**APPLICATION FOR COLLEGE TEAM TEACHING PRIZE 2022**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names and departments of applicants:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Saloni Krishnan, Psychology (Careers and Employability Lead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ilham Sebah, Psychology (2020/21, Undergraduate EDI Lead; 2021/present, Senior Tutor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nura Sidarus, Psychology (2021/22 Undergraduate EDI Lead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Victoria Bourne, Psychology (Director of Teaching and Learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Dawn Watling, Psychology (School PGR Director)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Title of collaborative innovation:**
Establishing transparency and inclusivity in accessing and developing research experience.

**If your application is successful, would you like us to add your case study to the Teaching and Learning space?**

Yes            No

**Please describe how your teaching innovation is distinctive in one sentence:**
We took a department level approach to a) identify systemic barriers to further research study (e.g., PhD) and b) established formal transparent processes to remove barriers to seeking departmental research placements.

**Please describe how your teaching innovation has a specific focus on inclusivity in one sentence:**
This work is built around inclusivity through a) engaging in wide and open discussion of barriers to studying for a research degree and b) providing opportunities for gaining research experience while minimising bias -- including providing funding support to take part, anonymising applications for short-listing, focusing on skills rather than marks and providing feedback to help people improve future applications.

**Please describe and evaluate your collaborative teaching innovation (for example creative, novel, original) in any aspect of course design (teaching, learning, assessment) and include reference to inclusion and engagement.**

Please write this so that it could be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

Students from non-traditional backgrounds do not always see research as a viable career option for themselves. This is partially due to the lack of role models “like them”, but also due to other systemic barriers like challenges gaining appropriate experience. Through this project we take a creative approach to demystify the path to PGR research and to establish a transparent and inclusive process to gaining research experience within the Department of Psychology.

**A. Identifying barriers to pursuing research careers**

In 2020-21, we reviewed PGR diversity data and identified that there was a particular need to address the racial diversity of the PGR community. We introduced the departmental Sarah Parker Remond studentship for strong qualified Black applicants. Following consultation with Black colleagues (internal and external), past PGR students, and a UG student, we also established that there was a need to support minoritised students in seeing PGR studies as an option for them, providing role models and opportunities for frank discussions around barriers.

We consequently organised two “Ever thought of doing a PHD?” workshops in 2020-21. Workshop 1 focused on hearing the journey of staff and current PGR students have taken. We asked staff who were from non-traditional backgrounds to talk about their journey (as minority status is not always visible). This was followed by a discussion with the attendees; we also had a
menti quiz to ask students what they see as “Barriers to taking a PhD?” and “What do you want to know more about.” Menti responses were used to design session 2, which focused on barriers for under-represented groups in Psychology. In 2021-22, we delivered this as single workshop, “Ever thought of doing a PhD: Breaking down barriers” allowing for a more integrated discussion of the two elements and engage with the speakers.

B. Establishing the Psychology Undergraduate Research Bursary Scheme

We learned that a systemic barrier to accessing to research careers is accessing research experience as an undergraduate. Research placements offer students a chance to actively learn, applying knowledge they acquire through their degree. They are very valuable for future career prospects in and outside of academia, as they involve developing practical and transferable skills, enriching their CVs for research careers and beyond. They provide an opportunity to build meaningful links with academic staff and valuable mentoring. However, there are many barriers to gaining such positions. It is often unclear how to apply for these positions, as they are often offered on an ad hoc basis, or involve directly emailing supervisors. There is little clarity on what supervisors want from students, or what they offer. Students also complain about receiving little to no feedback when they are unsuccessful, which does not allow them opportunities to refine and edit their applications. These issues particularly affect students from minoritized groups who do not know the hidden rules. Another barrier is that these are often voluntary, thereby excluding students who cannot afford to work for free.

To counter these issues, we set up the Psychology Undergraduate Research Bursary scheme. Initially, a call goes out to potential supervisors to advertise a position within their lab, using a standardised format where they outline what their lab does, what the role involves, and what specific skills are required (beyond grades). The adverts are made available to students at the start of the academic year, which allows them to see the breadth of opportunities available in the department. The call for students shows timelines for applications, interviews, and decisions, including when they should expect to receive feedback. Students apply by submitting a cover letter and CV, as well as a separate equalities and diversity (EDI) form to which supervisors do not have access. Participating supervisors agree to review all applications anonymously at the shortlisting stage and provide brief feedback, ensuring that all UG applicants are receiving feedback on their CV and cover letter. Supervisors are further asked to provide more detailed feedback after interviewing shortlisted candidates. Template feedback is made available for supervisors. Importantly, students selected for positions are awarded £250 research bursaries by the department.

To support students’ applications, we collated detailed guidance, providing them with a sample cover letter and CV, and tips and tricks. We also organised a training event, which allowed students to learn more about the role and application process from supervisors. The panel of academics showcased the diversity of work and academics in the department. Through this event, we covered common issues such as mitigating the impact of poor grades, and what to highlight on applications. This was also recorded and made available for students. We also released a Psychology Debrief podcast themed around gaining research experience.

Our standardised process makes research placements more transparent and inclusive, highlighting what is on offer and how to apply, thereby addressing the lack of clarity around these placements. Setting up a blinded recruitment process minimises potential biases (i.e., supervisors preferring students that were more like them), putting the focus squarely on candidate skills and knowledge. The training and feedback provided to all students is formative in student development. Even if they are unsuccessful, students are encouraged to seek support from
personal tutors and the careers service, and takes advantage of the fact they had prepared CVs and cover letters. Collecting EDI information from students also allows us to audit systematic biases in the process, in terms of who applies and who gets selected. Repeated collection of this information will allow us to refine this process over time, as one of the issues identified was the lack of relevant data.

Please describe the actual or potentially beneficial effect on student learning and include discussion of some source of external evaluation and/or (ideally), student feedback.
Please write this so that it could be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

Our breaking barriers workshops allowed students to learn about role models in the department, spotlighting staff and PGRs who were first-generation students, BAME students (Black, Asian, and mixed), immigrant to the UK, or mature students. They benefited from discussion on the barriers faced, and how staff navigated these. Students reported that: “This was so helpful!”, “It was very interesting and insightful”, “…this was super interesting and informative.” In addition to positive responses from attendees on what they learned from the sessions, we experienced an increase in the number of RHUL students applying for PhD Study, including securing strong applicants for the department’s Sarah Parker Remond Studentship, which has been awarded to outstanding Black Students for both 2021-22 and for 2022-23 entry.

Our UG Research Bursary Scheme enables students to understand and seek research placements in the department, making a relatively “hidden” process transparent. In the first year of the scheme, across winter and spring calls, we had an unprecedent number of opportunities to showcase, with 20 members of staff advertising placements (compared to 5-6 in previous years). 120+ students applied for these positions, and we have awarded 20 bursaries this year. Several students also chose to pursue voluntary opportunities within labs. Staff members commented on the importance of the scheme to widen access, as well as highlighted the quality of students they worked with. In this first instance of looking at the EDI data, we reassuringly observed that awarded positions matched the distribution of those applying. We intend to continue auditing in future iterations of the scheme, particularly comparing the distribution of applications to the makeup of our cohort.

As we have highlighted above, the scheme removes various barriers to minoritized students accessing such experience. Many students clearly highlighted the value of the financial incentive offered, showing how the bursary would help them reduce hours they committed to part time work, or pay for their travel and commuting expenses, and provide them with an opportunity they wouldn’t have otherwise been able to pursue. The bursary also clearly recognises and rewards the selective application process that students have undergone. More broadly, the scheme allows students to get training and practice applying for jobs, creating a formative learning experience. The research placements themselves are highly beneficial, with students who have received bursaries agreeing that this helped them apply knowledge gained, develop new skills, and improve their career prospects. All students also strongly agreed that the scheme should be continued.

Our bursary process has received significant interest from other institutions (Bristol, Durham) who want to emulate this scheme, and we have received an invitation to talk about this process by colleagues in the NHS.

Please briefly describe the contributions made by individual team members both to the task and to the effective functioning of the team.
All members of the team were involved in the conception and shape of the scheme. Prof. Bourne (Director of Teaching and Learning), Prof. Watling (PGR Lead) and Dr. Sebah organised the Breaking down barriers to PGR study workshops. Dr. Sebah developed and analysed feedback from the PGR research workshops. Prof. Bourne and Prof. Watling secured departmental funding for the bursary scheme, and have provided guidance and oversight on implementation. As Careers Lead, Dr. Krishnan leads on the implementation of the research bursary scheme, handling the calls to supervisors and students, and co-ordination of the team. As UG EDI Lead, Dr. Sebah (outgoing EDI Lead) and Dr. Sidarus (incoming EDI Lead) have taken responsibility for the EDI component of the bursary scheme, ensuring that templates and guidance were inclusive, and auditing the EDI data. Dr. Krishnan and Dr. Sidarus developed and analysed feedback from scheme participants.

Please describe any help which you have received from professional support staff (e.g. Careers, CeDAS, Educational Development) in developing, implementing or evaluating your initiative.

We received support for the Research Bursary Scheme from the LSE school admin team, particularly Alex Hale and Lucy Davidson. This was integral in allowing us to link our EDI monitoring statistics to candidate applications, maintaining candidate anonymity.