



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Research Services.

# Doctoral Times

Issue 18 Winter 2018

## Transitioning to PhD Studies

The Newsletter for  
Doctoral Researchers.

**\*\*A big THANK YOU to all article contributors, we couldn't have done it without you.\*\***

**All student articles can be found on the following:**

**[Google folder](#)**

# Welcome

Welcome to the University of Sheffield.....it's been a few months now since the start of your research studies and we hope that you have received a warm welcome and settled in well to your department, the University and of course the wonderful city of Sheffield.

This edition of the Doctoral Times sets out to provide you with some useful information to help you along your PhD journey, from the assistance available from University support services such as the Global Campus, SmartMove (Accommodation services), the Careers Service, to name a few, plus our essential TOP TIPS!

When we originally asked our existing PhD cohort to provide feedback on their own experiences as postgraduate researchers, we knew this would be a popular topic but, we never envisaged how much support would be volunteered. Although, we wouldn't expect anything less from our student community! We cannot say **'thank you'** enough to all of the students who have taken the time to write and contribute to this edition, we couldn't have done this without you. Unfortunately we couldn't include all of the amazing articles here, so we have created a [google](#) folder to showcase and share the valuable experience.

We hope you find this expert advice and personal experience valuable within your own research studies. Whether you feel comfortable with your PhD journey, or just need to check one or two processes we think you'll find articles of interest as well as useful tips and links.

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# Overview of the PhD Student Journey

Jo Rowlands - PGR Support Manager

Jo Rowlands, PGR Support Manager shares her knowledge of the PhD Student Journey.

Unlike an undergraduate or taught postgraduate degree, a research degree can often seem like a much more unstructured or individualised journey. PhD students can have very different experiences depending on their subject discipline, the nature of the research they are undertaking, or whether they are part of a larger cohort, for example, a Centre for Doctoral Training. However, all PhD students will experience a number of common key milestones in their journey from new entrant to graduate.

## Induction

The first key student milestone is an induction to the department and supervisory team, and to the Faculty Graduate School. As well as familiarising students with the environment in which they'll be working, this is an important way to introduce students to the key departmental staff who will help them on their journey and to set expectations.



## Training Needs Analysis

An early, but essential, task for all PhD students is to consider what skills and experiences they need to acquire via training opportunities available through the Doctoral Development Programme (DDP). This exercise should be undertaken in collaboration with their supervisory team, who will help students identify suitable development opportunities.

A student's training needs will develop and change over the duration of their PhD, so it is important to bear in mind that this exercise should be re-visited annually to ensure that training needs and skills gaps are correctly identified and addressed, and to help students successfully complete their research projects.



## Initial period of research and supervision

In this early period, students will be carrying out a literature review, conducting research and collecting initial results. They should also be having regular supervisory meetings.

The University requires supervisory meetings to take place at least every 4-6 weeks for a full-time student. In practice, and depending on the discipline, contact between a student and their supervisor is often a lot more frequent and can include contacts in laboratory settings, research groups, etc., as well as more formal 1-1 meetings.

During this initial period of research, regular supervisory meetings help to build up the relationship of trust between the student and their supervisor that is such a key element of successful PhD study, as well as ensuring that any problems, or needs, are identified at an early stage so that they can be addressed.



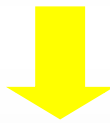
## Confirmation Review

All PhD students are required to undergo a Confirmation Review to confirm their status as doctoral students. The Confirmation Review process should confirm whether or not a student and his/her research project have the potential for successful completion, at doctoral level, within the student's time limit.

The University requires all doctoral students to have completed their Confirmation Review within 18 months of the start of the student's registration and most departments will schedule Confirmation Reviews for 9-12 months into the first year to ensure completion within this time frame.

Following Confirmation Review, students continue to undertake their research and training and many also have additional opportunities, for example to attend conferences, submit journal papers, teach, or go on a placement.

Departments will regularly monitor the progress of their students throughout their degree, through regular supervisory meetings and more formal progress monitoring points, e.g. the Annual Progress Report. Regular departmental progress monitoring is essential to help ensure that students are on course to complete their research and submit their thesis on time.



## Viva examination and post-viva amendments

After submitting their thesis, all students undergo a viva examination at which they will 'defend' their thesis to their appointed examiners, at least one of whom will be an external examiner. This is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their expertise in their research topic, as well as their wider subject knowledge.

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## Award of degree and graduation

Once the examiners are satisfied that any required corrections to the thesis have been undertaken the degree is almost ready to be awarded. There are a few checks that need to be undertaken to ensure that students have paid any outstanding debts and undertaken all other requirements, e.g. completion of a DDP e-portfolio, submission of an e-thesis. Once these are completed the degree can be awarded. All that remains is for students to have their degree conferred, either at a graduation ceremony or at an in absentia ceremony.

For more detailed information on all aspects of the PGR student journey, please refer to the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes.

([www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/code](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/code))



# Postgraduate Researcher Training

## Doctoral Development Programme

*Zoe Spink, Programmes and Provisions Assistant for Research Services, introduces the Doctoral Development Programme (DDP).*

The Doctoral Development Programme (DDP) is a training and development programme for all doctoral researchers at the University of Sheffield.

### Summary of the DDP Process

Below are the key actions required to complete the Doctoral Development Programme.

- ↓ Complete a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) ideally before you commence your PhD studies with us (please refer to the TNA diagram opposite).
- ↓ Discuss your TNA with your supervisor and produce a Development Plan.
- ↓ Undertake professional development identified in your TNA: your department may have some compulsory modules.
- ↓ Keep a record of your training and development activities.
- ↓ At the start of each year, discuss progress with your supervisor and update your TNA.
- ↓ In your final year of research, submit a summary of your doctoral development to the DDP team.

The number of modules and courses you take will depend upon your own requirements.

The DDP is an essential part of your doctorate. All doctoral students begin with different skills and experience so the DDP is designed to be tailored to your needs, to help you develop the skills you need to achieve beyond your PhD.

### Why is there a Doctoral Development Programme?

#### Quality

The University of Sheffield wants to ensure that all doctoral researchers receive the highest quality of training. As a leading institution, we also expect all doctoral researchers to acquire the necessary skills and training to become world-class researchers. This is why we require all doctoral researchers to take part in the Doctoral Development Programme. The Programme has been developed in line with the UK's [Researcher Development Framework](#).

#### Skills

The DDP helps you progress through your research studies by identifying your existing skills and providing opportunities to further develop your skills and experience. As well as transferrable skills that will make you a successful researcher, the DDP also aims to provide transferable skills that can be utilised in a career outside academia, which can increase your employability.

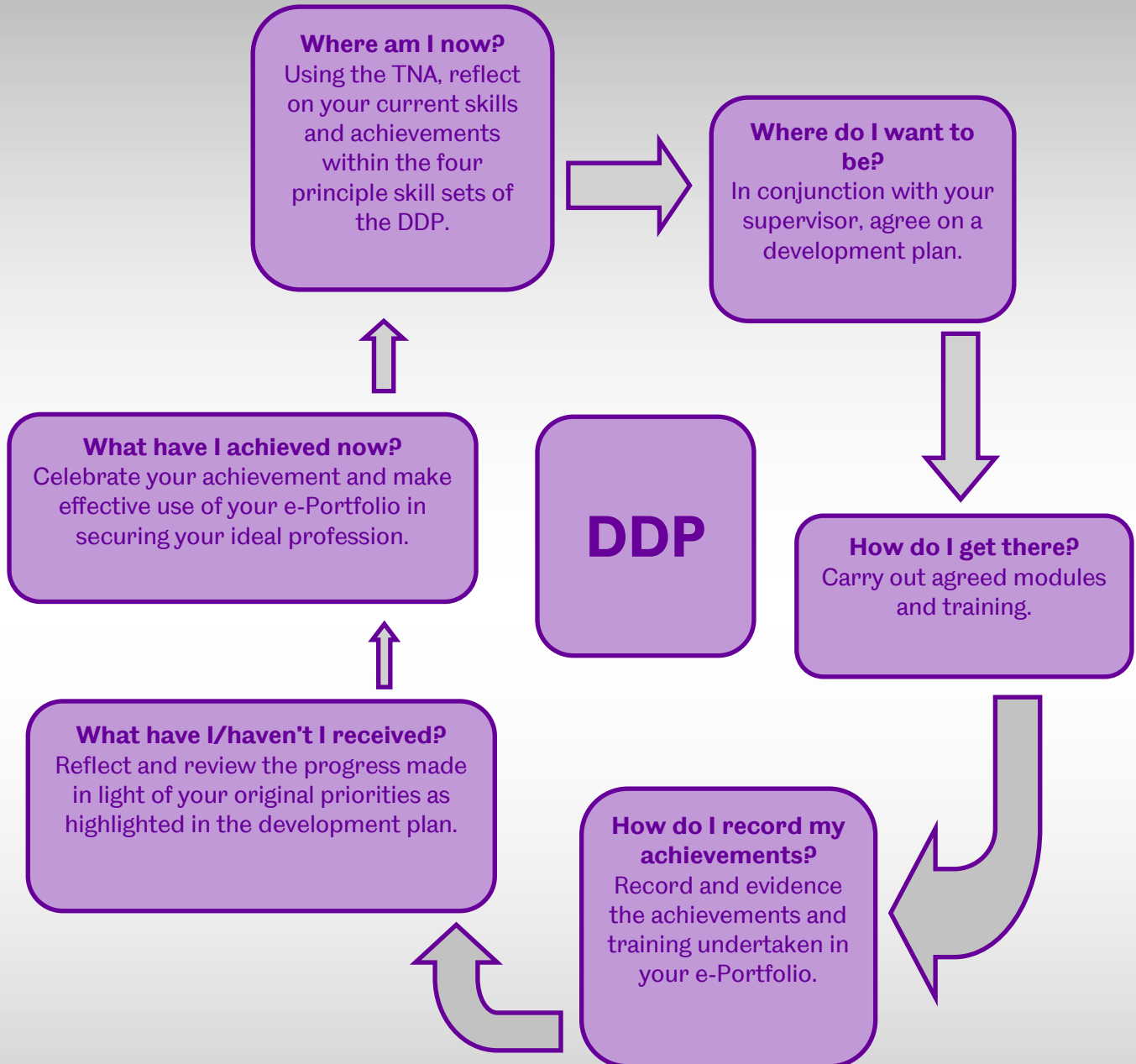
#### Flexibility

Inherent in the DDP is an understanding that different students will have different backgrounds and different needs. For example, a student who has just completed a first degree is likely to have a more limited skill set than one who has already spent time working in industry. This is why the Programme has been designed to be flexible to your needs.



## Doctoral Development Programme: Training Needs Analysis (TNA)

The **annual** DDP cycle is encapsulated in the diagram below. Once you have identified and agreed areas of development and solutions in your TNA discussion, the next step is to take part in CPD activities.



### Research Ethics and Integrity

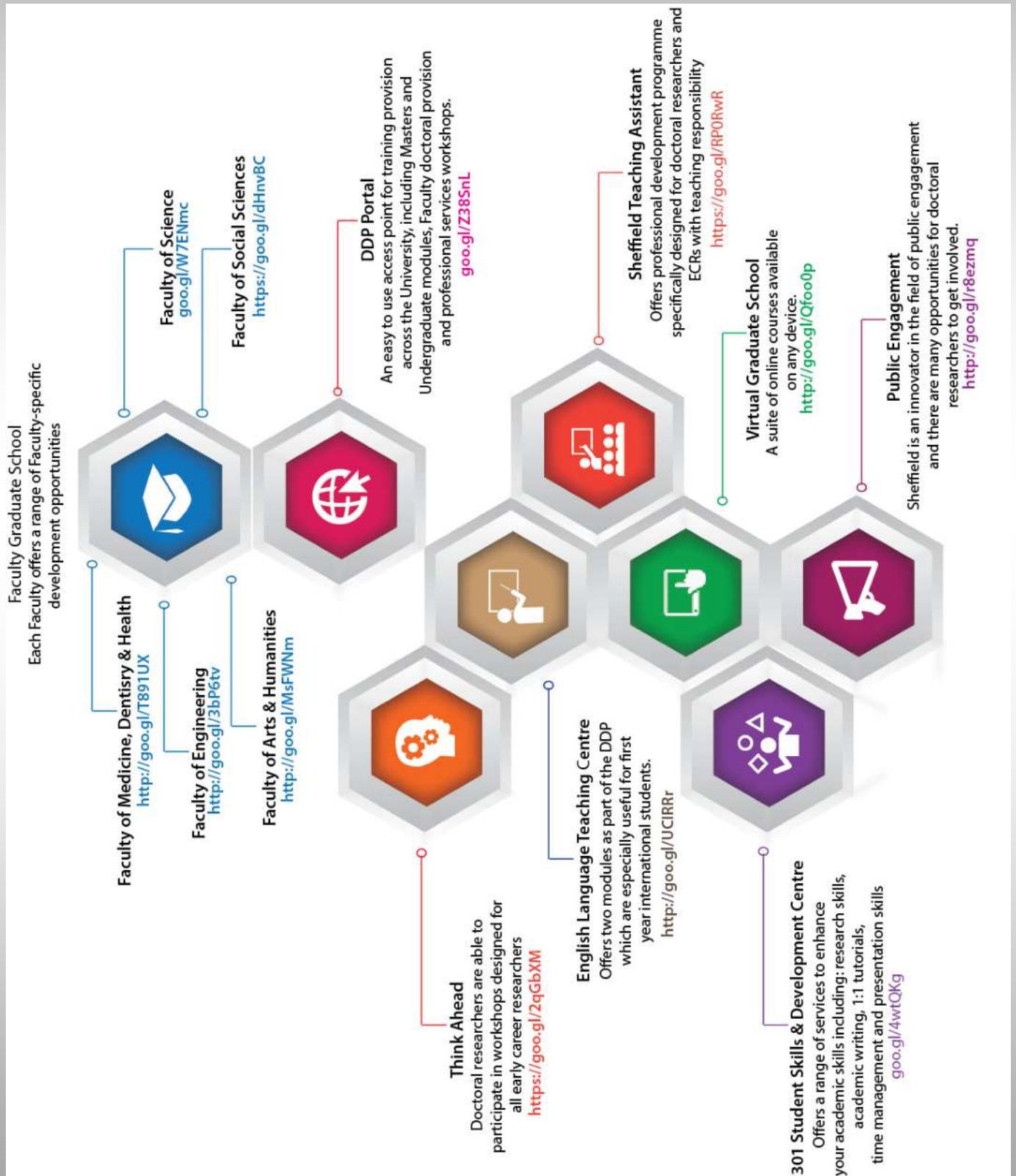
Research Ethics and Integrity is the only University wide mandatory module. Good research practices are fundamental to good research, and it is essential for every researcher to understand how to conduct their research ethically, and with integrity.

Each faculty runs this module tailored to the needs of its own research students, and each student will be automatically registered to attend. New doctoral researchers are automatically registered on Departmental and or Faculty-wide compulsory modules.

It is essential that you complete the Research Ethics and Integrity training as failure to do so will result in your award being withheld.

# Doctoral Development Programme Training Provision

Where can doctoral researchers get the training they need?





## SmartMove: Accommodation Support



**Smart Move  
Sheffield**

is one of the University of Sheffield's support services, and is here to help all students find

accommodation, it isn't just for undergraduates. We are happy to help you find somewhere to stay for your studies, whenever you might need us. We know that every person and PhD is different, so finding the right property is important.

We advertise a range of properties including studios and one bedroom flats, a room in a shared house and even family accommodation. These have different durations and start dates, so there is bound to be something suitable for you. We advertise everything on our website: [www.smartmovesheffield.com](http://www.smartmovesheffield.com) As it is limited to students at the University of Sheffield, once you have done your search it will ask you to log in using Shibboleth which will take you to MUSE to put in your University username and password.

### Smart Move Sheffield's Top Tips

#### **For individuals:**

There are a good number of self-contained properties, but these come with a higher price tag than a room in a shared house.

Many landlords advertise rooms in a shared house to both Undergraduates and Postgraduates, so if you find a shared property of interest but would rather live with postgraduates why not ask the landlord who the other tenants are.

#### **For families or couples:**

Private sector properties are usually around £550 - £700 per month plus bills. The price varies based upon the location, with properties further from the University usually being cheaper.

The University has some family/couple accommodation, but there is often a waiting list for these, feel free to talk to us about whether this could be an option for you.

Partners often have to pay council tax for the property, unless they are also a full time student, so make sure you factor this in to your budget.

For students undertaking field work: If you are looking for accommodation and know that you will be undertaking field work,

it can be possible to find short term accommodation instead of signing a contract for a whole year.

We advertise short term accommodation on our website, so make sure you have a look. If you need to find a replacement tenant for your contract, you can advertise your room on our website message board

#### **Areas in Sheffield:**

The areas popular with Undergraduate students are those closer to the University such as Crookesmoor, Broomhill and Broomhall. Ecclesall Road, Sharrow and Bramall Lane area are popular with students from Sheffield Hallam.

Areas further afield are less popular with students but more popular with young professionals, such as Walkley, Crookes and Nether Edge.

#### **Living with Non-Students:**

It is possible to live in properties for professionals, but the landlord may require a guarantor or proof of income.

You may need to discuss with the tenants whether you will pay for a proportion of the council tax (full time students are exempt) but the property will be liable for council tax if there is one or more working person living there so they may expect everyone to split it.

Smart Move Sheffield can provide a list of some local letting agents and websites where you might find suitable accommodation.

Feel free to pop in and ask us any of your accommodation questions, chances are we have heard it before! Or you could take a look on the website for some FAQs and advice: [www.smartmovesheffield.com](http://www.smartmovesheffield.com)

Visit us: Student's Union Building, Level 3 opposite Grill and Go. Open Monday – Friday, 10am – 5pm

Call us: 0114 222 6058. Email us: [smartmove@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:smartmove@sheffield.ac.uk)



## Did you know? Sheffield Students' Union is here for doctoral students.

*Our SU aims to offer wide range of support, activities and facilities for postgraduate research students, and we're always looking at how we can better meet your needs.*



This handy guide will give you a taste of the wide range of services and opportunities available to you at Sheffield Students' Union. If you have any questions or comments, you are welcome to check out our [website](#), call us (our number is 0114 222 8500), or visit the Welcome Desk by the SU main entrance. We're looking forward to seeing you!

### Activities, Sports and Volunteering

There are over three-hundred societies, covering a broad variety of interests, which are open to students at all levels of study. You can learn more about them here. For a thriving, interdisciplinary community of fellow postgraduates, check out the [Postgraduate Student Society](#). Find their facebook group [here](#) for events, meeting new people, and more.

We also boast approximately fifty sports clubs for those at all levels of ability and commitment, whether you want a casual-drop in or to take part in a competitive



national league. You can find out more about sport at Sheffield [here](#). Their contact details, as well as online self-help materials are also available.

The Give it a Go programme is also open to you, and is a great way to discover a new hobby and meet people, with many events being low-cost or even free! Check out the Give it a Go programme, and [get tickets, here](#).

### Food and Drink

Our SU is also packed full of different catering outlets where you are more than welcome. Try Coffee Revolution for your morning pick-me-up (although they're also open late into the evenings and have a weekly board games night!) or settle down in Interval for a cosy, chilled out dinner.

### Getting Support

The Student Advice Centre offers free, confidential advice on academic, money, housing and immigration issues. The knowledgeable front desk team are also able to help signpost you through any other welfare concerns.



## International Student Support

### Living in Sheffield

Moving to a new city in a new country can be an exciting time in anyone's life. Be prepared for your life and lifestyle to be different from your experience back home.

It is likely that for the first few days and weeks you will find the experience exciting but you should be prepared for some feelings of homesickness and confusion about the way that things are done in the UK. This is entirely normal and is part of the process of adjusting to a new culture.

We hope that this article goes some way to help you with some of the aspects of life in Sheffield which are likely to be different to your previous experience or expectations. Please take some time to read through this along with any signposted web pages so that you are well prepared for your new life in Sheffield.



### Accommodation

Sheffield has a wide range of available accommodation to suit different tastes, from traditional private "terraced" houses to purpose-built University accommodation. Smart Move - one of the University of Sheffield's accommodation support services have drafted some top tips to help all of our students find accommodation: ([www.smartmovesheffield.com](http://www.smartmovesheffield.com)).

### Money

Making the decision to study abroad represents a significant financial commitment by you and your family. As well as paying your tuition fees you need to think about the cost of living in Sheffield, including the social life which will be an important part of your experience as a student.

### Opening a Bank Account

It may be that you already have a bank account that can be used in the UK but in most cases opening an account will be one of the first things you will need to do when arriving in the UK.

There is quite a wide choice of banks in the UK, most of which have branches in Sheffield.

All banks will need to know that you are fully registered with the University. So when you have decided which bank you would like to open an account with you should go to SSiD and ask for a "bank letter". This will show proof of your registration and both your home address and your address in Sheffield.

You should make sure that your name as printed on the bank letter is exactly the same as it appears on your passport. When you go to the bank to open the account they will also ask to see either your passport or national ID card.

Please note that the University is not allowed to recommend which bank you should open your account with.

***"Top Tip: If you have a UK visa, choose to receive paper statements over online statements"***

If you need a visa to study in the UK, you might need to extend your visa at some point and when you do, you need to provide financial evidence. Therefore it is important to check that your bank will be able to provide you with the documents you will need.

Online statements need to be stamped to be accepted by the Home Office for your visa application. But most banks refuse to stamp online statements. We therefore strongly recommend that you chose to receive paper statements as frequently as possible (if possible every 2 weeks) so you will have a bank statement in the right format when you need to extend your visa.



### Health

Our public state-funded healthcare system in the UK is called the National Health Service or NHS. Students coming for courses of six months or more are eligible for treatment under the NHS and medical insurance is not necessary.

For more information about entitlement to health care including free hospital treatment, visit these [UKCISA](#) webpages.

In 2015 the UK Government introduced a surcharge payable by international students to access the NHS. Please see important information on our immigration webpages.

### Safety

UK Government figures show that Sheffield is one of the safest cities in the country. This is fantastic news for our students but you should take precautionary measures to help maintain your personal safety when in a new country and in unfamiliar surroundings.

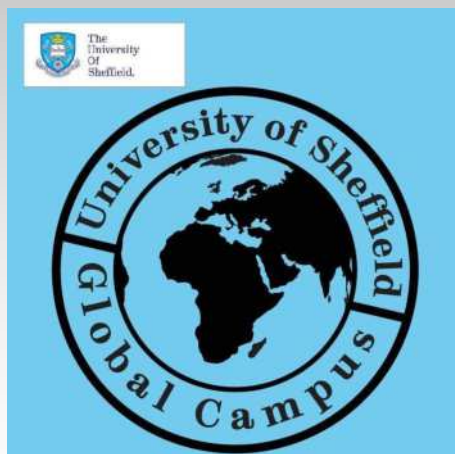
The British Council has produced a [booklet](#) with lots of information about how international students can stay safe. You can also get advice on safety and security matters from the Student Advice Centre.





## Introducing Global Campus: Your Passport to New Friendships and Experiences at The University of Sheffield

**Dr Tim Cooper, International Student Support Officer—Student Support Services** tells us about social opportunities for PhD students outside of their research.



When I was a PhD student in the late 1980s, the majority of us were UK students like myself. Move forward to 2018 and Higher Education is a truly global

phenomenon, especially at postgraduate level. As a research student – whether it's in a science lab or a medieval history research group- your fellow students are likely to be drawn from countries all over the world.

At Sheffield, one in three of our students is now from outside the UK and this is why in 2012 the International Student Support Team established the [Global Campus](#) platform with the aim of providing opportunities for students all over the world to come together socially alongside their studies and take advantage of everything that working in an multi-national environment has to offer.

Over the past five years since then, the range of events and activities has expanded to the extent that we now have a regular programme throughout the academic year and into the vacation as well. Only one of our activities – *Global Conversation* – is aimed exclusively at international students. The rest are all open to students from the UK since we firmly believe that an “integrated campus is a healthy campus”.

And crucially, all our events and activities welcome undergraduate and postgraduate students alike. Currently, the majority of participants are students at Master's level .

But right from the start, some of the most regular Global Campus participants have been doctoral students, from pretty much the full spectrum of nationalities represented on campus from India and Iraq to France and the UK.

Why is this? From my own experience – long ago though it was! – working towards a doctorate can often be a lonely experience, working in isolation, whether it's in library or lab.

More perhaps than any other group on campus, doctoral researchers welcome opportunities to get together socially, either to share experiences or to get away from “the thesis” altogether!

As co-ordinator of Global Campus, one of my genuine pleasures over the past five years has been seeing situations arising like a female Civil Engineering researcher from Saudi Arabia sharing coffee and experiences with a male counterpart in Biotechnology from India and another young woman from Nigeria who is working on superconductors! (as someone whose background is medieval history, I listen to some of these conversations in awe!)



At present, our weekly Global Campus activities are as follows:

**Mondays : *Global Conversation*.** Join with our native-speaking Global Campus Ambassadors to improve your social English and build confidence in both individual and group situations.

**Tuesdays:** *Culture Compass*. Students from all over the world – including the UK – come together to improve communication across cultures. If you're from outside the UK, this is a great opportunity to get a better understanding of British culture!

**Wednesdays:** *Local History Walks*. As a local historian I lead these one-hour tours to help you increase your sense of belonging to the city that is going to be your home for the next few years, as well as providing an opportunity to make new friends

**Thursdays:** *Global Café*. This is our “flagship” event, bringing international and UK students together in a relaxed atmosphere. We provide the room, games, and free tea and coffee – the rest is up to you!

**Fridays:** *GC Social*. This is where you take the lead! Fancy a visit to the cinema or a meal in a local restaurant while making new friends? Just meet up with our Global Campus Ambassadors and they can help you make it happen!

From the start, our programme has been flexible, so to check on what's coming up for 2018-19, visit our web page and also make sure you “like” our Sheffield Global Campus Facebook page.



Through attending our events, some of our doctoral students have established friendships in the UK and with fellow-researchers from the other side of the globe. Get involved and this could be you!

Global Campus web page:  
[www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/globalcampus](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/globalcampus)

Sheffield Global Campus Facebook Page:  
[facebook.com/sheffieldglobalcampus/](https://facebook.com/sheffieldglobalcampus/)

Sheffield Global Campus Twitter Page:  
<https://twitter.com/sheffglobal>





## GRAD Schools

### Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health

**Amy Shaw, GRAD School Manager, shares with us the PhD Student Induction Programme for the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health.**

The Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Graduate School runs a unique induction programme for new PhD students. Our Postgraduate Induction Course (PIC) introduces students to many of the core skills and experiences they are expected to gain during their research degree and gives them an opportunity to meet students from across the Faculty.

PIC is designed to help students to become better adapted to the research environment, to acquire basic research skills such as how to do a literature search, or use Endnote, and develop key skills, e.g. scientific thinking, critical appraisal, data handling. It's also a chance to start planning with clear goals in mind and to broaden their horizons – both in terms of careers they might consider and the people they connect with.

We run the course twice a year to coincide with our Faculty's preferred start dates (October or March) and we constantly evaluate and update the programme according to student feedback and the evolving PhD environment. Getting the right start to your PhD experience is crucial, as is ongoing support throughout your programme.

One of the ways we help our students from the start of their course is via our Peer Mentor Scheme. All of our new PhD students are offered a Peer Mentor, recruited from our existing PhD student body.

**Peer Mentors** are trained to help new students settle into their programme by offering insight into the transition from undergraduate study to postgraduate research, answering informal queries, referring to appropriate services and generally being a friendly face to talk to!



We have positive feedback from both mentors and mentees, as both sides gain a lot from taking part:

“There was always someone I could talk to informally if I had any doubts and someone who had very recently been in my shoes and faced similar situations and dealt with them. Having a tutor is of course useful but I found opening up to my buddy easier as she was almost my age and this gave me reassurance.” - Mentee

“It feels good to know you're helping new postgraduate research students settle in. I believe it has also improved my networking skills and made me more confident to approach people.” - Mentor

It's easy to stay in your department or even to feel isolated as a PhD student, so we run events throughout the year for our research students to help them come together as a community across the faculty. **Pizza Talks** is our quarterly opportunity for postgrads to test out their presentation skills in a relaxed, informal environment. Each session we invite three students to present their research in layman's terms to students from across the faculty, with time for a Q&A and constructive feedback. Students find this is a great way to practice public engagement and communicating their research. Everyone gets a chance to socialise across departments and of course, the free pizza is a bonus too!

The postgraduate research community comes together again in our annual **PGR Day**, which is run by our **PGR Forum** and is open to all postgraduates. We run workshops, panel debates and presentations on all aspects of PhD life, focussing on a different theme each year. Last year's theme was 'disseminating your research' and this year is 'research with a smile', concentrating on student wellbeing. A highlight is our 'Gone in 60 seconds' competition, where students compete to see who can best convey their research project to a general audience in one minute.



*Gone in 60 Seconds  
Competition*

## Library Services

### The University Library's top tips for publishing:

1. Remember to acknowledge ideas and work from other people. Collect your references to other people's work as you go along and don't leave it until the last minute.
2. Check which referencing style your publisher expects you to use (usually available from the journal website).
3. Use EndNote, or similar reference management software, to keep your references safe and to help you format them in the style required by your publisher. EndNote contains many journal referencing styles and additional ones can be downloaded.

In the Information Skills Resource (accessible from the 'Library' tab in MUSE) go to the 'Researchers' section and see the guidance on referencing.

4. Remember to make sure you obtain permission if you use diagrams, tables, illustrations, etc. from other people. Again, if you need to get authorisation make sure you allow plenty of time. Our copyright pages provide full guidance <http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/services/copyright>.

5. If you want to raise your profile consider publishing in an open access journal which isn't hidden behind a subscription barrier. SPARC®, (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition), is an alliance of universities, research libraries, and organisations which offers news and analysis of the open access movement. <http://www.arl.org/sparc/>

6. Save a copy of your article in the University's repository, White Rose Research Online. This is fully indexed by Google and makes your research available to a wide audience. Publishers' policies on the deposit of papers in repositories vary, and may change from time to time. Many publishers allow deposit of the final version of an author's paper in its original format (typically as a Word file), but will not allow their own pdf files to be used. If in doubt ask your liaison librarian <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/libstaff/sllist> or check the White Rose Research Online copyright guidance at <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/docs/copyright.html>

7. Think carefully when submitting your work for publication. Consider retaining your copyright in order to be able to re-use and distribute your work in the future. Review any documents publishers ask you to sign and check whether they will allow future uses of your work. It is sensible to agree to give the publisher a non-exclusive licence to publish your article.

8. Journal impact factors can be used as a way of selecting which journal you want to publish in and is one method of comparing journals in the same field. Journal impact is largely measured according to the Thomson ISI Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and you can find the impact factor of some electronic journals through StarPlus, the library catalogue. Search for the journal you want and on the 'Find it @ Sheffield' screen, at the bottom of the page under 'citation'.



The library service offers a wide range of resources for PGR students including access to online tutorials, group workshops and individual advice.

Each faculty has their own librarian who is available for advice, on literature searches for specific topics, which tutorial or workshops might be helpful. The Team members specialise in particular subject areas and contact details are available via the Library tab on MUSE.

This advice can be provided by email, telephone or face to face depending on the student's needs.

## Making the most of your PhD journey (to enhance your career prospects)

**Rachel Roberts—Careers Consultant for Researchers at the University of Sheffield provides a useful overview of developing your career prospects as part of your PhD.**



Each researcher has their own reasons for choosing to embark on a PhD or doctorate level study. Some researchers have a clear career path in mind and the PhD is the route to get there or continue in that field.

Some have been encouraged to pursue further research by academics that have spotted potential. Some have a passion for their discipline and want to continue working in it. Some have enjoyed the research aspects of their degree and want to do more of that. Some have experience in one career but are looking for a change of direction. Some have a passion to create new knowledge. Some feel that studying at doctoral level is the thing that fits best with their current life choices.

Regardless of your reasons for doing doctoral research, the fact that you are doing it provides a significant time of opportunity. You have 3 or 4 years ahead of you to develop and learn. Much of that time will be focused on your research but it shouldn't stop there. You should also focus on YOU and make YOU a priority.

Gaining a PhD will be a huge achievement and can potentially broaden your access to a diverse range of possibilities but the PhD alone won't be enough. Now is the time to increase your skills, knowledge and attributes. It is also the time to learn and grow and develop a greater understanding of what motivates and enthuses you, what you want from life and where you fit.

I'd encourage you to use every month of your PhD to develop your confidence, build networks, gain insights, improve your self-awareness, add to your experience and perhaps even have some fun. Start now and keep adding rather than thinking a better time will come. All too often researchers at the end of their PhD say, "I wish I'd done this much earlier" when talking about their own development.

**Festivals / Events** – the city of Sheffield and its universities host a range of festivals and events throughout the year. There are regular calls for speakers, participants and volunteers to get involved and it is a great way to add to your public engagement activity.

**Clubs and Societies** – are not just for undergraduate students and with over 300 to choose from you should be able to find one or two that appeal. Team work can be in short supply as a postgraduate researcher so working alongside others with a shared interest can be useful, productive and enjoyable. It doesn't all have to be hard work and being involved with something away from your research can be an effective stress reliever too. Find out what the Student Union can offer.

**Committees / Departmental responsibilities** – all academic departments look for ways to engage effectively with their research students. Staff-student committees will regularly be looking for new researchers to represent their peers at meetings and may advertise other roles and opportunities too.

**Training and Development** – you could be overwhelmed with the amount of training and development opportunities that get advertised to researchers at Sheffield. Engage with them from your first year, do something every month and pick a mix of research specific alongside broader developmental opportunities. That way you'll get the most from the programmes and won't miss out.

**Volunteering** – is a way to gain skills and experience, meet new people, try out a role to see if you like it and make a contribution. It could be a one off event just for an afternoon through to a regular commitment over a period of time. Volunteering is a highly regarded activity in the UK and often enables you to gain experience and responsibility beyond that you could expect to be paid for at this point in your career!

## Making the most of your PhD journey (to enhance your career prospects)

**Work shadowing** – enables you to find out what a job or role is like without taking on too much commitment. Spending a day or two with an individual or organisation, observing what they do in a typical day adds a whole new dimension to just reading a case study. If you like what you see, this may give you the incentive to get more experience in this area and develop specific employability skills. If you don't, you've learnt something important and can try something else!

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**Teaching / Demonstrating** – is a way to earn some money and gain useful experience whether you plan a career in academia or other sectors. Most careers have some responsibility for training and developing others as you progress, even if only informally. Sheffield Teaching Assistant (STA) workshops give you access to training to prepare you and opportunities may be advertised in your department or across the university on Career Connect. You could also be proactive and let your department or academic colleagues know you are interested in teaching opportunities.

**Competitions / Consultancy projects** – are advertised to individuals and potential teams on a regular basis. Prizes could include funding, travel or work experience opportunities but the experience you gain can be a prize in itself! Many encourage cross disciplinary working or applying your expertise in new ways. Look out for email alerts, posters, email newsletters and social media for further information.

**Research projects** – many researchers look to gain additional research experience by contributing to research projects outside of their own PhD. This could be in other research teams, labs or research groups either here at Sheffield or at other institutions. Looking for ways to

collaborate with others broadens your network and perspective.

**Community activities** – take advantage of living in the 6th largest city in the UK. There is a lot going on at the university but there is even more going on in Sheffield that you can get involved with. Feel a part of your community and expand your understanding of the region – this could aid your research too!

**Paid work / Internships** – many researchers need to earn money and like a job unrelated to their research as a way to think about something else. Others want to build on specific skills. Whether you want a regular paid job or an internship that fits alongside your PhD you'll find a range of opportunities advertised on Career Connect, and you can also visit the Careers Service Job Shop in the Student Union – or you could create your own!

**Funding applications** – gaining experience of writing funding applications can start small. Look for opportunities to apply for travel grants or other small awards that enable you to engage in opportunities during your PhD. The Careers Service has our own scheme, PREP (Postgraduate Researcher Experience Programme) to enable you to apply for money to fund your own work experience opportunity!

This is just a snapshot of some of the things you could do. There are many more. My main aim is to get all of you to do something, then do something else, do it now and keep doing it! If you're not sure what would be best for you and your longer term career development, come and talk to me and my colleague Darcey about this or any other aspect of your career. You can book appointments with us through [Career Connect](#) – and you can do this from day one too!



## Wellbeing

### How to Get the Support You Need, When You Need it Most Sarah Bell, Research Development Manager—THINK AHEAD

I am a member of the Think Ahead team, at the University of Sheffield. We work with postdoctoral and postgraduate researchers, supporting them to develop careers inside or outside of academia. We're very privileged to be able to work with researchers as they progress through their PhD, start a new research contract or take the next step in their career. We see their successes and their achievements – and it's brilliant!

Inevitably, though, we also see the other side: researchers who are struggling or stressed-out. Because – spoiler alert – academia is hard! It's enough of a challenge when everything's plain-sailing in the rest of your life but, when a perfect storm of work and other life stresses come at once, it can feel overwhelming.

What constitutes a “personal crisis” is as individual as the person experiencing it. Common areas of stress include your own health, the illness or death of a loved one, relationship breakdown, financial worries – anything extraordinary and traumatic that has an impact on other areas of your life. Suddenly, your definition of “work-life balance” isn't about having the time to train for a triathlon, learning to play the piano or even about being able to cheer your kids on in their after school activities. It's about trying desperately to juggle the bare essentials of everything you have to cram into your day without collapsing.

The University takes your wellbeing seriously, and there is a wide range of support that you can access, if you're struggling. As well as talking to your supervisor, you can use the Health and Wellbeing services run by Student Support (SSiD), and attend at workshops offered by the University or Think Ahead, to help you manage your stress, supervisor(!) and time, to enable you to feel more in control.



In addition to this, The University has a specific Researcher Wellbeing programme called ResearchWell (@reswellsheff), which offers wellbeing sessions, online resources and info throughout the year, as well as the annual Researcher Wellbeing Week, which returned on 18 June 2018—Keep your eyes peeled for further events!

However, while it's really important that these services exist for you, sometimes you need to consider your needs more broadly, particularly when things are tough. These three areas can be a good place to start:

#### Find flexibility where you can

Academic research is, naturally, intellectually demanding. You need to juggle complex problems, tasks and deadlines. However, research can also often offer a certain amount of flexibility in your working patterns or even in your work location. If you have some tasks that can only be done between set times or in a specific place, you may be able to juggle other aspects of your work to enable you to be with a sick relative, to attend hospital appointments or to cover childcare. It is worth formally discussing flexible working with your supervisor if you feel this would help you,



but you might not need to if you can take advantage of inbuilt flexibility within your role.

### Keep your supervisor informed

If you're experiencing personal difficulties that are significant enough to have an impact on your work, it's important that you discuss these with your supervisor. This can feel really awkward, particularly if you don't already have a great relationship, but the University has a duty of care to you, including specific policies to support you during difficult times. However, if you don't tell people, they can't help you.



This doesn't mean that you have to go into the minute details of your problems; you just need to outline the issues, explain what impact they might have (and how you intend to minimise these) and suggest ways that your supervisor could support you. You should try to find some specific things that you can both agree on – “I need more time to work on the results, and I'm going to have to work at home sometimes” is not as helpful as “I need an extra two weeks to analyse the results and will need to work at home 2 days a week.” Obviously, depending on the situation, you may not know exactly what you will need, but having a plan, even if it needs to be reviewed at a later date, demonstrates your professionalism and commitment to your work.

Approaching the situation proactively, not only makes it easier for your supervisor to support you while minimising disruption to the project, it can also help to give you back a feeling of being in control, which is crucial.

When something unexpected and awful hits, you can feel completely at the mercy of circumstance; this can help you start to wrest control back.

If this type of conversation is your worst nightmare, or you worry about not being able to get out everything you need to in a meeting, send an email first, summarising the situation and requesting a discussion. Then you'll be sure that you haven't missed anything you need to say and you'll have a handy aide-mémoire (or piece of paper to clutch!) when you have the conversation.

### Get help

Asking for and accessing help is crucial, and is about much more than just your academic life. When you talk to friends and family about your situation, I bet that most of them say something along the lines of “let me know if there's anything I can do to help.” I also bet that you won't. That might be because you don't want to burden them, don't think they mean it or feel like you should be able to cope on your own.

If you're involved in postgraduate or post-doctoral research, you're probably used to being capable; to being The Clever One; to figuring it out. So, it can be really hard to admit that there are some things that you can't handle entirely on your own. Needing help doesn't make you weak; recognising when you need help is smart.

Once you recognise this, you can take people up on their offers of help. Some friends might be wellmeaning, but ultimately unreliable; you know the type. But most people really mean it when they offer support. So, if you need to, follow up these offers. But, remember, it's your responsibility to ask (which can be hard).

You can also make things easier by, again, asking for a specific piece of help “could you pick up my library book/dry cleaning?” rather than something vague. Matching people's skills or interests to what you need, can also make a big difference. The biggest difference you can make, though, is simply finding the courage to ask.

## PGR Profile:

# What I wish someone had told me on my first day as a PhD Student

## Eve Corrie

**Eve Corrie, Postgraduate Researcher in the Department of Biomedical Science shares her experience of her first year of study.**



Nine months ago I made the move from London to Sheffield to begin my PhD, the logical next step in my academic career. I was offered the project very late as a replacement for somebody who dropped out, so I barely had any time to think about it and three weeks later I was a PhD student in a brand new city. It was (and still is) a steep learning curve, but I'm

by far a better scientist for it. This is a list that I wish I'd been given on my first day, and hopefully some of these tips will help you hit the ground running.

### 1. Join in and have fun

The PhD community here is really something special, and was the main thing that helped me feel at home so quickly. Make the most of it by going to socials, retreats and Christmas parties, and socialise at lunchtimes and at the pub on Fridays. As well as support, I've found other students an invaluable source of advice and antibodies when mine haven't arrived in time!

### 2. Get reading early on, while you still have spare hours

I had a lot of free time in my first few months, waiting for experiments to take off. It felt like all I was doing was reading around my subject while waiting to get stuck in, and at the time I complained about it. Now I'm truly stuck in I wish I had more time for reading... Use this settling-in period to become an expert in your field while you have the chance.

### 3. Ask questions

Ask why your lab does things the way they do, what each step of the protocol is for, why they

use particular techniques, why they've come to a particular conclusion. Question and understand everything. Don't assume anything; investigate it for yourself. After all, it's your PhD and it's you who'll have to defend it.

### 4. Keep your protocols up to date

Make detailed notes when somebody is showing you a new protocol, then update it so you could follow it again perfectly in three years' time when it's been completely erased from your memory. Keep a spreadsheet of all the antibodies and reagents you use, working concentrations and the company that makes them. All of this should make your thesis much easier to write up when you get there.

### 5. Get organised early

Come up with an organised system to store your protocols, data and all the relevant information for your experiments. Back it up immediately.

### 6. Remember that the world exists outside your PhD

Try and do things that aren't directly related to your work. There will be many opportunities for outreach, undergraduate demonstrating and getting involved in societies. All of these will make you a more rounded, employable person. They will also get you out of the lab and keep you in touch with the world outside research, because sometimes it can be hard to remember that exists!

### 7. Be prepared to find things hard...

You've probably been one of the elite throughout GCSEs, A levels, undergraduate study and your Masters... When you start a PhD everybody's just as good, therefore the standard of what's expected is much higher. This may be the first time in years you've found something truly challenging.

### 8. ... but try not to panic!

Everything is new. You're learning new techniques, getting used to a new lab and being left to figure things out yourself. Things aren't always going to go perfectly the first time, but that doesn't mean you can't do it! Don't freak out, just try your best and learn from your mistakes until you get it right.

## PGR Profile: Your PhD is your priority and there is a life outside of it Ligia Orellana

### **Ligia Orellana, Postgraduate Researcher in the Department of Biomedical Science shares her experience of her first year of study.**

Working on a unique idea carries a dose of loneliness. Your PhD addresses a unique idea, and while you have supervisors and colleagues with whom you share a field and a language, that is like living in the same country but in different regions. As a PhD researcher, you have your own habits and perspectives, your own questions and doubts, and nobody else sees exactly what you are seeing. At least not yet.

The peculiarity that is your PhD will demand more and more of your time and your attention. It may then be tempting to reinforce the isolation to reduce distractions and make as much progress as possible. At this point, there comes the advice that you should take regular breaks from your work. You should, and do not wait for a breakdown to appreciate breaks as more than slacking off, but you need more than a 10-minute-pause button to manage your life as an independent researcher.

A PhD is a long-term commitment, and for it to come to fruition it needs you on your best form: well-rested, with a clear head, and in good spirits. Being in such condition can be a lot to ask from someone who is intensely focused on the same subject for so long, with the additional stress of having limited time and money to conduct their research. Precisely, though, shift your focus often.

### ***“Your PhD will benefit from you having a consistent life outside of it.”***

The elements that make up this life are up to you, ranging from occasionally catching a movie with friends to joining a volunteer group; from basking in the city life to running a side research project; from going on day trips to mastering that skill that everyone says would never earn you a living but you would pursue if you weren't in academia. Maybe you already have a job, family to look after, or health issues that tug at your sleeve frequently.

At the start of my PhD, I was afraid of committing to anything besides my research. I happily went for some of the mundane deeds listed above, but I feared that more structured activities would take up too much of my time. Nevertheless, I also felt isolated, and, coming to this country from a radically different background, I felt I was letting my new vibrant surroundings go to waste. Thus I joined the Postgraduate Society of my Department, which was a bit of an accident, but also one of the most satisfying experiences of my PhD years.

### ***“Pay attention to yourself.”***

Being a Society committee member kept me close enough to the shore of academia whilst giving me a chance to breathe outside that bubble and help others do the same. I found myself being a part of a remarkable team and taking meaningful breaks from my research. As a Society, we organised coffee mornings, parties, wellbeing activities, seminars, fundraisers, and walks in the Peak District; we reached out to people inside and outside the Department. In doing so, I exercised practical abilities, I learned about subfields in my field, and I had colleagues turn into friends.

Nevertheless, my PhD remains my priority. Your PhD is your priority, a seemingly never-ending one. It may sometimes entail excruciating confusion, pressing matters, and sleepless nights. At some point you will need to put your life on hold for a week or two to meet a dreadful deadline, but for all the complications a PhD is made of, it should not feel like perpetual quicksand. There should be room for you to set the PhD aside for a while, not to procrastinate or merely pass the time until it's time to return to work, but to truly enjoy yourself and grow beyond the confines of your area of expertise. The doctor you will become will thank you for it.



*“Out and about with the Psychology Postgraduate Society - A walk in the Peak District”.*



## PGR Profile: Career change/Mature student's perspective Gabrielle Pitfield

***Gabrielle Pitfield, Postgraduate Researcher in the Department of Psychology provides an overview of her postgraduate journey as well her learning journey top tips.***

I feel compelled to write this and share my thoughts for the more mature students that may be embarking on their PhD.

Firstly, many congratulations for getting into the University of Sheffield - it is a great welcoming place located in a fantastically green and progressive city. You are embarking on a new adventure and whichever Faculty/ Department you are affiliated to we all share a common goal - the desire to explore and attempt to answer our burning research question(s)!

How we got to this juncture in life varies, but for more mature students it may have been quite a circuitous path. It was for me, although I practiced as a Chartered Surveyor, my passion was always Psychology so after my youngest child started school, I embarked on a MSc Developmental Psychology conversion course. Twenty years had passed since I had been an undergraduate and it did feel that way. I worked very hard and achieved a distinction. This proved to be my passport to my PhD.

It has not been plain sailing. When I first enrolled, I felt overwhelmed by planning timescales and workload and was uncertain of my ability to cope.

***“I have now discovered these feelings of apprehension come in waves (of varying intensities!) throughout the PhD journey and it is best to acknowledge and accept this is completely normal. “***

I have been very fortunate to have had excellent supervisors from my initial Professor's contagious enthusiasm to my current outstanding supervisors.

Listen carefully to their advice, they will challenge your thought processes but if you disagree and can justify your decisions, stick with your judgment. In a constantly evolving research arena, it is easy to lose sight of original objectives and travel down a very interesting but non-pertinent avenue! Keep re-engaging with your research question(s).



The University provide an amazing Doctoral Training Programme which is expansive and very comprehensive. The compulsory Year 1 and Year 2 Ethics and Integrity modules are fascinating and allow you the opportunity to learn of current interdisciplinary research.

***“The departmental postgraduate administrators are a constant source of guidance and support.”***

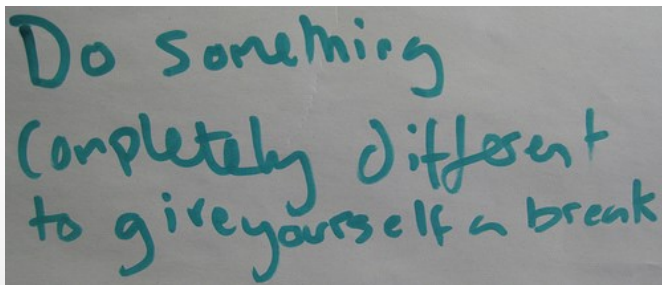
In addition, you can easily enrol on MSc/ undergraduate sessions in your department if you feel they are pertinent to your research. Although I would encourage you to immerse yourself in as many modules as possible the logistics of fitting this in with the demands of growing family can be problematic. The yearly postgraduate conferences are lovely events to see familiar faces and learn about the diversity and richness of research in your department.

Towards the end of your research you can attend numerous writing groups available (normally fuelled by biscuits!) and book yourself onto a Viva Survivor workshop on how best to prepare for your upcoming viva.



### Tips from my learning journey

- Research is demanding, both emotionally and physically. This is especially true if you have many other pulls on your time and energy, aging relatives and children facing their own important milestone examinations. Have self-compassion and be kind on yourself – give yourself little treats when you have accomplished a goal.



- Not everyone in your department is a genius on everything (although some truly will be in their own specific specialisms!). I experienced symptoms of 'Imposter Syndrome' in believing everyone else possessed higher intellectual and research abilities than myself, however speaking to others led me to believe this underlying feeling is more widespread than you originally perceive (and could lead to entire PhD in itself!).
- Take time out if you need it. Life does not run smoothly and during difficult times the University is extremely accommodating.

I have had two leaves of absence due to family illnesses and have switched from full time to part time to cope with demands. I have always felt extremely supported by my supervisors and the university.

- Organisation is key – whether this is daily time management (especially if like me your work from home) or how you name your computer files otherwise you can spend half your time trying to locate the latest version of your file!
- Always feel and show gratitude to your participants and stakeholders. I have felt humbled by the kindness of stakeholders when implementing interventions in secondary schools. Remember it's their time they are sacrificing not just yours!

***“Never forget the impact of your studying on family and friends, include them in your journey and thank them for their endless encouragement & support..”***

Although the PhD journey can be a long and very steep learning curve it also is an enlightening and inspiring process in which you will learn so much about yourself as well as your specific research area. Be reflexive as well as reflective. The University of Sheffield will support and guide you every step of the way.





## PGR Profile: Four Rules to Work Sustainably in a PhD

James Baker

**James Baker, Postgraduate Researcher from the Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology shares his perspective of how to work sustainably.**

Most students who have been through university have been here. It's 2AM in the library, coffee ditched in favour of Monster, Sainsbury's meal deal at 11pm for dinner, because your assignment is due at 9am the following day, and by hook or by crook, it must be finished.

The schedule of a typical student is one of highs and lows: mad rushes to write and revise and cram juxtaposed with long summers, reading weeks, and lie-ins. Transitioning from there to a PhD is hard, but as the cliché goes, it is a marathon not a sprint. Working this way might get you through two months of revision, but it cannot last for four years. Therefore, here are four rules for working sustainably in a PhD.

### 1. Don't Self Sacrifice

During the first couple of weeks of my PhD, inexperienced and uncertain, I asked of a senior academic what kind of workload was expected of me. I was informed that when they did their PhD, they lost every weekend, and several romantic partners to their work, and that the same was expected of me. Not once was office-hours, or productivity mentioned. Instead, the currency of workload was self-sacrifice.

This attitude is sometimes prevalent in academia, and if work doesn't go well for a period of time, it can become tempting to begin trading in this currency. Working weekends, missing socials, staying late, in order to prove to your supervisor (maybe even to yourself), that you care about and deserve this PhD. Few things are more assured to negatively impact your mental health, and the quality of your work.

Treating your workload sustainably means casting aside this currency.

Set yourself an achievable target for hours spent writing, or at your bench, or in your office, and stick to it as best you can, even when the going gets rough. Working consistently and effectively, rather than in self-sacrifice, will improve both your work and your state of mind.



### 2. Keep a Regular Schedule

Despite many PhD projects making it difficult, keeping a regular schedule can be an effective way to keep your work sustainable. Clocking in from 9-5 and nothing else is difficult, but try to allow yourself to go home when you need to, even if sometimes the work isn't done.

Pushing through until midnight might occasionally help in the very short term, but your productivity and wellbeing will thank you for some regularity. This also helps with the next tip: keeping your work and your life separate.



### 3. Your Work is Not Your Life

If you want to work sustainably, try to remember that your work is not your life, and your life is not your work. Keep your hobbies alive and active, be they gaming, dancing, sport, whatever you like to do. Find time to do them, even if that means time not spent working. Constructing boundaries, however arbitrary, between your work and the rest of your life can also help.

My arbitrary boundary is to dress smartly at work, and immediately change into relaxed outfits once I'm home. Yours could be anything, as long as it helps to differentiate your work from your personal time.



### 4. Take Your Holidays

As a student, holidays are as regular and assured as clockwork. Come rain or shine, there are no lectures over Christmas, and nothing to be done after summer exams. It's very easy to carry the same attitude onwards, but in a PhD, holidays will not come to you.

Make sure to plan ahead. I know from experience that it's easy to plough a furrow in a PhD, before you surface for air and realize you haven't taken a holiday for 8 months. Regular holidays, even just three or four days off, can be so important to keep up your wellbeing.

It can also be easy to trade in self-sacrifice using holidays. Informing supervisors of holidays can compound this; I know many PhD students who've heard the guilt tripping 'Well, it is your PhD' line when they bring it up. Remember that neither you, nor your work, benefits from you sacrificing your wellbeing.



It might seem to many reading this, that the advice given is obvious. Perhaps (indeed, hopefully) it's been heard before. But keeping to these rules is hard. This article is written by a PhD student who recently worked six straight weekends, and who hasn't taken a holiday since Christmas. Even when you know all of this, the nature of most PhD projects is to push against the healthy, sustainable habits mentioned here.

Try to stick to these rules, but when times get tougher and you most likely break a couple, remember what it is that you're doing, that you can't do it forever, all above all else, to be kind to yourself.

## PGR Profile: Gaining Transferable Skills During Your PhD

### Caroline Wood

**Caroline Wood, Postgraduate Researcher from the Department of Animal and Plant Science talks about gaining transferable skills to keep your career options open.**



Even if you are starting your PhD journey as I did, with your heart set on becoming a Professor, it's worth remembering that there simply aren't enough lecture ships available for every PhD student to take the academic

route. You may also change over time and realise that your skills align better to another sector. The key to keeping your career options open is to develop transferable skills that will allow you to apply your academic knowledge in new (and often exciting!) domains. The University of Sheffield provides countless opportunities for professional development; here I share the ones that have been most valuable for me. Remember – once you leave University, you'd typically have to pay a small fortune for a course in any of the below topics, so make the most of your chance to learn for free now!

#### Creative Design

Our modern society thrives on visual information, so being able to make arresting videos and images is a valuable asset. The Creative Media Team (part of Corporate Information and Computing Services) run a programme of free courses each term covering everything from photography, video editing with Adobe Premiere Pro, audio production and filming. You can even hire their top-of-the-range equipment to create your masterpiece, then edit them to perfection in one of the creative suites.

I knew nothing about video production when I arrived, but these courses gave me the confidence to produce a series of videos promoting the 2017 Pint of Science Festival in Sheffield – evidence that will be invaluable if I apply for a communications job.



#### Entrepreneurship

Having good business sense shows employers that you appreciate the challenges they face in order to succeed. But you don't get this just by watching *The Apprentice* and *Dragon's Den*. My advice is to take part in an entrepreneurship challenge such as BiotechnologyYES, where teams pitch a novel, biotech inspired product to a panel of real industry experts.

Doing BiotechnologyYES gave me a thorough grounding in key business concepts such as finance planning, intellectual property and marketing. It even convinced one of my team mates to become a chartered Intellectual Property Officer, a career they now find truly rewarding. If you fancy trying to launch a start-up idea of your own, check out the support offered by University of Sheffield Enterprise (USE).



#### Languages

Two things make Sheffield a particularly brilliant place to learn a foreign language: the international ethos and the Languages for All Programme, which allows PhD research students to study a language module for free as part of the Doctoral Development Programme.

With eighteen different languages on offer, from Latin to Luxembourgish, there really is something for everyone and such a skill could give you the edge if you want to work abroad.

Although I hated language lessons at secondary school, I have really enjoyed taking up French again and now have a stronger chance of getting a job at one of the international NGOs I have my eye on.



## Coding

The technology sector is growing at a phenomenal rate and shows no sign of slowing down soon. Having even basic programming knowledge could help you transfer to a range of related careers outside your discipline.

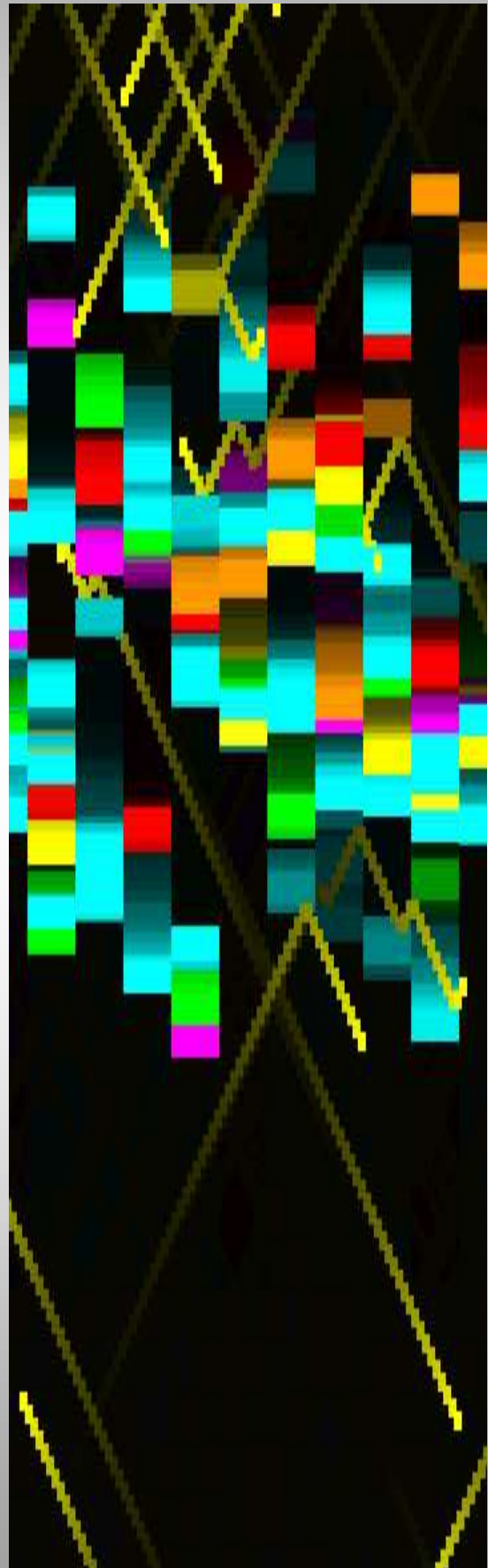
I was convinced that I would be hopeless at coding but when I took the Code Frist Beginners Course, the mentors were so approachable that I was soon building basic websites from scratch. The scheme also has a more advanced Python course and many departments have clubs for mastering specific software, such as R.



## Final Advice

Don't feel limited by your past experiences. At PhD level, your additional learning can be more focused on your weaknesses, allowing you to master skills you may have given up hope of ever achieving. Don't underestimate your ability to grow! That said, beware of going to the opposite extreme and taking on too many extra activities, causing you to lose your focus. Have a plan of what you want to learn and pace it to last the duration of your PhD, ideally concentrating on one area at a time.

To learn more about my experiences developing transferable skills alongside my PhD, you can read my blog posts as part of the [We are Sheffield Students](#) webpages.





## PGR Profile:

# The Trials and Tribulations of Being a Part-time PhD Student

## Rachel Staddon

### **Rachel Staddon, Postgraduate Researcher in the Department of Education tells us about balancing a part-time job and a part-time PhD.**

Jobs. Family. Doing the dishes. Feeding the cat. These are the challenges in the life of a part-time PhD student. Oh, and the studying too, I suppose.

Although I do not currently have a cat to feed, life is busy. I have a part-time job teaching in the Department for Lifelong Learning, and I'm completing my PhD, also part-time. Although my job is supposed to be three days a week, it inevitably usually takes up many more hours than I budget, particularly during assessment periods. Those four days a week I'd planned to spend on my PhD... well, it just doesn't work out, due to a host of reasons. However, finding the balance has gotten easier. I'd like to share my top five things I've experienced that new part-time PhD starters might find useful to consider.

#### **Schedule yourself rest time**

One of the reasons my four-days-a-week PhD didn't work out is I was overly ambitious with how much work I could do. A PhD is mentally exhausting; I simply couldn't come home from work and start reading journal articles. Now I award myself a proper weekend, where I can relax and decompress. This means I have less time per week for my PhD, but this actually encourages me to plan my time better.

#### **Your supervisor is also busy**

It's not just about planning my time – my supervisor often goes out of the country for weeks at a time, usually with limited access to the internet and therefore email. It is important to keep up communication with your supervisor to find out when they're not going to be around, and plan your work around this. Being a part-time student, this is occasionally tricky. I've had periods of study where I've met with my supervisors every four weeks, and periods where I haven't seen them for six months. This is definitely something to discuss with your supervisor, and I recommend keeping them informed about the pressure points in your life.

#### **Emergencies and periods of inactivity happen**

Family emergencies, periods of poor mental health, moving house – there's so many ways you can get side tracked, and these are some of the pressure points I mentioned above.

Some people would say you need to keep engaged in the PhD at all costs. As a part-time PhD student, I would give the opposite advice. Take the time you need.



Definitely let your supervisor know what's going on, but don't be afraid to take a month or two to cope with your life. Just be aware that it can be harder to get back into studying, so you do need to have some awareness of how you work best. Just remember – your studies are important, but your health is more important.

#### **You're less a part of the department than full-time students – but you don't have to be**

You will get forgotten about at some point. Not by your supervisor, but by your department. I started my PhD in March of 2015, and fell through the cracks. I didn't have any induction. I wasn't given any of the important paperwork and information that (I assume) the full-time September intake had. I had to ask to be added to important mailing lists. You are not in the office every day, or even every week, or every month, and this can be difficult. Don't be afraid to pester people, to ask to be involved. Do some bits of teaching. Attend meetings and get involved in others' studies. Chat to your student reps. You are in control of what happens to you. You don't have to be less a part of the department if you don't want to be.

#### **Don't forget the support services**

Sheffield offers a huge range of support services, from job seeking, to mental health services (SAMHS), from a nursery to legal advice. Don't be afraid to ask if you need support.

As a part-time PhD student, life can be difficult, juggling your studies and many other responsibilities. My one piece of ultimate advice would be to keep in contact with your supervisor. They've been through this, and they usually know where to point you if they can't help. Overall, enjoy your experience! Just make sure to feed the cat.

## PGR Profile: Summer, Sunshine and Study? Susan Hampshaw

**Susan Hampshaw, Postgraduate Researcher in ScHAAR tells us about balancing a part-time job, a part-time PhD and parenting!**



I'm a part time PhD student in ScHAAR looking at How NICE Public Health guidance is received, and used by Local Government . I work as Public Health Principal in Doncaster Council where I lead work on addressing Health Inequalities. I'm a parent too, to 2 children Thomas aged 13 and Emily

aged 10. So, I'm passed the really tiring, draining early stages and I'm in the midst of the really tiring, draining pre-teen stage!

If I were studying full time, I'd be about to enter my final year.... so pretty far on PhD wise - the end is in sight. Summer is also in sight - for me, a time usually spent with my family but also over the last four years a time to make progress on my PhD. I'm often in a reflective mood at this time of year as the seemingly endless days of Summer are ahead and I remember the excitement of childhood Summers. This is hopefully the final Summer before I submit my thesis. There I've said it!

Enrolling on my PhD in Summer 2013, has been a really positive for me but it does involve making a transition and perhaps highlighting these stages might be helpful if you are just about to start your PhD journey.

### **Adjusting to being a student again**

I said earlier, I lead Health Inequality work in Doncaster and so am perceived as holding specialist knowledge by my Public Health colleagues.

Starting a PhD and not knowing is a big change and becoming the apprentice again isn't easy. I was able to discuss this honestly and openly with my PhD supervisory team and this did help my transition.

### **Balancing work, family and study**

There are sacrifices and there is heated online debate about how much PhD work should occur on evenings and weekends. However, #phdweekend has become a way of life and is a sacrifice; my children and partner see a little less of me (I negotiate this in advance) but I am conscious that I am sometimes absent even when present - my thoughts wander to an issue I'm struggling with.

I've become adept at finding moments. I take my daughter to her swimming lesson every Saturday afternoon and this gives me 90 precious minutes and until I started this journey I had no idea how much could be achieved in 90 minutes of hard work which brings me to my current favourite quotation "Opportunity is missed by many people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work" (Thomas Edison).

### **Seeking support and development**

PhD life, requires juggling - and this is both a tricky balancing act and another important transition. I have been fortunate to have a truly brilliant PhD supervisors who recognise my experience (and the tacit knowledge therein) and also recognise the ebbs and flows of my commitments and so have been tolerant yet still ensured that I have made progress.

Developing a trusting relationship has been essential and some of this is about delivering what you promise you will (the cycle of supervision meetings, paperwork and objectives have aided this) and hitting deadlines, despite the multitude of priorities.

I have learned to embrace the precept, that "Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in day out" – Robert Collier. The doctoral development provision at Sheffield helped me with this - particularly, for me, with respect to Writing Retreats, and so another piece of advice for those starting out is to access all the resources and help that is out there

I wish I'd known before I started the importance of a trusting and honest supervisory relationship and that PhD life is a series of adjustments. It is important to acknowledge that PhD Life is hard work ... (in a way that is only really understandable to those in it) but, for me, it is also a real privilege and I am grateful to have the opportunity to indulge my curiosity; to puzzle, think and seek answers.

## \*ESSENTIAL\* Student Tips for Making the Most of your PhD

Contributions from: Amber McNamara; Eve Corrie, Eduardo Roberto Perez Guagrelli, Emmanuel Maiyanga & Mira Liberman

### Self-discipline

The lack of contact hours and the infrequent meetings with supervisors can make the PhD experience not only isolating, but a hotbed for procrastination. Some supervisors will see you as often as once a month when you are starting out, others take a more laid-back approach and let you instigate meetings. Either way, vast amounts of time need to be broken down into a feasible schedule. Give yourself weekly and monthly goals really help you stay on track, as well as making a list at the beginning of everyday with what you want to achieve.



### Training

Attend seminars and workshops offered by the university, especially those on how to manage your workload. Maybe keep a running journal of all the advice you are given and, through a process of trial and error, work out which worked and didn't work for you

Tips

## TOP TIPS

### Useful Support Services

The most obvious starting point is to acquire and be conversant with all necessary information a student is expected to have as contained in the postgraduate research handbook or Code of Practice. Your departmental administrative office is very helpful in providing answers to a range of questions on academic support issues.

Other services which are useful include: Library services, critical writing support services, language support.

### Develop and build a successful relationship with your supervisor

Develop a trusting relationship with your supervisor, some of this will be about delivering what you promise you will (the cycle of supervision meetings, paperwork and objectives have aided this) and hitting deadlines, despite the multitude of priorities.

Resolve divergent views cropping up between student and supervisor in relation to research matters as soon as possible. Keep communication clear at all times.



### Manage your money

Buy only the items that are highly necessary, go for the most affordable accommodation, avoid social entanglements that are financially very demanding, seek advice from student advisory centre on any financial issue where there is doubt.

### Write, read, write, read...

Writing, and the habit of writing, is an important one to cultivate, so start writing consistently. Allot some time every day or once a week to 'just write'. The more you write, the more 'material' you will have for future papers you might want to write. Take opportunities to write for your faculty platform or blog. Maybe your funder would like to showcase all the great things you are doing - volunteer to write for them every couple of months. It is likely that your cluster research group has a blog. Offer to write a piece for them, or cover one of the talks you've been to for the blog. This is also an example of being a 'yes' person - every opportunity to write makes writing easier, so grab every opportunity!

Reading and writing go hand in hand. Read around your subject, always looking for interesting theoretical angles that haven't been looked at before. Summarize what you've read in your own words on Word or OneNote for easy retrieval.



### Ask Questions

Ask why your lab does things the way they do, what each step of the protocol is for, why they use particular techniques, why they've come to a particular conclusion. Question and understand everything. Don't assume anything; investigate it for yourself. After all, it's your PhD and it's you who'll have to defend it.

### Take care of your mental health

This really follows on from the last point but it's no secret that mental health problems disproportionately affect those in PhD study. The university has acknowledged this with the introduction of Researcher Well-Being week which I'd encourage you to attend. It's also crucial to do something outside of your research and feed your other passions, whether that's watercolour painting or adventure sports. If you are struggling don't suffer in silence, contact your GP and reach out to the University Counselling Services.



### Step away from your work

Since we don't adhere to semester dates, it's up to you to set your own holidays. It can be tempting to keep working through major vacation periods, but in the long run it's much healthier to schedule solid blocks of free-time to relax. This is applicable outside of the holiday period too, whether you've hit a brick wall with your research or you're obsessing over a piece of writing which you can't get quite right, taking a few days away to free up your mind and simply mull things over is often more productive than staring worriedly at a computer screen all day. These periods of rest and recovery are as crucial to success as hard-work.

REST

### Make new friends

Be open to others, the PhD journey can be a lonely one. But what better way to forge new friendships and partnerships that can last a lifetime.





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