

Developing Research Proposals A Workshop for PhD Students



"Jonas Ludvigsson wrote nine applications before finally getting a grant to finance his first laboratory study. "That was a tough time," recalls the paediatrics postdoc at Örebro University Hospital in Sweden. Most students and postdocs, like Ludvigsson, learn grantsmanship through trial and error. But learning the ropes alone is hardly a recipe for instant success."

From "*A Winning Proposal*", Karen Kreeger, *Nature* **426** 102 (2003)

"It's possible to function quite well as a postdoc or grad student while giving little thought to your future. Writing a research plan casts your gaze forward and prompts you to begin planning for when you have your own laboratory."

Jim Austin, *Science nextwave*, June 2002

<http://nextwave.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/2002/07/23/2>

Although the ability to write successful grant applications is the lifeblood of an academic career – and, indeed, is required in many research environments outside academia – developing this skill does not generally form part of the training programme of a postgraduate or a postdoctoral researcher. Some might argue that this is not surprising because it's simply not possible to be trained formally in the art of grant writing: experience and practice are vital ingredients. While these are certainly important factors, it is nevertheless clear that there are some fundamental rules one needs to follow in preparing a research proposal. The purpose of the *Developing Research Proposals* workshop is to highlight these rules and, importantly, to give *you* the opportunity to collaborate with your peers in the development of a brief (1 page) research proposal.

The two hour session (14:00 – 16:00, Tuesday 23rd August) will be led by Philip Moriarty, Physics & Astronomy, University of Nottingham. Following a 20 minute discussion of some 'do's and 'don't's in research proposal preparation[†], you will be assigned a proposal team in which to work. (There will be ~ 6 students per team and we will strive to put together teams that have a reasonable interdisciplinary balance). During the remainder of the session you will be expected first to discuss your research area/PhD with your peers and then, as part of a group discussion, to put forward ideas for novel and exciting research projects. It is therefore worthwhile spending some time before the school considering ideas for new research (which may – but need not necessarily be – related to your PhD project). A proposal *pro forma* is on the following page. It is important to note that as the form is only one A4 page in length, your writing must be clear and concise (*and grammatically correct!*). (A minimum font size of 10 is required). Your budget for the project is £500K. During the *Developing Research Proposals* session you will be given some indicative costings for staff, consumables, and pieces of equipment.

Your proposal should be submitted by 14:00 on Friday 26th of August. There is a cash award of **£500** to the team who produces the best proposal. (The prize has been provided through the generous sponsorship of the *Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils* (CCLRC)). The proposals will be peer-reviewed (in the week following the summer school) both by other PhD students who have attended the event and by members of the summer school organising committee. Copies of the form to be used for refereeing the proposals will be handed out during the workshop.

If you would like further information please contact philip.moriarty@nottingham.ac.uk.

[†] The Nottingham Summer School website at www.nottingham.ac.uk/~pazxc/ssss2005 lists a number of links to documents providing lots of useful information on planning, writing, and developing successful research proposals.

UK Summer School in Surface Science '05: Student Research Proposal**Group:**

Abstract (a brief description of the proposed project).

Project description (method, results expected, how this work will advance the state-of-the-art).

Resources required.