

Skills Training Essentials  
for PGR Students

## STEPS

Issue 5 / June 2006

Critical Writing Skills Programme Away Day  
18 May 2006

An 'away day' was held at the University's new conference facilities – One Central Park - to mark the end of the first successful roll-out of the Critical Writing Skills Programme in the Faculty of Life Sciences. Since May last year, over 200 postgraduate students have completed the Programme.

The morning session of the day was dedicated to the core development team (photo above from left to right – Ian Miller, John Morley, Raquel Perry, Howard Goodison, Kate Breakey and Simon Raw), to 'brainstorm' version II of the programme scheduled to go on-line in September.

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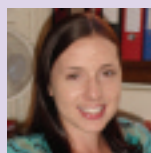
## Editor's Note

Summer is here and it has certainly been a busy few months. In this issue we hear about the Critical Writing Skills Programme away day, find out how postgraduate students can become Public Engagement Volunteers (PEV) and how staff can get involved with the newly formed Trainers and Developers Forum.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this edition of STEPS, in particular Christian Roedel from the Faculty Engineering and Physical Sciences who features in this issue's 'Skills Training through the Eyes of a PGR Student'. The next edition will be out in September 2006 and I look forward to receiving any contributions you may have for this edition.

Best Wishes

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## Critical Writing Skills Away Day

Continued

An 'Open Forum' was held in the afternoon where colleagues representing each of the faculties were invited to attend to informally share ideas and exchange information relating to the application of the Programme to each faculty. Over the next 6 months, the Faculty of Life Sciences will work in partnership with the Faculty of Engineering & Physical Sciences to develop an implementation model of the Programme. It is envisaged that this model will form the blueprint for implementation of the Programme to all other faculties.

Dr Raquel Perry  
Programme Manager

## Introducing the Public Engagement Volunteer (PEV)

The Faculty of Life Sciences is regularly presented with opportunities to communicate and engage with the public outside of the University. The Faculty is now encouraging postgraduate students who are interested in taking part in such activities to become Public Engagement Volunteers (PEV).



Postgraduate students can access a series of selected resources and register an interest in becoming a PEV through the eGTP (electronic Graduate Training Programme) which is currently being piloted. All first year postgraduate students from September 2006 onwards will have access to eGTP and will be able to register to become a Faculty of Life Science Public Engagement Volunteer.

The resources available on eGTP include a series of presentations on: 'How to Engage the Public' and 'Targeting your Audience'. The site will also host video footage of our Public Engagement Officers in action to give students a 'flavour' of what to expect. Those students who register an interest will be invited to attend an interview to assess their suitability for forthcoming opportunities and events in the Faculty's Public Engagement calendar.



If you would like to find out more information, please email [egtp@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:egtp@manchester.ac.uk)

## DL PhD; increasing flexibility in PhD study

Advances in communications technology are changing the way that many of us work and learn. The School of Nursing, Midwifery & Social Work is offering PhD students the option to study online by a Distributed Learning route. Using WebCT (the University's Virtual Learning Environment) and the latest communication technology students will have access to high quality online supervision. The PhD will be supplemented by virtual seminars, online courses, an active online community and support resources. The DL PhD will begin this autumn and is aimed at students who are generally unable to be present on the University of Manchester campus, but have the desire, potential and time to undertake a PhD. Most of the educational resources developed for the DL PhD will also be available to the School's on-campus postgraduate students, although their supervision will normally be face to face.



The DL PhD will offer

- An on-campus intensive induction course, with introduction to supervisors and fellow students
- Training in communications technologies required for the DL PhD
- High quality supervision through a range of communication technologies which will enable students to see and hear their supervisors online as well as share documents
- Online research methods modules with interactive discussion between tutors and students
- Virtual research training seminars with work tasks and in-built question and answer sessions
- Virtual seminars which consist of filmed researchers presenting their projects and the opportunity to pose questions using a discussion board
- Project presentation skills training with feedback
- Virtual student community through online discussion areas, personal pages and access to online conferencing
- Access to electronic library resources and support

Students will in turn need to have the required computer hardware and software and demonstrate adequate support in their local environment to conduct their PhD work

Further information can be found at [www.nursing.manchester.ac.uk/graduate/mphilphd/distributed\\_learning](http://www.nursing.manchester.ac.uk/graduate/mphilphd/distributed_learning)



## Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Training Activities

Introduction to Research in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences	Monday, 24 & Tuesday, 25 July 2006
Introduction to Research in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences	Wednesday, 26 & Thursday, 27 July 2006
Planning the Final Year	Monday, 4 September 2006
Academic Paper Publication	Tuesday, 5 September 2006
Planning the Final Year	Wednesday, 6 September 2006
For further information on the above events, please visit our website <a href="http://www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads">www.manchester.ac.uk/eps/grads</a>	

## Faculty of Life Sciences Training Activities

### Endnote training & online TNA

The Faculty of Life Sciences is taking part in the development of a University-wide Endnote training resource. This is a new collaboration between all of the faculties of the University and the John Rylands University Library to deliver Endnote training. This resource will consist of a TNA (Training Needs Assessment) followed by online courses and face to face support for those students who require further training. The training itself will take a blended approach of students utilising on-line resources and 'show me' guides as well as face to face training.

Each TNA can be tailored to the appropriate area or faculty to give it a 'flavour' and relevance for the different disciplines. Initially the TNA would be restricted to Life Sciences, Medical Sciences, Engineering & Physical Sciences and Humanities but could expand to fit specific sub-disciplines and subject areas.

The TNA and training will be available in the Faculty of Life Sciences for September 2006 via the new eGTP (electronic Graduate Training Programme) system.

If you would like to find out more about the project, please contact: [ITtraining.lifesciences@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:ITtraining.lifesciences@manchester.ac.uk)

For further information on the Life Sciences Graduate Training Programme please visit our website [www.ls.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/gtp](http://www.ls.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/gtp)

## Faculty of Humanities Training Activities

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 experiences for students.

Our programme is based around four main areas:

- Academic Skills
- Transferable Skills
- IT Skills
- Career Management Skills

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

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

## Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences Training Activities

Effective Academic Writing Division of Cancer Studies	Monday, 3 July 2006
Publication workshop and student forum Division of Regenerative Medicine	Tuesday, 4 July 2006
School of Medicine Research Showcase <a href="http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/showcase">www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/showcase</a>	Monday, 10 July 2006
Introduction to Research 'Speed PhD'	Thursday, 13 & Friday, 14 July 2006
Welcome event: new students	Monday, 25 Sept 2006
Clinical Research Fellows Forum	Thursday, 28 Sept 2006
Introduction to Research 'Speed PhD'	September / October 2006

For further information on the above events, please visit our website [www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp](http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp)

## Trainers and Developers Forum

The University has a wide range of staff involved in training and development activity at central, Faculty and School level, including, for example, the Staff Training and Development Unit, the Language Centre, The John Rylands Library, Graduate Training, Contract Research Staff Training and IT services.

The Trainers and Developers Forum exists to foster networking, sharing of best practice and

collaboration amongst staff involved in Training and Development activity. The forum activity consists of occasional lunchtime meetings on topics of interest to the group and a mailing list facility (listserv) to enable communication between group members. Membership is open to any member of staff who feels they will benefit from the activity of the group.

### TO SEND MAIL TO THE FORUM MEMBERS

To email members on the listserv use the following address [uni-tdf@listserv.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:uni-tdf@listserv.manchester.ac.uk)

### TO JOIN THE FORUM

Email [tony.bromley@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:tony.bromley@manchester.ac.uk) and you will be added to the listserv and listed on this website as a member - unless you specify not to be listed!

## RCUK set out 2006 reporting arrangements for Roberts's payments

RCUK have published a letter which provides early notice of the arrangements for the third stage of monitoring the Roberts' recommendations for supporting and promoting generic and employability skills training and career planning for postgraduate students and research-only employees.

This third phase of reporting will have three components:

- Summary of funds spent in the period 1 October 2005 to 30 September 2006
- Innovative or exemplary practices should be entered in the Database of Practice at [www.grad.ac.uk](http://www.grad.ac.uk)
- Brief (two page) report about the processes followed and their impact on the training of researchers

A copy of this letter can be viewed on the UK GRAD web site at [www.grad.ac.uk](http://www.grad.ac.uk)

The coordination of the reporting submission for the University of Manchester will be led by the Research Office, in consultation with the Graduate Education Group and Skills Coordinators Group.

If you have any questions relating to the above please contact Claire Atherton at [Claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk)

## Ask the Experts

### July 2006 is the UK GRAD Ask the Experts Month!

Throughout the month UK Grad will be holding a series of online chats and panel Q&A sessions on a variety of topics relating to your postgraduate research and beyond.

What UK Grad covers during the month is completely up to you!

Do you want to know how to...

- Raise your profile in your department / field of study?
- Keep motivation high during a part-time PhD?
- Prepare for the viva?
- Make your CV stand out from the rest?
- Begin a career in your chosen field?
- Find work abroad?

Contact [vicky.halliwell@grad.ac.uk](mailto:vicky.halliwell@grad.ac.uk) with any burning questions and discussion topics.

## National Skills Training Events

### 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 Fifth Annual Conference

#### Supporting researchers – our investment for the future – Thursday, 7 September 2006

#### Guoman Tower, London

This conference will:

- Share experiences of the opportunities and challenges of developing researchers to support the future of the UK academic research base
- Explore how employers increasingly are recognising the contribution of researchers to the wider knowledge economy
- Reflect on how effectively the Robert's agenda, QAA Code of Practice, and other initiatives are supporting researchers to realise their potential.

## UK Grad Schools 2006 – [www.grad.ac.uk](http://www.grad.ac.uk)

3 - 7 July	4 days, ½ day of outdoor activities	Windermere
28 July - 2 August	5 days	Exeter
4 - 8 September	4 days	Cambridge
18 - 21 September	3 days Careers	Newcastle
10 - 14 October	4 days	Brighton
6 - 10 November	4 days, ½ day of outdoor activities	Windermere

## UK GRAD - PGR tips: Thinking of a career outside academia?

If you are interested in exploring the options available to you outside academia why not:

Visit the University Careers Service where you can gain access to information and resources relating to different career options, or book an appointment with a careers consultant:  
[www.careers.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk)

Talk to as many people as you can about their careers. Try to track down postdoctoral alumni from your school through colleagues; ask them about their career choices.

Arrange work shadowing for a half day/day in an area of work you are interested in.



## The EMPRESS Project Report

A team of researchers at Leeds University recently completed a project looking at employers' perceptions of recruiting people with a research background. The project, Employers Perception of Recruiting Research Staff and Students (EMPRESS), was designed to take a look at the realities of the employment market for researchers looking for posts outside academia.

47 employers across a range of sectors and sizes (from a company of 3 employees, to one of 250,000) gave detailed feedback, and the project was supplemented by focus groups of inexperienced and more experienced researchers, to give their view of employers.

Employers tended to look for communication, intellectual ability and teamwork as the three most important skills they expected from postgraduates, with relevant work experience valued very highly. Almost all organisations did recruit postgraduates, but few specified a discipline. Exceptions were engineering and law firms, who obviously required specific training.

Most postgraduates were recruited through standard graduate entry and those that had

recruited postgraduates into their graduate intake had mainly done so incidentally - although once postgraduates apply, the additional skills may give them an edge. The majority were found not to specifically look for postgraduates and those that did largely did so because of previous positive experiences of recruiting postgraduates.

Another finding was that the organisations that had not recruited postgraduates previously were found to be more likely to be interested in Master's Graduates rather than PhD level graduates who were seen as too specialised and to have unrealistic expectations. However, the majority of organisations who had previously recruited postgraduates did not really see any difference in business quality between the two - suggesting that some businesses are turning down potential talent on shaky grounds.

The EMPRESS report is available at [http://careerweb.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/Empress\\_LR\\_000.pdf](http://careerweb.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/Empress_LR_000.pdf)

This report taken from the Graduate Prospects website [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)



## Skills Training Through the Eyes of a PGR Student

Christian Roedel is a 3rd Year full-time student undertaking his PhD programme in the School of Materials. Prior to embarking upon his PhD programme Christian worked as a textile engineer in Germany and also studied at the Texas Tech University.

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

At the commencement of my PhD programme I attended the 'Introduction to Research' session run by the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Graduate Development Scheme. This two day session enabled me to gain an understanding of what skills the University expected me to possess by the end of my programme and also gave me an insight into the PhD process. I also attended the sessions on 'Effective Presentations' and 'Academic Writing' during my second year. More recently I participated in 'Planning the Final Year' and 'Endnote Training' which provided me with the skills to produce a plan to ensure I graduate on time.

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

The timing of the skills training sessions is such that it enables you to implement the content. I also wanted to discover whether my skills in particular areas were sufficient or whether they needed updating.

### How have you benefited from attending skills training sessions?

The skills training workshops were helpful in enabling me to update my knowledge in particular skill areas and provided me with good guidance. At

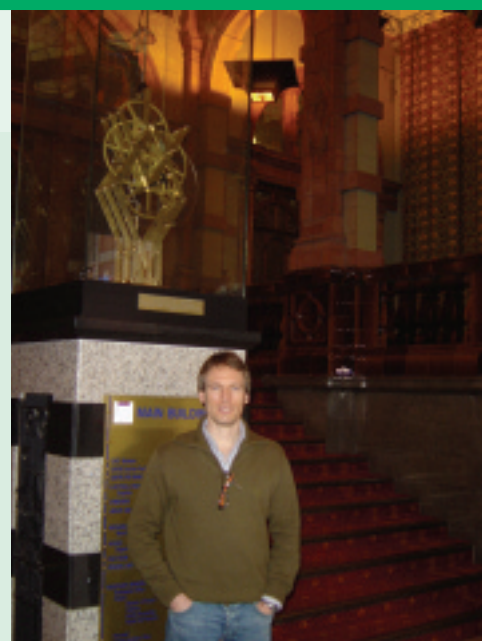
the beginning of my PhD the workshops helped me to gain an understanding of what was expected from me and also increased my confidence.

### What were the strengths and weaknesses of the skills training sessions you undertook?

I felt that some of the training sessions were too long and the content could have been delivered in a couple of hours rather than a whole afternoon. However, I did find that the tutors were very well prepared and the correct equipment was at hand to undertake the various activities. I found the handouts for the sessions to be particularly useful in that they summarised the course content in a user-friendly way. In addition, the skills training sessions offered me the opportunity to make new contacts and exchange ideas and experiences with fellow research students.

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

I think that skills training opportunities which prepare you for undertaking job applications and the job thereafter would be very helpful. When you have spent a significant amount of your time at University it would be very advantageous to gain information about industries' expectations of PhD students. Therefore, skills training which supports you in making a good start and impression in your new job would be of great interest.



### Any further comments

Research students in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences should make full use of the skills training opportunities available through the Graduate Development Scheme as it will not only benefit you whilst undertaking your PhD programme but also after completion.

## Peer-Mentoring Programme – Faculty of Medical & Human Sciences

For the last 18 months, The Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences has been co-ordinating a Peer-Mentoring Programme to support new postgraduate research students. This informal programme involves more experienced second- and third-year postgraduate students volunteering to pass on their knowledge and provide advice to first-year students. For all of our new students, the opportunity to speak informally to someone familiar with the new environment helps with adjustment to life as a postgraduate. However, schemes such as this can be particularly beneficial for international students. These students must meet not only the academic challenges of postgraduate study but also the cultural, social and language challenges of studying abroad.

New students are first introduced to the peer mentors during the Welcome Event, which is held as part of their induction programme. This gives students the opportunity to meet the mentors face to face in a relaxed, social atmosphere. After induction, students interested in contacting a peer mentor can find information on a dedicated site on the Postgraduate Student section of the Faculty intranet ([www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp/mentoring](http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/pg/gtp/mentoring)). The searchable site provides a short biography and contact details for each of the mentors. Further social events are planned to help students make contact with the peer mentors.



*Figure legend. The Peer Mentoring scheme has been expanded to allow prospective PGR students who have been offered a place on a PhD programme to contact the peer mentors before they register.*

Recently, the Peer Mentoring scheme has been expanded to allow prospective PGR students who have been offered a place on a PhD programme to contact a peer mentor before they register. This aims to provide students who are thinking about joining us with an opportunity to get advice about living and studying in Manchester. Along with their offer letter, prospective students receive a newsletter providing information about peer mentors who they can contact before arriving and answers to some frequently asked questions. Peer mentors for this scheme have been selected based on their specialist areas of experience, e.g. part-time study, being a clinician undertaking a laboratory-based project. It is hoped that this enhanced support will help prospective students to make the decision to come to Manchester, as well as be aware of all of the benefits and challenges that they will face.

Postgraduate research students in the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences who would like to be a peer mentor should contact Sarah Williams ([sarah.williams@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.williams@manchester.ac.uk)). Students volunteering to be peer mentors receive training to help prepare for the role.

Clare Austin, Academic Lead, PG Peer-Mentoring Programme  
Sarah Williams, Training Administrator  
James Power, Postgraduate Recruitment Officer  
Kathryn Quinn, Training Co-ordinator Faculty of MHS

## Online Research Methods Training Package for the Social Science Community

This online training resource to support researchers using online research methods was launched at an event at the Royal Statistical Society in London on 27 April 2006.

'Exploring Online Methods in a Virtual Training Environment' by Clare Madge, Henrietta O'Connor, Rob Shaw, Jane Wellens and Tristram Hooley (University of Leicester) has been developed as part of the ESRC's Research Methods Programme (Phase 2). The Training resource aims to enhance understanding of online research methods through the production and evaluation of a training portal targeted at the social science community. The portal focuses specifically on the potentials and problems of online research methods. It provides a self-supporting online training package covering theoretical, practical and technical aspects of online research methods including web-based questionnaires, virtual synchronous and asynchronous interviews. It also draws on successful good practice case studies, covers associated ethical issues and provides important resource links.

The resource can be accessed from [www.geog.le.ac.uk/orm](http://www.geog.le.ac.uk/orm)



## Faculty PGR Skills Training Contacts

Faculty of Engineering  
and Physical Sciences

Dr Jim Boran – Graduate Development Manager  
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Faculty of Humanities

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Faculty of Life Sciences

Dr Paul Shore – GTP Director  
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Faculty of Medical  
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Dr Judith Williams – Postgraduate Training Facilitator  
[Judith.Williams@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Judith.Williams@manchester.ac.uk)

## Feedback

The next issue of STEPS will be out in September 2006 and will mark the one year anniversary of this University publication.

To date, STEPS has been received with positive enthusiasm with both postgraduate research students and staff commenting on how useful they have found such a publication. The input of ideas and articles from students and staff across the University has been key to this success and will remain so for future issues.

We would like STEPS to keep growing and evolving in its content and regular featured, therefore if you have any ideas for future issues please email these to Claire Atherton at [Claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Claire.l.atherton@manchester.ac.uk)