The Doctoral Consortium

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Doctoral Consortium, pleasurable systems, emotional design, novel interactions, design activity.

Our future health as a community depends on a flow of new researchers entering the field and successfully completing PhDs. Doing a PhD can be a lonely experience and it is easy to think that you alone are struggling to achieve it. Having an opportunity to talk through the highs and lows with others in similar situations and taking time to reflect can make all the difference. With support it can become a positive and rewarding experience. The importance of wider training provision for research students is also now recognised. It is for these reasons that Doctoral Consortia can play a vital role and why the British HCI Group funds the Doctoral Consortium each year at its annual conference, paying for the participants to attend not only the consortium but also the full conference.

The specific aims of the Doctoral Consortium are:
- to offer a friendly forum for students to discuss their work and receive constructive feedback,
- to offer relevant information on issues important to doctoral candidates, and
- to nurture a community of researchers.

This year, we received 37 applications for 12 places and we would happily have accepted most of them. This is great, because it shows that we are part of a thriving research community, with so many new HCI researchers coming on board. It did make our selection job very hard, however. Unlike other submission categories the Doctoral Consortium does not select specifically on quality of the submission. We used a range of selection criteria such as how far into their research programme the applicants are, creating synergies between research themes, having a mix of UK and non-UK participants and having participants from a variety of institutions. Ultimately, the choice of students is based on ensuring that those attending will gain maximum benefit from doing so. Three major themes emerge from the participants selected, possibly reflecting major themes of the HCI community as a whole: the support of human-human interactions, supporting design activity, and emotive computer systems.

At the consortium itself, each participant gives a short, critiqued research presentation. However this is only part of the experience. They interact with established researchers and with other students. They also reflect - through short activities, information sessions and discussions - on the process and lessons of research and life in academia. They are then helped to make the most of their participation in the actual conference.

Whilst only a few can attend the consortium, we hope that from their experience they will spread the benefits back to other researchers in their own institutions as well as providing the foundation for the future of the HCI community itself.

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