



Medical
Research
Council



Guidance for Theme Days

This document serves as your comprehensive guide to developing an engaging and stimulating Theme Day for your PhD students. Theme days provide a unique opportunity to explore diverse topics relevant to your students' academic and professional development.

This guide equips you with the tools and resources necessary to plan, organise, and execute successful theme days. We will delve into key considerations that include:

- **Choosing engaging events:** Explore strategies for selecting activities that resonate with your students and align with their research interests.
- **Event structure and format:** Discover various event formats to cater to different learning styles and maximize engagement.
- **Logistics and resources:** Learn how to navigate logistical considerations and access resources for optimal event planning.

By leveraging the guidance provided here, you can confidently organise theme days that not only enrich your students but also cultivate a sense of community and shared learning within the GW4 BioMed DTP.

Choosing engaging events

Theme days are an excellent opportunity to introduce students to specific topics within their area of research. While activities that are more generic, or focused on pastoral issues, are important, students are given ample opportunity to engage with these at Orientation and Congress.

Do:

- Focus on theme-specific topics, such as new developments in the field or careers in industry/relevant organisations.
- Consider including external subject-specific speakers.
- Include opportunities for collaboration and active engagement, such as workshops or peer-to-peer teaching.
- Give your students a finalised agenda well in advance.

Don't:

- Repeat activities already covered at Orientation of Congress.
- Be too general: Theme days are a great opportunity for a deeper-dive on more complex research topics.

Theme days with the best feedback have been theme-specific, actively engaging and topical. There has also been lots of good feedback for events that included peer-to-peer teaching where students can share updates on their projects and information on skills they have learned.

External Speakers

Consider inviting external speakers from industry or relevant organisations to give your students another perspective.

- The DTP can cover the cost of public transport for invited speakers.
- Speakers will need to complete an expenses claim form available from the DTP and submit it to the DTP with copies of their receipts.
- They will be reimbursed within 1 month of submitting the claim.
- Cardiff University employees will need to obtain pre-approval and make a claim using the Sap Concur system to claim travel expenses rather than the expense claim form.

Event structure and format

Your Theme Day should take place in person, in March each year and includes students from all cohorts who have a project within your theme. The DTP can provide you with an up-to-date list and student email addresses on request.

When planning your event structure consider the length and format of each event. We strongly recommend splitting up the day with regular breaks.

Start and End Times

- Make sure to factor in travel times for students who are not based in your host city
- This may mean starting later and ending earlier
- The students may want to get together to meet informally after the Theme Day has ended.
 - You may want to ask them if a volunteer would like to co-ordinate a location for this, this so that all attendees can be invited, however there is no funding available for this and it's not part of the DTP event.

Agenda

One of the most important parts of planning your event is making sure the agenda is finalised and shared well in advance. This is important for accessibility, and it also helps to create excitement and engagement with your event.

Below is an example of a successful event agendas you can use as inspiration:

GW\$ DTP Neuroscience & Mental Health Theme Day

10:00am

Arrival, tea & coffee

10:15am

Title: *"An Introduction to Connectomics: pre-processing and quality control of DTI data"*

Speaker: Sophie Townend

11am

Title: *"The British Neuroscience Association – what we do and how we can support you"*

Speaker: Vasanta Subramanian (online)

12pm

Lunch

12:45 – 1:15pm

Title: *"This year in neuroscience – what made the news?"*

Speaker: Seline Uran

1:20 – 2:10pm

Title: *"Thesis write-up and post-PhD careers"*

Speaker: Emily Taylor

2:10pm Tea break

2:30 – 3:30pm

Title: *"Postdoctoral funding opportunities"*

Speakers : Alice, Sam, Rachel, Jamie, Anthony

Logistics and resources

We can book the venue for you, but it needs to be done through Clarity Travel at Cardiff University. We need to know your preferred date and location well in advance to check availability. Feedback shows that our students prefer to have as much notice as possible for DTP events, a minimum of 2 month notice of the date is requested. Once a date and venue is confirmed, we can send out as 'save the date' for you.

Attendance is mandatory for the students within your theme, unless they are on a placement, at a conference, are in their unfunded period (BioMed1 only), have annual leave scheduled or are unwell.

Venue

When choosing a venue there are several aspects to consider:

- Your budget and group size.
 - Theme days have an annual budget allocation of £2,000
- Is it wheelchair-accessible?
- Can they accommodate the need for a quiet room or prayer room?
- How close it is to public transport links? A distance that is easily walkable for some may be inaccessible to others.
- How much notice does the venue require for final guest numbers, menu choices, etc?

Food and Drink

Due to our funding and University regulations, there are a few rules

- We are **unable to provide alcohol** at our events due to the MRC's funding terms.
- Any alcohol purchases will **not** be reimbursed.
- Make sure to collect dietary requirements and allergies before the event: vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, halal, and other and provide them the venue before your event.
 - They usually require this information at least a week before.

Please be aware, spend on non-permitted items will **not** be reimbursed.

Other Accessibility Considerations

Some additional accessibility considerations to think about are:

- Consider offering name and pronoun badges
- Venues with gender-neutral bathrooms

Student costs

- The DTP covers travel costs, usually train, for students to attend the Theme Day, if they are not studying in the city where your Theme Day takes place.
 - For example, if the event takes place in Bristol, we will pay for the travel of Bath, Exeter and Cardiff students to attend.
- Excluded travel expenses include mileage claims, parking costs and taxis unless previously agreed by the DTP.
- Students can claim back their train costs by completing an expenses claim form and submitting it to the DTP with copies of their receipts.
 - They will be reimbursed within 1 month of submitting the claim.

On the Day

- Please make a note of attendance and reasons for absence so we can update progress records.

After the event

- The DTP send out a feedback survey to the students after the event.
- We'll compile the information and provide it to the Theme Leads to inform future planning.

Please do get in touch with the DTP at GW4BioMed@cardiff.ac.uk if you have any questions or require any assistance and may thanks for your support.