As I am writing, I am sitting in my tiny library office. The summer is ebbing away and the weather has been good for BBQs and other outdoor gatherings. It’s been a season of hot scandal too, which resulted in the closure of a popular tabloid, News of the World. Aside from that, the football season is back again. Arsenal FC show some steel.

So this is my final editorial after a long involvement with The GradPost since its conception in 2008. Volunteering my time in the production of this newsletter has been a worthwhile experience. If you want to actively engage with the Kent postgraduate community then join The GradPost editorial team. I have met the most wonderful people, learnt a great deal about ongoing research and it’s been an awesome feeling to be recognised everywhere on campus as ‘The GradPost guy’. The GradPost can only be what you want it to be and this means your involvement. Be part of this exciting initiative. Please, I beg you.

Welcome to the University of Kent. You will certainly enjoy the experience, the environment and the people. Do your bit. Get involved and become interested in what others are doing. I wish you the very best in your studies and hope you have a wonderful time at Kent.

Please contact us with queries or feedback on grad-editors@kent.ac.uk

Tinashe Mushakavanhu
Outgoing Chief GradPost Editor

**Notes from the Science Communication Conference 2011**

Scientists, science communicators and other crowds from all over the general landscape of science flocked to a copiously caffeinated King’s Place in London earlier this year. The reason? To share thoughts and ideas on current practices at the Science Communication Conference 2011, organised by the British Science Association and the Wellcome Trust.

This year’s theme, ‘online engagement’, could not be more appropriate in light of increasing numbers of academic departments breaking out their own Twitter accounts when the press offices handle the more formal, official side of business. The sessions on offer this year covered the virtues and difficulties in handling these new publishing powers, including blogs, microblogs, general social media platforms and podcasts, as well as discussion on the longevity of current practices within science communication.

Admittedly, the University of Kent representative (yours truly) did choose breakout sessions after her own interests. But I hope that you will indulge my enthusiasm, and perhaps find something valuable in this text for use in your future work.

For starters, a session called ‘Introduction to Public Engagement’ was held for first-time conference delegates and other science...
communication "rookies"; led by Simon Burall, Director of Involve (www.involve.org.uk), it aimed to present the ideas behind public engagement of science to the yet uninitiated.

The introductory session to the Science Communication Conference 2011 began with the question: why engage the public in science? The short answer, parrot-phrased, is “governance, social cohesion, improve services, learning, ownership (good for David Cameron's Big Society), law and regulations”. It seems the main reason to go into public engagement is the urge to change something in the current system, often policies. This is something not necessarily known to policymakers, making it important to tell them "why we do what we do" at the beginning of engagement-related collaborations.

In the big picture of science communication, engagement happens at many different, discrete levels, with local, national and international forming the basic brackets. The number of people reached at each level is inversely proportionate to the size of the bracket, despite today's plethora of methods used to reach the public. These include education, new media, science festivals, public debates and online forums. The disproportionality could be because most science communication is still imaged as the passing of information from scientists to the public, leading us to the hotly debated deficit (the aforementioned one-way passage of information) versus dialogue (where information and feedback is circulated) debate.

Bearing this in mind, we keep "to inform" as a key term in public engagement, while also adding collaborate, involve, consult and, ultimately, empower [the public] to the science communicator’s glossary. This outlook can also be applied beyond science, to aspects of health, youth services, criminal justice, environmental planning, and so on.

The overall consensus was that engagement should not be approached merely as an attachment to research, or a requirement that is part of a grant, but an opportunity to bring about positive changes to the many key players, including the government, scientists, schools, universities, specialist organisations and, of course, the public.

This oversized introduction lends us precious few words on the theme of online engagement, and exploring its present and future opportunities. The following are a mixture of what I have gathered from the conference, and some resulting advice I personally have to offer from experience:

• On the web, science blogs seem to be the main way of transmitting scientific thinking that is informal. While online editions of journals offer official discussion spaces, comment sections on blogs provide a kinder environment in which to banter.
• Social media platforms are good places to push blogs. Facebook has so far been proven to serve brands particularly well, which is something supplied by a blog. (Surely science itself has not been branded as yet?) The issue with Facebook, for now, is that it is still perceived somewhat as the young person's social media platform, even though the 50+ population are gradually taking to it.
• Twitter houses a very large community of science communicators (you can find conference tweets by searching for hashtag #SCC2011), who enjoy the informal environment and exchange journal articles as well as funny scientific YouTube videos. The problem with Twitter is reportedly the lack of archiving and import solutions: so far, only the archiving issue has been addressed by the online tool Storify.
• Evidenced by the row caused by a NASA-based blogger last year, there is still an overriding difficulty in making online content that is taken seriously likely due to the firm trust that the scientific community has in the peer review process. This was acknowledged by conference delegates, but it was remarked that the web is a good link to school pupils, who are less likely to worry about peer review, and form a key target group for public engagement.
• Finally, because of the informal nature of online engagement, it provides audience empowerment: the public (or indeed any audience member, regardless of academic speciality) asks more questions and is able to (constructively) criticise on neutral grounds.

What I personally feel is most important, however, is that academics, and I admit my scientific bias, feel that there are enough choices in methods with which to communicate their work. Scientific progress and prowess should be a collaboration between the creators and the consumers. As a member of the outgoing batch of Master's students, and the editorial team of this newsletter, I hope you feel more encouraged to create your own virtual (or real) soapbox, and share your work with others, and wish you a successful year at the University of Kent.

Jia-Ou Song
MSC Science, Communication and Society

Your Students’ Union

Welcome to the University of Kent. I am Tom Ritchie, the Kent Union President for 2011/2012. Along with my fellow sabbatical officers, it is our job to help make sure that your experience here at Kent is as fulfilling and enjoyable as possible.

Kent Union is the representative body for students at the University of Kent; run by students, for students. An example of the services we provide is the Advice Centre, which helps students with budgeting, housing and visa queries. Another service is the Jobshop, which students can sign up to in order to seek part-time employment to support their studies. In addition to these services, we also have lots of opportunities to get involved, from societies, sports clubs and volunteering to our shops, nightclub and cafes.

The other sabbatical officers form a big part of making sure that you are represented while at University. As well as me, there are four other sabbaticals who can help improve your experience on campus:

- Lauren Crowley, Vice President (Education) union-education@kent.ac.uk
- Colum McGuire, Vice President (Welfare) union-welfare@kent.ac.uk
- Kenny Budd, Vice President (Student Activities) union-activities@kent.ac.uk
- Hannah Davis, Vice President (Sports) union-sports@kent.ac.uk

To help keep postgraduate issues at the top of the agenda, Kent Union have a dedicated Representation and Postgraduate Student Coordinator named Paul Stalker, who is here to help facilitate your experience and will be delighted to meet with you to discuss ideas and how to get involved. As well as this, we help support the Graduate Student Association (GSA).

Principally, Kent Union is here to represent you to the University on an array of subjects such as your course, extending the library opening hours and any other issues which you may face. Both Kent Union and the GSA will ensure that you have a voice within the University, but also within the wider local and national communities.

If you have any thoughts on what Kent Union can do for you, or want more information on how to get involved, please contact us by visiting our website at www.kentunion.co.uk or by emailing me at union-president@kent.ac.uk

Tom Ritchie
Union President
Experiences of a postgraduate researcher at Medway

I am French and a final-year PhD research student under the supervision of Dr Maxwell Casely-Hayford at the Medway School of Pharmacy (MSOP). I have decided to pursue my studies to the PhD level as it is my desire to work in Research and Development. I like the calm rhythm at the Medway campus which is greatly beneficial for my concentration and, in turn, my experiment results. There are currently 18 PhD students from diverse cultural backgrounds and various research fields. This is an ideal environment for collaboration and for the generation of fresh, innovative ideas for my research work.

Studying at the Medway campus has really improved my knowledge in organic synthetic chemistry through the design, synthesis and biological evaluation of natural product analogues and hybrid compounds with potential anticancer activity. Moreover, I have been acquiring many other skills in this interdisciplinary environment within chemistry, biology and pharmaceutical technology. In my second year, I was trained in tissue cell culture and have deepened my knowledge in characterisation techniques such as Mass Spectrometry and NMR. I also discovered skills I was not aware of. During my first year, I was asked whether I later wanted to be a lecturer by one of the MPharm students who I usually supervise from October to December each year. I spontaneously answered “no”, only to be told that I was good at explaining chemistry projects to students with little or no knowledge of experimental chemistry.

I commute daily from London and until last year I used to take the University shuttle bus that links the Greenwich and Medway campuses. However, I have now passed my driving test and choose to drive as I work unusual hours in the lab. I am blessed to live in East London, which is a one-hour (one-way) journey to Medway. My journey to and from London means that my time on campus is limited in terms of social activities, but my colleagues and I recently rediscovered the tennis courts at the campus entrance, surrounded by huge trees and beautiful green spaces – perfect for relaxing and meditating during breaks from my research work. As a keen tennis player, I am delighted to practise my favourite sport for free in a fun and friendly environment.

I was recently chosen to be co-PhD research representative of MSOP and I really enjoy working and organising activities with my co-rep Emiliana, especially in June 2011 when we co-ordinated the Postgraduate Presentations Event. This was a platform for PhD students from the three science-related schools at Medway to present their research work.

I will be finishing mid-2012, which will make my brother and sisters sigh with relief – they thought I would be an everlasting student!

Lembé Ngassam
Final-year PhD Medicinal Chemistry

Campus in the summer holidays

As Coleridge so aptly puts it, ‘Summer has set in with its usual severity.’ There is something distinctly unnerving about being on campus over the summer break.

From the moment the last exam ends in June and students break out of the Sports Centre doors to blissful summer freedom, to the excited, nervous tension that crackles in the air just before the new influx of undergraduates arrive, there hangs a blank sort of limbo, a waiting. Some argue that this limbo provides a kind of heaven for the postgraduate students left behind.

Far from an unwelcome silence, the sudden disappearance of the undergraduate population brings with it a kind of dizzying calm. The campus becomes rife with families of ducks and singing blackbirds; the rabbits daringly hop into your path; the once-bustling hub of the Venue glazes over as dust begins to settle on the glass doors. It is suddenly possible to reach anywhere on campus with in ten minutes because paths and doorways are clear of milling Freshers.

The library boasts computers readily available, with no queues on Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein that despite holdings of 20 copies, cannot be found in term time due to its requirement for an undergraduate class. Maybe three students have actually read the book – the remaining seventeen have used it as a pillow after a particularly arduous night of discussing the finer points of the blurb and skimming an eye across SparkNotes over three bottles of cheap red wine.

But despite the quiet library, the clear pathways, the singing birds and hopping rabbits, and the general feeling of calm, we miss the undergraduates. After all, that’s what universities are here for; and in spite of their innocent ways and demanding presence, the students are for the most part a fabulous bunch of inspiring and intelligent people, the next generation to influence and shape our world. Plus, it would get boring if it was always this quiet round here. Roll on September!

Kasia Ladds
MA Creative Writing
Q&A with Amy Sackville

Novelist and lecturer Amy Sackville kindly agreed to talk to The Grad Post about her life as an award-winning novelist in the School of English, and gives vital advice to budding writers on reading, blogging and making the most of your Bachelor’s.

How did your professional work lead you to become a lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Kent?

The life of a writer is a lonely one, and typically not the most lucrative either – like most writers, I need to work to support myself. Having taught English and Creative Writing on and off for a few years, and having studied Creative Writing myself, it seemed a natural progression. I genuinely enjoy working with students; it keeps the mind sharp, I think, and being part of an academic community is far more invigorating for me than working in a vacuum.

How easy is it to balance your writing with your teaching life in the School of English? During term time, my week is split in half, so in theory I am a teacher until Wednesday and a writer Thursdays and Fridays. Writing days will be given over to research, redrafting, editing and so on, as well as getting the first words on the page, depending on the stage I’m at. It doesn’t always work like this; I am not always good at organising my days, or at multitasking. So there are phases of the academic year when I am unlikely to be doing much writing at all; but there are other times, the summer in particular, when I can focus on it more or less entirely. I find in any case that it’s good to leave a book to one side at certain points in the writing, so this structure of having periods of intensity and periods where the work is incubating and settling down works well for me.

What was it that initially drew you to fiction writing – was there a moment of epiphany, or was it just a natural progression following your degree in English Literature?

A rather twisted and convoluted progression, in fact. It took me a long time to even consider that this might be something I was capable of – I’m not one of those people that has always written reams, although I have always written scraps. At some point I think I realised that I had flirted with a variety of spheres and occupations – theatre, academia, journalism, publishing – which all circled around a love of language and text, and that however much I enjoyed what I was doing, it didn’t quite satisfy. I always wanted to get closer to the text, to be in it, to own it in some way. Which of course I can’t do even as a writer, but I’ve come to accept my perpetual dissatisfaction with greater equanimity. Ever tried, ever failed.

Your novel The Still Point has not only been described by critics as ‘an exceptional debut novel’, but won the John Llewellyn Rhys prize in November last year. How did it feel being recognised by the same body that has previously awarded this prize to the likes of Angela Carter?

It was completely unexpected, and to win this prize in particular, which has such a wonderfully broad remit and as you say an extraordinary pedigree, was a tremendous honour. I only hope to see it reinstated in 2012 – it would be a tragedy and a travesty if I were the last recipient.

Who, if any, are your greatest influences in the world of fiction writing?

I very nearly became a Joycean scholar, and I do love Joyce; I am in general drawn to modernist literature, and in my first book, I quite consciously borrowed from Woolf, Forster and others. The shifting between perspectives, the domestic setting and the interest in houses, interiors, the spaces we inhabit, the concern with memory and identity. The Still Point is clearly wearing this modernist influence on its sleeve by taking its title from Eliot. It’s the tension between language and the world, the desire to describe what’s ineffable, or irreconcilable, even if the best we can do is attest to that condition, which moves me. Lately, I’ve been looking at the nouveau roman; although I’m not willing to relinquish character and plot entirely. I’ve been thinking about writing something very distilled, condensed and formally structured.

How important do you think it is as a novelist to have an active online presence – Twitter, blogging, etc?

I think it’s probably very important. And yet I don’t. The last thing I need is another distraction from writing. I am trying to set up a website because I’m starting to feel like I don’t exist without one, but I will remain a half-ghost because I can’t see myself ever blogging in a consistent and sustained way, and you’re unlikely to hear a tweet out of me any time soon.

What are the three most important pieces of advice you’d give to novice writers?

Read a lot. Write as regularly as you can. Learn to balance intuition and craft – trust your instinct, but remember that you can always rework.

Having completed a Master’s in Creative Writing yourself, what would you say to those considering the course at Kent?

I think a Master’s of this sort is a rare opportunity to do something for yourself. So think about what it is that you’d like to get from it. Whether that is developing a single piece, taking advantage of the sustained input and guidance from two or three tutors (as I did at Goldsmiths), or the chance to experiment with forms and try out new things in a secure and stimulating workshop environment, don’t waste it.

Kasia Ladds
MA Creative Writing
Graduate School

Global Skills Award programme

June 2011 marked the completion of the first Global Skills Award (GSA) co-ordinated by the Graduate School. Run as a pilot, this award first year, with 114 who went on to complete the programme. The Global Skills Award programme is designed to broaden student understanding of global issues and current affairs as well as to develop their personal skills in order to enhance employability.

To receive the award, all students had to complete an online skills assessment and attend a lecture series delivered by leading academics, business persons and current affairs specialists. Lectures this year covered a wide variety of topics ranging from economics, the Middle East, extremism, genetics and cloning as well as sustainability and green issues. Students were also required to attend a series of workshops covering topics such as leadership, careers management, teamworking and networking. Evaluations of all lectures and workshops were completed online so that at the end of the award it was possible for students to create a document which recorded their development over the year and reflections on their learning.

The six-month programme ran from October to April and in June a celebration award ceremony was held to recognise the hard work of all the participants. Professor Diane Houston, Dean of the Graduate School, presented all those present with a certificate which was followed by a reception. This was a wonderful culmination of the award and a great place to meet friends and compare experiences.

“The Global Skills Award is an insightful programme which combines workshops on career skills with informative and innovative lectures on various topical issues confronting our modern world. University lecturers, administrative officers and even alumni gave up their free time to engage with postgraduate students which culminated in thought-provoking lectures and intuitive discussions. The workshops enhanced my knowledge of key career skills such as interviewing, networking and media awareness. I may not be a global citizen yet, but the GSA programme has certainly helped my progression towards this goal. Bravo to the University of Kent for starting such a brilliant programme and executing it so well!” Valique Gomes, MA in International Relations

“I also got a chance to meet people from other disciplines and backgrounds who I wouldn’t have met otherwise. The GSA broadened my academic and personal horizons and I’m very glad to have had the opportunity to take part.” Manuel Hohnekamp-Brüggemann, MSc in Science, Communication and Society

Further information about the GSA is available at www.kent.ac.uk/graduateschool/skills/programmes/gsa.html

Rhiannon Binns
Graduate School

Transferable Skills Training

The Graduate School co-ordinates the Transferable Skills Training programme, which offers a broad range of workshops that are designed to hone skills such as negotiation, communication, career management and time management. All our workshops are delivered by expert internal and external trainers and are open to all postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers.

A number of workshops are also open to postgraduate taught students. Please check the booking system for details at https://bloom.kent.ac.uk

Visa Stories: a workshop of experiences

21st October 2011, University of Kent, Canterbury campus

This workshop will provide an informal and friendly setting for sharing experiences of international mobility. It’s an interactive, cross-disciplinary event involving students, academics, activists, film-makers and writers. This will be an opportunity to dissect the issue of migration primarily from a variety of perspectives but with interventions from legal and political science experts. Too often, the issue of migration is just collated statistics and percentages overshadowing the real human stories beneath the figures and percentages.

The stories will range from experiences of migration, travel or transnational movement, and explorations of the different dimensions related to global mobility, from its legal and judicial regulations to its political, economic, cultural, artistic, or personal aspects. We are particularly interested in experiences with visas, laws, permits, acceptances and refusals, application processes, or anything that makes your story of international movement unique and important.

The idea of the workshop is to bring to the fore these issues in the hope that they will be tackled and so that the “processes” can be improved. The University has a significantly large international community who could benefit from these exchanges. Relevant University authorities will be in attendance to share University policy on students and visa issues.

The line-up of speakers will include students and academics from the University and across the UK. A book publication of selected presentations will also be compiled. This will provide a necessary documentation of the experiences and enable the dialogue to continue.

The Visa Stories workshop is being supported by the Centre for Colonial and Postcolonial Research in the School of English. The event is organised by Filippo Mennozi, Bahriye Kemal and Tinashe Mushakavanhu.

For more information or to get involved, email visastories@gmail.com