Welcome

The University of Bristol takes its responsibilities for the development of its postgraduate research students very seriously and recognises the significant contribution they make toward the University’s outstanding research profile.

In October 2013, the Bristol Doctoral College (BDC) was established to provide a clear and visible focus (external and internal) for postgraduate research and training, underpinning the continued development of doctoral education both at Bristol, and in collaboration with our growing network of partner universities and organisations.

Serving as a central hub of information and activity, the BDC supports a high-quality and inclusive experience for all postgraduate research (PGR) students, fostering a strong PGR community and a distinctive research environment in which every student can reach their maximum potential.

On behalf of the University of Bristol I would like to congratulate the BDC team on all they have achieved in their first year of operation. There have been significant developments in many areas of PGR activity, from supporting the bid application and associated partnership agreement processes, to the consolidation of skills training and researcher development opportunities. Throughout there has been significant streamlining of PGR processes, and the development of new efficiencies, as we build on the many examples of existing excellent practice in faculties, schools and doctoral training partnerships/centres across the University.

As Deputy Vice-Chancellor my intention is to ensure that the University of Bristol continues to attract research students of the highest quality and to develop outstanding researchers who will become leaders in their chosen fields. The BDC is key to achieving these aims and I am certain they will continue to build on their success as they move into their second year.

PROF GUY ORPEN
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and BDC Project Sponsor

PROF SALLY HESLOP
Academic Director of Graduate Studies and Director of Bristol Doctoral College

I am delighted to introduce this first annual report which reflects on what the Bristol Doctoral College (BDC) has achieved in its inaugural year. The BDC was officially launched on 1 October 2013 to nurture and support doctoral training and researcher development within the University of Bristol’s dynamic and innovative academic community, supporting research excellence at the highest level.

Over the course of the past few years the sector has witnessed significant changes to the doctoral training landscape, particularly with regard to the way in which doctoral researchers are funded by the UK Government. There has been a dramatic concentration of RCUK funding into both broad based collaborative doctoral training partnerships and increasingly specialist centres for doctoral training. Throughout 2013/14 the University achieved significant success in securing several very competitive bids for research council-funded doctoral training partnerships and centres for doctoral training, substantially expanding the Bristol portfolio of doctoral training entities (DTEs) to include fourteen RCUK partnerships and centres as the lead institution and a further six led by other institutions.

The University was immensely pleased to have received such substantial support for our doctoral training initiatives, and the BDC team has been working closely with our partner institutions to ensure that each new centre and partnership was ready to receive their first cohort of students in September for the 2014/15 academic year. The experience and advice of the more established centres and partnerships has been extremely beneficial, and we will all continue to work together, sharing best practice and learning from one another.

Over the last 10 years there has been an increasing focus on skills training and researcher development, and the BDC team have worked very hard over the past year to coordinate a centralised personal and professional development programme to ensure that Bristol’s postgraduate research (PGR) students, can access a range of resources and training to help them become well-rounded, multi-skilled, and highly employable researchers. There are now more than 160 centrally provided workshops, seminars, and online resources available to support our postgraduates in their research and as they prepare for their future careers. All of these courses are accessible via the new bespoke online Skills Training and Review (STaR) tool, which was launched on 22 September 2014 to PGRs and their supervisors across the University. As well as providing access to skills training, STaR was developed to support our PGRs in managing their research objectives, simplify communications between students and supervisors, track and plan skills training and researcher development, and facilitate formal progress monitoring processes.

It is gratifying to see the results of all this hard work, and the BDC team look forward to building on the successes we have seen this year. Our achievements to date would not have been possible without the dedication and support of Bristol’s academic and professional services staff, and the postgraduate community that we work so hard to support and engage with. On behalf of the Bristol Doctoral College, I would like to thank the many people that have supported and continue to support the College, contributing to its strategic development and enabling us to foster a dynamic postgraduate research community.

Over the last 10 years there has been an increasing focus on skills training and researcher development, and the BDC team have worked very hard over the past year to coordinate a centralised personal and professional development programme to ensure that Bristol’s postgraduate research (PGR) students, can access a range of resources and training to help them become well-rounded, multi-skilled, and highly employable researchers. There are now more than 160 centrally provided workshops, seminars, and online resources available to support our postgraduates in their research and as they prepare for their future careers. All of these courses are accessible via the new bespoke online Skills Training and Review (STaR) tool, which was launched on 22 September 2014 to PGRs and their supervisors across the University. As well as providing access to skills training, STaR was developed to support our PGRs in managing their research objectives, simplify communications between students and supervisors, track and plan skills training and researcher development, and facilitate formal progress monitoring processes.

It is gratifying to see the results of all this hard work, and the BDC team look forward to building on the successes we have seen this year. Our achievements to date would not have been possible without the dedication and support of Bristol’s academic and professional services staff, and the postgraduate community that we work so hard to support and engage with. On behalf of the Bristol Doctoral College, I would like to thank the many people that have supported and continue to support the College, contributing to its strategic development and enabling us to foster a dynamic postgraduate research community.
**MEET THE TEAM**

**PROF SALLY HESLOP**  
*Bristol Doctoral College Director and Academic Director of Graduate Studies*

As Director, I am the academic lead for the BDC, representing postgraduate research and development at all levels within the University and externally. I act as a champion for the postgraduate student experience ensuring all postgraduate researchers at Bristol receive high quality and inclusive support to help them maximise potential.

**FIONA KILLARD**  
*Bristol Doctoral College Manager (Oct 2013 – May 2014)*

Having managed the original project which eventually became the Bristol Doctoral College from 2012-13, Fiona transitioned into the BDC Manager role from October 2013, before leaving Bristol to take up a new role in Trinity College, Dublin in May 2014. As well as being responsible for getting the Doctoral College up and running during these early stages, Fiona worked closely with the Research and Enterprise Development (PED) team to support various doctoral training bid submissions, and subsequently to develop a robust procedure for the establishment of associated partnership agreements.

Another key focus for Fiona was improving the PGR student experience, and the development of an online e-portfolio tool which could be used to support the various aspects of completing a research degree. Fiona’s vision and determination laid the foundation for the University’s online Skills Training and Review (StaR) tool which was launched in September 2014.

**OKSANA KASYUTICH**  
*Bristol Doctoral College Manager (summer 2014 - to date)*

I joined the BDC team in summer 2014. My background is in research and development (nano-science, bio-tech) in academia and industry, and for the last five years I was part of the leadership team in the Industrial Doctorate Centre (IDC) in Systems. This hands-on experience of delivering the PGR programme of training to cohorts of Engineering Doctorate (EngD) Research Engineers, who are sponsored by companies and work with these companies on their EngD projects, gave me real insights and appreciation of various challenges within the PGR domain, internally within the University, as well as on the University-Industry interface.

It is really exciting to be part of the BDC team, where we strive to creatively enable a really positive experience in research, training and engagement for all postgraduate research students across the University! With the BDC team I work closely with senior managers, academics and PGR communities across the University to enable effective channels of communications, and to set up and foster fruitful collaborations and partnerships. I am committed to the vision of developing outstanding researchers, learning together and across disciplines and organisational boundaries, and recognising the needs and demands of the modern world for multi-skilled, creative, and proactive leaders.

**SOPHIE BENOIT**  
*Skills Development and Communications Officer*

The main focus of my role with the BDC is the development of the University’s Personal and Professional Development (PPD) programmes for PGRs. I work with a wide variety of professional service teams, faculty and school staff, and postgraduate research students, to raise awareness of the significant resources already available at Bristol, and to create a comprehensive central skills training and researcher development programme which enables all of our PGRs to get the most out of their time at the University.

Communication is central to everything we do at the BDC, and we use various methods and communication channels to keep in touch with a diverse range of contacts both within and outside of the University. I manage BDC communications including web and social media activity, and am passionate about using our communication channels (both digital and face-to-face) to help build and support a thriving postgraduate research community.

**EMILY HICKS**  
*Partnerships and Data Officer*

My role is to understand and report on PGR student data and champion PGR data needs. I produce data reports using the University’s student database. I joined the BDC in March 2014 after having worked for just over a year in the Student Systems and Information Office. Through a variety of networks, I maintain close links with the Academic Registry and other teams across the University involved in data reporting. I also provide administrative and analytical support to the BDC Manager on a variety of tasks, and support the development of Bristol’s PGR partnership portfolio, as well as various PGR processes and events.

**LORIEL ANDERSON**  
*Student Development Officer*

I joined the BDC in September 2013 as the Skills Development and Communications Intern, while writing up my dissertation. Upon successfully submitting my PhD I was offered a position working across Bristol Doctoral College and Academic Registry to support undergraduate and postgraduate skills training and development.

Within the BDC I work closely with the Skills Development and Communications Officer to coordinate the Personal and Professional Development (PPD) programme for PGRs. I help to maintain the catalogue of training courses and work with facilitators to develop and refine training activities. I organise various interdisciplinary research initiatives in support of the core skills training programme, including research seminars and large-scale events, and I am responsible for monitoring the programme, ensuring that it meets the needs of the postgraduate researcher community.

I will be taking on a new role in the BDC in 2015 as the Researcher Development and E-Portfolio Support Officer, continuing to monitor and manage the PPD programme, while also working on researcher engagement and providing support for StaR.

**JOHN HALLIWELL**  
*GW4 PGR Partnerships Coordinator*

I work on behalf of all four GW4 member institutions (Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter) to enhance the training and development opportunities for all PGR students across the GW4 Alliance. I started in this role in February 2014, having worked on the University of Bristol’s impact submission to the REF in my previous post. My first task was to develop a nuanced understanding of the PGR landscape across the GW4 Alliance to inform the activities I would be coordinating. I am working on the GW4 PGR Partnerships Toolkit, a comprehensive package of tools covering the lifecycle of doctoral training entities from cradle to grave. The toolkit is a mechanism for sharing the best practice and lessons learned from managing the delivery of a high number of outstanding doctoral training programmes.

I am also working with colleagues to develop training opportunities for PGR students including the first GW4 joint PGR training event, a residential workshop on the theme “Communication for Collaboration”, which ran in September 2014. I am enjoying working in such a dynamic environment, collaborating with a range of colleagues, and working in this setting helps me to provide a wider context for the activities of the Bristol Doctoral College, where I am based.

**FIONA KILLARD**  
*Bristol Doctoral College Manager (Oct 2013 – May 2014)*

Having managed the original project which eventually became the Bristol Doctoral College from 2012-13, Fiona transitioned into the BDC Manager role from October 2013, before leaving Bristol to take up a new role in Trinity College, Dublin in May 2014. As well as being responsible for getting the Doctoral College up and running during these early stages, Fiona worked closely with the Research and Enterprise Development (PED) team to support various doctoral training bid submissions, and subsequently to develop a robust procedure for the establishment of associated partnership agreements.

Another key focus for Fiona was improving the PGR student experience, and the development of an online e-portfolio tool which could be used to support the various aspects of completing a research degree. Fiona’s vision and determination laid the foundation for the University’s online Skills Training and Review (StaR) tool which was launched in September 2014.

**OKSANA KASYUTICH**  
*Bristol Doctoral College Manager (summer 2014 - to date)*

I joined the BDC team in summer 2014. My background is in research and development (nano-science, bio-tech) in academia and industry, and for the last five years I was part of the leadership team in the Industrial Doctorate Centre (IDC) in Systems. This hands-on experience of delivering the PGR programme of training to cohorts of Engineering Doctorate (EngD) Research Engineers, who are sponsored by companies and work with these companies on their EngD projects, gave me real insights and appreciation of various challenges within the PGR domain, internally within the University, as well as on the University-Industry interface.

It is really exciting to be part of the BDC team, where we strive to creatively enable a really positive experience in research, training and engagement for all postgraduate research students across the University! With the BDC team I work closely with senior managers, academics and PGR communities across the University to enable effective channels of communications, and to set up and foster fruitful collaborations and partnerships. I am committed to the vision of developing outstanding researchers, learning together and across disciplines and organisational boundaries, and recognising the needs and demands of the modern world for multi-skilled, creative, and proactive leaders.

**SOPHIE BENOIT**  
*Skills Development and Communications Officer*

The main focus of my role with the BDC is the development of the University’s Personal and Professional Development (PPD) programmes for PGRs. I work with a wide variety of professional service teams, faculty and school staff, and postgraduate research students, to raise awareness of the significant resources already available at Bristol, and to create a comprehensive central skills training and researcher development programme which enables all of our PGRs to get the most out of their time at the University.

Communication is central to everything we do at the BDC, and we use various methods and communication channels to keep in touch with a diverse range of contacts both within and outside of the University. I manage BDC communications including web and social media activity, and am passionate about using our communication channels (both digital and face-to-face) to help build and support a thriving postgraduate research community.

**EMILY HICKS**  
*Partnerships and Data Officer*

My role is to understand and report on PGR student data and champion PGR data needs. I produce data reports using the University’s student database. I joined the BDC in March 2014 after having worked for just over a year in the Student Systems and Information Office. Through a variety of networks, I maintain close links with the Academic Registry and other teams across the University involved in data reporting. I also provide administrative and analytical support to the BDC Manager on a variety of tasks, and support the development of Bristol’s PGR partnership portfolio, as well as various PGR processes and events.

**LORIEL ANDERSON**  
*Student Development Officer*

I joined the BDC in September 2013 as the Skills Development and Communications Intern, while writing up my dissertation. Upon successfully submitting my PhD I was offered a position working across Bristol Doctoral College and Academic Registry to support undergraduate and postgraduate skills training and development.

Within the BDC I work closely with the Skills Development and Communications Officer to coordinate the Personal and Professional Development (PPD) programme for PGRs. I help to maintain the catalogue of training courses and work with facilitators to develop and refine training activities. I organise various interdisciplinary research initiatives in support of the core skills training programme, including research seminars and large-scale events, and I am responsible for monitoring the programme, ensuring that it meets the needs of the postgraduate researcher community.

I will be taking on a new role in the BDC in 2015 as the Researcher Development and E-Portfolio Support Officer, continuing to monitor and manage the PPD programme, while also working on researcher engagement and providing support for StaR.

**JOHN HALLIWELL**  
*GW4 PGR Partnerships Coordinator*

I work on behalf of all four GW4 member institutions (Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter) to enhance the training and development opportunities for all PGR students across the GW4 Alliance. I started in this role in February 2014, having worked on the University of Bristol’s impact submission to the REF in my previous post. My first task was to develop a nuanced understanding of the PGR landscape across the GW4 Alliance to inform the activities I would be coordinating. I am working on the GW4 PGR Partnerships Toolkit, a comprehensive package of tools covering the lifecycle of doctoral training entities from cradle to grave. The toolkit is a mechanism for sharing the best practice and lessons learned from managing the delivery of a high number of outstanding doctoral training programmes.

I am also working with colleagues to develop training opportunities for PGR students including the first GW4 joint PGR training event, a residential workshop on the theme “Communication for Collaboration”, which ran in September 2014. I am enjoying working in such a dynamic environment, collaborating with a range of colleagues, and working in this setting helps me to provide a wider context for the activities of the Bristol Doctoral College, where I am based.
OUR VISION

The Bristol Doctoral College facilitates and supports doctoral training and researcher development across the University of Bristol, driving efficiencies and enhancing processes, building bridges between disciplines and with external partners. The BDC fosters the development of a well-integrated, dynamic postgraduate research community.

We are dedicated to developing outstanding researchers, and our aim is to support the University’s PGR community in a number of ways including:

- Providing a valuable information hub for students and staff, creating a more consistent, inclusive and collaborative research community across disciplines
- Ensuring efficient, effective, and coordinated management of high quality PGR data and processes
- Driving the development of an integrated and enriched experience through a comprehensive skills training programme for all postgraduate researchers
- Ensuring our postgraduate researchers are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in their future careers, whether they choose to continue in academia or explore other sectors
- Providing coherent and consistent information to support the establishment and development of Doctoral Training Partnerships, Centres and other funded doctoral training initiatives
- Facilitating innovation and creativity by building bridges across disciplines and with our partner organisations
- Promoting the broad range of personal development and welfare services available for postgraduate students
- Consolidating and coordinating information, advice, and resources for academic and professional staff to better facilitate the support of PGR studies and development

YOU SAID...

“I would like greater structure and support to all PhD students, not just those on special courses.”

~ PRES 2013 student comment

WE DID...

The BDC was established to provide a hub for students and staff. We are here for all University of Bristol postgraduate research students, regardless of funder, mode of study, or location.

YOU SAID...

“Understand that students are all different and need different support at different times in their degrees”

~ PRES 2013 student comment

WE DID...

The BDC are committed to creating a holistic approach to the PGR experience, providing resources, training, and guidance to support the needs of PGRs with different backgrounds, and at different stages of development. We champion the needs of PGR students in administrative processes and data reporting, and highlight the different approaches to PGR study on various University committees and groups where key decisions are made. Elected student representation in the governance of the BDC and regular PGR interns employed in our team provide different perspectives on the needs of Bristol’s PGRs.
STaR SYSTEM

ALIGNED SUPPORT FOR PGR PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT

One of the main projects for the BDC team over the last year has been the development of the University’s online Skills Training and Review (STaR) system, which was launched on 22 September 2014. Wherever they may be based, all Bristol postgraduate research (PGR) students and their supervisors can access STaR using their University login details to take advantage of a bespoke range of tools and resources designed to support various elements involved in successfully completing a research degree.

STaR provides a single platform with multiple facilities including sections for planning and managing research objectives; accessing skills training and development resources; completing formal progress monitoring procedures; and keeping notes and documents, either for private reference or shared between the PGR and their supervisor(s).

It also serves as a route for accessing Pure for PGRs (the University’s central repository for research outputs, projects, awards, and impact which feeds into an online Explore Bristol Research profile for every PGR student). The vision behind STaR was to create a student-driven system which not only supports interactions between PGRs and their supervisors, but provides a set of tools to enable PGRs to manage their own research progress more effectively and identify any personal and professional development needs. Alongside these self-management functions, STaR is also intended to support a unified approach to managing the processes for formal progress monitoring - a functionality that will be rolled out to most faculties (excluding Engineering) at varying stages through 2014/15.

Ensuring that STaR caters for the different approaches and needs of PGRs and supervisors across all six faculties has certainly presented its fair share of challenges. Developing this system would not have been possible without the invaluable contribution of the many PGR representatives and members of academic and support staff who made up the STaR Working Groups and Project Board, not to mention a fantastic STaR Project Team who’s determination, flexibility and support have enabled the development of a system that not only answers many and varied demands, but which launched on time!

With over 1,100 users within the first 3 months of launch, we are now considering future developments for STaR. Over the coming months, the BDC will be gathering feedback from all user groups to help refine and improve the system. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch (doctoral-college@bristol.ac.uk).

You can find out more about STaR on the BDC website: www.bristol.ac.uk/doctoral-college/

YOU SAID...
“I would like to manage my own personal development”
- PRES 2013 student comment

WE DID...
STaR gives PGR students the ability to map and plan their own personal and professional development (PPD). The University’s full PPD programme is accessible via STaR, and all activities and resources have been mapped against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF), a Government endorsed framework outlining the skills and attributes associated with multi-skilled and highly employable researchers. Logging completed training activities in STaR provides a graphic overview of the balance of experience against the RDF helping to identify potential areas for development.

YOU SAID...
“I cannot find the skills training I need and I do not have the time to search different areas of the website”
- PRES 2013 student comment

WE DID...
Working with all central University providers, we have audited and analysed provision of skills training courses across the University and developed a coordinated, centralised personal and professional development programme for PGRs.
FESTIVAL OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH

On 21 February 2014, postgraduate research (PGR) students from across the University came together to showcase their research at Bristol’s first Festival of Postgraduate Research.

Alongside stands run by University services, PGRs displayed their work through hands-on, interactive displays and a research poster competition. Breakout presentations and taster workshops provided more in-depth opportunities to discover the range of resources available at the University to support postgraduate researchers. Creative and performative displays from The Art of Science competition, the Department of Drama: Theatre, Film, Television, and See No Evil street art collaboration contributed to the celebratory atmosphere of the Festival.

“The event was a great idea and it was well-organised. It was nice to see so many postgrads there. I felt slightly dizzy with all there to see and hear!”

~ Postgraduate Researcher, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies

The key aims for this inaugural Festival were to raise awareness of the scope of research being undertaken at Bristol, to highlight the services available for PGR students during their studies and to encourage students and staff from different areas of the University to come together as a ‘PGR community’. Organising the Festival was particularly important for the BDC as it provided an opportunity for us to get to know some of the postgraduate research students we support (for many this was the first time they had become aware of the BDC), and to gain a deeper understanding of the many University Services available, building relations with key contacts across a wide range of teams that we have continued to work closely with since then.

We received a lot of positive feedback on the day, and are currently developing plans to build on this model for an even more exciting festival in 2015. Showcasing the extraordinary work of our postgraduate researchers lies at the heart of the BDC’s vision to fostering a well-integrated, dynamic postgraduate research community.

“I very much enjoyed the Festival of Postgraduate Research. Such a great idea!”

~ Student comment, Skills and Data survey 2014

YOU SAID...

“I don’t feel a part of any departmental, and certainly don’t have the opportunity to share ideas with fellow students.”

~ PRES 2013 student comment

WE DID...

Our skills training activities are open to all PGRs across the university and wherever possible include breaks with refreshments provided to encourage a relaxed atmosphere for sharing experiences and exchanging ideas. The Festival of Postgraduate Research and the 3 Minute Thesis competition showcase the outstanding research being carried out across the University and provide an opportunity for a diverse range of PGRs to talk to one another about their work.

YOU SAID...

“It would be nice to know what is going on in other parts of the university – through a PGR mailing list for example.”

~ PhD Candidate, BDC Project focus group

WE DID...

We send a fortnightly BDC Bulletin, highlighting relevant news, events, and opportunities for Bristol PGRs. Our ‘What’s On’ calendar on the BDC website provides a hub of information for current and prospective postgraduates, and also lists upcoming events and activities taking place across the University. Our website provides a hub of information for current and prospective postgraduates, as well as providing increased access to PGR processes and procedures for academic and professional services staff.

THREE MINUTE THESIS (3MT)

DISTILLING THE ESSENCE OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH

‘To pee or not to pee’, was the subject of the winning presentation at the University of Bristol’s inaugural Three Minute Thesis competition (3MT) – a global academic competition designed to improve participants’ presentation and communication skills and raising awareness of their research area. Using just one slide, contestants were challenged to bring their research to life in an engaging way, using language understandable to a non-specialist audience, before the three-minute bell chimed.

Dominika Bijos, a 3rd year PhD student from the School of Clinical Sciences, won the judges’ votes after successfully summarising her research into the muscle motions which cause an overactive bladder.

The 3MT brought together researchers from all faculties, and showcased the dynamic research being undertaken by our PGRs across the University.

This was Bristol’s first foray into the 3MT competition, and one of the first joint initiatives between the Bristol Doctoral College and the UBU Postgraduate Network. Plans are underway for this year’s competition, and several faculties have indicated an interest in hosting their own faculty-level heats, to meet the increased interest in the competition.

“‘It’s been a fantastic experience and it’s done a great deal to boost my confidence and the profile of my research. If I can explain it to people who don’t study or work in science and they think that it’s relevant and important then that’s awesome.’”

Bristol winner and runners up,
L – R: Oliver Mayoard, Dominika Bijos, and Saran Shanthikumar

Did you know?

In 13/14 79% of PGR students were studying full time

73% of PGR students in 13/14 paid ‘home’ fees

27% paid ‘overseas’ fees

‘overseas’ fees

21% part time

‘home’ fees

73%
Throughout 2013/14 the University achieved significant success in securing several very competitive bids for research council-funded doctoral training partnerships and centres for doctoral training, substantially expanding the Bristol portfolio of doctoral training entities (DTEs) to include fourteen RCUK partnerships and centres as the lead institution and a further six led by other institutions.

Managing the huge amount of work associated with the bid submission process and the subsequent implementation of several DTEs at the same time presented new challenges for the University, requiring the collective expertise of several teams, working together to develop robust procedures and guidance. This would not have been possible without the hard work of all of the PIs leading doctoral training initiatives, their centre or partnership managers and administrators, and key professional service divisions, including Research and Enterprise Development (RED), and the University’s legal and finance teams.

The University of Bristol currently leads
14 RCUK doctoral training partnerships or centres
3 Wellcome Trust PhD Programmes
6 Programmes for those already established in 2013/14 constituted ~14% of Bristol’s PGR student population

The BDC has been privileged to work with many individuals across the University and with external partners to ensure that once funding had been granted, agreements with partner institutions were finalised and new centres and partnerships were successfully set up, ready to receive their first cohort of students in September 2014.

We provide continued support to centres and partnerships across all faculties, developing a community network of Bristol DTE staff. Regular best practice meetings alongside a dedicated online hub of shared DTE resources, ensure that new centres and partnerships are able to learn from the experience and advice of the more established initiatives.

At Bristol we are proud of our outstanding research reputation and our excellent doctoral training provision, and recognise the pivotal role of DTE directors and managers in our success. We look forward to continuing to work together, sharing best practice and learning from one another.

You can find out more about STaR on the BDC website: www.bristol.ac.uk/doctoral-college/

The PGR community has over 3200 students registered at the University of Bristol. Bristol Doctoral College has a dedicated resource to understand the PGR data landscape throughout the university.

Traditionally, PGR data has had an (unfair) reputation for being complicated, difficult to extract from existing systems or even wrong. Through greater understanding, we have produced data reports with a clear source and documented process. For example, following requests from research councils for 4-year submission rate data, we produced a university wide submission rate report highlighting the time taken for PGR students to submit their thesis. This will continue to be improved and analysed, ensuring that we are reporting accurate data from a singular source.

This is part of a commitment to ensure that staff have improved access to data. We have answered a variety of data requests over the past year, including creating a monthly data dashboard, providing data for school and programme reviews, and providing mechanisms to check external examiners’ previous appointments, as well as detailed sponsorship record data analysis.

We are keen ensure that we are adding value by using evidence to aid our work-planning and decision-making. Surveys are a key way we have been able to analyse feedback from our PGRs. Our Data and Partnerships intern conducted detailed analysis of the 2013 postgraduate research experience survey (PRES) responses and produced thorough reports highlighting key outcomes. We conducted a Research Data and Skills Training survey in July 2014 and received over 300 responses. This is providing evidence about research data storage needs to feed into work with Library services and IT services and has provided detailed feedback about skills training requirements which will feed into the Personal and Professional Development (PPD) programme for the next year.

The BDC is interested in displaying data in a creative and innovative way. For example, for a September 2014 visit to the University of Bristol from the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council, we created an infographic to highlight key data information on EPSRC-funded PGR students.

We cannot analyse data and produce data reports without building effective networks with other teams throughout the university. The BDC is proud to be part of the academic registry and works closely through established links with the Student Systems and Information Office, the Student Data and Information team, the Examinations Office, the International Office, Research and Enterprise Development (RED), Finance Services, as well as faculties and schools to ensure that we keep up to date with latest developments and produce timely, reliable and accurate reports.

YOU SAID...
"Overcoming imposter syndrome and self-confidence problems has been the single biggest obstacle to completing my PhD, beyond any technical or academic challenges."  
~ Postgraduate researcher, Skills and Data survey 2014

WE DID...
We worked with Student Counselling Services to set up a Postgraduate Researcher Peer Support group over the spring and summer of 2014, allowing PGRs to share some of their experiences and concerns, such as difficulties with the supervisory relationship, isolation, maintaining momentum, stress, imposter syndrome, and overcoming procrastination.

YOU SAID...
“I found myself having to be less creative and innovative than I would have liked”  
~ PRES 2013 student comment

WE DID...
We are always looking for new ways to encourage creativity. We held a ‘LEGO Serious Play Workshop’ which encouraged participants to build their thesis out of colourful bricks!
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BDC

1 OCT
Launch of Bristol Doctoral College

31 JAN
BDC Seminar: Surviving the Stress of a PhD. First in a series of four large-scale seminars tackling a range of relevant topics and providing training with wide appeal for Bristol PGRs

12 FEB
BDC Seminar: Branding and marketing materials launched

18 FEB
BDC Seminar: Seven Secrets of Highly Successful Researchers

22 FEB
First GW4 PGR Working Group meeting for Building Capacities and Developing People workflow. First time the BDC team met with representatives from all four member universities to discuss plans for joint and shared PGR training

24 MAR
China University Visit. Supporting International Office in recruitment of PGRs to present their research to a delegation of senior Chinese university staff

4 APR
First joint meeting of DTE community network. Meeting for all Bristol academic and administrative staff associated with an RCUK Doctoral Training Partnership, Centre, or Wellcome Trust PhD to share best practice and exchange ideas and experiences

10 APR
Launch of BDC Bulletin. Forthrightly e-newsletter highlighting PGR opportunities and events taking place across the University and beyond

28 APR
BDC Seminar: How to Make a Difference

12 MAR
Vitae Good Practice Conference. Representing the UoB alongside other University Services and DTEs to discuss best practice with researcher development staff from HEIs across the UK and EU

18 MAR
BDC Seminar: Potential Energy

12 MAY
BDC presentation as part of Bristol research visit to the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE)

15 MAY
Launch of Postgraduate Research Peer Support Group. Working with Student Counselling Service to offer a confidential and safe environment for postgraduate researchers to support each other and share some of the experiences and concerns encountered during their PhD journey

16 & 27 MAY
BDC Roadshows. Raising awareness of the Bristol Doctoral College and our role at the University

29 – 30 JULY
NVivo workshop. In response to demand from the PGR community, we organised several Introduction to NVivo workshops which will continue to be offered as part of our Personal and Professional Development Programme

9 – 10 SEP
Vitae National Conference

18 SEP
Engage Conference. Working with the Centre for Public Engagement to facilitate a table discussion around training and support needs for public engagement activities

2 SEP
EPSRC SAN visit. The EPSRC Strategic Advisory Network visited Bristol to inform a current EPSRC workflow looking into how universities are using the funding allocated to them through CDTs and the DTP. The BDC hosted their visit, providing an overview of EPSRC funding data at Bristol alongside strategic discussions with the senior team, DTEs, students, and supervisors

3 – 5 SEP
GW4 Communication for Collaboration. 3-day residential workshop (see page 17)

22 SEP
Launch of StaR. First ‘Year in the Life of a PhD’ post. Building on the successes of the ‘Day in the Life of a PhD’ PGRs from a variety of disciplines contribute to this weekly blog item, providing valuable insights into the ups and downs of life as a PGR student

13 OCT
GW4 COMms. Picnic and reunion. Hosted the first PGR Picnic and windy Friday elements on a wet day.

14 OCT
GW4 COMms. Picnic and reunion. Hosted the first PGR Picnic and windy Friday elements on a wet day.

22 – 26 SEP
Welcome to new PGRs. Presenting at Welcome Week events across several faculties and schools, raising awareness of BDC support and providing an introduction to StaR

1 OCT
First ‘Year in the Life of a PhD’ post. Building on the successes of the ‘Day in the Life of a PhD’ PGRs from a variety of disciplines contribute to this weekly blog item, providing valuable insights into the ups and downs of life as a PGR student

22 SEP
Launch of StaR. First ‘Year in the Life of a PhD’ post. Building on the successes of the ‘Day in the Life of a PhD’ PGRs from a variety of disciplines contribute to this weekly blog item, providing valuable insights into the ups and downs of life as a PGR student

22SEP – 26 SEP
Welcome to new PGRs. Presenting at Welcome Week events across several faculties and schools, raising awareness of BDC support and providing an introduction to StaR

29 AUG
PGP Picnic. Braving the elements on a wet and windy Friday afternoon, the BDC hosted the first PGR Picnic complete with blankets and laser games – watch out for future picnic dates in 2014/15

6 JUN
Three Minute Thesis (3MT) Finals (see page 11)

11 JUN
Day in the Life of a PhD. A live Twitter event in collaboration with the University’s Public Relations Office as part of National Universities Week, featuring updates from PGRs across the University using #BrisPhDLife to highlight the different experiences and approaches to study by our PGRs

16 JUN
Mindfulness Workshop for PGRs. Supporting the wellbeing of Bristol’s PGR community in collaboration with the University’s Student Counselling service

17 JUN
Lego Serious Play Workshop

29 AUG
PGP Picnic. Braving the elements on a wet and windy Friday afternoon, the BDC hosted the first PGR Picnic complete with blankets and laser games – watch out for future picnic dates in 2014/15

13 OCT
GW4 Communications. Picnic and reunion. Hosted the first PGR Picnic and windy Friday elements on a wet day.
THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE WORK

A CHANGING PGR LANDSCAPE

The external PGR landscape is changing very quickly. Throughout 2013/14 the University has substantially expanded the Bristol portfolio of doctoral training entities (DTEs) and has achieved significant success in securing several very competitive bids for research council-funded doctoral training partnerships and centres.

The financial and resource implication of these models of doctoral training are being felt across the higher education sector, increasing the need to share lessons learned and best practice across institutions and beyond. Meanwhile various government and funding-body reports have articulated the need for high-level, comprehensive skills training and researcher development as a core part of doctoral training. As a result, the very nature of doctoral training is evolving for all PGR students.

Many UK Universities are looking to increase their number of high quality postgraduate research students, in the face of increased global competition for the best PGRs. A lot of work has been done by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to improve the student experience for undergraduates, in the context of delivering value for student fees. The same attention is now being paid to the research student experience, and only by delivering the best possible student experience can UK universities compete in a global marketplace.

Did you know?

In 2013/14, 73% of postgraduate research students were registered on a PhD programme, and 15% were working towards a Professional Doctorate or other doctoral award.

12% were on a Masters level research degree

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS: THE GW4 ALLIANCE

The GW4 is a formal research alliance between the University of Bath, the University of Bristol, Cardiff University, and the University of Exeter. The GW4 Alliance is investing in a range of initiatives to enhance the training and development opportunities for all GW4 PGR students and to make it easier for the four universities to work together in partnership.

The Bristol Doctoral College is playing a key role in delivering these initiatives including:

- Shared PGR training opportunities and resources – the GW4 has identified a number of existing PGR training opportunities and resources which have been opened up to PGR students from across the Alliance.
- ‘GW4 PGR Toolkit’ - a comprehensive portfolio of evidence-based tools for all phases in the lifecycle of a PGR partnership. This toolkit will be of value to all staff involved in doctoral training centres and partnerships.
- GW4 CDT/DTP Community of Practice – a programme of development activity designed for staff involved in leading and managing PGR training partnerships.
- PGR Quality Assurance and Governance – working in partnership to address emerging issues of governance (particularly of the increasing number of complex CDTs/ DTPs) and to map out our regulations to enable greater alignment in the future.

The Bristol Doctoral College hosted the first GW4 joint training event for postgraduate research students at Wills Hall in Bristol from 3-5 September, 2014. This event was the first training workshop designed and run for postgraduate researchers by the four universities working together. It was designed to introduce the participants to the opportunities and challenges of collaborative research. Sixty PGR students (15 from each university), from a range of research disciplines, were awarded places through a competitive application process. The intensive three day residential workshop not only exposed participants to the rich opportunities for collaboration with a wide range of disciplines but also demonstrated the capacity of collaboration to enrich the research process.

Enhanced doctoral research and training is a key driver for enhanced research performance across the GW4, and these activities are designed to add value for each of the four universities and help to deliver a world class student experience for postgraduate research students.

YOU SAID...

“I don’t feel I have a clear idea of what my thesis should be like and have had some confusion over what chapters are etc.”

– PRES 2013 student comment

WE DID...

We offer specialised training in ‘Planning and Managing your PhD’ and ‘Planning and Writing your Thesis’ to help PGRs tackle this significant challenge. We also direct PGRs to guidance available in the ‘Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes’ on expected format of the dissertation for research degrees.

Did you know?

The average age of our PGR students registered in 13/14 was 32.

WE DID...

Working with the School of Modern Languages we developed a pilot scheme to open up 20 highly competitive places on Applied Foreign Language courses across a range of languages and ability levels. We also work with the Centre for English Language and Academic Literacy (REAL) for International PGRs as part of the central PPD programme.

YOU SAID...

“It would be nice to have more language courses! Especially ones that give you a bit more than the current “reading skills” courses, ones that would really help you to learn a language”

– Postgraduate researcher, Skills and Data survey 2014
Looking Ahead...

Building on the Achievements of 2013/14

Personal and Professional Development Programme

Now that the Personal and Professional Development Programme has been launched we will continue to monitor and refine it, ensuring that it meets the needs of our postgraduate researchers. We will continually be gathering user feedback on the training activities that we run, and collating this with statistical data, to ensure that our programme runs efficiently and effectively. We will also be developing needs analysis tools, to ensure that new postgraduates will be able to assess their development needs within the first few months of beginning their programme and develop a training plan that ensures they make the best possible use of the programme. We will also be working closely with the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office and all centralised skills training providers to ensure that our programme is of the highest quality.

Alongside the quality assurance and engagement aspects outlined above, we will continue to develop opportunities beyond the University of Bristol, building on mechanisms for joint and shared training across the GW4 partner universities.

Monitoring and refining STaR

Although the launch of STaR was a significant achievement for the BDC, this is not a static system. We will be looking towards future refinements of STaR and will be basing future developments on user feedback. Over the coming months we will be gathering user comments through a series of focus groups, face to face interviews, and statistical analysis to ensure that it meets the needs of its users.

PGR Recruitment

The BDC will bring together the knowledge and the processes which are currently fragmented and widely dispersed, in order to drive forward the changes in PGR recruitment that we collectively need to make in order to stay competitive. This will continue the ethos of the work we have done so far, which is bringing people together to provide a focus on PGR matters and hence the coordinated drive to enable University-wide change. This coordinating role in PGR recruitment will include:

- working iteratively with the Deans and the PVCs to agree achievable faculty PGR targets, within the context of faculty student number planning and budgeting and the overall PGR recruitment targets as part of overall student number planning;
- working with the PVCs, faculties and relevant central divisions to identify key external PGR funding sources (home and overseas);
- working with the PVCs, faculties and relevant central divisions to position UoB to secure external funding, without compromising our commitment to quality;
- working with Student Recruitment Access and Admissions and others to keep the PG Recruitment Strategy up-to-date and competitive, and in due course (once it is developed and approved) to do the same for the PGR elements of the International Recruitment Strategy;
- working with the finance team and faculties to develop a long-term strategy for continued UoB investment in PGR scholarships and bursaries;
- working with faculties to significantly improve the management of doctoral students to ensure more timely completions.

Communications Channels

Throughout the coming months we will continue to refine and develop our communications strategies to ensure that information is effectively and efficiently communicated with both internal and external stakeholders.

Theme Deposit Agreement and Open Access

The BDC is working alongside Research and Enterprise Development, the Exams Office, Library Services, the Secretary’s Office and the Research Data Service to develop a thesis deposit agreement and process for the deposition of e-theses which will be publicly displayed and which will respond to Open Access requirements.

Building a researcher community

Throughout the coming year the BDC will be working closely with the UBU and faculties to continue to build an inclusive and dynamic research community. We will continue to run large-scale events, seminars, and skills training activities to bring academics and postgraduate researchers together, as well as continuing to build our online environment, encouraging dialogue and debate in an integrated research community.

Developing a PGR toolkit

Building on the excellent work being done by the GW4 PGR Partnerships coordinator, the BDC will be building a PGR toolkit. The toolkit will cover three main streams in the PGR lifecycle, including the PGR experience, from initial application to graduation and beyond, the academic experience, including University processes and procedures, and the lifecycle of a Doctoral Training Entity, from funding bid to closure.

Strengthening the GW4 Alliance

We look forward to strengthening our ties with our GW4 partners, and looking for new ways to work collaboratively in the future. Building on the success of the Communication for Collaboration event the Doctoral College will continue to develop joint and shared training initiatives to help better support postgraduate researcher development.

Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey

The BDC will be working with the UBU and the Academic Quality and Partnership Office to facilitate, administer and market the Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES) in spring 2015 and then provide detailed results analysis to schools and faculties.

Building UK and International Connections...

...with external partners, potential employers, funding bodies, research organisations and HEIs to explore new collaborations and opportunities for funding and sponsorship

Disclaimer

All data under ‘did you know?’ is taken from the student information database SITS on 03/12/14 for 13/14 academic year which is between 01/08/13 – 31/07/14. Data does not include PGR students who had suspended studies (dormant) but does include students with a writing up status. Data does not include visiting, occasional or non-Bristol students and does include students studying in Hong Kong. Data includes all students with an enrolment record in 13/14 excluding no shows, provisional or registered online only. National data can be found online here:

https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1897&Itemid=634