

# University of Liverpool Research Staff Association Annual Evaluation Report 2023

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## ***Current members of the RSA***

|                              |                 |   |
|------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Claire Wilson (she/her)      | Co-Chair        | Faculty of Health & Life Sciences       |
| Cordelia Dunai (she/her)     | Co-Chair        | Faculty of Health & Life Sciences       |
| Rishav Agrawal (he/him)      | Co-Chair        | Faculty of Science & Engineering        |
| Stella Morgana (she/her)     | Co-Chair        | Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences |
| Janette Greenhalgh (she/her) | Deputy Co-Chair | Faculty of Health & Life Sciences       |
| Selina Johnson (she/her)     | Deputy Co-Chair | Faculty of Health & Life Sciences       |
| Bengt Tegner (he/him)        | Deputy Co-Chair | Faculty of Science & Engineering        |
| Iaroslav Michurin (he/him)   | Deputy Co-Chair | Faculty of Science & Engineering        |
| Lakshay Jain (he/him)        | Deputy Co-Chair | Faculty of Science & Engineering        |
| Alexandra Hunt (she/her)     | Deputy Co-Chair | Faculty of Health & Life Sciences       |
| Jordan Jones (she/her)       | Deputy Co-Chair | Faculty of Health & Life Sciences       |

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# 1) Summary of the RSA

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The [University of Liverpool Research Staff Association \(RSA\)](#) is a **research community-owned and led initiative**. In partnership with [The Academy](#), the goals of the RSA are:

1. **Represent research staff** from all Faculties, Schools and Institutes on matters affecting researchers.
2. Provide a platform for **communication, networking and professional development opportunities for research staff**.
3. Coordinate **central support for researcher development** with that provided locally by faculties, schools and institutes.
4. Facilitate a **borderless community** for researchers to make the most of their time at the University of Liverpool.

The [RSA Steering Committee](#) – currently four co-chairs and nine deputy co-chairs – includes representation of research staff from across all 12 institutes/departments and meets on a tri-weekly basis with the Academy. The RSA is also supported by members of The Academy – Saneeya Qureshi, Amy Birch and Andrew Holmes.

In addition to the 5 RSA representatives on the Research Concordat Steering Group, the co-chairs have separately established regular quarterly meetings directly with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact (PVC R&I) to share updates, as well as strategically address issues by leveraging their position to drive positive change across the institution.

In this report we will discuss the numerous events and initiatives the RSA have been involved with in 2023. Past events are also highlighted on the [Researcher Hub - Researcher Development Events and Activities](#).

One of the biggest responsibilities of the RSA is sharing the weekly e-bulletin that advertises relevant events. Many groups send information to be disseminated to research staff this way. The bulletin also contains the useful “Did you know?” section that shows a rotation of useful resources and information, such as a reminder about the 10 career development days which are a part of the Researcher Development Concordat. Additionally, the RSA organises Lunch and Learns that cover the Concordat, career development, and other relevant research topics.

Overall, the RSA actively promotes research culture, advocates for an inclusive, positive and supportive research environment at the UoL and is a go-to group for research staff for staying informed and receiving career development opportunities. We continue to receive amazing feedback from researchers as well as other members of staff, and this year we were recognised for our efforts in promoting a positive research environment through a nomination for the Organisation Award at the National Post Doc Conference.

Finally, we would like to recognise the amazing efforts of our 2023 outgoing Co-Chair Sophie Jones and say thank you to Christof Baumgartel who helped with the organising of this year’s Research Staff Conference.

## 2) Steering Groups and Committees

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One of the main aims of the RSA is to be a voice for research staff here at Liverpool. Members of the RSA sit on various groups and committees throughout the University.

The [Concordat Steering Group](#) ensures the successful implementation of the Concordat and the University's Concordat Action Plan. The steering group is built of both members of the research community and those tasked with supporting their work and career development. These meetings occur quarterly throughout the year and the RSA are represented by Claire Wilson, Cordelia Dunai, Stella Morgana, Rishav Agrawal and Bengt Tegner. The members of the RSA act as ECR representatives and work with their respective faculty to provide suggestions on specific aims related to research culture and report on completed actions.

The [Athena Swan Charter](#) is a framework across the globe to support and transform gender equality with higher education and research. The charter aims to address gender equality. Cordelia Dunai is the RSA representative on the Athena Swan Steering Group and provides a researcher perspective on how to improve staff equality.

In 2022, the University embarked on a bid for Advance HE's **Race Equality Charter (REC)**. Claire Wilson has continued to act as an ECR representative on the REC Sub-Group. Claire has supported the REC application by providing suggestions on how to improve race equality at Liverpool and feedback good practices from the RSA.

The University's **Research and Impact Committee (RIC)** aims to develop and implement strategies, policies and frameworks to promote research at international and world-leading standards across all disciplines in the University. The committee oversees the enhancement of the University research environment in support of these objectives, which includes research staff development and consideration of the postgraduate research experience. Chaired by the PVC R&I, **Professor Anthony Hollander**, the committee includes RSA representation (Rishav Agrawal) to ensure that the voice of researchers is heard in the development of policies that will influence the research environment. Additionally, participation of the RSA in RIC meetings demonstrates an institutional commitment to support researchers and to synergise University policies with researcher activities.

The University's vision to create and sustain an inclusive and supportive environment, underpinned by effective mental health and wellbeing support systems within which all colleagues can thrive and flourish, is set out within the Staff Wellbeing Strategy. The **Staff Wellbeing Steering Group (SWSG)**, which operates as a sub-group of the Health & Safety Governance Committee, meets three times during the academic year and is responsible for driving the implementation of the Staff Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan (2022-26). The steering group includes RSA representation (Rishav Agrawal) to ensure an effective two-way communication and engagement with researchers across the University.

In addition to steering groups and committees, Co-Chairs of the RSA also continue to meet with **Professor Anthony Hollander** (PVC R&I). In these meetings, the RSA team present their upcoming events and report on matters concerning the researcher community. These meetings are an invaluable opportunity to feedback from "the ground" and we continue to be thankful for the support we receive from Professor Hollander.

In addition to the above, several members of the RSA sit on local committees. Since the inception of the RSA, it is now standard University culture for research staff to be involved in institute or faculty-based groups or committees and we are proud to have been part of encouraging this movement.

## 3) Yearly RSA Initiatives

### a) Lunch & Learn Events

- In total Lunch & Learn events in 2023 received 186 registrations (96 HLS, 19 HSS, 54 S&E, 16 Central Services).
- In total Lunch & Learns events in 2023 were attended by 129 people, each event ranging from 12 to 31 people (21 on average, see break down below).

| Lunch & Learn Events 2023 |   |   |                     |
|---------------------------|---|---|---------------------|
| Date                      | Session title   | Session facilitator   | Number of attendees |
| 13th February             | Save time, be more efficient, think about data management                                     | Judith Carr (Research Data Manager, Open Research Team)   | 12                  |
| 23rd March                | Research Integrity  | Prof Elizabeth Perkins (William Rathbone VI Chair of Community Nursing), Matthew Billington (Senior Research Ethics and Integrity Officer) and Dr Roberto Ferrero (Senior Lecturer, Department of Electrical Engineering & Electronics) | 22                  |
| 18th April                | Discover how career development can help you Prosper  | Dr Fiona McBride (Research Staff Developer, Prosper)  | 24                  |
| 3rd May                   | Making your Professional Development Review (PDR) fit with your personal & professional goals | Tracey Ellis (Organisational Developer, The Academy)  | 16                  |
| 17th October              | Project HORTICULTURE: The new tools UoL researchers need to know about                        | John Ellis and Janine Davies (Research Support Office)  | 31                  |
| 9th November              | Using the Researcher Development Concordat to support your development                        | Dr Yolana Pringle (Policy and Evidence Manager, Vitae)  | 24                  |

The Lunch & Learn series are events organised by the RSA and The Academy which give researchers the opportunity to learn about relevant topics during their lunch hour. We aim to cover a variety of different topics useful for researchers. The sessions are a mix of online, hybrid and in-person, with the aim of creating a balance of accessibility and opportunities for staff to engage with each other in person. The sessions were well received. All past Lunch & Learn recordings can be found [here](#).

“The session was precious as it stimulated me to think out of the box and reflect on my core values that eventually guide my career development. The presenter was brilliant, the format was engaging and the other facilitators/chairs very friendly.”

*Feedback from “Discover how career development can help you Prosper” session*

“I thought it was very useful and will take away what I learnt and will aim to start preparing for my next PDR”

*Feedback from “Making your PDR fit with your personal & professional goals” session*

“An excellent session, loved the polls and the insight into VITAE and the Concordat”  
*Feedback from “Using the Researcher Development Concordat to support your development” session*

## ***b) Celebrating Researchers – Your Time to Shine***

- 48 researchers were nominated for their achievements (30 HLS, 7 HSS, 11 S&E).
- 40 researchers took part in the summer celebratory event (24 HLS, 6 HSS, 10 S&E).

Contributions research staff make across the University of Liverpool were recognised at the Celebrating Researchers workshop and social on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023. **The Celebrating Researchers event recognises the huge role that research staff play at the University in producing cutting-edge research and fostering an inclusive working environment.**

In the run-up to the event, staff and postgraduate researchers nominated research staff who they felt deserved recognition and appreciation for their efforts. **Fifty-three nominations were made for 48 individual researchers** for achievements including driving forward research projects, supporting students, acting as wellbeing ambassadors, establishing ECR networks, leading departmental outreach programmes, and participating in University steering groups. The nominations can be found [here](#).

Nominated staff were invited to take part in a session led by **Daniela Bultoc** (Higher Education Consultant, Researcher Developer and Professional Development Trainer). The session focused on staff exploring their strengths, motivations and contributions, and increasing their awareness of how to articulate and build on them. The event concluded with the annual RSA BBQ social.



*Members of research staff during the Celebrating Researchers 2023 workshop.*

This year, research staff could also be nominated as Research Culture and Research Community Champions. Nominations were judged by a panel of academic and professional services staff and postgraduate researchers.



“I was very honoured to be asked to present this year’s Celebrating Researchers Awards. The winners were truly deserving of their recognition, and I’d like to thank and congratulate them and the wider researcher community, for everything they do to make Liverpool a friendly and enjoyable place to work.”

**Tina Lewis**, one of the judges and Research Strategy, Planning and Performance Officer in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

The 2023 **Research Staff Community Champion** was awarded to **Cordelia Dunai** (Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences) who is one of the main driving forces behind the Institute’s Postdoc Society. The 2023 **Research Culture Champion** was awarded to **Sophie Jones** (School of Histories, Languages and Cultures), who was nominated for her roles on various steering committees across the University, as well as the Universities UK Early Career Researcher Development Steering Group.

### **c) National Postdoc Appreciation Week**

- 22 registered for the “Pizza Solves Everything” event (14 HLS, 4 HSS, 4 S&E).

National Postdoc Appreciation Week takes place annually to celebrate the significant contributions postdoctoral staff make to research and discovery in higher education institutes. At Liverpool, several events were organised by The Academy and the RSA across the week of the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023, details can be found [here](#).

One of the highlights of this week was the RSA event "**Pizza Solves Everything**" which focused on working together to solve strategic challenges. The event was hosted by Iaroslav (Ross) Michurin, Cordelia Dunai and Andrew Holmes. Amy Birch suggested the idea during an initial brainstorm, and the RSA team developed and delivered the event. Great talks about how to have successful collaborations were presented by Dr Magdalena Plesa (Management School, HSS) and Dr Levi Gahman (School of Environmental Sciences, FSE). Small interdisciplinary groups came up with proposals for novel research topics and the attendees voted on winners. The event finished with Dr Lydia Nicholson (Research and Partnerships Development, RPI) going over next steps – guidance on interdisciplinary grant writing and what funding opportunities there are internally and externally. In addition, we provided free pizza to encourage staff to attend and socialise before and after the session.



*Images from our “Pizza Solves Everything” session*



## **d) Monthly RSA Coffee Mornings**

- 45 in-person attendees (faculty not registered)

The RSA hosts monthly coffee mornings that provide informal mechanisms of feedback for the research staff community. This year, the monthly **virtual coffee became in-person coffee**.

Initially introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, the RSA continued to host virtual coffee meetings throughout 2022. These were held on the fourth Thursday of every month and provide an informal opportunity to meet other researchers from across UoL. It is an invaluable part of community-building, especially during hybrid working and for new starters (who are encouraged to attend as part of their Welcome Email). The monthly coffees are advertised via the RSA's weekly e-bulletin. Following a decline in attendance online, we switched to in-person meetings in 126 Mount Pleasant and providing coffee, tea, and biscuits. Numbers have been steadily rising. In December, we will be hosting a festive coffee with Christmas jumpers and/or mugs encouraged.

## **e) Research Staff Conference 2023**

- 77 registered – 34 HLS, 16 HSS, 22 S&E, 5 Central Services

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023, the RSA in collaboration with the Academy hosted the **sixth annual RSA conference**. This year's theme was "**Merseyvision: Empowering research visionaries**" and included talks and panel discussions to help research staff consider how they can define, fine-tune, and enact their research and career visions. The RSA successfully secured sponsorship from *Club Liverpool*, *Proteintech*, *Shimadzu* and *ThermoFisher Scientific* to support the event. **The full programme for the event can be found online [here](#).**

Continuing with the tradition of past RSA conferences, the day began with an update from **Professor Georgina Endfield** (APVC Research Environment and Postgraduate Research) who spoke on the importance of our research environment and culture in supporting colleagues to realise their aspirations and their potential.

The morning session included two parallel sessions:

1. **Promoting yourself and staying on top of current research innovations through conference organisation:** *Sponsored by Club Liverpool*. Participants learnt about how conferences can be a useful tool in promoting research and the benefits of this to individuals, universities, and the wider local economy. **Jane Fawley** and **Rachael Molyneux** (from Marketing Liverpool) explained how Liverpool City Council supports academics who want to bring an association conference to the city region, whilst case studies were provided by **Dr Blandine Poulet** (lecturer, Department of Musculoskeletal and Ageing Science) and **Ramin Torkizadah** (fourth year Dentistry student).

2. **Figuring out how to Prosper** In this session, **Dr Stefania Silvestri** and **Dr Fiona McBride** (Prosper) guided participants through how to start unpacking some of the skills that we may be taking for granted, the skills employers have told us matter to them, how to identify what motivates us, and setting our own practical next step.

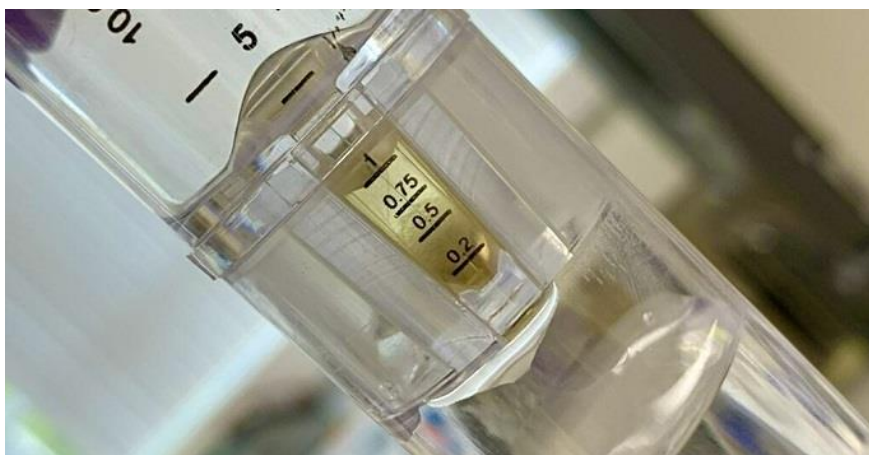
After the parallel sessions, there was **keynote talk by Dr Annette Bramley** (Director, N8 Research Partnership) on *redefining research leadership*.



*This year's panel session at the Merseyvision: Empowering research visionaries*

During the lunch break, we provided the opportunity for delegates to talk to peers and sponsors, make connections and to view the Images of Research Competition. This year, a **well-being space** was available for the conference, which included self-directed and guided mindfulness and wellbeing activities. Delegates were provided with a Virtual Delegate Pack, which had speaker information, resources, and further information to support attendees.

In the afternoon we had a Panel discussion by **Dr Srijan Jindal** (Co-founder, PhenUtest), **Dr Katy Roscoe** (Lecturer in Criminology, UoL) and **Dr Thomas Horsley** (Reader in Constitutional Law, UoL). In this session we heard discussions about the *decision-making and different career paths for researchers*. The last session for the day was by **Dr Edward Pyzer-Knapp** (IBM) who talked about the *Research in the age of AI*.



*One of the entries for this year's Images of Research Competition by Dr Iaroslav Michurin*

A total of 77 people registered for the event with approximately 60 people attending throughout the day. We received great feedback, delegates particularly enjoyed the personal stories shared during the panel session. Individuals commented on how they enjoyed having an opportunity to meet and interact with other members of staff.

#### **f) Buddy Schemes**

- 29 researchers took part in the 2023 RSA Buddy Scheme (10 HLS, 6 HSS, 13 S&E).
- 15 researchers (6 HLS, 2 HSS, 7 S&E) and 97 PGRs (23 HLS, 50 HSS, 24 S&E) took part in the 2023 PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme.

The [RSA Buddy Scheme](#) is an initiative launched in 2022 aimed at offering postdocs and ECRs the chance to meet new colleagues and expand their networks. In April 2023, we ran the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of the scheme. We had a total of 29 colleagues sign up, and these were divided into “buddy” groups of 3-4. Each group included a member of the RSA to help organise the meeting, facilitate discussion and signpost people to specific resources offered by the University. After the initial meeting, we encouraged people to continue to build on connections made. Once again, the scheme was a success and colleagues enjoyed making new connections with other researchers. The report from the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of the scheme can be found [here](#). We will continue with the scheme in 2024.

“The highlight was to meet buddies who are at various stages in their academic career, share my experience of being an early career researcher and learn about their career paths.”

*Participant of Round 3 of the RSA Buddy Scheme.*

This year, the RSA was involved in the pilot round of the [PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme](#), based on the RSA buddy scheme. Working with the Researcher Development & Culture team, as well as the PGR Development Network leadership group, the RSA piloted a new buddy scheme offering University of Liverpool PGRs the opportunity to meet their peers, make new connections and engage in discussions about their doctoral programme.

RSA members also acted as “lead buddies” to help organise and facilitate the PGR buddy meetings. The lead buddy facilitated discussion between the PGRs in their group, ensuring that all members of the group had a chance to participate and be heard, and providing conversation prompts if required.

Almost 100 PGRs took part which meant that several postdoc buddy leads had to lead 2 groups instead of just one. Members of the RSA staff found the session rewarding and PGRs enjoyed meeting other members of the community as well as the opportunity to discuss topics with postdocs/researchers. The scheme will continue in 2024.

## 4) RSA Communication and Promotion

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The RSA has continued to reach the wider research staff community via different communication channels. The RSA is committed to sending a **weekly email bulletin**, a **quarterly email bulletin with focus on wellbeing**, and **monthly welcome email to all new research staff**. In addition, the RSA has an [active X \(formerly Twitter\) account](#) which highlights events of interest for research staff.

**Weekly email bulletins** are curated on a weekly basis by the RSA Deputy Co-Chairs. The weekly bulletin is an important channel for communicating activities organised by the RSA, general opportunities for research staff, but also information related to wellbeing and support. The process for curating the weekly bulletin has been documented by Deputy Co-Chairs and is used to support the training of new Deputy Co-Chairs. The format of the bulletin has been revised in 2023 to make it easier for readers to quickly get information most relevant to them. The format is designed for easy weekly customisation, divided into different sections:

- Header: with RSA logo, including a link to all development opportunities available to research staff
- Upcoming RSA- and The Academy-organised events & Save the Dates:
- Other Upcoming Events
- Networking Events
- Diversity and Equality Resources
- Other Useful Resources
- About the RSA: list of current Chairs' and Co-Chairs' names, pronouns and faculties, as well as the RSA's aims
- Did you know? dynamic section with tips, and static information about the 10 days of development as part of the statement of expectations
- Contact details: how to reach the RSA and stay in touch (email and twitter handle)

Last year the RSA introduced a **wellbeing edition of the weekly email**. This version of the weekly email is circulated quarterly and signposts a range of resources and events which promote wellbeing and mental health. The Wellbeing Issue has a different colour scheme to the weekly e-bulletin and is circulated in February, June, September, and December. It has a section on the **wellbeing resources**, providing various resources ranging from [podcasts](#), [online resources](#), and [UoL's resources on wellbeing and work/life balance](#).

In addition to the weekly bulletin and wellbeing bulletin, the RSA is committed to sending a **'Welcome to the University' email** to all new starters. Curated monthly by the UoL Deputy Co-Chairs, the welcome email aims to provide a warm welcome to newly appointed research staff, to introduce them to the RSA, to notify new starters about relevant events and opportunities, and to invite them to RSA-organised events – in particular, the monthly coffee mornings. This email is of particular importance to new members of staff joining the University who are home-based or hybrid working.

## 5) Other RSA Activities

### a) Researcher Case Studies and Blog Posts

Members of the RSA have continued to engage in raising the profile of the RSA at the University of Liverpool. Members of the RSA have featured as [Researcher Case Studies](#), which present evidence of how the University sustains a research culture that encourages autonomy, nurtures success and supports the exploration of different paths for career development in research.

- Dr Claire Wilson – [Organising a research conference focused on early career researchers](#)
- Dr Sophie Jones – [The rewarding experiences of being a Co-Chair of the Research Staff Association](#)
- Dr Stella Morgana – [Research culture as a collective practice: how writing retreats build a sense of community](#)
- Dr Bengt Tegner – [The ups and downs of working from home](#)

In addition, members of the RSA have written posts for the Researcher Blog.

- Dr Stella Morgana – [Decolonising knowledge production and \(field\) research: a personal experience on Iran](#)
- Dr Christof Baumgaertel – [A Helping Hand in Organising the Research Staff Conference](#)

### b) Volunteer Events

The RSA raised funds for local charity the Paper Cup Project in the summer of 2023 by doing a bucket collection at Liverpool Central train station and the activity was featured in the university weekly newsletter in August 2023. Using their paid volunteer leave, the co-chairs and deputy co-chairs of the RSA spent an afternoon raising money, with proceeds supporting those experiencing homelessness. We also championed their nomination and successful selection as a Liv to Giv charity for 2023/2024.



*Members of the RSA volunteering for the Paper Cup Project*



### ***c) UUK Research Culture and Practice Forum***

This year, [Universities UK](#) held a [Research Culture and Practice Forum](#) in June. One of the RSA Co-Chairs at the time, Dr Sophie Jones, was invited to represent the postdoc community on the steering group for the event. The two-day event explored both the Researcher Development Concordat and the Research Integrity Concordat, as well as themes concerning career development for researchers, research integrity, culture, mental health and wellbeing and sustainable career paths. Sophie was also involved in the “How do staff at institutions work with the Concordats and initiatives in practice?” panel session during the event. Sophie highlighted good practices by the RSA and the University, and discussed how the Concordat has benefited research staff at Liverpool.

## 6) 2024 RSA Plans

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We are looking forward to the new year and are excited to continue to host excellent events for researchers. We have the next three Lunch and Learn sessions planned:

- “Reproducibility and open research” – 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024
- “How to publish your research: from submission to publication” – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- “Demystifying academia with Prosper” – 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024

The Celebrating Researchers event and the Annual Research Staff Conference will be major focal points for 2024, occurring on the 4<sup>th</sup> July and 4<sup>th</sup> December respectively. In addition, we will continue to run the Research Staff Buddy Scheme in the Spring of 2024 and PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme in the Autumn 2024.

As always, we will continue to be a central resource for researcher wellbeing and career development.