

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT– JANUARY 2023

1. Summary

LSE initially achieved the HR Excellence in Research award in 2010 and since then have remained committed to ensuring the needs of our researchers across the School are met. We take a partnership approach with our research staff community to co-create an action plan. 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 teaching.

The past few years continue to present challenges due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. We place high regard on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all colleagues across the School, while ensuring that we are providing support to help researchers develop their careers.

As with all Action plans, we see our plan as a living document- so it is frequently reviewed and updated. It has been aligned to the School’s LSE 2030 Strategic plan. It draws on a range of sources, including the School’s Pulse survey, the HR Organisational Learning survey, findings from surveys conducted through our Research Staff Association Discussion at the Research and Policy Staff Committee and data from the sector (e.g., Vitae’s findings on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on researchers in universities and research institutes).

2. Engagement with our research staff community

The School maintains excellent links with our research staff community through a range of mechanisms. We use these as a way of having an ongoing conversation with the Research staff community. This helps us shape the action plan. These engagement mechanisms include:

Research and Policy Staff Committee (RPSC): This committee has oversight of the Action Plan. The Committee includes four full time research staff and one of these roles is specifically allocated to an early career researcher 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 and a research staff member from UCU. Research-active staff such as Principal Investigators and Centre Directors are also on the committee providing insights and contributing to the work.

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

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 be in contact with our research staff community and obtain feedback – please see the following section for further details.

Early Career Researchers Network: This newly set up network will be an important, key way of engaging with the research community as we move forward. More about this network can be found in the Key highlights section of the report.

3. Internal review process

To help us review progress we regularly get feedback from research staff through the following channels:

Research and Policy Staff Committee (RPSC):

As outlined earlier, the membership is set up to ensure that stakeholders involved in providing support to research staff (e.g., those involved in research staff development) can provide and get feedback on diverse 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 action plan is based on these recommendations.

Pulse survey: The School undertakes an annual Pulse survey to obtain feedback on staff wellbeing and future ways of working.

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 2021 and 2022, the survey was also used to explore feedback on the responsibilities of three of the four main stakeholder groups (institutions, managers, and researchers) from the revised Concordat. The survey was also used to explore the main learning and development that respondents required, based on the domains from the RDF. These were influence and leadership, management and supervision and publication. The training programme is updated to ensure that these areas are covered. The responses also showed that most staff value the CDR process, and many find mentoring helpful. The response to research staff feeling familiar with the Concordat improved in 2022, however, is still lower than we would like. 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.

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 progress and achievements from the last two years

We have identified below some of the key areas of progress that have been achieved. These should be read in the context of ongoing institutional changes and developments. We have presented these broadly by stakeholder impact;

The Institution:

Research Staff Data: to support the communication strategy for Research Staff, a new mechanism of updating Research Staff email address lists has been instigated. This allows all providers of learning and development opportunities to have updated email groups on an ongoing basis. Alongside this, the process for capturing data on turnover, ethnicity, and contribution pay has been reviewed and improved.

Future Ways of Working: The Future Ways of Working project was created to bring together people, technology, and space to help Staff at LSE thrive within their roles - whether they are working on campus or remotely. The aims of the programme were to:

- Enable a more inclusive working environment through our Blended Working framework
- Ensure employee work/life balance and staff satisfaction levels from staff surveys is maintained and improved
- Increase our ability to collaborate through new ways of working, enabling office design and technology
- Enhance our ability to recruit talent and improve staff retention
- Save 154 tonnes of carbon emissions per year, via our Digital Smart LSE plan
- Make significant savings in lease each year to reinvest in our community.

As part of this, the School recognises that there may be some circumstances where staff may wish to be based abroad for personal reasons and either continue their work from abroad or to live abroad and commute to the UK for their work. Whilst it is not possible for faculty to be based permanently abroad and work at LSE, the School's Overseas Working Policy and the School's Cross Border Working Policy sets out the School's position and its approach to considering such requests. The policies also set out the tax and legal implications that faculty will need to consider before making a request.

Managers of Researchers:

Ethics of Research collaboration project/Authorship: Following initial discussions at the Research and Policy Staff Committee in late 2019, the Research Committee set up an informal working group to consider issues that sometimes arise within collaborative research, particularly regarding Principal Investigators' responsibilities towards early career researchers.

Guidance has been drafted on a key aspect of collaborative research, namely co-authorship and incorporates feedback from colleagues across LSE, including the Research Ethics Committee.

Researchers:

Early Career Researchers Network: the LSE has launched an Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network. Open to all staff who identify as early-career with regards to their research and are typically within 10 years of their PhD award date. The Network encourages LSE Fellows, and Policy and Research Staff as well as Faculty to join.

The ECR Network aims to:

- Build a community for peer-to-peer learning, support, and interaction
- Empower ECRs to co-develop training and events at LSE
- Contribute to the Researcher Development Concordat and amplify ECR voices and representation

Knowledge Exchange Initiatives: The School has launched a series of initiatives around knowledge exchange. These have included:

- KEI lunch and learn training sessions to building skills involved in effective knowledge exchange
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- LSE Research Showcase series - to give researchers the opportunity to share their work with the LSE community
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Research Information Sessions (RISe) - A new revised programme that provides a range of workshops, seminars and panels that support staff in realising their research development goals. The programme covers a broad range of topics including research funding, grant writing, and developing a grant leadership profile.

A Dedicated web area for Research Staff Development: A web space has been launched which pulls together all development opportunities for research staff into one place. The area will be further developed in the coming years with additional content e.g., induction, external events.

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

5. Strategic objectives and future implementation

We continue to align all our activity to the LSE Strategy 2030, 2 of the 3 specifically:

- Priority 2: Research for the World, which sets out our intention to broaden our real-world impact by forming a new generation of thought leaders, advocating for the value of the social sciences, and becoming the global convenor of influential debate on critical issues
- Priority 3: Developing LSE for Everyone; establishing LSE as a strong community by supporting staff, recognising, and developing talent, ensuring we can attract and retain the best academics, researchers, and professional service staff by embedding equity, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability across all our processes and procedures.

Some of the key activities we will undertake next include:

- The launch of a new regular newsletter for research staff: featuring learning and development opportunities, hints, tips, and features
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- The Design and launch of a new Leadership and Management programme for Research staff leaders and Managers
- Active consultation with the Early Career Researchers network to enable co-design of activity
- A Researcher Conference and a series of networking events, to be run in conjunction with the ECR network
- The design and launch of new Induction programme specifically for Research Staff
- A co-ordinate series of activity to raise awareness of IP Policy including workshops and publicity
- Design and delivery of a sessions and tools to raise awareness of the RDF and its use as a Career Development tool
- Raising awareness of the Concordat action plan through engagement with the ECR network, publicity in newsletters and workshop events.

Our Research Staff Policy statement sets out that we recognise the importance of personal and career development for Research Staff at all stages of their career. Through several concrete mechanisms, such as Career Development Reviews, we support and encourage researchers to pro-actively engage in their personal, career and lifelong development

6. Conclusions

The School remains as committed as ever to ensuring the needs of our researchers across the School are met. Despite the challenges presented over the last few years, much has been achieved. More work is still needed however and in partnership with our research staff community we are confident that we have a robust action plan to help us achieve even more over the next few years.

Research and Policy Staff Committee, London School of Economics & Political Science, January 2023