

Doctoral Training Awards

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There are many things about AKT that I am proud of, but I am very pleased that with the support of the EPSRC we could offer *doctoral training awards* where a number of doctorate studentships were allocated for the enactment of new PhD projects closely related to AKT's agenda. A total of 27 DTA funded students began their PhDs in the AKT period (2000-2006) and 10 have already completed and defended successfully their theses. This is a noteworthy achievement for AKT that highlights the depth of involvement of its doctoral students. In the latter half of the project this resulted in the organisation of three student-led Doctoral Symposia. Each event has provided AKT (and affiliated) students with experience directly relevant to their development as researchers, such as writing papers, giving oral and poster presentations, reviewing the work of their peers, compiling proceedings, and organising the events themselves.

There has been increasing initiative and autonomy on the part of students in planning and executing these events, with ongoing and enthusiastic support from the AKT's Principal Investigators. One noteworthy pattern is the extent to which the students evaluated the success of each event and used this as a basis for modifying the format of subsequent symposia, always with the goal of ensuring the events best met their current needs. Initiated by the PIs, the 1st AKT Doctoral Symposium took place in June 2005 at The Open University in Milton Keynes. Yun-Heh Chen-Burger, as a Senior Research

Fellow, was appointed to provide guidance and mentorship to the students planning the event. The event was chaired by Duncan McRae-Spencer (Southampton) and Dave Lambert (Edinburgh). Local Chair was Tom Heath (OU), and Technical Chair was Ajay Chakravarthy (Sheffield). AKT funded students were invited to submit papers reporting research results, or detailing work in progress. Eighteen papers were submitted, reviewed by staff members of the AKT project, and compiled into printed proceedings. Papers were presented to an audience of students and a small number of AKT staff, in an event running parallel to the wider AKT workshop, and in a subsequent poster session. These occasions provided a chance for students to present their work to others and exchange feedback. Following the event, a debriefing session was initiated to informally evaluate the symposium and discuss potential future events. Aside from significant enthusiasm for further events, perhaps the strongest theme emerged from this process was the need to cater to the differing needs of students at different stages of their doctorates. The opportunity for those at early stages of their research to present in front of a smaller audience of mainly students was seen as beneficial, however those at later stages were keen to receive feedback from more senior researchers on the AKT staff. The opportunity for students to review submitted papers (instead of, or in addition to, senior staff) was also seen as an important contribution to career development.

Drawing on this feedback, a second Doctoral Symposium was organised and held in conjunction with the January 2006 AKT workshop in Aberdeen. For this event, reviewing was carried out by AKT students, rather than AKT staff. Papers were once

again compiled into printed proceedings which were distributed to attendees at the workshop. Responsibility for organising the symposium was largely rotated, with Sam Chapman (Sheffield) acting as Chair, Tom Heath (OU) and Mischa Tuffield (Southampton) as Co-Chairs, Ajay Chakravarthy (Sheffield) as Technical Chair, Edward Thomas (Aberdeen) as Local Chair, and David Corsar (Aberdeen) as Communications Officer. With the AKT project drawing to a close, a final student-led event was held in conjunction with the AKT workshop in Southampton in October 2006, but following a different format. Rather than soliciting paper submissions from students, a Doctoral Showcase was organised highlighting ongoing student work.

Our experience of working with the students has been stimulating for us, and the

inclusion of students in the IRC context has provided them with a community of researchers and fellow-students that has allowed them to develop a range of skills and understanding of the wider context of their research. The results have impressed us as researchers. Many of the students have published impressive papers in major conferences, in competition with senior researchers – showing what can happen if highly talented individuals are placed in a first-rate research context. The final section of our *Selected Papers* is devoted to the work of our Doctoral Training Award students, and edited by two of their representatives, Tom Heath, of the Open University, and Mischa Tuffield, of the University of Southampton. I think you'll be impressed with the quality of the research presented.