

# Development of Networking Events for Postgraduates who Teach

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Anne Tierney, Joy Perkins & Morven Shearer

## Core Group of Academics

The core group of Anne Tierney, Joy Perkins and Morven Shearer, who created and developed the postgraduate networking events.



Angelique Stalmach, University of Glasgow  
 Kate Baker and Hedda Weitz, University of Aberdeen

## Introduction

Postgraduates and post-doctoral fellows contribute to teaching in Higher Education (HE). In Life Sciences, this is most often as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in practical classes, taking tutorials, or marking assessments. Despite this, support and training for GTAs can be patchy. In 2009, supported by the Higher Education Academy's UK Centre for Bioscience, a group of academics developed and offered networking events for postgraduates interested in teaching in HE.

The events were made possible by the contribution of a network of individuals; Centre staff, academics, postgraduates and post-doctoral fellows, all of whom contributed to the success of the events.

## Centre for Bioscience Support

The events were supported by the Centre for Bioscience. In addition to the financial support from the development grant, Centre staff attended events, provided reference materials, collated event responses and feedback. Katherine and Kevan also attended events, promoting the work of the Centre and the role of postgraduates in teaching in HE.



Kevan Gartland, GCU and Chair of Bioscience management group



Katherine Clark, Academic Adviser, Centre for Bioscience

## Student Feedback – pre event

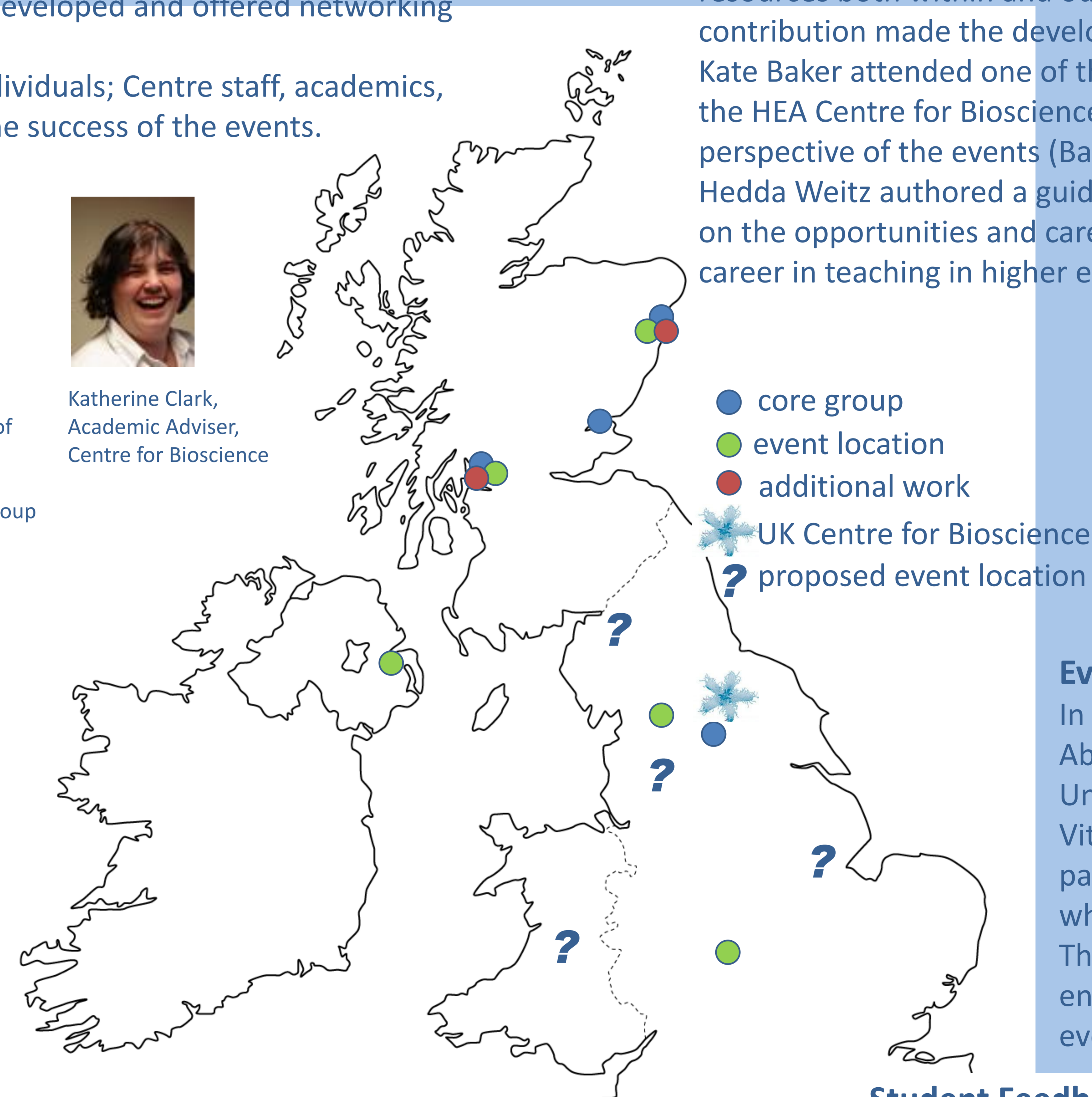
Prior to the events, a questionnaire was sent out to postgraduates and postdoctoral fellows. The responses (n-163; 18 institutions) are shown below demonstrated an interest in teaching & learning, but little knowledge of the HEA:

Have you heard of:	Yes	No
HEA	17	83
Centre for Bioscience	10	90
	Yes	No
Are you interested in attending a L&T event?	76%	24%

## Conclusions & Future work

It can be seen from the post-event feedback, that participants valued the event as an introduction to teaching. Three further events are planned for the coming academic session 2011/12; the University of Leicester have already confirmed their interest in hosting an event for the Midlands area. It is hoped that further events will take place in Wales, East Anglia, and/or Cumbria.

The core team have recently been awarded a further grant to expand the development of support for GTAs in Life Sciences and Physics, and a group of postgraduates at the University of Glasgow successfully bid for a grant to set up a peer support network.



## Postgraduate and Post-doctoral Fellow development collaboration

Angelique Stalmach was invaluable as a research assistant, collating resources both within and outwith the HEA Centre for Bioscience. Her contribution made the development of the session so much easier. Kate Baker attended one of the events, and was asked to write an article for the HEA Centre for Bioscience magazine, Bioscience Bulletin, of a student's perspective of the events (Baker, 2011). Hedda Weitz authored a guide for postgraduates and post-doctoral fellows on the opportunities and career paths that are open to those interested in a career in teaching in higher education.



Julian Park, University of Reading  
 Carol Wakeford, University of Manchester  
 Stephen McClean, University of Ulster

## Event Hosts

In addition to the events hosted at Glasgow and Aberdeen, three events have been held at the Universities of Manchester, Ulster and Reading. Vital to the success of the events is the participation of the event hosts; local academics who agree to organise the local arrangements. The knowledge and experience of the hosts ensures the smooth running of each of the events.

## Student Feedback – post event

*"Boosted my confidence in teaching"*  
*"A must-do for all post graduates involved in teaching"*  
*"I just wish that I had heard of the Centre for Bioscience several years ago"*

<sup>1</sup>HEA1 (2010) "Teaching in the Biosciences: an Introduction for Postgraduates and Postdoctoral Fellows", University of Glasgow Available from: <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/events/glasgow240210.aspx> [Accessed 31/08/2010]  
<sup>2</sup>HEA2 (2010) "Teaching in the Biosciences: an Introduction for Postgraduates and Postdoctoral Fellows", University of Manchester Available from: <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/events/manchester240210.aspx> [Accessed 31/08/2010]  
 Baker, K. (2010) "Engaging postgrads and postdocs – a participant's perspective", Bioscience Bulletin, 30, Summer 2010, p10 Available from <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/newsletters/bulletin30.pdf> [Accessed 31/08/2010]  
 Tierney, A. (2010) "Engaging postgrads and postdocs", Bioscience Bulletin, 30, Summer 2010, p10 Available from <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/newsletters/bulletin30.pdf> [Accessed 31/08/2010]