

Anonymous 5/29/2025 ↗

RSE South West discussion

For the RSE South West meeting on Monday, 23rd June, we would like to collect people's thoughts on the following topics as a basis for our discussion session. Please complete this before the session at 14:45. You're also welcome to complete this prior to the meeting.

Would you like RSE South West to be a distinct group and what would you like to see from this group?

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 9:41AM

In person

A focus on in-person events, as online events don't have physical distance as a similar barrier.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 10:03AM

Knowledge exchanges

Shared code review (e.g. before publishing in a paper) or shared workshops

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 10:36AM

Better ways of working

Use other institutions experience to identify better ways of working

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:41PM

distinct identity is important

Good to have a local group to meet in person and share stuff

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:48PM

I feel there are more people here from my institute than have ever been at RSECon, so there is clearly a benefit to meeting locally in person

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:49PM

Yes good to have local group. Discussing ways of working and establishing groups.
Maybe sharing use/impact examples to build evidence for broader utility of RSE groups

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:50PM

Smaller, more regular in-person or online events are helpful if you're unable to attend larger national events like RSECon

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:51PM

MO

The SW chapter of RSE is perhaps unusual in that it has a large pool of RSEs focussed (broadly) on one area - weather. This is a strength but shouldn't dominate

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 1:58PM

Career progression routes

Routes available for progression still seem to be largely influenced by an organisation's structure. It was useful to find out how progression works in different settings

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What works well about how you are organised as RSEs?

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 10:42AM

Assign by expertise

I'm part of a small (3) embedded RSE team, and within the research group most requests for RSE support fall under three categories - Fortran-related, general software practices or relating to our in-house software called SimTex. Two out of three of us work on SimTex, and the other on Fortran, so it is easy for us to divide RSE support based on who better suits the query

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:09PM

Flexibility

Able to support scientists in all departments across the organisation.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:49PM

Team with skills that can teach one another

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Centrally available support via lots of different means (Drop ins, Viva Engage pages, service requests, seminars)

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Small focussed team

Work within a small data science team focussed on supporting other teams across the organisation.

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Flexibility and autonomy

As a small team of RSEs that are not embedded in research groups we have considerable autonomy on our technical deliverables (and can use best-of-breed) for the specific project. We also have a very broad portfolio of interesting projects that aid skills development.

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Anonymous 6/23/25 12:51PM

Also this.

Is there anything which could be improved about how you are organised as RSEs?

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 9:21AM

Agile teams

Now we have a large team, I would like to see a switch to agile project management. A lot of work is done by people independently, but many types of projects could be done in larger groups, utilising peoples expertise as and when, with a product owner ensuring consistency with other rses/rdss coming in and out utilising their expertise.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:13PM

Funding model

Business model is cost recovery, so advised to secure 100% project funding time, so no personal development time, always 'learning on the job' difficult to stay up to date with new technologies etc

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|| **Anonymous** 6/23/25 12:48PM

In reality, skills development is part and parcel of RSE life. It should be an integral part of the model. The 80% idea is so that this can happen.

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:47PM

Limited set of technology stack

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Managing more projects can lead to a lot of context switching

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More links to other RSE's/RSE like teams within our organisation

More internal linkage and understanding of our different models and remits, finding out where we overlap and where there are gaps.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:52PM

Better support from the institution in terms of supplying core tools for CI/CD, monitoring etc. Currently we have to create and maintain our own tooling.

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What software best practices do you find most useful? What would you put in an RSE handbook?

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 9:16AM

Quality assurance

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 9:17AM

Agree Requirements

Make sure you agree what is required with the stakeholder(s)

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 9:20AM

Intent rather than prescriptive

An opening chapter or other overarching element should detail the goals the best practices are working towards, and note that the recommendations should be ignored when they are not applicable to achieving the goals in a specific context.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 9:24AM

Some discussion about writing effective documentation

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Anonymous 6/23/25 9:40AM

Covering the importance of structure and focus. We find <https://diataxis.fr> to be a good conceptual framework for this.

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 10:12AM

Evaluating and utilising existing software

A key skill that is not often recognised is making use of existing software as part of solution (i.e. building on existing software). Evaluating, selecting, and integrating existing software into a solution is important skill in RSE. I think guidance on how to critically evaluate the quality and robustness of existing research software, as well as suitability for integrating into a project would be a great section in an RSE Handbook.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:07PM

Modular and Testing

Avoid monolith code structures. Use modular code blocks that you can 'plug and play', you'll be surprised how often that the same use case comes up!

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:49PM

User needs

The importance of understanding why PIs need what they need, so you can develop something that is genuinely useful instead of what they think they need

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How to do professional development

Guidance on how to assess your skills (both technical and non-technical), where to get training, how to talk to your line manager etc. about learning.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:49PM

Basic good software practices

Version control, unit testing, cicd. Documentation

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How to manage time/projects/tasks

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Infrastructure as code

Writing scripts/code to ensure systems can be deployed and configured in a repeatable way

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comparison between different ways

Always useful to have comparisons how different methods or toolkits perform and the pros and cons of each. Avoid getting blindly stuck to one - use which is best for the task at hand.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:53PM

Testing

Some discussion about how much / what kind of testing is appropriate in different circumstances. Overarching principles.

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Everything we do has a comprehensive automated test suite and CI/CD. Without this our maintenance burden would be unsustainable.

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Project management practices

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How to write good requirements

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 1:27PM

Bring in other skills you don't have

We have found using User Experience/design centred thinking expertise really saves us time, also we are not designers. So think about bringing them in.

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 1:51PM

Type checking and linting

Particularly useful for Python projects

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↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 2:32PM

Have a good practice pose a problem session

At meet up let people submit a good practice question and then have answers session. Maybe the speed blog idea could be used.

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Any other topics to discuss?

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 9:50AM

GenAI for RSEng. Best practice or best avoided?

GenAI tools for coding (e.g. Copilot) are being pushed hard toward developers (just look at the VSCode release notes!). It would be interesting to take the temperature of feeling in RSE SW regarding these tools, particularly as they relate to the idea of “best practices”.

How have you encountered GenAI for software development in your role? Are you using it for your own code? Do you encounter researchers writing/generating code with GenAI?

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Anonymous 6/23/25 12:51PM

Agree very important due to the licensing implications.

Anonymous 6/23/25 1:47PM

Yes GitHub copilot is rapidly being adopted in my organisation, I have concerns around whether learning coding skills is affected for developers in the early stages of their career

↪ ANONYMOUS 6/23/25 12:50PM

Do we want to meet at RSECon25?

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Anonymous 6/23/25 1:41PM

There's a workshop planned by the "Regional RSE Groups SIG" so it's worth us at least attending that. There's sometimes been a planned lunchtime "meet your regional group" thing too so hopefully there's another one.

