

## **PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES ON INNOVATIVE POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH TRAINING**

*Report of an innovative project by a consortium of politics departments led by the Open University and the University of York.*

Imagine this scenario. You are a recently qualified postgraduate politics student. You have just landed a dream job as a researcher for an MP in the House of Commons. You arrive at work and check your inbox and your first task is to prepare a briefing report for a meeting with the Minister for Immigration. You are provided with a set of assets: some opinion poll data, a TV programme, a radio discussion, a couple of academic articles, and an article from Prospect or the PSA News. Each of these assets raises methodological issues and you want to make sure that your MP is well briefed on both the content of the assets and their methodological strengths and weaknesses. How do you start? What do you do?

This is the scenario which opens the Politics Active Research Learning Environment (PARLE) DVD, a HEFCE funded project which aims to put the fun and interactivity into what is often the driest part of the postgraduate curriculum. The student moves between the virtual role play and the research toolbox – the place where the research training takes place in 15 interactive tutorials modelled on the ESRC's Research Training Guidelines. Covering everything a postgraduate researcher needs to know to engage in research from research design (planning research, epistemology, sampling, ethics and doing a literature review) through data collection (qualitative and quantitative) to data analysis (including an introduction to some of the most common software used in research settings), PARLE is flexible enough to be used as a full one years training course, or as part of existing provision or can be dipped into to supplement existing provision.

The DVD is produced to the best standards associated with the Open University still the UK's leading provider of distance learning materials. Currently being produced by academics from 10 institutions, the DVD will be classroom ready by October 2006. And if innovation and flexibility were not impressive enough, the DVD is going to be free in the first instance to any politics department in the UK that would like to try it. It will be an ideal resource for those wishing to move into the postgraduate market but who lack the staff resources or expertise to fund a full programme internally or as an additional resource to departments who already run postgraduate programmes. It will also be able to be used as part of a distance learning programme.

Interested? Want to know more? Then contact the PARLE Project Director, Dave Middleton at [parle@open.ac.uk](mailto:parle@open.ac.uk) or if you want more information look at the PARLE website at [www.open.ac.uk/parle](http://www.open.ac.uk/parle)