

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Universities and Research Institutes

Name of Institution	University of Oxford
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Date statement sent to Researcher Development Concordat secretariat (refer to Researcher Development Concordat Reporting Guidance)	20 April 2026

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 new Strategic Plan 2025-2030 strengthens the institutional vision for inclusive, safe and supportive work environments for researchers at all career stages and across the institution. Concordat-related activity is integral to fulfilling the following research and people commitments:

"We will continue to improve our research culture as a prerequisite of research excellence."

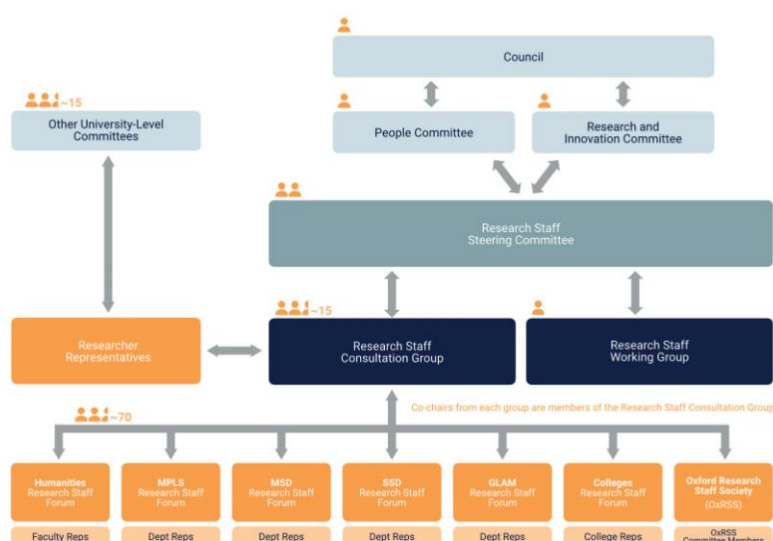
"Recognising the current inefficiencies in retaining our brightest early career researchers in a precarious funding environment, we should take a more structured approach to supporting career transitions of research-funded staff and retaining the next generation of research leaders, across all subjects."

"Over the next five years we will focus on delivering a transformative investment in our people by implementing the People Strategy, positioning Oxford as a globally-leading place to work. This will be achieved by creating an environment in which people feel valued and supported, talent is enabled to thrive, and high-quality people services underpin our organisational success."

Work to realise these goals is organised through delivery of complementary plans, specifically the People Strategy. Within the People Strategy, Oxford's action plan to fulfil the Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers ('the Concordat') is a named mechanism for achieving the strategy's second objective; enabling talent to thrive. Delivery of the Concordat Action Plan is coordinated via the multi-functional Research Staff Working Group, which is co-chaired by the lead of the Researcher Hub and Director of the Research Strategy and Policy Unit in Research Services. Commitments to researchers are also being pursued through the ED&I Strategy, Athena SWAN activity, the Race Equality Charter, the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, Mindful Employer, Technicians Commitment, and university's research culture programme.

A well-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 diagram below is shown to all new-joiners at the termly University researcher welcome events and helps new researcher representatives understand the significance of their roles, the information flows and governance processes.

The Chart of Researcher Representation



The strategic academic lead is the University Advocate for Research Staff, Professor David Gavaghan, who chairs the termly Research Staff Steering Committee comprising six Academic Advocates for Research Staff (one per main academic division, one for Gardens, Libraries, and Museums (GLAM), and one for the 40 Oxford Colleges), and professional service directors of central units with Concordat-related responsibilities. This committee reports to the University Research and Innovation Committee and informally to People Committee, and liaises closely with the Research Staff Consultation Group (comprising research staff representatives) and the Research Staff Working Group (comprising operational leads). Academic Advocates /Champions for Research Staff in each of the four main academic divisions work with local research staff representatives and professional support staff to identify and realise research staff priorities and to share best practice.

In April 2025 Oxford [reported on the completion](#) of its first 3-year Concordat action plan and published a [new 5-year plan](#). This contains nine objectives detailed below, and prioritises those that stand to make the greatest difference to the greatest number of researchers, namely; equipping academic managers/PIs appropriately; enabling routine researcher engagement in effective professional development and Career Development Reviews, and re-shaping employment approaches for staff on external research funding (see bold blue text below).

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)

Environment and culture

Oxford's three strategic objectives are to

- a. **Further equip PIs/managers appropriately in inclusive management and leadership skills, beginning with effective recruitment of research staff by the PI/manager and panel**

Work led by two divisions (Maths, Physics and Life Sciences, plus Humanities) to identify line managers for all researchers, set expectations of their roles and provide appropriate, accessible professional development, with the following success measures by 2029:

- All new PIs/managers engage in management training before recruiting first employees
- Since Oxford's 2023 Staff Experience Survey: 75% researchers report positive experiences of being managed (from an average score of 64% across 4 questions pertaining to specific behaviours)

- b. **Strengthen the researcher representation framework and effectiveness of governance**

Work led by the Researcher Hub to learn from peer HEIs to improve the framework and related practice and to align research staff committee agendas, as measured by

- 75% of researcher representatives fulfilling their roles effectively and contributing to decision-making by 2026

- c. **Ensure support for the mental, physical and social wellbeing of researchers within provision for all staff**

Success measures by 2027:

- All departments have at least two wellbeing champions equipped to signpost to a range of resources relevant to researchers, including on mental health awareness
- Divisional advocates and professional service teams know what each department is providing to protect researcher inclusion and wellbeing (NOTE: This measure was approved by Research Staff Steering Committee in November 2005. It has been added to the internal action plan used by Research Staff Working Group but does not appear in our published action plan)
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Employment

Oxford's three strategic objectives are to

- a. **Reshape employment approaches for researchers at Oxford and clarify internal career structures**

A collaborative project led by Medical Sciences division to diversify employment approaches with the following success measures:

By 2026: Proposals scoped and approved

By 2029:

- Internal employment approaches and career structures developed that are appropriate to different staff groups
- Related career structures understood by researchers, PIs/academic managers and HR teams
- Reduced reliance on successive fixed term contracts
- Progression into research and academic roles within and beyond Oxford increasingly reflects diversity (by disability, gender, ethnicity and where possible socio-economic status) within national demographics and Russell Group targets

b. **Improve engagement in and effectiveness of inductions and signposting to key resources**

Success measures by 2027

- 60% new researchers participating in University induction (from 30% in Academic Year 2023/24)
- 75% researchers report induction received within last 18 months as useful (from 51% in SES 2023)

c. **Enable researchers to raise concerns relating to behaviour and equitable treatment early, and to receive support with the aim of resolution, thereby providing a realistic choice as to whether to report formally**

Success measures by 2027

- Coherent local and central approaches to promoting the values and behaviours inherent to a positive culture in a world-leading institution, guided by the EDI and People strategies; measured by consensus in all three central research staff committees informed by regular People Strategy updates
- 95% researchers are aware of the harassment policy and procedure for university staff; noting these apply across the academic community including third parties (from 86% in 2023 SES)
- 75% researchers report feeling safe to speak up and challenge the way things are done (from 52% in 2023 SES)

Professional Development of Researchers

Oxford's three strategic objectives are to

a. **Achieve routine engagement in annual reviews focusing on career and professional development (CDRs/PDRs or equivalent) and continue improving their effectiveness**

Coordinated activity across the institution led by the Social Sciences Division so that by 2028:

- 75% researchers are engaging in annual CDRs (from 57% in SES 2023)
- 95% of departments are routinely offering an annual career-focused conversation
- 75% researchers report their CDR as useful (from 64% in SES 2023)

b. Achieve routine researcher engagement in professional development and the sustained provision of relevant development opportunities

Provision of and signposting to relevant professional development across the institution so that by 2028:

- 50% researchers are taking at least 10 days professional development (from 14% in SES 2023)
- 75% researchers are reporting opportunity to develop and grow at the University (from 64% 2023)

c. Strengthen researcher career mobility; including into and out of academic roles

Guided and/or provided by the Careers Service and Researcher Hub, activity across the institution to ensure that by 2029:

- Diverse researcher career destinations are illustrated to current researchers, including entry-points and the role of professional development in progression
- Progress is made in sustainable mechanisms to strengthen career mobility that include timely information and support

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

1a) Further equip PIs / academic managers in inclusive people management and leadership skills

Institution: Continuing to expand provision and promotion of people management and leadership development programmes for academics which has increased access and enabled learning from different approaches, including some that are discipline-oriented. Preparing to bring key providers together to map provision to support greater coherence and participation in people management and leadership development provision across the institution.

Academic Managers of Researchers: New and experienced managers from across the University can access a half-day hands-on training in Leading and Managing People in Research, either online or in person, as well as related modules such as Developing Teams, Performance Management and Using a Coaching Approach. Attendance varies, indicating that promotion and/or delivery mode of this training require attention. Those in Medical Sciences and Maths, Physics and Life Sciences can also access leadership development

1b) Strengthen the researcher representation framework and effectiveness of governance

offered by their division. More experienced academics from all the divisions are co-designing and participating in a new programme funded by Wellcome, called Leading in Academic Research Environments.

Researchers, in principle, are benefitting from a growing competence and confidence in people management and leadership amongst their managers and other senior colleagues, noting that participation in such development opportunities is low and patchy thus far. Researchers who are, or who aspire to be, managers in research settings have access to the half-day hands-on training in Leading and Managing People in Research, and other modules of the Confident Manager series. Uptake remains slow, reasons for which are being explored.

Institution: In all four academic divisions researcher representatives for each department or faculty are consistently in post and systems in place for re-election. The same holds for academic advocates or champions of fixed-term researchers in almost all departments and faculties. Divisions host regular meetings between these two groups of representatives to discuss approaches to researcher opportunities and challenges. Similar processes are being prepared for the comparatively few researchers who work in Oxford's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM). Governance practices have been strengthened in Medical Sciences (where the greatest proportion of Oxford researchers work) via a Researcher Rep Forum Handbook, induction documents for both reps and advocates, and a process to manage member terms and fluid recruitment as positions are vacated.

Academic Managers of Researchers participate in improving the environment and culture for researchers as Academic Advocates or Champions, or by working with these colleagues to ensure researcher perspectives and interests are considered in departmental decision-making

Researchers all have a local peer representative who is keyed into the institution-wide governance structure as well as a local academic advocate to champion their interests in local decision-making. Some Medical Science departments have produced maps to enable researchers to see how their views and voices feed into local decision-making.

<p>1c) Ensure support for the mental, physical and social wellbeing of researchers within provision for all staff</p>	<p>Institution: Conversations with departments via the Research Culture toolkit have helped to identify the range of wellbeing support or initiatives in place, and who engages. Researchers, like all staff, can access both the central mediation services and the wellbeing programme (Thriving at Oxford) which offers online resources plus training (e.g. in Mental Health Awareness)..</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers will soon be guided by a new policy on the prevention and management of work-related stress and accompanying implementation toolkit. Key messages will be included in training for PIs/academic managers such as The Confident Manager series.</p> <p>Researchers continue to volunteer their time to run and/or participate in frequent, wide-ranging social events hosted by the Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS), Currently all researchers automatically belong to OxRSS and over 2000 have signed up for the twice-monthly e-newsletter promoting events and other ways researchers can connect with each other. Funding to support the coordination of ongoing activity is however uncertain. Promotion of the British Academy’s Early Career Researcher Network by two divisions (Humanities and Social Sciences) is one example of strengthening researcher access to relevant communities beyond Oxford.</p>
<p>Employment</p> <p>2a) Reshape employment approaches for researchers at Oxford and clarify internal career structures</p>	<p>Institution: Work led by the Medical Sciences division to explore diverse employment approaches has accelerated this year through a combination of senior backing (the chair is the University’s PVC for Strategic Initiatives and Associate Head of Research for Medical Sciences), the allocation of significant professional service time and expertise to desk-based reviewing, coordination and consultation, and to the participation of colleagues from all divisions (on research-funded contracts, academic managers, plus departmental heads and HR teams) in a series of roundtables to consider potential models and their implications. This work is being done in close collaboration with a similar team at Cambridge University given the parallels in scale and structure. Proposals to develop pilot approaches during phase 2 of this project were approved by Research and Innovation Committee in November 2025.</p>

<p>2b) Improve engagement in and effectiveness of inductions and signposting to key resources</p>	<p>Academic Managers of Researchers have participated in roundtable consultations for the above project, and those in the Medical Sciences division were briefed on the goals and processes of the Academic Career and Reward Framework project in a workshop in which progression criteria and assessment processes were also discussed.</p> <p>Researchers: as above</p> <p>Institution A short central induction is offered (in-person or online) to all researchers starting at Oxford. Feedback is positive however attendance often low. One division (MPLS) also offers a half-day induction with time for networking with service providers and fellow new-starters. Research culture toolkit conversations have enabled all divisions to gain a clearer understanding of the content of local inductions, and are advising on content as needed. The University's new intranet is being used to improve signposting at all levels of the institution.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers are signposted to the Concordat-related expectations of PIs/managers outlined in our action plan and Charter in a new central academic induction instigated by the Pay and Conditions review</p> <p>Researchers are expected to attend inductions by Oxford's Charter. Work is underway to understand declining attendance with an eye to improving communication of this expectation, including clarity on which local and central events researchers should attend and where choices can be made.</p>
<p>2c) Enable researchers to raise concerns about behaviour and equitable treatment early, and to receive advice and support with the aim of resolution, thereby providing a realistic choice as to whether to report formally</p>	<p>Institution: This year's application of the Research Culture toolkit in the four major divisions has enabled systematic and structured conversations with departments/faculties on policies and practices relating to inclusion in research, plus preventing and addressing bullying and harassment. Most departments/faculties now have a harassment officer and a clear process for reporting issues. The two largest divisions (MSD and MPLS) are also actively promoting their new mediation services for the early resolution of perceived exclusion, contradictory understandings or disputes.</p> <p>Several Medical Sciences departments have produced respectful behaviour frameworks, anti-racism and anti-</p>

	<p>bullying policies to raise visibility and encourage people to speak up. These have been shared with other departments via the Research Culture Toolkit inspiration bank. A working group is being formed to progress this commitment in light of the structural power imbalances between academic PIs/managers and researchers that can foster inequitable treatment.</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers: Awareness of the University’s policies and procedures, particularly the new Report and Support Tool, remains low in some parts of the institution. The tool’s overall use and efficacy is being tracked but we cannot provide data for researchers or managers of researchers..</p> <p>Researchers: According to the 2025 staff survey 87% of researchers are aware of Oxford’s harassment policy and procedure, as compared to 84% in 2021 (these data were not collected in 2023) However there has been a small decrease in knowledge of how to contact a harassment officer (from 67% to 64%) and their confidence that their complaints about harassment would be taken seriously have fallen from 73% to 61%, which mirrors a similar decline across all staff groups.</p>
<p>Professional development</p> <p>3a) Achieve routine engagement in annual reviews focusing on career and professional development (CDRs/PDRs or equivalent) and continue improving their effectiveness</p>	<p>Institution: Staff survey data shows slight growth in researchers reporting that they had a review in the last two years (from 57% in 2023 to 59% in 2025). This year saw more concerted efforts to promote and facilitate effective CDRs/PDRs across the institution, e.g. a new video produced by the Researcher Hub on why CDRs matter, local championing via academic leaders and in careers talks, improved guidance and signposting. All departments were invited to adopt the new My Development module in Oxford’s HR System for managing annual reviews and professional development days (see next objective).</p> <p>Academic Managers of Researchers: In the 2025 staff survey, more academic managers reported that they were confident conducting probationary and personal development reviews (80% as compared to 75% in 2023). Yet only 65% of researchers reported their reviews to be useful (i.e. no significant change from the 64% in 2023).</p> <p>Researchers: Despite the above positive trends, 2025 staff survey data indicates that 40% of researchers across the institution are not yet engaging in regular annual CDRs</p>

<p>3b) Achieve routine researcher engagement in professional development and the sustained provision of relevant development opportunities</p>	<p>or PDRs. One contributing factor is likely to be low awareness of their own responsibility to initiate their CDR as part of their career development, as indicated by the low (yet rising) awareness levels of the Concordat and Oxford's related Charter (36% in 2025 as compared to 29% in 2023).</p> <p>Institution: Purposive activity to raise engagement includes systematic Research Culture Toolkit conversations with departments on how they are promoting and enabling professional development, and the integration of professional development planning within workshops on how to prepare a strong Narrative CV delivered by the central Careers Service and/or divisions or departments, with key resources, facilitator pack etc shared then uploaded on Oxford's Intranet for general use.</p> <p>The academic divisions continue to offer a range of professional development tailored to their research staff and often open to all. Development of the central research practice training modules has continued in light of new sector developments (including the use of generative AI). In-person sessions have been held for departmental audiences to go into topics in more depth, in which attendees can contribute to continuous improvement. Some investment was made in broadening access to leadership development centrally (via a new 'Exploring Leadership' module in the Confident Manager series) and locally (e.g. divisions and departments collaborating to offer courses and/or sponsoring research staff-initiated activities).</p> <p>Academic Managers are now more routinely prompted to discuss professional development with researchers by the CDR templates and guidance being promoted centrally and locally (as described above).</p> <p>Researchers: Focused and sustained communication efforts in parts of the University have prompted significant growth in research staff engagement; e.g. the MPLS division saw a 57% rise in research staff participation in their courses between academic year 2023/24 and 2024/25. Conversely engagement dropped where provision and promotion were interrupted or shrunk (e.g. the Careers Service saw a net reduction in research staff using their platform and participating in related</p>
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<p>3c) Strengthen researcher career mobility; including into and out of academic roles</p>	<p>opportunities after a period of minimal staffing related to funding insecurity).</p> <p>Following a period of focused promotion in which researchers were encouraged to consider a range of opportunities within ‘at least 10 days professional development’, the Social Sciences Division are surveying researchers on the barriers or detractors to their participation in professional development activity and Career Development Reviews. Results will be shared to inform practice across the institution.</p> <p>Institution: There is no current policy or practice for gathering career destinations, however the systematic Research Culture Toolkit conversations with departments enquire about local mechanisms, use of exit interviews, and the visibility and celebration of diverse destinations. Good practice examples were shared at the ‘Research Culture at Oxford: What next?’ event and via the Inspiration Bank. The MPLS division used Research England Culture funding to sponsor Vitae to investigate approaches to researcher career destination tracking, and to recommend a route forward for the sector. A UK-wide working group is now being formed with the aim of creating a Researcher Career Tracking Observatory.</p> <p>Academic Managers: are now more routinely prompted to discuss diverse career options by the CDR templates and guidance being promoted centrally and locally (as described above).</p> <p>Researchers have responded positively to local opportunities to initiate events focused on exploring and preparing for diverse career destinations. Their demand for 1:1 Careers Appointments has outstripped supply in this reporting period owing reductions in staff capacity noted above.</p>
<p>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.</p>	
<p>Implementation of the Research Culture Toolkit over the past year shows that research culture strengthening is an attractive and productive umbrella goal through which to engage individual departments and faculties in discussion about what is working well in the sphere of supporting researcher career development, and where the gaps lie. Our department-centred approach can accommodate the range in scale, nature and maturity of Concordat-related activity across the University, and</p>	

encourages each department to set their own goals and to draw accordingly on the resources and inspiration bank.

Relatedly, we have learnt more about the wealth of local initiatives underway in units and teams across the University, many of which are proving highly effective in their own spheres and have potential for growth or replication.

It is also proving helpful to have support for the Concordat Action Plan identified as an objective within Oxford's new People Strategy, for example in ensuring related implementation updates are shared at Research Staff committee meetings, to sustain effective coordination and to consider appropriate responsibilities for delivery.

Prioritisation and coordination are particularly important in an increasingly resource-constrained environment in order to ensure that Concordat-related activity builds on wider institutional momentum towards our University strategy and related action plans. For example, the Employment Approaches project (outlined under objective 2a above) is being progressed in close collaboration with work to address repeated use of fixed-term contracts by the Pay & Conditions team and with teams developing the Academic Career and Reward Framework and who lead on strategic workforce planning.

No modifications to Oxford's action plan (beyond the additional success measure for objective 1c noted above) are proposed at the end of this first year. Our plan contains a commitment to review measures of success and priority activities in April 2027 (year two) and in April 2029 (year four) in order to respond to innovation and change within the institutional and broader economic environment.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period

1) An overarching aim relevant to all the objectives within our plan is to improve awareness of career development responsibilities and levels of engagement in related opportunities amongst researchers and their academic managers, including through improved communications.

2) Our objectives for progressing our first priority, namely "to further equip PIs/academic managers in inclusive management and leadership skills" (1a), are to better understand what works for whom, when and why within the range of existing provision, and to improve coherence in the University's efforts to support academic manager/PI skill development in effective ways.

3) Our key objective towards our second priority, namely to "reshape employment approaches for researchers at Oxford and clarify internal career structures" (2a), is to progress workstreams for each of the four initiatives identified in phase 1 as potentially viable and to design pilots for testing these in appropriate parts of the University.

4) To advance our third priority, namely to "achieve routine researcher engagement in professional development and the sustained provision of relevant development opportunities", our objective is to learn from parts of the university seeing rising and

sustained engagement, and to tailor such approaches to areas where engagement is low.

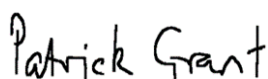
With regards to progressing further commitments in our action plan, we aim to:

- continue strengthening the researcher representation and governance structure (2b), specifically through activity to improve the integration of, and support for, researcher representatives on University-level committees.
- enable agreement on stable financing of researcher-focussed Careers Advisors who are equipped to provide informed, non-directive, supportive and confidential guidance to individual research staff and who support units across the University in effective, efficient ways to raise researcher engagement in career development activity, thereby strengthening career progression and mobility (3c).
- sustain and build on our sector collaborations including work with Cambridge on diversifying employment approaches, with Vitae and interested peer HEIs on developing a national Researcher Career Tracking Observatory (to support objective 3c and the sector more broadly), plus our regular participation in Researchers14 and in research culture forums and events.

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 the input from members of the Research Staff Consultation Group, 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 Patrick S Grant FEng
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)

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This annual report will be analysed by the 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 via the email address listed on the RDC website:

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk.