



# Social Sciences Researcher Development



## Welcome from **Dr Eleanor Pritchard** Social Sciences Division Researcher Development Coordinator

Hi and welcome to the introduction to Social Sciences Researcher Development! We're really glad you've joined us as a doctoral student and are looking forward to getting to know you through some of the training programmes we offer.

The Social Sciences Division is an umbrella structure, which includes 17 departments and centres. As a doctoral student, you now belong to a community of some 2,000 researchers, three quarters of whom are doctoral students, and one quarter of whom are early career researchers.

My name is Dr Eleanor Pritchard, and I'm the Social Sciences Division Researcher Development Coordinator. I'm responsible for the programme which delivers results-oriented transferable skills training and development opportunities to all social sciences doctoral students and early career researchers. This programme supplements the discipline specific training provided by your department, and knits together with training provided by the central university services: the libraries, IT Learning Centre, Language Centre and Careers Service.

In this brief chat, I'm going to:

- 1) give you an overview of the programme we deliver,
- 2) highlight a few things from our Michaelmas term card, and
- 3) give you three action-steps at the end to get involved in the Divisional Community!

You'll need to make a note of these, so please grab a pen and paper, or have your preferred note-taking mechanism to hand.

Before we go any further, a quick aside on Oxford terminology: the terms are known by names, rather than by seasonal descriptions or semester numbers. The first term, that's just starting now is Michaelmas tem, the spring term is 'Hilary' and the early summer term is 'Trinity'.

A term programme, whether for lectures, seminars or training, is referred to as a 'term card' – until relatively recently A4 card print outs of these were pinned on departmental and college noticeboards for students to consult, but of course now it's all handled electronically.

Let's have a look at key themes and highlights on the term card.

As I've already mentioned, we focus on transferable skills training, and courses where it's enriching for the participants to be in multi-disciplinary groups, and this is grouped around several themes.



## Social Sciences Researcher Development

### Writing and Communication Skills

Written communication is a fundamental skill for doctoral student, and often a concern for many. Every term, we offer a range of opportunities help you develop your skills in different types of writing. For academic writing, we focus in particular on writing methodology chapters, writing for publication, and transforming a thesis into a book or book chapters. We have an academic writing group which meets weekly for a half-day session during term time to do writing in community.

Looking at communicating with more general audiences: we're particularly pleased this term to have been able to secure a booking with our excellent podcasting trainers. If you've got an idea that you'd like to think about working into a podcast, this might be a really exciting way for you to start thinking about early stage public engagement with your work!

And if the idea of public speaking makes you break out in a sweat, or fills your stomach with butterflies, we also have presentation skills courses with an outstanding trainer who comes from an acting background and has worked with academics for many many years and is really gifted at helping academics find their literal and metaphorical presentation voice.

### Wellbeing

The Division is committed to supporting researcher well-being, and this takes a number of forms. We have a strong relationship with the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, which offers research-led teaching tailored for researchers. Each term we run short introductory 'taster' sessions for people who want to explore the technique, and every other term, we offer a full 8-week intensive programme for those who want to dig deeper. If you haven't done so already, I recommend investigating mindfulness, as many researchers find it a helpful technique for managing a lively academic mind, as they learn to really focus on being present with the task, place, or people in front of them. I know many of our students found it particularly helpful after the lockdown from March, as a way of creating a bit of mental breathing space when it wasn't possible to get outside as much as we like.

For researchers working with traumatized populations, or on traumatic research topics, we offer a sector-leading Vicarious Trauma programme. It was developed here in the university by a specialist trauma counsellor and teaches highly effective tools and techniques to help researchers better protect themselves against the effects of transmitted trauma. The course has now been running for around five years and is well-established and respected within the academic community. If it might be of help to you, please do check it out; the ideal time to complete the training is usually just before you do your empirical work, but it can also be very effective at other stages.

### Teaching

If you're interested in teaching while you're here, it's a requirement of the university that before teaching at Oxford, regardless of prior experience, that you complete an Oxford introductory course. In most terms, we offer a Preparation for Learning and Teaching at Oxford course for researchers whose departments do not offer an Introduction to Learning and Teaching at Oxford.

This term, because the opportunities for which the PLTO prepares researchers aren't available, this course is suspended but we fully anticipate it being back on the term card in Hilary (that's term 2) so, if you're interested, keep an eye open for it then.



# Social Sciences Researcher Development

We're also committed to creating opportunities for researchers to develop specific teaching skills further and this term we're excited to be running a new 3-part work-shop based course, for researchers who've already completed the preparation to learning and teaching course, to learn how to design and deliver a lecture! Interest in this is so high, we anticipate it becoming a regular feature on our term card, so again, if it's of interest, keep an eye open in future terms!

## Fieldwork

Our courses on fieldwork are suspended for this term, because the issues researchers are facing are practical rather than conceptual in nature, and there is so much variation in local circumstances that we cannot constructively contribute to training in this area at this time.

However, as soon as the situation has stabilized sufficiently, we have a solid core of fieldwork courses which run all the way through from planning your field work safety in the field, through troubleshooting research approaches while in the field. And then dealing with the post-fieldwork reintegration to Oxford and writing-up life afterwards. So, if fieldwork's on the cards for you, and it is for very many of our students, then please know, although there's nothing on the term card, this term, we've got you covered and by the time you get there, it should all be running again.

Now I've talked about what we provide for you, I'd like to note that we in Researcher Development are committed to supporting student-led initiatives. So, when you've had a chance to look around, if it feels to you that there's a gap, and you'd like to start a group, you're extremely welcome to contact me to discuss. Please find my email address on this webpage.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, unusual in format as this term may be to a doctoral study programme, what is steadfast is Division's pleasure in welcoming you and our anticipation of working with you over the course of your doctorate, to support your development as a researcher, in the directions that matter most to you. Every doctoral researcher and every research project is unique, and Oxford's decentralized approach to doctoral training enables you to put together a really bespoke programme that perfectly suits you.

Thank you very much for listening and I look forward to catching up with you online or face to face sometime soon.

## Calls to Action

1. Attend the welcome panel discussion on Thursday 8th October at 4pm UK time to hear from current students and ask any questions you've got floating around.
2. Make sure that you've booked yourself on to a Get Your DPhil off to a Flying Start session. We'll look at setting up a project management system for your doctorate, think about establishing a good working relationship with your supervisors, and discuss any training or networking queries you may have.
3. Make sure you open any emails you receive from Researcher Development, to keep up to date with all the latest news, events and opportunities!

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