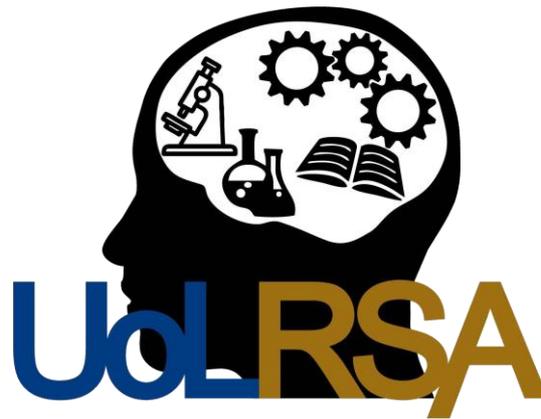


THE ACADEMY

Developing Liverpool

ENHANCING RESEARCH





University of Liverpool Research Staff Association Annual Evaluation Report 2020

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1. Summary

The [University of Liverpool Research Staff Association \(UoL RSA\)](#) is a research community-owned and led initiative. Started in 2018, the UoL RSA intends to provide a resource for all research staff at the University and be a link between the **880 Early Career Researchers (including Postdocs and Fellows) and 550 Research Managers**. Membership to the RSA is automatic upon commencement of a research contract. In partnership with the Academy, the goals of the RSA are:

1. Represent a **collective voice** for research staff from all Faculties, Schools and Institutes on matters affecting researchers.
2. Provide a platform for **communication and networking** amongst research staff both within the schools, institutes and across Faculties and the wider University community.
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.

Particularly this year with the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers have had to face significant hurdles to their personal and professional lives. Many had to adapt to new working environments and schedules whilst at home. Cessation of research activities has meant delays in publications, juggling caring responsibilities has translated to decrease productivity, lack of social interaction has resulted in mental well-being issues, and the absence of being on campus with the greater community has made some feel isolated. To address these issues, **the UoL RSA has offered several activities throughout this year to ensure that researchers still feel connected and that their voice is heard**. We sought to adapt to the new circumstances to reach all researchers by re-designing and adding more activities to online platforms, in partnership with the Academy represented by Dr Saneeya Qureshi and Dr Angela Midgley. In addition, the 2019 outgoing Chairs and co-Chairs, Dr Sarah Arrowsmith, Dr Nicola Beesley, Dr Alison Savage, and Mary Jane Monaghan, were a fundamental support during the transition period.

To ensure that the UoL RSA is representative of the entire researcher community, the Co-Chairs include members from across all Faculties, including the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (Dr Kris Subramaniam and Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (Dr Michael Robinson), and Faculty of Science and Engineering (Dr Filipe Braga). The Deputy Co-Chairs are from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (Dr Frances Sherratt and Dr Malaka De Silva) and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (Dr Katy Roscoe). We also have a dynamic [Liaison Committee](#) with representatives from across the entire University.

To reflect the inclusivity and diversity of the UoL RSA and our greater researcher community this year we have introduced a new design (created by Dr Perez-Sepulveda, see Section 12.1) which accompanies all internal correspondence such as weekly bulletins and welcome emails, and our [social media](#) where we have been more active. Furthermore, the UoL RSA has been actively engaged with

other post-doctoral platforms including the N8 Research partnership, Researchers14, the National Postdoc Association Week (NPAW) steering committee and UKRSA.

This year the UoL RSA has organised several activities, including a wellbeing event in the summer, interactive events using the Café Culture toolkit as part of the Wellcome Trust's Re-imagine Research initiative, events as part of NPAW, a focus group on University policies, and the annual Research Staff conference, which was focused on equity, diversity and inclusivity. The conference retained over 100 attendees and engaged with 19 Universities throughout the UK, placing the University of Liverpool (UoL) in a prime position for leading on Postdoc development. UoL RSA's participation at this year's NPAW, where we organised and ran several events, set the foundations for **Liverpool to host the National Postdoc Meeting in 2021, where we secured Dame Ottoline Leyser, the Chief Executive of UKRI as the Keynote Speaker**. Finally, the data gathered from the Café Culture events were shared and used by the Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE) (Section 2.5 and 11.2) program to address some of the issues faced by researchers as a result from COVID-19.

We also ran five Lunch & Learn seminars that encompassed a variety of themes including leadership, mentorship, understanding research budgets and using Microsoft Teams (Section 3). To address issues of researchers working from home feeling disconnected from other colleagues and the greater research community, the UoL RSA created monthly Virtual Coffee Breaks as an opportunity to chat and engage whilst at home. We also maintained engagement by participating in [the Academy's Developing Practice podcast](#) and [blog posts](#), to ensure that the research community did not feel alienated as a result of the pandemic.

Finally, the UoL RSA continues their active dialogue with senior University leaders to raise issues and awareness behind postdoc concerns. At present, the UoL RSA Co-Chairs sit on 6 different committees that span both University-specific and national agendas. Regular meetings with Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Impact Professor Anthony Hollander on researchers issues have resulted in several actions, including greater clarity in communications during the pandemic, general issues such as carparking, and a [message of appreciation and recognition targeted at UoL postdoctoral researchers](#) by Professor Hollander and VC Professor Dame Janet Beer.

To close, the UoL RSA is fully committed in advocating, galvanising and improving the culture and environment for all our researchers. Given the difficulty of 2020, this commitment has intensified so that no researcher feels without a voice. Our current organisation comprises Faculties from across the University to ensure that our message is reached across all Departments and Institutes, such as the newly created as a result of project SHAPE. **The events we have organised and ran this year reflect our ethos to create a “borderless community” where all researchers can grow and flourish.** We expect to continue working during 2021 with the support of the UoL RSA Liaison Committee and formation of a new core team that remains to ensure a wide University representation.

2. Researcher updates from representation on key University Steering Groups

2.1. Research and Impact Committee (RIC)

The remit of the University's Research and Impact Committee (RIC) is to develop and implement strategies and policies to promote research excellence across all the faculties and disciplines. The committee oversees the enhancement of the University research environment which includes research staff development and consideration of the overall experience of researchers. Chaired by the PVC of Research and Impact, the committee contains UoL RSA representation to ensure that the voice of researchers is considered during development of policies that will influence the research environment. Additionally, participation of the RSA in RIC meetings demonstrate an institutional commitment to support researchers and synergise University policies with researcher activities.

Given the COVID pandemic there were only three RIC meetings for which RSA representation was present at two. The first RIC meeting in March 2020 was focused on REF2021, Project SHAPE, and discussions on Open Research. Open Research was an important agenda item with funders and stipulates openness and transparency at all stages of the research lifecycle. UoL is expected to engage with the Open Research principles in order to develop a research culture that is open. Implementing a truly open research culture has its limitations and to gauge researchers' perspectives a document detailing the Open Access Policy was shared with the RSA liaison committee members and the greater researcher community and the following issues were raised:

1. Applying open access to datasets for "niche" areas will compromise confidentiality
2. Should research data be available upon request from the researcher
3. Incorporating intellectual property to open access policies
4. Concern about safeguarding open lab notebooks
5. Concerns about smaller charities funding open access and the University open access funds

These issues were raised in RIC and then sent to Martin Wolf and Judith Carr of the Open Research Team. The answers to the queries are in Appendix 12.2.

The June RIC meeting focused primarily on the University's response to COVID regarding preparations for remote learning and teaching and the transition to working from home for most of the research staff. To address the latter, Dr Kris Subramaniam and Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda presented to RIC (Appendix 12.3) about the short-term and long-term impacts of the pandemic for researchers. This set the stage for the development of the Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE) initiative.

2.2. Concordat Steering Committee (CSG)

The Concordat Steering Group, chaired by Professor Anthony Hollander, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact, meets quarterly with the mandate to drive forward and monitor the successful implementation of the Concordat and the University's Action Plan.

During the 2020 period, the CSG met on four occasions (27th February, 9th September, 21st October and 8th December). The UoL RSA was represented by Dr Michael Robinson and Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda.

The CSG reports to the Research and Impact Committee in terms of alignment to other R&I activities, and in turn, reports to Senate and Council, and the Planning and Resources Committee in relation to planning and resource allocation matters. The CSG Purpose within its Terms of Reference include:

- Oversee the implementation and review of the Concordat with appropriate sector representation, including key stakeholder groups
- Ensure that the Concordat, and strategies for communication and implementation, remains relevant to the wider research system
- Publish and regularly update activities in relation to an implementation plan for the Concordat
- Provide a platform to share practice and promote this for the benefit of the research community at the University of Liverpool and its beneficiaries.

The dates for futures meetings will be confirmed and the UoL RSA will continue to be represented by 2021 Co-Chairs Dr Katherine Roscoe and Dr Michael Robinson.

2.3. Athena Swan

Established in 2005, the Athena SWAN Charter is a framework used to support and transform gender equality within higher education and research. The charter now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect women. The University of Liverpool joined the Athena SWAN charter in 2009 and was recognised with an Institutional Silver award in 2016.

During the 2020 period, the Athena Swan Steering Group met on three occasions (28th January, 22nd June and 2nd November). The UoL RSA was represented by Dr Priyanka Raina (January and June meetings) and Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda (November meeting). The themes discussed included:

- Annual Review: review of the promotions paperwork to consider career breaks and periods of leave
- Inclusive Curricula: how intersectional inclusivity can be embedded into the development and delivery of campus wide inclusive curricula
- Project SHAPE: restructure process in the Faculty of Health & Life Science requires an interim Athena SWAN application and actions needed to put EDI structures in place

- International Women's Day
- Career Coaching Scheme: developed by The Academy
- COVID19: response, impact, workload, deadlines, and returning to campus
- Pulse Survey results: overall higher satisfaction compared to 2019. Wellbeing, communication and reassurance from line manager worse than 2019, everything else positive
- Female senior staff: keeping and attracting
- Reporting bullying and harassment: introduction of a Report & Support system for staff and students
- RISE project

The dates for futures meetings will be confirmed and the UoL RSA will continue to be represented by 2021 Co-Chair Dr Claire Wilson.

2.4. Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE)

The [RISE project](#) was created in the Autumn of 2020 as a response to the differential impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the research landscape. The pandemic has changed the way in which research was conducted across the University this past year, impacting a wide range of research groupings. The RISE initiative brings together research and professional staff from across multiple disciplines to accomplish three phases:

- **Listen:** to identify the differentiated effects of COVID on the University research and professional staff focus groups with different networks were conducted and the responses collated.
- **Consider:** to determine new approaches and methods of working to add to existing best-practice.
- **Report:** to develop recommendations on new ways of working to support researchers to achieve their full potential.

The UoL RSA is represented in the RISE project by Co-Chairs Dr Kris Subramaniam and Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda, who have taken active roles in both the Listen and Consider phases. We organised a RISE RSA Focused Meeting (Section 11.2) with the UoL RSA Liaison Committee members where we collected views regarding changes to ways of working, in order to co-develop approaches to support all colleagues. This was a unique opportunity to have a creative and constructive space to discuss our challenges and how the University can support our researchers in the short and long term. The feedback from this meeting was submitted to the RISE project as part of the "Listen" phase.

At present, work is ongoing with the hope that in early 2021 the results of the RISE project will be reported and available to the greater University community. The UoL RSA will continue to be represented in project RISE during 2021.

2.5. UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA)

The [UK Research Staff Association \(UKRSA\)](#) aims, in association with Vitae, to provide a collective voice for research staff across the UK, through building researcher communities and influencing policy. The University of Liverpool is represented by Dr Saneeya Qureshi (The Academy), Dr Angela Midgley (The Academy), and Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda (UoL RSA Co-Chair).

During the 2020 period, the UKRSA met in three occasions: 15th May, 24th July, and 8th October. The themes discussed were:

- Funding models, patterns of research careers, cultures and management of researchers
- UK Reproducible Research Network (UKRRN) links with the UKRSA
- Concordat Action Plan
- Wellcome Culture Cafés: the UoL RSA submitted
- National Postdoc Conference 2021: The University of Liverpool will be hosting NPDC 2021, where we secured Dame Ottoline Leyser, the Chief Executive of UKRI as the Keynote Speaker.
- COVID19 researcher concerns
- Universities contact with Postdocs: examples of good practice and how it could be improved
- Vitae's Open Connections Week participation: the UoL RSA participated in several sessions, including a pre-conference Twitter chat (11th August) led by Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda, and supporting the UKRSA Co-Chairs to facilitate a Wellcome Culture Café.

As part of this representation, Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda volunteered to be part of the core UKRSA team as [Recruitment & Engagement Officer](#), with Dr Angela Midgley from the Academy, with the aim of materialising a wider representation of researchers around the UK. The UoL RSA will continue to be represented at the UKRSA by 2021 Co-Chair Dr Claire Wilson.

2.6. Meetings with Prof Anthony Hollander

RSA co-chairs met with Professor Anthony Hollander, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact, once a month in 2020. These meetings provided an invaluable opportunity for the RSA to meet with University leadership to raise issues and concerns on behalf of the research staff community. Co-chairs were better able to collate researchers' issues by corresponding with departmental Liaison Committee Members on Microsoft Teams in the lead up to the meetings. We also gathered the thoughts of individual researchers during our more informal coffee monthly gatherings held on Zoom. The meetings with Professor Hollander were very productive. They successfully addressed a range of issues ranging from assisting researchers in purchasing office equipment to better enable them to work from home in the aftermath of Covid-19 to implementing steps to introduce a 'buddy system' for researchers to begin in 2021. These meetings also provided an opportunity to update University Leadership on the activities and progress of the RSA and to ensure they were fully up to date with our developments and plans.

3. Lunch & Learn events

The Lunch and Learn series are monthly events organised by the RSA and the Academy which give researchers the opportunity to learn about new topics of interest during their lunch hour. The events are succinct sessions that can vary from learning about new platforms (i.e. Microsoft Teams), to understanding how to create grant budgets, to more personal development events such as building leadership.

3.1. Academic Leadership – 6th February 2020

The qualities that govern leadership are important attributes to retain for a successful career in academia. However, leadership is a quality that is not taught or nurtured during research training. Therefore, we organised this Lunch and Learn event to bring focus to this topic and discuss how researchers can build their leadership skills and what it takes to be an effective leader. The seminar was delivered by **Nadia Soliman**, a former graduate of UoL who shared how her military experiences helped cement her leadership development. Nadia discussed what it takes to be a leader and the importance of developing these skills to bring about a more positive research culture. This session can be [watched online](#).

3.1.1. Attendance

This event was attended by 30 researchers from the following faculties: 16 from Health and Life Sciences, 6 from Science and Engineering and 3 from Humanities and Social Sciences.

3.1.2. Feedback

The session was very well-received by all attendees with the following feedback: 75% of the attendees rated the event as very good and 92% rated the event as good to very good. Some comments include:

“...the format provided a very reflective, thorough and provoking presentation but also allowed for discussion and questions to be asked. It felt very informal and therefore less intimidating to ask questions.”

Other positive words included: “...feeling inspired” and “...curious”.

3.2. Microsoft Teams – 27th April 2020

The UoL RSA steering committee have been using Microsoft Teams, which has reduced e-mails and supported organisation of events. **Monica Chavez**, Educational Developer in the Academy, delivered a practical session on how to use Microsoft Teams for research collaboration and communication. The session included a Q&A, and can be [watched online](#).

3.2.1. Attendance

This event was attended by 50 people

3.3. What the FEC? – 11th May 2020

Many researchers have shared issues when costing grants or how to budget properly. This Lunch & Learn session led by **John Ellis** from the Research Support Office (RSO) focused on exploring Full Economic Costing (FEC) and how the University recovers costs from grants. The RSO provides academics and their school/institutes with support on costing and submitting grant applications. Once awarded the RSO ensures compliance with the funder's terms and conditions, providing support and advice on eligibility and completing and submitting financial claims to funders on behalf of the University. [This session can be watched online.](#)

3.3.1. Attendance

This event was attended by 96 people

3.4. Mentoring – 8th October 2020

The University of Liverpool has a [Mentoring Network](#) to provide a whole institution approach to supporting staff to grow and develop in their role and beyond. This session was led by **Tracy Ellis** from the Academy, who runs the Mentoring Network. It provided an overview of mentoring, the personal and professional benefits, how it differs from other forms of support, how to choose a mentor, a brief tour of the University Mentoring Portal, and tips on how to make a mentoring relationship successful.

3.4.1. Attendance

This event was attended by 34 people

3.4.2. Feedback

The session was very well-received by all attendees with the following feedback:

"I'm never certain about lunchtime events any more but an ongoing debate!"

"Helpful, succinct and informative. Sides good length. Nice to see presenter at the same time."

"I particularly liked the combination of general information about mentoring and the reflective exercise at the end using this background"

"The content of the session was very helpful and interesting. The online format of the session made it very easy to access."

3.5. A researcher's perspective on building a profile across continents – 16th November 2020

UoL researchers identified that they found it difficult to create a recognizable research profile that could foster collaborations and networking. Dr Micaela Matta, a Marie-Curie Fellow from the Department of Chemistry, who has successfully built fruitful research partnerships through building an international profile gave a seminar that captured how she went about building these relationships. Dr Matta discussed how she built her research networks across the EU and the USA, which have led to papers and grants.

3.5.1. Attendance

This event was attended by 10 researchers with the majority being postdocs from the faculty of Health and Life Sciences.

3.5.2. Feedback

Attendees found that the content delivered was interesting and relevant. Towards the end of the session the speakers WIFI stopped, and the event had to finish abruptly. Despite this technical issue, the attendees enjoyed the session.

4. Wellbeing for Researchers

4.1. Summary

Originally designed as a one-day event finalised with a barbeque offered to all research staff, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the UoL RSA moved the delivery of the event to an online platform, extending it to a series of 8 sessions planned over 7 days during July 2020.

We also engaged on [social media](#) posting the “Wellbeing Question of the Day” to cover all 5 steps to wellbeing: connect with other people, be physically active, learn new skills, give to others, and pay attention to the present moment.

Sessions

When?	What?
1 July 10:00-11:30	Personal Wellbeing This is a two-part session with Denise Chilton, a leadership development coach and facilitator, to help you understand what are the key factors when it comes to wellbeing. We advise you to register for both sessions (the second on 8 July). Topics covered include: what wellbeing means to you, the difference between stress and pressure, self-care and resilience, how personality type can unconsciously impact our stress levels.

<p>1 July 15:30-16:00</p>	<p>Meditation session Facilitated by Dr Fabia Allen. Did you know that paying attention to the present moment is one of the steps for wellbeing? Join us on zoom for a guided meditation session to finish the first day of this Wellbeing week</p>
<p>2 July 10:00-10:30</p>	<p>DISC Drop-in Katy Mahoney, a professional coach, will be running a DISC (communication styles) drop in session for those that attended the Making an Impact session Different not Wrong: Communicating with Impact workshop. We will contact you separately if you are eligible for this session</p>
<p>3 July 14:00-15:00</p>	<p>Café Culture on Mental Health and Wellbeing Did you know that the Wellcome Trust wants to build a better research culture? One that is creative, inclusive and honest. Based on the largest ever survey into experiences of research culture, mental health was one of the main themes that came out: 53% of respondents had sought or wanted to seek professional help for depression or anxiety. A poor research culture based on unhealthy competition, quantity over quality, bullying, and harassment lead to mental health issues. To align with the UoL RSA's Wellbeing week, this Café Culture will focus on how a better research culture can be used to improve mental health and wellbeing, and YOUR opinion could actually make a difference. Don't miss out on this opportunity to have your say!</p>
<p>6 July 15:00-15:45</p>	<p>Quiz time! Facilitated by Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda. Join us for an afternoon of fun with this UoL RSA Quiz. Come have a laugh with us over zoom and show your general knowledge with this virtual quizzical quiz. No need to register.</p>
<p>7 July 13:00-13:30</p>	<p>Crafternoon Facilitated by Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda. Research shows that learning new skills can also improve your mental health! Join us via zoom where we'll be showing you some origami. Bring your paper (any size!!) and your folding skills to make animals with us for a crafty lunch break. No need to register.</p>
<p>8 July 10:00-11:30</p>	<p>Professional Wellbeing This is a two-part session with Denise Chilton, a leadership development coach and facilitator, to help you understand what are the key factors when it comes to wellbeing. We advise you to register for both sessions (the first on 1 July). Topics covered include: what wellbeing means to you, the difference between stress and pressure, self-care and resilience, how personality type can unconsciously impact our stress levels.</p>
<p>17 July 10:00-11:30</p>	<p>Wellbeing for Researchers extra session After the success of the RSA Wellbeing for Researchers' week, and because the sessions got quickly oversubscribed, the leadership development coach and facilitator Denise Chilton agreed to run an EXTRA session! If you couldn't get a ticket, don't miss out on this opportunity to participate in a session that will help you understand what the key factors are when it comes to well-being. "Work and wellbeing for life: A virtual learning experience for researchers" will cover the two previous sessions on Personal and Professional wellbeing. We strongly encourage early registration to avoid disappointment.</p>

4.2. Attendance

- Personal Wellbeing: 16 people
- Meditation session: not taken
- DISC drop-in: not taken
- Café culture on mental health wellbeing: 10 people
- Quiz time!: 10 people
- Crafternoon: 8 people
- Professional Wellbeing: 16 people
- Wellbeing for Researchers extra session: 16 people

4.3. Feedback

“Enjoyed the short taster sessions of different wellbeing activities, could have followed these with e.g. a 15 minute networking chat if people wanted”

“This was an enjoyable and laid session. It was the first such event I've attended and will look forward to attending more.”

“It felt a safe space to discuss ideas and personal wellbeing issues without being judged. It was good that we had an interactive group who were all up for participating. It may not have worked so well if this wasn't the case. I enjoyed the breakout rooms - felt like group work although not face to face but perhaps stress you need to assign one member as the one to feedback what was discussed so there is less waiting when we return. Perhaps only use chat function to ask questions or respond to a question raised by the facilitator and refrain from just comments- sometimes it's off putting when messages come through as you are trying to listen/concentrate. especially if they are not really”

“Wellbeing sessions: I would have felt reluctant to take a full day away from research, so having shorter sessions worked well for me. Being online also made it easier to be more open in the breakout discussions - I have never met the other attendees before in person and it is unlikely that I will again, which made anonymity a little bit easier.”

“It was a great and informative session, and I've already applied what I learned to how I organise my work (that Important/Urgent diagram was a revelation). The only thing I would say if I really had to be picky was that I would have liked to see a bit more discussed around the topic of 'guilt'.”

5. Café Culture events

5.1. Summary

Wellcome Trust has led an initiative to “Reimagine Research Culture”, following the [largest ever survey into their experiences of research culture](#) that thousands of researchers took part in. The Wellcome Trust is committed to help build a better research culture – one that is creative, inclusive and honest. Culture Cafés provide an opportunity to talk about the challenges we face in research culture, what a better culture would look like, and propose solutions.

The UoL RSA are fully supportive of giving research staff the opportunity to have conversations and discuss ideas to help craft goals for creating a better culture. Therefore, we led three 30-minute [Café Culture sessions](#) in June focussed on improving research culture more broadly, and an hour-long session in July as part of Wellbeing for Researchers week (section 4) focussed on improving researchers’ wellbeing. In total, approximately 20 researchers participated. Each session was comprised of three parts: a summary of the findings of the Wellcome Trust survey and a discussion on particular results the participants related to. This was then used to guide discussion on recognising examples of good practice already happening at the University to combat these concerns. Finally, we discussed ideas that could be implemented to encourage change.

Since a successful research culture requires collective responsibility and change at all levels, the outcomes of this events were shared for the attention of the Concordat Steering Group & other members of the Senior Leadership Team at the University of Liverpool, and with the UKRSA. We also participated in the Wellcome Trust Reimagine Research Townhall Event hosted by the University of Liverpool on the 12th November. Our conversations will continue, with periodic reporting to the research staff community, and other interested leadership groups.

5.2. Attendance

The attendance was of 20 people.

6. National Postdoc Appreciation Week

6.1. Summary of the event

Established in 2009, National Postdoctoral Appreciation Week (NPAW) takes place annually during the third week of September to celebrate the significant contributions postdoctoral staff make to research and discovery in higher education institutions. Liverpool worked in partnership with 17 other Universities to offer a series of development, recognition, and networking opportunities during NPAW 2020, which was held on September 21-25. Local and national events were planned to highlight and acknowledge the instrumental work postdocs do daily to advance research. The NPAW sessions had attendee numbers that varied from 40-130 and included Universities from across the UK including University of Manchester, Imperial, Cardiff, Kings College, University of Sheffield, University of Bristol, Lancaster, LJMU, etc.

The National events, (open to University of Liverpool researchers) involved an Uplifting celebratory event and career focused discussion panel were advertised alongside our local events and were attended by 364 and 498 people respectively from over 40 different institutions throughout the UK and republic of Ireland. The feedback from those attended was very positive and comments remarked on the practical and positive advice gained from the panel sessions and how they felt connected to other researchers in their shared experiences of being a postdoc.

For the local events, the UoL RSA and the Academy took an active leadership role including hosting the opening event on 'The Positive Approach' and the giant virtual coffee networking session concluding the programme. The UoL specific programme included:

- **Being LGBT+ in Academia:** panel session led by Dr James Lea, Chair of the UoL LGBT+ staff network
- **My Escape from the Lab: Scientific Publishing:** by Dr Matteo Cavalleri, publisher at Wiley
- **Getting the most from your PDR/appraisal:** by Andrew Scott, facilitator and coach.
- **The Talented Dr Postdoc:** by the Prosper team
- **The Use of Responsible Metrics:** workshop on the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) by Dr Zuzana Oriou
- **A Giant Virtual Coffee:** an invitation from the UoL RSA open to postdocs across the 18 partner Universities

6.1.1. Feedback

Many of the attendees found the sessions interesting (76.7%) with the following response:

“Nothing - thought this was beautifully done”

“I thought it worked really well”

“The online format was very useful. The interactive part with breakout rooms was great for feeling engaged.”

“Session worked well and was engaging”

6.2. The Positive Approach

6.2.1. Summary of the event

Liverpool-based Tallant Jones provided an interactive session using their experience as a business coaching consultancy firm to emphasise the importance of positivity and self-care for researchers to incorporate into their work lives. The University of Liverpool hosted this national event. The event was a positive and upbeat start to the week providing an innovative and holistic approach to life as a researcher.

6.2.2. Attendance

In total, 129 people registered of which 26 came from the University of Liverpool. The other attendees came from fifteen universities across Britain with Imperial College London representing the highest number of attendees with 23 participants. Of 26 University of Liverpool attendees, 17 were from Health and Life Sciences, 4 were from Humanities and Social Sciences, 4 came from Science and Engineering and 1 from Central Professional Service.

6.3. Being LGBTQ+ in Academia

6.3.1. Summary of the event

Dr James Lea, Chair of the University of Liverpool LGBTQ+ Network led this talk and panel session. Navigating the academic world as an LGBTQ+ academic can bring with it its own unique challenges. Many colleagues have at some point (or still do) feel that speaking openly and being able to be their real selves at work can be difficult or even impossible, and that doing so may have impacts on their careers. These concerns are often most profound amongst postdoctoral researchers and PhD students who are searching for permanent jobs or new contracts. This session aimed to provide a frank and open discussion of some of these challenges. The event was delivered on Zoom, therefore, those who preferred to attend/ask questions anonymously were able to through the chat function, and changing their display name and keeping their video/sound off. [The session was recorded and available here.](#)

This session was opened to other institutions outside of the University of Liverpool and the link to the webinar was advertised a few hours before the session without needing registration, to encourage attendance of individuals who preferred to remain anonymous.

This event generated a large number of questions by participants, which due to time constraints were not answered during the session. These questions were recovered and will be used in a future event in the form of another panel session, blog or Q&A video.

6.3.2. Attendance

In total, 43 people registered of which 26 were from the University of Liverpool. The other 17 registered were from Cardiff University, Liverpool John Moores University, University of Sheffield, University of Sheffield, University of Bristol, University of Glasgow, University of Southampton, Dalhousie University, and University of Turin (Italy). Of the 43 registered, 18 were Postdoctoral Researchers.

6.4. My Escape from the Lab: Scientific Publishing

6.4.1. Summary of the event

Dr Matteo Cavalleri, a publisher at Wiley, shared his experience going from a chemistry postdoctoral position to his current career on the “other side” of scientific publishing. His talk explored roles for postdoctoral STEM researchers in the publishing industry. He enabled a broader understanding of the distinct roles inside the editorial office of academic journals and the skills required for editorial positions posted by commercial and society publishers

6.5. Getting the most from your PDR/appraisal

6.5.1. Summary of the event

The PDR (Professional Development Review) is an integral part of the development process for postdocs because it gives the researcher the opportunity to flag any needs and concerns relevant to the individual's career. Indeed, as per the Concordat, last year, UoL postdocs had a 90.1% completion rate, and to support this high completion rate, we organised a NPAW event centred on strategies to have a meaningful and effective PDR to ensure that researchers can use the PDR process to empower themselves to gain the most from it. The session was run by personal coach Andrew Scott (<http://www.andrew-scott.net/>).

This event was organised by UoL and the RSA but was open to other UK institutions. UoL received some funds from the MRC (Medical Research Council) given to the NPAW organizing meet to run this event.

6.5.2. Attendance

The event had 129 attendees that included Academics, ECRs, and postdocs (n=109). Participating universities included UoL, Imperial, Cardiff, Oxford, QUB, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Manchester, Leeds, Exeter, Nottingham, York, Glasgow and Southampton.

6.6. The Talented Dr Postdoc: A Skills Celebration - Prosper Team

6.6.1. Summary of the event

This session was run by the Prosper team. It set out to celebrate the transferable skills that post-doctoral and early-career researchers can benefit from outside of academia. It explored the wide variety of employer-desired skills, attributes and mindsets and emphasised to attendees their value. There was also a breakout session which enabled attendees to identify and translate their existing skills to benefit their future job applications.

6.6.2. Attendance

The event had 48 attendees that included 45 post-doctoral researchers working at the University of Liverpool. 29 attendees were from Health and Life Sciences, 8 were from Humanities and Social Sciences and 11 were from Science and Engineering.

6.7. Declaration on Research Assessment

6.7.1. Summary of the event

The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) is an initiative developed during the 2012 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology. The initiative was developed to find new ways in which researchers and their research outputs could be evaluated outside of the limitations of a journal's impact factor and an individual's H-index.

DORA has four main objectives: 1) **To raise researcher awareness** of new tools and processes to assess research and how to utilise metrics responsibly, 2) **To facilitate implementation** of new policies and practices for recruitment, promotion and funding that goes beyond scholarly metrics, 3) **To promote change** by working across disciplines and institutions nationally and internationally, and 4) **To enhance equity** by fostering diverse representation of researchers in the design of research assessment practices that traditionally foster structural inequalities.

The session about DORA which was led by Dr Zuzana Oriou who is the Responsible Metrics Project Manager at UoL was focused on introducing attendees to the principles behind DORA, the rationale for

its creation and the importance of focusing on metrics that go beyond impact factors and scholarly quotas. UoL is a signatory of DORA and therefore, this session provided UoL researchers and other HEIs an opportunity to learn about this new initiative.

6.7.2. Attendance

This session was attended by nine participants from UoL, Imperial, Cardiff, Exeter, Sheffield, Nottingham and York. 88% of those who attended found the session interesting and informative and provided feedback such as:

6.7.3. Feedback

“I really enjoyed the session and in particular that there was time for the presenter to reply to questions afterwards.”

“Great use of polling, made Zoom interactive!”

6.8. Giant Virtual Coffee

6.8.1. Summary of the event

This event concluded the NPAW programme, and it provided an opportunity for attendees from across the United Kingdom to network online. Breakout rooms were set-up to allow smaller group informal discussions. The session was generally informal and friendly in nature with discussion of the week's events and life as a researcher during Covid-19 some of the various topics discussed. The University of Liverpool hosted this national event.

6.8.2. Attendance

The event had 31 attendees from 5 universities including 27 from the University of Liverpool. 27 attendees were from Health and Life Sciences, 5 were from Humanities and Social Sciences, 3 were from Science and Engineering and 6 were from Central Professional Services.

7. Virtual Coffee with the RSA

7.1. Summary of the event

With access to campus restricted due to Covid-19, the RSA set up virtual meetings over Zoom to replace the previously held coffee meetings on campus. Invitations were sent to all RSA members with attendees provided the informal opportunity to converse with their colleagues with many now working from home due to Covid-19. The meetings also provided valuable opportunities for the RSA to be alerted to any concerns or issues from researchers to bring up during its monthly meetings with Prof. Hollander and allow the RSA to potentially answer questions raised by researchers including non-work-related matters such as questions regarding medical care and childcare. These meetings were especially useful in the context of Covid-19 providing research staff, especially new staff members, with personal contact with representatives from the University of Liverpool. The year's final session was Christmas-themed with participants invited to wear Christmas jumpers and hats with a Christmas-themed game of Bingo held.

7.2. Attendance

The RSA does not tend to collect the numbers from the more informal virtual coffees we have once a month but the number that attend ranges from 8-20 usually.

8. Research Staff Conference 2020

8.1. Summary of the event

On 4 December 2020, the RSA hosted the fourth annual RSA conference. In comparison to previous years, the event was held virtually owing to Covid-19. The RSA was able to secure funding for the event via Scrintal and Facebook Reality Labs. The programme for the event, designed by Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda can be [found online](#). The programme incorporated lessons from previous years' successes whilst focusing on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion with a panel discussion, including experts from across the UK, on 'Inclusivity in Academia'. Continuing conference tradition, Professor Anthony Hollander, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact, provided the keynote lecture dedicated to Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE). The University of Liverpool's Prosper team delivered an interactive session that also launched and invited expressions of interest in Prosper's first postdoc career development cohort launching in April 2021. A networking session concluded the event allowing attendees to enter breakout rooms with the Prosper team, the Research, Partnerships and Innovation (RPI) team, conference sponsors, the co-chairs of the RSA or the Academy. With this year's conference being held online, the RSA took active steps to enable the conference to be more interactive. This included a conference Spotify playlist shared to attendees and used before events, a conference Twitter hashtag to facilitate online discussion and a 'Images of Research Competition'. We hope that the annual conference will again facilitate greater researcher engagement with professional development opportunities and the RSA and encourage sharing of best practice to promote a healthier and happier attitude towards researcher development across the University.

8.2. Keynote – Prof Anthony Hollander

In this Keynote session, Prof Anthony Hollander discussed the progress made to date via the RISE Project as not only has the pandemic necessitated a rapid pivot in research to tackle the crisis, simultaneously creating new challenges in the research environment, whilst turning a spotlight on issues that already exist. This session can be [watched online](#).

8.2.1. Attendance

In total, there were 48 attendees from across the University of Liverpool. 17 were post-doctoral researchers, 11 were Professional Services Staff, 8 were academic, teach or teaching staff, and 6 were early career researchers. 25 attendees were from Health and Life Sciences, 6 were from Humanities, 7 were from Science and Engineering and 10 were from Central Professional Services.

8.3. Panel discussion: Inclusivity in Academia

This panel discussion included 6 speakers who utilised their experience and expertise for a wide-ranging discussion dedicated to Inclusivity in Academia. Chaired by **Prof Georgina Endfield**, APVC

for Research & Impact in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the panel included the following speakers:

Dr Diego Baptista, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Adviser on Research Culture at Wellcome Trust

Dr Emmanuel Adukwu, Deputy Head of Science in the Department of Applied Science & Employability Leader at the University of the West of England (UWE) Bristol, and Co-Founder of Aspiring Professionals Hub

Dr Angela Obasi, Senior Clinical Lecturer at Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, and author of Lancet paper: 'Equity in excellence or just another tax on Black skin?'

Dr Shaima Hassan, Postdoctoral Researcher in Health Services Research at the University of Liverpool and representative of the UoL BAME Network

Dr Clara Barker, Engineer and Material Scientist at Oxford and Chair of the University's LGBT+ Advisory group.

This session can be [watched online](#).

8.3.1. Attendance

The panel discussion was attended by 99 people including 35 post-doctoral researchers and 25 Professional Services Staff from 20 different UK universities. 52 were University of Liverpool employees of which 24 came from Health and Life Sciences, 13 were from Humanities and Social Sciences, 6 were from Science and Engineering and 9 were from Central Professional Services.

8.4. Prosper session

Titled "I want to break free...from barriers to career development", the Prosper team gave an interactive session to explain what Prosper means by democratising access before opening the floor to postdocs. It also launched the recruitment for Prosper's first postdoc career development cohort, starting April 2021. During the session, participants could benefit from:

- Share and discuss barriers to participating in development activities
- Reflect on what democratising access means, including identity and how people currently engage with career development, and compare this with current studies around barriers to postdoc development
- Being the first to hear about the opportunity to join Prosper's first postdoc career development cohort – **recruitment for which opens at this event!**

8.4.1. Attendance

This session was attended by 32 people.

8.5. Networking sessions

One of the biggest challenges for running an online conference is networking. Because most interactions normally happen during coffee and lunch breaks, we design two different networking sessions to encourage the casual interactions that usually happen during face-to-face meetings.

The first networking activity was a 15-minute bingo session before the start of the Panel discussion (section 8.3). Unfortunately, due to technical issues we had to suspend it, however the activity was repeated during the Virtual Coffee break with the RSA– Christmas special (section 7), including 2 £10 retail vouchers for the winners.

The second networking session (*“Friends will be friends”*) was organised in a format that allowed participants to move round different Zoom breakout rooms that were hosted by colleagues from the **Prosper** team, the **Research, Partnerships and Innovation (RPI)** team, the Conference sponsor **Facebook Reality Lab**. There was also a general breakout room where researchers could interact between them without a host. At the end of the session all participants were automatically called to the main room to announce the Images of Research winners (section 8.6) and finalise the conference.

8.5.1. Attendance

In total, there were 31 registration representing all the Faculties and central professional services at the University of Liverpool. Of the 31 registered participants, 16 were Postdoctoral Researchers.

8.6. Images of Research

This year the UoL RSA inaugurated the first **“Images of Research”** competition as an opportunity for research staff to showcase the diversity and importance of research conducted across the University, to develop their professional skills and communicate their research to non-specialist audiences in an engaging and accessible way.

This competition was led by Dr Katy Roscoe and Dr Ramya Maitreyee. The theme of this year’s competition was **“Research in the time of Coronavirus”**, to follow the University’s Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE) initiative. It aimed to celebrate the adaptability and resilience of researchers during a time of crisis, and the personal and professional challenges faced.

The invitation was for researchers to submit a digital image of their research, such as a photograph of the home office set-up, a photograph of a socially-distanced set-up in the lab, a screengrab of data, or a piece of artwork. A 150-word abstract was submitted alongside the image, explaining how the image related to the participant’s research project or how coronavirus changed their work, aimed at non-specialist audience, written in an accessible and engaging way and avoiding jargon. We especially welcomed submissions that engaged with issues around diversity, inclusion and equity. Submissions were opened between the 9th to 30th November 2020.

Eligibility

1. This competition is open to research staff – postdocs and research fellows – only. This does not include postgraduate research students.
2. Contributors must have full copyright and publishing rights for their image and consent for the University of Liverpool to have full use of that material in any form and medium, including online, for the promotion on the University of Liverpool.
3. Contributors must give permission for their details (full name, department, job title), their abstract and any other written comments submitted in the application, to be published in conjunction with their photographs by the University of Liverpool, in any form or medium.

The shortlisted submissions were [exhibited online](#) and subjected to public vote open between 9 AM and 3:30 PM during the 2020 Research Staff Conference (7th December 2020), and by a judging panel constituted by Professor Anthony Hollander (PVC for Research & Impact), Dr James Howard (Director of the Academy), Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda (UoL RSA Co-Chair) and Michael Robinson (UoL RSA Co-Chair).

8.6.1. Participation

The shortlisted entries can be found [here](#)

Title	Author	School/Institute/Department
Making vision testing child's play	Anna O'Connor	School of Health Sciences
Science from the sofa	Anna O'Connor	School of Health Sciences
The cat still thinks it's her room	Bethan Mead	Department of Psychology
Trying to work through foggy lab specs	Filipe Braga Nogueira	Department of Chemistry
When every day is take your child to work day	Frances Sherratt	Department of Health, Policy and Systems
More than one way to learn	Katy Roscoe	Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology
Work from home	Lisa Cavalerie	Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences
Inventing a new office	Michael Robinson	Department of History
My wobble cushion and I	Rebecca Bresnahan	Department of Health Services Research
There' always a rainbow behind every cloud	Sofia Cividini	Department of Biostatistics
Garage collaborations from afar	Terence Heng	Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology
Using art to start the conversation about breastfeeding	Vicky Fallon & Lisa Creagh	Department of Psychology

The winners were announced at the end of the 2020 Research Staff Conference and received a prize of £50 (panel vote) and £30 (public vote) retail voucher. The winners of this competition were **Dr Vicky Fallon & Lisa Creagh** (panel vote) who submitted '*Using art to change the conversation about breastfeeding*' for a project in collaboration with the Liverpool Women's Hospital that had to pivot from their planned photo-gallery showing mothers breastfeeding to a virtual-reality installation as a result of COVID, and **Dr Lisa Cavalerie** (public vote) for her entry "*Work from home-stay wild*" depicting working on her literature review on zoonoses from home at Ethiopia and her cat prowling along past her desk, after her fieldwork had been cancelled.

The judging panel also highly commended the entries by **Dr Terence Heng** entitled "*Garage collaborations from afar*" depicting his makeshift photo studio for a project about ritual funeral objects with colleagues in Singapore, and by **Dr Katy Roscoe** called "*More than one way to learn*" about being confronted by an empty locker room during a much-anticipated trip to the British Library. The judging panel provided feedback to the winning and highly commended entries, which was shared with the participants. This competition was highly promoted and commented on Twitter using [#UoLRScnf](#).

9. Awareness and access to UoL HR policies

9.1. Summary

In accordance with the Concordat (Concordat Actions 2.2.5, 3.6.2, and 3.8.1), the UoL RSA consulted with the research staff community in November 2020 about general awareness and barriers to accessing Human Resources (HR) policies, induction process, and the potential of setting up a “Buddy” system at the University of Liverpool.

We set up a survey focused on HR policy awareness and buddy system, followed by a focus group to discuss the findings, including a discussion about the induction process. The general output indicates that there is a lack of awareness on policies, particularly “**dignity at work & study**” and “**redundancy**”, however the research community feel strongly about “**flexible working**”, “**bullying & harassment**” and “**diversity & equality of opportunity**” policies.

There is also a general need for improving the induction process. We received feedback on the requirement for a clear induction process different to the already existing safety or laboratory induction. It was voiced repeatedly the importance of supporting new starters at the beginning of their role, emphasising the need for a “**buddy system**”. The results from the survey also indicate that there is a disposition to participate in a buddy system, with 65% respondents willing to volunteer as a supporting buddy.

It was also suggested that there should be an up-to-date **induction booklet** with information about the University and life in Liverpool, but also tailored for each department. This booklet should contain information about *who to contact* for different issues/tasks.

The next step is to set up a new focus group (probably March 2021) to consult on possible changes.

9.2. Participation

The survey was responded by 53 individuals, of which the majority (34%) had been working at the University of Liverpool for more than 4 years, with a considerable number (19%) of new starters (>6 months). The Faculty of Health & Life Sciences was highly represented with >50% of responses, followed by the Faculties of Science & Engineering (28%) and Humanities & Social Sciences (13%). The research staff community was mostly represented by Postdoctoral Researchers (66%), followed by Early Career Researchers (19%).

The focus group to discuss results from the survey was attended by 21 individuals, including facilitators Dr Frances Sherratt, Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda, Dr Saneeya Qureshi and Dr Angela Midgley. It was organised using www.mural.co where a layout of some results from the survey were previously organised. The majority of individuals had been working at the University for over 4 years, in the same way as the survey, and we had representation from new starters, and 1-4 years.

10. RSA promotion and communication

With the aim of reaching the wider research staff community, we upgraded the channels of communication with a new strategy of recurrent communication and enhanced visual support (Appendix 12.1).

10.1. RSA weekly bulletin

The UoL RSA committed to send weekly emails to all research staff with opportunities and information. Designed by Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda and weekly curated by the UoL RSA Deputy Co-Chairs, the weekly bulletin became an important channel for communicating activities organised by the UoL RSA, general opportunities for research staff, but also information related to the COVID-19 pandemic and wellbeing support.

The format of the bulletin was designed for easy weekly customisation, divided into different sections:

- **Header:** including new design (Appendix 12.1)
- **Weekly opportunities and information:** dynamic section filled with most up-to-date information
- **Important updates:** information related to COVID-19 updates and other relevant resources
- **About the RSA:** mission and aims of the UoL RSA, including current chairs
- **Top-tips:** includes a “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 UoL RSA and stay in touch (email and twitter handle)

The image shows a vertical screenshot of an email newsletter from the University of Liverpool Research Staff Association (UoL RSA). The newsletter is titled 'Opportunities and Information for Research Staff' and is divided into several sections. On the right side, there are six yellow callout boxes with brackets pointing to specific parts of the newsletter:

- Header with UoL RSA design:** Points to the top banner featuring a group of diverse people and the UoL RSA logo.
- Weekly opportunities information for research staff:** Points to the first 'Heading' and 'Dates' section.
- Important updates:** Points to the 'COVID-19 Updates from Research Faculty' section.
- About the RSA:** Points to the 'About the RSA' section, which lists the Deputy Co-Chairs.
- Top Tips:** Points to the 'Did you know?' section.
- Contact details:** Points to the 'KEEP IN TOUCH' section at the bottom.

10.2. Twitter

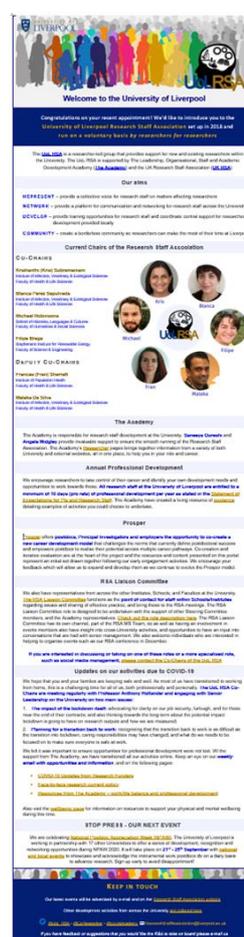
The Twitter account [@UoL_RSA](#) is monitored and managed by the Deputy Co-Chairs. We introduced a new header design (Appendix 12.1) and sought to maintain regular engagement, particularly during UoL RSA organised events.

10.3. Welcome email

In line with the UoL RSA weekly bulletin with opportunities and information, we dedicated to send each month a “welcome to the University” email to new starters. Designed by Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda and curated by the UoL RSA core team, the welcome email aimed to provide a warm welcome to newly appointed research staff, with relevant information about the University, UoL RSA and other events and opportunities. We believe that this email was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic when most research staff joined remotely.

The format of the bulletin was designed for easy customisation, divided into different sections:

- **Header:** including new design (Appendix 12.1)
- **About the UoL RSA and The Academy:** up-to-date information about the UoL RSA and the Academy, including the Liaison Committee and how to join
- **Other information:** dynamic section filled with most up-to-date information, such as annual professional development, Prosper, English language clubs, updates on activities due to COVID19, and other resources
- **Next UoL RSA event:** information about coming events and how to join
- **Contact details:** how to reach the UoL RSA and stay in touch (email and twitter handle)



Welcome to the University header with UoL RSA design

About the UoL RSA and The Academy

Other information

Next UoL RSA event

Contact details

10.4. RSA Teams

The main channel of communication for UoL RSA Chairs and Liaison Committee representatives is using the Microsoft Teams platform. We have designated channels for the Chairs, emails received, the Liaison Committee, and Research Staff Conference organisation.

11. Other activities and future plans

11.1. Podcast, blog posts and bite-size videos

Members of the UoL RSA have been engaging with different activities for raising the profile of the RSA.

11.1.1. Podcast

As part of the Academy miniseries of special podcasts, the UoL RSA discussed the role of the RSA in creating a positive change in culture for research staff at the University of Liverpool. The podcast, titled “Research communities” was released in June 2020 as part of Making an Impact 2020 and can be found [here](#).

11.1.2. Blog posts

Blog post written by members of the UoL RSA as part of the Researcher Blog:

- Mary Jane Monaghan: [Being in the Research Staff Association boosted my CV](#)
- Dr Fran Sherratt: [National Postdoc Appreciation Week: The impact of COVID-19 on planning and delivering](#)
- Dr Michael Robinson: [Working From Home as an Early Career Researcher: the ‘New Normal’](#)
- Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda: [From one to three hats – why is it important to engage outside our research?](#)
- Dr Kris Subramaniam: [Creating a “new normal”: Can we narrow the gender and ethnic inequities in academia made worse by COVID-19?](#)
- Dr Katy Roscoe: [Behind the Screens: images of research in the time of coronavirus](#)

Also, members of the UoL RSA have been highlighted as part of the Academy’s Research Hub in [Celebrating Members of our Research Staff Association](#).

11.2. RISE RSA focused meeting

We organised a RISE RSA Focused Meeting with the UoL RSA Liaison Committee members where we collected views regarding changes to ways of working, in order to co-develop approaches to support all colleagues. This was a unique opportunity to have a creative and constructive space to discuss our challenges and how the University can support our researchers in the short and long term. The feedback from this meeting was anonymously submitted to the RISE project as part of the “Listen” phase.

11.3. VC and PVC Messages for University of Liverpool Research Staff

[Message of appreciation and recognition targeted at UoL postdoctoral researchers](#) by Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Impact Professor Anthony Hollander and Vice Chancellor Professor Dame Janet Beer. This message was delivered to help address feelings of isolation and detachment brought up by researchers during our online forums.

11.4. Planned future activities

2021 promises to be another active year for the RSA. We will continue to take an active role in organising and participating in National Postdoc Appreciation Week in September 2021, led by Postdoc Futures. With Covid-19 continuing to impact campus access, the RSA will also continue to liaise with department Liaison Committee Members via Microsoft Teams and will host monthly coffee meetings with research staff virtually over Zoom for issues and concerns to be addressed. These issues will be discussed during the RSA co-chairs' monthly meetings with Prof. Hollander. Also, the RSA will continue to hold 'Lunch & Learn' seminars events for the remainder of the 2021 academic year. All members of the Research Staff Association will continue to receive an invite to these events.

11.4.1. National Postdoc Conference 2021

The University of Liverpool will also be the host of [National Postdoc Conference 2021](#) held on the 24th September, to coincide with National Postdoc Appreciation Week. Led by Dr Saneeya Qureshi, Head of Researcher Development and Culture at the Academy, the UoL RSA will be taking a key role in the organisation of this national event. The events organised by the UoL RSA, including those in partnership with other institutions across the UK, set the foundations for our successful bid and our furthering securing Dame Ottoline Leyser, the Chief Executive of UKRI as the Keynote Speaker.

11.4.2. Lunch & Learn Sessions

Lunch & Learn sessions planned for 2021 are:

- 9th February: **Positioning Research within the sustainable development goals (SDG's)** led by Fiona Brannigan (Chartered Environmentalist). This session will build upon Fiona Brannigan's stimulating workshop held at Making an Impact 2020 regarding the UN SDG Accord. The SDG Accord is a global commitment by Universities to Place the UN's Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of their activities, including research.
- 24th March: **The good, the bad and the ugly about getting a Tenure Track Fellowship**, panel discussion with HLS Principal Investigators Dr Kate Baker, Dr Jamie Hall and Dr Siobhan O'Brien, that will be talking about their experiences and lessons learnt in their path to forming their own group.
- 6th May: **Actions that can support the career development of researchers** led by Rachel Cox (Vitae) about principles on the concordat and researcher obligations.

- 20th July: **It's all about you: making your PDR fit with your personal and professional goals** led by Tracy Ellis from the Organisational Developer's team at the Academy
- 29th October **TBC**.

11.4.3. Wellbeing event

This programme will continue the RSA's tradition of putting on a full week of events dedicated to researcher wellbeing emphasising the importance of a healthy work/life balance in ensuring our members research their potential during their time at Liverpool University. The dates of Researcher Wellbeing Week are 5th – 9th July 2021.

11.4.4. Research Staff Annual Conference

Given the packed agenda and the various development activities that will be available for postdocs during the National Postdoc Conference, the annual RSA will be postponed till December 2022.

11.5. Representation within the Faculty

- Dr Kris Subramaniam and Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda are part of the Co-Chairs of the Postdoc Association at the Institute of Infection, Veterinary & Ecological Sciences (IVES), Faculty of Health and Life Sciences.
- Dr Michael Robinson and Dr Katy Roscoe sit on the Concordat Steering Group Committee as a representative of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Dr Kris Subramaniam sits on the Concordat Steering Group Committee as a representative of the School of Health and Life Sciences.
- Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda is the IVES Staff Advocate of the PGR Wellbeing Ambassadors scheme at the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences.

12. Appendices

12.1. New UoL RSA design



12.2. Open Access Policy document feedback

Appendix 12.2: Queries to the Open Access Policy and Feedback from Martin Wolf and Judith Carr

The UoL RSA circulated the open access document to our liaison committee representatives and asked them to gain local feedback. We have received the following comments:

Feedback from research staff in the School of Law and Social Justice:

I've read the " " and have the following concerns:

1. The open data policy will work fine for large-scale quantitative datasets, and I agree that this should be encouraged.
2. For small samples of qualitative data, especially those collected in "niche" areas, where identification of participants would be more likely, the drive to make data openly available is inappropriate. When recruiting participants for such studies, the limited access to data is one key aspect of confidentiality and must be retained. Even pseudo-anonymisation can fail to protect participants' identities

The overarching principle of open data is "data should be as open as possible and as closed as necessary". If it is necessary for data be closed (for reasons of confidentiality, potential for participant identification, etc.) then it needs to be closed, simple as that. Another option is controlled sharing with researchers who fit agreed criteria. This is where information *about* the dataset is made available, alongside clear instructions as to who may be allowed access under what circumstances. Decisions on whether to allow access to the data based on those criteria can then be taken by university staff.

3. It is possible at present to state that data are available on request from the researcher – will this option be retained for such circumstances?

It might be possible to do this, but it isn't good practice. Firstly, the data should not be held on personal drives; secondly, researchers can move institutions and thus become uncontactable, rendering the instruction to contact the researcher unworkable; and finally, as the data should be kept for a minimum of 10 years, ideally on university systems, relying on one researcher is not viable. If you can it is much easier to make the data open, and a dataset with a DOI can be cited and it is easier to track who uses the data and builds on your work. For data that cannot be shared openly, controlled sharing as described above means data available on request subject to certain criteria. These criteria should make clear what body (rather than individual) can make the decision on whether or not to share data (for example, a departmental research committee). The data creators and owners set those criteria. Both these options allow you to track who uses your data. 'Request from the researcher' will not increase your impact or opportunities.

4. If all data must be made openly available, then consent forms will need to be changed. I do have concerns about this and its effect on, for example, studies using ethnomethodology.

Under GDPR, research is carried out under Section 89 – public good. Strictly speaking there is no need to include sharing of anonymous data on consent forms, as this is covered by Section 89. However, as an act of courtesy your information sheet should indicate that the data will be shared in a controlled manner or be made open, whichever is appropriate. You can also state in your information sheet a time after which a participant cannot remove any data already collected even if they now want to withdraw, e.g. it should be impossible to remove a specific participant's data if all the data have

been anonymised. Participants do not have the right to withdraw their data from a project indefinitely if this has been [made clear](#) at the beginning.

It is also worth noting that you should never in the consent form or the information sheet state that the data will only be shared within the research group and/or only with named individuals. This is an impossible task, as members of research groups change and restricting to named individuals means that strictly speaking sharing with new colleagues would not be allowed, making research very difficult.

Feedback from research staff in the Institute of Infection and Global Health:

With regards to section three: openness during research: I think it might be appropriate to mention intellectual property within this section. This will affect whether research details can be made public and may also go on to affect section four in terms of publications.

[Agreed – a separate link to the IP policy could be provided.](#)

The postdoctoral researcher community in general in IGH (and in other institutes that we have spoken to) seems apprehensive about the use of open lab books:

- Concern that it will not actually solve the problem it sets out to: if someone wants to be fraudulent they will do this with an open lab book if they wish

[It's true that people can fabricate data at any stage – that is not a reason not to be open.](#)

- Would these be online lab books? How practical will it be to complete these as we are actually doing the research in the lab? If we had to transfer notes to an online lab book this would take a lot of time.

[That's a practical management decision for individual projects to take.](#)

- If we use open lab books during research how are we safe guarded against other people using our work before it is published in paper form?

[It depends on how open you make them and when. You can have open lab books that are only open to the rest of the team whilst the research is being carried out. They can then be made open to anyone after the project has been written and reported, as part of making the datasets open and disseminating the work. "Safeguarding" here comes from being able to clearly show when a particular experiment was run / observation was made, etc., establishing who discovered what when. Making the lab books data open under an appropriate licence, such as a creative commons licence, also establishes how the data can be used.](#)

Feedback from research staff in the Institute of Translational Medicine

On the whole, I'm very for open research as it benefits the whole community, but some questions arise around practicality and equality of funding to comply with it.

Funding for OA research:

- Many smaller funders i.e. charities do not fund publication charges or the value of the funding is so tight that OA charges often get removed from budgets (seen as less important) so work is published under green rather than gold access or only available to those with subscriptions.

[The comment seems to be suggesting that green open access isn't acceptable, but it is – there is nothing "wrong" with green open access. Please also note the University currently has a very generous institutional fund for open access charges in cases where funders don't allow grants to be](#)

[used for this purpose, or grants have been spent up, and papers are being submitted to a fully gold open access journal.](#)

- How can UoL support gold OA in these circumstances? How can we engage smaller funders into this process? Charities = public purse so technically they should be more wanting of access!

[In the first instance researchers putting together grant bids to charities can explain the benefits of open access and put in potential costs as part of a submission, making the point that if these are not supported then the impact of the work the charity is funding could be restricted. It is also worth noting that academic libraries nationwide are working together to establish "read and publish" deals with publishers, whereby we pay upfront to cover open access charges for our authors. The numbers of these are increasing and to date include two of the university's three most-published-with publishers \(Springer and Wiley\). If the University were to adopt a requirement that researchers not sign away copyright to publishers, author accepted manuscript versions of papers could also be made available immediately on an open access basis for no additional \[cost\]\(#\).](#)

- Aware UoL has a pot of money to support some OA charges but it was recently closed/limited applications due to high demand and money running out. Will more resources be put into this and if so, will there be a priority level or will all be equal? i.e. if it is a REF year how do we ensure that not just higher impact journals get priority?

The limitations are placed on funds when they are running low and simply restrict payment to articles in those journals which are fully gold, i.e. where a payment *must* be made to cover publication. These funds have only ever, and will only ever, be allocated on a first come first served basis, with no distinction whatsoever given to the journal in which something is to be published (unless we can see it is a fraudulent or "predatory" journal). There is also no distinction on whether the requester is a senior professor or a post-doctoral researcher. It should also be pointed out that both University and REF policy is that all outputs should be open, via either route, regardless of who the author is.

- Reward strategies for OA – those with larger grants can probably afford the OA charges, hence if there is a 'reward' (monetary or otherwise) system in place, then it perpetuates money going to money cycle!

Not sure what this refers to - no-one receives any kind of financial reward for making their work open access. As previously indicated, the university has an Institutional fund to cover gold open access payments, and if gold open access is not an option (or researchers don't wish for there to be a payment for gold open access) there is nothing wrong with 'green' open access route, provided any embargo period wanted by journals complies with what is allowed by your funder.

Open lab books:

- First question is around legibility!?! And then second is duplication electronically and greater workload? Perhaps more supplementary information around methodology is needed in manuscripts rather than limiting to a few 100 words for methods.

Please see the previous response on what kind of lab books are used. This is a specific research management decision for each individual project. Information about methodology can also be included in any dataset made open at the end of a project – indeed, the only way to ensure other users can make the best use of open datasets is when they are accompanied by clear README files outlining the methods used.

- Then, protection for sensitive information, potential IP and patents? When would they be 'published'? End of a project, when patent is filed?

Wherever necessary, embargoes can be placed on when data can be made openly available.

This is a decision that should be made when planning a project and drawing up its data management plan. Open does not necessarily mean open from the start of a project, or that *everything* has to be open.

Publishing of data sets

- I am all for this, especially relating to clinical trials to allow individual patient [meta analysis](#). But question always remains - how do we anonymise patient data? Do we need to change consent processes?

You should always use a good consent form that does not tie you down to just sharing within the research group. And again, if you follow the principle 'be as open as possible and as closed as necessary' then it should be clear which data can and can't be shared.

What may be needed are improvements in the support given to researchers on how to anonymise data appropriately; in cases of smaller sets where it is next to impossible to adequately anonymise data, it would not be possible to share and there would be no expectation to share openly. However, metadata *about* the research and the data collected and analysed should be available, alongside links to any outputs. This supports impact and could lead to potential requests to collaborate or share appropriately, which in turn lead to increased citations.

12.3. UoL RSA presentation to RIC



Update from the Research Staff Association (RSA)
 2020 co-chairs: Dr Kris Subramaniam and Dr Blanca Perez Sepulveda

Agenda items:

- I. Impact of COVID-19 on the UoL research community
 - a. Short-term
 - b. Long-term
- II. Actions already taken by the University and what still needs to be done
- III. On-going work of the RSA to continue and support our researchers



I. Impact of COVID-19 on the UoL research community

Short-term challenges:

1. Job security (specific to those coming to an end of contract or where their contract ended during lockdown)
2. Furlough
3. Freezing new appointments
4. Return to work

Long-term challenges:

1. Disruption to research productivity and outputs
2. Deficits in research funding
3. Feasibility of new working practices
4. Impact on teaching
5. Effect on knowledge exchange




II. What's been done and what needs to be done

ACTIONS:

1. Job security → Honorary status (6-month duration)
2. Furlough → More clarity required (PI-specific)
3. Return to work
 - Safe commuting → University bike scheme / car parking
 - Childcare/Caring responsibilities → Flexible working hours
 - Working practices → reduced occupancy, altered work patterns, availability of hand sanitizer dispensers

Loss of research productivity: Effect on career promotion and progression

→

Need to change the METRICS

→

Local consultation needed

→

Working practices

→

Access to interlibrary loans

→

Access to office equipment

→

Weekend working / out of hours work

Communication
Dialogue (top-down and bottom-up)
Transparency



III. On-going RSA activities to support researchers (with support from the Academy)

Activities

- Virtual Lunch & Learn Seminars
- Making an Impact 2020: Hosting Café Culture events
- RSA podcast on research communities
- RSA Wellbeing events: Researcher wellbeing during a time of crisis
- Planning for a virtual National Postdoc Appreciation week (#NPAW20) in September
- Annual University of Liverpool Research Conference

Actions

- Advocacy – regular meetings with Pro-VC Anthony Hollander
- Communications – continued weekly email bulletins
- Community-building - #ResDevInYourPJs + Virtual Coffee breaks

THANK YOU



12.4. Revised Terms of Reference and Roles

If you are interested in joining the **UoL RSA Steering Committee**, you can find guidance on responsibilities related to each role here: [RSA Terms of Reference and Roles](#). All roles are designed to be undertaken with the support of other Steering Committee members, and the Academy representatives. We also welcome individuals who are interested in helping to organise events such as our annual summer wellbeing event or Research Staff conference.

12.5. Sponsorship request for conference



Research Staff Conference 2020

The University of Liverpool Research Staff Association (UoL RSA) are delighted to announce that our annual Research Staff Conference will be held on 7th December 2020. Thanks to the financial backing of sponsors, previous conferences have galvanised the research staff on themes related to personal and career development. This year's conference titled "*Don't stop me now*" will focus on themes revolving around equity, diversity and inclusivity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many inequalities within academia and higher learning specifically issues related to the balance between caring responsibilities and research outputs faced by female academics and the disproportionate representation of minorities and other protected groups within leadership structures within universities. Our conference is aimed to discuss these issues in order to bring awareness to equity, diversity and inclusivity within academia and to think of potential solutions.

Established in 2018, the UoL RSA is run by volunteer research staff for research staff. Since its inception, we have held 2 very successful Research Staff Conferences, and we want to build on this for our 2020 event. You can read reports of our activities [here](#) and [here](#). In response to COVID-19 and to increase accessibility, the conference will be an online event and will be open to all researchers at the University, across all career stages, including research-related professional services colleagues such as technicians. Therefore, we anticipate a large audience given the nature of the event.

We are seeking sponsorship for this event to cover speaker's and facilitator's fees; even a small amount of money will go a long way. The benefit of sponsorship includes a large audience of researchers. In 2019, our annual conference attracted registrations from over 100 members of staff, ranging from postdocs to Principal Investigators and Research Leaders, whom we work hard to engage with. We offer three levels of sponsorship:

Bronze £50	Silver £100 <i>Bronze benefits PLUS</i>	Gold £200 <i>Silver benefits PLUS</i>
We will use your logo on advertising conference website , conference program circulated to all 950+ research staff mailing list, promotional e-mails, and place holder slides during the event	We will specifically acknowledge your sponsorship on Twitter via @LivResearcher (>1,200 followers) and @UoL_RSA (>530 followers), including #UoLRSCConf20	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5-minute talk at the Inclusivity in Academia session, where we will acknowledge you• Be part of the Careers networking session with your own breakout room• Be part of the judging panel of the Images of Research competition

We are very grateful of your sponsorship during the 2019 RSA Conference, and we would like to use this opportunity to invite you to support us again. Please let us know by **5th November** if you would be interested in sponsoring this event. If you would like to discuss further, please get in touch with us by e-mailing ResearchStaffAssociation@liverpool.ac.uk

Thank you

Blanca Perez Sepulveda, Krishanthi Subramaniam, Michael Robinson, Filipe Braga (UoL RSA Co-Chairs) Frances Sherratt, Malaka De Silva and Katalin Ujhelyi Gomez (UoL RSA Deputy Co-Chairs)

