

GRADUATE COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

The newsletter for the research student community



Hats Off to Everyone Involved!

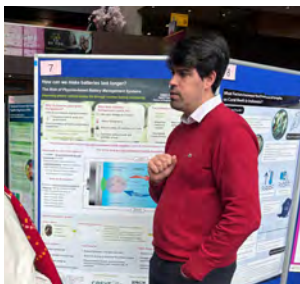
Annual Research Student Exhibition

Why do we like virtual reality games? - Research degree students presented a wide range of exciting projects at this year's Graduate College Research Student Annual Exhibition on 14 April at The Forum. One of the biggest events in the Graduate College calendar, the exhibition gives research students from all subjects and at every stage the chance to showcase their work to students, staff and external visitors. Our judges Prof Susan Brooks, Dr Susannah Wright, Prof John Durodola and Prof Ray Lee gave awards for the quality of their presentations to Zeena Hicks (DCM, OBBS), Heshika Hematilake (PhD, BMS) and John Manton (PhD, Fine Art). Clare Carswell (MRes, Arts) and Peilin Liu (PhD, OBBS) received a commendation.



What some of our research students are focusing on:

"My research explores which design choices and storytelling elements most influence how young adults experience virtual reality (VR). Understanding this can help create more engaging, meaningful, and effective VR experiences. By creating VR games from scratch and testing them on young adults, I'm exploring how player interaction, environment design, and narrative affect immersion and emotional response. I'll be measuring emotional responses through questionnaires, interviews, and observing player behaviour during game play to better understand what makes players feel genuinely connected to a virtual world. Maybe VR is becoming the future of entertainment and education, so why not make it unforgettable?" *Loujain Al Ibadi - MPhil/PhD in School of Arts.*



"I'm a fourth-year PhD student researching battery management systems for automotive lithium-ion batteries, focusing on physics-based modelling and real-time data, to monitor degradation and extend battery life. I applied for this PhD studentship at Oxford Brookes because I wanted to contribute to the development of more accurate, reliable and sustainable battery technologies for future electric vehicles". *Andre Costa - PhD in Engineering*

"My research is titled "Adaptive Practice: Performance, ageing and longevity in women artists' practice" I am looking at how older women artists adapt their art practice to ageing in order to remain productive. I aim to reveal the impact of lived experience on the chronology and content of older women artists' works, and on their archives, through autobiographical practice based research. I am comparing the personal to the institutional archive and am researching selected artists in the archives of Modern Art Oxford as I do".

Clare Carswell - MRes in School of Arts



This event would not have been possible without the participation and enthusiasm of all our research students. Looking forward to next year's.

Students' news

Brokenness and repair

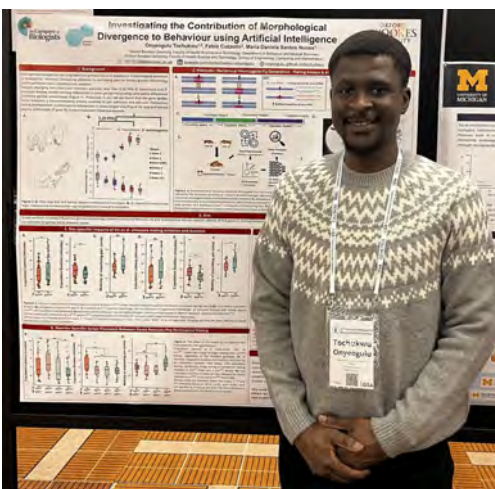


Katie Taylor, PhD student in the School of Arts presented her work at the Broken Repair exhibition held at the Glass Tank from 26 January to 13 February 2026. The exhibition included original works from Robert Simpkins, Johanna Tulloch, Dan O'Brien, Natasha Durie, Juliet Eccles, and Rachel Barbaresci, as well as kintsugi pieces by Iku Nishikawa (Oxford Kintsugi).

Katie's works represented a period of personal disruption. A needle-felted sculpture holding a wedding ring immobile, pewter casts formed in oyster shells at a site of an imagined future, and a rough gravestone casting marked with the word 'wife'. All these objects acting as transitional anchors, holding loss, identity shift, and suspended transformation, sitting firmly within Shifting States ethos and ideas.

Brokenness is not a problem to solve, but a liminal state to be attended to, and repair is not about returning to what was, but allowing something new to take shape from within the rupture (Katie Taylor)

AI and Drosophila



Tochukwo Onyeogulu, PhD student at the School of Biological and Medical Sciences presented a poster of his research at the Drosophila Research Conference in Chicago on 4-8 March organised by the Genetics Society of America. The Annual Drosophila Research Conference is the premier meeting for Drosophila researchers, with more than 1,000 presentations covering a wide spectrum of Drosophila investigations, genetics, molecular biology, cell biology, development, immunology, physiology, neuroscience and evolution.

Tochukwo's work explores how morphological divergence influences behavior in Drosophila using artificial intelligence to uncover patterns that link form and function across species.

Teaching and Research Conference



Catherine Ross, current PhD student in the School of Fine Art has been invited to host a multidisciplinary teaching and research conference at Brookes on the Future of Teaching and Research in the Modern Academy.

The conference welcomes papers on computational social sciences, digital humanities and universal design for learning. Papers may be focused on issues ranging from the scholarship of teaching and learning to rapid prototyping in research, from digital archiving to community engaged learning, and from specific teaching projects to emerging research theories, and more.

For more information and how to apply please go to the [Conference website](#)

Time well invested



Bernardo de La Vega, PhD student at Oxford Brookes Business School, delivered a presentation entitled "Digital Heritage as a Pathway to Community Agency: Insights from Ethnographic Research in Brazil" at the 2026 Society for Latin American Studies Conference organised by the University of Leeds. He then joined an international panel at the "Heritage and the Metropolis" conference organised by Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University in France, presenting "Edgy Heritage as Challenge and Opportunity in Community Empowerment," sharing findings from a collaborative study running since 2020 on the digitalisation of community-based tourism practices in Brazilian favelas.



From April to June 2026, Bernardo is undertaking a Visiting Scholar placement at Universität Trier, in Germany, supported by the Turing Scheme, via the Global Mobility & Engagement Team at Oxford Brookes University. Hosted by the Research Centre for Tourism and Sustainable Development and working alongside his external supervisor, Prof. Dr Fabian Frenzel, he is contributing to teaching, research dissemination, and knowledge exchange activities that bridge his doctoral research with practical applications in the European context. The placement is providing Bernardo with valuable experience in international teaching and knowledge transfer, whilst strengthening collaborative ties between Oxford Brookes University and Universität Trier.

.....and more

Latest networking events



Our recent networking events featured two great highlights. First, we visited the Bodleian Libraries' printing press to learn about book history and try out a historic press firsthand. In May, we followed up with another insightful, knowledge-packed guided tour of the Botanic Garden with Dr. Andrew Lack.

"I learnt more in the afternoon than in all my previous visits" Richard Bossons (Master by Research)

Alumni News



In her upcoming book alumna Dr Abbie Muchecheti reveals that institutional spaces—from lecture theatres and corridors to boardrooms and offices—are never neutral. Instead, they actively dictate who belongs and who is marginalised.

Grounded in Black feminist thought, disability justice, and spatial analysis, the book uncovers: Architectural privilege and the illusion of inclusion, bureaucratic containment and restricted movement, visibility vs. invisibility in workplace dynamics, power, whiteness, and leadership in institutional design. Shift your perspective from who occupies a space to how the space itself reproduces systemic bias.

Crucial for institutional leaders, architects, HR practitioners, and academics, this book offers a vital framework for understanding power, culture, and true belonging.

Abbie's book will be published in June 2026 and can be pre-ordered in [her own webpages](#)

FNN Harbour Foundation UK

Alumna Dr Abbie Muchecheti is the founder and trustee of a newly registered charity supporting disabled people who may be experiencing, at risk of, or recovering from domestic or emotional abuse — particularly individuals who are homebound, isolated, or living with limited mobility.

As the charity develops, they are currently looking for volunteers interested in supporting areas such as social media, communications, community engagement, awareness campaigns, administrative support, and research/funding support.

Most roles are flexible and remote. Anyone interested can contact: mainig@icloud.com or visit [FNN harbour foundation UK](#)

Upcoming Social & Academic Networking Events

more info and how to book from the graduate college webpages

Three Minute Thesis Competition

Wednesday 3 June, 11:00-13:00

JHB 301

Are you ready for a challenge to test your presentation skills? Present your thesis in just 3 minutes to a non specialist audience. Cash prizes for the best presentations. Come to support your peers on the day!



Oxford Mini Plant Tour

Monday 6 July, 12:20-14:00

Join us on this fantastic tour of the Oxford Mini Plant and see how approximately 800 cars are finished daily to each owner's specifications. Do not miss this great visit. Only 15 places available. Book yours soon.



Graduate College Writing Retreats

Are you writing a chapter of your thesis, or analyzing data, perhaps working on your transfer, sorting your library review search? Join your peers for a few hours or a full day with plenty of refreshments, network and encouraging. You will enjoy it and get your work done!

Feedback received from a participant:

- Scheduled and protected time in person and on a different site from where I work as OBU staff
- Joint commitment to producing stated work at the start of the event, with a strong sense of holding each other to account
- The breaks are helpful for stretching and also for reviewing progress and reaffirming what to focus on next
- Very helpful having Maria to talk through any challenge, particularly if we are overthinking or have some sort of block
- Really good to connect with other researchers and be informed about what they are passionate about and what they hope to achieve.
- Creates a space of research family connectedness and motivation to be productive.



Research Student Profile

Amy Poole

School of Nursing and Midwifery

Thesis title: Improving Support for Acute Oncology Patients: a Mixed Methods Study with Patients and Healthcare Professionals

This research aims to understand the experience of acute cancer-related hospital care from the perspectives of both patients and the healthcare professionals who provide this care. Acute care refers to a short-term but immediate medical need. For cancer patients, this can arise from the side effects of anti-cancer treatments, symptoms or progression of the cancer itself, or other medical issues related to their cancer diagnosis. Some patients may receive a cancer diagnosis during an emergency admission, either due to symptoms they presented with or incidentally, such as the discovery of a tumour during a scan for an unrelated head injury.

These situations can be incredibly stressful, as they encompass both urgent health needs and concerns about cancer. Currently, our understanding of these experiences is limited and under-researched. Incorporating the voices of patients and staff into service improvements aligns with the NHS 10 Year Health Plan, and it is hoped that this research will help provide that voice.

Interviews will be conducted with patients and healthcare professionals to gather insights about their individual experiences. This data will help pinpoint areas where support can be improved, primarily for patients, but also for healthcare workers.

Practically speaking, there is a limited budget for implementing changes within the NHS. Therefore, this research will consider the priorities, feasibility, and specific barriers to implementing potential changes through a survey of healthcare professionals. This approach aims to ensure that the resulting set of recommendations focuses on areas where they will be the most efficient and effective.

Acute cancer-related hospital care can be incredible stressful for patients and healthcare professionals

Research Student Profile

Heshika Hematilake Ekanayake

School of Biological and Medical Sciences


Thesis title: Regulation and functional implications of sexual dimorphism in eye morphology in *Drosophila melanogaster*

“Sexual dimorphism”, the differences between males and females of the same species, is widespread in nature and shaped by sexual selection. These differences go far beyond reproductive organs, influencing morphology, physiology, and even behaviour. In many animals, sex-specific differences in sensory input and information processing lead to distinct behaviours, but the overall gene regulatory networks that shape sexually dimorphic sensory organs and neural circuits are still poorly understood.

In *Drosophila melanogaster* (the common fruit fly), sexual dimorphism is clearly visible in the compound eyes. Male and female flies differ not only in overall body size but also in eye size and morphology. Females generally have larger eyes, composed of more and bigger subunits, while males have smaller eyes. However, how these differences are developmentally regulated, and what impact they have on vision and behaviour, remains unknown.

The sex determination pathway in *Drosophila* is controlled by two major regulators, Sex-lethal (Sxl) and Transformer (Tra). Recent evidence suggests they also play roles in somatic development, including regulation of organ size. Preliminary work has shown that knocking down Sxl in the developing eyes of female flies causes a major reduction in eye size, making them resemble male eyes, whereas knocking down Tra has only minor effects.

By combining genetics, developmental biology, bioimaging, and behavioural analysis this project aims at understanding how these regulators may control eye development and sexual dimorphism..



In *Drosophila melanogaster* sexual dimorphism is clearly visible in the compound eyes



Research Student Profile

Rasheedat Lawal

School of Sport, Nutrition and Allied Health Professions

Thesis title: Nutritional and Genetic Risk Factors in the Progression of Mild Cognitive Impairment to Alzheimer's Disease

Neurodegenerative diseases, particularly Alzheimer's disease (the most common form of neurodegenerative diseases) pose a growing public health challenge.

Studies suggest that while genetic factors are responsible for about 80% of the development of Alzheimer's disease, modifiable lifestyle factors such as nutrition and diet play a vital role in the onset and progression of Alzheimer's disease.

However, there are limited studies investigating the interaction between nutrition and genetic predisposition in Alzheimer's progression.

This research aims to investigate potential interactions between dietary patterns and genetic variants, and the influence on cognitive decline to provide intervention strategies for slowing the progression of mild cognitive impairment to Alzheimer's disease.

Currently a systematic review and meta-analyses is under progress to identify genetic variants in young onset and late onset, including key micronutrients and nutrients, and their potential role in slowing the progression of mild cognitive impairment to Alzheimer's disease.

This will be followed by a synthesis of the evidence supporting the role of long-term nutrition interventions in improving cognition.

There are limited studies on the interaction between nutrition and genetic predisposition in Alzheimer's progression.

Research Student Profile

Kate Culligan

Oxford School of Nursery and Midwifery

Thesis title: Internationally educated registered nurses (IEN's) experiences of career progression in the United Kingdom National Health Service.

Whilst the migration of nurses has been popular since the Windrush generation, it has become a global- phenomenon in the 21st century (NHS, 2023). There has been an increase in migration since 2000 to the UK and USA encouraged by government policy due to a national and global shortage of nurses.

In England alone, the NHS CNO stated 93% of 51,245 nurses recruited to the UK NHS over the past 4 years have been from overseas. The NHS 10 year Plan (NHS, 2025) aims at reducing international nurse recruitment to a target of 10% by 2035, in order to foster a more domestic workforce.

This will be supported by increased training and apprenticeships by creating 2,000 more places and increasing graduate nursing training places by 92% (NHS, 2025). This is in conjunction with improved staff support, motivation, and career development to increase retention and decrease the risk of burnout.

It is important that the value of the IEN workforce is also reaffirmed to ensure that targeted policies are implemented to guarantee their development and retention and that these valuable team members do not feel overlooked.

This study aims at understanding the experiences of IEN's nurses with respect to career progression in the UK.



93% of nurses recruited to the NHS over the past 4 years have been from overseas

Keeping you informed

WRITING HUB | WRITE SPACE WRITING RETREATS

Do you sometimes find yourself staring at a blank page instead of making progress with writing? This year the Writing Hub is offering eight writing retreats, four on campus and four online, between May and July. All retreats take place from 9am - 4pm.

Whether face-to-face or online the format is the same: writers of any style and level create a sense of community containing plenty of quiet space to make progress with their writing, whether it's a dissertation, a thesis or a research paper. Each writing retreat provides a supportive, structured environment within which you can meet a writing goal. The group reflects together on the writing process at intervals, and there will be a Centre for Academic Development tutor available to talk through any aspect of your writing with.

Participants consistently provide feedback on how much they have achieved on the day, appreciating the calmness of the space, the ability to focus and be productive, and the supportive, welcoming community. So if you need to increase your writing momentum, we would love to see you.

Research Degrees Placement Opportunities



1-3 months placements for Research Degrees Students.

- Gain direct experience within industry and or other organisations - even outside of your discipline
- Develop transferable skills
- Expand your network and professional horizons
- Develop interpersonal skills working as part of a team
- Liaise with staff in different roles, including senior staff
- Improve your organisational skills
- Engage with different audiences and interact with external stakeholders

Eligibility criteria apply - for more information please contact rdt-placements@bookes.ac.uk

How to contact us



Research Degrees Team
email us on rdt-researchdegrees@brookes.ac.uk

We are always looking for contributions to future editions of the newsletter. They are welcome from all sections of the University.

If you have something to share
please email asa-gcnewsletter@brookes.ac.uk

FOLLOW US ON

