**Evening Discussion Session - 4th October**

**Truth, Post-truth and Speaking Truth to Power: A Critical Discussion**

This is the first of four evening discussions sessions that are designed to stimulate broader thinking amongst PGRs, though all are welcome. The format is that there will be a short introduction, followed by some small group discussion followed by a larger discussion of the issue raised, which will always extend from the programme of PGR research skills sessions

Contemporary politics is replete with claims that we live in a world of 'post-truth'. Post-truth refers to claims that emotion and affect are as important as reason and evidence in arguments for social, political and cultural change. They speak to the power of rhetoric over philosophical sophistication, and are exemplified in Brexit, Trump and the rise of populisms. It manifests in a culture of hostility to the 'expert', to knowledge based argumentation and to a rationally constructed argument with a basis of evidence. The context to these developments is a sense that experts and 'elites' have failed to deliver to the expectations of particularly western democracies that have experienced over four decades of globalising neo-liberalism.

In this argument, truth has failed to deliver on expectations bound to assumptions of economic and technological progress and democratic politics. 'Truth' has instead become an ideological artefact, a contestation of competing interests and elite and cultural power, The politics of truth under late capitalist (post-?)modernity has replaced the enlightenment preoccupation with the possibilities of science with cynicism with a preoccupation with the art of persuasion, whether based on rational argument or rhetorical appeals. It represents a potent threat to the idea of a reasoning, if not a reasonable, society

Within the intellectual domain, the enlightenment commitment to scientific truth emerging from rigorous methods and logic has progressively been superseded by a more nuanced understanding of the paradigmic and constitutive/constituted basis of knowledge production and the resources of critique. A key element of the last two centuries of intellectual development has been the slow retreat from objective and absolute scientific truths in the service of progress to the conceptualisation of the truth teller and their truth claims in a contested world where 'enlightenment can serve genocide as well as civilisation. That in turn has revived a Greek notion of speaking truth to power - parrhesia - that exhorts truth telling in the face of the ownership of power and knowledge by institutions and elites.

This discussion will explore truth, post-truth and speaking truth to power as different approaches to thought in the world and what truth might be, both thinking about research in postgraduate degrees and the wider sense of contributing to knowledge in society. Is the foundation of your investment in intellectual work a commitment to turth? What does 'truth' mean to you? What does this mean in contemporary intellectual world and its wider contexts? Do you we need to return to Plato's philosopher kings on *the Republic* to re-establish a sense of truth bound to reason, if it seems to be so discredited it contemporary democracies?