

Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research – Early Career Researcher Summer Day 2023

Post-Event Report

Executive Summary

On August 3rd, 2023, the Tyndall Early Career Network (TECN) hosted a day of workshops and activities in Manchester. The event aimed to develop skills, promote well-being, and foster connections among ECRs between and within Tyndall institutions. Feedback from attendees highlighted the diverse range of topics, including skill-sharing, policy engagement, stress management, and creative research communication. The event also enabled valuable networking opportunities, and participants highlighted the solidarity and community they felt during and after the event. Overall the feedback was resoundingly positive, and the lessons and connections from the event can be built on for future TECN activities.

Introduction

The TECN network is a collection of early career researchers (ECRs) at the various Tyndall institutions, as well as members of the CAST centre, a Tyndall sister institution. Early career researchers are self-defined but generally include PhD researchers as well as postdoctoral researchers who are not yet on a permanent contract. The network is shared among the member institutions, with each institution generally having one or two TECN representatives who are responsible for communicating on behalf of their institution to the other representatives and the Tyndall Council.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, TECN activities were majorly disrupted for several years until the summer of 2022 when a two-day, in-person event was hosted at the University of Manchester. This event was followed in the summer of 2023 by a one-day event, again hosted at the University of Manchester. These events have been run in addition to the usual TECN half-day at the annual Tyndall Assembly in September.

The TECN network and events aim to foster support, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and equip Tyndall's ECRs with the skills and connections to thrive in their research and future careers. ECRs as a social group report high levels of mental health problems and stress across the UK¹, and studies have shown that reducing social isolation and increasing cohesion can enhance student resilience and improve wellbeing².

This report is intended to share the outcomes of the TECN event on August 3rd, 2023, with the Tyndall Council. It will cover the agenda, and the feedback from participants on each session, as well as some

¹ Hazell, C. M., Niven, J. E., Chapman, L., Roberts, P. E., Cartwright-Hatton, S., Valeix, S., & Berry, C. (2021). Nationwide assessment of the mental health of UK Doctoral Researchers. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 8–16. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00983-8>

² Satinsky, E. N., Kimura, T., Kiang, M. V., Abebe, R., Cunningham, S., Lee, H., Lin, X., Liu, C. H., Rudan, I., Sen, S., Tomlinson, M., Yaver, M., & Tsai, A. C. (2021). Systematic review and meta-analysis of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among Ph.D. students. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-93687-7>

reflections for future sessions. This report was compiled by Lois Pennington & Harry Barton, the TECN representatives for the University of Manchester.

The Agenda

The day was split into four sessions, and the evening activities and meal. There were short breaks between each session of around 15 minutes and 75 minutes for lunch.

Session 1: Skill Sharing Picotalks (60 mins)

For this session, each attendee was invited to present for 3 minutes about a skill they used in their research. The topics were self-suggested, and curated by the organisers, and most attendees participated in presenting. The topics varied from systematic literature reviews, semi-structured interviews, engaging with industry, and giving media interviews. The full list of topics is in Appendix A.

Feedback on this session highlighted that the breadth of topics meant there was something useful for all attendees, and the three-minute presentations often sparked further conversations with colleagues, as well as being a change from the usual research-based presentations. Participants described the session as a nice way to start the day and a great way to facilitate peer-to-peer learning, as well as practice presentation skills in an informal setting.

Session 2: Engaging with Policymakers as an ECR with Policy@Manchester (90 minutes)

This session was run by Policy@Manchester and was intended to introduce the policy landscape, and how to engage with it as an ECR. This included tips on the UK policy layout, how to write for policy and policymakers, and how to share research with governments, as well as what Policy@Manchester can do for ECRs.

This session was highlighted as informative, and useful, with participants stating they began to start thinking about how their work could be made more policy relevant. Participants also shared that the session built their confidence as to how they could engage with government outputs such as briefing notes and calls for evidence.

Session 3: Managing Stress as a Post-Graduate Climate Change Researcher with Manchester Mind (90 minutes)

This session was run by the Manchester branch of the charity Mind. They created a bespoke session for postgraduate climate change researchers which included an introduction to stress and anxiety, as well as techniques for managing it. It also covered some aspects of climate anxiety, and how to manage this within your work.

This was highlighted as a particularly thought-provoking session with an open space for ECRs to share experiences, with useful and practical advice to manage stress while feeling inclusive and participant led. Resources were shared after the session with participants on techniques to manage stress during research-based jobs and PhDs.

Session 4: Paint Our Research (60 mins)

This session was designed to help attendees practise communicating their research, and to decompress at the end of the day. Participants were partnered and given 3 minutes each to describe their research to one another. Everyone was provided with a canvas and paints, and they had 30 minutes to paint the research of their partner. At the end of the session, all the canvases were laid out, and attendees had to guess which one was meant to represent their research.

This session was described as the most fun session of the day, an opportunity to relax after the more technical aspects of the day. It was also an opportunity to informally bond with other ECRs, and a

unique way to learn about each other's research as well as practice communicating your work in a short space of time.

Evening session: Crazy Golf & Dinner

We went to Junkyard Golf, to play a round of crazy golf all together. We then went for a meal at Bundobust before a few last standers went on to NQ64 to play arcade games. This was an opportunity to spend some more informal time together and speak to people outside of the workshop setting.

Attendees

On the day there were 24 attendees, 21 from the University of Manchester, 2 from the University of East Anglia, and 1 from Cardiff University.

Feedback and Outputs from Attendees

A post-event survey was sent to all participants and was filled in by 50% of attendees. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, all respondents gave the day 5* and all sessions received positive feedback on the content. Attendees flagged the skills they learnt throughout the day, such as learning about policy, practising communicating research through a range of methods, and peer-to-peer skill sharing through the PicoTalks. They also highlighted the connections they built with other ECRs, through meeting attendees from different institutions as well as creating a community feeling and building solidarity and support. The main improvement suggested to the day was to have had more attendees from outside Manchester and to make some adjustments to the catering including more coffee, and an earlier evening meal. The overall organisation of the day was received positively, and the choice of activity and meal was also appreciated.

Future Sessions

As part of the feedback, people were asked to suggest ideas for future sessions. This feedback will be used to design future sessions, such as for the Tyndall Assembly in September. Ideas for future TECN activities are shared below.

- Include sessions with more group work, to get to know people through activities.
- More sessions incorporating creativity, for example on creatively writing papers or proposals.
- More skills-based presentations or activities, perhaps in smaller groups.
- More wellbeing sessions, to bring people together in a low-pressure setting.
- Career pathways, how to get from a PhD to academia.
- Public engagement training, like blogs, community workshops or media engagement.
- More work on policy engagement.

Overall

The general feedback was that the TECN Summer Day 2023 was valuable, fun, and well-rounded with a wide range of diverse sessions and topics covered. It was an opportunity for attendees to meet each other in person and build support networks in a low-pressure setting. There were valuable outputs for participants in terms of skills sharing, learning, and supporting wellbeing.

The connections built through the TECN network continue to be a strength for the wider Tyndall Centre. The support and space provided to the TECN network for hosting and running similar activities, such as the TECN section of the Assembly, helps to foster a successful network of ECRs within the Tyndall Centre.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Melanie Price and April Dyer, for their support in organising catering and accommodation for attendees throughout the day. Thank you to Carly McLachlan, for the support in developing the sessions and guidance. Thank you to Tyndall Manchester & Tyndall UEA, for the financial support to run the day and allow people to attend. Finally, thank you to all attendees who helped support and shape the day.



Appendix A – Skills Based Picotalks Topics

Picotalks were given by 16 of the attendees on a variety of skills. First-year PhD researchers were given the option to talk about their research, rather than a skill. The topics are listed below.

Picotalk Topic
Systematic literature reviews
Batteries using biomass and their roles in scaling up decarbonisation
Attempting social science methods as someone with an engineering background
Systematic evidence mapping
Ethics applications
Managing multitasking
Soil Salvation: The Critical Decade for Soil Carbon
Fieldwork and semi-structured interviews
Workshop skills
Deliberative research methods
Media interviews
How to get small grants
A social practice perspective on future water demand challenges in 2040 and 2050
Communicating complex modelling results to non-experts
Getting research to policymakers
Pitching research as a service to collaborate with industry