BRITISH COUNCIL

RESEARCHER
CONNECT

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Professional
development for
researchers

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Contents

The international research environment

In an increasingly globalised market, researchers and the institutions they represent need to communicate their work effectively to an international audience. Without the skills to do this, and no matter how innovative their work is, researchers and research institutions can find themselves at a competitive disadvantage, affecting grant income, and international standing.

In recognition of this need, and building on our vision for prosperity through internationalised education, the British Council has developed the Researcher Connect professional development course.

Why do researchers' communication skills matter?

Researchers with strong communication skills are more likely to:

- publish in international journals
- successfully promote their research and represent their institution at conferences
- gain funding from international bodies
- effectively communicate with the wider public and policy makers
- build international collaborations to further their research.

Researcher Connect

Researcher Connect is a professional development course that focuses on the development of excellent communication skills for international, multicultural contexts. The aim is to enhance the productivity of individual researchers and, in turn, help to strengthen the international reputation and ranking of the researcher's employer.

The course is designed specifically for early and mid-career researchers, but particular aspects are also of benefit to more experienced members of the research community. Researcher Connect is not an English language course, and participants should have a minimum of B2-level English to be able to participate fully in the workshop.

Researcher Connect provides participants from all academic disciplines with the insights, understanding and tools to communicate effectively, whatever the situation or context. The course is offered as a series of modules delivered through a face-to-face workshop format by experienced and quality-assured trainers. The usual length of a Researcher Connect course is three days, and the best results are achieved when the number of course attendees does not exceed 20.

4000+
researchers trained since 2014, through more than 220 workshops in 29 countries.

95%
of researchers felt that they gained new knowledge and/or skills from participating.

96%
felt better placed and more motivated to share their research with an international audience.

The British Council

With a presence in over 100 countries, and decades of experience in supporting researcher development globally, the British Council understands the demands researchers face when working in an international environment.

As the UK's cultural relations organisation, we encourage scientific, technological, cultural and educational co-operation between the UK and other countries.

We believe science and innovation are integral to culture, and the sharing of scientific knowledge to be an excellent way of building trust, understanding and opportunities internationally.

We have a long history of connecting researchers globally to encourage collaboration and support the development of research capacity in the UK and partner countries.

We do this by linking key organisations in the UK research sector, such as the funding councils, universities and research institutions, with their counterparts overseas.

Researcher Connect was developed in recognition of the fact that communication skills are indispensable to the free flow of knowledge and ideas across cultures, and are integral to researchers and research institutions functioning at the international level.

Why choose Researcher Connect

The UK has recognised, through the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers[1], that researcher training and development is essential to maintaining its status as a world leader in research.

In response to this, Vitae, the UK experts in researcher communication skills training, produced the Researcher Development Framework (RDF)[2] in collaboration with the higher education sector and other stakeholders. The RDF is an important part of research career development in the UK. It identifies attributes and behaviours of successful researchers and helps develop these throughout the research community, to allow researchers to get the most out of their careers.

Researcher Connect has been developed for an international audience, with consideration to the RDF. The Researcher Connect approach was formed by our expert development team after many years' analysis and practice of effective communication in multiple cultures around the world. It was created in collaboration with leading academics and piloted in over 15 countries worldwide. The delivery of all of the modules follows an experiential learning philosophy and practice. The learning experience is benefited by participant input and reflection generated through activities, feedback and review.

1. The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is an agreement between funders and employers of research staff to improve the employment and support for researchers and research careers in UK higher education. It sets out clear standards that research staff can expect from the institution employing them, as well as their responsibilities as researchers. For more information, please visit: www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/vitae-concordat-vitae-2011.pdf

2. The Vitae RDF Planner is a web based application which organisations and individuals can use to map professional development: https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework-planner

Running a workshop

Each Researcher Connect workshop starts with the Know Your Audience module that introduces the Researcher Connect approach, and builds awareness essential to all subsequent modules. Know Your Audience runs for half a day. In the remaining time, clients are able to select from seven modules designed to address the development needs of the participant researchers. A certificate of completion will be given to each participant to demonstrate their attendance at the course.

Each of the seven optional modules speaks to a different and important aspect of the modern international research environment, and has flexible content that allows our experienced trainers to adapt the materials to the needs and experience of participants. Please find an overview of the modules on the following page and a detailed description of each module in the *Researcher Connect modules* section.

Researcher Connect trainers

Researcher Connect trainers specialise in higher education training, and have extensive backgrounds in academia and teaching. Each trainer brings a high level of expertise and skill to every workshop, as well as their own experience in research, specific academic disciplines and professional communication.

Please contact us

We can help you tailor a Researcher Connect workshop to your priorities and the development needs of the participant researchers attending the workshop. Please contact your local British Council office for more information about the course and to discuss delivery options, including licensing, opportunities to run multiple workshops and possibilities to partner UK and local training expertise.

Researcher Connect modules at a glance

Know Your Audience
Half-day compulsory module

This module helps participants to think about their communication strategies and the different audiences they work with. Know Your Audience is a building block for the seven optional modules that follow.

Abstracts
Half-day module

This module enables learners to become critical readers and writers of abstracts through review and practice, using techniques and styles introduced throughout the course. It focuses on techniques and approaches to enable participants to make well-informed decisions when creating their own abstracts.

Academic Collaboration
Half or full-day module

This module helps researchers to approach potential collaborators with more confidence, and to understand when and where collaboration may be most useful and beneficial.

Academic Writing
Full-day module

This module uses the Researcher Connect approach to critically analyse the essentials of academic writing, and identify, critique and develop each learner's own writing style through acquisition of tactics, tools and relevant language techniques.

Digital Researcher
Half or full-day module

This module helps develop participants' abilities using digital tools with confidence to enhance their academic careers. The module will detail strategies for using social media to enable research to be more discoverable, more highly cited and achieve more impact.

Effective Emails
Half or full-day module

This module enables participants to understand how their emails are being read, and to be aware of common errors. It builds a toolkit for clear, accurate and successful communication.

Persuasive Proposals
Full-day module

This module introduces essential tools, including project planning, and puts these into practice through team-led development of a funding proposal. It emphasises audience-focused language and style and the creation of logically connected goals, outcomes, outputs and inputs.

Presenting With Impact
Half-day module

This highly interactive module helps learners build critical awareness and reflective skills, as well as techniques for the use of voice, body language and presentation structure, through the creation and delivery of their own oral presentations.

Know Your Audience

Half-day compulsory module

Overview

Most researchers have experienced giving what we feel is a brilliant, uplifting presentation, of writing an in-depth and perceptive paper or an abstract that ticks all the boxes, essentially believing we have communicated well. Yet, to our surprise, we then find that the audience was unresponsive, the editorial board rejected the paper, or the abstract failed to generate views. Our communication failed in some way to achieve what we wanted.

Know Your Audience provides participants with the insights, understanding and tactics to avoid such situations, and to communicate effectively whatever the situation or context. The module also examines writing skills and looks at how to adapt writing styles to suit a variety of audiences.

The unique approach delivered in Know Your Audience is the culmination of many years' study, analysis and practice of effective communication in multiple cultures around the world by our expert team.

This module offers a simple but challenging toolkit for effective communication, and serves as the foundation for all Researcher Connect modules. Its secondary function is the development of critical thinking and critiquing skills.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Understand your audience and their specific needs.
- Develop a toolkit of skills and techniques, plus the confidence to use them to effectively analyse and understand audiences and their specific needs.
- Be able to communicate using appropriate language, at a level and with a message that is relevant to the audience.
- Be able to confidently and concisely define your own internal objectives for communicating with a particular audience and understand how these will affect audience attitude, understanding or behaviour.

Abstracts

Half-day module
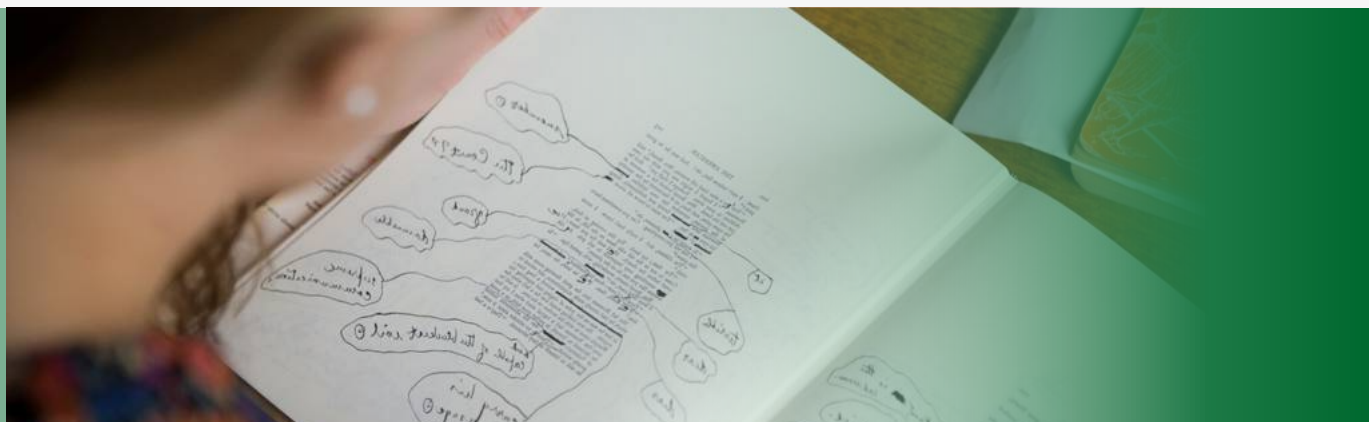
Overview

Abstracts are critical, not just as concise summaries of academic papers and presentations, but as roads to further publication opportunities and access to wider audiences. Written well, they can open doors to publication in peer-reviewed journals, to acceptance of papers in conferences and introduce your work to stakeholders from many areas.

The Abstracts module enables participants to become critical readers and writers of abstracts through review, specific skills development activities, and practice.

It applies the unique Researcher Connect approach to excellent communication, enabling participants to adapt and apply generic models, strategies and techniques to their own particular abstract writing needs. Researchers identify and adjust their particular abstract writing style, and understand how to develop their technique to write for different audiences such as corporate R&D, the public, or for cross-disciplinary research projects.

The module is applicable to participants from any research field creating abstracts for any platform, from submission of conference presentations to journal publications and online profiles.

Module content

The first units cover the essential structural elements of abstracts and how these can be reordered and used to meet the different requirements of different audiences and platforms. There follows a brief review of some basic 'good writing' techniques to adopt and practise, and an enquiry into abstract styles commonly demanded by different fields. From these units, participants create a personalised checklist of best practice criteria that they can apply to their own and to others' writing during their research careers.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Be able to create effective abstracts for different audiences.
- Have a good understanding of the functions of abstracts.
- Have been introduced to different styles of abstracts in different fields and different publications.
- Have practised using a range of tools and approaches for abstract creation.
- Be able to make well-informed decisions on how to structure abstracts and select appropriate content and style.

Academic Collaboration

Half or full-day module

Overview

Academia is an intensely collaborative, globalised activity. Research and teaching operate within extensive networks; funds and people flow between institutions and across borders. Therefore, when considering any academic project or work, it is important to consider whether it should be engaged in collaboratively.

Academic Collaboration is designed to enable participants to begin negotiating this complex environment and equip them with a toolkit for clear, accurate and successful communication and collaboration.

Module content

Participants first look at what collaboration is and examine the advantages and potential challenges of collaborating. Having familiarised themselves with this concept, they reflect on their own network, and the appropriate ways of expanding contacts through networking events. The module will also look at relationship-building, and how to follow-up with contacts through effective emails and further communication through social media sites.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Be able to understand which of your academic activities most readily lend themselves to collaboration.
- Be able to recognise the advantages and disadvantages of collaboration.
- Recognise how, when and where to approach potential collaborators and communicate with them.
- Develop communication strategies for establishing and maintaining successful collaborations.
- Be able to approach potential collaborations with more confidence and communicate with collaborators effectively.

Academic Writing

Full-day module

Overview

Publishing is a core component of any academic's job description. Researchers need to share their findings and their theories with academic colleagues around the world, and, increasingly, with other audiences too. This means publishing journal articles, books and book chapters that will get noticed, get read, and make a real impact on those who read them.

Academic Writing explores principles and techniques for adapting researchers' academic writing to become excellent publication material. The course also looks to support the development of tactics and a strategic approach to international publishing in multiple formats. It contains know-how on getting through and understanding the publishing process and the author's role in this. The module also includes a self-critiquing process that will run in parallel to the activities and conclude with a self and peer-developed analysis with 'next steps' to work on.

Module content

The module begins with an overview of the how, where and why of academic writing before considering how to gear academic writing towards certain audiences.

From there the module focuses on understanding and evaluating good writing for publication by looking at examples of excellent academic writing and focusing on their structure and narrative.

Finally, the module considers introductions and the best way to make a good first impression through abstracts, opening lines and editing. The module also contains many useful resources such as features of good and bad writing and ways into academic writing.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Be able to clearly distinguish excellent international academic writing, its qualities and voice.
- Be aware of the adaptations needed to develop academic writing for various publication audiences and have techniques with which to achieve this.
- Be able to write with clear purpose and from a strong ethical base.
- Be able to confidently use appropriate publishing jargon.
- Be able to make clear choices about publishing formats from the wide range of options available.
- Have a clear understanding of the reviewer process and the ethics of publishing.
- Have developed reflective skills for professional development in this area and have a plan to move their publishing careers forward.

Digital Researcher

Half or full-day module

Overview

This practical module develops researchers' abilities to confidently use digital tools to enhance their academic careers. Experienced trainers introduce participants to techniques and tips for using digital tools that will help them to connect with potential collaborators around the world and share their research more widely.

Module content

Digital Researcher starts by introducing and summarising the social media environment for researchers and academics. The content asks researchers to think about their work and their potential audience, and to think about how social media can contribute to their goals. The module then guides researchers through the development of a social media strategy. The module will look at existing platforms such as Research Gate and Twitter, before exploring other options and possibilities for promoting research and to creating networks. The module can be run over a half or full day. With both options, it will conclude with exercises to help researchers plan and manage their digital strategy and create an action plan.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Feel more confident using a variety of digital tools to disseminate research to wider more diverse audiences.

- Be able to assess which social media sites are most useful for you to build a reputation as a social media-savvy academic.

- Have a strategy for using social media to enable research to be more discoverable, more highly cited and achieve more impact.

- Learn how to use a minimum of three social media sites with confidence for professional and research purposes.

- Discover techniques to integrate digital tools into your research activities.

- Develop a sustainable social media strategy to help you achieve your research goals.

Effective Emails

Half-day module

Overview

Many of us email every day of our lives; however, miscommunication, missed information and, occasionally, personal offence from poorly thought-through emails can cause many problems. This is particularly true when it comes to working across multiple cultures in complex subject areas, and can be even more pertinent when emailing in a second language such as English.

Effective Emails enables participants to understand how their emails are being read, and to be aware of common errors. It builds a toolkit for clear, accurate and successful communication.

Module content

Participants first look at the function or purpose of specific professional emails and review common structures and standard phrases. Having familiarised themselves with these protocols, they practise using them in a series of 'difficult' communication scenarios and then give and receive direct feedback on the emails' effectiveness and impacts. Where time allows, the module also looks at email etiquette; for example, around out of office, storage and tracking.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Be able to format emails effectively.
- Be able to write in a range of styles appropriate to different audiences.
- Be confident users of standard phrases commonly found in emails.
- Be able to write 'difficult' emails such as large requests, complaints and persuasion.
- Have practised emailing single and multiple partners in challenging scenarios.
- Be able to interpret and, where needed, ask for clarification of requests embedded in indirect questions and complex phrases.
- Feel confident about understanding poorly written emails and have a strategy for clarifying these.

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Persuasive Proposals

Full-day module

Overview

It is becoming increasingly necessary in the professional research environment for researchers, even at a fairly early- career stage, to seek external funding from sponsors, grant agencies or governments. Researchers may also seek support in the form of resources or partnerships and access a myriad of other services from industry, the wider research community and other bodies.

In some fields it is often essential to gain authorisation to progress with a research programme from an ethics board or other statutory body. In these and many more cases, the researcher will likely be required to submit a proposal. Persuasive Proposals will enable researchers to write proposals that are clear, concise, and that better consider and meet the expectations of the funding bodies.

The insights and techniques gained in Persuasive Proposals are highly transferable to other professional situations such as pitching to investors, networking, and even for interviews.

Module content

The module starts with an overview of how proposals differ from other forms of professional writing. It looks at common structural elements and the qualities of successful proposals by analysing samples.

Participants look at why one proposal may differ from another and the decision-making process behind this.

The next section develops project planning knowledge and skills. Finally, participants work in teams to create a proposal and compete to submit a winning bid.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Be clear about what proposals are and why we write them.
- Have an understanding of what qualities make a proposal effective.
- Be familiar with generic international proposal structure (the parts of a proposal).
- Understand and have practised the process of proposal development.
- Be able to profile the proposal readers and meet their expectations.
- Be able to create clear and logically connected goals, outcomes, outputs and inputs.
- Be comfortable adapting language to the reader (clarity, simplicity).
- Be able to work with the proposal formula set by the reader organisation.

Presenting With Impact

Full-day module

Overview

Presenting with Impact focuses on the skills, confidence and know-how to present at international conferences. Participants work on creating and giving clear, effective and audience-focused presentations about aspects of their research. As with all Researcher Connect modules, Presenting with Impact is highly experiential, with participants developing, delivering and critiquing a brief presentation through a series of practical activities.

Module content

Presenting with Impact starts by looking at some presentation essentials and the basics of visual and vocal delivery, before analysing what makes a presentation effective or not.

Participants consider helpful presentation structures, then start to work on their own output using a model process. The module considers effective ways to generate content that engages with the audience's needs, and explores how to create an impactful key message and open and close in a memorable, effective manner. Throughout the module, participants practise a range of non-verbal and vocal skills and techniques. Finally, consideration is given to using notes efficiently, and the range of visual aids available to us.
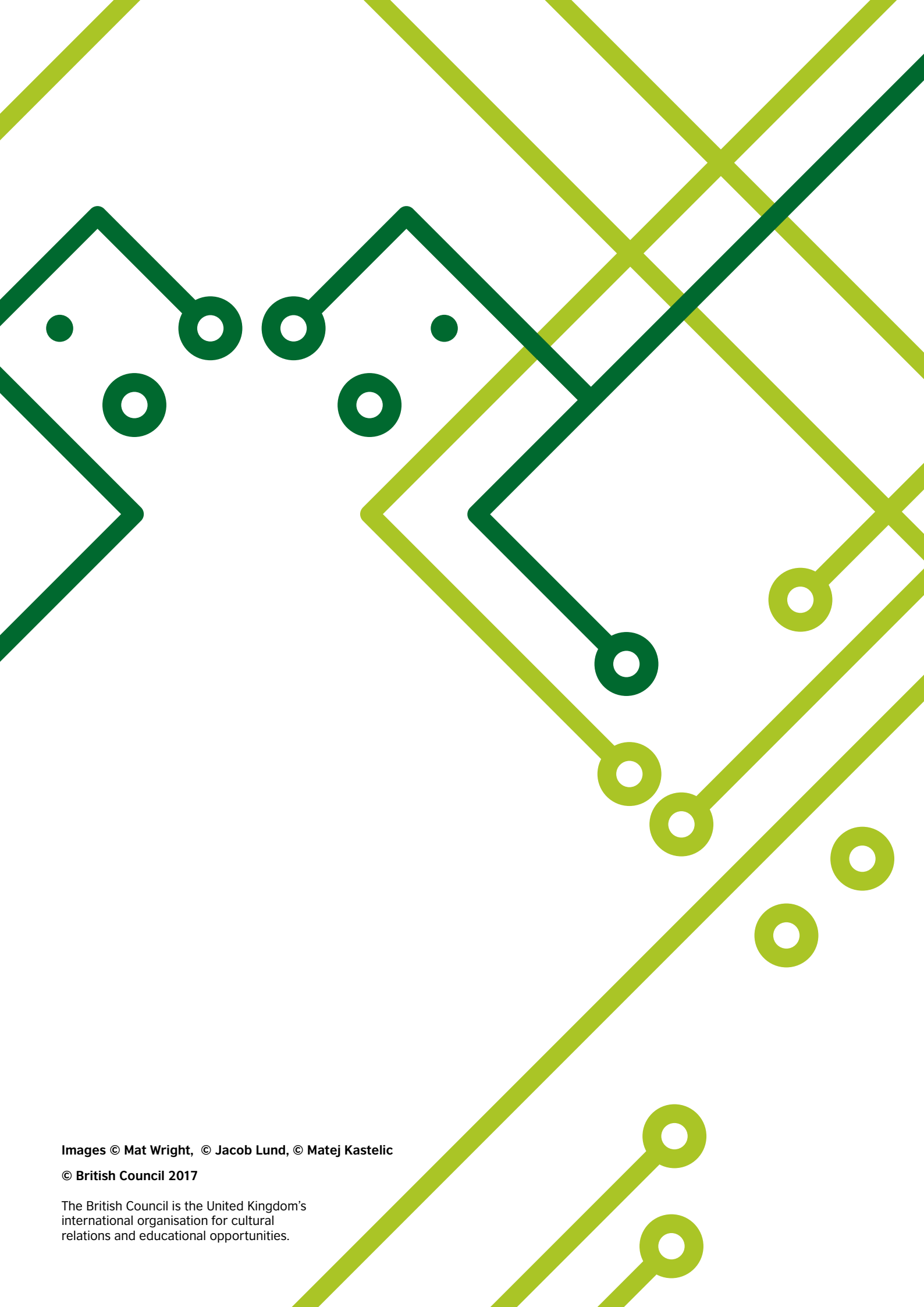
The module ends with a chance for participants to prepare and deliver their own presentations and fine-tune them after receiving critical evaluation from the rest of the group.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Be able to clearly articulate to the audience the key message(s) and purpose of your presentations.
- Have confidence in your ability to present clearly and effectively.
- Have experience of using a generic presentation structure and feel confident adapting this to your audience's needs.
- Have gained awareness and experience of using non-verbal, vocal and linguistic skills, and aids and techniques for effective presenting.
- Have gained exposure to several different presenting styles and the ability to critique them.
- Have developed and practised using a framework for self-critiquing and development.
- Have started to develop an appropriate style and technique for presenting.