Prepare for Doctoral Success: Facilitator Guide

A practical and accessible guide for planning and running a series of induction workshops for new postgraduate research students

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Facilitator Guide

What is it?

This guide outlines a series of activities designed to welcome Postgraduate Research (PGR) students to the University, provide them with useful information and to introduce them to the research community. The guide was inspired by the positive outcomes of a collaborative project between the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) and the School of Health in Social Science. This involved the School taking a 'flipped classroom' style approach to the IAD four-week online course, '*Prepare for Doctoral Success*' for new PGR students across the University. Over the same four weeks the School ran a series of activities which mirrored the themes of the online course.

Starting a research degree can be daunting and overwhelming. Offering a staggered induction process gives students the opportunity to gain the information they need to successfully start out on their PhD journey without needing to provide all the details during a single welcome event. It provides students with additional support at the beginning of their studies and offers further social opportunities to increase students' sense of belonging to the student and academic community.

Who is the guide for?

The guide is for anyone who is interested in providing induction activities for PGR students. It is hoped that it will be useful for PGR directors and administrators at School, Department or Institute level.

How can the guide be used?

The guide sets out a four-week programme of induction workshops. It gives suggested outlines for four ninety-minute workshops and a series of ideas for activities. This staggered approach is designed to help with cohort building and the creation of a sense of community. However, the activities described could also be used flexibly, either as standalone workshops or combined with other activities.

Practical matters

Before each workshop you will need to:

- Book a suitable room and catering if applicable.

- Advertise the workshop to your doctoral students.

- Ensure that you have arranged for facilitators and presenters to attend and give them a brief.

- Prepare any presentations. If you have more than one PowerPoint presentation it is always best to combine them into one before the workshop.

- Ensure that you have all necessary resources (paper / pens / post-it notes etc.).

Consider how you want to evaluate the workshops and prepare feedback sheets / online survey etc. It may be worth particularly focusing on getting feedback about how community building can be supported after the sessions are completed.

Session one: Getting to Know You

This is an introductory event and is designed to be enjoyable and motivating. It may be used as a community building event with continuing students and staff invited to attend. It could also be an opportunity to celebrate research and inspire new students.

Aims

- To welcome new students
- To give new students an opportunity to meet each other and staff
- To have some fun

Suggested format for workshop one

Timings (90 mins)	Activity	Resources required
10 minutes	Introduction and overview	Facilitator
40 minutes	Ice breaker / networking activity (x1 or 2)	Facilitator Post-it notes and pens Any other resources, such as sweets for odd one out or prize for network bingo
40 minutes	Lunch with posters or other additional activities (short talks / 3MT)	Catering Posters 3MT videos or presenters

Ideas for activities

Speed networking

Ask students to stand in two lines facing one another. Ensure they each have paper and pen. They are then given three minutes to tell each other about their research and to discuss what they are most looking forward to, or for continuing students, what they most enjoy about being a PhD student. Students should write down one keyword from what their partner said. When the time is up, ask students to move so that they are facing a new partner. Repeat the process for as many times as suits. Once completed, collect in the keywords. These can later be made into a wordcloud (http://www.wordclouds.com/) or used in another way.

Mini interviews

Ask students to pair up with someone they don't know and each conduct a short 'interview' (5 mins). Advise them to remember what their partner says. When they have finished, gather the group together and ask individuals to briefly introduce their partner. Some prompt questions can be given, such as name/area of research/ one thing you are looking forward to. This works well for small to medium sized groups. The length of time this takes will depend on the size of your group.

Network bingo

Prepare bingo cards in advance and put in envelopes which are handed out to students. These can be done simply as a table with 8 -10 separate boxes. in each box there is a statement such as, 'speaks 3 languages fluently' or 'plays the bagpipes'. The objective is for students to speak to as many people as possible and to complete the table with a different names in each box. A small prize can be awarded to the first person to complete their card. Make up a number of different cards, depending on the size of the group. This activity takes around 15 minutes.

Odd one out

Ask students to think of three things about themselves, two true and one false. Give each student five sweets. Students then pair up and share the information about themselves. Each student should guess which of the three things they are being told is false and if they guess correctly they take a sweet from the other person. Repeat as many times as suits.

Ideas for extra activities

These are ideas for extra activities which can be run over or after coffee time or lunch time and aim to be positive and inspiring.

1. Three Minute Thesis (3MT) – play some of the videos from past competitions (available here: https://media.ed.ac.uk/) or ask last year's 3MT entrants to present live.

2. Display posters from School or department Postgraduate Research Conferences.

3. Short talks – ask a representative from each subject or research area to come and give a five-minute presentation on research currently taking place within the School / department

Things to think about

- This session could be combined with a more traditional 'welcome' event

- Consider catering – could this be done as a coffee morning / afternoon or over lunch?

- Don't make it too structured, the aim is to be informal and give students space to get to know each other

- Icebreakers always take longer than anticipated, allocate sufficient time for this!

Word cloud created from keyword speed networking in session one at the School of Health in Social Science, October 2016.

Session two: Starting Out

Although an exciting time, starting a doctorate can also sometimes be stressful and over-whelming. It can help students to know that others are also in the same situation and that there are practical steps that they can take. This session gives students an opportunity to check understanding of expectations and to start to consider the bigger picture of doing a

Aims

♦ To build understanding of the structures, process and procedures which underpin the University of Edinburgh doctorate

♦ To encourage students to start to reflect on their own expectations and concerns about doing a doctorate

♦ To give students an opportunity to discuss common challenges and to share advice and tips on overcoming these

♦ To signpost further useful information

Suggested format for workshop two

Timings (90 mins)	Activity	Resources required
5 minutes	Introduction and frequently asked questions	Post-it notes and pens Facilitator
15 minutes	Quiz / card sort activity on expectations	As required for activity
30 minutes	Roundtable Discussions	Consider inviting alumni / post-docs to act as graduate facilitators Facilitator Flipchart paper and pens
10 minutes	Postcard Activity	Postcards, envelopes, pens and stamps
30 minutes	Questions and Answers Activity and coffee and cake	Flipchart paper and pens Catering Facilitator

Ideas for activities

Frequently Asked Questions
Ask students to bring one question they have about starting out on their new programme that hasn't already been covered during welcome activities, and ask them to write this on a post-it note. Collect the post-it notes. These questions can be answered by staff at the end of the session.

Quiz / card sort activity on expectations
Create a short quiz or card sort activity based on expectations of the institution, the student and the supervisor from the Code of Practice. Students can complete this in pairs or small groups. This should encourage discussion. Go over the answers as a whole group.

Roundtable discussions
Invite alumni / post-docs to act as graduate facilitators to lead roundtable discussions on the 'challenges of postgraduate research study and how to overcome them'. Split students into groups and allocate 10-15 minutes for them to determine what they feel are the main challenges they are facing at this point in their studies. Then ask half the students on each table to move to another group. These students, along with the graduate facilitators can then act as 'consultants' to offer a number of suggestions on how to overcome the challenges presented. Have a full group discussion to summarise challenges and recommendations for how to overcome them.

Postcard activity
Ask students to write down three personal challenges and what actions they might take to overcome them on a postcard. Place the postcards into an envelope with the student's address on the front and return the postcards to the students after a few months.

Things to think about

- Students may have questions that they don't wish to share with the group, provide an alternative method for them to ask these questions, for example a drop in session with the School's Postgraduate Research Director.

- A list of prompts for roundtable discussions on the 'Challenges of postgraduate research study' can be found on the Vitae website for [Starting a Doctorate](#).

- Consider adding an activity / discussion on imposter syndrome as this is a common feeling amongst researchers and it can be helpful for new students to hear about ways that others have tried to overcome this.

Session three: The First Year

It can be helpful for new doctoral students to think and plan in terms of key milestones. This session sets out what is required for the first year review and considers tools and techniques useful for time management and planning skills development.

Aims

♦ To help students identify the key milestones of the doctorate and understand the expectations of the first year annual review

♦ To introduce the importance of time management and the tools that can be used to assist with this

♦ To introduce the Researcher Development Framework and how to use it

♦ To discuss and share ways to make the most of the time as a doctoral student

Suggested format for workshop three

Timings (90 mins)	Activity	Resources required
30 minutes	The PhD Journey – academic led discussion	Facilitator Flip chart paper IAD PhD planner
30 minutes	Time management tips	Presenters Facilitator
30 minutes	Researcher Development Framework with coffee and cake	Copies of the researcher development framework Facilitator

Ideas for activities

The PhD Journey
Academic led discussion on the PhD Journey directing students to useful books and articles about starting out, which includes information about the process of the first year review. Ask students to map out a timeline / plan for the first year in small groups. Take pictures of these which can be shared later.

Time management tips
Ask some current PhD students and / or staff to give short (3 minute) presentations on time management, sharing any tips they have. Follow with a question and answer session. Encourage the new students to also share any tips they have.

Researcher Development Framework (RDF)
Run a short introductory workshop on the Researcher Development Framework. This could involve students undertaking a short training needs analysis.

Things to think about

- Leave enough time for students to pose questions to presenters, particularly to current students and academic staff.

- Remember that people learn and work differently and some tools and techniques will suit some better than others. Make it clear that this is ok and that students should find out what works best for them.

- Unsure about the Researcher Development Framework? Contact the Institute for Academic Development who can provide suggestions and resources for a workshop in this area.

- If appropriate, check-in with students to ask whether they have been engaging with the online 'Prepare for Doctoral Success' programme and ask whether they have any questions about the issues raised within that learning environment.

Session four: Working with your Supervisor

The supervisory relationship is critical for the success of a doctorate. However, new students can be unsure of the expectations surrounding supervision and their role in building and maintaining an effective relationship with their supervisor. This session aims to help demystify supervision and to share experiences and tips.

Aims

♦   To introduce students to University expectations of them and their supervisors

♦   To introduce different styles of supervision

♦   To discuss and share information and tips on building and maintaining an effective relationship with a supervisor

♦   To signpost where to go for more information and help if things go wrong

Suggested format for workshop four

Timings (90 mins)	Activity	Resources required
10 minutes	Introduction and aims of session	Facilitator Very short presentation
20 minutes	Supervision Styles and Expectations exercise – continuum or group discussion	Range of statements about supervisory expectations Facilitator
20 minutes	Supervision case studies / common issues	Short case studies Facilitator
30 minutes (add 15 – 20 minutes for lunch)	Lunch/ Coffee Question and Answer session with Supervisors	Catering Supervisors/ later year students
10 minutes	'Secret Santa' Buddy system	Paper and pens

Ideas for activities

Introductory presentation
The facilitator should set the scene by briefly presenting the University / School expectations of supervision (on both the supervisor and the student) as found in the Code of Practice. The presenter could also briefly speak about the concept of 'ideal supervisor'; and 'ideal graduate student' to highlight that all supervisory relationships are unique but that there are examples of good practices which can make the relationship more effective. If there is time, you could ask students to draw their 'ideal supervisor' in groups.

Supervisory styles and expectations continuum
Ask students to get up and place themselves physically along a continuum (strongly agree to strongly disagree) in response to different statements about supervisory expectations. You can use the supervisor expectations questionnaire (Appendix 1) to provide prompts for this exercise. Ensure students know that there is no right or wrong answer. This exercise could also be done as a small group discussion. You could also ask two or three supervisors to attend so that they could respond from a supervisory perspective.

Supervision case studies / common issues
Prepare a few short case studies of supervisory relationships and include a number of common issues (such as my supervisor always gives me negative feedback / my supervisor is always busy etc.) to prompt discussion in small groups about what the student can do to improve the situation. Feedback as a whole group and if possible ask some supervisors to attend and give input.

Question and Answer session with Supervisors / later year students
Ask two or three supervisors to attend to answer students' questions about the supervisory relationship. Give students some time before the session (over lunch or coffee) to post questions in a box or write them up on post-it notes on the wall.

'Secret Santa' Buddy system
If this is the final session, ask students to put their email address onto a post-it note and put this into a 'hat'. Pull out at random two email addresses. These students can pair up and meet for coffee to have an informal chat about their experience of PhD study so far. This would work well if students from all years were involved but should be on a voluntary basis.

Things to think about

- Ask continuing students to come along to the 'Working with your supervisor' session. They may still have questions about the supervisory relationship or will be able to offer advice to new students. It also provides another opportunity for community building.

- If using the continuum exercise be aware of the differing cultural expectations of supervision and be ready to discuss and address these.

- Be sure to highlight to students what they should do and where they can go if things are not going well with supervision.

Contacts

If you have any comments about this facilitation guide or would like further information or support for running any of the activities, please contact the researcher development team at the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) at iad.phd@ed.ac.uk

Useful links

University of Edinburgh, Institute for Academic Development

http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development

Vitae

www.vitae.ac.uk

Supervisor Expectations Questionnaire

Read each of the statements below and decide on your position for each. For example if you believe strongly that it is the responsibility of the supervisor circle '1', if you believe strongly that it is the responsibility of the student circle '5'. If you believe it is a joint responsibility circle '3'.

Adapted from Griffith University and Oxford Learning Institute. Originally adapted from Ingrid Moses, Moses, I. (1985) *Supervising Postgraduates*. (HERDSA Green Guide No. 3) Codes of Practice for Supervisors of PhD and Masters (UTS) University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

1. It is the responsibility of the supervisor/s to select a research topic.	1	2	3	4	5	The student is responsible for selecting her/his own topic.
2. It is the supervisor/s who decide which theoretical framework and/or methodology is most appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5	Students should decide theoretical framework and/or methodology they wish to use.
3. The supervisor/s should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student.	1	2	3	4	5	The supervisor/s should leave the development of the program and timetable of research and study to the student.
4. The supervisor/s are responsible for ensuring that the student has access to the appropriate services and facilities at the University.	1	2	3	4	5	It is the student's responsibility to ensure that she/he has located and accessed all relevant services and facilities for the research.
5. The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support and encouragement to the student.	1	2	3	4	5	Personal counselling and support are not the responsibility of the supervisor – students should look elsewhere.
6. The supervisor/s should insist on regular meetings with the student.	1	2	3	4	5	The student should decide when she/he wants to meet with the supervisor/s.
7. The supervisor/s should ensure that the thesis is finished by the maximum submission date.	1	2	3	4	5	As long as a student works steadily she/he can take as long as she/he needs to finish the work.
8. Supervisor/s should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track.	1	2	3	4	5	Students should submit drafts of work only when they want constructive criticism from the Supervisor/s.
9. Supervisor/s should assist in the writing of the thesis if necessary and should ensure that the presentation is flawless.	1	2	3	4	5	The writing of the thesis should only ever be the student's own work and the student must take full responsibility for presentation of the thesis.