Global Skills for Doctoral Researchers

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Imperial College Graduate Schools http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/graduateschools and International Office http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/international

Project aims

To help PhD students develop the global skills that employers most want including: interpersonal skills, commercial awareness and leadership, thus enhancing their readiness for international careers.

To increase understanding of employability and entrepreneurship and their value to doctoral students in an international context.

Programmes change attitudes

Imperial College Graduate Schools and the International Office have adapted their award winning Research Skills Development Course to run in Singapore and Hong Kong and have added a placement programme.

Early-stage doctoral students have attended from Imperial College London, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), National University of Singapore (NUS), Hong Kong University (HKU) and Tsinghua University, Beijing. At the end of the courses, students were more likely to get involved with international activities in the future (Graph 1).

Courses increase global skills

The five-day course allowed participants to develop their research skills while enhancing their cultural awareness, networking, team working, entrepreneurship and interest in international collaboration. The careers insight evenings were led by alumni and guest speakers from leading international organisations. This enabled the participating students to interact with PhD graduates with successful careers in Asia in academia, industry and the public sector.

Outcomes

The courses change attitudes, develop global skills, improve cultural understanding and increase the likelihood that students will participate in international collaborations and spend time abroad.

Future

Building on our success we are designing a course to develop the global skills of late-stage doctoral students from Imperial College London and Tsinghua University in Beijing. Supported by the British Council and funded by the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI2), the project aims to enhance students’ employability and entrepreneurship in a global context, focusing on the UK and China. It includes research into the perceptions of PhD students of employability and entrepreneurship and the skills required. It also investigates their views concerning the value of the PhD for their future careers.

Early results indicate a difference in the perceptions of British and Chinese researchers. These include the relationship between entrepreneurship and academic research, attitudes to risk and the importance of social networks. Ongoing analysis will enable us to improve course provision. This will better equip participants with global skills, creating an optimum foundation for international careers and entrepreneurship.

The project’s findings will increase understanding of the situation of doctoral researchers as they negotiate career transitions in an increasingly competitive labour market.

If you would like more information on our collaborations and courses please contact us at the above address.

Government agenda

There is an increased demand for researchers with high level skills. In addition to the skills highlighted by the Roberts report and Joint Skills Statement, the Government is calling for impact and entrepreneurial skills from postgraduates.

Global skills

Problem solving, networking, communication and interpersonal skills, combined with an entrepreneurial attitude, and advanced research and technical abilities enable PhD graduates to work effectively across borders, respecting local values.

International collaboration has become central to academic research and progress in academic careers demands a very high level of “international mobility”. A recent Association of Graduate Recruiters survey showed 44.3% of employers would like applicants to be willing to relocate.

However, whilst Britain is a popular destination for international students (there has recently been a 50% increase in full time international PhD students in the UK), British students are less keen to go abroad thus limiting their career opportunities. For example, Erasmus data show 62% fewer UK students study abroad compared to German students.

Resources


Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive: “It allowed us to play and work with people from other nations which broadened our networking”, “… I am more open-minded and collaborative”, “Excellent for networking, making friends, having a good time and practicing team work…”

Graph 1. Asian Summer Schools

Students Express Increased Interest and More Likely Participation

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