ac.uk/gradbritain](http://www.grad.ac.uk/gradbritain).

### Glittering Prizes

Autumn was awards time in the HE sector, and it was good to see that the hard work and dedication of those involved in skills training is getting recognition.

Our congratulations to Imperial College, London University who won the THES RCUK and UK GRAD sponsored award

for their outstanding support of early career researchers. You can read about their programme at [www.grad.ac.uk/practice/271](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/271). Well done also to those who were shortlisted: the universities of Bristol, Edinburgh, Oxford and Plymouth.

Congratulations are also in order for Exeter University. Dr Steve Gaskin, Director of Skills Development, was runner up in the AUA (Association of University Administrators) Excellence Awards. Entrants were asked to describe a project or programme on which they had worked, which they considered to be an example of excellence and Steve's

entry described Exeter's Effective Researcher Development Programme. Examples of elements of the programme can be viewed at:

[www.grad.ac.uk/practice/340](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/340) (Student Skills Ambassadors) and [www.grad.ac.uk/practice/341](http://www.grad.ac.uk/practice/341) (e-profile).

### New Research Council

The name for a new large facilities council has been announced. The Science and Technology Facilities Council will bring together the work of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC), the Council of the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils

(CCLRC) and the nuclear physics work of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). The STFC will be a member of Research Councils UK. The proposed merger follows the Government's 'Next Steps' consultation, which was announced in March 2006. Read about progress on: [www.newrc.research-councils.ac.uk](http://www.newrc.research-councils.ac.uk).

### Did you Know?

In 2005 6,600 doctorates were awarded as a result of Research Council funding, providing high-level skills for the research base and for industry. (Source: RCUK email bulletin).

# UK GRAD Events

For more details of any of these events go to **Diary of Events** on the front page of [www.grad.ac.uk](http://www.grad.ac.uk).

Key: Orange = Events for Researchers

## April

- 2 NW HUB PRASH Postgraduate Researchers in Arts, Social Science and Humanities, University of Liverpool
- 2-5 Edinburgh local GRADschool, Heriott Watt University
- 18 UK GRAD Programme of Delivering Researcher Development – London Hub: session on Preparing for Academic Practice, London School of Economics
- 23-25 National GRADschool, Brighton
- 23-27 UCL local GRADschool, Advanced Personal and Professional Management Skills
- 29-3 UCL local GRADschool, Advanced Personal and Professional Management Skills

## May

- 2-5 UWE local GRADschool, Personal Skills Development
- 7-11 National GRADschool, Windermere
- 9 YNE Hub Poster Competition
- 11 London Hub Good Practice Workshop: From Fieldwork to Completion, School of Oriental and African Studies, London
- 17 Joint London Hub and East of England Hub Good Practice Workshop: Supporting our International Research Students
- 21-25 National GRADschool, Bournemouth
- 22-25 Edinburgh local GRADschool
- 25 NW Hub Good Practice event, Manchester Town Hall

## June

- 1 The White Rose Interpersonal Skills School Part 1
- 4-8 National GRADschool, Nottingham
- 12-15 Edinburgh local GRADschool
- 19-21 Manchester University local GRADschool, Developing the Postgraduate Manager

## July

- 4-6 The White Rose Interpersonal Skills School Part 2
- 9 NW Hub PRISM – Postgraduate Researchers in Science and Medicine
- 11 Midlands Hub Poster Competition
- 23-26 Manchester EnviroGRAD
- 30-4 National GRADschool, Exeter

## August

- 13-16 UCL local GRADschool, Advanced Personal and Professional Management Skills

## September

- 12 UK GRAD National Conference
- 13 UK HERD conference
- 17-22 National GRADschool, Cambridge

## October

- 22-26 National GRADschool, Brighton

## November

- 5-9 National GRADschool, Windermere

# Keep in Touch

UK GRAD has a network of 8 Regional Hubs. Each Hub has a Hub Co-ordinator and Project Officer, and is hosted by a university in the Region. If you would like to be on the mailing list, to receive Regional newsletters, email alerts and details of local events, contact your local Hub:

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