



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: A St Andrews PhD: encouraging PGT students to continue to PGR study at the University of St Andrews

Transition(s) the practice supports: The transition from PGT to PGR study.

Abstract

Two large-scale events (Arts and Science) were held in academic year 2015/16 to encourage PGT students to think about making the transition to PGR study. The events provided guidance and insight into all stages of the transition: finding funding, the application experience, PhD interviews, Doctoral Training Centres, the PhD experience, PhD graduate destinations, and the alumni experience.

Description

At the University of St Andrews approximately 7% of PGTs continue to PGR study within the Institution. It was recognised that more support and information could be provided during their PGT studies about making such a transition.

In academic year 2014/15 a small scale event was held to encourage PGT students to think about PGR study. The events were well received so plans were made to repeat and expand the events.

To this end, two large events (one for Arts and Social Science, and one for Science and Medicine) were staged in November 2015. The aim of the events was to increase PGT students' understanding of the stages of transition from PGT to PGR, and offer advice and guidance on these.

The structure of the events was as follows:

| Element of PGT-PGR transition | Description of how element was addressed | Delivered by |
|--|--|---|
| Thinking about a transition from PGT to PGR study. | Presentation from senior academic about what people should consider before embarking on PGR study | Dean and Pro-Dean |
| Investigating funding options | An online demonstration about PhD funding works and where PGT students can look for funding sources. The University has recently launched 'Fund' an online database that collates funding opportunities. | Representative of University Finance team |
| Applying for a PhD | An experienced PI spoke about what they are looking for in a PhD application and shared examples of good and bad applications | Experienced Principal Investigator |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| The application experience and PhD interview | A representative from the Careers Centre spoke about how the application process varied from School to School, and shared insights and advice about preparing for a PhD interview | Careers Adviser |
| The PhD experience | A current 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd year PhD student described the focus of their current year of study. Following this there was a break-out 'café' event featured current PhD students from each school who spoke to the PGT students informally and openly about what the PhD experience was like | Approximately 30 PhD students from 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd year of PhD study. |
| PhD development | Science students learned about doctoral training centres and how they work. Arts students learned about the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities, and the opportunities it offers | A guest speaker from SGSAH (Arts event) and a Chemistry Doctoral Training Centre (Science event) |
| Opportunities post PhD | A Careers Adviser spoke about the percentages of PhD students who remain in and leave academia post graduation. The breadth of careers that St Andrews PhD graduates have gone on to was demonstrated, as was how best to contact PhD alumni. | Careers Adviser |
| The PhD alumni experience | PhD alumni shared the career paths and what they wished they'd known before embarking on a PhD | PhD alumni |

The events concluded with a Q&A panel session featuring academics, current PhD students, PhD alumni and Careers Centre staff. Following this a networking wine reception took place to encourage further informal discussion.

Each event took place over the course of an afternoon (1-5pm) and over 100 PGT students attended in total, equating to over 13% of the PGT cohort.

Images from the Arts and Science events:





Participants evaluated the event very positively.

- *It gave me a better idea about the reality of PhD study – Science PGT Student*
- *It was a great overview about what is involved in PhD study – Science PGT Student*
- *I'd say if someone was thinking about why and if they should do a PD, they should definitely go to this event! – Science PGT Student*
- *I liked the wide range of aspects discussed. It was very complete from the before to the after, and from an administrative point of view to an academic one – Arts PGT Student*
- *It helped a lot to gain focus – Arts PGT Student*
- *A great way of explaining the process with input from those who have been through it – Arts PGT Student*

In a 6-week post-event follow up evaluation participants indicated that they had acted as a result of attending:

- *I feel like I've gained more information on PhD applications which has helped me to start them and finish them successfully.*
- *I had really just started considering undertaking a PhD when I attended the course so everything was very useful. It gave me all the facts I needed in making my decision about what to do after this year of study. Career destinations, applying and funding were all very useful.*
- *Some things were really interesting: where and how to find information about PhDs and funding. Then I knew where to look to get it. I liked that some points of methods were developed: how to engage contact with a professor from another university, what to include in a PhD proposal, advice...*
- *After attending the course, I am better able to answer the ever raging question about why I want to pursue a PhD. I am also gained an insight into the appropriate ways to approach a potential supervisor and signify my interest to be his/her potential supervisee. I also got very vital information about the available funding options.*
- *I understand the process a bit better, and have a little more confidence looking for funding.*

The intention is to repeat these events in academic year 2016/17 and to podcast them for students who are unable to attend.

Contact: Catriona Wilson, Head of Student Development, Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development. cat.wilson@st-andrews.ac.uk 01334 462558