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Training School on Researcher Development

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Author: Jenny Read, Robert Bregovic, Sari Törmälä

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Abstract:

Report on ETN-FPI Training School on Researcher Development organized at University of Newcastle Tuesday 16th January – Thursday 18th January 2018.

Summary

Training School on Researcher Development was the fourth training school organized by the ETN-FPI network and took place at University of Newcastle upon Tyne from Tuesday 16th January to Thursday 18th January 2018. The aim of the training school was to provide personal development skills for Early Stage Researchers of the ETN-FPI network. The event covered following topics: influencing and negotiating, scientific writing, time management, effective communication and presentation skills, and innovation, creativity and problem solving. Speakers leading the sessions were Susan Mitchell, Chris Russel, Andrew Scott and Katie Wray. All 15 Early Stage Researchers attended the training school.



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¹ All photos by Sergio Moreschini.

Introduction

The fourth ETN-FPI training school, organized by University of Newcastle upon Tyne, was held at the Great North Museum: Hancock (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK) from Tuesday 16th January – Thursday 18th January 2018. The venue was selected as an inspiring learning environment to ease the transfer of knowledge from instructors to participants.

The training school focused on personal development of early stage researchers (ESRs). It aimed to provide ESRs with valuable preparation for their future careers by equipping them with complementary skills that will enable them to succeed whether in academia or industry. Specialist trainers provided sessions on communication skills, creative thinking, scientific writing, time management and negotiation skills. The school was a combination of lectures and group assignments, which gave the ESRs a chance to practice the newly acquired knowledge.

In addition to scientific part of the training school, there were several social activities included in the school program. They ranged from a formal group dinner at a city centre restaurant, karaoke session in a local pub, and escape room experience. Those activities were attended by training school participants and instructors which enabled additional discussions related to the school topics in a more informal environment as well as making personal connections that will be beneficial in future career.

All activities related to the school have been publicised on the school webpages <http://www.full-parallax-imaging.eu/TS4>.



Program of the training school

Tuesday 16th January 2018

AM: Chris Russell, My Consultants Ltd – “Effective Communication and Presentation Skills”

This session explored how to be effective in communication and how to present work with clarity, precision and purpose. Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) considered audience engagement, explored models of communication, and thought about what that means for them and their work. ESRs dealt with stage management, content choice and how to present with confidence.

PM: Chris Russell, My Consultants Ltd – “Influencing and Negotiating”

The second session considered what it means to work, and communicate, with other people. How do get your message across and make sure it is meaningful and memorable? How to influence others and protect ones interests? ESRs looked at approaches, process and examples to help them along. ESRs learned how to negotiate in collaboration, and with compassion. And learned how to manage manners, emotions and how to create a meaningful outcome.

Wednesday 17th January 2018

AM: Jenny Brady – “Creative Thinking for Innovative Researchers”

Idea innovation and evaluation is vital to being a successful researcher, in most areas of research e.g.: evaluating next research proposal, considering the impact of research or how results might be commercialised or influence policy. These skills are also a key part of the successful freelancer’s toolkit. This practical and interactive session helped ESRs to engage in various tools and processes to generate credible, innovative ideas, evaluate them and understand the next steps in making them happen.

PM: Katie Wray and Laura Rush – “The Entrepreneurial Researcher”

This session intended to introduce ESRs to enterprise and entrepreneurship and invited them to undertake an analysis of their own entrepreneurial development. It prepared ESRs to better engage with the application and impact of research and equipped with a better understanding of how ideas are made a reality.

The session explored the qualities, traits and behaviours of an entrepreneurial researcher and considered the options for generating, and protecting ideas. A person with an entrepreneurial mind set does not necessarily become a business owner; they may apply these skills in a research or other employment environment, project, or indeed to starting a new venture (and therefore becoming an entrepreneur). ESRs were allowed to consider own strengths, and the development needs that may feel required.

Thursday 18th January 2018

AM: Susan Mitchell – “Scientific Writing”

The Scientific Writing course provided an essential toolkit for producing professional and publishable scientific writing. This course consisted of intensive tuition and used good editorial practice to give participants immediate, useable methods of improving style, developing arguments, strengthening organisation and avoiding common errors, all with the aim of producing succinct and informative scientific prose.

In addition, the session encouraged academic/scientific precision, good critical thinking and well-considered arguments, ultimately enabling participants to produce a more thoughtful, well-organised and effective thesis. The course also involved individual exercises, group exercises and discussion designed to enable participants to increase the quality of their writing and to increase their confidence. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, there was good advice on how to successfully communicate the science.

PM: Andrew Scott – “Time Management”

This two hour session started by looking at the bigger questions of context, purpose and meaning, and then got into the nitty gritty of academic life: dealing with conflicting priorities, carving out time to make real progress on substantial tasks, realistic approaches to planning, dealing with interruptions and staying sane and healthy throughout.



Speakers

Jenny Brady: Enterprise Advisor, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Susan Mitchell: Research Funding Development Manager, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Chris Russell: My Consultants Ltd, UK

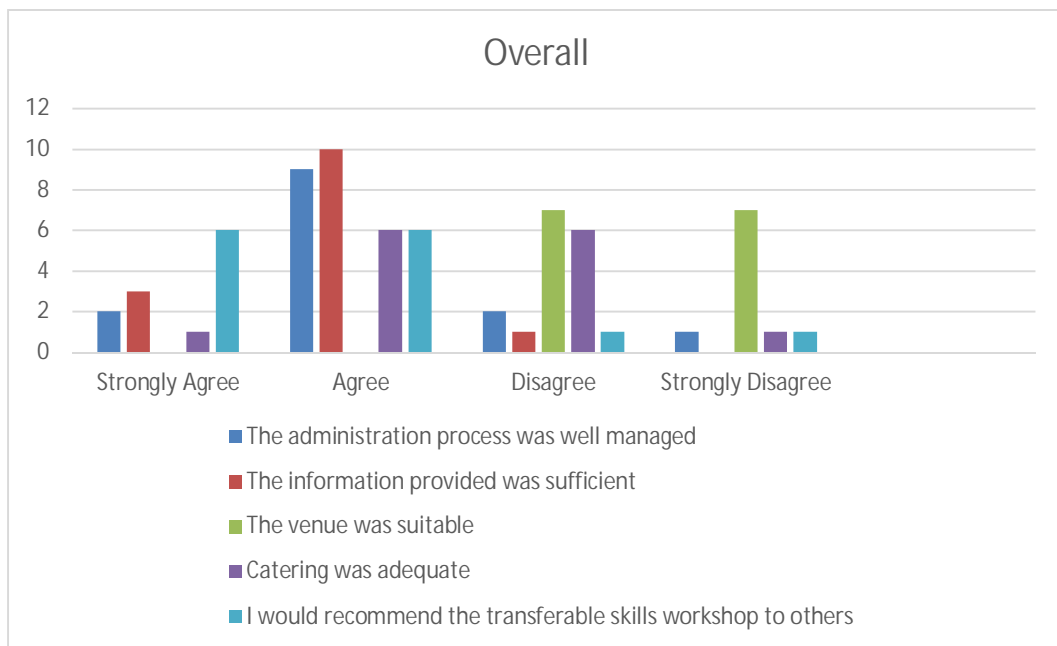
Andrew Scott: Management Training Consultant, Andrew Scott Training, UK

Katie Wray: Lecturer in Enterprise and a NCEE Entrepreneurship Education Fellow, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Laura Rush: Business Development Manager, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Feedback from ESRs

Fourteen out of fifteen ESRs replied to feedback concerning the training school on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The feedback in different categories is shown in the following graph:



As can be seen from the graph, overall, most ESRs were satisfied with the quality of content and presentations, interaction during the training school and considered the training school beneficial for future. Overall administration of the school was well managed and information provided were sufficient, whereas venue of the training school did not reach satisfactory. Although the venue has been selected with good intentions, it turned out that some construction work has been performed at the venue during the school which made the lecture room a little bit noisy. Nevertheless, all ESRs agreed that they learned things at the school that will be very beneficial in their future careers.

