



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Annual Report: Stoneygate Centre for Empathic Healthcare

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Executive Summary

We have achieved the objectives, milestones, and key performance indicators (KPIs) outlined in the workplan for the first year. Our successes include implementing a unique and revolutionary empathy curriculum into the Leicester Medical School (LMS), generating national and international collaborations, publishing high impact research and appearing on the news (BBC Radio 4). Through our high-profile launch and international visiting professor scheme, we have also already established ourselves as the “go to” place for experts to come to learn about empathy. Our successes have also led to our contributions to wider University of Leicester strategy meetings.

Key successes

1. Creating, delivering, and evaluating the enhanced empathy-focused curriculum

We have developed and piloted core parts of the revolutionary empathy-focused medical curriculum. With support from Professor Tom Robinson and Professor Richard Holland, we have secured space in the medical school curriculum for the following five streams:

1. Getting patients into the classroom for the teaching of pathophysiology
2. Reversing the decline in medical student empathy through near-to-peer learning
3. Extending the established clinical skills programme into Phase II of medical school
4. Giving students experiences of what it is like to be patients ('Walk a mile in your shoes')
5. Self-empathy (enhanced well-being / resilience)

This activity will culminate in formal introduction of our interventions into the core curriculum.

2. International, national, and local collaborations

To expand our influence, we have established international, national, and local collaborations.

- **International advisory board:** Professor Sir Muir Gray (UK), Professor Sue Carr (UK), Professor Sir Mayur Lakhani (UK); Professor Sheona MacLeod (UK), Professor Jodi Halpern (US), Professor Kevin Eva (Canada); Dr Dinesh Palipana (Australia); Ahmed Ahmed and Maya Dudko (Leicester Medical School students). See [Appendix A](#) for more detail.
- **International visitors:** Professor Karin Meissner (University of Coburg); Professor Tracy Levett-Jones (University of Technology Sydney); Dr Andrew Papanikitas (British Journal of General Practice).
- **National collaborations:** General Medical Council, Medical Schools Council, CAIPE (Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education), Point of Care Foundation, International thought leaders including Professor Stewart Mercer, Professor Mohammadreza Hojat and Professor Felicity Bishop,
- **Local collaborations:** Attenborough Arts Centre, LOROS, Healthcare, Inclusion Health/Project Light, Leicester Leicestershire Rutland Integrated Care Board (LLR ICB), University Hospitals of Leicester (via Richard Mitchell, Julie Hogg, Claire Rudkin)

In addition, Jeremy Howick is routinely invited to deliver keynote lectures about empathy at national and international venues.

3. Research

Despite only being in existence for less than a year, we have produced several major publications including:

1. [Turning diversity from a barrier to a facilitator of empathy in healthcare](#). BJGP/BJGP Life
2. [Why might medical student empathy change throughout medical school? Protocol for a systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative studies](#). BMJ Open.
3. [A survey of clinical empathy training at UK medical schools](#). BMC Medical Education.
4. [Why might medical student empathy change throughout medical school? A systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative studies](#). BMC Medical Education.

The Centre Team are on track to produce over 15 publications in the next academic year.

4. Establishing the Centre

The official Centre launch took place on 26 April 2023. It included a successful half-day conference and was followed by a keynote lecture by Professor Sir Jonathan Van-Tam, an expert panel discussion including a celebrity doctor (Dr Ronx) and evening reception. The event was reported on BBC Radio Leicester. Also, the Centre team has also grown from one to seven and is currently recruiting for additional roles.

5. Getting embedded within the NHS

Via James Goode (South Blaby & Lutterworth PCN Manager), and Claire Rudkin (Head of Patient Safety, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust) we have commitments to deliver our “system empathy” training which promote a culture of empathy within the NHS.

Challenges

1. Measuring empathy as a criterion for medical school admission

Leicester Medical School assesses empathic communication skills as part of the admissions process. Our international advisory board noted that because different cultures express empathy in different ways, increasing the relative importance of empathy as an entry criteria could discriminate against these students.

Solution: *Focus on ensuring that no matter how empathic students are at the outset, our empathy training is effective.*

2. Getting embedded into the NHS is slow

Despite our persistence and success (see “Getting embedded with the NHS”, above), getting our initiatives embedded within the NHS is slow.

Solution: *Be persistent, continue building relationships, take advice from advisory board.*

3. Structural barriers to empathy

For empathy between patients and practitioners to thrive, healthcare consultations must arise in a suitable milieu. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, with patient and practitioner satisfaction at an all-time low. To address this, we are delivering “system empathy training,” and have secured space to do this with regional GP practices (see “Getting embedded with the NHS”, above).

Solution: *Deliver our system empathy training, demonstrate value to patients, lobby NHS.*

Main goals for next year

The overarching goal for next year is to continue delivering on all milestones specified in the funding proposal.

Education

We aim to move from piloting to **implementing the curriculum interventions**. In parallel, we aim to have our curriculum **formally approved via the School Education Committee**. We will also **draft a textbook** that details our innovative curriculum. We will also implement revolutionary “**system empathy training**” at **GP surgeries and hospitals**. Finally, we will **expand our influence** by hosting a conference to certify empathy teachers.

Research

For research, our aim is to **continue with our success**, but shift our priority to high impact publications in high impact journals. Conditional upon research to establish necessity: **design new empathy measurement tool**.

Influence

Next year, we will have firmly established ourselves as the world class place where empathy research and education are developed and delivered. We will also complete audit of outreach activities, including within the Foundation Year, to **support young people from less advantaged backgrounds** into healthcare careers. We will also establish a **patient advisory group**, and continue recruitment to **complete the team**.

Funding

Prepare funding proposals in advance so they are ready when calls come out.

Progress against key reporting elements

1. Student empathy

Our current priority is developing, delivering, and evaluating our longitudinal empathy curriculum within the Leicester Medical School. We have piloted over half of our interventions and have obtained preliminary permission to formally integrate them in the next (2023/24) academic year. We have audited all UK medical schools and have established that we are unique in our comprehensive and intense approach to teaching empathy. Therefore, if we continue with our established track record, it will be the only longitudinal empathy curriculum in the world. We will then be able to export our curriculum to other medical schools in the UK and beyond, as well as adapt it for Allied Health curricula.

Longitudinal empathy curriculum

We are developing five curricula 'streams' (see [Appendix B](#) for current project list). To ensure relevance and need, we conducted a full audit of the entire medical school curriculum to find out where empathy was already being taught and where it was needed ([Appendix C](#)).

1. Getting patients into the classroom for the teaching of pathophysiology. By introducing real patients and their stories to lectures and seminars in the early years at medical school, we will enhance the biomedical and clinical science curriculum while further developing their empathy skills.

2. Reversing the decline in medical student empathy . The 'hidden curriculum' at medical school can lead to the erosion of empathy. The 'hidden curriculum' refers to the unwritten lessons and values that students acquire alongside their studies. Through peer support and training role models to be more empathic, we will reverse this decline.

3. Extending the established clinical skills programme into Phase II of medical school. The Compassionate Holistic Diagnostic Detective (CHDD) module delivered to students in Phase I (years 1 and 2) at LMS has a proven track method in supporting students to develop patient-centred and empathic communication skills. By extending this programme into Phase II (years 3, 4 and 5), students will continue to develop their skills, thus further mastering the art of empathic healthcare by taking opportunities through clinical placements to put their skills into practice.

4. Getting students to experience what it is like to be a patient ('Walk a mile in your shoes'). Through a range of experiences, from spending time with patients in the emergency department to working with the homeless, we will provide opportunities for students to really experience healthcare from the patient's perspective. Students will then be encouraged to reflect on their experiences through a creative writing exercise, which can then be used to help other students learn vicariously.

5. Self-empathy (enhanced well-being / resilience). The current Health Enhancement programme at LMS focuses on the health and well-being of patients and practitioners, and sits in Phase I. We can now develop a "Leicester Medical Student Wellbeing Programme," which will be the most evidence-based and effective in the world. To do this we are currently in the midst of systematically reviewing what other medical schools in the world do and based on this research we will implement. We are

also advertising to hire an international expert who will be able to implement the best evidence we identify. This programme of work will be piloted in the autumn of 2023, and rolled out in the winter and spring of 2024.

Measuring medical student empathy

We have measured medical student empathy for over half of the medical students from each year and are in the process of analysing it. Our preliminary results suggest that like at most medical schools, empathy among our students declines. We will be submitting our analysis for publication before the end of July 2023. Please see [Appendix D](#) for an abstract of the paper that describes how we have done this.

2. Student assessment and academic progression

The Centre has obtained baseline data of student success rates for Medical School assessments from 2018-2022, but we are not currently able to share this data externally. The Centre will use this data to track changes that may reflect the impact of the empathy-focused curriculum. Alongside this data, we will provide data on student satisfaction with the empathy curriculum, which is more directly under our control (see [Appendix E](#) for an abstract of the planned study).¹

3. Collaboration and student opportunities

Student experiential learning sessions in development with key collaborators for education:

- The main activity related to this will be the chef d’oeuvre of our empathy curriculum called “Walk a Mile in Your Shoes” (see above), and we have formed a team to pilot this activity in July 2023.
- We have formally offered Leicester Medical School students in year 3 a Student Selected Component (SSC) in empathic healthcare. 3 students (maximum capacity offered) have been assigned to the Centre. These students will join the team for a short period and be given the opportunity to contribute to one of 3 curriculum streams that the Centre is working on, with the potential to lead to publication.
- We have seeded a Student Empathic Healthcare Society, which has 10 members and is growing.

4. Healthcare Assistant training certificate

Almost all (315 Year 1 medical students and 35 Year 0 Medicine Foundation students) have undertaken the NHS Healthcare Certificate (NHSACC) programme in 2022-23. Training is provided in partnership with the University Hospitals of Leicester. This academic year, participation on the programme by all first-year medical students has been formalised as a mandatory part of the MBChB Phase I curriculum.

¹ Key performance indicator

To encourage students to join a staff bank, representatives from the local NHS Trusts deliver a lecture to all first-year students in March promoting the opportunity to work at each Trust. At the end of the programme (May/June) students are assigned to 2 or 3 hospital shadowing shifts and given the opportunity to sign-off relevant clinical competencies. On completion, students can opt to complete a customised, pared-down recruitment process to join one of the participating NHS Trust staff banks (UHL, LPT, Kettering or Northampton) to work as a Healthcare Assistant (HCA). Students are likely to complete the programme now that it is mandatory for progression. The Centre will review the situation at the end of the 2022/23 academic year and if appropriate and necessary, offer support to encourage students to consider working as a HCA.

5. Research programme and impact

Research themes

We have finalised and made progress on all research themes (see below).

Theme A: Building the evidence base for tools assessing the impact of empathy training and identifying potential for tool development

A rigorous study to establish the definition of empathy is underway, led by Amber Bennett-Weston. Following from this, we will conduct a review of empathy measurement tools and decide whether it is necessary to develop a new “Leicester empathy questionnaire.” To assist this, we have taken Jefferson Scale empathy measurements for all 5 years of medical school.²

Theme B: Assessment of measurement strategies for assessing the impact of empathic practice on patient care and experience

We have almost completed a systematic review of the impact of empathy training on patient satisfaction (see [Appendix F](#)). We are also setting up a longitudinal study to measure the impact of our curriculum (see [Appendix E](#)).

Theme C: Educational intervention design, delivery, and evaluation

We completed a comprehensive audit of the entire medical school curriculum (see [Appendix C](#)), and subsequently developed our five curriculum streams (see above). Interventions related to three of the themes (Getting patients into the classroom for the teaching of pathophysiology; Reversing the decline in medical student empathy; Extending the established clinical skills programme into Phase II of medical school), another (‘Walk a mile in your shoes’) is being piloted in July 2023, and the remaining one (Self-empathy) will be piloted in the autumn of 2023 following appointment of a new staff member.

Of note, all our interventions are developed with rigorous background research, evaluated carefully, with results submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals. Another core feature of our curriculum interventions is that they are co-developed with patient, student, and educator representatives; this is rare and increases the chances of success.

² Milestone

Theme D: Building the evidence for empathic practice on student and practitioner wellbeing, resilience, recruitment, and retention

To identify the “gold standard” of wellbeing interventions for medical students, we are currently undertaking a systematic review of interventions used by other medical schools around the world. The protocol for this study will be complete by the end of June, and the review will be complete by 15 September (see [Appendix G](#)) In addition, we are tracking Leicester Medical students’ empathy, satisfaction etc. through a longitudinal study (see [Appendix E](#)).

Theme E: Identifying the barriers and enablers to empathic care and building strategies to mitigate/harness these

Together with two Leicester Medical School students, the team have completed a systematic review on the reasons for empathy decline. This research was reported in the press, including BBC ‘All in the mind.’ In addition, collaborating with Professor Sir Muir Gray and Professor Paquita de Zulueta, Jeremy Howick has researched and drafted a white paper on the need for system empathy.

6. Dissemination Activities

Publications

Five research papers have been published to date ([Appendix H](#)). The research so far has delivered the first nationwide survey of empathy-focused training at UK medical schools; an analysis of the reasons for the decline of student empathy throughout medical school; and underlined the importance of training to transform diversity from a potential barrier to a catalyst for empathic care. Several additional publications are in progress including (1) a systematic review exploring the link between empathy and patient satisfaction ([Appendix F](#)), (2) a study investigating whether Leicester Medical Student empathy declines ([Appendix D](#)), (3) a foundational project on defining empathy (conducted with international partners), (4) a review of medical student wellbeing programmes ([Appendix G](#)), and several papers that report on the evaluation of our curriculum interventions.

Influence and momentum-building activities

Conferences and presentations

The Centre Team have been invited to give several plenaries and presentations, including to high profile audiences such as the Medical Schools Council, the International Conference on Communication in Healthcare, the Midlands Medical Education Conference, and the Cedars Cancer Foundation. A full list is provided in [Appendix I](#).

Inaugural conference

On 26 April 2023 the Centre hosted a launch event which consisted of a half-day conference and evening celebration. The conference offered seven workshops/symposia and two plenary lectures. The evening event included a keynote lecture and an expert panel discussion on the role of empathy in the NHS; See [Appendix J](#) for full launch event programme.

The launch event was a collaborative activity that attracted eminent speakers and guests from within the UK and beyond, most notably a keynote speech by Professor Sir Jonathan Van-Tam on 'The importance of empathy for public communication of science: experiences during the pandemic'. The launch attracted high profile guests, such as Dr Angela Lennox MBE (Deputy Lieutenant of Leicestershire and Medical Director in the NHS England) and University Hospitals of Leicester Chief Executive Richard Mitchell.

Enthusiasm for the work of the Centre was evident from the positive feedback received from attendees, shared posts on social media, and the opportunities presented following the event. Jono Broad (senior patient safety expert at NHS England) has since become an official collaborator of the Centre.

National media coverage

In April 2023 Jeremy Howick has given an interview for BBC Radio Leicester, and in May 2023 an interview for the BBC Radio 4 programme '[All in the Mind](#)'.

Collaborations

The Centre has achieved several high-profile collaborations which have helped expand our reach.

- Professor Elizabeth Anderson, Professor of Interprofessional Education and Patient Safety Lead, University of Leicester
- Professor Felicity Bishop, Professor of Health Psychology, University of Southampton
- Jono Broad, Patient Safety Expert, South West Integrated Personalized Care, NHS England
- Dr Mohammadreza Hojat, Professor, Director of the Jefferson Longitudinal Study
- Professor Stewart Mercer, Professor of Primary Care and Multimorbidity, The University of Edinburgh
- Professor David Wright, Head of the School of Healthcare, University of Leicester
- Sam Winter, College Marketing and Recruitment Manager, University of Leicester

Student Representatives:

- Esther Kentish – PhD student (supervised by Dr Claire Brock and Professor Jeremy Howick)
- Harry Dudson – 4th Year medical student and Centre Intern

Staff achievement

Rachel Winter was awarded RCPsych Higher Trainee of the Year (nomination strongly reflected involvement with the development of the Centre), 9 November 2022.

Visiting academics

Our programme of academic visitors is quickly establishing the Centre as the “go to” place where international experts come to learn about empathy.

- [Professor Karin Meissner](#) (Coburg University, Germany) has confirmed her visit to the Centre week commencing 19 June 2023. As part of her visit, she will be running a workshop and developing a funding application with Jeremy (on nocebo effects).

- [Professor Tracy Levett-Jones](#) (University of Technology, Sydney, Australia) has confirmed her visit to the Centre on 20 June 2023 to deliver a workshop to staff at the Medical School and School of Healthcare.
- [Dr Andrew Papanikitas](#) (Chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners' Committee on Medical Ethics, UK) has confirmed a visit to the Centre in September and October 2023. Dr Papanikitas will deliver a lunchtime seminar to staff and will provide publishing advice to the Centre team. As part of his visit Dr Papanikitas will also work with the Centre team on a research paper on the topic of empathy and ethics in healthcare.
- [Professor Andrew Miles](#) (European Society for Person Centred Healthcare, UK) will become a visiting professor of the Centre from September 2023 for one year, and potentially an official collaborator of the Centre following this.
- [Professor Mine Özyurt Kılıç](#) (Social Sciences University Ankara, Turkey) will be visiting the Centre from January to February 2024. The Centre will arrange a seminar with colleagues from the School of English.

Links with internal departments and external organisations

The Centre team have been very active in spreading the word about the Centre to internal departments, teams and external organisations. See [Appendix K](#) for a list of links established over the last year. We are especially excited about our link to the Medical Schools Council, and (via advisor Professor Sue Carr) the GMC.

In addition, Jeremy Howick has participated in several university-level strategy meetings. This includes a recent visit to Bolton University, who might be setting up a new medical school and may wish to use the Leicester Medical School Curriculum.

Integration with the Medical School and School of Healthcare (Allied Health)

The development of close working relationships with staff in the Medical School and School of Healthcare through regular meetings and invitation to events such as the Centre launch, are seen as key to the success of the Centre. The Centre has a regular item on the agenda to provide an update on activities at the fortnightly Medical School staff meeting. Our weekly coffee mornings have been a great success in terms of integrating the empathy programme within the medical school, helping to bring many of the medical school educators, including those who were initially reticent, on board. In addition, Centre members have contributed to Departmental lunchtime seminars. Also, our visiting academics in the next eight months will offer workshops or lectures to the wider departments.

Centre Communications

The Centre are implementing an extensive communication plan drafted by external communications consultancy, Dan Richards-Doran Ltd. In addition, we have ongoing support from Fiona Dryden, Communications Officer for the College of Life Sciences who joins the Centre team meeting once a month to provide advice and identify opportunities for press and publicity. Our collaboration with Fiona and the University Press Team will be leveraged to promote all our main research outputs and other relevant milestones.

We have a website, <https://le.ac.uk/empathy> which has been live since 13 October 2022 and is updated regularly with news, events, and other relevant Centre activity. We also have Twitter (@Empathy_Centre) and LinkedIn accounts, with 377 and over 250 followers respectively as of May 2023, and growing. Andy Ward has taken the lead on social media.

The Centre team worked closely with the University's Events team to plan the communication strategy for the official launch. Registration for the launch event resulted in a substantial increase to the Centre contact list which will be utilised to share Centre news, advertise events, and staff recruitment.

7. Securing external funding

During this set-up year, the Centre Team's focus has been on developing and implementing a revolutionary evidence-based curriculum throughout the medical school. Despite the focus not being on raising external funding, we have raised substantial funding and more importantly started the process of applying for external funds.

- We have generated a database of potential funders and held a strategy meeting in January to discuss what to focus on.
- Jeremy Howick is a named collaborator on a Wellcome Trust £998,277 application "I-REACCH: Inclusive Research Environment Achieved through Culture Change" (PI: Professor Nishan Canagarajah). Application submitted 8 May 2023, proposed start date 1 January 2024. If successful, the Wellcome Trust will fund a full-time fellow at the Stonegate Centre for Empathic Healthcare to investigate the relationship between empathic leadership and diversity.
- The Centre/ Jeremy Howick is a collaborator on £100,000 received from the Point of Care Foundation to evaluate Schwartz Rounds.
- Rachel Winter received £100,000 to pursue the successful Medicine Calling programme.
- Andy Ward is working on a collaboration to develop a new programme for Project LIGHT. £5000 funding has been received from the NHS Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland Integrated Care Board as part of the A&E avoidance projects.
- Jeremy Howick has had preliminary meetings with Gavin Murphy from the CTU to discuss an MRC grant about the role of empathy in improving trial recruitment and reducing unnecessary communication-induced harms. The project follows directly from Jeremy's current MRC grant which investigates a similar question (but is focused on patient information leaflets): <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=MR%2FV020706%2F1>
- Jeremy Howick is attending ongoing meetings with representatives from NHS England to discuss potential funding.
- Jeremy Howick has had preliminary meetings with the Centre for Ethnic Health Research to apply for funding for a cultural competence curriculum stream.
- Our postdoctoral Research Associates commenced in March and April 2023; a third of their role will be to raise funds.

8. Widening participation and student recruitment

Current outreach activities

The Centre are providing key elements of the Medicine Foundation Year curriculum and have a strong presence at open and offer holder days, with four representatives from the Centre attending each one. The Centre Team have audited outreach activities taking place for students aspiring to study at Leicester Medical School; these include national outreach programmes, taster sessions, and workshops and the Foundation Year (see summary in [Appendix L](#)). With regards to student recruitment in the local area, 9% of students commencing year 1 of the MBChB in 2022 were from Leicestershire and 21% from the East Midlands. The Centre will now undertake a scoping review to identify the most effective methods to attract more students from the most underprivileged groups. Following this, the Centre will work closely with Sam Adcock who leads the Foundation Year programme to deliver them.

Selecting for empathy in the student recruitment process

Leicester Medical School already has several actions in place to select for empathy during student recruitment including:

- At interview stage, applicants are presented with scenarios that assess their ability to show compassion and empathy.
- Consideration of personal statements and employment history on the UCAS form for borderline cases. Occasionally (mostly with graduates) the team will ask for references from volunteering etc.
- A situational judgement test is taken as part of the current University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT).
- At offer stage, the Admissions team look at interviewers' comments for any issues with judgmental behavior.

Our international advisory board has noted that adding more importance to empathy as a selection criterion might discriminate against applicants who come from ethnic backgrounds that express empathy differently. Other problems with adding more importance to empathy as a selection criterion include those listed below.

- If we only accept those with high empathy scores (and have little room for improvement) it would prevent from testing our curriculum's effectiveness.
- We are ambitious and believe we can make an impact. If our empathy curriculum is exciting, fun, and effective, we will be able to make initially unempathic students empathic.
- It risks discriminating against males, who are usually less empathic than females and we might be missing out on some potentially brilliant future doctors.

Based on the above, our current strategy is to ensure that Leicester Medical School graduates leave the University of Leicester as the most empathic in the UK, irrespective of how empathic they were when they started.

STRATEGY FOR 2023/24 (SUMMARY)

1. TEACHING AND EDUCATION:

- a. Embed empathy curriculum within the Leicester Medical School.
- b. Have the empathy curriculum approved as a longitudinal theme.
- c. Begin the longitudinal study of the effect of the empathy curriculum.
- d. Deliver empathy training to medical professionals.
- e. Continue supporting University Open Days.

2. RESEARCH:

- a. Conduct study of empathy definitions, develop empathy definition.
- b. Conduct study of empathy measures, develop new measures if required.
- c. Conduct high-quality and high-impact studies that deliver on all Centre research priorities.
- d. Work towards and submit major and medium-sized grants.
- e. Support new PIs to become confident independent PIs and mid-career researchers to become co-PIs.

3. PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION:

- a. Support all team members to ensure that they are producing the expected number of international-quality empirical papers with an eye on the next Research Excellence Framework (REF).
- b. Continue to provide support for early-career researchers to develop writing skills.

4. INFLUENCE:

- a. Set up national patient advisory group.
- b. Host international “teach empathy teachers” conference.
- c. Continue working with GMC, local, regional, and national commissioners and policy-makers to promote empathic healthcare.

5. STAFF SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT:

- a. Attract funding for core posts in research and teaching to reflect the extent to which we contribute substantially to the work, income and achievements of the Leicester Medical School.
- b. Support early and mid-career researchers to develop fellowship applications, work towards promotion, gain leadership experience, find external placements and develop their careers.
- c. Ensure all staff who supervise graduate and undergraduate students are confident and supported to deliver a world-leading experience for their students.
- d. Actively support professional development for administrative and support staff.