

PATHFINDER:

ADVENTURES IN RESEARCHER LAND

ISSUE 1 FEBRUARY 2021



**EXPLORING AND CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSE
RESEARCHER COMMUNITIES**



THE ACADEMY
Developing Liverpool

#ResDevInYourPJs

@LivResearcher @LivUniAcademy

- The University's mentoring network
- The mentoring process and the 5 Cs of mentoring
- Top tips for mentors and mentees at all career stages



6

1 – 19 June

Making an Impact 2020

Register for sessions at
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THE ACADEMY
Developing Liverpool

Research Staff Conference 2020

DON'T STOP ME NOW

7th December 9:45 AM – 4:00 PM

#UoLRConf20

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FOREWORD



Dr James Howard

Director of the Academy

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this first issue of *Pathfinder: Adventures in Researcher Land*, a dedicated publication for researchers and research related staff across the University of Liverpool.

Pathfinders forge ahead and discover the previously unknown, uncover new ideas and find routes across the wilderness that show others the way. For me, that's a concept that embodies the leadership, creativity and independent thought of the research community at Liverpool that this publication aims to explore and celebrate.

As we start 2021, with increasing optimism for a time beyond COVID 19, *Pathfinder* reflects on the last year and the many development opportunities that took place during 2020, despite the unprecedented circumstances we found ourselves in.

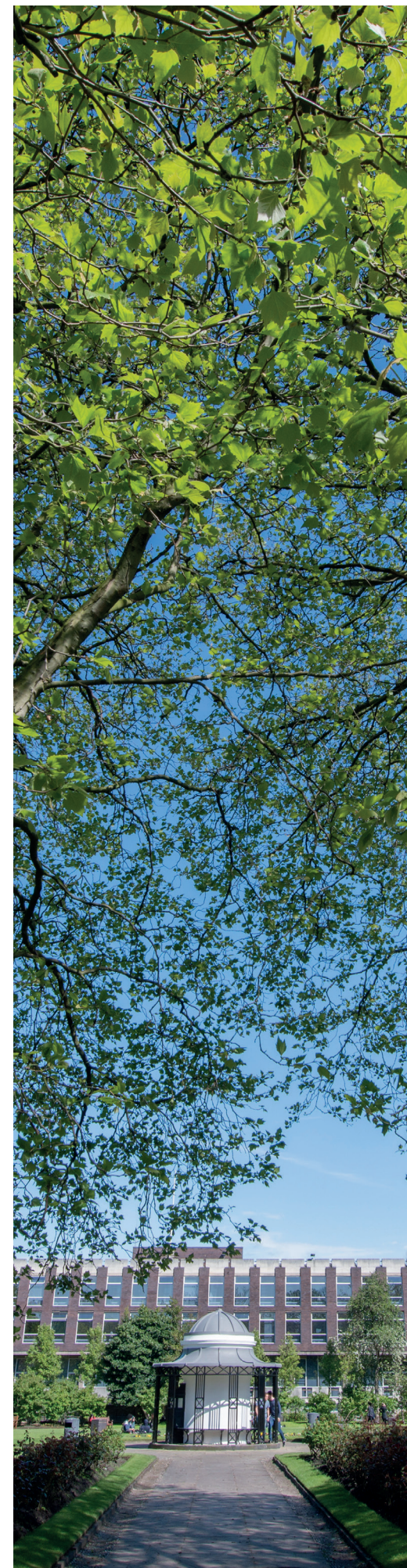
As you will read, creative approaches and collective responses were needed to maintain the connections and collaborative learning that define the researcher community at Liverpool.

Throughout, the versatility and commitment of researchers at the University has been inspiring.

We hear from some of our own researchers involved in the co-creation and delivery of highly successful local and national events, as well as positive reflections on how we can all work together to foster an inclusive and welcoming research environment. Taken together, these examples highlight that collaboration is central to maximising opportunities for personal and professional development.

I hope that you find this opening issue of *Pathfinder* interesting, and I look forward to your contributions to future issues, where we will continue to explore how, across so many areas of practice, researchers lead the way.

Until next time, I'd just like to sign off with a huge thank you, to everyone across our research and research-related communities, for the determination, hard-work and commitment with which you have faced the last few months.



Responding to a pandemic

In March 2020, the global pandemic and subsequent national lockdown, changed the working landscape for the majority of researchers across the University. Staff were no longer able to access face to face development opportunities and it was more important than ever to prioritise researcher wellbeing.

The annual Research Staff Association Summer Wellbeing Event for 2020 focused on 'Researcher Wellbeing during a time of crisis' and included sessions with a professional coach to help researchers understand what factors impact wellbeing at work and in their personal life as well as practical tools to improve wellbeing that can help identify early warning signs when it comes to managing stress.

ResDev In Your PJ's is a way of virtually reaching out to the researcher community in Liverpool and beyond to contribute to the development of practice of researchers and to support networking in the wider researcher community.

Res Dev In Your PJ's involves twitter check ins, virtual coffee get-togethers and also [bitesized videos](#) about a variety of topics.

The videos are informal short chats with colleagues and individuals from outside of the University regarding a diverse array of topics, including but not limited to, researchers' wellbeing, the UoL Research Staff Association (RSA), the Prosper project, Making an Impact, mentoring and the journey of a postdoc in obtaining a fellowship. Each video has been between 5-15mins long and all contain some great top tips.

Understanding that working from home during a pandemic is very different to a normal working from home environment, in depth thought and discussions regarding the challenges and situations that may prevent or limit full engagement to development activities were required.

Face to face events were quickly and successfully delivered entirely online, ensuring enhanced communication and engagement with participants to create a community feel and to sense of connection.

A hybrid approach is now being developed which continues to evolve and be refined. Sessions are delivered using synchronous and asynchronous material and a rich bank of online resources and recorded sessions that can be accessed in different formats and at anytime responds to the diverse needs of research and research related staff.

As a result of the pandemic, Dr Kris Subramaniam, a tenure-track fellow in the Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences research focus shifted to COVID and working to understand the T cell responses of individuals with mild infection. Here, Kris shares her experience of working as a researcher during the pandemic and her involvement in the [Research Staff Association \(RSA\)](#).

Tell us more about you.

I work on flaviviruses such as Zika, Dengue and Japanese Encephalitis. Specifically my work revolves around designing vaccines that use a strong immunological rationale and using suitable in vivo models to assess efficacy. There are limited vaccines that can tackle the high disease burden associated with flaviviruses and our team is currently working to bring a new Zika vaccine into Phase I clinical trials.

Before joining the University in 2018, I spent 6 years at LSTM working on insecticide resistance and parasite immunology. I was raised in New York City and did my training there and in Boston. I came to Liverpool in 2012 not knowing anyone and since then I have built wonderful friendships and a family. I have thoroughly enjoyed living in Liverpool and seeing it grow into the vibrant city it is today.

You have continued to carry out lab based research during the pandemic, how has that been?

After the Prime Ministers speech on the Friday evening calling for the first national lockdown I was asked to return to the lab on Monday morning as a key worker. Working through all the lockdowns has and continues to be intense. The research field has been moving at such a rapid pace that to stay on top of everything has been hard. However, I am fortunate to work with a wonderful team of researchers who are supportive and hard-working.

How has the RSA (of which you are co Chair) been able to support researchers during the pandemic?

I became RSA co-chair in March 2020 as the first lockdown was coming into effect. Initially it was difficult to rapidly move the face-to-face events that the RSA had planned to a virtual platform. It seemed like a daunting task, which I was not fully prepared for. However, I was so fortunate to have the help of the outgoing co-chairs Dr Nicola Beesley and Dr Sarah Arrowsmith along with the Deputy co-chair Dr Blanca Perez-Sepulveda who was a deputy at the time but is now an active RSA co-chair.

Collectively with the Academy we were able to offer our researcher community development and networking opportunities despite the pandemic. The fact that we could continue to provide researchers a way of staying connected despite working remotely was extremely rewarding. The feeling of community and being together in times of isolation is essential. I'm proud that the RSA could support our researchers and keep the feeling of togetherness alive although virtually.

You were involved in the organisation of the Research staff conference in particular the panel session (See pg 11), why was it important to have this sessions?

As a non-white woman I have been on the receiving end of racists and derogatory comments which have been painful. In most sectors including academia, non-white women are a minority population whether that is in senior positions or in management roles. In academia there is dearth of fellows, lecturers and professors that are in the BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) category and as we move forward, this should not be the case.



Dr Kris Subramaniam

Numerous studies have found that diverse and inclusive working groups produce better and more innovative results. As a result, it was important that in a year where we see the gendered impacts that COVID has had on our female colleagues and those with caring responsibilities plus the power of the BLM movement, our research staff conference should focus on bringing issues of equity, diversity and inclusivity to the forefront. We need to talk about the problems and face our own unconscious biases if we are to solve these issues and advance.

What have you learnt with regards to being a researcher during the pandemic?

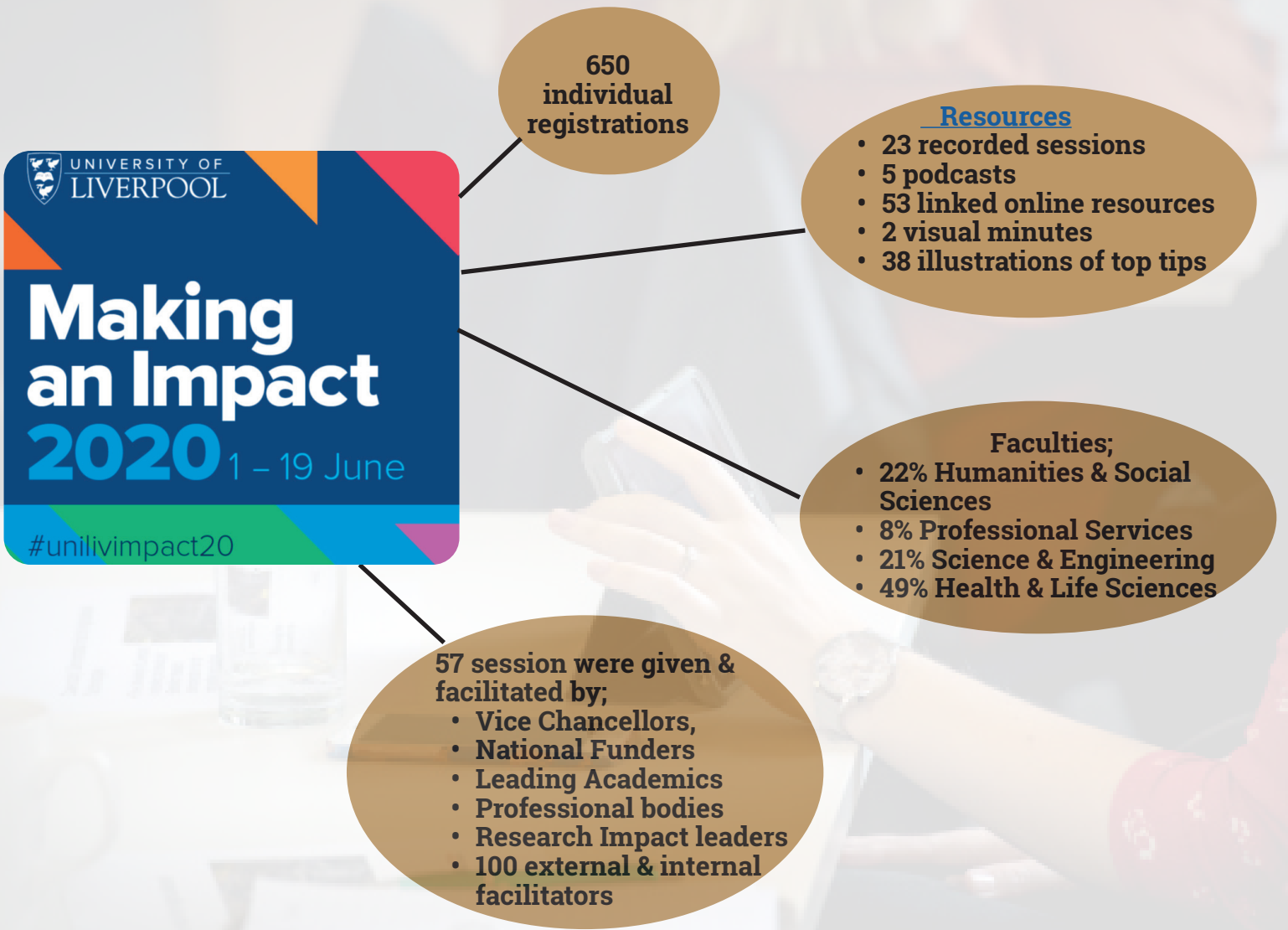
The most important thing I will take from this pandemic is the resilience of the human spirit. I have watched researchers who have worked tirelessly during the pandemic despite their own internal struggles. I have seen researchers who have taken on full workloads despite caring responsibilities and other home issues. I have witnessed teaching staff take full face-to-face curriculums and transition them to virtual learning in weeks. The strength and fortitude to continue despite all the negatives associated with COVID gives me hope and inspires me to push forward.

“The most important thing I will take from this pandemic is the resilience of the human spirit”

Making an Impact 2020

The Making an Impact series was initially developed in 2018 and 2019 to provide development activities focused around the Industrial strategy priorities. In 2020, once more in support of the University’s Vision to be “globally recognised in all our research and impact activities”, The Academy partnered with colleagues from Research, Partnerships & Innovation (RPI) to design and deliver Making an Impact 2020.

In response to COVID-19, the Academy committed to delivering Making an Impact 2020 as an entirely online event. Acknowledging and taking into consideration that the rapid changes in the professional landscape brought with it a state of isolation for many it was more important than ever to develop a community feeling regarding the event, to enable researchers to stay connected and develop their practice during this time of uncertainty.



Testimonials

“It is great to have access to a flexible, less formal, but genuine investment in my development, that doesn’t have to be linked to an annual review but depends upon my needs of the day”.

“Although we are all eternally busy, these sessions are really helpful for promoting moments to pause and reflect on where we, as individuals, are up to and where future possibilities lie but essentially, how to turn possibilities into realities”.

“The Making an Impact sessions have allowed me to learn new skills and engage with the vast spectrum of fascinating research and other activity that goes on at the University”.

“Making an Impact did ‘make an impact’ and was the perfect one-stop shop for all my research needs”

“Making an impact is a really useful series of event that allows researchers to take their allocated professional development time and work on different aspects of their career. What I particularly like is that it is not based on the assumption that every researcher wants to stay in academia and gives you opportunity to reflect on skills and interests outside and beyond your current role”.

“Making an Impact is an excellent opportunity to engage with other teams/departments across the wider University and to find out more about their current practice/research area. The sessions are always engaging with a dynamic approach to sharing knowledge and developing ideas for the future”.

“The current programme was absolutely brilliant. I would consider doing the Making an Impact online for 2021. It made it very inclusive for people living far or with caring responsibilities, who thanks to the online platform, were able to attend the workshops”.

National Postdoc Appreciation Week (NPAW) 2020



National Postdoc Appreciation Week, established in 2009, takes place annually on the third week of September to celebrate the significant contributions researchers make to delivering and progressing research excellence.

In 2020, the University of Liverpool were involved in organising both national and local events which involved 9 sessions attended by 355 individuals from across 30 Institutions across the UK (including 4 individuals from 4 different institutions abroad).

The week of events began with a fast paced and motivating introductory workshop, about how to lead more contented, fulfilling and satisfying lives and a celebratory session on how great postdocs are, sharing tips on identifying strengths and communicating which included a fun live performance by Emer Maguire (International Award winning science communicator) of a song about postdoc lives.

A career focussed panel discussion with speakers from UoL Prosper Team as well as, Prof Fiona Watt,

Executive chair from the MRC, Rachel Cox from Vitae, Dr Sarah Staniland, a reader from University of Sheffield and Dr Bethan Hughes from the Innovations team at Wellcome. The session provided information regarding available resources and opportunities to help researchers explore their career, and insights to navigating various career options.

Dr James Lea, Chair of the University of Liverpool LGBTQ+ Network lead a panel session on being LGBTQ+ in academia, this session facilitated a frank and open discussion on some of the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community both at Liverpool and nationally. A recording of this session can be found [here](#).

Later in the week, 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 and gave an insight into the different roles inside the editorial office of academic journals and the

skills required for editorial positions posted by commercial and society publishers. A recording of this session can be found [here](#).

Other sessions included a workshop on how to plan for and get the most out of your Professional Development Review and the Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA), which introduced the use of responsible metrics in research assessment and how to embed DORA recommendations in your research.

The Prosper team presented a special event for University of Liverpool postdocs which celebrated the unique skills and attributes of a postdoc and how to identify your own transferable skills using tools from the Prosper career development [portal](#).

The week ended with a giant coffee zoom attended by over 30 researchers from 12 different organisations. A lovely informal way to round off a busy week of activities. Roll on NPAW 2021 :)



During NPAW2020 the University of Liverpool worked in partnership with 17 other Universities to offer a series of development, recognition and networking opportunities.

This involved working very closely impartially with Dr Joan Chang, a postdoc at the University of Manchester and Chair of the first UK and Republic of Ireland-wide National Postdoc Appreciation Week organising committee.

NPAW2020 was also the first event Dr Michael Robinson, co Chair of the RSA and was involved in organising.

Joan and Michael provide some insights and highlights from their involvement with NPAW2020.



Dr Joan Chang

Tell us more about yourself.

I studied Biochemistry at Imperial College London, and received my PhD from the Institute of Cancer Research in 2013. I am currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Manchester. I believe strongly in changing the traditional views on “academia”, broadening career horizons for Postdocs, and promoting wellbeing for scientists in general.

Why did you get involved in organising events for NPAW?

I was the lead in organising the PAW event at University of Manchester, and when lockdown occurred it became clear that events designed for Postdocs and researchers were being cancelled. Not good. However, on the flip side, as everything moved online, this presented a unique opportunity

for British and Irish universities to come together, pool resources, and create an online event with celebrated speakers to appreciate postdocs.

What are your tips when organising a national event?

Finding people to support and help organising is the first step. The Researcher Development team at UoM, emailed networks of researcher developers, including the N8 Partnership, the responses were incredibly positive.

Make sure you utilise your network and that people feel that their opinions are heard and valued.

There will be setbacks, don't feel defeated, it's all part of the process and you will always learn something from them.

Finally make sure you acknowledge your team, credit their efforts, and appreciate them on a more personal level – it takes a team to make something big/important work, it's never just one single person.



Dr Michael Robinson

Tell us more about yourself.

I am an Early Career Researcher at the History Department funded by the Leverhulme Trust. My research centres on the experiences of disabled First World War veterans who returned to Britain, Australia, and Canada. I started my PhD at the UoL's Institute of Irish Studies in 2012 and Liverpool hasn't been able to get rid of me ever since!

Why did you want to get involved in the RSA?

As I am the sole researcher on my own individual project, in a department with not that many postdocs and ECRs, the RSA provided a forum to meet up with people at a similar career stage.

When I was asked to become a Co-Chair for the RSA then I was glad of the opportunity to promote the benefits of meeting up and creating a space for researchers from across the University.

How do you think events like this NPAW support postdocs?

2020 offered an integral opportunity to support post-docs as so many academic researchers are working from home or working in more isolated environments in the aftermath of Covid-19.

NPAW offered an opportunity to touch bases with people experiencing similar interruptions to their daily work lives and we were able to offer one another support and advice during formal, personal development or networking events held during the week.

What were your highlights from the week?

The event that most stood out for me was the opening session by Tallant Jones who provided an interactive session using her 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 event was a positive and upbeat start to the week providing an innovate and holistic approach to life as a researcher. Its focus on personal wellbeing was particularly helpful during the time of coronavirus.

“It takes a team to make something big/important work, it's never just one single person.”



The Research staff conference is an annual event organised by the Research Staff Association in collaboration with the Academy.

The 2020 conference took place on the 7th December and was themed “Don’t Stop Me Now” with a focus on Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity.

The conference was held entirely online, with participants having the option to attend all sessions or just one or two depending on interest and availability. There were 138 individual registrations from 20 different Universities.

The keynote session was given by Prof Anthony Hollander (Pro-Vice -Chancellor for Research and Impact) and provided an update on the progress of the Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE) project and also the launch of the recruitment phase for Prosper’s first postdoc career development cohort.

A panel discussion chaired by Prof Georgina Enfield (APVC for Research & Impact in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences) on Inclusivity in Academia generated a rich and honest conversation through the personal and professional experiences of the panel and also the questions asked by the participants on how to foster an inclusive research environment. (Information on the panellists can be found on page 12).

The Prosper team facilitated an interactive session on democratising access entitled; I want to break free... from barriers to career development

Participants were able to share and discuss barriers to participating in development activities they had encountered and to reflect on what democratising access meant to them, their identity and how they currently engage with career development.

The networking session at the end of the day also provided the space for informal networking with colleagues from across the University’s Faculties.

The keynote and panel discussion were both recorded and can be accessed [here](#).

Images of Research

As part of the 1 day conference, all research staff at the University of Liverpool were invited to submit an image of their research along with a brief description of their project and how coronavirus has changed the way their were able to work.

It was a great way to showcase some of the many amazing research projects that are carried out at Liverpool as well as a behind the scenes look at life as a researcher during covid, whether that be a desk in the kitchen or socially distance lab!

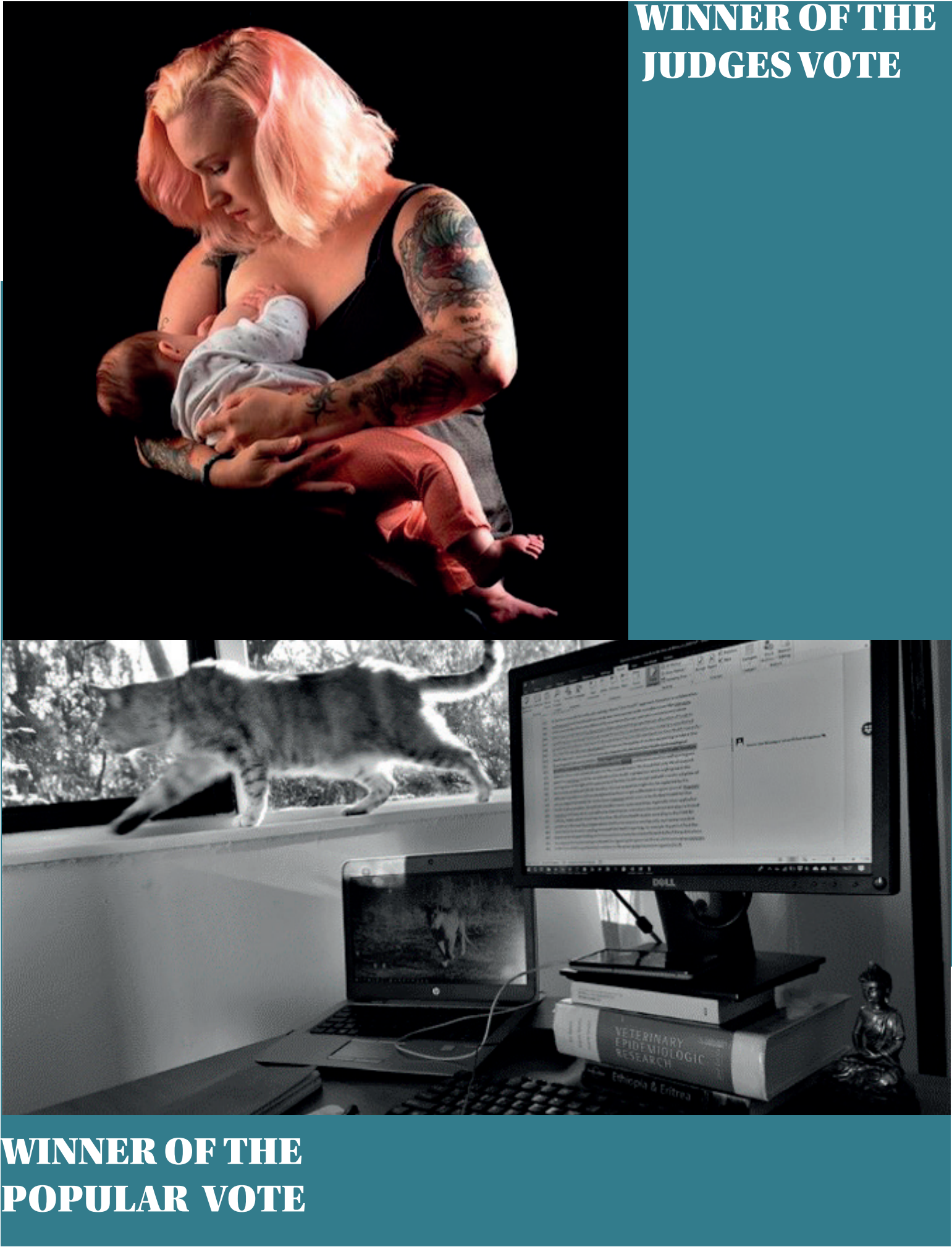
A panel of judges, made up of UoL Pro vice chancellor of Research and Impact Prof Anthony Hollander, made the director the Academy Dr James Howard and two of the co Chairs of the RSA, Dr Blanca Perez Sepulveda and Dr Michael Robinson chose one of the winning images as well as shortlisting entries that were open to a public vote.

The response to the competition was fantastic with 12 engaging and high quality entries illustrating research across a wide range of disciplines and showcased the diversity and importance of research conducted throughout the University. The competition was also well received by those attending the conference with many votes being cast and shared on twitter.

The judges winning image was entitled “Using art to change the conversation about breastfeeding” submitted by Dr Vicky Fallon from the Department of Psychology (see page 11)

The winner of the popular vote was “Entitled work from home” by Dr Lisa Cavalerie from the Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Diseases (see page 11)

The abstracts for the winning images and all of the other images can be viewed [here](#)



WINNER OF THE JUDGES VOTE

WINNER OF THE POPULAR VOTE



“What is one key action that we as individuals can do to make a difference to enable the creation of an inclusive and welcoming research environment?”

“To create an inclusive and welcoming research environment we need to more honest about our biases and prejudices; acknowledge our privileges and the role this might have played in creating a non-inclusive research environment. After which, there is a need to commit personally and professionally to learning and transforming our mindset and the “old ways” i.e. how things used to be and have always been”.



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.



“As individuals it is important for us to recognise our role in addressing and negating the inequities in our own work or study environment, to ensure an inclusive atmosphere where everyone can bring their whole true authentic selves into their interactions.”

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

“Inclusion will not happen by accident or osmosis; it must be intentional and systematic. We can all influence inclusion and participation in our environments. Every time you scan a participant list or look about you to see who is in the meeting, make a point of asking yourself, “Who is missing?” Then, take a step further; make a point of checking that the missing women, people of colour or people of alternative sexuality were actually ever invited”.



Dr Angela Obasi- Senior Clinical Lecturer at Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.



“I don’t think there is a silver bullet for creating an inclusive research environment, but also acknowledge that people have to prioritize their actions. For me, the single most important action is to put constant pressure on senior leadership and those with decision making power in your institution to put inclusion as an institutional priority with (budget and value placed on it!). This can happen at all levels, but is particularly important from those that interface with senior leadership.”

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

“It doesn’t need to be big things, small things can make you feel part of a group. Not assuming the gender of a partner (or that the person wants a partner), taking care of a persons pronouns, sharing articles of diverse people to your group/department. Just trying to be inclusive. Most people will not get upset if you don’t know something/get something wrong. But feeling erased really does impact moral which, in such a busy field like STEM research, probably will affect the researchers output.”

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



Biographies

Dr Emmanuel Adukwu - is passionate about research to address issues in antimicrobial research, development and evaluation of antimicrobial compounds, clinical transport systems and diseases of global health importance particularly in Africa.

He works closely with faculty colleagues to address issues of attainment, retention and student success for BAME students as well as championing the need for staff diversity in the applied sciences and STEM. He is also one of the coordinators of the BME forum and the creator/co-coordinator of the Africa Staff Network at UWE.

Dr Shaima Hassan - is currently involved in the Partner priority programme (PPP) as a facilitator and evaluator for both PPP and Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHCR) internal evaluation.

Her research interest centres around the factors that influence individuals’ experiences, decision-making and more specifically health seeking behaviours and health inequalities. Her masters and PhD research focused on religion, exploring its impact on individual perceptions of health/ wellbeing and experiences.

Dr Angela Obasi- completed her medical training at the Kings College Hospital in London and a Masters in Social Anthropology at University College London, Angela continued her training in Tropical Medicine, HIV and Genito-urinary Medicine at UCL and the Hospital for Tropical Diseases before securing an MRC Training Fellowship in Clinical Epidemiology.

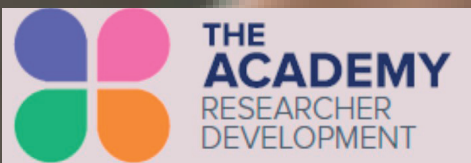
Angela’s PhD focused on the Epidemiology of Herpes Simplex and her leadership of the design and implementation of the MemakwaVijana(MkV) adolescent sexual health intervention in Tanzania, where she lived for four years. Angela is the author of Equity in excellence or just another tax on Black skin?

Dr Diego Baptista- works between the Policy and Advocacy team and the Diversity and Inclusion team at Wellcome Trust. He is making sure our efforts to Reimagine Research are inclusive in how they are developed and implemented. He has previously held a role at Wellcome in the Open Research team and holds a PhD in Biochemistry and Biophysics from Harvard University.

Dr Clara Barker manages the Centre for Applied Superconductivity, in the materials department at Oxford University. Her main areas of research have been transparent conductive oxides, hardness coatings and, currently, high temperature superconductors.

Clara is the vice chair of the LGBT+ advisory group at Oxford University, and in 2018 won the first diversity role model award from the University. Clara vocally campaigns for trans rights, reminding people that the fight for LGBTI+ equality is not yet won.

Clara is the recipient of the Points of Light Award from the UK Prime Minister in 2017, has written for the Huffington Post and delivered several talks about LGBT+ issues, including a TEDx talk about the importance of creating diversity in academia.



The Academy is committed to supporting the University's ambition to create a "borderless research community," in which every researcher can access high-quality development.

If you would like to contact us about anything mentioned in Pathfinder, have a contribution or idea for future newsletters or if you simply want to get involved with this work, please email us at:

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or find us on twitter at:
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and [@LivResearcher](https://twitter.com/LivResearcher).