

Horizons Institute Annual Report

2023-2024

HORIZONS
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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Introduction

The last year has seen notable successes, and some new challenges.

As this report will show, the Horizons Institute has embedded itself at the heart of the University’s research ecosystem, working with the Research and Innovation Service and the schools and faculties to promote and support challenge-led interdisciplinary research.

Our Challenge Networks programme has delivered four new clusters of research activity; Reimagine Ageing, Global Biosphere Sensing, Remaking Places, and Time, which are going from strength to strength, with contributions from all disciplines. In June, for example, the Reimagine Ageing Group brought together researchers from Medicine, Social Sciences, and Arts and Humanities to think about how data science can be unlocked to improve wellbeing in later life. All four networks have built new relationships, including externally, and ideas are emerging for major research projects and grant applications.

We have now recruited our next three Challenge Networks: Healthy Buildings, Polycrisis, and Magnetism in Biomaterials. We’re excited to be working with the leads of these new networks, to help them define their ambitions, grow their teams, and develop groundbreaking new research. A new focus for next year will be partnership building; helping the networks to connect to the people and organisations that can enhance the research, generate new solutions, and deliver tangible impact. We trialled a different approach to the final selection of our new networks, with a more diverse panel and greater focus on potential rather than the prior achievement of applicants. We think this has helped us to select networks with co-leads that can really benefit from what Horizons has to offer.

Demand for our programmes has increased significantly this year, for example applications to our Global Academy programme, working with partners in the Universities of Pretoria, Witwatersrand, and Ghana, trebled, and applications for the next round of Challenge Networks, doubled. Hundreds of people from across the University and beyond have attended our online Insight Series, in-person events

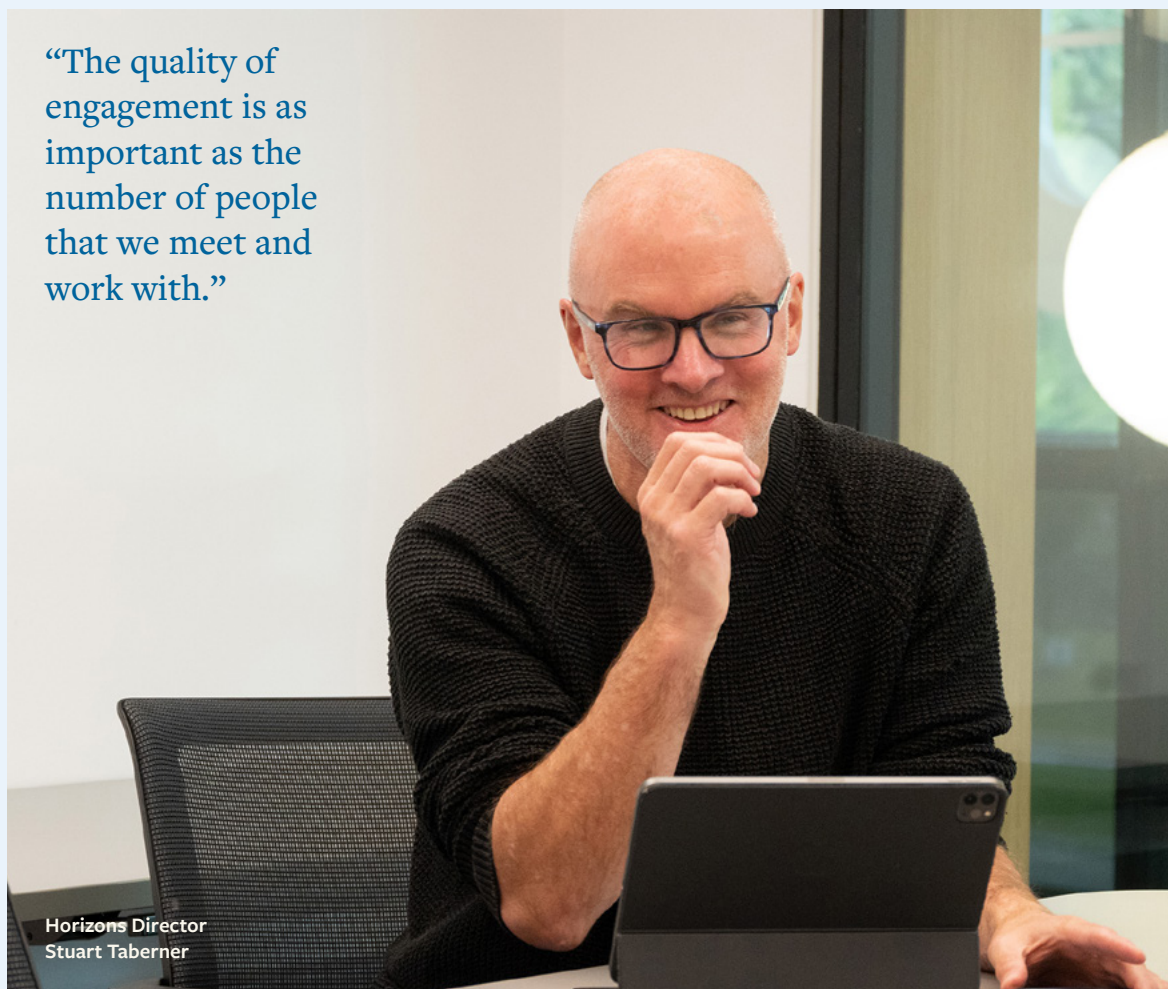
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The Horizons Team would like to thank our interns, Sidharth Thombrakudiyil Biju and Jordan Stead for the contributions they’ve made to writing and preparing the visual materials for this report.



“The quality of engagement is as important as the number of people that we meet and work with.”



Horizons Director
Stuart Taberner

such as Southern Methods and the Decolonising Research Methods Showcase, and ad-hoc workshops and Crucibles designed to support emerging areas of activity. This activity, supported by engaging communications content across platforms, is building a positive interdisciplinary research culture that is better connected across the University.

The quality of engagement is as important as the number of people that we meet and work with. The Horizons Institute team has worked hard behind the scenes this year to develop systems to track our interactions and to maximize their impact; connecting researchers, bringing in external partners, and supporting interdisciplinary research by focussing on the people involved, at all career stages and from all backgrounds. Here, our work with Leeds City Council and Policy Leeds on developing areas of research interest (ARIs) and, just as importantly, relationships between council officers and Leeds' researchers, stands out. The same is true of our new Horizons Platform programme, which is engaging more than 50 colleagues in Wits and Leeds, to develop new research ideas around climate, sustainability and inequality.

As for the challenges, as so often, these mainly relate to prioritisation. There is so much that the Horizons Institute could do, but decisions need to be made. For example, we want to engage much more intensively with technicians, professional services colleagues, and other people who contribute directly or indirectly to the success of Leeds' research. At the same time, there is increasing external interest on the Horizons approach to fostering interdisciplinary research, including requests for us to offer our expertise on a commercial basis to partners beyond the University, in the UK and internationally. We also have an ambition to develop as a nationally recognised centre for interdisciplinary methods, facilitation, and policy. This report describes some of what has already been done in these areas, and hints at the opportunities.

We hope that you enjoy reading this report, and we welcome your feedback!

Stuart Taberner
Director

Engagement

Over the last year the Horizons Institute has more than doubled the number of internal colleagues we have worked with to bring the number of contacts to more than 1,100 since the Horizons Institute started [see infographic 1 – Horizons Institute Engagement]. These colleagues are across all disciplines and career stages and include academics and research professionals.

Our Headline Pillar – What comes after the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? – led by Research Manager Poppy Leeder, provides some excellent examples of how we have engaged with colleagues across campus. This includes developing research projects with colleagues in Student Education, through BAIBEL (Building AI-Based Educational Language) and the Social Justice Jam (part of Curriculum Redefined), and with PhD students highlighting issues around decolonisation in research within the area of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WaSH) through a conference session and podcast series.

The impact of our cross-disciplinary approach is exemplified in the work we have done with Prof. Ruth Swanwick from the Social Research Methods Centre, highlighting the use of research methods in different contexts, particularly in the Global South. Working with Ruth, Research Manager Kate Kellett convened two workshops focusing on Southern Methodologies and organised the Decolonising Research Methods Showcase, engaging with more than 100 University of Leeds colleagues to develop a much needed cross-faculty conversation.

Our Global Academy Crucible Programme has specifically been designed for academics to develop their external networks. Over the past two years we have recruited academics from our partner institutions, the University of Ghana, the University of Pretoria, and the University of Witwatersrand to work with academics from Leeds to develop new interdisciplinary approaches to challenges and building collaborations across disciplines.

As our programme develops, so too does the recognition of its value from the participants it

“The showcase brought together researchers from various disciplines and universities, which allowed us to reflect on diverse research experiences. Providing the space for this focused networking challenges our thinking and enhances our practice. It was incredibly valuable to learn from other scholars in how they decolonise methodological approaches in research.”

Dr Francis Poitier, Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds



Dr Simon Manda shares his research with the Decolonising Research Methods Showcase participants in Spring 2024

engages. As a result, applications for our 2024-2025 programme have trebled with a significant increase in interest from our overseas partners as our reputation outside of Leeds has grown.

Challenge Networks, and our interaction with academics through these networks, are a key part of our increasing engagement across the University. We work extensively with the co-leads of each network to broaden their reach which allows them to build their memberships.

Infographic 1

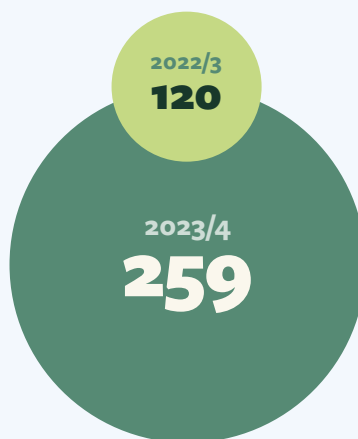
Horizons Institute Engagement

Total Horizons Contacts



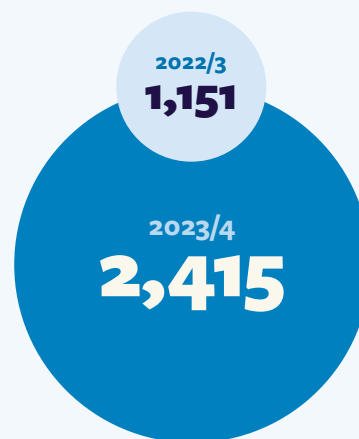
↑ **95%**
increase

External Contacts



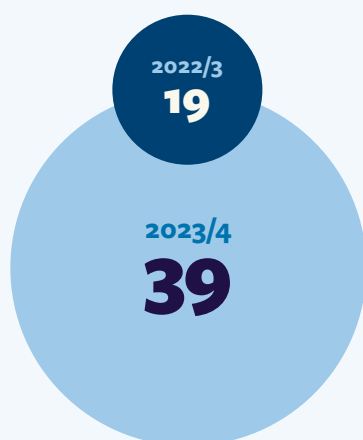
↑ **116%**
increase

Social Networks

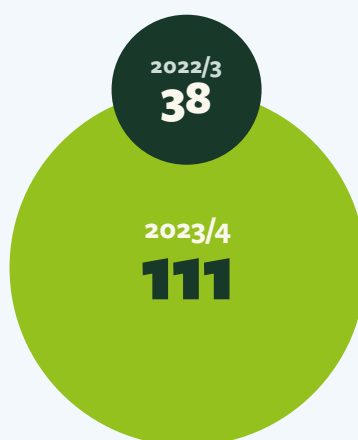


↑ **110%**
increase

Applications to Programmes

Challenge Networks
(Expressions of interest)

↑ **105%**
increase

Global Academy
(Applicants)

↑ **192%**
increase

Horizons Platform
(Applicants)

In 2023-24 we have supported four Challenge Networks: Reimagine Ageing, Remaking Places, Global Biosphere Sensing Network, and the Interdisciplinary Network for Time. These networks have developed their memberships through the organization of events, activities and focused workshops to generate interest, facilitate interactions and develop interdisciplinary research.

Network members across the four networks represent all disciplines across the University of Leeds as well as external academic institutions. The networks have also developed partnerships across sectors recruiting external members from a wide

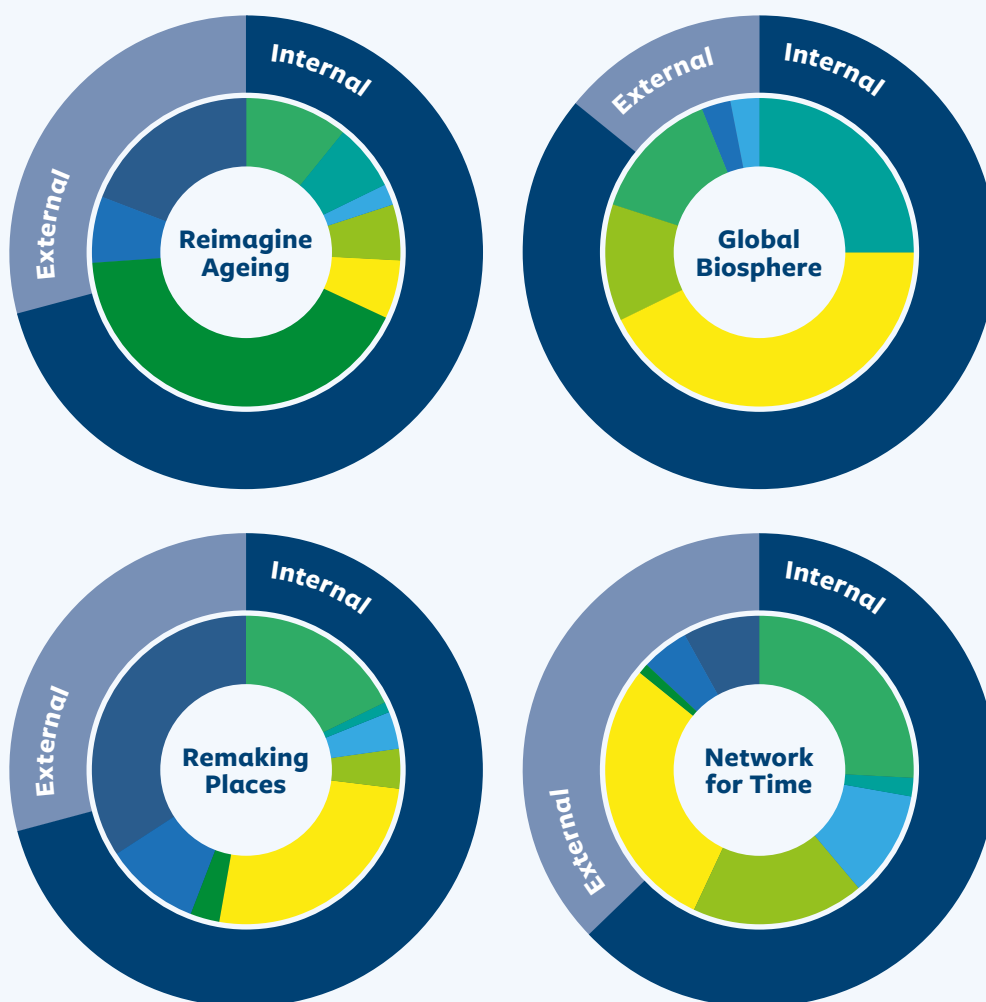
range of organisations including Leeds City Council, The Environment Agency and the National Physical Laboratory [see infographic 2 – Challenge Networks].

We have now recruited three new Challenge Networks; Magnetism in Biomaterials, Polycrisis, and Healthy Buildings through a competitive process following 39 applications at the expression of interest stage. We will be working with the leads from September 2024 to develop their Networks and look forward to their official launch events in the coming months.

Alongside the interest in specific programmes, we have also seen our external engagement increase

Infographic 2

Challenge Networks



Members

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Arts and Humanities | ■ Environment |
| ■ Biology | ■ Medicine and Health |
| ■ Business | ■ Social Sciences |
| ■ Engineering and Physical Sciences | ■ Other/not specified |



Vanessa Damianou from *thinkingvisually* Ltd illustrates a graphic at the Global Biosphere Sensing Network launch event.

more generally, particularly across our communication platforms, with more than 240 external colleagues having actively engaged in Horizons Institute events and engagement opportunities.

Part of this external engagement has come through the hybrid opportunities for interdisciplinary conversations through our online activities, allowing researchers and research-aligned colleagues to take part regardless of their location. We have held three hybrid international and multi-sectoral panels exploring What Comes After the SDGs? as well as our regular Insight Series sessions, which share interdisciplinary best practice across career stages.

Through our evaluation, we are starting to understand how and why colleagues engage with us and can monitor whether we meet expectations. We know that colleagues often engage with us in multiple different ways and can now evidence this through data collected in the Horizons Institute database set up by Institute Manager Lauren Wray to track, with consent, an individual's journey through different elements of our programmes.

Our evaluation is also helping us to understand more about the barriers that may prevent engagement and look at ways in which we can mitigate against these barriers. However, while we seek to ensure our programmes are inclusive and accessible, capacity and resource can often be the limiting factor.

New initiatives

Looking forward there are plans to increase engagement further through two exciting new initiatives:

Firstly, our recently launched Horizons Platform programme, designed by Research Manager Kate Kellett, has recruited 50 established academics from the University of Leeds and the University of Witwatersrand. This will provide support and funding to develop cross-institution interdisciplinary research in the areas of climate, sustainability and inequality, and strengthen the partnership between the two institutions.

Secondly, our new equipment and methods series, Methods Link, aims to build upon a technique developed by Head of Interdisciplinary Research, Samantha Aspinall. Methods Link, led by Research Managers Kate Kellett and Poppy Leeder, uses discussions around research methods as a way of starting conversations that can lead to interdisciplinary collaboration. Having successfully delivered the first methods mini-series online in June-July 2024 and engaging around 50 colleagues, we are looking to build a community and bring new voices, particularly those of technicians, into cross-disciplinary conversations.

People and Culture

At the Horizons Institute, we create a positive environment that enables interdisciplinary research to thrive and supports interdisciplinary leaders to emerge.

The Horizons Institute Research Managers have worked closely with our first and second cohort of Challenge Theme Network Co-leads reviewing the process to identify, improve on, and embed new approaches to support the leadership development of cohort three (2024-2026).

As a result of this review, we have now increased the duration of support provided to our new Challenge Theme Network co-leads from 12 to 18-months and have included a bespoke interdisciplinary leadership training programme to support network co-leads. This is designed to help develop the skills we know are essential to lead an interdisciplinary team and network. We expect to see the impact of these changes at the individual, team, and network level in the upcoming year.

We know that time can be a limiting factor for the colleagues we work with, which is why we dedicate time to developing positive working relationships with our programme participants and partners over a sustained period. This helps foster trust and buy-in.

In our Crucible Programme, for example, we invite participants to engage in three interdisciplinary multi-day workshops over a 6-month period. We also provide a series of mobility opportunities so participants can experience research culture in different contexts and strengthen research relationships.

Horizons Business Support Officer Kuldip Banger and Research Manager Poppy Leeder, design and implement the Crucible programme and are central to efforts in building collegiality between Crucible Programme participants from the Universities of Leeds, Ghana, Witwatersrand, and Pretoria from the moment they are awarded a place on the programme.

“Before I participated in the Horizons Crucible Programme, I thought I had a bit of an understanding of what interdisciplinary research was about, but I was confusing it with multi-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary research. Once it was explained I realised ‘no’, I had not yet arrived in that interdisciplinary space. It was an eye-opener.”

Thobela Nkukwana,

Natural and Agricultural Sciences, University of Pretoria

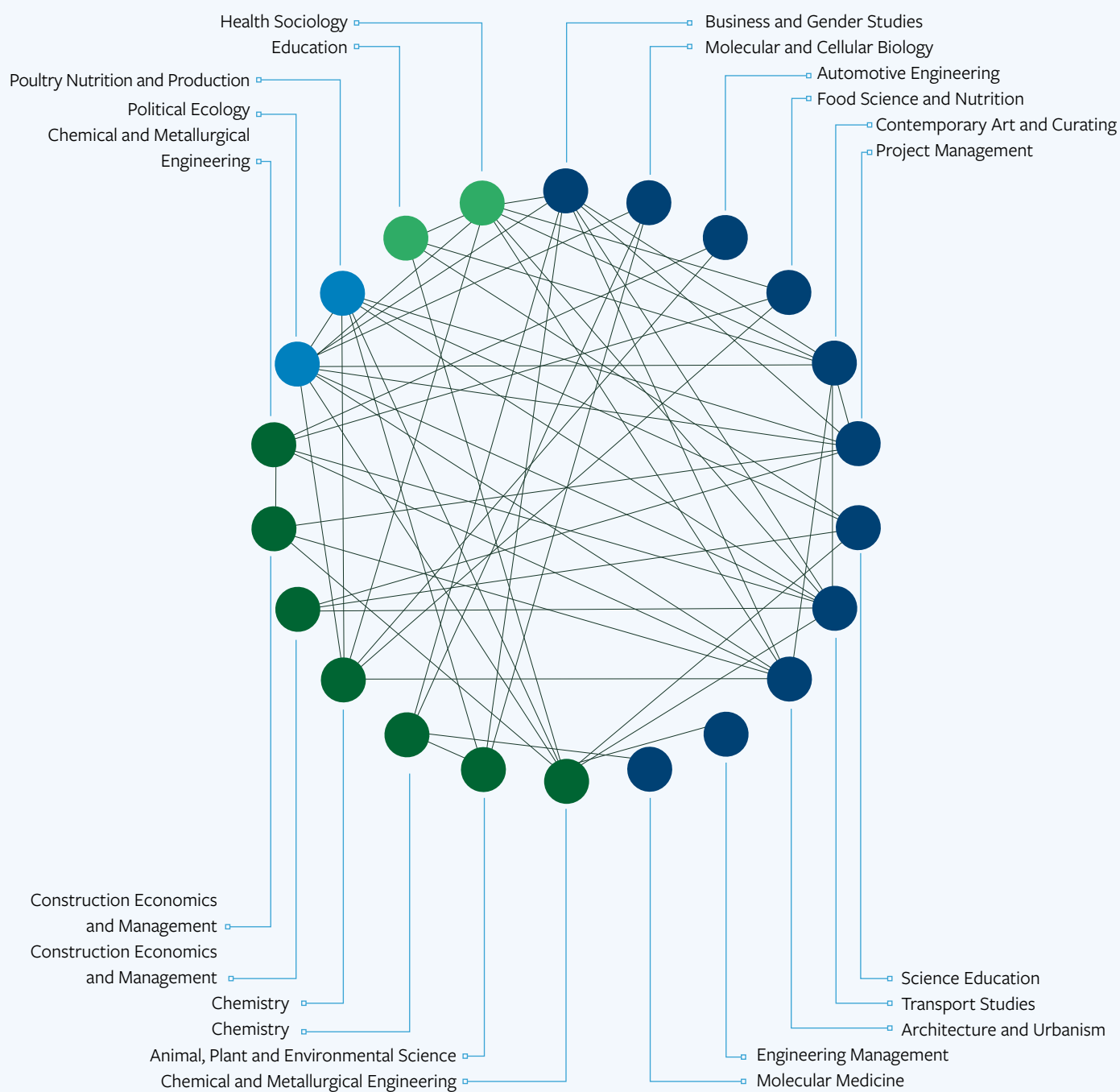
In 2023-2024, multiple collaborations across disciplines and geographies emerged from the Crucible Programme resulting in a deeper understanding and appreciation of interdisciplinary research, three new funded research projects, and other sustained informal partnerships across the globe. [see infographic 3 – Crucible Connections].



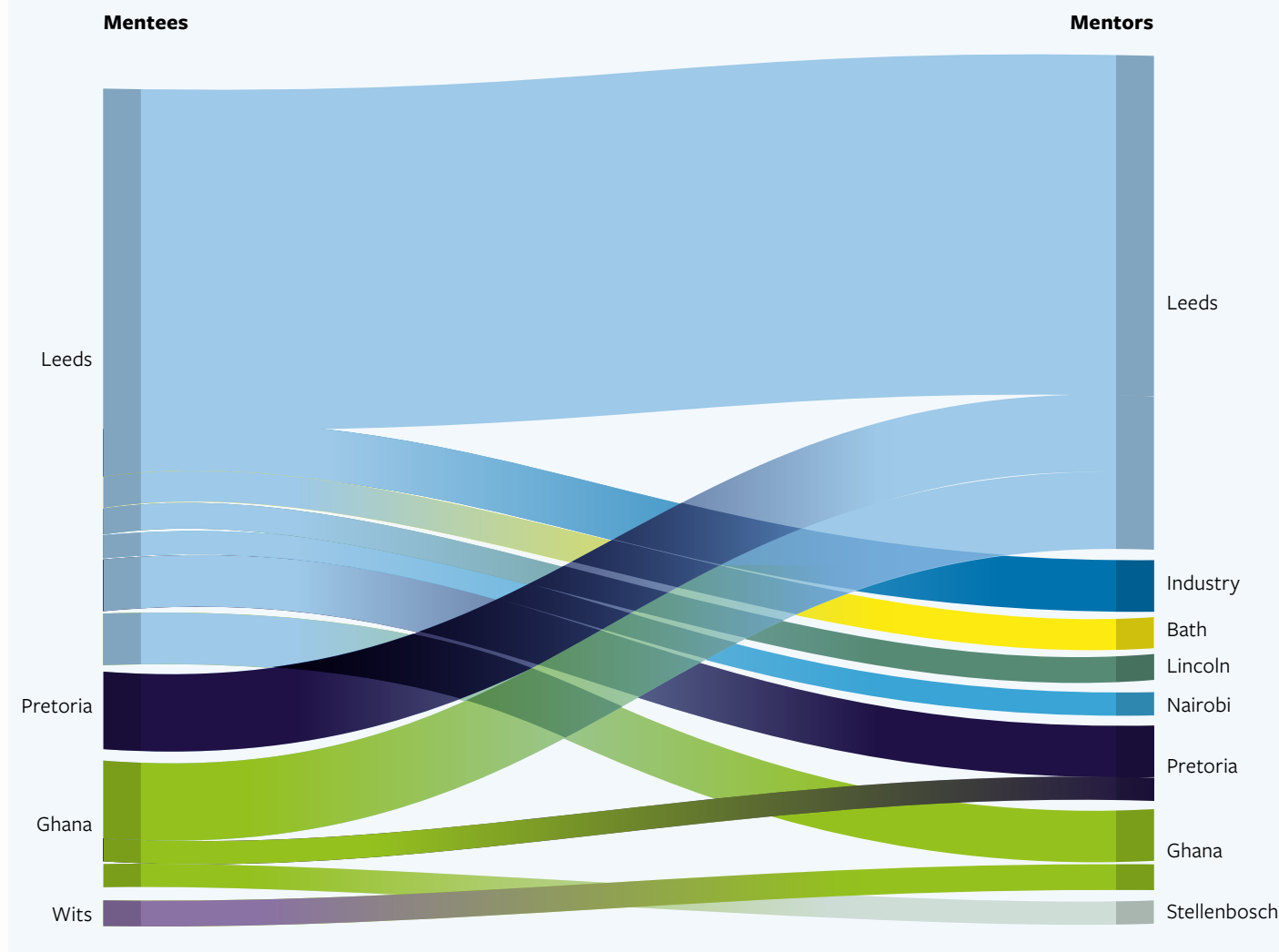
Research Manager Poppy Leeder in conversation with Dr Chris Hassall

Infographic 3
Crucible connections in 2023-2024
Institution

- University of Leeds
- University of Wits
- University of Pretoria
- University of Ghana



Infographic 4 Mentoring programme



In 2023, Horizons Institute Manager Lauren Wray, in collaboration with Charlotte Bonner-Evans, Mentoring Manager at the Future Leaders Fellows Development Network, launched the Horizons Institute Interdisciplinary Mentoring Programme. The Mentoring Programme provides Horizons Institute alumni with the opportunity to draw on and share their experiences and approaches with their mentoring partner, from a different disciplinary background, through reciprocal and reflective learning over 12-months.

In this first year of the Horizons Mentoring Scheme, 21 Crucible Programme participants and Challenge Theme Network Co-leads registered for the programme and were matched with mentors working in and outside of academia [see infographic 4 – Mentoring Programme]. Mentors were offered a small honorarium in recognition of the time and expertise they were dedicating to the programme.

Research Manager Dave Riley and Institute Manager Lauren Wray, have completed the

evaluation of the pilot programme, conducting over 24 exit interviews and will report the findings from the programme in Autumn 2024. Dave Riley successfully matched the next cohort of mentoring pairs, with four mentees from the pilot programme now stepping into the mentoring role growing the number of interdisciplinary scholars within the mentor pool.

The Horizons Institute is committed to upholding the highest standards of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The Horizons Institute insists that all project and Network proposals outline how EDI and accessibility has been built into their design. We support those we work with, pre-and-post-funding, to encourage and upskill them to go even further in their thinking and commitment to creating an inclusive research culture.

In 2023, Institute Manager Lauren Wray established the Horizons Institute Inclusion Fund. This enables grantees to address barriers to participation that emerge over the lifespan of their interdisciplinary

research project that weren't costed into the initial research proposal. In 2023-2024, the Inclusion Fund was used by grantees to support wider participation in a series of workshops and was used in one case to implement safety measures for a grantee conducting fieldwork in a remote location outside of the UK.

The Horizons Institute also encourages opportunities to learn about issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion within the safe environment of the team. Lauren Wray invited the Horizons team to work together to research the latest news and policy on topics such as caring responsibilities, digital accessibility, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion and to think about how we might best support each other as a team and the people that we work with to equitably engage and participate in our programmes.

“The Horizons team gave me enough space and support to design a project that can draw on and sharpen my research skills. They helped me become a more confident qualitative researcher.”

Siying Shen

Horizons Institute Student Intern

Team development and culture

In 2023-2024, Research Managers Kate Kellett, Abi Rowson, and Inés Soria-Donlan were appointed Joint Acting Head of Interdisciplinary Research at the University of Leeds. Institute Manager Lauren Wray was seconded to the Future Leaders Fellows Development Network for 6-months as Community Manager, Abi Rowson was seconded to the Policy and Intelligence Team at Leeds City Council, and Head of Interdisciplinary Research Samantha Aspinall, was seconded to UKRI to develop the Cross-Council Interdisciplinary Responsive Mode pilot funding call.

These secondments provide fantastic career development opportunities for the team and support the Horizons Institute to embed good practice from outside of Leeds and from across the Research and Innovation, and Policy sectors.

Communications Manager Karis Welch, Challenge Network Coordinator Rosemary Sanaee, and Research Manager Poppy Leeder each participated in a leadership development programme to develop their leadership style and skills.

The Horizons Institute also launched a paid Intern Programme in 2023 to provide opportunities for students at the University of Leeds to experience working in an interdisciplinary environment. In the programme's first year, the Horizons Institute recruited four students to work on activities including supporting the evaluation of one of our interdisciplinary research programmes, the organisation and delivery of events, and working on Horizons digital communications.



Participants in the Global Crucible Programme meet in Leeds in January 2024

FlowDent Case Study

“For [the] Crucible, you know that every single person in that workshop wants to collaborate, so it makes us feel at ease and just open to discussing issues and trying to find a collaboration [for the solution] actively”

Dr Mohammed Al-Mosawi

Faculty of Medicine, University of Leeds

FlowDent is an interdisciplinary research project that received pump prime funding through the Horizons Institute’s Crucible Programme in 2023. The project, is led by Dr Mohammed Al-Mosawi and Dr Robert Davies, from the School of Dentistry; Dr Junfeng Yang, School of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Leeds; and Dr Razan Aboljadayel, School of Physics from the University of Cambridge

The aim of the project is to explore the impact of fluid dynamics in dentin for dental treatment enhancement. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the team developed innovative methods that visualise the structural changes to dentinal tubes following the application of a self-assembled peptide matrix (SAPM) gel.

The project’s success has been attributed, in part, to the collaborative environment provided by the

Crucible Programme as this empowered the team to actively pursue interdisciplinary collaborations.

The availability of pump-prime funding as part of the Crucible programme helped the team to test their interdisciplinary approaches and generate results from which to seek further funding, something that they wouldn’t have been able to do through traditional, discipline specific research grants. Personal development has also been enhanced through this interdisciplinary collaboration, with members of the team learning skills from outside of their traditional field.

The FlowDent project has established innovative methods for studying fluid dynamics whilst also developing products for both the dentistry and medical fields. It demonstrates how, through the Crucible Programme, the Horizons Institute has fostered the emergence of innovative ideas by facilitating interdisciplinary approaches.



FlowDent project team (left to right): Dr Junfeng Yang, Dr Robert Davies, Dr Mohammed Al-Mosawi, and Dr Razan Aboljadayel.

Partnerships

The development of partnerships is central to the Horizons Institute's aims to expand the impact of our work and the research that we support. Recognising the benefits of partnership working, we have continued to engage with and support established partners, whilst also pursuing the development of new partnerships through our networks, funding opportunities, and partnered events [see infographic 5 – Partnered events].

Over the last year, and in anticipation of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture, we have continued our established partnership with the Cultural Institute at the University of Leeds, and partnered with the University of Bradford, and the Bradford Cultural Sector.

Horizons Institute Research Managers, Dave Riley and Inés Soria-Donlan, have led this partnership

project for the Horizons Institute, culminating in two research sandpits, which provided space to facilitate interdisciplinary connections between academics and cultural practitioners.

These sandpits tackled two themes that emerged from a number of scoping and networking events - "Our Connection to Nature" and "Culture's Role in Agency and Belonging". Sandpit participants were invited to apply for a share of £30,000 to lead pump-prime projects to run through 2024-2025.

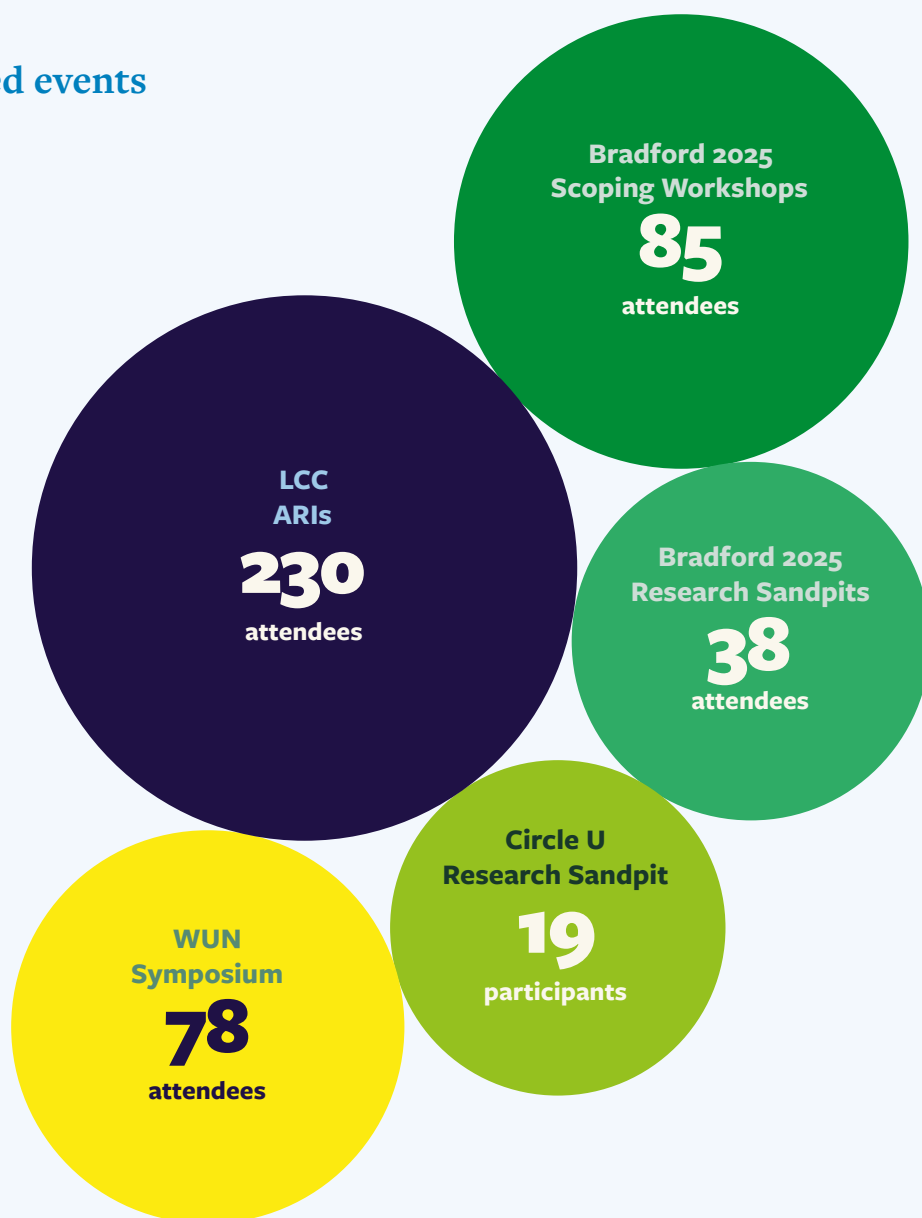
We received several exciting applications and funded two research projects: Re-imagining relationships with Urban Nature, Muslims in the North, and The Energy of Intention.

Participants at the Bradford 2025 sandpit in early summer 2024.



Infographic 5

Partnered events



Supporting Partnership Development

Starting in December 2023, the Connect Fund is a pilot scheme aimed to provide an opportunity for University of Leeds academics to develop new partnerships with third sector organisations. The funding supports projects for a year and a key aspect is the provision of time and space for facilitating the development of partnerships that build innovative, equitable, and needs-based research.

This initial pilot scheme funded four projects. The development of a network with a new international partner organisation Maharshi Karve Stree Shikshan Samstha (MKSSS), in Pune, India and the support of research projects with local partners including Otley 2030, Leeds Development Education Centre, and the Hull Food Partnership.

These projects are still active and we will conduct an evaluation of the successes and lessons learnt when they come to an end. Crucial to this evaluation will be understanding the value of structured early-stage support for sustainable and successful partnerships.

Through the Connect Fund, we aim to learn more about the priorities and conflicts within early-stage partnerships and develop an approach to successful transdisciplinary working with a view to feeding these findings into the wider understanding and discussions about partnership building across the University.

“Horizons shaped the dynamic of the symposium in critical ways, helping us to think “outside of the box” and provide activities that were experimental, fun and playful while leading to genuine research collaborations for the future.”

Prof Sarah Waters

Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Leeds

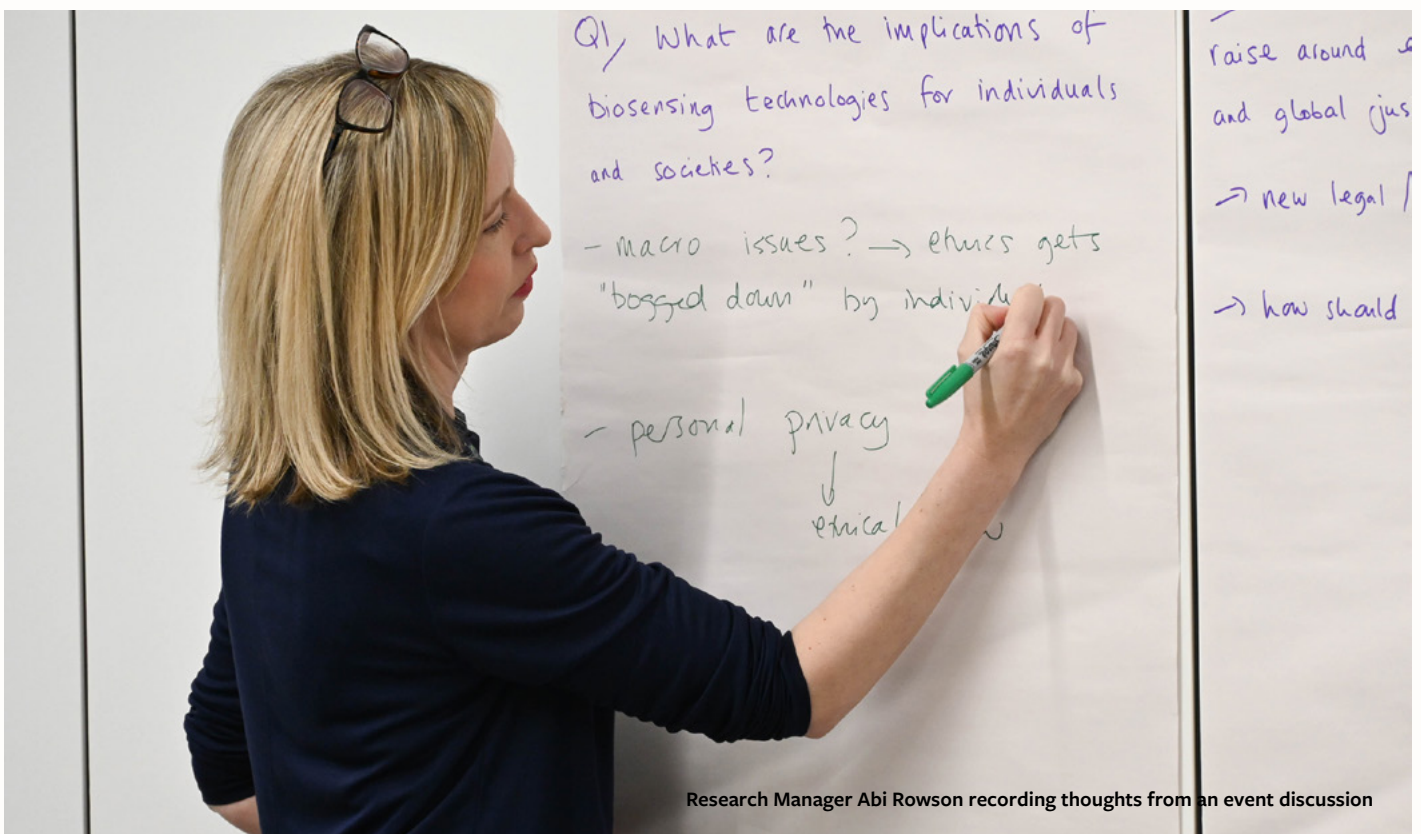
Providing bespoke support

A key part of our success as an institute is having the capacity to be reactive to requests and recognising where our input can add real value.

When previous Challenge Network co-lead, Prof. Sarah Waters, was invited to host the World University Networks' (WUN) International Mental Health Symposium, Horizons Institute Research Manager, Abi Rowson, worked with the organising committee to ensure the symposium provided interdisciplinary approaches and opportunities for future collaborations.

The New Research Directions in Global Mental Health WUN-sponsored 2-day symposium took place in June 2024 with 78 registrants from 14 countries. Attendees included two Early Career Researchers from the University of Ghana and Makerere University, Uganda, who attended to present their research, funded by bursaries from Horizons and the Knowledge Equity Network.

The symposium championed interdisciplinary approaches. Supported by Research Managers Kate Kellett and Dave Riley, Abi led workshops on research networking and interdisciplinary collaboration, which contributed to the overall success of the event and provided a solid foundation for future research. The 2024 WUN Research Development Fund (RDF) Programme was launched the same week with the aim to provide an opportunity to apply for funding to support collaborations developed through the symposium.



Research Manager Abi Rowson recording thoughts from an event discussion



Participants in the research connections session at the Worldwide Universities Network Mental Health Research Symposium in early summer 2024

Emerging partnerships

Horizons recently launched the Platform programme as an addition to our Horizons Academy offer. This programme builds on our Global Academy Crucible Programme and has been developed in partnership with the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. Research Manager, Kate Kellett and Business Support Officer Kuldip Banger have established a partnership with Professor Imraan Valodia, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Climate, Sustainability, and Inequality and the Director for the Southern Centre for Inequalities at the University of Witwatersrand. The programme focusses on the research areas of climate, sustainability, and inequality, building on areas of research strength at both institutions. Through this partnership, an open and cross-directional knowledge flow has been established which will continue as the Platform programme progresses and new interdisciplinary collaborations and research ideas emerge.

The benefits of broadening our network

Through continuing to establish new partnerships whilst sustaining our existing ones, we have been able to broaden the reach and impact of our work.

By helping academics to broker new partnerships across various sectors such as policy, the arts, and third sector, through programmes such as Bradford 2025 and the Connect Fund, we are supporting a rich and diverse range of ideas.

Many of these ideas have developed into co-produced research projects, and each have the potential for significant research impact on local communities in Leeds, Bradford, and across the world.

Leeds City Council and Policy Leeds Case Study

Since September 2023, Horizons Institute Research Manager Abi Rowson has been on secondment to the Policy and Intelligence team at Leeds City Council, working with Mike Eakins and Rosie Armitage to accelerate the partnership between the University of Leeds and Leeds City Council.

A key objective of the secondment was to create better routes for academic researchers and Council Officers to form partnerships to benefit the residents and communities of Leeds.

To achieve this objective, Abi met with Chief Officers at the council to understand the challenges they face in their role and in engaging with researchers. Abi, Mike, and Rosie then worked together to refine the Council's Areas of Research Interest (ARIs), a key mechanism for research-policy engagement. Consequently, in April 2024, the University of Leeds and Leeds City Council launched a fresh set of ARIs, newly grouped under the Council's Best City Ambition pillars of Health and Wellbeing, Inclusive Growth, and Zero Carbon.

These new ARIs provide a route to understanding the knowledge needs of the council and have led to enhanced connectivity between Leeds City Council officers and University of Leeds researchers.

More than 230 researchers attended the ARIs launch, and several collaborative research projects have

been funded through Policy Leeds and the Horizons Institute. Similarly, framing the ARIs in the language of the Council and the Best City Ambition pillars has shown how research expertise at the University of Leeds aligns with the council's priority areas. This has led to a dramatic increase in engagement from Chief Officers and senior staff through the ARIs mechanism.

Several Councils in England have expressed an interest in the ARIs model to promote collaboration between Chief Officers and researchers at their local institutions. Approaches for more information about the framework have been made by the University of Birmingham and Bristol City Council, Staffordshire University and Stoke City Council, Southampton University and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and Bradford Metropolitan District Council and Health Determinants Research Collaboration, among others.

Leeds City Council is forward thinking in its engagement with evidence-informed policy and is ambitious about strengthening its own capacity around research. Research institutions and policy institutions have much to learn from each other. The level of interest in the ARIs framework shows there is a willingness and a desire, nationally, to build collaborative research-policy partnerships now that Leeds City Council and the University of Leeds has shown them the way.



Mike Eakins and Abi Rowson

Change and Influence

Working across the University

A key aspect of our influence has been in the promotion of interdisciplinary approaches which we have defined for the Horizons Institute using the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) definition of interdisciplinarity.

“Interdisciplinary research brings together researchers to better identify problems, approaches, and solutions to global and multifaceted challenges. Researchers from two or more disciplines work together in a way that sees reciprocal benefits and integration of methods across traditional disciplinary boundaries.”

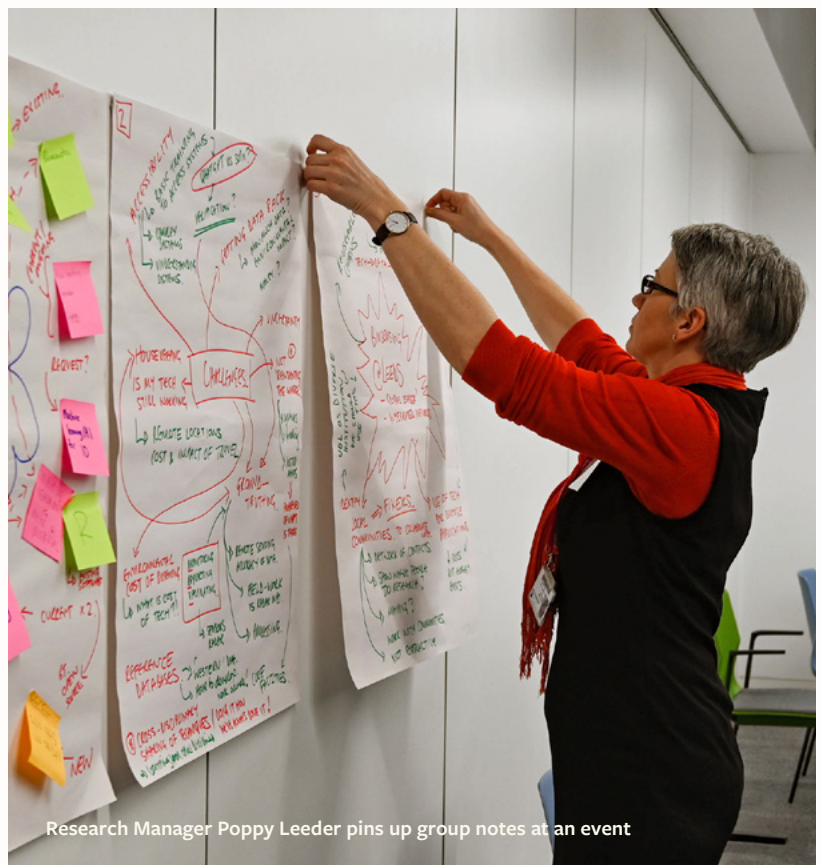
As evidenced in this report, the development and support of individuals to build capacity in interdisciplinary research and generate interdisciplinary research ideas has been an important element in the success of the Horizons Institute to date. Aligned to this is our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) and, by bringing these together, we have been able to implement small changes that influence and shape our interactions which can, in turn, shape and influence the interactions of others.

A new area of development has been working with the Advancement Team at the University of Leeds following the endorsement of a paper presented to the Philanthropy Steering Group by Research Manager Abi Rowson, and Horizons Director Stuart Taberner.

Through this work we are now piloting an approach to build a pool of donors who are enthusiastic about supporting challenge-led,

cutting edge research. This new direction is an exciting prospect for the future, and we are looking forward to working closely with the Advancement team.

Overall, throughout the year, we have seen our connection with other institutes and centres across the University grow and have become more visible as an institute. Through our communications, led by Communications Manager Karis Welch, we have had more opportunity to get involved with University-wide campaigns and collectively build a more complete picture of the thriving and vibrant research ecosystem across Leeds. As a result, we can also offer an opportunity for a diverse range of people from across the university to share their work, perspectives, and ambitions through our platforms.



Research Manager Poppy Leeder pins up group notes at an event

“The Horizons Institute is leading on so many exciting and innovative initiatives which is really stimulating and, I think, has a really positive impact on feelings of belonging and connection across departments and disciplines.”

Morgan Campbell

Faculty of Environment, University of Leeds



Research Manager Kate Kellett facilitates at a Reimagine Ageing event

Expanding our work with external partners

In the latter part of this year and looking towards the future, we have started to widen our vision towards making many of our outputs available externally to position the Horizons Institute as a sector leader in interdisciplinary, early-stage research development.

Led by the Head of Interdisciplinary Research, Samantha Aspinall, the Horizons Institute are in the process of formalising our approach to commercialise our expertise and services in interdisciplinary research and leadership development. The Horizons Institute has been approached to deliver Crucibles at universities on a global scale. These include national universities, Queen's University Belfast, King's College London, the University of Glasgow, and the White Rose Consortium (Leeds, Sheffield and York), as well as European universities, through Circle U (9 European Universities) and the University of Oslo, as well as in the United States. We have also partnered with research organisations, such as the Future Leader Fellows (FLF) Development Network, to deliver crucible-style workshops. The purpose of the workshops is to create frameworks for academics to collaborate across disciplines. By establishing an external commercial offer for global partners, we seek to position ourselves as a sector leader in interdisciplinary leadership and research developers, whilst also increasing the capacity and quality of interdisciplinary research applications at these partner institutes.

Cross-sector connections

In 2023, Research Managers Poppy Leeder, Kate Kellett, Abi Rowson and Inés Soria-Donlan laid the foundations for sharing good interdisciplinary research management practice with a broader audience. The four Research Managers joined an informal Interdisciplinary Research Manager Support Network with 8 partner Universities across the UK (Glasgow, Durham, UCL, Aberdeen, Oxford, Manchester Met, Sheffield, and Manchester) giving them the opportunity to proactively lead, but also to learn from other research professionals operating in an interdisciplinary space.

A highlight for this new Network was the development of a workshop session on interdisciplinary research development for Research Managers at the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) Conference in Brighton. The session was led by Research Manager, Poppy Leeder, who is now looking to build connections to further develop the network.

“The non-prescriptive way we are asked to develop the network allows for diversity of thought, and non-traditional ways of undertaking and evaluating work in the network.”

Dr Sarah Astill

Professor and Co-lead of the Reimagine Ageing Network, University of Leeds



Research Manager Dave Riley



Adapting our own approaches

Reflecting and evaluating our own processes and approaches has been an important part of the Horizons Institute's development.

Our ambition to be sector-leading in early-stage interdisciplinary research development requires an understanding and consideration of the wider landscape, which we have explored through secondments and through our wider networks.

Looking ahead we are keen to expand the adoption of sector-leading review and assessment models, such as those used by UKRI, with the development of an internal assessment college and will be working with colleagues across the University to do this.

We've trialled a new approach to how we select our programme participants, Network Co-leads, and funding awardees, taking inspiration from the UKRI Interdisciplinary Responsive Mode Pilot funding call designed by Head of Interdisciplinary Research Samantha Aspinall. Currently all peer review assessments are now moderated by a team of Horizons Institute Research Managers to check for consistency and live panels are observed by an independent rover who monitors the panel's behaviour to ensure a fair process. This robust assessment has helped us to select new Challenge Networks with co-leads that can really benefit from what Horizons has to offer.

In our next year we will trial the formation of an interdisciplinary peer-review college at Leeds, led by Samantha Aspinall. This will be modelled on the UKRI college, which recruited 320 members including academics at all career stages, technicians and professional service staff. This will bring a more diverse set of voices into the assessment process. As part of this initiative, we will deliver training to ensure that all Horizons Institute applications are reviewed robustly and transparently with an aim to develop a cohort of experts in interdisciplinary assessment here at Leeds.

Broadening the definition of success

One of the key points of difference of Horizons' working model is the lack of performance metrics in defining measures of success, enabling the academics in our research community to think more expansively about non-traditional outputs.

Part of this is embracing the notion of acceptable "failure", which has the potential to drive change in research culture. Supporting academics to embrace opportunities which might be considered more risky to their short-term trajectory, but with the potential to be more impactful in longer-term research and career development, is something we will continue to celebrate and explore as the Horizons Institute continues to develop and shape interdisciplinary research at Leeds and beyond.

Looking Ahead

The academic year 2024-25 will be the Horizons Institute's third year of operation as a fully-fledged part of the University's research eco system. We are keen to consolidate our success so far while also focusing on some key areas for development.



Our main ambition, of course, remains to engage as many people as possible from right across the University with interdisciplinary research: to foster new collaborations that can generate groundbreaking research addressing complex problems. We are committed to helping research teams to develop novel approaches, and to develop new ways of working.

A focus for our activities this coming year will be on developing our approach to failure and unintended consequences, working with our Challenge Networks and other partners to think about how research can benefit from what goes *wrong* and from what was *unexpected*.

In addition to this, there are five key areas that the Horizons Institute plans to develop over the coming year.

First, we are keen to expand our external offer, how we engage with people and institutions outside the University, how we can become a thought leader in interdisciplinary research, and how we can work with others, in either an advisory capacity or on a commercial basis. Concretely, we will invest time this year in building our external network; create a commercial framework to respond to the increasing number of requests we are receiving from other universities to run workshops, and to market ourselves to others; and engage with the formal and informal networks that exist nationally and internationally for research professionals.

Second, following a review of our programmes this year, we will be refining our offer to focus on two key areas: our Challenge Networks and our Global Academy. The ambition is to simplify our offer and group our existing activity more logically, and to allow

us to concentrate on activities that truly add value; specifically, interdisciplinary research incubation, external engagement for impact-focused research, and leadership development. This rationalisation follows extensive evaluation and reflection, focused on what is unique about the Horizons Institute, and includes extending the support offered to networks to 18-months and taking a more proactive approach in shaping their activities.

Third, we are rebranding our Global Academy as the *Horizons Academy*. The ambition here is to bring all of our researcher development activity together and begin to build a cohort of fellows across all programmes, sharing activities and creating more opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas. We are also adding a new element to the Horizons Academy, Horizons Platform. This builds upon our collaboration with University of Witwatersrand in South Africa and employs some of the philanthropic funding we received from David Fine to build much bigger collaborations and projects. As mentioned in our first ambition, we will also press forward with commercialising some of our activities under the Horizons Academy, responding to requests from other universities in the UK, Europe and North America to run Crucible sandpits with their academics. This has already generated some additional income and we anticipate that the reputation gain will be significant too.

Fourth, we are looking at our processes to make sure that we are operating in the most cost- and time-efficient way possible, also with a view to EDIA. We will be developing an Interdisciplinary Assessment College, which will improve our processes for selecting teams for our various programmes and ensure consistency and a diversity of reviewers. In addition, we are building partnership working into all our work (previously it was a separate strand) to make sure we maximise the opportunities for the researchers we work with to inform, and be informed by, communities.

Finally, an essential component of the Horizons Institute's plans for next year is career development for the Horizons team. Over the last few months, we have been discussing how we can continue to deliver high-quality engagement with our community while also making sure that there are opportunities for each of us to develop our skills, thinking about what our individual aspirations are for the future. To this end, we have been particularly focused on secondments into other parts of Research and Innovation Services or the University more widely; on working with

Leeds City Council on policy; engaging nationally with research professionals; and building cohorts and communities internally and externally. The development of all our colleagues and making sure that everyone has an opportunity to work on something that really matters, is an essential part of the Horizons Institute's success, and indeed its purpose.

This is a busy agenda! However, we have the ambition, the resources, and—critically—the right team to make this happen. We're excited about the coming year, and years, and look forward to engaging with colleagues from across the University and beyond.

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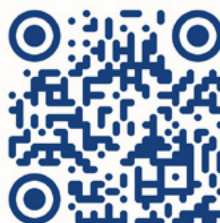
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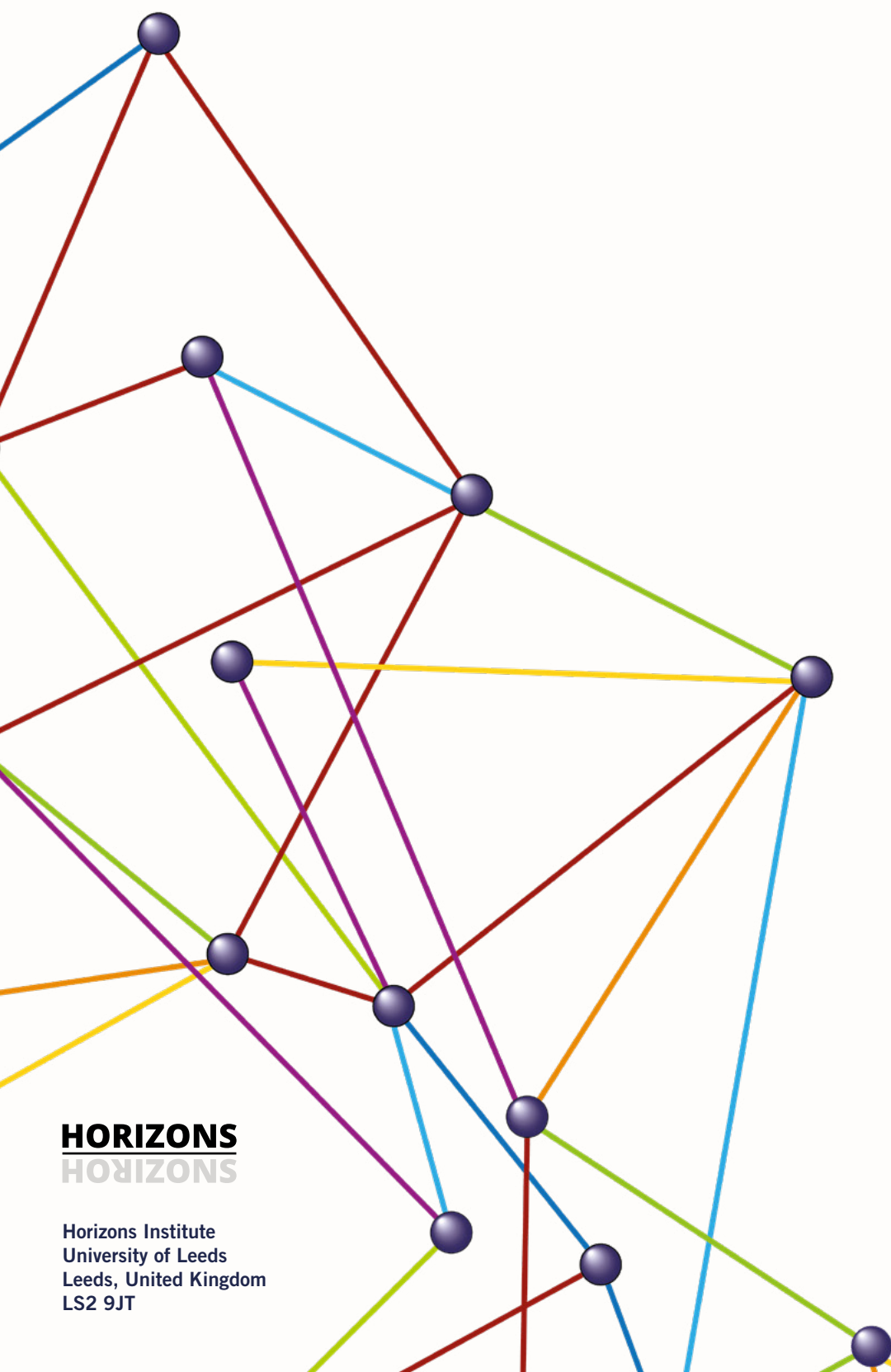
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If you would like to find out more about our work or upcoming opportunities to get involved, please scan this QR code for a full range of ways to connect:





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