ARC Research Leadership Academy

Impact and Learning Review

Developing research leadership is central to the mission of the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) South London to improve lives and the quality of health and social care through applied research. Each NIHR ARC is made up of a combination of local providers of NHS and social care services, NHS commissioners, local authorities, universities, private companies and charities.

The ARC Research Leadership Academy was conceived and launched in 2022 by Professor Cilla Harries, ARC South London Deputy Theme Lead for Capacity Development & Head of Graduate Research School and Researcher Development at Kingston University, as a place where health and social care professionals and academics across ARC South London can come together to learn leadership skills and build their research careers. Bernadette Corrigan, Business Support Administrator for NIHR ARC, manages the Academy participation and Microsoft Teams infrastructure including break-out rooms for group work.

The purpose of the Academy is to support participants to:

- reflect on their personal vision for their research career
- develop a deeper understanding of their research leadership qualities
- develop skills to design, and deliver research projects and impact
- understand the value of stepping up for leadership opportunities
- understand how to strategically lead research at local/national/international levels
- understand how to organise, give and receive mentorship/coaching

This review of impact and learning reports on the activities of the inaugural 2022 Academy, who participated, who contributed their expertise, and what has been achieved.

Target audience

The Academy is for academic staff, researchers and PhD students under organisations within NIHR ARCs in London. The Academy is open to applicants from clinical and non-clinical backgrounds (apply in December via the NIHR ARC[1] website). Briefing events are run by Prof Harries in November to provide further information and answer questions. Recruitment communications encourage people from diverse backgrounds and levels of experience to apply.

Sessions are scheduled to fit around the teaching, practice delivery and potential caring responsibilities of participants. The lecture programme is provided by highly experienced research leaders, so everyone can gain insights from their expertise. Group work and peer mentorship activities bring together those at similar levels of experience to optimise effective learning. In this way, the Academy is designed to accommodate participants with a wide range of levels of experience in research leadership, from novice to expert.
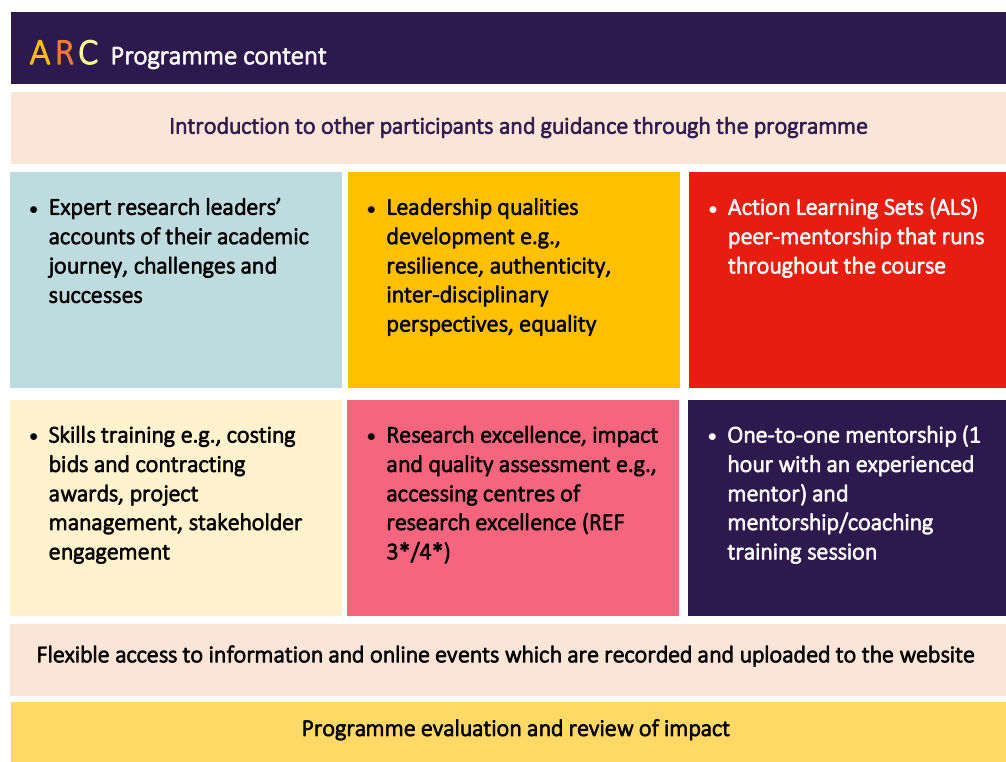
Participants who complete at least 25 hours receive an Academy certificate, which they can add to their professional development portfolio. They can also add their personal objectives for the Academy (which they submit as part of their application) to their personal research plans.

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[1] https://arc-sl.nihr.ac.uk/events-training/what-we-offer/nihr-arc-south-london-research-leadership-academy

Programme content

The main programme runs on Wednesday lunchtimes from January to June, with a mixture of in-person and online sessions. Participants are introduced and guided through the Academy programme by Prof Harries. The content of the programme is designed to align with the national researcher development Concordat framework[2]. It covers events and activities illustrated by the following figure.

ARC Programme content

Introduction to other participants and guidance through the programme

- Expert research leaders' accounts of their academic journey, challenges and successes

- Leadership qualities development e.g., resilience, authenticity, inter-disciplinary perspectives, equality

- Action Learning Sets (ALS) peer-mentorship that runs throughout the course

- Skills training e.g., costing bids and contracting awards, project management, stakeholder engagement

- Research excellence, impact and quality assessment e.g., accessing centres of research excellence (REF 3*/4*)

- One-to-one mentorship (1 hour with an experienced mentor) and mentorship/coaching training session

Flexible access to information and online events which are recorded and uploaded to the website

Programme evaluation and review of impact

Towards the end of the six-month programme all those taking part are supported to arrange a one-to-one session with an experienced, respected mentor, to discuss career advancement. Both mentor and mentee are offered training as part of the programme.

2022 Participants

The 2022 cohort had 52 participants. Data collected at the start of the course shows that participants were in a range of roles: Research Associate/Research Fellow (n=12), MPhil/PhD student/Clinical Doctoral Fellow (10), Clinical Teaching Fellow/Lecturer (9), Associate Professor/Consultant, Clinical or Professional Lead (6), Post-doctoral Research Fellow/Project Manager (5), Reader/Senior Clinical Researcher (midwife, physiotherapist) (5), Senior Lecturer/Lecturer (3), Senior Research Fellow (2). Eight were PhD students, 29 Fixed- term contract researchers and 15 were on permanent contract. Of the 18 (35%) that completed the EDI survey, half were carers, 15 (42%) were female, but only one person was from an underrepresented ethnic group.

Participants were from NIHR ARC South London member organisations: King's College London (KCL) (22), St George's, University of London (SGUL) (7), St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (SGH) (5), King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (KCH) (5), Kingston University (KU) (5), Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (GSTT) (3), South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) (2), and Other (South London) (3).

At the start of the programme participants were asked to rank their level of research skills on a scale of Level 1 novice to Level 6 most advanced and specialised knowledge and skills. Most participants had previous research experience: Level 3 Skills (n=16), Level 4 Skills (14), Level 2 Skills (12), Level 5 Skills (6), Level 1 Skills (4), Level 6 Skills (0).

Participants were asked to set three personal objectives when applying to join the Academy. Top answers were the opportunity to learn and understand research leadership, and to develop skills to lead effective research teams and collaborations, as shown in the following table of response themes.

What participants seek to gain from ARC Academy (Number of participants)
• Learning and understanding research leadership style, skills, and qualities (15)
• How to develop and lead effective research teams and collaborations (13)
• Gain experience or networking opportunities for career goals and progression (9)
• Enhanced research skills, e.g., research design, grant writing, research impact (6)
• Project management skills, e.g., costing proposals, financial management (7)
• Develop credibility or confidence to lead research (2)

Expert speakers

Each week a series of 16 core lectures is delivered by esteemed research leaders from different fields of health and social care. Speakers come from acute care, social care, midwifery, and palliative care, for example, as well as research commissioning and research assessment backgrounds.

- **All lectures were rated good or excellent by at least 90% of participants**
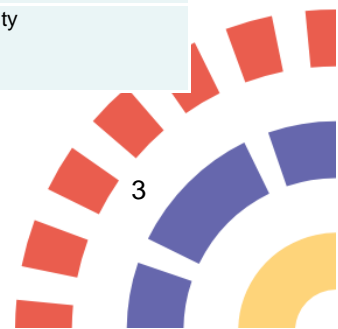
As one participant reported:

"All speakers were experts on their fields and excellent role models."

Speakers contributed their expertise to the programme by:
- sharing their top tips for research innovation, collaboration, and management
- explaining how they have made key leadership decisions
- talking about the factors that have shaped their research career journey
- setting practical exercises and group discussions

Speakers were asked to include issues of supporting diversity in their presentations and diversity of speakers was ensured. Specific equality, diversity and inclusion topics were also covered e.g., How to engage Black and minoritised women in research; a workshop with a service user voice/engagement specialist by Agnes Agyepong, Founder and CEO of Global Black Maternal Health, Health Inequalities/Diversity in PPI by Savi Hensman, Patient, Service User, Carer and Public Involvement Coordinator ARC South London & Prof Tushna Vandrevala, Professor of Health Psychology, Kingston University, 'Equality on Research Careers' by REF 2021 Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP) member Emerita Prof Fiona Ross CBE.
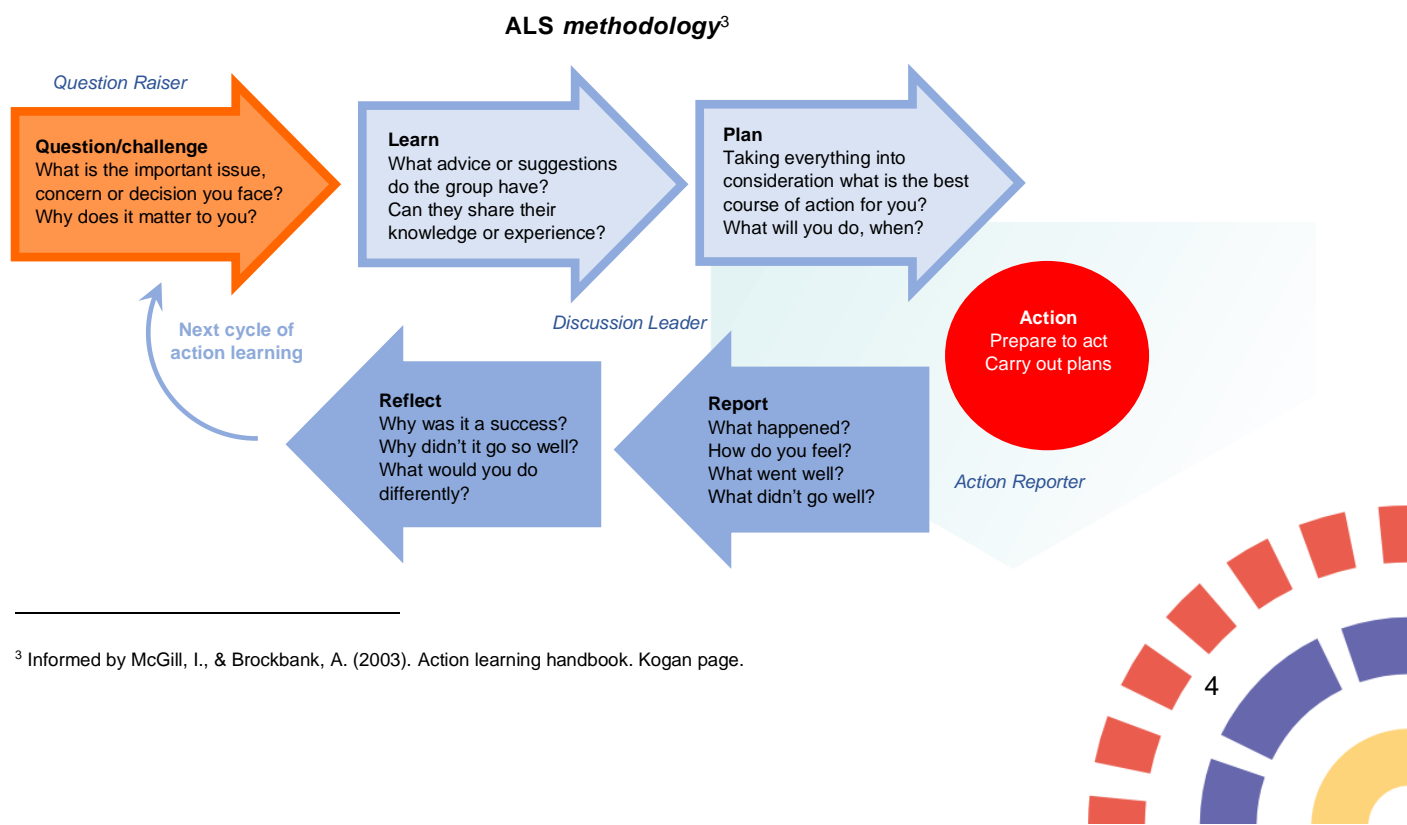
ARC Core lecture programme	Expert speakers
• **Introduction to the Academy**	Professor Cilla Harries (Academic Lead), ARC South London Deputy Theme Lead for Capacity Development, Head of Graduate Research School and Researcher Development, Kingston University
• **Action Learning Sets: Plan, format, and why action learning sets work**	Prof Cilla Harries & Savannah Workman, Kingston University
• **International partnership building (Palliative Care Theme)**	Prof Richard Harding, Vice Dean (International) and Director and Global Lead, Cicely Saunders Institute of Palliative Care, Policy & Rehabilitation, KCL
• **Research at the NHS Coal Face: navigating the challenges, facilitators and systems**	Visiting Prof Gita Rhamdharry, Kingston University, Consultant Allied Health Professional in Neuromuscular Diseases, UCLH
• **Costing up and managing grant applications and funders rules**	Jane Haycocks, Research Development Manager, Research and Impact Team, Kingston University
• **Contracting and project management including NIHR contracting**	Brenda Bih, Research Operations, Kingston University

• **Health Inequalities/Diversity in PPI**	Savi Hensman, Patient, Service User, Carer and Public Involvement Coordinator ARC South London & Prof Tushna Vandrevala, Professor of Health Psychology, Kingston University
• **Responsibility, fairness, performance and equality in research careers**	Emerita Prof Fiona Ross CBE, Kingston University & REF 2021 EDAP member
• **Being politically research savvy (governmental & national drivers)**	Emeritus Prof Tom Quinn, Emeritus Professor of Cardiovascular Nursing, Kingston University
• **How to form and run research collaborations/consortia (ARC Director)**	Sir Prof Graham Thornicroft, Professor of Community Psychiatry at the Centre for Global Mental Health and the Centre for Implementation Science, King's College London
• **Research leadership in social care (Social Care Theme)**	Prof Jill Manthorpe CBE, Professor of Social Work, King's College London
• **Research capacity building and research leadership in midwifery and maternity research**	Prof Jane Sandell CBE, Professor of Social Science and Women's Health, King's College London
• **Your research: route to impact and developing a theory of change**	Prof Fiona Jones, Professor of Rehabilitation Research Kingston University, founder and CEO of 'Bridges self-management'
• **My Health Service Research Journey – including some things I have learnt from membership of three research ethics committees and four National Institute of Health Research Funding panels**	Prof Vari Drennan MBE, Professor of Health Care & Policy Research, Kingston University
• **How to engage Black and minoritised women in research; a workshop with a service user voice/engagement specialist**	Agnes Agyepong, Founder and CEO of Global Black Maternal Health
• **Creating Excellent Research Environments**	Prof Cilla Harries, ARC South London Deputy Theme Lead for Capacity Development
• **Research Mentorship/Coaching**	Prof Cilla Harries & Dr Jackie MacRae, Associate Professor, Director of Research, Centre for Allied Health, St George's UoL

Action Learning Sets

Action learning in the programme is supported by online Action Learning Sets (ALS). 'Sets' of participants are matched at a similar level of experience so that they feel comfortable taking on the roles of Question/Challenge Raiser, Discussion Leader (keeping discussions on track and time), and Action Reporter (reporting back on actions taken), as illustrated by the Academy's approach below.

ALS *methodology*[3]

Question Raiser

Question/challenge
What is the important issue, concern or decision you face? Why does it matter to you?

Learn
What advice or suggestions do the group have? Can they share their knowledge or experience?

Plan
Taking everything into consideration what is the best course of action for you? What will you do, when?

Action
Prepare to act
Carry out plans

Action Reporter

Report
What happened?
How do you feel?
What went well?
What didn't go well?

Reflect
Why was it a success?
Why didn't it go so well?
What would you do differently?

Discussion Leader

Next cycle of action learning

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[3] Informed by McGill, I., & Brockbank, A. (2003). Action learning handbook. Kogan page.

- 100% participants rate the quality of the ALS briefings as very good to excellent
- 70% of participants rated the usefulness of ALS as good to excellent

Several participants explained what they particularly liked about the ALS:

"Going through the ALS in practice and hearing feedback from other groups".

"We used the space as an informal place to talk about career aspirations and worries, and just sharing them often helped."

ALS groups 'gelled' and worked best when participants took ownership, were clear about the methodology, shared leadership, and were able to attend at times that suited them.

Feedback from participants

Feedback from participants was captured during the course and at completion (survey using Likert scales and open-ended questions). All respondents were asked to give their consent for their anonymised quotes to be used for research evaluation purposes.

Participants said they liked the "welcoming warm style" and "very practically focused" introduction that is provided by Professor Harries. All highly rated the Academy briefing sessions (scoring 7 or more on a low-high scale of 1-10) for helping them to get the most from the flexible programme of lectures, group exercises, and one-to-one mentorship sessions that are on offer.

As one participant said:

"This was exceptional experience, really appreciate being part of this first cohort."

Participant's evaluations at completion confirm that the Academy is highly-valued:

- 100% agreed the course met or exceeded their expectations
- 91% agree or strongly agree the information is pitched at the right level for them
- 87% said they are likely or very likely to recommend the course to a colleague or friend
- 78% agree or strongly agree that the course covers relevant topics

As well as being inspired to connect across NIHR ARC, participants say they highly value the expert advice on offer.

Topics that were most valued included: developing research collaborations and proposals, costing up and managing research grants, ensuring diversity and inclusion in research, developing a theory of change, involving patients and members of the public in research, cultivating excellence in research environments, and strategies for increasing research impact such as through influencing policy change.

"The course increased my enthusiasm and confidence to reach out to people in the research and academic world as a result of seeing such high-profile researchers presenting to the group in such a supportive, open and encouraging way."

Participants praised the "well set out timetable" and variety of "diverse topics covered".

Most participants liked the timing, lengths of sessions and scheduling. Nearly all participants (91%) used the Academy platform to catch up on speaker recordings that they missed in person. As one participant commented, it was "easily able to attend and attend in my own time if required".

Mentorship

- 100% of participants who chose to arrange a one-to-one mentorship session rated their experience of the session as excellent

After having mentorship training and support from a mentor, participants said they feel more skilled in how to use mentorship in the future, as illustrated by the following quote:
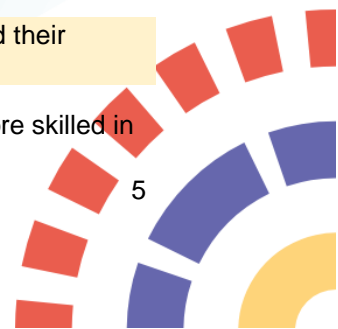
"My session with my mentor helped me to understand that impact and change start with getting the right information that will justify the change and looking for the right resources and people who can support the change."

Professional development and impact

Participants reported a range of immediate professional development outcomes including gaining understanding, confidence, and insights into how to develop research leadership at a level that is appropriate for them. Examples of what participants said:

"This course helped me to develop a deeper understanding of the research leadership qualities and provided me with strategies, ideas, and directions on how to improve my research career."

"It provided me with insights into how to develop myself as a leader, based on the sharing of other experiences from people in my action learning sets, the breakout discussions and the formal lectures. I feel that I now have more understanding and a broader skill set to implement in my research work."

"It gave me new knowledge, skills, and insight on developing and running large research projects, programmes, and consortia. It also offered new perspectives on how to build strategy and impact."

At the end of the course participants described a range of impacts or achievements on their research leadership development since commencing the Academy.

Impact or achievements by the end of the course (Number of participants)
• Confidence to lead a research study or take on a research leadership role (4)
• More proactive at making contacts and joining collaborations (4)
• Completed a grant application or gained research funding/fellowship (3)
• Built new links with patient groups or patient involvement in research (2)
• Wrote a research article or book chapter (2)
• Successfully completed a PhD or master's degree (2)
• Clearer about research career aspirations and goals (1)
• Supporting others in their clinical academic career development (1)
• More strategic about research impact (1)
• Too soon to tell (6)

Going from strength to strength in 2023

Based on this review of impact and learning, ARC Research Leadership Academy will build on its strengths in 2023. Key enhancements are as follows.

- The introduction to the Academy will now include an initial face-to-face event with additional time for participants to introduce themselves and practice ALS process in person.
- Each lecture will include a small group break-out exercise where participants can discuss an issue posed by the speaker.
- ALS groups will be slightly larger in 2023 to ensure optimal numbers for peer mentorship relationships to form and continue throughout the programme. Participants will be given information about the ALS methodology in advance and asked to come ready prepared with a challenge they would like to work on. Groups will be encouraged to self-organise sessions at times that suit them so that everyone has a turn to be a 'Challenge/Question raiser', 'Discussion leader' and 'Action reporter'.
- The Academy is committed to promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion in research and is taking action to monitor and enhance access to the Academy for people from underrepresented groups. In 2023 PPI applicants are also welcomed.
- Academy alumni will contribute through sharing their reflections and will provide support to ALS leads.
- A final in-person celebration event will be held for all Academy participants in summer 2023.

For further information about the Academy please contact: P.Harries@kingston.ac.uk