



Postgraduate Transferable Skills Unit

at *The University of Edinburgh*

# Delivering High Quality Doctoral Training: A Scottish Perspective

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# Contents

- The changing picture of postgraduate training
- An institutional response – postgraduate skills training at the University of Edinburgh
- Approaches to embedding skills training and development
- Collaborative approaches to postgraduate training
- Emerging themes



# UK National Funding and Policy Developments

- Growth of MRes, 1+3 year PhDs, 4 year PhDs (e.g. Wellcome Trust)
- Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement (2001)
- Research Council Doctoral Training Centres and Doctoral Training Accounts
- **Roberts Review Funding from the Research Councils (2003)**
- Revised QAA Code of Practice (2004)



# What is Roberts' Funding?

- For PhDs:
  - Transferable skills, personal & professional development to meet needs of employers & students
- For Research Staff:
  - As above + particular emphasis on career planning
- Funding based on numbers of research council funded PhD students and research staff
  - Around £750k per year to University of Edinburgh
- Can be used for initiatives that support **all** PhDs and research staff
- One element of a broad agenda that includes QAA Code of Practice, Bologna, EU Researchers Charter.....



# Institutional Response to Roberts – University of Edinburgh

- Structures and oversight
- Strategy and implementation
- Approaches to embedding skills training



# Structures and Oversight

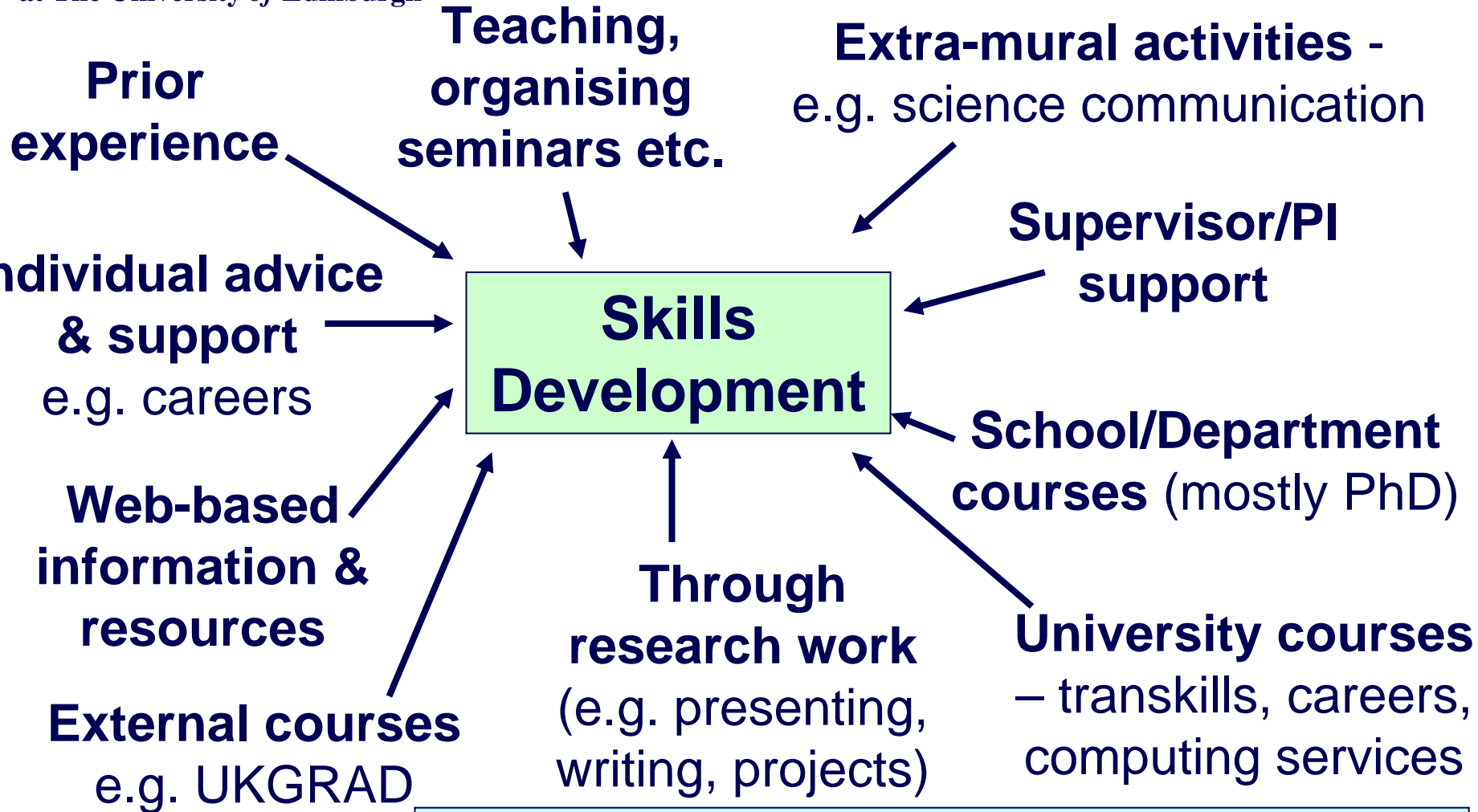
- University of Edinburgh
  - 3 Colleges, 21 Academic Schools (Graduate Schools)
  - Support departments (transkills, Careers Service, HR Researcher Development etc.)
- Roberts Policy
  - Overseen by University Steering and Management Groups
  - Chaired by Vice Principals
  - Coordination and reporting



# Strategy for Implementing Roberts

To offer high quality support and training that is open to all postgraduate researchers (irrespective of their source of funding) and is a valued and expected part of their experience.

- to **expand** central programmes
- to **enhance** existing programmes
- to **develop new** courses/resources
- to **develop** infrastructure/systems



*Identification of training needs, reflection, review, recording, awareness and articulation of skills*



# General Points

- An opportunity to try new approaches
  - Roberts funded projects from researchers, Graduate Schools, support groups
- Based on an individual's training needs
  - Choice and flexibility in content and timing
  - Links to annual review/appraisal
- Collaboration (internal and external)
- Changed remit for “central” organisations
  - Coordination, ensure equality & diversity of opportunity, efficiency, promotion
  - Work with Schools/Colleges to tailor offer, transfer ownership and increase take-up



# Edinburgh Implementation of Roberts

- **2003/04** – develop strategy, fill key gaps in provision through central programmes
- **2004/05** – major expansion of central provision, encourage project proposals
- **2005/06** – pilot bespoke courses for Graduate Schools, pilot University level PhD workshops, researcher-led initiatives, more projects getting started
- **2006/07** – further expansion of Graduate School and University level initiatives, projects focussed on supporting culture change, **major internal review**

**September 2006 and September 2007**

Short listed for Times Higher Education Supplement Award  
“Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers”



# How are we doing?

- Basics are covered in terms of Joint Skills Statement
- Challenge is to build take-up and impact
- Combination of central provision working with Schools shows great potential
- Opportunity to accelerate implementation and embed in experience, particularly through Schools
- Some very successful initiatives that are now being rolled out
- Need to enhance infrastructure (especially on-line bookings, e-learning, PDP(?))
- **Culture change and embedding transferable skills**
  - ?one third to half way through
  - Key moment, opportunity to build on strong base and accelerate progress



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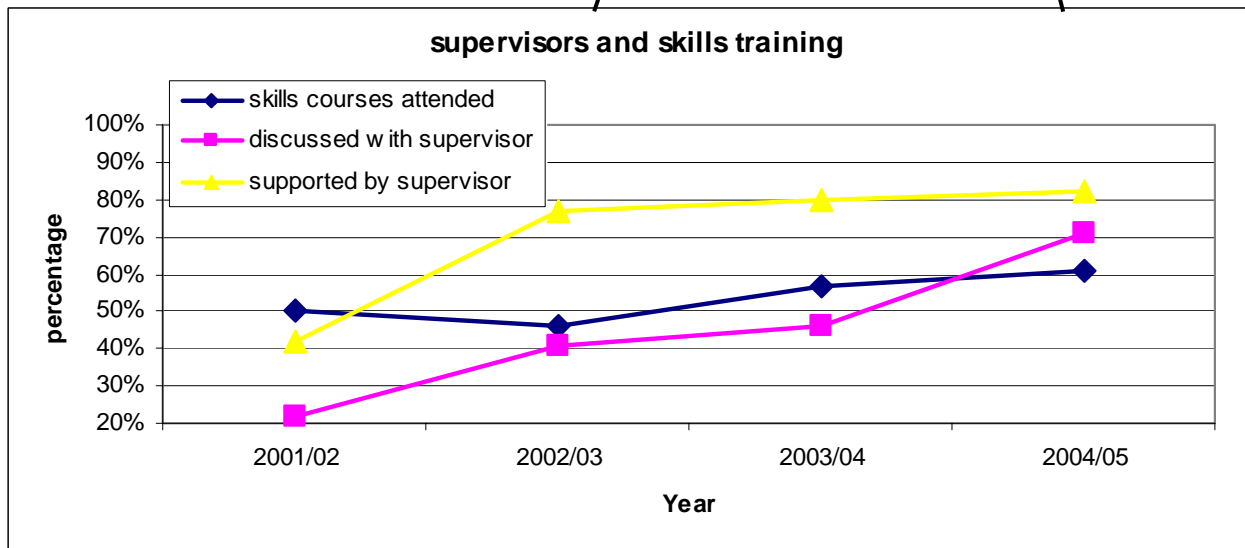
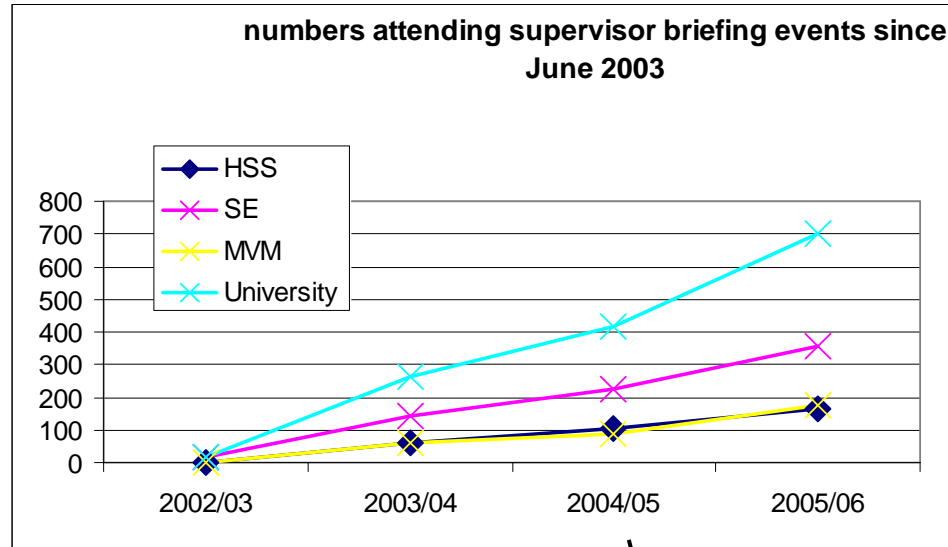
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# Approaches to Embedding Skills Training and Development



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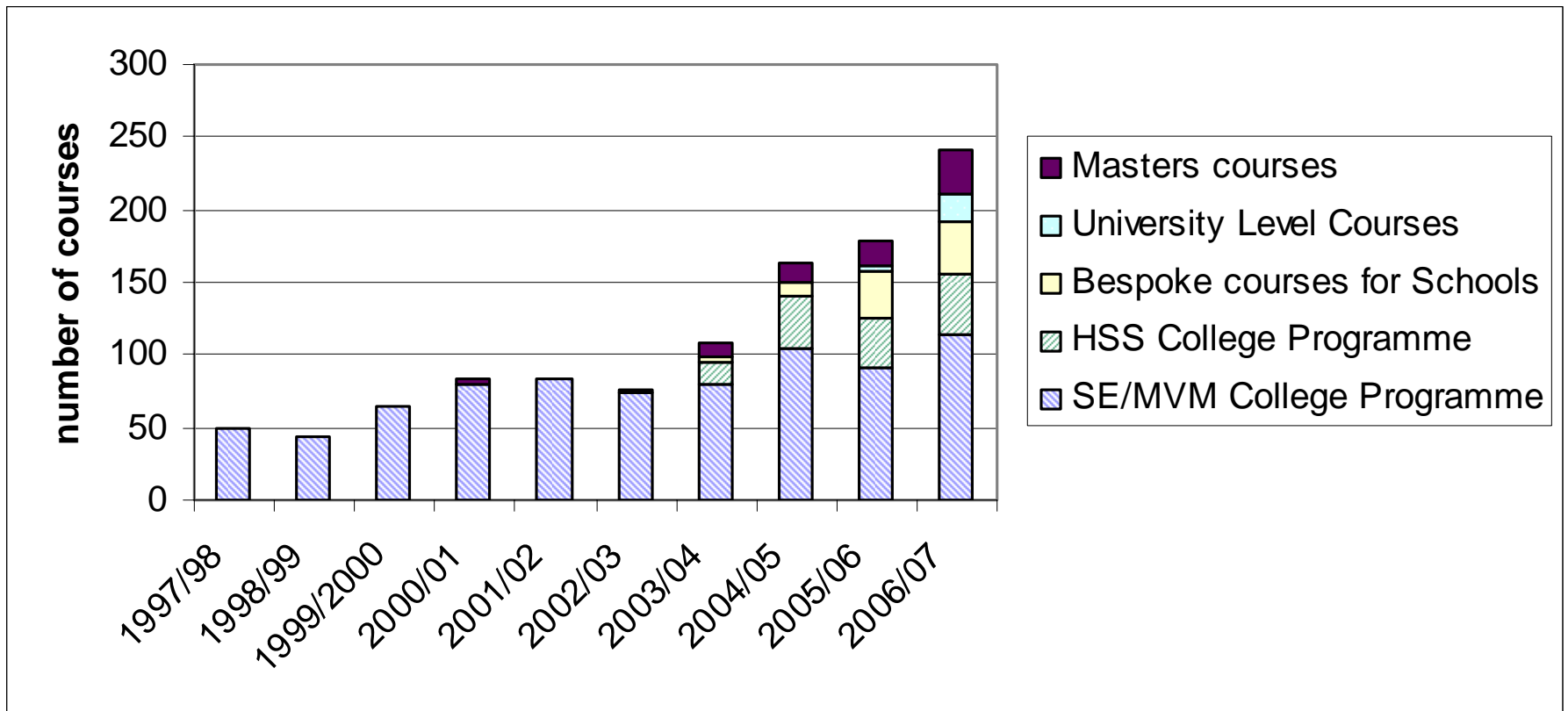
*from annual survey of postgraduate research students*

# Postgraduate Transferable Skills Unit

- University level workshops
- College skills development programmes
- Wide range of topics & timing
- College-level and Roberts funding:
  - no charge to students, supervisors or Schools
- Bespoke courses (Masters programmes & Schools)
- Promotes and complements other internal and external training



# transkills – workshops for postgrads



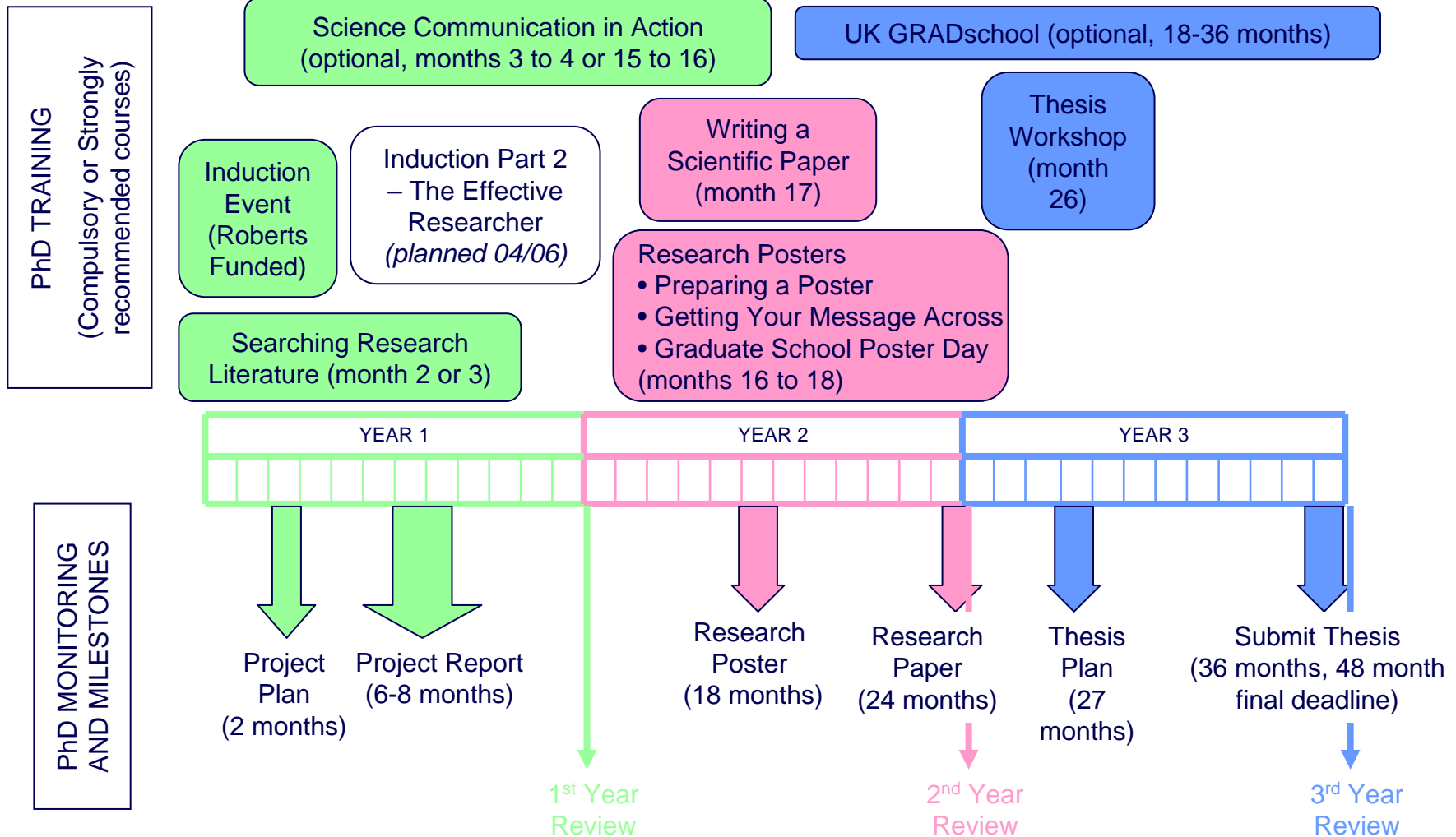


# Linking skills training to PhD milestones

- Why?
  - Engagement with students, Schools, supervisors
  - Impact
    - Increased (and explicit) awareness of skills development through PhD
    - Skills development improving PhD effectiveness
    - Positive feedback between the two
- How?
  - Early stages of PhD
  - Key points during PhD
  - Reinforced at annual review

# Graduate School of Engineering and Electronics

## PhD monitoring, milestones and training



Training Needs Assessment during induction and annual review points students towards appropriate elective courses including:

Effective Presentations (1), Effective Writing (any), Communicating Science to Non-Specialists (1 or 2), Scientific Computing Tools (usually 1), Computing Toolbox (any), Web Page Production (any), Research Grant Applications (3), Developing a Successful Career (3), Interviewing Skills (3), Entrepreneurship (any), IPR (any), Tutoring & Demonstrating (1)



# Interactive Induction Sessions

- Run with individual Graduate Schools, often **a month or so into the semester**
- Icebreakers to help introduce and build postgraduate community
- Introduction to PhD programme (from academic staff and existing students)
- **Interactive** activities looking at PhD challenges, training and development needs
- Introduction to available training and support
  
- E.g. GeoSciences, Engineering & Electronics, Education, Chemistry, Divinity



# Want to get your PhD off to a flying start?

## Managing Your PhD in Social & Political Studies

- 27 October, 10.45 – 14.00 (lunch included)
- Get to know the rest of the SPS postgraduate community
- Consider the challenges you'll face during the first year of your PhD
- Learn from the experience of and hear from 2<sup>nd</sup> year PhDs and supervisors
- How to make the most of your PhD
- Interactive, informal and practical

e.g. SPS, Informatics, PPLS, History & Classics



# Good Practice in PhD Research

- Project planning & experimental design
- Keeping lab notebooks & managing your research results
- Role & responsibilities
- Progress monitoring & assessment
- Research ethics & ethical practice
- Making the most of your PhD: training, support & opportunities

**5 sessions at different sites with senior academics**

Throughout the College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine



## other bespoke courses

- Poster Presentations (Engineering & GeoSciences)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> year assessment milestones
  - Linked to poster design, written and verbal presentation courses
- Academic Paper Writing
  - Tailored to different academic disciplines
  - Led by senior academics
- PhD Thesis Workshops
  - Timetabled for students about to start 3<sup>rd</sup> year
  - Mix of discipline specific and general sessions
  - Core materials tailored to local requirements and led by academics



# Alternative Careers Seminars

- Organised and run by PhD researchers for PhD researchers
- Funding from Roberts for speaker expenses and post seminar networking
- 20-50 participants each time
- Teaching, medical publishing, patent lawyer, science communicator, industry etc
- Succession plan, back-up support (e.g. web)

# Research Communication in Action

- Run with individual Graduate Schools
- Training in communication, working with children and a specific workshop
- Teams of PhD students and/or research staff take workshops to local schools
- Review day
- Broad range of transferable skills, increased capacity to deliver outreach, addresses broader issues in Roberts





# For research staff

## Examples

- Project Management (with BBSRC), Writing Grant Applications, Managing People
- Induction events, individual career development reviews
- Career Progression in Academia seminars

## New initiatives

- Research staff mentoring
- Code of Practice and guidance for research staff management



# Career Development Reviews (Research Staff)

- Roberts funding to allow specialist careers advisors to extend availability of career development reviews to all research staff
- Linked to Managing Your Future workshops
- New research staff induction sessions with emphasis on career planning
- Move towards more College based events
- Working group looking at research staff management and related issues like appraisal



# Collaborative Approaches to Postgraduate Training

- Impact of Research Pooling Initiatives
- Benefits of sharing practice and experience
  - UK GRAD



# Impact of research pooling and other examples of disciplinary collaboration

- EaST Chem
  - Scientific Paper Production (St Andrews)
  - PhD Thesis Workshop (Edinburgh)
- SUPA
  - Entrepreneurship event
- Mathematics
  - ICMS Generic skills training for postgraduate mathematicians in Scotland
- Social science networks

# UK GRAD Programme

- National Policy and Practice
  - Information and discussion
  - Annual conference, Roberts Policy Forum
- Resources for PhD students and staff
  - PhD planner, Just for Postgrads website
  - What do PhDs Do?
  - Resources database, database of practice

# Scotland & Northern Ireland Hub

- Community of practice
  - Sharing ideas, experience, advice on resources, approaches and trainers
  - Events and workshops
- Hub contributions to institutional events (e.g. student conferences, induction)
- Collaborative projects

# How to be an Effective Researcher

2 day course for mixed groups 6-18 months into PhD

Mix of indoor and outdoor activities, plenary presentations, small group reviews, discussion and reflection

- PhD project planning and time management
- Working effectively with others (including supervisors)
- Collaboration
- Culture within research groups, institutions and countries
- Self awareness and preferences for working



# How to be an Effective Researcher

- Developed in collaboration with other Universities across Scotland and Northern Ireland
- >750 participants in 9 institutions across Scotland and Northern Ireland since first piloted
- 22 courses for at least 600 participants in Scotland and Northern Ireland planned for 2007/08
- Extension to other parts of the UK through UK GRAD regional hubs

# Edinburgh local GRADschools

- Local version of national RC-funded programme
- run with other Scottish institutions
- 4-day residential
- 4-day working hours
- 3-day weekend
- Aimed at 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> years
- Taking stock of skills
- Looking at options
- Time out from PhD to regain momentum





# Looking to the future..... emerging themes

- Moving the location/ownership of skills training closer to the main academic experience
- Institutional collaboration
- PhD student-led initiatives
- Use of E-learning
- Links to employers (including placement programmes)
- Personal Development Planning/E-Portfolios
- Collaborative working (cross culture, cross discipline, use of technology)
- New topics, new approaches (e.g. computing and information skills)