

# ECR News

Issue 2 | November 2009

## Welcome!

With the beginning of the academic year, a number of early career researchers (ECRs) will be starting new chapters in their careers at Southampton. The editors extend a warm welcome to all new research staff at the University and also welcome our new VC, Professor Don Nutbeam.

*ECR News* comes out several times a year and seeks to reach everybody who is primarily employed on a contract to carry out research. The team of ECRs who edit the newsletter aims to publicise post-doc activities and professional development opportunities for ECRs and to encourage ECRs to see themselves as a community within the University.

This issue showcases the work of a group of ECRs at the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research who applied for funding to organise training courses that have already helped 60 fellow researchers. We also hear about mentoring schemes and welcome events around the University.

On a personal note, we are delighted to welcome Heather Thomson from School of Medicine to the editorial team. *ECR News* now has one editor from each of the University's three Faculties.

We are also looking for photographers to visit ECR events and take photographs around the University. Please contact one of the editors if you are a budding photographer or would like to lend a hand.

**Catherine Baker and Julie Reeves**

## What can my mentor do for me?

Mentors can be a valuable source of career guidance and advice for ECRs, especially for those that are just starting out. Several Schools have set up programmes to connect ECRs and mentors.

The mentor programme in the School of Medicine (SoM) was established in 2005. Currently there are over 30 members of staff ranging from senior post-docs through lecturers to senior academic staff who are available as mentors. As well as the chance to have a long-term mentor, the scheme provides peer and one-stop mentoring. In the future, new post-docs will be assigned an introductory mentor to guide them through the process. For further information, go to <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/medicine/postdoc/> or contact [resmed@soton.ac.uk](mailto:resmed@soton.ac.uk).



The mentor programme in the School of Engineering Sciences (SES) is well-organized and supported by the Roberts Skills Enhancement Fund. It is a voluntary programme in which ECRs who apply can choose from a number of mentors in SES, and meetings occur every month or two. There are periodic reviews of the programme by both ECRs and mentors. The programme also includes peer support groups, career development talks and workshops, and mentor training. The mentor programme in Chemistry is small and associated with the large programme in SES.

SES have starter packs for other Schools who are interested in starting their own mentor programme, and they also welcome ECRs from other Schools who wish to have a mentor from SES; contact Professor Philippa Reed at [p.a.reed@soton.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.reed@soton.ac.uk).

The mentor programme in Mathematics is very informal. All ECRs are assigned mentors, nominally the PI of the grant for which the ECR is hired, and the ECR must agree to the choice of mentor. There are no required meetings with or evaluation/guidance of the ECR and there is no evaluation of the mentor by the ECR. The programme is currently under review.

Everyone finds a mentor useful at some point in their career; if you do not have a mentor currently or are in a School without a formal scheme, you could raise the matter with your PI or approach someone yourself.

# ISVR idea helps 80 ECRs



Twelve months after a team of post-doctoral researchers raised the need for more technical training during an ECR networking session at the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research (ISVR), their successful funding application will have helped 80 researchers from 14 Schools to learn more about the technical computing language MATLAB.

“After the networking session, three ECRs championed the idea at a Research Training Committee meeting,” said Dr Rachel van Besouw, the ISVR’s post-doctoral representative. “We surveyed ISVR researchers’ training needs and drafted an application to the Roberts Skills Enhancement Fund. We got the go-ahead in March after discussing the

project with LATEU and the Associate Dean of our Faculty. Since then, we have organised three courses with an instructor from MathWorks, the developers of MATLAB.”

The popular courses have more than just technical benefits, according to Dr Chris Powles, an ECR who presented the case for training to ISVR alongside Dr Emery Ku and Dr Timos Papadopoulos. “A group of people learning together in a friendly environment produces a sense of camaraderie,” said Chris. “People help each other out and get chatting in coffee breaks. You soon find yourself interacting with people from a diverse range of research backgrounds.”



“Our course evaluation surveys found that many different Schools use research tools such as MATLAB,” said Rachel, “so they are of common interest to many staff across the University.”

However, there is still a need for interdisciplinary training in other packages. Emery said, “As far as we are aware, there is no central source for courses on research-related software, although our course feedback identified a strong demand for further instruction on packages such as Simulink, COMSOL, LaTeX, Fortran and SPSS.”

Planning the project has also helped the ISVR team members develop their own skills. “It has been great to work on a team with other ECRs, especially because work on research projects can be very lonely,” said Dr Katrine Rogers, who joined the team in March. “Regular events or seminars with tea and cakes might encourage more ECRs to meet and collaborate.” Katrine added, “The tea and cakes part is crucial.”

For ECRs in other Schools who would like specific training, Chris said, the message is clear: “ECRs need to make themselves heard. Make sure you are represented at School Board and lobby everyone with other ECRs in your School. Find out what funding is available for training—can you organise it yourself? and measure the demand (we used an online questionnaire). It will be harder for your School to ignore a strong case backed up by numbers. And remember—you don’t get if you don’t ask.”



## Last chance to attend

The final sessions of MathWorks’ popular MATLAB course for intermediate users will take place on 14 and 15 December.

The course, “Employing MATLAB for Interdisciplinary Co-Operation,” will cover: programming for correctness; structuring data and code; classes and objects; visualising and exporting data; GUI design.

To attend, please complete the survey at <http://bit.ly/1j7bbU> before 20 November. The organisers will contact the successful applicants by 27 November and set up a reserve list for each School.

# Welcome to Humanities

Two welcome events for new research staff and students started the academic year at the School of Humanities. A welcome lunch and an evening reception encouraged new staff and students to chat with each other about their research interests and current projects and also helped them to get to know existing members of the School.

“The events were especially important for our new early career researchers,” said Dr Eleanor Quince, the School’s Postgraduate Research Coordinator. “They gave them a chance to find out about our seminar series, training events and research groups and, most importantly, to start getting involved.



## Induction for future leaders

The Staff Development Unit has organised its first two-day induction for new University staff at Grades 4 and 5 who are interested in taking up a leadership role — or might be in one already.

The induction on 30 November and 1 December is the initial session of the Preparing for Leadership programme. For further details and an application form, please contact [sdu@soton.ac.uk](mailto:sdu@soton.ac.uk)

## CROS survey results

A national survey of research staff, the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), is ready to report back after Southampton researchers contributed with one of the highest response rates in the country.

The Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) asked researchers about their working conditions, career aspirations and skills development opportunities. A briefing on 18 November at 1 pm (Building 5, Lecture Theatre 2015) will explain the results.

## Trainers needed

What do you wish you’d known about networking when you were a PhD student? Could the next generation of researchers benefit from your expertise with qualitative data analysis software?

The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit (LATEU) would

like to hear from early-career researchers who feel that they could pass on their expertise by designing and delivering a networking course or a NVivo training package for PhD researchers. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Dr Julie Reeves at [j.d.reeves@soton.ac.uk](mailto:j.d.reeves@soton.ac.uk) by 28 November.

## Spectra Roadshow 2010

Does your research involve spectral analysis?

We are looking for postgrads and post-docs working in this broad area to put together exciting, interactive exhibits to engage the public on a touring roadshow in 2010. Training, help and funding is available. The Spectra roadshow will go to at least six venues and finish at the high-profile Cheltenham Science Festival in June 2010. Interested in taking part? Send a short email for further info to [spectra@soton.ac.uk](mailto:spectra@soton.ac.uk)

# Networking for FESM

Find out whether post-docs in other Schools are working on similar problems — and maybe even whether another department might be looking to hire someone just like you.

A networking session for all ECRs in the Faculty of Engineering, Science, and Mathematics (FESM) will take place between 2-4 pm on 11 November in building 46 (Physics), room 5081. ECRs from each department will give short presentations during the first half hour, leading to smaller informal discussions.

To attend, and to enable us to provide plenty of tea, coffee and cakes, please sign up at <http://bit.ly/xwZoM>. Please contact Katrine Rogers at [ksr@soton.ac.uk](mailto:ksr@soton.ac.uk) with any questions.

## Briefly

### Medical conference

**The sixth annual School of Medicine (SoM) Post Doctoral Association Conference will take place on 11 December at Southampton General Hospital.**

The guest speaker will be Professor Russell Foster BSc PhD RFS, Professor of Circadian Neuroscience, University of Oxford. All postgraduate students, post-docs and staff within SoM are welcome. Register now to attend at [resmed@soton.ac.uk](mailto:resmed@soton.ac.uk)

### Outreach training

**A one-day course on outreach and public engagement skills for post-doctoral researchers from any discipline will run on 23 November.**

This course will enable you to develop key skills in this exciting, enjoyable and expanding field. Use GradBook to book a place by visiting <https://www.gradbook.soton.ac.uk/>

### Get in touch

If you would like to help or if you have any articles for the news team, please contact Catherine Baker ([c.baker@soton.ac.uk](mailto:c.baker@soton.ac.uk)), Wynn Ho ([wynn.ho@soton.ac.uk](mailto:wynn.ho@soton.ac.uk)), or Heather Thomson ([h.thomson@soton.ac.uk](mailto:h.thomson@soton.ac.uk)). We would also like to hear from anyone who is interested in joining the *ECR News* team as a photographer.

## Research spotlight

Dr Cheryl Metcalf

Roberts Fellow (Life Sciences Interface)

**My research is based at the Life Sciences Interface and is influenced primarily by applying engineering principles to assessing impairment, particularly in the upper limb.**

At the moment I work across three projects; assessing the movements associated with hand function, characterising the parameters of reaching to inform development of a Functional Electrical Stimulation device for hand opening in stroke patient rehabilitation and developing a way of measuring the pressure distribution at the sock/stump interface in lower limb amputees.

**What is a Roberts Fellowship?**

A Roberts Fellowship is a fixed-term research position at the end of which you are granted a permanent academic position within the University. The fellowship provides me with the opportunity to focus on my own research. I have spent the past year consistently writing grants, but I also like to be involved in the research— this is what motivates me and provides such a rich resource for cultivating new ideas.

**What advantages does being based at the University of Southampton have for your research?**

Being based in Southampton is interesting, particularly for the culture in the University towards cross-disciplinary research. My PhD research was sponsored by the Life Sciences Interfaces Forum, based in



the School of Electronics and Computer Sciences (ECS) and the School of Health Sciences (SHS). I thrive on the ideas and versatility that the University promotes and the way it manages and supports multidisciplinary research.

**Do you have a mentor, and if so how has this helped your career?**

I work closely with ECS, particularly the Electronic Systems and Devices Group, led by Professor Neil White. Neil is also my mentor and has provided me with a consistent level of support over the past few years. He highlights opportunities for ways our Schools can work together and has involved me in supervising students in ECS working in areas related to my own research. His support has proved invaluable in maintaining collaborative links between ECS and SHS.