

University of Liverpool Research Staff Association Annual Evaluation Report 2024



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Current members of the RSA steering committee

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
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
Ceren Kabukcu (she/her)	Deputy Co-Chair	ACE School of Histories, Languages and Cultures
I Gusti Ngurah Edi Putra (he/him)	Deputy Co-Chair	Faculty of Health & Life Sciences
Thomas Spain (he/him)	Deputy Co-Chair	Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

RECENT LEAVERS FROM STEERING GROUP

Alexandra Hunt (she/her)	Deputy Co-Chair	Faculty of Health & Life Sciences
Jordan Jones (she/her)	Deputy Co-Chair	Faculty of Health & Life Sciences
Claire Wilson (she/her)	Co-Chair	Faculty of Health & Life Sciences
Janette Greenhalgh (she/her)	Deputy Co-Chair	Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

Thank you for all your hard work and contributions!

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1) Summary of the RSA

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 3 co-chairs and 7 deputy co-chairs – includes representation of research staff from across 7 of the 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 2024. 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 that 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 and as being awarded the Volunteer of the Year 2024 at the University Staff Awards for our work to contribute to a positive impact on the Liverpool City region.

Finally, we would like to recognise the amazing efforts of our 2024 outgoing Co-Chairs Claire Wilson and Stella Morgana who helped with the organising of several years of Research Staff Conferences and made so many positive contributions.

2) Steering Groups and Committees

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 2024 received 214 registrations (96 HLS, 63 HSS, 44 S&E, 11 Central Services).
- In total Lunch & Learn events in 2024 received 45 requests for resources from individuals unable to attend the events themselves.
- In total Lunch & Learn events in 2024 were attended by 85 people, each event ranging from 5 to 31 people (14 on average, see break down below).

Lunch & Learn Events 2024			
Date	Session title	Session facilitator	Number of attendees
26 Feb 2024	How to publish your research: From submission to publication	Prof Catherine Durose and Dr Stella Morgana, University of Liverpool	15
18 March 2024	A lens on the RD Concordat: It's national strategic importance for you	Tom Rowe, Policy Adviser at Universities UK	15
15 April 2024	Demystifying academia with Prosper	Dr Fiona McBride and Dr Stefania Silvestri, Prosper, University of Liverpool	12
18 Sept 2024	Project HORTICULTURE 2.0	John Ellis and Janine Davies, Research Support Office, University of Liverpool	5
15 Oct 2024	Supporting Disability and wellbeing in yourself and others	Jay Farrell, The Academy, University of Liverpool	7
5 Nov 2024	Fellowship Quest: Navigating the journey from pre-application to success	Brigid Bell and Suzanne Palmer, Research and Partnerships, University of Liverpool	31

The Lunch & Learn series are events organised by the RSA, support by 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](#).

Quotes from Lunch and Learn attendees:

"The session was very useful, the information given and the presentation were very clear. The format was good as well."

"I am looking to write my own fellowship; this webinar has given me a good kick start."

"The session was very helpful."

b) Celebrating Researchers – Your Path to Independence

- 34 researchers were nominated for their achievements (18 HLS, 12 HSS, 4 S&E).
- 37 researchers registered to take part in the summer celebratory event (13 HLS, 7 HSS, 17 S&E).

Contributions research staff make across the University of Liverpool were recognised at the Celebrating Researchers workshop and social on 4th July 2024. **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. **34 nominations were made** for achievements including actively promoting sustainability across the university, leading EDI initiatives and promoting inclusiveness, participation in committees at all levels across the university (e.g. Concordat Steering Committee), participation in wellbeing initiatives, coaching/mentoring postgraduate researchers and peers, exceptional research and research outputs, and leading charitable efforts. The nominations can be found [here](#)

Nominated staff were invited to take part in a session led by Denise Chilton, Career and Leadership Coach. The session focused on staff The session covered how research staff can own their own successes and feel more comfortable to talk about their strengths and what we do well. The event concluded with the annual RSA BBQ social.



Members of research staff during the Celebrating Researchers 2024 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 am constantly inspired by the way that University of Liverpool research staff go beyond expectations. They promote inclusivity and champion culture conducive to creativity, where groundbreaking discoveries can flourish in a supportive and positive research environment. It was a pleasure to be able to attend the Celebrating Researchers event and announce this year's Champion prize winners."

Prof Anthony Hollander, Pro-vice Chancellor for Research and Impact, who awarded the 2024 Champion Prizes.

The 2024 **Research Culture Champion** was awarded to Dr Stella Morgana who is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in Politics and Co-Chair of the RSA. The 2024 **Research Staff Community Champion** was awarded to Dr Yu Fu, who secured a NIHR Advanced fellowship.

c) National Postdoc Appreciation Week

- 20 registered for the "Cheesy Connections" speed networking and pizza event (9 HLS, 5 HSS, 6 S&E). This was well-attended and very fun event. Dr. Stefania Silvestri gave an intro and outro about networking tips, barriers to success, persevering, and using mutual contacts to network. A lot of positive feedback and people said that they will use the same discussion prompts in their departments.

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 16-20 September, details can be found [here](#)

d) Monthly RSA Coffee Mornings

- 123 in-person attendees total (faculty not registered)

The RSA hosts monthly coffee mornings that provide informal mechanisms of feedback for the research staff community. This year, we continued with **in-person coffee** which used to be just a virtual gathering.



Members of research staff enjoying the Christmas Coffee Morning, with carol singing led by Dr Christof Baumgartel, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Department of Electrical Engineering and Electronics

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 hosted a festive coffee with Christmas jumpers, live music, and cheery singing.

e) Research Staff Conference 2024

- 81 registered – 30 HLS, 20 HSS, 27 S&E, 4 Central Services

On 4th December, the RSA in collaboration with the Academy hosted the **seventh annual RSA conference**. This year's theme was “**Built to last: Developing resilience for a sustainable career**” and included talks and panel discussions to help research staff consider how they can develop resilience and consider sustainability in their career within or beyond academia. The RSA successfully secured sponsorship from CliniSciences, Proteintech, Shimadzu and ThermoFisher Scientific to support the event. **The full programme for the event can be found online <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/research-staff-conference/2024/>**

Continuing with the tradition of past RSA conferences, the day began with an update from **Professor Anthony Hollander** (PVC for Research & Impact) who spoke on the value of research staff in fulfilling Liverpool 2031.

After that, we had a Panel discussion by Dr Esther Garcia-Tunon Blanca (Senior Lecturer and Future Leaders Fellows in Materials Science and Engineering, University of Liverpool), Professor Bernadine Idowu (Professor of Biomedical Sciences, University of West London), Dr Junjie Xi (Senior Lecturer in Architectural Design and Humanities, University of Liverpool) and Dr Oscar Seip (Research Software Community Officer, Software Sustainability Institute). The panel spoke to their lived experiences in developing resilience.

Before lunch break, we had a session with **Professor Georgina Endfield** (APVC for Research Environment & Postgraduate Research, University of Liverpool) on the Research staff and the research environment.

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.

After the Images of Research Prize Giving, we had a Keynote by **Prof Louise Kenny**, EPVC of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, University of Liverpool on A celebration of failure. This was an excellent and inspiring presentation the importance of discussing failures, publishing negative results, and maintaining research integrity.

We had two masterclasses one in the morning and other in the afternoon:

1. In the morning session, **finding resilient and sustainable ways to face career setbacks** masterclass session was hosted by Dr Fiona McBride, Senior Researcher Developer (Prosper) and Dr Stefania Silvestri, Researcher Developer (Prosper).
2. In the afternoon session, **Interdisciplinary working to build a sustainable career** masterclass session was hosted by Professor Katie Atkinson, Associate Pro-Vice-

Chancellor and Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Sustainability Research and
Dr Amy Birch, Senior Research Developer (Research Staff)



This year's panel session discussion: Building a resilient workplace culture



*Judges Joint Winners **Avian pioneers of an Arctic ghost town** by Dr Natasha Gillies and
Ukrainian popular music in times of war by Dr Anna Glew*

In total, 81 people registered for the event with approximately 71 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

- 25 researchers took part in the 2024 RSA Buddy Scheme (16 HLS, 2 HSS, 7 S&E).
- 29 researchers (17 HLS, 4 HSS, 8 S&E) and 72 PGRs (17 HLS, 39 HSS, 16 S&E) took part in the 2024 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 March 2024, we ran the 5th round of the scheme. We had a total of 25 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 4th round of the scheme can be found [here](#). We will continue with the scheme in 2025.

Quotes from participants of Round 4 of the RSA Buddy Scheme:

“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”

This year, the RSA led the second 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, this buddy scheme offers 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.

Twenty-nine postdocs took part which meant that several buddy groups had two lead buddies 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 2025.

Quotes from postdoc participants of Round 2 of the PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme:

“As the lead buddy in my group, I learnt how to coordinate and organize meetings appropriately with colleagues from different cultures and research backgrounds. This has practised my leadership skills as well as give me more confidence for future career development.”

Participant of Round 2 of the PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme.

“It was a good experience leading a group and helping PGRs with their concerns and questions as someone with more experience.”

Quotes from PGR participants of Round 2 of the PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme:

“It's also great to have a postdoc contact who was friendly, approachable and is happy to be contacted in the future.”

“Starting off with some great advice on what it means to be a PhD student at Liverpool University right from the get go is invaluable.”

4) External Contributions

In September 2024, Dr Rishav Agrawal and Dr Stella Morgana, Co-Chairs of the RSA Steering Committee, joined members of the Researcher Development and Culture team to deliver a workshop at the Vitae International Researcher Development Conference 2024. This panel highlighted the collaboration between the RSA and Researcher Development and Culture Team to co-create development opportunities for research staff across the institution. Twenty-nine people attended this session from institutions from across the UK to hear from the Co-Chairs and discuss their own experiences and practices in an open and friendly way.

5) RSA Communication and Promotion

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 was 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.

6) 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 Cordelia Dunai -- [Postdoctoral Researchers Research Seed Funding project](#)
- 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](#)
- Dr Andrew Holmes - [Exploring co-development between researcher developers and research staff](#)

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. The RSA steering committee won Volunteer of the Year award at the University Staff awards for the fundraising that they did for Paper Cup charity. We also succeeded in our campaign to get them assigned as a Liv to Giv charity for 2023/2024. Following on from these successes, Ross (Dr. Iaroslav Michurin) organized a fundraising charity walk in the summer of 2024 for Paper Cup Project raising a total of £117.50 with a lovely walk that explored the docks.



Members of the RSA Steering Committee at the charity walk around Liverpool docks to raise money for the Paper Cup Project. From L to R: Dr Janette Greenhalgh, Dr Joshua Hurwitz, Dr Bengt Tegner, Dr Iaroslav Michurin, Dr Andrew Holmes

7) 2025 RSA Plans

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

- Research Data Management
- Introduction to Nature Masterclasses

The Annual Research Staff Conference will be major focal point for 2025, occurring in December. In addition, we will continue to run the Research Staff Buddy Scheme in the Spring of 2025 and PGR-Postdoc Buddy Scheme in the Autumn 2025, as well as contributing to the National Postdoc Appreciation Week and Making an Impact 2025.

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