

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT– February 2021

“LSE recognises the importance of personal and career development for Research Staff at all stages of their career. Through a number of concrete mechanisms, such as Career Development Reviews, we support and encourage researchers to pro-actively engage in their personal, career and lifelong development”

- LSE Research Staff Policy Statement (2016)

1. Summary

LSE achieved the HR Excellence in Research award in 2010. We are committed to making significant efforts to identify and address the needs of our researchers across the School, taking a partnered approach with our research staff community. This community is approximately 250 “research-only” staff within the School, however there are many academic staff who also focus on research as well as their teaching.

2020 was a challenging year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and our efforts have been focused on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all colleagues across the School, including researchers. We will continue with this focus as well as ensuring that we are providing support to help researchers develop their careers.

The work identified in our Action Plan will further evolve in the coming months based on the LSE 2030 strategic plan and the outcomes of surveys that have been conducted in late 2020 for which we now have the findings (the School’s Pulse survey, the HR Organisational Learning survey and the findings from surveys conducted through our Research Staff Association). We will be building next steps from these into our Action Plan as well as gathering data from the sector (e.g. Vitae’s findings on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on researchers in universities and research institutes).

This report is accompanied by a 2020-22 action plan (within the new template) and an updated 2019-21 plan showing progress and outcomes, as well as where actions have been moved to 2020-22.

2. Engagement with our research staff community

We have good links with our research staff community through a wide range of mechanisms:

Research and Policy Staff Committee (RPSC): This committee has oversight of the Action Plan. Research-only staff membership has been extended by one salaried research staff member, making a total of four committee members who are full time research staff and one of these roles is specifically allocated to an early career research or policy staff member. The membership also includes the Chair of the Research Staff Association who we engage with in the development of the agenda, and consultation on key areas e.g. flexible/agile working, safe return to campus following Covid-19 etc. A research staff member from UCU is also on the committee. Research-active staff such as Principal Investigators and Centre Directors are also on the committee providing insights and contributing to the work and a focus group of researchers has also been established to provide feedback on particular agenda items e.g. the School’s Race Equity Framework.

Research Committee: This committee also includes one research-only member of staff, as well as colleagues from across the School that are actively involved in research.

Town Hall meetings: Research staff are invited to attend Town Hall meetings held by The Director with active input from the Pro-Director Research, currently held virtually for updates on key School initiatives e.g. updates regarding Covid-19 and planning for a return to campus.

Research Staff Association (RSA): A group established in 2012 by research staff members to create a greater sense of community amongst research staff colleagues at the LSE, the RSA also enables research staff to connect and discuss a range of issues and communicate their views back to the School. The Head of Organisational Learning (HR) attends meetings annually to provide updates and get feedback.

Surveys: We also undertake a range of surveys to touch base with our research staff community and obtain feedback – please see the following section for further details.

3. Internal review process and outcomes

We have obtained feedback about progress and other issues from research staff through the following channels:

Research and Policy Staff Committee (RPSC):

The membership is set up to ensure that stakeholders involved in providing support to research staff (e.g. those involved in research staff development) are able to provide and get feedback on various topics outlined in the Action Plan, or proposed for inclusion. The School leadership takes research staff issues as a top priority, and therefore the committee membership also includes the Pro-Director Faculty Development, the Pro Director Research and the Vice Chair of the Appointments Committee (VCAC, who is also Chair of the committee). Smaller working groups including research staff are also drawn from the Committee to explore key issues faced by research staff. These working groups then make proposals and recommendations to the Committee about how to move areas forward, for example our working group on the development of the new action plan (see below).

Annual data review: The RPSC receives research staff data profiles on an annual basis, including diversity and equality information. The data sets are reviewed and recommendations are made as needed, helping to shape the committee's plan of work.

Sub-group for development of new Concordat Action Plan: A subgroup of the RPSC, including research staff was set up to review the Action Plan and make recommendations for changes. The new action plan is based on these recommendations.

Pulse survey: The School has undertaken a Pulse survey to obtain feedback on staff wellbeing and future ways of working. Themes received by the RPSC were as follows:

- 62% of research staff that responded have enjoyed working remotely. Furthermore, 81% noted that 'less commuting' was one of the top three positive experiences during this time, followed by 'saving money' (63%) and 'spending time with family/friends' (53%).
- the top three negative experiences were 'impact of COVID on friends/family' (59%), followed by 'no separation work/life' (52%) and 'increased screen time' (48%)
- that 60% of research staff that responded would like to work remotely more frequently and 46% would like to work more flexible hours.

Further work is being undertaken across the School via focus groups to explore future ways of working. The Committee will discuss any next steps to be included within the Concordat Action Plan at the Summer Term 2021 meeting.

Research Staff Association Survey: the School's Research Staff Association (RSA) has also explored the Covid-related issues regarding the return to work. Themes were as follows:

- concerns around care responsibilities for older family members
- concerns around job security
- most would consider appropriate redeployment opportunities
- lockdown had affected undertaking fieldwork
- data sets largely unaffected
- creative ideas being generated during this time
- preference for working from home

Urgent areas have already been explored by the School and there will be further discussions at the Summer Term 2021 RPSC meeting. Any next steps will be included within the Concordat Action Plan.

HR Organisational Learning Survey: An annual survey is conducted to obtain feedback on the training and development needs of research staff for the forthcoming academic year. In the most recent survey conducted in November 2020, the survey now also includes a section to obtain feedback on the responsibilities of three of the four main stakeholder groups (institutions, managers and researchers) from the revised Concordat. The main learning and development that respondents required, based on the domains from the RDF, were influence and leadership, communication methods and publication. The training programme has been updated to ensure that these areas are covered. The responses also showed that the majority of staff value the CDR process and many find mentoring helpful. There is a lower than expected response to research staff feeling familiar with the Concordat, and there are actions in the revised action plan to address this.

Review of research staff Career Development Review (CDR) forms: All research staff CDRs are read every year by the VCAC and the Pro Director Faculty Development and any themes raised in research staff CDRs are fed back to the RPSC and other relevant committees and used to inform next steps and actions.

In light of Covid-19, the Pro-Director Faculty Development and the Vice-Chair of the Appointment Committee (VCAC) have been reviewing any references to the pandemic within CDR forms. The feedback obtained is helping to shape any additional career development support that might be required by research staff, with a view to include any next steps within the Concordat Action Plan.

4. Key highlights from the last two years (including robust metrics):

Outlined below are some of the key areas of progress that have been achieved. These should be read in the context of ongoing institutional changes and developments:

Covid-19 researcher support: In advance of the clarification of the applicability of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's furlough scheme to UKRI-funded and other researchers, the School assessed the circumstances of every researcher and put in place institution-funded arrangements to extend the contracts of those at risk of imminent redundancy. The School's Covid-19 mitigation plans have sought to safeguard the lives and the careers of researchers by ensuring that research can continue in a safe environment as far as is possible, compatible with Government guidelines.

Metrics: 3 applications to the contract-extension fund, of which 3 were approved.

Dedicated web area for Research Staff Development: A web space is now being established to communicate development opportunities for research staff. The area will be further developed in the coming year with additional content e.g. induction, external events.

Metrics: web area is newly established, key metrics will include increasing the number of web visitors.

Regular newsletter for research staff: An email circulation list is being established for research staff and newsletters will be launched in 2021. The learning and development providers in the School also send out an email to all research staff at the beginning of each term highlighting development opportunities coming up during that term.

Metrics: newsletter will be established, with the aim to get at least 50% of salaried research staff signed up to the newsletter, and an engagement rate (opens and clicks) of at least 35%.

Virtual sessions for the Researcher Development Programme: The core programme has now been moved online to accommodate flexible/agile working during the pandemic, ensuring that research staff continue to have access to development opportunities. These include key areas from the RDF requested by staff including Leadership, Publication and presentation. Specific sessions have also been provided for mentors and new Principal Investigators.

Metrics: Attendance rates are 80%

Bridging Fund: The School's Bridging Fund which can help cover funding gaps in research staff contracts has been implemented since August 2020.

Metrics: Since implementation in August 2020 there have been no applications, however the fund will continue to be publicised through the LSE website.

Finalisation of the Intellectual Property Policy: This has now been approved and includes research staff.

6. Forward looking broad strategy

- By December 2021 undertake a review of the current development offerings to researchers in a post-Covid environment.
- By July 2021, strengthen the offering to European researchers, bearing in mind immigration barriers.
- By March 2021, improve communications to European researchers on the benefits of coming to the UK and LSE.
- By March 2021, ensure that we invest further in virtual support offerings centred around mental health and wellbeing, such as counselling, mentoring and good health.
- By September 2021, have policies and practices to enable researchers to work flexibly including homeworking in a post-Covid world.
- By September 2021, having policies and practices to enable researchers to undertake fieldwork safely in a post-Covid world.