SDF Member of the Year - Dr Amy Smith

Please tell us your name
Cathal Rogers

Please tell us your job title
Researcher Development Manager

Please tell us your institution
University of Manchester

Who is the person you would like to nominate?
Dr Amy Smith

What is their job title?
Researcher Development Officer

What is the institution of the person you would like to nominate?
University of Manchester

What are three words you would choose to describe the person you would like to nominate?
Innovative, inclusive, supportive

SDF Member of the Year - Dr Amy Smith

Please explain what made you submit this nomination, and give us examples to illustrate how your nominee has met the award criteria. Word count 300-500 words.

I would like to nominate Dr Amy Smith for this award to recognise her commitment and achievements in promoting a culture of inclusivity, shared practice and continuous learning in researcher development.

This is particularly evident in Amy's development of innovative approaches to equity for disabled postgraduate researchers at the University of Manchester. Amy uses her expertise and passion to promote a culture of sharing practice, trust, and continuous learning within the Researcher Development team, as well as within the PGR community and support services across the institution.

Amy has worked to embed the principles of inclusivity and accessibility within the team's practice and has successfully completed a key project that removes barriers of access to researcher development for disabled PGRs.

As well as benefiting PGRs through her innovative and compassionate practice, Amy supports colleagues by sharing her ideas and experience with the team on how we can better embed inclusivity in our researcher development training and resources. She works with colleagues to understand how some individuals and groups may struggle with access to our training provision, and how we can strive to be mindful of different needs and challenges of our PGRs and research staff. In these discussions, Amy encourages the sharing of ideas and allows everyone the opportunity to ask potentially difficult questions, responding to these in thoughtful and understanding manner, which encourages best practice sharing and continuous learning in a supportive, non-judgemental environment. All are encouraged to speak up and give their views.

To give an example of one of her projects; responding to the consistently lower satisfaction rates in the PRES reported by disabled PGRs, Amy identified challenges faced at the very start of their programme as space where real change could be made quickly. Amy aimed to reduce barriers to, and within, induction to ensure that all disabled PGRs had equitable access to researcher development – and to other key university services.

Amy facilitated focus groups to design a fully accessible and meaningful development resource with disabled PGRs. This approach ensured that it met their specific information and access needs. She then pulled together a coalition of cross-divisional colleagues to support the delivery of the induction. New Disabled PGRs now have a 'one-stop shop' of information on the researcher development programme, academic support, mental health and counselling services, peer support, disability advise, careers, and financial support at the very start of their PhD career.

This project was extremely successful.
Feedback from PGR and Co-Chair of the Disabled Staff Network stated
"I felt like the only disabled PGR and was incredibly self-conscious of the effects of my disability and would do my best to hide them. Amy identified the desperate need for an induction workshop for disabled students and went above and beyond to work with disabled PGRs and ensure the workshop was as effective as possible. Amy has a natural ability to connect with disabled students and understand their needs."