

Report: 2016 RE meetings in Maryland

In early May, Research Leaders and Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (DDoGS) from around the network gathered in the US for their annual meeting. Hosted by the University of Maryland, the meetings drew together colleagues from Auckland, Birmingham, Connecticut, Dublin, Edinburgh, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Korea, Lund, Maryland, Melbourne, Monterrey, Nottingham, Ohio, Queensland, Santiago, Singapore and Sydney.

Prior to the official meetings the DDoGS group held a separate workshop, this year on the theme of Doctoral Mobility. Our hosts in Maryland had lined up some interesting speakers and following a round table discussion, which brought up many common issues, most notably a lack of monitoring and support for doctoral mobility, we heard from Dr Suzanne Ortega from the US Council of Graduate Schools who addressed the impact of internationalisation on doctoral students and their careers. Initial studies carried out in the US have shown clear benefits of international mobility including higher rates of publications and increased cultural competencies. We also heard from a number of UMD doctoral students and supervisors on their very positive experiences of mobility, highlighting the strong personal connections developed which had led to lasting collaborations, the new skills they learnt and brought back to their home department and the general theme of being able to conduct research as part of a team which would not have been possible working alone.

The official meetings started with a joint session where the U21 Executive Director, Prof Eva Wiberg, presented on activities related to the 'Future Societies' theme including workshops on Language Science and Global Migration and on Climate Action, the latter of which informed the UN-backed Climate Action Summit which took place in Washington DC later that week.

Following this joint session the Research Leaders and DDoGS held separate meetings to discuss matters of importance to their individual groups. The Research Leaders discussed a variety of topics including career pathways of researchers, communicating the value of research and government regulation of research, in particular export controls, the understanding of which is becoming increasingly important for international collaborations. Research collaborations were also a hot topic, with Prof Ben Shneiderman (Computer Science, UMD) presenting on his new book "The new ABCs of Research" which outlined how research had changed over recent decades and proposed new ways of doing impactful research – by doing applied and basic research combined. In their meeting the DDoGS group discussed employability of doctoral students including what skills they need if they are not planning to continue in academia, mental health issues which are an increasing concern for Graduate Schools, mutual expectations between students and supervisors, along with plans for a new activity – Graduate Research Projects – which are outlined below.

The next RE meetings will take place in March 2017, at University College Dublin. There will be a workshop before the two-day meeting, where the DDoGS will focus their minds on the 'Future of the Doctorate'.