Welcome to a special anniversary edition of our Graduate School Bulletin. This is the tenth edition of this Bulletin and it comes as we are drawing to the end of our fifth anniversary year.

I can’t believe how time has flown by since the Graduate School was formally launched. Looking back at previous editions of the Bulletin, however, I can clearly see how much has been achieved over the past five years in terms of enhancing the doctoral research experience of our students.

As this is a special anniversary edition, we have got back in touch with our previous PhD Researcher of the Year winners to find out what they are doing now. You can read about their experiences in the pages that follow. You can also read about the shortlisted finalists for this year’s award; the winner will be announced at the Doctoral Research Conference on 20 June. As another way of marking the end of this anniversary year, the conference will open with a plenary speaker, and end with a Graduate School Challenge Quiz, pitting a team of doctoral students against a team of staff. The plenary speaker, Dr Tom Pey who graduated from Reading in 2008, will be talking about what led him to take up PhD study, the challenges he encountered, and what he is doing now. It should be an inspiring talk.

Since the last edition of this Bulletin, we have also held another very successful annual Fairbrother Lecture, the fourth to date. Ruth Barnes, from the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, attracted a large audience to listen to her talk about food poisoning and fresh produce. It was a fascinating talk, which included a number of useful tips on how to avoid food poisoning. As was the case last year, the lecture was also accompanied by a showcase of other PhD projects demonstrating the excellence and relevance of our doctoral research. You can read more about the event, and other interesting features, in the pages that follow.

Professor Dianne Berry, Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies
PhD PARENTS

PhD Parents at the University of Reading is a new Facebook group for researchers who are managing their PhD alongside parenting.

The group is open to those who have children or other live-in dependants, or are pregnant. This is a student-to-student group for talking with other doctoral researcher parents, exchanging stories, seeking advice or comparing notes about undertaking the PhD process as a parent and is open to full-time / part-time / PhD by distance Reading doctoral researchers of any gender in any subject area. The group already has 100 members, so if you are a PhD parent, or due to become one, then why not join. Join at www.facebook.com/groups/PhDParentsUoR

ENERGY INDUSTRY’S BRIGHTEST TALENT

Marek Kubik, a previous ‘A Professional Doctorate… but what comes next?’ Bulletin contributor, graduated from the University in the summer of 2014 with an Engineering Doctorate (EngD) from the Technologies for Sustainable Built Environments (TSBE) Centre. His doctoral studies were sponsored by AES, a Fortune 200 global power company that provides affordable, sustainable energy to 17 countries.

In March, Marek was identified as one of the biggest talents in the energy sector by the 2017 Forbes 30 Under 30 people to watch in the European energy industry. The Forbes list contains 300 of the brightest young entrepreneurs, innovators and game changers in Europe, across 10 industries.

Forbes recognised Marek for his work on energy storage and how this can address the intermittent nature of renewable power.

‘I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Reading researching the challenges of renewable intermittency.’

Marek was instrumental in the development of the UK’s largest and first fully commercial storage facility at Kilroot Power Station in Northern Ireland, which opened in January 2016. Marek currently leads the UK client solutions team for AES Energy Storage, a subsidiary of the AES Corporation and had paid tribute to the focus on innovation that was instilled in him during his doctoral studies:

‘I am deeply honoured to have been chosen for the list. The Engineering Doctorate placed a strong emphasis on taking groundbreaking, critical research and applying it in a real-world context. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Reading researching the challenges of renewable intermittency, and it was a pleasure to work both with leading academics and industry to advance our collective understanding of these issues. The value of this has been clear as I went on to be employed by my industrial sponsor, AES, to implement some of the solutions to these challenges and make a real contribution to creating a clean, unbreakable grid.’
When healthy foods go wrong: food poisoning and fresh produce.

This year, PhD researcher Ruth Barnes from the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, delivered the Graduate School’s annual Fairbrother Public Lecture in the Henley Business School. The talk was entitled ‘When healthy foods go wrong: food poisoning and fresh produce’ and with the help of some entertaining slides, Ruth outlined how her doctoral research was investigating how to reduce bad bacteria on fresh produce; making our food safer, while still maintaining its taste and appearance.

Ruth explained that many people don’t associate fresh and healthy foods, such as salad and soft fruit, with any food poisoning risk. However, several interesting examples in the lecture illustrated that this is certainly not the case. As the foods Ruth works on are usually eaten raw or with little processing, it can be trickier to reduce risk, so Ruth’s research focuses on the use of different acid washes to destroy the bacteria.

After her talk, Ruth fielded numerous questions on different aspects of food hygiene and food poisoning, providing the audience with practical information on how to minimise risk in relation to preparing and eating fresh produce.

Ruth’s PhD is funded by the BBSRC and AgriCoat NatureSeal and is supervised by Dr Andreas Karatzas at Reading and Professor Roberto La Ragione from the University of Surrey. She has recently completed an internship at the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology working on guidance notes on UK food security.

In addition to the lecture, there was a display of the doctoral research undertaken by four other outstanding Reading PhD researchers: Ester Lo Biundo (History); Mick Stringer (Classics); Owen Humphreys (Archaeology) and Kieran Hunt (Meteorology). This gave the lecture audience the chance to find out more about the variety of doctoral research taking place at Reading.

The Fairbrother Lecture was itself established to bring to wider attention the quality and scope of postgraduate research taking place at Reading. The lecture is named after Jack Fairbrother, who was the University’s first PhD graduate in 1929. Information regarding the 2018 Fairbrother Lecture will be available in the next academic year.

You can watch the Fairbrother Lecture at www.youtube.com/user/UniofReading
NEWS

BARRIERS THAT MUSLIM SCHOLARS FACE

Dr Nadya Ali, who graduated from Reading with a PhD in Politics in 2015, has recently published a thought-provoking article in the Times Higher Education (THE) magazine entitled 'How can the academy ease the barriers that Muslim scholars face?' A former Fairbrother Public Lecture speaker, she is now a lecturer in the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex.

Nadya’s article addresses a topical subject, the everyday experiences of Muslim passengers travelling around the world and their experience (hostile questioning and racial abuse) at passport / border controls. She highlights the knock on effect to Muslim academics’ ability to attend international conferences and wonders if event organisers should consider the location of conferences in the early event planning. She also raises the concerns of Muslim academics teaching critical approaches to terrorism, who may be afraid that their words or teaching materials may be taken out of context; especially when new legislation requires academics to report any students who they deem to be at risk of radicalisation.

You can read the full article at timeshighereducation.com/comment/how-can-academy-ease-barriers-muslim-scholars-face

WORKING THE WALBROOK

Earlier this year Owen Humphreys, a third year doctoral researcher co-supervised by the Museum of London and the University of Reading, curated a display entitled ‘Working the Walbrook’ at the Museum of London. This display, which took place between 12 January-26 March, contained tools and other everyday objects to examine what life was like for ordinary Roman Britons.

Owen’s doctoral research is to better understand Roman Londoners through the tools excavated from London, most of which come from the Walbrook River; a lost river buried beneath the modern London Streets. This lost river is an important time capsule for archaeologists. In order to raise their homes above the level of the river’s floods Roman Londoners dumped tonnes of rubbish, including tools, on the banks of the stream. 678 tools have been recovered from the course of the Walbrook stream; which comprises a small area of the City of London, between Cannon Street Station and Finsbury Circus.

‘It’s been fantastic to work on a project that brings a major museum and the University together in such a close relationship.

Museum collections can provide amazing data sets for academic work, whilst providing unique places for communicating that research to the public in an engaging way. This display was a great opportunity to work with professional curators, designers and technicians to put together a display that shows off what great results you can get working together.’

You can read more about Owen’s research at museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/roman-rubbish-reveals-lost-londinium
In order to mark the Graduate School’s fifth anniversary, we are delighted to announce that Dr Tom Pey, Chief Executive of the Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC), will deliver a plenary talk at the Doctoral Research Conference on 20 June. Tom started life as an accountant and at an early age rose to senior positions in international industry and banking. At the age of 39 years, he lost his sight and moved into the charity sector where he joined The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association as Director of External Affairs before moving to the RSBC. He self-funded a PhD at Reading in the School of Construction Management and Engineering, entitled ‘The Functionality and Needs of Blind and Partially Sighted People in the UK.’ This research study was supported by a £300k award from The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. He was awarded his PhD in 2008.

**Why did you select Reading?**

I chose Reading because I wanted to work with Dr Geoff Cook, who had considerable expertise in the world of disability, and the University had gained a worldwide reputation for undertaking groundbreaking research. Geoff was (and remains) a brilliant man with a very positive approach. There were also other staff members from various Faculties who challenged and supported my work. It was a fun time packed with lots of learning – and stress!

**Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give a new first year doctoral researcher?**

Be professional and open minded. This is a huge opportunity to learn and grow beyond your chosen topic. It is a big world out there. It needs clever people who can adapt. Take the time to learn these skills.

**What were your biggest challenges during your PhD and how did you overcome them?**

By far my biggest challenge was my inability to see. I overcame this by having a team of people around me who were expert in various aspects of my research and were committed to supporting me to deliver the outcome I set.

**What have you been doing since you were awarded your PhD?**

My passion and my job have given me the opportunity to change how things are done for blind and disabled people. I became the founding President of the European Guide Dog Federation, worked with government on various policy initiatives and laterally co-authored an ITU standard for audio based navigation systems.

**Was there anything you did at Reading that you feel has helped you in your current position?**

Interacting with the wider professional community and staff at Reading has given me the ability to understand the vastness of the challenge facing the UK and the wider world as it moves to meet the needs of a burgeoning disabled population. Just knowing that Reading possessed excellent research credentials has given me the credibility and therefore the confidence to become part of the wider world of people who are committed to making the world a better place for disabled people.

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**What motivated you to undertake a PhD as a mature student?**

I was of the opinion that the prevailing wisdom of the charity sector with regard to adult sight loss was incomplete. My discussions with other blind people reflected my own experience of losing my sight. My PhD interest was around how different services might impact the ability of a blind person to perform everyday tasks.
The Graduate School is pleased to announce the five PhD Researcher of the Year (ROY) finalists for 2017. These students have been selected to represent the five Research Themes: Food, Environment, Health, Prosperity and Resilience, Heritage and Creativity. These outstanding final year doctoral researchers will deliver presentations on their doctoral research and their time at Reading at the Doctoral Research Conference on 20 June 2017.

The conference will also include the very popular Three Minute Thesis Competition, Research Poster Competition and Research Image Competition. This year a new Research Life in Pictures Competition has also been introduced into the conference programme. To mark the Graduate School’s fifth anniversary, the conference will close with a Graduate School Challenge Quiz, pitting a team of doctoral researchers against staff. Who will be victorious…?

Doctoral researchers can book a place at the conference via the Graduate School RRDP booking pages on the RISIS web portal. Attendance at the conference will count towards one of your RRDP annual training requirement.

PhD RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR –

**Rebecca Emerton**  
Environment Research Theme  
School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science  
Title of PhD: Implications of climate variability for global scale flood forecasting and predictability

Floods are the most frequent of natural disasters, affecting more than 90 million people worldwide every year, and the anticipation and forecasting of floods is crucial for flood preparedness. Flood forecasting systems producing forecasts for the entire globe are now becoming operational, and my research aims to find ways to improve these global scale flood forecasts in order to provide earlier warnings of upcoming flood events. One aspect of my PhD explores the use of large scale atmospheric features, such as El Niño, to provide early indicators of flood events across the globe, months to seasons ahead.

‘Keep your eyes open for opportunities to present your work at workshops and conferences as they are fantastic learning and networking experiences.’

**Anna Thomson**  
Food Research Theme  
School of Agriculture, Policy and Development  
Title of PhD: Improving the efficiency of forage legume utilisation in the UK dairy industry

I have studied methods of feeding dairy cattle in the UK, with the aim of improving the sustainability of farming systems by replacing grass with specific legumes (clover or lucerne) in the diet. Growing ryegrass requires a high input of nitrogen fertilizer, which has a large carbon footprint and is expensive, whereas legumes are able to fix their own nitrogen from the atmosphere and also enhance local biodiversity. However, farmers often experience difficulty growing and feeding legumes efficiently, and therefore the aim of my PhD project was to generate knowledge on how to incorporate legumes successfully into their systems.

‘Try and enjoy the challenges your PhD throws at you because it’s not supposed to be easy, and that’s why you’ll feel so proud of it when it’s done.’
Saleh Omairi  
Health Research Theme  
School of Biological Sciences  
Title of PhD: Blood supply is the key determinant to endurance exercise and muscle regeneration  

Two ideas have been central to our understanding concerning the structure and regenerative capacity of skeletal muscle. Firstly, that the size of muscle fibres that support long term exercise could not grow above a certain limit which was set by the diffusion capacity of oxygen. Secondly, that the key determinant in promoting effective muscle regeneration was stem cell number. My research has overturned both these concepts. My work shows that it is possible to generate large muscle fibres that are able to generate a large amount of force whilst enduring longer periods of exercise. My work also demonstrated effective muscle regeneration in the face of a massive reduction in stem cell number.

‘First year students should spend time reading about their topic, discussing plans for their research with their supervisor and developing time management skills.’

Will Davies  
Heritage and Creativity Research Theme  
School of Literature and Language  
Title of PhD: Samuel Beckett and the Second World War  

My PhD thesis uses archival, historical and theoretical approaches to reassess Samuel Beckett’s writing in the context of the Second World War. In bringing these approaches together, this project offers new ways of understanding the role of Beckett’s experience of the Second World War within his writing whilst also working to recover the ‘moment’ of Beckett’s wartime and post-war work. In doing so, the thesis engages more broadly with the still under examined question of Beckett’s relationship to, and use of, history.

‘Building a strong network of people who will encounter similar experiences of PhD life is important for both personal wellbeing and professional development.’

Max Brookman-Byrne  
Prosperity and Resilience Research Theme  
School of Law  
Title of PhD: The international law implications of the use of armed drones  

My research considers the vague and problematic interaction between the use of armed drones by states and international law. I am assessing the overall lawfulness of the use of these weapons systems, as well as looking at how their use may be altering parts of international law, as these issues have big implications for the way states interact with each other. I am particularly concerned with highlighting how international law has been used to promulgate an approach to the use of armed drones that serves to undermine the protections enjoyed by individuals across the globe.

‘I arrived at Reading as an unsure master’s graduate and I will be leaving as a confident and able researcher.’
MARSH HORTICULTURAL SCIENCE AWARD

Oliver Ellingham, a Science SLAM presenter at the Doctoral Research Conference 2015, has been awarded the 2016 Marsh Horticultural Science Award.

This award, which is run in partnership with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), recognises the work of and encourages new postgraduate scientists to develop careers in horticultural science.

Oliver’s PhD research project, ‘Investigating novel DNA regions for increasingly efficient identification of powdery mildews’, aims to develop a reliable method for the identification of the 900 powdery mildew species, 150 of which can already be found in British gardens.

These diagnostic techniques should prove to be a vital tool for limiting the spread of novel plant diseases by plant quarantine, particularly for greater movement in plants and plant products via trade within the UK and from overseas.

The £1000 prize awarded at the Royal Horticultural Society John MacLeod Annual Lecture on 10 November 2016, will enable Ollie to continue to contribute to his research field and participate in related societies and events.

‘I was really happy to win the award and this is a really satisfying end to my PhD and start to what could be a long career in horticultural and agricultural science. The postgraduate environment at Reading is strong and the great campus has offered me numerous sites from which to collect my glorious powdery mildew samples so close to my office and lab space.’

IT’S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

Best European PhD thesis on flavour research

Luke Bell, a former PhD Researcher of the Year 2016 finalist, has won the Giract Prize for the best PhD thesis in Europe on Flavour Research. The aim of his PhD ‘Rocket science: Phytochemical, postharvest, shelf-life and sensory attributes of rocket species’ was to identify chemical indicators in rocket that are important for human health and consumer acceptance. This is the first time a Reading doctoral researcher has won such a prestigious prize which was awarded for the novelty and scientific quality of his thesis. Luke was invited to give a talk on his research at an all-expenses paid trip to the Savory Flavor Conference in Geneva in March 2017 where he formally accepted his award of 5,000 euros.

‘I am honoured and delighted to have my thesis chosen as the winner of the Giract Flavor prize. It was quite a shock when I received the news, but I couldn’t be happier. I really enjoyed doing my PhD at Reading; it was a lot of fun conducting my own research in such a supportive environment, and most days it didn’t seem like work at all. I’m looking forward to carrying on the research started during my PhD, and expanding our understanding of the genetic basis of rocket salad flavor.’

Luke Bell remains at Reading as a co-applicant on a BBSRC-LINK grant (held in partnership with Elsoms Seeds and Bakkavor) which continues his PhD research.
Over the past five years we have seen a huge increase in the number and frequency of training courses available on the Reading Researcher Development Programme (RRDP). Last academic year (2015 / 16) nearly 4000 training places were filled which equated to 193 RRDP training sessions. This is a marked increase from the first year of the programme where 132 training courses were delivered with nearly 3,000 places filled.

The RRDP could not run without the goodwill and help of staff from across the University. Last academic year, 74 members of staff presented one or more courses for us. However, we have two presenters who deliver the greatest number and variety of RRDP sessions for us throughout the academic year – Professor Bob Rastall and Dr Michelle Reid.

Bob Rastall, Professor of Biotechnology, Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, leads a successful research team developing novel functional food ingredients. Bob has been at the University for 24 years this coming autumn term and so far has supervised or co-supervised 56 PhD students at the University and has examined a further 67 in Reading, around the UK and internationally. He regularly delivers ‘Surviving the viva’, ‘Writing a thesis as a collection of papers’, ‘You and your supervisor’ and ’Presentations skills’ for the Graduate School. He also co-presents ‘Confirmation of registration’ and ‘How to write a literature review’ sessions with Dr Michelle Reid.

‘Looking back on my own time as a PhD student, I now realise the value of having an insight into the expectations of supervisors and how an examiner’s mind works before you get it horribly wrong as I frequently did! We all want a successful outcome for all of our PhD students and I am very proud to offer training courses for the Reading Researcher Development Programme to pass on my experience of successful strategies and pitfalls of doing a PhD.’

Michelle Reid was awarded her PhD from Reading in 2005 and has been working at the University for the last 10 years as a Study Adviser. For the RRDP she delivers ‘How to avoid plagiarism’, ‘Overcoming writers block’, ‘Confirmation of registration’ and ‘How to write a literature review’ sessions. On many of these courses she team-teaches with other academics.

‘I teach on the RRDP because it is always inspiring to see how PhD researchers are at the cutting edge of their disciplines and are starting to make a real contribution to knowledge in their areas, even if they don’t quite believe this themselves yet! Doing a PhD is so tied up with a sense of personal identity and worth, so I want to be able to help students gain confidence in their writing and studying, and help demystify the PhD process. I don’t supervise doctoral researchers directly, but as a Study Adviser, I probably see a wider variety of PhD students from more subjects than any other academic and I can provide an objective perspective entirely outside of their PhD process.’

We are very grateful to all staff members who so positively engage with the RRDP and for all that they do to support our students.
The PhD Researcher of the Year Award was launched in 2013 and is presented annually to an outstanding PhD candidate. We thought it would be interesting to see what the previous winners of this award have been up to since winning.

**Dr Katherine Livingstone, 2013 winner**

"I would encourage a first year PhD student to be proactive in seeking opportunities to develop their research skills and their CV."

School of Agriculture, Policy and Development

After I was awarded my PhD in 2013 I was employed at Newcastle University, UK, as a Research Associate on a pan-European personalized nutrition randomized controlled trial. This was a fantastic opportunity as it enabled me to establish collaborations with nutrition researchers across seven European countries, as well as to develop a strong research publication trajectory. In 2015 I was successful in securing a six-month Australian Government Endeavour Research Fellowship. This allowed me to relocate to Deakin University, Australia, where I continued my research in the area of diet and cardiovascular disease. Subsequently, I was also successful in obtaining a highly prestigious and competitive Alfred Deakin Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in November 2015, which I am still on currently.

The award of PhD Researcher of the Year 2013 was a career milestone that enabled me to be successful in securing two internationally competitive fellowships at Deakin University.

I would encourage a first year PhD student to be proactive in seeking opportunities to develop their research skills and their CV. For example, are there opportunities to attend courses/conferences, establish international collaborations or research visits and apply for awards? These will help to build your confidence and expertise and will be pivotal for enabling you to be competitive later in your career.

**Dr Birte Julia Gippert, 2014 winner**

"My advice to first year students is 'Don’t lose your head’. A doctorate is a big mountain but with organisation and structure you can climb it.”

School of Politics, Economics and International Relations

Since the award of my PhD I have been teaching at King’s College London in a Teaching Assistant role; the teaching experience I gained at Reading helped me immensely in this position. This past term I have worked as a Research Associate on a project. These jobs have enabled me to earn money while providing enough time to work on my publications.

My advice to first year students is ‘Don’t lose your head’. A doctorate is a big mountain but with organisation and structure you can climb it. The most important relationship is with your supervisor. Make sure it works. That may mean being specific (in a polite manner) with her or him about the kind of support you need.
School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences

Since submitting my thesis, I have begun work as a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant, in the Department of Meteorology at Reading. I’m working on an EU project called ARISE which is a project aimed at combining many different measurement technologies to construct a new dataset of observations of the whole atmosphere that can be used to improve weather forecasting models. Undertaking a PhD in which I designed my own measurement technology and compared it with a range of other measurement technologies has put me in good stead for this position. Furthermore, during my PhD I developed good collaboration skills which I have been able to put to use with my European ARISE partners.

My advice to new doctoral researchers is be organised. In the first few months of your PhD, your workload can be quite low, but it soon adds up. Poor organisation can cause problems.

School of Leadership, Organisations and Behaviour

I am now a Post-Doctoral Fellow in Entrepreneurship and Ethics at the Department of Leadership, Organisations and Behaviour, Henley Business School. I have recently completed a short-term visiting lecturing role in Business Ethics at the University of Roehampton. My current role involves both teaching and research.

A lot of the knowledge gleaned from RRDP training sessions has come in very handy in my new role. Besides, the network with other doctoral researchers has helped facilitate research collaborations and exchange of ideas on pedagogical methods. Also, the understanding of work-life balance acquired through memberships of different societies on campus has helped formed my attitude towards external engagement with professional and social bodies.

School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences

I was awarded my PhD in July 2016, and since then I have been working as a Clinical Teaching Fellow and a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant, both based at the University of Reading. As part of this, I am involved in lecturing on various aspects of clinical psychology. The remainder of my time is spent developing my research portfolio; this includes writing journal articles, attending conferences, and writing funding applications for exciting new research projects.

My experience at Reading has been fundamental in preparing me for my new positions. Throughout my PhD I was encouraged to develop my teaching skills; starting with small group tutorials and workshops for first and second year undergraduates, building up to postgraduate teaching in my final year. My research development across the PhD also enabled me to develop my knowledge, writing, presentation and analytical skills, all of which are vital in my current research role.

www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/events/gs-phdconference.aspx