CHLOE L SQUIRES

THE NEXT GENERATION OF RESILIENCE

The co-ordinator of the Terrorism and Political Violence Next Generation Network, based at the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews, reflects on the benefits that NextGen networks offer to the field.

INTRODUCTION

Next Generation Networks ('NextGen networks') are becoming increasingly popular in the field of counterterrorism, defence, and security. A NextGen network is an organisation that aims to support early career researchers (ECRs) navigate academia and the broader research environment.

In Summer 2024, the Terrorism and Political Violence Next Generation Network was founded at CSTPV, University of St Andrews. Since its establishment, the network has cultivated a community of over 300 members from around the world. Each month, members receive a newsletter featuring opportunities for ECRs worldwide, including funding calls, paper submissions, and online webinars. The network also hosts online events tailored to the needs outlined by the community. These have included sessions on publishing, ethical, and fieldwork challenges, and undertaking research in complex and changing political contexts.

HOW CAN NEXTGEN NETWORKS SUPPORT RESILIENCE?

Within a supportive environment, NextGen networks promote resilience across the field by enabling international and interdisciplinary connections, facilitating knowledge exchange, and identifying emerging challenges. For scholars working on terrorism and political violence, the opportunities afforded by NextGen networks support the development of skills that promote robust and insightful research and analysis.

INTERDISCIPLINARY PROBLEM SOLVING

Bringing together ECRs helps build communities of emerging researchers with diverse interdisciplinary and international networks; an asset for individual researchers and research teams alike. These connections encourage transversal approaches to understanding and countering complex and emerging issues. Peer engagement fosters awareness of current and emerging research agendas and supports collaborative thinking, relationships between practitioners and academics, and grant writing.

SUPPORT MECHANISMS

NextGen networks can offer support for ECRs and PhD researchers navigating complex research environments which can be emotionally challenging and, at times, isolating. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of terrorism studies, many researchers are based in departments such as Psychology, Criminology, Law, or Politics, where topic support may be limited. NextGen networks can be responsive to these needs and provide support beyond the parameters of an individual's university.

For example, VOX-pol provides extensive resources aiming to support online extremism and terrorism researchers to protect their emotional and mental wellbeing, and has its own NextGen network for those working on online extremism. NextGen initiatives provide spaces for ECRs to connect with peers tackling similar challenges and can offer guidance on navigating challenging research environments.

UNDERSTANDING THE FIELD

Understanding practitioner and policymaker interests and approaches can be a challenge for many ECRs and PhDs. Though their work is often highly relevant, because ECRs and PhDs often do not have direct access to these communities, they can lack insight into how these environments operate, or how their work can be applied. Some networks have aimed to address these gaps and support ECR access to policy and practice.

For example, RUSI NextGen delivered an online session to provide insight into the operation of a Think Tank. More recently, the NABS+ network launched a mentoring scheme, developed to support ECRs 'build their skills, knowledge and confidence through one-to-one conversations with an experienced mentor'. Support offered to ECRs and PhDs through these efforts helps to deepen their understanding of the field, enhance the insights that can contribute to policy and practice, as well as building their confidence in doing so.

> **ECR networks equip emerging scholars and practitioners with broad skills, connections, and understanding.**

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

In the early stages of their careers, PhD students and ECRs commonly bring new perspectives and innovative research methodologies to the field. The focus on contemporary issues and new solutions make postgraduate conferences particularly valuable for knowledge exchange by providing opportunities to showcase new insights from international contexts.

In 2025, the TPV NextGen network hosted the 9th Society for Terrorism Research Postgraduate conference, bringing together students from Europe, North America, and Asia. A direct result of the NextGen network, the conference facilitated new international connections while providing the opportunity to share knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of current and emerging research agendas. The supportive and collegiate atmosphere fostered in this environment enables ECRs to develop public speaking skills and refine academic arguments, building resilience in the communication of their work to diverse audiences.

THE FUTURE OF NEXTGEN

Early career researchers face a range of challenges, from academic challenges, navigating a complex research landscape, building professional connections with peers and institutions, and protecting their emotional wellbeing. NextGen networks offer practical solutions to the challenges ECRs face navigating the field by equipping emerging scholars and practitioners with broad skills, connections, and understanding which cannot be accessed in many universities and research institutions.

Fostering supportive communities has a direct impact on the capacity of ECRs. The work of networks such as VOX-Pol Next Gen, RUSI Next Gen, NABS+ (even those which do not directly focus on the 'NextGen') are vital to developing new research agendas and prioritising researcher wellbeing.

Ultimately, NextGen networks contribute to building the next generation of resilient research- and resilient researchers.

Chloe Squires is a NABS+ Research Associate. She also co-ordinates the Terrorism and Political Violence NextGen network based at the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, University of St Andrews.