



# Unit-Wide Discussions at MRC-PPU

University of Dundee

*Facilitating transparency and open communication: MRC-PPU Dundee's dynamic discussions on research culture, processes and policy awareness*

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*"Creating an open and supportive research environment is a crucial foundation for research integrity best practice." – Nicola Darling, Senior Research Assistant*

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The University of Dundee's MRC Protein Phosphorylation and Ubiquitylation Unit (MRC-PPU) fosters an inclusive research environment through unit-wide discussions on research culture. These discussions engage the entire community and promote a collaborative and inclusive atmosphere.

Every 2-3 months, MRC-PPU Dundee hosts Zoom discussions, inviting all unit members to share their knowledge, challenges, and feedback regarding research culture. A postdoctoral researcher leads these sessions, ensuring a 'safe space' by raising anonymous contributions. Each session begins with remarks from the director and unit manager, outlining the session's objectives. The primary goal is to unite conversations around diversity and inclusion, bringing attention to feedback and concerns. When challenges are identified, the discussions become a platform for brainstorming solutions.

A key objective of these discussions is to scrutinise and raise awareness about local processes and policies. To this end, guest speakers such as university charter and staff network leads are regularly invited. These guests clarify terminology, discuss challenges and strategies, and answer questions from participants. In addition to these discussions, MRC-PPU has established open feedback channels, including options for anonymous feedback, and holds planning and review meetings to follow up on the discussions.

Through this initiative, MRC-PPU has enhanced transparency and awareness of local policies. They have gained valuable insights into the issues faced by students, early career researchers, technicians, support staff, and principal investigators, along with their suggestions for improvement. As a result, MRC-PPU Dundee has implemented actions, trialled new initiatives, and encouraged the entire community to play an active role in fostering a positive research environment.

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*"The Unit-wide ED&I discussions are incredibly valuable for the well-being and mental health of people working in our Unit. The discussions help staff to feel that there is always someone to speak to about concerns of any kind, and that everyone's opinion is valued and they encourage people to speak up when they have something to say. The discussions deconstruct notions of hierarchy, and make people feel valued and included. Ultimately the drive for an open, inclusive environment where honesty and acceptance are encouraged improves research practices and culture. An environment where expectations are managed through honest and open communication, where it is made clear that there is never a pressure to achieve a certain result or experimental outcome, where people feel positive and empowered, even in the short term encourages much better research culture and practices. The impact is tangible even after a couple of years." – Principal Investigator*

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## Testimonials for the Unit-Wide Discussions

*"Everyone should be aware of the diversity in our society and in spite of this diversity, we are all equal - irrespective of Race, Gender, Sex, Sexuality, or Disability. A unit-wide discussion in the MRC-PPU gives us an opportunity to discuss these issues openly under a common umbrella."*

**Postdoctoral Researcher**

*"I really appreciate having the unit-wide discussions as they are a welcoming space for us to discuss our departmental culture and to try and improve it, as well as helping to educate our peers on issues that affect some people that otherwise would go unmentioned. It is important that we can all feel comfortable in our workplace environment, and hopefully having these discussions will help."*

**Research Technician**

*"I have taken part in the MRC-PPU group wide Mental Health and Wellbeing discussions, and I really felt that this was a platform that allowed everyone to talk freely and openly. It was great to see so many people engaged with these discussions from PIs, Postdoctoral Researchers, Technicians, Students and Support staff. I felt that conversations were had that would not have occurred outside of this forum and the majority of people appreciated that we all had the same goal: to have not only a productive work environment but a happy and healthy one too!"*

**Laboratory Manager**

*"The MRC-PPU-wide forum, where topics ranging from equality, diversity and inclusion to the way we do research are discussed in an informal setting, has identified many issues and solutions that have made a positive difference to our research and culture. In fact, I have personally advocated to the School of Life Sciences leadership that such a forum should be adopted in every department within the school."*

**Principal Investigator**