



Case Study Strand A: Research Culture and Community PGR Placement – Norwich Bioscience Institutes

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Strand A of the Courage Project focused on research culture and community across each of the four faculties at UEA, across the Norwich Bioscience Institutes and at the University of Suffolk. A PGR (or multiple PGRs) was employed as paid placement holders through the project to understand and address research culture and community in their respective faculties. The projects were PGR-led and responsive to the specific needs of PGRs within each of the respective general discipline areas.

This was a three month full-time paid placement, focused at the Norwich Bioscience Institutes, overarching the four research institutes. The placement was PGR-led and was responsive to the PGR environment across the institutes, which is made up of multiple research groups that will rarely have opportunity to develop a community across the institutes.

Action Taken

The placement involved developing a survey to map the attitudes towards research culture and community at the institutes and launching an event series aimed at building community through the sharing of mutual skills.

Research culture and community survey

The survey included the following areas: demographics, mapping personal wellbeing, measuring isolation and loneliness, sense of belonging and attitudes towards communities.

There were 44 participants who completed the survey, split across the four research institutes at the Norwich Bioscience Institutes. The findings about research communities were generally positive. However, some key areas of difference were identified. In general, PGRs felt a greater sense of belonging and sense of community amongst their own research institute and Norwich Bioscience Institutes than the broader University of East Anglia. However, there were differences in the sense of belonging and community depending on whether the PGR was a UK, EU or Non-EU citizen, with EU and Non-EU citizens reporting lower sense of belonging and community.

The Bioinformatics Knowledge Exchange (BIKE)

It is a workshop/seminar series, where experts are invited from within the institute to demonstrate certain computational tools, programming languages that could be useful in day-to-day work. The

skills that were to be shared at the workshop were decided upon through consultation with PGRs and PGRs from across the institutes were invited to attend.

Key Impacts and outcomes

This research placement provided a key opportunity to understand the experience of PGRs across research institutes. The key recommendations arising from this PGR placement were focused around:

- Further attention to research institute specific communities and focus on more NBI-wide opportunities. The surveyed attitudes towards the research institute and NBI communities were positive but could be further monitored in the future, should they change or get the worse.
- Understand why the EU and non-EU PGRs experience the communities as less open and less strong, and finding ways that could make them potentially more welcoming and inclusive.
- While it is already ongoing important work, the placement also highlighted the importance of the support services dealing with mental health issues and anxiety.

This placement was in a particularly unique position, positioned across all four research institutes. Generally, institute specific events and training takes place and there is rarely an opportunity for PGRs (and staff) from across institutes to interact. This placement provided that opportunity, something that was well received and deserves further investment in the future to break down the barriers to community development that often occur.