

Skills Training Essentials for PGR Students

STEPS

Issue 3 / February 2006

The Careers and Employability Division Embark Upon the Academic Careers Toolkit Project



The University has recently funded the Careers and Employability Division to work on a pioneering project to support students and researchers employed by the University who aspire to careers in academia.

In addition to producing practical careers information targeted specifically at academia, the project aims to develop innovative web-based support, driven primarily by the academic communities in Schools and Faculties across the University.

We are delighted to have recruited Dr Jennifer Allanson to work on this project. Jen has an outstanding background for this work, having combined a career as a successful academic with an innovative interdisciplinary approach to research and teaching, and postgraduate training consultancy.

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Editors Note

Happy New Year and welcome to the February edition of STEPS.

I hope readers of STEPS are finding the content of the newsletter informative and useful in providing an overview of the skills training activities being undertaken in Faculties and Schools.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this edition of STEPS, in particular to the Careers and Employability Division, the Counselling Research Group, and Davina Whitnall and Raquel Perry from the Faculty of Life Sciences.

Special thanks also go to Jane Cowley from the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences who features in this issue's 'Skills Training through the Eyes of a PGR Student'.

Best wishes

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The Careers and Employability Division Embark Upon the Academic Careers Toolkit Project

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Jen completed her PhD in Computer Science at Lancaster University in 2000, which included an internship at the Xerox Research Centre in Cambridge working on interactive virtual reality models linked to ethnographic fieldwork studies, research which became one of the stepping stones to the commercial Xerox product, Docushare.

Prior to completing her PhD, Jen secured a lectureship in Interactive Systems at the Computing Department at Lancaster University, establishing an international research reputation in the field of Physiological Computing (interactive systems that take detectable human physiology as an input source). She has published around 20 peer-reviewed articles, organised sessions at international conferences, been awarded EPSRC research grants and a CASE award, and has been invited to act as a reviewer for the EPSRC, ESRC and AHRC.

She was also part of the Pilkington Award-winning team that designed and ran Lancaster University's first paperless undergraduate course.

If you feel strongly about the career support you would like to see offered to aspiring academics by this University, please get in touch and help us to shape this exciting project – we'd love to hear from you.

Elizabeth Wilkinson, Head of Postgraduate Career Development,
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Dr Jen Allanson, Project Officer, Academic Careers Toolkit,
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Professor Jackie Oldham, Operational Director, Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility and Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences
Dr Caroline Bowsher, Lecturer in Plant Sciences, Faculty of Life Sciences



PGR Tips for Maximising Your Impact

To make the most of your doctorate, you must look beyond your research environment and offer something more than a thesis and research related skills. Even if you are planning a career in academia you will find that, in itself a PhD is not enough. Here UK Grad lists some of the opportunities that are available to you to develop wider professional skills.

- **Attending a GRADschool** offers you a chance to develop an awareness of your skills and attributes, and gives you the self confidence and self reliance to achieve your potential.
- Taking the opportunities for **formal training**
- **Conferences** provide the opportunity to interface with the research community, make new contacts, develop potential collaborations and better understand the context of your own work.
- **Faculty / School student representative** enables you to

develop your communication and negotiation skills as well as learning about the structure and nature of committee meetings.

- **Student or Voluntary Societies** involvement can assist in the development of organisational, communication, marketing and financial management skills.
- **Work Shadowing** offers the opportunity to gain more information about specific careers of interest to you outside academia.
- **Membership of Professional Bodies**
- **Demonstrating and teaching** enables you to develop your people management and communication skills, and learn how to give feedback.
- **Supervising undergraduate research projects** can provide you with the opportunity to learn how to manage research effectively and develop mentoring and communication skills.

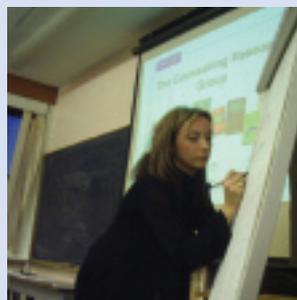
Counselling Research Group (CRG)

The University of Manchester is home to a vibrant and diverse body of counselling research and training, offering the MA in Counselling Studies, Certificate in Supervision and the Helping Professions, Professional Doctorate in Counselling and PhD. Consequently, we are keen to develop an active research network for our community of counselling researchers and formed the Counselling Research Group (CRG). The first meeting of the group took place at The University of Manchester on 25th October 2005.



Aims for the CRG are to facilitate research links enabling us to share resources, expertise and useful references with others who possess similar research interests. It was also anticipated that it could be a place to bring research issues when we get 'stuck' or need a fresh pair of eyes to look at things from a different perspective. The group could provide an opportunity to get feedback

about writing whether it is for dissertations, theses, proposals, presentations, funding bids or publication. We would be able to hear about the 'process' of research for students at different points in their study, for example preparing to submit the MA dissertation, supervision portfolio or planning the Doctorate viva.



On the night, 36 of us got together for a stimulating, dynamic and supportive meeting. The group was felt to meet a need; the attendance of such a significant number of people confirmed a 'hunger for an opportunity to engage with our research selves in a semi formal capacity'.

If you are interested in attending future meetings of the CRG (the next meeting is 14th February 2006 4.40 – 7.15pm in A5.5 of the Devas Street, Humanities Building) and would like further information please contact either:

Dr Clare Lennie at clare.lennie@manchester.ac.uk

Terry Hanley at terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk



Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Training Activities

13/02/06 Academic Writing	15/02/06 Academic Writing
20/02/06 Academic Writing	21/02/06 Effective Presentations
22/02/06 Academic Writing	23/02/06 Effective Presentations
27/02/06 Academic Writing	01/03/06 Academic Writing
02/03/06 Planning the Final Year	06/03/06 Academic Writing
08/03/06 Academic Writing	09/03/06 Planning the Final Year
13/03/06 Academic Writing	16/03/06 Starting a Business – Unlocking the Value of New Technology
23/03/06 Critical Thinking	29/03/06 Careers Conference

For further information on the above events, please visit our website
www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads

Faculty of Life Sciences Training Activities

The Faculty of Life Sciences (FLS) is developing an electronic management system. The FLS electronic Graduate Training Programme (eGTP) is a flexible, efficient system that monitors the progress and development of postgraduate students.

eGTP consists of several elements of skills units, research progression and personal development, but it is much more than an electronic platform to access these facilities. eGTP is a holistic programme which involves all aspects of postgraduate activity and is an integral part of the research, not a separate or additional element.

Training Need Assessments (TNA) and Personal Development Plans (PDP) processes are embedded into the research programme seamlessly and effectively without detracting from the main focus of postgraduate activity – the research.

eGTP provides an interactive experience above and beyond other conventional graduate training programmes by encouraging creative thinking in personal development as well as self ownership.

The research progression facility utilises 'e' systems to track and monitor student progress and introduces new approaches such as Problem Identification Plans (PIPs) to identify issues early and provide remedial advice. eGTP is used in conjunction with face to face meetings with the supervisor and advisor which underpin the progression process.

The eGTP incorporates many innovative qualities; however, perhaps the most effective is the most simplistic. Just that, it is simple, and easy to use.

The eGTP pilot is currently running until March 2006 with rollout to all postgraduate students within the Faculty in September 2006.

If you would like to find out more about eGTP or have any queries or comments, please contact davina.whitnall@manchester.ac.uk for further information.

Friday 13 February 06 Flow Cytometry

Monday 27 February 06 Bioimaging

Wednesday 15 March 06 Electron Microscopy

For further information on the Life Sciences Graduate Training Programme please visit our website www.ls.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/gtp/

Faculty of Humanities Training Activities

Thursday 23 February 06	Writing Workshop 1: Insights into the Writing Process
Thursday 2 March 06	Writing Workshop 2: Understanding academic style and conventions
Thursday 9 March 06	Workshop 3: Understanding academic style and conventions
Thursday 16 March 06	Writing Workshop 4: Academic Language and Structure
Wednesday 15 March 06	Project Manage your Research: From Conception to Completion
Wednesday 15 March 06	Presenting Your Research
Thursday 30 March 06	Presentation Practice and Feedback

For further information on the above events, please visit our website
www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/training

Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences Training Activities

Wednesday 15 March 06 - Interprofessional Healthcare Workshop

The Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences is offering all postgraduate students the opportunity to take part in a one-day conference forum to experience inter-professional team working within an educational setting.

It is intended to provide healthcare students with an opportunity to:

- Increase their knowledge, confidence and competence when discussing case management decisions within an interprofessional team
- Value the philosophies, opinions and patient management priorities of other healthcare disciplines
- Engage in deep reflective learning

Monday 3 April 06 Introduction to Research

Thursday 6 April
Friday 7 April 06 Speed PhD

Wednesday 26 April 06 Reference Manager

Endnote Training Sessions – One-to-one training sessions can be organised upon request with the training team

Peer Mentoring Programme - the first year of your PhD can be a difficult time and this is a simple, informal way for you to get extra help and advice from those who have been through it. We have a number of second and third year research students who have been trained as mentors. For further information please visit our website

<http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp/mentoring/>

For further information on the above events, please visit our website
www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp/

UK GRAD Database of Practice

The last few years have seen a large increase in interest in developing researchers' personal, professional and career management skills. This has been prompted partially by recent government initiatives such as Sir Gareth Roberts' review 'SET for Success' and Section One of the new QAA Code of Practice: Research Degree Programmes.



The UK GRAD Programme is responding to increasing requests from the sector to develop a mechanism to share practice in this area. The database has been set up to collect examples of practice relating to skills development for researchers and to share this through a searchable database. Brief entries are as valid as detailed entries. As well as having the potential to be a superb national resource for anyone with a remit to support researcher development, it will also allow institutions to record practice related to their Roberts funding.

To view the full array of institutional practices please visit;

http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/plealbcji

GradSkills Centre for Science Education Communications Skills Development

Based on the highly successful Researchers in Residence programme, this scheme places researchers in secondary schools on short term placements.

The aims of the scheme are twofold:

- To develop a range of transferable skills for the researcher, particularly communication and time management, by taking part in the training programme and spending 4-5 days in school.
- To enthuse young people during their studies by providing them with realistic and contemporary instances of where research, from the sciences, engineering and mathematics through to the arts and humanities, has made, and will continue to make, an impact on their lives and the lives of others.

Any researcher volunteering for the GradSkills programme will receive training and have a full police check before being placed in a school either of their own choosing or one found for them.

On completion of the placement a Record of Experience document will be issued which contains all the relevant information about the programme and the placement and can be used in CVs, PDPs and job applications.

For each participant the cost is £375. For any institution that recruits 10 or more researchers the cost reduces to £350 per participant.

For further information please contact Carly McDonald on 0114 2254876 or email C.McDonald@shu.ac.uk

Skills Training Through the Eyes of a PGR Student

Jane Cowley is a 3rd year full-time student undertaking her PhD programme in the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Prior to embarking upon her PhD programme Jane undertook her undergraduate degree at The University of Nottingham and subsequently worked as a Community Pharmacist in Leeds for 2 years. Jane is currently the postgraduate representative for the School and offers her thoughts on the skills training she has undertaken through the course of her degree programme.

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

Throughout the course of my PhD I have attended the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year workshops run by the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences. These offered a combination of skills training opportunities including how to write an abstract, communicating with the public and career management skills. At the beginning of my PhD I attended a number of courses offered by the Training and Development Unit, including one on project management, as the level of transferable skills training opportunities offered by the Faculty and School was not as comprehensive as it is today.

2. As the postgraduate representative for Pharmacy how have you been able to put the skills you have acquired into practice?

I organise the postgraduate student committee which includes around 8 research students and 2 senior academics. The main focus of this committee is to look at skills training opportunities, the PhD process and also to organise social and networking events. I have therefore put my communication, project management and networking skills into practice. The committee recently held a 'postgraduate fun day' involving team building exercises and networking

opportunities. The event was attended by 50 students and the feedback received was very positive.

3. Are there particular elements of the skills training programme you have found particularly useful?

The sessions which had a career focus were especially valuable as they enabled me to look at other career directions and possibilities. Also the skills training I received at the beginning of my PhD enabled me to make a smoother transition to becoming a student once again, as I had been out of academia for two years.

4. Are there any areas of skills training you would like to see improved?

There are a number of excellent courses available to students like the 'Speed PhD', and I feel that the whole training programme has great potential. I would like to see some aspects of the training tailored more towards specific needs whilst also having access to inter-faculty training. I would also find it useful to have training in abstract writing during my 3rd year in addition to the training I received in my 1st year.

5. What additional skills training opportunities would you like to see being offered to postgraduate research students?



I think it would be useful for students to have access to people management training, including how to be diplomatic with your supervisor. In addition, I feel it would prove useful to gain advice on your thesis from individuals aside from your supervisor.

6. Any further comments?

There are numerous skills training opportunities available to postgraduate research students but they are not all aware of these, therefore I think further marketing needs to take place.

National Skills Training Events

Thursday 30 and Friday 31 May 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.missendencecentre.co.uk

University Skills Training Events

Wednesday 15 March 2006 - 9:30am – 13.00pm – Interdisciplinary Team working Project for Postgraduates

Are you interested in;

- Applying your skills and expertise to important global, health, societal and environmental issues
- Problem solving
- Effective communication skills
- Project Management
- Negotiating with colleagues from other professions or disciplines

If so, the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences would like to invite you to participate in an interdisciplinary team working project with students from across the University. You will be working with them on scenarios concerned with important global problems in order to devise strategies for solving specific dilemmas. The issues will relate to the effects of the Tsunami and water pollution in the Bangladesh and the Indian sub-continent.

If you are interested, please contact Sarah Williams, Graduate Training Team at mhspg-training@manchester.ac.uk or by telephone on 0161 275 1454

Tuesday 4 to Thursday 6 April 2006 – Developing the Postgraduate Manager

This is a three-day course designed for second and third year postgraduate research students. The aim is to develop negotiation, team working, project planning and presentation skills and to increase self-confidence. The course includes decision making strategies, marketing methods, effective presenting, an introduction to Belbin Team roles, short film production, video editing and time management.

The objective of the course is for students to understand key features of teams and their roles along with the importance of this to future employment, demonstrate effective team working, practise oral and written presentation skills, apply decision making and problem solving skills in a safe environment and analyse strengths and weaknesses with the ability to give and receive constructive feedback.

This is an excellent opportunity for students to gain experience of leadership, decision making under pressure and the complex nature of personal interactions within teams.

For further information please contact Claire Gill at claire.gill@manchester.ac.uk

GRAD Schools 2006

PLEASE VISIT THE UK GRAD WEBSITE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION WWW.GRAD.AC.UK

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

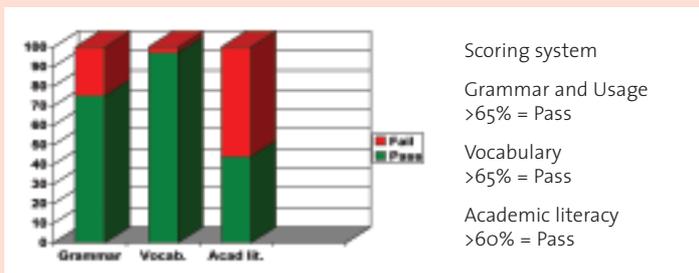
Skills Training Case Study Critical Writing Skills Programme

Faculty of Life Sciences

This year, a new innovative training package - The Critical Writing Skills Programme - was introduced to all first year postgraduates. As part of overall postgraduate training in generic transferable skills, the Programme was designed to help build competencies in critical reading and writing. The Programme is computer-based using an established IT platform within the faculty - electronic problem-based learning (ePBL). It consists of an on-line Training Needs Assessment (TNA) to determine current ability in English language skill utilisation and a 12 week modular programme.

A feasibility study of the Programme funded through Roberts was carried out early in the year with a cohort of 36 home and overseas student volunteers. The study was an inter-faculty collaboration with the University Language Centre and Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences.

Graph 1: Percentage of students who passed the TNA



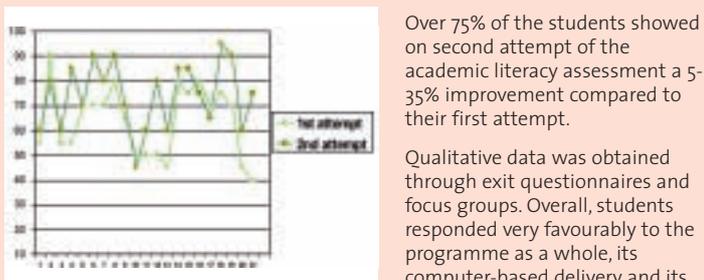
Graph 1 shows the results obtained from the Training Needs Assessment. Over half of the students failed the Academic literacy assessment reinforcing the need to improve English language skills among our postgraduates.

In terms of qualitative data collected, over 80% of students found the academic literacy assessment both relevant and useful. One student said,

“I believe that most students would benefit most from developing further their academic literacy”

On the Programme itself, 20 out of the 36 students completed the 12 week programme. We re-tested these students using the academic literacy assessment as shown in Graph 2 below.

Graph 2: Percentage scores in the re-testing of the academic literacy assessment



relevance to postgraduate study. One student commented as follows:

“I didn’t think I would find it helpful but I have. I think it has given me a lot more insight into my own writing and what I need to change. I’ve really enjoyed it”

In response to what personal or professional qualities they may have gained by completing the programme, most commonly cited by students was ‘confidence’.

Finally, all the student volunteers said, when asked that they would recommend the Programme to new postgraduates.

In September, the Critical Writing Skills Programme was successfully introduced to all new postgraduates within the Faculty. A total of 110 students completed the Training Needs Assessment with still over one-third failing the academic literacy assessment. The Programme is now in its ninth week with over 80% of students still completing the Programme.

Dr Raquel Perry – Programme Manager

Recommended Reading

Bolker, J. (1998)

Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day

Higham, N. (1998)

Handbook of Writing for the Mathematical Sciences, 2nd Edition
<http://www.ma.man.ac.uk/~higham/hwms/>

Rothwell, N. (2002)

Who wants to be a Scientist? Choosing Science as a Career

Recommended Resources

Writing about Research

The Writing Centre at Colorado State University provides a valuable online resource that deals with the rhetoric of research writing and with the methodology of conducting empirical research.

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/>

BBSRC - Communicating with the Public Guidance Notes

Advice on how to take your science to a broader audience by working with the media and schools, putting on exhibitions and displays, and addressing sensitive issues

www.bbsrc.ac.uk/tools/download/communicating_notes/Welcome.html

BBSRC - Postgraduate Training and Career Development Bulletin

Register with 'BBSRC Training' and they will send you a regular update of news, events, announcements and new initiatives. The bulletin is aimed at postgraduate, postdoctoral and other early-career scientists in the biosciences, particularly those funded by the BBSRC, but also of interest to the wider community. The bulletin will also be useful for those involved in organising training and developing training strategies at Universities and research institutes.

www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/training/bulletin.htm

overVIEW – UK Grad Bulletin for Supervisors

When it comes to matters relevant to postgraduate research degrees, and how these will impact supervisors, overVIEW can keep you up to speed with what’s happening – nationally, regionally, locally – and put these initiatives into a European context as well.

To view the latest overVIEW bulletin please visit;

www.grad.ac.uk/downloads/documents/overview%20winter%202005.pdf

Faculty PGR Skills Training Contacts

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences

Dr Jim Boran – Graduate Development Director
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Dr Tony Bromley – Graduate Development Director
tony.bromley@manchester.ac.uk

Faculty of Humanities

Dr Julie Reeves – Research Training Officer
julie.reeves@manchester.ac.uk

Faculty of Life Sciences

Dr Paul Shore – GTP 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 forthcoming issues of STEPS.

The deadlines for contributions to the next two issues of STEPS are;

March 2006 issue deadline – Friday 17th February 2006

May 2006 issue deadline – Friday 21st April 2006

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