

Opinion: How to foster a motivating ecosystem for our next generation



The Society of
Light and Lighting

Early career researchers (ECRs) play an important role in advancing scientific knowledge in the field of lighting by bringing the fresh perspectives, enthusiasm and a willingness to explore new ideas and interdisciplinary collaborations that can pave the way of progressing their research field as well as the broader society. So, how can we provide network opportunities across disciplines to encourage their growth?

More than 10 years ago, Professor Steve Fotios (University of Sheffield) and I sat down with an idea to establish a network where PhD students from around the world could meet. This network is now an established yearly event with two parts: the VELUX Academic Forum events, focusing primarily on daylight, and the LumeNet events, extending to broader lighting research. This network aims to provide PhD students with an opportunity to present their work to an invited panel of leading academic experts and fellow students. Each student receives dedicated time for discussion and feedback on developing their project further. Contrary to scientific conferences, these discussions primarily focus on research objectives and methodologies, rather than scientific results. Over the years, more than 200 PhD students have attended these events, and several of these students have now established careers in academia.

Another intention of these events is to support PhD students with the challenges they face in their academic journeys through mentorship. These networking events connect PhD students and academic experts and foster lifelong connections between students across academic institutions. Nevertheless, I could also foresee a need for a dedicated mentorship network to facilitate discussions, provide practical advice and foster a

culture of support, collaboration and open communication among academic institutions and individuals.

In addition, close collaboration between the academic and non-academic sectors can play a pivotal role in producing research findings that are accessible and applicable and reduce the gap between academic research, design practice and product development. Bridging scientific knowledge and practice by translating research into practical applications is critical for addressing 'real-world challenges' and driving progress in various fields, ultimately influencing standards, legislation, and policymaking positively. Initiatives like the European Training Networks under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions framework are an important step towards a firm structure of partnership between the academic and non-academic sectors, with a clear aim of advancing skills and competences relevant for research, innovation and long-term employability. In addition, academic recognition beyond scientific publications could encourage ERCs to widen their specialized knowledge, diversify their skills and expand their impact to a broader community.

In summary, supporting stronger synergies between researchers in lighting, as well as between academic and non-academic sectors, is essential for ERCs and for the development of valid and impactful new research outcomes. It is in our hands as experienced academics, practitioners, and institutions in the field of lighting to promote these synergies by supporting ERCs through informal mentorship initiatives, partnerships and dedicated events.

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