

Research Staff Association Buddy Scheme – 5th Round May 2025



Introduction

Following the successful rounds of the Research Staff Association's (RSA) Buddy Scheme in Spring 2022, Autumn 2022, Spring 2023, and Spring 2024, the RSA launched the fifth round in Spring 2025. The Buddy Scheme is designed for research-only contract staff - such as postdoctoral researchers and early career researchers (ECRs) - and provides a valuable opportunity to meet new colleagues, expand networks, and engage more fully with the University of Liverpool's research culture in an informal setting. It brings together peers at similar career stages across all faculties, fostering connections beyond individual research groups and enriching participants' professional, academic, and social perspectives.

The Process

The fifth round of the Buddy Scheme followed the same process as the fourth round. It was promoted through the RSA's weekly e-bulletins and the University of Liverpool RSA's account on X ([@UoL_RSA](#)). Appendix 1 shows the promotional materials published on the University of Liverpool RSA's X account, that reached 437 views ([@UoL_RSA](#), Appendix, Figure 1). Additional information on the Buddy Scheme was available on the [RSA webpages](#), where research-only contract staff could access and complete a short expression of interest form. The form requested basic details including name, department, email address and reason(s) for participating in the Scheme.

The overall timeline of the Round 5 of the Buddy Scheme is shown in Figure 1. The expression of interest form was open from 3rd February to 21st February 2025. Thirty research-only contract staff (postdoctoral researchers or ECRs) signed up for this round of the Buddy Scheme (a 20% increase compared to the last round). Applicants were matched based on their interests and grouped into teams of three or four, resulting in seven groups of three and two groups of four.

All participants were emailed the names and contact emails of their buddies on 28th February and asked to arrange a meeting – either in person or online - by 21st March 2025. General meeting guidelines were provided, encouraging participants to respect the meeting preferences of others in their group and keeping the tone of the meetings respectful, informal, and supportive.

A reminder email was sent to the buddy groups on 10th March prompting the participants to arrange their meeting by 21st March 2025. After a 3-week meeting window closed, a feedback survey was distributed on 24th March, with a reminder sent on 7th April. Participants were invited to provide feedback and share their experiences by 11th April 2025.

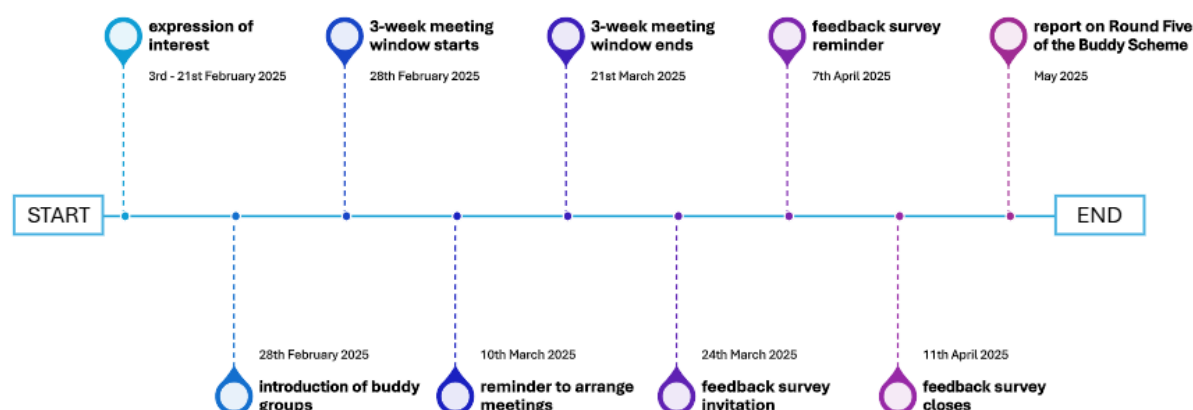


Figure 1. Timeline of the Round Five of the Buddy Scheme.

The Participants

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Buddy Scheme participants across three faculties at the University of Liverpool. Of 30 participants, the majority were from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (19 participants), followed by the Faculty of Science and Engineering (9 participants), and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (2 participants).

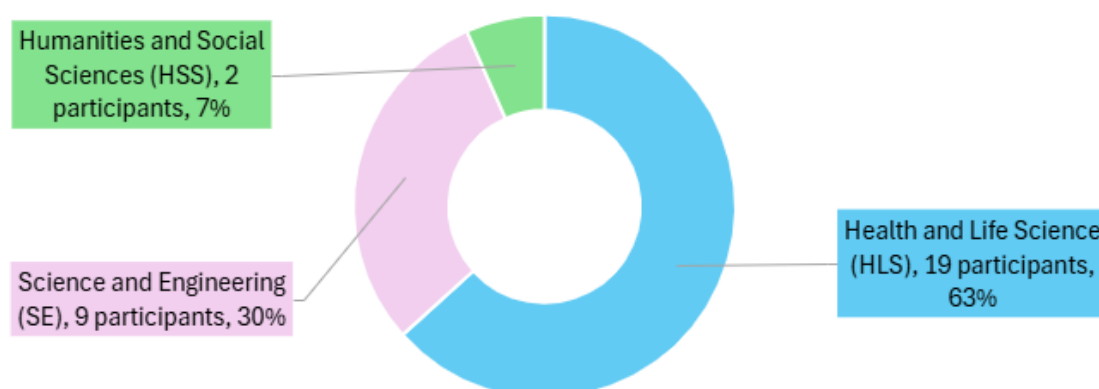


Figure 2. Faculty representation of participants in the fifth round of the RSA Buddy Scheme, shown as percentages.

Participants cited a range of motivations for joining the Buddy Scheme, with the most common being the opportunity to meet researchers from similar or different backgrounds and to exchange tips and experiences related to career development. Some participants also expressed an interest in meeting other research staff to explore potential research collaborations (Appendix, Table 1).

Selected responses to the question: *What would you like to get out of the Scheme?*

"Learn about very different areas of academia beyond my own network within natural sciences. Learn about academic practices in other disciplines"

"I have been at the University since July 2024 and would like to meet others doing either similar work in different areas, or people who are at a similar stage in their career. I have a long research career but am only just coming to the end of my PhD (outside the University of Liverpool) and am working on fixed term research contracts."

"I want to meet new people. I am currently engaging in the Prosper cohort and would like to understand different approaches to improve my prospects."

Evaluation

At the end of the Scheme, participants were invited to complete a short online evaluation survey. The initial invitation for feedback was sent on 24th March 2025 followed by a reminder on 7th April requesting feedback by 11th April. Ten participants (a third of the cohort) completed the survey by the deadline. All respondents reported meeting with their buddies during the 3-week window. These meetings took place in person (over coffee or lunch, 8 responses) or online (via MS Teams, 2 responses). Of those who met, 90% rated the experience as positive, selecting either 'good' or 'very good' (Figure 3 and Appendix, Table 2).

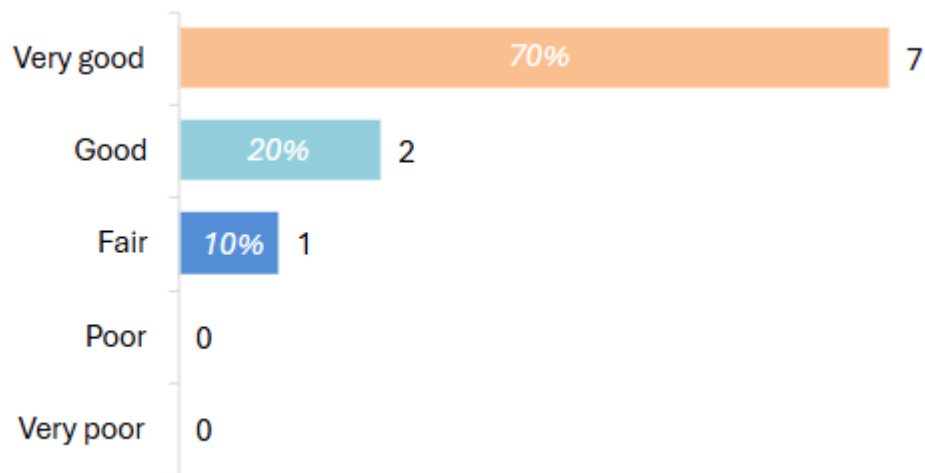


Figure 3. Participant ratings of their meetings with their buddies during the fifth round of the RSA Buddy Scheme.

Participants highlighted the opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the University who were at similar career stages. Respondents saw it as a useful opportunity to hear about other people's career journeys and reported feeling less isolated and more confident about navigating the new challenges as a result of their participation in the Buddy Scheme (Appendix, Table 3).

Selected responses to the question: *What was the highlight of the buddy Scheme for you?*

"A highlight of the buddy scheme for me was the opportunity to connect with someone in a supportive and welcoming environment. It was great to share experiences, exchange advice, and build confidence while navigating new challenges together."

"As few members of the group have completed their education in different parts of the world, it was interesting to understand their experience with university life specifically with regards to research in different countries. It was also interesting to learn about their current research projects."




"Meeting fellow researchers from other disciplines and getting to know about their interesting research"


Respondents expressed interest in learning about how the matching happens, recommended broader promotion of the Scheme and suggested extending the meeting window. They also proposed introducing meeting themes to help guide the discussions.

Conclusions

The fifth round of the RSA Buddy Scheme offered a valuable opportunity for research staff at the University of Liverpool to establish new connections and expand their professional networks. The sixth round of the Buddy Scheme is scheduled to take place in March 2026. In addition, the third round of the joint scheme between the RSA and University's PGR Development Network is planned for Autumn 2025 aiming to cultivate a more integrated and collaborative researcher community.

Appendix

	<p>UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 3</p> <p>1 / 10 Looking to expand your research network at @LivUni? The RSA Buddy Scheme is back for 2025! liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol... 🎉 This is a great way for research staff & fellows to meet peers across faculties in an informal setting! @LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy 🔗 Sign up today!</p> <p>🗨️ 1 🍏 104 📌 ⬆</p>
	<p>UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 5</p> <p>2 / 10 What is the RSA Buddy Scheme? 🤔 It's a chance for research staff & fellows to connect outside their research groups, meet new colleagues, and chat about research over coffee! ☕👥 @LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy 📅 Dates: 3rd-21st March 📅 Sign-up: liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol...</p> <p>🗨️ 🔄 1 📊 36 📌 ⬆</p>
	<p>UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 7</p> <p>3 / 10 Why join the Buddy Scheme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✅ Grow your research network✅ Have informal & supportive chats✅ Potential for collaborations 🤝 <p>🗣️: "Meeting new people and listening to others' experiences" was a highlight @LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy 📅 Sign-up: liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol...</p> <p>🗨️ 🔄 🍏 17 📌 ⬆</p>
	<p>UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 10</p> <p>4 / 10 Who can apply?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">💠 Research-only staff💠 Research fellows with independent funding (e.g. UKRI, Royal Society, UoL Fellows) <p>Want to meet researchers beyond your department? Join the RSA Buddy Scheme! 🚀 @LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy 📅 Sign-up: liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol...</p> <p>🗨️ 🔄 🍏 37 📌 ⬆</p>


UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 11


5 / 10 How does it work?

- ✓ Fill out a quick form
- ✓ Get matched with 2-3 research staff
- ✓ Show up to a 20-30 min chat (online or in person)

@LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy

Liverpool Sign-up by 21st Feb: liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol...

45


UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 12


6 / 10 Past participants loved the chance to step outside their research bubble

💬: "This scheme not only allows researchers to meet in an informal environment but allows also to build collaborations"

@LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy

Liverpool Apply before 21st Feb: liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol...

35


UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 14

7 / 10 Thinking about joining?


★ Last year, participants rated the Scheme "GOOD" and "VERY GOOD"

💬: "Gave advice to the newest member to the University about Liverpool life"

@LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy @LivUniResearch

Don't miss out—sign up by 21st Feb! 📅 liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol...

42


UoL RSA @UoL_RSA · Feb 17

8 / 10 Friday Deadline!

💬: "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"

@LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy

Liverpool Sign-up here: liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/uol...

46

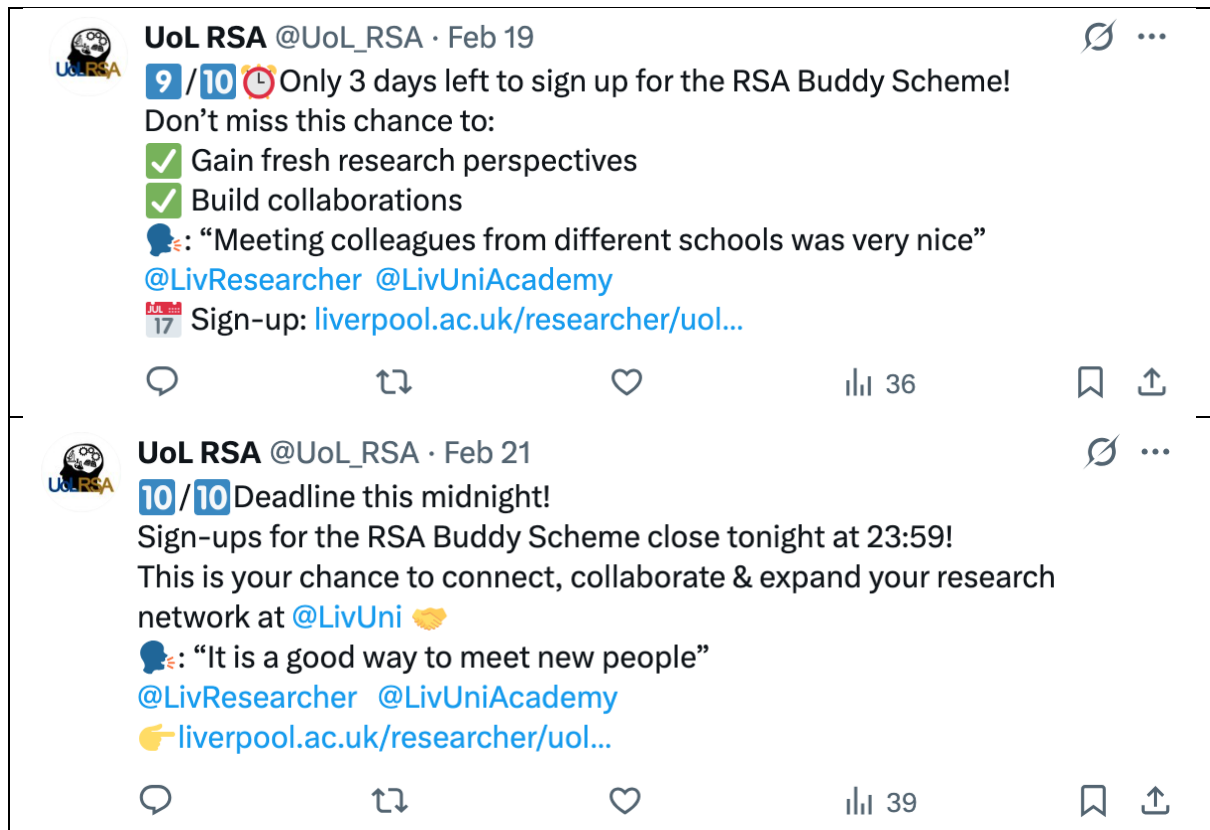


Figure 1. Social media campaign launched via the [@UoL-RSA](#) account on X.com to promote the fifth round of the Buddy Scheme. The campaign featured testimonials from previous participants and highlighted the benefits of participating in the Scheme, reaching 437 views.

Table 1. Participant responses to the question “*What would you like to get out of the Scheme?*” from the expression of interest form.

Answers
New buddies
Meeting new people and getting to know about research being carried out by fellow researchers
meet people with similar research interests
Meet new friends, familiarise myself with colleagues' work, grow my network, meet potential collaborators
I would to interest from different departments that we can make collaborators, I mostly work on mosquitoes, their ecology, but I really want to learn and make different studies about their virology, microbiology and especially bioinformatic analysis
I have been at the University since July 2024 and would like to meet others doing either similar work in different areas, or people who are at a similar stage in their career. I have a long research career but am only just coming to the end of my PhD (outside the University of Liverpool) and am working on fixed term research contracts.
I would like to be connected with people with similar research interests
I'm a computer science person, while I am in health and life science faculty working on medical image analysis by utilizing AI method. I want to meet people with similar research field, as now in my institute most of people are working so different from me.
I want to meet new people. I am currently engaging in the Prosper cohort and would like to understand different approaches to improve my prospects.
I would most preferably like to be meet people of similar interest (.i.e., health research) who have different perspectives to my area of research interest, e.g. from the social sciences or humanities.
Better to meet people with electronics background.
I would like to meet people with similar research interests in different institutes.
I'd like to meet new people with similar or different research interest/background.
Meet different people across the university.
Meet people with pharmaceutical and pharmacological background (Especially meet with people who has research collaboration with a pharma company).
Learn about very different areas of academia beyond my own network within natural sciences. Learn about academic practices in other disciplines
I would like to use the opportunity to network with others at the university at a similar career stage. I have been involved in previous iterations of the scheme and would like to see it continue.
I would just like to get to know some other members of staff!
meet people from different departments/faculties
I'd be interested in collaborating with anybody whose research involves statistical methods to analyse trends in populations (such as public health, psychology or social sciences), or anybody with a clinical background (especially if their work involved neuroscience or vaccines/infectious disease, two health areas I have experience in). This

is a minor preference, though, as I would also be very interested to learn about a completely different discipline if the other person wanted the same thing.
I joined the scheme last year and organised a group meeting with new PDRAs at the University. I am a part of the organising committee for this year's round and I would like to meet new PDRAs.
I will be submitting my PhD at the end of this month so I'm very early in my research career. I'm currently on a 0.5 contract within the Department of Primary Care and Mental Health, working on a series of systematic reviews. My research interests are wide - I previously studied history and global health. I'm happy to meet with anyone working in any field. I'm interested in hearing about others' research. I'd like to learn about any issues that can be encountered when starting an academic career, things I should be aware of or look out for, maybe to do with contracts, networking, and identifying opportunities for employment and collaboration.
Meet and share experiences with other members of the University, discuss similarity and differences in the daily challenges and how to solve issues and improve the workflow.
1) Tips and experiences from people also applying for grants/fellowships, from any Faculty. 2) Potential future collaborators, from health-related research area.
I would like to meet people from different institutes or faculties, preferably those conducting qualitative or mixed methods research.
I would like to meet researchers/RA's/early career researchers who are at a similar stage in their career. I wish to expand my network and meet researchers and hear about their experiences, research interests as well as suggestions that might help me advance my career. This could also be a great way to collaborate with researchers working on similar interests. I do not have a research area but I have some broad experience in cognition and neuropsychology. I want to learn more about psychological research that has practical application in industry and healthcare.
I would like to connect with researchers interested in epidemiology and data science, as my current department is not directly aligned with my research focus or background. Coming from a dental background, I am interested in engaging with other researchers working in public health, health data science, and related fields.
Meet other research fellows from different research areas and departments, to network and learn about different experiences of engaging with the university etc.
I would like to meet researchers especially in electrical engineering and physics departments, working on electronic devices.

Table 2. Participant responses to the question “*How did it go? Please provide information on how many times you met, whether you met online or face to face (or both) and did all members of your group attend?*” from the feedback survey.

Response
We met once, with the plan of meeting further in the coming weeks. It was face to face in campus and one member did not manage to join unfortunately. I reckon that end of the Financial year and before easter can be a busy period for many people due to project deadlines and deliverables.
We met face to face, Ceren, Leo and me. We met one time, it was a very good time for me
All the three of us met face to face, we exchange information through e-mails and we'll meet again at the fellow showcase I hope.
We met up in the coffee shop and had a lovely chat that ended up lasting more than an hour. Topics ranged from Liverpool life to the night climbers of Cambridge. All four members of the group managed to attend.
We all met face to face and went to cafe nero
We had one face-to-face meeting
Two online meetings were arranged as one of the members was unable to attend in the first meeting. Both meetings were held online on Teams. Most of the members attended the first meeting, but only two could attend the second one. It was interesting to get connected with other ERC's from diverse fields. Although we were in different areas and fields of research, we all had common aspects to share and talk about.
We have met online twice. One of the group member didn't make it to the first meeting and we scheduled another one with him.
We had a nice F2F chat
all three of us met once so far (second meeting in planning) face-to-face. Had a nice chat over lunch

Table 3. Participant responses to the question “*What was the highlight of the buddy Scheme for you?*” from the feedback survey.

Response
Good opportunity to meet with other people at the same stage of career, it was nice to meet and discuss about some difficulties some of us are experiencing in the research
A highlight of the buddy scheme for me was the opportunity to connect with someone in a supportive and welcoming environment. It was great to share experiences, exchange advice, and build confidence while navigating new challenges together.
It is very important to meet others in a similar career stage, not only to exchange experiences regarding next steps, grants, etc. but also to hear about experiences of living abroad, away from or with your family. For me it was a unique opportunity of meeting others that would not have met otherwise (not on my field, or on the professional setting of a conference...)
It has been a pleasure to be part of the buddy scheme and getting to know people from across the university. It has made me feel less isolated.
Good discussion, we are all from different countries so interesting to hear comparisons
Meeting fellow researchers from other disciplines and getting to know about their interesting research
As few members of the group have completed their education in different parts of the world, it was interesting to understand their experience with university life specifically with regards to research in different countries. It was also interesting to learn about their current research projects.
Hear about other people's career journeys. I think this is important when we deal with our own obstacles that we are not alone, everyone is going through the same processes.
Other group members gave each other useful resources for pursuing a challenge
got a chance to talk to people from other backgrounds