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Supporting research student mental health by stealth

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When the world changes, we have to too



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Interventions and collaborations aimed at building researcher communities & supporting mental wellbeing for researchers at the University of York.

The aim of the interventions has been twofold:

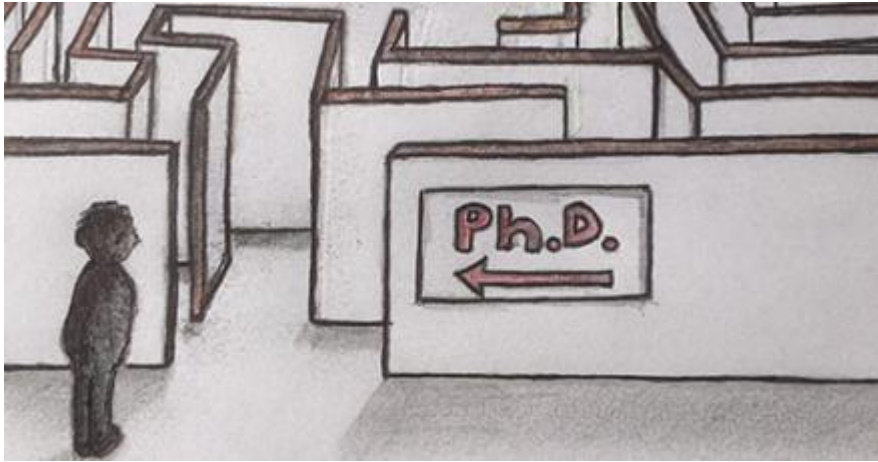
- I. To provide face-to-face support to those who feel themselves to be socially isolated and/or geographically distanced and
- II. To give voice to the lived reality and expectations of early career researchers and open a dialogue about mental health amongst PhD students

New Interventions



- The 'How to Thrive and Survive your PhD' peer led research student intervention
- Mentoring and buddying schemes - building connections & communities at local level
- Bite size training sessions for women in research - listening to the specific professional development needs of women researchers
- European Summer School - is mental health a cultural issue?

How to Thrive & Survive in your PhD



bit.ly/YorkPhDThriveSurvive

Peer-led sessions

Created by PGRs for PGRs

Safe, supportive forum for
discussion and Q&As

How to Thrive & Survive in your PhD



Personal sharings/stories
Insider perspectives

Empathy & solidarity:

- We're on the same journey
- We've come out the other side (post docs)

We offer what you don't commonly find in "official" literature

Networking / community building

How to Thrive & Survive in your PhD



Common topics:

- Supervisor relationship; community
- Expectations on a PhD vs Reality
- Practical tips/processes (writing, time management, progression)
- The affective life of the PhD

Themed sessions:

- Fieldwork
- Public engagement
- Health & wellbeing
- Submission / viva

How to Thrive & Survive in your PhD



Attendance:

- 60-70 (in person sessions)
- 15-40 (online)

How we use feedback to shape our sessions

Volunteers benefit too!

- Personal development & networking opportunities
- Other collaborations

University Wellbeing Support



- Development of PGR-specific mental health awareness training: pilots this Autumn
- Wellbeing Wednesdays: 30 minutes sessions over lunchtime
- Mental Health First Aid / Awareness training for Supervisors
- Health and Wellbeing Hub: information and prevention
- University Student Hub: help with the practical issues
- University Support Services: practitioner-led support groups

Buddying for new PGRs

- University-wide, interdisciplinary **‘Buddy’ scheme** for new PGR students who might be starting studies remotely
- Buddies can be any existing or recently graduated York PGR student
- Overall aim to help new PGRs settle into the University, to signpost information and support offered by the University and introduce them to peer networks where possible
- Buddy communication primarily via Zoom, email and/or WhatsApp - encouraging buddies to be creative e.g. getting to know York videos
- Invited to submit EoI followed by September training session
 - 62 interested buddies, 53 signed up for training so far
- Training designed to equip buddies with knowledge and confidence to maintain effective relationships, signpost further support and resources and introducing creative ways to integrate new students into the York community

Mentoring for final stage PGRs



- New [mentoring](#) programme for PGRs in final 18 months before thesis submission
- Opportunity to discuss and develop skills, behaviours and approaches to research, professional development and careers with a more experienced post-doctoral researcher
- Pilot scheme with **23** trained and matched postdoc mentors

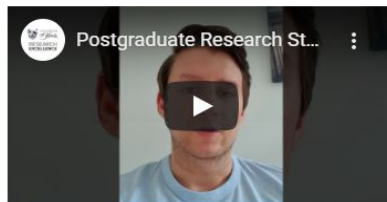


Information for New PGRs



What's it like to be a York researcher?

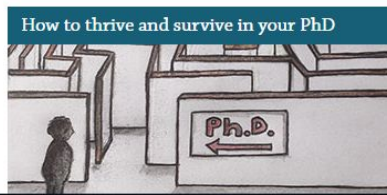
Hear from some of our existing research students and recent alumni to get a sense of what it's like to be a York researcher.



A welcome video and videos from current PGRs and alumni have been added to a new webpage for new PGRs along with details of the Mentoring (Postdoc to PGR) and Buddying (PGR to PGR) programmes.

Click [this link](#) to view the page

Meet other researchers



European Summer School

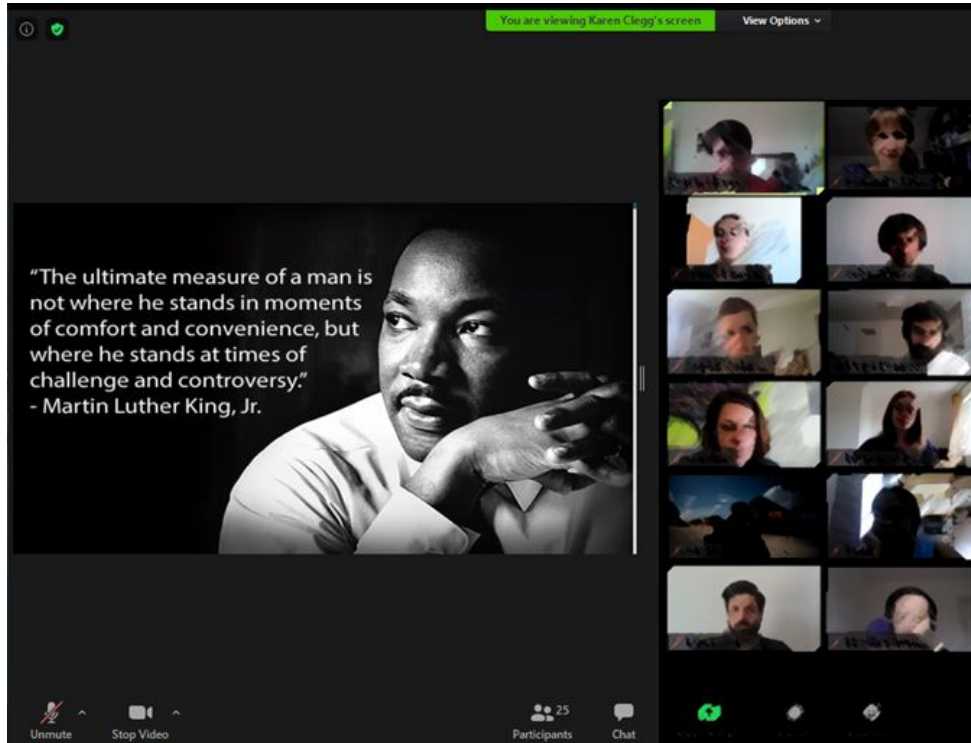
- Collaboration between three European Universities to support Professional Development of Doctoral Candidates
- Perfect opportunity to develop and enhance presentation and communication skills, CV writing and job hunting in a global context during uncertain times
- Unmissable occasion to share experiences and new ways of coping with challenges of post-pandemic world
- European Summer School Online Edition 2020 attracted over 500 participants from all three institutions



European Summer School



- European Coffee morning



Life as a researcher during the pandemic - What have you learnt about YOURSELF?

What have you learnt about your Research?

What have you learnt about your CAREER ASPIRATIONS?



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“The atmosphere was very warm and it felt like a protected space in which you could be as open as you wanted to be [...] After just an hour it felt as if we were all really **part of one community.**”

Feedback from the European Summer School Coffee Morning



It's incredibly hard to stay focused when there are such major events happening around the world

Life as a researcher during the pandemic - What have you learnt about YOURSELF?

don't be so hard on yourself

Online communication goes a long way, but it cannot replace meeting people in person

I used to overwork without noticing... During lockdown, I spent half as much time in front of my computer and completed the same amount!

I need a routine

I can always find a way to manage extra challenges. I've been doing my research (I'm part time), setting up a business and homeschooling my children! It's worked out much better than I'd anticipated when school closures were announced.

That research is exactly the right thing for me to be doing right now

It often feels as if I am not doing as much when I am working from home, because I feel much more relaxed, but actually I was doing more than usual!

I resonate with this so much

I have learnt that I really need to be with other people. I am highly motivated but still need people for the enjoyment of work and tasks.

Thanks to digital literature and open-sources I found myself privileged and thankful to do research and to not have income-losses and so on.

I need sunny breaks and different workplaces.

Motivation is difficult, and the uncertainty of what happens next term is stressful.

Thanks to digital literature and so on, I found myself in a privileged situation doing research.

Accepting that some days are more productive than others

I need PA and talking to others.

That not working on weekends is a good thing and something I should try to stick to in the next academic year (until marking hits).

My sense of time has been lost.

Running is good for you! :D

the zoom format has made it possible for me to access lectures that I could not afford to travel to before

I need social interaction during my work day!

It turns out I get super depressed without a routine and some social interaction

Nature is more important than coffee dates to relax

Same for me - I can do so much more now I don't have to travel!

I need activities such as running to lift my spirits so I can focus on my work.

Family is important. But can be a distraction while working from home. Now changing to a new apartment just to have an office room to myself.

i finally realize that my comfort zone is in research. i have had so much fun researching and explaining things to non academic fellows especially the BLM and COVID 19

It's so wonderful to be able to develop thoughts in that amazing depth during a PhD (especially during a pandemic :D) , this joy will definitely accompany me through my life

PhD would best not be rushed due to the pandemic. Fortunately, I managed to obtain a research position which I can do alongside finishing my studies. Thank goodness for technology and

What have you learnt about your CAREER ASPIRATIONS?

Can no longer assume that the opportunities will be available once PhD achieved.

I learnt about the advantages of working in science and how I am able to deal with the disadvantages. I even consider to stay at the university for a longer period than my PhD.

While academia has had its upsides, I'm more and more drawn to applied (policy) research. Definitely have to give it at least a shot

I love academic teaching and feel really responsible for my students especially in a situation like this

have not decided yet :) perhaps still in academia, perhaps to do something else.

I might stay in academia but the future is now unpredictable. COVID 19 has taught me so

You don't need to become a celebrated researcher to help make the world a better place

LOVE this!

I have had a clear plan to start a business for several years. I saw an opportunity for funding and mentoring to start a business and got it so now I'm pursuing it earlier than planned.

I discovered that there are many tools out there which I haven't used before, and which will enable me to accomplish more in the future!

Big aspirations is always a work in progress. We are never done learning.

I understand that being a young researcher in Germany is a somewhat privileged position. However with the economy being threatened by this pandemic, I'm concerned about career after the PhD.

That I want to stay in academia but am not setting this in stone. I can battle injustice outside of academia, too.

I have a lot to learn, e.g. time management, communication, doing a research that convinces myself and others

I have re-evaluated staying in academia and I am drawn to the private sector.

Question time for PGRs



PGR 'Question Time' Q&A in partnership with the GSA: sign up and submit questions



Posted by Christine Comrie on 4th May 2020

Your questions wanted for PGR 'Question Time' in partnership with the Graduate Students' Association (GSA).

We understand that the coronavirus pandemic has created multiple issues affecting research students. Therefore, the York Graduate Research School, in partnership with the GSA, is hosting a BBC-style Question Time Q&A event for research students to pose questions to a panel of University and GSA representatives.

Watch the videos from the Question time Events:

[7 May](#)

[19 June](#)

Thank You

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