



PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title: Evaluating the East of Scotland Doctoral Training Partnership Professional Internships for PhD students scheme (known as PIPS).

Principal Investigator: Dr Caroline Pope

School / Department: School of Biological Sciences

Multi-disciplinary Team members: included members of the University of Edinburgh Student Survey team (Joshua Stapp), Careers Service (Sharon Maguire and Susan Bird) and Professor Tonks Fawcett. External collaborators were Dr Julie Reeves and Dr Tania Morgan Alcantarilla from the University of Southampton Institute for Learning, Innovation.

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In this PTAS study a doctoral internship programme was considered in respect of the experiences of doctoral researchers and their views on whether the programme developed their employability skills and influenced their career plans and aspirations.

The richness of the data gathered suggest that PGRs developed self-awareness and ability to critically evaluate personal, social and professional capabilities, skills and attributes. It is anticipated that this may help PGRs view their internship learning in a more holistic way, with broader skills development, complementing learning provided within the University. We also discovered how the development of broader employability skills within the Bioscience doctorate have impacted more broadly on the doctoral education landscape and beyond.

Study recommendations that

- (1) All PGRs undertaking PIPS should embed a version of this PIPS evaluation survey as part of their doctoral education to encourage reflection on their learning experience.
- (2) Additional collaborative research is desirable to more thoroughly assess the value impact of the BBSRC PIPS scheme nationally. This should incorporate the views of all stakeholders' involved (PGRs, Universities and employers).

These were explored with the White Rose doctoral training partnership training managers in September 2016.

Benefits to student learning:

- The evaluation data provides a 'sneak preview' confirming that the curriculum innovation project designed to deliver the East of Scotland Doctoral Training Partnership doctoral internship programme is flexible and adaptable whilst encouraging innovation and creativity.
- The richness of PhD students' experiential learning gathered illustrate with concrete examples the high quality skills developed.



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- Individual student feedback was used to identify and address any difficulties encountered to enhance processes.
 - There are genuine concerns that initiatives such as the new UK BBSRC PIPS scheme may damage the quality of the doctoral experience, and jeopardise PGRs ability to compete in the global labour market. Therefore the tangible benefits and challenges of embracing this educational opportunity will be showcased at training events and via the website to inspire future students and assure the sceptics that this new initiative enhanced the doctoral student learning experience.

To extend the benefits to other parts of the University of Edinburgh and beyond:

- The PTAS outputs enabled the East of Scotland Doctoral Training Partnership to demonstrate a harmony between what was promised and what was delivered in its business plan which will be reviewed for the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) 2017 Mid-term Review to determine the continuation of financial support for the 2018/19 and 2019/20 PhD student intakes.
- The research findings were also communicated to the BBSRC Innovation and Skills Group to ensure our doctoral students have a clear say in how publically funded doctoral internship schemes across the disciplines go forward.
- Provided specialist advice to School of Health in Social Science and Employ-ed On Campus to enable a similar approach to the one used in their context.
- Delivering a Practical Strategies Workshop on the theme: running a small PTAS project: evaluating the impact of a Bioscience employability initiative (June 2017).

To inform future work:

- Hosted discussions with AGCAS Scotland (Association of Graduate careers advisory services, i.e. HE careers service professional body) group on research students / research staff in March 2016.
- Dissemination at the Researcher Education and Development Scholarship 2016 Conference, Anchoring Researcher Development: theoretical mindsets' event. The slides entitled 'Doctoral Internships: Fun Times but Was It a Good Learning Experience' are on the [REDS2016 web page](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/ecr/events/reds2016) <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/ecr/events/reds2016>.
- Authored a Vitae Occasional Paper Volume 5, Vitae Researcher Development International Conference 2015 article entitled 'Work wisdom' and the PhD: exploring the benefits of doctoral internships' (available on the Vitae website in September 2017).

Financial statement: This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.