

University of Liverpool

PGR-Postdoc Buddy

Scheme – 1st Round

Autumn 2023



Introduction

The PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme was a new initiative launched by The Academy in autumn 2023 to emulate the extremely successful RSA buddy scheme, whereby postdocs and early career researchers are buddied up with the intention of the offer to network in an informal setting. In this instance, PGRs were buddied with postdocs in a more senior position, and during the initial expression of interest form, PGRs were offered the chance to specify preferences on whether they would prefer to be matched with someone working in a similar area of research, or if they were happy to broaden their horizons entirely.

The scheme was launched with the core aims of offering PGRs a chance to meet new colleagues, expand their networks and enrich their experience of the University's research culture in a more informal setting. By being paired with a postdoc, insights of working as a researcher at University of Liverpool and how to make the most of your time here could be provided in an accessible and peer-friendly way. Furthermore, the scheme was ensured as being a great opportunity for PGRs to meet peers at similar career stages across the faculties of Health and Life Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Engineering whilst conducting itself as a fantastic way to build connections outside research groups and enhance the professional, research and social frames of reference for all PGRs.

The Process

In the lead up to the Buddy Scheme launch and the subsequent sign-up period, advertisement of information pertaining to the scheme were widely circulated on social media outlets such as the Twitter/X accounts run by both the RSA and PGRDevNet, alongside a webpage that was set up under the PGR Development Network section of the University webpage: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/pgr-development-network/pgr-rsa-buddy-scheme/>.

In order to sign up, PGRs who were interested in taking part were asked to fill in a form and answer a few questions, such as who they'd like to meet and what they were hoping to get out of the scheme, alongside more generalised questions on the form which requested name, department, and email address(es). PGRs were also asked whether they'd like to be matched with those in similar disciplines, or whether they'd like to explore and expand their network of researchers across the faculties. Those who registered their interest were sent their buddy groups early October 2023, and encouraged to meet by early November 2023, at which point they were asked to fill out a feedback form to capture their initial response to the scheme, its organisation and implementation, along with their personal reaction up until this point.

The Participants

Overall, the participation in the scheme was a great success, with 98 PGRs joining to be matched with a total of 15 postdoc buddies. Interestingly, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences accounted for over half of the PGR applications – 50/97, whilst the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences and Science and Engineering offered up 23 and 24 PGRs respectively. By way of contrast, the Faculty of Science and Engineering garnered the most interest from prospective postdoc buddies, with their 7 closely matched by the Faculty of Health and Life Science’s 6. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences only had 2 postdoc buddies involved in the scheme (Figure 1.). It should be noted that the majority of buddies involved did specify they would have preferred to be matched with somebody from their discipline or general faculty, however given the disparity in numbers, this was not always possible to achieve.

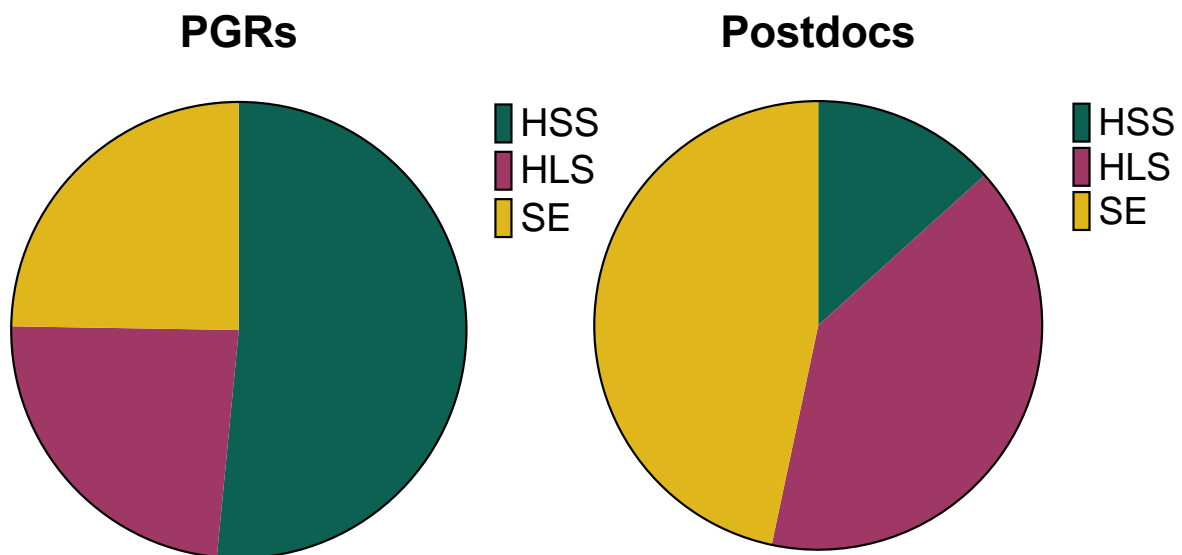


Figure 1. Proportion of PGRs and Postdocs participants from the different faculties at the University of Liverpool

Regarding the stage of PGR study, the numbers were more evenly balanced. 34 early-stage, 41 mid-stage and 22 late-stage PGRs were involved in total, emphasising the importance of the scheme for PGRs at every stage of their career. With this being a pilot initiative for PGRs, none had attended a scheme like this before, whereas almost all of the postdoc buddies involved confirmed that they had participated in a buddy scheme before – either as a mentor or a mentee, demonstrating that new postdocs tended to have been less inclined to join.

Evaluation

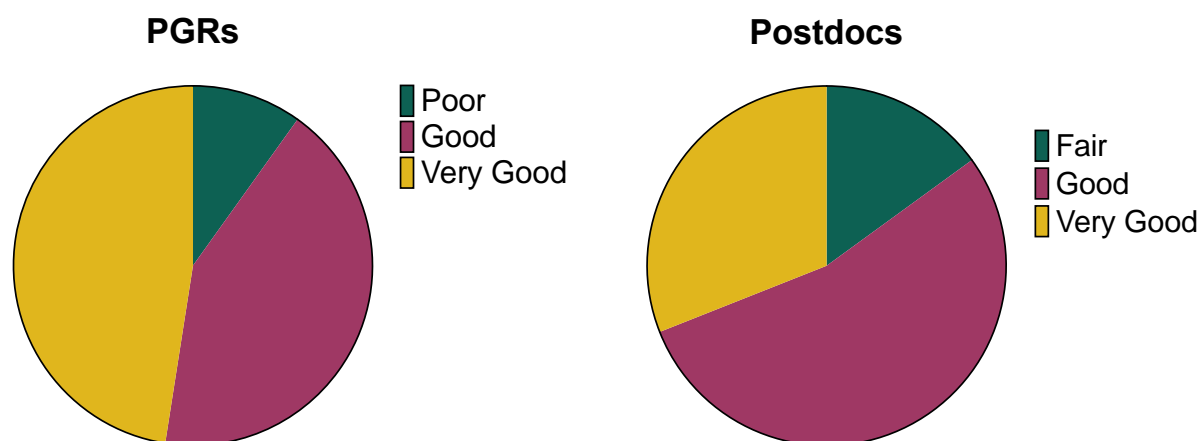


Figure 2. Proportion of responses by PGRs and Postdocs rating the meeting they attended. Survey participants were asked if they felt the meetings went: Very Poor, Poor, Fair, Good or Very Good.

The survey feedback gathered responses from 23 PGRs and 13 Postdocs in total. Most groups met in-person, with a few meeting online. 90% of PGRs felt the meeting went good or very good (Figure 2.).

The other 10% accounted the meetings as being poor due to numerous meetings been arranged but not everyone attending, therefore they were left feeling like they had not got as much out of the scheme as they had initially hoped. This is an issue that has been raised by varying teams in the hope of increasing participation and commitment to the scheme in the next round. The overwhelming majority of feedback was positive and mentioned the discussion between PGRs from different faculties as interesting as well as the ability to talk to a postdoc about their academic experiences – despite the fact that many were eventually matched with peers from different departments or faculties. 71% of PGRs have agreed to meet with their group again but had not arranged anything at the time of submitting the form. Another 10% would like to meet again but are not sure if the other members of their group would want to (Figure 3A.). Similar results were provided by Postdocs. Impressively, 91% of PGRs and 100% of Postdocs would take part in the scheme again (Figure 3B.).

Lots of suggestions for improvement were provided, which will be used going forward to consider how future iterations of the scheme are run and groups are paired together. The postdoc responses were similar and also cited that more time to organise meetings and multiple meetings before answering the form would be beneficial for everyone involved.



Figure 3. A) Proportion of PGRs and Postdocs responses to if another meeting had be organised at the time of answering the survey. Responses could have been: Yes & planned, Yes & not planned, Would like to, but not sure if other group members would, Maybe, Not sure/not discussed, and Postdocs could also answer PGRs only to meet again. B) Proportion of PGRs and Postdocs that would take part in the buddy scheme again.