

University of Sussex

School of Law, Politics and Sociology

RESEARCH STRATEGY

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 The overall aim is to nurture a strong and collaborative research culture, facilitate research of world-leading and international quality and having the maximum possible impact, support successful research grant capture, and provide support to LPS faculty appropriate to the stage of their academic career.

1.2 The LPS Research Strategy is consistent with the Sussex 2025 strategic objectives. The core values of kindness, integrity, inclusion, collaboration and courage underpin all our research activities.

2. AIMS

2.1 To support faculty to research to the highest quality, publishing research of 4* and 3* quality in the leading journals for their research and with publishers of international standing.

2.2 To support faculty in successful research grant capture.

2.3 To provide support to the advancement of the research careers of all LPS faculty through the realisation of ambitious research plans.

2.2 To provide research leadership and mentoring to junior members of faculty to foster the development of research careers.

2.5 To support faculty to maximise the impact of their research.

2.6 To create a dynamic research environment which builds upon existing, and supports the development of new, research expertise within LPS.

2.7 To facilitate the integration of research students within the LPS research environment.

3. STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

These aims will be achieved through initiatives in five areas: ensuring quality of publications (3.1), support for research funding bids (3.2), supporting individual research and career progression (3.3), strengthening research impact (3.4), and nurturing a strong research culture (3.5).

3.1 ENSURING QUALITY OF PUBLICATIONS

3.1.1 Quality Over Quantity Principle

In line with Sussex 2025, faculty are encouraged to prioritise quality over quantity of publications. The DORA principles are communicated to staff via HoD and Research Leads. While the metric relying on journal impact factors should not be used, the departments are encouraged to produce a list of desirable journals for their discipline and use the list as a guide during discussions in appraisals and Personal Research Plan (PRP) meetings. Encouraging quality over quantity should be an explicit part of appraisals and PRP meetings.

3.1.2 Professional Research Training Workshops

The school runs a series of research training workshops as informal meetings throughout the year. The departments are encouraged to organise their own sessions on lessons from REF, understanding the qualities of 3*/4* publications, and how to work towards improving the quality of publications.

3.1.3 Presentation and Feedback on Work in Progress

Faculty are encouraged to present their work in progress in research in progress seminars. Sharing of drafts of publications with colleagues is strongly encouraged both within and external to the University so to secure comments upon their work prior to submission. Where appropriate, research mentors will read drafts of the work of faculty for whom they are mentor.

3.1.4 Reading of Planned REF Publications

To support faculty to achieve the highest possible quality of publications and to plan work in preparation for a future REF, the departments are to organise internal REF Reading Groups, which will read publications planned for submission, prior to them being sent to external 'critical friends'.

3.2 SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH FUNDING BIDS

One of the school's core goals is to improve our record of external research funding and grant capture. As part of our post-Covid research recovery plan, we have re-designed our support for research funding bids, which now includes the following elements:

3.2.1 Pro-active Approach and Signalling of Funding Opportunities

Our newly appointed Assistant Research Manager (ARM) works closely with Research Development Manager (RDM) in Research & Enterprise, DRaKE, the departmental research leads, and the research centre directors to identify relevant staff for whom particular funding calls might be most suitable and encourages them to apply. We monitor closely all relevant funding schemes and start planning for those that have regular schedules before they are announced. A survey of individual research interests is updated annually to facilitate better matching of calls to individuals. In addition, all faculty are encouraged to register for Research Professional to obtain relevant calls in their inboxes.

3.2.2 LPS Pilot Funding Scheme

The school offers seed-corn funding for pilot projects (currently up to £5,000 per project). The LPS Seed Corn funding scheme is designed to enable pilot projects and pump-prime research leading to the submission of large, externally funded research applications. The expectation is that such applications should be clearly identified and formulated in the seed corn application and should be substantial in nature and in value. Applications are invited twice a year and are reviewed by a panel consisting of the departmental research leads, DRaKE, Deputy HoS and an additional senior academic.

3.2.3 Capacity Building – Workshops

The school organises a series of events throughout the year to facilitate grant applications. At least two workshops per year are organised with internal and external speakers, focusing on issues, such as practical tips for writing new and/or revising unsuccessful grant proposals, knowing what individual funders expect, and introductory sessions on funding for new faculty members. Writing retreats and regular writing sessions (see below) may also be used for individual faculty to work on and discuss their work on grant applications.

3.2.4 Capacity building – Research Bid Clinics

With the help of DRaKE and RDM, ARM will start from Spring 2023 organising regular Research Bid Clinics. These will be informal sessions that will be used to discuss either initial ideas for future grant proposals or grant applications in progress. When relevant, these forums will be used as scoping sessions for particular calls that require collaborative efforts.

3.2.4 Peer-Review Process

Our internal peer-review process is designed to improve grant capture. Applicants are required to secure two reviews, one from the LPS peer-review panel, and the other from a subject specialist within the school. Sending of applications to external reviewers is also encouraged, particularly when no internal expertise is available within the school. LPS also provides ethical clearance services. Information about the processes for peer review and approval of external funding bids can be found at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/lps/internal/staff/research>. Faculty are encouraged to use the support available through the University's Research and Enterprise Services (and RDM, Dr Bente Bjornholt in particular) and be informed of the University processes for the approval of applications.

3.2.5 Research Funding Guidance for Junior Colleagues

The departmental Research Leads, together with HoDs, are responsible for developing a mentor scheme whereby junior colleagues are guided in their efforts to apply for external funding and integrated, where possible, within collaborative bids developed by more senior colleagues. Introductory sessions on funding are organised for all new faculty members by RDM and ARM (see above).

3.2.6 Incorporation of Research Funding Plans in PRPs and Appraisals

Plans and aspirations for funding are required to be an integral part of discussions with the research leads and HoDs as part of the PRP and appraisal meetings.

3.2.7 Incorporation of Research Funding Plans in Annual Reviews of Research Centres

LPS Research Centres (see 3.5.1) have annual review meetings with DRaKE. As part of the process, the centres are required to submit a review of their previous activities and annual plans, including funding applications. In line with the new Guidelines for the Governance of Research Centres adopted by the SMT and discussed with the Research Centre Directors, the centres are expected to target large collaborative grants. Their progress towards this goal is monitored regularly and through the annual review meetings with DRaKE.

3.2.8 Incorporation of Research Funding Plans in Research Away Days

Whenever possible, research away days are to consider a possibility of collaborative grant applications with suitable partners within and/or outside of the university.

3.3 SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH AND CAREER PROGRESSION

3.3.1 Faculty Research and Scholarship Fund

As part of our post-Covid research recovery strategy, we have increased the financial support for individual research activities and attending conferences and other research events to £1500 p.a. in total. Discretionary top-ups may be considered by HoDs where required.

3.3.2 Personal Research Plans

Each member of research faculty is required to develop an individual 5-year Personal Research Plan (PRP) which addresses planned projects, publication placement, research funding bids, strategies to develop impact and networks and staff development requirements. All faculty meet annually with their Research Lead to review PRPs in order to ensure departmental support for the realisation of ambitious plans. Faculty are encouraged to provide a copy of their PRP to feed into discussions with their appraiser to enable a review of plans in the light of career progression, discuss obstacles and strategies to overcome them and identify staff development requirements.

3.3.3 Research Leave

There is a managed process of research leave applications aimed at maximising the research leave available to faculty. By mapping when all faculty are next eligible to apply for the University research leave (normally one 12-week teaching block and the following examining period), ambitious and realistic plans for leave can be made well in advance. Research leaves are awarded after a process involving the school-level committee (HoS, HoDs, and DRaKE). Leave applications are required to demonstrate alignment with the school's overarching research aims and priorities. Leave applications must include evidence of the quality of the project proposal, potential outputs and impact pathways. The proposal is required to be written to the rigorous standards of a funding bid. Leaves can be used to either prepare publications or develop large funding bids. Faculty are required to submit a written report on their research leave and to present, where possible, a paper to the research series upon return from leave.

3.3.4 Research Mentors

Newly appointed staff are given research mentors, with whom to discuss research in progress with tailored research targets previously agreed between the member of staff and HoD, encourage the delivery of seminar and conference papers and support the development of funding proposals. Mentors also provide support by reading work (where appropriate), facilitating networking opportunities and talking through publishing plans including identification of high-quality journals.

3.4 STRENGTHENING RESEARCH IMPACT

3.4.1 Dedicated Impact Support

The school has two part-time Knowledge Exchange and Impact coordinators. They support and help develop individual KE and Impact plans, REF impact case studies, and are responsible for showcasing our impact through the departmental websites. They work closely with DRaKE and help select the most suitable projects to be funded by our HEIF allocation (up to £2500 per project). In addition, each department has an Impact Lead, whose role is to further departmental impact plans, support individual impact work, and identify prospective REF impact case studies together with the Research Leads and HoDs. The school also has two part-time Research and Enterprise Coordinators who are facilitating all our research and impact activities, and are also responsible for preparing LPS Engagement News that identify relevant opportunities for policy engagement in particular.

3.4.2 Impact capacity building and enhancing visibility of our research

Together with DRaKE, the Knowledge Exchange and Impact Coordinators help organise a series of KE and Impact workshops throughout the year. These are aimed to provide information on relevant activities and equip individuals with skills necessary for successful KE and impact projects. Apart from workshops that focus on impact case studies and advice on how to achieve strong impact, we also provide a series of events designed to strengthen the skills necessary to reach the relevant audiences and translate our research for broader use. These include masterclasses on data visualisation, infographic and talking heads videos and podcasts.

3.5. NURTURING A STRONG RESEARCH CULTURE

3.5.1 Interdisciplinary research collaboration: Research Centres and Groups

LPS is home to five interdisciplinary research centres - Centre for the Study of Corruption, Sussex Centre for Human Rights Research, Sussex European Institute, Centre for Gender Studies, and Crime Research Centre. The centres are key to fostering the research culture within LPS, while also including and drawing on expertise from colleagues in other schools. The school is supporting each centre with up to £2,500 annually for scoping workshops and research events, and up to £2,500 for HEIF-funded knowledge exchange projects. LPS also has a number of vibrant research groups working on particular topics not directly covered by the research centres. Research events and activities of these groups are supported on an ad-hoc basis and budget-permitting. LPS faculty also engage with other research centres and programmes within the University (e.g. Sussex Sustainability Research Programme, (SSRP), Sussex Humanities Lab (SHL), Centre for Cultures of Reproduction, Technologies and Health (CORTH), Sussex Centre for Migration Research).

3.5.2 Research seminars, external talks and book launches

The school organises a series of events that contribute to producing a vibrant research culture. Apart from the departmental Research in Progress Seminars (which include both external and internal speakers, including PGRs), our Research Centres all organise regular research seminars, external talks, and workshops. The school also supports book launches where prominent books from faculty members are discussed and celebrated.

3.5.3 Writing retreats/writing lab

As part of our post-Covid research recovery strategy, the school has organised an external three-day writing retreat with a writing facilitator in June 2022. Following the success of this initiative, we have developed a writing lab within the school, which runs regular half-day sessions at least once a week. These sessions not only provide a supportive and quiet place for writing with self-identified targets, but also help strengthen connections between faculty and PGRs and promote research collaborations. External writing retreats are to be organised annually (funded partly by the school and partly by individual research and scholarship funds), with the next one taking place in July 2023.

3.5.4 Research Away Days

Each department is encouraged to organise annual research away days. These are used to track research developments, plan for a future REF, identify new research groupings, foster research collaboration, and discuss plans for grant applications.

3.5.5 Integration of Doctoral Students

Our doctoral students are an integral part of our research culture. The school is actively promoting their incorporation in all relevant research activities, including active participation in our research centres and projects, research in progress seminars, the writing lab initiative, and more informal gatherings. To further strengthen our sense of research community, we have recently redesigned a dedicated room to facilitate both the writing lab sessions and regular interactions between PGRs and faculty in an informal setting.

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