

Research Staff Association Buddy Scheme – 4th Round

April 2024



Introduction

Following the successful rounds of the Research Staff Association's (RSA) Buddy Scheme in the Spring 2022, Autumn 2022 and Spring 2023, the RSA conducted the fourth round in Spring 2024. The Buddy Scheme offers research-only contract staff (i.e., postdocs and early career researchers – ECRs) the chance to meet new colleagues, expand their networks and enrich their experience of the University of Liverpool's research culture in an informal setting. It is an opportunity to meet peers at similar career stages across all faculties, build sustainable and long-lasting connections outside of their research group, as well as enhance their professional, research and social frames of reference.

The Process

The fourth round of the Buddy Scheme followed the previous process of the third round. The scheme was advertised via the RSA's weekly e-bulletins and the University of Liverpool RSA's X account ([@UoL_RSA](#)). The fourth round flyer with a QR code linked to the [RSA webpages](#) (Appendix Figure 1) was printed and posted around the campus. Further information on the Buddy Scheme was available on the [RSA webpages](#) where a link to a simple expression of interest form was provided for research-contract staff to complete. The questions on the form included name, department, email address and reason(s) for taking part in the scheme.

The expression of interest form was made available between 19th February and 8th March 2024. Twenty-five research-only contract staff (postdocs or ECRs) signed up for this round of the Buddy Scheme. They were matched based on their interests and grouped with three or four research staff, resulting in seven groups of three and one group of four people from the same or different faculties.

All participants were then emailed the names and email addresses of their buddies on 14th March and asked to meet by 5th April, either in person or online. Broad meeting guidelines were provided asking everyone to respect the meeting preferences of others in their group and keeping the tone of the meeting respectful, informal, and supportive.

An email was then sent to the buddy groups on 26th March reminding the participants to arrange their meeting by 5th April. Following the culmination of the 3-week meeting window, a feedback survey was sent on 8th April (with a reminder on 16th April) and participants were requested to fill out the form to share their experience and feedback by 22nd April 2024.

The Participants

Figure 1 presents the proportions of participants by three faculties at the University of Liverpool. Out of twenty-five participants who signed up for the Buddy Scheme, majority were from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (64%), followed by the Faculty of Science and Engineering (28%), and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (8%).

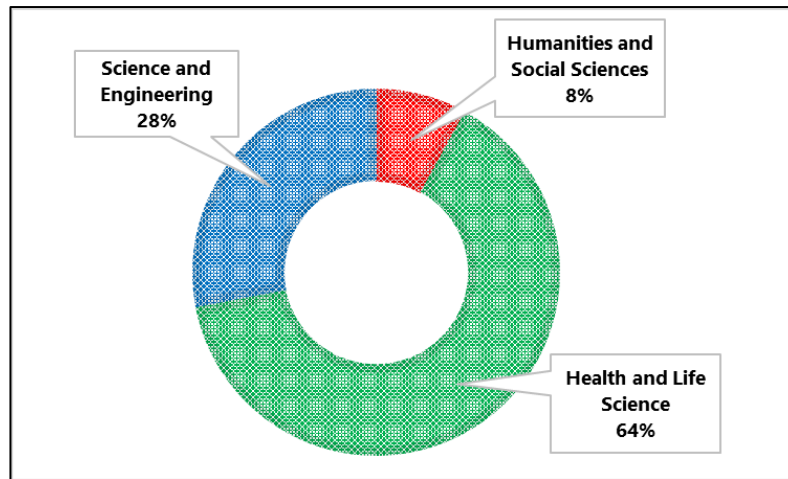


Figure 1. Percentages of participants across faculties that took part in the fourth round of the Buddy Scheme.

The reason for participating in the Buddy Scheme was mostly related to establishing new and broadening current connections with other researchers at the University of Liverpool. Some participants also expressed their interest in meeting other research staff to discuss and share ideas, experiences, and expertise. A few selected responses to the question, “*What’s your interest in the scheme*” are highlighted below:

“To meet other early career researchers at Liverpool. I started at Liverpool last year and to date have not met many others outside of my Institute/Faculty. Can be others with similar or different research interests.”

“Generally curious what other people are doing in UoL. I’d like to meet curious, non-judgemental minds and talk about the research opportunities in UoL and UK in general.”

Evaluation

At the end of the scheme, participants were asked to complete a short, online evaluation survey. A first email asking for feedback about the scheme was sent out on 8th April followed by a reminder on 16th April requesting feedbacks before 22nd April 2024. 11 participants (44%) completed the survey by the deadline.

Of the participants who completed the survey, 9 (82%) met with their buddies within the 3-week window. Meetings took place in person (over coffee or lunch) or online (via MS Teams). Two participants (18%) who were unable to meet with their buddies stated that they could not find a suitable time to meet within the 3-week window.

100% of those who were able to meet their buddies found the meeting to be a positive experience, rating it as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ (Figure 2).

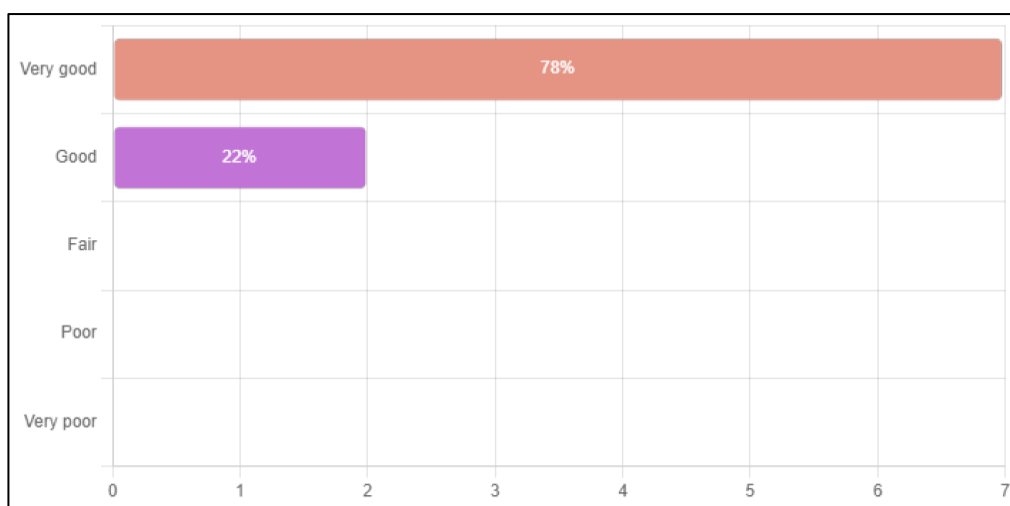


Figure 2. Graph showing participants rating of their meeting.

Reported highlights of the scheme were connecting with people from across the University from different backgrounds and different research areas. Respondents saw it as a useful networking opportunity and enjoyed meeting colleagues from similar research areas, meeting new and interesting people, meeting people at a similar career stage and exchanging views on life as a researcher. A few selected responses to the question, “*What was the highlight of the buddy scheme for you?*” are given below:

“As a post doc, you typically find yourself surrounded by people who have very similar interests to yourself ... it can very much seem like a bubble sometimes! It was so refreshing to hear the research interests of my buddies and the steps they have taken to get to where they are in their career, which was miles away from the people I typically interact with on a day to day basis. Beyond research, I was also surprised as to how well we were matched! We all had something in common with each other which made the conversation between strangers very easy! We all agreed we would like to meet again ...”

“The highlight was that this scheme not only allows researchers to meet in an informal environment but allows also to build collaborations.”

“Meeting new people and listening to others experiences”

Respondents mostly found the buddy scheme to be very well organised and suggested that it could be improved by avoiding the Easter break. It was also suggested that having a larger than 3-week meeting window could be helpful.

Conclusions

The fourth round of the RSA Buddy Scheme provided a great opportunity for research staff at the University of Liverpool to develop new and sustainable connections with people looking to meet again. The fifth round of the Buddy Scheme will take place in Spring 2025. Additionally, the second round of the joint scheme between the RSA and University’s PGR

Development Network is planned in Autumn 2024 to help promote a borderless researcher community.

Appendix



The flyer is titled 'BUDDY SCHEME' in large, bold, brown letters. Above the title, it says 'THE RESEARCH STAFF ASSOCIATION PRESENTS'. To the left of the title is the UoL RSA logo, and to the right is a network diagram of people icons. Below the title, it says 'FOR ALL RESEARCH STAFF' with arrows pointing left and right. The main text reads: 'If you want to expand your network, connect with new people, and feel part of the wider research(er) community... ...scan the QR code below to find out how to apply!'. A QR code is on the left, and a list titled 'How it works?' is on the right. The list includes: 'Complete the form using the QR code', 'You will be matched with 2 - 3 researchers', 'We will provide email addresses to contact one another', and 'You will get in touch with your buddies to organise your meeting'. At the bottom left, it says 'Sign up until 8th March 2024!'. At the bottom right, it says 'Follow us on X to stay updated or email us' with icons for X (@UOL_RSA) and email (ResearchStaffAssociation@liverpool.ac.uk). A yellow banner at the very bottom says 'BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE ACADEMY'.

UoL RSA

THE RESEARCH STAFF ASSOCIATION

PRESENTS

BUDDY SCHEME

← FOR ALL RESEARCH STAFF →

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and **feel part of the wider research(er) community...**

...scan the QR code below to find out how to apply!



How it works?

- Complete the form using the QR code
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8th March 2024!

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BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE ACADEMY

Figure 1. Flyer developed for the fourth round of the Buddy Scheme and posted around the faculties and the University Campus.