



MASTS & SUPER Graduate School 15th Annual Student Retreat



Monday 9 to Wednesday 11 March 2026
MacDonald Aviemore Resort

We very much look forward to welcoming all our postgraduate community to the 15th Graduate School Retreat. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet your peers, share experiences, build friendships, and be part of the PGR community which sits at the heart of the wider MASTS & SUPER network. With presentations, skills development, and networking opportunities, we hope there is something for everyone.



Attendees at the 2025 Retreat

The Programme

Day 1 – Monday 9 March	
1.00 pm	Lunch and networking
2.00 pm	<p>Introduction and welcome</p> <p>Introduction to the day and to the Graduate School team – Dave, Mark, Emma, Bethan, and Jules.</p> <p>What to expect and getting the most from the Retreat.</p> 
2.10 pm	<p>MASTS Themes, Forums, and Working Groups</p> <p>Dr Julia Sutherland, Programme Support Officer, MASTS</p> <p>Hear how you can get involved in the MASTS community.</p>
2.20 pm	<p>Ice breaker</p> <p>An opportunity to meet other PGRs and build connections.</p>
2.45 pm	<p>Outputs, Outcomes and Impact: Why are they important and what do they look like?</p> <p>Prof David Paterson, Executive Director, and Dr Mark James, Operations Director</p> <p>What will be the research outcomes and outputs from your PhD? Learn how to recognise opportunities to cultivate your impact and communicate the value of your research within and beyond academia.</p>
3.30 pm	Tea/coffee break and networking
4.00 pm	 <p>Connecting Science & Policy in the Water Sector</p> <p>Dr Nikki Dodd, Manager, and Dr Amy Cooper, Impact and Communications Officer, Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW)</p> <p>Nikki, supported by Amy, shares her experiences managing the Centre, its projects, and engaging with policy makers, regulators, industry and academic researchers across Scotland's water community, to support regulations and policy to improve water quality & health and maximise the benefits of the research to society.</p>
5.00 pm	Afternoon break and hotel check in
6.00 pm	<p>Bar stool speakers</p> <p>Dr Nikki Dodd and Dr Amy Cooper, CREW</p>
7.00 pm	Dinner and conversation

Day 2 – Tuesday 10 March

9.00 am

Interactive skills session

Session A

Making Policy & Conservation Effective – Stakeholder Engagement

Dr Jonathan Houghton, Reader, and Dr Lindsey West, Research Fellow, School of Biological Sciences, Queens University Belfast



The session includes:

- Why engagement matters
- Who to engage with
- How to engage with different audiences - public, government, regulators, etc.

Session B

Grant Writing

Prof W Gordon Mackay, Professor, School of Health and Life Sciences, UWS and Director of Research, Innovation and Academic Partnerships, NHS Lanarkshire



Writing a strong grant proposal can seem daunting, but it's a skill you can learn, and this workshop will show you how! Together, we'll break down what makes a great application, share tips from successful proposals, and give you a chance to start shaping your own proposal ideas in a supportive setting.

10.30 am

Tea/coffee break and networking

11.00 am

Interactive skills session continued

1.00 pm

Lunch and networking

2.00 pm

Social activity

Option to join a group walk, play board games, or use the recreation facilities at the resort. There is an ice-skating rink on site and local bike hire in Aviemore available at additional cost.



5.00 pm

Afternoon break

6.00 pm



Bar stool speaker

Dr Jonathan Houghton, Reader, Queens University Belfast

Jon came into science the long way round, leaving school at 16 with no science qualifications and returning after working in Michelin-starred kitchens. He went on to build a career in marine ecology that proved a better fit, and in this informal barstool chat he reflects on what that route taught him: research is rarely easy, progress is uneven, and “good luck” is often more honest than “have a great day”.

7.00 pm

Dinner and conversation

Day 3 – Wednesday 11 March

8.30 am **Check out**

9.00 am **Mentoring Programme**

Hear about the benefits of having a mentor. Applications will open after the Retreat.

9.15 am **An Introduction Data Sensing and Logging**

Dr René Swift, Research Fellow, and Dr Mark James, Operations Director, University of St Andrews

This interactive workshop will go through the basics of designing data loggers and how they work. It will also review other considerations, including ethics, data storage, and analysis and interpretation.



10.30 am **Tea/coffee break and networking**

11.00 am **Data Sensing and Logging continued**

1.00 pm **Lunch and networking**

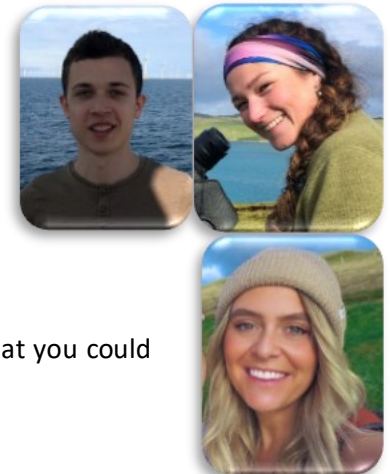
2.00 pm **Graduate Transitions**

Graduates share their experience of transitioning into the workplace and offer support and advice.

- Dr Rufus Danby, Fisheries Policy Officer, The Scottish White Fish Producers Association
- Dr Julia Sutherland, Programme Support Officer, MASTS

Hear from a current PGR who carried out an internship and learn what you could take away from a similar experience.

- Sophie Smith, UKRI Policy Internship with JNCC



2.55 pm **Final questions and comments**

3.00 pm **Close**

PG Cert Researcher Professional Development

Remember that the Retreat is a PG Cert-able activity. After the event, if you are currently registered on the programme, please take some time to reflect on what you have learned in any of the sessions, and record this on MyPlace.

The class to allocate credits to depends on where you believe you have developed most and can provide evidence of that development. For example, **Grant Writing** could fall into PG Cert Class RD904: Engagement, Influence & Impact. So, your activity log might include:

- Session at the Retreat = 3.5 hours
- Working with a supervisor on your own small grant for conference funding to give a presentation = 1 day
- Report for the funder on your conference contribution = 4 hours
- Total = approximately 2 days/credits under RD904

This work may generate other activities that could be captured e.g., creating a presentation.

If you need help or advice on how to add activities to your PG Cert, allocation credits, or anything else, please approach one of the Graduate School team, during or after the Retreat.

