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The European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations Junior Researcher Programme: A Review from Two Research Project Supervisors

Rose Turner and Edward John Noon

The European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA) Junior Researcher Programme (JRP) provides opportunities for students to gain experience of conducting or supervising international research projects. Two UK PhD students reflect on their experiences as supervisors on the current (2019-20) programme, with a particular focus on the European Summer School, a week of social and research activities that initiates the programme. Summaries of their research projects are provided, as well as reflections on the benefits and challenges of taking part in the programme. This review is intended to serve as a useful resource for potential JRP applicants.

The European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA) is an international network of student volunteers which works to serve Psychology students across Europe. Each year EFPSA's programme of events includes an annual conference, a congress, and a European Summer School (ESS) which kicks off the annual Junior Researcher Programme (JRP). As part of the JRP, prospective research supervisors (usually PhD students and early career researchers) propose a 12-month research project based on the annual theme – this year's theme was "Communication and Learning in the Digital Age". Undergraduate and postgraduate students then apply to one of the six selected research projects. Six students are recruited to each team, resulting in six teams of one supervisor and six students.

We (the authors) are two supervisors currently enrolled on the JRP. We met our research teams, and introduced them to our projects, at the July 2019 ESS in Lithotopos, Northern Greece. During this week-long event, we also had the opportunity to explore the nearby city—Thessaloniki—and attend several workshops relevant to early career researchers, such as a session on publishing your research, and an introduction to Registered Reports. In this article, we present our perspectives on the JRP and ESS and make recommendations for potential applications to the programme.

Why did you apply to be a supervisor at the JRP?

EJN: Having never conducted research outside of my current institute, when I saw the call for supervisors for the JRP, I immediately felt that this was the perfect opportunity to gain some cross-cultural research experience and remove me from my comfort zone. I also hoped that the experience would improve employability by increasing my research output, supporting professional development by enhancing my leadership and communication skills.

RT: I was approaching the end of my PhD write up, and with job opportunities in mind, I thought it would be great to develop a project that extended my current research and that allowed me to gain experience of supervising a research team.

What are your projects about?

RT: I proposed a project examining the effects of digital and non-digital forms of fiction engagement on people's empathic abilities (the abilities involved in successfully interpreting the inner experiences of others). This represents an extension of my previous research which has looked at correlations between different ways of engaging with fiction and empathic

abilities. Our team aims to conduct research across six countries and languages, though the data will be analysed collectively.

EJN: Our project is a replication and extension of the first study from my doctoral research. We are going to examine the frequency of, and motivations for, social comparisons on Instagram, and determine how such comparisons associate with adolescent identity development. In addition to this 'core' study - which everyone in the six-person team will collect data on - each member will also conduct their own individual 'side' project concerning a topic of personal significance. For example, one study will consider the extent to which social networking site network homophily influences adolescent identity development. Another project will examine how social networking site body comparisons associate with inspiration via the mechanisms of benign and malicious envy.

What was attending the ESS like as a supervisor?

EJN: The ESS far exceeded my expectations, and was, without question, the most enjoyable week of my doctoral journey to date. My research team were among the most engaged, passionate, and ambitious students that I have ever worked with, and it was extremely reassuring to see others so enthused about the topic I am studying for my PhD! Overall, spending the week with such a diverse group of psychologists from each corner of Europe (my team consisted of students from Austria, Germany, Ireland, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey) was both intellectually stimulating and personally enriching. As such, I feel I have left the ESS not only with new ideas that I can weave into my own research, but also with new friends.

RT: The ESS was a great experience. My research team are absolutely fantastic – I couldn't hope for a more committed and insightful group. I was really impressed by the depth of their ideas and questions, and their motivation. It was also great to meet the other supervisors and to get to know the EFPSA community. There was a good balance of social and work-related activities, which made for an exhausting but rewarding week!

What do you think will be the main challenges over the next year of the project?

RT: My main concern is about time commitment as my work schedule recently changed and things became much busier. However, the JRP team have been incredibly supportive. We are required to have monthly meetings with our team (my team plans to meet over an instant messenger), though as a supervisor my role is really to oversee data collection and help produce the registered report, analysis and write-up, there should be plenty of downtime. I think obtaining ethical clearance may be complicated, due to the range of institutions at which data will be collected, though again the JRP team are very knowledgeable and supportive and I feel confident asking them any questions.

EJN: Other than ethics - which I expect to be a nightmare - I think maintaining high levels of motivation throughout the 12-month project may be challenging. As we are all based in different European countries, much of our contact will be through either Whatsapp or Skype. Furthermore, given that each member of my team has other commitments – be that work or study-related - ensuring that they remain focused on this project may become a challenge.

What would you say to others considering applying to the next JRP?

EJN: To do it! One thing to be wary of, I guess, is time. It is quite a commitment, and if you already have a high workload, be that teaching, doctoral study, post-doc research etc., it may

not be feasible. However, if time is not a concern, I think it is an amazing opportunity to expand your networks beyond those in the UK, meet some amazing people, and conduct some interesting cross-cultural research!

RT: I would recommend having a close look at the timeline to see how the key events (the ESS, busy set-up period at the beginning of the project, sharing of research at the end of the year) coincide with your other commitments. The ESS is a really fun week, but there is some pressure on supervisors to run the team meetings, so try to have as much preparation done upfront as possible so that you can join in with the social events as much as you wish to. Overall, I would recommend the programme in particular to anyone who is hoping to progress in an academic career – it's a great opportunity to develop experience of project supervision, as well as to gain experience of producing a registered report.

Conclusion

The central challenge facing supervisors on the JRP is time-commitment. As such, it may particularly suit individuals with a clearly defined schedule for the full year of the programme (for example, being in the early or middle stages of a PhD or postdoctoral position). The key benefits are developing a cross-cultural research project, producing a registered report, and getting to know a range of psychology students involved in EFPSA. We aim to report back at the conclusion of the 12-month programme in order to share our reflections on the JRP as a whole and to provide further information for those considering applying in the future.

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