

# University Graduate College

Cardiff University

September 2011

## An Auspicious Start

Prof Terry Marsden  
Dean



*T Marsden*

**The new University Graduate College began on 1 January 2011 to provide a more integrated and focussed approach to post-graduate research (PGR) at Cardiff. Since then, a new governance structure has been agreed which involves Heads of Schools, Directors of PGR Studies, PGR students and members of administrative directorates. This newsletter will bring you up to date on the activities of and priorities set by the Programme Teams and the Board as well as highlighting some of the on-going activity of the University Graduate College. We have been delighted and encouraged by the very high level of engagement in the new structures and look forward to your continued involvement.**

Prof Ken Wann  
Deputy Dean



*Ken Wann*

## The University Graduate College Programme Teams

The University Graduate College is now up and running with all structures necessary for the efficient and effective running in place. The University Graduate College Board features representation across the university from Pro-Vice Chancellors to PGR students, although at its core are six Heads of School. The Board is supported by four Programme Teams, which each take responsibility for developing one of the following areas – Assuring a Quality Experience, Building Capacity, Graduate Facilities and Training and Development. The aim of the Programme Teams is to integrate and focus the activities of academic and support functions so that there is more cross-communication and unity of purpose with regard to both the university strategic priorities and the PGR action and implementation plan. Programme Teams are chaired by the Dean or Deputy Dean, while membership includes at least six Directors of PGR Studies, two to four PGR students and representatives from relevant University committees and Directorate staff. Initial areas of work and priorities for each of the Programme Teams are described overleaf.

## Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is a biennial survey of PGRs throughout the UK. Cardiff participated for the third time in 2011, alongside 101 other institutions, including 14 Russell Group universities; this generated over 31,000 responses, of whom 604 were from Cardiff (a response rate of 32%). PRES responses are reported only in aggregate, however it is possible for us to compare our results with those of the sector and with the Russell Group aggregate (but not with individual institutions).

In most areas, Cardiff responses were very similar to UK and Russell Group respondents. Cardiff respondents were most positive about supervision (scale mean of 4.1 on a 5 point scale), the infrastructure (libraries and IT with a scale mean of 4.1), and skills development (scale mean 4.0). This was followed by understanding goals and standards (scale mean 3.9) and research environment (scale mean 3.8) while respondents were least positive about professional and career development (scale mean 3.4). Because it is a very long survey, a short newsletter article cannot do justice to the results. The headline report can be found on the UGC website along with PowerPoint slides. A more detailed analysis will be undertaken in the autumn and will be extremely useful to us as we continue to identify areas of strength as well as areas for enhancement.

## Assuring a Quality Experience Team

The Assuring a Quality Experience Team has established as its key priority work on refreshing and re-embedding the Code of Practice, particularly the Progress Monitoring system, which is fundamental to quality of support and thesis submission rates. They agreed that work is needed to ensure greater consistency and improved feedback to PGRs. The development of electronic tools, such as a research log, will be important to assist students in record keeping and to support supervisors and Directors of PGR Studies in their roles.

Another key task is to contribute to the development of routine evaluation of Schools' PGR activity, and defining the evidence of quality research degree programme, which will align with the 'Proving Excellence' project. They are also considering ways to accommodate split site PhDs and to enable collaborative arrangements.

## Graduate Facilities Team

The Graduate Facilities Team has taken on the responsibility for oversight of the Graduate Centre, which remains a space for taught students as well as PGRs. The team was encouraged by favourable feedback by centre users. Work is ongoing to secure similar facilities at the Heath Park Campus and it is hoped that there will be good news to announce regarding the opening of a dedicated area in the near future. The Team is also carefully monitoring progress on the Hadyn Ellis building, which will house offices for the UGC as well as new training, conference and exhibition space. The Team considered facilities available to PGRs, including office space, which remains an issue; it also hopes to promote the sharing of research facilities across the university. The agenda for the new year includes consideration of library and information needs of PGRs, both electronic and physical. They will also be considering development of a virtual environment, including virtual networks. The team has been helped in determining its actions and priorities by the preliminary results from Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, which asked about facilities available within Schools.

## Building Capacities Team

One of the first tasks of the Building Capacities Team was to act as the Interim Review Panel of the President's Research Scholarship. The panel considered the submissions individually and collectively to assess the success of each and of the scheme as a whole. It was agreed that its aims were being met and continuation of the scheme was recommended. They also gave some thought to possible future approaches to institutionally-funded PhD scholarships, recognising the potential tension between supporting a large number of programmes and maximising the number of new PhD students versus investing in a smaller number of programmes in proven priority areas.

The team also examined key indicators of PGR numbers and submissions, including trends, and prioritised that two future areas of development should be establishing robust Management information and developing a more anticipatory approach to RCUK initiatives.

## Training and Development Team

The first task of the Training and Development Team was to consider the current approach to skills development; they endorsed the continuation of a central programme available to all PGRs and which differentiated sessions as 'generic' or related to specific discipline areas. 'Discipline Groups' then met in May to discuss the detail of the formal skills training programme and reported back to the T&D team, who considered and agreed their proposals, set the budget and advised on the marketing of the programme.

This has now been seen through to its logical conclusion in the production of the University Graduate College Programme (see article on page 4). On the basis of evidence from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, they recommended that review of development needs and training undertaken be a mandatory part of annual progress monitoring. Looking to the future, they established key priorities for enhancement of: training for teaching for PGRs and accreditation thereof; statistics training and support; public engagement; the provision of training through the medium of Welsh and additional e-learning.

## Successor to RSSDP Launched

The successor to the hugely successful Research Students' Skills Development Programme (the RSSDP), will be launched for the start of the new academic year. The new University Graduate College Programme consists of over 300 offerings across 196 different workshops, many of which are new this year, complemented by online courses, lectures and seminars and student-led conferences. Based on the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) developed and introduced at the start of the year by Vitae, The Programme is structured into four 'domains' encompassing the knowledge, intellectual abilities, techniques and professional standards to do research, as well as the personal qualities, knowledge and skills to work with others and to ensure the wider impact of research.

The new-look brochure rolled off the presses and was distributed in August to continuing students, and will be sent to new students in September in readiness for enrolment.

Students are encouraged to plan their skills training and personal development in conjunction with their supervisors, having first undertaken a review of their existing skills using the new RDF Professional Development Planner available at [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdflplanner](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdflplanner). Full details of the planner and tips for promoting and enhancing your professional and career development appear in the brochure.



## Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Involvement

In February, all postgraduate research students who were serving as representatives ('PGR reps') in their School were invited to a meeting with the Dean and Deputy Dean. The proposed structures and objectives were explained and PGR reps were invited to comment on their key priorities for the new organisation; these were wide-ranging, and included enhancements to the training programme; support for PGRs who teach; office space and facilities; communication systems and representation mechanisms. The input was used to inform agenda development of the Programme Teams. As well, several of the issues were explored via 'local' questions inserted into the biennial Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.

In July, a second meeting was held to update the reps on the deliberations and actions of each of the programme teams. This was seen as an important feedback loop to ensure accountability, which fed into a discussion about the future shape of postgraduate representation for the UGC including selection of PGR members of the Programme Teams and Board and how these representatives could gather views from the broader PGR reps group. This will be developed during the autumn. The group agreed to meet twice a year, with the PGR reps organising the agenda in future.

## Student Conferences

The University Graduate College has hosted three successful student conferences this year. The annual events of 'Spotlight on Social Sciences', 'Voice of Humanities' (both in March) and 'Speaking of Science' (May) attracted 119 delegates from Cardiff University and around the

region. The conferences started 8 years ago with Speaking of Science, in order to provide the opportunity to share postgraduate research within the University with the aim of developing a wider research community as well as mutually beneficial inter-disciplinary links. Events for the social sciences and humanities swiftly followed. The conferences give students the opportunity to present their work in a friendly and supportive environment, and acquire skills in making

their research accessible to a non-specialist audience.

The conferences are jointly run by University Graduate College staff and a steering group of students, who also sit on judging panels to award prizes to the best presentations. Any student interested in getting involved in running next year's events and gaining valuable experience in event organisation for their CV should contact the University Graduate College office.



## Funding for Interdisciplinary Projects

Carrying on our successful scheme of funding for interdisciplinary projects organised by post-graduate researchers and research staff, we have awarded several grants for interdisciplinary projects to be run during the next year. Examples of projects funded include a 2-day



conference on "Myths, Legends and Folklore", an "External Sensations" Seminar Series, a network of meetings on "Human Face Animation and Perception Network" and a "Place to Plate: New Connections in Food Research" conference.

## 'Transformations' International Conference

'Transformations' was the theme of the annual humanities conference on 7th July which was attended by fifty participants from as far afield as The Americas, The Middle East, Eastern Europe, South East Asia and Africa. This event differs slightly from those overleaf in that students give papers on a particular theme, which has seen topics as varied as 'The Body' 'Constructing Identities' and 'Reading, Images, Texts and Artefacts', rather than the presentation of research in general.



## Careers Events

The University Graduate College has run five careers event this year for postgraduates and research staff. The events focus either on academic careers or careers outside academia in the different disciplines. They provide an opportunity for our researchers to talk to current academic staff from both Cardiff and

other institutions, and a range of speakers from the public and private sector. Organisations represented at the events this year have included BAE Systems, GE Healthcare, Cummins, the Intellectual Property Office, Welsh Government and the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

The University Graduate College also hosted a talk by Jane Cocking, Humanitarian Director of OXFAM, about the range of career opportunities available in non-governmental organisations. Approximately 80 PGR students and early career research staff attended.



**" I made friends from different schools whose research areas are similar to mine, so we've decided to form a group and are putting together ideas for a seminar that we could do together – interdisciplinary research kicking off right from the beginning! Very excited!"**

Student feedback on Starting Out

## Starting Out

Starting Out is the University level induction which gives students an enjoyable opportunity to meet other research students and begin to develop those important personal and professional networks. Finishing with a free lunch, the morning

covers topics such as the rights and responsibilities of the research student, facilities offered by the Graduate Centre and the University, training and development opportunities, as well as presentations by existing students.

Starting Out is designed to complement school induction.

- Thursday 6 October
- Wednesday 12 October
- Tuesday 25 October