



## **Case Study Strand A: Research Culture and Community – Example of PGR placement project – Bitesize PhD**

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### **Action Taken**

Bitesize PhD has been supported through the Courage Project as part of the Strand A Research Culture and Community PGR Placements. This area of the Courage project focuses on PGR leadership in the development of research culture and research communities to reduce the common feeling of loneliness and isolation.

Bitesize PhD is a lunchtime seminar series organised by PGRs, for PGRs. The seminars are run by PGRs from the Faculty of Medicine and Health, across two schools (Medicine and Health Sciences) and with involvement beyond the faculty from PGRs in Pharmacy and Science schools.

The seminars take place on a monthly basis. They begin with pizza and networking and then one or two PGRs will present their research to their peers. Research can be presented at any stage of the process. Due to the peer-to-peer nature of the seminar series, Bitesize PhD is a supportive, informal, constructive and non-competitive environment.

Over the duration of the Courage Project, there have been 7 lunchtime seminars and 14 PGRs presenting their research progress. A vast range of topics have been covered in the seminar series, reflecting the diversity of the PGR topic areas across the Faculties of Medicine and Health, Science and Pharmacy. The topics have included, influenza infection, prostate cancer, sedentary behaviour and physical activity in adolescents and children, combating metabolic diseases, infections and stem cells, and health promotion applications.

## **Key impacts and outcomes**

The feedback from PGRs comes from the speakers, from people who have attended these seminars and from staff in the faculty, who highlight the benefits of having a PGR-led lunchtime seminar series:

Feedback from a speaker:

*“The Bitesize seminar was extremely useful. I was able to get hands-on experience in presenting my work, and it increased my confidence in answering questions related to the presentation and my project. Furthermore, it was a great opportunity to ask for immediate feedback on the clarity of the presentation, which is something that cannot do after a presentation at a conference.”*

Feedback from a speaker:

*“Taking part as a speaker for the Bitesize PhD seminar series was a great experience that in my opinion, every PhD student would be good to take advantage of. Being on my 1st year and just before my probation review, it helped me practice for the probationary review meeting. I experienced how it feels to receive critique from an audience that it is not totally related to my field.*

*I realised that I was not able enough in explaining some terms related to my project as such, I identified gaps in my knowledge to develop further. It really boosted my confidence and built my resilience as my experience was a great lesson on how I should defend my project and how to respond on feedback – all being part of the academia. I received valuable feedback which helps me to manage similar questions and highlight them every time I give a talk about my research. Last but not least, it helped me expand my network as I got to meet people with similar interests.”*

Feedback from an attendee:

*“I attended four Bitesize during the last year 3 of them for HSC students and one for Med Student all of them were really good and I found it useful for me personally rather than for my PhD as each subject is different.*

*First, you learn how different students from different backgrounds are presenting their research ideas and so you start to think about different styles of presentations. Second, communicating was another thing that was nice and how to communicate and also disseminate your research ideas. Third, students have the chance to practice in front of other PhD student in a friendly environment which can increase their level of confidence to present either at conferences or for their probation.”*

Feedback from faculty staff:

*“I have been incredibly impressed with the commitment and dedication shown by the PGR students in our Faculty, who take part in the Bitesize PhD seminar series. Running and organising these events is not a trivial matter and they have taken real ownership of these events. The seminar series offers real opportunities for our students to develop some of the key skills that they will need for the next step on their career path and it has also begun to establish a community spirit among this group of students.”*

### **Recommendations for setting up a PGR lunchtime seminar series**

- PGR-led seminars can create a supportive and informal environment for PGRs to gain experience in presenting to people outside of their research areas. Staff are welcome to attend but the priority remains that the seminars are led by and primarily for PGRs.
- A seminar series that is across disciplines can create a sense of a community and may reduce a sense of loneliness and isolation that is common during PGR studies.
- Raise the profile of the seminar series with supervisors so that they can encourage their PGRs to attend and present.
- Identifying the key methods for communication to raise awareness and advertise will support the attendance of the seminars.
- PGRs may be able to gain Personal and Professional Development accreditation for presenting and organising the seminars, given the skills that are gained.
- Having support, including financial support, from the institution / faculty / doctoral college is important for the longevity and sustainability of the seminar series. This should not be difficult to ascertain as there is a clear benefit to supporting PGR-led initiatives to develop research culture and community.