

LSTM Research Culture Strategy

2026-2029

Context and purpose

This research culture strategy complements our institutional five-year strategy (2023-2038) by setting out how we will create a supportive, equitable and inclusive research environment to achieve organisational goals. Our driver is LSTM's ambition to be a sector-leading research institution, delivering world-class, impactful research and training the next generation of global health leaders. This requires us to attract and retain the best talent, remain a trusted partner, and ensure our organisational systems and approaches are aligned with LSTM's values.

This strategy builds on LSTM's continued commitment to strengthening our organisational culture. Since 2021 (which marked the appointment of LSTM's inaugural Dean, (now Pro Vice-Chancellor) for Research Culture and Integrity) LSTM's research culture has been strengthened through the collective efforts of institutional leadership, academic departments, professional services, HR, staff networks—including ECRs and Technicians—and our Race Equity and Gender Equity Action Committees, working together to deliver a coordinated programme of activities. Developing this strategy unites these activities, setting out a cohesive and purposeful approach to advancing LSTM's research culture.

The strategy is directly aligned to our values:

Inclusivity: Staff, students and partners all have a key role to play in creating a positive research culture. Our community is a place where everyone is trusted, respected, appreciated and empowered. We are committed to hearing all perspectives, learning from diversity of experience and thought, and recognising and dismantling barriers for specific groups to produce an inclusive supportive culture.

Partnership: We acknowledge the historical power imbalances in global health and academic research that continue to disadvantage partners in the majority world. We prioritise fairness in research and the distribution of benefits—through learning, reflection, and improvement—to address these inequities. We work with those who share our values and ambitions and take pride in our collective achievements.

Integrity: We promote a culture of learning from mistakes and celebrating best practices. We aim to act with integrity, fairness and transparency, holding ourselves to the highest ethical standard empowering our global community to follow responsible research practices.

Positive Impact: Advancing academic knowledge and tackling complex global health challenges requires contributions from the entire research ecosystem through collaborative, interdisciplinary efforts; we value not only the research that our staff and students produce but

also the research they empower others to achieve. We take a holistic approach to assessing individual and team contributions, recognising and celebrating the diversity of outputs that contribute to our mission of improving health outcomes worldwide

Leadership and governance

Everyone within LSTM has a responsibility to strengthen our research culture but clear leadership and governance is needed to inspire action, foster collaboration, and drive change. The strategy will be governed and delivered through LSTM's People, Culture and Environment Committee (PCE), which reports to LSTM's Executive. The PCE will monitor progress on delivery of the strategy ensuring that internal and external communications honestly reflect progress and challenges, and that learnings are embedded across the organisation. PCE will work with relevant staff and student groups to deliver and report on our commitments to the Concordat for Researcher Career Development, Technicians Commitment and Declaration on fair Research Assessment (DORA), and be responsible for fostering a culture on inclusion and sense of belonging, in line with our EDI strategy. Chairs of our School Staff Forum and Equity Diversity and Inclusion will be members of PCE.

Research Culture Themes

The strategy is built around three themes that together define our vision for a thriving and inclusive research environment. These themes provide a framework for how we appraise, develop and embed our research culture. Under each theme we reflect on what we have achieved and outline our commitments for the remainder of our current strategy period (2023-2028).

Investing in Colleagues

Our research culture thrives when every individual feels recognised, supported and empowered to succeed. This theme focuses on creating an environment where everyone is encouraged to develop their skills, equity of access is assured, wellbeing is prioritised and contributions at all levels are valued.

What we have achieved since 2023

We have made substantial updates to **career pathways** across LSTM, clarifying routes to progression via five pathways (research, research and teaching, programme, technical, professional). The introduction of senior and principal research associate roles, with a matrix of expectations for these senior research roles, has filled a previous gap in career progression for grant funded researchers. Guidance for progression via the programme management pathway has been published, and the recent establishment of the **programme management resource centre** serves to connect this cohort of staff, supporting career development and staff retention. The criteria for academic promotion were substantially updated in 2024 to better reflect LSTM's values, provide a more holistic approach to recognising diversity of academic contributions and to set expectations around research culture.

Our **career track pathway** has been extensively revised, with new routes for staff based in global hubs and devolution of selection of candidates to departments. Additional mentoring and peer to peer learning approaches have been introduced to support this cohort as they transition to research independence.

We have increased the range of **training opportunities** for all cohorts of staff and introduced quarterly CPD days, where managers are requested to free up time for staff and students to participate in the variety of offerings. We have made several changes to **family friendly policies**, including increasing parental leave allowances and introduced transparent processes around overseas allowances and visa policies.

Our new **EDI strategy** sets out priorities for the next 3 years including enhancing community and belonging, promoting allyship and upholding accountability. Our BEACON programme, launched in 2025 provides additional career support to Black and Minoritised Ethnic early career researchers in response to data on career progression rates in this cohort.

We introduced a new app and web-based reporting system to enable anyone to raise concerns over conduct; the portal permits both direct and anonymous reporting and communication with those raising concerns. We have introduced a range of trained champions and focal points across the organisation, including: Dignity and Respect Champions to provide informal and confidential advice to anyone who has concerns about the conduct of LSTM staff or students; Safeguarding focal points in place across LSTM Liverpool and Global Hubs to support protection of research participants and safeguarding risk assessments and Research Integrity champions who act as a point of contact for advice on responsible research conduct.

Our commitments 2026-2028

- To develop and support our leaders and managers to provide an inclusive, equitable and rewarding working environment for all staff and students.
- To provide clear routes for development for all staff, and to equip staff with the skills to succeed within and outside the higher education sector.
- To centre well-being and mental health in our ways of working and embed psychological safety across the organisation

We will do this by

- Providing a comprehensive programme of learning and development opportunities, seeking and responding to feedback.
- Developing clear pathways for progression for our Technical and Professional Services staff.
- Clarifying mechanisms for transitioning between career pathways.
- Continual review of workload distribution, ensuring alignment to values.
- Increasing awareness of systemic barriers to progression for specific groups across LSTM and implementing and monitoring approaches to dismantle these barriers

- Providing dedicated support for career conversations and introducing specific programmes to support researchers applying for fellowships or for their first independent grant.
- Reviewing and strengthening our approach to encouraging psychological safety.

Key measures of success

- Increase in the proportion of staff responding positively to staff engagement questions around career progression.
- Increase in the number of fellowship applications shortlisted for interview, and number of Advance HE fellows.
- Decrease in proportion of cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination or misconduct made anonymously, and an increase in cases resolved through informal resolution.

Creating a world class research environment

The interdisciplinary, international context of LSTM's research is underpinned by excellent research and teaching facilities, with fair and transparent access. This theme outlines activities to provide a conducive environment in which research thrives, and equity, rigour and reproducibility are assured.

What we have achieved since 2023

LSTM's current 5-year strategy has seen major improvements to our estate, with renovation of the Mary Kingsley building to provide an optimal learning environment for students and staff, and completion of the completion of the Clinical Research Excellence and Training Open Resource (CREATOR) building at MLW. Purchase of the LLSA building in 2023 was followed by renovations to enable the creation of a 12 bed in patient facility to expand our human challenge activities and work is ongoing to install a unique, high containment facility for pre-clinical studies using organoids. A review of the health & safety provisions led to the establishment of a new **Research and Education Facilities Team** with responsibilities for shared containment laboratories, insectaries, herpetarium and teaching laboratories.

We have restructured our Professional Services Teams to streamline and strengthen support throughout the research lifecycle with the introduction of a new **Research Services Directorate**, and establishment of an **Office for Research Strategy**. We have invested in new Research Information Systems, with our research governance functions fully transitioning to an online platform in 2025 and the introduction of a research portal to increase visibility of our work. Consultation across the organisation identified areas to prioritise to ensure our work was aligned with the highest standards of research integrity, with a 16-point action plan agreed for the current strategy period.

We have clarified expectations for Research Group Leaders and developed resources, to support their continued professional development, including dedicated sessions on **CPD days**. To increase equity of access to specialised programme management support we are piloting a centralised **programme management resource**. Our principles of equitable partnership, agreed

in 2025, are being embedded across our activities, with means of monitoring compliance currently under review. We also updated our **Honorary Appointments Policy** to provide mechanisms for colleagues affiliated to LSTM to access essential resources.

The establishment of the **Global Hubs Council** in 2024 provided a mechanism to co-ordinate and align strategic direction, principles and values across the 4 hubs in our network of transboundary partnerships (LSTM, MLW, CeSHHAR and LSTM-Kenya). At the operational level, Communities of Practice are proving effective means of cross partner sharing of expertise in IT, research governance, safeguarding and data management.

Our commitments 2026-2028.

- To empower staff to act with autonomy by providing appropriate systems, processes and facilitating shared learning.
- To provide equitable access to sustainable world class laboratory facilities.
- To increase rigour and reproducibility in our research.

We will do this by

- Establishing a virtual academy that acts as a portal to support colleagues navigate research, education and enterprise opportunities, systems and processes at LSTM.
- Implementing processes to provide equitable access to shared laboratory platforms, and programme management support, with a transparent cost recovery process.
- Opening up opportunities for committees and working groups, and delegating decision making appropriately.
- Implementing the research integrity action plan.

Key measures of success

- Improvements in timelines from funding award to project start up.
- An increase in the proportion, and diversity of staff, inputting into decision making, via engagement in empowered committees.
- Greater adherence to FAIR principles of open research.

Celebrating Team LSTM

LSTM's success is driven by partnership across disciplines, sectors and national boundaries and is underpinned by excellence in our research enabling teams. Creating an environment that fosters collaboration and connectivity, celebrates individual and team success, and ensuring we act with integrity and authenticity is key to delivering on our mission.

What we have achieved since 2023

Our 2-day staff conferences, re-introduced in 2022 after a pause for the pandemic, provide an opportunity to connect, share knowledge and shape future plans and are now a regular bi-annual event. Our 125th Anniversary Symposium in 2024 was a particular highlight, bringing international

leaders to LSTM to showcase our work and to reflect on our vision for the next 125 years. Our series of monthly inaugural lectures and regular research seminars are popular cross-LSTM events to supplement Departmental led initiatives. The appointment of a dedicated internal communications manager in 2024, together with the work of the School Staff Forum, provides multiple routes for engagement and knowledge sharing, including monthly townhalls and newsletters.

We instigated annual **staff awards** in 2023 and have provided additional support to identify and support opportunities for nominations for external markers of esteem. Our **alumni network** is thriving, with a number of in person meet ups and online engagements held, including the launch of the LSTM in conversation podcast where current staff connect with alumni to learn about their career journey and accomplishments. **Staff networks** have led a diverse array of events including cultural celebrations, talks and workshops, including events celebrating Women in Innovation in the UK and Malawi.

Work continues to transition LSTM to be an actively anti-racist employer following the 2022 independent report into **race equity**. This work is led by the Race Equity Action Committee, and includes programmes to increase racial literacy, digitalise and decolonise our archives, and to publish a rigorous public record of our history. In 2026 LSTM was awarded the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award, in recognition of the rigorous foundational work being done to improve race equity across the school. Our **Sustainability and Environment Strategy** is driving commitments to climate justice across the organisation, from improving energy efficiency in laboratories, reducing emissions via travel, ethical investment and procurement policies, and increasing biodiversity in our city centre campus via transformation of derelict land into a well-being garden.

Our commitments 2026-28

- Increase the sense of belonging across the organisation, recognising the additional challenges faced by our staff and students working away from the Liverpool campus.
- Strengthening Employee Voice
- Ensuring our stories of success across LSTM reflect the diverse contributions of all.

We will do this by

- A revised school staff forum, strengthened staff networks, and increased opportunities for bi-directional interactions between staff and LSTM Executive.
- A bi-annual symposium and work in Liverpool week.
- Engaging with PGRs and their supervisory teams to map and implement activities to increase their sense of belonging.
- External and internal communications that celebrate contributions of unheard voices across the organisation.

Key measures of success

- Increased proportion of staff responding positively to staff engagement questions around belonging and inclusion.

- Improvements in feedback from PGRs on culture at LSTM.