

# overVIEW

## UK GRAD Bulletin for Supervisors

### Welcome

This is the fourth edition of overVIEW and may be the last in its current format. You may wonder at such a short life, and also be surprised that, as Editor, rather than bemoaning its (possible) demise, I am delighted to be announcing this! The reason becomes clear in the first article of this edition – *Next Steps in the 'researcher development' programme*. This gives details of the new £15million contract to support the personal, professional and career management of researchers awarded by the Research Councils to CRAC: the Career Development Organisation and its partners. (CRAC has been managing the UK GRAD programme since 2002). The new contract has a wider remit to include research staff as well as postgraduate researchers – so we will also be supporting principal investigators as well as supervisors (acknowledging that some

of you wear both hats.) So, we are very much looking forward to 2008 when we can start extending our reach. There may be changes ahead – to overVIEW and to other parts of the programme – but we will continue to provide you with news, views and opinions which we hope you value. If you are in the position of supervising research staff as well as PGRs, we'd be interested in hearing what items you would like to see.

This is a bumper edition of overVIEW, with an emphasis on one of the key aims of the current UK GRAD programme – and indeed of the new contract – that of sharing good practice. We have a case study from Edinburgh showing how a two day course developed by one HEI has been rolled out successfully across Scotland and in other Hub regions (page 7) and reports from a number of workshops looking at supporting PGRs, specifically

international PGRs and those involved in fieldwork. We also have some thoughtful musings on the art of supervision – from someone new to the job, someone from abroad and someone who has recently retired – fascinating stuff!

We report on two initiatives led by the Higher Education Academy: *PRES – the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*, and *Redefining the Doctorate*. The first gives an insight into what current PGRs think of the process of undertaking a doctorate, and the second is an opportunity for you to contribute to a discussion on the UK doctorate and on how it is likely to change over the next decade. Looking at the results of the first, may influence your thoughts on the second.

Anne Goodman, Editor

### Next Steps in the 'researcher development' programme

As you may know, in August Research Councils UK (RCUK) announced that CRAC: the Career Development Organisation and its partners were to be awarded a new £15m contract to support the personal, professional and career development of researchers in the UK.

The current UK GRAD Programme contract ended in December 2007. A competitive tender process took place in 2006/7 to confirm a new contractor for a programme with a wider remit to include research staff as well as postgraduate researchers, and this was awarded to CRAC.

CRAC will work in partnership with Dr Janet Metcalfe, the current director of the UK GRAD Programme, the host institutions for the UK GRAD Regional Hubs (the universities of Cardiff, Edinburgh, Hertfordshire, Leeds, Manchester, Sussex, Warwick and Kings College, London), and with UKHERD.

On page 2 Dr Janet Metcalfe takes time to look back over the last five years, to outline the aims of the new contract and to look forward to 2008 and beyond.

**CRAC: The Career Development Organisation** is an independent, national organisation dedicated to supporting career development and active, career related learning. Over the last five decades, CRAC has created and delivered personal skills and career development courses, all within the context of the needs of business, academia and the participants themselves. Working with hundreds of thousands of students and professionals, and in conjunction with schools and universities across the UK, CRAC has a complement of its own quality-assured and innovative programmes. CRAC has been managing the UK GRAD programme since 2002. [www.crac.org.uk](http://www.crac.org.uk)

**UK Higher Education Researcher Development (UKHERD)** was established to support the people responsible for providing development opportunities for research staff and to inform future policy relating to research careers. Its mission is to enhance research capacity and performance by fostering better management, better professional development and better career structures for researchers. Its aims are to share good practice, build effective policy and influence key decision-makers. [www.ukherd.org.uk](http://www.ukherd.org.uk)

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Winter 2008



## Looking forward to the New Year

Dr Janet Metcalfe, Director, UK GRAD Programme

As I write this, the end of the year is fast approaching. Not only has this year flown past, but also the last five years. Looking back as the UK GRAD Programme comes to the end of its five-year contract, I can't believe how fast time has flown by, or how much we have all achieved over this period.

We launched the UK GRAD Programme at our (pre-Roberts) 'Good Practice Workshop' in January 2003. At that time we had three nascent 'Hubs' – hosted by the Universities of Manchester, Leeds and Edinburgh – and lots of good intentions of encouraging local universities to work together to share practice and embed personal development of researchers into research degree programmes. We didn't know whether it would work, but we all believed it was the right approach.

Even so, I have to confess to being surprised by hugely positive reaction to the idea of the regional Hubs. Within the first year, the Hubs had engaged all their regional institutions, identifying key contacts, running regional good practice events and building and informing a database of individuals interested in developing postgraduate researchers. By the end of the first year, HEIs in three regions had got together to form Hubs. We now have eight Hubs covering all the institutions across the UK.

Of course, Sir Gareth Roberts' recommendations in 'Set for Success' and the accompanying Government money helped enormously. This provided both the money and senior level attention at universities, particularly with large numbers of Research Council funded researchers, to highlight and kick-start the agenda. The 2003 introduction of the QAA's revised Section One of their Code of Practice helped too.

I believe, however, that what has been most influential has been the willingness of individuals and institutions to engage with our vision for the UK GRAD Programme: 'for all postgraduate researchers to be fully equipped and encouraged to complete their studies successfully and to make the transition from their PhD studies to their future careers'.

Our ethos always has been to work in partnership with all stakeholders: to promote the importance of developing

postgraduate researchers, encourage the sharing of practice and experience, and to develop and provide opportunities for skills development. I can honestly say that I continue to be overwhelmed by the enthusiasm, openness and commitment shown throughout the extended UK GRAD network, now consisting of over 3500 registered contacts, in supporting our work.

But I don't want you to think that because this is the end of the UK GRAD contract, we are saying good-bye. CRAC, in partnership with myself, UK GRAD Hubs and UKHERD (the Higher Education Researcher Development group), is thrilled to have secured funding for the next five years. The new programme – yet to be named – will continue to build on the momentum gained during the UK GRAD contract in supporting postgraduate researchers, while widening the scope of our remit to include research staff.

Through the new programme we will continue to provide ongoing activities and support for postgraduate researchers in much the same way as through the UK GRAD Programme. Our 2008 programme of provision of national and local GRADschools and other courses for postgraduate researchers can be read about later on in [overVIEW](#).

In preparation for the official launch of the new programme in September 2008 we will be working with the Hubs, the UKHERD network, and more generally with the sector to develop our offer to research staff and individuals supporting research staff.

Overall, our vision is that the UK is world-class in supporting the personal, professional, and career development of all researchers. Building on the successes of UK GRAD, the new programme aims to:

- champion the development and implementation of effective policy
- enhance higher education provision through sharing practice and resources
- provide access to development opportunities and resources
- build an evidence base to support the researcher development agenda.

There are specific innovations that will characterise the new 'researcher development' programme:

- five overarching network groups comprising researchers, HE staff supporting researchers, those interested in policy relating to researcher development, academics and employers, will engage all stakeholders interested in developing and supporting researchers
- the website will be 'the first port of call for information about developing researchers and profiling researcher careers'. Extensive tools for facilitating online communities will complement a 'just for researchers' section, incorporating and building on the proposed *Research Careers Mapping Tool* as well as targeted support for other stakeholder groups
- a trainers' support unit will provide access to development, training resources, advice, and guidance to HE staff responsible for developing researchers. It will also support the programme of local GRADschools
- national provision will include a small programme of national GRADschools and a specific programme of activities to support Research Council-funded researchers focused around collaborative activities with individual Councils, capitalising on the training and support they offer directly to their own researchers
- a new incubator unit will work with the sector to innovate and leverage existing good practice identified in and outside the sector. It will pilot and promote the latest developments in providing career management and personal and professional development opportunities for researchers
- building an evidence base will have a higher priority in the new programme and a research and development unit will undertake research and evaluation projects to complement and support the agenda of the Rugby Team.

Throughout the year, we will continue to keep you informed and consult you as we develop our provision within the new programme and specifically to support the research staff agenda.

We are all enthusiastically looking forward to the New Year, with an exciting list of resolutions that, together with our existing and new colleagues, networks and stakeholders, we will achieve during 2008. Here's to a Happy New Year!

# UK GRAD Update

## Trends in destinations for doctoral researchers



***'This ground-breaking study provides, for the first time, a comparison of first destinations data for doctoral researchers over a three-year period. I recommend it to anyone who is interested in supporting researchers, to current and prospective doctoral researchers, and all those who have an interest in learning more about the careers of researchers.'***

**Margaret Dane, Chief Executive, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)**

The UK GRAD Programme's latest study *What Do PhDs Do? – Trends* provides, for the first time, a comparison of first destination data for doctoral researchers over a three-year period.

The study provides a commentary on key changes and trends and up-to-date first destination information, covering UK PhD graduates from UK institutions who responded to the DLHE surveys in 2004, 2005, and 2006.

The study found that employment rates of UK PhD graduates were consistently above those of first degree and masters' graduates and that PhD graduates were employed across all employment sectors and occupations. Unemployment rates for

PhD graduates remained between 3% and 4% over the three years.

*'What Do PhDs Do? – Trends* provides strong evidence of the consistent employability of PhD graduates across all sectors.' says Dr Janet Metcalfe, Director of the UK GRAD Programme and co-author of the report. 'The needs of employers in an increasingly global and innovation-driven economy are changing. The process of doing a PhD involves creativity, problem solving, working independently, assimilating information, and defending ideas, as well as a whole host of other skills. These are all valuable attributes for today's knowledge-based economy.'

Among those working in the UK, the education sector was the most popular destination for all disciplines (at an average of 50%), except for biomedical scientists. Over 45% of biomedical scientists opted for jobs in the health and social work sector as their top destination.

Social sciences and arts and humanities PhD graduates were most likely, compared to other discipline groups, to be employed as lecturers in higher education (at around a third). Overall HE lecturer rates ranged from 15% to 13% of the total over the three years.

Conversely, natural scientists were likely to be employed in postdoctoral positions,

particularly biological scientists (where a third were employed as postdoctoral researchers). On average 22% of PhD graduates were employed as postdoctoral researchers in HE (research staff).

Overall, a third of PhD graduates went into research occupations across all employment sectors as their first destination. However, this disguises large variations across the disciplines from two thirds of biological sciences PhD graduates to just less than a fifth of arts and humanities PhD graduates.

*'What Do PhDs Do? – Trends* confirms the employability of PhD graduates at first destination. However, to really see the contribution that PhD graduates make to our society and economy we need to look at long-term trends over the length of PhD careers,' Dr Metcalfe adds. 'We are looking forward to analysing the recent HESA longitudinal survey data, which will give us a snapshot of a sample of PhD graduates career paths 3.5 years after graduation.'

*What do PhDs Do? – Trends* is part of a series of publications (including *What Do PhDs Do?*, *What Do PhDs Do? – A Regional Analysis*) that are available online and downloadable in pdf formats at [www.grad.ac.uk/wdppd](http://www.grad.ac.uk/wdppd).

## Largest ever UK GRAD Conference

On 12 September 2007, over 300 people participated in the UK GRAD Annual Conference – Profiting from Postgraduate Talent. The theme this year was 'making the most of the skills agenda', particularly in light of two recent reports and their implications:

- the Leitch Review published in December 2006 which highlighted a focus on higher level skills such as enterprise, innovation and management to ensure the economic competitiveness of the UK
- the Worry Report which explores the Government's role in measuring the social, cultural, and economic impact of research, researchers, and their careers.

The event focussed on exploring how we can move forward the skills agenda by utilising the related streams of preparing for academic practice, developing an enterprise culture and improving knowledge transfer. Key themes which emerged from the day were:

- Ensuring the UK remains at the forefront in supporting researchers: reflecting on international approaches
- Building on the Roberts' agenda to develop high level skills: creativity, enterprise, innovation and leadership
- Developing an evidence base on the effectiveness of skills development: enhancing practice and ensuring funding (...continued on next page)

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- Understanding the needs, motivations and careers paths of PhD researchers

Speakers and contributors included: Dr Alexandra Bitusikova (Research Programme Manager, European University Association); Debra Stewart (President, Council of Graduate Schools US); Professor Chris Park (Senior Associate, Higher Education Academy; Director of Graduate School, Lancaster University); Professor Robert J. Allison (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex); Melanie Devine (History Lecturer, Teesside University); Dr Paul Redmond (Head of Careers and Employability, Careers and Employability Service, University of Liverpool) and Dr Chris Winter (New Venture Partners).

The conference report is available from UK GRAD [orders@grad.ac.uk](mailto:orders@grad.ac.uk) or your local Hub. Plenary and workshop slides are available at [www.researcherconferences.org.uk](http://www.researcherconferences.org.uk).

## GRADschool programme launched

In 2008 the new 'researcher development' programme will offer a small programme of national GRADschools under the UK GRAD Programme banner in addition to supporting individual institutions who run their own GRADschools. The new programme and its smaller offering of courses for researchers responds to the growth in training and development opportunities available within institutions.

As part of a wider programme of resources and activities for those who support the personal and professional development of researchers, the programme will continue to offer central activities and resources directly to researchers themselves. This will include: online resources and publications, a programme of national activities like Careers in Focus events (focussing on career paths in particular sectors) and some innovative new pilot programmes. For further information and updates about our 2008 activities, please go to [www.grad.ac.uk](http://www.grad.ac.uk). To find out more about GRADschools, go to [www.grad.ac.uk/gradschools](http://www.grad.ac.uk/gradschools).

As places on GRADschools are limited, we advise eligible postgraduate researchers\* to apply early.

(\*Any doctoral student in the 2nd year or above is eligible to attend a National GRADschool. Local GRADschools all have specific eligibility criteria; PGRs will need to contact the local GRADschool organiser for more information. Those funded by AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC or STFC, and final year PGRs funded by Wellcome Trust, can attend a GRADschool for FREE.)

## Ask the Experts!

At the end of November, UK GRAD hosted a whole day of online chats for PGRs. *Career planning – How to stand out from the crowd*, looked at careers in academia, the not-for-profit sector, the public and the private sectors. A team of

experts, supported by a Careers Consultant, were on hand for PGRs to discover what really is involved in these jobs, what opportunities are available, what employers are really looking for in applicants, and what skills and strengths it will take to succeed in what can be a very competitive environment.

Despite a technical problem that caused the cancellation of the public sector chat, the event was extremely successful and attracted over 90 participants throughout the day.

Further details about the event, including the transcripts from the chat, can be found at [www.grad.ac.uk/asktheexperts2007](http://www.grad.ac.uk/asktheexperts2007). The archive of previous Ask the Experts events on Writing Up, CVs and Applications, Future Careers and Careers in Academia can be found on [www.grad.ac.uk/asktheexperts2006](http://www.grad.ac.uk/asktheexperts2006).

## GRADBritain

This online magazine is written by PGRs for PGRs – the third issue is available online at [www.grad.ac.uk/gradbritain](http://www.grad.ac.uk/gradbritain) (issue 4 will be out in late February 08). Why not tell your PGRs to sign up – or have a sneaky look yourself!

Here's a taster of what's in the third issue:

- Managing two supervisors
- Generation 'Y' or 'Why'?
- The PhD departure lounge
- Stuck in viva limbo
- Overseas secondments.

## UKHERD Third Annual Conference Researcher Development: From policy to practice

Dr Sara Williams



On the day after the UK GRAD conference in September, over 220 delegates gathered for the third Annual Conference of

UKHERD. A sign of the growing link between the UKHERD and UK GRAD agendas was evidenced by over 100 delegates attending both conferences.

The conference focussed on the strategic and practical issues faced in supporting the development of research careers in HEIs, and addressed two key challenges:

- how to create an environment that supports at a strategic level, the management of research careers
- how to provide the effective development programmes and support services that are appropriate and relevant to research staff.

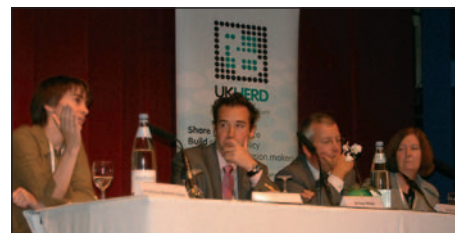
The Chair of UKHERD, Dr Sara Williams, (Training and Development Manager, Cardiff University) opened proceedings and a strategic overview of the current landscape for researchers was given by Professor Mary Bownes, Vice-Principal for

Research Training and Community Relations, University of Edinburgh. Professor Paul Blackmore, Director of the Centre for Study of HE, Coventry University addressed the area of Effective Leadership in HE- Impact on the Performance, Development and Management of Researchers. This was followed by a lively debate between Dr Iain Cameron, Head of Research Careers and Diversity Unit, RCUK and Dr Paul Wicks, a postdoctoral research fellow from Kings College London, on the new concordat for researchers. A very interesting and thought provoking session

was delivered by Professor Ottoline Leyser from the University of York who shared her thoughts, as a PI, on building research capacity and career paths for researchers. In the afternoon, delegates were able to attend workshops covering a range of topics including developing a training and development programme for research staff; PI development;

knowledge transfer in the arts and humanities; enterprise training, career development; evaluation, and accreditation.

To see the plenary and workshop slides go to [www.grad.ac.uk/researcherconferences](http://www.grad.ac.uk/researcherconferences)



Professor Ottoline Leyser (l.), Dr Paul Wicks, Dr Iain Cameron, Professor Mary Bownes

## Rugby Team Projects

# The Rugby Team

evaluating the impacts of developing researcher skills

In previous issues of *overVIEW* we have reported on the activities of the Rugby team – a sector-led working group, drawn from a cross-section of HEIs and other relevant stakeholders, with a mission to ‘propose meaningful and workable ways of evaluating the effectiveness of skills development in early career researchers’.

### New Reports

The team has recently published two reports –  
Employers’ views of researchers’ skills  
A review of the existing literature into employers’ views of the skills of early career researchers.  
What are Research Staff for?  
This report brings together the opinions and perspectives of line managers, funders and researchers in light of the recent initiatives in research staff training and development within the UK.

Both reports can be downloaded from [www.grad.ac.uk/rugby](http://www.grad.ac.uk/rugby).

### Impact Framework

The Ruby team has been involved in developing an impact framework, looking at how to assess the benefit of skills

development from the perspective of different stakeholder groups. The latest version was presented at the UK GRAD conference in September 2007 ([www.grad.ac.uk/rugbyteam](http://www.grad.ac.uk/rugbyteam)), and the final version will be presented at the UK GRAD Policy Forum to be held in Birmingham in January 2008.

### STaRRS survey

STaRSS stands for the skills agenda through the eyes of supervisors’ a survey aimed at soliciting supervisors’ views of the skills agenda. Developed by members of the Rugby team, a pilot was run with three institutions in 2007.

The survey asked questions related to: knowledge and understanding, evaluation of usefulness, uptake, and extent of supervisors’ own engagement in developing researchers’ skills.

The responses gave some interesting results:

- of all aspects of the skills agenda PDP (Personal Development Planning) was the most disliked
- fewer than 50% of respondents realised that research assistants and early career researchers are also covered by the Roberts’/skills agenda
- most respondents saw the skills agenda as related to future employment rather than contributing to the quality of research degree programmes
- many perceived the Roberts’ agenda to be about uniform and prescriptive training
- there was a general concern about inappropriate bureaucratisation of supervision.

The key messages to institutions from this pilot are:

- provide more explanation of the skills agenda in more appropriate medium
- reduce heavy bureaucracy and jargon
- promote more engagement of supervisors with decision-making to allay perception of external or ‘top down’ imposition.



### Next Steps

The Rugby team are now reviewing this project and exploring the possibility of sources of funding with a view to providing the survey tool to institutions.

## Enterprise Skills for Researchers

In February 2007, EPSRC provided an additional £1.4m of funding to 29 UK institutions holding the highest number of postgraduates/research staff funded by EPSRC. In response to this additional funding, a joint workshop arranged by CRAC in conjunction with UK GRAD, and funded by RCUK, was held in April to explore collaborative provision. This identified three key areas and projects where it would be useful to have more

information and knowledge within the researcher community.

Those identified are:

- intrapreneurship within an academic culture
- the use of placements and collaborative programmes to develop enterprise skills
- a sector overview of the development of enterprise skills for researchers (including social enterprise.)

A report from this workshop can be read at [www.grad.ac.uk/researchcouncils](http://www.grad.ac.uk/researchcouncils). In September, UK GRAD invited all HEIs, including those who did not receive additional EPSRC funding, to participate in these projects. A number of institutions are working in collaboration to develop the project focussing on intrapreneurship; if you are interested in being involved please contact [ellen.pearce@grad.ac.uk](mailto:ellen.pearce@grad.ac.uk).

## Entrepreneurship Days at the British Library

Two very successful Entrepreneurship Days for postgraduate researchers were held at the British Library in late November and early December 2007.

All PGRs attending, from different universities across the UK, were already seriously considering starting their own business – or indeed had already started. During the day, they learnt the importance of assessing their markets and identifying target audiences and key players, before putting it all into practice.

Working in small groups, delegates had to come up with a business idea before using the online business information databases in the Library's Business & IP Centre to explore the market size, key audiences, competitors, potential partners and industry trends. The Business & IP Centre is well equipped for this as it offers access to the UK's largest collection of business information, including market research reports, company directories, trade journals and IP resources.

The day ended with team presentations to an expert panel, who considered each team's passion for their idea as well as the idea itself and the use they had made of the Library's resources.

The days were organised in partnership with UK GRAD, and supported by Imperial College Graduate School, and form part of the Library's national research training days for postgraduate researchers. For further information about this programme, contact [highereducation@bl.uk](mailto:highereducation@bl.uk).

## European Update

*overVIEW* always likes to keep you abreast of what is happening in Europe – if you are new to this area, look at *overVIEW* No 2 – Summer 2006 ([www.grad.ac.uk/supervisors](http://www.grad.ac.uk/supervisors)) for a cut-out-and-keep guide to initiatives in Europe which relate to researchers, or look at [www.grad.ac.uk/europolicy](http://www.grad.ac.uk/europolicy) for fuller explanations.

In this section:

- [European Research Area](#)
- [UK response to Bologna](#)
- [Bologna shaping the Agenda](#)

### European Research Area

The UK HE Europe Unit and Universities UK hosted a high-level round table meeting on 27 July on the European Commission Green Paper on the European Research Area (ERA). Participants came from HEIs, funding and Research Councils, the Royal Society and the European University Association (EUA). The meeting focused on the UK HE sector response to the Green Paper.

Discussion centred on researcher mobility, excellence in research institutions, knowledge sharing, and cooperation with other regions of the world. Commenting generally on the Green Paper participants

agreed on the need for a solid evidence base for the Commission's proposal. There was also a focus on the importance of full economic costing of research activity. Transparency of HE sector funding in Europe is essential if greater comparability is to be achieved and the sustainability of European research secured. This was also a position likely to be taken by EUA. There was concern over proposals for new initiatives at European level to increase researcher mobility. There was a consensus that the intergovernmental Bologna Process structures and discussion on the doctoral cycle could be used here to good effect rather than new regulatory mechanisms.

It was felt that the European Commission should support existing networks of excellence, and evaluate outcomes of existing initiatives. Solutions for knowledge sharing activities should also be flexible and locally appropriate, and there was no appetite for a new instrument at European level in this area.

The Europe Unit and Universities UK submitted a UK HE sector response to the Commission's Green Paper at the end of August.



## UK Response to Bologna Process

The UK Government has published its response to the Education and Skills Select Committee report on the Bologna Process.

In its response, the Government welcomed the fact that MPs had recognised the importance of the Process and that it is vital for the UK to continue to be fully involved. The response also welcomed the fact that the Committee recognised that the Process is about greater comparability and compatibility rather than standardisation or harmonisation. The Government indicated its belief that there is a need for improved awareness and understanding of this in the HE sector.

However, on the role of the European Commission in HE policy, the Government stressed that the Commission had 'a role

to play in supporting the Bologna Process and that this is consistent with its role in relation to higher education within the EU'. It also stated that the organisation of higher education systems remained a matter of Member States national competence. See [www.grad.ac.uk/bologna](http://www.grad.ac.uk/bologna).

## Bologna Shaping the Agenda

This was the title of a conference organised by the UK Bologna Experts in London in November. The team of 15 UK Bologna experts – formerly known as Bologna Promoters – are funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the British Council to advise and promote the Bologna Process. (See [overVIEW 2](#) for details [www.grad.ac.uk/supervisors](http://www.grad.ac.uk/supervisors).)

The conference focussed on the employers' perspective on the Bologna Process as well as views from outside Europe. In particular, the event addressed employability and the means by which UK graduates might compete successfully with their peers elsewhere in Europe and the wider world. Participants also had the opportunity to hear the preliminary findings of the 2007 Europe Unit survey on the sector's involvement in the Bologna Process and European higher education issues.

The next Bologna Process summit will be held at the universities of Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve in April 2009.



## PRES

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is a service made available to all HEIs across the UK which have postgraduate researchers.

It was developed by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to be an easy-to-use tool for collecting comparative information about the postgraduate research experience to inform enhancement and is based on an online questionnaire, using Bristol Online Survey (BOS) software.

Following a pilot in which 8 HEIs participated, the first major survey which took place between mid March and mid May 2007 involved 58 HEIs producing a 25% response rate. Of these, 44 were from England; 8 from Scotland; 4 from Wales; 2 from N Ireland. 25 HEIs were 'post-92'; 19 'pre-92'; 8 were Russell Group; and 6 small and specialist colleges also took part.

Initial analysis shows that:

- two thirds of postgraduate researchers rated their overall experience better than expected
- 65% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that: 'I am confident that I will complete ...more or less within the planned timescale'

- 95% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that supervision was crucial to the success of the PhD.

HEA will produce an overview report of the aggregate results and ran an event in December share experiences and encourage others HEIs to participate in future surveys.

### What is PRES?

PRES is designed to help institutions enhance the quality of postgraduate research degree provision by collecting feedback from current research postgraduate researchers in a systematic and user friendly way. It takes no more than about 15 minutes to complete.

It is based on a survey that was originally developed in Australia (Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire – PREQ) and has been used in recent years by the University of Oxford (OPREQ). The Academy has adapted the Australian survey to better fit the UK context, particularly by including additional questions relating to the 2004 QAA Code of Practice: Research Degree Programmes, and increasing the attention paid to skills training and development (in line with RCUK expectations).

PRES is based on a standard set of questions seeking postgraduate researchers' views on a range of things, but it also includes free text boxes, and participating institutions are able to add as many of their own specific questions as they would like to (for example, in order to collect feedback on particular services, initiatives, policies or practices). You can see the standard set of questions on the PRES website [www.heacademy.ac.uk/pres.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/pres.htm).

PRES makes use of the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) methodology, and the online questionnaire is hosted on the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) computer system run by the Institute for Learning and Research Technology (ILRT) at Bristol University. (Many HEIs will be familiar with CROS, which is used by the sector to collect feedback from research staff including postdoctoral researchers and research fellows).

If you require more information about PRES, please contact Gosia Kulej, Survey Co-ordinator on 01904 717500 or [Malgorzata.Kulej@heacademy.ac.uk](mailto:Malgorzata.Kulej@heacademy.ac.uk).

## Redefining the Doctorate

You may be aware that in January 2007, the HEA, in partnership with UK GRAD and endorsed by other sector groups with an interest in doctoral education began a national debate in the UK about the nature of the doctorate. To inform this debate, the Academy published a briefing paper entitled 'Redefining the Doctorate', written by Chris Park (a Senior Associate of the Academy and Director of the Graduate School at Lancaster University). The paper outlined the perspectives of different stakeholder groups, sketched out the main drivers for change, summarised how the UK HE sector has responded, and posed a series of key questions for discussion. [www.grad.ac.uk/pgrexperience](http://www.grad.ac.uk/pgrexperience).

These questions have been discussed at a number of national meetings during 2007 with members from organisations including the National Postgraduate Committee, the UK Council for Graduate Education, EuroDoc and the Society for Research in Higher Education. The culmination of these and other discussions will be a national conference, expected to be held late autumn 2008. .

For more information please contact Gosia Kulej [Malgorzata.Kulej@heacademy.ac.uk](mailto:Malgorzata.Kulej@heacademy.ac.uk).

## Enthusiating the Next Generation

How do you enthuse the next generation of researchers? By showing them that research is exciting, interesting and relevant, and carried out by people like them! This is the aim of Researchers in Residence (RinR), a scheme funded by the UK Research Councils and the Wellcome Trust.

RinR places researchers (PhD and post doctoral) in secondary schools across the UK. The scheme provides training, help with the administrative side of things (like finding a school, suggesting activities and resources and arranging for a Criminal Records Bureau check), and support

through the entire process of placements. Regional co-ordinators are also available to offer help and support.

Placements are between 14 and 24 hrs long. How that time is best used is worked out through consideration of what fits in best with the researcher and their research and what will meet the needs of the school. Some people do a few hours per week for 6 weeks whilst others will spend a whole week in a school. A day long training session and a review session are also part of the package. Researchers who are interested in taking part are urged to chat with their supervisor/PI to make sure that they think the timing of the placement is right for the researcher.

### Benefits to both sides

The researchers have a fantastic opportunity to develop valuable skills such as communication, team working and planning, as well as engaging young people with their research. Schools have the opportunity to allow their students to connect with research and researchers as people – an excellent way of reinforcing positive role models, breaking down negative stereotypes, raising aspirations and motivating students.

With so much emphasis on public engagement, this scheme provides a very useful first stepping stone into this area for both PGRs and early career researchers.

## Key Facts

### Who runs RinR?

Researchers in Residence is managed by the University of Edinburgh, led by Vice-Principal Mary Bownes, and delivered through a consortium of regional partners. Each regional partner hosts a regional co-ordinator who facilitates the placements in their region. CRAC is also a partner on the project. In particular they will be involved in evaluating the impact of the scheme.

### Who can take part?

The scheme is open to all researchers funded directly or indirectly by any of the Research Councils, RCUK or the Wellcome Trust.

### For more information

To contact your Regional Co-ordinator, go to: [www.researchersinresidence.ac.uk/rir](http://www.researchersinresidence.ac.uk/rir).



researchers  
in residence

# Sharing Good Practice



## Support Strategies

The UK GRAD London Hub recently ran a number of workshops looking at Supporting Postgraduate Researchers Fieldwork and Supporting International Postgraduate Researchers. The outcomes from the workshops are the key points and tips given below.

### Supporting Postgraduate Researchers' Fieldwork

PhD researchers from a range of disciplines engage in fieldwork data collection as a central part of their research project. This can mean anything from several weeks to a whole year in the field, often at a great distance from their HEI, its resources, their supervisor(s), friends and families.

Fieldwork can sometimes be a lonely experience involving much emotional and mental isolation. Facilities which are taken for granted in the UK can be non-existent and safety and security issues may also need to be addressed. There is often uncertainty about the status of the researcher with respect to the HEI and an equal uncertainty about the supervisor's role.

How to provide effective support during and after fieldwork?

- As far as possible ensure that the expectations of those about to embark on fieldwork matches the reality of the situation that they will meet in the field. Many PGRs have unrealistic expectations of how much they can achieve and can soon become demotivated when unexpected

problems (such as lack of access to data) occur.

- Help PGRs arrange local contacts during fieldwork – with university departments and local academic networks. Many institutions will welcome presentations or participation in seminars. This can also be a good way of getting feedback on the research and can sometimes make visa applications go more smoothly.
- Encourage PGRs to take health and safety considerations seriously and to keep informed of potential changes in the research environment that may affect the progress of their work.
- Build fieldwork preparation and planning into 1st year research training and the upgrading process. A manageable fieldwork plan could even become part of the upgrading requirements.
- Encourage PGRs to maintain the habit of writing during fieldwork and of getting their ideas down on paper in whatever form. This will help to establish stronger links between the 'book learning' of the pre-upgrade period, the fieldwork period itself when sometimes 'theories go out of the window' and the post-fieldwork writing-up phase.
- Help PGRs to structure the fieldwork period by agreeing deadlines for data collection, data analysis and writing targets.
- Explore a variety of ways in which PGRs can keep in direct contact with

the HEI and with each other during the fieldwork period. This can lessen the sense of isolation and establish regular feedback channels.

- When PGRs return from fieldwork help them to re-assess their progress and find out the extent to which they may have become detached from their pre-fieldwork plan. Of course, in some cases the original aims may need to be re-stated as a result of findings obtained from the fieldwork – but the justification for this should be made clear.
- At all stages encourage PGRs to think aspirationally about actually finishing the research project. They should build up a picture of what the finished product will look like and think ahead at all times.
- Finally, allow some individuals the flexibility to engage in a follow-up period of fieldwork. For some people the first attempt should not be the last, since aims can be unclear and opportunities missed. In a follow-up period of fieldwork, with much analysis already on paper, PGRs may have a clearer idea of what they are looking for and often will have identified the 'holes in their thesis'.

### Supporting International Postgraduate Researchers

The changing face of international higher education and the diversity of experience and aspiration in our PGR population present us with a need to get right the balance between inclusion and special treatment for our international PGRs. Two recent good practice workshops on Supporting International Postgraduate Researchers produced some clear messages and advice summarised as the following series of tips:

- Supervisors need information about the countries from which their international PGRs come, and to recognise that diversity in the international PGR population is large meaning that a single approach to all may not meet the needs of individuals.
- Supervisors should be aware of the cultural, social and academic differences that are likely to confront their new international PGRs, and should find ways to discuss the issues that arise with them.

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- A mentoring system that involves other people can help new PGRs learn about and adapt to UK methods and culture, and supplement the supervisor's contributions. Mentors could usefully be drawn from more experienced researchers of the same international origin.
- It can be important to explain to new PGRs the nature of doctoral research programmes in the UK and in particular the central role of critical thinking and its implications for study and interaction with others needs to be explained.
- Supervisors need to explain their expectations to new PGRs, explain the relationship expected between PGR and supervisor and listen carefully to any concerns and questions raised by new arrivals.
- Supervisors need to be aware of cultural and religious differences to ensure that activities take place in an environment, and in a fashion, which does not exclude or alienate international PGRs. At the same time, local customs and practices should be explained.
- Induction processes will be central to success, and international PGRs should be included in all induction events, but special consideration also given to running additional dedicated induction events, possibly at departmental level, for international PGRs.
- Supervisors and departments should be proactive and take every opportunity to enable social interaction between international and home PGRs.
- All programme management systems should ensure equity in outcomes for all PGRs while not treating all the same.
- In order to persuade international PGRs to participate willingly in the reflective thinking that the PDP requires, the link between PDP, skills development, employability and careers should be explained carefully.
- Learning needs analysis (as all other literature) systems must be phrased in language that is comprehensible to the wide range of international and home PGRs.

## How to be an Effective Researcher

Dr Jon Turner, Postgraduate Transferable Skills Unit, University of Edinburgh;  
Scottish and NI Hub Co-ordinator



'A good combination of fun activities and activities that required serious brain power'

The new 'researcher development' programme funded by the Research Councils UK (see page1) will include the provision of an incubator unit which will work with the sector to innovate and leverage existing good practice in the area of personal and professional development for researchers. The pilot and development of the '*How to be an Effective Researcher*' programme, as detailed below, is a really good example of how this will work in practice; enabling HEIs access to quality resources and the training and support needed in order to deliver them within their own institution.

As is the case in many other UK Universities the University of Edinburgh has an extensive programme of training and development courses designed for PhD researchers that covers all areas of the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement. Much of the provision is based around short workshops that focus on one or more specific skills (e.g. Research Project Planning, Time Management, Effective Writing).

In Spring 2005 I met with two external skills development tutors (Dr Sara Shinton and Janet Wilkinson) to discuss a possible gap in the Edinburgh provision, an experiential learning style training course for PGRs near the beginning of their PhD that focussed on helping them be more effective as postgraduate researchers.

The course we designed – '*How to be an Effective Researcher*' was piloted in Edinburgh during summer 2005 as a 2 day non-residential course. PGRs and staff from Strathclyde University attended the pilots as participants and observers to give an external, critical friend perspective on the content, style, structure and impact of the course. These pilot courses were successful. Participants enjoyed the course and staff from Strathclyde University also expressed interest in running the course for their own PGRs. Indeed, discussions with colleagues in other Scottish institutions led us to the view that Effective Researcher might be of interest to other Universities.

Based on the results of the course pilots and the reaction for other institutions we approached UK GRAD with a request for support to further develop the Effective Researcher course and associated resources so that it could be shared and extended to other Universities, starting with institutions in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### Course Development

Key elements of the *How to be an Effective Researcher* course are the emphasis on experiential learning, the use of simple project management techniques and working collaboratively. We have applied these approaches to the development of the course and associated resources.

Rather than the original course team of three working in isolation to develop additional training resources, run pilot courses and support institutions we have steadily widened the group of institutions and individuals engaged in the Effective Researcher.

Potential tutors have been encouraged to observe a course, attend an orientation or taster session and then be mentored by more experienced tutors. Other members of the broader Effective Researcher tutor network have been approached to develop new activities, and to comment on and refine the resources and documentation associated with the course. Institutions and staff working with PhD researchers (including supervisors, Heads of Graduate Schools, careers advisors, skills development tutors) have been invited to orientation events and to observe and/or tutor on courses. We have also encouraged institutions to send PGRs to Effective Researcher courses running at other institutions to provide feedback on the impact and suitability of the course. These individuals and institutions have played a key role in enhancing the Effective Researcher course and opening up new avenues for its future development for new audiences.

Effective Researcher has generated far more interest than we had dared hope for and we now have nine Universities in Scotland and Northern Ireland who have run the course. We have worked with these institutions to refine and make improvements to the course in terms of content, flexibility and logistics. We have also begun to look at how the course can be adapted to meet the needs of different audiences and purposes (e.g. for part-

time PGRs, or as staff development for supervisors and support staff), and at different ways in which it can be built into a University or departmental training programmes. It has been a genuinely collaborative project with many institutions and individual tutors contributing to the development of a course and resources that can be made freely available through UK GRAD and its regional Hubs. This open and collaborative approach has made it a particularly enjoyable and rewarding project to work on and has been a key factor in its success.

### Development of Effective Researcher Resources

Our key objectives were to have a set of resources suitable for a range of different PhD researchers, that institutions could use immediately without restrictions on use linked to copyright and particular qualifications in the delivery team, and that PGRs are unlikely to have seen elsewhere in their PhD training or prior experience.

We have addressed several practical and logistical issues that emerged during the pilot courses. These included the need to develop a course which runs successfully in different venues, can be transported without a car and can be delivered to PGRs working in very similar academic subjects or to a group from all disciplines.

Whilst we have developed a network of external tutors who can support institutions who are new to the course, this is not essential. The combination of documentation and resources developed can be used 'out of the box' by institutional staff who feel confident in running the course after observing it or attending an orientation event.

### Demand and Participation

More than 850 postgraduate researchers have attended '*How to be an Effective Researcher*' course since it was first piloted. This includes 776 from 9 institutions in Scotland and Northern Ireland that have run the course to date. In addition, the course was piloted successfully in two other UK GRAD Hub regions – the Midlands and the South West and Wales. 22 courses (for at least 600 participants) are planned for academic year 2007/08 in Scotland and Northern Ireland, with further courses planned for other areas of the UK.

For more information contact:

Ben Kotovic [scottishhub@grad.ac.uk](mailto:scottishhub@grad.ac.uk)  
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*(Editor's Note: This project was shortlisted for the THES Award for Outstanding Support for Early-Careers Researchers, sponsored by RCUK with UK GRAD: [www.thes.co.uk/Awards/2007](http://www.thes.co.uk/Awards/2007) See article on page 15 for results.)*

*'Discussions and role play about supervisors, and work and collaboration between disciplines, helped to focus on the whole point of research'*

## How to be an Effective Researcher

### Course Aims

Over a two day programme this developmental training opportunity for PhD researchers concentrates on activities with the aim of increasing their effectiveness during their PhD. It is predominantly aimed at PhD researchers who are 6-18 months into their PhD with the aims of:

Enhancing the effectiveness of postgraduate researchers by providing an opportunity to build their understanding, skills and confidence in:

- communication
- planning and time management
- problem solving
- leadership
- assertiveness.

Building a greater self awareness of individuals' learning and working styles. This is done by focussing on the core areas of:

- PhD project planning and time management
- Working effectively with others (including supervisors)
- Collaboration
- Culture within research groups, institutions and countries
- Self awareness and preferences for learning and working.

It can be delivered across all disciplines.

# Personal Perspectives on Supervision

Each time you agree to supervise a new postgraduate researcher, you embark on a new relationship, and like any relationship there are expectations, challenges, misunderstandings, and reconciliations! And depending on the length of your relationship, there are lessons learned and advice to pass on to others. Here are three personal perspectives on being a supervisor..... read them and then, let us have yours.....

## Hindsight enhances supervision



**Professor Norman Staines, recently retired Professor of Immunology, Graduate School for Health Sciences, King's College London**

*'We now, as supervisors, strive to support the development of our postgraduate researchers not only in their research but also in developing long-lasting skills that are also valuable outside their immediate research'*

I have the pleasure of working with postgraduate researchers and their supervisors and have talked with many hundreds of them over recent years in the workshops and courses I have run. There is a heartening positive approach among younger staff who take on supervision with a desire to support the developing individual, but – and this is especially true in the experimental sciences – too many for my taste still reflect the views of an older generation of supervisors where the postgraduate researcher's role is to conduct research and the acquisition of a degree in the process is of secondary importance. Of course, there is no easy definition of an acceptable balance between these conflicting priorities. Some supervisors have in the past cloned their bad habits into their own PGRs and these in turn behave in the same way when they move into supervision themselves. Having had a less than perfect experience when being supervised makes me sensitive and supportive of PGRs and their supervisors who find the whole process very challenging.

It was the most natural thing for me to do a PhD: my undergraduate supervisor encouraged me, my department had a generous supply of Research Council studentships and the prospect of three years of research would let me continue the most appealing activity of my academic experience. It also meant I could defer a job decision for several years. In reality my supervisor was never more than marginally interested in me; my annual grant of £500 guaranteed a

marginal standard of living and research turned out to be immensely tough on the brain and emotions. By the end of the 1960s I had acquired an old-style PhD in natural sciences through the time-honoured tradition of working it out for myself and learning from my mistakes. I was rescued from total floundering by the generous intervention of an intellectual, highly intelligent and artistic young lecturer who joined the department while I was studying. I enjoyed immensely so many aspects of my research student life – continuing in productive and active research for another thirty-five years – but not significantly the taxing process of writing-up my thesis in the subsequent two years while coping with a job, moving, and fatherhood. I was not a model student, but I meet many nowadays who are.

So much has changed in my academic time that to pick out particular trends or fashions is bound to be highly subjective and selective. But, there does appear now to be a significant number of supervisors who work hard for their PGRs, understanding and meeting their respective expectations and objectives. The styles of supervision in the sciences and arts, once so startlingly dissimilar now converge: both sides are learning from the other to an all-round benefit. Scientists have become more reflective and a degree of rigour and new urgency to complete the doctoral study pervades the arts and humanities. The emergence of the Roberts' money has done so much to focus the attention of academics on now-accepted good practice in supervision. We have a national code and all universities have their local codes framed accordingly. Having said this, I meet too few supervisors and postgraduate researchers – and I visit many different institutions – who are actually familiar with their institution's code of practice. Where people are better informed, it is because significant leadership comes from the very top of the institution, making it clear that the education and training of researchers through doctoral programmes is a cherished activity that should be properly resourced and rewarded.

We now, as supervisors, strive to support the development of our postgraduate researchers not only in their research but also in developing long-lasting skills that are also valuable outside their immediate research, in their personal interactions with others and in career building. Slowly, training is losing its poor reputation in universities, academic staff attitudes have changed significantly and training itself is much better in its quality and universal accessibility. Researchers, we like to imagine, are now more rounded and more skilled than they were ten or twenty years ago. This is a matter of belief for most of us, the empirical evidence being thin, but we have no relief from the complaints of employers that graduates and postgraduates have weak interpersonal and organisational skills, and are prone to unworldliness. The experience of working with UK GRAD has convinced me that things are improving in these respects and the evidence that many organisations are now collecting supports the idea.

Are doctoral graduates really different? For a start, there are more of them, and there are many more academic subjects in which one can now obtain a doctoral degree, compared with only a generation back. The diversification of doctoral degrees is testament to that: happily, all doctorates in the UK involve research. The rise of the professional and practice-based doctorates is producing new breeds of researcher. Among the many more doctoral research candidates (in excess of 100,000 currently) the diversity of the individuals is a great cause for celebration. One can now embark upon a doctorate at any age and without the conventional first degree qualification, for example. A trajectory towards an academic career is also no longer a prerequisite. At the same time the traditional and often unsuccessful vanity doctorate is disappearing because of more realistic supervision and programme management.

We have progressively more detailed and reliable data on the working lives of doctoral graduates and we know now that approximately half of those who graduate

in the UK do not go into or remain long in research. Thus, a gigantic and learned army is working outside universities and research centres in what are non-traditional occupations for doctoral graduates. Some supervisors rue what they see as their effort wasted in training researchers who abandon research, but most people will rejoice that highly educated, clever and resourceful postgraduates are taking their experience into commerce, industry and government offices. The doctorate now opens doors for those who care to knock.

On the question of whether PGRs are different, there certainly are changes on their skills, motivations and aspirations at the start of their doctoral studies: there are more mature professionals with significant experience and more young first-degree graduates who have come through innovative degree programmes. PGRs of both kinds may be relatively poorly equipped with the depth of specialist knowledge required for research, so it is necessary to have

systems to identify learning needs and to address them right from the start. In my experience, new PGRs welcome such tools; older supervisors are unsurprisingly suspicious of what they erroneously see as a box-ticking approach to learning but are relatively easily persuaded of its value when the systems and benefits are revealed.

Through being a supervisor myself, and with hind-sight I realise I discovered so many things about postgraduate researchers that ought to have been, but were not, all immediately self-evident. Pre-eminently, each PGR is different from all others. This means they need different treatment if they are to prosper. Supervisors should be generous and avoid being too possessive about the research their PGRs undertake, letting them learn actively, and through mistakes if necessary. Supervisors do best when they treat each PGR as an equal in human terms, listen to them and demand they develop independence of thought and action without, of course, neglecting

them. The new institutional practices and resources make these much easier to achieve than previously, but I am firmly convinced of the value to everyone that excellent training linked with effective infrastructural support must be available to all staff involved in supervision.

The rise of mentoring schemes, both for postgraduate researchers and supervisors is a welcome development and the use of active learning, through learning sets for example, appears in my experience to have a lot to offer both sides. Life for all is much more competitive and complex than it used to be, so these approaches will help individuals succeed in their work, study and research, and that is no bad thing for personal fulfilment. Two heartening aspects of supervision today are that so many people are drawn by the challenge of doctoral research training, and that in the UK people still engage in high levels of scholarship and intellectual wrestling with important issues.

## Challenges of the doctoral supervisory relationship: A Canadian perspective



**Lynn McAlpine,**  
McGill University,  
Canada, on second-  
ment to the University  
of Oxford as Director,  
CETL Preparing for  
Academic Practice

*'One challenge is learning about and sharing with postgraduate researchers the range of career possibilities that exist today'*

As a Canadian, my experience of the doctoral supervisory relationship is somewhat different from that of supervisors in the UK. For instance, we have a Committee structure which, at its best, ensures that the postgraduate researcher is getting feedback from a number of different people – individuals chosen to bring different kinds of expertise to the dissertation/thesis process. As well, in my field, education, there is a small but growing pattern of co-supervision where two individuals share the support of a postgraduate researcher within the Committee structure. Thus, my experience of the supervisory relationship is that it can be distributed amongst a number of people who are resources for the postgraduate researcher, potentially reducing somewhat the prominence and the responsibility of the named supervisor. As I have accumulated supervisory experience, I have become increasingly

aware that there are aspects of supervision that I have overlooked – likely since I have never had any specific preparation for this kind of 'teaching'. These 'gaps' I see as challenges which the literature and others with more expertise may help me address. These challenges may be ones you also are dealing with, and have found other useful ways of tackling.

- At one time, those who wanted to find an academic post could do so with relative ease – this is not always the case today. So, one challenge is learning about and sharing with postgraduate researchers the range of career possibilities that exist today – both within and without academia. Here, I have found career service units are often helpful, as are colleagues who have chosen non-academic career paths.
- As well, while I work in a research-intensive university, many of my postgraduate researchers will find academic jobs in other types of universities. I am now more explicit with them about the differences in research and teaching cultures that exist amongst universities, and I encourage them when attending conferences to talk to colleagues from other types of universities. I also invite academic visitors to my university to describe to postgraduate researchers the nature of

their academic work. And, I particularly encourage PGRs to participate in teaching preparation programmes offered by the academic development unit, and to gain teaching experience alongside their research activities.

- A third challenge is helping PGRs understand the role of writing in creating their academic and other identities. Like others, I engage postgraduate researchers in co-authoring papers and co-reviewing manuscripts for journals. I also explore with them the importance of academic communication in creating an extended network of colleagues. For instance, I am particularly careful when we meet about actual pieces of the dissertation text to make explicit the tacit knowledge that one embeds there – the collegial alliances and disagreements that need representing and the ways in which we negotiate these in writing. I find colleagues in literacy studies particularly helpful in addressing this challenge.

Overall, there are many responsibilities related to supervision that I have only recently fully come to understand; thankfully, I am finding a range of individuals that I and my PGRs can call on to share the load; hopefully this will support them to be better prepared for the possible careers in which they may find themselves.

## Starting out – how I want to supervise my first postgraduate researcher



**Dr Paul Wicks,**  
Postdoctoral  
research fellow,  
Institute of  
Psychiatry, Kings  
College, London

*'The skill that's most important to work on is leadership'*

To get my own disclosures out of the way first, I had two excellent supervisors. That's not to say I always appreciated it at the time; what a supervisor sees as constructive feedback a PGR may see as a mass of red ink scrawled all over their precious work! During the course of my academic life I've seen other people's relationships with their supervisor up close and personal; I ran the Institute of Psychiatry's Student Forum for a year, tutored on the UK GRAD programme, and now edit a magazine written by PGRs themselves. As a postdoc, I've also had some first-hand experience helping to mentor undergraduates, research staff, and a PGR working in my group. When I ask people what kind of supervisor they want to be, a lot of them answer "nothing like mine!" But unless you actually sit down and plan out how you want to be different to them, chances are you'll slip into their old habits yourself. I've tried to identify a number of skills that I need to develop in order to be a great supervisor, one who can not only get PGRs through their PhD but perhaps even remain on speaking terms with them afterwards.

First, patience. I remember feeling incredibly frustrated mentoring PGRs when they didn't 'get things' first time. The temptation is to feel they're not trying hard enough or aren't smart enough, but it's important to consider the other possibilities which are less flattering to your own ego. Maybe you're not being explicit about what you want them to do, or are not pitching things at the right level. Most importantly, it's easy to lose sight of

the fact that a PGR is not a research worker. It's the process that's important as much as the outcome. If nothing else, you can have faith in the fact that they've made it through a selection process to be there, in many cases chosen by you from a field of strong candidates.

Next, encouragement. I'm sure many of us have been on courses outlining the old 'feedback sandwich' where your vitriolic ranting bile of dissatisfaction is neatly bracketed by lightweight praise such as 'I liked the font' or 'the title was OK'. However you can guarantee that most PGRs will ignore these and focus instead on every bit of criticism you have to offer, and in the worst case scenario, take these personally. There are a couple of strategies I hope to try. First, setting the PGRs' expectation of what kind of feedback they can expect from me and emphasising that good writing means re-writing. I think a lot of feelings get hurt when a PGR is used to schoolwork or undergraduate dissertations going through only one or two drafts, as opposed to the thirty-eight drafts we are used to in academia.

Second, by telling them what my expectations are upfront in terms of work submitted to me, and here's where I might sound like a bit of a fascist. I don't want to see things that are rough or unreferenced, I don't want to see things that clearly have not been proof-read, and if I make a style suggestion once or twice it should be taken up consistently. Many years ago an English A-level teacher had marked on one of my essays not to use contractions (e.g. 'can't' for 'can not'). The second essay I submitted continued to use contractions and he gave it back unmarked, telling me that if I wasn't going to take his feedback on board, he wasn't going to give it. I felt pretty peeved, but the lesson stuck with me. Finally, I must learn to be comfortable with giving praise. I know it feels cheesy and sappy and un-British, but once you get the hang of it, it's really not that bad to say 'I like what you did there with X' or 'This

theme Y is really interesting, I'd like you to develop that more'. The alternative, favoured by many supervisors, is a rather exhaustive list of all the things that are wrong with a piece of work. Whilst this might get you closer to the finished product that you wanted, it's demoralising for the PGR and without nurturing their strengths when you have the chance, you risk turning them into drones that just write what you want to see. However it's important to remember that the people they need to impress are reviewers, journal editors, and their peers, not just yourself! Finally, the skill that's most important to work on is leadership. Now just to be clear, that's "leadership" as opposed to "direction". Direction is easy; you just tell people what to do. Leadership is more about setting the right tone in which people want to perform well for you. It's about building respect from managing how you're perceived by others, and it comes across in all sorts of things that you do. How do you respond to emails? Do you socialise with the team? Do you set appropriate personal boundaries in being formal or informal? Is it more important for people to feel that your time is valuable or that their contribution is valuable? Now I know some people would argue that all of that are just frothy niceties, but I think it makes a vast difference. If you're a good leader, your PGRs will take more notice of your feedback, will work harder to please you, and respond more strongly to encouragement. The difficulty that I worry about in my development is that doing all these things right is hard. It's time consuming and requires quite a degree of self-control and diplomacy. It's almost certainly easier to scribble all over their drafts, have a whinge about your colleagues in front of them, and only answer emails if they're flagged as mega-urgent, but what you gain in the short term you will lose in respect.

So, that's my gameplan. Now there's just the small matter of someone giving me some funding...

## Miscellany

### Report on Researchers' Careers

In October, the Council for Science and Technology published a report on researchers' careers. 'Pathways to the future: the early career of researchers in the UK' recommends a national framework for research careers and that

research staff should be given greater independence at an earlier stage.  
[www.cst.gov.uk](http://www.cst.gov.uk)

**Consultation on the revised Concordat**  
A UK HE sector working group has published a draft revised Concordat to Support the Career Management of

Researchers. The aim is to update the original 1996 Concordat in light of the European Charter and Code for researchers. RCUK & UUK supported a sector-wide consultation on the overall framework of the draft Concordat, its principles and content. For further details go to [www.grad.ac.uk/researchercareers](http://www.grad.ac.uk/researchercareers)

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### New series of Postgraduate Guides

A new series of Issues in Postgraduate Education: Management, Teaching and Supervision have been published by the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE).

The Guides, which are developed by the SRHE Postgraduate Issues Network, are designed to be clear, practical and devoid of jargon. They form a valuable set of tools that will help deliver and support the delivery of high quality postgraduate training.

Titles include:

- Research Supervisors and the Skills Agenda:
- Learning Needs Analysis and Personal Development Profiling
- A guide for Internal and External PhD Examiners
- Supervising Disabled Research Students

Each Guide is priced at £8.00 per copy for SRHE members (£10.00 non-members). For more information go to [www.srhe.ac.uk/publications.gpi.asp](http://www.srhe.ac.uk/publications.gpi.asp)

### PostgraduateStudentships.co.uk: helping supervisors attract good PhD students

Supervisors with a PhD studentship or a PhD project to offer looking for a cost effective means of reaching a wide range of potential postgraduates, may find PostgraduateStudentships.co.uk can help. After only a year, the site is already attracting around 60,000 individual visits per month from the UK and around the world looking for postgraduate study and funding opportunities. And as its name indicates, it is highly targeted and easily accessible by and designed specifically for intending postgraduates.

PostgraduateStudentships.co.uk has the added advantage that it is the only site where PGRs can view a wide range of general funding from charities, trusts and research councils directly alongside University funding: ideal for unfunded projects, it also helps PGRs look for funding if they are not eligible for specific studentships but still want to study within that department. The site provides the information they need to look for appropriate general funding, direct from the University advert, which in turn can help departments attract a wider range of applicants.

Nearly 250 University Departments and Institutes are registered on the site, and studentships and unfunded projects (as well as Professional Doctorates, Masters and postgraduate open days) can be posted on the site for as little as £40 each, and sometimes less.

To find out more, and about how to advertise on the site, please go to [www.PostgraduateStudentships.co.uk/providers\\_advertisers](http://www.PostgraduateStudentships.co.uk/providers_advertisers) or contact Jane Penrose, Director of PostgraduateStudentships.co.uk on: [jane.penrose@postgraduatestudentships.co.uk](mailto:jane.penrose@postgraduatestudentships.co.uk).

### THES Higher Award 2007 winners announced

The winners of THES Higher Awards were announced at the Awards dinner on November 29 at Grosvenor House, Park Lane, London.

This year, the THES Higher Awards saw over 90 % of the UK universities entering in one or more of the 18 categories available and demonstrating a breadth of excellent practice with over 100 entries shortlisted across the different categories.

The Award for Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers went to the St Andrews University for their *GRADskills* entry. This Award, sponsored by RCUK in association with UK GRAD, aims to recognise the groundbreaking work being undertaken by higher education institutions in building a better future for UK research and researchers.

Other shortlisted, worthy candidates in this category included: *How to be an Effective Researcher* from Edinburgh University, ( see article on page 10) *Newcastle Business School* from Northumbria University, *Research Staff Support Team* from Newcastle University and *Transitions* from the University of East Anglia.

Dr Janet Metcalfe, Director of the UK GRAD Programme, said: "We have been impressed by the overall quality of the competition and all the shortlisted finalists provided evidence of outstanding support for researchers. We hope their innovative approaches will inspire other universities in developing their own practice."

## 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

### 2008

#### January

21-24, Local GRADSchool, Barony Castle

#### February

27, SWW Hub Good Practice event, Cardiff

#### March

5, Midlands Hub Part-time Researchers event, Nottingham Trent University

7, YNE Hub Poster Competition and Networking event, University of York

10-13, Local GRADSchool, Scalford Hall

17-20, Local GRADschool, Oxford

17-20, Local GRADschool, Scalford Hall

#### April

1-3, Developing the Postgraduate Manager, University of Manchester

1-4, Local GRADschool, Edinburgh

18, Midlands Hub Part-time Researchers event, University of Leicester

18-21, Local GRADschool, Cambridge

22-24, Local GRADschool, Birmingham

#### May

12-16, Local GRADschool, UWE

13-16, National GRADschool, Windermere

27-29, Local GRADschool, Loughborough

#### June

13, Midlands Hub Part-time Researchers event, Loughborough University

17-19, Developing the Postgraduate Manager, University of Manchester

17-21, National GRADschool, Windermere

24-27, Local GRADschool, Edinburgh

#### July

2-4, Local GRADschool, Essex

16, Midlands Hub Part-time Researchers event, University of Birmingham

22-25, National GRADschool, Bournemouth

28-31, Local GRADschool, Durham

#### October

28-1 November, National GRADschool,

Bournemouth

#### November

18-22, National GRADschool, Windermere

## Keep in Touch

UK GRAD has a network of 8 Regional Hubs. Each Hub has a Hub Co-ordinator and Hub Manager, 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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If you would like to become a member of your Regional Hub, please contact them using the email addresses above. It would be helpful if you could mention this publication when contacting them.

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