

SWan IBLs Summer School

Examples include Elgg, which provides a social networking environment - Eduspaces.net being a popular site - and the desktop web conferencing systems currently being trialled by SWan for multi-site meetings.

Other highlights of the first day included an animated session, given by Dr John Hands of University College, London, on 'How to produce a clear and effective PhD'. His clever use of trickery - the repeated sound of breaking glass certainly kept the audience awake - gave just a hint of what was to come as Dr Daniel Sokol, St George's resident magician, turned paper into money (a £10 note to be exact) during his speech on the implications of putting research material into print.

The focus of the second day shifted to Communications, as Karen Gardner, of Carpe Diem Corporate Communications invited students to participate in a mock press conference, teaching them how to field difficult questions on emotive subjects as part of a media training programme. Rounding off the Summer School presentations was a memorable, thought-provoking lecture given by the distinguished Professor Lewis Wolpert, CBE, FRS, FRSL, entitled 'Causal Beliefs make us Human'.

Despite the torrential July downpours, the planned barbecue went ahead on the Monday evening, hosted by the Heads of the SWan Universities. Professor Stephen Hill, Principal of RHUL, later commented: "The evening barbecue was a definite highlight, providing useful networking opportunities for staff and students. I thought the first IBLs Summer School was a great success. It was excellent to see students from all three partners within SWan building friendships and exchanging research tips during the interactive sessions over the two days."

In fact, the rain didn't appear to particularly dampen anyone's spirits. Helen Bennett, a 2nd year Royal Holloway/St George's PhD student, said: "The networking opportunity was invaluable and to talk 'science' or exchange experiences with other students was comforting and made me feel that maybe the PhD path isn't so lonely after all. The Summer School was put together thoughtfully, with a good balance of plenary and interactive sessions. I would definitely recommend students attend this training session at the next opportunity - and not just for the great social evening afterwards!"

All in all, the Summer School proved to be an excellent example of the added-value that being a member of SWan gives to all our PhD students.