Oxford Policy Engagement Network
Peer Mentoring Scheme 2024-25

Contents

1. Summary

The University of Oxford's Policy Engagement Team, the UK Civil Service Policy Profession Unit, and the Oxford Climate Research Network (OCRN) invite Expressions of Interest (EoI) from eligible researchers and policy professionals to join one of the two next cohorts of the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) Peer Mentoring Scheme.

In each cohort, the scheme matches 15 researchers at Oxford and 15 policy professionals at a similar career stage for six months, enabling them:

- To deepen their understanding of how research can inform policymaking and develop the relevant skills to catalyse that process;
- To broaden and deepen their academic and policy networks; and
- To strengthen leadership for academic-policy engagement.

"The relationship with my peer mentor has been fantastic. It's been working so well for us both that we've agreed to continue meeting over the next academic year as well, and to read things and offer feedback for one another." (Naomi Waltham-Smith, Professor of Music, 2023 intake)

This year, we're introducing an exclusive cohort 1 dedicated to those currently working on **Climate, Energy, and the Environment**. This specialized group will engage researchers and policy professionals in these critical fields, facilitating collaborations and supporting our members' professional development goals.

Deadlines

- **Cohort 1: Climate, Energy and the Environment (December 2024 – June 2025): 10:00 BST, 16 October 2024**
- **Cohort 2: Cross-Sector Policy & Research (February 2025 – August 2025): 10:00 GMT, 16 December 2024**

2. Why join the scheme?

Many researchers and policy professionals share an interest in better use of evidence in public policy, but when it comes to engaging with each other, they can feel like members of two communities divided by a common language. This unique, boundary-spanning scheme tackles this head-on, revealing to researchers and policy professionals the benefits of mentoring each other.

"I have found it a really positive way to broaden my perspective and think beyond my day-to-day policy concerns. It has made me consider how I could link more two of my key interests - the civil service and academia." (Policy professional, 2023 intake)

Since 2021, more than 120 researchers from all four academic Divisions at Oxford and policy professionals from 14 UK government departments, plus the Scottish Government, Government of Jersey, NICE, Oxfordshire County Council and the NHS, have taken advantage of the scheme. Each policy professional has been matched with a mentoring partner at a similar career stage from academia. Taking turns as mentor and mentee, participants provide each other with a sounding board, act as confidant(e), motivator, and a source of challenge and feedback, and clarify the culture, politics, and values of their respective environments.

"It really was great to create personal connections, and think more about my role as an academic and challenge my thinking." (Researcher, 2022 intake)

Participants join a cohort of 30, take part in an in-person cohort-building event, and are invited to online networking and informative sessions, as well as a final networking event across both cohorts in the Summer of 2025, providing opportunities to build wider networks with others interested in better use of evidence in public policy.

3. Objectives

The scheme aims to enable participants to achieve one or more of the following objectives

- To deepen their understanding of how research can inform policy-making;
- To develop awareness of their relevant strengths, potential, and opportunities for professional development and leadership in academic-policy engagement;
- To plan how to acquire more of the knowledge and skills required to achieve their potential, and begin to do so;

"I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it as everyone I encountered through the experience was lovely." (Policy professional, 2023 intake)

- To broaden and deepen their research and policy networks;
- To develop their understanding of mentoring, and some of the skills required to do it well; and
- To enhance their motivation to engage with the other sector and build their confidence to do so.

Most previous participants have found the scheme fulfilled their initial objectives, and allowed flexibility for those to evolve during the mentoring partnership.

4. How does it work?

Matching

Two Mentoring Coordinators manage the scheme, using the online platform MentorNet, as follows:
- Once accepted onto the programme, participants will be invited to register on MentorNet and create their peer mentor profile.
- Participants will be invited to consider the profiles of 15 potential peer mentors and to inform the Mentoring Coordinators of their choice of up to three who they consider likely to be a good match for them. Participants may optionally express a preference for matching based on specific policy areas of interest.
- The Mentoring Coordinators will propose peer mentor pairs, taking participants' preferences into consideration. While an effort will be made to accommodate these preferences, there is no

"It's been helpful to get a different perspective on some of the challenges in the policy world, and understand how academia operates." (Policy professional, 2023 intake)

guarantee that all preferences can be met. Participants should note that being matched with someone from a different policy area can be equally valuable for the purposes of the scheme, offering fresh perspectives and broader insights.
- Each peer mentor pair will be invited to diarise and meet in an initial 15-minute "chemistry" meeting, to explore whether the partnership is mutually agreeable. Both peer mentors will confirm with their respective Mentoring Coordinator within 24 hours whether or not they are willing to proceed with the partnership.
- Where a match is not deemed mutually agreeable, the Mentoring Coordinators may propose a new peer mentor for participants. If this is not possible, or this alternative partnership is not found to be mutually agreeable, participants will be invited to join the next cohort of the scheme instead.

Participants are:
- **Required to take part in an in-person, half-day in person meeting in Oxford** to meet other members of the cohort, share details of some of the engagement-related challenges they are facing, and offer insights that may be of common interest;
- **Expected to meet at least once a month** (online or in-person) until the scheme ends, providing a short record of each meeting on MentorNet;
- **Expected to participate in two online sessions** in which they will have the chance to share more about their work and day-to-day responsibilities with others in the cohort;

- **Expected to take part in a final in-person networking event** for members of both cohorts, to be held in Oxford in the summer 2025; and
- Encouraged to be in touch with Mentoring Coordinators at any point to discuss any concerns they may have relating to the scheme.

5. How will EoIs be assessed?

For **cohort 1: <u>Climate, Energy, and the Environment,</u>** EoIs are invited from individuals with demonstrated expertise in at least one of the areas of climate, energy systems, or the environment. Researchers should show interest in the policy implications of their work, while policy professionals should indicate appreciation for academic research in their field. Prior experience contributing to policymaking (for academics) or working with academia (for policymakers) is beneficial but not essential. They should also demonstrate how the applicant's objectives align with the scheme's objectives.

For **cohort 2: <u>Cross-Sector Policy & Research</u>** EoIs should demonstrate an interest in, and some understanding of, either public policy in at least one area (for researchers) or academic research (for policy professionals), however, no formal experience in the other domain is necessary. They should also demonstrate how the applicant's objectives align with the scheme's objectives.

6. Who can apply?

Researchers

EoIs are invited from OPEN members on a research or academic contract at the University of Oxford which lasts for the duration of the entire scheme (<u>Cohort 1</u>: until May 2025; <u>Cohort 2</u>: until August 2025).

Retired and Emeritus Fellows, as well as Masters and DPhil students, are ineligible.

Policy professionals

EoIs are invited from any civil servant who is a member of the Policy Profession at the equivalent of senior executive officer level (SEO) or higher, and individuals working in other policy-related bodies outside the Policy Profession (e.g. local governments, NGOs).

7. How to apply

Researchers must have joined OPEN before applying.

Applications to Cohort 1 are now closed.

All applicants to Cohort 2 should express interest by 12:00 GMT on 16 December 2024 using this form, taking careful note of the requirement to attend the cohort-building event for their preferred cohort. (See Section 10 below.)

8. Evaluation

All participants will be invited to an evaluation and networking event in the Summer 2025 in Oxford. Participants will also be asked to complete a mid-point survey and a final evaluation questionnaire about the scheme.

9. Key contacts

If you have any questions about the scheme, or would like to discuss an EoI, please contact the relevant Mentoring Coordinator:

Cohort 1

- **For researchers**: Roberta Wilkinson (roberta.wilkinson@physics.ox.ac.uk)

- **For policy professionals**: José Rojas Alvarado (jose.rojasalvarado@socsci.ox.ac.uk)

Cohort 2

- **For researchers**: José Rojas Alvarado (jose.rojasalvarado@socsci.ox.ac.uk)
- **For policy professionals**: Jessica Hedge (jessica.hedge@socsci.ox.ac.uk)

10. Key dates

Action	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Call opens	4 September 2024	4 November 2024
Application deadline	16 October 2024	16 December 2024
Applicants notified of acceptance or non-acceptance to the scheme	21 October 2024	7 January 2025
Deadline for participants to indicate their preferred choices for peer mentor	1 November 2024	22 January 2025
Participants seek chemistry meeting with their proposed peer mentor	5 – 19 November 2024	25 January – 6 February 2025
Half-day, in-person cohort-building event in Oxford	3 December 2024	20 February 2025
Cohort Ends	3 June , 2025	20 August 2025
Networking event in Oxford	TBC (Summer 2025)	TBC (Summer 2025)

11. About the Oxford Policy Engagement Network

The Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN) is a growing network of more than 1000 researchers and professional services staff in more than 50 departments and faculties across the University who share a vision of public policy powered by the world's best available research evidence and expertise. OPEN's mission is to equip members to share knowledge and expertise with the policymaking community so that, with them, they can contribute to better policies that protect what is valuable and change the world for the better. Find out more about OPEN at www.ox.ac.uk/open.

12. About the Policy Profession

The UK Civil Service Policy Profession is the second-largest of the 28 professions in the Civil Service. Made up of around 32,000 civil servants, its aim is to design, develop and propose appropriate courses of action to help meet key government priorities and ministerial objectives. Policy professionals' work centres around three activities:
- Developing and improving government strategies
- Ensuring democratic accountability
- Overseeing delivery

Find out more about the Policy Profession at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-policy-profession/about.

13. About the Oxford Climate Research Network (OCRN)

The Oxford Climate Research Network (OCRN) is a cross-divisional research community, harnessing Oxford's diverse strengths to address the challenge of climate change in a complex and uncertain world. The network aims to enhance the effectiveness and impact of climate research at the University of Oxford. It acts as an internal hub connecting and supporting researchers, as well as a co-ordinated point of contact and information for those beyond Oxford, including other research institutions, policymakers and the public.

Find out more about OCRN at https://www.climate.ox.ac.uk/home