

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (2023-2024)

Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	University of Oxford
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Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (max 500 words)

The [University of Oxford's Strategic Plan 2018 - 24](#) articulates the University's vision for embedding a research culture that upholds an inclusive environment for researchers at all career stages. The Plan commits the University to "Work towards an increasingly diverse staffing profile" (People Commitment Two) and to "Enhance the opportunities and support for early-career researchers" (Priority 8). The University aims to realise these visions for staff through implementing action plans for the Technician Commitment, Vitae HR Excellence in Research Award, Athena SWAN, the Race Equality Charter, the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, Mindful Employer, and the Concordat for the Career Development of Researchers ('the Concordat').

An established leadership and governance structure provides strategic oversight of the needs of research staff, and enables these staff to contribute to University decision-making. The strategic academic lead is the University Advocate for Research Staff, Professor David Gavaghan, who chairs the termly [Research Staff Steering Committee](#) comprising five Research Staff Advocates (one per main academic division and one for the 40 Oxford Colleges), and professional service directors of central units with Concordat-related responsibilities. This committee liaises closely with the [Research Staff Consultation Group](#) (comprising research staff representatives) and the [Research Staff Working Group](#) (comprising operational leads). In the past year, Academic Advocates/Champions for Research Staff have been appointed at departmental/faculty level within Medical Sciences and Humanities divisions, following the example set by Mathematics, Physical and Life Sciences division; these Advocates/Champions work with local research staff representatives and professional support staff to identify and realise research staff priorities and to share best practice.

Oxford's [Concordat Action Plan](#), launched in April 2022, specifies 12 commitments that are co-delivered by central units and the academic divisions in order to enable positive and sustainable change across a large institution of 14,000 researchers (including ~5,000 research staff). Responsibility for coordinating and reporting lies with two centrally based service units: the Researcher Hub and the Research Strategy and Policy Unit.

Launched in April 2021, the [Researcher Hub](#) has expanded its activity with central and divisional colleagues across key functions to ensure Oxford's researchers are welcomed, orientated, and supported to meet their aspirations for their time here and their chosen next career chapter. The Hub team initiates and supports policy and practice improvement, incorporating matters that are raised by the research staff governance structure (as above). Also formed in 2021, the [Research Strategy and Policy Unit](#) leads on institutional strategy, policy, evaluation, insight and information aimed to strengthen the quality of both research and the research environment. Of relevance to this report, the Unit leads on an institutionally coordinated [programme of work to strengthen research culture](#). The University priorities to support research culture are united around three interconnected priorities: conducting research to the highest standards of rigour; recognising the different skills, roles, and activities that contribute to research; and supporting the career aspirations of our colleagues. These priorities integrate the University's commitments to national and international sector requirements and agreements, such as the Concordat, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (max 600 words)

Oxford's three-year Concordat Action Plan (2022–2025) has three overarching goals:

1. Creating a research environment that is supportive, inclusive, and equitable
2. Recognising and valuing the diverse contributions of researchers
3. Supporting researchers to achieve a range of career goals

These goals will be delivered through 12 actions; these are referenced (e.g. 1.1) throughout this report.

Environment and culture

- 1.1 Ensure consistent induction and improved welcome (“soft landing”), especially for arrivals from overseas and diverse backgrounds; Signpost and enrich the opportunities for personal, professional and career development available from arrival to post-contract.
- 1.2 Consolidate and grow the existing comprehensive representation framework for researchers to participate in decision-making; Communicate internal policy on key areas affecting researchers and learn from sector-wide best practice.
- 1.5 Establish clearer routes for researchers to raise concerns relating to equitable treatment and research practice outside their management structure and in confidence, ensuring transparency in follow-up activity
- 2.2 Further strengthen and integrate training, tools, and policies to support rigorous research and its equitable and inclusive evaluation, aligned to our commitment to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA).
- 2.3 Embed tools in institutional systems (e.g. in our publications repository) to highlight and document diverse contributions to excellent research and impact.

Employment

- 1.6 Progress mechanisms to create greater contractual stability and security for fixed-term researchers, liaising with external funders as appropriate.
- 2.1 Review academic recognition, promotion, and reward criteria to include a broader range of research activities, including research integrity, open research practices, supporting researchers and their careers, and societal impact; Develop mechanisms to celebrate and share good practice.

Professional Development of Researchers

- 1.3 Ensure that all researchers are able to benefit from the availability of at least ten days professional development (pro rata) per year; Illustrate effective use of professional development time, and identify mechanisms for tracking and reporting on engagement.
- 1.4 Further equip principal investigators, academic line managers, and others with responsibilities for researchers, with guidance and skills development to support the career development of researchers; Co-design provision with senior leaders; Evaluate the impact of these interventions.
- 3.1 Support career destinations across a wide variety of sectors and roles; Track and analyse career destinations over time, and adjust resources as appropriate.
- 3.2 Enhance provision of career development expertise, including from sectors beyond academia.
- 3.3 Provide opportunities for all researchers to have review conversations focusing on their career at least annually, supported by institutional systems which capture professional development activity.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]

Environment and Culture (*max 600 words*)

The key developments in this period have been: the growth in the representational structure for fixed term researchers; increased resourcing to ensure that Research Culture priorities are understood and supported across the organisation; continued support for research practice including through training and external engagement.

Institution

- **Researcher representation on University committees** (1.2): Research staff are increasingly represented on University-level decision making and governance committees ([Research Staff Representatives](#)). Seven new

committees have invited researcher representation in this reporting period, including the Chancellor Election Committee and the Pay & Conditions Report committee. In total, there are now 19 researcher representatives on 14 University committees and working groups. There are also now 4 Oxford researchers on UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA), including two co-vice chairs and one on the UKRSA Concordat Strategic Group.

- **Appointment of Research Culture Facilitators** (1.3, 3.3): Following the successful creation of a Research Culture Facilitator role in the Medical Sciences Division (MSD), three further Research Culture Facilitators have been appointed within the other academic divisions, as well as an additional Research Culture Officer in MSD. The creation of these new posts signals organisational commitment to coordination and collaboration on research culture initiatives. An early initiative led by the Research Culture Facilitators is the **Research Culture Toolkit Project**: working in collaboration with the Research Strategy and Policy Unit and the Researcher Hub, this project will involve discussions with every department and faculty in the university about activities related to the Concordat commitments, identifying areas of excellence with a view to sharing good practice and informing future initiatives.
 - **Supporting excellent research practice** (2.2, 2.3): seven new [e-learning modules](#) are being developed to support researchers to conduct reliable, reproducible and transparent research. Two of these modules (Authorship, Publication and Peer Review; Open Research Practices) are in user-testing, and two further modules (Research Integrity and Governance; Research Data) will be ready for user-testing in Summer 2024. [Online research impact training](#) was launched in March 2024. **The Oxford | Berlin Autumn School on Open and Responsible Research Practice** (November 2023) aimed to train researchers in how to undertake open and responsible research practices, as well as how to advocate for and become open research leaders in their teams and disciplines.
- Continued implementation of CRediT** (Contributor Roles Taxonomy), including piloting a template agreement to evidence contributions to research outputs in the Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) division.
- A part of **our institutional commitment to UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN)**, 9 candidates from Oxford have been nominated to participate in the UKRN Train-the-Trainer programme, the aim of which is to build staff skills in high-quality open research practices through the provision of instructor training and support for trainers.

Academic Managers of Researchers

- **Academic advocates for research staff** (1.2) continue to be in place across the main academic divisions and in departments, and in the Gardens, Libraries and Museums division. The Medical Sciences Division is setting expectations for departmental leadership in support for researcher representation, and sharing resources for academic advocates. This approach has led to positive outcomes, including a financial commitment to a departmental research staff committee to enable their work.
- **Engaging managers with the University's Concordat commitments** (1.4): The Mathematics, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) divisional research culture team is conducting a tour of departments to brief senior managers on key aspects of the Concordat, career development reviews, and 10 days eligibility for training and development. MPLS is also incentivising managers through its **Awards for Outstanding Research Supervision**. As well as recognising existing areas of excellence, this award will be used to share the good practice of those who have won the award with other PIs in the division and the institution. **Improving routes to engaging with line managers** via a new working group to overcome the challenge of communicating with this large and disparate group across the collegiate university. Outcomes will be used to improve engagement with line managers regarding their own professional development and that of their more junior research colleagues.

	<p>Researchers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming researchers to Oxford (1.1): Local (divisional and departmental) and central university inductions and welcome events continue to provide orientation and a 'soft landing' for new researchers. Newly appointed divisional Research Culture Facilitators have initiated reviews of inductions, working with HR teams to share good practice and resources across departments. MPLS continues to offer its popular 'Optimise your time at Oxford' event. The Researcher Hub has produced a pre-arrival welcome page (with videos featuring peer-peer tips) and invited all new starters (623 in this period) to a welcome event. 254 researchers attended at least one event (approx. 40% of invitees attended an event, an increase from just over 20% in the last reporting period). • Development opportunities for researchers (1.1): The Researcher's Trailmap continues to be a valuable tool for signposting researchers to opportunities, advice and support. The Trailmap was reviewed and updated in autumn 2023, and the communications campaign continues to promote this resource, e.g. in divisional newsletters. Two Careers Advisors for Researchers have delivered events and workshops to over 1700 researchers signposting resources and opportunities from the careers service and beyond. The monthly careers newsletter reaches around 35% of all fixed term researchers. Training and development opportunities for researchers continue to be developed and expanded by divisions, departments and centrally: including, MSD Post-doc Power Hours; Grant writing workshops; MPLS new courses including Coaching, Negotiation and Influencing, UKRN Leadership in Academia; SSD collaborative pilots with Careers service to trial different models of improving Careers Service profile within departments, and thus increase awareness of existing offer and engagement by fixed term researchers. • Researcher representational structure (1.2): There are 107 researcher representatives: 64 representing 52 out of 54 departments/faculties, as well as 27 on university-level committees and 16 representing colleges. Representatives sit on divisional fora which meet at least termly to discuss local issues. The chairs of these divisional fora sit on the university-level Research Staff Consultation Group, which works closely with the connected Research Staff Working Group and Steering Committee. Representation is being expanded within one very large department within MSD, selecting additional representatives to gather views from a wider range of researchers. This expansion is being supported by the Academic Advocate and research culture staff. The Researcher Hub has hosted five all-rep events in this reporting period, with around 140 attendees. These provided opportunity to network and share ideas and good practice. The development of a 'researcher rep toolkit' is under consideration. • University 'Report and Support' tool (1.5): was officially launched in January 2024 as a 6-month pilot, following extensive consultation and development. This online platform will enable staff to report an incident or concern of bullying or harassment that they, or someone they know, has experienced or witnessed, introducing an option for staff to report an incident anonymously. The platform will also improve access to support, guidance and services. The Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU) is supporting staff to use the platform, as well as training and advising Harassment advisors on how to access reports and review data being collected. As part of the pilot phase feedback will be collated and reviewed to inform the content of the tool.
<p>Employment (max 600 words)</p>	<p>The Concordat Action Plan states that the two actions relating to employment (1.6 and 2.1) will be addressed in year 3 (i.e. from April 2024). Progress has already begun towards addressing these commitments.</p> <p>Institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pay and conditions review (2.1): In January 2023, Vice-Chancellor commissioned a comprehensive review of the total reward and benefits offered to all staff groups, to be reported to Council in Spring 2024. The review had

	<p>researcher representation on its working group. In addition, the Research Staff Consultation Group prepared a submission focussed on researcher priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising positive contributions to research culture (2.1): The Vice-Chancellor's research, partnership and engagement awards have added a new research culture category to recognise those who have contributed to a positive, inclusive and equitable research culture through actions to support careers, improve research practice, and value different contributions to research. Six research culture projects were shortlisted, with the winner to be announced in May 2024. <p>Academic Managers of Researchers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Academic Pathways Framework (2.1): This is one of four workstreams in the Academic Career and Reward project, led by Pro-Vice-Chancellor (People & Digital) Anne Trefethen, which aims to develop diverse, sustainable and rewarding career pathways for academics at Oxford. The steering group has approved the principles by which career pathways would be developed and have reviewed a draft framework. V2 of the framework was reviewed by the steering group in February 2024, and was followed by consultation with focus groups in March 2024. <p>Researchers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Sciences Division (MSD) review of fixed-term contracts (1.6): Departments within MSD (which is home to >60% of Oxford's fixed-term researchers) are undertaking a pilot project to reduce reliance on successive fixed-term contracts when employing research and research support staff. The expectation is that most staff who have been on successive fixed-term contracts for >10 years will be converted to open ended externally funded contracts (some departments are reviewing staff who have been on fixed-term contracts for >4 years). • Exploring alternative contract models (1.6): The Researcher Hub has conducted a light-touch internal review of existing, more secure employment models for researchers (e.g. Research Software Engineers). The next step will be to consider the broader applicability of these models.
<p>Professional development (max 600 words)</p>	<p>Institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Charter for the Career Development of Researchers (3.1, 3.3): In line with the requirements of the national Concordat and Oxford's Concordat Action Plan, this document sets out what researchers can expect while at the University, as well as their responsibilities towards their own career development. The Charter was approved by People Committee and the local UCU chapter. Publication of the Charter (October 2024) will be supported by an engagement plan and resources (e.g. FAQs) to support relevant stakeholders. • Destination tracking (3.3): The Vitae Researchers Careers Working Group, chaired by Dr Justin Hutchence (MPLS), with funding from the Research England 'Enhancing Research Culture' award to Oxford, will undertake an international literature review on the most successful routes for collating data on the career destinations of researchers. The review aims to report by August 2024. In addition, careers advisors for research staff are collating data from CareerConnect, LinkedIn and from guidance appointments to determine both the employment sectors of interest to current researchers and career destinations of recent researchers. This report is due in summer 2024. Together these reports will inform next steps on destination tracking.

Academic Managers of Researchers

- **Career development reviews (CDRs)** (1.4, 3.3): Enabling researchers to conduct conversations with line managers (and others) to enable their career continue to be a priority across the organisation:
 - **Understanding barriers to uptake:** A workshop in the Social Sciences Division was undertaken to identify barriers to CDR provision. In the Medical Sciences Division, departments have been sharing their experiences of trying to increase annual review uptake as well as sharing resources for all MSD departments to use.
 - **The CDR working group** (with representatives from all academic Divisions) has developed resources to [support constructive career conversations](#)
 - **Investigating systems to track uptake:** Funding has been secured from the University's Digital Transformation Programme to explore systems that would enable recording of the uptake and effectiveness of CDRs.
- **Training for Academic Managers** (1.4):
 - [Wellcome Institutional Funding for Research Culture award](#): Starting from 1 March 2024, the University of Oxford has embarked on a two-year programme to design, deploy and disseminate an institution-wide leadership programme that is tailored to the situations and barriers encountered by researchers. [The programme](#) is funded by a Wellcome Institutional Funding for Research Culture award (£1M).
 - The '[Essentials of People Management in Research](#)' module is a centrally delivered scheme targeted at managers of researchers and includes practical guidance and exercises towards conducting constructive conversations. 6 sessions have run this academic year involving 107 participants; a further 3 sessions are scheduled for the summer term 2024.

Researchers

- **Careers Advisors for Researchers** (3.2): A second careers advisor for researchers was appointed in late 2023. This has enabled a step change in the level of support available for researchers and departments. At the start of 2024 43% of all fixed term researchers are active registered users of the CareerConnect platform, 87% of which are signed up the monthly Careers Service newsletter for researchers. From April '23-March '24 the Careers Service has delivered over 782 1:1 guidance appointments.
- **Showcasing career destinations** (3.1): Led by research staff from Oxford and beyond, the online database hosted on [research-careers.org](#) continues to grow, now with over 150 profiles of fulfilling roles in sectors beyond academia.
- **Beyond Academia Careers Conference** (3.1) ran 18-21 March. The Careers Service hosted 25 events with 3608 attendees over the 4 days (20% increase on last year). 36% of the participants were FTR staff reflecting a 7% increase on last year.
- **Support for Narrative CVs** (3.2): [New guidance and resources](#) have been produced and made publicly available to support researchers and teams in developing their Narrative CV for funding applications.
- **Recognition of researcher representatives** (2.1): To acknowledge their contributions to the governance of the University, Humanities Division has awarded departmental researcher representatives a £500 allowance for research expenses, professional development, career enhancing opportunities etc. In addition, the 14 members of university-level Research Staff Consultation Group each received £2,000 for development and career enhancing opportunities.
- **Professional Development Planning for Researchers** (1.3): [A website](#) was launched in November 2023 to illustrate the benefits of professional development, provides examples of what this could look like, including

testimonials from 4 Oxford researchers. Three departments in Social Sciences Division piloted the use of the above website for planning professional development time. The findings will feed into revised guidance provided by the Researcher Hub, and further research culture work with departments.

Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. (max 500 words)

The University of Oxford has a devolved structure which leads to rich and diverse array of initiatives in pursuit of the Concordat Action Plan activities listed above. Academic divisions and departments/faculties pilot interventions that best suit their communities. As well as facilitating tailored offerings and initiatives, this approach enables the sharing of learning across the organisation.

One challenge of the devolved nature of the organisation is the decentralisation of data collection and difficulties of collating organisational-level data on the reach and effectiveness of initiatives within the Concordat Action Plan. One example of this is collection of data on how many researchers have completed a Career Development Review. Funding has been allocated to investigate an organisation-wide systems solution.

Another focus for the coming year will be publication and engagement around the Oxford Charter for the Career Development of Researchers. We are addressing the lack of clarity from some research funders on whether time spent on professional development which is not directly linked to a specific fellowship or research project can be charged to the funder, to avert any potential for reluctance to promote the uptake of ten days spent undertaking professional development.

From our experience at Oxford and our engagement with other organisations across the sector, we recognise that there is a significant challenge in enabling researchers to take advantage of career development opportunities on offer. This is a sector-wide issue stemming from a number of underlying issues, including: high workload for researchers; prioritisation of research over other development activities; pressure from colleagues/managers; concerns around negative perceptions of considering careers beyond academia. These issues result in a pattern of poor uptake of many of the excellent career development opportunities for researchers. Some specific examples we have encountered include: slow uptake of the Careers Interest Network pilots (initiated by the Careers Advisers with support from a range of professional service teams); Low sign-up and/or attendance at in-person welcome events (hosted by Researcher Hub and Humanities division); No-shows at training courses (such as The Confident Manager). In the coming year we intend to consider mechanisms that will enable researchers to engage with the offerings. These include: reviewing the relevance of the offerings; targeted communications and engagement in alignment with the publication of the Charter; increased focus on appropriate communications to help line managers of researchers offer effective support and strengthen culture.

As we move into the final year of this Concordat Action Plan, there will be opportunity to review current practice on consultation and information-sharing to improve or retain good practice and to streamline those aspects that have proven to be time-consuming or of limited benefit.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period (max 500 words)

The University of Oxford is entering the final year of its current Concordat Action Plan (which runs 2022–2025). Therefore, a significant objective for the next reporting period will be to consult on an appropriate refresh of the Concordat Action Plan, in relation to timescale, focus, and resourcing levels.

A key enabler for delivering the commitments of the current Concordat Action Plan will be the publication of the Charter for the Career Development of Researchers, to be published in Autumn 2024. Further areas of focus for the coming year include:

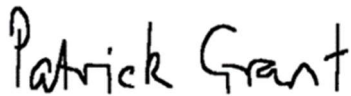
- Increasing awareness of and engagement with the Concordat Action Plan commitments among academic line managers. Ongoing work includes the new line-manager communications working group, and bespoke engagement and communications activities associated with the Charter.

- Reviewing approaches to reduce precarity for fixed term researchers. We will seek to explore approaches to improve retention, structure and reward for key long-term research and research support staff, particularly those with highly competitive and sought-after areas of expertise such as data science, statistics, and software engineering. Retention of these highly skilled staff in the face of high competition from other sectors is a significant challenge for the University. A review will provide a clearer picture of the current landscape as well as recommendations to inform future strategy around reducing precarity.
- The EDU is developing a communications plan for the harassment prevention programme to enhance staff awareness of the tool as part of the Harassment Advisory Service (consisting of the tool, Advisor Network and Harassment line). The aim is to increase the number of people using the tool. This plan will be part of broader communications work around harassment prevention to enhance awareness of the harassment policy and procedures, particularly among research staff. The pilot of the Report and Support Tool will continue. In July we will conduct a review of the tool and service.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (max 200 words)

This report has been prepared by the Researcher Hub as a co-coordinator of the University's Concordat Action Plan, with input from members of the Research Staff Consultation group, and the Research Strategy and Policy Unit, and the Research Staff Working Group. It was approved by the Research Staff Steering Committee, and then signed off by the governing bodies: People Committee and Research and Innovation Committee.

Signature on behalf of governing body:



Professor P S Grant FEng
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Contact for queries: Rachel Bray, Head of Researcher Hub: rachel.bray@admin.ox.ac.uk

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk