UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

For the meeting of the Board of Graduate Studies to be held on 30 April 2015

Policy on Professional Development for Doctoral Researchers

This document outlines a framework for professional development for doctoral students. It builds on an earlier draft submitted by the BGS Skills Working Group*, and subsequent discussions throughout the Spring Term within Faculties, at BGS, in the CDT Director’s Forum, and at DGS Lunch. It is also informed by student opinion, including two focus groups (one for Sciences, one for Arts and Social Sciences), and careful evaluation of student comments about training on Annual Report Forms, and PRES.

1. Priorities

The proposal below reflects the following specific priorities:

- All doctoral students should have equal access to a range of high-quality professional development opportunities (current provision varies considerably across the institution).
- Training and development opportunities for doctoral students should form a coherent and attractive offer, easily navigable from a single online portal. The menu of opportunities should be fixed and consistent as far as possible, so that the academic community can develop an understanding of what is available and help students plan their professional development.
- Excellent training and development should address – and prepare our students for – the dynamic employment landscape they will face.
- Flexibility is at the core of this approach. We recognise that students have different prior experience, needs, priorities and future plans, and that a number are already engaged in substantial professional development activities within or beyond the University. We expect students to demonstrate a substantial commitment to their own personal and professional development over the whole course of their doctorate, but this programme is designed to add structure and coherence to those experiences rather than to mandate additional commitments. Some of the training is designed to ensure students recognise what they have already learned (which is not just tedious paperwork!).
- Wherever possible, specialist academic training relating closely to the student’s discipline should be delivered locally (in departments or CDTs). This training is not covered by this document.
- Transferable skills training should normally be offered to students from related disciplines in a relevant format, to achieve economies of scale in delivery, and to provide students with cross-disciplinary networking opportunities. This training can be delivered across one or more faculties as appropriate.
- Some aspects of transferable skills training may be appropriately delivered at University level (e.g. some careers-related events for jobs outside academia, etc.).

2. Minimum Expectation of Professional Development

Noting that RCUK has recommended that doctoral students normally undertake approximately 10 days of professional development per year, and that students acquire many transferrable skills as part of their academic training, the university would expect a minimum of five working days per full-time year to be spent on professional development within an academic context, with an additional two days including conference attendance or

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seminar presentations. With the bulk of our Professional Development training provided at an academic level (within departments or faculties), this means that at least three days per full-time year must normally be spent on formal professional skills development.

For the intake of 2015–16, which has been recruited without knowledge of our training requirement, we will communicate a strong expectation of engagement with Professional Development Training; for subsequent years we will communicate that all students will need to engage with Professional Development as part of a Warwick PhD. Exceptions can be made, for instance, for students who can demonstrate sufficient professional experience.

To help students (and supervisors advising them) navigate the available opportunities, we will develop some optional pathways suitable for each particular year of study. We will also invite departments (and CDTs) to identify a combination of courses that might be recommended to their particular students, and to work with us to develop courses that would benefit their students (if these do not already exist).

As an integral part of the students’ Upgrade/annual progress panel they are required submit a short (up to 300 word) report on professional development for discussion with the reviewers. This will be used to prompt discussion with reviewers at the Panel meeting, and to assist the student in identifying further opportunities for development. The Graduate School, and Directors of Graduate Studies, will be able to monitor compliance with the University framework through the Annual Review process, as well as through a booking system for professional development courses which will be developed in 2015–16.

3. Postgraduate Certificates

Students have expressed a demand for the amount of Professional Development training they do to be formally recognized. For the time being, the Postgraduate Certificate in Transferrable Skills in the Sciences will continue, with transferrable skills courses completed within the PGCTSS counting towards the University requirement. Completion of the certificate will be deemed fully compliant with the University’s requirements. The BGS Skills sub-group will aim to converge requirements into a single framework with the Certificate or a successor qualification being available to all students.

4. Quality Assurance

To ensure the quality of the professional development provision all professional development training will report into BGS to ensure academic oversight, with Faculty Graduate Studies Committees feeding back concerns and suggestions for improvement. This will ensure that where academic concerns exist about particular provisions these can be responded to effectively and comprehensively.

5. Proposed Framework for Professional Development

The proposed framework is based on six key themes as detailed below. This structure is intended to introduce coherence across the institution, while recognising disciplinary differences. Training will be organized and presented to students in the form of a differentiated faculty-level offer, with content being adjusted to respond to students in cognate subject areas. Where possible, it will draw on the substantial body of existing provision (from departments, CDTs, central services) but some new courses/events are envisaged. Some events may be offered to students across more than one faculty, but the faculty remains the basic unit of organization.
This framework aims to ensure that all Warwick doctoral students:

- Are effective researchers with an excellent understanding of their field
- Produce a well-written, well-argued thesis which makes a substantial, original contribution to knowledge
- Fulfil their potential as creative thinkers, innovators, and leaders
- Have an up-to-date awareness of the national and international academic landscape
- Are able to articulate persuasively, and deploy effectively, the (transferable) knowledge, skills and experiences they gain during their doctorate; can consider the range of post-doctoral career options open to them; and feel supported in planning their career
- Understand the impact of research beyond the academy and have the opportunity to engage non-academic audiences with their research
- Develop a strong sense of research integrity: ethical and respectful of diversity

Each activity will be designed to help students develop specific professional skills. An indicative list is provided under each theme and has been mapped to the 4 domains of the national Researcher Development Framework (RDF), endorsed by RCUK and in keeping with best practice across the sector. The RDF's four domains are:

- Knowledge and intellectual abilities (domain A)
- Personal effectiveness (domain B)
- Research governance and organization (domain C)
- Engagement, influence and impact (domain D)
THEMES

Training will be provided along the following broad thematic areas.

Please note: the activities listed under each theme are indicative examples rather than a comprehensive list. Where appropriate, faculties or cognate subject groups will have the opportunity of shaping the contents of each theme.

1. Academic Skills

This substantial theme covers a range of essential research skills and methods relevant to the faculty and discipline. The [required] Doctoral Skills modules will provide students with a structured but flexible approach to the key stages of the doctoral research process, which will be aligned with each department’s expectations and internal monitoring processes.

Courses might include:
- Doctoral Skills 1, 2, 3 (1 p.a. for the first, second and final years)
- Critical reading for a PhD (inc. Journal Clubs, research seminars, reading in other languages)
- Core research skills (e.g. using archives; conducting interviews; programming; statistics)
- Academic writing (e.g. The Macro-Structure of the Thesis; Writing Extended Scientific Articles and Reports)
- Digital Tools for Researchers
- Gender in research practice

Key transferable skills/attributes:
- Information seeking
- Practical research skills
- Digital literacy
- Writing
- Languages
- Critical thinking
- Evaluating
- Project planning/Decision making
- Working with others/Team working
- Equality and diversity
- Leadership
- Entrepreneurship
- Communication to non-experts

2. Personal Effectiveness – Managing yourself, your research & others

All research students must be able to organise their time, manage their own research project and work effectively with others; they must also be able to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in these and other areas. This theme also creates safe spaces, outside the department/CDT, where students can articulate difficulties and problems around their PhD.

Courses might include:
- How to Be an Effective Researcher
- Research Ethics and Practice
- Project Management
- Defeating Self-Sabotage
- Using Psychology to Maximise Research Time [not currently offered]
- Decision Making and Leadership
- Team Working in a Research Environment

Key transferable skills/attributes:
- Working with others
- Communication
- Influence and leadership
- Global citizenship
- Equality and diversity
- Time management
- Self-confidence
- Self-reflection
- Project planning
3. Research Ethics and Governance

Here students think about some of the regulatory or general ethical aspects around their work. Sessions to help them to think in more informed ways about how academic institutions are structured, and how they are governed, may also be offered.

Courses might include:
- Research Ethics and Practice
- Ethics Masterclass – ‘How not to end your research career’
- What is Plagiarism and How to Avoid It?
- Copyright and Intellectual Property
- Research Data Management
- Understanding Higher Education governance
- Understanding Open Access Policies
- Understanding Research Funding (global contexts)
- National and International programmes to enhance diversity

Key transferable skills/attributes:
- Professional conduct
- Ethics and integrity
- Income generation
- Information management
- Publishing and dissemination
- Equality and diversity

4. Developing Your Academic Profile

To ensure students are employable in the job market, we need to get them to think about the significance of their research beyond their particular research interests, to think about the wider field, and to be able to communicate their work to broader academic audiences.

Courses might include:
- Introduction to Teaching for Postgraduates
- Academic Presentations
- Writing for Publication
- Managing Online Identity
- Building Research Networks
- The Global Researcher
- Business, Innovation and Commercialisation for Researchers

Key transferable skills/attributes:
- Publishing and dissemination
- Teaching
- Global citizenship
- Influence and leadership
- Equality and diversity
- Digital literacy
- Networking
- Career development
- Income generation
- Project planning
5. Impact and Public Engagement

All students need to be able to describe their research to an external, non-academic audience, and they must be able to think about how they might articulate the social, economic, or cultural value of their research. This theme includes elements of innovation and entrepreneurship as well as meeting the requirements of research funders; it also helps students negotiate the connections and transitions between academic research and the wider world.

Courses might include:
- Open Access & Publishing Beyond Academia
- Engaging with Public Policy
- Engaging with the Charitable Sector
- Business, Innovation and Commercialisation for Researchers
- Research communication workshop: Writing the News
- Science Communication
- 3-Minute Thesis competition
- The Brilliant Club (WP scheme)
- A mentoring scheme (especially for minority groups)

Key transferable skills/attributes:
- Public engagement
- Publishing & dissemination
- Working with others
- Global citizenship
- Enterprise
- Influence and leadership
- Teaching
- Equality and diversity
- Innovation
- Evaluation
- Networking
- Professional conduct
- Income generation

6. Career Development/Planning

This is to enable students to understand the breadth of career options open to them after their PhD. It will comprise the requirements and realities of academic careers as well as options for developing research careers outside academia and for doing something unrelated to their academic work: how can Arts students land a job in Industry; how do scientists get a job in the Civil Service, etc.?

Courses might include:
- Careers in Academia
- PhD Employer Networking event
- Careers in the Arts (museums, publishing, etc.)/Sciences (industry, regulatory bodies, etc.)/Social Sciences (think tanks, etc.)
- Setting Up as a Consultant
- Women in Academia events
- Effective CVs and Applications

Key transferable skills/attributes:
- Self-reflection
- Self-confidence
- Career development
- Networking
- Enterprise
- Communication and dissemination
- Equality and diversity
- Digital identity
6. Implementation

A survey was sent, in April, to all departments requesting them to complete a grid highlighting the transferrable skills programmes they offer their students, and noting whether there was any possibility to offer these to a wider cohort. Additionally, information has been requested regarding departmental student progress points for postgraduate researchers.

During the Summer 2015, we will work to bring together professional development training currently provided into a single website, under the headings outlined above. The aim will be to as comprehensive as possible, incorporating details of skills provision across the University at all levels (University-, Faculty-, CDT-, Department-). Work will be undertaken to promote this website across the institution and to all students, both those already enrolled and those who will be enrolling in the following year. Students will be directed towards this resource by supervisors, when considering their training needs.

During 2015–16 we will evolve the website to incorporate the facility of booking onto skills workshops and events for all Professional Development Training provided across the University. This Portal will be integrated with both Tabula and SITS, allowing both students and staff to record skills engagement.

During 2015–16 we will also work to improve training provision, ensuring that we not only rationalise provision where it is being provided by multiple providers, but also identify where new provision could be offered. Through analysis of student feedback, we will ensure that our offer meets student demand and is fit for purpose.

In September 2016 we will be launching our new, comprehensive professional development portal, complete with a booking system which links into SITS.

The implementation of the Framework will be reviewed annually and a more extensive review will be undertaken after three years of operation. This will involve external membership and Faculty representation.

7. Recommendations

The Board is invited to:

(a) Approve the Policy on Professional Development for Postgraduate Researchers;
(b) Note the timeline for implementation as outlined in Section 6.

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