Guide for running a Researcher Realities event in your local communities

Introduction

Researcher Realities is an umbrella initiative that invites conversations among and across the researcher community about the *hows* of research: the lived realities and experiences of being a researcher. In spotlighting the researcher's realities, we consciously shift away from outputs and outcomes to focus instead on processes, career histories, and the realities of navigating planned and unplanned life events alongside research. These realities relate to every-day activities such as juggling multiple responsibilities, developing project ideas, applying for funding, making research and career-related decisions in connection to situated circumstances, bouncing back when things go wrong, transitioning into new roles, handling rejections, building teams, developing others, collaborating with a variety of colleagues and partners, planning with risks, and much more.

Researcher Realities is, therefore, all about visibility of experiences, not about solutions.

We are keen to encourage Researcher Realities events in local communities and contexts. To support you in doing this, this Guide sets out our expectations and offers practical advice on setting up an event/ a session.

If you wish to run a local Researcher Realities event, get in touch to talk through your idea.

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IAD's Researcher Realities Events

We launched Researcher Realities in May 2023. Since then, we have established the following event formats:

- annual Researcher Realities event with multiple sessions;
- pop-up events;
- Principal Investigator Researcher Realities sessions.

Individual sessions usually take the form of a chaired panel with short talks and time for Q&A, either on campus or online. There is a variety of options to curate an event from panel discussions of a theme, sharing of lived experience in response to prompt questions, or in the style of 'In Conversation with....'. The event format depends on the topic, speakers, and session aim. We encourage the researcher community to be creative and explore different format options.

Our expectations

By running an event under this initiative, we expect that you:

- get in touch at the planning stage;
- use Researcher Realities in the title for your event to benefit from and contribute to the visibility of the initiative – we can share promotional materials as well as assist with speaker invitation templates;
- define the session aim and target audience;
- ensure speakers represent diverse lived experiences and, ideally, career stages;
- enable the opportunity for a Q&A, regardless of session format you choose;
- consider remuneration / vouchers for speakers on fixed-term contracts. (Please get in touch to learn more about our practice for IAD Researcher Realities events.)

Guidance for Researcher Realities event planning

Careful planning is required when running a Researcher Realities Event. Here are the steps:

Step 1 – Define the aim / purpose of the event

Your researcher community may have discipline-specific realities, contexts, and experiences. A local Researcher Realities event offers an opportunity to address those specifics and can support community building within your unit.
Think through and articulate your aim for a Researcher Realities event.

Step 2 – Decide on a topic

Researcher Realities seeks to address and make visible "hidden" experiences and challenges. Topics can be broad and general or specific to transitions into new roles, specific communities such as long-term, postdoctoral, or first-generation researchers. We strongly encourage bottom-up events, where the suggestions come directly from researchers.

Step 3 – Define your target audience

Who do you want to come to the event? Who is it for?
Think carefully who you want the target audience to be. The Researcher Realities ethos is to encourage sharing of experience across career stages rather than within specific communities. However, Researcher Realities may also support cohort-building such as among postgraduate or postdoctoral communities.

Step 4 – Identify and invite speaker(s)

Diversity among speakers is key. In addition to gender, under-represented lived experiences, and protected characteristics, this means to consider career stage, disciplinary background, and contract type. It is important to think carefully about the topic and target audience.
To give an example: when the topic for conversation is 'Dealing with Rejection' and this is aimed at postdoctoral researchers it is important to consider what stories will be shared. The stakes differ depending on whether speakers are on a permanent contract or on a fixed-term contract.
Think carefully about the dynamics between speakers and audience members. Having diverse experiences and even disciplinary backgrounds among the speakers has been highlighted as a key motivator for attending sessions in the past.

Step 5 – Decide on format

Your format choice will be influenced by the topic/theme, speaker availability, and aims for the event. If the topic is highly sensitive, then in-person might be better than online or hybrid. If the topic is of great interest to a large community, then online might work best.

Format option ideas (but not exhaustive):

- Moderated panel conversation with invited speakers. Each speaker is given clear prompts and allocated time for a presentation (formal or informal, with or without slides). Following all speakers, you open out to audience questions.
- Moderated conversation with invited speakers. For this format, you pre-prepare questions that each speaker answers in turn and then open out to audience questions.
- Moderated open round with invited speakers. Moderator sets out the focus and aim of the session. Each speaker briefly introduces themselves in relation to the theme. Audience can ask questions.

Length:

- Session length can vary, but 60 to 90 minutes is ideal. Feedback always suggests that there isn't enough time for Q&A. So make sure to leave ample time for audience participation. If budget available, consider catering for networking before or after.

Capturing:

- If you wish to record the event, you will need to seek consent from the speakers and decide how questions can be asked from the audience. If you wish to discuss this further or receive guidance and templates, please get in touch via IAD.Researchers@ed.ac.uk.
- Consider writing up the key points of conversation in a blog post for the IAD's Research Staff Blog, which has a dedicated Researcher Realities space. You need to inform speakers of your intentions for capturing, seek consent where required, and offer the opportunity to review any write-up prior to publication.

Step 6 – Decide on when & where

When

- Keeping your target audience in mind and ensuring access, we recommend keeping it within normal working hours between 9am to 4pm. We suggest you do not schedule a session over lunch, unless catering is provided, and this is explicitly framed as a lunch-time community building activity.

- Consider opportunities within your local academic calendar that could incorporate a Researcher Realities event – whether it is connected to research seminar series, writing retreat, a School, Institute, or College gathering etc.

- If you run a series of events, make sure you vary dates / times to enable those with caring responsibilities, part-time working patterns etc to attend.

Where

- In person: Consider the space you wish to use in terms of size, formal versus informal set-up and catering opportunities if networking is encouraged.

- Online: Consider the online platform you wish to use and its accessibility. Note that British Sign Language interpreters recommend Zoom as the default software.

- Hybrid: If you opt for a hybrid format, make sure you have tested the technical equipment in advance and that you have support in place.

Step 7 – Set up briefing meeting with all speakers and chair

To create a safe and friendly environment for speakers, we expect that you arrange a briefing meeting with all speakers prior to the event. This gives the event organiser/chair and speakers the opportunity to meet each other. You can share aim, format, technicalities, any prompts, and offer the opportunity to ask questions as well as discuss content of presentations. This is also an opportunity to discuss whether the format suits all speakers and whether there are any preferences, adjustments, or accommodations that need to be made. If the topic is of a sensitive nature, it is also crucial to ask and discuss what **won't** be part of the conversation.

Step 8 – Promote the event

For your event promotion, please use the Researcher Realities logo. To receive the file, please email iad.researchers@ed.ac.uk. Depending on your target audience, we can also support the event promotion through our channels.

Step 9 – Thank speakers & attendees

Post-event thank you emails to your speakers and attendees is expected. We recommend you consider remuneration / vouchers for speakers, particularly for those on fixed-term contracts.
If you wish to discuss our practice, please get in touch at iad.researchers@ed.ac.uk.

We look forward to hearing about your Researcher Realities event plans!