

Skills Training Essentials for PGR Students

STEPS

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Developing the Postgraduate Manager Event 20 - 22 June 2006



This three-day workshop is open to all postgraduate research students across the University and seeks to develop team working, project planning, presentation skills and negotiation. The workshop mixes experiential tasks with intensive reviews of team and individual performance, based on the UK GRADschool model. Attendance at the workshop fulfills the Research Councils requirement to attend a GRADschool.

This workshop offers students the opportunity to understand the key features of teams and their roles along with the importance of this to future employment; demonstrate effective team working; practice 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 postgraduate research students to gain experience of leadership, decision making under pressure and the complex nature of personal interactions within teams.

To book a place or for further information please visit:
www.eps.manchester.ac.uk/graduateschool/graduatedevelopment/wso4devpgm.html

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Editor's Note

Spring has arrived and has brought with it a vast array of skills training opportunities for postgraduate research students across the University. In this issue we hear how the October 2005 Skills Training Development Funds have been spent, find out about the bug hunting activities of a number of Life Sciences postgraduate research students and see how one student has combated the feeling of isolation.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this edition of STEPS, in particular Martin Gisby from the Faculty of Life Sciences who features in this issue's 'Skills Training through the Eyes of a PGR Student' and Clive Rowland who offers his thoughts on the recent UK Grad event PRASH.

Best Wishes

Claire Atherton
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Roberts Skills Training Development Funds

The 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 development funds and promoting best practice across the University. Final approval of all submitted bids is undertaken by the Graduate Education Group, whose members include the Associate Deans for Graduate Education.

The recent round of bidding took place in October 2005 with applications being invited from all Schools and Faculties. Bids that involved an element of collaboration between Schools and other areas, such as the Careers Service, were particularly welcomed.

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

October 2005 Funded Projects

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analytical Mathematics, Statistics & Data Representation Project Officer Grantmanship Masterclass Development for Postdoctoral Researchers Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Researcher workshops in Enterprise and Innovation Faculty wide programme of Research Conferences
Faculty of Humanities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Training Assistant Postdoctoral Training Day Part time Student Skills Training Away Day Support Resources Project Pool of Skills Trainers
Faculty of Life Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening Participation in the Critical Writing Skills Programme at intra and inter Faculty level Online computational, mathematical and statistical methods course Grant Proposal Writing Exercise Postdoctoral Training Coordinator
Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postdoctoral Training Secretary Development of Statistical Design and Analysis Training Package for Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Researcher Development of a suite of online training modules
Research Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online Intellectual Property Rights Course Skills Coordinators Group Activities

What is a PhD for?

What is a PhD for? The answer used to be obvious - a PhD launched one's academic career. Yet, when only 35% of Humanities PhDs' first job is an academic one, it seems naïve to assume that we know or can anticipate the answer to this question. Students do PhDs for a variety of reasons and we need to accept that becoming an academic is no longer the first career choice of many doctoral students.

Asking 'what a PhD is for?' challenges staff and students alike. Arguably, this is the question that drives the skills training agenda. Understanding and reflecting on the question at the institutional, supervisory and student level raises issues as to why skills' training is needed and what kind of training is required.

It is no longer tenable to argue (if it ever was!) that 'arts students don't need quantitative methods training' or that 'team building' will be irrelevant to an academic interview. If you don't know where

your students will end up, this kind of argument is not only mistaken but dangerously out of step with the expectations of student and employer alike.

We need to review the content, relevance and quality of everything offered to PGRs. The School of Environment and Development, under the direction of Professor Noel Castree (PGR Director) and Dr Sarah Bracking, is currently undertaking such a review. Professor Castree has asked staff and students to examine the training programme for best practice, efficiency and appropriateness. This is precisely the kind of debate the university needs to engage with. It would be an institutional disservice to fail to provide students with the best and most relevant training, or listen to what they say.

The nature of the PhD has changed and so have the aspirations and expectations of students who do them. As Richard Pawson (2nd year PGR, SED) pointed out, staff “shouldn't make 'how to be an academic' the

cornerstone of a training programme.” Absorbing this point may help to improve students' satisfaction and performance, as well as their career prospects.

Dr Julie Reeves – Research Training Officer Faculty of Humanities



Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Training Activities

03/05/06	Effective Presentations	03/05/06	Effective Presentations
05/05/06	Effective Presentations	05/05/06	Effective Presentations
08/05/06	Effective Presentations	08/05/06	Effective Presentations
10/05/06	Effective Presentations	10/05/06	Effective Presentations
11/05/06	Demonstrator Training	11/05/06	Demonstrator Training
12/05/06	Effective Presentations	12/05/06	Effective Presentations
15/05/06	Academic Writing	15/05/06	Academic Writing
15/05/06	Effective Presentations	15/05/06	Effective Presentations
17/05/06	Academic Writing	17/05/06	Academic Writing
17/05/06	Effective Presentations	17/05/06	Effective Presentations

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

Faculty of Life Sciences Training Activities

18-19/05/06	Second year workshop: Writing Skills and Careers
14-15/06/06	First year workshop: Communication Skills

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

27/04/06	Project Manage your Research: From Conception to Completion
10/05/06	Creative and Problem Solving
18/05/06	Presentations Practice and Feedback
24/05/06	Time Management

24/06/06 Part-Time Students Training Away Day
This away day provides an opportunity for part-time students in the Faculty to gather together, to share experiences and ideas, and to address practical issues that are pertinent to part-time students. The day will consist of a series of workshops and will include concentrated training in project and time management; IT skills including overviews of Endnote and using Word to organise your work; practical matters such as working with your supervisor, networking, publishing and establishing your career over a long period.

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

Faculty of Medical & Human Sciences - Training Activities

24/04/06 & 05/05/06	Effective Presentation Skills
28/04/06	In the home stretch: preparation of a high-quality PhD thesis
03/05/06	Effective academic writing: getting the message across
18-19/05/06	Second year workshop: how to make your PhD work for you
06/06/06	First year workshop: Communication Skills

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

Bug hunting with Life Science students

Three PhD students from the Faculty of Life Sciences recently spent a day looking down microscopes with children at St Paul's Constable Lee Primary School in Rawtenstall. Laila Beynon, Dawn Smith and Laura Davies had a great time showing the children how to use microscopes and identify a mesmerising range of creepy crawlies.

Dawn Smith said, **"It was a very satisfying experience, the children were so enthusiastic, it was great fun to see their reaction when the kicking legs of a giant Daphnia appeared on the screen."**

Dr Paul Shore, Director of the Life Sciences Graduate Training Programme commented, **"The Faculty has a long tradition of public engagement and is presently developing this ethos within the Graduate Training Programme, which now provides opportunities for research students to get involved with public understanding of science in and around Manchester. I'm personally pleased to see our research students engaging with very young children, it helps to break down stereotypes and show that science and scientists can be fun."**

For further information contact:

Dr Paul Shore, FLS Graduate Training Programme Director



Combating the Feeling of Isolation

Undertaking a PhD can be a very lonely experience, with students often experiencing long periods of isolation which can affect both morale and motivation. This feeling of isolation is particularly common amongst Humanities students where projects are often undertaken individually. There are a number of steps that can be taken to avoid feeling isolated including attending school seminars, joining a special interest group in your area and having regular discussions with your supervisor. Here Lee Williamson describes how she and her colleagues have combated the feeling of isolation.

I am PhD student in the Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR), which is an interdisciplinary research centre, including research from the areas of demography, sociology, politics and data confidentiality and privacy. I have found that a downside of both an interdisciplinary research centre and academic research is that one can feel quite isolated and although PhD students may share a common office, we do not regularly engage in discussions on issues directly relating to the PhD process or even our PhD topics.

Network with other research students

After chatting with other PhD students about this lack of interaction, last summer we decided to start

up a CCSR PhD Group, which involves meeting once a month at lunchtime to discuss all PhD related issues (while eating lunch together in the dept). It has given us the opportunity to discuss everything from PhD projects, exchanging ideas, starting up a reading group, becoming teaching assistants, useful training courses and websites, to arranging social events – such as lunch outings as a group! The meetings have also proved valuable as an informal feedback mechanism, providing the opportunity to do a trial run before going to present a paper at a conference. In addition, now that we all know what each other is doing, this can be useful for developing joint conference papers.

Keeping a balance to your life

Finally, it is often helpful for us simply to get together socially and to take some time out to talk about the PhD experience and about things that it would be useful to know. For example, before Christmas we organised a seminar called 'getting your work into print', where academic and research staff from CCSR gave short presentations drawing from their own experience. The seminar was very successful and the information valuable, while the focus of the seminar was academic journals, there was also advice on producing working papers throughout the PhD process, and even on keeping motivated to get the PhD into print!

Skills Training Through the Eyes of a PGR Student

Martin Gisby is a 3rd year full time postgraduate research student studying in the Faculty of Life Sciences. After successfully completing an undergraduate and MRes degree programme at The University of Manchester, Martin took the decision to continue his studies and undertake his research in the Plant Sciences Section of the Faculty of Life Sciences. As the postgraduate representative for the Faculty Graduate Training Programme (GTP), Martin attends monthly GTP committee meetings to offer a student perspective on existing and future training opportunities.

What skills training opportunities have you taken advantage of so far in the course of your research programme?

Through the course of my PhD programme I have attended training activities offered by the Faculty of Life Sciences and by the Biotechnological and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). Faculty events included the first year Communication Skills workshop, which encompassed how to write an abstract and critical marking, how to write a continuation report, tips for the continuation viva and how to communicate science to the public. I also attended the second and third year workshops which focused upon enhancing writing skills and career development, and your thesis and beyond.

I have also taken part in the Biotechnology YES (Young Entrepreneurs Scheme) which is organised jointly by the University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation and the BBSRC. This competition covered topics such as the Requirements of a Business Plan, Intellectual Property and Patenting Strategy, Financing a New Business, Financial Planning, and Commercial and Marketing Strategies. Together with my team members, we then implemented what we had learnt by producing a business plan presentation for our "imaginary" biotech start-up company, which was scrutinised by a panel of "investors".

What specific transferable skills did you develop from taking part in Biotechnology YES?

This scheme not only enabled me to enhance my presentation, team working and time management skills, but also provided me with the opportunity to

network with a number of biotech and business professionals, thus developing my networking and career development skills.

Did the skills training opportunities offered by the Faculty meet your expectations?

The yearly workshops offered to postgraduate research students cover areas appropriate to that point of study and therefore enable you to implement what you have just learnt. The Careers workshop run in the second year, for example, enables you to start thinking about the various career possibilities available at a point where you have time to give it some real thought. I felt the training opportunities were pitched at the right level to encompass the majority of participants.

How have you personally benefited from attending skills training sessions?

Through attending both internal and external training events I have been able to strengthen my skills set significantly, which will prove to be invaluable when applying to potential employers. The transferable skills I have developed will also help to widen the career options available to me on completion of my PhD programme.

Have there been any other skills enhancing activities that you would have liked to get involved with?

This academic year has seen the launch of the Venture Out and Venture Further business enterprise competitions within the University. These competitions have been designed to give students and staff the opportunity to gain business knowledge



and skills, and even to turn one of these ideas into a real business. These competitions involved workshops on 'How to Write a Business Plan', 'Intellectual Property Rights' and 'Financial Projections', with the ultimate goal being the submission of a business plan. I would have liked to get involved in the Venture competition as it would have added to my existing skills set, but obviously as I am approaching the final stages of my PhD there have been restrictions on the amount of time I have available. I would definitely recommend to any students who have the time to get involved in the next competition.

Additional Comments

There are numerous skills training opportunities available to postgraduate research students across the Faculty, University and region, but they need to go and investigate what is out there and what could be beneficial to them. For example, I have heard very good feedback from postgraduates attending the residential UKGrad workshops. The Faculty of Life Sciences is continuously developing, updating and evaluating its GTP and is at present working on an electronic Graduate Training Programme (eGTP). This will offer more personalised training for students and offer them the flexibility to dip in and out training to suit their needs, as well as highlighting external training opportunities.

Student Perspective on the Recent UK Grad Postgraduate Researchers in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (PRASH) Event

Red Roses for PRASH in Preston

It was enough to restart the Wars of the Roses. A very early train trip from York to the middle of darkest Lancashire on a cold winter's day, just to take part in some newfangled training event for postgraduates. In fact, with the excellent conference facilities offered by the Greenbank Building of the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, the whole occasion proved most rewarding.

Wednesday 18 January saw the successful launch of a new venture. PRASH - postgraduates in the arts, social sciences and humanities - had its inaugural training day. It was organised in a most professional way by UCLan, led by Prof Anne Wichmann of the CLASS Faculty, Dr Sarah Ashworth, who is the Project Officer for Postgraduate Talent NW, the North West Hub of the national UK GRAD Programme www.grad.ac.uk, and Dr Richard Hinchcliffe, UCLan alumnus and now Director of Postgraduate Training at the University of Liverpool.

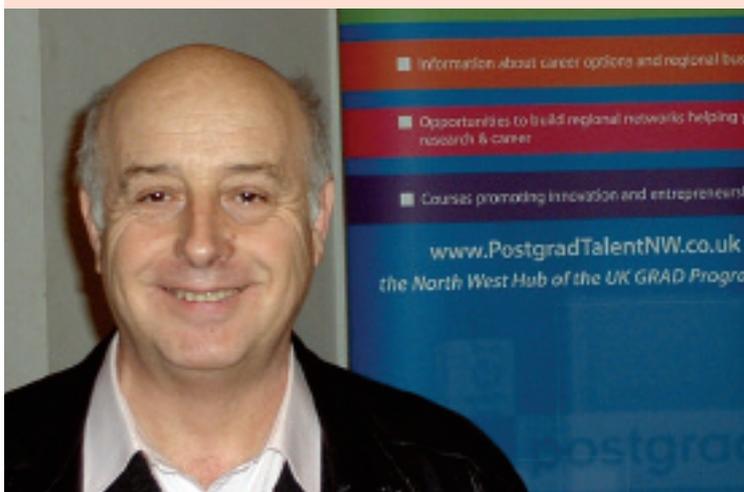
I was lucky enough to be one of the 40 or so postgraduates chosen, on the basis of their submitted abstracts, to give brief talks about their current research. As an extra incentive, all the talks were graded by those who came along to listen to them, and the top marks meant prizes of £50 worth of book tokens for four people, one from each of the groups to which we had been assigned. A similar scheme applied to the day's poster event for which postgraduates submitted sheets explaining their research, many in strikingly professional glossy laminated formats, though I did enjoy the one in felt-tipped pen on sugar paper!

Even without the incentive of the book tokens, it was a most worthwhile day. It gave all 90 of us the opportunity to meet fellow postgraduates from across the region, including some permitted cross-border interlopers from Durham and Newcastle. The key speakers for the day included Libby Raper from the North West Cultural Consortium. She and her fellow speakers gave us uplifting and useful messages about the thriving cultural, business and economic potential of the region and about the vital part we postgraduates were expected to play in its future.

A series of workshops offered us advice and training on a whole range of valuable topics. For instance, I am including interviews in my research into the Citizens' Theatre at the Theatre Royal in York. The down-to-earth hour's talk on oral histories, given by Steve Caunce from UCLan, was the most refreshingly informative, realistic and practical help I have received on the subject.

All in all, a great red rose day.

Clive Goodhead
Year 2 PhD student in Drama
School of Arts Histories and Cultures
The University of Manchester



National Skills Training Events

Postgraduate Researchers in Education (PRIE) Saturday, 10 June 2006 Manchester Metropolitan University

This conference aims to;

- Enable research students to present on the educational research process or on any aspect of their postgraduate experience
- Offer networking opportunities for research students
- Encourage collaboration across institutions and disciplines
- Provide workshops on generic and specific skills relating to educational research and related careers

Postgraduate Researchers in Science Medicine (PRISM) Wednesday, 12 July 2006 St Martin's College, Lancaster

The aims of PRISM are;

- To showcase healthcare and biomedical science research in the North West
- To offer networking opportunities for research students to meet colleagues, students and invited professionals
- To enable students to present a poster or talk on the process of completing a PhD in healthcare or biomedical science

UK GRAD Careers in Focus Event: Management Consultancy Friday, 28 April 2006 London Chamber of Commerce and Industry

This event provides a unique opportunity within a fast-paced and dynamic environment to:

- Find out about the real opportunities for doctoral researchers within a range of leading Management Consultancy firms
- Develop and practise the skills and competencies that employers in the sector look for in PhD recruits, by turning the tables on the consultants and experiencing being a consultant on the sponsors' real life issues, and finding out what employers are looking for at interview
- Enhance your awareness and understanding of the sector
- Understand how your skills as a researcher can be transferred to the management consultancy sector

UK GRAD Careers in Focus Event: Academia Monday, 5 June 2006 Manchester

This one-day event gives participants an insight into some of the areas that make up a career in academia.

Participants have the opportunity to:

- Meet with current academics from a range of disciplines and hear about their experiences; ask questions you've always wanted to, but weren't sure who to ask
- Explore how to market yourself for a career in academia, both within your department, and at interview
- Look at how to write and win grant applications and put some of the skills you've learnt into practice

For further information on any of the above events please visit the events page at www.grad.ac.uk

Skills Training Case Study – Medical and Human Sciences - Academic Life Skills Workshop

Maintaining a positive frame of mind that promotes success in their research degree is essential for all of our postgraduate research students. To help, the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences, in collaboration with the University Counselling Service, has piloted a programme in Academic Life Skills.

One of the fundamental aims was to teach students to identify and analyse behaviour patterns associated with successful progression in their work and, conversely, with blocks to progression. Overall, the goal was to show students how to develop flexible and positive coping strategies that could be used in a proactive and preventative manner. Such strategies are designed to solve particular problems whilst helping learn general lessons about self direction and management in the face of the demands of a PhD programme. These high-level social and leadership skills are eminently transferable and should promote students' success in any complex work environment.

There were three phases to the pilot. The first, a 2-hour lunchtime taster session involved small group work with facilitators. This was attended by 62 students from a range of disciplines, including 20 from the Faculty of Humanities. Issues were explored in more depth during three follow-up workshops with a small number of self selected students. During the final phase, these students provided feedback on the aspects of the programme that had been the most useful.

Overall, the programme was well received. After the taster session, 79% of students completed an evaluation questionnaire, with the vast majority of these (86%) indicating that the course lived up to, or was better, than expected. Importantly, the workshop was relevant to students from a range of academic disciplines. This was reflected in the mean satisfaction scores for the workshop, which were consistently high across all disciplines represented (Figure 1).

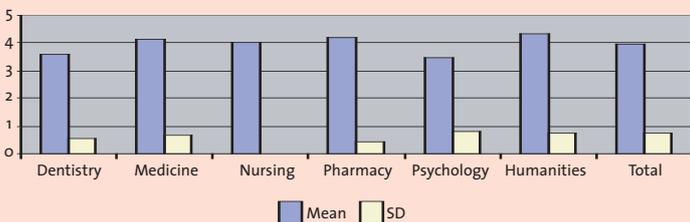


Figure 1: Overall ratings given by participants of the Academic Skills taster workshop were consistently high across the disciplines: mean ratings (range 1–5, with 5 being the best and 1 the worst rating) and standard deviations (SD).

A smaller group of students attended follow-up workshops to explore the issues raised in more depth. They applied them directly to their own experience. During a post-course evaluative focus group, participants indicated that they particularly valued the opportunity to, "hear other people's points of view especially at different stages of the degree" and "take part in shared problem solving and identification of coping strategies." When asked if the programme led to changes in the way they feel about and handle their PhD experience, students said that they feel "more proactive and can more clearly reflect on the processes involved in effective self management" and that they are "more independently minded." Another student indicated that they now had more confidence and clarity about how to make their working relationships with their supervisor and fellow students work positively.

Students said that they feel, "more proactive and can more clearly reflect on the processes involved [in their PhD]"

In summary, feedback showed that the pilot Academic Life Skills programme achieved its goals and helped postgraduate research students identify positive patterns of behaviour associated with progression in their work. The course was well received and considered relevant by students from a wide range of disciplines. The stage is now set to roll the programme out more widely across both the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences and the other Faculties of The University.

Steve Potter Director of the University Counselling Service
 Trish Gooding Director of Postgraduate Matters, School of Psychological Sciences
 Judith Williams Training Facilitator, Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences

Biotechnology YES (Young Entrepreneurs Scheme)

The Biotechnology YES (Young Entrepreneurs Scheme) is an innovative competition developed to raise awareness of the commercialisation of bioscience ideas among postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers.

The competition is run over three days. In the morning of the first two days participants, grouped into teams of four to five members, attend presentations from leading figures in the biotechnology industry on all aspects of technology transfer and the commercialisation of bioscience ideas. This knowledge is then utilised by participants to prepare an oral business plan presentation for an 'imaginary' biotech start-up company. The plan is prepared by the team, in the afternoon of the first two days and in the morning of the final day, with each member assuming a different role within the company. On the final afternoon the participants make a formal oral presentation of their business plan before a panel comprised of business, financial and academic representatives taking the role of venture capitalists. Six teams are selected to progress through to the final.

Winners of the competition receive £1000, with other prizes also available.

The closing date for entries to the 2006 competition is 30 June 2006.

To access the application form and view full details of the Young Entrepreneurs Scheme please visit; www.biotechnologyyes.co.uk



Recommended Reading and Resources

Tinkler, P & Jackson, C (2004)

The Doctoral Examination Process
 A Handbook for Students, Examiners and Supervisors

PORT - Postgraduate Online Research Training

This site has been built for academic researchers in the various disciplines that comprise the study of Romance and Germanic languages and cultures, offering online research training and resources in French, Spanish, Portuguese, German and Italian studies.

www2.sas.ac.uk/igrs/port

Faculty PGR Skills Training Contacts

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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 forthcoming issues of STEPS.

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