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 by Wednesday June 1ˢᵗ, 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

- Third-party nomination
    - Nominator name: Professor Richard Beardsworth
    - Nominator School: School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS)
    - Nominator role/post: Head of School

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: Dr Alexander Beresford
> Lead applicant contributor role: Director of Research and Innovation
> Lead applicant Service or School / Faculty: School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS), Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS)
> Lead applicant role/post: Director of Research and Innovation (DORI)
> Lead applicant career stage: ECR, Mid-Career, Professor, Professional / Technical staff

Team member name (include lead applicant)	Contributor role	School/Service/external organisation + role/post	If member deserves special mention, state reason (optional)
Dr. Alexander Beresford	Lead Contributor – designing long horizon mentoring strategy, mentor	School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS), Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) - Director of Research and Innovation (DORI)	Lead Contributor
Prof. Richard Beardsworth	Co- contributor, facilitator, mentor	POLIS – Head of School	
Dr. Emma-Louise Anderson	Co- contributor, mentor	POLIS – Deputy Director of Research and Innovation (DDORI)	
Marie Johnson	Co- contributor, administrative support	Faculty Research Support	

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

- Personal Development

Case for Award

1. **Title :** 'Long horizon' mentoring to foster a supportive, world leading research culture

2. **Summary**

We are building a new research culture in the School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS), which contributes to the development of an inclusive research culture across the Political Science discipline. This begins in POLIS, where we are transforming our mentoring and peer-support ethos: encouraging 'long horizon' planning with colleagues so they can reconnect with the core of their research identity rather than investing their energy in chasing short-term priorities. This enables staff to realise their potential, develop confidence and gain fulfilment, while accomplishing the strategic vision for POLIS.

3. **Why?**

Certain cultural tendencies within the modern academy generate a ceaseless, demoralising and counter-productive encouragement of short-term 'production-line' research activity. Researchers feel pressured to consistently over-promise and over-commit to an increasing range of short-term priorities within the competing demands on academic time (teaching, student support, research, bureaucracy, leadership). This diminishes research quality, encouraging a fixation on the frequency rather than quality of outcomes. It ferments a sense of estrangement from a research identity based on substantive intellectual outcomes. This culture is exacerbated within a political landscape that encourages metric-driven benchmarking as measures of success, and a social landscape that fuels a competitive, unquenchable desire for validation on social media. At best, this culture can provide researchers with transient affirmation but it corrodes the quality of the discipline. Our research community needs a contemplative pause. This initiative is focused on providing the space, time and resources to inculcate a caring community of researchers supporting one another's reconnection with the soul of their research. This is particularly important as colleagues rebuild their research while emerging from the pandemic. In particular it addresses a number of shortcomings in the school, including: a hierarchical research culture; inequitable, inconsistent mentoring; short-horizon fixation on 'the next output' rather than long-term planning; a lack of reflection on the type and scale of funding needed for each researcher to sequence their careers; and support for impact that was at times reactive rather than proactive.

4. **What?**

Led by the Director of Research and Innovation (DORI), the research leadership team (Deputy DORI, Head of School) and our support staff have advanced the following initiatives through the Research and Innovation Committee since September 2021:

- **"Open door" mentoring policy:** encouraging colleagues to reach out for mentoring from the research leadership (ongoing);
- **'Long horizon' mentoring**: 1) identifying the substantive intellectual and/or societal contributions researchers want to be known for in 3-4 years' time; 2) mapping out pathways to realising these ambitions including the support, time, networks, and funding needed.
- **Extended peer-to-peer feedback opportunities**: including on articles, books and grant applications through the research centres (ongoing);
- **Extended output support**: staff receive feedback on submission ready articles and books from the research leadership team to do justice to the research excellence (ongoing);
- **Building a collaborative, staff-facing website to share support resources** including guidance materials and videos on impact, publication strategy, open research, ED&I, everyday practice (expenses, risk assessment), and ethics (September 2022).

5. **How?**

The rolling commitment of mentoring is designed to formalise a commitment to openly accessible mentoring for all. Rather than a focus on the past year and the year ahead, the objective of the 'long horizon' ethos is to help colleagues to identify and reconnect with their core research identity (i.e. 'what you came in this job to do') and to

devise a 'pathway' to research excellence (defined as substantive intellectual/societal contribution, rather than quantity). Our objective is to build the support infrastructure/materials and extended mentoring to expand a caring community of researchers taking the time for contemplative reflection with one another. In terms of the next phase, the retreat will provide the physical time and space to initiate this in POLIS while the establishment of the disciplinary DORI forum will enable the DORI to scale up these interventions (see below).

6. So what?

We have already put many of these initiatives into policy and practice. Colleagues from across the school have been proactively accessing the mentoring and feedback opportunities on an unprecedented scale. It has strengthened their work at various stages from design to publication and impact. Testament to the appreciation of colleagues of the transformed mentoring strategy, the DDORI was awarded the Faculty Partnership Award for Mentoring. Based on his inspirational leadership, the DORI was asked to help build and lead the British International Studies Association DORI Forum, bringing DORIs together from across the discipline to collaborate and support one another. The DORI created the shared GoogleDoc for this forum where best practice for supportive research communities is to be shared on an ongoing basis.

7. What next?

A 'Long horizon research' overnight retreat – part-funded through this award scheme - would enable much needed time and space for colleagues to reconnect with their intellectual identities through in-person peer-support. Researchers will be asked to pitch their intellectual 'destination' and 'pathway' to it, and the retreat will allow for feedback and reflection for all participants. The DORI is also leading on establishing POLIS as a model for other Political Science departments, through his leadership role in the BISA DORI forum.

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

The challenges of the negative cultures identified in part 3 are deeply entrenched and require a thorough overhaul of our ethos and practice. This requires time and space for thoughtful reflection, as individuals, as a school, and as a discipline. This project aims to overcome these challenges by embedding a new ethos and growing a caring community of researchers. It requires commitment to a patient, compassionate approach that is personalised to individual researcher needs. This strategy has been key to developing confidence and building trust to create meaningful engagement that leads to culture change. The research leadership team and support staff are critical to this exercise and have spent a great deal of time diagnosing our challenges. This 'long horizon' initiative marks the beginning of a long process and the biggest challenge will be to keep brining colleagues 'on board'.

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

The research leadership team, led by the DORI (since September 2021), has invested a great deal of time and energy into the most systematic review of our research practice to date, including (but not limited to) a forensic examination of our REF result. This has not been done on this scale before. Through this we have identified our challenges and our interventions so far have already laid the foundations for a major 'reset' of our research culture.

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

We are already proud of the results we are producing from the changes we have brought about, however intangible some of these might be. Indeed, we are proud to prioritise and pursue the 'fuzzy' objective of creating a research culture and community measured by the care and support it dedicates to colleagues, rather than specific metrics. We want to challenge toxic elements of our research culture in the academy but we have devised a way of doing this that also complements the pursuit of our other strategic objectives in terms of promoting research excellence. Indeed, the reconnection of researchers with their core research identity is fundamental to improving the substantive quality of our research outcomes. The spirit of collegial sharing across the discipline evidenced by the DORI's work in the BISA DORI Forum instils a new ethos: we have a duty of care to the discipline. This duty can only be fulfilled by sharing best practice for research support, rather than making positive initiatives a guarded secret to be weaponised for competitive external audits.