loneliness, writers’ block and demotivation are just three of many challenges faced by PhD students across all disciplines. It was this realization that inspired me and a social-science colleague to organize an event about the experience of being a PhD student.

So great was our fellow students’ interest in our idea that what we’d originally conceived as a one-day workshop run by PhD students for PhD students turned into a two-day international conference. But it wasn’t simple. Organizing and leading such an initiative as a student felt like a huge undertaking. And there were times when the organizing committee felt that it might not work. This was particularly the case at the beginning when we had only a seed of an idea and no experience among us in how to carry on with it.

But we learnt as we went. We planned sessions about the research and data-gathering experience; writing up and publishing results; getting through the viva or dissertation defence; and finding and defining the post-PhD path. And before long, members of the organizing committee and I were also adjusting bookings, applying for more money, fielding e-mails from attendees, keeping a budget, contacting key speakers and arranging catering. We presented our conference ‘The PhD Experience’ on 17–18 November 2008 at the University of Hull, UK.

We had 6 keynote and theme speakers from academia, government and industry, 6 student presenters, countless poster presentations and 160 attendees.

This kind of student-led training helped attendees, our organizers and me to realize that so many others at the same career stage face similar experiences and emotions. Although the whole endeavour was a great deal of work, at the same time I learnt so much — from the conference sessions themselves, and from my experience of co-organizing the whole thing.

And I wasn’t the only one who benefited. Many of us forged new connections beyond our specific research disciplines and discovered a way forward beyond the...
COMPETITION
Energy start-ups
Energy entrepreneurs are invited to compete for a cash prize and the chance to network with investors. The German Energy Agency has launched Start Up Energy Transition, a global business competition open to start-ups and early-stage energy companies. Entrants can compete in five categories: Urban Energy Transition, for contributions to digitally enabled and sustainable cities; Cleantechn Against Climate Change, for technologies that cut greenhouse-gas emissions; Future Production and Manufacturing, for digital solutions; Mobility Meets Energy Transition, for sustainable mobility concepts; and Platforms and Communities, for networks expansion. Entrants can also compete for a grand prize, Start Up SDG7, for companies or products that contribute to clean, affordable energy. Results will be announced in 2017. Category winners will each receive €10,000 (US$10,400); the grand prize, a package worth €20,000, will be shared between three nominees. All entrants will have the chance to network with venture-capital representatives, industry partners and other start-ups. Applications may be submitted up to 31 January at go.nature.com/2hvk72h.

TRAINING
Careers in bioscience
The UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), a government-funded granting agency, has created collaborative PhD studentships that link doctoral students at participating universities with drugmakers and other industrial partners. The £18.9-million (US$23.9-million) investment in the Collaborative Training Partnerships programme will train 189 PhD students for careers in bioscience. The ten lead industrial partners are AstraZeneca, Berry Gardens Growers, Croda International, Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, the Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Centre, MedImmune, Mondelēz UK, Unilever UK and Waitrose.

Other companies and organizations are also taking part along with member universities; projects will be agreed between the industrial partners and collaborating institutions. The first round of studentships launches in October 2017 with additional rounds in October 2018 and 2019. Information for applicants will be available through the respective universities.

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CORRECTION
The Careers Feature ‘Find your voice’ (Nature 540, 157–159; 2016) misrepresented Steve Blank’s role in the NSF Innovation Corps Program. He didn’t just work with the programme, he is its architect.