



SCHOOL

Course report

Research course in Radiotherapy Physics

3-6 November 2019, Madrid, Spain

Introduction

Below is an interview with Oliver Gurney-Champion on his attendance at the research course in radiotherapy physics that was organised by the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) in Madrid in 2019. This was the fourth edition of this course and it was again highly appreciated by those who attended. This is clear in Gurney-Champion's interview and in the feedback from other participants, which was offered both informally and in participants' evaluation forms. As in previous years, participants in the course came from varied backgrounds; some were from departments or countries where the performance of research is not a given, while others were part of internationally well-known research teams. Some came with early ideas for research, others had more experience and wanted to improve their grant applications (like Oliver); some had very practical research questions, maybe closely linked to their clinic, while others had more theoretical research questions. At each course, a lot of time in the programme is reserved for discussions on the research endeavours that are proposed by course attendees. These discussions may be in small groups, or one-to-one between teachers and visitors. The relatively large number of teachers (~10) and low number of participants (max 32) make in depth discussions possible for all projects. Research is fun, and all can learn how to improve their efforts to undertake it.

Looking forward to seeing you at the course in 2021. Watch out for the 2021 ESTRO School calendar.



Ben Heijmen
Course director

Interview with Oliver Gurney-Champion

Could you please briefly introduce yourself?

My name is Oliver Gurney-Champion and I work as a physics postdoc researcher on quantitative MRI for radiotherapy purposes at The Institute of Cancer Research in London, UK. I am particularly interested in improving the quality of quantitative images, for example by using machine learning.

Why did you choose to attend this course?

To progress a career in modern research, it has become important to obtain grants. However, being good at and enjoying research does not necessarily make one good at writing and obtaining grants. Therefore, any help in improving this relatively new skill to me is more than welcome, and this course offered assistance with the composition of research proposals to apply for research grants.

What aspects of the course were the most interesting and why?

I learnt most from presenting and discussing my research proposal with a large group of experts. The course involved nine professors with 21 students, so there was a lot of personal attention and many experts were able to look at my idea and help to improve my chances of success.. This was both in a technical manner (e.g. 'you should add an additional image acquisition to learn more') and in a practical manner (e.g. 'have you considered how much money you need?').

Did the course activities improve your knowledge and skills in the relevant subject?

After the course, I feel way more confident about my project and what to do next.

Did the course meet your expectations? If so, how?

The course was actually fairly different from my expectations, generally in a good way. I expected more talks on next-generation blue-sky research topics, whereas in reality most talks were focussed on on-going research. However, what I did not expect, and what I think made this course unique and absolutely worth going to, was the amount of attention given to each participant and their projects.

List three important 'takeaways' following the course.

To get the most from this course, I would strongly advise attendees to come prepared, with a project you feel you have given your best shot at and would like to submit.

How will what you have learnt be implemented in your daily job/ clinical practice?

The project proposal I discussed was definitely improved through its treatment on the course, and I think the experience will help me to write better grant proposals in the future. I will definitely submit the project proposal.

How would you encourage someone who has never been to an ESTRO Course to join this course next year/ in two years?

I would strongly encourage doctorate and postdoc researchers who are starting to consider applying for grants to go. Others who should consider this course are people further on in their careers, but who are struggling with grant applications. The course is also meant for students who want to discuss their next projects and, if there is still flexibility to adjust the project, I imagine the course can be helpful too.



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