On 28th March Division of Brain Sciences held a Retreat for all its members across research, administration and technical support. We didn’t retreat far (only to the South Kensington Campus!) but enjoyed a very productive and inspirational day together. Thanks to funding from the Graduate School, we were able to invite all our 55 PhD students, who were then able to join all the group activities, participate in additional workshops for early career researchers, and discuss plans for cohort building.

After an inspiring talk from the Head of Division, Professor Paul Matthews, reflecting on progress and his hopes for the future and the day, we split into mixed groups for a session entitled “Shaping the Divisional environment, culture and practices.” Groups had neuro-inspired fantasy football team names courtesy of Dr Ed Roberts (co-Chair of the Early Career Committee in the Department of Medicine); my particular favourite was Schwannsy City. Topics for discussion ranged from how we can strengthen the training environment for early career researchers, improve internal communication, or magnifying the public profile, through to suggestions for new Master’s modules, ideas for public engagement activities or hearing different perspectives of the grant-writing/submitting process and how it might be more effective. The value of mixing people from a range of backgrounds and experience was reflected in the original and interesting ideas that were evident in the plenary feedback session, facilitated by Steve Rathborne and Fiona Richmond from the Learning and Development Centre.

A “Fostering research interactions” session followed, with mixed groups from first year PhD students to Professor pooling their varied research backgrounds and expertise to come up with ideas for research collaborations. While the PIs took these ideas further in a follow-up session, PhD students and postdocs were treated to a “Story of a Paper/getting published” workshop by the Head of Division and the Editor of Nature Communications.

The coffee, tea and lunch breaks were a good opportunity to get to know one another, meet new people, and browse the group posters to find out more about the range of activities & expertise in the division and spot opportunities for collaboration.

After a final round-up of all the ideas emerging from the day, we heard an inspiring talk by Mike Mason (successful entrepreneur and Imperial Engineering alumnus) who reminded us that we are all the authors of our own story and encouraged us to think big and be bold. The day ended with an evening reception where we all had a chance to socialise and get to know one another better.

The day can be summed up in these reflections from the co-Chairs of the Early Career Committee: “The Divisional Retreat was a unique opportunity for PhD students to interact with members of the division from all levels on an informal basis and gain an understanding of how the division functions. The dedicated session on academic publishing was particularly useful as it aimed to demystify the author-editor relationship and provide advice on all aspects of the publishing process. I hope this event has been of real benefit to PhD students and assured them that they are a vital part of the division.” Ed Roberts

“I found the Division Retreat invigorating and incredibly useful; I was amazed by the range of insights drawn from Professors to PhDs working together. In particular, it was great to meet so many people and put names to faces. The Story of a Paper session was a highlight as it was incredibly useful to be able to ask a senior editor about the process of academic publishing.” Amy Birch

[photos on next page]
Lunch and tea breaks were a good opportunity for PhD students to get to know other members of the division.

PhD studentsRegistering

Listening to a talk

Story of a Paper/Getting Published session