Skills Training Essentials for PGR Students

STEPS

Issue 1 / September 2005

Welcome to STEPS

A high priority for this university, as it is for Government and for the Research Councils, is to give our postgraduate research students and postdoctoral fellows the best quality training in research and in transferable skills. Only if we do this successfully can we describe ourselves, as we aspire to do, as national and international leaders in graduate education.

Key to the development of a successful skills strategy is flexibility and responsiveness to the diversity of the institution. To that end, the Skills Coordinators Group have developed a faculty focussed and centrally coordinated set of processes, aiming not for a one size fits all approach but designed, instead, to share good practice and learn from each other.

At the heart of this strategy is the need to communicate across the whole of the university. Hence the welcome launching of STEPS. Here students, their supervisors, postdocs and research fellows can find out what is being done, who is doing it, and why the provision takes the form it does. It is essential reading for all involved in graduate education.

Professor Gerald Hammond
Associate Vice President for Graduate Education

In this issue

Editor's Note

Welcome to the first edition of the STEPS newsletter. The primary aim of this newsletter is to raise the profile of PGR skills training provision across the institution and to enable good practice to be shared across Faculties and Schools.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this first edition. The next edition will be out in November 2005 and will be made available in hard copy and via the Research Office web pages. I welcome hearing any contributions you may have to this edition.

Best Wishes

Claire Atherton
Skills Development Coordinator
Claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk

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Research Councils Training Requirements

Arts and Humanities Research Council

The AHRC publishes an extensive account of training in its handbook for postgraduate students and has a broad view of the skills that graduate students should acquire. The Council encourages students to attend Grad Schools. They also identify the UKCGE as a useful source of guidance on training.

www.ahrc.ac.uk/university_staff/postgrad/
research_training_framework.asp

Biotechnical and Biological Sciences Research Council

BBSRC has endorsed the Joint statement of the Research Councils'/AHRB's skills training requirements for research students prepared by the Research Councils. The BBSRC publishes a handbook on Postgraduate Studentships in which their policy on training schemes is outlined.

www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/training/Welcome.html

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

The EPSRC believes that it is important for research students to broaden their personal skills, and it is now a requirement that all EPSRC funded PhD students should attend a UK GRAD Programme Graduate School (or an equivalent) during their second or third years of study.

www.epsrc.ac.uk/PostgraduateTraining/InformationForStudents/
GuideToEPSRCDirectlyFundedPostgraduateTraining.htm

Economic and Social Research Council

The ESRC believe that whatever career paths PhD graduates may follow, there are clear advantages to students if they have acquired general research skills and transferable employment-related skills. The ESRC ensures that all the research students they fund receive substantial, formal and broadly based training in research.

www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/pos
tgraduate/pgtrainingpolicy/index.aspx

Medical Research Council

The MRC expects each student to have a thorough training in generic research skills (eg experimental design, data handling, statistics, intellectual property rights, exploitation), and training in transferable skills, (eg oral and written communication, IT skills and time management) during their MRC-funded training period, in addition to subject specific training. The Council publishes a Studentships Handbook in which the broad policy is defined.

www.mrc.ac.uk/funding-handbook_04_05.doc

Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council

There are simple links from the Postgraduate Studentships web page that highlight the Council's adherence to the Joint Statement and advertising other courses available to graduate students.

www.pparc.ac.uk/Pg/trnews.asp

Natural Environment Research Council

The Council publishes the Joint Skills Statement as its expectations of training in research and transferable skills for graduate students. The Handbook appears not to specify more than this at present.

www.nerc.ac.uk

University PGR Skills Training Agenda

The University of Manchester is committed to ensuring its students have every opportunity to gain personal, social and intellectual skills. As part of its strategy in skills training the University provides students with opportunities to learn skills that may help in the achievement of personal and career development goals as students and graduates of the University.

The University is continuing to develop a portfolio of high quality skills training programmes to equip students with an **appropriate** skills set through;

- Developing **innovative** and **flexible** skills training workshops / events

- Reviewing and revising current skills training programmes regularly in light of feedback from students, supervisors and employers

- Improving skills training programmes delivery and communication, complemented by the use of online training packages.

- Promoting best practice in skills training

To gain further information on the University's skills training requirements and the PGR Skills Training Strategy and Policy, please visit the web page;

www.manchester.ac.uk/policies

National Skills Training Agenda

The development of skills training systems within each of the four faculties has additional importance within the context of emerging government policy. Dating back to at least the Harris Report 1996 the government has been developing policy on how to provide additional support to research students to address two emerging issues in the modern economy, namely;

- Employers require a maintenance of the quality of researchers but an enhancement in the breadth of training

- Employees need to start work with a larger portfolio of learning

In July 2003, the University received notification that the Government had accepted the main recommendations of Sir Gareth Roberts' "SET for Success" review. A primary recommendation of this report was the provision of at least **two weeks' dedicated training a year** principally in transferable skills for all postgraduate research students. As a result, the Research Councils would be allocated funds to provide additional transferable skills training for postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers.

The Joint Skills Statement of the Research Councils' Skills Training Requirements for Research Students outlines the skills a research student should acquire in addition to their main area of research study. These are backed by Government guidelines in response to the Roberts report, newly published QAA guidelines and HEFCE guidance.

To view the above documents please visit the below website and click on Universities followed by National Policy;

www.grad.ac.uk

How PGR Students Can Engage in the Skills Training Process

1   Identify current skills by completing a Skills Audit
2   Prioritise key skills development needs
3   Plan how to develop the required skills
4   Participate in a suite of training workshops / seminars to develop the required skills
5   Reflect on progress in specified skill development areas
6   Review and re-establish future plans / goals

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Training Activities

The Graduate Development Scheme (GraDS) of EPS combines the experience from the UMIST Graduate Personal Development Programme (GPDP) and the VUM Research Career Management Training (RCMT) to offer a free, comprehensive programme of development opportunities, delivered by staff with PhDs, for postgraduate researchers. There are two main focal points:

1   The online Development Needs Analysis (DNA) to help researchers assess their strengths and identify their own skills development needs to support the completion of their research degree and move into a career;

2   The purple Graduate Resource Book containing essential information for all EPS research students.

All new researchers must attend the two-day induction workshop, Introduction to Research, which combines talks on research methodology and ethics, presentations by essential University services and the unique Speed PhD interactive exercise developed by GraDS (see Case Study on page 6).

Contact us at eps-grads@manchester.ac.uk or see a full list of workshops on our website: www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads

Faculty of Humanities Training Activities

The Faculty of Humanities is the second largest Faculty in the University, comprising over 1000 research students from subjects as diverse as Archaeology to Accounting.

In designing our programme we have taken our subject diversity into account. We offer a suite of courses where not only do students have the opportunity to enhance their transferable skills, but also have the unique experience of mixing with research students from very different areas. This highlights the similarity of the research process and experience for students.

Our programme is based around four main areas:
• Academic Skills
• Transferable Skills
• IT Skills
• Career Management Skills

For more information, please visit the Faculty website at:
http://humanities.stage.manchester.ac.uk/training

To book a course, please visit and log on to:
http://humanities.stage.manchester.ac.uk/training/calendar

Faculty of Life Sciences Training Activities

The Faculty of Life Sciences (FLS) provides one of the largest and most innovative graduate training programmes in Europe. FLS presently has 316 PhD students and 96 Masters students. Research areas are diverse, ranging from molecular structure to the history of science. Plans are also afoot to double the numbers of PhD students by 2015. With such a large and diverse student research community we have to cater for different training needs by providing a flexible Graduate Training Programme (GTP). In addition, an efficient system is required to monitor the progress and development of such a large number of students. In response to these challenges we are using "Roberts money" to develop a flexible online GTP, or eGTP as we prefer to call it. The eGTP is presently under development and consists of three elements, Skills Training Units, Research Progression and Personal Development. These components are underpinned by our advisor system, which provides academic mentors to monitor, advise and support each student in all aspects of the GTP. A further innovation, funded by Roberts money, is the development of an on-line Critical Writing Skills course to enhance Supervisor-led training. During the induction week in September each PhD student will undergo a training needs assessment and subsequently develop their writing skills further by following a structured on-line writing course.

For more information, please visit the Faculty website at:
www.ls.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/gtp

Faculty of Medical & Human Sciences Training Activities

The Faculty's flexible training programme adapts to your requirements as you progress through your degree.

Core workshops are supported by ancillary courses giving practical help with developing the required skills for your research and for career development. Examples of some of the courses we run are:

• Introduction to Research

• Communications workshop

• Careers and Networking workshop

• Your Thesis and Beyond

• Effective Presentations course

• Peer Mentoring programme offering an informal support network amongst students

Further courses and information are available from our intranet site:
www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp

Postgraduates - How to Stand Out From the Crowd

Many students decide to do postgraduate study so that they will "stand out" over mere undergraduates when it comes to getting jobs. However it doesn't take a genius (or a PhD) to work out that if a job needs a postgraduate qualification, all other applicants will be postgraduates, so employers will be looking for other ways to choose between you - primarily the skills and experience you have developed and the evidence that you can apply those skills. For jobs which don't specifically demand a postgraduate degree, skills and experience become paramount.

Survey after survey finds that employers look for enthusiasm, communication skills and teamwork as the top non-technical skills needed. For example, Dave Alker from Pfizer says that they need people who "enjoy the challenge of solving complex problems without having a clear idea what the solution might turn out to be". However, he continues, "Our work is team based so the ability to communicate effectively with others, particularly in other disciplines, is also essential."

To put yourself at the top of an employer's pile of CVs, take advantage of any skills training available during your degree, and find opportunities to apply your skills in ways which differentiate you from all those other postgraduates.

Elizabeth Wilkinson, Head of Postgraduate Career Development

University of Manchester Careers Service
www.manchester.ac.uk/careers

PGR Skills Coordinators Group

The formation of the PGR Skills Co-ordinators Group was the direct result of the emerging national and institutional skills training agenda. The group currently convene on a monthly basis to identify and share good practice and to drive forward the institutional skills training strategy. The group met for the first time in January 2005 and have since looked at the following areas;

- Implementation of a Skills Audit and Personal Development Plan within each of the four faculties
- Sir Gareth Roberts Reporting mechanisms
- Student Experience Survey – Skills Training Feedback
- Supervisor and Post-Doctoral Training
- Personal Development Plan Policy
- New Student System Project and Skills Audit / PDP integration
- Skills Training Policy and Strategy
- Roberts money bids
- University Employer Satisfaction Survey

The group's membership, agendas and minutes are currently being transferred onto the new Research Office web pages, details of which will feature in the next edition of STEPS.

Roberts Skills Training Development Funds

The Roberts Skills Training Development Funds aim to promote and support the development of transferable skills training provision for postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers across the University. These funds are provided through the Research Councils and are referred to as "Roberts Money" as they are a direct result of the recommendations of Sir Gareth Roberts' "SET for Success" review. The Research Office is responsible for monitoring, co-ordinating and developing the operational activities supported by the skills training funds and promoting best practice across the University. Final approval of submitted bids is undertaken by the Graduate Education Group.

For further guidance on how to apply for Roberts Skills Training Development Funds please contact Claire Atherton at Claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk

Projects Funded by the Roberts Money

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences	• Electronic Resources Officer • Post Doctoral Training Officer • Post Doctoral Training Event • Training Manuals	• 4 years (Part time) • 2 years (Part time) • One off • One off
Faculty of Humanities	• Joint Faculty Postgraduate Conference • Research Training Officer • IT Officer • Post Doctoral Training Officer • Training Manuals	• One off • 2 years (Full time) • 15 months (Full time) • 2 years (Part time) • One off
Faculty of Life Sciences	• Critical Writing Skills Project • Critical Writing Skills Project Officer • TNA & PDP Project Officer • Post Doctoral Career Developments Progression Activities • Post Doctoral Fellowships & Alternative Career Workshops • Training Manuals	• 1 year • 2 years (Part time) • 1 year (Full time) • 2 years • 1 year • One off
Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences	• Postgraduate Training Facilitator • Post Doctoral Training Facilitator • Postgraduate Training Secretary • Training Manuals	• 3 years (Full time) • 3 years (Full time) • 2 years (Full time) • One off
Careers Service	• Academic Career Toolkit	• 2 years
Research Office	• PGR Skills Training Newsletter	• 1 year

Skills Training Events

19th - 24th September 2005	National GRADschool	Cambridge	www.grad.ac.uk
11th - 14thOctober 2005	National GRADschool	Coventry	www.grad.ac.uk
24th - 29th October 2005	National GRADschool	Otterburn	www.grad.ac.uk
7th - 11th November 2005	National GRADschool	Windermere	www.grad.ac.uk
21st November 2005	Doing a PhD in the UK – A one day course for international research students	London	www.missendencentre.co.uk/phd05.htm
Late November / Early December	North West Hub Sport, Tourism and Leisure Local GRADschool	North West	www.postgradtalentnw.co.uk

GRAD courses are designed for postgraduate research students to assess and develop their personal effectiveness, networking and team working, communication and career management skills. GRAD schools provide an opportunity to gain motivation, inspiration and insights into how to enhance working relationships.

The North West Hub is one of several regional 'hubs' run under the UK Grad programme, a Research Council funded initiative, which aims to support students, supervisors, universities and employers in realising the value of postgraduate talent.

The aims of the North West Hub are to;

· support PhD students, supervisors and institutions in the North West

· promote, encourage and share good practice in postgraduate skills training

· raise the profile of postgraduate skills training within institutions and with relevant regional bodies

· support the activities of the UK GRAD Programme's Centre of Excellence

www.grad.ac.uk

www.postgradtalentnw.co.uk or email **nwhub@grad.ac.uk**

NB: Please note that all National UK Grad Schools are free to 2nd and 3rd year PhD Research Council funded students. Local UK Grad Schools are free to all PhD students. Please be aware that places are limited.

Skills Training Resources

· **Online Communications Toolkit - www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Support/Communications%5FToolkit**
This online resource provides useful information on how to communicate research effectively and how to achieve the maximum impact for your work.

· **'Just for Postgrads' website - www.grad.ac.uk/jfp** – provides resources designed for all PhD students to help them get the most out of their PhD and prepare for their future careers.

· **PDP Guidance**

www.grad.ac.uk/pdp - The database of personal development planning and related practice in postgraduate research is designed to be a central resource for information about current systems in Personal Development Planning in Institutions, in order to discover best practice and aid future development.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/PDP.htm - The Higher Education Academy have carried out a substantial amount of work on PDP and their website contains a rich seam of information, ranging from research to practical guidance, for academic and related staff in higher education.

www.recordingachievement.org - Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) seeks to 'promote the awareness of recording achievement and action planning processes as an important element in improving learning and progression throughout the world of education, training and employment'.

· **Resources Database website - www.grad.ac.uk/resources** - A pool of resources for all organisers of courses for postgraduates, containing a wide range of course materials, career management sessions, case studies, project management sessions and other useful documents.

· **BBSRC Training Bulletin - www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/training/bulletin.html** - Provides information about developments and news regarding the BBSRC's policy and support for postgraduate training and careers development.

Skills Training Case Study – The Speed PhD

The University is continuing to develop a portfolio of high quality and innovative skills training programmes to equip students with an appropriate skills set. The Speed PhD, originally pioneered by the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences is an example of a skills training programme that has been adapted and implemented across other Faculties and Schools due to its high quality and innovative style.

Speed PhD - Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences

Sometimes you just can't tell people what it is like; sometimes you just have to do it! This is where the innovative 'Speed PhD' exercise used within the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences 'Introduction to Research' workshop, comes in. If you want the best idea of what research is really like, what the pitfalls are, what affects your time, what to look out for at every step, then this is the workshop for you! If you want to learn about research then do some. In two days you will be taken through a research degree from start to finish, in a group exercise. You will carry out some research, publish a paper, attend a conference, have a viva and even produce a thesis! By the end you will have had a great time and gained a wealth of real and practical knowledge that can make the completion of your research degree a whole lot smoother and more efficient.

For further information please visit www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads

Student Comments

"It brought together the many different elements of a PhD over two days. It was also very valuable to have contact with other PhD students".

"The course is very useful for my further research. It gives me an overview of what research is and many good suggestions on how to be an outstanding PhD student."

Speed PhD - Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences

The MHS Speed PhD is a two-day event which includes an overview of the key stages of a research degree, an introduction to project planning and time management, an overview of library facilities including using electronic databases, an overview of IT services with an introduction to Endnote and cite as you write, how to communicate your research effectively, research ethics, fraud and plagiarism (including the JISC system), and reflective learning through self assessment of personal skills.

For further information please visit www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp

Speed PhD - School of Arts, Histories and Cultures

The School of Arts, Histories and Cultures has developed its own take on the two day speed PhD, which is intended to debunk the myths of doctoral research. During day one we uncover the role of the student and the supervisor; you choose a research theme in groups of five or six and then begin research planning. The day covers all the milestones of year one of a "real PhD" including your first panel meeting, your research outline and introduction and your chapter outline. Day two covers the key events in years two and three of doctoral life. This includes your second panel, chapters one to three, your first seminar and conference and your third panel. In most cases it will also probably include the Freudian concept of "Killing the Father!" Add a book proposal, actually submitting your thesis and undertaking a mock viva and you'll really feel you've hit the ground running.

For further information please visit; www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduatestudy/sage-postgraduatetraining

Skills Training Glossary

Generic Skills – These are skills that are common to all graduates rather than specific for a particular field of study. They include communication and problem-solving skills and the ability to work successfully in teams.

GTP – Graduate Training Programme

JSS – Joint Skills Statement sets out the skills that doctoral research students funded by the Research Councils would be expected to develop during their research training.

'Innovation in Science' – This document published in July 2002 outlines the Government's response to 'SET for Success', in which they provide funding of just under £150M in the 2002 Spending Review to the Research Councils to increase stipends, length of PhD programmes and provide training for their funded researchers.

Metcalfe Report – Entitled 'Improving Standards in Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes (2002). This took the form of a consultative document to review good practice, determine the role of threshold standards and identify indicators that could be used to monitor their attainment.

PDP – Personal Development Plan

'SET for Success' – Sir Gareth Roberts review published in April 2002, covers the supply of science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills throughout the education system.

TNA – Training Needs Analysis

Transferable Skills – These are skills which may be of use in future within or out of the area of study (ie even if you don't follow a career in design or performance, these skills will be sought after by potential employers).

UK Grad Programme – The aim is to support the academic sector to embed personal and professional skills development into research degree programmes.

Faculty PGR Skills Training Contacts

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences	**Dr Jim Boran – Graduate Development Director** Jim.boran@manchester.ac.uk
	Dr Tony Bromley – Graduate Development Director Tony.Bromley@manchester.ac.uk
Faculty of Humanities	**Nichola Ellis – PGR Administrator** Nichola.Ellis@manchester.ac.uk
	Dr Julie Reeves – Research Training Officer Julie.Reeves@manchester.ac.uk
Faculty of Life Sciences	**Dr Paul Shore – Graduate Training Programme Director** Paul.Shore@manchester.ac.uk
Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences	**Dr Judith Williams – Postgraduate Training Facilitator** Judith.c.williams@manchester.ac.uk

Feedback

We would welcome all feedback on the content as well as ideas for items for forthcoming issues of STEPS.

Please email any thoughts and comments you may have to Claire Atherton at Claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk