

## Skills Training Essentials for PGR Students

# STEPS

Issue 2 / November 2005

### A Warm Welcome To New PGR Students



### Welcome to the November 2005 issue of STEPS

This September and October saw a flurry of activity with both new and returning postgraduate research students engaging in faculty training programmes.

Over 900 new postgraduate research students got off to a flying start by participating in faculty induction programmes. These events enabled students to gain an overview of what to expect during their research degree programme and also provided the opportunity to network with fellow researchers.

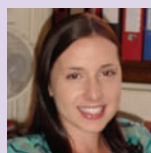
This new academic year promises to be an exciting year for postgraduate research skills training at The University of Manchester. Faculties and Schools have many informative and innovative activities planned to ensure postgraduate research students are equipped with the necessary skills to successfully complete their research and to succeed in future employment.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this edition of STEPS, in particular Yolande Cooke from the Manchester Business School, who provides the first in a new series of 'Skills Training through the Eyes of a PGR Student'.

The next edition will be out in January 2006 and I welcome any views you may have on this issue or ideas for future editions.

Best Wishes

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## New Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Programmes

The Graduate Education Team in the Research Office is co-ordinating the development and implementation of a new code of practice for postgraduate research programmes across the University. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education has written a national code of practice which will inform the new University code.

Work on the new code, to be used by students and academic and administrative staff, commenced in Spring 2005 and will progress through 2006. It will primarily focus on developing policies which facilitate good practice in the following areas of PGR education:

- Admissions, Registration and Induction
- Skills Training
- Supervision
- Student Progress and Review
- Assessment
- Feedback Mechanisms
- Student Services
- Research Ethics
- Quality Assurance Processes
- Complaints and Appeals
- Student Representation

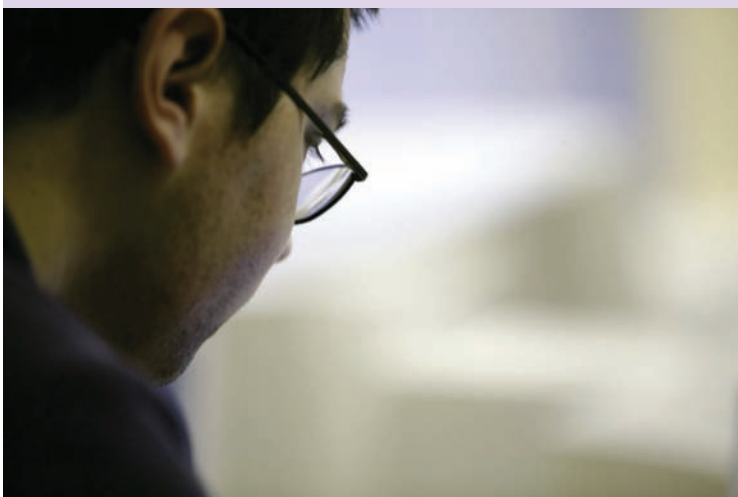
Many sections of the code of practice are now complete and available on the University's policies website as individual policy and guidance documents. Documents include Supervision of Postgraduate Research Degrees Policy, PGR Skills Training Policy, PGR Skills Training Strategy, and so on. In addition, the website contains essential guidance and forms related to the presentation, submission and examination of theses.

As more sections are completed, they will be added to the website, so please check the website on regular basis for new documents and information.

The website can be located at [www.manchester.ac.uk/policies](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/policies)

Click on the Postgraduate Research link on the left of the page to access the documents.

For further information on the new code of practice, please contact Acting Graduate Policy Officer, Joanna Heaps at [Joanna.heaps@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Joanna.heaps@manchester.ac.uk).



## Personal Development Planning

Personal Development Planning (PDP) provides PGR students with the opportunity to plan, reflect on and record progress throughout their period of research. The new QAA code of practice for research degree programmes which formally embeds the recommendations made in the UK Funding Councils 'Improving Standards in Research Degree Programmes' report, includes a precept relating to PDP. It states that 'institutions will provide opportunities for research students to maintain a record of personal progress, which includes reference to the development of research and other skills'.

For further PDP guidance for postgraduate research programmes please contact your relevant faculty graduate office and look at the University's Personal Development Planning Policy located at:

[www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/staffnet/policies](http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/staffnet/policies)



## PGR Tips for Effective Time Management



- Have clear objectives. Knowing the aims of your research will clarify your objectives
- Make and stick to deadlines
- Don't confuse urgency with importance
- Devote time to planning
- Use a diary and timetable key activities
- Don't get bogged down by others. Manage other people's expectations and make your priorities clear to them
- Do one thing at a time
- Review an activity before you leave it
- Reward yourself, ie I'll check my email after I find this reference, or once I finish the draft of this chapter, I'm taking the evening off!

(UKGrad)

## Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Training Activities

It is a busy time of year for staff and students across the University and it's no different in Graduate Development! Over 200 research students attended the Faculty Induction event in Roscoe Building on Friday 23 September, enjoying presentations, information stalls and free food and drink! The compulsory 'Introduction to Research' workshops are well underway now with over 240 research students already booked to attend. The workshops pack in just about as much information and experience as possible in two-days to get you off to a flying start in your research projects. If you have not booked yet don't worry, workshops run into November and there are further workshops in January. See the schedule on the web or drop us an email (details below).

Also well attended and positively received were the Demonstrator Training (Graduate Teaching Assistant) workshops run in September. The workshops covered the theoretical side of learning and teaching and also allowed research students the opportunity to have a go! Again, if you missed it don't worry, there are further workshops in November and January.

For further workshop information and details of how to book go online at [www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads) email [eps-grads@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:eps-grads@manchester.ac.uk)



### Forthcoming workshops

**Careers Conference** - 30 November 2005

**Demonstrator (Graduate Teaching Assistant) Training** - 17 January 2006

**Introduction to Research** - 30 and 31 January 2006

## Faculty of Medical & Human Sciences Training Activities

The new academic year saw the registration of more than 150 new postgraduate research students into the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences. To help get our new students off to a flying start, a two-day Introduction to Research Workshop was provided by the Faculty Training Team. This workshop gave an overview of what to expect during a research degree, and provided advice on research planning and ethics, training opportunities, as well as IT and library facilities.

We were delighted that more than 140 students took the time to attend this workshop in September and October. Their feedback was very positive, and is valued as it helps us adapt the workshop and ensure that it meets the diverse needs of our students. Don't worry if you weren't able to attend one of the recent Introductory workshops; these are being offered again in January 2006 and we would be delighted to see you then. We are also developing training workshops at off campus sites.

Full details of all courses are available on the Faculty Intranet at [www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/graduate/gtp](http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/graduate/gtp)

### Forthcoming workshops

#### Effective Presentation Skills

- Thursday, 29 November and Monday, 5 December 2005
  - Thursday, 26 January and Friday, 3 February 2006
- How to make an effective presentation from design through to delivery

#### Third Year Workshop

Thursday, 19 January 2006  
My thesis and beyond: tips and advice on thesis writing, viva preparation and career management

#### Introduction to Research

Monday, 23 and Tuesday, 24 January 2006  
Overview of key stages of the postgraduate research process with tips and training success

**Student Fora** - During the coming months schools and divisions will be holding student lunches (please contact your school/divisional trainer for details)

## Faculty of Humanities Training Activities

We would like to welcome all new and returning postgraduate students to the Faculty of Humanities.

September found the Faculty Skills Training team visiting individual Schools to highlight the training opportunities available to postgraduate research students new to the University. The team introduced the Skills Audit, training programme and Personal Development Planning (PDP) as part of Induction week.

Currently, the Faculty has 54 courses in the programme. Courses range from one-off sessions, ie Advanced Excel, to special events days including an Academic Careers Day and Humanities Careers Day. We also offer suites of courses consisting of several sessions which make up a whole package. Of special interest to first year students, for example, are the How to Write a Thesis and Academic Writing Skills suites.

A great opportunity has come up for five students to work with Dr. Jim Petch on the How to Write a Thesis suite. If you are a first year student and would like to be a lead student on this course, please email [humanities-training@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:humanities-training@manchester.ac.uk).

Another forthcoming event we are highlighting is the interdisciplinary Knowledge Transfer conference. This international conference, funded by the University, the AHRC and UKGrad, is run and organised by research students and will be organised in collaboration with students from the University of Salford this year. The conference presents a fantastic opportunity to develop management and organisational skills and be part of a prestigious event.

For further information on the Faculty programme, please visit our website [www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/training](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/training)

### Forthcoming workshops

**Presentations Practice and Feedback** - 5 December 2005

**Journal Reviewing** - 8 December 2005

## Faculty of Life Sciences Training Activities

Professor Alan North, Dean of the Faculty of Life Sciences, kicked off Induction week with a warm welcome to over 200 new postgraduates. This year all students were given individual timetables, tailor-made by their programme directors to ensure they attended only the relevant courses. Throughout the week students were provided with guidance and training on a series of subjects including, Faculty organisation, GTP events, Life in the Lab, Managing Literature, Research Facilities, Health and Safety and Computing. This year also saw the introduction of our pioneering Critical Writing Skills course, commencing with an online Training Needs Assessment taken by all new research students. The week culminated with the first Faculty Research Symposium, where new students were able to see firsthand the quality and breadth of research being carried out by 2nd and 3rd year PhD students.

For further information on the Faculty programme, please visit our website: [www.ls.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/gtp](http://www.ls.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/gtp)

### Forthcoming workshops

**EndNote Workshop** - 7 December 2005, ML3 Stopford Building

**Laboratory Demonstrator Training Course** - 21 November, 5 December, 23 January, Training Development Unit

**Statistics Workshop** - 26 & 27 January 2006, Stopford Building

**Core Facilities Workshop** - 24 January 2006

**3rd Year Communication and Careers Workshop (Your Thesis & Beyond)** - 13 & 20 January 2006, Stopford Building

## Outstanding student - 2004/05 Faculty of Humanities Training Programme

Congratulations to Chuan-San B. Wang, a PhD student in the Manchester Business School, who attended 15 training courses in the Faculty of Humanities last year! This was the highest number of courses taken by any student in the Faculty and a very impressive achievement. Equally notable was Chuan-San's reasoning for doing a training course.



Chuan-San, pictured with his family, found attending training courses especially useful as he was writing-up his research. As Chuan-San pointed out, writing-up is a lonely time for a PhD student and the courses were an excellent means, he said, of "getting fresh air." The courses were a great way of improving his skills and himself, and proved especially useful for meeting people and catching up with his peers. But he mainly used the training courses to set himself achievable goals.

**"I would do a course to set a deadline for finishing something – I would commit myself to coming into the University for a course and use the deadline to print out completed work."**

This proved to be an excellent strategy; not only did Chuan-San add to his range of skills but he has just submitted his thesis within the three year period! The thesis, entitled 'Information Content of UK Re-purchase Execution Announcements,' used a quantitative analysis to examine companies who re-purchase their own shares.

When asked which courses were the most useful and enjoyable, Chuan-San cited 'Influencing Others' because he learnt as much about himself as he did about other people, and the 'Presentations, Practice and Feedback' course because it helped him improve his professional presentation style.

Chuan-San came to Manchester from Taiwan in 2002 with his wife Shu-Wei Feng and young daughter Hsuan-Kai Wang and has enjoyed the cultural life of the city, especially the museums, galleries and parks. We wish Chuan-San every success with his forthcoming thesis examination and Good Luck for his future career.

## UK GRAD 4th Annual Conference - Building on UK achievements within the context of Bologna

This conference was designed to report on progress and take forward the key themes identified at the 2004 Annual Conference, particularly in the context of Bologna:

- the opportunities and challenges for the UK PhD in the international market place
- the importance of maintaining competitive edge in developing researcher skills and finding robust ways of evaluating the effectiveness of this provision
- the need for, and ways to achieve, sharing of experience and good practice in a period of rapid change in the postgraduate landscape

Keynote speakers included Professor Sir Gareth Roberts, Chair of the Research Careers Committee

"Postgraduate study is fundamental to the development of higher level skills and the preparation of people who will engage with the problems of the next generation."

For further information on the key themes and outputs of this conference please visit [www.grad.ac.uk/annualconference2005](http://www.grad.ac.uk/annualconference2005)

## The HERD UK Group

The Higher Education Researcher Development Group UK (HERD UK Group) has recently been established to support the people responsible for providing development opportunities for research staff and to inform future policy relating to research careers. The Group is intended to complement the work being done by bodies such as UK GRAD.

The group held a meeting on 15 September 2005 entitled Researcher Development – Making it happen. This meeting focused on the following topics:

- Research Career Development
- Skills Audit and Induction
- Broadening Horizons
- Developing Good Management of Researchers
- Engaging Researchers in University / Research Environment
- PDP & Appraisal

For further information visit [www.grad.ac.uk](http://www.grad.ac.uk)

## Skills Training through the Eyes of a PGR Student

**Yolande Cooke is a full-time, mature student undertaking her PhD programme at the Manchester Business School. Born in Barbados, Yolande studied for her first degree in the USA and a Masters degree at Birmingham University. With twelve years of work experience, Yolande took the decision to embark upon a PhD programme at The University of Manchester where she is currently in the midst of writing up her thesis.**

### 1. What type of skills training have you undertaken so far whilst undertaking your PhD programme?

This year I have attended two careers orientated training sessions entitled 'Where are all the post-graduate jobs?' and 'Finding a job outside the UK'. Also, I recently attended workshops on 'How to Write a Thesis' and 'Surviving the Viva'.

### 2. How have you benefited from attending these skills training sessions?

These sessions enabled me to fine tune my skills in these areas and also expose me to new skills I need for completing my PhD. The sessions also enabled me to network with other PhD students and discuss particular issues.

### 3. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the training?

Even though the thesis writing session was quite broad I found the content very useful, with the tutor

providing first hand experience of supervising and examining theses. It would, however, be good to have a further session at School level to go into further detail. The sessions were also run at timely points where I could implement what was being highlighted.

### 4. What motivated you to undertake training in these particular areas?

The desire to acquire additional information in these areas and to venture into new territory. I also wanted to broaden my understanding of where I could work and the possible career options.

### 5. Are there any skills training activities you would like to see developed for PGR students?

In particular, training activities in leadership, how to effectively manage staff and networking. Also it would be useful to speak with employers from industry to look at what qualities they are looking for from a PhD student.



### 6. Any further comments?

During the early years of my PhD some aspects of skills training did not seem to be relevant at that time. However, now I am writing my thesis I can implement what I have learnt.

## National Skills Training Events

### Monday, 28 and Tuesday, 29 November 2005, BBSRC Workshop - The Next Generation of Researchers (Millennium Gloucester Hotel, Kensington, London)

The Next Generation of Researchers workshop enables final year PhD students and early career postdoctoral researchers working on BBSRC grants to discuss different career paths and future funding opportunities with established researchers and senior BBSRC officials. The programme includes sessions on early career issues, grant awards, international opportunities, entrepreneurial training and multidisciplinary working, plus an open question and answer session. There is no registration fee, and BBSRC will pay for participants' accommodation and meals. Participants are required to pay travel costs.

For further information please visit [www.bbsrc.ac.uk/news/Welcome.html](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/news/Welcome.html)

### Thursday, 19 and Friday, 20 January 2006 Effective Supervision - developing best practice

This seminar provides the opportunity for supervisors - and those who engage and train them - to share in the examination of contemporary issues in the supervision of postgraduate students. All participants will be invited to submit specific problems for special attention.

For further information please visit [www.missendcentre.co.uk](http://www.missendcentre.co.uk)

## Postgrad Talent North West Events

### Wednesday, 18 January 2006 Postgraduate Researchers in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (PRASH) (University of Central Lancashire)

A free one-day conference for research students in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities in the North West which has been jointly organised by UCLAN and Postgrad Talent NW.

The aims of PRASH are:

- to enable research students to present their work in progress
- to offer networking opportunities for research students
- to encourage collaboration across institutions and disciplines
- to provide workshops on generic and specific skills relating to research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

For further information please visit [www.postgradtalentnw.co.uk](http://www.postgradtalentnw.co.uk)

### Wednesday, 8 February 2006 ENGAGE - approaches for the effective communication of research (University of Chester)

This FREE regional event will feature a number of speakers who will highlight the variety of opportunities and approaches there are to communicating your research topic. This event will be open to all postgraduate researchers from across the NW and will include a selection of keynote speakers and specially designed workshops.

This multi-disciplinary day conference for postgraduate research students in the NW responds to the continuing need for students engaged in research to communicate effectively the nature and value of their research, not only to fellow academics within their own discipline, but also to the wider community, thereby enhancing both public awareness of the important role and contribution of research to society and public support for postgraduate research activities.

For further information please visit [www.postgradtalentnw.co.uk](http://www.postgradtalentnw.co.uk)

## GRAD schools 2006 PLEASE VISIT THE UK GRAD WEBSITE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION [WWW.GRAD.AC.UK](http://WWW.GRAD.AC.UK)

20 - 24 February 2006	4 days, ½ day of outdoor activities	Windermere	Windermere Hydro Hotel	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
20 - 25 March 2006	5 days, ½ day of outdoor activities	Windermere	Windermere Hydro Hotel	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
24 - 27 April 2006	3 days, careers	Brighton	Royal Albion Hotel	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
8 - 13 May 2006	5 days, ½ day of outdoor activities	Windermere	Windermere Hydro Hotel	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
22 - 26 May 2006	4 days	Midlands	Britannia Hotel, Coventry	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
12 - 17 June 2006	5 days	Stirling	University of Stirling	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
26 - 29 June 2006	3 days, environmental	London	City University, London	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
3 - 7 July 2006	4 days, ½ day of outdoor activities	Windermere	Windermere Hydro Hotel	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
28 July - 2 August 2006	5 days	Exeter	Exeter	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
4 - 8 September 2006	4 days	Cambridge	Girton College Cambridge	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
18 - 21 September 2006	3 days, careers	Newcastle	Newcastle, Longhirst Hall	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
10 - 14 October 2006	4 days	Brighton	Royal Albion Hotel	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>
6 - 10 November 2006	4 days, ½ day of outdoor activities	Windermere	Windermere Hydro Hotel	<a href="http://www.grad.ac.uk">www.grad.ac.uk</a>

## Skills Training Case Study - Faculty Research Symposium

### Life Science students showcase their skills

Life Sciences recently held its first Faculty Research Symposium. The symposium is the Faculty's flagship Graduate Training Programme event and tops the bill of the postgraduate introductory week.



The event saw 12 postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers give presentations to nearly 700 of their peers, academic staff and invited guests at the Renold Building. The quality of the oral presentations was outstanding. Each of the speakers had already won a £250 cash prize and were competing for the Faculty's postgraduate and postdoctoral research prizes. It was a close run thing but Grigoris Amoutzias (postgraduate) and Anthony Tighe (postdoc) just pipped their peers to win the laptop computers provided by AstraZeneca and Professor Barry Furr through the Manchester Technology Fund. More prizes were also awarded to 5 second-year postgraduate students for presenting the best posters – the judges had the unenviable task of choosing the winners from 101 excellent posters on display. For those who missed out on prizes there were plenty of trade stands offering free gifts which were enthusiastically snapped up by staff and students alike. The whole day was superb; there was a celebratory feel and a real buzz of enthusiasm as staff and students discussed their work in the foyer of the Renold Building, where the posters were displayed alongside the trade exhibition.

Professor Alan North, Dean of Life Sciences, said he had been pleasantly surprised by what was his first research symposium in Manchester,

**“In my many previous positions in academia around the world I have rarely sensed such a buzz of enthusiastic interest in each other's work. This was the more surprising given the very wide range of life science on display.”**

Professor Martin Humphries, the Faculty's Associate Dean for Research, added:

**“This event was intended to showcase the very best work that has been published by our postgraduates and postdoctoral researchers and turned out to be a spectacular success. The special combination of breadth and quality made for a very entertaining and thought-provoking symposium.”**

Such a resounding success serves to demonstrate that the best way for students to develop their transferable skills is within the context of their research training.

Dr Paul Shore,  
Director of FLS Graduate Training  
Programme



## Recommended Reading

### Burnham, P. (1994)

Surviving the viva: unravelling the mystery of the PhD oral. Journal of Graduate Education, Vol. 1, pp. 30-34

### Cryer, P. (1996)

The research student's guide to success. Buckingham: Open University Press

### Hall, G.M. (1998)

How to Write a Paper. BMJ Books, pp. 157, ISBN: 0727912348

### Murray, R. (2002)

How to Write a Thesis. Open University Press, pp. 305, ISBN: 0335207189

### Tinkler, P. & Jackson, C. (2002)

In the dark? Preparing for the PhD viva. Quality Assurance in Education, Vol.10, No.2, pp.86-97

## Call for Papers

### Skills Training in Research Degree Programmes: Politics and Practice

A book edited by Richard Hinchcliffe, Tony Bromley, Steve Hutchinson.

Proposal Submission (Max 200 words) Deadline: 16 December 2005.

The book will be structured into the three sections:

- 1 The politics and Culture of Research Training
- 2 Skills Training in Practice
- 3 The Future

We are asking for contributions in any of these and ask for three types of article

- 1 Evidence-base and conclusion
- 2 Documentation (eg case study)
- 3 Opinion pieces

For further details visit [www.eps.manchester.ac.uk/graduateschool/graduatedevelopment/skillsbook](http://www.eps.manchester.ac.uk/graduateschool/graduatedevelopment/skillsbook)

## Faculty PGR Skills Training Contacts

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Faculty of Humanities

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**Dr Julie Reeves – Research Training Officer**  
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Faculty of Life Sciences

**Dr Paul Shore – GTP Director**  
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Faculty of Medical and  
Human Sciences

**Dr Judith Williams – Postgraduate Training Facilitator**  
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## Feedback

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

The deadlines for contributions to the next three issues of STEPS are:

January 2006 issue deadline – **Friday, 16 December 2006**

March 2006 issue deadline – **Friday, 17 February 2006**

May 2006 issue deadline – **Friday, 21 April 2006**

Please email any thoughts and comments you may have to Claire Atherton at [claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk)