UACES

Graduate Forum

GRADUATE FORUM TOOL KIT

2026 Edition



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A Word From Our Chair

Sydney Holt, UACES Graduate Forum Chair 2024-2026



I first attended a UACES conference in 2023 when it was held at my home institute of Queen's University Belfast. I was an incoming third year doctoral candidate at the time with no idea what to expect from an international general conference.

From the beginning, the UACES team and my fellow participating academics were open, welcoming, and quick to join in a discussion or raise a question to further the conversation. Happily, I know I speak for the rest of the Graduate Forum when I say this was our universal first impression.

Here on the UACES Graduate team we are made up of a diverse group of PhD candidates and Early Career Researchers, some of us with years of teaching experience, some with prior work in research institutes and other professional careers, and most with some combination of all.

During my two years tenure as the Chair, I have been lucky enough to learn from and work with this team, sharing my own ideas and growing from the recommendations of others, an experience that is quintessential to the ethos of UACES.

And so I would like to welcome you, from the University Association of Contemporary European Studies Graduate Forum, to our research and skills toolkit. I know you will enjoy it as much as we enjoyed creating it!

Why Do We Need a Toolkit?

Navigating academia as an early career researcher is not always straightforward. Between attending your first conferences, preparing journal submissions, teaching, searching for research funding and finding your place within an academic community, there is a lot to figure out. While some things can only be learned through experience, others become easier when someone shares what they have learned along the way.

How To Use This Toolkit

We suggest using this Toolkit simply: you do not need to read it from the first page to the last. You can dip in and out, explore the sections most relevant to you and probably lose it somewhere among the several hundred documents already sitting on your laptop.

Our Toolkit is not exhaustive or universally applicable and we know it will not answer every question. It is a practical, occasionally funny resource, shaped by the experiences of Graduate Forum members who have faced many of the same questions and challenges themselves.

But above all, we created it because we believe that leaving something behind for those who come after us can make a difference, however small. Some of us will pursue careers outside academia, others will become tenured academics and many will find themselves somewhere in between, following paths they had not originally imagined. We wanted to leave behind a collection of experiences, lessons and practical advice that might make those paths a little easier to navigate.

We hope that, somewhere between the conference tips, publishing advice, teaching suggestions, funding resources and discussions about inclusion, you will find something worth taking with you. And perhaps, one day, you will have something of your own to pass on to the next generation of researchers.

UACES

Are *you* making the most of your member benefits?

Discounts on events

Funding opportunities

Professional networking

Exclusive communications

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SECTION 1

ATTENDING A CONFERENCE

Before The Conference
During the Conference
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Attending A Conference

Whether you are attending your very first academic conference or have already presented several times, conferences can be exciting and rewarding, but they can also become a little overwhelming. Between preparing presentations, meeting fellow researchers and navigating academic environments, there is often quite a lot to think about.



The good thing is that you are not expected to know everything from the outset. Here are some suggestions to help you make the most of your experience.

Before the Conference

Plan Your Programme

Start by looking through the conference programme.

Ask Yourself!

- Which panels interest you?
- Are there researchers whose work you would particularly like to hear about?

You do not need to attend every session, so leave room to explore and take breaks.

Before the Conference

If You Are Presenting

If you are presenting, you may wish to look at your fellow panellists and their research beforehand. Knowing a little about their work can help you identify shared interests and make discussions easier. However, there is no expectation that you should have read everyone's publications before attending. It is entirely a matter of personal choice rather than an obligation.

When preparing your presentation, make sure you know how much time you have and which format you need to follow. Some Q&A sessions take place immediately after you present, while others take place at the end of the panel. Practise your presentation if it makes you feel more confident and keep a backup of your slides (and an adapter and a USB, if needed!).

Checklist:

- □ Know how much time you have and which format you need to follow
- □ Practise your presentation if it makes you feel more confident
- □ Keep a backup of your slides (and an adapter and a USB, if needed!)
- □ Check how to obtain an attendance certificate before the conerence ends

One last practical tip

If you need an attendance certificate, check how to obtain it before the conference ends.

During the Conference

Be Yourself

Whether you have attended 26 conferences or this is your first time facing the chaos of an auditorium full of academics looking for their name tags, you will probably encounter a familiar scene: a crowded hallway populated by people trying, with varying degrees of success, to figure out where they need to go and what they are supposed to do.

The best advice we can give you is simple: be yourself. There is no single right way to approach an academic conference, and trying too hard to appear confident can sometimes feel more rehearsed than natural.

There is no script we would recommend following. Instead, try not to get too caught up in your own head, find out which booths have the best sweets and help yourself (although perhaps leave some for everyone else).

This advice might sound a little ridiculous. But here is the thing: not every professional connection starts with a discussion of your research. Sometimes, it starts with something much more ordinary. A simple question such as "Which stand has the best sweets?" can be a surprisingly effective conversation starter.



During the Conference

Networking

Networking is an important part of conferences, though it can feel intimidating, especially when you are new to academia. It does not need to involve approaching senior scholars with a rehearsed introduction. Conversations over coffee, shared research interests or discussions after a panel are often the most natural starting points. If you want to approach someone, remember they are people too and do not expect you to have all the answers.

Social Events

Social events offer further opportunities to meet colleagues in a less formal setting, but participation is not compulsory. **Respect personal boundaries**, including your own, and remember that professional courtesy still applies outside conference sessions.

Take A Break

Networking can be rewarding, but it can also be tiring. **If you need some quiet time, take it**. Remember that you are attending a conference to exchange ideas and engage with other researchers, not to prove how many hours you can spend networking. Spending some time alone does not make you any less committed to your research.





Presenting Your Research

Work In Progress Is Welcome

Congratulations, you made it here! Your abstract was accepted, you sorted out the registration, made the journey, arrived at the venue and now you are about to present your work.

A conference presentation does not need to showcase a finished, and certainly not flawless, piece of research. In fact, presenting work in progress can be especially useful because it lets you test arguments, consider alternative interpretations and identify aspects of your research that may need further development.

Decide what you want feedback on

One useful trick is to think about what you want feedback on before presenting.



Ask Yourself!

- Are you struggling with your methodology?
- Unsure whether your argument is convincing?
- Have you reached the stage of research where you have read your own work so many times that you can no longer tell whether it makes sense?

You can tell your audience what you would particularly appreciate comments on. It may help make the discussion more useful for everyone.

Handling Questions

And then come the questions. Some will be helpful, some unexpected and others might leave you wondering whether you and the person asking them attended the same presentation.

You do not need to have an immediate answer to everything, and you certainly do not have to agree with every suggestion. Sometimes, acknowledging that you had not considered a particular point is the most productive response.

Finally, do not spend the rest of the conference analysing how many questions you received. A quiet Q&A does not necessarily mean your presentation was unsuccessful. Plenty of reasons might explain why an audience asks fewer questions, including the rather inconvenient fact that conference panels have time limits.

Respecting Time Limits

Speaking of which, respect yours. Your fellow panellists deserve their allocated time, and so does the discussion. Fifteen minutes may not seem like much, but trying to squeeze an entire PhD thesis into them is unlikely to improve anyone's experience.



After the Conference

Congratulations, you have made it through another conference! You have probably collected a few new references, met some interesting people and acquired at least one pen and one lanyard to add to your collection.

Review Your Feedback

Review your notes, especially the feedback you received on your presentation. Some comments might be immediately useful, while others may need a little more thought.

Follow Up

Look up the people you met. If you had an interesting conversation with someone, or discovered that your research interests overlap, consider sending a short follow-up message or adding them on LinkedIn. You do not need to contact everyone you spoke to, and you are not obligated to turn every encounter into a collaboration. Sometimes, simply staying in touch is enough.

Sharing On Social Media

Consider sharing your experience on social media, using the conference hashtag and continuing conversations with the people you met. It can be a useful way to stay connected, share insights and engage with the wider conference community. However, remember that not everything presented at a conference is necessarily intended for public circulation. When in doubt, ask before sharing.

Attending A Conference

Key Takeaways

- Conferences are opportunities to learn, share ideas and build connections.
- You do not need to know everyone or do everything.
- Feedback is often most useful when you actively seek it.
- Meaningful professional relationships often begin with ordinary conversations.
- Looking after yourself is just as important as attending sessions.





SECTION 2

PUBLISHING IN EUROPEAN STUDIES

Finding Your Contribution
Preparing The Manuscript
Choose a Journal
Submitting
Peer Review

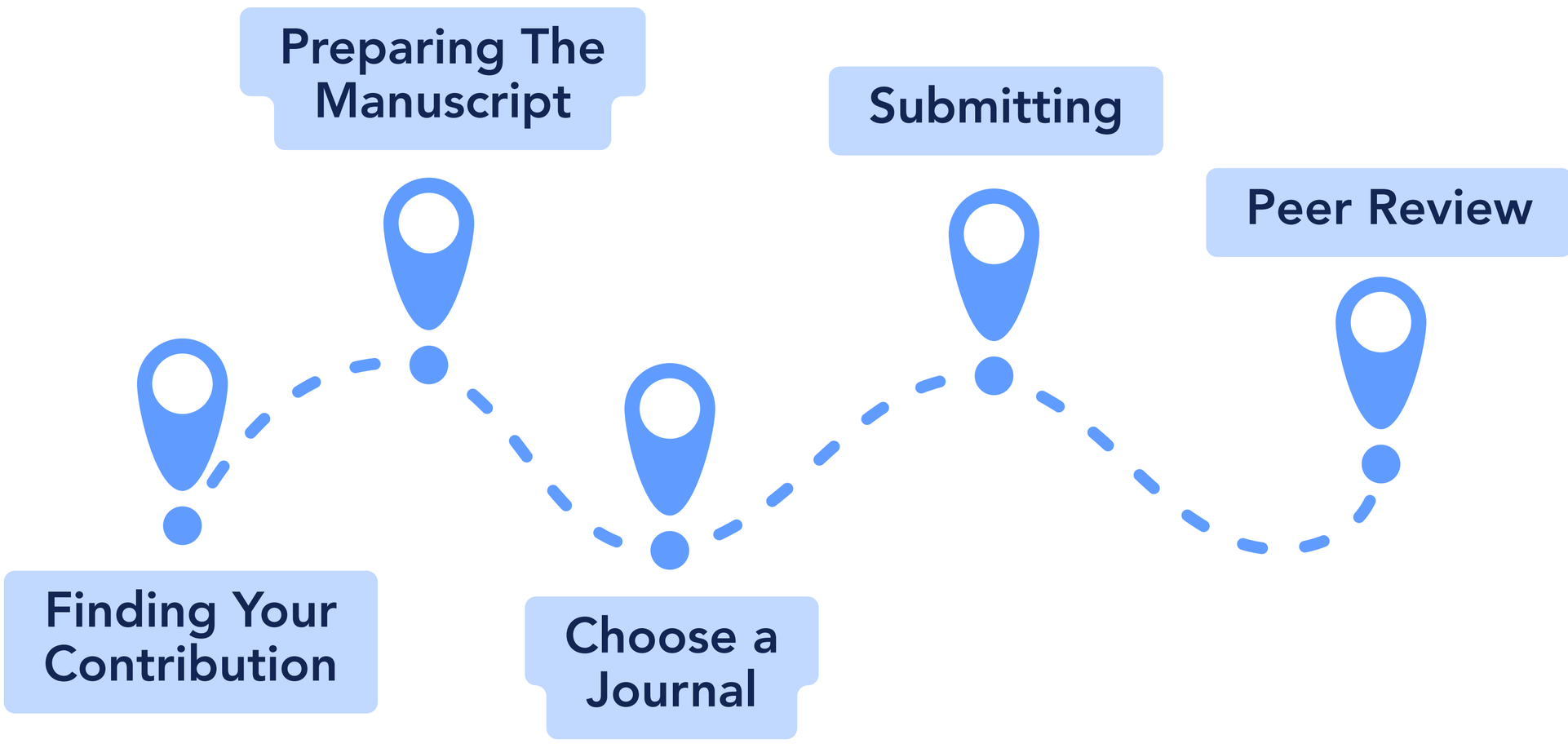
Publishing In European Studies

If you have spent months, or even years, working on a research project, you have probably accumulated enough material to write considerably more than one article. The difficulty, however, is not always finding something to write about. Sometimes, it is deciding what not to write about.

Publishing is not simply a matter of putting your research into a document, choosing a journal and hoping for the best. It requires identifying what your work adds to an existing scholarly debate, understanding who you are writing for and communicating your argument clearly enough for readers to engage with it without having spent the last three years researching the same topic.

Fortunately, we have advice from people who read journal submissions for a living.

Drawing on discussions with editors at UACES Graduate Forum events, we have gathered a few suggestions to help you navigate the process, from identifying your contribution and choosing a journal to preparing your manuscript, submitting your work and responding to reviewers. With this we will guide you through the road map of publishing in European Studies.



Find Your Contribution

Being Orignal Matters

Many of us start our academic careers believing that we need to find the elusive "missing piece of the puzzle". Which is all well and good until you realise that different disciplines have different ways of understanding originality.

Not every contribution needs to fill a previously unexplored "gap in the literature". Sometimes, being original means offering a new interpretation of a legal framework, revisiting an archival collection, challenging an established explanation or approaching a familiar question from a different perspective.

In any case, originality does not mean becoming the Indiana Jones of European Studies, travelling across the continent in search of a research question nobody has ever asked before. So, what do we actually mean?

Ask Yourself!

- Are you challenging an established assumption?
- Bringing together perspectives rarely considered together?
- Using new evidence to revisit an existing argument?
- Or applying a familiar framework to a different context to uncover unexpected findings?

Find Your Contribution

Consider what readers can understand differently because of your research. Of course, this is easier said than done. It is one thing to identify your contribution and another to communicate it clearly to an audience of academics. The first step is to work out exactly what you want to say, and then make sure every part of your article helps you say it.

It might sound obvious, but if you struggle to explain your central argument to yourself, your readers will likely struggle too. Simplicity does not mean sacrificing complexity or academic rigour. It means understanding which parts of that complexity are essential to the argument you are making.

Advice From Editors

During our 2026 Graduate Forum Conference, ‘JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies’ Editor-in-Chief Professor Paul James Cardwell delivered an advice session sharing valuable insights into the publishing process from an editor's perspective. This session is now free to watch for all, ahead of our member’s only ‘Publishing in European Studies’ series.

Click the thumbnail below to watch



JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies

JCMS JOURNAL OF COMMON MARKET STUDIES

WILEY UACES

The journal of the European Studies community

Global reach

4.0

2025 Impact Factor

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Preparing Your Manuscript

One piece of advice that came up repeatedly during a publishing session at the UACES Doctoral Training Academy (DTA) was that good English goes a long way. As Dr Christopher Huggins, Co-editor, Contemporary European Politics, emphasised, presentation matters.



Dr Christopher Huggins, Co-editor
Contemporary European Politics

And he has a point. Think about walking into a pâtisserie: one of the first things you notice is how appealing everything looks. The same principle applies to academic articles. A beautiful pastry still needs to taste good, just as a well-written article still needs a strong argument and convincing evidence. But helping readers follow your research can make all the difference.

Writing clearly to reach broader academic audiences and engage leading scholars is, admittedly, easier said than done. Different disciplines, journals and audiences have different expectations, but a few principles are worth keeping in mind.

Structure

A good structure goes a long way. Not every article follows the same format, but readers need to be able to follow your reasoning. If you find yourself explaining something fascinating that has very little to do with your central question, perhaps save it for another article.

Preparing Your Manuscript



Professor Monika Brusenbauch Meislová, Editor, Routledge/UACES Contemporary European Studies book series

Keep A Clear Thread

Clearly present your research question, main argument and contribution early in the manuscript, ensuring each section supports these elements. Your readers may not be familiar with your topic, so explain the significance of any theoretical frameworks, legal developments or methodologies you introduce.

As Professor Monika Brusenbauch Meislová, Editor, Routledge/UACES Contemporary European Studies book series, advises, avoid creating a methodology for its own sake. Be transparent about your research approach and how it supports your conclusions.

Do not overcomplicate your writing to sound impressive. Academic writing is not simply about proving how clever you are. It is about making your readers feel informed enough to follow your argument.

Writing in English as an Additional Language

European Studies is an international academic community. Many of us write in English as an additional language and different disciplines have different writing conventions. Writing well does not necessarily mean sounding like a native English speaker or imitating someone else's academic style. The aim is to communicate your research effectively while preserving your own scholarly voice.

Preparing Your Manuscript

Writing Principles Checklist:

□ Keep a clear thread throughout your article

□ Present your research question, main argument and contribution early in the manuscript

□ Explain the significance of any theoretical frameworks, legal developments or methodologies you introduce

□ Avoid creating a methodology for its own sake

□ Be transparent about your research approach and how it supports your conclusions

□ Do not overcomplicate your writing to sound impressive

Choosing A Journal

So, you have written your article, or at least have a clear idea of what you are going to write about. But here is the thing: where will you send it?

Choosing a journal can feel a little like online dating. Once you have weeded out the obvious catfishes, which in academia include predatory journals that you should steer well clear of, you need to find somewhere that will appreciate your work, understand what you are trying to achieve and hopefully not reject you at the door.

Unfortunately, much like dating, compatibility matters. A perfectly good article might simply not be the right fit for a particular journal, no matter how much effort you have put into it. And while we cannot promise you a perfect match, a few things can improve your chances.

Contemporary European Politics



Why Publish in Contemporary European Politics?

OPEN ACCESS

Gold Open Access journal

Broad scope

Scopus DOAJ

Scopus and DOAJ indexed

Early Career Researcher friendly

Visit our website!

Choosing A Journal

As Professor Gabriel Siles-Brügge, Editor-in-Chief, JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, reminded us, one of the first things to consider is a journal's aims and scope. Read journal descriptions, browse recent articles and look up the editorial team. You might discover a journal is not a great fit or, conversely, that a journal you had not previously considered is exactly the right home for your work.



Professor Gabriel Siles-Brügge, Editor-in-Chief, JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies

Ask Yourself!

- What kind of research does the journal usually publish?
- What kind of academic conversations does it contribute to?
- Where does your article fit?

Do Your Homework:

- ☐ Read the aims and scope
- ☐ Browse recent articles
- ☐ Look up the editorial team
- ☐ **Steer well clear of predatory journals**

Submitting

Here we are... the finish line is close. You have a journal, you have an article and you have looked at the guidelines, right?

This is one of the easiest mistakes to make (and yes, we are guilty of it too): we finally finish writing an article, feel ready to submit it and forget to check what the journal actually requires.

Before submitting, take a few minutes to go through the author guidelines. Check the word limit, referencing style, formatting requirements and whether the manuscript needs to be anonymised for peer review. Some journals also require specific statements about funding, conflicts of interest, data availability or AI use. These requirements may not be the most exciting part of academic publishing, but overlooking them can create unnecessary work or delay your submission.

Before You Submit:

- □ Check the word limit
- □ Check the referencing style
- □ Review formatting requirements
- □ Confirm whether the manuscript needs to be anonymised for peer review
- □ Include any required statements on funding, conflicts of interest, data availability or AI use
- □ Confirm that the article is original and not under consideration elsewhere
- □ Prepare a cover letter if required

The Cover Letter

And then there might be a cover letter. Yes, after spending months writing an article, you may also be asked to write a letter explaining why someone should read it.

Keep it concise. Introduce your manuscript, explain its contribution and show why it belongs in that particular journal. Depending on the journal's requirements, you may also need to confirm that the article is original and not under consideration elsewhere.

Once everything is ready, you can finally press submit. Congratulations! Now comes the part where you discover that checking the submission portal every morning does not, unfortunately, make editorial decisions arrive any faster.

Peer Review

Congratulations, you have submitted your manuscript.

Before we get to the reviewers' part, one thing is worth mentioning: not every article makes it to peer review. When you submit your manuscript, editors generally conduct an initial assessment to decide whether it suits their journal.

Process At A Glance



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Peer Review

Sometimes, this results in a desk rejection, meaning the manuscript is rejected before it goes to external reviewers. It can be disappointing, particularly when you have spent weeks preparing the submission, but it does not necessarily mean your research is poor. Often, the article is simply not the right fit for that journal.

One Graduate Forum contributor once received a desk rejection for an article whose abstract had previously been accepted by the same publication. It was a frustrating experience, but it highlights an important point: editorial interest at one stage does not guarantee publication at the next.

If your article makes it to external peer review, that is already worth celebrating. It means your manuscript has passed the initial editorial assessment and the editors believe it is worth sending to other scholars for evaluation.
Reviewer feedback is not always easy to receive.

As Professor Gabriel Siles-Brügge reminded us, academics are deeply invested in their work, so criticism can feel personal. At the same time, reviewers are usually balancing peer review alongside their own research, teaching and administrative responsibilities. While you may not always agree with their comments, it is important to engage with them thoughtfully rather than dismiss them outright.

Eventually, after weeks or months of waiting, the editorial decision arrives.

Possible Decisions

Decision	What it means
Desk rejection	The manuscript is rejected before it goes to external reviewers.
Accepted without revisions	The main scholarly evaluation is over and the article has been accepted for publication.
Minor revisions	The manuscript is generally considered suitable for publication but requires some changes.
Major revisions (Revise and Resubmit)	The manuscript has potential but substantial changes are required before a decision can be made.
Rejection after peer review	The journal has decided not to publish the article. Reviewer comments may still help strengthen future submissions elsewhere.

Accepted Without Revisions

Congratulations! Your article has been accepted for publication. You may still need to check proofs, address editorial queries and complete administrative formalities, but the main scholarly evaluation is over.

You can finally celebrate without immediately opening another Word document.

This is the vaquita of academic publishing: we know it exists, but very few of us have ever been fortunate enough to encounter one.

Footnote: The vaquita is the rarest marine mammal in the world.



Minor Revisions

You are very close. The editors and reviewers generally consider your manuscript fit for publication, but it still needs a few changes. These could include clarifying an argument, adding references, improving the structure or addressing specific questions.

Do not let the word minor fool you, though. Even small revisions require careful work and acceptance is not automatic.

Major Revisions (Revise and Resubmit)

Your manuscript has potential, but it needs substantial changes before the journal can make a decision. You might be asked to strengthen your conceptual framework, reconsider parts of your analysis, expand your evidence or explain your contribution more clearly.

This can feel daunting, particularly when you have already spent months working on the article. However, an invitation to revise is an opportunity to develop it further. Remember, it is not a guarantee of eventual acceptance.

Rejection after peer review

Sometimes, after peer review, editors decide not to proceed with publication. This can be disappointing, particularly after a lengthy review process. However, it does not necessarily mean the research lacks value. Reviewer comments can often provide useful guidance for strengthening the manuscript before submitting it elsewhere.

When The Decision Arrives

Whatever the decision, read the editor's communication carefully before doing anything else. It should help you understand the next steps and the timeline involved.

Give yourself some time to read the comments properly, decide which changes are necessary and work out how to address them without losing sight of your original argument.

Ask Yourself!

- What is expected?
- How much time do you have to revise?
- Will your manuscript undergo another round of peer review?

Response To Reviewers Letter

Once you have revised your manuscript, you will usually need to prepare a response-to-reviewers letter.

Preparing Your Reponse:

- □ Explain how you addressed the comments, what changes you made and where reviewers can find them
- □ Respond to each point individually
- □ Indicate the relevant pages or sections
- □ If you disagree, explain your reasoning clearly and respectfully

And with that, we have reached the end of our journey through academic publishing. Unfortunately, no magic formula guarantees publication, and even an excellent article may face rejection or several rounds of revisions. But understanding the process, choosing your journal carefully and learning how to engage with feedback can make the experience a little less mysterious.

Most importantly, do not forget that publishing is only one part of academic research. Your work does not suddenly become valuable the moment an editor sends you an acceptance letter. The research, ideas and contributions were already there. Publication is simply one way of bringing them into a wider scholarly conversation.

And now, perhaps, you can close that submission portal. At least until the next article.

Key Takeaways

- Focus on the contribution your research makes
- Write clearly and keep your argument focused.
- Choose a journal that fits your work.
- Treat feedback, revisions and rejection as part of academic publishing.



SECTION 3

TEACHING AND MENTORING

Preparing to Teach
Finding Your Teaching Approach
Assessment and Feedback
Mentoring and Supporting Students

Teaching and Mentoring

Teaching and mentoring are important parts of academic careers, but the skills they develop are also valuable in research, policy and other professional environments. Communicating complex ideas, supporting others' learning, evaluating work and managing activities are all transferable competencies.

The European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp) recognises teaching as part of Making an Impact and mentoring as part of Working with Others. Both can contribute to researchers' professional development.

Preparing To Teach

Familiarise yourself with the course's learning objectives, structure, assessment methods and expectations. If you are working as a teaching assistant, clarify your responsibilities with the course coordinator, including which materials you should prepare, your involvement in assessment and how students should contact you.



Consider what students should understand or be able to do by the end of the session. Rather than covering as much material as possible, focus on a few clear learning objectives and build your teaching around them.

Students will arrive with different levels of knowledge and experience. Adjusting your explanations, examples and activities to suit the audience makes teaching more effective.

Practical Considerations

Classroom equipment, online platforms, accessibility requirements and the availability of teaching materials can all affect how a session runs. It is also worth familiarising yourself with online learning environments, such as Moodle or Canvas, before you need to use them.

Preparing To Teach:

- □ Familiarise yourself with the course's learning objectives, structure, assessment methods and expectations
- □ Clarify with the course coordinator which materials you should prepare
- □ Clarify whether you will be involved in assessment
- □ Confirm how students should contact you
- □ Identify a few central learning objectives
- □ Consider students' existing knowledge
- □ Check classroom equipment, online platforms, accessibility requirements and teaching materials
- □ Familiarise yourself with online learning environments

Finding Your Teaching Approach

No single teaching method works for every subject or classroom. Traditional lectures and seminars remain valuable, but activities that encourage students to apply their knowledge, discuss different perspectives and develop practical skills can complement them.

Interactive teaching in European Studies

European Studies offers particularly interesting opportunities for interactive teaching.

Interactive teaching ideas

- ☐ Simulation of Council negotiations
- ☐ Analyse a judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union
- ☐ Compare national approaches to implementing EU legislation
- ☐ Prepare a short policy briefing

However, innovative teaching is not necessarily effective teaching. Before introducing a new activity, you should...

Ask Yourself!

- Does it support the learning objectives?
- Does it suit the students?
- Does it realistically fit within the available time and resources?

Encourage participation without assuming that every student will feel equally comfortable speaking in front of a group. Clear instructions, small-group discussion opportunities and different ways to contribute can make classroom interactions more accessible.

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment should reflect what students are expected to learn. Alongside traditional essays and examinations, assignments such as policy briefs, case studies or group projects can help students develop skills relevant to academic and professional settings.

Where possible, provide feedback throughout the learning process rather than exclusively after final assessment. This might involve commenting on an outline, discussing a draft or explaining common difficulties before a submission deadline.

Effective feedback should be specific and constructive. Remember that you were a student once too. You may remember feeling anxious about receiving comments on your work, especially when those comments focused only on what you had done wrong.

However, constructive feedback is not about avoiding criticism or simply reassuring students that everything is fine. Nor is it about pointing out every mistake from a position of intellectual superiority. Instead, explain what works, what needs improvement and, most importantly, why. Treat students as capable of engaging with criticism and developing their own ideas.

Try to	Try to avoid
Explain what works, what needs improvement and why	Simply reassuring students that everything is fine
Explain how students can improve their reasoning, structure or use of	Pointing out every mistake from a position of intellectual superiority
Provide feedback throughout the learning process	Giving feedback exclusively after final assessment

Mentoring and Supporting Students

Being Approachable

Teaching is not simply about communicating knowledge or assessing students' work. It also involves creating a learning environment in which students feel respected, supported and comfortable asking questions or seeking clarification.



A pastoral approach to teaching recognises that students are individuals with different circumstances, responsibilities and challenges that may affect their learning.

Being approachable is an important starting point. Make expectations clear, explain how students can contact you and encourage them to raise concerns before difficulties become overwhelming.

Circumstances you may not see

Sometimes, a student who appears disengaged may simply be struggling to understand what is expected of them.

Students may also face circumstances that are not immediately visible, including disabilities, caring responsibilities, financial difficulties or challenges associated with studying in an unfamiliar academic environment.

Avoid making assumptions about commitment or ability based solely on participation, attendance or communication style.

Mentoring and Supporting Students

Mentoring:

Mentoring builds on many of these principles. Whether you are helping a student develop a research question, approach a dissertation or consider future opportunities, the aim is to support their independence rather than make decisions for them.

Finally, remember that supporting students does not require lowering expectations or treating everyone identically regardless of their circumstances. Good teaching combines fairness, consistency and respect with an understanding that students may need different forms of support to achieve the same learning objectives.

Key Takeaways

- Focus teaching on a small number of clear learning objectives.
- Effective teaching should support participation and engagement.
- Good feedback explains what works, what needs improvement and why.
- Support students with empathy while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.



SECTION 4

RESEARCH FUNDING

Finding Opportunities
Research Funding Navigator

Research Funding

Finding Opportunities:

Finding research funding can sometimes feel like a research project in itself. Between different national systems, eligibility requirements, funding schemes and deadlines, it's not always clear where to start.

Fortunately, you don't have to begin entirely from scratch! We've put together a country-by-country overview of research funding organisations and programmes relevant to researchers in European Studies, whether you're seeking doctoral or postdoctoral funding, supporting an existing project, or exploring collaboration opportunities. The resource focuses on organisations that regularly provide funding for postgraduate students, doctoral researchers, and early career scholars across Europe and beyond.

Don’t Forget Your Institution’s Research Support Office!

They may help you identify suitable opportunities and navigate the application process. After all, there's no need to tackle every administrative labyrinth on your own.

SCAN THE QR CODE OR CLICK HERE TO ACCESS THE RESEARCH FUNDING NAVIGATOR

This resource is intended as a starting point, not an exhaustive or continuously updated database. Funding programmes, eligibility criteria, application procedures and deadlines can change over time, so always check the relevant funder's official website for the latest information.

Version 1, last updated November 2026



SECTION 5

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Respect and Recognition
Accessibility
Wellbeing and Academic Life
Speaking Up and Seeking Support

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion



Academic communities thrive when researchers with different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives can participate meaningfully. However, being invited into a room is not necessarily the same as being able to participate on equal terms.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is therefore about more than representation or a statement on an institution's website. It also concerns how we organise academic activities, communicate with colleagues, distribute opportunities and respond when things go wrong.

As early-career researchers, we may not have the authority to change institutional policies overnight. However, we can contribute to more inclusive academic environments through our everyday professional practices, while recognising that meaningful change also requires institutional responsibility.

Respect and Recognition

Academic life involves exchanging ideas, challenging assumptions and occasionally disagreeing quite strongly. These are important parts of research, but intellectual disagreement should never excuse personal disrespect.

Disagreement without disrespect

Be mindful of how you engage with colleagues, particularly when differences in seniority, institutional position, language or professional experience may affect whose contributions are taken seriously. **Avoid making assumptions** about someone's expertise, identity, nationality, background or career ambitions. Seemingly casual remarks and stereotypes can have consequences, especially when repeated or directed at researchers who already face barriers to professional recognition.

Credit Matters

Acknowledge the people who contribute to research projects, events, publications and academic initiatives. Not all valuable academic work appears on a publication record.

Organisational, administrative and mentoring responsibilities should not become invisible simply because someone performs them well.

Recognising contributions also means being mindful of how opportunities and responsibilities are distributed. Giving appropriate credit helps create an academic environment in which different forms of work and expertise are valued.

How We Speak To One Another

Pay attention to how people acknowledge expertise and how they speak to one another. Interrupting colleagues, talking over them, dismissing their contributions or condescendingly explaining their own expertise can undermine meaningful participation. Belittling language, including comments that trivialise someone's research, qualifications or experience, can be equally damaging.

This does not mean avoiding disagreement or assuming every explanation is patronising. Rather, challenge ideas without diminishing the people presenting them.



Respect and Recognition

Everyday Practices:

□ Challenge ideas without diminishing the people presenting them.

□ Acknowledge the people who contribute to research projects, events, publications and academic initiatives.

□ Use the names and pronouns people use for themselves.

□ If you accidentally misgender someone, correct yourself briefly and move on.

Respecting Identities

Respecting people's identities is part of everyday academic professionalism.

Avoid making assumptions about someone's gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs based on their appearance, name, nationality or background. Use the names and pronouns people use for themselves and avoid unnecessary references to someone's former name or gender identity.

Accessibility

Academic participation can be affected by physical, financial, sensory, communication and caring-related barriers. As ECRs, we may find ourselves organising conferences, workshops, seminars or networking activities, sometimes with limited resources or institutional support.



Making Academic Activities Accessible

Accessibility is not an optional extra to consider once an academic event has already been organised. It should be part of the planning process from the beginning.

Consider barriers that may not be immediately visible, including sensory or communication needs, neurodivergence, chronic illness, financial constraints or difficulties accessing particular formats of material.

Small practical decisions can make a meaningful difference. Providing materials in advance, allowing time for breaks, clarifying instructions and offering multiple ways to participate can help researchers engage more comfortably.

Organising Events With Different Needs In Mind

If you are organising an academic activity, consider how different participants might experience the event. Ask what participants might need rather than assuming everyone will have the same experience. At the same time, avoid requiring people to disclose unnecessary personal information to explain why they need an adjustment.

As an event organiser, consider how practical arrangements can make participation easier. Family-friendly facilities, childcare information and opportunities for remote participation can help ensure that caring responsibilities do not prevent researchers from accessing academic opportunities.

Aspects to Consider When Organising Events

Area	What to provide or consider
Information	Give clear information about venues, physical accessibility, available facilities, participation formats and whom to contact about adjustments.
Materials	Provide presentations, reading materials and other relevant resources in advance where possible.
Format	Allow time for breaks, clarify instructions and offer multiple ways to participate.
Adjustments	Ask what participants might need and avoid requiring people to disclose unnecessary personal information.
Families	Consider family rooms, suitable breastfeeding facilities and clear policies on accompanying children or carers.
Support	Explore childcare arrangements, financial support where available and opportunities for remote
Scheduling	Avoid networking events held exclusively in the evening and minimise last-minute changes.
Timing	Communicate accessibility arrangements and practical information well in advance of the event.

Academic life often assumes that early-career researchers can travel frequently, relocate, attend evening networking events and remain available outside conventional working hours. For parents and researchers caring for older relatives, supporting disabled family members or looking after dependants, these assumptions can create significant barriers to participation.

Remember!

Caring responsibilities do not make someone less committed to their research.



Wellbeing and Academic Life

Academic research can be rewarding, but it can also involve considerable uncertainty. Fixed-term contracts, publication expectations, funding applications, mobility requirements and the pressure to remain professionally visible can all affect researchers' wellbeing.

These pressures can be particularly challenging for ECRs, who may feel that they need to demonstrate their professional value by accepting additional responsibilities or remaining constantly available.

Committee work, event organisation, mentoring, peer review and other forms of academic service can make valuable contributions to research communities. However, they also require time and effort. Participation should not become an expectation of unlimited availability or unpaid labour, particularly when responsibilities are distributed unevenly.

Individual and institutional responsibility

Wellbeing is not simply an individual responsibility. While personal strategies can be helpful, they cannot replace the working conditions and institutional support necessary for a sustainable academic career.

Supporting wellbeing does not mean avoiding criticism, difficult conversations or academic disagreement. It means creating professional environments where these can happen respectfully, without unnecessary hostility, intimidation or personal attacks.

Speaking Up and Seeking Support

Even in communities committed to inclusion, discrimination, harassment, exclusion and unprofessional conduct can occur.

If you experience or witness inappropriate behaviour, familiarise yourself with the relevant institutional or organisational policies and reporting procedures. Depending on the circumstances, support may be available through different institutional and independent channels.

Where to find support

- Equality and diversity offices
- Student or staff representatives
- Designated safeguarding contacts
- Independent advice services

Responding When Someone Raises A Concern

As an ECR, you may find yourself in a position where a colleague approaches you about an uncomfortable experience or inappropriate behaviour. You may not have the authority or expertise to resolve the situation yourself, but how you respond can make a difference.

If someone raises a concern with you:

- ☐ Listen respectfully.
- ☐ Avoid making assumptions.
- ☐ Do not promise confidentiality or outcomes that you cannot guarantee.
- ☐ Help them identify the relevant channels for advice or reporting.
- ☐ Respect their autonomy and the applicable institutional procedures.

Final Thoughts

Drawing on the experiences, conversations and lessons of Graduate Forum members and the wider UACES community, we wanted to bring together practical advice and insights that could help make some aspects of academic life easier to understand and navigate. From preparing a conference presentation and responding to peer reviewers to developing your teaching approach, identifying funding opportunities and contributing to more inclusive academic environments, this toolkit reflects some of the questions and challenges that many of us encounter at different stages of our careers.

Academic environments can sometimes seem difficult to navigate, particularly when you are starting out and are unsure what is expected of you. Having access to advice from people who have faced similar situations can help demystify processes, build confidence and make unfamiliar experiences feel more manageable. We also hope it reminds you that there is no single way to build an academic career. Researchers have different backgrounds, interests, responsibilities and ambitions. Some will pursue permanent academic positions, others will move into policy, research organisations or other professional environments, while many will follow paths that evolve in ways they had not originally anticipated. There is no universal timetable for success and no single definition of what a fulfilling research career should look like.

We created it to support researchers as they find their way through academia. We hope it helps you find yours and that you will help make the journey a little easier for those who follow.

- The UACES Graduate Forum Committee



Useful Links:

UACES Website:

https://www.uaces.org/

UACES Graduate Forum LinkedIn

https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/uaces-graduate-forum

Research Funding Navigator

Click Here

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