

Skills Training Essentials
for PGR Students

STEPS

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PhD Careers Options Event



This year saw the inaugural PhD options event, a large careers event aimed at providing support and information for PhD students regarding the wide range of careers available to them after completion of their doctorate. We saw more than 600 students from across the University. The event also attracted many Research Staff and the feedback from both students and staff was extremely positive.

"I think it was really useful, because it wasn't necessarily geared towards one career and one career only, so you had the option of seeing all sorts of different options showcased, even ones that you wouldn't have immediately considered."

The day started with an inspirational talk from Professor Helen Gleeson, the Research Dean in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences. She spoke honestly about her career choices post PhD and gave an insight into how she has become such a successful academic. This was a fantastic start and set the standard for the day.

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PhD Careers Options Event

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The remainder of the day was split into a series of panel sessions and more intimate small round table discussion groups. During the planned breaks students were also able to book a face to face discussion with a specific external speaker. Participants were able to tailor the day to their own career aspirations picking and choosing sessions to create a bespoke timetable.

In order to achieve this bespoke timetable the events team had invited more than 90 external speakers to come and share their PhD experiences and careers advice with the students and staff. All of the presenters had provided a bubble Curriculum Vitae prior to the event. These CVs charted the education and career choices which had enabled each of the speakers to secure their current positions. Many of the presenters were University of Manchester Alumni who have gone on to successful and fulfilling careers not only in academia but across the professional sector. There were representatives from engineering and private R&D, intellectual property and commercialisation, communication and public engagement of science, NHS and allied health professionals. For students pursuing careers from outside the science sector there were representatives from the financial and professional services including market analysts, investment bankers and lawyers. There were also speakers from community arts, sales, education and the civil service.

Dr Clare Thomas, Senior Editor Nature Medicine
"The PhD Options event was a fantastic experience to participate in. It was wonderful to see such a large number of speakers covering so many different careers - a great opportunity for the students to get a taste of the wealth of different opportunities available after their PhD, and to get first-hand information about where to look for career openings and how best to apply for the jobs they're interested in. I only wish such an event had existed when I was a graduate student".



Not only was this a great career development opportunity, it was also an excellent networking occasion for students and staff who could request face to face discussions with the presenters during the planned breaks in the programme. The event also promoted networking between students and staff which is extremely important for those undertaking research in some of the more distant locations of the University. Further, the event proved to be a very effective showcase of the University's alumni which was both inspirational and motivational to our current PhD students.

"I went home really happy, because I felt more confident that there is a job out there for me. Was good to talk to people about their career paths and realise most were just as clueless as me, but that there are opportunities out there if you look."

This event was conceived and co-ordinated by Dr Judith Williams and Elizabeth Wilkinson. However, it was successfully achieved through a lot of hard work and co-operation between all of the faculty trainers, the careers service and the events team management. We would like to congratulate all involved. Many thanks must also go to the University for their financial support which was provided by Roberts Funding.

"I just wanted to say thank you for organising the PhD Options event. I found it very useful especially the 'marketing your PhD' session which helped identify the generic skills developed during a PhD. There was also a good selection of careers represented and it was very refreshing that everyone had been through a PhD. A great boost!"

Author: Dr Judith Williams
 (PGR Trainer, Faculty of MHS)



PhD Careers Options Event - Attendee Perspectives

PhD Student's perspective!

As a first year student PhD student I was initially unsure how useful the careers workshop would be. I'd only just decided to do a PhD, let alone know what I wanted to do after that. Having said that, the workshop was both really interesting and useful, with a whole range of people talking about careers I'd never have thought of or even known about otherwise. Students were able to choose from a wide and well organised selection of talks throughout the day. During these sessions it was interesting to hear speakers talk about their jobs and all the aspects they involved, both the good and the bad. In some cases, speakers also discussed their own PhD experiences, which, reassuringly weren't always perfect! I came away from the workshop with a much better idea of the careers that are actually available to PhD students, and some valuable food for thought over the next few years.

Postdoctoral Researcher's perspective!

Although I finished my PhD two years ago, I decided to go to the PhD options event in an effort to help me ascertain whether I should remain in academic research (as I am in my 2nd year of a postdoc), or whether I should look into a career in industry. I found the event to be highly organised, particularly considering the enormity of the event. There was ample opportunity to attend lectures or 'roundtable' workshops on a more personal level, in order to meet a variety of people involved in both afore-mentioned fields. I was able to ask questions about the security of postdoc/fellowship life as well as the ups and downs in R&D, which gave me a good insight into what life would be like in whichever area I choose to pursue. The speakers went on to give invaluable advice on the best way to follow their particular career path, which many people in the audience were very appreciative of.

Furthermore, the event made me realise that there is an enormous wealth of options for people with a PhD in science; e.g. promoting science in the media and reporting on new technologies and discoveries of interest to the public, involvement in patents, technology transfer and the clinical development of drugs, etc.

Research Assistant's perspective!

I just wanted to say how useful the recent 'Options Event' was for Research Assistants and Postdoctoral staff. Most of the researchers in my lab went along to the event and the general comments were that the day was really informative and gave those of us who are looking for careers outside of research science a lot to think about. I felt it was encouraging that many of the speakers on the day have faced the same problems with career development that we are now encountering. I hope that this event runs again in the future and that it will remain open to Assistants and Postdoctoral staff as it has been very helpful to us all.

New UK Grad Podcast!

The PGR Tips Podcast from the UK GRAD Programme aims to bring postgraduate researchers across the UK tips and advice on completing a PhD and planning their careers.

The inaugural podcast looks predominantly at the importance of transferable or generic skills for postgraduates and how to go about developing them. This episode also includes an exclusive interview with the author Alexander Masters www.alexandermasters.net

about planning and writing a major piece of non-fiction.

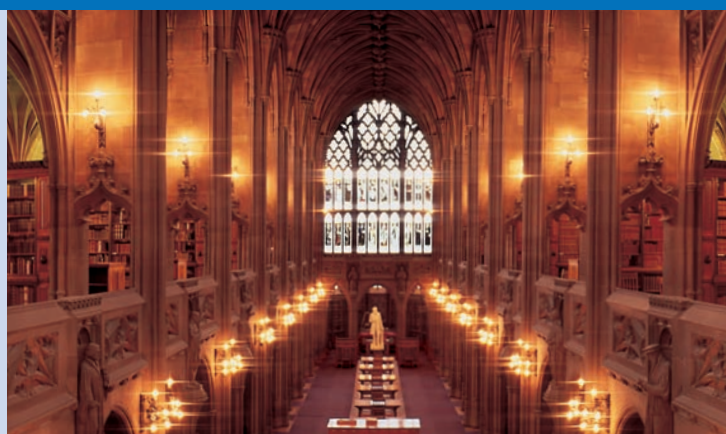
To listen go to; www.grad.ac.uk/publications



Information Fair for New Postgraduate Researchers

The Faculty of Humanities will be hosting an Information Fair for all new postgraduate researchers on Wednesday 26th September 4pm to 5.30pm, in the Staff House Lounge (Refectory Building). The fair will provide an opportunity for researchers to obtain a wealth of information on a number of University service providers including John Rylands Library, Careers Service, International Society, Counselling Service, Language Centre, IT Service and MSEC.

The Faculty of Humanities induction activities will begin the week commencing 24th September '07 and include IT and Skills Audit workshops, with students having the opportunity to be introduced to the new WebCT based 'Resources for Postgraduate Researchers'. There will also be a Saturday workshop for new part-time postgraduate researchers which will provide the essential skills (project management, time management, Endnote and Word) needed to get off to a flying start.



13 – 16 August 2007	3 days, outdoor local	Advanced Personal & Professional Management Skills	Hillingdon
17 – 22 Sept 2007	5 days	Cambridge	Girton College, Cambridge
22 – 26 October 2007	4 days	Brighton	The Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton

Careers in Focus: Academia

Are you a doctoral researcher considering your next step?

UKGrad's Careers in Focus programme was developed in response to requests from postgraduate researchers. It consists of one-day events that focus on careers for PhD researchers in various sectors. They aim to combine:

- information about careers in specific sectors
- a chance to explore the skills and competencies required for success in roles within that sector
- opportunities to network with employees from that sector, find out what it's really like, and how to make a successful application

Careers in Focus events are **free** to all postgraduate researchers.



Forthcoming Careers in Focus events:

- Careers in Focus: Academia
3rd September 2007, Glasgow*
- Careers in Focus: Academia
12th November 2007, Manchester

For further information on the above events please visit:

www.grad.ac.uk

* This event is being run in association with the following Scottish Institutions and places will be prioritised to students from these institutions: University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, Napier University, University of St Andrews and University of Stirling.

UK GRAD – PGR Tips How can I have a better relationship with my supervisor?



The relationship with your supervisor (and your supervisory team) can be the most rewarding and most frustrating aspect of your doctoral training and it is likely that you will experience both aspects at some time.

Your supervisor shares an important goal with you - the successful completion of your degree. However, it is up to you to discover the specifics of what your supervisor expects from you. In general terms you should:

Be independent

You will need support, but you should demonstrate you can think for yourself. Don't use your supervisor to set your objectives, produce project plans, analyse your findings, or as a spell checker for your thesis.

- Invite feedback rather than wait to be criticised. Am I doing enough research? Are these results credible? Am I planning my work effectively? Am I using the literature appropriately? Questions like these demonstrate that you are independent or can respond to previous feedback.

Arrange formal supervisory meetings

Remember that your PhD is only one of many constraints on your supervisor's time.

- Take the initiative by arranging meetings rather than waiting for them to happen.
- Don't be afraid to send information in advance.
- If you intend to discuss results ensure you do some thinking in advance and present ideas and hypotheses rather than raw data.

- Keep a written record of what has been agreed, to highlight any problems immediately and prevent misunderstandings in the future.

Be honest

You are not expected to get everything right first time and talking through your mistakes will give you the benefit of other people's experience.

- Gain the respect of your supervisor and avoid the worst-case scenario of them discovering your errors on the grapevine.
- When having difficulties remember supervisors are there to help you, but cannot do this if you don't ask, and may interpret a lack of progress as being the result of a lack of effort.

Keep a sense of perspective

As a trainee researcher you must expect to receive feedback and criticism. The purpose of this is to improve your performance: you should try not to take it personally.

- Discuss your personal development and training needs with your supervisors, and gain their support to attend training courses and events in your institution, and outside.
- Try also to get your supervisors' support to attend and present your research at conferences.
- If you feel demoralised by largely negative feedback then ask for suggestions on how to improve - these may come from other sources if you prefer not to approach your supervisor.

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PGR skills training practice taking place across the UK

Skills Ambassadors – University of Exeter

Ambassadors serve as representatives for the Graduate School generic skills training programme for research students, and support the Director of Postgraduate Training in expanding and enhancing the development programme for PhD students.

Ambassadors lend support by acting as a gateway for skills information into schools, helping to co-ordinate school-based training events (and idea generation), encouraging other PhD students to attend sessions (particularly incoming and 'detached' students) and generally promoting an enhanced postgraduate training culture in their schools. The Director of Postgraduate Study in schools (an academic member of staff) also supports and encourages ambassadors to help champion training initiatives at the local level.

The Charity Stretch – University of York

Charity Stretch aims to develop transferable skills through experience rather than through the slightly artificial method of attending courses. Its name reflects the "Stretch" programmes run by HM Reserve Forces, whereby people learn through experiences that take them out of their normal day-to-day pattern. The idea that "the 'stretching' of both physical and mental capabilities gives participants a great sense of achievement and personal satisfaction" will almost certainly apply.

To find out more about this initiative visit;
www.york.ac.uk/admin/pod/graduate/charity.shtml

Business and Enterprise Training – University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh has developed a programme of workshops to provide education and training to students. The programme is primarily a series of short half-day workshops designed to help participants to develop their business and entrepreneurial skills. The workshops offered include idea generation, patent searching, market assessment, preparing a business plan, establishing a new business and international trade and exporting.

To find out more about this initiative visit;
www.sie.ed.ac.uk/Training.htm



British Library Business and IP Centre

The Business and IP Centre, situated within the British Library London, is designed to support SMEs and entrepreneurs from that initial flash of inspiration to successfully launching and developing their business.

The Centre hosts the UK's largest freely accessible collection of business and intellectual property information and is an invaluable resource for businesses. To inspire and enable visitors to make best use of the Centre, there are a range of regular workshops and events.

Listed below are a few of the Centre's forthcoming events;

01/08/07 11:00 A beginner's guide to business information

01/08/07 13:30 A beginner's guide to IP

01/08/07 14:30 Introducing patents searching

23/08/07 10:00 Boost your business

For further information on the British Library's Business and IP Centre visit
www.bl.uk/bipc

Faculty Skills Training Contacts

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences **Dr Jim Boran** – Graduate Development Manager
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Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences **Dr Judith Williams** – PGR Training Facilitator
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Feedback

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

The next issue of STEPS will be distributed in September 2007

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