D07.2 - REPORT ON THE MULTI-DAY EVENTS FOR ESRS ON CAREERS OUTSIDE ACADEMIA

Date

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CONCEPT

PhD and postdoctoral researchers are building immense expertise in their field and in academic life, however, realistically, the majority of PhD holders will (have to) find employment outside university research due to the "funnel" of academic positions - there are a lot of PhD students, fewer PostDoc positions, even fewer Assistant Professorships and so forth, up the ladder. This transition often requires a different skill set and follows different rules, which can be difficult to recognize and adapt to. Within Arqus, we aim to support ESRs in the journey from academia to employment in business, industry, government, NGOs and other fields, as well as with developing their own entrepreneurial ideas.

This includes support with preparing CVs and job interviews, recognizing the skills one already possesses and those one wants to develop, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset by gaining experience with specific methods and tools, exchanging with successful alumni as well as with peers.

The "Arqus Training Programme for Careers Outside Academia", termed "Career Week" in short, is envisioned as an

> *Intense training of pre-and postdoctoral researchers as well as university staff working with them through different formats (multi-day events, workshops). Strengthening and development of (entrepreneurial) skills to transfer ESR's academic expertise to the non-academic labour market.*

Goals for this format include

> *Supporting ESRs to develop skills necessary for successful careers outside academia. Training awareness of (entrepreneurial) competencies among professional/administrative staff and young researchers. Increase employability of ESRs. Training of professionals to conduct training sessions at their home universities.*

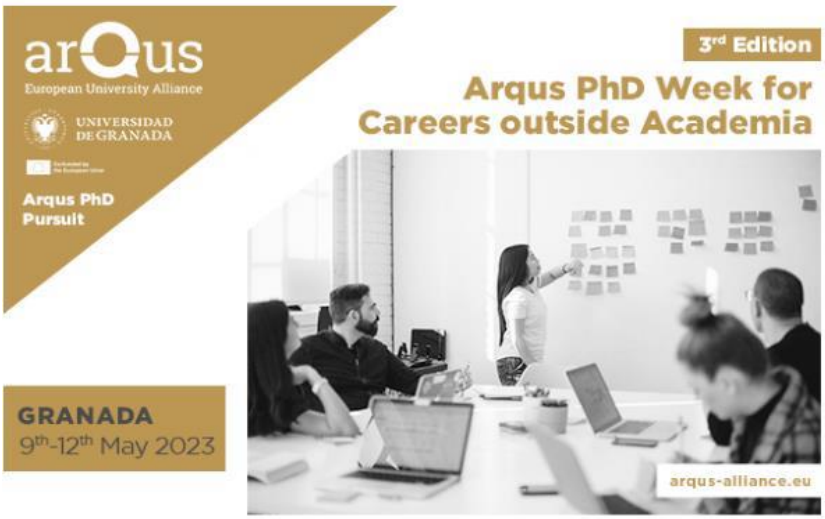
This training programme for pre- and postdoctoral researchers will be combined with "train the trainers" workshops, which are

Training events for professionals working with ESRs to offer high quality career support, skills awareness and communication training.

The joint organisation of these trainings allows for direct contact and exchange between the trainers and the ESRs, which we perceive as very valuable. It also allows the trainers to broaden their expertise by hosting workshops for the ESRs at the Career Week. Participants in the Career Week in turn benefit from international perspectives at the event.

First Career Week - Granada, May 2023

The first edition of the Career Week in Arqus II was hosted by the University of Granada from May 8th to 12th 2023.



Organisation and programme

The Career Week at the University of Granada was organised and hosted by a group of technical and academic staff:

Technical staff

- Inmaculada Yuste Martínez
- Ángel Pérez Contreras
- Mª Nieves López Fernández

WP07 Academic staff

- Pedro A. García Sánchez
- Francisca Serrano Chica

As an added value to the activity and with the aim of involving the doctoral students at the University of Granada, the team was supported by a group of volunteers for logistical issues. These doctoral students also had the opportunity to attend the sessions that were held and to participate in the social and cultural activities that were organised.

It should be noted that participation as an expert did not imply any economic remuneration and that no registration fees were charged to the participants.

The programme was developed together with local experts, with input and feedback from the Co-Leads Lyon and Graz. The following topics were considered as bridging points among the participants:

- Career Service: preparing CVs and Interviews
- Entrepreneurship: start-ups and pitches
- Knowledge Transfer: patents and licences
- Local and International companies that hire PhD profiles: what are they looking for?

The sessions and workshops were developed around these topics, with sessions over the five days in which several representatives from each university participated. This has given participants the opportunity to share interests and goals, exchange ideas and identify common interests that might lead to future joint activities.

The goals of this event were also

- Strengthening and developing entrepreneurial skills to transfer ESRs' academic expertise to the non-academic labour market
- Supporting ESRs to develop skills necessary for successful careers outside academia
- Training awareness of (entrepreneurial) competencies among professional/administrative staff and young researchers
- Increasing employability of ESRs as well as training of professionals to conduct training sessions at their home universities

The organising team of the Granada Arqus Ph.D Week for Careers Outside Academia designed a program for 5 days including the following activities:

- Plenary sessions with 10/15 minutes presentations of different companies and former Ph.D students which exchanged their experiences outside Academia and the path they followed. With regards the companies they explained the profiles they are looking for.
- Workshops for Early-Stage Researchers in the field of Career Services, Entrepreneurship and Knowledge Transfer.
- Workshops for trainers (professionals working in Arqus' universities).
- Networking activities that were the most interesting ones in order to create novel research collaborations.

All the presentations given during the event have been shared among the attendees in the following shared folder in Google Drive through a QR Code on the accreditations: sl.ugr.es/0dpd

The first day began with registration and a presentation of doctoral programmes at the University of Granada, followed by networking opportunities during lunch. The second day was filled with workshops on skills development related to the general job market and a round table on the impact of incorporating doctoral profiles in organisations and businesses, ending with a cocktail dinner. Wednesday was dedicated to exploring entrepreneurial thinking and techniques, workshops were held at the BREAKER (Centro de Emprendimiento de la Universidad de Granada). Some young entrepreneurs shared their experiences with developing knowledge-based spin-offs or start-ups. On Thursday, the morning was split between a lecture on knowledge transfer and a workshop on exploiting one's own competencies for private sector employment. The afternoon was dedicated to Knowledge transfer, and the day ended with a city tour. On the last day, former PhD students shared their experiences with transitioning to the private sector or their own companies, followed by a session on Open Innovation and the closing session.

CALL AND SELECTION PROCESS

The call for the first Career Week under the title "PhD and now? Explore new professional opportunities beyond the world of academia" was published on the Arqus website on February 15th 2023, with an application deadline of March 9th. The deadline was extended until March 20th for the universities of Padua, Wrocław and Leipzig to allow for more applications. The call already included the programme for the event and a travel brochure with information about the locations.

In addition to the main Arqus website, the call for participation was shared on the universities' websites and disseminated through social media, mailing lists and other communication channels available to the Alliance and the individual universities.

Applications were collected via Google Forms by the host University of Granada, where the organising team also selected the participants, to be able to select the best applicants from each university as well as having an overview of the group. Selection criteria were the quality of the application, specifically how convincingly the participants voiced their need for the offers of the Career Week. Aspects related to diversity, equity and inclusion were kept in mind when making the selection, resulting in 10 male and 18 female participants. This ratio of 36:64 is partly due to the number of applications from women, partly due to the quality of the applications, and was deemed acceptable since it is an express aim of Arqus to increase leadership of women, as well as LGQBT+ persons and minorities, and was discussed with the Task Force of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion of Arqus.

The results of the selection process were published on March 24th 2023, participants were informed via email. Rejection and waiting list mails were also sent out.

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 28 doctoral and postdoctoral researchers and 10 experts from 7 member universities of the Arqus Alliance (Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon 1, Minho, Padua, Vilnius and Wrocław) attended the activity at the headquarters of the Higher Technical School of Architecture (ETSAG) from 8th to 12th May 2023. The activity also had the presence of four students from Arqus' associated partner National University of Kyiv - Mohyla Academy from Kyiv, Ukraine.

However, no applications from Maynooth University and University of Minho were received, which we attribute to the fact that both universities were rather new to the Alliance at the point of the call and do not yet have established channels to spread Arqus calls.

University	Research Field	Gender	#
University of Granada	Mind, Brain and Behaviour Research	m	1
	Migration Studies	f	2
	Corpus Stylistics	f	3

	Plant Physiology	m	4
	Human Psychophysiology	m	5
University of Graz	Psychology	m	6
	Cognitive Psychology	f	7
	Inclusive Education Research	f	8
	Mathematics and Scientific Computing	f	9
Leipzig University	Cultural Studies	f	10
	Sociology	m	11
	Romance Languages	m	12
	Theoretical Linguistics	f	13
Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1	Mathematics	m	14
	Biochemistry	m	15
	Neurosciences	f	16
University of Padua	Pharmacological Sciences	f	17
	Sport and Health Science	m	18
Vilnius University	Economics/Business	f	19
	Physical Geography	f	20
	History	f	21
	Physics	m	22
University of Wrocław	Political and Administrative Sciences	f	23
	Political Sciences	f	24
Mohyla Academy	Law and Legal Studies	f	25
	Computer Science and Technology	f	26
	Econometrics	f	27
	Botany	f	28

BUSINESS PARTNERS AND INVITED SPEAKERS

Genyo: The new Pfizer-University of Granada-Junta de Andalucía Centre for Genomics and Oncological Research (GENYO) has been designed as a space of excellence for research on the genetic basis of diseases, including cancer, as well as on the influence of genetic inheritance in the body's response to certain drugs. More info: https://www.genyo.es/

Abbott: Abbott creates innovative products—diagnostics, healthcare, nutrition, and generic pharmaceuticals—that help you, your family, and your community lead healthier lives filled with limitless possibilities. Today, 115,000 of us are working to create a lasting impact in the more than 160 countries we serve. More info: https://www.es.abbott/

Eesy Innovation: Eesy -innovation was built to offer holistic services to make businesses of all sizes smarter. More info: https://www.eesy-innovation.com/

T- System: T- System contributes to your digital transformation with specific advice for different sectors, first-class services in the cloud, digital solutions and powerful security systems, from concept development to implementation. The company combines the most comprehensive specialist knowledge with a seamlessly integrated solution, all from a single source. More info: https://www.t-systems.com/de/en

Eco Interpreters: Eco Interpreters is a volunteer-led non-profit organisation that was born to ensure that the voices of those individuals are heard – irrespective of their native language. As professional conference interpreters, they are language and communication specialists and their organisation puts these skills in the service of the global movement for climate and environmental action. More info: https://ecointerpreters.org/

FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS

After the event, an online feedback survey was sent out to the participants, asking them to assess the organisation of the event, the quality and usefulness of the sessions and workshops and suggestions for improvement.

After this first Career Week, the co-leads for the work package created a "Guidebook for the Organisation of the Arqus Career Week", to aid subsequent organisers and ensure a continuation of best practices and the avoidance of previous mistakes. This guidebook can be found in Appendix 4.

Our main aim will be to make the event even more focused on participation and workshops, further limiting the time spent on presentations. Interactivity is key to the success and impact of the event.

We will shift focus further towards finding employment rather than aspects of knowledge transfer, spin-offs and start-ups, as experience has shown that participants were looking for support in finding a "traditional" job rather than becoming self-employed.

We will shorten the duration of the programme, ending earlier in the afternoon, to avoid fatigue during the week.

We will further take into account the expertise of the trainers to tailor the train-the-trainers sessions to their needs and interests.

The group of pre- and postdoctoral researchers developed a good rapport, spending afternoons and evenings together, and exchanging on personal and professional topics.

Trainers developed a good rapport with each other as well and discussed continuing collaboration as a Community of Practice within Arqus. Many also expressed their interest in contributing to the next Career Week as well.

Second Career Week - Wrocław, June 2024

In October 2023, the University of Wrocław volunteered to host the second Career Week under Arqus II, in the first half of 2024. Taking into account other events and public holidays, the date was set to June 10th to 14th 2024.



Organisation and Programme

Dominika Buczkowska, manager of the Career Office at UWr, took on the main responsibility of organising the event, with support from her colleagues at the Career Office, Piotr Sula (Professor at UWr), UWr Arqus Institutional Coordinator Emilia Wilanowska and the co-leads

As part of the Guidebook on the Organisation of the Arqus Career Week (see Appendix 4), the co-leads prepared an outline for the event, inspired by other international formats, especially The Odyssey Programme by the University College Cork in Ireland. Following the feedback of the last round, this time there was a focus on workshops and participatory approaches. The local organisers then took the outline and developed the full programme, in collaboration with local and international trainers. The local organisers also created a website for the participants where they could access all the relevant information and be informed about new updates (this website is no longer online, screenshots are available in Appendix 2c).

The 5-day programme started with a group building session that got participants to interact with each other and share goals for the event. It was followed by a tour of Wrocław University, and ended with a

Welcome Dinner at the university to allow participants to get to know each other in a more informal setting.

Tuesday was focused on different workshops, with participants being split into two smaller groups to enable more interaction and engagement. The workshop “Recognizing your skills for the job market” was held in parallel in two groups. Often PhD researchers struggle to recognize their skills beyond their knowledge of their subject, or lack the vocabulary to phrase it for a professional setting. The workshop

The workshop “How to prepare for job interviews” and the team building workshop were held at the same time. The former particularly focused on how to deal with “tricky” questions during job interviews, what to ask and which information to look out for. The latter workshop was built on playful collaboration, allowing participants to explore different roles and communication strategies in a group setting. The day also featured a presentation on key competences and new trends on the labour market (in particular a discussion of digitalisation and AI trends), followed by a Q&A session.

Wednesday began with the workshop “How to prepare for job interviews” and the team building workshop, with the groups switching this time. It was followed by a CV and Cover Letter lab (also held in two parallel groups). Participants were advised on how to design an appealing CV, how much information to include and then gave feedback to each other’s real CVs that they had been asked to bring. The afternoon was filled by a World Café on challenges and opportunities in Career Development in which each trainer hosted a table and all participants took place. It served as a session to exchange on goals and obstacles regarding people’s career dreams. The day concluded with an optional city tour.

Thursday started with a panel discussion with two successful graduates from UWr, hosted by Prof. Piotr Sula. The discussion focused on the pathway from academia to business, how the working cultures might differ, what strategies were successful for the speakers, which challenges they were dealing with and other questions from the audience. This session was followed by a presentation on “The Power of Social Media and LinkedIn”, with questions from the participants. The day ended with a visit to “Concordia Design - Center for Creativity and Entrepreneurship” that offers co-working spaces, consultations for businesses and start-ups and an event venue. This visit was intended to balance the focus on workshops and presentations and to give some insight into more entrepreneurial opportunities for researchers.

Friday closed with a summary session, collecting experiences from the week, asking participants two specific questions: “What are you thankful for in the Career Week?” and “What do you take away from the Career Week?”. Answers were collected on two large pin boards. The final act was the presentation of the Certificates of Completion to each participant and a photo session.

After the event, all the materials and presentations were shared with the participants via the dedicated event website.

CALL AND SELECTION PROCESS

The call was launched on the Arqus website on January 29th, 2024, and was initially open until February 25th 2024 (the deadline was then extended until early March).It was distributed through various Arqus and local channels (newsletters, email lists, event pages etc.). Applications were collected online via LimeSurvey by the co-lead at the University of Graz. After the deadline, they were distributed to the working group members of each university who were responsible for selecting their participants with ad-hoc selection committees. Depending on their application numbers and funding availability, universities

selected 1-5 participants. The co-leads then checked whether diversity within the selected group was sufficient (gender, field of study) before confirming the selection.

Overall, we received 90 applications for the Career Week 2024. There was a big range between the number of applications at the individual universities.

The results of the selection process were published on March 25th 2024, participants were informed via email. Rejection and waiting list mails were also sent out, to inform all applicants about the selection outcomes.

Of the applicants, 55,6% were male and 41,1% female, one person was non-binary and two would rather not say their gender. While the event was advertised to both doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, only 4 PostDocs applied.

University	PhDs	PostDocs	Total	female	male	other
Granada	27	1	28	10	17	1
Graz	10	1	11	5	6	0
Leipzig	0	1	1	1	0	0
Lyon	6	0	6	3	3	0
Maynooth	10	0	10	3	7	0
Minho	5	0	5	3	2	0
Padua	12	1	13	4	8	1
Vilnius	10	0	10	6	3	1
Wrocław	6	0	6	2	4	0
Total	**86**	**4**	**90**	**37**	**50**	**3**

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

PARTICIPANTS

36 applicants were selected based on the quality of their applications, however, some were ultimately unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts or funding issues. Ultimately 25 PhDs and 1 PostDoc from a diverse range of fields attended the Career Week in Wrocław (see table below). Due to the cancellations, there was a more uneven ratio of 17 male to 9 female researchers who took part in the workshops (a 65,4% to 34,6% split). One participant had to leave earlier due to personal reasons.

University	Field	Gender	#
University of Granada	Nanotechnology and Nanomedicine	m	1
	Soil Science	m	2
	Education Sciences	f	3

University	Field	Gender	#
University of Graz	Public International Law	m	4
	Institutional Law	m	5
	American Studies	f	6
Leipzig University	Nutritional Epidemiology	f	7
Université de Lyon 1	Chemistry	m	8
	Biomechanics	m	9
	Socio-Anthropology	f	10
Maynooth University	History	m	11
	Musicology	m	12
	Electronic Engineering	m	13
University of Minho	Optometry and Vision Sciences	m	14
	Industrial and Systems Engineering	m	15
University of Padua	Immunology	f	16
	Wireless Communications	m	17
Vilnius University	Chemistry	f	18
	Chemical Physics	f	19
	Climate Change Risks/Finance	m	20
	Reproductive immunology and allergology	f	21
University of Wrocław	Sociology	m	22
	Communication and Media Studies	f	23
	Physics	m	24
	Law	m	25
	Linguistics & Psychology	m	26

BUSINESS PARTNERS AND INVITED SPEAKERS

Anna Szczepankiewicz: PhD student at the University of Wrocław and a clinical research coordinator at DOBROSTAN

Mateusz Bartoszewicz, PhD: Senior Internal Business Advisor at EY and Lecturer at the DSW University of Lower Silesia and University of Wrocław

Magdalena Ślazyk-Sobol, PhD: Assistant professor at the department of PSychology in Management, also works as psychologist, HR consultant and coach with experience in business

Józef Orzeszyna: Talent Acquisition Leader for 3M GSC EMEA with over 15 years of experience

FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS

An online feedback survey was sent out the week after the event. 23 responses were collected, of which 4 were trainers. Overall the feedback was very positive, participants expressed their satisfaction with the event, applauded the coherent and smooth organisation and highlighted the good group atmosphere.

Amongst the positive aspects mentioned were:

- The team, trainers and the organisers “radiated calm and competence”
- Relevant topics covered in the workshops, lots to think about after
- Social networking and recognizing shared challenges
- Improving language skills
- The international atmosphere
- Personal advice given by the trainers
- Inter-disciplinary engagement
- Interactivity

Critiques and suggestions for improvement were:

- Have longer workshop sessions to go into more depth
- Possibly have one-on-one sessions with trainers
- More “hands-on” work on CVs, LinkedIn and interviews
- Make sessions more personalised and focused on individual paths, including focus on Individual Professional Development Plan (iDPD)
- Have fewer team building sessions
- Offer a more specific approach for the different fields/disciplines, divide participants into smaller groups according to field
- Days could have been longer, more dedicated work time, fewer visits
- The relevance of the study visit was not clear to everyone
- Include the topic of burnout and “workaholism” in the event
- Create the opportunity for participants to connect before the event (e.g. Discord) to exchange travel tips etc.
- Provide suggestions for evening activities
- Funding process has been time-consuming and tedious, wishes for dedicated Arqus funding

It was clear that the participants were very motivated to work, and that many would have preferred more time for the workshops. We had kept days shorter to keep up energy over the week, but there are ways to make both possible in the next round. We will reduce the amount of leisurely activities, focusing on achieving concrete goals, but still keep enough socialising opportunities as this was essential for the good atmosphere and ultimate success of the event.

Especially the workshops on CVs, applications, LinkedIn and job interviews should be longer and give time to not only hear the tips and tricks but to implement or practise them right away, with feedback from the trainers and the other participants. Overall, we will aim to give more focus to an individual career development plan and self-exploration within a peer group setting. Including the topic of burnout/work-life balance is a valuable suggestion.

Regarding one-on-one options with trainers and offers focused on specific research areas, this is probably not possible during the format of the Career Week. It became apparent that we also need to highlight and advertise the local career support offers at each of the Arqus universities, something that participants seem to be mostly unaware of or too hesitant to make use of.

We will discuss whether the Career Week should only be open for PhD researchers, not PostDocs. Postdoctoral researchers are further advanced and may not benefit from the "ground-level" information provided at the event. They might be in need of more personalised support. We have also gotten very few applications from PostDocs and were unable to have a peer group of PostDocs who can connect amongst each other, which might make PostDocs feel left out overall.

We will give bigger consideration to the gender balance of the selected participants and those nominated from the waiting list.

We will reach out to more trainers from each of the universities, specifically inviting targeted people.

We will consider the ways of connecting the participants before and after the event.

Conclusion

The 4th edition of the Arqus Career Week (2nd one within Arqus II) left both participants and trainers with very positive experiences. The good group rapport was a major contributor to the positive working environment. Many participants were sad when the event ended, saying "now that we have all become friends, we have to leave". We hope that some of the connections will continue beyond the event, and that the European spirit and connection among Arqus universities has been strengthened.

We were successful in focusing this round of the Career Week more on workshops and group work, but the feedback shows that there is still room for improvement regarding the duration and personal focus of the workshops. Overall, there was a good mix of playfulness and workshops, although the balance between fun collaboration and more serious self-exploration can be improved.

We are confident that many of the trainers are motivated to contribute to another round of the event and are also valuable ambassadors for Arqus among the general staff at the universities.

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THIRD CAREER WEEK - PADUA, JULY 2025

In November 2024, the University of Padua volunteered to be the host of the 2025 Career Week and it was decided that the event would take place from June 30th to July 4th 2025.



ORGANISATION AND PROGRAMME

The Arqus PhD Career Week 2025 was a collaborative effort organized by the University of Padua's Career Service (lead: Sara Raponi) and PhD Desk (lead: Matteo Volpin) in conjunction with partner universities within the Arqus European University Alliance. The organizing committee and the referees from WP7 began planning six months prior to the event, with regular virtual meetings to coordinate logistics, program content, and participant selection.

From the outset, the primary objective was to create a comprehensive and stimulating program that would equip participants with a wide range of tools and resources to support their professional journey after completing their doctoral studies. Meticulous efforts were made to ensure that the agenda reflected the needs and interests of PhD candidates, offering opportunities for growth both within and outside of academia.

A key priority was to assist participants in identifying and leveraging the skills acquired during their doctoral journey. To this end, sessions were dedicated to micro-credentials and open badges, valuable tools for highlighting achievements and making them easily recognizable. Specific workshops on crafting effective CVs and cover letters were organized, providing participants with the foundations to present themselves in the best possible light to potential employers. These components are essential for PhD graduates seeking to transition into diverse career paths, as they enable them to effectively communicate their qualifications and experiences.

Recognizing the growing interest in entrepreneurship among PhD candidates, it was deemed essential to include seminars focused on patents, research valorization, and the startup lifecycle. These topics offer participants a valuable understanding of entrepreneurial opportunities and intellectual property management. As more PhD holders explore alternative career avenues beyond traditional academia, equipping them with knowledge in these areas empowers them to capitalize on their research and innovative ideas, potentially leading to the creation of successful ventures. However, it's important to note that these entrepreneurship-focused sessions were limited to a total of 3 hours within the entire

program. This balanced approach was chosen deliberately, acknowledging that while entrepreneurship can open new career paths, it is not the ambition of all PhD candidates. The aim was to provide exposure to these important topics without overemphasizing them, ensuring a well-rounded program that caters to diverse career interests and aspirations.

Furthermore, efforts were made to broaden participants' horizons by providing information on international mobility programs and research funding opportunities, such as the EURAXESS portal and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships. These resources enable participants to explore opportunities beyond their current academic setting, fostering a global mindset and facilitating potential collaborations or career moves across borders.

Effective communication skills are crucial for success in any professional setting. To address this, the agenda included sessions on effective communication and constructive communication in challenging work environments. These sessions aimed to equip participants with the necessary tools to communicate effectively, navigate difficult situations, and foster positive working relationships. Strong communication abilities are invaluable assets, enabling PhD graduates to articulate their ideas clearly, collaborate effectively with diverse teams, and navigate complex professional dynamics.

It was agreed that the Career Week would be organised in combination with an event funded through the Arqus Innovation Fund 2024, the Fiasco Fest. This workshop, created and developed by Sabine Bergner and Johanna Stadlbauer at the University of Graz, is a three-hour experience lab designed to provide a safe and open space for PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers to share their stories of setbacks and failures. An innovative choice was the organization of this Fiasco Fest in two separate sessions, ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to take part in this interactive training experience, since it is designed for a limited number of participants around 15-20 per session. The first session involved experienced trainers and author of this formula Sabine Bergner who guided participants including some trainers-to-be through the process of joyfully moving on from rejection and career misfortunes. The second session was conducted by some of the trainers who had been trained during the first session, allowing them to put their newly acquired skills into practice. This approach not only provided valuable insights on resilience and perseverance but also created a supportive environment for participants to learn from shared experiences and develop coping strategies for navigating setbacks.

Networking opportunities, such as the aperitif, guided tour of the historic Palazzo Bo, and visit to the Museum of Nature and Humankind, were strategically included at the beginning and end of the program to provide flexibility for participants to decide when to arrive or depart without missing any formative moments. These events were designed to foster connections and the exchange of ideas among participants, strengthening the sense of community within the Arqus Alliance. Building a robust professional network can open doors to potential collaborations, mentorship opportunities, and career advancement, making these networking events an integral part of the program.

CALL AND SELECTION PROCESS

Interested PhD candidates and early-career researchers from the Arqus Alliance universities were invited to submit their applications from February 19th, 2025 to March 24th, 2025, at 23:59 CET (for most universities. Some universities requested a deadline extension, which was granted).. The call provided detailed information about the event's objectives, the range of topics to be covered, and the eligibility criteria for participation.

An article was published on the Arqus website to announce the call, while it was also disseminated on Arqus' social networks. Universities communicated about the event through their newsletters, mailing lists and social networks. Participants applied through a Limesurvey managed by the colead from Lyon 1.

Overall, we received 126 applications, with disparities between the number of applications between the universities.

University	Female	I would rather not say	Male	Non-binary	Total
Durham University	21	2	9		**32**
Leipzig University	2		2		**4**
Maynooth University	7		6		**13**
National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy	4		5		**9**
Université Lyon 1 - Claude Bernard	1		1		**2**
University of Granada	21		8		**29**
University of Graz	2		1		**3**
University of Minho	8		5		**13**
University of Padua	6		1	1	**8**
University of Wrocław		1	5		**6**
Vilnius University	3		4		**7**
Total	**75**	**3**	**47**	**1**	**126**

The majority of applicants (59.5%) identified as female, 37.3% as male, 3 would rather not say and 1 applicant identified as non-binary.

As the 2024 selection process proved to be successful, it was kept in 2025. The only change was that this edition was dedicated to PhD candidates (from the 2nd year on), a change suggested after the two last editions.

To ensure a diverse and representative group of participants, a selection process was implemented. The organizers carefully reviewed each application, considering factors such as the applicant's research field, career stage, motivation for attending, and potential to benefit from the program.

Preference was given to applicants who demonstrated through the motivation letter a strong commitment to their professional development and a genuine interest in exploring career opportunities both within and beyond academia. Additionally, efforts were made to achieve a balanced representation of participants from various disciplines and Arqus Alliance member universities.

The selection process aimed to create a dynamic and engaging environment where participants could learn from each other's experiences, exchange ideas, and establish valuable connections within the Arqus community.

The selection of participants was made by local committees at the home universities. Depending on the number of applicants and available funding, each university was able to send 3-4 participants. Applicants were informed about the outcome within 3 weeks after the application deadline.

Funding for travel and accommodation from different sources was made available through the home universities, although participants might have had to prepare a separate funding application after the selection process, as guided by their local Arqus contact person.

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Following the recommendations of the midterm-report, we asked all the partner universities to increase their number of participants. This was made possible by the additional funding we received through the Arqus Innovation Fund. As funding mobilities had been challenging for some partners, WG07 had applied to the Innovation Fund 2024 for funding for mobilities. 6600€ were granted, to be distributed between the 8 full-partners that had to fund mobilities.

Each university selected between 1 and 7 participants, according to their application numbers and mobility funding available. Overall, 48 participants were selected and contacted. During the planning process, 7 participants declined their participation in the event, often giving us no time to nominate other participants in their stead. In total, 41 had registered by the week before the event. As there were some participants who dropped out last minute due to illness or had failed to previously inform the organisers about visa issues, the number of participants at the event was 35. Albeit higher than at previous Career Weeks, after all the efforts to have more participants at the event, this number was slightly disappointing. However, as the highest feasible number of participants in this format (in order to be able to do productive group work) is around 40, we dared not go much higher with the number of selected participants.

Participants from the associate partners the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and Durham University were invited as well. As a matter of fact, the University of Padua provided a specific internal funding for 1 participant from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, whereas Durham University could fund 2 participants. Unfortunately, the participant from Ukraine and one from Durham had to drop out for personal reasons shortly before the event.

PARTICIPANTS

University	Field	Gender	#
University of Granada		f	1
		f	2
		f	3
		f	4
University of Graz	Labour Law and Social Security Law	f	5
	Inclusive Education	f	6
	Physics	m	7
Leipzig University	Economics	m	8
	Media and Communication Sciences	f	9
	Mathematics	m	10
University of Lyon 1	Psychosociology of Sport	f	11
	Structural Engineering	m	12
Maynooth University	Philosophy	m	13

	Business	f	14
	Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Studies	f	15
University of Minho	Management and Accounting	m	16
	Materials Engineering	f	17
	Health Sciences	f	18
University of Padua	Chemistry and Materials Science	m	19
	Cultural Heritage	f	20
	Biomedicine	f	21
	Developmental Medicine and Health Planning Sciences	nb	22
	Management Engineering	f	23
	Psychosocial Sciences	f	24
Vilnius University	Ethnology	f	25
	Management	m	26
	Biochemistry	f	27
	Biochemistry	m	28
	Chemical Physics	f	29
University of Wrocław	Social Communication and Media	m	30
	Sociology	m	31
	Constitutional Law	n/a	32
	Sociology	m	33
	Political And Administrative Systems	n/a	34
Durham University	Archaeology	f	35

No specific special needs were reported by the attendees. However, we proactively took measures to accommodate potential dietary requirements or preferences. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants, including a significant number of attendees from Muslim communities, we made sure to inquire about dietary preferences in advance. This allowed us to provide suitable meal options during the event, ensuring that all participants could comfortably partake in the provided refreshments without any concerns.

FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS

The satisfaction questionnaire for the Arqus PhD Career Week 2025 was shared with participants at the end of the last workshop, providing them with the link directly in the classroom. Subsequently, a follow-

up email was sent to all participants, urging them to complete the questionnaire through the same link. A total of 18 responses were received out of 45 people involved (35 participants and 10 trainers).

Training Sessions:

The evaluations of the training sessions were mixed. Sessions such as "Effective Communication" and "Job Interview" were well-received by a considerable number of participants, who found them insightful and beneficial. Respondents appreciated the practical nature of these sessions and the opportunity to develop essential skills for professional settings.

However, sessions like "Patents and Research Valorization" and "Start Up Lifecycle" were deemed less relevant or of little benefit by a significant portion of respondents. Several participants, particularly those from non-scientific disciplines, expressed that these topics were not applicable to their fields or future career plans.

It is worth noting that some sessions received polarized evaluations, with a portion of respondents finding them excellent and insightful, while others did not benefit from the content. This divergence in opinions likely stems from the diverse academic backgrounds and career aspirations of the participants.

Sessions for trainers

The "Train the Trainer" sessions, both for the Fiasco Fest and other topics, were appreciated by the participating trainers, who found them to be excellent opportunities for exchange and learning.

While the Arqus PhD Career Week received overwhelmingly positive feedback, there are areas that future organizers should consider for improvement to ensure the event's continued relevance and impact.

One recurring theme in the feedback was the need for more discipline-specific content tailored to the diverse academic fields represented by the participants. While the event aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of career development strategies, some attendees expressed a desire for sessions and workshops that delved deeper into the challenges specific to their respective disciplines. Future organizers could explore the possibility of incorporating parallel tracks or breakout sessions dedicated to different academic domains, allowing participants to engage with content that directly aligns with their areas of study and research.

Additionally, several participants highlighted the importance of incorporating more practical and applied approaches within the sessions. While theoretical knowledge is valuable, the integration of real-world case studies, simulations, and hands-on activities could further enhance the practical applicability of the content. By providing opportunities to apply the concepts learned in a simulated or experiential setting, participants can better prepare for the challenges they may encounter in their future careers, whether within or beyond academia.

Another area for improvement lies in the involvement of external experts and professionals from non-academic fields. Many participants expressed an interest in exploring alternative career paths and gaining insights from industry professionals. Inviting guest speakers, panelists, or facilitators from various industries and sectors could broaden the perspectives offered and provide valuable insights into the diverse career opportunities available to PhD holders.

Furthermore, participants expressed a desire for dedicated sessions or opportunities to receive feedback on their application materials, such as CVs, cover letters, and research statements. As these documents

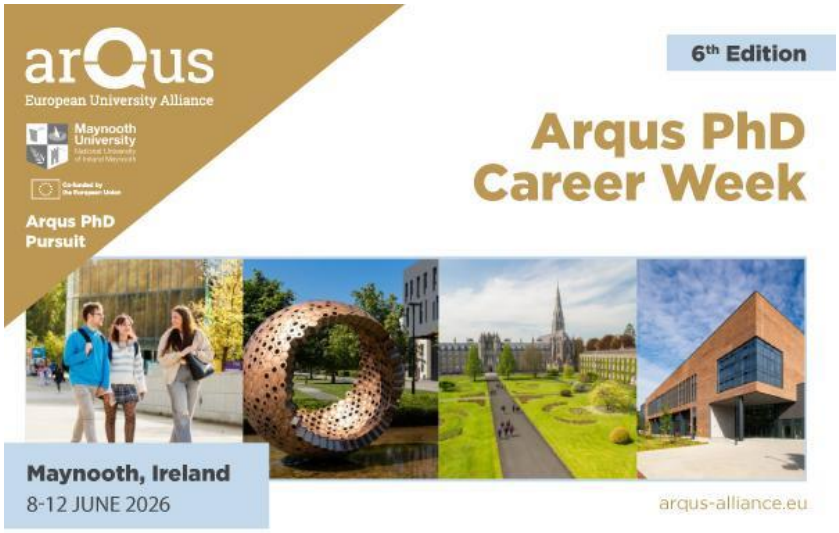
play a crucial role in the job application process, providing personalized feedback and guidance could significantly enhance the participants' preparedness and increase their chances of success in securing desired positions.

Lastly, future organizers should consider exploring accommodation support or recommendations for out-of-town participants. As the event attracts attendees from various locations, addressing logistical concerns related to accommodation could alleviate potential barriers to participation and ensure a more inclusive and accessible experience for all.

By addressing these areas for improvement, future editions of the Arqus PhD Career Week can continue to evolve, meeting the diverse needs and expectations of participants while providing a comprehensive and impactful professional development experience that prepares them for success in their chosen career paths.

ADDITIONAL FOURTH CAREER WEEK - MAYNOOTH, JUNE 2026

Given the success of the format and the enthusiasm of the target audience (doctoral candidates, early-career researchers) and the institutions themselves, it was decided to organize an additional edition of the Arqus PhD Career Week, which was not included in the initial work plan.



ORGANISATION AND PROGRAMME

The Arqus PhD Career Week 2026 was a collaboration by Maynooth University's Graduate Research Academy, our Arqus Office, colleagues in the ADVANCE CRT programme, careers advisers and partner universities within the Arqus European University Alliance. Early discussions commenced in June 2025, with major planning starting from August 2025. Maynooth University reported on planning activities with the WP7. The programme schedule was launched on Friday 19th December 2025. An early advertisement was initiated in order to minimise problems for students requiring visas to travel to Maynooth, as Ireland is outside the Schengen Area.

The programme drew strongly on the previous five iterations of the Arqus PhD Career Week. Planners drew on the excellent report of the 5th Career Week in Padua, on the Guidebook from 2025 and on the experiences of 2 Maynooth University staff who attended the event in Padua. A result of this was to invite number of careers advisers from previous iterations of the week, to ensure high-quality sessions. All had received excellent feedback. We added some careers trainers to this core group. It was decided to invite only postgraduate researchers to this event, rather than to open it out to postdoctoral researchers. This decision was taken to create a stronger core goal, as facilitating postdoctoral researchers was felt to complicate things to too great a degree. As with the 5th Career Week in Padua, it was decided to offer an element of careers within academia in 2026. This decision was taken after a discussion with 3 Maynooth University students who attended the 5th Career Week. The core focus was to remain on 'Careers Outside Academia' but some sessions and elements focused on those may seek academic roles on graduation.

A deviation from the previous career weeks was to partner up with a local doctoral programme. In May-June 2025, a proposal came from the Research Ireland Centre for Research Training in Advanced Networks for Sustainable Societies (ADVANCE CRT) to partner up for a joint event in 2026. That programme runs a summer school each June and had 21 PhD researchers due to attend, in third and fourth year of their PhDs. Their summer schools focus on career readiness, so the partnership was natural. For activities from

Monday 8th to Thursday 11th June 2026, the group was 33 Arqus and 21 ADVANCE CRT students. Catering costs were split. The ADVANCE CRT programme paid for 2 independent trainers to deliver sessions.

Another deviation was the introduction of a morning focused on career mentorship roundtables. We wanted to give PhD students the opportunity to talk with PhD graduates within and outside of academia. For this aspect of the event we invited two other groups to attend; 20 PhD researchers from the Research Ireland Centre for Research Training in Digitally-Enhanced Reality (d-real CRT) and 4 from the Research Ireland Centre for Research Training in Foundations of Data Science (Foundations of Data Science CRT). This decision was taken in order to widen the pool of mentors that we could draw on. In total we had 78 PhD researchers and 30 mentors (15 academic mentors and 15 from industry, public service and NGO sectors). We knew what disciplines were involved, so we invited mentors to match our student cohort (where possible). Before the event we issued a mentor booklet (here) and asked students to list their top 10 preferences. We then matched those to mentors. There was a range of industry, public service bodies and not-for-profit groups represented, as well as a range of academics. We had PhD graduates from Meta, Google, Intel, LinkedIn, Accenture and BNY Mellon. And we had academics from 6 Irish universities, from postdoctoral researchers, to assistant lecturers and full professors. We closed the session with a keynote talk by Dr Norah Patten, an aeronautical engineer by training and soon to become Ireland's first astronaut.

We had hoped to again include the Fiasco Fest as part of the programme. We were unable to find suitable trainers to facilitate the session, so we decided to remove it from the programme. We thought it best not to run it unless we were confident we could run it to a high standard. One thing that we found worked particularly well was using an online schedule through Canva (see here). This allowed us to make many small changes to the schedule without the need to email attendees about these changes. A note of caution is that Canva documents are not viewed as accessible, so an alternative solution might be appropriate (schedule on simple website or upload of PDF schedule).

As with previous iterations, we started late on the Monday. We had registration, with tea/coffee/treats to allow people to chat. We had a welcome from leadership from within the Graduate Research Academy, Arqus Maynooth and the ADVANCE CRT programme. We ran some icebreakers and team challenges to get people to know one another. The day finished with a dinner. The next two days focused on career readiness training, with sessions on assessing your skills, finding funding, growing your professional profile, whether to stay in academia or leave, preparing your CV and cover letter, job searching strategies, effective communication and job interview skills. The careers advisers also offered two CV clinics during two tea/coffee breaks to offer one-to-one support to students. This initiative came from the career advisers. This proved very popular. The goal was to increase the confidence of PhD researchers when moving beyond their PhD into a career.

As with previous career weeks, we tried to ensure that the days were not too long and that we included social activities during the week. The week was interspersed with social and cultural activities, designed to provide an opportunity to chat together, learn more about the history of Maynooth and offer a break from the intensive career-focused sessions. This included a human bingo icebreaker, a Lego-building team challenge, dinner, tour of the south campus, a scavenger hunt around Dublin city and a tour of the National Science and Ecclesiology Museum in MU. Attendees seemed to enjoy the social activities and welcomed a break from the, at times, intensive sessions.

A key strength of the week was the contribution of the core career advisers from Arqus Universities. We had two staff from Lyon, and one each from Graz, Padua, Leipzig, Maynooth and Wrocław. By including staff from across Europe, the training sessions proved more appropriate for the Arqus group, which included students from all 11 Arqus universities. A career week with 11 trainers from Ireland would not have worked as well. A core group of the careers advisers bounded closely during the week, building on

previous experience of working together over the years, which hugely improved the career week and the sessions they ran. Sessions were, at times, run as a collaboration, which greatly benefitted the experience.

Call and selection process

The call was officially launched from the Arqus Alliance website (here) and from there was advertised on social media and through local communications. We did the best we could to advertise the event with full detail as early as possible. We included the names of the trainers, the sessions and provided short descriptors of the sessions in the online booklet. We altered the schedule and booklet over time, once more details became available.

The application form was very similar to previous years. The deadline for applications was Saturday 31 January 2026, 23:59 CET. In 4 institutions the deadline was extended to Thursday 12th February 2026.

Category	Date
Publication of schedule on Arqus website	Friday 19 December 2025
Original deadline	Saturday, 31 January 2026
Extended deadline (select institutions)	Thursday 12th February 2026
Deadline to decide on who to attend	Friday 20th February 2026
Extended deadline to decide on who to attend	Friday 27th February 2026

Participants and contributors

Participants

134 postgraduate researchers applied to attend the PhD Career Week. Offers went to students and 19 either turned down the offer due to a scheduling conflict or travel difficulty or accepted and later turned the offer down. 33 postgraduate researchers ultimately attended the career week. 7 of those 19 were Maynooth University students, who withdrew for a variety of reasons, most conference clashes. 4 of the 19 dropped out due to difficulties securing a visa to travel to Ireland, demonstrating that visa issues, unfortunately, were at play in some candidates turning down offers. One stated they did not have research budget to pay for visa costs. This is something we hoped to avoid but feared may happen.

Organisers in the Graduate Research Academy assisted in sourcing Student Accommodation on campus and needed to communicate closely with students on this. This communication channel meant that we had advanced warning about candidates who may drop out. This helped with event planning, as we were confident on our attendance numbers. This was a lesson learned from last year's event, where some candidates committed to attend but were not there on the day (including 3 students from Maynooth University).

The distribution of the 33 participants who attended the event, categorized by their respective universities, is as follows:

University	Attendee number
Durham	2
Granada	3
Graz	3
Kyiv Mohyla	1
Leipzig	1

Lyon 1	4
Maynooth	3
Minho	5
Padua	3
Vilnius	4
Wrocław	4

The tables inserted below reported specific details on the gender distribution and research field breakdown of participants at the Arqus PhD Career Week 2026. It is important to note that these tables represent the final attendance data. As with 2025, we had a higher concentration of female than male candidates attend the Career Week. In terms of withdrawals, 8 female and 11 male students withdrew. Female applicants represented 53.5% of the total, but 70% of those who attended. I'm not sure why. This can partly be explained by the higher male withdrawal rate.

We had a diverse group of students, from a range of disciplines. We did find, however, a concentration far more in the STEM area, particularly in biology / life sciences and psychology/neuroscience.

Gender of attendees	
Female	23 (70%
Male	10 (30%)
Total	33

Gender of applicants	
Female	72 (53.5%)
Male	60 (45%)
Prefer not to say	2 (1.5%)
Total	134

Field of Study*	**Count**	**Examples**
Social Sciences / Law / Political Science	6	Sociology, Law, Media
Humanities / Philosophy / Communication	3	Gender Studies, Philosophy, Music history
Economics / Management / Business	1	Business
Natural Sciences / Mathematics	0	Note: All Biology disciplines listed in the 'Life Sciences/Biomedical Health' category below
Life Sciences / Biomedical / Health	14	Nutrition and Food Science, Animal and Food Science, Molecular Microbiology, Biology, Oncology and Immunology, Cancerology/Sciences and

		health, medical physics, Geology
Engineering / Technology	6	Mechanical Engineering, Construction Engineering, Environmental Systems Sciences, Computer Science, Software Engineering
Psychology / Education	3	Neuroscience and Complex Systems, Psychological Neuroscience, Education
Total	**33**	

We requested dietary and access requirements of candidates in advance, so we were aware of what needs were required. We had some dietary requirements, which we fulfilled as best we could. We ensured that we labelled food properly so people could see what each item contained. We had one student with quite severe dietary restrictions. In consultation with organisers this candidate pre-prepared food in the student accommodation and brought that to the venue. While not perfect, this proved a suitable solution, as the candidate had quite restricted options.

FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS

A satisfaction email was sent out to the 33 PhD researchers and 6 career mentors by email at the end of the last day of the career week. It was also sent out to researchers on the ADVANCE CRT programme. We have 24 responses from Arqus PhD researchers (73%) and 3 from careers advisers (50%).Welcome, icebreakers, team building and cultural events:

These proved the most popular sessions during the week. The tour of the south campus and the scavenger hunt in Dublin received the most popular satisfaction scores from Arqus PhD researchers and mentors. The welcome was similarly very popular. The icebreaker, team building challenge, dinner and tour of the National Science and Ecclesiology Museum were a little less popular, but scored highly. In the question about what you liked most about the week we received responses on socialising with other PhD researchers. Such as:

‘Meeting other PhD students. ‘

‘Getting to meet people in the same situation as I am, while from strongly different scientific backgrounds.’

‘Connecting with people from different unis’

‘The opportunity to connect with researchers from different disciplines and countries.’

Of 23 PhD researchers who answered this question, 8 explicitly mentioned the opportunity to network with fellow PhD researcher as something they liked most. This is the same as the Padua edition, where PhD researchers found socialising a key advantage of the programme.

Training sessions

We were guided by feedback from last year, from the 2025 guidebook and from our own experience of running similar events. We were very happy with the feedback on training sessions in general. Most sessions received satisfaction rates that we were happy about. The two sessions with Fionnán O'Sullivan were particularly well received, as was the session with Professor Deborah Riby (Durham University). The other sessions received high scores, indicating that the model of using careers advisers from across Arqus works well

One session, 'Should I Stay or Should I Go: How to Handle Being Uncertain About Your Academic Career' with Dr Johanna Stadlbauer (University of Graz) did not prove as popular with PhD researchers as we had hoped.

Feedback from our careers trainers was positive, as they found the sessions to be very useful and the atmosphere positive. They did say that the parallel sessions meant you could not attend every session. We held some parallel sessions in order to keep the group size down for some sessions. We have 64 students, and some sessions had a capacity of 20, necessitating three parallel sessions on Wednesday morning.

Event organisation

Feedback on the organisation of the event appears to be positive. In the question on what people liked most 9 mentioned the organisation of the week and communication. Opinion was split somewhat on the sessions. Many participants noted the interaction with other participants was useful and scored the interactive sessions high on satisfaction. Some others felt the interaction in small groups was not as useful.

Some students noted problems with the Thursday morning. A private bus left Maynooth early, at 7:00. in order to avoid possible traffic delays. Participants arrived at the venue at 8:00, long in advance of the kick off at 10:00. There was some confusion in the catering order, so there was a delay in breakfast being served and it was also not sufficient. Once the sessions started there were fewer issues, but the start of the day proved frustrating for all involved.

Catering and accommodation

Participants were complementary about the catering in some aspects but provided some criticism as well. There were no complaints on the amount of food or frequency of the breaks, nor on providing for food intolerances or preferences. Some felt there was not enough variety, that there could be more warm food. The Student Accommodation was adequate but there were issues. There was no hot water in many rooms on the first and second night. It was resolved once residents contacted the office. It is student accommodation so the kitchen utensils were limited and towels and sheets not replaced during the week. Noticeably, participants who stayed in the local hotel or local accommodation had fewer issues. The cost of the local hotel was very high, so not suitable for candidates for a 4-6-night stay.

Career Mentorship Day

The mentorship sessions were very popular with participants. 10 students noted the mentors as something they liked most about the week. Satisfaction with that aspect was high in the specific question. Two participants scored it very low, but maybe that is to be expected – for one participant that may have been due to the logistics issues. A huge amount of work went into the mentorship day, as we moved to an off-sit location and invited 30 PhD graduates to attend as mentors. It would not have been possible to run something this large without the partnership with the ADVANCE CRT programme. They also covered

the cost of travel and accommodation for a number of mentors, which would not have been possible within the Arqus budget.

Areas for improvement

Respondents suggested a few different areas for improvement but these did not group around particular areas. One asked for 'more workshop/training with real tools to use', another that there should have been 'longer more active sessions'. As with last year, one respondent mentioned that participants could have been 'grouped according to their academic or professional background'.

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