

# University of Leeds

## Research Culture Awards 2021-22

### Application Form

Please email nominations/self-nominations using this form to Holly Ingram  
[H.L.Ingram@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:H.L.Ingram@leeds.ac.uk) by Wednesday June 1<sup>st</sup>, 5pm

#### Information section

This section covers information about the lead applicant and the team as well as the chosen category of award. Expand the sections as necessary. The maximum number of people in a team is set to 10 for event planning and personal prize budgeting purposes.

1. Select the nomination type

- Self-nomination

2. Lead applicant and team

Provide details about the applicant and the team (including external partners if applicable), and their contribution to the initiative. The lead applicant will be the contact person for the management of the award application.

Lead applicant name: Andrew Lee

Lead applicant contributor role: Team Leader

Lead applicant Service or School / Faculty: FEPS faculty services

Lead applicant role/post: Bragg Centre Manager

Lead applicant career stage: Professional

Team member name (include lead applicant)	Contributor role	School/Service/external organisation + role/post	If member deserves special mention, state reason (optional)
Andrew Lee	Team Leader	FEPs Faculty Services, Bragg Centre Manager	
Lucy Leonard	Team Member	Research and Innovation, Bragg Centre †	
Daniel Paterson	Team Member	Research and Innovation, Bragg Centre	
Helen Walters	Team Member	FEPs Faculty Services, Bragg Centre	

Expand table as necessary; the upper limit for a team is 10 members.

3. Select the award category that best fits the research culture activity:

- A collegiate and supportive environment

## Case for Award

### 1. Title

Let's Bragg about it! How the Bragg Centre forged an engaged community when the world stayed apart.

### 2. Summary

The Bragg Centre team led the way within the University to deliver an expansive events programme despite the challenging and ever-changing environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centre immediately recognised the critical importance of keeping its community connected to the benefit of its productivity and personal wellbeing throughout the restrictions. The team acted dynamically to provide bespoke solutions, being the first at every step to deliver major virtual, hybrid and in-person events within the University. The team's best practice has been widely appreciated across the University, and it has been asked to help other institutes/centres/schools/services to support collaboration and wellbeing within their respective communities.

### 3. Why?

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant disruption to research activity, collaboration, and networking within the Bragg Centre community. Our community comprises ~300 members from 16 schools across a broad range of materials science and engineering. This is a difficult community to bring together under normal circumstances, let alone when consideration had to be given to social distancing and lock-down restrictions. The team were quick to recognise the long-term detrimental implications that extended isolation would have upon our community's ability to collaborate, in particular noting the mental health impacts upon our student membership (circa 100 students), and decided to act.

### 4. What?

Where the majority of engagements had ceased or were postponed by others, the Bragg team pressed hard to deliver consistent and continuous engagement with the community to stimulate them intellectually and support their wellbeing. We recognised quickly that both the consistency and delivery method are critically important to breeding community engagement and the team were not content delivering dry and uni-directional engagements via Zoom/Teams and sought to challenge this where safe to do so. Owing to our pro-active approach, the Centre has actually expanded our events programmes through the pandemic. It now offers three major annual events (the Bragg Exchange, the Bragg Centre PhD Colloquium and the Bragg Centre Town Hall Meeting), a monthly broad-remit lunchtime series (Lunch@Bragg), an ad hoc pitch-based series (Collaborate), and a monthly PGR-led forum. This is up from a single annual event and several ad hoc events prior to the pandemic.

### 5. How?

The team worked hard to develop bespoke event solutions, responding to the COVID restrictions at the time and coordinating the University's Events teams and H&S Teams to deliver events safely. It was the Teams vision and leadership that allowed the Bragg Centre to deliver the first major virtual events, the first major hybrid events and when the time was right to do so, the first major in-person conference that the University had held in two years.

Where others were delivering zoom calls, the Bragg Centre developed an entire virtual conference environment based on Sharepoint, and employed innovations such as pre-recorded video posters and avatar based spatial video networking platforms to deliver a full conference experience early on in the COVID-19 lockdowns (January 2020). As restrictions eased, the team pushed hard to deliver a socially distanced hybrid PhD Colloquium (June 2021) on campus and included talks from academic mental health advocates, alongside research talks, to stimulate discussion amongst our isolated PhD community. Moreover, the team developed innovative logistical solutions, employed virtual voting and remote Q&A approaches to enable the first major in-person conference – the Bragg Exchange – to be delivered on campus. The latter even featured a full livestream to Youtube to increase the

accessible legacy of the event (<https://youtu.be/xkBIRa2vnGc>), and to engage an international audience.

#### 6. So what?

The Centre's initiatives have been received incredibly well by the community, with 166 members attending the Virtual Symposium (January 2021), 88 students in person at the hybrid PhD Colloquium (June 2021) and 120 members joining us alongside external guests for the in-person Bragg Exchange (January 2022). Moreover, we have now established our ongoing event series with active engagement from over 68% of our community to date, with increasing interest through our recorded event archive.

The team have learnt from our experiences developing events throughout the pandemic. We continue to employ many of the practices, particularly around hybrid delivery, to enable the widest possible participation across the academic community. The team's best practice has been recognised throughout the pandemic by other Centre/Institutes/Schools/Services, with the team contributing knowledge and support to our neighbours to help their delivery of events and approaches to engaging with their own communities including through software tutorials and guidance.

#### 7. What next?

The Bragg Centre team has developed a reputation within the University through its events. We believe that demanding consistent high levels of professionalism in our delivery and accounting for the social aspect of human collaboration is key to this success. The team would like to work with other Centres/Institutes to develop a consistent engagement programme and avoid duplication. This would support academics who have multiple associations and enable us to deliver stronger collaboration potential across key research areas.

#### 8. What challenges did you have in planning/organising/running/evaluating your initiative and how did you overcome these?

The complexities of delivering largescale events through continually changing circumstances was considerable. The team had to demonstrate significant agility, in many cases simultaneously planning events in triplicate should lockdown rules change. The team accounted for all individual preferences to ensure that everyone felt safe whilst participating, and dynamically reacted to last minute changes should a participant's situation change. Without a doubt, the easiest route would have always been to run everything as a Teams/Zoom call, but the community didn't want this.

#### 9. Was there something particularly innovative/creative about your initiative?

The team recognised that research is about the people and that if they are struggling personally, disconnected, or isolated then innovation will stop. The team therefore placed equal importance on the methods of delivery as well as the academic content. The team ensured that all Bragg Centre events maintain a social aspect and facilitate naturally serendipitous interactions as a key to developing a collaborative community. We also believe that by supporting our community in a pastoral manner and providing the opportunity for colleagues to share their human experiences leads to a supportive, inclusive and accessible community that thrives and innovates together.

#### 10. What makes your activity a notable example of culture change?

We believe that the Bragg team has gone above and beyond to support its research community throughout the pandemic. At every stage the team have considered the community's personal wellbeing, alongside their academic productivity, and found solutions to maintain a high level of engagement throughout. We have shown leadership within the University, often taking the harder route and significantly greater workload to deliver events that benefit the community, instead of falling back on traditional approaches. Such efforts have not only benefitted the Bragg community, but set the precedent across the University, leaving a legacy of accessible and inclusive events for the Bragg Centre.